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RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES' POLICY TOWARDS NATIONAL  
MINORITIES. PROHIBITION OF LITHUANIAN  
PUBLICATIONS, 1864–1904

For many reasons it seems justified to raise the matter of the prohibition of Lithuanian publications by the Russian authorities after the January 1863 Insurrection. In the first place this was a very drastic move, which arrested general attention and unleashed a genuine battle, focussing around it many problems characteristic of the internal situation in Russia and of the behaviour of her authorities. This decision occasioned a clash of strongly reactionary tendencies in the Russian administration with more pragmatic strivings, which took into consideration the changing situation. The experiment of prohibiting Lithuanian publications written in the Latin alphabet was unsuccessful. It announced a failure of the governmental policy towards the national minorities, and heralded the approach of a deep crisis.

I should like to note here that I was able to prepare this article due to my access to the publications of Lithuanian historians: in the first place Vytautas Merkys, Antanas Tyla, Rimantas Vebera and others. I have also taken into account very important documentary publications issued in Lithuania.

The lands of the ex-Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or, according to the name that was then official, the North-Western Country, were treated by the Tzarist authorities as an area that had been Russian from time immemorial. Even before the January 1863 Insurrection it was clearly stated that it could not be regarded as captured, but restored to Russia, and belonging to her for ages. The postulate of retaining at all costs the “Russian” character of

these lands was of supreme importance to the Tzarist administration<sup>1</sup>.

After the bloody stifling of the January Insurrection the strivings to achieve this goal grew stronger. The Governor-General of Vilna, Mikhail Muraviev, in his obsessive anti-Polish activity, conceived a plan of the speedy Russification of the Lithuanians, a "tribe" of hardly-literate peasants that he deeply despised. As the most expedient tool for his plans he saw the introduction of Russian letters instead of the Latin alphabet used so far in Lithuanian writings.

He was said to be supported in this conviction by "the learned men", Alexandr Hilferding, a Russian Slavic scholar<sup>2</sup>, and Stanisław Mikucki, a nobleman born near Łomża, a reader at the Tzarist Warsaw University. Especially the role of the latter loomed large. Mikucki argued that the Cyrillic alphabet would be more convenient for Lithuanians, since it rendered better the sounds of their speech. However, the real intentions were different, and are shown by the following words of Mikucki's report: "When the liberated nation is revived, it will profit immensely by the fruits of this plan: the Lithuanians, who have suffered for so many ages under the harassing and cruel yoke of Polonized lords and priests, will be brought closer to their fraternal Russian nation. Their links with the gentry and Latinity will be broken"<sup>3</sup>.

Michał Röm er wrote about Mikucki that he was "a typical careerist, ambitious and unscrupulous. Devoid of all principles and respect for people and their ideals"<sup>4</sup>.

Mikucki set about his work with zeal. He prepared an alphabet consisting of 32 letters and on this basis compiled a Lithuanian primer written in the Cyrillic alphabet. Muraviev supervised these actions personally. In May 1864 the text-book was ready and in the same month it was confirmed by censorship. Published in 10 thousand copies it was destined for school use.

<sup>1</sup> D. Fajnhauz, *1863. Litwa i Białoruś (1863. Lithuania and Byelorussia)*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 14–15.

<sup>2</sup> G. Potašenko, Aleksandras Hilferdingas. "Slavofilai", in: *Lietuva, Lietuvių atgimimo Istorijos Studijos*, vol. 8, Vilnius 1996, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> A. Tyla (ed.), *Lietuvių spaudos draudimo panaikinimo byla* (henceforward *Byla*), Vilnius 1973, *Materialy sobrannye sovetnikom Strolmanom*, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> M. Röm er, *Litwa. Studium o odrodzeniu narodu litewskiego (Lithuania. A Study of the Rebirth of the Lithuanian Nation)*, Lwów 1908, p. 73.

The result was a kind of linguistic monster, as if written in Lithuanian, but with words changed past all recognition and resembling Russian. The frequently used hard and soft signs, the letter *yat'*, were something absolutely foreign to the Lithuanian language. The more so, because together with the change of letters, Russian words were inserted wherever possible, and Lithuanian words were ruthlessly distorted.

Nevertheless, this work was imposed on the schools and accepted by teachers, the majority of whom were Russian, and a large part clergymen.

As if in order to play safe, Muraviev addressed the emperor, asking his permission to apply force in case if his primer met with opposition. Alexander the Second agreed. Thus encouraged, Muraviev ordered the censorship not to let through the primers with Latin characters, that had been in use so far. This was the course of his action until the end of his stay in Vilna. Already after leaving for Petersburg on 5 April 1865, he still submitted a memorial where he postulated the final introduction of the Russian alphabet to Lithuanian primers and prayer-books<sup>5</sup>.

