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IN SEARCH OF A HOMELAND:
“LITVA/LITHUANIA” AND “RUS’/RUTHENIA”
IN THE CONTEMPORARY BELARUSIAN
HISTORIOGRAPHY

CONTEMPORARY BELARUSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY ORIGINATING from the second half of the 1980s includes the issue of ethnical and political nature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) in the canon of the national history topics as defined by Rainer Lindner (2003: 445). The objectives of our historiographical review do not include analysis of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’s origin concepts. However, these works have a direct relation to our subject, and therefore the conceptual provisions of such studies shall be noted.

I. FROM THE ORIGINS OF THE GRAND DUCHY

The subject has been entered as debatable by Mikola Jermalovič (1921-2000). Strictly speaking, Jermalovič formulated the main theses of his concept in 1968, once he had completed working on the book *In the Footsteps of a Myth* which for long time was distributed as a self-published conspiratorial work named *One Hundred Pages* (Dziarnovič, 2004: 81) and was first legally published only in 1989 (Jermalovič, 1989).

M. Jermalovič localised the *annalistic Litva*¹ in the Upper Neman region between Polack, Turaŭ and Pinsk, and Navahradak principalities and along with them called *Litva* one of the historical lands of Belarus (Jermalovič, 1991: 34, 83-84; Jermalovič, 1990: 310).² According to

¹ *Litva* is a name for Lithuania (both historical and contemporary) in Belarusian and other Slavic languages. In this article *Litva* (adjective *Litvan*) is used to underline the difference between historical and modern (ethnical and linguistic) meaning of the word. Here and onwards *Litva* is an exvocalant for *historical Lithuania*, *Lithuania* is used for *modern Lithuania* (since the nineteenth century). These differences are greatly important in the context of problems described in the article. – *Translator’s remark*.

² See also *Figure 1* with the location of the *Ancient Litva*, source: Jermalovič (1991: 43).

Jermalovič, later – in the sixteenth century – the name *Litva* (*Lithuania*) spread to the entire territory of the modern Republic of Belarus and the eastern part of the Republic of Lithuania. Most of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania was defined as Žemaitija (Samogitia, bel. *Žamojć*), i.e. wider than the historical and ethnographic boundaries of Žemaitija itself. The definition of *Rus'*, according to the author, belonged to the territory of Ukraine that was part of the GDL (Jermalovič, 1991: 57).

FIGURE 1

The boundaries of the *Ancient Litva* according to M. Jermalovič



FIGURE 2

Mikola Jermalovič, the creator of the concept of *Litva* as one of the historic Belarusian lands



Jermalovič's concept³ provoked strong reactions in Belarus and abroad – there appeared critics⁴ and epigones at the same time. Born in the depths of the Soviet underground, in the second half of the 1980s this concept was institutionalised, got its formal academic completion, hit the historical, journalistic and popular literature, and became actively utilised. A striking example of this are the books by Uladzimir Arloŭ (1994, 136-137; 2003: 78) and Vitaŭt Čaropka (1994: 96-100).

The author of another GDL origins concept Aliaksandr Kraŭcevič (born in 1958) insists on the initially biethnic interpretation of the choronym *Litva* (Lithuania Propria). According to this Belarusian researcher, the historic core of the GDL – the Upper and Middle Neman region – was an inter-ethnic contact zone inhabited by a mixed Balto-Slavic population. He continues: “*Creation of a new state did not stop the process of the Balto-Slavic interaction; neither did it change its nature*” (Kraŭcevič, 1998: 173; 2000: 179). A. Kraŭcevič believes that was the main reason why the ruling dynasty of the GDL, being of the Baltic origin, never attempted to stop the process of assimilation of the Balts by the Eastern Slavs. On the contrary, it rather facilitated the process through adoption of the East Slavic system of state organisation and the Old Belarusian language as the official one. A. Kraŭcevič comes to his basic conclusion that the GDL has been a biethnic Baltic and Eastern Slavic state from the outset, with the domination of Eastern Slavic element (1998: 174; 2000: 180). It should be noted that if applied to the political history of the GDL of the late thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, the above conclusion of dominance is clearly not working. However, A. Kraŭcevič's localisation of the *Ancient Litva* within Vilna⁵ region (in its broadest sense) and the thesis of a significant presence of Slavic settlers in these lands deserve attention (Kraŭcevič, 1998: 197, map 4, 2000: 203).

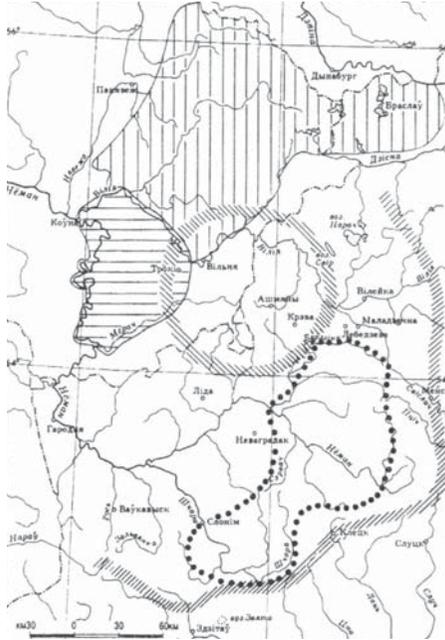
³ Jermalovič's works on the history of the GDL have been collected in one volume (Jermalovič, 2000).

⁴ Main bibliography on the debate around M. Jermalovič's concept: *Homeland*, 1993: 81–94; Pietrykaŭ, 1993: 51–64; Gudavičius, 1994; Gudavičius, 1996: 38–58; Zalozka, 1995: 337–342; Yakovenko, 1996: 112–137; Shevchenko, 1997: 55–67; Novik, Marcuľ, 1998: 92–101; Kraŭcevič, 1999: 61–63; Semiančuk, 2000: 195–202; Gurevich, 2003: 52–55; Lindner, 2003: 450–459.

⁵ Belarusian – Vilnia, contemporary Lithuanian Vilnius.

