

Prosvita Society in Kiev: The Ukrainian Struggle for Self-Identity in 1906-1920

**Fond F-1447; Opis' 1; 79 delo Tovarishchestvo
'Prosvita' v Kieve**

**Fond F-10, Kievskoe gubernskoe po delam ob
obshchestvakh prisutstvie; Opis'1**

***By Vladimir Danilenko,
Director of the State Archive
of the Kiev Oblast***

From the State Archive of the Kiev Oblast (GAKO) comes **Fond F-1447, *Tovarishchestvo 'Prosvita' v Kieve* [Prosvita Association in Kiev]** which includes 79 *delos*, or files, dating mainly between 1917-1920. This collection also includes the documents of **Fond F-10, entitled *Kievskoe gubernskoe po delam ob obshchestvakh prisutstvie* [Kiev Province Office for the Affairs Pertaining to Societies]**. All related documents remained classified and inaccessible to researchers until 1990.

The Prosvita Society was a cultural and educational public organization originally founded in Lvov in 1868 to promote education among the Ukrainians.¹ Prosvita came to Eastern Ukraine much later, after the 1905 revolution and the emperor's manifesto of October 17 – promising to guarantee freedom of religion, speech, assembly and associations – created conditions for normal political and public activities in Russia and the surrounding regions. All over the empire, people began to form public organizations and political parties of various orientations, including Prosvita. Branches of Prosvita were formed in 1905 and 1906 in Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, Odessa, Kamenets-Podol'sk, Zhitomir, Chernigov, the Kuban Region, Baku, and Vladivostok.

On 16 May 1906, the governor of Kiev was formally asked to authorize the opening of a Prosvita Association in Kiev, dedicated to Taras Shevchenko. The request was signed by prominent Ukrainian cultural figures including Boris Grinchenko (writer, public figure, publisher, student of folklore, and linguist), composer Nikolai Lysenko and painter Fotii Krasnitskii.²

The Prosvita's first meeting in Kiev on 25 June approved its charter and elected board members, including Boris Grinchenko as president. Others

elected to the board included S. Efremov, S. Shemet, and M. Levitskii. According to its charter, the society's goal was to "promote Ukrainian culture and, more importantly, education of the Ukrainian people in their own language, inside Kiev and in the Kiev Province." Working towards this goal, the society was to (a) publish books, magazines and newspapers, etc. in Ukrainian; (b) open libraries, museums, reading halls, and bookstores; (c) hold public lectures and readings, general education courses, stage performances, and encourage evenings of literature and music, concerts, exhibitions and so on; (d) establish grants, schools, homes, daycare centers, employment agencies and so on; (e) found contests and prizes for outstanding works of literature and art.³

Even though the authorities ruled to have Prosvita's activities permitted only in Kiev, it came to extend its influence all over Ukraine. The authorities then insisted that every city or village branch of the society should have its own charter and operate as an independent organization. This made it difficult to open local branches, public libraries, reading rooms, and bookstores.

The society's eventual success owed much to broad participation in its educational projects by Ukrainian intellectuals including Lesia Ukrainka (Larisa Petrovna Kosach), her sister Olga, V. Vinnichenko, D. Doroshenko and V. Stepanivskii.

Perhaps the greatest achievement for the Kiev-based Prosvita was the publication of books on a planned basis. The first booklet the society turned out listed subjects of the books soon to be released. Publication took off from there, with the number of copies per item published in Kiev ranging between 5,000 and 12,000, all of them well illustrated. All in all, the society printed 34 publications totalling 163,760 copies. This included two calendars for 1907 and 1908, a tear-off calendar, "Raduga," for 1907, the society's charter, progress reports for 1905 through 1909 and stories about Ukrainians who lived outside Ukraine at the time such as Galicia and the life of Galician Ukrainians, and Ukrainians living in Canada and America. Prosvita also cooperated with other publishers to produce "A Catalogue of Ukrainian Publications with Book Reviews," fliers and portraits.

