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### Polish-Russian Relations in Stanisław-August Poniatowski's Time. The Partitions of Poland

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## Polish-Russian Relations in Stanisław-August Poniatowski's Time. The Partitions of Poland

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Far into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Republic of Two Nations [Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów], that is, the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, seemed to be one of the most powerful countries in the world. Diverse problems such as the wars with Turkey, Russia and Sweden notwithstanding, the Commonwealth did enjoy military successes, the best evidence of which was undoubtedly the subjugation of Moscow during the Time of Troubles or Jan Sobieski's victory at the Battle of Vienna against the Ottoman Turks led by the Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa, in 1683. Those few, yet still spectacular, victories relaxed the vigilance of the Polish Republic and no significant reforms were introduced to facilitate functioning of the country in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The lack of reforms and a limited royal power contributed to the Republic no longer being an equal to her neighbours: Russia, Prussia and Austria, all of which were developing particularly fast during that period of time. It should not be considered an exaggeration if one would point here to two truly remarkable rulers, that is, Peter I (1689-1725) and Catherine II (1762-1796), the reign of whom lasted 70 years *in toto*.

The ills of the Polish Republic did not come unnoticed. The powers of Europe strived to place their candidates on the Polish throne. During

the Great Northern War, when the Swedish Empire and the Tsardom of Russia were fighting on the Polish land, the choice of the possible candidacies correlated with the results of the subsequent battles, thus turning the scales either in favour of a pro-Russian, Augustus the Strong, or a pro-Saxon, Stanisław Leszczyński. The victory of Russia in that conflict and thus ensuing Russian hegemony in East-Central Europe made the Saxon House of Wettin (Augustus the Strong, Augustus III), which was ruling then in Poland (1697-1763), completely dependent on Russia. Appositely, the next Polish king – Stanisław August Poniatowski – was also elected thanks to Russian money and troops; it was then, during the ‘free election’ period, that the Russian Army crossed the borders of the Polish Republic and threatened those who opposed their candidate.

Stanisław August Poniatowski was fully aware of the fact that his election would not be possible had it not been for Catherine II’s patronage. Neither his knowledge and abilities, nor his breeding were decisive – there were plenty of candidates who vaunted similar or superior qualities. Even his past intimate relations with the Empress could not settle the matter. Catherine just needed a weak, corrupted and, above all, submissive ruler to take control over the whole Republic. She also knew that Prussia and Austria were similarly interested in taking advantage of the falling empire. That being so, during the 1764 convocation Sejm,<sup>1</sup> the Empress and Frederick of Prussia signed a secret treaty in which both parties agreed to start a military action against the Republic the moment they found it useful for their national interests.

Stanisław August Poniatowski’s reign was the time when the Republic was treated as a Russian protectorate. In 1767, a Russian statesman, Nikolay Repnin, crossed the Republic’s borders leading a 20 000 army that exerted a direct influence on the Sejm passing the Treaty of Permanent Friendship with the Russian Empire [Traktat Wieczystej Przyjaźni z Rosją], thus conforming to all the changes introduced by Poniatowski, which strengthened the Republic’s dependency on Russia. What is more, in February 1768, Russia forced through the proceedings on the so-called ‘cardinal laws’, the passing of which retained the *Liberum*

1 Prior to the free election period, a convocation Sejm was summoned after the death of the king.

*Veto*, what further perpetuated the anarchy and chaos in the Republic. Since that moment, any changes to the system were practically impossible; the political and economic situation of the Republic could not be improved. The cardinal laws also included the section about the 'Security of the Faith', what turned out to be one of the reasons for constituting the Bar Confederation. In 1768, a military union consisting of the members of the Polish nobility declared the Republic's independence threatened and her rights – trampled on by the Russian Empire. In fear of the 'rebellion', the Senate Council pleaded the Russian army for help. That is why, in March 1768, there started a war the result of which was the First Partition of Poland. Deluding himself for a long time that it would be possible to avoid the bloodshed, Stanisław August Poniatowski sent the troops under Ksawery Branicki to bar the Confederates from the Russian. Taking control over Bar in June notwithstanding, Branicki could not stop the Confederation from spreading over other lands. What is more, finding a temporary refuge in Turkey, the Bar Confederates renewed the fighting. On the other hand, the constitution of the Confederation resulted in an anti-nobility rising of peasants and Cossacks in the Ukraine, called 'Koliwshczyzna', which claimed thousands of victims. During the very massacre at Uman [Human] there were killed several thousands of Poles and Jews (the number of victims is estimated at 2500-18 000).<sup>2</sup> Till this day, the insurgents are considered the Ukrainian heroes.

