

### III. AUFSÄTZE ÜBER NEUESTE GESCHICHTE DEUTSCHLANDS, WEISSRUSSLANDS UND ANDEREN LÄNDERN / СТАТЬИ ПО НОВЕЙШЕЙ ИСТОРИИ ГЕРМАНИИ, БЕЛАРУСИ И ДРУГИХ СТРАН

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#### THE STRUGGLE OVER THE CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM OF ELECTIONS TO THE STATE DUMA AND THE STATE COUNCIL IN THE WESTERN PROVINCES OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE (1906–1911)

#### БОРЬБА ЗА ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ СИСТЕМЫ ВЫБОРОВ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ ДУМЫ И ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО СОВЕТА В ЗАПАДНЫХ ГУБЕРНИХ РОССИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ (1906–1911 ГГ.)

*Summary:* The aim of the article is to study the activities of political parties and public associations of the western provinces of the Russian Empire on one of the most important issues of public and political life – the election of legislative chambers. The beginning of struggle over the changes in the electoral law to the State Duma was made at the congress of the “Union of October 17” on February 8–12, 1906 in Moscow. Activities of the Octobrists of the western outskirts were aimed at limiting the influence of the Polish landlords and the Catholic church, against granting autonomy to the Kingdom of Poland. In this, they essentially separated from the leadership of the Octobrist party. Around the idea of introducing the principle of proportional election of electors and deputies of the State Duma by nationalities, ensuring the election of at least one Russian member of the State Council from each outlying province, local Octobrists went to an agreement with the extreme right and regional monarchist organizations, forming the Russian Suburban Union. By sending petitions and deputies to Nicholas II, negotiations with P.A. Stolypin, the Octobrists of the western provinces and their allies managed to achieve a change in the electoral law to the State Duma on June 3, 1907, which allowed them to increase the number of monarchist deputies in the lower chamber.

In 1908 – 1911 together with other monarchist organizations, the “Union of October 17” managed to solve in its favor the question of “Russian” representation in the State Council from the Vitebsk, Minsk, Mogilev, Kiev, Podolsky and Volyn provinces,

*as well as to defend Stolypin's idea of the introduction of elective zemstvos in Belarus and Ukraine.*

**Key words:** *State Duma, State Council, Western provinces of the Russian Empire, "Union of October 17", Russian outskirts, zemstvos, national curia.*

The aim of the article is to investigate the activities of political parties and public institutions on one of the most important issues in the socio-political life of the Russian Empire – the election of legislative chambers. For five years, the right-liberal and the conservative organizations of the western provinces of the Russian Empire struggled over a separate representation in the State Duma and the State Council for the Russian (including the Belarusian and Ukrainian Orthodox) population.

The struggle over changing the rules of the election of members to the State Duma began at the congress of the "Union of October 17" on February 8–12, 1906 in Moscow. It broke out a principled dispute between the majority of the congress and the delegates from the western provinces on the issue of the system of elections to the State Duma. The regional commission, which was dominated by the representatives from Belarus, Poland and the Baltic States, proposed an immediate introduction on the western outskirts of the Russian Empire a system of elections for the national curiae, including the creation of a separate curia for the Russian (Orthodox) population. The resolution of the section said: "... in the interests of the Russian statehood and higher justice, introduce on the outskirts the principle of proportional election of electors and deputies to the State Duma by nationality, granting the right to elect at least one Russian member to the State Duma from each suburban province ..." [29, p.157]. The leader of the Vilna Octobrists N.Yu. Matson said: "We demand only equality, and not any special privileges. Simple justice should give the right to have a representative in the State Duma" [29, p. 141].

This was opposed by the left Octobrists, as well as the moderate delegates, who thought that the demand for a separate representation for the Russian population would provoke reciprocal statements by other peoples. One of the leaders of the "Union of October 17" A.I. Guchkov expressed the opinion of the majority of the congress: "The requirements for the representation of the Russian population of the outskirts have its bases, as well as the principle of minority representation. However, this principle cannot be realized only for the Russian population, because of our recognition of the equality of all nationalities" [29, p. 140]. Guchkov also said that the proposal to change the electoral law would delay the calling of the State Duma. N.Yu. Matson reasonably remarked: "Are you sure that the members of the "Union of October 17" will constitute the majority in the Duma. Moreover, if not. After all, then in five years, during which we will have to expect the implementation of the principle of representation from the minority, there, probably, will not be a single Russian left on the outskirts" [29, p. 141]. Nevertheless, the majority of delegates of the congress did not support the idea of elections for national curia.

