

# DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN 1918: A COMPARISON OF LITHUANIA AND BELARUS

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## ABSTRACT

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In 1918, two entirely different states had emerged in Europe – Lithuania and Belarusian National Republic. In comparison, these two countries are similar in geopolitical and historical sense. However, after declaration of independence, the attempt of Lithuania and BNR to govern and preserve nationalistic ideas had opposite results. By analysing historical context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Lithuanian and Belarusian lands, general picture reveals that major geopolitical events, internal societal conditions and cohesion differed in both states, eventually affecting emancipation of national ideas. Nonetheless, the level of governance, unity of political and institutional actors, as well as success decided fates of BNR, which dissolved by the end of the same year.

**Keywords:** Lithuania, BNR, declaration of independence of 1918, statehood.

## INTRODUCTION

Belarus and Lithuania had a shared history under Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even after partitioning of Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, both Lithuanians and Belarusians lived under the rule of the Russian Empire, consequently, these geopolitical circumstances had an impact on the development of cultural norms and identity, which formed the impetus towards the path of statehood in

1918. Before these events, Belarus was seen as a multilingual and ethnically diverse region that had both predominantly Russian and Polish cultures, without any larger national sovereignty aspirations. Nonetheless, before the Great War, conditions in the occupied Belarusian lands were dreadful. Repressions on Belarusian culture, lack of any institutional development, and the consequences of war affecting livelihood. For instance, taking into account language aspect, in Lithuania it proved to be useful in setting boundaries of nationality, while in case of Belarus the censorship affected society to a larger extent, leaving limited space for national development of belonging (Rudling 2014, 65). Interconnectedness between people in ethnic lands of Commonwealth is undeniable, while different regions had various dynamics of demographics, languages and customs, – amalgamation of Lithuanians, Belarusians, Russians and Poles. However, both Belarusian and Lithuanian ethnic lands were under control of Russian empire policy, which was characterised by massive public “Russification”, which had an enormous impact on the local culture and language. To understand the extent of conditions that led towards declaration of independence, thereby having a lasting impact on development of modern states, one needs to look into the history of both these countries. The aim of the paper is to emphasize the preconditions as an influence for national consciousness, and then to compare the effects on Lithuania and Belarusian National Republic (BNR) in the context of declaration of independence, while underlining similarities and differences. Furthermore, the paper contains the analysis of preconditions which affected Lithuania and BNR and their existence, the crucial state building events and developments, such as declaration of independence, and functionality of institutional and public services.

The first two chapters of the paper will focus on the observations of A. Rudling, A. Wilson, O. Mastianica regarding the early 20<sup>th</sup> century consolidation of Belarusian national movement, their ethnolinguistic approach on territorial claims, and general interrelation amongst the societal levels. The following two chapters focus on political events in Lithuania, the struggle for independence and reasons for political actions.

## **PRECONDITIONS OF BELARUSIAN TERRITORIES BEFORE 1918**

Belarusian language as such was not officially recognized in any press or piece of literature until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As for the society, political elites and intelligentsia were keen to employ Polish or Russian languages as a sign of societal status, while only peasants and working class used the Belarusian language somewhat. Even though the peasantry

had the lowest interest in national emancipation or sentiments for statehood, thus such nationalistic ideas were not even accessible to ordinary Belarusians. The majority of people outside the cities were not even able to identify their nationality, while around 75% of Belarusian population was rural (Rudling 2014, 62). Additionally, lack of education led to illiteracy, while majority of population had been basically living stranded, due to non-existent infrastructure and social mobility. Under these conditions, a possibility of sentient civil society, that could have a grasp on identity and nationalistic ideas was impossible.

Hence, the active intelligentsia from territories of Belarus in 1906 understood that any national idea was impossible without basic principles of education, therefore Anton Luckievich – a journalist with his acquaintances established *Nasha Niva*, the first Belarusian newspaper that reported on political, economic, and cultural issues. The inner circle of *Nasha Niva* thought that Belarusian national movement was possible with an advent of class consciousness. While the written Belarusian language was in Cyrillic, to access wider audiences, Latin was the second language of the paper in which it was printed (Unuchak 2011, 176). The scope and the essence of *Nasha Niva* publications were specifically targeted at indifferent national ideas of Belarusians who lived in ethnic territories. Even the text on the front page of the paper emphasized: “We will fight so that all Belarusians [...] realize that they are Belarusians” (*Nasha Niva* 1906). Interestingly, newspaper was printed in Vilnius, a spiritual capital of ethnic Belarusians, moreover, in terms of territorial integrity, many considered that the city should be an integral part of Belarusian nation state, rather than a part of Lithuania. Over the course of its publication, it helped to set standards for linguistic characteristics of Belarusian language, moreover, its weekly editions emphasized language, class awareness and ethnic origins. Due to strict persecution by Russian Empire based on its strict “Russification” policy and WWI effects on Belarusian lands, including that majority of the group responsible for the newspaper have been drafted to war, existence of paper for some time being came to end in 1915.

