

LIETUVIŲ ATGIMIMO ISTORIJOS STUDIJOS

16

Darius Staliūnas
Visuomenė be universiteto?
(Aukštosios mokyklos
atkūrimo problema Lietuvoje:
XIXa. vidurys - XXa. pradžia)

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Lietuvos istorijos institutas

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SOCIETY WITHOUT A UNIVERSITY?
(ON THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF A HIGHER-EDUCATION
INSTITUTION IN LITHUANIA BETWEEN THE MID-
NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES)

Summary

In the nineteenth century the ruling élites of the polyethnic Central and East European empires made attempts at the cultural assimilation of the non-dominant ethnic groups. That policy was conditioned by various factors: the penetration of the modern state, socio-economic changes, the desire to ensure the political loyalty of the population, etc. It was almost universally considered that the best institution to achieve such aims was the school. Conversely, the non-dominant ethnic groups generally strove for the tuition of their children in their native tongue. In more successful cases, national movements sought to create their own national systems of education encompassing all levels of education, including institutions of higher education, as early as the nineteenth century. The existence of the educational pyramid characterized the minimal size of a vital political entity (Ernest André Gellner). Nationalism usually ascribed three principal functions to the school: to create a stable network of co-operation for the members of a society (nation), to furnish knowledge corresponding to contemporary economic development, and to strengthen the sense of community.

This study aims at elucidating the political imperatives which conditioned the strategy and tactics of Russian rule in the sphere of higher education in the former lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereafter, the GDL; after the uprising of 1830–31 this area was named the Northwestern Provinces) and the dynamics of social attitudes in this field. The period under

consideration extends between the closure of the University of Vilnius in 1832 and the outbreak of the First World War. At first the institutional aspect is analyzed, namely the plans for the re-establishment or the foundation of a university or some other institution of higher education, and their political and sociocultural contexts. Due to the absence of an institution of higher education, the problem of training specialists necessary for the country had to be solved in some way or other, i.e., Lithuanian youth had to be sent for studies to Russian universities, or Russian specialists had to be employed by local authorities, secondary schools, hospitals, courts of law, etc. The book presents an analysis of the attempts by the authorities to influence the rise of individual members of the non-dominant ethnic groups up the steps of the education pyramid. The social aspirations in the field of higher education are examined, too. In this respect the plans to re-establish the University of Vilnius or set up a new one are associated with the sociocultural changes in Lithuania. Hitherto this aspect has not been dealt with in historiography – these projects so far have been described only fragmentarily, not related to the sociocultural development; the ‘Jewish factor’ was ignored as well, despite the fact that in the former lands of the GDL the Jewish community was numerous, and there were attempts on the part of the Jews to set up their own institution of higher education.

This study is based on archival material, documents of the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Public Education, the Governor-General of Vilnius, the Vilnius Educational District; personal archives of Russian politicians (Piotr Valuev and Aleksandr Golovnin); and periodical publications of that period, and other sources.

When the University of Vilnius was closed (the official decree was signed on 1 May 1832), two of its faculties were re-organized into separate institutions: the Academy of Medicine and Surgery, which functioned until 1840; and the Theological Academy, which was transferred to St Petersburg in 1842. That decision was made on the presumption that the university had a negative influence on local youth. Actually, its closure showed that the authorities did not trust the ‘Poles’, i.e., the traditional élite.

In the period between the closure of the university in 1832 and the accession of Alexander II in 1855, the Lithuanian gentry only several times raised the idea of the re-establishment of it. Its realization, however, was prevented by the above-mentioned reason – the authorities did not trust the

social élite of the country. True, the re-establishment of a 'Polish' university could be influenced by the situation in which the authorities were interested to some degree in a compromise with the gentry. When the empire was ruled by Nicholas I and the uprising of 1830–1 had not yet become history and still functioned in social discourse as a part of the present, and the Romanov Empire looked after 'order' in Europe (suffice it to recall the events of 1848 and the Russian intervention in the Habsburg Empire), a change in the situation did not look realistic in the near future.

