SUMMARY. This article deals with Lithuanian Belarusians’ position in relation to the transfer of Vilnius to Lithuania in Autumn 1939. For Belarusians, unlike other nations in the Vilnius region, the transfer of Vilnius to Lithuania did not mean a liberation from the Soviet occupation, but another division of ethnic Belarusian lands, or rather the separation of the former capital of culture from the reunited Belarusian lands that were separated since Peace Treaty of Riga 1921. The annexation of Vilnius completely changed the situation of the Belarusian minority in Lithuania, whose small community, consisting mainly of emigrants, had become the third largest ethnic minority in Lithuania with a rather serious social and political potential, which could be used by the Lithuanian government in resolving the Polish question in Lithuania.

KEYWORDS: 1939, Vilnius question, World War II, Belarusian national minority in Lithuania.

The year 1939 was described by Šarūnas Liekis as “the year that changed everything in Lithuanian history”.¹ This statement can be disputed, some agree, others may disagree with it, but there is little to argue that the events of 1939, namely the loss of Klaipėda and the annexation of Vilnius, had a great impact on the fate of Lithuanian statehood in 20th century. In this article I’ll dispute the role of Belarusian community in the events that took place in the autumn of 1939. However, although representing the third largest ethnic group in Vilnius, Belarusians are usually left outside the main narrative on Vilnius in 1939, somewhere in the shade of Polish and Jewish question. By this essay, which is based mainly on print media sources, memories of Vilnius Belarusians and archival material, I would like to reveal the crucial moments for the Belarusian community from both sides of the “administrative line”, and their position towards the state of Lithuanian straight after October 1939.

After Vilnius was taken by the Red Army on the 19 September 1939, Belarusian society was sure that the city would be annexed to the Soviet Belarus. There were even rumours that the capital of the Belarusian SSR will be moved from Minsk to Vilnius. The rumours were strengthen by the facts that under the Soviet Occupation, the Belarusian language received the status of the official language and the only newspaper published in Vilnius at the time was in the Belarusian language. “The Vilnius Truth” ("Віленская Праўда") announced the historical reunification of the Belarusian nation, liberated from the oppression of Polish lords.

In the early days of the Soviet invasion of Poland many Polish refugees fled to Lithuania, both civil and military, among which there were Belarusians, particularly those who were sceptical towards the Soviet regime, like the priests Wincent Godleński and Adam Stankiewicz, or had direct experience with the Soviet regime, like the writer Francišak Aliachnovič. The concerns about the Soviet policy were justified as soon as the Red Army entered Vilnius; not only the clerks from Minsk, with Yakim Žylianin as the head of Temporary Committee, but also Soviet security structures began to actively operate. We have to stress that they were acting, as if they were not informed by the comrades from Moscow about the provisions of the German-Soviet treaties on the Vilnius question.

Ideological infiltration of Belarusian community was entrusted to a young commissioner sent from Minsk, Ivan Klimaŭ, the head of the Department of Propaganda in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. On 24 September 1939, he held a meeting with local Belarusian activists in the auditorium of Belarusian Gymnasium in Vilnius. However, at the beginning of the meeting a few of them indicated the repressive policy of the new authorities, hence the Belarusian intelligentsia of Vilnius had agreed to cooperate. Especially this position was based on the fact that in the autumn of 1939 quite unexpected unification of Belarus took place, taking into account the fact that over the past 20 years the unification of Belarusian lands had been one of the main objectives for Belarusian politicians, regardless of the options available. Anton Luckievich, who was the main figure of Belarusian community in Inter-War Vilnius, also believed that positive changes would occur in the situation of Belarusian people ... Greeting the new regime in

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3 Francišak Aliachnovič (Францішак Аляхновіч, 1883–1944) while visiting Soviet Belarus in 1926 decided to stay in Soviet Union. After a few months was arrested and imprisoned in Solovki Prison Camp, after 7 years spent in Gulag, was exchanged for Belarusian linguist and politician Branislaŭ Taraškevič (Браніслаў Тарашкевіч). After coming back to Vilnius in 1934 he wrote a book based on his memoirs from the soviet prison „In the claws of the GPU” (У капцюрох ГПУ), which became one of the first testimonies from the Gulag, translated into several languages.
Vilnius he mentioned that “The creation of a free Soviet Belarus will open the way for rapid development of Belarusian culture. Working Belarusians will no longer be threatened by imprisonment and inhuman treatment.”

