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THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH IN EIGHTEEN-CENTURY ALLIANCE TREATIES OF THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES, 1720–72

Abstract

When in 1719 Augustus II of Poland made an attempt to emancipate himself from the influence of the Russian emperor, the latter entered into alliance with the Prussian king, with the intent of preventing emancipation of the monarch and his country. The alliance concluded by Tsar Peter the Great with King Frederick William I of Prussia expressed the substantial interests of both monarchies. It was all about keeping watchful oversight of political and military weakness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and rendering the country isolated in the international arena. The programme established by Petersburg and Berlin remained valid until the end of the eighteenth century and the final, third, partition of Poland. The monarchs guaranteed that they would do everything possible to prevent the Polish constitutional system from altering (keeping the king's rights restrained against the liberties maintained – primarily the *liberum veto* and free election of monarch), and treasury and military reforms from implementing. The preponderance over the Commonwealth implied the participation of Russia in what is termed the concert of the European powers. For the country of the Hohenzollerns, the debilitation of the nobility-based republic was, in turn, an opportunity for increasing its territory, which had been policy energetically pursued since the Great Elector Frederick William's reign (1640–88). For these reasons, the whole series of Russo-Prussian alliance treaties (1726, 1729, 1740, 1743, 1764, 1769, and 1772) comprised provisions regarding Polish affairs. The range of the issues covered by these bipartite agreements was ever-broadening, extending to the dissenters' affair, among other things. Other reasons stood behind the inclusion of clauses related to the Commonwealth in Russian-Austrian treaties. Of substantial importance was the antagonism prevalent in the Reich between Austria and Prussia, which from 1740 onwards turned into acrimonious hostility. The Viennese Burg, which solicited favour from Petersburg, endeavoured to persuade its Russian ally that it was ready and willing to replace the Prussian partner in Poland-related matters of importance to Russia (cf. the treaties of 1726, 1730, 1733, 1746). Discussed is also a never-ratified tripartite agreement of 1732 – the so-called Löwenwolde's treaty – which was momentous for the designs of the contracting parties, as well as the partition treaties of 1772.

Keywords: nobility's freedoms/liberties, free election, *liberum veto*, anarchy, alliance treaties between Russia, Prussia, and Austria

The first decade of the eighteenth century saw the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lose her sovereignty to Russia and became subject to political games pursued by her potent neighbours. The alliance treaties concluded by the neighbouring courts reflected the international position of Poland like in a mirror. For one thing, the treaties rendered the facts as they stood; for another, they constituted the instruments with which the dependence of the weakening Poland on the powerful countries surrounding it was strengthened. As for the intent behind this study, it is, primarily, to list the treaties which referred to Polish affairs; second, to catalogue the problems which, in the conviction of the neighbouring powers, were important enough to be reflected in the alliance treaties. Clauses related to matters involving Poland were included in almost every alliance entered into by the neighbouring states. The provisions regarding the oversight of 'Polish freedoms', maintenance of the free election of monarch by nobles, the *liberum veto*, and the like, became canonical in the obligations of the contracting parties. Another point is to provide an answer to the question concerning a broader background of the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian policies with respect to the Commonwealth. When, under what circumstances and in what situations the decisions were made to include clauses regarding Poland in the alliance arrangements? What was the importance of these provisions in the political plans and intentions of the powers neighbouring on Poland? What were the actual intents behind the euphemistic phrases appearing in the treaties? (For instance, the postulate to ensure the right for Polish nobility to free election meant, in reality, that the candidate obedient to the contracting Courts was to be installed on the throne.) The answers are provided based on the reference literature, taking into account the most recent research carried out with use of the *Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (Arxiv Vnešnej Politiki Rossijskoj Imperii)* in Moscow, recently (from 1992 onwards) made available to Polish historians – a collection of key importance for eighteenth-century East European history. The discoveries made by scholars with use of this resource have thoroughly changed our knowledge of the past in several aspects.

Some of the sources I have used were first published in the eighteenth century. Then on, they were analysed by each generation of historians dealing with the history of the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Rather than being a central focus, these records were usually considered in shorter time intervals – in the context of the Commonwealth's relations with one or two of its adjacent countries, or along the lines of a selected problem: for instance, the dissenter question. The present essay is the first attempt at breaking down the alliance treaty provisions compiled over more than fifty years.

The eighteenth-century *regnum calamitatis* began with the successes achieved by Sweden. Along with the economic and demographic drain of the country, Charles XII's army, having conquered a considerable portion of Polish lands in the first phase of the Northern War, imposed an anti-monarch on the nobility-dominated nation, proclaiming Stanisław Leszczyński king (1704). Subsequently, by forcing (by means of the Treaty of Altranstädt, 1706) the abdication of the legally elected monarch, Augustus II, the Swedish troops paved the way for Tsar Peter the Great, the next suppressor of Polish independence. His victory in the Battle of Poltava (1709) opened an opportunity for him to subdue Poland – as a premeditated initial step in the emperor's further westward expansion. Requested by the Wettin monarch, the tsar reinstated him on the throne of Poland: discredited before his subjects owing to his abdication under the Altranstädt Peace, Augustus was a useful ruler for Muscovy because of these developments. The Russian mediation in the dispute between the king and the nobles, carried out in 1716–17 by a tsarist envoy, supported to this end by the Russian corps stationing within the Commonwealth, testified to Peter the Great's extensive influence in the country. The mediation resulted in the conclusion in Warsaw of a treaty approved by the 'Silent' Sejm (*Sejm niemy*) of 1 February 1717. The constitutions adopted at this session, which were a *terminus post quem non* sovereignty of Poland, petrified the nobility's freedoms and privileges whilst also conclusively burying Augustus II's absolutist daydreams. The permanent unit of the army was reduced to 24,000 (in fact, funds were available for a dozen-or-so thousand), thereby conditioning the political and military debility of the Commonwealth. The Russian emperor had almost all his goals fulfilled – apart from his endeavours for officially becoming a guarantor of the Warsaw Treaty, which ended as a fiasco. Soon,

it turned out that withdrawal of the destructive constitutions was impossible without Russia's consent.¹

I

LAST YEARS OF AUGUSTUS II'S REIGN (1720–32)

Pushed into a dead-end situation, and in the danger of losing his throne again, the Polish king made in 1718 an attempt at emancipating himself from the tsar's influence, seeking for a foothold in Vienna and London. The English and Austrian politicians, seriously disturbed by the Åland bargaining with Sweden which was being brought to a conclusion by Peter, the tsar's actions in Poland and, even more importantly, in the Reich (especially, his interventions in Schleswig, Holstein, and Mecklenburg), resolved to counteract the shifting of the Russian politics' centre of gravity toward the West. On 5 January 1719, the ministers of Emperor Charles VI, George I – as elector of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, and Augustus II – as the ruler of Saxony, signed an alliance treaty in Vienna, whose aim was to expropriate the Russians from Poland and the German states, and to reduce

¹ Józef Feldman, *Polska w dobie wielkiej wojny północnej 1704–1709* (Kraków, 1925); *idem*, *Polska a sprawa wschodnia, 1709–1714* (Kraków, 1926); *idem*, 'Geneza konfederacji tarnogrodzkiej', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xlii (1928), 493–531; Józef Gierowski, *Między saskim absolutyzmem a złotą wolnością. Z dziejów wewnętrznych Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1712–1715* (Wrocław, 1953); *idem*, *Traktat przyjaźni z Francją w 1714. Studium z dziejów dyplomacji* (Warszawa, 1965); *idem*, *W cieniu wojny północnej* (Wrocław, 1971); *idem*, 'Dyplomacja polska doby saskiej', in Zbigniew Wójcik (ed.), *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, ii: 1572–1795 (Warszawa, 1982), 331–70; Vladimir D. Koroljuk, *Polska i Rosja a wojna północna* (Warszawa, 1954), *passim*; Valerij E. Vozgrin, *Rossija i evropejskie strany v gody severnoj vojny. Istrorija diplomatičeskix otnošenij v 1697–1710 gg.* (Leningrad, 1986); Vladimir A. Artamonov, *Rossija i Reč' Pospolita posle poltavskoj pobedy, 1709–1714 gg.* (Moskva, 1979); Jacek Burdowicz-Nowicki, Piotr I, *August II i Rzeczpospolita, 1697–1706* (Kraków, 2010); Wojciech Kriegseisen, *Tarnogrodzka konfederacja (1715–1717). Projavlenie vnutrennego krizisa šlaxetskoj Reči Pospolitoj ili rezul'tat konflikta v otnošenijax Rossii s Saksoniej*, in Boris V. Nosov, Kirill A. Kočegarov and Ljudmila P. Marnej (eds.), *Rossija, Pol'sa, Germanija v evropejskoj politike: istoričeskij opyt, vzaimodiejstvija i imperativy sotrudničestva* (Moskva, 2012), 101–15. I primarily refer herein to the 'canonical' studies by Russian, Prussian, and Austrian state historiographers, and subsequently, to the most recent studies which have shed a new light on the issues discussed or completely altering the hitherto-known picture. Reconstruction of the consequent historiographic discussion would have resulted in uncontrolled expansion of the footnotes.

the planned conquests from Sweden. The alliance was also targeted against the Stockholm Court. The coalition members were disturbed by Sweden's readiness for far-reaching concessions to the demands of the Russian emperor. Their concern was that a Swedish-Russian alliance might soon be formed and become an impulse for igniting a northern war again. The treaty was also, indirectly, focused on Prussia, should the latter have opted against Peter the Great. From the standpoint of Polish interests, the Vienna alliance could have proved momentous: the Commonwealth could namely have been included in the system of international alliances, its sovereignty, temporarily lost to Russia, restored. The allies guaranteed the territorial integrity of Poland, with Augustus II remaining its monarch. They moreover undertook to provide assistance in pushing out the Russian troops which continuously occupied Poland-Lithuania, contrary to what was provided by the Warsaw Treaty of 1716. The other commitments included taking joint action against alien troops in case they invaded the Commonwealth's territory, defence of Gdansk, and helping deal with the scheming and conspiracies of the neighbouring states. The agreement comprised a very important clause, though: its articles related to Poland would not be implemented unless Poland ratified the treaty. In Polish legislative system, only a parliamentary assembly was empowered to ratify international arrangements. The *sejm* that was in session in the late 1719 and early 1720 adopted no laws and thus did not endorse the treaty "which was to prevail for the salvation of the Commonwealth".²

The termination of the parliamentary session was mainly owed to the diplomats of the tsar and of the Prussian king. The Russian preponderance in Poland, against which the Viennese allies stood out, was the indispensable condition for Peter to build his mighty position in the West. Frederick William I was no less substantially interested in keeping the Commonwealth in inertia: after all, a weak Poland offered an opportunity for territorial gains, Russia permitting.

² Quoted after Władysław Konopczyński, *Dzieje Polski nowożytnej* (Warszawa, 2003), 530–1; for the text of the Vienna Treaty, incl. secret articles, see Per Sörensson, 'Kejsaren, Sverige och de Nordiska Allierade. Bilaga', *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (1929), 236–47. Cf. Johann G. Droysen, 'Die Wiener Allianz vom 5. Januar 1719', in *idem, Abhandlungen zur neueren Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1876), 285–305. The ratification of the Vienna Treaty by the Commonwealth is dealt with in detail by Urszula Kosińska, *Sejm 1719–1720 a sprawa ratyfikacji traktatu wiedeńskiego* (Warszawa, 2003).