The fact that the University of Vilnius was not re-organized into a Russian institution of higher education, and that the plans for its establishment were not even discussed until the end of the rule of Nicholas I, could be accounted for by the existence of estate principles in the Russian system of education. Gymnasiums (secondary schools) and universities were meant for the members of free estates. In the Northwestern Provinces very few Russians belonged to these estates. Therefore, it was not sensible to establish an institution of higher education in an area where it would be difficult to find Russian students. Meanwhile, a Russian Vilnius University would not be suitable for the re-education of the 'Poles'.

The issue of the institution of higher education became topical due to several reasons in the second half of the 1850s. After the defeat in the Crimean War the political élite of the empire understood that the restoration of Russia's position in the international arena was impossible without the modernization of the state. The tendency to create favourable conditions for reforms made the authorities look for a compromise with the élites of the borderlands. On the other hand, the intention to abolish serfdom put the question of the future role of the gentry point-blank. That was particularly important for the landless gentry, whom the authorities intended to transfer to the category of tax-payers. A part of the Lithuanian gentry considered that in future their education, rather than social status or economic power, could ensure their leading role in society. In that period the establishment of a higher-education institution seemed significant for the gentry in Lithuania.

Extreme conservatism was evident in the education plans proposed by the contemporary élite of Lithuania – each social group had to have its separate schools. No doubt, universities were meant for the gentry. True, a modern tendency could be observed as well, i.e., a design to introduce a system of education, common for all estates.

The petitions submitted by the Lithuanian gentry in 1855 show that society would have been satisfied with any type of institution of higher education, while in subsequent years it would be content only with a university. That change of outlook was evident in the project initiated by the authorities of the Vilnius Educational District in relation to the establishment of a non-classical higher-education institution. In their attempts to rationalize the system of education in the Northwestern Provinces, the authorities decided to re-organize not only the secondary schools, but also to establish in Vilnius a higher-education institution consisting of three departments – agronomy, mechanics, and architecture and geodesy. As there were no funds in the treasury, the authorities applied to the gentry, inviting them to support the foundation of the new educational institution. In summary, the gentry, however, expressed their intention to finance only the establishment of a university.

An analysis of the Lithuanian gentry's petitions related to the establishment of an institution of higher education shows that in the second half of the 1850s there were attempts to found a Russian school, i.e., with Russian as the language of instruction. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that at that time Polish was required only as a subject to be taught in the secondary schools and not as a medium of instruction. Secondary schools (gymnasiums) were treated as a preparatory stage for study at a university. Therefore, it would be logical to surmise that the medium of instruction was to be the same in both stages of education. The Lithuanian gentry did not intend to re-establish the university with Polish as the language of instruction, because such a requirement would seem unrealistic.

The establishment of a higher-education institution in the Northwestern Provinces became a burning issue in 1860-61 due to the situation at home and abroad. The rapprochement between France and Russia stressed the importance of the 'Polish question'. France endeavoured to drive a wedge between Russia and Prussia, the relations of which were strengthened 'by the negative policy in relation to Poland'. This change in the international constellation was favoured by the members of the Russian political élite (in the first place by the minister of internal affairs, Valuev), who endorsed the policy, based on a compromise with the élite of the borderlands.

On the other hand, the cause of the student unrest at the University of Kiev was seen by tsarist officials as 'Polish intrigue'. Thus, the establishment of a university in Warsaw (Szkoła Główna) was to eliminate Polish youth from the St Vladimir University in Kiev. Consequently, there remained only

the problem of the youth of the Northwestern Provinces. The central Russian ruling circles intended to solve it by establishing a Russian university in Vilnius, but the local authorities were against such a plan.

The 1860–61 request, presented to the minister of internal affairs by the traditional Lithuanian élite, on the re-establishment of the university, was characterized by a spirit of social conservatism, conditioned both by the world outlook and political considerations of the presenters. The leaders of the ‘White’ Party, which was in the process of formation, Aleksander Łappa, Wiktor Starzeński and others, made subtle attempts to convince the government that a re-established University of Vilnius, being under the aegis of the social élite, would protect the youth from revolutionary ideas, cherished by some Russian institutions of higher education. In other words, they wanted to show the authorities that they were as loyal as the Baltic Germans. The same arguments were used in 1862 as well.

