IN 1917–1918 DID LITHUANIA SEPARATE FROM RUSSIA OR POLAND?

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Abstract. The author attempts to reconstruct the rhetoric of national ‘separation’ of Lithuania in 1917–1918, and to inquire into its purports. To this end the article presents and discusses the facts underlying the circumstances of the separation formula, analyses the causes, and generally surveys the genesis of the ‘separation’ idea.

The issue of the historical ‘separation’ of Lithuania in 1917–1918 has not been analyzed specifically in the relevant scholarship¹ although, in describing facts memoirs and studies discussing the creation of the modern independent state of Lithuania do mention the moment of separation as a context of such creation.

My considerations are intended to reconstruct the implications behind the separation which was recorded in the main document declaring independence of Lithuania. To that end I will discuss circumstances and reasons for the thesis marking the separation and in general survey the genesis of the ‘separation’ idea.

It should be noted that the resolution adopted by the Council of Lithuania on 16 February 1918 declared:

The Council of Lithuania in its meeting dated 16 February 1918 unanimously decided to address governments of Russia, Germany and other states with the following statement:

The Council of Lithuania as the sole representative of the Lithuanian nation on the grounds of the recognized right of nations to self-determination and the resolution of the Lithuanians adopted at Vilnius Conference dated 18–23 September 1917 hereby declares that it restores the independent state of Lithuania functioning on democratic principles with its capital Vilnius and accordingly separates the state in question from all national ties with other nations.²

¹ Earlier scholarship will serve as a basis for our further discussions and thus will not be analyzed separately.

² *Vasario 16-osios Lietuvos nepriklausomybės aktas, Lietuva vokiečių okupacijoje Pirmojo Pasaulinio karo metais 1915–1918. Lietuvos nepriklausomos valstybės genezė*, ed. E. Gimžauskas (Vilnius, 2006), p. 285.

The first moment to be noted in the 'separation' wording of the 16th February Act is the emphasis laid on the plural form of the terms 'nation' and 'national ties'. Secondly, the wording of the act in question is exactly the same as the wording of the document dated 11 December where Lithuania is closely tied to Germany. That document also indicated: '<...> and its separation from all national ties previously existing with other nations'.³ Thus, it might be claimed that there were no impulses changing the object or objects of 'separation' in the period of 1917–1918.

To clarify the problem, provided we recognize it as such, we need to define a circle of historical national ties of Lithuania. We may discard immediately the relationship with Germany manifested only as a plan and statements concerning relationship with Sweden similar to manifestations of Janusz Radziwiłł. Only two historical ties with a longer or shorter duration are beyond any doubt, namely relationships with Russia and Poland. Apparently a 'termination' of national ties with Belarusians but not Belarus as a state might be also considered with certain reservations. I will share my remarks on the issue at the end of the discussion.

Firstly, it is obvious that both documents refer to Russia and Poland. The fact has already been noticed in historical scholarship. According to Edmundas Gimžauskas in his introduction to a collection of documents on Lithuania during German occupation, *Lietuva vokiečių okupacijoje Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais 1915–1918*. Lietuvos nepriklausomos valstybės genezė, the memorandum of Lithuanian politicians dated 10 June 1916 explained a strict ethno-political autonomy of Lithuania from Russia and Poland: 'The memorandum implied that the main enemies of the Lithuanian nation were Russia, Poland and the majority of the Lithuanian Poles'.⁴ Logically there is no space for one more 'and', therefore, it seems appropriate to identify whether Lithuania had anything else to 'separate' itself from? Yet was that a fact?

Considering the official version of the facts, the separation primarily underwent from Russia. What supports such claim? It should be noted that in the summer–autumn 1917 Lithuanian politicians already had dominating sceptical views regarding the return of the Russian authorities to Lithuania. Even such a cautious politician as Antanas

³ The Declaration of the Council of Lithuania dated 11 Dec. 1917 concerning statehood of Lithuania, *ibid.*, p. 254 and here p. 1.

⁴ Ivadas, E. Gimžauskas, *ibid.*, p.18.

