
JEWES IN BELARUSIAN NATIONAL PROJECTS FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 19TH CENTURY TILL 1905 (PROBLEM SETTING)

INTRODUCTION

AFTER THE BREAKDOWN OF TSAR REGIME IN RUSSIA, Belarusians sought to create their own sovereign state. However, unlike Finns, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, they failed to do so. Probably, Belarusians could succeed more in those particular conditions if they gained the support of Jews. So far little is known about how Belarusians saw Jews in their national projects, how Jews saw Belarusian national movement and how viable was a Belarusian-Jewish union. Academic research on this issue has not yet appeared in Belarusian historiography.¹

So, this problem should be uncovered and needs a separate study.² In our research we suggest to consider the period from the birth of Belarusian movement until 1905. National projects of that time can be considered only conventionally, as Belarusian nation was in the state of formation and its leaders did not create detailed national programmes which explained their views, goals and attitudes to Jews. Because of that we had to study the problem on the basis of speeches, memories of Belarusian leaders, media reports and historical works. Meanwhile, Jewish national and political programmes of that time are more famous. Since the 1890s they were published and discussed in the Jewish press.

Belarusian and Jewish peoples had much in common: 1. They lost their states. 2. Comparing to nations of Western Europe, they lagged in creation of national movement (second half of the 19th century). 3. Through centuries they defended themselves by self-isolation: Jews with the help of Judaism, Belarusians with the help of the Uniate Church and later patriarchal village tradition. Emansipation of Belarusian peasants and Jewish urban community in the 19th century was late and slow. 4. They nurtured the Polish and the Russian ideas with their intellectual resources. 5. Tsar government did not consider them independent nations and did not recognize their rights to national self-determination. 6. The two nations had a long tradition of cohabitation and were mentally very close. They both demonstrated diligence, tolerance, need to adapt to new governments for survival, and non-resistance to violence. They borrowed a lot from each other's language and culture (Biadulia, 1918). 7. As former residents of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereafter the GDL), they continued to call themselves Litvaks (Jews) and Litvins (Belarusians). 8. Jews and Belarusians were united by common patri-

¹ In modern Belarusian historiography, interaction of Belarusian and Jewish elite in the 19th – beginning of the 20th century was scarcely studied. See: Zajka, 1995: 50-52; Smilavicki, 1999; Herasimava, 2002; Cieraškovič, 2004; Šupa, 2004; Bulhakaŭ, 2006; Smaliančuk, 2013: 72-73.

² In neighbouring countries this problem is studied more successfully: Poland (Bratkowski, 2006; Zamojski, 2012); Lithuania (Sirutavičius and Staliūnas, 2011); Ukraine (Rudnytsky, 1988: 79-81; Petrovsky-Shtern, 2009; Chruslińska and Cima, 2011).

otism and love for Belarusian land. Here is an interesting phrase by a successful American emigrant, who visited his native town (*miastečka*)³ at the beginning of the 20th century: “I was looking forward to find out whether the bog near the market in our *miastečka* dried out. Back then it did not dry in most severe droughts. Believe me, this bog for me remains dearer than most prestigious avenues of New York” (Savicki). Therefore, Belarusians and Jews had good prospects for joint struggle for their rights and creation of a common state.

THE PROJECT OF VILNIUS UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AND HASKALAH (ENLIGHTENMENT)

According to the Belarusian historian from Białystok Oleg Łatyszonek (Alieh Latyšonak), the first Belarusian national project was created in the 1820s by Michail Babroŭski⁴ (1784–1848), Ihnaci Danilovič⁵ (1788–1848) and other professors of Vilnius University, who descended from Białystok region and were Greek Catholics (Uniates). They dreamt about the restoration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and independence from Poland, giving Belarusian language official status and establishing the Uniate Church as national church of the GDL. However, Łatyszonek might overstate the national separatism of Uniate professors. Actually, they promoted an Enlightenment project stemming from the modernisation processes in the Kingdom of Prussia, to which Białystok region belonged in 1795–1807. Professor Babroŭski in the letter to his colleague Anton Sasnoŭski⁶ wrote that he saw a possibility to awaken the nation through education, as local Jews did (Łatyszonek, 1992: 9-14) under the influence of Haskalah, promoted by German Jews. Belarusians, unlike Jews, lacked intellectual resources to organise their own Haskalah in the 19th century. Cooperation of Greek Catholics with tsar government brought a disaster to Belarusians – the Uniate Church, which could become the national church of Belarus, was destroyed in 1839. Independence from Poles turned into the dependence on Russians.

