**Bialik’s Belarusian passport - The Belarusian People’s Republic and the Jews in 1921**

Abstract: Starting from a seemingly anecdotal detail – Bialik’s Belarusian passport -, this article explores a little known page of the Belarusian People’s Republic history and of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Eastern Europe, i.e. the rapprochement between Jewish and Belarusian political activist in Berlin in 1921, before and after the peace treaty of Riga. Using published and unpublished archival sources, the author reconstitutes the efforts of three Jewish officials of the BNR government – David Anekshtein, Isaac Lur’e and Samuil Zhitlovsky – to raise awareness of the Belarusian cause among Jewish, and particularly, Zionist circles in Berlin and in the West. The article explores the BNR government in exile’s last attempt to secure statehood at a turning point in the history of the region through active cooperation with the Jewish community. It confirms the central role attributed to the Jewish nation in the Belarusian national project but also reveals the tensions and frustrations on both sides. While this cooperation failed to produce the expected outcome – BNR independence – it was crucial in shaping the BNR’s response to the violent anti-Jewish pogroms during the summer 1921 and broadening the public knowledge about the Belarusian cause to various émigré circles in Berlin, as well as laid the basis for mutual political and cultural recognition in the BSSR.

Keywords: Belarus – BNR – Berlin – Emigration – S. Zhitlovski – I. Lur’e – D. Anekshtein – V. Lastousky - pogroms – Bialik – Zionism – Lithuania – S. Zneur.

It is a well-known fact that the Hebrew national poet Khaim Nakhman Bialik left Bolshevik Russia in the summer 1921 together with other Hebrew writers and their family thanks to the help of his friend Maxim Gorky. After leaving Odessa Bialik reached Constantinople, from where he headed to Carlsbad (Czechoslovakia) to attend the Twelfth Zionist Congress in September 1921 [Bialik 1955, letter to Ravnitski 25/08/21; Aberbach 1988]. However it is less well-known that he was in possession of a Belarusian passport to travel through Central Europe. The passport was issued gratis by the Belarusian People’s Republic (BNR) consulate at Constantinople to Bialik and his wife Manya (spelled Menia in the passport) on the 15th July 1921, valid until 15 January 1922, and signed by the Colonel Consul-General Ermachenko [НАРБ, Ф. 827, Оп. 2, Д. 19, Лл. 1-6] [ill. 1, 2 and 3]. The Belarusian consulate in Constantinople had just been established and according to Ermachenko’s report to the head of the BNR government Lastouski in a letter dated 14 June 1921, he had already issued twenty passports to Belarusian citizens desperate to go home, but was ashamed to ask for fees because of their poverty [Архівы БНР 2790, 1123]. The official but factitious purpose of Bialik’s trip indicated on his passport was to ‘go home’ to Grodno [ill. 4]. The passport contained also a Belarusian visa indicating that Bialik and his wife were going to ‘Ruthénie Blanche via Lom-Budapest’ [Ill 5]. In order to turn Bialik into a Belarusian citizen, his place of birth on the documents was indicated as Slonim in the Grodno region, instead of Ukrainian Rady [Ill. 6]. The Constantinople Emigrant Office of the Joint Distribution Committee provided a certificate of birth dated of 15 July 1921 [НАРБ, Ф. 827, Оп. 3, Д. 34, Л. 2][[1]](#footnote-1).

There is no doubt that this passport actually belonged to Bialik who is clearly recognizable on the photograph [Ill. 3] and who indicated Odessa as his place of residence. The choice of Slonim as the fictitious birth place, and not Minsk, as in the application form filled in by Bialik, makes sense in the geopolitical context of the time: Slonim was then in Western Belarus that had just been incorporated into the Second Republic of Poland as a consequence of the Treaty of Riga, whereas Minsk was in Bolshevik Belarus where Bialik did not want to return. The passport holds Greek, Bulgarian, Hungarian and Czech transit visas which correspond to Bialik’s trajectory to reach Carlsbad from Constantinople[[2]](#footnote-2). In itself this passport can seem anecdotic and just a detail in Bialik’s life. However it helps to shed a new light on a period of intense political recomposition in post-war Central and Eastern Europe and of high stakes for different ‘small nations’ and minorities trying to get their existence and national rights recognised in the aftermath of the First World War.

The first question that this article will answer is why would the BNR have issued a passport to Bialik, who was not Belarusian and had no apparent connection to Belarus? Conversely why would Bialik and his friends have thought of asking the new and obscure BNR consulate in Constantinopole to help them? This intriguing fact, apart from confirming the BNR’s liberality in its deliverance of passports at this period in particular to Jews [НАРБ, Ф. 864, Оп. 1, Д. 1; Чернякевич 2018, 224] and its preoccupation with national symbols of statehood [Rudling 2014, 86-87], unveils a range of networks and behind-the-scene talks that are revealing about the personal connections between Belarusian and Jewish political figures at the local and international level at the crucial turning point of 1921.

Second, the fact that the BNR assisted the most famous Jewish writer of the time is not a coincidence and speaks to the political significance of the Jewish-Belorussian mutual collaboration that was developing at the time. Although it is not impossible that Ermachenko was not aware of who Bialik was, the circumstances that lie behind this seemingly insignificant fact shed a new light on what we know about the BNR activity and political strategy at a crucial moment. It helps to nuance the widely-held view that the BNR was an insignificant and illegitimate state, obsessed with symbols but with ‘no or little practical importance’ [Rudling 2014, 87; Savchenko 2009, 72-73]. It also questions the view that Belorussian nationalism was first and foremost an instrument used successively by the Germans, the Bolsheviks, the Poles and the Lithuanians to strengthen their strategic position in the region between 1914 and the 1920s, [Rudling 2014, ch. 2; Vakar 1956, 105]. It challenges the widely accepted view that Belarus is defined mostly as a borderland, whose history and future were determined in the first instance by its relations with its powerful neighbours Poland and Russia [Vakar 1956, 51-64; Savchenko 2009; Sahanovič 2011]. This paper shows that even after its exile, or more exactly, particularly during its period of exile in 1920-1921, the BNR government diversified its alliances and sought to receive international recognition and advance the cause of Belorussian statehood through the Jewish community. The terms of this ‘pragmatic alliance’ were reciprocal and a number of Jewish intellectuals and leaders welcomed the BNR support, in the context of violent pogroms on Belarusian lands.

Finally, Bialik’s Belarusian passport adds another layer to the already thick history of émigré Berlin, from which the Belarusians are however broadly absent[[3]](#footnote-3). The passport was the symbolic culmination of the active collaboration between Jewish and Belarusian émigrés in Berlin and confirms Olaf Terpitz’s assumption that émigré Berlin should not be studied in a compartmentalized way [Terpitz 2012, 179-199]. This multi-layered community of emigres from different background - Russian, Baltics, Ukrainian, Scandinavian, Yiddish-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews - met and interacted more than initially thought, and included a more discreet ‘Belarusian Berlin’, less visible in a historiography that focused on culture [Schlögel 1999; Будницкий Полян 2013, 17]. The strategy put forward by the BNR Jewish activists was precisely to make contacts with other emigre groups, in particular Zionist Jews, Russians and Scandinavians. Overall this paper adds to our understanding of cooperation between Jews and other East-European emerging nations in a city that was a refuge and in the context of hope created by the First World War and the Russian Revolutions.

