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State Authorities and Associations on the Eve of the “Springtime of Nations”: Perspectives from *Tygodnik Petersburski*, *Kurier Wileński*, and *Rigasche Zeitung* in 1847

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Abstract. This article examines how three newspapers from the western provinces of the Russian Empire in 1847—*Tygodnik Petersburski*, *Kurier Wileński*, and *Rigasche Zeitung*—reported on associations. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, it explores how editors balanced the need to comply with censorship restrictions on the one hand and the strive to inform and to shape local identities on the other. The findings reveal how press discourse shaped civic imaginaries and perceptions of state–civil society relations.

Keywords: *associations, civic identities, newspapers, nineteenth-century, Vilnius, Riga.*

Anotacija. Straipsnyje analizuojami 1847 m. trijų laikraščių – „Tygodnik Petersburski“, „Kurier Wileński“ ir „Rigasche Zeitung“ – pranešimai apie draugijas. Naudoti kiekybiniai ir kokybiniai metodai, atskleidžiantys redakcijų strategijas laviruojant tarp cenzūros apribojimų ir siekio informuoti bei formuoti vietos pilietines tapatybes. Rezultatai rodo, kaip spaudos diskursas formavo pilietinę vaizduotę ir valstybės bei pilietinės visuomenės santykių suvokimą.

Esminiai žodžiai: *draugijos, pilietinis identitetas, laikraščiai, XIX amžius, Vilnius, Ryga.*

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Introduction

Discussion and questions

The reign of Nicholas I, situated between the relatively liberal period of university censorship at the beginning of the century and the reforms of the 1860s, is considered the most repressive era for the press and civil society within the Russian Empire. The imposition of personal responsibility for “inappropriate content” not only on editors but also on censors severely constrained the empire’s media landscape.¹ Moreover, the special scrutiny applied to the press in the North-Western governorates², and particularly the requirement that foreign news could only be sourced from already censored imperial newspapers³, further restricted the content of Polish-language newspapers intended for the society of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Studies of media in other peripheral regions of European empires—particularly those examining how geopolitical tensions, the need to respond to domestic political crises, or specific social challenges shaped identity formation in the press⁴—suggest that the editorial conditions faced by Polish- and German-language newspapers in the Russian Empire were distinctive, yet not entirely exceptional. Even under the prevailing constraints, newspapers published in local languages in the western parts of the Russian Empire functioned as platforms for constructing representations of local, imperial, and European civil societies.⁵ These publications contributed to the formation of imagined civic communities and mediated the relationships among them and state authorities, serving—at least to some extent—as communication platforms where the images of local, national, imperial, and European identities were articulated and negotiated.⁶ Furthermore, the flow of foreign news played a significant role in shaping readers’ perceptions of political and social modernisation. It influenced their views on what forms of civic engagement were desirable or condemnable and prompted them to compare local achievements with European models. As Joseph Bradeley, the researcher of associational life in Czarist Russia, noted, “the origins of the seemingly sudden appearance of an organised political public must be sought not in dramatic events at the turn of the twentieth century but in

¹ RUUD, Charles A. *Fighting words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804–1906*. University of Toronto Press, 2009, pp. 67–82.

² MEDIŠAUSKIENĖ, Zita. Censorship in Lithuania: A Tool of Russian Policy; 1831–1865. *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 2002, 7.1, pp. 43–66.

³ INGLOT, Mieczysław. *Polskie czasopisma literackie ziem litewsko-ruskich w latach 1832–1851*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966, pp. 23–36.

⁴ BRAKE, Laurel; BELL, Bill; FINKELSTEIN, David. *Nineteenth-century Media and the Construction of Identities*. Springer, 2016, p. 6.

⁵ KOKKO, Heikki. From Local to Translocal Experience: The Nationwide Culture of Letters to the Press in Mid-1800s Finland. *Media History*, 2022, 28.2, pp. 181–198.

⁶ RANTALA, Heli. Global ‘Revolution’ in the Early Nineteenth-century Finnish Press. *History of European Ideas*, 2019, 45.5, pp. 721–736.

the prepolitical mobilisation of countless Russians that had been quietly proceeding for several generations.”⁷ The newspapers that presented transnational knowledge on associational life played a considerable role in this process.

It is reasonable to ask how newspapers in the western governorates of the Russian Empire contributed to the formation of civil society. How did editors navigate the dual imperative of demonstrating loyalty to the empire on the one hand, while simultaneously attempting to inform the readers and to shape their civic identities—either more European or distinctly local—on the other? How could the picture of civic life in the former Lithuanian and Livonian lands, in the Russian Empire, and abroad shape the civic identity of the newspaper readers? What idea of the relationship between state authorities and civil society would the readers get?

Research object

This article is a comparative analysis of the reports concerning associations published in the three most influential newspapers in the western governorates of the Russian Empire in 1847. The study focuses on two Polish-language official newspapers significant to the former territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania *Vilenskij Věstnik: official'naâ gazeta*,—*Kurier Wileński* (further KW), edited by Edward Odyńiec, and *Tygodnik Petersburski: gazeta urzędowa Królestwa Polskiego* (further TP), edited by Emanuel Przecławski, and published in St. Petersburg. Both held the status of official newspapers: KW of Vilnius and TP of the Polish Kingdom. The personality of Odyńiec, a poet, a polyglot, and a friend of the cherished Adam Mickiewicz, assured local sympathies for the Vilnius newspaper. Somewhat less strict censorship in St. Petersburg and extensive interest in the lands of the former Commonwealth within Czarist Russia helped make TP popular in the region until the end of Nicholas I's reign. The third newspaper is *Rigasche Zeitung* (further RZ), the most prominent privileged Baltic German newspaper at the time, privately owned by the publishing house in Riga. It was edited by Karl Alt in 1847.⁸

A comparative perspective on how these three newspapers reported on the same events allows a more nuanced understanding of the editors' capacities to address politically sensitive topics relevant to their readership. The narrow focus on a single pre-revolutionary year does not permit an exploration of the evolution of attitudes toward civil society; this task is left for future studies. Nevertheless, the year was rich in events that mobilised civil society globally. The potato blight, crop failure, and famine triggered governmental and civic initiatives to help people experiencing poverty across Europe, including the eastern Baltic. The year brought to the fore issues of civic emancipation, particularly the demand for civic equity for people of different religious denominations. These developments,

⁷ BRADLEY, Joseph. *Voluntary associations in tsarist Russia: Science, patriotism, and civil society*. Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 4.

