

## **Refusing a Local Compromise. Securitizing Debates on the Election Reform for L'viv's City Council before World War I**

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Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention, Columbia University 2-4 May 2019"

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"We need to create a law that will guarantee that Lviv will continue to be the arsenal and fortress for a better future", demanded Polish councillors at one of the numerous debates on the reform of the local Electoral Code between 1910-1914. The semantics of this quote clarified the threat-scenario related: "Arsenal" and "fortress" refer to the Polish myth of Lviv as a bulwark in the East, to the threat that comes from there – which in the context of these debates was a threat coming from Ruthenian demands for political participation at the local level. So, the councillors refused strictly a local compromise between the nationalities.

Since the turn of the century, the parties and the Ruthenian national movement had recognized the opportunity to influence not only the conditions of local politics, but also to introduce ideological ideas and values into public discourse. Local politics became an interesting field of actions, so local politics had become a competitive arena. Since the Polish political elites only recognised the "Polish character" of the city, they tried to claim this arena and therefore repel any democratization tendencies and especially the participation rights of Ruthenians.

In the following about 20 minutes, I want to discuss in a first step, how the election system of the Statute from 1870 was a means to exclude nationalities from local government. In a second step, I want to show that the local electoral code was a guarantor of stability for local elites and in the last step, the motives and arguments preventing a reform of the electoral code and a local compromise. Herewith, assume, that particularly the imperial local law of 1862 created preconditions for the nationalities' conflicts on local level.

My considerations are based on my forthcoming study of local political practices, strategies and visions to secure Lviv for the Polish nation. Here, I assume that "Security" refers to a socio-cultural value system which is recognised as a providing guidance for those who are involved. At the same time, it serves to give legitimacy to action taken by its stakeholders. I consider the term "security" of considerable importance for national groups, namely in terms

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of ethno-cultural integrity. Through this approach, I want to show, how conflicting ethno-spaces were created and nationalization processes were influenced by dynamics of securitization discourses on the local level in Lviv before World War I.

### **1. The Electoral Code as a guarantor of stability**

Central to L'viv's development was its local autonomy because of the statute of 1870. The city's statute formulated together with the integrated election system ground-breaking decisions which led to the Polish mapping of Lviv through symbols and national representations. It created the preconditions that saw the dominance of Poles within the local politics rather than marking the city as a multi-ethnic urban space. After 1870, the Poles knotted a web of Polish national representations all over the city and referred steadily to its Polish character even it was still functioning as the Crownland capital. To put it briefly: the urban space was defined understood as a Polish-Christian 'holding' which should be defended. At least since the 1890s, the Poles constructed Lviv also as a Polish spare capital.

In contrast to general Habsburgian municipal law of 1862, the statute of Lviv contained some particularities concerning the Jews while the local election code prescribed a tax- and educational census, so that the Ruthenians were more or less excluded from local elections. The electoral code was hence of particular importance for backing up the power of the Polish local elites.

The electoral code became until the eve of First World War a quite conservative, power guaranteeing means. Although the provisions of the electoral rules were aimed initially at a socio-economic as well as an educated elite, a deeper investigation reveals the ethnical-national implications for these groups: Generally, the ethnic borders corresponded with the social ones, so that the majority Ruthenian and Jews could not vote because most of them belonged to the lower and lower middle classes. An indication of this characteristic of L'viv's electorate is found in the voting lists: the "Ruthenian" list in the elections in 1899 and 1902 constituted only about 3-3.5 percent of the votes.

The Electoral Code delivered hence an important instrument for the exclusion of other nationalities from local government.

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### **2. Challenges to the Polish elites by the Ruthenian for participation**

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Since the turn to 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ruthenian National Democrats, who had their mouthpiece through the newspaper Dilo, recognized the mobilizing potential of the local elections. Therefore, the articles always stressed the need to "better represent the Ruthenian interest in the city council." The fact that these views had little success is clear in the election campaign appeal in 1911, which emphasizes once again that "it is time that Lviv Ruthenians gather their strength to finally organize". This political mobilization took place against the background that in Lviv the nationality conflict had escalated since the turn of the century: the struggle for the university was the real source of conflict since 1901, and the murder of the governor Potocki, a Polish magnate, saw the fronts harden even more.

Negotiations over the election code reform should also be seen against the background that the Polish political party bloc system in the city council was to be completed in the end at the council elections in 1911: On the one hand, the national block dominated by the National Democrats, and on the other side the "anti-national" block joined together with reformist liberal groups. The "anti-national block" had come under criticism because it held talks with "hostile Polish elements" and "its allies". Therefore, according to the agitation of the National Democrats, the national block should support the defence of the "threatened Polishness" of Lviv lest the Jewish separatists themselves combine with the Ukrainians. The National Democrats acted against the "hostile" attitude of the Ruthenians and also against Jews, whose masses had been partially fanaticized by the Zionists, so that all the nation's strength should be expended for the "defence" of the Polish character of the state capital.

