SUMMARY. The ideas of the Age of Enlightenment opened the way to the centralization and unification of the state territories in the 18th century. These trends became a great challenge in the construction of historical past for the national states established in the 20th century which saw the continuity of their national history since the Middle Ages till the national movements of the 19th century. For this reason, the Age of Enlightenment is most often seen as a transitional period. The article focuses on the events of the 18th century portrayed in the national history syntheses of the four states. It is observed that in the national historiographies of the analysed countries, selected historical events are attributed a greater significance than they really had and tend to be identified with the later processes.

KEYWORDS: Age of Enlightenment, national historiography, national awakening, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Kingdom of Hungary.

The Age of Enlightenment opened the way to the state expansion in the 18th century, followed by the processes of centralization and unification, which included the regions with different traditions, language, social and educational spheres. Although the processes in Western and East Central Europe were not absolutely identical, some tendencies were common to all Europe. Commonly, the Enlightenment is perceived as the age of spread of cosmopolitan ideas. However, Johann Gotfried Herder’s conception of those times which “emphasized the uniqueness of every nation culture and the equal right of each nation to preserve and develop its own traditions in its own distinctive way” is perceived as an exception rather

1 The article is written according to the research project “Central and Eastern European Region: Research of the Construction of National Narratives and Politics of Memory (1989-2011)” – VP1-3.1-ŠMM-07-K-02-024 – sponsored by the Programme for Human Resources Development for 2007-2013 “Support to Research Activities of Scientists and Other Researchers (Global Grant)”.


3 H. B. Nisbet, Herder: the Nation in History, National history and Identity: Approaches to the Writing of National History in the North-East Baltic Region Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, ed. M. Branch, Helsinki,
than a typical phenomenon of the period. Ulrich im Hof said that the states of the 18th century were not national, but their “sleeping” nationality was felt everywhere and erupted later. A British historian Thom Munck explains that “the ‘nationalist’ approach to the Enlightenment is bound to have its limitations. Nonetheless, it has been established beyond reasonable doubt that the Enlightenment was European-wide, and that its main strands at least after mid-century were not all French-inspired.” Thus in the general context of the period, the national historiographies of the “new nations” face the problem of relating the shared European and international (typical to ethnically diverse states) achievements of the period with the national history. Differently from Western Europe, in East Central Europe, the state territory was not inhabited by ethnically homogenous communities in the 18th century.

Although the construction of the national histories, especially the Central and East European visions of the past before the formation of the modern nations in the 19th century, is often criticized, the existence of the national narratives cannot be neglected. Miroslav Hroch argued that the attitude of the 19th century French peasant to France of the Middle Ages did not differ from the attitude of the Slovak peasant to the history of the Hungarian Kingdom. To paraphrase, it can be said that the relation of the Polish and the Lithuanian peasants with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ruled by the nobility matched, but differed from the position of the Lithuanian or the Belarusian nobleman who joined the national revival of the Lithuanians and the Belarusians. The meaning of the 18th century concepts of “Poland” and “Lithuania” were completely different from their 20th century usage. The states were not yet national, but ruled by the nobility and the monarchs. Therefore, not only “small”, but also “big” nations create the visions of the past, adapting the historical events to their needs.

In the descriptions of the national visions of the past, a particular attention is paid to the threats of the ethno-centric model. Raymond Pearson states that “all nations of Central and Eastern Europe undergo a three-phase career: an initial cultural flowering or “Golden Age”; suppression of identity and promise at foreign hands; and an “Awakening” to ultimate fulfilment as a modern nation-state. The more tardy the awakening nation, the more desperate was its campaign for

1999, p. 78.

6 M. Hroch, Historical Belles-Lettres as a Vehicle of the Image of National History, National History and Identity,, p. 98.
respectability, expressed in an unblinking regard for nationalist precedent and a slavish adherence to the internationally – established template of nation-building”8. According to this view, the Enlightenment is an intermediary age between the Golden Age and the national revival, or chronologically, a period on the brink of the national revival.

The article focuses on the four national states which formed in the 20th century. The nations have their distinctive historical path, heritage and different interpretations of the continuity of the national history. However, in the consciousness of the majority of their citizens, the second half of the 18th century seems of secondary importance in comparison to earlier or later times. In Lithuania, which declared the restoration of independence in 1918 and the continuity of traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the events of the second half of the 18th century are still viewed as foreign even among some historians.