Soon followed the German occupation that led to newly established educational practices, including teaching of Belarusian language in schools, books and newspapers publishing took place, and such precedence enabled growth of cultural life, ergo, emergence of new political elites with ambitions of autonomy (Turonok 1989). It could be argued that groundwork of *Nasha Niva* was continued by new political elites that bolstered ideas of national consciousness which led to establishment of new political movements, ideologically with different ideas on governance but with recognition that Belarusian populace truly inhabits these lands. Of course, the Great War worsened situation in Belarus: exodus of Belarusian population to

Russia, Poland and Germany, territory divided by the frontline of the great powers, famine, destroyed cities and villages, men forced to serve and die in army of Russian Empire (Stanisławski n.d).

Under these circumstances, new grassroots political movements with huge dissatisfaction of the situation emerged, including Belarusian People's Committee with the responsibility to coordinate other national organizations activities. Even though, ideas about the statehood circulated among political activists, including Lukashевич brothers, leaders of Belarusian National Committee who were contemplating the ideas of territorial union resembling Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Polish, Belarusian–Lithuanian and Baltic lands would somehow co-exist in autonomous form or alliance (Tsikhamirau 2013, 105). Common perception between scholars is quite unanimous that the role of *Nasha Niva* is undeniable in the quest for nation awakening. Firstly, editorials helped to form circle of intellectuals with somewhat common interest in acknowledging of existence of Belarusian as an ethnic group. Also, by selecting target audience an impoverished peasants and working class, newspaper rejected the Polish and Russian languages, thereby raising ordinary Belarusian issues publicly and making “political and cultural statement” (Rudling 2014, 56). That is why pre-independence period seemed to be a fundamental time to foster national identity and confidence, because Belarus had never before existed as a nation state, in comparison with Lithuania, which previously has been Grand Dutchy of Lithuania and later – an equal part in Commonwealth.

Consequently, another important issue for political elites was establishing where do the lands of Belarus begin and end. Firstly, for Belarusian territory, no clear answer existed as to the kind of parameters according to which those historical lands should be included in nation state. Belarusian scholars, on the basis of historiographical and cartographical evidence from the earlier ages of Grand Dutchy of Lithuania, launched a new national discourse on religion and language. The notion of ethnolinguistics was developed by Evfimii Karskii, a scientist from The Imperial Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences, who compiled a map of ethnic Belarusian territories based on regional dialects. Such findings were employed later in 1912 by Anton Luckievich, a leader of the Belarusian national movement. Based on Karskii's maps, Luckievich claimed that Vilnius, Minsk, Grodna, Vitsiebsk, and Magileŭ – and some parts of Smolensk Province were ethnic lands of Belarus (Mastianica 2019, 289). But there was a lack of substantial evidence to affirm how many people in those territories spoke in Belarusian or even considered their ethnicity such. Even in the Third Constituent Charter, before proclamation of independence, regions of Mogilev, Minsk, Vitebsk, Grodno, Vilnius, Smolensk and Chernihiv and Bialystok have been included.

Paradoxically, such a claim was based on the assumption that the majority of the population were ethnically Belarusian (BNR Rada 2016).

Other suggestions of borders included historical analysis of ancient tribal movement, that in 1910 documented by Vaclau Lastouski in the first history of Belarus in Belarusian, interestingly, in comparison to the first history of Lithuania, written by Simonas Daukantas, it was released almost a century later. However, the attempt by Belarusian intelligentsia to shape national movement lacked the support of common people, therefore, the pressures of war and disagreements with Lithuanian movement, in particular – regarding the overlapping claims of lands, somewhat complicated the border situation. Importantly, the essential goal – consolidation of ethnic Belarusians by educating them and providing national self-esteem was still intact, even during the war, up to the days of proclamation of independence.

