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17 October 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Byelorussia (Litsva)

Source of Information: General Frantisek KUSHAL

Date of Information: To October 1952

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1. Byelorussians, or Litsvins (as they call themselves), date their history back to the Kievan period as do both the Ukrainians and Great Russians. By the middle of the 14th Century, Litsva, in an alliance with Lithuania, had become a powerful state. In the latter part of the same century it entered into a union with Poland and remained under Polish domination until 1795 - the time of the third partition of Poland. During the period of Polish domination, Byelorussians had to accept the Uniate Church, that is, although they had been formerly Orthodox they now entered into a union with the Vatican, retaining the outer form of Orthodoxy but accepting the Pope as head of the church. In 1795, when Russia took over all of Byelorussia, and a great part of Poland, Byelorussians were forced into returning to Orthodoxy; those who did not desire to return to Orthodoxy became Roman Catholics. For this reason a great part of the Byelorussian population is now Roman Catholic. From 1795 until 1917, Byelorussia remained under the rule of the Russian empire.

2. In December 1917, particularly through the efforts of the "Byelorussian Socialist Hromada", one of the most powerful Byelorussian political parties, and two or three other political parties, there was called in Minsk an all-Byelorussian Congress which was to decide upon the relationship between Byelorussia and the Communist government of Moscow. This Congress, composed of over 1,000 delegates from the various strata of Byelorussian society, was allegedly highly nationalistic and its goal was an independent Byelorussia. For this reason, (fnu) KRIVASHKIN, the Bolshevik Commissar of MINSK and the Commander of the Krasnaya Gvardia, broke up the Congress with armed force. Despite this the Congress reconvened at the railroad depot in MINSK under the protection of the railroad union which allegedly was a particularly strong organization and which sympathized with the goals of the

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Congress. After extensive talks, the Congress, on 25 March 1918, issued a declaration of Byelorussian independence. After this followed a period of constant strife, at the end of which Byelorussia was divided between Poland and the USSR. The ENR, in the meantime, moved to PRAGUE where it remained until 1943. The first President of the ENR was (fnu) KRICHEWSKY who was elected by the Congress in 1918 and who died in the late 1920's. His place was taken by the Vice-President - (fnu) ZAKHARKO - who died in 1943. The present President of the ENR, Mykola ABRAMCHIK, obtained his position not through election but was appointed as the successor of ZAKHARKO in the latter's last will and testament.

3. The Byelorussian SSR developed according to the Bolshevik slogan of "Nationalist in form and Socialist in content". This, to a great degree, caused the growth of national consciousness among the Byelorussian masses. However, the Soviets realized that the ENR in PRAGUE was not doing the Byelorussian SSR too much good. Therefore, in 1927 they sent BSSR representatives to PRAGUE to tell the ENR members about all the wonderful things that were happening in their homeland and to ask them to return. The chief of this representation was (fnu) ZHILUNOVITCH, who wrote under the literary pseudo Tsishka HARONIY. Generally speaking, the ENR Bada received the Communist delegation rather coolly, but some of the members, including (fnu's) TSVIKEVICH, ZAYETZ and LASTOVSKY, returned to their homeland where they were liquidated within a year. Meanwhile the idealistic communists of Byelorussia were becoming disappointed with Moscow and therefore began organizing nationalistic anti-Soviet cadres. One of the greatest leaders of this movement between 1923 and 1930 was (fnu) IHNATOVSKY, who was the founder of the "literary" organization UZVYSHSHA. This organization and an analogous one for younger individuals - the "Molodniak" - were ostensibly communist groupings, but in actuality, they attempted to train nationalistic cadres who would some day be the leaders of an independent Belorussia. Another of the leaders of these "literary" groups was Janka KUPALA who later became a moral force of astounding proportions. In the early 1930's IHVATOVSKY and KUPALA, as well as a great number of other Byelorussians, were purged; IHVATOVSKY committed suicide and KUPALA attempted hari-kari with the rough edges of a broken spoon - but failed. Because the latter was such an important figure, he was released after he solemnly promised to abide by the rules and regulations of the communist party and the Kremlin directives. The importance of Janka KUPALA should not be minimized since it is quite apparent he is venerated by the Byelorussians whether in the Soviet Union or in the emigration. Despite the fact that he was apparently a Communist, he had the well being of the Byelorussian people at heart and was one of the outstanding nationalists. Although he cooperated with the Soviet Union and the communist party he always stood for only one thing - the independence of Byelorussia. It might be pointed out that in 1943 KUPALA committed suicide because he was directed to sign a pro-Soviet declaration

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originated by an "All-Slav Congress of Intellectuals" meeting in Moscow.

4. In 1941, the Byelorussians welcomed the Germans with open arms as liberators. The Germans would not, however, "share their victory" with anyone. Therefore, the masses began to resent them. As a result, some of the younger men "went into the woods" as partisans. Concurrently with this, the Soviet partisan movement in Byelorussia grew to great proportions and was of inestimable value to the Soviets. Because there were many Poles in Byelorussia, and particularly in the western part, the Polish partisan AK (Armia Krajowa) also operated in these regions. The Byelorussian nationalist partisans and AK fought both against the Germans and against the Russians, i.e., the Bolshevik partisans. The greatest partisan activity in Byelorussia took place in the NALIBOTSKAYA PUSHCHA in the BARANOVICHI-MOLODECHNO area. Other areas of extended partisan activity were at HLUBOKAYA in the HALDEITSKAYA PUSHCHA in the POLOTSK-VITEBSK-MINSK area; in the MINSK-VITEBSK-MOGILIEV area; in POLESYE and in the PINSK-BARANOVICHI-BOBRUISK area. It should be emphasized that the most extensive partisan activity was on the part of the Bolshevik partisans.