Smetona wrote in the editorial of the first issue of *Lietuvos Aidas* published on 6 September 1917, i.e. before the Vilnius Conference which formed the Council of Lithuania: ‘... thus we are no longer willing to return under the rule of Russia which would use us for its own matters’.⁵ Such wording was undoubtedly encouraged by signs showed by German politicians. Gimžauskas in the said introduction claims, and the documents in the collection edited by him indicate, that the emphasis on separation from Russia emerged at the initiative of the German politicians: in December 1917 preparing for peace negotiations with Bolsheviks ‘the Germans were already drafting projects concerning legalization of separation of Poland, Lithuania and Courland from the Russian State’.⁶ That explains why in the draft of the document dated 10 December provided by the Germans ‘the emphasis is not on the independence of Lithuania but only loosening from national ties which have ever existed with other states’.⁷ The thesis was continued by the Lithuanian politicians drafting the declarations of the independence of Lithuania on 11 December 1917 and 16 February 1918. Separation from Russia was also recorded in the document of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk dated 3 March 1918 between Russia and Germany. According to Gimžauskas, ‘no matter how the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is viewed, it is a fact that Lithuania albeit in such a manner legally freed itself from Russia after 120 years’.⁸ Memoirs of contemporaries also confirm the fact that the separation was primarily from Russia. For instance, Justinas Staugaitis, vice chairman of the Council of Lithuania, in his speech reviewing work of the Lithuanian State Council at the Second Conference of Lithuania held on 16 January 1919 notes that ‘the time has come when the Germans need for Lithuania to state clearly that it separates from Russia, which is particularly needed for the negotiations with Trotsky in Brest-Litovsk. The question of Lithuania even temporarily interrupted the negotiations. The Germans again applied a gentle approach towards the Council. They requested the Council to repeat its act of 11 December but only for the Germans, whereas the Russians should be sent only

⁵ J. Basanavičius, *Dėliai Vasario 16 d. 1918 m. Lietuvos nepriklausomybės paskelbimo* (London, 1978), p. 7.

⁶ Ibid., p. 28–29.

⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

the first part of the document, i.e. without mentioning the conventions with Germany. On 26 January 1918 the Council decided to send to Brest-Litovsk the first part of the act dated 11 December with the following supplement: The Council of Lithuania hereby informs the government of Russia and declares that as of today Lithuania has separated from the composition of the state of Russia and considers itself an independent state.⁹ Petras Klimas supports the position of Staugaitis saying that ‘when Russians in Brest-Litovsk negotiations demanded the free self-determination rights for the occupied countries, the German delegation flashed the first part of the 11 December act noting that Lithuanians had already determined their future’.¹⁰

Thus, the declarations emphasizing separation from Russia were inspired by the course of political events of that period and the fact that Russia was further viewed as a suzerain state for Lithuania in that international environment and the Bolsheviks were identified with Russia more and more often.

Unlike Russia, Poland as a state at that time did not receive direct declarations of separation from the Lithuanian politicians. When the third parties were addressed (mostly Germans) the focus was usually on separation of what is Lithuanian and Polish, reasonable and unreasonable claims of the Polish nation or its part to Lithuania. On the one hand, since the statehood of Poland was not yet manifested to its full extent and its expression continued to be influenced by the same German politicians, speculating, according to Klimas,¹¹ on positions of both Lithuanians and Poles and attempting to maintain tensions between the two. On the other hand, the links of Lithuania with the statehood of Poland only seemed to be historical which could be returned. The Polish and Lithuanian politicians of that period often treated them as a ‘family’ (in case of Poles) relationships or a relationship between ‘the mother and a grown-up child’ (Lithuanians). For instance, when Germany and Austria-Hungary on 5 November 1916 proclaimed the Kingdom of Poland and appointed the Regent Council which stated claims of

⁹ J. Staugaitis, ‘Apie Lietuvos valstybės Tarybos darbus, vasario 16-oji’, *Lietuvos valstybės atkūrimo diena. Straipsnių ir dokumentų rinkinys*, ed. E. Manelis, R. Samavičius, (Vilnius, 2006), p. 316.

¹⁰ P. Klimas, *Iš mano atsiminimų* (Vilnius, 1990), p. 115.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 96.

Poland to historical borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Lithuanians (Jonas Basanavičius, Andrius Domaševičius, Steponas Kairys, Antanas Smetona and Jurgis Šaulys) on 17 February 1917 sent to the German authorities (Verwaltung Wilna-Suvalki) a note stating that

Lithuania has no intention to take over another yoke once it has thrown one off and it does not matter whether it is a Polish yoke or some other. A diplomatic mission of Poland in Lithuania is out of the question because the Lithuanian nation has developed national consciousness and it feels mature enough to determine its fate and create its state.¹²

However, according to Klimas' remarks concerning the situation of 1917–1918 and certain features of the Lithuanian national movement such relationship was treated as particularly precarious primarily due to cultural proximity of Lithuania and Poland manifested in the Polish version of the GDL civilisation. It complicated determining of boundaries between 'our own' and 'alien' culture which was so important in forming the new (national) identity. The Polonized nobility, highly Polish towns and the church still closely related to the Polish identity carried and maintained the said proximity of cultures and were like a 'Trojan horse' in modern Lithuanian society, which was still forming. The proximity in question threatened to the Lithuanian foundation of the emerging society; therefore, as far as the possibility of restoring national ties between Poland and Lithuania was concerned there were attempts to 'nip it in the bud'. According to Klimas, in the situation of 1916–1917 it was most conspicuous in 'Polish Lithuania' and the fight of Lithuanian 'memoranda' addressed to German authorities. Reacting to the 'memorandum of 44' (addressed to German Chancellor Hertling on 25 May 1917), which proved the dominating element of the Polish aspect related to the old elite of Lithuania in its culture, economy and politics and requested to incorporate Lithuania into one state with Poland, a group of Lithuanian politicians led by Smetona replied with a special memorandum (addressed to Chancellor Hertling on 10 July 1917) refuting statements of the Polish memorandum and proving capability of the Lithuanian element to create a public body without the support of the old Polonized elite and the rights of that element in the territory of ethnographic Lithuania as well as exposing aggressive schemes of the former:

¹² Ibid., p. 93.

