

**THE
TSAR,
THE EMPIRE,
AND
THE NATION**

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Alexei Miller, Alfred Rieber, Marsha Siefert



**THE
TSAR,
THE EMPIRE,
AND
THE NATION**

Dilemmas *of* Nationalization
in Russia's Western Borderlands,
1905–1915

Edited by

DARIUS STALIŪNAS *and* YOKO AOSHIMA



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Right-Wing Russian Organizations in the City of Vil'na and the Northwestern Provinces, 1905–1915

Vytautas Petronis

Our age is a time of self-organization. The economic and socio-political relations of our times force people to organize. It is hard, even impossible, for a single individual to successfully struggle in the contemporary relations of societal life. Not just to struggle, but also to learn and go forward is only possible with the help of an organization. Even in his own work, his craft, a man can perform more successfully and usefully for society by joining some group in his profession, his comrades in craft.

—Excerpt from “Vilnius, 27 lapkričio,” *Vilniaus žinios* 204 (813) (1907).

Introduction

The revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire brought significant changes not only to the governance of the state, but more importantly, it was instrumental in activating deep structural and ideological transformations in society. One was the partial emancipation and legalization of national movements and nationalisms. As a consequence, some ethnic groups, and even nations, which until then did not have pronounced popular nationalisms, were forced to create them as a response to the growth and threat of other nationalisms. Paradoxically, the Russians, the dominant nation in the empire, whose nationalism rose during the years of the revolution, were latecomers. Until 1905, Russian state-nationalism was largely managed and controlled by the imperial authorities. The surge of popular nationalism and monarchism during the revolution, both of which supported

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the imperial regime in one way or another, had to define relations between themselves and the state authorities.

Research into Russian monarchism and nationalism has grown during the last twenty-five years. A number of studies concerning different aspects of imperial, right-wing political parties and organizations, as well as collections of documents, have been published by Russian historians.¹ When looking at research into the western provinces, the largest body of work has been done on the southwest region—the Ukrainian-inhabited lands—where radical right-wing Russian groups and nationalists were the strongest.² Investigations into the northwestern provinces have predominantly been carried out by Belorussian researchers.³ However, these works concentrate mostly on the five provinces of Mogilev, Vitebsk, Minsk, Grodna, and Vil'na.⁴ Almost no research has been done on the sixth province, Kovna, which was inhabited predominantly by Lithuanians, and where the Russian monarchist and nationalist movement was weakest. Therefore, to complement this picture, in this chapter I have concentrated primarily on Russian right-wing organizations in the center of the northwestern provinces,

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- 1 See, for example, D. Pavlov, ed., *Partiia 'Soiuz 17-go oktiabria': Protokoly s'ezdov, konferentsii, zasedanii TsK 1905–1915*, 2 volumes (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996, 2000); Iurii Kir'ianov, ed., *Pravye partii: 1905–1917; Dokumenty i materialy*, 2 volumes (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998); Daniil Kotsiubinskii, *Russkii natsionalizm v nachale XX veka. Rozhdenie i gibel' ideologii Vserossiiskogo natsional'nogo soiuzna* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001); Iurii Kir'ianov, *Pravye partii v Rossii. 1911–1917 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001); Iurii Kir'ianov, *Russkoe sobranie 1900–1917* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003); A. Stepanov, *Chernaia sotnia* (Moscow: Eksmo, Iauza, 2005); S. San'kova, *Russkaia partiia v Rossii: obrazovanie i deiatel'nost' Vserossiiskogo natsional'nogo soiuzna (1908–1917)* (Orel: Izdatel'stvo S.V. Zenina, 2006); A. Stepanov, A. Ivanov, and O. Platonov, eds., *Chernaia sotnia. Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia 1900–1917* (Moscow: Institut Russkoi Tsvivilizatsii, 2008); A. Ivanov, *Pravye v russkom parlamente: ot krizisa k krakhu (1914–1917)* (Moscow–St. Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2013).
 - 2 See, for example, the numerous studies by D. Kotsiubinskii, Iurii Kir'ianov, I. Omel'ianchuk, and others. Recent monographs by Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca, NY–London: Cornell University Press, 2013) and Klimentii K. Fedevich and Klimentii I. Fedevich, *Za Viru. Tsaria i Kobzaria: Malorosiiskii monarkhisti i ukrainskii natsional'ni rukh (1905–1917 roki)* (Kiev: Kritika, 2017) shed more light on different aspects of the topic.
 - 3 See, for example, the following monographs: Konstantin M. Bondarenko and Dimitrii Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty v nachale XX veka: monografiia* (Mogilev: MGU im. A.A. Kuleshova, 2003); Konstantin Bondarenko, *Pravye partii i ikh organizatsii v Belarusi (1905–1917 gg.)* (Mogilev: UO 'MGU im. A.A. Kuleshova', 2012), as well as other studies by these and other authors, predominantly published by Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University.
 - 4 All the geographical names in this text are given in the form in which they were used during the period of analysis.

the city of Vil'na, and also in the province of Kovna. During my research, several new archives of organizations were discovered, which will hopefully shed even more light on the history of the Russian monarchist and nationalist movement in the northwestern provinces.

Among the many questions discussed in this chapter, the main ones are: Who and what were the main right-wing organizations that operated in the center of the northwestern provinces? What were the relations between the northwest Russian monarchists and nationalists and the imperial authorities? And when and why did right-wing organizations seek to cooperate with the imperial government? Through an analysis of the history of northwestern right-wing organizations, their interaction with each other, and with the local and central authorities, I argue that the region was not homogenous. Russian organizations in Vil'na and Kovna provinces differed to some extent from those in Belorussian-inhabited lands, and from the beginning, they manifested themselves in a less radical and more moderate form of monarchism, while exhibiting pronounced nationalist tendencies.

Before beginning a detailed analysis, it is necessary to briefly examine the situation before 1905, that is, the first steps in the organization and activities of Russian imperial elites in Vil'na, the administrative center of the region.

The Appearance of the Northwestern Russian Societal and National Clubs

It is generally agreed upon that practical attempts to increase the uniformity of the northwestern provinces and their population with the rest of the Empire peaked after the uprising of 1863. Governor-general Mikhail Murav'ev introduced a hard-line political direction, which promoted Russianness in a variety of forms, and attempted to integrate the borderlands into imperial socio-political structures. The authorities supported Russian culture and the Orthodox Church; they sent imperial employees from the internal provinces to the borderlands, thus replacing most of the former local and predominantly Polish bureaucracy; they suppressed the Catholic Church and Polish cultural and social dominance, in addition to other

measures. In time, these top-down processes created a tradition of state-run “Russification,” or, in the eyes of the supporters of these policies, the “restoration” of historically inherent Russian rights in the provinces. Later, despite admitting that this strategy had largely failed, for many Russian conservatives, the Murav’ev period still represented the “golden age” of the state’s involvement in the protection and growth of Russianness in the western borderlands.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, this system had begun to be perceived as problematic: it slowed down the modernization of society and clashed with the new political ideologies and movements, chief among them socialism and nationalism. It was inevitable that the supporters of the monarchy and the old estate system had to adapt to the new trends. The first legal imperial monarchist organization, a club for the Russian elite, appeared at the turn of the century. The Russian Assembly (*Russkoe Sobranie*) was established at the end of 1900 in St. Petersburg. It included a number of senior imperial officials and members of the nobility and was primarily concerned with cultural activities, research, and the protection and promotion of Russianness, which to a great extent followed the ideology of Slavophilism. During the revolution of 1905, the Russian Assembly reformed into a political party. However, having enjoyed little success in attracting a greater following and influence on the political scene due to its elitist and conservative tendencies, by 1914 it had left politics and reverted to cultural and educational activities.⁵

Being more of a Slavophile club than a political party, the early Russian Assembly did not strive to expand the organization into other parts of the empire. Nevertheless, several sections opened in the provinces before 1905. One of the first was established in Vil’na in 1904.⁶ Having no political aspirations (political parties and organizations were prohibited before the declaration of the October 17 Manifesto), this section was formed as a kind of national club by several high-ranking provincial officials, some of

⁵ For more on this, see Kir’ianov, *Russkoe sobranie*.

⁶ V. Levitskii, “Pravye partii,” in *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale 20 veka*, vol. 3, book 5, ed. L. Martov, P. Maslov, and A. Potresov (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia t-va ‘Obshchestvennaia pol’za’, 1914), 358.

whom later became prominent imperial ministers and senators.⁷ Unfortunately, because of very limited documentation, the history and activities of the pre-1905 Vil'na section remain obscure. We can presume that it was involved in cultural and social activities, but it is also possible that after its establishment, as was quite common at the time, the section existed only on paper.

Parallel with the Russian Assembly, the northwest middle and high-ranking imperial bureaucracy found it necessary to create a variety of social, charitable and leisure organizations. Russian social clubs were established in Minsk and Vil'na, which in essence resembled the national clubs that were popular in other European countries. One of the earliest such institutions opened in Vil'na around 1904. It was called the Official Family (*Sluzhebnaia Sem'ia*) and included many high-ranking imperial employees stationed there, as well as other prominent members of the local Russian elite. The club was managed by a board of twenty elected elders who held meetings twice a month, and, for the most part, looked after leisure activities for members of the club and their families. Family gatherings, literary and musical evenings, lunches, dinners, and lectures were the most popular events.⁸

The Official Family existed until the beginning of 1906, when it was reformed into an openly nationalist club. Besides changing its name to the Vil'na Russian Societal Assembly (*Vilenskoe Russkoe Obshchestvennoe Sobranie*), it also opened its doors to lower-ranking officials and the local Russian intelligentsia, predominantly state school teachers.⁹ The transfor-

7 The founders and heads of the Vil'na section were imperial officers stationed in the city. According to Senator Stepan Beletskii, who became head officer in the Vil'na governor-general chancellery department in 1904, he was one of the founders and a member of the Russian Assembly's Vil'na section. At the beginning, it was headed by Alexei Kharuzin, a prominent ethnographer and anthropologist, and future senator, who at the time was in charge of the general-governor's chancellery. Later, after leaving the post, his successor Andrei Stankevich, another future prominent imperial politician, replaced him as head of the chancellery and the section. "Protokol pokazanii S.P. Beletskogo ot 14 iunia i 2 iulia 1917 g.," in *Soiuz Russkogo Naroda: Po materialam cherezvychainoi sledstvennoi kommissii vremennogo pravitel'stva 1917 g.*, ed. A. Chernovskii (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1929), 77.

