

Vladas Sirutavičius

Institute of the History of Lithuania

Institute of International Relations and Political Sciences of Vilnius University

On the Polish National and Territorial Autonomy in Lithuania (the Spring–Summer of 1991)

Zarys treści: W artykule omówiony został rozwój polskiej autonomii narodowo-terytorialnej w Litwie w roku 1991. Najwięcej uwagi poświęcono zjazdowi deputowanych ludowych Wileńszczyzny wszystkich szczebli w Mościskach 22 maja 1991. Zostały przeanalizowane okoliczności zwołania zjazdu, jego skutki oraz reakcje władzy litewskiej na uchwały zjazdu.

Outline of content: The article describes the development of the Polish national and territorial autonomy in Lithuania in 1991. The author's attention focuses on a congress of the deputies of the Vilnius region which took place on 22 May 1991 at Mostiškės (Polish: *Mościszki*); he analyses the circumstances of the congress, its outcomes and reactions of the Lithuanian authorities to the resolutions taken by the congress.

Słowa kluczowe: Republika Litewska 1991, mniejszości narodowe na Litwie, konflikty etniczne na Litwie, autonomia narodowo-terytorialna, Związek Polaków na Litwie

Keywords: Republic of Lithuania, national minorities, ethnic conflict, national-territorial autonomy, Union of Poles in Lithuania, Coordination Council for the creation of Polish National Autonomous Region

The issue of Polish national and territorial autonomy in Lithuania has already been discussed several times in historiography from different points of view. Most works on this subject were published by Polish scholars.¹ In the Lithuanian historiography for a long time there were no serious academic studies, the publicist works dominated, which discussed the sources of establishment of autonomy and

¹ Here I present only a few studies – in my opinion of major significance – in which the problem of the national and territorial autonomy is discussed in a broad social, political and cultural context: A. Bobryk, *Odrodzenie narodowe Polaków w Republice Litewskiej 1987–1997*, Toruń, 2006; Z. Kurcz, *Mniejszość polska na Wileńszczyźnie. Studium socjologiczne*, Wrocław, 2005.

– rather fragmentarily – its history.² But in the recent years also in Lithuanian historiography appeared the studies, in which the phenomenon of Polish national and territorial autonomy is analysed from different points of view.³ It is quite right to state that in the issue of “Polish autonomy” in Lithuania two directions prevail: explaining the reasons for Polish national and territorial autonomy being on the Lithuanian policy agenda and discussing the stages of development of “autonomy movement”.

This text deals with the second issue. The circumstances and effects of the congress in Mostiškės will be discussed. Looking at the problem theoretically one can separate three major “mobilization cycles” in the movement of national and territorial autonomy. The first one began in 1989, when organizations representing (Polish) national community were established and they began to define political goals. The Union of Poles in Lithuania (hereafter: UPL) and the Coordination Council were established at that time. They may be considered the political centres of the community. Later, in spring of 1991, the third political centre was established – Polish Fraction of the Supreme Council. The second cycle was the congress of representatives of Vilnius region councils in Eišiškės in autumn of 1990, during which the participants declared the goal of establishing the national and territorial autonomy (Polish National and Territorial Unit – in Polish: *Polski Kraj Narodowo-Terytorialny*) within the Republic of Lithuania. The third one was the congress in Mostiškės, which adopted the draft of a kind of constitution of the Polish national and territorial autonomy (“Draft act of the Republic of Lithuania regarding Polish national and territorial country of Vilnius District” – in Polish: “Projekt ustawy Republiki Litewskiej w sprawie kraju polskiego narodowo-terytorialnego Wileńszczyzny”).

Political context: Lithuanian plebiscite and union referendum

Lithuanian authorities decided to organize a plebiscite on 9 February 1991. The inhabitants were supposed to answer the following question: “Are you for the Lithuanian state to be an independent democratic republic?” The results of the plebiscite were surprising; more than 2 million 28 thousand inhabitants of Lithuania answered positively.⁴ This means that as many as 90.47% of voters were “for”. After

² K. Garšva, *Pietryčių Lietuvos autonomijos klausimai*, Vilnius, 1990; id., *Lietuvos lenkų autonomijos kūrimo istorija, Lietuvos rytai*, ed. K. Garšva, L. Grumadienė, Vilnius, 1993, pp. 314–320.

³ V. Sirutavičius, “Etniškumo politizacija Lietuvoje: lenkų autonomistų judėjimas, Sąjūdis ir Lietuvos valdžios politika 1988–1990 m. pradžioje”, *Etniškumo studijos/Ethnicity studies*, 2013, no. 2, Vilnius, 2013, pp. 120–148; id., “Lenkų autonomijos problema. 1990 m. pavasaris–vasara”, *Kultūros barai*, 2014, no. 7/8–10.

⁴ Total number of voters – 2 652 738. Negative answer was given by 147 040 of voters, over 66 thousand of votes were invalid. Approximately 404 thousand inhabitants having the right of vote did not participate in the plebiscite. “Lietuvos aidas inf. Apklauso duomenys”, *Lietuvos aidas*,

counting the results of all those who had the right of vote it would show that 76,46% answered positively. It is a more modest result but still very good. These data showed that population of Lithuania supports restoration of the independent state and wants it to be a democratic republic.⁵

One must mention that not in all regions of Lithuania the results were so optimistic. The voters from Eastern Lithuania were the most passive. In Šalčininkai region only 25,02% of voters took part in the plebiscite, that is 7344 persons (in this region 29 353 persons had the right of vote). Formally, the result here was also positive – 52,82% (3868) of voters answered positively the question of the plebiscite, even though only 13,18% of those having the right of vote voted for the independent and democratic Republic of Lithuania. In Vilnius region the result was a bit better. Here, 42,80%, that is 28 316 voters participated in the plebiscite (66 157 persons had the right of vote). The majority – 56,59%, that is 16 004 voters supported the postulate of the plebiscite. But counting all those entitled to vote, the support was much lower. Only 24,19% of them gave a positive answer to the plebiscite question.⁶ In both these regions there was the highest number of invalid votes – in Vilnius region 17,28%, and in Šalčininkai region – 14,75%.

This is why it seems that the decisions of the Lithuanian authorities of 29 January 1991⁷ and campaigning of Polish politicians and persuading to actively participate in the plebiscite had no real influence on the Poles living in the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions. It was said that the local activists prepared themselves to boycott the plebiscite⁸, which they, of course, denied. Adam Monkiewicz explained at the meeting of the council of Šalčininkai region Praesidium (7 February) that

32 (14 February 1991). Approximately 1% of the inhabitants of Lithuania did not have the right to participate in the plebiscite – military men enlisted in the army from other republics, as well as those who arrived in Lithuania after 4 November 1989, when the Act on Citizenship was passed.

⁵ There were no clear criteria of the plebiscite. The deputy chairman of the Republican Election Commission Vaclovas Litvinas asked by a journalist if any participation threshold is planned (50% or $\frac{3}{4}$ of all those entitled to vote) gave a negative answer. This is not a referendum – Litvinas explained, but if people answered positively, this position ‘could be entered in the Constitutional Act. If not – it would not be entered’. “On 9 February we will decide what Lithuania we want to have”, *Kurier Wileński*, 15 (24 January 1991).

⁶ Everything was counted according to: “Apklauso duomenys”, *Lietuvos aidas*, 32 (14 February 1991).

⁷ On 29 January 1991 two resolutions of the Supreme Council were passed. The first one amended the Act on National Minorities. The second ‘Regarding the results of the National Commission for Eastern Lithuania issues’ obligated the Government of the Republic to present, by 31 May, the draft administrative division of Lithuania, ‘according to which the anticipated basis of Vilnius district would be the present Šalčininkai and Vilnius regions’. In other point of the resolution the National Commission for Eastern Lithuania also committed itself to develop ‘the draft status of Vilnius region by 31 May’.

⁸ Valstybinės komisijos Rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti posėdžio, įvykusio 1991 02 20 d., protokolas, *R. Ozolo dokumentų rinkinys, Lietuvos istorijos instituto Bibliotekos rankraštynas* (toliau LII BR), f. 42–4, l. 253.

all bodies should try hard so that the plebiscite is held: “We had telephone calls stating that we allegedly boycott the plebiscite and that is why we organized a seminar with activists. But that is not true. Someone misinformed the main election commission. [...] Our task is to prepare the quality of constituencies and to create the conditions ensuring that confidence is maintained during voting and that observers from Sąjūdis are not disturbed”.⁹ The chairman of the regional election commission Nikolaĵ Amielewicz said similar things, but publicly, for the press¹⁰.

Polish politicians from Lithuania were the first to ask why the Poles from Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions were so passive and did not support the plebiscite. In the Polish press of Lithuania several articles on this subject were published. The mainstream Lithuanian press also gave a brief description of the plebiscite in eastern Lithuania.¹¹

According to UPL activist Janusz Obłaczyński, several important circumstances contributed to such results: first, a strong position of the Lithuanian Communist Party on the platform of the Soviet Union Communist Party (LCP/SUCP – still called a “platform”)¹², weakening influence of UPL and domination of “the old party and administrative nomenclature”. Second, resolutions from 29 January were passed with delay; that is why they could not change the views of majority of “ordinary” Poles. And third, in Obłaczyński’s opinion, there was “the information blockage”, and regional authorities “quietly boycotted the plebiscite”.¹³

⁹ It was noticed during the same meeting that certain districts were not fully prepared for the plebiscite: invitations were not sent to all places, the list of voters was not precise, but it was mentioned that errors were corrected. One member of the Praesidium noticed that when Sąjūdis began campaigning, many persons began to say ‘we will not vote’, *Vilniaus Apygardos teismo Baudžiamųjų bylų skyriaus archyvas* (toliau – VATA), b. nos. 1–6, 1999, v. 3, l. 128–130.

¹⁰ “Soleczniki: przygotowania w pełni”, *Kurier Wileński*, 24 (06 February 1991). The newspaper provided a large coverage of the voting in Eišiškės, Šalčininkai, Švenčionys and Trakai. No special violations were noticed, only weak activity and a large number of foreign journalists in Šalčininkai. It follows from the description that Šalčininkai for the first time in its history was in the centre of interest of the world media, “Sobota: w lokalach wyborczych”, *Kurier Wileński*, 28 (12 February 1991).

¹¹ It was stated that the inhabitants of Šalčininkai region were the most passive citizens; organizational shortcomings were mentioned (people were misinformed), and it was stressed that ‘the platform conducted an active counterpropaganda’ – it persuaded the people not to take part in the plebiscite, Vygantas Guiga, “Galime pasidžiaugti”, *Tiesa*, 28 (12 February 1991), E. Ganusauskas, “Raudonų šūkių paunksnėje”, *Lietuvos rytas*, 22 (12 February 1991).

¹² After the 20th congress of LCP in December 1989, a split in the party occurred. Two communist parties were active in Lithuania: ‘the independent’ LCP chaired by Algirdas Brazauskas and the one which ‘remained on the SUCP platform’, chaired by Mykolas Burokevičius. The first of them had approximately 80 thousand members, while 40 thousand remained ‘on SUCP platform’. About 80 thousand left the communist party, Č. Laurinavičius, V. Sirutavičius, *Lietuvos istorija. Sąjūdis: nuo “persitvarkymo” iki Kovo 11-osios*, v. 12, part 1, Vilnius, 2008, pp. 419–428.

¹³ J. Obłaczyński, “Brak zaufania i ... błysk nadziei”, *Magazyn Wileński*, 3–4 (1–28 February 1991). According to the author, inhabitants of the cities were more active, and those from rural areas were very passive; in some places only several per cent of citizens participated in the plebiscite.

There were more of such opinions. Representatives of Polish fraction joined the discussion.

