

Małgorzata Dajnowicz

POLITICAL SYMPATHIES OF POLES AS EXEMPLIFIED
BY THE NORTH-EASTERN LANDS (19th/20th Centuries)

The political orientations of individual lands or regions of Poland have long been the subject of the scholarly interests of historians, sociologists and political scientists. These interests have led to the publication of many works dealing with the shaping and the extent of influence of definite political trends and parties¹.

¹ Two works seem to be the most important: M. Śliwa, *Polska myśl polityczna w I połowie XX wieku (Polish Political Thought in the First Half of the 20th Century)*, Wrocław 1993, R. Wapiński, *Historia polskiej myśli politycznej w XIX i XX wieku (The History of the Polish Political Thought of the 19th and 20th Centuries)*, Gdańsk 1997. Mention is also due to the selected major works concerning the significant political movements of the 19th and 20th centuries: conservatism — M. Jaskólski, *Kaduceus polski: Myśl polityczna konserwatystów krakowskich 1866–1934 (Polish Caduceus: The Political Thought of Cracow Conservatives 1866–1934)*, Kraków 1990, W. Mich, *Między integryzmem a liberalizmem: Polscy konserwatyści wobec kapitalizmu (Between Dogmatism and Liberalism: Polish Conservatives Versus Capitalism)*, Lublin 1996; the national-democratic movement — R. Wapiński, *Narodowa Demokracja 1893–1939. Ze studiów nad dziejami myśli nacjonalistycznej (National Democracy 1893–1939. Studies in the History of Nationalist Thought)*, Wrocław 1980, A. Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, Oxford 1982; socialist movement — J. Tomicki, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna 1892–1948 (Polish Socialist Party 1892–1948)*, Warszawa 1983, J. Żarnowski, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna 1935–1939 (Polish Socialist Party 1935–1939)*, Warszawa 1965; peasant movement — H. Brodowska, *Chłopi o sobie i Polsce. Rozwój świadomości społeczno-narodowej (Peasants About Themselves and Poland. Development of Social and National Consciousness)*, Warszawa 1984, J. Borkowski, *Postawa polityczna chłopów polskich w latach 1930–1935 (The Political Posture of Polish Peasants in the Years 1930–1935)*, Warszawa 1970; Christian-Democratic movement — J. Stefanowicz, *Chrześcijańska Demokracja. Inspiracje — doktryna — polityka (Christian Democracy. Inspirations — Doctrine — Policy)*, Warszawa 1991, K. Turowski, *Historia ruchu chrześcijańsko-demokratycznego w Polsce (The History of the Christian-Democratic Movement in Poland)*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1989; communist movement — A. Czubiński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918–1939): Zarys historii (The Communist Party of Poland, 1918–1939. A Historical Outline)*, Warszawa 1985, A. Walicki, *Marxizm i skok do królestwa wolności: Dzieje komunistycznej utopii (Marxism and the Leap to the Realm of Freedom: The History of a Communist Utopia)*, Warszawa 1996; Piłsudski's movement — R. Świątek, *Lodowa ściana:*

The successes of individual political trends are determined by their adherents and sympathizers who make up the active, politically conscious part of society which exhibits its political sympathies. It is unjustified to identify the views or behaviour of this group with the opinions and behaviour of society as a whole². Therefore the research into the political orientations of the totality of Poles should take into consideration a certain margin of error, for the orientations of the élites will not fully represent the entire Polish society.

The political orientations of the Polish population which have taken shape since the end of the 19th century are to a certain extent continued today³. This work will discuss the north-eastern lands whose inhabitants have developed some special political sympathies which have taken roots in that area⁴.

These political sympathies arose under the influence of the conditions shaping the political consciousness of the local population since the end of the 19th century. At that initial period the north-eastern areas were economically backward. This must have hindered the development of the political consciousness of the population. The situation of the northern part of this region — the Suwałki district — was especially disadvantageous because of its short line of contact with the lands of central Poland — it was a sort of peninsula connected to the rest of Congress-Poland. The region of Łomża towered over that of Suwałki in its economic and social development. Many factors were here at work, among which that of crucial importance was the proximity of Łomża to

Sekrety polityki Józefa Piłsudskiego 1904–1918 (An Ice Wall: The Secrets of Józef Piłsudski's Politics 1904–1918), Kraków 1998, M. Król, *Józef Piłsudski: Ewolucja myśli politycznej (Józef Piłsudski. The Evolution of Political Thought)*, Warszawa 1985.

² This was pointed out by Roman Wapniński. See, more extensively: idem, *Świadomość polityczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (The Political Consciousness in the 2nd Polish Republic)*, Łódź 1989, pp. 9–10.