Although it was suppressed, the Bar Confederation sparked the resistance to the King and the Russian. "Landless *szlachta* [nobility] flocked to the confederate ranks, driven by obscure yet passionate stirrings of patriotism and religious zeal. Anti-Russian sentiment was running high, hatred or at best mistrust of the king and the politicians in Warsaw marched behind, and a dimly perceived threat to Poland's sovereignty brought up the rear, the whole bound together with conservatism, the bitterness of the magnates, and the grievances of the poor *szlachta*."<sup>3</sup> If the reasons as such were additionally supported by the ever-influential Jesuits in the Republic, who tried to en-

2 Władysław Serczyk, *Hajdamacy*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1972, p. 329.

3 Adam Zamojski, *The Last King of Poland*, London: Endeavor Press Ltd., 2014. Chapter 11.

dow the fighting with the mystical aura, one would get an extremely complicated situation which neither party could control.

The following four years witnessed the constitution of 66 confederations, the aim of which was to oppose the Russian supervision. They were led by Kazimierz Pułaski who later became one of the most significant generals during the fight for American independence (1777-1779) under George Washington. The American history commemorates Pułaski as the father of the American cavalry. He faced his heroic end at the battle of Savannah.<sup>4</sup>

For a long time, the King was hesitating whether he should join the Confederates who were openly fighting against him, or support the Russian army. On the one hand, he voiced his objections to the Russian occupying the fortresses at Kamieniec and Zamość as well as he did not join the 'crusade' against the Turks. What is more, he did consider a possibility of supporting the Confederates in this 'uprising against Russia'.<sup>5</sup> On the other, Poniatowski signed the request for the Russian military assistance to ease the Confederation, thus allowing for being further humiliated by Nikolay Repnin. The longer the Russian-Turkish war continued, the more could Poniatowski negotiate with the Tsardom. He even managed to replace Repnin with more conciliatory Nikolay Volkonsky and forced Catherine II to amend the cardinal laws. A dramatic turn correlated, however, with a sequence of victories of the Russian army. The Empress broke off the negotiations with Poniatowski and ordered him to join the Patriotic Council – a puppet-like unit with no Polish support. The King was left with no choice – had he not agreed, his ministers would have been imprisoned for life. That decision was the last straw for the Confederates. In 1770, they considered Poniatowski's election unlawful, thus forming a statement that Poland needed a new king. Norman Davies, a British historian who has been studying Polish history for years, wrote that the Confederates "generated an idealism, a questioning of fundamen-

4 Władysław Konopczyński, *Kazimierz Pułaski: życiorys*, Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1931.

5 Adam Zamoyski, op. cit., Chapter 12.

tal principles, which had not occurred for decades, and which was to form the starting-point of modern Polish nationalism.”<sup>6</sup>

The troops of the Confederation were several times weaker than the Russian army. However, their dispersion and constant ‘renewal’ made it difficult for the Tsardom to suppress that Polish act of resistance. Many towns, for instance Cracow, change hands repeatedly. Although the Confederates could not achieve a significant victory, they did manage to block some parts of the Russian forces. The most successful events took place in 1770; it was then that Kazimierz Pułaski and Józef Zareba refined the methods of guerrilla warfare, especially unexpected charges of splendid cavalry. Additionally, the Confederates dug in at several large fortresses (Częstochowa, Lanckrona, Tyniec), the capture of which was either time-consuming or demanded heavy siege engines that were then on the Turkish frontiers (the Balkans, the Crimea).

Lasting for four years, the Bar Confederation was marked by constant battles, skirmishes and an atmosphere of the civil war. That being so, the neighbouring empires set about taking possession of a part of the Republic's lands. It was already in 1769 that Frederick II annexed Spisz and Podhale; two years later Prussia also annexed a part of Pomerania. In spite of being believed to be the guarantee of the Republic's safety, not only did Russia make the annexation possible, but also decided to join in. Since the reign of Peter I, Russia considered the Republic the area of her influence and did not want to share that region with other countries. However, in 1771, the Russian diplomacy realized that the war with Turkey was too costly a thing to risk worsening the relations with Prussia, their northern neighbour, who most eagerly awaited the partition of the Republic. Hence, it was decided in 1771 in St. Petersburg that the Tsardom of Russia would annex the Polish Livonia (today's Estonia); detailed treaties were signed between three empires the following year. In 1772, Russia, Prussia and Austria demanded that the Republic confirm the cession of more than 200 000 km<sup>2</sup>. Despite the fact that the Republic did try to protest and even ask for help foreign courts, all those efforts were in vain.