Muraviev's work was zealously continued by his successor, governor general Konstantin Kaufman. In the regulation issued on 6 September 1865 he stated point-blank that the aim of this action was to restore the North-Western Country to its historical past. Especially — he stressed — the old historical ties between Lithuania and Russia must be restored. Through the intermediary of rural schools, the native, Russian literacy should be disseminated among Samogitians and Lithuanians (this characteristic distinction continually appeared in official Russian press and documents).

It is worthwhile specifying the goal that Kaufman set himself. It was “to liberate the popular masses from Polonization, to educate them, teach them writing in their tribal dialects and the Russian language, which as the medium of the Empire, will become indispensable”. He thought that this could best be done by introducing the Russian alphabet in which, he recalled, the *Lithuanian Register* was written.

Taking all this into consideration, the governor general of Vilna regarded it necessary to publish possibly a large number

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<sup>5</sup> V. Merkys, *Nelegalioji lietuvių spauda kapitalizmo laikotarpiu (ligi 1904 m.). Politines jos susikūrimo aplinkybės*, Vilnius 1978, pp. 32–44.

of text-books and books in the Samogitian dialect, but in the Russian alphabet. At the same time he forbade printing Lithuanian and Samogitian publications in the Latin-Polish alphabet. He also forbade bringing them from abroad<sup>6</sup>.

It is worthy of note that the same thing was planned to be done to the Poles. On 25 January 1866 a Polish primer written in the Cyrillic alphabet was prepared for "the peasant children", and published in 10 thousand copies. Further titles were also planned according to Mikucki's conception. The Lithuanian sources say that the distribution of this primer was started in the schools of the Suwałki *gubernya*. However, later this design was dropped and its architects withdrew quietly from the whole project<sup>7</sup>.

However, the same business was energetically continued with regard to the Lithuanians. The more so, because on 30 January 1866 Tzar Alexander commanded that in governmental publishing houses Lithuanian books should be printed exclusively in the Cyrillic alphabet. This was followed by ever stronger prohibitions of printing and distributing any Lithuanian publications written in the traditional Latin alphabet.

It might seem, and such a view has been represented by some authors, that the deprivation of Lithuanians of their own printing medium, and as a matter of fact, of their entire literature — was a revenge for the large participation of Lithuanian peasants in the January Insurrection. However, what has been said above leads us to a different conclusion. We are prone to agree entirely with Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, who clearly stated in a special booklet devoted to the matter of the Lithuanian alphabet that the action of the authorities reflected a striving for a compulsory Russification of the Lithuanians and the whole North-Western Country<sup>8</sup>.

Despite many resumed and intense efforts, the work upon publishing Lithuanian primers, prayer-books and calendars printed in the Russian alphabet brought little effect. In 1865 Kaufman managed to publish merely 5 titles. All in all, over the

<sup>6</sup> *Otnosheniye vilenskogo, kovenskogo, grodnenskogo i minskogo general-gubernatora 6. 09. 1865. Byla*, pp. 71–73.

<sup>7</sup> Merkys, as above, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> J. Baudouin de Courtenay, *Kwestya alfabetu litewskiego w państwie rosyjskim i jej rozwiązanie (The Question of the Lithuanian Alphabet in the Russian State and its Solution)*, Kraków 1904.

40 years of prohibition only 58 Lithuanian books printed in the Cyrillic alphabet appeared, among them 19 text-books, 16 prayer-books, 14 calendars, 6 works of fine literature, however, by no means Lithuanian, but translated from Russian<sup>9</sup>. The authorities boasted, indeed, that they published altogether 165 thousand copies of Lithuanian works written in the Russian alphabet, a significant number, it would seem. However, we have to take into consideration that the large majority of them were primers, or text-books, which were printed in large, 10 thousand copy editions, and later reprinted.

The small, or even minimal output of official publications stands out even more clearly against the background of what the Lithuanians managed to publish in Eastern Prussia, and later illegally transport across the border.

As has been established by a student of this problem, Vytautas Merkys, over the 40 years of prohibition 1480 titles of Lithuanian publications were printed abroad. There were two characteristic phenomena about it. What dominated initially were books of a religious nature, then there were more and more secular publications. Moreover, the number of publications grew year by year. In the first decade of the prohibition there were 164 titles, while in the last as many as 628<sup>10</sup>. Apart from books, from the 1880s onwards there also appeared newspapers. In the years 1866–1896 in Prussia alone 3.7 million copies of various publications were issued in print.

