

# POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE REGARDING THE POLISH POPULATION OF RIGHT-BANK UKRAINE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** The purpose of the scientific article is to reveal the specifics of the policy of the Russian Empire towards the Polish population on the territory of the Right-Bank of Ukraine.

**Methods.** The research methodology is based on the principles of scientificity, historicism, systematics. During the research work, both general scientific (analysis and synthesis, systematisation and generalisation) and special scientific methods were used: problem-thematic, as well as system-structural.

**Results.** The politics of the Russian government towards the poles had an important place in the socio-political life of Right-bank Ukraine. Using legislative documents and ordinances, the Russian government introduced a number of restrictive measures that were supposed to control and weaken the influence of Poles on the socio-economic life of the region.

**Conclusions.** The Russian authorities tried to neutralise the influence of the Polish population and the Roman Catholic Church. Determining the presence of Poles and regulating their number depended on the strict control of the Russian government. The Poles were seen as a "dangerous element" threatening the policy of tsarist autocracy. That is why the authorities decided to undermine their socio-economic position by depriving them of a significant number of privileges.

**Keywords:** Russian government, Poles, Roman-Catholic Church, political oppression, Right-Bank of Ukraine

## INTRODUCTION

During the period of its belonging to the Russian Empire (late eighteenth - early twentieth centuries), Right-Bank Ukraine was officially called the South-western land (territory) and included the Kyiv, Podillia,



and Volyn gubernias or governorates that merged into the Kyiv General Governorate (Shcherbak, 2005).

The policy of the Russian government was aimed, in particular, at levelling national characteristics and destroying the national culture of folk, who were under the power of the Russian Empire, mostly it was the Poles, Germans, Jews, and Czechs, and was also aimed at strong control of their development. *Obrusenie inorodsev* (Russification of indigenous people from other countries) was the purpose of imperial policy, the beginning of which was the reign of Nicholas I in the first half of the nineteenth century (Sheretyuk, 2011). The government began to introduce an imperial policy based on three basic principles: Russian orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.

### AN ANALYSIS OF PRIOR RESEARCH

This issue has not escaped the attention of Ukrainian researchers Oleksandr Buravsky and Mykola Kozlovets (2021), Natalia Ivchuk (2013), Ruslana Sheretyuk (2011). Basically, these generalisations cover important aspects of religious, socio-economic and cultural life on the Right-Bank of Ukraine. The monograph by Sergiy Zhilyuk and Bohdan Boyko (2010) highlights the religious policy of the Russian government and its influence on the religious life of the Volyn province. The publications of Julia Khitrovska (2010), Yuriy Polishchuk (2018a) and Anatoly Filinyuk (2008) are of considerable scientific interest in understanding state policy in the region. Natalia Shcherbak's monograph (2005) shows the process of realisation of the policy of the Russian Empire. Russian researcher Alexei Miller (2000) revealed the policy of Russification applied to the people living on the territory of the Right-Bank of Ukraine. Among foreign researchers, the works of Theodore Weeks (1996) and Andreas Kappeler (2001) are devoted to the issues of Russian government policy. French researcher Daniel Beauvoir (1996) revealed the interfaith relations of Poles, Ukrainians and Russians in the Right Bank Ukraine. In Polish historiography, the question of the place of the Polish people and the Roman Catholic church in the context of the policy of the Russian autocracy is covered in the work of Waclaw Lipiński (1909). However, there are no generalised works in which the means of confessional policy towards Poles during the stay of the territory of the Right Bank Ukraine as part of the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century are studied. This determined the relevance of this topic. Significantly supplemented the study of the involvement of archival documents of the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine and the State Archives of Zhytomyr region.

## PRESENTATION OF THE MATERIAL

Immediately after the annexation of the territory of Right-Bank Ukraine to the Russian Empire, an active policy of changing the state-administrative system began; it was aimed at conquering the Right-Bank as quickly as possible and detaching it from the Polish traditions that had been forming there for many years. Such actions ensured the quick establishment of control over these territories by the Russian government.

