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The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931

by

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Abstract

This study examines the rise and fall of the modern Belarusian national movement during the quarter century between 1906, the year when the first Belarusian paper appeared, until its demise around 1931, as a result of political repression in the Soviet Union and Poland. While the first steps towards a modern, ethnic definition of the nation, were taken around the turn of the century era, the February Revolution and the German occupation energized the national movement. The 1920s Soviet nationalities policies brought about a Belarusian cultural renaissance, but also highlighted the difficulties of introducing new concepts of nationality in a relatively underdeveloped region. The results of these experimental policies were not what Moscow had expected. In the BSSR the local population often misunderstood the Soviet nationalities policies, resisting the new and unknown taxonomies. While the Belarusization had strengthened the nationally conscious elites in the republic, it failed to generate popular support for Soviet rule among the Belarusian peasantry. In Western Belarus, which was under Polish rule from 1921 to 1939, the peasantry was often alienated from the nationalist intelligentsia. After Piłsudski's coup d'état established authoritarian rule in Poland in 1926, the Soviet government again became concerned about the threat of a Polish invasion. After a brief experimentation with liberalization of its nationalities policies, the Piłsudski's regime stepped up the efforts to Polonize Western Belarus. At the same time, from 1927 it suppressed, jailed and deported to the Soviet Union many leading Belarusian activists, accusing them for irredentism and pro-Soviet sentiments. By 1929-1930, opposition to unpopular Soviet polices brought the borderlands of the BSSR close to a popular uprising. This, in turn prompted Moscow to crack down on the national communists in Minsk. The purges of the BSSR elites were more thorough than in any other republic, leading to the demise of 90 per cent of the Belarusian intelligentsia. The national mobilization was interrupted. For the next six decades the Soviet Belarusian nation building was carried out from above, increasingly in the Russian language, and with little autonomy for the government in Minsk.

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Introduction: Intellectual Background, Belarus and Nationalism.

This is a study of identity and self-identification. The country, which today is known as the Republic of Belarus, is one with contradictory cultural and national identities, which often puzzle western observers. It is a society, the members of which often identify themselves with other societal models than the current political order. Only a minority speaks the language of the titular, Belarusian majority population, and the bonds with Russia remain very strong.

The partitions of Poland in the late 18th century made the territory that today comprises Belarus part of the Russian Empire. The fall of the Romanov Empire led to the re-emergence of Poland and the appearance of an independent Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Other peoples, such as the Georgians, Armenians, the Ukrainians, and Belarusians in the borderlands of the former Russian Empire were unsuccessful in achieving national independence. These peoples again ended up under Russian rule, while Ukraine and Belarus, were divided between Poland and the Soviets. A Belarusian proto-state, known as the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was established, and for seventy years, it remained solidly anchored in the Soviet Union. The independence that had been averted in the early 1920s would not arrive until 1991. When it came, it arrived unexpectedly, as a result of the collapse of the USSR.

The new reality of Belarusian independence led to the resumption of a debate about the cultural and political belonging of the inhabitants of the new state. Two main camps were formed. One was oriented towards the western world and the European Union, the other camp wanted to continue the orientation towards Russia and the former Soviet Union. This meant a resumption of an old debate which had followed the collapse of the Russian Empire over seventy years earlier.

The Context of the Study

Out of the turbulent period of 1918-1920 emerged two, incompatible historical narratives, which divided the national elite.¹ In the BSSR, the Soviet narrative became hegemonic. Alternative accounts of

¹ For an example of the Soviet Belarusian version, which was hegemonic for decades see, for instance I. M. Ihnatsenka et al. (eds.) *Historyia Belaruskai SSR, Tom 3: Peramaha Vialikai Kastrychnitskai Satsyialistichnai revoliutsyi i Pabudova satsyializmu u BSSR (1917-1937)* (Minsk: Vydatstva "Navuka i Tekhnika," 1973); Kuz'ma Venediktovich Kiselev (ed.),

history, such as those published during the more tolerant political atmosphere of the 1920s or written in Western Belarus, were removed from libraries and burned. Under Stalin and his successors, this Soviet Belarusian historical narrative was manufactured under strict political surveillance. It emphasized Belarus' historical links to Russia and presented the outside world as hostile. Alternative points of view could not be published in the republic until the *perestroika* years. When they appeared, they received a mixed reception. The attachment to the Soviet identity was still strong, and emotional reports of Stalinist atrocities and denunciations of the Soviet past were often met with silence or outright hostility.² More than in any other Soviet republic, the Belarusian public had internalized and identified with the Soviet historical narrative.³ The least “national” of the former Soviet republics,⁴ in March 1991, 83 per cent of the BSSR voters were in favour of keeping the USSR, a higher number than any other republic outside Central Asia.⁵ This “denationalization” had gone so far that by 1996, outside observers could describe Belarus “as a state that has a death wish.”⁶

Unlike neighboring Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, Belarus has lacked a strong diaspora to work as a repository for alternative political narratives than the official Soviet version.⁷ The result of this was a lack of consensus on one national historical narrative, around which the national activists could rally. In

Belorusskaia SSR na mezhdunaradnoi arene (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia,” 1964), 16. For the anti-Soviet national perspective, see for instance Adam Stankevich, *Da histoyi belaruskaha palitychnaha vyzvaleninia: Z nahody 70-tets' tsia s'merti Kastusia Kalinouskaha red. "Muzyckaj Pravdy" († 1864) i 50-lets' tsia "Homana"* (1884) (Vilnius, Vydatvetstva “Shliakhu Moladzi,” 1934) and Adam Stankevich, *Belaruski Khrystsiianski Rukh* (Vil’na: Drukarnia imia F. Skaryny, 1939).

² David R. Marples, *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 135.

³ The Belarusians did not regard the Communist leadership as agents of a modified Russian colonial rule, but as a part of their own history. The Belarusians became the most “Soviet” of all peoples of the USSR. Stanislav Shushkevich, *Neokommunizm v Belarusi: ideologiia, praktika, perspektivy* (Smolensk: Skif, 2002), 35-36. Jan Zaprudnik sees the Belarusians as a “denationalized” and even “anti-national” people, which instead identify with Soviet nationalism. He attributes this to post-colonial relations: “Russian language in Belarus has remained a carrier of imperial thinking, which, per force, is tied up with political conservatism.” Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 134, 137. Coit Blacker and Condoleezza Rice list a number of reasons for the Belarusian ambivalence to sovereignty, from a “poorly developed sense of national identity and historical uniqueness and an almost disabling social conservatism to the country’s overwhelming economic dependency on Russia,” Coit Blacker and Condoleezza Rice, “Belarus and the Flight from Sovereignty” in Stephen D. Krasner (ed.) *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 225.

⁴ Marples (1996), 37.

⁵ Blacker and Rice, 226.

⁶ Marples (1996), 125.

⁷ Ibid., 122.

contemporary Belarus, nostalgia for the Soviet past has been skillfully exploited by Lukashenka. The return to authoritarianism has been accompanied by a re-introduction of Soviet Belarusian symbolism. Under the current authoritarian leadership, history has come to play a central role in the legitimizing the regime.

The first, and perhaps most significant event was the March 25, 1918 declaration of Belarusian independence. Behind this action stood a rather small group of Belarusian nationalists. This date has been the center of the national mythology of the non-Communist political tradition in Western Belarus and in the Belarusian diaspora. Irreconcilable with the Soviet narrative, this date has been adopted by the national and democratic opposition to Lukashenka.⁸

On March 25, 1918, Belarusian national activists had claimed large “ethnographic” territories, from the German border in the west to Briansk in the east as part of their “state.” This idea seems to have had an impact on the young Soviet government, which soon thereafter, on January 1, 1919, claimed roughly the same territories for a Belarusian Soviet Republic. This first Belarusian Soviet Republic was soon merged with a Soviet Lithuania into one united Soviet republic, only to be dissolved during the Soviet-Polish war. None of these republics lasted more than a few months, and the interpretations regarding the ethnicity of the local Slavic populations differed. Despite, or maybe as a result of, six proclamations of Belarusian statehood between 1918 and 1920, all attempts at establishing a united Belarusian state failed, and Belarus was divided between the Soviets and Poland in the Treaty of Riga in 1921. Yet, this succession of declarations underwrote the notion that Belarusian statehood was a legitimate political goal. When Soviet Belarusian statehood was again “renewed” it was restricted to a part of the “ethnographic” Belarusian territory, claimed by the national movement. Even after the territory of the Belarusian Soviet Republic was expanded, considerable Belarusian-speaking areas territories ended up under Polish rule. Yet, the 1920s saw a remarkable upswing of Belarusian cultural, political and intellectual life on both sides of the border. The nature of these parallel rennaissances showed considerable

⁸ However, in 2007 the Lukashenka regime for the first time attempted to appropriate the celebration of the March 25, 1918 declaration of independence for his regime, likely as an attempt by Lukashenka to shore up support for his increasingly isolated regime by “reincarnat[ing] himself as a closet nationalist.” David Marples, “The Launching of a Patriotic Movement in Belarus” *Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation*, July 10, 2007. http://jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372279 (accessed July 10, 2007).

similarities as well as fundamental differences. In the BSSR this renaissance was engineered by the Soviet authorities, dedicated to the creation of “national” Soviet republics as a mean to consolidate Soviet power and pre-empt the emergence of “bourgeois,” or anti-Soviet nationalism.

The dilemmas of irredentism

The situation for the Western Belarusians was different. Having failed to establish a Belarusian nation-state, the Belarusians became a marginalized and increasingly alienated national minority in a political entity which the post-war Polish political establishment had intended as a Polish nation-state. The Western Belarusian elites tried to resist the assimilatory policies of the Polish government. The Belarusian national movement had to choose between irredentism and political illegality on one hand, or to side with the opponents of statehood, on the other. The situation was further complicated by the fact that east of the border, a Belarusian republic already existed, at least on paper. This forced the nationalists to take a stance: should opposition to Polish rule equate identification with the BSSR and Soviet nationalities policies? Should the Western Belarusian movement strive for autonomy within Poland or as part of a Polish-led Eastern European Federation? The result was that the Western Belarusian national movement split into two rival camps, a pro-Soviet and an anti-Soviet one. The more distant and unrealistic the goal of an independent Belarusian nation-state appeared, the more the marginalized Belarusian national movement retreated into nostalgia and myth-making. The pro-Soviet nationalists in Western Belarus openly flirted with the idea of unification under Soviet leadership or emigration to the BSSR, while the anti-Soviet nationalist movement generated national myths around the short-lived Belarusian People’s Republic. They were painfully aware of the dilemma that either path was laden with great difficulties. Were they to pursue the irredentist line, they risked attracting the interest of the authorities and causing a crack-down. On the other hand, to work within the Polish institutions would mean a de facto recognition of the division of Belarus and the legitimization of a political order which precluded the establishment of a Belarusian state. The result was a compromise: the Belarusian nationalists co-operated with the Polish authorities, but they refused to renounce their irredentist and separatist ideas. Far from being a homogenous force, Belarusian nationalists on both sides of the border

chose to work within the state institutions of the two states that controlled divided Belarus after 1921, the Soviet Union and Poland.⁹

While the establishment of Belarusian statehood was a result of political events outside Belarus, the catalysts for the surge in nationalist activity were the Russian revolutions of 1917 and the German occupation of 1915-1918. The existence of two, rivaling and, until recently, mutually exclusive “national” narratives in Belarus – the Soviet and the anti-Soviet – have led to a confused attitude to Belarusian statehood and identity. This work is an attempt to trace the roots of Belarusian nationalism by placing it in its historical context. It does so by raising the perspective beyond the narrow limitations of the “ethnic” Belarusian “nation,” and attempts to see the destruction of the Belarusian national movement in the light of the political rivalry and animosity of Poland, Lithuania and the Soviet Union. The rise and fall of the Belarusian nationalist movement, including Belarusian statehood, was largely the result of non-Belarusian actors and forces. In the BSSR, designated as a national republic and a national home of the Belarusian people, the titular nationality was conspicuously absent from the higher echelons of power. Following the establishment of a Belarusian republic, the Soviet leadership faced an acute shortage of ethnic Belarusian cadres. During the first 25 years of its existence the leadership of the BSSR was dominated by non-Belarusians. Until World War II, only two of the leaders of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Belarus (henceforth KP(b)B) were ethnic Belarusians, Danila Volkovich and Vasili Sharangovich. Their combined time in office was little over six months.¹⁰

In Western Belarus, the leading Belarusian national activists were all bi- or tri-lingual, growing up in a Polish or Russian-speaking environment, and more comfortable writing in Polish, Russian, and sometimes even Yiddish. As was the case with national activists in other parts of Europe, they only

⁹ This is certainly true for the Belarusian Christian Democratic Party and the Belarusian Peasant Union, but was also central to the political strategy of the BSRH. For the Communist Party of Western Belarus, KPZB, which was a subsection of the illegal Communist Party of Poland, the situation was more complicated. The party was taking orders from the Comintern in Moscow and was hostile to the Polish state. As to the BSRH, its program was not explicitly irredentist. Yet its leader, Tarashkevich, who simultaneously was a member of the KPZB, was in favour of the unification of Belarus as one Soviet republic. Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2005), 28; Michał Kurkiewicz *Sprawy białoruskie w polityce rządu Władysława Grabskiego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Nieriton, 2005), 101 and Anthony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939: The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 142.

¹⁰ Emanuil Grigor'evich Ioffe, *Ot Miasnikova do Malofeeva: Kto rukovodil BSSR* (Minsk: Belarus, 2008), 3, 80-87.

learned to master the Belarusian language as adults.¹¹ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa describes the cultural identities in the borderlands as “culturally polyvalent,” in that the inhabitants could identify with more than one nation, even choosing their national identification. As an example of this she mentions the Ivanouski brothers, who lived in Belarus in the early 20th century.

The three brothers, who grew up together and were educated in the same manner, chose to identify themselves with three different nations. Waclaw considered himself a Belarussian and referred to the ethnic roots of the family. Tadeusz saw himself as a Pole because of the culture: mother tongue, religion, etc. of the family. Jan, on the other hand, identified himself as a Lithuanian, motivating it by territory and history, as the estate and title of nobility of the family were linked to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Thus, all three brothers made different choices and were active in different national movements: the Belarussian, the Polish, and the Lithuanian respectively.¹²

Not only were the Belarusian elite “culturally polyvalent.” The emergence of Belarusian statehood was a result of external, international factors. The crucial decision to encourage the formation of pro-German vassal states in German-occupied Eastern Europe following the Brest-Litovsk treaty was made in Berlin, the decision to establish a Belarusian Soviet republic in Moscow, and the decisions to crush the Belarusian movements were made separately by the governments in Moscow and Warsaw. The destruction of the national movement in Western Belarus was made possible partly through the Concordat between the Polish government and the Vatican, which enabled the Polish government to turn the Catholic Church into an instrument of Polonization.

Purpose and Questions

This dissertation is an analysis of the rise and fall of the Belarusian national movement during the first third of the twentieth century. It attempts to outline the trends and dynamics behind the movement and seeks to answer the question *how* the Belarusian national project was so abruptly derailed, why it ended in the late 1920s and what impact this legacy has had on the current political situation in the republic. The central questions to be answered are: to what extent were the national enlighteners

¹¹ This was not uncommon. Similar patterns can be observed among other eastern and central European peoples. The founding fathers of independent Finland, such as Carl Gustaf Mannerheim and Per Svinhufvud, were both more comfortable in Swedish and only learned Finnish as adults. The national poet of Finland, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, the composer of the text of the Finnish national anthem, wrote in Swedish. František Palacký, “the father of the [Czech] nation,” Bedřich Smetana and Tomáš Masaryk, all grew up as German-speakers but made conscious choices to become Czech speakers as adults. Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 108-109.

¹² Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, “Cultural and National Identification in Borderlands – Reflections on Central Europe,” in Klas-Göran Karlsson, Bo Petersson, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (eds.), *Collective Identities in an Era of Transformations: Analysing developments in East and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1998), 98.

successful in establishing a Belarusian identity and to what extent did the Belarusian masses internalize the “modern” national identity, promoted by the national elites? These are questions that have again resurfaced in contemporary Belarus and are central to the understanding of the political situation in a republic which today is often referred to as “Europe’s last dictatorship.” At the core of this issue is the political belonging of Belarus, an issue that has again become acute following the enlargement of the European Union to include three of Belarus’ five neighbors. In order to understand the political development and the current retreat into authoritarianism it is necessary to revisit the past experiences of Belarusian nationalism and identity construction. As one of very few studies on the rise and fall of the Belarusian national movement in the first third of the 20th century, this thesis fills a void as no study on this topic has been published in the Western world in over thirty-five years, and none has been exclusively dedicated to the topic since Belarus achieved independence in 1991.

This work revolves around two key issues. The first one is the role of language and linguistic “purity,” which was the most important identity marker for the Belarusian national movement on both sides of the Polish-Soviet border.¹³ All other issues, such as class, education, and land redistribution were linked to the national question one way or another. Yet it was language that determined who would belong to the Belarusian nation: either the Belarusian dialect which was actually spoken by the largely illiterate masses or the constructed standard language the nationally conscious activists believed that the Belarusian population *ought* to speak. Language was the primary identifying factor utilized by Belarusian national activists and Soviet ethnographers alike to delineate the Belarusian nation from its neighbors. To use religion as an instrument for the national movement, the way the Greek Catholic Church was used by the Ukrainian national movement in Galicia, was not feasible. The Belarusians were divided between two religions, Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy, following the dissolution of the Greek-Catholic Church by the Imperial authorities in 1839.

¹³ In his important study on Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalism, Paul N. Wexler emphasizes the role of language as an identity marker. The linguistic nationalists desired to achieve linguistic “purity” by “recovering” unique terms in the local Ukrainian and Belarusian languages. This was seen as “purifying” the languages from harmful foreign influences and as a step towards the uncovering/establishing of a form of genuine national culture. See Paul N. Wexler, *Purism and Language: A Study in Modern Ukrainian and Belorussian Nationalism (1840-1967)* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1974).

A second key focus is the role of political propaganda and terror. The repression of the Belarusian national movement in Western Belarus and the mass purges in the BSSR were followed by the manipulation and re-writing of history. The figures that played key roles in the establishment of the non-Stalinist Belarusian historical narrative, disappeared from the pages of the history books, and their names were not to re-emerge until the late 1980s. Furthermore, political repression on a massive scale stifled initiative and left a political void. Because even the memories of the past were suppressed, even today there are few viable alternative narratives strong enough to challenge the Soviet tradition.

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the rise and fall of the Belarusian national movement. In order to answer the question why it was destroyed we also need to understand how it emerged, and how it came to be perceived as a potential threat to both the USSR under Stalin and Poland under Piłsudski, and to what extent these fears were justified. In the Soviet case, why did the Belarusian national movement, which had enjoyed the support of the central government in Moscow until 1927, suddenly come to be seen as subversive and dangerous? Had a genuine national consciousness been formed? And what were the results of its destruction on the Belarusian self-image? This dissertation will outline and analyze the “nationalist discourse” and why it failed. A working assumption is that the formation of the USSR and the restoration of the Polish state reduced the Belarusian nationalist movement to a pawn in a larger political game, in which its continued existence depended on its usefulness to the major powers.

Thesis and Working Assumptions

The initial presupposition of this dissertation is that the task of “rooting” the modern idea of linguistic nationalism among the masses proved an overwhelming endeavour to the Belarusian national elites on both sides of the Polish-Soviet border. The attempts to establish modern concepts of nationalism, both ethnic and civic, in a largely pre-modern society would have required organization and resources that were not available at the time in Western Belarus, and which in the BSSR were ultimately dependent on support from the central government in Moscow. Yet, by 1926 there were many signs that a Belarusian national movement was beginning to emerge. Ultimately, the relatively tolerant political climate did not last long enough for the national movement to consolidate, or to implement its contradictory objectives of

cultural and social autonomy. During the later years of the 1920s the political climate changed drastically as Stalin consolidated his power in the Soviet Union and Piłsudski returned to power in Poland. Over the next decade, the Belarusian national movement was crushed. Piłsudski's May, 1926 *coup d'etat* radically changed the political and social conditions in Poland. Piłsudski's return to power and the establishment of authoritarian rule led to the suppression of the Belarusian nationalist movement, which it had come to perceive as a political threat. The emerging Belarusian civic society, the contours of which were becoming visible by 1926, was destroyed, cultural and political institutions dissolved, its leaders arrested and silenced, and Western Belarus subjected to forced Polonization.

In the BSSR a cautious policy of linguistic Belarusization of state institutions continued throughout the 1930s, even though all real political power was restored to the central government in Moscow. All form of opposition was uprooted, and political initiative stifled. Belarusian institutions in the BSSR were made powerless and their leaders purged. While the policy of Belarusization helped establish legitimacy for the notion that a separate Belarusian nation existed, the memories of this period were overshadowed by the Stalinist 1930s followed by World War II, which both fundamentally reshaped Belarusian society and determined the political environment for the next forty years. For decades, historians and policy makers paid little attention to the 1920s in Belarus, which came to be seen as a brief historical parenthesis. Certainly, the independent republic that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union had changed beyond recognition between 1928 and 1991. Yet, Belarusian independence has led to renewed interest in the period when Soviet Belarusian institutions and its eastern borders were established. In order to understand why there is an independent Republic of Belarus we need to look into the complicated international relations during the period between 1917 and 1928.

Prior Research and the Context of the Study

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the return of “national” narratives have led to a significant increase in studies of nationalism during the past fifteen years. There is new interest in the link between nationalism and socialism. Labor historian Håkan Blomqvist writes that “When the socialist labor movement with its internationalist ideology organized large proletarian masses on a national level, these developed, for the first time, a national consciousness. This led to the paradox that the labor movement

created at the same time both a national consciousness and an international ideology among its followers.”¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm observes that “Marxist movements and states have tended to become national not only in form but in substance, i. e. nationalist. There is nothing to suggest that this trend will not continue.”¹⁵

Recent research on nationalism has increasingly focused on the role of language, adding a linguistic factor to the previously established historical/historiographic, ethnographic and anthropological factors behind the development of nationalism.¹⁶ In the early 20th century, the Belarusian national movement considered language as the single most important identifying factor, trumping “race,” religion and ethnicity. The weak national identity in post-Soviet Belarus can partly be attributed to this tradition of identification with language. In a setting where language remains the main factor for national self-identification the majority of the population has come to identify with a culture which transcends the boundaries of Belarus. The predominant language in Belarus – Russian – is a language shared with the majority populations in neighboring Russia and Ukraine. At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union many residents of Belarus identified with a larger, post-Soviet and Russophone ethno-linguistic community and the positioning of Belarus as part of a larger, Orthodox or East Slavic community.¹⁷ This is reflected in the rhetoric of the Lukashenka government, which gained mass support by exploiting these issues.¹⁸ The president of Belarus rarely uses literary Belarusian, a language few Belarusians can master,

¹⁴ Blomqvist, 48.

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “Some Reflections on ‘The Break-up of Britain’,” *New Left Review*, 105 (September-October 1977), 13.

¹⁶ Daniel Beauvois, “Linguistic Acculturations and Reconstructions in the ULB Group (Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus)”, in Tony Judt and Denis Lacorne (eds.), *Language, Nation, and State: Identity Politics in a Multilingual Age* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 204.

¹⁷ These overlapping, or multiple identities in the western borderlands of the Soviet Union are not new. Nor are they limited to Belarus. In his study on the Vinnitsia region during World War II, Amir Weiner observed that “Local [Ukrainians in Vinnitsa] had little comprehension and acceptance of the nationalist insistence on excising ethnic Russians from the Ukrainian body (...) [I]n Vinnitsa even nationally conscious Ukrainians considered Russians “our own” (*svoi*).” Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 250, 313. On the situation today between language and identity in the predominantly Russian-speaking Kharkiv area in Ukraine, see Margrethe B. Søvik, *Support, resistance and pragmatism: An examination of motivation in language policy in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Acta Universitatis Stockholmensis, Stockholm Slavic Studies* 34 (Stockholm: Stockholm University and Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2007), especially 37-39.

¹⁸ “Mass everyday usage of other people’s language, especially Russian and Polish, is the norm for the Belarusians. In this regard they remind us of the contemporary Celtic peoples – with the difference that the Belarusians have maintained their native language to a considerably higher extent than, for instance the Irish or Scots.” Iurii Shevtsov, *Ob’edinennai natsiia: Fenomen Belarusi* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Evropa,” 2005), 35-36.

but, following the tradition of the post-war Soviet era, relies on Russian, with occasional references in Belarusian.¹⁹ Presenting himself as a guarantor of order and stability, drawing heavily on Soviet Belarusian symbolism and rhetoric, Lukashenka has consciously worked to establish a new form of identity, referred to by some analysts as “Creole” nationalism, a merger of Soviet and Belarusian traditions into a new nationalism.²⁰

While the majority of Belarusians consider themselves Belarusian speakers, and regard Belarusian as their native language, only a small minority uses the standardized “high” form of literary Belarusian in everyday life.²¹ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa has observed that “the Belarusians know what they are *not*, while they still do not know what they *are*.²² This situation has complicated the work of advocates of linguistic nationalism. There were three waves of Belarusization in the 20th century, imposed from above and which met with various degrees of opposition from the reluctant local government. Each wave was

¹⁹ In November 2001, at the second congress of the Belarusian teachers, Lukashenka stated that “As long as I am president, people will be able to decide themselves in what language they choose to speak (Applause). From this tribune people delivered speeches in Belarusian. Did people squint at them? No. People here spoke in Russian. So what – did people react negatively? No. In the big picture, this is no problem, not in this state. And if we begin to artificially inflate a problem, which barely exists, we will damage our native Belarusian language. We will scare people away. We went through all this in the early 1990s. We do not need any formalism when it comes to the equality of languages. We need to do this calmly. We only need to calm down and begin speaking Belarusian and not go after people who speak English, German or Russian.” Aliaksandar Lukashenka, “II Z’ezd Nastaunikau: Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliky Belarus A. G. Lukashenko na Vtoroi s’ezde uchitelei 3 noiabria 2001,” *Belaruski Histrychny Chasopis*, No. 1, (2002): 11.

²⁰ Grigory Ioffe, in particular, has applied Ukrainian public intellectual Mykola Riabchuk’s thesis of Creole nationalism to Belarus, and made the case that Lukashenka is indeed a nation-builder who for the first time appeals to a sense of common identity that is inclusive and popular. “It turns out that many Belarusians who speak trasyanka are quite patriotic and nationalistic...For them, things Russian no longer belong in “we,” but cannot yet be assigned to “they.”...most Belarusians have found it problematic to see themselves as a community apart from Russia, and so has Lukashenka. Yet the country and its leader have made important steps in the direction of psychological (albeit not yet economic) independence from Russia.” Grigory Ioffe, “Unfinished Nation-Building in Belarus and the 2006 Presidential Election,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, No. 48, No. 1, (2007a), 48-49. See also idem, *Understanding Belarus and how Western foreign policy misses the mark* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Natalia Leshchenko, “A Fine Instrument: Two Nation-Building Strategies in Post-Soviet Belarus,” *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 10, No. 3, (2004), 333-351 and Idem, “The National Foundation of the ‘Last European Dictatorship’,” paper presented at the 12th ASN World Convention, The Harriman Institute, Columbia University, April 14, 2007.

²¹ During the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been an increase not only of the number of people who define themselves as ethnic Belarusians, but also in the number of people claiming Belarusian as their native language. The 1999 census was the first since 1926 that allowed Belarusians to themselves define their nationality, rather than having one ascribed to them at birth by the authorities. Between 1989 and 1999, the number of BSSR/Belarus citizens who claimed Belarusian as their “native language” increased from 65.6 per cent to 73.7 per cent (or 85.6 per cent of “ethnic” Belarusians). Yet, in 1999, only 36.7 per cent of the citizens of Belarus (or 41.3 per cent of “ethnic” Belarusians) claimed Belarusian as the language spoken at home. <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/en/census/p6.php> (accessed August 6, 2007). See also Shevtsov, 35 and Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language,” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 55, No. 7, (November, 2003), 1009-1047; Hirsch, 116-125.

²² Barbara Törnquist-Plewa *Vitryssland: Språk och identitet i ett kulturellt gränsland* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2001), 89.

followed by backlashes. In the BSSR, as in Belarus under Lukashenka, the primacy of the Russian language was re-established.²³

Because of the historical weakness of the Belarusian national movement, the topic of Belarusian nationalism has been neglected by scholars. Further, literature has been polarized. Soviet historiography insisted that the national question had been “resolved,” and that Soviet Belarus was an example of a peaceful and harmonious flourishing of national cultures.²⁴ In the West, much of the research on Belarus was colored by the politics of the Cold War.²⁵ The highly charged language of the authoritative *Belarusian Review/Belaruski zbornik*, published by the Munich Institute for the Study of the USSR described Soviet rule in Belarus as “the harshest instrument to suppress the freedom [of the Belarusians]. The end goal of this policy is the extermination of the Belarusian people as a nation. To this end, the Kremlin uses different dreadful methods and manners, beginning with the destruction of the Belarusian culture, systematic Russification, massive persecution and resettlements, and finally harsh physical terror and genocide.”²⁶

Recently, a number of works have appeared on the topic of nationalism and national mobilization in Belarus. In particular, Beth Baird Yocom’s pioneering work on the experimental Soviet attempts at establishing official multilingualism in the BSSR in the 1920’s deserves to be mentioned. Jakub Zejmis has focused on the role of religion and language for the national movement in Western Belarus, and David Alan Riach has written about the political orientation of Belarusian nationalism.²⁷ Terry Martin,

²³ Three periods of enforced Belarusization can be discerned during the 20th century. The first, and most significant, took place between 1919 and 1930/1938, and is the topic of the fourth chapter of this dissertation. A second, brief Belarusization took place during the power struggle following Stalin’s death in 1953, and a third Belarusization lasted from 1989 to 1995. All three pushes for Belarusization were followed by periods of reaction and a restoration of the primacy of Russian. Nikolai Zen’kovich, *Tainy ushedshego veka. Granitsty. Spory. Obidy* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2005), 227-239

²⁴ Klas-Göran Karlsson, “Kultur, historiemedvetande och nationell identitet: Det sovjetiska nationaltetsproblemet på 80-talet,” *Historisk Tidsskrift* (1988): 4, 516.

²⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, “Introduction” in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.) *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

²⁶ St. Stankevich, “Natsyianal’naia palityka Kremlia na Belarusi,” *Belaruski zbornik*, vol. 1, (January-March, 1955), 47. The Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of the USSR, organized in Munich in July of 1950 was organized to represent “a free corporation of scientists and men and women of letters who have left the Soviet Union...Anyone engaged in scholarly investigation may become a collaborator of the Institute regardless of his national or political affiliations provided he is not a Communist Party member or sympathizer.” *Belaruski zbornik*, vol. 1, (January-March, 1955).

Francine Hirsch, and Kate Brown have written important works on the role of ethnography and perception of race for the Soviet government during the *korenizatsiia*, all of which partly cover Belarus.²⁸ Concerning the national minorities in the BSSR, the works of Eugeniusz Mironowicz, Siarhiej Tokć, Ryszard Radzik and Elissa Bemporad are particularly noteworthy.²⁹

There are no studies on the rise and fall of the Belarusian national movement from the perspective of language policies in the BSSR and Polish-Soviet rivalry. This thesis examines Soviet nationalities policies in the western borderlands of Belarus in relation to Soviet foreign policy objectives, and links the destruction of the Belarusian elites to the political and diplomatic conflict between the USSR and Poland.

Materials and Methodology

This thesis is based on a number of primary sources. The chapters on Western Belarus under Poland are based on the use of Western Belarusian journals and newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s. Western Belarusian newspapers, particularly those published between 1925 and 1931, provide insights and a perspective very different from the Soviet government mouthpieces. The newspapers *Nasha Niva* and *Krynitsa/Belaruskaia Krynitsa* were particularly influential and exercised a significant impact on the intellectual development of the Belarusian national movement.³⁰ The focus here is on the self-image of the Western Belarusian intellectual elite, how it responded to Belarusization in the BSSR, and how it tried

²⁷ Beth Baird Yocom, “Constructing a Socialist Tower of Babel: Nationality Policy in Soviet Belorussia 1921-1933.” Ph. D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2003; Jakub Zejmis, “Belarus: Religion, Language and the Struggle for National Identity in a Soviet-Polish Borderland, 1921-1939,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University, Department of History, 2003; David Alan Riach, “[Themes in Belarusian national thought: The origins, emergence and development of the Belarusian 'national idea'](#),” Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University, Department of Political Science, 2001. This topic of language and identity in post-Soviet Belarus has received more attention. See, for instance Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian identity,” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 55, No. 8, (December, 2003), 1241-1272; Idem., “Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, no. 1 (January 2004) 85-118; Idem., “Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language,” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 55, No. 7, (November, 2003) 1009-1047 and David Marples, *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999).

²⁸ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.) *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Kate Brown, *A Biography of no Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), particularly 145-155.

²⁹ Eugeniusz Mironowicz, Siarhiej Tokć and Ryszard Radzik, *Zmiana struktury narodowościowej na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim w XX wieku* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymostku, 2005); Elissa Bemporad, “Red star on the Jewish Street: The reshaping of Jewish life in Soviet Minsk, 1917 – 1939” Ph. D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2006; Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

³⁰ The Western Belarusian press, and *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* in particular, has been extensively covered in Zejmis. Riach’s 2001 dissertation covers a similar topic, but focuses more on the political aspects of Belarusian nationalism. Also Riach relies on *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* as a key source of information.

to lay the foundations for a future Belarusian state by exploring the political rivalry between the governments in Moscow, Warsaw and Kaunas. *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, in particular, offers an alternate national narrative to that of official Minsk. The contributors represented the non-communist Belarusian intellectual elite, which perceived itself as the keepers and promoters of the Belarusian national idea. *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* became a leading intellectual forum for the Belarusian national movement in Western Belarus. Every issue had an editorial, and a section with letters to the editor and, as a general rule, a cultural and political section. While *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* was the organ of the Belarusian Christian Democratic Party (BKhD), the paper provided considerable intellectual diversity on its pages. Given the rather limited number of Belarusian language newspapers, journals and publications in Western Belarus there were no significant difficulties with regard to choice of material. *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, of which nearly every volume between 1925 and 1937 has been consulted, serves as the main source for the chapters on language, identity and the political life in Western Belarus. The views of this newspaper have been contrasted with those expressed in the organs of the pro-Soviet and left-wing Belarusian Peasants' and Workers' *Hramada* (BSRH).

While expressing the views of the Belarusian Christian Democrats, *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* articulated a minority view within the Belarusian nationalist movement. As the Polish authorities feared the radical Western Belarusian parties more than the Christian Democrats, the press of the largest political movement of Western Belarus – the BSRH – faced even more significant obstacles. Most of its papers were banned, and relatively few volumes of its papers have been preserved. Therefore, the perspective of the Western Belarusian left is represented by a number of short-lived publications of radical Belarusian papers and bulletins of the BRSR and the so-called *Zmahan'ne* factions in the Polish Sejm and Senate. The section on Polish-Soviet relations and on the plight of the national minorities in Poland is based partly on recently published archival material, and partly on quarterly reports from the Swedish embassy in Warsaw to the government in Stockholm. A neutral power, Sweden was assigned by the League of Nations to assess minority claims of abuse and unfair treatment at the hands of the Polish government.³¹

³¹ Arthur Sehn, "Etniska minoriteter i Polen i svenska diplomatiska rapporter 1918-1939. Part 1 and 2" *Acta Sueco-Polonica* Nr. 2 and 3. (Uppsala: Seminariet i Polens kultur och historia vid Uppsala Universitet, 1994).

The section dealing with nation building in the BSSR relies mainly on key policy documents, orders, meeting minutes, and reports by control commissions and local leaders. Hitherto, most of these documents have not been analyzed and discussed.³² The “national mobilization,” in the BSSR followed a different path than in Western Belarus. Here, the measures intended to forge a Soviet Belarusian identity were based on the initiatives of the central government, and carried out through the establishment of “national” Belarusian state institutions, within the framework of a one-party state. Already by the early 1920s newspapers in the BSSR had been reduced to propaganda vehicles. The aim is to use these newspapers to compare and contrast the two nation-building attempts in the two geographical parts of modern day Belarus – the Soviet, state-imposed policy in the east, and the grassroots movement in the west, their potential to be manipulated by their adversaries, and why they were both seen as threats to the authoritarian and secretive governments in Warsaw and Moscow.

This dissertation also aims to place Belarusian nationalism in its historical context. While the Belarusian national movement has often been compared and contrasted with the Ukrainian example, comparisons with the Jewish national movements are less common. The goal is to shed light on the interaction between the Belarusian national movement and other national movements in the region. The experiences of other modern political latecomers, such as Ukrainian, Lithuanian and secular Jewish nationalism had decisive influences on the Belarusian national movement. The latter, nevertheless tended to deny the influence of other nationalisms and to strive to delineate itself as a polity or ethnos, distinct and separate from its neighbors in spirit, race and content.

The outlook and orientation of the early Belarusian national activists were influenced by national movements among neighboring peoples, such as the Bundist movement,³³ which appeared and developed

³² R. P. Platonov and U. K. Korshuk (eds.), *Belarusizatsyia 1920-ia hady: Dakumenty i materyialy* (Minsk: Belaruski Dzerzhauny Universitet, 2001). U. M. Mikhniok, et al. (eds.), *Zneshniaia palitika Belarusi: Zbornik dokumentau i materialau. Vol. 2 (1923-1927 hh.)* (Minsk: The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian State University, 1999) and Idem., *Zneshniaia palitika Belarusi: Zbornik dokumentau i materialau. Vol. 3 (1928-cherven' 1941 h.)* (Minsk: The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian State University, 2001).

³³ The Bund, or *Der Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland* was founded in 1897, seeking to unite all Jewish workers in the Russian Empire into one socialist movement. From 1898 to 1903 it was a part of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party. It strongly opposed Zionism as an unrealistic form of escapism, and worked for the establishment of Jewish cultural autonomy and socialism in the areas of Jewish settlement in Europe. Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the*

primarily in the cities of Belarus that were mainly Jewish and Polish rather than Belarusian in ethnic composition.³⁴ The Belarusian and Jewish nationalist movements had their headquarters a few blocks away from each other in Vilnia/Wilno/Vilno, a city both national movements regarded as their intellectual capital. Their leaders often read the same books, were influenced by the same national currents, experienced similar social dynamics and, often attended the same universities. It is therefore not surprising that the Jewish and Belarusian national movements resembled each other. Much like the secular Yiddish national movement the Belarusian national activists identified with their vernacular languages rather than religion. Both leading Jewish nationalist movements in the region, Poale Zion³⁵ and the Bund, merged class and national awareness into a radical left-wing program. Shared experiences of national discrimination made the Belarusian and Jewish national movements similar in some key areas. The ideologues of the Belarusian movement appeared to be under the influence of its Jewish counterpart. Like the Belarusians, the Jews perceived themselves as a “nation” without a country.³⁶ One key difference is, of course, that despite their dispersion across the world and speaking several different languages, most Jews, not only their intellectual elite, shared a national consciousness.

The Belarusian national movement had difficulties in delineating Belarusian culture and tradition from those of its neighbors. On the one hand, this dilemma contributed to the relative weakness of the Belarusian national movement and national consciousness. On the other, it also appears to have contributed to a relatively inclusive nationalism. Expressions of anti-Semitism were relatively rare in the early Belarusian national movement, which instead emphasized class solidarity with the impoverished

Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 83-125; Bemporad (2006), 34-44.

³⁴ Whereas the Belarusians at the turn of the century made up 4 and 9 percent of the total number of inhabitants of Vilnia and Miensk respectively, Jews constituted 41.0 and 52.3 per cent. Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 109. According to the 1897 census, 9 per cent of the Miensk and 4.2 per cent of Vilnia inhabitants spoke Belarusian. Steven L. Guthier, *The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897-1970. Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIX, no. 1, 1977, 45.

³⁵ The Poale Zion was a Marxist Zionist Jewish organization, founded in Poltava in 1906. While it called for a Jewish state in Palestine, it supported the October Revolution and played a role in the establishment of both the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet republics. It was forced to merge with the Bolsheviks in 1919 and formally banned in 1928. One wing of the movement, the “Left Poalei-Zion” was Yiddishist, wishing to retain the Yiddish language in Israel and making it one of the its official languages. Zimmerman, 229-231; Vebl Chenin, “Spiritual Potential of the Communal Revival” Yiddish Culture and Post-Soviet Jewry,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 14: 1-2 (Spring 2002).

³⁶ Stary Dzied (pseud.), “Hutarka Staroha Dzieda,” *Krynitsa* No. 14, June 15, 1924, 3-4.

Jewish dwellers in the *shtetlekh* of Belarus. Like the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), they interpreted anti-Semitism as a tool of Russian reactionaries and Polish landlords, and as a threat to the national aspirations of the Belarusians.³⁷

Outline

This dissertation is organized chronologically in chapters that cover the period from the beginning of the national awakening, the multiple declarations of Belarusian statehood in 1918-1920, the division of Belarus into a western and eastern part, the Soviet Belarusian nation building initiatives, and the conflict between Poland and the USSR and its disastrous consequences for the Belarusian elites. It begins in 1906, when the first Belarusian-language newspaper appeared, a pivotal event for the Belarusian national movement, and ends in 1939-41, with the unification of Belarus under Stalinist rule. During 1939-41, the newly annexed areas became the center of Stalinist political terror, largely targeting Poles. The subsequent war that ravaged the republic from 1941-44 decimated its population and removed most of its large Jewish population, transforming Belarus from a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic republic to the increasingly homogenized and “de-nationalized” society of today. These eventful thirty-five years mark, on the one hand the establishment of Belarus as a political unit. On the other, they encompass the rise and fall of the Belarusian nationalist movement. The establishment of Belarusian statehood took place through a complex and contradictory process. Numerous attempts to establish Belarusian statehood were followed by the division of Belarus between Poland and Soviet Russia and two radically different political experiences in the two parts of Belarus. This dissertation covers separately the Soviet attempts at Belarusization, the rise of Stalin and Piłsudski and the subsequent destruction of the Belarusian movement on both sides of the border.

Chapter Two outlines the development of the early Belarusian national movement from the turn of the century to the revolutions of 1917. It traces the origins of the movement in the failed rebellion of 1863 but particularly the political opportunities that opened following the revolution of 1905. It reanalyzes the debate concerning the ethnic, “racial,” and cultural belonging of Belarus, which appeared mainly as a

³⁷ Jerzy Jedlicki, “Resisting the Wave: Intellectuals against Antisemitism in the Last Years of the ‘Polish Kingdom,’” 73-74, in Robert Blobaum (ed.), *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

reaction to the tsarist authorities' denial of a separate Belarusian ethnicity, and discusses the particular difficulties such as poverty and ignorance that faced the early nationalist movement. Chapter Three is a study of the various national projects that were initiated during the period between the Brest-Litovsk and Riga Peace Treaties, 1918–1921, when Belarusian statehood was declared six times. From this period stems at least two rival national mythologies that have defined the national discourse. The focus is on the impact of the March 25, 1918 Declaration of Independence and its impact on the Bolsheviks' nationalities policies. As events in Belarus were heavily influenced by political developments in Europe, the chapter also analyses the ambitious German, Polish and Soviet plans for the region and the framework, which enabled these multiple declarations of a Belarusian statehood. The inconclusive settlement of the Polish-Soviet War and the awkward Peace Treaty of Riga in 1921 failed to fulfill the aims of Stalin, Piłsudski, and, especially, the Belarusian nationalists. They divided Belarus and made Belarusians on both sides of the border vulnerable to accusations of irredentism.

The fourth chapter, in many ways the centerpiece of this work, is a study of the Soviet experimental policy of the 1920s that gave rise to a movement, often referred to as Belarusian National Communism. Its reception in Western Belarus, where developments in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (the BSSR), had a massive impact and set the tone for the political debate, is also discussed. In the mid-1920s the Belarusian national movement on both sides of the border began to attract mass support. The realization of the national ambitions of the Belarusian movements – autonomy, linguistic Belarusization and the building of national institutions – now seemed within reach. The National Communists were aided by the relatively tolerant political climate in the Soviet Union in the NEP era and supported by state policies, which have been described as “affirmative action.”³⁸ The emerging national institutions were operating in the Belarusian language and were increasingly staffed by ethnic Belarusians. Chapter Four focuses on the attempt to establish not only a republic that was to be a “national home” for the Belarusians, but also for three sizable national minorities, the Russians, Jews, and

³⁸ Martin (2001) and Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.) *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 202-238.

Poles. During the 1920s, the Soviet government experimented in constructing a multilingual and multiethnic national republic, attempted to build political legitimacy by appealing to non-Russians, and established “national” institutions and historical narratives.

Chapter Five is a study of the situation in Western Belarus, which became a part of the Polish state that re-emerged at the end of World War I. In the immediate post-war years Poland was led by weak coalition governments. Exhausted from the wars, Poland lacked the resources to carry out the assimilationing measures advocated by the national democrats who dominated the political landscape until 1926. This offered the Belarusian movement a breathing space, during which it was able to organize and lay the groundwork for its future activities assisted in part by the governments of Lithuania, the USSR, and Czechoslovakia. This chapter focuses on the Belarusian political movements and their attempts at establishing Belarusian institutions in Poland.

Chapter Six is a study of the opposition to the joint policies of Belarusization and *korenizatsiya*, both among ordinary people and the Soviet bureaucracy. The establishment of a quadrilingual administration and the heavy-handedness of the enforced switch of the language of administration from Russian to the Belarusian, Yiddish, and Polish languages was widely unpopular among the masses, who lacked a Belarusian identity and were concerned about the limitations on their social mobility that might result from a Belarusian, Yiddish, or Polish education. Not only was official multilingualism unpopular, it was also impractical and confusing, undermining the efficiency of the Soviet rule.

Chapter Seven is a study of the changed political atmosphere in Poland and the Soviet Union following Piłsudski’s and Stalin’s parallel rise to power. The destruction of the Belarusian movement in Poland from 1927 was the result of a complex interaction and political rivalry between Moscow and Warsaw. This chapter also examines the disastrous consequences for the Belarusian movement of Piłsudski’s 1926 coup d’etat and his resumption of schemes to bring about a regime change in the Soviet Union. Of particular interest here is the interaction between the two rival powers and its consequences for Belarus, which has not been studied in detail by Western historians.³⁹ It centers around an analysis of the

³⁹ There are, however, a number of Belarusian works on the Stalinist terror in the BSSR. See, for instance Uladzimir Adamushka, *Palitychnaya represii 20-50-ykh hadau na Belarusi* (Minsk: “Belarus” 1994); Symon Kandybovich, *Razhrom natsyianal’naha rukhu u Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruski Historychny Ahliad, 2000); Tat’iana Sergeevna Prot’ko, *Stanovlenie sovetskoi totalitarnoi*

relations between Poland and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and on how the two states exploited Belarusian nationalism as a vehicle to undermine each other. In 1926 the Belarusian national movement was on the verge of turning into a mass movement. The development towards authoritarianism in Poland and dictatorship in the USSR radically changed political conditions in the two countries. Political violence spelled the end to the “national” movement in Belarus.

Chapter Eight covers the onset of political repression in the BSSR, following Stalin’s consolidation of power in 1928, a process resulting in the destruction of the Belarusian movement in both countries, a process which was essentially complete by 1932. The undoing of the joint policies of Belarusization and korenizatsiia took place over five years, from 1929 to 1934, during which the elites of the republic were destroyed. Of particular interest here are the long-term consequences of the political terror and the near-total destruction of the Belarusian intelligentsia over the course of the decade and the results of the destruction of the large Polish minority in the republic.

A Note on Transliteration

Given the use of several Belarusian alphabets, this dissertation consistently utilizes the Library of Congress (LOC) transliteration of the Belarusian originals throughout. That means that even texts in *lacinka*, the Belarusian version of the Latin alphabet, have been transliterated according to the LOC system. Thus, *Bielaruskaja Krynica* is transliterated as *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*. However, Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian names that are known in other transliterations in English have not been changed. Thus, names like Hunczak, and Yushchenko are not transliterated to LOC style. Polish names are spelled in Polish, complete with diacritical signs. Belarusian names of persons and places, even though they may be better known in their Russian, Polish or Lithuanian forms, are given in Belarusian. Thus we have Lukashenka, Ihnatouski, and Masherau, not Lukashenko, Ignatovskii and Masherov

sistemy v Belarusi (1917-1941 gg.) (Minsk: Tesei, 2002); Aleksandr Petrovich Vrublevskii and Tat’iana Sergeevna Prot’ko, *Iz istorii repressii protiv Belorusskogo krestianstva 1929-1934 gg.* (Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1992); Aliaksandar Lukashuk, “Za kipuchai chekistskai rabotai:” Z zhyts’tsyia katau (Minsk: Nasha Niva, 1997).

Chapter 1

Intellectual Background, National Theories, and Political Climate in Pre-Revolutionary Belarus

The manufacturing or awakening of a Belarusian consciousness took place within a context of the ideological historicizing of the past, a deliberate attempt by Belarusian intellectuals to break the Russocentric approach of the tsarist historiography of Vasilii Kliuchevskii, Pavel Miliukov, Sergei Solov'ev and others. A new, “national” Belarusian history began to emerge with Belarusian national activists’ attempts to establish a historical continuity to legitimize the notion of Belarusian statehood. The proponents of Belarusian statehood imagined such a continuity in the Principality of Polatsk and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which were both identified as “Belarusian” states. The 16th century flourishing of the Grand Duchy, in particular, was presented as a “golden age” of Belarusian culture.¹ This nation-based narrative tends to exclude the experiences of non-Belarusians.²

As a linguistic and ethnic group, which long lacked a political and cultural elite of its own, the task of constructing a continuous “national” history was daunting for the Belarusian movement. One does not have to go very far back in time to see how the “national” definitions blur. The principality of Polatsk and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania can only with difficulty be described as “Belarusian” political entities, and their cultural expression “Belarusian” in any modern sense of the word. Certainly the elites of these societies seem to have little in common with the Belarusian national activists of the 20th century. Unlike their Lithuanian counterparts, the Belarusian national activists lacked a viable tradition of statehood.

¹ For an example of this, see Belaruski Natsyianal'ny Hramadski Arhanizatsyiny Kamitet "Belarus' – 2000" Zhurtanvanne Belarusau Sveu "Bats'kaushchyna,"/Belarusian National Public Organizing Committee "Belarus – 2000" International Association of the Belarusian People "Batskaushchyna" *Histarychny Shliakh Belaruskai Natsyi i Dziarzhavy/The History of the Belarusian Nation and State* (Minsk: "Belaruski khiahazbor, 2001); Rainer Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft: Nationsbildung und Geschichtspolitik in Weißrussland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), 18, and Andrej Kotljarchuk, The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood: Conflicts about the Past of Belarus," in Egle Rindzeviciute (ed.) *Baltic and East European Studies 2: Contemporary Change in Belarus* (Huddinge, Sweden: Baltic & East European Graduate School, Södertörns Högskola, 2004), 41-42.

² The writing of history has often been nation-centered. This is particularly true of the histories of the East European peoples which until recently lacked statehood. The modern discipline of history was formed at a time when few of today's East European states existed. Therefore, the national awakeners framed national histories as narratives about peoples. Following the enlightenment tradition, Western libraries organize the topic of history by states along the current borders, recognized by international law. This tradition tends to focus on “nations” and “national” cultures, often in isolation from others, sometimes at the expense of de-emphasizing cross-cultural interactions. The histories of art, music, economy and politics are organized along state and national lines, even though in reality ideas, money, music and ideas know no borders. Johan Dietrich, *Making Sense of Suffering: Holocaust and Holodomor in Ukrainian Historical Culture* (Lund: Mediatryck, Lund Universitet, 2006), 170.

Unlike the Ukrainian nationalists, they lacked even a proto-national precursor state, such as the Cossack tradition. Thus, all the great “Belarusian” saints, heroes, and cultural figures had to be shared with neighboring peoples.³ In lieu of a tradition of Belarusian national statehood, the national movement was forced to share the Lithuanian historical narrative, claiming the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Belarusian, or joint Belarusian-Lithuanian state.⁴

All societies and cultures have been influenced by interactions with their neighbors. Ideas, politics, music, literature, not to mention the phenomenon of nationalism itself, are international or interethnic phenomena, results of human interactions, which do not stop at ethnic or political borders. Yet, the writing of history has primarily been in the service of empires, states and ruling elites. This is true even for states that have long vanished. Karl Marx famously observed this relationship, pointing out that

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it.⁵

Other states, such as Muscovy, Lithuania, and the Latvia had also been highly contested constructs, the successes of which had by no means been given. The Latvian polity, for instance, had been united in 1919 for the first time in history. One problem here was the late arrival of national consciousness to Belarus. When national, or ethnic, awareness reached there, rival ethnic groups such as the Poles had already staked their claims to certain geographic areas. Unlike the weak and poorly organized Belarusian nation builders, Polish and Lithuanian, and even Latvian national activists could both argue and bargain their claims to lands from a position of strength. They had the support of the Western delegations at the Paris peace conference that followed the First World War and relied on Wilson’s Fourteen Points to lay claims to territories, which their delegations claimed legitimately belonged to “their” nations.

Not only victories and historical triumphs are important to the nationalist imagination. National tragedies and failed attempts at establishing statehood have also had a powerful impact on the nationalist

³ Törnquist-Plewa, (2001), 95.

⁴ See, for instance, “500-lets’tse s’mertsi Vitauta (1430-1930)” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 14, April 11, 1930, 1.

⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology in Marx Engels, Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlooks (New Publication of Chapter I of The German Ideology)* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 57.

imagination in many groups. As Belarus achieved full independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, some influential Western historians and political scientists, among them Kristian Gerner and Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, have questioned the existence of a Belarusian nationality, or dismissed it as an artificial construct, a result of arbitrary decisions by Soviet bureaucratic planners.⁶ Yet, even if one was to accept the claim of Belarus being an artificial construct, this does not mean that it lacks legitimacy. Assertions of the non-existence of a Belarusian nationality have become increasingly rare. Over time, the Soviet borders gained acceptance in Belarus and after seventeen years of independence, the idea of the existence of a separate Belarusian nationality appears to have gained popular acceptance. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger famously claimed that the nation itself was the greatest of all invented traditions. All states and national consciousnesses are constructed and a result of political or economic processes. If Belarus is an invented tradition or artificial construction, so by necessity are its neighbors.⁷

State, Nation, Identity. Central Concepts

The words “nationalism” and “nationalist” can be applied to the Belarusian case only with some reservations. Yet, the primary focus of this dissertation is the perceptions of the *nation*. To define a nation is notoriously difficult. The word has traditionally been used in two main ways, in an ethnic and civic sense. Ethnic nationalism describes a community of people with common origin and a common culture. Civic nationalism establishes a group of people who populate a more or less well-defined territory, recognizing the same government and obeying the same laws. The former is cultural and equivalent to ethnic groups, the latter political and describes the inhabitants in a state.⁸ The ethnic definition appears to predate the political.⁹

⁶ Kristian Gerner, "Ryssland: statsbildning som historiskt problem" in Birgitta Furuhagen (ed.), *Ryssland – ett annat Europa: Historia och samhälle under 1000 år* (Stockholm: Utbildningsradion, 1995), 227; Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Le Figaro* August 28, 1991, as quoted in Adam Maldsis, "Die Wiederentstehung der belorussischen Nation aus ihrem historischen und kulturellen Erbe," *Osteuropa*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (April, 1992): 311; Kjell-Albin Abrahamsson, *Vitryssland: 89 millimeter från Europa* (Stockholm: Fischer & co, 1999), 69 and Ihar Babkoŭ, "Belarus: Dual Modernity" in Karin Junefelt and Martin Peterson (eds.) *Cultural Encounters in East Central Europe* (Stockholm: Forskningsrådsnämnden, 1998), 105.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 263-308.

⁸ Otto Dann "Introduction" in Otto Dann & John Dindwiddy (eds.), *Nationalism in the age of the French Revolution* (London and Roncverte, WV: Hambledon Press, 1988), 4f.

Hans Kohn defines nationalism as “a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state.”¹⁰ The phenomenon “nation” is complicated and notoriously hard to define.¹¹ Ernest Renan suggested cynically that “A nation is a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours.”¹² Indeed it is useful to keep in mind the evolving, developing nature of the concept of the nation, and that it indeed is a social construct. Ross Poole, rather than taking primordial nationalist claims at face value, states that “a more empirically adequate account of the nation would not emphasize sameness of culture, but the existence of a common *will*: a nation is a group which – for whatever reason – *wants* to be treated as politically sovereign.”¹³ Miroslav Hroch stressed that “One must not determine the objective character of the nation with a fixed collection of features and attributes given once and for all, just as it is not possible to view the nation as an everlasting category, standing outside concrete social relations.”¹⁴ One definition, which is sometimes used and which takes this aspect into account, is that of the young Josef Stalin, who in one of his earliest scholarly endeavors defined a nation as “a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological disposition, manifested in a community of culture.”¹⁵ This definition takes into account the temporal nature of the nation. Benedict Anderson has expanded our understanding of the nation by emphasizing it as an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁶ In covering the period when Belarusian intellectual elites began

⁹ Voltaire used the term “nation allemande” when referring to the German language cultural sphere, and not to a German state. The term is old, and the term *Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation* was used for the first time in 1486. In the 17th century this term was understood in the sense that the German nation ruled the *Reich*. A more recent historical interpretation is that this term meant that the power of the Emperor was limited to German-speaking areas. Aira Kemiläinen, *Nationalism: Problems concerning the Word, the Concept and Classification*. Studia historica Jyväskylänsia III (Jyväskylä, Finland: Jyväskylän Kasvatusopillinen Korkeakoulu, 1964), 55.

¹⁰ Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*. Revised Edition (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1982), 9.

¹¹ Hroch, 3-7.

¹² See Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?,” in Eley and Suny, eds. *Becoming National*, 41-55.

¹³ Poole, 35.

¹⁴ Hroch, 3.

¹⁵ I. V. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1950), 51.

¹⁶ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 6-7.

to imagine the Belarusian-speaking community as a “nation,” this dissertation uses Kohn and Stalin’s definitions of nation and nationalism as working theories.

The term “state” is easier to define. Max Weber defined the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory.”¹⁷ The formation of a *nation-state* would mean that the political unit would correspond with the “national” unit. While the creation of such a unit would be almost impossible in practice, it is important as the imagined final goal of nationalism. Following Thomas Hylland Eriksen, this dissertation defines nation building as “the creation and consolidation of political cohesion and national identity.”¹⁸ In this fundamental aspect - the desire to establish a Belarusian nation-state - the Belarusian activists, regardless of their political belonging in other matters, were nationalists. Benedict Anderson has pointed out that nationalism does not represent *one*, coherent ideology, but appears in a number of forms. “Part of the difficulty is that one tends unconsciously to hypostasize the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N and then to classify ‘it’ as an ideology. It would, I think, make things easier if one treated it as if it belonged with ‘kinship’ and ‘religion,’ rather than with ‘liberalism’ or ‘fascism.’”¹⁹ We are reminded of Elie Kedourie’s observation that it is “a misunderstanding to ask whether nationalism is politics of the right or the left. It is neither.”²⁰ Only in the 1930s, influenced by the radicalization of the political climate in Europe, did this change and the first calls for the removal of the national minorities appeared. Yet, in Belarus, integral nationalism never came to exercise mass appeal. Thus, unless otherwise noted, when the term “Belarusian nationalist” is used, it is applied in this general understanding of the term, meaning someone dedicated to the idea of establishing a Belarusian nation-state.

Czech historian Miroslav Hroch introduced the concept of a three-stage periodization and a division of the intensity of the process of national activity. Hroch refers to these stages as phases A, B,

¹⁷ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.

¹⁸ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, Second edition. (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁹ Anderson, 5.

²⁰ Kedourie, 84.

and C. Phase A is signified by heightened awareness of the cultural and national distinctiveness among the intellectual elite, whereas phase B corresponds to the introduction of nationalism as a political program and patriotic agitation. Phase C, the mobilization of the masses into a mass national movement, constitutes the third step in this process, when the nationalist agenda has a chance to materialize.²¹ Based on this methodology, this dissertation is a study of the two first stages of national mobilization. Phase A roughly covered the period from 1906-1915; Phase B roughly 1915-1926. The interrelated German occupation and the February Revolution became catalysts for the Belarusian nationalist movement, the message of which now began to reach mass audiences. The key focus of this dissertation is Phase B of the Belarusian national movement, and the efforts of the national movement on both sides of the border to awaken national consciousness among the masses. Hroch himself lists the Belarusians, along with peoples like the Lusatian Sorbs and the Bretons, as examples of nationalities “which did not manage to form themselves fully into modern nations.”²²

While these patriots, or national activists, often belonged to the emerging middle class, their social background varied from country to country. While Czech, Slovak, Finnish and Norwegian patriots often came from the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie, the case was different for Estonian, Lithuanian and Belarusian patriots, who were overwhelmingly rural. In the Lithuanian case, less than five per cent came from cities.²³ The Belarusians were peasants, not workers, and overwhelmingly rural. In 1897, only one per cent of Belarusians lived in cities larger than 20,000.²⁴ Very few lived in Vil’nia, which the national movement regarded as their historical and spiritual capital. According to the official Polish census of 1931, the Belarusian share of the population was only 0.7 or 0.9 percent, whereas in the surrounding areas, Belarusians made up over 50 percent of the population.²⁵ In Miensk, the second candidate for

²¹ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 23.

²² Hroch, 137.

²³ Eley and Suny (eds.), 34.

²⁴ Stephen L. Guthier, “The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897-1970,” *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIX, no. 1, (January 1977): 44.

Belarusian capital, the Belarusians made up 9 percent of the population in 1891. The absolute majority, 51.2 percent of the residents of Minsk, spoke Yiddish.²⁶ Yet, it was urban life that awoke the Belarusian national consciousness, as it was in the cities that the overwhelmingly rural Belarusians encountered Jews, Poles and Russians. Contrasting their culture and language with that of other ethnicities, a small elite of Belarusian patriots began defining themselves as a distinct nationality and becoming aware of their own ethnicity in a different way from the homogeneity of the Belarusian village. There, the Belarusian identified himself as being a *muzhik*, or peasant, as opposed to a *pan*, or *gentleman*, which often meant an ethnic Pole, or a Polonized Belarusian or Lithuanian.

By 1926 the predominant Belarusian political organization appeared on the verge of turning into a mass movement. Combined with the significant successes of the Belarusian national communists in the BSSR, it could be argued that Belarus was indeed entering Phase C of Hroch's model. The years 1924-1930 constituted the peak years of Belarusian national, political and social activism. Between 1924 and 1927 the Belarusian national movement forced the Belarusian question onto the agenda of a number of successive Polish minority governments, uncertain how to deal with the new phenomenon.²⁷ Poland's ineptitude in handling national minorities contributed to the discrediting of the Grabski government and built momentum for Piłsudski's coup in 1926. Piłsudski's return to power marked the beginning not only of a new political system, but also a different approach to the national question. The years 1927-1930 saw a government crackdown on the Belarusian movement in Poland. In the absence of a Western Belarusian government or even cultural autonomy, the establishment of a national mythology and commemoration of the past, tasks often carried out by centralizing national government were instead being formulated in a democratic fashion on the pages of the rather limited number of publications of the national movement. Whereas the creation of state symbols and "national" holidays and celebrations were drafted by commissions and bureaucrats in the BSSR, in Western Belarus this had the character of a grassroots

²⁵ Stephen R. Burant, "Belarusians and the Belarusian Irredentia in Lithuania," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 25, No. 4, (December 1997): 646 and Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 54, 309.

²⁶ Guthier, 45, 49.

²⁷ Michał Kurkiewicz, *Sprawy białoruskie w polityce rządu Władysława Grabskiego* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2005), 39-54.

project, undertaken by a number of national activists who considered themselves the vanguard of national development. Although these constituted the elite within an underprivileged and poverty-stricken community, the word “elite” is misguided here, as these national activists were often low-ranking clergy, who lacked access to state structures to carry out their nationalizing agenda.

Ethnic and Civic Nationalism

The principle that the nation should constitute the basis for internationalism has been part of the classic liberal tradition since Bentham. Universalist values and international organizations appeared at the same time as modern nationalisms had their breakthrough in Western Europe.²⁸ Yet, European nationalisms fall into two categories, each with their own intellectual traditions. The tradition that has been predominant in Eastern and Central Europe is based upon language and ethnicity. Following Hans Kohn, many studies of nationalism have made a distinction between an inclusive, “western,” democratic civic nationalism and an exclusive, “eastern” ethnic authoritarianism based upon blood and ethnicity.²⁹ Kohn saw the enlightenment version of nationalism as part of the liberal, inclusive and universalistic tradition of the French and American revolutions, based upon the idea of the sovereignty of the nation, as opposed to the sovereignty of autocrats. Kohn juxtaposed this to ethnic particularism, authoritarianism and conservatism, which originated from the romantic tradition and in opposition to the Napoleonic occupation and the multiethnic empires of Central and Eastern Europe.

Whereas the nationalism in Western Europe was inclusive and non-ethnic, Central and Eastern European nationalism was centered on the issue of self-determination. The latter, according to this model, was obtained when all nations achieved independence to create their own nation-states, and when the geographic distribution of the ethnic boundaries of the nation coincided with its political borders. Seen from this perspective, self-determination would be achievable only through national independence and the formation of ethnic states. This differed from the Western European form of nationalism, according to

²⁸ Blomqvist, 67.

²⁹ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 329-334. See also Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (London: BBC Books, 1993), 3-6; Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 134-152 and Eley and Suny, “Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation,” in Eley and Suny, *Becoming National*, 4.

which popular sovereignty and self-determination were accomplished through the creation of representative governments. The fact that many Western European countries contained substantial national minorities was seen as being of little relevance.³⁰

Kohn saw these two traditions as mutually exclusive, or bound to stand in opposition to each other. Yet, there are many cases of these two traditions co-existing. Most European nationalisms contained a combination of the two forms. Belarusian nationalism and the official “Soviet patriotism,” established as official ideology in 1934,³¹ were no exceptions; they combined characteristics from both traditions, and so did the architects behind Soviet nationalities policies. On the one hand, Soviet planners relied on ethnic particularism and linguistic distribution in order to draw political boundaries. On the other hand, “Soviet patriotism” was not based on ethnicity, but on a political ideology, which in theory was internationalist and ethnically inclusive.³² Francine Hirsch emphasizes the ambiguity of the Soviet concept of “nationality.” The Soviet government subscribed to a definition of “nationality” that was based both on assumptions of the primordialism of nations while assuming that the state could intervene to “construct” modern nations and awaken national consciousnesses with the stated aim of creating a national communism.³³

Therefore, Kohn’s binary between “eastern” and “western” forms of nationalism is an oversimplification; it is not applicable to many of the left-wing Slavic ethnonationalist movements such as those of the liberal and socialist left in the Czech lands, Ukraine and Belarus. Despite its roots in the French and American revolutions, “Western” civic nationalism was fully compatible with slavery, segregation and genocidal policies towards native populations, such as the case of the United States or imperial expansion, as in the case of France. In some cases, it was also combined with political

³⁰ Thomas Duncan Masgrave, *Self-Determination and National Minorities* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13-14.

³¹ Lindner (1999), 156.

³² Slezkine, 202-238. In practice, this was to change in the 1930s, where many peoples were regarded as enemy nations or diaspora communities, to be excluded from the “friendship of peoples,” such as Poles, Germans, Swedes, Lithuanians, and Japanese. Hirsch, 291-292 and Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001), 311-343.

³³ Hirsch, 295-297, Martin (2001), 442-443.

authoritarianism, as in the case of Brazil.³⁴ At the same time, the “eastern” ethnic nationalism of Herder, Fichte and Schiller could be both radical and democratic. From this tradition stemmed democratic demands for rights for ethnic and linguistic groups subjected to foreign domination and national oppression. The key aspects of the ethno-nationalist projects were, at least until the mid-1800s, liberal, progressive and peaceful.³⁵ Democratic demands were articulated in the name of the ethnic community, and the nation was seen as the legitimate arena for political activism. In the words of David Arim Kaiser:

In Romantic discourse, both literary and political, this principle is expressed in narratives of beings striving after and developing their own particular genius by following the call of their own inward rules. The difference between liberalism and cultural nationalism is that for liberalism the being striving to obtain autonomy is an individual, while for cultural nationalism it is a whole people.³⁶

The Belarusian national movement during the first third of the 20th century belonged to a tradition of Kohn’s “eastern” nationalism, yet it was democratic, socialist-leaning and anti-colonial. Belarusian ethnicity, language and culture were used as vehicles for democratic change and mass political empowerment. As Margareta Mary Nikolas has pointed out,

Nationalism is not the rite of passage to modernity, but goes beyond this. It is a cultural and political reaffirmation of a group within modernity and towards post-modernity. Collectives are dynamic and new or altered high cultures always have the potential to still emerge. The exercise of nationalism is a result of a set of social conditions that produce a situation where the pervading culture is the high culture.... Nationalism as a function of modernity is used by the elite as a vehicle for social mobility – a method of redefinition. It is the role of the elite as intellectual awakeners to mobilize the mass, and by doing so nationalize them, either through management or outright manipulation....The elite governs and the mass follow, but the elite must be moved from below.³⁷

³⁴ One prime example of this was the corporate dictatorship, the New State, or *Estado Novo* of Getulio Vargas in Brazil. Lasting from 1937 to 1945, civic nationalism and strong central government was combined with a populist, authoritarian dictatorship. Already in the 1920s, Brazilian policy makers “turned their attention away from racial pessimism and toward education, social reform, and sanitation as answers to the ‘national problem.’” Nancy Leys Stepan, “*The Hour of Eugenics*”: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 156. Gilberto Freyre was perhaps the best known promoter of this positivist civic nationalism. “[Ethnic nationalism], be it said, is essentially non-Brazilian in that it considers men of color as a separate class with specified duties in the Brazilian community. Such a biologically ethnocentric attitude, if it had been general, would have resulted in a Brazilian society as segregated as that of the Jew in the ghetto or the Negro in the United States and South Africa.” Gilberto Freyre, *Order and Progress: Brazil from Monarchy to Republic*. Edited and Translated from the Portuguese by Rod W. Horton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 187-188. See also Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 165-172.

³⁵ Rune Johansson, ”’Ett odödligt sinnelag?’ svensk nationell utveckling i ett komparativt perspektiv,” in Erik Olsson (ed.), *Ethnicitetens gränser och mångfald* (Stockholm: Carlssons 2000), 292-294.

³⁶ David Arim Kaiser, *Romanticism, Aesthetics and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18ff.

³⁷ Margareta Mary Nikolas, “False Opposites in Nationalism: An Examination of the Dichotomy of Civic Nationalism and Ethnic Nationalism in Modern Europe,” (1999) available at <http://www.nationalismproject.org/articles/nikolas/title.html> (accessed October 18, 2007).

Collective Memory and National Identity

Maurice Halbwachs introduced the concept of collective memory, which he viewed as a phenomenon socially constructed by groups and institutions. Halbwachs argued that human memory can only function within a collective context. Such a context can be evoked by the erections of war memorials and the celebration of socially significant anniversaries, which link a community of people together. A certain amount of shared collective memories is necessary for a community to function. It is a flexible and changing phenomenon, expressed by separate individuals who remember and recollect individually,

but whose recollections are determined by a group context, shared by members of this community.³⁸

James Wertsch developed this concept further, emphasizing that collective memory differs within members of the community. Wertsch distinguishes between three kinds of collective memories:

“homogenous,” “complementary,” and “contested.” Whereas the first category means the most simple version of memory distribution, by “complementary” collective memory, Wertsch means events that are remembered differently by various members of the community, which supplement each other.

“Contested” memories are the most complicated, and constitute situations when members of a group or community remember things differently, and the interpretations of the past contradict and exclude each other.³⁹

At the same time, collective memory can be characterized by a set of characteristics, one of which is the inclination to create a simple and clear version of an event. Collective memory is remarkably flexible and constantly developing. Its content can be kept or forgotten, consciously and unconsciously distorted, manipulated and appropriated by various groups. The recollections of the past can also be rejuvenated and “woken up” to life again, and adjusted in accordance with the political and social needs of the present.⁴⁰ Collective memory is therefore highly selective, and reproduces only the memories and facts that “fit” with the current social and political needs, while it has the capacity to censure and repress memories that are not politically useful.

³⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Edited, Translated and with Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³⁹ James Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23-24.

⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 1-20 in Pierre Nora (ed.) *The Construction of the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Halbwachs, 25.

There is a consensus among scholars that national identity is inseparably linked to collective memory. Ukrainian sociologist Olena Ivanova maintains that “development, support, and transformation of national identity is impossible without collective memory. Therefore national identity cannot exist without support of collective (historical, national) memory.”⁴¹ Historical memory is therefore central to nationalist movements and nation-builders, and closely related to the concept of nation building.

Class and nationality

Given that national and class consciousness can stand in opposition to each other, and on occasion appear as mutually exclusive, many nationalist movements have downplayed the class divisions within “their” ethnic community. According to Benedict Anderson, nationalists perceive the nation both as a “fraternity of equals” and as a “deep, horizontal comradeship,” which includes a notion of egalitarianism. Historically, nationalist egalitarianism has sometimes been an ally, sometimes a foe of liberalism and socialism.⁴² In the case of Belarus, national mobilization in the Belarusian language was a recent and rather short-lived phenomenon, interrupted by political repression and the physical elimination of the intellectual elite.⁴³ Belarusian nationality (much like that of the neighboring Ukrainians) often overlapped with membership in the peasant class, something that complicated the relationship between class and nation.⁴⁴ Ronald Suny asserts that the peasantry among the national minorities of the disintegrating Russian Empire supported the local Soviets rather than the national independence promoted by the small nationalist elites. Unprepared for a sustained political movement, they eventually sided with the Bolsheviks.⁴⁵ As for Belarus, “national awareness came late, remained an intellectual phenomenon, and did not take hold among the peasants.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Olena Ivanova, “Collective Memory of the Holocaust and National Identity of the Student Youth in Ukraine,” paper presented at the Third Annual Danyliw Seminar in Contemporary Ukrainian Studies, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa, October 13, 2007.

⁴² B. Anderson, 7.

⁴³ Shevtsov, 75.

⁴⁴ On the complex relation between class and nationality in Ukraine, see Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 79.

⁴⁵ Suny (1993), 78-79.

⁴⁶ Suny (1993), 35.

Well into the 1920s, to the extent they possessed a collective identity, a majority of Belarusians identified with their religion, the churches of which designated them either as Poles or Russians, depending on whether they attended Catholic or Orthodox churches, popularly referred to as the “Polish” and “Russian” faiths. Others simply defined themselves as locals, and still do, to some extent.⁴⁷ The landowners spoke Polish and were either ethnic Poles or Polonized Lithuanians or Belarusians. The simple people, the *muzhiks*, spoke Belarusian. The language demarcated the *class* of the speaker, rather than her/his ethnicity. Within the Belarusian-speaking community, there were of course variations in terms of economic assets, even though the economic differences within the members of the community of Belarusian-speakers were smaller than in many other groups. The modern nationalist identification with the Belarusian nation or language came late, and was vague and superficial. Thus, the Belarusian peasant considered his or her language an expression of social, rather than national belonging.⁴⁸ The notion of Belarus as a society without class distinctions originated with the Russian populist and Socialist Revolutionary movement. Merging with the common nationalist impulse to downplay the importance of class within the “nation,” the Belarusian national movement’s notion of Belarus as a classless society came to have an impact on Belarusian national communism and become a central part of the Belarusization, as the Kremlin equated the promotion of Belarusian culture and language with promotion of the Belarusian nation of pauperized peasants.⁴⁹ The leading national communist intellectual in the BSSR, Vsevalod Ihnatouski, believed that “class and the national composition of the Belarusans almost coincided with each other.”⁵⁰ Similar assumptions were made by the Christian Democratic thinkers, such as the Roman Catholic priest Adam Stankevich, who insisted that “Marx’s proletarian materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat do not hold any promise for the Belarusian people, particularly not for the peasantry.”⁵¹ The belief that Belarus essentially lacked class divisions was likewise a cornerstone of

⁴⁷ Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 33

⁴⁸ Ryszard Radzik, *Miedzy zbiorowością etniczną a wspólnotą narodową: Białorusini na tle przemian narodowych w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX stulecia* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2000), 179.

⁴⁹ St. Stankevich, “Natsyianal’naia palityka Kremlia u Belarusi,” *Belaruski Zbornik*, vol. 1 (January-March 1955), 41.

⁵⁰ Zaprudnik, 77.

ideology of the Belarusian Peasant's Union, which claimed that "the Belarusian people is in its social makeup exclusively a peasant society."⁵² The overlapping of class and identity could also be found at the other end of the social and political spectra. Parts of the Polish elite perceived themselves as a nation of nobles and their ethnic group as lacking class divisions. The conservative Polish political thinker Paweł Chościak Popiel maintained that "Polish society was immune to the disease of communism" because of its strong Catholic traditions and because its social structure was characterized by a lack of a "developed modern proletariat."⁵³

Belarus faced the problem of many "non-historical" nations of lacking a native intelligentsia as well as a continuous tradition of high culture in the native language.⁵⁴ While old Belarusian, or *ruski iazyk* had been the language of administration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its use had virtually ended as the language of administration by the end of the 17th century, and been replaced by Polish and Russian during the 18th and 19th centuries.⁵⁵ Given the near-absence of a national elite at the turn of the century and the limited size of the urban Belarusian population and lack of an industrial proletariat, the national communists in the BSSR, the BSRH, the Belarusian Christian Democrats, and the Belarusian Peasants' Union all attempted to rely on the Belarusian peasant masses to achieve their objectives.

The BSRH strategy to mobilize of peasants to establish a form of peasant socialism was, from an orthodox Marxist perspective, an unlikely development, yet one with parallels in other European countries.⁵⁶ This form of peasant socialism came to play an important role in the Belarusian national

⁵¹ "Pradmova posl. PS A. Stankevicha u Soime 24 September 1926 *Belaruskaia Krynička*, no. 35, October 8, 1926, 2-4. Also cited in I. I. Koūkel', "Belaruskaia Khrystsiianskaia Demokratyia i iae rolia u belaryskim hramadska-palitychnym rukhu (1917-1939)" in L. Dziadzinkin, "Etnakonfesiiny aspekt palitiki bal'shavikou na vitsebskhyne u adnosinakh da iaureiskaha nasel'nistvya (1920 – 1930 h.)" in U. D. Rozenfel'd (ed.), *Etnosotsial'nye i konfessional'nye protsessy v transformiruiushchemsia obshchestve: Materialy mezhdunar. Nauch. Konf.* Vol. 2, Part 2 (Hrodna: Grodnenskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. Ia. Kupaly, 2001), 38.

⁵² "Ad radaktsyi," *Sialianskaia Niva: Orhan Belaruskaha Sialianskaha Saiuzu*, No. 1, December 6, 1925, 1.

⁵³ Joanna Michlic, "The Soviet Occupation of Poland, 1939-41, and the Stereotype of the Anti-Polish and Pro-Soviet Jew," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, n.s. 13, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2007): 140, citing Paweł Chościak Popiel, "The Disease of Age," in *Polish Perspectives on Communism*, ed. Bogdan Szlachta (Lanham, Md., 2000), 48-56.

⁵⁴ Eley and Suny (eds.), 7.

⁵⁵ Snyder (2003), 48.

⁵⁶ "Palitychnaia pliatforma Belaruskei Sialianska-Rabotnitskiae Hramady," *Biuuletén' Soimavaha Klubu Belarusk. Sialianska-Rabotnitskiae Hramady*, No. 9, April 17, 1926, 1. Similar parties existed in other Eastern European states. The most prominent were found in Poland and Bulgaria. The peasant movements were something more than just political parties. They had elements

movement in Western Belarus. In an attempt by the Bolsheviks to utilize the Belarusian national movement for their own aims and objectives, national communism – a hybrid movement – was established, according to Lenin’s dictum: national in form, socialist in content. In both the BSSR and Western Belarus the development of class and national consciousness was interrelated. The Soviet experience in the 1920s and the development of a radical socialist nationalism in Western Belarus had its equivalence in the labor movements in other European countries. Much like the Scandinavian labor movements, rather than rejecting national rhetoric, the Belarusian national communists adopted a rhetoric that presented the “toiling masses” as the true representatives of the nation.⁵⁷

Despite the centrality of the notion of internationalism in socialist ideology, socialism is far from incompatible with nationalism. Neither did nationalism necessarily stand in opposition to internationalism. On the contrary, the Belarusian nationalist press emphasized solidarity with colonized peoples and other groups that had been denied national self-determination and/or class rights. Class and national rights were seen as interlinked. The Belarusian national movement perceived itself as part of a global struggle for national liberation and self-determination, and the Western Belarusian press, Christian Democrat as well as radical left, maintained an international perspective, which emphasized solidarity with Abyssinians, Indians and Negroes.⁵⁸

While the poor, often landless Belarusian peasants largely lacked national consciousness,⁵⁹ the awareness of class was more developed, and linked to the notion of nationality. They clearly perceived the Polish elites as a community separate from theirs. Thus, long before Belarusians acquired national consciousness, there was a link between language and class.⁶⁰ The Belarusian language, which the

of corporatism. They emphasized education, land redistribution and social welfare, and were left-of-center, often co-operating with socialist and communist parties. On the Polish Peasant Parties, see Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939: The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 79-83; on Bulgaria, see John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁵⁷ Håkan Blomqvist, *Nation, ras och civilisation i svensk arbetarrörelse före nazismen* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2006), 51.

⁵⁸ “Barats’ba za vyzvalen’ne Kitaiu,” *Nasha Prauda*, No. 4, April 7, 1927, 1; “Abisiniiia,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* 30 (623), 10 August, 1935, 1; “Abisiniiia i kalia Abisinii,” and “Narada ‘pryiatsielau’ z voraham Abisinii,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, 31(624), 25 August, 1935, 1, “Vyzvol’nyia imknen’ni negrau,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* 28 (621): 10 July, 1935, 1.

⁵⁹ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 111.

⁶⁰ Radzik, 179.

Belarusian-speaking peasants referred to as *prosta mova*, was a class marker, the language of the uneducated, simple people. As the result of official bans and discrimination Belarusian was not used in the churches until after the revolution.⁶¹ The churches, the Polish elite and the Imperial Russian authorities either refused to recognize the existence of the Belarusian language, or alternatively treated it as a language with the lowest possible status.⁶² This association of Belarusian dialects with poverty, backwardness and social misery were hard to break and complicated the Soviet attempts at Belarusization in the 1920s.

The Belarusian national communists came to embrace the notion that the Belarusians constituted a nation without class divisions but which made up one single, proletarian class. They linked class conflict to the struggle for national rights. Belarusians and Poles were defined in terms of ethnically defined antagonistic classes. The national communists identified with the economic elite, the *szlachta zagródowa*. This practice could be seen among Belarusian national activists and later by BSSR national communists alike.⁶³ The intellectual trends analyzed in this work are the political expressions of a small intellectual elite, rather than reflecting popular opinion. They illustrate what sort of “national” narratives the cultural elites envisioned for “their” people or “nation,” and to what extent they were successful in establishing a “national” idea among ordinary people.

As late as 1939, 70 per cent of the people in Western Belarus were illiterate, and a large portion of, if not most Belarusians in Poland, lacked an awareness of their ethnicity.⁶⁴ To the extent the Belarusian

⁶¹ Publishing in the Belarusian language was banned in the Russian Empire from 1863 to 1905. While the Belarusian language was introduced as a liturgical language in some parishes following the revolutions of 1917, it was again banned in Poland following the 1925 Concordat with the Vatican. Johannes Remy, “The Valuev Circular and Censorship of Ukrainian Publications in the Russian Empire (1863-1876): Intention and Practice,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. XLIX, Nos. 1-2, (March-June 2007): 87; Zejmis, “Belarus,” 272-273.

⁶² Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, ”Språk och identitet i Vitryssland: En studie i den vitryska nationalismens historia,” *Slavica Lundesia*, 16 (1997): 49-51; Törnquist-Plewa *Vitryssland* (2001), 94-95.

⁶³ Conversely, national minorities in Belarus, such as the Poles, also maintained the internal equality within their ethnic community. Occasionally, Polish clergy made statements to that effect, claiming that “All Poles are Catholics: All Catholics are equal.” Beth Baird Yocom, “Constructing a Socialist Tower of Babel: Nationality Policy in Soviet Belorussia 1921-1933.” Ph. D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2003, 329.

⁶⁴ In some areas of Polessie it was as high as 96 per cent. According to the 1931 census, 50 per cent of the local Orthodox population in the Vil’nia and Novahrudak wojewodstwos was illiterate. H. Niamicha, “Education in the Belorussian SSR and Communist Doctrine,” *Belorussian Review*, Vol. 3, (1956) 90; Zen’kovich, 76; Barbara Stoczewska. *Litwa, Białorus, Ukraina w myśl politycznej Leona Wasilewskiego* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1998), 189-190.

peasants had a collective consciousness, they shared the class-based identity of the *muzhik*, or peasant. Yet, this class consciousness was far from the class awareness in the Marxist understanding of the phrase. It was simply a way to distinguish themselves as peasants from the Polish ruling class and the largely Jewish city dwellers. The Belarusian language was not necessarily easy to internalize as a natural, ethnic marker and a national symbol for the Belarusian masses.⁶⁵ The early Belarusian nationalists of the *Nasha Niva* circle referred to the ignorant and nationally unconscious Belarusian peasants as *tsëmni narod*, literally: *darkened people*.⁶⁶ They perceived it to be their historical role to awaken a national, and class consciousness.

Nationalist sentiments remained weak in Belarus, something that has been attributed to the fact that urbanization and social mobilization processes, which occurred very late compared to elsewhere in Europe. In 1913, 86 per cent of the Belarusians lived in the countryside. Only in 1980 did a BSSR census show a majority urban population.⁶⁷ Thus, modernization and industrialization, which Gellner links to the rise of nationalism, were still in their initial phase. In 1918, Belarus remained an agrarian, pre-industrial society where social mobilization was limited and a civic society was still largely lacking.

The Left and Nationalism

The political left has a contradictory and ambiguous political tradition with regard to language politics. Historically, it has been polarized between two extremes; on the one hand the universalism of the enlightenment, on the other, the *Völkerstimme* and *Volksseele* of the Romantic tradition. While there have been attempts at reconciling the two traditions, they have often remained at odds with each other. The Jacobins pursued a political line of mobilizing the people as a nation, using one language as a vehicle. The use of several languages and dialects was seen as an obstacle to popular participation, and as tools of reaction and counterrevolution. On June 4, 1794, during the height of the Revolutionary terror, Bertrand Barère asserted that regional languages interfered with the broadcasting of the Revolution: “Federalism

⁶⁵ Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 94.

⁶⁶ Lindner (1999) 259.

⁶⁷ Viktar Siarheevich Smiatannikau, *Belarusaznaustrva* (Minsk: Belaruskaia navuka, 1998), 124, citing *Narodnoe khoziastvo BSSR v 1987 g.* (Minsk, 1988), 162 and *Narodnoe khoziastvo v Respubliku Belarus' v 1991 g.* (Minsk, 1993), 35.

and superstition speak Low Breton: emigration and hatred of the Republic speak German; counter-revolution speaks Italian and fanaticism speaks Basque.”⁶⁸ That year, Abbé Grégoire, the leading promoter of religious freedom among the revolutionaries conducted the first major language-sociological survey in history, “Report on the necessity and the means to annihilate the patois and to universalize the use of the French language.”⁶⁹ The aim to annihilate the dialects was considered a central aim of the revolution, and a core aim of French nation-building. Similarly, political mobilization around a national language was a core purpose of the national democratic movements of the 19th century. Languages, such as Finnish, Latvian, Serbo-Croatian and Norwegian, were standardized and turned into vehicles of national mobilization. Two major arguments for the development of national language were discernible. One was the democratic need for communication: the need of the citizens to be able to speak and write to each other in order to address public concerns, which requires a common language. The other argument was that those who speak a common language find it easier to form common, national identities.⁷⁰

Herder and Balto-Slavic Agency

In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Johann Gottfried Herder developed the idea of the *Volk*, as a natural community of people tied together by blood ties and characterized by a particular language, customs, culture and religion. Herder understood the *Volk* as a community very similar to a family, which has the right to develop its own political institutions, independent and uninfluenced by others, as expressions of their unique national character.⁷¹ From this it followed that

⁶⁸ Cited in Lise Carretero and Robert D. Zaretsky, “On the Horns of a Dilemma: Paris, Languedoc and the Clash of Civilizations in Nineteenth-Century France,” *French History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2002): 421.

⁶⁹ Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia, and Jacques Revel, *Une politique de la langue: la Révolution française et les patois: l'enquête de Grégoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 300-317.

⁷⁰ Olle Josephson, “Etnicitetsfällan,” *Clarté*, No. 2, 2002. http://www.clarte.nu/grafik/cl012/cl012_2.htm (accessed Dec. 23, 2007)

⁷¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit, Zweiter Teil* (1785) in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke herausgegeben von Bernhard Suphan*, vol. XIII, ed. Bernard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung 1887), 384. See also Carlile Aylmer Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), 97, and Kenneth R. Minogue *Nationalism* (London: Batsford, 1967), 57-59. Following this tradition, in an attempt to combine Herder’s *Humanitätsideal* with his own ideal of *Bildung*, Wilhelm von Humboldt defined the sum of the collective cultural expressions of individual *Volk* as *Nationalcharakter*. This distinct *Volk* character was revealed in the totality of its cultural manifestations, such as traditions, customs, religion, language, and art. These could not be measured and evaluated against any external standard, but were seen as values of their own. Yet, the cultural self-realization of different people varied. Some peoples, such as Germans, French, English, Greeks and others, were seen as having done more to realize their cultural potential, and constituted a model for others to follow. Matti Bunzl, “Frank Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volkgeist

multinational states were “artificial contrivances, patched-up fragile contractions...devoid of inner life.”⁷² Herder’s brand of “nationalism,” while ethnic and primordial, belongs to a liberal democratic tradition, which foreshadowed and influenced John Stuart Mill and Mazzini, and which was peaceful and democratic in its character.⁷³ The 19th century nationalists of Mazzini’s generation believed that world peace would prevail only after every ethnic group attained its own nation-state.⁷⁴ This form of nationalism did not arrange the various *Volk* cultures into hierarchies, but considered them all equal and expressions of a unique spirit.⁷⁵ Living and working in Riga between 1764 and 1769, Herder developed a particular interest in the languages and customs of the Baltic peoples, and the Latvian folkloristic traditions inspired him to develop his concept of folklore.⁷⁶ He was fascinated with the Slavic peoples, for whom he foresaw a great future. Herder disapproved of the German predominance in Eastern Europe. “The Teutonic Knights and recently converted Poles exterminated the Prussians and enslaved the poor Balts and the peaceful Slavs,” he wrote.⁷⁷ This kind of pro-Slavic sentiment had a strong impact on Slavic nationalisms. Tomas Masaryk, in particular, was influenced by Herder’s ideas on the role of the Slavs in history.⁷⁸ The historical agency which Finns, Balts and Slavs could find in Herder’s writing inspired them to construct

and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethics: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 21- 22, citing *Wilhelm von Humboldt’s Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: 1903-1936), 380-81.

⁷² Frederick M. Barnard, *Herder’s Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 59.

⁷³ Carlton J. H. Hayes, “Contributions of Herder to the Doctrine of Nationalism,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, (July, 1927): 734; Royal J. Schmidt, “Cultural Nationalism in Herder,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 17, no. 3 (June, 1953): 412.

⁷⁴ Minogue, 55.

⁷⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit. Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts*, (1774) in Bernard Suphan (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder, Sämtliche Werke, herausgegeben von Bernhard Suphan*, vol. V (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung 1891), 509. On the absence of national hierarchies in Herder’s thought, see Hayes, 734.

⁷⁶ Andrejs Plakans, “Peasants, Intellectuals, and Nationalism in the Russian Baltic Provinces, 1820-90,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 46, no. 3 (Sep. 1974): 452.

⁷⁷ Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), 184.

⁷⁸ Barnard, 86, citing Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, *The Making of a State* (New York: Stokes, 1927), 421. Herder collected and published folk songs and other cultural expressions from a number of the people that Engels regarded as “non-historical,” such as Lithuanian, Serbian, Finnish, Sami and others. *Volkslieder* (1774) and *Alte Volkslieder* (1778-1779), published in Bernard Suphan ed., *Johann Gottfried Herder, Sämtliche Werke, herausgegeben von Bernhard Suphan*, vol. XXV, (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1907); Hayes, 727.

national identities and “national” historical narratives.⁷⁹ The scholarly attention given to the language also firmly established that the East Slavic languages were interrelated, suggesting a common origin of the languages of the three Eastern Slavic peoples. Herder assumed that related languages implied related nations,⁸⁰ leading to the establishment of two intellectual traditions. On the one hand, this contributed to the formation of a particularistic Slavic nationalism: on the other it enhanced the development of a pan-Slavic narrative. While research into their linguistic history provided national Czech and Slovak activists with arguments to set up a common state, it provided Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists with arguments for increased political autonomy and even independence.

The early Belarusian national movement, generally socialist-leaning, built its claims to legitimacy upon the assumption of the equality of culture and folklore, which it used as a basis to argue the legitimacy of a Belarusian nation to exist. The Herderian tradition found its way into the movement of Russian pan-Slavs, Slavophiles, *narodniki* and Christian Socialists, and the Belarusian national movement, which were all strongly influenced by the Herderian tradition.⁸¹ Herder’s insistence that culture was a universal and equal phenomenon was a novel and radical idea. It mounted a challenge to the common practice of distinguishing “cultured” from “uncultured” nations, something which was used to legitimize the rule of one hegemonic culture over another.⁸² Such a reading of Herder provided cultural legitimacy and historical agency to the national movements of subjugated, “non-historical” peoples. While Herder did not himself embrace nationalism,⁸³ he established a particular tradition of

⁷⁹ Jennifer Fox, “The Creator Gods: Romantic Nationalism and the En-genderment of Women in Folklore,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 100, No. 398, *Folklore and Feminism* (Oct. 1987): 567.

⁸⁰ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, “Contrasting Ethnic Nationalisms: Eastern Central Europe” in S. Barbour and K. Carmichael (eds.) *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 209. Already during the Romantic era, language and race became associated. Following Herder, Ernst Moritz Arndt believed that the Germans preserved their racial purity by maintaining linguistic purity. Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: its Meaning and History* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1965), 36.

⁸¹ Kohn (1982), 32. While the Belarusian “national awakeners” rarely referred to Herder, he is celebrated as the father of the Slav national revival, by Czechs, Poles, Latvians, Slovenes, and Ukrainians. Barnard, 13. Berlin, 184. Pan-Slavism, Thomas Kohn argues, was based on false premises, as it was established to expand the power of Russia, rather than emancipating the Slavs in any meaningful way. Kohn (1965), 71. In Belarus, pan-Slavism only played a marginal role, as the pan-Slavists regarded, and still regard Belarus as a part of a “Russian” nation.

⁸² F. M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 134.

⁸³ Fox, 565.

ethnonationalism, which is closed and exclusive, but contains democratic aspects and tools of emancipation.

This tradition was not easily reconcilable with Marxism, because it was incompatible with the Marxist notion of “progress.”⁸⁴ To Herder and Humboldt, the progress of a culture or *Volk* vis-à-vis another could not be measured.⁸⁵ The Herderian tradition emphasizes linguistic diversity rather than uniformity of languages. Herder saw in diversity the hand of God.⁸⁶ In this tradition, Wilhelm von Humboldt associated language, thought, and *Nationalcharacter*. Most importantly, the language of each people affected the language of the *Volk*, *die Völkerstimme*, or “the people’s voice.”⁸⁷ “Language is the external representation of the genius of peoples,” von Humboldt wrote.⁸⁸ In accordance with this tradition, linguistic nationalists preferred “clean” and “unpolluted” languages to ambiguous transitional forms.⁸⁹ If nations were a result of divine intervention, they must not be amalgamated. If every language is a product of God, speaking a foreign language means living a corrupt and artificial life.⁹⁰ Elie Kedourie points out two conclusions that can be made on the tradition of linguistic nationalism that grew out of the French revolution and Napoleonic wars: first, speakers of original languages are nations; and second, nations must speak original languages.⁹¹ In other words, languages define and delineate the nation.

⁸⁴ Hirsch, 239.

⁸⁵ Bunzl, 21.

⁸⁶ Johann Gottfried von Herder, “Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Mankind: One among Many Contributions of the Century (1774): Third Section (Addenda)” in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*. Translated, with introduction and notes, by Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 68-97; Kedourie, 48-49.

⁸⁷ Bunzl, 32, citing Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Werke* VII: 18.

⁸⁸ “[d]ie äußere Erscheinung des Geistes der Völker.” Bunzl, 32, citing Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Werke* VII: 42.

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher claimed that “only one language is firmly implanted in each individual,” adding that “every nation is destined through its peculiar organization and its place in the world to represent a certain side of the divine image.” Schleiermacher, cited in Kedourie, 52 and 57.

⁹⁰ Kedourie, 56, 58.

⁹¹ Ibid., 60.

