

BELARUSIANS IN THE POLISH PARLIAMENT (1922–1939)

MIROŚLAW SZUMIŁO

Abstract: This article provides a collective portrait of the 39 Belarusians who were members of the Parliament of the Second Polish Republic in 1922–1939. The data for the analysis were collected from biographical dictionaries and Polish archival documents. The Belarusian deputies and senators can be divided into three political orientations: 1) moderate opposition (national); 2) radical opposition (philo-Soviet and crypto-communist); 3) pro-government (“conciliatory”).

Keywords: Belarusian Club, Polish Parliament, Political Orientation, Collective Portrait.

БЕЛАРУСЫ Ў ПОЛЬСКІМ ПАРЛАМЕНЦЕ (1922–1939)

Анотацыя: Тэмай артыкулу з’яўляецца зборны партрэт 39 беларусаў, якія засядалі ў парламенце Другой Польскай рэспублікі ў 1922–1939 гадах. Дадзеныя для аналізу ўзяты з біяграфічных слоўнікаў і польскіх архіўных дакументаў. Беларускіх паслоў і сенатараў можна падзяліць на тры палітычныя арыентацыі: 1) памяркоўная пазіцыя (нацыянальная); 2) радыкальная апазіцыя (прасавецкая і крыптакамуністычная); 3) прапольская (“згодніцкая”).

Ключавыя словы: Беларускі Клуб, польскі парламент, палітычная арыентацыя, зборны партрэт.

The activity of the Belarusians in parliamentary chambers of the Second Polish Republic (the *Sejm* and Senate) has been repeatedly raised in historical literature, though has not yet reached full development. The most comprehensive approach to the problem is presented in the article by Helen Glogowska (Głogowska, 1994). All previous publications had completely omitted profiles and activities of the 13 Belarusians who were members of the Polish parliamentary groupings. I'm going to include them here. My goal is to provide two collective portraits: the 26 deputies and senators of Belarusian clubs and the 13 Belarusian parliamentarians from Polish clubs.

Biographical data for analysis were primarily collected from biographies published in the biographical dictionary of deputies and senators (*Posłowie i senatorowie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, t. I-IV), the Belarusian encyclopedia, and also previously unknown Polish archival documents. A valuable complement to the data is presented in the memoirs of the 3 deputies: Vasil Rahula (Rahula, 1993), Aliaksandr Stahanovich (Stahanovich, 2011) i Hienadz Shymanovski (Szymanowski, 1998).

In the first parliamentary election involving Belarusian territories, in 1922, 11 Belarusian deputies and 3 senators were elected from the Bloc of National Minorities' electoral list. Despite different political views, they formed one common Belarusian Club, which in time had been divided. At this time the parliamentary club of the Polish People's Party «Wyzwolenie» had 5 Belarusian members: Stanislav Ballin, Adolf Bon, Feliks Halavach, Anton Shapiel, Vladimir Shakun (Rahula, 1993: 35).

In the parliamentary election of 1928, candidates from Belarusian electoral lists won 10 Deputy seats and 2 Senate seats. This time they at once split into two clubs: moderate Belarusian Club (4 deputies and 2 senators) and radical left-wing Belarusian Peasants' and Workers' Parliamentary Club «Zmahannie» (5 deputies). Deputy Jan Stankievich remained independent (Zaporowski, 1999/2000). Furthermore, four Belarusians – Deputies: Jazep Makrecki and Aliaksandr Michalchuk and Senators: Isidar Pryka and Mihal Soroka – sat in Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR) Club which supported the Pilsudski government (*Posłowie i senatorowie II kadencji 1928-1930*).

The accelerated election of 1930 was held in different circumstances. Repressions and abuses of the authorities caused that Belarusians did not obtain any parliamentary seats from their independent electoral lists. Only one of them was elected with the Ukrainian electoral list – Fabian Jaremich – and became a member of the Ukrainian Club, whereas the BBWR Club had 3 Belarusian members in the Parliament: Deputies Hienadz Shymanovski and Vasil Kuc and Senator Vasil Siadun. In autumn 1931 Paviel Kurus joined them. In the two subsequent elections of 1935 and 1938, the Parliament was reduced by half and became completely dependent on the government.

Only one Belarusian remained in the Parliament – Deputy Shymanovski, mentioned above.

The 26 deputies and senators of Belarusian clubs can be divided into two political orientations (camps):

I. moderate opposition (national), namely: 1) activists of the Belarusian Christian Democracy (3 persons), 2) members of the Belarusian Union of Peasants (Bielaruski Sialanski Sajuz) – 3 persons, 3) others (7 persons). A total of 13 activists.

