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**COOPERATION OF LATVIAN BELARUSIANS WITH THE NON-BELARUSIAN
POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS OF LATVIA IN 1928—31**

**СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО БЕЛОРУСОВ ЛАТВИИ С НЕБЕЛОРУССКИМИ
ЛАТВИЙСКИМИ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИМИ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯМИ В 1928—1931 ГГ.**

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается вопрос о характере отношений представителей белорусского меньшинства Латвии с политическими партиями Латвии в период предвыборных кампаний в парламент второго и третьего созывов. Именно в это время белорусы начали интенсивно искать контакты с другими политическими организациями Латвии. Поддержка белорусами социал-демократов и коммунистов была закономерна и обуславливалась социальной структурой белорусского меньшинства Латвии. В начале 1930-х гг. белорусы сделали попытку расширить свои контакты через взаимодействие с другими гражданскими партиями Латвии, которые, хотя и были левыми, выражали некоторые идеи, ранее не характерные для белорусских политических организаций (Латгальского объединения прогрессивных крестьян, Партии крестьян-христиан). Это свидетельствует, с одной стороны, о разочаровании в белорусских национальных политических партиях, а с другой стороны, о более глубокой интеграции белорусов в латвийское общество. Статья написана на основе архивных документов и периодической печати того времени, много информации из источников публикуется впервые.

Keywords / Ключевые слова: Latvia, Latgale, Belarusian minority, Belarusian political parties, parliamentary elections, the 3rd Saeima, the 4th Saeima / Латвия, Латгалия, белорусское меньшинство, белорусские политические партии, парламентские выборы, Третий Сейм, Четвёртый Сейм.

In the 1920s and 1930s the Belarusians were one of the largest national minorities in Latvia. The majority of Belarusians lived in region of Latgale (the eastern part of Latvia) and Pūkste Municipality (southeastern Latvia, part of Zemgale region). Latgale was always a multinational region in Latvia and the presence of Belarusians in the eastern part of Latvia, which now borders Belarus, is a well-known fact. The history of the eastern part of Latvia is deeply connected with the history of Belarus. Since the 16th century Latgale and the territory of present-day Belarus were a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After The First Partition of Poland Latgale was incorporated into the Russian Empire and in 1802 became a part of the Vitebsk Governorate, mostly populated by Belarusians (This province was considered to be Belarusian by the Russian authorities). Dvinsk (or Daugavpils in Latvian) became the most populated city in the Vitebsk Governorate. Therefore, many Belarusians in Latgale were autochthones.

In the 1920s Belarusians of Latvia enjoyed national and cultural autonomy, including a network of Belarusian schools and cultural organizations. The Belarusian organizations of Latvia carried out mainly national and cultural activities; however, the Belarusian political unions also existed. The main role in the parties' activities was performed by the representatives of the national intellectuals, while the vast majority of the Belarusian society, which was represented mainly by peasants, was politically inactive and economically depressed.¹

According to the results of the 1st Latvian census, there were 66,194 Belarusians living in Latvia, who made up more than 4% of the total population. In the interwar period the number of Belarusians was decreasing. According to the 2nd general census of 1925, 38,010 Belarusians lived in Latvia and made up about 2 % of total population, but in 1935 there were only 26,867 Belarusians (1.4%). It could be explained by many factors, one of the most important was a lack of national consciousness of the Belarusian minority that led to the fluctuation in determining their nationality as Belarusians. As there was no significant emigration of Belarusians from Latvia, Belarusian activists in Latvia insisted that by 1930 the total number of ethnic Belarusians was in fact about 4%, and due to this the Belarusians could count on 4 deputies in the Parliament, which consisted of 100 deputies. It should be mentioned that anti-Belarusian discourse sometimes presented at the Latvian policy, including a point of view popular among some circles that the Belarusians were a pseudo-nation without a right to the political representation.² Moreover, the formation of national parties could be considered as the split of some solid front (socialist, Catholic and so on). In such conditions it was very difficult to provide the activity of the sustainable parties with the permanent electorate. This forced to seek for allies in the political arena. These allies were mainly the left and the centre-left parties of Latvia.

