

TOWARDS THE STATE OF LATVIA

100th anniversary of the Latgale Congress

Picture

*The First Congress of Latgale in Rēzekne
10 May 1917*

The photo captures Andrejs Švirksts (1), Juris Pabērzs (2), Jānis Velkme (3), Aloīzs Bojārs (4), Kampāns (5), Vaclavs Krops (7), Pīters Strods (8), Pāvuls Laizāns (9), invited politician Jānis Zālītis (10), Nikodems Rancāns (11), Jāzeps Rancāns (12), Jānis Krakops (13), Frīdrihs Obšteins (14), Francis Trasuns (X), Antons Laizāns (15), Jānis Rubulis (16), Vladislavs Rubulis (17), Francis Greivulis (18), Pēteris Lazdāns (19), Jezups Kindzuļs (20), Kazimirs Skrinda (22), Džereņš (23), Konstantīns Kangars (24), Vinca Barkāns (25), Antons Maskalāns (26), Apolonija Laurinoviča (27), Valerija Seile (28), Stafekis (29), Lāčkājs (30).

The photo of the Congress captures the delegates on the second day of the Congress, i.e. without proponents of F. Kemps. Photo of 1917

Illustrated annex to the newspaper "Brīvā Zeme" of 12 May 1917

The Congress of Latgale in Rēzekne

9-10 May 1917

The first Latgale Congress was held from 9-10 May 1917 (26-27 April - Old Style) in Rēzekne. On the first day, the Congress took place in the cinema "Diana," on the second - at Atbrīvošanas aleja 56, which is currently the Rēzekne Music Secondary School of Jānis Ivanovs. The Congress of Latgale Latvians was a meeting of representatives of Latgale Latvians who discussed issues of Latgale's self-governance including the separation of the Daugavpils, Ludza and Rēzekne districts from the Vitebsk Province and their merger with the areas populated by Latvians of Vidzeme and Kurzeme. The Provisional Land Council (with places reserved for the Polish, Russian and Jewish minorities) was established at the Congress. Its representatives together with other regional self-government institutions - the Provisional Land Council of Vidzeme and the Provisional Land Council of Kurzeme - played an active role in the work of the Latvian Provisional National Council and contributed to the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia. The Latgale Congress was attended by the most visible public figures of the region who, at that time, worked in St. Petersburg, other areas in Russia, and parishes and churches in their homeland; the Congress was attended also by Russian Army officers and mobilized soldiers. During the preparation for the Congress



(March and April 1917), an agreement was reached in principle that self-government should be granted to Latgale in a unified Latvia (at that time still part of democratic Russia). At the same time, there were differing views on attaining the status and guaranteeing the rights of this self-government. One part (proponents of clergyman Francis Trasuns) optimistically hoped for synergy and mutual understanding among all Latvians (including

Catholics) in addressing religious, language and other matters. The other part (proponents of engineer Francis Kemps) highlighted the peculiarities of Latgale that had developed over centuries (e.g. the dominance of the Catholic Church, the region's own language, different land rights) and objected to the oral agreement with the Baltic Latvians (who were represented in the Congress by J. Zālītis and Z.A. Meierovics). They advocated an

Supplementary information:

Latgale data

<http://latgalesdati.du.lv/notikums/261>

Picture

Reproduction of the painting "Congress of Latgale Latvians in Rēzekne"

In January 2015, Gunārs Ciglīs presented a poster to the National History Museum of Latvia by artist Jēkabs Strazdiņš with a scene of the First Congress of Latgale in 1917. The scene of the Congress is invested with colours at the initiative of Alfrēds Goba, literary historian and employee of the Ministry of the Interior. In 1935, it was reproduced for the benefit of schools, public organizations and authorities by the publishing house "Pagalms".

Photo: Roberts Kalniņš, LNVm.

<http://www.historia.lv/jaunumi/lnvm-iegust-20g-s-30-gadu-plakatu-ar-1917g-latgales-latviesu-pirma-kongresa-ainu>

¹Trasuns, F. (1924). *Fabulas: b-kgā Fr. Trasuna darynotas*. Reiga: Leta, p. 3

extensively discussed program for cooperation between Latgale and other regions of Latvia (in written form).

The Congress was attended by 350 participants including 232 delegates with voting rights. As the result of disputes, 39 delegates left the Congress following the lead of F. Kemps. Decisions were adopted by the remaining 183 delegates. We can gauge the number of delegates at the Congress from photos of that time. The photo capturing the delegates of the Congress - proponents of F. Trasuns on the second day of the Congress - is the most frequently published photo. After 10 years (in 1927), 30 delegates of the Congress were recognized in the photo. Today, there is information about at least 12 other delegates of the Congress.

