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Features of the historical and political development of the Baltic countries in the 1910s

Abstract: On August 1, 1914, the First World War broke out, and everything changed decisively for the Baltic States, and for Russia, and for the whole world as a whole. At the same time, no one could foresee all the consequences of the war. And at the same time, the Baltic peoples were among the most affected in the 1914-20 wars. The author presents the results of a study of the historical and political development of the Baltic countries in the 1910s. The study analysed the political state of Lithuania at the beginning of the 20th century, identified the features of the period of occupation of Lithuanian lands in 1915-1917, presented statistical data on the emigration process that swept the Baltic States during the period under study, and also determined the contribution of the Latvian and Estonian military to the political transformations of the Russian army and territory of the Russian Empire. Historical, comparative, logical, and deductive research methods were used. In the course of scientific research, numerous historical and statistical sources published in Russia and the Baltic countries, as well as the works of famous researchers, were used.

Keywords: Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, World War I, State Duma, Austria-Hungary, Courland.



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Особенности историко-политического развития стран Прибалтики в 1910-х годах

Аннотация: 1 августа 1914 года разразилась Первая мировая война, и все решительно изменилось и для Прибалтики, и для России, и для всего мира в целом. При этом никто не мог предвидеть всех последствий войны. И при этом прибалтийские народы оказались в числе наиболее пострадавших в войнах 1914-20 гг. Автор представляет результаты исследования историко-политического развития стран Прибалтики в 1910-х годах. В ходе исследования проанализировано политическое состояние Литвы в начале 20 века, определены особенности периода оккупации литовских земель в 1915-1917 годах, представлены статистические данные эмиграционного процесса, охватившего Прибалтику в исследуемый период, а также определён вклад латышских и эстонских военных в политические трансформации российской армии и территории Российской Империи. Были использованы исторический, сравнительный, логический и дедуктивный методы исследования. В ходе научного исследования использовались

многочисленные исторические и статистические источники, опубликованные в России и странах Прибалтики, а также труды известных исследователей.

Ключевые слова: Прибалтика, Литва, Латвия, Эстония, Первая мировая война, Государственная Дума, Австро-Венгрия, Курляндия.



Introduction

On August 1, 1914, the First World War broke out, and everything changed decisively for the Baltic States, Russia, and the whole world as a whole. At the same time, no one could foresee all the consequences of the war. Two revolutions will take place in Russia at once, the country will fall apart, then another one will break out, now a civil war. Among the collapse of several empires and an attempt to create a fundamentally new society, quite unexpectedly (one might even say, by accident) three small Baltic republics appeared. And at the same time, the Baltic peoples were among the most affected in the wars of 1914-20. In addition to those who fell on the battlefields, as well as those who died in the rear from the hardships of military life, the population of the Baltic states has significantly decreased as a result of the evacuation and flight of civilians to the rear, far from the Baltic coast. The ethnographic and demographic consequences of these bloody events are still felt today.

The study's purpose was to research the features of the historical and political development of the Baltic countries in the 1910s.

Based on the purpose, the following study's tasks were developed:

- analyse the political state of Lithuania at the beginning of the 20th century;
- determine the features of the period of Lithuanian lands occupation in 1915-1917;
- provide statistical data on the emigration process that has engulfed the Baltics;
- determine the contribution of the Latvian and Estonian military to the political transformation of the Russian army and the Russian Empire territory.

To solve the tasks set, historical, comparative, logical and deductive research methods were used.

In the course of scientific research, numerous historical, and statistical sources, as well as the famous researchers' works published in Russia and the Baltic countries were used.

The Baltic States went to war together with Russia

In total, 178,387,800 people lived in the Russian Empire at the beginning of 1914, including 570,200 (250.2 thousand men, 257 thousand women) in the Estonian province, 1,744,000 (861.3 men, 882.7 women) in the Livland province, 798, 3 thousand (388.5 men, 409, 8 women) in Courland, 1857 thousand (914 thousand men, and 943 thousand women) in the Kovno province (Russia ..., 1995: 18-22). According to the Military Statistical Yearbook for 1912, there were 979,557 Russians, 104,079 Poles, 23,790 Lithuanians and Latvians, 18,874 Germans, 50,237 Jews, 26,621 Caucasians, 9,551 Finns, Mordvins, Cheremis, Chuvashs, 38,679 Tatars, Meshcheryaks, and Bashkirs, and Teptyars in the army (*Military Statistical Yearbook..., 1914:372-375*).

The Baltics became a battlefield literally from the first hours of the war. Thus, the war was officially declared by Germany to Russia at 18:00 on August 1, 1914. The Russian port of Libava was shelled by German warships on August 2. And at the same time, hostilities began on the lands of ethnic Lithuania and in East Prussia.