This review provides the brief information about the issue concerning the relations of the representatives of the Belarusian minorities of Latvia — the Belarusian political parties and the separate representatives of the Belarusian national movement of Latvia with the non-

¹ See further in: Ēriks Jēkabsons, “Baltkrievi Latvijā 1918.—1940. gadā”, *Latvijas vēstures institūta žurnāls* 4 (2001): 104—133; Ilga Apine, *Baltkrievi Latvijā* (Rīga: Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūta, Etnisko pētījumu centrs, 1995); Katsiaryna Kazachonak, “Latvijas baltkrievu sabiedriski politiskā darbība 1919.—1934.gadā”, (MA thesis, Latvian university, 2013); Per Anders Rudling, “Belarusian Nationalism in the Second Polish Republic”. In *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906—1931* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 164—208, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1287p7r.9>.

² Māris Goldmanis, “Baltkrievu diskurss latviešu presē (1920—1934): izpratnes evolūcija par baltkrieviem kā pastāvīgu nacionālo minoritāti”, *Daugavpils universitātes 56. Starptautiski zinātniskās konferences rakstu krājums, C.daļa.Humanitārās zinātnes* = Proceedings of the 56th International Scientific Conference of Daugavpils University. Part C “Humanities” (Daugavpils: Daugavpils universitāte, 2014): 166—174, accessed September 1, 2015, URL: http://www.dukonference.lv/files/proceedings_of_conf/978-9984-703-1_56%20konf%20kraj_C_Hum%20zin.pdf.

Belorussian political parties of Latvia during the period of the Parliamentary elections of the 3rd and 4th calling (1928—31). The main period is determined by the obstacle that Belorussian political activity was tightly connected with the elections to the Parliament (*Saeima* in Latvian) and that the most active official cooperation with other parties was held at the end of the 1920s — the beginning of the 1930s.

The first Belorussian political party of Latvia — *Таварыства беларусаў-выбаршчыкаў у Дзяржаўны Сойм, павятовыя, гарадзкія і валасныя самаўрады ў Латвіі* (The Union of Belorussians electorate) was formed in 1925. The leader of the Belorussian movement in Latvia Kanstancin Yezavitau (Konstantin Yezovitev as a Russian form) became its chairman. The Union positioned itself as the Belorussian national organization — the only one all Belorussians should vote for. It was decided that the members of the party would not participate on other political lists of candidates. However, the party did not achieve success in the elections of the 1st Saeima in 1925 and its candidates were not elected to the Parliament. The Belorussian political situation in Latvia became more complex due to the confrontation of the two Belorussian leaders — Kanstancin Yezavitau³ and Uladzimir Pihulevski⁴ (Vladimir Pigulevskiy as a Russian form). The both leaders at the beginning were the members of the above mentioned party. However, in 1927 the views of Yezavitau became more radical, he started to bind his interests with the Latvian Party of Independent Socialists (hereafter — LPIS), while Pihulevski became the member of the Latvian Social Democratic workers' party (hereafter —

³ Kanstancin Yezavitau (1893—1946) was one of the most known and active leaders of the Belorussian movement in Latvia in the interwar period. He was born in 1916 in Dvinsk, the Vitebsk Governorate. In 1916 Yezavitau graduated from Vitebsk Pedagogical Institute. Since 1913 he had participated in Belorussian politics. Yezavitau was a Belorussian general, the head of the Military-Diplomatic mission of the Belorussian People's Republic in Latvia and Estonia in 1919—20. After the liquidation of the mission he worked as a teacher, was a headmaster of the Belorussian gymnasium in Ludza and taught in other schools. In parallel with teaching Yezavitau actively participated in the activities of Latvian Belorussians, he was an organizer of many Belorussian organizations (*“Бацькаўшчына”*, *“Беларускае навукова-краязнаўчак таварыства”*, *“Таварыства беларускіх настаўнікаў”*, *“Таварыства беларусаў-выбаршчыкаў”* and others). He was also an author of several books about Belorussians in Latvia and a poet. Because of his political activities and *adherence to the BSSR* (he was a Soviet agent in 1925—34), Yezavitau was arrested four times. During World War II he collaborated with the German occupational authorities and used the state of occupation for the revival of the Belorussian movement in Latvia. In August 1944 he moved to Berlin. Since 1945 he had been a Minister of War in the Belorussian government, which was operated under Nazis — the Belorussian Central Committee (*“Беларуская цэнтральная Рада”*). In 1945 he was detained by the Soviet counter-intelligence (SMERSH) and arrested. Yezavitau probably died (or was shot) in the Minsk prison in 1946.