The major Polish newspaper *Kurier Wileński* published an article by the deputy of the Supreme Council (hereinafter SC) Zbigniew Balcewicz.¹⁴ The author admitted that the views of Poles expressed during the plebiscite differed from those prevailing in the country. He stressed that political forces opposing independence of Lithuania “did not manage to boycott [the plebiscite]”. But, at the same time, “mistakes in the nationality policy of the resurgent Lithuanian State were noticeable”.¹⁵ The acts regulating the status of national minorities adopted at the end of January were not in force yet, so Poles from Vilnius region could not notice their positive effect. A deputy of the SC, the same as Obłaczyński, stated that “the local party nomenclature” had still a strong impact on the people from Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions. It wants to keep power and the old Soviet order by all means.¹⁶ Generally speaking Balcewicz explained that “whether you like it or not, mentality of Vilnius region inhabitants is like this”. And changes in this mentality will mainly depend on the way in which Lithuanian state fulfils its promises and how the January resolutions of the SC are performed.

At the end of February, the same paper published an article by the president of the Polish parliamentary fraction, Ryszard Maciejkianiec, in which he did not only consider the results of the plebiscite, but mainly searched the answer to the question how to change the situation.¹⁷ He was critical about the approach of certain bureaucratic institutions of Lithuanian state to the hopes of Polish minority; he was particularly critical about the National Minorities Department, which spread the untruthful propaganda on “Soviet Poles”, allegedly not interested in the situation. The local government politicians, where Poles prevailed, were also criticized for not paying the proper attention to the social and economic problems, which are the most important for the people. This is why Maciejkianiec called on his compatriots to get actively involved in the private economic initiative and to take advantage of the new social and economic reality being shaped.¹⁸ Only initiative

The growth in the impact of the ‘platform’ Obłaczyński explained by the fact that it managed to take over from UPL the national demands and to use them.

- ¹⁴ Z. Balcewicz, “Pewne wnioski z wyników sondażu”, *Kurier Wileński*, 28 (12 February 1991).
- ¹⁵ In the Polish press there were also voices trying to blame Sąjūdis and the new Lithuanian authorities for the failure of the plebiscite, because they did not take into account the needs of the Polish community, J. Mincewicz, “Jak roztopić górę lodową?”, *Magazyn Wileński*, 5 (1–15 March 1991).
- ¹⁶ In one of the interviews C. Wysocki explained that ‘Polish autonomous region’ must be socialist ‘within the independent Soviet Lithuania’. And if Lithuania leaves USSR, the ‘Polish autonomous region’ is supposed to be ‘an independent unit, but within the Soviet Union’, “O, mój socjalizmie, rozwijaj się...”, *Kurier Wileński*, 35 (21 February 1991).
- ¹⁷ R. Maciejkianiec, “Przed nami jeszcze długa droga”, *Kurier Wileński*, 39 (27 February 1991).
- ¹⁸ Lithuanian authorities passed many laws which had impact on the development of Vilnius region as the agrarian region. They included amendment of the Land Code adopted on 5 April 1990,

and business activity can ensure social and economic wellness, which will have impact on the further development of Polish community.

Another Polish political centre – Coordination Council of Polish National and Territorial Unit – also reacted to the results of the plebiscite. In the statement of the Council's Praesidium it was reminded that in the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, which are mostly inhabited by Poles, 37,2% of those who have the right of vote took part in the plebiscite, and 20,8% of voters were “for” (all those who have the right of vote were counted).¹⁹ This is why the Praesidium stated that the absolute majority of Vilnius region inhabitants did not have a clear picture yet and “that is why they did not take an independent decision on this important issue”. According to the authors of the document, in order to have impact on the attitude of this region's population and make it advantageous for the Lithuanian state, the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Republic must, as soon as possible, pass a law on the establishment of Polish national and territorial unit.

It is hard to say whether the Lithuanian authorities noticed this public statement; even if it did, it did not officially react to it. The Supreme Council, its praesidium and the government did not consider the Coordination Council to be their partner, only the body representing interests of the Poles from Vilnius region. Nevertheless, at the end of 1990 they held consultations with Polish activists, who were in the Coordination Council, in spite of the fact that they treated them as representatives of the local governments.

The world and Polish major newspapers mentioned the results of the plebiscite and attitude of national minorities (Poles). The comments were rather specific, the same as reaction of certain Lithuanian politicians. Radio stations “Swoboda” and “Free Europe” quoted American press (*Los Angeles Times*), according to which the national minorities: Poles, Russians and Belarussians “voted against independence of Lithuania”.²⁰

pursuant to which it was permitted to take a portion of land from the kolkhozes and based on the decision of the regional deputy council give it to the farmers. In July of the same year the Supreme Council adopted a resolution on granting the inhabitants of rural areas 3 ha of land for their own needs. These and other legal acts destroyed the kolkhoz structure in the rural areas and created premises for individual, capitalistic economy. Liquidation of kolkhozes was finalized by the Act on Agricultural Companies passed on 16 April 1991. And finally, on 25 July of that year the Act on Land Reform was passed, which set forth the possibility to regain the formerly possessed land. It applied to the Lithuanian citizens who were residents. For more, see L. Šabajavitė, *Lietuvos socialinė transformacija 1990–1997 metai*, Vilnius, 1999, pp. 99–109.

¹⁹ “Prezydium rady koordynacyjnej”, *Kurier Wileński*, 37 (23 February 1991), date of the statement – 13 February 1991.

²⁰ From the major Soviet papers *Izviestija* published a short comment on the results of the plebiscite, which was quite correct. The journalist wrote that ‘the so-called Polish-speaking regions’ were the most passive – the inhabitants of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, but even there the result was positive. The author stated that Lithuanian authorities would base their interior and foreign policy (in relations with the USSR) on the results of the plebiscite, Н. Лашкевич, “Литва после опроса”, *Известия* 37 (13 February 1991). The party paper *Pravda* did not even mention the February plebiscite.

In response to such information the Polish paper *Kurier Wileński* published an article by the deputy of SC and chairman of the Commission for Citizens' Rights and Nationality Issues Virgilijus Čepaitis.²¹ The deputy proved that the attitude of national minorities can not be treated as an illustration of lack of trust and hostility toward Lithuanian Republic. In his opinion, a substantial part of non-Lithuanians (he began with discussion of the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions) gave a positive answer to the question of the plebiscite, and those who did not take part in the plebiscite simply had not decided yet what they wanted. At the end of the article Čepaitis stressed that passive attitude of certain voters during the plebiscite, which was “conducted in the situation of occupation” should not be considered as national minorities' reluctance to “live in the independent Lithuania”.²²

Rzeczpospolita, one of the major newspapers in Poland, published one article regarding the results of the plebiscite. The author did not conduct an analysis of factors which affected Poles' attitudes during the plebiscite, but she noticed that the western journalists are more interested in the weak activity of minorities than Vytautas Landsbergis.²³ The journalist drew such conclusion after the press conference of the chairman of SC, during which he positively assessed participation (activity) of Poles and Russians. Another opinion-shaping paper *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote more about the plebiscite. It called Poles' participation in the plebiscite modest. The journalist stated that such results may only make the Lithuanian-Polish relations even more difficult.²⁴ He also mentioned that certain Polish activists (such as Jan Ciechanowicz), and Polish emigration activists persuaded people to boycott the plebiscite.

Comments of the journalists who were observers of the plebiscite were interesting. They wrote that in certain constituencies next to the Lithuanian three-colour flag there was a Soviet Union flag, mentioned “platform's” campaigning aimed at boycott of the plebiscite, people's indifference and weak propaganda campaign.²⁵ But the most interesting was the part in which Lithuanian politicians' reactions were described. They were very cautious and diplomatic. The advisor of SC chairman, Aurelijus Katkevičius, stated that such results reflect uncertainty as to the future; apparently Landsbergis shared this opinion. A member of SC Praesidium, Mečys Laurinkus, explained to the journalist that Poles were not hostile toward Lithuanian state. According to this politician a referendum organized in Moscow was supposed to be a “test” for Poles. In his opinion, Poles would probably not support Kremlin and would stay indifferent to the referendum. A conversation with the leader of UPL, Jan Sienkiewicz, was also referred to. He stated that the Union of Poles tried to motivate its compatriots, especially after the resolutions of SC of

²¹ W. Czepaitis, “Kilka uwag o wynikach plebiscytu”, *Kurier Wileński*, 30 (14 February 1991).

²² Ibid.

²³ M. Narbutt, “Zwycięstwo nad kłamstwem”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 35 (11 February 1991).

²⁴ M. Rapacki, “Odpowiedzialność”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 35 (11 February 1991).

²⁵ J. Borkowicz, “Niełatwo odrobić te wszystkie lata” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 35 (11 February 1991).

29 January, but admitted that it is difficult to change outlook and opinions which were formed for a long time. But, as he stressed, the Lithuanians understood this.

Therefore, after the plebiscite, in spite of the results from the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, Lithuanian politicians were restrained in their opinions. They avoided any radical and critical statements regarding national minorities. It was confirmed by an analysis of the results of the plebiscite in the Supreme Council. The session on 11 February was chaired by the Council's Chairman Landsbergis and Aloyzas Sakalas. It was attended not only by the deputies, but also by many foreign guests, who observed the course of the plebiscite, and representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and embassies in the Soviet Union (of Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, USA and other countries, including Poland) and representatives of Lithuanian government and of local governments.²⁶

The chairman of the election commission Juozas Bulavas was the first speaker. He discussed the course and results of the plebiscite. Mentioning participation of national minorities (including Poles) he briefly commented that not only the Lithuanians but also people of other nations voted for the independence of Lithuania. Of course, there occurred obstacles, mainly of organizational nature, and this would have to be seen to, for example in the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions and in some other places. But this – according to Bulavas – did not have a significant influence on the results of the elections. If not for these obstacles, the number of votes “for” could be higher.²⁷ SC Chairman, Landsbergis gave a broader and more detailed description of national minorities' participation in the plebiscite and of the possible political consequences. He admitted that “in certain locations of Eastern Lithuania” activity of voters was “relatively low” and imperial propagandists of the Soviet Union could take advantage of this fact. Landsbergis attempted to explain the reason of such decision of national minorities, especially Poles. First of all, “interference by the Soviets” political and war leaders, who created the mood of uncertainty and terror, was undoubtedly stronger there [in Eastern Lithuania] than anywhere else”. At the same time Landsbergis stressed positive attitude of the Union of Poles in Lithuania to the plebiscite and organization's efforts to change their compatriots' attitude. On the other hand, continued the Chairman of SC:

Probably people in these places had more doubts, they have not decided yet or simply are politically passive. **Their political awakening is still the issue of the future and this is why we do not have to accuse them of anything** [emphasis mine – V.S.]. I want to stress that among politically active people who took part in the voting in Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, the majority was for the independence of Lithuania. And counting the city of Vilnius and these two regions together we have the following proportion: 260 thousand “yes”, 43 thousand “no”.

²⁶ LR AT antra eilinė sesija, šimtas dvidešimt pirmasis posėdis, vakarinis, 11 February 1991, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_sale.dien_pos?p_data=19910211 (access: 11 March 2015).

²⁷ Ibid.

Finally, Landsbergis stressed that many non-Lithuanian citizens did not give in to slandering Lithuania, lies and intrigues, which were aimed at causing the national conflict in Lithuania.²⁸

Therefore, Lithuanian authorities assessed participation of national minorities, including Poles, and effects of their low involvement which cannot be called positive, in a rather restrained and diplomatic way. Generally speaking, they tried to emphasize that national minorities, as to the principle, support the independent and democratic state of Lithuania. Later, Lithuanian authorities also demonstrated good intent toward national minorities. At the beginning of March the meeting of SC Chairman Landsbergis with representatives of local governments was held. A few days later a conference of national communities was held, in which representatives of 15 communities took part. The Vice Chairman of SC Česlovas Stankevičius participated in the conference. After stressing that “imperialist forces” did not manage to sow dissent between the nations of Lithuania, he also ensured that representatives of national minorities, who would not want to adopt Lithuanian citizenship, would be granted all their rights.²⁹ The Chairman of SC. also met with the participants of the conference. This was the public and official position of the authorities.