As we know from the memoirs of his son Leon, commissioner I. Klimka made a good impression on A. Luckievich. After the first, relatively quiet period of Soviet rule in Vilnius and the actions taken by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), the Belarusian activists, who did not manage to avoid repressions, started acting almost straight after the announcement of the decision to transfer Vilnius form Soviet Belarus to Lithuania. Among the people arrested and deported from Vilnius during the first weeks of Soviet rule there were many leaders of Belarusian community: the aforementioned head of the Vilnius’ Belarusian Museum – A. Luckievich, journalist Uladzimir Samoila, engineer Anton Nekanda-Trępka, editor Jan Paźniak and poet Makar Kraucoŭ. Among them, there was also Viačaslau Bahdanovič – an Orthodox priest, former member of the Polish Senate, who just before the start of the war was released from the infamous Polish prison called “The Place of Isolation in Bereza Kartuska”, and whose memories form this camp were published in the “The Vilnius Truth.”

Changing of the boundaries of the Republic of Lithuania in October 1939 was crucial for the Belarusian question in the country, but due to the war and migration processes, and lack of specific data, we cannot gain any precise statistical data on the region. According to the estimates, the area that was ceded to Lithuania they accommodated 75.2 out of 549 thousand people, which constituted 13.7% of all the inhabitants and made Belarusians the third largest ethnic group in this land, after the Poles and Jews. The estimated number of Belarusians across the Republic of Lithuania in June 1940, according to the data provided by the Belarusian Centre in Lithuania, was “no less than 100 thousand.” According to the various data collected by Belarusian scholar Anatol Trafimczyk, the percentage of Belarusians

4 Віленская Праўда, 1939, № 4, 1.
5 “Ілюзії былі даволі моцны...” Размова Андраника Антаняна з Лявонам Луцкевічам. Дзяйслоў, 2009, № 6, 268.
7 Віленская Праўда, 1939, № 13, 4.
9 1940 06 10 Gudų veikimo centro memorandumas Lietuvos Respublikos Ministrų Tarybai. LCVA, f. 1091, ap. 1, b. 6, l. 1–7.
on the territory transferred to Lithuania under the treaty of the 10 October 1939 varies from 2.6% to 26.1%.10

However, the incorporation of Vilnius region, focused on rapid integration with the rest of the country, appeared to be a very slow process. As the position of Lithuanian community in Vilnius was very weak, Lithuanian authorities were trying to find, as they did in the period of 1918–1920, allies in Belarusian and Jewish community, who could balance the Polish cultural and political domination.11 However, little was done and, in fact, we cannot find any attempts to encourage Belarusian community, and the chosen direction led to large-scale brutal Lithuanization of the region.12 It seems that the most successful was the integration of rural areas outside Vilnius as the city’s economy was ruined by the Soviet rule and the unemployment rate was high. State-controlled cooperatives were successfully integrating the agriculture of the region with the rest of the country, and, most importantly, guaranteed modest, but stable income for farmers.13 One of the crucial problems for the inhabitants of Vilnius region was the strict law on citizenship, which limited the access to the citizenship for people born outside the Vilnius region. Restrictions on Lithuanian citizenship was a serious obstacle for those who wanted to carry out legal activity, study or work in the city. The positions in State institutions were usually occupied by the clerks sent from Kaunas or the activists of local Lithuanian organizations. The administration of the City Council of Vilnius, which consisted of up to 1.3 thousand employees, included only 13 Belarusians.14