Since the 1667 political testament of Frederick William ('the Great Elector'), the conquests of new territories ranked amongst the chief principles of the Prussian monarchy.³ The shared purpose of Petersburg and Berlin in respect of the Polish state was expressed in the declaration signed in Potsdam on 17 February 1720 (bargained on since 1719), in whose Art. 2 the monarchs committed to prevent Poland's accession to the Vienna Treaty. That both courts were concerned about the Commonwealth's conduct under its internal inertia is testified by the provisions concerning the sustainability of the 'noble liberties' (this mainly referred to the *liberum veto*, free election, and the permanent army unit as restricted by the 1717 *sejm*). The intervention in the internal affairs of the powers' neighbour penetrated as deep as the election of a successor to Augustus II. The foreign courts conspired against admitting the Saxon succession in Poland, be it during the reigning monarch's lifetime (*vivente rege*) or after his death. To ensure efficiency, they agreed that in respect of Polish affairs the contracting parties should communicate with each other and, if forced by the circumstances, take common action.⁴ Likewise, a provision ensuring the permanence of Polish political system was superimposed by Russia on Sweden, as this country was also falling into increasing dependence on the country of tsars – a trend sealed by the defence treaty signed on 22 February/4 March 1724.⁵

Although the death of Peter the Great in 1725 implied a temporary weakening of the Russian position in the international arena, the intentions behind the policy practised by this Court in respect of Poland remained unaltered; in any case, this policy was continually run by Vice-Chancellor Andrej Ivanovič Osterman (Heinrich Johann Friedrich Ostermann), one of the closest associates of the deceased emperor. The

³ Stanisław Salmonowicz, *Prusy, dzieje państwa i społeczeństwa* (Poznań, 1987), 122.

⁴ Friedrich F. (Fëdor F.) Martens (ed.), *Recueil des traités et conventions conclus par la Russie avec les puissances étrangères*, v (St. Pétersbourg, 1880), 199–200. For the Russian and Prussian diplomatic services, oversight of maintenance of the nobility's freedoms was a fundamental long-term goal, with the aim to sustain the free election and appointment to the throne of Poland their most convenient candidate after the death of Augustus II. In this particular respect, Józef Gierowski is wrong in approaching this watchful oversight as an interim occurrence; cf. *idem*, 'Dyplomacja polska doby saskiej', 341.

⁵ Cf. Nils Ahnlund, 'Sveriges sista fred med Polen. "Vänskapens återställande" efter det stora nordiska kriget och dess förhistoria', *Karolinska Förbundets Årsbok* (1915), 279–83.

objectives of the Russian policy in the early reign of Catherine I were exposed by Osterman in his *Memorial on Poland and Prussia* from late March 1725: the Commonwealth was expected to remain passive in the international arena; as for the internal affairs, relaxation was expected from Poland so as not to force Russia, now weaker after Peter's death, to any serious intervention. The question of Courland was approached in a purely instrumental manner: Poland was deceived by a chance to retrieve the land. Formally, Courland remained part of the Commonwealth until 1795 whilst in fact, since 1711, it was controlled by Russia. Plans were made to tempt Augustus II by a prospect of support for the Saxon succession in Poland; in parallel, anti-succession phobias amidst nobles were intended to be incited in the contacts with them. As far as Polish affairs were concerned, Russia was willing to cooperate with Prussia; however, while understanding the two countries' shared interest in maintaining the weakness of Poland, Russia in fact did not intend to share its protectorate with Prussia (not yet on a *de iure* basis). It was all about preventing a partition of the Commonwealth – the idea that was particularly dear to the Berlin Court (Frederick William I was deceived with a prospect for Courland).⁶

To implement its vested interests, Russia sought a strong ally in the West – and the Vienna Burg came as a reply. Ostermann assumed that the purposes of the House of Habsburg and those of the Romanov rulers were convergent in respect of Poland as well as Turkey, the other country of importance for both empires. In the Vice-Chancellor's opinion, Petersburg and Vienna equally cared about preventing any constitutional reform in Poland (such as auctioning the army) that would reinforce the position of the monarch and the state. For Austria, obstructing the reforms in Poland was an issue not on a par with the Russian designs. The two countries shared, in turn, long-term interest as far as Turkish affairs were concerned, as convincingly evidenced by Russia's entering the war against Turkey in the Holy League period and, subsequently, the wars against the Porte waged by Peter the Great.⁷

⁶ Urszula Kosińska, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika. Między aliansem wiedeńskim i hanowerskim (1725–1730)* (Warszawa, 2012), 448–53.

⁷ The situation of Poland and Saxony in the European political arena in the latter half of the 1720s is broadest discussed – with use of Prussian, Austrian, Russian, and Saxon archival materials – in Kosińska, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika*, 21–108; also, cf. Walter Leitsch, 'Der Wandel der österreichischen Rußlandpolitik in den Jahren 1724–1726', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., vi (1958),

The Austrian-Russian alliance entered into on 6 April 1726 determined the Burg's political system for a number of decades. One of the most momentous and longest-surviving eighteenth-century alliance arrangements (its validity was formally established for twenty years), the treaty – primarily focused against Turkey – moreover provided a potential to collaborate on essential German affairs. A clause was included, on request of Charles VI, providing for the option to co-opt Augustus II to the agreement – as king of Poland or, in case the Commonwealth turned down the opportunity to join the alliance, as elector of Saxony (Art. 9–10). Nonetheless, the alliance with the tsarist empire had to result in the withdrawal of Vienna from proactive policy in respect of Poland;⁸ all the more that prior to signing the Viennese treaty, the Austrian Court joined, as from 16 April 1726, the aforementioned 1724 Swedish-Russian treaty which provided for maintaining the Polish freedoms.⁹ Soliciting the recognition by the potent European powers of a pragmatic sanction that would secure the succession of Maria Theresa in the successor countries, the Austrian emperor recognised the primacy of Russia in Eastern Europe and its leading role in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Like Prussia did in 1720, Austria now, in 1726, sacrificed its independent policy with respect to the Warsaw Court in favour of Petersburg.¹⁰

From the standpoint of Polish interests, far more dangerous provisions appeared in the subsequent Russian-Prussian treaties, of 1726, 1729, and 1730. The contracting Courts, in re-establishing the treaty after Peter I's death and Catherine I's coming to power, intended to keep watch over Poland's inertia, and undertook to preserve the country's existing political system and to prevent auctioning of the army.

It was known in Petersburg that the Prussian king intended, in the first place, to make territorial acquisitions. The Berlin-based

33–91; Hans Bagger, *Russlands alliancepolitik efter freden i Nystad* (København, 1974), 57.

⁸ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i (St. Pétersbourg, 1874), 40.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 29–30 (save for two separate articles); for the entirety, see the treaty base Heinz Duchhardt and Martin Espenhorst (ed.), *Europäische Friedensverträge der Vormoderne* (Leibniz-Institut für europäische Geschichte, Mainz), <<http://www.ieg-friedensvertraege.de>> [Accessed: 29 July 2017].

¹⁰ Albrecht Philipp, *August der Starke und die pragmatische Sanktion* (Leipzig, 1908); Leitsch, *Der Wandel*, 33–91; Sergej G. Nelipovič, *Sojuz dvuglavyh orlov. Russko-avstrijskij vojennyj al'jans vtoroj četverti XVIII v.* (Moskva, 2010), 21–33.

government thought about Polish Pomerania (the Royal Prussia) or Courland (more on this follows below), as well as about the duchies of Jülich and Berg situated on the lower Rhine. Another expectation of the Berlin Court was that Saxony would be subdued within the Reich. The Lusatian margraves were the Prussian authority's special object of lust. From the standpoint of Prussian interests, in terms of chance for territorial gains, keeping Poland weak and remaining allied with Russia was a must. However, Russia did not intend to share with its Prussian partner the preponderance over Poland achieved under Peter the Great.¹¹

A secret article in the alliance of 3/14 October 1726 addressed the issue of election after Augustus II's death in a broader manner. Prussia and Russia undertook to indicate and support the candidate who would ensure good neighbourly relations and sustainable constitutional status quo – so as to make the Commonwealth permanently politically lethargic.¹² A declaration of Tsarina Catherine I, attached to the treaty, announced that Augustus II would be replaced after his death by “*ein geborener polnischer Edelmann*”.¹³ The agreement moreover provided that both parties, if need be, would counteract, including taking up arms, against any attempt at disturbing the free election procedure. In reality, it was about not admitting any other European power to the election game and preventing the election of a candidate who might threaten the status quo prevailing in the Commonwealth. Stanisław Leszczyński, son-in-law of Louis XV of France since 1725, was one such potential candidate. Any *vivente rege* election, or abdication of Augustus II, paving the way for the Saxon *Kurprinz* to ascend the throne at Warsaw, was excluded – all the more so that news about such endeavours had reached Berlin and Moscow.¹⁴ In all matters

¹¹ Johann G. Droysen, *Geschichte der preussischen Politik*, iv, Pt. 2 (Leipzig, 1869), 321–453.

¹² Martens, *Recueil des traités*, v, 248.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 249.

¹⁴ Droysen, *Geschichte der preussischen Politik*, iv, Pt. 3; Paul Haake, ‘La Société des antisobres’, *Neues Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, xxi (1900), 241–54. The Saxon-French negotiations are investigated in Emanuel Rostworowski, *O polską koronę. Polityka Francji w latach 1725–1733* (Wrocław, 1958); for a completed picture, see: Urszula Kosińska, ‘Polityka zagraniczna Augusta II w ostatnich latach jego panowania – rozważania nad książką Emmanuela Rostworowskiego “O polską koronę”’, in Zofia Zielińska and Wojciech Kriegseisen (eds.), *W kręgu badaczy dziejów politycznych XVIII wieku. Feldman, Rostworowski, Michalski* (Warszawa, 2010), 45–56; *eadem*, ‘August II i królewicz Fryderyk August w latach 1725–1729 a problem

regarding the Commonwealth, the diplomats of the new Russian tsarina and of the Prussian king were expected to strictly collaborate, “*miteinander de concert zu gehen und aus einem Munde zu sprechen*”.¹⁵

The secret section of the 1726 treaty contained one more component which referred to the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, then within the Prussian orbit and, *de facto*, under the Russian rule. It was recognised in Moscow that Frederick William I dreamed of taking over the territory through marriage of a Prussian duke with Anna Ivanovna, Courlandian widow princess, niece of Peter the Great. Russia primarily sought to exercise complete control of the Duchy, and thus prevented the promotion of a Prussian or Saxon claimant to the throne at Mittau, and incorporation of the Duchy into the Commonwealth. Meanwhile, in late June 1726 (a few months before the treaty under discussion), the estates of Courland installed on the ducal throne Maurice of Saxony, a natural son of Augustus II. The Court on the Neva and its counterpart based on the Spree feared that in case of an issueless death of Courland's duke Ferdinand Kettler, the Dresden Court would be willing to enforce this right, whilst Poland, in line with the legal titles held by it, would attempt to incorporate the Baltic territories into its own administrative system.¹⁶ In a secret article, Prussia and Russia undertook to counteract Poland's plans to incorporate Courland, even if with use of force. Moreover, Prussia and Russia declared they would counteract anything that might lead to alteration of the duchy's socio-political system and diminish the privileges of local nobles. This was an euphemism, though: in reality, the intent was to violate this regulation. The debatable problem of who was to be appointed to the throne at Mittau was not discussed; it was however agreed that a common action in this respect would be launched in a future.¹⁷

The Russo-Prussian treaty of 1729, concluded after Peter II's ascension to the throne of Russia, repeated most of the previously

elekcji *vivente rege'*, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cixx, 2 (2012), 305–21; *eadem*, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika*, *passim*.