Marx, Engels and the “non-historic” peoples

In the reactionary political environment following the 1815 Vienna Congress liberal Europeans perceived Russia as an example of non-European oriental despotism.⁹² This attitude to Russia was colored by positivist notions of the development of European civilization, where the West symbolized progress and development and the East was perceived as a reflection of barbarian backwardness, rooted in Asian or Oriental societies. These attitudes were further strengthened as a result of the development of modern nationalism in the 19th century. The focus on cultural uniqueness and racial and national characteristics solidified Western attitudes regarding the “Asiatic” characteristics of the Russian people.⁹³ Marx and Engels reflected this Western tradition. When the former delivered a speech on London in 1867 on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the Polish rebellion, he referred to the Poles as “the immortal knights of Europe,” which in 1848 again “forced the Mongols to retreat.” The end to serfdom had not liberated the Russians from “Asiatic barbarism,” Marx said, adding that it takes “centuries to build a civilization.” Marx considered the Russian regime to be ruling “over a mass of barbarians” and bent on world domination: “Either the Asiatic barbarism led by the Muscovites will bring down Europe like an avalanche, or Europe will have to restore Poland and thereby protect itself against Asia with a wall of twenty million heroes in order to win time for its social reconstruction.”⁹⁴

Engels’ assessment of the Slavs was similar. He perceived them as inferior to Western Europeans in cultural development and civilization. He referred to the tribes along the Danube, Elbe and on the Balkan Peninsula as “non-historical people,” whose progressive role in history had “ended forever.”⁹⁵ Instead, Marx and Engels believed in a German civilizing mission in Eastern Europe, and supported the elevation of German as the official language for the *Reichstag* in Vienna. In Germany and the Germans,

⁹² Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass. And London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 89.

⁹³ Blomqvist, 194-195.

⁹⁴ Karl Marx “Resolution of the Polish Meeting in London January 22, 1867” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels *Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, Hrsg. vom Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der Kommunistischen Partei der Sowjetunion und vom Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Vol. 20 (Berlin: Dietz 1972), 245.

⁹⁵ Frederick Engels “The Magyar Struggle” in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* January 13, 1849 as cited in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels *Collected Works* vol. 8 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 227.

Engels saw a people with an historic mission as *Kulturträger* in the east.⁹⁶ German and Magyar rule in Central Europe, he believed, had helped civilize Slavic peoples, such as the Czechs and Slovanes.⁹⁷ Yet, unlike the imperial Russian authorities and many Polish nationalists, Engels did recognize the existence of Belarusian and Ukrainian nationalities distinct from Russians.⁹⁸ Unlike Herder and Humboldt, who downplayed or dismissed the notion of “race,” Soviet anthropologists claimed that at the economic stage of the early 1920s, human races existed, and dismissed as “subjective-idealistic” the notion that race “does not exist.” However, argues Francine Hirsch

the “present racial face” of the earth should be understood as a “phase.” The “relative (geographical) isolation” of peoples in “preclass societies” had facilitated the formation of races; distinct physiological characteristics had developed “in response to geographical and climatic conditions,” and in the course of a protracted “historical period” had been “transferred from generation to generation.” Moreover, as humankind evolved from primitive societies through feudal societies to class-based societies, “races mixed” and racial traits became less distinct. As societies advanced even further on the Marxist historical timeline, racial distinctions would continue to soften – and would at some point disappear altogether.⁹⁹

Marx and Engels’ negative attitudes to the “non-historical peoples” of the east constituted a problem for the radical national movements in Eastern Europe. Marx, and especially Engels made many derogatory statements about Slavs and other people they referred to as “non-historical.” John-Paul Himka has identified a number of these attitudes in Engels’ writings.

During the revolution of 1848-49 Marx and Engels had characterized most of the Slavic peoples (the outstanding exception being the Poles) and other Eastern European peoples (such as the Romanians and Saxons of Transylvania) as nonhistoric, counterrevolutionary by nature and doomed to extinction. The statements, moreover, were saturated with insulting epithets (pig-headed, barbarian, robber) and ominous-sounding threats (a bloody revenge that would annihilate these reactionary peoples).¹⁰⁰

Marx and Engels were, in fact, explicitly rejected by the main theoretician of the Western Ukrainian social democrats, Volodymyr Levyns’kyi. Writing in 1918 on Marx and Engels’ views on the “nonhistoric” peoples, Levyns’kyi claimed that along with the Bolsheviks, they were deniers of the

⁹⁶ Blomqvist (2006), 197 citing Engels “Socialism in Germany” after Horace B Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917* (New York and London, 1967), 48.

⁹⁷ Friedrich Engels, “Democratic Pan-Slavism” in Karl Marx [and Friedrich Engels] *The Revolutions of 1848*, ed. David Fernbach (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1973), 234, as cited in Rozdolsky, 110.

⁹⁸ Rosdolsky, 184.

⁹⁹ Hirsch, 265.

¹⁰⁰ John-Paul Himka, “Introduction” in Roman Rosdolsky, *Engels and the “Nonhistoric” Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848*. Translated, edited and with an Introduction by John-Paul Himka (Glasgow: Critique Books, 1987), 1.

national rights of Ukrainian as well as other East European nationalities.¹⁰¹ He saw a link between Marx and Engels' disregard for the “non-historical peoples” and what he perceived as Bolshevik national oppression of the Ukrainians. In similar fashion, the Belarusian national activists developed a non-Marxist socialist tradition, based on the Herderian tradition.

Cultural Nationalism and Linguistic Purity

Einar Haugen has emphasized the central importance of language to the studies of nationalism. “Nationalism has also tended to encourage external distinction...[T]his has meant the urge not only to have one language, but to have one’s own language.”¹⁰² Thomas Hylland Eriksen observed that “[L]inguistic unification, or homogenization, is thus an integral aspect most nation-building projects.”¹⁰³ Belarusian linguistic purists, such as Dounar-Zapol’ski, Lastouski, Lesik, Ihnatouski and others, operated with uniqueness in mind. They perceived “mixed” languages and transitional dialects as particularly obnoxious. The Belarusian nationalists were no different from their counterparts in other European countries. In their work to codify the languages, they often chose artificial idioms, false archaisms and hypercorrect forms.¹⁰⁴ In order to find specific Belarusian words and expressions, they searched Belarusian dialects, and regarded as unique the words which lacked “immediately recognizable cognates in Russian and Polish.”¹⁰⁵ “We need only the purest dialects for the literary language...Linguists can tell which areas are the purest; the further away from the towns, the purer the language,” Western Belarusian national activist Ian Stankevich wrote in 1930.¹⁰⁶ Storytelling, folk dancing and singing attracted a particular interest from the nationally minded intellectuals, as they believed they were finding the most genuine and unspoiled reincarnations of their culture in these expressions.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰² Einar Haugen, “Dialect, Language, Nation,” in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds. *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Vol. IV (London and New York: Routledge, 2000 [1966]), 1348.

¹⁰³ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Linguistic Hegemony and Minority Resistance,” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1992): 315.

¹⁰⁴ Eley and Suny (eds.), 7.

¹⁰⁵ Wexler, *Purism and Language*, 231.

¹⁰⁶ Wexler, 229.

Yet, the linguistic nationalists' attitudes towards dialects were more ambiguous: on the one hand, rural dialects were seen as pure, unspoiled and representative of genuine popular culture: on the other hand, not all dialects were equally appreciated. The assumption was that archaic and more "genuine" expressions of the "national" spirit could be found in the dialects. The problem was that the study of the Belarusian language was so neglected that some Ukrainian writers still claimed that Belarusian was a Ukrainian dialect as late as the 1870s.¹⁰⁸ Only with the works by ethnographer E. Karskii, the linguists M. and H. Haretski in 1918 and the Soviet government efforts to delineate the eastern boundary of the Belarusian ethnographic territory in the 1920s did the view that Belarusian was a separate language begin to gain a more general acceptance.¹⁰⁹

FIGURES 1, 2, AND 3

Yet, the existence of two, often contradictory narratives in terms of religious, political and social identities delayed and complicated social mobilization. In addition to having a small and weak national elite - a problem for many European nationalist movements¹¹⁰ - Belarusian nationalists faced the additional problem that there was no consensus regarding collective memories upon which to base a national identity. Rather, they were forced to reconcile two rival traditions. The division of Belarus in 1921 by the Treaty of Riga exacerbated this dilemma. Belarusians in the east and west were subjected to radically different experiences, further deepening the national division. By the mid-1930s, three different forms of the Belarusian language were in place, revealing the divisions not only between Orthodox and Catholic Belarusians, but also between Western and Soviet Belarusians. The intelligentsia was eliminated or marginalized. The reunification of Belarus in 1939, was unlike most national unifications Europe had seen to that point. No Belarusian nationalists played key roles in the unification, which came as a result of

¹⁰⁷ Suny and Eley, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Such were the claims of Ukrainian authors Ivan Nechui-Levits'kyi and Fortunat Piskunov. This claim was shared by circles in the Imperial Russian government, such as the Interior Minister Aleksandr Egorovich Tymashev. Johannes Remy, "The Valuev Circular and Censorship of Ukrainian Publications in the Russian Empire (1863-1876): Intention and Practice," *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. XLIX, Nos. 1-2 (March-June 2007): 97-98, 105.

¹⁰⁹ M. Haretski, *Belaruski-rasejski slownik* (first edition Smolensk, 1918; second edition Vilna, 1921, revised third edition Miensk, 1925), cited in Wexler, 214, and "Z zapiski pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. T. Kryničskaha u TsK KP(b)B 'K voprosu o prisoedinenii Gomelskoi gubernii k BSSR,'" November 15, 1926. NARB. F. 4-p. Vop. 21. Spr. 98. L. 12-16, in R. P. Platonov and U. K. Korshuk, eds. *Belarusizatsiya 1920-ia hady: Dokumenty i materyialy* (Minsk: Belaruski Dzerzhauny Universitet, 2001), 88; Petr Gavrilovich Chigrinov, *Istoriia Belarusi s drevnosti do nashikh dnei*. (Minsk: Knizhnyi Dom, 2004), 463.

¹¹⁰ Hroch, 134-135.

a secret agreement between two totalitarian states. The unification was carried out by brute force and accompanied by massive political violence, from 1939 by the Soviets, from 1941 from Nazi Germany.¹¹¹ The Second World War redrew the political and ethnic landscape of Belarus, and laid the foundation of a new identity, encouraged by the authorities. Only during Gorbachev's *Perestroika* in the late 1980s was this image challenged. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a reevaluation of history, and a search to find precedents for Belarusian statehood.

¹¹¹ The Soviet terror mainly targeted Poles. While 292,513 former Polish citizens were deported from former Polish territories under Soviet occupation in 1939-1941, about 200,000 of these were ethnic Poles. The number of deported Belarusians ran into the tens of thousands. While 4.5 per cent of the Poles in these territories were deported, the same fate befell only 0.9 per cent of Belarusians. Stanisław Ciesielski, Grzegorz Hryciuk and Aleksander Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje ludności w Związku Radzieckim* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2005), 246-247; Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War*, 177.

Chapter 2

National Awakening and the Belarusian Nationalist Movement Prior to the February Revolution.

*Chto ja – palak, bielarus ci litwin? –
Boh tolki wiedaje prawdu adzin.
Ja ż chaczu pracawać uwień wiek,
Kab zasłużyć imia – czaławiek.¹*

The National Question in the Western Borderlands: Introduction and Background

Modern nationalism arrived late to Belarus. A multilingual and ethnically diverse corner of Europe, lacking clear geographic boundaries in the historical borderlands between Poland and Russia, Belarus has been influenced by both Russian and Polish cultural traditions. The modern form of nationalism, seeking cultural “purity” and “authentic” cultural expressions was in many ways a problematic import to an area with multiple identities, which had not yet adopted the ethnic and linguistic definition of nationhood. This chapter outlines the history of modern nationalism in Belarus to the year 1906.

Lithuania, or *Letuva, Litwa, Lietuva* and *Lite*, as it was called in the five local languages, was commonly not thought of in the same terms as today, as an ethnic nation-state of the Lithuanian people. The Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), born in Novahrudak, at the time a Yiddish- and Polish-speaking city surrounded by a Belarusian-speaking countryside, therefore saw no contradiction when he opened his most famous poem, exclaiming “Lithuania! My fatherland! You are like health! Only he who has lost you may know your true worth.”² “Lithuania” was simply the definition of a geographic area, inhabited by a number of people who were beginning to develop their collective national consciousnesses during the 19th century. The names “Belarus” and “Lithuania” originated in historical geographical terms which evolved into definitions of ethno-linguistic groups that lived in these territories.³ In the early 19th century, “Belarusian” or “Lithuanian” did not yet denote any particular ethnic belonging. Therefore, there are references to “Lithuania” in place names such as Minsk Litewski (Minsk-

¹ J. Staubun, *Kaladnaia pisanka na 1904 hod*, cited in Mironowicz, Tokć, and Radzik, *Zmiana struktury narodowościowej* (2005), 155.

² Cited in Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 28.

³ Vytautas Petronis, *Constructing Lithuania: Ethnic Mapping in Tsarist Russia, ca. 1800-1914*, Acta Universitatis Stockholmensis 91 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2007), 126.

in-Lithuania) in Polish, and Brest-Litovsk (Brest-in-Lithuania) in Russian.⁴ The concept of historical Lithuania and Belarus as Polish lands only began to fade following the first Polish uprising in 1830-31 in the case of Lithuania, while a similar process began following the 1863-64 Polish uprising.⁵ The Polish and Russian languages did not distinguish between the ethnicities of the local peoples in the region. Yiddish, on the other hand, did. In Yiddish, a Litvak meant a Jew from Lithuania, whereas a Litovets was a gentile Pole, Belarusian or Lithuanian from that region.⁶

Official Imperial Russian state policy denied the existence of separate Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnicities. This reflected the Herderian assumption that related languages implied related nations.⁷ The clear and obvious linguistic similarities between the three East Slavic languages were interpreted by imperial Russian historians from Karamzin to Kliuchevskii as proof that there were no Belarusian and Ukrainian nations. Linguistic differences between the “Great Russians,” “Little Russians” and “White Russians” were interpreted as results of external influences and foreign occupations. Russian historians regarded differences between the three Slavic peoples as superficial, and limited to dialects and regional customs.⁸

In the wake of the partitions of Poland in the 18th century philologists in St Petersburg classified the vernacular language of the *Kresy* as a Polish dialect. Only following the Polish rebellions of 1830 and

⁴ Daniel Beauvois, “Acculturation and Linguistic Reconstruction in Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus,” in Tony Judt and Denis Lacorne (eds.) *Language, Nation, and State: Identity Politics in a Multilingual Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 211.

⁵ Petronis, 126.

⁶ Katz, *Words on Fire* (2004), 145.

⁷ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, “Contrasting Ethnic Nationalisms: Eastern Central Europe” in S. Barbour and K. Carmichael (eds.) *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 209.

⁸ This Imperial definition of “Russianness” resurfaced in a modified form after the end of *korenizatsiia* in the early 1930s. The famous Soviet historian Boris Rybakov equated “East Slavic” with “Russian,” and Kievan Rus’ therefore rather uncomplicatedly became the cradle of Russian civilization. Rybakov, echoing Kliuchevskii, extended this line of continuity to the period of Soviet empire. “Lithuanians and Karelians, Mordvinians and Latvians, Estonians and Chuvashians are all equal members of the Soviet Union and all were involved in the significant initial process of feudalization in Kievan Rus,’” Klas-Göran Karlsson, *Historia som vapen: Historiebruk och Sovjetunionens upplösning 1985-1995* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1999), 258, citing Boris Rybakov, *Mir istorii: Nachal’nye veka russkoi istorii* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1984), 5. These attitudes have deep roots in the Russian nationalist tradition. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn denied the existence of Belarusian and Ukrainian nationalities, arguing that they were the result of external influences – Mongol, Polish and Habsburg. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Kak nam obustroit’ Rossiiu?”, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, September 18, 1990, 5; Zinaida Gimpelevich, “A. Solzhenitsyn’s Belittling of the Belarusian Nation in *Dvesti let vmeste* (Two Hundred Years Together),” Conference paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Slavists Annual Conference, London, Ont., May 29, 2005; Zinaida Gimpelevich, “Dimensional Spaces in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *Two Hundred Years Together*,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. XLVII, Nos. 3-4 (2006): 306.

1863 did Russian scholars re-designate the Belarusian vernacular as a Russian, rather than a Polish dialect.⁹ At the end of the 19th century, the term *zapadnorosism* was introduced to describe the Belarusians. Identified as an Orthodox community, Belarusians were seen as a part of a larger Rus'ian family that had been exposed to extended periods of Polish and Catholic influences. While *zapadnorosism* denied that Belarusian would be a separate culture, it did signify recognition of distinctly Belarusian peculiarities, such as a Belarusian accents, last names, and particular Belarusian expressions of popular culture.¹⁰

Of the emerging new nationalisms in the western borderlands, Polish nationalism caused the authorities most concern. The imperial authorities associated Polishness with the Roman Catholic Church, and Orthodoxy with the “nation” of Rus’. The authorities tried to counter Polish separatism by campaigns to limit the influence of nationalism. The banning of the Uniate Church in the Russian empire in 1839 and the official “reunification” of the Greek Catholic Church with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1875 ended the power of the Uniates, who had been led by a largely Polish-speaking clergy, which identified with the Polish nation.¹¹ In 1840, the word “Belorussia” was banned.¹² As 75 per cent of the Belarusians had adhered to the Uniate faith, the dissolution of the church would also have a far-reaching impact on them.¹³ These administrative reforms of the clerical structures did to some extent converge with the formation of modern national consciousness, since they eliminated institutions, which could have served as a basis for a national revival of Ukrainian and Belarusian national consciousness.¹⁴ Subsequent attempts by Belarusian nationalists to revive the Greek Catholic Church in the Belarusian lands were

⁹ Nicholas Vakar, *Belorussia: the Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956a), 69, 73.

¹⁰ Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik (2005), 167.

¹¹ Theodore R. Weeks, “Between Rome and Tsargrad” in Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodorkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001b), 75-81. The only place on Belarusian territory where the Uniate Church survived in the Russian Empire was in the Sapotkin district in the present-day Hrodna district, which for most of the 19th century was located in the Kingdom of Poland. Andrei Vashkevich, “Greka-katalitskai nasel’nitsva Auhustoushchyny v kantsy XVIII – pachatku XX stst. (kanfesiiniye zmeny i farmiravanie etnichnau sviadomasti),” *Belaruski Histrychny Zbornik/Bialoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 24, (2005): 39-61.

¹² William M. Mandel, *Soviet but not Russian: The ‘Other’ Peoples of the Soviet Union* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), 350.

¹³ Kotljarchuk, “The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood,” 53.

¹⁴ Snyder (2003), 45.

unsuccessful.¹⁵ Polish nationalism, the major rival to Russian imperialism, was open to the assimilation of Belarusians. In the words of Theodore R. Weeks, “Assimilation always retained a colonial aspect, a presumption of a more advanced, superior culture (Polish/European) “generously allowing” a more backward group to join it.”¹⁶ Lacking “national” institutions, potential national activists were often recruited for the Polish and Russian national projects.

At the turn of the century, Ukrainian national consciousness was strongest in Ukrainian lands under Habsburg control. There, the Greek Catholic Church under the leadership of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptyts’kyi began developing into something resembling a national church for Galician Ukrainians.¹⁷ The Belarusian nationalists faced an even more daunting task, given the absence of a “Belarusian” church, which could have been used as a catalyst for a national awakening. Unlike the Ukrainians, Belarusians lacked a Galicia beyond the confines of the Russian empire that could have served as a “reserve” of Belarusian culture. Belarusians were therefore vulnerable to the actions of the imperial government. The imperial authorities never recognized the existence of a separate Ukrainian or Belarusian “nation,” but considered these peoples as branches of one larger “Rusian” family. The Kholm Uniates, which existed until 1876 were thus regarded as Russians from the outset. This was especially true after the failed 1863 Polish uprising, when the official imperial discourse fused the notion of Russian nationality with the Orthodox faith. The Ukrainian national movement was able to establish its claims that Ukrainians were a distinct people rather than a part of an all-Russian nation.¹⁸

Another significant influence on the growth of Belarusian national activism was the rise of Russian *narodniki* following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. They believed it possible to skip the stage of capitalism altogether, moving directly to a peasant-based socialism. Influenced by nostalgia and a critique

¹⁵ Mark Nordberg and Taras Kuzio, “Postroenie natsii i gosudarstv. Istoricheskoe nasledie i natsional’nye samosoznaniia v Belorussii i Ukrayinve (Sravnitel’nyi analiz),” in Dmitrii E. Furman, *Belorussia i Rossia: obshchestva i gosudarstva* (Moscow: “Prava cheloveka,” 1998), 385.

¹⁶ Theodore R. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The “Jewish Question” in Poland, 1850-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁷ Snyder (2003) 125; Ricarda Vulpius, “Ukrainische Nation und zwei Konfessionen. Der Klerus und die Ukrainische Frage 1861-1921,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Band 49 (2001) Heft 2, 254.

¹⁸ Aleksei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 256-257.

of capitalism, the *narodniki* renewed interest in the conditions of the Russian Empire's peasantry.¹⁹ After 1863, some leading Russian intellectuals began to think of Belarusians as a separate nationality or people, partly in reaction to the brutal crushing of the Polish rebellion. Many Russian radicals sympathized with the Poles and saw national rights as part of a larger struggle for social and political rights. Bakunin's "Appeal to the Slavs" called for autonomy and national rights for the national minorities of Imperial Russia: Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Finns and others. If they so desired, he maintained, they ought to have the right to full independence.²⁰ Aleksandr Herzen and other radical intellectuals, such as Chernyshevskii, opposed the imperial authorities' concept of a large, "all-Russian" nation, and argued that the right to national self-determination ought to be extended to Ukrainians and Belarusians.²¹ On the national issue, Herzen agreed with Bakunin's positions, albeit more cautiously, and advocated a federation of free peoples.²² In a letter to Herzen, Bakunin expressed his belief that "the Polish uprising emphasizes the legitimacy of the desires of the peoples of the former Great Duchy of Lithuania to self-governance and a movement towards full independence or the establishment of a federation."²³ Gradually, the notion that Belarusian and Ukrainian were separate languages spread into liberal circles. A generation later, Pavel Miliukov, the leader of the Russian Constitutional Democrats (*Kadety*), defended the right of Ukrainians and Belarusians to be taught in their native languages.²⁴

The first Belarusian *narodnik* and national activist was Kastus' Kalinouski (1838-1864). He was not a nationalist in the modern sense of the word, and did not think of Belarusians as a separate nation. He identified with the geographic region of Lithuania, or the Lithuanian Commonwealth. Considering himself a Lithuanian, he made no distinction between Lithuanians and Belarusians. Even though he

¹⁹ Theodore von Laue, "The Fate of Capitalism in Russia: The Narodnik Version," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 13, no. 1 (1954): 11-28.

²⁰ A. Stankevich, *Da histoyi belaruskaha palitychnaha vyzvaleninia* (1934), 16.

²¹ Miller, 249.

²² A. Stankevich (1934), 16, citing L. Kulczycki, *Rewolucja Rosyjska*, Vol. 1, (Lwow, 1909), 398-399.

²³ A. Stankevich (1934), 16, citing *Pis'ma M. A. Bakunina k A. I. Hetsenu i N. P. Ogarevu s bibliograficheskim vvedeniem i obiasnitel'nymi priiechaniiami Dragomanova*, 82.

²⁴ Andrei Vladislavovich Marchukov, *Ukrainskoe natsional'noe dvizhenie USSR 1920-1930-e gody: Tseli, metody, rezul'taty* (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), 89.

mastered the Polish language, he never referred to himself as a Pole, nor did he think of himself as being Polish. His most important contribution to the development of Belarusian nationalism was his publishing and editing of the first journal in the Belarusian language, *Mužyckaja Pravda*.²⁵ Kalinouski imagined the Belarusians, or Belarusian-Lithuanians as a distinct group with a separate language and culture, much in the same way Shchevchenko thought of Ukrainians.²⁶ A *narodnik*, Kalinouski's primary concern was the social conditions of the Belarusian peasants, which he considered a marginalized group with few, if any rights under Polish landowners and Russian tsarist rule. The Belarusians were overwhelmingly rural, extremely poor and uneducated. Their material and social conditions were even worse than those of neighboring peoples.

Kalinouski advocated the liberation of the Belarusian-Lithuanian people from the control of and exploitation by Polish and Russian landowners.²⁷ His activism was primarily class-based, but took a national form. The overwhelmingly rural Lithuanians were largely indifferent or opposed to the Polish rebellion of 1863, which they saw as a rebellion by the landowners and elite. Their primary concern was the shortage of land, an issue that the Polish nationalists, many of them landowners, were unlikely to address. During the Polish rebellion, the Belarusians similarly stayed passive, largely identifying with Orthodoxy and Russia. Not only were the bulk of the Lithuanians and Belarusians unimpressed by the appeals and promises made by the Polish rebels; they actively assisted the Russian authorities in tracking down and arresting them.²⁸ Many perceived the tsarist authorities as a lesser evil than the local Polish land owners. If there was a certain antagonism in Belarusian-Polish relations, this was a class-based, rather than an ethnic conflict.²⁹ Kalinouski attempted to exploit the rebellion for the purpose of improving the situation of the Belarusian peasantry. Unlike many Polish participants, Kalinouski did not dislike

²⁵ A. Stankevich (1934), 24.

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ A. Stankevich, (1934), 23.

²⁸ P. N. Batiushkov, *Belorussiia i Litva: istoricheskiiia sudby severo-zapadnago kraia* (St. Petersburg: Tipografia Tovarishchestva ‘Obshchestvennaia Pol’za,’ 1890), 369; A. Stankevich, (1934), 25, citing the State Archives of Vilnia, Audy. Polowy Nr. 280 1864.

²⁹ Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, 152.

Russians. His concerns were rather the plight of the Belarusian and Lithuanian peasants. At his trial, Kalinouski stated “I am not an opponent of the happiness of the people of Russia, as its people wishes our happiness, but an opponent of the misery, under which our land suffers.”³⁰ Certainly, Belarusian folklore refers to Poles in terms of “liakhi,” “palaki,” “warszawiaki,” “mazury,” and “pany,” indicating that the Belarusians perceived Poles as different from themselves. Yet, much of this derision could be related to class antagonism.³¹

The Aftermath of the 1863 Rebellion

Compared to the Polish uprising in 1830-31, the 1863 rebellion was a limited in scale. Three to four thousand people participated, one-third of the number of participants in the 1831 rebellion. Within ethnic Belarusian territory, the largest rebellion took place in the Hrodna area, where 1,700 people participated.³² Prior to 1863, the Belarusian language had not been banned: it just could not be written in Latin script.³³ Following the failed rebellion of 1863, the Belarusian language was prohibited in the Russian Empire, and only limited material was published in Krakow, Posen and Vienna.³⁴ On 18 July 1863, the Imperial Russian Minister of the Interior, Petr Valuev, issued a circular that severely limited Ukrainian and Belarusian publications. This circular had the approval of the tsar, yet was never published as a law, but was rather a secret administrative instruction to the censors. It was extended through the so-called Ems Decree of May, 1876, which would remain in force until 1905.³⁵ Even before 1863, the Imperial Russian government had attempted bans and repressive measures against a number of minority languages. From 1850 to 1860, the publication of material in the Finnish language was limited to

³⁰ A. Stankevich (1934), 25, citing the State Archives of Vilnia, Audyt. Polowy Nr. 280, 1864.

³¹ Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, 153.

³² Oleg Łatyszonek and Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Historia Białorusi od połowy XVIII do końca XX wieku* (Białystok: Związek Białoruski w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Katedra Kultury Białoruskiej Uniwersytetu w Białymostku, 2002), 95-96.

³³ Snyder (2003), 43.

³⁴ Jan Zaprudnik, “National Consciousness of the Byelorussians and the Road to Statehood,” in Vitaut Kipel and Zora Kipel (eds.), *Byelorussian Statehood* (New York: Byelorussian Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1988), 13.

³⁵ Johannes Remy, “The Valuev Circular,” 87.

religious and economic literature. In 1862, there were plans to ban Yiddish in the Russian Empire.³⁶ The Belarusian question elicited considerably less interest from the authorities than the Polish and Ukrainian issues. National consciousness was still largely undeveloped in Belarus. Ukrainian authors, such as Ivan Nechui-Levits'kyi and Fortunat Piskunov, maintained in the 1870s that Belarusian was a Ukrainian dialect; an attitude shared by some government officials, such as Aleksandr Tymashev, the Interior Minister.³⁷ The Russian government subscribed to the notion of a hierarchy of languages. It assumed that dialects were distortions or corruptions of "higher" and "purer" literary norms. In his 1863 circular, Valuev cited opinions that denied the existence of the Ukrainian language as "nothing, but Russian corrupted by Polish influence."³⁸

The nine Western provinces of the Russian empire, the territory which used to make up the Kingdom of Poland, became known as the Vistula Land following the 1863 rebellion. Following the uprising the imperial government came to rely on policies of manipulation and intimidation to assert control over the territories that now constitute the bulk of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and West-Central Ukraine. The Polish universities in Vilna and Warsaw were closed or Russified, and the Ukrainian language and culture subjected to near total suppression.³⁹ The national awakening had not yet reached Eastern Ukraine and Belarus, where the overwhelmingly rural inhabitants of these lands remained deaf to nationalist appeals.⁴⁰ Corresponding largely to Ernest Gellner's analysis of the rise of nationalism, Warsaw and Łódz, the most industrialized areas in the Western parts of the Russian empire, were the most receptive to nationalist agitation. The successes of the Polish nationalist agitators constituted a dilemma for the Imperial authorities. Writes Ross Poole,

³⁶ Remy, 90-91.

³⁷ Ibid., 97-98, 105.

³⁸ Miller, 264. This was not uncommon; until the late 19th century Yiddish was not seen as a full-fledged language, but referred to contemptuously as *zhargon* by German, Polish, and Yiddish speakers alike. Friedrich Engels reflected this attitude when he referred to the language of the *Ostjuden* as "a horribly corrupted German." This attitude was shared by Paderewski and the first government of resurrected Poland. Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 55; Isaac Lewin, "The Political History of Polish Jewry, 1918-1919" in Isaac Lewin (ed.), *A History of Polish Jewry During the Revival Of Poland* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1990), 196.

³⁹ Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification in the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 13.

⁴⁰ Weeks (1996), 64, 111.

As a country or an area industrializes, a dominant economic/political group will attempt to impose its language and culture on others. Members of other cultural groups will have the choice of assimilating or resisting. While the path of resistance has been the more conspicuous one, assimilation has been, as Gellner points out, easily the most common option. Most potential nationalisms have surrendered without an appreciable struggle. But some will resist, and counter-nationalisms will be born. Where nationalism becomes the norm, then multicultural – now multinational – states and empires will become unstable.⁴¹

While no formal “nationality policy” *per se* existed in imperial Russia, the custom was to assimilate the smaller East Slavic peoples into the body of the Russian people. Such an approach was not unique to Imperial Russia. Similar practices to assimilate national or linguistic minorities were attempted as far back as fifteenth-century Spain. From the late 18th century, similar assimilationist practices appeared in France and Great Britain.⁴² This praxis was articulated by the word *sliianie* (merger, assimilation) of these smaller Slavic peoples into the larger Russian community.⁴³ This policy assumed that smaller languages, or dialects, as they regarded Ukrainian, Belarusian and Yiddish, would dwindle and disappear, and be replaced by Russian, which would flourish in their stead.⁴⁴ While nationalist movements among the peoples of the Russian Empire were subjected to harsh repression, it was not state policy to discriminate against Ukrainians or Belarusians on the individual level, provided that they were able to communicate in the Great Russian language.⁴⁵

The imperial government was particularly worried about the threat from Poles and Jews. While Poles were seen as a political danger, Jews were seen as a moral threat. The national aspirations of both these groups endangered the cohesion of the empire. The Lithuanians were a smaller, rural group, which the authorities considered less important and therefore enjoyed more of their confidence.⁴⁶ Contrary to assertions by Polish nationalists, Russian policy was never intended to crush Polishness, but rather to

⁴¹ Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.

⁴² Remy, 88-89.

⁴³ Weeks (1996), 14, 70, 73.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁵ Miller (2003), 26, citing Andreas Kappeler, “Mazapintsy, malorossy, khokhly: ukraintsy v etnicheskoi ierarkhii Rossiiskoi imperii,” in A. Miller, ed., *Rossia-Ukraina: istoriya vzaimootnoshenii* (Moscow, 1997), 134-135.

⁴⁶ Weeks (1996), 67.

reconcile the Poles with the idea of Russian rule.⁴⁷ State preservation rather than Russification was the main goal of the Russian government between 1863 and 1914.⁴⁸ Theodore Weeks argues that “the Russian imperial government, far from pursuing a consistently nationalist course, reacted rather than acted and was plagued by the fundamentally non-national (or even anti-national) nature of the empire.”⁴⁹ The imperial authorities tended to interpret the Eastern Slavs as one nation, “children of the same fatherland.”⁵⁰ Anton Budilovich, Professor of Russian and Church Slavonic at Warsaw University, argued in 1877 that only the Russian language “remained a faithful preserver of the Slavic heritage, both in Church matters and in literature, gaining thereby for its literary language a historical right to be called ‘all-Slavic’”⁵¹ Other Slavic languages, he claimed, would not be able to compete with the Russian, German and Italian languages. In an apparent attempt to discredit the national aspirations of other Slavic groups in the Russian Empire, Budilovich claimed that “the Russian language, because of its history, its character, and its position, has very little in common with any of the other literary languages of the Slavs.”⁵² He argued from a position of strength, as Polish society under Russian rule, at least until 1905, was deprived of – to use Theodore R. Weeks’ words – “all control over instruments of cultural replication and national indoctrination.” No Polish-language university was allowed, private education was banned and the school system was dominated by the Russian language.⁵³

According to Taras Hunczak, the imperial authorities and the pan-Slavists expressed a particularly negative attitude to the other two East Slavic languages, Ukrainian and Belarusian. “The Russians could not logically approve of or tolerate other Slavic languages within their own state since these could

⁴⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁰ Remy, 108.

⁵¹ Taras Hunczak, “Pan-Slavism or Pan-Russianism,” in Taras Hunczak (ed.) *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 95, citing Anton Budilovich, “Ob izuchenii Slavianskogo mira,” in *Slavianskii sbornik* (St Petersburg, 1877), vol. II, 2.

⁵² Hunczak (1974), 95, citing Budilovich (1877), vol. II, 3-4.

⁵³ Weeks (2006), 5.

correspond to the political aspirations of non-Russian groups.”⁵⁴ Given Russia’s backwardness, the policies of Russification in the western borderlands had limited success. Lack of good communications, efficient government, and widespread illiteracy and a largely rural population made the imperial authorities’ assimilationist project difficult to implement.⁵⁵ Although language bans and other restrictions slowed down the development of the Ukrainian national movement, repression was less effective than compulsory education in the Russian language might have been. Furthermore, the inefficiency of the imperial bureaucracy undermined the centralization it was supposed to promote.⁵⁶ The attempts to establish an “official” Russian nationalism and reconcile it with archaic political institutions proved to be an insurmountable challenge for the imperial order. The Imperial authorities intended to Russify the entire region, but these plans rarely translated into action.⁵⁷ The government relied on manipulation and on an elastic interpretation of what constituted the Russian nation, which was occasionally extended to include non-Slavic Lithuanians.⁵⁸ It was assumed that history was condemning small “non-historical” peoples such as the Lithuanians to extinction, and the superiority of the Russian culture was taken for granted.⁵⁹ British historian Geoffrey Hosking argues that in imperial Russia, the state-building efforts of the old archaic order obstructed modern nation building.⁶⁰ As new ethno-nationalist ideals reached the western borderlands of the Russian empire, they clashed with the old imperial attitude of establishing nationality on the basis of religion. The imperial government was slowly forced into taking an approach to its ethnic minorities more similar to the practices its Central and Eastern European neighbors, where the linking of nationality and ethnicity was common practice.

⁵⁴ Hunczak (1974), 95.

⁵⁵ Miller, 254.

⁵⁶ Remy, 89, 110.

⁵⁷ Theodore R. Weeks, “Russification and the Lithuanians, 1863-1905,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring, 2001a), 97.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, MA: Fontana Press, 1997), xxv-xxvi.

Imperial Reaction and Assimilation

In 1890, Russian publicist and historian P.N. Batiushkov outlined the development of the smaller “branches” of the Rusian family noting that it was the “national destiny of these people to merge with Russia.” Batiushkov argued that Ukrainians and Belarusians were “originally baptized into the Eastern Church, and only after the 16th century came to become Uniates, and, in some cases, Catholics,” thus sidestepping the awkward issue of conversion.⁶¹ He focused almost exclusively on a religious identity, and presented Orthodoxy as a common national denominator. Following the practices of the Imperial Russian government, he did not make a distinction between Belarusians and Russians, but referred to them both as “Russians.”⁶²

The assimilation plans of the imperial authorities were never fully implemented.⁶³ For example, the ban on the publication of printed matter in Lithuanian using the Latin script imposed after 1863 mattered little since literacy was low; only six percent of the Lithuanian children in Kovno province attended school in the late 1890s.⁶⁴ From 1888, there had been no Lithuanian publications in Russian letters. Until the ban was lifted in 1904, illegal Latin-script Lithuanian publications flooded the area from East Prussia, which had a Lithuanian population of over 100,000.⁶⁵ Money and resources needed to implement serious Russification programs were lacking, and the nationality policy of the empire was muddled at best. Unlike the USSR, the Russian empire had no legal definition of nationality.⁶⁶ Only slowly and reluctantly

⁶¹ Weeks, (2001b), 84.

⁶² For the North-Western *Krai*, Batiushkov provides the following population data: Russians (here: meaning Belarusians, Russians and smaller numbers of Ukrainians) 3,474,883, Poles 744,410, Lithuanians 2,295,300, Jews 1,200,522, Germans 149,020, Tatars 14,839, “various peoples” 74,598, a total population of 7,953,572. Batiushkov, 373, citing *Vilenskii kalendar’ na 1888 god* (Vil’na, 1887), 145, *Statisticheskie ocherki Severo-Zapadnago kraia*, in *Vilenskii Vestnik* for 1888, no. 158. Pipes, (1997) provides the following numbers from the censuses of 1897 and 1926: 1897 (Belarusians by language, within the borders of the Russian Empire): 5,885,500. For 1926 (within the borders of the USSR): 3,570,600 or 3,466,900 Belarusians by language, 4,738,200 by nationality. Richard Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 300, citing “Tsentral’noe statisticheskoe upravlenie SSSR, Otdel perepisi, Vsesoiuznaia perepis’ naseleniya 17 Dekabria 1926 g., Kratkie svodki, Vypusk IV,” *Narodnost’ i rodnoi iazyk naseleniya SSSR* (Moscow, 1928), Table I, pp. xxiv-xxvii.

⁶³ Mikhail Dolbilov, “Russification and the Bureaucratic Mind in the Russian Empire’s Northwestern Region in the 1860s,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Volume 5, Number 2 (Spring 2004), 271.

⁶⁴ Weeks (2001a), 107.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 111-112; Snyder (2003), 47.

⁶⁶ Weeks (2001a), 98.

did the empire start to accept ethnicity as a definition of nationality. Partly as a response to pressure from above by the Polonizing Catholic Church and the Russifying authorities, the Lithuanian situation had some resemblance to the Ukrainian. Whereas the Ukrainian nationalists could look across the border to Austrian Galicia for support in national development, the Lithuanians looked to the Lithuanians in the German Empire.⁶⁷

During the years of World War I there was an abrupt qualitative shift from the pre-war nationality policy of the Russian Empire. The ambivalent and half-hearted policy of Russification through the spreading of Orthodoxy and the promotion of Russian culture was replaced by the aim to “nationalize larger abstractions: the economy, the land, the population.”⁶⁸ Eric Lohr sees this radical departure from previous praxis and radical expansion of the power of the state as a precedent to the Stalinist nationalities policy, as this policy led to a more “modern,” ethnic definition of nationality, and included deportations and forced migrations of roughly a million people, designated as “enemy aliens” and minorities, feared to be subversive.⁶⁹ Following the revolution of 1905, Balts and Finns increasingly attracted the attention of the authorities as dangerous revolutionaries.⁷⁰ Following the breakout of war, Russia introduced restrictions on ethnic Germans. This policy turned many of them into revolutionaries, after previously having been the least radical of all the national minorities in the empire.⁷¹ At the time of repression of the German minority, the old Polish enemy suddenly became an ally.⁷² The wartime purging of “enemy alien” diasporas helped to “nationalize” the border regions, setting the stage for both national revolutions and the Soviet experimental nationalities policy.⁷³ According to the incomplete data available, between

⁶⁷ The Lithuanians in Imperial Germany could publish freely, but they chose neither Cyrillic script, nor Polish orthography for their literary language. Instead, they emulated the Czech orthography in their attempts to differentiate their language and distinguish it from Polish as much as possible. Ironically, the Czechs, in turn, had chosen this orthography to differentiate their language from German. Snyder, (2003), 36-37.

⁶⁸ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 170.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1, 170.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 163.

⁷¹ Lohr, 169.

⁷² Ibid., 163.

1885-1889 there were 76 peasant rebellions in the 29 western *uezdy* of the Russian Empire, and 88 between 1890 and 1900.⁷⁴ Between 1885 and 1900 104,414 people from the five Northwestern *gubernii* emigrated east of the Urals.⁷⁵

Belarusian Self-Identification

Who were the Belarusians? Did they constitute the western branch on the tree of the Russian, or Rus'ian people, as the Imperial authorities maintained? Were they Slavicized Baltic people or were they really Poles, who had been forced into the Orthodox faith? Few Belarusian peasants devoted much energy to these issues. The question itself was new and alien. Nationalism was an expression of the modern era, and a foreign import. The Belarusian peasant knew in which village he lived, and which religion he practiced. While his religion was convoluted with a number of local practices and superstitions that departed from Christian orthodoxy, he certainly thought of himself as a Christian. He knew that he lived in the Russian empire, even though he could refer to his region as *Litva*, *Rus'* or even *Belarus'*. He knew that he was a subject of the Russian tsar, and associated the Polish language with the ruling lords, or *Pans*. The representatives of power – the landowners tax collectors, and administrators – insofar as he had any contact with them – did not speak his language. He had a foggy, if any understanding about the identities and history of his people – of Polatsk, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or the *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*. To a westerner, the questions “who are we?” and “who am I?” are not ideologically neutral. They assume an ethnic or nationalist answer. If we had asked a Belarusian peasant in 1870, he would have answered “I am nn, an Orthodox peasant, living in village x.” A modern European would not be satisfied with such an answer. We want to know to which people he belongs. A Belarusian in 1870s would not *understand* the question. He had several identities: a religious identity, Orthodoxy or Catholicism, which he could refer to as the Russian and Polish faith. On top of that, he may also have a local identity as *tuteishii*. Referring to himself as a *muzhik*, or peasant, he knew what he was *not*, and that was a *pan*, or lord, or a Jew. But he would be hard pressed to find a category defined as “People.”

⁷³ Ibid., 165-173.

⁷⁴ Susanna Mikhailovna Sambuk, *Politika tsarizma v Belorussii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka* (Minsk: Nauka i Tekhnika, 1980), 160, citing TsGIA SSSR, f. 1282, op. 1, d. 248, l. 43ob.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 161, citing TsIA LitSSR, f. 378, op. 121, d. 1224, l. 113-114.

Belarusians mainly maintained a religious identity – their Orthodox traditions distinguished them from the Catholic Poles and Lithuanians.

At the same time, the Belarusians were a people living along what Samuel Huntington described as a “civilizational fault line,” between the eastern and western world. This divide determined their culture and historical experiences, producing a multi-layered identity.⁷⁶ The national movement relied on religious allegiance when delineating the Belarusian ethnos, but unlike the Poles, Russians, or Galician Ukrainians, the Belarusian community was not religiously homogenous, but contained a large Catholic minority. This diversity, writes Lithuanian historian Vytautas Petronis, led to confusion in religious matters:

The religious criterion was another factor that was closely related to the examination of ethnicity. At the beginning of the 1860s the religious situation in the North Western provinces was as ambiguous as the ethnic. Two major confessions – the Roman Catholic and Orthodox faiths – competed for the souls of the inhabitants. The Roman Catholic Church still retained its former position as a result of its traditional, historical and cultural association with the dominant Polish culture and Polish speaking elite. The Orthodox Church was supported, controlled, and promoted by the Russian state... [T]he religious and ethnic confusion among the peasantry of the Western region resulted from their self-perception with what was “Polish.” Having no conscious perception of their ethnic identity, the Catholic peasants avoided being labeled as “Russians,” which would have denoted their association with the Orthodox Church...[T]he Orthodox and Catholic Belarusian peasantry described their language as “simple” (*prostoi*), and called themselves “Russians” or alternatively – “Lithuanians,” or just “peasants,” which indicated a social separation from their landlords.⁷⁷

Many nationally conscious Belarusians were frustrated by the absence of an ethnic identity in their fellow countrymen, because it paved the way for Russian and Polish claims to Belarusian lands. Ianka Kupala, perhaps the best-known Belarusian writer, made reference to this confusion in his 1919 play *Tuteishiia*. Of the fifteen characters in the play, only three refer to themselves as Belarusians, while the rest lack a national consciousness and do not subscribe to this ethnonym.⁷⁸ Roughly translated into something like “locals,” In Kupala’s interpretation, *tuteishiia* means “nationally indifferent” local Slavs who lack a national identity, unlike the local Jews, Poles and Russians.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone Books, 1998), 158.

⁷⁷ Petronis, 204-205.

⁷⁸ Grigory Ioffe, “Culture Wars, Soul-Searching, and Belarusian Identity,” *East European Politics and Societies* Vol. 21, No. 2, (2007): 351.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 351.

In an environment, where the historical narratives of four national traditions were linked to one city, Vil'nia, the Belarusian voice was the weakest and most recent. Even though the Belarusians only made up a small minority in the city – 0.7 per cent according to the disputed Polish census of 1931 -- the countryside was predominantly Belarusian.⁸⁰ Vilnia appeared as something of a “spiritual home” and a natural candidate for a Belarusian capital to the Belarusian nationalists, who saw it as an integral and central part of the Belarusian nation.⁸¹ To complicate the situation further, since the late 18th century Vil'nia had been a part of the Russian Empire, a state whose archaic practices and policies obstructed modern nation building, let alone Polish, Lithuanian or Belarusian autonomy. Many ethnic groups laid claims to the city, regarding it as a cultural capital, but the largest group was the Jews, who in 1897 constituted 45 per cent of the population.⁸² The Jewish community was deeply divided along sectarian and political lines. The largely secular Bundists, regarded *Lite* as their homeland and Yiddish as their natural national language. Conservative groups, such as *Aguda* regarded their Vilne as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania.”⁸³ Poles made up a significant part of the city’s population and tended to regard Lithuania as a historical part of Poland, and considered their Wilno a Polish city, which few Polish nationalists were prepared to exclude from a resurrected Polish state. Finally, there were the Lithuanians, who despite being a minuscule part of the population – 2 per cent, according to the 1897 census – regarded their Vilnius as a Lithuanian city, and the integration of which in a resurrected Lithuanian state as a central objective, which no Lithuanian nationalists were prepared to discuss.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Petronis, 145-185.

⁸¹ Stephen R. Burant, “Belarus and the “Belarusian Irredenta” in Lithuania,” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (December 1997): 646; David R. Marples, *Belarus. A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Press, 1999), 14.

⁸² According to the 1897 Russian census, there were 45 per cent Jews and 37.8 per cent Poles. A 1909 Russian estimate is 37.8 per cent Poles and 36.8 per cent Jews. Jędrzej Giertych, *In Defense of my Country* (London: Publication of the Roman Dmowski Society, 1981), 184-185.

⁸³ Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 12. The epithet “The Jerusalem of Lithuania” was in use for a long time, at least since 1859. Another tradition has it that this epithet was coined by Napoleon during his occupation of the city. Dovid Katz, “The Posthumous Gaon of Vilna and the History of Ideas,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (December 2005): 257, citing Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1943), 105.

⁸⁴ Leonas Sabaliunas, *Lithuania in Crisis: Nationalism to Communism, 1939-1940* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972), 13. According to the 1897 Imperial Russian census, the Lithuanian component constituted only 4.3 per cent of the population of the city of Vil'nia. In the district of Vil'nia, with their 20.9 per cent of the population they were the third largest ethnic group, following the Belarusians and Jews with 25.8 and 21.3 per cent, respectively. With their 20.1 per cent of the

Racialization: Slavs or Balts?

The historical confusion regarding the political belonging of Belarus gave rise to competing national narratives. A number of Belarusian national activists placed Belarus in a western cultural tradition. Some went so far as to try to disprove the linguistic links between the Belarusian and Russian peoples. In 1910, Vatslau Lastouski, the future leader of the Belarusian People's Republic, developed his so-called *Krievan* theory, according to which there were no ethnic relations between Belarusians and Russians. Lastouski based this theory on commonly held assumptions that Belarus since ancient times had been populated by a people known as the *Krivichi*, or Krievans. These people were often referred to as a "Slavic-Russian" tribe or people (*slaviano-russkoe plemia*).⁸⁵ While the origins of this people remain uncertain, some scholars claim that they originated "from a Baltic sub-stratum."⁸⁶

Lastouski held that the Belarusian "anthropologic type" derived from Aryans and Western Europeans, while he regarded the Great Russians as assimilated Mongols.⁸⁷ Similar to other Slavic nationalists during the first half of the 20th century, Lastouski attempted to establish Western credentials for his "nation" by identifying it as an Aryan, or occidental people.⁸⁸ He attempted to introduce the term

population, Poles constituted the fourth largest group. An official Russian estimate in 1909 gave the number of Lithuanians in Vilnia as 4.7%, and the Russian and Belarusian Orthodox population as 20.7 percent. Guthier, *The Belorussians*, 42, 45; Giertych, 183-184. According to the German census of 1916, the population of Vilnia was 50.1 per cent Polish but only 2.6 per cent Lithuanian. In the surrounding countryside, according to the German authorities, a full 89.8 per cent of the population was Polish while 4.3 per cent were Lithuanians. Alfred Erich Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 43.

⁸⁵ Batiushkov, 6, 8, citing I. Beliaev, *Razskazy iz russkoi istorii*, Vol. 4, part 1 (n.p., n.d), 10, 11, 15, 25 ff.

⁸⁶ A recent textbook in Lithuanian history, published in English, and obviously intended for a foreign audience, holds that "Because of the Slav invasions, the eastern Balts broke away from the remaining Balt world, and the evolution of the latter had no major effect on them. On the other hand, the tribes of eastern Slavs – Krivichi, Dregoviches, Radimichi, Viatichi – who formed in the river-basins of the Upper Dvina and Upper Dnieper, evolved from a Baltic sub-stratum. This substratum is very significant for that part of the Ruthenian nation which developed later, in place of these tribes." Given that writing was introduced only with Christianity and that Lithuania and Samogitia were the last areas of Europe to be Christened – in 1386 and 1414, respectively – we know relatively little about the Baltic world prior to the 14th century, but scholars believe that around ten Baltic languages were spoken. Other than the two surviving Baltic languages, Latvian and Lithuanian, and the Old Prussian language, the last native speaker of which died in 1682, there were a number of other Baltic peoples: the Yatvingians (or Yotvingians/Sudavians), Narravians, Skalvians, Curonians, Semgallians/Semigallians, and Selonians. Zigmantas Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2002), 18-19, 20-25. Latvian historians also consider the Latgallians to have been a separate Baltic people. Daina Bleiere et al. *History of Latvia: the 20th Century* (Riga: Jumava, 2006), 17. In modern Latvian, Russians are known as *krievi*, and Belarusians are called *baltokrievi*.

⁸⁷ Zen'kovich, *Tainy ushedshego veka*, 37, citing V. Iu. Lastouski, *Kratkaia Istoriiia Belorussii* (Wilno, 1910). The perception of the Great Russians, or "Muscovites" as a bastard race, a mix of "Tartars, Mongols, Finns, Jews, and others" was also a commonly held in Poland and Western Europe. Report sent from Swedish embassy in Warsaw to the Swedish Foreign Ministry. Riksarkivet, Stockholm A F1d:70, HP-dossierer 1923-1937, HP 21, Report No. 181½, Warsaw, May 5, 1926.

Krivichi for Belarusians, something he found reflected a different origin. The term “Rus” spread to Belarus much later, with Volodymyr/Vladimir the Great’s conversion to Christianity in 988, and reflected the jurisdiction of Kievan Rus’ over Belarus.⁸⁹ Some Belarusian nationalists sought to abandon the term Belarus, and attempted to introduce other terms. For instance, the linguist and politician Ian Stankevich tried unsuccessfully to introduce the term Great Litvan (*Vialikolitovski*).⁹⁰ Latouski sought to introduce the term Krievans. In the introduction to his 1924 *Russian-Krievan (Belarusian) Dictionary*, Lastouski emphasized, “We are Krievans and not Lithuanian, Variagian or Muscovites. We are neither White, nor Black Rus’; we are a separate Slavic people.”⁹¹ The idea of the Krievan origin of the Belarusian people came to exercise significant attraction for nationalist publishers who rejected both the Polish and Russian heritages and sought a Belarusian ethnos and nationality.⁹² The notion that there is a biological, or racial distinction between the Belarusians and Russians has since entered the Belarusian nationalist discourse.⁹³ Post-war émigré Belarusian nationalists argued that if the Belarusians had mixed with other races, it was with “some Germanic (Nordic) admixture,” which they felt would explain their “political sympathy for the Scandinavia and the Balticum and account for their “historical aversion” for Russia and Ukraine.⁹⁴ A 1960 diaspora publication even provides an exact list of the Slavic-Baltic-Finnish ancestry of the Belarusians, placing these prehistoric tribes on a map: “The Byelorussian people were composed of many

⁸⁸ To re-assign a new identity to an ethnic group became quite common during World War II. For instance, the Croatian Ustaše leader Ante Pavelić declared Croats and Bosnian Muslims Germanic people, rather than Slavs, and considered them descendants of the Ostrogoths. John A. Armstrong, “Collaborationism in World War II: The Integral Nationalist Variant in Eastern Europe” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 40, No. 3, (Sept., 1968): 403. Similarly, Bulgarian National Socialists denied the Slavic character of the Russians. Vakar (1956a), 239, citing Janko Janeff, “Der Untergang des Panslawismus,” *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, VIII (1937): 881-888.

⁸⁹ V. Sienkiewič, “Lastoŭski the Historian and his Historical Views,” *The Journal of Byelorussian Studies* Vol. V, Nos. 3-4, Years XIX-XX (1984): 8.

⁹⁰ Ian Stankevich, *Belaruska-Rasiiski (Vialikalitouska-rasiiski) Slounik* (New York: Lew Sapieha Greatlitvan (Byelorussian) Foundation, n.d.), 1.

⁹¹ Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft* (1999), 284, citing V. Lastouski, *Padruchny rasiiska-kryuski (belaruski) slounik* (Kaunas, 1924), xi.

⁹² Lindner (1999), 238-239.

⁹³ These theories were promoted in the 14 papers of the Belarusian People’s Republic in 1918, and gained much popularity in the collaborationist Belarusian press between 1941 and 1944, which paid much attention to the racial origins of the Belarusians. Zen’kovich, 37.

⁹⁴ Vakar (1956a), 40, 239.

Slavonian tribes, such as; Kryvichy, Radzimichy, Dryhavichy, Lucichy-Vielaty, Duleby, Sievieranie, Draulanie and other stocks of Baltic and Finnish tribes.”⁹⁵ FIGURE 4.

The notion of racial purity also entered the national communist discourse of the 1920s. Vsevalod Ihnatouski and other national communists in the BSSR did not trace the racial origins of the Belarusians to a Baltic, or Aryan ancient past, but claimed, somewhat contradictorily, that compared to Russians and Ukrainians the Belarusians were the “purest ethnic type of the East Slavic-Russian race,” since the Belarusian nation “during its entire development has not mixed with peoples of other races.” In maintaining their racial purity, Ihnatouski claimed, the Belarusians differed quite sharply from the Russians and Ukrainians, who had their racial “purity” ruined “under the Turkish-Mongolian yoke” and intermarriage with neighboring Finnic or Mongolian tribes. Ihnatouski conceded that there may have been intermarriages between Poles and Belarusians, particularly with the Belarusian elite, and that the Polish nation had benefited from this infusion of pure, Slavic blood. A national communist, Ihnatouski found a class aspect to this miscegenation, as the Belarusian elite “was cut off from their people and made into Poles.” While Ihnatouski identified the Poles with classes historically antagonistic to the Belarusian peasantry, he maintained that the Lithuanians were “the same kind of Aryans as the Belarusians,” since they had also been sheltered from Mongol influences.⁹⁶ By adopting the Aryan mythology about the origin of their people, Lastouski and Ihnatouski placed Belarus in the European orbit, emphasizing not only the racial, but also the cultural purity of the Belarusians.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Uladyslau Rzy-Ryski, *Origin of Whiteruthenia or “Bielaruś”* (Princeton: The Board of Scientific Research “Leu Sapieha” of the International Institute of the Byelorussian Studies, St. Eufrasinia of Polacak, 1960), 1.

⁹⁶ Lindner (1999), 249, citing Vsevalod Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys historyi Belarusi*, (Miensk, 1926), 25. Interestingly, recent research by Aliaksei Mikulich, using physical characteristics and DNA-markers seems to validate some of the primordial assumptions of the early Belarusian nationalists regarding their “race,” such as the absence of miscegenation with Mongols. “The graphical depiction of the generalized features of the [Belarusians] gene pools allows us to detect easily their affinity and distinctness. [Mikulich] notes that the indigenous inhabitants of Pskov, Novgorod and Smolensk regions are genetically very close to the Belarusians of the Prydžvińie, the region along the Dzvina/Dvina river, which is accounted for by their common Kryvičian roots. However, it is the Belarusian ethnic area that they all make part to. [sic] The analyses of anthropo-genetic and gene-demographic data suggests that the Belarusian ethnies is very ancient. (...) The researcher argues that singularity of origin, as well as language, material and spiritual culture of their own, combined with the sovereign state, i.e. Grand Duchy of Lithuania, that existed for several centuries, and prevalence of emigration over immigration facilitated consolidation of the Belarusians as a singular and sustained ethic group.” Aliaksei Mikulich, *Belarusy u henetychnai prastory: Antrapalohia etnasu* (Minsk: Tekhnalohii, 2005), summary, iii-iv.

⁹⁷ Vakar (1956a), 39; University of Chicago and Abraham A. Hurwitz (ed.) *Subcontractor’s Monograph, Human Relations Area Files No. 19, Aspects of Contemporary Belorussia* (New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files, 1955), 155.

Similar attitudes are to be found in the writings of Belarusian historian Mitrofan Dounar-Zapol'ski (1867-1934). He considered both Poles and Belarusians as "the most purely preserved Slavic people," since their intermarriage with other people was minimal or non-existent.⁹⁸ The ancestors of the modern Belarusians, according to Dounar-Zapol'ski, were able to retain their uniquely pure racial characteristics as they were never conquered by the Lithuanians.⁹⁹ Dounar-Zapol'ski identified the Kryvichy, Radzimichy and Drehavichy as ancient Slavic tribes, and the ancestors of the modern Belarusians.¹⁰⁰ The speculations on the racial origin of the Belarusians had little impact on the Belarusians themselves. Few Belarusians internalized a *Krievan* identity.

Today, while Belarusians are regarded as an Eastern Slavic people, they are also seen as carriers of two or several cultures, an amalgamation of Slavic and Baltic peoples.¹⁰¹ Genetically, the Belarusians differ to some extent from the Russians, as Belarus was not occupied by the Tatars. A recent study claims that there is among Belarusians "practically no evidence of the [sic] features of the Mongol race. This confirms the historical data that Belarus was not occupied by the Tatar Mongols." The same study suggests that "the Belarusian ethnies is very ancient," and that its origins can be dated no later than the mid-second millennium BCE.¹⁰² Yet, the concept of "race" remains contested, and physical anthropologists have identified "as many as nine different racial strains" among the inhabitants of Belarus.¹⁰³ For the national activists, it was not too difficult to agree upon what the Belarusians were not. They were not "Great" Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Jews or Poles. To establish a positive

⁹⁸ Lindner (1999) 249, citing M. V. Dounar-Zapol'ski, *Historyia Belarusi* (Minsk, 1994), 25. There is some dispute with regard to Dounar-Zapol'ski's own ethnicity. He is sometimes described as a Pole, sometimes as a Belarusian. In any case, Dounar-Zapol'ski was born in Rechytsa, but studied and taught at the University of Kyiv. David R. Marples, "Europe's Last Dictatorship: The Roots and Perspectives of Authoritarianism in 'White Russia,'" *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 6 (September 2005): 907f.

⁹⁹ Marples (2005): 899, citing Mitrofan Dovnar-Zapol'skiy, 'Osnovy gosudarstvennosti Belorussii,' *Neman*, 1990, 2, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Lindner (1999), 249, citing M. V. Dounar-Zapol'ski, *Historyia Belarusi* (Minsk, 1994), 25.

¹⁰¹ Törnquist-Plewa, *Vitryssland* (2001), 96-97.

¹⁰² Mikulich, iii-iv.

¹⁰³ Vakar (1956a), 40.

Belarusian identity, however, has remained a dilemma ever since. The Belarusians know what they are *not*, but they still do not know what they *are*.¹⁰⁴

“We will fight to make sure that all Belarusians...realize that they are Belarusians”: The Early Belarusian National Movement

The first Belarusian political party, the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* (henceforth: BSH) was formed in 1902 by young national activists who had formed nationalist study circles in Vilnia, Miensk and Hrodnia.¹⁰⁵ A broad, non-Marxist socialist party, the BSH explicitly rejected the dogmatism of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP) and the Marxist theory of the centrality of the working class in the revolution, focusing instead on national issues, particularly on cultural autonomy for the Belarusians within the Empire.¹⁰⁶ The BSH appealed to a wide and diverse spectrum of Belarusian nationalists. Zmitsier Zhylunovich, the first head of state of Soviet Belarus, described Anton Lutskevich, the leader of the BSH, as a “conscious Marxist.”¹⁰⁷ Lutskevich himself emphasized the diversity of the organization and the origin of its members in the social democratic, Socialist Revolutionary movements and the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, or PPS). Vatslau Lastouski, another leading BSH member, vacillated between radical liberalism and socialism.¹⁰⁸ Soviet historians condemned the party as petit-bourgeoisie, nationalist, and conciliatory.¹⁰⁹ During the first years of its existence, the movement used political appeals, sometimes printed on the presses of the PPS, and distributed through underground circles. In 1906 the BSH set up its own printing house in Miensk. The international nature of the Belarusian national movement was clear from the very beginning. The appeal “Comrades!” of March 1904 was issued in four languages: Belarusian, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish. The BSH produced some twenty political and didactical appeals to the Belarusian people in an attempt to awaken a Belarusian

¹⁰⁴ Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 89

¹⁰⁵ During the first years of its existence, until November 10, 1904, the Belarusian Socialist Hramada called itself the Belarusian Revolutionary Hramada. Anatolii Sidarevich, “Da historyi Belaruskai Satsyialistychnai Hramady: ahliad krynnitsau,” Part IV, *Arche*, No. 5 (45): 2006. <http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-5/sidarevic506.htm> (accessed Dec. 23, 2006)

¹⁰⁶ Zen’kovich, 81.

¹⁰⁷ Nedasek (1956), 85, 86.

¹⁰⁸ James Dingley, “Lastoŭski as Politician,” *The Journal of Byelorussian Studies*, Vol. V, Nos. 3-4, Years XIX-XX (1984): 14.

¹⁰⁹ Vladimir Aleksandrovich Poluiyan, *Revolutsionno-demokraticesoe dvizhenie v zapadnoi Belarussii* (Minsk: Nauka i Tekhnika, 1978), 43.

national consciousness.¹¹⁰ It did not demand Belarusian independence, but local autonomy and a local Sejm. The BSH was a party in the *narodnik* and SR tradition, and differed from the Marxist parties, in that it catered to the peasants rather than the proletariat.¹¹¹

National enlightenment was seen as a way to improve the situation for the poor and uneducated Belarusian peasants. Since class distinctions largely followed ethnic lines, the ambition to improve the plight of the Belarusian masses also meant the improvement of the most disadvantaged layers of society. National in form and moderately socialist in content, the early Belarusian national movement focused as much on social injustice and class oppression as it did on national rights. The two aspects, nationalism and socialism, complemented each other, and class-based concerns were articulated in the name of the Belarusian nation. The Belarusian Socialist Hramada kept growing in importance, and had some 5,000 members on the eve of the October Revolution.¹¹² It split into several smaller groups in 1918.¹¹³ The Belarusian Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party both regarded themselves as the successors of the BSH.

The political changes following the Revolution of 1905 radically changed the conditions for the establishment of a broad Belarusian movement. Particularly significant was the fact that the ban on publications in the Belarusian language was lifted. The first paper to appear in the Belarusian language since Kastus' Kalinowski's 1862-1863 pioneering *Mužyskaja prawda*, was the short-lived, illegal *Nasha Dolia*.¹¹⁴ It was intended as a weekly newspaper, a de facto organ of the BSH, on the initiative of Ivan

¹¹⁰ Some of these appeals targeted a certain group of Belarusians, such as to the workers at the hospital in Vilnia. These were radical appeals, some written in Cyrillic, others using Polish transliteration. They were appealing to the soldiers, denouncing the Tsarist Duma or attempting to explain what a constitution is. Anatolii Sidarevich, "Da historyi Belaruskai Satsyialistychnai Hramady: ahliad kryničau," Part III, *Arche*, No. 5 (45), 2006.

¹¹¹ The early history of the BSH is still an under-researched topic. After 1929 research into this history was prohibited in the USSR and the diaspora took little interest in the topic. Sidarevich, *Arche*, No. 4 (44), 2006, "Da historyi Belaruskai Satsyialistychnai Hramady: ahliad kryničau" Part I and IV, *Arche* No. 5 (45), 2006. <http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-4/sidarevic406.htm> (Accessed December 23, 2006).

¹¹² Zen'kovich, 81-82.

¹¹³ Poluijan, 43.

¹¹⁴ Paul Wexler, book review of Pawstan'ne na Belarusi 1863 hodu: "Mužyskaja prawda" j "Listy z-pad šybeniecy." *Teksty j kamentaryj*. The 1863 uprising in Byelorussian: "Peasants' Truth" and "Letters from Beneath the Gallows." Texts and commentaries by Jan Zaprudník and Thomas E. Bird. Byelorussian Institute of Arts and Sciences. New York: The Kręcuszki Foundation, 1980. *Slavic Review* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring, 1982): 158-160.

Lutskevich.¹¹⁵ Its few published volumes contained articles by the leading Belarusian intellectuals, such as Iakub Kolas and the brothers Ivan and Anton Lutskevich. It filled a void, demonstrating a demand for a publication in the Belarusian language.¹¹⁶ The first issue, printed on September 1 (14) 1906, included Iakub Kolas' poem "Our Native Land." The following issue contained his first prosaic work, "Freedom," an emotional denunciation of the arbitrary rule of the *Okhrana*, the tsar's secret police.¹¹⁷ All but one of the six printed issues were confiscated. The content in the first, third and fourth issues led to legal processes against its editor and caused a rift within its editorial board. The final issue was published on December 1 (14), 1906. In January 1907, the paper was formally banned and its editor, Ivan Adomou Turkenes put on trial. The prosecutor described the publication of *Nasha Dolia* as part of an "attempt to destroy the entire current political system."¹¹⁸ Turkenes was sentenced to one year in jail on the grounds that "it is necessary to punish the desire to change the established order."¹¹⁹

As it became evident that *Nasha Dolia* would not last, on November 10 (23) 1906, a second Belarusian paper, *Nasha Niva*, was established. Its inaugural issue addresses the Belarusian nation, regardless of class:

Do not think, that we want to serve only the Polish lords (*panam*) or only the people (*muzhykam*). No, never! We will serve the *entire oppressed Belarusian people*, attempting to be a window of life, and from us as from the window, light will disperse the darkness. We will take everything from it and, once we are organized, pass the light on to others. Be advised that *Nasha Niva* is not a paper for the editorial board, but for *all Belarusians* and for all those who sympathize with their cause. Everybody has the right to be heard on the pages of our paper and to lead it through reason. We, in our country, will fight so that *all Belarusians*, who do not know that they exist, *will realize that they are Belarusians and human beings*, that they are made aware of their rights and assist us in our work. ... *Support is in the work, which now begins!*¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ "20-tyia uhodki Belaruskae presy," *Belaruskaia khata: Orhan nezalezhnai demakratychnai Belaruskai dumki*, Year 1, no. 1., October 7, (1926): 3.

¹¹⁶ Uladzimir Konan, "Nasha Dolia" in H. P. Paskou, ed. *Entsyklapediya Historyi Belarusi*, Vol. 5 (Minsk: Belaruskaia Entsyklapediya imia Petrusa Brouki, 1999), 313.

¹¹⁷ Iakub Kolas, "Nash podny krai," *Nasha Dolia*, September 1, 1906, 4.

¹¹⁸ Signature "Martsin," "Sud 'Nashai Doli," *Nasha Niva: Pershaia Belaruskaia Hazeta z Rysunkami*, No. 3, January 19, 1907, 6-7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.; Uladzimir Konan, "Nasha Dolia" in H. P. Paskou, (ed.) *Entsyklapediya Historyi Belarusi*, Vol. 5 (Minsk: Belaruskaia Entsyklapediya imia Petrusa Brouki, 1999) 313 and "20-tyia uhodki Belaruskae presy," *Belaruskaia khata: Orhan nezalezhnai demakratychnai Belaruskai dumki*, Year.1, no. 1., October 7, 1926, 3.

¹²⁰ Unsigned editorial, *Nasha Niva* No, 1 November 10/23, 1906, 1.

Published from 1906 to 1915, the importance of *Nasha Niva* can hardly be underestimated. It was the first legal paper in the Belarusian language, and the first publication in the Belarusian language that articulated its agenda in terms of class, referring to the Belarusians as a nation. Established on the initiative of Ivan Lutskevich, *Nasha Niva* was published by the same circle of people behind *Nasha Dolia* and became a platform for the Belarusian intellectual elite. It published the works of historians, poets, linguists and ethnographers, such as A. Pashkevich (Tetki), K. Kostrovitski (E. Kahan), V. Ivanouski, Vatslau Lastouski, F. Statskevich, A. Burbis and A. Vlasou. Moderately socialist in its orientation, the tone of *Nasha Niva* was more cautious, advocating the national awakening of Belarus but avoiding chauvinistic expressions of nationalism.¹²¹ Ianka Kupala, Iakub Kolas, and Vatslau Lastouski, all front figures in the Belarusian movement, served as editor at various times from 1909 to 1914.¹²²

The publication of the first issue of *Nasha Niva* led to an immediate backlash from the Polish and Russian intellectual establishments. The editors received numerous letters complaining about the paper's use of the Belarusian language. The complaints argued that a paper in Belarusian was unnecessary, and that the use of Polish or Russian would be more pertinent, since "Belarusian is a dead language, and it is not worth the effort to help it out of its grave."¹²³ The intellectual establishment in Vilnia seemed puzzled that a group of urban, multi-lingual academics would choose Belarusian as the vehicle of communication. Not only did Belarusian lack the prestige of the established languages, it also lacked much of the vocabulary needed for higher learning and political organization. This position marked the beginning of a long-standing argument, which has still not been conclusively decided one hundred years later. The editor of *Nasha Niva* defended his choice of language.

We will not reject [the Belarusian language]. The only thing we want to say is that even though we could have chosen to publish our paper in Polish or Russian, not to mention German or French, we insist on publishing it in the language of the *tuteishy* Belarusian. The language is not dead, but spoken by some ten million dark, oppressed and humiliated people. The quicker our people can read what we publish, the less the language will appear as the language of the *muzhiks*. It is understood not only by the *muzhik* on his field, but also the factory worker, who abandoned his village in order to seek bread and income. The Polish lords (*pane*) who live alongside the *muzhiks* and want the

¹²¹ Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, 156.

¹²² Uladzimir Konan, "Nasha Niva" in H. P. Paskou, (ed.) *Entsyklapediya Historyi Belarusi*, Vol. 5 (Minsk: Belaruskaia Entsyklapediya imia Petrusa Brouki, 1999), 314.

¹²³ Unsigned editorial, *Nasha Niva*, No. 2, 17/30 November, 1906, 1.

paper to be published in Polish as well as the government functionaries who look down upon the *muzhiks* and speaks to them in Russian will also understand us.¹²⁴

Nasha Niva's objection to Polish culture and influence was based primarily on the fact that Polish was the language of the landlords and the privileged. Not all Poles in Belarus were lords or well-to-do peasants, but the lords and well-to-do peasants were, as a rule, Poles. Russian, on the other hand, was the language of the tsarist government, the censors, the military, and police. The rejection of the Polish and Russian languages was a conscious rejection of hegemonic cultures in favor of rights for the poor and disenfranchised Belarusian peasantry. The choice of Belarusian was not only a political and cultural statement; it was also an expression of social consciousness and class solidarity. By choosing the Belarusian language as the vehicle of communication, the nationalists felt that they sided with the poor majority of Belarusian-speakers against the economic and political establishment. From their perspective, national consciousness was linked to class consciousness. Yet, the class identity of most Belarusian peasants was much stronger than national consciousness.¹²⁵ They juxtaposed their peasant status with the Polish magnates, or *pans*. The first copy of *Nasha Niva* spelled out the main aim of the paper. “[W]e will fight *so that all Belarusians...realize that they are Belarusians.*”¹²⁶ While the paper did much to advance Belarusian national consciousness, it did not propagate independence, maintaining that “separatism is a form of political movement, while the Belarusian national rebirth is strictly a cultural issue.”¹²⁷

The choice to publish in Belarusian was a deliberate attempt to foster a national identity and build confidence among the Belarusian peasantry. The authors might also have chosen Polish or Russian as the vehicles for their message, since most of the people in their intended target group had considerably more experience of writing in these languages. In itself, this was nothing unique. Many Lithuanian nationalists used Polish as the vehicle of national agitation, as they were more comfortable in that language, much as many Czech and Finnish nationalists were more familiar with German and Swedish, respectively.¹²⁸ The

¹²⁴ Unsigned editorial, *Nasha Niva*, No. 2, 17/30 November 17 (30), 1906, 2.

¹²⁵ Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, 157.

¹²⁶ Unsigned editorial, *Nasha Niva* No, 1 November 10 (23), 1906, 1.

¹²⁷ H. B., “Pro domo sua,” *Nasha Niva* no. 4, Jan 27, 1911, 52, cited in Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, 156.

¹²⁸ Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 66, 164-166.

overwhelming majority of the Zionist movement in this part of the world grew up speaking Yiddish, and often only learned the newly resurrected modern Hebrew language as adults or adolescents. Belarusian national activists reflected eastern European patterns.

Influences from Neighboring Nationalisms

In 1927 Zhylunovich identified the Bund, the PPS, the Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania as sources of inspiration for the BSH and the early Belarusian nationalism.¹²⁹ From the time of its establishment in 1902, the BSH's destiny intertwined with that of the Jewish Bund. The secular Jewish national awakening coincided roughly with the Belarusian.¹³⁰ Belarusian nationalism developed in cities where the Bund was particularly active. Both movements regarded Vilnia/Vilno as their spiritual home, and both were closely linked to Miensk. The BSH's program for the Belarusian national awakening appears modeled on the program of the Bund. Secular, but ethnic, the two movements both rejected religion as an identity marker, building an identity upon a linguistic basis. The miserable social conditions in the Jewish *shtetlekh* showed much resemblance to that of the Belarusian peasants.¹³¹ The rhetoric, methods and orientation between 1906 and 1922 show striking similarities. After 1928, the Bund was denounced as a “bourgeois” and “nationalist” and its role in the history of Belarus was downplayed in Soviet historiography. However, from its foundation in 1897 it cooperated closely other radical groups, merging with the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party in 1898 as an “autonomous unit.” In fact, three of the nine members at the founding congress of RSDWP came from the Bund.¹³² In the 1920s, the importance of the Bund for the development of the revolutionary movement was openly recognized. Grigorii Zinoviev mused that:

¹²⁹ N. Nedasek, *Bol’shevizm v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii Belorussii: Vvedenie v istoriuiu bol’shevizma v Belorussii. Issledovaniia i materialy (Seriia 1-ia, vyp. 25)* (Munich: Institute for the study of the USSR, 1956), 84, citing Z. Zhylunovich. “Ales’ Burbis (revoliutsyinaiia kharakterystyka),” *Polymia*, No. 2 (1927): 181.

¹³⁰ However, in terms of an ethnic identity, Anthony D. Smith argues that the Ashkenazim has one of the oldest collective identities in Europe. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 63-64.

¹³¹ In his story *The Pot*, Sholom Aleichim (Shalom Rabinowitz) (1859-1916) tells the story of how the Jews of the *shtetlekh* of the Pale lived in an unsanitary environment, ignorant of even the most basic aspects of personal hygiene, where life expectancy was low and the ignorance of medicine and personal health widespread. Irving Howe and Ruth R. Wisse (eds.) “The Pot,” in *The Best of Sholom Aleichim* (New Republic Books: Washington, D.C., 1979), 77-78.

¹³² Paul Kriwaczek, *Yiddish Civilization: The Rise and Fall of a Forgotten Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 295.

For two, three years [the Bund] was the most influential and numerous organization of our Party. Also in the second half of the [18]90s the role of the “Bund” in the party was very strong. It is enough to consider that the “Bund” was the main organizer of the first congress of our party in 1898. And it was by no means a coincidence that this Congress was held in Minsk, a city in the Pale of Settlement, the area of operation of the “Bund.”¹³³

While stereotypical and hostile images of Jews were widespread in 19th century Belarus,¹³⁴ expressions of anti-Semitism were rare in the early Belarusian nationalist movement. Outside observers such as Sergei Maksimov’s 1867-1868 ethnographic expedition, reported that Belarusians and Jews coexisted without any major conflicts.¹³⁵ *Nasha Niva* regarded ethnic Polish and Russian nationalisms quite cynically, emphasizing the transparent political objectives behind the Black Hundreds and pointing out that Poles, Russians and Belarusians were fraternal people who had lived in peace for a long time.

The “pure Russian” Black Hundreds pit Orthodox against Catholics, Poles and Jews while the “pure Poles” encourage hatred between Belarusian Catholics and Orthodox....May our people realize these [Russian and Polish nationalists] are their enemies! The only difference between the Russian and Polish “peoples” is that one leans towards Moscow, and the other towards Warsaw, while they jointly strive to keep in their grip over, and calmly control our dark [Belarusian] people.¹³⁶

Thus, the form of nationalism *Nasha Niva* advocated contrasted sharply with the chauvinism of the Russian extreme right and the emerging Polish national democrats.¹³⁷ *Nasha Niva* associated both Russian and Polish nationalism with reaction and class-based oppression. As the paper promoted a linguistic and cultural nationalism it perceived the emergence of Belarusian culture as a progressive expression of an emerging national and class consciousness. At the same time, it expressed a class-based solidarity with representatives of other ethnic minorities in the region, notably the Jews. In national and cultural terms, the Lithuanians were seen as brothers and allies, despite the very obvious and very substantial linguistic differences. It explicitly rejected a focus on purity of blood and the arranging of national minorities into a racial pecking order as a transparent attempt to preserve the political status quo. The rhetoric of the Black

¹³³ Grigori Sinowjew, *Geschichte der KPR(b)* (Hamburg: Verlag der KPD, 1923), 52.

¹³⁴ Vol’ha Sabaleŭskaia, “Mezhy talerantnastsi: khrystianska-iudeiskiia stasunki na Belarusi u XIX stahoddzi,” *Bialoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, vol. 25 (2006): 82.

¹³⁵ Petronis, 165.

¹³⁶ Unsigned editorial, *Nasha Niva*, No. 15, April 13/26, 1907, 2.

¹³⁷ On the ideology of the National Democrats, see Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to Present* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 57-68. On the Russian radical right, see Walter Laqueur, *The Black Hundreds: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 16-28.

Hundreds stressed that “pure” Russians (*istinno-russkie*) ought to possess all power, but *Nasha Niva* simply interpreted the overwhelmingly rural Belarusian nation as homogenous in terms of class belonging.¹³⁸ *Nasha Niva* extended its solidarity to the poor Jewish masses in Belarus, trumping national consciousness with class solidarity.

Every *muzhik* knows how the Jews live. In our Belarus, very many Jews make their living through all kinds of odd jobs. If, for instance, a *muzhik* needs to have clothes done for a wedding, or buy a pair of boots or make shoes for the horse or something else, then he will go to the Jewish store keeper, seamstress or horse keeper...The majority of these merchants live in our *shtetlekh*. The Jews work in the cities and in factories: tobacconists, guilds, textile industries and so forth. Others work with heavy labor, as carriers, bringing heavy goods into town on their bare shoulders and performing all kinds of heavy physical work. Who can claim that these Jewish workers do not live off their own labor? Is it perhaps true, that the Jew who works with his needle from early morning until late at night, or the Jew who works as a carrier or in the factory works less or perform less heavy duties than the Christian worker? No! ... And every *muzhik* is aware how poorly the Jews in our cities live. It is true that in every *shtetl* there are a few rich men, while all other Jews are laborers of traders – there is such poverty, that a large part of them live even worse than the *muzhiks*. Take a look at them – all their people are undernourished, hungry and pale, and their huts are dark, with dirt everywhere....It is no better in the cities. Anyone who has been to Vilnia, Minsk, Vitsiebsk, Mahileu, Harodnia in the parts of towns where the poor Jews live know first hand, that the living situation of those Jews is simply catastrophic.¹³⁹

Nasha Niva suggested that the poor Jewish and Christian workers ought to fight the rich Jewish and Christian owners of the factories. “[W]orkers of all nationalities and religions have only one enemy – only one blood sucker, and there is only one path for us to follow...”¹⁴⁰ That path, *Nasha Niva* argued, linked national awakening and socialism. The same theme appears in one of Ianka Kupala’s stronger poems, *Jews*, from 1919, emphasizing the brotherhood of Jews and Belarusians.¹⁴¹

The Belarusian nationalist movement was soon frustrated by the superficiality of the reforms following the October Manifesto. Many of the promised changes remained on paper, and when the tsar dissolved the second Duma, *Nasha Niva* correctly predicted that a conservative Duma would be elected under the new franchise rules which overrepresented the wealthy and marginalized both the poor and landless classes, as well as national minorities, such as the Belarusians. The paper emphasized that there

¹³⁸ Unsigned editorial, “Z’ezd tak-zvanaho ‘Soiuza Russkaho Naroda,’ *Nasha Niva* No. 26, 1907, 2.

¹³⁹ Signature “B,” Ab zhydokh,” *Nasha Niva*, No. 17, 4/17 May, 1907, 2-5.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5. This comment reflected the attitude of the Polish Socialist Party, the PPS. Jedlicki, “Resisting the Wave,” in Blobaum (ed.) *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland*, 73-74.

¹⁴¹ Anthony Adamovich, *Opposition to Sovietization in Belorussian Literature (1917-1957)* (Munich: The Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1958), 43, citing A. Lutskevich, *Adbitae zhytstse*, Vol. 1 (Vilnia, 1929), 144-145.

were alternatives, and used neighboring Austrian Galicia as an example of what could be accomplished through popular representation. The form of local government in place in Galicia was presented as a model for a future Belarus.¹⁴² The paper felt that the Dumas did not meet popular demands for democratic change. The elections to the Third Duma were also criticized as insufficient. “The [Belarusian] *muzhiks* felt like uninvited guests at a wedding,” *Nasha Niva* remarked sarcastically.¹⁴³ The result was that out of 39 deputies from Vilnia gubernia, there were only 10 Belarusian *muzhiks*.¹⁴⁴ For the entire Russian Empire 168 conservatives and 168 Octobrists were elected, while on the left, 92 deputies for the Party of People’s Freedom and 30 Socialists were elected.¹⁴⁵ It was clear that the political situation had stabilized and the forces of reaction were consolidating their power. *Nasha Niva* found it increasingly difficult to spread its message. The same issue that expressed bitterness about the undemocratic new franchise laws was also the last weekly issue of the paper. Henceforth, it became a bi-weekly publication.¹⁴⁶ A month thereafter the printing house at which *Nasha Niva* was published was closed down by decree of the governor general, and it had to be produced at an alternative printing house, which lacked both *latsinka* and Cyrillic Belarusian fonts.¹⁴⁷ Yet, unlike *Nasha Dolia*, *Nasha Niva* managed to survive until 1915.¹⁴⁸

In comparison with Belarus, Russian Ukraine was considerably more developed, both economically and socially. After 1905, some pupils in the schools in the Russian part of Ukraine were taught in Ukrainian, something *Nasha Niva* saw as an enormous step forward. The paper argued that if it was possible to instruct school children in Ukrainian, it should also be possible to teach Belarusian children in their native language. Like the Belarusian language, Ukrainian had long been considered an unsophisticated language, unworthy of being used for education. This had changed. “Now it is possible to

¹⁴² Unsigned editorial, “Ab pereselanniu,” *Nasha Niva*, No. 31, October 12 (25) 1907, 3.

¹⁴³ Unsigned editorial, “Vyvary 2 deputata ad “russkaho naselen.” Vilen. h.,” *Nasha Niva*, No. 32, October 26 (8) 1907, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 1

¹⁴⁵ *Nasha Niva*, No. 32, October 26 (8) 1907, 4.

¹⁴⁶ “Ad Redaktsii,” *Nasha Niva*, No. 31, October 12 (25) 1907, 1.

¹⁴⁷ “Ad redaktsii,” *Nasha Niva* No. 33, November 10 (23) 1907.

¹⁴⁸ *Nasha Niva* were published more or less continuously from October 10 (23) 1906 to August 7 (20), 1915. Until October 18 (31) 1912 there was also a parallel edition in *Lacinka*. Uladzimir Konan, “Nasha Niva” in H. P. Paskou, (ed.) *Entsyklapediya Historyi Belarusi*, Vol. 5 (Minsk: Belaruskaja Entsyklapediya imia Petrusa Brouki, 1999), 314.

nurture the hope that our darkened (*tsemni*) Belarusian will wake up from his deep sleep and recognize that he is a human being. Maybe also we will be able to hear the great words of science in our native language.”¹⁴⁹ In the absence of public schools, *Nasha Niva* needed to take upon itself the role as a national enlightener. “*Nasha Niva* is working on behalf of the unenlightened Belarusian, and wants to show him that he is no worse than other people; it wants to plant in his soul a seed of truth and light.”¹⁵⁰ The paper stated that the enemy of the Belarusian people was no particular ethnic group or race, but rather the “centuries-long darkness,” in which the Belarusian had been living. The terminology of *Nasha Niva* was positive and optimistic; history was portrayed in positivistic terms as a journey from darkness to light.

The Belarusian nationalists’ choice of the anthem *Ad veku my spali*, [For centuries we slept] was not random. Celia Applegate has emphasized that “[b]ourgeois national consciousness could not have spread without networks of railroads and rivers, printing presses and postal offices, academic halls, associated meeting rooms, and army training posts. We need to understand how national belonging was fit into a structure of social and cultural identities, some of which already existed and some of which evolved alongside the new nationalism.”¹⁵¹ A central aim of the Belarusian nationalists was to transgress from *tsemni* to *svidomi*, to create a modern national consciousness and modern citizens, transferring the passive and ignorant Belarusian *muzhik* from an object into agent and subject. Some fetishized the moment when they gained national consciousness, treating it with near-religious reverence, not unlike certain protestant sects treat the moment of conversion.¹⁵²

The Belarusians were among the last people in Europe to urbanize. In 1910 the required infrastructure was still missing.¹⁵³ Before any social mobilization or national consciousness could be

¹⁴⁹ “Ukrainskaia mova u universitetakh,” *Nasha Niva* No. 33, November 10 (23) 1907, 4.

¹⁵⁰ “Hod vydannia ‘Nashai nivy’,” *Nasha Niva* No. 33, November 10 (23) 1907, 4.

¹⁵¹ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 12.

¹⁵² See, for instance, how Jan Stankevich describes his experience of “learning my nationality in 1909.” J. Stankevich, *Belaruski-Pasiiski (Vialikalitouska-rasiiski) slounik*, iii.

¹⁵³ In 1913, 86 per cent of Belarusians lived on the countryside. By 1940, 79 per cent still did, making Belarus one of the most rural states in Europe. Only in the late 1950s did ethnic Belarusians constitute the majority population in the Belarusian cities,

accomplished, the national movement needed to confront a number of urgent social and material problems. First and most immediately this consciousness was limited to small circles within the tiny Belarusian intelligentsia, primarily concentrated in the city of Vil’nia. The overwhelming majority of the Belarusians were rural dwellers, most of them illiterate. In fact, Belarus was one of the poorest areas in the Russian Empire, which in turn was one of the least developed countries in Europe. The socially mobilized section of society, to use Karl Deutsch’s terminology, was small. Out of almost seven million Belarusians in 1913, 59 thousand, or 0.9 per cent were workers. And of this tiny percentage, few were industrial proletarians in the Marxist understanding of the word. These workers were often handcrafters in small, non-mechanized and largely pre-industrial workshops that seldom had more than fifty or sixty employees.¹⁵⁴ The per capita industrial production in the Belarusian *gubernii* was five times less than in central Russia.¹⁵⁵ Over 75 per cent of Belarusians lived in the countryside, and the overwhelming majority were illiterate.¹⁵⁶ This low level of communication and social mobility kept in existence medieval or pre-modern conditions. Most Belarusians outside the small cities were unable to identify their own nationality.¹⁵⁷

The *Nasha Niva* circle believed that national emancipation would come with education, the establishment of consciousness and political activism. Yet, the physical, social, and educational needs were enormous. The average life span of a Belarusian peasant was 32 years, and the Belarusians often

and it was first in 1975 that the urban population exceed the rural, making the 1980 census the first to show a majority urban population in the BSSR. In Western Belarus the same shift did not take place until the 1980s, and in the ethnically Belarusian areas in Poland, it has yet to take place. Here, only between 35 and 49 per cent of the Belarusian population is urban. Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language,” (2003), 1014, 1039; Spartak Aliaksandravich Pol’ski (ed.), *Belarusy : Etnaheahrafia, demahrafia, dyiaspara, kanfesii: atlas* (Minsk: Kamitet dziarzhaunykh znakau pry ministerstve finansau Respubliki Belarus, 1996), 13; Viktar Siarheevich Smiatannikau, *Belarusaznauystva* (Minsk: Belaruskaia navuka, 1998), 124, citing *Narodnoe khoziastvo BSSR v 1987 g.* (Minsk, 1988), 162 and *Narodnoe khoziastvo v RB v 1991 g.* (Minsk, 1993), 35.

¹⁵⁴ Zen’kovich, 74.

¹⁵⁵ Ivan Kravchenko and Ivan Marchenko, *Radians’ka Bilorusiia (Korotkyi istoryko-ekonomichnyi narys)* (Kyiv: Vyadvnytstva politychnoi literatury Ukrainy, 1965), 15.

¹⁵⁶ H. Niamicha, “Education in the Belorussian SSR and Communist Doctrine,” *Belorussian Review*, Vol. 3, (1956): 90; Zen’kovich, 76.

¹⁵⁷ Hroch, 184.

lacked the most basic knowledge of personal hygiene and cleanliness.¹⁵⁸ The articles in *Nasha Niva* portray the social conditions vividly.

Anyone who has been to our Belarusian village knows about the lack of cleanliness of the conditions, under which our unenlightened *muzhik* lives. The floor in our huts often consists of dirt. He has no place to rest: the hut serves as kitchen, dining room, bedroom and whatever you wish. It is bad enough for a family of eight to ten people. To this, add a cow in the winter, or a pig. A calf and a sow with her piglets running across the floor. Not to mention the chickens, who run around in the hut the entire winter... [Consider then that] our *muzhik* thinks it unbecoming to wash himself.

--What? Do you think I am a *pan* or something, he says, covered in dirt.

-- The bear does not wash, yet he is quick and healthy.

And when he washes himself once a week, it is as if he'd be doing himself a big favor. But only look at how he is washing himself. You can safely say that half of our Belarusians only rinse their mouth. They take a little water in their mouths, dip their hands in water and wipe off some dirt on an animal – and they call that washing! (...) You see few clean hands. They wipe their hands off a little on the long coat and then reach for the bread. And with our hand we touch all kind of things, clean as well as dirty – and eat, without washing our hands. It is terrible, and from such habits we can catch all sorts of illnesses – ringworms, sores and other diseases. And here is the reason for all this: the cause of all diseases is that in the blood, in your intestines, yes, inside the entire human being are these small, living little organisms, invisible to the naked eye, that are called *bacteria*. You can easily get these bacteria on dirty hands, and if you do not wash your hands before eating, the bacteria end up on bread, and from there into your guts. That way you can get typhus, cholera and even tuberculosis.¹⁵⁹

Nasha Niva pedagogically goes on to explain how one goes about washing oneself and how to construct a simple washing stand, consisting of a wooden barrel and a ceramic pot, hanging from a rope.¹⁶⁰ FIGURE 5. Other issues contain very elementary information on cholera bacteria and what causes diseases.¹⁶¹

Thus, the Belarusian movements not only had to fight the censorship of the authorities, and claims to their land by rivaling national movements, but also combat the ignorance and poverty of the Belarusians themselves, which served as an effective barrier against national mobilization. Under the tsarist autocracy, the nationalists had little opportunity to achieve their modest goals prior to the revolutions of 1917.

Conclusion

The Belarusian national movement was inspired by, and partly modeled on, the nationalist movement in neighboring Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, but it also found much inspiration from the Jewish Bund,

¹⁵⁸ Mandel, 360.

¹⁵⁹ *Nasha Niva* No. 1, January 4, 1908, 4-5.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶¹ "Khalera" *Nasha Niva*, No. 20, September 18, 1908, 4. Other volumes explains how a parliament works and what a library is. "Narodnaia biblioteka u s. Ostromecheve," *Nasha Niva*, No. 21, October 9, 1908, 1. "Vyborg u Hasudarstveniu Dumu," *Nasha Niva*, No. 1, November 10/24, 1906, 2-3.

which like the Belarusian national movement was based in Vilnia. The first Belarusian newspaper appeared in a society in which national consciousness was underdeveloped. Other, more pressing social concerns took precedence, and there was little social mobilization. Miroslav Hroch describes the Belarusian lands before 1917 as being in a “mediaeval condition of national inertia.”¹⁶² The nationalist movement that began to take shape was largely limited to Vilnia and to the educated Belarusian diaspora in intellectual centers such as St Petersburg or Moscow. But World War I, German occupation, and the collapse of Imperial Russia brought more favorable conditions for national revival. Given the oppressive social conditions and its limited national consciousness, the Belarusian movement was leftist in orientation and focused on issues of class as much as nation. It suffered from several disadvantages: the ban on the Belarusian language, which lasted from 1863 to 1905, made education in the Belarusian language near-impossible. Censorship impeded national propaganda among the Belarusian masses. There was also competition from other left-wing groups, such as the Socialist Revolutionaries. At the outbreak of World War I, few activists envisioned Belarusian independence. Rather, the territory of Belarus was claimed by a number of stronger, and better organized national movements among the emerging and re-emerging neighboring nation-states.

¹⁶² Hroch, 184.

Chapter 3

The First Belarusian State

Introduction

This chapter outlines the dramatic events of 1918-1920, the dominant political figures and their rival agendas. It covers the political development of the Belarusian national movement during the last phase of World War I, through the concluding Versailles and Riga Treaties. The destiny of Belarus was dependent more on political developments in Moscow, Berlin, Warsaw, Versailles and Riga, than in Miensk. While a new, political entity with Belarus in its title appeared, it was a Soviet construct with limited autonomy, forced to operate under the new and increasingly authoritarian conditions of the interwar era. This chapter provides a background to the political situation under which the first attempts at establishing Belarusian statehood were carried out and in which Belarusian statehood was first formulated.

Europe in 1918 – Window of Opportunity

After the United States entered World War I in 1917, US President Woodrow Wilson announced his proposals for the post-war order in Europe. He summarized these in his famous Fourteen Points, announced on January 8, 1918 to the US Congress. A central theme was the right to national self-determination. Article ten extended that principle to the nationalities of the Habsburg Empire, who “should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.”¹ Wilson’s thirteenth point explicitly stated that “An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.”² However, the non-Polish Slavic peoples in the borderlands between the old Russian and Polish lands – the Ukrainians and the Belarusians – were not mentioned at all, nor were their national concerns addressed by Wilson.

¹ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002), 495-496.

² Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918 to 1939* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1982), 52.

The October Revolution and the subsequent Soviet Russian withdrawal from World War I seemed to shift the power balance in Europe temporarily in the favor of the Central Powers. As nationalism was becoming an increasingly important force in Eastern European politics, the German leadership started to consider options to utilize this force to their advantage. This attitude contrasted with that of the Imperial Russian government in the prewar years, which refused to accept the existence of a distinct Belarusian nationality or a separate Belarusian language. Not only the Entente Powers, but also the Bolsheviks and the Germans recognized the explosive power of nationalism and wanted to give the impression that they recognized the legitimacy of the nationalist claims.

Brest-Litovsk: Belarus in the German Orbit

While there is no consensus among historians regarding German aims during World War I, but there is no doubt that a German victory in the war would have led to German predominance in Eastern Europe.³ In the so-called September Program, German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg spelled out the German policy for Eastern Europe: “Long-term security for the German Reich on its eastern and western borders. To this end...Russia must be pushed back as far as possible from the German border and its rule over the non-Russian nationalities will have to be ended.”⁴ He continues

In Russia we have only one interest, namely promotion of the forces of disintegration, the long-term weakening of that country. ... Our policy must be the establishment of good relations with the newly formed independent states that are in the process of breaking away from Russia, in particular, Ukraine, Finland, and the new government in the Caucasus. It is there that we must anchor our influence and attempt to suppress any tendency toward federation with Russia.⁵

Ludendorff had a similar vision of the post-war order. He envisioned a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*. consisting of nominally independent nations, dominated by and revolving around Germany. German satellites were to span the continent, from Turkey to Belgium, from Alsace to Finland.⁶ An independent Polish kingdom had been proclaimed already in November 1916. It was to be governed by a German-

³ Peter Borowsky, “Germany’s Ukrainian Policy during World War I and the Revolution of 1918-19,” in Hans-Joachim Torke and John-Paul Himka (eds.) *German-Ukrainian Relations in Historical Perspective* (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1994), 84.