So the aim of this paper is to find the link between Bialik and the BNR. I will show that the activities of the BNR extraordinary mission in Berlin in 1921 were closely connected to and even led by a group of Jewish intellectuals, mostly Zionists, who supported the Belarusian cause in the hope of securing Jewish national autonomy, while the Belarusian government in exile courted the Jewish public opinion as part of a strategy of rapprochement with the nations oppressed by Polish and Russian powers in the past. I will argue that Bialik’s Belarusian passport is emblematic of the intense period of rapprochement between the BNR and Jews in 1921 that brought a superficial albeit immediate recognition among some Zionists of the existence of a Belarusian national movement. This encounter was made possible by the converging efforts of a group of Belarusian and Jewish activists mutually interested in the creation of a democratic and multi-ethnic Belarus, in the post-civil war context of partition of Ukraine and Belarus between Poland and Bolshevik Russia. Although failing to secure Belarusian statehood, this period revealed the know-how and lobbying work of a small group of individuals from diverse horizons and highlights the ingrained challenges, frustrations and unrealized promises of a Jewish-Belarusian friendship.

**Belarus difficult path to statehood**

As noted by Per Anders Rudling, there were six declarations of Belarusian statehood between 1918 and 1921. Eroded by political and strategical divisions, the Belarusian nationalist movement followed different paths and leaders during this period and it is important to understand what were the political and geopolitical issues at stake in 1921 before looking at the BNR’s activity in Berlin.

Generally considered a weaker movement because a latecomer in comparison with other nationalisms in the region and dominated by small groups of intellectuals disconnected from the population, the Belarusian national movement nonetheless successfully achieved statehood in March 1918, uniting its different elements in an anti-Bolshevik and separatist momentum. The birth of the BNR in March 1918 and its declaration of independence on the 25th March 1918 resulted from a conjunction of various long-term and short-term factors: the emergence of a Belarusian national idea in the second half of the 19th century, embodied at its height by the Belarusian-language journal *Nasha Niva* (1906-1915), the German support to the Belarusian national movement during the war, the Russian revolutions interpreted by national intelligentsias as a blank cheque for social and national liberation of ‘oppressed peoples’, and finally the Brest-Litovsk peace that resulted in the departure of the Bolsheviks from Minsk and created a political vacuum favourable to the proclamation of national independences [Vakar 1956; Чернякевич 2018; Rudling 2014]. The BNR’s independence was however short-lived. Soon after the German defeat in November 1918, the government was dispersed by the Bolsheviks. The territory claimed by Belarusian nationalists was then split between Polish and Bolshevik rulers. Some Belarusian nationalists participated in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus (SSRB) created in January 1919, soon to be transformed into a joint Lithuanian-Belarusian republic (Litbel) after the Bolshevik conquest of Vilna. The BNR continued its existence in exile, some of its leaders going to Vilna (Anton Lutskevich), while others found refuge in Grodno (Vaclau Lastouski). The BNR soon had two governments: the Supreme Rada headed by Lutskevich and the more radical People’s Rada led by Lastouski. The Bolshevik counter-offensive in July 1920 forced the BNR governments to flee again: Lutskevich to Warsaw, Lastouski to Riga. A Polish counter-offensive was successful in reconquering most of Western Belarus and Ukraine, and the Treaty of Riga in March 1921 partitioned the territory of Belarus between the Soviets and Poland.

During the tumultuous period of 1918-21, the fate of Belarus increasingly depended on ‘political developments in Moscow, Berlin, Warsaw, Kaunas, Versailles and Riga’ [Rudling 2014, 66]. Immediately after the 25 March 1918 proclamation of independence, envoys were sent to the United States and European capitals including Paris, Berlin, Bern, Warsaw and Kiev with little success. The Rada also opened consulates or missions in neighbouring states (Kiev, Odessa, Moscow, Stavropol and Vilna) [Vakar 1956, 103; Rudling 2014, 87]. After the departure of the BNR from Minsk in November 1918, exiled leaders diverged on the strategy to conduct. Latsouski and the BNR-in-exile in Grodno tried to join forces with Lithuania and plan for a federative state [Rudling 2014, 94]. The Lithuanian government signed a treaty with the BNR in December 1918 and supported the Belarusian cause by including Belarusian representatives in the Taryba (parliament) and creating a Ministry for Belarusian Affairs. Lutskevich on the other hand supported an alliance with Poland with mixed results, pursuing his 1915 project of restoration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a confederation of the Belarusian, Lithuanian, Polish and Jewish peoples [Vakar 1956, 94-95]. He also headed a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference to seek recognition of the BNR but struggled to be heard [Rudling 2014, 103-104]. His conciliatory efforts extended also to Soviet Russia.

The Treaty of Riga exacerbated divisions within the Belarusian movement. Some joined what could be seen as the first stable Belarusian polity, the BSSR, but many BNR supporters continued to fight for an independent Belarus allied with Lithuania, or for national rights in Poland. Historians disagree in their assessment of Belarusian nationalists’ interpretation of the Treaty of Riga. In Vakar’s words ‘this was a godsend: with competition on both sides of the border, their cause could only gain!’ [Vakar 1956, 118]. Snyder on his part considers that ‘Belarusian activists regarded the Riga settlement as treason and tragedy. Although other blows would follow, after Riga it was hard to see Warsaw as an ally of Belarusian aspirations. […] Without Minsk, the Belarusian intelligentsia was too small to serve as an ally for any Polish political formation’ [Snyder 2003, 65]. During the unstable period between October 1920 and early 1922, it is probably fair to say that Belarusian activists’ mood went from one extreme to the other. For the People’s Rada then in Riga and Lastouski in particular, the solution to the national question was not to be found in Soviet Belarus or in Poland but prospects were low for a Belarusian state especially after Belarus was removed from preliminary peace negotiations in October 1920 [Пурышева 2009, 158; Чернякевич 2018, 213]. Lastouski was anticipating the liquidation of the BNR government and planning his return to BSSR [Чернякевич 2018, 214]. The situation changed after Żeligowski’s capture of Vilna in October 1920 and the creation of the Republic of Central Lithuania where a plebiscite was to be held, Lastouski’s Rada and the Lithuanian government signed a secret agreement in November 1920. They committed to mutual support: the Lithuanian government recognised the BNR Rada under Lastouski and promised financial support, while Belarusians promised support in the Lithuanian fight to free the Vilna region from Polish occupation and the holding of the plebiscite [Тихомиров 2006; Чернякевич 2018, 216-7]. The months that preceded and followed the Riga peace, up to the final resolution of the Vilna situation in spring 1922, coincide with a period of high diplomatic and political activity on the part of the BNR in exile but also of ongoing internal struggles and uncertainty as to Lithuanian support [Чернякевич 2018, 219-222].

