



THE PERSECUTION OF CZECH AND OTHER NATIONAL CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UKRAINIAN PROVINCES OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN 1905–1917

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Abstract: From 1905 to 1917, a number of non-political civic organisations were constantly under the spotlight of the gendarmerie authorities and under pressure from the administration. In particular, national non-Russian charitable, cultural and educational organisations were closely observed and monitored. The administration obstructed their work and refused them a permission to start the activity. Ukrainian, Czech, Polish, Jewish, and other national organisations were persecuted for similar reasons. Forming organisations of unity was also forbidden to Slavic people on the territory of the Russian Empire, since their existence was contrary to the policy of assimilation, which was officially conducted in the country. A number of restrictions on the activities of national cultural, educational and charitable organisations was imposed during World War I.

Keywords: national organisations – Czech national community – Zdolbunov Czech Charitable and Educational Society – cultural and educational organisations – charitable organisations – political persecution

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Political and legal preconditions for the creation of national cultural, educational and charitable organisations in the Russian Empire

In the early twentieth century, the issue of persecuting non-political public organisations for political motives peaked, especially during and after the revolutionary events of 1905–1907. Despite the presence of relevant legal acts and the permits granted for the functioning of a number of public organisations, the state and authorities in the field were suspicious of cultural, educational, national, professional and charitable associations.

Czech non-political societies underwent the same process as other non-political organisations, which were initially provided with many opportunities for their formation and development on the tide of the First Russian Revolution and new legislation on societies and unions, but were later hindered by a period of reaction in the Russian Empire.

The problem of political persecution of non-political organisations, including Czech ones, has been explored by a number of Ukrainian scholars. In particular Andreyko, Vovkanych,¹ Boychuk,² Lesnich,³ Shulga⁴ and others.

The purpose of the study is to identify and characterize the persecution of national non-political public organisations from 1905 to 1917 in current Ukraine, which was then a part of the Russian Empire. The Czech national minority expressed a desire for self-organisation. Beginning from 1880–1890s, the social life of the Czechs who lived on Ukrainian lands under the rule of the Russian Empire became more proactive.⁵ The problems they encountered in the process of creating their own national cultural, educational and charitable organisations were similar to those faced by other non-Russian nations of the empire.

Under the pressure of the revolutionary wave of 1905–1907, the Russian empire provided more opportunities for union and cooperation among citizens belonging to various

¹ I. VOVKANICH – V. ANDREYKO, *Osnovni etapi rozvitku cheskoj natsionalnoj menshini v Ukraini*, in: Uzhgorodski cheski naukovi chitan-nya: istoriya, kultura, politika, pravo: Nauk.zbirnik, Uzhhorod 2013, pp. 231–242.

² Ya. A. BOYCHUK, *Diyalnist blagodiynih tovaristv etnomenshin na PravoberezhzhI Ukraini (1880–1914)*, in: Visnik agrarnoyi Istoriyi, 2013, issue 6–7, pp. 32–38.

³ P. LESNICH, *Viniknennya ta osnovni napryami diyalnosti gromadskih tovaristv u Volinskiy guberniyi na pochatku XX stolittya*, in: Aktualni problemi vitchiznyanoyi ta vsesvitnoyi istoriyi, 2015, issue 26, pp. 17–20.

⁴ S. SHULGA, *Prosvitnitska diyalnist cheskih gromadskih organizatsiy ta chasopisiv v Ukraini (kinets XIX – pochatok XX st.)*, in: Naukoviy visnik Shidnoevropeyskogo natsionalnogo universitetu imeni Lesi Ukrainki, Istorichni nauki, 2016, issue 3, pp. 101–106.

⁵ I. VOVKANICH – V. ANDREYKO, *Osnovni etapi rozvitku cheskoj natsionalnoj menshini v Ukraini*, in: Uzhgorodski cheski naukovi chitan-nya: istoriya, kultura, politika, pravo: Nauk.zbirnik, Uzhhorod 2013, pp. 231–242.

