

**LEGAL AND POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS  
OF STATEHOOD DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE BELARUSIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (1918):  
INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract.** The *subject* of this study is the legal and political foundations of the formation of state institutions of the Belarusian People's Republic (BPR) in 1918, particularly their organizational structure, mechanisms of functioning, and regulatory framework. The research encompasses an analysis of key legislative acts of the BPR, such as the three Statutory Charters, as well as normative legal acts that defined the system of state governance, the functioning of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and local self-government. The *methodological* framework of the study is based on a comprehensive approach that integrates general scientific and specialized methods of historical and legal science. The historical-genetic method is employed to examine the process of the formation of BPR state institutions in the context of the political transformations of 1917–1918. The comparative-legal method is used to analyze the legislative norms of the BPR in relation to the legal systems of other countries. Additionally, formal-legal and structural-functional methods are applied to assess legal norms and their implementation in state governance. The *aim* of the study is to identify the characteristics of the legal and political regulation of state governance in the BPR, analyze the effectiveness of the established state mechanisms, and determine their impact on the subsequent development of the Belarusian national legal tradition. The research examines the historical prerequisites for the creation of the BPR, the organizational principles of its governmental bodies, key normative legal acts that defined the competence of state institutions, and the system of local self-government. The study

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demonstrates that the legal system of the BPR was based on the principles of parliamentarism, the rule of law, democratic freedoms, and social justice. The highest legislative body was intended to be the Rada of the BPR, which was to function as a temporary parliament and unite representatives of political parties, social groups, and national minorities. Executive power was to be exercised through the People's Secretariat, which was later expected to transform into the Council of People's Ministers, accountable to the parliament. The judicial system was in its formative stage, with plans for the establishment of a national judicial system based on adapted norms of Russian legislation. Particular attention is given to the system of local self-government, which was institutionalized according to the Provisional Order for Local Belarusian Radas. This normative act outlined the legal foundations for forming a democratic model of local governance, defining the procedure for electing councils, their competencies, and subordination. The document envisioned the creation of volost, town, municipal, and district councils, which were to play a key role in implementing state policy at the local level. Simultaneously, the Provisional Order for District Belarusian National Radas detailed the organizational structure of local government, outlining three primary directions of its activity: social-organizational, cultural-educational, and cooperative-economic. This indicated the aspiration of Belarusian state-builders to establish an effective system of decentralized governance that combined political and administrative functions. Despite the ambitious nature of the proposed model of state governance, its implementation was hindered by political instability, external pressure, and a lack of administrative resources. The formally adopted legal mechanisms did not receive the opportunity for full-fledged functioning, which limited their practical realization. At the same time, the legal foundations of the BPR laid a historical precedent that influenced the further development of Belarusian political thought and the formation of a national legal tradition.

Overall, the BPR was perceived as the first attempt to create an independent Belarusian state on democratic principles. Its political and legal system was shaped in accordance with broader European trends in state-building at the beginning of the 20th century but remained unstable due to unfavorable external and internal factors. The experience of forming BPR state institutions, its legal system, and normative acts became the

foundation for subsequent efforts to establish Belarusian national statehood in the 20th century. The BPR represented a significant stage in the process of Belarusian state formation.

### 1. Introduction

The issue of the formation of state institutions and the legal system of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918 remains insufficiently studied within the context of Belarusian state-building and the development of the national legal system. The BPR became the first project of Belarusian statehood in the 20th century, consolidating the concept of an independent republic based on democratic principles. Although its existence was short-lived and the possibilities for implementing political and legal reforms were significantly constrained by external factors, the legal framework and institutional model of the BPR nonetheless influenced the further development of Belarus's national legal tradition.

The relevance of this study is determined by the necessity of a comprehensive analysis of the historical and legal aspects of the BPR's functioning, particularly the formation of state authorities, their organizational structure, competencies, and legal regulation. To date, most scholarly research has primarily focused on the socio-political dimension of the Belarusian national movement, whereas the legal mechanisms of state functioning, its normative framework, and institutional structure require further investigation. In this context, it is appropriate to focus on the analysis of the three *Statutory Charters* of the BPR, which defined the political system, principles of state governance, guarantees of citizens' rights and freedoms, and the status of national minorities.

The aim of this study is to conduct a historical and legal analysis of the process of the formation and functioning of the BPR's state institutions, their political and legal foundations, and the normative regulation of state administration. To achieve this objective, the following research tasks have been set:

1. To examine the historical prerequisites for the formation of the BPR's state institutions within the context of the socio-political transformations triggered by the February and October Revolutions of 1917.

2. To determine the characteristics of the formation of the BPR's government bodies, particularly their structure, functional powers, and mechanisms of interaction.

3. To analyze the legal foundations of the BPR's state-building, focusing on the content and significance of the *First, Second, and Third Statutory Charters* as the republic's fundamental legislative acts.

4. To study the BPR's political system, the principles of organizing executive, legislative, and judicial authority, as well as the mechanisms of state governance.

5. To assess the legal nature of the BPR's normative legal acts, their effectiveness, and their impact on the development of the Belarusian legal tradition.

The methodological foundation of the study is based on a comprehensive approach that integrates general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, generalization) and specialized methods of historical and legal science. The historical-genetic method allows for tracing the evolution of the BPR's state institutions, while the comparative-legal method enables a juxtaposition of the BPR's legal norms with the legislative systems of other states. The formal-legal method is applied to examine the content of normative acts, whereas the structural-functional method is used to determine the interconnections between governmental bodies and their competencies.

The logical structure of the study is based on a sequential analysis of key aspects of the BPR's state-building process. First, the socio-political prerequisites for its establishment are examined, followed by an investigation into the mechanisms of state governance and legislative acts that defined the legal foundations of the republic's functioning. Particular attention is given to the analysis of the political system and the role of representative institutions in state administration.

This research is aimed at providing a comprehensive historical and legal analysis of the formation of the BPR's state institutions and legal system, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the patterns of Belarusian statehood development, its political and legal heritage, and its place within the broader European context of state-building processes in the early 20th century.

## 2. Historical Prerequisites for Belarusian Statehood

The February Revolution of 1917 in Russia served as a catalyst for the national revival among the peoples of the former empire, including Belarusians. The weakening of all-Russian authority and the introduction of political freedoms contributed to the activation of Belarusian social and political forces. The central issue of the Belarusian national idea became state self-determination, which required the organizational consolidation of various political movements. By the spring of 1917, approximately 20 political parties and movements were active in Belarus. Among them were Belarusian national organizations (Belarusian Socialist Community, Belarusian National Committee, Christian Democratic Union), Jewish parties (Poale Zion, Bund), and all-Russian forces (Constitutional Democratic Party, Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries) [15, p. 28].

