The Struggle between Confessional and Nationalist Groups for the Chełm–Podlasian Region: The 1905 Decree of Tolerance and Former Uniates

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Introduction

The Eastern territories of the early modern Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth were called Ruthenia (Ruś), which had been domains of the Kyivan Rus and its successors (principalities of Ruś), therefore, traditional inhabitants of Ruthenian lands were Orthodox Christians. After Polish influences began overwhelming Ruthenian lands, local elites gradually acclimated to the new environment, accepting Polish language and Western Christianity as their own. In contrast to the local elites, who became Polonized and Catholicized, Ruthenian non-elites remained Orthodox. Although the Union of Brest (1595–96) made majority of Ruthenian population Eastern Catholic (Uniate), it secured them separate (from Roman Catholic) hierarchy and parishes based on Eastern tradition, therefore, did not Polonize them. As a consequence, a situation peculiar to Ruthenia, where Polish nobility (including Polonized nobility of Ruthenian origin) ruled over Ruthenian peasants, was made up.

After the partitions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, throughout the nineteenth century, Ruthenian lands were under the rules of the Russian Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, where the formation of Ukrainian or Belorussian nations started. However, many of the Ruthenian peasants had not yet been assimilated to any nationality until the twentieth century. They were no one but “tutejsi” (or autochtons) of the
lands, dependent on their Polish lords even after the Emancipation, whereas the Russian Empire always treated them as Polonized branches of “Russian” nation and continued the efforts to de-Polonize them.

This chapter features these Ruthenians and the competition over them between the Polish and Russian elites. The focus of the discussion is the religious issue, especially the Decree of Tolerance (1905), and the Chełm question, the most visible consequence of the Decree.

**Former Uniates in the Former Territories of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth**

When the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was formally dissolved in 1795, the Uniate population was unevenly distributed and more heavily concentrated in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania than in the Kingdom of Poland. Earlier research indicates that during the first half of the nineteenth century, Uniate peasants were already conscious of their confessional identity as Catholic, although they were still very far from any form of nation-building. In 1838, on the eve of the Union of Polotsk (the “reunion” of the Uniate Church and the Russian Orthodox Church), more than one hundred Uniate priests petitioned Nicholas I for permission to become Roman Catholic and not Orthodox if the Uniate Church was to be abolished.

Not all Uniates expressed such resistance to the empire’s policy of absorbing them into the Russian Orthodox Church. Resistance was peculiar to those Uniates living in the Western provinces concerned with the Union of Polotsk, and especially those in Congress Poland, where the Uniate diocese of Chełm remained active until 1875. Uniates in Right-Bank Ukraine, where the policy to reunite them with the Orthodox Church had already been initiated during the reign of Catherine II, converted rather smoothly to Orthodoxy. The main reason for this was the lack of dominance of the Uniate Church among local Little Russians there.

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2. The struggle between the Uniate and the Orthodox church was seesawing in the Ukrainian lands. Barbara
Before the Union of Polotsk, Uniates more or less evaded Orthodox Mass and sacraments. Conscious of their own confessional identity, they considered Orthodox believers as “other” and doctrinally schismatic. Those who moved to the Orthodox Church were called “Moskals” by those who did not. Smaragd Kryżanowski, the Orthodox Bishop of Polotsk and Vitebsk, mentioned conflicts between local Uniates and Orthodox believers in his letters. They called each other names such as “Moskals,” “apostate,” or “Polish fools."3 Since the locals had no distinct national identity, they were identified only by their religious association and were seen as Catholic or Orthodox. Both “Muscovite” and “Polish” were just alternative names for Catholic and Orthodox confessional identities.

Even before the Union of Polotsk, the Russian government made local Uniate priests celebrate Mass and preach in their local (Ruthenian) language instead of Polish in order to de-Polonize these regions. This was rational because not all locals understood Polish, and the switch from Polish to Ruthenian was accepted by locals. Notwithstanding this development, a segment of Ruthenian Uniates changed their rite and became Roman Catholic after the Union of Polotsk, while the majority became Orthodox.4

Yet those Orthodox priests who had previously been Uniate priests faced difficulties in fulfilling their functions after 1839. Many of them had never been taught how to conduct Mass in Old Church Slavonic. Parishioners were even less proficient in Old Church Slavonic, although they did not understand Polish either. Pavel Ignatiev, the governor of Vitebsk, admitted that the integration of former Uniates to Orthodoxy was not going well.5 After the “reunification” of Uniates with the Russian Orthodox Church, they were no longer Uniate, but neither were they strictly Orthodox. Having maintained Uniate-like characteristics in their culture, they

Skinner, The Western Front of the Eastern Church: Uniate and Orthodox Conflict in 18th-century Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

3 Filipowa, “Kościół unicki,” 201.
4 Ibid., 202. As a consequence of this union, around 1,500,000 people converted to Orthodoxy. Paul W. Werth, The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79.
became quasi-Orthodox. Some researchers emphasize that this hybrid character of autochthonous peasants became one of the fundamental elements of future Belorussian identity.6

Although the attempts to make former Uniates fully Orthodox or Russify them were not very successful, the Russian Empire did succeed in partly de-Polonizing them. In the mid-nineteenth century, Ruthenian peasants seemed to distance themselves from their Polish lords. Further, the Poles failed to mobilize Ruthenian peasants during the January Uprising (1863–64), though there were exceptions, for example, in Congress Poland.7

The Reality of “Nominally” Orthodox Former Uniates

Until the suppression of the January Uprising, the situation of Congress Poland had been different from that of other former Polish–Lithuanian territories. It enjoyed comparative autonomy, and the Uniate diocese of Chełm was the only place in the empire where Uniates could legally practice their religion. The autonomous status of the kingdom came to an end with the suppression of the January Uprising. It was then renamed Vistula Land, and the diocese of Chełm, which included its approximately 260,000 parishioners, was dissolved and merged into the Russian Orthodox Church in 1875.8 The Russian Empire leveraged Orthodox immigrants from Galicia—who were Russophiles and hostile to the growth of Polesnism among Ruthenians—to establish Russian Orthodoxy and de-Polenize the Ruthenian lands of former Congress Poland, that is, the Chełm–Podlasian regions.9

After 1875, Uniates of the Chełm diocese who longed to join Roman Catholic Church but were rejected became formally (but nominally) Or-

8 According to the calculation by Kolbuk, the number of parishioners of the whole diocese numbered to a total of 260,156 in 1874. Witold Kolbuk, Duchowieństwo unickie w Królestwie Polskim 1835–1875 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL, 1992), 15.
9 Włodzimierz Osadczy, Święta Ruś: Rozwój i oddziaływanie idei prawosławia w Galicji (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2007), 204–34.
Orthodox. While contact between Roman Catholics and former Uniates was forbidden in the empire after the January Uprising, former Uniates were dependent on Catholic priests. Many of the former Uniates of Congress Poland registered in Orthodox parish records boycotted Orthodox services and sacraments and secretly availed themselves of various Catholic services and sacraments performed by Catholic priests. It is ironic that in specific cases, the attempt to de-Polonize Ruthenian peoples produced the opposite result.