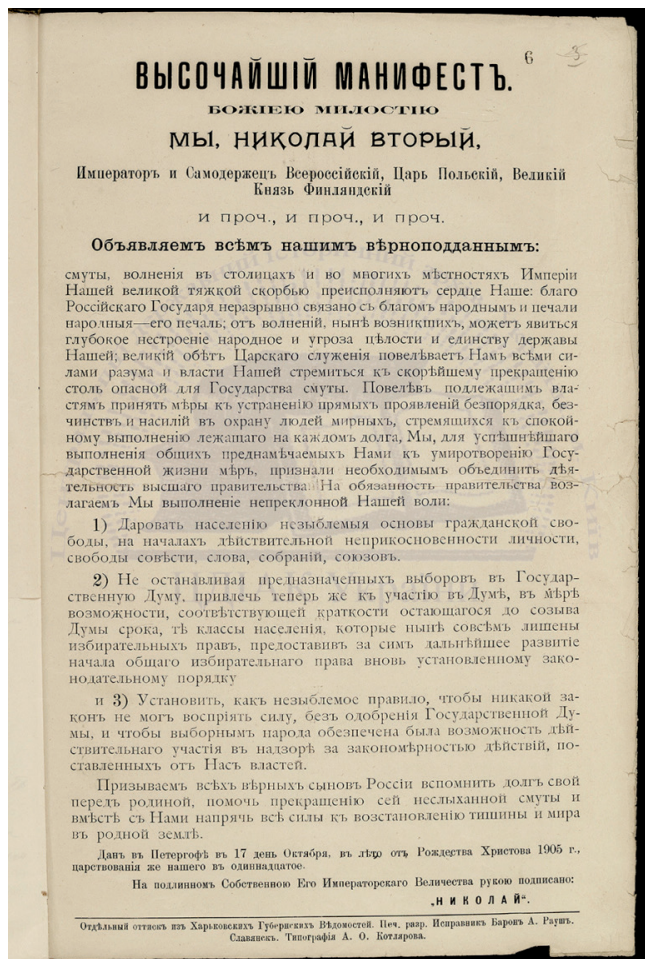


Fig. 1. The Russian emperor's manifesto, October 17th 1905, proclaiming civil liberties, including freedom of assembly and union, Source: Separate print from the Kharkov Provincial Newspaper.

fields. The main normative legal acts thanks to which the activities of the public organisation took place were included the Manifesto of 17th October 1905, which proclaimed freedom of association and assembly.⁶

After the publication of the Manifesto, the legislation on public organisations became more liberal, to a certain extent. For example, the process for approving the statutes of private societies (for consumer societies, assistance to students in need, assistance to the poor, etc.) was simplified, as a circular notice sent on 17th November 1905 from the Department of Public Health and Public Welfare of the General Directorate of Local Affairs shows.⁷

The rights proclaimed in the Manifesto were included in a new version of the Basic Laws of the Russian Empire, which came into force on 23rd April 1906. These granted both freedom of assembly (Article 36) and freedom of unions (Article 38). In particular, the latter stated that Russian subjects had the right to form societies and unions for a purpose that is not contrary to the laws. Subsequently, a separate law was prepared. However, in the end, no additional regulation in the form of a separate legislative act was

⁶ Manifest «Ob usovershenstvovanii Gosudarstvennogo poryadka» (17 oktyabrya 1905), in: Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii, 33 volume (3th edition), SPb, 1881–1913. T. XXV: 1905, Part 1 – number 25605–27172, 1908, pp. 754–755.

⁷ Tsentralniy derzhavniy istorichniy arhiv v m. Kievі Ukrayina (TSDIAK Ukrayini), f. 310, inv. no. 7, f. 1, pp. 547–548; TSDIAK Ukrayini, f. 332, inv. no. 1, f. 20, p. 142

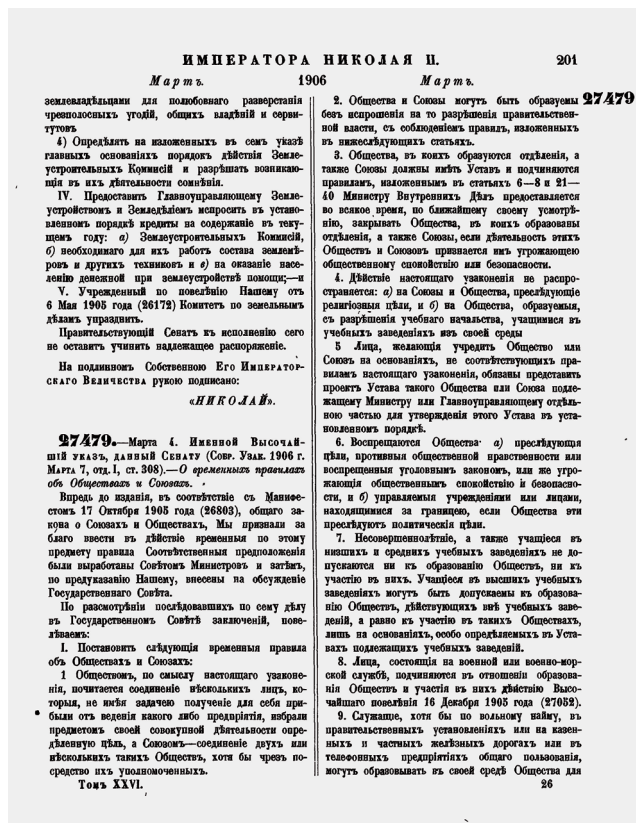


Fig. 2. First page of the Provisional Rules on Societies and Unions, 4th March 1906, Source: Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire. The third meeting T. XXXVI. 1906. Dep. I. St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 201–207.

adopted. Instead, on 4th March 1906, the emperor, by his decree, issued “Provisional Rules on Societies and Unions”, approved by the Council of Ministers and previously discussed by the State Council.