The Russian government took control of the lives of national minorities, and if they “expressed loyalty to the emperor and maintained socio-economic stability, they received certain privileges and were integrated into the state system in various ways” (Teploukhova, 2011, p. 140).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a change of religious priorities and the Russian authorities began to be hostile to other peoples, especially the Polish and Jewish populations, which differed from the Russian population on religious matters. They were seen as a threat to the stability of imperial policy and the functioning of Orthodoxy. Poles felt national, religious and political pressure from the Russian government and the Orthodox Church. Because of this, the Roman Catholic Church began to lose its position and turned into an opposition structure to the authorities.

Conventionally, two periods of the Russian government’s implementation of the policy of pressure on the Polish population can be distinguished. These periods are connected with the first and second Polish uprisings.

The situation in western Ukraine changed dramatically and worsened after the first Polish uprising in 1830-1831. On this occasion, researcher Ivchuk notes that the participants of the uprising

encroached, on the one hand, on the territorial integrity of the empire, and on the other hand, neglected the fundamental criterion that guided the Russian Empire in its domestic politics towards different peoples – political loyalty. The Russian authorities could not allow the insurgents’ desire to annex the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian lands to the Polish state, as this threatened the loss of these territories (Ivchuk, 2013, p.154)

The Russian authorities used this fact to weaken the socio-political and economic influence of the Polish nobility and the Roman Catholic Church. The decrees of Nicholas I of March 22 and May 10, 1831, which “began the process of confiscation of the estates of the insurgents, were the basis for the plan” (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, 1832, Fund. 1080, Description. 1, Case. 9, p. 8). In 1831, the law on *odnodvortsy* and citizens of western governorates was introduced, according to which most of the landless people of Polish privileged social class (Polish: *szlachta*) was deprived of the state of nobility. At the beginning of 1832 in all districts (or poviats) of right-bank Ukraine new commissions were created to “revise the position of the Polish nobility”, which took place in accordance with the Senate decree of November 11, 1832 on the division into three categories of people belonging to the state of the former nobility (Polishchuk, 2018b).

The second stage, in 1863-1864 there was another Polish uprising, which covered the territory of Poland, right-bank Ukraine and partly Belarus. Thus, there was a rise of the Polish national movement for the restoration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a sovereign country. The participants of the uprising advocated an increase in land plots of peasants, the abolition of estate privileges, the possibility of obtaining land by the peasants of right-bank Ukraine, who would support the uprising.

According to Polishchuk, the problem of ethnic policy of the Russian Empire became especially relevant in the specified period. This was due to the escalation of the Polish question, which resulted in two Polish uprisings. After their suppression, the Russian autocracy in the "manual regime" tried to solve ethno-social, ethno-political and ethno-cultural problems. At the same time, control over the ethno-political processes of the Right-Bank Ukraine was strengthened (Polishchuk, 2014).

Uprisings 1830-1831 and 1863 led to a radical change in the guidelines of the Russian government. Initial loyalty to the Polish element had already changed in the early nineteenth century by numerous anti-Polish measures, which were accompanied by oppression and discrimination in the socio-economic, political and national-cultural sphere, which clearly reflects the legislation of that time. The main goal of normative-legal acts was to reduce the influence of the Polish nobility on socio-economic, socio-political, religious processes in the region (Polishchuk, 2014).

The Russian authorities applied the process of declassification of the Polish nobility, as a result of which it was equalised in rights with the Russian nobility. As a consequence of these actions, there was an abrupt reduction of it. This is confirmed by the data presented by researcher Beauvoir (1996) that in the 30s of the nineteenth century

in the Kiev province – 28603 people, in Podolsk – 32024 people and in Volyn – 11527 people were deprived of the status of nobility. During the 1840s, this process continued and, according to the decision of the commission, another 20,000 poles were deprived of the nobility (pp. 78-79)

Kyiv Governor-General Aleksandr Bezak in 1865 in a reported note to Alexander II presented his views on the attitude of the Polish population of the Right Bank to power. He noted that "in political way there is no change among Poles, and contempt for Russians continues; they express it wherever it is possible to do it with impunity. In the sermons of priests, sometimes political hints are manifested" (Buravsky, 2011, p. 339).