After 1875, former Uniates of former Congress Poland not only became more dependent on local Roman Catholic priests but also grew their ties with the Galician Uniate Church. Many Podlasian couples avoided Orthodox weddings and held their marriage ceremonies in Galicia, where the Uniate Church still functioned. This became somewhat fashionable, and such marriages were called “Cracovian marriages.” Since “Cracovian marriages” were considered illegitimate in the Russian Empire, couples who had “Cracovian marriages” were continuously pressured to marry in the Orthodox Church, and their children were treated as illegitimate. Moreover, couples who married in Galicia could be fined for illegally crossing the border. Another popular custom among former Uniates was “burial without a priest.” When former Uniates did not want an Orthodox priest to supervise their funerals and they could not find a Catholic priest, they buried the dead by themselves. This custom was formally prohibited in the former Congress lands in 1882, and violators were fined.


Those who were nominally Orthodox but did not follow the Orthodox Church were called “recalcitrants” (“oporni” in Polish). There has been much discussion about how many former Uniates still remained attached to Catholicism. According to data emanating from the Orthodox side (shared by Bishop Evlogii Georgievsky), about 100,000 former Uniates were under the influence of Poles, including both Catholic and secular nationalists.\(^\text{14}\) Another set of data from an investigation conducted by the Holy Synod in 1899 revealed the number of “recalcitrants” to be 81,246 (nearly 18 percent of former Uniates).\(^\text{15}\) The governor of Siedlce reported that about 20,000 of 136,215 “Russians” in his province emphatically claimed to be Catholic.\(^\text{16}\) Until 1905, various punishments (penalties or banishment) were meted out to “recalcitrants” for working on Orthodox holidays, burying their dead in Catholic cemeteries, and so on. Occasionally, they were even deported to the deep interior of Russia proper.\(^\text{17}\)

**The Decree of Tolerance (1905) and Mass Conversion in Former Territories of the Commonwealth**

The Decree of Tolerance, which was the primary issue in the religious politics during the twilight years of the Russian Empire, must be studied in the broad context of the Eurasian Empire as has been done by Paul Werth.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, the status and treatment of former Uniates was comparable to that of other religious groups in the empire who had been forced into Orthodoxy and were also the beneficiaries of the Decree of Tolerance. Yet, as part of the “Russian nation,” former Uniates could not be put placed in the same category as various groups of “foreign” faiths. In this sense, former Uniates were very similar to the Old Believers, who were the primary beneficiaries of the Decree.

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 162.
\(^\text{17}\) Kołbuk, “Kwestia chełmska,” 144.
\(^\text{18}\) Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths*. 

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The background of former Uniates was specific to them: the historical encounter of Ruthenianness (later, Russianness) and Polishness in their regions. As nationalism flowered, the issues of confessional identity could not remain separate from that of nationality.

Aleksander Łotocki (Oleksandr Lototskyi), a contemporary Ukrainian politician, analyzed the motives behind the conversion and the influence of conversion on the formation of the national identity of Podlasian Ruthenians. Karol Dębiński analyzed the list of converted people compiled by the Catholic Church, which was called the Liber Conversorum. Studies on former Uniates by contemporaries not only prefigured research on a group which requires special attention in regard to the effect of the Decree in the Polish–Russian borderlands, but are also valuable as primary sources for researchers of later generations.

Since that time, in Polish historiography there is an accumulation of research into the consequence of the Decree of Tolerance among former Uniate population. This research has established new facts and clarified many points regarding, for instance, the situation of the former Uniates before and after the Decree, and how the mass conversion to Catholicism affected their identity. Activities of external groups (Catholic Poles, Polish nationalists, Orthodox clergy, Russian officials and so on) have been studied as important agents affecting former Uniates, as the latter rarely left their own voice in the historical record. The question of identification of for-

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19 Oleksandr Lototskyi (published under pseudonym, Blousenko), Kholmska sprava (Kiev: Vik, 1909).
22 Tadeusz Krawczak researched the reactionary activities of the Orthodox and Russian nationalistic camp after 1905. Tadeusz Krawczak, Kształtowanie świadomości narodowej wsi podlaskich w latach 1896–1918 (Biała Podlaska: Podlaskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne, 1982). Witold Kolbuk, who researched Orthodox–Russian interference with the practice of the Decree, concluded that the Decree of Tolerance was strictly for appearances, and neither the tsar nor the Orthodox Church allowed former Uniates to leave “the Russian world.” Witold Kolbuk, “Skutki carskiego ukazu tolerancyjnego z 1905 roku na ziemi chełmsko-podlaskiej,” Roczniki humanistyczne XLI–XLVI, no. 7 (1997): 239–49. Józef Łupiński pointed out the discord in the Orthodox camp due to the lack of consensus between the tsar,
former Uniates, which is connected with the situations around the Decree and the conversions as their choices, and the separation of the eastern borderland of the Congress Kingdom of Poland (the Chełm–Podlasian region) as a consequence of the loss of equilibrium caused by the mass conversion of former Uniates to Catholicism have also aroused researchers’ interests.23

The work of these historians reveal much about the Chełm–Podlasian region at a time of great change in the religious policy of the Russian Empire, and have helped explain the role of religious issues in the political struggles between the Russian Empire and Polish nationalists in regard to the borderland. But less attention has been paid to the potential for a Uniate revival.

In this study, based mainly on Polish sources, I am going to retrace the transformation process of the autochthonous identity into a modern nationality by analyzing the outcomes of the Decree of Tolerance and reactions and counteractions from competing actors in the region. My special attention will be directed to examining the possibility of a Uniate revival, which could provide autochthonous Ruthenians other options than becoming Polonized. By following developments before and after the Decree, the links between religious and nationality issues and the conflicts involving not only the Russian Empire and Poland, but also the Ukrainian nation-building program become clear.