⁴ Uladzimir Pihulevski (1889—1958) was also an active member and leader of the Belorussian movement in Latvia. He was born in Hrodna, graduated from the Gymnasium of Minsk and then from the Faculty of History and Philology of the University of Saint-Petersburg. Pihulevski, just as Kanstancin Yezavitau, also supported the Belorussian People's Republic. He worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the BNR. Since 1922 he had lived in Latvia and worked as a teacher. He was a headmaster of the Belorussian gymnasium in Ludza in 1924—25. Pihulevski was the head of the Belorussian department at the Ministry of Education of Latvia in 1926—32. He was a member of many Belorussian organizations in Latvia. He was also an active member of the Latvian Social Democratic Worker's Party and the only Belorussian who was elected to the 3rd Saeima (1928—31) from this Party. Pihulevski was an editor of the Party newspaper in Russian. He was arrested in 1934 and sent to the Concentration camp of Liepāja. After an amnesty he was a cultural activist, translator, writer.

LSDWP). At the All-Belarusian conference of the Belarusian organizations, that was held on July 10, 1928, Yezavitau offered to refuse of nationalistic slogans and support the LPIS. After hot debates, when the split between the groups of Yezavitau and Pihulevski (the last was supported by another active Belarusian leader, the chief of the organization “*Беларуская хата*” (“Belarusian Home”) Mikalaj Dziamidau⁵) became obvious, was made a decision that the party would not provide its list of candidates in the elections of 1928. At the conference the majority of members supported the LSDWP on condition that Pihulevski will be included on the list of the candidates. Advocates of the LPIS remained in the minority. Soon Pihulevski was excluded from the above mentioned Belarusian political Union. Due to inner contradictions this Union stopped its activity.

The LPIS that actually was the legal body of the forbidden Latvian Communist party was founded in 1927 upon the direct order of the *Comintern*. Yezavitau began his cooperation with the party in the same 1927. From April 5, 1928 Yezavitau was the chairman of the party’s department in Sarkandaugava — Riga’s district, in which a lot of Belarusians resided.⁶ At the meeting of the initiative group, which was responsible for the formation of the Belarusian section affiliated with the LPIS, Yezavitau noted that “after the meeting of the representatives of the Belarusian community of Latvia the idea of Belarusian national front should be rejected, so as the active part of the Belarusian community could stand on the socialist basis.”⁷ On April 29, 1928 the Belarusian section in the party was created. Aliaxandar Saltsevich, Pjotra Masalskis, Mikalaj Talerka and other Belarusians joined the party as well. Yezavitau in the letter to Aliaxandar Tsivikevich (the former head of government of Belarusian People’s Republic in exile, but by 1928 he became very pro-Soviet and was living in Minsk) calls the LPIS “a party similar to *Hramada*,⁸ and thus the most left party of Latvia”, and reports that, he tries not to allow Belarusian people to follow the Social-Democrats, “where Pihulevski draws them, who became a total bureaucrat... and build his entire career on the contention with the leftism.”⁹ The party maintained the contacts with the *BSSR* (Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic) and advocated the Belarusians of Poland. For example, already the first LPIS

⁵ Mikalaja Dziamidau (1888—1967) was one of Belarusian activists in Latvia. He was a nephew of the famous Belarusian revolutionary Kastus Kalinouski. Since 1924 he had lived in Latvia. He was a chairman of a big Belarusian organization “*Беларуская хата*” (“Belarusian Home”), cooperated with Yezavitau and Pihulevski. He worked as a pedagogue in Belarusian schools. After the Soviet occupation he was arrested and sent to the prison in Moscow. In 1941 he was released and moved back to Latvia. In 1942 he left Latvia again and collaborated with the German occupation authorities. He was a member of the 2nd Belarusian Congress in Berlin. Dziamidau died in Chicago, USA.