Of great significance is that these publications were not only printed in the traditional Latin alphabet, modified as years went by, but were free of censorship. This became even more important in later years, when secular newspapers, but also pamphlets and books criticized ever more strongly the system prevailing in Russia and the prohibition of printing itself. These books, despite confiscations on the border and fines imposed on their distributors, spread all over Lithuania, passing from hand to hand and reaching a general public.

Governmental publications, on the other hand, were met with reluctance and distrust. This was acknowledged, although many years later, by the authorities themselves. Thus e.g. in a document of the Ministry of Internal Affairs we can read: "The appear-

<sup>9</sup> Merkys, as above, p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205–206.

ance of official Lithuanian text-books was received with an extreme enmity by the local population. The parents of peasant children refused to buy these text-books and prayer-books [...]. Children, instructed by their parents, did not accept these books even free of charge. The teachers had to buy these books at their own expense and distribute them among the children, but the books thus handed out were immediately destroyed"<sup>11</sup>.

As a result the large majority of books printed in the Cyrillic alphabet lay useless in the stores. In the school stores of Kaunas alone, there were 14 thousand of those publications. This was gradually acknowledged even by the representatives of the administration. Thus, e.g. the superintendent of the Vilna school district wrote on 25 April 1884 that "there have been no beneficial results of count Muraviev's regulations in evidence for the past 20 years. What has been achieved over that time was limited to narrow school use"<sup>12</sup>.

Nevertheless, the administration did not take this situation very much to heart. Everything went according to the established course. Regulations were in force, prohibitions and commands as well. And the fact that the officially printed books were not read or used, while illegal publications got over the border by thousands, did not especially disturb the officials' peace of mind.

They were not disturbed, either, by numerous petitions and letters of the population, requesting a restoration of Lithuanian publications. They are worth citing. This is what was written by the inhabitants of the Lyngmiany commune of Święciany district to the minister of education on 17 April 1883: "As a result of the prohibition of Lithuanian publications we have found ourselves in a desperate intellectual and spiritual plight. In fact, the books disappeared from which we and our children could learn everything indispensable for saving our souls". Other arguments were used in a letter of the inhabitants of Widziszki village in the same Święciany district, written on 28 July 1883: "We are absolutely short of Lithuanian books and if we want to pray to God we are forced to reach for Polish books. But we do not wish to pray from them, since we do not understand much Polish as yet"<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> *Izlozheniye dela. MWD, 29.02.1904, Byla*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> *Apie lietuvių spaudos draudimą ir katalikų dvasininkijos vaidmenį jį įgyvendinant. Parengė K. Misius*, in: *Lietuvių atgimimo istorijos studijos*, vol. 7, 1994, p. 414.

<sup>13</sup> *A. Kulauskas, Penki 1882–1883 m. Rytu Lietuvos valstiečių kolektyviniai prašymai dėl lietuvių spaudos lotyniškų raidžių leidimo*, in: *Lietuvių atgimimo istorijos studijos*, vol. 4, 1993, pp. 486, 489.

Such petitions usually remained unanswered, the authorities simply ignored them. In the middle 1890s the number of such petitions grew, and their tone became more insistent. However, by then the situation had already changed.

But in the 1870s the authorities were not prone to make any concessions. The need to sustain the prohibition of Lithuanian publications was not questioned either in Petersburg or Vilna. The decline of Alexander the Second's reign, i.e. the year 1880 and the beginning of 1881, was a minor exception.

On 27 April 1880 the Imperial Academy of Sciences was informed that as a result of its long endeavours, the Emperor allowed the publications of the Academy in the Lithuanian language, for scholarly purposes, to be printed with the Latin types. However, there was a reservation that they should not be distributed "among the masses of the Lithuanian population in the North-Weastern Country and the Vistula Country"<sup>14</sup>.

Almost at the same time the administrator of the Samogitian diocese Bishop Aleksander Bereśniewicz ventured to address the authorities with a request to legalize Lithuanian publications of a religious nature printed in the Latin alphabet. He argued that the people shunned new publications and could not read them. Bereśniewicz emphasized that "the knowledge of religion is declining among the people, while various vices grow rank and fallacious anti-religious teachings and destructive views reach them easily"<sup>15</sup>.

What is even more important, the bishop's arguments found the support of the governor general of Vilna, Count Eduard Totleben, who "saw no obstacles to complying with the presented request"<sup>16</sup>. It might have seemed that things were progressing well. However, they were thwarted by unfavourable events of a general nature. Following the death of Alexander the Second, his successor, Alexander the Third started a reactionary rule. In his manifesto issued on 24 April 1881 he announced that he would guard autocracy against any attempts to weaken it. In this situation any concessions to the Lithuanians were out of the question.

<sup>14</sup> *Otnosheniye Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya k Prezidentu Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk 27.04.1880, Byla*, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Cit. according to Merkys, as above, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> *Materialy sobrannye nadvornym sovetnikom Stolmanom, Byla*, pp. 225, 230.