Professional historiographies of Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia and Lithuania formed only after the WWI, thus are among the youngest in Europe. With the help of the history science, the mentioned nations had to form and ground their identity and find place in the European history. Another common feature connecting Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Slovakia is the lack of the cultural and political metropolis in the second half of the 18th century which could have disseminated new ideas9. The functions of metropolis were partly performed by the universities situated in the territories of the present day Lithuania and (temporarily) Slovakia. For example, the Vilnius University was the centre of the ideas of Enlightenment in the area of the present day Lithuania and Belarus. It should be noted that the validity of pretensions of Belarus and Lithuania to the cultural and territorial heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is not relevant for the current research. There are far more disputes over the heritage of the historical period starting with the formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the GDL) and lasting until the Union of Lublin in 1569, in comparison to the discussed epoch10. In any case, the Lithuanian and the Belarusian historians cooperate in their research and discussions. As Gintautas Sliesoriūnas states, the historians of contemporary Lithuania, Belarus and Poland, who focus on the heritage and times of the GDL, most often agree without greater

8 R. Pearson, History and Historians in the Service of Nation Building, National History and Identity... p. 69.
9 In the case of the GDL, the central government institutions moved to Warsaw where the ruler resided. The joint Diet gathered in the GDL territory only twice (in 1784 and 1793). In the end of the 18th century, the most prestigious schools (Collegium Nobilium), cultural life and most important state periodicals were in Warsaw.
disputes on what is common to Lithuania or Belarus or belongs to each country\textsuperscript{11}. Leaving aside all the disputes, we focus on the interpretation of the past in the historiographies of the national states\textsuperscript{12}. Drawing on the specific examples, the research aims at finding the regularities typical to the young historiographies of Central and Eastern Europe.

The article discusses the works of professional historians of national states, which reflect broader visions of the national history and discuss the events of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The ideas of Enlightenment reached Central and Eastern Europe later than other European countries. Their dissemination in the Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Slovakian national historiographies began in the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, or more specifically, with the reforms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Hungarian Kingdom.

In Lithuania, as well as in Belarus, the Age of Enlightenment is associated with the history and territory of the GDL by dividing it into the owned or alien spaces. As a historian of philosophy Steponas Tūnaitis claims, the Lithuanian and the Polish heritage in the Age of Enlightenment was common. However, the research of the Polish historians mostly focuses on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from a general perspective, thus the cultural and historical traditions of the GDL “disappear” in the general context with Poland\textsuperscript{13}. A Belarusian historian Oleg Latyszonek attempted to distinguish the features of the Age of Enlightenment specific to the Belarusian heritage; however, the historian agreed that Herder’s conception could not be accepted at that time and shifted attention to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{14}. Most of the attention of the Ukrainian historiography is devoted to the spread of ideas of Humanism, Renaissance, and Baroque, whereas the Enlightenment is barely mentioned. Political issues overshadow the spread of the European ideas of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century which influenced religious and social changes and affected all ethnic groups in East Central Europe. In the Ukrainian case, the lack of research and the


\textsuperscript{14} O. Latyszonek, *Białoruskie oświecenie*, *Białoruskie zeszyty historyczne*, nr. 2, 1994, s. 35-45.
repetition of pervasive stereotypes are especially problematic. Meanwhile, the Slovaks relate the Enlightenment to the national revival which greatly influenced the further course of events in the 19th century.

During the Soviet and the first years of the post-Soviet periods, the area of the national states was most often presented as homogeneous and dominated by a single nation. Unfavourable facts were concealed and their importance diminished. Apart from the discussed countries, similar attitudes were typical in the historiographies of other Central and Eastern European states. The tendency, however, is gradually changing in Belarus and Lithuania which identify their past with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. An exceptional attention of the Ukrainian and Slovakian historiographies to the ethnic history in the 18th century complicates the task. Still, the existence of other ethnic and religious communities in the Ukrainian and Slovakian territories can also be traced to a certain extent. As is seen, the national historiographies are influenced by the attitudes and trends of the European historiography, especially when publishing the visions of the national past in foreign languages.

The former Soviet space countries were heavily influenced by the historiography of the Soviet Russia. Even the concept of Enlightenment (Apšvieta) was associated with the Russian translation of the word (Просвещение, Švietimo epocha). The term was understood in a narrower sense as encompassing only changes in the sphere of education in the 18th century. As Kristina Mačiulytė observes, although religious texts were carefully recorded in the Soviet bibliographical publications, researchers were interested only in their language specificities or some educational and social aspects. However, there were no attempts to write about the texts themselves. On the other hand, specifically during the Soviet period, the interest in the events brought by the Age of Enlightenment in the education system and their impact on the development of society intensified in Lithuania (as well as in Belarus and Ukraine). During the interwar period, the educational reforms of the second half of the 18th century were viewed as disturbing in the independent Republic of Lithuania because of the strengthening positions of the Polish language and Polonization. The discourse changed in the second half of the 20th century when professional historiography transferred the cultural threats of the Polish in the Age.