The books were sold directly from Prosvita's bookstores and during various festive events. From 1908 onwards, books included the rules of Ukrainian grammar and spelling, which most certainly won more readers. The

society gained even more readers to its side by publishing a "Catalogue of Books for Popular Reading," a guide to the book market.

Prosvita accomplished much in the realm of teaching, and eventually set up a special subcommittee that developed programs for daycare centers and elementary schools, made plans for opening a people's university for Ukrainian studies and so on. The authorities, however, banned all these plans with the exception of those for lectures intended for the general public. The number of lectures permitted also varied with the changes in the political climate.

Prosvita also sponsored a library and reading room in Kiev which consisted mainly of donated books. The core of the library was a collection of books owned by Dr. K. Pan'kivskii of Galicia comprising 1,500 volumes.

In May 1910, the Kiev authorities, who resented Prosvita's leading role in the cultural affairs of Ukraine, decided to ban the society entirely. The official reasons for the ban were stated in a memo to the governor of Kiev:

Acting on Your Excellency's verbal instructions, we have studied 12 publications of Prosvita in the Ukrainian language, including the calendar for 1908, and 11 popular booklets brought out from 1906 to 1908. The 1906 booklets are 'About Ukrainian Cossacks, Tatars and Turks,' and 'Land Management in New Zealand.' The 1907 booklets are 'The Liberation of North American States,' 'Stories about Ireland' and 'Ukrainians in the Kuban Region.' The 1908 booklets are 'Taras Shevchenko' and 'About Canada.' The 1909 booklets are "Hetman Sagaidachnyi,' 'Labor and Capital' and 'The Brothers Gracchus.' The 1910 booklet is 'About Bukovina.'⁴

Analyzing the contents of these booklets, they concluded:

All the booklets, regardless of their different titles, are concerned with sociopolitical matters and at the same time they follow a very clear-cut program: to discredit the monarchy and spread revolutionary ideas, eulogize revolutionary and rebellious acts...undermine the prestige of the government's legislative and administrative bodies and preach the solving of the agricultural issue according to the prescriptions of anarchist-communists...reject the need for religious education in

people's schools and raise the banner of a narrow ethnic autonomy for members of multilingual components of the state...Their authors are up in arms against initiating the Little Russian [Ukrainian] race into the Russian culture; they refer to this race as being deprived of all human rights and dream about a Slavic federative republic with Little Russia [Ukraine] as an independent member of this federation.

Thus, this 'educational' association does not sow among the masses of people the seeds of spiritual wheat but it sows chaff, or to put it more accurately, it is out to sow the wind in the hopes of reaping the whirlwind in due course.⁵

The documents pertaining to the elimination committee may be of particular interest to researchers. These include the minutes of Prosvita's general meeting of 14 May 1910, attended by 132 out of 180 members of the society; 9 reports from the elimination committee; a list of the society's property; a statement showing who and bought the property, when it was purchased and the relative value (ex. the library valued at 770 rubles, a bust of Shevchenko valued at 100 rubles, charcoal portraits on canvas of outstanding Ukrainian cultural figures Shevchenko, Kotliarevskii, Staritskii, Antonovich, Kulish, Rudanskii, Marko-Vovchok, and Karponko-Karyi valued at 25 rubles each); letters of K. Pan'kivskii about the books he donated to the Prosvita library; financial documents and so on.

The revolution in Russia during February 1917 overthrew the imperial government. Prosvita resumed operation in April the same year and passed a new charter. Prosvita's higher ruling bodies held annual general meetings. Between such meetings, the society was steered by its elected council, led by O. Lototskii. According to its charter, applicants were first accepted as probationary and then as full members of the society, with members paying dues of between three and six rubles. The society began its own magazine, Prosvitianin and sponsored commissions and groups for literature and libraries, performing arts and a group for children's affairs. The Kiev-based Prosvita set up branches in Poltava, Zhitomir, Borispol', Korostyshev and in other localities and villages around the Kiev Province. All in all, Ukraine had some 600 branches of the society. Their councils included mainly local writers, academics, teachers and medical doctors.