⁸ BUCHHOLTZ, Arend. *Geschichte der Buchdruckerkunst in Riga, 1588–1888*. Brill, 2024, p. 235.

alongside the Sonderbund War in Switzerland, which exposed both longstanding confessional tensions and the modern opposition between conservatism and liberalism, left a trace in the newspapers that is analysable both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The analysis focuses on news items and articles that explicitly refer to associations—using terms such as *towarzystwo* (occasionally *związek*) in Polish, and *Gesellschaft* or *Verein* in German. Those associations may, in most cases, be defined as voluntary associations formed for a particular purpose and functioning in accordance with their internally accepted statutes. Nevertheless, the autonomy of the associations and the freedom of civic initiatives of those joining them differed between European countries and czarist Russia. Therefore, I designate them here just as “associations”. Furthermore, the words *towarzystwo* or *Gesellschaft* also applied to profit-oriented companies or financial institutions. Despite their business nature, companies were often described in the newspapers as citizen-led initiatives serving socially beneficial goals (e.g., transportation, communication, services for people experiencing poverty, or credit for compatriots). Reports on the Czar or the Senate confirming their statutes were a regular part of official news, alongside similar reports on associations of a more voluntary character. Because of this affinity for general discourse on associations, they are not excluded from the analysis. Finally, political associations, legal and illegal, are included. Traditional religious congregations (e.g., the Jesuit Society) and cases when the term refers to ecclesiastical communities are excluded, as are recurring advertisements that mention associations.

Methods

The article employs quantitative and qualitative methods. The first step in the quantitative analysis was to compile a comparative statistical overview of articles mentioning associations. The second and third steps involved categorising these reports by purpose and by region. The classification by purpose reveals the newspapers’ prioritisation of different areas of civic life. The regional distribution of reports mentioning associations helps to conceive how editors positioned the civil society of their regions within the broader framework of the Russian Empire and Europe.

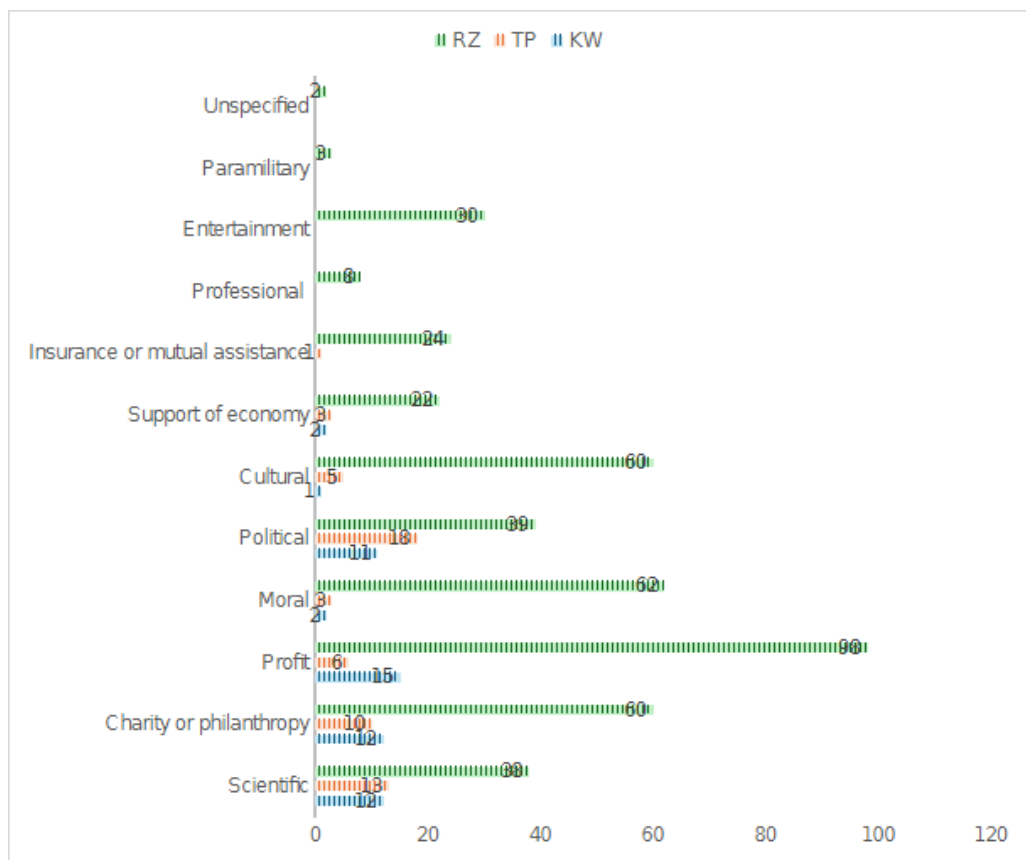
The qualitative analysis is a content analysis aimed at grasping the general ideas of the relations between state authorities and the voluntary associations that the reader could get from the newspapers. The qualitative analysis draws on all reports on associations as context but is particularly informed by the quantitative findings on charitable and political associations. The domain of charity was important in a year of crop failure, which prompted comparisons between local and foreign responses to similar challenges. The statistics on political associations help illuminate how the newspapers addressed the relationship between civil society and the state. This aspect of the analysis offers insight into how editors found ways to discuss a highly restricted topic: public civic life and its role in modernising Europe.

General Statistics

The number of reports mentioning associations and the total number of newspaper issues published in 1847 are as follows:

- *Kuryer Wileński* (KW): 55 (+1)⁹; 101 issues
- *Tygodnik Petersburski* (TP): 59 (+1); 101 issues
- *Rigasche Zeitung* (RZ): 429 (+17); 304 issues

Chart 1: Distribution of reports by the goals of associations:



Although RZ published the highest absolute numbers of reports on various types of associations, TP devoted the largest relative share of attention to political associations (18 reports). KW focused primarily on charitable, scholarly (12 reports each), and political (11) associations, though it most frequently reported on profit-oriented companies (15 reports). This statistical outcome is initially surprising, given that KW mentioned profit companies more often than TP, which was programmatically interested in economic and

⁹ (+xx) means, that some reports could mention more associations with different goals.