¹⁵ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, v, 250. Also, cf. the provisions of the 1729 treaty, *ibidem*, 269–74, and that of 1730, *ibidem*, 286–90.

¹⁶ Bagger, *Russlands alliancepolitik*, 73–5; Klauspeter Strohm, *Die kurländische Frage (1700–1763). Eine Studie zur Mächtepolitik im Ancien Régime* (Berlin, 1999), 67–117. Cf. the constitution of the 1726 *sejm* on annexation of Courland to the Commonwealth, Jozafat Ohryzko (ed.), *Volumina legum*, vi (Petersburg, 1860), 404–7.

¹⁷ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, v, 245.

agreed points, the only amendment referred to a Saxon succession in Poland. The agreement did not preclude the member of the House of Wettin from pretending. Peter II's rule was marked with passiveness in Russian politics and a more tolerant anti-Saxon attitude on the part of Berlin. Yet, the Dresden-based Court, caught up in cabinet mutinies after the death of Jacob Heinrich von Flemming, was unable to take advantage of the prosperous situation.¹⁸

The subsequent Russo-Prussian treaty, executed in 1730, following Anna Ivanovna's ascension to the tsarist throne, contained a new thread related to Polish affairs. The contracting monarchs undertook, in a separate article, to protect the Evangelicals and the Orthodox who since the middle of the seventeenth century had had their political – and, to a degree, also confessional – rights restricted in Poland. The so-called dissenters were offered care and support in their endeavours to have their rights reinstated.¹⁹ Provisions offering favour to Polish Protestants had first appeared in the Treaty of Oliwa (1660) and in the subsequent Prusso-Swedish treaties (of 1696, 1703, and 1707). The inducement to include the dissenters' affair in the treaty obligations endorsed by the Protestant countries of the time was provided by the so-called Bloodbath of Thorn (Toruń, in Royal Prussia): on 16 and 17 July 1724, the burgomaster and several members of the Lutheran municipality were sentenced to death. The clauses regarding the Evangelical minority were contained, *inter alia*, by the Hanoverian Alliance of 1725 that allied Prussia, France, and Great Britain.²⁰

It was the Tumult of Toruń that the aforementioned Ostermann's *Memorial on Poland and Prussia* of March 1725 referred to. The supervisor of Russian foreign policy approached the dissenter question thoroughly instrumentally: his political plans made it a tool with which to manage the international situation and incite resentments

¹⁸ Nelipovič, *Sojuz dvuglavyh orlov*, 56–77; Kosińska, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika*, 495–513.

¹⁹ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, v, 290–1.

²⁰ Viktor Loewe (ed.), *Preussens Staatsverträge aus der Regierungszeit König Friedrichs I.* (Leipzig, 1923), 291; cf. Józef Feldman, *Sprawa dysydencka za Augusta II* (Kraków, 1924); Gotthold Rhode, *Brandenburg-Preußen und die Protestanten in Polen 1640–1740* (Leipzig, 1941), *passim*. For important relevant remarks, see also Andrew C. Thompson, *Britain, Hannover and the Protestant Interest 1688–1756* (Woodbridge, 2006), 97–132.

against the Nobility's Republic among the European public opinion. The issue was also meant to contribute to reinforcement of Russian preponderance in Poland, and was used as means of pressure on the Commonwealth. Ostermann believed that the Russian diplomatic service ought to make use of the Thorn affair, and of the overall problem of the Evangelical minority in Poland, adroitly enough to incite the Protestant countries encouraged by the Moscow Court to continue their pressures on Poland and, in parallel, to inspire the Poles to request the Russian ruler – as a moderate and neutral party – for mediation and resolution of the conflict.²¹ A separate article in the 1730 treaty, which had been postulated by Prussia as part of the bargaining for alliance in 1726, was unique in that it joined the Protestants and the Orthodox into one unit that enjoyed support from Berlin and Petersburg. These two courts, in turn, using the opportunity to stand up in defence of their fellow believers, claimed the right to intervene in the Commonwealth's home affairs.²² The Russian party considered the expressions of commitment in defence of Orthodox believers founded upon the Treaty of Perpetual Peace of 1686, also called the Grzymułtowski Peace Treaty. Polish Evangelicals had for years been seeking support for their postulates with the Berlin Court. The latter willingly took advantage of the problem, seeing these postulates as a convenient instrument of influence – in the talks with the Warsaw Court and in a broader international arena.

Extending Russian custody over the dissenters' affair, which was solicited by the Prussian Court at least since the early 1720s, was of crucial importance to Prusso-Russian relations and to the position of the Berlin Court in the Commonwealth. Based on later sources, it becomes apparent that Russia did not, in reality, intend to admit Prussia to meddle into the internal affairs of the Nobility's Republic and afterwards wanted to discount the confessional conflict on its own – as additionally testified by the fact that no such clauses reappear in the period 1720–9.²³ The Petersburg Court actually intended to make

²¹ Moscow, Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (*Arxiv Vnešnej Politiki Rossijskoj Imperii*), fond 79, op. 1, 1725, no. 16, c. 12. I am indebted to Prof. Urszula Kosińska, for having benevolently given me access to excerpts from the archive cf. *eadem*, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika*, 451–2.

²² Cf. Loewe (ed.), *Preussens Staatsverträge*, 306, n. 3.

²³ Lucian Ryszard Lewitter, 'Peter the Great and the Polish Dissenters', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, xxxiii, 80 (1954), 75–101; Wojciech Kriegseisen, *Die*

an instrumental use of the dissenters' affair, as a convenient tool for increasing its political influence – and, a powerful means of preventing the emancipation of Polish Prussia-related policies, which otherwise might have been supported by Polish Evangelicals.

By the late 1720s/early 1730s, Poland's situation had grown tough. Incapable of playing an autonomous part on the European political scene, the Commonwealth neighboured on powers which aimed at securing her international passivity. The rule of Tsarina Anna Ivanovna reconfirmed, between 1730 and 1740, the tsarist Empire's full-fledged participation in the 'European concert of superpowers' and brought about a consolidation of Russian foreign policies, which in respect of Poland meant a resumption of the principia of Peter the Great. This was reflected in the international treaties entered into by the Russian Empire.

II

AFTER THE DEATH OF AUGUSTUS II AND IN THE TIME OF AUGUSTUS III (1732–62)

As the death of Augustus II was expected since the late 1720s, the succession to the Warsaw throne triggered growing interest among European diplomatic circles.²⁴ In the year 1730, the king joined an anti-pragmatic coalition, placing his hopes for the implementation of the Polish and Austrian succession plans in the Versailles. The Wettin monarch's anti-imperial turn led to outrage and concern at the Burg, where it was expected that the elector would demand the Bohemian crown, if not the imperial throne, for his son, married to Charles VI's niece.

The rulers residing on the Danube did not consent for a *Kurprinz* to be elected to the Polish throne. Stanisław Leszczyński was resolutely excluded as a candidate: his reign would imply increased significance of France in the east of Europe, it was presumed. Louis XV's son-in-law

Protestanten in Polen-Litauen (1696–1763). Rechtliche Lage, Organisation und Beziehungen zwischen den evangelischen Glaubensgemeinschaften (Wiesbaden, 2011), 241–72; Jacek Burdowicz-Nowicki, 'Polityka Piotra I w związku ze sprawą toruńską 1724 r.', in Urszula Kosińska, Dorota Dukwicz and Adam Danilczyk (eds.), *W cieniu wojen i rozbiorów. Studia z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej XVIII i początków XIX w.* (Warszawa, 2014), 77–102.

²⁴ Kosińska, *August II w poszukiwaniu sojusznika, passim.*

did not enjoy good reputation in Petersburg, where his submissiveness to Sweden and close relationships with Turkey were kept in mind. Prussia continuously strove for keeping the Commonwealth isolated, politically and militarily weak. The ‘Treaty of the Three Black Eagles’ (also called the Löwenwolde’s Treaty), whose phrasing was completed in Berlin on 13 December 1732 (and which was never ratified), meaningfully expressed these strivings and interests of Poland’s neighbouring countries.²⁵

The contracting Courts intended to undertake action during the interregnum in Poland for the election of a candidate who would ensure preservation of the noble freedoms and unchangeability of the Commonwealth’s constitutional system. This actually repeated the purport of the secret treaties entered into between 1720 and 1730. The signatories moreover undertook to defy the potentially impending French and, possibly, Turkish military intervention whilst not admitting a “violation of the principle of free election”. This particular point was meant as a pretext for intervention in the elections made by Poles, which boiled down to preventing election of a candidate unacceptable to the neighbouring powers. To this end, the signatories intended to gather military troops near the Polish border: 16,000 cavalymen and 14,000 infantrymen from Russia; twelve infantry battalions and twenty cavalry squadrons from Prussia; and, 4,000 of cavalry and a regiment from Austria.

Let us remind that, following the reduction of 1717, Poland formally had 24,000 but in reality some 16,000 soldiers altogether. Russian, Prussian and Austrian troops would have entered the Commonwealth’s territory had the election been completed before Augustus II’ death or had the *szlachta* voted Stanisław Leszczyński. In a secret article, the desirable candidate, Portuguese infant Manuel de Bragança, was pointed out to: “ein Subjectum ... welches für die Erhaltung der Respublicq-Freiheit, und dermaligen Verfassung, der Ruhe mit

²⁵ Jerzy Dygdała, ‘Die Politik Österreichs gegenüber Polen während des Interregnums im Jahre 1733’, in Walter Leitsch, Stanisław Trawkowski and Wojciech Kriegseisen (eds.), *Polen und Österreich im 18. Jahrhundert* (Warszawa, 2000), 123–43; *idem*, ‘Gra pozorów: zabiegi dyplomacji cesarskiej o rosyjską interwencję zbrojną w Rzeczypospolitej w 1733 r.’, in Kosińska, Dukwicz and Danilczyk (eds.), *W cieniu wojen i rozbiorów*, 137–60. The circumstances behind the ‘Three Black Eagles’ treaty call for detailed research involving the Russian archival materials (unavailable for so many years to Western scholars).

denen benachbarten, mithin der guten Einverständniss mit Allerseits Höchsten Paciscenten anständig seie". The three courts equipped their diplomats with 36,000 ducats each for the election campaign of the Portuguese prince, hoping that the funds will be reimbursed after the lucky outcome by John V of Portugal or the infant himself.²⁶ On request of Austria, which feared excessive territorial appetites of Prussia, the treaty in question contained a clause protecting the Commonwealth against a partition. The contracting courts namely agreed that none of them would demand remuneration in the form of a Polish territory for Manuel's elevation to the throne, in case neither he nor his brother returned to the contracting parties the cost incurred on the intervention. This was justified by the need to avoid making the nobility-dominated society averse to the new ruler; with a loss of popularity among his subjects, he might have turned useless in respect of the neighbouring countries' designs.²⁷ The contracting parties intended to communicate with respect to the future king's match, and to cooperate in the formation of (as it was described) a royalist party in the Commonwealth. What they had in mind in reality was, clearly, a faction that would favour the allies in superimposing their own candidate on Poland. In the event that the Portuguese prince was not to be elected, the signatories stipulated for themselves the right to propose another candidate for the crown; very importantly, the Saxon candidacy was not precluded.²⁸

Also, the issue of Courland was touched upon. The overt section of the treaty guaranteed that the constitutional status quo would be preserved and the new prince freely elected by the estates. A restriction was introduced, though, targeted at a weakened position of the pretender: the new ruler would have to disown his possessions not situated within the duchy. In the secret section, it was agreed – the idea cherished by the Prussian party – that Augustus William, Frederick William I's elder son, would come to the throne at Mittau.²⁹

²⁶ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 312–15, 319–21; cf. Urszula Kosińska, 'Could a Portuguese Prince become King of Poland? The Candidacy of Don Manuel de Bragança for the Polish Throne in the Years 1729–33', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, xciv, 3 (2016), 497–508.