It seems that similar tendencies also prevailed in non-public policy. Alas, there is no factual material for a broader analysis. Based on the available information one may suspect that restraint also prevailed here. A proof of it was the basis of relations with the councils of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions prepared at the beginning of March by the National Commission for Eastern Lithuania Issues (hereinafter – Eastern Lithuania Commission).³⁰ In this document the councils were ordered to revoke resolutions which were against the Provisional Main Act of Lithuanian Republic, and were called to get involved “in a comprehensive cooperation in restoration of Lithuanian state”. Other items were addressed to Lithuanian authorities, such as the vision of Vilnius region status: “Status of Vilnius region could differ from other Lithuanian regions by: a) the way of forming the elected and other administrative bodies; b) regulating the use of languages other than the official language, and providing regulations for other local languages; c) guarantees liquidating the economic and social discrepancies; d) specially determined legal and economic relations with the city of Vilnius”. It was also stressed that “in the

²⁸ Many different calculations were presented as to the way the national minorities voted in the plebiscite. Ryszard Maciejkianiec wrote: “Statistics proves that only 5 per cent of non-Lithuanian population voted for the independent Lithuania. The Lithuanians in their vast majority voted ‘for’”, R. Maciejkianiec, “Przed nami jeszcze długa droga”, *Kurier Wileński*, 39 (27 February 1991).

²⁹ “Konferencja towarzystw narodowych”, *Kurier Wileński*, 48 (12 March 1991).

³⁰ Bendros darbo grupės prie Valstybinės komisijos Rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti nuostatos. Mašinarštis, be autoriaus, 2 March 1991, Rytų Lietuvos valstybinė komisija. R. Ozolo dokumentai, *LII BR*, f. 42–4, l. 239.

form of a multilateral dialogue the statutory bases of such status of the [Vilnius] district should be prepared, which would approve: a) historical significance and demographic and national specificities of the eastern territories of Lithuania; b) competences of the region in the new legal system of Lithuania”. Obviously, the provisions of the document were of a general nature and differed from those accepted by the congress in Eišiškės and published by the Coordination Council.

The above arrangements also differed from the draft bill prepared on 21 February by Polish fraction of SC “Regarding establishment of the Polish National and Territorial Country in Vilnius District”³¹. The draft contained eight articles. Article two stipulated that “Vilnius District is a **separate** [emphasis mine – V.S.] administrative and territorial unit of Lithuanian Republic acting within the political and territorial uniformity of the state, established on a democratic basis, in accordance with the laws of Lithuanian Republic”. The draft provided for acceptance of the Statute (Constitutional Act) of Vilnius District. The borders of the country were clearly defined (it would consist not only of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions but also some districts of Švenčionys, Trakai and Širvintaj regions), and it was stressed that “borders of the Vilnius District may be changed only pursuant to the consent of the domestic Sejm”. The supreme legislative body was to be the parliament, and its speaker was a member of SC presidium. Executive power was supposed to be vested in the management board. The country had its budget. Lithuanian was supposed to be the “state” language, and Polish – the “official” language. It was also stressed that “if needed, in separate districts and places” Russian and Belorussian may be used as official languages. The last, eighth item had the following wording: “Pursuant to the laws of Lithuanian Republic the Sejm of Vilnius District approves its attributes”. In the introductory document to the draft it was stressed that “adjourning the question” about the country’s status “would be a serious mistake and would stop the process of normalization of national relations which commenced in January of this year”.

One may assume that both aforementioned documents give a clear picture of the strategy of Lithuanian authorities and of one of the Polish political centres: for the Lithuanians it was essential not to hurry, to wait, to uphold a kind of dialogue, but not to contract any liabilities. Such attitude was not only affected by the results of the already conducted plebiscite, but also by anxiety for the referendum of the Soviet Union on 17 March. Participation of national minorities, including Poles, was possible. The Polish fraction, on the contrary, pushed a quick adoption of the law of Vilnius District, and the reasons of such conduct were similar – unclear political situation, it was not stated whether the Vilnius

³¹ Įstatymo projektas, 21 February 1991, Lietuvos valstybės naujasis archyvas (hereinafter: LVNA), f. 31, ap. 1, b. 128, l. 32–34. The draft was formally based on the Provisional Main Act, rules of international law and Article 127 of Lithuanian Constitutional Act of 1938. The document was distributed among fractions and standing committees of SC.

and Šalčininkai local governments would organize the Soviet referendum. At the same time one should remember that among different Lithuanian political forces (as well as among simple-minded Lithuanians) the issue of “the special Vilnius District” awoke contradictory and rather negative feelings.³²

The answer to the question if the Vilnius and Šalčininkai local governments would organize the union referendum (in which the inhabitants were supposed to tell whether they were for the establishment of a new, reformed union, but, in fact, if they were for maintaining the USSR)³³ came at the end of February and the beginning of March. In the second half of February the chairman of Šalčininkai regional council, Czesław Wysocki stated that “the union referendum will take place”, but he was of the opinion that in Lithuania Mikhail Gorbachev must delay it by about two months.³⁴ Interview with Wysocki was published several days after visit in Vilnius of the member of the Political Bureau of the Soviet Union Communist Party (SUCP), Oleg Szenin, during which a meeting with the activists from the “platform” was held. Szenin discussed various subjects, but two aspects of his speech were particularly significant and sounded quite menacingly. First he stressed that if Lithuania did not stick to the “mechanism of exit” of the republic (from the USSR) determined by Kremlin, the country might face territorial problems. In such case – the party activist explained – Lithuania would lose the territories (Vilnius and Vilnius District), included in Lithuania after the October agreement of 1939.³⁵ The second warning was equally threatening: if Lithuanian authorities continue to breach the Soviet laws, Kremlin may take steps to “protect the inhabitants of certain territories against unilateral influence of separatist forces”.

³² Negative attitude toward ‘the special’ status of Vilnius district was presented by “Vilnija” society. In the document of the society dated 6 March it was stated that establishing the Vilnius district ‘only based on the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions’ was not based on any criteria. This is why the Vilnius district may not have any status different from the remaining districts of the state. It should be, nevertheless, mentioned that it is admitted in the document that there occurs the district specifics (language and national), “Dėl Vilniaus apskrities status”, *Voruta*, 7 (1–15 April 1991); also, S. Spurga, “Imantas Melianas, Vilniaus apskritis ir tautinių mažumų problemos”, *Atgimimas*, 11 (7–14 March 1991). In the authors’ opinion ‘the special’ status would fix isolation of Eastern Lithuania and could be the source of ethnic tensions.

³³ Full wording of the referendum question was as follows: ‘Is it, in your opinion, necessary to save the USSR as federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedoms of people of all nationalities will be fully guaranteed?’.

³⁴ “O, mój socjalizmie, rozwijaj się...”, *Kurier Wileński*, 35 (21 February 1991).

³⁵ Ю. Строганов, “Нет’ противостоянию”, *Правда*, 43 (19 February 1991). On 16 February Gorbachev, at the meeting with the ministers of foreign affairs of Luxembourg, Italy and Netherlands, also mentioned ‘territorial problems’ that might occur in Lithuania, if it still wanted to ‘exit’ in a way different from the mechanism of exit. President of the USSR explained it in the following way: five regions of Lithuania had formerly belonged to Belarussia, which already reminded Vilnius about it. And Klaipeda (Memel), after victory over fascism, was offered to ‘the Soviet people, first of all to the Russian nation. And it belonged to it [...]. Vilnius – earlier Wilno – is a former Polish city’. Žr. Pavel Stroilov dokumentai perduoti Lietuvos istorijos institutui, *LII BR*, f. 65–56, l. 155.

One of such steps was supposed to be “introduction of the presidential rule on the above mentioned territories”. The precise status of these territories would be determined later. In Szenin’s opinion the future of “certain territories” would depend on the results of the union referendum.³⁶ It could be concluded from his speech that not only the regions of Eastern Lithuania “aspired” to the status of “certain territories”, but also Klaipeda District.

Lithuanian authorities reacted to the idea of organizing the union referendum in Lithuania on 22 February. SC Chairman Landsbergis and Prime Minister Gediminas Vagnorius issued a common statement in which they called the planned referendum “interfering in the internal matters of Lithuanian Republic” and attempt against its sovereignty.³⁷ This, nevertheless, did not stop the organizers of the referendum. The Vilnius District council was the first to discuss the issue of union referendum on 6 March. Based on the press coverage we may guess that discussion was hot and fierce.³⁸ Two Poles, SC deputies, participated in the council’s session. Both were against referendum and proposed continuation of constructive cooperation with the central Lithuanian authorities. But the council supported the idea of organizing referendum³⁹ (41 members were for, 15 against, 20 abstained).⁴⁰ Šalčininkai region council met on 8 March. Here, no such dispersion of votes occurred as in Vilnius District: of 40 deputies taking part in the session 35 voted for the referendum, 4 voted against, and one abstained.⁴¹ Participant of the session, the chairman of Polish fraction Ryszard Maciejkianiec stated that solving the issues important for Polish community must be performed in consultation with Lithuanian state and those who voted for referendum “also voted for the death of the regional council”.⁴² (Here I want to stop and mention that the words of the Polish politician were prophetic, even though they did not impress the deputies).

Lithuanian authorities mentioned referendum for the second time on 7 March. The presidium of SC of Lithuanian Republic issued a statement in which it called referendum a “condemned and punishable” activity and stated that resolutions

³⁶ Wysocki took part in this meeting. A journalist recorded his short replica: “The time of silence has passed, one has to protect oneself, one’s idea. We must protect our choice”, Строганов, ‘Нет’ противостоянию.

³⁷ *Lietuvos aidas*, 40 (26 February 1991).

³⁸ M. Ławryniec, N. Niezamow, “Niekonsekwencja postaw i decyzji”, *Kurier Wileński*, 49 (13 March 1991); R. Maciejkianiec, “Dlaczego nie wezmę udziału w referendum”, *Kurier Wileński*, 50 (14 March 1991); L. Drozd, “Rajono liaudies deputatų tarybos sesija”, *Draugystė*, 9 (15 March 1991); “Polacy będą odnawiać ZSSR” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 59 (11 March 1991).

³⁹ Литовская Республика Вильнюсский районный Совет. Постановление 6 March 1991, *LVNA*, f. 32, ap. 1, b. 128, l. 174.

⁴⁰ Ławryniec, Niezamow, Niekonsekwencja postaw. According to Maciejkianiec, of 80 deputies participating in the session 41 voted for referendum. This means that the decision on organizing referendum won by one vote, R. Maciejkianiec, Dlaczego nie wezmę udziału.

⁴¹ “W Solecznikach – referendum ZSSR”, *Kurier Wileński*, 48 (12 March 1991).

⁴² A. Kieda, “Referendum odbędzie się”, *Przykazania Lenina*, 20 (12 March 1991).

and guidelines of local government councils regarding its organization were “illegal and may not be implemented”.⁴³ Finally, SC resolution of 12 March annulled resolutions of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions councils regarding the union referendum and announced that any activities related to this matter were illegal.⁴⁴ Five representatives of Polish fraction (Stanisław Akanowicz, Zbigniew Balcewicz, Ryszard Maciejkianiec, Stanisław Peszko, and Edward Tomaszewicz) issued an appeal to Polish voters. They stressed that the organized referendum is not good for the interests of Polish community but only for those who want to torpedo the dialogue between Lithuanians and Poles.⁴⁵

Lithuanian press called the referendum “an action organized by SUCP”, and its course was criticized due to many breaches.⁴⁶ In certain districts (first in the Vilnius District) the referendum was not held, in some places election commissions ceased to exist (all political forces of Lithuania, including UPL, recalled their representatives), so SUCP activists had to form them from scratch; confidentiality was not observed, people voted without identity documents, and there were cases when servicemen brought ballot boxes to voters. The Soviet media hardly mentioned the course of referendum in Lithuania, and provided a very general coverage of the results in the republics which refused to organize it (there were six of them). The results of referendum differed and were inaccurate. The Soviet media stated that approximately one million inhabitants took part in the referendum in Lithuania. Michail Gorbachev also quoted such number.⁴⁷

The press published the referendum data from Šalčininkai and Vilnius Districts. In Šalčininkai region 76% of voters took part, 97,8% of them were for maintaining the reformed union.⁴⁸ The total number of those who answered positively amounts to 22.838 persons.⁴⁹ Czesław Wysocki, summing up the results in the region stated that they “clearly show” that the inhabitants of the region do not support “separatist policy of the government of the republic”

⁴³ *Lietuvos aidas*, 49 (9 March 1991).