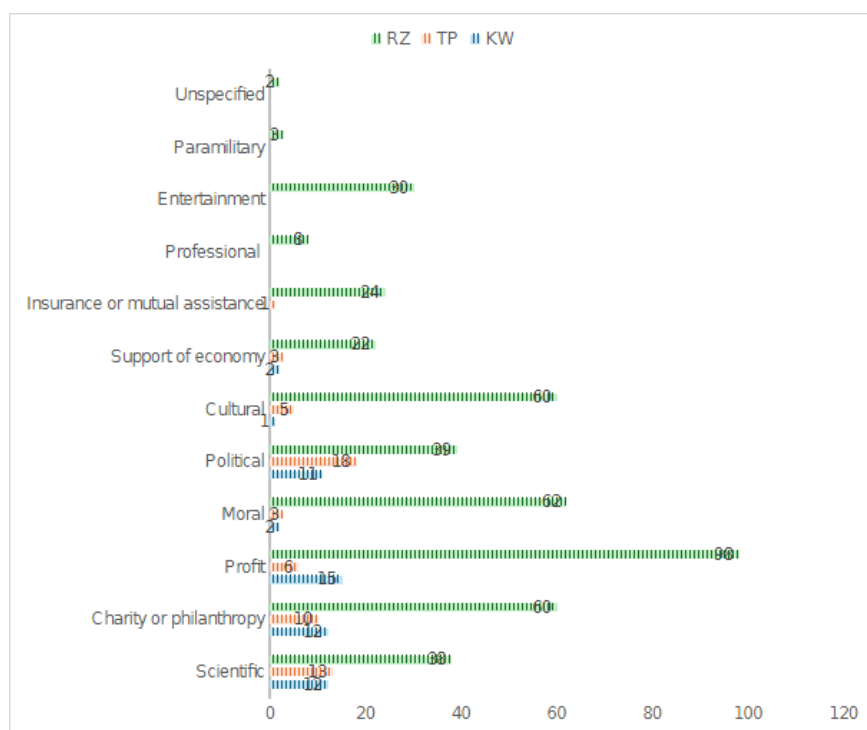
infrastructural development.¹⁰ In contrast, RZ devoted relatively less attention to political associations than its Polish-language counterparts. After profit-oriented associations (98 reports) and those aimed at moral improvement (62), RZ published approximately 60 reports each on charitable and cultural associations.

Constructing Civic Identity between East and West

Reports on Local Charity or Philanthropy Associations and their contexts

The chart that presents the distribution of reports on charity associations according to the region in the three newspapers displays significant differences between the civic societies of Riga (former Livonian lands) and Vilnius (former GDL lands) in imperial and European contexts:

Chart 2: *Distribution of charity or philanthropy associations according to the region (KW blue, TP orange, RZ green)*

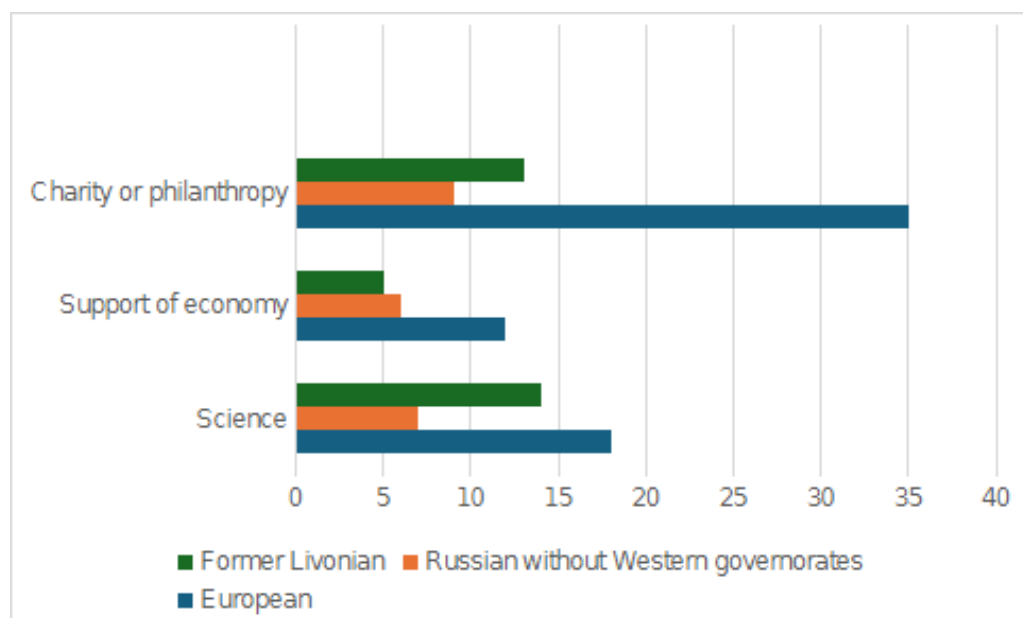


¹⁰ BERESNEVIČIŪTĖ-NOSÁLOVÁ, Halina. Vilnius Civic Life in an Imperial and European Context: The Perspective of the Weekly Tygodnik Petersburski (1830–1858). *OIKOS: Lithuanian Migration and Diaspora Studies/OIKOS: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, 2024, 2.38, pp. 54–55.

For RZ readers, it had to be evident that the former Livonian lands were aligned with European, particularly German, civic traditions. Thirteen reports mentioned charitable or philanthropic associations in the Baltic German provinces; eight were based in Riga. Those reports outnumbered news from the non-Western lands of the Russian Empire, reflecting the actual state of Baltic associational life in the context of Czarist Russia. 72 of 100 charitable associations founded in the Russian Empire between 1780 and 1862 operated in the Baltic German provinces.¹¹

Fourteen reports, i.e., the largest group, described civic charity in German-speaking lands. The report from Turkey concerned the charity organisation of German expatriates in Constantinople.¹² RZ's orientation towards Europe was constant while reporting on the most prestigious types of associations:

Chat 3: *Distribution of reports on associations with charitable, scientific, and economic goals according to the regional orientation in Rigasche Zeitung*



In all categories, the number of reports on foreign European associations was the highest, and German lands were significantly represented: seven out of eighteen reports on the European scientific associations and five out of twelve reports on European economic associations. Reports on charitable and scientific associations active in the Baltic German provinces outnumbered those from other parts of the Russian Empire. Only the Russian imperial economic associations, which were intensively promoted by the tsar family, were

¹¹ HACKMANN, Jörg. *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa: Studien zur Vereinskultur, Zivilgesellschaft und Nationalisierungsprozessen in einer polykulturellen Region (1770-1950)*. Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020, p. 250.

¹² *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 281 (not paginated).

mentioned six times, compared with five based in the former Livonian lands. The latter, nevertheless, were shown to be outstanding by their achievement.¹³

In 1847, the image of local charity—traditionally a source of pride in Vilnius—was overshadowed by deeper pessimism, even amid the gloomy period between the Polish-Lithuanian Uprisings. Unlike *TP*'s general tendency¹⁴, mentions of charitable institutions in the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania were fewer than those from Russia and Europe. *TP* mentioned Vilnius Charity Society only in connection with the imperial senate's approval of new statutes, integrating it into the imperial social welfare system,¹⁵ and both Polish newspapers reported on the election of Count Mostowski as its president.¹⁶ *TP* and *KW* relied on nostalgic recollections and wishes for more intensive associational efforts in the future when presenting local achievements in science and the economy. Newspapers praised the associations that were formerly affiliated with the closed university, or celebrated individuals who, elsewhere, carried out the work previously provided by the associations. For example, the death of Stanisław Müller, a linguist and the author of the *Wiadomości Brukowe* column, prompted a remembrance of the Vilnius Rascals society (1816-1822).¹⁷ A necrology for Józef Strumiłło, a member of the Russian Imperial Society of Rural Economy and Horticulture, recalled that he had personally and at his own expense established a horticultural base in Vilnius, from which seeds and saplings were distributed widely throughout the region.¹⁸