Lithuanians do not follow the occupational politics of the Pole, on the contrary, they do not seek lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, do not want the entire territory presently occupied by the Germans. Lithuanians do not intrude into the region densely populated by the Poles and Belarusians. <...> However, the question is whether the Lithuanian nation is mature enough to live an autonomous, independent life of the state. The answer could be as follows: the past evidences that Lithuanians were able to govern and manage their country; only when the Slavs, first of all the Poles, interfered in the matters of Lithuania, the country against the will of Lithuanians came to a standstill and sank into the Polish anarchy, thus destroying the body of the Lithuanian state. Renouncing historical regions of Lithuania, the Lithuanian nation demands only the lands which were inhabited by this nation from the ancient times, for the creation of its future state namely within such boundaries, based on the ethnographic principle, which we have already noted. As the successful growth of Bulgaria indicates, the so-called lack of intellectuals and upper classes would be no obstacle in restoring Lithuania. <...> Lithuanians cannot imagine their future in any other way, only as an independent state... It is the essential condition for free development and prosperity of their nation, which should end their sufferings.¹³

One statement of the memorandum should be noted in particular:

Lithuanians do not follow the occupational politics of the Poles, on the contrary, they do not seek lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, do not want the entire territory presently occupied by the Germans. Lithuanians do not intrude into the region densely populated by the Poles and Belarusians. <...> Renouncing historical regions of Lithuania, the Lithuanian nation demands only the lands which were inhabited by this nation from the ancient times for the creation of its future state; namely within such boundaries, based on the ethnographic principle, which we have already noted. As the successful growth of Bulgaria indicates, the so-called lack of intellectuals and upper classes would be no obstacle in restoring Lithuania.

I would consider it as an instrument of the Lithuanian politicians in negation of national ties with Poland. In fact, the Lithuanian national movement as a process directed towards shaping a modern Lithuanian nation 'developed' that statement as an agenda for construction of such nation. It was approached tentatively, yet single-mindedly and consistently. In the stage of wakening the national consciousness, i.e. in the period of *Aušra* and the early period of *Varpas* (1883–1896), the historical statehood of the GDL was presented as an example of the glorious past and powers of Lithuanians in addition to a still relatively scarce criticism of the union between the old states of Poland and Lithuania. In the context of later articles of *Varpas* devoted to history, the negative consequences of the 'union' to the statehood of the GDL were emphasized more often and the ties with Poland were identified as a cause for the downfall of the GDL statehood.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 139–147.

That union pushed Lithuania onto a new and fairly good way, generated new cultural and political conditions, under which a free autonomous existence and functioning was interrupted and blocked. Prior to the union with the Poles, the Lithuanians defended what was dear to them, but later they had to defend what was alien and not dear. Nowadays the political conditions have altered and the Poles leading the Lithuanians down the way of progress have stopped next to the freedom and that is the fate of Lithuanians.¹⁴

In 1902 the draft of the agenda of the Lithuanian Democratic Party (since 1905 the Democratic Party of Lithuania) (LDP) expressed an aim for independent Lithuania within its ethnographic boundaries. It was identified as an axis of the political agenda of the movement in the resolution of the Great Seimas concerning the autonomy of Lithuania within its ethnographic boundaries in 1905. That year also became a turning point since the project of restoring Historical Lithuania was finally abandoned after an active discussion. It should be noted that political activists of the democratic orientation before the Great Seimas in 1905 in an attempt to give prominence to the issue of the 'Lithuanian autonomy' in the environment of liberal political powers of Russia of that period tried to adjust their concept of ethnographic Lithuania with the project of Historical Lithuania defended by democratically-minded Lithuanian Poles, Belarusians and Jews of Vilnius in conventions held in April-May 1905. Corrections of the Lithuanian autonomy within its ethnographic boundaries towards the Historical Lithuania project was then made by Lithuanian politicians in order to attract democratic politicians of Lithuanian Poles as well as Belarusians and Jews of Vilnius for realization of the aims to establish the Lithuanian autonomy within its ethnographic boundaries and prevent confrontation with Belarusians and Poles regarding the historical-cultural heritage of the GDL and dependence of Vilnius (such questions were raised by activists representing Belarusians, e.g. J. Lutskevich). In the context of the said discussions the Lithuanian political activists actually discarded the Historical Lithuania project as threatening to completion of consolidation of the modern Lithuanian nation and even existence of the Lithuanian nation as such. Discussions revealed that Lithuanians had fears whether the still weak Lithuanian culture would manage to resist the Polish version of the GDL culture with both old traditions and potential conditions for its spread. Therefore, based on the interests of the Lithuanian nation, they selected the project leading to a national state though