²⁷ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 321.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 321–2.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 315–18, 322–4; cf. Strohm, *Die kurländische Frage*, 119–33.

The Löwenwolde's Treaty was aimed, in the first place, against France and, to a lesser degree, against Saxony. It should be noted that the phrasing of the would-be alliance did not mention that election of the Saxon *Kurprinz* would be prevented – although such a provision was envisioned in the initial drafts.³⁰ The clause stipulating for the Courland estates the freedom to elect a duke debilitated the promises made once to the Prussian king. The Löwenwolde's Treaty marked a breakthrough in the history of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: it was for the first time that the three surrounding potent powers united to decide the fate of their inertia-immersed neighbour.

After the death of Augustus II (1 Feb. 1733), the decision-makers in Vienna, Petersburg and Berlin fairly soon realised that the election of Prince Manuel could not be carried out – the only candidate to potentially oppose Stanisław Leszczyński being, instead, the deceased king's son. Pursuant to a defence treaty concluded on 16 July of that year in Vienna, the Saxon elector recognised the pragmatic sanction, receiving the promise of Austrian and Russian support for his ambitions for the Polish crown.³¹ The agreement contained a series of important clauses. Frederick Augustus was to be elected by the nobles by means of free election, and undertook not to take, in the future, any steps that might lead to an alteration of the political system in the Commonwealth and eradication of Polish freedoms (Art. 6).³² Article VIII of the Treaty moreover expressed the elector's obligation to satisfy the Russian claims.³³ These were explained by the Russo-Saxon defensive treaty which, in an ultimatum form, was submitted on 10 July 1733 to the Saxon diplomats in Petersburg and ratified by Frederick Augustus on 1 September that year. What it was about was to guarantee the sustainability of the Polish system (Art. 3 [secret]), corroborate the obligatory role of the Grzymułtowski Treaty (the 'perpetual peace' of 1686), quitting by the Polish party of its pretence for Livonia – the land once promised by Peter I to Augustus II in the Treaty of Narva (1704, Art. 1 [secret]), preventing the inclusion of Courland in

³⁰ Droysen, *Geschichte der preussischen Politik*, iv, Pt. 3, 195.

³¹ Vladimir I. Ger'e (Guerrier), *Bor'ba za pol'skij prestol w 1733 godu* (Moskva, 1862); Rudolf Beyrich, *Kursachsen und die polnische Thronfolge 1733–1736* (Leipzig, 1913), 13–41; Walter Strobl, *Österreich und der polnische Thron 1733*, PhD diss., Vienna University, 1950; Kosińska, *Could a Portuguese Prince become King of Poland, passim*.

³² Friedrich A.W. Wenck, *Codex juris gentium recentissimi*, i (Lipsiae, 1781), 708.

³³ *Ibidem*, 711.

the Commonwealth, and stipulation of the rights of the local nobility, including free election of the duke under the actual Russian rule (Art. 2 [secret]).³⁴ In reality, the point was to secure the election of the pretender demanded by Russia. Following the death of Ferdinand, the last of the Kettlers, promoted to the ducal throne was Anna Ivanovna's favourite Ernest Jan von Biron.³⁵

Art. 8 of the Saxon-Austrian treaty explained the reasons behind the moves of the allies whose intention was to prevent the election of Stanisław Leszczyński and to restrict the French influence in Poland. To this end, it was intended that "alles in Polen anzuwenden, damit I. Ch. D. daselbst habende Partei der Stanislaischen nicht unterliege, oder ein widrig gesinnter Tertius auf den Thron gelange". It was agreed that in case Frederick Augustus was not elected by the election *sejm*, endeavours should be taken to render the assembly bifurcated to promulgate the election of the Wettin candidate by the opponents of Stanisław Leszczyński's party. The possibility of armed intervention was also taken into account, with an aim to maintain the Saxon elector, once elected as king of Poland, on the throne. The secret part of the convention implies that the allied parties admitted various options for putting an end to the interregnum, including failure of Saxon election plans.³⁶

In parallel, Austrian-Russian talks were going on concerning a joint military intervention in the Commonwealth, which the resulting elevation of Frederick Augustus to the throne of Poland. Concerned about the possible war against France, Charles VI did not intend to join the military action and expected that Russian troops will resolve the potential conflict. This being the case, a Russo-Austro-Saxon declaration was signed in Warsaw on 19 August 1733 that provided for provision of active support to the Wettin candidate. The Russian troops, numbering 32,000, were expected to continue their march on Warsaw, commenced in the first days of August. A joint Austrian-Saxon corps was to enter Poland on 22 August. The contracting parties intended not to admit the election of Stanisław – or, in case this was unpreventable, declared that fight would be waged with his followers

³⁴ Georg F. de Martens, *Supplément au recueil des principaux traités d'alliance* (Göttingue, 1807), suppl. iii, 1–10; Ger'e, *Bor'ba*, 302–5.

³⁵ Strohm, *Die kurländische Frage*, 153–76.

³⁶ Wenck, *Codex juris gentium*, i, 709–11. Art. 5 (secret) of the Saxon-Russian alliance contained analogous provisions; cf. Martens, *Supplément au recueil*, suppl. iii, 9.

until the rule of the Saxon elector in Poland is completely secured. The Austrian diplomacy aimed at provoking the Petersburg Court to be involved in the issue of Poland's interregnum to an extent preventing it from withdrawal after the Austrian plan to remain passive is discovered.³⁷ On 12 September, the nobles gathered at the election field successfully elected Stanisław Leszczyński king; however, he was soon after forced by the Russian troops to leave Warsaw. 5 October saw the announcement of the election of the Saxon elector (carried out in a place tightly surrounded by Russian troops), who assumed that name of Augustus III as king of Poland. Owing to the successful progress of Russian military intervention, the issue of the Polish throne was resolved to the liking of the coalition partners. Stanisław was forced to flee from the country and, thereafter, to abdicate.

Austria's action against the election of Stanisław Leszczyński gave France a pretext to declare war to the emperor (10 Oct. 1733). Albeit referred to as the War for the Polish Succession, it was mainly fought in the Italian and Rhineland fronts. Once the Italian and Lorrainean purposes of the Versailles Court and its allies were fulfilled, work started on peace preliminaries which were completed in Vienna in October 1735. A final peace treaty was compiled on their basis: executed on 18 November 1738 in the Austrian capital, it provided that Stanisław Leszczyński remain the titular ruler of Poland, and receive in exchange of his lost kingdom the Duchy of Lorraine, on a lifelong basis. After his death, the Duchy was to fall to France.³⁸

The Polish succession affair provoked an outburst of warfare not only in the West; also, it became one of the reasons behind the Austria's and Russia's conflict with Turkey, which started in 1736. The High Porte protested against the Petersburg Court's intervention in Poland, in line with what had been agreed in the peace treaty of Pruth (1711), as confirmed two years later in Adrianople (1713) and renewed in 1720 in Constantinople: Russia should namely have had to renounce any intervention in the international affairs of the Commonwealth.³⁹ The war, initiated by the Porte, was joined in 1737 by

³⁷ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 66–9.

³⁸ Wenck, *Codex juris gentium recentissimi*, i, 1–2 (1735), 98–101 (1738).

³⁹ By means of the treaties of Pruth and Adrianople, Peter I eschewed intervention in the Commonwealth's home affairs and undertook to have his army leave the country's territory. The Constantinople treaty of 5/16 November 1720 ensured territorial integrity of Poland-Lithuania, whilst also petrifying the *szlachta's* rights

Russia's ally, Austria. An Austro-Russian convention concluded in January 1737 expressed the hope for participation of, also, the Polish army in the warfare against the Porte; should this have proved impossible, as was suggested by the deliberations of the 1736 *sejm*, at least Saxon troops would join (Art. 13).⁴⁰ This did not mean, however, that Russia and Austria placed a bet on overcoming the crisis of the Polish military. In its will to bring the Commonwealth into the war against Turkey, Russia did not assume that it would support, or even tolerate, the auction of the Polish army by the *sejm* of 1738. On the contrary: Russia intended to counteract the auction. Polish accession to the war was to have a symbolic purport: Turkey was expected to realise its absolute isolation.⁴¹ Austria showed no initiative to support the Polish plans of auctioning troops. The basic principles of both imperial courts in respect of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth remained unchanged.

A decisive shift in the Central European balance of power was brought about by the war over the Austrian succession (1740–8), resulting from which the Habsburg empire lost the entire Lower Silesia and a considerable portion of Upper Silesia, as endorsed by the 1742 peace treaty of Breslau/Berlin. The strategic situation of both parties to the conflict made them understand, since the outset of the conflict, that Saxony's role in it could have been important. Both Berlin and Vienna solicited the Electorate's favour, as its neutrality posed a potential peril to both rival German powers. The Dresden Court, initially opting for the pragmatic coalition, resolved to take a volt: inspired by Frederick the Great's military successes, it allied in 1741 with the opponents of Maria Theresa. With all the successful progress of the Saxon troops in Bohemia, Augustus III did not receive his longed-for Moravia or Upper Silesia, whilst the peace treaty of 1742 was concluded behind his back. This incited about Dresden's rapprochement

and liberties. It was agreed that in case the Swedish monarch or any other Christian ruler invades Poland with the intent to superimpose the hereditary throne therein, bring about constitutional changes enhancing the prerogatives of the monarch, or partition the country's territory, then the tsar, conditional upon the Porte's prior consent, might have his troops enter the Commonwealth. Cf. Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki (ed.), *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vi: 1700–1750 (București, 1878), 342–3; Władysław Konopczyński, *Polska a Turcja* (Kraków, 2013), 54–84.

⁴⁰ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 78–9.

⁴¹ Konopczyński, *Polska a Turcja*, 110–33; Zofia Zielińska, 'Rosja wobec polskich planów aukcji wojska w 1738 r.', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cvii, 3 (2000), 3–25.

with the imperial camp. The defensive alliances with Austria (signed 20 Dec. 1743) and Russia (24 Jan./4 Feb. 1744) aimed against the Berlin Court marked a new direction in the Saxon foreign policy.⁴²

Art. 2 (secret) of the Saxon-Austrian convention concerned the conveniences in the communication with Poland as demanded by the Dresden Court. The idea to acquire a corridor that would link the Electorate and Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) was already projected in the Saxon ministry under Augustus II. Maria Theresa undertook by way of the 1743 treaty to facilitate the communication between the Electorate and the Commonwealth, should Saxony put up more than 6,000 soldiers in view of a war against France (as stipulated in the treaty). While the arrangement specified no details as to the actual solutions, the facilitations would have been brought about at the expense of Prussia, since the aforesaid article comprised a clause preventing any shrinking of the territory of the Habsburg monarchy.⁴³ A separate article of the treaty, as well as Art. 11 of the Saxon-Russian treaty of 1744, moreover provided for potential participation of Poland in a war against Prussia. Augustus III undertook, however, that the potential accession of Poland to the pragmatic coalition would imply no constitutional reform or restricted Polish freedoms. The political principles of the Austrian Court and those of its Russian counterpart with respect to the Commonwealth differed considerably. The former did not fundamentally protest against certain reforms, as long as they might reinforce the anti-Prussian camp. In contrast, the latter had no intent whatsoever to let the Nobility's Republic lift itself from the abyss of anarchy and help the Commonwealth become a player in international politics through consent for its participation in the war against Prussia.⁴⁴

⁴² Reinhold Koser, *Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen*, i (Stuttgart, 1912), 265–538; Karl Hübner, *Zur Geschichte der kursächsischen Politik beim Ausbruche des österreichischen Erbfolgestreites* (Leipzig, 1892); Reinhold Becker, *Der Dresdner Friede und die Politik Brühls* (Leipzig, 1902), 38–45; Johannes Ziekursch, *Sachsen und Preussen um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des österreichischen Erbfolgekrieges* (Breslau, 1902); Hildegard Odernheimer, *Der Legationsrat Ludwig Ferdinand von Saul. Ein Gesamtleben des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts; gleichzeitig ein Beitrag zur Brühl'schen Politik* (Leipzig, 1925), 80–6; René Hanke, *Brühl und das Renversement des alliances. Die antipreußische Außenpolitik des Dresdener Hofes 1744–1756* (Berlin, 2006), 31–194.