⁴⁴ “LR AT ir Vyriausybės žinios” 9 (1991), p. 345–346.

⁴⁵ Oświadczenie, *Kurier Wileński*, 49 (13 March 1991). The document was accepted on 11 March.

⁴⁶ G. Songaila, “Kareiviai su urnomis”, *Lietuvos aidas*, 56 (20 March 1991); A. Paliesius, “Balsavo 100 procentų”, *Lietuvos aidas* 56 (20 March 1991); “Tak przebiegała ‘akcja referendum’”, *Kurier Wileński*, 54 (20 March 1991); J. Geštautas, M. Gorbačiovas, “Opozicija neturi perspektyvos”, *Tiesa*, 60 (28 March 1991).

⁴⁷ “Информирует центральная комиссия”, *Правда*, 68 (20 March 1991); “Сессия обсуждает первые итоги референдума”, *Известия*, 67 (20 March 1991); Geštautas, Gorbačiovas, Opozicija neturi perspektyvos.

⁴⁸ “Jak się odbyło referendum?”, *Przykazania Lenina*, 23 (22 March 1991).

⁴⁹ The numbers announced at the meeting of the regional council’s praesidium differed only slightly: 23.441 voters (76,4%) took part in the referendum. There were 30.661 names entered on the lists. Of those 22.838 (97,4%) answered positively, and negatively – 374 (1,6%), less than one per cent of votes were considered invalid. Šalčininkų rajono tarybos prezidiumo protokolai ir sprendimai. Информация об итогах референдума, 25 March 1991, Vilniaus apskrities archyvas (hereinafter: VAA), f. 2270, ap. 1, b. 22, l. 11–12.

Precise results were announced at the session of the regional council. They showed that activity in the region differed, for example in the 1st municipal district in Šalčininkai 37% of voters took part in the referendum, whereas in the 2nd municipal district in Šalčininkai – 77% of voters. There were districts where over 90% of voters took part in the referendum.⁵⁰ In Vilnius District, according to the election commission, 57,1% of voters took part (37.289), of which 98,1% gave a positive answer (36.605), negative – 1,3%, and only 204 votes were considered invalid.⁵¹ Later certain authors from Poland stated that 76% of inhabitants of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions took part in the referendum.⁵²

In the Lithuanian public space the results of the referendum organized by Moscow were, obviously, not discussed,⁵³ since the union referendum was illegal. For Lithuanian politicians and for the whole society the fact of organizing referendum and its results were just one more proof of the pro-Soviet and pro-Communist political orientation of Lithuanian Poles, at least a large part of them. In the Soviet times, the Polish inhabitants of eastern regions of Lithuania were, for various reasons, more “indoctrinated” and were more influenced by the official Soviet ideology, and this shaped their choices and political sympathies and their geocultural and geopolitical orientation. To put it in metaphorical way, they look more at the Kremlin towers than on Gedymin’s castle...

It is obvious that in the periods of social and political transformations people’s choices are taken under the influence of complex social, economic, political and cultural factors. Nevertheless, with respect to national minorities some additional elements occur. In my view, the conduct of certain members of Polish community was dictated by several other circumstances, which were connected with the need of security.

First, the Soviet social and economic system, Soviet nomenclature of these regions and “the headquarters” in Moscow for a large part of Polish inhabitants of the eastern regions of Lithuania meant a relative stability and predictability. This does not mean that they were fully satisfied with those structures and their representatives. But it was them and their activists who created premises for individual and community security and this is why they were more trusted than the not yet formed and not settled social and political system of a new state. Probably this is why the regional activists – “the Soviet nomenclature” – had an easy job to mobilize the inhabitants.

⁵⁰ Šalčininkų rajono tarybos prezidiumo protokolai ir sprendimai. Информация об итогах референдума, 25 March 1991, VAA, f. 2270, ap. 1, b. 22, l. 11–12.

⁵¹ “Rajono rinkiminės komisijos informacija”, *Draugystė*, 10 (22 March 1991). *Gazeta Wyborcza* the major Polish newspaper, which sympathized with Lithuania, wrote that in Vilnius region activity in the referendum was lower than 50 % (66 [19 March 1991]).

⁵² Kurcz, *Mniejszość polska na Wileńszczyźnie*, p. 140.

⁵³ Several days after the referendum the Polish press quoted R. Maciejkaniec, who called Poles’ participation in the referendum a misfortune. “Litwa: Polacy za ZSSR”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 67 (20 March 1991).

Second, the sense of insecurity was upheld and strengthened in the inhabitants of these regions by the domination of Lithuanians. Social and economic reforms, political changes are often evaluated by national minorities through the prism of titular nation ruling. Third, if Polish minority saw the increasing domination of the Lithuanian majority as a threat, the perspective of Lithuanian state was not so clear and certain for the substantial part of inhabitants of south-east Lithuania as for Lithuanians - the titular nation – quite opposite.

Spring tensions: resolutions of Mostiškės congress

In spring the social and economic situation was full of tension. Soviet servicemen still controlled the occupied buildings and they did not intend to leave them. In different places in Lithuania special units of USSR internal troops (OMON) were active, customs offices and border posts were attacked. At the end of April OMON occupied a branch of Bank Rolniczo-Przemysłowy in Naujoji Vilnia, in which a commercial bank was active, which was not subordinated to Lithuanian authorities and was in direct contacts with Moscow. Later, it turned out that “platform” was financed through this bank. Rumors spread that General Valentin Varenikov appeared in Vilnius. Lithuanian authorities spoke about “crawling occupation” and the need to counteract it. In the end of April Sąjūdis again called on people to be on duty next to SC palace and to protect it. Social and economic situation was difficult. Sociological surveys showed that citizens considered profiteering and lack of basic goods the main economic problem and a quick growth of criminal activity – the most dangerous one.⁵⁴

At the beginning of spring, after the Soviet referendum, there was silence in the Polish-Lithuanian relations. It is interesting that in that period political opposition became active. The main opposition force – Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (*Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija*, hereinafter – LDLP, formerly KPL) issued several statements regarding national minorities and, in particular, Lithuanian Poles. They were sympathetic. As early as in February the party leader Algirdas Brazauskas stated at the party council meeting, evaluating relations between different nationalities in the country (Lithuanians and main national minorities – Russians and Poles), that they were not regulated.⁵⁵ The party established the Eastern Lithuania Commission and tried to develop contacts with Vilnius District activists (at the beginning of April they organized a discussion on Vilnius District problems). The biggest opposition party was for development

⁵⁴ “Skurdo kaina”, *Lietuvos rytas*, 75 (15 May 1991).

⁵⁵ According to the Polish journalist who forwarded the party leader’s speech, Brazauskas explained that it is not enough for Lithuania to be oriented at the USA; it is also necessary to develop relations with Russia and Poland, J. Szostakowski, “DPPL nie zgadza z radykalami?”, *Kurier Wileński*, 37 (23 February 1991).

of dialogue between representatives of Lithuanian political forces and national minorities' communities, it promised to support the efforts of the state authorities aimed at reduction of tensions between nations, but it also criticized the government for delays in implementing adopted resolutions.⁵⁶ One may think that such activity of LDLP (rather cautious) was not accidental but reflected the party's intent to increase the circle of supporters and have influence on national minorities (Poles included).

At the same time when representatives of LDLP criticized state institutions for acting too slowly, in the Polish press in Lithuania an article was published, which was written by two activists of the Polish underground Solidarity, in which they persuaded to create "a civic movement for revival of Vilnius District".⁵⁷ This movement was supposed to be similar to Sąjūdis or Solidarity and its main goal was to establish "a self-governing administrative and territorial unit in Vilnius District". But the idea of "civic" movement did not cause any discussions in the Polish press and was not supported by Polish political centres, probably because its practical performance would result in confusion and tensions between three main structures representing Polish community. Nevertheless, one must mention that the idea of such movement was not completely ignored. Moscow was informed about it by the Lithuanian State Security Committee (KGB).⁵⁸

Silence in Lithuanian-Polish relations did not last long. At the beginning of April the Lithuanian authorities got the news that Coordination Council, not waiting until 31 May, was getting ready for organizing the congress of Vilnius District deputies. Its goal was to consider and confirm the draft status of the Vilnius District.⁵⁹ It is true that not all Polish political centres supported this idea. The Vilnius branch of UPL and some deputies of the regional council decided not to organize the congress until the decisions of the State Commission, that is until 31 May. The same decision was taken the Management Board of UPL.⁶⁰ But the positions of the organizers of the congress in the Polish community were stronger and at the beginning of May it became clear that the congress of the people's

⁵⁶ "Tautiniai santykiai: santarvės keliu", *Tiesa*, 61 (29 March 1991); J. Szostakowski, "O Wileńszczyźnie – z pozycji LDDP", *Kurier Wileński*, 68 (10 April 1991); "Droga do porozumienia – poprzez poprawę stosunków narodowościowych", *Kurier Wileński*, 70 (12 April 1991); J. Lakis, "Vilnija politikos ir emocijų sankirtoje", *Tiesa*, 92 (14 May 1991); M. Ławryniec, "Odbudowa państwowości, ugruntowanie sprawiedliwości", *Kurier Wileński*, 95 (17 May 1991). In this article the journalist described the meeting of Brazauskas and Česlovas Juršėnas with the inhabitants of Naujoji Vilnia.

⁵⁷ A. Chajewski, S. Plewako, "Program odrodzenia Wileńszczyzny – polityczne zaplecze", *Kurier Wileński*, 71 (13 April 1991). One of the authors of this article – A. Chajewski – was later appointed a Vicepresident of the Federation of Borderlands Organizations.

⁵⁸ КГБ ЛССР Исходящая шифртелеграмма. О возможных путях возрождения Виленщизны, 1991 04 (?), Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas (LYA), K-35, ap. 2, b. 292, l. 147–149.

⁵⁹ J. Bielawska, "W maju odbędzie się zjazd", *Kurier Wileński*, 80 (26 April 1991).

⁶⁰ J. Szostakowski, "Stanowisko ZPL", *Kurier Wileński*, 7 (20 April 1991).

deputies of Vilnius District would be held before the decision of Lithuanian authorities. The congress was planned to be held on 22 May. Information about its organization was announced on 8 May by TASS agency. It stated that the congress would discuss the draft of Vilnius District status (“a specific main legal act”), and “the Sejm of Polish autonomy” would be authorized to pass it”.⁶¹ A few days later the Lithuanian news agency issued its statement, in which TASS information was called “provocative” and it was stated that Lithuanian authorities were not “officially” informed about this event.⁶² Nevertheless, the decision on convening the congress, during which the statutes of Vilnius District would be discussed, was a political challenge. How did the organizers motivate such step?

Probably the most detailed justification was formulated by Leon Jankielewicz in a statement, which was read at SC on the eve of the congress.⁶³ It was signed by five (of eight) members of Polish fraction – Stanisław Akanowicz, Edward Tomaszewicz, Stanisław Pieszko, Walentyna Subocz and Leon Jankielewicz, and the Praesidium of the Coordination Council. According to SC deputy the Lithuanian authorities delay the solution of the Vilnius status issue, no draft has been presented to the society, and the future of the proposals prepared by Poles is unknown. Second, the organizers of the congress heard the news that Lithuanian government prepared “two projects of administrative and territorial division of the Republic, in which the option of great Vilnius was strongly supported, and two thirds of the Vilnius District were included in the city of Vilnius”. In such case, in Jankielewicz’s opinion, the decision of 29 January cannot be effective. Third, the government of the republic ignores the congress of the deputies of Vilnius District and the Coordination Council, state bodies do not respond to the documents and letters sent by it. Summing up, Jankielewicz considered Lithuanian authorities to be “the culprit” of convening the congress.⁶⁴ Therefore, he denied rumours that the congress “was inspired by Moscow” and stated that its organizers and participants “do not aim at announcing a new administrative and territorial unit”. According to him, the goal of the congress was to discuss the project of Vilnius status and present it to Lithuanian institutions.⁶⁵

Lithuanian politicians denied accusations of the congress organizers. The Chairman of the National Eastern Lithuania Commission, Romualdas Ozolas, explained that the commission and Lithuanian institutions actively work on

⁶¹ О съезде по вопросам автономии поляков в Литве, ТАСС, 8 May 1991, Rytų Lietuvos komisijos dokumentai, [8 May 1991] R. Ozolo dokumentų rinkinys, LLI BR, f. 42–4, l. 106.