It is in this context of all-around campaign for international recognition that the extraordinary diplomatic mission in Berlin, officially registered in May 1919 by Anton Lutskevich [Сакалоўскі 2009, 21] needs to be analysed. Although preoccupied initially mostly with the question of the 60.000 Belarusian prisoners of war in German camps that the BNR wanted to recruit to create a national army, the mission increased its activity in 1920, culminating in 1921. In the months that preceded the Treaty of Riga, Belarusians, allied with Lithuanians in their battle against Poland over the status of Vilna, hoped that there would be an opportunity to advance the Belarusian cause; after the Treaty of Riga, and while the Vilna question was not completely settled, they hoped to maintain some interest in the Belarusian question and to make use of the bad publicity brought by Polish pogroms and famine in Russia to raise awareness of the unfair treatment of Belarus. Continuing its quest for international recognition and financial subsidies, the BNR government now in Kaunas encouraged its representatives in Berlin to increase their contacts with diplomats from France, Germany, Britain and the United States. It also gradually turned to the Jewish community that occupied, in the view of some nationalists, a central place in the future of an independent Belarus.

**Jews, the reluctant ally of the Belarusian cause**

This turn to Jews was not unprecedented. From the 1900s, Belarusian nationalists actively sought an alliance with Jews [Le Foll 2008]. From its inception the Belarusian Socialist Hramada recognized the right to national autonomy for all minorities and took position against antisemitism and pogroms in 1905-06 [НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 26, Л. 1]. There is much evidence of this stance in favour of Jews in the Belarusian journal *Nasha Niva*. The activities of the Black Hundred in the Belarusian *gubernii* in 1906-07, pogroms and the treatment of Jews in the Beilis affair [1906, n°5, p. 4 ; 1907, n13 p.6, n°17 ; 1908, n°17, p. 1; 1913 17 Oct;] were regularly denounced. The journal also refuted anti-semitic stereotypes about Jewish exploitation and wealth [A. Lutskevich ‘About Jews’, 1907 n 17]. Regretting the underrepresentation of Jews in local self-government, *Nasha Niva* editors emphasized the loyalty to the peasant cause and the ethical qualities of Jewish deputies at the Duma. It emerges from reading *Nasha Niva* that the Belarusian nationalists welcomed the Jews in their political combat by praising their intellectual and moral qualities, even recognizing their superiority over the Belarusians in the political sphere. A step further was taken by Anton Lutskevich when he published an article in Yiddish under his pseudonym Novina in *Di yidishe velt* in 1913, titled ‘Vegn der natsionaler oyflebung fun di belorusen’ (about the Belarusians’ national revival) [Novina 1913]. The purpose of this article was to explain the aims and progress of the Belarusian national movement and to convince the Jews that they had to support their neighbours. Admitting the weakness of the Belarusian leadership, he recognized the necessity to ‘seek allies among the peoples who are deprived of rights and oppressed like the Belarusian people’. Then, there were only two possible allies in Lutskevich’s opinion: Lithuanians and Jews. While Lithuanians and Belarusians cohabited only in Vilna, Jews lived all over the Belarusian territory, in close and peaceful relation with Belarusian peasants. To consolidate the Belarusian-Jewish friendship, he asked Jews to clarify their attitude towards the Belarusian national movement. This ideal of friendship also underpins the Belarusian ‘nasha-niviste’ literature of the time where Jewish characters are humanised, shown as generous, morally and intellectually remarkable as well as proud of their Jewishness [Le Foll 2006, 459-466].

Despite the fact that Jews and Belarusians were in agreement on the idea of national autonomy [Герасимова 2009, 71], and that some Jewish intellectuals started to express interest in the Belarusian culture[[4]](#footnote-4), the Jewish support was still very timid. The Belarusian frustration with what they saw as Jewish ‘assimilationism’ was growing, as reflected in the poem ‘Zhydy’ (Jew) by the national writer Ianka Kupala in 1919:

Масква й Варшава аплюлі вам імя

І ў дзікай чэрні ненавісць спладзілі к вам,

А Беларусь пад крыллямі сваімі

Вас грэла й вашым нянькаю была дзяцям.

Пасля, жыды, вы зрэкліся народу,

Які вам шчыра даў багацце і прыпын;

Пайшлі прыдбаць сабе чэсць і выгоду

Да сільных тых, хто даў вам вісельню і чын!

[…] Цяпер за вамі слова ў буру гэту:

Пайці ці не, з народам нашым да святла...

Пара, жыды, паны усяго свету,

Сплаціці доўг, які вам Беларусь дала!

Belarusian nationalists nevertheless kept the door open. The Executive Committee of the Belarusian Rada in December 1917 comprised representatives of Jewish parties (Socialist-Zionists, Zionists and Poalei-Zion) [Le Foll 2008, 67]. The BNR recognised the rights to national autonomy for ethnic minorities and the equality between languages [Герасимова 2009, 71]. The first ‘universals’ (Constituent Charter) were published in Belarusian, Polish and Yiddish. After its declaration of independence in March 1918, the BNR government included Jewish representatives (M. Gutman, G. Belkind) while the Rada (parliament) counted up to ten members from Jewish parties [Le Foll 2008, n16; Герасимова 2009, 71]. The BNR guaranteed the representation of ethnic minorities at the local level and Jews were entitled up to seven sieges in the Rada. Gutman played a key role in the writing of the first Charter, using his experience of former member of the Central Ukrainian Rada [Герасимова 2009, 72]. It is worth noting that Ukraine’s People Republic, proclaimed after the February revolution, had paved the way for this collaboration with Jews by recognizing Yiddish as an official language, creating a Ministry of Jewish affairs and recognising Jewish cultural autonomy [Abramson 1999; Magosci 1996]. However this idyll ended when the Ukrainian Rada declared its independence in January 1918, only to be replaced with growing tensions between the two communities because of the violent wave of pogroms in 1919-21. In a similar way, the Jewish representatives left the Belarusian Rada in April 1918 after the BNR decided to take its distance from Russia and to collaborate with the German authorities. This Belarusian-Jewish friendship was underpinned by publications of members of the intellectual elite, primarily the Belarusian writer of Jewish origin Zmitrok Biadulia. In his ethnographic study *The Jews in Belarus* (1918) and several articles published in 1918-19 he advocated a Belarusian-Jewish symbiosis and encouraged the Jews to participate in the creation of a Belarusian state [Le Foll 2008, 69]. Articles by other Belarusian authors in the press also testify of the continuous attempts to trigger a rapprochement[[5]](#footnote-5). These examples demonstrate the willingness of most if not all Belarussian nationalists to conclude a pragmatic alliance with the Jews and to associate them with the building of a Belarusian state, although it was not strongly reciprocated on the Jewish part. Bialik’s passport and the BNR efforts in 1921 to approach the Zionists in Berlin were the culmination of this long-term effort to attract Jewish support and attention in a final struggle to get international recognition for the BNR.