Depicting civil life in the Russian Empire

KW reported civic charity in Vilnius somewhat more frequently but did not designate the Temporary Committee established to help people experiencing poverty during the crop failure as an "association." With a single report on a charity association in inner Russia in 1847, *Odyniec's* newspaper tended to present Russian charity as guided from the imperial court and lacking civic spontaneity. Typical is his story on the measures to mitigate the outcomes of increasing grain prices in St. Petersburg: the commitment of merchants to reserve the tenth part of the grain to be sold for people experiencing poverty for moderate prices was depicted as the response to the czar's wish, which was surveyed by the minister of finance and reworded by the czar's thanks.¹⁹ This trend in *KW* is stronger than in the other newspapers. For example, when reporting about the fire in Bucharest, *KW* mentioned only the measures taken by the czar to organise the gatherings all over

¹³ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 48; Nr. 167.

¹⁴ BERESNEVIČIŪTĖ-NOSÁLOVÁ, Halina. Vilnius Civic Life in an Imperial and European Context: The Perspective of the Weekly *Tygodnik Petersburski* (1830–1858). *OIKOS: Lithuanian Migration and Diaspora Studies/OIKOS: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, 2024, 2.38, pp. 56–59.

¹⁵ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 52, pp. 327–328.

¹⁶ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 75, p. 479; *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 77, p. 614.

¹⁷ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 57, p. 360.

¹⁸ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 59, p. 471.

¹⁹ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 41, pp. 325–326.

the Empire.²⁰ *RZ*, however, reported on the local nobles' initiatives to support victims in addition to governmental measures.²¹

TP and *RZ* reported on civic charity in Russia outside the western governorates more extensively (five and nine reports, respectively). For *TP*, this was the largest group of reports on charity associations, which echoed the editor's goal of informing the Polish-Lithuanian public about the Russian Empire from St. Petersburg. The two papers, however, also portrayed the czar family as dominant vis-à-vis civil society. In four out of five reports in *TP* and six out of nine in *RZ* concerning charity societies in the Russian Empire (excluding the western governorates), members of the imperial family are described as authorising²², managing²³, or supervising²⁴ these associations and their institutions. Only one *RZ* report mentioned the heir to the throne donating to the St. Petersburg Philanthropic Society on the occasion of the son's birth, without indicating any hierarchical relationship between the monarch and the Society.²⁵ Joseph Bradley noted that the presence of high representatives of the empire, the members of the imperial family among them, in the boards of associations fostered the crossover between official and unofficial realms and provided an opportunity for a pragmatic, advantageous reciprocal relationship with the imperial government, and rightly considered it as an all-European phenomenon of the nineteenth century.²⁶ The newspaper editors in the Western provinces tended to stress the difference.

Showing the difference in Europe

For Odyńiec's newspaper, the truly vibrant civic life dwelt in Western Europe:

"No city in the world has so many societies as London; There are forty of them, in addition to twenty subsidiary ones, which publish books, provide lectures, and toil in similar practical means for the expansion of education."²⁷

RZ also presented extensive appreciative articles on English clubs and associations.²⁸ It referred to Berlin,²⁹ Hamburg,³⁰ and Halle³¹ as cities characterised by a high density of associations; it is considered a matter of interest to publish a comprehensive list of association meetings held or announced that year "in German lands and beyond."³²

²⁰ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 47, p. 374.

²¹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 86.

²² *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 39, p. 1847, 249.

²³ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 14, p. 89; Nr. 99, p. 637.

²⁴ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 12, pp. 77–78.

²⁵ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 97.

²⁶ BRADLEY, Joseph. *Voluntary associations in tsarist Russia: Science, patriotism, and civil society*. Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 259.

²⁷ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 1, 4.

²⁸ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 129.

²⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 15, p. 1847.

³⁰ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 73; Nr. 301.

³¹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 290.

³² *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 219.

When *KW* and *RZ* devoted relatively more attention to the Western civic charity, however, it was not the quantity that made the main difference in their depictions of the inner Russian civic life. Western European monarchs (or Russian royals travelling through Europe) were often depicted as contributing to an independent civil society rather than governing it, as in Russia. This contrast is evident in *RZ*, where the King of Prussia is shown expressing concern for people experiencing poverty during a year of crop failure via donation to a civic institution and entrusting its distribution to voluntary associations. He gave 10,000 thalers to Berlin's municipal authorities to distribute among various philanthropic societies and institutions. His contribution by means of subjugated institution was mentioned only at the end of the report: he ordered three charity balls to be held at the Imperial Theatre's concert hall.³³ A report on the Friedrich Wilhelm Fund in Berlin, which the Russian Empress established, highlighted insufficient resources and thus the impossibility of proceeding without continued support from the magistrate and the public in the following year. According to the correspondent from Berlin: "Our charitable institution can meet the demands placed upon it only to a limited extent, and there remains much room for collective efforts."³⁴ Indeed, in response to the crop failure, German civil society was portrayed as acting independently and spontaneously. Reports from Kassel,³⁵ Königsberg,³⁶ Koblenz,³⁷ and other cities described unprompted civic initiatives aimed at providing affordable food to the urban poor.

The warmest portrayals were reserved for the British royal family: not governing but deeply participating in the life of Britain's civil society. Narratives about Nicholas I's cousin and the queen of the empire with which Russia maintained friendly relations until the Crimean War could not provoke censorship. *KW* presented a very civil picture of Victoria's family celebrating Christmas: the dinner featured a beef tenderloin for which Prince Albert had won a prize in an agricultural society competition. After dinner, the family admired the Christmas trees with gifts awaiting the children. Only the last sentence distinguished the royal family from citizens. Yet it did so by illustrating royal power in service of civil society values: during the holidays, all museums and galleries remained free to the public.³⁸ The British royal family not only supported music societies³⁹ but also practised music themselves: the Prince of Cambridge was praised as an accomplished violinist, and Queen Victoria was considered one of the country's finest amateur musicians.⁴⁰ A *RZ* report on a model housing project for working-class families, built by a British society to improve

³³ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 11.

³⁴ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 39.

³⁵ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 37.

³⁶ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, p. 92; Nr. 104.

³⁷ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 236.

³⁸ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 1, p. 5.

³⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 268.

