

Challenges to Imperial Authorities' Nationality Policy in the Northwest Region, 1905–15

Darius Staliūnas

There are different approaches toward the longevity of the Russian Empire in historiography. Some researchers claim that the Romanovs' recipe for success lay in the effective integration of the peripheries (primarily their elites) into imperial ruling structures, and that the state collapsed in 1917 due to the particular circumstances created by the war.¹ Others argue that the Russian Empire did not collapse earlier thanks to its military power.² Only a small part of this fundamental debate will be analyzed here. The question raised in this study is whether the tsarist government had a clear nationality policy concept in the Northwest region in the late imperial period, that is, one that in its own view could produce results, at least to ensure the loyalty of non-dominant national groups.³ I argue that tsarist officials had problems finding this kind of strategy, and essentially reconciled themselves to the disloyalty of the non-dominant national groups (or at least their elites) in the Romanov Empire.⁴

This research was funded by a grant (No. S-LJB-17-3) from the Research Council of Lithuania. I would like to express my appreciation to all members of the Michigan university *kruzhok*, especially to Valerie Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny for the lively intellectual discussion of this paper.

1 This idea prevailed at the conference “Russia between Reforms and Revolutions, 1906–16,” held at the European University in St. Petersburg on May 26–28, 2017.

2 This approach dominates among historians of Central and Eastern Europe.

3 The Northwest region consisted of the Vil'na, Kovna, Grodna, Minsk, Vitebsk, and Mogilev provinces, even though the term was sometimes applied to only three provinces: Vil'na, Kovna, and Grodna, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

4 Imperial nationality policy regarding Poles, Lithuanians, and Belorussian Catholics will be analyzed in this chapter. These are the most significant national groups that are either not recognized as part of the Russian category, or their Russianness was controversial (as in the case of Catholic Belorussians). The “Jewish ques-

The policies of the tsarist government on the western periphery of the Russian Empire following the 1905 Revolution have received much less attention than the period after the quelling of the 1863–64 uprising.⁵ This is because in the post-1905 period, the imperial government did not experiment much in terms of politics, passing only a few decrees based on nationality policy motives (for example, the creation of Cholm [Chełm] province and the introduction of the zemstvo system in six of the Western region's provinces), while public life was significantly more active, consequently drawing greater interest from researchers. Additionally, between 1905 and 1915 as compared with the post-1863 era, the centers of power changed somewhat.⁶ During the earlier period, especially between 1863 and 1865 when Mikhail Murav'ev was the governor-general of Vil'na, many nationality policy innovations were implemented at the initiative and through the efforts of local authorities (banning the Lithuanian press in the traditional script, the introduction of Russian into supplementary services in the Catholic Church, the mass conversion of Belorussian Catholics to Orthodoxy, etc.), while at the beginning of the twentieth century, the powers of the Vil'na governor-general were much less extensive. The reduced influence of the Vil'na governor-general was related to numerous develop-

tion" will not be discussed here both because of the limited scope of this study, and because this problem had obviously become a prerogative of the central government in the early twentieth century, and local officials showed little initiative on this issue. Nationality policy toward these non-dominant national groups will be revealed through an analysis of debates among tsarist bureaucrats, decisions made by imperial authorities, and, only to a very limited degree, through an examination of how that policy was implemented.

- 5 The following works are worth mentioning here. Malte Rolf's research on the Kingdom of Poland; see: Malte Rolf, *Imperiale Herrschaft im Weichselland. Das Königreich Polen im Russischen Imperium (1864–1915)* (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2015); the summative study by Mikhail Dolbilov and Alexei Miller, *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006); works dedicated to confessional policies: Vytautas Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai Vilniaus vyskupijoje 1798–1918 m.* (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2006); Aleksandr Bendin, *Problemy veroterpimosti v Severo-zapadnom krae Rossiiskoi imperii (1863–1914 gg.)* (Minsk: BGU, 2010); and the monograph by Theodore R. Weeks in which the following questions are analyzed in greater detail: local self-government, the separation of the Chełm province from the Kingdom of Poland: Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1996). See also a monograph on the Chełm problem by Polish historian Andrzej Szabaciuk, *'Rosyjski Ulster': Kwestia Chełmska w polityce imperialnej Rosji w latach 1863–1915* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013).
- 6 This research spans the period up to 1915, as after this time, a larger part of the Northwest region came under German military occupation.

ments: the officials who took up these posts, Alexander Freze (1904–1905) and Konstantin Krshivitskii (1905–1909), did not have the same authority as, for example, Murav'ev. The jurisdiction of the Vil'na governor-general at the beginning of the twentieth century spanned only three provinces: Vil'na, Kovna, and Grodna, whereas in the 1860s, it also extended to the “Belorussian” provinces of Minsk, Vitebsk and Mogilev, where the government often applied the same anti-Polish measures. Furthermore, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, there was increasingly more discussion among bureaucrats about the need to abolish general-governorships on the empire's peripheries, which is what happened in the case of Vil'na in 1912.⁷

There were even more differences between these two epochs that are noteworthy. Starting in 1905, Russia was a constitutional monarchy, and all decrees had to be approved by the parliament (Duma). Even though the first two Dumas opposed to the government were dissolved and the third and fourth Dumas in effect supported the government's policies, this new government institution limited the ability of tsarist authorities to experiment in the field of nationalities policy. At the same time, there were numerous situations where members of non-dominant ethnic or confessional groups participated at the discussion stage on certain measures in the fields of education, local self-governance, and religion. This also reduced the potential for drastic discriminatory measures.

Nevertheless, this approximately ten-year period was important in the evolution of the tsarist government's nationalities policy in the Northwest region. It is important for our understanding of how the imperial government tried to manage old and new challenges: growing nationalism among Russians and non-Russians; the strengthening of the revolutionary movement; the (at least formally) legalized constitutional regime; and the influence of the international situation on the empire's domestic affairs. Although the focus of this chapter is on the post-1905 period, tsarist nationalities policy in the last decade of the Empire cannot be analyzed without at least briefly discussing the changes that took place in nationalities policy in the early twentieth century.

7 The post of the Vil'na governor-general had been vacant since 1909.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the government's main enemy on the empire's western periphery was without doubt the Poles. However, at around the turn of the twentieth century, influential imperial officials emerged, such as the Vil'na governor-general Petr Sviatopolk-Mirskii (1902–1904; also minister for internal affairs in 1904–1905), who imagined the empire's "hierarchy of enemies" quite differently.⁸ In May 1904, while summing up his activities throughout his tenure as the governor-general of Vil'na, he recommended differentiating between different sectors of Polish society despite practically admitting that the government must continue fighting against Polish influence and, in particular, stop the Polonization of non-Polish Catholics (Belorussians and Lithuanians). Sviatopolk-Mirskii only considered Poles living in cities to be disloyal, while the Polish gentry were "a calmer, [politically] more lucid group and were a great support to the government."⁹ Even at this stage, the senior official stated that it was no longer the Poles' anti-government activities that posed the greatest problem, but the "workers question," which was closely associated with the "Jewish question"; that is, the main challenge to the maintenance of political stability came from the participation by Jews in the revolutionary movement.¹⁰ Some of the empire's political elites also changed their attitude toward the empire's Polish subjects in response to the political conjuncture. At the end of the nineteenth century when Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy formed the Triple Alliance, the negative policy against Poland that had been in place since the beginning of the eighteenth century disintegrated.¹¹ Thus, some senior officials in Russia such as, for example, the Warsaw governor-general Pavel Shuvalov, alleged that discrimination against Poles in the Romanov Empire would make them politically loyal to the Triple Al-

8 On his program, see also: Witold Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863–1905)* (Lublin: Scientific Society of Lublin, 1998), 225–42.

9 Rimantas Vėbra, ed., *Lietuvių klausimas Rusijos imperijoje XIX a.–XX a. pradžioje* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2001), 158–85, quote on 168.

10 Ibid., 241.

11 This was, first of all, the goal of Prussia and Russia not to allow the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth to grow strong in the eighteenth century, and to stop it from re-establishing itself in the nineteenth century: Martin Schulze Wessel, *Russlands Blick auf Preussen: Die polnische Frage in der Diplomatie und der politischen Öffentlichkeit des Zarenreiches und des Sowjetstaates 1697–1947* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995).

liance, which was why policies relating to Poles had to be changed.¹² These changes to the empire's imagined "hierarchy of enemies" became even more pronounced during the period of the 1905 revolution.¹³

The altered informal "hierarchy of enemies" was an important, but not the only reason for least part of the empire's ruling elite's changes in their periphery integration strategies. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some bureaucrats admitted that the "Russification" policy not only failed to bring the anticipated benefits, but even produced results that directly opposed the imperial government's expectations. Officials noted the ineffectiveness of earlier policies not just with regard to Poles, but also, for example, in their policy on the publication of the Lithuanian press in the traditional script. Some senior officials admitted that this prohibition had worsened relations between the government and the Lithuanians: "The population, usually quite calm and compliant, was pushed to the verge of revolt."¹⁴ Furthermore, in the view of imperial officials, the policy of Cyrilization did not reduce the Polonization of Lithuanians but increased it. It was no great secret to imperial officials that Lithuanians had devised a way of printing Lithuanian books and, later on, newspapers in the Latin script in Prussia (from 1870–1871 in the German Empire), and then smuggled them into the Russian Empire. Lithuanian historians have identified as many as 2,854 individuals who were caught with illegal Lithuanian printed material. It was obvious to the Kovna governor-general Alexei Rogovich that: "It was impossible to force a million-strong tribe to forget their nationality or language, which it had preserved completely intact during the entire history of Poland and Russia, and at the same time it was impossible to destroy the 'Lithuanian movement.'"¹⁵ The enormous amount of illegal literature was also dangerous to the government, not only because it was printed in a prohibited script, but also because of its content. In other

12 Petr Shuvalov, Overview of the Situation in the Northwest region (1896), *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), f. 543, op. 1, d. 466, l. 7.