**Belarusian Jews working for the BNR in exile**

The collaboration between the Jews and the BNR resumed when several Jewish personalities joined the Berlin mission at the end of 1920. The BNR was then alarmed by the fact that the West received information about the BNR only from ‘hostile sources’. It was urgent, according to the then chief of the mission in Berlin Leanid Barkoù, to send trusted representatives to the places where there were none, for example London [Arche 70, 137]. As noted by Inna Gerasimova, the BNR needed to maintain ‘official and unofficial relations with various international organisations and influential individuals’ to receive the international recognition crucial to its existence [Герасимова 2009, 72]. The BNR government did not have this kind of contacts, therefore they reached out for help to public figures with Belarusian background, first and foremost Jewish politicians and cultural figures. To this end, the BNR mission in Berlin and BNR government hired a few Jewish personalities to help lobbying through informal channels in favour of their cause.

The first one to join the BNR was Isaac Lur’e from Pinsk. His father Grigorii Lur’e was a Zionist activist, and he had connections with Zionist leaders including Weizmann, Sokolow and Motzkin. He was a journalist in Copenhagen when he started to collaborate with the BNR in exile in 1920 [Герасимова 2002]. He became the BNR representative in Copenhagen. Barkoù was delighted about his zealous service and in particular the incomes that he generated by selling passports to Belarusian citizens in Copenhagen [Arche 70, 136]. Later Lur’e became the head of the BNR press office in Northern countries. He was a loyal supporter of the Belarusian cause and was particularly active in disseminating information in Scandinavian and more broadly Western media. For instance, in January 1921, he indicated to the Belarusian mission in Berlin that several Scandinavian journals were to open a joint bureau in Berlin and that it would be ‘extraordinarily important’ to send them regular news [Arche 151, 253-254]. He also played a key role in publishing information about pogroms and publicizing the BNR position about anti-Jewish violence. He published interviews and articles in Lithuanian newspapers in 1921 where he urged other countries to support Belarus in its struggle for independence [‘Jews in the Belarusian movement’, *Volnaia Litva,* 10/07/21]. To him the Jews of Eastern Europe had to play a key role in ‘promoting the defence of the liberated nations from the centralised tendencies of the Russian nation,’ in order to erase the memory of the role they played in the russification in Ukraine, Poland and Belarus and ‘for our own disgrace.’ [Герасимова 2002, 52]

The second Jew who started working for the BNR in this period was David Anekshtein, a Zionist student of karaite nationality from Minsk [Arche 74, 139-140, 244]. He was nominated military attaché of the BNR in Berlin in November 1920 by Lastoùski [Arche 73, 139; Архівы БНР 2508, 963] but then appeared in the official documents as Conseiller [radnik]. A month after his appointment he sent suggestions for a plan of action to Lastoùski, aimed at creating closer relations between the BNR and Zionists and Jewish societies [Arche 76, 141]. Building on the BNR’s diplomatic strategy aimed at the great powers, Anekshtein recommended to go a step further by approaching prominent and historical Zionists such as Kurt Blumenfeld, Martin Rosenblut, Nahum Sokolow, Leo Motzkin and Ben-Ami[[6]](#footnote-6). He also suggested to establish contact with ‘German socialists and especially independent personalities through [Albert] Baumeister, Khazanovich and Bialichka (chairman of the Saxon independents)’[[7]](#footnote-7). Albert Baumeister, a trade unionist and journalist who worked at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva and later in Berlin would be of great help to get articles published in the German, Swiss and French press. Finally Anekshtein advised to ‘build relations with Jews native from Belarus living in Germany to raise their awareness of the Belarusian question’. He believed that all these contacts would help securing income to the BNR through loans and passport fees. Lastouski had met Sokolow and Motzkin in November-December 1920 during a session of the League of Nation in Geneva, where he received their promise of help [Архівы БНР 2541, 975] but he was impatient to see more concrete results and enquired in a letter to Aneksthein dated 21 January 1921 whether he had seen Zhabotinsky and if he was corresponding with Sokolow and Motzkin [Arche 80, 145-156]. He also suggested to send Walter Jäger’s book *Weissruthenien* to American and Jewish newspapers. Anekshtein complied and sent a letter to Motzkin and Sokolow (12 February 1921) asking for their support [Arche 84, 153]. The letter expressed the hope that following ‘our success’ in Geneva and with the departure of the Poles from the Vilna and Grodno region, the plebiscite on the status of the Vilna region would benefit to Belarusians, Jews and Lithuanians in the region and that the time for an independent Belarus was coming closer[[8]](#footnote-8). He enquired whether they had met Isaac Naidich, a Zionist and entrepreneur, chair of the finance commission of the WZO [председатель финансово-экономической комисии Всемирной сионистской организации] in London and Paris and asked for advice on which Zionist leader could work with the BNR government to support the creation of an independent Belarus where Jews would not only have a large national autonomy but also equal rights and proportional representation in the government. Anekshtein also contacted Khazanovich who was in the US and asked him to disseminate information about Belarus to Jewish newspapers and organisations [Arche 85, 154]. He received help from Baumeister in Geneva to publish in the French press and asked him contacts among Socialists in London [Архівы БНР 2770 and 2783]. Anekshtein later organized the visit of Symon Rozenbaum, the chair of the Jewish council in Lithuania, to Berlin in July 1921 and arranged meetings for him with German Zionists and Jewish intellectuals, while securing his support in the question of Lithuanian loans to the BNR [Архівы БНР 2843]. Anekshtein’s active networking in the Jewish community was promising and laid the ground for the next stage in the BNR’s rapprochement with Jews – the creation of a Ministry for national minorities at the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of the proclamation of independence in March 1921. The position was offered to a Belarusian Jew of a higher calibre, Samuil Zhitlovsky, Khaim’s brother and whose other brother Moisei Zhitlovsky had joined the Lastouski’s government in June 1920 as Minister of trade and industry [ministr torgovli i promyshlennosti] [Сакалоўскі 2009, 25].

The creation of a Ministry for national minorities precisely at this moment and in exile underlines the emergency for Jews and Belarusians to defend, symbolically and in practice, the principles of national rights for the peoples oppressed by Poland and Russia, in the new geopolitical order created by the Riga peace. Zhitlovsky was a useful person to this regard. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory and became a music teacher, conductor of his own symphonic orchestra and violin soloist for some time in Vitebsk, his hometown where he returned. At the same time he helped his father with the family business and was involved in trade. He then lived for some time in Riga, Moscow and Petersburg, before emigrating to Vilna and then Kaunas after the October revolution [Герасимова 2009, 75]. His education, experience in business and connection with prominent Jewish intellectual and cultural figures in Eastern Europe but also in the United States, through his brother Chaim, made him the perfect candidate for the position of Minister for national minorities. He was mostly based in Berlin but travelled occasionally.