THE PROJECTS OF POLISH INTELLECTUALS AND DISSATISFACTION WITH THE NEUTRALITY OF JEWS

In the first half of the 19th century a group of people educated in Polish culture, including the students of Vilnius University, acknowledged the distinctiveness of Belarus, which they understood as eastern lands of present Belarus, and *Litva*,⁷ understood as present western Belarus and Lithuania. They hoped

³ *Miastečka* (from old Belarusian “small town”, in Yiddish – שטעטל, *shtetl*) – a settlement of transitional type between a village and a town in the lands of the former Commonwealth of Both Nations. From the end of the 17th century till World War II *miastečkas* were mostly populated by Jews.

⁴ In Russian – Михаил Бобровский.

⁵ In Russian – Игнатий Данилович.

⁶ In Russian – Антон Сосновский.

⁷ *Litva* – regional name of the western part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The names of other parts included Ruś or Bielarus (eastern part), Paliessie (southern part), Podolia, Volyn, Podlasie (south-western parts). The name *Litva* in the 19th century did not mean the current ethnographic Lithuania and encompassed northwestern part of the ethnic Belarusian territory.

that soon these lands will revive in the form of the GDL and become an autonomous part of the new Commonwealth of Both Nations.⁸ The intellectuals saw the anti-tsar uprising of old *Litva* in a union with Poland as a primary means to achieve this goal. Such views were especially popular among the writers who attempted to write in Belarusian: Jan Czeczot⁹ (1796–1847), Jan Barszczewski¹⁰ (1794?–1851), Alexander Rypiński¹¹ (1809–1900) and others.

After the defeat of anti-tsar uprising of 1830–1831, local patriots tried to understand the reason for their failure. Hence, they started to analyse the role of Jews in the liberation struggle. Alexander Rypiński, a strong adherent of Polishness, who devoted his work “Belarus” (1840) to Belarusian peasants, wrote about Jews: “...If you cut his [Jew’s – Z.Š.] foul beard and ridiculous earlocks off, take off all the garments, which differ him from us and create a nation in a nation, to strip off his mask of ignorance and encourage him, although I do not know how, to love his land, which he does not want to accept as his Motherland, although he was brought up here and feeds from it, so, perhaps transformed in this way, with all his unwasted diligence and craftiness in trade he will once become more or less useful to us [Belarusians – Z.Š.]” (Rypiński, 1840: 67–68). According to European (including Polish) Enlightenment tradition, the author of these words understood the concept of “nation” as a political community and not as ethnographic, linguistic and cultural community. He wrote about Jews with certain irritation, as they did not strive to become Belarusians of Polish language and culture, but stuck to their peculiar traditions. Such attitude to Jews (slightly contemptuous, suspicious, ironical at best, but with a hope for assimilation) was generally widespread among local intellectuals of Polish culture, who saw Belarusian lands as a part of the restored Commonwealth of Both Nations.