An apparently calm period of a dozen-odd years followed, in which the question of Lithuanian publications was not raised at all. This time saw, however, a rapid development of the Lithuanian national movement, closely connected with publications from abroad, their smuggling and distribution at home. However, the authorities seemed not to notice it. The matter came to a head and gained large resonance only in the second half of the 1890s.

The proverbial stone that moved an avalanche, triggered off discussion and showed that the question had to be solved — was a report of 1896 by S. Suchodolski, governor of Kaunas. It was he who stated unequivocally for the first time that Count Muraviev's attempt to introduce the Russian alphabet in Lithuanian writings was a failure. A great number of books printed at the expense of the state were lying in the stores. At the same time Suchodolski raised the alarm about a great deal of foreign publications infiltrating into the area of the *gubernya* under his control. He saw and proposed as the only method of thwarting this evil, to allow for printing books in the Samogitian and Lithuanian languages also with Latin types, and to submit all this procedure to the supervision of censorship. Such a solution, he argued, would undermine the interest in clandestine foreign publications. "In order to Russianize the Lithuanians more effectively", said Suchodolski, "action should be taken not to allow the Polonization of Lithuania and to make every Lithuanian identify as such and not to rank himself as Polish only because he is Catholic. Lithuanian books will be a good means of thwarting such an unfavourable phenomenon". Only when the Lithuanian stops regarding himself as a Pole, he said, desirable influence will be exerted on him by the Russian school and the Russian book<sup>16</sup>.

The governor of Kaunas did not perceive that the consciousness of the Lithuanian peasant had already changed to a large extent. However, with a lot of courage, he admitted that Muraviev's project had ended in failure. He also indicated the necessity to take radical steps to solve this question.

Suchodolski's report reached as far as Nicholas the Second's desk. The Tzar formulated the following question in the margin: Have any measures been taken in this matter?

Suchodolski's report concurred with that of the governor of Suwałki Konstantin Bożowski in the same year 1896. Bożowski emphasized even more strongly the threat represented by the



influx of publications from abroad. He wrote that many cases of the contraband of books, prayer-books, calendars and newspapers could be observed. Some of these publications contained statements condemning state regulations; they also voiced demands for permission to print with Latin types. On this report, too, the Tzar wrote a question: What measures are being taken in our country to print in the Russian alphabet a sufficient number of Lithuanian books destined for the people?

The above remarks and resolutions of the Tzar were extremely characteristic of his method of performing his official duties. He never made clear and unequivocal recommendations that would show his own stand and his own wishes. However, he showed his dissatisfaction and demanded explanation. It was clear that he wanted to be relieved of his tasks by his officials who would suggest ready solutions in difficult matters.

Meanwhile, Nicholas the Second's resolutions, which were treated as a supreme command, were analysed by the Committee of Ministers. This Committee, in a special resolution of 28 November 1897 ordered the Ministries of Internal Affairs and of Education to analyse the matter in detail and to present their conclusions. The Ministries, in turn, addressed their subordinate organs. A whole bureaucratic machinery was put into motion.

The Ministry of Education addressed the superintendents of the Vilna and Warsaw school districts. The Vilna superintendent in his report of 27 January 1898 enumerated all the steps taken in order to continue printing the Lithuanian-Samogitian books with Russian letters. The difficulties with their distribution would be — in his opinion — much less “if not for the Roman-Catholic clergy's fanatic hatred of those books”. The clergy commanded the Lithuanians and Samogitians to throw books printed in the Russian alphabet “straight into the fire”, since these were the “devilish chains of the Muscovites”. Despite these obstacles, the superintendent, Secret Counsellor N. Sergiyevskiy, was of the opinion that the process of publishing books printed in the Russian alphabet should continue, and additional sums should be assigned for this purpose<sup>17</sup>.

The superintendent of the Warsaw school district Valeryan Ligin in his report of 29 May 1898 approached this problem from

<sup>17</sup> *Sprawa po woprosu o litovskikh izdaniyakh napechatannykh russkim shriftom 10.02.1900*, Była, p. 88.

a different angle. He also agreed that all the efforts to distribute books written in the Russian alphabet among the people were ineffective. However, the prohibition of traditional publications made a very unpleasant impression on the Lithuanians. Hence their continual striving to purchase books smuggled from abroad, among which there were also some of a clearly anti-government character. On the other hand, books printed in the Russian alphabet were bought unwillingly, just in order to mislead the authorities and in case of inspection serve as a proof of loyalty. However, the superintendent observed a new phenomenon. This was the appearance in Tilsit of a Lithuanian newspaper "Auszra", designed for Russian Lithuanians. This newspaper, in his opinion, by all possible means tried to awaken a separate national consciousness of Polonized Lithuanians, as a result undermining the Polonization of the intelligentsia.