⁶² “Provokacinis sujudimas”, *Lietuvos aidas* 94 (14 May 1991).

⁶³ LR AT trečia eilinė sesija, keturiasdešimt penktas posėdis, vakarinis. Stenograma, 21 May 1991, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_sale.dien_pos?p_data=19910521 (access: 16 February 2015).

⁶⁴ Similar arguments were presented by the Chairman of Vilnius region and member of Coordination Council, Anicet Brodowski, see: “Kito kelio nėra”, *Draugystė*, 22 (6 June 1991).

⁶⁵ Already in mid-May the organizers of the congress stated that they had no intent to announce ‘territorial autonomy’. “Ar iškasim kovos kirvį?”, *Tiesa*, 96 (18 May 1991).

preparation of different projects for Polish community,⁶⁶ although he admitted that this work is not noticeable and known to the Polish community. But it is representatives of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions who are responsible for that, as they have not taken part in the common work on the government projects since November 1990.⁶⁷ It is true that several draft bills sanctioning the status of national minorities were prepared in spring but they were forwarded to the government and so far they have not been published. At the beginning of May the proposed amendments to the Act on National Minorities were prepared.⁶⁸ They stipulated that in the administrative and territorial units, which “were inhabited by a large number of national minorities”, the offices would treat “the documents written in the state and not-state language” as valid; in information writings the texts in the not-state language may be written following the appropriate text in the state language with letters of the same format; written names of Lithuanian towns and villages must be in the normative forms, with the use of appropriate language;⁶⁹ in the territories inhabited by a large number of national minorities, the inhabitants have the right to address the state administration in the local language. But one important aspect was ignored – the project did not define what could be considered as territory, in which “a large number” of national minorities live. This circumstance could complicate the enforcement of this law.

Several projects of the Vilnius District were prepared. Jankielewicz was partly right – there were two separate projects of Vilnius District and several variations thereof. According to Ozolas, in the first concept of administrative division Lithuania would be divided into bigger territorial units corresponding with historical lands, and in the second – into the smaller administrative units.⁷⁰ “The smaller Vilnius District” would cover only Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions.⁷¹ According to the authors the minus of “the small Vilnius District” was the fact that the majority of its inhabitants would be non Lithuanians, for which “the idea of Lithuania’s sovereignty is not prevailing”. This would create a basis for the ideas of autonomy

⁶⁶ “...intensywnie pracujemy”, *Kurier Wileński*, 92 (14 May 1991).

⁶⁷ “Ar iškasim kovos kirvį?”, *Tiesa*, 96 (18 May 1991).

⁶⁸ LR Vyriausybės nutarimo “Dėl tautinių mažumų įstatymo 4-ojo punkto įgyvendinimo”. Projektas. Ruošė V. Ambrasas, L. Grumadienė, G. Songaila, R. Ozolas, [6 May 1991], LVNA, f. 78, ap. 1, b. 9, l. 20–21. There were more similar projects, and they hardly differed.

⁶⁹ It seems that according to this rule, the Polish version of name would have the Lithuanian form. Thus, the name Šalčininkai would not be Soleczniki in Polish but Szalczininkai. Representatives of Polish intelligentsia were against such form. In their opinion, in the towns and villages ‘which have for a long time been inhabited by Poles and have old Polish names’, they should be used next to the Lithuanian names, “Czy Miedniki będą Miedninkami?”, *Kurier Wileński*, 93 (15 May 1991).

⁷⁰ For Polish press Ozolas stressed that in any case the interests of Poles should not suffer, “...intensywnie pracujemy”, *Kurier Wileński*, 92 (14 May 1991).

⁷¹ Valstybinės komisijos rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti Išvada dėl Vilniaus apskrities statuso kūrimo [May 1991], R. Ozolo dokumentai, LII BR, f. 42–4, l. 130.

and separatism. Demographic and political situation would change if the city of Vilnius were included in such district.⁷² “The big Vilnius District” was planned to be composed of five or six regions. In such district “the supporters of autonomous and separatist ideas” would not dominate, the majority of citizens would be for uniformity of Lithuania. Other districts of Lithuania were supposed, in the opinion of the originators, to be of a similar size. However, in case of such division, “federalization” of the state might occur, as district authorities would strive to be independent and ultimately they could attempt to change Lithuania into “the union of districts”.⁷³

There were more of such or similar projects. But among the documents of the National Eastern Lithuania Commission stored in the manuscript section of the Lithuania’s History Institute there is a project not similar to the aforementioned. Its main rule is: “The legal situation (status) of Vilnius District in the legal system of Lithuania can be finally determined only if/when: a) the reform of administrative division of Lithuanian Republic is implemented and borders of districts are defined; b) [...] the relations between the new self-government and central institutions of the state are legally regulated.”⁷⁴ In other words, the author or authors proposed to adjourn the issue of establishing the Vilnius District. However, ethnic specifics of Eastern Lithuania are taken into account in the document. A different status of the official language, “minimizing the demands regarding knowledge of Lithuanian language” was provided for; “reglamentation of the official use of not-official languages” was planned; “different regulation of the national culture and education system taking into account the ethnic specifics of the inhabitants”; different order of forming the local authorities (multi-mandate elections, slightly different structure of the local institutions); “specially regulated legal and economic relations with the city of Vilnius”. It is obvious that this project, the same as all other, could not satisfy the supporters of Polish autonomy.

Projects of establishing Vilnius District were prepared by different state institutions. For example, the Ministry of Economy also proposed several variations. According to the first of them, Vilnius District would be formed by merging Šalčininkai and Vilnius Districts. The city of Vilnius with an extended area (at the expense of the region) did not have to be included in the district. According to

⁷² Valstybinės komisijos Rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti Nuostatos Vilniaus apskrities kūrimo klausimu. Priedas no. 1 [May 1991], R. Ozolo dokumentai, LII BR, f. 42–4, l. 124.

⁷³ Priedas no. 1. Valstybinės komisijos rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti Nuostatos Vilniaus apskrities kūrimo klausimu, [May 1991], R. Ozolo dokumentai, LII BR, f. 42–4, l. 123. The idea of creating Vilnius district based on Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, including the city of Vilnius, was criticized. The project was called non-scientific, politically harmful, and unrealistic. Valstybinės komisijos rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti paskiri dokumentai, 8 May 1991, R. Ozolo dokumentai, LII BR, f. 42–4, l. 103–104; Algimantas Gureckas, Pastabos dėl naujo administracinio padalijimo projektu, 2 July 1991, LVNA, f. 32, ap. 1, b. 128, l. 108.

⁷⁴ Valstybinės komisijos rytų Lietuvos problemoms išnagrinėti išvada dėl Vilniaus apskrities statuso, no date, R. Ozolo dokumentai, LII BR, f. 42–4, l. 122.

the second variation – the district would consist of the “extended” city of Vilnius, three regions (Vilnius, Šalčininkai, and Trakai) and couple localities of four more regions.⁷⁵ In the ministry’s project it was stressed that it would be advisable to form Vilnius District concurrently with the administrative and territorial reform of the republic (it was proposed to determine the future administrative and territorial division of the Republic at the local government deputies’ end of the term of office). This means that the establishment of the Vilnius District was also delayed.

Drifting away from chronological order I want to mention that at the beginning of June Lithuanian government adopted a resolution, the second point of which had the following wording: “The Vilnius District to be established based on the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, but the city of Vilnius (with an extended territory) as the capital of the Republic not to be a part of this district.”⁷⁶ There was one more point in this resolution, which stipulated that the whole documentation relating to the administrative and territorial division of Lithuania (variations of the project and justifications thereof) must be prepared by January 1993. This means that the government proposed the Supreme Council the establishment of the Vilnius District based on two regions dominated by Poles, but in practice, the establishment of this district was shelved for nearly two years.⁷⁷

In July the SC presidium adopted a resolution regarding projects of administrative and territorial division. As to the principle, it supported the work of the government and the commission. The last point of the resolution obligated the National Eastern Lithuania Commission together with representatives of the Polish fraction in SC to create a joint working group. It was supposed to develop, by October, proposals regarding “legal and administrative possibilities of the priority forming” of a new administrative and territorial unit, which would include Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions.⁷⁸ Formally, such decision was a proof that Lithuanian authorities are ready to continue discussion – “to consider possibilities” – with

⁷⁵ LR Ekonomikos ministerijos raštas Vyriausybei, 22 May 1991, LVNA, f. 32, ap. 1, b. 128, l. 68–69.

⁷⁶ LR Vyriausybė, nutarimas “Dėl LR administracinio – teritorinio suskirstymo projekto ir Vilniaus apskrities sudarymo”, 10 June 1991, LVNA, f. 32, ap. 1, b. 128, l. 59. The famous emigration lawyer, SC policy and law advisor Algimantas Gureckas was strongly against including Vilnius city in Vilnius district. He also proposed not to hurry with extending the city of Vilnius at the expense of the region: ‘Extending the territory of the city we will lose this absolute majority of Lithuanians which grew in Vilnius in the recent years. This is a very important factor in the defense of Lithuania’s rights to Vilnius, which must be protected [...]. If we do not take it into account, we will create the conditions for flaring up national conflict in Vilnius, which occurs in the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions. This is why it is too early for extension of Vilnius territory’, Algimantas Gureckas, Pastabos dėl naujo administracinio padalijimo projektų, 2 July 1991, LVNA, f. 32, ap. 1, b. 128, l. 108–109.

⁷⁷ Taip pat žr. A. Ribokas, “Projektų przyszłych zmian na mapie Litwy”, *Kurier Wileński*, 122 (26 June 1991); id., “Jaki ma być powiat Wileński”, *Kurier Wileński*, 124 (28 June 1991).

⁷⁸ ⁷⁷ “LR AT ir Vyriausybės žinios” 21 (1991), p. 951. The Vilnius district was established on 30 December 1994. It comprises eight local governments – municipalities – including Vilnius and Šalčininkai.

representatives of Polish community regarding the establishment of a new administrative and territorial unit in Eastern Lithuania. Several circumstances are interesting. The last point of the resolution, according to which the joint Lithuanian-Polish working group had to consider “possibilities” of establishing the district was rather unclear. One may only suspect what factors had impact on such logic of the resolution. Probably the Lithuanian authorities tried to create the best possible conditions for political manoeuvres for themselves: first, Poles were in the process of taking political decisions, but the final date of this process was not defined – the taking of a decision kept being delayed... Finally the Polish fraction remained as the partner of Lithuanian authorities “in the consultations” and in this way Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions authorities and the Coordination Council were eliminated from the decision process. This resulted from the lack of trust toward regional activists as not loyal and not supporting Lithuania’s sovereignty, as those who are under the influence of the union structures, SUCP and “the platform”; convening the congress in Mostiškės without waiting for the decisions of Lithuanian authorities strengthened this distrust.

Jankielewicz denied from SC podium that Moscow had any impact on convening the congress. Lithuanian politicians had different opinions. Answering the *Tiesa*, journalist’s question: did the USSR deputies Jan Ciechanowicz and Anicet Brodawski really visit the chairman of the Nationality Council of SC of the USSR, Rafik Niszanow, from whom they got “a blessing for a secession of Lithuania”, Romualdas Ozolas said: “I know that Niszanow met with a group of persons involved and said: “present Lansbergis” supporters with fact accompli and our army will help you”⁷⁹ It was difficult to give a clear answer to the question if the Kremlin functionaries initiated, encouraged or in any other way tried to affect the convening of the congress of Polish deputies, its course and resolutions. Academic historian who wants to check several versions is obliged to base on as many documents as possible (first of all on archive sources). But quite often the opportunities to use documents are limited. The same applies to this case.

