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The Congress of Vilnius in 1906 and the congress of Kiev in 1907: the Attempts of the Polish Gentry from the Taken Lands to Establish a Common Political Platform During Elections to the Second and Third State Duma

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The relatively small Polish gentry communities occupying nine guberniyas (governorates) of Western Russia were successful in introducing to the First State Duma gentry 16 deputies out of the total of 84 mandates awarded to the region¹. Polish deputies vastly influenced the choice of four deputies who were not landowners². This was a huge achievement, and the Polish gentry were hoping to repeat that success in the elections to the Second Duma which were based on the same set of statutes. The elections to the First Duma were largely improvised, and the “constitutional enthusiasm” of candidates representing various nationalities in western guberniyas and the entire country lacked a specific political undertone. The Polish gentry failed to form organizations whose territorial reach extended beyond election committees at the district and guberniya level. Polish communities were characterized by a general uniformity of political views, and their potential opponents (state authorities, Russian nationalists, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarussian nationalists) were even less well prepared for the elections. The situation began to change rapidly after the short-lived term of the First Duma. The presence of two separate Polish groups in the Duma spurred the

¹ For more information about elections to the State Duma and the State Council, refer to: R. Jurkowski, *Sukcesy i porażki. Ziemiaństwo polskie Ziem Zabrzanych w wyborach do Dumy Państwowej i Rady Państwa 1906–1913*, Olsztyn 2009.

² They were Catholic priests: Bishop Edward Ropp and Father Antoni Songajło, and two peasant deputies: Michał Gotowiecki and Marcin Żukowski.

political polarization of the Polish gentry, in particular in the associated intellectual communities of Vilnius, Kiev and, to a smaller extent, Minsk. The emergence of *Dziennik Wileński*³ and *Dziennik Kijowski*⁴, daily newspapers with a strong national-democratic orientation, accelerated this process, as demonstrated by press disputes of growing frequency and vehemence (mainly the Kiev Daily and the Lithuanian Courier in Vilnius) concerning the political program of deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia. During a short election campaign for the Second Duma (from 8 (21) July 1906, the dissolution of the First Duma, to January 1907, when the elections for the Second Duma took place), Polish press titles published in Vilnius, Kiev and Warsaw featured an extensive debate on whether the deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia should join forces with the Circle of the Polish Kingdom. Przemysław Dąbrowski⁵ recently presented us with an account of the National Democrats' position on the matter, but his views seem to be biased by newspapers sympathizing with the National Democrats. For this reason, this paper attempts to analyze the political and organizational aspects of two resolutions adopted during constituent congresses. The resolutions are presented in Annex 1 and Annex 2.

The National-Democrats' heightened press activity forced conservative and loyalist circles which controlled the vast majority of the Polish gentry to state their political views with greater openness and precision. This process fostered the emergence of ideological and political criteria which could be adopted by a successive group of candidates from the Taken Lands running for the Second Duma. The gentry working for the respective guberniyas' election committees decided to organize meetings where they could consolidate their views and action plans. The conservative members of that community were hoping to demonstrate that by outnumbering the National Democrats, they would emerge as the victors in the upcoming elections⁶. Organizational matters were of equal importance. Polish gentry representatives

³ The promotional issue came out on 6 (19) July 1906, and the first regular issue – on (14) September 1906. Cf.: R. Jurkowski, *"Kurier Litewski" w latach 1905–1907*, "Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej", R. XXII, (1983), No. 1, p. 89.

⁴ The first issue was published on 1 (14) February 1906. Cf.: M. Korzeniowski, *Za Złotą Bramą, Działalność społeczno-kulturalna Polaków w Kijowie w latach 1905–1920*, Lublin 2009, pp. 257–278.

⁵ P. Dąbrowski, *Narodowa Demokracja byłego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego, Studium z zakresu myśli politycznej i działalności obozu narodowego na ziemiach litewsko-białoruskich w latach 1897–1918*, Kraków 2010, pp. 207–230.

⁶ In an analysis of the Vilnius congress, P. Dąbrowski (ibidem, p. 222) wrote that "the text somewhat changed the National Democrats' views about the solidarity of Polish deputies in the State Duma", which is a certain simplification because the National Democrats' decision was not influenced by the "text" but rather by the fact that they constituted a minority among the gentry. They were also a minority at the congress where resolutions were passed by a simple majority vote. Three National Democrats were outvoted by 20 members of the gentry. The author also erroneously spells the first name of Father Drucki-Lubecki (correct version: Hieronim) and the last name of Kazimierz Kaczkowski (not "Kuczkowski").

from nine guberniyas were able to convene only after the announcement of electoral laws for the Bulhygin Duma and the October Manifesto of 17 (30) October 1905. The gentry were hoping to debate on the establishment of a Central Elections Office covering the nine guberniyas, the methods of financing the operation of election committees as well as Lithuanian and Ruthenian representation in Petersburg. Those were the main objectives of the Vilnius Congress of 6–7 (19–20) December 1906. Similar topics were discussed in Kiev on 1–2 (14–15) September 1907, while the Vilnius Congress of 8–9 (21–22) January 1908 debated mainly on financial matters and failed to adopt any formal resolutions.