6 Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 1: *The Origins to 1795*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 392.

European empires did not find it beneficial to come into conflict with the partitioners. That is why the 1773 Partition Sejm summoned at the Tsardom's bidding rectified the Treaty of Partition. Minor complaints notwithstanding, the majority of the opposing nobility did not continue their protests as they were either threatened or bribed by the Russian. Nevertheless, three envoys: Tadeusz Rejtan, Samuel Korsak and Stanisław Bohuszewicz did refuse to accept the Russian terror. One of the most dramatic scenes that happened during the Partition Sejm was the so-called 'gesture of despair' made by Tadeusz Rejtan.<sup>7</sup> He lay in the doorway of the Sejm, rent his clothes and begged other members to stop dishonouring the Republic by saying, "On the blood of Christ, I adjure you, do not play the part of Judas; kill me, stamp on me, but do not kill the Fatherland."<sup>8</sup> Although that gesture was nothing more than a symbolic act, the Polish nobility recognized that Rejtan defended the honour of the Republic.

As a result of the First Partition, Russia annexed 92 000 km<sup>2</sup> with 1.3 million inhabitants; Austria took 83 000 km<sup>2</sup> with 2.65 million inhabitants and Prussia settled for 36 km<sup>2</sup> with 580 000 inhabitants. In a sense, Russia came out worst on the First Partition; the Polish Livonia and the counties of Mścisław, Witebsk, Polotsk and Mińsk belonged to the least developed ones, whereas the biggest towns annexed, such as Polotsk, Witebks, Mohylew, Mścisław or Homel were quite poor and of local significance only. Russia took control over the lands that were ethnically neither Polish nor Russian. Prussia annexed the counties of Pomeranian, Chełmno and Rojla Prussia as well as the parts of the counties of: Poznań, Gniezno, Inowrocław and Brześć Kujawski. Those lands were more developed and definitely more important from a strategic point of view. Finally, Austria annexed significant parts of the counties of Cracow, Sandomierz, Ruthenia, Bełz, Podole and Wołyń, thus taking control over such towns as Lwów and Zamość, and getting more 'subjects' than did Prussia and Russia together. The Empress Catherine II had, however, a different goal: she wanted to maintain the Russian Protectorate over the remaining part

7 In 1866, Jan Matejko, one of the most outstanding Polish artists, painted the picture 'Rejtan – upadek Polski', thus commemorating Rejtan's gesture after the First Partition.

8 Qtd. in Norman Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

of the Republic and further manipulate Stanisław August Poniatowski from St. Petersburg.

Catherine II repeatedly stressed that thus annexed lands of the Republic, only temporarily 'torn away' from the Tsardom, had always constituted her inextricable part of Russia; that fact was to be supposedly proved by the history, religion and language used by the inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> Corresponding with a German writer, Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, the Empress cited her own research conducted in St. Petersburg's archives, which unmistakably confirmed the Russian ethnicity of the eastern part of the Republic. Appositely, the leading Russian historians also emphasized the historical rights of the Tsardom to the lands annexed during the First Partition:

Polotsk changed hands 20 times and no treaty was signed without the local protests [translation mine].<sup>10</sup>

There are historians who consider the Bar Confederation the first rising against Russia. Almost 100 000 Poles joined the Confederates, half of them were killed. A majority of the Confederation leaders such as Michał Krasiński, Michał Pac, Joachim Potocki and Józef Sapieha were forced to exile. Those Confederates who did not manage to leave the country or were captured in the course of the fighting (about 14 000 people) were exiled deep into Russia, including Siberia. The research on the life of the Confederates deported to Russia has not been undertaken until recently.<sup>11</sup> One of the well-recognized figures was undoubtedly Maurycy Beniowski, who was exiled to Kamchatka. His half-legendary escape and subsequent adventures, e.g. seizing the ship of the Russian harbour, made him famous in the world. Sailing under the Bar Confederation flag, the ship reached Macau; a couple

9 Александр Пыпин, *Исторические труды императрицы Екатерины II (с документами и письмами Екатерины II)*, „Вестник Европы”, 1901, vol. 5, p. 189; cf. Михаил Б. Сверлов, *Екатерина II как историк*, „Вестник Ленинградского государственного университета им. А.С. Пушкина”, 2014, no. 3, pp. 53-66.

10 Александр Пыпин, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.