ADAM MICKIEWICZ’S (ADAM MICKIEVIČ) PROJECT FOR POLAND, BELARUS
AND LITHUANIA BASED ON JEWISH SUPPORT

World famous poet and public figure Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), born on the territory of modern Belarus, in fact shared the views of intellectuals of Polish culture in Belarusian-Lithuanian lands. In his lectures in Paris, he repeatedly raised the Jewish issue. He did this probably because in emigration he considered the lack of support of 1830–1831 uprising by Jews as one of the reasons of its defeat. Bearing this in mind, the great poet created a Jewish legion on the side of Turkey during the war of Russia against Turkey and its European allies (1855–1856). In the struggle for revival of Poland and Litva, Adam Mickiewicz placed high hopes on Jews. He shared these hopes with Armand Levy, the participant of revolutionary movement of 1848 in France. He wrote: “If we are able to rise the Jewish synagogue with the help of our Jewish regiment when we enter Poland, the peasants will have no doubts about our success. Knowing the prudence of Israelis, they will tell themselves: the victory is theirs, since the Jews ally with the rebels. And our regiment will move forward like avalanche from

⁸ The Commonwealth of Polish and Lithuanian-Belarusian political nations.

⁹ Belarusian spelling – Jan Čačot.

¹⁰ Belarusian spelling – Jan Barščeuški.

¹¹ Belarusian spelling – Aliaksandr Rypinski.

synagogue to synagogue, from village to village deep into Poland and Litva, growing bigger and bigger".¹² The citation shows that Adam Mickiewicz did not forget his homeland – *Litva* (modern Belarus and Lithuania). It might seem quite a fantastic plan, but it could bring fantastic results provided that fighters for freedom managed to turn local and foreign Jews into their allies.

THE PROJECT OF KANSTANCIN KALINOŪSKI (KONSTANTY KALINOWSKI)
AND DISREGARD OF JEWS

One of the leaders of the anti-tsar uprising of 1863 in Belarusian lands Kanstancin Kalinoŭski (1838–1864) struggled for restoration of the GDL as a state for Belarusians, which would form a union with Poland. He began the struggle for national rights of Belarusians even earlier than Jewish leaders did, but it was stopped by tsar repressions.¹³ Unfortunately, it remains unclear how this Belarusian leader saw the role of Jews in the uprising and the new GDL. His modest literary and epistolary heritage does not mention this issue. Most likely, Kalinoŭski saw the GDL as a prototype of modern state, where various ethnoses live together and enjoy equal rights, and by doing so they form a single political nation. The Warsaw leadership of the Uprising in its manifesto of 22 January 1863 also declared "*all sons of Poland regardless of belief and gender, origin and estate, free and equal citizens of the country*" (Eisenbach, 1988). Kalinoŭski expressed rather friendly opinion about working Jews. In his "Letters from under the Gibbet", Kalinoŭski wrote that after the landlords joined the rebels, the Russians even tried to register within the Jewish fraternities, but Jews did not accept "*those who drank plenty of Jewish tears and blood*" (Mužyckaja praŭda). But he never mentioned Jews as potential allies. The provincial leadership of the Uprising in Vilnius also did not publish appeals to Jews according to available sources. Apparently, they did not trust the Jews. It is obvious that Kanstancin Kalinoŭski was a more pragmatic politician than the romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz.

Religious prejudices of Christians significantly undermined mutual trust and help of Poles, Belarusians, Lithuanians on one side and Jews on the other side. Jewish communities of the Belarusian-Lithuanian lands still led their isolated lifestyle and did not take part in politics (Stępniewska-Holzer, 2013). The Jews of this region in the 1860s were more conservative than their Polish and Ukrainian fellows (Kuzniajeva, 1923: 14-15). As Jewish elite realised that the Poles lost their former influence in Russia, they took the side of the ruling Russian nation for good and all. It was economically necessary to obey the tsar regime, and this concerned the Jewish merchants and Russian-speaking Jewish intelligentsia (*maskilim*) in the first place.¹⁴ The rebels, on their part, did not offer to Jews any tangible benefits. As a result, noninvolvement of Jews in the political struggle narrowed the social basis of the 1863 Uprising in Belarus.

¹² Cited from Eisenbach, 1988: 450.

¹³ Šybieka, 2012. The idea of national renewal was suggested by Peretz Smolenskin, who published Hashahar magazine in Vienna since 1868. See Hessen, 1993.