⁶ Latvian State Historical Archives of the Latvian National Archive (LNA LVVA), fund 3235 (Collection of the Department of Political Police), inventory 2, file 4630, folio 124.

⁷ LNA LVVA f. 3235, inv. 6, file 196, fol. 33.

⁸ Belarusian party, that was active in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic.

⁹ LNA LVVA f. 3235, inv. 6, file 196, fol. 40.

newspaper edition contained an article that supported Belarusians, who stayed under “the Polish oppression.” The Belarusian foreign policy factor played a significant role in the Yezavitau’s support of the LPIS. However, the party had existed legally not long. In August 1928 it was forbidden, after the demonstrations in support of the pro-communist trade unions. After this the party ceased its legal activity. According to some sources, some of the members carried out underground activity, organizing pro-communist groups at Belarusian schools.¹⁰ The Belarusians of Latvia cooperated with parties, which proclaimed left political ideas, and many members of which were or became soviet agents later. In July 1930, Yezavitau was arrested for anti-government (communist) activity. At first it was planned to deprive him of citizenship and deport from Latvia, however, after he promised to cease his political activity and leave all Belarusian organizations, he was allowed to reside in Latvia. When Yezavitau stayed under arrest, the chairman of LPIS Andrey Kurtsyj, who, on the elections in 1928, in spite of the fact that the party was forbidden, was elected on the post of the deputy of the Parliament, visited K. Jezavitau and helped him to stay in Latvia.

In September 1928 the Political Administration of Latvia, which was keeping an eye on a number of non-governmental organizations, noticed that “the LPIS group sustained a defeat and the Belarusian group, that earlier was rather solid from the political point of view, splinted into the following groups: 1) The group of V. Pigulevskiy, 2) The Christian group under the leadership of the teacher of the Piedruja school Edvard Voyvodzish, 3) The Belorussian division of the Progressive peasant union of Latgale.”¹¹ This information is rather convincing. As one may notice, all three groups were not independent Belarusian national parties. In January 1929 the Political Department noticed that, from “December 1928 the Belarusian national movement fell under the influence of the Social Democrats.”¹² This was really like that. As mentioned above, the aim of all Belarusian political parties was to lead its representative to the Saeima. From this point of view the most successful Belarusian politician and the only member of the Parliament was Uladzimir Pihulevski, who in the elections in 1928 became the candidate for deputy within the Latvian Social-Democratic workers' party, of which he was a member. Pihulevski was supported by a lot of Belarusians, however he was elected to the Saeima from the Russian group of LSDWP, moreover, he was an editor of the Russian newspaper “*Трудовая мысль*” (“Worker thought”). Having become the member of the Saeima, Pihulevski, surely, did not retreat from Belarusian national activity, furthermore, in 1930 he became the chairman of the Belarusian Department at the Ministry of Education of

¹⁰ LNA LVVA f. 3235, inv. 1/22, file 689, fol. 69.

¹¹ Ibid., fol. 54.

¹² Ibid., fol. 58.