8 For an account of the Vil'na club, see "Official Family for the year 1904/1905," Vilniaus Universiteto Biblioteka Rankraščių Skyrius (Vilnius University Library Manuscript Department, VUB RS), F6-857, 19-20.

9 Id., "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 10 (1910): 153. A prominent lawyer and statesman, member of the St. Petersburg Russian Gathering, and one of the founders of the St. Petersburg Russian Borderland Society (*Russkoe*

mation presumably occurred due to the ongoing revolution, and also because of new laws, which required the registration of all legally operating organizations.¹⁰ Similar Russian societal assemblies opened in other north-western towns too.¹¹

Starting in late 1905, the assemblies became places where local Russian state officials and supporters of the imperial authorities could meet and interact. Judging from the lists of members, these national clubs were predominantly frequented by people with right-wing political preferences. There is no information that liberals, like the Constitutional Democrats (or the *kadets*), ever participated in the activities of the assemblies, although officially there were no restrictions based on political views. Only minors, members of the military on active service, people with criminal convictions, and those whose memberships in similar organizations were revoked were not permitted to join.¹² The popularity of these local elite organizations was reflected in their growing numbers: for example, the Vil'na Russian Societal Assembly had 340 members in 1908–09, and in 1910–11, it had 467 members.¹³

These Russian clubs were also instrumental in the emergence of other local right-wing organizations, such as the Circle of Russian Women (*Kruzhok Russkikh Zhenshchin*). The first Circle appeared in St. Petersburg in May 1907. It would seem that the northwestern organizations of women followed its principles, but they were not directly associated with the St. Petersburg branch.¹⁴ Despite being charitable and educational institutions, the Circles nonetheless belonged to the right-wing, sometimes even radical end of the political spectrum, and focused only on working with Or-

Okrainoe Obshchestvo), Nikolai Sergeevskii also described the Vil'na Russian Societal Gathering as a national club in the ethnically non-Russian city. Nikolai Sergeevskii, "Shest' dnei v Vil'ne," *Okrainy Rossii* 35–36 (1908), 501.

10 "O vremennykh pravilakh ob Obshchestvakh i Soiuzakh," in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii. Sobranie tret'e. T. XXVI. 1906: Otdelenie I* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 201–7.

11 For example, the Minsk Russian Societal Assembly was established in 1908.

12 *Ustav Russkogo Obshchestvennogo Sobraniia* (Vilnius, 1908), 1.

13 *Otchet [Vilenskogo] Russkogo Obshchestvennogo Sobraniia za 1908–9 god* (Vilnius, s.a.), 1; *Otchet Vilenskogo Russkogo Obshchestvennogo Sobraniia za 1910–11 god* (Vilnius, s.a.), 1.

14 *Chernaia sotnia. Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia 1900–1917*, 502–3.

thodox and Russian (including Belorussian and Ukrainian) people.¹⁵ They were usually headed by the most active and prominent women in local Russian society; for example, the leader of the Minsk Circle was the Minsk governor's wife, Vera Erdeli.¹⁶ The Vil'na Circle was headed by Elena Dobrianskaia, whose father Flavian Dobrianskii was a prominent teacher, a member of the Vil'na Archaeographical Commission and the northwestern section of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, as well as possibly being one of the founders of the Russian Assembly's Vil'na section.¹⁷ Circles also tried to become more prominent and secure larger followings and greater financial support by electing women from society's elite as honorary members. The Vil'na Circle indicated that the wives of the Vil'na governors Dimitri Liubimov (1906–12) and Petr Verevkin (1912–16), as well as the widow of the former governor-general Konstantin Krshivitskii (1905–09), also belonged to the organization. Despite their political preferences, however, these women's organizations excelled in charitable work: the Vil'na Circle supported war refugees and soldiers at the front until the German occupation of the city in the autumn of 1915.¹⁸

Some of the first northwest right-wing political organizations appeared in the midst of these Russian societal assemblies and/or national clubs after the proclamation of the October 17 Manifesto. However, this can only be said about the moderate ones, whose supporters came from among the middling and senior officials and the intelligentsia, and not about the radical organizations like the Union of Russian People (Soiuz Russkogo Naroda), which had a larger following among the lower classes and the peasantry.

15 This was not something unusual because other national groups (Poles, Jews, Lithuanians) also established their own national charitable, educational, medical, and similar organizations, which worked primarily with members of their own nation. However, unless they were religious, Russian state organizations were more liberal in the sense that they provided assistance to non-Russians too.

16 For more on the Minsk Circle of Russian Women, see Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 75–77; and Dimitrii Lavrinovich, "Russkie zhenskiiye kruzhki v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni Vil'no i Minska v nachale XX veka," in: *Religia i obshchestvo 10* (conference proceedings), eds. V. Starostenko and O. D'iachenko (Mogilev: MGU im. A.A. Kulshova, 2016), 49–52.

17 "Mestnaia khronika," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1075 (Jan. 4, 1907).

18 *Otchet vilenskogo kruzhka russkikh zhenshchin za 1909 god* (Vilnius, 1910); "V 'Kruzhke russkikh zhenshchin,'" *Vilenskii vestnik* 2887 (Jan. 30, 1913); *Otchet vilenskogo kruzhka russkikh zhenshchin za 1914 god* (Vilnius, 1915).

This had an effect on the uneven distribution of right-wing organizations in the northwestern provinces. Whereas moderate and liberal monarchists, as well as nationalists, were stronger in the western parts of the region, especially in urban areas with the highest concentrations of Russians in their population, radical parties and organizations had a stronger following in the eastern parts, and especially in the countryside. The dividing line ran approximately where Catholics and Orthodox met, with the provinces of Kovna and Vil'na (Lithuanian) on one side, and the Minsk, Mogilev, and Vitebsk (Belorussian) provinces on the other. Grodna Province was split between the two. This relative division can be noticed when looking at the societal support and activities of right-wing parties, especially the radical Union of Russian People, which, due to its promotion of the monarchy, Russianness, and Orthodoxy, targeted very specific ethnic and confessional societal groups. In the territories dominated by or boasting high percentages of non-Russians and Catholics, the support for radicals was low. Moderate right-wing groups and nationalists were somewhat more successful there. A stronger Russian nationalist ideology presumably developed as a response to the potent and active non-Russian nationalisms, primarily Polish and Lithuanian. Despite this division, however, moderate monarchists and nationalists had followers in the Belorussian provinces too.

The Organization and Activities of the Radical Right: The Union of Russian People

Radical right-wing Russian political and societal organizations emerged in the northwest region during the revolution of 1905. At the beginning, they appeared as various self-organized groups that supported monarchism and aimed at combating the revolution. Most of them had a short life span: they either disappeared or joined the newly organized political party the Union of Russian People. Until the suppression of the revolution, the Union was the main radical right-wing organization in the empire. It was started in October 1905 by Aleksandr Dubrovin, and it quickly managed to establish numerous sections, especially in Orthodox-dominated

parts of the western provinces.¹⁹ They were supported by the highest state authorities due to their strong counter-revolutionary attitudes and activities, as well as the promotion of absolute monarchy, Russianness, and Orthodoxy. To a great extent, the Union stood against any reform of imperial governance and perceived the Duma as an advisory institution that essentially limited the power of the emperor.²⁰ This radical attitude toward the October 17 Manifesto narrowed the party's participation in politics even though it had a huge following, especially among the Orthodox, and to some extent among Old Believers too. The Union became infamous for the violence, pogroms, and terror it inflicted in the northern and especially the southwestern provinces.²¹

After the suppression of the revolution in 1907 and the stabilization of everyday social and political life, the troublesome radicals became a burden for the imperial government. The internal power struggle between several groups within the party led to its split, and in March 1908, the moderate wing headed by Vladimir Purishkevich reorganized itself as the Russian National Union of the Archangel Michael (Russkii Narodnyi Soiuz Imeni Arkhangel'a Mikhaila). Later, in 1909–10, another break occurred in what remained of the Union of Russian People. In 1911, Dubrovin's followers established the All-Russian Dubrovin Union of Russian People (Vserossiiskii Dubrovinskii Soiuz Russkogo Naroda), while the other, more moderate (or centrist) part became known as the Union of Russian People (Reformed) (Soiuz Russkogo Naroda [Obnovlencheskii]). All these changes in the central party were also reflected in the provincial sections. There were splits and transformations, and changes of leadership and loyalties. Unfor-

19 See, for example, I. Omel'ianchuk, *Chernosotennoe dvizhenie na territorii Ukrainy (1904–1914)* (Kiev: NIURO, 2000); Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarchisty*, 41–56; for the spread of the right-wing parties and groups in the northwestern provinces (except Kovna), see: Bondarenko, *Pravyye partii*, 108–27.

20 Despite the fact that the Duma was perceived only as a simple institutional connection between the emperor and the people, the Union of Russian People nevertheless envisioned itself actively participating in politics, and thus protecting the monarchy, the state, and the Russian nation. *Ustav obschestva pod nazvaniem 'Soiuz Russkogo Naroda'* (St. Petersburg, 1906), 3–6.

21 Hans Rogger, "Was There a Russian Fascism? The Union of Russian People," in *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Macmillan–St. Anthony's College, 1986), 212–32.

tunately, very limited archival material remains on these developments in the northwestern provinces; most of the information presented here comes from the periodical press and other scholarly research.

