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## **EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG UKRAINIANS IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC**

*Еволюція політичної участі українців  
у Другій Речі Посполитій*

*The article examines the challenges encountered by democratic institutions in the 1920s, focusing particularly on the Second Polish Republic. It delves into the tactics employed by communist forces to maneuver around restrictions on their activities by leveraging democratic processes for their advantage. Ukrainian*

*communities in the Chelm and Podlasie regions are central to this analysis, as they became primary targets for communist infiltration and subversion of democratic mechanisms. The study investigates the conversion of organizational branches into covert cells of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, the reconfiguration of a newspaper into a tool for political propaganda, and the influence over local opinion to facilitate the election of pro-communist officials in the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland. This article sheds light on the intricate dynamics of Ukrainian political involvement during this period and its broader implications for understanding the challenges faced by democratic institutions.*

**Keywords:** Political Participation, Crisis of Democracy, Second Polish Republic, Ukrainian Minority, Political Party, NGO.

*Статтю присвячено викликам, з якими зіткнулися демократичні інституції у 1920-х рр., з особливим акцентом на Другій Речі Посполитій. Досліджено стратегії, які використовували комуністичні сили, щоб уникнути обмежень на свою діяльність, використовуючи демократичні процеси у власних цілях. Центральне місце в цьому аналізі посідають українські громади в регіонах Хелм і Підляшшя, які стали ключовими цілями для комуністичної інтеграції й демократичної підривної діяльності. У дослідженні розглядаються перетворення організаційних осередків на таємні осередки Комуністичної партії Західної України, перетворення газети на знаряддя політичної пропаганди та вплив на місцеву думку для сприяння виборам прокомуністичних посадовців до Сейму й Сенату Республіки Польща. У статті висвітлено складну динаміку української політичної активності в цю епоху та її наслідки для розуміння ширшої кризи в демократичних інститутах.*

**Ключові слова:** політична участь, криза демократії, Друга польська республіка, українська меншина, політична партія, громадська організація.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the democratic systems in Central and Eastern European countries were in the process of development and remained fragile. Autocratic regimes, notably the Soviet Union, sought to exploit this situation. The Polish Republic, re-established on November 11, 1918, drew on centuries-old traditions of democracy and envisioned its political development within this framework. The goal was to establish modern democratic institutions and guarantee significant freedoms for the population. However, as a multinational state with a substantial population of Germans, Czechs, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, the latter being the most numerous ethnic minorities, the Polish Republic faced challenges.

Ukrainians, having experienced political participation in various political parties, NGOs, and state authorities during the Ukrainian Revolution, played a significant role. Through local political and social structures established by Ukrain-

ians, the Communist Party, officially banned in Poland, and the USSR attempted to undermine the foundations of democracy in the state and discredit the political process.

Archival research is a methodology employed by scholars to examine historical documents, records, and artifacts. To craft a scientific article using archival research, researchers can follow the steps outlined below:

*Identify the Research Question:* The initial step in conducting archival research is to pinpoint a research question that can be addressed through the analysis of historical documents or records. This question should be specific, clear, and relevant to the field of study (Ventresca, M. & Mohr, J. 2017).

*Identify the archival sources:* After formulating the research question, the subsequent step involves identifying archival sources essential for addressing the research query. Primary sources within archival materials encompass items like letters, diaries, photographs, and official government records. Additionally, secondary sources, including books, articles, and academic papers, can provide valuable context and insights to support the research.

*Access the archival sources:* After identifying the archival sources, the researcher needs to gain access to them. This may involve visiting archives or libraries, or accessing digital archives online. It is important to follow any guidelines or procedures for accessing the archival sources.

*Collect and analyze the data:* Once access to the archival sources is obtained, the researcher can begin to collect and analyze the data. This may involve transcribing documents, categorizing information, and identifying patterns or themes in the data.

*Evaluate the reliability and validity of the data:* When conducting archival research, it is important to evaluate the reliability and validity of the data. This involves assessing the authenticity, accuracy, and completeness of the archival sources.

*Interpret the findings:* After collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher needs to interpret the findings. This involves drawing conclusions based on the data and connecting the findings to the research question.

To summarize — archival research is a valuable method for studying historical documents and records to answer specific research questions. It involves identifying relevant archival sources, gaining access to them, collecting and analyzing data, and evaluating the reliability and validity of the findings. Archival research can help provide insight into historical events, social structures, and cultural practices, and can be used in a variety of academic fields. It is important for researchers to follow ethical guidelines and procedures when conducting archival research to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of their findings.

The election system in the Second Polish Republic was characterized by its openness, fairness, and inclusiveness. All citizens, regardless of gender, religion,

or ethnicity, had the right to vote, with the exception of those serving prison sentences or being declared mentally incompetent. The electoral process was overseen by an independent body, the National Electoral Commission, which ensured the transparency and impartiality of the electoral process.

The electoral system consisted of two types of elections: parliamentary and presidential. Parliamentary elections were held every four years, using a proportional representation system with a minimum threshold of 5% of the vote for political parties to gain representation in the Sejm. The Senate was indirectly elected by an electoral college consisting of local government officials and representatives of various professions (Davies, N. 1982).

Presidential elections were held every seven years, with the president being elected by universal suffrage. If no candidate received a majority of votes in the first round, a second round was held between the two candidates with the highest number of votes. The president had limited powers, serving as a symbolic head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Parliamentary elections in the Second Polish Republic were conducted using a proportional representation system. For example, in the 1928 parliamentary elections, 20 political parties participated, and 56.1% of eligible voters cast their ballots. The end result was that the Centrolew coalition, which was a center-left coalition of parties, won the most seats in the Sejm, with 40% of the vote. This allowed the coalition to form a government with the support of smaller parties (Lesiakowski, K. 2013).