Latvia — the official representative of Belarusian minority in the government of Latvia. His election and work at the Parliament were not connected only with the Belarusian activity. At Saeima Pihulevski was a member of the agricultural and budgetary committee, although in his speeches he addressed the problems of Latgalian Belarusians (in particular the problems of the residents of the frontier zone), Belarusian schools, nevertheless this was not the main aspect of his activity. He just addressed the problems of social character emphasizing the problems of Latgale. In such a way in spite of the fact that he held a post of the chief of Belarusian Department in the Ministry of Education, Pihulevski was compelled to vote for the reduction of educational expenses. Often other Belarusian politicians did not support such actions. In 1930 Aliaxandar Bartkevich, the chief of the association of Belarusian teachers, alongside with other teachers submitted a memorandum to the president of Latvia in which they called to dismiss Pihulevski, as a member of the party.¹³ However, eight Belarusian organizations pleaded for Pihulevski and as a result he was not discharged. Pihulevsky explained that some Belarusian leaders wanted to eliminate the autonomy of Belarusian schools in Latvia, to have an opportunity to tell about the oppression of the Belarusians in Latvia and to raise their political rating.¹⁴ In 1931 a conflict happened between him and the representative of the community “Belarusian Home” and the director of the second Riga primary school, Mikalaj Dziamidau, his former team-mate. After Dziamidau was dismissed, the community decided not to support the candidacy of Pihulevski and in elections voted for the Latvian Progressive Peasant Party.¹⁵ Pihulevski’s feud with the main Belarusian leader in Latvia Yezavitau only aggravated the situation. The ideological motives that segregated them, gradually developed into enmity. As a result, Pihulevski did not put forward his candidacy in the elections of 1931. Alongside with the economic crisis, growth of nationalistic rhetoric, the elections of 1931 were unsuccessful for the LSDWP. For that time Belarusians were not so supportive and began to seek for new allies.

In the late 1930s, the new Belarusian political unions were formed — *Беларуская дэмакратычная партыя* (the Belarusian Democratic Party — hereafter BDP), the Belarusian group of Christian Peasants Party (hereafter CPP). Although they positioned themselves primary as the national organizations, aiming to unite all the Belarusians, these organizations actually from the very beginning of their activity were seeking cooperation with the non-Belarusian Latvian parties. This circumstance, however, did not prevent them from accusing each other of allying with other Latvian political parties. On the one hand, in the pages of the

¹³ Redakciya, “Ab kiraunictve Bielaruskim addzelam”, *Shliah praudy*, October 24, 1930, 1.

¹⁴ Vladimir Pigulevsky, “Pro Belorusskij otdel”, *Trudovaya mysl’*, August 17, 1930, 1.

¹⁵ LNA LVVA f. 2750 (Collection of the Belarusian educational union “Belaruskaja hata”), inv. 1, file 6, fol. 30.

print media the BDT called to form only one Belarusian list and do not vote for other parties and criticized Pēteris Žurkovskis (Pjotr *Zhurkovski*) for cooperation with the CPP. On the other hand, the party itself cooperates with the "Progressists" (Progressive alliance of the Latgalian peasants) and in the elections used the Lithuanian list.

On December 17, 1930, the Belarusians Democratic Party was established with Siarhei Sakharau¹⁶ (or Sergey Saharov) as its leader. The party had a regional character and advocated common issues for the Latvian Belarusians — the review of the land reform, the improvement of the social guarantees for the Belarusians and the implementation of the Belarusian cultural autonomy. The program mentioned that the party advocated "nationhood and robust democracy", and also cooperation with allied parties.¹⁷ The leaders of the party Sakharau and Aliaxandar Bartkevich, even before the party was formed, supported contacts with the Latvians with the Progressive alliance of the Latgalian peasants (hereafter as PALP).¹⁸ The negotiations about the alliance with the PALP were held already in August 1931. But cooperation with the PALP could not be considered as a rather successful for the BDP. The PALP leader Francis Trasuns and also other party members gave consent to the coalition. The BDP sent the PALP a draft of the agreement about the mutual support, in which apart from other, asked 1200 lats on the newspaper needs and instruction on Latgale. The BDP also required from the PALP support of Belarusian schools and opening of new ones, increase of the budgetary funds allocation on the needs of Belarusian culture, the proportional representation of the Belarusians on the governmental posts and etc. The requirements were quite substantial. In return the BDP were obliged to "work in total contact with the PALP and support as much as possible the lists of this party in the elections to Saeima, and to the self-governing organizations." Apparently such requirements did not satisfy the PALP. However, the official PALP's answer was not found in the archives. The speech of Sebastjāns Pabērzs, who was the deputy and the representative of the PALP, casts light on the official variant of the refusal to cooperate.¹⁹ On

