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MAKING A NATIONAL CAPITAL
OUT OF A MULTIETHNIC CITY:

Lithuanians and Vilnius in Late Imperial Russia[*]

It is well known that national movements usually begin to make claims on certain territories and future capital cities when these movements formulate political goals. It is also known that the nationalists representing "historic nations," as a rule, select the historic capital as the future center of the nation-state. Lithuanian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, having formulated the goal of political autonomy, and later the creation of an independent state in the ethnographic territory of Lithuania, including Vilnius, also meets these criteria. However, the Lithuanian case is also unique in the context of the nationalism of nondominant Central and East European national groups.[1] The majority of national movements faced problems in making claims or acquiring their "geo-bodies," but none of them, at least to my knowledge, faced as huge a problem with taking

[1] The term "nondominant national groups" is taken from recent historiography in order to avoid the usage of terms like "national minorities" or similar, which are rather anachronistic when applied to the situation of the Russian Empire. "Nondominant" in this case means that these groups had no access to political control – in other words it means all non-Russians.

control over the future national capital as Lithuanians did. There were very few Lithuanians in Vilnius, and the Lithuanian language was seldom heard in the Vilnius district in late imperial Russia.

Of course, we must note immediately that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, even if the Lithuanian press talked about Vilnius, it was as the center of the Lithuanian national movement, and not as the future capital. Moreover, the Lithuanian press paid scanty attention to Vilnius. A new stage in the increasing activity of Lithuanians in Vilnius as well as their symbolic taking possession of it, can be dated to the beginning of the twentieth century. The actualization of the idea of Vilnius as the capital is associated with the politicization of the Lithuanian national movement. In the first decade of its activities (up to the 1905 Revolution), the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) continuously included in its documents the idea of an independent Lithuania as an aspiration.[2] At the beginning of the twentieth century, the goal of creating an independent state was expressed clearly in the liberal press as well as in the agenda of the Lithuanian Democratic Party. The aspiration for political autonomy, and later the creation of an independent state, inevitably forced the players to clarify the borders of the projected Lithuania and the question of its capital. Yet the capital was not specified in the programs of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party in 1896[3] or the Lithuanian Democratic Party in 1902, although it was most likely expected to be Vilnius. But the documents from 1905 and subsequent party programs clearly talked about the "autonomy of Lithuania with a Seimas [parliament] in Vilnius."[4] So, other political projects, first of all coming

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[2] Blinda [P. Višinskis]. "Credo". Kilk ir kelk! // Varpas. 1901. No. 5. P. 50; Revoliucionierius [V. Kapsukas]. Politiškas Maskolijos judėjimas ir lietuviai // Varpas. 1903. No. 1. Pp. 12-13; Red. Senuosius metu baigiant, naujuosius pradėdami. Ūkininkas. 1904. No. 1. P. 7; R. Miknys. Lietuvos demokratų partija 1902–1915 metais. Vilnius, 1995 (Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos, t. 10); R. Miknys. Vilniaus autonomistai ir jų 1904–1905 m. Lietuvos politinės autonomijos projektai // Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos. Vol. 3: Lietuvos valstybės idėja (XIX a.–XX a. pradžia). Vilnius, 1991. P. 179; R. Miknys. P. Višinskis ir Lietuvos nepriklausomybės idėja // Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos. Vol. 3: Lietuvos valstybės idėja (XIX a.–XX a. pradžia). Vilnius, 1991. Pp. 133-137.

[3] Programas Lietuviškos Soacial-demokratiškos Partijos. N.p., 1896.

[4] R. Miknys. Lietuvos demokratų partija 1902–1915 metais. Vilnius:, 1995. Pp. 184-217; Tautiškosios lietuvių demokratų partijos programos projektas // Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos. Vol. 1: Tautinės savimonės žadintojai: nuo asmens iki partijos. Vilnius, 1990. P. 185; Kipras Bielinis. 1905 metai. Atsiminimai ir dokumentai. Kaunas, 1931. P. 35; Kipras Bielinis. Penktieji metai. Revoliucinio sąjūdžio slinktis ir padariniai. New York, 1959. P. 529; Lietuvių Krikščionių Demokratų susivienijimo programo projektas // Draugija. 1907. No. 1. P. 72.

from Polish parties or the so-called *krajovcy* movement,[5] in which Vilnius was also seen as the capital of Lithuania, not just ethnographic Lithuania, but covering all the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, provided an additional stimulus for Lithuanians to explicitly declare their claims to Vilnius.

In this article, we analyze the reasons for this choice of capital and identify the problems that Lithuanian nationalists faced in seeking to implement this goal. We attempt to answer the question of how the leaders of the Lithuanian national movement hoped to implement this goal.

The motives for selection

One can only agree in part with the claim of the Lithuanian historian Egidijus Motieka that the question of Vilnius as the capital of modern Lithuania in the Lithuanian national movement was rarely discussed.[6] After the 1905 Revolution, intense discussions were held between Antanas Smetona, one of the leaders of the National Democratic Party, and supporters of the Catholic (Christian democrats) camp on what was to be the center of the country,[7] and, in addition, from time to time, polemics were instigated with politicians from other nondominant national groups. In these discussions and on other occasions, Lithuanian leaders formulated the reasons that Vilnius should be the capital of the modern Lithuanian nation-state.

The most important motive for declaring Vilnius the capital was associated with the desire to substantiate the historical link between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the modern country. This was particularly relevant when the goal of political autonomy was formulated, and there were also

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[5] *Krajowcy* (from the Polish term for "land" [*kraj*]) treated historic Lithuania as an indivisible territory. First of all, they envisaged the society of historic Lithuania as a democratic body of citizens. Here it should be stressed that they did not deny the existence of ethnocultural nations. The formation of such nations on the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania was held to be a precondition for the development of a society of citizens and a new state organism. It was thought that only as the national consciousness of the common people of historic Lithuania developed would civic consciousness be nurtured along with an understanding of the common weal of historic Lithuania. Usually, two wings of that group are discerned: democratic and conservative.