I. Political issues

The resolution published after the Vilnius congress contained guidelines for three categories of election committees at the municipal, district and guberniya level. In line with these recommendations, the selected candidates, electors and deputies had to officially comply with the provisions detailed in six paragraphs of the resolution (cf. Annex No. 1). Under paragraphs 1 and 4, the candidates had to accept the constitutional monarchy system (§1) and support measures aiming to develop an internal system of state rule (§4 – decentralization and territorial self-government). Paragraph 2 made a general reference to “constitutional freedoms” guaranteed to Russian citizens after 17 (30) October 1905 (equal treatment for members of various national and religious groups). Property rights and ownership laws in agriculture were discussed in §3. The last two paragraphs (§5 and §6) concerned the representation of Polish communities living in Lithuania and Ruthenia in the Duma. While the provisions of §5 which advised the deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia to join forces with representatives of other national groups did not stir heightened emotions⁷, paragraph 6, which recommended that “Polish Circle deputies abide by the principle of mutual support and solidarity in external action” spurred a long-term debate. The conflict was appeased only in 1912 when three of the five deputies elected for the Fourth Duma were members of the National Democratic Party. The vagueness of these provisions supported the formulation of various opinions, including Aleksander Chomiński’s statement which was readily cited by Józef Hlasko, editor-in-chief of *Dziennik Wileński*, namely that “the congress made it absolutely clear that an understanding should be reached with the Circle of the Polish Kingdom”⁸. The notion of “solidarity in external action”

⁷ Before the elections to the First Duma, *The principal declaration of Polish national election committees in the Kingdom of Poland, Lithuania and Ruthenia during the first elections to the representative assembly of the Russian State* spoke of “local fractions” of the Polish Circle rather than a separate circle of deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia (P. Dąbrowski, op. cit. p. 211).

⁸ J. Hlasko, *Po zjeździe wileńskim*, “Dziennik Wileński”, No. 94 of 21 December 1906 (2 January 1907).

produced similar interpretation difficulties. Every speech delivered by members of the Polish Circle or the Circle of Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia in the Duma constituted “external action”, therefore, all statements and speeches were acts of solidarity, while “mutual support” could apply to all or selected matters on the agenda. The above also allowed a vast freedom of interpretation.

There are no surviving records of the three meetings in Vilnius. The laconic reference in Edward Woyniłłowicz’s memoirs does not contribute any valuable information⁹. A brief report on the Vilnius congress, delivered by count Ksawery Orłowski on 13 (26) December 1906 at a meeting of the Election Committee of the Podolian Guberniya¹⁰, is much more informative. According to the report, the Polish Election Committee of the Vilnius Guberniya initiated a debate on the self-proposed resolution of 23 October (5 November) 1906 containing 18 postulates (with additional sub-points) which constituted the committee’s election program¹¹. “Mr. Woyniłłowicz and Mr. Korwin Milewski gave harsh criticism to the proposed resolution. They argued that the resolution had been drafted in excessive detail and that it offered a variety of *mandats imperatifs* which would tie our deputies’ hands, turning them into mere pawns in the political game. They objected to such mandates and argued that the method had proven to be quite useless and harmful during Duma sessions. The Polish Circle was deprived of decision-making powers, and it had to consult all important matters with the central office of the National-Democratic Party in Warsaw. This procedure led to errors. The discussion about Poland’s autonomy was completely [this word was crossed out in pencil – R. J.] badly timed and presented in an inappropriate manner, which is why it received a very cold welcome at the Duma. The resolution was also criticized on account of its length. The election platform for our guberniyas should be laid out in a succinct fashion to contain only the most important postulates, while providing the deputies with extensive freedom of action”¹². The report suggests that meeting participants subscribed to the opinions of E. Woyniłłowicz and H. Korwin-Milewski.

⁹ He wrote: “Those congresses were always marked by the emergence of two completely opposite movements: an «all-Polish» trend which received its slogans from the National Democratic Party in the Kingdom of Poland, and a «domestic» movement that accounted for the local specificity and national identity of the Taken Lands and was more ideologically similar to the «party of realists» and «loyalists». (E. Woyniłłowicz, *Wspomnienia 1847–1928*, part 1, Wilno 1931, p. 173).

¹⁰ *Protokół posiedzenia polskiego podolskiego komitetu gubernialnego z dnia 13 Grudnia 1906 r. w Winnicy*, in: *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu a Duma Państwowa 1906–1907 i Rada Państwa 1907–1909. Materiały zebrane przez Kaliksta Dunin-Borkowskiego*, Jagiellonian Library, Manuscript Department, Rkps 7989 IV, k. 51–56.

¹¹ *Akcja gubernialna wileńska. Powstanie i organizacja Polskiego Gubernialnego Komitetu Wyborczego Wileńskiego. Uchwała Wileńskiego Polskiego Gubernialnego Komitetu Wyborczego z dnia 23 października 1906 roku*, “Kurier Litewski”, No. 246 of 29 October (11 November) 1906.

¹² *Protokół posiedzenia polskiego podolskiego komitetu gubernialnego z dnia 13 Grudnia 1906 r. w Winnicy*, in: *Polscy wielcy właściciele...*

A special committee responsible for drafting the “election platform” was appointed. Its performance was discussed at the following meeting and “the final editorial work was entrusted to Mr. Milewski to ensure the platform’s compliance with legal requirements”¹³. Ksawery Orłowski also remarked on the provisions of §§2, 5 and 6 of the Vilnius resolution: “the instructions for territorial groups and their relations with the Polish Circle were modeled on the regulations of our Circle in Vienna and the rules of P. circles [“P.” probably denotes “Polish” – R.J] in the State Council. During a debate on the equal treatment of various nationalities, no reservations were made against the Jews”¹⁴.

E. Woynilowicz and H. Korwin-Milewski thus contributed to the formulation of a compendious election platform, and the latter was also responsible for the final shape of the six paragraphs of the Vilnius resolution. In view of later role the played by those two gentry members in the State Council and the Polish political community, E. Woynilowicz’s criticism of the Vilnius Guberniya Committee’s program stemmed from his “practical and civil” approach to politics. He was only too aware that members of the Polish gentry were inclined to discussion, conflict and hair-splitting, and he could have been afraid that a highly specific program (such as that proposed on 23 October (5 November) 1906) would divide and weaken the Polish community before the following elections. This explains why he lobbied for a short and highly generalized resolution. While H. Korwin-Milewski could have been guided by a similar logic, he held his political skills in very high esteem, therefore, a highly specific election program with strict instructions for parliamentary conduct would significantly restrict his freedom. Korwin-Milewski would never consent to such a solution, which directly led to his dismissal from the post of Vilnius deputy in the State Council in 1908–1909. In 1909, the Vilnius gentry granted to Korwin-Milewski a special privilege to speak individually (without the prior approval of Lithuanian and Ruthenian Circles) in the State Council¹⁵.