Nevertheless, one can think that Lithuanian politicians had some reasons to be suspicious. This included Communist party activists’ visits in Lithuania, strong links of some autonomy supporters with “the platform” and the tense political situation in the republic (activating the militarized Soviet formations in the second half of May). At the end of May in Šalčininkai region two tragic incidents happened, during which a Belarussian policeman and Lithuanian functionary were killed. And although it seems that these events had nothing to do with activity of the Soviet military formations, they added fuel to the fire. After these incidents, on the eve of the congress in Mostiškės, the council of Šalčininkai region adopted a resolution in which we read: “until the signing of a new union agreement with Lithuania the customs posts [of Lithuanian Republic] should be liquidated in this

⁷⁹ “Ar iškasim kovos kirvį?”, *Tiesa*, 96 (18 May 1991).

region and activity of the Country Protection Department should be restrained”. The resolution had to be enforced within two days. If the authorities of the republic “began aggressive actions”, the council reserved the right to ask “the union instances and the world community’ for help”.⁸⁰ Vytautas Landsbergis called this resolution “the most dangerous provocation of all previous ones” and stressed that: “now the council of Šalčininkai region, which, as you know, is led by SUCP, and is instructed by emissaries coming from the Moscow Central Committee of SUCP, constitutionally challenges [Lithuania]”.⁸¹ The Chairman of SC did not exclude the possibility, either, that Šalčininkai region authorities may attempt to affect the course and resolutions of the congress. The position of Lithuanian authorities regarding the congress Landsbergis formulated briefly and clearly: resolutions of the congress of Vilnius District deputies would be treated as “proposals or wishes for the Supreme Council”. He also expressed hope that the conflict could be avoided and Lithuania would not be included “in the traditional USSR scenario, which is applied in Caucasus and other places”.⁸²

If any “black” scenario of the congress existed, it did not come true. The press mentioned that the members of “the platform” participated in it. Also organizers of the congress were anxious – they were afraid of Lithuanians’ reaction and changed the place of the congress at least several times.⁸³ This shows that the influence of “the platform” and activists from Moscow on the organizers was limited. The course of the congress also confirms it. Representatives of Lithuanian authorities were invited to Mostiškės – Landsbergis, Ozolas and SC deputy Vytenis Andriukaitis took part in the congress⁸⁴ (seven members of Polish fraction also participated in the congress). The most radical was the Chairman of Šalčininkai region council *Czesław Wysocki*. In his opinion, “the Vilnius District nation”⁸⁵ gave a clear answer in the referendum that it wants to live in Lithuania, which

⁸⁰ Решение VI сессии районного Совета первого созыва, 21 May 1991, LII rankraščių skyrius. R. Ozolo archyvas, f. 42–4, l. 70; Uchwała, *Przykazania Lenina*, 41 (28 May 1991).

⁸¹ LR AT stenograma, keturiasdešimt šeštas posėdis. V. Landsbergio kalba, 22 May 1991, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=251612.

⁸² “V. Landsbergis: tikiuosi, konflikto išvengsime”, *Tiesa*, 97 (21 May 1991).

⁸³ O. Skwiecińska, “Polski kraj radziecki”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 119 (23 May 1991); J. Bielawska, R. Piotrowski, “Droga prowadzi przez Wilno”, *Kurier Wileński*, 103 (29 May 1991).

⁸⁴ On 22 May, approximately 100 delegates gathered in Mostiškės from Vilnius, Šalčininkai Trakai, Švenčionys, Širvintos and Naujoji Vilnia, J. Bielawska, “Zjazd deputowanych do terenowych rad samorządów Wileńszczyzny”, *Kurier Wileński*, 100 (24 May 1991).

⁸⁵ The notion “Vilnius district nation” was used in various texts by the supporters of autonomy. In the documents of Eišiškės congress, in Lithuanian translation the more neutral expression “the inhabitants of Vilnius region” was used. But in the Russian documents of Eišiškės congress we find reference to “the multi-national Vilnius district nation”. “The Vilnius district nation” described not only the particular features of ethno-cultural community, but also ethnopolitical community, that is a national unit having the right to national self-definition. Using the notion ‘Vilnius district nation’ in the context of the union referendum just emphasized its political content. For Lithuanian politicians, this notion and its use had negative connotations, which is understandable.

would be a part of the USSR. This is why he proposed to enter this attitude in the country's statutes.⁸⁶ Wysocki also announced other initiatives: he demanded not to liquidate kolkhozes, granting the inhabitants the right to have a triple citizenship (Lithuanian, Polish and Soviet), creating "its own" national television. But the most challenging was his proposal to include the following demand in the resolutions of the congress: "if the Supreme Council of the Republic does not approve our statute, we will approach the Supreme Council of the USSR and ask for approval of the Polish Vilnius Republic in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics".⁸⁷ However, it should be stressed that this proposal was not supported by the participants of the congress. Journalists of *Kurier Wileński*, stressed that Wysocki's opinion "was not popular. It was announced and that's it". This means that even if Wysocki's supporters were present (which is very likely), they were a minority and they did not aggravate the situation. His proposal was not entered in the documents of the congress. Much more restrained expression was chosen. In the resolution regarding the statute of Vilnius national and territorial country we read: "the congress reserves the right to analyse this issue once again", if the Lithuanian authorities' rejected or delayed the issue of statute.⁸⁸

Such course of the congress allows us to conclude that "the Moscow factor" should not be exaggerated in the activity of autonomy supporters. It should not be ignored, either. I believe that Moscow's impact could have different forms, not necessarily direct ('advice', "encouragement" or other type of "help" of different emissaries and functionaries of SUCP). It is possible that more moderate autonomists, supporters of Brodawski, thought that "the centre" (central structures of Soviet Union) maintains its influence in the union republics also after signing the so called new union agreement. At the same time, in their opinion, the West (first of all Western Europe) did not want the fall of the Soviet Union, either – its collapse would have catastrophic effects for the whole Europe.⁸⁹ They thought that Moscow would remain a factor sufficiently important to solve tensions and conflicts between the nations in the new, reformed union. Summing up, it can be stated that a group of more moderate autonomists thought that "the union centre" was an important geopolitical factor capable of limiting Lithuanians' intent to dominate in the Polish regions of the country.⁹⁰ Also, they were convinced

⁸⁶ Bielawska, Piotrowski, Droga prowadzi przez Wilno. The main goal of the congress was to consider and adopt the country's statute – a kind of Vilnius region constitution.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ "II zjazd deputowanych do rad Samorządów Wileńszczyzny. Dokumenty", *Kurier Wileński*, 115 (14 June 1991). A statement on the citizenship of Lithuanian Republic. It was proposed to amend the Act on Citizenship: to enter the possibility of a double citizenship - Lithuanian Republic and USSR or Lithuanian Republic and Republic of Poland.

⁸⁹ "Žmogaus teisės, tautų teisės. (Interviu su A. Brodavskiu)", *Draugystė*, 28 (11 July 1991).

⁹⁰ After the failed putsch in Moscow, in August, in the situation of the decreasing influence of the union centre, the more moderate Polish autonomists opposing Vilnius' domination, began to look for support in Warsaw. At the end of August, delegation of the Coordination Council

that in the relations between Lithuanians (majority) and Poles (minority) “general European norms” would play more important role. All these aspects are contained in Brodawski’s speech. He criticized (as usual) Lithuanian authorities for not taking into account the requests of Polish community, delaying discussion on the projects proposed by Poles, or generally ignoring them.

But there were also other elements in his speech. Brodawski recalled the results of the plebiscite and the union referendum. According to him only 5% of non-Lithuanians living in Vilnius District voted for the sovereign state.⁹¹ This fact cannot be ignored – stressed Brodawski (these words were addressed to representatives of Lithuanian authorities). At the same time, one cannot oppose the Lithuanians in their strive to freedom and sovereignty. Poles must negotiate their goals with Lithuanian state, be loyal to Lithuanian nation, but not resign from their vital interests. Brodawski proposed to base minority’s requests on the rules of Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.⁹² Ultimately, he asked the participants to consider and accept the draft statute of the country.

The press coverage shows that the moderate political mood prevailed at the congress. Two SC deputies, Maciejkianiec and Balcewicz quite clearly supported cooperation with Lithuanian authorities solving the issues sensitive for Poles.

consisting of Leonarda Sapkiewicz, Anicet Brodawski, Stanisław Pieszko and Walentyna Subocz visited Poland. They were hosted by the Polish Minister of Justice Wiesław Chrzanowski, Senate speaker and Polish Community leader Andrzej Stelmachowski, Secretary of State Janusz Ziółkowski, President Lech Wałęsa’s advisor Jan Olszewski, the head of President’s office Jarosław Kaczyński and Vice-Minister of the Foreign Affairs Aleksander Krzysiński. It follows from the statement published in the press that activists of the Coordination Council presented the following ‘postulates’: Poland would have to recognize Polish Vilnius district within the Lithuanian Republic, grant Lithuanian Poles a double citizenship, and Poles, representatives of Vilnius district, must participate in the Lithuanian – Polish negotiations. Other requests related to economic and cultural issues. We do not know what the discussion between Coordination Council representatives and Polish officers looked like. After meetings Brodawski said that they were listened to but it did not seem that their goals were accepted. But certain Polish organizations (Federacja Organizacji Kresowych) and several small right-wing political parties (Polska Partia Niepodległościowa, Partia Konserwatywna, Stronnictwo Wierności Rzeczypospolitej) supported their requests, “Działacze z Sołecznik w Belwederze”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 204 (2 September 1991); “Komunikat prasowy”, *Dzień dobry* 69 (6 September 1991); Papildomas liudytojo L.S. tardymo protokolais, 2 March 1992, Vilniaus Apygardos teismo archyvas (toliau – VATA), b. 1–6 1999 m., t. 15, l. 19, 25.

⁹¹ Bielawska, Piotrowski, Droga prowadzi przez Wilno.

⁹² In Helsinki Final Act the most general rules of states’ policy regarding national minorities were formulated. In the documents of the meeting of CSCE in Copenhagen, which was held in June 1990 the option of establishing ‘the local or autonomous ruling bodies being compliant with the historic and territorial conditions of [national] minorities’ was set forth, but ‘in accordance with the policy of the state involved’. In other words, only upon the consent of the state in the territory of which the national minorities live. See: “Žmogaus teisės mažumų teisės. Tarptautinių dokumentų rinkinys”, Vilnius, 1996, p. 178, 186.

According to Balcewicz, Poles should stop thrashing between a rock and a hard place – between Moscow and Vilnius. “We should clearly say that we are for the freedom of Lithuania – explained SC deputy – but also for the guarantees of rights for us – Poles.”⁹³ Other members of the congress said similar things and encouraged their local authorities to be more active in solving particular problems valid for the community, such as: protection of cultural monuments, Polish language issue in the bureaucratic apparatus and information writings in Polish, land ownership problems and so on. Two other SC Polish deputies Pieszko and Tomaszewicz also spoke at the congress.

Two Lithuanian politicians - Landsbergis and Ozolas – also took part in the discussion.⁹⁴ Their speeches were also restrained, although Landsbergis was critical about the resolutions of Šalčininkai region – according to him they show disloyalty toward Lithuanian state and that is why they should be called provocative – and he reminded the participants the attempts of Lithuanian government regarding solution of social and economic problems of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions (the government additionally transferred 8 million rubbles for both regions). The Chairman of SC commented the draft statute; he negatively reacted to the demand regarding a triple citizenship. Landsbergis was convinced that national minorities’ problems, including Poles, can be effectively solved only if these minorities are loyal to the state⁹⁵ (this position is approved in international documents and Šalčininkai region council – according to Landsbergis – ignores it). The SC Chairman expressed his wish that Poles in Lithuania are “Lithuanian” Poles, not “Soviet” Poles and ended his speech with traditional phrase: “Let’s go together to your and our freedom”. Ozolas’ speech was similar in tone: criticism of certain Polish activists (particularly Brodawski) corresponded with encouragement to solve problems together. The chairman of the Eastern Lithuania Commission promised to analyse the documents accepted at the congress and did not exclude the option that they would be included in the common projects prepared by Lithuanian-Polish working groups.⁹⁶

⁹³ Bielawska, Piotrowski, Droga prowadzi przez Wilno.