Presidential elections were also fiercely contested. In the first presidential election in 1922, there were 14 candidates running for office. In the second round, the incumbent president Gabriel Narutowicz, a respected scientist and politician, was assassinated by a nationalist fanatic, highlighting the polarized political climate of the time. However, subsequent presidential elections were peaceful, and the candidates were able to campaign freely across the country. For example, in the 1926 presidential election, Ignacy Mościcki, a chemist and engineer, won the presidency with 54.7% of the vote (Lesiakowski, K. 2013).

The National Electoral Commission played a key role in overseeing the election process. It was responsible for organizing and supervising elections at all levels of government. For example, during the 1928 parliamentary elections, the Commission conducted voter education campaigns and published detailed instructions on how to vote, ensuring that citizens were informed and prepared for the voting process. Additionally, the Commission oversaw the counting and tabulation of votes to ensure the transparency and fairness of the electoral process (Davies, N. 1982).

The election system of the Second Polish Republic was one of the most democratic and inclusive in Europe at the time. It allowed for the participation of all citizens in the political process, regardless of their social status, religion, or eth-

nicity. The system's transparency and impartiality ensured that the election results were widely accepted as legitimate. However, the system was not without its flaws, including a lack of women's representation and the exclusion of some minority groups from political participation. Despite these shortcomings, the Second Polish Republic's election system remains a model for democratic governance and inclusive political participation.

Restored on November 11, 1918. The Polish Republic was based on centuries — old traditions of democracy and saw its political development in this vein. It was supposed to be created of all modern democratic institutions of power and provide the population with significant freedoms. On November 28, 1918, the «Decree on the Election Law» was published and elections were scheduled and a broad campaign for the participation of the population in the elections was launched<sup>1</sup>. Including actively campaigning to participate in the elections and the Ukrainian population, because it made up a significant part of the Polish state.

Communists boycotted the elections, seeing them as an attempt by the capitalists to distract the masses from the revolutionary struggle (Алексієвець, Л. М. 2002, с. 100–101). They believed that it was necessary to rely on the Council of Workers' Deputies in the construction of the state system and the vertical of power, and not to give the right to vote to all the society during the revolutionary period, they urged workers to boycott elections and fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat (Jabłonski, H. 1962). In fact, the backgrounds opposed the democratic path of state development.

On January 26, 1919, elections to the Legislative Sejm were held, which completed the first stage of the independence of the revived Poland as a democratic state (Алексієвець, Л. М. 2002, с. 100–101). Communists were not represented in the Polish parliament, and their activities were classified as illegal, and the Communist Party and its national representatives, such as the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and the Communist Party of Western Belarus, were banned (Зашкільняк, Л. 2002, с. 449).

From the middle of 1919, the activity of the communists shifted to the plane of theoretical popularization of the achievements of the revolution in Russia and opposition to the current Polish government. But since the beginning of the 1920's, the activities of Polish communist forces (including Communist Party of Western Ukraine and Communist Party of Western Belarus) began to be controlled by the USSR, and the search for tools to bypass the ban was conducted through activities and attempts to use democratic tools and institutions for their own purposes.

One of these goals was the Ukrainian community of Chelm and Podlasie regions. The First World War was the historical prerequisite for the importance of the region for the development of Ukrainian political forces and the activity of the local community, which led to the creation of a network of non-govern-

<sup>1</sup> Wybory do warszawskiej konstyтуanty, 1918.

mental organizations and other grassroots initiatives. It was a significant stress for the territory of all of Western Ukraine. The front line passed through this territory several times, administrations changed, which caused the number of refugees to increase. According to the data of P. Kosyk, in the summer of 1915, more than 300,000 Ukrainians were evicted from the territory of the Chelm and Podlasie regions, who were placed in 37 provinces of Russia, including Tobolsk, Tomsk, Transbaikal, Ural, Samarkand, and others districts (Костик, П. 1997, с. 25).

In 1918, the re-emigration of residents of the specified territories began. However, their situation was extremely difficult: as a result of long-term military operations, this region was heavily devastated, many houses were destroyed or occupied by settlers, and the property was requisitioned. Quite often, Ukrainians returned without any property they had lost in exile. There was almost no work for Ukrainians, and the local administration was in no hurry to help solve these problems.

Taking into account the indifference of the Polish authorities to the problems of the Ukrainian minority, its most conscious representatives began to implement public initiatives aimed at helping the population that was in a difficult situation. In this context, first of all, it is necessary to point out the activities of A. Vasinchuk, a former representative of the UNR (Ukrainian National Republic) government in the territory of Chelm region, later — the minister for repatriation in Rivne region and Volyn.

In order to fight for national culture, education, religion, and, in general, for wider assistance to Ukrainians of the Chelm and Podlasie regions, the creation of two organizations was initiated: the Ukrainian Pedagogical Society and the Ukrainian Charity Committee, which was soon renamed the «Native House» («Ridna Khata») Charity Society.

The purpose of the organization was to provide financial and material assistance to the Ukrainian population of the Chelm and Podlasie regions, which included free mediation and assistance in the purchase of building materials, agricultural equipment and providing legal advice in the organization of agricultural cooperatives.

In February 1919, the Ukrainian Pedagogical Society was established in Chelm. The society's administration temporarily included: E. Vasynchuk (cousin of A. Vasynchuk) — as chairman, Uhanskyi — as secretary, E. Kozachuk — as treasurer (Пебра, Ю. 2014a, с. 100). The main task of this association was the organization of the teaching environment and attempts to introduce Ukrainian schooling. In addition, it helped Ukrainian teachers who were in financial difficulty due to the fact that the Polish authorities did not recognize their qualifications and did not provide any work in their field.