Zhitlovsky’s nomination was announced in the international Jewish press [eg. *The Sentinel*, 22/04/21] and he inaugurated his ministerial position with a few interviews in the Lithuanian press in which he supported the idea that Jews and Belarusians should collaborate closely to build an independent Belarusian state. In his first speech as newly nominated minister he emphasized the attachment of Jews to ‘the freedom of their nation and of their neighbours’, as a people that had been oppressed [Герасимова 2009, 75]. He denounced the occupation of Belarus by Poles and Russians and resolutely supported the national liberation of Belarusians, as a project compatible with and even assuring the realisation of the Zionist ideal: ‘The Jewish state will not be able to solve entirely the ‘Jewish question’. […] All Jews who cherish the interests of the Jewish people should take part in this work of creating an independent Belarus. If Palestine is our war front, then Belarus, Poland and Galicia are our rear. A front without a rear does not mean anything.’ [Герасимова 2009, 76]. One of Zhitlovsky’s first act as Minister was the preparation of a project of agreement “about the common construction of the BNR by Belarusians and Jews, dominant elements in Belorussia, neck and neck”. In this document that I analysed and published elsewhere [Le Foll 2008, 68], he places Jews and Belarusians on an equal foot in the building of a Belarusian state: ‘Considering the historicity of Jews in Belarus and the strength of the Jewish population, Belarusians and Jews are the two dominant nations on the Belorussian territory. These two nations, Belarusians and Jews, conclude an agreement regarding the creation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic’. Inspired by the principles of national-cultural autonomy (each nation would be allowed to have cultural, religious and educational autonomy, separate tribunals, proportional representation in government and national institutions), Zhitlovsky went further and requested that the two ‘dominant donations’ should bear an equal responsibility to ‘increase the economic and cultural level of the dominant nations and of the whole population of BNR’ [НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 119, Л. 6]. Zhitlovsky widely publicized this agreement and his role for the BNR. He gave interviews and published articles in the international press [*La Tribune Juive*, 10/06/1921 n76, p. 6; *Der Mizrekh Yid,* Berlin n18,6/05/1921, published in Архівы БНР 2755, 1113] where he commented on the unique agreement signed between Jews and Belarusians in March 1921. The creation of this Ministry and adoption of this new strategy were also celebrated in a declaration of the government of the BNR on the 3rd anniversary of the proclamation of independence (25 March 1921) in Yiddish. It states that the ‘two sovereign nations living on the Belarusian Land, imagined and united themselves into one people [narod], sharing the future fight for their land, culture and statehood’ [Arche, 533-534; *The Hebrew standard,* 1/07/21]

A fourth Jew joined the BNR team in Berlin. The financier and banker David Lur’e, from the region of Chernigov, became the commercial and financial agent for the Belarusian government in Germany but without salary. He supported the chief of mission Andrei Barouski, who succeeded Barkou in March 1921 in his work to facilitate the collaboration between Belarusian cooperatives and Germany to bring income to Belarusian government. Lastouski requested his help at moments of financial difficulties for the BNR to obtain a credit for example in April 1921 [Arche 101, 170-171] and August 1922 [Arche 117, 1840].

**Samuil Zhitlovsky and the BNR**

Zhitlovsky’s collaboration with the BNR lasted until 1923 [Arche 188, 299] but was at its height between March 1921 and November 1921. During this period he established contacts with Zionists and Jewish personalities in Germany and abroad, represented the BNR at the Zionist Congress, supported initiatives in relations with pogroms and facilitated the BNR commercial and financial activities. Typical of this holistic approach to his role, in a letter to Lastouski dated 30 April 1921 he reported on everything from communication to economy and diplomacy [Архівы БНР 2748]. He had made contact with different representatives of the Jewish society in Berlin and was pleading for a growth of the press office in Berlin. He had received donations for the BNR, and was expecting more, particularly £2000 promised in London. He successfully conducted a commercial operation with IWEG (Internationale Waren-Export und Import Gesellschaft) that helped with the import-export of raw material from Kaunas such as salt, paper, glass, linen, hemp, bristle [id]. He continued to look after the commercial relations with Germany in general in the following months. In August he secured a cash infusion of 700,000 marks (probably a loan) through IWEG [Архівы БНР 2898]. He was confident that these financial incomes would allow him to go to London and America ‘where I am expecting a great deal of work, since the ground is already being prepared and amenable Jewish circles will welcome us, fully sympathizing with our idea’ [Id]. At this point Zhitlovsky did not receive a salary from the BNR but took a percentage on the cash he brought to the BNR for his expenses. His optimism was unlimited: ‘There is a lot to do here but there is even more courage and faith in our future!’[id]. He shared his enthusiasm with his brother Chaim in a letter in Russian, informing him of his intention to come to the US to raise funds and asking for his help [Герасимова 2009, 76]. In July, he participated together with Belarusian and Jewish personalities in a discussion about the Jewish question in Belarus organised at the headquarters of the BNR in Kaunas, the hotel Metropol. Lastouski, other Belarusian activists such as the editor of *Volnaia Litva* Ia. Voronko, Isaak Lur’e and Jewish public figures and journalists (M. Kreinin, L. Babkov, Ben-Adir, S.V. Pozner and Leyzerov the editor of *Di yidishe shtimme*) made warm speeches about the union of Belarusians and Jews and the willingness of Jews to support the Belarusian people in their fight for independence. Belarusian politicians expressed their wish to create a Belarusian state where Jews could be sovereign and live their own cultural and economic life, peacefully and without assimilatory pressure [Архівы БНР 2847, 1148-49]. During these first months, Zhitlovsky was very committed and eager to play a central role on all fronts.

Relations with BNR colleagues started to sour in the autumn, however Zhitlovsky continued to fulfil various missions in 1922. Apart from the general dislocation of the situation of the BNR in 1921 due to the degradation of relations with Lithuania and increasing financial difficulties, one of the sticking point was the disparity between how Zhitlovski and the BNR government conceived his role. Zhitlovski assumed the role of ‘travelling agent’ for the Belarusian nation among Jews around the world and did so very actively and seriously. However he envisaged his role not only as an executant but as a full-fledged member of the BNR government. He wanted his views on the strategy and directions for the future to be heard. The tensions culminated during the summer 1921 when Lastouski, who was still in Kaunas, ignored several letters sent by Zhitlovski and did not keep him informed of the development of relations between the BNR and Lithuania. The situation was particularly tense as pogroms on Belarusian territory were intensifying. Zhitlovsky was worried that the first cracks in the alliance with Lithuania and the increasing antisemitism in Lithuania were detrimental to Belarus and would ‘grist to Poles’ mill’: ‘we need more than ever full unity and the mobilisation of all the existing forces’ [Архівы БНР 2909, 1170]. Zhitlovski complained in his letters to Lastouski of this lack of communication on the latest decisions and of the slowness to send him brochures and copies of the memorandums that he could distribute at the Zionist Congress [Архівы БНР 2929, 1199]. His growing frustration is noticeable in his anxious and numerous letters to Lastouski and then Tsvikevich, the BNR Minister of foreign affairs, ahead of the Carlsbad congress, where he expressed his alarm at the growing chauvinism and ‘poorly hidden antisemitism’ of Lithuanians and needed confirmation that Lithuania was still Belarus’ main ally [Архівы БНР 2948, 1208].