In order to reduce the manifestations of "Polish separatism", the government of the Russian Empire decided to carry out a number of restrictive and punitive measures, which would weaken the position of the Poles. First of all, the authorities made the main emphasis on the implementation of measures aimed at limiting Polish landownership. The basic measures included: sequestration of property of Poles, confiscation of land and property, application of 10% tax on the profits of estates, a ban on the purchase of estates in private ownership.

At the legislative level, such restrictions were fixed by a law issued by Alexander II on December 10, 1865, which prohibited Poles from buying estates and renting land in the western governorates of the empire. In the South-Western region, the Poles were the main part among the landowners, and the peasants were mainly Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians. According to the orders, Poles were not allowed to purchase anything in the nine western governorates either. The ban, which initially applied only to large landowners also extended to Catholic peasants at the end of the nineteenth century. There were active prohibitions on the establishment of private educational institutions and the use of the Polish language during the teaching process in public schools (Dyakin, 1995). The defined government politics is presented in the position of Adjutant General Bezak, who pointed out that the only measure for the successful Russification of landowners living in the South-Western Region consists "... in the displacement from the Russian land of our local enemies - Polish landowners" (Rudchenko, 1882, p. 69).

In such steps, there was a systematic policy of the government, which used economic and social means of pressure and was aimed at reducing the presence of the Polish population, and at the introduction of bans on the resettlement of Poles in the provinces of Right-Bank Ukraine.

As noted Ivchuk, by implementing the attack on the Poles, the authorities carried out a programme of Russification of the region. Various methods were used for this purpose. In particular, the authorities provided support to those Russian buyers who wanted to acquire property in western governorates, provided them with benefits and cash loans when they bought private or state estates. Such protectionism was reflected in the Regulations of March 5, 1864. By this law, the right to benefits and loans in the acquisition of estates in the western region was granted to anyone regardless of origin and condition, except two nations: Poles and Jews (Ivchuk, 2009).

At the background of declassification of the Polish nobility during the nineteenth century, Russians moved quite actively to the Right-Bank Ukraine; mostly they received their places, serfs or held official positions in local authorities. Historian Oleksandr Kurylenko supported the opinions of the participants of those events about the politics of the Russian authorities on the Right Bank, which was based on the idea of "introducing into the land, which has always been the patrimony of the Russian tsars and populated by the Russian and Orthodox..., Russian nobles and landowners in significant numbers" (Kurylenko, 2009, p. 84).

As a result, at elected public positions, which were once held by Poles, the government began to appoint officials of Russian origin. As a result, the government began appointing Russian-born officials, including military or Russian officials sent from the eastern Ukrainian provinces, to elected government positions. Instead, they tried to refuse the services of Poles. Thus, there was a tendency to reduce the predominance of the Polish influence in the western provinces. However, it was not always possible, and

the Polish sometimes entered the civil service, but this happened, firstly, in limited numbers, secondly, mostly in secondary positions, and thirdly, when there were not enough "personal" officials (Polishchuk, 2014).

Historian Nicholas Barmak rightly noted that by the middle of the nineteenth century, due to the use of a clear action plan, the Russian authorities managed to reduce the number of Polish nobility on the Right-Bank Ukraine. The reasons for such politics he saw in "the desire to limit influence of nobility in the region, subordinate the nobility to the authorities and increase the profits of the state treasury by the taxes which they paid" (Barmak, 2010, p. 18). As a result of such actions, some of the nobility could not confirm their status and lost not only political but also economic influence. The Polish nobility lost its dominant status, instead giving way to Russian nobles.

The Russian government issued many laws and orders, which regulated the social, cultural, educational and religious life of Poles. In this regard, the modern researcher Shcherbak (2005) noted that

some issues of the life of Jews and Poles were often resolved not by legislative, but administratively, and these orders, as a rule, were authorised by the supreme authorities, they were reported only to individual administrative persons and institutions and were not made public... (p. 66)

Anti-Catholic policy pursued by local authorities led to aggravation of interreligious conflicts. For example, the governor of the Volyn province in the report to the emperor in 1894 claimed that the activities of his administration were directed

to strengthen the consciousness of the population that always Russian and Orthodox Volyn should forever be so and that not only the restoration of Poland's traditions here, but also the maintenance of national unity with the Poles is no more than an impossible dream (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, 1895, Fund. 442, Description. 532, Case. 416, p. 2-3)

After the liquidation of the uprising, the Russian government strengthened the control over the social strata, in particular over the Catholic clergy who took an active part in it. According to Zhilyuk, on the basis of the decisions of the Committee on Church Estates, orders were issued which transferred church estates to state estates. The clergy lost their estates and received one-time financial assistance in return (Zhilyuk, 2010).