⁴³ Wenck, *Codex iuris gentium*, i, 732.

⁴⁴ Formerly, the authors expressed their conviction that these allies contributed to favourable international circumstances that fostered the actions of the

A promise that Poland would be assisted to be made ‘more useful’ – that is, capable of fighting against Prussia – was expressed in Art. 3 (secret) of a quadripartite alliance entered into on 15 January 1745 in Warsaw by Austria, Saxony, Great Britain, and the United Provinces. As was the case with the convention involving the Viennese Burg and Russia, this provision was burdened with a stipulation that seems to have been a concession to Russia. The contracting parties agreed to support Augustus III as a king of Poland, under the condition that the laws of Poland remain unaltered.⁴⁵ On concluding the treaty, the Russian party for the first time remarked to their allies their intention to annex certain Polish territories. This desideratum was included in a secret article of the quadruple alliance, which was offered by the Petersburg Court by London: the article assumed the option to exchange Ducal Prussia, which after the victorious battle against Prussia would fall to the Commonwealth, for some undefined Polish demesnes (*quelques districts*) in Ukraine.⁴⁶

Commonwealth’s reforming camp; cf.: Władysław Konopczyński, ‘Sejm grodzieński 1752 r.’, in *idem*, *Mrok i świt. Studia historyczne* (Warszawa, 1922), 58; Szymon Askenazy, ‘Z czasów Fryderyka II’, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 3 (1895), 123–56; ‘Z dwóch sejmów’, *ibidem*, 4 (1895), 118–31; Mieczysław Skibiński, *Europa a Polska w dobie wojny o sukcesję austriacką w latach 1740–1745*, i (Kraków, 1913). German historian Walter Mediger was the first to read the declaration of Elisabeth Petrovna of 13 Dec. 1744 in terms of being targeted against the Polish court which intended to reform the constitutional system of Poland-Lithuania, and to redirect its army against Prussia and the Opposition that was designing a sedition; cf. Walter Mediger, *Moskaus Weg nach Europa: der Aufstieg Russlands zum europäischen Machtstaat im Zeitalter Friedrichs des Grossen* (Braunschweig, 1952), 264. Mediger pointed in this respect to Russia’s intent to stay neutral in the Hohenzollern monarchy’s conflict with the other countries of the German Reich, whilst actually understating the importance of Poland-Lithuania in the Russian policies. See: Zofia Zielińska, *Walka “Familii” o reformę Rzeczypospolitej 1743–1752* (Warszawa, 1983), 148–51; *eadem*, ‘Rosja wobec polskich planów’, 3–25; *eadem*, ‘Rosja wobec polskich prób reform w latach 1738–1744’, in *eadem*, *Studia z dziejów stosunków polsko-rosyjskich w XVIII wieku* (Warszawa, 2001), 12–59.

⁴⁵ The related passage in the quadruple alliance treaty read: “Pour mettre le Royaume de Pologne plus en état d’être utile à la cause publique [emph. by JK], Sa Majesté Britannique et Sa Majesté la Reine de Hongrie et de Bohême promettent d’aider Sa Majesté Polonoise dans ses vues salutaires à cet égard, d’autant qu’Elles le pourront faire, sans porter atteinte aux lois et constitutions [emph. by JK] dudit Royaume”; Wenck, *Codex iuris gentium*, ii, 179.

⁴⁶ Władysław Konopczyński, ‘Anglia wobec niedoszłej pacyfikacji prusko-rosyjskiej 1760–61’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xxv, 1 (1911), 36.

Part of the overall commitments made by Poland's neighbour countries under the treaties was the Russo-Prussian alliance, as renewed in 1740 and then in 1743. These agreements provided, over and over again, for the need to preserve the Commonwealth's existing constitutional order and cherish the *szlachta* liberties. Clauses concerning Courlandian and dissenter affairs were comprised there as well.⁴⁷

Whereas Russia failed to provide the demanded support to its Austrian ally in the first phase of the Silesian wars (as otherwise required under the 1726 entente) and, indeed, soon acknowledged the Prussian possession of Silesia (by means of the treaty of 12/23 Nov. 1743⁴⁸), renewed its defensive alliance with Austria as from 2 July 1746. Accession of the Commonwealth was envisioned at this point; failing this, Augustus III would accede as the elector of Saxony.⁴⁹ For Austria, the Wettin ruler was an important partner even when the Saxony he ruled, destroyed as it was in the Silesian wars, no more represented its previous combat effectiveness. Austria sought to keep its client within the Reich and to prevent a decomposition of the anti-Prussian camp. Russia, on its part, basically oversaw the Commonwealth's falling into inertia. Formerly, historians discerned in the policies pursued by the Petersburg Court in the late 1730s and early 1740s an intent to support the reforming movement in Poland; signs of favourable attitude on the part of Russia toward the plans to auction the military and improve the state's constitutional system tended to be identified.⁵⁰ More recent studies, based on Russian archival resources, have however shown that the Petersburg-based ministry did not intend to let the Polish army grow and to use it in the battlefield against Prussia, to say nothing of any constitutional reform.⁵¹ In relation to Poland, Austria's stance at this particular point was not identical with that of Russia: in face of the planned combat against Prussia to regain

⁴⁷ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, v, 327–30 (1740), 348–52 (1743).

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 341.

⁴⁹ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 159.

⁵⁰ Szymon Askenazy, 'Fryderyk II i August III', in *idem*, *Dwa stulecia XVIII i XIX. Badania i przyczynki*, i (Warszawa, 1901), 245–6; Władysław Konopczyński, 'Fatalny sejm', in *idem*, *Od Sobieskiego do Kościuszki* (Kraków, 1921), 109–26; Michael G. Müller, *Polen zwischen Preußen und Russland. Souveränitätskrise und Reformpolitik, 1736–1752* (Berlin, 1983), 51–72.

⁵¹ Zielińska, *Walka „Familii”*, 55–60, 70–7.

Silesia, assistance provided by Poland would be of significance to Austria. Yet, as sustaining the alliance with the Petersburg Court was the basic guideline of Austrian foreign policy, the Austrian Court never attempted at supporting the reforms undertaken in Poland, particularly during the *sejm* sessions of 1744 and 1748. Rather than part of Austrian interest, this was merely the country's concession to Petersburg. The Viennese Court realised that Prussia's and Russia's objectives related to the Polish question were possibly convergent: both courts sought to keep Poland possibly weak. In order not to arouse resentment of Petersburg, the Austrian cabinet had to show its disinterestedness in regard of the Commonwealth. The aim was to convince the Russian ministry that in fighting the Polish reforms, the Habsburg monarchy – being Russia's ally – could efficiently replace Prussia. Although the Commonwealth was not a party to the treaty, the Prussian attack at its possessions was a *casus foederis*, on a par with the penetration of the Frederician troops into the territories of Austria and Russia.⁵²

The inversion of the alliances that took place in 1756 and the consequent Seven Years' War did not change much as far as the Commonwealth's international situations was concerned. The anti-Prussian coalition actors declared their support for Augustus III as the ruler of Saxony, promising to indemnify for the losses incurred during the Electorate's occupation by the Frederician troops.⁵³ A primary significance is attachable to the Austro-French treaty of December 1758, joined by Russia in March 1760. The arrangement announced support for the House of Wettin in its strivings for the crown of Poland after Augustus III's death. This obligation was worded in pretty general terms, and preconditioned by the contracting parties' refraining from any action that would counteract the principles of free election; moreover, the allies expressed their will to tend to the Polish liberties.⁵⁴ The Versailles Court did not intend to prematurely tie its hands by making promises to the Saxon Court, and considered the option to enthrone a French candidate at Warsaw.⁵⁵

⁵² Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 170.

⁵³ Austro-Russian alliance treaty, 22 Jan./2 Feb. 1757, Art. 3 (separate); Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 209; Austro-Russian defensive alliance, 21 March/1 April 1760, Art. 1 (separate); *ibidem*, 298.

⁵⁴ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, i, 243.

⁵⁵ Adolf Beer, *Die erste Teilung Polens*, i (Wien, 1873), 60–1.

The Saxon ministry that resided during the Seven Years' War in the Commonwealth was primarily concerned about securing the throne of Poland for one more Wettin House member still during Augustus III's lifetime, counting on Austria's assistance to this end, in the first place. Following the occurrences of the years 1733–5, it was understood across Europe that Petersburg would have the decisive say on the appointment to the Polish throne. This is why Saxony expected, if not support, at least well-meaning neutrality from the Russian Court. During the Seven Years' War, these plans did not develop beyond unconcluded talks. Meanwhile, the system of arrangements and alliances changed radically as Tsarina Elisabeth Petrovna died – and was followed to the throne of Russia by Peter III (5 Jan. 1762), a fanatic admirer of Prussia and Frederick the Great.⁵⁶

III

AFTER ELISABETH PETROVNA AND AUGUSTUS III: EARLY REIGN OF STANISLAUS II AUGUSTUS (1762–72)

The new ruler resolved to discontinue the warfare and associate closer with Prussia; this resulted in the conclusion, on 8 June 1762, of a defence alliance. True, the royal coup that elevated Catherine the Great to the throne on 9 July 1762 prevented Peter III from ratifying the alliance; however, examining its points on Poland seems purposeful owing to the shared interests of Russia and Prussia. By means of the secret Art. 3, the rulers vowed that they would prevent a change in the political system of Poland, particularly any breach of the free election rule, the launch of hereditary rulership and increased prerogatives of the king. The contracting parties declared that they would oppose, including by means of armed forces, any action aimed against the foundations of the Polish system.⁵⁷ After the death of Augustus III, it was agreed, Russia and Prussia would support the candidacy of a 'Piast' (which meant, a native Pole) as one that would not threaten the neighbour countries whilst also giving no chance for a change in the political system they would consider adverse.⁵⁸ Art. 1 (secret)

⁵⁶ Cf. Johannes Dassow, *Friedrich II. von Preußen und Peter III. von Rußland* (Berlin, 1908); Carol S. Leonard, 'The Reputation of Peter III', *The Russian Review*, xlvii (1988), 263–92; *idem*, *The Reign of Peter III of Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993).