³ The political tendencies of Polish society in the north-eastern part of Polish lands before the First World War have been discussed in my work, *Orientacje polityczne ludności polskiej północno-wschodniej części Królestwa Polskiego na przełomie XIX i XX wieku (The Political Orientations of the Polish Population in the North-Eastern Part of Congress-Poland at the Turn of the 19th Century)*, Białystok 2005.

⁴ Mass political movements started taking shape from the 1880s. In that period (until Poland regained her independence) the north-eastern lands had consisted of the Łomża and Suwałki regions, which were then part of Congress-Poland. My research does not embrace the Białystok district, which then belonged to the Russian Empire. After Poland regained her independence there started a unification of the north-eastern lands. Białystok district was the scene of the processes of integration with the lands of ex-Congress-Poland.

Warsaw and the areas with a more advanced capitalist economy, industry and commerce.

In the adoption of political orientations considerable role was also played by demographic factors. Although the numbers of the population in the areas under discussion were growing at that time, this process was much slower than in the central Polish lands. The factors additionally responsible for the small density of population in the Suwałki region were its large areas of lakes and forests and the intensive emigration towards industrialized territories. The increase in population was greater in the Łomża region, where the percentage of floating population was growing in the towns. The leader in this respect was Łomża itself, the centre of the socio-economic life of north-eastern lands at the turn of the 19th century. The areas left by a considerable percentage of actually the most active population were marked by an economic, social and political stagnation. On the other hand, the return of those emigrants favoured the development of the activeness of the inhabitants in various fields: economic, political, etc. As a result of the migration, growing since the end of the 19th century, of more mobile groups of the population who moved to urban centres, the latter experienced an accelerated development of capitalist relations which favoured the rise of their inhabitants' social and political consciousness⁵.

The fact of the co-existence in this territory of several national groups intensified at that time the general social activeness and resulted in the development of various social and political initiatives. This was best exemplified by towns, where various groups, mainly Poles, Jews and Russians, lived side by side and where political life was the most active. But also the rural territories, nationally homogeneous, experienced a more rapid development of the socio-political consciousness of the peasant stratum.

The Polish-Jewish relations were more complicated in the areas where, apart from Poles, there were numerous and mobile Jewish groups⁶. These relations were even more tense towards

⁵ Conclusions drawn from the statistical calculations, especially the most valuable data, are included in the census: *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepys' naseleniya Rossiyskoy Imperii 1897 g.*, vol. 54, vol. 59, St. Petersburg 1904.

⁶ This especially concerns the Łomża region. It was inhabited by the Jewish community, quite active economically (according to the census of 1897 11% of the total population in the Łomża region, and 6% in the Suwałki region were believers in Judaism), a fact which influenced positively the socio-political activity of the totality of the local population.

the end of the 19th century, after the north-eastern lands were “invaded” by the so-called “Litvaks”, the Jewish groups removed by the Tsarist system from the eastern parts of Russia. This ruined in the Polish consciousness the age-long order which had a place for the functioning of “our own” Jews⁷. The economic difficulties besetting the entire community of the area under discussion, and the resultant migration, also of the Polish rural population to the towns, and the increase in the more mobile Jewish population, caused the growth of Polish-Jewish tensions. The national relations in those territories were also influenced by the development of the national consciousness of the Polish community, its resultant broader participation in social life, and — last but not least — its greater activeness in the adoption of definite political orientations. The nationalist slogans that reached the north-eastern lands towards the end of the 19th century, propagated there mainly by the rightist political parties, coincided with the growing Polish-Jewish conflict, and additionally inclined the Poles to the “nationalist” ideology⁸. The economic rivalry was accompanied by the ever more distinct division, supported by the Roman-Catholic Church, into the Christian initiatives and the Jewish ones⁹.

The Polish-Lithuanian relations at the turn of the 19th century were dominated by the issues connected with the Lithuanian national revival. In the Suwałki region, ethnically mixed, the Polish or Lithuanian character especially manifested themselves in the struggle of the languages of those two nations for dominance. To most Poles, the process of the creation of the Lithuanian nation seemed incomprehensible and unjustified. Indeed, a considerable part of the Lithuanian areas, among other things because of the strong influence of Polish culture there, were considered to be the Polish land¹⁰. On the other hand, the

⁷ The Jewish question was also discussed by non-Polish scholars — S. D. Corrsin, *Warsaw before the First World War. Poles and Jews in the third city of the Russian Empire 1880-1914*, New York 1989.