¹⁶ Siarhei Sakharau (1880—1954) was one of the leaders of the Belarusian national movement in Latvia. He was born in Polotsk, the Vitebsk Governorate. In 1895 he graduated from the Theological Seminary of Vitebsk, in 1913 from the Faculty of Law of the University of Tartu. Since 1917 he had lived in Lucyn (Ludza). In 1921 he obtained the citizenship of Latvia. Since 1921 he had lived in Riga and worked as a pedagogue. S. Sakharau was the head of the Belarusian department at the Ministry of Education of Latvia in 1921—25. In 1925—32 he was a headmaster of the Belarusian gymnasium in Daugavpils. Sakharau was a member of numerous Belarusian organizations in Latvia and was a chairman of Belarusian Association of teachers. Sakharau was also known as an ethnographer. He collected Belarusian folklore in Latgale and published many books about the history of the Latgale region, especially about the history of religion. In 1942, Sakharau was a headmaster of the Belarusian gymnasium in Indra. In 1945 he was arrested on charges of collaboration with Germans and sent into exile. He returned to Latvia in 1950.

¹⁷ LNA LVVA f. 3234 (Collection of the Administrative Department of the Interior Ministry), inv. 1, file 2319, fol. 1—5.

¹⁸ LNA LVVA f. 5054 (Collection of the Latgalian Farmers Progressive Union), inv. 1, file 1, fol. 12.

¹⁹ Prysutny, "Z'yezd delegatau Belaruskay Demakratychnay partyi", *Dumka belarusa*, September 26, 1931 (1—2).

the meeting of the BDP on September 20, 1931, he reiterated that from the 1920 he always supported the Latgalian Belarusians, and in 1920 helped to develop Belarusian schools; moreover, his party always regarded the Belarusians with respect. Also the deputy mentioned about the negotiations, during which was discussed the inclusion of the Belarusians on the PALP's list in the elections of 1931. The Deputy mentioned that the wish of the BDP was not executed due to organizational changes in the party (in July 1931 two parties — the National Progressive Union and the Democratic Union of Latgalian Peasants united into the PALP). At the end of the speech S. Pabērzs claimed, that the PALP, in distinction from the LSDWP and the CPP, is the most congenial party and called to support his party in the elections. And actually a lot of Belarusians supported this party. In the elections 1931 the PALP was supported by the community “Belarusian Home”, and the member of this party, the assistant of the Minister of Finance Bronislavs Trubiņš became even the honored member of this community. Moreover on the congress were held the debates concerning the candidacies of Pihulevski and Žurkovskis. In spite of the critique, the collective decision of the BDP was to regard these candidacies neutrally. After the PALP's refusal of cooperation, the BDP, before the Parliamentary Elections in 1931, decided to enter into coalition with the representatives of the Lithuanian minority. The coalition was mutually beneficial: both organizations were not strong enough to lead its candidate alone (namely the main aim was to lead its candidate to the Parliament), the Belarusians and the Lithuanians were bonded together by a common history, often Catholic religion, and what is also important, an opposition to the Polish minority of Latvia. In Zemgale, a joint list of the Lithuanians-Catholics and the Belarusians was created under the number 20.²⁰ On the list were three Belarusians: Siarhei Sakharau under the number 5, the number 7 was Danat Dalecki (a teacher of the Belarusian gymnasium in Horauka and the leader of the Belarusians of Ilūkste district),²¹ and the number 11 — Ihnat Zavadski (a peasant an active member of the Belarusian movement). Within the scope of the preparations to the elections on September 20, 1931 in Gryva (Now the district of Daugavpils) was held a joint event of the Belarusians and the Lithuanians — were read papers and was given a concert. On the pages of the print media (Sakharau was the editor of the newspaper “*Беларуская думка*” (“Belarusian Thought”) the Belarusians and the Lithuanians of Latvia were called to vote only for the list number 20 promoting it as the only true advocate of the national interests of the Belarusians and the Lithuanians of Latvia.²² In both print media the editors assured the electorate that “it does not make much difference for us, who will be elected to the

²⁰ Spisak, № 20”, *Dumka belarusa*, September 26, 1931, 3.