That’s what L. Luckievič recalls: “When I finished school, I knew that there in Vilnius, it was very difficult to find a job. There were enough people willing to work, but there were not enough positions for all of them. A good friend of my father, Klaudijus Duž-Dušeŭski, lived in Kaunas <...> First, my brother went to Kaunas <...> and became a salesman in an optical and photographic shop <...>. I received a diploma in electrical engineering and Duž-Dušeŭski hired me at the institute of Industrial design.”15 Of course, the story of the Luckievič brothers was rather an exception, the contacts between Belarusians from Vilnius and those who lived in Kaunas during the period of 1920–1939 was quite limited, and the

11 Žepkaitė R. Vilniaus istorijos atkarpa: 1939 m. spalio 27 d. – 1940 m. birželio 15 d. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1990, 100.
14 Žepkaitė R. Vilniaus istorijos atkarpa, 56.
15 „Ілюзії були доволі мощні…”, 271.
Belarusian community in Kaunas was too little to help the people that immigrated to the country in September or at a later time.

The Belarusian community in Inter-war Kaunas was divided in two main groups. The first one was concentrated around the aforementioned K. Duž-Dušeŭski and acted in 1930s as a Belarusian Centre in Lithuania. This group was pro-Lithuanian and cooperated tightly through the entire Inter-War period with Belarusian Christian Democrats, the only Belarusian group in Vilnius that received some financial support from the Lithuanian Government. However, the Belarusian Centre in Lithuania was not very numerous and included only several people, mainly former activists of Belarusian People's Republic Council in exile that decided to stay in Lithuania after 1923. The other group was concentrated around Simon Jakaviuk, who at the beginning of 1930s became the leader of Kaunas Belarusian community, headed the Belarusian Cultural-Educational Society, which included almost the whole community of Lithuanian Belarusians, running Belarusian Club, Library and even Kindergarten, having branches in villages on Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. However, this group was strictly controlled by the Soviet Embassy in Kaunas.

For the Belarusian community of Vilnius, the transfer of the city to Lithuania was unexpected. Despite the cautious approach to the Soviet system and awareness of the tragic fate of compatriots under Soviet rule, the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic was treated as the Belarusian State, and the events after the 17 September 1939 led to the unification of Belarusian territory divided since 1921. L. Luckievič recalled: “At the time, no one in Vilnius, absolutely no one was speaking about it, nobody thought that Vilnius could be returned to Lithuania. In general, I did not hear about it from anyone. It is possible that in the Lithuanian community some- one had discussed this possibility... There were only a few Lithuanians in Vilnius, while all the other residents of the city certainly did not address this issue. Neither among well-informed people, nor among the Jewish intelligentsia I could ever hear somebody speaking about the transfer of Vilnius to Lithuania”. 

The unification of Belarusian lands, although under the banner of communism, was adopted rather positively by the Belarusian intelligentsia. The goal pursued by all the nationally conscious Belarusian parties since 1921 was achieved. Thus, after

17 Вашкевіч А. Грошы для партыі. Фінансаванне партыйнай дзейнасці Беларускай хрысціянскай дзякунства (1921–1939 гг.). Беларускіе Весны Historyczne, 2007, nr. 28, 73.
19 „Ілюзії були довоєнні моцні...”, 268.
the transfer of Vilnius, which was the centre of the Belarusian socio-cultural life in Western Belarus, some Belarusian activists, especially those who were not strongly connected to Vilnius, and, above all, those able to accept the Soviet reality, decided to leave for the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Barys Kit, who at the time was the head of the Vilnius Belarusian Gymnasium, mentioned: “It was time to leave Vilnius as neither students nor teachers wanted to work in Lithuania. Since the majority of students came from Navahrudak region <...>, we decided to go to the Navahrudak, which was at the time already a Soviet city.”20 In fact, many of Belarusian intelligentsia in Vilnius, who came to the city during the Interwar period and stayed there after graduation, couldn’t proof theirs right to Lithuanian citizenship, therefore, after October 1939 they came back to their hometowns or to the families of their spouses and worked under the Soviet system of education.21