On 14 May 1917, members of a general meeting of the Kiev-based Prosvita decided to convene a congress in Kiev of Prosvita's representatives in order to draft a charter for an All-Ukraine Prosvita.

Despite the difficult political and economic conditions prevailing between 1917 and 1920, the society continued to open village seminaries, schools, libraries, reading rooms, bookstores, run courses of the Ukrainian language and publish books and newspapers in Ukrainian. Despite a lack of funds, the society put out several books and produced a number of short biographies of prominent hetmans, authors and cultural figures (Sagaidachnyi, Doroshenko, Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka, Kotsiubinskii, Grinchenko, Kostomarov, Antonovich, and Lysenko). During this period, the Prosvita society ran one kindergarten, four Ukrainian high schools, an evening elementary school, a school for adults and set up its own library of 8,000 volumes.

In the early 1920s, the Communist authorities charged Prosvita with conducting nationalist and anti-Soviet propaganda. The society folded soon after. Official propaganda claimed this closure was because of the emergence of new cultural and educational organizations brought forth by the Soviet system.

The Soviet government scrapped Prosvita in Western Ukraine in 1939 as a hotbed of separatism.

Prosvita's operation was resumed once Ukraine became independent.

Fond F-1447 of this collection contains materials of the First and Second All-Ukraine Congresses of Prosvita, minutes of general meetings of the Kiev-based Prosvita members, and progress reports of its branches in Kiev, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, Volyn', Tavria, Chernigov, and Helsingfors. It also includes statistical reports of the Prosvita societies in Kiev, Poltava, Kharkov, Kherson, Volyn', Chernigov, Kursk, Voronezh oblasts, Black Sea area, Caucasus, Kuban, Siberia, Bessarabia, Donbass area, and Moscow. These reports contain information on Prosvita's membership; addresses of its branches; the years and months of their foundation; the number of meetings held; their funds; numbers of books in their holdings and numbers of readers; which books were in greatest demand; the events and lectures they held; and profiles of founders. Other documents include correspondence between

Prosvita and the Kiev Province commissioner of the Provisional government, the Central Rada, the governments of the Ukrainian People's Republic, Hetman Skoropadskii and the Directoria; the society's memorandum to the hetman on making Ukrainian the state language; and the Central Rada's donation of gold and silver medals for Prosvita's needs.

Additional valuable information can be found in the correspondence between Prosvita and its publishers Chas, Sil'skii Gospodar, and Soiuz; its correspondence dealing with the opening of an Ukrainian university, high schools, elementary schools, seminaries; the operation of lecture and library commissions; the building of a monument to Taras Shevchenko in the city of Romny in the Poltava region and a cultural center dedicated to the poet in his native village of Kirilovka in Zvenigorod Uezd of the Kiev Province; in the events to commemorate composer N.V. Lysenko, authors Turgenev and Kashchenko and economist and historian Tugan-Baranovskii; minutes of Prosvita council meetings in 1918 and 1919; documents pertaining to the renaming of streets in Kiev; papers concerning a Ukrainian Prosvita socialist center in Oranienbaum; papers on the financial performance of the society and so on.

The documents included in this collection are in Ukrainian and Russian.

¹ Lvov was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time.

² Kiev Oblast State Archive, fond 10, opis' 1, delo 20, pages 1, 2 ob.

³ GAKO, fond 10, opis' 1, delo 21, p.1 ob.

⁴ GAKO, fond 10, opis' 1, delo 21, p. 36.

⁵ GAKO, fond 10, opis' 1, delo 21, p. 42.