The superintendent's expositions were complemented by the Chief of the School Management in Suwałki, A. Nenadkevich, who exhibited a much better knowledge of the new developments. He confirmed that the peasants refused to buy the books offered to them, and even if they paid for them, this was in order to destroy them immediately. "According to the ideas of the simple folk", Nenadkevich emphasized, "print and religion are inseparable. Latin is called Catholic. Therefore the folk cherish so much prayer-books printed in the Latin alphabet. On the other hand, prayer-books printed in the Cyrillic alphabet are regarded as Orthodox, aimed against the Catholic faith".

Nenadkevich expressed the view that the persecution of Lithuanian prayer-books and text-books printed in the Latin alphabet did not achieve and would probably never achieve its goal. The Lithuanians would never accept the Russian alphabet. In the opinion of the chief of education in Suwałki it would be better if the resolution to print Lithuanian books with Russian letters could be changed and Lithuanians could regain the possibility of printing their books and newspapers in the Latin alphabet.

The Warsaw superintendent Ligin was more cautious in his conclusions. He only wrote about the need for applying more energetic measures to the work upon the publication of text-books and readers in the Upper-Lithuanian dialect. He did not say in what alphabet, but the context showed that he meant

Russian. However, he left to the discretion of the authorities the resolution of the most important matter: whether the prohibition of printing should be maintained<sup>18</sup>.

This material was prepared by the Department of Education. The same was done by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It presented a report by the governor general of Vilna, Vitaliy Trotskiy, who expressed the opinion that the wide secret distribution of prohibited publications in the Lithuanian–Samogitian language, printed with Polish letters, was due to the Lithuanians' strong demand for books. The administrative measures applied in this matter could bring no solution to this question. The best method, according to Trotskiy, to prevent this evil, would be a more energetic distribution of Lithuanian books printed in the Cyrillic alphabet. In this connection the governor general requested additional sums for this purpose, amounting to 7–10 thousand roubles.

All the above–presented reports and opinions were sent to the Learned Committee of the Ministry of Education. After acquainting itself with these materials and some discussion, the Committee reached the conclusion that currently it was no use insisting on sustaining the prohibitions of 1865/66. It declared that their objective was then to alienate the Poles and Lithuanians and to bring the latter closer to the native Russian population, in order to transform them into “genuine Russians of Roman–Catholic denomination and Lithuanian tribe”. It turned out, however, that the results achieved were contrary to this design, and the population, usually quiet and submissive, had been almost brought to the point of rebellion. The method of Russification applied was an utter failure. It should be completely renounced, the sooner the better.

However the Committee considered that this prohibition should be kept valid for the present, although, until the appeasement of minds, the publication of Lithuanian books in the Cyrillic alphabet should be withheld. On the other hand, the publication of Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet by private persons, as well as the trading of these books, should be permitted, (needless to say, under the supervision of censorship). The idea of printing Lithuanian books in the Russian alphabet, however, should not

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90.

be dropped. In due time, with the participation of Lithuanians themselves, it could be resumed.

They concluded that the idea of printing in the Russian alphabet should not be renounced completely, since it would make it easier for the Lithuanians to assimilate Russian literacy. The Lithuanian national consciousness, once developed, would be an intermediate stage for assimilating the best examples of Russian culture. On 20 January 1900 the minister of education approved the Committee's opinions<sup>19</sup>.

The conclusions and recommendations of the Committee might be regarded as a choice of more cautious tactics, not offensive and better adjusted to the conditions that arose, although their long-term goal would remain the same — Lithuanians should be delivered from the Polish influence, but not in order to make them a nation in its own right, but to submit them to the influence of the Russian language and culture, so that they would become Russians "of the Lithuanian tribe". It was not perceived or completely understood, at the very end of the 19th c., that the Lithuanian national movement had made evident progress, it developed and consolidated, and that the national consciousness of the Lithuanians was not merely a transitory stage leading to Russification, but was an independent value in its own right. And there was no way back from it.

Meanwhile, there was no end in sight to this problem, which got more and more involved. In the second half of 1898 a question emerged of the attitude that should be taken towards the petitions and applications of Lithuanians addressed to the ministries, and even to the Emperor in name, demanding more and more insistently the reintroduction of the Latin printing. The Ministry of Education said that such endeavours should not gain approval. The matter was examined by Nicholas the Second, who on 24 December 1898 "vouchsafed to command" that the applications for permission of printing Lithuanian books with the Latin types "should be left without consequence". That is, in other words, should be rejected.