These rules, a development from the 17th October 1905 Manifesto, governed the activities of public associations. Although these were meant to have a temporary status, they were operative until the end of the Russian Empire in February 1917. From 1906 to 1917, the creation, processes and closures of societies and unions were governed by these rules. It should be, however, noted that the rules from 4th March 1906 did not apply to unions and societies that pursued religious goals, as well as societies formed with the permission of the school administration by students in educational institutions from their own environment (Section I, Article 4).

The Decree “On Temporary Rules on Societies and Unions” from 4th March 1906 stated that a “partnership” should be understood as the association of several persons, who have chosen a certain purpose as the subject of their joint activity with no intention of earning profit, while the term “union” referred to an association of two or more such societies (Section I, Art. 1).

Societies and unions could be formed without the official permission of governmental authorities (Section I, Article



Pic 3. Photograph of Jindřich Jindříšek (1857–1924) – a merchant of the Second Guild of Kyiv, the founder and chairman of the Society named after Comenius.

2). The only mandatory condition for the formation of partnerships and unions was a proved approval of their registration, according to the prescribed method (section I, Art. 3).⁸ The Minister of Internal Affairs had the special right to close unions and departmental societies at any time at its discretion, if the activities of these societies and unions were recognised by it as threatening to public peace and security (Section I, Article 3).

To form a society it was necessary to adhere to a number of conditions. For example, societies were prohibited to pursue goals which were contrary to public morality or prohibited by criminal law, which threatened public peace or security, and if they were guided by institutions or people

who were abroad, if pursuing political goals (Section I, Article 6)⁹. The Provisional Rules also set restrictions on the people who could participate in societies and unions. Minors and students of secondary schools were not allowed to form associations and participate in them. Students enrolled in institutions of higher education could be allowed in the formation and participation of societies only if these operated outside the educational establishments, and on the grounds especially defined by educational institutions statutes (Section I, Article 7).¹⁰

In September 1907, in full compliance with the aforementioned law, the Czech Charitable and Educational Society was formed, named after John Amos Comenius. The Society was responsible for opening schools, libraries, theatres, and publishing a number of magazines, while promoting the Czech language and culture.¹¹ For a long time, up to the revolution of 1917, this society remained the centre of Czechs cultural life.

Governmental harassment of the scientific and educational society “Prosvita” and other Ukrainian societies

However, the pressure on non-Russian national cultural, educational and charitable organisations on part of the authorities registered an increase. From 1906 onwards, a number of Ukrainian cultural and educational societies were denied registration. Thus, the local presence refused registration to the Kyiv Ukrainian Workers’ Society “Self-education” on 11th July 1906,¹² to the “Taras Shevchenko Society” on 18th October 1906,¹³ to “The Society of Improvement and Protection of the Tomb of the Ukrainian Poet T. Shevchenko” on 8th April 1910,¹⁴ and to the “Kyiv Publishing Society”, named after Grinchenko, on 10th February 1911.¹⁵ In 1912, the “Kharkiv Publishing Society” rejected the registration of the “Kharkiv Little Russian Public Assembly”.¹⁶

The most important national cultural and educational organisations were multiple associations called “Prosvita”. They encountered a number of obstacles in their work. It was not always possible to open Prosvita centres, as Prosvita activities were subject to administrative barriers.¹⁷

It was not always possible to open educational centres. Thus, in Kharkiv, the initiative group was not granted the necessary permission due to the “unreliability” of the applicants.¹⁸ For the same reason, they were denied permission to establish such one of their centre in Poltava.¹⁹ Even in

⁸ *Imennoy Vyisochayshiy ukaz, danniy Senat* “O vremennykh pravilah ob Obschestvah i Soyuzah” (4th March 1906), 27479, in: Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii, 33 volume (3th edition), SPb: Gos. tip., 1885–1916. T. XXVI: 1906, Part 1 – number 27173–28753, 1909, p. 201.

⁹ *Imennoy Vyisochayshiy ukaz, danniy Senat* “O vremennykh pravilah ob Obschestvah i Soyuzah” (4th March 1906), 27479, in: Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii, 33 volume (3th edition), SPb: Gos. tip., 1885–1916. T. XXVI: 1906, Part 1 – number 27173–28753, 1909, p. 201.

¹⁰ *Imennoy Vyisochayshiy ukaz, danniy Senat* “O vremennykh pravilah ob Obschestvah i Soyuzah” (4th March 1906), 27479, in: Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii, 33 volume (3th edition), SPb: Gos. tip., 1885–1916. T. XXVI: 1906, Part 1 – number 27173–28753, 1909, p. 201.

¹¹ Ya. A. BOYCHUK, *Diyalnist blagodiynih tovaristv etnomenshin na Pravoberezhzhzi Ukrayini (1880–1914)*, in: Visnik agrarnoyi Istoriyi, 2013, issue 6–7, p. 36.

¹² Derzhavniy arhiv Kiyivskoyi oblasti (DAKO), f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 24, p. 133.

¹³ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 24, p. 286.

¹⁴ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 274, pp. 7–8.

¹⁵ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 274, pp. 7–8.