¹⁴ Adherents of Jewish Enlightenment, including Russian speakers.

THE PROJECT OF BELARUSIAN NARODNIKS AND POLITICISATION OF JEWS

1881 was the turning point in the life of Russian Jews. The murder of Russian Emperor Alexander II (1818–1881) caused anti-Jewish pogroms. They broke the hopes of Torah people for peaceful coexistence with tsar regime. Nation-wide narodniks movement, where Belarusians and Jews also participated, hoped to transform the Empire into a democratic country through a peasant rebellion. But it failed, because peasants did not support the Russian revolutionaries. A part of Jewish elite detached from the Russian revolutionary movement and established the ground for their own nationalism. Even the *Narodnaya Volya* leadership contributed to this process, because they considered the pogroms as the means of heating revolutionary mood of people (Dejč, 1923: 8).

At the same time, in the 1880s, Belarusian narodniks started to claim the rights of their own nation. Belarusian and Jewish nationalism grew with the decay of narodniks in Russian Empire, but they also were nurtured by the strengthening of Polish nationalism (the end of the 1870s – the beginning of the 1880s), which became the rival and enemy of the Jewish, Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian nationalisms (Klejnman, 2010).

Belarusian leaders, like Jewish ones, sought to separate from the Russian narodniks and create their own organisation. Finally, they united around a Russian-language journal “Homan”, titled “Belarusian social-revolutionary review”. In the 1880s they proposed a project of national autonomy of Belarus¹⁵ in the Russian Empire. Incidentally, the question of national autonomy of small nations of Europe became quite widespread in the last quarter of the 19th century, especially in Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Among the leaders of narodniks organisation “Homan” there were Jews Chaim Ratner and A. Ratner.¹⁶ They joined the Belarusian narodniks as a result of politicisation of Jewish public. Chaim Ratner originated from a merchant family of Škloŭ town in Mahilioŭ province. He organised an illegal typography of the Belarusian narodniks group and was one of its theorists and editor of publications (Alieksandrovič, 1976: 78). Well-known Belarusian social anthropologist Paviel Cieraškovič called the participation of Chaim Ratner in the Belarusian political project a unique phenomenon, because, for instance, the ukrainophile Jews A. Margolin, I. Hermaize, M. Hechter joined the Ukrainian national movement only in the end of the 19th century.

Chaim Ratner, most probably, was the author of these words: “It is in Belarus that the poorest part of Jewish population appeared closest to local people. The Jews not only borrowed some customs and prejudices, but also often struggled together against the Jewish money-bags and landlords...” (Cieraškovič, 2004). Maybe, this Jewish advocate of Belarusian affairs exaggerated the degree of alliance of the poorest parts of both nations against the local landlords. This problem has hardly been studied so far. Though, as Russian ethnographer Nikolaj Jančuk observed, “a Belarusian treated a Jewish merchant badly and

¹⁵ Most probably they considered the whole Belarus, but it also could be only its eastern part. So far no evidence has been found that in 1880s the name “Belarus” encompassed all ethnic territories of Belarusians.

¹⁶ This personality remains a mystery until now.

was nice with a Jewish craftsman".¹⁷ What is most important here, the members of "Homan" through the words of Chaim Ratner demonstrated the understanding of the need for a union of Belarusians not only with Russians, but also with Jews in their struggle for autonomy in the future democratic Russia. However, this issue did not appear in "Homan" (No.1 and No.2 are known) and previous publications of Belarusian narodniks (Publicistika..., 1983).

The repressions of Russian government and anti-Jewish pogroms of the beginning of the 1880s quelled political activity on the western margins of the Empire. Jewish elite accepted the idea that nobody cares about Jews and they have to solve their problems only relying on themselves.¹⁸ They were suspicious of the explicit and imaginary anti-Semitism of the local population.