Regardless of the official position of the Polish authorities, at the end of 1919 another social initiative of Ukrainians appeared, which was expressed in the crea-

tion of the Ukrainian Committee in Chelm. A. Vasynchuk organized the first congress of the Ukrainian population of Chelm and Podlasie regions, where urgent issues and plans for the future were discussed<sup>1</sup>.

In June 1920, A. Vasynchuk managed to obtain permission to publish the Ukrainian socio-political magazine «Our Life» («Nashe Zytia»). It was decided to place the editorial office at his home, and Anton's brother Pavel became the editor<sup>2</sup>. Money for publications and printing materials was provided by the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party<sup>3</sup>. On June 27, 1920, the first issue of the journal was published with a circulation of 300 copies<sup>4</sup>. In 1920, a total of 7 issues were published.

A study of the materials of «Our Life» shows that it published comments on the current political and economic situation and articles on the goals and methods of the Ukrainian socio-political movement in Chelm and Podlasie regions. It also contained sections on local and world news<sup>5</sup>, which indicates the socio-political nature of the publication.

Already in August 1920, the newspaper «Our Life», the Ukrainian Pedagogical Society and the Ukrainian charitable organization «Native House» were liquidated, which continued their activities illegally until the beginning of 1922<sup>6</sup>.

On the eve of the parliamentary elections of 1922, there were frequent discussions about the expediency of the participation of representatives of the Ukrainian community in them, thereby legitimizing the Polish government on the territory of Western Ukraine. The Galician political community was still waiting for a change in the decision of the Paris Peace Conference and the granting of independence or at least official autonomy.

The opposite position was taken by Ukrainian figures in the Chelm and Podlasie regions, who understood the strategic perspective of winning the elections. On April 18, 1922, a congress of representatives of the Ukrainian population of the Lublin Voivodeship was held in Chelm, in the hall of the «Polonia» theater. It was attended by 165 delegates and 41 guests, most of whom represented Volyn Ukrainians, headed by M. Lutskevich. This meeting was also attended by the ambassador of the PSP (Polish Socialist Party), M. Malinovskyi<sup>7</sup>. The most important issue discussed at the congress was the decision regarding the participation of Ukrainians in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The majority of congress delegates voted for the participation of representatives of Volyn, Chelm and Podlasie regions in the 1922 elections.

<sup>1</sup> Archiwum panstwowe w Lublinie. Urzadz wojewodski Lubelski. Wydzial Spoleczno-Polityczny. (Далі — APL. UWL. WSP). Sygn. 438. K. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Наше життя. 1920. № 1.

<sup>3</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 2317. K. 20.

<sup>4</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 2317. K. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Наше життя. 1920. № 1.

<sup>6</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 444. K. 11.

<sup>7</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 437. K. 8–9.

On June 12, 1922, Lublin Voivode S. Moskalevsky re-registered the «Rusyn charity organization called “Native House” in Chelm»<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it was able to leave the semi-legal situation and officially conduct her activities.

Not only during the election period but also in the following years, this organization played a leading role in the socio-political and cultural life of the Ukrainian population of Chelm and Podlasie regions. According to the statute, the field of its action was Chelm and the Lublin Voivodeship. The main goal was «material assistance to citizens of the Rusyn nationality of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth», the secondary goal was cultural and educational activities, which consisted in the creation of reading rooms, libraries, clubs, theater performances and concerts<sup>2</sup>.

In August 1922, the creation of the company's branches on the territory of the voivodship began. This happened illegally due to the fact that the first edition of the charter approved by the authorities did not include the articles that allowed the company to create branches, and, accordingly, their activities. Also at this time, the printing of the weekly «Our Life» resumed, the updated first issue of which was published on September 5, 1922. Its chief editor was Ya. Voytyuk<sup>3</sup>.

The next steps of the organization in the near future were decided upon. Among them: the construction of our own bookstore in Chelm, further development of the theater troupe, organization of cultural and educational gatherings, a periodic publication of a bulletin on the educational and cultural state of Ukrainians in the region, and a message to the local Orthodox church requesting permission for meetings of members of the «Native House» society in churches<sup>4</sup>.

It is worth emphasizing that at that time, the election campaign was quite active in Volyn, Chelm and Podlasie regions. The government order issued on August 5, 1922, which allowed pre-election rallies and demonstrations without the permission of the local administration, opened a wide field of activity for agitation with pro-Ukrainian slogans. Active use of the journal «Our Life» contributed to this. Various announcements about gatherings and demonstrations, information on the conduct of elections and instructions for voters were constantly present in its columns<sup>5</sup>. Leaflets with pre-election campaigning were printed separately<sup>6</sup>.

The results of the elections, which took place on November 5 and 12, 1922, were successful for the Ukrainians of Chelm and Podlasie and Polesieregions. Candidates from the Ukrainian population won in all districts where they ran, and A. Vasynchuk and Ya. Voytyuk passed the general list. V. Dmytryiuk and S. Khrutsky were elected to the Sejm from the Polish districts, and I. Pasternak, a teacher by profession, became a senator<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> APL. Rusińskie Dobroczynne Stowarzyszenie «Ridna Chata» w Chelmie. Sygn. 12. K. 1–3.

<sup>2</sup> APL. Rusińskie Dobroczynne Stowarzyszenie «Ridna Chata» w Chelmie. Sygn. 12. K. 1–3.

<sup>3</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 555. K. 17–18.

<sup>4</sup> Наше життя. 1922. № 6. С. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Наше життя. 1922. № 1.

<sup>6</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 2387. K. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Наше життя. 1922. № 12.