⁴⁰ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 147.

workers' living conditions, mentions at the end that Prince Albert and 300 city officials had subscribed to this collectively funded philanthropic initiative.⁴¹

Religious tolerance as Vilnius' traditional and European liberal value

In highlighting positive European examples, editors sought to align them with civic values emphasised in their own cities. A recurring theme across all three newspapers was the civic ability to transcend political, social, or confessional divisions in pursuit of noble goals. For instance, both *TP* and *KW* noted the formation of a new confederation in Dublin, composed of representatives from all political and religious backgrounds and aimed at addressing the consequences of crop failure.⁴²

Such reports were particularly significant in *Odyniec's* newspaper, which drew a parallel between Vilnius tradition and the modern European value of tolerance. While reporting on the activities of Vilnius' Temporary Committee to mitigate the crop disaster, *Odyniec* emphasised cooperation among various social and confessional groups in Vilnius in their support of the Christian and Jewish poor.⁴³ When reporting on European charity associations, five of 12 reports emphasised cross-confessional cooperation. These reports also showed that individuals from various social strata could initiate collaboration between citizens and state representatives or institutions. According to such a report, the Queen of France, together with the Princess of Orléans, donated a substantial sum to Parisian charitable societies; the princess, in addition, contributed to aid the Calvinist poor.⁴⁴ In another case from London, a newly formed association, "composed of individuals from all shades of public opinion, aiming to collect donations for the suffering populations of Scotland and Ireland," initiated a campaign that later attracted the royal family. "Queen Dowager contributed £1,000 to the society, which had already raised £25,000 and was preparing to send a steamboat loaded with food, clothing, and other supplies to Ireland."⁴⁵

Both *KW* and *RZ* reported on the British ambassador to France, Lord Normanby, who donated 2,000 francs to Irish and Scottish famine relief on the Anglican Church's designated day of fasting and prayer, and encouraged fellow Britons abroad to contribute similarly.⁴⁶ The two newspapers also covered a proposal by the Jewish banker Rothschild to the French Ministry of the Interior, offering to open a credit line of five million francs for grain purchases to be sold at low prices in city markets. Rothschild pledged to cover any losses himself and, if profits were made, to use them to purchase bread vouchers for

⁴¹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 138.

⁴² *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 13, p. 103; *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 5, p. 31.

⁴³ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, pp. 98–99; Nr. 76, pp. 606–607.

⁴⁴ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 4, p. 28.

⁴⁵ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 7, p. 53.

⁴⁶ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 26, p. 206; *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 67.

people experiencing poverty. The city government accepted the proposal with gratitude, declined to participate in the project, but allocated 15,000 francs to local soup kitchens.⁴⁷

In *RZ*, the theme of interconfessional cooperation was significant; however, the newspaper did not draw direct parallels between local and European behaviour as *KW* did. Reports on interconfessional solidarity in *RZ* were exclusively taken from foreign contexts. For example, a longer article on the London Ragged School Union emphasised that its committee brought together individuals from various religious congregations.⁴⁸ Another report described a society of 306 women in Wrocław from all social classes and confessions, dedicated to providing food and vocational training to Catholic children.⁴⁹ As calls for Jewish civic equality gained momentum across Europe, *RZ* reported on a British association advocating the removal of all restrictions on Jews and celebrating the election of Lionel Nathan Rothschild to Parliament.⁵⁰ The newspaper also presented examples of Jewish civic virtue, such as a noble Jew from Poznań who, as a member of a youth rescue association, risked his life to save two children from a fire and refused any reward.⁵¹ Another report described a Jewish-led civic initiative in Stuttgart to establish a grain warehouse, which obtained a donation of 10,000 thalers from the king.⁵²

The differences in how Odyniec and Alt reported on cross-confessional cooperation in the realm of charity should be interpreted in the light of their beliefs and expectations. For Odyniec, the ability of Vilnius multi-confessional society to collaborate not only reflected the closeness of the Lithuanian traditional tolerance to the contemporary European trend. It also served as a rhetorical strategy to justify rapprochement between local citizens and Russian officials after the uprising, in the name of “noble” goals.⁵³ Reporting on Lord Russell’s government’s loans to Irish railway companies, Odyniec expressed confidence that this “charitable” measure would provide employment and support for the suffering Irish. While radical national leaders might reject such steps, driven by their “typically Irish expansive imagination that demands more than any government can offer, broader and more moderate circles will receive them with gratitude, and their practical benefits will convince others.”⁵⁴ *KW*’s comment perhaps delineated acceptable boundaries of collaboration with the authorities for his compatriots.

RZ’s attention to religious tolerance in Europe was more likely motivated by a desire to protect the local Protestant church in the Russian Empire. 15 of *RZ*’s 62 reports on

⁴⁷ *Kurier Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 25, p. 198; *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 62.

⁴⁸ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 180.

⁴⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 231.

⁵⁰ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 208.

⁵¹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 240.

⁵² *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 99.

⁵³ BERESNEVIČIŪTĖ-NOSÁLOVÁ, Halina. *Artists and Nobility in East-Central Europe: Elite Socialization in Vilnius and Brno Newspaper Discourse in 1795–1863*. Vol. 19. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017, pp. 181–185.

⁵⁴ *Kurier Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 15, pp. 117–118.

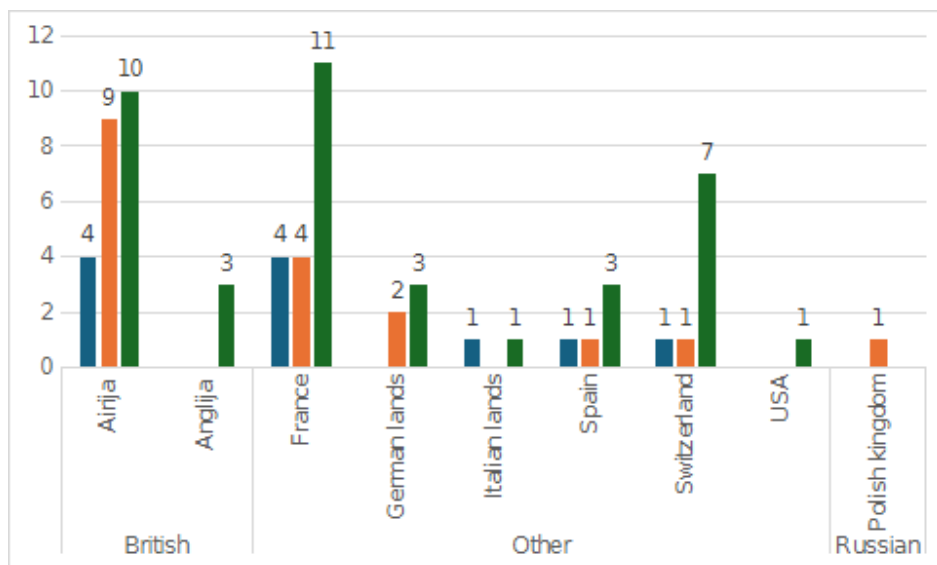
associations aimed at moral improvement concerned the *Gustav-Adolf-Verein* in German lands, which supported Lutheran communities where they constituted a religious minority and advocated for religious tolerance in that context.