It is paradoxical that, under conditions of historical isolation and the Russification of Latgale, the most consistent enthusiasts of consolidation of the Latvian nation came from Latgale. Even before the Rēzekne Congress, at the beginning of the 20th century, F. Trasuns explained the diversities and commonalities of the Latvian community in the Vitebsk Province and the Baltic Latvians. F. Kemps saw the commonality in the ancient history of Latvia and the origins of the red-white-red flag. It should be noted that F. Kemps and his counterparts discussed these issues in the newspaper "Līaužu Bolss" after they had left the Rēzekne Congress.

According to a decision of the Congress, an editorial commission was established under the guidance of Valerija Seile. On 15 May 1917, it published "Pagaidu Zemes Padomes Ziņotājs" (Newsletter of the Provisional Land Council) (10,000 copies), including eight resolutions adopted at the Congress.



F. Trasuns, "It was my earnest wish to elevate a peasant of Latgale spiritually and materially, to develop intellectuals in Latgale, to unite the Latvian nation in a single organism by tearing down its specificity, and to conquer freedom."¹

Resolutions of the Congress of Latgale in 1917*

* According to Report No. 1 of the Provisional Land Council of Latgale 15 May 1917, republished in magazine "Sējējs", 1936, No. 6

Picture

The National Flag of Jelgava School of Agriculture at 1921 graduation. The school participated with the flag in the Latgale Congress manifestation in May 1917. It is captured in the photo of Congress delegates. During the years of evacuation (1915-1918), Jelgava School of Agriculture was located in premises of Rēzekne School of Commerce. Row 2 left side – Lavīze Putniņa, flag maker; in the centre – Jānis Mazvērsītis, director of school, invited guest of the Latgale Congress, May 1917.

Photo of 1921

Pumpuriņš, T. Sarkanbaltsarkanās – Latvijas karoga krāsas, 2000. p. 70.

1. "We, the Latvians of Latgale, the plenipotentiaries who have assembled for a congress convened on 26-27 April in Rēzekne, recognizing the Latvians who live in Vitebsk Province, as well as the inhabitants of Kurzeme and Vidzeme as a single Latvian nation, decided to unite with the Latvians of Kurzeme and Vidzeme in one politically autonomous state of Russia.
2. We, the Latvians of Latgale, following a merger with the Latvians of Kurzeme and Vidzeme, will maintain our self-government, full rights as regards self-determination, language, religion, church, schools and farms, as well as the land issue; join the Catholics of Kurzeme and Vidzeme to Latgale in church activities.
3. We, the Latvians of Latgale, are very keen to maintain the closest possible harmony with other nationalities - Russians, Poles, Jews and others within the borders of Latgale; while striving for freedom for our people, we recognize, maintain and support freedoms of other nationalities in all activities of their community - religion, language, school authorities, etc.
4. Elections in all self-government authorities take place on the basis of general, equal, direct, secret and proportional (in terms of nationality) provisions.
5. We, the Latvians of Latgale, by electing our Provisional Land Council, entrust it with establishing contacts with Councils elected by other nationalities and developing common principles for action.
6. The Provisional Land Council of Latgale has to establish relations with the Land Councils of Vidzeme and Kurzeme in order to defend and put into practice the autonomy of



7. The Assembly recognizes the need for the establishment of the Farmers' Union in Latgale and expresses the wish that the Provisional Land Council, for its part, contribute to the establishment.

8. The Assembly decided to elect the Provisional Land Council of Latgale with 60 members incl. 36 Latvians, 12 Russians, 8 Jews, 3 Poles and 1 other nationality (in proportion to the population in Latgale)."

Picture

Organizers of the solemn parade of the Latgale Congress. Row 1 to the left – K. Ozoliņš, Francis Greivulis, Nikodems Rancāns, Jānis Rubulis, Teteris.

Photo of 1917

Pumpuriņš, T. Sarkanbaltsarkanās – Latvijas kara krāsas. Pētījumi, atmiņas un dokumenti par Latvijas valsts kara tapšanas vēsturi. 2000, p. 67.

As we approach the centenary of Latvia, the State Chancellery is producing a series of informative materials about the formation of the State of Latvia and its founders. The informative material is aimed at strengthening the sense of statehood, raising awareness of the history of Latvia and its national values, as well as vivid personalities who influenced history and contributed significantly to the foundation and growth of the State of Latvia, particularly to the work of the government.

We thank Henrihs Soms, Doctor of History, for encouragement in drafting a fact sheet on the Latgale Congress in Rēzekne.



Information about the origins of our State, its path towards independence and events celebrating Latvia's centenary at:

LV100.lv
www.mk.gov.lv/simtgade

Latvia 100 