16 E. Raila, Apšvieta, Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštijos kultūra, Vilnius, 2001, p. 44.
of Enlightenment to the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries. Similarly, in the discussion of the development of the Lithuanian writing and language in the 18th century, it was maintained that despite the lost contact with the ethnic language and values, the Lithuanian nobility relied on the civil tradition of the GDL and thus, of Lithuania. As research shows, in the 19th century, the national identity and ethnic culture of Lithuanian peasants was influenced by the nobility culture, which remained a significant part of the national identity in the 20th century. The research of the last two decades of the 20th century stopped to identify the Lithuanian ethnic origins with the Lithuanian speaking peasants or small town dwellers. New research emphasized the role of nobility, stressing its importance for the national and societal development. A negative image of nobility which prevailed in the works of the Soviet historians was replaced by the examples of educated and patriotic noblemen. Although the romantic myth of the exceptional role of peasants and small town dwellers as preservers of ethnic culture was gradually retreating from historiography, it remained strong in the national consciousness. Finally, in response to the expectations of society and alerts about the common misconceptions, the important components of the national history, such as the Lithuanian language, were arranged with greater caution. For example, the issues of Polonization or denationalization retreated from the key part of the narrative, finding their own niche and giving way to the political ideology of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although there are certain exceptions, they depend on the interpretation and addressee. Apart from the nobility culture, Alfredas Bumblauskas distinguishes the appearance of the first Lithuanian primer and the Lithuanian translation of the Constitution of the 3rd of May (although the date of document translation remains the object of discussions) as the key components of the Age of Enlightenment.

In the generalizing research of the vision of the Lithuanian national past, the influence of Enlightenment is seen in the educational reform; the activities and programs of schools and the Vilnius University in the second half of the 18th century; the printing-houses and printing in Polish and Lithuanian. Although the program of the French language teaching introduced by the Piarists is mentioned as a significant event, publications in other languages are not discussed. The programs

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of centralization of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the second half of the 18th century are considered to be extremely dangerous; however, the rights to the common heritage with the Kingdom of Poland are not relinquished. In 2007, some historians and politicians attempted to emphasize the importance of the 3rd of May to the constitutional legacy of Lithuania and offered to give the date a symbolic political significance. However, such attempts provoked strong resistance not only in part of society, but also among the historians. Within a year, the dispute grew into discussion in which the historians of the 18th century had to prove that the Constitution of the 3rd of May was a significant document worth exceptional place in the Lithuanian history in any case.

The Belarusian historiography is not homogenous, and can be divided into four23 or, more generally, two branches: the post-Soviet writing supported by the government and the national historiography, which visibly revived at the end of the 20th century and is lead by the GDL historians. In Belarus, like in Lithuania, the narration of the second half of the 18th century is constructed around the axis of a common history of the GDL and the Kingdom of Poland. Similarly, the opposition to the plans of centralization and unification of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is emphasized. Drawing on recent research, the Belarusian historians describe the economic reforms and the cultural spaces of the towns in the territory of the present day Belarus in greater detail. On the basis of the Soviet research, printings and printing houses (mostly focusing on the Polish, and the Ruthenian-Belarusian languages), and the positions of the Uniate and Orthodox churches are discussed. In addition to the university and schools, the Belarusian scholars distinguish the residences of nobility as the centres of Enlightenment culture, which contributed significantly to the spread of innovations in theatre, music, architecture, and art. The specificity of the Belarusian historiography is probably dictated by the territorial principle as the largest lands and residencies of the GDL nobility were situated in the centre of the present day Belarus. It should also be noted that the heritage of the Soviet tradition is especially important. In the Soviet Union, historians were forbidden to go beyond the borders of the Soviet Republic in their writings. These Soviet period clichés can still be felt in the work of the Belarusian historians. On the other hand, the heritage of the national Soviet historiography and the available data sources also contribute to the current situation. As a result, during the two decades, relatively few works devoted to the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and encompassing the whole territory of the old state were published. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new tendency appeared: if the borders of the present day state are crossed, the research stops at the quasi ethnical

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23 A. Hryckiewicz, Przedmowa, in: H. Sahanowicz, Historia Białorusi, s. 8-11.
borders at Trakai, beyond which, according to some Belarusian historians, starts foreign Samogitia\(^{24}\). Although the mentioned perspective is not the only one, it clearly dominates the Belarusian research. In any case, the multicultural heritage of Vilnius and its importance for the political and cultural life of the whole Grand Duchy of Lithuania, explains and grounds the expansion of the historical space beyond the borders of the contemporary Belarus in the works of the Belarusian historians.