Writing about politics without mentioning politics in Russia

The image of European political associations without Russian associations

The distribution of reports on political associations by region reveals a striking absence of political life within the Russian Empire, clearly showing the line beyond which the czarist regime was eager to allow civil initiatives. In 1822, Alexander I forbade freemasonry and similar associations in his realm. Any association with political or even moral goals could be easily criminalised, Vilnius student societies falling as the first victims. The editors of the Polish-language newspapers, the witnesses of the student trial in the mid-twenties, and the friends of the convicted navigated the troubled waters of pre-Revolutionary political tensions with particular caution. *TP* published a single article on the Tsar's clemency toward Denker, a member of a secret society uncovered in Warsaw in 1845; however, the row of conspiracies, revealed in Vilnius in the mid-forties, was not covered.⁵⁵ Most reports focused on political associations in Britain and France, but they may also reveal the editors' concern about very local issues.

Chart 4: Distribution of political associations according to the region (KW blue, TP orange, RZ green)



⁵⁵ MEDIŠAUSKIENĖ, Zita. Visuomeninis gyvenimas ir politiniai įvykiai. In Virgilijus Pugačiauskas et al. *Vilniaus istorija. II tomas, 1795–1914 metai*. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2025, pp. 270–275.

Writing about political associations in France

When reporting on foreign political life, the newspapers' tone often mirrored the alliances and antagonisms of the Russian Empire. At the same time, editors could use this emotionally charged domain to pursue their own specific interests. The difference in how the French and the British presented their political life was crucial.

The portrayal of post-revolutionary France's political life was mostly negative, emphasising the dangers posed by radical elements. All four *TP* reports, three of *KW*'s four, and nine of *RZ*'s eleven reports on French political associations highlighted the socially disruptive plans of radicals, state repression against them, or preventive surveillance. In the case of a materialist society uncovered in Paris, all three newspapers cited *Gazette des Tribunaux*, noting that its members came from the least educated social strata and, having rejected the principle of private property, engaged in theft and looting.⁵⁶ *RZ* criminalised French radicals in two other reports.⁵⁷ *KW* portrayed those repressed by the authorities as eccentric rather than dangerous, which may reflect Odyniec's anxiety about the fate of Vilnius conspirators currently under trial. For example, it conveyed the opinion that "these men, as it turned out, had no religious principles and were avid readers of contemporary French novels."⁵⁸

The poor reputation of France's political life was further reinforced by *KW* and *RZ* editors through coverage of a topic relevant in Russia but rarely discussed in the Russian press as a matter of the Russian society: government corruption. Odyniec's interest in the French corruption scandals explains his frequent mention of profit-oriented associations. Five of *KW*'s six reports on French companies and eleven of *RZ*'s 21 focused on this theme. Both newspapers published extensive coverage of the trial at the Chamber of Peers involving politicians implicated in the Gouhenans mining company scandal.⁵⁹ *TP* was more concise on this.⁶⁰ Allegations of corruption and speculation among French politicians provided Odyniec with an opportunity to present a vivid picture of the press's role in public accountability, introducing readers to prominent journalists and critics of government policy, such as Émile de Girardin.⁶¹ *RZ* also published reports from England on political speculation in railway companies and legislative measures to curb such abuses.⁶²

Editorial perspectives occasionally diverged when reporting on political exiles. *RZ* described Polish émigrés in Paris in criminalising terms: "It was also announced in Paris that factions of the Polish emigration in France had united to initiate new criminal attempts

⁵⁶ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 8, p. 50; *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 13, p. 101; *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 24.

⁵⁷ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 28; Nr. 132.

⁵⁸ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 58, p. 464.

⁵⁹ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 55, pp. 440–443; Nr. 56, pp. 446–450; Nr. 57, pp. 455–459; Nr. 59, pp. 472–474; *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 154; Nr. 156; Nr. 157; Nr. 167.

⁶⁰ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 52, pp. 331–332.

⁶¹ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 65, p. 521; Nr. 52, p. 417.

⁶² *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 108; Nr. 233.

in Poland.”⁶³ However, in the case of a German workers’ society on trial, *RZ* was sceptical about the official charges, suggesting it may have been merely a German singing club that fell afoul of legal formalities.⁶⁴ *TP* also reported on this incident but adhered to the official French version, describing the group as communists from across Germany who had come to France to refine their methods and incite fellow craftsmen.⁶⁵

Writing about political associations in Germany

Reports on political associations in German-speaking lands were fewer but similarly focused on conspiracies or preventive bans. Both *TP* reports and three of *RZ*’s four reports on German associations followed this pattern. All three newspapers covered the Berlin trial of 254 members of the Polish Democratic Society,⁶⁶ with *KW* referring to them only as “Polish rebels”⁶⁷ or “political criminals,”⁶⁸ omitting to name the association. The Polish-language newspapers were evidently more restricted in showing solidarity with their national emigres than the Riga newspaper.

While avoiding confrontation with the Tsarist regime’s stance on politically oriented associations, *RZ* found ways to express scepticism toward the government’s paranoia in cases involving associations with undeniably beneficial aims. For example, it reported the banning of a temperance society’s congress in Hanover with a tone of doubt, noting that a similar event in Berlin the previous year had gone unnoticed.⁶⁹ Instead of a supportive tone typical of reports on bans on political associations to prevent riots, *RZ* reported on restrictions placed on gymnastics clubs (*Turnvereine*) and other leisure associations suspected of political tendencies, in a neutral tone but with evident interest. Of fifteen *RZ* reports on leisure associations in Germany, eight concerned repressions due to “political tendencies.”⁷⁰

Writing about political associations in the British Empire

The French political activism was reported without a critical or scandalous note in the case of the Paris Free Trade Association.⁷¹ Facing the threat of widespread famine, movements advocating the abolition of tariffs gained momentum across Europe, and especially in Britain, where they were portrayed as exemplary civic initiatives.⁷² The English Free Trade associations were also depicted as relevant to Russian imperial subjects. Newspapers

⁶³ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 214.

⁶⁴ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 114.

⁶⁵ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 36, p. 231.

⁶⁶ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 95, pp. 612–613; *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 146.

⁶⁷ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 96, pp. 779–780.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 146.

⁷⁰ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 133; Nr. 148; Nr. 201; Nr. 294.

⁷¹ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 3, p. 19; *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 75.