## **BELARUSIAN STATEHOOD AFTER PROCLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

First All-Belarusian Congress unanimously approved the declaration of independence, however, the problem besides some socialist political groups disapproving or abstaining from voting, was that provincial municipalities and other regional units across BNR did not approve the document either, indicating a serious gap in understanding of the statehood between political elite and rural areas. A month later, the council authorities sent a telegram to the German Emperor Wilhelm II expressing gratitude for the liberation of Belarus, yet the telegram remained unanswered. Another problem was lack of support from international actors. No European country, nor the states in other continents officially recognized Belarus as a *de facto* nation. Even though the cabinet of BNR led by I. Varonka reasoned and expressed their arguments based on historical evidence, no external recognition was present. The BNR Council found itself in a difficult situation: the new Prime Minister, Anton Luckievich, managed to send diplomatic missions to the Entente states, also to Warsaw and Kyiv, and, moreover, conducted talks with Lenin in Moscow, and yet no one was willing to unequivocally support the new state (Stanisławski, W. n.d). Meanwhile, Germany did not really envision any larger role for BNR besides that of a buffer state, which would counter the influence of Soviet Russia and spread of Bolshevism (Michaluk, Rudling 2014, 22).

In the case of governance, local German authorities allowed BNR *Rada* to act in certain fields of self-governance. Establishment of trade networks, industry, social care, school education and publishing were allowed by Germans. Under these conditions, the BNR government had a chance to enhance the sense of national identity with symbols and language. Besides,

establishment of school education institutions, rule of law and judiciary system was another issue to be tackled. Local German governing units did not allow for Belarus to have their own military service or police force, making the army of Kaiser Wilhelm II responsible for public order. Still, the short tenure of BNR expired at the end of autumn, when Germany had to capitulate in WWI. As to BNR government, the grim scenario of Soviet troops overtaking German governance forced it to flee abroad. The inability to gain recognition by international community or the lack of proper attachment to society affected the chances of successful existence of nation state, but most important factor was the collapse of Germany, that led to re-established presence of Soviet Russia's Army in Belarusian territories.

While there were some attempts to battle Soviet troops by securing two Polish national battalions, the majority of common citizens did not take up arms or understood the need for the defence of BNR (Wilson 2011, 138). Therefore, BNR government had to flee abroad, first to Berlin, later – to Prague and finally to settle in US. Internal factors, as well as the inability for three governments over the span of the six months to establish social consensus with other national groups. With regard to effectiveness of government, it was difficult to exert any influence in ethnically contested regions, like Vilnius, where other political powers also wielded their leverage. Consolidation of territories without any actual force or representative structures was quite difficult. Another important issue was internal disagreements between political groups that were supporting Bolshevism, moreover, opposing German forces. Clearly, the lack of societal integration in farther regions and involvement in pursuit of statehood, moreover, the absence of tangible ties with governmental structures complicated the cause of perseverance for independence. Of course, the immense influence of Bolshevik underground organizations funded by Moscow provided a certain level of internal destabilization. During the short term of BNR *Rada* governance, it was managed to lay the groundwork principles, but most importantly, in case of national identity, the foundations for national narrative were reinforced in the fields of Belarusian language, new symbols, such as the coat of arms “Pahonia” and national hymn “Vajacki Marš” (March of Warriors). Nonetheless, implementation of principles of democratic governance that were rather associated with the Western European traditions, separated BNR political cultural, at least on the symbolic level, in comparison with Russian Empire.

## **PRECONDITIONS IN LITHUANIA UNTIL MARCH 1918**

Lithuania was under German occupation from 1915, but, as the war dragged on, by 1917 Germany realized that it would not be able to continue