One of the key factions in the Belarusian movement was the Belarusian National Union (BNS), which advocated for broad regional self-government without demanding autonomy or independence. Other political forces, such as the Belarusian Party of National Socialists (BPNS) and the Belarusian Party of Autonomists, called for national-territorial autonomy within a federal Russian republic. The program of the Belarusian Socialist Community (BSC) envisioned transforming Russia into a federal republic with broad autonomy for Belarus. Similar positions were held by the Belarusian National Community, which proposed the creation of a federal Belarusian republic with its own parliament [2, p. 84].

After the February Revolution, the Minsk Belarusian Committee was established in Minsk, which in March 1917 initiated the First Congress of Belarusian Organizations. The congress decided to create the Belarusian Regional Council as the highest representative body of an autonomous Belarus.

In April 1917, the Belarusian National Committee (BNC) was formed based on the Minsk Belarusian Committee, with Roman Skirmunt as its head. However, his election was not universally supported by Belarusians due to his aristocratic background. The BNC advocated for the cultural, national, and political revival of Belarus within a federative Russia. By July 1917, a congress of Belarusian parties and public organizations was held in Minsk, leading to the establishment of the Central Council of Belarusian

Organizations and Parties (CCBOP), headed by Alexander Smolich. The Central Council supported the Provisional Government and called for Belarusian autonomy within a federative Russia [4].

In September 1917, Belarusian delegates participated in the Congress of the Peoples of Russia in Kyiv, which endorsed the Belarusian demands for autonomy. At the Petrograd All-Russian Democratic Conference (September 14–22, 1917), Belarusian representatives advocated for a federative structure of Russia and the convening of a Belarusian Constituent Assembly. From October 15 to 25, 1917, the second session of the Central Council of Belarusian Organizations took place, leading to the creation of a new regional body – the Great Belarusian Council (GBC). This body was intended to represent the interests of all social groups in Belarus [9; 10].

Following the October Revolution in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks established their authority in Minsk. The Regional Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies of the Western Region and Front became the leading Bolshevik institution in Belarus [24]. On November 15, 1917, the GBC called on Belarusians to «take control of their own land» and announced the convening of the All-Belarusian Congress, which was to determine the future political status of Belarus.

Meanwhile, in November 1917, the Belarusian Regional Committee (BRC) was established in Petrograd, supporting the Bolsheviks and advocating for Belarusian autonomy within Soviet Russia. After disputes between the GBC and BRC regarding the location of the congress, a compromise was reached – it was to be held on December 5, 1917, in Minsk.

The All-Belarusian Congress opened on December 5, 1917, in Minsk, bringing together 1,872 delegates, of whom 1,167 had voting rights. The main agenda items included:

- The political status of Belarus,
- The establishment of a temporary Belarusian government,
- The organization of a Belarusian army,
- Land reform policies.

The congress witnessed a confrontation between two political factions:

1. **Independence supporters**, who demanded the creation of an independent Belarusian state.

2. **Autonomists**, who advocated for Belarusian autonomy within the Russian Federation.

On December 17, 1917, the delegates passed a resolution establishing the All-Belarusian Council of Peasant, Soldier, and Worker Deputies, intended to function as a provisional government of Belarus [21, p. 42].

However, during the night of December 17–18, Bolshevik forces dispersed the All-Belarusian Congress. Power was transferred to the Regional Executive Committee of the Soviets of the Western Region and Front, dealing a severe blow to the Belarusian national movement.

Based on these events, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. The All-Belarusian Congress was the first national forum of the Belarusian movement that officially declared aspirations for political self-determination.

2. The dispersal of the congress demonstrated that the Bolsheviks were not genuinely prepared for Belarusian self-determination, despite their proclaimed support for the right of nations to secede.

3. The signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 solidified the status of Belarusian territories as part of Soviet Russia, temporarily occupied by Germany.

4. The events of December 1917 paved the way for the proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic in March 1918.

On February 18, 1918, following the failure of peace negotiations in Brest initiated by the Bolshevik delegation, German forces launched an offensive on the Eastern Front. Due to demobilization and severe demoralization caused by Bolshevik pacifist propaganda, their military units were unable to organize effective resistance and began a mass retreat. During the night of February 18–19, the Council of People's Commissars of the Western Region and Front decided not to resist the advancing German forces and to surrender Minsk without a fight [15].

On February 19, Bolshevik commissars hastily left the city and headed for Smolensk. The head of the Council of People's Commissars (RNC) of the Western Region and Front, K. Lander, noted in his memoirs that an active movement had begun in Minsk, particularly among Belarusian national forces preparing to rise against the Bolsheviks. Street clashes were accompanied by gunfire, which complicated the evacuation of Soviet officials. Lander recalled that as he fled through the back exit of the government building, armed groups had already entered, searching for Bolshevik leaders. At the railway station, the Bolsheviks' evacuation

encountered additional resistance: local activists attempted to block the train, inciting railway workers to sabotage. As a result, an act of diversion occurred – two train cars were overturned, and the car in which Lander was traveling derailed. According to him, these actions were aimed at delaying the Bolshevik leadership to allow time for the arrival of German or Polish troops [15, p. 72; 18].

After the Bolsheviks' departure, the Executive Committee of the All-Belarusian Congress declared itself the highest governing body in Belarus, assuming the status of the Belarusian regional representation. On the same day, February 19, 1918, by order of the Executive Committee, K. Yezovitov was appointed commandant of Minsk. By the end of the day, Belarusian armed formations of the Central Belarusian Military Council (CBVR) had established control over key strategic sites in the city. They seized the arsenal on Moskovskaya Street, the Governor's House, and the building of the Hotel Europe, which had previously housed Bolshevik administrative institutions, the headquarters of the Red Guard, and the Cheka. Thus, Belarusian national forces began forming their own governing bodies, marking an important step toward state-building [7].

### **3. Normative and Legal Foundations of the Formation of the Belarusian People's Republic**

On February 21, 1918, in Minsk, the Executive Committee of the Council of the First All-Belarusian Congress adopted the *First Statutory Charter*, which declared this body the supreme authority in the territory of Belarus until the convening of the All-Belarusian Constituent Assembly. It was envisaged that elections to this assembly would be conducted on the basis of universal, equal, direct, secret, and proportional voting. Suffrage was extended to the entire population of the country, regardless of gender, nationality, or religious affiliation. Notably, it granted voting rights to women, Jews, and peasants, who had previously been deprived of this opportunity [11].