As was mentioned earlier, the radical wing drew its greatest support from the imperial authorities during the revolutionary years. In a famous quote from a telegram sent by Nicholas II to Dubrovin, the founder of the Union of Russian People, on June 5, 1907, the emperor greeted the party and thanked it for its support of the monarchy, calling them an example of “obedience to law and order.”²² Indeed, since its establishment and until the change of the election law on June 3, 1907, the Union received official and unofficial support from many high-ranking state authorities. Even after the decline in its popularity, some of the imperial authorities continued to help the party and its offshoots financially until the beginning of World War I.²³

The first radical right-wing organizations appeared in the northwestern provinces in Belorussian-inhabited territories, such as the Mogilev Province Union of Russian People (*Soiuz Russkikh Liudei*), in October 1905. Similar organizations with different names sprang up in other provinces too: the True Russian People (*Orsha*), the Society of Old Believers and Rightists (*Vitebsk*), For Faith, the Tsar, and Fatherland (*Bobruisk*), and others. Most of these were soon incorporated into the Union of Russian People.²⁴

The Union was a very popular organization, boasting 2,124 sections all over the empire by 1908, when all the other right-wing parties barely had 105.²⁵ According to Iurii Kir’ianov, who based his calculations on data collected by the Ministry of the Interior, it was claimed that at the peak of the movement around 1907–08, in Vil’na Province there were approximately

22 Kir’ianov, ed., *Pravye partii: Dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 1, 341.

23 Vladimir Kokovtsov, *Iz moego proshlogo: Vospominaniia 1903–1919*, vol. 2 (Paris: Izd. zhurnala “Illustrirovannaia Rossiia,” 1933), 9–13.

24 Bondarenko, *Pravye partii*, 109–110. For detailed numbers of members of right-wing organizations in the Belorussian provinces for the period 1907–1916, see: Konstantin Bondarenko, “Kolichestvo i chislenost’ pravomonarkhicheskikh obrazovaniĭ v Rossii i Belarusi v 1907–1916 gg.,” *Vesnik Magileuskaga dzharzbaunaga universiteta imia A. A. Kuliashova, Ser: A, Gumanitarnyia navuki (gistoriia, filasofia, filalogiia)* 2(46) 2015, 4–13.

25 Bondarenko, *Pravye partii*, 112.

one thousand members (mostly members of the Union); in Kovna there were 6,450 members of the Union;²⁶ in Grodna 897 members (502 [the Union] and 395 [other organizations]); and in Minsk there were 16,486 members (3,770 [the Union] and 12,716 [other organizations]). Statistics for later years are not available, and only Minsk Province has approximate numbers for the year 1915–16, in total 450 members.²⁷

Such high numbers for the earlier period, however, should be treated with caution. Close connections between the radicals and the Orthodox Church, Orthodox brotherhoods, Old Believers and Russian landlords might have had a strong albeit temporary mobilizing effect on the peasantry. There were many reports about the artificially created Union's provincial sections, where whole parishes registered by the politicized Orthodox clergy. In some cases, people were tricked into joining radical monarchist organizations. For example, in Ponevezh (in Kovna Province), the local landlord Grigorii Gnatovskii, an active member of the Union's Vil'na section and one of the monarchist delegates to Nicholas II (April 11, 1907),²⁸ took the initiative in establishing a section in the center of the Ponevezh district. It should be noted that Gnatovskii had long and good relations with the Kovna governor Petr Verevkin and his family.²⁹ Enjoying a privileged position as the head of the assembly of the local nobility, he opened the section

26 Kir'ianov's numbers for Kovna Province are very inaccurate. The file on the Union of Russian People in the Kovna governor's chancellery archive shows that during the entire period from 1905 until the beginning of the war, there were only three officially registered sections: in Novoaleksandrovska (opened in 1906), in Ponevezh (1907), and in Kovna (1910). The registration of sections was done at the St. Petersburg city governor's office, and the Kovna governor was only informed about the fact (see, for example, the note on the registration of the Kovna section: Kauno Regioninis Valstybės Archyvas [Kaunas Regional State Archive; KRVA], I-53; 1, 51; 9).

Reports from the heads of the local district police to the Kovna governor's chancellery reveal that in mid-1907, the Novoaleksandrovska section had 300, and Ponevezh 1,449 members, which officially made 1,749 members of the Union in total (KRVA, I-59, 1, 51; 11, 27). These numbers were the peak of the party's popularity. Membership of the Kovna section is not known, but it could not have been high, probably up to a hundred.

27 Kir'ianov, ed., *Pravye partii v Rossii, 1911–1917*, 79–80 (table).

28 "Mestnaia khronika," *Morskaiia volna* 4 (April 20, 1907).

29 Gnatovskii corresponded with Verevkin at least starting from the early 1890s. Gnatovskii's telegram to Verevkin's family in St. Petersburg, dated 1892, Lietuvos Nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo Biblioteka Rankraščių Skyrius (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania Manuscript Department, LNMMB RS), F19-475, 3.

on October 14, 1907. The highest Orthodox authority, Archbishop Nikandr of Vil'na and Lithuania, participated in the festivities, which combined imperial and religious rituals; mass in the Ponevezh Orthodox church was followed by a blessing of the section's flag and patriotic speeches given by the archbishop and other participants. Afterwards, a politicized religious procession went through the town to the Orthodox cemetery, where respects were paid to the Russian soldiers who fell during the suppression of the 1863 uprising. The celebrations continued in Gnatovskii's house, where the archbishop, a number of high-ranking Orthodox priests, and members of the Vil'na and Ponevezh sections, composed a telegram expressing their loyalty to Nicholas II.³⁰

Arguably, this small example illustrates rather well the relations between the Union's section and different imperial authorities. Many members and heads of district sections were either Orthodox priests or Russian landlords. The Vil'na provincial section occupied a higher hierarchical position within the organization, where Archbishop Nikandr was an honorary member and a strong spiritual authority. The direct or indirect participation of high-ranking members of the Orthodox Church in politics, and their support for conservative and even radical right-wing groups, provided the latter with a strong foothold in parishes and semi-secular conservative Orthodox brotherhoods, and allowed further political agitation through the churches. Also, at the end of 1907, some local authorities still expressed support for the Union of Russian People, and personal relationships with governors, such as the one between Gnatovskii and Verevkin, contributed greatly to the party's strong position.³¹

Additionally, personal contacts could have been beneficial for political groups and the authorities. One example of such cooperation came from the Gnatovskii–Verevkin connection. In a letter to the governor, Gnatovskii announced that on his trips through the province where he was promot-

30 Ochevidets, "Torzhestvo osviascheniia znameni Ponevezhskogo otdela Sojuza Russkogo Naroda," *Morskaiia volna* 21 (October 22, 1907).

31 An exchange of congratulations between the Ponevezh section and governor Verevkin (Jan. 1, 1908), LNMMB RS, F19-1081, 1-3.

ing the Union's candidates to the Third Duma, he had encountered leftist politicians, who, in his words, had carried out "anti-government agitation." Therefore, he asked Verevkin to order the police in Ponevezh and other districts to be ready to respond at Gnatovskii's request in order to prevent political agitation by opposition parties. Interestingly enough, Verevkin found this suggestion useful; however, he pointed out that such assistance had to come at the initiative of the district policemen themselves and not by order from the Kovna governor. Despite that, a request (albeit unofficially) was issued.³² Whether this had any effect is not clear.

As was mentioned earlier, statistics about the Union's membership are problematic. Some Orthodox and Old Believer parishes were registered as provincial sections, quite possibly even without the consent of the people. This turned out to be the case with the Ponevezh section. As the Lithuanian press reported, supposedly even during the opening, heads of local state schools and commanders of the military garrison rejected the organizers' invitation to participate in a religious-monarchist procession.³³ Only Old Believer and Russian settlers attended because, as it was claimed in the press, Gnatovskii assured people that during the opening of the section, the archbishop would announce an official manifesto about the new redistribution of land. (This might have been connected with ongoing discussions regarding the introduction of zemstvos in the western provinces.) People came and probably joined the section to improve their chances of getting more land. But when nothing was announced, everyone became angry at Gnatovskii's trick.³⁴ Moreover, the section faced more trouble: a few months

32 An official letter from the Ponevezh section of the Union of Russian People to the Kovna governor, July 16, 1907, KRVA, I-59; 1, 51; 32, 45 and two following unnumbered pages.

33 It is important to note that at the end of 1905, active-service military were forbidden to participate in any political organizations, and because of this, many officers abandoned political groups and only reserve military remained. Moreover, in the spring of 1906, the Ministry of the Interior issued a recommendation to all state employees to abstain from participation in political groups because, as it was explained, political activities distracted them from their primary duties. Later, in a circular from September 14, 1906, civil servants were prohibited from participating in anti-government revolutionary groups, which to some extent also included right-wing radicals who openly declared themselves to be against the changes introduced by the October 17 Manifesto. Finally, in October 1913, the Holy Synod passed a decision that forbade Orthodox priests from joining political movements and parties (Kir'ianov, *Russkoe sobranie*, 87-88).

34 Beparnis, "Panevėžio rusų sąjunga," *Vilniaus žinios* vol. 203, no. 812 (1907).

later, in July 1908, the administration of Kovna Province took Gnatovskii to court for embezzling money given by the state for orphans. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to prison.³⁵ But with the help of the Union's Vil'na section, Gnatovskii was released.³⁶

Despite the generally negative attitude towards the Duma, the Union of Russian People was nonetheless quite successful on the new political scene, especially in the western borderlands. The change to the election law on June 3, 1907 and the introduction of separate Russian electoral curia, opened up possibilities for Russians to send representatives to the parliament. At the same time, this law also introduced strong division among local right-wing followers. Earlier attempts at consolidation against non-Russians and leftists became an internal power struggle for seats in the Duma. This will be addressed later in this chapter, when looking at moderate right-wing organizations. But it should be mentioned here that the radicals were successful in winning several seats for their candidates in Vil'na Province in the elections to the Third (1907) and Fourth (1912) Dumas, when the infamous radical right-wing politician Gregorii Zamyslovskii won the majority of votes.³⁷

Despite the initial support, the Union's relations with the authorities gradually worsened. After the successful 1907 elections, the radicals became much more vocal in criticizing senior officials who, according to them, did not adhere to the principles of monarchy, Orthodoxy, and Russianness. In Vil'na, they were especially negative about the overseer of the Vil'na educational district, the Baltic German Baron Boris Vol'f, who was accused of supporting the Poles and other non-Russian ethnicities in schooling and refused to appoint the Union's members as teachers.³⁸ Later, the Vil'na section reported other attempts to force local authorities to conform to their political agenda and appoint their candidates as teachers in state schools, employees at the Polesie railway company's administration, and elsewhere.

35 "Žinios. Iš Lietuvos. Panevėžys," *Lietuvos ūkininkas* 30 (July 23 [August 5], 1908).