⁵⁷ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, v, 405.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 405–6.

covered Courland-related affairs, including preservation of the duchy's system and the privileges of local nobles, plus an arrangement for filling the throne at Mittau.⁵⁹ Art. 2, separate, resumed (in the spirit of the broadly-outlined arrangements of 1730) the issue of political and confessional rights of the Polish disunites and dissenters.⁶⁰

The overthrowing of Peter III did not alter the basic principles of Russian foreign policy. Tsarina Catherine the Great only withdrew the military aid that had been endowed to Frederick by her husband, whilst maintaining the return to Prussia of the areas conquered by the Russian army during the war; moreover, she initiated a secret exchange of letters (in her own hand) with Frederick. The Prussian king's favourable inactivity eventually proved decisive in the delivery of Russia's plans regarding the future election in Poland. The dramatic experiences of the Seven Years' War sufficed to convince Frederick the Great that soliciting the friendship of Russia was, indeed, a must.⁶¹ Hence the resistance alliance entered into on 11 April 1764 with the Petersburg Court could be seen by the Prussian king as a great success: in spite of a number of concessions to the eastern neighbour, the king was coming out of international isolation and becoming Tsarina Catherine's major partner in the Reich and in Western Europe, not to mention Poland. Apart from the Swedish and Turkish questions, a separate convention forming an integral part of the alliance treaty concerned the Polish interregnum which commenced after the demise of Augustus III (died 5 Oct. 1763). In the secret Art. 4, the parties agreed that they would collaborate in the elevation to the Polish throne of a candidate who would ensure the maintenance of free election, and in preventing the introduction of hereditary throne and increasing the monarch's prerogatives. They moreover agreed to use armed forces if an attempt was made to alter the Commonwealth's political system.⁶² A separate article of the treaty, which repeated the wording of the previous Prussian-Russian stipulations, concerned

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 403–4; cf. Strohm, *Die kurländische Frage*, 259–337.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 407–8.

⁶¹ Karl Elias, *Die preussisch-russischen Beziehungen von der Thronbesteigung Peters III. bis zum Abschluss des preussisch-russischen Bündnisses vom 11. April 1764* (Göttingen, 1900); Georg Küntzel, 'Friedrich der Große am Ausgang des Siebenjährigen Krieges und sein Bündnis mit Rußland', *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte*, xiii (1900), 75–122.

⁶² Martens, *Recueil des traités*, vi (St. Pétersbourg, 1883), 22.

the Polish dissenters and disunites. The contracting parties indicated no measures to be used to support the delivery of the proposed demands; neither did they set the timeline for their fulfilment. No precise executive indications were comprised in the Prussian-Russian convention of 22 July 1764, which concerned the 'unfaithful' and was seemingly concluded out of persistent urgency of Prussia. The dissenter affair was still not a priority for the Petersburg Court; in the first place, though, the point was not to hinder the election of an aspirant for the Polish crown that would be desired by Russia.⁶³ Protection of dissenters was covered by the 22 July 1764 declaration of the two courts. The contracting parties, not as yet bound by the declaration to act, intended to invite the other non-Catholic powers to cooperate.⁶⁴

The secret convention regarding the election of a 'Piast', which was signed on the same day as the treaty, declared that the candidate to be supported by both courts should be Stanisław Antoni Poniatowski, Pantler of Lithuania, former Saxon envoy to Petersburg. The other articles specified the terms of Russo-Prussian cooperation in Poland during the interregnum and after the new ruler was elected. The diplomats of both countries who stayed at that time in Warsaw were supposed to strictly collaborate with one another, seeing to that any action against the elected king would be treated by the allied courts as an act of opposition against these countries. It was agreed that in case of failure of these oral remonstrations, use of force would be employed. In case a third-party country joined such actions, the Prussian king should have his troops enter into the Commonwealth, apart from the Russian army.⁶⁵

On 7 September 1764, the election *sejm* elevated to the throne of Poland the Russian candidate, who assumed the name of Stanislaus Augustus. The course of the interregnum after Augustus III's death was a thorough triumph of Tsarina Catherine the Great's policy. The Catholic states proved helpless in face of the Russian action; the Porte appeared unable to act, while Prussia was assigned the role of a passive observer of the doings of the eastern ally.⁶⁶ The tsarina did not intend

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 23. Zofia Zielińska, *Polska w okowach „systemu północnego” 1763–1766* (Kraków, 2012), 100–25, 154–7.

⁶⁴ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, vi, 33–7; Zielińska, *Polska w okowach*, 161–7.

⁶⁵ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, vi, 25–31.

⁶⁶ Beer, *Die erste Teilung*, i, 106–74; Szymon Askenazy, *Die letzte polnische Königswahl* (Göttingen, 1894); Nikolaj D. Čečulin, *Vnešnjaja politika v načale carstvovanija Ekateriny II*

to admit emancipation of the Commonwealth. The supreme goal was not only to keep entire control over the Polish state and, moreover, to deepen its dependence on Russia. Catherine responded pretty severely to any manifestations of independence of the king and the Czartoryski faction, who strove to bring about the most urgent constitutional reforms.⁶⁷ The tsarina increasingly perceived Polish Protestants and Orthodox as yet another means to widen and strengthen her influence in the Commonwealth; this particular issue had a resolute impact on the Polish policy pursued by the Petersburg Court, and on the Polish-Russian relations overall. A concession to the non-Catholic minority was decisively demanded by Catherine from the coronation *sejm* in session in December 1764. However, her hopes did not come true at that point. Then, the tsarina demanded from the *sejm* held in 1766, in an ultimatum manner, that the dissenters be made equal in rights – in a fashion unprecedented in Europe. Actually, Catherine considerably overestimated their political role as a possible Russian and Prussian ‘supply base’ in the Commonwealth. The rejection by the 1766 *sejm* of the Russian postulates, which were supported by the diplomats of England, Denmark, and Prussia, resulted in Catherine II’s decision to resort to a force-based settlement.⁶⁸

The dissenter affair was important for Catherine for other reasons as well. In the early days of her reign, the tsarina sought support from her Orthodox subjects, especially the Russian ecclesiastical hierarchy. Of importance was, also, recognition by the European public opinion – all the more that the problem of toleration and freedom of conscience occupied a worthy place in the Enlightenment discourse. The 1760s decade was particularly beneficial to such manifestations. After Jean Calas, a Protestant merchant from Toulouse, accused of killing his son

(Peterburg, 1896), 208–51; Waclaw Mejbaum, *O tron Stanisława Augusta* (Lwów, 1918), 3–67; Hamish M. Scott, ‘France and the Polish Throne, 1763–1764’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, liii, 132 (1975), 370–88, *idem*, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756–1775* (Cambridge, 2001), 103–20.

⁶⁷ Władysław Kisielewski, *Reforma książąt Czartoryskich na sejmie konwokacyjnym roku 1764* (Sambor, 1880); Čečulin, *Vnešnjaja politika*, 251–70; Jerzy Michalski, ‘Plan Czartoryskich naprawy Rzeczypospolitej’, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxxiii, 4–5 (1956), 29–43; Zielińska, *Polska w okowach*, 196–255.

⁶⁸ Maria C. Łubieńska, *Sprawa dysydencka 1764–1766* (Warszawa, 1911); Boris V. Nosov, *Ustanowlenie rossijskogo gospodstva v Reči Pospolitoj, 1756–1768* (Moskva, 2004), 321–498; Zielińska, *Polska w okowach*, 549–91.

who reportedly intended to convert to Catholicism, was sentenced to death, the European republic of letters' interest in the issue of religious freedoms mounted. For use of the Western public opinion, interferences in the confessional relations in the Commonwealth was placed in a false light, described in terms of a battle for religious tolerance. In fact, the latter remained extensive in Poland.⁶⁹

In face of the actual, though undeclared, war with Poland, the secret Russo-Prussian convention concluded on 12/23 April 1767 secured Russia against a possible counteraction of the southern countries. The treaty's first article stated that Russian troops would support the designed dissenter confederations, which will also receive diplomatic backing from Prussia.⁷⁰ Frederick II undertook to take armed action in the event that Maria Theresa resolved to have her army march into the Commonwealth. In such a case, Prussian troops would enter into the hereditary Habsburg dominion (Art. 2).⁷¹ For his partaking in the armed action, the Prussian king was to receive appropriate indemnification (Art. 3).⁷² Apart from a small military demonstration, in spite of admonishments from the Apostolic See, the Austrian Court did not undertake a military intervention. Exhausted with the Seven Years' War, Austria had to rebuild its potential and temporarily avoid warfare.⁷³

This allowed the Petersburg Court to lead new troops into Poland-Lithuania. The associations of dissenter nobles (confederations) launched on 20 March 1767 in Toruń, Poland (Evangelical) and in Słuck, Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Evangelical-Orthodox), as well as a Catholic confederation (set up on 23 June 1767 in Radom, also under the auspices of the Petersburg Court), successfully paralysed the political life, with the effect that the Russian ambassador, Prince

⁶⁹ Zdzisław Libera, 'Z problemów tolerancji w publicystyce i literaturze czasów Stanisława Augusta', in *idem, Rozważania o wieku tolerancji, rozumu i gustu* (Warszawa, 1994), 17–25; Jerzy T. Lukowski, 'Unhelpful and unnecessary: Voltaire's *Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des Églises de Pologne* (1767)', in Ulla Kölving and Christiane Mervaud (eds.), *Voltaire et ses combats. Actes du congrès international*, i (Oxford, 1997), 645–54.

⁷⁰ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, vi, 45.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 45–6.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 46–7.

⁷³ Beer, *Die erste Teilung*, i, 222–5. On the financial exhaustion of the Habsburg monarchy, see Peter G.M. Dickson, *Finance and Government under Maria Theresa*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1987).

Nikolaj V. Repnin, became the actual ruler of Poland. The provisions on dissenters, demanded by the Russian party, were adopted by the extraordinary *sejm* of 1767–8, under pressure from the Russian diplomat.⁷⁴ The statutes adopted at that assembly petrified the country's political system by introducing the notion of 'persistent cardinal rights' that secured the noble liberty (with certain amendments compared to the Saxon period: for instance, the majority vote rule for dietines, established in 1764–6, thereby abolishing the *liberum veto*, was maintained). Beside these, the *sejm* adopted statutes providing for equality in political rights and extended the rules of religious tolerance for dissenters. The work was crowned by a Polish-Russian perpetual treaty that provided for guaranteeing the Polish constitutional system by the Petersburg Court (Art. 4).⁷⁵ The arrangement moreover comprised mutual guarantees of the entirety of the territories (Art. 1), along with Russia's obligation to protect the integrity of Poland (Art. 4).⁷⁶ The guarantee formally (not only factually, as had thitherto been the case) marked the depriving of the Commonwealth of sovereignty: ever since, any projects of political change had to be based on prior approval from Petersburg.

Raising the slogan of endangered faith and liberty (the *liberum veto* was abolished along with adoption of some secondary-rank economic projects during the same parliamentary assembly), the legislation of the *sejm* of 1767–8 was objected against by a vast majority of the noble society, whose exponents appointed the Confederation of Bar in response. The resulting unrest led to setting the Polish cause on international track. Turkey stood for the Confederates, and declared war on Russia in October 1768. The association of Polish noblemen received good will from France and Austria, whereas hopes were revived in Saxony for restoring the royal crown to the Wettins: one of the goals of the Confederates was to dethrone Stanislaus Augustus, who was considered accessory to the declarations of the 1767–8 *sejm*.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Aleksander Kraushar, *Książę Repnin i Polska* (Warszawa, 1900), 221–612; Jerzy Lukowski, *The Szlachta and the Confederacy of Radom, 1764–1767/68. A Study of the Polish Nobility* (Rome, 1977), *passim*; Nosov, *Ustanowlenie rossijskogo*, 498–661.