It quickly became apparent that the Vilnius resolution was not a golden measure. As is usually the case, it attracted both praise and criticism. To give more precision to §6 of the Vilnius resolution, it was further expanded during the congress in Kiev “to avoid interpretations that are inconsistent with the spirit and the original intention of Vilnius resolutions”. The follow-

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem. K. Orłowski refers to “territorial groups” in the plural. This implies that the Poles in the region of Podolia expected the constituents from Lithuania and Ruthenia to form two separate groups, while the gentry in north-western guberniyas always looked to the Circle of Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia as a single group and juxtaposed it against the Polish Circle from the Kingdom. The above implies strong regional separatism which became even more clearly manifested during the establishment of the constituency office in Petersburg.

¹⁵ For a detailed description and an analysis of Hipolit Korwin-Milewski’s efforts during elections to the State Council and his conduct in this house of the Russian parliament, refer to: R. Jurkowski, *Sukcesy i porażki...*, pp. 337, 354–367, 374–377, 381–384.

ing provisions were added: 1) it was unanimously decided that deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia “should create a separate and an unconditionally autonomous circle”. They should be able to choose whether they wanted to initiate any action “in solidarity with the Circle of the Polish Kingdom” and on the “principle of mutual reciprocity” in matters pertaining to “Polish national interests”, and in any other matters – “at the discretion of the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia” (cf. Annex No. 2). 2) This “solidarity on the principle of mutual reciprocity” was further restricted by “vital interests of our country” which, although second to “the general needs of the Polish nation”, proved to be more important than “Polish national affairs” because “our deputies should support all initiatives of the Polish Circle that do not stand in opposition to the interests of our Country”. The above statement emphasized the full autonomy of the Lithuanian and Ruthenian Circle, while the “solidarity of the two circles in matters pertaining to Polish national interests”, often postulated by press titles sympathizing with the National Democrats, was nothing more than the Polish gentry’s declaration of support for the Polish Circle’s postulates and projects concerning mainly the Kingdom of Poland (unless they “stood in opposition to the interests of our Country”, which was a highly generalized formula).

During the Kiev congress, the interpretation of the provisions of §6 the Vilnius resolution was actually expanded, and this accomplishment was a success of the conservative fraction of Polish landowners. It evoked protest from the National Democrats attending the congress as well as several landowners who were not party members but were responsible for communication between the two Polish circles in the Duma. Marcin Chełchowski and count Wawrzyniec Puttkamer, the most outstanding members of the National Democratic Party in the Vilnius guberniya, decreed the Kiev resolution to be “deficient and not sufficiently conducive to the promotion of solidarity”. They were joined by Bronisław Umiastowski and Bolesław Jałowiecki¹⁶, both official delegates of the Vilnius guberniya. In their votum separatum, they underlined that their objections to the amended §6 of the Vilnius resolution resulted from “diffuseness and ambiguity of the edited text which could lead to the misinterpretation of the essence of solidarity between the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia and the Circle of Royal Deputies”. Needless to say, the authors never defined the “essence of solidarity” or its practical implications¹⁷. The third group of delegates who raised objec-

¹⁶ Bolesław Jałowiecki did not even sympathize with the National Democrats, but he supported cooperation between the two circles for purely practical reasons. He believed that by joining forces, the two groups would stand greater changes in elections and parliamentary alliances.

¹⁷ P. Dąbrowski quotes an article in *Dziennik Wileński (Uchwała zjazdu kijowskiego)*, No. 202 of 5(18) September 1907) about a meeting of congress participants who protested against or were opposed to the expanded content of §6. In this context, he mentions Henryk Dymśza, although Dymśza had never expressed any remarks or objections on the list of signatories printed in the official text of the resolution (cf.: *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu...*, k. 232, printed leaflet).

tions to the amended version of §6 of the Vilnius resolution comprised Stanisław Horwatt and Kazimierz Kaczkowski, members of the Kiev guberniya committee. Although they voted for the amendments, they also remarked that the “Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia may exercise autonomy only under extraordinary circumstances and in the last resort”. This statement was more of a reflection on the NDP’s powerful influence on the Kiev guberniya committee than an expression of the delegates’ personal views.

As it could be expected in the light of §6 of the Vilnius resolution, National-Democratic press was less critical. Similarly to the above NDP activists from the Vilnius guberniya, Józef Hłasko also criticized the ambiguity of the solidarity provision “which could lead to skirmishes, making the task even more difficult for our deputies”¹⁸. *Dziennik Kijowski* formulated its opinions more openly: “regrettably, this interpretation is not quite successful in reconciling opposites”, but it also attempted to identify the common areas between the Polish gentry and the NDP: “despite poor editing, it undoubtedly emphasizes that the two circles will join forces in all matters pertaining to vital Polish interests. The deputies from the eastern territories would take independent action only if the Polish Circle’s decisions stood in opposition to the interests of our country”¹⁹. The reasons for this highly restrictive commentary in National-Democratic press, which was renowned for its highly aggressive stance towards conservative deputies²⁰, lay elsewhere, and I will mention them towards the end of this sub-chapter.

Although the resolutions adopted by both congresses attracted most criticism from the communities sympathizing with the National Democrats who opposed the concept of a civil society and accentuated its “Polishness”, skeptical voices were also heard among the loyalists who argued that the Vilnius resolution “was founded on nationalistic and not civil grounds”. This far-reaching interpretation of the Vilnius resolution (which made no references to the Polishness of election committees or the election of constituents who were Polish nationals – cf. Annex No. 2) was proposed by the district election committee in Kaunas. In a resolution of 30 January (12 February) 1907, “Kaunas delegates’ decision to sign the appeal of the Polish gentry representing nine guberniyas during the Vilnius congress was deemed as inappropriate”²¹. The reasons for the above were complex and they stemmed from the

¹⁸ J. Hłasko, *Uchwata Zjazdu kijowskiego*, “Dziennik Wileński”, No. 203 of 6 (19) September 1907.

