Stanisław Wiech, *Litwa i Białoruś. Od Murawjowa do Baranowa (1864–1868)*,
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This book by Stanisław Wiech contains publication of 24 documents that reveal the anti-Polish politics of the Russian Empire between 1864 and 1868, when Mikhail Murav'ev, Konstantin Kaufman and Eduard Baranov were governor-generals of Vilnius (pp. 169–305). The choice of this period is justifiable, regardless of the fact that the Imperial Russian bureaucracy described the styles of governance of these officials differently: 'Murav'ev did not speak much but he did a lot; Kaufman talked a lot but did little; Baranov did not speak at all, and neither did he do much either' (p. 43). If Kaufman and Baranov continued the policies begun by Murav'ev, then Aleksandr Potapov, who was the Vilnius governor-general from 1868 to 1874, tried to alter these policies, even though no fundamental changes actually took place. Therefore, the year 1868 is indeed an important date. On the other hand, it might be more logical to start the publication of documents from 1863, when Murav'ev was appointed, and started to approve or initiate various legal acts regulating the development of the territory under the jurisdiction of the Vilnius governor-general.

This book is the first volume in a major project encompassing not only documents relating to Imperial Russian policy in the Northwest region (Lithuania and Belarus), but also in the Southwest Region (right-bank Ukraine), from the suppression of the 1863 uprising until the First World War. Some of these documents were already published in the 19th century, others were uncovered by the author in archives. Most are well known to historians researching this issue. It is undoubtedly of great value that these documents are being published in the original Russian, making them accessible to researchers. Readers who do not know Russian will find comprehensive summaries of the published documents in the long introductory article.

In the first part of the book (pp. 13–167), Wiech not only discusses the content of the documents, but also presents an overview of the anti-Polish policy in the Northwest Region between 1855 and 1868. He pays a great deal of attention to the lives of the governor-generals, their relations with influential members of the Imperial Russian political elite,

the circumstances behind their appointment to and dismissal from Vilnius, and the course of preparations for certain anti-Polish legislation. He believes that Murav'ev implemented a policy that had no equal in any other European state in terms of the scale of its brutality, while his style of governance and conceptual recommendations could be termed 'tsarist totalitarianism', since according to the nature of this nationality policy, 'ethnic cleansing', confessional policy, cultural and religious repressions, and the methods he applied are reminiscent of those that were implemented several decades later, but on a much larger scale, by the Soviet Union, as well as those that are typical internal policies in totalitarian systems (p. 116). According to Wiech, Kaufman continued the policies of Murav'ev (pp. 40, 128), while there were very few changes when Baranov held the post (p. 43). This thesis about the similarities between tsarist policy and the early Soviet period, and even more so, its comparison with totalitarianism, will not be easily accepted by Western or Russian historians. Wiech states that the Russian government achieved the goals that Murav'ev and Kaufman formulated: the elimination of the social and economic domination of Polish nobles and the Catholic clergy, the change to social, ethnic and confessional relations, the elimination from public life of the Polish language, and the political, economic and religious domination of Russia and the Orthodox Church (p. 164).

In his introduction, Wiech confirms that the mechanisms put in place for accepting decisions regarding the 'de-polonisation' of the 'taken lands' (*Ziemie Zabranne*), and the national policy concept in particular, as well as their implementation in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century, have yet to attract the attention of historians, while the existing knowledge about these processes is incidental and rarely based on archival sources. He believes that researchers have so far paid more attention to the 'Russification' of the western provinces of the Russian Empire.¹ He is quick to explain that he is talking about Polish historiography, which, compared to its Russian, Lithuanian and English counterparts, is less well developed (p. 9). I agree with the author that tsarist policy in the so-called Western Region has indeed received a great deal of attention from researchers in Russia, Lithuania, Belarus and the United States, so readers who can access research literature in languages other than Polish would be hard-pressed to find something new in this book.²

¹ I am not sure how the author distinguishes which actions of the Imperial Russian government were 'de-polonisation' and which were 'russification', since usually tsarist officials sought to make Poles Russian, and Polish influences Russian. Thus, these were constituent parts of one and the same process.