FIGURE 3

Localisation of the “Ancient Litva”
(according to Aliaksandr Kraūcevič)



II. LITVA AND ŽEMAITIJA

In terms of determining the location of *Litva* and *Žemaitija*, the views of Jermalovič were very closely followed by the Belarusian emigre historian Paviel Urban (1924-2011). Urban’s *Žemaitija* is also a much broader concept than the historical and ethnographic *Žemaitija* (Samogitia) region. The most important task for Urban was to distinguish between *Litvins* and *Žemaitians* and demonstrate that *Žemaitija* was detached from *Litva* both in linguistic and ethnic terms. This programme is supported by the historian’s assertion that “since 1579, in the publications which are also printed in Königsberg, *Žemaitian* language starts being called *Lithuanian*” (Urban, 1972: 38). Urban’s work *On the Question of the Ancient Litvins’ Ethnicity* published in the recent times in Belarus formulated the author’s following thesis: “*Aukštaitija* was a separate land and had never been associat-

ed directly with Litva” (Urban, 1994: 43). An extended (primarily through inclusion of additional sections) edition of this book titled *Ancient Litvins* was published seven years later. Supporting his interpretation with onomastic material, Urban, as before, sought to justify his main idea of the Slavic *Ancient Litva* while considering Žemaitija a “foreign body” within the GDL (Urban, 2001: 91, 114). These Urban’s views were even more radical than the views of Jermalovič who certainly recognised the Baltic origins of the ancient *Litva*.

FIGURE 4

Historian and journalist Paviel Urban,
the protagonist of the Slavic concept of the *annalistic Litva*



However, when it comes to Žemaitija itself, things are not that simple. Proclaiming all Baltic-speaking residents of the GDL *Žemaitians* – so persistently justified by Paviel Urban – is admittedly a rather artificial construct. Through this aspiration, the emigre historian found quite a range of supporters in the modern Belarus. Nevertheless, the transformation of the notion *Žemaitija* and related definitions really took place in the fourteenth-seventeenth centuries. The fact is that the *historical* *Žemaitija*, being the territory of the Duchy (or *eldership*) of Samogitia which enjoyed broad autonomy within the GDL, covered a bigger area than the ethnographic *Žemaitija*, including also Sudovia and a part of Western Aukštaitija. But there was another administrative territorial unit which contained the name *Žemaitija* in its title, the *Žemaitian Roman Catholic Diocese* (episcopate). Besides the land of *Žemaitija*, *Žemaitian Diocese* included Upytė District of Trakai Voivodeship.

This district stood out greatly to the north and was surrounded by Žemaitian land and Vilna Voivodeship, therefore, probably due to the geographical, political factors and logistical problems, it was attributed to Žemaitian Diocese in the administrative and religious sense. But this administrative move had other consequences – sociocultural and sociolinguistic ones.

According to the Lithuanian linguist Zigmąs Zinkevičius, even before the appearance of Lithuanian writing, two interdialects were popular in the GDL, which were used for communication between the speakers of different dialects (Zinkevičius, 1994: 27-28). One of these interdialects was created on the basis of Lithuanian dialects from around the capital Vilna and originated from the local east Aukštaitian tongue. The other interdialect belonged to the Duchy of Samogitia of the Middle Lithuania plains. It was called the *Žemaitian language* being very different from the Vilna interdialect which was called the *Lithuanian language*. On the basis of these two basic interdialects, two different variants of the Lithuanian written language were later formed in the territory the GDL. The East or the Vilna dialect was at that time called the *Lithuanian language* and was most often used within the Vilna Diocese. The *Middle* dialect of the Kėdainiai region called the *Žemaitian language* was used in the Žemaitian Diocese. At the same time, Lithuanians created their written language in the Duchy of Prussia, which was based on the local west Žemaitian dialect.

Thus, in the GDL times, the *Žemaitian language* was the western version of the Lithuanian (Aukštaitian) language which has no relation to the modern Žemaitian dialects (Zinkevičius, 1999: 33). This *Žemaitian language* was used for writing by many important Lithuanian cultural activists such as, for example, Mikalojus Daukša (1527-1613).⁶ Z. Zinkevičius believes that the written Lithuanian (east Aukštaitian) language disappeared at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Zinkevičius, 1996: 126). In any case, we have to admit that the range of the written use of this language was very limited and the language never reached the official status. In fact, these were only a few notes of religious content (Dziarnovič, 2011a: 117-119).

But the oral Vilna tongue of the east Aukštaitian dialect has been partially preserved, also at the territory of the modern Republic of Belarus (Hierviaty region). It seems that this is the language relic of that

⁶ Mikalojus Daukša, known in sources by the Polish spelling Mikołaj Dauksza, or Dowksza.

ancient (*annalistic*) Litva. The modern Lithuanian literary language was originally created by the natives of the province of Suwalki (modern Vilkaviškis district) at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century and is a direct descendant of the *Žemaitian language* of Žemaitian Diocese. So, this tortuous path of terminology and socio-linguistic transformations in the Northwest Territories of the GDL allowed P. Urban to take a definitive position on the delimitation of *Litva* and *Žemaitija*. Although Urban did not use dialectological materials, he still made his own interpretation of the GDL anthroponymy (Urban, 2001: 121-212).

FIGURE 5

Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the seventeenth century. The Duchy of Samogitia's territory occupies the far Northern West of the country



FIGURE 6

Ethnocultural regions of the modern Republic of Lithuania
(according to contemporary division in the humanities)



III. DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN LITVA AND RUS'⁷

P. Urban's views on *Ancient Litva* were unexpectedly supported, to a certain extent, by Aliksandr Rohalieū, the toponymy scholar from Homiel' born in 1956. Naming the Upper Neman a region where centripetal trends prevailed in the middle of the thirteenth century, the researcher also highlights the areas that would later become the "bone of contention" first between the GDL and Red (Galician) Rus', and then between the GDL and the Moscow state. "These 'transitional' lands preserved the relic Old Russian superethnos. Being inert, amorphous, passive, conservative, it is however crafty in its volatility and uncertainty in political sympathies" (Rohalieū, 1994: 96). A. Rohalieū believes that the remains of that Old Russian superethnos became part of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian nations during the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries. And due to the fact that each of these nations – being located in the area of the Upper Dnieper, Sož (Sozh), in

⁷ Rus' (Rus, Ruś). Adjective *Rusian*. *Old Rusian* is used (instead of *Old Russian*) in this article as it refers to Rus' of the ninth–thirteenth centuries but not to modern *Russia*. *Ruthenia* (*Ruthenian*) is used for medieval and early modern Grand Duchy of Lithuania (since the fourteenth century).