⁸ This was the ideology of the National-Democratic camp, also called “the national camp” — see R. Wapniński, “Obóz narodowy” (“The National Camp”), in: *Życie polityczne w Polsce 1918-1939*, ed. J. Żarnowski, Wrocław 1985, pp. 145-163.

⁹ I wrote about it in: *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Łomżyńskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku (Polish-Jewish Relations in the Łomża Region at the Turn of the 19th Century)*, in: *Świat niepożegnany. Żydzi na dawnych ziemiach wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej w XVIII-XX wieku*, ed. K. Jasiewicz, Warszawa-Londyn 2004, pp. 333-341.

national aspirations of the Lithuanian “younger brothers”, which were neither rare nor unusual, were accelerated due to the Polish–Lithuanian conflict. One should also think that the “Lithuanian problem” made the Polish side more determined in its opting for the “national camp” and “nationalism”.

The attitude of the Poles to the German colonists, in these areas a very small group, became sharper with the change of the international situation and the approach of World War I. At that time the “anti-German” agitation of the adherents of National Democracy grew stronger¹¹. More active anti-German attitudes and the resultant strengthening of nationalist sympathies could be especially noticed in more uniform agglomerations of German colonists who resisted assimilation to the local Polish population (in the Polish lands bordering on Eastern Prussia).

The Russian group, at the turn of the 19th century consisting mainly of military men, civil servants and their families, was perceived by the Poles as a heterogeneous community. Especially unfavourable was the opinion of those who engaged in the process of Russianization. More easily tolerated was the group of those who had long lived in these areas and especially those who were in favour of the general development of the region. That development was supported by some representatives of governmental bureaucracy, especially those who had long been in service in a given region. Also the co-organization of the Polish–Russian charitable work earned Polish praise. Everyday contacts of Russians and Poles, even if only official, made some Russians yield to the broadly understood Polish influence. The presence of numerous Russian groups, their attitudes and behaviour towards Polish society, only helped to consolidate and intensify anti-Tsarist and anti-Russian postures. The presence of the Russians, whose main task was to help with the Russianization and unification of the Polish population, in fact activated the Poles, and made them take up political work¹². On the other

¹⁰ On the subject of Polish–Lithuanian conflicts in the Suwałki region see: P. Čepenas, *Naujuju laikų Lietuvos istorija*, vol. 1, Vilnius 1992, pp. 75–77; many works by Piotr Łossowski, see: *Bibliografija prac Profesora Piotra Łossowskiego za lata 1955–2005 (The Bibliography of Professor Piotr Łossowski's Works within 1955–2005)*, Warszawa 2005.

¹¹ This was pointed out by A. Dobroński, *Łomża w latach 1866–1918 (Łomża in the Years 1866–1918)*, Łomża 1993, p. 128.

¹² Cf. L. Gorizontov, *Paradoksy imperskoy politiki: Polyaki v Rosii i Ruskiye v Polshu (XIX–nachalo XX g.)*, Moskva 1999, pp. 178–185 ff.

hand, the Polish political parties, mainly nationalists, and to a smaller extent also socialists, while taking advantage of the opposition to Russianization, inclined the Polish community to opting for concrete political solutions.

Among other factors that conditioned the political and national consciousness, worthy of attention were also the migrations of the population accompanied by the process of adoption (as well as consolidation and change) of political orientations. Those who moved, as we have said, were the most active, also in a social and political sense. A correlation was noticed of the degree of territorial mobility and the political activeness of people (greater in the Łomża than in the Suwałki region). This correlation pertained especially to urban centres and the areas of the Łomża region inhabited by the petty gentry¹³.

Of crucial importance in the development of consciousness, including the political one, was the activity connected with education and enlightenment. At the turn of the 19th century the scope of elementary education was very limited, which resulted in a high percentage of illiteracy. At that time considerable progress in the spread of education in Polish rural areas was achieved by the educational activity among the adults. Here the organizations working under the patronage of National Democracy deserve special praise, that is the Circle of Peasant Education and the Society for National Enlightenment. Most influential were the organizations operating in the Łomża region. In later times, the Society for Protection of the Uniates, created on the basis of SNE (TON), started working among the Graeco-Catholics who lived in the environs of Augustów.

The prominent position among the schools of Łomża and Suwałki was held by male grammar schools. Girls were usually educated at home or sent to private boarding-schools. Since the end of the 19th century the students of grammar schools started establishing secret self-educational organizations, which with time took on a political character. The most active were the

¹³ The petty gentry consisted of the impoverished members of the ex-knightly estate. From the 17th century onwards this group grew more numerous due to the pauperization of the middle gentry. At the turn of the 19th century it could be distinguished from the peasantry mainly due to its origins and the fact that it cultivated tradition. The petty gentry was one of the basic groups of the rural population in the Łomża region. It densely inhabited the regions of the towns: Wysokie Mazowieckie, Zambrów and Łomża.

students of Łomża, among whom were also found the leaders of the later "national camp".