13 Dolbilov and Miller, *Zapadnye okrainy*, 343.

14 Quoted from: Vytautas Merkys, *Knygnešių laikai 1864–1904* (Vilnius: Valstybinis leidybos centras, 1994), 368.

15 Ibid., 364.

words, some officials maintained that a legal Lithuanian press in the Latin script would be more advantageous to the government as then it could be shaped by censorship.¹⁶ Also, an unquestionable incentive was the general liberalization of the regime, which resulted from both the defeat in the war against Japan and the revolution of 1905.

Probably the first complex attempt to recommend an alternative to “Russification” was the aforementioned report by Sviatopolk-Mirskii, from which we learn that the Vil’na governor-general at the time suggested changing policies affecting non-Russians. There was no reason to exclude the Polish gentry from various organizations and state institutions; rather they should be invited to join, and thus encouraged to cooperate with Russians. In other words, the imperial government had to move from a policy of segregation to one of integration. These joint efforts by Poles and Russians would contribute to the integration of the region into the Russian Empire.¹⁷ He also acknowledged that the policy carried out against Lithuanians—which in analytical terms could be described as acculturation, and which had to be followed by assimilation—was counter-productive, and that the Russian authorities had to come to terms with the Lithuanian ethno-cultural community’s existence in principle.¹⁸ But in the case of Belorussian Catholics, the ultimate goal had to remain conversion to Orthodoxy, or, as we would put it, complete assimilation. However, the methods here had to be completely different. One of the most important principles was to stop discriminating against the Catholic Church, because that kind of policy “would only distance Catholic Belorussians from the government, and, in retreating from the Russians, they would ultimately join the Poles, doing so entirely consciously and in great numbers.”¹⁹ Guided by this particular logic of nationality policy, in 1905, numerous legal acts were changed in the Russian Empire in order to regulate non-Russians’ education, religious life, and the acquisition of land.

¹⁶ For more on this issue, see *ibid.*, 358–86.

¹⁷ Vėbra, *Lietuvių klausimas*, 168–85.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 200–22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

In this research, I make the distinction between the *imperial* or *pragmatic* nationality policy and *nationalist* nationality policy strategies, which are understood here as ideal types. The first strategy's main aim was to ensure stability in the empire, so that the demands of non-Russians could be met if it helped to achieve tranquility within the society. At the same time, acculturation or even assimilation methods could be employed here too, as long as they did not increase opposition among imperial subjects. The second strategy, meanwhile, was defined by the idea that political loyalty could only be achieved through cultural homogenization; that is, the political loyalty of non-Russians had to be secured by applying assimilation or acculturation policies, and in cases where that was impossible, or if such policies failed, segregationist political measures were applied, and ethnic Russians protected. Proponents of this strategy perceived any concession to non-Russian nationalities as dangers to the wellbeing of the empire.²⁰

“The Polish Question”

On March 15, 22 and 23, 1905, the Committee of Ministers considered the abolition of discriminatory measures against Poles, basing their judgment on the report by Sviatopolk-Mirskii already cited here.²¹ The participants in these meetings noted that the Poles' attitude to the Russian Empire had changed. They no longer exhibited separatist tendencies, and they could prove to be quite useful as a conservative element in the struggle against the new main enemy: “dangerous teaching, seeking the social equality of

²⁰ Witold Rodkiewicz has defined the empire's different nationality policy strategies in a little bit different way. He writes that *bureaucratic Nationalism* sought to transform the empire into a Russian nation-state, and understood integration as “a full linguistic and cultural Russification of non-Russians,” while nationhood within the framework of *imperial Strategy* was taken to be political loyalty, supporting Lithuanians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians as a counterforce against the Poles, etc.: Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy*, 13–16. For a slightly different conceptualization of different approaches towards nationality issues in the late imperial period, see Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 250–52. Out of the four “visions for the empire” identified by Kivelson and Suny, that of the “true Russian’ nationalists” is actually the same as the *nationalist* one described above.

²¹ The Committee of Ministers was charged with preparing point 7 of the tsarist decree of December 12, 1904, which foresaw the implementation of eliminating discrimination against non-Russians.

all classes, and extreme democracy.”²² We can also see such changes in the empire’s imagined “hierarchy of enemies” on its western periphery. Summarizing the experience of the 1905 revolution that had just taken place, the governor of Grodna thought the activities of Jewish revolutionary organizations, which he went so far as to call “a terrible threat,” were a much more serious problem, despite noting that Poles had not abandoned their aim to Polonize the Belorussians.²³

In the meetings of the Council of Ministers held in March 1905, senior officials demonstrated that they were going to take into account at least some of the demands of non-Russians, primarily of Poles, so that “they could improve their economic situation and develop their religious strength.” As was written in the meeting’s minutes, this kind of attitude “would inspire love and respect by the incorporated nations for the dominating [nation], and eliminate, or at least minimize, ethnic tensions and dissatisfaction.”²⁴ This kind of approach can be attributed more to methods of *imperial* (or *pragmatic*) nationality policy than *nationalist* nationality policy. The imperial decree of May 1, 1905 confirmed the resolutions passed at these meetings, which abolished certain anti-Polish discriminatory measures that had been introduced after 1863 (many of the prohibitions on purchasing or renting land, it planned to revive the self-governing activities of the gentry; teaching subjects in Lithuanian and Polish at various levels in state schools was also permitted).²⁵

Like other legal acts that eased discrimination against “persons of Polish origin,” this decree did not change the perception of the Western region as a Russian national territory in official discourse, nor were the convictions of the imperial ruling elite changed so that other ethnic groups (first of all

22 Minutes of the Committee of Ministers’ meetings, March 15, 22, 23, 1905, *RGIA*, f. 1276, op. 1, d. 106, l. 407.

23 Report for the Grodna province, 1907, *RGIA. Chital’nyi zal*, papka No 2820, doc. no. 20, l. 1.

24 Minutes of the Committee of Ministers’ meetings, March 15, 22, 23, 1905, *RGIA*, f. 1276, op. 1, d. 106, l. 404.

25 Decree of May 1, 1905, *RGIA*, f. 1276, op. 1, d. 106, l. 423. The prohibition on buying land from Russians remained in place. Even though it was the cancellation of anti-Polish prohibitions that was formally being deliberated, some discriminatory measures against Lithuanians were also revoked.

Lithuanians and “Russians”) had to be protected from Polish influence.²⁶ This position was very clearly elucidated by Krshivitskii, the Vil’na governor-general: “Any external oppression of the Polish element is deeply wrong and naturally opposes the sentiments of Russians; [in addition], as experience has shown [this kind of policy of oppression] brings the opposite results, which simply strengthens the oppressed element and morally weakens the dominant [element].” However, this kind of approach, according to the governor-general, was acceptable only within the “ethnographic boundaries of the Polish nation,” while in Belorussia, the government had to see to the survival of the Belorussians under the influence of Russian culture.²⁷

Ivan Tolstoi, who had been appointed education minister in October 1905, suggested making radical changes to policies concerning the Poles. His credo declared that schooling cannot “Russify” non-Russians, that is, change their collective identification, which is why schools had to be made attractive to these nationalities. One of the first measures in reaching this goal had to be the introduction of “local languages” as part of the curriculum.²⁸ The minister suggested particularly radical changes to the education policy in the Kingdom of Poland.²⁹ As he himself wrote in his memoirs, he recommended a reform program practically repeating word-for-word the recommendations made by Leon Petrażycki, a Polish professor at St. Petersburg University. Besides other recommendations, this program foresaw the introduction of Polish as the language of instruction not only in state primary schools, but also in secondary schools. However, not only Russian and Russian literature, but also Russian history and geography had to be taught in Russian. Russian gymnasiums were to operate in the same way

26 Minutes of the Committee of Ministers’ meetings, March 15, 22, 23, 1905, *RGIA*, f. 1276, op. 1, d. 106, l. 403. On the Russian mental map, only Kovna province and the northwest part of Vil’na province within the Western region with a majority Lithuanian population were not perceived as Russian “national territory.”

27 Draft report from the Vil’na governor-general to P. Stolypin, August 20, 1905, *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1906 m., b. 412, l. 4. Similar ideas appear in a report prepared by the head of the Common Affairs Department of the Interior Ministry at the end of 1905, *RGIA*, f. 1284, op. 250, d. 220, l. 114–6.