Prypiać (Pripyat), Chernihiv and Sumy Polesia (all of these are very archaic zones in historical, ethnographic and linguistic terms) – absorbed the remains of the Old Russian superethnos, no distinct language borders have been settled between them. As we can see, the Homiel researcher actively utilises Lev Gumilyov's conceptual apparatus (Gumilyov, 1990: 9-33).

As to localising the *historical Litva*, A. Rohalieŭ lines up with M. Jermalovič but also introduces a temporal dimension of the region's status variability: *"During the tenth-eleventh centuries, Slavs assimilated the territory of the future Black Rus' situated to the west of the 'historical Litva'... while the 'historical Litva' was literally continuing to maintain its 'integrity' and turned into a real ethnic 'oasis' separated from the neighbouring territories – Turaŭ and Pinsk lands, Minsk and Polack principalities, and even Black Rus' – by ancient forests and partially swamps... This geographical factor determined the name 'Litva' to be fixed to this 'oasis' in the tenth-eleventh centuries"* (Rohalieŭ, 1994: 103-104).

According to Rohalieŭ, by the fourteenth century, two major ethnonyms could be clearly distinguished on the territory of the modern Belarus, *Litvins* and *Ruthenians*. He goes on with the following statement: *"Litvins are representatives of a new East Slavic ethnos; Ruthenians is a generalised name for the East Slavic subethne and the ethnographic groups within the former Old Rus'"* (Rohalieŭ, 1994: 101). The collective name *Litva* combines two meanings: the actual ethnic name and the territorial/geographical one. According to Rohalieŭ, the latter of the two proved more stable than the former. In practice, this means that the corresponding collective name in its territorial and geographical sense was assigned to a particular area and traditionally linked to it regardless further historical, political or ethnic changes. *"That is why the Upper Nioman (Neman) region was called Litva even before the rise of Belarusians and up to the recent times until the nineteenth-twentieth centuries; that is why the state inevitably formed by the evolved ethnos was called the Grand Duchy of Lithuania"* (Rohalieŭ, 1994: 101). It seems that A. Rohalieŭ did not fully complete the task of explaining the transition of the region's population name from Baltic to Slavic one.

In 1991, the ethnographer Michail Pilipienka (born in 1936) suggested his vision of the distribution of the names of the GDL-era medieval regions of Belarus. According to his statement, the regional name of the inhabitants of the Central part of Belarus in the early days of the Belarusian ethnos and during the times to follow, was a polysemantic term *Litvins* and the central region territory has itself been often called *Litva* (Pilipienka, 1991: 108-109).

In the ethnographic sense, the region is characterised by the presence of the elements and features of both the northern (or north-eastern) and southern (or south-western) complexes of traditional Belarusian culture, mix of these elements and features, their synthesis and existence of transitional forms (Citoŭ, 1983: 127, 129). M. Pilipienka listed a number of factors that have affected, in his view, the expansion of the name *Litva* to the Central part of Belarus. These included the region's proximity to the ethnic Litva which occupied the territory between Nevėžis and Vilija (Neris). While the term *Litvins* is a Slavic form of Lithuanians' ethnic name (Pilipienka, 1991: 109). The Central region, as compared to the Prypiac and the Dvina-Dnieper (Dzvina-Dniapro) area, was inhabited by a large group of people of the Baltic (Lithuanian) origin, along with the East Slavic population. A large part of the Baltic population was later assimilated, but it certainly affected the uniqueness of the region inhabitants' name and the originality of their culture.

Against the background of the abovementioned general works, the authors of which were pursuing the aim of creating the complete concepts of ethnogenesis and nation building, the approach of Viačaslaŭ Nasievič (born in 1957) and Michail Spirydonau (born in 1937) looks rather positivist (one of their articles was written in joint collaboration). These works relate primarily to localising the regions of *Rus'* and *Litva*. A large amount of factual material was collected by M. Spirydonau during the preparation of his study *The Enserfment of the Belarusian Peasantry* (Spirydonau, 1993). The thing is that M. Spirydonau made a card index of the sixteenth century GDL settlements containing the attributes of the administrative and territorial belonging, ownership and other details. In our times, at the turn of the twentieth to the twenty first century, this card index became the basis for creation of maps with the GDL administrative and territorial division (in the first place, after the administrative and judiciary reform of 1565-1566).

In collaboration with Viačaslaŭ Nasievič, M. Spirydonau (1996: 4-27) analysed a variety of published and unpublished sources (mainly of the sixteenth century) – official public and private acts: testaments, complaint applications, inventories, regulations, orders, various papers (mortgages, bills of sale, court letters, etc.), Sejm approvals, the *Volok Reform Law (Valočnaja Pamiera)* of 1557, *GDL Army Censuses (Popis vojska VKL)* and other documents. As a result, 122 settlements located exclusively in the eastern part of Belarus were attributed to *Rus'* in the narrow sense (see Figure 7). Most often, *Ruthenian* households and villages are

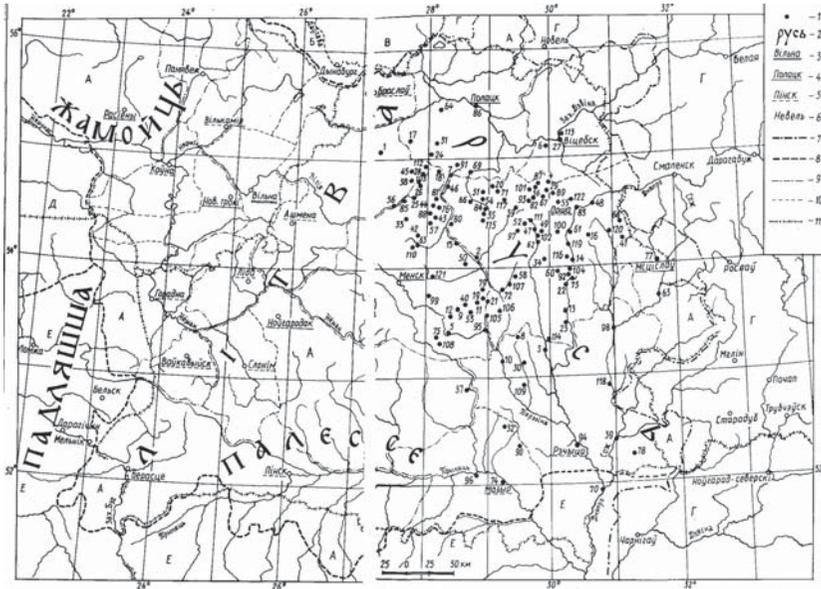
localised around the upper Berazina (tributary of Dnieper) and in the northern part of Orša district, the place of many magnates' and gentry estates, the owners of which at the same time possessed estates in other parts of the GDL (Nasievič and Spirydonaŭ, 1996: 11). In this sense, there was no big need for the boyars of Polack and Viciebsk to define their estates as *Ruthenian* since they already were in the *historic Rus'*. So, this focus allows us to understand the principle of toponymic object's regional origin indication, being a location clarification as opposed to the other estates situated in the traditionally acknowledged narrower *Litva*.