¹⁶ TSDIAK Ukrayini, f. 276, inv. no. 1, f. 414, p. 22.

¹⁷ A. A. KAVUN, V. O. MAHAS, “Prosvita” ta vlada v Naddnipyrianskyy Ukrayini na pochatku XX st., in: Sumskiy istoriko-arhivniy zhurnal, 2013, issue 21, pp. 10–13.

¹⁸ TSDIAK Ukrayini, f. 275, inv. no. 1, f. 2198, pp. 17–18.

¹⁹ TSDIAK Ukrayini, f. 275, inv. no. 1, f. 2198, p. 14.

the case of successful registration, the work of Prosvita was repeatedly hindered. The administration and the police constantly monitored all aspects of the companies' activities.

The Kyiv Prosvita society, founded in memory of Taras Shevchenko on 26th May 1906,²⁰ aimed to spread science among the Ukrainian people in their native language.²¹ As a result of their work, the Kyiv Provincial Union of Society Affairs decided to close Kyiv's Prosvita for good on 8th April 1910.²² Despite this, in the autumn of 1906, the gendarmerie conducted a thorough check of the "political credibility" of the leaders of the Kiev Prosvita society – this included Borys Hrinchenko, Lesya Ukrainka and others. The results of this inspection were stated in a police report: "A society called "Prosvita", which operates in Kyiv, is not credible and, given its extremely harmful activities, granting a request to open a library and bookstore in Kyiv is very inappropriate".²³ Trying to find a reason to close the Prosvita society in Kyiv (founded in 1906),²⁴ the gendarmes thoroughly analysed the texts of its publications for the period of 1906–1910.²⁵ From their analysis, the following conclusion was drawn: "So, the "educational" society sows not grains of spiritual bread in the masses, but weeds, or, to be more precise, diligently tries to sow the wind in the hope of reaping the storm later".

Even the use of Ukrainian language caused disapproval among members of the ruling elite. As an illustration of this attitude, we note that in the draft statute of the Podolsk Prosvita society, submitted for approval to the Governor-General of Kiev in 1906, the terms "Ukrainian population of Podillya" and "Ukrainian language" were highlighted and marked with a question mark.²⁶ Educational activists were placed under public police surveillance.²⁷ The Prosvita Kamenets-Podolsk society was closed twice. The first time was in 1907, due to the "extreme and anti-government views of some of its members".²⁸ In March 1908, the society resumed its activities. In May 1914, the police searched the premises, concluding that the Prosvita society was involved in anti-government activities. On 25th September 1914, the Prosvita Council decided to terminate its activities.²⁹

The authorities deemed the Prosvita's management and personnel unreliable, across their Odesa, Chernihiv,

Kozelets, and Nizhyn branches. As a result, they were under police watch, leading the administration to call for their rapid closure.³⁰ Thus, in November 1909, the Prosvita centre in Odesa was closed. However, before its closure, it was subject to severe pressure from the authorities: members of the society were searched and persecuted, some were deported to Siberia or imprisoned, and it was forbidden to read essays in the Prosvita "Little Russian dialect", etc.³¹

Prosvita societies also encountered repeated administrative obstacles. In February 1912, the local public library refused to share its premises with the Prosvita centre in Zhytomyr.³² Local Prosvita activists did not want to just leave their business and therefore held meetings in the private apartment of the chairman of the board, Melnikov.³³ Eventually, the local representation in the organization's structure decided to close the Zhytomyr's Prosvita centre. The closing meetings of the society took place in May 1912.³⁴ The Prosvita members tried to protest against the decision, made by the "Prisutstvie" organisation in the Ruling Senate, but were unsuccessful.³⁵ Later, during the First World War, the police continued to monitor the political credibility of members of the closed Prosvita society in Zhytomyr.³⁶

One of the first Prosvita centres in the Russian Empire was the one in Katerinoslav, opened on 7th October 1905³⁷. In the course of its activities, it also faced a number of restrictions; in particular, it was denied registration for a number of local branches within the Katerinoslav province.³⁸ At the end of 1915, the authorities began persecuting the Prosvita Katerinoslav branch because of its role in informing about the Ukrainian proclamations. At the beginning of 1916, it was closed by the "Prisutstvie", a local state administrative body of the Russian Empire.³⁹

The only Prosvita centre that received no hindrance from the police and local administration was the one in Mykolayivska, although it was constantly monitored.⁴⁰ It was the only one in Ukraine to continue its activities until February 1917.⁴¹

From the start of 1906, a number of Ukrainian cultural and educational societies were not granted registration. The "Prisutstvie" refused to register the Kyiv Ukrainian

²⁰ TSDIAK Ukrayini, f. 275, inv. no. 1, f. 2198, p. 14.

²¹ Instytut rukopysu Natsionalnoi biblioteky Ukrayiny im. V.I. Vernadskoho (IR NBUV), f. 114, inv. no. 496, p. 1.

²² IR NBUV, f. 114, inv. no. 496, p. 51.