Under the influence of the western departments of the “Union of October 17”, the Old Believer Communities of the Belarussian-Lithuanian and adjacent provinces attempted to develop their own political platform. On January 25–27, 1906, the congress of local Old Believers was held in Vilna with the invitation of the representatives of the Baltic States and the Suvalkov province of the Kingdom of Poland. The editor of the newspaper “Vilensky Vestnik” VA. Chumikov, referring to the Old Believers at the opening of the congress, determined their political role: “The mission entrusted to you by history ... is to be a Russian guard on the outskirts of the state” [33, p. 41]. The assembled took the “petition to the Tsar”. It contained a complaint about the intensified national movement of “aliens”, expressed anxiety of being not admitted to the State Duma and other elected bodies, petitioned for special representation in the lower legislative chamber for the Old Believers, as well as the introduction of proportional representation of members on a national basis in zemstvo for the western provinces [40, p. 12]. In addition, the delegates tried to obtain the extension of the decree on the abolition redemption payments not only to peasants, but also to perpetual tenants – the Old Believers; their resettlement from the hamlets to large villages, due to the hostile attitude of “foreign” [*Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian – D.L.*] environment; giving the Old Believers land from the state fund with granting them the rights of Russian settlers; opening state schools with Russian teachers in the Old Believers’ villages [40, p. 12].

Thus, in the west of the Empire the Old Believers acted as a social support of government policy. They were the bearers of Russian identity, who sought to strengthen ties with aboriginal Russia. Therefore, the governor-general of Vilna, in a letter addressed to the Minister of the Internal Affairs, asked for assistance to the “petitioners”. He justified his request by the fact that the Old Believers kept the Russian language, customs and antiquities in complete purity, and, consequently, represented a “major Russian force”, which greatly contributed to the strengthening of Russian cultural origins in the province [18, p. 22].

With the active participation of the Vilna Octobrists, in February 1906 the Russian Suburban Union began to be formed. The prerequisite for its creation was dissatisfaction with the decisions of the first congress of the “Union of October 17” in Moscow, and, in particular, the system of elections to the State Duma. In a week after the Congress closed, Vilensky department decided to break with the party discipline by initiating through the local governor-general a petition for sending a special deputy from the Russian population of Vilna to the State Duma [5, p. 1].

The North-Western Russian Veche, formed in Vilna in December 1905, supported the initiative of the Octobrists. This organization, numbering about 500 members, consisted mainly of officials, teachers and priests, as well as many Old Believers. The North-Western Russian Veche published the newspaper “White Russia”. The leaders of the organization viewed their party as a defensive organization of the Russian population, which in the future, perhaps, will turn into a national-liberal party. They considered the Belarussians a part of the

Russian people although they recognized that the latter had their own national characteristics. To counteract the pressure of the Poles, the ideologists of the North-Western Russian Veche considered it possible to promote the awakening of the national consciousness among the Belarusians, and advocated the creation of an elementary school with teaching in the Byelorussian language [14]. The special position of the North-Western Russian Veche in the Byelorussian question was explained by the desire to preserve the region for the Russian Empire.

Simultaneously with the struggle over the changes in the system of elections to the State Duma, a discussion arose about the necessity to separate representation for the "Russian" population in the upper legislative chamber. Elections of the members to the State Council from the Belarusian-Lithuanian and Ukrainian provinces, as there were no elected zemstvos, under the law of 1906 were made at the congresses of landowners. Since the most cohesive and economically powerful group of landowners was the Roman Catholic nobility, its representatives were elected to the upper legislative chamber. It aroused dissatisfaction of the monarchist parties and organizations that saw in this infringement of interests of the Orthodox population.

On February 20, 1906 in Vilna the congress of oppositional to the Central Committee of the "Union of October 17" representatives on the outskirts of Vilna, Minsk, Warsaw, Riga and Yuryev as well as the North-Western Russian Veche took place. N.Yu. Matson and I.D. Chigirev were elected a chairman and his assistant accordingly [12]. The main themes discussed at the congress were issues on the system of elections to the legislative chambers and the formation of a special suburban "Union of October 17". The delegates sharply criticized the decisions of the first Octobrists' congress. It was blamed for not understanding the ethnic situation in the western provinces of the Russian Empire. "People of the Central Russia usually do not know the history of the North-Western Region properly, they do not understand its present situation," – "White Russia" wrote [1].

