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## **BELARUSIANS IN THE REFLECTION OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE JOURNALISTIC MATERIALS OF THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE**

### **БЕЛОРУСЫ В ОТРАЖЕНИИ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОЙ ПУБЛИЦИСТИКИ ПЕРИОДА ПАРИЖСКОЙ МИРНОЙ КОНФЕРЕНЦИИ**

***Abstract:** The article shows that the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 - the beginning of 1920 contributed to the appearance of information about Belarusians in the English-language journalism, albeit a very limited amount; it contained rather contradictory theses generated by Russian and Polish traditions, but it carried a single message about the underdevelopment of Belarusians as an ethnic group.*

***Keywords:** Belarus, the United Kingdom, the United States, Paris Peace Conference, Belarusians, English-language journalism.*

«No Conference that has ever assembled in the history of the world has been confronted with problems of such variety, of such complexity, of such magnitude, and of such gravity. The Congress of Vienna was the nearest approach to it. You had then to settle the affairs of Europe. It took eleven months. But the problems at the Congress of Vienna, great as they were, sink into insignificance compared with those which we have had to attempt to settle at the Paris Conference. It is not one continent that is engaged – every continent is affected. With very few exceptions, every country in Europe has been in this War» [16]. This is how the British Prime Minister described the Peace conference in Paris, which drew up the results of the First World War and laid the legal foundations of international relations system of interwar time. The decisions taken there not only determined the political image of the world for several decades, but also set precedents for the peaceful settlement that followed the Second world war, which results continue to have an impact on the life of modern society. This fact actualizes the continuation of a comprehensive study of events and phenomena closely related to the Paris Peace conference, and causes the preservation of the Belarusian historical science interest in this issue. In particular, researchers in Belarus continue to analyze the significance of the events of the First World war for the Belarusian history, to consider various aspects of the question of the place of Belarus in international relations in the postwar years, while, however, the focus is on the Belarusian vector in the policy of Poland and Soviet Russia [28; 26; 25; 27].

However, in our opinion, a number of important aspects of the post-war peace settlement still remain outside the field of historical research. In particular, it is known that during the conference the fate of previously little-known or not known regions and peoples was the subject of experts, diplomats and politicians discussion (one can recall a quote from the speech of D. Lloyd George «How many Members have heard of Teschen? I do not mind saying that I had never heard of it, but Teschen very nearly produced an angry conflict between two Allied States, and we had to interrupt the proceedings to try and settle the affairs at Teschen» [16]). It was during the conference that many statistical, geographical, ethnographic and other information, as well as propaganda materials, actively penetrated the pages of printed publications and became available to public. In particular, in this article a subject of research is the information about Belarusians, contained in the English-language journalistic materials of the Paris Peace conference period, and is of interest because of its impact on their perception and assessment by the English-speaking community.

The corpus of used sources is represented mainly by narrative sources (journalistic works, press materials).

To begin with, it should be noted that in the English-language texts of the considered time the equivalent of the word Belarusians was the phrase «White Russians», that is, part or variety of the Russian people, which immediately set a certain prism of Belarusians perception.

The second thing that should be noted is the fact that the level of knowledge about the situation in the territory where the Belarusian population lived was extremely low even among the members of the delegations of the peace conference positioned as «experts». For example, one of the British experts on Russia was James Simpson, Professor of natural science at the University of Edinburgh. John Simpson traveled extensively in European and Asian parts of Russia before and during the war and was therefore considered a valuable member of the British Department of Information who knew the Northern regions – the Baltic provinces and Finland. He «had heard of peoples of whom nobody else in the department had a knowledge» [9, p. 74]. The second example is the position of the adviser to the British delegation at the conference on political and diplomatic affairs James Hadlam-Morley. In particular, the following excerpt from his letter of June 11th, 1919 is indicative: «I cannot reconcile myself to the position that it is the right thing to satisfy the Poles by giving them more than they can justly demand on their western frontiers, so as to relieve the tension on the eastern. Of course this arises from the fact that I really know nothing about the problems on the eastern frontier of Poland, but I feel it would be a fatal thing to give the Poles more than they can justly demand at the expense of Germany; in my mind Germany is more important than the White Russians» [6].

In conditions of the obvious lack of reliable information about the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, even the government circles listened to the opinion of «experts» who have recently arrived from Russia. Such as, for example, Harold Williams, whose name appeared in articles in the «Daily Chronicle» and

«Daily Telegraph» dedicated to Russia, where he spent considerable time, even married. H. Williams also gave public lectures [2, p. 170-171]. He gave one of these lectures in Cambridge in the summer of 1916 as part of an educational summer seminar on «Russia and Poland». In it Mr Williams said «Look first of all at the Russians, of whom there are nearly one hundred millions in all, of all types, the Great Russian, the Little Russian, and the White Russian, the three great divisions of the Russian people. ... As to the White Russians, their dialect is so little different from Great Russian that it is hard to imagine that a White Russian movement of any considerable extent could arise. There is an incipient movement which is now being used by the Germans as a means of propaganda in Vilna, because the Germans wish to emphasize even minor distinctions within the Russian nation» [24, p. 140, 145]. This text already allows us to highlight several key theses that were present in the English-language journalism of the Paris conference period, which appeared thanks to the authors who came from Russia: first, Belarusians are, along with the great and little Russians, part of the Russian people; secondly, the allocation of their differences and support for their national movement during the war are the machinations of Germany.