Although in Lithuania the territorial principle in the discussions of the GDL heritage has long been observed, the question of Grodno was often brought up in the Soviet period works as in the research of the 18\(^{th}\) century. Grodno was often referred to as the city on the borders of the ethnic lands of the Lithuanians and the Belarusians and mentioned in the context of the reforms of Antoni Tyzenhauz (for example, the establishment of manufactures), which were largely implemented in the territory of the present day Belarus. Moreover, the Assembly of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth gathered in Grodno, in the 18\(^{th}\) century. Attitudes about the significance of Grodno which prevailed in the Soviet times date back to the national historiography of the interwar period and the established historical consciousness of those times. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the principle of breaking down the old state on the ethnical or confessional basis was sooner abandoned in Lithuania. Professional historiography divided the state territory according to the historical boundaries, set by the administration of those times. Finally, the division of the territory of historical state on the ethnic principle was recognized as unacademic. Despite this, in the syntheses of national history, the borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with Russia remained as insignificant examples of common state development or were mentioned only in the context of military operations (most often by foreign countries). As in the Belarusian case, the presented situation in the Lithuanian historiography was determined by the prevailing attitudes to the national space, not related to the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The effect of the research of the interwar or Soviet periods is of secondary importance in this situation. Over the last twenty years, historical research has increased significantly in Lithuania. The attitudes of the interwar period and Soviet terminology withdrew. Still, works which take the historical state as their research objects to construct the narrative of the national history encounter certain problems. Following the old traditions, the borders of the historical state are crossed and the relations with Lithuania Minor are distinguished. In this way, ethnicity as a key element in the national vision of the past is singled out.

Certain propositions in the Belarusian historiography remain unchanged from

the Soviet era. For example, quite often, the Age of Enlightenment is characterized as a transitional period between feudalism and capitalism. It is often emphasized that the ideas of Enlightenment spread in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania only when education system was secularized and Church domination in the state stopped. On the contrary, as research suggests, the role of the Church in the Age of Enlightenment was undeniably significant. Even when the influence of the Church hierarchy was regulated by secular government, the Church remained an important instrument of government not only in Austria and Hungary, but also in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The claim is supported by Richard Butterwick’s study devoted to the analysis of the relation of the Four-Year Diet and the Church. According to the British historian, before the modern nations formed, the Catholic faith strengthened the foundations of civil society and unity among the nobility of the 18th century. Therefore, the creators of the reforms deliberately supported the positions of Catholicism at the expense of other confessions. According to Butterwick, the fact that the Catholic faith was declared as the supreme state religion in the Constitution of the 3rd of May, corresponds with the ideals and values of the Enlightenment. In the post-Soviet Belarus, where the Uniates prevailed, and the Catholic Lithuania, this historical event was negatively evaluated and seen as evidence that the reforms of the Four-Years Diet were behind the times and ineffective. The strengthening of the Catholic Church is often related with the processes of Polonization and Latinization in the Belarusian territory. In the same context, the Belarusian researchers stress the role of the Uniat clergy for the education in the Belarusian (or Ruthenian) language. However, the claim that the ethnic consolidation of the Belarusians and the dependency for the Uniat confederation were going hand in hand since the second half of the 18th century has been criticized even in the Belarusian historiography. Also, the attempts of the Soviet historians to transfer the fight against the Polonization in the arena of the political confrontation between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland have been rejected as completely unfounded.

The Ukrainian case is much more complicated as during the discussed period, the territory of the country was divided among the three countries: the Russian and Austrian Empires and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. After the collapse
of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the country appeared in the hands of the mentioned empires. The Ukrainian historiography mostly concentrates on the Cossack history. Thus, as the Zaporizhia was eliminated by the Russian Empire, the 18th century and the Enlightenment are most often seen as another downfall by the Ukrainian historians. This attitude has received criticism from the Ukrainian historians themselves. In a summary of the latest trends of the Ukrainian historiography, Jelena Rusina notes that unlike the Belarusians, who based their revival of the end of the 20th century on the heritage of the GDL, the Ukrainians see their golden age in the Cossack times and Cossackia as a cornerstone of the Ukrainian national identity30. Natalia Jakowenko draws attention to the existence of the anti-Polish stereotypes in the Ukrainian historiography, the prevalent heritage of the Soviet-Marxist historiography, clichés and theories of outdated historiography. On the other hand, the scholar views positively certain works which consider the old writings in Latin and Polish and propose that ideas of the ‘real’ West reached Ukraine through Poland31. Thus, the researchers of the Ukrainian history do not give sufficient attention to the complicated Ukrainian history of the second half of the 18th century. The Kingdom of Poland, which included a part of the present day Ukraine, receives even less attention. The period of Enlightenment is associated with the activities of the Basliions and the changes after the reform of the Educational Commission. However, parallel events after the first partition when a part of the territory was taken by the Austrian Empire are viewed more favourably. According to Jakowenko, the beneficial policy for ethnic and religious minorities strengthened the role of the Greek Catholic clergy in the national revival of the West Ukraine32. Other researchers, however, continue to emphasize the threat of Germanization as in the tradition of the Soviet times.