Mass conversion to Roman Catholicism and the Chełm question are the most significant issues that emerged from the Decree of Tolerance, and while this chapter touches on these, many researchers have also addressed


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them. But another important and no less curious question has received decidedly less attention: Why did a Uniate revival not occur? 24 This chapter explores this question as well.

The Decree of Tolerance, April 17/30, 1905

When the Russian Empire realized reforms and liberation were necessary after its defeat in the Russo–Japanese war, it quickly set about changing the religious policy. On February 11/24, 1905, the bill that later became the draft of the Decree of Tolerance was introduced by the Committee of Ministers and confirmed by Nicholas II. Further, on April 17/30, 1905, “The Decree confirming the beginning of the Tolerance,” or the so-called Decree of Tolerance was issued by the tsar. 25 This decree enabled the subjects of the tsar to convert from Orthodoxy to other Christian faiths. Converting from Orthodoxy to other religions, which was considered apostasy, had been formally prohibited and designated as a punishable offense under the penal code of the Russian Empire since 1847.

The Decree contained seventeen articles. The main intended beneficiaries of this decree were the Old Believers, to whom seven articles (5–11) of the Decree were dedicated. The first, second, and fourth articles covered all Christian religions. In addition to those three articles, the thirteenth article, which focused on the places of worship for all Christian denominations, and the fourteenth, which focused on religious education (catechism, above all), applied to former Uniates. The third article, concerning nominally Orthodox people who actually followed the religion of their ancestors, was intended for non-Christian peoples, and therefore, did not apply to former Uniates. 26

26 Ibid., 257.
**Mass Conversion**

The Decree of Tolerance did not permit the foundation of new religious groups, and it only allowed tsarist subjects to select one from the many existing groups. Therefore, former Uniates, who had nowhere to return to, expressed their affiliation with Catholicism by converting to the Roman Catholic Church.

Following the Decree, there were large-scale conversions from Orthodoxy to Catholicism. Werth has estimated that 252,571 people converted to Catholicism between 1905 and 1915 (214,949 out of them converted between 1905 and 1906) in the whole Empire. Many conversions were recorded in the provinces of Vil’na and Grodna (approximately 62,000 cases between 1905 and 1908). Eastern Belorussian lands recorded smaller numbers (4,000 in the province of Vitebsk, for example), while in Western Belorussia, where a large population of “recalcitrants” lived, far more conversions were recorded.

There were discussions on the actual number of conversions. According to the data documented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, approximately 170,000 people converted from Orthodoxy to the Roman Catholic Church between 1905 and 1909 across the whole of Congress Poland, and out of them, 150,000 were from the Chełm–Podlasian region. The tsar’s government officially estimated smaller numbers (100,000 cases), while the Poles overestimated the number as closer to 200,000. Today, many researchers tend to use the data documented by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, although Łupiński suggests the possibility of an intentional underestimation of the number of cases by the Ministry.

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27 His calculation was based on the records of the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Faiths. Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths*, 210.
29 The Chełm–Podlasian region is defined as the Chełm region together with the Southern part of the Podlasian region, which corresponds to the eastern halves of the provinces of Lublin and Siedlce. Ninety-five percent of such conversions occurred in 1905. These numbers are supported by the records of the Orthodox Church.
There is no doubt that the Ruthenians of the former Congress Poland had the highest rate of conversions. According to Dębiński, the Catholic population, which was 32,769 in 1904, increased to 90,349 in 1906 in eight selected parishes in the province of Siedlce. The rate of increase was almost 280 percent. Many people converted to Catholicism in the province of Lublin, too, although the rate of conversion was much lower than in the province of Siedlce. In the Chełm–Podlasian region, the Roman Catholic Church was a minority until the twentieth century. The ratio of Catholic and Orthodox followers was approximately 1 to 4.5 until 1905, when the numbers were reversed. Between 1905 and 1909, more than 95 percent of those who left Orthodoxy wished to become Roman Catholic.

The Catholic Church’s Attitude to Large-Scale Conversion

Because Uniate Ruthenian peasants of former Commonwealth territories had been dependent on local lords and intellectuals, or government officials, who were usually Roman Catholic or Orthodox, they were inevitably affected by activities of those actors after the Decree. Further, as Roman Catholics of the “Historical Poland” became increasingly conscious of their Polish nationality, their attempts to recover their exclusive hegemony over Ruthenian peasants were assisted by the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church welcomed conversions of former Uniates. Catholic priests actively traveled around former Uniate regions and encouraged people to join the Catholic Church. Kazimierz Franciszek Jaczewski, the Bishop of Lublin, gave instructions to Catholic parish priests to register all those who wished to leave Orthodoxy and “come back” to the Catho-

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32 In the province of Siedlce, there were nine parishes (dekanaty) total. The parish of Garwolin is excluded from consideration by Dębiński because it was exceptional in the sense that more than 95 percent of the population was Polish and Jewish, and Ruthenians were a very small minority.
33 Cabaj, “Unici Podlascy,” 164.
34 According to a brochure published in 1918, the Catholic population grew by 109 percent (from 184,134 to 201,052) in the sample districts of Lublin. M. T. (Maria Tańska) (oprac.), Sprawa chełmska (Warsaw: Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1918), 19.
Since large numbers of former Uniates were rushing to local Catholic priests, the priests wanted the procedure for accepting them to be as quick and easy as possible.

In July 1905, Bishop Jaczewski asked Konstantin Pobednostsev, the chief procurator of the Holy Synod, for directions on how the Catholic Church should deal with former Uniates. In August 1905, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, pressured by the Orthodox Church, provided additional clarification of the Decree, and on August 20, 1905, the Department of Foreign Confessions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced the concrete conditions and procedures for leaving Orthodoxy:

Those who wish to leave Orthodoxy must first inform the local governor about their decision, and then inform the Orthodox bishop. An Orthodox parish priest has to confirm a person’s desire to leave Orthodoxy. If the person cannot be persuaded by the Orthodox priest to remain in Orthodoxy, he/she would inform the local governor of his/her desire to convert. The local governor has to report this to the Orthodox bishop, then to the hierarch of the church to which this person wants to belong. The Orthodox bishop sends this person the agreement within a month, and the governor gives the hierarch of the designated church the permission to accept him/her. The local curia discusses the matter and informs the province’s chancellery whether the person is acceptable or not. If the person is considered to be acceptable, the local curia has an obligation to report this to the governor and the Orthodox Church. The governor then informs the Orthodox parish about the conversion.