The monarchists, gathered in Vilna, decided to send a delegation to Nicholas II to present the address with a request to grant the Russian population of the province the right to elect individual representatives to the State Duma and the State Council. In addition, the delegates decided to form a suburban union, in which all Russian regional organizations could enter on autonomy rights.

On February 26, 1906 the departments of the "Union of October 17" that participated in the congress, began discussing the draft of a new party. On March 2, S.Yu. Witte presented an address demanding the addition of an electoral law to the State Duma of December 11, 1905. The note stated: "The outskirts of Russia, comprising in their composition cohesive alien groups, among which the Russian population is often in the minority, represent so many features that the monotonous distribution on them the elective law is completely inapplicable without violation, as requirements of simple justice, and national interests". According to the authors of the note, the complete elimination of the Russian suburban population from participation in the work of the legislative chambers was not only a completely unjust violation of its legitimate rights,

but also represented a danger from the general Russian point of view, since only the Russians (Orthodox) always acted as a reconciling party in all interethnic conflicts [18, p. 10, 11]. On March 3, the Minsk Octobrists sent a letter to P.N. Durnovo, a Minister of Internal Affairs, with a request to initiate a petition to the emperor about the division of Minsk province voters into national curiae during the election to the State Duma [18, p. 14, 15].

On March 9, 1906, the emperor received a delegation from “Russian people of the western outskirts”, who handed him a petition demanding a system of elections for the national curia. The delegation included the representatives of the Baltic region – Professor of the University of Yuryev V.P. Kurchinsky, editor of “Riga Vestnik” I.I. Vysotsky; from the Kingdom of Poland – engineer and teacher of the Warsaw Polytechnic Institute A.Ya. Kasmin; from the Belarusian-Lithuanian provinces – landowner of Lida county and editor of the magazine “Peasant” A.S. Vrutsevich, inspector of the Libava-Rominskaya railway in Minsk G.K. Schmidt and Vilensky engineer F.F. Fiedler [37, p. 36]. The petitioners proposed issuing a decree on the additional election of one “Russian member to the Duma” from the western provinces, and insisted on increasing the number of Russian representatives in the State Council [18, p. 11]. By tsar’s order, the petition was transferred to the special committee under the leadership of the chairman of the State Council D.M. Solsky. The committee, in principle approving the basic ideas contained in the petition, decided, however, that it was too late to change the electoral law on the eve of the opening of the State Duma [39, p. 151, 152].

On April 15, 1906 Russian electors from the Minsk province sent to Nicholas II a petition asking about the introduction of national curia [3]. However, as noted above, the government did not change the electoral law.

In the end, even despite the support of the local administration, the Octobrists and the rightists were unable to attract the masses to their side. Not the least role in their defeat in the elections to First State Duma was played by their sharp nationalist attacks on the Jews and the Poles, representing at that time a significant part of urban population in the “Jewish Pale of Settlement.”

With the beginning of the election campaign to the Second State Duma in the autumn of 1906, the Octobrists intensified their efforts to create a special Russian suburban party. On October 7–9, the “Congress of Russian people from the western suburbs” was held in Vilna on the initiative of the “North-Western Russian Veche”, where monarchists from Minsk, Vitebsk, Grodno, Kovna, Warsaw and the Baltic region came together. The meeting was held in the hall of the “Russian Assembly”. G.K. Schmidt, the leader of Minsk department of the “Union of October 17” was elected a chairman unanimously [23, p. 548].

The participants decided to initiate a new petition to the government to supplement the electoral law: “There is no need to change the law for this. Let only the population on the outskirts be divided into curia; and from the Russians, Poles and Jews there will be representatives in proportion to their number. Of course, from every city or province there should be a Russian, even if the Russians

are less than 250 thousand people “[23, p. 548]. They rejected the idea of blocs in elections with the Poles and the Jews. “The assumption of the possibility of an agreement between the Russian groups and the national – Polish, Jewish and other parties is not only practically impossible, but in principle, the very idea of an agreement with anti-state and openly separatist parties is unacceptable, and such an act must be equated with treason” – the Octobrists and their allies motivated their decision [36, p. 648]. “If the Council of Ministers refuses to review the electoral law, they will threaten with mass protest actions. If the riots that may arise are suppressed by force, the Russian population will lose any belief in the significance of the Russian statehood in the province”, – the delegates believed [36, p. 648]. At the same time, in their opinion: “... the presence in the State Duma and the State Council, even a few local Russian representatives, would be of great importance ... Obviously, only aboriginal Russian population is a true builder of its state and the sole bearer of the state idea” [36, p. 648].