the war on several fronts, and moreover, would have to deal with its dwindling resources and with the *Ober ost* question (Tauber 2015, 171). The *Ober ost* was the name of the territory which included Courland, Lithuania and Bialystok-Grodno, and was administrated by the Supreme Commander in the East and covered 108,808 square kilometres (Liulevičius 2000, 21). The size of territory presented challenges for keeping it under control, therefore the German authorities had to take steps to subdue this territory. The annexation of the occupied former Russian territories was not an option, hence, as the most legally acceptable option appeared the idea to create legal Trust Councils to be established in the occupied territories, which would draw up and submit declarations of independence in favour of the Germans (PA AA RZ201/21702 005). On 31 July 1917, a meeting of representatives of the German authorities took place in Bingen, Germany. During this meeting, Erich Ludendorff, Chief of the German General Staff, proposed creation of Trust Councils in Lithuania and Courland, which would be empowered to act simultaneously. The two councils should be presented with a German letter stating that all nations were entitled to fundamental rights. In response, both the Courland and Lithuanian councils should submit their own reply agreeing with the German authorities, asking for German support and affiliation (PA AA RZ201/21702 011). However, the situation began to change in both occupied territories in the second half of 1917. On 18–22 September 1917, the Lithuanian Conference took place, during which a resolution was drafted stating that Lithuania should be an independent, democratic state in the ethnographic lands, and that the final foundations of the state and its relations with neighbouring states would be determined by the convened Constituent Assembly. On 10 December 1917 negotiations between representatives of the Council of Lithuania and the German authorities on the Declaration of Independence of Lithuania was held at Kaunas. After agreement on the main points, the declaration was signed by all the members of the Lithuanian Council the following day (PA AA RZ201/21716 000264-265). This declaration shows the legal expression of the “alignment”: conventions. On the German side, the aim was to append Lithuania to Germany by means of customs, transport, monetary and military unions. Although the document was signed, Lithuania did not receive German recognition of its independence, because the Council of Lithuania wanted to divide the document into two parts, one for Russia (without the conventions) and the other for Germany (with the conventions). Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Council was becoming increasingly aware of its own importance and drafted a new document declaring the restoration of an independent state of Lithuania, organized on democratic foundations, with its capital in Vilnius, and the separation of that state from all state relations that existed with other nations. This document later became

known as Act of 16 February, since it was signed on 16 February 1918 (PA AA RZ201/21717 000085-86). However, the German authorities did not like the Act of 16 February – there were no more conventions, the sentence that the relations of the Lithuanian state with other states would be determined by the convened Constituent Assembly, which was absent from the Declaration of 11 December, was reinstated.

## LITHUANIA DECLARES INDEPENDENCE

In the beginning of March, German authorities discussed what to do with Lithuanian territories. The Presidium of the Council of Lithuania decided to declare that the two documents – the Declaration of 11 December and the Act of 16 February – did not contradict each other. Erich Ludendorff, the German army commander, was of the opinion that Lithuania's independence could not be recognised. Unlike the German army, the German Reichstag proposed recognising Lithuania, and disputes arose between the two institutions. Representatives of the German Foreign Office tried to find a diplomatic compromise that would satisfy both the German military and the Reichstag (Stenographische Berichte, 4428–4435). The German military proposed to take time to recognize Lithuania. It was thought that Lithuanians would not outnumber the economically and intellectually strong Polish minority and would not be able to counter-balance it. After recognition, a difficult internal struggle for the Polish–Lithuanian union expected by the Poles would begin, so the militarization of such struggles should be avoided at all costs. Therefore, the first thing to do was to strengthen the Lithuanian identity by means of economic and ecclesiastical policies, which would be impossible to implement after the recognition of the state (PA AA R22301). German Chancellor Georg von Hertling stated that Lithuania must be recognized as an independent state. The implementation of this decision had thus far been hampered by the ongoing negotiations with Russia. Relations with Russia had become clear, and regarding Germany, a declaration of the Lithuanian Council of 11 December had been adopted. On this basis, the Chancellor was willing to receive the delegation of the Council of Lithuania on 21 March and to submit a request for recognition based on the declaration of 11 December (PA AA R22301). The German diplomatic logic at the time was to force the Lithuanian Council to repeal the provisions of the 11 December Declaration again. Such a repetition of the Declaration, a repeated listing of all the conventions by which the Council of Lithuania was bound to Kaiser Germany, would undoubtedly have meant a diplomatic victory for Germany by “gluing” Lithuania to Germany in as many ways as possible,



and by diluting the essence of the Act of 16 February. However, the representatives of the Council of Lithuania were invited to come to Berlin and received recognition after they assured German authorities that Act of 16 February complemented the statements in the Declaration of 11 December. On 23 March Germany recognized the independence of Lithuania but on the basis of the Declaration of 11 December (PA AA RZ201/21717 000073). It should also be stressed that after 16 February 1918, the Council of Lithuania did not repeat the statements of the Declaration of 11 December 1917 concerning the conventions, neither “affiliation” nor “support and assistance” to Germany, and the notification of the Council of Lithuania to the German authorities on 23 March 1918 did not mention the latter statements.

