

# Between Local and National: the Case of Eastern Belarus in 1917

BY

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In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Belarusian society could be described as traditional and conservative. Most of the ethnically Belarusian population, nearly 98 per cent, was concentrated in the countryside, with few chances of upward social mobility (Guthier 1977, 43; Tereshkovich 2001, 82).<sup>2</sup> The archaic lifestyle provided peasants with a feeling of undisturbed existence which they were reluctant to give up, while their identity remained defined in local rather than national terms. The peasantry lacked internal mechanisms to facilitate the process of its integration into the modern national community. Thus, the educated strata of society willing to promote the modern project of a Belarusian nation first had to introduce this idea to the majority of the population (Toké 2003, 18).

After the February Revolution broke up the Russian imperial regime, liberalization and democratization opened new avenues for the national activism of this kind. With regard to Belarus, this concerned primarily the territories in contemporary eastern Belarus, which were not occupied by the German Empire, and included parts of Minsk, Viciebsk and Mahilioŭ provinces.<sup>3</sup>

Belarusian patriots in these provinces faced the task of promoting Belarusian national consciousness among various segments of the population and involving the masses in the political process. Miroslav Hroch referred to these people as national activists of the *Phase B*, which in his typology denoted the stage of active patriotic agitation. Hroch's model postulates that national movements are sparked by the start of scholarly interest in the nation, initiating the so-called *Phase A*. *Phase B* starts as soon as scientific explorations move into the practical realm and a group within the educated strata of society decides to offer a new national identity to the masses. The premise for successful national agitation implies the creation of a certain system of

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<sup>2</sup> Such a social structure was not exceptional in the region, since about 94 per cent of Ukrainians and 96 per cent of Lithuanians inhabited rural areas as well (Bauer and others 1991, 69).

<sup>3</sup> At this time, the western parts of the Minsk province, as well as the Vilnia and Hrodna provinces, were under German military administration, which imposed different conditions on local national movements (Liulevicius 2000, 7–8; Kasmach 2016, 321–340).

coordinates, including the delimitation of territorial boundaries, the dissemination of historical knowledge, and the establishment and regulation of national traditions. In the aftermath of *Phase B*, the national movement transforms into a ‘material force’ (Hroch 2005, 45–46) initializing *Phase C*, at which point the national movement receives mass support (Hroch 2000, 23). Within this model, patriotic agitation by the elites, defining for *Phase B*, has to be studied against the background of the social transformations specific to each society (Hroch 2000, 178–179).

Yet analysis of European societies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries reveals that this process was never as smooth and linear as the theory suggests.<sup>4</sup> In particular, national activists often had to deal with a number of obstacles in order to be able to assert themselves against the passive majority and create their own mass following. Competition of the new national elites for the ‘souls’ of potential supporters had to overcome the major obstacle of indifference to their cause.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the Belarusian case, the project of the modern Belarusian nation had yet to overcome the heavy influence of colonial discourses of West Russism and modern Polish nationalism (Bulgakov 2006, 115–128), both of which presented Belarus as a marginalized region. The political context of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the assimilatory pressures directed towards Belarusians, slowed down the evolution of their national movement (Kappeler 2003, 34).

Another distinctive feature of the Belarusian national milieu, similar to its Ukrainian counterpart, was its increased receptiveness to socialist rather than nationalist agitation, a common feature of peasant-dominated society. In this respect, the convergence of social and national demands could be used as an effective means of mobilizing the masses, which also explains the popularity of the socialist parties (Rudling 2014, 22; Kappeler 2003, 31). On the other hand, the socialist character of the leading Belarusian political parties and their emphasis on social liberation rather than a clear national self-determination program precluded the inclusion of all social strata in the process of modern nation construction.

Socialists focused on their own narrow vision of a nation, rooted in the perceptions of Belarusians as predominantly peasant masses, Orthodox by religion, and populating the countryside. Consequently, the nation was interpreted

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<sup>4</sup> For the Belarusian case, historians note several distinctive features, such as a coincidence of all three phases during the Belarusization process in the early 1920s (Markava 2016, 280) or the need to expand Hroch's theory in order to explain the dynamics of national movements within the multiethnic socialist state, as was the case of Belarusian nation-building in the Soviet Union (Bekus 2010, 829).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Jeremy King and Tara Zahra discuss the issue of national indifference and nationalizing efforts in Bohemia (King 2002; Zahra 2008). Caitlin Murdock's work provides an additional perspective with attention to the reasons for the persisting character of national ambiguities, using the case of the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands (Murdock 2010). James Bjork raises the issues of practical implementation of modernist theories of nationalism in the problematic case of Upper Silesia, where non-national and national identities coexisted for a long time (Bjork 2008).

in exclusivist terms, leaving no place for the nobles or even, often, the Roman Catholics (Michaluk 2010, 320). Moreover, in contrast to the Lithuanians, whose elites had strong connections to the peasantry (Sukiennicki and Siekierski 1984, 53–54), Belarusian activists had other backgrounds: most of them belonged to the smallholding gentry with strong ties to Polish culture, magnified through common religion and language affinity. Thus, the broad masses of the ethnically-Belarusian peasant population, which was either Orthodox or converted to Orthodoxy, had little in common with its largely Roman Catholic elites from noble backgrounds, which further contributed to the weak position of the national movement (Snyder 2003, 45–47).

Methodologically, this article is based on the modernist approach to the study of nationalism, assuming the artificial nature of every national project and treating it as a product of certain conditions, which enabled nationalism to emerge in the capacity of a political principle (Gellner 1983, 1). Within this framework, this article addresses Belarusian nation-building after the February Revolution, focusing on the transition from local to national forms of identification. My chief aim here is to identify and analyze the practical challenges of the national mobilization process after the February Revolution, based on internal documents of Belarusian organizations, memoirs, and materials from the major newspaper of the Belarusian national milieu in 1917, *Vol'naja Bielaruś*.

The article concentrates on three main areas reflecting the challenges of the Belarusian nation-building process in 1917. First, it will discuss the political education efforts of Belarusian national activists among the peasantry. Second, it will focus on the narrower issue of establishing a system of national schooling and the role of teachers as bearers of competing ideologies. Finally, it will outline the connections between Belarusian national activism and religion, with a specific focus on the involvement of both Catholic and Orthodox churches in the process of Belarusian nation-building.