When the war broke out, the local population demonstrated loyalty to a single state in the Baltic provinces of Russia. Moreover, the struggle against the eternal enemies – the Germans – led to a certain enthusiasm and patriotic upsurge. All politicians of the Baltic region declared their loyalty to Russia. Thus, deputy J. Goldmanis declared from the rostrum of the IV State Duma: “Among the Latvians and Estonians there is not a single person who would not be aware that everything that they have achieved in terms of well-being has been achieved under the protection of the Russian Eagle and that everything that Latvians and Estonians must still achieve, perhaps only when the Baltic region will continue to be an indivisible part of Great Russia. Therefore, we can now see such an upsurge in our spirits, such enthusiasm to stand up for our dear Fatherland, that in order to paint a correct picture of this, the brightest colours would be completely pale. These great days prove that neither nationality, nor language, nor religion prevents us, Latvians and Estonians, from being ardent patriots of Russia and defending our Fatherland, standing shoulder to shoulder with the great Russian people against the daring enemy” (*Zorin, 2009:166*). Lithuanian Martin Ichas, a deputy of the State Duma from the Cadets, declared support for Russia’s military efforts: “At this crucial historical moment, I must declare on behalf of all Lithuanians, without distinction of parties, that the fate of our people has always been connected with the fate of the Slavs. The Lithuanian people, on whose land the first shots fell, who are forced to fight in the forefront, go to this war as if it were a sacred one. He forgets all his grievances, hoping to see Russia free and happy after this war, and Lithuanians torn in half united under one Russian flag” (*Zhelezynov et al., 1928:712*).

In the autumn of 1914, the Lithuanian political elite wrote the so-called *Amber Declaration*, a political proposal to the government. Russia was called “the liberator of peoples” in it, and it was said that the friendship between the Lithuanian and Russian people “is not overshadowed by anything” (*Laurinavičius & Rowell, 2009:50*). In this declaration, it was stated that in return for the full support of the Lithuanians for all Russian military efforts, Lithuania also hopes for the restoration of historical truth and it will be allowed to reunite with the Prussian part of Lithuania. It was understood that the united region would become an autonomy within Russia.

Jaan Raamot, an Estonian State Duma deputy, speaking in the Duma in early 1915, said that the entire Estonian people supported the government’s military efforts. He believes that Russia’s military victory will mark the beginning of the prosperity of the state and mark the success of Estonia, which “in these great historical days tied its fate with her both with blood and love” (*Zetterberg, 2013:43*).

Newspapers in local languages wrote enthusiastic articles, urging, e.g., Latvians from a shepherd people to become a people of warriors (*Bleyere et al., 2005:71*). At the same time, the publication of newspapers in German was prohibited.

However, of course, it was not the official speeches of politicians that testified to the real attitude towards the outbreak of war, but the behavior of those who had to go into the trenches. On the second day of the war, 3,000 Latvians voluntarily signed up for the Russian army. The mobilisation carried out in the Baltic provinces showed a remarkable result – 96% of those called

up arrived in the barracks. By the way, do not think that 4% evaded the draft. Just in the midst of field work, some peasants on farms did not immediately learn about the war and mobilisation, and besides, many Balts were in St. Petersburg and other areas far from the Baltic provinces. Many conscripts, unable to get to their recruiting center, simply went to the nearest parts of the Russian troops in the hope of being enlisted in the regiments. “Reverse dodgers” were noted – some exempted from military service for health reasons tried to bribe doctors in order to be recognised as fit.

It is difficult to calculate how many Balts in total wore Russian military uniforms between August 1914 and March 1918 (the time of the conclusion of the *Brest Peace Treaty*) due to the poor preservation of documentation in the chaos of the subsequent events of the revolution. In total, in 1914, 17,600 reservists, 3,500 recruits, and about 14,500 Estonian origin volunteers were called up in the Estonian lands, which amounted to at least 7% of the male population of Estonia and the Estonian counties of the Livonian province. In the future, new mobilisations were carried out. A total of 100,000 Estonians joined the ranks, and 2,000 of them received officer ranks. Seven senior officers commanded regiments, 17 commanded battalions, 13 had an academic military education, 12 had the rank of colonel, 28 were lieutenant colonels, and three served as division chiefs of staff during the war. About 600 Estonians fought at the front in the rank of company or battalion commander. During the First World War, 333 Estonian officers were awarded orders for bravery and skillful leadership of hostilities, including 47 by orders of St. George. At least 120 Estonian officers died or went missing in the battles of the First World War (*Tannberg, 2010:100-111*). In total, they fell about 10 thousand Estonians under the Russian banners in the battles of 1914-17.

According to the results of the mobilisation of 1914-1915. from the Latvian districts of Livonia, 91,700 people were called up for service (*Krustyn, 1972:52*). In total, about 140 thousand people were called up from the Latvian lands. Some researchers point out that during the World War, 55% of the total number of men aged 18 to 43 were mobilised (*Tannberg, 2014:98-113*).

About 70 thousand Lithuanians fought in the ranks of the Russian army (with a total population of about 1.7 million people). Approximately 11 thousand Lithuanians died in battles under the Russian banner. It is difficult to count how many Lithuanians became officers and generals of the Russian army in that war, since many of the natives of the Lithuanian lands belonged to the gentry class, and on this basis were considered Poles. So, Major General Sylvester Zhukovsky was considered a Pole, but after the collapse of the Russian Empire and the declaration of Lithuania's independence, he served in the Lithuanian army. Probably, Russian military officers considered themselves (or began to consider themselves) Lithuanians, who went to serve in the newly created army of Lithuania after the collapse of the Russian Empire. Among them were: a military general (S. Zhukovsky), four persons who were in general positions, 12 colonels, 46 lieutenant colonels and captains, more than 150 junior officers in ranks from ensigns to staff captains, several hundred non-commissioned officers.