To transfer the petition they pointed the deputation. The chairman of the Council of Ministers P.A. Stolypin was attentive to the petition and promised in the future to obtain from Nicholas II additional representation from the western outskirts [22, p. 658].

The second resolution of the October Congress was the decision to establish the Russian Suburban Union with an independent Central Committee in Vilna, regional and vestry departments [36, p. 648]. The provisional Central Committee of the Russian Suburban Union included G.K. Schmidt, I.D. Chigirev, N.Yu. Matzon, and also V.P. Kurchinsky and Kovensk, engineer A.F. Bezpalchev [25, p. 174]. In January 1907, the Vilna governor approved the charter of the Russian Suburban Union. Publisher of the influential weekly edition “Outskirts of Russia” P.A. Kulakovskiy described new organization as follows: “This” Suburban Union “is supported mainly by people who are on the principles proclaimed by the Manifest on October 17, 1905, that is why even some of the emerging political Russian parties called themselves “parties on the bases of October 17”, in the difference from the “Union on October 17”, which seemed to them a non-national and uncomprehending the tasks and position of the Russian people on the western outskirts “[28, p. 86]. Thus, Kulakovskiy emphasized fundamentally different approaches to the solution of the national issue on the western outskirts between the Central Committee of the “Union of October 17” and the local Octobrists with their allies.

The Russian Suburban Union set a goal to become “the bulwark of the Russian statehood and the Russian people on the outskirts” [37]. Its program provided “the awakening and strengthening of the national self-consciousness in the Belarussian population”, the preservation of the native language and the transfer of Catholic worship to it [26, p. 6]. However, they regarded the Byelorussian language a dialect of the Russian language, and the Belarussians an integral part of the Russian people. In order to protect the Russian people (Belarussians) from “aliens” in the charter of the Russian Suburban Union, the following activities were envisaged: 1) unification of the “Russian”

population of the province on national principle and the protection of their interests; 2) petitions on issues arising from the local “Russian” population before the government, the State Duma, the State Council and the monarch; 3) familiarizing of Russia with the real situation on the outskirts and their “Russian” population [35].

To the union were accepted persons of both sexes who shared its goals, except infancy, people subjected to restriction of the rights in the court (*mainly the participants in anti-government actions – D.L.*) and students. The charter of the Russian Suburban Union was designed for the maximum coverage of the Orthodox population of the region. The department could be opened at each arrival. To enlist in the ranks of the organization “those who do not have the opportunity to be full members” (*i.e., military, police, senior officials – D.L.*), could be joined as member-competitors. They could not pay membership fees. The Russian Suburban Union was open to all suburban organizations that shared its purpose and did not have items in its program documents that contradicted it [35].

The same month, G.K. Schmidt, D.V. Skrynchenko and I.D. Chigiryov organized Minsk department of the Russian Suburban Union [13]. Its members conducted active agitation among the population of Belarus arranging evenings, performances, and lectures. During the work of the Second State Duma, the opening of Vilna department of the Russian Suburban Union was held on March 25, 1907. N.Yu. Matson was elected a chairman. On the same day, telegrams were sent to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers P.A. Stolypin, chairman of the Second State Duma F.A. Golovin and member of the State Duma I.P. Sozonovich with a protest against the petition of the Polish deputies to introduce the autonomy of the Kingdom of Poland. “This autonomy is necessary to them only as the first step towards realization of their cherished dream of restoring an independent Polish state, but not only within the ethnographic Poland really populated by the Poles, but which existed before its first partition, that is, with the inclusion of Lithuania and Western Russia”, – considered the members of the Russian Suburban Union [26, p. 1]. The meeting protested against the intention of the Poles to annex the Belarusian-Lithuanian and Ukrainian provinces to Poland [24]. The number of Vilna department of the Russian Suburban Union reached 500 people [24, p. 207].