[6] E. Motieka. Didysis Vilniaus seimas. Vilnius, 1996. P. 87.

[7] L. Gudaitis. Platėjantys akiračiai. Lietuvių literatūrinė spauda 1904–1917 metais. Vilnius, 1977. P. 16; E. Aleksandravičius. Bandymai atgaivinti universitetą Lietuvoje 1832–1918 m. // E. Aleksandravičius. XIX amžiaus profiliai. Vilnius, 1993. P. 162; D. Staliūnas. Visuomenė be universiteto? (Aukštosios mokyklos atkūrimo problema Lietuvoje: XIX a. vidurys–XX a. pradžia). Vilnius, 2000. Pp. 156-165.

prospects for a nation-state. Vilnius is the cradle of Lithuania, the seat of the grand dukes, whose names are associated with the golden age of the capital.[8] Lithuanians can claim to be a historic nation only by declaring a link with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, to which Vilnius was the most obvious material witness.[9] The leaders of Lithuanian society strongly felt this necessity to proclaim themselves a historic nation in their most important confrontation – with the Poles – some of whom, especially the conservative-leaning players and the National Democrats, traced the Lithuanian national movement only from "Samogitian folk."[10]

At the same time, Vilnius, the Gates of Dawn, and the Stations of the Cross at Verkiai outside the city, were the most important Catholic religious symbols of the whole land.[11] Here, thousands of pilgrims would gather each year, including Lithuanians. Regardless of where the national leaders decided to locate the capital, the role of Vilnius as the center of religious gravity would not have disappeared. In practical terms, this was dangerous, because in the understanding of the leaders of Lithuanian nationalism, during these pilgrimages Lithuanian pilgrims would come under the influence of Polish priests. Meanwhile, with the city already a religious center in the symbolic sense, it was easier to make it still another, a national center.

However, Vilnius was important to Lithuanian nationalism not only for its symbolic capital but also for quite pragmatic reasons. Smetona, one of the right-wing leaders, argued that, as the largest city in the Northwest Region[12] (more or less historic Lithuania), Vilnius was "the main center for politics, science, painting, the arts, education, commerce, and industry," where we could hope for the establishment of a university.[13] As Mykolas Römeris [Michał Römer], a famous Lithuanian public figure at the beginning of the twentieth century and one of the leaders of the *krajowcy* movement, wrote in 1906, whoever rules Vilnius controls the whole territory.[14] This argument

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[8] Už ką mes lenkams turime būti dėkingi arba nedėkingi? // Varpas. 1892. No. 1. P. 3; K. L. Revoliucijos metai Lietuvoje // Varpas. 1905. No. 11-12. P. 111; -ba-. Vilnius, kaipo lietuvių tautos centras // Rygos garsas. 1910. No. 49.

[9] A. Smetona. Vilnius – Lietuvos širdis // Vilties Kvieslys. 1907.

[10] K. Buchowski. Litwomani i polonizatorzy. Mity, wzjajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy w stosunkach polsko-litewskich w peirwszej połowie XX wieku. Białystok, 2006.

[11] Smetona. Vilnius – Lietuvos širdis.

[12] The Northwest Region comprised six provinces: Vilnius, Kaunas, Grodna, Minsk, Vitebsk, and Mogilev.

[13] Smetona. Vilnius–Lietuvos širdis; A. Smetona. Kur Lietuvos centras? // Viltis. 1910. No. 139; K. L. Revoliucijos metai Lietuvoje // Varpas. 1905. No. 11-12. P. 111.

[14] M. Römer. Stosunki etnograficzno-kulturalne na Litwie. Kraków, 1906. P. 9.

about the "capital" of the land was important in several respects. First, due to the sheer number of different institutions, it was easier for people, first of all intellectuals, to get a job. Second, the main resources of the land were concentrated here, so it was important to be closer to them. To put it more simply, it was the center of power, and consolidation here also meant influence in the land.

Another pragmatic reason for Lithuanians to "return" to Vilnius was associated with the fact that, from the perspective of Lithuanian national-ism in the Vilnius area, especially in the southern and eastern parts of the province, there were many assimilated Lithuanians. Abandoning Vilnius as a (potential) Lithuanian outpost was also tantamount to abandoning the goal of "bringing back" to the nation these people who were Lithuanian by origin.[15]

This explanation of motives could satisfy the researcher supporting the constructivist approach to nationalism, while the ethnosymbolist researcher would still have to ask whether it had not been the case in Lithuanian eth-nic culture, even before the national movement started, that Vilnius was already an important symbol. We do not have many sources to support this thesis, but the testimony of the Social Democrat Kipras Bielinis confirms it unequivocally:

> Vilnius entered my consciousness as a city of fairy tales. How did it become like that in my imagination? It's true that I had heard a lot about the city from my father's vivid stories; I had read the legends of Lizdeika and the valley of the Sacred Horn. [...] In my childhood memories, the images of the songs sung in our land about Vilnius had not faded. [...] The people of our land did not have economic relations with Vilnius, but the name of the city was known from songs and stories, and it was steeped in legends.[16]

If we believe Jonas Basanavičius, of Lithuanian topographical names, only Vilnius is encountered in the songs of various regions of Lithuania, and it is encountered often.[17] Moreover, the *aušrininkai* (publishers of the illegal newspaper *Aušra* [Dawn], 1883−1886) did not begin the construction of a modern Lithuanian world from scratch. Their fascination with the works of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski and Theodor Narbutt, mid-nineteenth-century pa-

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[15] Smetona wrote: "The consolidation of Lithuanians in Vilnius befits the whole life of the Lithuanians of the Vilnius province". A. Smetona. Kur Lietuvos centras? // Viltis. 1910. No. 139.