²³ O. D. BARDASH, *Vkaz. pratsia*, p. 60.

²⁴ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 5, p. 1.

²⁵ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 21, p. 33.

²⁶ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 442, inv. no. 636, inv. no. 647, p. 178.

²⁷ O. D. BARDASH, *Rosiiske samoderzhavstvo ta suspilno-kulturne zhyttia v Ukraini na pochatku XX stolittia (1900–1917)*, in: Ukr. priorytet, Kyiv 2011.

²⁸ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 320, inv. no. 1, f. 1382, p. 19.

²⁹ IR NBUV, f. 10, f. 14702, pp. 2–4.

³⁰ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 320, inv. no. 1, f. 1382, pp. 20–21.

³¹ A. MYSENKO, *Vzaiemozviazky Odeskoi ta Halytskoi prosvit*, in: *Ukraina: kulturna spadshchyna, natsionalna svidomist, derzhavnist: zb. nauk.* pr. Lviv: In-t ukrainoznavstva im. I. Krypiakevycha NAN Ukrainy, 2010, issue. 19, p. 542.

³² Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zhytomyrskoi oblasti (DAZhO), f. 560, inv. no. 1, f. 5, p. 1.

³³ DAZhO, f. 560, inv. no. 2, f. 4, p. 16.

³⁴ DAZhO, f. 560, inv. no. 2, f. 2, p. 6.

³⁵ DAZhO, f. 560, inv. no. 2, f. 6, p. 1.

³⁶ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 1335, inv. no. 3, f. 172, p. 40.

³⁷ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 313, inv. no. 2, f. 3216, p. 14.

³⁸ IR NBUV, f. 317, f. 49, p. 4.

³⁹ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 385, inv. no. 7, f. 100, p. 10.

⁴⁰ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 320, inv. no. 1, f. 1382, p. 21.

⁴¹ IR NBUV, f. 10, spr. 14702, p. 1.

Workers' Association "Samoosvita" on 11th July 1906,⁴² the "Taras Shevchenko Society" on 18th October 1906,⁴³ the "Society for the improvement and protection of the grave of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko" on 8th April 1910,⁴⁴ and the "Kyiv Publishing Society Borys Grinchenko" on 10th February 1911.⁴⁵ In 1912, the Kharkiv "Prisutstvie" did not allow the registration of the "Kharkiv Little Russia Public Assembly".⁴⁶

In 1908, the "Kyiv Ukrainian Public Assembly" began to operate in Kyiv.⁴⁷ Its activities were terminated on 11th October 1912, as its activists were accused of promoting the autonomy of Ukraine and distributing biased publications.⁴⁸ An attempt to protest this decision in the ruling Senate was unsuccessful.⁴⁹ In place of the Ukrainian Club, a new centre for Kyiv Ukrainians called "Rodyna" was immediately opened, and lasted until the fall of the autocracy.⁵⁰

There was a general trend in the view the authorities had on any express representation of Ukraine as a country, considering it an act of separatism. In December 1908, the head of the Kyiv Security Department sent an excerpt from the article "Ukrainian Movement" published in the newspaper "Russia" (№ 914, 916) to the Head of the Podolsk Provincial Gendarmerie Department. The article was sent as containing useful information on the officers of this department, as "the article... is of interest to the investigative bodies that are part of the South-West District Office".⁵¹ In the article it was stated, in particular, that all restrictive measures against Ukrainian culture had been lifted by the Manifesto of 17th October 1905, and the Provisional Rules on Societies and Unions made it possible to register a number of "Ukrainophile" societies that renounced political struggle and instead concentrated all their efforts at cultural work. The ultimate goal of Ukrainians, according to the author of the publication, was the political separation of Ukrainian lands from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires.⁵²

Ukrainian public, political and cooperative activist Khrystyuk, identifying the oppression on Ukrainian cultural and educational movements in the early twentieth century, noted that "Ukraine-eaters" in this period saw separatism everywhere, even in the fact that Ukrainians dare to speak "in their own language" at Ukrainian meetings. The authorities reacted to the proposal of opening an Ukrainian bookstore as if it were a "laboratory for bombs".⁵³

On September 4, 1909, the ruling Senate adopted a resolution to close the centre of the Polish Educational Society "Oświata" in Kyiv. It noted, in particular, that although not pursuing any political goals, the organisation "by force of circumstances and even beyond the will of its founders, will inevitably set foot on the slippery path of narrow-minded



Pic 4. Photograph of Pyotr Stolypin (1862–1911) – Minister of the Interior Affairs and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire (1906–1911), member of the State Council (1907–1911).

political activity." In addition, it added that "taking into account the tasks that historically took place before the Russian state policy in the Southwestern Territory and are aimed at creating national and political unity in order to assimilate the Polish element with the Russian nationality," the goals of the said society went against the stated objectives of state policy. It therefore concluded that the decree on the registration of "Osvyata" from 14th July 1906 had to be repealed.⁵⁴

The intensifying persecution of Czech, Polish, Jewish and other national societies after the Stolypin circular of 20th January 1910

On 20th January 1910, Pyotr Stolypin sent a circular to the governors. The letter was against any organisation of "foreigners" (term which according to him included societies of Czechs and Ukrainians), formed in accordance with the

⁴² DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 24, p. 133.