On the territory of Volyn and eastern counties of Lublin Voivodeship, the Bloc of National Minorities won 57.3% of the votes in the elections to the Diet and 61.8% to the Senate (Зайцев О. 1993, с. 73). In Volyn, 12 Ukrainians won parliamentary seats in the Sejm (Zaporowski, Z. 2000, p. 20). Instead, not a single Polish candidate was elected to the parliament. According to the results of the 1922 elections, 20 Ukrainian representatives entered the Sejm and 6 — into the Senate (Szumyło, M. 1999, p. 190).

In December 1922, the main issue in the Polish state was the presidential election. The Ukrainian Parliamentary Representation decided to support the candidate from the left — H. Narutovych, who promised equality and constitutional rights and freedoms for all peoples within the borders of the Second Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>.

On December 12, 1922, A. Vasynchuk held a meeting with local figures of the Ukrainian people's movement in the editorial office of the newspaper «Our Life» in Chelm and reported on the situation regarding the elections. «The right and the left are fighting in these elections not for life, but for death. That is why in this situation we must get the most out of them». He substantiated the merits of the candidate from the left and conducted an appropriate campaign for him.

We note that already at this time in the territories of the Second Polish Republic, left-wing ideas are beginning to gain more and more popularity. This was primarily due to two reasons: active Soviet propaganda among the general population and close contacts of the Ukrainian elite with left-wing Polish parties.

During the last months of 1922, the «Native House» society also intensified its activities. 10 of its branches have already been opened on the territory of the Lublin Voivodeship. However, the local administration refused to register them due to the fact that the previously adopted charter of the organization did not mention branches (Kuprianowicz, G. 1995, p. 178). The management of the NGO decided to adopt relevant changes in the future. On January 9, 1923, a society meeting was held, at which A. Vasynchuk gave a speech about the state of affairs. A change in the charter was discussed and approved for the possibility of creating branches of the organization; it was also decided to change the name from «Rusyn» to «Ukrainian»<sup>2</sup>. The Lublin governor several times refused to make changes to the charter that would allow the creation of branches, but on October 6, 1923, he finally registered them. This contributed to the territorial expansion of the influence of the «Native House» society, and, accordingly, the influence of the leaders of the Ukrainian community on the Ukrainian population of the region.

In general, the whole of 1923 can be characterized as a turning point in the shaping of the views of the Ukrainian population. This was facilitated by the economic crisis, the policy of the Polish government aimed primarily against Ukrainization in the region, uncertain situation with the Ukrainian Parliamentary

<sup>1</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 446. K. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Наше життя. 1923. № 3. С. 3.

Representation in the Sejm and the gradual radicalization of the views of a part of the local political elite, which had an undeniable influence among the population. In fact, A. Vasychuk can be considered the only significant political figure who remained on moderate positions.

In the spring, the socio-economic and public life of the region intensified. On April 13, 1924, on the initiative of A. Vasinchuk, the consumer cooperative «Welfare» («Dobrobut») was established. As a representative of this organization, he talked on the pages of «Our Life» about how to properly take loans from the Polish Peasant Bank, giving concrete examples from life<sup>1</sup>.

On May 11, 1924, A. Vasynchuk, together with Sejm ambassador Chumach, organized a cooperative congress of Volyn, Chelm, Podlasie and Polesie regions in Lutsk. On it, Vasynchuk proposed to create the Ukrainian People's Bank<sup>2</sup>. In addition, several decisions were made at the congress regarding:

- 1) creation of universal peasant credit and consumer cooperatives;
- 2) creation of regional ties of cooperatives and banks;
- 3) resumption of the work of the Economic Council Volyn, Chelm, Podlasie and Polesie regions, consisting of 10 people, who were to deal with the creation of the Ukrainian National Bank;
- 4) conducting mandatory cultural and educational work among members of cooperatives (Szumyło, M. 2006, p. 91).

In the summer of 1924, a new political structure — the «Peasant Union» (full name Ukrainian Socialist Union «Peasant Union» («Selsojuz»)) emerged on the territory of Chelm and Podlasie regions. This happened immediately after the closure of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party (USDP) by the Polish police, which actualized the need for a new political platform. The leaders of the Ukrainian socio-political movement of Chelm, Podlasie and Volyn became the initiators of the foundation of the left-wing Ukrainian peasant party. Seimas Ambassadors A. Bratun, M. Chumai, S. Makivka, A. and P. Vasynchuk, S. Kozytskyi, S. Nazarchuk and V. Dmytriuk (Szumyło, M. 2006).

In the spring and summer of 1924, in some villages and towns of Volyn, Chelm, Podlasie, and Polesie regions peasant meetings were held at which delegates to the Constituent Congress were elected. It took place on August 17, 1924 in Chelm (Torzecki, R. 1989, p. 68). The printed organ of the association was «Our Life», founded by A. Vasynchuk in 1920, which was published under the patronage of the «Native House» organization.

The main speech at the congress of the new peasant party was delivered by P. Vasynchuk, who was elected as the head of «Peasant Union». The unification program approved by the Constituent Congress was published in the party newspaper «Our Life». It emphasized that the new party of Ukrainian peasants aspires

<sup>1</sup> Наше життя. 1924. № 34. С. 2.

<sup>2</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 1710. K. 41.

to the elimination of exploitation in the countryside, will fight for the destruction of the capitalist system and the establishment of a socialist system, and to achieve these goals will use different forms of struggle depending on the political situation. At the forefront of the program theses was also the demand to fight «for the right to self-determination of the Ukrainian people» (Torzecki, R. 1989, p. 44).