The imperial chancellery informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to this effect, and at the same time conveyed the Tzar's recommendation to start work on the preparation of an act on printing books in the Samogitian and Lithuanian dialects with

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91–94.

Russian letters. The results of these works should be reported to the authorities.

Meanwhile the Committee of Ministers received a report by Prince Alexander Imeretinskiy, governor general of Warsaw, who informed that the matter of Lithuanian publications had become so urgent and was such a sore point in the system of the country's administration that its rapid solution was a "need of state and existential importance". The Tzar, who read these words, "vouchsafed" to put a question mark against it. This gave rise to further exertions of the officials, who called for new expert reports and opinions.

The situation that developed at that time could be described like this: while the officials in the central ministries and offices, especially in the field of education, showed a tendency to dilute and protract the whole issue, to delay decisions and practically to leave everything as it had been before, the administrators in the country, responsible for public feeling and the state of security in the *gubernyas* saw a need for radical change. So it was in the case of Imeretinskiy, Bożowski, Suchodolski, and the same attitude was taken by the successor of the latter, the governor of Kaunas from 1900 onwards, A. Rogovich. In his report of 15 November that year one could read that the masses of the peasantry were astir. Out of their ranks arose the intelligentsia. The authorities' hopes that through the prohibition of printing, Lithuanians could be prevented from Polonization and set on the road to Russification, were a historical mistake. Indeed — Rogovich said — a million-strong nation could not be forced to renounce their nationality. The state publications were doomed to failure. The prohibition of printing would be harmful to the state itself<sup>20</sup>.

Among the administrators, the only adherent of leaving everything as it had been before was the general of infantry Vitaliy Trotskiy, governor general of Vilna in 1897–1901. This professional soldier who had spent many years in the wars in Central Asia, clearly did not live up to understanding the complicated situation that developed in the North-Western Country on the threshold of the 20th c. He could only think and act as his long-standing routine told him.

<sup>20</sup> Merkys, as above, pp. 222–223.

In the meantime, in 1901 the debates and work on the matter of Lithuanian printing continued. The new minister of education, general-aide-de-camp Piotr Vannovskiy addressed the superintendents of Warsaw and Vilna again, in order to learn their opinion on this matter. Then, "in order to finally clarify the problem" he appointed a special commission headed by Vice-Minister Grigoriy Zenger. Its work lasted until 1902. At that time Vannovskiy retired and was replaced by Zenger.

The Commission went on the assumption that any moves regarding Lithuanian books should be connected with simultaneous steps aimed at the dissemination of the interest in the Russian language and literature among the Lithuanians. At the same time the interest in the Lithuanian dialects should be transferred to a strictly scholarly plane in order to educate people who could be helpful to the authorities as translators, censors, etc. Thus these actions were to serve the supreme goal of Russification, which was to be delayed, but never renounced.

The proposals for concrete actions that were worked out and then unanimously accepted by the said Commission of the Ministry of Education, confirmed this intention.

Thus it was proposed to grant a subsidy in order to disseminate among the Lithuanian community not so much Lithuanian, even if printed in the Cyrillic alphabet, but Russian publications, especially newspapers, speaking about the everyday problems of the life of the Lithuanian rural population. This would — in the opinion of the Commission — help to eradicate the prejudice against Russians, supported by the clergy.

Then the Commission reached the conclusion that scholarships granted to Lithuanians since 1866 had not fulfilled their task. They not only did not help to Russianize the Lithuanian intelligentsia, but awakened the Lithuanian sense of identity. It would be much more advantageous, according to the Commission, to establish a chair of Lithuanian dialects at Warsaw University. However, the students who would obtain scholarships should be of Russian descent. It was essential for the studies of the language and history of a tribe that had been so strictly linked with the fortunes of Russia, to be delivered into the Russian hands.

The Commission also took care of the matter of the education of Lithuanian girls; however, this did not mean it intended to raise

the level of their education. There was a different design at work. Intelligent Lithuanians who could not find suitable partners in their own milieu, married Polish women, thereby ceasing to be a good object for Russification. A “school for wives” with its seat at Mariampol, invented by the Commission, was to counteract this phenomenon.

Finally a postulate was put forward to redevelop teachers’ training–colleges at Veivery and Ponevezh. The selection of students, almost exclusively Orthodox Russians, satisfied the Commission. However, it wanted to increase their number considerably by granting scholarships.

The Commission also appraised the situation in the North–Western Country and expressed the view that it was not threatening as yet. However, it advised that indispensable administrative actions, as far as possible, should not take on a too strict and rough character that might needlessly offend the people.