In addition to Minsk and Vilna, the departments of the Russian Suburban Union were also established in other provincial centers, including the countryside: Snov and Ishkolid parish of Novogrudok county, Ruchaevsko-Voznesensky parish of Rechitsa county, and other settlements [38, p. 264]. The printed body of the Russian Suburban Union was the newspaper “Vilensky Vestnik”, with which “White Russia” was united [4].

Within the Russian Suburban Union, the Octobrists and the Rightist could hold their candidates to the Second State Duma. Out of 36 delegates from the Vilna, Vitebsk, Grodno, Minsk and Mogilev provinces, 16 belonged to the “Union of October 17” and the rightist organizations [6, p. 176 – 179].

Ultimately, the campaign started by the Octobrists and their supporters to protect the interests of the “Russian” population of the North-Western Region brought them political dividends. After the dismissal of the Second State Duma on June 3, 1907, Nicholas II changed the election rules. On the orders of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs, the congresses of landowners in the Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev provinces and 7 districts of the Vitebsk province were divided into 2 departments according to nationality: all non-Poles (the Russians, the Orthodox Belarusians, the Germans, the Tatars and others) were assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> department; the Poles, to whom the Byelorussian Catholics were also counted were assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> department. In the province of Vilna, a special “Russian” curia was created.

After Nicholas II changed the electoral law to the State Duma on June 3, 1907, the Vitebsk Union of Orthodox Parishes for the Alliance of Russian Voters re-initiated a petition to the government to change the conditions for elections to the State Council [17, p. 99]. Then Minsk department of the Russian Suburban Union also demanded the division into national curiae (Russian, Polish and Jewish) in the elections of city self-government bodies [20, p. 15, 16]. One of the leaders of the Russian Suburban Union, a member of the State Council, D.I. Pikhno wrote a note addressed to Nicholas II on organizing the election of members to the State Council on the basis of proportional representation from the Russian (Orthodox) and Polish landowners in the western provinces. A note was signed by 32 members of the State Council [21, p. 2].

In March 1909 in St. Petersburg, a meeting on this issue was held in the club of moderately right-wing public figures (later the All-Russian National Club – D.L.) initiated by Pikhno and the county governor of the nobility Y.N. Ofrosimov. The latter compiled a special note in which, on the basis of digital data, he tried to prove the inconsistency of the electoral law to the State Council, since in the west of the Empire the Polish upper chamber was predominantly represented by the Polish landowners [27]. The meeting decided to establish in St. Petersburg the Union of Russian public figures of the western provinces to discuss measures on changing the electoral law to the State Council [17, p. 96].

In April of the same year, a corresponding draft law was submitted to the State Duma. At the same time, the All-Russian National Club hosted a meeting of the representatives of the Belarusian-Lithuanian provinces with right-wing and conservative deputies of the lower chamber. The meeting was presided over by Vilnius Orthodox Archbishop Nikandr. It was decided to draft a petition requiring discussing the issue on changing the elections to the State Council in legislative institutions in the current session. They indicated the need to introduce into the upper chamber at least 1 Russian representative from each western province. It was also decided to elect from 3 to 4 authorized representatives from the Russian population in each province, ready to come to St. Petersburg for further petitions on this issue [17, p. 100].

On April 26, 1909 authorized representatives from the western provinces arrived in the capital. The delegation consisted on half of the clergy: Vilna



Archbishop Nikandr, Grodno Bishop Michael, Grodno Dom Archpriest D. Korchinsky, Minsk Diocesan observer D. Pavsky, 3 priests from Kovno and Vilna dioceses. Secular delegates from the Vitebsk province were Russian nationalists Ya.N. Ofrosimov, Baron A.F. Rosen, Octobrists A.E. Zhukovsky and V.K. Stukalich. From the Minsk province the delegation consisted of two Lieutenant-Generals N.A. Kovanko and S.N. Mezentsev, and P.M. Yakimovich. The delegates had the authority to express to Nicholas II gratitude for the June 3, 1907 amendment of the electoral law to the State Duma and transfer a petition on changing the procedure for elections to the State Council. In St. Petersburg, they were joined by the monarchical deputies of the Third State Duma from Belarus and Lithuania. At the meetings of the All-Russian National Club, the texts of the petition to Nicholas II and the speeches of Archbishop Nikandr were drafted. A well-known conservative publicist M.O. Menshikov participated in their editing [17, p. 114]. In the same place, a final list of delegates was drawn up, which included, in addition to the provincial commissioners, also deputies of the State Duma.