¹⁹ *Uchwały Kijowskie*, introduction, “Dziennik Kijowski”, No. 202 of 6 (19) September 1907.

²⁰ In 1907–1909, the National Democrats were engaged in a conflict with the Polish Domestic Alliance in Ruthenia. (R. Jurkowski, *Polskie Stronnictwo Krajowe na Rusi 1907–1909*, “Echa Przeszłości”, vol. X, (2009), pp. 191–219.

²¹ M. Br[ensztejnl], *Kowno, prawyборы ziemiańskie*, “Kurier Litewski”, No. 26 of 2 (15) February 1907.

election strategy of the Kaunas gentry who were hoping to solicit the support of politically undecided Lithuanians by promoting to loyalist slogans²². This gave rise to the short-lived concept of the “non-curial principle” which aimed to ensure that church curias selected candidates from districts outside the respective curia in parliamentary elections. The deputies were to be selected on account of “their ability and character”²³ rather than nationality or social status. For this reason, the criticism given to the “nationalistic” resolutions adopted at the Vilnius congress quickly subsided after the Polish deputies from Kaunas had lost the elections to the Second Duma.

The Podolia gentry began to have doubts. During a pre-election meeting in the guberniya on 3 (16) February 1907, they inquired why the word “Polish” had been omitted in the title of the Vilnius program. Count Ksawery Orłowski, the meeting chairman, gave the following explanation: “the title has been developed by delegates from guberniya committees, and each committee chose to operate under a different name. Many committees had mixed composition, and their delegates could not come to an agreement on the program’s title. Coming from Poland, chauvinism would be grossly out of place in reference to something as trivial as a title, because the entire program clearly asserts the participants’ Polishness and the fact that it had been developed for the Poles”²⁴. The discussion at the meeting indicates that the Podolia gentry had very limited knowledge about nationalistic and political relations in Lithuanian and Belarusian guberniyas. Gentry member Waclaw Skibniewski emphasized that “Lithuania abides by different relations, it has a different composition of national groups. In Lithuania, constitutional-democratic principles do not pose a threat for nationalistic ideas, and a vote based on four democratic principles is possible”. In Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, a vote based on those principles would completely eliminate the Polish minority from every platform of public life. Skibniewski asked the chairman and the Podolia delegate to the Vilnius congress “what guarantee is there that our union with Lithuania will not result in a rift?”²⁵. In his answer, K. Orłowski emphasized the strongest bond between members of the Polish gentry in Ruthenia and Lithuania: “we share the same views on the agricultural problem. The Vilnius congress was of the opinion that members of territorial circles were not allowed to join Russian political parties. The above could not have been contained in the program for a variety of reasons”. His reply cut the discussion short. Count Orłowski argued that the vagueness and terseness of the Vilnius resolution was dictated by “the Lithuanians’ caution and fear of being attacked by various par-

²² I have discussed this in detail in: *Sukcesy i porażki...*, pp. 168–169, 435.

²³ M. Br.[ensztejn], *Akcja wyborcza w guberni kowieńskiej*, KL, No. 27 of 4 (17) February 1907.

²⁴ *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu...*, k. 85.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, k. 86.

ties”²⁶. The following resolution was adopted unanimously: “Polish voters in Podolia advise their constituents to abide by the postulates of the Vilnius resolution and seek union with the Circle of the Polish Kingdom”²⁷.

The unconditional formation of a separate circle of Polish deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia, as decreed by the resolution of the Kiev congress, was a huge blow for the Nationalists both in the Kingdom and the Taken Lands. In this situation, the NDP actually benefited from the vagueness of §6. Józef Hłasko, the leading National-Democratic journalist in Vilnius, praised the Vilnius resolution and searched for weaknesses in the Kiev resolution. But the NDP played a more subtle game which was not based on mere praise or criticism. The National-Democrats chose to praise the Vilnius resolution only after the Kiev congress had put an end to the free interpretation of the relations between the two circles (or at least its selected aspects) that was allowed under the vague provisions of §6. Before the Kiev congress, National-Democratic press strongly criticized the Vilnius resolution for its failure to directly address the merger with the Polish Circle. Despite the above, the National Democrats were reluctant to attack the Kiev resolution for at least two reasons: 1) they constituted a minority among Polish guberniya committees and Polish deputy groups from nine guberniyas, and excessive criticism of the Kiev resolution would cost them the support of populous gentry communities that held conservative views or simply refused to accept National-Democratic ideas. For this reason, the criticism given by National-Democratic deputies in Kiev was toned down, and it merely pointed to the resolution’s lengthy and ambiguous character which was “not sufficiently conducive to the promotion of solidarity”. The National-Democrats did not directly criticize the formation of a separate circle of deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia or the principles of cooperation between both Polish circles in the Duma; 2) the former National-Democratic deputies in the Second Duma (M. Chełchowski, M. Węśławski and W. Puttkamer), publishers of National-Democratic newspapers in Vilnius and Kiev, were fully aware that the relations between the two Polish circles in the Second Duma had been far less optimistic than described by National-Democratic press²⁸. They realized that the Kiev resolution summarized the attitudes of the loyalist

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem. k. 86.

²⁸ Przemysław Dąbrowski had no knowledge of archive materials from Russia, and basing his views on press reports and the biased opinions of Włodzimierz Dworzaczek (in a series of articles in *Dziennik Wileński*, later *Dziennik Kijowski*, published in a brochure entitled *Polityka “Koła postów Polaków z Litwy i Rusi”*, Wilno 1907), he portrayed the cooperation between two circles as nearly harmonious (op. cit., pp. 225–226). The fact that such collaboration did not exist despite shared meetings and committees is illustrated not only by archive materials, but also by the fact (which was cited and misinterpreted by Dąbrowski who argued that it had led to the dissolution of the Second Duma) that the circles had been unable to agree on meeting regulations or the terms of parliamentary cooperation during the 100 days in the Duma.

gentry circle and other communities who perceived the National Democrats to be the main source of political conflict in the Taken Lands and objected against the instrumental treatment offered by the Polish Circle to the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia in the Second Duma. The choice of National-Democratic constituents for the Third Duma (the elections were scheduled for 1907, less than a month after the Kiev congress) was completely determined by the gentry curia which was dominated by land-owners who sympathized with the loyalists and had neutral or hostile attitudes towards the NDP. The above fact fully explains the National Democrats' restraint in formulating opinions about the Kiev resolution²⁹.