Unfortunately, we do not have any sources at hand to estimate the range of this phenomenon and see, for example, how popular was the opposite direction. Only isolated cases, like the professor Waclau Ivanoŭski’s, brother of Tadas Ivanauskas, arrival in Vilnius from Warsaw, are known.22 In his case, the family reasons served as a clearly decisive factor. Once the new border was set in the late autumn of 1939, the press spread rumours that Belarusian and Jewish will be expelled from the Vilnius region to the Belarusian SSR, and their homes will be occupied by Lithuanians form Belarus.23

Lithuanian army marched into Vilnius on 28 October 1939. They were greeted on the Cathedral Square by a representative of Belarusians, Adolf Klimovič, who was already serving in the Ministry of Belarusian Affairs in the Lithuanian Government during the short period of Lithuanian rule in Vilnius in 1920: “The entrance of the Lithuanian army to Vilnius region for us, Belarusians, is not just an ordinary change of power, which we can observe here for the 10th time during the last quarter of the century; this entrance is not a result of conquest and violence, but it is being performed on the basis of a peaceful agreement. We, Belarusians, see it as a natural return to the famous Belarusian-Lithuanian past and as a guarantee of peaceful coexistence of our people today and in the future <...> Soviet Belarus, renouncing Vilnius and part of the Vilnius region in favour of Lithuania, showed a lot of good will, understanding and willingness of proper coexistence with the Lithuanian Nation. The same will and intentions we will show here, in Vilnius, to

21 This scheme appears quite often in the biographies of Belarusians who resided in Vilnius. Да роднага ганку. З журналісцкага нататніка пачатку 90-х. Гутаркі з віленскімі беларусамі Амерыкі. Мінск: Выдавецтва Віктара Журсіка, 2009, passim.
22 Вітан-Дубейкаўская Ю. Мас яспаміны. Вільня: Тэхналогія, 1994, 8.
23 Dzień Polski, 1939, nr. 256, 4; Gazeta Codzienna. 1939, nr. 5, 2.
maintain such intercourse, to live in peace, work and create free Belarusian national life and culture within the limits of the Republic of Lithuania.”

After the change of the government in Vilnius, all operating Belarusian organisations were closed, or, to be precise, they were announced non-existent according to the resolution from 27 October 1939, since the power of laws of the Republic of Lithuania extended to the territory of the Vilnius Region. All the existing organizations could try to legalize their work. On the 10 November, the governor of Vilnius city and county issued a regulation, according to which all organizations existing in Vilnius had to present their statutes and data on their property, membership and activities of the Society to the Department of Press and Societies in the Administration of the Vilnius City and Region until the 30 November. In this situation, the best and fastest possible way to start legal work for Belarusians was to join any of the already existing organizations on the territory of Lithuania. The process of re-registration was completed only by the Belarusian Academic Union (Беларускі студэнцкі саю) and the Belarusian Scientific Society, headed by its former deputy director, the dentist Boleslaw Grabiński, PhD.

In this situation, Vilnius Belarusians began to seek support from the Belarusian organizations in Kaunas. At the very time, Belarusian Centre in Lithuania and Belarusian Cultural-Educational Society were looking for new members. The latter organization, despite the much greater number of its members and despite the fact that there were many more activities in Kaunas and in Kaunas Province, faced difficulties in performing this task. Its leadership was mostly formed by emigrants from Grodno region, who were viewed rather unfavourably by Vilnius. First of all, the situation was connected with the figure of S. Jakaviuk and his adventurous attitude during the early 1920s, as well as his ambiguous activities held already during his life in Kaunas. Distance, which was formed during the interwar period between Kaunas and Vilnius, also had an impact on the decisions taken by Kaunas Belarusians, who almost finally decided to stay in Kaunas. At the end of 1939, only