### **Belarusian Dilemmas in Minsk and Beyond**

In contrast to the Belarusian areas under German occupation, abandoned by the refugees, the eastern Belarusian provinces were overpopulated during the First World War (Głogowska 1996, 24). The influx of armies, refugees, workers, and administrative personnel to the cities disrupted the ethnic composition of the population, which further disadvantaged Belarusian national mobilization. According to Alieh Latyšonak's estimates, the armies of the Western Front (its headquarters were stationed in Minsk) numbered over 1,500,000 soldiers and officers of non-Belarusian ethnic origin. At the same time, about 636,000 ethnic Belarusians from

Minsk, Viciebsk, and Mahilioŭ provinces were mobilized into the Russian army and sent away from home to distant fronts. Similarly to *Ober Ost*, the economic life was reorganized in such a way so as to satisfy military needs first: this is especially noticeable in the creation of new enterprises for the army and employment of workers mobilized from the interior of Russia (Latyšonak 2009, 33).

Another problem was that Minsk initially did not offer a lot of space for Belarusians. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city was firmly anchored in the Russian cultural space. While there was some connection to local traditions, as the growing interest in Belarusianness after the Revolution of 1905 indicated, overall Minsk was a result of Russification policies, which influenced even its Jewish population (Šybieka 2007, 293).<sup>6</sup> Speaking about the population of Minsk in 1917, Kanstancin Jezavitaŭ notes in his memoirs the predominance of local Jews in industries, trade, and press. In these circumstances, it was very difficult to notice the Belarusian movement, especially if newcomers and strangers were not interested in local national life (Jezavitaŭ 1993, 26). On the other hand, positions of the Polish culture remained strong in Minsk, reinforced by the arrival of the significant numbers of Polish refugees to the eastern Belarusian provinces in 1915 (Tarasiuk 2007, 111).<sup>7</sup> Newspapers of the period colourfully described Minsk as ‘Harbin of the rear, where all the natives have disappeared’ (*Bielaruski Šliach*, Nr. 12, 6 April 1918, p. 1).

Repressive restrictions imposed by the tsarist authorities at the start of the First World War were lifted in 1917, and the territories to the east of the front line experienced an unusual surge of political activities. The revolutionary changes of 1917 also influenced the status of Viłnia and Minsk as Belarusian centers. By early 1917, the Belarusian national movement still developed in parallel form, but not with equal intensity, in both cities. During the First World War, Viłnia became more prominent in cultural and educational matters due to the specifics of the occupation regime, which allowed for a limited degree of freedoms in these spheres, yet the German powers restricted all other activities. In these circumstances, Minsk was assuming the role of a political center during 1917 (Tsvikevich 1918, 7).

On 25–27 March 1917, about 150 delegates gathered in Minsk for the First Congress of Belarusian National Organizations. They were determined to estimate the power of the Belarusian movement and to ‘show its face to the world’ (Ž. 1925, 202). The Congress established the Belarusian National Committee (*Bielaruski Nacyjanałny Kamitet*, BNK), chaired by Raman Skirmunt. In July 1917, it was replaced by the Central Rada of Belarusian Organizations and Parties, later

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<sup>6</sup> According to the 1897 Russian Imperial Census data, the population of Minsk was 90,912 people, Belarusians made up 9 per cent of the total population, 25.5 per cent were Russian, 11.4 per cent were Polish, and 51.2 per cent were Jewish (Guthier 1977, 45).

<sup>7</sup> In 1915, the number of Polish refugees in Minsk province alone was estimated at more than 90,000 (Zienkiewicz 1997, 111).

transformed into the Great Belarusian Rada (Vialikaja Bielaruskaja Rada, VBR) ('Vialikaja Bielaruskaja Rada', *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 27, 30 October 1917, p. 1). In its 'Letter to the Belarusian People', the Rada declared its main goal to be the unification of all Belarusians from Viľnia, Viciebsk, Hrodna, Minsk, and Mahilioŭ provinces into one big family (Turuk 1921, 95–96).

The revolutionary events of 1917, along with political liberalization, represented new challenges for the Belarusian peasantry as well, as it was forced out of its traditional existence. The process of adjusting to new political circumstances and democratic government, compared to the more repressive conditions of the preceding Russian Empire, required time. Clearly, the process of involving the peasantry in politics was slow not only in Belarusian territories, but in other parts of Europe too, as Eugen Weber demonstrated in his study on the transformation of French peasants into citizens of the Third Republic in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Weber 1976). According to Weber, the political indifference of peasants gave way to participation only when they abandoned limited thinking in terms of their own local community and thought of themselves as members of a much larger community – a nation (Weber 1976, 242). Weber described this increasing involvement of the peasantry in politics and their subsequent transition to modernity as the 'country's colonization by the town' (Weber 1976, 241).

The national activists of Miroslav Hroch's *Phase B*, who were struggling for the 'souls' of potential supporters, had to overcome the major obstacle of local forms of identification, otherwise described as the national indifference of the masses. Alternative terms range from national ambivalence, national apathy, and bi-nationalism to regionalism and backwardness (Zahra 2010, 98). In the Belarusian case, indifference to nation-wide affairs is generally known as *tutejšasć*, consequently, while people with predominantly local identifications are known as *tutejšyja*. Literally, this term can be translated as 'people from here,' although the connotation is wider and includes a broader meaning of 'local-mindedness' (Snyder 2003, 40). Peasants who called themselves *tutejšyja* avoided cultural identification with narrow national projects and could not yet be defined as Belarusians.

The fluidity and invisibility of non-national attitudes indicate that they primarily represent a strategy of the weak; a political statement by avoiding active involvement in politics and rejecting commitments (Zahra 2010, 113). Shifting borders, wars and domination of foreign powers, according to Alexander Pershai, did not leave the Belarusian population a lot of space for expressing its own political aspirations, therefore *tutejšasć* can also be treated as a strategy of cultural defense and survival (Pershai 2012, 252). Thus, the population of the periphery, without the potential to influence politics, was able to resist the imposition of other identities from outside (Pershai 2012, 260). Siarhiej Tokć represents a similar point

of view, maintaining that people used *tutejšasć* as an escape strategy, hiding behind it, in order to keep alive their familiar traditional world (Tokć 2003, 19).