28 Ivan Tolstoi, *Zametki o narodnom obrazovanii v Rosii* (St. Petersburg, 1907), 12–15.

29 Tolstoi also dismissed the Vil’na educational district overseer Vasilii Popov, whose “Russification” policy I will discuss later in this chapter. See Popov, *Memuary grafa I. I. Tolstogo* (Moscow: Indrik, 2002), 66.

in that Polish and Polish literature had to be taught.³⁰ However, Georgii Skalon, the governor-general of Warsaw, did not approve of such radical changes, and it was decided in St. Petersburg that this kind of reform was “not for these times.”³¹

The conditions for teaching “local languages” (Polish and Lithuanian) as subjects in the Northwest region were also revised while Tolstoi was education minister. If the resolutions passed in 1905 in St. Petersburg (the decree of May 1 and the resolution from the Education Committee at the Ministry of Education issued on September 22) foresaw that these languages could be taught as non-compulsory subjects in state schools only if “the majority of the pupils were of Lithuanian or Polish nationality” (the first document referred to a majority in a certain locality, the second meant a specific school); then, by January 21, 1906, the Ministry of Education allowed the introduction of this subject even where a specific national group did not make up the majority.³² Thus, Polish as a subject was introduced in certain secondary, higher primary and two-year primary schools in the Northwest region.³³ However, soon enough, at the end of April 1906, Tolstoi and Sergei Vitte, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, were dismissed from their positions, which symbolized the end of the more liberal era.

Even though the tsarist decree of April 22, 1906 foresaw that the teaching of the Polish language as a subject could be introduced in primary schools in the part of Grodna province where Poles lived in a rather com-

30 *Memuary Tolstogo*, 164–72. In the Manuscript Department of the Russian National Library, the Tolstoi collection has a document “Note about languages of instruction in state education institutions in the Kingdom of Poland” (*Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi natsional’noi biblioteki v Sankt Peterburge*, f. 781, d. 118), whose authorship has been attributed to the minister, although in his memoirs he wrote that he did not keep this document and only had the recommendations made by Petrazhyski at hand when he was writing them. *Memuary Tolstogo*, 165.

31 *Memuary Tolstogo*, 165, 172. The Polish language basically only received these kinds of rights in private schools from 1905, which Tolstoi recommended granting to state schools in the Kingdom of Poland.

32 Report from the Vil’na educational district overseer to the minister of education, March 9, 1908, *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 26, b. 800a, l. 15. For earlier regulations, see: Excerpt from the Vil’na educational district Circular No. 9 (1905), *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1904 m., 316, l. 181.

33 In 1908, out of the forty-one state secondary schools in the Northwest region, Polish was only taught as a subject in twenty-one, and in just a few primary schools in the cities. Out of the 117 private Christian schools, Polish was taught as a subject in only twenty: report from the Vil’na educational district overseer to the minister of education, March 9, 1908, *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 26, b. 800a, l. 15.

pact area, this resolution was never implemented, regardless of the four meetings of the senior local officials in Vil'na and Grodna that took place in 1906, during which a "Polish territory" in Grodna was designated. In the years to come, senior local officials questioned the reliability of the research conducted in 1906.³⁴ It is likely that some of them did not even want to see this resolution carried out, and their critique of the collection of the data was only a pretext for failing to introduce Polish in primary schools in Grodna province. In the post-1905 period, imperial nationality policy changed yet again, and some tsarist bureaucrats no longer wanted to grant "privileges" to Poles any more.

The non-Russian elites on the empire's peripheries did not abide by the "rules of the game" envisaged by the imperial government. Take, for example, the case of the implementation of the April decree (April 17, 1905), whereby non-Orthodox clergy, first of all from the Catholic Church, took advantage of the fact that the government had not set down procedures for conversion, and initiated mass conversions of Orthodox believers to Catholicism.³⁵ In other words, it became clear to officials that the concessions the government was prepared to make could not satisfy the demands of the non-Russian elite. The change in direction in policy was also determined by the suppression of the revolution, which meant that the government had to take less notice of the demands made by opposition forces.

Gradually, in the perception of at least some tsarist officials, Poles recovered their status as the Empire's main enemies on its western periphery. This change is also evident in the reports by the Grodna governor Nikolai Nevrovich. Discussing the situation in 1907, he devoted a lot of attention to the threat coming from Jewish revolutionaries, and even noted that the Russians and the Poles had temporarily become united in the face of this threat in the province. In later years, the governor highlighted the dangerous activities by

34 See: "Ob upotreblenii mestnykh iazykov v nachal'nykh shkolakh Severo-Zapadnago kraia (Vysochaishee povelenie ot 22 apreliia 1906 goda)," *LVI*, f. 378, BS, 1906 m., b. 378; "Ob ustanovlenii etnograficheskikh granits primeneniia Vysochaishego poveleniia 22-go apreliia 1906 goda o dopushchenii pol'skogo iazyka v nachal'nykh uchilishchakh Grodnenskoii gub.," *LVI*, f. 567, ap. 13, b. 1301.

35 See also Žaltauskaitė's chapter in this volume.

Poles somewhat more, even though his reports still contained negative assessments of Jewish activities.³⁶ Thus, we should not be surprised by the fact that some of the points in the decree of May 1, 1905, such as the one concerning elections to the self-governing institutions of the gentry, were never realized, and, if we believe Aleksander Meysztowicz, Konstanty Skirmuntt and Stanisław Lopaciński, all Polish members of the State Council, then the decree was only followed in the first two years after its announcement, after which administrative practices changed, and local officials made it difficult for Poles to make use of the newly granted rights. Governor-generals were said to be stalling the issue of permits to Poles wanting to buy plots of land in order to eliminate land strips (domains sandwiched into other land holdings). In 1911, the Cassation Department of the Governing Senate explained that Poles could not buy land from legal entities, etc.³⁷

The trend whereby the imperial government treated Poles *in corpore* as an enemy element whose influence could not be allowed to affect other national groups, primarily “Russians,” is illustrated very well in the story of the introduction of the zemstvo in the Western region. This local self-governing institution was introduced in the Russian Empire in 1864, although not in all of its peripheries. It was not introduced in the Western region because the ruling regime feared that the Poles would dominate these institutions. The bureaucratic correspondence that began at the end of the nineteenth century regarding the introduction of the zemstvo in the Western region ended in 1911, when Nicholas II confirmed the law on creating zemstvos in six of the provinces of the Western region.³⁸ They were not introduced in the “Lithuanian” provinces (Vil’na, Kovna, Grodna). The Vil’na and Kovna provinces were excluded from the area where the law applied because the Ministry of Interior Affairs believed that “zemstvo meetings in most of the districts in the Kovna and Vil’na provinces [...] would not have a Russian character at all, and [...]

36 Report for the Grodna province, 1907, 1908, 1910, *RGIA. Chital’nyi zal*, papka no. 2820.

37 Report by the State Council members Meysztowicz, Skirmuntt and Lopaciński “On the situation of Poles in the Western region,” *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 128, d. 1407, l. 20.

38 The details surrounding the preparation of this law have been discussed in historiography: Aron Avrekh, “Vopros o zapdnom zemstve i bankrotstvo Stolypina,” *Istoricheskie zapiski* 70 (1961): 61–112; Weeks, *Nation and State*, 131–51; Dolbilov and Miller, *Zapadnye okrainy*, 271–75, 378–81.

would be completely undesirable in terms of the state's interests, and completely impermissible in terms of the domination of the Russian idea in the land."³⁹ The imperial government's greatest fear was that local self-governing institutions would be taken over by Poles. One dimension of this context which has received less attention in historiography is that the zemstvo system was never introduced in Grodna province either. Based on the official version, tsarist officials decided not to apply this reform in Grodna province because it would have proven inconvenient to administer the Vil'na governor-generalship if the zemstvo existed in only one of its provinces.⁴⁰ This could actually have been an important motive for tsarist bureaucrats, but it might not have been the only one. The abolition of the institution of Vil'na governor-general was deliberated extensively in imperial government institutions basically from the post-1863 period on, and the post was vacant altogether starting in 1909. The resolution for the abolition of the institution was finally passed at the beginning of 1911.⁴¹ In other words, in 1909–10, bureaucrats might have suspected that the institution of the Vil'na governor-general would soon be non-existent. Therefore, it is likely that the imperial ruling elite also looked suspiciously on Grodna province as a territory overly influenced by the Poles, where there were quite a few Catholic Belorussians, and for this reason were "undoubtedly under the influence of Polonization."⁴²

Meanwhile, in the remaining six provinces of the Western region, elections to zemstvo self-governing institutions had to take place according to the national curia system, so that Russians would have the majority. This decision is a clear illustration of the government's nationality policy priorities. It was passed regardless of the fact that some of the participants in the discussions that took place in government offices warned of the nega-

39 Official letter from the Interior Ministry to the State Duma on the introduction of zemstvos in the Western Region, January 20, 1910, *RGIA*, f. 1288, op. 4, 3e deloproizvodstvo, 1909 god, d. 38a, l. 171.