However, accentuating attention on this methodological approach has a risky side as Ukraine is almost completely dropped out from the problem analysis field. According to the authors, contextually *Rus'* is mentioned in the sources as often as the other GDL regions – along with *Litva*, *Žemaitija*, *Volhynia*, *Kyiv land*, *Podlasie*, *Podolia*, *Polesia/Paliešsie* (Nasievič and Spirydonaŭ, 1996: 9). Here is how an early twentieth century publication quotes the 1569 message of Sigismund Augustus to his governors and deputies saying that the Crimean Khan “*umysleł... ziemię nasze Ruskie, Podolskie, Kijowskie i Wołyńskie woiować*” (Archiwum, 1910: 350, Nr. 280). But further in the same document there is a clue of what was meant by the *Ruthenian lands* – it was the *Ruthenian* voivodeship with the centre in Lviv, as the name of the *Ruthenian* voivode Jerzy Jazłowiecki from Buchach is mentioned. The Ukrainian lands were a primary target for the raids by the Tatars of Crimea.

But in terms of delimitation of the *Litva* and *Ruthenian* regions in the GDL territory, the authors' observations are very valuable. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the boundary between *Litva* and *Rus'* was along the western border of the Polack land and further around Lahojsk and Minsk. And while at the end of the fourteenth century the *land of Litva* had not yet included Minsk area, in the sixteenth century this voivodeship centre was referred to as *Litva*. According to M. Spirydonaŭ's observations, in the sixteenth century *Litva* included the following districts: Vilna, Ukmergė (Vil'kamir), Kaunas, Trakai, Upytė, Braslaŭ, Vaŭkavysk, Hrodna, Lida, virtually the entire Ašmiany and Slonim, most of Navahradak and the western part of Minsk (Spirydonaŭ, 1996: 208). Nasievič and Spirydonaŭ suggested that the takeover of a part of Minsk district by *Litva* was possibly related to the spread of a new system of taxation (the *Litvan service*) (Nasievič and Spirydonaŭ, 1996: 13-14).

FIGURE 7

Ruthenia and Litva in the sixteenth century
 (according to M. Spirydonaŭ and V. Nasievič)



Thus, one of the main signs of delimitation, as of the middle of the sixteenth century, was the prevailing system of obligations for dependent peasants. While the dominating obligation in *Litva* was the corvée, in *Rus'* it was the traditional natural and monetary tribute (which since the mid-sixteenth century partially took the form of quitrent). Particularly eloquently it is manifested through the analysis of the land property of the feudal lords who had land holdings both in the *Lithuanian* and the *Ruthenian* parts of the GDL.

The main conclusion of the researchers is that the boundary between *Ruthenia* and *Litva* did not match neither the ethnic (in the modern sense), nor the administrative border (of the voivodeships and districts). The *Rus'* of the GDL included only a part of the territory inhabited by *Ruthenians*, the descendants of the population of *Kievan Rus'*. The inhabitants of the Upper Neman region, Bug region, Prypiac basin also professed Orthodoxy, spoke the *Ruthenian language* (a version of the old Belarusian language), but these lands were called *Litva*, *Podlasie*, *Polesia /Paliéssie*. According to the pre-reform administrative division of the

GDL (before 1565-1566), *Ruthenia* also included some *federal* lands (from the beginning of the sixteenth century named voivodeships) – Polack and Vicebsk areas, as well as the eastern part of Vilna voivodeship, including Barysaŭ volost which was governed directly by the voivode. In addition, *Ruthenia* included Babrujsk, Liubašany and Svislač volosts which since the times of Algirdas and Kęstutis had dual subordination to Vilna and Trakai (Lubavskiy, 1892: 13-14, 103-106).

The new administrative and territorial division of 1565-1566 was neither matching the boundaries of *Ruthenia* which – according to Nasievič and Spiridonau (1996: 14) – was split between Polack, Vicebsk (including Orša district), Mscislaŭ voivodeships, Rečyca and Mazyr districts of Minsk voivodeship. The western border of *Ruthenia* went through Minsk and Navahradak districts. In addition, the authors strongly disagree with M. Pilipienka that the term *White Rus’/ Ruthenia* referred to the entire ethnic territory of Belarusians in the sixteenth century (Pilipienka, 1991: 105-106).

V. Nasievič summarised the results of his work in the articles for the *Encyclopaedia of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*. The researcher notes that in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, the name *Litva* was a politonym and was used to refer to the entire state under the rule of the Gediminas-Jagiellonian dynasty. In this sense, the name's area matched the state borders and was changed along with their changes, regardless of the ethnic composition. But at the same time there was a regional meaning of the name (i.e. choronym) *Litva*, which distinguished it from *Žemaitija* and *Ruthenia* (Nasievič 2006: 205).

The origin of the choronym *Litva* can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, these were the areas that were firmly within the GDL since the moment of its foundation, in contrast to the other lands which either were annexed later, or temporarily moved out of the power of Lithuanian princes (Polack, *Žemaitija*). But Nasievič does not rule out the fact that *Litva* could be further associated with the area of dispersed settlement of the Balts, even in the form of small enclaves. At the same time, sources mention a significant proportion of East Slavic population in Trakai and the Vilna districts (to a lesser extent in Ukmergė (Viłkamir) area). In this case, concludes Nasievič, *Litva* roughly corresponds to the territory of the Balto-Slavic synthesis and assimilation process (Nasievič, 2006a: 206). In contrast to *Litva*, the name *Ruthenia* takes on the character of metaethnonym (a common name for multiple ethnic groups that be-

gan to take shape). The title *Ruthenia* was also used as a regional name in relation to Eastern Belarus (Nasievič, 2006b: 522).