The pragmatism of populations, which were not yet nationalized, was a recurring behaviour pattern throughout Europe. As Tara Zahra noted in her study of the nationalization of the Czech lands, idealized nationalist appeals often encountered lack of understanding among the population, as it tended to be rational in its choices. For instance, in the case of schooling in Bohemia, people opted for bilingual education for their children, instead of supporting national schools. This choice can be interpreted as a way to increase social mobility for the next generation (Zahra 2008, 26). In the Belarusian case, people were usually polylingual, as they had to interact on a daily basis with representatives of various ethnic groups: Russians, Poles, and Jews. Command of several languages was common, and similar to the Czech case, these skills too were used for purposes of social mobility. The lack of a clear definition of *tutejšasć* allowed people to retain a greater degree of neutrality and flexibility as opposed to the choice of a certain identity and resulting social or political limitations (Pershaj 2012, 262–263). People consciously chose new national allegiances only when they recognized in them more benefits for themselves (Zahra 2010, 103). Therefore, in order to succeed, Belarusian national activists had to make the Belarusian option more appealing.

### **Political Enlightenment Efforts**

The delegates at the Congress of Belarusian Organizations in March 1917 recognized the need to overcome the problem of non-national attitudes among the population. They pointed out the importance of political enlightenment, stressing the need to eradicate local or imperially ascribed allegiances. Congress resolutions established a special department of travelling lecturers and agitators for the countryside and supported publication of a daily newspaper. This decision was especially important since most of the pre-war Belarusian publishing was concentrated in Viłnia, which was under the German occupation since 1915 and remained cut off from the Belarusian territories to the east of the front line in 1917 ('Pratakol druhoha dnia zjezdu,' *Spadčyna* 1990, Nr. 4, p. 31).

To what degree were these resolutions implemented, and what factors impeded their realization? The matter of a daily newspaper was indeed a timely decision, as there were hardly any Belarusian periodicals circulating in eastern Belarus. The first issue of *Voľnaja Bielaruś*,<sup>8</sup> edited by Jazep Liosik, appeared on 28 May 1917. It aimed to consolidate Belarusian society with an emphasis on the national revival, democratic traditions, and the struggle for national consciousness, continuing the

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<sup>8</sup> In English: Free Belarus.

tradition of *Naša Niva* (Konan 1994, 353). In 1917, *Voľnaja Bielaruś* focused primarily on political life, providing coverage of current affairs, information on national organizations, protocols of political meetings, news from Belarusian towns and villages, as well as news from abroad. Advertisements informed the readers about events in Minsk, newly published books, and courses of Belarusian language and culture. The subscribers also received up-to-date practical information about prices for groceries and available job opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

*Voľnaja Bielaruś* urged all those who were interested in Belarusian affairs to subscribe to and popularize the newspaper, as well as to provide the editorial office with addresses of potential readers for mailing sample issues. The newspaper was recruiting its writers in a similar fashion: encouraging every subscriber to act as a contributor by reporting about local news, spreading the information on newly established Belarusian organizations, and informing the readers about the lives of Belarusians abroad ('Adozva da čytačočů,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 8, 21 July 1917, p. 4). Given the insufficient numbers of Belarusian national activists, this was a viable strategy to involve new people in the national work in the peripheries and to encourage others to continue their engagement. The newspaper acted as a recruiter of national activists, creating for them a virtual space of Belarusianness. They were the 'reading classes' (Anderson 2006, 76), literate and mobilized parts of the population, who were to become the backbone of the national movement. However, the lack of reliable data on the newspaper's circulation and popularity in the provinces does not allow for any further conclusions on its effects for Belarusian political enlightenment.

On another level, the efforts of national consolidation were supplemented by the theatre. According to Miroslav Hroch, theatre is instrumental in maintaining national culture, both for nations in possession of a state and for national movements without their own statehood. The first treat the national theatre as a 'sanctuary' of national art and language, bringing cultural elites together and contributing in this way to the strengthening of national unity. For national movements, this task is taken over by popular theatres or even amateur theatres, especially if these movements are in the phase of active national agitation. In this case, the theatres function as complementary mediums of national communication between different social strata (Hroch 2005, 177). Moreover, as Mayhill Fowler notes, the lack of political public sphere in the Russian Empire predetermined the greater importance and popularity of literature, arts, and theatre as compared to Western Europe (Fowler 2017, 14).

Anton Luckievič, one of the leading Belarusian national ideologists, saw in the theatre a manifestation of the 'nation's spirit' (Luckievič 2006, 26). The First Belarusian Society for Drama and Comedy, established in May 1917, made its

<sup>9</sup> See for example *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 16, 28 August 1917; *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 16, 5 May 1918.

own contributions to the national mobilization by providing leisure activities, and at the same time involving people in politics. According to the Society's founder, Usievalad Fałski, they toured almost all of eastern Belarus in June 1917, with major performances in Mahilioŭ, Orša, Žlobin, Babrujsk, Asipovičy, Sluck, and Radaškovičy. Fałski specifically pointed out that one of the primary goals of the Society during this tour was to strengthen the national consciousness of the audiences by acquainting them with Belarusian music and singing (NARB, f. 325, vop. 1, spr. 19, ark. 180). At the railway stations on their journey through the Mahilioŭ province en route to guest performances, they disseminated Belarusian newspapers and proclamations. Peasants, soldiers and station personnel in Žlobin asked for more and, eventually, a spontaneous rally took place alongside the train with the actors ('St. Žlobin,' *Vołnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 3, 20 June 1917, p. 3). Thus, combining a political message with leisure activities, national activists provided an attractive 'packaging' of the national agitation for wider circles of the population.

In comparison with the popularity of the theatre, political agitation by national activists could not boast comparable levels of success. It is therefore important to see under what conditions they had to work and to identify the major obstacles at this early stage. Above all, a power struggle for leadership of the Belarusian movement between two major Belarusian socialist parties<sup>10</sup> in summer 1917 obscured the importance of national work with the population (Varonka 1920, 4). While Minsk politicians were busy determining how to reorganize the Belarusian movement and how to increase their own political capital, examples of ordinary activists provide useful insights into the actual situation in the provinces.

According to a report by one of the national activists, who was working in Rečyca district in July 1917, the Belarusian cause was not faring well in the provinces. As the First World War continued, the political situation remained the source of complications. Proximity to the front line determined stricter regulations, limiting mobility and transportation in these regions. For instance, the author of the report noted that political rallies in the areas adjacent to the front line or close to railways were prohibited, thus depriving him of the possibility to organize meetings with peasants in public spaces. Accordingly, everyday survival matters, such as rising prices, war with the Germans, and the land question, remained the chief priority for the population (D. 1917, 3). The author of the report<sup>11</sup> realized he would be in a better position if he was working for the government. He applied for the job of a census instructor in the agriculture census, as it facilitated transportation between the villages in the region. More importantly, he made a correct observation,

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<sup>10</sup> Bielaruskaja Sacyjalistyčnaja Hramada – BSH (Belarusian Socialist Hramada) and Bielaruskaja Narodnaja Partija Sacyjalistaŭ – BNPS (Belarusian People's Party of Socialists).