Nevertheless Zhitlovsky represented the BNR at the 12th Zionist congress in Carlsbad in September 1921 and had some satisfactions: ‘I had lengthy discussions with the President of the XII Zionist Congress N. Sokolow, as well as with the members of the Presidium sirs Motskin, Dr Weizmann (president of the executive of the Zionist party), Goldberg and others. I passed the memorandum on the political, economic and cultural situation of Belarus to Sokolow and noted the Jewish problem in Belarus’ [Архівы БНР 2955, 1213]. He also met with Dr Kohn, the chairman of the Belarusian organisations in the US. Zhitlovski ‘was promised moral and material support in London and America, but not from the funds of the Zionist party, from other public sources’ [id]. He had long discussions with editors and correspondents of the largest Jewish journals in America, England and France, who, to his disappointment, either knew nothing about the Belarusian problem or were misinformed by Poles. He met with the Lithuanian Minister for Jewish Affairs Max Soloveichik. The meeting that seemed most promising to Zhitlovsky was with the Hebrew writers N. Bialik and Z. Shneur because ‘they have an enormous influence on the intelligent Jewish masses’. There was no mention of the passport, but it seems reasonable to assume that Zhitlovsky’s and Anekshtein’s efforts to reach out to Zionists since December 1920, that were crowned with the warm welcome made to Zhitlovsky at Carlsbad, might have drawn Zionists’ attention to the BNR and give them the idea to approach the BNR representation in Constantinopole to get a Belarusian passport for Bialik. Zhitlovsky was particularly pleased of his discussion with Z. Shneur, ‘a Belarusian (from Shklov) who rendered me here a lot of services in terms of acquaintance and connections, works a lot for us and promised to pay a lot of attention to our business’ [id]. Zhitlovsky suggested to make him ‘adviser to the Minister for national minorities’ without salary, to keep his good will. Zhitlovsky also had useful discussions with Dr Jakobson the director of *Judischer Weltverlag* in Berlin who was influential and well-connected in the German press.

Zhitlovsky’s enthusiasm decreased at the end of 1921 when the financial difficulties of the BNR and some visa issues created obstacles to his project to go to London. As analysed below, he was however instrumental in the initiative of creating a Belarusian relief organisation for victims of pogroms in which Z. Shneur was closely associate, and extended his network to the Union of Russian Jews in Berlin, that was not aware of the Belarusian question. His letters to Lastouski in the autumn and winter 1921 lacked the optimism of the earlier ones. In a letter dated 8 December 1921, he justified his apparent lack of results but also complained about his isolation in the government:

‘You can’t strongly condemn Jews who in the current situation don’t join our cause, because they had not been familiar with our idea until now. The work started when I joined the cabinet and this work is beyond the power of only one man without resources. But I can say with satisfaction that I got our idea among Jews off the ground and that the further the wider will be the path and our idea, as fair and vital, will itself already attract the masses. You just need a little patience and a little more trust in your comrades along this thorny path. I came to the matter not for the sake of fame and material gain, which, as you know, I do not have, and there is no power that could tear me away from our holy cause, to which I give all my strength and all my time. But I am very sorry to notice the lack of support of some of our comrades, who, due to their short-sightedness, do not understand that moral success is most important for our cause, and material success will follow of itself. ’ [Архівы БНР 3049, 1253].

In the following report to Lastouski, he mentioned a meeting with Weizmann who promised to help him to obtain a visa to England but he also seemed to have lost his illusions about the Zionist support, being ready to continue the fight on his own ‘if Zionisits refuse to help us’ [Архівы БНР 3068, 1259]. For the first time he also wrote about his financial difficulties and noted the fact that he hadn’t been paid since 15 July 1921. A letter from the BNR Foreign affairs minister Tsvikevich, who was then in Berlin, to Lastouski in March 1922 sheds some light on tensions between Zhitlovsk and the BNR juris consul Bruno Muller[[9]](#footnote-9): ‘Zh[itlouskii’ and Br[uno] K[arlavich Muller] have done very little. Above all, they haven’t got along well with each other, didn’t work together, and generally created a confused state of affairs. They don't like each other and rage over who is the best. What is clear is that everyone was looking in different directions and cared only about money’ [Архівы БНР 3140, 1291]. Tsvikevich noted however that Zhitlovskii had obtained a diplomatic passport with Weizmann’s help to go to London with Anekshtein. Mentioning Zhitlovski’s request of funds for the trip, he advised Lastouski to give him a little sum of money and although sceptical about Zhitlovsky’s success in raising funds, he seemed satisfied that Soloveichik would help him to make contacts in London. [id, 1292].

The so long awaited trip to London with Anekshtein finally took place in June 1922 but did not seem as successful as expected. There is no formal report from Zhitlovski or Anekshtein in the archives, only a postcard to Lastouski where they asked for copies of the BNR resolution against pogroms to be sent urgently [Архівы БНР 3240]. Barousky mentioned the trip in a letter to Lastouski and seemed bitterly disappointed: ‘Zhitlovskii and Anekshtein came back from London already a month ago. I didn’t see the former at all and he already left to Tsopot to see his family. I met the latter by chance on the street. According to his confused and hasty story, all the blame for the failure of the trip for the “Belarusian cause”, and such is obvious to me, they transfer to Kovno, who refused them money at a decisive moment… Human impudence has no boundaries and it's hard for me to write about it.’ [Arche 117, 184]. After the trip, Zhitlovsky’s involvement in the BNR mission in Berlin seemed to be limited to sorting out relations with IWEG that was accusing the BNR of having failed to provide raw material as promised, while Belarusians had to sell at a loss the German manufactured products of poor quality send by IWEG [Чернякевич 2018, 239-241]. In January 1923, in response to Lastouski’s request to engage in commercial affairs, he expressed his disappointment at the fact that Lastouski had ignored his letter sent three months earlier. He considered that now was the time for ‘our other work, for our main activity for which we are recognised’, having in mind political activities [Архівы БНР 3377]. Nonetheless he gave advices on how to liquidate relations with IWEG in the least damaging way for the BNR’s reputation: ‘our only asset here in Berlin is that although poor, we are honest. We are seen as the representatives of a defined political group that does not engage in adventures and racket [shiberstvom], etc. If we lose our “renomee”, we lose everything.’ He therefore suggested that the BNR pays 10% of its debts to be able to then negotiate payment in increments and avoid a scandal.

Zhitlovsky’s collaboration with the BNR did not end on a high note and did not achieve the results hoped for both by him and the BNR movement. He did not succeed in securing the concrete and extensive support of the Jewish international community. He however contributed to acquainting some Jewish leaders with the Belarusian national idea. One final strand of activities that Zhitlovsky, Anekshtein and Lur’e tried to develop to break the isolation of the BNR and create support and exposure in the emigres circles in Berlin was relief to victims of pogroms and famine.