The most urgent issues to be resolved were also formulated: the right to a school with the native language of instruction, the implementation of agrarian reform with the confiscation of large land estates and the distribution of their lands, first of all, among local Ukrainian peasants. «Peasant Union» was opposed to compensation to large landowners for land alienated from them. Regarding the future government, «Peasant Union» wanted it to consist «of peasants together with workers» (Radziejowski, J. 1976, p. 117).

In addition, the «Peasant Union» made a number of social demands, including: observance of the 8-hour working day, state assistance to the elderly and the unemployed, labor protection of women and minors, organization of free medical care (Соляр, І. 2009, с. 55–67). According to the charter, each member of the party undertook to pay contributions, to the extent possible to support the party materially and morally, to distribute the party press. The highest body of the «Peasant Union» was proclaimed the Party Congress, which was supposed to take place annually no later than May 20 (Соляр, І. 2009, с. 55–67).

It should be noted that «Peasant Union» was created with the active participation of Communist Party of Western Ukraine and partially became the conductor of its ideas. However, not all Ukrainians were satisfied with this state of affairs, which is why the socialist faction of the Ukrainian Club split in the Sejm at the beginning of 1924. There was also a certain ideological struggle within the organization itself.

According to the analysis of its activities, it was a left-wing, mostly pro-communist, political party of Ukrainian peasants from Chelm, Podlasie, Volyn and Polesie regions. Prominent figures of this party became a group of teachers who managed the departments of «Prosvita», «Native House», various Ukrainian cooperatives and social organizations. With this, the communists began to actively infiltrate the social and political circles of Ukrainians in the region and discredit political participation and the democratic process in every possible way.

Thanks to the proper organization of campaigning and the activities of branches, already in the fall of 1924 the most popular Ukrainian movement in the Chelm and Podlasie regions became the «Peasant Union». Through this party, it intended to exercise its influence in the region and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, which was in the Second Polish Republic illegally and was an autonomous party within the Communist Party of Ukraine.

In October 1925, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, it was decided that in order to consolidate political influence among the

Ukrainian peasants of Chelm and Podlasie regions and all of Western Ukraine, a peasant organization should be created that could cover the entire region. Already in November 1925 in Warsaw, representatives of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine M. Teslyuk and P. Kraykivsky met with representatives of the «Peasant Union» S. Makivka, M. Chuchmai, S. Kozytzkyi, A. Bratun and P. Vasynchuk and offered them to unite with Galician party «People's will». The negotiations were not easy. One of the conditions of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine was the requirement for the representatives of the «Peasant Union» to sever relations with the Ukrainian Club in the Sejm, which was fulfilled (Пепра, Ю. 2014с, с. 42). The negotiations ended with the decision to unite the «Peasant Union» and «People's Will».

The next step of Communist Party of Western Ukraine representatives was to conduct an active discussion with the leaders of «People's Will». The main problem was the existence of Russophiles in the leadership of the Galician organization. They demanded that after unification into a new political platform, spheres of influence should be divided: Eastern Galicia should be considered as «People's Will»; Chelm, Podlasie and Volyn — as «Peasants Union». However, in the process of difficult negotiations, they agreed to the demands of the communists to sever relations with the Russophiles and unite with the «Peasant Union» (Пепра, Ю. 2014с, с. 42).

At the end of the spring of 1926, a meeting of representatives of «People's Will» and «Peasants Union» took place, which did not produce the expected results. Representatives of the Galician party reproached their partners for nationalism, who, in turn, accused them of national nihilism. Also, representatives of the «Peasant Union» insisted on the term «Ukrainian» in the name of the new party (Пепра, Ю. 2014с, с. 43).

After long negotiations, on October 10, 1926, a joint congress of «Peasant Union» and «People's Will» was held in Lviv, which was attended by 56 and 92 delegates from these organizations, respectively (Пепра, Ю. 2014с, с. 44). The delegation of «Peasant Union» consisted of 56 people: 6 deputies of the Sejm (A. Bratun, P. Vasynchuk, S. Kozytzkyi, S. Makivka, S. Nazarchuk, M. Chuchmai), 4 delegates from three Galician counties (Brodivskyi, Bereznivskyi, Stanistavskyi), delegates from 14 counties of Volyn, Polesie and Lublin Voivodships. The composition of the «People's Will» delegation consisted of 92 people: 76 delegates from Eastern Galicia, 7 from Volyn, Chelm, Polesie regions, 3 delegates representing student youth and 6 members of the Central Committee of the «People's Will»<sup>1</sup>.

The new party was called the Ukrainian Peasant-Worker Socialist Association or «Selrob». Under the guise of this legal party, the Communist Party of Western Ukraine continued its active activities on the territory of Western Ukraine. The

<sup>1</sup> Українська суспільно-політична думка в XX столітті. Документи і матеріали. Т. 2. Сучасність. 1983. С. 169.

temporary Central Committee of the party included M. Chuchmai, S. Kozytskyi, S. Makivka from «Peasant Union» and K. Valnytskyi, M. Zayats, K. Plekhatyi from «People's Will»<sup>1</sup>.

However, it is worth noting that even during the process of unification and negotiations, a certain split began in the middle of «Peasant Union». Thus, P. Vasynchuk and his supporters were distinguished by a rather moderate position, while the group headed by S. Makivka and M. Chuchmai was much more radical and prone to communist influence.

In fact, the creation of «Peasant Union» and its subsequent entry into «Sel-rob» significantly strengthened the pro-communist movement and the territories of Chelm and Podlasie regions. The parties themselves actually became the leader of the policy of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and, accordingly, the USSR.