According to the provisions of the *First Statutory Charter*, executive power in the country was to be exercised by the People's Secretariat (NS) – a temporary governmental body that was to function until the convening of the Constituent Sejm. The NS consisted of twelve secretaries and two authorized representatives. The document called on the Belarusian people



to unite in exercising their right to self-determination and to resist the threat of German occupation by taking their fate into their own hands.

The *First Statutory Charter* guaranteed all national groups residing in Belarus the right to national-personal autonomy. This provision ensured linguistic, religious, and political freedoms but did not imply the establishment of separate autonomous entities within the state. Representatives of Jewish, Polish, and Russian communities were to be included in the Executive Committee of the Council, thereby ensuring their political participation in the governance process [6, p. 186].

However, the document contained no direct references to the autonomous status or independence of Belarus. The primary focus was on democratic reforms and addressing socio-economic issues. The Executive Committee of the Council adhered to the previously adopted resolution of the All-Belarusian Congress, according to which Belarus was to become an autonomous unit within the Russian Democratic Republic with a republican form of government. Following the adoption of the *First Statutory Charter*, the decision of the Executive Committee was supported by the Minsk City Duma, which expressed confidence that Belarus's democratic system would guarantee equal rights for all its residents in close alliance with a democratic Russia.

However, the political situation in Belarus underwent significant changes following the onset of the German offensive. On February 21, 1918, German military representatives entered Minsk, effectively placing the city under German occupation. Within a short period, more than two-thirds of Belarusian territory came under the control of German forces. The front line passed through such strategic points as Rossony, Polotsk, Orsha, and Zhlobin, then turned southeast towards Novozybkov and Gomel. In the remaining territory, particularly in six districts of the Vitebsk and Mogilev governorates, Soviet authority continued to operate [9, p. 105-106].

Two weeks after the adoption of the First Statutory Charter, the political situation in the region became even more complex. Soviet Russia concluded a peace agreement with Germany and its allies, effectively dividing Belarusian territory among Germany, Soviet Russia, and Ukraine. This development forced Belarusian political forces to intensify their activities, leading to the preparation of a new political document – the Second Statutory Charter, proclaimed on March 9, 1918 [21].

The Second Statutory Charter of the Belarusian People's Republic marked a significant step in the formation of Belarusian statehood, defining its territorial boundaries and establishing the foundations of a democratic order. The territory of the BPR was determined based on the «boundaries of settlement and the quantitative predominance of the Belarusian people». This meant that the state borders were not fixed within the administrative units of the time but were instead based on the ethnic principle, aligning with contemporary European trends of national self-determination [14, fol. 126].

The document contained eight key provisions regulating state governance and the rights and freedoms of citizens. Legislative power was to be vested in the Council of the All-Belarusian Congress. Its composition included representatives of zemstvos, municipal governments, national minorities, political parties, trade unions, and other civil organizations. This reflected the new state authority's aspiration to involve a broad range of social and national groups in governance. Executive power was entrusted to the People's Secretariat, which was subordinate to the BPR Council, in accordance with the principle of parliamentary government accountability.

The Statutory Charter enshrined a range of democratic rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, strikes, association, and religion, as well as guarantees of personal inviolability and the inviolability of one's home. Particularly significant was the provision on national-personal autonomy for all national minorities, ensuring equal rights in the use of native languages, political participation, and the preservation of cultural identity.

Certain provisions of the Statutory Charter addressed socio-economic issues. A decision was made to abolish private ownership of land and transfer it for use to those who worked on it directly. State ownership was also extended to natural resources, including forests, lakes, and mineral deposits. Additionally, an eight-hour workday was introduced, aligning with broader European trends in labor protection and social policy [14, p. 127].

Thus, the Second Statutory Charter not only sought to formalize the political structure of the Belarusian People's Republic but also established the foundations for the country's democratic development. It became one of the first normative acts defining the principles of national self-governance, social order, and social policy in Belarus. The provisions proclaimed in

the charter reflected the aspirations of Belarusian politicians to create an independent democratic state committed to securing civil rights, ensuring equality among national communities, and promoting social justice.

On March 18, 1918, a session was held in the Minsk City Duma, where a member of the BPR Rada, A. Tsviakevich, presented arguments for the necessity of establishing Belarusian statehood, based on the geopolitical context of that period. He emphasized that without the formation of an independent state, Belarusian lands could be divided among neighboring countries, which contradicted the interests of the Belarusian people. His arguments found support among various factions of the Minsk Duma, including representatives of the Polish community. Notably, K. Demidetski-Demidovich also spoke in favor of Belarusian statehood. As a result, the Second Statutory Charter was supported by a majority – 41 deputies voted in favor, while 7 opposed it, and 17 abstained [20, p. 851; 22].

Following these decisions, on March 18, 1918, the composition of the BPR Rada was expanded to include representatives from the Vilnius Belarusian Rada (VBR) and the Minsk Duma. A significant political shift occurred as Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, who had previously paid little attention to the issue of Belarusian statehood, also supported the provisions of the Statutory Charter of March 9, 1918. This indicated the ability of the Belarusian national movement to achieve political consolidation and seek compromises among diverse ideological groups. However, the documents did not contain a direct declaration of sovereignty, which helped avoid sharp confrontation with external forces while simultaneously laying the legal groundwork for the further development of independence-oriented ideas. On March 19, 1918, the Rada of the All-Belarusian Congress was officially renamed the Rada of the BPR, marking another step in the institutionalization of Belarusian statehood. An alternative proposal to name the body the All-Belarusian Council of Peasant, Soldier, and Worker Deputies was rejected, reflecting the intention of its members to distance themselves from the Soviet political model. On the same day, the Statute of the BPR Rada was adopted, setting its total membership at 71. Various social and national groups received representation: 27 seats were allocated to members of the Congress Rada, 9 to representatives of provincial Belarusian councils, 10 to municipal self-government representatives, and another 10 to the Minsk zemstvo. Additionally, 15 seats were reserved for

national minorities, including 1 mandate for the Ukrainian community, 1 for the Lithuanian community, 2 for the Russian community, 4 for the Polish community, and 7 for Jewish representatives [20].

On March 23, 1918, a delegation from the Vilnius Belarusian Rada arrived in Minsk, with six of its members being co-opted into the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic. This significantly altered the balance of political forces, as the Vilnius delegates represented a more radical faction of the Belarusian national movement advocating for independence. Consequently, their inclusion in the Rada reshaped the internal dynamics of Belarusian politics, strengthening the position of BPR independence supporters [11].

Thus, the process of forming the Rada of the BPR demonstrated the gradual establishment of Belarusian state authority based on representative principles. Political actors sought to maintain a balance among different political groups, national minorities, and social strata, which was reflected in the composition of the Rada and its decisions regarding the principles of state governance. The documents adopted at this stage laid the foundation for further steps toward sovereignty, as reflected in subsequent statutory charters and decisions of the Rada of the BPR.