⁷² *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 75.

covered the travels of Anti-Corn Law League founder Richard Cobden in Russia and a banquet that the merchants in St. Petersburg held in his honour.⁷³ *RZ* also noted that free trade ideas were particularly appealing to port city residents:

“After Berlin, a Free Trade Association has now been established in Szczecin, which is not surprising, as free trade will find many supporters in all port cities. If only they could convince the inland regions that what benefits them will equally benefit the rest of the country.”⁷⁴

Reporting on British political life was more positive: the reasons for the relative freedom to report on the British royal family as an ideal of engaged civic leadership were also valid in this respect. It used to be mostly the reports from England that presented political movements and their petitions as examples of respectful communication between the government and an association. While French tax resisters were portrayed as criminals pursued by authorities,⁷⁵ English reports described their associations, motivations, and petitions. *RZ* provided detailed coverage of a society’s meeting with Lord Russell to protest the window tax, including the Prime Minister’s respectful explanation of why the tax, though not levied in Ireland, was still beneficial to the English budget.⁷⁶ *KW* also reported on the rise of a navigators’ movement in England seeking to unite and protect their privileges.⁷⁷

British profit-oriented companies were shown as relevant partners to the government, sharing their opinions on political matters, demanding governmental action, or consulting authorities. So, a Manchester trade company addressed the Prime Minister after changing its stance on free trade due to disastrous developments that year.⁷⁸ *RZ* covered Russell’s consultations with merchant and banking delegations on possible government interventions during hardship and recession,⁷⁹ and mentioned companies communicating with the Prime Minister on international policy matters, particularly regarding China and India.⁸⁰

Identifying with national movement abroad: Ireland

A relative freedom to engage with British political life made Ireland a cause for Catholic editors of *KW* and *TP* to identify with, or at least to formulate opinions on, national movements. Nine of the *TP* reports covered debates on the position and future of the Repeal Association during the famine, the Young Ireland movement’s goal of achieving independence by all possible means while avoiding religious conflict, and the association’s

⁷³ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 215.

⁷⁴ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 282 (1847.12.03).

⁷⁵ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 75, p. 1847.

⁷⁶ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 23, (1847 01 29).

⁷⁷ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 24, p. 190.

⁷⁸ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 4 (1847 01 07).

⁷⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 243 (1847.10.18); Nr. 282.

⁸⁰ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 167 (1847.07.22).

stabilisation following Daniel O'Connell's death.⁸¹ Przecławski also published a longer article commemorating O'Connell's leadership after his death.⁸² Odyńiec's tone on this topic was more cautious, reflecting his scepticism toward "national egoism," a sentiment he also expressed toward Hungarian nationalism in a later year.⁸³ Whenever mentioning O'Connell, he emphasised his commitment to legal means of achieving liberation,⁸⁴ repeating the principle that "a man who breaks the law arms his enemy against himself,"⁸⁵ and noting that O'Connell expelled any member who refused to abide by legal constraints.⁸⁶ Reporting on John O'Connell's election as chairman after his father's death, *KW* quoted his statement that he was assuming an extraordinary burden.⁸⁷

Like Odyńiec, *RZ*'s editor preferred to emphasise the British support for famine-stricken Ireland. The newspapers covered Prime Minister Russell's and Parliament's efforts to assist the Irish through capital mobilisation, reforms of entailment laws, and government loans for railway companies.⁸⁸ *RZ* reported on O'Connell's death and funeral but devoted less attention to the Repeal Association's goals, focusing instead on the scandalous disputes between Young Ireland and Repeal factions during the mourning period.⁸⁹ More extensive reports addressed the association's stance on grain export bans⁹⁰ and John O'Connell's opposition to the tax resistance movement.⁹¹

Identifying with national movement abroad: The Sonderbund War

While the editors of the Polish-language newspapers could identify with the emancipation movement in Catholic Ireland, *RZ* revealed its liberal stance most clearly during the Sonderbund War in Switzerland. Early reports emphasised the conservative civic movement's efforts to avoid civil war within the confederation.⁹² Following the conservative victory in the March elections in Lausanne, the State Council's position was portrayed as legitimate: it suppressed riots and the storming of the conservative Esperance Society's headquarters. The report stated that the Society was dissolved only after the stockpiled weapons were discovered.⁹³ Further, the newspaper's position ever more clearly took the side. It presented the liberal People's Alliance's view of the Jesuits as instigators of discord and supporters of foreign intervention. The righteousness of the side was stressed by

⁸¹ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 39, p. 250; Nr. 41, pp. 264–265; Nr. 52, p. 330.

⁸² *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 37, pp. 236–237.

⁸³ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1848, Nr. 35, p. 281.

⁸⁴ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 54, pp. 429–433.

⁸⁵ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 45, p. 362.

⁸⁶ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 56, p. 446.

⁸⁷ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 73, p. 585.

⁸⁸ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 35; *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 15, pp. 117–118; Nr. 37, p. 296.

⁸⁹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 134.

⁹⁰ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 227.

⁹¹ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 218.

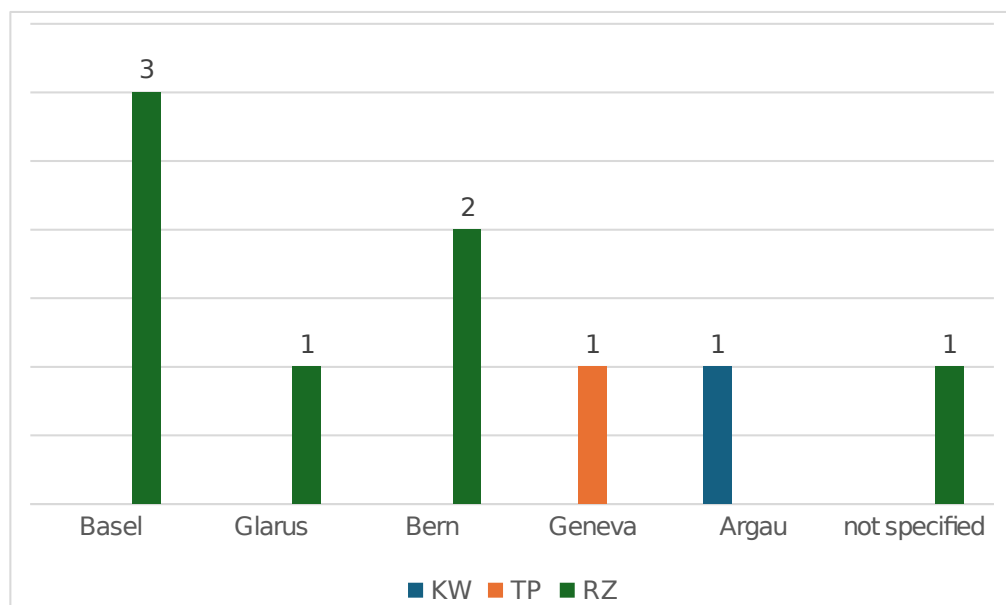
⁹² *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 24.