The «Native House» association, which continued its active activities at that time, was also influenced by communist ideas. The term of its leadership, elected at the beginning of 1922, ended on May 17, 1925. To resolve this issue, a congress of all members of the society was organized in Chelm. A new leadership was elected at it: Senator Ya. Pasternak became the president of the society, Ya. Kozachuk became vice president and editor of the newspaper «Our Life», and Ye. Makovka (wife of the ambassador of the Diet S. Makovka) became a member of the management (Пепра, Ю. 2014а, с. 97).

At the beginning of 1925, «Native House» already had 600 members in branches in the South-Eastern counties of the Lublin Voivodeship. The society also had its own library, which had 850 volumes. The treasury of the society amounted to 2,330 zlotys, which was collected for the construction of its own public house (Пепра, Ю. 2014а, с. 97).

In 1925, a political component began to manifest itself more and more actively in the activity of the association, as opposed to a social and cultural-educational one, which attracted the close attention of the Polish authorities to it. Therefore, already on May 31, 1925, a reminder was sent to its branches that according to the association's charter, namely, paragraph 5 of section II, its members can be «an unlimited number of persons of Ukrainian nationality, citizenship of the Second Polish Republic living in the city of Chelm and the Lublin Voivodeship, except for: minors, soldiers and sailors of the Polish army, pupils of scientific institutions and convicts». Branches were strongly recommended to monitor their members more closely and not to interfere in politics under any circumstances under the threat of closing the branch (Пепра, Ю. 2014а, с. 99).

On July 2, 1925, the police reported to the Lublin governor that «Native House» had come under the influence of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine.

<sup>1</sup> Українська суспільно-політична думка в ХХ столітті. Документи і матеріали. Т. 2. Сучасність. 1983. С. 171.

During the investigation, it turned out that this process started with the branches of the Wlodavskiy and Grubeshivskiy counties, among whose members were representatives of this organization. And in Hrubeshiv county, the branch was opened only in order to hold meetings of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine under the cover of the «Native House». A. Vasynchuk also confirmed to the investigation the strengthening of the influence of Communist Party of Western Ukraine on the branches of «Native House» and the activities of the association (Пепра, Ю. 2014а, с. 98).

Thus, since 1925, the influence of the communists on the activities of the association increased, due to which it began to lose its democratic nature, and loosen its purpose of the example of political participation of Ukrainians in the region, and actually turned into a conductor of the politics of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine and the USSR.

It should be noted that, Yu. Pilsudski's coup caused a surge in the activity of leftist and pro-communist forces in the region. First of all, this can be connected with the intensification of the agent work of the USSR throughout the territory of Western Ukraine. This thesis is confirmed by the instructions of F. Dzerzhynskiy to the deputy head of the Joint State Political Directorate G. Yagoda, which indicated the possible danger of a new Soviet-Polish war and the critical need to «find measures to increase sympathy for us in Western Belarus and Western Ukraine»<sup>1</sup>.

Another part of the activists began to focus on external aid, primarily on the USSR, which led them to the pro-communist camp. As of 1927, the Ukrainian parliamentary representation, the governing body of the charity society «Native House», and a large part of rural cultural and educational, social and cooperative centers were under the influence of «Selrob».

On February 16, 1927, the updated program of «Selrob» was adopted, which indicated that the new political platform is «a party of Ukrainian poor peasants, workers and the labor intelligentsia and fights for the victory of the socialist order» and that the Ukrainian question is at the forefront and the party is behind the goal of «implementing this right in the life of the Ukrainian people» (Власюк, О., Сидорук, В. and Тятко, В. 2004, с. 71).

On the eve of the constituent congress of «Selrob» in December 1926, the moderate wing and former leaders of «Peasant Union» P. Vasynchuk and S. Nazaruk left the party. They restored the «Peasant Union» party and opened their own newspaper — «Peasant Way». However, the restored party was significantly weaker than its predecessor due to a significant loss of both party members and organizational structure, as well as popular support.

In order to correct the situation, in 1927 the leadership of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Club was changed. It was headed by representatives of Ukrainian

<sup>1</sup> Україна — Польща 1920–1939: 3 історії дипломатичних відносин СРСР з Другою Річчю Посполитою. Документи і матеріали. Київ, 2012. С. 267.

National Democratic Organisation, who began to pursue a more moderate policy. In response to this, the socialist-federalists M. Chuchmay, S. Makivka, A. Bratun, S. Kozytskyi and I. Pasternak, who were ideologically close to the communists, left the Parliamentary Club, about which they made a corresponding statement on September 9, 1927<sup>1</sup>.

On May 22, 1927, politicians of the center–right orientation convened the People’s Congress of the Chelm region. In his speech, A. Vasynchuk said: «The Ukrainian club did not conduct the appropriate policy, it did not achieve practically anything. Divided into parties and started a quarrel. Sejm ambassadors leading the people under red flags brought special damage. They talk people down, and then, like M. Lutskevich, run away»<sup>2</sup>.

The main goal of the congress was the election of the new People’s Committee of the Chelm region, as the main institution and official representatives of all Ukrainians of the Chelm and Podlasie regions<sup>3</sup>.

The convention was held on May 22 in the hall of the «Oasis» cinema in Chelm. Sejm ambassadors — brothers A. and P. Vasynchuk, S. Khrutskyi, S. Makovka, senator E. Pasternak and 150 delegates from Chelm, Vlodava, Hrubeshiv, and Bilograi counties arrived for it<sup>4</sup>. The security measures that were supposed to prevent the penetration of «unreliable» elements into it. Before entering the hall, voting cards were issued to those present in such a way as to prevent delegates suspected of collaborating with the communist movement from entering the congress. This greatly annoyed S. Makovka and his associates, as they were the main targets of the initiative<sup>5</sup>.