The Slovakian historiography is relevant when the issues Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are mentioned. Moreover, it is interesting to see how the vision of national development is constructed in the neighbouring country of Ukraine. According to a firmly established approach since the Soviet times33, the reforms of the Age of Enlightenment in the Hungarian Kingdom enlarged the numbers of literate people and created favourable conditions for the consolidation of the Slovakian ethnos. The development of the events is chronologically divided into two

32 N. Jakowenko, Historia Ukrainy, s. 331-332.
stages. Joseph’s II policy of religious minorities, which increased press in the native language of the congregation, is also acknowledged. These processes are referred to as the “starting point of the national movement” or even the “beginnings of modern Slovak nation”34. Similar claims of the Slovak researchers have attracted criticism of the historians from other countries. It was noted that the standard Slovakian language and grammar were only starting to develop at that time. The language was influenced by Czech and the general processes of the religious policy of the state. Moreover, the Slovak symbols which were created at the end of the 18th century and had to distinguish the ethnic Slovak community from Hungary and other nations, were still related to the common symbols of the history with the Hungarian Kingdom35. While it is acknowledged that the reforms of Joseph II influenced the development of the Slovak and other nations ruled by the Habsburg dynasty, the processes are transferred to the future36. In any case, the national historiography of Slovakia associates the reforms of Enlightenment with the beginning of the modern Slovak nation and puts emphasis on language, writing and creation or succession of the first narratives of the past.

A common desire met in historiography is to enhance the national processes or concretize the transitional events as is in the case of the Age of Enlightenment. Natalia Jakovenko critically observes that some Ukrainian historians often transfer the concept of modern Ukrainian nation back to the 17th century37. Although aware of the differences between the old and the modern nations, Jaroslav Hrycak still writes about the dangers brought by the Age of Enlightenment to the Ukrainians. According to Hrycak, the conception of the old nation, which dominated in Europe until the end of the 18th century, related the nation with the ruling classes. Ordinary people did not fit the formula. If this conception would have survived for several decades in the collective consciousness, the Ukrainian nation would have been at a risk of disappearance from the face of the earth38. In the latest Belarusian historiography, it is still possible to find concerns about the dangers of assimilation (related to the spread of the Polish language and the Catholic faith) which were relevant in the second half of the 18th century.

Meanwhile, in Lithuania, it is claimed that the Catholic faith, despite some exceptions, was a unifying force for the Lithuanians in the territory of the Grand

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34 E. Kowalska, Enlightenment and Beginnings of Modern Slovak Nation, *Slovakia in history*, p. 88.
37 N. Jakowienko, *Druga strona lustra*, s. 419.
Duchy of Lithuania. The Polish language was not seen as increasing the gap between the different estates (i.e., nobility and townspeople) 39. To summarize the significance of the Age of Enlightenment in the European and the Lithuanian history, such aspects are distinguished: economic, political and cultural innovations; the rise of the modern nations; attention to the ethnic foundation of the nation, its language and verbal creation 40; the growth of the Lithuanian national and cultural consciousness and the appearance of the idea of a peasant as state citizen 41; different conception of the nation which encompasses all estates of the country. The listed claims are supported by the ideas of physiocrats, extracts from the Constitution of the 3rd of May, and especially the proclamations of the uprising of 1794 written in Lithuanian, which address the Lithuanian nation regardless estate differences. The addressee of the first proclamations in Lithuanian was referred to as a backbone of the forming nation of peasants and small town dwellers who retained their native language 42. Later, in an attempt not to overestimate the significance of the document, it was presented as an opportunity to strengthen the Lithuanian language. As Zigmantas Kiaupa claims, the document was written under special and dangerous conditions for the fate of the state; therefore, certain extremities were possible. On the other hand, the union of all estates in one nation was prepared throughout the whole 18th century. It is also evident that the preparation of this conception was not finished and its implementation was postponed after the defeat of the rebellion 43.