<sup>11</sup> The report was printed in *Vołnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 22, 4 October 1917 and signed by A. D. It is likely that the author did not want to disclose his identity due to safety concerns.

suggesting that national activists would have more chances for success if they combined their national agitation work with the holding of public offices (D. 1917, 3). In addition, the status of a state official provided the incumbent with significant levels of authority and security. This proved to be useful in some situations. Since this activist decided to use only Belarusian for his everyday communication with the population, and since people<sup>12</sup> did not expect state officials to communicate in Belarusian, they mistook him for a spy on one occasion. Concluding that he was not capable of speaking any Russian at all, it was assumed that he was working for the Germans (D. 1917, 3), which was also quite probable, considering the vicinity of the front and German support of Belarusian national milieu in *Ober Ost* (Liulevicius 2000, 7–8; Kasmach 2016, 321–340).

A. D. was assigned Chojniki and Jurevičy districts, where he had been working for nearly two months, moving between fifteen villages, talking to the peasants about future land allocations, and inquiring about the national identification of his respondents in the meantime. The combination of these two themes proved to be a successful approach, as peasants were genuinely interested in the land question and often even left the field work to gather more information on possible developments. After having established trust among the population of the fifteen villages, A. D. proceeded with distributing proclamations, brochures, and books in the Belarusian language, speaking about history, collecting addresses of sympathizers for maintaining contacts, and patiently explaining differences between religious and national identification. Noting that the peasants and their children were especially fascinated with Belarusian poems, he managed to establish a reading room in the village Rudnoje with the help of a local student (D. 1917, 3). Thus, conditions for national agitation required attention to everyday concerns of the population and flexible adjustments of tactics.

### **Teachers and the Problem of Belarusian Schooling**

Successful political education also depended on the readiness of people to identify, accept, and internalize national values. The basis for this could be provided to them from early childhood by the system of national education. Among the factors determining the intensity of national activities and agitation, Hroch in particular points to the development of school networks in rural regions and the activities of the teachers involved in patriotic movements (Hroch 2000, 168). The situation in the eastern Belarusian areas in 1917 revealed a rather sad picture in this regard. In contrast to the territories under German occupation, where the first Belarusian schools appeared in Vínia during the winter of 1915–1916 (Liachouški

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<sup>12</sup> Rečyca district was located in the region of Paliessie, which had its own dialect with notable Ukrainian influence, different from most Belarusian dialects.

2010, 20), schools which used Belarusian as the language of instruction did not exist in eastern Belarus in 1917, with the rare exception of a few private initiatives, such as the private Belarusian school on the estate of Princess Radzivil (Miadziolka 1974, 96). A small group of Belarusian teachers in Minsk, Viciebsk, and Mahilioŭ provinces, who supported national schools, was by far outnumbered and overshadowed by their colleagues educated in the Great Russian imperial tradition with disdain towards Belarusian aspirations.

One of the most telling examples of such attitudes was the congress of rural teachers from Minsk province in late May 1917. Newspapers compared this gathering to a meeting of parish priests debating the best way to express their ‘feelings of infinite love for the worshiped monarch’ (Liosik 1917, 1). When one of the female teachers decided to deliver her speech in the Belarusian language, she was ridiculed, rudely interrupted and insulted. Demand for an autonomous solution for Belarusian territories was regarded as a deceptive ruse, and the Belarusian movement was readily labeled either as a Polish intrigue or suspected of being inspired by German espionage.<sup>13</sup> Some of the attendees bought up Belarusian newspapers, only to tear them to pieces and to trample them down later. Unofficially, some of the delegates confessed that if they accepted the emerging Belarusian national program, they would automatically lose their jobs, since their chief task in schools was the promotion of the Great Russian ideology and denigration of everything connected to the manifestations of Belarusianness. The majority of them were not capable of providing instruction in Belarusian should it have been required (Liosik 1917, p. 1).

The attitudes of teachers in other cities did not differ a lot from those of the Minsk province, confirming the trend described above. According to the BSH activist Paluta Badunova, the teachers’ congress in Homieĺ on 22 June 1917 followed an almost identical pattern. Teachers who attended this provincial gathering were encouraged by a Russian chairman and enthusiastically spoke against the autonomy of Belarus (*Zjezd delehataŭ ad bielaruskich partyjnych i hramadskich arhanizacyj 8 – 10 lipnia ŭ Minsku. Praciah, Voĺnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 9, 26 July 1917, pp. 2–3). Badunova noted that ‘intimidated teachers’ feared that even the mere fact of introducing Belarusian language to schools would completely separate Belarus from Russia and cause the former’s takeover by the Poles. Teachers were convinced that Belarus lacked political organization to resist this drift (NARB, f. 325, vop. 1, spr. 19, ark. 266). These fears reflected one of the tenets of the imperial Russification policy, demonizing and exaggerating the Polish threat. It is therefore not surprising that participants of the Homieĺ teachers’ congress were

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<sup>13</sup> Such suspicions were not ungrounded. The German military administration in *Ober Ost* provided support to Belarusian nationalism, using it for its own ends of controlling and restraining Polish nationalism (Kasmach 2016, 334).

convinced that the Belarusian language did not exist. However, there was no unanimity of views on this issue, as some delegates expressed a wish to learn more and made inquiries where they could buy Belarusian books ('Zjezd delehataŭ ad bielaruskich partyjnych i hramadskich arhanizacyj 8–10 lipnia ŭ Minsku. Praciah,' *Voľnaja Bielarus*, Nr. 9, 26 July 1917, pp. 2–3).

The teachers' hostility to the Belarusianness can be explained by the legacies of the Russification policy, which in the Belarusian case clearly pursued assimilation goals (Staliūnas 2007, 303; Miller 2008, 57). Education was one of the spheres where Russification practices were implemented widely and left a lasting legacy. Russian imperial authorities saw the school system as one of the most effective tools to bring Belarusians closer and finally merge them with the Great Russian nation (Weeks 2003, 213). After the failed uprising of 1863–1864, de-Polonization methods prevailed, placing all primary schools under subordination of the Orthodox Church. None of them offered instruction in Belarusian (Staliūnas 2007, 303).