Could the resolutions of the congresses in Vilnius and Kiev be regarded as an effective platform for Polish gentry's election committees? The Vilnius resolution did prove to be helpful, but only to the extent that it offered general political advice for the candidates. Czesław Jankowski referred to them as "election slogans" which "should be adopted by the candidates to solicit the support of their voters"³⁰. The vagueness of the Vilnius resolution and the fact that the Kiev resolution merely supplemented the last paragraph of the document drafted in Vilnius clearly demonstrated that the committees from nine guberniyas of Western Russia could not hope to develop a shared political program or electoral procedures. Even if the progressing political diversification among the Polish gentry was not a factor obstructing the development of shared principles, the vagueness of the Vilnius resolution was also affected by the local characteristics of Polish gentry from nine guberniyas, the differences in their social and political views and, above all, their attitudes towards parliamentary rule in Russia.

II. Organizational matters

The only press coverage given to a two-day meeting in Aleksander Chomiński's apartment in Świętojerska St. (later 21/5 Mickiewicza St.)³¹ included the publication of the adopted resolutions. This decision was proba-

²⁹ However, their restraint did not bring the anticipated results. The loyalist gentry were hoping that by opposing the National Democrats, they would attract the support of other national groups in the Taken Lands, thus silencing the anti-Polish propaganda of Russian nationalists and winning the authorities' approval. They were reluctant to support National Democratic candidates in elections to the Third Duma. None of them were elected, and a parliamentary seat went only to Father Stanisław Maciejewicz who was supported by the National Democrats, but was elected in Vilnius (not by the gentry) (refer to: R. Jurkowski, *Sukcesy i porażki...*, pp. 335–336).

³⁰ Cz. Jankowski, *Po zjeździe, cz. II*, "Kurier Litewski", No. 281 of 12 (25) December 1906.

³¹ At the time, A. Chomiński chaired the Polish Election Committee of the Vilnius Guberniya. According to his son's unpublished memoirs, Chomiński was the event's initiator (L. Chomiński, *Pamiętniki*, T. IV, National Library, Manuscript Department, Akc. 9736, k. 14–15). The memoirs describe differences in the delegates' political views and deliver an overtly hagiographic account of Aleksander Chomiński's role in formulating and adopting the resolution.

bly made deliberately in order not to raise the suspicions of the authorities who continued to scrutinize Polish gentry's political activities and were resentful of any communication between the Poles in the Taken Lands that escaped the formal constraints of the guberniya framework³². A meeting agenda was probably drafted, but the document was lost. In Jan Olizar's letter to Stanisław Syroczyński of 19 January (1 February) 1907, found in the Manuscripts Department of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine in Kiev, we read that meeting participants debated on the incorporation of an institution combining all election committees from nine guberniyas in Western Russia. Count Jan Olizar wrote to his colleague, a member of the State Council: "Many persons are of the opinion that we need a permanent organization to coordinate our election efforts and represent us in various political matters, both in Petersburg and at home. I believe that such an organizations should begin their operations only after the elections, and for practical reasons, they should be created separately by every guberniya with a postulate regarding their [illegible word – R.J.] communication, while one organization should represent all guberniyas, as it has been suggested in Vilnius [...]. The main goal is to create such organizations everywhere. Their form may vary, but those differences will level out with time, and an understanding will be reached"³³. At the time, Olizar's concept had not yet fully matured, and he failed to specify how those institutions were to "represent us in Petersburg". Nevertheless, he proposed to create more permanent institutions than the committees running election campaigns to the Duma and the State Council. Olizar was probably referring to elections to the planned lands, but the cited letter clearly indicates that members of the Vilnius-based meeting had debated on an institution coordinating the work of elec-

³² The correspondence exchanged by Włodzimierz Suchomlinow, General-Governor of Vohlynia, Kiev and Podolia, and Paweł Ignatiew, Kiev Governor, after the Kiev congress indicates that those fears were not unfounded. Although the congress's organizers, Stanisław Horwatt, Stanisław Syroczyński and Piotr Podgórski, had the resolution officially approved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Petersburg, Suchomlinow had his doubts about a meeting "that was a continuation of the congress [...] without a program, without outsider participation, that did not fit the definition of a public meeting" (from S. Syroczyński's letter to P. Ignatiew, dated 4 (17) September 1907 in: Центральний Державний Історичний Архів України у Києві, ф. 442, оп. 857, д. 430, л. 3). He argued that the presence of "landowners from non-Ukrainian guberniyas" during a meeting held after the formal part of the congress "could not be regarded as an ordinary meeting, and pursuant to the provisions of §17 of the law of 4 (17) March 1906, it falls subject to the decisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs whose approval had not been obtained". The organizers reported the meeting only to the civilian governor. For more information, refer to: *Sukcesy i porażki...*, pp. 429–430. The general-governor's reaction to a closed-doors meeting (reported to the governor) attended by 9 former deputies to the State Duma and 4 deputies to the State Council (in accordance with the law of official ranks, the latter ranked higher in the court hierarchy than general-governors) testified not only to general W. Suchomlinow's hostility, but to Russian authorities' open reluctance towards any movements organized by the Polish gentry on a scale broader than the guberniya.

³³ Національна Бібліотека Академії Наук України імені В. Вернадського, Рукописний Відділ, ф. XXIV, д. 2036, Станіслав Сырочинский.

tion campaigns. Unfortunately, their plans never materialized, and the hostility of the authorities was not the only reason. The committees in each guberniya were founded by the local gentry, and they were characterized by different organizational standards and level of activity. Some guberniya committees (the several dozen district and municipal committees would require a book-length study) were very active and effectively organized, among them Kaunas, Vilnius and Podolia, while others, including Kiev, Volhynia and Minsk, had no permanent address in late 1907³⁴. The efforts to establish a Central Office³⁵ were also impaired by the fact that several signatories of the Vilnius program later failed to observe its provisions or complied with them at their sole discretion. The above example of the district committee in Kaunas and the way it influenced the Kaunas Guberniya Committee fully asserts this observation.