Due to the general liberalization of relationships after 1905 there arose a possibility of creating private schools with Polish as the language of instruction. At that time schools of commerce were established at Łomża and Suwałki, where the future activists of the national liberation movement started their education. This period was also favourable to the broader influence and circulation of the local Polish press¹⁴. All attempts to spread enlightenment among the population increased the chances of making them politically conscious and helped them with making political options and taking up political activity.

Those who set the direction to social and political life were the representatives of the local élites: the urban and rural intelligentsia. The most active were lawyers and physicians, in the countryside the landowners; also the Roman-Catholic clergy played an important part. The state of the political consciousness of the inhabitants of those territories depended to a large extent on the commitment of those élites. Most of the intelligentsia at that time exhibited national sympathies. As a result the landowners, the clergy, as well as the Polish urban intelligentsia to a large extent contributed to the political successes of the "national camp" in the north-eastern areas. The activity of the "national camp" could also be seen in open organizations. The issue of the "law about associations" in 1906 created the possibility of establishing various social organizations. In accordance with the intentions of nationalists, in the period before the First World War these associations not only to a large extent represented public opinion, but were also instruments of influencing it. Most social initiatives came from (and were led by) the representatives of the urban and rural intelligentsia, most of them sympathizers of the ideology of the "national camp". Their postures had certainly influenced the political options and sympathies of the members of organizations, and persons and groups who were in contact with them.

The beginnings of the political animation of the 1880s were ideologically and politically nebulous. The later political divisions had not yet been crystallized. This was the period when the

¹⁴ The 1905 revolution carried a sense of broadly-understood freedom which was also manifested in the possibility of the rise of a wide range of Polish, including local periodicals.

national and socialist ideas started reaching the north-eastern Polish lands. A more distinct crystallization and the separation of nationalists from socialists came in the middle 1890s. As we have said, the first to reach these areas were the slogans of the nationalist party. It can be assumed that the sympathies with the ideology of the "national camp" were from the very beginning strengthened by the national-patriotic atmosphere consolidated earlier among Poles, and the influence of the tradition of national uprisings connected with it.

In the last years of the 19th and the first of the 20th century political activity was taken up by the young generation; among them there were many political leaders of the later period which followed the recovery of Poland's independence. The political horizons of the young activists were largely developed due to the patronage of the above-mentioned representatives of the élites, contacts with Warsaw as well as political illegal press that reached them from the centre of the country. It should be noted that as early as the beginning of the 20th century the sympathizers (both in the older and younger generation) of the main two political trends of that period: National Democracy and the Polish Socialist Party, sometimes co-operated both in their social and political work. A more distinct ideological conflict gathered strength from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, especially from the revolutionary years 1904/1905.

The animation connected with the Russo-Japanese war was the first sign of the imminent 1905 revolution. More intensive activity was then shown by the milieux connected not only with "the national camp" (Polish urban and rural intelligentsia, petty gentry, a large group of peasantry), but also with the socialist and leftist trends (workers, to a smaller extent also craftsmen), as well as a narrow group of sympathizers with the liberal movement (representatives of the Suwałki intelligentsia). This animation also produced a stronger crystallization of the political orientations of the local people.

The 1905-1907 revolution activated all the social groups and consolidated the political sympathies exhibited in the earlier period. The main scope of influence of individual political camps was established as early as 1905, during the major revolutionary events. The greatest political successes in the lands under discussion were scored by the national camp. Its main attack was

centred on the Russian language, then obligatory in district offices, law-courts and schools (this was connected with the struggle for the introduction of Polish); nationalists enjoyed the strongest influence in the Łomża region, and also, though weaker, in the Polish part of the Suwałki region (in the first place in the Augustów region, to a smaller extent near Suwałki, since the rest of the Suwałki region was mainly inhabited by the Lithuanians). Polish peasant movement was then also organized, which had some, though limited influence among the peasantry. At that time also the scope was crystallized of the influence of the workers' — socialist and leftist — parties. The contacts of the local workers with the Warsaw centre were visible mainly in the ethnically Polish territories, while the ethnically Lithuanian areas established them rather with the centres lying in the Russian Empire. In comparison to the Łomża region, the revolutionary events lasted longer in the Suwałki district. It can be assumed that they gradually moved from the regions closer to the Warsaw centre to the peripheral areas¹⁵.

