

THE MEMORY OF MULTICULTURAL TRADITION OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA IN THE THOUGHT OF VILNIUS KRAJOWCY

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Abstract: The formation of national states and spread of nationalism at the beginning of the first half of the 20th century receded memory about common Polish-Lithuanian history. The dispute on the shape of Lithuania bore the idea of reconstruction of multicultural Lithuanian state. The article describes memory of multicultural tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the will to improve Polish-Lithuanian relations and mutual understanding, which the Krajowcy activists promoted.

Keywords: Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Krajowcy, Lithuanian-Polish Relations, Multicultural Tradition, Vilnius.

ПАМЯЦЬ ПРА ШМАТКУЛЬТУРНУЮ ТРАДЫЦЫЮ ВКЛ У ДУМЦЫ ВІЛЕНСКІХ КРАЁЎЦАЎ

Анотацыя: Фармаванне нацыянальных дзяржаваў і распаўсюд нацыяналізму напачатку першай паловы ХХ стагоддзя знішчалі памяць пра супольную польска-літоўскую гісторыю. Дыскусіі пра новы кшталт Літвы спарадзілі ідэю рэканструкцыі шматкультурнай літоўскай дзяржавы. Артыкул апісвае памяць пра шматкультурную традыцыю ВКЛ і жаданне палепшыць польска-літоўскія стасункі і ўзаемаразуменне паміж народамі, якія падтрымлівалі носьбіты гэтай ідэі.

Ключавыя словы: Вялікае Княства Літоўскае, краёўцы, літоўска-польскія стасункі, шматкультурная традыцыя, Вільня.

Krajowcy idea was a political proposal created by Polish speaking nobility from Lithuania and Belarus. The idea was based on the heritage of multicultural state – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. *Krajowcy idea* was an attempt to defend this memory from threats like nationalism and new national movements, which took place at the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century. During the formation of modern nations of Poland and Lithuania the unique type of national identity focused on the interest of common homeland – the territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania continued to develop (Wielhorski, 1953: 18-19).

The roots of *Krajowcy idea* can be found in the multicultural tradition which was formed after Krewa Union and then upheld in the act of Lublin Union. *Krajowcy* were representing identity called “obywatelstwo krajowe” – “homeland citizenship”. They called themselves Lithuanians in historical meaning. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania for them was a homeland called “Kraj”. *Krajowcy* marked the role and heritage of the city of Vilnius – the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. At the beginning of the 20th century Vilnius was a multicultural city located between East and West. This city had a very specific importance for Poles, Lithuanian, Jews, Belarusians and Russians. At the same time Vilnius became “a bone of contention” in Polish-Lithuanian relations. *Krajowcy* identified themselves with the heritage of this “vanished kingdom” as Norman Davies says. They identified this heritage not only with territory, but also with community. Historical consciousness of the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is not the consciousness of one nation, but rather a multinational one. This coexistence of many nations was based on the principle of co-operation and tolerance.

When nationalism started to develop, the *Krajowcy idea* and the concept of multicultural society became a response to this process. *Krajowcy* supported the process of building nations, which descended from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Lithuanians or Belarusians. They put emphasis on their own ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, which stood between political and ethnical nation.

The formation of national states and spread of nationalism at the beginning of the first half of the 20th century receded memory about common Polish-Lithuanian history. *Krajowcy* spread the idea of unity without division by language or religion. The Polish federalist conceptions discouraged Lithuanians to cooperate with Poles. Another problem was Vilnia matter. Both nations claimed their right for the old capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Polish solution of Vilnia matter affected further Polish-Lithuanian relations in the interwar period and during World War II. The Conference in Yalta and Potsdam definitely blurred any chance for reconstruction of former community.

Mykolas Römeris was a precursor of the democratic part of *Krajowcy idea*. He used the term of “national citizenship”. Konstancja Skirmuntt, who

represented the conservative party, was the author of the political definition of the idea. In her view, *Krajowcy idea* is a harmony of three eternal elements of the GDL: Lithuanian, Polish and Rusyn. She emphasized that they should cooperate for the benefit of community, common good, and for their own cultural development (Futurus, 1913: 81).

Both democratic and conservative groups understood the essence of development of revitalised Lithuanian society, and were looking for a place for themselves within it.

Krajowcy idea partially lost its influence after World War I. The proclamation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Uniwersał Konfederacji Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego) in 1915 was the last project of restoration of the GDL as an independent country. *Krajowcy* approved the national idea of Lithuanians, but at the same time they highlighted their ethnical and cultural uniqueness, balancing between political and ethnical nation in the modern nationalist meaning of this term. Most of the nationalist-oriented Polish and Lithuanian activists could not understand the reason for national movement and civil awareness of the people living in the area of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Because of lack of understanding and acceptance, the principle *gente lithuanus nationae polonus* lost its importance in the 20th century and was perceived as anachronism.

The moment of establishment of independent Poland and Lithuania ended the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. From 1918 to 1922, *Krajowcy* equated the concepts of national point of view and federal concept of the Eastern politics. However, the federal concept was not based on the principles of equity and freedom of choice. The incorporation of Vilnius region into Poland in 1922 showed even greater divisions in already divided group of *Krajowcy*. They split into small groups formed on the basis of particular beliefs, social groups, and values.

In 1921, Römeris wrote about this problem in his diary. He explained that people understood the concept of their *Krajowcy idea* quite differently. What they had in common was the common view on the incorporation of the part of Lithuania into Poland and struggle for politically independent Lithuania, which should not become a Lithuanian nation-state and should preserve the contact with Poland (Sawicki, 1998: 108).

In the interwar period, the ideas of the tradition of former GDL could be found in the views of Ludwik Abramowicz, Konstancja Skirmuntt, Mykolas Römeris, Józef Albin Herbaczewski, Józef Mackiewicz, and others. They suggested to improve relations between Poles and Lithuanians, to combat nationalism, to establish autonomy for the Vilnius region. The main figure among them was Ludwik Abramowicz and his "Przegląd Wileński" newspaper. After his death in 1939, his views were continued by Józef Mackiewicz. In his

view, *Krajowcy idea* was necessary in the multicultural state. According to him, the drama of the division of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Russia, Prussia and Austria was triggered by the lack of successor. For Mackiewicz, *Krajowcy idea* was the result of political calculations. It was the idea to create a country that would become the guardian of the nations living between Germany and Russia (Mackiewicz, 2002: 8-9, 160).

During the communist time *Krajowcy idea* disappeared, as communism closed the nations within their state borders and promoted the *homo sovieticus* identity.

To sum up, it is worth to notice that *Krajowcy* realized the negative effects of reinforcing nationalism and chauvinism and warned against closing societies in the national borders. *Krajowcy* were looking for a way out, a *modus vivendi* based on the old community and seeking a compromise.

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