After March 1918, The Council of Lithuania was unable to form a government, police, or other state institutions due to the continued presence of German troops. On 4 June 1918, The Council of Lithuania voted to offer the Lithuanian throne to the German noble Wilhelm, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Urach, who accepted the offer in July of 1918 and took the name Mindaugas II. However, when it became clear that Germany was losing the war, the Council of Lithuania decided to reject the monarchy, Urach II and formed a government to create Lithuanian army and other institutions.

## **AFTER INDEPENDENCE - CONDITIONS, SIMILARITIES AND DIFFICULTIES**

The conditions of Lithuania and Belarus during their endeavours towards independence were quite different but led to the same outcome – both countries declared independence in March of 1918. Before embarking upon comparison, it must be emphasised that both countries began their search for national identity at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lithuania and BNR experienced their major developments towards formation of national movements at a very similar period, including birth of the first political parties. On cultural scale, newspapers, books with classical texts and general fascination with history had an impact, at least for the intellectual part of society, to strive for political and cultural consolidation of nations (Kamuntavičius 2021, 325). However, after declaration of independence, the directions taken by the two countries diverged, hence they faced different challenges. There are several reasons for that outcome. First, Belarus received no actual support from Germany and no response from German Kaiser Wilhelm II after sending the telegram to express the gratitude (Stanislavski n.d). On the other hand, the Council of Lithuania had the support of Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Reichstag. The Lithuanians managed to

establish connections with a few German politicians by sending representatives to Berlin to meet German authorities and giving presentations to representatives, politicians and officials on the situation in Lithuania. This tactic seemed to work, since Lithuania gained allies which included influential politicians like Member of the Reichstag Matthias Erzberger and Eduard Heinrich David. It also meant that not all representatives of the German government had a negative attitude towards Lithuania as it was believed in public discourse. German Reichstag and military representatives had different opinions on the future status of Lithuania. German military with Erich Ludendorff as a Head of Army imagined Lithuania weak, culturally and politically underdeveloped, consequently, this territory was supposed to be under care of Germany (PA AA RZ201/21710 000029), while Member of the Reichstag Matthias Erzberger believed that Lithuania should be a monarchy.

Also, municipal assemblies in the Minsk province voted against the Act of Independence, moreover, municipal assemblies were not supported by any international actors. On the other hand, the Council of Lithuania also lacked legitimacy on an international scale, but it had support of exiles and politicians in the West. For example, Lithuanian exiles wrote statements and organised conferences to draw attention to the Lithuanian cause in different countries. It also had an impact on hostility towards the Russian government, so Bolsheviks from Moscow had much less influence upon political groups in Lithuania, whereas they had much more power over the underground communist groups in Belarus. Another quite major issue was the question of territorial sovereignty, which on Belarusian side was less clear, than on the Lithuanian one due to the earlier nation state. In case of BNR, its claims for land had been based on ethnolinguistic preferences, yet lacked a clearly pronounced and preserved national identity, which was present in case of Lithuania. In addition to ethnic, sovereignty and territorial questions, BNR had to solve the issue of its political alliances. Political leaders from the government were divided, as their alliances ranged from Soviet Russia to Poland, and there were even those who preferred restoration of Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Belarusians also felt a paramount hostility towards Germans, especially in the Eastern part. Both countries were similar in terms of absence of institutions crucial for a nation state (they lacked clearly defined and controlled borders, army, police force, constitutions or rule of law). As a result of historical, internal and geopolitical circumstances, BNR and Lithuania were not under the same conditions politically. Lithuania managed to preserve the statehood and independence for two decades, while BNR fell under Soviet Russia and Poland within the same year of declaration of independence.

## CONCLUSION

There is no common agreement among historians on the reasons why BNR could not manage to prolong its independence. On the one hand, the effects of WWI did largely impact impoverished nations, while the citizenship due to long-standing patterns of negligence and “Russification” by the Russian Empire was underdeveloped, consequently, the statehood ideas were not a priority. Of course, the opposition to pro-Bolshevik movements, including propaganda, had an enormous effect on BNR. The collapse of the government was precipitated by the lack of fundamental institutions for a nation state: absence of clearly defined and controlled borders, army, police force, constitutions or rule of law. Belarusian society had a weak inclination for upholding the nation state principles or at least to understand them, and only the elites were advocating such ideas.