⁹⁴ The whole Landsbergis’ speech was published in Polish press in Lithuania. He addressed the participants of the congress in Polish and his appearance – the press reported – was welcomed with applause. “Przemówienie przewodniczącego Rady Najwyższej Landsbergisa”, *Kurier Wileński*, 104 (30 May 1991). The comments of a journalist from Poland were a bit different. She stated that Landsbergis’s presence at the congress was a surprise for the majority of the participants but his speech did not make impression of those present; Skwiecińska, Polski kraj radziecki.

⁹⁵ Such attitude was supported by the well-known and influential activists of Polish emigration, such as Jan Nowak-Jeziorański. The Polish politician mentioned also that Lithuanian authorities should be ‘more flexible’: they should ensure education, work, holy service in Polish, and permit the Polish service in the cathedral, J. Szostakowski, “Wierzę w Wolną Europę”. Rozmowa z Janem Nowakiem-Jeziorańskim”, *Kurier Wileński*, 108 (5 June 1991).

⁹⁶ After the congress Ozolas was criticized in Polish press for not mentioning the project of Vilnius region status prepared by the commission, Bielawska, Piotrowski, Droga prowadzi przez Wilno.

“The draft bill of Lithuanian Republic regarding the status of the national and territorial unit of Vilnius District” was accepted by the congress almost by acclamation: 195 delegates voted for, 6 abstained, no one voted against. It was a big document, which consisted of 11 chapters and 91 articles.⁹⁷ I will not comment it in detail; I will only discuss several of its major rules. The highest authority was to be vested in the national Sejm, which was to be elected for five years (the highest executive power would be performed by the management board appointed by the Sejm). Lithuanian government would appoint “an authorized representative” for the district. His task would be to control the compliance of resolutions adopted by the Sejm and national management board with the main law of the state. This representative could “question” laws approved by the bodies of the district, but the Sejm and national management board could do the same with the resolutions of Lithuanian government, if they “violated the rights of the district” (disputable issues between the central and national authorities were to be examined by the Constitutional Court).⁹⁸ The project also provided for a particular “citizenship of Vilnius District”. A citizen of the district would be a citizen of Lithuania, and would also be entitled to be granted the Soviet or Polish citizenship.⁹⁹ The Sejm would have to approve the flag, anthem and emblem of the country.¹⁰⁰

Although the approved document stated that Vilnius District is “an autonomous administrative unit within the Republic of Lithuania”, it provided for a quite substantial political autonomy. Maybe even more than “substantial autonomy”... According to the lawyer Stasys Stačiokas, the district “is not an administrative and territorial autonomous unit of the Lithuanian state, but a state unit connected by federal links with Lithuania as an equal subject”¹⁰¹ (even though certain elements of the project, exceeding the limits of political autonomy, such as citizenship of the country, was criticized also by Polish authors.¹⁰²) It would be difficult to clearly

⁹⁷ *Draugystė*, 19 (22 May 1991).

⁹⁸ Several articles of the statute provided for the possibility of signing “agreements” between Lithuanian state and the national Sejm. They would describe what functions the state grants the country, and what functions the country grants Lithuanian state.

⁹⁹ Polish language would be announced “equal” with the official Lithuanian, and Russian – “the means of international contacts”.

¹⁰⁰ At the end of the congress representative of Šalčininkai region, Adam Monkiewicz, proposed to adopt a resolution regarding heraldry. Decisions on the flag and anthem were also taken. The Vilnius region flag (fabric with white and red stripes) would be raised on 16 February, 9 May, 6 October and 11 November and on other holidays. Monkiewicz also announced that the resolution would come into force on the date of its adoption and encouraged local governments to raise national flags not waiting for anything. On 30 May the Vilnius region council passed a resolution to raise ‘Vilnius region flag’ together with the Lithuanian, tricolour flag. “Vėliava virš rajono Tarybos pastato” *Draugystė*, 24 (16 June 1991).

¹⁰¹ S. Stačiokas, “Ar spręšime Vilniaus lenkų teritorinės autonomijos klausimą?”, *Atgimimas*, 29 (11–18 July 1991).

¹⁰² It was stated that the country is a part of Lithuania and that is why it cannot have its citizenship. Bielawska, Piotrowski, Droga prowadzi przez Wilno.

define the goals that the authors of the project aimed at and how they imagined the practical realization of their plans (during the congress, the project was presented by the Vilnius District lawyer Stefan Świetlikowski. It seems that he was one of its authors.¹⁰³) It may be assumed that the main goal was to ensure the widest possible autonomy of Vilnius District and to approve it.

But implementation of such idea would mean decentralization of Lithuania. In the complex political and geopolitical conditions the Lithuanian political elite could interpret such attempt of decentralization only as a threat for Lithuanian state. This is why the concept of Vilnius District adopted in Mostiškės was unacceptable for the government of Lithuania.¹⁰⁴

Mostiškės congress and its resolutions were, obviously, noticed in the public space of Lithuania, Poland and the Soviet Union. In the Lithuanian media they were evaluated negatively (it was stressed that the goal of accepting “the Vilnius District status” is establishment of a state within a state); main papers in Poland wrote that there occurs a drive to establish autonomy in the Lithuanian Republic (Lithuanian authorities were criticized for presenting numerous declarations but not doing much to satisfy Polish aspirations). In the Soviet Union it was noticed that no compromise was achieved between the authorities and the majority of congress participants. Papers also wrote that the issue of Polish national and territorial autonomy is a “serious problem for Lithuania”, which will have to be solved sooner or later, either by granting autonomy or by refusing it.¹⁰⁵

Lithuanian authorities also reacted. At the press conference after the congress the Chairman of the Eastern Lithuania National Commission Ozolas stated: “This action [the congress and adoption of the project] should be considered a major mistake in the process of Polish national revival; it was conducted not-politically and not in European style, with stylistics that is not characteristic for the Polish nation”.¹⁰⁶ According to Ozolas, the decisions may “complicate political existence of the Polish national minority”. At the same conference the press spokesman of SC Chairman Audronius Ažubalis treated the documents approved at the congress as proposals to be considered, and “only the rational elements thereof will

¹⁰³ According to witnesses, he and a group of other local activists prepared resolutions of the congress in Eišiškės. Papildomas liudytojo L.S. tardymo protokolas, 2 March 1992, VATA, b. 1–6 1999 m., t. 15, l. 18.

¹⁰⁴ In the certificate of SC legal division it was stated that the supporters of autonomy adopting such a project want to ‘establish a state unit, the status of which would clearly compete not only with Lithuanian Republic as a uniform state, but also with the content of its statehood in general’, AT juridinio skyriaus vedėjo J. Žylio pastabos dėl statuto, no date, VATA, b. 1–6 1999 m., t. 16, l. 84.

¹⁰⁵ A. Degutis, “Derybos ar dalybos?”, *Tiesa*, 99 (23 May 1991); J. Baužytė, “Mostiškėse deginami tiltai”, *Tiesa*, 100 (24 May 1991); “Polacy chcą autonomii w ramach Litwy”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 119 (23 May 1991); Н. Лашкевич, “Чего добиваются поляки Литвы?”, *Известия*, 122 (24 May 1991).

¹⁰⁶ Iš brifingo AT, *Lietuvos aidas*, 102 (24 May 1991).

be taken into account". He also said: "one has an impression that the [project] was prepared in Moscow".

At the beginning of June the Eastern Lithuania Commission finished development of its project of Vilnius District. It was entitled: "Status of Vilnius District in the constitutional system of Lithuania". Judging by the character of the document it was alternative to the one approved in Mostiškės. It was not published in Lithuanian press and the society was not acquainted even with its basic rules. During the press conference at the end of June the members of Eastern Lithuania Commission, including Ozolas, did not even mention it.¹⁰⁷ This project of the status of Vilnius District was only published in the Vilnius District newspaper in August of that year.¹⁰⁸

It was based on several elements. First, the issue of "depoliticization of ethnicity". In other words, if in the project accepted at the congress in Mostiškės the goal was to extend, as much as possible, and to approve "political autonomy" of Vilnius District, whereas in the commission's project autonomy was to be "cleaned" of political issues. It was stated that "establishment of the Vilnius District is not connected with minorities' rights". This means that establishing a district based on Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions cannot in itself guarantee its inhabitants the civic and ethno-cultural rights. In this project the main guarantee for "national minorities" – in this case Poles – was not "any administrative and territorial unit", but general democratization of political system of Lithuania, which assumes taking over "European standards" regarding minorities. In the Mostiškės "statute" much place was devoted to the definition of competences of the local authorities bodies, their relations with the state authorities, whereas in the project drawn by the commission these problems were mentioned very generally and fragmentarily (but the rule of equality with other districts in Lithuania was stressed).

Even though the commission project tried to "clean" Vilnius District autonomy from political dimensions, its ethno-cultural specifics was accepted and was considered worth support. It is stressed in the document that: "in the [Vilnius] district the Slavonic ethno-cultural image of Lithuania would be traditionally respected, the same as variety of other historical national cultures of Lithuania". Or in another place: "Vilnius District would have its natural, historically formed specifics, which could enrich culture in the democratic Lithuanian state". Taking into account the "real ethno-linguistic situation" of Vilnius District, the state would have to regulate the "official" use of the languages of the district (in the local law office the act allows to use, besides the official Lithuanian language, other languages – Polish, Russian, Belarussian; "analogical statutory guarantees" regulated spelling of information writings); "specifics" in education would mean

¹⁰⁷ J. Bielawska, "O projektach rządowych mowy raczej nie było", *Kurier Wileński*, 124 (28 June 1991).

¹⁰⁸ *Draugystė*, 30 (1 August 1991).

various forms of support ‘for the network of secondary schools with at least three languages’; to teach the official Lithuanian language special teaching centres would be established; special attention was focused on protection of cultural heritage; it was proposed to introduce the proportional system of elections for local governments; it approved the symbolic of Vilnius District – a flag and an emblem. It would be approved by the country small Sejm (the former regional council), and confirmed by the Sejm of Lithuanian Republic (the former SC) (the same law would apply in other districts of Lithuania). A detailed status of the district would be defined in a special law approved by the Sejm (SC).

This means that the project from the congress and the one prepared by Eastern Lithuania National Commission were completely different. I do not know whether and how these projects were amended to be compatible. As I have already mentioned, on 17 July, SC Praesidium adopted a resolution which empowered Eastern Lithuania Commission and representatives of Polish fraction in SC to create a common working group. This group had to prepare by 1 October the proposals on the possibility of establishing Vilnius District which would include Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions. Discussion on the establishment of such district would directly lead to the question about its status. But it was impossible to find out if such a working group was organized and what did it manage to achieve. We know that representatives of Polish fraction contacted with Eastern Lithuania Commission and with SC presidium. On 18 July fraction even issued a special appeal, in which they stated that the decisions of Lithuanian government approved in January were blocked and were not implemented.¹⁰⁹ One month after SC decision the situation of Lithuania dramatically changed. The failure of putsch in Moscow had impact not only on the general situation of Lithuania, its international status, but on the relations between the authorities and Lithuanian Poles. At the beginning of September the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regional councils were liquidated. One of the Polish political centres actively supporting the idea of national and territorial autonomy was removed from Lithuania’s political scene.

Several comments instead of conclusions

The passive attitude of Poles living in Eastern Lithuania during the plebiscite organized by Lithuanian authorities and decision of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions’ authorities regarding organization of the USSR referendum and relatively active participation in it of local Poles created premises for escalation of inter-nationalities relations. The conduct of a major part of Polish community members resulted from several circumstances. First, the Soviet social and economic structure, Vilnius

¹⁰⁹ LR AT trečia eilinė sesija, aštuoniasdešimt šeštasis posėdis. Stenograma 18 July 1991, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=251827 (access: 11 March 2015).

and Šalčininkai regions' authorities and, finally, Moscow "centre" meant for substantial part of inhabitants relative stability and predictability. Obviously, this does not mean that the inhabitants were fully satisfied with these structures and their representatives, but it seemed that they could be the guarantors of security. Soviet structures were more trusted than the new, not yet settled Lithuanian social and political order. This is why local activists and Coordination Council ('Soviet nomenclature') had no problems with mobilizing the inhabitants.