[16] Kipras Bielinis. Penktieji metai. Revoliucinio sąjūdžio slinktis ir padariniai. New York, 1959. P. 18.

[17] Jonas B. Birštonas [Jonas Basanavičius]. Vilnius lietuvių dainose. Vilnius, 1925. P. 40.

triots of Lithuania writing in Polish, is well known. In their cherished image of Lithuania (even if different from the one modeled by modern Lithuanian nationalists), an important place was given to the historic capital, Vilnius.

However, in seeking to achieve this goal, Lithuanian nationalism faced several serious problems, including the ethnodemographic situation in the city, and the opposition of Poles, Russians, Belarusians, and Jews.

The Lithuanian interpretation of the national statistics of the city of Vilnius

At the very beginning of the Lithuanian national movement, from its ranks optimistic voices were heard about the favorable ethnic composition of the population of Vilnius for Lithuanians. In 1884 in *Aušra*, M. Davainis-Silvestraitis, one of the most active figures in Lithuanian society, affirmed:

> Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, has a lot of memories from our past; it has not disappeared with the rest of us. In getting the language to prevail, there are Polish and Jewish, and also Muscovite, and yet nearly all Catholics consider themselves to be Lithuanian. Polish-speaking Catholics welcome the rise of spiritual Lithuania, and say that the Lithuanian language is the language of their ancestors.[18]

However, this optimistic assessment quickly collided with the painful reality: according to the first comprehensive census of the Russian Empire in 1897, people reporting their native language as Lithuanian numbered only about 3,000, which accounted for 2.1 percent of the city's population. In late imperial Russia, many cities had significantly greater numbers of Lithuanians: more than 35,000 in Riga, 30,000 in St. Petersburg, and 15,000 in Liepaja.[19]

The reasons why Lithuanians "did not go" to Vilnius have already been identified in historiography: there were not many major industrial enterprises in the "capital" of the Northwest Region, and smaller ones were satisfied with impoverished artisans who were often valued as more skilled and educated than illiterate peasants.[20] Therefore, the "labor migra-

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[18] Veversis [M. Davainis-Silvestraitis]. Vilnius // Auszra. 1884. No. 10-11. P. 374. Varpas wrote in 1895 that about half the Catholics of Vilnius knew the Lithuanian language: Vilnius // Varpas. 1895. No. 91-92. P. 51.

[19] L. Truska. Emigracija iš Lietuvos 1868–1914 metais // LTSR MA Darbai. 1961. Vol. 1 (10). P. 79.

[20] V. Merkys. Razvitie promyshlennosti i formirovanie proletariata Litvy v XIX v. Vilnius, 1969. Pp. 368-369. See also: Kipras Bielinis. Penktieji metai. Revoliucinio sąjūdžio slinktis ir padariniai. New York, 1959. P. 213.

tion" of Lithuanians turned to other cities of the Russian Empire and to foreign countries.

It was difficult for the leaders of the Lithuanian national movement to come to terms with the official statistics. Subsequent national statistics also hardly made them more optimistic. In 1908, the nationalist publication Viltis (Hope) estimated that the total number of people who wanted additional Masses in the Lithuanian language in Vilnius came to only about 2,100.[21] And in 1909, according to data collected by the government, Lithuanians made up 3.96 percent of the city's total population.[22] So it is not surprising that Lithuanian public figures presented their own interpretations of these statistical data.

The Lithuanian interpretation was that the official statistics were unreliable because many Lithuanians in Vilnius were not nationally conscious, and others did not like to admit that they were Lithuanians; so in fact, there were several times more Lithuanians than the official statistics showed.[23] According to Smetona, one could not rely on nationality statistics, especially surveys of the population about their native language, because Lithuanians were still not nationally conscious. Knowing various languages, they could register themselves at one time as Lithuanians, but another time as Poles. The ethnographic method is significantly more reliable. It allowed the determination of national dependency of the population according to certain objective criteria (people's customs, song melodies, methods of farmhouse construction, names of ancient tools, types of crosses, and folk art in general).[24] This is why Lithuanian activists were so fond of Russian nineteenth-century ethnographic maps, in which Vilnius was included in the ethnographic territory of Lithuania.[25] Mentioning of people's Polish nationality was often written in quotes, thus emphasizing their alleged Polish identity, their Lithuanian surnames purportedly showed their ethnic Lithuanian descent.[26] The ethnographic Lithuanian identity of Vilnius was

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[21] Vilniaus lietuvių surašymas // Viltis. 1908. No. 131.

[22] V. Merkys. Tautiniai santykiai Vilniaus vyskupijoje 1798−1918 m. Vilnius, 2006. P. 97.

[23] Lapas. Vilnius // Ūkininkas. 1899. No. 2. P. 32; Apie lenkų kalbą Lietuvos bažnyčiose. Lietuvių raštas, paduotas Jo Šventenybei Pijui X. Popiežiui ir visiems S. R. katalikų bažnyčios Kardinolams. Kaunas, 1906. Pp. 12-13; M. Dovoina-Silvestravičius. Padėkite, Vilnių atgauti // Šaltinis. 1907. No. 32. P. 499; Vilniaus lietuvių surašymas // Viltis. 1908. No. 131; Dzūkas. Taigi rūpinkimės mūsų statistika // Viltis. 1914. No. 6; L. Lenkiškosios gegužinės pamaldos Ryme, ar lietuviškosios Vilniuje? // Viltis. 1914. No. 97.

[24] A. Sm. [A. Smetona]. Skaitmenų šviesoje // Vairas. 1915. No. 2. Pp. 25-26.

[25] A. Sm. [A. Smetona]. Lietuvos etnografijos ribos // Vairas. 1914. No. 16. Pp. 2-8.