The purpose of such complicated procedures was to make conversions from Orthodoxy to Catholicism long and arduous. It was the Holy Synod’s way of resisting the Decree of Tolerance. Twice in 1907, Bishop Jaczewski made official complaints about these complicated procedures. However,

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37 Ibid., 195; Cabaj, "Unici Podlascy," 167.
the seemingly complicated procedures did not discourage people from becoming Catholic because Catholic priests in practice accepted even those who had not completed the procedure for leaving Orthodoxy. In December 1906, the Catholic Church in Poland summoned a special synod in Warsaw to discuss the Decree. The leading figure at the synod was Bishop Jaczewski. The synod stated the Catholic hierarchs’ intention of accepting as many applicants as possible into the Catholic Church. In 1908, the Ministry of Internal Affairs intervened and decided to treat as Orthodox those people who had moved to the Catholic Church without following proper procedures to leave Orthodoxy. Despite the repeated appeals by Jaczewski and other Catholic figures, and the discussions by the Polish Circle (Kolo Polskie) at the State Duma, the procedures for leaving Orthodoxy were not made easier.38

Not all Catholic priests took pains to accept former Uniates unconditionally. Some priests rejected them upon finding that they had not followed the legitimate procedures to leave Orthodoxy. Other priests demanded bribes for accepting former Uniates (although Jaczewski had instructed them not to accept anything from converts).39

Since the Decree of Tolerance was not particularly detailed and did not pay special attention to former Uniates, many concrete problems remained, and it took some time to resolve them. The most peculiar problem among former Uniates was the issue of “Cracovian marriage.” As already mentioned earlier, “Cracovian marriage” was invalid in Russia, and children from such unions were considered illegitimate. In 1907, the Council of Ministers made the decision to allow civil courts to legitimize such marriages, as well as the children born in them. The problem of age was also unresolved. The Decree guaranteed the freedom to choose faiths to adults only, while the Orthodox and Catholic churches had different stan-

39 Ibid., s.198. Bribes were also offered to local officials to speed up the process. According to Polish sources, the commission located in Warsaw, which had jurisdiction over conversion cases, received approximately two million rubles in bribes from those who desired to convert from Orthodoxy to Catholicism. Orthodox sources confirm this. Orthodox Bishop Evlogii complained that officials received bribes and released former Uniates from the Orthodox Church too easily. Kolbuk, “Skutki carskiego ukazu,” 241.
dards concerning legal age. In the Orthodox Church, legal age was twenty-one years old, while in the Catholic Church, it was fourteen. In 1910, the Department of Foreign Confessions decided that for the purposes of the Decree of Tolerance, the legal age should follow the Orthodox standard of twenty-one.40

The stubbornness of “the recalcitrants” had always attracted local Roman Catholics. Additionally, Poles’ compassion for the miseries of the former Uniates in the Chełm–Podlasian region was anchored in their resentments over the suppression of the 1863–1864 Uprising. Roman Catholics tried to attract former Uniates to their side. To this end, their activities aimed at former Uniates included running such organizations as the Collegium Secretum, which was established in 1896 in Congress Poland and published underground periodicals for former Uniates, or as the Society for Defending Uniates (Towarzystwo Opieki nad Unitami), which was established in 1903 in Cracow and provided former Uniates with education in the Polish language.41 In 1904, the Society drew up a petition to the Pope (Pius X) calling on him to recognize former Uniates as Catholic, and 56,500 former Uniates signed it.42 Another organization called Catholic Association (Związek Katolicki), established in 1907 in Congress Poland conducted critical activities against not only the Orthodox Church, but also the Mariavite Church which exercised growing influence among Poles in the Russian Empire.43

The interest of Poles in Ruthenian matters was not limited to the religious sphere. Organizations like the Society for Defending Uniates and the Catholic Association contributed significantly to making many Ruthe-

41 Sawa remarks that the initial activities of the Society for defending Uniates, which was connected to the Polish League (Liga Polska), later renamed as “the National League” (Liga Narodowa), can be traced back to 1897. Blobaum, “Toleration and Ethno-Religious Strife,” 116; Sawa, “Unici chelmsko-podlascy,” 74.
43 Having been excommunicated from the Catholic Church since 1906, the Mariavite Church was criticized by mainstream Catholic Poles. Blobaum, “Toleration and Ethno-Religious Strife,” 111. Kolbuk points out that the Holy Synod even supported the Mariavite Church with the hopes of making it strong enough to rival the Catholic Church, which was becoming more and more influential over former Uniates due to the strong leadership of the Bishop Jaczewski. Kolbuk, “Skutki carskiego ukazu,” 142, 145; Kolbuk, “Kwestia chelmska,” 149, 152.
nians, especially in the Chełm–Podlasian region, pro-Polish. Cabaj points out that Polish secular nationalist activists joined the open-air Mass organized by the Society for Former Uniates.\(^{44}\) In addition to the schools run by religious-based organizations, Polish political parties also provided former Uniates with Polish-language education in several institutions, for example, the Polish Motherland School (Polska Maciez Szkolna) run by National Democrats (Endecja) and even the Light (Swiatlo) run by essentially anti-clerical Socialists. They were forced to move their activities underground by the government at the turn of 1907.\(^{45}\)

Against the background of fierce struggle with Ukrainian nationalists in Galicia, Poles were enthusiastically sought to facilitate the entry of Podlasian Ruthenians into their camp. Many contemporary publications in Galicia highlighted Poles’ sympathy toward former Uniate Podlasians.\(^{46}\) Besides working with these former Uniate Podlasians, Polish activists also tried to awaken the Poles’ interest in them.\(^{47}\)

### The Counteractions of the Orthodox/Russian Camp

Łupiński pointed out that the decree was embarrassing for the Russian Orthodox Church. Pobednostsev, the procurator of the Holy Synod, had not been consulted during the preparation process of the Decree and stood categorically against it. Orthodox priests were uneasy about the large-scale conversions and were afraid of the collapse of Orthodox parishes in the former Congress Poland. In May 1905, Ieronim, the Orthodox archbishop of Chełm and Warsaw, warned about the possibility of persecutions of

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\(^{44}\) Cabaj, “Unici Podlascy,” 167.


\(^{46}\) An example of such publications seeking to inform Poles about former Uniates was Hospody Pomiłuj na Podlasiu: Kronika 33 lat prześladowania unii przez naocznego świadka, which was published in Cracow, 1908.