40 Ibid., l. 172; Avrekh, "Vopros o zapadnom zemstve," 69.

41 Darius Staliūnas, "An Awkward City: Vilnius as a Regional Centre in Russian Nationality Policy (ca 1860–1914)," in *Russia and Eastern Europe: Applied 'Imperiology'*, edited by Andrzej Nowak (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2006), 222–43.

42 Official letter from the Interior Ministry to the State Duma on the introduction of zemstvos in the Western region, January 20, 1910, *RGIA*, f. 1288, op. 4, 3e deloproizvodstvo, 1909 god, d. 38a, l. 172.

tive impact of national curiae on integration processes: this kind of election procedure would only transform the Poles into representatives of Polish national groups, and instead of seeing various national groups unite, they would work more for the benefit of their own national group.⁴³ The imperial ruling elite's priority was the defense of Russian interests, while the integration of non-dominant national groups, first of all Poles, was less critical, and in actual fact, was not quite feasible from the point of view of the elites. This is precisely the kind of policy direction we see in the meeting of senior tsarist officials held in St. Petersburg in April 1914 "On the Fight against Polonization in the Northwest region."⁴⁴

At these meetings, senior officials expressed their concern over the recent intimacy between the "Polish aristocracy and intelligentsia" and the common people, which could be very dangerous to the integrity of the empire.⁴⁵ There was no discussion of the possibility of making Poles loyal subjects of the emperor, or to exerting some kind of influence over their cultural identification. We get the impression that senior tsarist officials had reconciled themselves with the idea that Poles would have anti-Russian views, and that this was something they could not hope to change. A discussion recorded in the meeting journal on April 18 1914 mentioned that a German should not be appointed as the Catholic Archbishop of Mogilev because the Poles would treat this as a challenge.⁴⁶ Discussions like this, in which we find the high-ranking officials meeting in St. Petersburg actually cared about the feedback from Poles, were rare and exceptional. All attention in these discussions was focused on measures meant to protect "Russians" and Lithuanians from Polish influence. The participants in the meeting decided to approach the Interior Ministry with suggestions to reduce Polish influence in the Catholic Church: for example, attempts to ensure

43 Avrekh, "Vopros o zapadnom zemstve," 92–93.

44 The Northwest region is understood here in a narrower sense, as the Vil'na, Kovna, and Grodna provinces, and perhaps also the Minsk, provinces. The governors of the first three provinces participated in the meeting. The Minsk governor was also invited to the meeting, but he could not attend.

45 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 17, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 88.

46 Ibid.

that Lithuanians were appointed as bishops in Vil'na and Tel'shi [Samogitia], and that a Latvian should hold this post in Mogilev; a reduction in the number of Poles in chapters and in staff collectives at consistories and religious seminaries; holding additional Catholic prayers and the teaching of religion to Belorussians only in Russian; restricting the influence of the Catholic Church using various other means; strengthening the position of the Orthodox Church; taking up a whole range of other measures further complicating the purchase of land for Poles, and improving the economic situation of Russians, etc.⁴⁷

Even with the outbreak of the Great War, when some of the western borderlands were occupied by the German army and when rivalry broke out between the warring sides over trying to win over the Poles, only some of the more senior imperial officials (such as the minister for war, Alexei Polivanov) were prepared to abolish legal acts discriminating against "persons of Polish origin." Others (the interior minister Alexei Khvostov and the minister of agriculture Aleksandr Naumov) suggested not hurrying, and still others (the minister of education Pavel Ignat'ev) proposed making only partial concessions; there were also some (the minister of justice Aleksandr Khvostov), who, in the event that the Kingdom of Poland receive autonomy, would have suggested introducing new prohibitions aimed at Poles in the Western region.⁴⁸

What to Do with the Lithuanians?

In the view of most tsarist officials, unlike "the Polish question," Lithuanians did not pose any immediate threat to the integrity of the Empire. But the tsarist government still had trouble finding a clear and consistent nationality policy with regard to Lithuanians.

47 The plan for counteracting Polonisation prepared by the meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25 and 26, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 70-72. Many of these ideas had already been discussed after the suppression of the 1863-64 uprising.

48 See the file: "O vvedenii prepodavaniia na inorodcheskikh iazykakh v chastnykh srednikh uchebnykh zavedeniakh," *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 196, 1915 g., d. 1003.

Despite the increasing liberalization of the political regime, which began in 1904, and the obvious consolidation of the Lithuanian national movement, even in the revolutionary 1905 period, there were officials in the Northwest region who essentially suggested continuing a nationalist policy that had been introduced after 1863. The most prominent adherents of this policy were Vil'na educational district officials, with overseer Vasilii Popov (1899–1906) at the fore of such efforts. In the spring of 1905, local education agency officials tried to convince both the Vil'na governor-general and the central government that religion could only be taught in Lithuanian in the first year, as previously.⁴⁹ They also sought to limit the presence of Lithuanian in schools as much as possible at the beginning of 1906 (they agreed to the use of Lithuanian in primary schools when teaching arithmetic in the first year of school, but only alternating it with Russian).⁵⁰ Northwest region officials based these nationality policy recommendations on several arguments. They argued that the Lithuanian national movement was anti-government: revolutionaries were said to play an important role in this movement. Some activists used the slogan “Lithuania for Lithuanians” and sought to bring down the tsarist government. In Kovna province, the interests of these activists and Polish estate owners coincided. In addition, Popov and his subordinates repeated images about the Lithuanian language from the post-1863 period. They asserted that there was no such literary language, while the Samogitians could not understand Lithuanian. Nonetheless, during the period of the 1905 revolution, this was not the only approach to nationality policy that existed.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, from 1905 the local government had much less power to determine the selection and implemen-

49 For more on this, see the following files: “Po voprosu ob uregulirovanii narodnogo obrazovaniia v guberniakh Severo-Zapadnago Kraia, tut zhe i perepiska po voprosu o prepodavanii Zakona Bozh'ego w uchebnykh zavedeniakh na prirodnom iazyke uchashchikhsia,” *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1904 m., b. 316, l. 16–35; and “Po prosheniiu krest'ian-litovtsev o vvedenii v nachal'nykh narodnykh uchilishchakh prepodavaniia zakona Bozhiia r.[imsko]-katolicheskogo ispovedaniia na litovskom iazyke,” *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 12, b. 7453.

50 Official report by the Vil'na educational district overseer and an overview prepared by the overseer's assistant A. Beletskii on the situation in the Kovna province at the end of 1905, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 173, d. 27, l. 52–61, quoted from l. 53.

tation of specific nationality policy measures compared to the post-1863 period. The liberalization of the tsarist regime that occurred in 1905 unavoidably had to offer more rights to Lithuanian social activities and the status of the Lithuanian language in the public sphere. Even though the language rights of non-dominant national groups were regulated separately in each region (for example, opportunities to use “local languages” in the educational institutions in the Baltic provinces and the Kingdom of Poland were expanded earlier and were more wide-ranging than in the Western region), the empire-wide liberalization of the political regime affected the Western region as well. Furthermore, the imperial government could no longer ignore the collective demands of Lithuanians, especially with regard to the rather dramatic situation that unfolded in Kovna province at the end of 1905, when Russian officials and teachers were driven out from rural areas en masse. Ultimately, some imperial officials admitted that the earlier policy was fruitless: “When the government implemented certain Russification measures towards Lithuanians in the mid-1860s, after it had subdued the Polish revolt, the Lithuanians were, in a political sense, an indifferent mass, lacking any national consciousness, and the government could expect that Lithuanians, feeling the effects of the measures implemented, would go along with unification with the real Russia. However, the outcomes [of this policy] did not meet these expectations.”⁵¹ In the end, regardless of all the repeated claims coming from various government institutions and separate officials that after 1905 “this language [Lithuanian] does not actually exist, as Lithuanian today is still just a language of the common folk and is split into numerous dialects, which sometimes differ greatly from one another,” gradually, both in the imperial bureaucracy and in public discourse, a different approach to the existence of Lithuanian literary language began to take shape.⁵² A good illustration of this were the debates in the Third Russian State Duma, during which constitutional dem-

51 Official letter from the interior minister to the Committee of Ministers, September 10, 1905, *RGLA*, f. 472, op. 60, d. 2137, l. 5.

52 Kazys Žukauskas, *Iš Lietuvos mokyklos istorijos. 1905–1907 metai* (Kaunas: Valstybinė pedagoginės literatūros leidykla, 1960), 63.

ocrats identified eight non-Russian languages in the Empire that should be taught for four years. Alongside Polish, German, Tartar, Estonian, Latvian, Georgian and Armenian, Lithuanian was also mentioned.⁵³

All of the mentioned circumstances led to the situation whereby after the April decree (April 17, 1905), Lithuanians could study Catholicism in Lithuanian during the whole teaching period; after the extended bureaucratic correspondence between Kovna, Vil'na, and St. Petersburg in 1905–1906, Lithuanian could be taught as a subject in state secondary and primary schools, and the language could be used in primary schools when teaching arithmetic.⁵⁴ Lithuanians were the first to receive permission to publish periodicals in the region, and starting in 1906, they could study at the Ponevezh Teacher Training College and work as teachers in the Northwest region. One Lithuanian society could establish private primary schools in Kovna province although the government placed greater restrictions on the activities of these particular schools in 1908–15.⁵⁵ In the Kovna province, the government allowed societies to keep their documentation in “local languages” (i.e., in Lithuanian and Polish). There were other reforms to the position of Lithuanians as well.