¹⁴ Š-s, 'Šis-tas apie uniją su lenkais', *Varpas*, 1902, nr. 2, p. 28.

it complicated the relationships of the modern Lithuanian nation with the state and cultural tradition of the GDL.

In fact, liberal politicians in Russia undergoing a democratization process also pointed the Lithuanian national movement in that direction. Russian liberals (would be Cadets) in 1905 held a number of conventions for activists of *zemstva* (regions) and towns of the whole Russia. In order to implement plans of democratization and decentralization of Russia they attempted to include in that process liberal political forces of national peripheries. Therefore, representatives of Lithuanians and Poles were also invited to participate in the conventions. One of the central issues in the conventions was the autonomy of Poland discussed in great detail in the fifth (12–15 (21–27) September 1905)¹⁵ and the sixth (6–13 (18–25) November 1905) conventions. The question of the Polish autonomy for Russian liberals was merely a convenient tool for realization of their own plans. According to Pavel Miliukov's memoirs, the actual autonomy of Poland was out of the question. Even in separate negotiations of the would-be cadets (P. Miliukov, Petr and Dmitrii Dolgorukov and others) with Polish representatives (Alexander Lednicki, a Pole of Lithuania, a representative of land owners and one of the famous Cadets, etc.) on 20 (7, old style) April 1905 and in conventions of September and November the right of Poland to autonomy was recognized only in the ethnographic territory and provided that it did not threaten the integrity of the Russian state. The Poles, firstly Lednicki, later Tadeusz Wróblewski assured Russians that they would observe that condition hoping in the course of the political game to acquire new trumps and to win, if opportunities were favourable.¹⁶ Meanwhile in the September convention the demand of the Polish autonomy adopted as a separate resolution was intended only for appeasement of Poles so that with their support a move towards democratic constitutional Russia could be made. The position of Lithuanians (Kazys Grinius, Vaclovas Bielskis and Povilas Višinskis participated as representatives in the said conventions) to raise the question of the Lithuanian autonomy in the sixth (November) convention was in fact threatening to the adopted resolution concerning

¹⁵ P-tis [J. Vileišis], 'Iš Lietuvos susivažiavimų nutarimų', *Varpas* (1905), nr. 7/8, p. 75.

¹⁶ Miliukov, *Vospominanie (1859–1917)*, I (New York, 1951), pp. 273, 304; idem, *Natsional'nyi Vopros* (Prague, 1925), pp. 16–164; Akta 5 i 6 zjazdów ziemskich 1905 g. w Moskwie, LMAB Rankraščių skyrius, fos. 9-1155, fos. 16a, 118.

the Polish autonomy and further considerations of that autonomy. The Lithuanians avoided a clash with the Poles over the Lithuanian part of the Suvalki gubernia in discussing the issue of the Polish autonomy. The Polish activists recognized and respected the right of Lithuanians to autonomy and offered to continue the work initiated by Poles of Vilnius and Lithuanian democrats, invited to hold advisory conventions of all the parties on the autonomy issue.¹⁷ As the notes indicate a compromise mostly thanks to Višinskis was found: the limits for the Polish autonomy were not defined in the convention and the question of the Lithuanian part of Suvalki gubernia did not come into focus. It was a logical and appropriate in that situation step in terms of a strategy of searching allies for the demand of the Lithuanian autonomy to be stated in the future. A different position would have seemed as backstabbing the only possible allies as a real political force in the Russian Empire, i.e. the democratic powers of Russia. However, the same liberals of Russia apparently tried to support the position of Lithuanians to the extent it was beneficial in restricting the aims of the Polish political independence to the territory of ethnographic Poland and not the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Moreover, even people implementing the official politics of Russia based on the principle ‘divide and rule’ tried to deepen a gap between Lithuanians and Poles primarily in the sphere of culture and after 1905 increased protection of national-cultural activities of the former. Russia treating the territory of the former GDL as ancient Russian lands (*iskonno russkie zemli*) was interested in maintaining a contraposition between Lithuanians and Poles in Lithuania so that it would be easier to implement its plans of Russification and colonization. The tsar authorities were actually favourable to national-cultural activities of the right-wing Lithuanian activists (from the Nationalists and Christian Democrats) supporting them as a leverage against Poles. Russia considered Poles its biggest enemies in Lithuania because they were related to Poland which in the future could have claims to Lithuania. The tsar authorities combined such policy with Russification of purely ethnographic Lithuania and Eastern Orthodox colonization first of all assisted by the Peasants’ Bank. It established centres of Russian and Orthodox culture target-