11 Анна Крих, Светлана Мулина, *Польские конфедераты в Западной Сибири*, „Przegląd Wschodni”, 2014, vol. XIII, no. 3 (51), pp. 705-747; Светлана Мулина, ‘Бунт конфедератов в Тобольске в источниках и исследовательской литературе’, [in:] *Syberia. Wizje literackie – wizje dokumentalne*, ed. Piotr Głuszkowski, Warszawa: Instytut Rusycystyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2017, pp. 11-20.

of years later Beniowski arrived in Madagascar and proclaimed himself the Emperor.<sup>12</sup> His life is surrounded by a number of myths, which have been further propagated by Polish authors, e.g. Juliusz Słowacki or Waław Sieroszewski.

The First Partition was a blow to the Republic; yet, it did not initiate any radical changes to the country's policy. Despite the fact that the Republic's condition had been deteriorating for over a century, what made the country plunge in chaos, the reforms were not decided on till the end of the 1780s. After the partition, all political parties in the Republic were weak and unable to act. One of the most important persons in the country turned out to be Otto Magnus von Stackelberg, a Russian ambassador, who tried to manoeuvre between the King and the opposition. That period is a gloomy epoch in the history of the Republic; therefore, it is often referred to as the time of the Russian Protectorate. Stanisław August Poniatowski appointed the ambassador 'proconsul'. In one of his letters, Stackelberg wrote, "I find myself in a position similar to those occupied by the rulers of Egypt, Syria or Asia Minor – it was there that the Romans sent attendants and called them their 'ambassadors' or 'proconsuls'. How much humiliation did they have to suffer and why? All that because they and their domains were put at the mercy and denunciation of the confidantes sent by Rome" [translation mine].<sup>13</sup> A majority of the reforms the King wanted to advance were torpedoed by the opposition. On the other hand, Stanisław August Poniatowski was not trusted by the reformers who were convinced that the King supported the Russian. One of the few institutions that were established already during the Partition Sejm was the Commission of National Education, that is, the central educational authority subordinate solely to the King and the Sejm. Nevertheless, since 1773, Catherine II was a skillful power behind the Polish throne.

The year 1788 marked the convocation of the Four-Year Sejm, which is also referred to as the Great Sejm. Initially, its aim was to approve the military alliance between the Republic and Russia but Catherine II was not interested in having any agreements with Poland. The Empress was convinced that the magnates and, above all, those hetmans

12 Maurycy Beniowski, *Pamiętniki*, Warszawa: Volumen, 1995.

13 Mariusz Markiewicz, *Historia Polski 1492-1795*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005, p. 675.

who were in opposition to the King (Seweryn Rzewuski, Franciszek Ksawery Branicki, and Stanisław Szczęśny Potocki) would support her anyway and come against Turks with their private armies. Taking advantage of the Russo-Turkish war, the Sejm focused on reforms. The Polish reformers believed that the contemporary state of affairs was perfect for making an attempt to free the Republic from the Russian supervision. It was the time when Frederick II died, what resulted in the change of the Prussian policy towards Poland. Moreover, the victory of the United States of America over England and thus ensuing ratification of the United States Constitution also contributed to such a conviction. Finally, the most significant arguments for initiating the reforms were the very policy of Stanisław August Poniatowski as well as the Russian conflicts with Sweden and, above all, Turkey, which was being observed by a half of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Unwilling to bring about a Polish-Prusso rapprochement or worry about two wars, Catherine II liberalized her policy towards the Republic and allowed the Great Sejm to continue its work. Those who had a realistic view of the contemporary situation were well aware of the fact that the Empress could send her army to the Republic at any moment as that was the first time that Poles had legally tried to throw off the Russian Protectorate. During the four-year period of the Great Sejm's work, there were active several parties, the opinions of which were significantly divergent. The most influential ones were labelled as the Patriotic Party, Royal Party and Hetmans' Party. The Patriotic Party was strongly backed up by the clergy, what turned out to be an advantage when it comes to the clashes between the Conservatives and supporters of the Russian supervision.<sup>15</sup> Under its Marshal, Stanisław Małachowski, the Four Years' Sejm managed to pass the Constitution of 3 May, which was to thoroughly reform the Republic. The most salient decisions concerned:

- abolishing 'free' elections and the *Liberum Veto*;
- making the monarchy hereditary;
- establishing the army of 100 000 men;

14 Krystyna Zienkowska, *Stanisław August Poniatowski*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998, p. 296.

15 Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, *The Polish Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1788-1792: A Political History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; idem, *Poland's Last King and English Culture: Stanisław August Poniatowski, 1732-1798*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- granting the citizens of the town and the peasantry rights;
- abolishing the union of Poland and Lithuania in favour of a unitary state (the Republic of Poland).