As far as the matter of Lithuanian books was concerned, the Commission declared for printing official publications in the Cyrillic alphabet. At the same time, however, it permitted the printing of private publications in the Latin alphabet. The latter were to be subject not only to the supervision by censorship, but also by the “competent organs of the department of education”<sup>21</sup>.

This is how in May 1902 the Ministry of Education saw not only the method of “setting in order” the matter of Lithuanian printed publications, but in the first place the general solution of the whole Lithuanian problem through conscious, active Russification “from above”.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs in its letter of 24 September 1902 approved the Commission’s proposals. It agreed that it was necessary to print official publications in the Cyrillic alphabet. However, it allowed the printing and importing of Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet by private persons. Of course, not without control. However, the Ministry of Internal Affairs declared against the differentiation of actions in the Kaunas and Suwałki *gubernyas*, proposed by the Commission, because it regarded them as one, strictly inter–connected area<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ministerstvo Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya gospodinu Ministru Vnutrennikh Del*, 29.05.1902, *Byla*, pp. 103–127.

<sup>22</sup> *Otnosheniye Ministra Vnutrennikh Del v Ministerstvo Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, 24.09.1902, *Byla*, pp. 129–130.

At that time, on 17 September 1902, the hitherto Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs, Prince Piotr Sviatopolk-Mirskiy, who had earlier gained a reputation as an adherent of reform, was appointed governor general of Vilna.

Already after two months of his stay in Vilna Sviatopolk-Mirskiy reached the conclusion that "the transcription of Lithuanian publications is one of the major problems" in the North-Western Country. On 26 November 1902, he also informed to this effect the Minister of Internal Affairs Vyacheslav Plehwe.

After acquainting himself better with the problem, Sviatopolk-Mirskiy, on 8 February 1903 addressed Plehwe with a fundamental proposal. Treating the matter more generally, he indicated that Lithuanian writings had a long history and in the 19th century there was a steep rise in their quantity. He criticized Muraviev's actions, accusing him of disregarding the previous output of Lithuanian literature. "We should remember" he said "that printing by itself could neither Polonize nor Russianize the Lithuanians". Of decisive importance was not printing but the language. The measures applied by Muraviev and Kaufman remained in force because of the authorities' inertia. Lithuanian literature, despite prohibitions, developed unboundedly in the second half of the 19th c., while its publishing centres moved to Eastern Prussia.

At that time at home in Russia — he emphasized — peculiar Lithuanian books written in the Russian alphabet were imposed on the people. Several dozen prayer-books and calendars — that was all the Russians could set against the foreign publications. This was quite understandable, since "nowhere and never was literature created by governments; it was the property of society".

The alphabet imposed on them was not accepted by the Lithuanians — Mirskiy continued — while books printed abroad, despite prohibitions and fines, paved their way in tens of thousand copies. This must not be disregarded.

The Prince's further words also surprise us. He saw the main reason for the authorities' abortive policy in the fact that "the Russian alphabet, delayed by three centuries in comparison to the Latin, was introduced to Lithuanian writings when the Lithuanian nationality, having created its literature, was developing with the aid of all its spiritual powers". The significance of Lithuanian priests as adversaries of the Russian alphabet was



more profound. They personified the enlightened social stratum, descended from the peasantry, and were dedicated to the Roman-Catholic Church, but even more to their nationality, which they tried to save by all possible means.

Sviatopolk-Mirskiy concluded: in the second half of the 19th c. the Lithuanian tribe had entered a new stage in its development. The process of Polonization was checked and Lithuanians followed their own course. In this situation the local population should be definitely introduced into the orbit of the general interests of the Russian state. "We cannot lose control of the spiritual development of the Lithuanian nationality, which at present slips out of our hands" — he emphasized. When printing in the Latin alphabet is allowed, Russia will see a rise of Lithuanian literature, which it will be possible to direct in accordance with the designs of the government. "There is absolutely no reason why we should see any threat to the state goals of Russia in the emancipation of Lithuanians".

To finish his memorial Mirskiy stated categorically that the prohibition of printing in the Latin-Lithuanian alphabet should be lifted without any reservations<sup>23</sup>.

We have given more scope to the summary of Sviatopolk-Mirskiy's statement, since his words were new, and would be sought in vain in the declarations of other Russian administrators at that time. He admitted that the national consciousness of Lithuanians existed and was developing and he did not want to stand in the way of this process. He declared definitely and unequivocally for the granting of permission to publish Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet. Needless to say, Mirskiy also aimed at the strengthening of Russian rule in the North-Western Country, but he wanted to achieve it by different methods, and thought rather of state than national assimilation of Lithuanians.