On March 24–25, 1918, a ceremonial session of the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic took place, attended by representatives of the Vilnius Belarusian Rada. One of the key speeches at this meeting was delivered by J. Varonka, a member of the Rada of the Republic and a representative of the Belarusian Socialist Community (BSC), who emphasized the significance of Vilnius in the Belarusian national movement. Varonka noted that this moment symbolized the spiritual unification of Vilnius and Minsk, metaphorically comparing them to the soul and body of the Belarusian nation. He concluded his speech with the words: «Today, the Belarusian has risen,» underscoring the importance of this political stage for the national consciousness of Belarusians.

Following this, A. Smolich, leader of the BSC faction, argued for the necessity of proclaiming Belarusian independence. His speech sparked lengthy and emotional debates among the Rada members. According to the protocol of the third ceremonial session, the atmosphere in the hall was tense, as the question of independence was decisive for Belarus's future. The independence faction, supported by a portion of the Rada members,

proposed a resolution declaring the Belarusian People's Republic an independent state. This resolution was supported by nearly all participants in the session, and the statutory charter itself became a key document in legally formalizing this decision [15, p. 77].

However, the decision was not unanimous. Representatives of the Bund and the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party opposed the declaration of independence, arguing that Belarus should remain part of the Russian Republic. Additionally, representatives of the zemstvo and municipal self-government of the Minsk province opposed secession, indicating certain political and social divisions within the Belarusian elite. Meanwhile, representatives of the United Jewish Socialist Party and the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Party Poale Zion abstained from voting, demonstrating the national minorities' ambivalent stance on the issue of independence. The Rada of the BPR adopted the proposed resolution on March 25, 1918, at six o'clock in the morning, marking a significant milestone in Belarusian history. Despite political disagreements, the Rada of the BPR declared the state independent, thus laying the foundation for the further development of Belarusian national statehood. The declaration of independence was a political victory for the proponents of Belarusian sovereignty; however, the state-building process remained complex and was tested by external political factors, particularly German occupation.

The Third Statutory Charter, adopted by the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic on March 25, 1918, became the official act of proclaiming the state independence of the BPR. The document provided a justification for breaking away from the imperial past, emphasizing that the Belarusian people had suffered oppression under Russian Tsarism, which had dragged Belarus into war without the consent of its population, leading to the destruction of its cities and villages [19, p. 67].

According to the Charter, the Rada of the BPR decided to abolish any state dependence on Russia, declaring the country free and independent. The proclamation of sovereignty also included provisions for future national self-determination, which was to be confirmed by the Constituent Sejm. Additionally, the document underscored the illegality of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed by Bolshevik Russia and the Central Powers, as it divided Belarusian lands among different state entities without considering the will of the Belarusian people. In this regard, the BPR government expressed its

intention to revise those parts of the Brest Treaty that concerned Belarusian territory and to propose a new peace agreement to the warring parties.

The document also reiterated the fundamental provisions of the Second Statutory Charter regarding civil rights and freedoms, particularly guarantees of democratic principles in state governance and the protection of equality for all national minorities. An important aspect of the Third Statutory Charter was the delineation of the territorial claims of the BPR. The text emphasized that the republic should include all lands where the Belarusian population constituted a majority. Specifically, the following regions were mentioned: Mogilev, Belarusian parts of Minsk, Grodno, Vilna, Vitebsk, Smolensk, and Chernihiv provinces, as well as border territories of neighboring governorates inhabited by Belarusians [19, p. 68].

The proclamation of the independence of the Belarusian People's Republic on March 25, 1918, was a decisive step in the process of national state-building. This decision was driven by the necessity to legally formalize sovereignty and to revise the provisions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which did not account for the national interests of the Belarusian people. As A. Lutskevich noted, although the declaration of independence could not be fully implemented in practice, it had a significant historical impact. It became an ideological reference point for nationally conscious political forces striving to preserve the territorial integrity and independence of Belarus.

Along with the proclamation of state sovereignty, the need arose to establish national state institutions. It was essential to develop legal and administrative governance mechanisms, define the foundations of the political and social system, and ensure the functioning of the state apparatus in accordance with the resolutions adopted at the First All-Belarusian Congress. A fundamental stage in this process was the adoption of the three Statutory Charters, which defined the key aspects of state-building and established the legal foundations for the functioning of the BPR.

#### **4. Structure of state governance**

The proclamation of the independence of the Belarusian People's Republic took place under conditions of German occupation, which created additional difficulties for the establishment of a sovereign state. The German authorities, who controlled a significant part of Belarusian territory, did not

recognize the BPR as an independent state. After the adoption of the Third Statutory Charter, the German occupation forces dissolved the Rada of the BPR and the People's Secretariat, effectively paralyzing the activities of the Belarusian government. However, after some time, the German administration reconsidered its stance on the Rada of the BPR, recognizing it as the national representation of the Belarusian people. This granted the Rada limited powers, including the administration of education, culture, and social protection [22].

The state apparatus is a key element in the functioning of any state, as it ensures governance, the implementation of state policy, and the maintenance of legal order. In the Belarusian People's Republic, the system of state administration was based on the principle of the separation of powers, which was reflected in legislative acts, particularly in the law of the Rada of the BPR «On the Supreme Authority of the Belarusian People's Republic» [12, fol. 15; 13, fol. 67].

According to this law, supreme authority belonged to the Belarusian people and all ethnic groups residing within the BPR's territory. The highest legislative body was to be the Sejm of the Republic, whose election was to be based on universal, equal, direct, secret, and proportional suffrage. However, until its convocation, legislative functions were carried out by the Rada of the Republic, which acted as a temporary representative body. Its powers included the approval of all normative legal acts, ensuring the legitimacy of state decisions. The organizational structure of the Rada provided for regular sessions convened on the 20th day of each month. If necessary, extraordinary sessions could be held at the initiative of the Presidium, the People's Secretariat, or with the support of at least 25 members of the Rada. For effective governance, the Presidium of the Rada was established, comprising the Chairman, two deputies, and three secretaries. A quorum of at least one-third of the total number of Rada members was required for decision-making. The composition of the Rada was formed considering the social, national, and professional structure of the BPR's population. It included representatives of the Rada of the First All-Belarusian Congress, territorial Belarusian councils, and bodies of zemstvo and municipal self-government. Quotas were established for various population groups: the Orthodox clergy received four mandates, the Catholic clergy – one mandate per chapter, and national minorities delegated one representative each.

The Polish Rada of the Minsk region was allocated four mandates, while the Jewish representation received seven [22].