⁷⁵ The Polish-Russian treaty of 13/24 Feb. 1768; cf. Jozafat Ohryzko (ed.), *Volumina legum*, vii (Petersburg, 1860), 566–97.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 253–4.

⁷⁷ Konopczyński, *Konfederacja barska*, i, *passim*.

Given these circumstances, a Russo-Prussian alliance was renewed in October 1769. While it was primarily set against the Porte, it did contain essential stipulations regarding the Commonwealth. Provisions reappeared once again concerning the guarding of Polish freedoms, including free election, immutability of the laws and the Constitution; in particular, the allies would not consent for increased prerogatives of the king (Art. 4 [secret]).⁷⁸ The arrangement touched upon the Dresden Court's aspirations for the crown of Poland, which the contracting parties undertook to oppose. In case that the Saxon army is led into Poland, the allies would take joint action against it, including, possibly, a Prussian diversion attack at the Electorate's territory.⁷⁹ Frederick II undertook to take action against Poland only in the event that Austrian troops have entered it. He was certain, though, that the Austrian Court, still suffering after the Seven Year's War, would not proactively support the Bar Confederates or the Porte.⁸⁰ The dogma of the tsarist Empire's exclusive influence in Poland could only be undermined by the Versailles Court. Étienne-François de Choiseul, who ran the French foreign policy, fought Russia as the potential ally of England, and made use of the Confederation diversion to this end.⁸¹

When the phantom of Russian presence in the Balkans – the region Vienna was willing to largely take over from Turkey – was turning real, in an attempt to encourage Petersburg to quit the acquisitions in the south Chancellor Kaunitz proposed in 1769 a 'replacement plan' for the north. The Prussian king could, namely, obtain the Royal Prussia and Courland, then owned by the Commonwealth, while Austria would regain Silesia. The years 1769–70 saw a rapprochement of both hostile German powers which endeavoured, each for a different reason, to withhold the Russian southward expansion. The conferences of Frederick the Great and Joseph II in Neisse and Neustadt in Mähren

⁷⁸ Wolfgang Stribny, *Die Russlandpolitik Friedrichs des Großen, 1764–1786* (Würzburg, 1966), 28–35; The Russo-Prussian treaty of 12/23 Oct. 1769; cf. *Martens, Recueil des traités*, vi, 61–2.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 59.

⁸⁰ Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 75.

⁸¹ "We only have one objective, and that is, to mightily check-mate Russia. All the other purposes – the interest of Poland, for instance – are merely a pretext"; Étienne-François de Choiseul to François Emmanuel Guignard de Saint-Priest, French ambassador to Istanbul, 14 Nov. 1768; quoted after Konopczyński, *Konfederacja barska*, i, 132.

(Nové Město na Moravě) (summer 1769, and 1770) unambiguously indicated that the pacification would be carried out at the expense of Poland. The concept had it that the Court of Petersburg, withdrawing from the conquest aspirations in the Balkans, will find a compensation in the Commonwealth. To keep a balance, Berlin and Vienna would receive their apportioned holdings in Poland as well. It was all about whether Russia would accept the 'replacement plans'.

Given the weakness of Poland, a partition of the country was not a new idea. Berlin first offered to Russia to divide and share the land in the early years of the eighteenth century. Such designs came across an obstacle in Petersburg, though, as the tsar was not willing to share what it deemed its property. By the middle of the century, new trends came to the fore at the Petersburg Court, consisting in annexation of a considerable portion of Polish territory: indeed, a unilateral *annexation*, rather than partition. These strivings, known since the 1745 Treaty of Warsaw, intensified during the Seven Years' War. Russia planned to take over Pomerania, together with Gdansk, or some part of Byelorussia or Ukraine; the best-known in this respect is the plan prepared by General Zahar G. Černyšev, President of the War College, which was submitted to Catherine II probably in 1763. As is known, the annexation designed by Černyšev was to cover the territory taken over by Russia in the First Partition.⁸² The annexation was to be a one-sided takeover of Polish lands with no participation of Prussia and Austria. During the Turkish war and the Confederation of Bar, attempts of the Warsaw Court to shake off the Russian yoke came out. Moreover, Stanislaus Augustus and his closest associates, the uncles Czartoryski, refused to fight the Bar Confederates hand in hand with Russia. Catherine decided to punish the Polish ruler for this act of resistance. In spite of the advanced attempts made by Černyšev, the expected one-sided attempts appeared unreal. Apparently, the consideration of the possible response from Berlin prevailed: given the war circumstances, Russia did not want to be exposed to a hostile

⁸² Čečulin, *Vnešnjaja politika*, 223–4; Konopczyński, *Anglia wobec niedoszłej pacyfikacji*, 35–6, *idem*, *Pierwszy rozbiór Polski*, 57–62, Jerzy T. Lukowski, 'Guarantee or annexation: a Note on Russian Plans to Acquire Polish Territory Prior to the First Partition of Poland', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, lvi, 133 (1983), 60–5; Zofia Zielińska, 'Pogłoski o rozbiórce Polski oraz ich reperkusje w Rzeczypospolitej w okresie bezkrólewia 1763–1764', *Przegląd Historyczny*, xcvi, 4 (2005), 543–71.

move from the Prussian king. Consequently, the partition concept, rather than the annexation option, ultimately prevailed.⁸³

This concept ripened between April and November 1770. While the final decisions are known, not much is known about how the arrangements developed. Given the permanently unresolved Turkish conflict and a thaw in the Prussian-Austrian relations, it seemed that a partition-based pacification at the expense of the Nobility's Republic might bring about the desired *détente* in the Berlin–Vienna–Petersburg relations (disputes over the Balkans) whilst also being a grievous lesson for Stanislaus Augustus. The findings of Dorota Dukwicz, a Warsaw-based scholar, shift the established chronology of the decisions concerning the partition and challenge its authorship. The actions of Vienna, so willingly emphasised by Russian and Prussian historians as partition precedents, had *de facto* nothing to do with the actual partition. Austria's seizure of Spiš (Feb. 1769) and, subsequently, of the Starosties of Nowy Targ, Nowy Sącz, and Czorsztyn (summer 1770), plus, lastly, the announced annexation of Spiš in December 1770 were all uncongenial steps in the perception of Poland, but could not imply the decision to pare down the country's territory by a third. Such a decision could only be taken by the empire that decreed the fate of Poland – that is, Russia. And, it was Russia that resolved so on its own, in 1770.⁸⁴

Before the partition plans were notified by Petersburg to its potential partners, the tension in the continent had mounted to the climax. In the middle of 1771, the tsarist army subdued Crimea and crossed the Danube line. Toward the end of July of that year, once it became clear that the Porte would not manage to overcome the Russian attack,

⁸³ Lukowski, 'Guarantee or annexation', 60–5; Zofia Zielińska, 'Pytania wokół genezy I rozbioru', in Marian Biskup (ed.), *Ziemie północne. Rzeczypospolitej polsko-litewskiej w dobie rozbiorowej 1772–1815. Materiały z konferencji międzynarodowej odbytej w dniach 11–14 maja 1995 r. w Toruniu* (Toruń, 1996), 7–12; *eadem*, 'Przygotowanie do rozbioru? Rosyjska lustracja ziem nad górną Dźwinią z lata 1767 roku', in Michał Kopczyński and Antoni Mączak (eds.), *Gospodarka. Ludzie. Władza. Studia ofiarowane Juliuszowi Łukasiewiczowi w 75. rocznicę urodzin* (Warszawa, 1998), 129–35.

⁸⁴ Dorota Dukwicz, 'Czy konfederacja barska była przyczyną pierwszego rozbioru Polski? (Rosja wobec Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1769–1771)', in Anna Buchmann and Adam Danilczyk (eds.), *Konfederacja barska. Jej konteksty i tradycje* (Warszawa, 2010), 103–16; *eadem*, 'The Internal Situation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1769–1771) and the Origins of the First Partition (In the Light of Russian Sources)', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 103 (2011), 67–84.

the Austrian Court allied with Turkey. At the price of high subsidies for Vienna, and territorial acquisitions at the Porte's expense, the Habsburgs undertook to help the Porte out in its reclamation of the areas then under Russian occupation. The alliance obliged also the Austrian party to solicit for inclusion in the future peace treaty for clauses providing for securing the independence of Poland (as a separate state) and the freedoms characteristic of its nobility (the *liberum veto* and free election to be preserved; Art. 5).⁸⁵ Yet, the treaty said nothing of the country's territorial integrity. Austria did not ratify the alliance treaty with the Porte and soon started considering the option to acquire various Turkish dominions. As it betimes proved clear to the observers of the European political scene, the Court of Vienna did its best to avoid a war against the tsarist Empire, which continually was a compass for its actions. Vienna used the alliance with the Porte instrumentally, counting that it would encourage Russia to quit its acquisitions in the Balkans; albeit Austria has received from Turkey the first instalment of the subsidy under the alliance, it never ratified the treaty and, in parallel, secretly bargained with Frederick on participation in the impending partition of Poland. Inviting Austria to the negotiations of the partition, in which Petersburg and Berlin have already been involved, was virtually a must for tactical reasons: without Vienna participating (the option initially considered by Catherine), it might have easily challenged the new order, whereas Austria's partaking in the partition apparently pushed the threat aside. In the middle of 1771, Russian troops set out for the final battle against the Bar insurrection in Poland: by the end of September, the fate of the Confederates, whose troops were repeatedly defeated, was finally settled. In the early days of November 1771 they made a failing attempt at kidnapping King Stanislaus Augustus. The 'regicides', cast into ridicule among the European powers, facilitated the Burg, who hosted at that time the Confederation leaders in Prešov (in today's Slovakia) to quit their affability.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Johann Eustachius von Görtz (ed.), *Mémoires et actes authentiques relatifs aux négociations qui ont précédées le partage de la Pologne* (s.l., 1810), 152.

⁸⁶ Beer, *Die erste Teilung Polens*, i, 226–329, ii, 1–142; Alfred Ritter von Arneth, *Maria Theresia's letzte Regierungszeit*, ii (Wien, 1877), 121–360, Konopczyński, *Konfederacja barska*, i–ii, *passim*; Jerzy Michalski, *Schylek konfederacji barskiej* (Wrocław, 1970).

6/17 February 1772 saw the signing of a secret Prussian-Russian convention (which was antedated 4/15 January), which was basically about avoidance of the impression that the final decision of the powers related to the partition was informed by the attitude of Austria.⁸⁷ The extensive preamble described the internal situation of the Commonwealth: the omnipresent clutter and discord between the factions, and moral corruption of the citizens all caused that none of the measures taken to secure the Commonwealth had yielded good results:

Qu'au contraire l'acharnement de l'esprit de parti et de faction y acquiert chaque jour de nouvelles forces, et que l'anarchie s'y enracine de telle sorte, qu'il est à craindre que la perpétuité des troubles et des divisions n'entraîne la décomposition totale de l'État.⁸⁸

This being the case, the document explained, the Russian tsarina and the Prussian king have resolved to annex to their potent countries certain selected Polish domains. On the one hand, declared was the necessity to protect one's own interests; on the other, hope was expressed that the act of partition will exert an appropriately strong impression on the Poles, thus contributing the sedation of the country.⁸⁹ Art. 1 declared that the annexation of a territory in the Commonwealth will constitute reclamation of the areas to which the powers

⁸⁷ Of the major studies concerning the First Partition of Poland-Lithuania, the following are worthy of note: Władysław Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór Polski* (Kraków, 2010). Cf. Albert Sorel, *La question d'Orient au XVIIIe siècle: le partage de la Pologne et le traité de Kaïnardji* (Paris, 1889); Reinhold Koser, 'Aus der Vorgeschichte der ersten Teilung Polens', *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1908), 286–92; Gustav B. Volz, 'Prinz Heinrich und die Vorgeschichte der ersten Teilung Polens', *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte*, xxxv (1923), 193–211; Emanuel Rostworowski, 'Na drodze do pierwszego rozbioru. Fryderyk II wobec rozkładu przymierza francusko-austriackiego w latach 1769–1772', *Roczniki Historyczne*, xviii (1949), 181–204; Herbert Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland* (New York and London, 1962); Horst Jablonowski, 'Die erste Teilung Polens', *Beiträge zur Geschichte Westpreußens*, ii (1969), 47–80; Jerzy Topolski, 'Reflections on the First Partition of Poland', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 27 (1973), 89–104.