In total, in proportion to the total population, the Baltic peoples gave Russia the largest number of soldiers in that war. With their blood, the Balts proved their loyalty to a single country.

The First World War inflicted a severe wound on the Ostsee. After the outbreak of the war in the Livonia and Courland provinces, there were numerous cases of manifestations of an open negative attitude of the indigenous population towards the local Germans. Many of them were

deported by the tsarist authorities deep into Russia, some of them fled to the German troops. However, the bulk of the Ostze people remained loyal to Russia right up to the *Treaty of Brest-Litovsk*. As one Baltic writer put it, “the oath was higher than popular feeling”. In other words, for all their sympathy for Germany, the Ostze people remained loyal to Russia. Russian military leaders from the Baltic Germans P.K. Rennekampf, I.K. Baggovut, R.R. Bisnek, A.F. Brinken, A.P. Budberg, N.F. Krusenstern, N.A. Korf, I.N. Maydel, F.V. Sievers, and many others probably did not show themselves as outstanding commanders, but none of them changed their oath and did not work for Germany. When the revolution broke out, the Ostsees suddenly found themselves abandoned by their Fatherland – Russia.

During the war, the authorities of the Russian Empire tried to abolish the special privileges of landowners and liquidate the manor police. In the interests of local peasants, in 1915, the Duma adopted the law “On the abolition of special land rights of the owners of noble estates in the Baltic provinces”, which came into force the following year and expanded the opportunities for trade and entrepreneurship of the indigenous population (*Karjabarm, 1987:176-177*). The development of the zemstvo reform, which would finally transfer power in the regions to the ethnic majority, was postponed until the end of the war.

The very first defeats of the Russian army in East Prussia, as well as the retreat in Poland, led, in particular, to heavy losses among soldiers and officers of Baltic origin, many of whom went to war as volunteers and adhered to Russophile views. Only in the almost completely destroyed 20th Corps of the 1st Army (where almost all the reservists from Livonia and Courland were sent), in early February 1915, in the battles in the swamps of the Augustow province, the number of dead, wounded and captured by the Germans Latvians was about 20 thousand people, according to some estimates (*Butulis & Zunda, 2010:69*).

From the very first days of the war, in August 1914, Lithuania found itself in a war zone. After the defeat of the 2nd Army under the command of General Samsonov, the Russian troops retreated to the Lithuanian territory, but already on September 28, 1914, the German troops were driven out of it. However, during the German troops’ offensive, which began in February 1915, they again entered Lithuania. In the spring, the Germans took Shavli (Shauliai). After 10 days, the Russians managed to return Shavli back, but the Germans retained the initiative of actions and positions in Lithuania. In the summer of the same year, a new German offensive followed, which led to a serious defeat of the Russians and the abandonment of the entire territory of ethnic Lithuania, and half of the Latvian lands. In August, the Kovno fortress was taken by the Germans. Although the fortress garrison bravely fought for 10 days, the commandant, General V.N. Grigoriev ordered the fortress to be handed over to the enemy, although the possibilities of defense were far from being exhausted, the stocks of weapons and food were sufficient. The surrender of Kovna shocked Russian society, becoming one of the reasons for the spread of panic rumors about the betrayal of the tops of the empire. After the capture of Kovna, German troops moved between the Neman and Viliya, approaching Vilna. Vilna was surrendered on September 3 (16).

In the spring of 1915, hostilities also unfolded on the Courland territory: at the end of April, Libava (Liepaja) fell almost without a fight. On August 1, the provincial city of Mitava (Jelgava) was captured by the Germans. The front approached Riga. The fighting was already going on 20-30 kilometers from the city center. A mass evacuation of the population began. Convoys with

refugees from Courland passed through the city. By order of the military command, the Riga wine warehouse was destroyed. As the newspapers wrote, not a single sober cab driver was seen in Riga for two days. The city authorities knew that the Germans needed copper, so it was decided to evacuate the bells of the Cathedral of the Nativity of Christ, the monuments to Peter the Great, Barclay de Tolly. But the city stood. For two years, near Riga there were fierce battles with varying success, but the front remained motionless.

Nevertheless, the panic of the authorities in the rear led to the evacuation of enterprises and valuables, even from territories far from the front line. When the German zeppelins fired on several cities in Estonia, the famous Waldhof pulp mill near Pernov was blown up in fear of the expected German landing.

In October 1915, the Germans reached the approaches to Dvinsk (Daugavpils). In November, the German troops were forced to stop the offensive and switched to a long positional war. As a result of the 1915 campaign, the Kaiser's troops occupied all of Lithuania and almost half of the territories inhabited by Latvians, most of which they controlled for four long years.

The fighting was extremely fierce. Many settlements repeatedly passed from hand to hand. Entire cities were wiped to the ground by artillery. Kalvaria, Shavli (Shauliai), Taurongen (Taurage), Kelme and other cities and towns were almost completely destroyed. At the same time, both sides often carried out destruction that was not at all caused by military circumstances. German troops burned the city of Taurongen (Taurage) under the pretext of revenge for the destruction of Memel by Russian troops. Retreating, Russian troops also destroyed infrastructure, blowing up bridges, damaging roads, burning food supplies, and taking industrial enterprises to the rear to make it difficult for the Germans to use the occupied territories. In general, the large-scale destruction of material assets was the only success of the Russian imperial army in the 1915 campaign.