The attitude that in the end of the 18th century the “subordinates” who were beyond the threshold of the political nation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were becoming increasingly visible in the state life is also observed by the Polish historians 44. As Kiaupa claims, the Four-Year Diet reforms made the foundations of civil society in towns as the estate property became territorial. Moreover, in 1794, the rebels invited in their proclamations members of all estates to form one political nation which could be seen as the beginning of the formation of the “multi-estate” nations 45. In Lithuania, a particular attention was given to the social-political movement of the small town dwellers during the period of the Four-Year

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40 M. Jučas, Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė..., p. 320.
43 Z. Kiaupa, Lietuvos istorija..., p. 287.
44 A. S. Kaminski, Impoderabilia społeczeństwa obywatelskiego Rzeczypospolitej wielu narodów, Rzeczypospolita wielu narodów i jej tradycje, ed. A. K. Link-Lenczowski, M. Markiewicz, Kraków, 1999, s. 35.
Diet. Most towns which received the King’s privileges of self-government are in the contemporary Lithuanian and not Belarusian territories. Historians see the king’s privileges as the most obvious result of the reforms which reached contemporary times. Although the implementation of the reforms was stopped by the historical events, the network of the self-governed towns would have expanded across the whole territory of the GDL. The reforms were stopped due to the policy of Catherine II, direct military support of the Russian Empire to the opposition of the reforms, and invasion. In the generalising works of the Belarusian history, little attention is given to the social reforms of the second half of the 18th century. The discussion is limited to the general events, short overview of the law of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jakub Jasinski’s attempts to abolish serfdom, and folk songs which evidence the participation of the Ukrainian peasants in the rebellion of 1794. Although the GDL territory greatly diminished after the partitions, especially with respect to the territories of the contemporary Belarus, the GDL history still remains in the centre of the Belarusian national narrative. Without diminishing the contribution of the Belarusian historians, it should be noted that the research of the Lithuanian historians on some questions is more solid, but less known due to the language barrier.

Successful and unsuccessful efforts to relate the continuity of the national history with the “sleeping nation” of peasants and small town dwellers have their own reasons explained by the historical tradition. Alvydas Nikžentaitis claims that because of the treatment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the positions of modern state, such features of modern state as ethnicity and language are imposed to the people of the 16th-18th centuries. From the perspective of the modern nationalism and contemporary position, it seems that the Polish situation is more favourable. First, the dominant language was Polish in the Commonwealth. This fact alone could be a crucial starting point for a young Polish nationalist of the end of the 19th century to wonder about the Polish origin of the old Republic. Further on, Nikžentaitis states that the same reasons, determined by the modern conception of nationalism, caused more problems for a Lithuanian of the end of the 19th and the 20th centuries. The language factor showed Lithuanians, representatives of a political nation, close to the Polish people. At the same time, it did not allow to see the GDL citizens as belonging to the same nation throughout the history. The processes lasted throughout

47 H. Sahanowicz, Historia Białoruś..., s. 331.
the 20th century; therefore, in consideration of the events of the 16th-18th centuries, a milder concept of “acculturation” came into use instead of the negatively viewed “Polonization”. Comparing the observations of Nikžentaitis with the discussed ideas, it can be observed that for the acceptance of the national history, the language factor still remains significant. Other factors which distinguished ethnic community from the neighbours are of secondary importance in the national history narratives despite the fact that they were far more important in the 18th century. It is evident that this attitude is influenced by the Soviet heritage which enhanced the fostering of the folk culture and rejected the importance of confessional dependency. The social visions of the national revival, which programmed the events to the future, should also be considered.

In the Ukrainian historical syntheses, the 18th century is presented as the period of existence between Russia and Poland. A Ukrainian historian Vladimir Mokry claims that the conception of opposition between the Polish and the Ukrainians-Ruthenians in the 15th-18th centuries was formed in the 19th century and has not lost its significance until now. Jakovenko mitigates the confrontation with Poland by explaining that the country was spreading universal ideas of the West. However, drawing on the attitudes of the czarist times, some Ukrainian historians still see the Belarusians among the “nations disadvantaged by Poland” 49. The Belarusian historiography, which follows the historical traditions of the GDL, rejects these claims. However, following the tradition of statehood, which protects the nations of the GDL as a shield from the historical and related political threats of Poland, and basing on the provisions which formed in the 20th century, the Belarusian historians put threats arising from the Kingdom of Poland as the stronger partner in the first place. The statehood tradition of the GDL in Belarus is closely related with the continuity of the national history. Differently from the Ukrainian historiography, in Belarus, the partitions and resistance against them receives exceptional attention. There are also no disputes about the negative consequences originating from the dependency to the Russian Empire. However, most emphasis is given to

the political relation of the GDL and Poland i.e., the internal history of the Commonwealth.