⁸⁸ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, vi, 72. The aspects that anarchised the system – primarily, the *liberum veto*, also the support provided to the Opposition (gathered in the Radom Confederacy) that opposed the reforms – resulted from the prevention by Russia of the changes that would have rendered the state more efficient.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 72–3.

had long had their rights. In case no legal title may be found to any of these domains, it was agreed that they would be seized under the pretext of remuneration and indemnification for other reasons.⁹⁰ The subsequent article stated the scope of the partition in detail; it was also determined that the military occupation of the pretended territories will occur in the springtime, and the Vienna Court will be invited to the partition action.⁹¹ A separate article detailed the plan for a joint Prussian and Russian action in case Austria demonstrates against Russia.⁹² The monarchs reciprocally guaranteed their respective holdings (Art. 3), agreeing that their diplomats residing in Warsaw would strictly collaborate in order that Poland finally acknowledge of the partition.⁹³

In the end of January 1772, in spite of the lament of the Empress Maria Theresa, who was gnawed by remorse, the decision-makers at the Viennese Court finally resolved to contribute to the partition project. Maria Theresa signed the secret declaration in this respect on 19 February that year, recognising the Russian and Prussian legal titles to certain domains of the Commonwealth, submitting analogous claims and forewarning that Austria's accession was predetermined by the principle of equality in the acquisitions. To determine the latter in detail was subject to debate, and the bargaining went on over the subsequent months in Petersburg. Under the partition treaties concluded in Petersburg on 5 August 1772 and the demarcations made at a later date, Prussia obtained a territory of 36,000 square kilometres, populated by 580,000 people; Russia, 92,000 sq. km, with a population of 1,300,000 people; Austria, 83,000 sq. km and 2,650,000 people.⁹⁴

The partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth heralded a new era in the Prusso-Russo-Austrian relations. In spite of their diverse interests in the other parts of the continent, these powers were inclined to closely collaborate for keeping the Polish domains in their hands.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 73–4.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 75–6.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 77–81.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 76.

⁹⁴ Martens, *Recueil des traités*, ii (St. Pétersbourg, 1875), 20–1; Arneth, *Maria Theresia's*, viii, 361; Beer, *Die erste Teilung*, ii, 342, Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 111–28.

IV CONCLUSION

La Pologne – Frederick the Great wrote in his political testament of 1768 – ne peut à peine se compter entre les puissances de l'Europe Enfin tous les vices de l'ancien gouvernement féodal s'y sont conservez jusque à nos jours: des élections de leurs rois, suivis de guerres civiles, des diètes tumultueuses dont aucune ne subsiste, point de législation, point de justice. C'est la règne de l'anarchie.⁹⁵

Overdrawn in the Prussian king's account, this picture of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was, matter-of-factly, the political programme of the Petersburg and Berlin Courts, which mutually supportively kept watch in the eighteenth century over the political numbness of the Polish monarchy.

This brief overview of the alliance treaties concluded during the eighteenth century by the powerful countries neighbouring on Poland has shown that, regardless of the changes in the political configurations of the diplomatic quadrille, the objectives of these adjacent countries with respect to the Commonwealth remained unchanged. The clauses concerning the Polish affairs were identical with the political principles of the neighbouring courts. The community of negative Russo-Prussian interests stood fast throughout the century, and was reflected in the provisions of the alliance treaties entered into by these states. Their collaboration was most aptly commented on by Władysław Konopczyński in his monograph on the First Partition: "Russia may be oscillating at will between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons, but will never, even during the Seven Years' War, relax the chain that links Petersburg and Berlin, and quashes the Polish life."⁹⁶ Russia and Prussia were equally interested in keeping the Commonwealth weak. This imperative was strong enough to have been referred to in almost all the arrangements that linked Petersburg with Berlin in the eighteenth century.

Whether during the reign of Peter the Great, Elizabeth Petrovna, or Catherine the Great, the delivery of the Petersburg Court's designs

⁹⁵ Frédéric II de Prusse [Frederick II], 'Testament politique [1768]', in Richard Dietrich (ed.), *Die politischen Testamente der Hohenzollern* (Köln, 1986), 626.

⁹⁶ Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 44; cf. Klaus Zernack, 'Negative Polenpolitik als Grundlage deutsch-russischer Diplomatie in der Mächtepolitik des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Uwe Liszkowski (ed.), *Russland und Deutschland. Festschrift für Georg von Rauch* (Stuttgart, 1974), 144–59.

was conditioned upon completion of the Russian preponderance over Poland. The subjugation of the Commonwealth introduced the tsarist Empire into the European concert, paving the way open for its further westward expansion and, consequently, establishing it as the 'adjudicator of Europe' – the role Tsar Alexander I indeed assumed during the Napoleonic Wars.⁹⁷ Regardless of whether it was about ousting Sweden from the fight for the *dominium Maris Baltici*, pursuing territorial expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Porte, or preserving the status quo, thereby re-establishing Russia's position in the concert of the European powers, Poland was constantly assigned the role of an observer of the developments – one that remained completely dependent on the nerve centre on the Neva. Russia would never let Poland's political system improved and its army's permanent unit increased, by means of which the international position would have been reinforced.

During the reign of Frederick William I as well as under Frederick the Great, the desideratum to keep Poland weak was permanently upheld. The impotence of the former suzerain was the *sine-qua-non* condition for the political significance of the Hohenzollern monarchy to increase. A weak Commonwealth preconditioned the success of the Berlin Court's plans to annex a part of the former suzerain's territory. Obviously, the Prussian kings desired territorial acquisitions not only at the cost of Poland: also the Swedish and, later on, Saxon dominions came into play. As emphatically testified by Frederick II's reflections in his political testaments, an appropriate consistency of the monarchy could have only been ensured by annexation of Royal Prussia and merger of Brandenburg with Ducal Prussia.⁹⁸

This remark is true also for Austria, the country that was perceived by the earlier historians as more favourable toward the Court at Warsaw. The Austrian Court did not act as an inactive observer at that

⁹⁷ These daydreams dated back of much earlier days: cf. Catherine II to Nikolaj V. Repnin, Russian envoy to the Congress of Teschen, 22 Oct. (2 Nov.) 1779, in *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoričeskogo Obščestva*, lxx (1888), 4. Cf. Jurij E. Ivonin, 'Povorot Veny i Berlina k razdelam Pol'sy. Staraja Imperija i territorial'nye gosudarstva Germanii ot tešenskogo mira do knjažeskogo sojuza 1785 g.', in *Rossija, Pol'sa, Germanija v evropejskoj i mirovoj politike XVI–XX vv.* (Moskva, 2002), 180.

⁹⁸ Frédéric II de Prusse [Frederick II], 'Testament politique' [1752], in *Die politischen Testamente der Hohenzollern*, 368, 372–4; *idem*, 'Testament politique' [1768], 658, 664.

time yet; it was already in the 1720s that the Burg renounced its own policy with respect to Poland – an obvious concession to Petersburg. Austria recognised Russia's preponderance over the Commonwealth: it understood that, regardless of the changing circumstances, Petersburg approached Poland as the area of its exclusive political penetration. This regularity was reinforced after Silesia got separated from the Habsburg monarchy. After 1742/8, the Austrian Court became even more willing to ally with Russia: it was namely believed that Russia could provide a chance for Austria to regain the 'Gem of the Crown of St. Wenceslaus', which it had lost to Prussia. Contrary to the opinion prevalent in the earlier (including Polish) historiography, neither in the 1740s nor in the 1750s was the Viennese Court contemplate to support the political or constitutional reforms in Poland, whose throne was occupied by their allied Wettin rulers, but undertook to solidify the systemic weaknesses in Poland.⁹⁹

The secret clauses of almost all the treaties concluded by the potent neighbour countries – including such which might have potentially been joined by the Nobility's Republic – comprised provisions to maintain, with use of all the available forces, those systemic elements of the Commonwealth which consolidated its weakness: those were referred to as 'nobility's freedoms (or liberties)'. The purpose behind cherishing the 'freedoms, statutes, prerogatives, and entitlements' was to prevent a strengthening of the royal power and improve the legislative procedures, which might reinstate Poland as an international player again. The focal point was, basically, the *liberum veto*, using which also the foreign powers could break off the parliamentary sessions, taking advantage of their clients' services. The notorious 'free veto' device stifled Polish political life and prevented the necessary reforms. Another systemic element about whose petrification the neighbour countries particularly cared was the free election of monarch – the 'pupil of the noble liberties' (*pupilla libertatis*). The obligations reappearing in the treaties to ensure to the Polish nobles unrestrained (s)election of the monarch or counteract the attempts at disturbing free election processes by the other powers were, in reality, about foreclosing the election of a candidate the contracting parties would have found unwelcome on the Warsaw throne. For the capital hubs interested

⁹⁹ Eduard Winter, 'Grundlinien der Österreichischen Russlandpolitik am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, iv, 1 (1959), 94–110.

in keeping Poland politically inert, free election moreover ensured a havoc reappearing across the country at least every several dozen years, with their strengthened influence in Poland coming as a result. The countries adjacent to the Commonwealth vouched to one another that they would mutually communicate their comments on Poland's affairs whilst their diplomats residing in Warsaw would collaborate. The treaties, moreover, expressed the signatories' readiness to undertake far-reaching interventions – political and, if need be, armed. When in the early days of his reign Stanislaus Augustus made an attempt at carrying out the necessary systemic reforms, Russia, in cooperation with Prussia, took steps to obstruct the initiative – and succeeded, given its considerable vantage in military build-up.

Keeping Poland powerless and torpid – the postulate that reappeared in all the eighteenth-century Russo-Prussian alliance treaties – was the fundamental pillar for Petersburg and Berlin. Although the safeguarding of the Commonwealth's political inertia was not of primary priority to Vienna, the latter put the friendship with Russia before the relationship with its northern neighbour and, consequently, consented to treating the Nobility's Republic as an arena of the tsarist Empire's exclusive influence. Hence, in the treaties concluded with Prussia accepted the clauses levelled against Poland. The provisions for guarding the weakness of Poland were included in the series of treaties entered into by the neighbouring countries. The weakness, nicknamed the 'Polish anarchy', was quoted to justify the eventual partition of the Commonwealth.

In the period under examination, the common interests, translating into the hindering of political sovereignty of Poland and prevention of its constitutional or military reforms, remained almost unaltered. It has to be emphatically stressed that, regardless of the changing international situation, the alliances or leagues rising and falling, the points referring to Poland remained a fixed element of the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian treaties.

trans. Tristan Korecki

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