² The main works on this theme are: T. R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb,

Thus, Wiech wants to reveal the 'Polish historical perspective' (p. 9). This declaration does not come as a surprise, since first of all, he uses terms like *Ziemie Zabranne*, which is specifically characteristic of the Polish historical tradition. In this case, he does not choose the official terminology of the day (despite mentioning it in his book), nor does he use the more neutral term *Zabór Rosyjski* (Russian Seizure), which is also equally characteristic of the Polish tradition, but instead uses a term with very clear Polish connotations. 'Ziemie Zabranne' implies that he is referring to territory that was 'taken' from Poland. I would say that the main approach itself in this book is Polish, as Wiech is interested only in the actions of the Imperial Russian government directed against Poles and the Catholic clergy, or the Catholic Church in general. Since not only Poles were Catholics, there are inevitably some mentions of nationality policy measures that were aimed against other ethnic groups, such as the Lithuanians; however, this kind of information is relatively rare. Tsarist policy regarding Jews remains outside Wiech's field of vision. I think this happens to be a classic case of what was criticised by Aleksei Miller, who said that combining an ethnocentric and regional approach is not much better than taking an exclusively ethnocentric perspective.³ In contemporary historiography, an absolute majority of researchers agree that in the post-1863 period, the main enemy of the tsarist government in the Western Region were Poles and the Catholic clergy, and that the Imperial Russian government sought mainly to minimise the influence of Poles and Polish culture in the region. However, a narrative where nationality policy is discussed from the perspective of only one national group creates the impression that it was only Poles who were the objects of the repressive policies, and that they experienced more

1996); W. Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863–1905)* (Lublin, 1998); A. Komzolova, *Politika samoderzhaviia v Severo-Zapadnom krae v epokhu Velikikh reform* (Moscow, 2005); M. Dolbilov, A. Miller, *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow, 2006); D. Staliūnas, *Making Russians. Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Amsterdam/New York, 2007); A. Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest/New York, 2008); M. Dolbilov, *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: Etnokonfessional'naiia politika v Litve i Belorusii pri Aleksandre II* (Moscow, 2010); *Nationalizing Empires*, eds. S. Berger, A. Miller (Budapest, New York, 2015). There is no mention whatsoever of important works by Lithuanian authors (such as Vytautas Merkys, Antanas Tyla, Rimantas Vėbra, etc) that were published in Lithuanian.

³ A. Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism. Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest/New York, 2006), pp. 10–20. Miller suggests using the situational approach, i.e., to include all parties that had an influence in one way or another on the processes discussed.

discrimination than any other nation. I can illustrate the problems that arise when taking this approach with an example.

As I have already mentioned, Wiech sometimes mentions discriminatory measures that were applied not only towards Poles but towards other non-dominant ethnic groups as well. One such measure was the introduction of Cyrillic in Lithuanian writing. First, we read:

Evidence of the indiscriminate fight against Polishness not just in Lithuania but in the whole Western Region was the [government's] introduction of the ban on using the Polish language in schools, government institutions, all public places (squares, streets, theatres, cafes and shops), and on publishing texts using the Polish alphabet. Discrimination against the languages of the population in the Taken Lands was aimed not only at Poles but at Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians as well. The ban on publishing in the Latin alphabet was also extended to apply to the Lithuanian language' (p. 37).

Later, we find several more details about this discriminatory measure relating to Lithuanians (pp. 37–38, 112, 150). However, they do not change the image conveyed in this long quote, that the government's repressive policy was directed against the Polish language, while the other languages (Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian) were discriminated in a similar way to Polish. Wiech writes that the measure ('publishing texts using the Polish alphabet') was 'extended' to apply to Lithuanian. The problem here is that writing in these languages experienced different scales of discrimination. There was no ban on publishing books in Polish using the Latin alphabet in the Western Region; only for a period after the suppression of the 1863 uprising did the government prohibit the publishing of such books in this province. Publications in Lithuanian, meanwhile, which used the traditional script (Latin and Gothic), were banned outright, and publications in Lithuanian could only come out if they used the Cyrillic alphabet. Apart from a few rare exceptions, no publications in Ukrainian or Belarusian could be printed at all, even in Cyrillic.⁴ Thus, the scale of repressions regarding these languages was different, and in this sense the Polish language experienced the least discrimination.

Despite these critical remarks Weich's selection of primary sources and their publication are an important contribution.

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⁴The Imperial Russian government banned the publication of texts in Ukrainian and Belarusian using Latin script in 1859.