Although the debates were not followed by any concrete action aiming to create a central institution assisting election committees, several months after assuming their post in the Second Duma, the members of the gentry noted that the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia should receive legal and administrative support from a constituency office. Whether such support should be provided by a Central Office in one of the largest cities in the western guberniyas or a Petersburg-based office was the second most ardently debated topic during the Kiev congress. A full meeting agenda did not survive to our days, but information on the topics discussed during the congress can be found in other sources. Count Ksawery Orłowski attended the Kiev congress as a delegate of the Podolian Election Committee. The committee's agenda of 16 and 17 September 1907 features Orłowski's abridged report: "The congress was chaired by Stanisław Horwatt, Mr. Montwiłł and Tołoczko [the correct spelling is "Tołłoczko" – R.J.] acted as its vice chairmen, and Mr. Dymcza held the post of secretary. During the first part of the meeting, the participants debated on the establishment of a legal office and a spokesman's office in Petersburg which would

³⁴ This information can be found in a letter of 7 (20) December 1907 written by Bronisław Umiastowski, vice chairman and secretary of the Polish Voters Committee of the Vilnius Guberniya, in response to Michał Brensztejn's, secretary of the Telsiai District Committee, request for the addresses of all guberniya committees. Umiastowski wrote: "We are not in possession of the exact addresses of all guberniya committees. Despite our numerous requests, we have not been provided with the relevant data. Below you will find «temporary» addresses to which we mail our correspondence". In the list, Roman Skirmunt's address in the Minsk guberniya section features a question mark, and the Volhynian, Kiev and Podolian committees have a linked to S. Horwatt's address with a note "these three committees have a single central office", which was not true at the time the letter was written. (Государственный Архив Российской Федерации в Москве, [ГАРФ], ф. 5122, оп. 1, д. 70, л. 41).

³⁵ This is how Michał Brensztejn referred to the planned institution in the report from a meeting of representatives of 8 guberniya election committees in Vilnius on 8-9 January 1908 (Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas, Vilnius, [LVIA], ô. 1135, id' 6, â. 16, ë. 31, *Protokół z posiedzenia przedstawicieli komitetów wyborczych gubernialnych Kijowskiego, Wołyńskiego, Mohylowskiego, Mińskiego, Witebskiego, Grodzieńskiego, Kowieńskiego i Wileńskiego z 8 i 9 I 1908 r.*).

monitor the press and respond to any negative publicity. The proposed institution would also be a constituency office. The annual cost of running an office was estimated at 18,000 rubles, divided equally into 2,000 rubles per each of the nine guberniyas. The first down payment of 1,000 rubles would be made directly after the office opened³⁶. Michał Brensztejn, secretary of the Election Committee of the Kaunas Guberniya³⁷, gave a more detailed account of the Kiev debate in a report of 17 September 1907: "Members of the Kiev congress deemed it appropriate to create a permanent constituency office in Petersburg in addition to the permanent guberniya organization. The constituency office would develop projects in collaboration with experts, it would collect information and statistical materials, perform chancellery services, collect and store documents between the Duma's successive terms, transfer those documents to the new Circle and maintain our representation in the Duma. The cost has been calculated in Kiev at 18,000 rubles, including office and library furnishing expenses, etc. Every Lithuanian guberniya shall contribute 2,000 rubles annually³⁸, one-half this year, and one-half in 1908"³⁹. None of the reports mention the Central Office, and only M. Brensztejn makes a reference to a "permanent guberniya organization" which, similarly to the organizations quoted in J. Olizar's letter to S. Syroczyński, could imply gentry organizations at the guberniyas level which, in addition to their involvement in the elections for the Duma and the State Council, fostered the development of social and cultural life in Polish communities. He makes no reference to a spokesman's office mentioned by count K. Orłowski, although it can be presumed that the project to open a spokesman's office and a constituency office had been approved by the delegates in Kaunas. The Kiev congress decided to create a constituency office in Petersburg, and its upkeep would be paid for equally by Lithuanian and Ruthenian guberniyas in annual installments of 2,000 rubles each. The efforts to set up the office began in late December 1907⁴⁰.

It could seem that the high cost of maintaining a constituency office would discourage the gentry from reactivating the Central Office concept for guberniya election committees, but this was not the case. In the following,

³⁶ *Protokół posiedzenia Podolskiego Komitetu Gubernialnego d. 16 i 17 Września 1907 r w Winnicy*, in: *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu...*, k. 149–153.

³⁷ We do not know if he attended the Kiev congress, and whether the report was a direct account or was based on second-hand information. He was not listed in the official resolution, but this does not mean that he had not attended the congress. Only the delegates voted on the resolution, and only their names were printed in the text. Therefore, it is highly probable that he was a member of the Kaunas delegation.

³⁸ M. Brensztejn probably forgot to add "and Ruthenian" in this sentence. Even if Lithuania were treated as a group of 6 north-eastern guberniyas, it would not raise 18,000 rubles in installments of 2,000 rubles each. A total of nine guberniyas had to contribute to raise the required amount.

³⁹ LVIA, ф. 1135, оп. 6, л. 2, л. 45.