So great were the changes initiated by the Four Years' Sejm that those who were observing its proceedings designated the reforms as the 'Polish revolution.' The adoption of the Constitution of 3 May altered the perception of the nation; up till then, the nation equalled the nobility that consisted of the Sarmatians who were ruling over the ethnic communities living in the country. Since 1791, the nation has encompassed all citizens of the country. Despite the fact that it was still the nobility who were leading the county, the citizens of the towns were also granted rights. What is more, the very approach to the Polish language changed as well since it was to bring together all inhabitants of the Republic.<sup>16</sup> A Polish writer and statesman, Hugo Kołłątaj, claimed that "[t]he native language in its perfected form, if used in education and employed by all divisions of government, will establish the character of the nation incomparably greater than clothing styles. [The native language] will incomparably better meld together all provinces. And that country which can communicate to itself in one language, for which one language is employed in education, law, and government, can truly call itself one nation."<sup>17</sup> The Constitution of 3 May was the first document of that sort in Europe and second – after the American one – in the world. It won the support of the majority of the Republic's society. However, there was a group of the magnates who did not approve of those resolutions maintaining that it was a violation of the noble democracy. The leading figures of that party were a Conservatist, Seweryn Rzewuski, who longed for the return of the 'Golden Freedom' of Augustus II, and Szczyński Potocki, who dreamt of introducing in the Republic the republican system of the United States of America. Having won the war with Turkey in 1792, Catherine II decided to take advantage of the dissatisfaction expressed by a part

<sup>16</sup> Mariusz Markiewicz, op. cit., pp. 680-681.

<sup>17</sup> Hugo Kołłątaj, *Listy Anonima i Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego*, eds. Bogusław Lesnodorski, Helena Wereszycka, vol. 1, Warszawa: PWN, 1954, pp. 369-370. Qtd. in David M. Althoen, *That Noble Quest: From True Nobility to Enlightened Society in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1550-1830*, Diss., Ann Arbor (MI): University of Michigan, 2000, p. 226.

of the nobility and, acting in the name of that threatened freedom, she sent the Russian troops to the Republic.

The Empress had most probably taken the decision about the intervention already in May 1791 but waited to make peace with Turkey, thus avoiding two simultaneous wars. Therefore, the constitution of the Confederation of Targowica on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, which opposed the King and the reforms of the Great Sejm, was solely an excuse for the Empress to start the military intervention. It turned out that the magnates had hatched the plot in St. Petersburg a couple of weeks earlier and, complying with the Empress' wishes, they signed an Act of Confederation.<sup>18</sup> The Polish army tried to stop the Tsarist troops but the latter's military superiority was overwhelming. Although Warsaw did expect a war with Russia, the preparations for the defence of the Polish borders were not advanced. The Republic was suffering both from the lack of money to enlarge her army as well as the shortage of experienced commanders and soldiers. It had been almost 100 years since the Polish army fought in serious wars! The command headquarters were fully aware of the disproportion of power; therefore, there was adopted a tactics of retreating from the Russian troops to Warsaw and avoiding the combat. It was hoped that international mediation would be of help; what is more, other plans included offering the crown of the falling empire to Konstantin – Catherine II's grandson. Unfortunately, in spite of the victorious battle at Zieleńce (18 June) and Kościuszko's defence at Dubienka (18 July), the Russian controlled the majority of the Republic already after two months. That being so, after several defeats of the Polish army, Stanisław August Poniatowski decided for a ceasefire and adhere to the Confederates of Targowica. Some historians believe that in so doing Poniatowski betrayed both the homeland and the Constitution of 3 May. On the other hand, his defenders claim that the King listened to reason and, for fear of an escalation of military violence and enfeeblement of the country, resolved to face a painful, yet inevitable, capitulation. They also high-

18 Similar situations were also taking place in the history of the Soviet Union – under the Protectorate of USSR and thanks to the Russian army, small groups of 'patriots' managed to seize the power in, for instance, Finland (1939), Hungary (1956) or Afghanistan (1979).

light Poniatowski's dead-end situation at that moment. Nevertheless, Targowica has become a symbol of betrayal.