\(^{47}\) Z ziemi chełmskiej by Władysław Reymont (1909) and several works by Stefan Żeromski were inspired by the tragic history of Belorussian Uniates. Makoto Hayasaka, Belarus: Kyokai-ryoiki no rekishigaku (Tokyo: Sairyu-sha, 2013): 226–34.
Orthodox believers in that region, and the local governors reported the volatile situation in the Chełm–Podlasian region to the governor-general of Warsaw. In fact, even stones were thrown at some Orthodox priests (probably by former Uniates). Since the Decree of Tolerance did not allow the conversion of Orthodox churches to Catholic churches, the former became vacant in those parishes where the majority of parishioners had converted to Catholicism. Further, government officials, at the request of the Orthodox Bishop Evlogii, did not turn over these churches to Catholics.48

On realizing that their position was in danger in the westernmost regions of the empire, the Orthodox camp reacted quickly. The figure leading the Orthodox side in its reaction to the crisis was the Bishop of Chełm, Evlogii Georgievskii. In the sense that he was hard-working and extremely charismatic, he was the exact counterpart of the Catholic Jaczewski. He actively made his rounds in the diocese and called on Orthodox followers to adhere to the Orthodox faith. He also pressured the Holy Synod (Pobednostsev), and even the tsar, to lend more support to Orthodox people in the Congress Poland.49

To compete with the Catholic and Polish influences, the Orthodox camp had already founded organizations aimed to shield Ruthenians from Polish influence in 1905. The Confraternity of the Holy Mother in Chełm was one such organization. It engaged in anti-Polish propaganda and warned locals not to switch to the Catholic side. In addition, it conducted a campaign to vilify the Commonwealth as a suppressor of Ruthenians and to exalt the tsars as protectors. Another organization, the Confraternity for the Protection of Ruthenians from Poles and Catholic Priests, was established specifically to counter the Catholics’ the Society for Defending Uniates. The journal *Kholmskii narodnyi listok* (1906–08) recorded a number of criticisms against Polish-Catholics by the Russian-Orthodox side.50

Comparing the activities of such Russian organizations with their Polish counterparts, Cabaj noted some commonalities: they both referred to history, although their interpretations of the history of Ruthenian lands

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50 Kołbuk, “Kwestia chełmska,” 150.
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greatly differed. The Catholic side emphasized the persecution of Ruthenian Uniates by the Russian Empire, while the Orthodox side emphasized the partition of the Commonwealth as God’s punishment for torturing Ruthenian Orthodox people.51

In the westernmost territories of the empire, the Poles’ focus on former Uniates, their anti-imperial, anti-Orthodox activities, and the rapid increase in their population as a consequence of the large-scale conversions to Roman Catholicism led to a reaction not only from the Orthodox Church but also from the imperial government. To prevent former Uniate Podlasians from leaning toward Catholics and Poles, a discriminative policy against non-Orthodox subjects was introduced. The Włościański Bank (Peasants’ Land Bank) was forbidden from lending money to non-Orthodox peasants to purchase land. Russians even used demagoguery, with Bishop Evlogii promising to divide Polish estates among Orthodox peasants.52

Toward the Separation of the Chełm–Podlasian Region

The last attempt to defend Russianness, or perhaps more appropriately, Ruthenianness, in the Chełm–Podlasian region was an administrative reform: the separation of the Chełm–Podlasian region from Congress Poland and its reorganization into an independent administrative unit called the Province of Chełm (1912–1915).53

The Chełm–Podlasian region was where Orthodox inhabitants faced the most serious pressure to convert to Catholicism after the issue of the

53 Until the separation, this region consisted of all or part of eleven counties in the eastern halves of the Siedlce and Lublin provinces. The counties of the former, where Orthodox population was relatively large, were Włodawa (56 percent), Biała (38 percent), Konstantynów (31 percent). Of the latter, the Orthodox population formed a majority in Chełm, Bilgoraj, and Zamość. Blobaum, "Toleration and Ethno-Religious Strife," 113–14; Kolbuk, "Skutki carskiego ukazu," 248–49; Cabaj, "Unici Podlascy," 168; Wojciech Trzebiński i Adam Borkiewicz (oprac.), Dokumentacja geograficzna, Z. 4: Podziały administracyjne Królestwa Polskiego w okresie 1815–1918 r. (Zarys historyczny) (Warsaw: Instytut Geografii PAN, 1956): 96–99.
Decree of Tolerance, and this occasionally took the forms of terrorizing or discriminating against their Orthodox neighbors. The region even came under martial law for several months so that the state could reestablish there, but it could not fully halt anti-Orthodox violence. Bishop Evlogii played a crucial role in realizing this plan, too. Three months after the promulgation of the Decree, Evlogii drew up a petition for the separation. He proposed that “Kholmskaia Rus,” (the eastern part of the provinces of Lublin and Siedlce) should be separated from the Vistula Land and made a new province. He also proposed that the region should be annexed to the provinces of Grodna or Volhynia, if it was too costly to establish an independent province.

The idea of separating this region from Congress Poland had already been discussed by the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. When Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism appeared as “Great Russian nationalism” in the Russian Empire, the Chełm–Podlasian region, also called “Kholmskaia Rus” or the “Russian Trans-Bug region,” was considered to be an important strategic front in “the Russian world.”

In the 1860s, the emancipated peasants of the region, the majority of whom were former Uniates, were targeted for integration into the Great Russian nation. It was Vladimir Cherkasskii, a Slavophile activist, who first mentioned the foundation of the province of Chełm in 1866. In 1878, the plan for separation was discussed at the Commission for the Affairs of Congress Poland but was rejected. In the 1880s, the idea was again proposed, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, the governor of Siedlce, the governor-general of Warsaw, and the Orthodox bishop of Chełm and War-

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54 Blobaum, “Toleration and Ethno-Religious Strife,” 120–23. State authorities demanded the Bishop of Lublin transfer local Catholic priests disrupting social peace by zealously trying to convert rural Orthodox inhabitants. Reports sent by statesmen of Siedlce and Lublin provinces show how local Orthodox believers and state officials were threatened by daily outbreaks of “pogroms.” They reported about Polish employers’ wage discrimination against Orthodox workers.
55 M. T., Sprawa chełmska, 18.
56 Szabaciuk, “Rosyjski Ulster,” 103.
57 Kołbuk, “Kwestia chełmska,” 142.
58 Ibid., 143.
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saw (Leontii Lebedinskii at that time) supported this idea. In the 1890s, Vladimir Bobrinskii, a representative of “the Russian–Galician Association,” actively promoted this idea. However, during the nineteenth century, the idea of the separation was never implemented because there was still optimism that the whole Congress kingdom could be de-Polonized over a long period of time. Moreover, there were opposing opinions on territorial-administrative reforms from a legal viewpoint.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the idea of separation finally came to fruition. The ecclesiastic administrative reorganization preceded the secular administrative reorganization. In February 1903, the governor-general of Warsaw sent a letter to the Holy Synod emphasizing the necessity of the formation of the independent diocese of Chełm. After the Russo–Japanese War, and soon after the Decree of Tolerance, the Holy Synod made the decision to establish an independent diocese of Chełm on April 29, 1905. In June, this decision was acknowledged by a decree, and the new diocese began in September. The former archdiocese of Warsaw was divided into two dioceses: the archdiocese of Warsaw and the Vistula region, and the diocese of Chełm and Lublin. The secular administrative reorganization followed this ecclesiastical reorganization.