In addition, the Rada included representatives of landowners, cooperative unions, trade unions of educators, employees of railway and postal-telegraph services, as well as other categories of citizens. Until general elections were held, the Rada also included delegates from the functioning self-government bodies of the Minsk and Mogilev governorates. According to the approved composition, the total number of Rada members was 71 [15, p. 78].

Thus, the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic functioned as a temporary parliament with broad legislative powers. Its structure and formation procedures adhered to the principles of representative democracy and facilitated the integration of various social groups into the state-building process. Despite challenging political conditions, the Rada played a key role in establishing the institutional foundations of the BPR, ensuring the legal framework for its activities and the prospects for further state development.

The organizational structuring of state power in the Belarusian People's Republic was marked by an aspiration to create an effective governance system that accounted for the national, social, and political characteristics of the population. A significant step in this direction was the Rada's decision on April 29, 1918, to establish commissions, the Presidium of the Rada of the Republic, and the Seniorens-Convent [19, p. 63].

According to the adopted resolution, the Rada's Presidium was to consist of seven members, reflecting the principle of national representation. It included the Chair (a Belarusian), three deputies (a Belarusian, a Polish representative, and a Jewish representative), a Secretary (a Belarusian), and two Deputy Secretaries (a Belarusian and a Russian). This distribution of positions demonstrated the government's intent to ensure the participation of all major ethnic groups in state administration. The Presidium was elected through a secret ballot [8, p. 367; 15].

Additionally, several specialized commissions were established, including those on internal affairs, finance, education, national economy, communications, and publishing. Their activities were aimed at ensuring the effective functioning of the state apparatus and implementing the primary objectives of the BPR.

One of the key structures in the governance system was the Seniorens-Convent (Council of Elders), composed of representatives of the Rada



of the Republic. The formation of this body was based on the numerical strength of political factions: groups of up to five members delegated one representative, those of five to ten members delegated two, those of ten to twenty members delegated three, and factions exceeding twenty members delegated four. The first session of the Seniorens-Convent took place on May 7, 1918. It included representatives from various political groups, such as J. Varonka, I. Sereda, A. Ovsjannik (Presidium of the Rada), A. Smolich, J. Liosik (Belarusian Socialists), T. Hryb, M. Pashkovich (Socialist-Revolutionaries), and centrist representatives – R. Skirmunt, A. Vlasov, P. Aleksuk, and Father W. Godlewski [15, p. 79].

The creation of the Seniorens-Convent was a response to the political challenges of the time. In particular, during the German occupation of Minsk and the inability of the entire Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic to convene regularly, this body ensured the prompt adoption of decisions. The small size of the Convent contributed to greater cohesion and efficiency in decision-making, which was critically important in conditions of political instability.

Based on the Law On the Supreme Authority of the Belarusian People's Republic, five main functions of the Rada of the BPR can be identified:

Constituent function – organization of the system of state governance, including the formation of the Rada of the Republic, approval of the composition of the People's Secretariat, and the establishment of commissions and other bodies.

Legislative function – drafting and adoption of normative legal acts.

Supervisory function – oversight of the activities of the government, ministers, and other executive bodies, as well as the authority to dissolve them or dismiss individual officials.

Financial function – allocation of state resources, funding of government activities, and resolution of socio-economic issues.

Representative function – expression of the interests of political parties, public organizations, and other groups of the population [15, p. 81].

According to the Law On the Supreme Authority, executive power in the Belarusian People's Republic belonged to the government, which operated in the form of the People's Secretariat. This body consisted of separate secretariats responsible for various areas of state governance, including internal and foreign affairs, education, justice, national economy, finance,

social protection, agriculture, and postal and telegraph communications. Each secretariat developed and published government programs that defined key policy directions in the political, socio-economic, and cultural spheres [20, p. 63].

On March 27, 1918, the People's Secretariat adopted a resolution stating that all government institutions within the territory of the BPR were subordinated to it, effectively centralizing executive power. The document specified that «all government institutions of the region, without exception, as of March 9, 1918, are institutions of the Belarusian People's Republic and must conduct their activities solely in its name.» This decision was a significant step in the process of state-building, as it formally established the BPR's authority over administrative structures and provided mechanisms for implementing state policy [16].

The Law On the Rights and Duties of the Council of People's Ministers of the Belarusian People's Republic, adopted on November 11, 1918, established the legal foundations for the functioning of the executive branch, defined its competencies, and set out mechanisms for interaction with other governing bodies. According to this normative legal act, the Council of People's Ministers was the highest executive body, responsible for governing the state until the final determination of the form of government. At the same time, its activities remained under the constant supervision of the Rada of the BPR, which reflected the parliamentary nature of the political system. The head of government was elected by the Rada of the Republic from among its members, after which they were granted the mandate to form a cabinet of ministers. This mechanism of executive power formation aligned with the principles of a parliamentary republic, where the government was accountable to the representative body and could be dismissed through the adoption of an appropriate resolution [19].

The law established broad powers for the Council of People's Ministers, including the appointment of heads of People's Ministries and oversight of their activities. It issued orders and decrees necessary for the implementation of laws, managed defense resources, and concluded international treaties, which became effective only after parliamentary approval. Additionally, the government had the right, in cases of urgent necessity, to issue decrees with the force of law, subject to subsequent approval by the Rada of the BPR. If such acts were not ratified, they lost their validity. The government was

also responsible for initiating legislative proposals through the Presidium of the Rada of the BPR, as well as convening extraordinary parliamentary sessions or postponing regular meetings, but for no longer than two months. This system of interaction between the legislative and executive branches demonstrated a balance of powers, ensuring the dominant role of parliament while allowing the government to act swiftly in critical situations [20].

Structurally, the Council of People's Ministers consisted of 14 People's Ministries, each responsible for a specific area of state administration. The government included ministries of foreign affairs, internal affairs, defense, finance, trade and industry, transport, postal services and telegraph, agriculture and state property, public education, labor, supply and food, as well as justice. Additionally, the appointment of four ministers without portfolios was envisioned, one of whom held the position of State Secretary. A crucial function was performed by the State Controller, who oversaw financial discipline and the activities of the state apparatus. The Chairman of the Council of People's Ministers presided over government meetings or could delegate these powers to a deputy. All government decisions were binding on state administration bodies, reflecting the centralized nature of executive power [20].