The Roman Catholic Church was under the control of the Kiev, Volyn and Podolsk Governor-General, who gave permits for the foundation of new churches, appointed priests in the parish and, in accordance with the order of November 26, 1876, dismissed them from position. This practice existed until 1905, since then the right to appoint and move priests was transferred to local bishops, who had to report on personnel changes of governors to the Department of Spiritual Affairs of foreign religion. We agree with Khitrovska's statement that "autocracy has set itself the aim to



merge this region into whole with the empire not only territorially, but also ideologically" (Khitrovska, 2008, p. 74).

Beauvoir argued that the participation of the Catholic clergy was only an occasion for the Russian authorities to openly implement policies aimed at weakening the influence of the Catholic Church here (Beauvoir, 1996).

The Committee in Affairs of Western Governorates made a decision to confiscate the property of Catholic monasteries on the basis of the tsarist decree of July 19, 1832 ON the liquidation of some Roman Catholic monasteries. According to the adopted document, subject of confiscation was the property of Catholic orders that took part in the uprising or which had serfs of another non-Catholic religion, monasteries that did not have a minimum number of monks established by canonical rules (Khitrovska, 2010).

In December 1830, the Synod issued an order defining the rules for mixed marriages (State archive of Zhytomyr region, 1831, Fund. 1, Description. 7, Case. 99). According to it, the Orthodox could marry members of other religions, only if the latter would give written consent to raise children in the Orthodox faith. The next step of pressure was "the conversion of Catholics to Orthodoxy in the western provinces of the empire after 1864. Evidence of such cases can be found in the documents of the State Archives of Zhytomyr region" (State Archive of Zhytomyr region, 1862, Fund. 1, Description. 16, Case. 883, p. 9).

The leading role belonged to the Orthodox Church, which should become a support for the policy of the Russian government. This is confirmed by the opinion of the researcher Khitrovska that "Right-Bank hierarchs agreed with their role as a cog in the national bureaucratic apparatus, and they supported the autocratic regime of the Russian Empire not out of fear but out of conscience" (Khitrovska, 2008, p. 91). The leading role belonged to the Orthodox Church, which was to become a support for the implementation of the policy of the Russian government.

Under such conditions, in the second half of the nineteenth century, church-religious activity of Catholic and Orthodox churches on the Right-Bank of Ukraine gained an increasing political tinge. Despite the protection of the state, the process of "orthodoxisation" of the local population was not too fast. In such a situation was the great merit of the Catholic clergy. Significant moral help to Roman Catholics was also provided by the Jesuit missions established in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1884, and various Catholic fraternities (Polishchuk, 2018a).

Researcher Ivchuk characterises government policy as aimed at evicting Poles from the South-Western Region and political neutralisation in this way of this national minority (Ivchuk, 2009).

What follows is that the government began to introduce an imperial policy based on the following basic principles: Russian Orthodoxy, autocracy and, accordingly, the spread of these ideas among the population of the empire. In the Russian Empire the politics continued aimed at gradually levelling the peculiarities of the national culture of the peoples who were

under its power. The policy of Russian autocracy towards Poles was characterised by a weakening of the socio-political and religious positions of the Polish population. The Russian authorities decided to radically neutralise the manifestations of Polish "separatism".

The task of the authorities was first to weaken the influence and then to exercise control over the Roman-catholic church. As a result of the restrictive measures, the monasteries were closed, the activity of monastic orders was banned, the clergy were forbidden to open schools and teach primary school children in Polish. In the context of the implementation of such a policy, systematic work was planned to carry out to strengthen the foundations of Russian orthodoxy, in particular among the population of the south-western territories.

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