Occupied lands in 1915-17

The Baltic States annexation was one of the main motives for Germany to start the World War. The Ostsee provinces were automatically considered German territories, which should "return" to Germany. For the territories of the Russian western provinces, inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Little Russians, the German plans provided to create pseudo-independent states under German control. Moreover, work in this direction began immediately. So, already on August 1, 1914, in the Prussian Landtag, Wilhelm Gaygalat (in modern Lithuania he was declared Vilius Gaygalaitis), parliamentarian from Memel, announced his hopes for joining Greater Lithuania to Germany "on behalf of the Lithuanians". In just 4 years, this Gaigalatis became the initiator of the so-called Tilsit Act on the accession of the Memel Territory to Lithuania. As already mentioned, during the 1915 campaign, all Lithuanian and half of the Latvian lands were occupied by German troops. The German occupation authorities established their own administration on this territory – "Oberost" (occupied regions in the East), headed by P. von Hindenburg, the commander-in-chief of the troops of the Eastern Front, and E. Ludendorff, the chief of front staff. The Germans considered Lithuania as a promising colony due to its proximity to the main territory of the Reich. Literally immediately after the occupation, German circles began to implement the "Hindenburg Plan", i.e., colonisation measures. The

occupiers confiscated 1,200 estates with a total area of 650 thousand hectares of land, planned to be transferred into the hands of German landowners who wanted to become colonisers and “Germanisers” of the region. The new landowners required not only an impeccable German noble origin, but also experience to manage strong farms in the east. Particular preference was given to persons with experience in colonial activities in Africa.

While the war continued, the Germans organised a large-scale robbery of Lithuania, requisitioning everything that could be taken away. For the Lithuanians themselves, the invaders introduced food rations of 250 grams of bread (or 160 grams of flour) and 40 grams of potato flour per person per day. 130,000 Lithuanians were taken into “worker battalions”, which built roads and military facilities for the occupiers. The population movement from county to county without special passes was prohibited. Only one weekly newspaper in Lithuanian and one daily newspaper in Polish were allowed, subsidised by the German government. Famine, epidemics, and reprisals by the invaders claimed the lives of about half a million people.

The occupying authorities sought to attract influential figures from the local population to their side in the region. However, initially the invaders did not have any support. Archbishop Franciszek Karevich of Zhmud, now called Pranciscus Karevičius (1861-1945), who was in the occupied territory, refused to swear allegiance to the German Kaiser, saying that he had already sworn allegiance to the Russian Tsar. However, with the help of the Baltic baron Friedrich von der Ropp, who had defected to the other side of the front, the German occupation authorities drafted an appeal from the “oppressed peoples of Russia” to the American President Wilson and an appeal to the entire “civilized world” in the spring of 1916. In April 1916, under the auspices of Gisbert von Romberg, the German ambassador to Switzerland, the *League of non-Russian Peoples of Russia*, which, of course, demanded the destruction of Russia in the name of the “freedom” of non-Russian peoples, arose. These demands were contained in the *Appeal of the Oppressed Peoples of Russia*, sent to US President Woodrow Wilson in May 1916. Then the *Congress of the Union of Peoples* (June 27-29, 1916) was organised in neutral Switzerland, in Lausanne. It was attended by 400 delegates from 23 nationalities. Among the deputies was a journalist, the future dictator of Lithuania Antanas Smetona. Of course, this “Union” was led by the German services and all the “decisions” of this event were reduced to the “liberation” of the oppressed peoples of Russia in the form of their subjugation to Germany.

The German authorities took the first steps in relation to the Polish lands, given the long-standing Russophobia of the Polish society. In August 1914, the formation of the Polish Legion, the “commandant” (commander) of which was Józef Klemens Pilsudski, began in Austria-Hungary. In August 1915, after the occupation of the Poland’s territory by German and Austrian troops, in order to develop pro-German sentiments among the Poles, the occupying authorities introduced teaching in Polish in schools and announced the creation of a national higher school. On November 5, 1916, Germany and Austria-Hungary signed an act on the creation of a constitutional monarchy in the territory of the Kingdom of the Polish of the Russian Empire, closely associated with the two founding states (*Tymanovsky et al., 2004:388-390*).

However, as always, the Polish leaders immediately began to put forward claims to all the lands of the former Commonwealth. The German authorities did not promise anything concrete, simultaneously playing out conflicts between Poles and Lithuanians. At the same time, the Germans began to take advantage of the Belarusian movement. In the Belarusian territories

occupied by the Germans, the Central Union of Belarusian National Public Organisations, headed by the Belarusian People's Committee (BPC) in Vilna, was created. Under his leadership in 1916-1917, a significant network of Belarusian schools emerged. The publication of textbooks, full of topics about the suffering of Belarusians under the tsarism yoke and about the "freedom" that came under the German occupation, began. The newspaper *Gaumont* also began to be published. Polish, Lithuanian, and Belarusian figures constantly argued with each other for the right to become the main favorite of Germany.