II. radical opposition (philo-Soviet and largely crypto-communist), in 1922 was formed by former revolutionists, socialists, and social democrats – members of the Belarusian Club, who later in 1925 set up the “Hramada” club. In 1928 the “Zmahannie” club was established. There were a total of 13 people in this orientation. Most of them secretly belonged to the Communist Party of West Belarus and collaborated with it.

Belarusian parliamentarians at various stages of their lives were discovering their Belarusianness. They grew up under the influence of many cultures. Vasil Rahula, Aliaksiej Nazarevski and Viachaslav Bahdanovich described themselves as Belarusians of the Russian culture (Rahula, 1993: 22-24). They were seen in the similar way by the Polish. Branislav Tarashkievich in his youth belonged to the Polish youth organization «Wyzwolenie», later became associated with the Belarusian movement. By many he was regarded as a polonophile.

All of them were born and raised in the countryside in the western part of Belarus, belonging to Poland. Only 4 of them came from small towns (Dziszna, Vileyka, Stouptsy). In total, 13 of them came from the Vilna Voivodeship, 7 from the Navahradak Voivodeship, 4 from the Hrodna land, 2 from Polesia.

We do not have full information about their social background. The majority evidently came from peasant families. Besides them there were also sons of: an organist, a craftsman, a military feldsher, an Orthodox priest.

Taking into account the realities of that time, it should be noted that the Belarusian parliamentarians were fairly well educated: 9 had completed higher education (35 %) – including 2 graduates of Polytechnic, 2 of Theological Academy, 3 of the universities of St. Petersburg and Kharkov, 2 of Charles University in Prague. Among the rest, 2 persons completed gymnasiums, 5 – teacher seminars or pedagogical courses, 6 – technical schools, 4 – a few years of primary school.

As an occupation 10 of them declared a farmer, 8 persons were a teacher. In the discussed group there were also a theological seminary professor, a Catholic priest, 2 journalists, 2 cooperative members, a surveyor, and an electro technician.

Farmers were often mayors (*wójt*s), and others were members of county sejmiks. Nazarevski served in the city council of Baranavichy, Bahdanovich

in the council of the city of Vilnius. Virtually, all deputies and senators were activists of social, cultural and cooperative organizations, such as the Belarusian School Society.

5 Belarusians from the Polish People's Party "Wyzwolenie" can be also included into radical camp. In November 1924, along with 3 Polish deputies they set up a separate Polish Parliamentary Club of the Independent Peasants' Party (NPCh), closely cooperating with the Communists (Cimek, 2011: 49). 8 deputies and senators of the BBWR formed third orientation – pro-government («conciliatory»).

Shymanovski wrote in his memoir: «I felt Belarusian of Polish culture», and most of the 13 Belarusians belonging to the Polish parliamentary clubs could define themselves in this way. Only one of them, Isidar Pryka, claimed to be "Poleszuk" (Posłowie i senatorowie II kadencji 1928-1930; Szymanowski, 1998: 120).

Most of them (8 persons) came from the countryside in the Navahradak Voivodeship, two (Mihalchuk and Pryka) from Polesia, one (Shapiel) from the Vilna Voivodeship, one (Bon) from the Lublin Voivodeship. Merely one (Shymanovski) was born in the area of Slutsk, which was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

Only two had completed higher education – economic studies (Shymanovski) and agricultural studies (Halavach), 2 had completed secondary education, 2 – teacher seminars or pedagogical courses, 2 – technical schools, 5 – primary school. Bon and Shapiel were teachers, Kurus – a railwayman, all others – farmers.

Later fates of the Belarusian parliamentarians symbolize the tragic fate of the whole Belarusian political elite in the Stalin era. In 1932, seven Belarusian deputies in an exchange of political prisoners were transferred from Poland to the Soviet Union. Seven others went there voluntarily. Only one of the all 14 (Paviel Krynchyk) survived the Stalin's purges of the 30's. Ten deputies – nationalists and polonophiles – were arrested by NKVD in 1939-41. Two (Jaremich and priest Stankievich) fell into the hands of the Soviets in 1944-45. Paviel Karuza presents an interesting case due to the fact that he was hijacked by Soviets in 1934 in the Free City of Danzig. To sum up, as many as 29 out of 39 Belarusian deputies fell victims to Soviet repression. Only eight survived.

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