Collection Contents

Index

Item No.		Number of Pages	Film Number
1	Introduction in English		1
2	Introduction in Russian		1
3	Opis' 1 (F-10)		1
4	Opis' 1 (F-1447)		1
5	Contents of Reels in English		1
6	Contents of Reels in Ukrainian		1
7	Contents of Reels in Russian		1

Fond F-10

File No.		Number of Pages	Film Number
	Opis' 1		
21	The passing of the charter of the "Educational Society" founded in commemoration of T. Shevchenko.	255	2

Fond F-1447

File No.		Number of Pages	Film Number
	Opis' 1		
1	Correspondence of the Kiev governor on banning the opening of libraries with reading rooms in Kiev and the village of Krivoe in the Skvirskii uезд, with citizen Zhebunev concerning his gift of two hundred rubles for the publication of books in Ukrainian and with citizen Prokopovich concerning three hundred rubles he gave "Kolonius" publishers to publish a book entitled "What Does our People Read and How."	28	2
2	Minutes of the commission to eliminate "Prosvita society in Klev." A letter to the Kiev governor concerning the winding up of work by the elimination commission. A list of property owned by the eliminated society.	53	2
3	Instructions to Prosvita branches.	10	2
4	Minutes of general meetings of the Kiev-based Prosvita.	35	2
5	Minutes of a Prosvita council meeting held in Kiev, of the meetings of peasants of the village of Kumanivtsi, Berdichev uезд of the Kiev Province, minutes of general meetings of the Morozovskoe Prosvita society regarding the society's cultural and educational work.	8	2

6	Minutes of meetings held by the publishing commission of Prosvita in Kiev to review the subjects of publications, the purchasing of newsprint and other matters.	28	2
7	Meetings of a joint meeting of Prosvita in Kiev of the publication and library commissions.	3	2
8	Materials of the First All-Ukraine Kiev-based Prosvita, minutes of meetings, lists of reports and resolutions at the congress concerning the organization of Prosvita branches, school and adult education, theaters and so on.	97	2
9	Progress reports of Prosvita societies in Kiev, Poltava, Volynia and the Helsingfors.	109	2
10	Reports on the founding, operation and current state of Prosvita societies in Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, Poltava, Tavria and Chernigov.	30	2
11	Reports on the national museum-archive, the culture and education commission of the All-Ukraine Council of Military Deputies, programs of the uiezd museum, local museums.	10	2
12	Reports of the Prosvita societies based in Kiev and Ekaterinoslav on their condition and activities.	10	3
13	Statistics on Prosvita societies based in the Kiev, Poltava, Kharkov, Volynia, Chernigov, Kursk and Voronezh regions, the Black Sea area, the Caucasus, Kuban, Siberia, Bessarabia, Donbas and Moscow.	62	3
14	Lists of Prosvita society members approved on 14 May 1917 by the society's board after the general meetings.	2	3
15	Correspondence of the Prosvita lecture commission in Kiev on the organization of lectures, provision of Kiev's districts with adult education establishments, correspondence of the "For the National Foundation" committee on raising money for the National Ukrainian Foundation, correspondence of the Artistic Committee on handing over to Prosvita the Lukianovskii community center. Minutes of the library committee. An appeal of the Ukrainian Peasant Union Central Committee on launching a "Day of the Electoral Fond."	43	3
16	Correspondence with the Central Ukrainian Cooperative Union on setting up unions of the tillers of the soil. An appeal of the Ukrainian military society of the 5th Infantry Replacement Reserve Regiment on solidarity with the Prosvita society; correspondence with the Vinnitsa Youth Union on its condition and operation, with the Ukrainian secondary-school youth union based in Kiev, the return by Prosvita of the property taken for safekeeping; with the Melitopol society on the provision of help in its operation, with the council of the Ukrainian "Sich" gymnastics society in Kiev on the use of its premises, with the "Molodaia Ukraina" hobby group, on Prosvita bookstores in Kiev.	15	3