Additionally, during the revolution of 1905 as well as in later years, imperial officials of various ranks deliberated over whether it would be beneficial to support the Lithuanian national movement, and thereby weaken the position of the Poles in the Northwest region. Petr Verevkin, who served as Kovna governor in 1904–1912 and Vil'na governor in 1912–1916, is often presented in historical scholarship as a tsarist official who was “favorable toward the Lithuanians,” and who “always backed the Lithuanian side in arguments between the Poles and Lithuanians.”⁵⁶

53 Wayne Dowler, “The Politics of Language in Non-Russian Elementary Schools in the Eastern Empire, 1865–1914,” *The Russian Review* 54, no. 4 (Oct. 1995): 536–90. These debates did not affect the situation in the Grand Duchy of Finland.

54 Magdalena Karčiauskienė, *Pradinio švietimo raida Lietuvoje XIX a. antrojoje pusėje ir XX a. pradžioje* (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1989), 126–37; Olga Mastianica, “Lietuvių kalba Vilniaus švietimo apygardos vidurinėse mokyklose 1906–1914 m.,” *Lituanistica* 2, 104 (2016): 77–90.

55 Vladas Pupšys, *Lietuvos mokykla: Atgimimo metai (1905–1918)* (Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universitetas, 1995), 58.

56 Martynas Yčas, *Atsiminimai. Nepriklausomybės keliais*, vol. 1 (Kaunas, 1935), 22; K. Giedraitis, “Guber-

At first glance, certain circumstances appear to support the aforementioned historiographical thesis. Verevkin made suggestions numerous times to Sviatopolk-Mirskii, the Vil'na governor-general, to support the Lithuanian periodical press financially.⁵⁷ He backed some Lithuanian demands, such as the appointment of Lithuanian teachers to primary state schools in Kovna province in 1906.⁵⁸ In 1906, the governor-general recommended allowing the establishment of private schools where Lithuanian (and not Polish) would be the language of instruction.⁵⁹ In 1909, Verevkin suggested that once the zemstvo system was introduced, elections in Kovna province would be organized for groups of large and small landowners separately, thereby ensuring the proportional representation of Lithuanians.⁶⁰ However, having analyzed other suggestions made by the governor, especially those formulated in his later years in the office, we see that this tsarist official's concept of nationality policy was rather more complex. Verevkin's actual approach to the educational and cultural activities of Lithuanians is illustrated quite well in the discussion that took place in 1910–1911 between local and central government agencies over the future of the Saulė (the Sun), a Lithuanian Catholic education society.⁶¹

This kind of discussion could not have taken place without the Kovna governor's involvement, especially because it was none other than he who confirmed the society's by-laws in 1906, and later, without consulting the leadership of the Vil'na educational district, confirmed a new edition of these by-laws. At first, Verevkin highlighted the positive aspects of the society's activities: the society was led by the priest Konstantinas Olšauskas,

natorius, kurio bloguoju nemini," *Bangos* 33 (1932): 835; Laima Laučkaitė, *Ekspresionizmo raitelė Mariana Veriovkina* (Vilnius: Kultūros, filosofijos ir meno institutas, 2007), 121.

57 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 17, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 79. The Kovna governor suggested this kind of measure so that the "government's aims" would be reached, but he received a negative response because there was a "shortage of funds."

58 Minutes of the meeting discussing the implementation of the April 22, 1906 decree (May 5, 1906), *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1906 m., b. 378, l. 65.

59 Minutes of an official meeting regarding schools, February 8, 1906, *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1906 m., b. 378, l. 46.

60 Journal of the commission which discussed the introduction of zemstvos in the Western region, dated October 10, 1909, *RGIA*, *Pechatnye zapiski*, No. 2512, p. 1.

61 For more on Lithuanian educational societies, see Vida Pukienė, *Lietuvių švietimo draugijos XX amžiaus pradžioje (1906–1915 metais)* (Vilnius: A. Varno personalinė įmonė, 1994).

who tried to arouse “feelings of national consciousness” in Lithuanians; was a “harsh opponent of Polish influence,” and believed that the Lithuanian nation was “historically closely associated with Russia, and had to maintain a permanent connection with Russia for a peaceful future and for its own benefit.” In addition, Olšauskas was said to have served the government’s interests in numerous ways during the revolution of 1905. Thus, in the governor’s view, the society’s president should not be considered a dangerous person, and his oppositional stance toward Poles, “from the government’s point of view, had a rather positive aspect, as the reduction of the influence of the Poles among the Lithuanians was always one of the main objectives of the local government, and from a general policy point of view in the borderlands as a whole, [it] juxtaposes [Polish] influence with a certain degree of growth in the Lithuanian national consciousness that was completely justifiable.”⁶² However, Verevkin’s positive stance toward the cultural demands of Lithuanians had some clear boundaries. Since the task of any school was to prepare “future subjects” of the Russian Empire, as many state schools as possible had to be opened, thereby pushing out any private schools, especially those for non-Russians. Therefore, it would be best if Saulė did not open separate schools, but rather collected funds and contributed to the establishment of state schools. Further, so that these schools would be attractive to Lithuanians, future Russian teachers had to be able to speak Lithuanian as well as they could.”⁶³ On other occasions as well, Verevkin expressed a similar opinion regarding *Saulė* and other Lithuanian educational societies, and about education policy in general: their activities expressed certain anti-government signs, primary education should be controlled by the government, Lithuanians should work only as supplementary (auxiliary) teachers in state primary schools, and after the introduction of zemstvos, education should be re-

62 Secret report by the Kovna governor to the minister of education, December 14, 1911, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 177, 1910 g., d. 273, l. 22.

63 Ibid., l. 23–24. The overseer of the Vil’na educational district was even less approving of *Saulė* and recommended that it be closed. Report by the overseer of the Vil’na educational district to the minister of education, May 17, 1911, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 177, 1910 g., d. 273, l. 72–73.

moved from their field of competency, so that “primary schools would not serve any separatist-nationalist goals.”⁶⁴

There is no doubt that Verevkin's political views were quite different from those of most tsarist officials who worked in the Northwest region in the second half of the nineteenth and even the early twentieth century. Some local officials like Nikolai Griazev, the vice-governor of Kovna (1905–1910) who later became the Kovna governor (1912–1917), suggested bidding by a strict, *nationalist* nationality policy strategy because he considered non-Russians to be “natural enemies of Russian statehood,” and saw “the goal of complete separatism and the creation of Lithuanian autonomy” in the activities of Lithuanian educational societies, thus recommending they be closed.⁶⁵ Verevkin's reaction to most situations shows that his nationality policy featured more elements of *imperial nationality policy* than *nationalist nationality policy*. In his view, the government had to support Lithuanians' cultural demands only to the extent that they protected this non-dominant group from Polish influence, but no more. As far as we can gather from the information available, the Polish community also had a positive view of this governor's activities, which would imply that he had not earned the status of a supporter of the Lithuanians in the eyes of the Poles. In 1912, the Kovna City Municipality, where the Poles were the strongest group, decided to make Verevkin an honorary citizen of Kovna, stressing his “care shown to city dwellers of all religions and nationalities.”⁶⁶

Verevkin also participated in the mentioned meeting in St. Petersburg in 1914, in which anti-Polish policy measures were discussed. The only problem is that the surviving documentation just has a summarized account of the opinions of a majority or a minority of the participants in the meeting and does not specifically identify which officials were in favor of one or another position. The opinions of the participants over policy regarding the

64 Draft report for the Kovna province, 1908, *Lietuvos nacionalinės Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos Rankraščių skyrius* (LNB RS), 19-76, l. 6–7, 10, 26–7; draft report for the Kovna province (1908–1911), LNB RS, f. 19-82, l. 17–19.

65 Confidential letter from the Kovna governor to the interior minister, April 28, 1913, *RGLA*, f. 821, op. 128, d. 44, l. 633–34.

66 Astramskas, *Kauno gubernijos miestų savivalda*, 177.

Lithuanians were divided. A minority thought that, generally speaking, the government “should not support non-Russians,” and this should also apply in the case of Lithuanians because that kind of assistance “to the Latvian movement” in the Baltic provinces was not justified, as once the movement strengthened, it became not only anti-German but also anti-Russian.⁶⁷ In the opinion of a minority of the participants, the same would happen with the Lithuanian movement, which would seek to “give the Lithuanian nation a position of independence from Russian statehood, and they would most probably be drawn, along with the Polish nation, into a struggle against the government.”⁶⁸ Many tsarist officials thought it was quite realistic that the Lithuanians were actually cooperating with the Poles. For example, Griazev suspected that the Lithuanians were just pretending to be opposed to the Poles in order to confuse the government.⁶⁹ But in the opinion of most of the participants in the meeting, the Lithuanians did not pose this kind of threat because they were Catholic, and the Catholic Church was “one of the harshest opponents of socialism.” In addition, the Latvians were fighting against Germans who were loyal to the empire, while the Lithuanians were fighting Poles, who were disloyal to the emperor, and who had proven their disloyalty both in the past, when they rose up against the Russian government, and the present, when they were preparing to back Austria-Hungary in the coming war.⁷⁰ Importantly, surrounded by Poles and Russians, Lithuanians had no chance of securing political independence, while “the Russian state was their main protection against Polonization.” Ultimately, a majority argued that “the Russification of Lithuanians would result in difficulties, and would ignite dissatisfaction among the masses,” which is why the government “should not create obstacles for the development of the Lithuanian na-

67 Even though imperial officials looked rather favorably upon the Latvian national movement (until around 1883), much like in the Lithuanian case, it would be hard to identify any specific measures it took that would have promoted Latvian nationalism. For more on this, see: Staliūnas, “Affirmative Action in the Western Borderlands of the Late Russian Empire?” *Slavic Review* (Winter 2018): 995–97.