The Chełm province was explicitly designed to be Orthodox dominant. However, the regions where the Orthodox Church had dominance over the Catholic Church were too small (only the districts of Hrubesczów

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59 Ibid., 144, 146.
60 Ibid., 147.
61 Iosif Gurko, the governor-general of Warsaw, was anxious about the significant difference between the legal systems of Congress Poland and the Russian mainland. Therefore, he seemed unenthusiastic about transferring the Chełm region to the Empire proper. M.T., Sprawa chełmska, 16–17.
62 Szabaciuk, "Rosyjski Ulster," 103.
63 Ibid., 104.
64 Evlogii, who was a strong supporter of the idea of a separate province of Chełm, was appointed the bishop of Chełm and Lublin, while Hieronim was appointed the bishop of Warsaw.
65 Prior to the actual separation, several policies indicating the government’s intention to treat the Chełm region separately were formulated. In June 1905, the Chełm region was excluded from the limited concessions for local administration and elementary schools granted by the Committee of Ministers in the Vistula lands. During the second Duma of 1906, the “Russian” population of the Chełm region was guaranteed the right to separately elect its own representatives. Blobaum, “Toleration and Ethno-Religious Strife,” 123–24.
and Chełm) to form a separate province. Consequently, the government also had to include in the province some other regions where the Orthodox and Catholic populations were more equally split. The administration of the new province of Chełm corresponded with the administrative reorganization in the Orthodox Church. The territories in Congress Poland belonged to the diocese of Warsaw and the Vistula region, and the province of Chełm belonged to the diocese of Chełm and Lublin.

The Chełm Question in the Polish National Discourse

The Poles were unnerved by the separation of the Chełm–Podlasian region from the historical territory of Congress Poland. Lubomir Dymsza, the delegate to the State Duma from the province of Siedlce, emphatically objected to the separation. He argued that the separation would prove to be a serious mistake for both the state’s interests and the local inhabitants’ welfare in his book published in 1911, which presented various demographic data on the provinces of Siedlce and Lublin. He opposed the separation, especially from the perspective of equal rights for Orthodox and Catholic inhabitants, which the Decree of Tolerance was meant to secure. He also condemned Russia as an oppressor of the Poles, despite Russia’s claim to be the leader of Slavic nations. He entreated that Russia should respect those nationalities who had no state on their own.

To counter the Russian and Ukrainian national discourse, which claimed the Chełm–Podlasian region as their own (Russian or Ruthenian), the Poles developed their own arguments. The important points of those arguments can be found in a brochure written by an anonymous author (with initials M. T., later identified as Maria Tańska) and published in Warsaw in 1918. Tańska called the separation of the Chełm–Podla-

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67 M. T., Sprawa chełmska, 20.
68 Kołbuk, “Kwestia chełmska,” 152.
69 Lubomir Dymsza, Sprawa chełmska (Warsaw: Nakład Gebethera i Wolffa, 1911).
70 Ibid., 96–104.
71 Ibid., 119–20.
72 M. T., Sprawa chełmska.
sian region “the new partition of Poland,” and attempted to demonstrate the region’s Polishness. The author mentioned many reasons to consider the Chełm–Podlasian region could have been a part of the historical Polish territory. The first was the geographical location of the region, which was a part of the Vistula and, not the Dnieper or Dniester basin. Second, it was only Vladimir who brought the region into his realm; until then, it belonged to the Western Slavs. Added to those geographical and historical reasons is the third reason: the region’s religious tradition. Tańska mentioned the Church Unions of Florence (1439) and Brest (1596) as the examples of the region’s long familiarity with Catholicism, and emphasized the Commonwealth’s tolerant attitude toward Orthodox institutions (educational and printing institutions above all), which was generally much friendlier than Russia’s attitude toward Ruthenian coreligionists.

As for ethno-national factors, the fourth reason, Tańska claimed that all Podlasian (and Volhynian and East-Galician) peasants have Polish blood. She insisted that they, along with their lords, were of a Polish–Ruthenian mix, even though they became “Ruthenianized” while their lords were Polonized. On the one hand, the author emphasized historical connections between the Chełm–Podlasian land and Poland, while on the other hand, she emphasized the lack of any strong relationship between this region and Russia. She recalled that in the third partition of the Commonwealth (1795), Russia did not specifically object to Austria’s claim to this region. Using this incident, she pointed out Russians’ indifference to the region and also noted that the emergence of the idea of separating this region from Congress Poland was a very recent development in Russia.

The author placed a great emphasis not only on the history of the Commonwealth in the region but also on the Napoleonic tradition. She not-

73 Ibid., 30.
74 Ibid., 6.
75 Ibid., 6–10.
76 When Poles extensively colonized eastern territories during the medieval and early modern periods, Polish peasants (many of them were taken from Mazovia and Mazuria) became Ruthenian, while local elites assimilated into the Polish nobility. Ibid., 7.
77 Ibid., 11, 15.
ed legal and juridical features in Congress Poland derived from the Duchy of Warsaw. She also asserted the crucial differences between these features and those of Russia proper, and argued that the incorporation of the Chełm region into the empire’s estate-based system could cause great confusion as well as legal and economic disadvantages for locals.\footnote{Ibid., 20–26.} She did not fail to mention the different calendar systems adopted by Congress Poland and the empire, and insisted that the revision of the calendar created considerable difficulties in everyday lives of local Catholics.\footnote{Ibid., 21–23.}

The Chełm Question in the Ukrainian Nation-Building Scheme

Former Uniate peasants in the Chełm–Podlasian region, who were yet to be integrated into any modern nation, could potentially become not only Russians or Poles, but also Ukrainians.