17	Correspondence of Kiev Regional Commissioner of the Provisional Government on compiling booklets and postcards in Ukrainian, correspondence with various people on the distribution of books, newspapers and literature.	34	3
18	Correspondence on donations of money for Prosvita's cultural and educational activities in Kiev.	6	3
19	Correspondence of army-in-the-field military officials on distribution of newspapers, books and other literature.	48	3
20	Correspondence of the Kiev educational district administrator on assigning representatives for the district's newly organized temporary consultative body, the teachers' council of the elementary school in Skopets, on convening a congress, with the "Iuzhnyi Cooperative Bank" on putting money on a current account.	21	3
21	Correspondence with a primary unit of secondary-school organizations in Kiev on helping with the development of secondary-education organizations, correspondence with the social education subdivision about the setting up of a preschool department, correspondence with the Kiev-based Ukrainian School Sub-commission on assigning a Prosvita representative to sit on the School Sub-commission, and other matters.	11	3
22	Correspondence with rural Prosvita societies about the distribution of model charters, instructions regarding the establishing of Prosvita societies, the putting on the lists of newly founded Prosvita societies, registered Prosvita societies with amended charters. Brief descriptions of charters of the central bureau of the All-Ukraine Union of Prosvita Societies.	54	3
23	Correspondence with Prosvita, Vremia and Sel'skii Khoziain publishers on publishing and orders for magazines and books.	47	3
24	Kiev-based Prosvita journal with entries describing its foundation, orders for literature, lists of publications by various publishers.	32	3
25	Incoming and outgoing papers.	204	3
26	Minutes of Prosvita Council meetings in Kiev in 1918.	43	3
27	Minutes of meetings held by Kiev Prosvita Regional Executive and its elimination.	6	3
28	Materials of the Second All-Ukraine Congress of Prosvita Societies in Kiev.	39	4

29	A report on convening a territorial congress of Ukraine. An appeal for convening a congress on questions of art-appreciation education, a postcard entitled "Congress of Zemstvos and Cities of Russia's South" protesting the pogroms.	4	4
30	The T.G. Shevchenko Prosvita Society's memorandum to the hetman on giving Ukrainian the state language status.	11	4
31	An instruction of the Main Council of the Ukrainian Peasant Society on organizing regional and uiezd councils of the Ukrainian Peasant Society jointly with the Prosvita Society.	6	4
32	Applications for positions in the Kiev-based Prosvita office, in the kindergarten, library and for quitting jobs.	35	4
33	Applications for membership in the Kiev-based Prosvita and discontinuation of membership.	119	4
34	Lists of Prosvita members in 1917/1918 and lists of Prosvita members pending approval by general meetings.	32	4
35	A letter from the chairman of the Sukhumi-based Ukrainian society stating the wish of the council personnel for getting jobs in Ukraine's institutions.	7	4
36	A request from the society of the Central Expedition of the Ukrainian Press to the state government on the establishment with government funds of a book foundation and a letter to Prosvita to back this request.	6	4
37	Materials of the Lecture Committee of the Kiev-based Prosvita society.	12	4
38	Materials on the operation of the Library Committee of the Kiev-based Prosvita Society.	26	4
39	Materials dealing with the organization of a Kiev-based Prosvita kindergarten. Questionnaires filled out by parents wishing to place their children in the kindergarten.	81	4
40	Invitation from Prosvita to attend, on 22 October 1918, the opening of the Kamenets-Podol'sk Ukrainian State University. Invitation from the Council of the Poltava Prosvita to attend the opening in Poltava, on 6 October 1918, the higher Ukrainian school at the History and Philology Department.	1	4
41	Correspondence on the construction of the T.G. Shevchenko People's Duma building in the village of Kirilovtsy, Zvenigorod Uiezd; the unveiling of a monument to T.G.. Shevchenko in Romny.	10	4
42	Correspondence with regard to marking the anniversaries of literary and public activities of D.B.. Markovich, composer M.V.. Lysenko, Professor M.I.. Tugan-Baranovskii, M.V. Levitskii, writers I. S. Turgenev and A. Kashchenko.	22	4