Dynamite was thrown by the Ruthenian resolution in 1911 which demanded equality for Ruthenians in municipal elections and a fair distribution of seats between Poles and Ruthenians. This continued to polarize and radicalize the nature of the debate. Ultimately, it was common sense to carry out a "policy of defending Polish Lviv" because its defence was a model for the whole country and as such was crucial for the future of East Galicia.

The Polish side reacted hence sensitively to the increasing Ruthenian interest in local politics and to their claims for greater political participation. The Polish councillors evaluated them as an attack on Polish claims to the arena of the City Council. Therefore, the National Democrats vainly propagated for example a long-term cooperation of all Polish "national" parties in the local election campaign in this year. They interpreted the failure of such an anti-Ruthenian coalition as a "national betrayal".

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### 3. Securitizing the reform demands

In this increasingly incendiary mood caused by party politics and national developments since the turn of the century, the question of electoral reform came to the fore as concern was now to enable political participation not just for 7.6 percent of the population, but all residents. Here, the possible democratization of the electoral process as an existential threat to the "Polish character" Lviv was formulated, because the extension of the franchise, would be of especial benefit to the Ruthenians.

Impetus was thus given to the question of electoral reforms at the imperial level and at the level of the crown lands. In 1906/1907 universal male suffrage was introduced and the curia system was abolished. In Galicia, however, demand for a "balance" between the nationalities intensified after only minor adjustments were made to Curia suffrage since the end of the 1900s, and which had as their target the amendment of electoral law and constituency boundaries in particular. In February 1914, this "Galician compromise" was adopted as a state law, where it appeared as a "last resort" to hedge the conflict between Ruthenians and Poland. The close relationship between municipal electoral code reform and the Galician electoral reform debate is very clear in the sources: the farther the negotiations progressed in parliament, the more likely it was that the council would debate the electoral law reform in Lviv. But what remained out of the question was any debate over the Polish character of the city.

Since 1900, the democratization of local suffrage became a topic within the city council, but from the mid-1900s the arguments against electoral law reform shifted from social argument to national one. Now, the conflict with the Ruthenians and the resulting danger to the "Polish character of the city" got into the foreground. Since the 1911 the debates became more intensely. So, the mayor Józef Neumann argued for the "double" importance of the city, "because it was up to [the Council] in particular to maintain the Polish character of the city. After all, more than half of the population in Lviv is of Polish origin. The city should also be at the forefront of national culture, and must not be allowed under any circumstances to lessen the Polish character of its basis."

Vice Mayor Tadeusz Rutowski stressed that it was not enough that one demands universal suffrage and simultaneously to guarantee the "security of the Polishness" of the city: "You have to give the means for this security", with which he circumscribed the voting census.

Rutowski, stressed that he wanted to open the town hall doors to the people, "but [only] for the Polish people do I want to work in the future". The fear of "foreign" infiltration of the "city council arena" is even clearer emphasize, because the councillors stressed that the population growth in Lviv would take place only in the lower strata and this element "is not on our national ground. [...]" Others advanced an argument for an extension of the franchise and for allowing Ruthenians in the council, because "the Polish, as the stronger, more cultural and human nation should outstretch to the former [the Ruthenians] a fraternal hand to achieve unity." This argument underscored an attitude that emanated from a sense of the civilizing mission of Lviv and therefore of the cultural superiority of the Poles to the Ruthenians.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Overall, the futile struggle to reform the electoral rules acted as an important focal point for discourses and practices of power of the local Polish political elite. Unlike at the country level, where at least to some extent and at the expense of the Jewish mandates Ruthenians received additional mandates within the Galician compromise, the city council was able to resist these efforts as well as democratizing efforts in general. The autonomous status made it possible to resist a "compromise" on the local level. Here, the particular social and ethnical conditions facilitated these nationalizing politics.

The claim for participation by broader social strata was therefore increasingly replaced by the ever more virulent need to repel by all means the Ruthenian claims for participation in the Lviv municipality. Around 1910, there reigned a sort of minimal consensus, the right to vote was extended as a "palliative for partially settling the claims of a large part of broad sections of the population, [and as] a stage for the development of political rights". But also attached to this minimal consensus was the aim of avoiding jeopardizing the "Polish character" of the city and therefore repelling Ruthenian demands for participation.

The debates about electoral code reforms were consequently particular nationalization discourses, which were based on lines of argument derived from the need for insurance: it was employed in defence of an ethno-culturally justified claim to political dominance. Overall, it is clear that the rigid and intransigent attitude of the city council over election regulation reforms contributed to the dynamics of the nationality conflict on local level. Based on the scenario of the threat to the Polish character, the Polish population was mobilized and the power of the political elites was legitimized. Hence, the dynamics of the

national confrontation between Poles and Ruthenians were considerably enforced by local securitizing politics and culminated in the after-World War I violence escalation.

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