The first attempt to “Ukrainianize” this group was made not by Ukrainians, but by the Russian imperial government, which tried to introduce the Little Russian language in Orthodox churches in 1905, not long after the influence of the Decree of Tolerance became visible. Although the Mass was to be held in Old Church Slavonic, sermons were to be given in Little Russian, which was more similar to the local dialect of the region in comparison with Russian, so that parishioners could easily understand them. The goal of this policy was to de-Polonize local churches and parishioners.\footnote{Sawa, “‘Unici chelmsko-podlascy,’” 77–78. Bishop Evlogii required even Roman Catholic churches in the former Uniate region to introduce Old Church Slavonic and Little Russian (Ukrainian). Szabaciuk, “Rosyjski Ulster,” 98.}

When Nikolai Ignatiev, the Minister of Internal Affairs, advocated for the separation of the Chełm–Podlasian region from Congress Poland, he proposed that the region must become a part of the Volhynian province, which belonged to the general government of Kiev (the so-called Southwestern provinces, where the predominant nationality was Ukrainian).\footnote{Kolbuk, “Kwestia chelmska,” 146.}
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Ukrainian nationalists in Eastern Galicia also had an interest in the Chełm question. They first approached the Chełm–Podlasian former Uniates around 1907. The Shevchenko Society and Prosvita (Enlightenment) had begun their activities in the region, and Ukrainian nationalists believed that they had to be more cautious about the Polonization rather than the Russification of the Podlasian Ruthenians. Therefore, they welcomed the formation of the independent province of Chełm, which meant the separation of “Chełm Ukrainians” from the Polish lands.\(^82\)

The author of the abovementioned brochure seemed anxious about the eventual Ukrainization of the region. She pointed out the great distance that lay between the province of Chełm and Kiev given that the governor-general of the latter was also in charge of the province of Chełm. The author also criticized the transfer of Catholic parishes to the bishopric of Lutsk and Zhytomyr. She expressed her objections to those changes from the perspective of convenience. Presumably, however, the author did not underestimate the ambitions of the Ukrainian side in this region.\(^83\) As the Ukrainians established their state, Poles hoped that even if the worse came to worst, the Polish–Ukrainian border would still be fixed on the Bug (also known later as the Curzon Line), although it was more likely that the Styr would become the borderline. This was desirable from the perspective of the ethnicity and religion of the people in the region.\(^84\)

The Chełm question attracted the attention of the Habsburg monarchy, too. Poles were actively lobbying to involve Hungarians in particular in this issue because both faced the same menace: the Ukrainian national movement. Their common interest was to prevent the Carpatho-Ruthenians from becoming involved in the Ukrainian national movement. The Polish Circle even sent representatives from Russia to visit Budapest to form a united front.\(^85\) During World War I, Austria supported the Polishness of

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\(^{82}\) Ibid., 155; Cabaj, “Postawy ludności Chełmszczyzny i Podlasia,” 69.

\(^{83}\) M. T., Sprawa chełmska, 26–28.


\(^{85}\) Ibid., 6–7.
the Chelm region, in contrast to Germany, which supported Ukrainians’ efforts to nationalize the region.\textsuperscript{86}

In 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada proclaimed that this region was to be included in the Ukrainian state.\textsuperscript{87} In 1918, when the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, the Ukrainians got close to taking control of this region with German support. However, the Chelm–Podlasian region was becoming increasingly Polonized due to the efforts of Poles, while the Ruthenian population was decreasing as a result of Russians’ appeals for the local Orthodox population to migrate eastwards.\textsuperscript{88}

\textbf{The Reactivation of the Uniate Church}

Despite their enthusiasm about joining the Roman Catholic Church, former Uniates seemed to have no ambition to reestablish the Uniate Church. The top priority for them was being acknowledged as Catholic, and the difference between the rites in the two Churches was not of much interest to them. This clearly shows that, at least in former Congress Poland, Ruthenians had been firmly confessionalized as Catholics but had no national identity yet (whether Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, or Belorussian; apparently not even Ruthenian). Although Hryhoriewa sees the reason for this in the longer local history of religious tolerance (or perhaps indifference) among the people of the region, it seems that their identity as Catholics was unquestioned, even if they were not really concerned about their Eastern ecclesiastical tradition.\textsuperscript{89}

Still, there were some prospects for reviving the Uniate Church, but not from within the region. Interestingly, it was Russians and Ukrainians who discussed the possibility of reestablishing the Uniate Church. The liberal

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sawa, “‘Unici chełmsko–podlascy,’” 75.
\item Ibid., 78. Ukrainianizing movements were followed by the German occupation during World War II. Ibid., 80.
\item After the provocation of World War I, nearly 100,000 Orthodox inhabitants were evacuated from the Chelm–Podlasian region to the Russian interior. Some of them returned to their homeland, which belonged to Poland in the interwar period, and revived the Church Union. Kołbuk, “Kwestia chełmska,” 155–56.
\item Hryhoriewa, “Wyznanie unickie,” 206.
\end{enumerate}
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press in Russia argued that they must not abandon the possibility of re-
constructing the Uniate Church. They considered the Uniate revival the
best counteraction to the mass conversions to Roman Catholicism, and the
most effective way to protect Chełm–Podlasian peasants against aggressive
Catholicization, and eventual Polonization. They argued that the Greek
Catholic Church of Galicia, which was effectively resisting the Poloniza-
tion of the region, could be used as a model, although the Russian central
government and Orthodox clergy did not agree with this position.90

In Ukraine, Andrii Sheptytskyi, the Metropolitan of the Galician Uni-
ate Church, had already initiated concrete actions for the Uniate revival
in the Russian Empire in 1901.91 After the Decree of Tolerance, Niko-
laj Franko, a Studite monk of Albanian origin, and Jeremia Lomnytskyi, a
Basilian monk from Lviv, became actively involved in the reorganization of
the Uniate diocese of Chełm.92 The interests of these clerics were, of course,
not unrelated to the Ukrainian nationalists’ program mentioned above.
Such efforts aimed at the Uniate revival disturbed the Orthodox clergy.
Bishop Evlogii categorically opposed the idea of such a revival, and he as-
serted that it is the reeducation of the former Uniates in Russian Ortho-
doxy, and not the revival of Uniatism that was most needed to exterminate
the Polish influence in the region. His opinion was supported by the Holy
Synod in 1906.93 The Ministry of Internal Affairs did not permit the revival
of the Uniate diocese, but it allowed the newly converted Catholics (former
Uniates) to practice Eastern rites in Roman Catholic churches.94