On May 1, 1909, permission for an audience was received and the next day, after a prayer service at Kazan Cathedral, the delegation left for Tsarskoe Selo. The deputy of the Third State Duma, the priest F.I. Nikonovich described the reception in his diary. The audience took place in the library room, located next to the office of Nicholas II in the Alexander Palace. The delegates stood in a square along the walls according with the provinces. 37 people were present. At 2.30 p.m. the emperor came out to them. Archbishop Nikandr addressed to him with a speech, and then presented a special petition on behalf of deputation. After going the round of the delegates and the members of the State Duma, Nicholas II received the blessing from the bishops, exchanging with each of them in several words, and a more lengthy conversation took place with Nikandr. In conclusion, the tsar thanked the delegation for expressing loyal sentiments and promised that “the just desire of the Russian representation in the State Council will be fully satisfied” [17, p. 118].

At 4 p.m. the deputation returned to St. Petersburg and went to P.A. Stolypin. Archbishop Nikandr briefly reported to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers the results of his audience with Nicholas II. Then an exchange of opinions took place regarding “the law on elections to the State Council for the Russian population unsatisfactory” [17, p. 119].

The Polish landowners tried to take countermeasures: the representative of the Minsk province in the State Council, E. Voinilovich, personally knew P.A. Stolypin, prepared an address to Nicholas II with a request to preserve the existing system of elections. The address was signed by 8 members of the upper chamber from the western provinces and through Baron V.B. Frederiks was transferred to the emperor [2, p. 210].

As a result of the measures taken, in June 1909 a law was issued on the election of the members of the State Council from the western provinces for a period of one year. It was assumed that, the functions of selecting members of

the upper chamber would go to elective zemstvo, the introduction of which was expected in the near future.

Realizing the possible loss of representation in the State Council, the leaders of the “Polish” party decided to go for a trick: to transfer voluntarily one or two seats in the upper chamber to the Russian landlords from the western provinces. On August 29, 1909, a meeting of the Polish landowners was held in Vilna, initiated by the members of the Group of Lithuania and Russia in the State Council. Since it was unrealistic to transfer the “mandate” to the Russian who lived in the Vilna or Grodno province, because of the insignificant number of the landowners of the Orthodox faith, it was decided to give way to the Vitebsk, Minsk, or Mogilev provinces. The members of the State Council from the Vitebsk province S.I. Lopatsinsky and the Mogilev province V.P. Voynich-Syanozhensky refused to give up their seats, so the choice of the assembled fell to the Minsk province, where the elections were to be held on September 10 of the same year. But national egoism also prevailed here: in spite of the electing of two Russians (K.A. Butenev-Khreptovich from Shchors and Colonel M.M. Kiriakov from Sluchina) Polish agrarians elected prince I.E. Drutsky-Lyubetsky to the State Council [2, p. 207–209].

Since the next time the elections were to be held not at the congress of landowners, but at zemstvo meetings, in 1909 – 1911, in the center of public attention was the issue on elective zemstvo in the western provinces of the Russian Empire. As a result, the unification of the Russian monarchists took place on the platform for the creation of a separate national curia in the drafting bodies of local self-government.

Back in May 1908, the State Duma adopted the transition formula proposed by the fractions of the Russian Nationalists and the Octobrists, in which they expressed the wish for the introduction of an elected zemstvo in 9 western provinces subjected to the protection of the interests of the “Russian” population in the region. The government by P.A. Stolypin prepared a corresponding bill, but the creation of full zemstvo was envisaged only in 6 western provinces: Vitebsk, Mogilev, Minsk, Kiev, Podolsk and Volyn. The deputies passed the bill to the Duma commission on local self-government, electing as a reporter one of the leaders of the Russian nationalists D.N. Chikhachev. The latter proposed: 1) to introduce the number of zemstvos according to nationalities (to record the number of the Polish and the Russian representatives); 2) to arrange a special national curia for their election; 3) to consolidate the Russian majority in the composition of boards and among civilian employees, and determine a number of posts that could be dealt with solely by the Russians; 4) to enlist the clergy in the Western zemstvos in an amount that would increase in comparison with the Central Russian provinces; 5) not to extend the new bill to the Vilna, Grodno and Kovno provinces, where the Russian population does not constitute the majority [15, p. 97, 98].