The 1905 revolution was a breakthrough in political, social and cultural history. The political activity of various milieux, social strata and national groups crystallized at that time. One of the essential aspects of the revolutionary period was that it initiated the process of changes in the manners and customs characteristic of the 19th century. These changes to a different degree reached and were assimilated by individual areas, earlier by the central urban agglomerations, later by the peripheral rural territories. Some processes were also accelerated by generation changes which started precisely in 1905. The young generation, with a new ideology, named in the literature as the generation of 1905, was in comparison to the previous one more impatient and uncompromising. It was under a stronger influence of the more widespread cultural, political and ideological climates characteristic of the end of the by-gone era. This generation was more conscious than the previous one of the crisis of the 19th century¹⁶.

¹⁵ These conclusions are drawn on the basis of research in the Central Archives of Historical Records (mainly the Chancery of Governor General of Warsaw) and in the State Lithuanian Historical Archives in Vilna (Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas) (mainly records of the Gendarmerie Headquarters of the Districts of Suwałki, Augustów and Sejny 1880–1917, f. 1006).

¹⁶ See, more extensively: R. Wapiński, *Pokolenia Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (The Generations of the Second Polish Republic)*, Wrocław 1991, pp. 9–11.

Later, before the outbreak of World War I, although the influence of the "national camp" weakened (mainly due to the change of its policy into less revolutionary and more legalistic towards the Tsarist system as well as due to the internal dissent and the evolution of the young generation in the direction of the ideas of national liberation) in the areas under discussion the previous scheme of political relations was consolidated. The support for the national ideas, above all in the countryside, continued to be ensured by the growing socio-political activity of the Roman-Catholic clergy, especially young priests, and the increasing influence of social organizations (e.g. Polish School System)¹⁷.

It is difficult to estimate precisely the political consciousness and sympathies of Polish society at that time. Different political orientations and more diversified political consciousness were exhibited by the urban and rural intelligentsia, large groups of the inhabitants of the areas dominated by the petty gentry as well as by small groups of workers in towns and villages. The strongest political activity was developed by the majority of the Polish urban and rural intelligentsia and the younger generation of educated classes (pupils of secondary schools and college students). The urban population was politically more active, the rural — less. A difference could also be noticed between the two regions under analysis: the Łomża one was more active — the Suwałki region — less.

About 1914 the greatest successes in the Polish north-eastern lands were scored by the rightist "national camp". The most important factor that determined these successes was the support given to the national ideas by both a narrow group of the Polish intelligentsia and the majority of the politically conscious inhabitants of the countryside. The National Democrats invoked the ideas of Polishness, patriotism, tradition, religion, that is values cherished by the basic group inhabiting the rural areas of the Łomża region — the petty gentry. Moreover, the national movement was strengthened by the fact that the Polish peasant party as well as the socialist and leftist parties enjoyed little

¹⁷ In the areas under discussion the young generation of Roman-Catholic clergy was very active. The confidence of the local community in the priests was strengthened by their social background (they came from the so-called "familiar milieu" — frequently the petty gentry) as well as by the deep religiousness of the Polish inhabitants of the north-eastern lands.

influence there. The latter parties were unsuccessful mostly because industry was underdeveloped in these areas and consequently there were no major agglomerations of the Polish proletariat there. The peasant party, on the other hand, could mostly count on the sympathies of those groups of the rural population whose socio-political consciousness started developing only about 1905. An important role in the organization of peasant movement circles and in raising the social consciousness of the peasants was played by rural teachers, derived mainly from the peasant stratum.

The political orientations shaped before Poland had regained her independence developed also in the inter-war period. The creation of the Polish state and unification of the Polish lands were a strong stimulus to integration in political life. These tendencies were, however, hampered by the separate traditions of the three partitions, and the difference in the correlation of social forces in the individual parts of the country. Despite some progress in integration, individual regions retained their separate character in political life, and this specificity has been preserved to this day.

In the period following the recovery of Poland's independence the rightist National Democrats consolidated their influence in the Łomża region. The earlier revealed nationalist sympathies were confirmed among the big landowners, the petty gentry, numerous in these regions, some peasants, the Polish urban intelligentsia and the Christian petty bourgeoisie. The leaders of this political trend were invariably, as earlier on, the secular representatives of the Christian élites — the urban intelligentsia and the big landowners — as well as the Catholic clergy. Throughout the period of the 2nd Polish Republic this region was dominated by the political influence of the rightist-nationalist trend. This domination was especially visible in the first years after Poland regained her independence and in the 1930s. The rightist forces, however, grew weaker before the coup of May 1926, and in the first years following it. The main basis for the activists of the "national camp" were rural areas with a lot of the petty gentry. As earlier on, many Polish social organizations were under the influence of the nationalists. In towns and villages, Jewish parties (mainly the Zionists, and to a smaller extent the leftist-socialist Bund) took the upper hand of the Polish rightist