[26] D-ras Basanavičius. Vilniaus lietuviai ir "lenkai" statistikos šviesoje // Viltis. 1908. No. 127.

still based on national statistics in the first half of the nineteenth century, according to the data from which Lithuanians accounted for the greater part of the city's Catholics, and there were very few Poles.[27] The task of "recovering" these assimilated Lithuanians would have to be completed on an unprecedented scale, a sort of national revolution.

Understandably, these attempts to deny the official statistics were needed in ideologically oriented discussions, but could not replace the steps necessary to strengthen Lithuanians in Vilnius. In addition, the absence of any real allies in the fight for an ethnographic Lithuania with its capital in Vilnius made the situation more complicated.

Vilne, Wilno, Vil'na, Vilnia

According to the aforementioned 1897 comprehensive census of the Russian Empire, in Vilnius, Jews made up 40 percent of the population, Poles 30.9 percent, Russians 20 percent, and Belarusians 4.2 percent,[28] and to none of these groups did the idea of a *Lithuanian* Vilnius seem appealing.

For the imperial authorities, Vilnius (Vilna) was the administrative center of the Northwest Region, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which, according to the concept of history constructed in the first half of the nineteenth century, was a Russian state. So it is not surprising that, especially after the suppression of the 1863–1864 uprising, an effort was made in every way to emphasize the Russian character of the city (including the changing of street names, the construction of Orthodox churches and monuments to the governor-general Mikhail Muraviev[29] and the Empress Catherine II). While political practice quite clearly showed that the imperial authorities themselves realized the impossibility of turning Vilnius from a center of Polish culture into a center of Russian culture,[30] neither the government nor sympathetic Russian public figures were prepared to admit this. After

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[27] Kauno ir Vilniaus gubernijų vietinei gyventojai // Vilniaus žinios. 1905. No. 79; D-ras Basanavičius. Vilniaus lietuviai ir "lenkai" statistikos šviesoje. On the nineteenth century statistics also see: V. Sirutavičius. Tautiškumo kriterijai multietninių visuomenių statistikoje. XIX a. vidurio Lietuvos pavyzdys // Lietuvos istorijos metraštis 1998. Vilnius, 1999. Pp. 74-85.

[28] We should stress that not "nationality" but "native language" was recorded.

[29] T. R. Weeks. Monuments and Memory: Immortalizing Count M. N. Muraviev in Vilna, 1898 // Nationalities papers. 1999. Vol. 27. No. 4. Pp. 551-564.

[30] An illustration of this thesis is the imperial government's fear of establishing a Russian university in Vilnius because it was expected that Poles would soon outnumber Russians in it.

Poles, the Jews presented the most concern to state officials. If we are to believe the Bund press in the early twentieth century, there were rumors that a "rebellion" would have to be suppressed in the Vilnius garrison, because "the Poles and the Jews want to take Vilnius away from the Russians."[31] In this national constellation that comprised the Vilnius population, officials noticed the Lithuanians much less.

Polish politicians were the main critics of the idea of a modern (ethnographic) Lithuania in the twentieth century, with Vilnius. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Vilnius had become a city of Polish culture in the Polish discourse. The university and famous nineteenth-century Polish writers and artists had allegedly left marks of Polish identity. The idea of the autonomy (later independence) of an ethnographic Lithuania was not acceptable to any of the Polish political currents at the beginning of the twentieth century (national democrats, democrats, socialists, conservatives, *krajowcy*). All of them, even if they imagined different future relations with ethnic Poland, gave priority to projects of the autonomy (sovereignty) of the *historic* territory of Lithuania.[32] Polish publicists, first the National Democrats and Democrats, answered the question "to whom does/should Vilnius belong?" with *national* and *historical* arguments. Even Polish journalists who admitted that Lithuanians in Vilnius made up more than 2 percent still considered them a quantitatively marginal group in the city.[33] Since it was not difficult to "forget" the Jews, Vilnius was easily turned into a Polish city in the writings of the National Democrats.[34] Of course, at the level of rhetoric, a place in Vilnius was "reserved" for the Lithuanians (just as for other ethnic groups). According to the Polish interpretation, the Vilnius districts were part of Polish Belarus; but taking into account the still weak Belarusian national consciousness, they (first of all the Catholics) were counted as Poles.[35] In this way, the Vilnius district became Polish, and therefore was not included in the *Lithuanian* territory of Lithuania.[36] In addition, Vilnius

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[31] Vil'no // Poslednie izvestiia. 1903. No. 133.

[32] The Polish political currents mentioned had different visions of relations between the future Lithuania and Poland, but this is a different topic.

[33] Piotr Zubowicz. O obecnym stanie poasiadania ludu litewskiego // Praca. 1909. No. 7. P. 23; Leon Wasilewski. Litwa i Białoruś. Przeszłość-teraźniejszość-tendencje rozwojowe. Kraków, [1912]. P. 255.

[34] Jan Obst. Historja a życie // Kurjer Litewski. 1912. No. 116.

[35] Narcyz Ogończyk. Stosunki etnograficzne na Litwie // Goniec codzienny. 1910. No. 35.

[36] Leon Wasilewski. Litwa i Białoruś // Przeszłość-teraźniejszość-tendencje rozwojowe. P. 255. Position taken by Józef Piłsudski: A. Vyšniauskas. Lietuvos socialdemokratijos

was considered to be a Polish city historically because, for example, in the magistrate books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the surnames of all the craftsmen were Polish or Ruthenian, and furthermore, the city's name was of Slavic origin.[37]