⁴⁰ Refer to: R. Jurkowski, *Sukcesy i porażki...*, pp. 437–446.

heavily publicized congress of delegates from guberniya committees (delegates from Podolia did not attend) which took place in Vilnius on 8–9 January 1908, the matter was readdressed by Józef Montwiłł, the congress's initiator and organizer⁴¹. "Montwiłł proposed to create a central office in Vilnius to which all legislative drafts would be forwarded for the general use of guberniya committees"⁴². The idea did not pick up, and it was ultimately abandoned when Kazimierz Zawisza, a Kaunas guberniya deputy to the Third Duma, declared to distribute government drafts to all guberniya committees. The congress rejected Professor Józef Ziemacki's motion to "establish a magazine defending Polish interests in Petersburg", but admitted that "a spokesman's division should open in the constituency office to distribute information on the deputies' activities and issue disclaimers in response to false information printed in Russian and foreign press"⁴³. The gentry in Vilnius recognized the dire need for a special newspaper presenting the Polish community's views and opposing the increasingly aggressive Russian nationalism. As always, funding was the main problem. The high cost of running the constituency office had already impaired the committees' financing capabilities, which is why the following provision was entered in the congress report: "Should the Circle's funds prove to be insufficient [for creating a "spokesman's office" – R. J.], we hereby ask the Circle of Deputies to create an additional budget and communicate it to guberniya committees". In practice, this implied that the spokesman's office project would never take off⁴⁴.

The majority of the proposed projects could not be implemented for reasons of financial difficulty. The constituency office in Petersburg drained the committees' funds, and it was practically the only initiative of Vilnius and Kiev congresses that had been implemented⁴⁵. The joint meetings of three Lithuanian guberniya in Vilnius – the Podolia Organization project developed by the Podolia guberniya committee – was open to the remaining

⁴¹ The congress was chaired by count Jan Olizar, his deputies were Edmund Bortkiewicz and Michał Węśławski, and the secretaries were Tomasz Zan and Bronisław Umiastowski.

⁴² LVIA, ф. 1135, оп. 6, д. 16, л. 31, *Protokół z posiedzenia przedstawicieli...*

⁴³ Ibidem. The same report can be found in ГАРФ, ф. 5122, оп. 1, д. 70, л. 57. It also indicates that Professor J. Ziemacki raised an additional motion to "instruct the spokesman's office in the Deputy Circle to investigate the newspaper's establishment [...] for protecting Polish national rights".

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Although funding had been allegedly scarce, three guberniya committees in Russia gave 1,000 rubles, a significant amount at the time, to cover the cost of "welcoming the delegates for the Kiev committee". The report from the meeting of the Podolian Guberniya Committee of 16–17 September 1907 reads: "The cost of welcoming election committee delegates from 6 Lithuanian guberniyas to the first and the second congress amounted to 1,000 rubles, and it would be covered in equal part by Podolia, Volhynia and Ukraine; therefore, it was agreed that Fr.[anciszek] Jaroszyński would pay to count X. Orłowski 333 rubles and 33 kopeks from the committee's budget in virtue of Podolia's contribution" (*Protokół posiedzenia Podolskiego Komitetu Gubernialnego d. 16 i 17 Września 1907 r. w Winnicy*, in: *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu...*, k. 149–153).

guberniyas in the Ukraine, and it paved the way to cooperation at the supra-local level. Nevertheless, a single central institution was never created. The Polish gentry were gradually losing their interest in political and social matters. Russian nationalism was expanding, fuelled by the Orthodox Church and state authorities, and it prompted many Polish landowners to adopt the "wait quietly for better times" strategy that had guaranteed their survival after the January Uprising. The new electoral law of 3 (16) June 1907 cut the number of Polish gentry deputies from seven in the Third Duma to five in the Fourth Duma. The Third and the Fourth Duma no longer addressed the issue of "expropriation of private land", therefore they did not pose a threat to the gentry, and the peasants' revolutionary inclinations, which had raised the gentry's fears during the First and the Second Duma, were effectively put down by a repressive state policy.

* * *

In an attempt to evaluate the political significance of the discussed congresses, it seems that E. Wyoniłowicz's and H. Korwin-Milewski's proposal to formulate election postulates in a rather vague and succinct manner was a clever tactical maneuver. It laid the foundations for developing detailed programs and formulating the gentry's standpoint towards other political parties, both Polish and foreign. The decisions passed at both congresses paved the way to a resolution of the Podolian Guberniya Committee of 17 September 1907 which was adopted after a stormy debate over the political program of the Polish Domestic Alliance, an organization created in Ruthenia in 1907: "The Podolian guberniya Committee hereby approves the resolutions adapted on 6 and 7 December 1906 and 1 and 2 September 1907 at the Kiev congress and the Vilnius congress of delegates from 9 guberniyas as its shared election platform that shall be binding for our organization during negotiations with other political groups. No other program of any other political alliance shall be binding"⁴⁶. The provisions of the Vilnius resolution also served as a venture point in discussions and agreements during the creation of temporary election alliances in Grodno, Vitebsk, Minsk, Mohyliv and Żytomierz. They were the last point of reference below which no concessions were made.

According to Wincent Lisowski, the only Polish deputy from three Ukrainian guberniyas, the Kiev Congress and the Vilnius Congress had convened "to cope with our inability to cooperate. The future is bleak, we do not know how the Ruthenian problem will be resolved. It could pose a significant difficulty, and we should come up with an effective strategy"⁴⁷. This highly accurate observation of the future Podolian deputy pointed to the dire need for cooperation between Polish gentry groups in the Taken Lands.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, col. 85.

Both the Kiev congress and the Vilnius congress brought together the leading members of the Polish gentry from the distant guberniyas of Western Russia but it was only the beginning of the long road that was drastically blocked by the war and the revolution. Polish landowners from the Kaunas region differed significantly from members of the gentry residing in Ploskirov or Olgopol, and this issue still waits to be explored. Count K. Orłowski's account of Lithuanian and Belorussian gentry delivered to members of the Podolian community after his return from the Vilnius congress suggest that even the most prosperous circles of the Polish gentry had very little knowledge about their countrymen residing in other parts of the country, especially their social and political views. The congresses paved the way to communication and dialogue between the Poles inhabiting the Taken Lands which greatly aided their efforts during the war and the February revolution in Russia. Unfortunately, those efforts were not sufficient to rescue the Polish gentry residing in those territories.

Annex No. 1

Resolution adopted by the congress of election committee delegates from nine guberniyas and the city of Vilnius regarding election principles and the conduct of deputies to the Second Duma. Vilnius, 6-7 (19-20) December 1906.