groupings. The political activity of the Jews additionally strengthened the nationalist feelings among the local Poles. At the beginning of the 1920s a large percentage of the Polish urban population (mainly workers and craftsmen) supported the socialists, whose influence weakened after 1926, giving place to the government camp. Although the rural areas of the Łomża region, as I have said, remained mostly under the influence of the National Democrats, the areas with the prevalence of the peasant population (near Kolno, Szczuczyn, and mainly the areas bordering on the Pułtusk region) sympathized with the peasant parties. The latter consolidated their influence due to the cultural integration of the peasant stratum, which in contrast to the earlier period manifested itself more strongly between the two World Wars. At that time large groups of peasants joined the economic organizations that were initiated by the peasant movement¹⁸.

Our preliminary findings show that in the inter-war period in the ethnically Polish part of the Suwałki region the socialists gained more influence than in the Łomża region, and their leaders were recruited mainly from the circles of young people earlier connected with the ideas of armed struggle for Poland's independence. This to a certain extent confirms our opinion that the influence of the National Democrats, just as before World War I, was much weaker there than in the Łomża region.

The district that deserves to be set apart is that of Białystok. This area, with the exception of its urban centre where before the Great War considerable influence was gained by the working class movement (adherents of socialism and the Left), in comparison to the lands of Congress-Poland, was inhabited by people who generally showed smaller political activeness. This should be associated with their less developed social and national consciousness¹⁹. The processes that united this area with the former lands of Congress-Poland were developing most rapidly in Biały-

¹⁸ The political orientations of the inhabitants of the Łomża region after Poland regained her independence have been discussed by A. Mieczkowski, *Oblicze polityczne regionu łomżyńskiego w latach 1919-1930 (The Political Face of the Łomża Region in the Years 1919-1930)*, Łomża 1983.

¹⁹ Among the Orthodox Byelorussian population who densely inhabited the Białystok district, the national and, consequently, political consciousness developed much later in comparison to the consciousness of Polish or Lithuanian nationalities. On the other hand, the Polish population of the Białystok district, in comparison to the Łomża district, was also marked by much more limited national consciousness.

stok itself. In fact, throughout the inter-war period this region was under a strong eastern influence, mainly caused by the earlier longstanding connection of these lands to the Russian Empire.

Until the coup of May 1926 the Polish population of Białystok was under the prevailing influence of the rightist camp, forming at that time a Christian Democratic and National Democratic bloc. Just as in other towns of the north-eastern lands, large support was also given here to the Jewish parties. Towards the end of the 1920s the Christian Democrats started losing their strong position and some of them joined the government camp. Also the "national camp", opposed to the ruling Piłsudski's government line, gathered strength²⁰. The gradual increase in the influence of the National Democrats in the ethnically Polish areas of the Białystok region was due to the growing support of their activities by the Roman-Catholic clergy. It seems that this was also due to the transmission in the direction of Białystok of the strong rightist tendencies established earlier in the Łomża region.

Today we may perceive some stability in the territorial distribution of political orientations shaped at the turn of the 19th century. For example in the Lithuanian political circles the fear of the influence of Polishness is still alive today and the Polish community still preserves the tradition of treating Lithuanians as "younger brothers". The preconceptions concerning other nationalities, for example the Jews (their natural economic operativeness) or Byelorussians (a population without a distinct national consciousness), popular a hundred years ago, are still current among a certain percentage of Poles. The lack of political freedom in the period of the Polish People's Republic has misshaped the natural cultural and political transformations. As a result of the longstanding Soviet domination the pace of transformations, not only in Poland, but almost in the whole of Central-Eastern Europe was much slower than in Western Europe. This was largely due to the long existence of the "iron

²⁰ The political influences in the Białystok district have been discussed in several contributory works, among others: H. M a j e c k i, *Kierunki życia politycznego na Białostocczyźnie w okresie międzywojennym (The Trends of Political Life in the Białystok District in the Inter-war Period)*, "Białostocczyzna" 1997, N° 2; S. F i l o n, *Życie polityczne Białegostoku w latach 1919–1939 (The Political Life in Białystok 1919–1939)*, in: *Białystok w 80-leciu. W rocznicę odzyskania niepodległości 19 luty 1919–19 luty 1999*, ed. C. K u k l o, Białystok 2000. They are an introduction to a broader discourse and complex research on this subject.

curtain". The system of People's Poland did not, as had been assumed, produce a one-line political orientation, but rather set and retained the earlier established views as well as political sympathies in their earlier state²¹. Suffice it to mention, for example, the nationalist grouping similar to the National Democrats and their radical fractions. This is the National-Radical Camp, referring to the ideology of the extreme rightist and pro-Fascist organization of the inter-war period called the Camp of Great Poland.