¹⁷ P. Višinskio užrašų knygelė, Library of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (LLI), fos. 1-814, 1. unpaginates.

ed against Lithuanians and even its favourite Christian Democrats and National Democrats.¹⁸ A group of right-wing political forces of Lithuania noted for its open anti-Polish attitude and attempting to consolidate Lithuanian cultural capabilities, used Russia's policy and instead of hostility tried to demonstrate its loyalty. However, the left-wing of the Lithuanian movement (Democrats, Social Democrats) were against this rightist tactics and harshly criticized it proving its disastrous potential and adhering to their aims in the territory of ethnographic Lithuania to create a society functioning on civic and democratic principles.¹⁹

Until the First World War and both in the official setting (the Russian Duma) and unofficially (with freemasons in the Russian Great Eastern Lodge) the Lithuanian politicians pursued the statehood project of ethnographic Lithuania. The only exception was the first half of 1915 when at the initiative of Michał Römer, a leader of the democratic wing of Lithuanian Poles, Jurgis Šaulys, Mykolas Biržiška, Augustinas Janulaitis, Jonas Vileišis and Felicija Bortkevičienė, i.e. Democrats and Social Democrats, were provided a project for restoration of the statehood of Lithuania combining it with the Polish national movement for independence. The project suggested reviving the idea of the Commonwealth during the period of the Jagiellonians of equal democratic states of Poland and Lithuania in a form of a federation in order to break Lithuania away from Russia. However, consultations held in Warsaw between Mykolas Sleževičius, Jurgis Šaulys, Witold Abramowicz and Michał Römer representing Lithuania and the Independence Bloc representing Poland resulted in failure due to an adverse position of Sleževičius.²⁰ Still on the part of Poland the constellation of political forces for some time continued to be favourable to the project of Römer.

In late 1915 – early 1916 opinions of the leaders of the Supreme National Committee (*Naczelny Komitet Narodowy*, NKN) residing in Cracow and their supporters among political activists, the National Democrat members, *Polska Partija Socialistyczna* (PPS) and

¹⁸ 'Litwa wobec wojny (Poufny memoriał Michała Römera z sierpnia 1915)' in *Zeszyty historyczne*, 17 (Paris, 1970), p. 97.

¹⁹ For greater detail see: R. Miknys, 'Lietuvos demokratų partija 1902–1915 metais', *Lietuvos atgimimo istorijos studijos* (hereafter – *LAIS*), vol 10 (Vilnius, 1995), pp. 150–153.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 164–167.

other political parties concerning the agenda of Polish independence became quite similar. A tendency to spread the Polish expansion towards the East became obvious. Even Cracow Professor Michał Sokolnicki, who was close to Józef Piłsudski, was designing plans of annexing Catholic Belarus with Vilnius to Poland as he believed that Lithuanians could not be left for Germans.²¹ (71). Other figures around Piłsudski (T. Filipowicz, H. Tennenbaum, T. Gruzewski, M. Downorowicz, St. Thugutt, Marian Lempicki) in February 1916 organized a ‘declaration of one hundred’ the draft of which stipulated restoration of the state of Poland with borders of 1772. (The original document did not focus on the issue of borders for the sake of tactics).²² The expansion was apparently supported by Roman Stanisław Dmowski who still calculated how much of the ‘alien element’ could be enclosed within the borders of ‘our’ state in order to absorb and assimilate it easily.²³ Concerned with the situation Römer wrote a letter-memorandum in May 1916 to one of the leaders of the NKN, namely Prof. W. L. Jaworski. Römer highly critically viewed the common opinion of Polish politicians to expand positions of future Poland to the east as much as the circumstances allowed. In his opinion such policy would be destructive to Poland:

let us assume that the short-sighted strategy ‘grab as much as you can’ is implemented. Poland receives a part of Belarus, absorbs and colonizes it. The Polish ethnic territory would increase by thousands of kilometres and the population would rise by several million... Meanwhile the Germans would colonize and Germanize Courland and Lithuania they currently occupy: and avoiding rising strength of the Poles, Russia would undoubtedly harshly Russify the eastern part of Belarus it still holds. At the same time when Poland completes Polonization of Western Belarus, it would crash into a solid Prussian wall in the north and into an equally strong wall in the east. What next? Will small ethnic Poland without an access to the sea, without a possibility to expand to the east and wedged between two giants, manage to maintain its independence?²⁴

In his opinion the annexation plans of Germans and claims of Russia could be neutralized only by ‘recognition of Historical Lithuania as

²¹ Römer, *Dziennik*, vol. 11, LMAB Rankraščiu skyrius, fos. 138–2237, fo. 18.