In 1862 the conservative faction of the Lithuanian gentry, the ‘Whites’, intensified their activity; in negotiations in Moscow, St Petersburg, Warsaw and Paris they endeavoured to eliminate, or at least to postpone, the danger of an uprising, and to retain their positions as the ruling class in a society undergoing modernization. The main aim at that time was to gain cultural autonomy, the principal component of which was to be the re-establishment of the University of Vilnius, with Polish as the medium of instruction. In 1862, as well as in previous years, the university was seen as an educational institution for the gentry.

The imminence of an uprising altered the viewpoint of the political élite of the empire. In December 1862 the minister of internal affairs, Valuev, argued for granting the Lithuanian gentry certain concessions. In the hope of winning their favour, he proposed to make an announcement on the re-establishment of Vilnius University. This was the viewpoint of Governor-General of Vilnius Vladimir Nazimov, which underwent the most radical transformation. In the summer of 1862 he advocated such measures as the ‘nationality policy’, the realization of which, particularly in the sphere of higher education, would curb the influence of the high Polish-language culture and protect ‘local Russians’, i.e., ethnic Belorussians and Lithuanians. In January 1863, Nazimov proposed a diametrically opposed ‘nationality policy’. His proposals were even more radical than those of the minister of internal affairs. In contrast to Valuev, Nazimov spoke not about the declaration of the ‘re-establishment’ of Vilnius University, but about ‘re-establishment’ proper.

The processes discussed above would lead to a hypothesis that the granting of cultural autonomy to Lithuania, the main attribute of which had to be the re-established University of Vilnius, would have ensured, at least temporarily, the political loyalty to the authorities of the greater part of the more conservative gentry. A number of Russian politicians were prepared to offer such concessions to the gentry of the Northwestern Provinces. However, some influential politicians in St Petersburg were against fundamental concessions to the 'Poles' of that region. Besides, the outbreak of the uprising excluded any social compromise between the government and the social élite of the country.

After the suppression of the uprising of 1863, Governor-General of Vilnius Mikhail Muraviev initiated the opening of the University of Vilnius, the task of which would be to spread Russian culture in the country and detract the 'Poles' from Russian universities. However, the political élite of the empire, as can be seen from the Pan-Slavic periodical *Moskovskie vedomosti*, edited by Mikhail Katkov, considered that it was too early to establish such an institution. According to the publication, the time to establish the university would be ripe when the cultural level of the ethnic Belorussians (in its term, simply, the Russians) was raised.

After the failure of that initiative, Muraviev tried other ways to compensate for the shortage of officials and teachers loyal to the empire in the Northwestern Provinces. He introduced extra salaries for the Russians, Baltic Germans and citizens of other countries working in educational institutions. Muraviev also established additional grants for ethnic Russians who after graduation had to work for a certain period in the Northwestern Provinces. On his initiative the 'Polish question' was solved, too – a numerus clausus (ten per cent) was fixed for 'Polish' youth in secondary schools and universities outside the borderlands.

Muraviev also endeavoured to set up an Orthodox academy (later extending the studies at the Orthodox Seminary) in Vilnius. That project showed his aspiration to integrate the clergy into society. The formal cause which prevented the realization of the project was the absence of finance for it. It is probable that the failure of the project was really due to the negative attitude of the Orthodox hierarchy towards Muraviev's radical enterprise.

In the late 1860s and early 1870s the realization of initiatives in higher education depended on two main factors: the absence of reliable functionaries and teachers, and the superiority of the 'Polish' civilization. Due to these two

reasons at that time priority was given to various projects of the Orthodox academy. It seems that those goals were not realized for the same reasons as for Muraviev's projects.

Whenever, in the early 1870s, the issue of a Russian university in the Northwestern Provinces was dealt with at all, only Polotsk and Vitebsk were mentioned. However, the shortage of financial and intellectual resources prevented even serious debates of the issue.