The Polish-based Belarusian historian Oleg Łatyszzonek (Alieh Latyšonak) who was born in 1957 in Podlasie, a GDL area in Poland, examines the Belarusian nation's sources of origin. He notes that at the turn of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the GDL inhabitants distinguished the following regions: Žemaitija, Litva (Vilna, Navahradak, and Minsk), Ruthenia (from Polack in the north to Liubech in the south), Polesia/Paliešsie (Pinsk, Mazyr, Ovruch), Podlasie (Brest, Drahičyn, Bielsk), Kyiv area (Ukraine), Volhynia, Podolia, Galicia. In addition, geographical representations of the Dnieper region's residents contained reminiscences of the ancient division into the *Upper* and *Lower* areas (see Figure 8). In fact, following the idea of Oleg Łatyszzonek, we must admit that during the sixteenth century, the ethnic content of the region names is gradually decreasing and they are increasingly acquiring a historical and geographical sense.

FIGURE 8

Historical and geographical regions of the GDL in the sixteenth century, according to Oleg Łatyszzonek



The newest concept of Alieś Biely (born in 1968) adds socio-cultural and civilisational components to the understanding of the terms *Litva* and *Ruthenia*. The historian believes that according to the available sources and research, the *political Litva* of the middle of the sixteenth century, which could also be called a “collective domain for the political people of Litva,” being non-uniform in the ethnic and religious relationships (considering the significant share of the Orthodox Ruthenian population in the east and south), appears substantially different from Ruthenia in the following legal and social aspects (Biely, 2007: 145):

- private land ownership was much more developed in *Litva*, the old volosts had largely been destroyed;
- the vast majority of private land holdings belonged to the privileged class, the *political people of Litva* represented by the Catholic szlachta of almost entirely Lithuanian ethnic origin (the share of the *political people* among smallholders was lower, and still lower it was among the feudal-dependent population, which explains the differences between ethnic and political boundaries of *Litva*);
- the obligations system of the feudal-dependent population was different, at least after the Agrarian Reform of the 1550s (in *Litva*, it was mostly the corvee while in *Ruthenia* it was the traditional natural and monetary tribute, later also quitrent) and so was, possibly, the customary law regulating the life of peasant communities;
- a network of Catholic parishes was being intensely developed across the entire *political Litva's* territory including the peripheral areas with the predominance of the Orthodox population, while in the neighbouring *Ruthenia*, Catholic churches were established very rarely and only in large cities, in which there were extra-territorial Catholic communities;
- civilisational predominance of Catholicism facilitated the adoption of the Western European legal norms – and most importantly of the Magdeburg Rights – in the cities and towns of *Litva*; in *Ruthenia* these were established only in a few major cities;
- in many cities in *Litva* there were legally registered Jewish communities;
- in this territory, neither the government nor the citizens could appeal to the principles of the *Ruthenian old ways*;

- the entire territory of *Litva* was free from any formal obligations in respect of the Horde and the Moscow state.

According to A. Biely, these rather sharp differences between *Litva* and *Ruthenian* were not in doubt before the start of the Livonian War which revealed an acute threat of losing *Ruthenia* in favour of the Moscow state. The military threat forced the GDL, and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's government to abandon the policy of preservation of the *Ruthenian old ways* and move to the dynamic expansion of the listed principles of social order throughout the entire GDL territory, which was mainly achieved by the end of the seventeenth century. And in this sense it can be stated that by the end of its existence, the whole GDL became *Litva* (albeit this concept had undergone a significant change as compared to the thirteenth-sixteenth centuries). The main manifestation of that was assimilation of the *Ruthenian* Orthodox nobility by the *political people of Litva* due to the former's inability to set up any alternative program except for the reflectory preservation of the *old ways*. A. Biely also notes that later, since the 1580s, but in fact since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the choronym *White Ruthenia* became associated with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's *Ruthenian* region (Biely, 2000: 158).

It should be noted that A. Biely suggested a wide array of civilisational changes in the Grand Duchy that overlap with the ethnic factor. Certain provisions of A. Biely's concept have a solid grounding in the works of Belarusian historians, particularly with respect to the land ownership and land use issues. However, if we analyse the concept's particular points, a number of questions may be posed to the author's theses.

It is not clear what A. Biely means by including the feudal-dependent population to the *political people of Litva*. In the realities of the GDL, the political group was formed as an integral noble class, and even the *third estate* failed to clearly declare their political interests, as the class simply had not been legally formed as it happened in Western Europe at the end of the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern Times.

It seems that the author takes the sixteenth-century *old ways'* principle in a quite mechanistic way. Inaccurate is the provision that the references to the *old ways* came only from *Ruthenia* and had nothing to do with *Litva*. Moreover, appeals to the *old ways* by the Grand Duke's

power in the sixteenth century actually became a slogan of social innovations (Dziarnovič, 2011b: 67). In general, the *old ways* was not only the *Ruthenian* principle, but also the one of *Litva*. The assertion of the Horde's claims for *Ruthenia* as one of the fundamental principles for delimitation of the GDL's *Litva* and *Ruthenia* also looks rather risky. Crimean Tatars' raids reached the very heart of *Litva*, and at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Grand Duke Alexander initiated the construction of a defensive wall around Vilna just to ensure against the Tatar raids. Before these times, the *Ruthenia* composing part of the Horde's claims was mostly Ukrainian lands. This was the *Ruthenia* which eventually – after the unifying processes that ended up in signing the Union of Lublin in 1569 – passed to the jurisdiction of the Polish Crown.

IV. "LITVA" AND "RUTHENIA": THE TERMS' ETHNIC CONTENT

In addition to the historical and geographical, social and political definition and delimitation of *Litva* and *Ruthenia*, Belarusian historiography has also formulated the question of correlation of these two components with the ethnic history of Belarusians. As noted by Oleg Łatyszzonek, the fact that the term *Litva* was not only the state or region name, but also the ethnic group name and in this sense belongs to the ancestors of the modern Lithuanians, caused no doubt among all the researchers except for the Belarusian ones (Łatyszzonek, 2006: 112).