At the beginning of 1793, Russia and Prussia signed a treaty of the Second Partition of Poland. Engaged in the war against France, Austria was forced to accept the Russo-Prusso agreement; otherwise, neither would Prussia help Austria during the war, nor would the Prussian troops contribute to getting the revolution under control. Catherine II was hesitating for a long time whether it would be more beneficial to opt for the protectorate or agree to the next partition; the Prussian pressure and fear of another anti-Russian confederation turned the scales in favour of the latter. This time, the Tsardom expanded its territory by taking the counties of Mińsk, Braclaw, Kijów and Podole as well as parts of Wołyń, Brześć Litewski and Wilno (250 000 km<sup>2</sup>; 3 million inhabitants). The Prussian army occupied the lands of Częstochowa, Sochaczew, Działdowo, also annexing Toruń and Gdańsk (57 000 km<sup>2</sup>; over 1 million inhabitants). Catherine II once again made the Partition Sejm legalize the conquests of the partitioners. All decisions were made at the Grodno castle, which was surrounded by Russian troops. Additionally, a Russian ambassador, Jacob Sievers, bribed a considerable group of deputies and threatened the others with sending them to Siberia. During that last Sejm of the Republic there was ratified the Partition Treaty, which deprived the country of her sovereignty. Moreover, the Republic was forced to reverse the reforms initiated by the Constitution of 3 May. The Partitions were conducted illegally and the Empress maintained only an appearance of acting in accordance with the letter of the law. After the defeat in the Polish-Russo war and the Second Partition, many Polish patriots were forced into exile or handed in their resignation. The international community once again did not react to the Second Partition. It was 1793 and the whole Europe was observing the Revolution in France; the Polish Cause was a side issue.

The Russian were elated at expanding the borders of the Tsardom – not surprisingly that the Russian poets praised Catherine II in their works. One of them was Ivan Dmitriev who compared the Polish lands thus annexed to new laurels in the crown of the Empress; another one – Wasyl Petrov – considered the Empress ‘the goddess’ and advised the Poles to be glad having a new ruler. Appositely, Mikhail Kheraskov

even claimed that those Poles who had just become the Russian citizens did start a new wonderful life in the care of the 'Sun Tsarina'.<sup>19</sup>

The Second Partition made the Republic a shadow of her former self: bled to death with civil wars and conflicts with Russia, deprived of many lands and exhausted after an unsuccessful attempt at introducing significant reforms. Bearing in mind the fact that the partitioning powers were very meticulous about their 'Polish policy' and did not want to let one of them control the whole Republic, a complete erasure of the country from the map of Europe was just a matter of time.

Many Polish patriots did not want to stay passive and just observe the partitioning of the Republic. That is why, already at the end of 1792, there was created a combination of Polish exiles who decided to establish a military dictatorship in the country that would defend the provisions of the Constitution of 3 May. Considered a hero who gained renown during the American War of Independence, Tadeusz Kościuszko was chosen as their leader. On 24 March 1794, Kościuszko read the Act of Insurrection in the Cracow Market Square and was appointed Supreme Commander of the Polish National Armed Forces. The insurrectionists were fighting under the banner of 'Liberty, Integrity, Independence'. All men between the ages of 18-28 were conscripted to Kościuszko's army, which also consisted of many volunteers. The victorious Battle of Raclawice made a memorable impression on people; it was then that the charge of scythe-men, that is, the peasants conscripted by Kościuszko himself, tipped the scales in favour of the insurrectionists. One of them was Wojciech Bartos, who was first to reach the enemy's position and he covered the barrel of a cannon with his cap; that act conferred on him a title of nobility so he later became known as Wojciech Głowacki. Killed during the battle of Szczekociny, Głowacki has been immortalized in the Polish history as a symbol of bravery and valour. To win the support of peasants,

19 Иван Дмитриев, 'Стихи на присоединение польских провинции, Курландии и Семигалии к Российской империи', [in:] idem, *Сочинения*, vol. 1, Петербург: Издание Евг. Евдокимова 1893, pp. 134-135; Василий Петров, 'На присоединение польских областей', [in:] idem, *Сочинения*, ч. 2, Петербург: В Медицинской типографии 1811, p. 146; Михаил Херасков, 'Ода ее Императорскому Величеству на победу в Польше в мае 1793 года', [in:] idem, *Творения вновь исправленные и дополненные*, ч. VII, Москва: Унив. тип. у Хр. Ридигера и Хр. Клаудия, 1803, p. 185; cf.: Jan Orłowski, *Z dziejów antypolskiej obsesji w literaturze rosyjskiej*, Warszawa: WSiP, 1992, pp. 40-42.

Kościuszko issued the Manifesto of Połaniec – a document which freed the peasantry from servitude and halved their dues. The more Kościuszko's standing was growing, the less support Stanisław August Poniatowski was being given. A growing number of people considered him a traitor or a failure who did not manage to defend the Republic. A well-known Russian writer of Polish origin, Thaddeus Bulgarin, recalled that when he was three years old he would Kościuszko and repeat after the adult 'King Poniatowski, full by the grace of God.'<sup>20</sup> However, it is worth remembering that "none of the splendid constitutional and social projects of the reformers were ever put into effect. Neither the Constitution of 3 May nor Kosciuszko's Manifesto of Połaniec were ever implemented."<sup>21</sup> The ideas for changes came too late.