5. Despite the resentment that many Byelorussians held towards the Germans many of them, none-the-less, collaborated because although Germany promised nothing concrete, its propaganda toward Byelorussian aspirations was very encouraging. A "general commissariat" for Byelorussia was created and was headed by Gauleiter William KUBE, who, toward the end of 1943, was killed by the Soviet partisans and was replaced by the SS General GOTBERG. Because of the mass resentment and the German setbacks in Africa, as well as because of the Soviet and other partisan activity, the Germans decided to give the Byelorussians some form of expression by the end of 1943. It was at this time that General GOTBERG created the Byelorussian Central Rada under the leadership of ASTROVSKY. The Rada was promised that it would be taking over the government of Byelorussia gradually, but many people realized that this was nothing more than a political maneuver on the part of the Germans to get the support of the Byelorussian masses.

6. In January 1944, Colonel Frantsishek KUSHAL was asked by ASTROVSKY to become a member of the BGR and to organize a Byelorussian army. KUSHAL accepted and drew up a plan for the mobilization of this army which was to be called the Byelorusska Krayova Aborona (Byelorussian National Guard). By March the mobilization was underway and 44 battalions of 800 to 1000 men each were organized. There was no lateral organization between the battalions but they were all responsible to the general staff which, in turn, was responsible to, and controlled by, General GOTBERG. Each battalion was commanded by a Byelorussian but attached to the unit were a German liaison officer and a German contingent of some 50 armed men. In effect, this liaison officer was the commanding officer of the battalion. As a result of this extensive control, the general staff of the BKA was divided into two staffs - one legal and subordinate to the

Germans and the other illegal with a goal towards Byelorussian independence. The organization of the EKA had a positive effect on the population since the masses believed that this was the first step towards a free Byelorussia. The Germans apparently became afraid that they had created a Frankenstein monster and therefore began to sabotage the EKA by not arming or supplying the units properly.

7. In June of 1944 the Soviets began an attack on the eastern front. Some 10 or 15,000 of the EKA retreated with the Germans, and the others "went into the woods" and lasted some two years fighting the communists the entire time. Now it is believed that they have liquidated themselves to a large extent, that is, some of them have gone into the civilian population, many have been killed off, but the rest are still hiding out in the woods although their activity is quite limited. Those going west were reformed into the Byelorussian SS Waffen Division under the nominal command of Colonel KUSHAL, but under the actual command of Lt. Colonel ZIEGLING; ZIEGLING's Byelorussian liaison was Lt. Colonel Boris RAHULIA (RAGULA). The BCR, as such, retreated to Berlin. In passing, it might be pointed out that those Byelorussians connected with the BCR were considered as traitors by the Soviet Union. The following may serve as an example of their feeling: On his way to Berlin General YEZOVITOV, the military minister with the BCR, fell ill and was taken into a hospital. When the Soviets approached this area, YEZOVITOV was not one of the fortunate ones to be evacuated. Therefore, he was captured by the Soviets, brought to VITEVSK, tried and convicted as a traitor, and thereupon unceremoniously hung.

8. In March 1945, Colonel ZIEGLING was transferred to command a German Youth Division, whereupon KUSHAL became full commander of the Byelorussian SS Division. Shortly thereafter, the Germans ordered all the SS troops to TYROL where they expected to make their last stand. KUSHAL's division was ordered towards PASSAU. While stationed in EISENSTEINDORF, KUSHAL made contact with General MALTSOV, a commander of an ROA division (VLASOV's army). The latter was already in contact with a US corps. Between their positions and the Americans there was stationed a German SS division in Eisensteinstadt. MALTSOV and KUSHAL, on the directive of the American sector commander, fought through the German SS division to ZWISSEL, where they joined the American troops, whereupon they were all promptly interned as prisoners of war. Later KUSHAL escaped from the concentration camp but MALTSOV was repatriated to the Soviet Union where he was tried, convicted and hung.

9. The BCR, being an out-and-out collaborationist group and fearing American reaction, met in November 1945 at Würesburg and liquidated itself. Instead it created the Byelorussian Narodny Tsent (Byelorussian National Center) oriented on the principles of the ENR and

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ABRAMCHIK, who at this time was in Paris. In 1946, ABRAMCHIK came to Germany and there began forming the ENR. In 1948, ASTROVSKI, the President of the BCR, who appears to be somewhat of an opportunist, realizing that the Americans were not going to take any action against German collaborators, wrote letters to former members in an attempt to recreate the BCR. Of the thirty original members of this organization, only two went to ASTROVSKI and the others to the ENR. The other members of the present BCR are individuals who had nothing to do with the original organization set up in 1943.

10. About 25% of the Byelorussian emigration are followers of the ASTROVSKI movement. This is explained on the basis that they are either not too well acquainted with the BCR politics during the period of 1943 to 1945 or that they are attracted to ASTROVSKI because of his magnetic personality and imposing stature. At the present time, sympathizers of the ENR allude to the ASTROVSKI movement as the "ZARUBELZHNIKI" and consider them as pro-Russian oriented, although they appear to favor an independent Byelorussia.

11. The ENR is composed of some 120 members who have been hand-picked by ABRAMCHIK. They ostensibly represent all the strata of the Byelorussian emigration. Some 70 of these members are in the United States, some 30 in Canada, and the rest are scattered throughout the world. The ENR has always supported, and will always support, the idea of a free and independent Byelorussia. The ENR feels that it is a government-in-exile and that it should be the interim government in Byelorussia between the time of occupation and the time that an all-Byelorussian Congress decides the fate of the land.

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