The ethnologists Ihar Čakvin (1954-2012) and Paviel Cieraškovič (born in 1958) indicate that the name *Litva*, on the one hand, was a politonym, and on the other an exonym (external ethnonym) used by Russians, Ukrainians and Poles. This name was applied to all residents of the GDL, primarily to Lithuanians and Belarusians (Čakvin and Cieraškovič, 1990: 44-45).

In his turn, Hieorhij Halienčanka (born in 1937) critically evaluates the assumption about *Litvins* being an endonym (internal ethnonym) of Belarusians from the so-called *historical Litva*, or the western parts of Belarus. The researcher notes that the fourteenth–sixteenth-century sources provide at least eight definitions for the term *Litva*, four of which were the most common (Halienčanka, 1992: 45-48):

- 1) state and political belonging of Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and representatives of other ethnic groups living in the GDL;

- 2) identification of the residents of the GDL's western part which in the sixteenth century included Vilna and Trakai voivodeships;
- 3) the "actual Lithuanian ethnic group" (mainly from the territory of Aukštaitija);
- 4) Lithuanian ethnos within wider boundaries including the Balts of Podlasie and Western Belarus.

According to Haliencanka, the politonym, or the territorial and political definition of Belarusians as *Litvins* in that period did not turn into an endonym. In the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries, and to a certain extent later, the endonym of the contemporary Belarusians' and Ukrainians' ancestors was the term *Ruthenia* (*Ruthenian people*, *Ruthenians*). As a historical and territorial concept within the GDL, *Ruthenia* referred to the territory east of Minsk, while *Ruthenia* as an endonym extended to the whole Belarusian (and East Slavic!) ethnos including Podlasie. The Belarusian historian believes that prior to the Age of Reformation, the major ethne and ethnic groups in the GDL generally retained their monoreligious structure, where Orthodoxy was considered the *Ruthenian* faith. As a result of the reformation and the Union of Brest, the circles of the Belarusian and Ukrainian intelligentsia, educated szlachta and petty bourgeoisie shifted to the new perceptions containing mostly *ethnodifferential* components: origin, "blood", language.

In his later works, Haliencanka gave a detailed assessment of the term *Ruthenia*, *Ruthenian people* in the fourteenth–sixteenth-century sources (Haliencanka, 2008: 16-17):

- 1) In the historical context and the consciousness of mainly educated groups of Belarusian and Ukrainian population, the ancient Rus' was often understood as a politonym for the former state formations throughout the whole conglomerate of Rus' or separate Rusian principalities and at the same time as a community with certain common confessional, spiritual and ethnic features.
- 2) In the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries and later, the term was used domestically by official circles and for the self-determination of the main population of Belarus, Ukraine (and those northeastern Rusian principalities which fell under the rule of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania). *Rus'/Ruthenia* was the name of a specific historical area of the GDL, which had no general administrative boundaries, but at the same time did not cause particular difficulties in its practical territorial determination.

- 3) At that stage of the ethnic consciousness formation among the main population of Belarus and Ukraine, the term Ruthenia was predominantly used as common to all Ruthenian lands of the GDL. In certain circumstances, it is possible to assume the specific importance of a particular region (ethnic group) in the general concept.
- 4) In the foreign policy context, the same term was used to determine the neighbouring and more distant principalities of the North-East and North-West Rus', Novgorod and Pskov Republics. In a certain context, the term was utilised to identify some regions of Volyn, Kyiv lands and Poland (Ruthenian voivodeship).
- 5) The same concept was used to define the Orthodox population of the GDL and the foreign *Rusian/ Ruthenian* principalities, *Ruthenian old ways*, language, customs and culture. The GDL's main official language in the Statutes and other legal acts of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries was also called *Ruthenian*.
- 6) Finally, it was used for the determination of the Orthodox Church and confession. Only the Orthodox Church and confession were sometimes called *Ruthenian* or schismatic faith.

Thus, according to H. Haliencanka, in the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries, the majority of Belarusian population for various reasons retained the traditional endonym *Ruthenians* to determine their origin; “*in the minds of the then Ruthenians of the GDL, ‘Ruthenian people’ were usually perceived as a single unified ethnoconfessional community of the Belarusian-Ukrainian area. Ruthenians’ rare confessional conversions until the last third of the sixteenth century and the formation of a political nation – the GDL szlachta (nobility) – did not considerably affect the ethnic, confessional, historical and religious consciousness of the people of Belarus and Ukraine*” (Haliencanka, 2008: 19).

Viačaslaŭ Nasievič came to partially different conclusions. According to him, in the sixteenth century, the term *Rus’ (Ruthenia)* had two meanings. On the one hand, it was a *super-ethnonym*, the common name for all peoples originating from the territory of Kievan Rus'. Similar to Ukrainians, the ancestors of Belarusians were called *Ruthenians, Rusyns* not because they were identified with the inhabitants of Moscow Rus', but for the reason that they were considered the descendants and heirs of the ninth–thirteenth-century Rus'. Besides, the term *Ruthenians* had a religious connotation as Orthodoxy was considered the *Russian* faith. On the other hand, the concept of *Rus’ (Ruthenia)*, just as

Litva and *Paliéssie* (*Polesia*), was a *sub-ethnonym*, the name of one of the Belarusians' ethnic territory parts. That *Rus'* was located upon the rivers Dzvina (Western Dvina / Daugava) and Dniapro (Dnieper) east to the Braslaŭ–Lahojsk–Pietrykaŭ axis. Thus, the names *Litva* and *Ruthenia* were *sub-ethnonyms* for a part of Belarusians and Lithuanians. At the same time, according to Nasievič, neither Belarusians, nor Lithuanians had a name that would refer to their entire ethnic territory – “*there were no proper names on the ethnic groups' level*” (Nasievič, 1992: 97-98).

A new impetus to the GDL ethnicity discussions was given by the publications of Ihar Marzaliuk (born in 1968), which appeared at the beginning of the twenty first century. The researcher collected and systematised an extensive material and came to the conclusion that in the sixteenth century, the concepts of *Litva*, *Litvins* and *Ruthenia*, *Ruthenians* related to different ethnic groups. Important in this case is the opposition of the *Lithuanian* and *Ruthenian* languages in the documents. According to I. Marzaliuk's observations, the *local* books (municipal government records) never opposed these peoples except the cases of Vilna, Trakai and Hrodna. Typically, the notions *Roman law/Polish faith* and *Greek law/Rusian faith* were used to designate Catholics and Orthodox christians (Marzaliuk, 2002: 56-58). I. Marzaliuk considers Ruthenians to be the ancestors of Belarusians.