Although in Lithuanian periodicals at the beginning of the twentieth century the Belarusian national movement was not identified as posing dangers to the political ambitions of Lithuanians or in regard to the battle for Vilnius, and there was sometimes even talk about the possibility of co-existing peacefully in the historic capital of Lithuania,[38] from the time of the 1905 Revolution it was clear to Lithuanian politicians that the Belarusian national movement, which at the time was in its early phases, would eventually become yet another obstacle to the implementation of the political project of an ethnographic Lithuania. The Belarusian national movement was the typical nationalism of a nondominant Central or East European nation, based on an ethnolinguistic concept of nationality. Belarusian nationalists perceived Belarus as an area dominated by a Belarusian-speaking population,[39] and according to their concept, Vilnius would end up in the territory of Belarus. In the public debates at the beginning of the twentieth century, this "overlap" of ethnographic Lithuania and ethnic Belarus had not yet become a subject of fierce debate, because the Belarusian national movement was weak, and in the first stage, many of the movement's leaders wanted to achieve the autonomy of *historic* Lithuania, within the framework of which the Belarusian national consciousness would strengthen, and in the future this would help it to achieve autonomy as ethnographic Belarus.[40] Therefore, Belarusian activists wanted to see in Vilnius not the dominance of any single nation, but the center of the whole territory, of all the nations,[41] and could in no way agree with the political idea put forward by Lithuanians of an ethnographic Lithuania, which, in their understanding,

politinė transformacija 1898 metais // Lietuvių Atgimimo istorijos studijos. Vol. 3: Lietuvos valstybės idėja (XIX a.–XX a. pradžia). Vilnius, 1991. P. 108.

[37] Ignacy Świetliński. Mały feljeton. Wiosna wszechwładna // Kurjer Litewski. 1915. No. 147.

[38] Dėl Vilniaus // Viltis. 1909. No. 1.

[39] A. Unuchak. "Nasha niva" i belaruski natsyianal'ny rukh (1906–1915 gg.). Minsk, 2006. Pp. 70-71.

[40] A. Unuchak. Nasha niva i belorusskoe natsionalnoe dvizhenie nachala XX v. // Acta humanitarica universitatis Saulensis. 2011. Vol. 12. Pp. 172-180.

[41] Vilniaus reikšmė mūsų krašte // Lietuvos žinios. 1914. No. 80. An article from *Vecherniaia gazeta* is retold here.

divided Belarus into two parts, and illegally assigned Vilnius to Lithuania, and not to Belarus.[42]

On the agendas of the Jewish political parties in Russia in the twentieth century, various projects of personal and not territorial autonomy dominated and had to be implemented after the democratization of the Russian Empire. Therefore, up to the beginning of World War I, there was no interesting debate among Jewish publicists about the attribution of Vilnius to one national territory or another. Moreover, the Lithuanians, as a peasant nation in general, received little attention on "the Jewish street." The only exception was the Lithuanian-dominated province of Kaunas, where the tradition of forming an electoral bloc of Lithuanians and Jews emerged during elections to the Russian Duma.[43] The question "To whom does Vilnius belong?" began to be raised in Jewish publications during World War I.

The signals coming from leaders of the underground Russian Social Democratic Workers (Bolshevik) Party, which was not influential in Lithuania, also promised nothing good for the Lithuanians. Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin), the leader of the party, in a dispute with Rosa Luxemburg, another famous leftist leader, attempted to prove that the national autonomy of Lithuania within the Russian Empire was possible, based only on the areas where Lithuanians made up a majority, rather than the four provinces (Vilnius, Kaunas, Suwalki, and Grodno), as Luxemburg proposed. However, this real or alleged friendliness on Lenin's part toward the national autonomy of Lithuania would have been totally unsuitable to Lithuanian nationalist leaders because out of the whole of the Vilnius province, the Bolshevik leader offered to include in an autonomous Lithuania only the single district of Trakai, "in which Lithuanians form a majority."[44]

So the leaders of the Lithuanian national movement unsuccessfully struggled to find allies in the battle to implement the idea of a political ethnographic Lithuania with Vilnius as its capital.

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[42] Mykolas Römeris. Lietuva // Studija apie lietuvių tautos atgimimą. Vilnius, 2005. P. 205; Michał Römer. Lietuva karo akivaizdoje // Baltos lankos. 1993. No. 3. P. 215; R. Miknys. Vilnius and the Problem of Modern Lithuanian Statehood in the Early Twentieth Century // Lithuanian Historical Studies. 1997. Vol. 2. P. 114.

[43] V. Sirutavičius and D. Staliūnas (Eds.). A Pragmatic Alliance: Jewish−Lithuanian Political Cooperation at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. Budapest and New York, 2011.

[44] V. I. Lenin. Polnoe sobranie sochinanii. Vol. 24. Moscow, 1961. P. 146.

How did they expect to implement the idea?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lithuanian nationalist leaders exerted strong efforts to make Vilnius the center of the Lithuanian national movement,[45] and to fix that idea in the minds of the masses (in geography textbooks, maps, and poetry, and in public campaigns, such as protecting Gediminas Hill from the plan to set up a water tank on it). In the opinion of some figures in the national movement, these activities by Lithuanians in Vilnius created an optimistic spirit. However, despite all this activity, the city remained Jewish and Polish. The Lithuanian influence was very well illustrated in the elections to the Russian Duma in Vilnius, when the Lithuanian candidate gathered a few dozen votes, while the Polish National Democratic candidate in the elections to the Fourth Duma gathered well over 5,000.[46] In the elections in the Vilnius province to all four Russian Dumas, the Lithuanians failed to elect even one representative.