43	Correspondence with the department for adult education of the Ministry of Public Education of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the State Council, school departments of the Cherkassy Uiezd Administration and the Ukrainian Labor Union on matters of adult education.	108	4
44	Correspondence with various establishments on cultural and educational matters.	33	4
45	Correspondence with the Ministry of Education, the Kiev Region people's zemstvo administration, the "Soiuz" publishers about Prosvita's addresses and lists of Prosvita societies.	20	4
46	Correspondence of the Ukrainian University education committee on organizing the Ukrainian University	14	4
47	Correspondence with the council of the Lukianovsky branch of Prosvita in Kiev; on the opening of a school attached to Dykhtiarevskie orphanages by the Kiev region Ukrainian council; about the founding of seminaries for the children of peasants attached to secondary schools by the teachers' council of school No. 76, about using Prosvita's premises.	16	4
48	Correspondence with the Ministry of Public Education about permission for Prosvita to open high schools.	31	4
49	Correspondence of Prosvita's district societies about converting them into Prosvita branches in Kiev.	12	5
50	Correspondence with the Kiev department of the Ukrainian Red Cross Society on joining the Red Cross Society; about the use of premises; correspondence with the Ukrainian construction cooperative "Oselia" on becoming members of the cooperative; with the central Ukrainian cooperative committee about sending a representative to attend a meeting of the organizing committee of the cooperative-educational congress.	4	5
51	A telegram of the chairman of the Ushitskoe uiezd Prosvita society about releasing from jail its council member Znovitskii arrested by Austro-Hungarian authorities.	1	5
52	Notes about local people's self-government.	30	5
53	Notes written by Lobai and addressed to Kiev-based Prosvita societies about opposing the influence of the Russian language on the Ukrainian language, about publishing and translating the work by V. Domanitskii "About Galichina and Bukovina."	11	5
54	Subscription lists to raise funds for cultural and educational institutions and other projects of the society.	21	5
55	An inventory of the Kiev-based Prosvita and calculation of damages sustained when the society's premises remained seized.	11	5

56	Invoices and receipts for money to be spent on various running needs of the society.	61	5
57	Account, deposit and payment books of the Kiev Union of Small Credit Institutions pertaining to current accounts of the Kiev-based Prosvita.	18	5
58	Minutes of Prosvita Council's meetings in Kiev in 1919.	45	5
59	Minutes of meetings of the committee to start a kindergarten, minutes of the meetings held by parents and mothers to arrange a New Year show for their children.	21	5
60	Applications from parents to get their kids admitted to the kindergarten and lists of children.	61	5
61	Minutes of meetings held by the lecture committee of the Kiev-based Prosvita on 1 January 1919.	6	5
62	Personnel of the Kiev-based Prosvita. Lists and correspondence of members of the society's council and members of the committee.	34	5
63	A letter to the Kiev mayor asking permission to hold lectures about Ukrainian literature, history of the Ukrainian language, geography of Ukraine in the premises of the Ukrainian Club /vul. Pushkinskaia No. 1/, with draft texts of the lectures.	19	5
64	Correspondence with the Ukrainian Municipal Council in Kiev on giving streets in Kiev the names of Ukrainian prominent figures.	5	5
65	Correspondence with the elimination committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party /of Borot'bisty/ about making available to the Prosvita society space and funds for moving in there.	7	5
66	Lists of order books that could be bought from various publishers in Kiev.	29	5
67	Pay sheets of Kiev-based Prosvita.	10	5
68	Current account books of the Ukrainian People's Cooperative Bank, a daybook and savings book of the Kiev-based Prosvita society.	45	5
69	Minutes of meetings held by the presidium of Kiev-based Prosvita Council.	5	5
70	Findings of the examination into the way the Kiev-based Prosvita kindergarten was being run.	18	5
71	Pay sheet of the Kiev-based Prosvita.	19	5
72	Letters from those wishing to participate in activities related to schools, libraries, lectures, publishing and theater-related activities of the Kiev-based Prosvita.	5	5
73	Lists of Prosvita members based in the Poltava region and other lists.	5	5

74	Lists of publishers and their addresses for ordering literature and lists of the publishers' representatives.	9	5
75	Minutes of meetings held by the committee of employees of the All-Ukraine Zemstvo Union.	2	5
76	Magazine No. 62 and the 103rd meeting of the All-Ukraine Zemstvo Union Council.	2	5
77	A draft program of the All-Ukraine Peasants' Society.	16	5
78	Draft program of the S-F party.	54	5
79	Correspondence of the Kiev committee of the Ukrainian party of the left-wing socialist-revolutionaries /Borot'bisty/ with Agitprosvit, Narkomvoi about supplies of literature.	2	5