36 "Kratkii obzor deiatel'nosti Vilenskogo Gubernskogo Otdela Soiuzu Russkogo Naroda za 1908 god," *Morskaiia volna* 45 (March 9, 1909).

37 "Mestnaia khronika," *Morskaiia volna* 21 (October 22, 1907).

38 Morskaiia volna, "V chem obviniaetsia g. popechitel' Vilenskogo uchebnogo okruga baron Vol'f," *Morskaiia volna* 35 (June 7, 1908).

They used personal contacts to secure Gnatovskii's release from prison, wrote reports about the "improper" behavior of Jews and Poles, and so on.³⁹

The Union of Russian People was much more successful in Belorussian rather than Lithuanian-inhabited lands. There, starting from 1906 up to the beginning of 1908, the radicals had at least sixty-four sections and sub-sections, not including other similar, but not Union-run radical organizations.⁴⁰ After splits in the party in 1908 and 1911, the provincial sections either divided or became loyal to one of the offshoots, the Russian National Union of the Archangel Michael, the Union of Russian People (Reformed), or the All-Russian Dobrovin Union of Russian People.⁴¹

The Moderate Right and the Nationalists

The Northwestern Russian Veche

Generally, supporters of the October 17 Manifesto can be grouped under the common label "the moderate right," although this political trend evolved into a variety of organizations. Unlike the radical right, the moderates (chief among were the main political parties, the Union of October 17 [Soiuz 17 Oktiabria], or the Octobrists, and the All-Russian National Union [Vserossiiskii Natsional'nyi Soiuz]), supported the reformed monarchy and the unity of the empire. The first steps taken by the moderate right, however, were more cautious than those of the radicals.

39 "Kratkii obzor deiatel'nosti Vilenskogo Gubernskogo Otdela Soiuza Russkogo Naroda za 1908 god," *Morskaiia volna* 45 (March 9, 1909).

40 See Bondarenko's calculations for every northwestern province (except Kovna): Bondarenko, *Pravye partii*, 112-18.

41 On the distribution of sections in five northwestern provinces (except for Kovna) for the period between 1908 and 1914, see *ibid.*, 118-24. Statistics on Kovno Province are very fragmented and require further investigation. In reports to the Ministry of the Interior about the province, governor Verevkin indicated that in 1908, besides the Sviato Nikol'skoe Petropavlovskoe Orthodox brotherhood, there were two Union of Russian People sections (in Poneviezh and Novoaleksandrovsk), with approximately 2,000 members, and the newly created, but barely functional section of the Union of the Archangel Michael in Onikshty, Vilkomir district. "Vsepoddaneishii otchet Kovenskogo gubernatora za 1908 god," LNMMB RS, F19-76, 3. The latter was established in May 1908 and was run by the local Orthodox priest Ioan (or Iakov) Budnikov. Just as with the registration of the sections of the Union of Russian People, the Onikshty chapter of the Union of the Archangel Michael was registered in St. Petersburg. "V Kovenskoe gubernskoe po delam ob obshchestvakh Pristutstvie," KRVA, I-53, 1, 112, 1.

One of the first moderate northwestern right-wing organizations was the Vil'na-based Northwestern Russian Veche (Severo-Zapadnaia Russkaia Veche). The word *veche* suggested a form of assembly or council of Russian society, which came from the medieval Slavic tradition and was indicative of the traditionalist and, to some extent, democratic approach to building the organization. The idea to establish an organization that would unite all northwest Russian right-wing supporters was first proposed on October 30, 1905 at a meeting at the Official Family club. The suggestion came from Aleksandr Beletskii, the assistant to the overseer of the Vil'na educational district. Receiving overwhelming support, the participants in the meeting formed a preparatory committee tasked with formulating a charter for the new organization. It must be noted that the committee was composed of prominent imperial officials and the local Russian intelligentsia, such as Stepan Beletskii, the head of the Vil'na governor-general's chancellery and future senator and vice-governor of Samara Province, and Semion Kovaliuk, the owner and head of a private school in Vil'na. At the next meeting, members of the club were also joined by invited representatives from the local Old Believer community. The already-printed statute, however, caused some disagreement over the paragraph allowing all inhabitants of the northwestern provinces to join the organization regardless of their faith or nationality. The paragraph was quickly removed, allowing only Russians (i.e. those with official Russian nationality, Belorussians, Russians, and Ukrainians) to become members. The opening of the Veche took place on December 26 that year.⁴² It was reported that the ceremony was attended by over four hundred.

One of the most important tasks for the new organization was to create its own periodical. At same time, another newly established moderate right-wing Vil'na organization, the Peasant Society (Obshchestvo 'Krest'ianin', its founder was the aforementioned Kovaliuk), was also preparing to publish its own journal. However, they were aiming at a very specific social

42 Although the Veche's January report showed that only 216 joined the organization "Journal No. 4 of the meeting of the Central Council of the Northwestern Russian Veche" (January 16, 1906), VUB RS, F4-A754, 16.

stratum, the Belorussian peasantry, and were primarily concerned with improving their patriotic and economic standing. Therefore, this periodical did not fit the Veche's plan for the unification of all the Russian inhabitants of the region. Moreover, the Vil'na section of the Union of October 17 was also looking forward to having its own periodical, but its members soon became preoccupied with political matters and cancelled the plan. Additionally, the Veche positioned itself as a non-political and more national(-ist)-cultural organization, which made it difficult to cooperate with the Octoberists.⁴³ With no suitable alternative, on February 19, 1906, they began publishing a newspaper entitled *Belaiia Rus'* (White Rus'), which appeared weekly until the beginning of June, when it was closed due to financial problems.

The charter of the Veche opened with the slogan: "Total tolerance and respect for opinions" (*Polnaia terpimost' i uvazhenie k mneniiam*). This was quite unusual for a right-wing Russian organization, especially bearing in mind the ongoing revolution and the activity of the radical Union of Russian People. This could, in part, be explained from the perspective of "defensive nationalism," which was quite prevalent among local moderates: surrounded by strong non-Russian nationalisms, they did not want to escalate violence in the city or the region. On the other hand, comprised as it was of a number of middle and high-ranking imperial officials, taking a radical path was not favored by the local authorities, whose main goal was to maintain stability and order. It is no surprise then that the Veche aimed to find consensus between different nationalisms and establish their place among them. This conclusion can be made by looking at the first paragraph of its statute, which stated: "Acknowledging the right to individual cultural development for every nationality [*narodnost'*] of the region and based on the grounds of the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, the Northwest Russian Veche has the goal of uniting Russian inhabitants of the northwest provinces in the form of the protection of Russian national [*narodnykh*] interests

43 "Protocol from the meeting of the Central Council of the Northwestern Russian Veche No. 1" (December 30, 1905), VUB RS, F4-A754, 1-6.

in the sphere of socio-political life in all its manifestations, and at the same time striving to clarify common political and societal goals with the other nationalities [narodnosti] of the region.”⁴⁴

It is important to point out that, unlike the radical right, the Veche’s charter did not mention religion as a criterion for national identification. By leaving this out, they probably expected to win the sympathy of Belorussian Catholics, who were usually identified (by others) as Poles. Combining religious with national identification was much more important for radical groups and political parties, as well as conservative Orthodox organizations like the numerous northwestern brotherhoods. For them a “true Russian” was a person who not only belonged to the “official Russian” nationality, but also adhered to either the Orthodox or (to some extent) Old Believer confession. No Catholic could be a “Russian,” unless he converted to Orthodoxy, and even then there was no guarantee. And no Jew could ever become a “Russian.” Another explanation for the absence of the religious criterion could be that the Veche included people adhering to different Christian confessions, mainly Orthodoxy and Protestantism. A number of active moderate northwest Russian rightists were Lutherans such as, for example, the heads of the Vil’na and Minsk Octobrists, Nikolai Matson and Gustav Shmid.

Despite claiming to be a non-political organization, the Veche unofficially associated and partnered itself with the Union of October 17. Both regarded the October 17 Manifesto as their founding document; both proclaimed moderate rightist or even liberal conservative views; and they also shared members. As was stated in the Veche’s letter to the Vil’na Octobrists, the implementation of the party’s political program and state reforms required patriotically motivated citizens. Educating them was one of the main goals of the Veche, which also meant raising new Octobrist supporters. Still, the Octobrists’ task was the political protection and practical realization of state reform, while the Veche cared more about “national defense” and the support of the local Russian population. It was “... not a

44 *Ustav soiuzu ‘Severo-Zapadnoe Russkoe Veche’*, VUB RS, F4-A754, 7.

political organization, not a party, but a community, a brotherhood, if you wish; however, not a religious, but a spiritual one, which connects through common attitudes, interests and goals.” It could only have been called political because it urged people to be politically active, like, for example, participating in elections to the Duma because, as was stated in the letter, refusing to do so was a civic crime.⁴⁵

Despite the big plans, high hopes, and rather liberal attitudes, the Veche faced serious problems, which hindered its activities from the very beginning. The main challenge was financial. The publication of the newspaper proved to be extremely difficult. Moreover, many members did not bother paying membership fees, which put all the other plans on hold. Furthermore, the distribution of the newspaper met with strong resistance from Vil'na newspaper vendors (mostly of Jewish and Polish origin) who either boycotted *Belaia Rus'* or physically attacked the hired distributors.⁴⁶

This situation forced the Veche's Central Council to seek the governor's assistance. Reaching him was presumably not very difficult because of the personal or professional connections of some of the members. Therefore, instead of having their own publication, the Central Council thought of appropriating the semi-official newspaper of the northwest provinces, *Vilenskii Vestnik* (The Vil'na Gazette). It would seem that its editor V. Tchumikov was not associated with the organization. However, convincing the governor Dimitrii Liubimov (1906-12) to appoint one of the members of the Veche as the new editor of the newspaper was unsuccessful. Instead, Liubimov agreed to compensate subscribers to the discontinued *Belaia Rus'* with issues of *Vilenskii Vestnik* for the pre-paid period.⁴⁷

By the beginning of 1907, the Veche had stopped all its activities. The initial excitement and declarations of support from high-ranking officials and the local Russian elite proved empty. The failure of the organization

45 Congratulatory letter to the Vil'na section of the Union of October 17 (possibly early 1906), VUB RS, F52-425, 1.

46 Journal No 11 of the meeting of the Northwestern Russian Veche's Central Council (February 23, 1906), VUB RS, F4-A754, 27-28.