Inside the Congress Kingdom, Konstantin Maksimovich, the governor-
general of Warsaw, and Evgenii Menkin, the governor of Lublin, together
with Bishop Evlogii, discussed the plan to re-launch the Uniate Church in

90 Szabaciuk, “Rosyjski Ulster,” 90.
91 His intervention in Russian territory was justified by the old tradition of the Rus’ that entrusted a vacant
diocese to the jurisdiction of the neighboring diocese’s hierarch. Ibid., 90–91. In 1907, Sheptytskyi re-
quested and received jurisdiction over all Uniates of the Russian Empire from Pius X. He seemingly was
concerned that a considerable number of former Uniates converted to the Catholic Church of the Latin
92 The former appealed to the pope, while the latter to the tsar. Szabaciuk, “Rosyjski Ulster,” 91.
93 Ibid., 92.
94 The Christmas of 1905 became the first such occasion for holding Mass in the Eastern rite. Ibid., 93.
order to stop the mass conversion of Podlasian Ruthenians to the Roman Catholic Church. However, the plan was never realized. Nevertheless, no such effort for a Uniate revival came from former Uniates themselves.

I would argue that there were three major factors that impeded a spontaneous Uniate revival among former Uniates at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first is the lack of an intellectual stratum among former Uniates. Since there were effectively no Uniate priests available, former Uniates would have been largely dependent on Roman Catholics for the education of younger generations. The education provided in Polish may have facilitated the Polonization of the local Ruthenian society. Second, former Uniates lacked property. The thirteenth article of the decree allowed non-Orthodox Christians to build, rebuild, and repair their churches and prayer houses, but it did not clarify if the institutional infrastructure confiscated by the Orthodox Church would be returned to non-Orthodox Churches. Therefore, in principle, the former Uniates were without any ecclesiastic property even after 1905. The Orthodox Church did not return churches, nor monasteries, to them, and neither did the Catholic Church transfer their institutions to former Uniates. Additionally, the thirteenth article ordered that the construction of churches must be carried out with the permission of the top priest of every religious group. Since there was no particular hierarchy among Uniates, no former Uniate could obtain such permission to build a new church. Hence, the decree implicitly deterred the revival of the Uniate Church.

Lastly, Roman Catholics, who devotedly supported former Uniates, were not enthusiastic about reviving the church union, despite the fact that they made great use of the Uniate martyrology in preserving their influence over former Uniates. Even the Society for Defending Uniates failed to help

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96 Poczne sobranie zakonow, 258.
97 After the suppression of the January Uprising, the Empire confiscated a part of the Roman Catholic Church’s assets in the Western provinces, with many of them closed and transferred to the Orthodox Church. Since then, the Catholic Church itself had been prohibited from building new churches or repairing old churches. Witold Jemelity, “Sytuacja Kościoła Katolickiego w Królestwie Polskim po Rewolucji 1905 r.,” Prawo Kanoniczne 48, nos. 1–2 (2005): 157–84.
former Uniates to reorganize their own church. It only offered them protection against pressures exerted by the Orthodox Church.

The connection between the Galician Uniate Church and Ukrainian national interests was the crucial factor behind the Polish Roman Catholic clergy’s lack of support for the reorganization of the Uniate Church in the Russian Empire.98

Moreover, former Uniates themselves were content with the opportunity to convert to the Roman Catholic Church.99 However, the memory of having been Greek Catholics survived. It was in interwar Poland that “Belorussian” people attempted to reestablish the Uniate Church (Neounia).100 Those who had once migrated eastward, and then returned to their homeland from Soviet Belarus made an effort to revive the union, and in 1923, Rome expressed its support for the project. Against all expectations, this new Uniate Church’s growth was impeded by World War II, and only one parish has survived.101

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I would like to confirm the hypothesis that, from a long-term perspective, the dissolution of the Uniate Church Latinized and Polonized a section of Ruthenians (potential Belorussians/Ukrainians) both in terms of religion and nationality. This process occurred despite forcible attempts to de-Polonize/Russify the majority (an example of such an orientation was “Western Russism” [Zapadnorusizm] in Belorussia).

98 The fear that Galician Ukrainian nationalism might expand outside of Galicia through a Uniate revival in the Chełm–Podlasian region was the main reason Poles prevented the attempts by Galician Uniate clerics to reorganize the Uniate Church in this region in the interwar period. Sadowski, “Religious Exclusion and State Building,” 518–20.
101 The parish of Kostomłoty, which now comprises the Roman Catholic parish of Siedlce, has not been absorbed into the Ukrainian Uniate Church and has preserved its originality.
The conversion to the Roman Catholic Church and the formation of Roman Catholic identity became the route used by “recalcitrant” former Uniates to embrace Polish national identity. This transition was initiated primarily through Polish-language education. Even though the autochthonous Ruthenians continued to use their mother tongue in everyday life, their younger generations became literate in Polish. Through the Polish-language education offered by politically motivated Poles, former Uniate peasants in Podlasia were greatly influenced not only by Polish culture but also Polish political nationalism. Since the National Democrats were influential in the former Congress Poland at that time, and many churchmen supported this party, former Uniates who had become Roman Catholic quickly internalized the party’s message: unenlightened peasants who are potentially Poles must be educated to be Poles. Since the formerly Uniate peasants in the Chełm–Podlaskan region had not identified themselves as Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, or Belorussians, their one and only identity—Catholics—eventually made them embrace Polishness, or perhaps more specifically the identity of “Polak-Katolik.”

Meanwhile, the Orthodox camp failed to draw in those “autochthons” in order to secure the region’s “Russianness,” an imperial rather than a national identity. Moreover, a Uniate identity, which could possibly steer the “autochthons” toward the Ukrainization, was not re-established. The Polish national program had the advantage over its rivals because of the historical connections between Roman Catholics and former Uniates in the region, and this older identification was not interrupted despite conditions in Congress Poland (or Vistula Land), enabling its consolidation during the Second Polish Republic.

102 Stanisław Kutrzeba, professor at Jagiellonian University, tried to refute the Russians’ claim to Lithuania and Belorussia in his 1919 study which asserted that “Catholic White-Ruthenians consider themselves mostly as Poles.” Stanisław Kutrzeba, The Rights of Russia to Lithuania and White-Ruthenia (Paris, 1919), 6.