⁴ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914-1918*, Third edition. (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag 1967), 116.

⁵ Borowsky, 87.

⁶ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 87.

assisted parliament and a council of leading Polish politicians, closely tied to Germany and Austria-Hungary, and surrounded by German colonies.⁷ Extensive border areas in Western Poland were to be purged of Poles and Jews and resettled with Germans to “provide a sanitized ethnic barrier between Germany and the Slavic peoples to the east.”⁸ Beyond the German eastern border, there was to be a “protective belt” of former Russian territory to protect Germany from future attacks from the east.⁹ At the same time, measures were taken to build support for the new order among the peoples in the east. In a number of cities in the Belarusian lands local papers were established. They were mostly in German, but in Hrodna and Belostok the papers were multi-lingual, with Polish and Yiddish sections.¹⁰

The German “Discovery” of the Belarusians

By the fall of 1915, Germany had conquered significant parts of the Imperial Russian borderlands. Ludendorff and the German command needed a better understanding of the ethnic groups living in the territory the German military called *Ober Ost*, the occupied eastern Polish, Baltic and Belarusian lands. FIGURE 6.

German attempts to carry out censuses failed, as many of the locals were unfamiliar with constructs of ethnicity and race, key concepts in the German understanding of *Volk* and nation.¹¹ The religious division among the Belarusians further complicated the situation. Writes Lithuanian historian Vejas Liulevicius:

Scarcely to be fathomed was a further fact: language, (so important to German concepts of national identity) did not completely define ethnicity, either. Natives might define themselves as Lithuanians, without being able to speak the language. Conversely, others were proud of their Polish identity, while speaking Polish at home. Most scandalously, sometimes it could not even be ascertained what language was spoken at home. Mixing of Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarusian had

⁷ Chickering, 86; Lamar Cecil, *Wilhelm II, Volume 2, Emperor and Exile, 1900-1941* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 265; Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship: The politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976), 211.

⁸ Chickering, 87; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 49n. See also Ihor Kamenetsky “German Colonization Plans in Ukraine during World Wars I and II,” in Torke and Himka, 95-109.

⁹ Cecil, *Wilhelm II*, 264.

¹⁰ As a concession to the natives, the German texts were printed in Latin type rather than Gothic. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity & German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115-116.

¹¹ As a result, local Poles in Vil’nia were able to manipulate the 1916 census, in which the number of Belarusians was significantly lowered. “The Polish intelligentsia was well organized and, long before the census, they started oral and written propaganda among the population insisting that all Catholics must declare themselves Poles if they do not wish to be considered non-Catholics, i.e. “Lithuanian heathen” or “Belarussian schismatics.” Wiktor Sukienicki, *East Central Europe During World War I: From Foreign Domination to National Independence*, vol. I (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984), 161.

produced a hybrid called “common” or “plain” language, and in any event, life was of necessity multilingual.¹²

In 1916, Ludendorff was surprised to learn that the German administrators in *Ober Ost* had “discovered” a new nationality which had until then been invisible: the Belarusians. “At first they were literally not to be found. Only later was it revealed that they were an extremely diffused, but superficially Polonized tribe, standing on such a low level of *Kultur*, that it can only be helped by long influence,” Ludendorff wrote in his memoirs.¹³ At first, the German authorities did not even know what to call the local, Belarusian-speaking people. Troubled by the words “Belorussian” and White Russian, terms that underlined the semblance to the Russians, the authorities began using the word *Weissruthenien* – White Ruthenia – a term that would predominate in the German narrative until 1945.¹⁴

The Germans were troubled by their findings: here was a people which appeared to have lost its ethnicity. “Poles had taken this nationality from [the Belarusian], without giving him anything in exchange,” wrote Ludendorff.¹⁵ One German officer observed that the Belarusian peasants were good natured “but culturally very backward and indolent. Their shelters, clothes, and economic modes were of a primitiveness, which I would not have considered possible in twentieth-century Europe.”¹⁶ The “discovery” of this “new” ethnic group constituted a new strategic opportunity for the German government. In the absence of a Belarusian national identity, the German government felt that it would be able to form a new nationality out of the mass of local farmers. The explicit aim was to weaken the Poles, which the German leadership saw as a more dangerous threat to their control over the area. A secret German report on the ethnic politics in *Ober Ost*, dated May 1916, strongly suggested that the “the German future in this land depends on White Russians experiencing a renaissance and confronting the

¹² Liulevicius, 120-121.

¹³ Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen, 1914-1918* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1919), 145.

¹⁴ Liulevicius, 121; Eugen von Engelhardt, *Weissruthenien: Volk und Land*. (Amsterdam, Prague, Vienna: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1943), 18.

¹⁵ Ludendorff, 145.

¹⁶ Liulevicius, 121, citing Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BAMA), Freiburg-in-Breisgau, Germany. N 196/1, Nachlass von Heppe, vol. V, (“Im Weltkriege”) 72, Bundesarchiv (BA), Koblenz, Germany.

Poles.”¹⁷ Forced Germanization, the author of the report warned, should be avoided, as it would risk alienating the Belarusians and further increase the Polish influence. By contrast, if the German authorities “succeed in causing a rebirth” of the Belarusians, this would weaken the Polish case. Taking a stance very similar to that of the Belarusian nationalists, the author claimed that the local Polish elite had “lived off this disoriented group parasitically, drawing upon it for recruits to its own nationality.”¹⁸ In the late fall of 1916, Ludendorff ordered support for Belarusian cultural policies.¹⁹ The Belarusians constituted a formidable challenge to the German administrators, who referred to the Belarusians either as a *Stamm*, *Volksstamm*, or *Völkerschaft* – as “tribe,” “mini-nation,” or “nation in process” treating them as an embryonic nation, in need of German tutelage in order to become a fully fledged nation.²⁰

While the Belarusian movement never figured prominently in Ludendorff’s plans for the east, education in the Russian language was banned in the lands of the Ober Ost. In early 1916, in an attempt to prevent the consolidation of Polish interests in the area, Ludendorff ordered the mass establishment of Belarusian schools in the Hrodna area. The German administrators established Belarusian schools on a massive scale. By December 1917, the German authorities had organized over 1,300 schools, employing over 1,700 teachers and teaching about 73,000 pupils.²¹ In June 1916, orders were issued that the German administration was to remain strictly neutral, and act as an outside power broker. “The different people-tribes of the area under command are to be treated by all German officials on equal terms.”²²

The German authorities facilitated a Belarusian cultural renaissance in the land of the *Ober Ost*. The Germans helped organize a Belarusian theater. German army newspapers wrote that the Belarusian

¹⁷ Liulevicius, 121, citing (Hoover Institution Archives) Germany. Oberste Heeresleitung. Box 2, folder no. 5, untitled memorandum from Ober Ost (Wilna, May 5, 1916), 110b-111b.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., citing BAMA N 196/1, Heppe, vol. V., 101

²⁰ Liulevicius, 122.

²¹ Uladzimir Liakhouski, *Adukatsyia akupiravanykh Hermaniiai belaruskikh zemliakh u hady Pershai Susvetnai Vainy* (1915-1918) (Minsk: Natsyianal’naia Akademii Navuk Belarusi, 2007a), 8.

²² Liulevicius, 122, citing BAMA PHD 8/20 “Ziffer 259. Verwaltungsordnung für das Etappengebiet im Befehlsbereich der Oberbefehlshabers Ost (ob. Ost),” Befehls- und Verordnungsblatt des Oberbefehlshabers Ost (BUV) 34 (June 26, 1916): §9, p. 271.

plays represented “the earliest stages of dramatic sensibility.”²³ Belarusian art, they maintained, was rooted in “the unique character and peculiarity of the customs and usages of the rural people, among whom ancient rights and traditions still live on today.”²⁴ Liulevicius has shown how these German efforts helped to establish concepts of race and ethnicity among the Belarusians:

Ethnicity came to be regarded as race, something immutable, physical, and visible. Natives were sometimes seen as separate nationalities, but since so much about their essential natures was alike, they could also often seem interchangeable, referred to collectively as “Poles” or “Russians” or by mildly derisive labels like “Panje.” Soldiers looked out at a native scene so varied that there were no clear distinctions to be discerned. Chaos itself seemed characteristic of those lands and peoples.²⁵

Soviet Power in Belarus

Bolshevik national policy vis-à-vis Belarus seemed to offer some positive perspectives. Stalin, the People’s Commissars for Nationalities, had professed his belief in the existence of the Belarusian nation a decade earlier, and Lenin had given the national minorities reason to hope that the Bolsheviks would provide them national and regional autonomy. Following the October Revolution, Soviet power in Belarus was established rapidly, mainly due to outside influences. Following the fall of Kerenskii’s provisional government in Petrograd on November 7, 1917, all Belarusian territory not under German occupation was controlled by the Soviets by November 20.²⁶ Soldiers from Moscow and Petrograd arriving in Minsk helped to consolidate the Minsk Soviet, accompanied by the 60th Siberian Regiment.²⁷ One day earlier, the Congress of Workers and Soldiers’ Deputies of the Western Region had expressed support overwhelmingly for the October Revolution. They represented a total of twenty Soviets, claiming to speak on behalf of the Belarusian people. At a joint session of these Soviets, a regional executive committee for front and the western areas was established, consisting of thirty-five members. The Congress of Peasants’ Deputies and the Congress of Representatives of the Western Army

²³ Liulevicius, 138-139, citing Paul Rohrbach, “‘Nationale Kultur’ im baltischen Gebiet,” *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, no. 543 (April 13, 1918) (Wilna: Druck & Verlag der Zeitung der 10. Armee, 1918)

²⁴ Ibid., 139, citing Das Land Ober Ost, Deutsche Arbeit in Verwaltungsbezirken Kurland, Litauen und Bialystok-Grodna. BAMA PHD 8/20, 423.

²⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁶ Zen’kovich, *Grantsy, spory, obidy*, 78.

²⁷ J. Mienski, ”The Establishment of the Belorussian SSR,” *Belarussian Review* No. 1, (1955): 11.

who met the same day made a similar decision in support of the October Revolution.²⁸ In the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which were held November 12-19, 1917, the Bolsheviks did very well in Belarus. While receiving a quarter of the votes in all of Russia, out of 56 deputies from Miensk, Vitsiebsk, Mohileu and the western front, 30 were Bolsheviks, 22 were Socialist Revolutionaries and four represented other parties, making Belarus one of the areas where the Bolsheviks had their strongest support.²⁹ Not all parties in Belarus, however, supported the October Revolution. The largest nationalist party with some 10,000 members, the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* (BSH), had split into a left and right wing over it. The Belarusian Socialist People's Party (BNPS) also opposed the Bolshevik takeover of power, fearing that this could lead to anarchy. There was also opposition among the military stationed in Belarus.³⁰

While support for the Bolshevik revolution in Belarus was significant,³¹ leading Belarusian communists were surprised by the strength and efficiency of the nationalist opposition against the Bolsheviks.³² Vilhel'm Knoryn, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, wrote: "It is rather surprising that the Belorussian National Democrats and the National Socialists were the first to convoke the Constituent Assembly This speed is to be envied by the Russian Social-Revolutionaries who achieved their Omsk dictatorship under Kolchak considerably later."³³ As early the summer of 1917, and without informing Soviet Russia, the Belarusian Rada had planned an all-Belarusian congress in order to "solve the question about the destiny of Belarus."³⁴ The Right-wing SRs played a central role in the planning of the Congress, and used conciliatory rhetoric towards the Soviets, which were dominated by the Bolsheviks. It recognized Soviet power in the Russian heartland and its desire to

²⁸ T. S. Gorbunov, N. V. Kamenskaia, I. S. Kravchenko, (eds.) *Istoriia Belorusskoi SSR*, Tom II (Minsk: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Belarusskoi SSR), 72.

²⁹ Petr Gavrilovich Chigrinov, *Istoriia Belarusi s drevnosti do nashikh dnei*. (Minsk: Knizhnyi Dom, 2004), 434.

³⁰ Ibid., 436, 438.

³¹ Zen'kovich, 78.

³² Mienski, 11.

³³ Ibid., 14, citing V. Knoryn, *Da historyi dyktatury praleitaryatu u BSSR* (Minsk: Polymia, 1929), n.p.

³⁴ Gorbunov, Kamenskaia, Kravchenko (eds), 76.

establish contacts with the Soviet government in Petrograd, but declared that Soviet organs did not have control over the Rada, adding that this “central Belarusian organ” was the sole legitimate source of power in Belarus, and that all power in the region must be transferred into its hands.³⁵

Three days after the meeting that consolidated Bolshevik control of the Minsk Soviet, the paper *Vol’naia Belarus'*, edited by Iazep Lesik, carried a declaration that on December 5, 1917 an event of truly historical significance would take place: Belarusian statehood would be declared. The tone of the paper was openly anti-Russian, and called for the separation of Belarus from Russia, which was described as an “infected and hopelessly sick organism.”³⁶ It was not clear from the announcement whether this would signify sovereignty within Russia or outright independence. Lesik wrote that “the government of Lenin will disintegrate like a house of cards.” The remedy, Lesik claimed, was to be found in “national reconstruction.”³⁷ Much like the Social Democrats, the Belarusian nationalist movement included representatives from the national minorities, particularly Jews. Jewish Belarusian writer Biadula-Jasakar urged all ethnic groups of Belarus to “join the Belorussian army and defend your own country from destruction.”³⁸

The First All-Belarusian Congress

On December 18, 1917,³⁹ 1,872 delegates from across Belarus convened at the first All-Belarusian Congress to establish a Belarusian national government. Most belonged to the Belarusian Socialist *Hramada* and the SR, claiming to represent the Belarusian middle class and wealthier peasants.⁴⁰ The All-Belarusian Congress declared its ambition to create a national army and achieve independence for Belarus.⁴¹ While the congress had gathered with the sanction of the Soviet of People’s Commissars,

³⁵ Ibid, 76.

³⁶ Zen’kovich, 78-79.

³⁷ Mienski, 13, citing *Vol’naia Belarus*, No. 30, 1917.

³⁸ Ibid., citing ”Para baranitsa,” *Vol’naia Belarus*, No. 33, 1917.

³⁹ December 15-16 1917 according to Soviet sources. Gorbunov, Kamenskaia, Kravchenko (eds), 76. Other sources give the number as 1,167 delegates, gathering on December 18. S. Krushinsky, *Byelorussian Communism and Nationalism: Personal Recollections* (New York: Research Program on the U.S.S.R, 1953), 1.

⁴⁰ Chigrinov, 450; Zen’kovich, 80.

the Bolsheviks refused to accept Belarusian independence and dissolved the Congress by force on December 30, 1917. Congress delegates met secretly the next day and elected a Council of the Rada, consisting of 43 people, which proclaimed itself the representative body of the Belarusian people.⁴² This Council, in turn, established the Rada Executive Committee,⁴³ which rejected independence and supported a federation with Russia. Yet, during the winter of 1917-1918, when the Bolsheviks still controlled Minsk and most of Belarus, their harsh treatment of the Congress alienated the nationalists and weakened the positions of those who favored federation with Russia.⁴⁴

Belarus within the framework of the larger German Plan for the East

From Turkey in the south to Finland in the north, Germany was the undisputed master of Eastern Europe by the spring of 1918. As the Russian Empire crumbled, Germany expanded its influence eastwards. Finland declared independence on December 6, 1917. The young Finnish state was closely allied with Germany, copied its system of government, and elected a German prince as king in October 1918. On December 11, a pro-German Lithuanian state was proclaimed, to be united with Germany in a “permanent and firm alliance.”⁴⁵ On July 11, 1918, the Lithuanian *Taryba* declared Lithuania an independent constitutional monarchy, with a German Duke, using the adopted name Mindaugas II, as king.⁴⁶ On September 22 the German leadership recognized the rest of the former Russian Baltic Provinces as a monarchy called “the United Baltic Duchy,” subordinate to Kaiser Wilhelm.⁴⁷ In late April

⁴¹ Mienski, 14.

⁴² Zen'kovich, 80.

⁴³ Mienski, 13.

⁴⁴ Törnquist-Plewa, *Vityrssland* (2001), 56.

⁴⁵ Zen'kovich, 86. In fact, Lithuania issued two declarations of independence, the first on December 11, 1917 and a second on February 16, 1918 after Germany failed to respond to the first declaration. Alfred Erich Senn, *The Emergence of Modern Lithuania*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 31-33.

⁴⁶ The German-influenced political systems collapsed within weeks of the armistice of November 11, 1918. Mindaugas II's reign was short-lived, as Lithuania changed its constitution to become a republic in November 1918. Senn, 37; Daina Bleiere et al., *History of Latvia: the 20th Century* (Riga: Jumava, 2006), 123; Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania*, 324.

⁴⁷ Bleiere et al., 123.

1918, the Germans forcibly dispersed the powerless Ukrainian Central Rada, and had Pavel Skoropads'kyi “elected” hetman of a German puppet state in Ukraine.⁴⁸

German conditions for a separate peace were harsh. Negotiations started on December 9, 1917, but as Trotskii tried to delay the signing of the treaty, the German Central Command gave orders to resume hostilities. The Bolsheviks were forced to retreat, and vacated Miensk on February 18, 1918. German troops arrived one week later.⁴⁹ When a final treaty was signed in Brest-Litovsk on March 3, most of Belarus was under German control. One of the provisions at Brest-Litovsk was that the Imperial German government would not recognize any new states on the territory of the former Russian Empire. The Bolshevik government of Russia was forced to pay the Imperial German government compensation in the form of six billion rubles, and gave up control over Belarus.⁵⁰

The First Belarusian Declaration of Independence, March 25, 1918

Belarusian nationalists connected to the Rada emerged from the underground to establish control over central government functions even before the Germans arrived in Miensk.⁵¹ The establishment of a Bolshevik dictatorship weakened the appeal of a federation with Bolshevik Russia. On February 19, 1918, a “People’s Secretariat” under Iazep Varonka, Kanstantyn Iezavitau and Arkadz’ Smolich declared itself the government of Belarus, claiming to represent the Belarusian Rada. On February 21, as the German Army entered Miensk, the declaration of the formation of the Secretariat and its list of members were presented on posters and billboards and written in German on the streets of the city. Three days later, the leaders of the Belarusian “People’s Secretariat” arrived at the residence of the newly arrived German commander and expressed their loyalty to the German military administration. Concerned about the formation of a separate Belarusian military formation, on February 25, 1918, the German *Kommendant* expelled the Belarusians from their headquarters and removed the Belarusian white-red-white flag that had been raised over their building. The Germans torn apart the red-white-red Belarusian flag, confiscated

⁴⁸ Zen’kovich, 86.

⁴⁹ Mienski, 15.

⁵⁰ Zen’kovich, 87-89.

⁵¹ Ibid., 92.

their financial assets and claimed their building for a German military orchestra.⁵² Iezavitaŭ, who was responsible for the Secretariat's military affairs, was banned from establishing a Belarusian regiment. The Secretariat complied and immediately suspended the efforts to establish a Belarusian army. However, on March 9, the Executive Political Committee of the All-Belarusian Congress declared itself the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic, with a Presidium, led by Ivan Sierada. On the night of 24-25 March, 1918, after an intense discussion that lasted for over ten hours, the Rada declared Belarus an "independent and free state" called the Belarusian People's Republic, extending into all Belarusian "ethnographic" territories.⁵³ The Rada insisted that this voided the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, since it had never received the approval of the Rada, but by a "foreign government."⁵⁴ FIGURE 7

While its constituent parties could all be described as left-of center, the Rada represented a wide variety of views and opinions, including not only the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, the Jewish Bund, Poale Zion, and the left-wing Zionists but also the "Russian" Mensheviks and SRs. The declaration of independence was divisive and controversial. The Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries opposed it. The Socialist Revolutionaries defended the preservation of a "united and indivisible" Russia and abstained from voting, as did the representatives of the city Dumas and *zemstvos*, the Bundists, and Poale Zion. Thus, almost half of the representatives supported the federal program and voted against independence.⁵⁵ The representatives of the *zemstvos* even left the Rada and withdrew their representatives from the People's Secretariat in protest. The only major parties that clearly defended the declaration of independence were the Belarusian Socialist Hramada and the Belarusian Socialist Revolutionary Party.⁵⁶ The support for the Rada was the strongest among well-to-do peasants, landowners, certain orthodox Christian organizations, parts of the Belarusian nationalist intelligentsia and the Belarusian Socialist

⁵² Ibid., 84; "BNR: poverkh bar'ev," *Sovetskaia Belorussiia* March 22, 2008. <http://www.sb.by/print/post/64919> (Accessed March 26, 2008).

⁵³ Mienski, 16.

⁵⁴ Zen'kovich, 84-85.

⁵⁵ Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 56.

⁵⁶ Zen'kovich, 85.

Revolutionary Party. However, the majority of Belarusians outside the Miensk area were either unaware of its existence, or did not recognize its legitimacy.⁵⁷

At the same time Belarus, along with industrial centers as Moscow and Petrograd, was one of the strongest Bolshevik strongholds in Russia. In the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917, the Bolsheviks received 63.1 per cent support in Belarus, whereas the Belarusian National Party failed to win a single mandate. In Miensk, the Belarusian national parties performed dismally. The SRs received 19.8 per cent of the votes in the Miensk district, the Mensheviks and Bundists 1.7 per cent, and the Belarusian Socialist Hramada only 0.3 per cent. In the city of Miensk, the Belarusian Socialist Hramada polled only 161 votes out of 35,651 votes cast.⁵⁸ Only 0.3 per cent of the Belarusian electorate voted for the list of national parties and organizations.⁵⁹ At the elections along the front, the Bolsheviks did even better, with 66.9 per cent while the SRs received 18.5 per cent of the votes.⁶⁰ In Vitsebsk, the Bolsheviks received 51 per cent of the votes. Of the four electoral districts in Belarus, only in Mahileu did the Bolsheviks perform poorly, receiving 15 per cent of the votes. Their closest competitors were the SRs, who received 37 per cent of the votes in the four districts.⁶¹

The year 1917 had seen impressive growth in the membership of the Bolshevik Party. In Miensk, party membership grew from 2,530 members at the end of August 1917 to 28,508 members and 27,856 candidates by the beginning of October. However, its members were predominantly ethnic Russians, members of the national minorities, or soldiers. The average Belarusian lived in the countryside and was

⁵⁷ Reznik, 17; *Sovetskaiia Belorussia* March 22, 2008.

⁵⁸ Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union* (1997), 75, citing V. K. Shcharbakau, *Kastrynistkaia revoliutsiya na Belarusi i belapol'skaia okupatsyia* (Miensk, 1930), 50. Cold War diaspora accounts tend to inflate the support of the SRs and the Belarusian national movement among the Belarusian peasantry. Without citing any sources, N. Nedasek asserted that the sympathies of the Belarusian peasantry, to the extent they were politically conscious, lay with the SRs and the Belarusian national movement. N. Nadesek, *Ocherki istorii bol'shevizma v Belorussii, I. Bol'shevizm na putiakh k ustyanovleniu kontroli nad Belorussiei. Issledovaniia i Materialy (Seria 1-ia, vyp. 18)* (Munich: Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of the USSR, 1954), 64.

⁵⁹ Pavel Urban, *Da pytannia etnichnai prynalezhnosti litsvinau* (Minsk: VTS "Bats'kaushchyna," 1994), 51.

⁶⁰ Pipes (1997) 75, citing A. Kirzhnits, "Sto dnei sovetskoi vlasti v Belorussii," PR, no. 3/74 (1928) 88, V. B. Stankevich, *Sud'by narodov Rossii* (Berlin, 1921), 39.

⁶¹ I. M. Ihnatsenka (ed) et al., *Historiyia Belaruskai SSR u piatsi tamakh. Tom 3: Peramoha vialikai kastrychnitskai satsyialistychnai revaliotsyi i pabudova satsyializmu BSSR (1917-1937 hh.)* (Minsk: Vydatstva "Navuka i tekhnika, 1973), 84.

unaware of either nationalism or Marxism. Richard Pipes claims that “The Bolsheviks had virtually no contact with the Belarusian population.”⁶²

Industrial workers represented at best 1-2 per cent of the population in the Russian Empire, and on the eve of the October Revolution, only 5.3 per cent of Russian workers were active Bolsheviks.⁶³ Thus, neither of the forces aspiring to represent the Belarusian people – the Rada, and the Bolsheviks – could claim to have mass support.

The Rada found itself in a difficult political situation. An unelected body, the Rada’s legitimacy was questioned from the beginning.⁶⁴ It was also clear both to Belarusian national activists and the German leadership that Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and the new Baltic German state would remain German satellites.⁶⁵ According to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Germany was in control of occupied Belarus. It did not recognize the independence of the BPR and surrendered few of its powers to the local Belarusian authorities. Peasants turned to the Belarusian authorities to complain about German grain acquisitions or to request a permission to log. All requests from the People’s Commissariat and the BPR Rada to exercise local power were answered by the occupying German authorities in the same way: “Guided by the regime established by the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, we cannot recognize the Belarusian People’s Republic.”⁶⁶ The Rada lacked real political power in the German-occupied territories and was reduced to little more than an intermediary between the local population and the Germans. If the interests of the German authorities and the Rada of the BPR collided, the latter had to yield.⁶⁷ Leading nationalists, such as Anton Lutskevich, openly recognized that these states were German creations and at the mercy of Germany.⁶⁸ Lutskevich traveled on a German passport, and the BPR Rada received German

⁶² Pipes (1997), 74.

⁶³ Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History*. (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 39.

⁶⁴ Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 56.

⁶⁵ Mienski, 17; Magosci, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*, 124.

⁶⁶ Sovetskaia Belorussiia March 22, 2008.

⁶⁷ Liakhouski (2007a), 12.

⁶⁸ Reznik, 34, citing A. Lutskevich, *Belarus*, No. 12, 2 November, 1919.

financial support until 1919.⁶⁹ Under the German occupation, not even the leadership of the Rada could move freely.⁷⁰ The Germans were unhappy with the political orientation of the BPR Rada, which they regarded as socialist. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, considered the Rada a bourgeois institution.⁷¹

Split in the Rada

The authority of the Rada was also challenged from within by some of the Belarusian elite. A group, called the Belarusian People's Government appeared in opposition to the Rada. Led by Raman Skirmunt, Paval Alaksiuk, the Roman Catholic priest Vintsent Hadleuski, F. Vernikovskii and others, it was joined by the right wing of the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, led by A. Vlasov and A. Trusinskii, who used the paper *Belarusskii Shliakh* to attack the Rada for its revolutionary and left-wing origins. They presented themselves to the German command as rivals of the Rada, and “the only legal representatives of the Belarusian people.”⁷² In order to broaden its base the Rada asked Skirmunt to form a conservative “government” together with Alaksiuk and General Kandratovich.⁷³ Hoping to enlist support for the state, a telegram was sent to Kaiser Wilhelm, thanking him for “the liberation of Belarus” and asking him to recognize the independence of the BPR under the protection and “in close union with the German Reich.”⁷⁴ It was signed by Siareda, the chairman of the Belarusian Rada, Varonka, the chairman of the Belarusian People's Assembly, as well as Skirmunt, Lesik, Ovsianik, Kravcheuski and Aliaksiuk on April 25.⁷⁵ While the decision to ask Germany for protection had the support of an absolute majority of the delegates of the Rada - of the 43 members of the Rada, 35 voted for it, four against, and

⁶⁹ Oleg Roman'ko, *Sovetskii legion Gitlera: Grazhdane SSSR v riadakh vermakhta i SS* (Moscow: "Izdatel' Bystrov", 2006), 149; Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 33.

⁷⁰ The Lutskevich brothers experienced this first hand. Along with the other delegates of the Vil'nia Belarusian Rada, they had only with difficulty received permission to leave for the March 24 meeting of the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic. *Sovetskaia Belorussiia* March 22, 2008.

⁷¹ Zen'kovich, 87, 84. There are different views on political orientation of the BPR. Several historians have shared Wilhelm II's assessment describing the BPR as having “the character of a socialist government.” Zejmis, 66, citing Zarchar Szybieka, *Historia Białorusi 1795-2000* (Lublin, 2002) 214; F. Turuk, *Belorusskoe Dvizhenie* (Moscow, 1921), 44, 52, 61-62.

⁷² Zen'kovich, 87-88.

⁷³ von Engelhardt, 113.

⁷⁴ Ibid.112-113; Zen'kovich, 88.

⁷⁵ Mienski, 17; Zen'kovich, 88.

four abstained – the telegram caused a bitter split in the assembly.⁷⁶ Representatives of a number of parties left the Rada and the Belarusian Socialist Hramada split over the issue, resulting in the emergence of a number of new parties, such as the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP), the Belarusian Socialist Federalist Party (BPS-F), and the Belarusian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (BPS-R).⁷⁷

A Mild Occupation

The Supreme Command of the Tenth Army under von Falkenhayn, stationed in Miensk, maintained friendly relations with the Rada leaders. The German occupation authorities were prepared to accommodate them on a number of important issues. From the summer of 1918 onwards, every German commander would have a Belarusian advisor to counsel him in decision-making in matters of culture, economy and administration.⁷⁸ The Germans also allowed the Belarusian representatives to allocate some of the budget, with the result that the first Belarusian high school was opened in Butslau, soon to be followed by a Belarusian teaching seminar in Miensk. A Belarusian school inspection and supervisory board was also established.⁷⁹ The local Jewish population also experienced significant improvements under German rule. Former tsarist anti-Semitic laws were abolished and civil rights extended to Jews. The German authorities also recognized Jewish political parties in *Ober Ost* from 1915.⁸⁰ As German control was extended eastwards, following the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, many liberties were extended to the peoples in the occupied territories. Not only Belarusian, but also Yiddish schools appeared in the occupied territories. While instruction in Hebrew was banned, Yiddish was promoted as a step in the policy of Germanization of the Belarusian Jews.⁸¹ The German authorities issued multi-lingual passports,

⁷⁶ von Engelhardt, 112.

⁷⁷ Chigrinov, 453; Mikhail Fedorovich Shumeiko (ed.) et al *Po vole naroda: Iz istorii obrazovaniia Belorusskoi SSR i sozdaniia Kommunisticheskoi Partii Belorussii: Dokumenty i materialy* (Minsk: Belarus', 1988), 242.

⁷⁸ von Engelhardt, 113, citing J. Varonka, *Die Weissruthenisch Bewegung von 1917 bis 1920*. No page numbers, publishing dates or publisher provided. Nicholas P. Vakar, *A Bibliographical Guide to Belorussia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956b), 39, cites this book as J. Varonka (Voronko), *Belaruski ruch ad 1917 da 1920 hadu: karotki ahliad* (Kaunas, 1920).

⁷⁹ von Engelhardt, 114

⁸⁰ *Dos amolike yidishe Varshe: bei der shvel fun dritn khurbn, 1914-1939* (Montreal: Farband fun Varshever yidn in Montreal, 1966), 844.

⁸¹ Liakhouski (2007a), 8.

which used both German and the native language of the holder. This was the first time passports had been issued in Belarusian and Yiddish.⁸²

National Symbolism of the BPR

The leaders of the BPR put substantial efforts into a national symbolism, with a national flag, a coat of arms, printed passports and postage stamps. However, the BPR lacked a constitution, army, police, central banking system, and even defined borders, all necessary criteria for statehood. Its funding came primarily from voluntary monetary contributions from its supporters, issuance of BPR passports, and levy from the sale of certain goods.⁸³ The BPR issued about 2,000 diplomatic passports.⁸⁴ During its 258 days of existence, the BPR failed to achieve international recognition, because of its lack of control of its claimed territory. Although it sent envoys to Germany, Switzerland, and the United States, they were unable to attain recognition for their government. Imperial Germany informed the BPR government that it considered Belarus a part of Soviet Russia, and that in accordance with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, could not recognize the independence of Belarus without the consent of the government in Moscow.⁸⁵ The only “states” that did recognize the BPR were themselves unrecognized by the international community.⁸⁶ BPR had interest sections established in Kyiv and Odesa, and set up similar offices in the short-lived Russian republics in White-held areas, such as the Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic in Rostov-na-Donu and Stavropol.⁸⁷ Only Hetman Skoropads’kyi’s Ukraine gave full diplomatic accreditation to the

⁸² Katz, *Words on Fire* (2004), 279.

⁸³ Anatolii Nikolaevich Reznik, *K voprosu o gosudarstvennosti BNR, ili Tak byla li BNR gosudarstvom?*, (Minsk: UP “Tekhnoprint,” 2002), 19-30; Andrej Kotliarchuk, “The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood: Conflicts about the Past of Belarus,” in Egle Rindzviciute (ed.) *Contemporary Change in Belarus, Baltic and East European Studies*, vol. 2. (Huddinge, Sweden: Baltic & East European Graduate School, Södertörns Högskola, 2004), 55.

⁸⁴ Sovetskaia Belorussia March 22, 2008.

⁸⁵ Zen’kovich, 87, 91; Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 56.

⁸⁶ To receive international recognition was hard. Even Lithuania had some difficulties in achieving such status. A May 5, 1920 request from Petliura’s Ukrainian Democratic Republic to have its “independence” recognized received an abrupt response from the Swedish Foreign Ministry on May 27, 1921: “The Foreign Office informs that there will be no official recognition of Lithuania, until a definite agreement between Poland and Lithuania has been reached. Currently, Ukraine cannot be considered to exist...the question of its existence was not even considered, as its existence as an authentic state currently has to be considered deeply problematic. The country neither has borders, nor a constituted Government, nor an army. The existence of this country can only be considered a hope for the future.” Riksarkivet, UD:s arkiv, Avd HP, Grupp 12, HP 895A, No. 104.

⁸⁷ Zen’kovich, 87.

BPR.⁸⁸ Interestingly, the Bolshevik government in Moscow, allowed the BPR to open a consulate in Moscow. While Germany never recognized its legitimacy, the Rada continued its work throughout the German occupation. On October 9, 1918, a decision was even made to increase the size of the Rada by 100 deputies and to establish a cabinet, known as the Council of People's Ministers (*Rada Narodnykh Ministrów*).⁸⁹ Through the Rada there was a significant increase in national agitation, with the message that a Belarusian nation indeed existed, based upon blood, race, and language, rather than religious affiliation. The key principles of Belarusian nationalism were condensed into a catechism of Belarusian nationalism, called *What Every Belarusian Needs to Know*, containing texts by leading nationalists such as Lesik and Lastouski. In the form of a didactic question and answer session, the brochure attempted to explain the concept of nation and people to the masses.

Who are we?

We are Belarusians.

Who are the Belarusians?

Belarusians are a people of the Slavic tribe.

Why are we called Belarusians?

Since we were born as Belarusians, we are fed by the Belarusian land and farm and live in Belarus.

What is a Belarusian?

Belarusian is he, in whose veins run Belarusian blood, and whose great-grandfathers, grandfathers and father were Belarusians. ...

What is a people, or nation?

A people, or nation, are people who speak one language, share a common country and thus constitute one great family, people, nation.

Who belongs to the people, or nation?

Anyone, who stems from one people, or nation. Belonging to a nation, or people can never be a choice. Every human being belongs to a nation through his blood, his environment, body and heart. A Belarusian becomes a free member of his people only when he becomes nationally conscious – that means when he becomes aware of the spiritual and blood bonds of his entire people. National consciousness brings people closer and unites them into one powerful family. Every Belarusian is appreciated and dear to our hearts, no matter how far from us he lives. since he belongs to our Belarusian people and is a brother in our nationhood. All other people, even if they live in Belarus, are aliens, since they associate with and love their own people, and only attempt to suck the wealth from our land and our people.⁹⁰

Once the somewhat complex issue of what a race and nation is explained, the booklet attempts to explain what the ethnic Belarusian peasant is *not*.

⁸⁸ Sovetskaia Belorussia, March 22, 2008. According to Andrei Kotljarchuk, the BPR was recognized by Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Finland, Poland, Turkey, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia and Georgia. He does not provide any source. Kotljarchuk (2004), 54.

⁸⁹ von Engelhardt, 114; Zen'kovich, 91.

⁹⁰ V. Lastouski et al., *Shto treba vedats' kazhnamu Belarusu* (Miensk: A. Ia. Hrynbliat, 1918), 1-2.

The first important question to answer is: who are we? When we ask our brother: “Of what faith are you?” – then the parishioner of the Catholic church answers: “I am a Pole,” and the Orthodox parishioner answers: “I am Russian.”

Is that really true?

The Frenchman, the Italian, and anyone else who goes to the Catholic chapel to pray in the same way as we do and whose priests likewise are under the jurisdiction of the Pope in Rome are not “Poles” or of the “Polish” faith.

They, like everyone else who goes to the Catholic chapel are *Catholics*, and their faith is *Catholic*, not Polish, not French, not Italian, but Catholic.

And he who goes to the [Orthodox] church does not belong to the Russian faith, but to the Orthodox faith, because Bulgarians, Serbs and Greeks also go to [Orthodox] church without being Russians, but only Orthodox. Therefore remember: the one who goes to the chapel is of Catholic Faith, the one who goes to the [Orthodox] Church is of the Orthodox faith.⁹¹

Belarusians! ...[D]o not be embarrassed by the language of your forefathers, since that is a shame and sin -- the same kind of sin as to be ashamed of your situation! We have already said that when praying in church, your faith is either Catholic or Orthodox. Now, when somebody asks you about your religion, you know what to answer.

When somebody asks: what people do you belong to, what nationality do you have, you ought to answer: we are Belarusians! – since our language is Belarusian. Everybody needs to energetically and openly always recognize, that he is Belarusian.

When someone tells you: “You are a Catholic, that means you are a Pole,” then you should answer such people:

Though I am of the Catholic faith, at the same time I am no Pole, but Belarusian, since both Frenchmen, Italians and others can be Catholics too, yet they are not Poles, since they do not understand Polish at all.⁹²

Arkadz' Smolich produced a Belarusian geography textbook, outlining not only the geographic distribution of the Belarusian people, but also filled with physical depictions of the Belarusians, depicting them as peasants in folk costumes, comparing and contrasting them with the neighboring peoples.⁹³

FIGURES 8-15 The German occupation also facilitated an impressive increase in the number of Belarusian-language publications. Among the more noteworthy journals were the anti-Bolshevik *Vol'naia Belarus'*, first published in 1917 and edited by Iazep Lesik, who had just returned from his Siberian exile.⁹⁴ *Belaruskaia Ziamlia*, *Belaruski Shliakh*, *Krynitsa*, and the monthly journal *Varta* were published in Miensk. In Vilnia, the paper *Homan'*,⁹⁵ and the journals *Belaruskaia Iliustrirovanaia Chasopis'* and *Kryvichanin* were published. Slutsk saw the appearance of the paper *Rodnyi Krai*. The impact of a rich

⁹¹ Ibid., 60-61.

⁹² Ibid., 63-64.

⁹³ Arkadz' Smolich, *Heohrafiia Belarusi. Vydan'ne 3-iae, znachna peraroblenae i pashyranae z 159 rysunkami dy kartami* (Vil'na: Vilenskae vydavetstva B. A. Kletskina, Belaruski addzel, 1923), 100-109.

⁹⁴ Mienski, 9.

⁹⁵ *Homan'*, first published in 1916, was the successor to *Nasha Niva*, the publication of which was discontinued in 1915. Ibid., 7, 9.

plethora of journals, which argued that Belarusian was a separate language, appears to have had a significant impact on the elites, not least the Bolsheviks, who now began to pay serious attention to the Belarusian question.

The Collapse of the Central Powers

The Bolsheviks quickly returned to Belarus without meeting any resistance following the collapse of Imperial Germany. After the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm on November 9, 1918, control of Belarus passed to radical socialist Councils of Soldiers, who were sympathetic to the Bolsheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries and often pro-Russian. On November 22, the Red Army started an offensive towards Mahileu and Miensk. General Kandratovich, the Rada's "minister of defense" was unable to establish a Belarusian army.⁹⁶ The Bolsheviks did not preclude cooperation with the BPR. Lenin appeared prepared for half-hearted recognition, inviting Lutskevich to Moscow in late November 1918 to carry out negotiations on the future status of the BPR, apparently considering its continuation as a buffer state to Poland and Germany following the collapse of Imperial Germany.⁹⁷ However, negotiations with the Bolsheviks proved unfruitful and the members of the Rada and the Council of People's Ministers evacuated Miensk during the first week of December, retreating towards Hrodna and Vilnia. As the last German units left Miensk on December 8, power was taken over by Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee, followed by the Red Army which entered the city on December 10.⁹⁸ The Revolutionary Committee ordered the Rada of the BPR dissolved and its members arrested.⁹⁹

The Rada now made a serious effort to join forces with Lithuania. The leaders of the exiled BPR government, representatives from Hrodna, Belostok, Brest, Slonim, and other smaller cities met in Hrodna, where they made a decision to unite Belarus with Lithuania on the basis of regional autonomy. A delegation from the BPR Rada participated at a November 27, 1918 meeting of the Lithuanian *Taryba*. At this meeting Lastouski declared that the Rada was in favor of "establishing a federative Belarusian-

⁹⁶ Zen'kovich, 92.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 72, 91.

⁹⁸ Zen'kovich, 92, and Gorbunov, Kamenskaia, Kravchenko (eds), 119. Von Engelhardt, 115, gives the date as December 12.

⁹⁹ Mienski, 20.

Lithuanian state...considering it necessary to join the concrete work of the *Taryba*, as the sole representative body of Lithuania.”¹⁰⁰ While a restored Belarusian-Lithuanian federation was not a realistic option at this point, the *Taryba* did what it could to support the Rada. Supported by the Allied Powers, which were now getting involved in the Russian Civil War, the BPR government signed a treaty with the Lithuanian government in December 1918.¹⁰¹ The *Taryba* included six Belarusians in its leadership and established a Ministry of Belarusian Affairs under Ia. Varonka, which continued its activities until 1924. From 1919 until late 1923, Kaunas was also the base for Lastouski’s exiled Rada.¹⁰²

From their exile, the exiled BPR leaders published maps, which staked claims to disputed territories.¹⁰³ They used ethnographic principles of language and race, counting as Belarusians not only the inhabitants of today’s Republic of Belarus, but also the populations of extensive adjacent areas, such as the Vilnia area, Pskov, Novgorod, Smolensk, Bryansk, and parts of Ukrainian Polessie.¹⁰⁴ From his exile in Riga, Smolich published maps of the borders of the BPR, based upon “ethnographic” principles, adding that “Belarus has not fully settled [the border disputes] with its neighbors...The borders can still be changed.”¹⁰⁵ Following the Riga Treaty these territorial claims appeared unrealistic, reflecting the dreams of a marginalized group of émigrés, increasingly out of touch with the realities of its citizens it claimed to represent, and trapped in a frozen immigrant culture.¹⁰⁶ FIGURES 16, 17, 18, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Chigrinov, 454, citing *Belarusskaya minushchyna* 1994, no.4, 3.

¹⁰¹ Zen’kovich, 92-93.

¹⁰² Chigrinov, 454-455.

¹⁰³ Reznik, 14 citing the National Archive of the Republic of Belarus (NARB), f. 325, op. 1, d. 21, l. 53. One of these maps was even presented at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, but failed to impress the Great Four. Ostrowski, Plate XXVI.

¹⁰⁴ Recent research in the field of anthropology has produced results that appear to validate the assumptions of the early national movement regarding the geographic distribution of the Belarusian “nation.” “The Belarusian gene pool includes the indigenous inhabitants of the areas of Pskov, Novgorod, Smolensk, Bryansk, Vilnius regions and Ukrainian Palieśsie. (...) The Belarusian gene pool generally matches the area of distribution of Belarusians in the [sic] historical perspective.” Aliaksei Mikulich, *Belarusy: u henetychnai prastroy* (Minsk: Tekhnalohiiia, 2005), iii.

¹⁰⁵ Reznik, 14, citing A. Smolich, “Belarus pamizh svaimi susedami,” *Na chuzhyne*, no.1, 1920, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Reznik, 17.

Between Two Military Campaigns: Two Soviet States in Two Months

The declaration of the Belarusian People's Republic had been largely a political statement, concerning the existence of a Belarusian nation and its legitimate right to exist.¹⁰⁷ Both Lenin and Stalin, his Commissar of Nationalities, shared this view. The Bolsheviks now initiated nation-building efforts. A conference of Belarusian communists, convened in Moscow on December 21-23, 1918, declared its support for Belarusian autonomy. Speakers maintained that the Belarusian question had become a weapon in the hands of "bourgeois nationalists, demanding the creation of 'a Belarusian state'." This, the statement continued, had played "into the hands of German imperialists, wanted self-determination for all of Belarus."¹⁰⁸ Two days later, on December 25, 1918, Stalin announced the decision to create a Soviet Belarusian government.¹⁰⁹ Four days later he instructed the local communist leadership to accept the Belarusian delegation that was sent to Smolensk and Minsk with the task of establishing Soviet Belarusian statehood. Ironically, the task to establish a Belarusian Soviet republic fell upon Aleksandr Miasnikou, an Armenian Bolshevik who had been a vocal opponent of Soviet Belarusian statehood.¹¹⁰

Today, [a group of] Belarusian [communists] are leaving for Smolensk: they are bringing a manifest. It is a request from the CC of the Party and Lenin to accept them, as inexperienced little brothers perhaps, but little brothers who are prepared to give up their lives for the party and the Soviets. The proclamation of a [Belarusian] government should be made in Minsk.¹¹¹

On December 30-31 the sixth regional conference of the North-Western district of the Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks), the RKP(b), was held in Smolensk. It re-organized the local RKP(b)

¹⁰⁷ In 1925, A. Tsvikovich, the future chairman of the BPR Rada of People's Ministers, conceded that the government of the BPR was predominantly "of declarative nature." *Za dziarzhauniu nazalezhnasts' Belarusi. For national independence of Byelorussia: Dokumenty i matarialy sabraniia i padrukhtavan'ia publikatsyi I. Kasiakom, pad kiraunitsvam R. Astrouskaga* (London: n.p. 1960), 68.

¹⁰⁸ Shumeiko (ed.), 239f.

¹⁰⁹ "Zapis' razgovora po priamomu ptovodu I. V. Stalina s presedatelem Severo-Zapadnogo oblastnogo komiteta RKP(b) A. F. Miasnikovym o gosudarstvennom stroitel'stve Belorussii," in Shumeiko, (ed.), 83-84.

¹¹⁰ On October 6, 1918, Miasnikou published an article in *Zvezda* together with Vilhel'm Knoryn, stating that "We believe that Belarusians do not constitute a separate nation, and the ethnographic differences that set them apart from other Russians will disappear with time... We communists in the land we call Belarus work together without thinking about tribe and nationality." E. G. Ioffe, *Ot Miasnikova do Malofeeva*, 13. At a meeting of the Central Buro of the KP(b)B in January, 1919, Miasnikov admitted that "Originally, we [local communists] were categorically opposed to [the creation of] a [Soviet Belarusian] republic. Vadim Andreevich Krutalevich, *Rozhdenie Belorusskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki: provozglaslenie respubliki: razvertyvanie natsional'no-gosudarstvennogo stroitel'stva: noiabr' 1918-fevral' 1919 g.* (Minsk: Nauka i Tekhnika, 1979), 124. See also Zen'kovich, 90; Suny, *The Revenge of the Past* (1993), 34.

¹¹¹ PA IIP pri TsK KPB, f. 60, op. 3, d. 431, l. 2, copy, printed in Shumeiko (ed.), 87.

districts into the Communist Party (bolsheviks) of Belarus, the KP(b)B, as a section of the RKP(b), with the explicit aim of establishing a Soviet Belarusian state.¹¹² The first appeal of the KP(b)B was aimed at the “workers, toilers, peasants, and soldiers of the Red Army” of Belarus, issued on the day of its foundation. The party declared that “the working masses of Belarus do not recognize any government other than the Soviets – the power of workers, toilers and peasants. They hate the rule of the representatives of the landlords’ Belarusian Rada and their Peoples’ Republic.”¹¹³ The 175 delegates represented 17,771 Communists in the Belarusian areas of Smolensk, Vitsebsk, Miensk, Mohilev *gubernii* and a number of Belarusian districts in the Vil’nia and Chernihiv *gubernii*. The Congress elected a party leadership, called the “Central Bureau” of the Communist Party of Belarus, consisting of 15 people.¹¹⁴ Two days later, on New Years’ Day 1919, the first Soviet Belarusian state appeared as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus, SSRB, and was proclaimed in Smolensk. On January 8 its government moved to Miensk.¹¹⁵ This first Soviet Belarusian state mirrored the BPR also in the sense that it was declared on a large territory, roughly covering the same extent as the BPR. FIGURE 20.

This state lasted a total of 58 days. As the Bolsheviks pressed westwards, the political situation changed rapidly. On January 2, the *Taryba* had evacuated Vil’nia/Vilnius for Kaunas.¹¹⁶ On January 5-6, 1919, the Red Army entered Vil’nia. By February 1919, the Bolsheviks controlled all of Belarus with the exception of parts of Hrodna *guberniia*.¹¹⁷ At this point, the Bolsheviks convened the First all-Belarusian Congress of Soviets, held in Miensk on February 2-3, 1919. It adopted a constitution modeled on the constitution of the RSFSR. At the same time, it passed a unanimous resolution to create a joint

¹¹² Shumeiko (ed.), 239f.

¹¹³ “Obrashchenie i s’ezda KP(b)B k rabochim, batrakam, krest’ianam i soldatam Krasnoi Armii Belorusskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki,” in Shumeiko, (ed.), 89.

¹¹⁴ Shumeiko, (ed.), 239f. The names of the new Soviet and republican institutions indicated that Soviet Belarus was the “little brother” not only of Russia, but also of Soviet Ukraine. The Communist Party of Ukraine was the only regional Soviet party organization to have its own Politburo. Serhy Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 241-242f.

¹¹⁵ This short-lived republic has been referred to in the literature as both BSR and SSRB, and, sometimes anachronistically, as BSSR, a name which was not used until 1922. Bryhadzin and Matsias, 26; Chigrinov, 459; J. Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question* (1999), 72, gives the name of the republic as the Independent Socialist Republic of Belorussia.

¹¹⁶ Kiaupa, 327.

¹¹⁷ Chigrinov, 441.

Lithuanian-Belarusian state, the Socialist Soviet Republic of Lithuania and Belarus, or LitBel. On February 18-20 the first Lithuanian Congress of Soviets, organized by the Bolsheviks on the territory conquered by the Red Army, approved a merger of the two Soviet republics. LitBel was proclaimed on February 27, 1919 by the Executive Committees of the Soviet republics of Lithuania and Belarus.¹¹⁸ Soon thereafter, at the Second Congress of the Belarusian Communist Party, on March 4-6, 1919, the Belarusian and Lithuanian Communist parties merged.¹¹⁹ By absorbing the Lithuanian Soviet Republic, an equally short-lived construct, proclaimed on December 16, 1918,¹²⁰ LitBel included large territories: the Miensk, Hrodna, Vilnia, Kaunas and parts of the Suwałki *gubernii* with over six million people. Its coat of arms signaled its multi-ethnic nature, spelling out “SSR L and B” in five languages.¹²¹ As capital of LitBel, the Bolsheviks unsurprisingly chose Vilnius/Vil’nia, the spiritual capital of both the Lithuanian and Belarusian nationalists.¹²² The Bolsheviks hoped to use common capital to unite Lithuanians and Belarusians against the Poles. Resurrected Poland was a formidable opponent, and constituted a danger not only to Soviet power, but also to the ambitions of Belarusian and Lithuanian nationalists. The new, amalgamated Lithuanian-Belarusian state reflected the perceptions of both the Lithuanian and Belarusian nationalist movements that the two people somehow belonged together, through blood ties, history, and destiny. This perception was based upon a shared history in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Paweł Urban, “The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic: A Brief Historical Outline,” *Belorussian Review*, No. 7. (May 1959), 11; Kiaupa, 327.

¹¹⁹ Shumeiko (ed.), 133-134.

¹²⁰ P. Urban (1959), 10.

¹²¹ I. M. Ihnatsenka (ed.) et al., *Historiyia Belaruskai SSR u piatsi tamakh. Tom 3: Peramoha vialikai kastychnitskai satsyialistychnai revaliotsyi i pabudova satsyializmu BSSR (1917-1937 hh.)* (Minsk: Vydatstva Navuka i tekhnika, 1973), 149.

¹²² How volatile the Vilnius/Vilnia issue still is today is reflected in contemporary textbooks. A 2002 Lithuanian history textbook in English intended for foreign consumption states: “The Lithuanian mass of the village population in eastern Lithuania was divided up in more than one place by Belorussian areas or islands of local increasingly polonised populations, while in the small and large towns Jews were predominant. However, Vilnius had been the *historical capital of Lithuania and Lithuanians alone*, the centre of the nation’s life even under Russian rule. (...) Vilnius was part of the Lithuanian national consciousness and the *full-blooded Lithuanian state* [was] inconceivable without it.” Kiaupa, 331-332. (My emphasis, PR)

¹²³ If we exclude Lastouski’s December 1919 proposition to establish a joint Belarusian-Lithuanian state by merging BPR with Lithuania, there were three more serious attempts to restore the Commonwealth. Two of them were attempted by the Soviets, in 1919 and 1939. The first attempt took place in 1807, before Napoleon’s attack on Russia, when the Belarusian nobleman and magnate Mikhail Ogin’skii suggested a resurrected Commonwealth, consisting of eight Lithuanian and Belarusian *gubernii* to be restored as a Great Duchy, ruled by Ekaterina Pavlovna, Aleksandr I’s sister, and which would have a certain autonomy within the Russian empire and its own army of 100,000. This may partly be understood as an attempt to preempt the attraction of

The Bolsheviks' sudden departure from the guiding ethnographic principle is puzzling. They provided few official rationalizations for the establishment of LitBel. Their rhetoric emphasized strategic concerns and tactical necessity, presenting the merger as a joint attempt by the progressive forces of Belarus and Lithuania in order to fight the counterrevolutionaries who had merged the *Taryba* and the Rada of the BPR. The official declaration of February 2, 1919 made no reference to nation or ethnicity. The focus on class interest and temporary strategic needs make the merger of the two republics appear as something of a marriage of convenience:

Workers and peasants of Belarus and Lithuania, united by their historical common interests were also closely linked politically, and united in their struggle to establish Soviet power in Belarus and Lithuania, they combined their forces into one communist organization. But, much like the workers and the poor peasants, the Belarusian and Lithuanian bourgeoisie, in their attempts at preserving their riches, have a single goal – to strangle the proletarian revolution and to crush the working class. The Lithuanian *Taryba* and the Belarusian Rada work against the workers and peasants of Belarus and Lithuania in a united counterrevolutionary front.¹²⁴

The creation of a united republic was deemed necessary in order to “crush the White Army-Belarusian-Lithuanian government.”¹²⁵ Sverdlov, the chairman of the VTsIK, also made it clear that a united Belarusian-Lithuanian republic was established to counter “national-chauvinist tendencies,”¹²⁶ i.e. to silence critics, also among the local elites in Belarus, who denied the existence of a Belarusian nation.¹²⁷ The Bolsheviks were pragmatic regarding the establishment of internal political borders. “The ethnographic principle was at the heart of the demarcation, but could occasionally be modified by the economic principle and was obstructed by the resistance of the local Soviets and the military successes of

Napoleon's revolutionary ideas. In 1807 Napoleon had emancipated the Polish serfs. The local landlords in Belarus, many of them Poles and well aware of the political developments on the other side of the border, felt that without changes to the way Belarus was administered, there was a significant risk of a peasant uprising. However, Ogin'skii's plans were firmly rejected by the tsar. Zen'kovich, 64-65.

¹²⁴ Shumeiko (ed.), 128.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 129.

¹²⁶ “Iz protokola zasedaniia TsB KP(b)B o sozdaniii Belarussko-Litovskoi Respublikii,” February 2, 1919, PA IIP pri KPB f. 4, op. 1, d. 6, l. 7, copy, in Shumeiko (ed.), 130.

¹²⁷ J. Smith, 78.

the Poles. The former were overcome by 1926, the latter in 1939, delaying until then the creation of a greater ethnological Belorussia,” writes Jeremy Smith.¹²⁸

While the White forces made serious advances into the Russian heartland, in the west the Bolshevik faced an attack from the Poles. They suffered an acute shortage of qualified Belarusian and Lithuanian communists to staff the administration of two separate Soviet republics. The Bolsheviks argued that the unification of the two republics was a necessary merger of the forces of Lithuania and Belarus in the face of Polish aggression. Nationalist arguments of history and ethnicity had to yield to the requirements of class struggle and the export of the communist revolution. The SSRB constitution, adopted on February 2, 1919, established equal rights for its citizens, regardless of nationality and race, spelling out the rights to free association and organization, freedom of speech, and tuition-free education. However, these rights pertained only to members of the working class, not to “exploiting classes.”¹²⁹

The victorious Entente Powers ensured that Piłsudski’s legions took over much of the territory the Germans surrendered. After the pact of February 5, 1919, the Polish Army took over Brest, Hrodna, Pruzhany, and Volkovysk in mid-March.¹³⁰ The Polish army captured a number of Belarusian cities in the spring of 1919. In several cases, the arrival of the Poles was followed by pogroms against the local Jews, accused of collaboration with the Bolsheviks.¹³¹ On April 19, Vilna was captured by the Poles.¹³² On April 28, 1919 the capital of LitBel was moved from Vilna to Miensk. On July 16, 1919, with 75 per cent of the new state occupied by Polish forces, the government of LitBel effectively ceased to exist.¹³³ Miensk fell to the Polish army on August 8, 1919.¹³⁴ The government was once again evacuated, this time

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Chigrinov, 461.

¹³⁰ Zen’kovich, 93.

¹³¹ In an episode known as the Massacre of Pinsk, Polish soldiers slaughtered 35 Jews on April 5. Following the Polish capture of Lida on April 17, 39 Jews were murdered. The Polish capture of Vilna was followed by street fighting that left 65 Jews dead. Isaac Lewin, “The Political History of Polish Jewry, 1918-1919,” in Isaac Lewin and Nathan Michael Gelber, *A History of Polish Jewry during the revival of Poland* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1990), 143-153.

¹³² P. Urban, 11, 12

¹³³ “Z nashaha frontu,” *Zorka*, No. 6, October 29, 1919, 1; Chigrinov, 461.

to Smolensk, where the SSRB had first been proclaimed.¹³⁵ It lasted less than half a year. The local populations reacted to its demise with the same indifference as they had received its proclamation. There has been some speculation that the Soviet authorities considered having Polish lands added to LitBel following a Soviet victory in the war.¹³⁶ While LitBel impressed neither the Lithuanian, nor the Belarusian nationalists, Stalin did not dismiss entirely the idea of a Belarusian-Lithuanian federation under Soviet control, and considered this as a serious option again in 1939.¹³⁷

Poland Resurgent

By September 1919 Polish troops controlled all Belarus except the Mahileu and Vitsebsk provinces. In addition, local Poles owned the overwhelming amount of the land. Many of Poland's aristocratic elites hailed from these eastern borderlands, and felt a strong attachment to these lands, which they considered part of the resurgent Polish state.¹³⁸ The Polish elites were divided into two main camps. The two predominant Polish political figures, Piłsudski and Dmowski, had radically different visions of the resurrected Poland. Piłsudski desired a resurrected Polish commonwealth, a multi-ethnic federation on the territory of the pre-1772 Polish borders. Inspired by a *Missionsidée* – Polish nationalism aspired for the resurrection of the Jagiellonian state, an ethnographic Poland that would stretch from the Baltic to the Black Seas, a *Polska od morza do morza*, a project interrupted by the partitions of the 18th century.¹³⁹ The eastern peoples, federated with Poland, Piłsudski thought, would quickly be assimilated and turned into Poles.¹⁴⁰ Most leading Polish nationalists, particularly within the national democratic party, the *endecja*, did not recognize the existence of separate Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian ethnicities, but regarded them as ethnic raw material, which could be turned into Poles. The leader of the *endecja*, Roman

¹³⁴ Shumeiko, 159.

¹³⁵ P. Urban, 12.

¹³⁶ J. Smith, 76.

¹³⁷ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations* (2003), 80.

¹³⁸ Borzęcki, 27.

¹³⁹ von Engelhardt, 187.

¹⁴⁰ Ivan L. Rudnytsky, *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History*, Edited by Peter L. Rudnytsky (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1987), 68, citing Stanisław Mackiewicz, *Historja Polski od 11 listopada 1918 do 17 września 1939 r.* (London, 1941), 106.

Dmowski, desired a smaller, but ethnically homogenous Poland. At the same time, he considered the peoples to the east of Poland incapable of governing themselves.¹⁴¹ Yet, Dmowski's attitude to Polish eastward expansion was ambivalent. While he desired a strong Polish state, he wanted to control only those border areas, the populations of which could be easily assimilated into the Polish nation.¹⁴² Convinced of the cultural superiority of Polish culture, the National Democrats believed that it was the duty of the Poles to civilize the peoples of the borderlands through forced assimilation.¹⁴³ In 1904, Dmowski had spelled out his ambitions for the eastern borderlands:

We have to come alive and expand our existence [as a nation] in all aspects. Our aim should be to become a strong nation, one nation that cannot be defeated. Where we can we should civilize foreign elements and expand our potential by absorbing these elements into our nation. Not only do we have a right to do so, but this is our duty...Our national organism should absorb only those [foreign elements] that are capable of assimilating, elements that should serve to expand our growth and collective potential – a category Jews do not fall into.¹⁴⁴

The Polish delegation to Versailles arrived ready to pursue aggressively its agenda, undeterred by the risk of upsetting its allies in the west. Its members were determined not to yield to Allied demands and prepared to cause trouble if need be.¹⁴⁵ On October 8, 1918, Dmowski had presented US president Woodrow Wilson with a list of extensive territorial demands for the resurrected Polish state, essentially a restoration of the 1772 borders, plus Upper Silesia and East Prussia.¹⁴⁶ Dmowski did not want to see an independent Lithuania, Ukraine or Belarus, which he feared would be turned into German or Russian pawns. "A creation of independent Lithuanian and Ukrainian states would mean either anarchy or foreign

¹⁴¹ MacMillan (2002), 214.

¹⁴² Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other* (2006), 70.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁴ Roman Dmowski, *Myśli Nowoczesnego Polaka*, 2nd ed. (Lwow, 1904), 214-215, cited in Michlic (2006), 66.

¹⁴⁵ Watt, 63.

¹⁴⁶ Dmowski presented the western powers with an extensive wish list. He demanded the three *kresy*, Central Silesia, all of Galicia, the part of Teschen that is inhabited by Poles, the (1916) Kingdom of Poland, most of the Wilno/Vil'nia and Mińsk/Miensk *gubernii*, including the cities of Wilno, Mińsk, and Pinsk, the entire Grodno/Hrodna *gubernia*, the western part of Volhynia to the city of Horyn, the western part of Podolia, including Ploskirov and Kamenets-Podils'kii, the western part of Vitebsk *gubernia*, formerly known as Polish Livonia, including the city of Dvinsk/Dzvinsk/Daugavpils and the southern and eastern parts of Kurland, with its shoreline and ports, including Polangen, Libau/Liepaja and Windau/Ventspils. German-speaking areas, such as Danzig, would be included in the Polish state, Dmowski claimed, since "almost half are Polish, but superficially Germanized." Dmowski also laid claim to the German-speaking East Prussia and Upper Silesia, which had not been Polish since the 14th century, claiming it as "90% Polish" territories. In addition, Dmowski wanted the historical Lithuania, including the Kowno/Kaunas *gubernia*, and the lion's share of the northern part of Suwalki *gubernia*. These lands would all be annexed or in other ways subjugated to Polish domination and control. Watt, 7, 55, 69; von Engelhardt, 188, n. 189, citing Paul Roth, *Die Entstehung des Polnischen Staates* (Berlin, 1926), 138.

rule, or more specifically, German,” Dmowski claimed.¹⁴⁷ Dmowski’s aggressive stance did not endear him to the Americans and British, who urged him to build a coalition with the more moderate Piłsudski.¹⁴⁸

France was Poland’s strongest supporter. Already in the fall of 1917, the French Foreign Minister Stéphen Pichon had publicly stated French support for a reborn, “big and strong, very strong” Poland as a counterbalance to Germany.¹⁴⁹ However, as the Paris peace talks progressed, even the French got increasingly concerned with the Polish claims. As Polish troops in 1919 advanced far into territories which could not be considered ethnically Polish, the ever-increasing Polish appetite for land increasingly turned into a potential source of trouble in the region. The Polish claims in the east were so extensive that they risked totally alienating Russia, a country, which from Paris’ perspective was seen as having the potential to become an ally once again.¹⁵⁰ During the Paris peace talks in 1919, it became clear that the right to self-determination, which Dmowski eloquently employed as a justification for the resurrection of Poland, would not be extended to the people under Polish rule.¹⁵¹ Since ethnic Poles constituted a minority of 5 to 35 per cent of the population in these eastern borderlands Dmowski claimed for a resurrected Polish state, his argumentation shifted from the right to ethnic and national self-determination to loose claims of the historical predominance of “Polish culture and civilization” in these areas.¹⁵²

Sir Lewis Namier later recounted a story of how during the Versailles negotiations in 1919 a Polish diplomat “expounded to me the very extensive (and mutually contradictory) territorial claims of his country, and [when] I enquired on what principle they were based, he replied to me with rare frankness: “‘On the historical principle, corrected by the linguistic wherever it works in our favour.’”¹⁵³ Stanisław

¹⁴⁷ von Engelhardt, 188.

¹⁴⁸ MacMillan (2002), 211, 213.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 212.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 214-215.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 211.

¹⁵² von Engelhardt, 188; Jan T. Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 4.

¹⁵³ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*. Fourth, expanded edition (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA, 1993), 115-116. Sir Lewis Namier, himself of Polish Jewish origin, had little sympathy for Dmowski and “his chauvinist gang.” His crude and public anti-Semitic

Grabski, the *endecja* Polish minister of education and religion,¹⁵⁴ gave a fairly straightforward assessment of the nationalities policy of the resurrected Polish state when he declared publicly that “the political border [of Poland] became the ethnographic border.”¹⁵⁵ Unlike the Poles, the Belarusians lacked a strong lobby in Paris and other western capitals. Representatives of a number of ethnic groups that aspired for independence flocked to Versailles. The representatives of the Rada found it difficult to make their case with the big three, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Wilson, who drafted ambitious plans that re-shaped the political order of the world.¹⁵⁶ The high aspirations of the exiled Rada gave the impression that they had lost all contact with reality; at the Paris Peace Conference, the BPR claimed sovereignty over an enormous swathe of land in Eastern Europe, which would have made Belarus the second largest country on that continent.

Neither Poland, nor the Allied powers recognized the fugitive government of Soviet LitBel, chased from Vil’nia to Miensk and Smolensk. There was no possibility of solving the issue of the Polish-Soviet border through negotiations.¹⁵⁷ The delegates at Versailles were uncertain of what kind of people populated Belarus. The area between L’viv and Vilnia, one of the experts at the Paris peace conference maintained, was populated by an “enigmatic population” which “may be White Russian or Ukrainian, but it is certainly not Polish.”¹⁵⁸

Whereas Dmowski was the leading proponent of a more aggressive line, Piłsudski took a more moderate approach, arguing for a federative solution with autonomy for Poland’s national minorities. Such a federation would be in line with the interests of the West, because, in the words of French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, it would serve as a *cordon sanitaire* to quarantine communism and

remarks, such as “my religion came from Jesus Christ, who was murdered by the Jews,” had made Dmowski unpopular among the British leaders, particularly at Namier’s Foreign Office. MacMillan (2002), 212.

¹⁵⁴ Snyder, *Sketches From a Secret War* (2005), 149.

¹⁵⁵ I. I. Kovkel’, I. I. and E. S. Iarmusik, *Istoriia Belarusi: S drevneishikh vremen do nashego vremeni* (Minsk: Aversev, 2000), 478.

¹⁵⁶ Ostrowski, Plate XXVI B. Watt, 62.

¹⁵⁷ Watt, 70.

¹⁵⁸ MacMillan (2002), 216, citing H. W. V. Temperley, (ed.) *A History of the Peace Conference in Paris*, Vol. 6 (London, 1924), 220.

prevent its further dissemination.¹⁵⁹ Parts of the Belarusian elite supported Clemenceau's idea of a *cordon sanitaire*. On October 15, Vilnia-based *Nezalezhnaia Belarus'*, closely allied with the Belarusian SR party, stated that

[O]nly an *independent* Ukraine, independent Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia can create a wall that would protect us from our enemy. (...) We are firmly convinced that as long as Belarus is not independent, there cannot be peace. Poland will stagnate under Polish and German boots, Russia will continue to suffer from the diseases of anarchy and nihilism (diseases Germany continues to support as long as they are to its advantage), while the Germans themselves ... permanently and definitely will turn into wolves and robbers.¹⁶⁰

When the Polish-Soviet War changed the geopolitical situation once again, despite rivalries and disputes over territories with Polish nationalists, in 1919 the BPR government in exile began considering a federative relationship with Poland.¹⁶¹ Though a Polish nationalist first and foremost, Piłsudski had a background as a socialist, and had indicated his willingness to cooperate with the Belarusians against the Soviets. In 1919, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), with which he had been associated throughout most of his career, openly called for the recognition of the BPR.¹⁶² Some of the leaders of the exiled Rada were attracted by the idea of a federation with Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine.

Throughout the Polish-Soviet war, the Piłsudski leadership gave loose and unspecific indications to the exiled BPR leadership that the Belarusians would receive some form of autonomy or even statehood in a resurrected Polish state, based upon the principles of federalism. The Polish military authorities published Belarusian-language newspapers to unite Belarusians and Jews against "Muscovite imperialism."¹⁶³ Visiting Minsk in September, 1919, Piłsudski delivered a speech in Belarusian, solemnly promising "that nothing will be imposed on this land [which] will decide by itself what way of

¹⁵⁹ Jan Karski, *The Great Powers & Poland 1919-1945: From Versailles to Yalta* (Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1985), 123

¹⁶⁰ Unsigned and untitled editorial, *Nezalezhnaia Belarus': Palitychna-Hramadzianskaia i Literaturnaia Chasopis'*, No. 3, 15 October, 1919, 1.

¹⁶¹ Zen'kovich, 92.

¹⁶² "Adkaz pasla pol'skaha soimu nedzialkouskaha na deklaratsyi Belaruskai parti i sotsyalistau-revolutsyianerau," *Nezalezhnaia Belarus': Palitychna-Hramadzianskaia i Literaturnaia Chasopis'*, No. 12, 5 November, 1919, 2.

¹⁶³ Among them was the short-lived pro-Polish paper *Zvon*, edited by Ianka Kupala between August and October, 1919. Here, Kupala published a number of pro-Piłsudski poems, something the Soviet authorities would not forget. See Ianka Kupala, "Paustan'ne," *Zvon* No. 11, September 17, 1919, 1; Idem, "Na skhod!.." *Zvon*, No. 14, September 24, 1919, 1. See also "Nezalezhnaia Belarus' i Rasiia," *Zvon*, No. 15, September 25, 1919, 1; "Da zhydoustva," *Zvon* No. 20, October 8, 1919, 1.

life and what law to adopt...Then will come the moment when you will be able to express yourself freely as to how your state is to be ordered.”¹⁶⁴ The Polish advances eastward allowed the Rada of the BPR to once again return into the heartland of Belarus, from which it had been expelled in November-December 1918. Yet, the Polish government conceded no power to the BPR Rada, which during most of 1919 was based in Hrodna. The Rada attempted to put pressure on Piłsudski through appealing directly to the Entente Powers, but again without success.¹⁶⁵ The Rada promised autonomy for Polish schools in the BPR and that the Poles could maintain representatives in the Belarusian government, with significant influence over the issue of land reform, a serious issue for many Polish landowners in Belarus.¹⁶⁶

In Miensk on September 18, 1919, Piłsudski declared that “The character of Wilno is and will remain a center of Polishness in the eastern lands. Miensk will become the center of the Belarusian lands in the east.”¹⁶⁷ Yet, the autonomy was intended to be cultural, rather than political. In most of the territories conquered, the Poles made up a minority of the population.¹⁶⁸ An eastern Pole, Piłsudski had a deep personal attachment to Lithuania, which he saw as a part of the historical Poland. While he paid lip service to the idea of a Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian-Belarusian federation, Piłsudski added privately that he would not want to discuss plans of federation “without a revolver in my pocket.”¹⁶⁹

The BPR Rada gathered in Hrodna, before sending a delegation to Warsaw to plead for Polish recognition. From the Polish perspective, this was out of the question.¹⁷⁰ It was very clear that these were negotiations on unequal terms, and they did not go smoothly. The Polish government dismissed

¹⁶⁴ Borzęcki, 32, citing Józef Piłsudski, *Pisma zbiorowe* (London: M. I. Kolin, 1943), 186-187.

¹⁶⁵ Zen'kovich, 94-95.

¹⁶⁶ “Adkaz pasla pol’skaha soimu,” *Nezalezhnaia Belarus*, ’ No. 12, 5 November, 1919, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Józef Lewandowski, *Federalizm: Litwa i Białoruś w polityce obozu Belwederskiego (XI 1918 – IV 1920)* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962), 228.

¹⁶⁸ The key Foreign Office expert on Poland, Sir Lewis B. Namier, appears to have been aware of the 1897 Imperial Russian census, which showed that Belarusians and other non-Russians outnumbered the Russians ten to one in Lithuania and Belarus but “believed that the Belarusians were so deficient in national consciousness that they did not count as a separate nationality.” Anna M. Cienciala and Titus Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno: Keys to Polish Foreign Policy, 1919-1925* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 121, 126.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷⁰ Borzęcki, 33.

Lutskevich entirely: “The chairman of the Belarusian Rada, Mr. Lutskevich, who recently visited Warsaw, wants to preserve the fiction of a [Belarusian] state and conduct negotiations with the Polish government. The [Polish] government, aware of the absence of any real grounds for such a program, did not take these negotiations seriously.”¹⁷¹ The Rada did not have much to offer the Poles. Yet Alaksiuk, the leader of the Belarusian delegation, suggested the creation of a Belarusian army, and asked for permission from the Polish leadership to recruit soldiers on the territories controlled by the Polish army with the purpose to keep the Bolsheviks at bay. A Belarusian Military Commission was duly created, chaired by Rak-Mikhailouski, and with General Konopatski as the “supreme commander.” This Commission, intended as the embryo of a Belarusian army, was partly funded by and received uniforms from the United States.¹⁷² The bulk of the funding came from the Polish Ministry of War, which provided funds to create two Belarusian battalions.¹⁷³ The commission was based in Slonim, where it began giving courses for officers. Even though he was personally opposed to the idea of a Belarusian army during the Polish-Soviet War, Piłsudski agreed to some form of Belarusian armed formation. In any case, a Belarusian army was not much of a concern to Poland. Its resolutions and shrill rhetoric were aimed primarily against Russian forces: the Bolsheviks and Denikin’s. By contrast, the Belarusian Military Commission referred to Piłsudski as “our friend.”¹⁷⁴

Most Belarusian peasants saw this “army” as an attempt to recruit them into the Polish forces. By November 1919, it seemed unlikely that a Belarusian army would materialize.¹⁷⁵ Two-thirds of the funds for the army were embezzled by one of the intended leaders for the battalion.¹⁷⁶ In late 1920, the

¹⁷¹ Reznik, 32, citing “Strazhi kresovoi,” (Warsaw, 1919), in *Dokumenty i materialy po istorii sovetsko-pol’skikh otnoshenii*, Vol. 2. (Moscow, 1964), 323-324.

¹⁷² On November 11, 1919, there were press reports that a shipment of materials for uniforms for the Belarusian army had arrived in Vilnia and Warsaw. The material was sufficient to equip fifty soldiers and one hundred officers. This gives an indication of the scope and size of the Belarusian army. “Belaruskaia Armiiia: Pryvezena adzmundirovan’ne,” *Nezalezhnaia Belarus’: Palitychna-Hramadzianskaia i Literaturnaia Chasopis*’, No. 14, 10 November, 1919, 2 Yet, a 1995 monograph claims that as many as 10,000 people served in the various regiments of the BPR. Oleg Łatyszonek, *Białoruskie formacje wojskowe 1917-1924* (Białystok: Białoruskie Towarzystwo Historii, 1995), 146.

¹⁷³ Łatyszonek (1995), 121-146.

¹⁷⁴ “Belaruski narodze!” *Nezalezhnaia Belarus’* No. 14, 10 November, 1919, 3.

¹⁷⁵ “Adkaz pasla pol’skaha soimu” *Nezalezhnaia Belarus’* No. 12, 5 November, 1919, 2.

Belarusian Armed Command recognized that its attempts to set up an army had failed. In publicly stated it stated that “The work of the Armed Commission did not produce desired results. This, however, was not the commission’s fault. We have still been unable even to set up the two battalions we were allowed according to the decree of October 22, 1919.”¹⁷⁷ The Belarusian army was never able to attract more than 500 volunteers.¹⁷⁸

The Polish occupation was harsher than the German one. None of the military administrators in Minsk used the Belarusian language. Neither did they rely on Belarusian administrators. These were, as a rule, Poles who often shared the political positions of the *endecja*. Others of the local officers were “white,” anti-Bolshevik, ethnic Russians who had served in the tsarist army and were hoping to overthrow the Bolsheviks.¹⁷⁹ The Belarusian national activists could expect little sympathy from these circles. The areas under Polish occupation were often unruly and parts of the Belarusian peasantry were rebellious. The Polish authorities responded with repression, arresting or interning 20,000 peasants.¹⁸⁰ The Bolsheviks’ counter-attack meanwhile threatened the very survival of the young Polish state. The support for Piłsudski’s idea of a Polish-led eastern federation eroded quickly as sympathies switched increasingly towards the *endecja*. The promised Belarusian cultural autonomy was never implemented. On the contrary, even before the Polish-Soviet War had ended, the Polish authorities started a campaign to close down Belarusian schools, high schools and other institutional facilities dedicated to Belarusian culture and education. They introduced in turn a policy of forced Polonization, which was deeply unpopular, and led to an increase in anti-Polish sentiment. After the negotiations with Piłsudski had failed, Anton Lutskevich declared in September 1919 that “Piłsudski and the entire bourgeois Poland are as much the enemies of Belarus as they are the enemies of Russia.”¹⁸¹ Piłsudski reacted by ordering the Rada of the BPR dissolved and put Lutskevich in a Warsaw jail. He was later released after pleas by the PPS Central

¹⁷⁶ Łatyszonek (1995), 121-146.

¹⁷⁷ Zen’kovich, 94-95.

¹⁷⁸ Łatyszonek (1995), 121-146.

¹⁷⁹ Lewandowski (1962), 245.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹⁸¹ Chigrinov, 456.

Committee.¹⁸² After his release, Lutskevich went into exile in Lithuania, from which he continued the leadership of the exiled Rada.

On October 30, 1919, the National Democrats introduced a motion to arrange a plebiscite on the future of Western Belarus. Both the Belarusian SRs and the Lithuanian government in Kaunas considered this a violation of the Versailles treaty, and complained that the vote would not be fair.¹⁸³ The SR press raised concerns over the potential for manipulation, given that the vast majority of the intended voters were illiterate. Most Belarusians did not even know what the word *plebiscite* meant.¹⁸⁴ In response to the proposed plebiscite, the *Taryba* quickly issued a declaration that Vil'nia and Hrodna were parts of Lithuania, something the Rada strongly protested.¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, the plebiscite, originally planned for January 1920, was canceled, writes Jerzy Borzęcki, "Paradoxically...because of the fear not so much that Belarusians would vote against federation with Poland, but rather that the Poles of the Wilno and Grodno regions would overwhelmingly vote for incorporation."¹⁸⁶ On February 1, 1920, Piłsudski announced that "There has been some significant concessions in the [eastern] borderlands for the development of the culture of the Belarusians. Yet we will not make any political concessions for this Belarusian fiction."¹⁸⁷ British Prime Minister Lloyd George was concerned about Polish expansion eastwards, something he regarded as an "imperialist and annexationist policy," complaining that Polish troops had "advanced far into territories exclusively and completely Russian."¹⁸⁸ On July 11, 1920 the British foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, presented a note to the Soviets and the Poles, urging them to withdraw their armies to the territories where the ethnic Poles constituted the majority populations, approximately following the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Chigrinov, 456.

¹⁸⁴ "Belaruskiia zhydy tsi zhydy, iak hramadziane Belarusi," *Nezalezhnaia Belarus'* No. 14, November 10, 1919, 2.

¹⁸⁵ "We energetically protest the aggressive policy of the Lithuanian government, which attempts to annex the area without any legitimate claims to the Belarusian lands around Vilnia, the population of which is 80% Belarusian and Hrodna, whose population is 70% Belarusian." Unsigned editorial, *Nezalezhnaia Belarus'*, No. 9, October 29, 1919, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Borzęcki, 58-59.

¹⁸⁷ Lewandowski (1962), 229.

¹⁸⁸ Weronika Gostyńska et al., eds., *Dokumenty i matrialy do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich* (Warsaw: KiW, 1957-) vol. 3, doc. 81, 148 and 152; and doc. 84, 157.

current Polish border.¹⁸⁹ The Curzon Line would have drawn the eastern border of Poland much further to the west than most Polish nationalists were prepared to accept; it was based upon ethnographic principles and largely followed the current eastern border of Poland. At this point, Piłsudski's federalist schemes had lost their appeal. The Polish government agreed with Dmowski's assessment "Let us save what can be saved!...One thing – we are going to win nothing on the self-determination of nations, because these nations do not exist: neither Ukrainians nor Belarusians. Let us look after our own business only."¹⁹⁰

The Rada Splits Again

The limited results of cooperation and its brusque treatment at the hands of Piłsudski caused bitter criticism towards the Rada leadership, particularly from the Belarusian SRs. Lutskevich, Aleksiuk, Liosik, and Adamovich were perceived as Polonophiles and harshly criticized by the SRs at a meeting of the BPR Rada in December 1919. At this meeting the SR took over the leadership of the Rada, advocating a two-front war against both the Polish occupation and the "imperialist Muscovite-Denikin forces from the east."¹⁹¹ Relations with the PPS, which had been sympathetic to the Belarusian national movement, deteriorated after its leader Nedzialkowski declared in the Polish Sejm that his party opposed the inclusion of the Hrodna and Vilna areas into an independent Belarusian state. The Belarusian SR attacked the PPS in its press, accusing it of putting Polish nationalism above socialism and turning its back on the idea of a federation of equals between Poland and its eastern neighbors.¹⁹²

When the Rada opposed the inclusion of Hrodna and Vilna into the Polish state, the Polish authorities dissolved it and arrested its SR-dominated presidium, including Lastouski, P. Bodunov, T. Hryb, E. Mamon'ka, and others.¹⁹³ Their paper, *Nezalezhnaia Belarus'*, was closed. Those who managed to escape were isolated, and fled to Lithuania, where they signed a treaty with the government to fight

¹⁸⁹ Borzęcki, 79.

¹⁹⁰ Jan Borkowski, (ed.) *Rok 1920: Wojna polsko-radziecka w wspomnieniach i innych dokumentach* (Warsaw: PIW, 1990), doc. 199-200, Artur Leinwand and Jan Molenda, eds., "Protokoly Rady Obrony Państwa," *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-radzieckich: Studia i materiały*, vol. 1, (1965): 177-195.

¹⁹¹ Zen'kovich, 95.

¹⁹² Petra Stanich, unsigned editorial, *Nezalezhnaia Belarus'*, No. 13, 7 November, 1919, 1.

¹⁹³ Chigrinov, 456.

both Poland and Soviet Russia.¹⁹⁴ The Polish authorities created a pro-Polish Belarusian body, the Supreme Rada of the BPR, led by Lutskevich, Lesik, Smolich, Ivanouski, and Rak-Mikhailouski.¹⁹⁵ The SRs established an alternative body, the People's Rada of the BPR, which went into exile in Kaunas in December 1919. They found a supportive ally in independent Lithuania, which signed a treaty to support their fight against the Poles and Soviets.¹⁹⁶ Disillusioned with Poland, the more radical Belarusian national activists oriented themselves towards Lithuania, which housed and supported Lastouski's group, the Belarusian People's Rada. Lithuania never acknowledged the loss of Vilnius, and continued a "state of war" with Poland.¹⁹⁷

On March 8, 1920, the Polish government ended its limited support of Belarusian state-building, opting instead for local self-government and cultural autonomy, but only in the Miensk region.¹⁹⁸ While he had no intention to recognize the independence of the BPR, Piłsudski nurtured the idea of creating "a Belarusian Piedmont," allowing Belarusian cultural and educational activity to win Belarusian support for a federative Polish project.¹⁹⁹ Piłsudski contrasted the ambitious Belarusian territorial claims with the inept political behavior of the Belarusian leaders. He now openly dismissed the idea of Belarusian statehood as "fiction," describing Belarus as "still completely unprepared [for independence] and [that] to advance with the Belarusian question would just compromise other, more important issues. It is necessary to create precedents and wait for suitable circumstances, establishing for the moment a Belarusian Piedmont in Poland."²⁰⁰ The Polish administrators of the Belarusian territories compared the Belarusian movement to a "resourceless child."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ Zen'kovich, 95.

¹⁹⁵ Chigrinov, 456-457, Voitsekh Materski, "Ryzhski traktat i Belarus'," *Belaruski Histrychny Chasopis*, No. 5, 2002,, 41.

¹⁹⁶ Materski, 41.

¹⁹⁷ Stephan M. Horak, *Poland and her National Minorities, 1919-39* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 45.

¹⁹⁸ Gostyńska et al, vol. 2, 640.

¹⁹⁹ Borzęcki, 33; Materski, 41.

²⁰⁰ Borzęcki, 58, citing Leon Wasilewski, *Józef Piłsudski jakim Go znałem* (Warsaw: Rój, 1935), 216.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 59, citing Krystyna Gomółka, *Miedzy Polską a Rosją: Białoruś w koncepcjach polskich ugrupowań politycznych 1918-1922* (Warsaw: Gryf, 1994), 86.

In April 1920, Lutskevich's group, the Supreme Rada of the BPR had offered the Polish leadership a treaty that would create a federation between Poland and Belarus, a union with one Sejm but separate legislatures, armies, and finances. This idea was simply ignored by the Polish government.²⁰² The only concession the Belarusians were able to obtain was the signing of a political treaty with the Supreme Rada of the BPR and the creation of a department of Belarusian-Lithuanian Affairs within the Polish Foreign Ministry, led by Ludwig Kalinowski, a historian and specialist on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.²⁰³

The following month, Lutskevich's group signed a treaty with the Polish government according to which Belarus would receive limited cultural autonomy within a Polish state.²⁰⁴ In the summer of 1920, Lutskevich's group "renewed" the declaration of the independence of the Belarusian People's Republic.²⁰⁵ In reality, this fourth proclamation of Belarusian statehood in little over two years had marginal impact. Lutskevich's support for Poland turned out to be a miscalculation, and he was taunted as a Polonophile by the more radical Belarusian nationalists. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, other nationalists would question his Belarusian credentials.²⁰⁶ Many Belarusians blamed the collaboration of Lutskevich and his group with the Poles for the loss of Vilnia. In 1920, two factions claimed to represent the BPR. The Polonophile Supreme Rada of the BPR under Lutskevich sided with Warsaw, the SR-dominated People's Rada of the BPR under Lastouski was backed up by Kaunas. At the grassroots level, both lacked popular support among the Belarusian masses, and because their political influence was minimal, the future of Belarus now had to be decided in Warsaw and Moscow.²⁰⁷

²⁰² Chigrinov, 446.

²⁰³ Materski, 41.

²⁰⁴ Zen'kovich, 96.

²⁰⁵ *Za dzierzhaunuiu nazalezhnasts' Belarusi*, 18.

²⁰⁶ Lutskevich himself came to identify increasingly with Poland. He later described his ethnicity as "Belarusian-Polish." Stankevich, 112-113.

²⁰⁷ Materski, 41.

SSRB Restored

During the Polish occupation, LitBel existed only on paper. When the Red Army returned, the Soviet authorities were already giving up the idea of a joint Lithuanian-Belarusian statehood. As the Red Army pressed on towards Warsaw, on July 14, 1920 Ivor T. Smilga, the commissar of the Soviet front, recommended the restoration of a Soviet Belarusian republic. The government in Moscow consented, but added that the Belarusians did not constitute a separate nation, and that neither the Belarusian language nor culture differed from that of Russia. Further, it declared that the Belarusian national movement lacked support from the “toiling masses.” In the absence of ethnic, economic, and cultural reasons to establish a separate Soviet Belarusian republic, its restoration was deemed necessary based upon the precedent of it having existed in the past.²⁰⁸ Again, the Soviet leadership made a half-hearted attempt to “begin negotiations” with “the so-called Belarusian government of Lastouski.” These negotiations came to nothing, and appear to have been merely a tactical maneuver, intended to put pressure on the Lithuanians.²⁰⁹

The decision to restore SSRB came on July 30, 1920 from the Communist Party of Lithuania and Belarus, led by Chevriakau, Knorin, and Adamovich, Ihnatouski’s Belarusian Communist Organization, and the Jewish Bund led by Art Vaynshteyn.²¹⁰ On July 31, 1920, after the end of the Polish-Soviet war, the statehood of “the country of Belarusian, Russian, Polish and Jewish workers and peasants was “renewed,” again under the name of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus, or SSRB.²¹¹ The decision was made at a solemn ceremony at the Miensk city theatre and was accompanied by music and mass

²⁰⁸ I. Ignatenko, *Oktjabr'skaia revolutsia i samoopredelenie Belorussii* (Minsk: Navuka i Tekhnika, 1992), 202-203.

²⁰⁹ Borzecki, 85.

²¹⁰ A number of members of the Belarusian SR party (BPS-R), which appeared in 1918 after a split within the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, supported the restoration of SSRB, but were not allowed as signatories to the declaration of renewal of statehood. The Soviet organs never fully trusted the Belarusian Socialist Hramada after its support of Kerenskii’s provisional government. Soviet historians remained sharply critical of the BSH, accusing it of being a nationalist, petit bourgeois movement that despite its name had little to do with socialism. The Belarusian SR party was soon outmaneuvered and lost its political significance. During the Civil War in Soviet Russia the party split. One section continued its existence in exile, but no longer functioned after August 1924. Zen'kovich, 81-82; Shumeiko, 171-172, 174, 176-177, 242.

²¹¹ Chigrinov, 459; Bryhadzin and Matsias, 26.

meetings.²¹² This fifth proclamation of Belarusian statehood would have a lasting impact, as the restored Soviet republic would remain in existence for the next seven decades. Since it needed its own republican Communist Party, the Communist Party of LitBel was formally split into two titular organizations on September 5, 1920.²¹³

The Riga Peace Treaty

The restoration of separate Soviet Belarusian institutions coincided with the Soviet-Polish peace negotiations, which began on August 17, 1920 in Miensk. The Poles' demands followed their victory at the battle of Warsaw and initially reflected the federal approach of Piłsudski, calling for a semi-independent status for Ukraine and Belarus, as Polish protectorates outside the borders of the Soviet state.²¹⁴ Poland also rejected the Curzon Line, claiming that "from a strategic point of view, the so-called Curzon Line does not provide Poland even the most elementary security guarantees," adding that many cities to the east of the line, such as Wilno, Hrodno, and other cities in Western Belarus "are undoubtedly Polish cities."²¹⁵ The Polish side, represented by Lech Wasilewski and Witold Kamenetski, envisioned a Belarusian quasi-state in federation with Poland as a buffer on the Soviet border.²¹⁶ As the Piłsudski camp was weakened, the Polish delegation in Riga became dominated by National Democrats, who sought reconciliation with Moscow and preferred a Polish state with limited numbers of national minorities. The National Democrats had severely criticized Piłsudski's military campaigns of 1920 as a criminal folly,²¹⁷ and felt it preferable to incorporate only the western part of Belarus,²¹⁸ which would undercut the goals of the Belarusian nationalist movement while easing the assimilation of Western Belarusians into Poles.

Influenced by Social Darwinism, Dmowski and his National Democrats did not recognize the national

²¹² Schumeiko, 171-175.

²¹³ Ibid., 184-185.

²¹⁴ Ol'shanskii, 102; Materski, 44-45; Borzęcki, 98-99.

²¹⁵ Ol'shanskii, 106, citing *Archiwum Akt Nowych*, Ambasada RP w Waszyngtonie, w. 19, t. 12.

²¹⁶ Materski, 42.

²¹⁷ Michlic (2006), 9, 66, 70.

²¹⁸ Materski, 42, citing S. Grabski, *Pamiętniki*, Vol. II (Warsaw, 1989), 175 and J. Dąbski, *Pokój Ryski: Wspomnienia, pertraktacje, tajne uklady z Joffem, listy* (Warsaw, 1931), 92-96.

aspirations of the Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian elites, perceiving the people of the east as ethnic raw material, to be assimilated and civilized by the superior Polish culture.²¹⁹ If Dmowski and the National Democrats had taken maximalist positions in Paris, in Riga two years later they settled for reconciliation with Moscow.²²⁰ The final peace agreement was a disappointment to the PPS and the Piłsudski camp. Their ideas of a Polish-dominated federation of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine never materialized, and Poland was also forced to end its support of Petliura's forces in Ukraine.²²¹

Nevertheless, the Peace Treaty of Riga brought large Belarusian and Ukrainian territories, far to the east of the Curzon line, under Polish control. The armistice was signed on October 12, 1920, and representatives from the RSFSR, the Ukrainian SSR, and Poland signed the formal peace treaty on March 20, 1921. Even though the negotiations began in their capital, there were no representatives from Soviet Belarus.²²² The SSRB was represented by the RSFSR, which negotiated on its behalf.²²³ The newly reconstituted government in Minsk was hopeful that Poland would recognize the "independence" of the SSRB. Yet, Riga was a harsh peace that left Belarus divided. The KP(b)B informed "all workers of the republic" about the treaty, in a rather cautious note that the revolution had been put on hold. "Peace, and the signing of a peace treaty does not mean that Belarus' hard struggle is over yet. It only takes different forms, and enters a new stage... For the time being, the Red Army cannot liberate our enslaved brothers."²²⁴

As the peace negotiations were well under way in Riga, a last attempt to establish an alternative Belarusian statehood was carried out. In September 1920, General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz, a nobleman of mixed Polish, Tatar and Belarusian descent who had fought with Iudenich on the White side

²¹⁹ Snyder (2005) 11-15; Michlic (2006), 65-66.

²²⁰ Snyder (2005) 12-13.

²²¹ Ol'shanskii, *Rizhskii mir*, 150-151

²²² Materski, 41.

²²³ Ol'shanskii, 99, Zen'kovich, 97.

²²⁴ PA IIP pri KPB, f. 60, op. 3, d. 663, l. 45-47, copy. In Shumeiko (ed.), 186.

in the Russian Civil War, drove the Bolsheviks out of Pinsk.²²⁵ The following month Bułak-Bałachowicz tried to organize an uprising in the city, and attacked Bolshevik-held Homel', hoping that a victory would trigger an all-Belarusian uprising. His forces captured Rechitsa, Homel, and Mozyr, as a part of the so-called Slutsk uprising. Bułak-Bałachowicz declared Belarus independent in Mozyr on November 6, 1920, proclaiming himself head of the Belarusian State.²²⁶ This belated attempt to establish a pro-Polish Belarusian republic lasted four days. While the republic adopted the name the Belarusian People's Republic, it is often referred to today as the Koidanovo Independent Republic, after the small village in which it was declared.²²⁷ Bułak-Bałachowicz named his own group the Belarusian Political Committee. Neither Lutskievich's government-in-exile in Warsaw, nor Lastouski's in Kaunas recognized the new formation. Now there were three factions aspiring to be the legitimate leaders of the BPR.²²⁸ Insofar as the Belarusian masses were aware of this sixth declaration of Belarusian statehood in less than three years, it was met with indifference by the war-tired population. Even though Bułak-Bałachowicz attempted to create an army, known as the Belarusian Social Army or the Belarusian Insurgent Army (*Belaruskaia Paustantskaia Armyia*), which had up to 8,000 men and officers, this enterprise soon failed, and Bułak-Bałachowicz retreated across the border into Poland, where he was interned until the peace treaty was signed.²²⁹ The only discernible impact of this uprising was that it halted the Riga Peace Conference for several days.²³⁰

²²⁵ While Bułak – Bałachowicz is sometimes referred to as a Belarusian, the way he presented his mixed ethnic background depended on the circumstances. Piłsudski complained that "Today [Bułak – Bałachowicz] is a Pole, tomorrow he'll be a Russian, the day after, a Belarusian and the following day perhaps an African." Marek Cabanowski *General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz: zapomniany bohater* (Warsaw: PW Mikromax, 1993), 38.

²²⁶ Borzęcki, 157

²²⁷ M. P. Kostuk, *Bol'shevistskaia sistema vlasti v Belarusi* (Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2002), 61. This "republic" also issued BPR postage stamps, which do not appear to have been used.

²²⁸ Oleg Łatyszonek and Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Historia Białorusi: od połowy XVIII do końca XX wieku* (Białystok: Związek Białoruski w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Katedra Kultury Białoruskiej Uniwersytetu w Białymostku, 2002), 146.