68 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 25, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 180.

69 Report for the Kovna Province, 1913, *RGIA*, f. 1284, op. 194, 1914 g., d. 35, l. 14.

70 Interestingly, with the conflict with Austria-Hungary and Germany approaching, senior tsarist officials did not question the loyalty of the Germans.

tional movement, and had no grounds to make a negative assessment of its leaders just because they participated in the movement.”⁷¹

Judging from the opinions of most of the participants in the meeting, the measures devised by these senior officials in April 1914 featured several points that can be regarded as protective measures on behalf of Lithuanians: government institutions had to try to ensure that the Catholic bishops in both Tel'shi and Vil'na were Lithuanians, to “de-Polonize” the chapters of Catholic Dioceses, that is, increase the number of non-Poles in the structure; determine quotas based on nationalities in Catholic seminaries; and to give the Lithuanians the opportunity to take up secondary positions in state public service structures.⁷²

The idea of supporting a Lithuanian's candidacy for Bishop of Vil'na was not a new one. It had been raised in the bureaucracy in 1907, when Bishop Edward von der Ropp was dismissed from his post. Taking into account the small percentage of Lithuanians in the Vil'na diocese and the request of the Holy See to find a suitable Polish candidate, the prime minister and interior minister Petr Stolypin thought that a Lithuanian would be suitable to serve as suffragan bishop.⁷³ Since the late nineteenth century, the local and central government had been closely following Polish–Lithuanian conflicts in the Catholic Church over the language of additional prayers, and they constantly received complaints from Lithuanians over the inappropriate appointments of priests to parishes (with Lithuanians being sent to Slavic parishes, and Poles to Lithuanian parishes). In most cases, the main concern of officials was to guarantee social stability, and the easiest way of achieving this was to ensure that additional prayers should take

71 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 25, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 181–82.

72 The plan for counteracting Polonization prepared by the meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25 and 26, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 70. When selecting a Lithuanian candidate for the post of Vil'na bishop, the participants in the meeting suggested taking into account the opinion of *The Union to Return the Right to Use Lithuanian in Roman Catholic Churches in Lithuania*, although we should not take this at face value. Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 18, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 99. This union, which had gathered rightist Lithuanian public figures under its umbrella, was noted for its radical anti-Polish policy.

73 For more on this, see Staliūnas, “Affirmative Action”, 992; official letter from the interior minister to the minister of foreign affairs, January 27, 1908, *LVIA*, f. 378, bs, 1908, b. 334, l. 3–4.

place in the language of the majority of parishioners, and in mixed parishes, in the languages of the majority and the minority. But a more sympathetic position towards Lithuanians can often be detected in officials' reports. In 1912, the Kovna governor Verevkin informed the central government numerous times that a bad trend was becoming evident in the province: a rise in additional prayers in Polish, which could be explained by the "goal of Poles to Polonize the Lithuanian peasants."⁷⁴ The constant sending of letters by various officials to Catholic hierarchs obviously served as a form of pressure. However, as has already been mentioned, the concern of the government was to protect the Lithuanians and Belorussians from Polonization and not to create any special conditions for the Lithuanians.

In the context of the government's approach towards the situation in the Catholic Church, the points in the plan devised at the 1914 meeting about support for Lithuanians comes across as something exceptional. However, we have no knowledge of any further bureaucratic moves that led to their actual implementation. Some of these measures might have been introduced only with the approval of the Holy See, and this was a field in which the tsarist government had no illusions about its success. In addition, some more senior officials feared the popularization of socialist ideas and Lithuanians' "dreams about the introduction of autonomy in Lithuania."⁷⁵

The "Belorussian National Feeling Development" Program

In the late imperial period, the status of Belorussians as an ethnic group in Russian official and public discourse did not really change when compared to the earlier period. As before, it was conceptualized as a constituent part of the tripartite Russian nation. Members of the imperial government treated the status of the Belorussian language accordingly: "In reality, the Belorussian dialect is not an independent language at all, but only a debased Russian

74 Reports from the Kovna governor to the Department of Foreign Confessions, February 15 and May 13, 1912, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 128, d. 699, l. 12, 58.

75 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 13, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 79.

language with Polish impurities, and, incidentally, it has not been debased so much that Russians cannot understand it or that Belorussians are not able to understand Russian.⁷⁶ Just like Yiddish, Belorussian was often referred to in the Russian discourse as jargon.⁷⁷ This kind of approach to Belorussians was typical even of rather liberal-minded imperial officials, such as the education minister Tolstoi, for example. Tolstoi called Belorussians and Little Russians “branches” of the Russian tribe (*plemia*).⁷⁸

However, at least during the period of the 1905 revolution, many senior tsarist officials recommended searching for means of influence other than those used prior to the revolution. Tolstoi believed that the prohibition on printing books in the Little Russian and Belorussian languages incited “autonomous-separatist goals” in these communities.⁷⁹ The Vil’na governor-general Krshivitskii (1905–1909) explained that under the new conditions, the government could only rely on “cultural measures.” Even though the governor-general admitted that, because “Lithuania and White Rus” were part of one state with Poland, “based on their language and customs,” Belorussians were “a kind of mixture of real Russians and Poles,” and could “just as easily become Russians or Poles.” Yet, the “cultural struggle” at the time “had almost ended in favor of the Russian element.” Nonetheless, in Krshivitskii’s opinion, in order for Belorussians to “become nationally aware,” i.e., identify themselves with Russians, a whole swathe of measures had to be implemented: “to ensure as quickly as possible” that additional Catholic prayers be held in Belorussian; to open primary schools where Belorussian is taught; to contribute to the formation of a clergy of local origin; to create better conditions for Belorussian peasants to buy land; to create a network of consumer societies; and to publish cheap books in the “local dialect” for the common folk. Krshivitskii believed that in this field, the government needed assistance from the public, which is why he supported

76 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 25, 1914, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 179.

77 Aleksandr Milovidov, *O iazyke prepodavaniia v narodnykh shkolakh Severo-Zapadnogo Kraia (Po povodu zaprosa v Gosud. Dumu)* (Vilnius: Tipografia ‘Russkii Pochin,’ 1912), 12–13.

78 *Memuary Tolstogo*, 154–55.

79 *Ibid.*, 155.

right-wing organizations that had become established in the region, such as the Northwest region Russian Veche (Severo-zapadnoe russkoe veche) and The Peasant (Krest'ianin). He also believed that these efforts would become easier to realize when zemstvos were introduced in the region.⁸⁰

In many respects, Krshivitskii's program was reminiscent of the measures recommended by certain tsarist bureaucrats in the early 1860s. Then, exactly as in 1906, some members of the imperial political elite searched for "cultural measures" in the fight against Polish influence among Belorussians. However, much as in the mid-nineteenth century, toward the end of the empire's existence, the tsarist government hesitated to support the institutionalization of this language, even at the primary school level; and there is not much information to suggest that there was broad support for publications in the Belorussian language. In fact, Krshivitskii's suggestions regarding Belorussian as a language taught in primary schools were completely unacceptable to the absolute majority of officials because they were considered dangerous to the integrity of the Russian nation.

The idea concerning the use of Belorussian in additional Catholic prayers was deliberated many times in various government institutions in the lead-up to the World War I.⁸¹ We may suspect that tsarist officials would often have treated the introduction of Belorussian simply as a transitional stage in adopting Russian. In addition, some Orthodox bishops feared that additional prayers in Belorussian might attract Orthodox believers to the Catholic church, who could eventually convert to Catholicism.⁸²

Officials did not harbor such fears over the introduction of Russian in supplementary Catholic services in the early twentieth century, and the central government went to great lengths to see the Holy See revoke the prohibition of 1877 regarding the use of the language in the Catholic Church. The Holy See did not lift the prohibition of 1877, but issued a new interpre-

80 A draft report from the Vil'na governor-general to P. Stolypin, August 20, 1906, *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1906 m., b. 412, l. 4–5. For more on this topic, see also Vytautas Petronis's chapter in this volume.

81 Report from the Vil'na governor-general (Freze) to the interior minister, June 27, 1905, *RGLA*, f. 1284, op. 190, d. 84a, l. 63; Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai*, 226, 297; Bendin, *Problemy veroterpimosti*, 357–58.