⁹³ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 54.

highlighting the liberals' preference for peaceful methods such as education and public opinion formation.⁹⁴ In October, however, a report from Basel informed that the People's Alliance was urging the government to declare general mobilisation. Clerical calls for prayers for peace were described as "abusive," with demands for police surveillance upon sermons.⁹⁵

As can be seen in the chart on Swiss associations, RZ reported more frequently on political associations from liberal Protestant cantons:

Chart 5: *Swiss political associations according to location:*



The Polish-language newspapers, on the other hand, mentioned the associations from the Catholic cantons and reported on the escalating conflict with greater sympathy for the Sonderbund's position. *TP* mentioned the Lausanne Patriotic Society in connection with its call to organise armed volunteer units against the Catholic cantons, as well as the State Council's decision to dissolve the society.⁹⁶ *KW* referred to the conservative Patriotic Society of Aargau by quoting a clearly conservative article that criticised the hypocrisy of the Protestants, who demanded liberty for themselves, but refused to tolerate Lucerne's right to entrust youth education to the Jesuits.⁹⁷

Not only the location from which the newspapers reported on the conflict matters, but also the terminology was significant. Editors tended to use the terms "association" or

⁹⁴ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 172; Nr. 180.

⁹⁵ *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1847, Nr. 234.

⁹⁶ *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1847, Nr. 57, p. 363.

⁹⁷ *Kurier Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 61, p. 489.

“alliance” more frequently when referring to the side they supported in the conflict. *RZ* thus referred to the Liberal *Volksverein* (People’s Alliance), while Odyniec translated the term *Sonderbund* for his readers as a “Catholic cantons’ union” (*związek*).⁹⁸ Although this referred to a confederation of cantons rather than a civic association, the editors’ choice of language clearly aimed to present their preferred side as a civic agency, the unity of people standing for their ideals.

Conclusions

Despite the evident constraints imposed on the press within the Russian Empire—and the quantitative differences between *Tygodnik Petersburski* and *Kuryer Wileński* on the one hand, and *Rigasche Zeitung* on the other—the newspapers served as platforms that shaped locally specific images of civil society. The editors found their ways to navigate between the imperial surveillance authorities, the duty to inform, and the expectations of local societies through nuanced editorial strategies. They carefully selected topics and framed narratives to remain within the bounds of censorship while subtly promoting civic ideals rooted in either European liberal trends or local values.

The comparative analysis showed that the Polish-Lithuanian newspapers were evidently more restricted. They had fewer examples of local civic life to report on. They could not show solidarity with the Polish national movement abroad nor criticise foreign oppressive governmental measures. The image of civic life in the former GDL territories was marked by nostalgic memories of early nineteenth-century Vilnius civic life, praise for individual civic achievements, and a cautious search for ways to promote civic progress within the imperial framework. *KW* depicted voluntary associations as a European phenomenon, not common in the Russian Empire. Odyniec linked Vilnius to Europe by drawing a parallel between the traditional ability of multi-confessional Vilnius society to cooperate with the modern trend of religious tolerance and civic emancipation in Europe.

RZ operated with greater editorial freedom, portrayed Baltic German civic life as closely aligned with Western European models and showed that voluntary associations in the Baltic provinces were more locally rooted and transnationally informed. The Riga newspaper demonstrated solidarity with the German national movement abroad. It managed to depict the complex relations between German civil society and authorities, and sometimes criticised the repressive measures against the latter. Its coverage of liberal movements, interconfessional cooperation, and civic responses to crises reinforced the idea that civic virtue could flourish outside the shadow of imperial authority. While clearly showing interest in movements for civic emancipation and religious toleration and supporting the cause of the liberal Protestant cantons in Switzerland, *RZ* did not, however, provide stories about local multi-confessional cooperation for its readers. It seems that the

⁹⁸ *Kuryer Wileński*, 1847, Nr. 63, p. 504; Nr. 64, p. 514.

modern values were rather embraced as a tool for the eventual defence of the Lutheran community in the Orthodox Empire.

Some strategies were common to the Polish-Lithuanian and Baltic German editors. The reports on Western monarchs participating in civil society, spontaneous Western charity initiatives, and the respectful communication between the British political associations engaging and the government offered models for civic engagement that contrasted sharply with the top-down, state-managed, and restrictive approach to associations prevalent in Russia. All three used foreign news to address matters that could not be discussed directly within the Russian imperial context. Obediently critical of French radical activism, the editors also used the bad reputation of French political life for reporting on governmental corruption and the press's role in controlling authorities. Relatively good relations between the Russian and British empires provided an occasion to show positive examples of British civic activism. The Polish-Lithuanian editors used the reports on British-Irish relations to inform and comment on matters relevant to local Polish-Lithuanian aspirations of national emancipation. Similarly, newspapers took sides in the Sonderbund War, identifying with one side or the other and framing their engagement through the lens of political associations as the most important agents. Through this contrast, these newspapers encouraged readers to rethink their local civic traditions, compare their civic life with European models, and define their identity within both the Russian Empire and Europe.

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Valdžios institucijos ir draugijos Tautų pavasario išvakarėse: „Tygodnik Petersburski“, „Kuryer Wileński“ ir „Rigasche Zeitung“ požiūris 1847 metais

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojami 1847 m. trijų laikraščių – „Tygodnik Petersburski“, „Kuryer Wileński“ ir „Rigasche Zeitung“ – pranešimai apie draugijas. Tyrimo problema – kaip spauda, veikusi griežtos cenzūros sąlygomis, galėjo formuoti laikraščių skaitytojų pilietinės visuomenės sampratą ir jų vietinę pilietinę tapatybę. Tyrimui svarbus kontekstas – visą Europą sukrėtęs nederlius, pilietiniai emancipaciniai judėjimai bei įtampa Europoje prieš Tautų pavasarį. Tyrimo objektas – laikraščių žinutės apie pilietines draugijas buvusios LDK ir Livonijos žemėse, Rusijoje bei Europoje. Tyrimo tikslas – atskleisti, kaip redaktoriai laviravo tarp būtinybės paklusti cenzūros suvaržymams ir siekio informuoti apie Europoje svarbias temas, kaip jų laikraščiai kūrė europines ar vietines pilietines tapatybes, kaip aprašė pilietinių draugijų ir valdžios santykį.

Naudoti kiekybiniai ir kokybiniai metodai: statistinė analizė pagal asociacijų tikslus ir regionus bei turinio analizė, atskleidžiančios redakcijų strategijas ir bendrą jų kuriamą pilietinių draugijų

vaizdą. Rezultatai rodo, kad „Rigasche Zeitung“ pabrėžė Baltijos vokiečių pilietinį aktyvumą ir ryšį su Vakarų Europa, o lenkakalbiai laikraščiai – nostalgiją dėl prarastų draugijų bei pastangas sieti tradicijas su Europos religinės tolerancijos ir pilietinės emancipacijos tendencijomis. Visuose laikraščiuose pilietinė veikla užsienyje buvo vaizduojama daugiau savarankiška ir spontaniška, o Rusijoje – subordinuota ir priklausoma nuo valdžios. Kontrastas vertė skaitytojus permąstyti savo bendruomenės tradicijas ir ieškoti savo tapatybės Rusijos imperijos ir Europos kontekste.

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