²²⁹ Materski, 43, citing TsGASA, F. 1260, op. 2, d. 161, k. 5-7; and I. I. Maidanov, "Razgrom konterrevolutsionnogo banditizma v Belorussii v 1921 godu," *Voprosy istorii* No. 7, 1980, 32. In the 1920s and 30s, Bułak-Bałachowicz came to align himself with the Piłsudski camp, and fought for the Falangists in the Spanish Civil War. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union Bułak-Bałachowicz was "rediscovered" by the Belarusian nationalist opposition, which has come to regard him as a national hero. *Neviadomaia Belarus'/Project Belarus Incognita: Slutski Zbroiny Chyn/The Slutsk Home Guard*, DVD. Directed by Siarhei Isakau Minsk. 2007. Minsk: Siarhei Isakou, 2007.

²³⁰ Borzęcki, 165-167.

The treaty, signed in Riga on March 18, 1921, was controversial. The Polish military conquests were not accepted as legitimate by the governments in London,²³¹ Paris, Moscow, and Kaunas, let alone Poland's Belarusian and Ukrainian minorities.²³² Piłsudski felt compelled to promise significant autonomy to the national minorities, partly in order to improve Poland's image abroad and counter the negative image as an ungrateful aggressor Poland had gained during the war.²³³

The Vil'nia/Wilno Question

According to the so-called Suwałki agreement, reached on October 7, 1920, after talks between the Entente and Poland, Vilna was to belong to Lithuania. Piłsudski strongly disagreed, and told his commanders that "If we do not acquire Wilno, history will not forgive us."²³⁴ Two days later, the Polish army in the Vilna area under the leadership of General Lucjan Żeligowski started an open rebellion and took control of Vilna, expelling the Lithuanian government, which had established itself there following the end of the Polish-Soviet War. The Poles then created a puppet state under their control, known as "Middle Lithuania." The League of Nations mediated, and on November 29, 1920, an armistice was reached between Lithuania and Poland, and it was decided that the legal situation of Vilna should be decided by a plebiscite. The Lithuanian government, the *Taryba*, now relocated to Kaunas, blankly refused to accept this solution. During the talks of arbitration in June 1921 Tsvikovich, who represented the Ministry of Belarusian affairs, and was simultaneously speaking as a representative of the Lithuanian *Taryba* in Kaunas, expressed the desire of the Belarusians of Hrodna and Vilna areas to join Lithuania. This position was backed by the Soviets, who thought that awarding the Vil'nia and Hrodna territories, which the Soviet regarded as ethnically Belarusian, to Lithuania would bring about the collapse of Lithuania as a national state and export of the communist revolution.²³⁵ When Poland refused the Lithuanian claims, the *Taryba* asked the Polish side to renounce their claims to Hrodna in exchange for

²³¹ The position of the British government of Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary Curzon was that Vilna should be given to Lithuania. Cienciala and Komarnicki, 130, 132.

²³² Brown, *A Biography of no Place*, 7.

²³³ Cienciala and Komarnicki, 7, 148, 279.

²³⁴ Chigrinov, 462.

²³⁵ Borzecki, 82-84.

Vilnia.²³⁶ The Polish government unilaterally announced a plebiscite for the Vilna region. The French representative criticized the lack of voter identification and noted that the Lithuanians, Jews, and many Belarusians had abstained from voting.²³⁷ The question of Vilna was finally settled by a vote in the Sejm recognizing the Polish puppet state of “Middle Lithuania” on February 20, 1922, after which the “Provisional Sejm of Middle Lithuania” dissolved itself and declared that the Vilna voivodship would join Poland.²³⁸ The League of Nations concluded that their attempts at mediation had ended in failure. Lithuania, backed by the Soviets and Latvia, stood by the Suwałki accord, protested and continued to consider Vilnius/Vilna its legal and historical capital.

In Poland, the war had weakened Piłsudski and his camp. Piłsudski, the PPS, and the center-left parties close to him reacted with disappointment and bitterness. The PPS complained that the Riga treaty had squandered the chance of Belarusian independence and that the National Democrats had unnecessarily antagonized the Belarusian nationalist elite through the division of Belarus.²³⁹ In the unofficial organ *Przymierze* of the center-left Polish agrarian party *Wyzwolenie*, Tadeusz Hołówko accused Stanisław Grabski of ruining the chance to establish an independent Belarus and Ukraine.²⁴⁰ For their part, the Soviets were bent on redrawing the Soviet-Polish border and did what they could to prevent a full interpretation of the Riga peace treaty.²⁴¹ Over the next five years, the national democrats would dominate the Polish political landscape. Piłsudski’s proposed Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian-Ukrainian federation failed before the war was over.²⁴² The *endecja*-drafted constitution gave the president limited powers, whereupon Piłsudski retired from politics.²⁴³

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Alfred Erich Senn, *The Great Powers, Lithuania and the Vilna Question, 1920-1928, Studien zur Geschichte Osteuropas* 11 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 85.

²³⁸ Chigrinov, 462.

²³⁹ Materski, 45, citing A. Leinwand, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna wobec wojny polso-radzieckiej 1919-1920* (Warsaw, 1964), 227.

²⁴⁰ Materski, 45, citing T. Hołówko, “Skutki pokoju w Rydze,” *Prymierze*, No. 16, November 28, 1920, 3-5.

²⁴¹ Borzęcki, 230-274, 279.

²⁴² Lewandowski (1962), 228.

Conclusion

The seven years between 1914 and 1921 saw almost constant warfare, which exhausted Belarusian territory. The human cost was substantial. There were 6.9 million people in what today constitutes the Republic of Belarus in 1913, but by 1920 the population had fallen to 4.3 million, a decrease of almost 40 per cent.²⁴⁴ At the same time, Belarus witnessed a national renaissance. Between March 1918 and November 1920, Belarusian statehood was proclaimed six times, as various political factions struggled to appropriate Belarusian nationalism for their own agenda.²⁴⁵

With reference to the period 1915-1920, and the subsequent occupations of Belarusian lands, Ernest Gellner's words that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist"²⁴⁶ comes to mind. As evidenced by its struggle to find a proper terminology to define the Belarusians as a collective, the German leadership was not fully convinced of the existence of a Belarusian "nation." The German occupation authorities tolerated the declaration of Belarusian independence, but the German leadership never recognized the BPR. It was not interested primarily in small peoples' right to self-determination, but was guided by *Realpolitik* and strategic aims. That ethnographic principles were a secondary consideration was illustrated by the Germans' recognition of the short-lived United Baltic Duchy, with its capital in Riga, a non-ethnic "state," based on the rule of a small minority of German land owners, lacking the same identity markers as their subjects. A key objective was to consolidate German control of the Eastern Front by isolating Russia and weakening the Polish nationalist movement.

²⁴³ Snyder (2005), 14.

²⁴⁴ Spartak Aliaksandravich Pol'ski (ed.), *Belarusy: Etnaheahrafyia, demahrafyia, dyiaspara, kanfesyi: atlas* (Minsk: Kamitets dziarzhaunykh znakau pry ministerstve finansau Respubliki Belarus, 1996), 3.

²⁴⁵ The declarations of the three, successive Soviet states were made by bodies heavily dominated by, but not exclusively consisting of Bolsheviks. The first Central Executive Committee (TsIK), which was the highest legislative organ between the all-Belarusian Congresses of Soviets elected in February 1919, had 50 members: 45 Bolsheviks, 2 Bundists, 2 members of the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Party Poale Zion, and 1 Menshevik. Chigrinov, 460. The declaration of the "renewal" of SSRB was signed by representatives of the Communist Parties of Belarus and Lithuania, trade unions, Ihnatouski's Belarusian Communist Organization (BKA), and the Jewish Bund. Bryhadzin and Matsias, 26.

²⁴⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1964), 169.

If we accept Max Weber's definition of the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory",²⁴⁷ when assessing the Belarusian People's Republic, it cannot be regarded as a real state. Weber's disclaimer that the claim to monopoly over violence needs to be successful was illustrated by the analogy with the situation on the Eastern Front in 1918. In fact, the BPR lacked most of the attributes associated with statehood. Borders, army, parliament, police, currency, constitution, and codified laws, all important components of any functional state, were missing. A few dozen military uniforms, a handful of different Belarusian stamps, a few foreign information bureaus, and a government with limited responsibilities in an area of foreign occupation does not meet the requirements for statehood. The German, Polish and Russian governments, the countries of the west, and many Belarusian nationalists were acutely aware of this fact. The Belarusian nationalists' assumptions concurred with Max Weber and Leo Trotsky's claim that "Every state is founded on force."²⁴⁸

Brest-Litovsk opened opportunities for the nationalist movement. Lutskevich admitted that the "independence" proclaimed in the declaration of March 25 was limited. Yet, he was aware that it was the *will* to establish statehood that mattered, and that even if popular support for independence was still lacking, March 25 increased the legitimacy of the nationalist claims in the eyes of the Entente. "We do not have our own army or money. One after another, the Entente has begun to recognize new states, who, even though they were created by the Germans (such as Lithuania), have demonstrated an ability to maintain a state. If we do not demonstrate such ability, we will lose."²⁴⁹ Moreover, the declaration of independence in 1918, had important political ramifications for Belarus. Not only did it provide a significant impetus for the nationalist movement and Belarusian national identity, after 1918 it became much harder to deny the existence of Belarus and the Belarusian language, even among leading communists. A foundation for nation building had been laid. If the BPR failed to mobilize the critical

²⁴⁷ Weber (1958), 78.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Reznik, 34, citing A. Lutskevich, *Belarus*' No. 12, November 2, 1919.

mass of nationalist believers at the grass-roots level, it impelled Russian leaders to establish a Belarusian Soviet Republic. A consensus was emerging within the Bolshevik leadership as well as local Bolsheviks that the creation of a national homeland for Belarusians must be a priority.

Until 1917, the Bolsheviks assumed that following a socialist revolution, the peoples within the Russian Empire would no longer be interesting in secession, but voluntarily join the socialist republic. In April 1917, following the fall of tsarism, Stalin mused that nine-tenths of the peoples of the Russian empire would not want to secede.²⁵⁰ “The Bolsheviks did not hesitate to use arms to enforce their erroneous assumption that a centralized state would evolve more or less spontaneously after the socialist revolution,” writes Gerhard Simon.²⁵¹ However, they were taken by surprise by the strength of the local nationalisms. Stalin himself admitted in 1924 that the national movements proved “considerably more influential” than he had imagined before the revolution.²⁵² Faced with unexpectedly strong nationalist sentiment, the Bolsheviks showed a great deal of political skill and flexibility. The fact that the Bolsheviks appeared prepared to make significant concessions to the nationalities, in sharp contrast to the White forces’ uncompromising dedication to a “one and indivisible Russia,” contributed to their victory in the Civil War.²⁵³ The March 25 declaration of independence should be seen against this backdrop. While it was a symbolic action with few practical consequences, it influenced the leadership in Moscow to establish a Belarusian Soviet republic. In 1924, Vilhel'm Knoryn, the leader of the KP(b)B, wrote that the existence of the BPR had convinced the Soviet leaders that the Belarusian claims to independence were legitimate.

The period of German occupation was at the same time a period of absorption by the masses of the idea of Belarussian independence, to which the Party should have given its attention. Under these circumstances the Party organizations of Moscow and Smolensk became convinced almost simultaneously that the establishment of the Belarussian republic was necessary immediately.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, translated by Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 21.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 21.

²⁵² Ibid., 22.

²⁵³ Ibid., 21.

²⁵⁴ Mienski, 18, citing V. Knoryn, *Kamunistychnaia partyia na Belarusi* (Miensk: Bielarus, 1924), 219.

March 25 showed that there was now existed a movement which imagined Belarus as a separate nation, articulating its agenda in the name of that nation. To the diaspora and the anti-Soviet nationalist movement in Western Belarus, March 25 entered the canon of Belarusian national myths as the most important moment in Belarusian history –the day the Belarusians proved their desire and capacity to create their own state.²⁵⁵ Soviet-era textbooks referred to the Rada's leaders as counterrevolutionary demagogues, while diaspora and nationalist textbooks refer to the Bolsheviks as anational outsiders and stooges of Russia, who relied on brute force and terror to impose their will.²⁵⁶ Insofar as Soviet historiography even mentioned the BPR, it condemned it as a failed attempt by bourgeois nationalists to divide the Slavic brothers.²⁵⁷ First Secretary Piotr Masherau described the Rada as “counterrevolutionaries, Belarusian bourgeois nationalists, who attempted to cut off the Belarusian people from the workers of Russia under the flag of “self-determination,” and return it to the slavery under the landowners and capitalists.”²⁵⁸ True Belarusian sovereignty could be achieved only within the Soviet Union, Masherau claimed: “The BSSR’s entrance into the brotherly family of Soviet republics immeasurably strengthened the sovereignty of the Belarusian people, which was safeguarded by all the political, economic and military might of the Soviet Union.”²⁵⁹ In the BSSR a different set of national myths developed over the decades, primarily built around the heroism in the Great Patriotic War.²⁶⁰ The rhetoric from the Lukashenka regime largely follows this narrative, presenting the BSSR as the first real

²⁵⁵ Törnquist-Plewa (2001), 56. In her address to her “dear Belarusian brothers and sisters,” on the occasion of the 88th anniversary of its declaration, the current president of the BPR Rada, Ivonka Survilla, emphasized that March 25 “is our greatest holiday, the day of pride, because on this day the people informed the world that they want to be free and independent after long-time bondage.” Ivonka Survilla, “Adkryty List Da Belaruskaha Narodu,” <http://www.belarus-misc.org/bnr-2000.htm>. (Accessed June 21, 2006)

²⁵⁶ Mienski, 10-13.

²⁵⁷ I. Kovkel, N. Stashkevich, *Why was the BPR Never Formed?: (From a History of Political Bankruptcy of Nationalistic Counter-Revolution in Byelorussia, 1918-1925)* (Minsk: Holas Radzimy, 1984).

²⁵⁸ Piotr Masherau, “O 100-letii so dnia rozhdeniya Vladimira Ilichia Lenina: Doklad na torzhestvom zasedanii TsK Kompartii Belorussii i Verkhovnogo Soveta Belarusskoi SSR 18 aprelia 1970 goda,” in P. M. Masherov, *Izbrannye rechi i stat'i* (Minsk: “Belarus,” 1982), 60-61.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 37.

²⁶⁰ Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, ””Enade vi stod”??: Postsovjetiska berättelser om andra världskriget i Vitryssland,” *Nordisk Øst-forum*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2004): 325-344; Per A. Rudling, ”The Great Patriotic War and National Identity in Belarus” in Tomasz Kamusella and Krzysztof Jaksulowski (eds.), *Nationalisms Across the Globe, volume I: Nationalisms Today* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009): 199-225; Nordberg and Kuzio (1998), 380.

state in Belarusian history.²⁶¹ The lasting result of the tumultuous years around 1920 was the establishment of two irreconcilable historiographical traditions, two rival national myths. The absence of a common, unifying mythology would come to have a lasting, adverse effect on national mobilization.

²⁶¹ Tamara Guzenkova, “Etnonatsional’nye problemy v uchebnikakh po istorii (na primere Ukrayiny, Belarusi i nekotorykh respublik Rossiiskoi Federatsii),” in K. Aimermakher, G. Bordiugov (eds.), *Natsional’nye istorii v sovetskikh gosudarstvakh* (Moscow: Airo-XX, 1999), 130-131; Kotljarchuk (2004), 56. However, in the past two years this has slowly started to change. In March, 2007 the Belarusian authorities celebrated the March 25, 1918 declaration of independence as part of a campaign to shore up support for the regime by appealing to national sentiments, after facing political pressure from Russia. David R. Marples, “The Launching of a Patriotic Movement in Belarus.” *Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation*, July 10, 2007. In 2008, pro-government papers took an interest in the history of the BPR and published a number of articles on the topic. See, for instance *Sovetskaia Belorussiia* March 22, 2008.

Chapter 4

Nationalities Policy in Soviet Belarus: Affirmative Action, Belarusization, and *Korenizatsiia*.

My parents, and probably others, remembered the 1920s as the best years of their lives, though that golden age was a very short period.

Vasyl Bykaŭ¹

The re-establishment of the SSRB in 1920 was accompanied by nation-building policies, aimed at shoring up support for Soviet rule. The division of Belarus between Poland and the Soviets as a result of the Riga treaty was a serious setback to the Belarusian national movement, which had witnessed a significant growth in national consciousness in the wake of the revolutions of 1917. The Polish-Soviet War ended in a peace that left all parties dissatisfied. Soviet Russia was forced to accept the Polish conquest of large areas to the east of the Curzon line, populated by Ukrainians and Belarusians. The Polish leadership had to accept that Russia was now in the hands of a hostile, revolutionary regime, which actively promoted a communist revolution in Poland. The Polish state itself was exhausted, weak and fractured. The result of Riga was neither the Polish-led Lithuanian-Belarusian-Ukrainian federation Piłsudski had hoped for, nor the *endecja*'s vision of an ethnic Polish nation-state. Lithuania bitterly resented the Polish annexation of the Vil'nia area, something that led to a twenty-year freeze of Polish-Lithuanian relations. The Bolsheviks and the Lithuanian government in Kaunas realized the potential offered by this environment of uncertainty, resentment, and suspicion. They both made approaches to the disgruntled Belarusian and Ukrainian national movements, hoping to destabilize the Polish state. Frustrated with their failures to establish lasting Ukrainian and Belarusian states, the Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalist elites responded well to the courtship from Moscow and Kaunas. Having seen their national projects halted, they tried to take advantage of the Polish-Soviet rivalry to bring about a national renaissance among their respective peoples.

This chapter is a study of Soviet nationality policy in Soviet Belarus – its origins, aims, and implementation. The main questions addressed are: What was the main impetus behind the policy to create Soviet Belarus? To what extent was the Soviet government successful in its aim of creating a

¹ Zina J. Gimpelevich, *Vasil Bykaŭ: His Life and Works* (Montreal & Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 136.

viable Belarusian republic? What obstacles did the republican leadership face in attempting to establish a national republic in a multi-ethnic region in which the majority population was still unfamiliar with the concepts of ethnic and linguistic nationalism? Looking at the logic behind the nationality policy, this chapter discusses official quadrilingualism and the policies of the joint policies of Belarusization/Yiddishization/Polonization, and *korenizatsiia*. It introduces the leading national communists, their political platforms and their programs to “nationalize” the republic through education and the creation of national symbolism.

The Assumptions behind the BSSR’s Nationality Policy

Karl Marx called the national question “the sore tooth of the German Social Democracy.”²

During the 1910s and 1920s, Stalin and Lenin, the two main architects of the nationalities policies of the early Soviet period, tended to interpret nationalism as a reaction to colonialism and oppressive tsarist policies aimed at advancing Russian culture at the expense of the non-Russian peoples in the empire.³ They had been very impressed by the role of nationalism in the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, and concluded that the nationalist threat was to be taken seriously.⁴ Both believed that the most effective way to counteract nationalism was to address the source of discontent – national oppression. If legitimate concerns of national oppression were addressed, the Bolshevik leadership reasoned, nationalism would lose its appeal, and national consciousness would instead be superseded by class consciousness. Stalin did not think that nationalism necessarily had to stand in opposition to socialism, but rather was something that could be “disarmed by granting the forms of nationhood.”⁵

In the wake of the tenth party congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921, the Central Bureau of the KP(b)B established that “Only after the ending of the foremost danger – the influence of imperial chauvinism, colonizers, and Great Russian chauvinism – will the influence of bourgeois-

² Feduta, *Lukashenka*, 75.

³ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001), 32.

⁴ Suny and Martin, “Introduction” in Suny and Martin (eds.) *A State of Nations*, 8.

⁵ Martin (2001), 8.

democratic nationalism recede.”⁶ The Soviet authorities perceived Belarusian nationalism as a reaction to Great Russian chauvinism, something they regarded as a far more dangerous threat than nationalist sentiments among the smaller peoples.⁷ But while the Bolsheviks believed in the existence of a Belarusian nation, they were worried that national consciousness would prevail and distract the proletariat from its class interests. Ernest Gellner famously parodied this logic as the “wrong-address theory” of nationalism: “Just as extreme Shi’ite Muslims hold that Archangel Gabriel made a mistake, delivering the Message to Mohammed when it was intended for Ali, so Marxists basically like to think that the spirit of history or human consciousness made a terrible boob. The wakening message was intended for *classes*, but by some terrible postal error was delivered to *nations*.⁸

The Bolsheviks believed it possible to construct a national consciousness of a socialist kind, national in form, but socialist in content. To implement this, the Party wanted to develop the cultures of the minority nationalities of the Soviet Union through the establishment of schools, theatres, and other cultural institutions in the native languages of the newly established Soviet republics. Local government, unions, cooperatives, and Communist Parties were to be “national,” i.e. dominated by the titular nationalities of the various republics.⁹ The Bolsheviks accepted the Herderian idea of language as the most important component of national culture and central to the development of national culture. Linking the Soviet project to national aspirations, the creation of national republics and the promotion of minority languages were seen as necessary steps to win over the peasant masses, which were thought not yet ready to identify with socialism.¹⁰

⁶ *Pastanovy i rezaliutsyi UseKP(b) i KP(b) na natsyianal’nym pytanni* (Miensk, 1926), 84-88, in R. P. Platonav and U. K. Korshuk (eds.), *Belarusizatsiya 1920-ia hady: Dakumenty i materyialy* (Minsk: Belaruski Dzerzhauny Universitet, 2001), 44.

⁷ Ibid., 44; Lindner (1999), 151.

⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 129.

⁹ Zen’kovich, *Granitsy. Spory. Obidy* (2005), 185.

¹⁰ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923* (Houndsmill, UK and New York: MacMillan’s, 1999), 27.

“The multi-million masses of people can be successful in the spheres of cultural, political and economical development only in their native, national languages,” Stalin claimed.¹¹ This idea was merged with positivist assumptions of “higher” and “lower” levels of cultural development, inherent in Marx’ political philosophy.

As a fully developed nation, according to Stalin, required a common language, territory, economic life, and “physical disposition manifested in a community of culture,” the Belarusians’ status as a “nation” could be questioned.¹² Since Stalin considered that a “tribe” and “race” could not fulfill all four of these characteristics, the status of the Belarusians as a nation was problematic. In particular, the Bolsheviks paid attention to territory, which was an essential requirement for their central policy of national self-determination. The Bolsheviks wished to maintain and retain ethno-linguistic segregation as a way to promote cultural autonomy. As Terry Martin has shown, the Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s was uncompromising in its hostility to assimilation, even if it was completely voluntary.¹³ Yuri Slezkine argues that the Soviet state originally promoted *ethnophilia*, love for all things ethnic, and goes as far as to assert that “Soviet nationality policy was devised and carried out by nationalists. Lenin’s acceptance of the reality of nations and “national rights” was one of the most uncompromising positions he ever took.”¹⁴

Lenin and Stalin, and indeed most of the Bolshevik leadership did not need the March 25 declaration to be convinced about the existence of a separate Belarusian ethnicity or that the Belarusians had the right to self-determination. As coauthors of the Affirmative Action Empire, they were already believers.¹⁵ It is plausible, however, that the symbolic declaration of independence had an impact on communist officials, among whom opposition to the creation of a Belarusian republic had been

¹¹ Zen’kovich, 199.

¹² I. V. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1950), 51.

¹³ Martin (2001), 32.

¹⁴ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 203.

¹⁵ Martin (2001), 395.

significant.¹⁶ The German promotion of “national” cultural institutions in occupied Belarus facilitated a cultural revolution that culminated in the declaration of the BPR in 1918. Belarusian nationalism was revitalized. In response to the many Belarusian papers that appeared under the German occupation, Stalin and the Bolshevik leadership began promoting papers in the Belarusian language in a number of cities under Bolshevik control. In Kyiv, the paper *Belaruskae Slovo* (*The Belarusian Word*) and *Belaruskae Ecko* (*The Belarusian Echo*) were published, and in Odessa *Belarusy u Adessi* (*Belarusians in Odessa*). Moscow was the location of *Dzianitsia* (*The Morning*)¹⁷ and in Petrograd was issued *Chervoni Shliakh* (*The Red Path*). While these papers were Bolshevik propaganda vehicles,¹⁸ the fact that they were published in the Belarusian language reinforced the perception that the language was suitable for propaganda and governance.

The Bolshevik leadership broke sharply with the Imperial Russian dictum, famously espoused by Kliuchevskii, that there existed no separate Ukrainian or Belarusian nations. The concessions to the nationalists were a tactical move rather than a sincere belief in the necessity of dividing up humanity into nations. In the long run, Lenin assumed that capitalism would lead to the assimilation of nationalities. In 1913, he had described “the process of assimilation of nations by capitalism [as] the greatest historical progress,” and noted with satisfaction the assimilation of Ukrainian and Russian workers in the cities of Ukraine and compared it to the assimilation of immigrants in the United States.¹⁹ This was a position shared by Stalin, who in 1913 noted that

A minority is discontented not because there is no national union, but because it does not enjoy the right to use its native language ... A minority is discontented ... because it does not enjoy liberty of conscience (freedom of religion), liberty of movement, etc. Give it these liberties and it will cease to be discontented.²⁰

¹⁶ As early as September 1918, at the Third Congress of the Western District of the RSFSR, which claimed to represent the working people of the Belarusian territories, now under German occupation, several high-profile communists, among them the leader of the communists in the Western District, A. F. Miasnikov, were reluctant to accept a Belarusian republic and argued instead for the merging of nations, and the absorption of Belarus into Russia. Zen'kovich, 90; Shumeiko et al (eds.) *Po vole naroda*, 239f.

¹⁷ In 1916, there had been a paper by the same name in Petrograd, alongside the Belarusian journal *S'vetach*, but they were both suppressed by the tsarist censors after the seventh issue. Mienski, “The Establishment of the Belorussian SSR,” 7.

¹⁸ Von Engelhardt, *Weissruthenien*, 113.

¹⁹ Vladimir Ilich Lenin, “Kriticheskie zametki po natsional’nomu voprosu,” in *Sochineniya*, Second edition, Vol. XVII (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1930), 140-143.

Soviet anthropologists rejected the denial of the existence of human races as a “subjective-idealistic position.” They considered human races a result of the geographical isolation of pre-class societies. This belief was accompanied by the positivist notion that through the evolution of humankind from primitive societies, from feudalism to class-based societies, races would mix, and racial distinctions become less pronounced and eventually disappear altogether.²¹ The Bolsheviks agreed that concerns about national oppression voiced by the nationalist movements were legitimate. They feared that nationalism could be used against Soviet power by diverting the working class from its class interest. Stalin stated that “The national flag is sewn on only to deceive the masses, as a popular flag, a convenience for covering up the counter-revolutionary plans of the national bourgeoisie.” He continued: “If bourgeois circles attempt to give a national tint to our conflicts, then it is only because it is convenient to hide their battle for power behind a national costume.”²²

But although they were concerned that nationalism could be used against them, the Bolsheviks also realized the potential in using nationalism for their own purposes. They had seen how Imperial Germany’s strategy of encouraging local nationalisms had helped it to gain the support of the national intelligentsias in many occupied territories in the east. The assumption that a generous minorities policies would help strengthen the new states of East-Central Europe was also a central aspect of Wilsonian liberalism and a guiding principle at the Versailles Peace Conference. Like Lenin, Woodrow Wilson attributed irredentism to states’ mistreatment of their minorities, believing that liberal minority policies were more likely to win the loyalties of the national minorities than alienate them. At Versailles Woodrow Wilson had the following exchange with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George concerning the Jewish question in Poland:

LLOYD GEORGE: [T]he Jews ... wish to form a kind of state within the state. Nothing could be more dangerous...In any case...provisions must be imposed upon the Poles. There is obviously something to be said to justify the hostile feeling of the Poles against the Jews. M. Paderewski told

²⁰ I. V. Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” in *Sochineniya*, Vol. II (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1946), 363.

²¹ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 264-265.

²² Martin (2001), 4, citing Josef Stalin, “Politika sovetskoi vlasti po natsional’nomu voprosu v Rossii” (1918) in *Marksizm i natsional’no-kolonial’nyi vopros* (Moscow, 1934), 54 and “Vystupleniia na III vserossiiskom s”ezde,” 31.

me that, during the war, the Jews of Poland were by turns for the Germans, for the Russians, for the Austrians, and very little for Poland herself.

WILSON: It is the result of long persecution. The Jews of the United States are good citizens.... Our wish is to bring them back everywhere under the terms of the law of the land.²³

The British delegates at Versailles relied on their own experiences of dealing with their Jewish and Welsh minorities, trying to apply these experiences to resolve the nationalities question in Eastern Europe. Yet, these national minorities were well-integrated into the British mainstream and the language of the majority and identified with Great Britain. With regard to minorities and autonomy, the balance was delicate. While the American and British delegates at Versailles were prepared to implement policies that would safeguard national and cultural autonomy for the national minorities, they were not prepared to allow for the creation of ‘states within states’.²⁴

During the first part of the 1920s, Stalin considered “Great Russian chauvinism” as the main threat to the inter-ethnic relations in the Soviet Union.

Great Power chauvinism is growing in our country daily and hourly – Great Power chauvinism, the rankest kind of nationalism, which strives to obliterate all that is not Russian, to gather together all the threads of administration into the hands of Russians and to crush everything that is not Russian.²⁵

Terry Martin calls the assumption that Great Russian chauvinism was more dangerous than the suppressed nationalisms of the national minorities the “greatest danger principle.”²⁶ At the Tenth Congress of the VKP(b) in 1921, when confronted with accusations that the Belarusian nation was an artificially cultivated figment of the imagination,²⁷ Stalin responded that “it is not true, for there exists a Belarusian nation, which has its own language, different from Russian. Consequently, the culture of the Belarusian people can be raised only in its native language.”²⁸

²³ Arthur S. Link, *The Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24-June 28, 1919). Notes of the Official Interpreter*, Paul Mantoux. Volume I, Translated and edited by Arthur S. Link (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 440.

²⁴ Maccartney, National States and National Minorities, 282.

²⁵ Josef Stalin, “Report on National Factors in Party and State” (1923), cited in Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: its history and ideology. Second, Revised Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 229.

²⁶ Martin (2001), 268.

²⁷ William M. Mandel, *Soviet but not Russian: The ‘Other’ Peoples of the Soviet Union* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), 356.

National Symbolism

Norwegian political scientist Øyvind Østerud argues that the process of nation building is the sum of direct and indirect means in the development of a national community: institutions, common symbols, communication, education, and cultural characteristics.²⁹ Soviet statehood required national symbols, heraldics, and rituals. The Belarusian People's Republic had established a three-band white-red-white flag, and a modified version of the coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It appears the Soviets took less interest in national symbolism. For LitBel a plain red flag was used, while the coat of arms utilized five languages.³⁰ From 1919 to 1927, SSRB/BSSR used a coat of arms virtually identical to that of the RSFSR. As the republic grew through the addition of territories in 1924 and 1926, the BSSR government arranged a competition for a new coat of arms. The winning entry, adopted at the VIII all-Belarusian Congress of Soviets on April 11, 1927, featured wreaths of oak leaves and wheat, covered by clovers. The center of the emblem depicted a sun rising over the earth. A hammer, sickle and red star appears over the sun. Around the ears of wheat and leaves of oak is a red ribbon, featuring the phrase "Proletarians of the World, Unite!" in the four official languages.³¹ The initials B.S.S.R are shown at its base denoting the name of the republic.³² FIGURE 21.

In 1927-1938, the BSSR coat of arms was quadrilingual and displayed three different alphabets.³³ The official symbols manifested the regime's intentions that the republic be a national home, not only to

²⁸ M. P. Kastsuk, I. M. Ihnatsenka, U. I. Vyshynski et al., *Narysy historyi Belarusi: U 2 ch. Ch. 2* (Minsk: Belarus, 1995), 117, citing *Desyatyi s'ezd RKP(b). Mart 1921goda. Stenograficheskiy otchet* (Moscow 1963), 213; Joseph Stalin, *Works*, Vol. V (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 48-49.

²⁹ Øyvind Østerud, *Hva er nasjonalisme?* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1994), 24.

³⁰ Ihnatsenka (ed.) et al., 149.

³¹ The original Belarusian text read *Proletaryi usikh kraeu, zluchaitsesia!* The spelling and writing reform of 1933 would not have an impact on the design of the coat of arms until much later. Only in 1958 was the Belarusian inscription changed to read *Proletaryi usikh krai, iadnaitesia!* After 1958 there would not be any changes to the coat arms until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. When this coat of arms was reintroduced in modified form of 1995, the slogan was removed. Viktar Siarheevich Smitannikou, *Belarusnausta: Vuchebna-mata. dapam. dla vykladchykau siarednikh spetsial'nykh ustyanou* (Minsk: Belaruskaia navuka, 1998), 115.

³² Smitannikou, 115, 125; Dmitri Semuschin, "Wappen und Staatsymbolik der Weißrussen vom Mittelalter bis in die Gegenwart" in Dietrich Beyrau and Rainer Linder (eds.) *Handbuch der Geschichte Weißrusslands* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 60; Kotljarchuk, "The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood" (2004), 58-62; I. M. Ihnatsenka (ed) et al. *Historiyia Belaruskai SSR u piatsi tamakh. Tom 3: Peramoha vialikai kastrachnitskai satsyialistychnai revaliotsyi i pabudova satsyializmu u BSSR (1917-1937 hh.)* (Minsk: Vydatstva "Navuka i tekhnika, 1973), 148.

the majority Belarusian population, but to the national minorities as well. The colors of the national symbols of Belarus, red and green, had deep historical roots. In addition to being the color of socialism, the red color on the Belarusian state symbols also represented the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Supposedly, these colors were also “etymologically connected” to the ancient Kryvichi.³⁴ On March 9, 1927, it had been announced that the “unofficial” national anthem of Belarus, *Ad veku my spali*, would be officially demoted from “hymn” to “Marseilles,” while the text of the *Internationale* would be translated into Belarusian and the lyrics mass produced.³⁵

Yet, the final status of the SSRB was not yet determined. In August 1922, Stalin proposed the inclusion of Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan as autonomous republics within the RSFSR. Later that fall, Lenin proposed a union state of republics, to which Stalin conceded.³⁶ The abbreviation SSRB was changed to BSSR as the republic joined the Soviet Union as one of four founding members on December 30, 1922. Appeals to Belarusian patriotism and “national interest” were used to reach a political consensus and overcome various disagreements.³⁷ The building of a centralizing Belarusian state followed patterns similar to that of the nation building of the new national states in 19th century Europe. The policies set out to construct a national consciousness strong enough to override local, religious and class loyalties. For this purpose, the Bolsheviks set up nationalizing institutions, utilizing political education and systematic propaganda.³⁸

In the 1920s, it remained a problem for the modernists, nationalists, and Bolsheviks alike, that the vast majority of the Belarusian masses retained pre-modern identities, identifying with religion rather than

³³ Smiatannikou, 125.

³⁴ Ibid., 115, citing A. Mikhal’chanka, *Sovietskaia Belorussia*, October 13, 1989, 2.

³⁵ “Pastanova Biuro TsK KP(b)B ‘Ab Belaruskai ‘Marsel’eze’”, March 9, 1927. NARB, f. 4p. vop. 3. spr. 20, ch. p. 1. 377, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 174.

³⁶ Lev Vladimirovich Metelitsa, *Rastsvet i sblizhenie sotsialisticheskikh natsii: Posobie dlia uchitelei*. (Moscow: “Prosveshchenie,” 1978), 83-84.

³⁷ There was little that was new in this official use of state patriotism, which showed many similarities with other examples of state formation in the late 19th century. See for instance Geoff Eley “State Formation, Nationalism, and Political Culture: Some Thoughts on the Unification of Germany,” in Geoff Eley (ed.), *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 68.

³⁸ Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9.

ethno-linguistic association. The nationalists of the BPR, in the absence of “real” state institutions that could re-mould the identities of the masses through schooling, military conscription, and other forms of mass mobilization, relied on propaganda and volunteers to install an “ethnic” Belarusian identity. The Bolsheviks, however, commanding a monolithic state, were able to use the government to impose an ethnic identity on the Belarusian masses. To change people’s identity was a massive undertaking, a challenge even to the totalizing Bolshevik state. Yet, the fact that the Belarusian masses lacked an awareness of their own ethnicity was not going to stop the Soviet enterprise in nation-building. After all, the level of national awareness in Belarus did not differ significantly from that of Western Europe a century earlier. In France, less than 50 percent of the people spoke French at the time of the 1789 revolution, and only 12 to 13 percent spoke it correctly. In Italy the number of Italian-speakers at the time of the unification was 2.5 per cent. In the German lands of the 18th century, not even 500,000 people could read and speak the vernacular language which we now know as standard German.³⁹ The former prime minister of Piedmont, the Italian nationalist Massimo D’Azeglio, famously remarked that “[w]e have now made Italy: now we must make Italians.”⁴⁰

As in prior cases of nation-building in Europe, a single, standardized education system became a key factor in producing a new national consciousness. It created reliable and predictable standards for what was important, what ought to be learned, and how. A French minister of education, reflecting on the success of French public education, remarked that “he could consult his watch at any moment, of the day and say whether every child in France, of a given age, would be doing long division, reading Corneille, or conjugating... verbs.”⁴¹

³⁹ Eley and Suny, 7; Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream: How Europe’s Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2004) 170, citing Ferdinand Brunot ed, *Histoire de la langue française*. 13 vols. (Paris, 1927-43); Tullio de Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita* (Bar, 1963), 41; H. Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1700-1815* (Munich, 1987), 305.

⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 267.

⁴¹ Rifkin, 169, citing Lawrence Wright. *Clockwork Man* (New York: Horizon Press, 1969), 121.

Appropriating History for the Belarusian Soviet Cause

In order to mobilize the masses for the new Soviet Belarusian statehood, the government in Minsk attempted to appropriate Belarusian history for the Soviet cause. This was not unique. Every European nation-state of the modern era has created myths of its background and origins, complete with its own heroes, past trials and tribulations, as well as moments of past glories, memorialized in rituals, symbols, and history writing. The aspiring nation-states had to construct a powerful image of a people with a heroic and ancient past, destined for future greatness. Political movements across Europe often adopted a similar rhetoric. In Scandinavia, the Social Democratic movements were able to consolidate their power by claiming to be the most legitimate representatives of the nation.⁴² Hitler relied on an expansive and racist *Volksgemeinschaft*. Roosevelt's New Deal evoked a rhetoric of national destiny and based its aims for social solidarity on a tradition with Christian undertones.⁴³ During the 1920s, the Belarusian national communists tried to claim the Belarusian "national" history for Soviet Belarus, as the legitimate heir and representative of the Belarusian national tradition. Early Belarusian "patriots" such as Kalinouski (despite his Polish nationality), and the *Nasha Niva* circle, represented by Iakub Kolas and Ianka Kupala, were claimed as parts of a Belarusian national historical continuity, which had found its first authentic expression in the BSSR.⁴⁴ In the 1920s, both Ihnatouski and Dounar-Zapol'ski described the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as "an achievement of the Belarusian people... While the ruler was Lithuanian, the culture and learning were dominated by Belarusians."⁴⁵

⁴² Rickard Lindström, the secretary of the Swedish Social Democratic Party in the 1920s and 1930s, claimed that in an ethnically homogenous nation state, such as Sweden, the national idea was the natural basis on which the labor movement could build. The problem had not been nationalism per se, but rather that the working class had been left out of the national project. "The working class has, through its entire striving, consciously or unconsciously been based on a national consciousness." Thus, the main goal of Swedish Social Democracy was to realize the national idea and turn Sweden into a fatherland for the working class. Henrik Berggren and Lars Trädgårdh, *År svenska mäniska?: Gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige* (Stockholm: Norsteds, 2006) 201-203, citing Rickard Lindström, "Socialism, nation och stat" in Alf W Johansson (ed.) *Vad är Sverige?* (Stockholm: Prisma, 2001), 294.

⁴³ Berggren and Trädgårdh, 206.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Ivanovich Picheta, *Osnovnye momenty istoricheskogo razvitiia Zapadnoi Ukrayiny i Zapadnoi Belorussii*. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1940), 117-119.

⁴⁵ U. Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys historyi Belarusi* (Minsk, 1926) 80, as cited in Lindner *Historiker und Herrschaft* (1999), 253-254.

National commemorations of important dates often took on a teleological character, portraying the establishment of the BSSR as an historical mission.⁴⁶ To “non-historical people” such as the Belarusians, the establishment of historical continuity through precedents was an important component of the quest to establish historical legitimacy for the idea of Belarusian statehood. In 1925 the TsK of the KP(b) ordered massive celebrations of the upcoming 400th anniversary of “Belarusian” book printing in 1926. The celebrations were to emphasize the role of the press “in the liberation of the workers,” and to “link the question of the role of the press in the 4th centennial with class struggle of our era.” The celebrations included spelling competitions, the erection of monuments, and renaming of schools and streets in Miensk and Polatsk.⁴⁷ Not only was 1926 the four hundredth anniversary of “Belarusian” book printing, but also the twentieth anniversary of both *Nasha Dolia* and *Nasha Niva*, the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Belarusian State University, twenty years of Jakub Kolas’ literary production, twenty-five years of Picheta’s scientific research, and his fifth anniversary as rector of the Belarusian State University.⁴⁸ These dates were all presented as landmarks in Belarusian history, and commemorated by impressive official celebrations. Cultural events commemorated the works of Vsevalod Ihnatouski, Ianka Kupala, and Iakub Kolas. Theaters, clubs and libraries across the country staged cultural events in the Belarusian, Yiddish, and Polish languages. Belarusian commemorations were accompanied by mobilization of crowds, festive music, marches, and solemn speeches on the importance of these dates to the formation of the Belarusian nation. These ritualized celebrations resembled patriotic celebrations in other young European nation-states. The inaugurations of national monuments were linked to national festivals, patriotic choral singing, planting of trees – to show the longevity of the nation – and other

⁴⁶ A well-known Romanian joke on this ritualized and teleological celebration of dates in the history of the Romanian Communist Party went the following way: “What do we celebrate on May 8, 1821? One hundred years until the founding of the Romanian Communist Party.” Verdery, *National Ideology*, 250.

⁴⁷ “Pastanova sakrataryiata TsK KP(b)B ‘Ab sviatkavanni 400-hoddzia Belaruskaha druku’”, October 2, 1925. NARB. F 4-p. Vop. 16. Spr. 10, L. 142. Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 142-143.

⁴⁸ “Pastanova kamisii pa praviadzenni sviatkovannia 5-hoddzia Beldzerzhuniversiteta i ab plane iubileinykh merapryemstvau,” NARB. F. 4-p. Vop. 3. Spr. 11. L. 347-348, Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 155-157, “Pastanova Biuro TsK KP(b)B ‘Ab sviatkovanni 20-hoddzia z dnia vykhadu pershai Belaruskai hazety ‘Nasha Dolia’”, September 6, 1926. NARB. F. 4-p. Vop. 3. Spr. 11. L. 342. Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 19, 158-159.

activities aimed at making the monuments “come alive.”⁴⁹ In the words of Eric Hobsbawm, “Nationalism is a ‘civic religion’ for the modern territorial-centralized state, and a mode of confronting social changes which appear to threaten and disrupt certain aspects of complex social relationships.”⁵⁰

The “nationalization” of the BSSR was a project ridden with serious contradictions. While the establishment of Belarusian cultural and national autonomy was seen as imperative to solidify Bolshevik control of the republic, the Bolsheviks were conscious of the dangers linked to the replacing of forced Russification with Belarusization, which ran the risk of stirring up opposition among the republic’s national minorities. Therefore, the policy of Belarusization was accompanied by similar policies of Yiddishization and Polonization of the national minorities in the titular Belarusian republic. At the same time, the lack of Belarusian cadres in Soviet Belarus was so acute that even during the most frantic period of *korenizatsiia* the top positions in the soviets and party were occupied by non-Belarusians.⁵¹ While Latvians, Jews, Poles, or for that matter Georgians and Armenians were well represented in the Bolshevik movement, there were almost no Belarusian Bolshevik revolutionaries in leading positions.⁵²

The national communists considered it an important task to wrest the initiative over history writing and the establishment of national rituals out of the hands of the non-Marxist nationalist movement in Western Belarus. The BPR government in exile and *Belaruskaia Krynička* were involved in a similar nation-building enterprise, initially rejecting Bolshevik rule as a foreign occupation by the Red Army. Associating the BSSR with “Muscovite” dominance, they rarely forgot to point out that the KP(b)B was

⁴⁹ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Fertig, 1975) 63-65. Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” 277, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ Geoff Eley, “State Formation, Nationalism, and Political Culture: Some Thoughts on the Unification of Germany,” in Geoff Eley (ed.) *From Unification to Nazism*, 81.

⁵¹ Until 1956, the only Belarusians to head the KP(b)B were Danila Volkovich and Vasilii Sharangovich, who headed the party for the first half of 1937, during the *yezhovshchina*, before being shot themselves. During this period, the party was led by one Armenian, Miasnikov; one Lithuanian, Mitskiavichus-Kapsukas; one Latvian, Knorin; one Pole, Bahutski;; a Czech, Hamarik; one Estonian, Hei; two Jews, Henkin and Iakovlev; four Russians, Asatkin-Vladimirskii, Krynički, Hikalo, Volkov, and one Ukrainian, Ponomarenko. E. G. Ioffe, *Ot Miasnikova do Malofeeva*, 6, 80-87, 124; Symon Kandybovich, *Razhrom natsyianal'naha rukhu u Belarusi* (Minsk: Belarusski Histrychny Ahliad, 2000), 33-35.

⁵² Zen’kovich, somewhat superficially explains this by claiming that “the Bolshevik *Weltanschaung* was foreign to the flexible Belarusian nation.” Zen’kovich, 325.

led by non-Belarusians.⁵³ This made the recruitment of ethnic Belarusian cadres an important aim for the Bolsheviks.

Soviet Belarusian Nation-Builders

Many nationally conscious Belarusian and Yiddish activists found the Soviet nationalities policies highly appealing. The early BSSR government was able to enlist the support of a number of capable politicians and intellectuals, among them Anton Balitski, Z'mitser Zhylunovich and Usevalod Ihnatouski, the future president of the Belarusian Academy of Science. The Belarusian national communists espoused the idea that Belarus needed to depart from both the Polish and Russian narrative. They opposed Russian “colonialism” and chauvinism, and condemned the legacy of the tsarist past as alien and destructive. For most of the 1920s, their positions resembled that of Stalin, who was also initially a strong supporter of their activities.⁵⁴ While Belarus lacks a towering “national” historian of the type of Mykhailo Hrushevskyi in neighboring Ukraine, few people had a greater impact on the process of Belarusian nation building than Ihnatouski.⁵⁵ As one of the main architects behind the policy of Belarusization and a pioneer in the field of Belarusian history, his impact can hardly be underestimated. In character and intellectual stature he resembles Tomas Masaryk and Eduard Beneš in Czechoslovakia. From 1901 until 1918, Ihnatouski had been one of the most prominent Belarusian Socialist Revolutionaries, and from 1915 he led an educational organization called *Nash Krai* (Our Land), renamed *Maladaia Belarus'* (Young Belarus) in May, 1917. Its program was not unlike that of the pre-war Belarusian Socialist Hramada.⁵⁶ After the revolution he sided with the Bolsheviks. Although he was perhaps the most influential national communist in the BSSR, Ihnatouski's political priorities were national first, and communist second. Ihnatouski utilized Lenin's dictum “national in form, socialist in

⁵³ “Kamunistychnaia akupatsya na Belarusi,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 32, November 17, 1929, 1.

⁵⁴ Lindner (1999), 242.

⁵⁵ David Marples, “Europe’s Last Dictatorship: The Roots and Perspectives of Authoritarianism in ‘White Russia’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 6 (September 2005): 899.

⁵⁶ Piotr Ivanavich Bryhadzin and Iryna Dzmitryeuna Matsias, *Uladzimir Ihnatouski: Palitychny dzeiach, vuchony* (Minsk: Vydarvetsva “Polymia,” 1997), 4, 22; Lindner (1999), 280.

content” as a vehicle to advance the development of a national republic that he hoped would one day be independent.⁵⁷

Ihnatouski’s whereabouts during the fateful year of 1918 are somewhat unclear.⁵⁸ Recent historical works hold up the claims of 1920s Communist writers that Ihnatouski was a Communist sympathizer already by 1918 to be “highly unlikely.”⁵⁹ During the Polish occupation in 1919-1920, Ihnatouski kept his job at the Pedagogical Institute in Miensk, where he became the leader of the underground resistance movement known as *Belaruskaia Komunistychnaia Arhanizatsiya*, or BKA (the Belarusian Communist Organization), with about 2,000 members.⁶⁰ It maintained contacts with the exiled Communist Party of Lithuania and Belarus.⁶¹ After the war, Ihnatouski served in many functions in the Soviet Belarusian government. From 1920 to 1926 he was SSRB/BSSR People’s Commissar of Agriculture and later BSSR People’s Commissar of Enlightenment.⁶² From 1925 until October 1930 Ihnatouski was a member of the Bureau of the CC of the KP(b)B.⁶³ His program, a mix of Communism and Belarusian nationalism, quickly found adherents among Western Belarusians in Poland and very much appealed to the BSR Hramada in Western Belarus.⁶⁴

Another prominent figure during Belarusization was Vladimir Picheta. A son of a Serbian Orthodox priest,⁶⁵ Picheta studied history under Kliuchevskii at the University of Moscow. During World

⁵⁷ Von Engelhardt, 175.

⁵⁸ Lubachko erroneously claims that Ihnatouski had been among the activists behind the Belarusian People’s Republic in 1918, and that he had served as secretary of education. When the Germans evacuated Miensk on December 9, 1918 and were replaced with the army of Soviet Russia the next day, he decided to stay. Ivan Lubachko, *Belorussia Under Soviet Rule, 1917-1957* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 27, misquoting Vakar, 107, claiming that Ihnatouski was the BPR secretary of education. Indeed, some observers have doubted Ihnatouski’s Bolshevik credentials. “It is beyond any doubt, that [Ihnatouski] in his heart neither was a Bolshevik, nor would he become one,” Eugen von Engelhard wrote in his magisterial work on Belarus, published during the Nazi occupation of Belarus. Von Engelhardt, 175.

⁵⁹ Lindner (1999), 280.

⁶⁰ Lubachko, 39; Bryhadzin and Matsias, 25.

⁶¹ Bryhadzin and Matsias, 25, citing Ihnatouski, NARF, f. 4, Op. 1.p. 44, line 25-26.

⁶² Zen’kevich, 151; Kandybovich, 140; Bryhadzin and Matsias, 28.

⁶³ Zen’kevich, 739.

⁶⁴ Törnquist-Plewa *Vitryssland* (2001), 59.

⁶⁵ O. A. Ianovskii and A. G. Zel’skii, Vladimir Ivanovich Picheta, *Istoriia belorusskogo naroda* (Minsk: Izdatel’skiy tsentr BGU (Scriptor uinversitatis), 2003), 4.

War I, a number of Belarusian refugees had moved to Moscow, where they funded the Belarusian Scientific-Cultural society, of which Picheta was elected chairman. In this function, Picheta delivered lectures on various aspects of the history of the Belarusian people. An academic pioneer, Picheta wrote a “national” Belarusian history, emphasizing the existence of a Belarusian nation with a history and traditions of its own.⁶⁶ After the war, he was sent to Miensk, where he served as the first chancellor at the newly founded Belarusian State University. A productive scholar, Picheta wrote over 150 scientific papers, articles, and monographs on various aspects of Belarusian history.⁶⁷ Particularly influential was his 1923 *Belaruskaia mova iak faktar natsyianal’na-kul’turny* [*The Belarusian Language as a Factor of National Culture*], which helped to establish the perception of Belarusian as a separate language, rather than a dialect of Russian, Ukrainian, or Polish.⁶⁸ Picheta emphasized the role of the protestant and Uniate churches in maintaining and preserving the Belarusian language.⁶⁹

Ironically, Soviet government support for the Belarusian national project was partly motivated by concerns about “nationalist tendencies” in the neighboring Ukrainian SSR. The leaders of the BSSR complained that the borders of the SSRB/BSSR were “almost a caricature of an autonomous republic in its insignificant size.”⁷⁰ Given the “disproportionately small size” of the SSRB in relation to the Ukrainian SSR and the RSFSR, the central government found it imperative to enlarge the Belarusian republic with adjacent territories, “related to it in *byt* and ethnographic and economic type.”⁷¹ Subsequently, the territory of the Belarusian republic was significantly expanded in 1924 through the transfer of the Mohileu and Vitsebsk *gubernii* from the Russian Federation to the BSSR.⁷² The population of the

⁶⁶ M. P. Kastsuk, I. M. Ihnatsenka, U. I. Vyshynski et al., *Narysy historyi Belarusi: U 2 ch. Ch. 2* (Minsk: Belarus, 1995), 134 - 136. For a select bibliography of Picheta’s works, see Picheta (2003), 5-8 and Zen’kovich, 148.

⁶⁷ Zen’kovich, 147- 148.

⁶⁸ Kastsuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshynski, 118.

⁶⁹ As late as 1989, BSSR historian Anatolii Kruglov condemns Picheta’s emphasis on the role of churches in preserving the Belarusian language as “erroneous.” Kruglov, *Razvitiye ateizma*, 243, citing V. I. Picheta, *Belaruskii iazyk kak faktor natsional’no-kul’turnyi* (Miensk, 1924), 17-19.

⁷⁰ Martin (2001), 275, citing GARF f. 3316, op. 16, d. 206, l. 2 (1923-1924).

⁷¹ Hirsch, 151, citing GARF f. 3316, op. 16, d. 206, ll. 3-4.

⁷² Lubachko, 64-66.

republic was more than doubled: to the approximately 1.5 million inhabitants of the republic were added two million people.⁷³ Equally significant was that the geographic and cultural center of the BSSR was moved eastward.

While the nationally conscious elites in Vil'nia and Miensk greeted the expansion with enthusiasm,⁷⁴ the transfer met significant opposition from the local population in the areas merging with the BSSR. Though designated as ethnically Belarusian by the authorities, the predominantly Russian-speaking population in the Vitsebsk *guberniia* did not primarily identify with Belarus.⁷⁵ This opposition was shared by the largely ethnically Russian leadership of Vitsebsk, as well as Homel' *gubernii*, originally intended to become a part of the BSSR already in 1924, which vocally opposed the transfer and conducted propaganda among the people in opposition to the proposed transfers, “scar[ing] the population with the claim that immediately after the transfer to Belorussia, the Belorussian language would replace Russian everywhere. As a result, they got a negative response from the population.”⁷⁶ The leaderships of both the BSSR and the USSR treated these concerns as a false consciousness, expressions of Great Russian chauvinism which had to be fought. The strategic goal of Soviet foreign policy – to undermine Poland by encouraging Belarusian irredentism – was an important political priority. Terry Martin refers to this aspect as “the Piedmont Principle.”⁷⁷ Avel Enukidze bluntly stated that the foreign policy concerns of the USSR were given a higher priority than the borderland population’s fear of Belarusization.

One must speak frankly. This [transfer] is a blow to the local population and I understand the fear of the Belorussians. Their children understand Russian better than Belorussian, and from the cultural point of view, we sacrifice the interests of the people...But in this case, we are guided by the political consideration that we must expand Belorussia and draw the attention of foreign countries to her. Based on this consideration, we are expanding the population of Belorussia, and thereby draw the attention of foreign countries to her and thereby demonstrating the nationalities policy of Soviet power.⁷⁸

⁷³ Martin (2001), 275-276.

⁷⁴ Iazep Fal'tsevich, “Ras’tse Belarus’!” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 1 (10), January 1, 1927, 1.

⁷⁵ Martin (2001), 275, citing RTsKhIDNI 17/162/1 (13.11.23): 11-22, 34-46, 65.

⁷⁶ Martin (2001), 275, citing GARF, 3316/16/206 (1924): 37-38.

⁷⁷ Terry Martin refers to “the Soviet attempt to exploit cross-border ethnic ties to project political influence into neighboring states as the Piedmont Principle. It should be emphasized, however, that this foreign policy goal was never the primary motivation of Soviet nationalities policy. It was seen as an exploitable benefit of a domestically driven policy that affected the intensity of implementation in sensitive regions, but not the content of the policy itself.” Martin (2001), 9.

The Piedmont principle was seen as being of a greater importance than concerns about opposition among local Belarusian peasants. In the first Soviet censuses, Soviet citizens could freely choose the nationality with which they identified. In contrast to the pre-revolutionary censuses, the first Soviet census in 1920 allowed the respondents to choose their nationality, a principle that was still maintained when internal passports were introduced in 1932. Only in 1938 was the principle of the national self-definition abandoned, a measure introduced explicitly to prevent “suspect” enemy nations from “concealing” their “true” ethnicities.⁷⁹ Frustrated with the local population’s unawareness of modern ethnic identities, already by 1924 and 1926, as these territories were transferred to the BSSR, the Bolsheviks began to abandon the principle of individual self-identification, relying instead on “expert” ethnographic advice on who was to be considered a Belarusian, collectively re-designating the ethnicity of entire regions. The transfer of Vitsebsk, Mohileu, and Homel’ districts to the BSSR meant a departure from the principles that guided the Soviet censuses, and a rejection of the right even to voluntary assimilation.⁸⁰

At the time of the creation of the first Soviet Belarusian republic, the model source upon which the Bolsheviks based their nation building was the linguist Evfimii F. Karski’s *Ethnographic Map of the Belarusian Tribe* published in 1917. Karski used mother tongue as “the exclusive criterion” of national difference.⁸¹ He maintained that Belarusians lived in five guberniias: Miensk, Mahileu, Vitsiebsk, Hrodna and Vil’nia, with another 150,000 Belarusians making up significant minorities in ten adjacent *gubernii*.⁸² Karski argued that most of the inhabitants of the SSRB were “ethnographically Belarusian” even if they lacked national consciousness. He proposed that Lithuanians who spoke Belarusian should be counted as Belarusians. Yet, the Soviet authorities were concerned by the fact that some nationalities did not speak

⁷⁸ Martin (2001), 276, citing GARF 3316/16/206 (1924): 40.

⁷⁹ Hirsch, 106-107, 275, 294.

⁸⁰ Martin (2001), 276.

⁸¹ E. F. Karski, *Etnograficheskaiia karta Bieloruskago plemeni: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemmenogo sostava naseleniya Rossii*, vol. 2 (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiiia nauk, 1917).

⁸² Chigrinov, *Istoriia Belarusi*, 463.

“their own language.” Such communities were designated as “denationalized.”⁸³ In fact, Soviet census takers in the mid-1920s “discovered that peasants did not distinguish between Belorussians, Great Russians and Ukrainians.” Instead, they used regional identities or indiscriminately referred to all eastern Slavs as “Russians.”⁸⁴ As late as 1929, Belarusian peasants explained to representatives of the Soviet government in fluent Belarusian that they only spoke Russian.⁸⁵

The principle of ethnography was central and essential to the designation of borders in the Soviet Union, and would constitute the basis for where the borders would be drawn for each and every single border revision of the BSSR.⁸⁶ Administrators and ethnographers, hired to determine the appropriate geographic extent of a Belarusian state, were frustrated in their task and reported that it was often impossible to distinguish between Belarusian and Russian villages. They often shared the same dialects and were “ethnically” intermixed.⁸⁷ Smolensk, the city in which the republic had been proclaimed, is a good illustration of this confusing lack of consensus regarding the extent of the Belarusian nation. Most ethnographers considered Belarusian dialects or “nation” to extend to Smolensk.⁸⁸

Karanizatsyia pa-Belarusku

The Belarusization of the 1920s remains an under-researched topic, partly due to the fact that many documents on this period were destroyed during World War II.⁸⁹ There are still no monographs dedicated to the topic.⁹⁰ On January 14, 1921, the so-called “Declaration of 32 Belarusian Communists”

⁸³ Slezkine (1996), 213.

⁸⁴ Brandenberger, 16.

⁸⁵ Martin (2001), 260.

⁸⁶ Hirsch, 145-155.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 149-150, citing GARF f. 3316, op. 22, d. 129, ll. 42-43.

⁸⁸ Anthropologists and linguists, such as A. F. Ritch in 1875, E. F. Karski in 1903, the official Moscow dialectological Commission in 1915, as well as V. Stankevich in 1921, all extended the Belarusian “nation” to Smolensk. Von Engelhardt, 221. E. F. Karski claimed that “almost all of the Smolensk *guberniya*” had a Belarusian majority population. Hirsch, 151, citing GARF f. 3316, op. 16, d. 206, l. 2.

⁸⁹ Bryhadzin and Matsias, 29.

⁹⁰ Platonav and Korshuk, 3. The most detailed study to date is Beth Baird Yocom’s “Constructing a Socialist Tower of Babel: Nationality Policy in Soviet Belorussia 1921-1933,” Ph. D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2003. Francine Hirsch and Terry Martin’s research covers certain aspects of the Belarusian nationality policies within a broader Soviet context.

was made public. Initiated by Il'iuchenok and Ihnatouski, the declaration demanded the unification of all Belarusian lands “into one ethnographic organism.” This new “organism” was also intended to absorb the part of Belarus controlled by Poland. The declaration also stated the ambition to have Belarusian Communists, intellectuals and professionals displaced during the wars return to SSRB. This massive project of nationalizing the republic through education, printing, and administration in the Belarusian and other local languages was funded by the RSFSR.⁹¹

The signatories conceded that there was a need to heal the wounds caused during the occupations of the Polish-Soviet war. Led by a desire to apply “the internationalist principles of Communism in regards to the Belarusian question,”⁹² the SSRB Central Executive Committee declared its intention to “spread the light of communism into the most backward Belarusian village,” and break with a history in which “Polish *pans* and the Catholic Church have forced Polish culture upon us and the Russian tsars.”⁹³

The following month the Central Executive Committee of the SSRB formally enshrined multilingualism in law by adopting a decree on the adoption of four official languages, and their equality in terms of function of government. While Belarusian, Russian, Yiddish and Polish were given equal status as official languages, Belarusian, the language of the majority population in the republic, was declared to be “the most important” of these languages, and to be introduced in all spheres of society and to become the predominant language, reflecting the ethnic composition of the republic.⁹⁴ The designation of Yiddish as an official language was unique.⁹⁵ To the south of Belarus, the ill-fated Ukrainian People’s Republic had taken the radical step of making Yiddish one of its official languages. The Ukrainian

⁹¹ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 11.

⁹² “Daklad 32-kh belarusau-kamunistau u TsB KP(b)B ab shliakhakh budaunitsva uzornai savetskai Belarusi,” February 1, 1921, NARB. f. 15-p. vop. 28. spr. 2 L. 91-96, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 30-31.

⁹³ “Zvarot sesii TsVK SSRB da kulturnykh rabotnikau – uradzhentsau Belarusi z zaklidam viartatstsa u respubliku dlia pratsy pa iae natsyanal’na-kul’turnym adrashenni”, Februari 5, 1921. NARB. f. 701. vop. 1. spr. 10. ll. 17-18, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 35-37.

⁹⁴ Bryhadzin and Matsias, 29; Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 11.

⁹⁵ Elissa Bemporad, “The Yiddish Experiment in Soviet Minsk,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 1, April 2007, 92. Apparently, the short-lived Ukrainian Peoples’ Republic also recognized the Yiddish language as official, and banknotes issued carried texts in Yiddish. Yevhen Nakonechnyy, “Galicia in Times of Fear and Sorrow,” *Postup*, August 3, 1999, translated from the Ukrainian by Roman Zakharii. http://www.personal.ccu.hu/students/97/Roman_Zakharii/jewish.htm (accessed Dec. 21, 2007).

Central Rada published all its legal documents in four languages; Ukrainian, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian.⁹⁶

The Tenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in March 1921 was followed by the Twelfth All-Belarusian Party Conference (the Seventh Congress)⁹⁷ of the KP(b)B in March of 1923, which passed a resolution to “resume full responsibility with regards to the national question and to undertake to provide all resources to conduct work in Belarusian, and provide normal prerequisites for the development of the Belarusian culture.”⁹⁸ This official decision confirmed a Bolshevik practice established already during the Civil War. The Belarusian School Council had begun its work to construct a scientific or scholarly terminology for the Belarusian language during the Polish-Soviet war in 1919-1920. The first and immediate task was to enable the teaching of pupils in elementary and secondary schools in Belarusian.⁹⁹ Belarusian primary and secondary schools had been tolerated by and flourished under the German military administration, but were forcibly closed by the advancing Poles.¹⁰⁰ During the German occupation in 1918, there had even been plans to set up a Belarusian university. Professors Mitrofan Dounar-Zapol’ski and Evfemii Karski, in particular, had actively lobbied for such an entity.¹⁰¹ Their aim was to build acceptance for the Belarusian language as a language on a par with other Slavic languages and to introduce it in all spheres of society.

BSSR Minority Policies

The Bolsheviks introduced two interlinked national policies in the former western borderlands of the Russian empire. One was the goal of Belarusization, the other one was known as *korenizatsiya*, or

⁹⁶ Henry Abramson, “Jewish Representation of the Independent Ukrainian Governments of 1917-1920,” *Slavic Review* Vol. 50, No. 3 (Autumn, 1991), 542; Nakonechnyi.

⁹⁷ The VI North-Western regional conference of the Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks) declared itself on December 30, 1918 to be the I Congress of the Belarusian Communist Party. This has resulted in a somewhat confusing double numbering system where each subsequent congress is also given a congress number, predating the creation of LitBel and BSSR. A.P Ignatenko, V.N. Sidortsov, P. Z. Savochkin and A. I. Sidorenko (eds.) *Khrestomatiia po istorii BSSR (1917-1983)*, 2nd Edition (Minsk: Izdatel’stvo “Universitetskoe,” 1984), 64.

⁹⁸ Kastsiuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshynski, 117, citing *KPB v resoliutsiakh*, T. 1, 96.

⁹⁹ A. I. Zhurauski, “Pershya kroki Belaruskaha savetskaha movaznaustva,” *Belaruskaia linhvistika*, Vol. 37 (1990), 3.

¹⁰⁰ Bryhadzin and Matsias, 24.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 30.

indigenization. As a part of the Soviet policy of “double assimilation” to classify people into national categories and, simultaneously, mould pre-modern peoples into modern, assimilated subdivisions of Soviet society, these policies were ultimately aiming at transforming pre-modern or “colonial” peoples into Soviet citizens, participants in the Soviet project. *Korenizatsiia* was a conscious attempt to find local leaders and “root” Bolshevism among the ethnic groups of Soviet Russia and the national republics. Belarusization, on the other hand, was a policy to introduce the Belarusian language as the predominant language of administration and education in the BSSR, as part of an attempt at societal, economic, national, and cultural awakening of the Belarusian “nation” within the framework of a new, socialist society.¹⁰² The official aim of Belarusization, in the words of Krynetski, was “the application of the national policy to the Belarusian population in the field of cultural construction.”¹⁰³

The Soviet nationality policy was contradictory. On the one hand, the authorities assumed the existence of primordial ethnic groups. On the other, they believed that national identities were constructed, a by-product of modern capitalism that would retain a political significance under the early period of socialism.¹⁰⁴ The government could step in and form and construct modern nations and a socialist national consciousness if they found that such were lacking.¹⁰⁵ This praxis followed a positivist Marxist notion whereby nations were placed along a timeline, from “less-developed” to “mature.” Ethnic groups seen as retarded in their cultural and national development were the targets of assistance and governmental programs aimed at bringing about what Francine Hirsch calls a “double assimilation” – “the assimilation of diverse peoples into nationality categories and, simultaneously, the assimilation of nationally categorized groups into the Soviet state and society.”¹⁰⁶ The Bolsheviks’ ambitious “double assimilation” utilized the power of a totalizing state to build and enforce a Belarusian national

¹⁰² Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 6-7.

¹⁰³ “Z dakkada pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha ‘Ab novykh zadachakh Homel’skai arhanizatsyi KP(b)B’ na ckhodze aktybu Homel’skai haradskoi, zalineinai i novabelitskai partyinykh arhanizatsyi,” *Zvezda*, December 19, 1926, in Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 94.

¹⁰⁴ Martin (2001), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Hirsch, 7-9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 146.

consciousness from above, through massive state involvement and social engineering. Hirsch emphasized that in order for this project to be successful, it required mass participation. “Soviet leaders and institutions introduced new vocabularies and structures, and then worked to make sure that people found them meaningful.”¹⁰⁷

The idea that the new state had an educational and civilizing mission was central to the Soviet affirmative action policies of the 1920s. The Soviet authorities compiled lists of people, ranked according to their levels of social retardation. Ninety-seven peoples – in fact most of the ethnic groups of the Soviet Union – were listed as “culturally backward.” Of the large titular nationalities only Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Jews, and Germans were considered culturally advanced, “western nationalities.”¹⁰⁸ Writes Hirsch: “The national republics and oblasts of “less-developed” peoples were entitled to special assistance, while the republics and oblasts of “mature nations with mature classes” were to be monitored for signs of bourgeois nationalism.”¹⁰⁹

No culture was considered too small or unimportant to receive protection and support from the government. This had some paradoxical consequences for the Belarusians. Migration had served as a pressure valve during the late imperial era, alleviating some of the land hunger. In the 1920s the Bolsheviks halted migration to Siberia and the Kazakh territories, regarding Slavic settlements there as a form of colonization of eastern peoples.¹¹⁰

The Supreme Soviet of the SSRB established that the republic was to be “national” and Belarusian in character and form and adopted the resolution “On the practical implementations of a national policy,” initializing the official policy of *korenizatsiia*, or indigenization, of July, 1924.¹¹¹ The supervision and implementation of Belarusization was to be carried out by a control commission. Similar

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰⁸ E. F. Karski (1917). In addition, there were a number of small “western national minorities”: Poles, Germans, Bulgarians, Greeks, but also Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Swedes. Their greater religiosity and prosperity made the Soviet authorities particularly suspicious of them. Martin (2001), 23, 35, 56, 167; Hirsch, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Hirsch, 146-147.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 90.

¹¹¹ Kastsiuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshynski et al., 118.

“nationalizing” polices were introduced for the ethnic minorities of the republic. The Jews, Russians, and Poles were recognized as official national minorities. In regions with significant Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian populations, these were designated as “regional minorities.” National and socialist agitation was to be conducted on the respective minority languages under the supervision of this control commission.¹¹² These policies were not unique to Belarus: similar policies were implemented in other areas under Soviet control.¹¹³ By focusing on language and identity, the government hoped to promote ethnic Belarusian cadres within the administration of the republic. By promoting the culture and history of the peoples of the BSSR, the Soviet leadership hoped to further the development of the republic on the basis of Soviet socialism, and meeting the political challenge posed by nationalism.¹¹⁴

The KP(b)B understands the *korenizatsiia* as the demand to increase constantly the representatives of all regionally rooted nationalities in leading positions. ... *Korenizatsiia* deals exclusively with questions regarding the education of leading cadres in the BSSR. It should therefore not be confused with the Belarusization. Besides, this [political] line is under no circumstances only aimed at promoting of Belarusians – *korenizatsiia* is also aimed at the promotion of Jewish, Polish and Russian workers, as well.¹¹⁵

Belarusization promoted the Belarusian language to a position not seen since the 16th and 17th centuries, when Chancellery Ruthenian had been used as administrative language in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹¹⁶ In 1926 KP(b)B leader Krynetski declared that “Not all our work is in the field of Belarusization, but it is our most important duty since it involves the majority of our population, which suffers from backwardness.”¹¹⁷ Under the slogan “Socialist Rebirth,” the KP(b)B made mandatory education in the Belarusian language, culture, and history a central part of its policies.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Korshuk, Platonav (eds.), 8.

¹¹³ For the similar experiment during the same time period in Soviet Ukraine, see James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983); on Georgia, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press in association with Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1988).

¹¹⁴ Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 7.

¹¹⁵ *X-ii S'ezd Komunisticheskoi parti (bol'shevikov) Belorussii, 3 – 10 ianvaria 1927 goda: Stenograficheskii ochet* (Minsk, 1927), 32, cited in Lindner (1999), 158.

¹¹⁶ Snyder *The Reconstruction of Nations* (2003), 48.

¹¹⁷ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

A Classless Community?

Traditionally, class stratification had followed national division, with Polish (or Polonized Lithuanian) land owners, Jewish middle men, and Belarusian peasants. Historical legitimacy and precedent for the young Soviet republic was found in *Polatskaia Rus'*, the semi-autonomous medieval principality of Polatsk that merged into the Lithuanian-Belarusian commonwealth during the Middle Ages. The shared cultural legacy of Belarus and Lithuania and its impact on the development of Belarusian history were heavily emphasized.¹¹⁹ According to this interpretation, the class characteristics of the Belarusian nation had come into place only following the division of Poland, when the Poles and Great Russians had become the land owners, the Jews had been divided into two classes, the city bourgeoisie on one hand and proletarians on the other, while the Belarusian masses became the peasants and, to a limited extent, urban proletarians.¹²⁰

The official rhetoric was tolerant and inclusive. The existence of large national minorities was not seen as a problem or an obstacle to the creation of a Belarusian state. Antagonism and ethnic divisions were primarily interpreted as the result of economic injustices. The national communists believed the Jews had been divided into two classes by the Polish feudal lords and through the emergence of capitalism. The Belarusians, on the other hand, had seen their language ostracized as a result of repressive tsarist policies, which had deliberately designated it as the language of the “uncultivated working classes,”¹²¹ and prevented the development of a modern Belarusian literary language. Thus, the low status of the Belarusian language was interpreted as a result of outside forces and influences, and class enemies such as Polish *pans* and the tsar responsible for this predicament. The introduction of socialist education was intended to give the Belarusians both a national, but more importantly, a *class* consciousness. A Belarusian national consciousness was intended to reinforce a class consciousness and seen as instrumental in building support for the new Soviet state.

¹¹⁹ Kotljarchuk (2004), 50-52; Maldsis, “Die Wiederentstehung der belorussischen Nation,” 311.

¹²⁰ “Tezisy ‘Belaruskae natsyianal’nae pytanne i kamunistichnaia partyia,’ iakia raspratsavany na dyskusiynikh skhodakh adkaznykh rabotnikau Minskai arhanizatsyi KP(b)B,” in *Pastanovy i rezaliutsyi UseKP(b) i KP(b) pa natsyianal’nym pytanni* (Minsk, 1926), 84-88, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 41.

¹²¹ Ibid. 42.

On November 5, 1921, the KP(b)B published 13 theses, entitled “The National Question and the Communist Party,” intended to guide the nationalities policies throughout the 1920s. They were based on the assumption that the Belarusian nation constituted a classless society.¹²² The assumptions appeared colored by the ideology of the SRs, but also of the Belarusian Christian Democrats. Ihnatouski and the national communists emphasized that the October Revolution had brought the workers and peasants to power and thus ended the social and national oppression of the proletarian Belarusian nation, the members of which were now streaming into the cities and entering the ruling apparatus and administrative organs of the republic.¹²³ Promotion of the toiling masses would therefore be linked to the advancement of the Belarusians, aiming at undoing centuries of Polonization and Russification.¹²⁴ If the Belarusians were a proletarian nation of peasants and workers, then cultural affirmative action programs aimed at the empowerment of the Belarusian toiling masses could be promoted as the implementation of socialism.

The third principal thesis emphasized the proletarian nature of the Belarusian people: “The Bourgeoisie arrived from the West, for instance Germans and Jews, which pushed the city-dwelling Belarusian burgher out of the cities...the Belarusian masses consisted of peasants, paupers and sometimes city proletarians.”¹²⁵ The sixth thesis was an attempt to reconcile nationalism with Bolshevism, claiming that the October Revolution ought to be followed by national liberation: “The sociopolitical liberation for the Belarusians was accompanied by national liberation, since the class and national composition of the Belarusians more or less coincided. The Belarusian long ago ceased to be a landowner or tradesman. He is no entrepreneur, and was never a kulak.”¹²⁶

Evoking classical nationalist arguments, Ihnatouski asserted that “class and the national composition of the Belarusians almost coincided with each other,” that the Belarusians were a nation of

¹²² St. Stankevich, “Natsyianal’naia palityka Kremlia u Belarusi,” *Belaruski Zbornik*, vol. 1 (January-March 1955), 41.

¹²³ St. Stankevich (1955), 41-42.

¹²⁴ As Timothy Snyder notes: “Throughout the nineteenth century, Lithuanian-speaking peasants were assimilating to the Belarusian language, which provided the Slavic platform for a further assimilation to Polish and Russian. In some peasant families, grandparents spoke Lithuanian, parents Belarusian, and the children Polish: thereby a single household encapsulating the historical trend that Lithuanian activists wished to reverse.” Snyder (2003), 32.

¹²⁵ St. Stankevich (1955), 41, citing *Vol’ny S’tsiah*, No. 6 (8), Miensk, Dec 25, 1921, 38-39.

¹²⁶ St. Stankevich, (1955), 39.

peasants and with little or no internal social stratification. He claimed that among ethnic Belarusians, class divisions were almost non-existent. Regarding the class composition of the Belarusian nation, Ihnatouski could provide rather exact data: 75 per cent of the Belarusians were small landowners, and 14 percent landless peasants, in addition to an “insignificant” number of industrial workers.¹²⁷ As the least industrialized area in the European part of the Russian empire in 1913, there were a total of 34,132 workers in the territory that constitutes Belarus. In the SSRB, which was officially designated as a “republic of workers and peasants,” there were only some 24,000 industrial workers in 1922.¹²⁸

Belarusian Universities and Academies

The idea to create a university in Belarus had arisen very soon after the October Revolution. Already in 1918 the Petrograd department of the Belarusian National Committee, which at the time was a part of the RSFSR People’s Commissariat of enlightenment, had supported the creation of a Belarusian university in one of the ethnically Belarusian areas not under German occupation; in Vitsebsk or Smolensk. At the same time, the so-called Belarusian People’s University was opened in Moscow.¹²⁹ For nearly six decades, there had been no institutions of higher learning in Belarus. The Hory-Horkach Agricultural Academy had been closed by the tsarist authorities following the rebellion of 1863 and reopened in St Petersburg. The minuscule part of the Belarusian youth that was able to pursue higher education had to leave Belarus in order to do so, and, of course, received their education in Russian.¹³⁰

Ihnatouski believed the most efficient path to national mobilization was through schooling and the establishment of institutions of higher education, assuming that academic interest in Belarusian culture would raise its prestige. He was instrumental in the establishment of a national primary and

¹²⁷ Zaprudnik, 77. The idea that there were no real class divisions among the Belarusians was shared by the Belarusian Christian Democrats in Western Belarus. Adam Stankevich, the leader of the party declared in 1926 that “Marx’s proletarian materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat does not hold any promise for the Belarusian people, particularly not for the peasantry.” “Pradmowa posl. PS A. Stenkevicha u Soime 24 Veresnia 1926,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 35, October 8, 1926, 2-4. The belief that Belarus was a society that essentially lacked class divisions was also a cornerstone of the Belarusian Peasants’ Union’s ideology. “The Belarusian people is in its social makeup exclusively a peasant society,” was one of the first points made in the first issue of the organ of the Belarusian Peasants’ Union. “Ad radaktsyi,” *Sialianskaia Niva: Orhan Belaruskaha Sialianskaha Saiuzu*, No. 1, December 6, 1925, 1. For a discussion about the notion that the nation is an equal, “horizontal” community is a key aspect of modern nationalism, see Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 17-18.

¹²⁸ Zen’kovich, 12, 14.

¹²⁹ O. A. Ianovskii, A. G. Zel’skii, preface to Picheta (2003), 7.

¹³⁰ Bryhadzin and Matsias, 18.

secondary education system in the Belarusian language, the creation of the Belarusian State University in 1921, the Belarusian Academy of Sciences and the re-organization of the Agricultural Academy in Hory-Horkach.¹³¹ In 1921, Lenin approved the idea of establishing a Belarusian State University. Later it was to carry his name. The establishment of Belarusian language schools for teacher education across the young republic in the early 1920s was also a result of Ihnatouski's efforts.¹³² They became a key factor in the Belarusization campaign, as the majority of the teachers in Belarus lacked formal training.¹³³

In February 1921, an organization called the Institute of Belarusian Culture, *Inbelkul't* for short, was established. It was the first scientific research institute of the BSSR, and came to have an enormous importance.¹³⁴ With its 19 sections, or departments, it was dedicated to the study of Belarusian nature, arts, and science.¹³⁵ *Inbelkul't* functioned as a state-sponsored institution of “national” awakening. Its purpose was to lay the ground work for the establishing of a Belarusian Academy of Sciences.¹³⁶ From the time of its establishment, *Inbelkul't* was led by Ihnatouski, who was able to recruit several leading Belarusian intellectuals who returned from exile in Poland, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia,¹³⁷ including Nekrashevich, Lesik, Lastouski, Smolich, and Baikou.¹³⁸ In 1928, under Ihnatouski's leadership, *Inbelkul't* was transformed into the BSSR Academy of Sciences.¹³⁹ Within the auspices of *Inbelkul't* a “Scientific-Terminological Commission” was established, intended to develop academic terminologies

¹³¹ Nikolai L'vovich Ivanov, *Kritika fal'sififikatsii istorii sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva v BSSR (1921-1937 gg.)* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhnika, 1980), 127; von Engelhardt, 175.

¹³² von Engelhardt, 175.

¹³³ Lindner (1999) 35.

¹³⁴ Zhurauski, 3-4.

¹³⁵ Ivanov, 130.

¹³⁶ Kandybovich, 17.

¹³⁷ Lubachko, 86; Kastsiuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshynski et al., 135, claim that Ihnatouski became *Inbelkul't*'s president in 1925.

¹³⁸ Platonav and Korushuk (eds.), 8.

¹³⁹ “Rezoliutsiya prezidyuma saveta natsyianal'nastsei TsVK SSSR pa dakladu prezidyuma TsVK BSSR ab praviadzenni belarusizatsyi,” March 5, 1928. NARB. f. 701. vop. 1. spr. 56. l. 54-54adv. Copy. Korshuk and Platonoau (eds.), 181. Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 238; Kandybovich, 17; Kastsiuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshynski (eds.), 137; and Zen'kovich, 147.

and put together dictionaries in the four official languages of the BSSR.¹⁴⁰ This commission had three sections: one set up to establish of a vocabulary for the humanities, one for the sciences, and one for mathematics. Nekrashevich was put in charge of the *Inbelkul't* dictionary commission, and Baikou was the secretary of the *Inbelkul't* scientific commission. The first dictionaries were, perhaps not surprisingly, Nekrashevich's Belarusian-Russian and Baikou's Russian-Belarusian dictionaries, published in 1927 and 1928, containing 30,000 and 60,000 words respectively.¹⁴¹ Having declared in July 1925 that "at this point, no scientific project is more important and urgent in Belarus than the work on compiling a dictionary of our language," Nekrashevich's largest and most ambitious project was the compilation of a standard dictionary of the Belarusian language. In addition to the codification of the Belarusian language, *Inbelkul't* also planned a ten-volume academic encyclopedia on the dialects of the Belarusian language, of which three would be dedicated to Western Belarus, and three to the Homel', Nevel'shchyn, and Smolensk areas of the RSFSR.¹⁴²

Official Multilingualism

The August 1, 1920 declaration of the restoration of independence of the SSRB proclaimed "The full legal equality of the languages (Belarusian, Russian, Polish, and Yiddish) in relations with government agencies and in organizations and institutions of public education and socialist culture."¹⁴³ To replace the Russian language with the vernacular national languages was seen as an important political aim. This policy of language change was called Belarusization. The official decision to Belarusify the republic followed shortly thereafter. On November 20, 1920, the director of the Belarusian department in Moscow P. V. Il'iuchenok sent a note to Miensk, ordering education in the Belarusian language and the establishment of schools in the languages of the republic's national minority languages.¹⁴⁴ Belarusization

¹⁴⁰ Through its existence, the Commission changed names a few times. It went from being called Belarusian Scientific-Terminological Commission to the Spelling and Terminology Commission, and finally the Scientific Language Institute. Zhurauski, 4.

¹⁴¹ Zhurauski, 3-5.

¹⁴² S. Nekrashevich, "Da pytannja ab ukladanni složnika zhivoi belaruskai movy," *Polymia*, No. 5 (1925), 186.

¹⁴³ Bemporad (2007), 92, citing *Prakticheskoe razreshenie natsionalnogo voprosa v Belorusskoi SSR, Central Executive Committee of the Belorussian SSR, Central Commission of Nationalities*, Part I (Miensk, 1927), 120-123.

was a part of a union-wide policy, and modeled after the analogous program of Ukrainianization in the neighboring republic.¹⁴⁵ On February 21, 1920, the Ukrainian language had been elevated to equal status with Russian in the Ukrainian SSR. A policy of Ukrainianization of Ukrainian schools was been introduced on September 21, 1920.¹⁴⁶ Stalin, the Peoples' Commissar of Nationalities, was a driving force both behind the establishment of a Belarusian Soviet Republic, and of joint *korenizatsiia* and Belarusization polices and became instrumental in facilitating the Belarusian national renaissance of the 1920s.¹⁴⁷

Yiddish in the BSSR

The Jewish community was a diverse and divided group. While its ethnic identity as a separate ethnic group was clearer, it was divided along political and linguistic lines. There were secularists, assimilationists, neo-Orthodox, Bundists, as well as Zionists who spoke a number of languages: Yiddish, Russian, Polish, Hebrew and, in many cases, various Belarusian dialects. Perhaps even more than other ethnic groups in the borderlands, the Jews had experienced national oppression under the tsarist regime. The Bolsheviks attempted to reverse the destructive tsarist policy of forced Russification, and replace it with a policy that encouraged the “titular” languages of the ethnic groups of the republic. This policy was complicated by the fact that the development of a universally accepted, codified standard language was still in its early stages of development. However, the Bund differed in many ways in its goals from both Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In sharp contrast to his position on Belarus, Lenin did not recognize the Ashkenazim as a separate nation, and saw assimilation as the solution to the Jewish problem. “It is up to the Bundists to develop the idea of a separate nationality of the Russian Jews – a nationality whose language is the *zhargon* (Yiddish) and its territory the Jewish Pale of settlement.”¹⁴⁸ Lenin demanded a united Social Democratic party, to which the Bund was to subordinate its national agenda. It finally broke

¹⁴⁴ Zen'kovich, 151.

¹⁴⁵ Martin (2001), 260.

¹⁴⁶ Elena Borisenok, *Fenomen sovetskoi ukrainizatsii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Evropa," 2006), 61-62

¹⁴⁷ Under Lukashenka, standard university textbooks approve of Stalin's nationalities policies during the early Soviet period. “[D]uring V. I. Lenin's lifetime, I. V. Stalin often took the correct position with regard to the Belarusian question.” Kastsuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshynski et al, 117.

¹⁴⁸ V. I. Lenin, *O ievreiskom voprose v Rossii* (Moscow: Proletarii, 1924), 39.

with the Bolsheviks at the fourth party congress of the RSDWP in 1906, reasserted its national autonomy, and allied itself with the Mensheviks.¹⁴⁹ In 1917, it stood by its Menshevik allies, and opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power.¹⁵⁰

The Bundists had a tradition of allying themselves with left-wing Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish national activists who worked for national and social rights. Like the Belarusian national activists, the Bund heavily emphasized the need to build a school system, from kindergarten to the university, in the native language of the majority of Belarusian Jews, Yiddish. While pre-war Belarusian-Jewish relations were not without some difficulties, they were generally “normal” or even good, in contrast to Ukrainian-Jewish relations to the south.¹⁵¹ On January 31, 1919, a Jewish Communist Party was founded in Belarus.¹⁵² While a separate organization, its members were simultaneously joint members of the KP(b)B. The party had its own committees and national and cultural autonomy. The aim was to undermine the Bund and bring its members into the fold of one, Communist, Yiddish-language organization. The Jewish Communist Party issued the paper *Der Shtern*. It only existed as an independent organization for six months. Fear of “Jewish nationalism” prompted the republican leadership to merge the Jewish Communist Party with the KP(b)B. It became known as the Jewish Section, or the *evsektsiia* of the party.¹⁵³ While the Bund shared the Bolsheviks’ goal of a classless society, it shared the orthodox Marxist historical interpretation of the Mensheviks that the socialist revolution needed to be preceded by a phase of bourgeois capitalism. Its leadership had therefore opposed the October Revolution, which it regarded as a *coup d'état* and historically premature.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ J. Martow, *Geschichte der russischen Sozialdemokratie. Mit einem Nachtrag von Th. Dan* (Erlangen: Buchhandlung und Verl. Politladen, 1973), 218.

¹⁵⁰ Kriwaczek, *Yiddish Civilization*, 299.

¹⁵¹ Martin Dean, “Collaboration and Resistance in the Mir Rayon of Belarus,” in David Gaunt, Paul A. Levin & Laura Palosuo (eds.), *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 242.

¹⁵² NARB, f. 4p, vop. 1, d. 34, l. 6.

¹⁵³ “Z daklada pershaha sekretara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Kryničkaha ‘Palitychnaia spravadacha TsK X z’ezdu KP(b)B,’” from *X s’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol’shevikov) Belorussii 3-10 ianvaria 1927 goda, Stenograficheskii otchet*, 37-44, in Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 114-115.

¹⁵⁴ Bemporad, “Red star on the Jewish Street,” (2006) 67; Kriwaczek, 299.

A central figure and strong influence on the educational policies of the Bundist movement was Esther Frumkin. A native of Miensk, she maintained that Yiddish was the natural, and only Jewish language. She viewed Hebrew as an elitist project of a small group of intellectuals, far removed from the Yiddish-speaking masses.¹⁵⁵ Following the dissolution of the Bund in February 1921, Frumkin joined the Bolsheviks, “in order to save the idea of the Bund, in order to at least preserve the Bund as an *apparat*.¹⁵⁶ The dissolution of the Bund in Belarus and its merger with the KP(b)B was marked with a dramatic ceremony at a local theatre in Miensk on April 19, 1921, in which representatives of the Bund handed their banners over to representatives of the KP(b)B.¹⁵⁷ Frumkin became the minister of education in the first Soviet Belarusian government. She was accompanied by another Bundist, Arn Vaynsteyn, the Minister of Social Affairs.¹⁵⁸ The Bund lingered on, and had some influence on the early formation of the BSSR. Bundists (and even representatives for Poale Zion) were represented in the first Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of the all-Belarusian Congress of Soviets, elected in February 1919.¹⁵⁹ They were also among the signatories of the “renewal” of the declaration of the SSRB after the end of the Polish-Soviet War.¹⁶⁰ While the Bundists were soon marginalized and banned in the Soviet Union, following the Tenth Party Congress, they continued their activities in Poland under increasingly oppressive conditions.

In 1924 *Inbelkul’t* organized departments for the minority languages, beginning with the so-called “Jewish language.”¹⁶¹ Yiddish was the native language of 91 per cent of the 407,000 Soviet Belarusian Jews in 1926,¹⁶² whereas Hebrew had been banned by the Bolsheviks as early as 1919 on the grounds that

¹⁵⁵ Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 261-262.

¹⁵⁶ Zvi Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 209; Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 73.

¹⁵⁷ Bemporad (2006), 75.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁹ Chigrinov, 460.

¹⁶⁰ Bryhadzin and Matsias, 26.

¹⁶¹ Bel: *iaureiskaia mova* – only after the collapse of the Soviet Union did the word *idysh*, Yiddish, re-enter the Belarusian vocabulary.

“Hebrew culture is the culture of clerical Zionism.”¹⁶³ This spelled an end to publication in modern Hebrew, even if occasional books on religious subjects were printed in ancient Hebrew until 1928.¹⁶⁴

The *Inbelkul’t* Jewish section was organized in two parts and three commissions, dedicated to the study of the economy, history, language, literature, and life of the Jews in the BSSR.¹⁶⁵ The linguistic branch of the Jewish section was particularly active, working on a practical Yiddish-Belarusian/Yiddish dictionary of 12,000 words. The compilation of dictionaries went hand in hand with the work to codify and standardize BSSR Yiddish, which followed the same pattern as in the standardization of Belarusian. A new, Soviet Yiddish was introduced. The most significant reform of Yiddish in the Soviet Union was the introduction of a phonetic spelling, consistent with the Yiddish phonetic system of the Hebrew and Aramaic words in the language.¹⁶⁶ The Jewish section of *Inbelkul’t* also created Yiddish words and expressions for mathematics, physics, chemistry, agricultural sciences and law and began working on an atlas of the Yiddish language.¹⁶⁷ This was the first ever such undertaking, and it was published in a huge folio format in 1931.¹⁶⁸ The section had its own academic journal in Yiddish, *Tsaytshrift*, dedicated to problems regarding the literature, history, and language of the

¹⁶² Sven Gustavsson, “Belarus: A Multilingual State in Eastern Europe” in Sven Gustavsson and Harald Runblom (eds.) *Language, Minority, Migration* (Uppsala: Centre for Multiethnic Research, 1995), 47.

¹⁶³ Most of the few books that had been published in modern Hebrew following the October revolution had been published in Odessa and Kyiv, cities which the Bolsheviks did not yet control. After the Bolsheviks established their power over Ukraine, the Kyiv TSIK issued orders that all printing houses, related to organizations “that are Zionist and clerical in orientation and content ... will have their publications prohibited and confiscated.” The printing presses were given to the Jewish sections of the republican communist parties. Ieguda Slutskii, “Sud’ba ivrit v Rossii,” in Ia. G. Frumkin, G. Ia. Aronson, A. A. Gol’denevizer (eds.), *Kniga o russkom evreistve: 1917-1967* (Jerusalem, Moscow, Minsk: Met, 2002), 255, and L. Dziadzinkin, “Etnakonfesiyny aspekt palitiki bal’shavikou na vitsebskhyne u adnosinakh da iaureiskaha nasel’nitsstva (1920 – 1930 h.)” in Rozenfel’d (ed.), *Etnosotsial’nye i konfessional’nye protsessy*, 27, cites DAVV. f. 10050, vop.1, spr. 26, ark. 17. For a discussion on the Soviet campaigns against Hebrew, see Gitelman (2001), 74 -77. Ironically, in the Zionist state, there was only room for one official “Jewish language.” For years, Israel maintained “a complete ban on education and publication” in Yiddish. Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, 2nd edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 401.

¹⁶⁴ Slutskii, 255.

¹⁶⁵ NARB, f. 4p, op. 1, d. 1859, ll. 14-19.

¹⁶⁶ The Hebrew-Aramaic component makes up about 15 per cent of modern Yiddish. Outside the Soviet Union it was – and is – spelled etymologically. These spelling reforms were controversial in some camps and polarized the world-wide Yiddish-speaking community along political lines. In many ways, this anticipated the similar polarization of the Belarusian-speaking community following the Soviet Belarusian spelling changes in 1933. Dovid Katz, *Grammar of the Yiddish Language* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 22-23.

¹⁶⁷ Zhurauski, 10.

¹⁶⁸ Katz (2004), 304.

Belarusian Jews.¹⁶⁹ The quality of the Yiddish language research carried out was very high, and *Tsaytshrift* emerged as a rival to the publications of *Yivo* in Vilnius.

For the first time, Yiddish writers were employed and received salaries from the Soviet government, something previously unheard of. The Yiddish academic institutions in Belarus were accompanied by similar institutions in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Moscow. Kyiv, in particular, became an important center of Soviet Yiddish intellectual life. In addition to the promotion of Yiddish language and culture, the Jews of the BSSR, Ukraine, and Crimea had been given limited autonomy in so-called Jewish regions, complete with their own Yiddish-language law courts. In 1931, there were a total of 46 courts operating in Yiddish in the BSSR and Soviet Ukraine. Education in Yiddish was implemented on all levels. In 1931, there were 339 Yiddish schools in the BSSR with an enrollment of 36,501 pupils. Similar policies were implemented in Soviet Ukraine and the RSFSR, where 94,872 pupils were enrolled in 831 Yiddish schools and 11,000 pupils in 110 schools, respectively. If the numbers of Yiddish language kindergartens are added, over 160,000 pupils received state-sponsored education in Yiddish in the USSR by 1931.¹⁷⁰ Whereas more than a quarter of the Jews in the BSSR and Soviet Ukraine did not attend school at all, almost half of the Jewish children enrolled in school received their instruction in Yiddish.¹⁷¹ In order to alleviate the deep poverty of the Belarusian Jews, the KP(b)B attempted to reduce the high unemployment in the *shtetlekh* by providing the Jews with land and assisting them in establishing cooperatives. The party was well aware that hostilities on behalf of the majority Belarusian society to national minorities risked causing the latter to withdraw from the joint, all-Belarusian project.¹⁷² Similarly, the elimination of the historical hostilities between Belarusians and Poles was another important goal.

¹⁶⁹ Zhurauski, 10, citing H. Aliaksandrau, "Kraiznauchaia pratsa siarod iaureiskaha nasialennia BSSR." *Nash Krai*, 1927, No. 10, pp. 65-66. Archive of the BSSR Academy of Science, f. 67, vop. 3, spr. 24, l. 21-22.

¹⁷⁰ Katz (2004), 303-304, 389; Bemporad (2007), 100.

¹⁷¹ Gitelman (2001), 89.

¹⁷² "Rezaliutsia plenuma TsK KP(b)B 'Ab natsyianal'nai palitytsy,'" *Rezoliutsii plenuma TsK KP(b)B (12-15 oktiabria 1925 g.)* (Minsk: 1925), 12-24, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 78-79.