²¹ He way studied together with the bishop and the member of CPP party Jānis Rancāns.

²² “*Lietuviu balsas*” on September 20, 1931 tells about Belarusians as about „the nation, that have been fighting against Polish for many years, today this nation is our ally in Saiema, but tomorrow will be our ally in Vilnius”.

Parliament — a Lithuanian or Belarusian, as both of them will equally advocate the interests of the Belarusians and the Lithuanians.” However, in spite of such statements, the unification was a pure tactical maneuver. The Belarusians as well as the Lithuanians (those even in more explicit form) were concerned primarily only about their own national interests. The „The Voice of Lithuanians” promoted the idea, that „as all other national minorities do, now the most important is to support Lithuanians, even if the electorate not fond of any particular candidate in the list”.

The alliance was permitted to provide the list of candidates only in one constituency — in Zemgale. Moreover, the electorate was called to come to vote in Zemgale from other regions of Latvia. However in the elections on October 4, 1931 the alliance failed to have any of its deputies elected to the Saeima. On the documentations of the Lithuanian print media only 100 Belarusians voted for the list, and besides almost 60—70 of them were not from Zemgale.²³ The fall of the alliance was inevitable — in the conditions of disunity and competition of organizations and the leaders of the national minorities’ organizations, the electorate’s low activity — it was almost unreal to lead the deputy to the Saeima with the help of the new list, launching the campaign 2—3 months before the elections. After the failure in the elections the activity of the Belarusian Democratic Party decreased significantly, the newspaper “Belarusian Thought” stopped publishing.

Some of the Belarusians joined a party with the Christian (Catholic) overtones. In 1931 the Belarusian group operates within *Kristīgo zemnieku partija* (Christian Peasants Party). The chief of the party was Catholic bishop Jāzeps Rancāns. The main activists of the group were Belarusian educators Edvard Vajvodzish and Pēteris Žurkovskis.²⁴ The latter was the editor of a newspaper “*Беларускае слова*” (“Belarusian word”), established in August 1931, which propagated the ideas of the party. The Christian Peasants Party (hereafter — CPP) with a 12 years history in Latgale was the most powerful party; it competed with the *Progressists* and the Social-Democrats for the votes of the Belarusians. The sharp criticism of those two parties could be also seen on the pages of “Belarusian Thought”. For example: “The Social-Democrats and the Communists use crises to sow distort between peasants (...) The Progressists in their

²³ “*Lietuviu balsas*”, October 10, 1931 (26).

²⁴ Pēteris Žurkovskis (1906—89). Ethnically Latvian, but connected with the Belarusian movement, P. Žurkovskis was born in the Malta’s parish. He studied Natural sciences in the University of Latvia and Chemistry in the Stephen Bathory University in Vilnius. P. Žurkovskis was the inspector of schools in Latvia, referent in the Ministry of Education. He was a headmaster of the Gymnasium in Abrene in 1939. After World War II lived in exile in the U.S.A.

turn should save their estates, gardens, mills that they endowed themselves while being at the Saeima.”²⁵