THE ANTI-SEMITIC PROJECT OF ZACHODNIERUSISM¹⁹

Zachodnierusism idea emerged among the Orthodox intelligentsia of Belarus in the second half of the 19th century. Zachodnierusists saw the future of Belarusian nation in close relations with Russia. They considered Belarusians as an ethnographic group of Russians, Belarusian language as a Russian dialect and Belarus itself as a Russian province. According to Russian historian and the theorist of Zachodnierusism Michail Kajalovič (Mikhail Koyalovich)²⁰ (1828–1891), Jews and Poles formed a ruling alliance in Belarus, which exploited Belarusian peasantry and blocked their way to middle and higher strata of the society (Kajalovič, 2011: 38, 74, 79-80, 124-126). Zachodnierusism ideology, which combined the ideas of narodniks, Slavophilism and anti-Semitism, was quite popular in Belarusian lands. A famous historian from Viciebsk Aliaksej Sapunou (1851–1924) was one of its adherents.²¹ His like-minded country fellow Daraškievič, a teacher by occupation, wrote an article in the *"Viciebsk Province News"*²² newspaper (1903, № 93), where he accused Jews of being the reason for poverty and ignorance of Belarusian peasants. He suggested to spread education and professional knowledge among peasants in order to liberate them from the Jewish exploitation. In response to this article, the editors of the Jewish newspaper *"Voskhod"* wrote that *"what Jews desire most is the increase of intellectual capabilities of the "indigenous population" (speaking not only about Belarusians)"* (Voschod, 1903: 15-16).

LITHUANIAN PROJECT ON BEHALF OF BELARUSIANS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERACTION WITH JEWS

The Lithuanian Social Democratic Organisation (since 1895 a party), created in 1893, united the proponents of social democracy in Lithuanian and partly

¹⁷ Cited from Cieraškovič, 2004.

¹⁸ These views Leon Pinsker justified in a very popular book *"Auto-Emancipation"* (1882). See Ettinger, 1993: 264-265.

¹⁹ From Belarusian *"West Russianism"*; Russian variant – Zapadnorusism.

²⁰ In Russian – Михаил Коялович.

²¹ In 1911 in State Duma he voted against abolition of the Jewish Pale (Jevrejskij..., 1911: 5).

²² In Russian – *"Витебские губернские ведомости"*.

Belarusian lands. The activists of this party (hereafter LSDP) spoke Polish language and aimed to create an independent democratic republic, which would embrace Lithuania, Poland and other provinces (potentially also Belarus – Z.Ś.) as a voluntary federation. Every province should have autonomy and self-government. The activists of Lithuania and Belarus proposed the principle of federation and autonomy for the creation of future state even earlier than Austrian social democrats. The leaders of LSDP (Andrius Domaševičius, Jokūbas Daumantas, Konradas Kaspieravičius and others) brought forward political claims which were acceptable for Belarusians.

Already in 1894, LSDP and Jewish social democrats established working contacts. At that time Jewish leaders advanced only economic claims and focused on the alliance with the Russian proletariat. During the discussions LSDP activists tried to persuade their colleagues that Jews would feel better in the federational republic than in the “constitutional” Russia, but it was vain. However, the disagreements did not prevent Jewish and Christian²³ workers from joint May-Day rallies, meetings and strikes in the second half of the 1890s (Archive of the Center...: 25-26, 62, 137, 195-196; Koūkiel, 2009).

FRAGILITY OF BELARUSIAN IDEA AND INDIFFERENCE OF JEWS

The facts of direct involvement of Jews in the political consolidation of Belarusian movement in the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century have not been found in the documents. The weakness of Belarusian movement did not attract even the Jewish social democratic internationalists.

The leaders of the Jewish Party of Proletarian Socialism (The Bund) traditionally preferred to support the Russian proletariat. In national question they advocated the integrity of the Russian state and did not recognise the need of non-Russian proletariat to struggle for liberation from the Russian oppression, and even for national autonomy (Archive of the Center...: 175). The international Jewish movement, Zionism, which was organised at the Basel Congress (1897), directed the Jewish nationalists towards the creation of their own state in Palestine. This extraordinary project did not satisfy Belarusian patriots at all.