The differences between the former sectors are still alive and affect the political scene of present day Poland. The significance of this division has been perceived by historians and sociologists as well as political scientists. From 1989 onwards an animated discussion has been going on about the heritage of the political geography of the Polish lands that was formed at the turn of the 19th century. The historical regions are also differentiated internally. To this day within the former Russian sector we find strongly rightist areas, such as Podlachia and Mazovia (the Łomża district), and at the same time those that are very leftist, such as the Dąbrowa Basin or the southern Kielce region. The historical frontiers of the former Austrian sector are still quite clear-cut (this region gives support to the peasant and rightist movements). The historically separate character of the pro-Polish part of Upper Silesia also finds confirmation in its strong support for the Right²².

Political diversification also finds its basis in denominational and national differences. In Western Europe, too, political sympathies correspond with the religious denomination of the people who inhabit a given area. In Germany, for example, the present political divisions began in the period of the Reformation and religious wars²³. Today, as well as they did in the past, leftist sympathies prevail in the North, while the rightist in the South of Germany. Holland can serve us as another example. The system of divisions according to religious criteria that arose in the middle of the 19th century, survives there to this day²⁴.

²¹ Cf. A. Wapiński, *Uwarunkowania oglądów (The Conditioning of Views)*, in: *Czas XX wieku — nie tylko w polskiej perspektywie*, ed. R. Wapiński, Gdańsk 2000, p. 12.

²² Cf. T. Zarycki, *Region jako kontekst zachowań politycznych (Region as Context of Political Behaviour)*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 70–71.

²³ J. Krakuski, *Historia Niemiec (The History of Germany)*, Wrocław 1998, pp. 35–36.

The north-eastern lands of Poland are one of the best examples of the connection between national, religious and political differences. The political preferences of the people inhabiting a given region can now be quite clearly defined according to their nationality and religious denomination. The Suwałki region is divided between leftist sympathies (Lithuanians in the north-eastern part of this area), and rightist, peasant movement-oriented ones (in the Augustów district). The same factors have influenced the division of the political sympathies of Podlachian people: the Byelorussian minority (inhabiting mainly the south-eastern part of the Białystok district) sympathizes with the Left, while the population derived from the petty-gentry (part of the Łomża district) with the Right²⁵. These divisions have been preserved most distinctly in the rural areas, but they are more vague in the towns where large groups of people tend to sympathize with the Liberals.

The regional differences in political sympathies and behaviour result especially from the tradition of ethnically Polish areas. The post-petty-gentry areas of the north-eastern lands are distinguished by very large attendance at the polls and strong support for the Right²⁶. The political orientations crystallized a hundred years ago are preserved to this day. Political loyalty is expressed by sympathizing with a political line, while concrete programmatic solutions are of less significance. A question seems important what has determined the persistence of the rightist political orientation in these areas. It seems that its successes depend on the stable social structure of the sympathizers of this trend. The basic electorate of the Right in the north-eastern lands — the former petty gentry — has retained some invariable values.

²⁴ J. Baliński, M. Bogucka, *Historia Holandii (The History of Holland)*, Wrocław 1989, p. 330.

²⁵ This has not changed since the transformations of 1989. For example in the presidential elections in the areas dominated by the Byelorussian (Orthodox) population Aleksander Kwaśniewski gained over 90% of votes. This result could be compared only to the support he gained in the Dąbrowa Basin. In the post-petty gentry areas of the Łomża region, on the other hand, similar support was gained by Lech Wałęsa — T. Zarycki, *Wybory Prezydenckie 1995 — stabilizacja struktury polskiej przestrzeni politycznej (Presidential Elections 1995 — Stabilization of the Structure of the Polish Political Scene)*, in: *Polska przestrzeń w perspektywie długiego trwania*, ed. A. Kulikowski, Warszawa 1997, vol. 178, pp. 195–197.

²⁶ The rightist options in the elections are a kind of manifestation of definite values. In People's Poland the opposition to the ruling power was manifested by absence from the elections.