Moreover, the Belarusian population was deprived of higher institutions of learning on its territories after the tsarist powers closed the Viľnia University in 1832 and the Hory-Horki Agricultural Institute in 1863. These measures cemented provincial status of the Belarusian territories, forcing people to seek higher education opportunities in other parts of the Russian Empire or abroad. Some of them chose never to return home later, depriving their homelands of capable intellectual forces (Liachoŭski 2010, 23) and potential national elites. By comparison, the Ukrainian national movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could rely on the intellectual forces educated on Ukrainian territories at the universities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, and L'viv (Werdt 2011, 96) By 1917, the Russified education system became one of the greatest concerns for the Belarusian activists. Yet fortunately for the emerging Belarusian national movement, consistent and full implementation of the assimilation program of the Belarusian population was limited by a shortage of funding in the Russian Empire (Staliūnas 2007, 303; Weeks 1996, 12).

Another danger for the Belarusian activists, albeit on a smaller scale, was the growth of Polish cultural influences, attributed to the significant numbers of Polish refugees during the First World War on Belarusian territories. The influence of Poles was noted first and foremost in the cities of eastern Belarus, where they often replaced the Russian population, which was evacuated further east in 1915 (Tarasiuk 2007, 111; Wróbel 1990, 51; Smaliančuk 2001, 249). After the February Revolution, Poles also started to make use of the political liberalization. The number of Polish organizations in Minsk alone reached twenty; they represented a broad spectrum of activities, including political,

cultural, educational, and charitable spheres (Zienkiewicz 2001, 152). Polish refugees were allowed to open and operate their own schools with Polish as the language of instruction. These schools remained in place even after the Poles were repatriated following the end of the war and were subsequently attended by the children of Belarusian Catholics. The schools were considered to be effective instruments of Polonization, detrimental to the Belarusian national consolidation (*Bielaruski Śliach*, Nr. 30, 27 April 1918).

The local Polonized populations in eastern Belarus, represented by the landowners and Catholic clergy, also contributed to the polarization of the society along national lines. In Buda (Viliejka district, Vĺnia province), a young teacher established a school as early as March 1917 on her own initiative, gradually trying to introduce teaching in Belarusian. In response, a local landowner and a Catholic priest opened a Polish school. They managed to win over students from the Belarusian school by promising them all services ‘free of charge.’ The correspondent of *Voĺnaja Bielaruś*, reporting this case, sarcastically commented that instead of free food there was only Polish language everywhere in the end. Other local efforts to establish a separate four-year school proved to be slow in implementation due to the lack of funds (‘Buda, Vilenskaj hub.’, *Voĺnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 12, 8 August 1917, p. 4).

Nevertheless, schools gradually started to play a more active role in the process of national consolidation due to the re-evacuation of educational institutions. In September 1917, the Niasviž Teachers’ Seminary became one of the defining centers of the Belarusian national milieu. Immediately upon the re-evacuation of the seminary from Russia, one of its students, Michaś Mickievič,<sup>14</sup> established a youth group at the seminary called the ‘Association for Education’ (Liachoŭski 2012, 98). Finally, a step towards strengthening positions of Belarusian teachers was taken during the Congress of the Belarusian Party and Public Organizations on 8–10 July 1917 in Minsk. The teachers who participated in the work of the Congress restored the Belarusian Teachers’ Union. It was originally founded in 1905, but due to the arrests of its members it ceased to exist the following year. The proclaimed aim of the revived Union was the nationalization of the Belarusian school and creation of a Belarusian teachers’ community (*Voĺnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 11, 3 August 1917, p. 3). According to Sviatlana Snapkoŭskaja, this was the time when a ‘village teacher of a new type’ (Snapkoŭskaja 1998, 79) appeared. These teachers contributed to the establishment of the first centers of national education in eastern Belarus in the second half of 1917. Most notable among them were Sluck Zemstvo Belarusian Grammar School, Belarusian primary schools in Minsk, and the school in the village Žornaŭka (Ihumien district, Minsk province) (Ramanava 2005, 127).

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<sup>14</sup> Brother of the Belarusian poet Jakub Kolas.

## **The Image of the Belarusian Language**

The teachers' congresses in 1917 also demonstrated that one of the chief problems for the national activists was the negative image of Belarusian language. Despite the fact that Belarusian continued to be used widely in everyday life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it failed to acquire adequate levels of social prestige, which would have facilitated its transformation into a powerful and effective factor of national mobilization. Since the language was not embedded in the national ideology and failed to develop a symbolical value for its speakers, the indifference towards it proved hard to eradicate. Belarusian national activists attempted to reverse this trend and to introduce the language as an integral part of the idea of Belarusianness. Initially, their chief task was to argue and struggle against the prevalent idea that Belarusian was a poor and undeveloped 'dialect' with no potential to develop into an effective means of communication for all spheres of social life. In an attempt to improve the image of the language, Francišak Aliachnovič pointed out that the connotation of a 'simple' language should be interpreted as simple in understanding for its native speakers, but by no means as primitive by nature. Aiming to create an image of a prestigious language, he noted that historically nobility and dukes spoke Belarusian (Aliachnovič 1917, 3). By uncovering to the public connections to the past of once powerful peoples, Aliachnovič was linking modern Belarusian nationalism to a more distant historical tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Yet in contrast to some initial successes of the newspapers and theatrical performances, local politics revealed a less optimistic situation for the Belarusian language in the public sphere. The degree of linguistic assimilation in the eastern Belarusian territories bordering with Russia remained high, as shown by Mahilioŭ Belarusian National Committee documents from 1917. The protocols disclose that, despite sincere efforts, most of its members had trouble communicating in Belarusian (BDAMLIM, f. 3, vop. 1, spr. 136, ark. 20). The Belarusian National Committee in Minsk also struggled with the language issue, using Russian and Belarusian interchangeably, although trying to practice Belarusian on more occasions. A similar attitude was characteristic of the national activists in the military too: Belarusian soldiers from the 12<sup>th</sup> Army pointed out that they would attempt to keep up all correspondence with national organizations in Belarusian, welcome attempts to speak Belarusian during their meetings and change to literary Belarusian completely in due course (NARB, f. 325, vop. 1, spr. 21, ark. 8).