At the same time the inhabitants' sense of uncertainty was upheld by domination of the Lithuanians. Social and political reforms and political changes are often seen by representatives of national minority through the prism of the ruling majority. And finally, if the increasing domination of Lithuanians was seen as a threat, the perspectives of the existence of Lithuanian state, in spite of the first signs showing political acceptance of Western politicians to the Lithuanian Republic, were not so clear and certain for the inhabitants of these areas as for the majority of Lithuanians.

In such situation the Polish activists of Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions decided to convene the congress of representatives. Although according to the project of Vilnius District status adopted at the congress the country is "an autonomous administrative and territorial unit within the Lithuanian Republic", a wide political autonomy was planned for it. In the opinion of Lithuanians Vilnius District was no longer an administrative and territorial unit of Lithuanian state, which had autonomy, but a "state unit" connected with Lithuania by federation links as with an entity equal to Vilnius District. It is difficult to state what were the goals of the organizers of Mostiškės congress and how they presented their practical implementation. But one may say that the authors of the draft Vilnius District status wanted to extend autonomy as much as possible and consolidate it with respect to Lithuanian authorities. But implementation of this idea would mean decentralization of Lithuania. In the complex political and geopolitical conditions of that time the political elite of Lithuania saw attempts of decentralization as a threat for the Lithuanian state, its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On the Polish National and Territorial Autonomy in Lithuania (the Spring–Summer of 1991)

Abstract

A new system of Polish-Lithuanian relations was shaped mainly by the passivity of Poles inhabiting the eastern Lithuania in the plebiscite organised by the Lithuanian government on 9 February 1991, and a decision of the authorities of Vilnius and Šalčininkai (Polish: *Sołeczniki*) regions to hold a referendum, initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, on the future of the Soviet Union to turn it into a new, loose confederation of states, which was not recognized by the Lithuanian authorities. Such an attitude of Lithuanian Poles was determined by several factors. Firstly, the Soviet social and economic structure; secondly, for a large part of people the old

governments of the Vilnius and Šalčininkai districts and the memory of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic guaranteed stability and predictability. The soviet structures were more trusted than a newly introduced, not strong yet Lithuanian social and political order. The sense of threat was intensified by an unquestionable domination of Lithuanians on all levels of the new hierarchy. Social and political reforms were perceived by the Polish minority in Lithuania through the prism of a rule of the majority. For the rest of the Lithuanian society (except of the Russian minority) such an attitude was completely incomprehensible. In such complex geopolitical circumstances Poles from the regions of Vilnius and Šalčininkai decided to convene a congress of deputies of the Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions to Mostiškės. According to a project adopted at the Congress, the Vilnius district was to become “an autonomous administrative-territorial unit within the Lithuanian Republic”, with a broad political autonomy. In the opinion of Lithuanians, however, the region of Vilnius should not be “an autonomous administrative-territorial unit of the Lithuanian State”, but form a part of Lithuanian federation. This meant that the Poles wanted to enlarge the status of the Vilnius region and to strengthen its autonomy within Lithuania. The implementation of such a project would mean a decentralisation of the state. In a complex geopolitical situation of that time all attempts at the decentralisation of the country was regarded by the Lithuanian political elite as the threat of the security of the young Lithuanian state, its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

О польской национально-территориальной автономии в Литве (весна-лето 1991 г.)

Аннотация

Пассивность поляков, живших в Восточной Литве, в плебисците, организованном литовскими властями 9 февраля 1991 и решение властей Виленского и Солечницкого районов организовать референдум о преобразовании Советского Союза в новую, более свободную конфедерацию, объявленный Горбачевым и признанный литовскими властями нелегальным, формировал новый контекст для польско-литовских отношений.

Причины такой позиции литовских поляков были предопределены несколькими обстоятельствами. Во-первых, старой, советской общественно-экономической структурой. Во-вторых, прежними властями Виленского и Солечницкого районов, а также памятью о Литовской ССР, которые для значительной части жителей гарантировали стабильность и предсказуемость. Советские структуры вызывали больше доверия, чем новый, еще не укрепленный, литовский общественный и политический строй. Дополнительно, чувство опасности среди жителей усиливалось из-за подавляющего преобладания литовцев на всех уровнях новой власти. Общественно-политические реформы оценивались представителями польского меньшинства сквозь призму господства большинства.

В настолько сложном геополитическом положении поляки из Виленского и Солечницкого районов решились на созыв съезда депутатов в Мостишках. Согласно, принятому на съезде проекту статус Виленского края был определен как «автономная административно-территориальная единица в составе Литовской Республики». Для нее предусматривалась широкая политическая автономия. В интерпретации литовцев, Виленский край таким образом становился не столько автономной административно-территориальной единицей литовского государства, а «государственной единицей» соединенной федеративными узлами с Литвой.

Можно делать вывод, что целью поляков являлось расширение статуса Виленского края и укрепление его автономии по отношению к центральным властям. Осуществление

такого проекта означало децентрализацию Литвы. В сложных геополитических условиях этого периода литовские политические элиты истолковывали попытки децентрализации страны как угрозу безопасности молодого литовского государства, его суверенитета и территориальной целостности.

Перевод Агнешка Постнишил

Bibliography

Secondary literature

- Bobryk A., *Odrodzenie narodowe Polaków w Republice Litewskiej 1987–1997*, Toruń, 2006.
- Garšva K., *Lietuvos lenkų autonomijos kūrimo istorija, Lietuvos rytai*, ed. K. Garšva, L. Grumadienė, Vilnius, 1993, pp. 314–320.
- Garšva K., *Lietuvos lenkų autonomijos kūrimo istorija, Lietuvos rytai*, ed. K. Garšva, L. Grumadienė, Vilnius, 1993, pp. 314–320.
- Kurcz Z., *Mniejszość polska na Wileńszczyźnie. Studium socjologiczne*, Wrocław, 2005.
- Laurinavičius Č., Sirutavičius V., *Lietuvos istorija. Sąjūdis: nuo „persitvarkymo“ iki Kovo 11-osios*, vol. 12, part 1, Vilnius, 2008, pp. 419–428.
- Šabajavaitė L., *Lietuvos socialinė transformacija 1990–1997 metai*, Vilnius, 1999, pp. 99–109.
- Sirutavičius V., “Etniškumo politizacija Lietuvoje: lenkų autonomistų judėjimas, Sąjūdis ir Lietuvos valdžios politika 1988–1990 m. pradžioje”, *Etniškumo studijos/Ethnicity studies*, 2013, no. 2, Vilnius, 2013, pp. 120–148.
- Sirutavičius V., “Lenkų autonomijos problema. 1990 m. pavasaris – vasara”, *Kultūros barai*, 2014, no. 7/8–10.

Press publications

- Balcewicz Z., “Pewne wnioski z wyników sondażu” *Kurier Wileński*, 28 (12 February 1991).
- Baužytė J., “Mostiškęsė deginami tiltai”, *Tiesa*, 100 (24 May 1991).
- Bielawska J., “O projektach rządowych mowy raczej nie było”, *Kurier Wileński*, 124 (28 June 1991).
- Bielawska J., Piotrowski R., “Droga prowadzi przez Wilno”, *Kurier Wileński*, 103 (29 May 1991).
- Bielawska J., “W maju odbędzie się zjazd”, *Kurier Wileński*, 80 (26 April 1991).
- Bielawska J., “Zjazd deputowanych do terenowych rad samorządów Wileńszczyzny”, *Kurier Wileński*, 100 (24 May 1991).
- Borkowicz J., “Niełatwo odrobić te wszystkie lata”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 35 (11 February 1991).
- Chajewski A., Plewako S., “Program odrodzenia Wileńszczyzny – polityczne zaplecze”, *Kurier Wileński*, 71 (13 April 1991).
- Czepaitis W., “Kilka uwag o wynikach plebiscytu”, *Kurier Wileński*, 30 (14 February 1991).
- Degutis A., “Derybos ar dalybos?”, *Tiesa*, 99 (23 May 1991).
- Drozd L., “Rajono liaudies deputatų tarybos sesija”, *Draugystė*, 9 (15 March 1991).
- Ganusauskas E., “Raudonų šūkių paunksnėje”, *Lietuvos rytas*, 22 (12 February 1991).
- Geštautas J., M. Gorbačiovas, “Opozicija neturi perspektyvos”, *Tiesa*, 60 (28 March 1991).
- Guiga V., “Galime pasidžiaugti”, *Tiesa*, 28 (12 February 1991).
- Kieda A., “Referendum odbędzie się”, *Przykazania Lenina*, 20 (12 March 1991).
- Lakis J., “Vilnija politikos ir emocijų sankirtoje”, *Tiesa*, 92 (14 May 1991).
- Landsbergis V., “Tikiuosi, konflikto išvengsime”, *Tiesa*, 97 (21 May 1991).

- Ławryniec M., N. Niezamow, “Niekonsekwencja postaw i decyzji”, *Kurier Wileński*, 49 (13 March 1991).
- Ławryniec M., “Odbudowa państwowości, ugruntowanie sprawiedliwości”, *Kurier Wileński*, 95 (17 May 1991).
- Macejkianec R., “Przed nami jeszcze długa droga”, *Kurier Wileński*, 39 (27 February 1991).
- Maciejkianiec R., “Dlaczego nie wezmę udziału w referendum”, *Kurier Wileński*, 50 (14 March 1991).
- Maciejkianiec R., “Przed nami jeszcze długa droga”, *Kurier Wileński*, 39 (27 February 1991).
- Minczewicz J., “Jak roztopić górę lodową?”, *Magazyn Wileński*, 5 (1–15 March 1991).
- Narbutt M., “Zwycięstwo nad kłamstwem”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 35 (11 February 1991).
- Obłączyński J., “Brak zaufania i... błysk nadziei”, *Magazyn Wileński*, 3–4 (1–28 February 1991).
- Paliesius A., “Balsavo 100 procentų”, *Lietuvos aidas*, 56 (20 March 1991).
- Rapacki M., “Odpowiedzialność”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 35 (11 February 1991).
- Ribokas A., “Jaki ma być powiat Wileński”, *Kurier Wileński*, 124 (28 June 1991).
- Ribokas A., “Projekty przyszłych zmian na mapie Litwy”, *Kurier Wileński*, 122 (26 June 1991).
- Skwiecinska O., “Polski kraj radziecki”, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 119 (23 May 1991).
- Songaila G., “Kareiviai su urnomis”, *Lietuvos aidas*, 56 (20 March 1991).
- Spurga S., I. Melianas, “Vilniaus apskritis ir tautinių mažumų problemos”, *Atgimimas*, 11 (7–14 March 1991).
- Stačiokas S., “Ar spręsimė Vilniaus lenkų teritorinės autonomijos klausimą?”, *Atgimimas*, 29 (11–18 July 1991).
- Szostakowski J., “Wierzę w Wolną Europę”. Rozmowa z Janem Nowakiem-Jeziorańskim, *Kurier Wileński*, 108 (5 June 1991).
- Szostakowski J., “DPPL nie zgadza z radykalami?”, *Kurier Wileński*, 37 (23 February 1991).
- Szostakowski J., “O Wileńszczyźnie – z pozycji LDDP”, *Kurier Wileński*, 68 (10 April 1991).
- Szostakowski J., “Stanowisko ZPL”, *Kurier Wileński*, 7 (20 April 1991).
- Лашкевич Н., “Литва после опроса”, *Известия*, 37 (13 February 1991).
- Лашкевич Н., “Чего добиваются поляки Литвы?”, *Известия*, 122 (24 May 1991).
- Строганов Ю., “Нет’ противостоянию”, *Правда*, 43 (19 February 1991).

Vladas Sirutavičius (b. 1959), PhD, senior researcher at the Institute of History of Lithuania, associate professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Sciences, Vilnius University. The author of several dozens of monographs and articles, including his most recent book *Lietuviai ir Lietuvos lenkai, Lietuva ir Lenkija 1988–1994 metais* to be published this year (sirutavicius@yahoo.com).