One of the most important of them is their deep Catholicism. The Church continues to be their moral authority and, what is equally important, enjoys unceasingly high social confidence. No less important is the attachment of the descendants of the petty gentry to national traditions. The oldest generation of the inhabitants of petty gentry villages retain the memory of the active participation of this social stratum in the Insurrection of 1863–1864 and generally in the struggle for Poland's independence. Polish patriotism with a conservative, Catholic tinge has not lost its significance there, either. The ex-members of the gentry estate have also preserved their community ties connected with the consciousness of their age-long privileged social status. Some traces of the separateness of this ex-petty gentry from others have been preserved to this day. The inhabitants of the post-gentry areas of the Łomża district are politically most active groups in the north-eastern countryside; this finds its expression, for example, in their large attendance at the polls. This is also connected with the tradition of the active participation of this group in social and political life beginning with the first half of the 20th century²⁷.

What determines in the first place the support given to the political movement in the north-eastern Polish lands is the social structure of their population. Also the broadly understood tradition plays its part here. The support for a given political line is also determined by the general political climate current in the country. In the case of rightist political sympathies this climate determines the decisiveness of political behaviour.

In north-eastern Poland the rightist sympathies seem to be the most persistent. This political option was shaped at the time of partitions. The leftist option, characteristic of large urban working class agglomerations, gains sympathizers among the groups that previously supported the ruling communist power, as well as definitely among the national minorities. It seems that the leftist options of the Lithuanian population are a kind of protest against the pro-Polish political movements, especially those perceived by society at large as strongly rightist. According

²⁷ S. Siekierski, *Wszyscy są równi, ale my jesteśmy szlachtą (Everybody is Equal, but We Are Gentry)*, "Przegląd Humanistyczny" 2001, N° 6, pp. 4–7; M. Dajnowicz, *Zanikająca kultura szlachecka wsi mazowiecko-podlaskiej (The Disappearing Gentry Culture in the Mazovian and Podlachian Countryside)*, "Przegląd Humanistyczny" 2003, N° 4, pp. 79–85.

to the general opinion held by the Lithuanians, the leftist line can more effectively ensure the defence of their national separateness. Among the Byelorussian minority, quite numerous in the Białystok district, leftist sympathies have been developed and strengthened only since the middle of the 20th century. In the previous period, the Byelorussian political groupings, still immature, had little power of influence on the political life of Białystok and its region. Today the leftist sympathies are more strongly rooted among the Byelorussians than among the Lithuanians. Another factor that strengthens this option is their Orthodox denomination. Some Catholics perceive the invariable and definite support for the Left given in the elections by the Orthodox population as a manifestation not only of the anti-rightist, but also of anti-Catholic attitude²⁸. The small influence of the peasant movement observed nowadays results from its weak earlier position. One can generally assume that the present influence of this movement tallies with that observed in the territory under discussion (mainly in the area of dense peasant settlements — near Pułtusk) in the period of its formation, at the beginning of the 20th century. Researchers contend that liberal slogans have met with a minimal reception in the territories of ex Congress-Poland. At the beginning of the development of the liberal movement only a narrow group of the urban intelligentsia was receptive to these slogans. Today, like earlier, liberalism may count only on finding support in the towns, where political life is the most active and various options find their sympathizers.

It should be noted that just as in the first half of the 20th century the most spontaneous political behaviour is shown by the young generation of Poles, greater political activeness (especially during the elections) can be observed among the educated people, greater political consciousness in towns, while the weakest in peripheral rural areas. Among the electorate we also find a group of people with changing political options that is largely receptive to populist slogans, as well as a group of inactive people who, though holding definite views, do not reveal any political sympathies.

²⁸ In the Białystok district the Orthodox Byelorussians used to be the backing of the communist power (People's Poland), a fact which sometimes additionally kindled the conflict with the Catholic population. The stereotypes established long ago (for example the identification of the Orthodox population with the Russian invader) are still felt today.

The historical regional differences continue to affect the political sympathies and behaviour of the population. To a certain extent one may get the impression that the contemporary strivings for European unity and globalization (sometimes also understood as a threat) are accompanied by a revival of the consciousness of regional identity in some communities. In the north-eastern lands under discussion regional consciousness generates the activeness of local communities (especially visible in the case of the descendants of the petty gentry in the Łomża district). Regional identity strengthens the sense of responsibility for the region's fate, kindles the interest in the active participation in generally understood social life, including the political life of the region and the whole of Poland²⁹.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

²⁹ Cf. W. Wrzesiński, *Region i tożsamość regionalna w świetle badań historycznych (Region and Regional Identity in the Light of Historical Research)*, in: *Badania nad tożsamością regionalną. Stan i potrzeby*, ed. A. Matczak, Łódź 1999, pp. 26–27.

The North-Eastern Part of the Polish Lands (19th/20th cc.)