47 A letter from the Vil'na governor-general's chancellery to the head of the Northwestern Russian Veche Aristarkh Pimonov (no date; probably late September to early October 1906), VUB RS, F4-A754a, 69.

was primarily because its members did not show any great interest in spending their leisure time taking part in its activities. Financial support was also a problem, despite the fact that some members were rather wealthy people, like the head of the Veche, the successful merchant and board member of the Vil'na branch of the State bank and other organizations, Aristarkh Pimonov. Nevertheless, the Northwestern Russian Veche became the first attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to create a local moderate right-wing and nationalist-oriented organization.

It was officially closed on June 20, 1911.⁴⁸ Even during the first half of 1906, the slow demise of the organization was not a hard blow to the Vil'na and northwest moderate rightists and nationalists. Many of them had already moved on to other organizations, choosing the radical right or the Octobrists as alternatives. It was time for differentiation according to ideology, nationality, and/or religion. The initial goal of the Veche to become a "universal" organization that would have united different branches of the northwest right-wing movement did not disappear. Soon it found its mission among local Octobrists, many of whom were instrumental in establishing the Veche in the first place. The idea of an umbrella organization to coordinate the activities of the monarchists materialized in the more articulated and political form of the Russian Borderland Union (*Russkii Okrainyi Soiuz*).

The Russian Borderland Union

The all-empire liberal monarchist party Union of October 17 was established after the proclamation of the October 17 Manifesto, and its first sections appeared in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Besides supporting state reforms and the imperial government, it also aimed at introducing a form of constitutional monarchy. Contrary to the elitist Russian Assembly, the Octobrists welcomed everyone who supported the state, the Duma, and the reforms. From the beginning, it started actively establishing provincial sections, and preparing for the forthcoming elections to the First State

48 Official document of the closure of all activities and bank accounts (June 20, 1911), VUBRS, F4-A754, 73.

Duma. The northwestern sections opened at the end of 1905 and the beginning of 1906.

For the better coordination of political and societal work and the elaboration of the party's ideology, the first general meeting of Octobrists was held in Moscow on February 8–12, 1906. Before the meeting, some of the delegates joined several work groups, which discussed specific issues and problems and prepared resolutions in order to formulate the party's position. One of the work groups was called the Borderland Commission most of which consisted of representatives from Poland and the northern, southwestern, and Baltic provinces. The resolution of the Commission had strong nationalistic undertones and claimed to protect Russian national interests in the western borderlands. For this reason, it was suggested that the party's Central Committee approach the highest authorities of the state in order to change the existing electoral law, which had just been introduced on December 11, 1905. According to the law, every citizen of the empire who was eligible to vote, regardless of his religion or nationality, could elect whomever he wanted. The Borderland Commission, however, was concerned that in the provinces where Russians constituted an ethnic minority or where local elites were of non-Russian origin, Octobrist candidates could not compete. In their understanding, this situation eroded the position of Russians as the nation forming the state. Therefore, the Commission proposed that imperial authorities should introduce a proportional electoral census according to nationality so that Russian voters could elect their own Duma representatives independently of others. Additionally, it suggested that at least one Russian member should be elected from every non-Russian dominated western and Baltic province, and two from every province in Poland. The same principle had to be applied in other ethnically mixed regions, like the Caucasus. Together with issues of electoral law, the Commission also touched on the use of the Russian language. They argued that Russian was the only inter-ethnic, all-empire language that allowed different ethnic groups to communicate with each other, and therefore, it had to be taught in all state and private schools at all levels. The party's Central Committee and congress agreed partially to the second part, stating that all

laws and regulations for different linguistic groups that applied at that time were a sign of cultural and political oppression. But this was a question that should have been resolved in the Duma.⁴⁹

The first part of the resolution, however, provoked heated debates. Prince Petr Volkonskii, who also participated in the work of the Borderland Commission, disagreed with it, noting that the laws of the empire had to be applied to everyone equally, and asking for privileges for one nationality would create a precedent for others; that is, non-Russian groups that lived in areas dominated by Russians would have a reason to ask for the same special treatment. Also, he pointed out that no non-Russians from Poland, or the north- and southwestern and Baltic provinces took part in either the work of the Borderland Commission or the Octobrist congress. Finally, in his opinion, the demand for a special electoral census for Russians clashed with the party's ideology because it was the party's position that all imperial subjects had to obey the laws of the state. The introduction of the census would result in inter-ethnic tensions. Besides, the demand for such privileges pushed the Octobrists closer to the radical right parties, which declared that only Russians and Orthodox should be eligible to vote. Volkonskii's opinion was supported by the party's leader Aleksandr Guchkov and most of the congress. The resolution of the Commission was changed according to the party's ideology and the opinion of the majority.⁵⁰

However, this outcome did not satisfy the borderland Octobrists. The strongest and most vocal supporters of the introduction of the nationality census were the Octobrists from the northwestern provinces: the head of the Minsk section, retired second-class navy captain Gustav Shmid and Nikolai Matson, the leader of the Vil'na Octobrists and engineer with the Polesie Railway Company. They and other delegates from Poland and the Bal-

49 For the resolutions and reactions to them, see Pavlov, ed., *Partiia 'Soiuz 17-go oktiabria'*, 137–38. It should be noted that in the collection of documents published in 1996, the text of the resolution of the Borderland Commission differs slightly in formulation and wording from the one published just after the congress. Therefore, I have followed the text published in *Rezoliutsii, priniatyie pervym s'ezdom delegatov otdelov 'Soiuz 17-go oktiabria' i partii, k nemu prisooedenivshikhsia* (s.l., 1906), 4.

50 Pavlov, ed., *Partiia 'Soiuz 17-go oktiabria'*, 138–40; see also *1-ii vserossiiskii s'ezd delegatov 'Soiuz 17-go oktiabria'. 8–12 fevralia 1906 g. g. Moskva* (Moscow, 1906), 29–32.

tic provinces argued that the Russians in the borderlands did not want any privileges, only equal rights to be represented in the Duma; otherwise, the future of the Russians in the non-Russian dominated provinces was unclear. Guchkov's assurance that the issues raised by the Borderland Commission would be a priority for the party in the First Duma was not credible because at that time, nobody could guarantee that the Octobrists would win a majority of seats.⁵¹ And as the results of the elections to the First Duma showed, the borderland Octobrists were absolutely right to doubt these promises.⁵²

It was quite clear from the discussions at the congress that the borderland Octobrists differed from the others in their strong nationalism. Politically they constituted the right wing of the Union of October 17, but before the appearance of the All-Russian National Union (*Vserossiiskii Natsional'nyi Soiuz*) in 1908, and especially after the introduction of its new organizational charter in 1911, most of the borderland Octobrists remained connected with the party in one way or another.

Meanwhile, after the unsuccessful attempts to secure the party's support, they decided to take matters into their own hands. The northwestern sections in Minsk and Vil'na tried to bend the opinion of the highest imperial authorities by writing personal and public letters; trying to secure the Vil'na governor-general's help in contacting the government; sending delegations to Nicholas II; and so on. They were supported and joined by the previously mentioned Northwestern Russian Veche as well as other local right-wing organizations.⁵³ The fear of losing the forthcoming elections and the threat of declining Russian political superiority in the region, which before October 17, 1905 was, to a large extent, secured by the power of the

51 Pavlov, ed., *Partiia 'Soiuz 17-go oktiabria'*, 140–41; *I-ii vserossiiskii s'ezd delegatov 'Soiuza 17go oktiabria'*, 32.

52 For more about the introduction of Russian electoral curia, see Konstantin Bondarenko, "Bor'ba za Gosdumu: Ideologiya russkikh monarkhicheskikh partii i ikh belorusskikh predstavitel'stv v vybornykh kampaniakh nachala XX veka," *Belarusskaia dumka* 4 (2015): 89–93; Dimirii Lavrinovich, "Bor'ba za izmenenie sistemy vyborov Gosudarstvennogo Soveta v Zapadnykh guberniakh Rosiiskoi imperii (1906–1911)," in *Rosiiskie i slavianskie issledovaniia: sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, ed. A. Sal'kov (Minsk: BGU, 2015), 82–88; Dimirii Lavrinovich, "Bor'ba za izmenenie sistemy vyborov v Gosudarstvennuiu Dumu na territorii zapadnykh gubernii Rosiiskoi imperii (1906–1907)," in *Tavricheskie chteniia 2015* (conference proceedings), ed. A. Nikolaev (St. Petersburg: OOO ElekSis, 2015), 55–63.

53 "Obozrenie sobytii i okrainaia zhizn'," *Okrainy Rossii* 1 (1906), 13–15; see also: *Okrainy Rossii* 2 (1906), 37; Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 71–72.

state authorities, all forced them to disregard the party's cautious path. The heads of the Union of October 17 did not appreciate this contempt for discipline; however, it would seem that no stricter measures were taken against the borderland sections.⁵⁴

A few days after the initial Octobrist congress, delegates from the western and Baltic provinces and the Kingdom of Poland held a separate meeting in Vil'na on February 20, 1906. Among the many things discussed, they agreed unanimously to establish a new borderland organization, the purpose of which was the unification of all right-wing political groups and the coordination of their efforts. At this early stage, however, they did not come to any particular decision, and the establishment of the organization was delayed for a year. Additionally, similar aims to unify northwestern rightist groups were declared by the Veche, although its main goal was more socio-cultural than political.⁵⁵

The Veche's official distancing from politics and its loose organizational structure resulted in more theoretical and populist declarations than actual work. Therefore, the Octobrists took up the same ideas but improved them with a more concrete political outlook and organizational character. It is not surprising that one of the final acts of the Veche was the preparation of the foundation for the new organization, announcing another borderland Octobrist gathering. The Veche officially invited the Warsaw, Minsk, Iur'ev (Tartu), and Riga Octobrists to attend a meeting in Vil'na on October 7–9, 1906.⁵⁶ During the meeting, the Octobrists discussed the political pressure that Russian organizations felt from Poles and Jews. It was clear to them that no assistance could be expected from the imperial authorities or their political partners in the internal provinces of Russia because, as it was said, the latter did not know the actual situation in the imperial borderlands, while the former did not want to understand it or were un-

54 Ibid., 72–73.

55 Later, it was claimed that the idea to have such an umbrella organization appeared just after the announcement of the October 17 Manifesto. D.B., "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 6 (1907), 91. However, no discussion regarding this matter was found in the press or anywhere else.