⁴³ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 24, p. 286.

⁴⁴ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 274, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁵ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 346, pp. 10–11.

⁴⁶ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 276, inv. no. 1, f. 414, p. 22.

⁴⁷ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 274, inv. no. 1, f. 2033, pp. 21–22; f. 301, inv. no. 2, f. 28, p. 104.

⁴⁸ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 351, p. 53, 99.

⁴⁹ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 351, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromadskykh obiednan Ukrayiny (TSDAHOU), f. 57, inv. no. 1, f. 118, p. 85.

⁵¹ TSDAHOU, f. 274, inv. no. 1, f. 2033, pp. 21–22.

⁵² TSDAHOU, f. 274, inv. no. 1, f. 2033, pp. 21–22.

⁵³ IR NBUV, f. 317, f. 49, pp. 1–3.

⁵⁴ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 275, inv. no. 1, f. 2198, pp. 17–18.

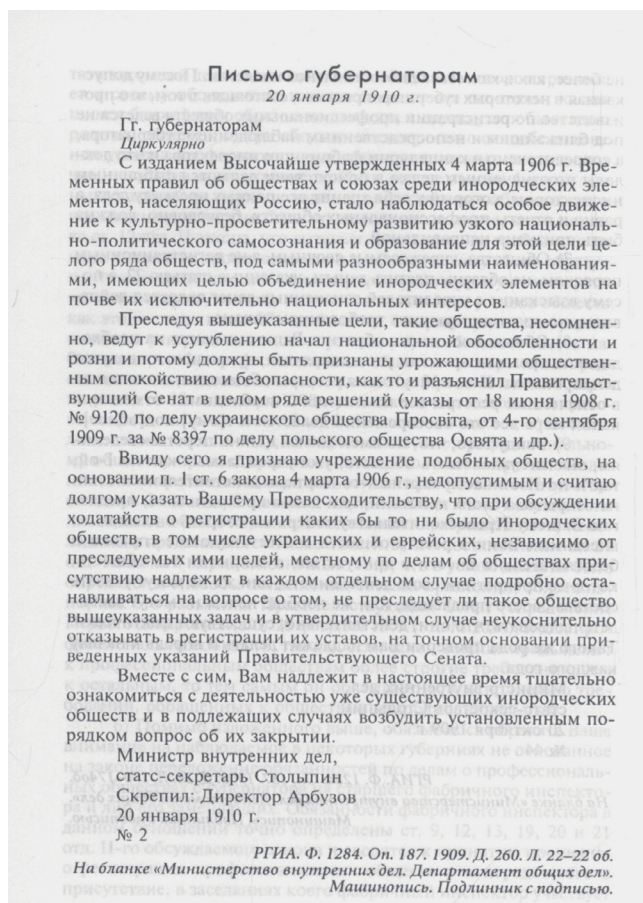


Fig. 5. A circular to the governors, signed by Pyotr Stolypin on 20th January 1910, demanding the termination of the registration of “foreign” national cultural and educational societies.

“Provisional rules on societies and unions” from 4th March 1906. According to the author, the existence of these societies threatened public peace and security, in accordance with the Section I, Article VI, Paragraph I of the Provisional rules. Such a threat was seen in the “cultural and educational development of a specific national and political consciousness” within the formed associations that “led to an increase in national identity and enmity”. In expressing these considerations, Stolypin emphasised the inadmissibility of the formation of such societies and referred to the explanations contained in the decrees of the ruling Senate concerning the Ukrainian Society “Prosvita” (18th June 1908) and the Polish Society “Oświata” (4th September 1909). The circular highlighted the need for a particularly meticulous examination of cases involving the formation of “alien” associations by locals. In case of any slight suspicion, it recommended to refuse to register their statutes. In addition, Stolypin forced the governors to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the



Fig. 6. View of the city of Zdolbunov, Volhynia province, early XX century, where a large community of Volhynian Czechs lived.

activities of all existing organisations of “aliens” and, if necessary, to raise the issue of their closure with the authorities in due course.⁵⁵

In the early 1910s, the MIA General Affairs Department, in its circular letter, demanded information on the organisations that were aiming at uniting Slavic tribes (both those who inhabited the empire and foreign ones).⁵⁶ The message stated that the concept of tribal unity went against the basic idea of Russian state policy, namely the assimilation of foreign tribal elements and Russian nationality.⁵⁷