Congress of Election Committee delegates

“With the aim of ensuring the successful representation of Lithuania and Ruthenia in the future State Duma, the delegates of Election Committees from nine guberniyas and the city of Vilnius have thus convened in Vilnius on 6 and 7 December 1906, in the presence of six deputies to the State Council, to recommend to guberniya, district and municipal committees that the candidates for deputies support and observe the following principles:

1. Implementation and development of constitutional principles.
2. Equal rights to all national and religious groups.
3. Inviolability of property, formal regulation of title to property and property possession, abolishing geographical separation of farmland and servitude, land consolidation, improving farming culture in small estates.
4. Decentralization of state and public institutions, promotion of territorial self-government rule.
5. Polish deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia will form a unified circle, and they will attempt to reach an understanding with deputies from other national groups inhabiting our country – as an integral part of this program.
6. An understanding will be reached with the Circle of Deputies from the Kingdom of Poland for the purpose of mutual support and joined external action.

Signed by delegates of the following Committees:

Vilnius:

– Aleksander Chomiński, Wawrzyniec Puttkamer,

City of Vilnius:

– W. Węsławski – Chairman of the Polish Committee of Central Vilnius

Grodno:

– Juljan Tołłoczko, Józef Bańkowski,

Kaunas:

– Tadeusz Dowgird, Zygmunt Węcławowicz,

Minsk:

– Hieronim Drucki-Lubecki, Józef Świącicki,

Vitebsk:

– Henryk Dymsha, Bohdan Szachno,

Mohyliv:

– Waldemar Doria-Dernałowicz, Waclaw Wasilewski,

Kiev:

– Stanisław Horwatt, Kazimierz Kaczkowski,

Volhynia:

– Szczęsny Poniatowski, Jan Olizar,

Podolia:

– Ksawery Orłowski,

The undersigned State Council deputies give their support to the above mentioned resolution: Edward Woyniłłowicz, Hipolit Korwin-Milewski, Dymitr Korybut-Daszkiewicz, Count Aleksander Tyszkiewicz, Stanisław Łopaciński, Jan Olizar”.

[source:] *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu a Duma Państwowa 1906-1907 i Rada Państwa 1907-1909. Materiały zebrane przez Kaliksta Dunin-Borkowskiego*, Jagiellonian Library, Manuscript Department, Rkps 7989 IV, k. 232, printed leaflet; text of the resolution: *Akcja przedwyborcza dziewięciu guberni*, “Kurier Litewski”, No. 279 of 8 (21) December 1906.

Annex No. 2***Resolution adopted by the Kiev congress of delegates from election committees in nine guberniyas of Lithuania and Ruthenia. Kiev, 1-2 (14-15) September 1907.***

“During a meeting of 1-2 September 1907, the Kiev congress of delegates from election committees in nine guberniyas of Lithuania and Ruthenia approves the resolutions adopted by the Vilnius congress on 6-7 December 1906, but in order to avoid interpretations that are inconsistent with the spirit and the original intention of Vilnius resolutions, the Kiev congress hereby declares that our that deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia shall

create a separate and an unconditionally autonomous circle. In addition to the general needs of the Polish nation, the Circle should promote the interests of our country. Its decisions and independent strategies shall be formulated in consideration of the diverse characteristics of our country. It shall promote the interests of all nationalities inhabiting the country, and it shall foster the growth of amicable relations on the principle of equality. It should initiate action in solidarity with the Circle of the Polish Kingdom and on the principle of mutual reciprocity in matters pertaining to Polish national interests, and in any other matters – at the discretion of the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia. Our deputies shall support all initiatives of the Polish Circle that do not stand in opposition to the interests of our Country. The rules of cooperation between the two Circles shall be formulated by the deputies of Lithuania and Ruthenia.

Guberniya delegates:

Kiev: – we sign this resolution in the name of solidarity, but we are of the opinion that the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia may exercise autonomy only under extraordinary circumstances and in the last resort:

– Stanisław Horwatt, Kazimierz Kaczkowski

Volhynia:

– Szczęsny Poniatowski, E[ugeniusz] Starczewski

Podolia:

– Ksawery Orłowski, J[ózef] Orłowski

Vilnius: Two Vilnius deputies made reservations. We voted against the resolution to supplement §6 of the Resolution of the Vilnius Congress of 6-7 December 1906 due to the diffuseness and ambiguity of the edited text which could lead to the misinterpretation of the essence of solidarity between the Circle of Polish Deputies from Lithuania and Ruthenia and the Circle of Royal Deputies - Bolesław Jałowicki, Bronisław Umiastowski.

Grodno:

– Julian Tołłoczko, Adam Zamoyski

Minsk:

– M[ichał] Jastrzębski, R[oman] Skirmunt

Vitebsk:

– Henryk Dymśa, former deputy, K[onrad] Niedźwiecki

Mohyliv:

– K[onstanty] Gordziałkowski, Michał Obiezierski

Kaunas:

– Józef Montwiłł, Feliks Raczkowski

Members of the State Council, present:

– E[dward] Woyniłłowicz, Jan Olizar, W[ładysław] Woynicz, Sianożęcki, Aleksander Tyszkiewicz

Former deputies:

- A[leksander] Chomiński, former deputy W[incenty] Lisowski, Henryk Dymśa,
- M[arian] Chełchowski – nonetheless, I consider the congress's resolution to be deficient and not sufficiently conducive to the promotion of solidarity.
- W[awrzyniec] Puttkamer – I subscribe to the above opinion”.

[source:] *Polscy wielcy właściciele ziemscy na Podolu a Duma Państwowa 1906–1907 i Rada Państwa 1907–1909. Materiały zebrane przez Kaliksta Dunin-Borkowskiego*, Jagiellonian Library, Manuscript Department, Rkps 7989 IV, k. 230, printed leaflet; text of the resolution: *Uchwała zjazdu kijowskiego*, “Dziennik Wileński”, No. 202 of 5 (18) September 1907.