Bearing in mind the weak position of Lithuanians in the historic capital and in the Vilnius province, the more or less democratic determination of the borders of this autonomous territory, or as an independent state, could have had an unfavorable outcome for the Lithuanians. There is no doubt that the Lithuanian leaders foresaw this possibility. This is why in 1906 the most influential Lithuanian newspaper stated:

> We demanded autonomy for Lithuania with a Parliament in Vilnius, not taking into account the fact that some residents of the city and its environs are foreigners and some are assimilated Lithuanians who care little about the matters of ethnographic Lithuania, [the number of] conscious Lithuanians compared with foreigners is just a handful in Vilnius itself [...] How can there be a Parliament in Vilnius, if most of the inhabitants of Vilnius will not agree to belong to an autonomous Lithuania, but will want, let us say, to be in the capital of Belarus. [...] If the representatives of Vilnius to the Duma are the same as last year, then an autonomous Lithuania within its national borders, with a Parliament in Vilnius, will be impossible to accomplish. Then we will have to either totally renounce Lithuanian autonomy, or agree with

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[45] The actual steps taken by Lithuanians to establish themselves in Vilnius would be a separate topic. Some aspects of the historiography of this question have already been discussed: T. R. Weeks. Creating Lithuanian Patriotism in a Polish-Jewish City: The Wilno/Vilnius Lithuanian Press, 1904−1922 // Andrzej Nowak, Andrzej A. Zięba (Eds.). Formuły patriotizmu w Europie Wschodniej i Środkowej od Nowożytności do współczesności. Kraków, 2009. Pp. 251-263.

[46] K. Delei rinkimų Vilniuje // Lietuvos žinios. 1912. No. 116.

the opinions of those who demand the country's autonomy within its historic borders, or to further narrow Lithuania down to a stump, and choose a different location for the Seimas, but not in Vilnius.[47]

Taking into account the ethnodemographic situation, the Catholic wing suggested considering Kaunas, an ethnographic center of the Lithuanians' lands, as the center of modern Lithuania. However, this "alternative of Kaunas" did not displace Vilnius in the aims of the Lithuanian national movement.[48]

The Lithuanian Social Democrats envisaged liberation from the Russian Empire as a result of the joint struggle by enslaved nations, and especially working people.[49] Since social and economic issues dominated their agenda and activities, the multiethnicity of Vilnius or the whole of Lithuania was not as great a problem for them as it was for other elements in the Lithuanian national movement; in other words, it was not believed that the different language used by workers would prevent them from agreeing on the most important political goals. In the initial stages of activities in Vilnius, the Lithuanian Social Democrats carried out their agitation mainly in Polish, because there were almost no Lithuanian-speaking workers.[50] The Polish-speaking workers were considered ethnic, but Polonized, Lithuanians. This was purportedly shown by shared interests, a common past, and even "the very blood and manner of the people" between them and the Lithuanian-speaking workers. An additional argument was the fact that the Polish-speaking workers participated in quite large numbers in LSDP activities.[51]

[47] P. Zonis [St. Stakelė]. Lietuvos autonomija ir lietuviai-rytiečiai // Vilniaus žinios. 1906. No. 277. The author of the article, the priest Stanislovas Stakelė, was one of the most ardent fighters for the Lithuanian language in churches of the Vilnius diocese.

[48] For more on this issue, see L. Gudaitis. Platėjantys akiračiai. Lietuvių literatūrinė spauda 1904–1917 metais. Vilnius, 1977. P. 16; E. Aleksandravičius. Bandymai atgaivinti universitetą Lietuvoje 1832–1918 m. P. 162; D. Staliūnas. Kauno vizija XX a. Pradžioje // Darbai ir dienos. 1997. No. 4. Pp. 59-64; D. Staliūnas. Visuomenė be universiteto? Pp. 156-165.

[49] Susivažiavimas L. S. D. P. // Darbininkų balsas. 1902. No. 3. Pp. 2-3; S. P. [A. Janulaitis]. Neprigulminga Lietuva // Darbininkų kalendorius 1904 metams. London, 1904. P. 49. We are talking here only about LSDP figures who advocated Lithuania's separation from Russia and the creation of an independent state as fully independent, or in a (con) federation with other states.

[50] A. Lietuvis [Moravskis]. Lietuvos darbininkų judėjimo istorija sąryšy su Lietuvos valstybės atgimimo judėjimu. Pirmas dešimtmetis: 1892–1902 m. m. // Kultūra. 1931. No. 4. Pp. 199-200.

[51] C.L.S.D.P.K. Lietuvių Social-Demokratų Partijos Konferencija // Darbininkų balsas. 1903. No. 1. P. 9; Šis-tas apie Lenkų Socijalistų Partiją // Darbininkų balsas. 1905. No. 6. P. 177.

The cooperation between the Lithuanian Social Democrats and the Jewish socialist parties, in particular the Bund, also strengthened the conviction of the former that ethnic/national problems would not be a barrier to forming the territory of Lithuania.[52]

Lithuanian liberals, first of all the left wing of the Lithuanian Democratic Party, like the Social Democrats, relied not only on their own forces, but tried to cooperate with other national groups that were in opposition to the imperial regime. From 1913, the possibility of creating an independent state began to be linked to the war, in the hope that major European countries after the war would try to create independent countries between Germany and Russia.[53] However, efforts to reach an agreement with Democrats representing other nations were difficult: the idea raised by the Lithuanians of an ethnographic Lithuania with Vilnius conflicted with the concept of the autonomy of the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which Polish and Belarusian activists supported.[54]

The Lithuanian right-wing politicians, who most consistently defended the ethnolinguistic model for the creation of a modern Lithuania, were in a no less complicated situation. Focusing their attention on ethnocultural values, they inevitably made the Poles their main enemy. Having an aggressive enemy in the fight for influence in Vilnius and its area, Lithuanians sought allies, and in the constellation of national groups at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jews fitted this role. In the elections to the Russian Duma in the Kaunas province, Lithuanians formed an electoral bloc with the Jews, according to the principle of the "lesser evil." This tradition began thanks to the inventive manipulation of Jonas Basanavičius, one of the main leaders of right-wing Lithuanian in the elections to the Duma in 1906. That pragmatic alliance, especially between Lithuanian right-wing politicians and Jewish representatives, was not based on a deep concurrence of political programs, but was more an action dictated by political unions.[55] Lithuanian politicians well knew that no political group on "the Jewish street" was interested in the territorial autonomy of Lithuania or the creation of an independent state. So in Vilnius, as in other cities, the Lithuanian right

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[52] There was a Jewish faction in the Polish Socialist Party in Lithuania (PPS Lietuvoje) which joined the LSDP in 1906: E. Vidmantas. Lietuvos darbininkų periodinė spauda 1895–1917. Vilnius, 1979. P. 63.