Initially, the Germans sympathised with the Poles in the Lithuanian lands. The representative of Bekerat, the German General Staff in Vilna, reported in 1917 that "... the importance of the Poles in Lithuania is incomparably stronger than expected, moreover, the Poles there are the only element with good political and creative qualifications. If, in time of war, it is still possible to rule without them, then in time of peace, ruling against them is not only difficult, but even dangerous, since other nationalities in Lithuania are not able to provide a single serious and permanent point of support" (*Silvanovich, 2014*). However, the German command soon considered that the claims of the Poles were excessive. In addition, the Entente countries also sought to attract the Poles to their side. Thus, the *Declaration of the Provisional Government of Russia* dated March 29, 1917, recognising Poland's right to restore statehood, had some success among the Polish population, Polish military units were soon formed in the Russian army, including a whole corps. Because of this, German politicians decided not to trust the Poles. The bet was made on the support of small peoples.

Most Lithuanians remained loyal to Russia. In the occupied Lithuanian territory, the partisan movement of the *Forest Brothers* began (the pro-Russian-minded Lithuanian partisans in 1915-18). The Germans had to throw regular units against the partisans. So, in June 1916, at the height of the Brusilov breakthrough, the kreishauptman (county chief) Raseiniai, where the "forest brothers" were especially active, reported to his superiors that "the situation threatens to paralyse the entire administration ..." (*Tautavičius, 1978:284*). However, the partisan movement, which in was a rare phenomenon during the First World War, did not develop widely in Lithuania because Nicholas the Second and his generals were afraid of any popular initiative, including in the fight against an external enemy. In addition, a significant part of adult men from among the Lithuanians either already fought in the Russian army, or were evacuated to the inner Russian provinces. So, old men and teenagers fought in the "forest brothers".

The occupied Latvian territories were also thoroughly plundered. In 1915-1917, wheat, oats, flax, hay, livestock, building materials⁶ and non-ferrous metals, valued at more than 20 million marks, were exported from Courland to Germany. In occupied Courland, the German military administration failed to win over even the German population. The astonishing loyalty of the Ostsees to the Russian monarchy was preserved even under the occupation of the German "brothers". The *February Revolution* and the abdication of Nicholas the Second, who released his recent subjects from the oath of allegiance, changed everything.

After the fall of the Russian monarchy, the sentiments of the Baltic Sea began to change. In March 1917, the Courland Landtag turned to Wilhelm the Second with a request to annex the region to Germany. However, there was no quorum at this meeting, the majority of deputies deliberately ignored the meeting. The Livonian Landtag, which continued to operate in the Livonian province, unequivocally occupied an all-Russian patriotic position.

The Baltics outside the Baltics

The war moved not only the soldiers. Hundreds of thousands of refugees rushed deep into Russia. The wave of immigrants covered 25 provinces, their number reached 3-4 million already in 1915. According to official data as of December 20, 1915, presented by the governors and published by the *Tatyanin Committee*, 2,706.3 thousand refugees were registered on the territory of the empire, with the exception of Transcaucasia ... As of February 1, 1917, the *All-Russian Central Labor Bureau* registered 3,200.5 thousand refugees... Among all registered refugees, Russians accounted for 54%, Poles – 16.3%, Latvians – 8.8%, Jews – 6.2%, Armenians – 3.8%, Lithuanians – 2.7%, “other”, among which were predominantly German deportees – 6%, undistributed – 2.2% (*Petrov, 2014:233*). Data on the ethnic composition of the refugees, not collected from all counties, were presented to Petrograd in January 1916. According to these incomplete data, there were 17,050 (53%) refugees of Russian nationality in the province, 9,470 Poles (29.4%), Latvians – 3,305 (10.3%), Jews – 1,327 (4.1%), Lithuanians – 126 (0.4%), German colonists – 631 (2%), other nationalities – 269 (0.8%) (*Belova, 2011*).

The exact number of refugees is unlikely to ever become known to historians. A mass of people spontaneously moved away from the border areas already in the first days of the war. The Russian authorities began organised evacuation only during the retreat of 1915. However, even so, the number of those who left on their own without notifying the authorities exceeded the number of legally evacuated. Many who had relatives and acquaintances in the inner provinces of Russia never got registered as refugees. Workers of the evacuated enterprises, like as students and teachers of the evacuated universities, were not registered as refugees. In addition, following the Russian army retreating from Galicia in 1915, hundreds of thousands of Galician Rusyns, supporters of Russia, poured in. In general, approximately 10% of the Rusyns left their native lands along with the retreating Russian army. Major statistician G.Z. Volkov determined the total number of refugees and evacuees at 7,421 thousand souls (*Volkov, 1930:72*). Most researchers estimate the total number of refugees in the deep provinces of Russia at 5 million people.

At the same time, in fact, there was no central management of all refugees. In Vilna, e.g., several independent committees for helping victims of the war functioned in parallel – Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian, Belarusian, and even the Old Believers (*Buldakov, 2010:106-109*). The most effective were 260 Latvian refugee organisations, led by the Central Committee of Latvian Refugees in Petrograd. The Committee published the newspaper *Echo of the Motherland* (Dzimtenes Atballs), organised a network of schools for refugee children. In Moscow, the created Latvian theater played only plays by Latvian authors (*Bartele, 2002:68*).