Usually, Belarusian historians note the influence of Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian or Russian political leaders on Belarusian movement in the beginning of the 20th century. The Jewish impact is never mentioned. But it would be strange to fully exclude the Jewish factor, because Jews and Belarusians lived side by side. In the report to the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (1903) the Bund delegates presented their work among Christians: printing of leaflets in Russian language, and joint demonstrations and strikes (Bund, 2010: 345, 347, 350). Organisational work and propaganda of the Bund in the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century certainly deterred the economic pressure on Belarusian workers as well, undermining their servile psychology.²⁴

Influenced by Zionist movement, the Bund corrected its programme in 1901–1902. It recognised Jews as a nation and put forward a claim for the

²³ The name of Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians in the Jewish circles.

²⁴ For details see Savicki, 1997.

rights of Jews for national autonomy in the Russian Empire (Daniel-ben-Samuel, 1906: 66-77). The Bund leadership did not accept the idea of migration of Jews to Palestine and considered it unfeasible. They stated that Jews had their Motherland at the place where they currently lived, and there they should fight for their social and national rights (London). Zionists, influenced by the Bund, also started to admit the need for improvement of the conditions of Jewish life in diaspora. This was discussed at the second congress of Russian Zionists in Minsk (1902) (Chlenov, 1906: 191-192). Gradually emerging conditions encouraged the Jewish revolutionaries to join the Belarusian movement.

According to the memoirs of Zionist activist from Homiel Š. Šnejfal, Homiel city significantly influenced not only Jewish, but also Belarusian youth, which looked for new ways. In Homiel, they became "Jewish" and discovered new feelings (Šnejfal, 1917). The Jewish influence penetrated in the thick of peasantry through the system of Jewish towns lying across the country. Taking examples from Jews and Lithuanians, a part of Belarusian youth actively studied their nation in the 1890s. Several educational circles of gymnasium and university students existed in Minsk, Saint Petersburg and Moscow.

EMERGENCE OF THE NATIONAL PROJECT OF THE BELARUSIAN SOCIALIST HRAMADA AND BELARUSIAN DECLARATION OF JEWISH RIGHTS

Year 1903 occupies a special place in the history of Belarusian movement. That year a group of founders created the first Belarusian political party – the Belarusian Revolutionary Hramada,²⁵ later in 1904 or 1905 renamed as the Belarusian Socialist Hramada (hereafter the BSH). The party aimed to fight for political autonomy of Belarus in the Russian Empire. The party programme declared equal rights for all nations which lived on Belarusian territory.²⁶

The BSH leaders sought contacts with Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Ukrainian social democratic parties (Luckievič, 2003: 116), but were suspicious of the Jewish social democracy. The Jewish party leaders on their part did not notice the BSH leaders, because the party was too small. Its programme also presented no interest to Jews.

While the BSH demanded political autonomy for the Belarusian land in the Russian Empire, the Bund could accept only cultural autonomy on the whole territory of the Empire, because the Jews had no particular territory where they densely lived. Jewish Marxists still dreamt of the global socialist revolution and hoped that Jews would receive equal rights with other nations everywhere. The cooperation of the BSH and the Bund was complicated by the difference in their social basis. The former mostly relied upon Belarusian peasants, while the latter – on the Jewish workers in urban areas. The language barrier also played its role. According to the BSH political programme, it was closer to the Polish Socialist Party and the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries than to the Bund, let alone the Zionist parties.

²⁵ Hramada (Belarusian) – a community.

²⁶ Cited from Turuk, 1921: 86. Poles declared equal rights for Jews in 1862, Lithuanians in 1894, Russian government in 1917 and Ukrainians only on 9 January 1918 (Rassvet, 1918). But these rights were never fully implemented.