During the 8-month campaign, there were conscripted almost 150 000 people who fought a few victorious battles, what significantly boosted their morale. Nevertheless, the Kościuszko Uprising could not alter the course of history. Kościuszko's leadership talents and valour of many Polish soldiers did not manage to counterbalance the numerical and military superiority of the Russian army. What is more, the Republic also had to repel the attacks of the Prussian troops which were able to increase their power at any moment. Those months of fighting with the Russian was solely the agony of the Republic. On 4 November, the troops under general Alexander Suvorov easily stormed and overran the makeshift defences of Praga and captured Warsaw. Having only 13 000 corrupted Lithuanian men, general Józef Zajączek could not oppose 23 000 splendid Russian soldiers. While conquering the city, the Russian slaughtered the townspeople of Praga. The massacre of about 20 000 civilians and capitulation of Warsaw signified the end of the Polish fighting for independence. Paradoxically, the best Polish troops still could have been used but they were idly standing by the Bzura river and observing the activity of the Prussian troops.

It was already during the Rising when Catherine II decided that, together with Prussia and Austria, she would completely dissolve the Republic. The Third Partition Treaty was signed by the monarchs on 25 October 1795, thus making the Republic cease to exist. This time,

20 Фаддѣй В. Булгарин, *Воспоминания*, Москва: Захаров 2001, p. 34.

21 Norman Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

however, Russia did not have to wait for any resolutions of the Partition Sejm since Stanisław August Poniatowski was forced to abdicate. As a result of the Third Partition, Russia got 120 000 km<sup>2</sup>, what encompassed the lands east of the Neman and Bug rivers (with Vilnius). Austria received 47 000 km<sup>2</sup> with 1.5 million inhabitants (the remainder of Lesser Poland with Cracow, the Lublin area as well as parts of Podlachia and Masovia). Prussia was given control over 48 000 km<sup>2</sup> with over 1 million inhabitants (including Warsaw).

The Partitions of Poland significantly increased the European territory of Russia. After 1795, almost the whole Grand Duchy of Lithuania was located within the border of the Tsardom of Russia. Together with the Polish Livonia, all the lands annexed to Russian in the course of three partitions encompassed 436 000 km<sup>2</sup> with 5.5 million inhabitants. That was undoubtedly one of the greatest successes of Catherine II that could only be compared to conquering the Crimea and victorious wars with Turkey.

During the reign of Catherine II and even long after, the Partitions of Poland were considered a good and reasonable step taken by the Empress. The only charges she had to face concerned empowering Prussia and giving Galicia back to Austria.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only few individuals (e.g. Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin) claimed that the Empress made a mistake by erasing the Republic from the map of Europe. The majority of Russians believed that the partitions restored the Ruthenian lands to the Tsardom; the lands, which had been lost under the Rurik dynasty rule. That conviction is perfectly illustrated by the inscription on medals which were given to deserving soldiers of that time: "I recovered what had been torn away." What is more, a surge of the praises sang of the Empress after the decline of the Republic additionally confirmed the Russian satisfaction derived from annexing the lands between 1772-1795. Vasyl Ruban, Ivan Dmitriev, Ippolit Bogdanovich, Gavrila Derzhavin and many other anonymous authors worshipped the Empress' wisdom and Suvorov's valour, writing about taming, defeating and subjugating that hostile

22 Петр В. Стегний, *Разделы Польши и дипломатия Екатерины II*, Москва: Международные отношения, 2002, p. 5.

Poland.<sup>23</sup> After 1791, Catherine II was demonstrating her kindness towards the Republic to the whole world by presenting herself as the one who brought about peace on those lands. The Empress did her best to be perceived as the guarantor of national peace who had to put the Polish Revolution (*vide* the French Revolution) down; otherwise, the rebellion would have spread on whole Europe. Hence, Catherine II was not a tyrant or aggressor. What is more, she also maintained that, “thus annexed lands constituted only a modest compensation for what Russia had lost” [translation mine].<sup>24</sup> “In her point of view, a return to the idea of Empire ought to signify for the countries conquered by the army of the Empress the restoration of order as well as reopening of the possibilities for them to enjoy the auspiciousness, renown and gratitude toward the Empress.”<sup>25</sup> In 1801, that is, at the very beginning of the reign of Alexander I, a grandson of Catherine II, Nikolay Karamzin, perfectly summarized the Russian approach to taking part in the Partitions of Poland: “The Empress solely took our heritage back when the weak spirit of the decaying Republic lost its power to rule over her territory. Polotsk and Mohylew returned to their homeland as if they were children who, torn away from their mother, have finally come back to the beloved family.”<sup>26</sup> Obviously, the Russian did not have any pricks of conscience due to annexing a majority of the Republic’s lands. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Russian journalists led by Mikhail Katkov even claimed that the Partitions of Poland was Catherine II’s duty; otherwise, Poland could have taken advantage of any potential weakness of Russia and annihilate her.