**BNR role in pogroms and famine relief organisations**

The dramatic wave of pogroms in Belarus that preceded and followed the Riga treaty from the summer 1920 to the autumn 1921, widely reported in the international Jewish press, was seen by the Jewish members of the BNR mission in Berlin including Lur’e as a significant moment in the Belarusian-Jewish rapprochement. Pogroms that resulted in the death of over 2000 Jews and many more wounded and raped, were perpetrated mostly by Polish regiments but Bulak-Balakhovich’s regiment, recognized by Lastouski’s government in January 1920, also took part in these pogroms [Будницкий 2005, 337; Милякова 2007, VIII-IX]. The BNR government in exile was slow to react to this anti-Jewish violence [Le Foll 2008; Герасимова 2000]. Lur’e, Zhitlovski and Anekshtein were however very active in the summer 1921 to push BNR leaders to be bolder and to publicize the BNR’s position on pogroms. While an article was published in June by the BNR press office, the question was discussed during a meeting of the Presidium of the Rada on 14 July 1921 during which Lastouski and Zhytlovsky made speeches about the pogroms. The Rada decided on a range of actions to stop these shameful acts: call the Belarusian people not to participate in pogroms and do everything they can to stop them; organise meetings and lectures and publish on the Jewish question to convey strongly the idea that Jews and Belarusians are brothers and have the right to live together in Belarus ; call all Belarusian parties and organisations to use their influence to fight against pogroms on the Belarusian land [Архівы БНР 2851, 1150]. As pogroms continued over the summer, the BNR sent a note to the Soviet government, protesting against pogroms, blaming the Soviet authorities for their inactivity and even responsibility, and demanding the authorisation for their representatives to enter Soviet Russia to combat pogroms [Arche 159, 264-5]. The BNR’s position against pogroms was publicized in the Bulletin of the Belarusian press bureau in Kaunas and in the international Jewish press [*Haynt* 13/09/21, *The Sentinel* 16/09/21]. Still in preparation for Carlsbad, Zhitlovsky called Lastouski to take further actions to fight with the pogromist agitation of Polish bandits by sending ‘our special commissars’ to every Jewish center with the mission to organise peasants against the bandits. He was however aware that the BNR lacked material resources. He requested the preparation of a brochure on the ruinousness of pogroms for Belarus to be then publicized abroad and at the Carlsbad Zionist congress [Архівы БНР 2911, 1172]. He established in October an organization to combat anti-Jewish pogrom tendencies in all parts of the world [*The Sentinel, 13/10/21*]

Zhitlovsky, apart from insisting on the necessity to publicize the BNR call as widely as possible abroad, also suggested that the BNR Rada should react to the famine in Russia [Архівы БНР 2898]. The famine, due to crop failures and the harsh requisitions by Bolshevik forces from peasants, triggered an international operation of food relief at the request of the Bolshevik government. Zhitlovsky was convinced that Belarus and its natural ally, Lithuania, would benefit from the bad press on Russia’s incapacity to avoid the starvation of its people. Preparing his trip to Carlsbad, he insisted on the necessity to gain not only Germany but the Entente to their cause, for moral as well as material support. ‘I firmly believe that, with the events now playing out in hungry Russia, it is possible that our dreams come true sooner than we think’ [id].

The idea of creating a committee for the help of the people starving in Belarus therefore emerged among the ‘Belarussian colony’ in Berlin in August. A first meeting chaired by the BNR mission chief Barouski was organised on the 20 August to explain the aims of the organisation, followed by a lecture on the famine by Anekshtein [Schlögel 1999, 72]. The ‘Belarusian Public Committee in Germany for the help to people starving in Belarus’ [**beloemigrantski Belorusskii obshtshestvennyi komitet v Germanii pomoshtshii golodaiushtshim v Belorussii]** was created on the 15 September and was registered at the address of the BNR mission in Berlin, 21 Motzstrasse [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 1]. The Committee was non-partisan and its aim was to provide ‘help to all people starving in Belarus, regardless of their nationality, faith or party affiliation’. Its headed paper was in four languages: Belarusian, Russian, Yiddish and German. It was directed by a Presidium elected on the 17 September: Barouski as president, Z. Shneur as vice-president, Anekshtein as secretary and Tsvikevich as treasurer. Although BNR members were heavily represented (including Zhitlovsky, Bruno Muller and I. Lur’e who joined the committee from Dantsig in December [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 8, Л. 22]), the Committee also included some Jewish personalities met through Anekshtein or Zhitlovsky and close to the Zionist/Hebraist circles such as Z. Shneur and Gurvitsh, Julius Syrkin and Isaak Friedland. It also counted adventurists such as Boris Solodovnikov[[10]](#footnote-10)and Belarusians or Russians difficult to identify (Kontorovish, Alexander Dmitrieff, Wladimir Boritsch, Iwan Makarewitsch, Georg Seldowitsch) [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 3a, Л. 22]. The Committee’s creation was publicized in the BNR Bulletin n35 September 1921 [Arche 161, 266]. It met regularly in the autumn and started with the organisation of different sections, including a woman section and the writing of a statement of intention [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 3a, Л. 1, 3, 4]. They also established contacts with different organisations: the Soviet mission of the Red Cross in Berlin; Polish representation in Berlin; Belarusian Public committees in Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Vilna; Paris Public Committee.

The committee’s main aim was to send provisions to Belarus, therefore it targeted its network building at Russian NGOs in Berlin (such as the Soviet Mission of the Red Cross) and representatives of Soviet and Polish authorities to organise the transit and sending of parcels containing clothes, food, medicine, seeds. A lot of effort was put in the publicization of this campaign and the Committee looked into creating a poster in Belarusian and Yiddish [id, Л. 17,]. A charity concert, to be organized by Zhitlovsky was planned to raise funds [id, Л. 12, 15]. They also edited a bulletin [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 6] and were planning to publish information on their campaign in the American, Russian, Jewish and Russian press in order to raise funds [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 8, Л. 29].

Their initiative received support in principle from all the organisations that they contacted: the Russian Mission of the Red Cross (Rossijskoe obsöestvo Krasnogo Krestä), the Russian Public Committee of help to the starving population in Russia, Comité Russe en France de Secours Aux Populations Eprouvées par la Famine en Russie and the Polish Legation in Berlin [ГАРФ, Ф. Р-6229, Оп. 1, Д. 8, Л. 5, 8, 12]. Isaac Lur’e in Dantsig was contacted by many Belarusian citizens who wanted to pass parcels to their starving relatives in Soviet Belarus [id., l.17] and he helped publicize the operation [Id, Л. 22]. The Russian cooperative ‘Russkaia kolonia’ also contacted the Committee for help to send parcels [id, Л. 26] however the Belarusian committee seemed to struggle to organise the transfer [id, Л. 27]. We know that the BNR government was rather ineffective and helpless in stopping the pogroms. It made a declaration during its national-political Conference in Prague in October 1921 [Arche 162, 268-269] but it is difficult to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Berlin committee. It committee is not listed or mentioned in the historiography dedicated to émigré Berlin or the BNR. Whatever its concrete results, its existence nonetheless represents the peak of the efforts made during this period by Zhitlovsky, Lur’e and Anekshtein to build a bridge between Jewish and Belarusian political, cultural and economic interests. Thanks to their networking, the Belarusian government was seen by Jewish and non-Jewish organisations in emigration as of possible assistance in attempts to help victims of pogroms.