In addition to refugees and evacuees, deported representatives of various nationalities – Germans, like as citizens of enemy countries – were in the depth of Russia against their will.

The Baltic provinces gave a lot of refugees. So, in the summer of 1915, about half of the population of Courland, along with livestock and belongings, went into forced exile to the east. The townspeople also fled. So, more than half of the former inhabitants left Libau (now Liepāja), 90% of the inhabitants lost Tuckum (now Tukums). As a result, at the beginning of 1916, about 149 thousand Latvian refugees were registered in Estonia and Livonia, and about 109 thousand – in the “internal” provinces of Russia. By the middle of the year, the number of officially

recorded Latvian refugees reached about 334 thousand people, while their actual number estimated to be twice as large (*Šalda, 2005*). According to A. Spreslis, in 1916 there were 492,954 refugees from Latvia in the inner provinces of Russia. Of these, there were 276,378 people in the Baltic States (Latgale and Estonia), 11,748 in Belarus, 66,967 in the northwestern provinces of Russia, 79,259 in the Central Industrial Region, and 31,507 in the south of Russia (in Ukraine, on the Don, etc.), 7,547 in the Volga region, 12,667 in the Urals, 3,794 in the northern provinces. In Siberia and the Far East there were 3208 Latvian refugees, which accounted for 6.5% of their total number (*Lotkin, 2003:44*).

The evacuation of part of the population deep into Russia, and at the same time the arrival of many refugees in the Baltic cities, not yet affected by hostilities, led to dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of the population. The data of the census conducted at the end of July 1917 in Riga, literally on the eve of the fall of the city, are indicative. By this time, 209 thousand inhabitants were counted in the city (2.5 times less than in 1913). The census showed that among the inhabitants of the city, Latvians made up 54.3% (more than ever before), Germans – 14.3%, Jews – 10.4%, Russians – 8.6%. True, in this case, the number of Latvians, of which 113,000 were counted, was noticeably increased by the 49,000 refugees who were in the city from Courland occupied by the German troops (*Krastinš, 1978:30*). Also, the proportion of Jews increased due to those who fled to Riga from the Lithuanian provinces. New waves of refugees poured after the capture of Riga by the Germans in 1917 (*Bartele & Šalda, 2000*).

Many Lithuanians fled from their lands at the beginning of the war, a year before the official evacuation, and the evacuation in the summer of 1915 took place in a hurry, almost unorganised, for this reason, Lithuanian refugees can only be counted according to indirect data. According to A. Plakans, 300,000 Lithuanians fled or were evacuated from Lithuanian lands, many of whom found salvation in the east (*Plakans, 2016:296*).

The ranks of refugees were mowed down by epidemic diseases (e.g., typhus), domestic disorder, and personal dramas, generated by war and flight, led to an increase in alcoholism, to a large number of suicides. Many of these refugees, having accumulated in large cities, embittered at the “old regime”, became the combustible material of two Russian revolutions and the Civil War.

The Russian military command, along with the evacuation of the civilian population, also began to dismantle and remove industrial enterprises. Only in the lands of modern Latvia during the war years, about 400 enterprises ceased to exist. Up to 90% of the entire machine and power equipment park were removed from Riga. However, many industrial enterprises stopped working due to the cessation of supplies of raw materials and fuel.

In the Russian army under the Latvian banners

Against the background of the retreat of the Russian army and the loss of half of the ethnic Latvian territory in July 1915, the Latvian deputies of the State Duma appealed to the highest military authorities with a request to organise volunteer Latvian rifle battalions. The military command, highly appreciating the bravery of the Latvian militia units near Mitava in the spring of 1915, agreed with the need to replenish the ranks of the army with highly motivated, literate, and disciplined Latvian soldiers. A special Latvian committee headed by Goldman (Goldmanis) addressed in the summer with an appeal “*Gather under the Latvian Banners*”. This appeal said that

“the Latvian regiments will serve to protect Latvia, so that it will continue to bloom as an indivisible part of mighty Russia”. The results were impressive: at once 8 thousand volunteers signed up for the units being formed. Thus, units of the Latvian Riflemen (in Latvian: *Latviešu strēlnieki*) were created as part of 9 regiments, united in two brigades. Soldiers of Latvian nationality, previously drafted into the army, asked to be transferred to their Latvian units. Most of the shooters were workers, landless peasants, and farm labourers. So, by the beginning of 1916, there were 1,639 riflemen in the 2nd Riga Rifle Battalion. Of these, there were about 42.2% workers, 35.8% landless peasants, 4.7% sailors and fishermen, 2.2% artisans, 8.4% landowners and tenants, 3.4% representatives of urban entrepreneurs. Thus, 81.2% of the shooters of this battalion were representatives of rural and urban middle and poor segments of the population (*Kopylov, 2014*). This social composition of the shooters largely contributed to their Bolshevisation. The only politically significant criterion to select the shooters’ ranks was nationality (the Organising Committee of the Latvian battalions was vigilant that there were no Germans or Jews in them) (*Kopylov, 2014*). The banners of the Latvian battalions had Latvian national symbols on one side (usually a sword and the sun) and the monogram of Nicholas the Second and the Russian double-headed eagle on the other side (*Latviešu strēlnieku brigāde, 2016*). The anthem of the Latvians during the war became “*God Save the Tsar*” in Latvian. In the old orthography of the Latvian language: Deews, šargi Ķeisarū!/Dod viņam špehku waldit/ Par šlawu, par šlawu mums! (in modern spelling: *Dievs, sargi Ķeizaru!/Dod viņam spēku/Valdīt par slavu,/Par slavu mums!*). In 1916, there were 40 thousand Latvian riflemen (excluding Latvians who continued to serve in the Russian army in other units, like in the navy).