The administration also oversaw the activities of national societies, in particular of the Society for Aid to Jewish Teachers and Melamedes,⁵⁸ the Kyiv Polish Women’s Circle⁵⁹, and the Berdychiv Roman Catholic Society.⁶⁰ Authorities were also interested in the activities of the Proskuriv branch of the Jewish Language Society. On 5th April 1911, the vice-governor of the Podolsk province sent a petition about the need for a police representative to be present at the meetings of the “Prisutstvie Society”. In addition, everything had to be discussed in Hebrew.⁶¹ Otherwise, the meeting of the Berdychiv branch of the Jewish Literary Society was usually held in Yiddish and attended by outsiders. As a result, in a memorandum on 25th July 1911, the Berdychiv police chief raised the issue of closing the branch.⁶² In November 1911, the police checked the political credibility of individual members of the Jewish Colonization Society,⁶³ and in December 1912 they monitored the Roman Catholic Terter Circles in Kyiv, Berdychiv, and Vinnytsia, suspecting them of separatism.⁶⁴

A number of Polish, Czech, and Jewish organisations were not allowed to open. For example, on 4th March 1910, a request for the opening of the “Zdolbuniv Czech Charity and Educational Society” and the draft of its charter were submitted to Volynsky for consideration under the activities of the Prosvita organisation managed by Czech nationals

⁵⁵ Rosyiskiyi gosudarstvennyi ystorycheskiy arkhiv, f. 1284, inv. no. 187, 1909, d. 260, p. 22.

⁵⁶ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 1, p. 160.

⁵⁷ TSDAHOU, f. 57, inv. no. 1, f. 108, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Derzhavnyi arkhiv Khmelnytskoi oblasti (DAKhO), f. F-629, inv. no.1, f. 3, pp. 4–7.

⁵⁹ DAKO, f. F-10, inv. no. 1, f. 327, p. 1.

⁶⁰ TSDIAK Ukrainy, f. 442, inv. no. 861, f. 48, pp. 4–5.

⁶¹ DAKhO, f. F-629, inv. no. 1, f. 1, p. 9.

⁶² TSDIAK Ukrainy, f. 442, inv. no. 861, f. 48, p. 11.

⁶³ DAKO, f. 10, inv. no. 1, f. 319, p. 1.

⁶⁴ TSDIAK Ukrainy, f. 274, inv. no. 1, f. 2931, p. 115.



Pic 7. Volhynia Governor Kutaisov (1869–1927), under whose chairmanship Volhynia “Prisutstvie” refused to open the Zdobuniv Czech Charitable and Educational Society on 23rd October 1910.

Alexander Khola, Anton Umlaud, and others. The statutory goals of the planned society were to provide support and material assistance to Czechs struggling with poverty, as well as to provide the necessary education and upbringing for Czech children living in the Russian Empire.⁶⁵ This draft charter was considered at a Prosvita meeting on 23rd October 1910. The conclusion drawn at the meeting sustained that this society was aiming at unifying the Czechs on the basis of their national interests exclusively. In addition, it was also aiming at a spiritual development of the Czech nationality, which, as stated in the minutes of the meeting, undoubtedly led to a deepening of national hostility and went against the objectives of Russian state policy and could not be admitted in accordance with the circular of the Ministry

of Internal Affairs Department dated 20th January 1910. In view of these circumstances, Volyn “Prisutstvie” decided to not to grant registration to the Czech Charity and Education Society.⁶⁶

Many societies and organisations were denied registration during this time: on 28th June 1911, registration was denied to “The Society for Assistance to the Poor Jews of the town of Grytsev”,⁶⁷ on 8th February 1912 to the “Rivne Polish Public Centre”,⁶⁸ on 3rd July 1912 to the “Zhytomyr Polish Women’s Centre”,⁶⁹ on 2nd May 1913 to the “Society for Promoting the Learning of Poor Jewish Boys in Rivne city”.⁷⁰ Prosvita used the decision of the Ruling Senate in “Osvyata” case and the mentioned Stolypin circular dated January 20, 1910 regardless of the refusal to register pointed societies. In general, the suspicion of the spread of national (non-Russian) culture became a barrier to development discovery, as well as grounds for liquidation of existing societies.⁷¹

The Kharkiv Latvian Mutual Aid Society, founded in 1899, was also under the attention of the authorities. In February 1914, at the suggestion of the head of the Kharkiv province, the local “Prisutstvie” on societies and unions checked the political credibility of the leaders of the society.⁷²

Czech resilience in fighting for their rights inspired Ukrainians, Jews, and other nationalities living in Ukraine while it was part of the Russian Empire. This was manifested in the activities of their national organisations. Thus, on 19th January 1911, the Kiev Ukrainian Club (which began operations in Kyiv in 1908⁷³) presented an essay on the need for unity of Jews and Ukrainians in the struggle for their national rights. The report was read by a Jew Zhmikhalsky from Odesa, who was invited by general agreement of the Club elders. The paper detailed the struggle of Czech nationalists against the Germans and their counteraction to assimilation. Jewish nationalists joined in this struggle, which took place in Prague and lasted from 1860 to 1880. The terms “assimilation” and “assimilators” were used by the speaker as an attempt to bring Czechs and Jews closer to German culture. According to the speaker, this eventually helped the Czechs to win. The national policy in Right-Bank Ukraine, according to Zhmikhalsky, was in the same situation: the national interests of Ukrainians and Jews were closely linked, and therefore they had to go against the Russian governmental assimilation policy by the quoted example. The speaker thus called on the need of Ukrainians to be united. In other words Zhmikhalsky stated that the national interests of both Jews and Ukrainians were closely connected, or in any case parallel to each other; therefore, the most desirable outcome in the near future would have been a fraternal union between the Jewish and Ukrainian population, to mutually support one another on the grounds of national revivals and joint struggle against the government’s Russification policy.