[53] L. V-kas [K. Grinius]. Apie šalies neprigulmybę // Varpas. 1914. No. 3. P. 100.

[54] R. Miknys. Vilniaus autonomistai ir jų 1904–1905 m. Pp. 173-198.

[55] D. Staliūnas. Collaboration of Lithuanians and Jews during the Elections to the First and the Second Dumas // Sirutavičius and Staliūnas (Eds.). A Pragmatic Alliance. Pp. 45-75.

lacked sincere adherents to the idea of an ethnographic Lithuania among the other nondominant national groups.

Turning cities, and in particular Vilnius, into Lithuanian ones in an ethnolinguistic sense had very vague prospects. Of course, some hope could have been found by the media in the examples of other cities in the Baltic provinces, where nondominant national groups with similar social structures (such as the Estonians and Latvians) successfully expanded their presence.[56] Lithuanian politicians, and, in general, broader layers of society, could expect that after the abolition of the Pale of Settlement, some Jews would move out of Lithuania.[57] These hopes were not even hidden: "By allowing Jews to live not only in Lithuania but also in all of Russia, many Jews will move out of Lithuania, and then there will be fewer with us."[58] However, it seems that in this sense Lithuanian politicians were not great optimists, at least in thinking about the immediate future. Smetona, showing that Vilnius should be Lithuania's capital, presented arguments for the inadequacy of Panevėžys in such a role. After converting the city into the center of the land, it would not become Lithuanian, as Lithuanians were still weak in an economic sense and they did not have enough educated people, so Poles and Jews would dominate. In other words, "the physiognomy of the center of Panevėžys would be the same as that of Vilnius and Kaunas now."[59] The same logic should have been valid in the case of Vilnius, so in this way Smetona practically recognized that the Lithuanians were so far unable to change the "physiognomy" of Vilnius. Therefore, in their political vision, right-wing Lithuanian political movements, more than other currents in the Lithuanian national movement, felt the need to find allies beyond the borders of Lithuania.

In a more abstract discussion, it was felt that a reestablished Poland during the European conflict, which was expected to come, would not be strong, because the other countries of the region would not want it.[60] While this was not stated directly, one could understand that Lithuanian activists

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[56] A. Smetona. Mums svarbu Lietuvos miestai // Viltis. 1913. No. 126.

[57] A significant part of Lithuanian society expected such a move from the government: Pilyps [K. Žalys]. Su kuo reikia tartis rinkimų laike // Lietuvos ūkininkas. 1907. No. 3. P. 35. See also: Kroniai // Vilniaus žinios. 1905. No. 109; A. Sketeris. Sodiečių sandora // Vilniaus žinios. 1905. No. 266; Joniškis // Vilniaus žinios. 1905. No. 286; A-s [P. Višinskis]. Naujos caro "malonės" // Ūkininkas. 1905. No. 10. P. 272; Za nedeliu // Voskhod. 1905. No. 16. Col. 25; Petition of Lithuanian peasants, July 10, 1905 // Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas [Lithuanian State Historical Archive]. F. 378. PS. 1905 m. B. 13. L. 116.

[58] Paaiškinimas // Vilniaus žinios. 1905. No. 112.

[59] A. Smetona. Kur Lietuvos centras?

[60] Terremont [G. Landsbergis]. Pro domo sua // Varpas. 1893. No. 7. Pp. 107-108.

hoped that the main European countries would not allow Poland to harm Lithuania. However, such options in postwar European restructuring were rarely considered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The subject became relevant only just before World War I. Until about 1913, Lithuanian politicians had to follow the existing political realities. The Lithuanian right and liberals first sought allies in the Russian liberal camp, in particular in the ranks of the Russian Constitutional Democrats (Cadets).

Even some Lithuanian politicians, such as Petras Leonas, joined the Cadet Party. Lithuanian activists nurtured especially great hope for the support of this party in the project for the autonomy of ethnographic Lithuania at the time of the 1905 Revolution. In 1906, a meeting took place in St. Petersburg between the right-wing Lithuanian figures, J. Basanavičius, A. Dubinskas, and A. Voldemaras, and the leaders of the Cadet Party. The latter were interested in the widest possible support for their party throughout the empire, and made promises to the Lithuanians, but these promises were very vague. The Lithuanians were assured that the Cadet Party was "sympathetic to the demands of the Lithuanians, and agreed to support the immediate introduction of the widest self-government of our territory in the Seimas."[61] As we can see, even at the level of verbal promises, the Cadets talked of self-government rather than autonomy. In fact, however, they did not intend to support the establishment of national territorial units in the borderlands of the empire.[62] In addition, their main supporters in Lithuania were Jews and Poles,[63] for whom the idea of autonomy for ethnographic Lithuania, as has already been mentioned, was unacceptable. This circumstance also discouraged the leaders of the Cadets from supporting Lithuanian demands. The Lithuanian right understood this quite rapidly. In 1909, Basanavičius openly said that Russian right-wing parties were more favorable to the Lithuanians than were the "friends of the Poles," the Cadets.[64] Lithuanian representatives also did not get support from the Cadets for their autonomy projects after World War I began.[65]

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[61] D-ras J. Basanavičius, A. Dubinskas, A. Voldemaras. Lietuvos autonomija ir Rusų konstitutiškai demokratiškoji partija // Vilniaus žinios. 1906. No. 13.

[62] In his memoirs, K. Grinius wrote that Leonas left the party because the Cadets did not support the demand for the autonomy of Lithuania: K. Grinius. Atsiminimai ir mintys. Vol. 2. Chicago, 1962. Pp. 64, 163. We think that the proposition by Egidijus Motieka that "the Cadets recognized Lithuania's right to autonomy" (E. Motieka. Didysis Vilniaus seimas. Vilnius, 1996. P. 228) should be corrected.