From the very first days at the front, the Latvian riflemen showed excellent fighting qualities. Already in the autumn of 1915, the Latvian Riflemen received a baptism of fire in the vicinity of Riga, fighting the Germans on the Misa River. The command used these shooters in the most difficult front sectors, which was accompanied by huge losses. In 1916, they valiantly fought on the “island of death” – a foothold on the left bank of the Western Dvina, withstood all German attacks, including those using gases. Subsequently, the Latvians took part in the *Christmas Battles*, which began on January 5, 1917, according to the new style (December 23, 1916, according to the old style). During these battles, the shooters suffered huge losses – 43.13% of the personnel. The mediocrity of the high command, the decomposition of the rear, had a painful effect on the shooters. Among them, the slogans of the Bolsheviks began to enjoy particular popularity. After the February Revolution, the Latvian units were quickly propagated by the Bolsheviks.

At the same time, the shooters retained discipline and fighting spirit. If desertion flourished in parts of the Russian army after February 1917, riots, reprisals against officers were common, mass surrenders were observed, orders were not followed, then the shooters had nothing of the kind. This was especially evident during the battles for Riga in the summer of 1917. On August 19 (September 1), 1917, after a powerful artillery preparation using gases, German troops attacked Russian positions near Riga, forcing the Western Dvina. Although the Russian units, including the Siberian units operating jointly and the Latvian riflemen, initially steadfastly repulsed the enemy offensive, the orders to retreat followed from the command. The retreat soon turned into a stampede. Only the Siberians and Latvian Riflemen, who suffered huge losses in the battles, continued to fight and retreated in an organised manner. It is significant that in one Latvian 5th Zemgale regiment, commanded by I. Vatsetis, the future commander-in-chief

of the Red Army, 664 soldiers and officers were awarded the St. George Cross for their courage and stamina in battle. This was the largest number of Knights of St. George in one military unit in the history of the Russian army. In these battles, the 5th Zemgale Latvian Rifle Regiment lost 80% of its officers and 67% of privates from its composition, and the 1st and 5th companies of this regiment were completely killed.

Soon the Germans took Riga, the Russian troops left the “island of death”, which they staunchly defended for two years, without a fight. The German offensive lasted only 4 days. Having occupied Riga, the Germans immediately turned the Russian cathedral into a Lutheran church. Russian street names were painted over. In the early days, only one newspaper was published, and it was in German, of course. Its programme article was called *The Liberation of Riga from the Slavic Yoke*. The new owners quickly began to turn Riga into the rear of the German army, where the Kaiser’s soldiers could rest and have fun. So, special army brothels began to open, separate for private ones, for gentlemen-officers – a special luxurious ones on Zamkova Street, in the building of the former Balta Hotel. So that the prostitutes did not get tired too quickly, they were given a double food ration. Exactly one year after the capture of Riga, the German command erected a monument to a German soldier in the city center, officially called the *Iron Soldier*. However, by the way, the monument itself was made of wood, only painted with steel-colored paint, so the Riga inhabitants called this sculpture *Wooden Fritz*.

For the city of Riga, the consequences of the First World War were sad. No, the city was almost not destroyed, but forever ceased to be that dynamic, advanced world-class scientific and industrial center that it was before the war. For the century that followed, Riga was nothing more than the administrative center of Latvia. Miroslav Mitrofanov, co-chairman of the *Russian Union of Latvia (RUL)* party, member of the *Riga City Council*, said that “If it were not for the influence of the First World War, the pace of development of these provinces remained the same, today Riga would be a world center, a metropolis of skyscrapers, scientific laboratories, and outstanding scientific world discoveries. And so today we are a small peripheral administrative center – well, this is also not bad, but the greatness remained there forever, in June 1914. Latvia fell victim to the ambitions of global players who clashed the interests of different empires in a conflict. It is a pity, but it is forever” (*Melkonov, 2021*).

In the fall of Riga, a much greater role than military circumstances was played by the internal political struggle in Russia. The Bolsheviks assured that the Supreme Commander L.E. Kornilov deliberately surrendered Riga to open the way for the Germans to revolutionary Petrograd. Bolshevik influence was really strong in Riga. So, in August, literally on the eve of the capture of the city by the Germans, in the elections to the Riga City Duma, in which 18 parties and blocs competed for 120 seats, the Bolsheviks received 41% of the vote, which gave them 49 seats, other socialist parties – 15% (18 seats).

However, just immediately after the fall of Riga, Kornilov began his campaign against Petrograd (so-called *Kornilov Rebellion*). Be that as it may, the surrender of Riga and the *Kornilov Rebellion* undermined the combat effectiveness of the Russian army and in many respects contributed to the Bolshevisation of the Soviets and many army units, in particular, the Latvian riflemen and sailors of the Baltic Fleet.