56 "Iz Vil'ny," *Okrainy Rossii* 32 (1906), 531.

der the strong influence of non-Russians. Therefore, it was concluded that the Russian rightist intelligentsia had to organize and fight its opponents on its own. Questions about the electoral census and a change to election law were raised. They prepared an address to Prime Minister Petr Stolypin, which asked once again for the introduction of an electoral census and the appointment of permanent borderland Russian representatives on the State Council.⁵⁷ Most importantly of all, it was decided unanimously to finally open the Borderland Union.⁵⁸

The Vil'na governor-general approved the statute of the Union on January 17, 1907. The organization's headquarters were in Vil'na, the center of the northwestern provinces. It planned to have sub-sections in districts and parishes. The Union declared that it should become a link between the state and the Russians (i.e., the "official Russians," Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians) in the region. For this reason, their goal was to unite the inhabitants of the Russian borderland on the basis of nationality, represent their interests and voice their needs in government institutions, as well as inform the rest of the empire about the true situation in the borderlands. Moreover, any Russian organization could join the Union as long as their programs did not contradict its ideology. The official declaration was signed by Vasilii Kurchinskii, a professor at Iur'ev (Tartu) University and dean of the Medical Faculty, Aleksandr Bezpalchev (Kovna), a civil engineer, Ivan Chigiriov, an official with the Minsk district court, and Octobrist leaders Shmid (Minsk) and Matson (Vil'na).⁵⁹

Judging from the statute, the new organization resembled the Veche and did not have a strict organizational structure. Its main units were provincial committees (they were formed in Vil'na, Minsk, Grodna, Vitebsk, Iur'ev [Tartu], Kovna, and elsewhere before the official opening of the organization). There was no limit to membership either. Men and women were both allowed to participate. The only restrictions were on schoolchild-

57 Extracts from the address to the prime minister: "Khronika," *Okrainy Rossii* 38 (1906), 647-48.

58 T., "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 33 (1906), 548-49.

59 "Mestnaia khronika," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1076 (January 5 [17], 1907); 1085 (January 17 [30], 1907); "Ustav Russkogo okrainogo soiuza," in Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 198-200.

dren, adolescents, and people with criminal convictions.⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the provincial committees did not follow the administrative division of the state: they had to be opened “where Russian national awareness was strongest.” For this reason, for example, the Union’s center in the Baltic provinces became Iur’ev (Tartu) instead of Riga.⁶¹

The opening ceremony took place on March 25, 1907, and it was attended by around six hundred participants. Matson was elected head of the new organization, and his deputies were Aleksandr Vrutsevitch and Vladimir Kontor, both Vil’na state school teachers. Most of the speeches made during the ceremony focused on the Belorussian question, stressing their “Russian” and not “Polish” ethno-cultural origins. As was usual with right-wing organizations, the meeting ended by dispatching telegrams to top state officials protesting Polish demands in the Duma to unite the northwest provinces with Poland.⁶²

At first the Borderland Union was quite successful in its work. It opened several new provincial sections and established good relations with other right-wing organizations across the ideological spectrum: moderate (the Vil’na “Peasant” Society), radical (the Union of Russian People), and religious (mostly with different Orthodox brotherhoods, like, for example, the Vil’na Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost [Vilenskoe Sviato-Dukhovskoe Bratstvo]). Its council organized meetings; discussed the possibilities of disseminating their ideology among the Belorussian peasantry; and reported on the results of the information campaigns which presented the situation in the region for Russians in the empire’s internal provinces, etc. Soon, however, the organization started to face the same financial difficulties as the Veche; it failed to start its own periodical publication. Even though *Minskoe Slovo* (The Word of Minsk), which was edited by Shmid, to some extent served as the organization’s newspaper, it could not completely meet the needs of the Borderland Union.

60 Elfi [L. Ivitskii], “Iz Vil’ny,” *Okrainy Rossii* 11 (March 17, 1907), 174–75; Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 74.

61 D.B., “Vil’na,” *Okrainy Rossii* 6 (1907), 91–92.

62 “Vil’na,” *Okrainy Rossii* 13 (March 21, 1907), 207–8.

Parallel to this, there was another challenge: the lack of societal support. Apart from a few hundred northwestern intelligentsia in the urban areas (predominantly teachers from state schools), the propagation of rightist ideas in the Lithuanian provinces (Vil'na and Kovna) was not successful, especially after the end of the revolution. Relatively greater support was found among the Belorussian Orthodox peasantry in the Minsk and Grodna provinces. Still, when it came to active participation, it would seem that meetings held by the organization's Central Council were the only work in which the Borderland Union engaged.⁶³

The most active period for this and other northwestern right-wing organizations was during the elections to the Duma, and major goal was the consolidation of Russian voters in order to win their votes. The introduction of the "Third-of-June" system in 1907, when, among other things, changes were made to the electoral law and the Russian curia was separated from the rest of voters, played a favorable role; at the same time, it became a test for the Borderland Union. Before the change to the electoral law, right-wing parties had to compete with non-Russians and their political opponents on the left. After the change, their only political opponents were Russian liberals and leftists, and, as it turned out, other right-wing parties. Moreover, on an official level, the change to the electoral law was, to some extent, a return to the old system based on the confessional identification of people, when religion once again became a more important factor than ethnicity. For example, the identification of the Russian curia in the Vil'na and Kovna provinces was done by looking only at confession. The curia was composed of Orthodox, Old Believers, and Protestants.⁶⁴

In order to consolidate right-wing supporters, the Borderland Union called a meeting of all local right-wing organizations in Vil'na on June 14, 1907. Matson urged delegates to begin propaganda campaigns. However, the Union refused to take the lead because many of its members complained of having no time due to their main work and responsibilities. Despite the

63 Elfi [L. Ivitskii], "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 21 (May 26, 1907), 329.

64 "O poriadke izbraniia chlenov Gosudarstvennoi Dumy ot russkogo naseleniia Vilenskoii i Kovenskoii gubernii," *Krest'ianin* 22 (July 9, 1907), 344-47.

importance of the upcoming elections, no one was willing to dedicate all their leisure time to this matter. Nonetheless, after long discussions, an electoral committee was formed to rally Russian and Belorussian voters and recruit suitable candidates as MPs who would be the best representatives of the northwest imperial Russian community. The committee consisted of radical and moderate representatives, Orthodox clergy, and other groups. Matson became the head of the electoral committee, and on June 22, they published an official address to Russian voters.⁶⁵

Just after the meeting, however, another address to Russians appeared in *Vilenskii vestnik* (The Vil'na Gazette), signed by an unknown "non-party group" (the Russian Non-Party Electoral Committee /Russkii Vnepartiinyi Izbiratel'nyi Komitet), which identified its political position as center-right; supported moderate and liberal Russian nationalism and the reforms announced by the October 17 Manifesto; and declared the left and the radical right its political opponents.⁶⁶

This unexpected appearance threw the fragile right-wing coalition into disarray. The open declaration of political animosity by a non-party group toward the radicals and other influential religious-conservative organizations, like the Vil'na Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost, fragmented the electoral committee. In the end, instead of a unified group, three individual right-wing committees appeared: the "right," led by the radical Union of Russian People, the "center," led by the Borderland Union, and the "left" non-party. The newspapers predicted that because of the political apathy among the general population, victory belonged to the group that managed to mount the most active propaganda campaign, promising voters whatever they wanted to hear.⁶⁷

The next big meeting of Vil'na's Russian voters was organized by the non-party group. Matson, many members of the Borderland Union, and

65 "V obshchestvakh i sobraniakh. Pervoe predvybornoe sobranie russkikh izbiratelei," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1210 (June 16, 1907); Vremennyi izbiratel'nyi komitet, "Russkie izbirateli!" *Vilenskii vestnik* 1215 (June 22, 1907).

66 Russkii vnepartiinyi izbiratel'nyi komitet, "Russkie izbirateli!" *Vilenskii vestnik* 1209 (June 15, 1907); "Mestnaia khronika," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1216 (June 23, 1907).

67 Avich', "Kogo vybirat'," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1222 (July 1, 1907).

representatives of the radical right also participated. It turned out that the organizers, the non-party group, were rather young, mostly Belorussian-born teachers and civil servants whose political views did not differ much from those of the Octobrists and the Borderland Union. The meeting was the final break-up of the coalition between the moderates and the radicals. In the end, the Borderland Union and the non-party electoral committees merged and formed a new unified group.⁶⁸

Leaving the joint electoral committee and elections aside, it should be noted that the radicals were much more active in the 1907 elections in Vil'na and in other parts of the northwestern provinces. The promotion of their candidates was better organized and structured. They also received moderate support from local authorities, as was shown earlier in the case of the Ponevezh section of the Union of Russian People and the Gnatovskii-Verevkin cooperation against agitation by left-wing parties.

Contrary to the moderate and liberal right-wing groups, the Vil'na provincial section of the Union of Russian People had its own ideologically representative newspaper, *Morskaia volna* (The Wave of the Sea), which was probably the most radical and antisemitic periodical publication in the northwestern provinces.⁶⁹ In it, they claimed to represent *Realpolitik*, protecting Orthodox peasants from the Polish gentry, fighting Jewish economic dominance, and so on. The radicals were especially successful in building economic organizations like artisan workshops, which unofficially received large contracts to produce clothing and underwear for the army that might have given them adequate income.

Judging from the activities of the united electoral committee, their main work mostly revolved around organization and coordination activities with other provincial electoral committees. Surprisingly, they chose to follow more democratic principles for the 1907 elections by asking voters to propose the best Duma candidates from Vil'na province. In this respect,

68 P.K., "Sobranie russkikh izbiratelei," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1229 (July 10, 1907); P., "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 27-28 (August 8-11, 1907), 420-21; K., "Sobranie russkikh izbiratelei," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1230 (August 12, 1907).