A. Vasynchuk was the first to speak. He stated that his policy is based on the support of Warsaw, and not on the support of Moscow, «like some of those present» and strives for normal cooperation with the Polish government and will continue to seek equal rights for Ukrainians with Poles. The speaker also talked about the difficult state of the economy, culture and education of Soviet Ukraine, summarizing this thesis with the conclusion that in fact the Ukrainian government is not in its territory, but the Soviet one<sup>6</sup>. Then A. Vasynchuk criticized Ukrainian politicians who «support the red flag, not the yellow-blue flag» and called for a loyal attitude towards the Polish authorities. In the end, he called on all those present to unite before the parliamentary elections, which were to begin soon<sup>7</sup>.

The discord that existed among Ukrainians can be demonstrated by the example of such a fact. In response to A. Vasynchuk’s statements, Sejm ambassador S. Khrutskyi attacked him, delivering an impassioned speech in which he empha-

<sup>1</sup> Наше життя. 1927. 18 Травня.

<sup>2</sup> Наше життя. 1927. 22 Травня.

<sup>3</sup> Sprawy Narodowościowe. 1927. № 21. С. 280.

<sup>4</sup> APL. UWŁ. WSP. Sygn. 439. К. 6.

<sup>5</sup> APL. UWŁ. WSP. Sygn. 439. К. 6.

<sup>6</sup> APL. UWŁ. WSP. Sygn. 439. К. 7.

<sup>7</sup> APL. UWŁ. WSP. Sygn. 439. К. 7.

sized his «conciliatory» position. S. Makovka called the speaker an impostor and a spy of the Polish authorities. Later, the quarrel between Makovka and the Vasynchuks flared up more and more brightly and reached a real fight, but due to the clear superiority of the Vasynchuks' side, it quickly ended with their victory<sup>1</sup>.

After this «misunderstanding», they started voting for new members of the Committee. The Ukrainian People's Committee of the Chelm and Podlasie regions was elected by the majority of votes (only 3 against) with the following composition: chairman — A. Vasynchuk, 1st vice-chairman — A. Rochniak, 2nd vice-chairman — H. Novosad, secretary — V. Gul, treasurer — S. Pelek, members — B. Bzhus, A. Ivanchuk, deputy members — P. Vasynchuk, M. Vavrysevych, M. Borys<sup>2</sup>.

«Selrob» reacted very sharply to the resolutions of the congress of May 22 and the newly created Committee, using the newspaper «Our Life» for this purpose. The Vasynchuk brothers were called names in every way and tried to slander them, accusing them of selling the property of Ukrainians to Poles in 1918 as part of the repatriation commission in Kovel and usurping the Ukrainian national movement in 1919<sup>3</sup>.

In the autumn, the Committee began to implement the previously adopted action program. Already on September 21, 1927, a general meeting of the Ukrainian People's Committee of the Chelm and Podlasie regions was held. In addition to solving economic problems, in particular, the further development of the cooperative business and the establishment of the Ukrainian National Bank, it was decided to expand the areas of activity: to open Ukrainian private schools and, most importantly, to develop social and political organizations on the territory of the entire voivodeship. For this purpose, a decision was made to hold a number of district people's congresses, at which the question of creating Citizens' Committees was to be raised<sup>4</sup>.

This led to a negative reaction of «Selrob» to the activities of the Vasynchuk brothers. For example, in the columns of «Our Life» A. Vasynchuk was subjected to sharp criticism; he was called a «Polish-Ukrainian fascist» for his condescending attitude towards the authorities and positive feedback about Yu. Pilsudskyi<sup>5</sup>.

For an objective disclosure of the socio-political development of the Ukrainian minority in the Chelm and Podlasie regions in the second half of the 1920's, it is important to take into account the growing activity of pro-communist forces, who during this period focused on attracting political leaders of the region to their ranks. Thus, thanks to their efforts, some deputies of the Sejm from Chelm region, in particular Ya. Voytiuk, became members of the Communist Party of

<sup>1</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 439. K. 10.

<sup>2</sup> APL. UWL. WSP. Sygn. 439. K. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Нове життя. 1927. № 2. С. 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Селянський шлях. 1927. № 24. С. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Наше життя. 1927. № 39. С. 2.

Western Ukraine. The Chelm district committee of this organization was headed by the secretary of deputy Y. Voytyuk on public grounds, the proofreader of the newspaper «Our Life», O. Yasynskyi. The Youth Organization for Helping the Revolution became a structural division of Communist Party of Western Ukraine, whose Chelm District Committee was headed by O. Yasynskyi's wife Maria (Макар, Ю. & Макар, В. & Горний, М. & Салюк, А. 2011. С. 249).

In my opinion, these organizations could not carry out active political activity without external financial assistance. This is indicated by the letter of the Soviet diplomat O. Shlichter to the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine L. Kaganovich. In particular, it emphasized that political work with the Ukrainian population in Poland should be conducted among political groups, cultural, educational, and economic organizations, in particular, with «Selrob», the left wing of UNDO, and radical socialists. The attention of the political leadership of the Ukrainian SSR was drawn to the fact that strengthening and expanding the influence on the Ukrainian population can be achieved by financing these political organizations and schools of various types. It was proposed to allocate 324,200 rubles for the needs of Ukrainian schooling, in particular for 75 primary, 40 so-called home and several secondary schools in the Chelm and Podlasie regions (Макар, Ю. & Макар, В. & Горний, М. & Салюк, А. 2011. С. 249).

Further actions of the left-oriented parties paralyzed the work of the Ukrainian People's Committee of the Chelm and Podlasie regions, as a result of which its head at the time, Sejm ambassador S. Lyubarskyi, was forced to announce the self-liquidation of this organization, which was extremely necessary for the Ukrainian population, on April 28, 1927<sup>1</sup>.