The financial support for officials of the People's Ministries was carried out according to a staffing schedule approved by parliament, with additional funds allocated to the Chairman of the Council of People's Ministers for the fulfillment of official duties. An important aspect of government functioning was that the distribution of responsibilities among ministries was determined by the Council of People's Ministers itself but required parliamentary approval. This confirmed the subordination of the executive branch to the representative body, aligning with the model of a parliamentary republic. However, the scope of responsibility of the ministries and the State Controller was defined by the legislation of the Provisional Government of the Russian State, indicating the transitional nature of the BPR's legal system. The government programs of the People's Secretariat, and later the Council of People's Ministers, laid the foundation for the formation of the judicial system of the Belarusian People's Republic. The declaration of the government cabinet under the leadership of Roman Skirmunt, adopted on July 9, 1918, emphasized the necessity of creating a multi-level judicial system that would include courts of all instances – from local to higher

cassation courts. This indicated an intention to establish a hierarchical structure of judicial bodies in accordance with the principles of the rule of law [11, p. 357].

One of the key aspects of judicial reform was the development of national legislation. According to paragraph 14 of the government program, it was planned to conduct a «selection of laws (norms) from the Russian Code of Laws and supplement them with laws that correspond to the interests of the Belarusian people.» This implied a gradual transition to an independent legal system by adapting the existing Russian legislation of the time to the socio-legal realities of the BPR. The formation of a Belarusian justice body and the organization of judicial authority were intended to serve as the foundation of legal regulation in the state. The government aimed to create a national code of justice based on universally recognized legal principles while simultaneously reflecting the specifics of the Belarusian legal tradition. Government initiatives in the field of justice were directed not only at ensuring legal order but also at laying the groundwork for a future independent judicial system of the Belarusian People's Republic.

Thus, the Council of People's Ministers of the BPR functioned in accordance with the principles of parliamentary accountability, which required its subordination to the representative body. The structure of the government was based on the division of competencies among individual ministries, ensuring the systematic functioning of the executive branch. At the same time, legally established mechanisms of parliamentary control limited the powers of the government, aligning with the European tradition of state governance in the early 20th century. However, political instability, military-political circumstances, and external pressure prevented the full realization of the governance mechanisms enshrined in legislation.

### **5. System of local self-government**

The establishment of local councils in the Belarusian People's Republic was a significant stage in the process of national state-building. The Provisional Order for Local Belarusian Radas, approved on April 29, 1918, defined the organizational principles of the self-government system, established the procedure for forming councils, outlined their competencies, and determined their subordination within the administrative hierarchy [20, pp. 295–296]. This normative act reflects an attempt to create a

democratic system of local governance aimed at ensuring Belarus's state independence, fostering Belarusian culture, and shaping a nationally conscious society. The document explicitly defines the primary goal of the councils – to ensure state self-governance at the local level, protect the national interests of the Belarusian people, and promote their cultural development. It is noteworthy that a key feature of the legal framework was the integration of national consciousness and administrative governance. Article 1 of the order emphasizes that the councils aim to achieve «the state independence of Belarus,» highlighting their political orientation. Thus, local self-government bodies were regarded not only as administrative units but also as instruments for the political mobilization of the nationally conscious population.

The system of local self-government was based on a multi-level structure that included volost, township, municipal, and district councils. According to Article 3, a corresponding council was to be established in every settlement, regardless of its size. Above all local councils stood the Rada of the Belarusian People's Republic, which functioned as the central representative body. This structure ensured the vertical subordination of local authorities, which was crucial for implementing state policies in the regions. The procedure for forming councils adhered to democratic principles of representation, as reflected in Article 4. The election of council members was determined by population size, ensuring equal representation of communities. For instance, in volost councils, each village, hamlet, or estate elected one representative, whereas larger settlements delegated a proportional number of representatives. In municipal and township councils, members were elected from each street or group of households, indicating an effort to establish a democratic electoral system at the local level. An important aspect is Article 5, which provided for the possibility of reviewing elections in cases of illegitimacy or identified violations. This indicates that the BPR sought to implement a mechanism for democratic oversight of the electoral process. Such provisions laid the foundation for parliamentary accountability, as they allowed for the reorganization of council composition depending on the actual situation in the regions.

Once the councils were formed, they were required to elect the Council Board (Uprava Rady) (Article 6), which performed executive functions. Its composition consisted of at least five members (a head, deputies,

clerks, and a treasurer); however, if necessary, the Board could be expanded. This demonstrates the flexibility of the administrative system, allowing the governance structure to be adapted to the specific characteristics of a given region.

Particular attention should be given to Article 13, which defined the legal status of the councils. Until their approval by the Council of the Republic, local councils were considered private organizations; after approval, they became official political bodies of the state. This provision is particularly interesting from the perspective of legal theory, as it indicates a two-stage procedure for the formation of government institutions. In practice, this mechanism allowed communities to establish their own administrative structures, but these structures acquired state status only after official approval. Such a system resembles modern mechanisms for legalizing local self-government bodies during transitional periods [20, pp. 295–296].

Articles 14 and 15 defined the functions of local councils, which included:

**1. Protection of the rights and interests of the Belarusian population.**

This encompassed both legal support and assistance in resolving socio-economic issues.

**2. Promotion of Belarusian culture and national identity.** The councils were responsible for overseeing the development of Belarusian education, supporting Belarusian-language publishing, and establishing libraries and folk theaters.

**3. Supervision over the implementation of state decisions.** This involved cooperation with central authorities and ensuring compliance with their directives.

**4. Organization of Belarusian schools and oversight of existing educational institutions.** In this aspect, the councils effectively functioned as educational administrations.

**5. Assumption of administrative functions when necessary.** This provision (Article 15) stipulated that in extraordinary situations, local councils could assume power in their district, provided they informed the central administration.

The latter provision is particularly significant, as it reflects an effort to create a decentralized model of governance in which local bodies could operate autonomously. This aligned with the concept of crisis management,

wherein the central government was unable to effectively control all regions. At the same time, Article 17 established a mechanism for the oversight and accountability of local councils. If their activities contradicted state interests, the Council of the Republic had the authority to dissolve them or bring executive members to trial. This provision laid the foundation for administrative responsibility of officials and oversight of local government bodies [20, p. 297].

An analysis of the Provisional Order for Local Belarusian Radas indicates that the system of self-governance in the Belarusian People's Republic was built on democratic principles, taking into account the national and cultural context. The document established a multi-level structure of local councils, defined their powers, mechanisms of subordination, and responsibilities. A key feature of this normative act was the attempt to combine the administrative and political functions of local self-governance, which was intended to contribute to the formation of Belarusian statehood amid political instability. However, despite the clearly defined principles of functioning, the effectiveness of this model remained limited due to a lack of administrative resources and the military-political situation. At the same time, the legal mechanisms embedded in the document became an important historical precedent for the development of Belarusian national statehood.

The Provisional Order for District Belarusian National Radas further developed and detailed the provisions of the first document, specifying the legal, organizational, and functional foundations of local government activities. Unlike the general conceptual approach outlined in the previous order, this document defined specific mechanisms for administrative management, the development of national culture, and the economic system at the local level. The primary focus was on creating an effective administrative apparatus that would ensure the continuous operation of the councils.