Meanwhile, the disorder reigning in Russia after the *February Revolution* aroused interest not only among Germany, but also among the Entente countries, as it were, allied with Russia. It

was the Entente representatives who began to quietly finance various self-proclaimed committees and organisations, hastily assembled from unknown figures proclaimed “autonomy”, and even complete independence of individual regions of Russia.

On the territory of the Latvian lands not occupied by the Germans, Soviets began to emerge, as well as throughout Russia. The Soviets were led by the *Executive Committee of the Council of Workers', Soldiers', and Landless Deputies of Latvia* (Iskolat). The *Iskolat* was created in Riga on July 29-30, 1917, at the initiative of the Central Committee of the Social Democracy of Latvia at a meeting of the *Council of Workers', Soldiers', and Landless Deputies of Latvia*. Of the 27 members of the Committee, 24 were Bolsheviks, and three were Social Democrats and Internationalists. The Presidium of *Iskolat* had 7 members. Otto Karklin became its chairman. In fact, the *Iskolat* established Soviet power in Livonia and Latgale even before the October uprising in Petrograd. After the *October Revolution* in Petrograd, the *Iskolat* became the body of the Bolshevik government in the Latvia's territory not occupied by the Germans. And the creation of the *Iskolat Republic* was nothing more than an administrative completion of the process to form and strengthen the Bolsheviks power in Latvia.

Estonian lands had not yet been affected by hostilities. The *February Revolution* contributed that long-standing demands to create a separate Estonian autonomy within Russia, which included ethnic Estonian lands (the Estonian province and the Estonian counties of Livonia) were fulfilled. On March 30 (April 12), 1917, the Provisional Government adopted a resolution *On the Temporary Structure of the Administrative Management and Local Self-Government of the Estland Province*. According to it, the Estlandian autonomy was formed (note, not Estonian) as part of Russia. At the head of this administrative unit was the provincial parliament named the *Zemsky Council* (in Estonian: *Maapäev*). The chairman of the *Zemsky Council* was the mayor of Reval, Jaan (Ivan Ivanovich) Poska, who also acted as commissar of the *Provisional Government* in Estonia. So far, no nationalist slogans have been raised, and Estonian politicians have seen Estonia as a Russian autonomy. During the May Day demonstration of 1917, almost 100 thousand people marched in columns under red banners. Attempts to raise the blue-black-and-white Estonian flag provoked a nervous reaction from the demonstrators, sometimes simply beating the nationalists.

However, the bourgeois parties also demanded only the autonomy of the Estonian lands. In July, at the *Estonian National Congress*, which was attended by representatives of various political parties (except for the Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries), it was decided that it would be preferable to remain part of Russia on the rights of administrative national-territorial autonomy for the Estonia's development. The strength of the Estonians was given by the presence of Estonian military units.

The Russian command began to form national military units from Estonians immediately after the February Revolution of 1917. From April 1917 to February 1918, the national Estonian military units united about 35 thousand Estonian soldiers and almost 2 thousand officers. However, unlike the Latvian riflemen, the Estonian units did not particularly show themselves in battles, but this was due only to the rapid disintegration of the country.

In March 1917, the *National Lithuanian Council* was created in Russia (included the main parties, with Smetona as leader), which spoke in favour of autonomy. Finally, in the same 1917, an attempt was made to form Lithuanian units (although since 1915 the Lithuanian lands had

been occupied by the Germans). These were: the 1st separate Lithuanian battalion in Vitebsk (1500 people), the Lithuanian reserve battalion in Smolensk (500-600 people), the Lithuanian battalion in Rovno (700 people), the Lithuanian battalion. Vitovt in Siberia (500 people), the Lithuanian division of dragoons in Valka (Latvia, 150 people). In general, by the end of 1917, there were up to 3,500 military personnel in the Lithuanian national units. However, at the beginning of 1918, the Lithuanian units were disbanded.

The final chord of the battles on the Eastern Front of the First World War was the capture of the Moonsund Islands by the German troops in October 1917. For 9 days, the islands were taken by the Germans with minimal losses, while over 20 thousand Russian soldiers were captured. On the island of Moon (Muhu), 1600 Estonian soldiers were also captured by the Germans. However, the Baltic Fleet, commanded not so much by admirals as by the pro-Bolshevik Tsentrobalt (Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet), on many of whose ships red flags were raised, fought skillfully and inflicted significant losses on the German fleet. During the retreat, Russian sailors blocked the fairways with flooded ships and minefields. As a result, the German fleet was unable to break into the Gulf of Finland. However, the Moonsund Islands remained in the hands of the Germans.

Soon after the battles for Moonsund, news came that the *Provisional Government* had been overthrown in Petrograd and the power of the Soviets had been established.

Discussion

In the course of studying the topic, a need arose for a deeper study of the following issues:

1. Methodology for searching and studying statistical data on migration changes in the Baltic countries in the period 1914-1918.
2. Clarification of the quantitative indicators of military personnel from the Baltic countries who took an active part in the hostilities on the side of the Russian army in the period 1914-1918.



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