**Conclusion**

Berlin, as the capital of Belarusian diplomatic activity, had its days when the Lithuanian political and financial support faded and that the centre of gravity of the Belarusian cause shifted to Czechoslovakia, US and Lithuania. The BNR activity in exile did not achieve its main aim because support failed from other allies to create a state. However, one can argue that it contributed to an increased awareness of Belarus in general and to the success of the Belarusianisation and Yiddishisation policies in BSSR [Пурышева 2009]. Anekshtein’s, Lur’e’s and Zhitlovsky’s relentless endeavours to familiarise the Jewish intellectual and political, mostly Zionist, elite with the Belarusian cause, through meetings, interviews, correspondence and trips undoubtedly contributed to this. Their continuous work created the conditions for Bialik’s temporary ‘Belarusianisation’ and was crucial to carry the voice of the Belarusians beyond the diplomatic and Belarusian circles, out to the Jewish cultural elite and émigré Berlin. This episode of intense cooperation confirms that involved Belarusian and Jewish intellectuals agreed on the principle that the Jewish nation was at the core of the Belarusian national project, but they diverged in practice. The alliance tended to confine Jews to a secondary and pragmatic role of ‘travel agents’ or lobbyists for the cause that did not satisfy them. The Jewish-Belarusian honeymoon had mixed results and seemed to be over by 1922, at a moment when the mission in Berlin was threatened of closure by financial difficulties, but it facilitated Bialik’s escape and most importantly laid the basis for the increasing mutual awareness and cooperation of Jews and Belarusians in Soviet Belarus.

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Архівы БНР 2948: Письмо С. Житловского А. Цвикевичу, 3/09/1921, ЛЦГА, ф.582, оп. 2, д. 58, л. 16.

Архівы БНР 2955: Письмо С. Житловского В. Ластовскому, 9/09/1921, ЛЦГА, f. 582, op. 1, d.25, ll. 7-8.

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**НАРБ - Национальный архив Республики Беларусь**

НАРБ, Ф. 827, Оп. 3, Д. 34 [Личное дело Бялика в консульстве БНР, 1921]

НАРБ, Ф. 864, Оп. 1, Д. 1 [Список граждан, получивших паспорт БНР в 1919–1920 гг. в рижском консульстве]

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**Arche - Arche, 3 (78), март 2009**

Arche 70: Отчет главы миссии Л. Баркова В. Ластовскому, 1/11/1920, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1. Д. 110. Л. 38-40.

Arche 73: Upavazhanne Рады народных министров БНР Давиду Анекштейну, 23/11/1920, ЛЦГА, Ф. 582, Оп. 2, Д. 54, Л. 459.

Arche 74: Сертификат, выданный Давиду Анекштейну Белорусской Радой, 12/07/1919, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 110, Л. 32

Arche 76: Доклад советника миссии БНР в Германии Д. Анекштейна про свои планы работы на будущее, 20/12/1920, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 110, Л. 33.

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Arche 85: Письмо советника миссии БНР в Берлине Д. Анекштейна господину Хазановичу, 14/02/1921, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 130, Л. 94a.

Arche 117: Письмо А. Боровского В. Ластовскому, 2/08/29121, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 130, Лл. 13-15.

Arche 151: Письмо И. Лурье в чрезвычайную миссию БНР в Германии, 4/1/1921, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 184, Л. 7a.

Arche 159: Бюллетень белорусского пресс-бюро № 34, 26/08/1921, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 183, Лл. 179-180.

Arche 161: Бюллетень БНР № 35, сентябрь 1921, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 183, Л. 190.

Arche 188: Протокол от 31/01/1923 о ликвидации торгового соглашения между IWEG и белорусской торговой комиссией, НАРБ, Ф. 325, Оп. 1, Д. 229, Л. 53.

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1. His date of birth is also inaccurate and indicated as 25th May 1873 instead of 9 January 1873, for an unknown reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is difficult to ascertain whether Bialik actually used this passport to travel, as he was still in Constantinopole on the 23rd August after the Belarusian visa had expired. He complained a lot about visa issues and financial problems in his letter to Ravnitski but he was hoping that the situation would be resolved soon. Given that he had paid for the visas, and that he did not need a Belarusian visa since he had no intention to go to Grodno, it is very likely that he actually used this document. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The BNR mission in Berlin is not mentioned [Schlögel 1999] and activities by Belarusians are extremely rare [Schlögel 1999, 76] or absent from the historiography [Будницкий Полян 2013; Reinharz 1981; Maurer 1986 ; Adler-Rudel 1959]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For example a short story by Zmitrok Biadulia and an article by V. Lastovski were published in Yiddish translation in the edited collection *Lita* published by Kletskin in 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On 5 December 1921, A. Lutskevich gave an interview to *Undzer Tog* about the forthcoming elections to the Lithuanian parliament; A.B., ‘Belorusy i evrei’ in *Svobodnaia Litva*, 10.07.21 mentioned by Gerasimova 2009, p. 71. He continued to publish articles in the Yiddish and Belarusian press to trigger this rapprochement: ‘Di vaysrusn’ *Der haver ,* 1/11/21, pp. 500-507 and 1/12/21, 559-566republished by Di naye yidishe folksshul, Vilne, 1925; ‘Belarusy i zhydy’, *Syn Belarusa*, August 10, 1924; ‘Zhydy i ziamlia, *Syn Belarusa*, August 24, 1924. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Both Blumenfeld and Rosenblut were then members of the Berlin bureau of the World Zionist Organisation. Blumenfeld had been general secretary of the WZO between 1911 and 1914. Sokolow occupied the same function in 1906 and was elected chair of the Zionist executive in 1920. He became president of the WZO in 1931. Motzkin was one of the founders with Weizmann of the Democratic faction within the Zionist movement in Russia (1901), created the German Committee for Freeing of Russian Jews in 1914 and led the Zionist delegation at the Paris peace conference. Ben-Ami was a Hebrew writer and Zionist theorist, who helped organize the first Zionist congress in 1897. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is probably Leon Khazanovich, a leader of Poalei Zion, editor of its journal *Der yidisher kemfer*, friend of Borokhov. He documented the pogroms and persecution of the Jews in 105 towns and villages in Poland in November-December 1918 and was the editor of *Arkhiv fun'm idishn sotsialist* (Berlin, 1921). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Anekshtein’s interpretation of the so-called ‘Hyman’s plan’ is overtly optimistic. The plan provided for the incorporation of the Republic of Central Lithuania [Grodno and Vilna regions] into the Federation of Lithuania and the recognition of the region’s multiethnicity but it was not approved by either Poland and Lithuania [Cherniakevich 219] [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bruno Muller also participated in the creation of the German-Russian society in December 1919 before joining the BNR mission [Schlögel 1999, 22] [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It could be Sh. I. Gurvits, editor of two Hebrew journals in Berlin before the war who returned to Berlin at the beginning of the 1920s and created a circle of Hebraists including Bialik, Chernikhovskii, Z. Shneur, N. Sokolov [Будницкий Полян 2013, 195]. Julius Syrkin was trader for Syrkin edtions, a continuation of the Vilna A. Syrkin publisher, specialised in textbooks and teaching material [Schlögel 1999, 560, n231]. Isaak Friedland might be a Jewish student (Schlögel 1999, doc 3963). Boris Solodovnikov was an adventurist who participated in the Russo-Japanese war and in the 1905 revolution, joined the SR party and was arrested for terrorist attacks. When released, he was recruited into the Russian army in 1916 and joined the White army. He narrated his Siberian adventures in Сибирские авантюристы и генерал Гайда: Из записок русского революционера (Прага, 1921) and Наш счет (Berlin 1922). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)