A great challenge related to the reforms of the Enlightenment is the processes of centralization and unification. Although these trends receive almost no attention in the historical syntheses of the Ukrainian and Slovak historians, they are central to the Belarusian and, especially, the Lithuanian historiographies. The Belarusian and Lithuanian historians, who relate the statehood traditions to the GDL history, often painfully accept the centralization of the government of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and attempts to unify law in the whole territory of Poland and historical Lithuania. Each resistance against these initiatives of the Polish nobility since the 16th to the end of the 18th centuries constitutes the foundation of the national narrative in Lithuania and Belarus. For this reason, the attitudes to the Four-Year Diet reforms are not unanimous. There is no doubt that the reforms had to help the state to withdraw from the crisis; however, the end of the reforms has long been associated with Poland rather than Lithuania. Until now, the manifestations of conspiracy theories in assessing these historical events can be met. A Polish historian Andrzej B. Zakrzewski believes that the issue of the GDL status in a common state with the Kingdom of Poland in 1791-1792 requires further investigation50. Therefore, the debate on the statehood of the GDL becomes increasingly emotional.

The first historian to pose the delicate situation of the Four-Year Diet back in the third decade of the 20th century was Adolfas Šapoka. His approach to the Constitution of the 3rd of May evolved from stricter to more moderate evaluations. In 1936, in the first professional “Lithuanian History”, Šapoka wrote that the Four-Year Diet was destroying the autonomous government of Lithuania; in 1938, he mitigated the position by explaining that the Constitution of the 3rd of May did not harm the autonomy of the Lithuanian government; in 1940, Šapoka already claimed that not a word was included in the Constitution which would ruin the Lithuanian government51. Šapoka’s changing attitude was clearly influenced by the evaluation of the “Mutual Vow of the Two Nations” law which was passed on the 20th of October, 1791, after the Constitution of the 3rd of May. The law declared the unionist attitudes between Poland and Lithuania. However, the first claim of the professional synthesis of the Lithuanian history remained more known and

heard among the Lithuanian society and historians as it played an important role during the “period of national revival” in the 8th decade of the 20th century. Discussions about the Constitution of the 3rd of May were once again brought into focus only at the end of the 20th century in the articles of the Polish historian Juliusz Bardach and the Lithuanian historian Leonas Mulevičius52. The articles devoted attention to the “Mutual Vow of the Two Nations” law of the 20th of October, 1791, passed after the Constitution of the 3rd of May. As after Šapoka’s work no one has analysed the document for half of the century, the importance of the document was rediscovered.

Not all historians agreed with the idea that the 3rd of May Constitution is an important historical event for both Poland and Lithuania; Šapoka’s thesis posed in the first professional “Lithuanian History” (1936) claimed that although the Targowica Confederation, supported by the Russian army, was hostile to the Four-Year Diet reforms and supported the old regime, it also restored the old autonomy of Lithuania and Poland53. In disagreement with the mentioned attitude of some historians, the researchers of the 18th century observed that the confederates did not have their army and relied on the military forces of the Russian Empire. Therefore, it was offered to treat the GDL confederates as Russia’s allies and by no means to refer to the 1792 war as civil (because there were some suggestions) as, in the words of Rakutis, some defended their homeland and some betrayed54. Attempts to revive the image of the reform opponents as the rescuers of Lithuania and the portrayed the events of the end of the 18th century as an intermediate existence between Russia and Poland are similar to the position of the Ukrainian historiography. However, the reaction of the conservative nobility to the Four-Year Diet reforms and the accepted help of the foreign army to achieve the political aspirations are criticized in the Lithuanian history syntheses and even referred to as a symbol of the collapse of the state55.

Researchers of the 18th century GDL observe that the Lithuanian historians mostly disagree whether the Constitution of the 3rd of May is Polish or Polish-Lithuanian. Is the document significant only to Poland or also to Lithuania?56 In any case, the thesis that the Lithuanian name is “erased” from the document and

53 Lietuvos istorija, red. A. Šapoka, Kaunas, 1936, p. 433; also see: R. Jurgaitis, R. Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, „Ketverių metų seimo epocha Adolfo Šapokos tyrimuose”, p. 35-36.
54 V. Rakutis, LDK karuomenė Ketverių metų seimo laikotarpiu (1788-1792), Vilnius, 2001, p. 12.
55 A. Kuncevičius, Z. Kiaupa, J. Kiaupienė, Lietuvos istorija iki 1795 metų., p. 400. Original quote: „valstybės žlugimo simboliu”.
56 R. Jurgaitis, R. Šmigelskytė-Stukienė, Ketverių metų seimo epocha., p. 36.
the state becomes referred to as Poland remains valid so far. Specifically, the issue of the GDL autonomy and statehood is of key importance in the discussion.