At the same time, the members of the Mahilioŭ Belarusian National Committee could not yet imagine switching completely to the use of Belarusian (BDAMLIM,

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<sup>15</sup> However, Lithuanians were able to exploit historical connections to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania more successfully than the Belarusians (Snyder 2003, 45).

f. 3, vop. 1, spr. 136, ark. 32). When they discussed the possibility of publishing a newspaper in June 1917, the debates almost immediately shifted to the choice of language, reflecting its problematic status in the province. The committee members were unanimous in their opinion that the newspaper could not be published in Russian, which would be perceived as an instrument of Russification, but at the same time they hesitated to publish it in Belarusian because the language appeared incomprehensible to them (this statement was based on their experiences after reading the BSH newspaper, *Hramada*, which was published in spring/summer 1917). Delegate Kakašynski stated the futility of discussions as to whether Belarusian was a dialect<sup>16</sup> or a separate language. In his opinion, there was no language suitable for the publication of a newspaper. Other delegates shared similar concerns (BDAMLIM, f. 3, vop. 1, spr. 136, ark. 32 adv.), despite the fact that Belarusian newspapers had already been published in the preceding years, starting with *Naša Dolia* and *Naša Niva* back in 1906.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, there was no common ground even in such a crucial matter as determining the status of the language. This incident also illustrates that Mahilioŭ province was prone to a higher degree of Russification, in contrast to western provinces where Belarusian in general was more widely accepted and was used for newspaper publications during the revolutionary period.<sup>18</sup>

### **Orthodox and Catholics in 1917: Religious Divide vs. National Unity**

Religion remained a divisive factor in Belarus, emphasizing the conflict between Russia and Poland rather than playing a constructive role in the Belarusian national project. Nevertheless, the option of national divide within one single church structure remained open (Radzik 2012, 312). Taking into account the long-term repercussions of the 1839 ban on the Uniate church on the one hand, and the strong ties of the Orthodox clergy with the Russian imperial administration on the other, the Catholic milieu in Belarus displayed more potential to become an alternative source of national consolidation.

The participation of Catholics in the Belarusian nation-building project started relatively late, only during the Revolution of 1905, and did not play such a prominent role as in the Lithuanian case. Yet it followed the Lithuanian pattern, although in a less pronounced manner due to the greater religious diversity of the population.

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<sup>16</sup> This word was underlined in the original protocol document.

<sup>17</sup> However, according to the 1910 data on the geographical locations of the newspaper correspondents, *Naša Niva* was far more popular in the western areas of contemporary Belarus, where 74.7 per cent of correspondents lived, in contrast to 12.1 per cent in the eastern areas (Tereshkovich 2004, 177).

<sup>18</sup> *Voŭnaja Bielaruś* published in Minsk in 1917 is one such example. *Homan* was published from 1916 onwards in Vilnia.

As in Lithuania, Catholic priests were recruited from the local population and were not sent to serve in the western provinces from inner Russian provinces, as in the case of the Orthodox priests. National and social divisions in Belarusian and Lithuanian societies also coincided, leading to the belief that national elites were 'stolen' through the Polonization process. Thus, the clergy stepped in and assumed the role of national activists (Sukiennicki and Siekierski 1984, 54).

Belarusian Christian democracy, connected to the Catholic milieu, started to spread through student circles in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Čarniakievič 2007, 155). According to Adam Stankievič, Belarusian Catholic priests were among the active promoters and popularizers of the Belarusian language during 1917–18, especially in the western part of the unoccupied territories around Dzisna and Viliejka (Stankievič 2008, 499). In practice, they faced the same challenges as any other national activists. The Catholic priest Astramovič from Smilavičy provides an interesting account of his national activism during 1917. When he started to state in public that peasants from his congregation were Belarusians, like himself, people first reacted with surprise. With time, acceptance of his ideas grew, especially among the younger generation. Astramovič identified the religious divide as the most serious problem since it dangerously interfered with national identification, with peasants persistently referring to their faith either as 'Polish' or 'Russian.' Belarusian Catholics got so used to the Polish language in churches that they wished to be able to speak 'like in Warsaw.' However, after being exposed to an alternative national agitation they could be persuaded to change their minds ('Zjezd delehataŭ ad bielaruskich partyjnych i hramadskich arhanizacyj 8–10 lipnia ŭ Minsku,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 9, 26 July 1917, p. 3). The challenge in this case was to make national work consistent and all-reaching.

Promotion of the national idea by the community's spiritual leaders appeared to be an effective strategy. When Bishop von der Ropp<sup>19</sup> visited Belarusian provinces in the summer of 1917, he heard requests from congregations to allow sermons in Belarusian. During his stay in Dzisna in July 1917, the bishop chaired the first diocesan congress of Catholic clergy and delegates from the congregation of the Dzisna deanery. Jazep Drazdovič, representing the congregation from Hiermanovičy, delivered an official address to the bishop in Belarusian. Von der Ropp was pleased to hear it and regretted that he was not able to respond in the same language. The bishop stated that he had never been an enemy to national movements, be they Polish, Lithuanian, Belarusian or even Jewish. Obviously, he was aware of the difficulties in the matter of establishing Belarusian schooling, noting that Belarusians were under strong assimilatory pressures from neighbouring cultures. Finally, von der Ropp supported the efforts of the Catholic clergy in

<sup>19</sup> He was known for displaying a favourable attitude towards Belarusian as the language of the catechism and as a possible option for additional divine service (Smaliančuk 2001, 87).

Belarus to talk to Belarusians in their mother tongue in church and beyond ('Pa Bielarusi,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 13, 11 August 1917, p. 4).

Such encouragement resonated well with the wishes of the congregations. The news that Catholic priests were becoming national activists was spreading in the form of a rumour, a very hopeful and optimistic one, as in the village Mačynauščyna (Vilejka district, Viľnia province) ('Pa Bielarusi,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 23, 9 October 1917, p. 3). Yet several younger Belarusian priests who delivered speeches after the bishop's address in Dzisna also complained about the 'reactionary' moods of the parishioners ('Pa Bielarusi,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 13, 11 August 1917, p. 4).

The importance of the Christian Democratic movement in 1917 should not be overestimated. Generally, the number of Catholic priests interested in the Belarusian national movement remained low. For instance, their largest official meeting – the Congress of Belarusian Catholic clergy in Minsk on 24–25 May 1917, chaired by A. Abrantovič – gathered only a little over twenty other participants from Minsk, Mahilioŭ and Viľnia provinces ('Zjezd ksiandzoŭ-bielarusau,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 3, 20 June 1917, p. 4). The resolutions of the Congress emphasized the wide autonomy of Belarus within the future Russian federative democratic republic, the need for school instruction in Belarusian, and the gradual introduction of sermons in Belarusian (Stankievič, 2008, p. 499). By November 1918, a Catholic seminary headed by Fabijan Abrantovič opened in Minsk with Belarusian as the language of instruction (Hryckievič 1998).