The local government committee that considered this project made significant changes to it, including, in particular, the possible combination of national curiae in one body for the election of district members, as well as the

assumption of the existence of a non-Russian majority in the government and among civilian employees. The nationalists and the rightists were against the changes to the bill.

At a joint meeting on May 2, 1909, the council of the Russian Suburban Union and the delegates of the 9 western provinces, V.K. Stukalich and Ya.N. Ofrosimov proposed the idea of convening a congress of the representatives of all monarchical organizations of the western provinces. On May 5 at a regular meeting it was decided to hold a congress in Kiev in the autumn of the same year [31]. The organization of the event was entrusted to the Kiev Club of Russian Nationalists, headed by A.I. Savenko and the Vitebsk Russian election committee, headed by V.K. Stukalich. A little later, the monarchists from Vilno (N.E. Matzon) and Kamenets-Podolsk (I.E. Rakovich) joined the proposal [10; 11]. In Belarus, a great preparatory work was done by V.K. Stukalich. In a letter to the latter A.I. Savenko, praising his work, wrote: "... if Western Russia began Russian national movement and revival, then in the history of this movement your name will be pronounced with gratitude" [34, p. 59].

The congress of the "West-Russian people" gathered in Kiev on October 4–6, 1909. It was attended by the representatives of the moderate monarchical organizations, deputies of the Third State Duma, the Russian landlords. Russian nationalist I.P. Sozonovich was elected a chairman in the Third State Duma. His deputy was N.Yu. Matson [7, p. 2]. The program of the congress provided a discussion on the introduction of an elected zemstvo in 9 western provinces, the role of the Orthodox clergy in it, representation from the "Russian population of Western Russia" in the State Council, the ratification of the Union of Russian Nationalists and others [19, p. 1]. The Belarusian newspaper "Nasha Niva" quite accurately described the goals of the audience: "As can be seen from the report of the congress, all the thoughts were about not to introduce the Poles into zemstvo but also let the Russian keep the husbandry" [16, p. 603]. The Byelorussian question was also raised, according to which two points of view were determined. The first was represented by N.Yu. Matson, who proposed that the Belarusian peasants in zemstvos elections would be divided into two parts on the basis of religion: the Orthodox should be written down to the Russian curia, and the Catholics to a special Belarusian Catholic curia. He explained his point of view by the fact that although the "Belarusian Catholics cannot be called the Poles, there is a danger that they will join the Poles in zemstvo" [8, p. 1]. This was opposed by P.A. Kulakovsky. He said that it was impossible to separate the Orthodox Belarusians from the Belarusian Catholics, since they speak the same language and adhere to certain "customs and views". The entry of the Belarusian Catholics into the Polish curia, in his opinion, meant the admission of their polonization. In addition, division on religious grounds could lead to unrest in the peasant environment [8, p. 2; 16, p. 604].

P.A. Kulakovsky's view was supported by G.K. Schmidt. On the contrary, N.Yu. Matzon's opinion was supported S.A. Kovalyuk, a chairman of the Vilna society "Peasant". He argued to the congress that by giving the Poles to the

Belarusian Catholics, it would be possible to achieve complete control over the zemstvo by Russian monarchists. At the same time, if we give the right to the Catholics to choose the members together with the Orthodox, the election results may prove unfavorable for the adherents of the “one and indivisible” Russia, since the Catholics can become members from the Russian curia. As a result, the majority of the delegates of Kiev congress took the idea of Matson and Kovalyuk, having decided to divide the Belarusians in elections to zemstvo on religious grounds. Thus, the Russian monarchists agreed to write about 2 million Belarusians to the Poles. In addition, the congress decided to send a telegram to P.A. Stolypin with a request not to extend the elective zemstvo to the Vilna and Kovno provinces [9, p. 2; 16, p. 604].

On April 27, 1910 in the Slavic Charitable Society in St. Petersburg, a meeting of the Russian Suburban Union was held. It involved 20 large Russian landowners and members of the State Duma – the priests F.I. Nikonovich and A.D. Yurashkevich. A draft law on the introduction of an elected zemstvo in the western provinces of the Russian Empire was discussed at the meeting. Nikonovich wrote in his diary: “Not only the bill, with the amendments and additions that have been made in Duma commission, but even the government bill on the administration of zemstvo ... is recognized by the majority of the assembly as unacceptable” [17, p. 258, 259].