Working class and peasants were more prone to socialist movements and Bolshevik ideas, which were more oriented towards structural economic promises, therefore their orientation was toward a deeper integration with Soviet Russia. To compare, political orientation in Lithuania was clearly streamlined towards the West and Europe, while in case of BNR, *Rada* also expressed willingness to have alliances with Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, but as a liminal, not homogeneous country it had a difficulty to consolidate the society, and therefore to respond to its needs accordingly. In 1917, Lithuania and Belarus shared the same goal of becoming independent states. Favourable circumstances led to both countries declaring independence in March of 1918. Lithuania and Belarus had similar goals in achieving independence. However, one of the most important aspects of why Lithuania and Belarus followed different paths to statehood after declaring independence consisted of different political orientations. Lithuania sought Western support, forging links with Western politicians. In the case of Belarus, there was a support for the East.

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# NEATKARĪBAS PASLUDINĀŠANA 1918. GADĀ: LIETUVAS UN BALTKRIEVIJAS SALĪDZINĀJUMS

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## ANOTĀCIJA

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1918. gadā Eiropā izveidojās divas pilnīgi atšķirīgas valstis – Lietuva un Baltkrievijas Tautas Republika (BTR). Lai gan abas valstis ir līdzīgas ģeopolitiskā un vēsturiskā ziņā, tomēr pēc neatkarības pasludināšanas Lietuvas un BTR mēģinājumi pārvaldīt un saglabāt nacionālistiskas idejas noveda pie pretējiem rezultātiem. Analizējot lietuviešu un baltkrievu zemju 20. gs. sākuma vēsturisko kontekstu, kopainā redzams, ka galvenie ģeopolitiskie notikumi, iekšējie sabiedriskie apstākļi un saliedētība abās valstīs atšķirās, galu galā ietekmējot nacionālo ideju emancipāciju. Pārvaldības līmenis, politikas dalībnieku vienotība, kā arī institucionālie faktori izšķīra BTR likteni, kuras pastāvēšana tā paša gada beigās izplēnēja.

**Atslēgvārdi:** Lietuva, BTR, neatkarības pasludināšana, valstiskums.

## KOPSAVILKUMS

Pirmā pasaules kara notikumi kardināli mainīja ģeopolitisko ainavu Eiropā, tāpēc Krievijas impērijas un ķeizarkās Vācijas sadursmē iezīmējās negaidīts valstiskuma un nāciju veidošanas ideju uzliesmojums austrumu teritorijās. Pirmkārt, baltkrievu etniskās zemes kopš 1915. gada bija sadalītas divās frontēs starp galvenajām konfliktā iesaistītajām lielvalstīm, savukārt pieredzētais bads, iedzīvotāju aizplūšana un milzīgais kara upuru skaits nesa postu iedzīvotājiem. Vācijai anektējot Lietuvu kara sākumā, Lietuvai bija labvēlīgāki apstākļi, lai veidotu politiskus kontaktus ar Vācijas varas iestādēm. Turklāt dažādos līmeņos īstenotā “rusifikācijas” politika lielākā mērā ietekmēja baltkrievu etniskās zemes nekā Lietuvu, atšķīrās politisko organizāciju ideoloģiskā orientācija, kad 1917. gadā tām bija jālempj par valsts veidošanas jautājumiem un lojalitāti politiskajiem spēkiem, balstoties Austrumu–Rietumu dihotomijā. Visbaltkrievijas kongresā 18. decembrī

neizdevās skaidri noteikt topošās Baltkrievijas valstiskuma virzienu un to, cik liela būs tās autonomija no Padomju Krievijas, savukārt Lietuvas konferences laikā 1917. gada 18.–22. septembrī politisko partiju delegātiem izdevās vienoties par neatkarības pamatprincipiem. Vēl viena būtiska atšķirība starp Lietuvu un BTR redzama pēc neatkarības pasludināšanas saistībā ar starptautisko atzīšanu. Lai gan BTR februārī un martā spēra visus nepieciešamos soļus un 25. martā pasludināja neatkarību, to oficiāli neatzina neviens starptautiskās sabiedrības pārstāvis, tostarp ķeizarskā Vācija ignorēja telegrammu. Lietuvai izdevās nodrošināt pietiekamu Vācijas varas iestāžu politisko atbalstu, lai pasludinātu neatkarību, tomēr vēlāk jaunās valsts institūciju un militāro spēku izveide izrādījās sarežģīta.