BSSR Poles and Catholics

The situation of the Poles in the BSSR differed from that of the Jewish minority. Soviet policies vis-à-vis the Polish population were dictated by outside influences, primarily by the Polish Communist movement, which had been forced underground. Its exiled leadership was stationed in Moscow. There was no shortage of Polish communists; in fact the Poles, as a “western,” relatively well-educated and discriminated nationality were overrepresented in the Bolshevik movement at all levels. Several of the leading Bolsheviks were Poles: Dzerzhinsky, Marchlewski, Kon, and Unshlikht. In 1924, Poles constituted 10.9 per cent of the party workers of the KP(b)B.¹⁷³

There were two Polish Bureaus, or *Pol'biuro*'s in the Soviet Union; one central organ in Moscow and one locally in Miensk. The Miensk *Pol'biuro* was established in 1921 and continued its existence until 1930. It was made up of émigrés from Poland and a central aim was to subvert the Polish state and stir up revolution in Poland.¹⁷⁴ The Poles of Soviet Belarus constituted a culturally, politically, and socially diverse population, many of whom belonged to the so-called “unorganized population,” such as pensioners, former office workers, small farmers and artisans. This heterogeneous community consisted of three main groups, which had little in common. The first, major group, was made up of Roman Catholics, which loosely identified with Polish culture and tradition, while speaking East Slavic dialects. The national identity of this group was weak and ambiguous. The second group consisted of Polish settlers and their descendants, who had arrived in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of them were skilled workers or intellectuals, and constituted the local elites. While most had fled to Poland during the wars, a few stayed for various reasons. The third group consisted of Polish communists, refugees from Poland, dedicated to building a national Polish communism in the USSR. The latter group was small, constituting 1-1.5 per cent of the Soviet Poles.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Mikołaj Iwanow, *Pierwszy naród ukarany: Stalinizm wobec polskiej ludności kresowej (1921-1938)* (Warsaw: Agencja Omnipress, 1991), 44.

¹⁷⁴ Zejmis, *Belarus*, 76.

¹⁷⁵ Iwanow, 27-28.

The Poles, particularly the first group constituted an invisible community, geographically scattered and hard to find. According to the 1926 census, most Poles in the BSSR did not speak Polish.¹⁷⁶ In addition, few were interested in having their children instructed in the Polish language, something that made government work among the Poles difficult. The Polish Bureau came up with three different categories in order to classify this diverse category. First was the category of nationally conscious Poles, who demanded Polish schools, even though they themselves spoke Belarusian. A second category was those who identified as Belarusians but partly used Polish in their Catholic Church. The third group consisted of Catholics without any strong sense of national consciousness, lacking knowledge of Polish but which sought Polish schools for their children.¹⁷⁷ Out of a total of 97,498 Poles in the census of 1926, only 36,046 declared Polish as their native language. A plurality, 42,752 gave Belarusian and 17,179 Russian as their native languages, while the remainder was cryptically listed as speaking “other languages.”¹⁷⁸

In March 1925, *Inbelkul’t* followed suit with a Polish branch, organized in three sections: language and literature, history, and ethnography. Its assignment was similar: to map and research the linguistic particularities of the Polish minority in the BSSR, standardize the Polish language used in the BSSR, and provide a consistent terminology of BSSR Polish. Since the political situation was considered to be entirely different following the October Revolution, a new terminology in the areas of the economic, political, and social life of the Polish minority was considered necessary in order to reflect these changes.¹⁷⁹ *Inbelkul’t* even opened departments of Lithuanian and Latvian, which were assigned to study the languages, history, and ethnography of the small numbers of Lithuanians and Latvians in the BSSR.¹⁸⁰ Throughout the 1920s, both the *Pol’biuro* and the central authorities of the KP(b)B in Minsk recognized

¹⁷⁶ Zejmis, 78, 79, 81.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 85-86.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 113f, citing *Vsesoiuznaia Perepis’ Naselenia 1926 goda*. Tom X., 9, 10, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Zhurauski, 10-11, citing Ia. Vitkouski, “Kraiaznauchaia pratsa siarod pol’skai natsyianal’nastsi,” *Nash Krai*, 1927 No. 10, 67-68.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 11.

the *szlachta* stereotype as problematic and as a source of anti-Polish sentiments.¹⁸¹ The Bolsheviks had in fresh memory how the Polish workers, guided by anti-Russian nationalism, sided with Piłsudski during the Polish-Soviet War, and regarded the Poles as one of the least reliable ethnic groups in the borderlands.¹⁸²

Quadrilingualism in Practice

The constitution of the BSSR guaranteed any citizen of the republic, regardless of nationality the right to be served by the republican authorities in his/her native language. To manage an enormous multilingual bureaucracy was a massive enterprise. The People's Commissariats of education and agriculture, the militia, courts and legal system, as well as post and telegraph needed to be operational in the four official languages.¹⁸³ Their employees had to know both Belarusian and Russian, and sufficient Yiddish and Polish.¹⁸⁴ All forms, legal documents, birth certificates, ID cards, and passports were printed in the four official languages, and so were all government stamps and seals.¹⁸⁵ All important government information, and "all documents of mass character," as well as all important political meetings and demonstrations, needed to carry slogans and information in all the four official languages.¹⁸⁶ Laws were published in Belarusian, Russian and other languages, when necessary. Furthermore, in the border areas of the republic, local officials needed to be able to communicate in Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian as well. From 1924, multilingualism was aggressively enforced within the bureaucracy. Employees, who did not know the official language, or locally Polish, Yiddish, Latvian, Lithuanian, or Ukrainian were given six months to learn these languages.¹⁸⁷ Learning a new language in six months was a challenge for any full-time employee. In the BSSR, neither the government, nor the party sponsored courses in these

¹⁸¹ Zejmis, 93.

¹⁸² Snyder, *Sketches From a Secret War* (2005), 11, 29.

¹⁸³ "Pastanova 2-i sesii TsVK BSSR 'Ab praktychnykh merapryemstvakh pa praviadzenni natsyianal'nai palityki,'" July 15, 1924. NARB, f. 6. vop. 1 spr. 278. l. 17-24, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 130.

¹⁸⁴ Helena Głogowska, *Białoruś 1914-1929: Kultura pod presją polityki* (Białystok: Białoruskie Tow. Historyczne, 1996), 100.

¹⁸⁵ However, the BSSR leadership was not the first to do so. Already the German occupation forces had allowed printing of passports in Yiddish, and the BPR had partly financed its limited activities through the sale of passports and other paraphernalia in the Belarusian language. Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 17; Katz (2004), 279.

¹⁸⁶ "Rezaliutsyia plenuma TsK KP(b)B 'Ab natsyianal'nai palitytsy,'" 12-24, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 78.

¹⁸⁷ "Pastanova 2-i sesii TsVK BSSR," NARB, f. 6. vop. 1 spr. 278. ll. 17-24, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 131.

languages, but assumed that new employees had somehow acquired these languages as their mother tongue at home and therefore only needed to fall back on their “national” languages.¹⁸⁸

From January 1, 1925, all signs on public buildings had to be posted in the four official languages, the largest font being in Belarusian, with the other languages in descending order, reflecting the relative importance or usage of the language in the region. Private buildings were allowed to keep monolingual signs until the next renovation, at which point the other four languages had to be added.¹⁸⁹ According to the official guidelines, addresses written in the Polish or Belarusian languages were to be written on the left hand side of the envelope and had to be translated into Russian on the right side by a postal worker. If the address was written in Yiddish, there were special procedures, as they often took up the entire front side of the envelope. Therefore, the translators were instructed to enter the Russian translation on the back of the envelope.¹⁹⁰ The contrast with the situation in Western Belarus could hardly have been sharper; letters addressed in Belarusian were returned to the sender.¹⁹¹ Foreign visitors, arriving in Minsk, marveled at this official use of Yiddish. Large posters at the Minsk railroad station greeted the visitors in the four official languages.¹⁹² The Yiddish writer I. J. Singer, traveling to Minsk from Warsaw in 1926, noted in astonishment that

These four languages, Belorussian, Russian, Polish and Yiddish, meet me at the train station. They look down at me from the grey wall... I come across them at every step, in every commissariat, office, everywhere there are signs in the four languages. [This] is now something normal. The only one who marvels at this is probably me...In Minsk, the Yiddish signs, the schools, the courses, the theatre, the newspaper, the courtroom, the scholarly institute – are something natural. It was unnatural that they did not exist before the Revolution.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Yocom, 285.

¹⁸⁹ “Pastanova 2-i sesii TsVK BSSR,” NARB, f. 6. vop. 1 spr. 278. ll. 17-24, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 136.

¹⁹⁰ Bemporad (2007), 95.

¹⁹¹ Lubachko, 134.

¹⁹² Katz (2004), 302.

¹⁹³ Bemporad (2007), 94 and 102 citing I. J. Singer, *Nay-Russland: bilder fun a rayze* (Vilna: Kletskin, 1928), 25, 29.

Ethnicizing and Belarusifying the Communist Party

Between 1922 and 1927 the number of Belarusians in the Soviet Communist Party more than tripled.¹⁹⁴ To a large extent, this surge of new members was due to members of rivaling leftist parties switching their allegiances to the Communist Party. Former members of other nationalist leftist organizations, such as the Belarusian Socialist Hramada (BSH), the Belarusian Communist Organization (BKA), and the Belarusian Socialist revolutionary Party (BPS-R), now made careers in a KP(b)B that was rapidly implementing some of the key issues of these parties' old programs.¹⁹⁵

The rapid expansion of the Belarusian Communist Party was a necessity, since there was an acute shortage of qualified administrators. On an all-union level, two factions dominated the party. The first faction considered the national question to be of secondary importance and largely solved by the victory of socialism and the coming to power of the Bolsheviks. Zinoviev was a leading critic of Belarusization, and articulated the opposition of the left wing of the party, which was concerned that the class aspects of the policy would be overshadowed by its national content and its internationalism by nationalism.¹⁹⁶ The other faction, which had the support of Lenin and Stalin and the majority of the leadership in Moscow, was the national communists, who were in agreement with the national awakeners.¹⁹⁷ They supported positions similar to those of the BSH and the BPS-R. Like Ihnatouski, many of these were nationalists first, and communists second. The national communists were strengthened by the resolutions of the tenth and twelfth party congresses of the RKP(b) in 1921 and 1923, which established resolutions and platforms not only on the national question, but also on industrialization, and the need to transform the

¹⁹⁴ This was one of the highest proportions of any people in the Soviet Union. Yet the party membership of other nationalities, who were subjected to the *korenizatsiya*, surged as well in the period 1922-1927. While the number of Jewish party members increased by 92.9 per cent, the number of Ukrainians increased by 276.9 per cent. Other than the Belarusians, only a few Caucasian nationalities showed an even more exceptional growth (400 to 500 per cent). *Sotsial'nyi i natsional'nyi sostav VKP(b)* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928), 115.

¹⁹⁵ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 13.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 12.

SSRB/BSSR into an industrial center.¹⁹⁸ This was the beginning of the processes of national mobilization, seen as necessary in order to turn the SSRB/BSSR into a modern, national Belarusian republic.

Ihnatouski's Belarusization was highly effective. The national communists efficiently utilized the government machinery to implement substantial linguistic changes. Within a few years, the Belarusian press changed from Russian and was almost exclusively published in the Belarusian language.¹⁹⁹ In order to mark its 10th anniversary, *Zvezda*, the paper of the Central Committee of the KP(b)B, was published exclusively in Belarusian from July 1927. Subsequently its name was Belarusified to *Zviazda*.²⁰⁰ In 1927, four of the eleven republican papers and three of the eleven journals, were published exclusively in Russian.

1927	Belarusian	Russian	Yiddish	Polish	Bilingual Belarusian-Russian
BSSR papers	3	4	1	1	2
BSSR journals	4	3	2		2

By 1929, there was only one newspaper exclusively published in Russian, and no Russian-language journals in the republic.²⁰¹ Even more swift was the rate at which the primary education was switched to Belarusian. Whereas 28.4 percent of the schools instructed in Belarusian in 1924-25, this number had risen to 93.8 percent by 1929-1930.²⁰² The Platform on the National Question, adopted by the KP(b)B in July of 1923, contained proposals to Belarusify the system of higher education, the Communist University, and even the Second Belarusian Division.²⁰³ Given the lack of qualified Belarusian language

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁹⁹ Martin (2001), 261.

²⁰⁰ "Pastanova biuro TsK KP(b)B 'Ab 10-hadovym iubilei hazety 'Zviazda'" March 11, 1927. NARB f. 4p. vop. 3, spr. 23. l. 63, and "Pastanova Biuro TsK KP(b)B 'Ab navykh hazety 'Zviazda' pry peravodze iae na belaruskuiu movu i rabotai hazety na ruskai move'" July 15, 1927. NARB, f. 4p, vop. 3, spr. 21. ch. 1, l. 238, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 174, 178.

²⁰¹ Even so, the decision to switch language to Belarusian was accompanied by the introduction of a Russian language "workers'" paper. The first issue of this paper, called *Rabochii*, was published on July 29, 1927. In September 1937, the paper was renamed *Sovietskaia Belorussiia* and became the most important paper in the republic, a position it still retains. Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 19.

²⁰² Martin (2001), 261.

²⁰³ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 16.

professors, not to mention the lack of a Belarusian academic vocabulary for many subjects, the Belarusization of higher education progressed slowly and met with much resistance, forcing the authorities to take more aggressive measures. In the bureaucracy and the state apparatus, the rapid changes in the use of language were equally impressive. Whereas in 1925 only 20 per cent of the central administration of party, state, and union organizations spoke Belarusian, this number had increased to a full 80 per cent by 1928. For the local administration, this number increased from 36 per cent to 70 during the same time period.²⁰⁴ Classes in *Belarusaznaustva* (Belarusian studies), became mandatory for government employees twice a week, and two hours per session.²⁰⁵ The number of Belarusian speakers in government did not mean a corresponding increase in the number of Belarusians in government. The *korenizatsiia* of the state apparatus was more successful than that of the party organs.²⁰⁶ Even if many Belarusians were recruited to the government, they were still much underrepresented, particularly in the government and the courts.²⁰⁷ Ironically, the Belarusization of the government workers occurred more rapidly among ethnic Jews and Poles than ethnic Belarusians.²⁰⁸ Certain ethnic groups remained overrepresented in the upper echelons of the state and party apparatus, among them the Jews and the smallest ethnic minorities in the republic, such as Latvians, Lithuanians, and even Estonians. Poles and, in particular, Russians were consistently underrepresented.²⁰⁹

Conclusion

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 19.

²⁰⁵ “Tlumachal’naia zapiska da kashtarysa vydatkau na kursy pa belarusaznaustvu na 1925/26 navuchal’ny hod,” September 1, 1925. NARB. f. 4p. vop. 7. spr. ll. 27-28. kopiia, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 138.

²⁰⁶ Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union*, 36.

²⁰⁷ In 1929, Belarusians made up 51.3 per cent of the employees in the administrative organs, 30.8 per cent of government employees, 26.3 per cent of employees in the legal system and 59.5 per cent in agricultural administration. Platonav and Korshuk, 19. In 1926, the TSIK consisted of 18.6 per cent Jews, 11.6 per cent Russians, 2.3 per cent Poles, 9.3 per cent representing “other nationalities.” The Savnarkom was composed of 35.7 per cent Jews, 3.6 per cent Russians, 7.1 per cent “other nationalities.” Yocom, 287n, citing NARB f.4, op. 7, gg. 1925-1926, d. 274, l. 24.

²⁰⁸ In December, 1926, of the employees in the Central Executive Committee, the Soviet of People’s Commissars, the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture and the People’s Commissariat of Education, 48 percent of the Jews (who constituted 12.2 percent of the employees) and 45.5 per cent of the Poles (who made up 2.9 per cent of the employees) had a command of Belarusian. Of the Belarusians (who constituted 68.2 per cent of the employees), 8.5 per cent had a good command of the Belarusian language, 34.7 per cent had a command of the language. “Zvestki natskamisii pry TsVK BSSR ab vynikakh praverki vedau pa belaruskai move supratsounikau TsVK, SNK, NKZ, NKA” December, 1926. NARB. f. 701. vop.1. spr. 25. l. 79, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 171.

²⁰⁹ Yocom, 286-287.

The revolutions of 1917 marked a sharp break with the forced Russification of the tsarist period. In their construction of republics, national in form, and socialist in content, the Soviet authorities replaced Russification with forced Belarusization, Yiddishization, and Polonization. “Expert opinions” of Soviet ethnographers came to trump the self-identification of the locals, who were often confused by modern definitions of ethnicity and still lacked a national consciousness in the modern understanding of the word. While the principle of ethnic self-identification on an individual level was retained in the Soviet censuses until 1932, on a macro level it had been abandoned already in 1924, when large territories of the RSFSR were transferred to the BSSR, often against the wishes of the local population, with the motivation that authorities had collectively designated the population as Belarusian. Thus the people of the BSSR had their nationality assigned to them by bureaucrats, ethnographers and politicians, who fulfilled political directives, and were often guided more by foreign policy concerns than the interests of the local populations. In the absence of modern national identities, the Belarusians generally identified with their religions. The Belarusian national activists and the Bolsheviks shared a common desire to superimpose new, ethno-linguistic identities on the pre-modern religious identities in the borderlands. Rejecting even the right to voluntary assimilation, the Soviet authorities deliberately maintained and preserved the pre-modern ethno-linguistic divisions in the BSSR. Following the tripling of the population of the BSSR after the two enlargements in 1924 and 1926 large numbers of Russian-speaking city-dwellers were re-designated as Belarusians, and subjected to the same form of forced Belarusization already imposed upon the rural Belarusian-speaking population around Minsk. Genuine concerns among this population that the forced Belarusization would constrain communication and put them at a disadvantage were brushed aside, with opposition dismissed as Great Russian chauvinism. While a Soviet republic, under the political control of Moscow, the BSSR in some regards began to act as a centralizing nation-state, not unlike those in Eastern Europe. Large sections of the population were forced to switch their language, or operate in languages other than those they spoke at home. Schools switched from Russian to Belarusian or from Russian to Yiddish, forcing a re-molding of nationalities in accordance with the desires of the authorities. Personal preference mattered little, as these policies were carried out from above, in a heavy-handed fashion, which created resentment and opposition. The beneficiaries were the national

communists, who were able to implement much of the agenda for the BPR, now under Soviet auspices. These policies were attractive to the nationally minded intelligentsia, and were effective in assisting the growth of a pro-Soviet irredentist movement in Western Belarus, the topic of the next chapter. On the other hand, the quadrilingualism led to a Socialist tower of Babel, a fractured and unwieldy society where various interest groups were pitted against each other, and where the administration was run in four languages, and up to seven locally. While this system was difficult to administer even during the NEP, such multilingualism would be hard to reconcile with the extreme centralization required during the crash industrialization and introduction of central planning.

The Bolsheviks believed that they could construct new national identities. While they were involved in a conscious project of forging new identities, their concept of nationality was based on primordial assumptions. They believed in the existence of a distinct Belarusian nation, long before most Belarusians themselves did, and joined with the *smenovekhovtsy* émigré nationalists to superimpose on the pre-modern Belarusians a modern sense of identity. At the same time, they preserved notions of old, religious identities, in the case of the Poles. Many Belarusian-speaking Catholics were simply remolded as Poles, and their pre-modern, religious identities with their religion accepted at face value. While education, publishing, and local governance rapidly switched their language of operation from Russian to Belarusian, Yiddish, and Polish, this new, linguistic nationalism remained something novel and abstract to the masses, which to a large extent retained pre-modern local or religious identification, describing themselves as “locals,” Russians, Orthodox, Catholics, or Poles. The forced introduction of modern “national” identities upon the residents of the BSSR meant a sharp break with the pre-modern past. For the national minorities in the republic, and particularly for the Poles, this ethnic designation would have devastating consequences in the 1930s.

Chapter 5

The National Movement in Western Belarus

Introduction and background

The peace treaties that concluded World War I failed to resolve the national question for several peoples in Eastern Europe. The principles of national self-determination, articulated in Woodrow Wilson's famous 14 points, were implemented unevenly. Sizable German and Magyar minorities were dispersed among the territories of newly independent states. Their irredentist aspirations would be a constant irritant over the following decades.¹ Whereas the Versailles and Trianon treaties treated the Germans and Magyars harshly, the 1921 Riga peace treaty was nothing less than a catastrophe for the Belarusian and Ukrainian national movements. While several new nation-states were established in Eastern and Central Europe in 1918 on the basis of national self-determination, the Belarusian national movement failed spectacularly to establish a Belarusian state. Belarus was divided between two hegemonic states, each representing the two predominant cultural traditions of the traditional elites in the Belarusian lands: the Polish and Russian. Resurgent Poland did not recognize the aspirations of the Belarusian national movement as legitimate, let alone the existence of a Belarusian nation or a separate Belarusian culture. Unlike Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus even lacked representation at the Riga conference. With Belarus divided by closed and increasingly impenetrable borders, the Belarusian movement faced an entirely new political situation. In an area with several over-lapping national territorial claims, the promotion of one language and culture over another requires the demotion of another. Walker Connor has observed that that nation building also entails "nation destroying."² The territory of Western Belarus in 1920 was claimed not only by Belarusians, but also by Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian nationalists. Ethnic Belarusians constituted the majority of the population, but their nationalism was the weakest and most recent, and came to lose out in this struggle of nationalisms. FIGURE 22.

¹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (2002), 210.

² Connor argues that, since "ethnic identity" constitutes the only "true nationalism" and since the process of building state loyalties often involves overcoming ethnic identities, the proper term for the development of state loyalties is "nation-destroying" rather than "nation-building." Walker Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?," *World Politics* vol. 24, no. 3 (1972): 319-355, particularly 332-336.

The new nationalizing states came to rely on political and cultural assimilation. While the Soviet authorities in the 1920s were more tolerant of minority cultures than the Poles, its demands for adherence and conformity to their political system were much more extensive. Lithuania initially conceded power and autonomy to its Jewish and Belarusian movements, but was motivated primarily by *Realpolitik* rather than a genuine interest in its Belarusian minority, which constituted 0.08 per cent of its population. This chapter deals with the half of Belarus that became a part of Poland at the Riga Peace of 1921 and analyzes the nationalist movement in Western Belarus between the years 1921 and 1926. The chapter seeks answers to the following questions: what were the conditions under which the Belarusian national movement operated in Poland? How did it imagine the Belarusian nation? How did it relate to the BSSR and Lithuania, and what influence did the governments in Minsk/Moscow and Kaunas exercise on its elites? The chapter covers two main themes: the social and political situation in Western Belarus and the two main political wings of the Western Belarusian national movement, their origins, and ideology.

The Political Situation in Western Belarus: Background

The 1921 Peace treaty of Riga was an awkward compromise, which pleased neither Piłsudski, nor the Polish National Democrats. Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian nationalists were outraged by it. Strong forces, both within and outside Poland, regarded the Versailles, Trianon, and Riga treaties as unacceptable and illegitimate and did not expect them to last long.³ The post-1921 Polish state had unresolved border issues with most of its neighbors: with Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Germany and the USSR. Each of these states attempted to get involved in Polish domestic affairs by influencing their respective national minorities and supporting their national organizations. The USSR, Germany, and Lithuania were particularly active in this regard, but the Jewish diaspora also constituted a significant lobby group that acted on behalf of the Polish Jews in international affairs.⁴ Poland, which had just

³ In his memoirs, Kaganovich referred to the Polish control of Western Belarus as an “illegal” occupation that he did not expect to last. Lazar Moiseevich Kaganovich, *Pamiatnye zapiski rabochego, kommunista-bolshevik, profsoiuznogo i sovetsko-gosudarstvennogo rabotnika* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1996), 333.

⁴ Stanisław Ciesielski, “Kresy Wschodnie II Rzeczypospolitej i problemy identyfikacji narodowej” in Stanisław Ciesielski (ed.), *Przemiany narodowościowe na Kresach Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1931-1948* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2003) 22; and Stanisław Ciesielski, “Kresy Wschodnie – dynamika przemian narodowościowych,” in Stanisław Ciesielski (ed.) *Kresy Wschodnie II Rzeczypospolitej: Przekształcenia struktury narodowościowej 1931-1948. Raporty Centrum Studiów*

reappeared as a state after 123 years, was fiercely patriotic and led by a number of weak coalition governments dominated by the National Democrats between 1921 and 1926. The disenfranchised Belarusian and Ukrainian nationalist movements looked actively for allies. Non-communist nationalist forces, such as the Belarusian Peoples' Republic in exile and the Belarusian Christian Democrats, initially found an ally in Kaunas. The left oriented itself towards Minsk and Moscow, which came to underwrite their national ambitions.

The *Endecja* in Power: Assimilationist policies

The treaty of Riga meant the inclusion of large national minorities within the reestablished Polish state. Theoretically, the treaty between Poland and the Allied and Associated Powers along with the 1921 Polish constitution guaranteed the rights of the Polish minorities to preserve and develop their national cultures, languages, and traditions.⁵ On July 28, 1919, Poland was the first of eight newly independent states in Eastern Europe to sign the Minorities Treaty, which constituted a part of the Versailles Peace Agreement. It did so only under tremendous pressure from the Entente Powers. For Dmowski, one of the two Polish signatories, this concession was deeply embarrassing, and reinforced his belief that the Western democracies were under Jewish control.⁶ The National Democrats kept using the minorities' treaty as proof of a Jewish conspiracy against Poland, even though Polish Jews refrained from petitioning the League of Nations with their grievances. Poland did not intend to abide by such terms, and few of these rights were implemented. In September, 1934 Foreign Minister Józef Beck renounced the treaty.⁷

Piłsudski's stature had been diminished by the Polish-Soviet War, a war in which both sides failed to achieve their objectives. The National Democrats represented Poland at the Riga peace conference during the drafting of the final peace accord. They desired reconciliation with Moscow and to consolidate Polish control over the newly conquered areas. A common assessment is that while Piłsudski

Niemieckich i Europejskich im. Willy Brandta Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2006), 8, 68.

⁵ Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939: The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 139.

⁶ Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 72.

⁷ Ibid., 73, 76-77.

won the war, the National Democrats won the peace.⁸ The 1921 elections brought the *endecja* and their allies to power, and they drafted a constitution that limited the power of the executive. The *endecja* had crass political motives for this. Since Piłsudski was the dominant figure in Polish politics and carried enormous prestige, he would easily have won a presidential election, had he run, but he now announced his retirement from politics.⁹ Focusing on consolidation and Polonization, the *endecja* showed little interest in Piłsudski's old plans to subvert its eastern neighbor. Between 1921 and 1926 the Warsaw government had an inward focus, pursuing a policy of assimilation of its Slavic minorities and taking relatively little interest in developments in the USSR. For a period in 1923, Dmowski was himself minister of foreign affairs. The National Democrats insisted that "Poland was a country of Poles, a national home of the Polish nation, and not a federation of Poles, Jews and others."¹⁰ Increasingly this country, which was neither a federal state, nor a Polish nation-state, would come to rely on intimidation and discrimination of its ethnic minorities to hold these realms together.¹¹ In fact, Poland developed an utterly unstable parliamentary system, which lacked a political consensus on everyday matters.¹² A succession of weak coalition governments between 1921 and 1926, mostly dominated by the National Democrats, failed to establish a consistent policy toward the national minorities.¹³ Their primary focus was on the consolidation of the gains of the Polish-Soviet War and the assimilation of the Slavic minorities. However, this process was inconsistent and slowed down by political instability. Poland was weakened not only by massive wartime destruction from over six years of warfare, but also by an unstable political system with limited popular legitimacy. By 1923 there were no fewer than 92 political parties

⁸ Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War* (2005), 11-15.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ Giertych, *In Defence of my Country*, 376.

¹¹ Alexander Motyl identifies four models for multinational states. One of these models is the state which lacks "culturally bounded administrative units," a characterization Motyl suggested interwar Poland shared with Franco's Spain and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Alexander J. Motyl, "Thinking About Empire," in Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (eds.) *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building. The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 21.

¹² Arthur Sehn, "Etniska minoriteter i Polen i svenska diplomatrappporter 1918-1939. Del 2." In Andrzej Nils Uggla (ed.) *Acta Sueco-Polonica* Nr. 3 (1994), (Uppsala: Seminariet i Polens kultur och historia vid Uppsala Universitet, 1994), 174.

¹³ Kurkiewicz, *Sprawy białoruskie*, 39. For the makeup of the Polish Sejm in the early 1920s, following the elections of January 1919 and December 1922, see Giertych, 226-227.

working under a parliamentary system of proportional representation.¹⁴ In 1920, Poland had six different currencies and nine different fiscal systems in use simultaneously. Although a national currency was introduced in 1920, it did not come into general use until 1923.¹⁵

Belarusians suffered systematic discrimination in the political system of the Second Polish Republic. While elections in Poland were still relatively free until 1926, Western Belarusian attempts at political organization were severely hampered not only by widespread illiteracy, but also by legal measures. In 1926, five years after the signing of the Riga Peace Treaty, half of the Belarusians in Poland remained stateless and thus ineligible to vote.¹⁶ The National Democrats and their allies had skewed the electoral laws such that the national eastern districts and thus the national minorities would be underrepresented in the Sejm.¹⁷ In elections to the local legislative assemblies, one Polish vote equaled four Belarusian.¹⁸ The eleven Belarusian deputies to the Polish Sejm and the three Belarusian senators elected in the general elections of 1922 formed the so-called Club of Belarusian Deputies.¹⁹

The National Democrats tried to assimilate Poland's East Slavic minorities, beginning with the Belarusians, but economic hardship and fragile coalition governments undermined their ambitious programs. The results were half-measures, which did little to assimilate the Western Belarusians into the Polish state, but rather radicalized the nationalists and pushed them into the arms of the enemies of Poland. The harshness of the policy was illustrated by *endecja* cabinet member Skulski, who declared in

¹⁴ Derek H. Aldcroft, *Europe's Third World: The European Periphery in the Interwar Years* (Haunts, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 108.

¹⁵ Aldcroft, 109, Kurkiewicz, 118.

¹⁶ "A significant part of the Belarusian population in the kresy still does not have citizenship rights. About 50 per cent of the Belarusian citizens are still considered citizens of the former Russian Empire." Interview with *Hramada* Sejm deputy Petra V. Miatla. "Pavedamlenne druku ab sostrechakh deputata pol'skaha seima u dziarzhaunykh orhanakh i ustanovakh respubliki i abmene dumkami pra stanovishcha u savetskai i zakhodnai Belarusi," *Zvedza*, January 22 and 24, 1926, reprinted in U. M. Mikhniuk, U. K. Rakashevich, Ia. S. Falei, A. V. Shapava (eds.) *Zneshniaia palitika Belarusi: Zbornik dokumentau i materialau, T. 2. (1923-1927)* (Minsk: Ministerskva Zamezhenykh Sprau Respublik Belarus, Belaruski Dzierzhauny Universitet, Belaruski Navukova-Dasledchy Instytut Dokumentaznauistva i Arkhivnau Spravy, 1999), 199.

¹⁷ Timothy Snyder, "The Life and Death of Western Volhynian Jewry, 1921-1945," in Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower, eds. *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008), 79, citing Henryk Józewski, "Zamiast pamiętnika (2)," *Zeszyty historyczne*, no. 60 (1982): 151 and Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, "Przemiany cywilizacyjne i socjotopograficzne miast województwa wołyńskiego 1921-1939," *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, no. 1 (1995): 111.

¹⁸ Zen'kovich, *Granitsy, spory, obidy*, 103-104, citing Tsvikevich in *Zvezda*, November 15, 1925.

¹⁹ Kovkel' and Iarmusik, 484.

1925: “I assure you that in ten years you will not find, even with a candle, a single Belarussian in Poland.”²⁰ The influential politician and publicist Władysław Studnicki wrote that “We cannot even talk about the existence of a Belarusian people, as Belarusians have no traditions of their own. Given that, it is impossible to talk about a Belarusian culture, as there is no cultural unity among the Belarusians.”²¹ In exile, National Democratic veteran politician Jędrzej Giertych assumed that in the absence of national consciousness the Belarusians would automatically be attracted to the superior Polish culture: “[T]he Byelorussians mostly lacked the feeling of being a separate nation and quite inclined to polonization.”²² Conservative politicians in Wilno/Vil’nia, such as Aleksander Meyszowicz, Prime Minister of Polish-occupied Middle Lithuania 1921-1922, feared undue influence from abroad, and emphasized the need to “protect [the Western Belarusians] from influences from Kaunas and Bolshevik Belarus.”²³

The National Democratic strategy of turning Poland’s political boundaries into ethnographic borders was a central aim of the pre-1926 governments.²⁴ Władysław Grabski’s brother, Stanisław Grabski, served as *endecja* minister of religion and education in 1923 and 1925-26. He was also the author of the so-called “Lex Grabski” of 1924, aimed at eliminating the Ukrainian and Belarusian languages from Polish schools. Speaking on the national minorities in 1919, Grabski had stated that “We want to base our relationships on love, but there is one kind of love for countrymen and another for aliens. Their percentage among us is definitely too high (...) The foreign element will have to see if it will not be better off elsewhere. Polish land for the Poles!”²⁵ Grabski spelled out the *endecja* vision for Poland,

²⁰ Ivan S. Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule 1917-1957* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1972), 135. This quotation often surfaced in Soviet propaganda to justify the Soviet annexation of Western Belarus. *Komu my idem na pomoshch'* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel'stvo Narkoma Oborony Soiuza SSR, 1939), 22.

²¹ Statements like these were reprinted and widely disseminated by the Soviet government, which used them in their anti-Polish propaganda. *Zaprosy beloruskikh poslov v pol'skikh seim. 1922-1926 gg. Sbornik dokumentov o panskikh hasiliakh, mucheniiakh i izdevatel'stvakh nad krest'ianami i rabochimi Zapadnoi Belorussii* (Miensk: Belarusskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927), xvii, cited in *Komu my idem na pomoshch'*, 20-21.

²² Giertych, 188.

²³ Szpoper, *Sukcesory Wielkiego Księstwa*, 233, citing Aleksander Meyszowicz, *Trzy miesiące rządów w Litwie Środkowej* (Wilno 1922), 8.

²⁴ I. I. Kovkel', I. I. and E. S. Iarmusik, *Istoriia Belarusi: S drevneishikh vremen do nashego vremeni* (Minsk: Aversev, 2000), 478.

²⁵ *Deutsche Zeitung*, 2 September 1919, cited in Richard Blanke, “The German Minority in inter-war Poland and German foreign policy - Some reconsiderations,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 25 (1990), 89.

according to which Poland's aim should be “the transformation of the Commonwealth into Polish ethnic territory.”²⁶ “Lex Grabski” essentially pushed the Belarusian language out of the schools of Western Belarus, in violation of the treaty between Poland and the Western Powers, signed in Versailles in 1919.²⁷ From the first to the third class, instruction in Polish would be mandatory. Grade four to seven would have core subjects, such as the Polish language and literature, history, geography, and social sciences taught exclusively in Polish. Belarusian instruction would be allowed only in science classes and only in schools where non-Poles constituted over 40 per cent of the pupils. Further, it required that the parents demanded Belarusian instruction for their children. If not, science would also be taught in Polish.²⁸ Three hundred and forty-six private Belarusian language schools, which had been opened in 1918 and 1919, were closed by the Polish authorities between 1920 and 1925.²⁹ All Belarusian schools in Poland were closed down.³⁰

Polish Colonization

Given that ethnic Poles constituted a minority in the east, the Polish government made substantial efforts to change the population balance.³¹ One way to do this was through Polish colonization of these newly

²⁶ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90n, 100.

²⁷ Article 8 of the treaty read “Polish nationals who belong to racial, religious or linguistic minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as the other Polish nationals” Article 9 stipulated that “Poland will provide in the public educational system in towns and districts in which a considerable proportion of Polish nationals of other than Polish speech are residents adequate facilities for ensuring that, in the primary schools, instruction shall be given the children of such Polish nationals through the medium of their language.” “Treaty Between the United States of America, the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan and Poland (Signed at Versailles, June 28, 1919) in Isaac Lewin, *The Political History of Polish Jewry* (1990), 209.

²⁸ The law would give preponderance to the Polish language at the expense of the languages of the minorities. The Bloc of National Minorities strongly objected to the law and boycotted the voting in the Sejm. For a discussion on the details of the law and the controversy surrounding its implementation, see Kurkiewicz, 57-61; and Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations* (2003), 144.

²⁹ Hermann Bieder, “Der Kampf um die Sprachen im 20. Jahrhundert,” in Beyrau and Lindner, 456.

³⁰ Snyder (2003), 65, 282. This was a process that moved very quickly. Of 150 Belarusian schools in Western Belarus, only two were still operating in the fall of 1921. Prokhor Nikolaevich Ol’shanskii, *Rizhskii mir: Iz istorii bor’by Sovetskogo pravitel’stva za ustavlenie mirnykh otnoshenii s Pol’shei (konets 1918-mart 1921 g.)* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1969), 203.

³¹ While Wilno/Vilnius had a substantial Polish population, Belarusians made up some 50% of the population in the surrounding areas. Stephen R. Burant, “Belarus and the “Belarusian Irredenta” in Lithuania,” *Nationalities Papers*, 25, 4, December 1997, 646 and David R. Marples, *Belarus. A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Press, 1999), 14. According to Polish sources, of the total population of 549,000 people, 321,000 were Poles, 107,000 Jews, 75,200 Belarusians and 31,300 Lithuanians. Many observers consider these numbers inaccurate. “Since the [Vilnius] area was so important a source of contention between Poland and Lithuania, and the nationality of its population so much disputed, these figures – which are based on the census of the interested party – are not to be taken at face value. The extremely high Polish population and the very small

conquered lands. During the ten years following 1921, 235,000 Polish war veterans, known as *osadnicy*, or military colonizers, settled in the *Kresy Wschodnie*, increasing the Polish population to 260,000, or 5.9% of the population. Poles held most of the economic power in these areas, as Polish landowners owned 37% of Western Belarusian farmland.³² The *osadnicy* were assigned some of the best land in Western Belarus. The military colonization was intended to tilt the demographic balance in the region and promote cultural and intellectual Polonization. The lands of these military colonizers were designated as ethnic Polish islands, outposts of Polish rule in the east.³³ However, violent resistance by the local populations made life hard for the 38,000 Polish *osadnicy*. Half of the *osadnicy* in Western Belarus soon left their new land.³⁴ When military colonization was halted in 1923, most of the 8,732 holdings created were unoccupied.³⁵ The Polish authorities' attempt to destroy the Belarusian movement through military colonization and forced assimilation under Polish Prime Minister Władysław Grabski³⁶ was a failure.³⁷

Censuses

There is no consensus on the exact size of the population of Western Belarus. Belarusian-American historian Ivan Lubachko articulates the Belarusian perspective.

population of Lithuanians are particularly suspect, for it was commonly understood by impartial observers that there were more Lithuanians than Poles, but more Jews than either. However, there seems no method to go behind these figures, or to assign any given number of persons listed as 'Poles' to other categories, but it should be remembered in later breakdowns of the Lithuanian population that there are considerably fewer Poles and more Lithuanians, and perhaps White Russians, than are stated." A. W. De Porte, "Population," in Benedict V. Mačiuika (ed.) *Lithuania in the Last 30 Years* (New Haven: Human relation Areas Files, Inc. 1955), 18.

³² Horak, *Poland and Her National Minorities*, 176.

³³ Kurkiewicz, 44.

³⁴ Kovkel' and Iarmusik 483, claim that until 1924, a total of 38,000 Polish *osadnicy* settled in Western Belarus alone, but that half of them soon left their land, partly due to partisan activities. Forty-four per cent of all *osadnicy*, or 3 800 Polish military veterans were given land in Volhynia, distributed over 665 colonies. "The total number of military settlers was estimated (in [the] mid-1930s) at about 9.0-9.1 thousands of which 3.8 thousand settled in Wołyń (Volhynia), 1.1 thousand in Polesie (Polesye), 2.0 thousand in Nowogródek voivodship, 1.2 thousand in Wilna (Vilna) voivodship, and 1.0 thousand in Białystok voivodship. There were some 680-700 military settlements (osady)." Janina Stobniak-Smogorzewska, *Kresowe osadnictwo wojskowe 1920-1945* (Warsaw: Instytut studiów politycznych pan oficyna wydawnicza rytm, 2003), 93-116, 407-408.

³⁵ Polonsky, 140.

³⁶ Władysław Grabski was Prime Minister twice, from 23 June 1920 to 24 July 1920 and 19 December 1923 – 14 November 1925. Wojciech Morawski, "Władysław Grabski, premier rządu polskiego 23 VI – 24 VII 1929, 19 XII 1923 – 14 XI 1925," in: Andrzej Chojnowski, Piotr Wróbel (ed.), *Prezydenci i premierzy Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1992), 133.

³⁷ Kurkiewicz, 111.

More than 700,000 Belorussians from the Polesie region were simply designated as "local Slavs."

A large number of Belorussians were intimidated, and many were forced to register themselves as Poles; others were not asked their nationality but were automatically counted as Poles. Many of them could not even speak Polish, but the purpose of the Polish nationalists was achieved. In the general census of 1921 the total number of Belorussians was reduced to 1,041,700. The second Polish census of 1931 showed only 989,900. These results, though perhaps impressive as a feat of thaumaturgy, are statistically unreliable.³⁸

Belarusian sources claim that the real number of Belarusians in Poland at this time was 3,460,900, or 77.9 per cent of the total population in West Belarus.³⁹ Given the diaspora claims that over 70 per cent of the Western Belarusians disappeared in the official statistics, there is no agreement or common ground regarding the actual number of Western Belarusians.⁴⁰ Yet, it does appear clear that the Polish government deliberately formulated the questions in such a way that it would reduce the number of minorities.⁴¹ Not only were the majority of people surveyed illiterate, but also many did not understand the concepts of nationality and ethnicity. There were Orthodox inhabitants in Polesie who, when asked

³⁸ Lubachko, 129.

³⁹ Mikola Volacic, "The Population of Western Belorussia and Its Resettlement in Poland and the USSR," *Belorussian Review*, no. 3 (1956): 12. When the population statistics were published in 1923, local Belarusians were again registered as "locals." The census gave the number of Belarusians as 910,252. Curiously, it counted a full 156,105 people in Polessie as "Ruthenians." In addition, another 28,557 people were counted as "locals." Still, even if these people were counted as Belarusians, they still would not number more than 1,094,914. At the same time, the number of Poles in the voievodstvos of Polessie, Novahrudak and Vilnia was given as 878,967. These data confused the Swedish embassy to the point that they added a report to the quarterly report, attempting to explain the discrepancy between the numbers to the Swedish Foreign Ministry. Per G. A. C. Anckarswärd to Swedish Foreign Department, "Med befolkningsstatistik för de östra delarna av Polen," Warschau, March 12, 1923, UD:s arkiv, F1d:70, HP-dossierer 1923-1937, HP 21, No. 106:1. It contains an attachment from *Monitor Polski*, No. 55, March 8, 1923 in German translation. Even though the Polish census of 1931 was notoriously unreliable, it may be useful in one respect, as is listed the religious affiliation of the Western Belarusians. Of 996,000 Western Belarusians, 903,000 were listed as Orthodox, 78,000 as Roman rite Catholics, and 2,000 Greek Rite Catholics. Giertych, 384.

⁴⁰ Vakar estimates the number of Western Belarusians to be "about 3.5 million." Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (1956), 130-131. Snyder cites three million. Snyder (2003), 80. There are similar controversies concerning the size of the Lithuanian population in Poland. A current Lithuanian source gives their number as 200,000. Zigmantas Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2002), 339, while Mackiewicz gives the number of Lithuanians as "no more than 75,000." Stanislaw Mackiewicz, *Colonel Beck and his Policy* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1944), 117. Yet, some contemporary Polish historians maintain that the 1931 census "by and large" was correct. They explain the discrepancies as due largely to the national organization and the more developed levels of national consciousness among the Poles than among the Belarusians and other national minorities, such as the Volhynian Ukrainians. When many Belarusians identified themselves as "locals," this may have reflected their actual sense of identity. Jan Kęzik, "Struktura narodowościowa województwa wołyńskiego w okresie międzywojennym," in Ciesielski (2006), 8, 13-23, 68-69.

⁴¹ Aleksander Srebrakowski, "Struktura narodowościowa północno-wschodnich ziem Polski w latach 1931-1939," in Ciesielski (2006), 24-25, 70.

about their nationality answered, “We live in Poland, so we are Poles.”⁴² The nationally conscious elite condemned such tactics. *Belaruskaia Krynička* objected to the introduction of the category “locals” as a separate category in the census, and interpreted its use as a deliberate attempt to discriminate against Belarusians and Lithuanians. The paper considered the introduction of a “local” nationality unnecessary, since “Every person knows his nationality.”⁴³ In the absence of a “national” identification, the local, predominantly illiterate population in Polesie gave their ethnicity as “locals.” Many Belarusian-speaking Polesians identified with their isolated, local communities, their religion, dialects, or local traditions. While the Soviet government redesigned millions of people into Belarusians, the Polish government deliberately decreased the ethnic Belarusian component in the Polish state.

Poland had one of the poorest records of respecting minority rights in Eastern Europe.⁴⁴ Not only were the cultural and political movements of all ethnic minorities restricted and banned, the dominant Belarusian national organizations and Ukrainian political parties that were considered enemies of the Polish state were also prohibited.⁴⁵ There were no representatives of minorities at a ministerial level, or even among local governors in a country where minorities made up one third of the population.⁴⁶ The Polish minority policies constituted gross violations of both the Versailles and Riga treaties, as well as the Polish constitution. Paragraph VII of the Riga treaty guaranteed all Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians in Poland the same rights to their national culture as the Poles.⁴⁷ Belarusians were not allowed into positions of state authority, and the Belarusian language was treated as if it was non-existent. Letters and

⁴² Srebrakowski in Ciesielski (2006), 25.

⁴³ “Chi patrebna u spisie ‘tuteishast’?”?, *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 3, January 18, 1929.

⁴⁴ Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 95.

⁴⁵ Minority political parties considered opponents of Polish statehood, such as the Communist Party of West Ukraine and the Ukrainian Peasant-Worker Union (Sel-Rob), were banned from their foundations in 1923 and in the early 1930s, respectively. In 1926 the Communist Party of Western Ukraine dropped its demand to unite Western Ukraine with Soviet Ukraine. The Communist Party of Western Belarus, however, did not drop its goal of reuniting Western and Soviet Belarus. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 150; Lumans, 95; Janusz Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine 1919-1929* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983), 76.

⁴⁶ Snyder (2003), 150.

⁴⁷ Ol'shanskii, *Rizhskii mir*, 203, 218; Edward D. Wynot, Jr. *Polish Politics in Transition: The Camp of National Unity and the Struggle for Power, 1935-1939* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), 16-18.

telegrams written in Belarusian, even those using the *lacinka* orthography, were not delivered by the Polish mail service.⁴⁸

The Political and Social Situation in Western Belarus

While most of Europe was devastated by World War I, Belarus was among the most severely affected areas. After the war, Belarus became a central theatre of the Polish-Soviet conflict, leaving behind a burned-out wasteland gripped by epidemics, in which even the most primitive infrastructure had collapsed. Foreign aid workers described Western Belarus in the 1920s as a surreal landscape, crossed by endless lines of barbed wires, mine fields and military fortifications, and almost abandoned by the native population.⁴⁹ In 1923, 60 per cent of all children in the Vil'nia voivodship suffered from tuberculosis. Dying people were seen everywhere in the streets of Brest and Pinsk. The limited resources were severely overstretched by the burden of more than a million refugees from the Soviet Union, exacerbating an already critical situation.⁵⁰

During the 1920s, neither Poland, nor the USSR fully controlled the border area. The lax border security allowed for significant illegal traffic, something exploited by both regimes. Despite Soviet efforts at closing the border, peasants – refugees from the BSSR – crossed into Poland in the tens of thousands.⁵¹ Both countries sent spies across the border and encouraged rebellions and uprisings in the other state. Only in 1923 did the Soviet side begin to demarcate and set up control zones along the border area. The Soviet leaders, in particular, were able to exploit these zones to their advantage.⁵² Between 1922 and 1925, border guards on the western border of the BSSR arrested 11,641 people who had attempted to cross the border illegally, 675 of which were described as “spies and terrorists,” and

⁴⁸ Kovkel' and Iarmusik, 478.

⁴⁹ Werner Benecke, “Die Quäker in den Kresy Wschodnie der Zweiten Polnischen Republik,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, No. 42, vol. 4 (1994): 516-517.

⁵⁰ Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag her der Front: Besatzung, Kolaboration und Widerstand in Weißrussland 1941-1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998), 32.

⁵¹ A. L. Zaerko, *Krovavaia granitsa: kniga pervaia 1918-1939* (Minsk: Kameron-D, 2002), 118-119.

⁵² Snyder (2005), 31.

2,604 smugglers.⁵³ In addition, various radical Belarusian groups, dissatisfied with Polish rule and the division of Belarus, organized and formed partisan formations, active in Polesie, Navahrudak, and Vilnia voievodstvos.⁵⁴ Soviet sources emphasize the role of communists in the resistance, particularly the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB), founded in 1923. In 1924 and 1925 alone, the party organized several hundred operations. Partly, this campaign was made possible by Soviet support, particularly between 1921 and 1924.⁵⁵ The other major factor was the Belarusian Socialist Revolutionaries, led by their exiled leadership in Kaunas. From bases in the BSSR and Lithuania, partisans carried out strikes against the Polish state.⁵⁶ While this resistance had more the character of “partial outbursts” of violence than a general uprising, it had some impact.⁵⁷ According to Polish government sources, there were 878 partisan attacks on Polish interests in 1922 and 503 in 1923.⁵⁸ Some of these attacks were large scale operations. On the night of August 3 and 4, 1924, Navahrudak was attacked by a detachment of 100 armed men under the command of a Soviet military officer. The men took possession of the town, destroyed the local police offices and railroad stations, and plundered houses and stores.⁵⁹ This armed resistance to Polish rule does indicate a certain level of political awareness and mobilization among the Belarusians. It led to a backlash, resulting in some 1,300 political prisoners, most of them leftists, jailed in Western Belarus by the end of 1923.⁶⁰

⁵³ Zaerko, 255ff. Between 1921 and 1935, over 37,000 people escaped over the border into Poland and Latvia. As a result of the terror, between 1936 and 1939, a further 10,000 people crossed the border. Over the entire mid-war period, 1921-1939, about 7,000 people were arrested and deported in the border area. Zaerko, 117. Even after 1939, it was possible to cross the border between the General-Gouvernement and Soviet Belarus. For a personal account of such an illegal border crossing, see Boris Ragula, *Against the Current: The Memoirs of Boris Ragula as told to Dr Inge Sanmiya* (Montreal & Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 37-39.

⁵⁴ Kovkel' and Iarmusik, 478.

⁵⁵ Poluijan, *Revolutsionno-demokraticesoe dvizhenie v zapadnoi Belarussii* (1978), 49, citing TsGA LitSSR, f. 2, op. 2, d. 6, l. 257, 262; Zaerko, 93-94.

⁵⁶ Polonsky (1972), 142; Kurkiewicz, *Sprawy bialoruskie*, 36.

⁵⁷ Radziejowski, 45.

⁵⁸ Kovkel' and Iarmusik, 482.

⁵⁹ Polonsky (1972), 142.

⁶⁰ Kovkel' and Iarmusik, 479-483.

The Belarusian Christian Democratic Movement

The major political rival of the BSRH was the Belarusian Christian Democratic movement (*Belaruskaia Khrystianskaia Demokratyia*, henceforth, BKhD). Its ideology was a combination of liberalism, nationalism, and Christian idealism, mixed with socialist ideas of cooperatives and land redistribution. The BKhD held that through reforms, Christian ethics, sobriety, national solidarity, and education, the Belarusian people would be able to improve their situation, ultimately restoring the independence they had achieved in March 1918. Despite its relatively small size, the BKhD had considerable intellectual influence on the development of Belarusian nationalism. Leaning on the activism of Roman Catholic Belarusian priests, the BKhD grew out of the Belarusian National Committee, the first coordination center of the Belarusian nationalist movement.⁶¹ In 1911 a Belarusian cultural educational study circle was set up at the Catholic Seminary in Vilnia, founded by the seminarian Adam Stankevich. He would play an important role in the Belarusian nationalist movement in Western Belarus for over thirty years, both as a minister in the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic of 1918, and as a leader of the BKhD. When Stankevich moved to Petrograd to study at the Catholic Academy of Petrograd, he was instrumental in setting up a Belarusian study circle there in 1916. Stankevich and his group demanded that Belarusian be used in the church and schools and advocated an increased printing of Belarusian-language journals and textbooks.⁶²

The February Revolution had made it possible for Catholic priests to take an active part in the political life of the former Russian Empire, and the movement traced its origins to the First Congress of Belarusian national organizations held in Miensk on March 25-27, 1917. At this Congress, the academic and Roman Catholic priest Uintsent Hadleuski was elected a member of the leadership of the so-called Belarusian National Committee, the first coordinative center of the Belarusian national movement. Shortly thereafter, the Belarusian Christian Democrats, or the Belarusian Christian Democratic Union (*Belaruskaia Khrystsianska-Demakrattychna Zluchnasts'*, or BKhDZ), as they initially called themselves,

⁶¹ I. I. Koukel', "Belaruskaia Khrystsianskaia Demokratyia" in Rozenfel'd (ed.) (2001), 37, cites J. Tomaszewski, "Białoruska Chrześcijańska Demokracja: Uwagi o kryteriach ocen," *Studia polsko-litowsko-białoruskie* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), 161.

⁶² Koukel', 37.

was founded in April-May 1917 as a section of the Polish Christian Democratic Union (*Polski Związek Chrześcijańsko-Demokratyczny*). The Union catered primarily to Belarusian Catholic intellectuals in the western part of Belarus and the Vilnia area in particular. Only later did the Christian Democrats direct their activities toward the Belarusian peasantry and the Orthodox majority. Its first paper *Svetach* was short-lived but was soon replaced by the paper *Krynitsa* (Wellspring), the first issue of which was published in Petrograd on October 8, 1917.⁶³ *Krynitsa* (from 1925 *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*) became the most long-lasting publication in Western Belarus, surviving for twenty years under the editorship of Adam Stankevich,⁶⁴ who rejected the notion that the Belarusian nation was divided by class. “Marx’s proletarian materialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat does not hold any promise for the Belarusian people, particularly not the peasantry,” Stankevich declared in the Sejm.⁶⁵

Instead, the ideology of the BKhD was based upon Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 15 May 1891.⁶⁶ An attempt to diminish the appeal of the radical left by addressing some of the needs of the working class,⁶⁷ the encyclical rejected the idea that “class is naturally hostile to class.”⁶⁸ Described as a principle of Christian justice, *Rerum Novarum* entered the Belarusian Christian Democrats’ program in February 1920. The Belarusian Christian Democrats advocated redistribution of state land to peasants with little or no land, but the party program also explicitly defended the right of the church to its land and property and opposed the redistribution of church lands.⁶⁹ It also supported property rights. “Every worker, every laborer needs to be the owner or co-owner of craft shops or the land, on which they work.” This goal, the BKhD argued, required government assistance for Belarusian peasants to set up cooperatives, worker-operated enterprises, factories, banks, and credit institutes, which in turn would

⁶³ “Dziesiatyilechtsie ‘Krynitsy,’ *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 35, October 8, 1926, 1.

⁶⁴ Koukel’, 38, citing Adam Stankievich, *Belaruski Khrystsiianski Rukh* (Vil’nia: Drukarnia imia F. Skaryny, 1939), 186.

⁶⁵ “Pradmowa posł. PS A. Stankevicha u Sojme 24. IX. 1926,” *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 35, October 8, 1926, 2-4. Also cited in I. I. Koukel’, “Belaruskaia Khrystsiianskaia Demokratyia i iae rolia u belaryskim hramadska-palitychnym rukhu (1917-1939),” (2001), 38.

⁶⁶ Koukel’ (2001), 38.

⁶⁷ Lillian Parker Wallace, *Leo XIII and the Rise of Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1966), 262, 268.

⁶⁸ Wallace, 269, 271.

⁶⁹ A. Stankevich, *Belaruski Khrystsiianski Rukh* (1939), 143.

assist workers to open their own workshops, cooperatives, and small enterprises. The party described this attitude as an expression of the “Christian spirit.” Religion was at the core of the party’s philosophy. The party program declared that religion was “the basis for human existence.”⁷⁰ The Christian Democrats Adam Stankevich, Vintsent Hadleuski, and Fabian Abrantovich had all been members of the BPR *Rada*. After the collapse of the BPR, they propagated and published materials advocating an independent, democratic Belarus.⁷¹ The leaders oriented themselves towards Lithuania; Stankevich even advocated the unification of all of Belarus with that country.⁷² The party tried to use religious institutions for national mobilization. In the absence of a “national” church like the Greek-Catholic Church in neighboring Galicia, the BKhD attempted to create one, following Andrei Sheptyts’kyi’s example in Galicia.

In the Sejm, the BKhD joined the Ukrainian and Lithuanian deputies to form the so-called Bloc of National Minorities (*Belaruski pasol’ski Klub*, BPK). *Belaruskaia Krynička* regularly celebrated the “eternal friendship” with their “natural partners” and “our brothers,” the Ukrainians and Lithuanians.⁷³ The Ukrainian-Belarusian-Lithuanian Bloc worked for constitutional changes and the recognition of rights of the national minorities. The Bloc brought together the national minorities of the *Kresy Wschodnie*, in the belief that their destinies intertwined. “[W]e unite only with those people, with whom we have common interests and [with whom we are] united through common historical traditions.” *Belaruskaia Krynička* considered other minorities in Poland, such as the Germans “and particularly the Jews,” culturally and socially too remote from the eastern peoples to share any substantial interests with them.⁷⁴ The BKhD felt culturally alienated from the Great Russians, from which they marked a distance

⁷⁰ Ibid., 145; “Shto vyias’nilasia?,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 21, 30 June 1926, 1.

⁷¹ Koukel’ (2001), 39; Poluijan (1978), 94.

⁷² Kurkiewicz, 102.

⁷³ “Belaruska-ukrainski blok,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 29, October 23, 1930, 1. The Belarusian Peasant Union, the *Belaruski Sialianskii Saiuz*, an ally of the BKhD, likewise oriented itself towards these peoples. “Z kim pa daroze?” *Sialianskaia Niva*, No. 2, December 14, 1925, 1.

⁷⁴ “Belaruska-ukrainska-litouiski blok,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 35, December 6, 1929, 1; Davidovich, ”Polska-zhydovskaia zmova,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 1, September 20, 1925, 1-2; idem, ”Chym adkazam zhydom?,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 5, October 25, 1925, 4-5.

in both cultural and biological terms. “The Russians have Mongol blood in their veins,” the party organ claimed.⁷⁵

The BKhD sought legitimacy for the notion of independence in history, eagerly commemorating key dates in Belarusian history. They considered the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth as a Belarusian state, and the late Middle Ages a golden age of Belarusian history. FIGURE 22 In 1929 the Vilnia statute of 1529 was celebrated as the fourth centennial of Lithuanian-Belarusian statehood.⁷⁶ For the fifth centennial of his death, Prince Vytaut was commemorated as the leader of an independent Lithuanian-Belarusian Slavic state.⁷⁷ The national activists also identified with and celebrated national heroes of other Slavic and Baltic peoples.⁷⁸ Regarding itself as the successor of the BPR, it institutionalized these celebrations. The party remained opposed to the idea of Soviet Belarusian statehood, and competed with the BSSR in establishing a “national” history, with alternative holidays and key historical events. Its leaders established their own national symbols and “national” historiography, in which March 25, 1918 featured as the date Belarusian independence was “re-established” after centuries of foreign rule. Like the national communists in the BSSR, the BKhD “invented” new national traditions. Its press worked to develop a “national” Belarusian “folk music.” *Krynička* called on Belarusians to create a “national” religious literature and for Belarusian composers to create “original” melodies based upon Belarusian folk songs and to reject Polish and Russian musical traditions. They linked Belarusian cultural traditions to religion, and atheism to denationalization, which they feared would leave the Belarusians defenseless in the face of foreign influences.⁷⁹ The national activism of *Belaruskaia Krynička* also had strong internationalist undertones, and the paper regularly carried reports on the independence struggle of other ethnic minorities in Europe and colonial peoples around the world. For example, the paper contained

⁷⁵ “Raseitsy i ikh pretensii na nashykh zemliakh,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 7, 1928.

⁷⁶ “400-lets’te Litouskaha Statutu (30. XI. 1529-20. XI. 1929),” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 34, November 30, 1929, 2.

⁷⁷ “500-lets’te s’mertsi Vitauta (1430-1930),” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 14, April 11, 1930, 1.

⁷⁸ In 1929, *Belaruskaia Krynička* celebrated the millennium of the birth of Czech national hero St. Venceslaus. “Światu Wacław (929-1929),” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 28, August 27, 1929, 1. It presented the death of the Latvian writer Janis Rainis, “a great friend of the Belarusian people,” as a tragedy for the Belarusian nation. “Rainis” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 28, August 27, 1929, 1.

⁷⁹ Siaibit, “Patreba bielaruskai relihiinai kultury,” *Krynička* no. 5, February 1, 1925, 3-4.

sympathetic reports on the Ethiopian resistance to Italian aggression.⁸⁰ *Belaruskaia Krynička* engaged itself with the freedom and rights of the “125-million strong negro people,” sending “Greetings and wishes for success for you, our black brothers, from the Belarusian people,” demanding “Africa for the Negroes” and their right to university education in the United States.⁸¹ The Western Belarusian press found inspiration for autonomy or independence in such diverse cases as Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia,⁸² Alsace-Lorraine, Flanders, Corsica, and Breton.⁸³ As Ukrainian and Polish nationalism were radicalized in the late 1920s, the BKhD explicitly rejected the integral nationalism of Dmytro Dontsov as “Macchiavellian and not entirely healthy.”⁸⁴

Prior to the 1922 elections the BKhD joined forces with the Belarusian Peasants’ Union (*Belaruski Sialianski Saiuz*, BSS) under Fabian Iaremicz and Bazyl’ Ragulia, representing the emerging Belarusian middle class. The two movements were allied in the so-called Bloc of National Minorities.⁸⁵ While the BSS never attained mass support, it had some impact as a political ally of the BKhD, working primarily among Orthodox Belarusians.⁸⁶ Like the BKhD it equated Belarusians with peasantry. “[W]e lack our own bourgeoisie... and [have] only a very small percentage of merchants, let alone workers and working intelligentsia... The overwhelming majority of the Belarusian population consists of peasants. The very poorest of our classes – the peasantry needs to play the deciding role in the history of our people.”⁸⁷ The BSS explicitly rejected the joint policies of *korenizatsiya* and Belarusization as artificial.

Does the Belarusian have influence on political issues? He does not. Does the Belarusian have any influence over the army? He does not. Can the Belarusian serve in a Belarusian army, commanded

⁸⁰ “Abyssinia is an independent state of a dark-skinned people,” faced by Mussolini, “the dictator of Italy,” who wants “to make an Italian colony of that independent state.” “Abisiniia,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 30, August 10, 1935, 1.

⁸¹ “Vyzvol’nyia imknen’ni nehrau,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 28, July 10, 1935, 1.

⁸² Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Palestine were specifically singled out as encouraging examples of recently established states or autonomous units. “Niakhai zhyve Arabiia!,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 22, 20 Mai, 1934, 1.

⁸³ “Alzatsyia i Lotarynhia,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 36, 1928, 1.

⁸⁴ A. Stepovich, “Belarusy i dziarzhaunaia nezalezhnast’,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 14, 1929, 3.

⁸⁵ Polian (1978), 66; V. Polian, I. Polian (1962), 106-107; Zejmis, “Belarus,” 274.

⁸⁶ The BSS lasted from 1925 to 1932-33. After its dissolution, some of its members joined the BKhD. Zejmis, 274-274, 290, citing Jerzy Towaszewski, *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodow* (Warsaw, 1985), 127; and Krystyna Gomulka, “Bialorusini w II Rzeczypospolitej,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Gdanskiej. Ekonomika* Vol. 31(1992): 90-91.

⁸⁷ A. Saiuznik (psed.) ”Belaruski Sialianski Saiuz,” *Belaruski Iliustravany Kalendar* 1928, 86.

in the Belarusian language? God forbid. Does the Belarusian have his own, Belarusian postal system, since it is the Belarusians who primarily utilize the postal system in Belarus? Again, no. Do you think the railroad employees speak Belarusian? Think again. [...] And maybe you think that in Soviet Belarus they somewhere speak Belarusian? Never mind. You may speak Polish, Yiddish, Russian, but not Belarusian. ... Yet, in all fairness, I have to say that in the countryside the Belarusians do a great deal for the pupils [to learn Belarusian]. Maybe you think, that in Soviet Belarus, after all, the Belarusians are in charge, that Belarusians occupy the highest echelons of power? Where? You tell me! You can see various people in the leadership: a Pole, a Jew, a *Moskal'*, a Latvian, but no Belarusians.⁸⁸

Lithuania and the Belarusian People's Republic Government-in-Exile

Traumatized by the loss of Vilnius, Lithuanian political activists made the recovery of that city the focal point of Lithuanian foreign policy. A paragraph was entered into the Lithuanian constitution that Vilnius/Vilnia was the “eternal” capital, despite its temporary occupation by Poland.⁸⁹ Lithuania sealed its border with Poland and abstained from exchanging ambassadors with its southern neighbor. For almost two decades, the border remained closed, and no letters could be sent across it.⁹⁰ For the next twenty years, there was a diplomatic rift between Kaunas and Warsaw. Supported by Moscow, Kaunas held the Warsaw government responsible for the “permanent danger of international banditry.”⁹¹ Until its conquests had been recognized by the Treaty of Riga and accepted by the western powers, Poland kept a low profile.⁹² Only on March 15, 1923 did the international community recognize Poland’s sovereignty over the territories it occupied east of the Curzon line.⁹³ The Wilno issue continued to make all compromises with Lithuania impossible while complicating Poland’s relations with Latvia, which sided with Lithuania in the conflict. Even considerably less ambitious plans, such as the creation of a Baltic defense block consisting of Poland, Finland and the Baltic States, came to nothing, as Finland oriented itself towards Scandinavia. The only concrete step in this direction was the November 1, 1923 mutual

⁸⁸ F. Iaremich, “Samastoiast’ts’, tsi kul’turnal’na-personal’naia autanomia u BSSR,” *Sialianskaia Niva* No. 8, 28 February, 1928, 1.

⁸⁹ Jerzy Kochanowski, “Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland’s Former Eastern Territories”, in Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (eds.), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 137.

⁹⁰ Cienciala and Komarnicki, 148.

⁹¹ Leonas Sabaliunas, *Lithuania in Crisis: Nationalism to Communism, 1939-1940* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972), 14.

⁹² Polish control over Vilnius was not recognized until March 14, 1923 by the Western Powers. Cienciala and Komarnicki, 148.

⁹³ Kurkiewicz, 46; Borzęcki, 252; Gross (1988), 3.

defense treaty between Estonia and Latvia.⁹⁴ The Polish conflict with Lithuania also complicated relations with Latvia, which sided with Lithuania in the conflict over Vilna/Vilnius dispute, and blocked any prospects of a Baltic federation or defense league, and forced Lithuania to orient itself towards the Soviet Union and Germany.⁹⁵ The Soviet government used the Vil'nia issue to influence and manipulate Lithuania. In 1926, Moscow signed a treaty of mutual assistance with Lithuania, which recognized the latter's right to the Vil'nia territory.⁹⁶

The new Lithuanian leadership attempted to establish good relationships with both Jews and Belarusians. In August, 1919 Lithuania introduced generous minority rights policies, including national autonomy and language rights for its Yiddish-speaking minority, meeting the demands of the Bundists. The Jewish minority in Lithuania had far-reaching national rights. There was a minister for Jewish affairs, Yiddish was used in courts, and traditional trilingualism of the Ashkenazim--Yiddish-Hebrew-Aramaic--would be allowed in state schools.⁹⁷ Concerning Belarusians, on November 11, 1920, exactly two years after the armistice of World War I, the Lithuanian government signed a secret treaty with Vatslau Lastouski's exiled Rada, uniting to fight "Polish imperialism."⁹⁸ A Ministry of Belarusian Affairs was established, and members of the BPR Rada were included in the Lithuanian cabinet.⁹⁹ In this treaty the Lithuanian government agreed to finance the BPR government in exile "no less than one per cent of the Lithuanian state budget."¹⁰⁰ The Lithuanian state supported and encouraged the Belarusian national

⁹⁴ Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland*, (1985), 128.

⁹⁵ Riksarkivet, Stockholm. Dossier HP 885, Polen och Danzig, 1920-1926 No. 363, Kvartalsrapport från Sveriges beskickning i Warschau, No. 2, 1921, del II, 1. C. Anckarswärd to Swedish Foreign Minister Ernst Trygger, "Polen och de Baltiska staterna," Warschau, Dec. 16, 1929-1933, F1d:6, HP 1, 1929-1933; Erik Boheman to the Swedish Foreign Ministry. Warschau Nov. 20, 1929 Riksarkivet, F1d:5, HP 1, Polen-Ryssland, 1929-1933. UD:s utlandsmyndighet, Beskickningsarkiv Warszawa. No. 306 1/3.

⁹⁶ "Pol'skaia nota Savetam," *Belaraskaia khata: organ nezalezhnai demokratychnai Belaruskai dumki z iliustratsyami*, Year 1, no. 2, October 31, 1926, 2.

⁹⁷ Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: the Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 286-287.

⁹⁸ Oleg Łatyszonek and Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Historia Białorusi: od połowy XVIII do końca XX wieku* (Białystok: Związek Białoruski w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Katedra Kultury Białoruskiej Uniwersytetu w Białymostku, 2002), 148.

⁹⁹ Kiaupa, 325.

¹⁰⁰ Mikhniok, Rakashevich, Falei, and Sharapa (eds.), *Zneshniaia palityka Belarusi: Zb. Dokumentau. T.1. (1917-1922 hh.)*, 217. In accordance with the November 11, 1920 treaty, the Kaunas government lent the BPR government one million auksings. Kovkel and Stashkevich, *Why was the BPR never formed?*, 86, citing Central State Archives of the Lithuanian SSR, f. 551, inv. 17, file 406, sheet 117.

movement, particularly in the Vilnia area. The BKhD and the BPK received significant funding from Lithuania.¹⁰¹

The circle around Lastouski, who had been living in exile in Kaunas from the fall of 1920, was expanded after Poland deported twenty Belarusian national activists in 1921.¹⁰² The BPR government in exile was invited to Kaunas, from which it continued its activities. The Lithuanian government funded on September 25, 1921 the so-called National-Political conference in Prague.¹⁰³ At this conference, the diaspora recognized the exiled Rada of the BPR, as “the only legislative organ of Belarus, whose power derives from the All-Belarusian Congress of 1917, and proclaimed that the government of the BPR, which has its mandate from the BPR Rada, is the only executive power in Belarus.”¹⁰⁴ Lutskevich’s Supreme Rada dissolved itself and ceased its activities.

In Berlin, the BPR Rada operated a Belarusian mission and press bureau. It also kept an information center and Belarusian correspondents in New York and Copenhagen. Paris, home to a sizable Belarusian émigré community, even had a diplomatic mission, while Riga had a military diplomatic mission.¹⁰⁵ However, the generous Lithuanian minority policies were never ratified by the second *Seimas* of Lithuania, after opposition from the Lithuanian Christian Democrats.¹⁰⁶ The new Lithuanian government that was created on June 18, 1924 lacked a Ministry of Belarusian Affairs.¹⁰⁷ The Minister for Jewish Affairs and the elected National Jewish Council were abolished in 1924.¹⁰⁸ These measures led

¹⁰¹ Andrei Vashkevich, “Hroshy dlia partyi. Finansavanne partyinai dzeinasts i Belaruskai khrystsianskai demakratiyi (1921-1939 hh.)” *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 28 (2007): 73.

¹⁰² Polonsky (1972), 89.

¹⁰³ Reznik, *K voprosu o gosudarstvennosti BNR*, 29, citing *Belarusakaia entsyklopediya*: u 18 t. Vol. 2 (Minsk, 1996), 399.

¹⁰⁴ A. Stankevich, *Da histoyi belaruskaha palitychnaha vyzvaleninia* (1934), 114.

¹⁰⁵ Zen’kovich, *Granitsy, spory, obidy* (2005), 92.

¹⁰⁶ Liudas Truska and Vygačas Vareikis, *Holokausto prilaidos: Antisemitizmas Lietuvoje XIX A. Antroji Pusė – 1941 M. Birželis*, *The Preconditions for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania (Second Half of the 19th Century – June, 1941)* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004), 143.

¹⁰⁷ Chigrinov, 454.

¹⁰⁸ Katz (2004), 287.

to protests from the members of the *Seimas*, which represented the national minorities of Lithuania.¹⁰⁹

While a generous minority policy could have been justified in the case of the sizable Lithuanian Jewish population (7.6% of the total),¹¹⁰ it was harder to support for the Belarusian minority, which, according to the Lithuanian census of 1923, constituted 0.08 of the total population. At this time Stankevich's view that Lithuania would be able to reunite all Belarusian lands under its leadership appeared unrealistic.¹¹¹ In 1923, after the League of Nations recognized the Vilnia area as part of Poland, the Lithuanians realized the futility of using Belarusian irredentism as a way to promote Lithuanian state interests.¹¹² In November 1923 the BPR government-in-exile was forced to leave Kaunas. Its members left for Prague, but not in their function as representatives of a government-in-exile, but as private individuals.¹¹³ Following this move, funding from the Lithuanian government ceased almost completely.¹¹⁴

Nationalism in Western Belarus: the View From the Left

The leading rival of the BPR and the Belarusian Christian Democrats, and incomparably the strongest national movement in Western Belarus was the radical left,¹¹⁵ which connected the issue of national advancement with the improvement of the social situation of the poor and often landless Belarusian peasants. The Belarusian political left refused to accept the 1921 Riga Treaty, which had been negotiated without any Belarusians present.¹¹⁶ Its mainstream movement merged the themes of language, class and identity in its political platforms. Its ideology was Social Democratic or left-wing liberalism.

¹⁰⁹ Truska and Vareikis, 151.

¹¹⁰ The 1923 Lithuanian population census gave the following numbers: "153,743 Jews (7.6 percent of all population), 65,599 Poles (3.2 per cent), 40,460 Russians (2.3 per cent), 29,231 Germans (1.4 per cent excluding Klaipeda district), 14,882 Latvians (0.7 per cent) and 4,421 Belarusians (0.008 percent)." The percentage of Belarusians appears to be a miscalculation, and I have adjusted the number in the text accordingly. Truska and Vareikis, 145, citing *Lietuvos gyventojai. Pirimo 1923 m. rugėjo 17 d. visuotinio gyventojų sarašymo duomenys* (Kaunas, 1924), 54-55.

¹¹¹ Kurkiewicz, 101.

¹¹² Vashkevich (2007), 73.

¹¹³ Uladzimir Liakhouski, "Chekhia i belaruzki vyzvol'ny rukh u pershai tretsi XX stahoddzia," in Dorota Michaluk (ed.), *Białoruś w XX stuleciu* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2007b), 506.

¹¹⁴ Reznik, 30, citing *Ideologicheskaiia deialnost' kompartii Belorussii*, volume 1 (Minsk, 1990), 191.

¹¹⁵ The radical left, particularly the Communist Party of Western Belarus, has been rather thoroughly examined by both Soviet Belarusian and western scholars. See, for instance Radziejowski (1983), Poluijan (1978).

¹¹⁶ Materski, "Ryzhski traktat i Belarus'," 41.

This was not unique to Belarus –the Jewish Bund, the Polish Socialist Party, Lithuanian Democratic Party (the LDP), Latvian Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries merged national rights with a class narrative to demand various forms of “people’s socialism.”¹¹⁷

In Soviet historiography, the BSRH was given legitimacy by its association with the Communist Party of Western Belarus,¹¹⁸ itself part of the Communist Party of Poland, (*Komunistyczna Partia Polski*, KPP), founded on December 16, 1918, originally as the Worker’s Party of Poland (*Komunistyczna Partia Robotnicza Polski*, KPRP). It was a rather small party that remained illegal until dissolved by the Comintern in 1938.¹¹⁹ Throughout its existence, its members were under strict police surveillance, and subjected to regular arrests.¹²⁰ It was the leading pro-Soviet party in Poland with a very high proportion of ethnic minority members, including Jews, Belarusians, and Ukrainians.¹²¹ In October 1923 the Communist Party of Western Belarus was founded at a conference in Vilnius. In January 1924, KPZB also formed a youth organization, the Komsomol of Western Belarus, (KSMZB). It received substantial assistance from Minsk and Moscow. The party had a bureau and a party school in Minsk.¹²² As support for the anti-Polish armed struggle from Moscow and Kaunas ended, the partisan struggle was replaced by political activism through legal channels.

In June-July 1925, the most important Belarusian nationalist organization in Western Belarus was founded. The Belarusian Peasants and Workers *Hramada*, (*Belaruskaia Sialianska-Rabotnitskaia*

¹¹⁷ Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality* (2004), 4 -5; Theodore R. Weeks, “Assimilation, Nationalism, Modernization, Antisemitism: Notes on Polish-Jewish Relations, 1855-1905,” 37 and Jerzy Jedlicki, “Resisting the Wave: Intellectuals against Antisemitism in the Last Years of the ‘Polish Kingdom,’” 74-75 in Robert Blobaum (ed.) *Antisemitism and its Opponents in Modern Poland* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005); Kiaupa, 293-294; Bleiere et al. *History of Latvia*, 73-74.

¹¹⁸ V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan, *Revolutionnoe i natsional’no-osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie v Zapadnoi Belorussii v 1920 – 1939 gg.* (Minsk: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo BSSR, Redaktsiya sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1962), 82.

¹¹⁹ Only at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 was the dissolution of the Polish Communist Party declared to have been a mistake. V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan (1962), 9.

¹²⁰ Michlic (2006), 91.

¹²¹ Jews constituted between one fourth and one third of its membership, a similar percentage to that of the Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities. The highest number of Jewish members has been estimated at 10,000 individuals (out of a Jewish population of three million). In 1928, 7 per cent of the Polish Jews voted communist, i.e. the overwhelming majority of Polish Jewry supported non-communist parties. By the early 1930s, Poles made up 70 per cent of the membership in the party, Jews 26 per cent, and Ukrainians 3 per cent. Michlic (2006) 89, 92; Joanna Michlic, “The Soviet Occupation of Poland” (2007), 140.

¹²² Zaerko, 94-95.

Hramada henceforth BSRH) regarded itself as a “revolutionary socialist” movement, yet aimed to achieve its goals by legal means, staying within the framework of the constitution.¹²³ However, while it worked as a democratic mass organization, its leaders were simultaneously members of the elitist – and illegal – Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB), which took its orders from Moscow. Its leader, the linguist Broneslau Tarashkevich, had joined the KPZB in January 1925 and was a proponent of unification with the BSSR. A mass movement, the BSRH represented a variety of opinions. While the majority faction supported unification with the BSSR, another wing demanded full independence for Belarus.¹²⁴ Also, deputy chairman Rak-Mikhailouski and Sejm deputies Miatla and Voloshyn were simultaneously Communist Party members.¹²⁵ Political considerations prevented the BSRH from explicitly spelling out its irredentist ambitions in its program, which stated instead that the organization “adheres to the principle of self-governance of the Belarusian people. The Belarusian Workers’ and Peasants’ Hramada believes that all Belarusian lands need to be united in one independent republic under the rule of peasants and workers,” a euphemism for the detachment of Western Belarus from Poland and its unification with the BSSR.¹²⁶

The BSRH maintained closed links with the Miensk government, and was strongly supportive of its policies of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia*, which they perceived as a model also for Western Belarus.¹²⁷ In August 1925, representatives of the Polish Communist Party (KPP) and the KPZB organized a conference with Belarusian national communists and government officials from the BSSR in the Free City of Danzig. Tarashkevich represented the BSRH, meeting with Ihnatouski as one of three representatives of the TsK of the KP(b)B. Agreeing about the need for a joint political platform to guide

¹²³ Kurkiewicz, 103; V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan (1962) 81; Szpoper, 201.

¹²⁴ Polonsky, 142, citing A. Bergman, “Białoruska włościańsko-robotnicza Hromada (1925-27),” *Z Pola Walki* (1962): 73-99.

¹²⁵ The only non-Communist member of the BSRH leadership was Maksym Brusevich. Kurkiewicz, 102.

¹²⁶ Bergman (1984), 118; V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan (1962), 92.

¹²⁷ Poluijan (1978), 53-54; “Charhoviia pytan’ni natsyianal’nae palityki u BSRR,” *Narodnaia sprava* No. 22, October 7, 1926, 4.

the Belarusian movement in Poland, they adopted a platform with strong communist undertones, confirming also the government of the BSSR as the “sole representative of the Belarusian people.”¹²⁸

Generously supported by the Soviet Union, the leadership of the KPZB sent invoices to Minsk, which funded not only the activities of KPZB, but also the BSRH, the TBSh, the Belarusian Gymnasium in Vilnia, as well as sport and recreational clubs.¹²⁹

The BSRH conducted a conscious and systematic campaign to raise Belarusian national awareness through education. During the second half of 1925 the party was able to organize over 400 new Belarusian schools.¹³⁰ It combined the strategy of schooling of young Belarusians with education campaigns to eliminate illiteracy among the adult population. This latter campaign followed the Soviet model, whereby literate people were assigned to teach others to read. Across Western Belarus, small local Belarusian libraries, known as people’s clubs or reading club were soon established. By early 1926, there were forty such reading huts; by March 1, there were seventy.¹³¹ As every reading hut could tutor hundreds or even thousands of people, this was a significant development in an overwhelmingly illiterate society.

A central question for the movement was the acute shortage of land that many Belarusian peasants experienced.¹³² It demanded an end to the military colonization of Belarus, the nationalization and redistribution of land owned by church, *szlachta* and military colonizers (*osadnicy*), eight-hour workdays, and health care insurance. It also advocated an end to class privileges and equal rights for all Polish citizens regardless of national origin, class, and religious background. After Piłsudski’s coup in

¹²⁸ Kurkiewicz, 100-101.

¹²⁹ A bill of the TsK of the KPZB of September 1926, requested 468,965 rubles for the activities of the KPZB and its frontal organizations for the fiscal year of 1926-27. Almost half of these funds were used to support the KPZB, R 132,000 was assigned for the front organizations, and R 45,000 for the electoral campaigns for the KPZB and the BSRH. NARB, f. 4, vop. 21, spr. 112, l. 5-5 adv., in Mikhniuk et al. (eds.) (1999), 251-252; Kastsiuk et al. (eds.) M. Kastsiuk (ed.) *Historyia Belarusi: Tom piaty, Belarus u 1917-1945 hh.* (Minsk: Sovremennaia shkola/Ekoperspektiva, 2007), 396.

¹³⁰ V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan (1962), 83, citing the Central State Archives of the Lithuanian SSR (TsGA Lit. SSR), F. 2. op. 1. d. 9, l. 19.

¹³¹ Ibid., 83, citing TsGA Lit. SSR, F. 2. op. 1. d. 9, l. 20.

¹³² Ibid., 82.

May 1926 it demanded an end to the state of emergency and the release of all political prisoners.¹³³

Linking the land issue to a nationalist agenda, such as education in the Belarusian language and the promotion of Belarusian culture, the BSRH emphasized the link between literacy and political rights.

“Our struggle under Poland is not exclusively of national character, but is at the same time a social issue: we fight for our nationality, for our right to develop our culture, our language, and our schools. We are dedicated no less, or no less energetically to our social liberation, since our people is exclusively the working people: peasants and workers,” the BSRH organ *Narodnaia Sprava* claimed in September 1926.¹³⁴

The BSRH also formed alliances with other ethnic groups in Poland, such as the Ukrainian and Lithuanian minorities, in an attempt to halt the forced Polonization of the churches. They united in turn with the Jews to allow education in Belarusian and other minority languages, such as Yiddish.¹³⁵ In the Sejm, the BSRH often cooperated with the Independent Farmers’ Party, the *Niezależna partia chłopska*, a left of center grouping, which represented the poor or landless Polish peasants,¹³⁶ and the Ukrainian Peasant and Workers Party, *Sel-Rob*, which also had working chapters in Western Belarus, particularly in Polessie.¹³⁷ On September 25, 1926, together with the Ukrainian club in the Sejm, the BSRH voted to bring down the Piłsudski government, expressing its non-confidence in Piłsudski’s ministers of education and domestic affairs, in particular.¹³⁸

At the BSRH congress in Navahrudak that same month, the delegates admitted forty new chapters of the organization, which now consisted of 414 local organizations. It was a greatly strengthened and

¹³³ Ibid., 90.

¹³⁴ “Nia uhoda, a zmahan’ne,” *Narodnaia sprava*, No. 15, September 8, 1926, 1.

¹³⁵ V. Poluian, I. Poluian (1962), 85.

¹³⁶ With 21,000 members, this party never reached the same size as the BSRH, but was an important ally. Poluian (1978), 55, citing Benon Dymek, *Niezależna partia chłopska, 1924-1927* (Warsaw, 1972), 201.

¹³⁷ *Sel-Rob* had chapters in Brest, Kobinsk, Stolinsk, and Sarnensk districts in Polessie. Poluian, 55. In 1927, the party, an ally of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, had split due to a number of conflicts, most of which concerned relations with the USSR and the Comintern. The movement split into two factions known as Sel-Rob Right and Sel-Rob Left. While Sel-Rob Right was by far the larger faction, Sel-Rob left was strong in Polissia, particularly in the Stolin and Drahichyn regions. Radziejowski, 143.

¹³⁸ “Uradavy kryzis u Pol’shchy,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 1, September 30, 1926, 1-2.

self-confident movement that concluded the congress by the singing of the Belarusian anthem “Ad veku my spali.”¹³⁹ The 123 local BSR Hramada organizations that existed in Western Belarus in June 1926, had increased more than tenfold over a few months, to 1,370 local organizations by November that year, with 60,000 members.¹⁴⁰ The growth continued through the winter of 1926-1927, expanding to up to 160,000 members, organized in over 2,000 chapters.¹⁴¹ The BSRH attracted significant numbers of members and sympathizers from the PPS and *Wyzwolenie* and entire local party committees in Pinsk, Baranovichi, and neighboring parishes. The PPS organization in Navahrudak ceased its existence due to mass defections to the BSRH.¹⁴² If we are to believe the Polish census of 1921, which lists 1,041,700 Belarusians in Poland, the movement organized over 15 per cent of the entire Belarusian population in Poland, an impressive level of national mobilization.¹⁴³

At the start of the New Year 1927, the BRSR stated that: “Our people has started to look out for itself through all kinds of local activities. It has grabbed the hand extended to it, gathering its strengths to form a mighty, unbreakable organization – the Hramada.”¹⁴⁴ The New Year’s greeting was accompanied by the triumphant headline “Belarus is Growing!” The enlargement of the BSSR through the addition of the Homel’ and Rechitsia areas was enthusiastically received by the BRSR, which added that “We greet the new initiative to unite the eastern Belarusian lands around their center in Miensk, but nevertheless think that the three *povetys* that currently are part of the Homel’ *guberniia*, which are now being included

¹³⁹ “Z zhyts’tsia ‘Hramady’: Staupetski Paviatovy z’ezd Hramady,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 1, Sep 30, 1926, 3.

¹⁴⁰ V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan (1962), 96, citing TsGA Lit. SSR, f. 42, op. 1, d. 36, l. 190.

¹⁴¹ Estimates of the BSRH membership vary. Kurkiewicz and Koukel’ list the number of members as 100,000. Kurkiewicz, 103; Koukel’ (2001), 43, citing M. Moroz, “Bialoruski Instytut Gospodarki i Kultury w polnocnowschodnich wojewodstvach Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1926-1937),” *Bialoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, No. 14 (2000):145-146. According to both Poluijan and Kandybovich, in January 1927 the organization had 120,000 members: Poluijan (1978) 53, Kandybovich, 32. Aleksandra Bergman, *Sprawy bialoruskie w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984), 34-36, claims “well over 125 000”, 84. Lubachko and Kastsik claim the organization had 150,000 members by 1927. Lubachko, 130, citing V.I. Gurskii et al., (eds.) *Bor’ba trudiashchikhsia Zapadnoi Belarussii za sotsial’noe i natsional’noe osvobozhdenie i vosoedinenie s BSSR: dokumenty i materialy*. Vol. 1 (1921-1929) (Minsk: 1962) document No. 402, p. 554; Kastsik et al. (eds.), (2007), 396, citing NARB f. 242, vop. 1, spr. 563, ark. 51. Contemporary Soviet sources provided the highest estimate. On February 5, 1928, *Izvestiia* gave the number of members as 160,000. *Izvestiia*, February 5, 1928, cited in Adamushka (1994), 73.

¹⁴² V. Poluijan, I. Poluijan (1962), 102-103.

¹⁴³ Counting the 700,000 people in Western Belarus that the Polish census takers registered as “locals” in 1921, 160,000 members would still mean that the movement organized 9 per cent of the population.

¹⁴⁴ “Z novym hodam: Na Novy Hod,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 1 (10), January 1, 1927, 1.

in the Briansk *guberniia*, should be added to Belarus as well, since its population is predominantly of Belarusian stock. The same is true for the northern *pavety* of the Vitsebsk *gubernia*, and a good part of the Belarusian Smalensk era.”¹⁴⁵

The Piedmont Principle at Work: Attracting the Émigrés to the Soviet project

In 1920, a group of Russian émigrés in Prague held a symposium, *Smena vekh* (Change of Landmarks), which was followed by the publication of a journal of the same name. While they did not share the Bolshevik interpretation of Marxism, this group of émigrés identified with many aspects of the Soviet project, and many showed an interest in returning to their homeland. They became known as *smenovekhovtsy*. The main theorist of this group was Professor Nikolai Ustrialov in Prague, a former member of the Constitutional Democratic, or *Kadet* party.¹⁴⁶ While mainly a movement, associated with Russian national Bolsheviks such as the writer Aleksei Tol’stoi and others,¹⁴⁷ similar movements existed in Ukrainian and Belarusian émigré circles. The development in Miensk exercised a significant attraction for many members of the intelligentsia. From 1922 to 1927, the journal *Kryvich* was published in Kaunas by Lastauski and the League for the Political and National Liberation of Belarus. The Belarusian émigré activities declined significantly after Lastouski’s departure from Lithuania in 1927.¹⁴⁸ Over the course of the 1920s virtually the entire Belarusian elite had returned to Miensk.¹⁴⁹ Among the more high-profile returnees were Ianka Kupala, Iakub Kolas, Iazep Lesik, and even the prime minister of the BPR, Vatslau Lastouski.¹⁵⁰

In 1921 the TsIK of the SSRB, headed by I. Adamovich and deputy of the SSRB People’s Commissariat for Education, Esther Frumkin, made an appeal to “scholars, literati, pedagogical, preschool, and … cultural activists, who [are] natives of Belorussia,” asking them to return to Soviet Belarus

¹⁴⁵ Iazep Fal’tsevich, “Ras’tse Belarus’!” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 1 (10), January 1, 1927, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Agurski, *The Third Rome*, 69-70, 75.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴⁸ von Engelhardt, *Weissruthenien*, 210.

¹⁴⁹ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language,” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 55, No. 7 (2003): 1025.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001), 263.

and assist in the building of the new republic. The appeal admitted the enormous difficulties involved in poor and war-torn Belarus and that “the work conditions in the Belorussian language are especially difficult,” but it also held the promise that “You should not be embarrassed if you do not know well enough the Belorussian language. Here … you will remember the language of your childhood and you will study it.”¹⁵¹

As the BSSR implemented many of the core policies of the BPR, it undermined its claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the Belarusian people. At the Twelfth All-Belarusian Party Conference, held in March 1923, several delegates emphasized that Belarusian rebels in Poland, and even “Belarusian reactionaries,” increasingly oriented themselves towards Miensk and took up allegiance to the government of BSSR. B. I. Stasevich, the secretary of the Miensk party organization, proudly emphasized that

Rebellious formations in Western Belarus turn to Soviet Belarus in order to have their concerns addressed. Further, I would like to state that even the Belarusian intelligentsia abroad, which we regard as chauvinistic, are influenced by our Belarusifying work and more and more often turn to Miensk for assistance. It worries [the reactionaries], but they are steadily losing ground. … The [Western Belarusian] intelligentsia is alarmed that the initiative now increasingly lies in Miensk.¹⁵²

A. A. Siankevich added that “in 1918, Miensk won out over Vilnia in the political arena. Now it takes over also in the cultural and educational fields.”¹⁵³

The Demise of the Rada

With the loss of Lithuanian support, the exiled Rada of the Belarusian People’s Republic, now based in Prague, faced an increasingly difficult existence. In the spring of 1923 the leader of the BPR government in exile, Vatslau Lastouski, resigned. He was replaced by Aliaksandar Tsvikevich, who initiated negotiations with the BSSR Council of Soviets about suspending the activities of the Rada.¹⁵⁴ In connection with the change in leadership of the BPR Rada in exile, the Central Executive Committees of

¹⁵¹ Bemporad, “Yiddish Experiment in Soviet Minsk” (2007), 93, citing *Prakticheskoe razreshenie natsionalnogo voprosa v Belorusskoi SSR, Tom 1* (Miensk: TsIK BSSR 1927), 132-133.

¹⁵² *Stanahramma dyskusii na XII usebelaruskai partyinai kanferentsyi ab belaruskai move i ae poli u hramadstve*, March 20-26, 1923. NARB. F. 4-p. Vop. 2. Spr. 21. L. 184-216, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 49-50.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁴ Zen’kovich, 101.

the USSR and the BSSR on July 13, 1923 offered an amnesty to all parties and movements that had fought the Bolsheviks, and guaranteed political rights and freedoms to all returnees.¹⁵⁵ Over the next two years the government in exile was weakened further. In spring 1925 BPR activist Tamash Hryb complained that “The Belarusian émigrés are weak in numbers, cut off from their homeland, and prevented from active contact with the people due to internal disorganization and a suicidal squabble, ... Under the current conditions, the Belarusian émigrés are destined for an inglorious death through self-liquidation.”¹⁵⁶

On October 15, 1925, Ts’vikevich’s government announced an end to its anti-Bolshevik struggle and dissolved itself at a conference in Berlin. The conference recognized Miensk as the capital of Belarus and the BSSR as the only legitimate representative of the Belarusian people. Thereafter, the majority of the BPR government, led by Ts’vikevich, returned to Miensk, followed by Zhylka, Krasouski, and Lastouski. Liosik, Smolich, and Nekrashevich had received amnesty and returned earlier.¹⁵⁷ The official document from the Berlin conference as published in the Soviet press reads:

Realizing that the peasant and workers’ government, consolidated in Miensk, the capital of Soviet Belarus, is genuinely aimed at the re-birth of the Belarusian people culturally, economically and nationally, that Soviet Belarus is the only real force, which can liberate Western Belarus from the Polish oppression, we have decided, in full accordance with the national organizations to end the existence of the Belarusian People’s Republic and recognize Miensk as the sole center of the national and state rebirth of Belarus.¹⁵⁸

Aliaksandar Ts’vikevich recognized “the government of the workers and peasants as the basis for the regeneration of the cultural, economic and political life of the Belarusian people. ... Soviet Belarus has laid the foundation to reconcile the rebirth of the Belarusians with a communist program.”¹⁵⁹

The Soviet authorities attributed considerable importance to the return of the exiles to Miensk.¹⁶⁰ This was a major propaganda victory for the Soviet government and a resounding success for the policies

¹⁵⁵ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 10.

¹⁵⁶ Tamash Hryb “Tezisy ab kult’urna-natsyial’nym ab’iadnan’hi belaruskaha studentstva u Praze,” *Spadchyna* No.3 (1996): 121.

¹⁵⁷ von Engelhardt, 177; Zen’kovich, 101; Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft* (1999), 193, 285.

¹⁵⁸ Zen’kovich, 102.

¹⁵⁹ Kurkiewicz, 101, citing Seweryn Wyslouch, *Rola Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Białorusi w ruchu narodowym Białorusinów w Polsce* (Wilno, 1933), 135.

of *korenizatsiia* and Belarusization, as well as a step towards breaking the encroachment of the *cordon sanitaire* around the USSR.¹⁶¹ *Zvezda* carried a long article, signed by Tsvikevich, extolling the virtues of Soviet nationalities policies:

The decision of the government of the Belarusian People's Republic ... to end its existence underlines the importance of Minsk as the center for the Belarusian liberation movement. This idea has ripened over time. Among local Belarusian organizations as well as among individual members of the government there have been thoughts for some time on the necessity of uniting all forces of the people in order to accomplish our most important national task – the liberation of Western Belarus from Polish occupation.

It is clear that the unification [of Belarus] can only be organized from Minsk and through the government of Soviet Belarus, the only credible political force. The government of the Belarusian People's Republic has had a predominantly symbolic character. In the opinion of local organizations, expressing the opinions of the large masses of the Western Belarusian population thereby becomes clearer and more forceful.

The reality of the harsh oppression, under which the Belarusians ... in Poland suffer, has forced them to look east and see the Soviet Union as the only defender of their violated rights. ... The decisive moment [was] the national policy of the central Soviet government. The Soviets have realized that the national pathos of oppressed peoples constitutes a powerful creative force, which has removed the century-long ban on national development forced upon Belarus by the tsarist government.... The situation in Soviet Belarus reflects a great process of rebirth of [previously]¹⁶² oppressed nationalities, which have been actively and seriously supported by Soviet policy.....