82 Copy of the minutes of a meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg, April 18, 1914, *RGLA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 108.

tation: it allowed ethnic Russians who had converted from Orthodoxy to Catholicism to use Russian; while in 1907, it allowed the use of Russian dialects in the historic Polish–Lithuanian lands, including, therefore, Belorussian.⁸³ During negotiations between the Russian government and the Holy See, correspondence began between government offices in St. Petersburg and Vil'na over the publication of prayer books and other religious books in Belorussian. An expert commission had to be established in Vil'na especially for this matter.⁸⁴ However, local Catholic hierarchs, such as the bishop of Vil'na Ropp, believed that Belorussian would only be a temporary measure before the introduction of Russian.⁸⁵ Even in later years, various imperial officials believed that the introduction of Russian in additional Catholic prayers would be a suitable means of fighting “Polonization.”⁸⁶ But this move did not win support among the Catholic clergy or laity. One of the factors that encouraged Catholics to oppose the introduction of Russian in additional prayers (just as in the teaching of the Catholic faith in state schools, which will still be discussed in this chapter) was the fear that events from half a century ago—when the imperial government introduced Russian in additional Catholic prayers to convert Catholic Belorussians to Orthodoxy—would be repeated.⁸⁷ So the tsarist government was forced to

83 Translation into Russian of the letter from the papal nuncio to the Catholic bishops in the Russian Empire, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 196, d. 54, l. 4–5; Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai*, 294–302.

84 See the file: “Po voprosu o sostavlenii i izdanii katolicheskikh molitvennikov i drugikh bogoslužhebnykh knig na razlichnykh belorusskikh govorakh,” *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 196, d. 54. So far, no information has been found that would suggest the formation of a commission like this.

85 Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai*, 302.

86 Official letter from the interior minister to the Vil'na and Grodna governors, June 13, 1912, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 128, d. 697, l. 11; “Zapiska ministra vnutrennikh del o deiatel'nosti katolicheskogo dukhovenstva, napravlennoi na podchinenie naseleniia zapadnago kraia pol'skomu vliianiiu, i o merakh bor'by s etimi vliianiiami,” *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 150, l. 8, 14–5.

87 A request from peasants of the Ialovskii (Volkovysk district) Catholic parish to the administrator of the Vil'na Catholic diocese, *LVI*, f. 694, ap. 1, b. 2811, l. 235–6; report from the administrator of the Vil'na educational district to the Ministry of Education, October 19, 1911, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 173, d. 30, l. 103. On the introduction of the Russian language into supplementary services in the Catholic Church, see Darius Staliūnas, *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi, 2007), 164–70; Mikhail Dolbilov, *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: Etnokonfessional'naia politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii pri Aleksandre II* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 471–77. Theodore R. Weeks, who was not as closely acquainted with the documentation from this experiment, thought that when implementing this measure, imperial officials were not seeking to convert Catholic Belorussians to Orthodox believers: Theodore R. Weeks, “Religion and Russification:

accept that Catholic Belorussians were being “Polonized” in the Catholic Church. Yet, there was another area closely related to additional prayers where the tsarist government could have an impact on Catholic Belorussians: the teaching of religion courses in state schools.

Until the revolution of 1905, Belorussians had to learn about the Catholic religion in Russian, but the April decree foresaw that this subject had to be taught in the “native language.” A fierce struggle broke out immediately on the western borderlands of the Empire between tsarist officials and the Catholic Church over what the “native language” meant, and how it should be determined. The Catholic clergy consistently took the position that religion should be taught to Belorussians in the language in which they prayed, i.e., in Polish. At the initial stage, it would be possible to use Belorussian. The government in the Northwest region, however, maintained a strict position, arguing that religion had to be taught to Belorussians in Russian, and that the final decision about a specific pupil’s “native language” had to be made by officials.⁸⁸

However, the regulation of non-Orthodox religious education had to be applied across the whole Empire, so final decisions regarding this matter were made by the central government. At the beginning of September 1905, the Education Committee of the Ministry of Education prepared a draft of its Provisional Rules, which stated that non-Orthodox religious education in secondary and primary schools was not compulsory. If religion was offered, it would be taught in the “native language” of the pupils, which would be determined by a written or oral request by parents or guardians, while the school leadership was obliged to check that pupils actually understood that language.⁸⁹ However, the Ministry of Education confirmed the

Russian language in the Catholic Churches of the ‘Northwest Provinces after 1863,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 1 (2001): 93.

88 This theme is not completely new in historiography. The main legal acts regulating the teaching of religion to non-Orthodox believers have been discussed by Bendin and Merkys. However, neither of them tried to analyze in greater detail the existence of different nationality policy concepts among the imperial ruling elite, or to explain the changes in regulations concerning religion that took place. What is even worse in Bendin’s case is that his writings focus mainly on tsarist policy apologetics. Bendin, *Problemy veroterpimosti*, 344–56; Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai*, 221–32.

89 Excerpt from the minutes of the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Education meeting held on September 7, 1905, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 195, d. 710, l. 18; See also: *RGIA*, f. 764, op. 3, d. 109, l. 581–601.

Provisional Rules only on February 22, 1906. The process took so long because the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was also involved in the process of preparing the document, decided to ask the opinion of representatives from non-Orthodox churches. Most of the Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical Reformed, and Catholic hierarchs criticized the point in the Provisional Rules about the participation of school officials in procedures to determine pupils' "native language."⁹⁰ The latter point also earned criticism from Petr Durnovo, the Minister of Internal Affairs, who noted that in most cases, people working in educational agencies would not be able to check whether pupils actually knew the language they were declaring as their native language because these officials simply did not know the local languages.⁹¹ By this time, Tolstoi had recently been appointed education minister, and, as has already been mentioned in this chapter, he believed that state schools had to be attractive to non-Russians, that they should not have any "political aims," and that they should allow students to learn in their native language.⁹² In addition, prime minister Sergei Vitte maintained that religion had to be taught to non-Orthodox pupils in the language "they had been accustomed to praying in since childhood."⁹³ Thus, it is no wonder that the Ministry of Education took the comments of Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed clergy into consideration and indicated in the Provisional Rules of February 22, 1906 that religion would be taught to pupils in their "native language," which would be determined at the request of parents or guardians.⁹⁴

90 All feedback: *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 10, d. 514, l. 40–49, 52–54, 57–80.

91 Official letter from the interior minister to the education minister, February 7, 1906, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 195, d. 710, l. 23. There were members of the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Education such as Henrijs Visendorfs, a Latvian activist and publicist of folklore, who said that learning religion was a matter of personal conscience, so no outside examiners needed to participate in the process. Excerpt from the minutes of the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Education meeting held on September 7, 1905, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 195, d. 710, l. 9.

92 Tolstoi, *Zametki o narodnom obrazovanii*, 12–5.

93 Official letter from the chairman of the Council of Ministers to the minister of war, February 6, 1906, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 10, d. 514, l. 154.

94 Provisional Rules, confirmed by the education minister on February 22, 1906, on the teaching of religion to non-Orthodox Christians and the supervision of the teaching of this subject by clergymen at educational institutions of the Ministry of Education, *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 12, b. 6385, l. 339–40. Religious instruction lessons were never made compulsory.

The Catholic clergy exploited these Provisional Rules very successfully, achieving their aim that the Catholic religion be taught in Polish to Belorussians in state schools, if it was taught at all in a given school. The overseer of the Vil'na educational district reported to St. Petersburg in 1908 that, within the boundaries of the region, Belorussian Catholics were not being taught religion in Russian anywhere, only in Polish.⁹⁵ This had happened because priests had a much greater influence on this ethno-confessional group than government officials or teachers. In addition, officials complained that the members of this ethno-confessional group considered their dialect and the Russian language to be "peasant," or "common" languages, whereas Polish was the language of the "lords," and a respected Church language.⁹⁶ Often, people who professed the Catholic faith and spoke one of the Belorussian dialects at home would answer questions about their nationality by saying they belonged to the "Catholic nation," or the "Catholic nationality," adding that they were Catholics; some asked to have religion taught to them in the "Roman language" (*rimskii yazyk*).⁹⁷ The imperial government naturally blamed Catholic priests for this kind of identification of nationality with faith.

Some members of the local government thought this situation was not all bad. Baron Boris Vol'f, the overseer of the Vil'na educational district, was one such local official, who believed that the will of the people had to be considered, as that was the only way of ensuring they would send their children to state schools.⁹⁸ Officials like this prioritized the loyalty of a sub-

95 Report from the Vil'na educational district overseer to the Ministry of Education, December 18, 1908, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 173, d. 29, l. 72–73.

96 Report from the head of the directorate of the Grodna people's schools to the Vil'na educational district overseer, March 2, 1909, *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 13, b. 1301, l. 52; report for the Vil'na province, 1910, *RGIA*, f. 1284, op. 194, 1911g, d. 66, l. 7–8.

97 "O predstavlenii svedenii o rodnom iazyke uchenikov uchebnykh zavedenii," *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 1, b. 1948; "Po khodataistvu krest'ian der. Krazhina o razreshenii im obuchat' detei gramote na russkom i rimskom iazykakh," *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 23, b. 487. Roman from Roman Catholic Church.