The proposals of Aleksandr Gilferding, a prominent Russian specialist in the 'nationality policy', were based primarily on the divide et impera principle: by encouraging the ethnocultural consciousness of the Lithuanians to take them into the Russian political orbit and thus detract them from the Polish influence. Gilferding treated the Lithuanians as a constituent part of the Russian political nation, which nevertheless, would preserve its ethnocultural identity. On the other hand, offering his political tactics, Gilferding drew attention to the situation of the Lithuanians in Prussia (Lithuania Minor). There the Lithuanians gave in to the process of Germanization. Therefore it could be surmised that, according to Gilferding, fostering Lithuanian consciousness was conceived only as a temporary measure to separate them from the Poles. After that the final 'merger' of the ethnic Lithuanians with the Russians should begin.

In the Vilnius Educational District there were supporters of Gilferding's ideas; however, they were concentrated mostly in the province of Augustów (later Suwałki). There, after the uprising of 1863, education reform was carried out under the guidance of Nikolai Miliutin, and its main outline was prepared by Gilferding; he probably also organized 'Lithuanian grants' at the universities of Moscow and St Petersburg. These were intended for Lithuanian pupils from the secondary schools in Suwałki and Mariampolė and prepared them for an academic or pedagogical career. That was the policy of training Lithuanian pro-Russian (and anti-Polish) intellectuals. The fact that only those pupils who knew Russian and, what was more important, had a good command of Lithuanian, could be eligible for such grants clearly showed that the Russian authorities were liable to acknowledge the Lithuanian ethnocultural identity in future as well (at least in the Polish Kingdom).

The case of 'Lithuanian grants' was indicative of the changes that any initiative underwent in the bureaucratic apparatus of the empire. The initial intentions of distributing the grants were ignored. There were enough resources only for nine grants (instead of ten). Grants were given also to

students of law and medicine, i.e., not only to those who were preparing for pedagogical and academic activity.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the number of institutions of higher education and of students increased rapidly in the Russian Empire, and Lithuanian society could also hope that a school of that type could be established in Lithuania as well. On the other hand, Russification grew in the empire, in particular in higher education (in the 1880s the University of Dorpat [now – Tartu] was Russified). Therefore, at the turn of the century, only a Russian higher-education institution could be expected in the Northwestern Provinces.

In 1900 the Agricultural Society of Vilnius, the members of which were landowners, proposed setting up an institute of agriculture in Vilnius, which was to be oriented primarily to the needs of the social élite. The establishment of such a school (though it had to be Russian) was welcomed by the majority of the socially active Lithuanian people, including the leaders of the Lithuanian national movement. The idea of a university (or a similar institution of higher education) in Lithuanian society did not undergo any major changes until the revolution of 1905. At the turn of the century Lithuanian public figures discussed the pluses and minuses only of a Russian higher-education institution, merely expecting some concessions for the Lithuanians. The idea of a national university did not exist until 1905.

The plan for the agricultural school proved abortive because the authorities, as in previous years, were afraid of Polish dominance. Besides, one more motive preventing the establishment of an institution of higher education in the Northwestern Provinces appeared in official considerations. That was the danger posed by the Jews. Some local officials even suggested, in the case of the establishment of such a school, to limit the number of Jewish students drastically to three per cent, or not to accept them at all.

During the revolution of 1905 the Russian political system was liberalized, at least temporarily. At that time various political and sociocultural models of the future Lithuania, devised by different political groups, emerged. Each non-dominant ethnic group, realizing its own political vision, had to take care of the construction of a corresponding pyramid of education. The ways of re-establishing or founding a university, discussed in Lithuanian society in 1905–7, were connected with the ethnopolitical tendencies of that period. Thus, taking into account the contemporary future models of Lithuania, four principal concepts of the University of Vilnius could be distinguished:

a Lithuanian university, a Polish university, a Russian university and a university of Lithuania. The principal distinguishing criterion was the medium of instruction.

It was the concept of the *Liuposos universitetas* (Free university) that provoked extensive discussions during the revolution and afterwards in historical literature. That university had to take into account the cultural and educational interests of all the nations (with the exception of the Jews) in Lithuania – therefore we called it the University of Lithuania. The concept of the Free university, having originated in the most appropriate circumstances (it was the time when the new minister of public education, Ivan Tolstoj, proposed liberalizing the system of education), was not realized. First, the democratic liberties achieved in the revolution were suppressed at the beginning of 1906. Second, of all the initiators of the concept only Professor Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (who, by the way, was against the formation of national states) seemed to be in favour of a university with several mediums of instruction. The Lithuanians and the Poles preferred national universities.