²² W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864–1945*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1953), p. 287.

²³ J. Tomaszewski, ‘Kresy Wschodnie w polskiej myśli politycznej XIX i XX w.’ *Polska myśl polityczna XIX i XX wieku*, vol. VI (Wrocław, 1988), p. 102.

²⁴ Römer, *Memoryał w sprawie litewskiej*, Cracow, Archiwum Państwowy w Krakowie, NKN-142, fo. 717.

an undivided whole'. He was deeply convinced that the geopolitical situation of that period forced Poland unwillingly to choose the only way, i.e. to acknowledge and declare to the world about the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a political historical formation. That way it was possible to win approval of Belarusian and Lithuanian politicians in favour of establishing a union (federation) between Lithuania and Poland. Moreover, an idea of a buffer neutral state, namely Historical Lithuania with Courland, was proposed. Such state could separate the Western Europe (with Poland) from Russia.²⁵ Römer tried to prove the necessity to restore the GDL and its eventual positive impact on the statehood prospects of Poland, also noting actual potential for restoration of the GDL, i.e. interested political forces. Assuring that his ideas are not 'concocted' he enclosed the Universal of the Confederation of the GDL established in Vilnius in December 1915 as an example claiming determination to restore such a state.²⁶

However, the consequential position of the author of the letter-memorandum was not popular among Polish politicians and was met with hostility. *Wiadomości Polskie*²⁷ in its issue of 1 May 1916 no. 74 printed an article sent from Vilnius where its author (already mentioned Waław Studnicki) referred to the Universal of the Confederation of the GDL sent by Römer as a 'political plot' and stated that the Poles of Lithuania 'first of all want to be together with Poland'.²⁸

Subsequent events indicated that those were the first signals predicting impracticability of Römer's concept and his failure as a politician.

The course of further events corresponds with the direction of the agenda developed by the Lithuanian national movement in 1905 and later. In 28 February – 5 March 1916 a conference of Lithuanian political activists in Berne supported the idea of ethnographic

²⁵ 'Litwa wobec wojny' (Poufny memoriał Michała Römera z sierpnia 1915), *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 17 (Paris, 1970), pp. 126–127.

²⁶ Römer, *Memoriał w sprawie litewskiej*, fos. 702–731.

²⁷ The newspaper devoted to disseminate the idea of 'legions' was first issued in Dec 1914 in Cieszyn and since March 1915 in Piotrków. It was published by the Military Department of the Supreme National Committee (Naczelný Komitet Narodowy) in Aug. 1914 established at the initiative of a parliamentary Polish group.

²⁸ *Memoriał w sprawie litewskiej* złożony przez prof. W. Zawadzkiego 7 Nov. 1917, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 30 (Paris, 1974), pp. 81, 84–85.

Lithuania without any ties with Poland. Drawing such state borders of Lithuania, Belarus was divided into two parts. The idea of entirely separate Lithuania was emphasised in the Hague conference (25 – 30 April 1916), in the first (may 31 – June 4 1916) and the second (June 30 – July 4 1916) Lausanne conference²⁹ as well as in the Memorandum on Restoration of Independent Lithuania which in the name of the Lithuanian National Council was delivered to diplomats of Western states on 11 January 1917.³⁰ Thus, the brief survey of peculiarities in the expression of the Lithuanian national movement indicates that the wording of ‘separation’ of 16 February 1918 was primarily directed to negation of historical national ties between Lithuania and Poland which were considered dangerous to the existence of the modern Lithuanian nation.

On the other hand, Polish politicians in 1916–1918 were concerned only with restoration of Poland and essentially interests of the Polish nation. Admittedly, after the act of Austria-Hungary and Germany dated 5 November 1916 concerning restoration of the state of Poland, there were attempts in Warsaw to develop a specific agenda to solve the issue of Lithuania. In May 1917 political figures of Warsaw and supporters of independence of the GDL lands as well as traditional relationships of the independent GDL with Poland delivered the Declaration on the Issue of Lithuania. However, the said declaration clearly evidenced disagreements between the two groups: some of them wanted to accept and respect the independence of Lithuania without ties with Poland, whereas the others supported such ties.³¹

The idea of Historical Lithuania was further influenced by Dmowski defending positions of the independence of Poland. In his memorial of March 1917 to Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, he proposed the idea of creating the state of Poland, strong enough to become an ally of Europe against Germany. His goal was for Poland to receive Grodno, Vilnius, Minsk and Wołyń among other lands³² since Polish civilization was deeply rooted in

²⁹ R. Žepkaitė, *Diplomatija imperializmo tarnyboje* (Vilnius, 1980), p. 24.