According to the provisions of the document, district councils played a central role in the system of local governance, representing the interests of the Belarusian population. They performed not only administrative but also political functions, as they were considered the «voice of the representatives of the Belarusian population of the district and the defender of its interests.» Consequently, their activities encompassed a wide range of issues, from

uniting nationally conscious Belarusians to addressing socio-economic and cultural problems.

The order stipulated that the administrative structure of the district councils was based on collegial decision-making. General council meetings were held at least once a month, and their legitimacy was ensured by the presence of a quorum, which constituted half of the total number of council members. To ensure the prompt execution of adopted decisions, the councils had a Presidium, consisting of the Chairperson, two deputies, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. The Presidium was responsible for implementing resolutions, organizing administrative processes, and coordinating the activities of the councils. Its meetings were required to take place weekly, highlighting the necessity of a continuous governance process. A distinctive feature of the councils' activities was the clear division of competencies into three main areas: social-organizational, cultural-educational, and cooperative-economic. Each of these departments had its own tasks and areas of work, allowing the councils to respond more effectively to the needs of the population and ensure the comprehensive development of the territories.

The social-organizational department was responsible for registering the Belarusian population, identifying community leaders, and analyzing documents that confirmed Belarusian national identity. This was of significant importance in the context of the formation of a new state, where defining citizenship and national identity played a key role in state-building processes. Additionally, this department oversaw the activities of Belarusian organizations, processed citizen complaints, and forwarded them to the Central Belarusian Authority, demonstrating its role as a human rights body [23].

The Cultural and Educational Department was responsible for the development of Belarusian national education. It collected information about schools, identified the need for teaching staff, organized the opening of Belarusian schools, and sought their funding from local institutions. One of the key aspects of its activities was the promotion of extracurricular education, including the organization of evening schools, public courses, libraries, theaters, and publishing initiatives. Thus, this department fulfilled the function of cultural enlightenment and laid the foundation for national revival through education and culture.



The Cooperative and Economic Department was tasked with ensuring the development of the economic system at the local level. It supervised the activities of cooperatives, agricultural societies, and production associations, as well as facilitated their expansion. Special attention was given to maintaining a Belarusian-language environment in the economic sphere – cooperatives were expected to adopt a Belarusian identity by involving individuals who supported the national idea. This provision underscored the importance of economic policy as an integral part of national state-building. The financial support of the councils was based on voluntary contributions, donations, activities of local enterprises, and subsidies from the central bodies of the BPR. This highlights the significant role of civic engagement in supporting local self-government, as a substantial part of the funding depended on community initiatives. Another important aspect of the councils' activities was language policy. According to the directive, administrative documentation was conducted exclusively in the Belarusian language, which was a principled decision aimed at securing its status in administrative governance. Additionally, the councils had an official seal with inscriptions in Belarusian using both Cyrillic and Latin scripts. This provision emphasized the intention to establish the Belarusian language in state administration and strengthen national identity [15, p. 86].

Thus, the Provisional Order for District Belarusian National Councils defined the organizational and legal foundations of local self-government in the BPR. It established a democratic governance principle based on election, collegiality, and accountability of the councils to the population. The system of local self-government relied on a structured approach to the distribution of functions, encompassing social, cultural, and economic spheres. Although political and military circumstances did not allow for the full implementation of this document's provisions, it reflected the Belarusian government's vision regarding the organization of local authorities, their competencies, and their place in state governance.

It should be noted that the effectiveness of local self-government largely depended on external factors, particularly the stability of state power, the level of support for the national movement, and the ability of central authorities to coordinate the activities of regional structures. However, even under difficult conditions, the development of this order reflected the

Belarusian state-builders' attempt to create an administrative management system that would meet societal needs and contribute to the formation of a Belarusian national state.

Thus, the system of local self-government in the Belarusian People's Republic, as defined by this order, played a crucial role in the state-building process. Its primary objectives included political representation, the protection of the rights of the Belarusian population, the organization of national education, and economic development. Although the councils' full-scale operation was hindered by political instability, the principles of governance laid out in the order became a significant historical experience for subsequent attempts to establish Belarusian statehood.

The state-building process of the BPR involved not only the formation of governmental bodies and the definition of legal principles for their functioning but also the development of the attributes of statehood. Following the declaration of independence and efforts to formalize Belarusian statehood legally, there arose an urgent need for national symbols that would affirm its sovereignty on the international stage. Official activities, such as diplomatic visits, receptions, and the signing of intergovernmental agreements, required appropriate symbolic representation, including a national flag, coat of arms, anthem, and official seal. One of the first steps in this direction was the approval of seals for government institutions. As early as April 3, 1918, the BPR People's Secretariat approached the engraving workshop of Izakov with a request to produce a large round rubber seal with two inscriptions: «RADA BIEŁARUSKAJ NARODNAJ RESPUBLIKI» and «РАДА БЕЛАРУСКАЙ НАРОДНАЙ РЭСПУБЛІКІ». The central element of the seal was to depict a sheaf, rake, and scythe, symbolizing the agrarian character of the state. On April 28, 1918, this seal was officially approved. Subsequently, similar seals were adopted by the People's Secretariat and later by the Council of People's Ministers and its structures. However, these symbols were later modified, as the Pahonia coat of arms was chosen as the primary state emblem [15, p. 86].

The development of national symbols also became an important aspect of the state-building process. On April 30, 1918, the newspaper *Bielaŭruski Ślach* reported on the activities of a special commission under the People's Secretariat, tasked with determining official emblems and other state attributes. One of the first decisions was the selection of the national flag.

The well-known Belarusian politician and cultural figure Vaclau Lastouski stated that the national Belarusian color was white-red, and the Belarusian flag was composed of three horizontal stripes – white, red, and white. On July 9, 1918, the Rada of the Republic and the People's Secretariat officially approved the Pahonia coat of arms as the national emblem, and on August 5, 1918, the white-red-white flag was granted official state status. As for the national anthem, its official adoption took place later. In 1919, Belarusian poet M. Kravtsov wrote the lyrics to Vajacki Marš (Warrior's March), with music composed by V. Teravski. This composition became the national anthem of the BPR, symbolizing the Belarusian people's aspiration for independence and their struggle for freedom.

An interesting aspect of the state-building process was the discussion regarding the renaming of the Belarusian state and its governing bodies. In May 1918, Information Bulletin No. 25 proposed changing the name Belarusian People's Republic to Rzeczpospolita Belaruska (RPB). Consequently, it was suggested that the Rada of the BPR be renamed the General Sejm of the RPB, its head – Grand Marshal, the People's Secretariat – the Council of the RPB, and the members of the Rada – deputies of the General Sejm. Similar changes were planned for the administrative system: provincial councils were to be renamed sejmiks, the mayor – wójt, and members of the city council – lawniks. However, this proposal was not adopted, as such names were not used in subsequent official documents [13, p. 91].