The same theses can be clearly seen in the English press during the conference, for example, in the newspaper «The Times» on January 14th, 1919 we read about «...White Russian and Little Russian peasant nations ... the White Russians and Little Russians being but branches of the Great Russian nation...» [15]. In the same newspaper of January 21st we find information about the development of the political situation that fits into the previous thesis «the White Russia Soviet Government has proclaimed White Russia (Smolensk and Mink district) a part of the Russian Soviet Republic» [11]. The above-mentioned theses were consistently duplicated in the English-language press of the USA. So in newspaper «The New York Times» from 29<sup>th</sup> of December, 1917 we can read: «the Russians are divided into Great Russians, Little Russians, and White Russians. According to latest available statistics, the White Russians number about 5000000» [21]. During 1919, the American press also constantly published short notes about the events that took place on the territory of Belarus, accompanied by eloquent explanations. For example, in the newspaper «The New York Times» on January 21st, you can find such an explanation «The bulk of the White Russians, who number about 5000000, live in Lithuania, which recently was invaded by the Bolsheviki» [19].

Reports in the English-language American press in 1918 also show the inheritance of the journalistic tradition of the Belarusian national movement's connection with German politics. In particular, we can mention a number of notes about Belarus related to the information received through London from Moscow from the correspondent of the Agency «Exchange Telegraph company» dated May, 16th. It was printed in both large [8; 20] and regional editions [23; 7; 3; 18; 22; 17] and it concerned the proclamation of the Belarusian Republic «with the consent of Germany». Notes on this topic almost verbatim repeat each other. It was noted that a coalition government is being formed, negotiations on the unification

of Lithuania and Belarus with a view to forming a separate state under the military protectorate of Germany are continuing. The above information was accompanied by the necessary explanation for readers, which stated that Belarus had indefinite borders, approximately occupied the territory North of Ukraine, East of Poland and the Baltic provinces and South and West of the «great Russia», it includes Lithuania, where the bulk of the Belarusian population lives. The map-scheme given in one of the Newspapers [Picture 1] located Belarus on a very elongated territory from West to East (from the Baltic coast to what is called Siberia in the scheme) and was accompanied by an explanation that «another republic has been added to the list of «free» Russian states. It is to be known as «White Russia», as distinguished from «Greater Russia», which is the Bolshevik nation» [3].



Picture 1 [18].

Identifying information about Belarusians and Belarus in the English-language journalistic materials of the Paris Peace conference period, it is impossible not to refer to the whole block of propaganda materials distributed by representatives of the emerging national states in order to substantiate their territorial claims. It is known that from May to October 1919 in Paris under the guidance of Professor of history at Stanford University Dr. E.D. Adams the collection of propaganda materials for the creation of the Hoover library was carried out [1]. Among the materials presented in the collection within the «distributed» block at the conference there are Polish works, in which attention is paid to Belarus. In the English version, in particular, the works of Stanislaw Kutrzeba and Wincenty Lutosławski are known [12; 13].

The nature of the information contained in the brochures of these authors was determined by the purpose of these works creation, that is, the need to justify the lack of Russian rights to the Belarusian «provinces». At the same time, the implementation of this goal began with a terminological question. For example, St.

Kutrzeba thoroughly painted as Russians actively use their language specificity: «there is no difference in the Russian language between the terms “Russian” and “Ruthenian”. Thus, by dexterously juggling with the words, more than one Russian author tries to produce the impression that the White Ruthenians are Russians. This is a deliberate falsification of facts. The White-Ruthenians are the Slav population, differing from the Russians as regards their language. While it is true that the Russian, Ukrainian and White-Ruthenian dialects are considered by linguists as forming part of the same eastern group of Slavonic languages, it must certainly be recognized that White-Ruthenian is a distinct language» [12, p. 5-6]. In the same direction, but even further W. Lutoslawski follows. He writes about «discovery of White Ruthenians» in his work. At the same time, he actively uses the terms «White Ruthenians» and «White Ruthenia» even «Bialorus», on the one hand, and «Muscovites», on the other, thereby emphasizing the difference at the terminological level. At the same time he offers a brief but informative description of Belarusians: «The White Ruthenians have never formed a State of their own, as they almost exclusively a rural population (93% are peasants). The majority of the White Ruthenians came early under Polish rule, and only a small part belonged to Muscovy. The White Ruthenians of Lithuania are nationally undeveloped, and... they had until the war scarcely any political aspirations of their own... 93 % of the White Ruthenians are uneducated peasants» [13, p. 3-5].