Often, there are concerns that the two political nations, Polish and Lithuanian, are referred to in the Constitution as one “nation”, or “the Polish nation”. However, the Lithuanian nobility identified themselves with the GDL in certain situations and with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in other, and these trends are found since the 17th century. The fact that the GDL becomes referred to as a province rather than a state is painfully accepted. However, as Grzegorz Blaszczyk points out, Lithuania was a province of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and not Poland’s. In response to the discussion, Kiaupa summarizes the events of the Four-Year Diet by saying that the opposition between the federal state established by the Union of Lublin and the aspired unitary state became evident in the Diet of 1788-1792. Although the Four-Year Diet has led to significant changes, especially in the development of the centralized government, the Republic remained a federal state, Lithuania remained a legal entity, and the binominal structure of the Republic was retained. Although the discussions continue to focus on the events of 1791, it is often forgotten that the position of the Lithuanian delegates on the issue of the GDL was raised not only in 1792 by the general confederation of the GDL, but also implemented in the Grodno Diet and re-opened at the beginning of the 1794 uprising.

Just as in Lithuania, in Belarus, it has long been argued that the Constitution of May 3rd denied the GDL statehood. This approach is determined not by the historiography (the new historiography revised the approach in response to the latest research), but by a collective belief and common attitudes. The Belarusian historians rehabilitated the Constitution of May 3rd by basing on the research of a Polish historian Bardach. Due to the language barrier, the Lithuanian research and discussions did not reach the Belarusian historians.

In Lithuania, it is still possible to find claims that all positive evaluations of the Constitution of the 3rd of May are erroneous and not grounded. These claims are further influenced by the common attitudes and conceptions of the interwar period, which were revised by a number of the professional Lithuanian historians. For example, a review of the secondary school textbooks criticizes the “positivist” approach of one textbook which does not mention the potential impact of the

58 Z. Kiaupa, Lietuvos istorija.., p. 86.
59 Гісторыя Беларусi, ч. 1... с. 231; O. Latyszonek, Tradycja współistnienia narodów w jednym państwie i jej konsekwencje z punktu widzenia narodu białoruskiego, Rzeczypospolita wielu narodów i jej tradycję, Kraków, 1999, s. 207-208.
Constitution of May 3rd to the further development of the state and the nation 60. Also, two alternatives (referred to as verified hypotheses) of the evaluation of the reforms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second half of the 18th century are distinguished. First, the reforms and the Constitution are treated as a positive, although late step in the modernization of the state, which could have created favourable conditions to the formation of the modern Lithuanian nation and state. Second, the reforms can be considered as the last step in the destruction of the GDL statehood and the final collapse of the Lithuanian nation: if the reforms were implemented and Lithuania would have become Poland’s province, the process of denationalization would have been irreversible 61. It should be pointed out that these two alternatives provided in the professional historiography presuppose negative assessments, whereas the relation of the events of the end of the 18th century with the processes of the second half of the 19th-20th centuries is not possible, unless it would be predefined what would change and what would remain stable for more than half a century. One way or another, the fears that the Constitution of May 3rd could stop the national revival of the Lithuanians in the 19th century are not grounded.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing, it can be stated that although the national historiography declares identity with the historical state, it does not cope with the three factors, namely, territory, cultural environment (mostly related to confessional dependency) and language. These criteria function as reference points for the nations which construct their identities without direct relation to the historical state of the 18th century. Typically, history is presented through the vision of confrontation between the periphery and the centre. The later events are incorporated into the narration or even dated earlier. On the other hand, the second half of the 18th century is not marked with disagreements of a similar kind. Therefore, the examples of the 19th century are often projected into the Age of Enlightenment, which brought significant innovations at the dawn of the birth of the modern nations. To say in another way, the deconstruction of historiography shows that such themes like territory, religion, language, and social factors have been determined by ethno-cultural conceptions. Interpretations of historians are based on a special pattern. On the one


hand, they are creating stories objectively and there are no direct associations with nationalist conceptions. On the other hand, they are based on some predetermined attitudes.

In sum, the modern nations’ national history of transitory period (which is the Enlightenment) from an undefined and ambiguous state to the existence can be seen as a construct which emphasizes selected historical events to provide the validity of the *status quo*. In addition to reasonable claims and attempts to retain the continuity of the historical tradition, the Lithuanian and the Belarusian historians defend the positions of the GDL in the Four-Year Diet in order to give the historical grounding to and strengthen the independence in the 20th-21st centuries. In any case, the general public processes influenced by the Age of Enlightenment are a common historical heritage, which allow us not only to be proud of the so called “first constitution in Europe”, but also invite to revise the old evaluations of the past.

Liudas Glemža

**APŠVIETOS EPOCHOS NACIONALINĖS PRAITIES KONSTRAVIMAS:**
LIETUVOS, BALTARUSIJOS, UKRAINOS IR SLOVAKIJOS ATVEJAI


**RAKTAŽODŽIAI:** Apšvietos epocha, nacionalinė istoriografija, nacionalinis atgimimas, Abiejų Tautų Respublika, Vengrijos karalystė.