24 Krynica, 1939, No.1, 1.
26 Dzięń Polski, 1939, nr. 255, 4.
27 The Belarusian Academic Union at the Stefan Batory Univeristy was the only Belarusian organisation that had been working in Vilnius under Polish rule without any interference since 1920 (officially established in 1921), having a great impact on the upbringing of the future Belarusian elites. Being an Academic organization, The Union was not strictly dependent on the local authorities, which especially in late 1930s limited the activity of ethnic minority organisations. Under Lithuanian rule in Vilnius, the Union was allowed to continue its work along with the Stefan Batory University, which was closed on 15 December 1939. At the time there were 53 Belarusians out of 2.5 thousand students at the University. The Union was finally liquidated on 17 April 1940, and the reason was prosaic – the lack of students. P. Łossowski, Ibid., 223.
Aleksandar Ružančoŭ moved to Vilnius, but in his case it was related to his work in the General Staff of Lithuanian Army.28

In 1939, two main groups can be distinguished among Vilnius Belarusians.29 The first one – Belarusian Christian democrats, who gathered around Father A. Stankievič, who had returned to Vilnius from Slonim, where he had been expelled by Polish authorities back in December 1938.30 This group, traditionally pro-Lithuanian, greeted Lithuanian rule in Vilnius very positively. A. Stankievič and A. Klimovič were the first to go to Kaunas and meet with President A. Smetona. Traditionally good contacts between Christian Democrats and Lithuanians lead to the following situation: During the nine months of Lithuanian rule in Vilnius this group completely dominated the affairs of the Belarusian minority, while in practice they only acted as a legal representation.

A group of radical nationalists, who remained in opposition in view of Christian Democrats, were linked with the Belarusian People’s Union (Беларуская Народная Аб’яднанне) and the newspaper “Belarussian Front” (“Беларускі Фронт”).31 The group of radical nationalists was headed by Father V. Godleŭski and Mikalai Szkilionak, who demonstrated absolutely pro-German views and worked as correspondents for the newspaper “The Morning” (Раніца) published in Berlin since December 1939. As great Polish publicist Józef Mackiewicz states in his memoirs, it was a much stronger group, “intransigently anti-Bolshevik, but completely relied on Germany.”32 Consequently, they represented the anti-Lithuanian attitude, criticizing every step and any activities of A. Stankievič, who was consequently accused by them of unfounded Lithuanophilia.33 According to their assessment, Lithuanians in Vilnius aspired to absolute Lithuanization of Belarusians. The small concessions provided in the field of culture did not meet the demand of the Belarusian society, which considered that much more should be required from an ally.

Considering the relationship between the Vilnius Belarusians and the Lithuanian authorities, the fact cannot be ignored that the position of many peasants that were far away from the political turmoil could feel rather satisfied by the new

29 During the Inter-War period, apart from Belarusian Christian Democrats, who could be labeled as pro-Lithuanian, we can distinguish various forms of pro-Polish or pro-Soviet groups. After the events of 1939, the collapse of the Polish state and the short-term Soviet occupation of the City of Vilnius they had lost every impact on Belarusian politics, at least in the territories controlled by Lithuanian State.
33 Раніца, 1940, № 16, 2; № 17, 2; Gazeta Codzienna, 1940, No. 21, 2.
authorities, especially on the economic basis. This attitude was totally in line with the pre-war predictions of one of the correspondents for the “Belorussian Front”: “At the first opportunity people would fall into the arms of anyone, who sincerely, or insincerely, promises them a better fate. Communists have the influence, but our primitive villages would be equally affected by fascists, and even by monarchists.”

It looks like the Belarusian villagers’ acceptance could also be won without referring to any ideology, but by showing the efficiency of the state, and, at the same time, by raising the standard of living in the countryside. Undoubtedly, an important role in the acceptance of the Lithuanian authorities’ favourable reception in the province was played by the process of exchange zlotys into litas. While city dwellers had limited opportunities to exchange their savings to the new currency and very little chance of get any job, the residents of the village, whose homesteads were small, received regular payment in litas for their products.