98 Official letter from the overseer of the Vil'na educational district to the head of the chancellery of the Vil'na governor-general, April 3, 1907, *LVIA*, f. 378, BS, 1906 m., b. 378, l. 202–04; report from the overseer of the Vil'na educational district to the Ministry of Education, January 29, 1908, *LVIA*, f. 567, ap. 13, b. 1301, l. 49–50. For a similar approach: the report sent by G.O. Freitakh von-Loringofen (an official from the Ministry of Education) to the Vil'na educational district for an inspection, *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 172, d. 16, l. 226–31.

ject of the empire over cultural identification. The fact that Vol'f, a Baltic German, took this approach should not surprise us.⁹⁹ However, when he left the post in 1908, officials from the region again began to jointly pressure the central government about the provision concerning the responsibility of educational agency staff for determining the "native language" of students. They finally succeeded in this effort in 1912: a circular issued by the education minister on October 27, 1912 on the matter transferred the decision to school officials.¹⁰⁰ However, this victory by Northwest region officials was rather deceptive, for in many cases, priests would not attend schools at all in order to avoid teaching religion in Russian.¹⁰¹ In addition, most Catholic children generally did not attend state schools, which meant that Belorussian Catholic children were being taught religion in Polish at secret or semi-secret schools.¹⁰²

The efforts of the tsarist government to exert an influence on Catholic Belorussians, and even to an extent, Orthodox believers as well, was also complicated by the fact that newspapers were being published in the Belorussian language starting in 1906. This press, primarily the newspaper *Nasha niva*, experienced repressive censorship of its publications, which were alleged to raise issues of social injustice, while other government institutions feared negative political consequences of these policies. Sometimes officials were afraid that the Belorussian press, especially when it was published in the Latin script, would only encourage Belorussians and Poles to become closer. But tsarist officials with a deeper knowledge of the situation saw that, for example, *Nasha niva* was not pro-Polish but was dangerous for its Belorussian separatist flavor; that is, it popularized ideas about an independent Belorussian nation.¹⁰³

99 Vol'f became the overseer quite accidentally. The minister of education Tolstoi had already received approval from the tsar to appoint him as overseer of the Riga educational district. However, dissatisfaction arose in the Russian press over the fact that a Baltic German was being appointed to an educational district that was already dominated by Germans, whereupon the minister immediately found another position for him. *Memuary Tolstogo*, 263-64.

100 Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai*, 232.

101 For example, the Vitebsk governor reported that in this province, "in a majority of places, priests were no longer teaching Catholic instruction": excerpts from governors' reports, *RGLA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 172, l. 225-6.

102 Merkys, *Tautiniai santykiai*, 232.

103 "O nabliudenii za belorusskoiu gazetoiu 'Nasha niva,'" *RGLA*, f. 821, op. 10, d. 1154; an official letter from

The unsuccessful attempts to introduce Belorussian or Russian in supplementary Catholic services and in the religion curriculum taught in state schools, and the existence of the periodical press in Belorussian at the beginning of the 1910s, again prompted the imperial government to devote special attention to Belorussians. In 1912, the minister of the interior started to think about a complex “Belorussian national feeling development” program, which involved the governors of the region. Everything was summarized at the meeting of senior officials in St. Petersburg in April 1914 discussed earlier. First, as before, senior tsarist officials suggested decreasing the “Polonization” of Belorussians through the Catholic Church: the national composition of Catholic seminaries had to correlate (percentagewise) with the national composition of the population, Russian had to be introduced in additional Catholic prayers, and officials had to check that religion was being taught to Belorussian Catholics in Russian in schools, etc. Second, government institutions had to ensure the “nationalization” of Belorussians through state schools (for example, by strengthening patriotic education in teacher training colleges), and other cultural-educational activities like opening Russian libraries and reading centers, organizing agricultural shows and lectures, etc. An intense discussion about the government’s potential funding of a periodical publication aimed at Belorussians also took place at the meeting in 1914. Even though one of the participants in the meeting suggested allocating this kind of funding to Belorussian publications, the majority decided that the subsidy should be given to publications in Russian, because “less attention should be given to the idea that Belorussians are a unit separate from the Russian nation.”¹⁰⁴

the provisional administrator of the Interior Ministry to the Vil’na governor, January 26, 1913, *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 128, d. 977, l. 2; Andrei Unuchak, “‘Nasha niva’ i belaruski natsyanal’ny rukh (1906–1915 gg.)” (PhD dissertation, Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus), 121–38. The press aimed at Belorussian Orthodox believers was published in Cyrillic, and in the Latin script for Catholics. *Nasha niva* was initially printed in both scripts, but in 1912, due to financial difficulties, the editorial board decided that the newspaper would be published in only one script, Cyrillic, as there were more Belorussian Orthodox believers than Catholics.

¹⁰⁴ “Ob opoliachenii belorussov i o merakh k vozrozhdeniiu v belorusskom naselenii natsional’nogo russkogo samosoznaniia,” *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 128, d. 697; “Delo (sekretnoe) o merakh bor’by s pol’skim vlianiem na belorusskoe naselenie,” *RGIA*, f. 821, op. 150, d. 167; “Ob usilivshimsia v poslednee vremia stremlenii pol’skoi narodno-demokraticheskoi partii k opoliacheniiu belorusskogo naseleniia,” *LVIA*, f. 567, op. 26, d. 999.

Conclusions

During the period of 1905–1915 in the Northwestern provinces, we observe a collision of different nationality policies. In the proposals made by some tsarist officials (Minister of Education Count Tolstoi, Governor of Kovna province Verevkin, and Overseer of the Vil'na educational district Vol'f), especially between 1905 and 1907, there were many elements of *imperial nationality policy*, which demonstrated a belief that fulfilling the cultural aspirations of the non-Russian population would guarantee their loyalty to the empire. Likewise, Stephen Badalyan Riegg has found a similar concept of nationality policy in the activities of the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov between 1905 and 1915.¹⁰⁵ However, as the events of the revolution of 1905 revealed, the empire could not rely on non-Russians: the Poles—primarily the Catholic clergy—did not follow the imagined “rules of the game” and according to imperial officials, they quickly advanced the “Polonization” of Belorussians and Lithuanians.

During the time of the revolution, the Lithuanian inhabitants of rural areas forced large numbers of Russian teachers and local bureaucracy out of their country and demanded territorial autonomy. Such demands, however, were unacceptable not only to the governing imperial elite, but to Russian liberals too. Besides, the tsarist bureaucracy understood well that even if they supported Lithuanians against the Poles, this would not have produced the desired results: “By giving Lithuanians certain forms of support, the department [of Foreign Confessions] also understands that expecting total solidarity [from Lithuanians] with the government is unlikely.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the strategy of employing *imperial nationality policy* in the Northwestern provinces could not have provided the means to secure the loyalty of local non-Russian population.

The policy that was promoted and, to some extent, implemented by the overseer of Vil'na educational district, Popov, and the governor of Kovna prov-

105 Stephen Badalyan Riegg, “Neotraditionalist Rule to the Rescue of the Empire? Viceroy I. Vorontsov-Dashkov amid Crises in the Caucasus, 1905–1915,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2018): 115–39.

106 Official letter from the Department of Foreign Confessions to the head of the Department of the Local Economy, June 30, 1913, RGIA, f. 821, op. 128, d. 44, l. 654–5.

ince, Griazev, had more aspects of *nationalist nationality policy*, which became prevalent starting around 1908 and continued to intensify during the 1910s. It provided somewhat better results when dealing with the Orthodox Belorussian population, but it was not consistent (i.e., in the sense of aiming at complete assimilation) because starting from 1905, Belorussian-language publications (including periodicals) were legally printed in the empire. At the same time, Belorussian Catholics' submission to imperial integration was problematic: whenever they could choose the language of religious education in state schools, they opted for the Polish, not Russian; when the choice was removed, Catholic priests refused to teach, and catechism classes were moved outside of state schools. Lithuanians did not succumb to the attempts at cultural homogenization after 1863; hence the imperial government did not have illusions about the success of such policies during the first decades of the twentieth century. After the suppression of the revolution of 1905, the Poles once again became the main enemies of the empire in this region. Because the imperial government was quite sure about their disloyalty and the fact that nothing could have been done to change the situation, it considered the implementation of the policy of segregation. After 1905, tsarist officials frequently proposed the same discriminatory or subtle social engineering-oriented schemes to be included in nationality policies, which were first discussed after the suppression of the uprising of 1863–64. However, because of the more liberal political regime, the gradual centralization and strengthening of the national movements of non-Russians, their implementation before World War I was even less feasible than during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The challenge of non-Russian nationalisms discussed in this chapter do not imply that these nationalisms were capable of destroying the Romanov Empire anytime soon. Yet, at the same time, tsarist officials did not have a clear-cut strategy for enacting nationality policies, which, in their understanding, could have guaranteed the loyalty of the imperial subjects in the Northwest region, just as in other western borderlands.¹⁰⁷

107 For the same argument with regard to the Baltic provinces, see Brüggemann's chapter in this volume. For the Kingdom of Poland, see Rolf, *Imperiale Herrschaft im Weichselland*, 427.