Sviatopolk-Mirskiy's stand exerted a significant influence on the further course of events, bringing nearer the solution of the matter of Lithuanian publications. At the suggestion of Grand Duke Constantine, on 15 March 1903 the Imperial Academy of Sciences also declared for lifting the prohibition of printing, and expressed a hope that "this will be the beginning of a new era which will give rise, under the direct influence of Russian lite-

<sup>23</sup> *Vilenskiy General-Gubernator Ministru Vnutrennikh Del. 3.02.1903. Byla. pp. 133–142.*

rature and Russian education, to the proper spiritual development of the tribe akin to ours"<sup>24</sup>.

Also Minister Plehwe in his letter of 20 June 1903 to the minister of education, referring to Sviatopolk Mirskiy's memorial, inclined to the solution that would lift all kinds of prohibition of the Latin-Lithuanian publications. He considered that the matter should be entered anew in the debates of the Committee of Ministers<sup>25</sup>.

The answer of the Minister of Education Zenger of 5 July 1903 was not, however, unequivocal. Although Zenger asserted that he did not insist on the maintenance of printing in the Cyrillic alphabet, yet he declared that he did not see the lifting of the ban of 1866 as indispensable. He openly admitted that he was not in favour of fostering the development of Lithuanian literature. A simple Lithuanian (*prostoliudin*) — Zenger emphasized — did not feel a need for making use of other publications than payer-books and calendars alone. And he should not be deprived of them. However, the intelligentsia should not be allowed to take up publishing activity, for they intended to shape the Lithuanian national consciousness and to change the Lithuanian language into a powerful tool for conveying the idea of separatism to the masses of the peasantry. This meant a threat that the whole national movement would take on a clearly political character, and the influence of the Russian language would be limited.

Thus in fact the minister of education continued to be reluctant, if not outright hostile towards the Lithuanian national movement. Although he did not admit it openly, he seemed to entertain the ideas that once animated the actions of Muraviev and Kaufman.

Thus two different standpoints were manifested: on the one hand that of the ministry of education, which while verbally admitting the need for changes, in fact worked for their delay; on the other that of the minister of internal affairs and governors in the country, with Sviatopolk-Mirskiy at the head, who "in order to appease the country" saw the indispensability of lifting any limitations to Lithuanian printing.

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<sup>24</sup> *Vypiska iz zasedaniya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 15.03.1903, Byla, p. 145.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ministr Vnutrennikh Del Yego Vysokoprevaskhaditelstvu G. E. Zenger, Byla, pp. 147-151.*

Thus the body to take the initiative was the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the turn of 1903 it prepared an extensive memorial, which on 2 March 1904 was sent to the Committee of Ministers. Plehwe, while presenting its justification and enclosing the necessary documentation, declared once again for lifting any limitations to Lithuanian publications.

The debate of the Committee of Ministers on this matter, headed by Sergey Vitte with the participation of Sviatopolk-Mirskiy and the governor of Kaunas, took place on 13 April 1904. During the discussion those who were for lifting the ban gained a considerable majority, although their opponents did not fail to emphasize the threat of Lithuanian separatism. However, in the end a unanimous resolution was made “to lift all the acts and regulations accepted previously by the government concerning the printing of Lithuanian and Samogitian publications and to permit using in them, apart from Russian, also the Latin or any other alphabet”<sup>26</sup>.

On Saturday 24 April 1904 Prime Minister Vitte saw Emperor Nicholas the Second, who “vouchsafed to approve” the resolution of the Committee of Ministers.

Thus an end was finally put to the forty year long prohibition of printing, which became the most difficult experience for Lithuanian society. However, it was precisely in this period that the Lithuanian community exhibited its great vital power. The movement aroused by this prohibition had led to the shaping of a modern nation.

From the point of view of the Tzarist authorities and the Russian administration, the matter of prohibition of Lithuanian publications became a difficult problem that they did not know how to cope with. The prohibition adopted after the January 1863 Insurrection seemed to be an effective method of Russification of the North-Western Country and the Suwałki *gubernya*, which had long been a strategic objective of the Russian authorities. However, the method which at first seemed so easy to apply, in time turned out to be more and more abortive. It led to results contrary to what was intended. Nevertheless, the administrators, especially the officials of the educational department, did not want to renounce the concepts they had accepted, fascinated by

<sup>26</sup> Merkys, as above, pp. 244–247.

the idea of delivering the Lithuanians from Polish influence, and their Russification.

The voices of realists who perceived the uselessness of the prohibitions introduced, initially isolated, gradually gathered strength. In this chorus Prince Sviatopolk-Mirskiy played a special role. However, the final decision was taken due to the unrest surging in Russia, and above all due to the outbreak of the war with Japan. In this situation the government, reluctant to tolerate “unsettled problems” on its western border, made a decision which finally and definitely put an end to the forty year long prohibition of Lithuanian publications.

*(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)*