The first result of A. Stankievič and A. Klimovič’s visit to Kaunas was the consent of the Lithuanian authorities to revive the journal of the Belarusian Christian Democrats named “The Source” (Krynica), which was closed by the Polish authorities on the 15 April 1937. The first issue, edited by A. Klimovič and printed in Francis Skoryna Printing House, was released on 17 November 1939. It was the only newspaper in the Belarusian language, released in Vilnius during the time of the Republic of Lithuania. The editors of “The Krynica” had adapted to the requirements of strict censorship, which resulted in fully loyal attitude towards the Lithuanian authorities. At the same time, an undoubtful paradox of the Christian Democrat press was that it lacked any criticism towards Soviet Belarus and Soviet Union. In the opinion of J. Mackiewicz, a prominent expert on Soviets, it was an expression of open Philo-Sovietism. It should be noted that the opinion was issued by a person who knew the reality of the Lithuanian censorship and the principles of editorial policy. The question remains, whether this approach reflected the view of the editors, and to what extent it was driven by the pressure from the outside, because the sources of the Christian Democrats journal’s funding were on the Lithuanian side. In his testimony during the investigation before the authorities of the Soviet secret police A. Klimovič admitted: “The first issues <...> were printed on credit in A. Stankievič’s printing shop, then the subscription began;

35 The Printing House, which was one of the most important Belarusian spots on the map of Inter-War Vilnius, was established by A. Stankievič in 1926, under the wave of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the first Belarusian book, printed by Francis Skaryna.
36 J. Mackiewicz, Prawda w oczy., 130; J. Mackiewicz appeals to the article, which was praising the national and international policy of Soviet Union: Савецкі Саюз і Славянства, Krynica, 1940, № 5, 1.
later, the newspaper received assistance from the Lithuanian social organizations. I cannot say specifically from which one, due to the fact that the money was received by Father Stankievič. It should be emphasized that, regardless the ideological issues, ‘‘The Krynica’’ was important, and if we don’t count the weekly broadcasts in Belarusian via the radio station in Vilnius, this newspaper was the only source of information about the life of Belarusians in Lithuania.

The situation that developed after the events of October 1939, which played the main role in consolidating the Belarusian minority to the Belarusian Centre in Lithuania. First of all, the group of the developers of ‘‘The Krynica’’ decided to join the Belarusian Centre. It was the second decision taken after the visit of A. Stankievič and A. Klimovič to Kaunas, which took place on 19-21 November 1939. On 23 November, at the headquarters of BCL, which at the time was located in a private house owned by K. Duž-Dušeūski, at the address 47 Aušros St in Kaunas, an extraordinary meeting of members was held, during which the new board was elected, with A. Stankievič as chairman. The most important positions on the board were given to the representatives of Vilnius: A. Klimovič was appointed secretary, Janka Šutovič was appointed treasurer, while the other members of the board were chosen from the representatives of Kaunas: Vasil Borisovič and Anton Matač. On 6 December 1939, the office of the Centre was moved from Kaunas to Vilnius, 1-2 Pylimo St, where, beside other institutions, the aforementioned Printing House was located. There, as well as in the building of former Belarusian gymnasium, the attention was focused on the cultural and political life of the Belarusian minority. The Belarusian Centre sought to extend its activity to all the spheres of Belarusian life in Lithuania, to start with material aid to the poorest members of the community by conducting an extensive educational, cultural and publishing activity, and to finish with the pursuit of political representation of minorities against the Lithuanian authorities. After the transfer of the organization to Vilnius, Father A. Stankievič, became undoubtedly a leader of Belarusian community in Lithuania, while K. Duž-Dušeūski, in fact, withdrew from the social and political life.

After it was moved to Vilnius, the Belarusian Centre concentrated on social issues, organized courses of the Lithuanian language, registered the unemployed, both professionals and unskilled workers. The data collected was only of informative

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38 Krynica, 1939, № 7, 1.
39 1939 11 28 Гудų веikimo centro Lietuvoje pranešimas Kauno miesto ir apskrities viršininkui. LCVA, f. 401, ap. 2, b. 385, l. 12.
40 1939 12 07 Гудų веikimo centro Lietuvoje pranešimas Vilniaus miesto ir apskrities viršininkui. LCVA, f. 401, ap. 2, b. 385, l. 1.
character, but the Centre was trying to help the registered in the Lithuanian Labour Exchanges, alone or in cooperation with other humanitarian organizations, like The Lithuanian Red Cross. Then The Centre started very intensive cultural and scientific activities. In January 1940, the entire Belarusian community celebrated the 25th jubilee of Father A. Stankievič’s Service, which resulted in publishing the jubilee book edited by J. Šutovič. Apart from “The Krynica”, the Centre was publishing various books and brochures.