A minority, led by Petra Kracheuski, opposed the decision to dissolve the Rada. Kracheuski stayed in Prague, declaring that he would only return to a fully independent Belarus.¹⁶³ However, Kracheuski's faction constituted a politically insignificant sect, without any influence on Western Belarusian politics. After the Berlin congress, his "government" consisted of two or three unelected men, ignored and largely forgotten, even by the Belarusian Christian Democrats, far removed from the realities of life in Belarus.¹⁶⁴ From his exile in Prague, home to just 1 per cent of the Belarusian émigrés, Kracheuski continued to protest the Riga Treaty, and the treatment of the Belarusians in Western Belarus and the BSSR,

¹⁶⁰ "BNR: poverkh bar'erov," *Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, March 22, 2008.

¹⁶¹ Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation* (1983), 94.

¹⁶² "Belarusskaia emigratsiia za sovjetskuiu Belorussiia! Sovetskoe pravitel'stvo – edinstvennyi zashchitnik beloruskogo naroda," *Zvezda*, 15 November 1925, cited in Zen'kovich, 102-105.

¹⁶³ Bahutski.H. Palanevich, "Natsyianal'naia teoriia i praktyka bal'shavizmu u Belarusi," *Belaruski zbornik*, vol. 12 (1960), 51; Anthony Adamovich, *Opposition to Sovietization in Belorussian Literature (1917-1957)* (Munich: The Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1958), 77.

¹⁶⁴ Von Engelhardt, 177 cites *Krasnaia Gazeta* No. 304, December 25, 1930, evening edition, Leningrad. Stankevich, 117-118.

telegraphing heads of governments and the League of Nations.¹⁶⁵ After 1925, Krecheuski lived out his life in poverty and isolation in Prague. He died in 1928.¹⁶⁶

Belarusians in Latvia

While the largest concentration of Belarusians outside the Soviet Union was in Poland, there was also a considerable Belarusian minority in Latvia. Its situation was significantly better than that of its Polish counterpart. During the 1920s, the Latvians founded a Belarusian department at the Ministry of Education and funded some Belarusian high schools.¹⁶⁷ Yet the number of Belarusian schools in Latvia fell sharply during the 1920s, from 46 in 1921-22 and 50 in 1925 to only 31 schools in 1929.¹⁶⁸ While the 1920 Latvian census listed 76,000 Belarusians in the republic, by 1925 the number was reduced to 35,000.

Belaruskaia Krynička insisted that the number of Belarusians in Latvia was much higher and that they were systematically undercounted. The reasons for this, the paper claimed, were “1) the hostile attitude to Belarusians by some members of the Latvian government and 2) powerful propaganda from the Poles and Russians, detrimental to the Belarusian minority.”¹⁶⁹ The political makeup of the Belarusian movement in Latvia was also different from that in Poland and lacked high-profile pro-Soviet political activists.

Substantial numbers of refugees from both Russia and Belarus had found refuge in Latvia,¹⁷⁰ among them “the most hostile and sworn enemies of the BSSR among the Belarusian émigrés... such types” as Pihulevski, Shchors, Teter, Dziamidau, and Sakharaŭ, reported the representative of the KP(b)B in Riga.¹⁷¹ The group around Shchors and Teter, organized as the organization *Prasvet*, which issued the paper *Haspadar*, was worried about influences from the BSSR on the Belarusian peasants in Latvia, and therefore worked to “reconcile the interests of the Belarusian peasantry with the interests of the Latvian

¹⁶⁵ Likahouski (2007b), 506, 522.

¹⁶⁶ Stankevič, 118.

¹⁶⁷ Mikhniuk et al. (eds.) (1999), 417.

¹⁶⁸ “Z zhys’tsia bielarusau u Latvii,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 4, January 26, 1930, 1.

¹⁶⁹ “Belarusy u Latvii,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 2, January 12, 1930, 1.

¹⁷⁰ “Dakladnaia zapiska upaunavazhanaha TsK KP(b)B u Latvii F. P. Kuptsevicha u biuro TsK KP(b)B ab zahranichnai rabotse u Latvii,” NARB, F. 5, vop. 21, spr. 63. ll. 7-11, published in Mikhniuk, et al (eds.) (1999), 327

¹⁷¹ Mikhniuk et al. (eds.) (1999), 327.

state.”¹⁷² Dziamidau’s group called itself *Belaruskaia Khata*. Founded in Riga in 1924, it was dedicated to integrating the Belarusian national minority within the framework of the Latvian state. The first paragraph of its program stated that its main purpose was to “raise the new generation in the spirit of love and dedication to Latvia.”¹⁷³

The number of Belarusians was too small to attract any serious interest from the Soviet (or Polish) governments. In 1927, at the height of the Belarusization and korenizatsiia, the KP(b)B sent a liaison officer to Latvia, the writer and critic F. P. Kuptsevich, to see whether it would be worthwhile to fan irredentist sentiments among the Belarusian minority. Such work would be difficult, Kuptsevich reported to the TsK in Miensk, as the majority of the estimated 80 to 90,000 Belarusians in Latvia lived under “very harsh material conditions as a result of the specific colonizing activities and taxation policies of the Latvian government.”¹⁷⁴ In 1932, Latvian president Karlis Ulmanis carried out a coup d’etat, establishing an authoritarian dictatorship and by October, 1936 *Belaruskaia khata* was banned by the Latvian authorities.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

Thoroughly disappointed with the Riga Peace treaty, which resulted in a division of Belarus that appeared to have undone the efforts of the Belarusian national movement, the Belarusian nationalists sought allies that would help them reverse what they perceived as a historical injustice. The governments in both Kaunas and Moscow/Miensk were eager to support any group that would undermine Poland. There were two major trends in the national movement in Western Belarus – the Christian Democratic tradition, particularly strong among the Roman Catholic clergy; and the leftist tradition, which merged elements of the Belarusian SR and pro-Soviet communist sentiments, and was organized as the BSRH in 1925. While the exiled Rada and the Christian Democrats oriented themselves towards Lithuania, the country on which they pinned their hopes for Belarusian independence, the left was impressed by the

¹⁷² Ibid., 326.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 326-327, 417.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 417.

Soviet national policies of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* in the BSSR. In 1924, the new government in Lithuania ended support for the Belarusian Rada, which moved to Prague. Supported by Moscow and Miensk in its border conflicts with Poland, Lithuania allowed the Soviets take the lead role in recognizing the national aspirations of the Belarusians. By 1925, the impact of Belarusization in the BSSR had made such a strong impact that the Rada dissolved itself, returned to Miensk, and recognized the government of the BSSR as the legitimate representative of the Belarusian people.

In Western Belarus, the nationalist movement remained divided. The largest wing, the BSRH, was pro-Soviet, whereas the BKhD and the BSS were pro-Lithuanian. The BSRH was funded by Soviet money, and its leaders were simultaneously members of the Communist Party of Western Belarus. Following the Riga Peace Treaty, the nationalists of Western Belarus faced an insurmountable dilemma: living in a divided land, yet desiring national independence made them separatists and irredentists, not only in the eyes of Warsaw, but also of the various governments in Kaunas, Moscow, and Miensk, which recognized their aspirations and tried to exploit them in order to weaken the Polish state. The *korenizatsiia* and Belarusization in the BSSR encouraged a similar national mobilization among the Western Belarusians. Attracted to, and supported by the developments in the BSSR, the Western Belarusian national movement was leftist and pro-Soviet.

A considerable portion of the Belarusian elite returned to Miensk after 1923, including the majority of the Rada of the BPR. From the BSSR came books, newspapers, educational materials and funding for the national movement. Supported by, and inspired by the example of the BSSR, the BSRH experienced a political breakthrough in 1925-1926, facilitated by the weakness of a long row of Polish coalition governments, and quickly grew into a mass movement. By the mid-1920s, national mobilization, which failed in 1918, now appeared to be building momentum. National mobilization approached a mass level, or Phase C, the third stage in Miroslav Hroch model of the development of national movements, during which the masses are mobilized into a mass national movement and the nationalist agenda brings political results. The success of Belarusian nationalism was perceived as a threat to the cohesion of the Polish state, and a situation that could be exploited by the governments in Miensk and Moscow. With over 100,000 members and chapters in every Western Belarusian village the irredentist and pro-Soviet

BSRH was destined to do well in the 1928 Polish elections. When a new political order was established by Piłsudski's May 1926 coup d'etat, the stage was set for a sharp reversal of these trends: the tragic destruction of Belarusian political, social and cultural life in Poland in 1927-1930.

Chapter 6

Opposition to Belarusization

Introduction

In her study on Soviet ethnography and the construction of Soviet nationality policy Francine Hirsch shows that “the Soviet regime would use ethnographic data to impose nationhood on people who either ‘hid’ or did not know their ‘true’ nationality.”¹ Since the Soviet authorities interpreted lack of national awareness as a sign of social and political retardation, parents and students that were not interested in the promotion of their “ethnic” languages were labeled as “politically immature,” and as displaying “abnormal attitudes” towards education in their native tongues.² The authorities concluded that minorities unaware of their ethnicities had to be subjected to forced Belarusization, Yiddishization, or Polonization.³ Whereas the nationalities policy in the BSSR was successful in building up goodwill for the Soviets among the national intelligentsia in Western Belarus, it was less popular among the peoples of Soviet Belarus. As the majority of the Belarusians showed little enthusiasm for the national project, the authorities responded with increasingly heavy-handed implementation of it. Stalin wanted to use Belarusian nationalism as a tool to produce loyal pro-Soviet nationalists. In 1934 he announced that “people must be carefully and attentively cultivated the way a gardener tends a favorite tree.”⁴

By 1926, following the second enlargement of the BSSR, the problems associated with the policies of Belarusization, Yiddishization, and Polonization, of which Stalin himself had been one of the major architects, became increasingly clear. The enlargements added large numbers of Russian-speakers to the BSSR. At the same time, the republic was in the midst of transition to Belarusian, a newly codified language which few of the new citizens of the BSSR could master. Belarusization, in particular, was implemented by overzealous national communists who often enforced the language switch on the locals against their free will. Rather than its intended effect of legitimizing Soviet rule, this praxis generated

¹ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 154-155.

² Slezkin, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment” (1996), 218.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1929-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990), 320.

dissatisfaction and opposition. Also, Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* strengthened the national communists, emboldening them to take increasingly independent positions vis-à-vis Moscow. The authorities' heavy handedness also increased the opposition among the national minorities. The Jews were often concerned about their children being disadvantaged in secondary education by having their children forced into Yiddish language schools. The heterogeneous groups of "Poles" were, with few exceptions, cold to the Soviet overtures to engage them in the Soviet project. The increasingly aggressive stance by the national communists also attracted the attention of the left wing of the Communist Party, which now felt emboldened enough to attack Stalin, the main architect behind the policies. This chapter focuses on the opposition to indigenization, and why the latter failed to achieve its goals. What were the main concerns of the central leadership, and why did Belarusization fail to generate enthusiasm at the grass roots level? Why did the emerging Stalinist leadership increasingly come to perceive the national communists as a liability?

Opposition to Belarusization

The January 25-29, 1925 plenum of the Central Committee of the KP(b)B assessed the implementation and progress of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia*. It cited Stalin's statement, "The essence of the national question in the RSFSR is how to extinguish the de facto backwardness (economic, political, and cultural) of some nations, which they inherited from the past and to provide the possibility for backward people to catch up with central Russians in terms of state, cultural, and economic conditions."⁵ At the same time, the plenum cautiously warned that the petit bourgeoisie could exploit these issues for their own purposes.⁶ While the plenum generally considered *korenizatsiia* a success, it also noted that in order to overcome peasant hostility to Belarusization, it was necessary to develop a more varied Belarusian language, and to bring the literary and everyday spoken language closer to each other. It was also noted that the Belarusian language still largely lacked a scientific and political terminology. The party therefore passed a resolution on language policies, the central aim of which was to:

⁵ "Rezolutsiya plenuma TsK KP(b)B pa dakladu 'Charhoviy zadachy KP(b)B u natsyianal'nai palitytsy,'" 58-69 from *Rezoliutsii plenuma TsK KP(b)B, 25-29 ianvaria 1925 h.* (Minsk, 1925), 3-11, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), *Belarusizatsyiia 1920-yia hady*, 58-59.

⁶ Ibid., 60.

- 1) develop a literary language closer to the language of the village.
- 2) Concentrate on the publication of literature and papers in the Belarusian language.
- 3) Organize the development of a political, Marxist, scientific, and legal Belarusian terminology.
- 4) To conduct similar work in the corresponding fields in Yiddish and Polish.⁷

A number of practical issues needed be solved. There was an acute shortage of typographic equipment in the Belarusian language, and the quantity of books brought in from other republics into BSSR, particularly in the Belarusian language, was insufficient. The shortage of qualified Belarusian cadres remained acute. The persistence of tension motivated a special initiative aimed at bridging differences between the ethnic groups. The party used the word *sblizhenie*, meaning rapprochement, or drawing closer of these nationalities. One aspect of this policy was to turn city dwelling Jews into farmers without alienating the Belarusian majority in the countryside. Regarding the Poles, the authorities decided to bring the middle *szlachta* closer to the Belarusian *sredniaki*, or middle farmers. Belarusian Catholics were to be instructed in Belarusian in schools, with Polish as a second mandatory topic. In ethnically Polish schools, Belarusian would likewise be a mandatory subject. One aim was to acquaint the Poles with the Belarusian language, but also to target anti-Soviet elements in educational campaigns. The Latvian minority in the border regions was to be educated in Latvian, while at the same time brought closer to the Belarusian peasants.⁸ As in other parts of the Soviet Union, national soviets operating in the language of ethnic minorities were introduced in Belarus. In May 1926, there were forty-two national soviets in the republic, of which eighteen were Jewish/Yiddish, fourteen Polish, five Latvian, two German, one bilingual Polish-Yiddish, and one Russian.⁹

Party functionaries and government employees who did not speak Belarusian well enough would be educated in the language. Those who actively opposed the policy would be subject to mild penalties. The targets were set very high: all party work was to be conducted in Belarusian by the end of 1925. Effective immediately, local party organizations were ordered to compile lists of Belarusian communists

⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁹ “Z pavedamlennia NKUS BSSR u natskamisiio pry TsVK BSSR ab vynikakh belarusizatsyi akruhkomau, raivykankomau i sel'skikh savetau,” May 26, 1926. NARB. f. 701. vop. 1. spr. 17. l. 200-200 avd., in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 146.

who needed to learn the Belarusian language by the end of the year.¹⁰ In November 1925, mandatory language tests were to be held for government employees in the central power organs.¹¹ Simply to learn the Belarusian language was deemed insufficient. Belarusian citizens were taught to respect and cherish their language and adopt it as their own. In October 1925 the plenum issued a decree that “the Party needs to conduct a decisive struggle against the yet not fully uprooted chauvinist perception that the Belarusian language is constructed and ‘artificial’.”¹² At the same time, the BSSR leadership was concerned about overzealousness in the implementation of Belarusization. Exaggerated hostility to the Russian language and rejection of Russian culture was often associated with pro-Polish orientation.¹³

In 1925, the Politburo appointed a government commission under Mikhail Kalinin and Iurii Larin to formulate a coherent nationalities policy for the entire union and to address complaints about overzealous *korenizatsiia* functionaries overstepping their boundaries, particularly in Ukraine.¹⁴ The formation of the BSSR enjoyed limited popular support among the mostly illiterate Belarusian peasantry, which was largely indifferent to the idea of nationalism. In the absence of a clear Belarusian identity at the grass roots level, the central government in Moscow decided to take up the Belarusian national cause and carry out nation building by bureaucratic means. Belarusian national activists had long asserted that the Belarusian “nation” extended far beyond the 1924 borders. Their arguments found a receptive audience in the Kremlin. The borders of the BSSR were based upon ethnographic data and what was considered the best available scientific evidence of the day.¹⁵ The enlargement of the BSSR in 1924 and 1926, rested on political calculations. Avel Enukidze, leading the special “Central Committee Sub-commission for Changing the Borders between the RSFSR and the BSSR,” expressed concern that

¹⁰ “Rezolutsyia plenuma TsK KP(b)B pa dakladu ‘Charhoviyia zadachy KP(b)B u natsyianal’nai palitytsy,’” from *Rezoliutsii plenuma TsK KP(b)B, 25-29 ianvaria 1925 g.* (Miensk, 1925), 3-11, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 68.

¹¹ “Pastanova natskamisii pry TsVK BSSR ‘Paradak praverki vedau pa belaruskai move supratsounikau ustanou I arhanizatsyi BSSR,’” *Savetskaia Belarus’* October 14, 1925, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 144.

¹²“ Rezaliutsiya plenuma TsK KP(b)B ‘Ab natsyianal’nai palitytsy,’” *Rezoliutsii plenuma TsK KP(b)B (12-15 oktiabria 1925 g.)* (Miensk: 1925), 12-24, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 71.

¹³ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001), 206.

¹⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵ Hirsch, 154.

Belarusians lacked national consciousness, whereas the Ukrainians were perceived as taking indigenization too far.¹⁶ A second enlargement of the BSSR would make the Slavic republics more equal in size and population, and make it possible to utilize the BSSR as a counterweight to Ukraine, in case the Ukrainian national communists should become too influential. The territorial issue had also been a central focus of the SSRB/BSSR leadership since the foundation of the republic, as it considered that enlargement would increase the effectiveness of party work.¹⁷ In May 1926 the Central Committee of the KP(b)B requested from Moscow the transfer of the Homel' *gubernia* and two *raiony* from Pskov *gubernia* to the BSSR. They argued that these areas were ethnically Belarusian, justifying the transfer on historical, economic, cultural and political grounds. Yet, the local inhabitants in these areas largely lacked a national or ethnic consciousness. In the first Soviet census of 1920, the number of people who identified as Belarusians were 22 and 43 per cent respectively in the Homel' and Rechitsa *uezdy*, a sharp drop from both the 1897 and 1917 censuses, which listed the percentages of Belarusians in these areas as 74 and 95 per cent.¹⁸

In the absence of self-identification, it took a commission to establish the ethnicity of the people in this region. Many locals did not identify themselves as Belarusians. On the contrary, the only form of identity in this area was that the locals preferred to speak Russian and opposed enforced Belarusization. The local residents were mostly ignorant of Belarusian, as there had been *no* publications in Belarusian in the Homel' and Rechitsa areas prior to 1926.¹⁹ Given their unfamiliarity with ethnic identities, the local inhabitants thought of themselves as non-Belarusian since the territory in which they lived had not been included within the 1920 borders of the restored SSRB.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., 152, 158.

¹⁷ Stanahramma dyskusii na XII usebelaruskai partyinai kanferentsyi ab belaruskai move iiae poli u hramadstve, March 20-26, 1923. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 2. spr. 21. l. 184-216, in Korshuk and Platonav, (eds.), 57.

¹⁸ M. P. Kostiuk, *Bol'shevistskaia sistema vlasti v Belarusi* (2002), 44.

¹⁹ "Z zapiski pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynitskaha u TsK KP(b)B 'K vororosu o prisodenienii Gomel'skoi gubernii k BSSR', " November 15, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 98. l. 12-16. Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 91.

²⁰ Kostiuk, 44.

A commission under Ia. Kh. Peters, a member of the Central Control Commission of the VKP(b) and the USSR Central Executive Committee, was set up to establish the geographical extent of the Belarusian nation. It became known as the Peters Commission.²¹ Its working assumption was that the extent of the nation could be determined by language. The commission studied the population of the Homel' *guberniia* and parts of Pskov *guberniia*, the population of which had long been claimed as Belarusian by the national intelligentsia. In addition to language, the economic conditions, along with cultural, political and historical experiences of these regions, were also scrutinized. The commission focused on a few rural settlements and a number of industrial plants around Homel' and Rechitsa. Demographers surveyed the local population's attitude to the Belarusian language, Belarusian culture, and the level of national consciousness of the people in the region. The findings of the commission were presented to the Politburo in Moscow on November 13, 1926, but were contradictory. On the one hand, it established that the majority of these people were indeed Belarusians, or at least of Belarusian origin. However, far from speaking "pure Belarusian," they spoke a language with a high proportion of Russian words. The commission referred to the everyday language spoken as "basically Belarusian, but heavily Russified."

In its final report, the commission used the word "mixed language" ("smeshannyi iazyk") rather than Belarusian, to the annoyance of the BSSR leadership.²² The local population displayed a near-total absence of a Belarusian national consciousness, and no identification with the Belarusian language. On the contrary, the people surveyed were strongly opposed to the policy and practice of Belarusization in neighboring BSSR.²³ A mere 4.7 per cent of residents of the city of Vitsiebsk, which had been added to the BSSR in 1924, spoke Belarusian by 1926. A similar situation existed in the city of Homel', transferred to the BSSR in 1926.²⁴ The commission admitted that the results of its survey varied heavily

²¹ "Z zapiski pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. T. Krynnitskaha u TsK KP(b)B 'K voprosu o prisoedinenii Gomelskoi gubernii k BSSR,'" November 15, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 98. l. 12-16, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 88.

²² Ibid., 90.

²³ Ibid., 88.

²⁴ Steven L. Guthier, "The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897-1970," *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIX, no. 1 (1977): 53.

depending on the phrasing of the questions.²⁵ To compensate for the lack of self-identification the surveys and field studies were combined with a thorough study of the available anthropological and ethnological works on the Belarusian people, compiled by Karski, Rastoguev, Usakov, Serzhputovskii, and others.²⁶

Two days after the publication of the report by the Peters Commission, Aliaksandr Krynički, first secretary of the KP(b)B, requested the unification of the Homel' and parts of Pskov *gubernii* with the BSSR. The request was backed up by economic and ethnographical arguments. The former was tailored to political requirements: an enlargement would "increase the political proletarian base of the BSSR." This argument was sounder than the second argument the authorities made, that "the enlargement of the borders of the BSSR brings the [republic's border] in the east in tune with the ethnographic and linguistic limits of the Belarusian population."²⁷ In fact, the heavily Russophone "proletarian base" of these areas strongly opposed their re-molding into ethnographic and linguistic Belarusians. If asked, as was the case in the census of 1926, they gave a different nationality than that assigned to them by the Peters Commission. In the 1926 census, more than 75 per cent of the Belarusians in Homel regarded Russian as their native language, and less than half of the population described its nationality as Belarusian.²⁸

Krynički was critical of several sections of the Peters report, which he did not think went far enough in terms of clearly establishing the extent of the Belarusian areas. He dismissed expressions of opposition to Belarusization in these areas as a result of sabotage by the local power structures in the Homel *gubernia*, which actively opposed the transfer to the BSSR. "Many representatives of the party and Soviet apparatus, and workers from the organs of the Peoples' Commissariat of Education in the Homel' area ... have conducted work *against* Belarusization," Krynički complained,²⁹ interpreting resistance to Belarusization not as an expression of a Russian national consciousness, but rather as a form

²⁵ "Z zapiski pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. T. Kryničkaha u TsK KP(b)B 'K voprosu o prisoedinenii Gomelskoi gubernii k BSSR'", November 15, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 98. l. 12-16, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 89.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 89; Emanuil Grigor'evich Ioffe, *Ot Miasnikova do Malofeeva: Kto rukovodil BSSR* (Minsk: Belarus, 2008), 55.

²⁸ Guthier, 49, 56-57.

²⁹ "Z zapiski pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. T. Kryničkaha u TsK KP(b)B 'K voprosu o prisoedinenii Gomelskoi gubernii k BSSR'", November 15, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 98. l. 12-16, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 91.

of false consciousness and a residue of social and class oppression. Krynetski emphasized that the objections had an economic basis, and were linked to the low status of the Belarusian language. He gave several examples of such opposition from the locals: “Belarusian is the conversational language of the boondocks,” “We consider our language incorrect.” “In the Voronezh *guberniya* they called me a Homel country bumpkin (*gomel’skoi bul’boi*).”³⁰

Yet, opposition to the Belarusian language often came from the Belarusian-speakers themselves, who often found the Belarusian language “harmful.” Often, these native Belarusian speakers did not understand the literary Belarusian language that was being constructed by national intellectuals.³¹ Most native Belarusian-speakers dismissed their language as a “servile,” “peasant” language (*kholopskii iazyk*) or even “a canine tongue” (*sabachaiu movu*), unsuitable for use outside the village.³² Others denied the existence of a Belarusian language outright. “No one doubts that … at some point there was a Belorussian language…in our time, the Belorussian language and culture as such do not exist.”³³ Comparing Belarusization to Ukrainianization, some critics claimed the latter to be more justified, arguing that “Ukraine has its own history and heroes, something that is missing in Belorussia.”³⁴

Krynetski linked the absence of national consciousness to a lack of national pride, which in turn was the result of a legacy of class oppression. In order to reverse these attitudes, Krynetski suggested extending the programs of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* already in effect in the “old” BSSR, into these areas in order to counter what he described as “Great Russian chauvinism.” The decision to enlarge the BSSR for a second time in two years also served Soviet foreign policy objectives: the formal resolution to include the Homel’ and the Rechitsa *uezd’* of the Pskov *guberniya* came on December 4, 1926. The enlargement of the BSSR, by decision of the All Union Central Executive Committee, was described as

³⁰ Ibid., 91.

³¹ Yocom, “Socialist Tower of Babel,” 458, citing DAMV, f. 3, op. 1, g. 1925, d. 169, 1.7 (Report of Miensk akruh commissariat of education about implementation of nationality policy, 22 April 1925).

³² Yocom, 456, citing NARB, f. 4, op. 21, g. 1925, d. 37, 1. 6ob. (top-secret draft resolution for the plenum of the CC of the Belarusian Communist Party, 25-29 January 1925), 1. 21ob.; NARB, f. 6, op. 1, g. 1925, d. 541, ll. 228ob-229 (Protocol, minutes of the first meeting of the Mahileu akruh congress of Soviets, 21 April 1925).

³³ Bemporad, *The Yiddish Experiment* (2007) 95, citing State Archives of the Minsk Voblast’ (GAMO), f. 37, op. 1, d. 1228, II. 54-72.

³⁴ Bemporad (2007), 95, citing GAMO, f. 1260, op. 1, d. 3, II. 38, 78.

“a revolutionizing factor, particularly in Poland, as an act in accordance with the national policy of the proletarian state.”³⁵ It was implemented two days later, on December 6, 1926.³⁶ Foreign policy goals took priority over the interests of the local population. The eastward enlargement meant that a large group of people had their nationality re-designated. The Orthodox inhabitants in the region were collectively defined as Belarusians. Thus, bureaucratic decisions led to the infusion of a large quantity of “Belarusian” ethnographic raw material to the republic regardless of the national consciousness or national self-definition of the prospective new Belarusians themselves. The result was the addition of a large, dissatisfied mass of people who often resisted Belarusization, and were unhappy about their re-designation as Belarusians.

This transfer would not have been possible without Stalin’s active support. The Belarusian people had been largely indifferent or even opposed to the numerous geopolitical changes during the past decade. The creation of the Belarusian Peoples’ Republic, LitBel, BSSR, and its four border revisions received little acclaim among the peasant masses.³⁷ Soviet nationality policy was based upon the assumption that Belarusians were entitled to nationhood, whether they desired it or not.³⁸ Soviet nationalities policies in the 1920s were uncompromisingly hostile even to voluntary assimilation.³⁹ By the stroke of a pen, through bureaucratic decisions, millions of people were assigned a new ethnicity and a new nationality. Next, the government intended to assign them a new language, complementing their new identity. The “enlarging of the proletarian base” of the republic came at a high political and social cost. By expanding its jurisdiction, the Minsk government had also significantly increased the number of opponents to its policies. Opposition to Belarusization was particularly strong in the east. People in Orsha/Vorsha complained that the Belarusization limited their social mobility. The eastern enlargements of the BSSR in

³⁵ “Rezaliutsyia plenuma TsK KP(b)B pa pytanni ab pashyrenni hranits BSSR,” December 4, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 20. spr. 35. l. 9, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 92-93.

³⁶ Lubachko, *Belorussia Under Soviet Rule*, 65.

³⁷ Hirsch, 149.

³⁸ Ibid., 154, 158.

³⁹ Martin (2001), 32, and 276, citing GARF f. 3316 vop. 16 spr. 206, l. 40. (1924)

1924 and 1926 transferred large numbers of predominantly Orthodox and Russophone Eastern Belarusians to the republic, making the republic's "eastern" character more pronounced.

To market a language spoken only by illiterate peasants turned out to be a difficult task.⁴⁰ Not only were the "new Belarusians" unfamiliar with the Belarusian language, but also the form of literary Belarusian language introduced was the *Tarashkevicha* standard, based upon the dialects of Western Belarus, which had a high level of mixing with Polish and thus differed substantially from the heavily Russian-influenced dialects of the east.⁴¹ The enlargement of the BSSR thus weakened rather than strengthened the national communists. The change of language not only alienated many of the new citizens of the enlarged BSSR, but it also carried the risk that government propaganda would be lost on a population unfamiliar with the Belarusian language. The enlargement forced a slowdown of the pace of Belarusization, resulting in a larger, but linguistically less homogenous republic.

From January 1, 1927, the government apparatus in the entire BSSR changed the language of administration, giving the local authorities in Homel' less than a month to switch from the familiar Russian to the lesser known Belarusian language.⁴² To Belarusify the people of the new territories would require further support from the government in Moscow. But by now the central government was showing signs of hesitation. The KP(b)B decided to postpone the full switch into Belarusian of their organ *Zviazda*, originally scheduled for 1927.⁴³ However, concessions to the opponents of forced Belarusization were limited. Belarusian Communist leader Krynetski felt compelled to build support for his policies. "Belarusization," he claimed, "is the most important task, since it affects the majority of the population of our republic – the peasantry, the most culturally and economically backward majority."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ V. A Chabriakou, "U paezdtsy pa Arshanshchyne," *Savetskaia Belarus'*, May 26-28, 1926, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 148.

⁴¹ Grigory Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 55, No. 7, 2003, 1026.

⁴² "Z daklada pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha 'Ab novykh zadachakh Homel'skai arhanizatsyi KP(b)B' na skhodze aktybu Homel'skai haradskoi, zalineinai i novabelitskai partyinykh arhanizatsyi'," *Zvezda*, December 19, 1926, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 99.

⁴³ "Rezoliutsiya plenuma TsK KP(b)B pa pytanni ab pashyrenni hranits BSSR," December 4, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 20. spr. 35. l. 9. in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 93.

It is, of course, an obvious absurdity when people claim, as one comrade from Homel' wrote in a note, that "the Belarusian language died 200 years ago." That is not true: poetry and literature in the Belarusian language is growing. It is developing, and develops beautifully....We have a wonderfully preserved Belarusian language, which the peasant uses in his family, everyday life and work. ... If we look at ... Homel' and Rechitsa districts, then we can see it all clearly. When the Belarusian peasant speaks with the city dweller, he uses the most pristine Russian language he is capable of, struggling not to use any Belarusian words. But it is enough to listen to how his wife speaks to her children, how the old people, and the youngsters, who have not been working at the big enterprises speak. Then we can already feel a different language, the Belarusian language of the simple people, that language which is the basis of the Belarusian literary language. On the one hand, you have a part of the male population, which works at the factories; on the other you have the rest of the population – women, children, and old people. They constitute two groups. One is considerably Russified, while the other fully preserves the Belarusian language. And we should not confuse this situation with another mix-up – that of 'literary language' with 'popular language.' That question needs to be treated the way we treat the Russian language. – there is a popular and a literary language....There are not 'two Belarusian languages': there is the Belarusian language, fully developed in literature, from which the peasant takes only a limited number of concepts and expressions, while naturally bringing in some local terminology into the language (no more, than in the Russian language).⁴⁵

The negative attitudes toward the Belarusian language, Krynetski claimed, were due to economic injustices, which over time would be rectified by Soviet power. The Belarusian language preserved in the countryside would be looked upon in an entirely different way when

all representatives of the Party and government begin speaking with the peasant in his language, in Belarusian, when the peasant in the Soviets is being answered in Belarusian, when he is being asked in Belarusian and when he knows that schools – both middle and high schools--exist in Belarus, and he knows that he can send his children to a school *where the Russian and Belarusian languages are equal*, when there are papers and literature in the Belarusian language, when the peasant starts to realize that it is not so hard to liquidate illiteracy for a person who speaks Belarusian.⁴⁶

By comparing the 1897 and 1926 censuses, Steven Guthier shows how large numbers of people had their nationality re-designated. With the areas that were adjoined to the BSSR, the number of "ethnic Belarusians" increased radically; however, the opposite was the case on the other side of the border. In the areas that were not transferred to the BSSR in 1924 and 1926 – the Velizh, Sebezh and Nevel' (part of Vitsebsk *guberniia* in 1897 and Pskov oblast' in 1926), Surazh and Mglin (Smolensk *guberniia* in 1897 and Briansk oblast in 1926) and Krasnin in Smolensk province – the number of Belarusians decreased drastically. According to the 1897 census, these regions had 463,000 Belarusian speakers, but by 1926 the

⁴⁴ "Z dakkada pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha 'Ab novykh zadachakh Homel'skai arhanizatsyi KP(b)B' na skhodze aktybu Homel'skai haradskoi, zalineinai i novabelitskai partyinykh arhanizatsyi," *Zvezda*, December 19, 1926, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 94.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁶ "Z zapiski pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B A. T. Krynetskaha u TsK KP(b)B 'K voprosu o prisoedinenii Gomelskoi gubernii k BSSR'", November 15, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 98. l. 12-16, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 96-97.

number of “ethnic Belarusians” in this area had fallen to 75,745. Only 2.2% of the Belarusian population knew their national language, and 98 per cent of Belarusian speakers had “disappeared” by 1926. In the absence of large-scale emigration, Guthier attributed these changes to linguistic assimilation.⁴⁷ Once the 1926 border between the BSSR and the RSFSR had been drawn, populations on both sides were registered as belonging to the titular nationalities of their respective republics.

According to official statistics, the BSSR was ethnically the most homogenous of all the republics of the Soviet Union. There is reason to assume that the weak national consciousness in Belarus enabled the authorities to influence the census data. Entire regions were re-designated as Belarusian, based upon ethnographic assessments, influenced and guided by political considerations, rather than self-identification by the local populations. For example, in the Soviet census of 1926, 80.26 per cent of the inhabitants of the BSSR were registered as “Belarusians” in terms of nationality, yet only 67.2 per cent of the citizens of the BSSR gave their native language as Belarusian.⁴⁸ By 1938, this number had increased to 82.9 per cent. In terms of school instruction in the titular Belarusian language, the number was even higher at 93 per cent.⁴⁹ At the same time, in the areas across the border, which remained within the RSFSR, the Belarusian proportion of the population dropped radically.

Orthography, Politics and Political Paranoia in the BSSR

The borders of the BSSR were redrawn only two weeks after the end of an important international academic conference on the Belarusian language, organized by *Inbelkul’t* and held on November 14-21, 1926 in Miensk. It was dedicated to reforms on spelling and writing of the Belarusian language.⁵⁰ The Soviet government paid much attention to orthography and spelling of the languages. In the decade following the revolutions of 1917, all four official languages in the BSSR were subjected to substantial

⁴⁷ Guthier, *The Belorussians*, 57-58.

⁴⁸ Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft*, 160, citing *Prakticheskoe razreshenie natsional’nogo voprosa v Belorusskoi sotsialisticheskoi sovetskoi respublike. Chast’ II-ia. Rabota sredi natsiona’nykh menshinstv* (Miensk, 1928), 20. BSSR remained one of the Soviet republics with a high percentage of the population belonging to the titular nationality. Whereas Belarusians constituted 81 per cent of the BSSR population in 1926, in 1979 they constituted 79.4 per cent. In the Armenian SSR the situation was similar, with 84 and 88 per cent, respectively. In Lithuania, annexed and enlarged in 1940 as the Lithuanian SSR, the titular nationality constituted 80 per cent in 1979. Lindner (1999), 168.

⁴⁹ Lindner (1999), 159.

⁵⁰ A. I. Zhurauski, “Pershia kroki belaruskaha savetskaha movaznaustva,” *Belaruskaia Linhvistikyka* vol. 37, (1990): 7-8.

spelling reforms.⁵¹ The conference was an important and highly publicized event, including sixty-nine participants from a number of countries. There were representatives from universities in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kyiv and international linguistic authorities from Germany, Poland,⁵² Czechoslovakia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Because of the increased usage of the Belarusian language in a number of countries, not only in the BSSR, Tarashkevich's system of spelling was considered inadequate, particularly for foreign loan words. Issues such as the spelling of the affricatives *dzh* and *dz* and the introduction of the letter "j" in the (Cyrillic) Belarusian alphabet were also discussed. A committee on the lexicography of the Belarusian language was established, but it did not reach a definite solution to the issue of style, spelling and writing of the Belarusian language.

The conference was a conscious attempt to boost the status of the Belarusian language and to get international recognition for its status as distinct, separate, and equal vis-à-vis other Slavic languages.⁵³ An important aim of this public display of the achievements of Soviet education was to raise the prestige of the Soviet Union abroad, particularly among the Belarusian and Ukrainian minorities across the border. The purpose was to undermine the Piłsudski government by fostering irredentist aspirations among the Eastern Slavs in Poland.⁵⁴ The atmosphere at the conference was strongly pro-Soviet. Speakers declared the correctness of the nationality policies of the VKP(b). The respect this academic conference commanded further underlined the position of Minsk as the international capital of Belarusian national aspirations. Ihnatouski proudly proclaimed that only the Soviet Union had established guarantees to safeguard the rights of national minorities and previously oppressed minorities.⁵⁵ He read out a letter from Tarashkevich, who, he stated, was "The chairman of the Workers and Peasants' Hramada in Western

⁵¹ Similar reservations were made regarding the Polish language, as the "aristocratic, historical character of the Polish orthography creates difficulties for the masses to establish a proletarian Polish culture." Iwanow, *Pierwszy naród ukarany*, 88-90.

⁵² The representation of Western Belarusians from Poland was extremely limited. The Polish authorities had refused to issue passports to these delegates. The only Belarusian nationalist activist free to travel was the Christian Democratic politician Ian Stankevich, who abstained out of solidarity with his fellow Western Belarusian compatriots. Leading Belarusian intellectuals in Poland, such as Tarashkevich and Lastouski, sent greetings and letters to the conference, but were unable to attend. "Z daklada starshyni Inbelkul'ta U. M. Ihnatouskaha u Bioro TsK KP(b)B ab vynikakh akademichnai kanferentsyi pa reforme belarsuaha pravapisu i azbuki," December 17, 1927. NARB, f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 2546. l. 1-19, in Platonav, Korshuk (eds.), 104-105.

⁵³ Zhurauski, 8. A similar, all-Ukrainian conference on reform of Ukrainian spelling was held in June 1927. Martin (2001), 205.

⁵⁴ Martin (2001), 206.

⁵⁵ "Z daklada starshyni Inbelkul'ta U. M. Ihnatouskaha u Bioro TsK KP(b)B ab vynikakh akademichnai kanferentsyi pa reforme belarsuaha pravapisu i azbuki," January 17, 1927. NARB, f. 4-p. vop. 21. spr. 2546. l. 1-19. Platonav, Korshuk (eds.), 106.

Belarus, who was prohibited from attending the conference by [the Polish] government.” Ihnatouski added that “[t]he Workers and Peasants’ Hramada is a legal party in Poland, which works on the directives of the Polish Communist Party and the Communist Party of Western Belarus, and counts up to 70,000 members. The leader of the *Hramada* is a [Communist] Party member.”⁵⁶

In his letter, Tarashkevich triumphantly declared the success of the Soviet Belarusian nationalities policy, emphasizing that “even [BKhD leader Adam] Stankevich admits that only in the BSSR is it possible to develop a Belarusian cultural policy.”⁵⁷ In his report to the Bureau of the Central Committee of the KP(b)B on December 17, 1926, Ihnatouski provided examples highlighting the success of his policy. He reminded the TsIK that most Belarusian nationalists, even the staunchly anti-communist ones, had espoused the cause of Soviet Belarus. Furthermore, Ihnatouski also claimed that the polices of Belarusization and korenizatsiia were winning over the Belarusian minorities in Poland and Latvia for the BSSR. Following the conference, the Polish paper *Kurier Wileński* complained that the clumsy policies of the Polish government had resulted in bad publicity internationally, and that Latvian papers had begun to focus on the plight of the Western Belarusians in Poland. Ihnatouski’s conclusion was that the conference had been a resounding success, “our first appearance on the international arena.”⁵⁸

However, the aftermath of this conference, held at the height of the *korenizatsiia*, did not turn out as expected. Within eight weeks, a number of events changed the political situation. The spirit of independence displayed at the conference immediately caught the Kremlin’s attention. Leading Belarusian national activists had made clear their support for a switch to *latsinka* script. Adamovich had raised the issue and Zhilunovich had shown particular enthusiasm for the idea. Ihnatouski approved of Latinization on condition that it would also be applied to Russian. Even though this proposal was ultimately rejected, many observers were under the impression that the BSSR was adopting the Latin script, and this story found its way into several foreign newspapers.⁵⁹ Zhylunovich, Ihnatouski, and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 109.

Adamovich were severely criticized by the party. The Bureau of the Belarusian Central Committee rebuked the conference organizers, issuing a statement that “The raising of [the question of Latinization] objectively reflects the orientation of part of our intelligentsia toward ‘independence’ and the west, rather than toward proletarian Moscow.”⁶⁰ The conference organizers sent letters of apology to Stalin and the Central Committee in Moscow, attempting to explain the purpose of the conference.

However, the issue of Latinization would later resurface in accusations against the three who were denounced as “national democrats.”⁶¹ Other accusations were added to the list: while the conference hall had been decorated exclusively in red, white and green, the Belarusian national colors, there was no display of Soviet flags and Lenin’s portrait had been removed from the conference hall. In addition, Western Belarusian playwright Frantsishak Aliakhnovich had been given a much too warm welcome and the BSSR Commissar of Education, Balitski, had neglected to mention the role of the Communist Party in the development of Belarusian national culture.⁶² A number of delegates were accused of having expressed nationalist and national democratic sentiments.⁶³ Aliakhnovich, a Polish citizen, was arrested as a Polish spy, and spent six years in the Solovki concentration camp, until he was exchanged for Tarashkevich in 1932.⁶⁴

Moscow’s reaction seemed exaggerated, as both Ihnatouski and Nekrashevich had both warned against the danger of right-wing deviation at the congress. In fact, Ihnatouski had made his point very clear, using the rhetoric of the day:

Along with the growth of socialist society there is also a growth of the elements of NEP. Those NEP elements can be utilized by kulaks, nationalists, and chauvinists. (...) A part of the Belarusian intelligentsia can and will take advantage of Belarusization in order to promote national-democratic ideals, and a part of the Russian intelligentsia will respond by reacting with Russian

⁵⁹ Martin (2001), 204-205.

⁶⁰ “Z dakkada pershaha sekretara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha ’Palitychnaia spravadacha TsK X z’ezdu KP(b)B’”, from *X s’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol’shevikov) Belorussii 3-10 ianvaria 1927 goda, Stenograficheskii otchet*, 37-44, in Platonov and Korshuk, (eds.), 116; Martin (2001), 205.

⁶¹ Zen’kovich, 152-153; Martin (2001), 204.

⁶² Martin (2001), 204.

⁶³ “Z dakkada pershaha sekretara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha ’Palitychnaia spravadacha TsK X z’ezdu KP(b)B’”, from *X s’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol’shevikov) Belorussii 3-10 ianvaria 1927 goda, Stenograficheskii otchet*, 37-44, in Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 116.

⁶⁴ Ant. Adamovich, *Opposition to Sovietization* (1958), 185.

chauvinism. There is also a risk that representatives among the Jewish and Polish national minorities will claim that the Belarusization means that their cultural issues are being ignored.⁶⁵

Ultimately, the delegates at the 1926 conference never reached a satisfactory compromise that would resolve the many issues involved with the standardization of the Belarusian language. A final decision on the standard form of Belarusian in the BSSR was reached only in 1933.⁶⁶ The period of *korenizatsiia* saw serious attempts to Latinize the languages of the Soviet Union,⁶⁷ partly to break with the imperial Russian past of forced Russification. To the Bolsheviks and national movements across Eastern Europe, the choice of orthography was much more than just a practicality. Mustafa Kemal saw the replacing of Arabic script with Latin as a chance to break with the imperial Ottoman past. A similar logic applied to the Bolsheviks, who saw Latin script, unlike Cyrillic, as historically untainted by the legacy of (Great Russian) national oppression. During the early Soviet period it was a part of the Bolsheviks' nationalities policy to Latinize the languages of the USSR. With regard to the smaller languages outside the border areas of the USSR the process continued until 1933, long after the Latinization of the Belarusian language had been ruled out.

By 1926, at the time of the second enlargement of the BSSR, *latsinka* was criticized in publications from government printing houses. It was clear that the central government in Moscow would not accept the Latinization of the Belarusian language. That year, the prominent Soviet Belarusian writer Uladzimir Dubouka published a brochure with the title *Kirylitsa chi Latsinka? (Cyrillic or Latin?)*, in which he strongly condemned *latsinka* as unnecessary, imperialist, and bourgeois.⁶⁸ Even if there did not seem to be a formal ban on the use of *latsinka* in the BSSR, it was never used officially.⁶⁹ The issue of *latsinka* or Cyrillic was formally decided in January 1930, through a Politburo decree that declared the

⁶⁵ V. K. Shchebryn, “Pytanni mounai palityki u pratsakh I. V. Vouka-Levinovicha”, *Belaruskaia Linhvistyka*, Vol. 36, (1989): 27, citing *Pratsy akademichnej konferentsyi pa reforme belaruskaha pravapisu i azbuki* (Minsk, 1927), 220.

⁶⁶ Abrahamson, *Vitryssland*, 68.

⁶⁷ Slezkine, 215-227.

⁶⁸ Mikolai Pachkayeu, “Belarusian ‘Lacinka’,” <http://www.cus.cam.ac.uk/~np214/lacin.htm> (Accessed November 8, 2005), 12.

⁶⁹ Ibid. However, Lesik’s grammar, published in Miensk in 1926 contains a section on the 32-letter *Lacinka*, along side Cyrillic and the Glagolitic alphabets. Lesik, *Hramatyka Belauskae movy* (1926/1995), 38-42.

Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Russian languages off-limits for Latinization.⁷⁰ By 1933, most of the codified languages in the Soviet Union had been switched to Latin script.⁷¹ While the Bolsheviks were troubled by the imperial legacy of the Cyrillic orthography, in the western borderlands the situation was the reverse. Here, Latin was politically tainted by its association with Polish landlords and the Catholic Church. Allegiance to the Latin orthography was increasingly seen as an indication of pro-Polish political leanings.

Opposition from the Subjects of Belarusization/Yiddishization/Polonization

Even though 90 per cent of the press in the BSSR had switched to the Belarusian language by the end of 1927, the resistance showed no signs of decreasing. At the all-Belarusian Congress of Trade Unions in 1927 many speakers requested to speak in Russian. The request reflected the prevailing mood in the republic. Those who could avoid Belarusian often did so. In December 1927, the new KP(b)B leader Vilhel'm Knoryn – a Latvian – complained that “Unfortunately, Belarusization is very often still only of a decorative character (*paradni kharaktar*). In many instances the meetings are held in Russian, while the protocols are written in Belarusian.” Belarusians were literate in Russian but often had a limited vocabulary. Belarusian Jews were Russified to a high degree, and switched to Russian in non-Yiddish speaking environments, while a considerable number of Jews had abandoned Yiddish for Russian altogether.⁷² The authorities considered this Russification undesirable and explained it by “historical reasons,” i.e. a vestige from tsarist times.⁷³ They considered that with the introduction of a new political order, the Yiddish and the Belarusian languages could be preserved and rejuvenated.

Many educated Jews were passive and indifferent toward Belarusization. Yet, the Jewish population adopted the Belarusian language more rapidly than the Belarusians themselves. Significant parts of the Jewish and Belarusian communities considered the Belarusian language an artificial creation.

⁷⁰ Martin (2001), 198, 200.

⁷¹ Ibid., 203.

⁷² “Z daklada pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B V. H. Knoryna ‘Spravazdacha TsK XI z’ezdu KP(b)B,’” *XI z’ezd Kamunisticheskoi partii (b)Belarusi (22-29 listopada 1927 goda). Stenografskaya spravazdacha* (Minsk, 1928), 130-133, cited in Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 120-121.

⁷³ “Pastanova Biuro TsK KP(b)B ‘Ahul’nyia vydavy pa pravertsy Belarusizatsyi dziarzhaunykh ustanou BSSR,’” April 1, 1927. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 3. spr. 20. ch. II. l. 575-578, in Platonov and Korshuk (eds.), 176.

Opposition was often articulated in terms of subversive joke, such as: “Which is the hardest language in the world to learn? Belarusian, of course! Not even the Belarusians themselves know how to speak it.” Others feared that forced Belarusization would fuel anti-Semitism. Rumors were circulating that Jewish government officials were enriching themselves by the selective promotion of Belarusians, supposedly by extorting bribes.⁷⁴

Anti-Semitism was deemed as a serious problem that could play into the hands of the enemies of the Soviets. Many Belarusians were also hostile to Poles. Poles and Latvians were in turn suspicious of other nationalities. The BSSR government took these rivalries seriously. At the Eleventh Congress of the KP(b)B, in November 1927, first secretary Knoryn cited the case of a Jewish industrial worker who was severely beaten and almost killed by his Belarusian co-workers after performing a song in Yiddish. At a different factory, where 300 Jews worked, Belarusian workers strongly disapproved of public conversations in Yiddish or the reading of Yiddish newspapers. Workers reacted aggressively, “Jews, Jews, (*zhydy*) they all speak Yiddish (*pa-zhydouski*). They ought to speak Russian, not Yiddish.”⁷⁵

The decision to promote Yiddish in the republic was controversial. The Soviet authorities’ support for the Yiddishists in the battle over the identity of Soviet Jewry had been divisive. Yiddish was not uncontested as *the* Jewish language. Like Belarusian, it had a low status, and was associated with poverty, backwardness, and the conservatism of the rural *shetl* existence. Yiddish could not compete with Russian within Jewish party cells or within the trade unions. When the opportunity arose, many Jews chose to opt out of this traditional lifestyle. Renouncing the Yiddish language, they adopted a modern identity. Prior to the revolution, the desire to escape the often claustrophobic existence of clan and class divisions and the strong social control exercised by the ultra-Orthodox religious establishment had been as strong a pull as the fear of anti-Semitic discrimination and pogroms in the Pale itself.⁷⁶ The Russian language was associated with modernization, progress, and social mobility.

⁷⁴ “Z materyialau eubiuro pry TsK KP(b)B ab adnosinakh iaureiskaha nasei’nitsva BSSR da belarusizatsyi,” December 1928. NARB. f 4-p. vop. 10. spr. 107 l. 60, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 193.

⁷⁵ “Z daklada pershaha sakratara TsK KP(b)B V. H. Knoryna,” 130-133, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 122.

⁷⁶ Kriwaczek, *Yiddish Civilization*, 300.

The Yiddish press often contained articles about popular opposition to Yiddishization. The following report, from *Der emes*, 1924, is representative. “A meeting of the transport workers takes place. One comrade, a porter, takes the floor and opposes categorically any work in Yiddish. When challenged, he answered: The matter is quite simple...For many years I have carried hundreds of pounds on my back day in and day out. Now I want to learn some Russian and become an office worker.”⁷⁷ These attitudes remained strong throughout the 1920s. In 1928, *Oktiabr* lamented the fact that “the Jewish worker does not want to read a [Yiddish] newspaper. He will break his teeth, he will not understand a word, but give him Russian. A Jewish comrade begins to speak in Yiddish at a workers’ meeting – they don’t want to listen. And when she finishes, they translate, even though you can’t find a non-Jew here for love of money.”⁷⁸ Similar attitudes were found within the *evsektsiia* of the party apparatus. Throughout the 1920s, a number of Jewish communists dodged or refused to work in the Yiddish language.⁷⁹ Religious Jews were particularly reluctant to send their children to Yiddish schools and tried instead to get them into Russian- Belarusian- or Ukrainian- language schools. The latter attacked all religions equally, whereas the Yiddish schools focused their anti-religious propaganda on Judaism and their political propaganda on Zionism.⁸⁰ Belarusian settlers in Siberia, who had their children sent to Belarusian-language schools, similarly opposed this forced “nationalization.”⁸¹ In other cases, the problem was the reverse. In some areas of the BSSR Belarusian Catholics refused to send their children to Belarusian language schools, and instead demanded the construction of separate Polish-language schools.⁸² Modern ethnic consciousness had yet to be established among a peasantry which largely retained pre-modern identities. The authorities’ promotion of modern ethnic identities was made all the more difficult since Polish identity in the borderlands was linked to class, particularly since the old definitions, which defined

⁷⁷ *Der emes*, April 6, 1924, cited in Gitelman (2001) 93.

⁷⁸ *Oktiabr*, January 28, 1928, cited in Gitelman (2001) 93.

⁷⁹ Yocom, 288, citing DAMV, f. 516, op. 1, g. 1925, d. 4, ll. 8, 17, NARB, f. 701, op. 1, g. 1925, d. 4, l. 9, NARB, f. 4, op. 21, g. 1926, d. 37, l. 56, DAMV f. 3, op. 1, g. 1927, d. 280, l. 259; NARB, f. 4, op. 7, g. 1927, d. 79, l. 12; NARB, f. 4, op. 2, g. 1929, d. 60, l. 96.

⁸⁰ Gitelman (2001), 90-92.

⁸¹ Slezkine (1996), 218.

⁸² Yocom, 334, citing NARB, f. 4, op. 21, g. 1924, d. 23, ll. 6-7.

Polishness as a religious, aristocratic, and bourgeois identity were unacceptable to the Bolsheviks.⁸³ It mattered little that most of the local Poles were small farmers and that most of the Polish *szlachta* and landowners had fled during the Civil and Polish-Soviet Wars.⁸⁴ Soviet terminology often described local Poles as “*kulak szlachta*,” and some Party cells chose not to work among the Poles. During the redistribution of land and resources, some local soviets bypassed the Poles or cut off much of their land, telling them to find it in Warsaw.⁸⁵

During the second half of the 1920s a conflict regarding the ethnicity of the Belarusian Catholics arose between Polish and Belarusian communists. While the Polish communists considered the Belarusian Catholics as Poles, the Belarusian national communists saw them as Catholicized Belarusians. Belarusian communists protested what they saw as an attempt at Polonization of Belarusian Catholics, under the guise of the Soviet nationality policy.⁸⁶ Polish communists were given significant leeway to build a miniature socialist Poland in the Polish autonomous areas of Marchlewska in the Ukrainian SSR from 1925 to 1935.⁸⁷ The Soviet authorities also organized a Polish autonomous district, the Dzerzhynsky raion or *Dzierżyńskczyna* in the BSSR between 1932 and 1936. A key function of the region was to produce cadres for a future socialist Poland, but success was limited, as a considerable part of the Polish population in the Western Soviet borderlands remained politically apathetic, or outright hostile to the Soviet government and showed little enthusiasm for their “cultural autonomy.”⁸⁸ The formation of the Polish district may have been undertaken in response to the difficulties posed by official multilingualism. Several books in the Polish language were printed in the region. Concentrating some of the resources into a more easily manageable ethnic district would be more cost-effective, and would also make it easier to survey an “ethnic” community that had been distrusted historically and was now responding

⁸³ In 1925, the “Poles” of the Marchlewska Region in Ukraine, claimed to be of “Catholic” nationality, while maintaining that they spoke “the Catholic language” quite well. Brown, *Biography of no Place*, 39.

⁸⁴ Iwanow, 27.

⁸⁵ Zejmis, 92-93; Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, *Zmiana Struktury*, 160; Kurkiewicz, *Sprawy białoruskie*, 47-48; von Engelhardt, 152.

⁸⁶ Mironowicz, Tokć and Radzik, 160-161.

⁸⁷ On Marchlewska, see Brown, 18-51.

⁸⁸ Iwanow, 159; Mironowicz, Tokć, and Radzik, 158.

unenthusiastically to the overtures of the Soviet government. Until the unleashing of the Stalinist revolution the authorities attempted to keep anti-Polish feelings at bay. In the second half of the 1930s, the situation would be reversed, and the ethnic stereotype of the Pole was officially sanctioned. Poles were collectively condemned as an alien enemy nation and singled out for unprecedented persecution by the authorities.

The “nationalization” of the BSSR was more successful than in other parts of the USSR.⁸⁹ In the 1920s, several ethnic groups were “nationalized” against their wishes.⁹⁰ As schools in the minority languages existed only at the elementary level, parents were concerned that their children would be disadvantaged continuing into secondary school or higher education, particularly as entrance examinations and instruction were in Russian. As in other Soviet republics, the continuum between primary, secondary and tertiary education in the national language was disrupted in the BSSR.⁹¹ It was clear to the leadership that as long as higher education was conducted in Russian parents were reluctant to have their children taught in other languages, fearing that this would hamper their social mobility. This made Belarusization of higher education particularly urgent, yet the authorities encountered stubborn opposition to the Belarusization of academia. And unlike school children and village teachers, professors and academics were better poised to articulate their opposition. Belarusization of the Belarusian State University (BDU) was implemented in a particularly aggressive manner. Although the party had decreed that it was necessary to abstain from repressive measures,⁹² the switch of languages was enforced harshly. In April 1928, chancellor U. I. Picheta complained to the BSSR Central Executive Commission that opposition from students and faculty had hampered the Belarusization of his university. A new policy was introduced, under which university publications, examinations, and speeches were all to be in Belarusian. Henceforth, the promotion of professors would be dependent on their proficiency in the

⁸⁹ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 13.

⁹⁰ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 255; Martin (2001), 49-50, citing *Pervoe vseukrainskoe soveshchanie po rabote sredi natsional'nykh men'shistv. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Kharkiv, 1927), 14; Brown, 39.

⁹¹ Ben Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union: A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 51.

⁹² “Rezoliutsiya prezidyuma saveta natsyonal'nastsei TsVK SSSR pa dakladu prezidyuma TsVK BSSR ab praviadzenni belarusizatsyi,” March 5, 1928. NARB. f. 701. vop. 1. spr. 56. l. 54-54adv. Copy. Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 176.

Belarusian language. All candidates for tenured positions would be required to teach in Belarusian. Those who relapsed into using Russian, even occasionally, would lose their positions as professors.⁹³ Instructors who procrastinated or refused the transfer to Belarusian were dealt with harshly.⁹⁴ A professor Shchapots'ev at the BDU was fired after stating bluntly that “As long as I am alive, I will not switch to Belarusian.”⁹⁵ Another BDU professor commented that publishing in Belarusian would limit both the access and appeal of his work.⁹⁶ Instructors and students showed their dissatisfaction with the Belarusization by threatening to leave the BSSR or to transfer to universities in the RSFSR,⁹⁷ a concern in a republic with an acute shortage of academics.

A teachers’ conference in Rechitsa in 1928, conducted in the four official languages, required translators. When a Yiddish-speaking delegate asked to speak, most delegates could not understand her without simultaneous translation. Responding to the situation, a teacher at a Belarusian language school, known for his liberal views, suggested that the discussion should be conducted in the “Russian language, which is comprehensible to us all.” He was accused of Great Russian chauvinism, immediately fired, excluded from the teacher’s union, and denied pension despite having worked as a teacher for forty years.⁹⁸ Similar stories surfaced in the Soviet press in the 1930s, after the policies of Belarusization and korenizatsiia had been abandoned. In 1933, during the reversal of the 1920s nationality policy, *Pravda* published a letter from an ethnically Russian teacher in the BSSR who claimed to have been forbidden “to speak Russian with his own wife” after having written an appeal to his village soviet in Russian.⁹⁹

⁹³ “Pratokolny zapis daklada raktara Beldzerzhuniversiteta U. I. Picheta na ahul’nym skhodze supratsounikau ab vynikakh absledavannia natskamisiiai pry TsVK BSSR belarusizatsyi BDU,” April 13, 1928. NARB. f. 701, vop. 1. spr. 56. l. 97-97 adv. Copy. Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 185-186; Yocum, 418.

⁹⁴ Yocum, 419, citing NARB , f. 4, op. 14, g. 1930, d. 64, l. 413.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 419, citing NARB, f. 701, op. 1, g. 1931, d. 104, ll. 59-60.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 419, NARB f. 701, op. 1., g. 1925, d. 4, l. 27 and NARB, f. 7, op. 1, g. 1927, d. 444, l. 189.

⁹⁸ Krushinsky, *Byelorussian Communism and Nationalism*, 13.

⁹⁹ Martin (2001), 354, citing Hikalo. *XVII s'ezd vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii /b/. 26 ianvaria -10 fevralia 1934 g. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1934), 72.

The opposition to Belarusization often focused on the alleged artificial nature of the Belarusian language. At the Twelfth All-Belarusian party Conference in September, 1926, the delegates discussed Belarusization. A party member of the Babruisk regional organization by the name of Kubler claimed:

How can we advance the Belarusian culture when at the same time the Belarusian language is artificially created? Comrade Charviakou says that we ought to develop a national culture in the schools, where we vaccinate our students with their native language. But I have to say, that there is no native language in the schools. Rather, they inculcate [students] with an artificially created Belarusian language. ... Concerning the issue at hand, I think that this is a mistake: we should not force the Belarusian language upon people. It would be better to introduce the language in accordance with the desires of the peasantry. But if the peasants do not want to have their children taught in the Belarusian language, we need to provide them with the option to teach their children in Russian. We can introduce the teaching of Belarusian in the countryside as a subject, but not force the teachers to have six weeks' training in the Belarusian language. The teachers are trained at six-week courses in the Belarusian language. What does one learn in six weeks? It is clear that, given the limited knowledge the teachers have of the Belarusian language, they are not able to implement it. As far as the peasants are concerned, they say: 'So you are going to teach us in Belarusian in elementary school, but what about secondary? In Russian? Under those circumstances the peasants' children cannot expect to continue into secondary school. To be honest, in our party organization almost everyone is decidedly opposed to the introduction of the Belarusian language.¹⁰⁰

Ihnatouski himself responded to these allegations, again spelling out the reasoning behind Belarusization:

As Comrade Kubler mentioned, it is a fact that there is no such thing as a single Belarusian language, and the language which is taught in schools is still not the language of the people. [But] the literary Russian language also differs from the spoken language. It is worth mentioning, that the Belarusian language, which we are talking about, is in many ways artificial, it contains little from everyday life. But it is necessary to mention that the literary language is getting closer to becoming a true popular language in terms of its usage by the masses. Belarusian is still a language that is in the process of being constructed by the intelligentsia. The Communist Party has only now started to talk about Belarusian, but still not in the Belarusian language. Therefore there is a fully understandable rift between the artificial and the popular language, and this rift will be overcome only when we all start using the Belarusian language. Concerning the Belarusian language in the countryside: it is a fact that peasants often reject it. And that is reflected in the speeches of the delegates at the local party conferences. But at these conferences, there are comrades who certify that also the opposite is true. In everyday life you are constantly confronted with both negative and positive attitudes to the Belarusian language. Therefore it would be useful to ask: Who feels alienated? The peasant? And why? Is it regarding the proletarian school and education? But why do we consider the peasant a specialist on proletarian education? School work requires specialization. Therefore, it is important that specialists on matters of education speak up. Secondly, few *muzhiks* would argue that we do not pay attention to what he has to say. Thirdly, we need to study why the *muzhik* says what he says. Very often the *muzhik* expresses his opposition to the Belarusian language in the Belarusian language. Besides, as we have heard from the local party conferences, he likes to be addressed in the Belarusian language. It is important to study the psychology of the speaker, not only what is being said. Why don't the peasants want the Belarusian language? Our *muzhik* is a practical man. When he sees that the Belarusian language is not being used by the party and soviet organs, he concludes that he does not need that language.

¹⁰⁰ Stanahramma dyskusii na XII usebelaruskai partyinai kanferentsyi ab belaruskai move i ae poli u hramadstve, September 20-26, 1926. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 2. spr. 21. l. 184-216, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 48-49.

From that we can deduce that we need to constantly, and irreversibly, introduce the Belarusian language into party and soviet institutions. When this will be a reality, the *muzhik* will not shy away from the language.¹⁰¹

A. H. Charviakou defended Belarusization and explained its rationale:

We need to recognize the fact that many [Belarusians], deep down in [their] souls, hide a negative attitude toward the Belarusian language and Belarusian culture. Why do we put the issue of learning Belarusian on the political agenda? Does anyone really think that this is done for our personal pleasure? We have taken on the Belarusian language because it is our dear native, mother tongue (*rodnoi, materinskii*), in order to facilitate its use and more fully and more quickly realize its potential, and execute the tasks that pedagogy demands. It is the language of the majority population, and our intention is to strengthen its influence on entire societal life and in our work among the population.¹⁰²

Deputy People's Commissar A.V. Balitski claimed that the Russian language in the BSSR was not threatened by Belarusization, adding that "we consider the Russian language so wide and rich, and we use it so often as the language of federal communication that it will no doubt remain in the schools."¹⁰³ The fact that the entire party conference was conducted in Russian provides an indication of the strength of that language in the republic. Despite the expansion of the use of Belarusian, the process was still in its infancy. The situation was further complicated by the local peasants' lack of ethnic awareness. They did not differentiate between Belarusian and Russian. In 1929, peasants informed Zatons'kyi's Control Commission that "they spoke only Russian, unaware that they were explaining themselves in fluent Belorussian."¹⁰⁴

The Socio-Economic Situation of the Titular Belarusian Population

The government of the BSSR promoted national minority culture, even though the titular, ethnically Belarusian majority remained underrepresented among the elites of the republic. In the academic year 1924-1925, only two of the professors in the republic knew Belarusian, and only one, Ihnatouski, taught in the national language.¹⁰⁵ Belarusians dominated only the lowest levels of academia. In 1924-1925, the number of ethnic Belarusians among the research and teaching staff at the BDU, the

¹⁰¹ "Stanahramma dyskusii na XII usebelaruskai partyinai kanferentsyi ab belaruskai move i iae poli u hramadstve, September 20-26, 1926." NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 2. spr. 21. l. 184-216, Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 52.

¹⁰² Ibid., 57.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁴ Martin (2001), 260, citing GARF f. 1235 op. 121 d. 2 (1926) l. 23; f. 3316 op. 16a d. 175 (1926); ll. 48-51; RTsKhIDNI f. 17 op. 69 d. 59 (1927); l. 17; f. 17 op. 85 d. 365 (1929) ll. 98-99.

¹⁰⁵ Yocom, 404; Lindner (1999), 165.

Agricultural Academy, and the Veterinary Institute was 26.3 per cent. Despite ambitious government programs, this number had increased only slightly to 31.0 per cent by 1925-1926. Of the professors, only 8.5 per cent, or seven out of eighty-two professors, were Belarusians, while the Veterinary Institute did not have a single Belarusian professor.¹⁰⁶ From the perspective of the national communists, the situation was a little better at *Inbelkul't*, where 59 per cent of the faculty's 206 scientists and 77-man board of directors in 1925-1926 consisted of ethnic Belarusians.¹⁰⁷

In 1922, of all the students at institutions of higher learning, Jews constituted over 60 per cent, and Belarusians only 31 percent.¹⁰⁸ At the Belarusian State University in 1925, Belarusian students constituted just over 40 per cent of the student body.¹⁰⁹ The authorities found this unsatisfactory, and prior to the start of the 1924-1925 academic year the BDU expelled many students whose command of Belarusian was too poor. As a result, in 1925-1926, the number of Belarusian students attending the BDU, the Agricultural Academy, and the Veterinary Institute increased to 59 per cent.¹¹⁰ In January 1927, a satisfied Krynetsky reported to the TsK that Belarusians now constituted 61 per cent of all the students enrolled in tertiary education, which he deemed to be an acceptable number.¹¹¹ Among government employees, the under-representation of Belarusians was equally striking.¹¹² It largely reflected the predomination of Jews in the cities of the BSSR. Some three quarters of all Soviet Jews lived in Ukraine

¹⁰⁶ Yocom, 408-409.

¹⁰⁷ Kastsiuk, Ihnatsenka, Vyshinski, *Narysy historyi Belarusi u 2 ch. Ch. 2* (1995), 135.

¹⁰⁸ Yocom, 411.

¹⁰⁹ The ethnic composition of the students at the BDU in 1925 was as follows:

Jews	1,265, or 51.5%
Belarusians	1,025, or 41.0%
Russians	162, or 6.0%
Poles	12, or 0.5%
Others	25, or 1.0%
Total	2,489

Von Engelhardt, *Weiβruthenien*, 182, citing *Polymia* No. 4, 1925.

¹¹⁰ Yocom, 411, citing NARB, f. 4, op. 3, g. 1926, d. 15, ll. 369-370, NARB, f. 7, op. 1, g. 1927, d. 444, ll. 179-180.

¹¹¹ In the 1927-1928 academic year the proportion of Belarusian students was 57.1 per cent at the BDU, 70.8 at the Agricultural Academy, and 76.2 per cent at the Veterinary Institute. Yocom, 411, citing NARB, f. 4, op. 21, g. 1927, d. 119, l. 29, NARB, f. 101, op. 1, g. 1928, d. 2934, ll. 47, 59-60, NARB, f. 701, op. 1, g. 1928, d. 56, l. 74.

¹¹² According to Platonav and Korshuk, at the beginning of 1929, Belarusians made up 51.3 per cent of the employees in the administrative organs, 30.8 per cent of government employees, 26.3 per cent of employees in the legal system, and 59.5 per cent in agricultural administration. Platonav and Korshuk, 19.

and Belarus and they constituted between 40 to 50 per cent of the urban population in the BSSR.¹¹³ In the larger cities Jews constituted 50-80 per cent of the population.¹¹⁴ However, Jewish proportional overrepresentation in local government did not translate into the higher echelons of power. In the political administration of the Soviets, their representation largely reflected the demographics of the republic.¹¹⁵

“Jewish Nationalism”

At the Tenth Congress of the KP(b)B in January 1927, Krynetski, an avid supporter of Belarusization, now turned attention to the danger of nationalism: Russian, Belarusian, Jewish, and Polish. In particular, he condemned the continued existence of petit bourgeois “Jewish nationalism” within the party, which he claimed was taking the form of an inward-looking isolationism. He warned that residues of Jewish nationalism remained among some of the Jewish party members. The Bund had merged with the KP(b)B, but the process had been complex and not without conflict.¹¹⁶ While Russian and Belarusian nationalisms were seen as potential sources of danger, Krynetski gave Jewish nationalism more attention than the other two combined at the Tenth Party Congress. The Yiddish version of the paper of the Central Committee of the KP(b)B paper had its name changed from *Veker* to *Oktiabr*, “in order to fully reject the Bundist traditions and bolshevize the Jewish workers.”¹¹⁷ Krynetsky explained that “changing the name of the newspaper *Veker* to *Oktiabr* has a moral meaning. It is not only about

¹¹³ “Rezolutsyia plenuma TsK KP(b)B pa dakladu ‘Charhoviyia zadachy KP(b)B u natsyinal’nai palitytsy,’” from *Rezoliutsii plenuma TsK KP(b)B, 25-29 ianvaria 1925 h.* (Miensk, 1925), 3-11, cited in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 60.

¹¹⁴ According to the 1926 Soviet census of the recently enlarged BSSR, 80.6% of the population was made up of Belarusians, 8.2% Jews, 7.7% Russians, 2.0% Poles, and 1.3% Latvians, Lithuanians, and other ethnicities. Platonav and Korshuk, 14. Some of the major Belarusian cities had an even larger Jewish presence. In 1900, Jews constituted 41.0 % of the population of Vilnia, 52.3% of the population of Minsk, 63.4 % of Bialystok, 52.4 % of Vitsebsk, 46.0% of Daugavapils, 65.8% of Brest, 49% of Hrodna, 77.3% of Pinsk, 50% of Mahiliou, 60% of Babruisk, 56.4% of Homel’, 61% of Polatsk, and 78% of Slonim. Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 109.

¹¹⁵ In 1929, Jews made up 2.4 per cent of the people in the village soviets, 30.5 per cent of the city soviets, and 2.1 per cent of village soviet chairpersons. In the BSSR oblast and raion executive committees, Jews made up 10.3 per cent, whereas in the krai committees, Jews constituted 18.6 per cent. *Natsional’naia politika VKP(b) v tsifrakh* (Moscow: Kommunisticheskia Akademiia, 1930), 208.

¹¹⁶ “Z daklada pershaha sekretara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha ’Palitychnaia spravadacha TsK X z’ezdu KP(b)B’”, from *X z’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol’shevikov) Belorussii 3-10 ianvaria 1927 goda, Stenograficheskii otchet*, 37-44, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 111-113.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 112. *Der Veker* was of great symbolic value for the Bundist movement. A paper by that name first appeared illegally in 1900, and again in Vilnia in 1905, as the first Bundist newspaper to be published legally in tsarist Russia. Bemporad, “Red Star on Jewish Street” (2006), 90.

changing names, but about introducing the Bolshevik tradition into the circle of Jewish workers.”¹¹⁸ At the same time, the Jewish section, or *evsektsiia* of the party was renamed Jewish Buro (*evbiuro*) to be consistent with the names of the other ethnic sections of the party. Former Bundists were singled out for severe criticism, and accused of “inadequate understanding of the role of the proletariat as the leading force, insufficient appreciation of the role of the peasantry, and of petit bourgeois distortions of the nationalities policy,” something Krynetski deemed characteristic of the Belarusian Bundists. Furthermore, they were accused of petit bourgeois and anti-proletarian Zionism, which Krynetski claimed had developed into a threat that could no longer be tolerated, as it “essentially is against the dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹¹⁹

Following Piłsudski’s May 1926 coup the authorities began to worry about the loyalty of the members of the old Bund, which had been forcibly merged with the KP(b)B. Following their suppression in the BSSR, the Bund and Poale Zion continued their activities in Poland and Sweden, respectively.¹²⁰ While both movements had helped to establish the BSSR, in Poland the Bund and Poale Zion became strong supporters of Piłsudski. As early as 1918, they had both pledged their loyalty to the Polish state.¹²¹ In Poland, the Jewish Bund maintained friendly relations with Piłsudski’s regime, and the Polish Jews were among the strongest supporters of the *sanacja* government.¹²² Nevertheless, with the initiation of Stalin’s revolution from above, Poale Zion was formally banned in the USSR on June 28, 1928.¹²³ For the remainder of the Soviet period both the Bund and Poale Zion all but disappeared from the official narrative.¹²⁴ At the same time, Belarusian nationalism again became a source of increased concern.

¹¹⁸ Bemporad (2006), 95.

¹¹⁹ “Z daklada persaha sekretara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha,” 37-44, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 114-115.

¹²⁰ Following the Russian Revolution Poale Zion moved its headquarters to Stockholm. Only in 1924 did it officially register as “the Palestinian section” of the reconstructed Socialist International. Blomqvist, *Nation, ras och civilisation*, 351- 352.

¹²¹ Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 77.

¹²² Jacek Piotrowski, “The Policies of the Sanacja on the Jewish minority in Silesia 1926-1939,” in Antony Polonsky (ed.), *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume Fourteen, Focusing on Jews in the Polish Borderlands* (Oxford and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 150.

¹²³ Bemporad (2006), 120.

Krynetski warned about petit bourgeois Belarusian “national democrats” coming out of the woodwork and taking advantage of Belarusization.

The reason for the current growth of [Belarusian] nationalism is, to a significant extent the fact that we have actively conducted a policy of Belarusization. In response to this, part of the Belarusian intelligentsia came to the conclusion that “the wind now blows in their direction,” and that Belarusization is a concession to the essentially petit bourgeois part of the Belarusian intelligentsia. This has resulted in the invigoration of nationalistic and national democratic attitudes among the intelligentsia. A significant influence on the growth of these sentiments is the right wing of the foreign Belarusian intelligentsia.¹²⁵

The problem, Krynetski stated, was that these attitudes had influenced and affected party organizations and individual party members. The 1926 academic conference on the Belarusian language was singled out as a source of danger. Balitski, Ihnatouski, and their form of Belarusian national communism increasingly came under attack from Krynetski and the KP(b)B. They were accused of lack of socialist vigilance at the conference and having allowed the resurgence of “national democratic” sentiments. The party leadership started to scrutinize Ihnatouski’s writing of history. He was accused of

idealizing the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, a petit bourgeois organization, un-proletarian, at times in its history taking openly kulak positions. Ihnatouski had defended the incorporation of the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, Poale Zion, Polish Party of Socialists (PPS), the Belarusian Party of Socialist Narodniks, the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Ukrainian Social Democrats into the “Bloc of National Socialist Parties” at the time of the Constituent Assembly (*Uchreditel’noe sobranie*) immediately following the October Revolution. He had tried to bring these leftist Belarusian, Jewish, Ukrainian, and even Polish nationalist into the canon of BSSR history. Ihnatouski presented the positions of the BSH as “without doubt standing for social democratic positions, while their tactics were close to the Bolsheviks.”¹²⁶

Krynetski condemned what he saw as the rehabilitation of leftist groups that had been rivals to the Bolsheviks and opponents of the October Revolution. “[W]e are dealing with the same kind of attempts to idealize the BSH, as we can observe among individual Jewish communist workers who are attempting to idealize the Bund.”¹²⁷ From 1926 onwards, the KP(b)B conducted a massive campaign against “neo-

¹²⁴ *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, describes the Bund as a counterrevolutionary, separatist organization, defined by its “opportunistic positions and nationalist tendencies.” Its bourgeois positions led it to “support liquidators and L. D. Trotsky” at the time of the Stolypin reaction. S. V. Sheprovskii, “Bund” in A. M. Prokhanov et al (eds.), *Bol’shaya Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia*, vol. 4, third edition (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia,” 1971), 67. Poale Zion gets less attention, and fewer adjectives are used in condemning the organization, but the description of the party as nationalist and Zionist clearly indicated its incorrect political orientation. “In 1922 part of [Poale Zion’s] members were absorbed into RCP(b) [while] the right wing of its party continued nationalist propaganda. Poale Zion turned into an anti-Soviet organization, and was outlawed in 1928.” “Poalei Tsion” Prokhanov et al (eds.), vol. 20, 67.

¹²⁵ “Z daklada pershaha sekretara TsK KP(b)B A. I. Krynetskaha,” 37-44, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 115.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 118.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 118.

Bundist movements,” which were extended to include also Ihnatouski and the Belarusian national communists.¹²⁸

Conclusion

The nationalizing programs in the BSSR were pilot projects, and the republic itself an experimental workshop for Soviet nationality policy. Considerably smaller in scope and less developed than in Soviet Ukraine, these policies were easier to implement and met less resistance. Mykola Riabchuk has described the parallel “Ukrainization” policy in the BSSR’s southern neighbor as “a dubious agreement between a Russian-Bolshevik Mephisto and a Ukrainian-Nationalist Faustus that [came] to an end as soon as the Bolshevik’s [sic] first goal (firm domination over Ukraine) was achieved, and the second one (“World Revolution”) was abandoned.”¹²⁹ A similar allegory can be applied to the situation in the BSSR. To both parties, Belarusization and Ukrainianization were tactical maneuvers; steps toward the realization of their respective agenda. The main problem was that their goals were incompatible and mutually exclusive. To a nationalist, dedicated to the establishment of Belarusian – or Ukrainian – statehood, *korenizatsiia*, Belarusization and Ukrainianization, were but steps on the road to independence. To Stalin, the said policies were intended to buy support for their internationalist goals of world revolution and the weakening of their hostile neighbors, Poland in particular. Much like their Ukrainian counterparts, the Belarusian intelligentsia came to support Belarusian national communism to further their national agenda. A significant segment embraced the BSSR as a viable and promising proto-state, a legitimate successor of the BPR.

By the mid-1920s, the BSSR was emerging as an increasingly self-confident new European political entity. The republican leadership presided over an impressive national revival. Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* went further than the nationalist intelligentsia had anticipated. Belarus shared several characteristics of an emerging state. Much like in Western Belarus, it could be argued that the Belarusian national mobilization had reached stage C in Hroch’s model of the development of national movements.

¹²⁸ Lindner (1999), 227.

¹²⁹ Mykola Riabchuk, ”Behind the Talks on ‘Ukrainization’: *Laissez Faire* or Affirmative Action?” in Theofil Kis and Irena Makaryk with Roman Weretlynk (eds.), *Towards a New Ukraine II: Meeting the Next Century* (Ottawa: Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa, 1999), 135.

In its national communist form, Belarusian nationalism was about to enter its third, mass phase at the beginning of 1927. The national communists had moved forward their positions, and built significant republican power bases. The Soviet Belarusian republic was enlarged for a second time in 1926. The political rhetoric behind mobilization in the republic was based more on nationalism than communism. This form of national communist mobilization was not limited to the BSSR, but appeared to be a model that could be successfully exported. In Western Belarus, a national revival was well under way. At the same time, the heavy-handedness of Belarusization had antagonized many people at all levels of society in the BSSR and created animosity in Moscow, which followed the actions of the increasingly self-confident Belarusian national communists with increasing concern. Yet, the year 1927 would mark a turning point in nationalities policies in both Poland and the USSR. So intensive was the Belarusization that some modern historians have dismissed the validity of a Belarusian nation and reduced it to an artificial construct of the Soviet authorities.¹³⁰

Far from being universally popular, the Belarusization policies encountered significant opposition in powerful circles, particularly within the government and academia. This opposition was not necessarily ideological in nature, but often based upon a reluctance to switch from Russian to Belarusian. A significant portion of the republican state and party elites found forced Belarusization unnecessary and artificial, noting that it originated from the intellectual elite, rather than the Belarusian-speaking masses. The opposition observed that a considerable part of this elite consisted of returning émigrés or recent arrivals in the republic, many of which were not native Belarusian speakers, but had acquired proficiency in the language as adults.

The party's strategy was to build support for the Soviet project by cultivating a pro-Soviet nationalism, partly by reversing discrimination against minority cultures. Not only Belarusian, but also the Yiddish and Polish languages were promoted by the authorities. This gave rise to significant, if not insurmountable problems. Paradoxically, the affirmative action policies of Belarusization and Yiddishization contained elements of preserving the status quo, and reinforced the separation and

¹³⁰ See, for instance Gerner, "Ryssland: Statsbildning som historiskt problem," in Furuhagen (ed.), *Ryssland – ett annat Europa*, 227; Abrahamsson, *Vitryssland*, 69 and Babkoŭ, "Belarus: Dual Modernity," in Junefelt and Peterson (eds.), *Cultural Encounters in East Central Europe*, 105.

segregation of the ethnic communities, a phenomenon that has been referred to as *ghettoization*.¹³¹ Rather than enthusiastically embracing these policies, Jews, Poles, and Belarusians were often opposed to sending their children to “ethnic” schools, where they would be taught in a language other than Russian, fearing that they would be disadvantaged in their careers. The nationalities policies therefore were often met with much skepticism and opposition from the ethnic groups that they were intended to benefit. This opposition took both active and passive forms, something exacerbated by the authorities’ refusal to accept even voluntary assimilation. The opposition it generated was met with heavy-handed measures that were often counterproductive. In her study on the Belarusization, Beth Baird Yocom concluded that

University students seem to have had an intuitive understanding of nationality policy that the Bolsheviks lacked. They sensed inherently the contradictions and flawed logic of the nationality policy: when the government divided its energy and resources by nationality, it created separate and unequal conditions....They insisted that Soviet cultural policy would not bring about the changes in mentality desired by the Bolsheviks. Instead, they emphasized that economics was the key; through industrialization the republic’s economic growth and development would convince the masses of the correctness of socialist ideology.¹³²

Soviet Belarusian nation building aimed at forging a new national consciousness that combined ethnic, linguistic, and civic nationalism. It was an attempt to establish a territorial patriotism and to cultivate loyalty to the multi-national BSSR and USSR. The *ethnophilic* promoters of national enlightenment took an active interest even in the smallest national minorities in the BSSR, such as the Latvians and the Tatars. They believed they would strengthen BSSR by encouraging ethno-pluralism, cultural diversity, and linguistic pluralism. It marked a departure from the praxis of the tsarist era, and differed sharply from the increasingly brutal treatment of the national minorities in Poland. Rather, it was to be based upon the principles of an inclusive civic nationalism, based upon allegiance to certain political rules rather than on ethnicity. At the same time, ethnic principles played a key role. Yet, this civic nationalism was based upon the promotion of segregation and the retaining of separate spheres, languages, and cultures.

¹³¹ Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 115-117.

¹³² Yocom, 420-421.

From its outset, Soviet nationalities policy had been uncompromising in its hostility even to completely voluntary assimilation.¹³³ Beth Baird Yocom finds that Belarusization did “not fulfill its mission to raise and develop the political consciousness of the Belarusian majority. Instead, these institutions had promoted the nationalist message to the detriment of more important socialist principles.”¹³⁴ Kate Brown has shown that once the Soviet state established national identities, “residents started to use them to voice local interests....When collectivization threatened their livelihood, they called on their Polish identities to dodge Soviet power. When famine threatened, villagers used their national identities to seek aid from German and Polish consulates and to petition to leave. These local cultures were powerful, more powerful than the Soviet state, which was underrepresented and disorganized in the borderlands. By the early thirties it was becoming clear that national forms did not aid Soviet rule.”¹³⁵

Although Belarusization did raise Belarusian national consciousness in the BSSR,¹³⁶ its ghettoism and multilingualism undermined the efficiency of the republic. Not only did it fail to win the sympathies of its own citizens, it also alienated significant sectors of society, which feared discrimination and limitations on their social mobility as a result of their limited knowledge of the Belarusian language. In the words of Beth Baird Yocom, it “fostered a ‘tower of Babel’ atmosphere in education.”¹³⁷ Yet, despite disappointment with the results of the nationalities policies, Belarusization and Yiddishization laid the framework for a new state, something that generated considerable goodwill and pro-Soviet sentiment in Western Belarus. Ironically, Belarusization worked abroad, encouraging the development of national and political consciousness among the Western Belarusians. It thus accomplished the goal of undermining and weakening Poland. The real beneficiary of this process was the Belarusian national movement, which came to act increasingly independently from Moscow and was establishing strong links with the national communists in Western Belarus.

¹³³ Martin (2001), 32, 276.

¹³⁴ Yocom, 446.

¹³⁵ Brown, 9.

¹³⁶ Guthier, 37; Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992), 176-177.

¹³⁷ Yocom, 448.

As the Soviet government put great emphasis on progress, the modernist Soviet project set out to install ethnic identities in its citizens. Since poverty, illiteracy and socioeconomic retardation prevented the establishment of a modern identity, the authorities assigned identities for its citizens. The completion of this project took two decades. In many ways, this was a logical progression of events. The practice of imposing nationalities on its citizens was an important step towards the abandonment of the principle of national self-identification in the Soviet censuses. In 1938, the NKVD decreed that individuals could not change their nationality.¹³⁸ Instead, it was determined by the ethnicity of the parents, and written into domestic passports, which had been re-introduced in urban centers in 1932.¹³⁹

While the Soviet authorities felt compelled to force modern national identities upon their citizens, this policy found a lukewarm reception among its intended beneficiaries. One result of having government-assigned ethnicity supersede and ultimately replace national self-identification was the legacy of weak national identities. In the BSSR, “Belarusianhood” became a bureaucratic category of classification, motivated more by foreign policy concerns than actual interests expressed by citizens at the grassroots level. As a result, it was thus poorly anchored among the masses. In their eagerness to create a Belarusian national consciousness, the nationalists stirred up considerable opposition among a population, which was not yet ready to receive and accept the nationalist message. The return of Piłsudski to power in Poland ended parliamentary rule in that country. Following the destruction of the Belarusian national movement in Western Belarus, the “Belarusian Piedmont” lost much of its utility. Instead, the resumption of the promethean project made the Belarusian national communists suspect in the eyes of the Soviet government.

¹³⁸ However, in the post-war period it became possible to change one’s nationality by marriage. This was used by members of “enemy” nations within the Soviet Union to assimilate into Russian-Soviet culture. Brown, 190-191.

¹³⁹ Hirsch, 106-107, 275, 294.

Chapter 7

The Suppression of the Belarusian National Movement in Poland, 1927-1930

Introduction

During the first half of the 1920s the Polish government was hostile to the aspirations of the Belarusian national movement. Perceiving Belarusian nationalism as an irredentist threat to the state, strong forces within the ruling circles of the Grabski government wanted to suppress it. However, Poland was in disarray, and the weak coalition governments lacked resources to carry this out. For years, an armed rebellion raged in Western Belarus, supported by the Soviets. It ended in 1925, as the left-wing Belarusian nationalists instead opted for participation in the political process. The years 1924-1926 represented the peak of Belarusian national activism in Poland, aided by two major factors. First, nation-building in the BSSR was a major source of inspiration for the Western Belarusian nationalists. The government in Miensk supported them morally and financially. The Soviets, as noted, established educational facilities and even universities in the Belarusian language. Second, this national revival in Soviet Belarus was accompanied by a rich outpouring of publications in the Belarusian language, many of which found their way across the border. Encouraged and funded by the political leadership in Miensk, in 1925-1926 the Belarusian Peasant and Workers *Hramada* (BSRH) had emerged as a mass organization, a champion of national and class rights of the Western Belarusians. Warsaw saw it as irredentist and subversive. Following the reorganization of the political life after 1926 Poland embarked on a path of authoritarian development, which greatly enhanced the authorities' ability to suppress national organizations among its minorities. Belarusian nationalism became one of the first casualties of the new order. The destruction of the Belarusian movement became a test case for the policies of assimilation and Polonization.

This chapter addresses several key questions: Why did the Polish authorities react so harshly to the emergence of a Belarusian nationalism? How justified were the Polish fears of Western Belarusian irredentism and Soviet subversion? How did the Polish government go about destroying the national movement? How effective was it in uprooting Belarusian nationalism? Who were the Prometheans and

what were their aims? What were the short-term and long-term consequences of the suppression of nationalism in Western Belarus?

Repressions in Poland

In accordance with their consistent anti-Bolshevik and anti-Soviet line, the Polish authorities and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland regularly accused the Belarusian Christian Democratic movement of Bolshevism, immorality, and being an agent of the Jews.¹ Parts of the Polish clergy equated Belarusians and Orthodoxy with Bolshevism, and eagerly cracked down on every expression of Belarusian national consciousness or signs of irredentism. The years 1925-26 had been a turning point for Belarusian activists in Poland. In January-February 1925, the Communist Party of Poland – of which the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB) and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) were semi-autonomous subdivisions – held its third congress, at which the decision was taken to end the armed struggle against the Polish state.² The KPZB withdrew its support for violent rebellion, leading to the end of partisan resistance in Western Belarus by late 1925. Instead, the left-wing of the national movement in Western Belarus attempted to influence developments through participation in the political process. This second phase of Belarusian political activism would last for about three years, from 1926 to the beginning of 1929.³ Two crucial events contributed to their failure: Concordat between Poland and the Vatican in 1925; and Piłsudski's return to power in 1926.

The 1925 Concordat with the Vatican as a Polonizing Measure

As discussed in Chapter Five, a significant part of the Belarusian national movement was linked to Catholic circles. While SRs and Communists originally opted for violent resistance, the Belarusian Christian Democrats (BKhD), following the principles outlined in *Rerum Novarum*, chose to work peacefully within the framework of the Polish constitution. The Polish constitutions of 1921 and 1935 separated church and state, and the Catholic church retained a privileged and central political role. For example, paragraph 54 in the 1921 constitution stated that only a Roman Catholic could become president

¹ Von Engelhardt, *Weissruthenien*, 152.

² Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 44.

³ Kovkel' and Iarmusik, *Istoriia Belarusi*, 483.

of Poland.⁴ Subsequently, the Grabski government's February 10, 1925 Concordat with the Vatican specified that the Pope could appoint only Polish bishops to positions in Poland and that henceforth the church would serve the Polish state.⁵ It also gave the Greek Catholic church equal status with the Roman Catholic church in Poland.⁶ It allowed the Polish government to enlist the support of the Vatican and the Catholic church for their assimilatory policies. In many ways, the Catholic church was a natural partner for the *endecja*. Many National Democrats, as well as conservative Polish intellectuals, had long seen the church as a bulwark against Bolshevism in the east. Polish conservatives considered Bolshevism a form of political disease, and regarded Poland as the last outpost against Asiatic barbarianism.⁷

Belarusian history lacks an equivalent to Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts'kyi in L'viv, a towering political figure who used his position in the Greek Catholic Church to promote national consciousness among Galician Ukrainians. The closest equivalent was the bishop of Vilnius/Vilnius, Iu. Matuljavičus (Matulewicz). It is telling, and somewhat ironic that Matuljavičus, the leading promoter of a "national" Belarusian church was an ethnic Lithuanian. Favorably disposed toward the Belarusian language and culture, Matuljavičus was a "Belarusophile," belonging to a Lithuanian intellectual tradition, which emphasized affinity and solidarity with the Belarusians.⁸ He shared the core historical interpretations of the BKhD, particularly the idea of the Belarusian and Lithuanian peoples as brothers, linked by a common heritage and history, who suffered national oppression under Polish and Russian masters. Lithuanian nationalism shared with the BKhD a tradition of being more anti-Polish than anti-Russian.⁹ Matuljavičus actively supported the Belarusization and Lithuanization of the clergy in the Catholic church and

⁴ Anatolii Agapeevich Kruglov, *Razvitie ateizma v Belorussii (1917-1987 gg.)* (Minsk: Belarus', 1989), 238.

⁵ I. I. Koukel', "Belarskaia Khrystsianskaia Demakratyia" (2001), 40.

⁶ Aliaksandr Sviryd, "Palityka Druhoi Rechy Paspalitai u adnosinakh da unii na terytoryi Zakhodniai Belarusi (1921-1939 hh.)," *Belaruski Histrychny Chasopis*, No. 5 (2000): 54.

⁷ Marian Zdziechowski, Aleksander Cat-Mackiewicz and others viewed Bolshevism as the antithesis of God's law. Zdziechowski saw Bolshevism as a system of total destruction, an expression of shortcomings of the Russian psyche. Yet, he did not equate Bolshevism with Russia. Other conservative Polish politicians, such as Stanisław Mackiewicz, Stanisław Wańkowicz, and Szymon Meysztowicz, had similar ideas. Dariusz Szpoper, *Sukcesory Wielkiego Księstwa. Myśl polityczna i działalność konserwatystów polskich na ziemiach litewsko-białoruskich w latach 1904-1939* (Gdańsk: Arche, 1999), 196-205.

⁸ Koukel' (2001), 39.

⁹ Cienciala and Komarnicki, *From Versailles to Locarno*, 114.

introduced Lithuanian and Belarusian as the languages of worship.¹⁰ He collaborated closely with the nationally minded clergymen and public intellectuals, such as the BKhD leader Adam Stankevič in Vilnius, Kanstantin Stavovich in Sviry, Vintsent Hadleuski in Zhodzishi, Andrei Tsikota in Druia, and Iazep Hermanovich in Luzhki.¹¹

Article XI of the Concordat sanctioned the appointment of new bishops through nomination by the Vatican and confirmed by the Polish president. Article XIX required bishops to provide information to the authorities about any priests to be appointed to parishes, and whether their activities were acceptable from the perspective of security for the Polish state. The result of these two articles was that Belarusian clergymen were systematically excluded from any position of authority in the church. As far as the use of Belarusian – or any non-Latin language in religious service--Article XXIII stipulated that this question would be decided by the conference of Catholic bishops (where the Belarusian Catholics lacked representation), which further restricted the already marginal use of Belarusian within the sphere of religion. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, vernacular languages were used during preaching at religious services outside the regular Church calendar (the so-called *Zusatzgottesdienst* or *Nawuka*)¹² and during lectures at theological seminars.¹³ Very few parish churches used Belarusian in services and the Conference of Bishops rarely allowed any exceptions to the rule of using Polish as the language of sermons. Despite the fact the Belarusians made up more than 80 per cent of the parishioners in the Vilnius and Pinsk dioceses, only in a handful of churches in Western Belarus were sermons delivered in Belarusian: including the St. Nicholaus Church in Vilnius, three minor churches and chapels in the Vilnius diocese, and two Greek Catholic churches in the Pinsk diocese.¹⁴

In accordance with the provisions of the Concordat, Bishop Matuljavičus was fired and replaced by Romuald Jałbrzykowski, a hard-line Polish nationalist, who immediately started implementing a

¹⁰ Iuri Turonak, “Belaruskaia maryniany u Drui,” *Spadchyna* No. 5 (1991): 51-56.

¹¹ Karel Gomulka, “Bialorusini w II. Rzeczypospolitej,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Gdańskiej. Ekonomia XXXI.* – Gdańsk, 1992, No. 495, 127.

¹² von Engelhardt, 152.

¹³ Ibid, 151.

¹⁴ Ibid, 152.

policy of forced Polonization similar to the one advocated by the *endecja*. He targeted both the Belarusian and Lithuanian minorities.¹⁵ Jałbrzykowski's authority was further enhanced by his elevation to archbishop. This signaled an end to the use of Belarusian in the Catholic churches,¹⁶ excluding the option of using this institution to carry out Belarusization. Jałbrzykowski instructed the clergy to preach that *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* was "a Bolshevik newspaper," its readers non-Catholics and closet atheists, and the paper guilty of "religious indifference" for catering to Belarusians across sectarian lines. Jałbrzykowski categorically refused to cooperate with the BKhD, accusing it of being too conciliatory towards Orthodox Belarusians and of cooperating with the Bolsheviks. He also worked for a Catholic boycott of *Krynitsa/Belaruskaia Krynitsa*.¹⁷ Reading Belarusian newspapers could result in the refusal of confession or the blessing of their homes.¹⁸ The archbishop issued an outright ban on any affiliation with the Belarusian movement that extended to all Catholics: "Catholics, and especially Catholic clergy, may not belong to Belarusian Christian Democracy or in any way show their support for it. Catholics are not allowed to subscribe to, read, distribute, work with, or in any way support the newspaper called *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*."¹⁹ This order had a significant impact on BKhD, as few Roman Catholic Belarusian priests dared to challenge the Archbishop's orders. The party continued its work, albeit without Catholic priests in its leadership. Some priests continued their national activities within the Catholic Church as non-members of the BKhD. The party itself remained defiant. Two years after the ban, *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* even claimed that the movement had gained in strength. While it had lost a few members it had acquired others who joined in protest.²⁰ Despite its claims to the contrary, however, the

¹⁵ Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania*, 340.