The most counteraction was met by the bill from the representatives of the Grodno, Minsk and Mogilev provinces, since, according to them, it gave the “Russian” population to the power of the Poles. They justified their point of view by the fact that the numerical superiority of the Russian land qualification over the Polish property in the government bill was actually apparent. The meeting claimed that many Russian landowners do not live in their provinces, and therefore they do not accept any participation in public affairs, as the elections to the State Duma and the State Council have shown. In addition, among the Russian landlords there were many who “sold their names to the Jews and the Poles who are thus actual landowners”. Also, the representatives of the three above-mentioned provinces explained, some landowners “who are considered the Russian, in reality are the enemies of all Russian”. Therefore, the members of the Russian Suburban Union came to conclusion: “It is better to stay absolutely without zemstvos than to surrender ourselves to servitude of the Poles” [17, p. 259].

More moderate positions were held by the Russian nationalists, who gathered a few days later for an emergency meeting at the All-Russian National Club. The meeting was attended by about 70 people, representing both the capital and the western provinces. A speech was delivered by D.V. Rodzevich. As a result, the meeting passed a resolution on the desirability of introducing full zemstvos in the western provinces on the basis of a government bill, discarding all the amendments proposed by the left deputies in Duma commission on local self-government [17, p. 261].

On May 7, 1910 the general meeting of the State Duma started the discussion of this bill. The essence of the government project (the curative system of

elections by nationalities and the replacement of all executive zemstvo posts by persons of Russian origin) was presented by P.A. Stolypin. F.I. Nikonovich said: “The whole of the right-wing Duma and the majority of the Octobrists are very pleased with the speech of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, calling it brilliant and resolute” [17, p. 266]. A.D. Yurashkevich, who was considered an expert on the Polish question and the relationship of the Poles to the Russians, criticized the leftists for not understanding the needs of the Belarusian-Lithuanian provinces. Deputy from Vitebsk, Octobrist A.P. Sapunov declared: “... the Polish culture, which is so much talked about in the Duma, is not at all a culture for the people, and that since the time the Belarusian people fell under the rule of Poland, they did not join the Polish culture, but it grew wild and literacy diminished to improbability. For there almost were no schools “ [32, p. 33–41]. Representative of the Mogilev province, Russian nationalist N.N. Ladimirsky told the deputies of the Duma: “If you accept the bill with the changes proposed by local government commission, then you from zemstvo ... will make a purely Polish organization, a powerful tool for polonization of this region” [15, p. 109]. Supporters of P.A. Stolypin failed to uphold all his assumptions, but “the bill as it came out of the State Duma was a powerful means for the revival of the Russian people in the Western region” [15, p. 115].

However, since the introduction of zemstvos was delayed, in 1910 the election of the members of the State Council from congresses of landowners took place according to the old rules. In the upper chamber for three years the western provinces were represented mainly by the Polish landlords. Y.N. Ofrosimov was the only member from the Vitebsk province.

In March 1911 elected zemstvo institutions, in accordance with the draft by P.A. Stolypin, were introduced in the Vitebsk, Minsk, Mogilev, Kiev, Podolsk and Volyn provinces. But only in 1913, after the expiration of the election of members of the State Council from congresses of landowners, zemstvo assemblies could elect their representatives to the upper chamber. They were – from the Vitebsk province Ya.N. Ofrosimov, from Minsk province – the right-wing activist, retired colonel G.A. Loshkarev, from Mogilev province – the leader of local Octobrists N.N. Drutskoy-Sokolinsky, from the province of Kiev – the provincial leader of the nobility, the Russian nationalist F.N. Bezak, from Podolsk province – I.E. Rakovich, from Volyn province – the right-wing activist M.E. Nirod. Polish landowners remained the representatives in the State Council from the Vilna and Grodno provinces [30].

Thus, the activities of the local political organizations of the Octobrist direction and to the right in the west of the Russian Empire were aimed at protecting the unity of the Empire, ensuring broad rights for the Orthodox population in the sphere of local government, combating so-called “Polish influence”, correcting the conditions for elections to legislative bodies, national curia, while ensuring preferential rights for the “Russian” population in the elections of the bodies of zemstvos self-government. As a result of a long struggle, the monarchists managed to achieve a change in the electoral law in the western provinces, to

decide in their favor an issue on “Russian” representation in the State Duma and the State Council.

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