The publication of I. Marzaliuk's book *People of the Old Belarus: Ethno-Religious and Socio-Cultural Stereotypes (Tenth-Seventeenth Centuries)* provoked a lively discussion (Biely, 2003; Sahanovič, 2003). Hienadž Sahanovič (born in 1961) responded to the book with a rather sharp and broad review calling Marzaliuk's initial approach of the commonality of the ethnic and the religious profoundly erroneous. Sahanovič believes that Marzaliuk employs a “*double standard mixing ethnonyms and confessions*” (Sahanovič, 2003: 294). At the same time, the reviewer states: “*...when avoiding to select sources exclusively fitting one's own construct, it is easy to notice that in those days, the term 'Rus'* was used as a self-designation both in the Moscow state and across the Orthodox lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. But while the Ukrainian and Belarusian elites sought to monopolise the right for its use, they well understood the religious and cultural affinity with Great Russians” (Sahanovič, 2003: 296).

Sahanovič's underlying idea in this debate is that there were no self-designation for Belarusians in the GDL times: “*The collective identity at that time could not be consolidated, as human societies tend to have a multi-*

level system of self-identity. One ethnic group could contain several self-identity forms each of which had a corresponding separate component of the same ethnic consciousness." He went on: "I believe, in the GDL it was possible to be 'Litvin' and 'Ruthenian' at the same time and that did not cause any conflict in the then consciousness; only in the industrial society, simultaneous belonging to several nations became impossible" (Sahanovič, 2003: 297–298). In addition, the reviewer points out that the synonymous use of the terms *nation* and *people* is a mistake: "At that time, the word 'people' did not mean an ethnic community in the modern sense but was understood as a state, a corporation united by the rights and duties, in a word, the 'szlachta people'. The petty bourgeoisie was entirely excluded of it, not to even mention the peasants" (Sahanovič, 2003: 301).

H. Sahanovič proposed a somewhat more flexible society model of the GDL. In this, he opposes Marzaliuk's ethno-confessional and socio-cultural construct which also has its own arguments.

In his following book *Ethnic and Religious World of the Belarusian Town in the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries (Population Ethno-Confessional Composition, Ethnic and Religious Stereotypes of the Belarusian Citizens)*, I. Marzaliuk even structurally separated the material for analysis in accordance with the ethno-regional division: the towns of the Belarusian Dniapro (Dnieper) and Dzvina (Western Dvina / Daugava) regions were considered separately from the *historical Litva* and Podlasie. The author attempted to demonstrate that there was a strong tradition at the level of mass consciousness to identify Orthodoxy (and later the Uniate Church) with the Ruthenian (Old Belarusian) ethnos while Catholicism was attributed to the Lithuanian and Polish ethnic groups. Besides, Roman Catholicism was associated with the Polish cultural tradition and language (Marzaliuk, 2007: 147).

For our understanding of the whole debate's essence, very important was the fact that in the introduction to his book, I. Marzaliuk determined the basic methodological differences between him and H. Sahanovič: "Sahanovič is right in one thing: I am a real primordialist. Primordialists' position in determining the phenomenon of ethnicity seems to me much more scientific and close to the reality than that of the constructivists, many of whom are simply 'indulging' themselves in subjective idealism" (Marzaliuk, 2007: 4).

Primordialism is the oldest scientific approach to the views on ethnicity. The idea of ethnos as a blood- and family- (biological) related community placed at the base of primordialism takes its

origins from the Ancient philosophy. Ethnos in primordialism is a primeval community of people which manifests itself in unique concrete historical forms. Quite figuratively, the characteristics of ethnos were described as “chains” by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the creator of the primordialist concept: “*These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on... have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves*” (Geertz, 1963: 109).

Today primordialism, being one of the basic concepts, is opposed by constructivism which understands ethnicity not as a certain reality, but as a result of creation, as an innovative act of creative imagination. Over time, ethnic consciousness tends to be spread across increasingly broader social spaces. The process of social construction takes place on the individual and group levels. As a result of countless interactions in the daily life, individuals are involved in a constant process of defining and redefining themselves. Self-consciousness is understood not as a kind of *fixed essence*, but as a *strategic assertiveness*.

Summarising various versions of ethnic identity, as opposed to I. Marzaliuk and H. Halienčanka, Oleg Łatyszzonek believes that “*Historical sources concerning the entire territory where later Belarusians were formed, name Litvins together with Ruthenians in the ethnic sense*” (Łatyszzonek, 2006: 117). His book’s final phrase sounds particularly strong in this respect: “*The reason why the Belarusian people did not appear in the modern history, was not a weak national consciousness of the inhabitants of Belarus, but on the contrary, their strong Russian or Lithuanian national self-consciousness*” (Łatyszzonek, 2006: 313; Łatyszzonek, 2009: 324).

V. IN SEARCH OF A HOMELAND: IN PLACE OF CONCLUSION

The above analysis of contemporary Belarusian historiography on ethnicity issues in the GDL period can be narrowed down to one very specific question: who does the *Ancient Litva* belong to? The political life of the Grand Duchy did not end with the disappearance of the state from the map of Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, but “*since the end of the 1980s, it experienced a true revival of its political capital*” (Kazakievič, 2008: 77).

The modern concepts of ethnicity in the pre-national era allow avoiding that persistent search for the true ancestors. Who, for example, inhabited the thirteenth-century Navahradak? From the point of view

of the actual modernity, it was, for sure, inhabited by the ancestors of Belarusians. But how to determine that population with relation to the thirteenth century? The region was in a collision of colonisational waves of the Dregovichs, Krivichs and Volhynians, while in the city itself, a constant presence of the Masovians is obvious.

And what about *litva*? I am now using this term starting with a small letter and in the sense in which it was used in ancient chronicles, identifying not a country but a certain ethno-social phenomenon. Finally *Litva*, after decades of paying tribute to *Rus'*, established its control over Navahradak. This act, in fact, was the beginning of the history of the state which we know as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. That Litva occupied a good part of Neman region and the whole Vilna region, and many cultural impulses originated later from this territory, leading to the formation of the peculiarities of the area that would become fully referred to as Belarus only in the nineteenth century.