¹⁶ Zejmis, "Belarus," 272-273.

¹⁷ Unsigned editorial, *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 38, December 23, 1929, 1.

¹⁸ Karlikau, "Tsi dobry nas probasch – skazhytse?," *Krynitsa*, No. 20, May 17, 1925, 3.

¹⁹ "Pramova pasla Al. Stepovicha, skazanaia u soimie 7-II-29 h. u chasie biudzeta dyskusyi nas resortam Ministerstva Vieravyznannia i Pubichnai Asviety," *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 8, February 22, 1929, 2.

²⁰ "Z zhytstsiia Belaruskaha Narodu u Pol'shchy," *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* No. 39, December 6, 1931, 3.

BKhD found it difficult to function.²¹ Belarusian clergymen who refused to accept the changes were reported to and arrested by the police.

On April 7, 1925, Vatslau Lastouski, former Chairman of the BPR Rada, protested the Concordat from his exile in Lithuania. He described it as a disaster for the Belarusian nation, comparable to Nikolai I's dissolution of the Uniate Church in 1839 and Aleksandr II's banning of the Belarusian language. Turning directly to Cardinal Gasparri in Rome, Lastouski expressed "the sharpest possible protest" against the violent "transformation of the Catholic Church on the Belarusian territory, temporarily under the Polish yoke, into a Polish political agency." Lastouski described the Concordat as a "remarkable and unbelievable ... bitter injustice against the Belarusian people ... playing into the hands of its political and national enemies."²² The protests from the Belarusian Catholics were justifiably concerned that the harsh measures would radicalize the Western Belarusian population further, and drive them into the arms of the radical left and the Soviets. Dissent was dealt with harshly, through cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish authorities. In Zhodzishki, Vintsent Hadlouski had introduced Belarusian-language services to great acclaim by his overwhelmingly Belarusian-speaking congregation. When the Polish minority in the parish complained about Hadlouski's continuous use of Belarusian, the Belarusian priest was warned by Jałbrzykowski. When Hadlouski continued to serve his Belarusian congregation in its native language, he was arrested by the police and sentenced to two years in jail for "inciting the congregation to anti-governmental activities."²³ In 1926, when the priest A. Tsikota, head of the monastery in Druja, informed the archbishop that the use of the Belarusian language was essential to the continued existence of his monastery, Jałbrzykowski told him to leave Poland and "go to the Bolsheviks."²⁴ Prior to the Sejm elections of 1928, representatives of the Polish minority in Druja *gmina*

²¹ Von Engelhardt, 151.

²² Vatslau Lastouski, *Kryvich* No. 9, 1925, 94-98, cited in von Engelhardt, 153-155.

²³ Gomulka, 128; *Belaruski Iliustravany Kalendar 1928* (Vil'nia: Vydatstva Belaruskaha Istorytu Haspadarki i Kul'tury 1927), 83, 97.

²⁴ Von Engelhardt, 152.

in Western Belarus sent an open letter to the Polish authorities accusing Belarusian priests of secessionism, anti-Polish activities, and even of distributing communist literature in Belarusian circles.²⁵

The Concordat would have far-reaching consequences for the BKhD.²⁶ That the Vatican sided with the Polish state against the Belarusian and Lithuanian minorities was a heavy blow from which it was unable to recover. The Belarusian Christian Democrats depended on at least the Vatican's passive support for their program of populism, nationalism and Catholic Christianity. The theological seminars in Vilnia and Pinsk, which had been central to the Belarusization efforts, now became instruments of Polonization. With the Catholic priests barred from participating in the movement, it slowly moved away from its Christian and Catholic origins. Stankevich's methods and strategy had backfired. The Belarusian Christian Democrats never reached the strength and influence of their radical left-wing competitors, and the party failed to realize its full potential. Over the next decade, it slowly toned down its Catholic attributes, and turned into a center-left, increasingly secular and national movement.

The *Sanacja* Order

By 1926, Poland was a country in deep political crisis. The parliamentary system had largely failed to generate the public support necessary for its survival.²⁷ The national minorities felt discriminated against, and had been in open rebellion against the central government during most of the years since the restoration of Poland. Having essentially retired from politics in 1922 and from the military in 1923, Piłsudski returned to power in 1926 in a coup that left over 200 dead and over 1,000 wounded.²⁸ At the time of its execution, it was not seen as a political watershed. To the Belarusian nationalists, the choice between the old government, consisting partly of National Democrats and military rule under Piłsudski was not obvious. Neither recognized Belarusian national aspirations as legitimate.²⁹ The Belarusian

²⁵ Zejmis, 267.

²⁶ Kruglov, 238.

²⁷ Joseph Rothschild, *Pilsudski's Coup d'Etat* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), 359.

²⁸ Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland, 1921-1939: the Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 514-517; Snyder, *Sketches From a Secret War* (2005), 23; see also Jędrzej Giertych's highly polemical account in Giertych, 228-229; *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 17, May 23, 1926, 1.

²⁹ Snyder (2005), 75.

Christian Democrats kept a low profile during the coup. Their party organ cynically remarked that little would change in Poland with Piłsudski as its leader.

We only know one thing, which is that this “coup” will not lead to any improvements in Polish policy, neither for the national minorities, nor for Poland as a whole. Everything in Poland after the bloody battles in Warsaw will follow the same old path. ... Piłsudski will stay the same. ... His words sound similar to his appeal to the people to restore the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania when he conquered Vilna the first time. Of that, only words remain. The lords took control over Poland and ruled the way they wanted.³⁰

According to *Belaruskaia Krynička*, Dmowski and his national democrats wanted to see “the death of the Belarusian people.”³¹ Piłsudski’s old PPS also was unappealing to the Belarusian movement. *Belaruskaia Krynička* referred to it as a “chauvinist socialist party,” which “doesn’t love Belarusians.”³² The Belarusian minority had few reasons to expect much from Piłsudski’s opponent, incumbent Prime Minister Wincent Witos. His party, the *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe Piast*, or PSL ”Piast”³³ took a similar position to Dmowski’s *endecja* on the policy of Polonization and assimilation of the “culturally inferior” Eastern Slavs.³⁴ This attitude to the people in the east was deeply rooted.

The Communist Party of Western Belarus, as a section of the Communist Party of Poland, faced a double dilemma. Its followers had put down their weapons and ended the armed resistance to Poland by 1925, on orders from Moscow. In May 1926, the Polish Communists received further instructions to support and assist Piłsudski and his plotters. Communist railroad workers went on strike to prevent hostile troops from reaching the capital, and many Communists fought for Piłsudski on the barricades during the coup.³⁵ In supporting Piłsudski, Stalin and the Moscow leadership followed a failed logic, similar to that which they would apply to the Nazis in 1933: they regarded social democrats as the major threat to a communist revolution through their offering of compromises with the class enemy. Once Piłsudski was in

³⁰ *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 17, May 23, 1926, 1.

³¹ “Za koho halasavach?,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 19, February 29, 1928, 2.

³² “Kto za iaki numar halasue?,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 20, March 6, 1928, 3.

³³ *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, the Polish People’s Party or Polish Peasant Party, was one of two parties that used the name, PSL *Piast* and PSL *Wyzwolenie*. They were both agrarian or peasant parties, center or somewhat left-of center, but socially conservative. *Wyzwolenie* was generally more positively disposed towards the national minorities and occasionally cooperated with the Belarusians and Ukrainian factions in the Sejm, while the *Piast* often gravitated towards the *endecja*.

³⁴ Kurkiewicz, *Sprawy białoruskie*, 47-48; Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other* (2006), 82-83.

³⁵ Snyder (2005), 29.

power, they believed, class antagonism would increase and his regime would be overthrown, paving the way for a communist revolution in Poland. When this did not happen and Piłsudski instead installed his co-conspirators in key positions, Moscow chastised the Polish working class for failing to bring about a revolution, ordering the Polish communists to break off all contacts with Piłsudski rather than supporting him for president as planned. Stalin accused the Polish Communists of the “very great error” of supporting Piłsudski, even though they had acted on orders from Moscow, probably issued by Stalin himself.³⁶ In June 1926, just weeks after ordering them to the barricades to fight for Piłsudski, Moscow issued directives for the Polish communists to denounce him as a “fascist.”³⁷ Stalin’s handling of the Piłsudski coup received criticism from Zinoviev, one of the most vocal critics of Belarusization and other aspects of Soviet nationalities policies.³⁸

A number of contemporary observers shared the perception that foreign interests stood behind the coup. For their part, the *endecja* and the Polish right were convinced that the British Foreign Office was involved.³⁹ This view was soon adopted by the Soviets. The Soviet People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs informed the Polish embassy that

England has not renounced the idea of overthrowing the government in Russia through external military intervention. England is aware that, in the present political configuration, only Poland can be a jumping-off point for military intervention. England could not reach agreement with any of the successive Polish governments because no Polish government wanted to take part in the realization of an interventionist scheme. The new Witos government would certainly not have agreed to take part in such a venture. England has thus sought an arrangement with Piłsudski, and he has approved their plans for intervention.⁴⁰

Following the coup, the new government announced the rejuvenation of Piłsudski’s plans of an eastern federation. In June 1926, the left-wing parties in the Polish Sejm began outlining a more tolerant attitude toward the national minorities. Four left-of-center parties, the PPS, *Wyzwolenie* (liberation), *Chłopskie*

³⁶ Ibid.; RTsKhIDNI f. 558, op. 1, d. 4297, published in Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov, and Oleg V. Khlevniuk (eds.), *Stalin’s Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 110-112

³⁷ Snyder (2005), 29.

³⁸ William Korey, “Zinov’ev’s Critique of Stalin’s Theory of Socialism in One Country, December, 1925-December, 1926,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December, 1950): 266.

³⁹ Polonsky (1972), 514, citing *Kurjer Poznański*, 17 May 1926.

⁴⁰ Polonsky (1972), 514.

Stronnictwo (the Peasant's Union),⁴¹ and *Klub Pracy* (The Workers' Club) made a public declaration in favor of territorial autonomy for the Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities, even recognizing their claims to independence. While *Belaruskaia Krynička* expressed "great joy" over this declaration from the center-left parties, they remained pessimistic that these principles would ever be realized.⁴²

Piłsudski declined to accept the Polish presidency, deferring to the rather colorless professor Ignacy Mościcki. Instead, he exercised his power from behind the scenes, under the title Minister of War.⁴³ The result of the 1926 coup was the establishment of a new political order. Poland departed from the path of democracy and begun a descent towards authoritarianism that would end in military dictatorship. This new government became known as the *sanacja* regime, meaning convalescence or healing, and referring to Piłsudski's promises of economic and social recovery.⁴⁴ The *sanacja* government circumvented the constitution. Knowing that the radical left and the *endecja* would win a free election, Piłsudski instead built a political system based upon informal networks of people, which he referred to as "men of trust." Having more faith in the loyalty of individuals than parties, Piłsudski ruled Poland from his Belvedere mansion or through informal meetings in colleagues' apartments in Warsaw.⁴⁵

On August 12, 1926, the new government amended the constitution to expand the power of the president. The executive got the right to adjourn parliament and to enact emergency laws arbitrarily. Another amendment limited the parliament's ability to impeach the government or individual ministers.⁴⁶ Described as "merely a Mussolini-watcher," Piłsudski's authoritarian *sanacja* order displayed fascist and

⁴¹ On March 15, 1931, *Wyzwolenie*, *Chłopskie Stronnictwo* united with the *Piast Sejm* faction, forming the united Peasant Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*). Rothschild, 344.

⁴² "Ab chym pommich treba," *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 20, June 20, 1926, 1.

⁴³ *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 18, May 30, 1926, 1; Snyder (2005), 25.

⁴⁴ Polian, *Revolučionno-demokratickoe dvizhenie v zapadnoi Belarussii* (1978), 51. "The name "Sanacja" was derived from the Latin word *sanus* and signified Pilsudski's commitment to restore "health" and clean up Polish political life, which, he believed, had deteriorated in the contentious and corrupt climate of parliamentarianism." Jan T. Gross *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006), 198f.

⁴⁵ Snyder (2005), 24.

⁴⁶ Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918 to 1939*, 2nd edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 241-242.

corporatist tendencies, though it lacked the social dynamism of Nazism and Bolshevism.⁴⁷ Without a consistent ideology or utopian vision for his country, Piłsudski ruled through extra-parliamentary compromises. Contemporary observers referred to him as an authoritarian “tutor” of Poland⁴⁸ and he formed a coalition of sympathetic parties in the Sejm to legitimate his regime. From 1928 it was called the “Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government,” (*Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem*), or BBWR. Consisting of the Polish Socialist Party (the PPS), Piłsudski’s old party, the *Wyzwolenie* parliamentary group, and the Bund, it would last until his death in 1935.⁴⁹ The BBWR also had a right wing, which attracted the support of many conservative intellectuals and factions of the *endecja*.⁵⁰

Differences in personality and political orientation aside, Stalin and Piłsudski were both masters of political intrigue and behind-the-scenes plots, sharing similar experiences of revolutionary and underground activities. Their parallel ascent was followed by the relapse of the political decision-making processes in their respective countries into conspiratorial and secretive workings.⁵¹ To both men, politics was a power game in which there are no friends, only temporary alliances. Piłsudski’s 1926 coup changed political life in Poland. It boosted the authorities’ power and ability to counteract irredentist activism among its minorities. While open, violent resistance had largely been eliminated prior to the coup, opposition from the Belarusian national minority had not ceased. In fact, for the Belarusians the years 1925-1927 saw significant political mobilization using legal political mechanisms. Nevertheless, the Polish leadership remained concerned about the strong appeal of communism in Western Belarus.⁵² In 1930, Piłsudski introduced police methods on a mass scale to subdue any opposition, henceforth Piłsudski’s dictatorship could be called authoritarian, though he went to great lengths to maintain a

⁴⁷ While inspired by Mussolini, the authoritarian regimes of Poland and the Baltics were not explicitly fascist. “Pilsudski was merely a Mussolini-watcher. Augustinas Voldemaras, Antanas Smetona and Antonio Carmona were Pilsudski-watchers.” Piotr Łossowski, *Kraje bałtyckie na drodze od demokracji parlamentarnej do diktatury, 1918-1934* (Wrocław, Zakład Narodów im. Ossolińskich, 1972), 254-255.

⁴⁸ Eric J. Patterson, *Pilsudski: Marshal of Poland* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1935), 115.

⁴⁹ Poluian (1978), 66.

⁵⁰ Szpoper, 196-205.

⁵¹ Snyder (2005), 24.

⁵² Polonsky (1972), 141; Snyder (2005), 75.

pseudo-parliamentarian façade.⁵³ “Poles,” Piłsudski claimed in 1931, “have an instinct for freedom. One cannot rule Poland by terror.”⁵⁴ Yet, the elections of 1928 and 1930 were not free, and the 1935 constitution established an undisguised military dictatorship.⁵⁵ In 1937 this new regime was formalized as the Camp of National Unity, signifying a union of ethnic Poles, and it was promoted at the expense of the national minorities, against which there was now open discrimination. In 1937-38, the last Belarusian papers were closed, and anti-Semitism elevated to a guiding political principle.⁵⁶

Intellectual Development

Following the Concordat and Piłsudski’s coup it became increasingly difficult to publish books in Belarusian in Poland.⁵⁷ Whereas a total of 377 Belarusian books had been published in the Belarusian lands from 1901 to 1920, in Poland from 1921-1939 only 24 Belarusian titles appeared.⁵⁸ In the BSSR, on the other hand, the publication of Belarusian titles increased substantially. With a focus on building support for the Soviet Union, these books were subsidized by the Soviet government and thus inexpensive, printed in large editions and catered to readers with limited reading skills. While a significant amount of the Belarusian titles that passed the Polish censors covered topics on religion, the steady stream of Belarusian books from the state printing houses in Minsk pedagogically addressed many of the concerns of the Western Belarusian peasantry: the shortage of land, the right to education in their native language and the construction of Belarusian institutions. About 90 per cent of the BSRH’s printed matter, including its periodicals, was printed in the BSSR and smuggled across the border.⁵⁹ On

⁵³ Watt, 265; Jerzy W. Borejsza, “East European Perceptions of Italian Fascism” in Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtveldt, Jan Petter Myklebust; with the assistance of Gerhard Botz [et al.] *Who were the Fascists: Social Roots of European fascism* (Bergen: Universitetsfølaget and New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 357.

⁵⁴ Rothschild, 358.

⁵⁵ Giertych, 229.

⁵⁶ Edward D. Wynot, Jr., ”A Necessary Cruelty: The Emergence of Official Anti-Semitism in Poland, 1936-1939,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 76, No. 4 (October 1971): 1035-58.

⁵⁷ Hitherto, the publication of books in the Belarusian language in Poland had been very limited. From 1923 until July 1, 1927 a total of 112 titles were published in all of Western Belarus, through the efforts of the Association for the Belarusian School (TBSh), the Belarusian Institute of Economy and Culture (*Belaruski Institut Haspadarki i Kul’tury*), and the Educational Society (*Tavarystva Pras’vety*). *Belaruski Iliustavany Kalendar’ 1928*, 57.

⁵⁸ Iury Turonak, *Madernaia historyia Belarusi* (Vilnius: Instytut belarusistyki, 2008), 281.

⁵⁹ Kastsiuk et al. (eds.) (2007), 397.

February 12, 1928, the BSSR Soviet of Nationalities ordered the printing of mass editions of books in Belarusian and the languages of the national minorities, funded by the BSSR and central government.⁶⁰ In addition, the Soviet Belarusian authorities funded the printing of numerous pro-Soviet publications in Western Belarus.⁶¹

Authoritarianism in Lithuania

Piłsudski's authoritarianism inspired similar coups in Lithuania and Latvia and even became a model for the Getulio Vargas' corporatist dictatorship in Brazil.⁶² On December 17, 1926, a coup in Lithuania brought an authoritarian and increasingly fascist-inspired government to power in Kaunas, led by President Antanas Smetona and Augustinas Valdemaras as premier and foreign minister.⁶³ The Soviet government, which had regarded Lithuania as an ally against Poland, their mutual adversary, was uneasy about the coup. In January, 1927 Aliaksandr Charviakou, the head of the BSSR government,⁶⁴ denounced the event as a “fascist coup d'etat … under the influence of the policy of England, and with the collusion of Polish diplomats.”⁶⁵ The BSSR leadership interpreted it as part of a larger conspiracy. “Everyone of us, particularly in Soviet Belarus, which is located on the border with bourgeois states, needs to pay especially close attention to international relations, in order to be ready to defend itself at any time.”⁶⁶ Across the BSSR protest meetings were held denouncing the leaderships of Poland and Lithuania. “We condemn the shameful Lithuanian hangmen and oppressors. We protest the fascists’ savage reprisals against the working class in Lithuania and call upon the toiling masses in all countries to join us in protest

⁶⁰ “Rezoliutsiya prezidyuma saveta natsyianal’nastsei TsVK SSSR pa dakladu prezidyuma TsVK BSSR ab praviadzenni belarusizatsyi,” March 5, 1928. NARB. F. 701. Vop. 1. Spr. 56. L. 54-54adv. Copy. Korshuk and Platonav (eds.), *Belarusizatsiya 1920-yia hady*, 179, 181.

⁶¹ NARB, f. 4, vop. 21, spr. 112, l. 5-5adv., in Mikhniuk et al, (eds.) *Zneshniaia palitika Belarusi*, Vol. 2, 252.

⁶² Lossowski, 254-255.

⁶³ Antanas Smetona (1874-1944) was president of Lithuania from 1926 to 1940. He was evacuated to Germany in 1940. The organizer of the December, 1926 coup, Augustinas Valdemaras, born in 1883, was premier and foreign minister between 1926 and 1929. Following an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1934 he was sentenced to twelve years’ imprisonment. Released in 1938, he was arrested by the Soviets and died in 1940 or 1942. Mikhniuk, Rakashevich, Falei and Sharapova (eds.), 420.

⁶⁴ E. G. Ioffe, *Ot Miasnikova do Malofeeva*, 169.

⁶⁵ “Pramova starshyni tsentral’naha vykanauchaha kamiteta BSSR A. R. Charviakova na chatsvertai sesii TsVK BSSR Semaha Sklikannia ab mizhnarodnym stanovishchy,” *Zvezda*, January 20, 1927, in Mikhniuk et al. (eds.), 282-283.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

against the white terror in Lithuania,”⁶⁷ the main BSSR paper *Zviazda* protested. The BSSR leadership appeared particularly worried about the prospect of Polish-Lithuanian rapprochement and the creation of a united front against the USSR. However, it was soon evident that the differences over the Vilnia territory remained insurmountable. Smetana and Valdemaras essentially continued an anti-Polish policy and a cautiously friendly line vis-à-vis the USSR.

A New Eastern Policy: Prometheism

Piłsudski and Stalin tried to attract national movements among Ukrainians and Belarusians on both sides of the borders. Both Poland and the USSR attempted to use their respective territory of Belarus as a Piedmont for their own purposes.⁶⁸ Already during the Polish-Soviet War Piłsudski made generous promises to the Belarusians in order to create an order in which Poland would be the master of east-central Europe. Contemporary observers referred to this policy as a way to establish a “Belarusian Piedmont.”⁶⁹ On August 16, 1926, Piłsudski took part in a meeting of the Polish Council of Ministers, in which the decision was made to revise the Polish nationalities policies. Instead of antagonizing the national minorities by forced Polonization, the new policy aimed at “drawing these people into the Polish state system.”⁷⁰ The initial draft was founded upon the assumption that an end to the discrimination of Ukrainian culture in Poland would weaken the appeal of Soviet socialism, and win the sympathies of the Ukrainian movement for Poland. This policy became known as *Prometheanism* after the titan of Greek mythology who stole the divine fire of light.⁷¹

The Promethean project was an ambitious plan that emerged from the circle around Piłsudski, notably Tadeusz Hołówko, an old Polish socialist, its main designer and coordinator, and Henryk

⁶⁷ “Adkaz pratounykh BSSR na terror u Pol’shchy i Litve,” *Zvezda*, February 11, 1927, in ibid., 292-293.

⁶⁸ Martin, (2001), 9; Frantsishak Kushal’, *Sproby stvareninia arhanizatsyi belaruskaha voiska* (Minsk: Belaruski Histrychny Ahliad, 1999), 13.

⁶⁹ Kushal’, 27.

⁷⁰ Snyder (2005), 32, citing Czesław Madajczyk, ed., ”Dokumenty w sprawie polityki narodowościowej władz polskich po przewrocie majowym,” *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 4:3, 1972, 159.

⁷¹ Snyder (2005), xviii.

Józefski, the governor of Volhynia.⁷² Hołówko and his circle had grown increasingly frustrated with the Polonizing and assimilating policies of the post-1921 *endecja*-dominated Polish governments, which lacked programs for the large national minorities in Poland and failed to address the urgent issue of land in the eastern borderlands. Hołówko was aware that the assimilationist policies of the *endecja* and the Piast-dominated governments had alienated the Western Belarusians and further increased the appeal of Soviet communism.⁷³ He drew attention to the acute situation in the *Kresy Wschodnie*, which he described in medical terms as infected and “sick,” arguing the need to ease the harsh Polonization policies implemented in the schools of Western Belarus.⁷⁴ This group was aware that the Soviet redistribution of land in the 1920s had helped generate support for the Soviet system and felt it important to address the issue of land reform in the Polish eastern borderlands. Their ambitious program rested on two pillars: land reform; and cultural concessions, particularly to the large Ukrainian minority. Liberalization of the cultural atmosphere would be combined with an active program to infiltrate and subvert the Soviet western borderlands and fomenting rebellion, particularly in Soviet Ukraine.⁷⁵ By copying some aspects of the Soviet nationalities policies in the *Kresy*, the proponents of this policy hoped to gain the cultural and therefore the political loyalties of their minorities.⁷⁶ This policy indicated a change from “state assimilation of the national minorities (forming a citizen who possesses his rights and knows his obligations) and an abandonment of national assimilation, especially linguistic assimilation.”⁷⁷

Hołówko considered the Riga treaty a betrayal of Petliura and a sellout of Ukraine to the Bolsheviks. He had never given up the ambitious plans of a Polish-led federation in Eastern Europe. Together with his colleagues in the Ministry of War he drafted ambitious plans to liberate Soviet Ukraine

⁷² Snyder (2005), xix, xxi, 32.

⁷³ Kurkiewicz, 111.

⁷⁴ Lewandowski (1967), 153, citing Tadeusz Hołówko, “Ostatnia okupacja,” *Droga*, No. 1, Jan. 1926.

⁷⁵ Snyder (2005), xxi.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 32-33.

⁷⁷ Radziejowski, 94.

and to resurrect the grand plan of a Polish-led federation, roughly encompassing the borders of 1772.⁷⁸

The Prometheans envisioned a federation of Finland, the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine and the creation of a semi-autonomous Crimea, Cossack states and a union of Caucasus states.⁷⁹ Piłsudski, whose stated goal was to expand Polish influence eastwards and to take over Russia's role as the leading political and economic power in the region, generously funded the Prometheans. In 1927, their budget was 900,000 złoty, an amount that increased until it peaked 1932 with 1,450,000 złoty. The funding continued until the outbreak of war in 1939. It was largely a secret operation, led by Piłsudski and his associates, and unknown to political parties in Poland.⁸⁰ In addition to the Ministry of War, the Prometheans were organized around the Institute of Minority Affairs and the Eastern Institute in Warsaw and the Easter European Research Institute in Wilno.⁸¹ Supported by Piłsudski's inner circle, the Prometheans also had the support of an entire school of Polish *kresy* writers and intellectuals, who felt that the failure to establish a Polish-led federation had left the historical Poland dismembered. These writers presented the Polish-Soviet War as a saintly crusade to save Christian Europe from godless infidels, depicting Polish culture as the easternmost outpost of civilization, facing brutal Bolshevik hordes who stormed Polish manor houses, destroying books and braking up pianos with hatchets.⁸²

⁷⁸ Snyder (2005), 16.

⁷⁹ Elena Borisenok, *Fenomen Sovetskoi ukrainizatsii 1920-1930-e gody* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Evropa" 2006), 167, citing T. M. Simonova, "'Prometizm' v vostochnoi politike lageria Pilsudskogo v 1919-1926 gadakh" in *Ivan Aleksandrovich Voronikov – professor-slavist Moskovskogo universiteta. Materialy nauchnykh chtenii, posviashchennykh 80-letiu so dnia rozhdeniya I. A. Voronokova (1921-1983)* (Moscow, 2001), 125.

⁸⁰ Snyder (2005), 40-42. While the Promethean project revolved around Poland, its main political and financial sponsor, it also involved Britain and France and extended to the southern borderlands of the Soviet Union. There were permanent Promethean outposts in both Ankara and Teheran, which were both led by Polish socialists, old associates of Piłsudski. Hołówko was a frequent visitor to the Polish embassies in Turkey and Iran. The Promethean ambitions for the Caucasus and Central Asia resembled the aims for the western borderlands. The Polish government actively worked to gain Turkey's support to initiate a pan-Turkic rebellion in the Soviet south, and to involve Iran in an ambitious project to separate the Caucasus from the Soviet Union. Within the Soviet Union, the Polish consulates in Tbilisi and Kharkiv were particularly active participants of this program. Hołówko approached Georgian, Ukrainian, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Caucasians, Crimean and Kazan Tatars, Kuban and Don Cossacks, Karelians, Ingrianlanders and other émigrés, hoping to enlist their support for overthrowing the Soviet government. During the fall and winter of 1926 the Polish and Western Belarusian press reported frequently on the Promethean project, focusing on the cooperation between Poland and Great Britain and on the close relations between Piłsudski and Max Miller, the British ambassador. Józef Lewandowski, *Imperializm słabości: Kształtowanie się koncepcji polityki wschodniej piłsudczyków 1921-1926*, (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), 137-141; See, for instance, "Manarkhia – nia meta, ale – sredzta," *Narodnaia Sprava*, Nov. 6, 1926, 1.

⁸¹ The *endecja*, now a proponent of an ethnic nation-state, remained sharply critical of the Promethean project. Roman Dmowski did not think that Poland could afford the "luxury" of provoking a conflict with Russia, given the rise of Hitler and an increasingly assertive Germany to its west. Bohdan B. Budurkowycz, *Polish-Soviet Relations 1932-1939* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), 37, n., citing Roman Dmowski, *Przewrót* (Warsaw, 1934), 455.

Some aspects of Piłsudski's new line resembled the Soviet nationalities policies. While the political climate became more authoritarian, Piłsudski's authoritarianism was combined with a liberalization of the nationalities policies and a temporary easing of the forced Polonization. Yet, while the architects of the Promethean project took little interest in the Belarusians, in the years immediately following Piłsudski's coup a number of Belarusian schools were re-opened. Whereas only four Belarusian-language schools remained in Poland in 1925, in 1927-28, 29 Belarusian, and 49 bilingual Polish-Belarusian schools were opened.⁸³ Despite these initial concessions to the Belarusian political elite, Hołówko and the Prometheans did not recognize the aspirations of the Belarusian national movement as legitimate, but soon resumed policies of coercion and forced assimilation.⁸⁴ The Prometheans did not regard the Belarusians "a valuable anti-Russian outpost," considering them too pro-Russian and an unlikely ally against the Soviet Union.⁸⁵ While Bułak-Bałachowicz expressed an interest in participating in the implementation of the Promethean projects in Belarus, the Prometheans never formed a Belarusian section.⁸⁶

Polish Reaction and Repression: The Suppression of the *Hramada*

Piłsudski's coup marked a change in policy. "National assimilation" of the kind the *endecja* had been promoting was replaced with "state assimilation." Henceforth, the guiding principle was that citizens were to be judged by their loyalty to the state, rather than their nationality.⁸⁷ The practical consequences of these policy changes were limited. As the state was designated as a Polish nation-state, national activism and demands for national self-determination from its minorities would be regarded as disloyalty,

⁸² Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 35.

⁸³ These were however closed in the 1930s, and in 1938 not a single Belarusian-language school remained open. Hermann Bieder, "Der Kampf um die Sprachen im 20. Jahrhundert," in Beyrau and Lindner (eds.), 456.

⁸⁴ Snyder (2005), 75.

⁸⁵ Kurkiewicz, 52.

⁸⁶ Lewandowski (1967), 143.

⁸⁷ Snyder (2003), 144. It was obvious that the Grabski government's forced assimilation policies in Western Belarus had been a failure. Even the conservative press, such as the *endecja*-leaning Wilno paper *Slowo*, suggested an alternative Belarusian policy, based on four pillars: voluntary assimilation, encouraged through schools and administration; improvement of the work of the Polish administration in Western Belarus; winning over anti-Bolshevik Belarusian elements for Poland; and accepting the process of building a Belarusian national consciousness. Szpopoń, 233-234, citing Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, "Powtarzamy stale," *Slowo* no. 66, 22 March 1927.

separatism and irredentism. The Belarusian press became a prime target of the Polish government. In 1925-26 in Vilnius alone, forty issues of nine different journals, six bulletins and one public declaration were confiscated.⁸⁸ This roughly corresponded to 20 per cent of the Belarusian press.⁸⁹ Accusations of “Bolshevik diversion” led to a crackdown on the BSRH. The decision was taken in late December 1926 by Walerian Meysztowicz, whom Piłsudski had appointed Minister of Justice.⁹⁰ He had opposed concessions and local autonomy for the Belarusians, fearing the secession of Western Belarus and its unification with the BSSR. He believed it possible to reverse national mobilization among the Western Belarusians. He proposed combining polonization of education and administration with efforts to win over the anti-Bolshevik part of the Belarusian elite for the Polish state.⁹¹

On the night of January 14 and 15, 1927, Polish police arrested BSR *Hramada* leaders Branislau Tarashkevich, Symon Rak-Mikhailouski, Paval Voloshyn and Petra Miatla. Sejm deputy Sabaleuski avoided arrest by going into hiding. Along with the BSRH the *Niezależna Partyja Chlopska* was similarly regarded as a “Bolshevik threat” and also targeted in the crackdown.⁹² Its deputy Hołowacz was arrested.⁹³ The BSRH leadership, its Sejm deputies, and about 800 activists were arrested. The Belarusian Bank in Vilnia and its filial in Pinsk, both of which were linked to the BSRH, were closed by the authorities.⁹⁴ The secretary of the Central Council of the *Tavaryshstva Belaruskai Shkoly* (TBSH) in Vilnia, Iazep Shcherchevich, was arrested. Also arrested was the director of the Belarusian Gymnasium in Vilnia, Radoslau Astrouski, as well as the president of the Belarusian Cooperative Bank in Vilnia, along with the branch directors in Hlubokoe and Pinsk. Thirty-three Belarusian and Lithuanian cultural workers

⁸⁸ Kovkel’ and Iarmusik, (2000), 478.

⁸⁹ Kastsuk et al. (eds.), (2007), 397.

⁹⁰ Szpopoer, 201.

⁹¹ Ibid., 233-234.

⁹² The decision to crush the Hramada was not unanimously accepted within the Piłsudski government. Aleksander Meysztowicz belonged to the dissenters. Szpopoer, 201-202.

⁹³ “Aryshty paslou Belarusau,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 4, January 21, 1927, 1; “Masavayia areshty pa vusei Pol’shchy: Aryshty belaruskikh paslu i kul’turnykh dzeiachou” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 6 (15), January 19, 1927, 1.

⁹⁴ Poluijan (1978), 54; Szpopoer, 202.

were also detained.⁹⁵ *Nasha Sprava*, the organ of the BSRH, was banned.⁹⁶ In the last issue the Belarusian National Committee in Vil'nia protested the arrests, pointing out the illegality of the action, and emphasizing that Article 21 of the Polish Constitution allowed the arrest of deputies of the Sejm only if they had committed crimes. The paper interpreted the arrests as a “a clear example of *struggle of the privileged classes with the Belarusian working people.*”⁹⁷ Realizing the futility of violent resistance, the paper appealed “to the Belarusian masses to preserve their calm and in that spirit continue their *creative work of [national] construction in order to bring about a better future.*”⁹⁸

Following the ban on *Nasha Sprava*, the BSRH made several attempts to establish new papers. *Nasha Sprava*, its successor *Nash Holas*, was also soon banned. The paper *Nasha Pratsa* was prohibited in September 1927 after six months. Its successors *Pratsa*, *Dumka Pratsy*, *Prava Pratsy*, *Da Pratsy*, *Sila Pratsy*, *Volia Pratsy*, *Holas Pratsy*, *Stiah Pratsy*, *Dolia Pratsy*, *Slova Pratsy* and *Za Pratsu*, were all short-lived papers, published in 1927 and 1928.⁹⁹ Following these repressive measures, there were only two Belarusian political parties in Western Belarus, the Belarusian Peasant Union and the Belarusian Christian Democrats.¹⁰⁰ Compared to the 90,000-160,000 organized members of the *Hramada*, these two groups had only marginal influence.¹⁰¹ The crackdown on the BSRH further alienated the Belarusian minority from the Polish government. The Western Belarusian press, across party lines, condemned the measures.¹⁰² Following the arrest of the *Hramada* leaders, *Belaruskaia Krynička* asked despairingly

⁹⁵ “Masavyia areshty pa usei Pol’shchy: Aryshy belaruskikh paslou i kul’turnykh dzeiachou,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 6 (15) January 19, 1927, 1.

⁹⁶ *Nasha Sprava*, No. 7 (16) January 19, 1927 was the last issue of the paper. The BSRH attempted to publish a number of papers in lieu of *Nasha Sprava*, such as *Nash Holas*, of which three issues were published in January-February 1927. Pro-BSRH *Nasha Prauda* lasted somewhat longer. Fifty issues were published, of which six were confiscated. Its final issue (No. 49) was published on September 21, 1927.

⁹⁷ “Rezaliutsyia Belaruskaia Natsyianal’naha Kamitetu u Vil’ni,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 7 (16), January 22, 1927, 1-2.

⁹⁸ “Masavyia areshty pa usei Pol’shchy: Aryshy belaruskikh paslou i kul’turnykh dzeiachou,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 6 (15) January 19, 1927, 1.

⁹⁹ Poluijan (1978), 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Belaruski Iliustravany Kalendar* 1928, 85.

¹⁰¹ The Belarusian Christian Democrats never had more than 1,000 members. Koukel’, 43; “Vodhuki masavykh aryshtakh,” *Nasha Sprava*, No. 7, January 22, 1927, 1.

whether there were any Belarusians left who trusted Poland.¹⁰³ Ironically, by 1927 the deteriorating political situation in Poland generated support for the BSSR even among the anti-communist Western Belarusian intelligentsia.¹⁰⁴ In the customary commemorative article, on the occasion of the ninth anniversary of the March 25, 1918 establishment of the BPR, *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* presented the BSSR, despite Communist rule, as the only beacon of light.

A substantial part of Belarus, including Minsk, is under Soviet control. Life there, despite being subjected to the special conditions of a communist dictatorship, is developing strongly and hopefully. True, policy in Soviet Belarus under the current communist government is only Belarusian in form, while its content is international, proletarian, and limited by the narrow dogmatism of historical materialism. Nevertheless, the form is Belarusian, and the Belarusian language is used as the language of administration. Children are educated in Belarusian in the schools and Belarusian books are printed in editions of considerable size. When that is the case, then life improves little by little within the parameters of that foreign form, and we will ultimately see that foreign political form, the nature of which has nothing to do with the Belarusians, replaced by a native one. In this regard, *Inbelkul't* has earned particular attention, as the most advanced Belarusian educational institution. This institution has gathered the best representatives of the intelligentsia and is using their skills for the advancement of Belarusian science in philology, history, ethnography, ethnology, archeology and other fields. In other words, with *Inbelkul't* the foundation of a future flourishing Belarus has been laid.¹⁰⁵

In the so-called “Trial of the 56,” which lasted from February-May 1928 in the Vil’nia district court, the leadership of the BSR *Hramada* received lengthy prison terms.¹⁰⁶ Tarashkevich, Rak-Mikhailouski, Voloshyn and Miatla were all sentenced to twelve years of hard labor.¹⁰⁷ Lower ranking activists were sentenced to hard labor between three and twelve years. On May 27, 1928, 37 leading *Hramada* members received their sentences, and 19 were found innocent, including the old polonophiles Radoslau Astrauski and Anton Lutskevich.¹⁰⁸ After receiving their sentences, the BSRH leaders were

¹⁰² “Aryshty u Zakhodnai Belarusi,” *Sialianskaia Niva* January 29, 1927, 1; “Ab aryshtakh u Zakhodnai Belarusi,” *Sialianskaia Niva*, February 2, 1927, 1.

¹⁰³ “Aryshty paslou Belarusau,” *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 4, January 21, 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Polonsky (1972), 140.

¹⁰⁵ “U dzievityia uhodki (25.III. 1918 – 25.III.1927),” *Belaruskaia Krynitsa* No. 13, March 25, 1927, 1. Other Western Belarusian sources, close to the Christian Democrats and Peasant Union, claim that “The smallest part of Belarus, which is under Latvian rule, can actually be called the happiest. The Latvian government, while it is not fulfilling the desires of the Belarusians, does after all carry out relatively decent cultural-educational work, even though on a small scale...But the land there is predominantly in the hands of Latvians.” A. Nezalezhnik (pseud.) “Try shliakhi,” *Belaruski Iliustravany Kalendar* 1928, 82.

¹⁰⁶ M. Kastsiuk (eds.) *Historyia Belarusi: Tom piaty*, 399; Zaprudnik, *Belarus* (1993), 84.

¹⁰⁷ Aliaksandra Berhman, *Slova pra Branislava Tarashkevicha: Histarychny zhytstsiapis* (Minsk: Mastatskaia literatura, 1996), 134-179.

¹⁰⁸ Anton Lutskevich was arrested twice, the first time in 1927, and accused of working with both German and the Soviet intelligence. Released in early 1928, he was again arrested and released later that year. Excluded from the TBSh by the pro-

defiant, breaking out in the patriotic hymn “Ad veku my spali,” the anthem of the Belarusian People’s Republic in the court room.¹⁰⁹ Despite the destruction of the BRSR, 14,000 to 15,000 former members continued their activities within TBSh, the Belarusian School Society.¹¹⁰ The following day, the judgments in the parallel “trial of the 133” in Belastok, 133 leading members of the KPZB and leftist trade unions, were announced, sentencing many of their leaders to lengthy terms of imprisonment.¹¹¹ The repression of the BSRH was followed by a few unsuccessful attempts to reorganize the movement. Some of the more conservative members of the Hramada, led by Jan Stankevich, the brother of the Adam Stankevich, the leader of the BKhD, sought the support of the Polish authorities to form a rural party that would promote a moderate socialism on the basis of peasant cooperatives. According to Polish military intelligence, Stankevich’s group largely lacked influence.¹¹² Even after the repression of the BSRH, the fears of the Polish authorities that they might lose Western Belarus were still not alleviated. A Polish military intelligence report from early 1928 warned that

The Belarusian movement, despite the violence [from the authorities], is entirely under the influence of the Third International... The national consciousness of the Belarusians grows by the day. ... Today, the Belarusian movement threatens to become an irredentist force, which demands the detachment of Belarusian lands from the united Rzeczpospolita.¹¹³

The *Zmahan’ne*

In December 1927, some leading activists of the BSR *Hramada* who had escaped arrest attempted to re-organize the remnants of the movement as the “Struggle for the Interests of the Peasants and Workers (*Zmahan’ne za interesy sialian i robochykh – Zmahan’ne*). The reconstructed Belarusian left united around a common platform and electoral bloc, in which the *Zmahan’ne* group cooperated with the

communist majority, boycotted by the Christian Democratic press and accused by Astrouski of Marxist sympathies, Lutskevich was politically isolated through the 1930s, until he was arrested by the Soviet authorities in 1939. S. F. Sokal, *Karotki ahliad historyi palitychnai i pravavoi dumki Belarusi (lektsyiny materyial)* (Mahileu: Ablasnaia drukarnia, 1999), 126-128; Anatol’ Sidarevich, “Anton Lutskevich i Belarskaia Sialianska-Rabotnitskaia Hramada,” *Arche*, No. 9, 2007. <http://arche.bymedia.net/2007-09/sidarevic709.htm> (Accessed June 26, 2008).

¹⁰⁹ *Sialianskaia Niva*, ”Asud asprave ’Hramady’,” No. 30 (177), May 31, 1928, 3.

¹¹⁰ M. Kastsiuk et al (eds.) (2007), 403; Zaprudnik (1993), 85.

¹¹¹ Kastsiuk et al. (eds.) (2007), 588.

¹¹² Poluijan (1978), 67, citing State Archives of Brest region, f. 67, op. 1, d. 527, l. 17. On the three Stankevich brothers, Adam, Jan, and Stanislau, see Uladzimir Konan, ”Lider Belauskaha Katalitskaha adrashennia,” *Nasha Vera*, No. 3 (1998) Available online <http://media.catholic.by/nv/n6/art2.htm> (Accessed July 1, 2009)

¹¹³ Ibid., 64-65 citing the State Archives of the Brest Oblast’ f. 67, op. 1, d. 527, l. 3.

KPZB, the PPS-left and the Independent Party of Polish Socialists. The authorities responded harshly to such initiatives. *Belaruskaia Krynička* was often accused of Bolshevism and censored on a regular basis and the banned BSRH was not permitted to run any candidates in the 1928 elections. Voting lists and ballots for *Zmahan’ne* and the KPZB were confiscated and destroyed in all electoral districts. On election day some 500 Belarusian activists were arrested, tens of thousands of Belarusian voters were missing from the rosters and thousands of votes for the *Zmahan’ne* and Unity bloc were declared void. Still, the unity group of *Zmahan’ne*, PPS-Left, and the KPZB received over 328,800 votes, 26 per cent of all Western Belarusian votes cast in the 1928 elections.¹¹⁴

Of the 1,051 local deputies elected across the Vilnia wojewódwo, over 500 were former members or sympathizers of the BSRH. In the Lida electoral district, where the Unity list was invalidated, the Unity bloc received 12,000 votes.¹¹⁵ Under the new electoral rules, this translated into four mandates in the *Sejm*. They were joined by two other deputies from Western Belarus from the Left *Sel-Rob Party* and a defector from Stankevich’s group. With one exception, this group consisted of peasants. The more high-profile leaders were Iosif Havrilik and Ihnat Dvorchanin. *Zmahan’ne* assumed radical positions, defending the national rights of the Belarusian minority and the equality of the languages of all national minorities with the Polish language, using radical class rhetoric and siding openly with the Communist Party of Western Belarus. The six books that its publishing house was able to publish before it was forced to close down, included works by Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, and Stalin.¹¹⁶ In its press and even in the *Sejm*, *Zmahan’ne* demanded the nationalization of industry, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the unification of Western Belarus with the BSSR.¹¹⁷ With 57 and 14 elected deputies respectively, the KPZU and the Belarusian Peasant Union did less well.¹¹⁸ However, the results of the *Sejm* elections in

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 65, 68, 70; Zaerko, *Krovavaia granitsa*, 95.

¹¹⁵ Poluian (1978), 68-69.

¹¹⁶ Turonak (2008), 287, 298.

¹¹⁷ Poluian (1978), 72-74.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 63-64.

Western Belarus showed that leftist and communist influence remained very strong.¹¹⁹ The new parliament was dominated by Piłsudski's "Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government," while the *endecja* became the most vocal oppositional group.

In 1929, sixteen independent *Zmahan'ne* chapters were formed across Belarus, even though it remained a loosely organized network. The authorities feared the restoration of an organization like the BSRH, and prohibited the formation of a central organization.¹²⁰ *Zmahan'ne* appealed to the same electorate as the BSRH. As the censorship of the Belarusian press became increasingly severe, *Zmahan'ne* relied on the Sejm as a vehicle for disseminating its political agenda.¹²¹ Heckled in the Sejm by a right-wing deputy, who told him to go to Soviet Belarus, *Zmahan'ne* deputy Havrilik replied "Gladly, we'll go, but we'll bring our land with us!"¹²²

From June 28 to July 25, 1928, the illegal Communist Party of Western Belarus held its first congress underground in Vilnius. It demanded an end to discrimination against the Belarusian language and culture, and demanded territorial autonomy for Western Belarus as a step towards the reunification of Western Belarus with the BSSR. The party was still split over how to relate to Piłsudski's coup in 1926. It was also divided over the issue of how to relate to the other Belarusian parties. A radical faction opposed cooperation with the anti-communist parties, which they accused of being agents of fascism.¹²³ The rise of Stalin also weakened the Communists. In 1929, Stalin began to suspect an infiltration of Polish agents through the Polish Communist Party, to which the Communist Parties of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine belonged, and ordered the GPU "to take measures to expose provocateurs."¹²⁴

In 1930, Poland was moving rapidly towards a political crisis. Opposition to the *sanacja* rule increased, and in late June a mass meeting was held in Krakow where over 30,000 people demanded

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 70; "Sklad novaha Soimu," *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 20, March 6, 1928, 2.

¹²⁰ Poluian (1978), 75.

¹²¹ Ibid., 76-77.

¹²² Ibid., 79, citing the Brest regional State Archive, f. 1, op. 9, d. 520, l. 130.

¹²³ Ibid., 61-62.

¹²⁴ William J. Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?: The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934-1939* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 121.

Piłsudski's resignation. Piłsudski ordered president Móscicki to dissolve parliament on August 30. One week earlier Piłsudski himself briefly assumed the role of Prime Minister, with Colonel Józef Beck as his deputy. When new elections to the Sejm and Senate were announced for November 17 and 23, Piłsudski ordered the arrest of leading politicians, including members of the Sejm and Senate. Some 60 leaders of the opposition were arrested without any public announcement, including 18 senators and Sejm deputies. Most of them were taken to the fortress in Brest-Litovsk. This repressive move permanently destroyed the center-left opposition. Among the arrested were six PPS leaders, and the two leading representatives of the *Piast* Peasant Party, including Wincenty Witos, the three-time prime minister of Poland. Virtually the entire leadership of the parties of the Ukrainian minority was placed under arrest. In Brest-Litovsk, the prisoners were tortured, insulted, and forced to clean the latrines with their bare hands. Several deputies were subjected to mock executions.¹²⁵

As the elections of 1930 approached, the *Zmahan'ne* deputies faced mounting difficulties, as the authorities were determined to neutralize them. On May Day in Vilnia, police had attacked and beaten *Zmahan'ne* organizers and sympathizers. Its meetings were interrupted by police, many of its sympathizers severely beaten, sometimes to death. In Belostok, a *Zmahan'ne* meeting was interrupted by tear gas. At a January 1930 meeting in Pinsk, police attacked and attempted to arrest two *Zmahan'ne* Sejm deputies.¹²⁶ Following the crackdown on the BSRH, the BKhD tried to distance itself from the now-defunct body, denouncing it as a disloyal Communist organization, dedicated to spreading the world revolution to Western Belarus.

It was obvious that the *Hramada* from the beginning of its existence (in 1925) included among its members Belarusian *narodniki*, Polish and Soviet spies, Jews, Poles, Russians, Masons and fellow travelers. This multi-colored *Hramada* was utterly socialist, guided by Marxist theory and the practices of Lenin. Its followers were anti-Christian and opposed to the interests the people.¹²⁷

By 1930, the few remaining Belarusian and Lithuanian papers in Poland were censored on a regular basis.¹²⁸ Whereas there were 23 legal papers and journals in Western Belarus in 1927, only 6

¹²⁵ Watt, 286-287.

¹²⁶ Poluijan (1978), 82.

¹²⁷ "Pasla prysudu nad "Hramadoi" u druhoi instantsyi," *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 14, April 6, 1929, 1.

remained by 1932.¹²⁹ Non-communist or anti-communist Belarusian politicians were also targeted for political repression and randomly arrested.¹³⁰ Prior to the 1930 elections the BKhD again united with Ukrainian parties in a marriage of convenience and ran a joint list as “the Belarusian-Ukrainian Bloc.”¹³¹ Its candidates were targeted by the police and several leaders were arbitrarily arrested in the run-up to the elections.¹³² The outcome of the elections was predictable. Not a single Belarusian candidate was elected for the Ukrainian-Belarusian Bloc. Yet, 17 Ukrainian deputies were elected from Galicia and one from Volhynia. The editors of *Belaruskaia Krynička* lamented the lack of national consciousness among the Belarusians, which they saw as the reason why Belarusians voted for non-Belarusian parties, but added that they hoped “our national idea will prevail in the end.”¹³³ The post-1930 Sejm practically lacked Belarusian representation.¹³⁴ In the Senate the Ukrainian-Belarusian Bloc had four senate seats out of a total 111. By 1930, the Belarusian movement was essentially broken, and unable to challenge the anti-Belarusian policies of the Warsaw government.

Conclusion

To what extent did the Catholic Belarusian Christian Democratic movement, the Workers and Peasants’ *Hramada*, and the *Zmahan’ye* movement constitute a real threat to the *sanacja* order? By themselves, these movements were hardly in a position to overturn the 1921 Riga Peace Treaty, or even to

¹²⁸ In the run-up to the elections, the Vilnius/Lithuanians had their paper *Wilnijaus Rytojus* confiscated. “Z Vilni: Kanfiskata litouskai presy,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 31, December 4, 1930, 3.

¹²⁹ Bieder, 457.

¹³⁰ Prior to the fundamentally flawed Polish Sejm elections of 1930, several leading Belarusian candidates for the Christian Democratic Party, running on the list for the Belarusian-Ukrainian Bloc, were arrested, among them. Anton Hnarouski, Aleksandar Tsimashewich, and Mikalaj Parlienchyk. No reasons were given for their arrest. “Arysht kandydatau u pasly z spisku Nr. 11 Belaruska-Ukrain. Bloku,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 29, October 23, 1930, 2.

¹³¹ Aside from the Belarusian-Ukrainian Bloc, there were also two minor Belarusian parties, *Belaruski Sialianski Saiuz*, (the Peasant Union) and *Belaruskae Pravaslaunae Demakracychnae Ab’iadnan’ye* (the Belarusian Orthodox Democratic Union). “Belarusy i vybary,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 30, November 9, 1930, 1; “Belaruski-ukrainski blok,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 29, October 23, 1930, 1.

¹³² For instance, the top three candidates of the Belarusian-Ukrainian Bloc in the Belostok riding were arrested on October 19, 1930. No reasons for the arrests were given. “Arysht kandidatau u pasly z spisku Nr. 11 Belaruska-Ukrain. Bloku,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 29, October 23, 1930, 2.

¹³³ “Pas’lavybarnya razvazhan’ni,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 31, December 4, 1930, 1.

¹³⁴ Out of 444 Sejm seats, Pilsudski’s non-party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government got 248, *Endecja* 64, The Center Group (PPS, *Wyzwolenie*, *Str. Chłopskie*, *Piast*) 79, Catholics 14, Communists 6, Ukrainian-Belarusian Bloc 21, and various Jewish parties 7. “Z Polshchyi: Navy polski parlament,” *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 31, December 4, 1930, 4.

constitute a serious threat to the regime in Warsaw. Yet, it was evident to Piłsudski and the Prometheans that Soviet nationality policy was successful in building support for the Soviet Union among the eastern Slavic peoples of the *Kresy Wschodnie*, particularly among the Western Belarusians. Whereas the Galician Ukrainians had different historical experiences and a distinct, exclusivist culture,¹³⁵ the Western Belarusians and the Volhynian Ukrainians showed greater openness and less resistance to Russian and Eastern Orthodox culture, which made them more receptive to propaganda from Kharkiv and Minsk. Hołówko's approach to the national minorities of the *Kresy Wschodnie* was two-fold: first, he made Volhynia the scene of an experimental reversal of policies aimed at parroting key aspects of the *korenizatsiia*. Second, he took a different approach to Western Belarus, which he perceived as permeated by Communist and pro-Soviet sympathies. Before national consciousness grew too strong or became too firmly implanted among the local peasants, Warsaw made a serious attempt to undermine and destroy the national movement.

The Catholic Church in Poland, also, was worried about the ecumenical leanings of the Belarusian Christian Democrats, fearing that they would put their nationalist agenda above Roman Catholic religious doctrine and the clerical hierarchy. The Polish Roman Catholic clergy, backed by the Vatican and the *endecja*, feared that Belarusian Christian Democracy had a pro-Orthodox, and pro-Bolshevik hidden agenda. As the national movement was still in its infancy, both Grabski and Piłsudski opted to prevent further national mobilization among the Belarusians. The 1925 Concordat spelled an end to the ambition to use the Roman Catholic Church as a vehicle for the national mobilization, rendering ineffective the strategy of the BKhD. Following Piłsudski's 1926 coup, the pro-Soviet movements were dealt with harshly through force and intimidation. Their leaders were sentenced to lengthy terms in prison, followed by their extradition to the BSSR, where they were later repressed as "Polish spies" and "National democrats." The Concordat, the January 1927 repression of the BSRH and the 1930 destruction of the *Zmahan'ne* effectively disabled the national movement in Western Belarus. Belarusian nationalism was politically pacified, crippled by the economic and social conservatism of pre-modern Belarusian

¹³⁵ John-Paul Himka, "A Central European Diaspora under the Shadow of World War II: The Galician Ukrainians in North America," *Austrian History Yearbook* 37 (2006), 17-18.

society. In 1925, illiteracy rates in the borderlands ranged from 43 to 95 per cent, which had a negative impact on social and political mobilization.¹³⁶ Western Belarusians remained bitterly disenchanted and fundamentally alienated from the Polish state.

While Western Belarusian nationalism in itself hardly constituted a serious threat to the authorities, Poland's geographic location between three hostile neighbors with territorial claims on Polish territories colored the *sanacja* regime's attitude to Belarusian national aspirations. Belarusian irredentism was seen as a dangerous vehicle, exploited by both Moscow and Kaunas to undermine the Polish state. The national aspirations of the Western Belarusian nationalists became a question of international relevance, in which a number of international actors had vested interests. The Vatican, worried about the spread of Communism and uncomfortable with modernity sided with the Polish state and treated it as an outpost against Bolshevism, allowing the Polish authorities to turn the Roman Catholic Church into an agency of polonization. Lithuania and the Soviet Union sought the weakening of Poland through the encouragement of irredentist and separatist aspirations among its minorities. The fact that the alienated national minorities in the *Kresy Wschodnie* eagerly welcomed such help turned them into disloyal elements in the eyes of the central government. The *sanacja* introduced legislation which criminalized "disloyalty to the state" after which many political and cultural organizations were banned. The Belarusian elite became a victim of this international power struggle, which was ultimately a result of the unsatisfactorily peace treaties of Versailles and Riga.

National mobilization in both parts of Belarus was to a significant extent facilitated by outside support, motivated by an international rivalry between two or three mutually hostile states. Until 1927, the Belarusian national elite were able to exploit this rivalry to achieve some of their key objectives. Yet, no matter how impressive the achievements of the national movement, it was in no position to withstand the onslaught of the Polish authorities. When Soviet support ended and the Polish authorities under the *sanacja* government expanded the mandate of its repressive apparatus, social mobilization was interrupted and many of the achievements of the Belarusian national movement were undone. The Belarusian language now disappeared from the pulpits, and was severely curtailed from printing presses,

¹³⁶ Brown, 243, citing GARF f.374 op. 32 d. 549, l. 13 (1925).

schools, and political assemblies, the traditional means of national mobilization.¹³⁷ The social mobilization of the masses is under normal circumstances an enormous challenge, involving education, socialization and organization on a mass scale. The mobilizations of the Czech, Slovak, Lithuanian and Latvian masses and the establishments of nation-states were unlikely developments, as these national movements faced opposition from sources much stronger and better organized than themselves.¹³⁸ In an illiterate, overwhelmingly peasant society amid two hegemonic cultures such mobilization proved an almost impossible task. The rise of Stalin and Piłsudski sealed the fate of the young Belarusian national movement. Following the destruction of the national movement in Western Belarus, which began in earnest in January 1927, a similar policy reversal would follow in the BSSR in the following years. More thorough and violent, the destruction of the Belarusian movement in the BSSR is the topic of the following chapter.

¹³⁷ See, for instance Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Hobsbawm, “Mass-producing Traditions,” in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, 263-308.

¹³⁸ Grigory Ioffe, “Culture Wars, Soul-Searching, and Belarusian Identity,” *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2007), 371.

Chapter 8

Soviet Repression in the BSSR: The Destruction of Belarusian National Communism

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the key events behind the destruction of the Belarusian national communists in the BSSR. It starts with the controversial decision to Belarusify the divisions of the Red Army, stationed on the territory of the recently enlarged BSSR. The Polish authorities' repression of the BSRH severely weakened Soviet influence on the Western Belarusian national movement. They coincided with a British campaign to counteract the influence of the USSR and the Comintern. The Soviets responded by launching a hysterical media campaign, which in turn revealed significant popular dissatisfaction with Bolshevik rule. The main questions raised in this chapter are: what role did the opposition to Soviet rule, revealed during the War Scare of 1927, play in the demise of Belarusian national communism and the reversal of the nationalities policies? To what extent did Polish Prometheanism constitute a threat to Soviet rule in Belarus and how justified was the Soviet leadership's fears of a foreign intervention? Why did a continuation of the Belarusization policies of the 1920s no longer seem like a workable path by the late 1920s, and what was the role of the rise of Piłsudski in this reversal of policies? Having analyzed the rise of national communism and opposition to the forced nationalization of the masses in chapter four and six, this chapter provides an analysis of the policy reversal and its implications for the Belarusian national communists. Chronologically, it covers the period from the Polish crackdown on the BSRH in January 1927 to the first wave of Stalinist political terror of 1930-31.

The Turning Point

Whereas the key events that led to the repression of the Belarusian movement in Poland had been the 1925 concordat with the Vatican and the 1926 Piłsudski coup, the War Scare in the spring of 1927 became the turning point in the BSSR. The brutality of the Stalinist policies destroyed not only the political base and livelihood of the elites, but was linked to a violent transformation of Belarus through mass murder and ethnic cleansing, that would permanently alter the ethnic and demographic makeup of Belarus. Virtually the entire political and intellectual leadership, among them 90 per cent of Belarusian

intelligentsia, would perish in a violent political terror that lasted longer and was more thorough than anywhere else in the Soviet Union.

The suppression of Belarusian nationalism, which began in early 1927, was essentially complete by 1931. It appears that Stalin's change in attitude towards the Belarusian national movement was heavily influenced by two key events in 1926 and 1927. One was Piłsudski's coup d'état in May 1926, which Stalin misjudged completely. The other was the War Scare of 1927, which demonstrated the vulnerability of the Bolshevik regime. This was the first time since the end of the Civil War that Soviet citizens were able to challenge openly the Bolsheviks' power monopoly. The War Scare revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the Soviet political order, and significant hostility to the Bolshevik leadership. In several cases it escalated into violent rebellions. Many questions regarding the 1927 War Scare remain unanswered. Yet, whether it indeed was based on genuine concern of an imminent war or whether the events of 1927 were designated as a litmus test by Stalin and his government to probe the loyalty of his subjects, it revealed the vulnerability of the system, and the unpopularity of the Bolsheviks. The War Scare appears to have led to a fundamental revision of the policies of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia*. The emerging Stalinist leadership and the GPU took a renewed interest in the national communists of the western borderlands, particularly the Piłsudski regime's interest in the Belarusian and Ukrainian movements in the USSR. From Stalin's perspective, the May 1926 coup returned some of the most dangerous adversaries of the Bolsheviks to power in Poland, only five years after the Polish-Soviet War. The Soviet government's promotion of the Piedmont principle had been a considerable success, which had earned the Soviet leadership much goodwill and won many Western Belarusian nationalists over to the Soviet project. Yet Piłsudski's government began parroting these strategies and using them against the Soviets, Belarusian nationalism increasingly seemed like a potential liability to the Soviet leadership.¹

The *Smenovekhovtsy*

By the late 1920s a significant part of the intellectual elite in the BSSR elite was constituted by *smenovekhovtsy*, nationalist intellectuals who had accepted the Bolshevik offer to work to promote

¹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, (2001), 325.

korenizatsiia.² Many of the Belarusian *smenovekhovsty* were educated in Poland, Lithuania, or in the capitalist west. They were fluent in Polish and had many contact networks in Poland. The communist credentials of these former SRs, Bundists and nationalist *Hramada* members could be questioned. Their allegiance had been to the Belarusian national idea first and foremost, and their dedication to communism and the Soviet project were often secondary concerns. The former leaders of the BPR Rada, who had returned to the Soviet Belarus in 1923, had been active opponents of the Bolsheviks. Many of these returnees had reached positions of considerable power and influence. Another concern, from Stalin's point of view, was that they did not owe their positions of power to his largesse, but were constructing their own power bases. By 1926 the BSSR showed signs of pursuing an increasingly independent line from the central government. Networks were emerging that were nationally Belarusian first and Soviet second. Most had embraced Bolshevism only reluctantly, a move conditioned more by *Realpolitik* than dedication to the integration of Belarus into the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership also feared that the Belarusian national communists were getting too comfortable with their fellow Belarusians on the other side of the border. Warsaw and Moscow shared the concern that unfettered Belarusian nationalism was a threat to their territorial integrity.

Belarusization of the Red Army in the BSSR

The leaders of the BSSR would soon learn that there were institutions that were considered off-limits for Belarusization. They included the churches, which were seen as inappropriate carriers of Belarusian culture in Soviet Belarus. Similarly, attempts to Belarusify ethnic Belarusians beyond the borders of the BSSR, particularly in Siberia, which had seen a significant emigration during the late 19th century, worried the central government.³ However, the area of most concern to the central government in Moscow was the Belarusian national communists' attempts to create a Belarusian military division. The decision to Belarusify those divisions of the Red Army, stationed on BSSR territory was made at the

² Ibid., 155.

³ Many of the Belarusians in Siberia were recent migrants of the 1920s. The peak year was 1922-23, when 40 per cent of all migrants within the Soviet Union originated from Belarus. By 1928, the Belarusian population in Siberia was around one million. Platonav and Korushuk (eds.) *Belarusizatsiya 1920-ia hady*, 20; *Belaruski iliustravany kalendar'* 1928, 82.

January, 1925 Plenum of the TsK of the KP(b)B.⁴ The following year, the second division of the Red Army in Minsk and the 33rd division in Mohilev were re-designated as Belarusian territorial divisions. The language of command was to be rapidly switched to Belarusian, and they were to be made up exclusively of Belarusians.⁵ Even though this division was intended to be an integral part of the Red Army, its formation would have meant a departure from the practice of monolingualism in the army command. Russian had been clearly designated as the language of all-union communication, and the command of union institutions. Until now, this had not been challenged. The language of instruction in the BSSR military academies switched to Belarusian at the same time as the Belarusian State University. Instruction in the Belarusian language was accompanied by the teaching of a national, Belarusian history, the economy of the BSSR, and particularly training in “classical” nationalist areas such as the *byt*, or the study of popular tradition or “way of life” of Belarus.⁶

Inbelkul’t was enthusiastically developing a Belarusian military terminology and translating military materials into Belarusian. The first volumes of books on military rules of engagement, discipline, and the second volume of an instruction manual for firearms as well as a Belarusian military songbook had already been sent to the presses, while a military dictionary was ready for printing by June 1926.⁷ By September, the military reported that the Belarusization of the regular army of the second Belarusian division was carried out at a rapid pace. While 60 per cent of the activities of the military had been conducted in Belarusian in 1925, this had risen to 73 per cent in 1926. For the political commanders the

⁴ “Rezolutsyia plenuma TsK KP(b)B pa dakladu ‘Charhovyyia zadachy KP(b)B u natsyianal’nai palitytsy,’” from *Rezoliutsii plenuma TsK KP(b)B, 25-29 ianvaria 1925 g.* (Minsk, 1925), 3-11, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 68.

⁵ S. Krushinsky, *Byelorussian Communism and Nationalism: Personal Recollections* (New York: Research Program on the USSR, 1953), 14.

⁶ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 19. In focusing on the local, the *Völkische* culture of the peasants, the BSSR national enlighteners followed pattern a similar to those of many Central European nationalists. Images of the local community, *Heimat*, or *radzima* were used as a way to build support for the new state. In her study of Heimat nationalism of Germany from the unification to the Third Reich, Celia Applegate found that “*Heimat* was the term that called forth a vision of a common good; it was the moral dimension of mere geographical closeness, the common obligations, duties, and values implied by a ‘feeling of belonging together.’” Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 149.

⁷ “Pavedemlenne u natskamisiiu pry TsVK BSSR ab praviadzenni belarusizatsyi ad’iadnai belaruskai vaiskovai shkoly imia TsVK BSSR,” July 13, 1926. NARB. F. 701. Vop. 1. Spr. 17. L. 184-184adv, in Platonav and Korshuk, (eds.), 151.

growth was even more rapid, from 61 per cent in 1925 to 79 per cent in 1926.⁸ Stalin, now in the process of consolidating his power and eliminating the opposition, was well aware of the potential difficulties associated with this development. The creation of a Belarusian speaking division could potentially create confusion in the command, but also send adversaries of the Soviet government the signal that Belarus was drifting away from the union.⁹ Increasingly concerned by the return of Piłsudski and the general deterioration of the international situation, Stalin decided to rethink the entire policy of Belarusization and korenizatsiia. Fears of a Polish-led invasion appear to have played a significant role in triggering the first wave of Stalinist terror. The war scare of 1927 exposed the vulnerability of the Soviet government, which responded with a heavy-handed government-orchestrated campaign against “wreckers,” enemies, and spies, leading to the first show trials.

The War Scare of 1927: Background

The prelude to the reversal of the nationality policies in the Soviet Union was the mysterious War Scare of 1927, which tested the loyalty of the party and state leadership on the local level. The importance of the War Scare, particularly for the western border regions, has been a neglected and under-researched topic.¹⁰ Following Piłsudski’s return to power, Stalin, in the words of Suny and Martin, developed a growing concern that “the alliance with national elites was leading to a nationalization of Bolshevism, rather than a Bolshevization of nationals.”¹¹ The nationality policies in Belarus and, especially, Ukraine had long had their opponents within the Bolshevik leadership, expressed particularly by Zinoviev and the

⁸ “Rezaliutsya natskamisii pry TsVK BSSR ‘Ab Belarusizatsyi 2-i Belaruskai dyvizii,’ September 6, 1929. NARB. F. 4-p. Vop. 3. Spr. 11. L. 345-346, in Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 159-161.

⁹ Less brutal political leaders in the past have refused to command armies in several languages. Under the provisions of the *Ausgleich* of 1867, the Habsburg monarch placed a veto on Hungarian legislation both before and after it was presented to parliament. In 1903, when the Hungarian premier Kalman Tisza attempted to introduce Hungarian as the language of command in the Hungarian part of the Habsburg double monarchy, Emperor Franz Joseph refused to accept this and brought about a change in the Hungarian franchise laws. This paved the way for the only free Hungarian elections, in January 1905. When the new Hungarian parliament stood by the idea of a Hungarian army, Franz Joseph dissolved the Hungarian parliament, suspended the Hungarian constitution, and returned Hungary to absolutist rule. Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918*. Second edition (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 196; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918: A History of the Austrian Empire and Austria-Hungary* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 207.

¹⁰ Concerning the debate on whether the Bolshevik leadership really believed in an imminent invasion in 1927, see J. P. Sontag, “The Soviet War Scare of 1926-27,” *The Russian Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan. 1975); Alfred G. Meyer, “The Great War Scare of 1927,” *Soviet Union/Union soviétique* Vol. 5, no. 1 (1978): 1-27.

¹¹ Suny and Martin “Introduction,” in Suny and Martin (eds.) *A State of Nations*, 12.

United Opposition. The War Scare emboldened the opposition. On April 24, 1927, Zinoviev attacked the policy of Ukrainization, warning that it “helps the Petliurists.”¹² Three months later, at a meeting of the TsK on June 24, 1927, Zinoviev accused Stalin of colonialism and of failing to implement Lenin’s nationalities policies. “In Ukraine, they are conducting an ‘Ukrainization’ that clearly contradicts our nationalities policy. It’s awful! They are supporting the *Peliurovshchina* and not fighting true chauvinism.”¹³

Different objections to Ukrainization and Belarusization came from the right wing of the party. Bukharin, in particular, focused on “self-determination for the working masses” rather than self-determination of nations.¹⁴ The War Scare appears to have convinced Stalin that the nationalities policies, which he himself had helped draft, had not only empowered “real” nationalists, but also stirred up considerable resentment and opposition to the Belarusization and Ukrainization from significant sections of the local populations. While the heavy-handed language switch into the “national” languages of the titular nationalities and minorities stirred up resentment, there were signs of national elite formations in the republics on the Polish border. In a report of September 1926, Vsevolod Balyts’kyi, the head of the Ukrainian GPU, repeated these warnings, emphasizing that support for state independence in Ukraine had increased significantly and that Ukrainization lay behind this dangerous rise in separatism and nationalism. The same line of reasoning appears in a 1928 report to Ukrainian Party leaders, in which Balyts’kyi warned them that enemies of the Soviet Union had been reinforced by the new *sanacja* order in Piłsudski’s Poland.¹⁵

There are still many uncertainties about the War Scare. The central question – whether Stalin indeed feared an invasion of the Soviet Union in 1927 – remains unanswered. The War Scare carries

¹² Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation*, 99f.

¹³ Martin (2001), 236.

¹⁴ Geoff Eley, “Remapping the Nation: War, Revolutionary Upheaval and State Formation in Eastern Europe, 1914-1923,” in Peter J. Potichnyj and Howard Apter (eds.), *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in historical perspective*. Second Edition (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1990), 212.

¹⁵ Iurii Shapoval, Volodymyr Prystaiko, and Vadym Zolotar’ov (eds.,) *ChK-HPU-NKVD v Ukrayini: Osoby, fakty, dokumenty*. (Kyiv: Abrys, 1997), 254-267; Liudmila V. Hrynevych, “Tsina stalins’koї “revoliutsiї zhory”: ukrains’ke selianstvo v ochikuvanni na viinu,” paper presented at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, November 9, 2007a, 7.

much resemblance to later Stalinist campaigns with its media reports on wreckers and saboteurs. One possibility is that Stalin and his allies knew that the chance of an actual invasion was small, but used the authoritarian coups in Poland and Lithuania and the diplomatic crisis with Britain in order to consolidate their power and prepare Soviet citizens for the forthcoming industrialization and collectivization campaigns. At the same time, the War Scare also appears to have been utilized as an attempt to test the loyalty of the masses to the Soviet government, to shore up popular support and to prepare people mentally for enormous sacrifices.¹⁶ Whatever the danger of an invasion in 1927, the OGPU observed that people both inside and outside the Soviet Union treated an imminent war as a real possibility.¹⁷

The Piłsudski threat was not invented. Between 1919 and 1926, i.e. already before Piłsudski's coup, about sixty "Baltic conferences" had been held between Poland and Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, aimed at creating an anti-Soviet Baltic Bloc. While these plans ultimately foundered as a result of the conflict with Lithuania over Vilnius, the Polish plans for the east remained a constant concern for the Bolshevik leadership.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in December 1926 the General Staff of the Red Army concluded that while the military threat against the USSR had indeed increased, it viewed a foreign invasion of the USSR in 1927 as unlikely.

In general, during 1926 our Western neighbors have significantly increased their military strength, particularly their air forces, their technical weapons and guns, increased their mobilization reserves and have developed their defense industry. However, in what was undertaken during 1926 and is anticipated for 1927, we do not see any immediate war preparations during 1927.¹⁹

The deteriorating international situation forced a change in the defense policy of the Soviet Union in 1926. In a report entitled "Assessment of the international and military situation of the USSR at the beginning of 1927," the General Staff expressed concerns about Great Britain's increased influence

¹⁶ Meyer, 1-27; Hrynevych, 2007a, 4.

¹⁷ See Lennart Samuelson, *Plans for Stalin's War Machine: Tukhachevskii and Military-Economic Planning, 1925-1941* (London and New York: Macmillan Press, 2000); Michal Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism: The USSR on the Eve of the "Second Revolution"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Borisenok, *Fenomen Sovetskoi ukrainizatsii*, 167, citing O. N. Ken and A. I. Rupasov *Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) i otosheniia SSSR s zapadnymi sosednimi gosudarstvami (konets 1920-kh – 1930-e gg. Problemy. Dokumenty. Opyt kommentariia. Ch. 1. Dekabr 1928 – iyun' 1934 g.)* (St. Petersburg, 2000), 80-81.

¹⁹ Samuelson (2000), 35.

among the neighbors of the Soviet Union, and Piłsudski's return to power. Yet, Soviet fears of the creation of a Polish-Baltic alliance against the Soviet Union had not been realized, and the economies of these countries remained crisis-ridden.²⁰

In general, our international position in the West has worsened, and the chances of an armed operation by our Western neighbors have increased. On the other hand, the unresolved conflicts between our neighbors, and between Poland and Germany, as well as the difficulty of common action by the Western European Great Powers to support our neighbors in a war against us – this makes military action in 1927 unlikely.²¹

On December 26, 1926, Mikhail Tukhachevskii, the head of the General Staff of the Red Army reported that “Neither the Red Army nor the country is prepared for war. Our meager material stocks for mobilization for fighting are scarcely sufficient for the first period of war. Subsequently, our position will worsen (especially in conditions of blockade).”²² He continued: “A successful defense of our Union is possible only if we can disrupt the “force composition” of our enemies during the initial period [of war] ... Only after a number of years of successful industrialization will our capacity for a protracted war increase.”²³ On January 18, 1927, A. R. Charviakau, the chairman of the BSSR CEK, warned that “dark clouds” were gathering on the horizon. In particular, he expressed concern over “the English government, which uses its leading role among European affairs to gather strength and aim it against the Soviet Union. We are also not mistaken when assessing the events that took place in Poland last year.... The May coup has strengthened the current Polish regime, which uses all its power to tone down the struggle against its class enemies, to enable the safeguarding of the development of Polish imperialism. That policy coincides with the intentions and directions of the English government.” An additional concern for Charviakau was the “fascist coup” in Lithuania, which “took place under the influence of the English policy, with active participation by Polish diplomats.” The consequences are clear, according to Charviakau: “Every one of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² N. S. Simonov, “Strengthen the Defence of the Land of the Soviets’: The 1927 ‘War Alarm’ and its Consequences,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 8, (1996):1357, citing GARF, f. 8418, op. 16, d. 3, l. 435.

²³ Lennart Samuel’son, *Krasnyi koloss: Stanovlenie voenno-promyshlennogo kompleksa SSSR, 1921-1941* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2001), 39, citing RGDA, F. 33988, op. 2, spr. 671, ark. 140.

us, especially in Soviet Belarus, which is located on the border of bourgeois states, needs to pay particular attention to international relations in order to be ready at any moment to repel [a foreign invader].”²⁴

The crackdown on the BSRH in Poland caused great alarm in the BSSR leadership. It was interpreted as an attack on Soviet interests, and preparation for an attack on the BSSR. In an undated circular letter, issued no later than January 20, the KP(b)B issued orders for a major campaign to support “the starving population of Western Belarus,...suffering under the white terror.” The instructions, issued by Krynetski, the Secretary of the TSK of the KP(b)B to the local branches of the Party, were aimed at “increasing the class hatred of the worker and peasant against Piłsudski’s fascist dictatorship, helping to foment protest and rage against the fascist terror, and also to unite even more firmly the workers and peasants around the Soviets and the Party....Piłsudski’s fascist destruction of the mass revolutionary and national liberation movement in Western Belarus is a preparation for a forthcoming attack on the USSR, and the BSSR in particular.”²⁵ During the winter of 1926-1927, the Soviet leadership issued increasingly hysterical alarms about an imminent war with its neighbors. Commenting on a speech by Nikolai Bukharin in January, 1927, a British diplomat reported that

In the present instance it becomes clearer every day that the panic that now exists, which is audible in every utterance of public men, and legible in every press leader, is not ‘faked,’ at all events in essentials, but indeed represents the feelings and emotions of the Communist Party and the Soviet government; further, that this state of nervousness has been successfully communicated to the people at large.²⁶

The Voikov Murder

The sudden murder on an open street in Warsaw on June 7, 1927 of the Soviet ambassador to Poland, Petr L. Voikov²⁷ constituted the climax of the crisis. The murderer was a 19-year old Belarusian student from

²⁴ Zvezda, January 20, 1927, in Mikhniuk et al. (eds.) *Zneshniaia palityka Belarus*, Vol. 2, 282.

²⁵ NARB f. 4, vop. 21, spr. 112, l. 45-47, in Mikhniuk, et al. (eds.), 284, 285.

²⁶ Public Records Office (PRO), London, Foreign Office (FO), N 530/190/38, report of January 26, 1927 cited in Samuelson (2000), 35.

²⁷ Voikov was an old revolutionary, born Naum Veikin, who had spent many years in Swiss exile. He returned to Russia together with Martov and Lunacharskii, joining the Bolsheviks in August 1917. He had been one of the people responsible for relocating the Imperial family from Tobol'sk to Ekaterinburg prior to the murder. His association with the murder of the imperial family had earned him particular hatred from White Russian émigré groups. Voikov was originally designated as ambassador to Canada, but declined the position after facing opposition from George V's government and media, who labeled him a murderer of the tsar. Nina Ivanauna Stuzhynskaia, *Belarus' miatsezhnaia: z historyi antysavetskaia uzbroenaha supratsivu 20-yia hady XX stahoddzia* (Vilnius: n.p.. 2000), 128-129.

Vilnia by the name of Boris Kowarda (Kaverda). Kowarda came from a politically active Belarusian family, and worked as a proof reader and administrator at the weekly paper *Belaruskae slova*²⁸ in Vilnia.²⁹ His father was an activist in the SR party in Vilnia,³⁰ while Boris Kowerda himself was active in A. V. Pauliukevich's *Chasovaia Belaruskaja Rada*, a pro-Polish right-wing Belarusian organization in Vilnia, opposed to all three major Belarusian parties: the BKhD, BSRH, and the Belarusian Peasants' Union.³¹ At almost the same moment as the Voikov murder, an explosion went off in a Leningrad party clubhouse, killing several people. The circumstances surrounding the Leningrad bombing have never been fully established.³² The Soviet government and media claimed that the Voikov murder was a result of a White Russian monarchist conspiracy and loudly accused the Polish authorities of conspiring to overthrow the Soviet government. The leadership of the BSSR held a number of crisis meetings, discussing how to respond to the situation. The TsK of the KP(b)B concluded that

The imperialists, led by England have decided to sort out their problems with the [Soviet] Union by means of a military attack. Currently we are living through a period of preparation for an attack on us. England is putting together an anti-Soviet bloc....The imperialists are trying to weaken us from within...a) [through] the organization of terrorist acts against ... party and soviet officials, b) organizing an uprising on the territory of the USSR, c) sending in bandits on the territory of the border republics, d) organizing diversion (arson, blowing up depots, factories, bridges and so on, arranging for the derailing of trains, etc), e) strengthen the espionage of agents of imperialist states on Soviet territory.³³

In addition to harsh measures to fight internal enemies, the TsK KP(b)B decided to "increase the intensity of the work and assist the organs of the GPU in their struggle against counterrevolution, espionage, and diversion."³⁴ It was also decided to conduct a campaign in the press, both in the BSSR

²⁸ *Belaruskae slova* was a weekly newspaper, published in Belarusian in Vilnia from February 1926 to February 1928 by Pauliukevich's Polonophile group the *Belaruskaia natsyianal'naia rada*. Mikhniuk et al (eds.), 414.

²⁹ Ibid., 416.

³⁰ Stuzhynskaia, 133-134. "Barys Kaverda," *Nasha Prauda*, No. 21, June 15, 1927, 2.

³¹ Mikhniuk, et al. (eds.), 410.

³² The Leningrad explosion was linked to a White Russian émigré organization called *Trest* (the Trust), which, in fact was controlled by the GPU and to a man called O. P. Upenlis or Oberput. Michal Reiman does not exclude the possibility of a provocation. Reiman, 14, 158.

³³ NARB, f. 4, vop. 3, spr. 26. l. 116-118, in Mikhniuk et al. (eds.), 320-321

³⁴ Ibid., 321.

and Western Belarus,³⁵ emphasizing that Kowarda was a member of Pauliukevich's organization. Ihnatouski was assigned to write an article, attesting to this fact. At this point, not only Poland, but also the ethnic Poles in the BSSR were increasingly perceived as a threat to the Soviet system. The TsK KP(b)B decided to "Request the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to demand the expulsion of the right wing of the Belarusian émigrés from Poland" and to "strengthen work among the Polish population [in the BSSR]. Within a week, the Polish bureau has to work out a number of measures, intended to intensify activities among the Poles."³⁶

The Soviet media now identified Poland as the main aggressor behind an international conspiracy against the Soviet Union, supported by a number of co-conspirators, including the United States.³⁷ The Soviet government delivered a sharply formulated note of protest, in which Poland was accused of not doing enough to restrain the activities of "counter-revolutionary organizations" on its territory. Taken aback by the fierce Soviet reaction to the Voikov murder, the Polish government went to great lengths to assure the Soviet government that it was not planning an invasion.³⁸ It insisted it carried no responsibility for the deed, and offered to pay compensation to Voikov's family in addition to seeking a very long sentence for his assassin. The Soviets responded with a second note of protest, formulated as an ultimatum, describing the Voikov murder as but "one example of a systematic and planned struggle of dark forces of the world reaction and the enemies of peace with the USSR."³⁹ It was accompanied by a list of demands. The note requested that Soviet government representatives be allowed to follow the murder investigation, the cessation of all raids into the Soviet Union, and immediate dissolution of all terrorist organizations operating from Polish territory, as well as "the deportation from Poland of all

³⁵ A significant part of the budget for the KPZB and Hramada press were paid for by the BSSR for the fiscal year 1926-27, even the presses, toner and paper. NARB, f. 4, vop. 21, spr. 112, l. 5-5adv., in Ibid., 252.

³⁶ NARB, f. 4, vop. 3, spr. 26. l. 116-118, in Ibid., 323.

³⁷ Reiman, 14; Velikanova, 6.

³⁸ Quarterly report from the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw to the Swedish Foreign Ministry Riksarkivet, UD:s Arkiv, Stockholm. F1d: 63, 1920-1931, HP E1, Politisk Kvartalsrapport No.2, 1 July 1927, No. 176, 2.

³⁹ "Zavastren'ne pol'ska-radavykh adnosinau: Druhaia nota Radau da Pol'shchy," *Nasha Prauda* No. 22, 18 June 1927, 1.

people, conducting [anti-Soviet] activities, and to immediately inform the Soviet government about their expulsion.”⁴⁰

The Soviet government initially seemed to have substantial support from the western world, but this goodwill was soon lost after twenty “monarchs,” allegedly implicated in a conspiracy against the Soviet Union, were summarily executed as traitors within a week of Voikov’s murder.⁴¹ “If the Russians had not rushed so hastily into the madness of mass executions in Moscow, England would have found itself in an exceptionally difficult position,” French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand commented.⁴² In a top secret report, sent on June 17, 1927, the First Secretary of the KP(b)B Vilhel’m Knoryn described the murder of Voikov as evidence that

England is putting together a bloc of anti-Soviet states, particularly states that border the USSR – Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Finland and others, by organizing and supporting fascist, monarchist and White guard organizations and enticing them to attack the USSR. The weakening of our positions, the activities of the imperialists, the growth of the international reaction against us and the working class in the entire world strengthens the organized anti-Soviet formations inside the Soviet Union.⁴³

Such hysteria reflected the Soviet leaders’ fear of a breakdown of the unstable postwar order in Europe and awareness that they would not be able to repel an invasion by a major European power. In case of war, they feared a conflict not only with Great Britain, France, or Poland, but an outbreak of hostilities with Romania, the Baltic States, Finland and Bulgaria in the west, and Japan and China in the east.⁴⁴ War on all fronts was, however, a worst case scenario. In the foreseeable future, Tukhachevskii’s most likely scenario was a war against Poland and Romania.⁴⁵ In such a war, Tukhachevskii expected to have to give up Soviet territory in Belarus and Ukraine in the short run, until a counteroffensive could be organized.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Quarterly report from the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw to the Swedish Foreign Ministry Riksarkivet, UD:s Arkiv, Stockholm. F1d: 63, 1920-1931, HP E1, Politisk Kvartalsrapport No.2, 1 July 1927, No. 176, p. 1.

⁴¹ Reiman, 15; “Rasstrel 20 manarkhistau u SSRR,” *Nasha Prauda*, no. 21, June 15, 1927, 2.

⁴² Reiman, 15.

⁴³ V. Knoryn, “Zakryty list TsK KP(b)B da usikh chlenakh KP(b)B ab mizhnarodnym stanovishchhy,” NARB. F. 4. Vop. 21. Spr. 67. L. 73-73 adv., published in Mikhniuk et al. (eds.), 324.

⁴⁴ Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 336.

⁴⁵ Lennart Samuelson, *Röd koloss på lerfötter: Rysslands ekonomi i skuggan av 1900-talskrigen* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 1999), 114.

Commenting on the economic crisis and shaky political situation in the USSR following the severing of the diplomatic relations with Britain, Zinoviev stated in July 1927 that “the probability of war was clear three years ago, now one has to say *inevitability*.⁴⁷ The same month, Stalin reiterated that line: “War is inevitable,” he stated, “of that there can be no doubt. But does that mean that it cannot be put off even for a few years? No it does not. Hence the task is to put off the war against the USSR either to the time when the revolution is ripe in the West or until imperialism suffers more powerful blows from the colonial countries (China, India).”⁴⁸ In an interview with a Soviet newspaper in August 1927, Stalin again claimed that “The murder of Voikov, organized by the agents of the [British] Conservative Party, was supposed to play, by the intentions of its authors, the role of the murder in Sarajevo, pulling the USSR into a military conflict with Poland.”⁴⁹

Political Discontent and Peasant Opposition to Soviet Rule

The Bolshevik leaders had reason to be concerned. The War Scare revealed significant popular opposition within the country. The dissatisfaction was particularly strong in the western borderlands. After a couple of months the rhetoric from Moscow calmed down, and the acute crisis was over by the summer of 1927. The Swedish embassy attributed this to “Polish restraint and personal promises from the Polish ambassador in Moscow that his country was genuinely interested in peaceful relations and in the solving of the conflict.”⁵⁰ Yet, the notion that war was imminent lingered for several years, and was shared by the Soviet leadership and grassroots Communists alike. The War Scare became a litmus test, as it forced Soviet citizens to take a stance and often to “articulate their political positions of allegiance or resistance to the regime.”⁵¹ Archival sources indicate that popular opinion, particularly in the borderlands,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁷ Simonov, 1359, citing RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 317 (v-1), 1.45.

⁴⁸ Ibid., citing RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 317 (v-1), 1.123.

⁴⁹ James Morris, “The Polish Terror: Spy Mania and Ethnic Cleansing in the Great Terror,” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 56, No. 5 (July 2004): 752, citing “Tov. Stalin ob ugroze voiny i o Kitae,” *Krest’ianskaia gazeta*, August 2, 1927, 1.

⁵⁰ Quarterly report from the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw to the Swedish Foreign Ministry Riksarkivet, UD:s Arkiv, Stockholm. F1d: 63, 1920-1931, HP E1, Politisk Kvartalsrapport No.3, 12 October 1927, No. 253, 3.

⁵¹ Velikanova, 17.

leaned toward the latter.⁵² While the youth largely responded to the War Scare with expressions of loyalty and preparedness to fight, the predominant mood of the older generations and most peasants and workers was an unwillingness to fight in order to preserve the Soviet order. More alarming still was that many groups, in particular peasants, Christians, and the unemployed, welcomed the reports of external aggression and actively sided against the government. In many cases, they expressed a desire that a war would be their chance to overthrow Communist rule.⁵³ Cossacks secured arms, many started to bear tsarist era decorations such as St. George's Cross in open defiance of the authorities, and both the pioneer organization and Komsomol lost members, particularly in border areas, such as Pskov, Miensk, and Kryvyi Rih *oblasti* and Crimea, but also in Chuvash' okrug. There was also a rise in anti-Semitic attitudes, particularly from the Orthodox Church.⁵⁴

In a report of August 20, 1927, the OGPU warned that the opposition to the Bolsheviks was significant. Belarusian peasants openly stated that "after the Poles come we will hang and shoot the communists like dogs."⁵⁵ Other typical comments were: "Like most others, I shall not defend. There are no more fools, we have defended enough and what have we got for it? Nothing. A worker now lives much worse than under the tsarist regime." "Kill all the communists and Komsomol members who want war." "If you give us war we shall get weapons and make a second revolution."⁵⁶ The majority of the people appear to have taken the threats of an impending war seriously. British diplomats reported in early 1927 that there was "a genuine obsession and not a pretended fear" among the people.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the War

⁵² Hrynevych, (2007a) and Idem., "Commemorating the 1932-1933 Famine in Ukraine," paper presented at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, November 13, 2007b; Velikanova.

⁵³ In some villages in the Antoninskyi raion in the Shepetovskyi okruh the local peasants voted to establish "Soviet power without Communists." Hryhory Kostiuk, *Stalinizm v Ukrayini: heneza i naslidky: doslidzhennia i sposterezhennia suchassnyka* (Kyiv: "Smoloskyp," 1995), 121-122.

⁵⁴ Velikanova, 15, 7 citing OGPU summary N 44 (165) of August 20, 1927.

⁵⁵ Snyder (2005), 99.

⁵⁶ Simonov, 1358, citing RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 85, d. 213, ll. 10-11. See also TsA FSB RF 2/5/394/71-89ob, published in V. Danilov, R. Manning, L. Viola et al (eds.), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizatsiia i raskolachivanie: dokumenty i materialy. V 5 tomakh, 1927-1939. Tom 1. Mai 1927 – Noiabr' 1929* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskia entsiklopedia, 1999), 73-75, 80-81, 84-85; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 22, citing RGASPI 17/85/289; 17/85/19/138-140, 180-182.

⁵⁷ Samuelson (2000), 35, citing PRO, FO 37/12588.

Scare had sharply negative economic consequences as many peasants refrained from selling their products. Across the Soviet Union, even in Moscow, there were shortages of the most basic products such as grain, potatoes, and pasta.⁵⁸ The authorities responded harshly, with mass requisitions of bread from the peasantry during the winter of 1928.⁵⁹ These harsh measures further increased the opposition to the Soviet regime, something perceived as particularly worrisome in the strategically important western borderlands.⁶⁰

The popular reactions to the War Scare made it clear that Stalin's and the Party's power was not all-encompassing. It reminded the leadership that there was still a rather large civil society outside the realms of state and party control, while the republican leaderships, particularly in the border regions, displayed an alarming level of independence vis-à-vis the central government. The War Scare even split the top Soviet leadership between the group around Stalin on one hand, and the moderates, such as Tomsky, Rykov, Kalinin and, most notably the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Chicherin who saw no immediate danger of war, on the other.⁶¹ From the war scare, Russian historian N.S. Simonov concluded that

The 1927 war alarm was absolutely genuine. It demonstrated the weakness of the party-state *nomenklatura*... the country's military and economic backwardness were liable to undermine the regime's authority through international complications, that with the slightest threat of growing into a major international war these international complications would reveal serious internal problems, which would occur above all in the area of relations between the authorities and peasantry, which made up the backbone of the mobilized army. On the basis of these conclusions the party-state leadership of the USSR took the fundamental decision to eliminate the country's military and economic backwardness in the shortest possible time, and for this purpose to switch the administrative apparatus to the conditions of the 'preparatory period for war.'⁶²

⁵⁸ Elena Osokina, *Za fasadom "stalinskogo izobiliia": Raspredelenie i rynek v snabzenii naseleniya v gody industrializatsii, 1927-1941* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Politicheskiaia Entsiklopedia, 1998), 48.

⁵⁹ Hrynevych (2007a), 5.

⁶⁰ The Ukrainians, who were a far larger and significant group in the USSR than the Belarusians, had an anti-Soviet government in exile, A. Livyts'kyi's émigré Ukrainian People's Republic, which was prepared to participate in a Polish-led struggle against the Bolsheviks. Hrynevych (2007a), 5.

⁶¹ Velikanova, 3; Reiman, 16. Yet, despite his differences with the Stalinists, Chicherin remained at his post until he resigned in mid-1930, after a long illness. Jan Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland 1919-1945: From Versailles to Yalta* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 135.

⁶² Simonov, 1363-1364.

By the fall of 1927, Stalin had largely consolidated his power within the Communist Party.⁶³ Trotsky had been expelled from the Party, and the funeral of Adol'f Ioffe on November 19, 1927 following his suicide as a reaction to the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Central Committee in Moscow turned out to be the last public demonstration of the opposition in the Soviet Union for over sixty years.⁶⁴

The activities of the Prometheans and Piłsudski's resurrecting of his federalist plans were taken very seriously by Moscow. The Soviet leaders were particularly worried about Polish claims to Belarus, fearing that the Polish-Lithuanian conflict over the Wilno area would cause Piłsudski to attempt to annex all of Lithuania.⁶⁵ On November 21, 1927, Chicherin called the Polish ambassador S. Patek, following the sharp deterioration of Polish-Lithuanian relations that fall over the Vilna question, expressing Soviet concerns about the "extremely serious threat to the general peace constituted by Polish-Lithuanian relations," and that "any attack on Lithuania, whatever form it would take, will be considered as the first stage of an attack on us." Patek assured him that "Poland is not planning to attack the USSR."⁶⁶ As both Latvia and the USSR sided with Lithuania in the Vilnius/Wilno conflict, an informal system of balance of power appeared in the region, which was successfully exploited by both the USSR and Germany.⁶⁷

Sealing the BSSR-Polish border

By 1932, only two border crossings between Poland and the USSR remained open.⁶⁸ In 1935 the border zone was thoroughly militarized, with a 7.5 kilometer wide strip of land along the border, which only people with special permits could enter. A unit of mounted border guards was organized in every village and settlement in the zone.⁶⁹ The border area was entirely under the jurisdiction of the GPU/NKVD.

⁶³ Even in January, 1928 Stalin still had to compromise with more moderate leaders in the party, such as Kalinin, and his hold on power was not complete until April, 1929. Reiman, 106.

⁶⁴ Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* (London and New York: Penguin, 1995), 144-145.

⁶⁵ Reiman, 13.

⁶⁶ *Dokumenty vneshej politiki SSSR*, Tom. X, 489, in Mikhniok, Rakashevich, Falei, Sharapa (eds.), t. 2., 362.

⁶⁷ The USSR had offered the Baltic States separate neutrality treaties. While the two northern Baltic states turned down the Soviet offers, Lithuania signed a treaty with the Soviet Union on September 28, 1926. On behalf of the Soviet government, Chicherin declared that the Soviet Union considered the Polish oTsKupation of the Vilna area illegal, and a "violation of the Lithuanian frontiers which has taken place against the will of the Lithuanian people." Karski, 132.

⁶⁸ Morris (2004) 752, citing *British Foreign Office: Russia Correspondence*, reel 4 (1938), vol. 22294, 132.