However, in spite of the critique, the programs of these three parties were rather similar, except for the Belarusian section of the CPP that emphasized strongly the Catholic ethics and called all the Belarusians Catholics for solidarity (“Catholics! Is not it clear for you that only a Catholic can stand up for Catholics?”).²⁶ In its print media the CPP evaluated the fact of the Belarusians joining the party as a sign of disappointment in the LSDWP: “In the last elections the Belarusians supported the Social Democrats and due to this support the representative of the Social Democrats was elected to the Saeima [...] The Belarusians understood that the Social-Democrats are not their advocates and that their ideas differ from those of the Catholics and during these elections decided to support their true advocates — the Christian Peasant Party.”²⁷ On the pages of the paper the Belarusians were called to vote for the list of the CPP — Number 9. On the list were 25 candidates, including Pēteris Žurkovskis, a Belarusian, under the number 17 and thus without any real opportunity to be elected to the Saeima. Before the elections the representatives of the CPP held meetings at the places with large Belorussian communities. On August 6, 1931 Aloizs Bojārs, the chairman of the board of the CPP came to Piedruja. Then the Piedruja’s department of the party was formed, and a Belarusian Nina Slosman became its secretary. In the elections the party gained eight places (what was on two places more than in 1928). This result was successful for the party; however, after the elections the further signs of activity of the Belarusian group were not detected. The newspaper also stopped publishing, which could be the evidence that the Belarusian section of the CPP was formed with the aim to participate in the Parliamentary elections in 1931, and for this reason joined the more powerful political party.

After the coup d'état of 15 May 1934, when political power became concentrated in the hands of Kārlis Ulmanis, the national policy became less favorable to Belarusians than it had been during parliamentary democracy. Legal political activity became impossible, almost all Belarusian public organizations were stopped, Saeima was dissolved. Thousands of Social Democrats and Communists were arrested and sent to the concentration camp of Liepāja, among them a Belarusian Uladzimier Pihulevski. At first Belarusian activists were trying to focus on the cultural and patriotic activities in order to prove their loyalty to the new regime

²⁵ Pjotr Zhurkovski, “Krestjane-katoliki!”, *Belaruskaye slova*, September 25, 1931, 1; or A. Pastor, “Kak progressisty obmanyvajut narod”, *Belaruskaye slova*, September 25, 1931, 2—3.

²⁶ Ēriks Jēkabsons, Valters Ščerbinskis, *Latgaliešu politikā un politiskās partijas neatkarīgajā Latvijā* (Rīga: Jumava, 2006), 19—26.

²⁷ Zemniks, “Boltkrīvu it kupā ar Kristigim”, *Latgolas words*, September 9, 1931 (3). Accessed September 1, 2015. <http://data.lnb.lv/nba01/LatgolasWords/1931/LatgolasVords1931-075.pdf>.

(for example, sending a congratulatory telegram to Ulmanis in April 1935). However, by 1936 almost all Belarusian organizations in Latvia had been eliminated, Belarusians had lost their cultural autonomy, and the number of Belarusian schools in Latvia had significantly decreased.

Summarizing, it could be said that the Belarusians of Latvia chose the most popular parties in Latgale as their allies: The Christian Peasants Party, the Progressive Union of Peasants of Latgale, and the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party. Namely the Belarusians legally cooperated with the centre-left parties of the Latvian political arena. The cooperation had a strong regional character with the emphasis on the interests of Latgale and Ilūkste district. Sometimes it was difficult to detect the ideological differences of these parties, as many politicians of Latgale changed the parties, and the parties were mainly criticizing their opponents, rather than building their own political ideology. The cooperation of the Belarusians with the Latvian Party of Independent Socialists and the illegal Latvian Communist party was mostly related with the figure of Yezavitau and happened during the period of radicalization of his political views and increasing of his sympathy towards the BSSR (the prime of the Belarusian culture at the end of the 20ies in the BSSR as well as the Polish anti-Belarusian politics facilitated the emerging of such moods), and also was inspired with the propagandists activity of the Communist party, mainly among students. The choice of political allies was determined by the social and economic situation of the Belarusians that became even worse due to the global financial crisis. The fact that the majority of the conservative parties also represented the Latvian national ideology also did not facilitate the popularity of such parties among the Belarusians.

The political activity of the Belarusians closely correlated with the periods of the Parliamentary elections, increasing several months before the elections and decreasing after the failure. The publication of the Belarusian newspapers was also directly connected with the elections. The tendency of seeking of new allies among the non-Belorussian political parties could indicate the increasing of the Belarusians involvement in the political life of the Republic of Latvia and the integration to the Latvian community.

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