After the occupation of Vilnius by the Red Army, according to the decision adopted at a general meeting, Vasyl Kovalevič was dismissed from the post of director of the Vilnius Belarusian Gymnasium, and his deputy was B. Kit. As previously mentioned, after the recovery of Vilnius by the Lithuanians, the city was left by a vast majority (according to the data, about 80%) of students, who went to Navahrudak. This step extremely negatively affected the fate of the Belarusians’ education in Vilnius, as it had to be organized from the very beginning. Under the Lithuanian authority rule Belarusians managed to form only two classes of pupils living in Vilnius and its surroundings. Because of the small number of pupils, the Belarusian school managed to receive only the status of progymnasium. Father A. Stankievič was appointed new director, who carried out all other functions of school administration as well. The school was located at 3–5 Dominikonų Street; the pedagogical staff was formed form the teachers that had remained in Vilnius and had experience in teaching at Polish schools or even at the University. The school used the same textbooks as in the Polish times. A. Ružancou stressed the need to develop the curriculum in Belarusian, which was the only language used in schools for national minorities that still did not have a curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education. In addition to the problems with the number of pupils, the school was experiencing various difficulties; during the Soviet times, the equipment was stolen from the dormitory and the Physics room. Apart from the progymnasium, there was also Belarusian Primary School No. 55. Meanwhile, there were no schools in the province teaching students in Belarusian.

43 1939 12 05 LR švietimo ministerijos Vidurinio mokslo departamento raštas A. Stankievičui, ЦНБ НАНБ, ф. 4, сп. 45, л. 48.
44 Krynica, 1939, № 5, 2; 1940 03 08 А. Руžанцава анкіета. LCVA, f. 1091, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 16.
45 Gazeta Codzienna, 1939, nr. 5, 2.
46 Adozva „Bački bielarusy zapisvajcie sviach dziaciej ü bielaruskija školy!” ЦНБ НАНБ, ф. 4, сп. 77, л. 1.
47 Tautos mokykla, 1940, nr. 7, 196–197.
of the school year 1939–1940, only 1,689 Belarusians pupils studied in primary schools of Lithuania (in 123 schools outside Vilnius), which constituted only 0.5% of all students in the Republic. Due to the lack of staff, the Belarusian Centre started registration of teachers or people that had any practice in didactical work. Only 21 candidates applied, mainly unemployed people that had previously been employed in Polish schools.

The absence of the long-term director of the Belarusian Museum A. Łuckievič affected the fate of the museum, which, despite the fact that it had been under special interest of the Soviet authorities, still managed to survive the turmoil of 1939, unlike other museums in city, with its collections untouched. The same museum, which was the most important centre of Belarusian culture in Vilnius, and even in the entire pre-war Poland, was formally subordinate to the Vytautas Magnus Culture Museum in Kaunas. At the beginning of Lithuanian rule in Vilnius the museum was closed until the end of 1939. After that, in was entrusted to the Belarusian Scientific Society, and Dr B. Grabiński became the new head of the Museum. The Museum was opened for visitors twice a week for two hours.