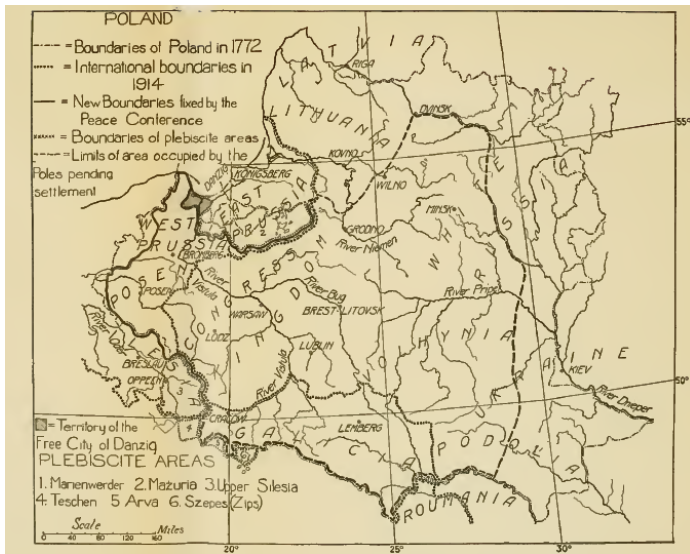
Another significant source of Polish origin, created explicitly for propaganda purposes and containing information about Belarusians and Belarus was an encyclopedia edited by E. Piltz reprinted in English (the first version was published in French in 1916) [14]. In it one can find brief information about Belarusians (in the text «the White Ruthenes») mentioned as one of the «nationalities established on the territories of the ancient Republic of Poland» [14, p. 11]. One can find their characteristics as well: «The White-Ruthenes number 6,250,000, and inhabit the governments of Minsk, Mohylow, and a part of the governments of Witebsk, Wilno and Grodno. They form a mass of undecided nationality, whose evolution it is impossible to foresee. The White-Ruthenes are Roman Catholics, and are markedly under the influence of Polish civilization» [14, p. 12-13].

It is obvious that during the conference information about Belarusians and Belarus in English-language journalistic materials was presented in two main versions: Belarusians were presented as part or a kind of Russian nation, or were positioned as a community under significant Polish influence. A common feature of the two versions was the recognition of the underdevelopment of Belarusians as a nation, the absence of any national movement among them.

The influence of information about Belarusians published on the eve and during the peace conference on the English-language journalism that appeared immediately after the conference can be seen in the works published in the early 1920s.

In particular, in 1920, the work of Ch. H. Haskins and R. H. Lord, devoted to the problems of Paris conference came. In it in the section, prepared by R. H. Lord, who was an adviser to the American delegation on the problems of Russia

and Poland, there is a passage about Belarusians of the following nature: «What will become of the White Russians, of all the peoples in this region the most enigmatic? The western section of them, being Catholic, may perhaps gravitate towards Poland; the eastern section, being Orthodox, may perhaps cleave to the side of Russia. Or will they develop a national movement of their own? When and in what fashion will a reorganized Russia be able to reassert her voice effectively in these questions? Such are some of the uncertainties in the case» [10, p.196]. This edition also contains a map reflecting the idea of the territory of Belarus, much more accurate than the above one.



Picture 2 [26, p.200].

Another interesting mention of Belarusians can be found in the work of the journalist and writer E. J. Dillon, who was Russian correspondent of «The Daily Telegraph» from 1887 to 1914 and published several books about Russia before the conference, in one of which, published in 1918, he mentioned «the White Russians» as «undoubtedly pure Slaves» [4, p. 32]. After the conference his book «The Inside Story of The Peace Conference» appeared, in which he pointed, «White Russians... an interesting Russian tribe, dwelling chiefly in the provinces of Minsk and Grodno (excepting the extreme south), a small part of Sувальки, Vilna (excepting the northwest corner), the entire provinces of Vitebsk and Moghileff, the west part of Smolensk, and a few districts of Tshernigof» [5, p. 260]. At the same time, he noted that during the war most of Belarusians left the mentioned territories and did not return. «For the Russian army, when retreating before the Germans, drove before it a huge population computed



at eight millions, who inhabited the territory to the east of Brest-Litovsk and northward between Lida and Minsk. Of these eight millions many perished on the way. A large percentage of the survivors never returned (mainly White Russians). Roughly speaking, a couple of millions (mostly Poles and Jews) went back to their ruined homes. Now the Poles, who are one of the most prolific races in Europe, might be encouraged to settle on these thinly populated lands, which they could convert into ethnographically Polish districts within a relatively short span of time» [5, p. 270].

Thus, the Paris peace conference of 1919 – early 1920 contributed to the appearance of information about Belarusians in the English-language journalism, though extremely limited; it contained quite contradictory theses generated by the Russian and Polish traditions, but at the same time carried a single message about the underdevelopment of Belarusians as an ethnic group.

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