[63] D. Staliūnas. Collaboration of Lithuanians and Jews during the Elections to the First and the Second Dumas. P. 45.

[64] Iks. [J. Basanavičius]. Dar apie Suvalkų gubernijos atskyrimą // Viltis. 1909. No. 99.

[65] R. Miknys. Lietuvos demokratų partija 1902−1915 metais. Vilnius, 1995. P. 164.

These reflections by Basanavičius about possible goodwill from Russian right-wing parties toward Lithuanian political ambitions were not a one-time episode by the "patriarch of the Lithuanian nation." Right-wing politicians consistently tried to persuade the government of the empire that they could fight against the main enemy of the Russian Empire on the western borderlands also by supporting the Lithuanians, that is, by carrying out a policy of "divide and rule." In principle, led by this intention, Basanavičius published anti-Polish articles in 1883 in the newspaper *Novoe vremia* [New time]; in 1884, the Lithuanian J. Šliupas delivered a letter to the Warsaw governor-general with the demands of the Lithuanians;[66] in 1911, J. Basanavičius, A. Smetona, and M. Davainis-Silvestraitis held talks with the Russian right for a common anti-Polish front;[67] and so on. Indeed, the bureaucrats of the empire often considered the usefulness of supporting the Lithuanians against the Poles and the merging of all ethnic Lithuanians into one territorial-administrative unit; but at the beginning of the twentieth century all the talk remained only talk. The empire's political elite understood clearly how ethnic territorialization threatened the integrity of the empire: "the government, by artificially creating special ethnographic units and grouping administrative centers by nationality, would only emphasize that at the state level, the existence of individual nations also contradicts the tsar's mandates, by which the state interests of Russia are protected."[68]

Conclusion

So Lithuanian nationalism proclaimed Vilnius to be the capital of ethnographic Lithuania, since in this way ties with historic Lithuania (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) were declared; it was the most important religious center; it was also the official center of the Northwest Region, so the greatest resources were accumulated in the city; only after an entrenchment in Vilnius would it be possible to influence the Lithuanians of the Vilnius province.

The implementation of this political objective confronted several obstacles: the very unfavorable ethnodemographic situation of Lithuanians in the city and its area, and foreign disapproval of the political autonomy (or even an independent nation-state) of ethnographic Lithuania, which would

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[66] J. Bkp [Jurgis Šaulys]. J. Šliupo pasiuntinystė Varšuvoje // Varpas. 1904. No. 3. Pp. 42-45.

[67] R. Miknys. Lietuvos demokratų partija 1902−1915 metais. Pp. 150-151.

[68] A top-secret report from the governor-general of Warsaw to the interior minister, January 4, 1899: Russian State Historical Archive. F. 1284. Op. 185, 1898. D. 55. L. 8.

also include Vilnius. Despite these problems, most Lithuanian nationalist leaders consistently supported the idea.

For the Lithuanian Social Democrats, linguistic and other similar ethno-cultural differences were not a very important factor; therefore, from their point of view, no problems should arise in inserting Vilnius into modern Lithuania. Other political forces tried to find allies among the movements that opposed the Russian Empire, but their searches produced no results. Some of the Lithuanian leaders, first of all from the right, hoped for the support of the imperial government, but it was not ready to agree to the territorialization of ethnicity, and thus to the autonomy of ethnographic Lithuania.

Hence, it was already clearly seen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the aspiration of Lithuanian nationalism to become established in ethnographic Lithuania with the Vilnius area could hardly be implemented. As is well known, this happened after World War I: Vilnius and its surroundings ended up within the borders of Poland, and not of Lithuania.

SUMMARY

This article is devoted to the question of Vilnius as the capital of a modern Lithuanian nation-state in the Lithuanian national movement in the late imperial period. In this article, the author attempts to reveal the reasons behind such a decision, to identify the problems that Lithuanian nationalists faced in seeking to implement this goal, and to answer the question of how the leaders of the Lithuanian National Movement hoped to implement the goal. It is claimed that despite the very unfavorable ethnodemographic situation of Lithuanians in the city and disapproval among other nationalities, Vilnius was proclaimed the future national capital of Lithuanians/Lithuania not only in order to claim historical rights for an independent state but also because this city was the most important religious and official center of the region, and finally because of the need to nationalize the population of the Vilnius region. Lithuanian political forces tried to find allies among the movements that opposed the Russian Empire, but their search produced no results. Some of the Lithuanian leaders, particularly from the right, hoped for the support of the imperial government, but the latter was not ready to agree to the territorialization of ethnicity, and thus to the autonomy of ethnographic Lithuania with Vilnius.

Резюме

В статье рассказывается об обосновании выбора Вильнюса в каче-
стве будущего литовского национального государства литовским на-
циональным движением в позднеимперский период. Автор исследует
аргументы в пользу выбора именно Вильнюса, а также проблемы, с
которыми столкнулись националисты, претворяя в жизнь свои планы,
и способы решения этих проблем. Несмотря на крайне незначительную
долю литовцев среди жителей Вильнюса (всего несколько процентов)
и возражения со стороны других национальных групп, Вильнюс был
объявлен столицей будущего литовского государства. Это было сделано
не только для подтверждения исторических прав нового независимого
государства, но и потому, что Вильнюс являлся главным религиозным
и административным центром региона. Провозглашение Вильнюса
литовской столицей должно было способствовать национализации на-
селения. Литовские политические силы безрезультатно пытались найти
поддержку своим планам среди других движений, оппозиционных
по отношению к имперским властям. Некоторые литовские лидеры,
прежде всего с правого фланга, возлагали надежду на имперское пра-
вительство, но оно не было готово к признанию территориализации
этничности, а значит, и к автономии этнографической Литвы с центром
в Вильнюсе.