Some sources provide similar information about a much larger gathering of Orthodox clergy in Moscow, claiming it was attended by over 700 Orthodox priests. Allegedly, it laid the foundations of the union of Belarusian Orthodox clergy (Stankievič 2008, 503; Głogowska 1996, 31).<sup>20</sup> However, there are doubts among historians concerning this event, mostly because the information about this congress came from Viľnia, which at that time was under German occupation and cut off from Belarusian political life east of the front line. Since no other sources corroborate this statement, this information is therefore considered to be in the category of wishful thinking (Rudovič 2001, 99). Moreover, there are no further documents confirming any significant organized activities of the Orthodox clergy in support of the Belarusian national movement later.

Nevertheless, in separate instances Orthodox priests supported Belarusian national aspirations. They popularized the Belarusian language in an attempt to increase the role of the church and its presence in local affairs. Another goal was to reverse the common stereotype that the Orthodox Church was totally dependent on directions sent from Moscow. Andrej Karnilovič, who served as a priest in Chožava (Viliejka district, Minsk province) edited a collection of sermons in Belarusian.

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<sup>20</sup> See also 'Report on the Situation in Eastern Belarus,' written by Anton Luckievič in Viľnia, dated 3 April 1918 (BDAMLIM, f. 3, vop. 1, spr. 134, ark. 34).

Ioan Chrucki, deacon in Lebedzeva (Viliejka district, Minsk province), was working on translations of prayers from Church Slavonic into Belarusian. Popular reception of their activities appeared to be encouraging and positive since people were happy to grasp the meaning of all that was going on during the church service, as opposed to the earlier experiences with mechanical memorization of unfamiliar words and expressions in Church Slavonic ('Bielaruski ruch siarod pravaslaŭnaha duchavienstva,' *Homan*, Nr. 85, 29 October 1918, p. 2).

'National conversions' of the Orthodox clergy, as described above, remained rare. As a rule, the Orthodox Church dismissed the Belarusian movement as a 'Polish intrigue.' The overly conservative positions of the majority of the Russified clergy often alienated them from their congregations in 1917. Orthodox priests often did not feel the needs of a revolutionary society and openly displayed nostalgia for tsarist times. For instance, peasants from Siomkaŭ Haradok (Minsk district) even submitted an official request to replace their Orthodox priest, Samajlovič, in the summer of 1917, complaining that he spoke neither in defence of the revolution nor in the interests of the working people. He was accused of defending the tsar and his good deeds, referring to the supporters of the revolution as 'a bunch of hooligans.' The congregation was offended by Samajlovič's behaviour, collecting forty-eight signatures in support of a request for his replacement ('Pa Bielarusi,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 16, 28 August 1917, p. 3).

Another characteristic feature of 1917 was the intensification of the religious struggle for national identification both in Orthodox and Catholic milieus. In the village of Haruciški (Minsk district), the local Orthodox priest was calling meetings, trying to discourage the peasants from sending the children to Belarusian schools. In addition, he even hired people to confiscate Belarusian books. Such behaviour did not gain him sympathy and some people started to contradict the priest in public. The Catholic part of the village displayed similar trends towards polarization. The landowners, so-called 'local Poles,' were using the priests to deepen the divide between Catholics and Orthodox ('Pa Bielarusi,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 13, 11 August 1917, p. 4).

The zemstvo election campaign in the autumn of 1917 revealed several cases where the Catholic priests were aggressively agitating for Polish electoral lists. In particular, in the Minsk district some of them did not hesitate to turn their sermons into political campaigns. The head of the electoral commission in Piaršaj, the Catholic priest Urublieŭski, along with several other commission members, was arrested on charges of conducting agitation by the ballot-boxes. However, the majority of peasants opposed Polish electoral lists due to social tensions, while the national aspect did not yet play a significant role ('Vybary ŭ valasnyja ziemstvy,' *Voľnaja Bielaruś*, Nr. 23, 9 October 1917, p. 3).

## **Conclusions**

The resolutions of the Congress of Belarusian Organizations adopted in March 1917 prioritized the political education of peasants and their organization as immediate goals. The initial experiences of Belarusian national activists in the provinces revealed the need for consistent and expanded efforts in this direction. However, the majority of the population was more concerned with matters of everyday survival, choosing local identity as the most suitable strategy. In this situation, the national message benefited from being delivered indirectly, 'packaged' in a more attractive and accessible form for the population in the provinces.

For those activists not associated with pre-existing governmental or religious structures, it was notably harder to carry out national agitation. They had to establish a network of reliable contacts, which was often a time-consuming and tedious task. One of the options was to combine national activism with the holding of public posts, in order to reinforce the influence of national agitation with the authority provided by holding a governmental position. Another option was to involve spiritual leaders of the community in the national cause, as the cases of the Belarusian Catholic priests from Dzisna demonstrate. Last but not least, paying attention to the local everyday concerns of the population, and taking a personalized approach, combined with consistency and long-term dedication, were indispensable qualities in improving the image of the activists and their cause.

However, in the background, nation-building work was still influenced by the legacies of earlier Russification policies. In particular, they continued to contribute to the negative image of the Belarusian language, representing it as belonging to peasant culture, thus making Belarusian national identification seem unattractive both for educated society and those aspiring to achieve superior social standing, i.e. the potential pool of future national activists. Qualitative changes regarding the status of Belarusian could be introduced only from a position of authority. If the governmental officials, teachers, and priests used it, it could acquire more symbolical value for its native speakers, as is evident from popular reactions to attempts to incorporate Belarusian language elements in church services. Here the use of already existing structures, as the example of Belarusian Catholics indicates, also played a certain role, although it should not be overestimated. Their influence was limited exclusively to the western areas (parts of Minsk and Vîlnia provinces).

Moreover, the persistent conservatism of the Orthodox Church and its unwillingness to cooperate in the Belarusian nation-building project had a stronger negative effect on national consolidation. In addition, rural teachers, who were optimistically counted on to become the key actors in the Belarusian national movement, in reality exposed their anti-Belarusian positions in a series

of congresses held throughout 1917. Nationally-engaged teachers at this time remained in a minority.