Belarusian-Jewish relations were darkened by the anti-Jewish pogroms, which spread over the cities and towns of Eastern Belarus in 1903–1904. Belarusians lacked the understanding of their national interests, and the Russian parties used them as an instrument of politics. The Black Hundred monarchists urged Belarusian peasants to be Russian patriots and eliminate Jews in order to save the tsar and Russia. In Homiel pogrom of September 1903, and later in the other pogroms, some Belarusians raided the Jews and others defended them (Karasioŭ and Hlušakoŭ, 2001: 179).

Anti-Jewish pogroms and anti-Semitic propaganda increased the danger of Russification of Belarusian peasants and made the fight for awakening of their national identity more urgent. Because of high level of poverty in Belarus, the BSH leadership had to combine in their political programme social and national claims, the ideas of socialism and nationalism, as did Austrian social democrats as well as local Zionist leaders. A socialist Zionist movement emerged from the depths of Zionism in 1904. Its leaders tried to combine Zionism with labour movement and generally with socialism (Tamaševič, 2003: 13). According to a widespread opinion of that time, only socialism could make the nations flourish.

CONCLUSIONS

From the very birth of Belarusian idea the struggle of Jews for their identity and rights was a fine example for Belarusian leaders.

The Uniate project of national awakening of Belarus in the 1820s became a failed attempt to rely on the new master of Belarusian lands – tsar regime of the Russian Empire.

The nobility project, or symbolically saying, the project of Adam Mickiewicz,²⁷ as well as peasant project of Kanstancin Kalinoŭski pushed Belarusians into the union with Polish nation. These projects provided no place for Jews. Jewish neutrality in fact meant the support of tsar government. Belarusian leaders were unable to make Jews their allies and engage them in political struggle. Among the Belarus descendants, only Adam Mickiewicz in the 19th century properly estimated the significance of Jews for the national liberation of the nations of former Commonwealth of Both Nations.

In the second half of the 19th century, local political elite reoriented from Poland to Russia. Jews completed their alliance with Russia in the 1860s, and Belarusians did it later in the 1880s. The reasons for such turn were the futility of anti-tsar rebellions, shift of the economic interests to the east because of building of railroads, and voluntary but in fact compulsory integration into the Russian culture.

Narodniks (“Homan”) and social democratic (the BSH) national projects connected Belarusian future with Russia and focused on resolving social problems. Belarusian political leaders, like Jewish ones, became ardent socialists. They were socialists above all and their nationalism was only secondary. This circumstance enhanced the convergence of positions of the BSH leaders and the Bund in the beginning of the 20th century. Jewish social democrats in a sense advocated social interests of Belarusian workers.

²⁷ As Belarusian philosopher Valiancin Akudovič calls it. See Akudovič, 2007.

The leaders of Belarusian movement began to connect the fight against tsar regime with the necessity to unite with all nations of Russia, including Jews, but they did not regard Jews as the most important allies. Sometimes political documents of the BSH did not even mention Jews. In addition, not all Jewish leaders were easy to deal with. Unlike Belarusian intelligentsia, Jews created national Zionist project, which was free from socialist ideology and aimed to create a Jewish state, independent from Russia. Strategic goals of Belarusian and Jewish movements were different. Zionists could not claim for Belarusian lands on the ground of existing statehood or domination of Jewish population there. National projects, which could connect the future of Jews with Belarus, could not appear in the 19th century. Likewise, in the beginning of the 20th century Belarusian movement could not attract the Jewish leaders. A direct national cooperation did not happen. Nevertheless, the Jewish movement indirectly influenced Belarusian national movement.

Finally, Belarusians and Jews, starting from the 1880s, were more and more doomed to ally in the fight against tsar regime and for democratisation of Russia. Here, their tactical interests agreed, as did interests of other oppressed nations of the Russian Empire. In this sense, the dream of Adam Mickiewicz partly came true.

Aspiration for free national life, which obviously appeared at the turn of the centuries, later made Belarusians and Jews the active participants of the revolutions of 1905–1907 and 1917.

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