After the changes that followed the autumn 1939 the Belarusian Educational-Cultural Society still continued their activities, but due to the dominance of Belarusian Centre, its activities went far into the background and it could operate only within Kaunas or its region and did not extend its activities to areas that were incorporated into the Republic of Lithuania in October 1939. This state of affairs, as was mentioned above, was due to the poor contact with the Belarusian community in Vilnius. However the Educational-Cultural Society responded positively to the resign of K. Duž-Dušeŭski from the political and social activity. The Society limited its work to several performances by the Belarusian People’s Theatre and a solemn annual meeting. At the congress, which was held in Kaunas on 25 February 1940, even a small group of guests from Vilnius were
present. On the 10 June 1940, the Belarusian Centre in Lithuania submitted to the Council of Ministers a comprehensive memorandum on the Belarusian question in the Republic of Lithuania.\(^5\) As was already mentioned, according to the Centre’s calculations, the number of Belarusians living in Lithuania was no less than 100 thousand, about 15–20 thousand of which were of orthodox faith, while the rest were Catholics, although most of them of the orthodox origin as their ancestors were often converted to Uniates. The memorandum stated the generally good attitude of authorities toward Belarusian, but the attitude didn’t turn into a rational political programme. In fact, under Lithuanian rule, the process of Polonization of Belarusian masses has still being continued, at first through the schools, which still use Polish as the language of instruction, secondly, through the Catholic church, thirdly by the mass media, especially the radio. On the other hand, the Orthodox church was continuing its mission of Russification, especially encouraged by the fact that Lithuanian Orthodox Church is still directly submitted to the Patriarch of Moscow. Because of this fact, local Orthodox Belarusians were sometimes treated as Russian colonists.

The aforementioned memorandum contained a list of specific requests as well. In the field of education, there was a requirement to conduct education in the Belarusian language for the pupils whose mother tongue is Belarusian, regardless the entry referring to nationality in their parents’ passports. In addition, the Ministry of Education should organize trainings for teachers and establish a special Department of Belarusian Schools under the Ministry of Education. With regard to religious issues, the Centre insisted on a wider use of the Belarusian language in church and seminary, and the appointment of a suffragan from the Belarusian clergy. In the case of the Orthodox Church, the Centre called for restoration of the autocephaly and organisation of courses for Belarusian clergy.\(^6\) In terms of propaganda, they proposed an extension of radio broadcasts in Belarusian for at least 45 minutes a day, and the introduction of Belarusian as an auxiliary language.

\(^5\) 1940 06 10 Гу́дų ве́йкімо цэнтру мемарандум Летувос Рэспублікіс Міністру Тарыбай. LCVA, ф. 1091, ап. 1, б. 6, л. 1–7.

\(^6\) After the incorporation of Vilnius region into Lithuania, a specific situation was created. The territory of the Republic of Lithuania belonged to the Western Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Lithuanian Bishop Eleuterius was the only bishop outside the territory of the Soviet Union, recognizing the supremacy of Moscow. In September 1939, he returned to Vilnius, taking over from Archbishop Theodosius, who was administering the diocese of Vilnius and Lida in The Polish Autocephalic Orthodox Church. Finally, Teodosius declared autocephaly as a mistake and asked to be admitted to the Russian Orthodox Church. The conflict engaged Lithuanian Belarusians and divided the community by the ideological line: on one side there was the Belarusian Centre as supporters of autocephaly in favour of Lithuanian Church, on the other side there was a group of S. Jakaviuk, supporting the Russian Orthodoxy and supremacy of Moscow. Krynica, 1940, № 20, 4; 1940 02 25 Пратакол Агульнага з’езду БКАТ у Літве. ЦНБ НАНБ, ф. 23, сп. 57, л. 54. Laukaitytė R., Stačiatikų bažnyčia Lietuvoje XX amžiuje. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2003, 93.
(at least in terms of announcements) in the territories inhabited by Belarusians. The memorandum also raised the issue of citizenship and Belarusians’ problems related to the acquisition of passports, which greatly hindered them from finding a job or acquiring desired education. However, Belarusians admitted that the percentage of Belarusians that could not apply for Lithuanian citizenship was not very high. What concerned economic matters, Belarusians emphasized the need to expand the radical land reform on the Vilnius region, taking into account that the population of Belarusians had been treated fairly. At the end of the list of requirements there was official assistance for Belarusian cooperatives.

The memorandum, although it did not play any political role, and was not even answered as the authorities in Lithuania had changed, was kind of a detailed catalogue of main problems of the Belarussian community in Lithuania, especially in the Region of Vilnius. Soon the Belarusian question became a new issue for Soviet authorities.

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