The intentions of the Lithuanians were quite evident by 1905: it was a national pyramid of education, 'crowned' by a Lithuanian (national) university. Similarly, the Poles declared that their goal was a Polish university.

The case of the idea of the Free university, as well as the absence of information about any other projects of educational or scholarly multicultural institutions, leads to the conclusion that that idea was not realized due to complicated sociocultural and political processes rather than the different viewpoints of its initiators. In other words, the political and cultural disintegration in the former lands of the GDL was so far advanced that a multicultural university did not seem realistic.

At the start of 1905 and in 1906–7, i.e., not in the period of the revolutionary upsurge and of the greatest concessions on the part of the government, the public figures representing various Lithuanian political trends discussed the possibilities of establishing even a Russian university. The authorities, however, were apprehensive of having a Russian higher-education institution even in Minsk or Vitebsk. Their pretext was that the national composition of the student body would be undesirable in those cities, in other words, they were afraid of the Polish and Jewish influences.

Late in 1907 and early in 1908 the government of the Russian Empire was seeking at least minimal compromise with the Poles on the basis of Pan-Slavic considerations. It is believable that, by promising permission to establish an institution of higher education in Vilnius, it expected to ensure the political

loyalty of at least a part of the Poles in the Northwestern Provinces. That could be the reason for the intensive discussions about the establishment of a higher-education institution, which began in Vilnius at the end of 1907. On the other hand, the statements by the highest officials of the empire late in 1907 and in the first half of 1908 showed that the authorities were not going to modify the main principles of the 'nationality policy'.

One more aspect, presenting an obstacle in the formation of the concept of the higher-education institution, revealed itself in the discussion of the issue in the Duma of the city of Vilnius in 1908, when it became evident that there were 'objective' differences in the cultural and educational goals of the nations of Lithuania. A Russian university (with Russian as the medium of instruction) would have satisfied the Lithuanians, Belorussians and Jews. A part of the Polish community of Lithuania acknowledged the usefulness of the Russian school in Vilnius, while many influential Poles adhered to a different point of view. They had to take heed of the situation at the University of Warsaw, which was boycotted by the Poles. Under such circumstances the Poles of Lithuania could not support a Russian university in Vilnius. Moreover, they could go for their studies to the higher-education institutions of the Habsburg Empire where the medium of instruction was Polish. However, that was not the main obstacle for the establishment of an institution of higher education in Vilnius in 1908 and later (in 1911 the Duma of Vilnius again initiated a similar project, exploiting the approaching occasion of the 300th anniversary of Romanov rule). An analysis of the views of the Russian political élite and the concrete actions of the 'nationality policy' unequivocally shows that after the revolution of 1905–7 there were no real chances for the establishment of a university in Vilnius. That was conditioned both by the shortage of financial and intellectual resources in the empire and by the fear of the dominance of the Poles and Jews in the borderland university. Additionally, the emperor Nicholas II was of the opinion that there were enough universities in Russia. Those circumstances determined the fact that in 1913–4 even the initiatives of those Russian public figures to whom Russification tendencies were not alien, were not supported by the highest state officials as regards the establishment of universities in the Northwestern Provinces.

In the early twentieth century there appeared an authentic need of a part of Lithuanian society, mainly of clerical intellectuals, to have a Catholic higher-education institution in Kaunas. Those circles were orientated towards

ethnographic values, they needed a conservative social layer, which could ensure stability. Kaunas, being in the centre of ethnographic Lithuania, had the diocesan administration, most relevant in Lithuanian national activity, and in the opinion of the clerical intellectuals it was best suited as the centre of the Lithuanian national movement and at the same time for the Catholic theological academy. That idea was fostered most intensively between 1907 and 1910, and later even that part of Lithuanian society acknowledged Vilnius as the centre of Lithuania and Lithuanians.