Entire villages were emptied, as over half the male population in these border areas was arrested and put in special collection camps, from which they were deported to Siberia, the Urals and the Far East.⁷⁰ On the Polish side of the border, a similar zone was established, but spanning over a larger area. In the 100 kilometers closest to the BSSR border the Polish authorities forcibly converted the Western Belarusian population to Catholicism. Martial law was introduced and those who resisted were deported from the border area.⁷¹ Whereas there had been a substantial flow of refugees across the border throughout the 1920s, by 1930 the border was sealed.⁷² Perhaps the first purely ethnic deportation in Soviet history occurred on March 5, 1930, when the Politburo ordered the deportation of 3,000-3,500 families from the BSSR and 10,000-15,000 families from Ukrainian border areas, mainly to the virgin lands in northern Kazakhstan.⁷³

The end of *Korenizatsiia* in the USSR

Behind the increasingly fortified border, Stalin and his leadership announced a new political line on the nationalities issue. Volodymyr Zatons'kyi, on behalf of the Central Control Commission of the VKP(b), also known as the TsKK, led a commission to investigate the implementation of Soviet nationalities policies in the BSSR. At a session of the Executive Bureau of the Central Committee of the KP(b)B on June 27, 1928, Zatons'kyi criticized the Belarusian leadership, as well as the entire scientific community, institutions of public education, publishing and printing houses, artists, and state and party activists and functionaries for their “National Democratic” and chauvinist attitudes and positions. Zatons'kyi’s report was devastating.

I have seen all kind of things in Ukraine, but the degree of animosity towards Moscow that oozes out of every gathering of writers or academics here is greater by several degrees than the most frenzied nationalism of the *Petliurovshchina* in 1918. A large number of Communists are caught up in this intoxication... No matter how much Shums'kyi differed from the Party line, no one ever dared suspect that after a fight in the TsK *Biuro* he would go to Hrushevskyi and drink tea and consult on tactics for their joint battle. Yet in Belorussia all this is the normal course of affairs...

⁶⁹ A. L. Zaerko, *Krovavaia granitsa: kniga pervaia 1918-1939* (Minsk: Kameron-D: 2002), 232.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁷¹ Zaprudnik, *Belarus*, 85; Lubachko, 135.

⁷² Zaerko, 118-141.

⁷³ Martin (2001), 313-322; Morris (2004) 253, citing “Protokol 119: O pol'skikh seleniak v pogranichnykh oblastiakh” and “Protokol 120: Oprosom chlenov Politbiuro ob Ukraine i Belorussii,” in O. N. Ken and A. I. Rusapov, *Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) i otnosheniia SSSR s zapadnymi soosednimi gosudarstvami* (St Petersburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2000), 508-510, 514; Brown, 146-152.

[Many] figures slightly lower in the hierarchy, but still members of the government and close to the TsK, are so intertwined with non-Party nationalists that you can't find a border between them.⁷⁴

Zatons'kyi saw an ideological deviance in the Belarusian national communists' anti-modernism, provincialism and commercialization of the nation. "There is an orientation toward the West here, but nevertheless there is a much stronger orientation toward *lapti* [peasant sandals] and indigenous *lapti*," Zatons'kyi complained.⁷⁵ He believed the Belarusian party leadership had fallen under the ideological influence of the *smenokhovstvo* intelligentsia. This was the beginning of a backlash against the nationalities policies of the 1920s, and the restoration of the notion of progress. Whereas Russian chauvinism had been regarded as the major threat to the coherence of the union, Russian was now again regarded as a progressive carrier of culture. The national communists' embracement of Belarusian culture was now regarded as regressive, and treated as a political liability. The Herderian ethnophilia of the 1920s was increasingly abandoned for Marxist concepts of progress and modernization. Concepts of linear progression, which measured progress in production results, the paving of roads, building of plants, opening of schools and universities, production results, and higher levels of literacy were now embraced. The Soviet order was seen as bringer of civilization and the displacer of savagery.⁷⁶

In March 1929 the Bureau of the KP(b)B issued a statement that the Belarusization of the Second Belarusian Division had been carried out incorrectly, and that it needed to be slowed down. Also, it was deemed as imperative that the state and political leadership gained full control over the publication of Belarusian language material to be used in the Division.⁷⁷ Belarusization of the army slowed dramatically in 1930. Experts on Belarusian culture, employed to enforce Belarusization in the army were fired, and many were soon arrested. By 1932, no traces of this experiment remained, and the process was condemned as a hostile act, aimed at undermining Soviet power and explained by the presence of hostile

⁷⁴ Martin (2001), 262, citing GARF 374/27s/1691(1929): 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 262, citing GARF 374/27s/1691 (1929): 43.

⁷⁶ Brown, 186-187.

⁷⁷ "Pastanova biuro TsK KP(b)B 'Ab belarusizatsyi chastei belaruskai vaennai akrushi'" March 7, 1929. NARB. f. 4-p. vop. 3. spr. 32. ch. II. l. 323-323adv. Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 196-198.

wreckers in the organization.⁷⁸ This policy reversal heralded a purge of the Belarusian leadership, which was initiated a year later. On June 29, 1929, a *Zviazda* editorial accused the entire Belarusian leadership of nationalism, counterrevolution and “national democratism” in *Zviazda*. Later this same year, *Zviazda* published an article declaring that Belarusian nationalism, rather than Great Russian chauvinism, was the greatest danger in the BSSR. Soon, all the leading Belarusian papers repeated the same line. Belarusian nationalism was suddenly associated with right deviance, and condemned.⁷⁹ The state security organs were ordered to begin a campaign against “Belarusian nationalism.”⁸⁰ In late 1929, a number of members of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, as well as Anton Balitskii, the Commissar of Education and Aliaksandr Adamovich, head of the TsK Press Department, were removed from their positions. In September 1930, they were arrested by the OGPU.⁸¹ The purge that followed in 1929 removed 10.7% of members and candidate members of the KP(b)B.⁸² The Belarusian national communists had never constituted a formal political bloc with a coherent political ideology or program, but were divided into often openly hostile factions. These divisions were exploited by Moscow.⁸³ The national communists had fallen out of favor and were targeted for political repressions by the authorities. They were accused of factionalism, setting up “anti-party groups” within the KP(b)B, and causing a split within the Belarusian Communist movement.

Although Stalin and his associates began adopting some of Zinoviev’s critique of the *korenizatsiia* they did not adopt Zinoviev’s platform of internationalism. Instead, they linked the attacks against the Belarusian and Ukrainian national communists with campaigns against Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev himself. Stalin associated the United Opposition with Jews and encouraged anti-Semitic

⁷⁸ Krushinsky, 15.

⁷⁹ Martin (2001), 267, citing Kunitsa, “Natsional’nae budaunitstva na Homel’shchine za aposhniiia tri hadi,” *Bol’shevik Belarusi*, nos. 1-2 (1930), 120 - 126.

⁸⁰ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 24.

⁸¹ Martin (2001) 264-265.

⁸² Nikolai L’vovich Ivanov, *Kritika falsifikatsii istorii sotsialisticheskogo stroitel’stva v BSSR*. (Minsk: Nauka i Tekhnika, 1980), 74.

⁸³ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 22.

sentiments, even against Kamenev, who was half-Jewish but did not identify himself as a Jew.⁸⁴ The focus on Jews may have been exacerbated by the fact that the Bund – which had continued its political activism in Poland – had opted to join Piłsudski’s ruling non-party bloc for cooperation with the government.⁸⁵ The attack on Belarusian nationalism was accompanied by a reversal of the policies of Yiddishization. Political activism of the Jewish minority was now attacked as “Jewish nationalism” and “Bundism.” Highly unspecific, the accusation of “Bundism” could include a number of loosely defined political sins like “national-chauvinism,” “pessimism,” and “territorialism.” Even matters of a personal nature, such as a mother’s decision to send her child to a Yiddish school instead of a Russian or Belarusian-language school, or a Jewish communist choosing to marry another Jew could be denounced as “Bundist behavior.”⁸⁶

Political terror in the Soviet Union was significantly expanded in 1930. That year, ten times as many people were sentenced by OGPU troikas than had been sentenced between 1926 and 1929. Most of the repressed were from the border areas, particularly the BSSR and Leningrad oblast.⁸⁷ The terror began with two waves of arrest by the GPU in late June aimed at “national democrats.” By July, these arrests had become a daily occurrence in Minsk, and by August in the provinces too. In October the leader of the OGPU of the BSSR, R. Ia. Rapoport, revealed that his organization had uncovered a secret, nationalist underground organization *Saiuz Vyzvalenia Belarusi*, (SVB, Union for the Liberation of Belarus,) dedicated to overthrowing Soviet power by provoking civil war in Belarus. According to the OGPU, this organization had posed as Belarusifiers and infiltrated republican agencies. The OGPU announced that the beginning of these subversive activities was linked to the return of Lastouski to the BSSR. Earlier that year, the GPU had “uncovered” a sister organization in Ukraine, *Spilka Vyzvolennia Ukrayiny* (SVU),

⁸⁴ Mikhail Agursky, *The Third Rome: National Bolshevism in the USSR* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), 320-323.

⁸⁵ Poluiyan, *Revolutsionno-osvoboditel’skoe dvizhenie* (1978), 66.

⁸⁶ Bemporad, “Red Star on the Jewish Street” (2006): 111.

⁸⁷ In the entire Soviet Union, out of 179 620 people subjected to the troikas, 18,966 people were executed, 99,319 imprisoned and 47,048 people deported. V. Danilov, R. Manning, L. Viola et al (eds.), *Tragedia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizatsiya i raskolachivanie: dokumenty i materialy. V 5 tomakh, 1927-1939. Tom 2. Noiabr’ 1929 – dekabr’ 1930* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskia entsiklopedia, 2000), 27.

conspicuously linked to the return of Andrii V. Nikovs'ky, the foreign minister of the Ukrainian People's Republic to Soviet Ukraine in 1924.⁸⁸

Furthermore, the SVU and the SVB had supposedly coordinated their activities as part of a scheme to establish a “union of nationalities.”⁸⁹ Rapoport’s speech indicated the launching of an aggressive campaign against Belarusian nationalism. The signers of the 1921 “Declaration of the 32,” who had called for Belarusization, were now accused of having carried out a counterrevolutionary act and of belonging to a secret SR organization.⁹⁰ Despite publicly blaming themselves for having failed to uproot national democrats within their ranks, the leaders of Belarusization were now quickly arrested and deported to camps and settlements in the interior of the Soviet Union.⁹¹ The OGPU linked the national democratic conspiracy to linguistic reform,⁹² claiming that a counterrevolutionary organization had been established within the Scientific Terminological Commission of the BSSR People’s Commissariat of Education, and resulting in the 1926 conference on the Belarusian language. The organization was linked to the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, and aimed to flood “the Belarusian language with Polish words, introducing the Latin script, and so on … this was not only important scientifically, but above all politically. They needed to produce not only ordinary terminology, but terminology that would separate Belarusian from the all-union culture.”⁹³

A purge of Belarusian culture was initiated. Grammar books, text books, even articles written at the time of the Polish-Soviet War were studied in detail by the OGPU in order to uncover “wreckers” and national democrats among poets and writers.⁹⁴ Many Belarusian nationalists had nurtured reservations

⁸⁸ On SVU, see Volodymyr Prystaiko and Iurii Shapoval, *Sprava “Spilky Vyzvolennia Ukrayiny”: Nevidomi dokumenty i fakty* (Kyiv: Intel, 1995); Vitaly Chernetsky, (ed.) “The NKVD File of Mykhailo Drai-Khmara,” *Harriman Review*, vol. 15, no. 2/3 (May 2005): 52; Martin (2001), 265.

⁸⁹ Martin (2001), 265, citing GARF 374/27s/1968 (1930): 62; SVU: *Sten. zvit*, 35.

⁹⁰ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 31.

⁹¹ Ibid., 23-24.

⁹² Martin (2001), 206-207.

⁹³ Ibid. 206, citing GARF 374/27s/1968 (1930): 2, 4, 26, 66. While emphasis was on linguistics, the OGPU also had other concerns. Ihnatouski, while not yet arrested, was accused of “bourgeois-liberal nationalism” for idealizing the 15th and 16th centuries as “the Golden age of Belarus.” Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft* (1999), 205.

about Bolshevism. Ales' F. Adamovich, had even claimed that “Bolshevism is alien to the spirit and character of the Belarusian people.”⁹⁵ The OGPU uncovered a poem by Ianka Kupala, published in the paper *Zvon'* on September 17, 1919 during the Polish occupation of Minsk. A tribute to Piłsudski on the occasion of his arrival in Miensk, the poem, called “The Uprising” referred to the Polish leader as a “knight from the West, who had conquered Belorussia’s heart not to injure her but to raise from decline this enchanted princess in peasant clothing, to return her to her eternal throne, to help the formation of an independent and indivisible Belarussia.”⁹⁶ The OGPU assigned Ianka Kupala a key role in the conspiracy as the leading ideologue of Belarusian “national democratism,” and “national opportunism,” accusing him of arranging conspiratorial meetings in his apartment and in the offices of *Savetskaia Belarus*.⁹⁷

Ultimately, behind this plot of intellectuals in both the BSSR and Western Belarus stood Piłsudski and the Polish government, aiming at provoking a public uprising that would enable foreign intervention and the formation of a Belarusian satellite state under Polish control. Kupala had been given the title “People’s Poet of the BSSR” in 1925. According to the OGPU, this award established an anti-Bolshevik link between intellectuals and the Belarusian political leadership. Kupala’s portrait now hung alongside Lenin’s in every Belarusian school.⁹⁸ On November 20, 1930, Kupala was arrested by the GPU. On his way to prison, Kupala attempted to take his life “like a Japanese samurai” by cutting himself with a smuggled knife. The GPU agents were unprepared for the suicide attempt and alerted some passers-by. The story leaked out and reached the west, where it became an embarrassment for the Soviet government. Stalin himself ordered that the poet be treated and halted the show trial against him. The GPU restructured

⁹⁴ Krushinsky, 30.

⁹⁵ Cited in H. Niamiha, “Dakumental’nae znachen’ne antynatsdemauskai literatury,” *Belaruski Zbornik*, vol. 1 (January-March 1955), 51.

⁹⁶ Ianka Kupala, “Paustan’ne,” *Zvon* No. 11, September 17, 1919, 1. Anthony Adamovich, *Opposition to Sovietization in Belorussian Literature (1917-1957)* (Munich: The Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1958), 41, citing S. Vol’fson (ed.) *Navuka na sluzhbe natsdemauskai kontrrevolutsyi* Vol. I, Part I (Miensk, 1931), 70; Zen’kovich, *Granitsy. Spory. Obidy*, 168, 170-171.

⁹⁷ Zen’kovich, 155, 160, 165; Martin (2001), 266, citing GARF 374/27s/1968 (1930): 13-14.

⁹⁸ Martin (2001), 263-264, citing RTsKhIDNI 17/85/365 (1929): 102.

the trial, building a case around Ihnatouski, the president of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, who was now “identified” as the leader of the SVB.⁹⁹

On December 1, 1930, the leading Belarusian nationalist *smenovekhovtsy*; Lastouski, Tsvikevich, Smolich, Krasnouski, Lesik, and Nekrashevich were arrested, along with Pichteta and Balitski, the BSSR People’s Commissar of Agriculture Pryshchepau, Haratski, I. Savitski and the writers Dunar, and Zaretski, followed by Dubouka, Pushcha, Babareka, Zhylka, Ales’ F. Adamovich and many others—pedagogues, scientists, and students. Altogether about 300 persons, the majority of the Belarusian-speaking intellectual elite, were detained.¹⁰⁰ A trial against Lastouski and thirteen other Belarusian intellectuals was announced.¹⁰¹ Shortly thereafter leading national communists, among them Zhylonyvich, were arrested.¹⁰²

In February 1931, the Central Control Commission of the VKP(b) focused its attention on two cases: “On the question of the Belarusian comrades” and “On the question of the Belarusian national democrats.” These cases involved the leaders of Belarusization. The first group included Zhylunovich, Charviakou, and Vasilevich; whereas the second included Ihnatouski, Balitski, and Ales’ F. Adamovich. The leaders of the Belarusian Communist Party were accused not only of deviation from “Bolshevik nationalities policy,” but also of actively conducting a secret national democratic counterrevolutionary campaign through the institutions of Belarusization, such as the Belarusian State Publishing House, *Inbelkul’t*, and the Belarusian Academy of Sciences.¹⁰³

Professor Picheta, with his academic background in Moscow, was singled out as the contact person between the SVB and the fictitious monarchist organization the International Union of Struggle Towards the Rebirth of Free Russia, allegedly led by the Russian historian Sergei Platonov. Ihnatouski

⁹⁹ Ant. Adamovich (1958), 164; Krushinsky, 30; Zen’kovich, 155, 168.

¹⁰⁰ Palanevich, “Natsyianal’naia teoriia i praktyka bal’shavizmu u Belarusi,” (1960), 67; Ant. Adamovich (1958), 162-168.

¹⁰¹ Lindner (1999), 204; Adamushka, *Palitychnya represii* (1994) 61; “Z radavai Belarusi,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 31, December 4, 1930, 3; “Aryshty belarusau u Radavai Belarusi,” *Belaruskaia Krynička*, No. 32, December 16, 1930, 3.

¹⁰² Latyszonek and Mironowicz, *Historia Białorusi*, 159.

¹⁰³ Platonov and Korshuk (eds.) 23, citing NARB, F. 4-p. Vop. 21. Spr. 220. L. 13.

and Zhylunovich were accused of contacts with this group and opportunism.¹⁰⁴ However, on February 20, 1931, Ihnatouski shot himself, just before his impeding arrest, and following his suicide, the accused co-conspirators retracted their confessions. Instead the OGPU summarily deported the intended victims of the show trial. Rapoport, the head of the BSSR GPU, was transferred to the Urals.¹⁰⁵ Lastouski was accused of being a national democrat and deported to Saratov for five years. He was arrested again and shot in 1938.¹⁰⁶ The GPU had allegedly identified 108 members of the SVB among the leading BSSR intellectuals, whereas it identified only 45 members of the SVU in Ukraine.¹⁰⁷ Ninety members of the Belarusian Writers' Union were arrested, most perished in the camps.¹⁰⁸ Only a handful of Belarusian writers associated with the Belarusization project survived the terror, often as a result of Stalin's personal intervention.¹⁰⁹

After his arrest, Picheta was deported to Voronezh in 1930, and then to Viatka where he was placed under strict police surveillance. He was accused of belonging to a "national fascist" group and connected to other "national fascists" in Czechoslovakia. Picheta was released on Stalin's personal orders in 1934 and moved to Moscow.¹¹⁰ While Kupala was among the few survivors, he was a broken man. After publishing a written "confession" of his sins, he confined himself to conformist poetry. In 1938, arrest orders for both Kupala and Kolas were issued again. Only first secretary Panamarenka's interference and a direct plea to Stalin on their behalf saved their lives.¹¹¹ While the policy of

¹⁰⁴ Lindner (1999), 204.

¹⁰⁵ Ant. Adamovich (1958), 164. The treatment of Kupala and Ihnatouski caused considerable negative publicity in Western Belarus. See, for instance "Akhviary kamunistychnaha teroru u Uskhodniai Belarusi," *Belaruskaia Krynička* No. 12, March 30, 1931, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Lindner (1999), 295.

¹⁰⁷ M. P. Kostiuk, *Bol'shevistskaia sistema vlasti v Belarusi* (2002), 43.

¹⁰⁸ Zen'kovich, 155.

¹⁰⁹ "Those who survived can be counted on one's fingers: Kolas,...Krapiva, Hlebka, Luzhanin,...Brouka,...Lunkou,...Kulashou, Zarytski, and Iakimovich." Ant. Adamovich, (1958), 170.

¹¹⁰ Krushinsky, 6. After the Great Terror he became a corresponding member in 1939 and a full member of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1946. This is rather remarkable as Picheta had criticized the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty and claimed that "the USSR is a fascist state, not a socialist one." Lindner (1999), 290.

Belarusization was not abandoned, the speed of Belarusization was reduced, and there was renewed focus on the “Bolshevik” character of the enterprise. The *korenizatsiia* was slowly dismantled over the next five years.¹¹² In practice, this meant a significant reversal of policy, and even a tendency to anti-Belarusization.¹¹³ Terry Martin interprets the Stalinist revolution as a retreat from the policy of *korenizatsiia*.

[T]he attempt to create a hegemonic linguistic environment in Belorussia and Ukraine failed and a bilingual public sphere emerged. More importantly, an anti-*korenizatsiia* hard-line stance emerged as central authorities grew increasingly concerned that *korenizatsiia* was abetting rather than disarming nationalism.¹¹⁴

Rehabilitation of Russian Culture and Language

Unlike collectivization of Belarusian agriculture, which was met with disapproval and resistance, the end to the Belarusization and the beginning of Russification met little protest.¹¹⁵ By and large, the peasantry reacted in a similar way to the end of the Belarusization as they had to its original announcement: with indifference. The end of the Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* marked the beginning of a long process of rehabilitation of Russian nationalism.¹¹⁶ Sergei Kirov, one of Stalin’s closest allies, accused the opposition of anti-Russian sentiments: “[T]he opposition accuses us of being real ‘*katsapnia*’ [a humiliating nickname given to Great Russians], maintaining that we don’t see anything beyond our own country, that we don’t believe in the world revolution and so on, that we are narrow nationalists, mediocre people, while Trotsky and Zinoviev are genuine internationalists.”¹¹⁷ Older historiography, and indeed

¹¹¹ Zen’kovich, 257. In 1942, Kupala finally succeeded in committing suicide. This did not, however, prevent the Soviet regime from presenting him as a model Soviet artist and the most celebrated Belarusian poet of the 20th century. Ant. Adamovich (1958) 164; T. Khadkevich (ed.) *Narodny paet Belarusi* (Minsk: Vydatstva Akademii Navuk BSSR, 1962).

¹¹² Rainer Lindner, “Weißenland im Geschichtsbild seiner Historiker,” in Beyrau and Lindner, (eds.), *Handbuch der Geschichte Weißenlands* (2001), 30.

¹¹³ Platonav and Korshuk (eds.), 21-22.

¹¹⁴ Martin (2001), 26.

¹¹⁵ Yocom, “Creating a Socialist Tower of Babel,” 541.

¹¹⁶ There are a few different interpretations on the dating on the rehabilitation of Russian nationalism. Agursky claims that Stalin, who “more than any other Bolshevik identified himself with Russian nationalism,” relapsed into this stance around 1924-1928. Brandenberger traces it to 1934, about the same time as Zhores Medvedev, who claims that “from the middle of the 1930s traditional Russian nationalism began to be encouraged.” Agursky, 306, 305-341; Brandenberger, 43-62; Zhores Medvedev, “Stalin as a Russian nationalist,” in Medvedev and Medvedev, *The Unknown Stalin*, 257, 248-263; Martin (2001), 451-461.

¹¹⁷ Agursky, 320, citing S. Kirov, *Izbrannye stat’i i rechi* (Moscow, 1957), 436.

many Belarusian nationalists, communist and anti-communist alike, interpreted these changes as the return of anti-Belarusian sentiments.¹¹⁸

Some older Leninists were bewildered by the policy changes, fearing a return of Great Russian chauvinism: “Up to now everybody was talking about the leading role of the working class, and now for some reason the question is about the leading role of the Russian people.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, older research often pinpointed the reversal of Soviet nationalities policies around 1930, as a struggle between two nationalisms. Belarusian émigré historian Ivan Lubachko claimed that “The period between 1929 and 1934 was one of struggle between Belorussian nationalism and Great Russian chauvinism. … [The Great Russian chauvinists interpreted this] to mean that the national question had lost its validity and therefore should be forgotten. The Belorussians, however, stubbornly resisted this planned reversal of the policy of permitting cultural autonomy to the various nationalities.”¹²⁰ Recent research suggests Belarusization, *korenizatsiia* and its subsequent reversal were less an expression of a struggle between Great Russian chauvinists and Belarusian nationalists than a consequence of the reorganization of Soviet society after 1928.¹²¹ In the BSSR, the primary opposition to the Belarusization did not come from Great Russian chauvinists, but from local peasants, who had been assigned a Belarusian ethnicity by the Soviet authorities, but resisted their forced “nationalization” from above.

Another source of opposition to the Belarusization was the left wing of the Bolshevik party, which considered *korenizatsiia*, Belarusization, and Ukrainization dangerous concessions to the nationalists that were not only ideologically dubious, but could also be exploited by a hostile outside world, and Poland in particular. After 1927 Stalin increasingly adopted this attitude. Partly, he was concerned that the nationalities policies of the 1920s had strengthened local nationalism. The War Scare

¹¹⁸ Suny and Martin, “Introduction” in Suny and Martin (eds.) *A State of Nations*, 4. The Belarusian Christian Democrats in Western Belarus saw the in-fighting in Minsk as an example of ethnic Russian oppression of Belarusians and an expression of “the struggle between Russian and Belarusian communists over [the control of] Belarus, [and] that that national-democratism, of which we can read in [the BSSR] press, is nothing but *Belarusianness*, and for this Belarusianness the Belarusians of Minsk are now being persecuted by the Muscovite communists.” “Za shto pratsleduiuts bielarusau u BSRR?,” *Belaruskaia Krynitsa*, No. 31, November 10, 1929, 1.

¹¹⁹ Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Soviet Russia* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 1995), 28f.

¹²⁰ Lubachko, 112.

¹²¹ Brown, 230.

had revealed that rather than strengthening the Bolsheviks' position in the border areas, it had established rival power centers at the republican level, which Stalin feared could be used by enemies of the Soviet regime, particularly by the Prometheans within the Piłsudski government. Also, Belarusization, Yiddishization and multilingualism were ill suited for the emerging Stalinist order, based upon centralization and planning. In practice, the experiment in Belarusization ended by 1930. Whereas the formal institutions of the experimental nationalities policies of the 1920s were not dismantled for another half decade, they had lost their original function. Although the presidium of the Council of Nationalities existed until 1936, it had lost its importance, as the party instead promoted a loyal, Russian-speaking intelligentsia in non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union.¹²² That year, Nikolai Bukharin, the editor of *Izvestiia*, claimed that the USSR "has created a single people, identified not in an ethnographic way, but as a social category." This people, Bukharin maintained, was a multinational community, a "united and sovereign" people, yet "consolidated along the verticals (of classes) and horizontally (as nations)."¹²³ The echoes of tsarist era were re-appearing in the official rhetoric of Soviet nationalities policies. The rhetoric about a single, Soviet people, formation through *sblizhenie*, growing closer, and *sliianie*, merger, signified the reversal of the nationalities policies of the pre-revolution era, both in terms of rhetoric and practice.¹²⁴

Conclusion

As far as the BSSR is concerned, the Great Terror, known in Russian simply as "1937," began in earnest already in 1930. It was organized as a counteraction to a supposed "national democratic" conspiracy.¹²⁵ Just as it had been a laboratory for Soviet nationality policy, the BSSR now became a laboratory of Stalinist transformation.¹²⁶ The terror swept the BSSR in three massive waves. The first, in 1930, led to the arrest of almost the entire elite of the Belarusian intelligentsia, particularly old *smenovekhovtsy* and

¹²² Yocom, 541; Martin (2001), 394-431.

¹²³ Nikolai Bukharin, "Rasshirenie sovetskoi demokratsii," *Izvestiia*, May 1, 1936 and "Konstitutsiya sotsialisticheskogo gosudarstva," *Izvestiia*, June 14, 1936, cited in Marchuk, 509.

¹²⁴ On the use of *sliianie* in the late imperial period, see Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia* (1996), 14, 70, 73. On *sblizhenie* and *sliianie* in the rhetoric of the late Soviet era, see Metelitsa, *Rastsvet i sblizhenie sotsialisticheskikh natsii*.

¹²⁵ Berhman (1996), 178.

¹²⁶ Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front*: 27; M. P. Kostiuk (2002), 43.

former activists of the BPR. The reversal of nationalities policies in both the USSR and Poland can be partly attributed to a general European trend towards centralism and marginalization of ethnic minorities towards the end of the 1920s. In the case of Belarus, the destruction of the national movement appears to have been motivated by fears of Piłsudski, and as a part of Stalin's greater plan to transform the Soviet Union. In the BSSR, the terror was particularly brutal. The onslaught on Belarusian culture and society eliminated virtually all cultural and intellectual life in the republic.

Piłsudski's and Stalin's mutual fears and distrust of each other constituted a tragedy for the people that inhabited the border areas. The political and physical annihilation of the Belarusian elites in the decade following Piłsudski's coup of 1926 had far-reaching consequences. Far smaller than the Ukrainian SSR, the BSSR was more manageable and easier to handle. The lessons learned from the repressions of the Belarusian elite were later used during the destruction of the national elites in other republics, notably Ukraine. The War Scare demonstrated to the Bolshevik leadership that the nationalities policies of the 1920s had not built support for the Soviet regime, but rather had created a new platform for the opposition. Together with the New Economic Policy they had weakened the authority of the center in favor of autonomy on the republican level.

The terror was particularly harsh in the border areas of the Soviet Union. Stalin was well aware of the explosive power of nationalism. The destabilizing of neighboring Poland by exploiting nationalist sentiment had indeed been one of his primary aims. In turn, the new policies of Hołówko and Jozefski, and the resumption of the Promethean project were seen as a direct attack on the Soviet Union. In the policy reversal that followed, the border areas became the first targets of the terror. While the most active promoters of Belarusian autonomy were among the initial victims, the terror was soon extended to all sectors of society in the BSSR. Nowhere was Stalin's transformation of the western borderlands republics into model Soviet societies, "fortresses of socialism," more noticeable than in the BSSR. Here, political terror and Sovietization lasted longer and was more thorough than in any other Soviet republic. In her study on the Soviet Belarusian experiment in multilingualism, Beth Baird Yocom concluded that "Ultimately, Stalinists used the desire to excite Belarusian national consciousness to undermine and discredit Belarusification by associating its leaders with a secret, "counter-revolutionary" crusade to

establish an independent Belarusian state.”¹²⁷ Not only did Belarusization, Polonization, and Yiddishization fail to achieve the aims for which they were designated, their implementation was impractical, particularly under the new post-1928 central planning, which created great demands for centralization and cohesion. The policies themselves were problematic, as they stirred up resentment and opposition among their intended beneficiaries, and provided a platform for real or potential opponents to Stalin, which in turn could be used by Piłsudski and other opponents of the Soviet regime. Stalin also exploited the danger of a conflict with Poland, and used it against his political adversaries. Belarusization had promoted national communists, whose loyalty to Stalin and the Soviet system could indeed be doubted. The Promethean project was a potential threat, but it provided an opportunity to undermine and get rid of rivals and ideological opponents. Stalin was able to skillfully exploit this threat to further his own agenda by linking the policy to real or imagined conspiracies.

By 1930, the Herderian ideas, which had been absorbed into Belarusian national communism were rejected as irreconcilable with the new Stalinist order, which increasingly emphasized the indivisibility of the Eastern Slavs and merger of the Soviet people. In this new intellectual climate, “bourgeois nationalism” and “national democratism” replaced “Russian chauvinism” as the greatest threat to Soviet society. The national communism of Ihnatouski and Tarashkevich was irreconcilable with the emerging Stalinist narrative of unity, built around Russian culture as the mortar that kept the Soviet people together. In addition to national security concerns, the forced industrialization and command economy provided economic reasons to abandon Belarusization. At the same time, the Stalinist system brought more social mobility that created a new political elite, which was, for the first time in modern history, ethnically Belarusian. The emergence of this class of Soviet Belarusian technocrats became particularly noticeable in the post-war years.

Ultimately, the affirmative action-based nationalities policies of the 1920s proved too complicated to manage, particularly after the launching of the “socialist offensive” in 1928. There was also the changing international situation following Piłsudski’s return to power, and the risk that the Poles

¹²⁷ Yocom, 539.

would be able to exploit Soviet nationality policy for their own purposes. Stalin delegitimized the Belarusian national communists by accusing them of working for Piłsudski, the symbol of the class and national enemy, robbing the national communists of their credentials both as proletarians, but perhaps even more destructively, as Belarusian patriots.

Conclusion

How do you build a nation? How does one turn, to paraphrase Eugen Weber, peasants into Belarusians? On the surface, many of the requirements national movements require in order to become successful were there at the turn of the century. According to the 1897 census, more people spoke Belarusian in the Vil'nia province than all other languages combined. As Timothy Snyder has correctly observed, "If their success were actually determined by fidelity to the traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or by members of people speaking a given language, the Belarusians would have had more reason to hope that anyone else. The Belarusian failure is the result of social and political contingencies which escape national reasoning, and thus deserve historical attention."¹ At the same time, in 1906 most of the common building blocks of nationalism were missing: a public sphere, an extensive education system, a developed industry, a critical mass of nationally conscious intellectuals, communication. Belarusian nationalists were obstructed by the autocracy and competed with better organized rivaling nationalisms of the neighboring peoples. Their claim to Vil'na was hardly taken seriously by other, competing nationalisms. The 1918 declaration of independence was premature and issued by a divided and weak body with a limited popular mandate and unable to generate a mass movement. In the short term, the Belarusian nationals were, like most nationalist movements, unsuccessful in achieving their aims.² The Belarusian People's Republic had little popular support among the predominantly illiterate masses it claimed to represent. Lacking an ethnic consciousness, most Belarusian-speakers were either unaware of, or did not comprehend the March 25 declaration of independence. As the German occupation ended, few people came to the republic's defense. Belarus was divided between its neighbors.

While largely symbolic, March 25 made an impression on the Soviet leadership. After the end of the civil and Polish-Soviet wars the Soviets initiated ambitious projects for Belarusian national mobilization. They built Belarusian national institutions, aiming at establishing Soviet rule in Belarus. The paradoxical situation arose that one form of nationalism was manufactured in order to prevent

¹ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 42.

² While there are over 800 nationalist movements in the world, there are less than 200 states. See, for instance Philip G. Roeder, *Where Nation-States Come From: Institutional Change in the Age of Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

another. National mobilization in Belarus differed from other parts of Europe by being organized primarily by outside actors. Stalin, the Soviet Commissar of Nationalities became a founding father of modern Belarusian statehood, the republic itself a large laboratory for the Soviet experiment in nationality policy. The BSSR was intended as a showcase of how the Bolsheviks had resolved the nationalities question. The political experiments we know as Belarusization and Ukrainization were Soviet government attempts at reconciling two rivaling identities, developing as a result of modernization and industrialization; on one hand a class-based identity, on the other a national, or ethnic identity. As the Belarusians were underrepresented in the Communist Party and Soviet organs at the time of the revolution, the Soviet leaders aimed to “root” the Soviet and Communist rule in the young republic, and to attract cadres and sympathizers from outside the ranks of the Bolshevik movement.

At the core of the Belarusian and Ukrainian tragedies lies the failure to deal with the Belarusian and Ukrainian questions at Versailles and Riga, something which turned Belarusian national activists into irredentist potential traitors in the eyes of the Polish and Soviet leaderships. Frustrated with the division of Belarus, the Belarusian national activists responded well to courtship from the Soviet and Lithuanian governments. They gravitated to the camp that appeared to offer them the best deal, opening the Belarusian national movement to manipulation from Warsaw, Kaunas and Moscow, reducing it to a pawn in a larger political game. After Kaunas lost interest in its Belarusian “allies” around 1924, Moscow and Minsk stepped up their efforts to court the national movement in Western Belarus. Most of the Belarusian nationalist movement belonged to the political left, and linked national and class consciousness.

Using Will Kymlicka’s definition of a nation as a “historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture,”³ the BSSR could, at best, be described as a semi-state. It lacked both army and independent administration in the Belarusian language. The BPR, on the other hand, shared a distinct language and culture, but lacked political institutions with any real clout.

³ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

Yet, with the serious constraints imposed by one-party Bolshevik rule, a national cultural renaissance took place in the republic during the 1920s, and a significant part of the exiled Belarusian nationalists perceived it as genuine. Others saw the BSSR as but one step towards statehood and full independence. They welcomed the Soviet Affirmative Action policies as means to an end, rather than an end in itself. In 1925, most of the exiled Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic returned to Soviet Belarus. The relationship between the Belarusian national activists and the Bolsheviks was a marriage of convenience, which gave rise to Belarusian national communism. However, the Belarusians were not ready for independence in 1918. Belarusian national consciousness was poorly developed, and the social base for Belarusian statehood was lacking in 1918-1921. Illiteracy, poverty, and insufficient education delayed the formation of modern identities. In Poland, the closing of Belarusian schools, theological seminars, and papers delayed modernization and social mobilization, preserving pre-modern identities and modes of organization into modern times.

In Poland, the nationalities policies of the *endecja*-dominated governments between 1921 and 1926 were the opposite of those in the BSSR. The *endecja* promoted centralization, Polonization, and assimilation of its “inferior” Eastern Slavic minorities. Inefficiently and inconsistently implemented, the policy alienated its Belarusian minority, increasing pro-Soviet sentiments in Western Belarus. Generously funded by the Soviet Union, a broad, pro-Soviet Belarusian movement emerged by the mid 1920s. The 1925 Concordat with the Vatican and Piłsudski’s 1926 coup d’etat had a profound impact on Warsaw’s ability to counteract and restrain the nationalist movement in Western Belarus. Piłsudski surrounded himself with activists who were eager to subvert the fragile Soviet system and to establish a Polish-led federation of states, reaching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. While there were some minor concessions to the Belarusian national movement in 1926-28, primarily in the field of education, as a number of Belarusian schools were opened, the political repression became much more severe and effective following the establishment of authoritarianism in 1926. Well aware of the pro-Soviet sympathies within the Belarusian movement in Poland, Piłsudski did not regard Belarusian nationalism as a tool that could be used against the Soviet regime. On the contrary, he was well aware of how the Soviets were exploiting Belarusian nationalism for irredentist purposes to weaken the Polish state. Less than a year after his coup,

Piłsudski used his extended powers to clamp down on the Belarusian movement, whose leaders were arrested, jailed, or deported to the Soviet Union.

While Belarus played a marginal role in the strategy of the architects of the Promethean project, whose primary focus was Ukraine, the Soviet leaders became increasingly concerned with Belarusian irredentism within the Soviet Union. To Stalin, who was consolidating his position as the leader of the Soviet Union, Belarusian national communism now appeared a liability. The emerging Stalinist leadership feared that rather than creating national culture, Belarusian national communism had become a breeding ground for Belarusian nationalists, which took up an increasingly independent line to the central government in Moscow. They felt that the concessions to the national communists had been too far-reaching, and that this had weakened their control over the borderlands. The policies of Belarusization and multilingualism met significant opposition within the communities targeted by these programs. The BSSR government's 1926 decision to create a Belarusian army coincided with the initiation of Piłsudski's Promethean project to topple the Soviet government. The government-fanned "war scare" in 1927 demonstrated how weak the popular support for the Bolsheviks was. Rather than adopting a patriotic fervor, the borderlands populations perceived the Poles as potential liberators who would free them from an unpopular system. The central government in Moscow interpreted this political situation in the borderlands as evidence that the nationalities policies of the 1920s had failed. Stalin then utilized the Polish threat to consolidate his power and outmaneuver his opponents.

In 1921, Soviet Belarus had officially been designated as a multilingual state, aiming at neutrality between its four official languages. Yet, the modern project seems to indicate that contemporary states require *one* official language for mass mobilization, efficient governance and administration. In the BSSR, the Belarusians constituted the "core community" or core nationality, which generated "national" conflicts that threatened the regime's ambitious agenda for economic modernization. The Bolsheviks treated Belarusization as a means to muster support for the Bolshevik order among the locals. This appealed to the Belarusian national and cultural elites, who wished to transform Belarusian into a modern language, which would be used to develop a modern Belarusian state. Nation building was a tool to stabilize the new regime and to bring about a social revolution, but not to arouse Belarusian nationalism.

The Bolsheviks were unable to resolve the inherent contradiction between building new nations and striving towards centralism. Soviet and Polish nationalities policies in Belarus and Ukraine vacillated between assimilation and devolution. On neither side of the border did the political situation allow for the building of inclusive, functional polities which satisfied the expectations of the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations.

In the 1920s, the Soviet government attempted to gain support from their national minorities by the implementation of policies, which today are described in terms of affirmative action and multiculturalism, leading to the encouragement of ethnic, national, and linguistic particularism among its non-Russian minorities. These policies were only partly successful. The Soviet classification of peoples into simplistic, easily manageable categories met many challenges and obstacles in the borderlands. Many people felt that the Soviet government artificially maintained the Yiddish and Polish languages, and imposed these languages upon its minority students against their wishes. At the grass roots level, Belarusians misunderstood and resisted being ethnicized as Belarusian. National minorities feared their ghettoization by having their children schooled in Yiddish and Polish, against their wishes. Jews and Poles often attempted to have their children opt out of “ethnic” schools, believing they would have better chances in society with a Russian-language education. Other groups, such as Roman Catholics, consciously used Soviet policies to achieve their own goals, promoting Catholic and Polish culture, and demanding Polish-language schooling for their children. The aim to defuse national problems had instead exacerbated ethnic conflict. Suny and Martin write that: “The now well-known phenomenon of strategic ethnicity, where individuals manipulate their ethnic identity to take advantage of national preferences, also struck the Bolsheviks as unseemly and ungrateful opportunism.”⁴ In the 1920s, the Soviets were uncompromising in their hostility to assimilation, even if it was completely voluntary.⁵ Resistance to the Belarusian language within the administration remained strong. The Soviet authorities often had to use force and intimidation to persuade a reluctant bureaucracy to switch their language of administration and education to Belarusian.

⁴ Suny and Martin, (eds.), “Introduction” in *A State of Nations*, 12.

⁵ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 32.

While guided by good intentions, the policies of Belarusization/Yiddishization/Polonization and official multilingualism reinforced segregation and ghettoism. They created a fractured, weakened society, entrenched ethnic divisions and, in many cases, linked class to ethnicity. Ironically, while the *korenizatsiia* and Belarusization failed to achieve their objectives in the BSSR, they had the effect of strengthening the pro-Soviet attitudes on the other side of the border, in Western Belarus and Volhynia, increasing Polish fears of Belarusian irredentism. They also inspired the Promethean project in Poland.

The principle of national self-identification was abandoned over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1924 and 1926, the transfer of Mahileu, Vitsiebsk, and Homel' areas to the BSSR was based upon a collective re-designation of these areas as ethnically Belarusian, based upon the “expert” opinions of Soviet ethnographers. From 1938, self-identification was abandoned, and nationality was determined by the ethnicity of the parents. “Unlike in Britain, Yugoslavia, India, or America, “Soviet” was never considered an ethnic or national identity,” write Suny and Martin.⁶ Yet, from the 1920s onward, Belarus saw the development of two parallel identities, Soviet and Belarusian. “Soviet patriotism” was linked to a return to propagating “internationalism,” which was tantamount to a Russification, which now began in earnest.

We can identify three main reasons for the destruction of Belarusian national communism. First, the Stalinist revolution from above, initiated in 1928 required new societal modes of organization. The command economy necessitated an extreme level of centralization and a common language of communication. Second, with Piłsudski’s return to power, the Soviet nationalities policies appeared as a liability. Stalin’s obsession with Poland was fuelled by concerns over Promethean plans to detach Belarus and Ukraine from the USSR, triggering the war scare of 1927, which tested the loyalty of Soviet citizens. The hysterical reaction of the Soviet regime reflected a fear that Piłsudski would attempt to exploit the Belarusian movement in the BSSR to undermine the fragile and unpopular Soviet regime. From their own experience the Soviets knew how the national question could be exploited for political purposes against adversaries. Third, the alliance between the Bolsheviks and Belarusian nationalists was a marriage of

⁶ Suny and Martin (eds.), 9.

convenience. The brand of Belarusian national communism propagated by Ihnatouski, Picheta, and Tarashkevich was an awkward ideological hybrid. The ideological and philosophical differences between the Marxist and the Herderian traditions were significant. While the concept of “progress” and linear development were central concepts to the former, the latter, which had influenced Belarusian nationalism, perceived each culture and language as possessing values of its own. Also, the Belarusian national communists had integrated non-Marxist ideas from the SRs and BKhD, and tended to perceive the Belarusians as a classless community. That stance was increasingly seen as a bourgeois political heresy. The Stalinist revolution was accompanied by an ideological change away from Herderian ethnophilia, towards a cult of progress.

From 1915, Belarusian nationalism was exploited for political purposes by governments in Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow, and Kaunas, with the result that the Belarusian nationalists lost control over key aspects of the national program early on. While the Belarusian national movement has failed spectacularly to have their national project recognized in Versailles and Riga, they were able to utilize the rivalry between Poland, Lithuania and the Soviet Union for their own purposes until 1927. As Stalin consolidated his power in the Soviet Union and authoritarian dictatorships were established in Poland and Lithuania in 1926, in this increasingly paranoid political environment the Belarusian national movement attracted the attention of both Warsaw and Moscow. Belarusian nationalism had been reduced to a tool in a regional power struggle, and could rightly be suspected of irredentism. While Warsaw was the first to clamp down on the Belarusian movement, the political terror in the BSSR was incomparably harsher than in Western Belarus.

From the 1930s onwards, national mobilization in the BSSR was carried out in the Russian language. It was accompanied by an extensive and brutal political terror, followed by decades of Russification after World War II. The Belarusian population, unlike many other peoples of the Soviet Union, came to adopt and internalize the Russian language and regard it as its own. In Belarus, Russification was linked to progress, development, and upward social mobility while Belarusian - like Yiddish – was largely linked to a pre-industrial, pre-modern existence. When Belarusian peasants moved into the cities they did not perceive their native language as different from Russian, but rather as a dialect

or a variation of the standard language. “Modernization went hand in hand with Russification,” writes Barbara Törnquist-Plewa.⁷ Asked about the limited use and appeal of the Belarusian language, residents of the Belarusian capital explained it by the multilingualism of its intelligentsia and simply Belarusian parents’ lack of desire to speak Belarusian with their children.⁸

Following John Stuart Mill’s argument that democracy requires homogeneity, it would not be possible if significant communities consider themselves, and are regarded by the central authorities, as “alien.” After a few chaotic years of consolidation in the early 1920s, the fragile multinational states that replaced the collapsed Romanov, Hohenzollern and Habsburg empires pushed for homogenization of their minorities, and in the process of doing so they increasingly resorted to authoritarianism. This development was particularly clear in Poland. The treaties of Paris and Riga had led to the creation of unstable multi-ethnic states, which increasingly relied on violence and intimidation to stay together. The second Rzeczpospolita was a state created against the wishes of its Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian minorities, as well as the Russian Bolsheviks. The treaties had either forced people to live together who did not want to live together, or separated people who desired to live together.

Organized as a nation state with an ethnic core community, post-war BSSR shared many characteristics of the mainstream of European states. Yet, modernity arrived in Soviet form, implemented in the Russian language. In Minsk, Belarusian was used so infrequently that street signs in Belarusian were sometimes taken for misspellings. The cultural and ethnic homogenization, paradoxically brought a new hybrid identity: Belarusian identity became *both* Soviet and Belarusian. Nevertheless, the BSSR’s status as the third most important Soviet republic was marked by certain distinguishing features, such as its own seat in the United Nations and a new flag, with clear “national” symbolism. A prioritized region in the Soviet Union, the BSSR experienced a heavy industrialization and significant improvements of its standard of living. The “de-nationalization” of the republic was given an ideological expedience.

Attending the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the BSSR in January, 1959, Khrushchev lost his temper when the CPB leader Kirill Mazurau delivered his speech at the gala ceremony in Belarusian,

⁷ Törnquist-Plewa, *Vitryssland* (2001), 69-71; Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language,” 1014, 1039.

⁸ Zen’kovich, *Granitsy, spory, obidy*, 246.

swearing that he could not understand a damned thing, “*Ni cherta ne poniatno*,”⁹ and stating that communism would be built faster in Belarus if the Belarusians learned to speak Russian. Pleased that no one he met in Minsk spoke Belarusian, Khrushchev announced in 1962 that “The Belarusians will be the first to attain communism.”¹⁰

Soviet anthropologists now claimed that races were a result of pre-class societies, and would disappear as society moved towards communism. The rapprochement and merger of the socialist nations would lead to a new nation, characterized by a common, socialist culture, speaking in the language of “international communication,” i.e. Russian.¹¹ Nowhere else in the Soviet Union was Soviet identity more firmly ingrained than among the post-war residents of the BSSR. Under Masherau, Belarusian language schools were closed en masse in the cities of the BSSR. In the late 1980s, 69 per cent of the Belarusians identified themselves as “Soviet”, the highest number of any Soviet republic.¹² The first post-Soviet leader of Belarus, Stanislau Shushkevich complained bitterly that the Soviet Belarusians became the most Soviet of all people in the former USSR, “more Soviet than the Russians themselves, and could not hide their pride in that fact.”¹³

When independence arrived in 1991, the Belarusians were reluctant to embrace it. The goal of the nationalists – a united, independent and internationally recognized Belarus with one official language – Belarusian – was achieved despite the conspicuous absence of Belarusian nationalism. Rather than being perceived as an historical justice, independence appeared shocking and confusing. Ironically, the political situation in 1991 curiously resembled that of 1918. While there was a nationalist elite, which enthusiastically embraced independence, it was a relatively small group with limited popular support. The *nomenklatura* retained its identification with the BSSR and heroic Soviet exploits during Great Patriotic

⁹ Zaprudnik, 106.

¹⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹¹ Gustavsson, “Belarus,” 52.

¹² By comparison, in Russia the number was 63%, in Ukraine 42%. Astrid Sahm, “Belarus’ von der parlamentarischen Republik zum präsidentalen Regime“, in Rainer Lindner and Boris Meissner (eds.) *Die Ukraine und Belarus’ in der Transformation: Eine Zwischenbilanz* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 2001), 125.

¹³ Shushkevich, *Neokommunizm v Belarusi*, 35.

War. The nationalist opposition was less successful in its attempts to establish an alternative national historiography on the basis of the BPR and the near-forgotten tradition of anti-Bolshevik resistance.

While Ukrainian voters voted on December 1, 1991 to reconfirm the Ukrainian declaration of independence, the only referendum that took place in the BSSR was in March 1991, when 82.7 per cent of votes were cast in favor of retaining the Union, a number higher than any other republic outside Central Asia.¹⁴ The Republic of Belarus, which gained independence and international recognition in 1991, lacked a political orientation and a strong nationalist movement to give the independent state a “national” content. The Belarusian People’s Front, founded in 1988, was too elitist to gain massive political support. Lukashenka’s reliance on “national” rhetoric from 2002 fits into a larger pattern of homogenization and nationalization that is taking place all across Europe. What makes Belarus different is that while it is organized on ethnic principles, the popular interest in rejuvenating the Belarusian language and remains tepid, as people remain ambivalent about their identity.

Following the Perestroika and Belarusian independence in 1991 there has been a renewed interest in the Soviet nationalities policies of the 1920s. During the post-war era, the Belarusian national movement was reduced to a footnote in Soviet history books. While the nationalist opposition has attempted to renew its legacy, its success has been limited. Soviet references had instead taken their place. Unlike Western Ukraine and the Baltic republics, the living memory of the past was gone and the link to the past broken.

While both the president and the opposition are engaged in nation building, they are producing rival national mythologies. The Lukashenka regime has restored the Soviet Belarusian core myths of national suffering, resistance, and heroism in the Great Patriotic War as the *raison d'être* of the state and the centerpiece of its “national ideology.” The nationalist opposition provides an alternative historiography, in which historical legitimacy for Belarusian statehood is found in the Principality of Polatsk, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the Belarusian People’s Republic.¹⁵ FIGURE 23. The

¹⁴ Per A. Rudling, “Belarus in the Lukashenka Era: National Identity and Relations with Russia,” in Oliver Schmidtke and Serhiy Yekelchyk (eds.), *Europe’s Last Frontier?: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine between Russia and the European Union* (Hounds Mills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 60.

nationalists dismiss the official historiography as denationalized, while the regime has continued the Soviet practice of linking the nationalist opposition to Fascism and portraying them as enemies of the state.¹⁶ While Lukashenka's regime has started to show some interest in the BPR, there has been little common ground between the two traditions.

¹⁵ They tend to overlook the experiences under Kievan Rus, Tsarist Russia, and the Soviet period, even interpreting the Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* in terms of conspiracies against the Belarusian national movement, a trap set by the Soviet authorities to have the nationally conscious Belarusians revealing their true political positions, in order to be able to repress them. Kotljarchuk, "The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood," 48; Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 360-361; Tobias Ljungvall, *Kontroll: Rapport från Vitryssland* (Stockholm: SILC, Svenskt intnationellt liberalt centrum, 2003), 13; Zen'kovich, 150.

¹⁶ Kotljarchuk, "The Tradition of Belarusian Statehood," 61.

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Narodnaia Sprava (1926)

Nash Holas (1927)

Nasha Dolia (1906)

Nasha Niva (1906-1915)

Nasha Prauda (1926)

Nasha Sprava (1926)

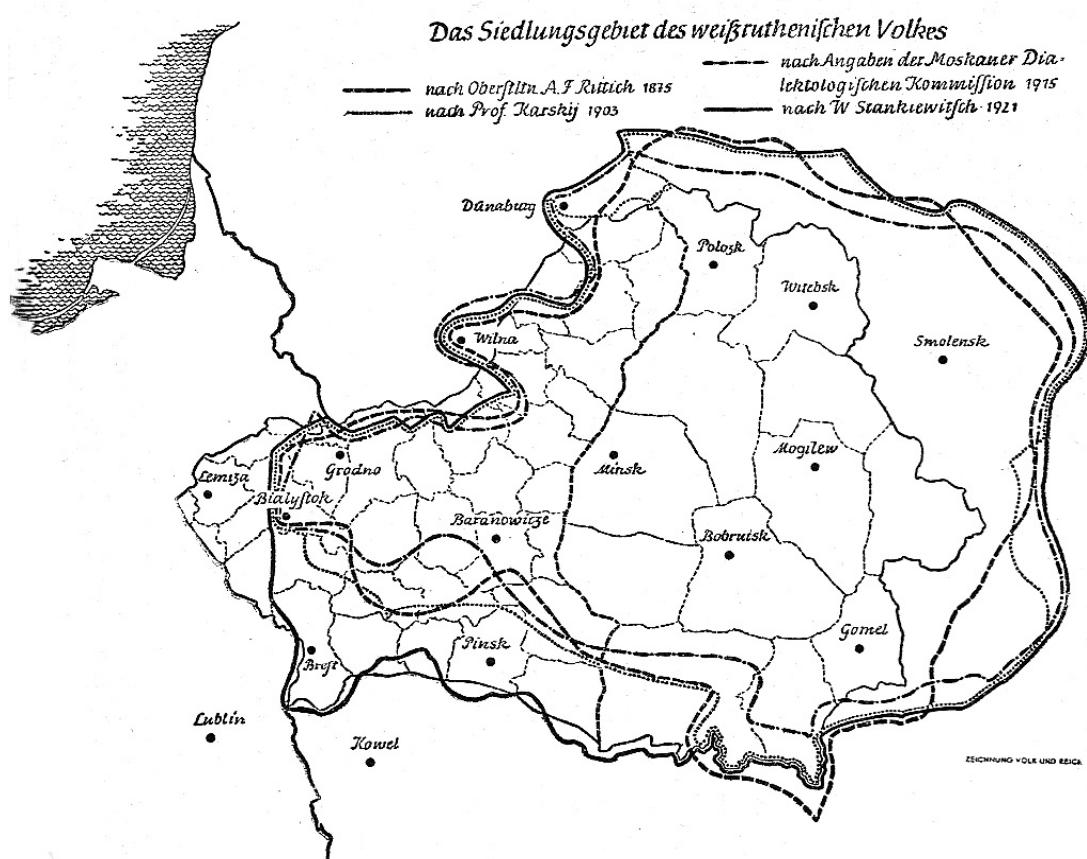
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Zvon (1919)

FIGURE 1 – The Belarusian area of settlement.



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FIGURE 2 – Distribution of Belarusian dialects, according to BPR activist Arkadz' Smolich.



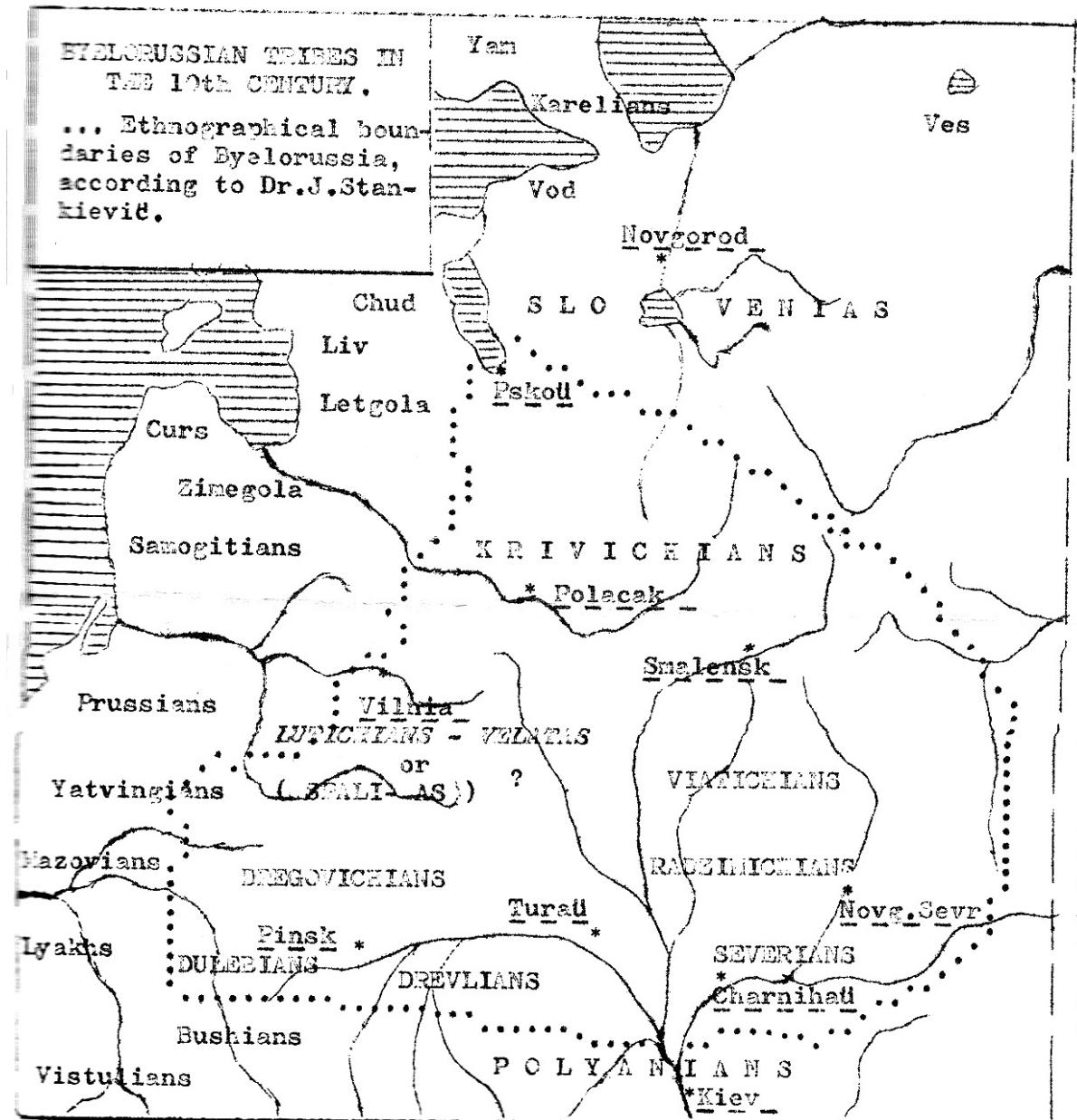
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FIGURE 3 – The Ethnographic Map of Belarus



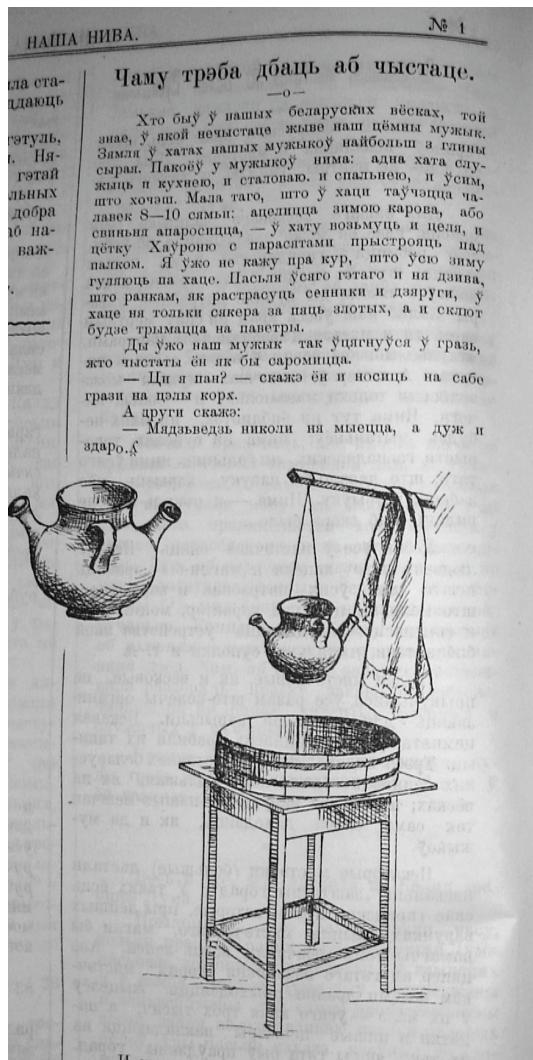
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FIGURE 4 – Belarusian Tribes in the 10th Century



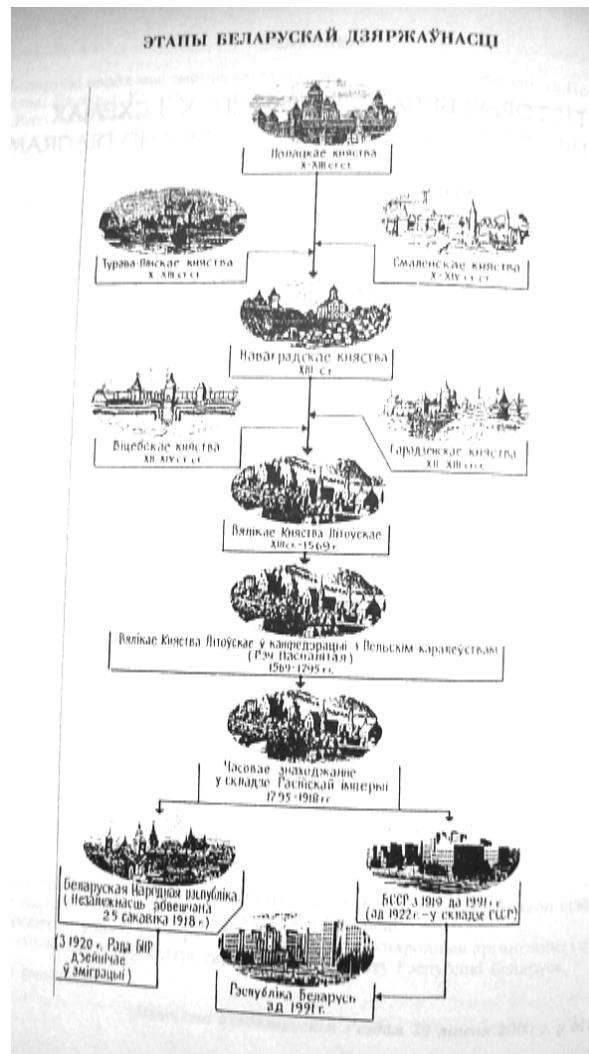
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FIGURE 5



Nasha Niva No. 1, January 4, 1908: 4

FIGURE 23



Belaruski Natsyianal'ny Hramadski Arhanizatsyiny Kamitet "Belarus' – 2000" Zhurtanvanne Belarusau Sveu "Bats'kaushchyna,"/Belarusian National Public Organizing Committee "Belarus – 2000" International Association of the Belarusian People "Batskaushchyna" *Histarychny Shliakh Belaruskai Natsyi i Dziarzhavy/The History of the Belarusian Nation and State* (Minsk: "Belaruski khihazbor, 2001), 122.

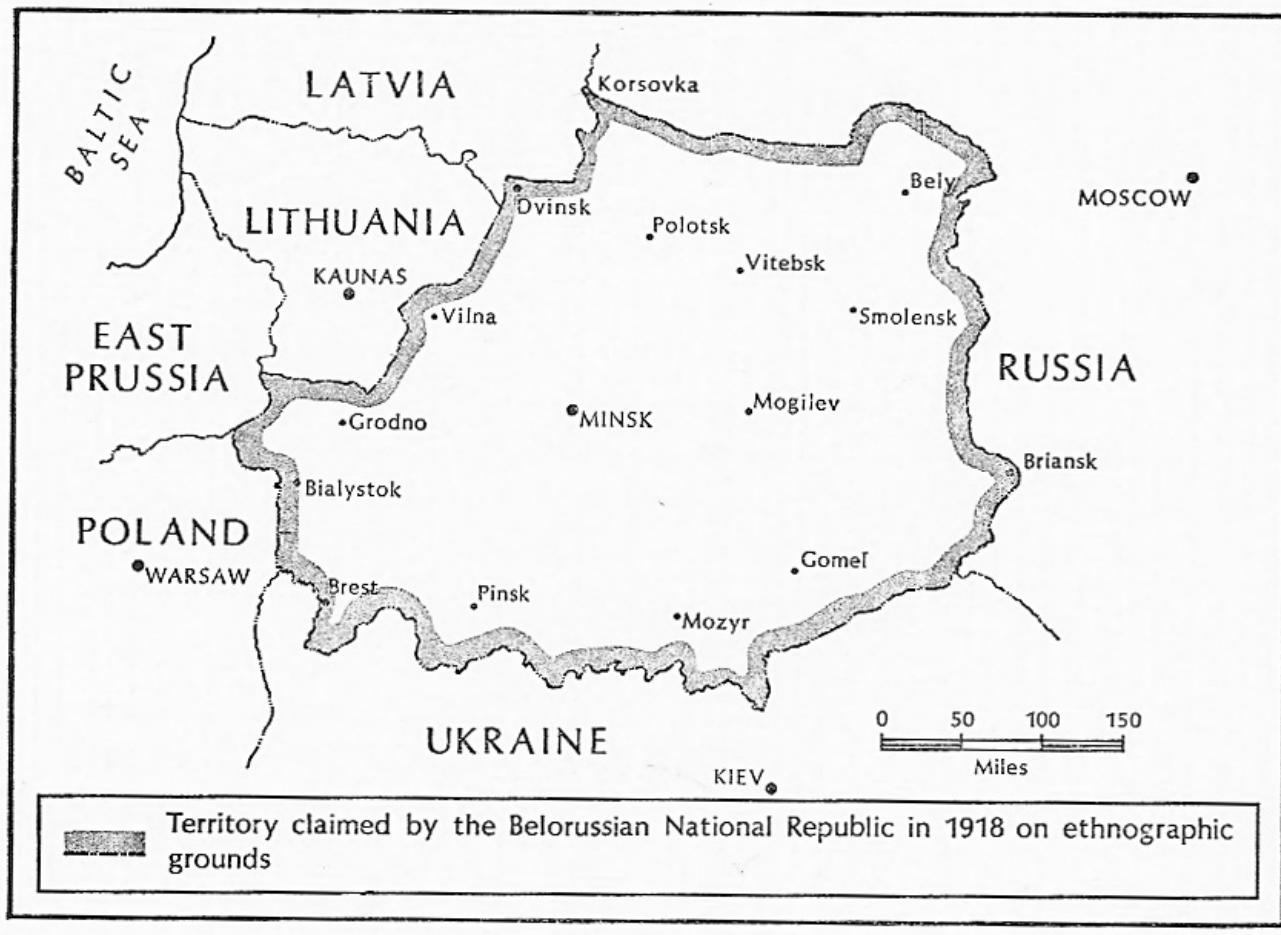
FIGURE 6 –The Ober Ost Land under German Occupation



The Ober Ost State – Main Administrative Divisions

Vejas Liulevicius. *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity & German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 60.

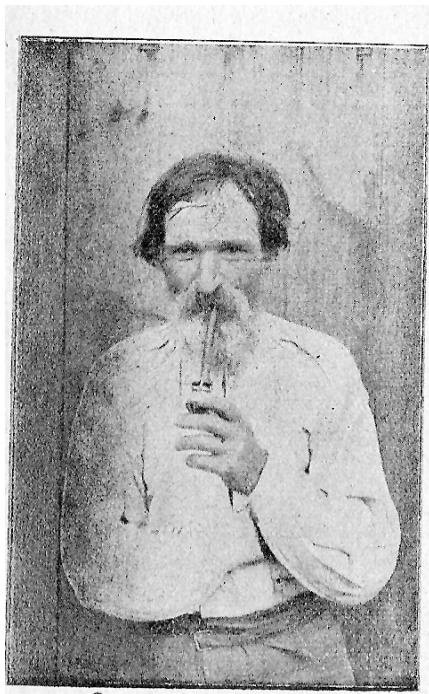
FIGURE 7 – The Belarusian People's Republic



THE BELORUSSIAN NATIONAL REPUBLIC

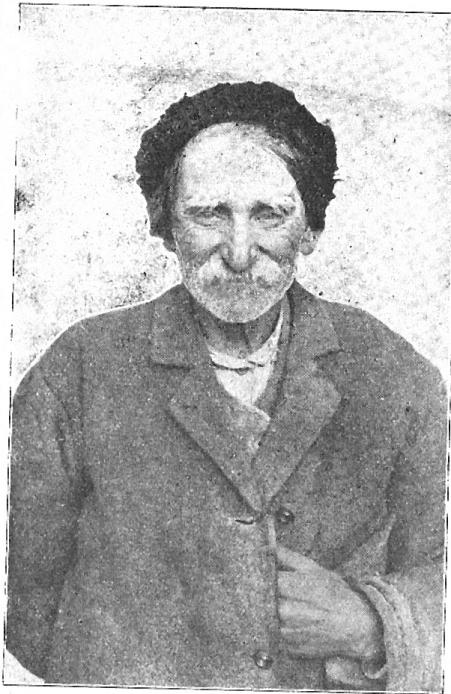
Ivan S. Lubachko, *Belarussia under Soviet Rule, 1917-1957* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 1972), 34.

FIGURE 8 – Belarusian proprietor



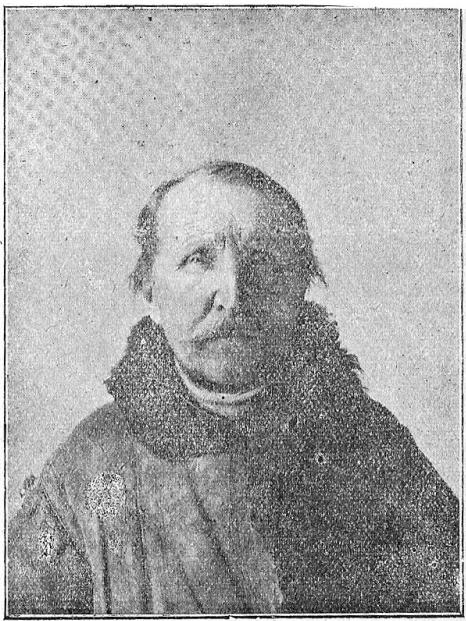
Рыс. 52. Стары гаспадар.

FIGURE 9 – peasant from the Miensk area



Селянін з пад Менску.

FIGURE 10 – Belarusian nobleman



Рыс. 53. Беларускі шляхціц.

FIGURE 11 – Belarus (from Ilya Repin's painting)



Беларус (з аброза Репіна).

FIGURE 12 – Female dress from Kletsk area



Жаночая вopратка
з пал Клецку

FIGURE 13 – Sketch of Belarusian woman



Наметка.

FIGURE 14 – “Ancient Belarusian Types”



Даўнешыя беларускія тыпы.

FIGURE 15 – “Belarusian Types”



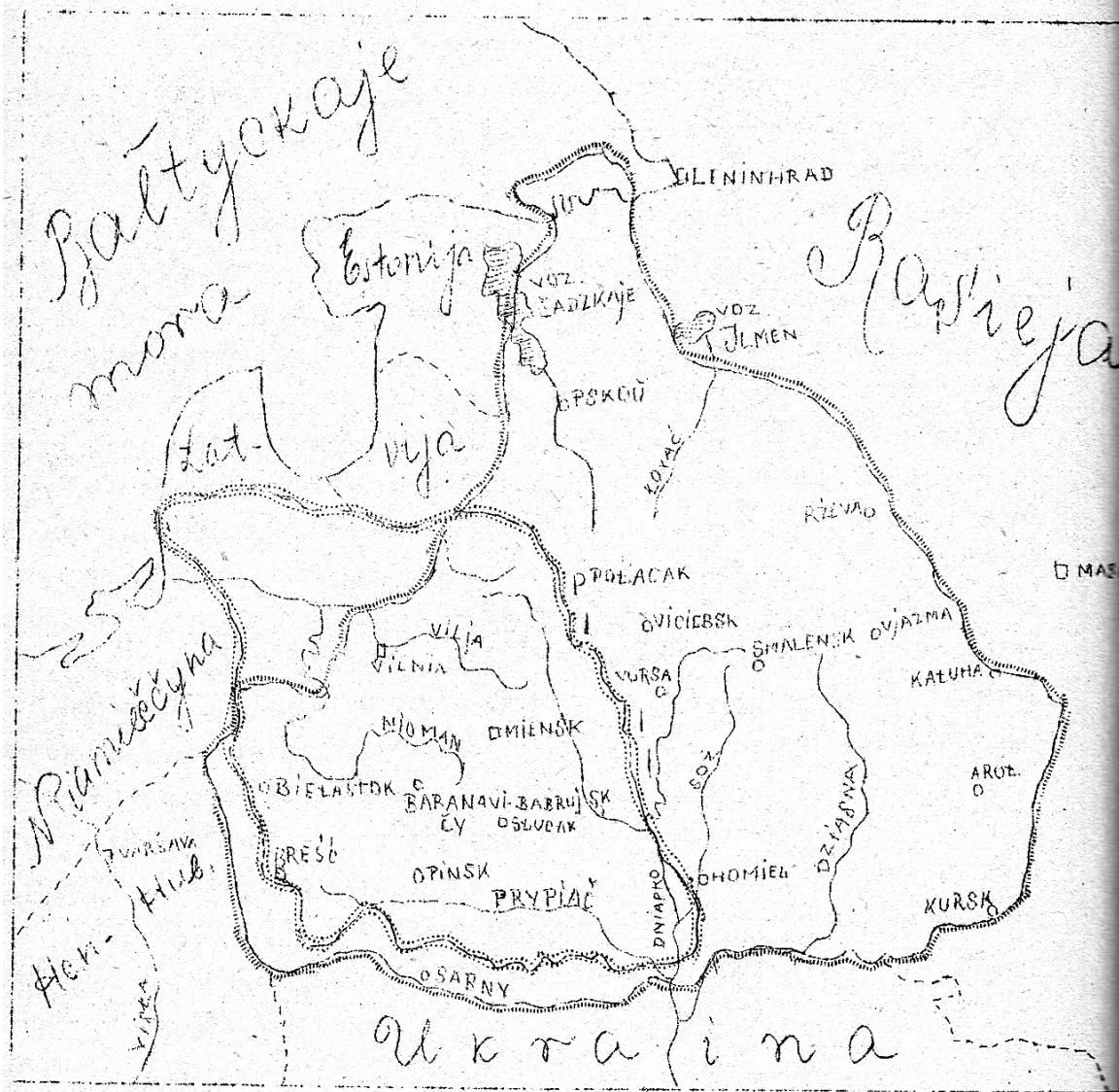
Рыс. 55. Беларускія тыпы.

FIGURE 16 – Litbel

- 42 -

Hranicy stvoranaj balsavikami u 1919 hodzie t.zvanaj -

- L I T B I E L - (Litoūska-Biežaruskaj Respubliki)



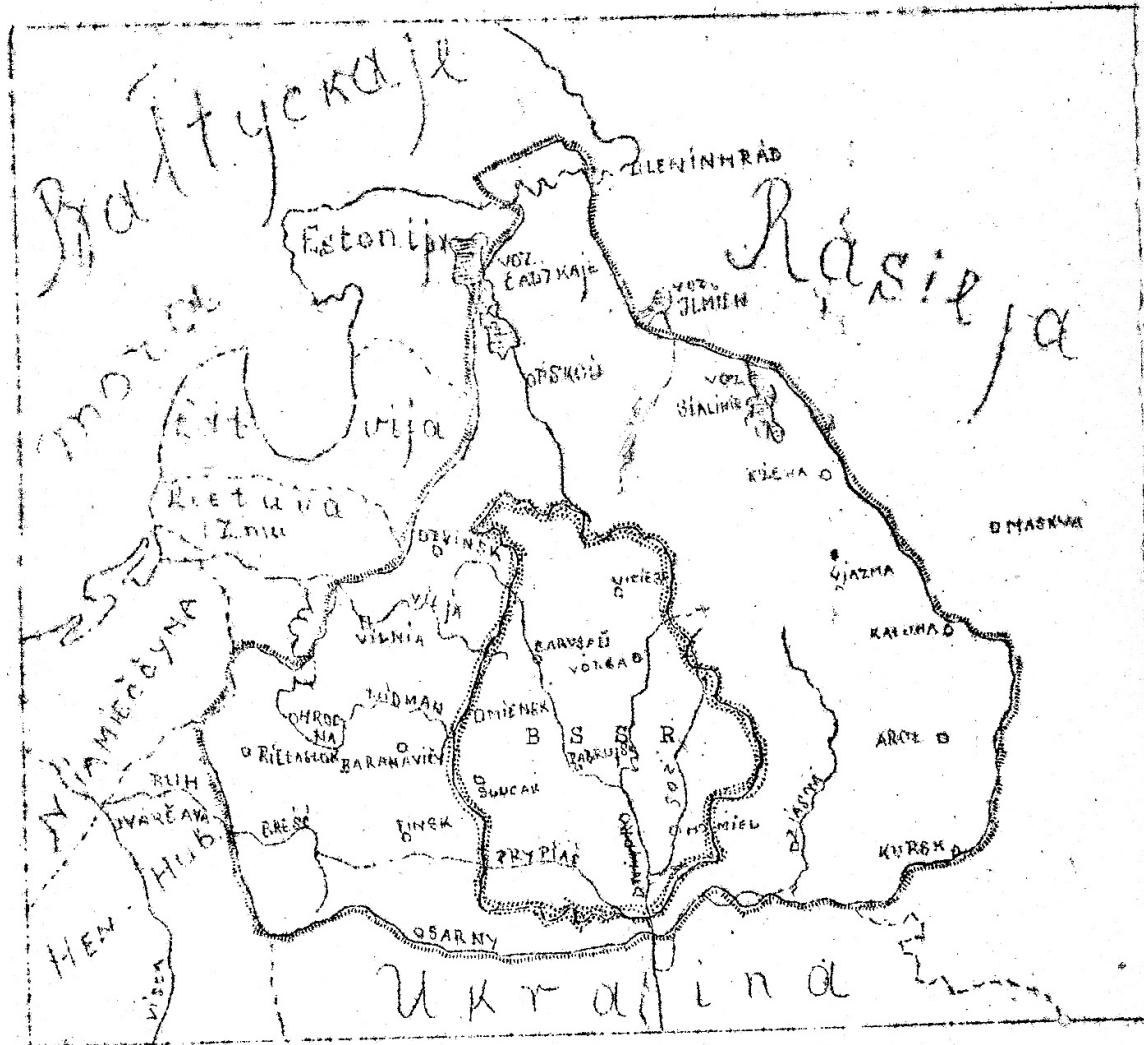
Umoňyja znaki: — -Hranicy biežaruskaha jazyka.

..... -Hranicy "Litbielu"

FIGURE 17 – BSSR 1926-1939

Hranicy B S S R z 1925 pa 1939 hod.

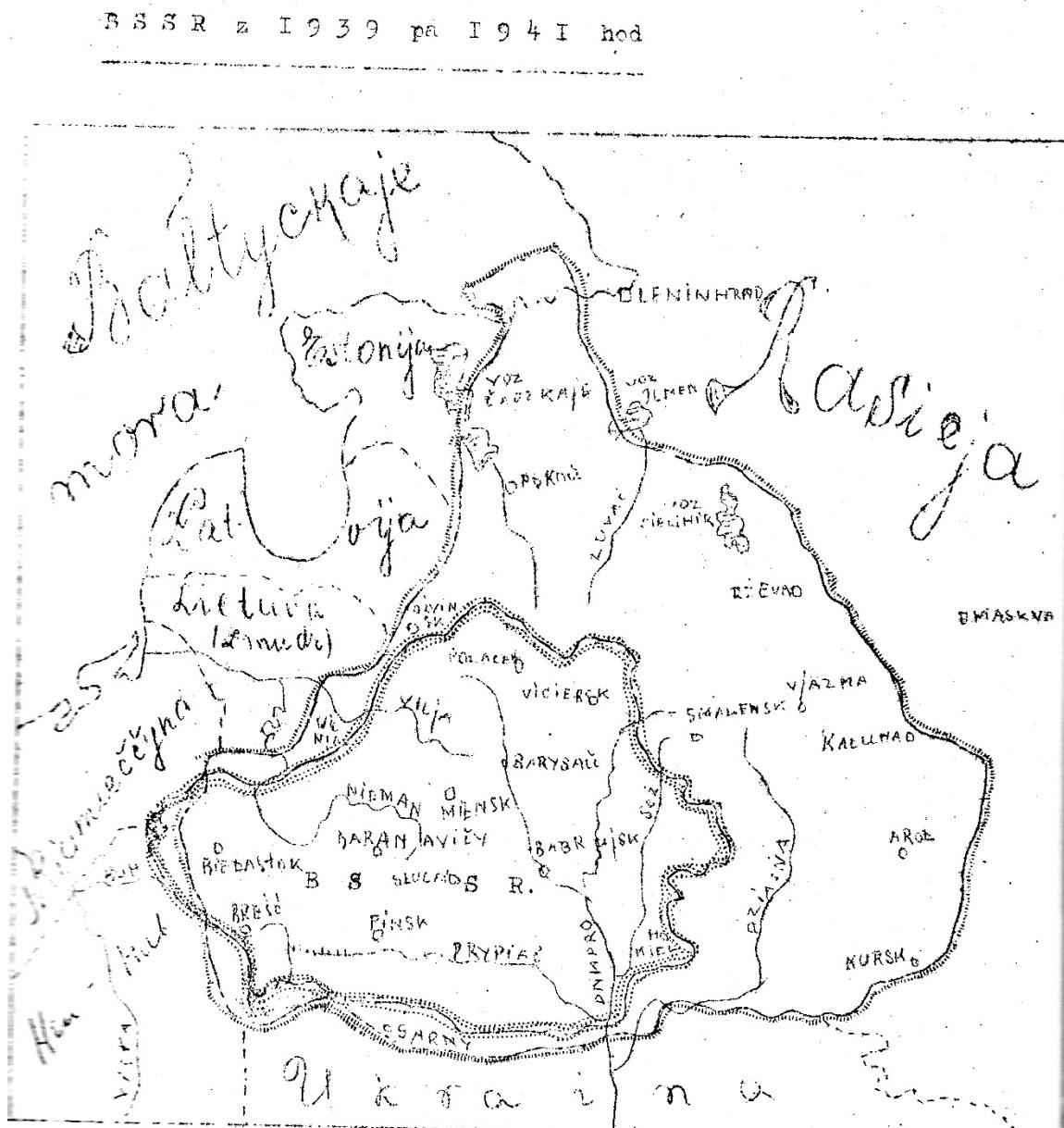
U hestych hranicach narachovyvajecca užo praz 5 miljonai násiel.



Umožnyja znaki: —— Hranicy bielaruskaha jazyka.

---- Hranicy B S S R z 1925 pa 1939 hod.

FIGURE 18 – BSSR 1939-1941



Umownyje znaki:
 ——— - Hranicy biełaruskaha jazyka.
 —— - Hranicy BSSR z 1939-1941 hod.

Abramčyk, Mikoła *Historyia Bielarusi u kartakh: pavodle lektsyi chytanykh inh. M. Abramčykom, na kursakh Belarusavedy u Berline 1941-1942*. Berlin: Vydan'ne Belaruskaha kamitetu samopomashchy, Berlinskaha addzelu, 1942.

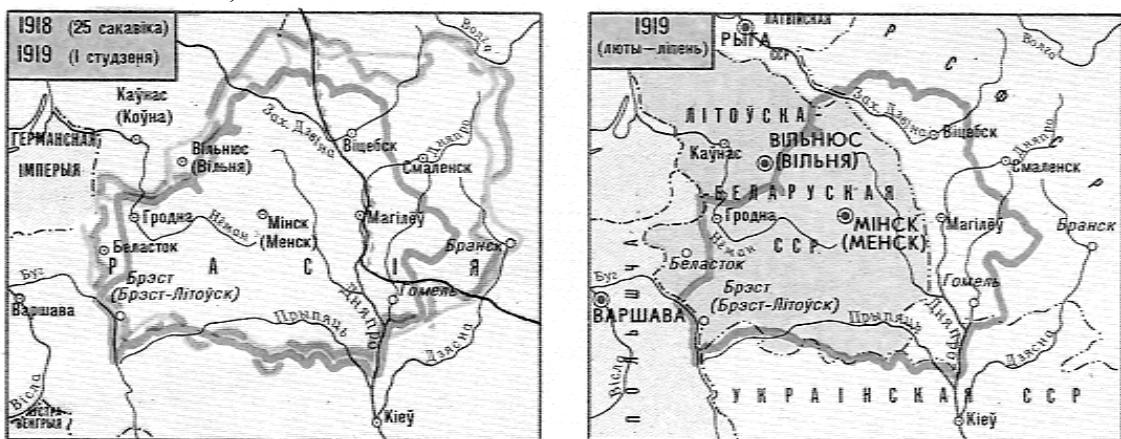
FIGURE 19



Apracavaū-compiled by Jury Popko, 69 Heidelberg 1 · BRD, 1971 Scale 1 : 6,680.000 Reproduction permitted

Jury Popko's Ethnographic Map of Belarus, 1971, Wiktor Ostrowski, *The Ancient Names and Early Cartography of Byelorussia*, 2nd Edition. (London: Wiktor Ostrowski, 1971), plate xxxiii.

FIGURE 20 – BSSR, the first SSRB and LitBel



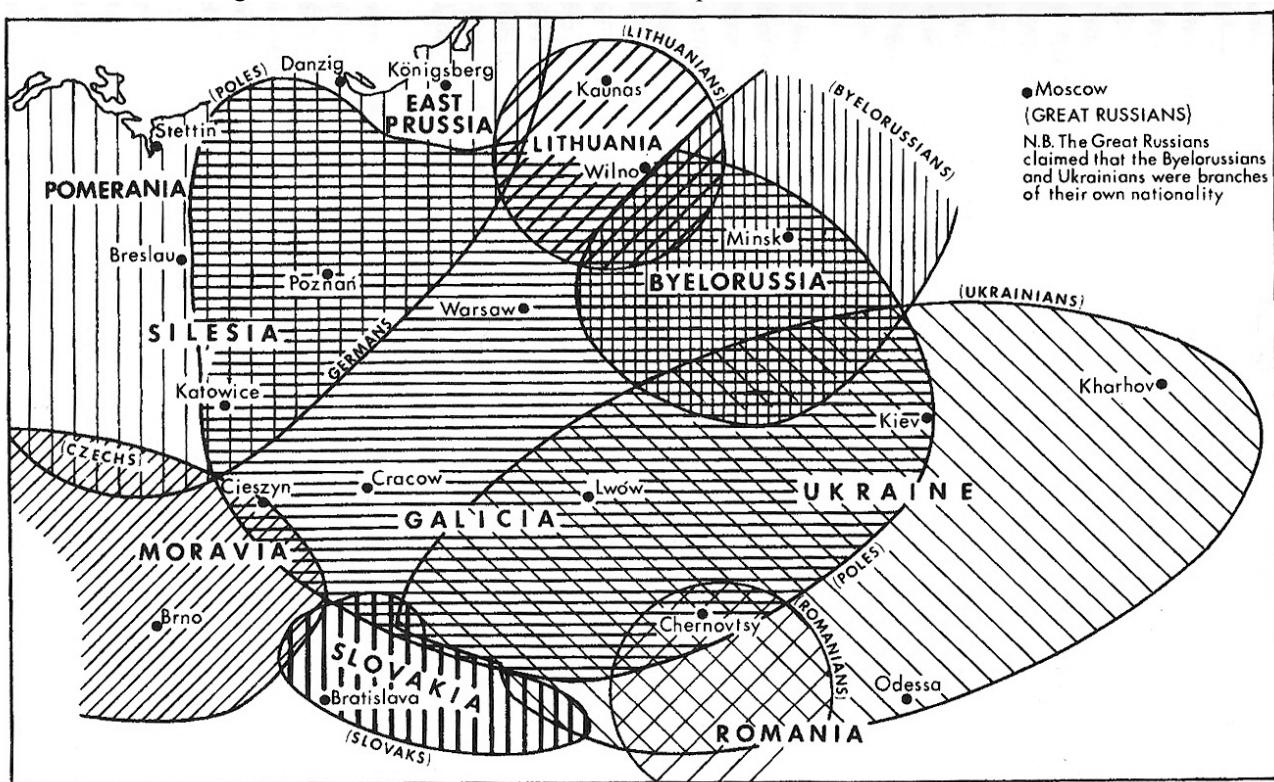
Spartak Aliaksandravich Pol'ski (ed.), *Belarusy : Etnaheahrafia, demahrafia, dyiaspara, kanfesii: atlas* (Minsk: Kamitet dziarzhaunykh znakau pry ministerstve finansau Respubliki Belarus, 1996), 3.

FIGURE 21 – The quadrilingual Coat of Arms of the BSSR, 1927-1938



Viktar Smiatannikou, *Belarusnaustva: Vuchebna-mataad. dapam. dlia vykladchykau siarednikh spetsial'nykh ustanou* (Minsk: Belaruskaia navuka, 1998), 115.

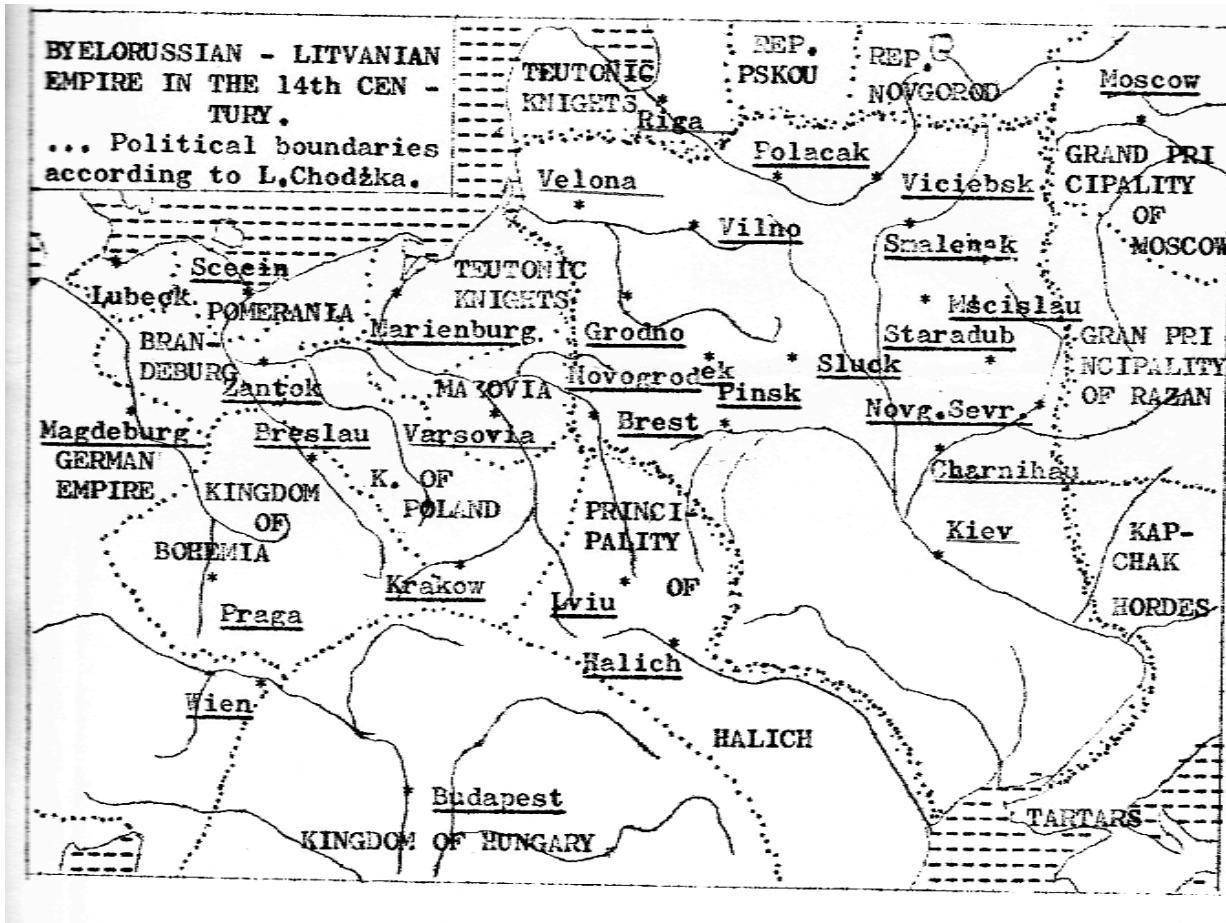
FIGURE 22 – Rivaling territorial claims in East Central Europe.



Conflicting Territorial Claims of the Nationalities, c. 1900

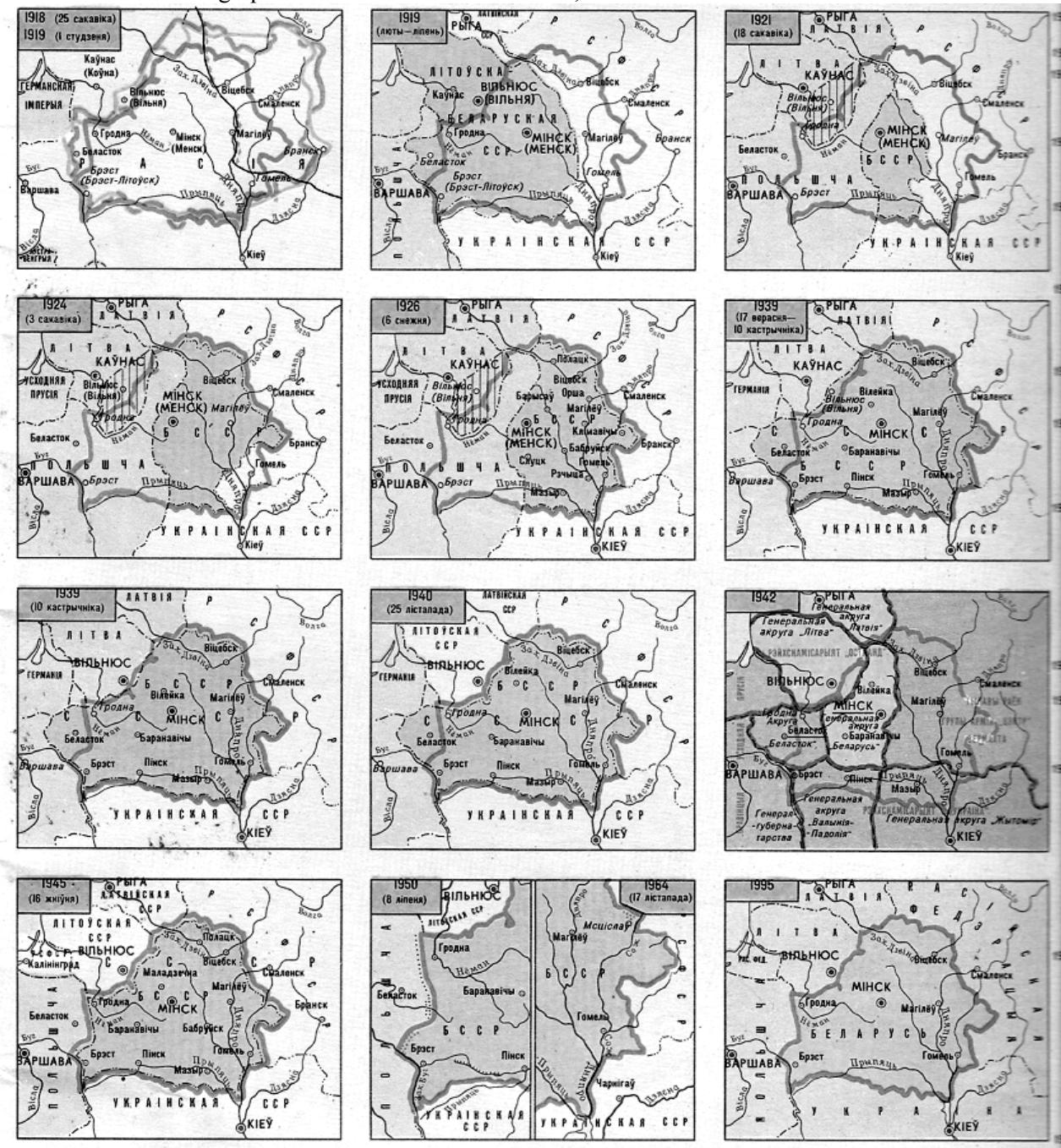
Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, Vol. II, Revised Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 49.

FIGURE 24



Uladyslau Rzy-Rysky, *Byelorussia Between Tartaria and Rome* (Princeton: The Board of Scientific Research "Leu Sapieha" of the International Institute of the Byelorussian Studies, St. Eufrasinia of Polacak, 1960a), 1.

FIGURE 25 – The Geographic borders of Belarusian states, 1918–1991



Pol'ski, 3.