69 It is hard to say whether the periodical was directly associated with the section.

the radicals were much more pragmatic: they appointed the candidates and told people to vote for them.⁷⁰ In the end, the elections to the Third Duma in the Vil'na Province Russian curia were won by two representatives of the radical right: the aforementioned Zamyslovskii, and the Orthodox priest Veraksin. The moderates and the centrists were somewhat more successful in the Belorussian provinces.⁷¹ Overall, the elections to the Third Duma were a success, and the imperial parliament was dominated by right-wing parties.

After the successful elections, most Russian organizations basically stopped their activities on the public scene and returned to irregular meetings, organizing cultural events, leisure activities, public lectures, and so on. With the partial exception of the Union of Russian People, which continued its different economic endeavors, most right-wing organizations became inert, hoping that perhaps with the right wing's majority in the Third Duma, their active work was finished. Because of this, as some noted, many monarchist and nationalist organizations came to exist only on paper.⁷²

Soon, however, the newly established St. Petersburg Russian Borderland Society (*Russkoe Okrainoe Obshchestvo*), which opened officially on February 17, 1908, began operating with the same ideology and aims as the northwestern Borderland Union. The Society evolved out of one of the branches of St. Petersburg's Russian Assembly. Even before it appeared, several of its founding members were publishing the rather influential, moderate, and to some extent, nationalistic journal *Okrainy Rossii* (The Russian Borderlands).⁷³ Among the founders of the periodical and the Society were persons from the northwestern provinces: Polikarp

70 "Russkii vnepartiinyi izbiratel'nyi komitet," *Vilenskii vestnik* 1276 (September 7, 1907).

71 Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 52–53.

72 As one of the correspondents of the journal *Okrainy Rossii* sarcastically noted about the right-wing organizations in Vil'na (which could probably be applied to the whole northwest region too): "The history of all local Russian societal endeavors was one and the same: at first, arduous organization, debates, tiresome waiting; then pompous openings with dinners, balls, speeches, telegrams; afterwards a few years of existence; and, finally slow death at the hands of the same founders." Id., "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 10 (March 6, 1910), 152.

73 For more, see Konstantin Bondarenko, "Russkoe okrainoe obshchestvo: vznikovenie, politicheskie tseli i zadachi," in *Romanovskie chteniia: sbornik trudov Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, Mogilev, 21 oktiabria 2004 g.*, ed. O. D'iachenko (Mogilev: MGU im. A.A. Kuleshova, 2005), 27–34.

Byval'kevich, the long-term school inspector of the Vil'na educational district, editor of several Vil'na-based newspapers and journals, and publicist, and Platon Kulakovskii, who was a prominent scholar, Slavacist, and writer. Byval'kevich was born in Vil'na, and Kulakovskii in Ponevezh (in Kovna Province).⁷⁴

The appearance of the Borderland Society, which claimed a number of prominent imperial politicians and members of the intelligentsia as members, somewhat superseded the Vil'na Borderland Union as the coordinator of regional right-wing organizations. Therefore, after a slight adjustment to the charter, the Borderland Union and its sections joined the Society in May 1908, while at the same time preserving its semi-autonomous organizational character. However, this did not prevent their gradual decline, and it seems that after 1909, the Union ceased to be active. Whether it continued to virtually exist, just like the Veche, or when was it closed is unclear. The initial high hopes for the Borderland Society were overrated too, because it did not, and could not, become an active player in the northwestern provinces. Basically, it remained in St. Petersburg, and continued collecting and publishing information on Russian national issues in the western provinces, Finland, and elsewhere. After the elections to the Fourth Duma and the subsequent closure of *Okrainy Rossii* in 1912, some members of the Society, including Kulakovskii and Byval'kevich, as well as many of the northwestern Octobrists and members of the Borderland Union, joined the nationalists and their party, the All-Russian National Union.

The All-Russian National Union

The disappearance of the Borderland Union and its sections resembled that of the Veche. Until the elections to the Fourth Duma in 1912, northwestern Russian right-wing parties and organizations were barely functioning. As mentioned earlier, due to internal conflicts between the leaders of the radical Union of Russian People, the party split several times. The Vil'na

74 Short biographical data on Byval'kevich may be found in the lists of people involved in the Russian White movement. See <http://xn--9oadhkb6agof.xn--p1ai/arhiv/uchastniki-grazhdanskoi-vojny/uchastniki-belogo-dvizheniya-v-rossii/uchastniki-belogo-dvizheniya-v-rossii-bsh-bya.html>, accessed October 23, 2018.

section ceased publishing its newspaper *Morskaia volna* in 1909. From then on, there is almost no information on the activities of the radicals in the provinces of Vil'na and Kovna.

From early on, the northwest moderate right wing was much more inclined towards modern Russian nationalism. During the revolution of 1905 and the years after it, there was no proper all-empire Russian nationalist party or organization that could have satisfied their needs. Attempts to create their own organizations failed, primarily due to a lack of commitment and the general political inertia of the population. Moreover, the aim to unite all northwest Russian right-wing organizations and their supporters could not have been achieved due to the great ideological discrepancy between radicals and the moderate right. Many local right-wing supporters belonged to the intelligentsia and the middle-class, which, due to the old social structures still in existence, hindered their attempts to establish a dialogue with the highest state authorities.

Local authorities (although not all, of course) did not show any particular interest in the nationalists. There is no indication that the Vil'na governors supported the nationalist cause; however, the Minsk governor, just like the Minsk Russian Societal Assembly (established in 1908), was more inclined to cooperate with the nationalists because they promoted "Russian state interests."⁷⁵ One explanation for the low level of support in the "Lithuanian provinces" could be the preservation of stability within society because open support for one right-wing group might have caused dissatisfaction in another. The brief period of revolution-induced reforms lasting until mid-1907 was followed by the strengthening of imperial conservatism. Nevertheless, Stolypin, who grew up on an estate near Keidany (in Kovna Province) and spent a lot of time there while he was Prime Minister, turned to the newly organizing Russian nationalist party after distancing himself from the Octobrists.⁷⁶

75 Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 93.

76 For an in-depth analysis of the All-Russian Nationalist Party, see Kotsiubinskii, *Russkii natsionalizm v nachale XX stoletii*; San'kova, *Russkaia partiia v Rossii*. On the evolution of the south and northwestern nationalists, see Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, *Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 92–100.

The organization of the All-Russian National Union began in 1908; however, for a few years, they remained a small parliamentary faction without attempting to build a stronger political party and create a network of provincial sections. The approaching elections to the Fourth Duma, and Stolypin's turn towards nationalism, pushed for reorganization. The new statute of the party from 1911 envisaged the growth and opening of provincial sections. It is important to note that many nationalists came from the western provinces, primarily the southwest. Politicians from the Kiev Nationalist Club were instrumental in founding the National Union. Further, there was sympathy for the ideology among the moderate right in the northwestern provinces too.

However, the organization of sections of the party in Vil'na Province began rather late, primarily as a result of the introduction of the new statute and the approaching elections in the autumn of 1912. Also, the murder of Stolypin in Kiev in 1911 increased respect for him and provided additional impetus for consolidation among the nationalists.⁷⁷ The Vil'na section, which was called the Vil'na Russian National Union (*Vilenskii Russkii Natsional'nyi Soiuz*), was opened by the same group of former Octobrists, members of the *Veche*, and the *Borderland Union*, together with moderate rightists from the *Peasant Society*. The head of the latter, called *Kovaliuk*, a teacher and the owner of a private school, together with his colleague *Vrutsevich*, also a teacher, became the most active promoters of nationalism. *Kovaliuk* was appointed to lead the Vil'na section. The Duma elections once again became a mobilizing event, and yet another attempt was made to unify and establish common ground between the Vil'na radical right, the nationalists, and the conservative *Orthodox Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost*.

One of the first actions taken by the newly established section was their attempt to present themselves on the broader imperial scene and cultivate support in St. Petersburg. A delegation that included *Kovaliuk*, *Vrutsevich*,

⁷⁷ The Minsk section of the All-Russian National Union was opened in April 1911 by the Octobrist leader I. Chigarev, who closed the section and moved to the nationalists. By the end of the year, the new section had 193 members, 30 of whom were Orthodox priests (*Bondarenko and Lavrinovich, Russkie i belorusskie monarkhisty*, 92).

and another teacher, historian Lukian Solonevich, arrived in the capital on April 17, 1912. They were joined by their old colleague Byval'kevich, who was officially a delegate of the Sofia Orthodox Brotherhood in Grodna, as well as MPs in the Third Duma from Minsk Province, Orthodox priest Andrei Iurashkevich and Iosif Pavlovich, both of whom were connected with the parliamentary nationalist faction.⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that in the rightist press they were called "the Belorussian delegation," which indicated not only their origins, but also their representation of the Belorussian population. They expressed concerns about the Polonization of Catholic Belorussians through schools to senior officials. According to them, the local administration and Catholic priests either actively or passively supported the identification of Belorussians as "Poles," which was based on the stereotypical belief that Catholicism was a Polish religion. In a memorandum presented to the authorities, the "Belorussian delegation" demanded that religion should be taught in the local language of the majority in the northwestern provinces, either in Lithuanian for Lithuanians or in Russian for Belorussians.⁷⁹

They were granted audiences with the minister of the interior, the minister of education, and other senior officials. They also received a warm welcome from the nationalists and monarchists and made presentations on the situation in the northwestern provinces, the dangers of creeping Polonization, and other related topics.⁸⁰ The trip was a success, and St. Petersburg's right-wing politicians and senior officials appreciated the newly established Vil'na section and its goals and agenda. Still, it would seem that it was only moral support; in practice, however, they did not achieve much. Upon the delegation's return, the Vil'na section began actively building a new coalition for the approaching Duma elections.

On April 29, 1912, the first meeting of the Vil'na Russian right-wing voters took place. All major organizations were represented: the nationalists, the radicals, and the moderates, as well as the Brotherhood of the Ho-

78 F.O., "Vil'na," *Okrainy Rossii* 27–28 (July 7–14, 1912): 417–19.

79 P.K. [Platon Kulakovskii], "Priезд belorusskoi delegatsii," *Okrainy Rossii* 16 (May 21, 1912), 233–36. For more on issues related to the education of Catholic Belorussians, see the chapter in this book by Darius Staliūnas.