So is this *litva* an external force or a factor of internal ethnic, cultural and political processes? Such a question would be strange from the European point of view. Not to mention the historians, but a French student would not understand the base of the problem as they know that the French ethnos passed through very intense processes of "mutations," starting with the Romanisation (Latinisation) of the Gauls, which led to the formation of the Old French language. That was followed by the overlapping rule of a new political elite – the Germanic tribe of Franks – which actually gave birth to the Old French ethnos, as well as to the country name, France.

British ethnic and linguistic history may look even more confusing. Celtic heritage, indeed, left rather few actual visual traces, although it is known that the Celtic tribes of Britons who gave the name to the country, stubbornly resisted the penetration of Angles and Saxons from Jutland (Southern Denmark) and Northern Germany. The conquest of Britain by the Germanic Anglo-Saxon tribes was a long and complex process which lasted over 180 years and ended at the beginning of the fifth century. It is considered that before the conquest, the number of Britons was about 2 million while the number of Anglo-Saxons constituted no more than 200 thousand people (Pryor, 2004: 128). Other authors even claim that the number of Anglo-Saxons fluctuated between 10 and 20, or 25 thousand (Snyder, 2003: 87; Laing and Laing, 1990: 69). Further invasion of the Vikings (Danes) introduced new

genetics and some legal regulations in the future English ethnicity.

The linguistic and ethnic landscape of England as it is known today was born after the establishment of the Normans' domination in 1066. Former Vikings attacked Britain from France bringing French, which had been adopted as a spoken language, along with them to England. For a long time, Norman-French remained the language of the Church of England, the administration and the higher circles. But gradually, the medium and small landowners, who mainly belonged to the Anglo-Saxons, were gaining weight, not least due to the demographic superiority. Instead of the Norman-French language rule, a kind of *linguistic compromise* was gradually formed. This is how the modern English language was born, in which out of 80 thousand most used words, approximately 22.5 thousand are French borrowings (from all periods of history). The majority of those French borrowings are included in the daily language, accounting for about 59% of the total number of the borrowed words (Mikheeva, 2010: 10-15).

Admittedly, I am not a big fan of the interpretation of history through the argument from analogy. But that was to demonstrate that the Belarusian example of ethnic history is not exceptionally unique and the most difficult one. The problem is in the reading of this historical experience and its interpretation.

So far, in the views on the GDL ethnicity issues, strong positions among the Belarusian humanities belong to primordialist representations. This concept considers ethnos as the primary and permanent association of people "by blood" and claims that any given people maintain stable ethnicity characteristics. Most often, *Rus'/Ruthenia* is associated with such ethnic core in our history, with all its complex religious and cultural traits. And this *Ruthenian* tradition is indeed very deepened in the cultural history of Belarus. But it is often forgotten that the *Rusianism* itself was constructed in the area of Eastern Europe by the Scandinavian elite with the help of the cultural complexes imported from Byzantium and the Balkans. Of course, in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries it was a tradition that had become strongly embedded in our land and united Belarusian territories with Ukraine, being at the same time very different from the Moscow tradition.

Returning to the problem, we face the question: what is to be done with *Litva*, a big part of which was located on the territory of the modern Belarus? And more important is the fact that a whole lot of cultural impulses and transformations that directly impacted Ruthenia and were

involved in the formation of Belarus are primarily related to Litva.

In contrast to my theses, one can present a counterargument that, as opposed to the aforementioned French and British ethne formation models, there is another contender for the heritage of Litva, the modern Republic of Lithuania. Well, this example is neither unique. The Frankish Empire of Charlemagne was divided, giving rise to three modern nation-states: France, Germany and Italy. In its turn Saxony, from the territory of which the Saxons migrated to Britain, has long existed in Europe as a sovereign state within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

However, there is one really serious counterargument to our considerations of *Litva* and *Rus'*. If the above-mentioned European examples relate to the processes that occurred in the Middle Ages, the cultural diffusions of *Litva* and *Ruthenia* took place in the Late Middle Ages. The results of these processes passed to the Early Modern Times (sixteenth-eighteenth centuries) and are still perceived as very relevant – tense debate on the state and religious unions, the religious conversions of the elites, the origin and fate of the national languages is ongoing on the pages of Belarusian publications and does not cease to date. Also, these processes from the era of printing have left much more written (including polemical) evidence. The shorter time span and the aftertaste of controversy actualise the four hundred years old events in the consciousness and provide a fertile ground for speculations on historical themes. In general, this instrumentality of historical knowledge is specifically characteristic of historical consciousness in our region of Europe.

These ethnic body contradictions were perfectly understood by the founders of the Belarusian *revival* of the nineteenth – early twentieth centuries. Apparently, not only they understood the problems of solving this puzzle. The certain division – confessional, alphabetical (between the Latin and Cyrillic scripts), political – was their daily cultural practice. Combining *Litva* and *Ruthenia* and having acknowledged that this is our national history, the protagonists of Belarus thereby transformed the political problem into a cultural potential. And this activity of the “makers” (founders) of Belarus perfectly fits the stream of *constructivism*, one of today’s important ethnic groups’ concepts opposite to primordialism. According to constructivists, ethnos is not a primary reality. Ethnicity is *constructed* by people themselves in the process of their creative social activity; it is constantly being confirmed,

revised, or reorganised. We can also notice another trend: Oleg Łatyszzonek's thesis of the GDL Belarus inhabitants' strong national consciousness refers to *perennialism* (literally meaning *continuous*). From the point of view of the supporters of this concept, nations and nationalism are not exclusively the inventions of Modern Times but existed long before that (Cieraškovič, 2004: 55).

It is plausible that in the modern Belarusian historians' discussions regarding the ethnicity of the *historical Litva* occurs a methodological failure when the preindustrial societies' ethnicity problems get mixed with the issues of the industrial era's nation-building processes. The forms of ethnicity expression in the Late Middle Ages or Early Modern Times can easily be debated. But prolonging these concepts to the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries inevitably leads to a clear methodological impasse, in which the base characteristics of the modern ethnic groups are extrapolated to the *Litva* and *Ruthenia* communities of the GDL.

One argument can be specified for sure: the very fact of heated debate on the *Litva* and *Rus'/Ruthenia* topic suggests that Belarusian history of the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Times can only be understood as the interaction of these two factors (Dziarnovič, 2009: 249). Remove one of them – and Belarusian history becomes totally different. In fact, it falls apart.

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