Despite the significant number of normative legal acts developed, most of them never became the full-fledged legal foundation of an independent BPR. The documents adopted by the Rada primarily reflected the political aspirations of Belarusian national figures and their attempts to expand their authority, outline the functional powers of state institutions, and make the government operational. The emergence of the BPR was a natural phenomenon in the context of World War I and the collapse of the Russian Empire. Under German occupation, Belarusian politicians sought to lay the foundations of national statehood, but the actual possibilities for its realization remained limited. The Statutory Charters of the BPR legally defined the fundamental principles of the state system, the mechanisms of power distribution, citizens' rights and freedoms, and the status of national minorities. Together with other documents, these charters provide insight

into the political platform of the Belarusian national movement. Although the attempts to secure Belarusian independence lacked broad international support, they were of great significance for the further development of the Belarusian national idea.

The formation of the concept of an independent Belarusian state and the attempts at its practical implementation were significant historical events that demonstrated the Belarusian people's aspiration for self-determination. The declaration of BPR independence marked the first transition of the Belarusian statehood issue from theoretical discussions to practical action. However, defining what kind of republic Belarus should be, the principles of its statehood, and its relations with neighboring countries remained a matter of debate. The Belarusian national movement found itself in complex geopolitical conditions, which significantly complicated the realization of the idea of independence.

## **6. Foundations of the Political and Legal System of the BPR**

The political system of the Belarusian People's Republic was in its early stages of development and was based on the principles of representative democracy. Despite complex internal and external political conditions, Belarusian state-builders aimed to establish a governance system reliant on elected bodies. It was planned that the highest legislative body would be the Sejm of the BPR, elected through universal, equal, direct, secret, and proportional suffrage. Until its convocation, legislative functions were performed by the Rada of the BPR, a representative body uniting various political parties, social groups, and national minorities [1]. The executive power was exercised by the government, initially functioning as the People's Secretariat and later transforming into the Council of People's Ministers, accountable to the Rada of the BPR, following a parliamentary-republican model of governance. However, the political structure remained unstable, largely influenced by external factors, particularly Germany's stance on Belarusian independence [15].

The legal system of the BPR was also in formation, based on the principles of the rule of law, democratic freedoms, and social justice. The foundations of legal regulation were outlined in the Statutory Charters, decisions of the Rada of the BPR, and governmental acts. The First Statutory Charter of February 21, 1918, defined the Executive Committee of the All-Belarusian

Congress as a temporary governing body and introduced universal suffrage. The Second Statutory Charter of March 9, 1918, expanded democratic rights and freedoms, granted national-personal autonomy to minorities, and abolished private land ownership [3]. One crucial aspect of the legal system was the organization of the judiciary. On July 9, 1918, the government decided to establish a multi-level judicial system, including local courts and a cassation instance. It was planned to base legislation on adapted norms of the Russian Code of Laws. However, due to political instability and a shortage of qualified legal personnel, these plans remained largely unrealized.

The political and legal systems of the BPR developed simultaneously, leading to challenges and contradictions. On the one hand, Belarusian state-builders sought to legally establish the foundations of a parliamentary republic, but on the other, their implementation was constrained by the lack of an administrative apparatus and external pressure. Although formally enshrined in legal documents, state mechanisms never fully functioned due to the unstable political situation in the region [15].

Despite these difficulties, the BPR became the first project of an independent Belarusian state, laying the foundations of its political and legal system. The proclaimed democratic principles – citizens' rights and freedoms, equality of national minorities, and representative governance – aligned with broader European state-building trends of the early 20th century. The BPR experience significantly influenced the further development of Belarusian political thought and state-building processes in the region.

### 7. Conclusion

The formation of state institutions of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918 was a natural consequence of the socio-political processes that unfolded in Belarus following the February Revolution of 1917. The genesis of the BPR was closely linked to the rise of the Belarusian national movement, which gained mass support after the fall of autocracy. This process was accompanied by the establishment of political parties, civic organizations, and the search for ways to realize the idea of self-determination for the Belarusian people amid the collapse of the Russian Empire. The subsequent transformation of the political landscape, triggered by the October Revolution, the Bolshevik dispersal of the All-Belarusian

Congress, and the onset of the German occupation of Belarusian territories, created the conditions for the proclamation of statehood.

The establishment of BPR government bodies occurred in several stages. A decisive moment was the convening of the All-Belarusian Congress in December 1917, which represented the first attempt to unite political, social, and ethnic groups to address the issue of Belarusian autonomy. However, the Bolsheviks' harsh intervention and the dispersal of the congress demonstrated the lack of political consensus regarding Belarus's status. Following the Bolsheviks' withdrawal from Minsk and the declaration of autonomy by the Great Belarusian Council, it became possible to form the Executive Committee of the Congress Council, which proclaimed itself a temporary governing body. Nevertheless, the subsequent German occupation significantly limited the activities of these institutions. The subsequent legal acts – the First, Second, and Third Statutory Charters – solidified the concept of Belarusian statehood, evolving from temporary self-governance to the proclamation of full sovereignty.

The political system of the BPR was based on the principles of representative democracy and parliamentarism. The highest governing body was the Rada of the BPR, composed of representatives from various social and ethnic groups, ensuring a certain balance of interests. Executive power was exercised by the People's Secretariat, which was later replaced by the Council of People's Ministers, accountable to the parliament. Thus, the model of state governance exhibited characteristics of a parliamentary republic, where the government depended on the representative body.

The legal system of the BPR was founded on democratic principles enshrined in the Statutory Charters and decisions of the Rada of the BPR. However, due to the short-lived existence of the state and the limited opportunities for implementing adopted legal norms, they largely remained declarative. The BPR government planned to establish a national judicial system based on adapted norms of Russian legislation. However, due to a shortage of qualified personnel, financial difficulties, and political instability, this process remained incomplete.

Overall, the BPR represented one of the first attempts to establish a Belarusian national state in the early 20th century. Its progressive nature was reflected in the recognition of universal suffrage, guarantees for national minorities, and plans for socio-economic reforms. However, the

functioning of the BPR was constrained by external factors, primarily German occupation and Soviet expansion, as well as internal challenges, such as political divisions among nationalist forces. Despite these obstacles, the political and legal achievements of the BPR had a lasting impact on the development of the Belarusian national idea, laying the foundations for the restoration of Belarusian independence in the 20th century.

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