In recent years, Polish historians have not been that eager to devote their time and energy to studying 18<sup>th</sup>-century history of Poland. 17<sup>th</sup> century and earlier epochs signify the glory of the country and numerous heroic and victorious battles; 19<sup>th</sup> century is the time of romantic uprisings against ‘bad’ partitioning powers as well as the period of martyrdom the Polish have always been prone to, whereas 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

23 Jan Orłowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-46.

24 *Сборник Императорского Русского исторического общества*, vol. 57, p. 144.

25 Andrzej Nowak, “Oświecony” rosyjski imperializm a Polska, [in:] *Polacy a Rosjanie*, ed. Tadeusz Epsztein, Warszawa: Neriton, 2000, p. 70.

26 Николай М. Карамзин, ‘Историческое похвальное слово Екатерине II’, [in:] *idem, Сочинения в III томах*, vol. 1, Санкт-Петербург: В тип. К. Крайя, 1848, p. 275.

tury is the late modern period so always the most interesting one. That being so, 18<sup>th</sup> century is the time of weakness and bad decisions, what result in the decline of the Republic – no wonder that the period is less popular nowadays. Unfortunately, the Polish historiography of the time of the partitions is limited. To illustrate that, it should be mentioned that half a century ago many historians were still eagerly observing an argument between two notable scholars – Emanuel Rostworowski and Jerzy Łojek – over the assessment of Poniatowski's reign.<sup>27</sup> The Russian historiography of that period is significantly poorer.

The Partitions of Poland erased the country from the map of Europe for 123 years. The majority of lands were annexed to Russia, the territory of which was expanded by the Kingdom of Poland after 1815. Despite the fact that many a time the Polish historiography does present the period between 1795 and 1918 as an unceasing fight for independence, that approach seemed to make no difference to the majority of the inhabitants of the former Republic – they did not care whether they were living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or the Tsardom of Russia. The peasants' national identity was still poorly developed and some members of the nobility did only care about restoring their privileges. A significant number of Poles who took part in the Kościuszko Uprising were sent into exile; in the future they would constitute the core of the Polish Legions fighting under Napoleon. Others did accept the fate of the Republic and got used to the fact that from then on they would be living in Russia, Prussia or Austria. When it comes to Russia, the situation was easier; for the next 25 years the Polish did have a possibility of succeeding in St. Petersburg (e.g. Adam Jerzy Czartoryski – an adviser to Alexander I and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Imperial Russia between 1804 and 1806; Michał Ogiński – a composer and a Russian senator; Thaddeus Bulgarin and Józef Sękowski – writers; Aleksander Orłowski – a sculptor; and many others).<sup>28</sup> After the November Uprising and especially the January Uprising that state of affairs changed. Attempts at restoring autonomy within the Tsardom of Russia turned out to be unsuccessful.

27 Cf.: Emanuel Rostworowski, *Ostatni król Rzeczypospolitej; geneza i upadek Konstytucji 3 maja*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1966; Jerzy Łojek, *Stanisław August Poniatowski i jego czasy*, Warszawa: Alfa-Wero, 1998.

28 <http://www.polskipetersburg.pl/>

The Partitions and the defeat for the Kościuszko Uprising did not mean, however, that the Polish resigned themselves to their lost statehood. Almost every generation of Poles during those 123 years tried to regain independence through wars and uprisings (the Napoleonic Wars, November Uprising, Spring of Nations, January Uprising, World War I and Russian Revolution) or diplomatic activity (e.g. the attempts made by the Hôtel Lambert at encouraging European empires to intervene on the Polish behalf). The idea of independence was also propagated by Polish writers led by Adam Mickiewicz who considered Poland 'the Christ of Nations'. Both the Partitions and loss of independence have exerted a great influence on the mental and cultural sphere of contemporary Poland.

*Translated by Agnieszka Matysiak, Ph.D.*

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