The situation that developed on May 15, 1927 at the general meeting of the «Native House» in Chelm is a vivid example of the active struggle of left-wing political forces with populist ones<sup>2</sup>. P. Vasynchuk and A. Vasynchuk tried in every possible way to reduce the influence of «Selrob» and Communist Party of Western Ukraine on the NGO. Speaking at the general meeting, A. Vasynchuk warned that due to active illegal political activity, the association may be closed, and this will have a detrimental effect on the entire Ukrainian population of the region. However, S. Makovka replied to A. Vasynchuk that due to non-payment of membership fees since 1925, he is excluded from the ranks of the NGO and does not have the right to teach those who are present<sup>3</sup>. After the tough debates, «Native House» remained under the influence of left forces.

At that time, the Polish authorities canceled the results of the local elections. Because of the frank restriction of political freedoms, people resorted to protest

<sup>1</sup> Селянський шлях. 1927. 21 Травня.

<sup>2</sup> Селянський шлях. 1927. 21 Травня.

<sup>3</sup> Наше життя. 1927. № 21. С. 2.

actions. In most cases, mass gatherings were organized and led by left-wing politicians, in particular Communist Party of Western Ukraine and «Selrob», at which they distributed leaflets and pro-communist press, hung anti-state and anti-Polish posters. These slogans found support among the broad masses of the population (Макар, Ю. & Макар, В. & Горний, М. & Салюк, А. 2011. С. 251).

In the pre-election campaign for the parliamentary elections of 1928, «Selrob», the journal «Our Life» played a major role. A. Vasynchuk decided to return it to his property and use it in his campaign. For this purpose, on February 1, 1928, in the Chelm county government, he wrote a statement about the rejection of his own declaration of 1920 as publisher and responsible editor, due to which the newspaper stopped being published already on February 8. At the same time, A. Vasynchuk created a new edition with the same name. Its main editorial office was located in Brzesia, and the journal was published with a circulation of 1,000 copies, which were distributed primarily in the territory where the Ukrainian National Economic List carried out active campaigning<sup>1</sup>.

During the 1928–1930's, the socio-economic situation worsened, primarily due to the world economic crisis. There were constant demonstrations by workers and peasants dissatisfied with their situation and the government's policy of overcoming the Great Depression. The left and pro-communist forces, who actively organized strikes and participated in them, decided to take advantage of this situation.

The Polish government responded to the actions of pro-communist organizations with mass searches and arrests. On April 13, 1929, the Lublin District Court, at an external hearing in Chelm, convicted P. Scherbak, editor of the newspaper «New Life» for the article «Utraquism» published in the newspaper. In it, the author criticized the anti-Ukrainian policy of the Polish authorities in the field of education and the falsity of the slogan «equal to equal»<sup>2</sup>.

On December 17, 1927, in a letter from B. Stomoyankov, a member of the Collegium of the Communist Party of the USSR, personally to Y. Stalin regarding the urgent needs of «Ukrainian work» in the Second Polish Republic, he reported on the latest course of events and the situation with the left movement in Poland. It was noted that a similar situation arose due to errors made by the Communist Party of Western Ukraine. Particular dissatisfaction was caused by the situation with «Selrob», in particular, its loss of positions in the region and the emergence of intra-party contradictions. In fact, the thesis was expressed that Communist Party of Western Ukraine cannot play the role of organizer and leader of the left wing of Ukrainian society and actually lost the trust of the Soviet leadership<sup>3</sup>. This led to a decrease in funding and institutional support so, already on December 25, 1929, «Selrob» published a statement on the termination of its activities.

<sup>1</sup> Sprawy Narodowościowe. 1928. № 22. С. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Наше життя. 1929. 21 Квітня.

<sup>3</sup> Україна — Польща 1920–1939: 3 історії дипломатичних відносин СРСР з Другою Річчю Посполитою. Документи і матеріали. Київ, 2012. С. 185.

Despite certain local successes, these attempts to undermine democratic institutions could not be extended to the entire state or even to neighboring regions inhabited by Ukrainians and Belarusians. Although they achieved their other goal — discrediting democratic institutions and political participation of the population in local initiatives, primarily in NGOs and charitable organizations.

In summarizing the article, it is clear that the 1920's era of the Second Polish Republic exemplifies a significant crisis in democratic institutions. This period witnessed Polish communists skillfully utilizing democratic mechanisms to further their own agenda, with the Ukrainian communities in the Chelm and Podlasie regions becoming their primary target. By integrating into these communities and manipulating local political structures, they successfully established underground cells of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (CPWU), covertly gaining democratic control. The conversion of a newspaper into a tool for political propaganda and the strategic influence exerted on the local populace led to the electoral success of pro-communist activists in the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland.

This case study is instrumental in understanding the vulnerabilities of democratic institutions. It underscores the necessity for continuous vigilance and proactive measures to safeguard democratic values against manipulation. The evolution of political participation in this context reveals how ostensibly democratic processes can be subverted for autocratic ends, highlighting the delicate balance between democratic freedoms and the risks of exploitation by powerful political forces.

Moreover, this study offers insights into the mechanisms through which a democratic state can transition towards autocracy, driven by the local-level devaluation and distortion of democratic ideals. It illustrates the potential for political forces, even those officially banned, to exploit democratic tools for subversive purposes. This includes influencing populations through electoral processes, propagandizing through media outlets, and infiltrating local organizations to seize control.

Ultimately, the experiences of the Ukrainian minority in the Second Polish Republic serve as a cautionary tale. They emphasize the importance of robust democratic safeguards to protect citizens and institutions from the machinations of those who would undermine the foundations of democracy for their own gain. This study is not only a historical examination but also a relevant guide for contemporary democracies in fortifying their institutions against similar threats.

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