⁶⁵ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 45, pp. 26–33.

⁶⁶ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 45, p. 35.

⁶⁷ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 71, p. 27.

⁶⁸ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 86, p. 37.

⁶⁹ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 98, p. 33.

⁷⁰ DAZhO, f. 329, inv. no. 1, f. 123, p. 16.

⁷¹ P. LESNICH, *Viniknennya ta osnovni napryami diyalnosti gromadskih tovaristv u Volynskiy guberniyi na pochatku XX stolittya*, in: Aktualni problemi vitchiznyanoi ta vsesvitnoyi istoriyi, 2015, issue 26, p. 19.

⁷² Derzhavnyi arkhiv Kharkivskoi oblasti, f. 29, inv. no. 1, f. 521, p. 5.

⁷³ TSDIAK Ukrainy, f. 274, inv. no. 1, f. 2033, pp. 21–22.; f. 301, inv. no. 2, f. 28, p. 104.



Fig 8. The house where meetings of the Ukrainian Club often took place. At this house, the meetings where an essay on the struggle of Czech nationalists in Prague in the 1860s and 1880s against the Germans and their opposition to assimilation was read (modern view, 42 Volodymyrska Street, Kyiv).

This paper received unanimous approval from the audience, gathering more than 150 visitors of the Ukrainian Club in heated debates among.⁷⁴ As a result of their work towards this end, the Ukrainian Club was terminated on 11th October 1912. Its activists were accused of promoting the autonomy of Ukraine and spreading publications.⁷⁵ An attempt was made to challenge this decision in the Ruling Senate, but it was unsuccessful.⁷⁶

Changes in state policy towards national organisations after the beginning of the First World War

With the beginning of the First World War, the persecution of public organisations of foreign nationalities which were at war with the Russian Empire intensified. Thus, on 3rd December 1914, Nicholas II approved a resolution of the Council of Ministers; one of the provisions in it provided for the closure of existing unions, assemblies, clubs and other public organisations of foreign nationals within the empire.

For the latter, who operated in the battleground and engaged exclusively in charity work, a gradual procedure of closure was provided, and, in exceptional cases, permission could be obtained to continue their activities.⁷⁷ In addition, on 26th November 1914, the Minister of Internal Affairs announced that it was necessary to exclude all subjects of hostile states from all unions, societies and other similar associations.⁷⁸ On 7th May 1916, the Council of Ministers additionally announced that all the above-mentioned restrictive measures were applied to Bulgarian societies and subjects too.⁷⁹

During the war, representatives of the central and local authorities continued to monitor the political credibility of national cultural, educational and charitable organisations. On 16th December 1916, the Police Department spread a circular about the need for increased monitoring of educational, cooperative, and professional societies.⁸⁰ At the beginning of 1917, the Kiev governor spread this order among the police chiefs of the Kyiv Province.⁸¹ On 28th December 1916 and on 3rd February 1917, the chief of the Kherson provincial gendarmerie department sent to his assistants the instruction to conduct a thorough and systematic search of the direction of activities of public organisations, in order to prevent their premises for revolutionary purposes. To this end, special effort was put into providing informants and auxiliary agents and into the need to identify anyone who could intend to use non-governmental organisations for propaganda purposes.⁸²

Thus, in the territory of the Dnieper Ukraine, the Russian Empire implemented a policy of oppression and persecution of national cultural, educational and charitable organisations. The government, following the official policy of assimilation of non-Russian nationalities, persecuted Czech national societies. If, immediately after the revolution of 1905–1907, there were opportunities for their opening, then, since the publication of a number of legal acts in 1910, administrative barriers began to prevent it. This manifested in the prohibition of the activities of the Zdolbunov Czech Charity and Educational Society. The persecution of cultural, educational, and charitable national organisations continued throughout World War I.

⁷⁴ DAKO, f. F-10, inv. no.1, f. 351, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁵ DAKO, f. F-10, inv. no. 1, f. 351, p. 53, 99.

⁷⁶ DAKO, f. F-10, inv. no. 1, f. 351, p. 5.

⁷⁷ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 278, inv. no. 1, f. 221, p. 256.

⁷⁸ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 442, inv. no. 864, f. 312, p. 79.

⁷⁹ DAZhO, f. 70, inv. no.1, f. 909, p. 23.

⁸⁰ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 274, inv. no. 1, f. 2799, p. 7.

⁸¹ TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 442, inv. no. 860, f. 65, p. 27.

⁸² TSDIAK Ukrayiny, f. 352, inv. no. 1, f. 8, p. 1.