³⁰ R. Lopata, ‘Lietuvos valstybingumo raida 1914–1918 metais’ (*LAIS*, vol. 9), (Vilnius, 1996), p. 114.

³¹ Sukiennicki, *Memoriał w sprawie litewskiej*, p. 72.

³² Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski, 1864–1945*, vol. 1, (London, 1956), p. 325; Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 1989), pp. 219–222.

those regions. That meant division of Historical Lithuania. Such postulates became items in the agenda of the National Polish Committee established in Lausanne on 15 August 1917. Dmowski was elected chairman of the committee*. After the Fourteen Points presented by Woodrow Wilson on 18 January 1918 the thirteenth of which declared the necessity to establish an independent Polish state after the war, the significance of the committee substantially increased. It represented Poland undergoing the process of creation in its relationships with the Western states (Entente). In January of the same year the French authorities assigned for the 'care' of the Committee all Polish military and political matters.³³ In July–August 1917 Germans deactivated legions and imprisoned their leader Józef Piłsudski in Magdeburg. It gave even more leverage to Dmowski and the ND organization which were against any unions and federations and pursued the incorporation agenda. Even Democrats of Vilnius Poles having established the Party of Democrats in 1916 balanced between nationalism and the local identity.³⁴ Some of them (Witold Abramowicz, Jan Piłsudski, A. Turski) were in favour of the ND organization and supported separation from ethnographic Lithuania. According to them Polish–Catholic–Belarusian Lithuania with Vilnius had to be annexed to Poland. Whereas the others, such

* It should be noted that Dmowski in his memorial to the US President Woodrow Wilson 'On the Territory of the Polish State' (Oct. 1918) expressed intentions to incorporate into Poland: the entire ethnographic Lithuania with Kaunas, Klaipėda, Palanga; half of Belarus with Polotsk and Kamenets, Latvian Liepaja; former Livonian lands. Only an autonomy within such state was planned for Lithuanians. Cf. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski*, vol. 2, part 1 p. 51; St. Bóbr-Tylingo, W. Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I: From Foreign Domination to National Independence* (Boulder, 1984), p. 1288 /review/; *Teki Historyczne*, vol. XIX (London, 1988–1989), p. 297.

³³ Ibid., p. 346.

³⁴ It was defined as a democratic anti-national ideology unrelated to any nation (Lithuanians, Poles, Belarusians, Jews, etc.) residing in the region (Historical Lithuania which essentially consisted of ethnographic Lithuania and Belarus) and based on the principle of common citizenship. Nations of Historical Lithuania have equal rights to a free economic, cultural and national development. Their different national-cultural needs and aims should be adjusted applying the civic principle in relationships among the nations and the people in the region. Democratic national movements are treated as factors organizing a passive mass of residents unconscious in terms of nationality and citizenship and enabling it to become a civic society. Furthermore, democracy and equal rights are recognized as the basis for relationships among modern, democratic, culturally and politically close states. Any chauvinism, imperialism, political, cultural or military hegemony were denied.

as Ludwik Chomiński, Zygmunt Jundziłł, still defended federation ties of Lithuania with Poland,³⁵ but they were not mature as an actual political force.

Concluding this article, it should be noted that when Lithuanians rejected the statehood project of Historical Lithuania, a separation was made from ‘national ties with the Belarusian nation’ as well. As it has been mentioned above when convents held in Vilnius in 1905 discussed the concept of the political autonomy of Lithuania, the concepts of Lithuanians and Belarusians clearly diverged. In fact that was the onset of ‘separation’ of Belarusians and Lithuanians as two ethnic nations of the former GDL which used to co-exist in a common state body. The Lithuanian representatives in those convents were forced to provide arguments for separating ethnographic Lithuania from Belarus. Although they essentially were not against the autonomy of Belarus and considered the principle of autonomy for nations or territories forming a separate cultural, economic and public structure as true, the Lithuanians claimed that realization of such principle depended on self-determination of the people in that country and region. Vileišis explaining the position of Lithuanians noted that

It was indicated that the national movement of Belarus had not gained a direction towards autonomy and final achievement of autonomy would depend only on abilities of the nation which would support it and that people themselves could support such political ideals yet such political agenda could not be presented as it would be overly idealistic like a mere fantasy.³⁶

In the opinion of the Lithuanian democrats, a handful of intellectuals did not represent the Belarusian nation since the latter was not yet ‘awake’. Therefore, the autonomy postulate presented by Belarusians was considered to be illogical since it did not originate naturally from the process of a national revival. They had plenty of arguments to support such opinion. According to Römer who analyzed those processes, Belarusians still did not overcome obstacles on the way towards a national formation and in their ethnographic territory they were highly heterogeneous both in terms of economy and culture. It could be clearly distinguished: (1) Orthodox Eastern Belarus affected by the Russian culture; (2) mostly Orthodox but ethnographically and culturally more individual Middle Belarus affected by both Polish

³⁵ Römer, *Dziennik*, vol. 25, LMAB RS, fos. 138–2251, fo. 166.