Apart from the legacies of Russian imperial policies, Belarusian national activists did not have constant communication with some localities, whether due to financial constraints or repercussions of the political situation along with continuing war. Newspapers also did not reach every settlement on a regular basis. In retrospect, Belarusian activists needed more time, yet already by October 1917 they had to combine the peaceful task of promoting Belarusian national identity with more serious and far-reaching political decisions.

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# ВОЛЬНАЯ Беларусь

Цэна асобнага № 15 кап.

Умовы падпіскі на 1917 год.									
За 1 м.	За 2 м.	За 3 м.	За 4 м.	За 5 м.	За 6 м.	За 7 м.	За 8 м.	За 9 м.	За 10 м.
1. 50 р.	1 р.	1 р 50 к.	2 р.	2 р 50 к.	3 р.	3 р 50 к.	4 р.	4 р 50 к.	5 р.

Падпіска прывядацца толькі с 1-го чысла кожнага месяца.  
 Перамена адрэсу—50 коп. Пры змене адрэсу кожна прывядацца стары адрэс.  
 Рукапісы павінны быць чытабельна напісанымі толькі з аднаго боку напіраў. Кенска перапісанымі рукапісамі ні чытацца, ні друкавацца на будучы.  
 На істаўтанцы, перыскаў, рукапіскаў і іншых аляксы-наўнннм прывядацца адрэс:  
**Газета палітычная, эканамічная і літаратурная.**

Адрэс падпіскі і адміністрацыі: Мінск, Захар'евск. 18.  
**Умовы друку абвестак:**  
 (На IV боку газеты)  
 за 1 радок шпальту 40 к. за 2 рэд. 80 к. за кожным рад.  
 Асобам, шукаючым працы — 1 руб. за 3 радкі за адна рад.

№ 3. (Аўторак) Выходзіць двойчы на тыдзень. (20 июня) № 3.

## ГРАМАДЗЯНЕ-БЕЛАРУСЫ!

На ліку газет, кніг і журналаў Беларусь самая бедная у Дзяржаве Расійскай. Наша сьвятая павіннасьць дапамагчы нашэраўню друкаваннага слова.  
 Беларусы! Заўчайцеся у гурткі, у сямействы, зьбірайце грошы на фонд «Вольнае Беларусі», арганізуіце падпіску, шукайце прыхільнікаў, спадачоу і чытачоў. Памятайце, што, калі мы самі аб сабе ні падбаем, дык ніхто нам ні паможэ. Наша справа у нашых руках. Хто дае, той і мае. Складайце фонд «Вольнай Беларусі»!

### РЭДАКЦЫЯ.

### НАСТАУНІКІ З'ВЭД.

На прыканцы мая адбыўся у Мінску з'езд настаўнікаў, або сельскіх вучыцэляў Мінскай губэрні. На ўсім

Тро было бачна, як шчыра і сумленна выродвалі і абразжалі настаўнікі, што на іх з'ездзе, на з'ездзе гэтых-вучыцэляў, з'ездзі аднагоўся заўважыць да іх на «мудрыя гаворкі», на «прэстыж парлям», як адрэсуюць старшынэ з'езду беларускую мову, тую самую мову, якая панавала

у «барбарства, глупства і пданустві»!  
 «Калі справядліва паўстае», ніна нашэй-пашчэрага галста: «што німечкі вучыцца у гэты час пераход француска, дык беларускі настаўнік, с адным скарбонкам класікам у галду, гэты прамасьціць, німцу і паўнашчыны, німца ні перамажа, што ад сабы гэтых сьвободы выражае «шэра, а ні разумнае, збожае менае. Трыба як навуцтой зьвяданьня казачыць у неаістарыку нікому і на рэўнах не публікаваць «арэаіжкі беларуску» а навуцольнае у рэўнах мовы, і толькі ад галста» нікому скажа нічога «дзюк» беларускі народ».  
 Сучаснаму беларускаму вучыцельству прывітае! У такім што сьвядзе, ніз вывучыць на гэтым з'ездзе, белару навуцна на высьнянны паданкі. Гэта, калі ні разлучоць, дык адлучоць іны самі, бо на панаваньня з'ездзе, панавалі, іны рыхталіся арганізавана у тым сьнеці, каб адгарадзіцца ад народу, бо, як шчыра прывячаліся адна настаўнікі, сьнеці іх на любіць, сьнеціна. «ні давож дую на апаку» і дражніць дражніцамі і гуптаваці. Ці, зрабілі іны ніку

«Учэ навука, гісторыя, тое сучаснае прывітае! як Ушчыкі, перамацад прывітаваць», прывітае белару-вучыцель, што бо навуцольнае у нікому на роднай мовы». «Беларускі абскавае прамую настаўніка: «галта ніхто нідзе ні кажу».  
 У адуцэнах з'езду тое і вучыцэляў, у якіх нішто тое іхна амава, нілота прывітаваць, што, калі агадана с беларуска, дык прывітае і стравіць пагада, бо іны зувь час німажэліся а беларусчыны, мовы абаліся і вучыць на-беларуску ні адрэсны. Не бачым, паваг у сучасна-ніваціх і дэвольна сьнеці іх, сьнеці нітарэ на прудам мейсам і засьне вышні часе, якіяк прудам і справядліваеца! Паау-жа, з'езд вышні нічэрнае у гісторыі дывіць, сьнеці народа, сьнеціна ніваці прару, адрэсны ад банькашчыны сьне, адгарадзі мовы банькаду сьнеці і на зувь сьвет высьлавіць, што іны ніва-вядоць усе рэдыне, беларускіе і рад-ді і навалі нітарэ арыя мажучычыны і нацымалынаго уакук. Мага таго, іны апаку агадзіць усьвядыць арыя нацымалі і на тых усьвядыць бэау сьнеці, каляны бэау, усьвяды-

Figure 2: Newspaper *Volnaja Bielarus*  
Source: Wikipedia <<http://bit.ly/2zAswCA>>, [accessed 6 November 2017].



Figure 3: Minsk, Zacharjeŭskaja Street (currently Niezaliežnasci Avenue), around 1917  
 Source: <<https://news.tut.by/society/373861.html>>, [accessed 6 November 2017].



*Minsk — Gouverneur-Strasse, links Hotel Europäischer Hof*

Figure 4: Hubernatarskaja Street, currently Lenin Street  
 Source: <<https://news.tut.by/society/532992.html>>, [accessed 6 November 2017].