80 S.K., "Belorusskaia deputatsiia v Sankt Peterburge," *Okrainy Rossii* 16 (May 21, 1912), 241.

ly Ghost. A list of eighteen candidates was compiled for future discussions.⁸¹ However, a few days later, in a *Vilenskii vestnik* interview with Kovaliuk and Vrutsevich (he was not named in the original article, but he was identified later), the latter expressed his reservations about the participation of Orthodox priests in politics, which he called an “erroneous practice.” Moreover, it was stated that a stronger coalition between the nationalists and the radicals was impossible in the future due to ideological differences. They supported each other and the right-wing candidates only during elections.⁸²

The wish of the nationalists to become the leaders of all right-wing organizations and the denunciation of the Orthodox clergy’s participation in politics by some represented a new political direction in the Russian right wing. When looking at other northwestern provinces, we can see similar tendencies, whereby Russian nationalists formed separate electoral committees. Interestingly enough, in the Belorussian-inhabited territories, rather close cooperation was established between the radical right, the Orthodox brotherhoods, and in some cases, even the imperial authorities.⁸³

This unexpected turn of events within the Vil’na right-wing camp escalated further when, at the beginning of June, the Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost announced it was establishing a separate electoral committee and invited nationalists to join their leadership and support the Brotherhood’s candidates. Until the elections to the Fourth Duma, the Orthodox Brotherhood and similar religious organizations exhibited relatively low-level political activism. The elections, however, activated a semi-secular organization that became a consolidated political factor. The long-established hierarchi-

81 “Russkoe predvybornoe sobranie,” *Vilenskii vestnik* 2663 (May 1, 1912).

82 “Sredi vilenskikh izbiratelei,” *Vilenskii vestnik* 2667 (May 6, 1912).

83 Bondarenko, *Pravye partii*, 275. On the role of Orthodox brotherhoods in the monarchist movement in the Belorussian-inhabited provinces, see Konstantin Bondarenko, “O meste i roli pravoslavnykh bratstv v monarkhicheskom dvizhenii na territorii Belarusi v nachale XX veka,” in *Religiia i obshchestvo 11* (conference proceedings), eds. V. Starostenko and O. D’iachenko (Mogilev: MGU im. A.A. Kuleshova, 2017), 97–99. The author states that in the 1912 elections, the role of the Orthodox brotherhoods in the Belorussian provinces was generally insignificant. However, judging from the press and later developments in the northwestern right-wing camp, their connection with the radical parties and organizations was beneficial for both, and thus led to the partial politicization of the religious brotherhoods. Also, many of the northwestern radical right sections were either established or managed by Orthodox clergy, some of whom, as in the case of the Vil’na archbishop Nikandr, were leaders of local brotherhoods.

cal structure, close connections with the Orthodox clergy, and provincial religious communities demonstrated that the Brotherhood could compete with political parties and organizations.⁸⁴ Additionally, the Brotherhood was also assisted by other radical organizations like the Union of the Archangel Michael, the Union of Russian People, and the like.⁸⁵

The Vil'na Brotherhood and their followers were especially fierce in their criticism and even personal insults against Kovaliuk, Vrutsevich, and other nationalists through the newspaper *Vilenskii Vestnik*. They also started another periodical just for the election campaign called *Russkii izbiratel'* (The Russian Voter), which was edited by a man called Tikhmenev, a specially hired person from St. Petersburg, whose goal, according to the nationalist press, was to wage a campaign promoting Brotherhood candidates and, at the same time, discredit the nationalists. In the end, this rivalry backfired, and the Russian voters in Vil'na refused to elect any right-wing candidates. However, with the help of the Brotherhood, the radical right succeeded in sending two of their members from the Vil'na district to the Duma: Zamyslovskii and the Orthodox priest Vladimir Iuz'viuk, both of whom were members of the Union of Russian People.⁸⁶

After the unsuccessful elections, Kovaliuk gave up his leadership over the Vil'na nationalists. But the failure to elect a new head of the section forced him to continue chairing the organization officially until 1913. This election defeat also reflected the diminishing activity of the Vil'na nationalists. Some of them began supporting the Brotherhood, and some even joined the organization. Probably the last appearance of the Vil'na nationalist section was in the autumn of 1913, when their representatives travelled to Kiev to commemorate the anniversary of Stolypin's murder.⁸⁷

84 P.B.-ch [P. Byval'kevich], "Predvybornoe vremia v Severo Zapadnom krae," *Okrainy Rossii* 25 (June 23, 1912), 377–79.

85 On the place of the Orthodox Church in radical right ideology, see K. Bondarenko, "Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' v ideologicheskoi doktrine pravyykh partii i ikh belorusskikh formirovanii," in *Religiia i obshchestvo 9* (conference proceedings), ed. V. Starostenko and O. D'iachenko (Mogilev: MGU im. A.A. Kuleshova, 2015), 48–50.

86 "Mestnaia khronika," *Vilenskii vestnik* 2804 (October 19, 1912).

87 "V Vilenskom russkom natsional'nom soiuze," *Vilenskii vestnik* 3065 (September 1, 1913).

Before the beginning of World War I, northwestern Russian right-wing organizations gradually shifted from more political to practical work, like, for example, improving agriculture and introducing cooperatives to Belorussian peasants. Some nationalists took the lead in the Vil'na Russian Agricultural Society (Vilenskoe Russkoe Sel'sko Khoziaistvennoe Obshchestvo), and many also joined other economic organizations like the all-empire Russian Grain (Russkoe Zerno).⁸⁸ With the beginning of the war, political and societal activism by Russian nationalists and other right-wing groups stopped. Many were called up or volunteered for the army; others, like Kovaliuk, were forced to move deeper into Russia with the advance of the Germans.

Conclusions

The history of the right-wing parties and organizations in the northwestern provinces and their central city Vil'na shows the complicated relationship between the newly born popular Russian monarchist and nationalist movements and the imperial authorities.

During the revolutionary period from 1905 to the end of 1907, radical and conservative religious groups like the Union of the Russian People and various Orthodox brotherhoods generally received stronger support and greater sympathy from both local and central imperial authorities. They stood for the traditional socio-political system in which monarchism, Orthodoxy, and the dominance of Russians were pillars of the empire. Moreover, these groups opposed the revolution and fought against it, which also made them a useful ally for the state authorities.

The moderates and the nationalists were more inclined to organize people, stressing the importance of political participation, patriotic (imperial) education, nationalism, and so on. Many times, especially during elections to the Duma, the northwestern Octobrists, nationalists, and their organi-

⁸⁸ "K organizatsii Vilenskogo Russkogo sel'sko-khoziaistvennogo obshchestva," *Vilenskii vestnik* 3200 (February 9, 1914).

zations attempted to mobilize Russians and Belorussians by taking a somewhat more democratic approach, asking people to propose the best representatives to the Duma, express their opinions, vote, etc. This, of course, was primarily for the educated population, but organizations like the Peasant Society explored to some extent the opinions of the Belorussian peasantry and their needs. However, this approach proved to be less successful primarily because of the lack of such traditions and the general political inertia within society. Therefore, the direct and authoritarian path taken by the radicals was, in a sense, more pragmatic and perhaps even more understandable for many, especially in rural areas where the Orthodox clergy were sometimes the only moral authority and the only representatives of the intelligentsia. Arguably, this approach produced rather good short-term results, but it failed to raise the Russian patriotic and/or civic consciousness, and thereby modernize society. Instead, it continued to reproduce and strengthen the old social structures and the lack of interest in change.

The revolution became a catalyst for organizing and increasing the active participation of people in politics, the economy, and cultural life. However, the traditional gap between the imperial authorities and society (regardless of ethnicity or confession) was not overcome during the period analyzed. Despite their concern about the threat of non-Russian nationalism and the Polonization of Catholic Belorussians, the nationalists were nonetheless a modernizing force given their goal of building a modern Russian nation. Most were civil servants, bureaucrats or school teachers, and educated people in white-collar jobs. In this sense, they were appreciated more by the central imperial government; however, local authorities were quite ambivalent when it came to showing support for the provincial moderate right and nationalists by, for example, backing them in the 1912 Duma elections or helping moderate right-wing organizations like the Northwestern Russian Veche survive. Arguably, delegating more political power to the people was seen as a dangerous practice, just like the deeper reform of the state. The aggression that the radical right demonstrated tended to unbalance the local social order and traditional relations, which was undesirable for the authorities whose task was to preserve stability.

The distribution of right-wing groups according to ideology showed that the northwestern provinces were not a homogeneous territory. It would appear that Russian right-wing organizations in the Lithuanian-inhabited lands, notably regions with a Catholic Belorussian population and urban areas, tended to be somewhat more nationalistic than radical or conservative. Perhaps this could be explained by the higher civic consciousness in towns where larger numbers of civil servants and members of the intelligentsia were concentrated. The Orthodox clergy and, to some extent, Russian landlords had greater influence in rural settlements and parishes. Even though the statistics of the radical right did not represent their actual numbers, they were still favored by the more conservative, patriarchal, and religious communities, to whom the "old ways" of being ordered were, perhaps, more legible than was the articulation of an informed and individual position.

The history of the northwestern and specifically Vil'na Russian right-wing organizations reveals that one of the biggest hindrances to the formation of modern Russian nationalism was the absence of a clear ideology and strategy that would have encompassed other, non-Russian, nationalisms within the general framework of the empire. The radicals were the most consistent because they kept to the pre-1905 doctrines that preached exclusive rights for the monarchy, the Russian nation, and the Orthodox religion, whereas most of the local imperial authorities either took on the position of a mediator, showing no particular preference for either side, or just ignored them altogether. Arguably, for the local authorities, the Russian popular right-wing movement was useful to have around and to maintain and deploy when necessary, but only as an instrument rather than a partner.

From around 1913, the Russian right-wing movement in the northwestern provinces lost popularity and influence, especially in the Lithuanian-inhabited parts and the city of Vil'na. After the unsuccessful elections of 1912, many nationalists changed their activities from more political to socio-economic, which was a field largely dominated by different Orthodox religious organizations and the radical right. However, the outbreak of the war halted the transformation and the further development of the northwestern Russian right-wing movement.