³⁶ P-tis [J. Vileišis], ‘Iš Lietuvos inteligentų susivąžiavimų nutarimų’, *Varpas*, 1905, nr. 7/8, p. 73.

and Russian cultures; (3) mostly Catholic Western Belarus or Russia of Lithuania with dominating Polish and Lithuanian influence.³⁷

The goal of restoring statehood to Historical Lithuania was briefly revived in the war period in the form of the GDL confederation but it was soon forgotten.³⁸ After the above mentioned statements of Lithuanians at the Berne Conference Belarusians focused on creation of purely Belarusian statehood. Late in 1917 the Belarusian Congress elected the so-called 'Belarusian Rada' which on 25 March 1918 declared the independence of Belarus boycotting the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In Vilnius the 'Belarusian National Committee' was established which reiterated former claims to Vilnius.

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NUO KO 1917–1918 M. ATSISKYRĖ LIETUVA – NUO RUSIJOS AR LENKIJOS?

Santrauka

RIMANTAS MIKNYS

Straipsnyje siekiama rekonstruoti Lietuvos 1917–1918 m. valstybinio „atsiskyrimo“ retoriką ir išsiaiškinti jos prasmes. Aptariami faktai, atskleidžiantys atsiskyrimo aplinkybes, nagrinėjamos priežastys ir bendrais bruožais apžvelgiama „atsiskyrimo“ idėjos genezė. Konstatuojama, kad minėtuojau laikotarpiu pirmiausia buvo kalbama tik apie du ilgiau ar trumpiau trukusius realius istorinius ryšius – su

³⁷ Römer, *Litwa. Studium o odrodzeniu narodu litewskiego* (Lviv, 1908), pp. 349–350.

³⁸ The Universal was signed by the Lithuanians Jurgis Šaulys, Jonas Vileišis and Augustinas Janulaitis; the Belarusians Anton Lutskevich, Ivan Lutskevich, Dominik Semashko and Vaclav Lastouski; the Pole Aleksandr Zosztawt and the Jews Cemakas Šabadas and Rozenbaumas (LCVA, f. 383, ap. 7, b. 56, fo. 53.)

Rusija ir Lenkija. Be to, su tam tikromis išlygomis buvo užsimenama ir apie valstybinių ryšių su baltarusiais, tačiau ne su Baltarusija kaip valstybe, „nutraukimą“. Pažymima, jog Lietuvos atsiskyrimą nuo Rusijos pabrėžiančias deklaracijas padiktavo to meto politinių įvykių seka ir tas faktas, kad valstybė – Lietuvos siuzerenu – to meto tarptautinėje aplinkoje ir toliau buvo matoma Rusija, ir kuo toliau, tuo dažniau su ja tapatinami bolševikai. Lenkija kaip valstybė tada tiesioginių atsiskyrimo deklaracijų, kaip Rusija, iš lietuvių politikų nesulaukė. Kreipiantis į trečiąsias šalis, dažniausiai vokiečius, daugiau buvo kalbama apie lietuviškumo ir lenkiškumo perskyras, lenkų kaip tautos ar jos dalies Lietuvoje pagrįstas ar nepagrįstas pretenzijas į Lietuvą. Tačiau, kaip rodo nagrinėjamo laikotarpio lietuvių politikų retorika ir lietuvių tautinio sąjūdžio plėtotės ypatumai, toks ryšys buvo traktuojamas kaip ypač pavojingas, pirmiausia dėl kultūrinio Lietuvos ir Lenkijos artimumo. Ši ikūnijo LDK lenkiškosios civilizacijos versija ir jis trukdė apibrėžti „savo“ ir „svetimo“ skirties ribas, kurios buvo tokios svarbios naujos – tautinės – tapatybės formavimuisi. Tokiam artimumą ikūnijo ir buvo „Trojos arklys“ besiformuojančioje modernioje Lietuvos, tiksliau, lietuviškoje, visuomenėje, sulenkėjusi bajorija, aplenkėję miestai ir su lenkiškumu vis dar gana glaudžiai susijusi bažnyčia. Tas artimumas kėlė grėsmę besiformuojančios visuomenės lietuviškumo pagrindams, todėl buvo stengiamasi „užbėgti už akių“ galimybei atkurti Lenkijos ir Lietuvos valstybinius ryšius. Daroma išvada, kad neabejotina, jog 1918 m. vasario 16 d. Lietuvos nepriklausomybės akto „atsiskyrimo“ formuluote buvo siekiama užkirsti kelią Lietuvos ir Lenkijos valstybiniais ryšiams kaip pavojingiems lietuvių modernios tautos egzistencijai.