

### **Lecture 3**

#### **The Partitions of Poland 1763-1795**

##### **I. Partition in Eighteenth Century**

‘Partition was a major political fashion in the eighteenth century, a rational way for monarchs to settle their differences and adjust one another’s potentials in the name of the balance of power.’ (Lucjan Lewitter, author of the chapter on the subject in the *New Cambridge Modern History*).

Many examples:

1. Great Northern War – originates in a scheme to share out Swedish possessions on southern shore of Baltic.
2. Division of Spanish possessions in 1713-1714.
3. Austrian inheritance nearly subdivided in 1741.
4. Plans for exchange of Bavaria, parts of Rhineland, Netherlands, Austrian Italy, Hanover, English, French, Dutch colonies.
5. Turkey – Austrian and Russian plans.
6. Seven Years’ War. Russian hopes to dismember Prussia – Silesia to go to Austria, East Prussia to Poland.

##### **II. First Partition**

1. Reasons for weakness of Poland obvious and have already been discussed in some detail.

2. Election of Stanisław August in 1764

He was a member of the Czartoryski faction. Elected with help of Catherine. Hoped for reform. His character has been hotly disputed. Ambitions, endowed with great natural gifts, had had a good education and had traveled widely in Germany, France, England and Russia. Charming, good-looking, had great capacity for work. An intellectual to his fingertips, steeped in the cosmopolitan culture of the eighteenth century. But he was also vain, extravagant, pleasure-loving. Not a heroic figure. Way opinions about him have changed:

1. Immediately after partitions
2. Rehabilitation
3. Present-day view in Poland

There are a number of studies in French and English on him:

J. Fabre, *Stanislaus-August Poniatowski et l'Europe des Lumieres* (Paris, 1952)

J. Butterwick, *Poland's Last King and English Culture* (Oxford, 1988)

Adam Zamoyski, *The Last King of Poland* (London, 1992)

3. Catherine and Poniatowski; Development of Dissident Problem

Catherine and Poniatowski at cross purposes. Catherine unwilling to acquiesce in

type of reform which Poniatowski favoured – the emergence of a permanent Sejm bound by the will of the majority.

Catherine's advisers divided on Polish policy. On the one side, Zakhar Chernyshev, President of the College of War favoured a 'rectification' of the Russian western frontier. He was opposed by Nikita Panin, Catherine's chief political mentor during the first eighteen years of her reign, who was for the maintenance of Polish territorial integrity as part of his attempt to create a 'Northern System' to oppose the Bourbon-Habsburg alliance. Catherine herself not strongly committed to either position. But all Russia statesmen committed to maintaining Polish unreformed constitution – this one of the terms of the Prusso-Russian alliance of 1764.

Frederick II – 'the Great' – the King of Prussia hoped to unite East Prussia and Pomerania. In 1752 he observed that Polish Prussia to be 'consumed in peace after the manner of an artichoke, leaf by leaf'.

Main issue in early year of Poniatowski's reign was that of dissenters.

1. Protestants – some 200,000
2. Orthodox – originally perhaps 4 million. By 1763 numbers had shrunk to something like 600,000

Frederick saw in dissenters a lever. But Catherine determined to demand full civil and political rights for dissenters, not only on grounds of principle, but primarily to make impossible any reform of the constitution. As Panin wrote to Nikolai Repnin, the Russian Ambassador in Warsaw in 1766, 'It is necessary to resolve the Dissident affair not for the sake of propagating our faith and that of the Protestants in Poland, but for the sake of acquiring for ourselves, through our coreligionists and the Protestants a firm and reliable

party with the legal right to participate in all the affairs of Poland’.

Conditions demanded for dissenters described by British Secretary of State for Northern Department as ‘unreasonable’ and likely to cause ‘danger’ and ‘envy’.

Under instructions from abroad, Orthodox form confederation at Slutsk early in 1767, Protestants do same at Torun. Discontent among Catholics leads to confederation being formed at Radom.

Russian ambassador forces issue – this settled by confederate Sejm of 1767-8.

Orthodox and Lutherans granted:

1. Complete freedom of worship
2. Right to build and rebuild churches and schools
3. Admission to public offices

These terms forced through under Russian pressure. Moreover, Sejm also compelled to lay down five ‘eternal and invariable’ principles:

1. Free election of kings.
2. liberum veto
3. Right of renouncing allegiance to king (i.e the right to form a confederation)
4. Nobility’s exclusive right to hold land.
5. Landowner’s dominion over peasantry (serfdom)

Thus religious liberty was associated with political license. Moreover, at the conclusion of the Sejm, in February, a ‘perpetual treaty between the Polish Commonwealth and the Empire of all Russia’. This provided for:

1. Guarantee for rights of dissenters (Art III)
2. Guarantee of existing constitution.

#### 4. Confederation of Bar

Humiliation of republic causes reaction among gentry. Confederation formed at Bar in South-eastern Poland – claimed it was fighting for defense of faith and liberty

No coherent pattern to leadership – indeed leaders continually intrigued against each other. Some wanted return of Saxons, some mainly hostile to the Czartoryski faction. But all anti-Russian.

Fairly general desire for reduction of royal patronage, in return for abolition of free veto. Not all confederates bigoted. Some were Protestants, freemasons, admirers of West. Some sought advice of people in West – notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mably, Mercier de la Rivere. Final deed issued in 1773 an eloquent document. First to use word ‘niepodległość’(independence).

Progress of confederation now impeded by an uprising of Ukrainian peasantry against Polish landlords and their Jewish agents. Looked to Russia for help – thought misguidedly that their social and economic objectives would win as much support as their religious claims. Russians act against Haydamaks – but cannot prevent them sacking Turkish port of Balta

Turks thus declare war on Russia in October 1768. Role of French in encouraging Turks.

Confederacies now formed in rest of Poland. In 1769 these united to form General Confederacy. Headquarters set up in Hungary. The French foreign minister, Etienne Francois, Duke of Choiseul, sends military mission there under Colonel Charles Francois

Dumouriez. Under his instigation that confederate leaders decide to declare Poniatowski deposed.

Confederates discredited by attempt to kidnap king. This prevents any real chance of reconciliation between Czartoryskis and confederates through good offices of France with help of Austria. These two countries now united in hostility to Russia.

## 5. Partition

Austro-Russian relations deteriorate badly. Austrians promise Turkey to safeguard the country's integrity and defend Polish independence. Occupying some Polish territory. But Austrians half-hearted – partition proposed and accepted.

Prussian and Russian armies force surrender of confederation bands

Partition:

1. Prussia: area lying between Pomerania and East Prussia in West and also Ermeland
2. Austria: large triangle based on Carpathians, north side running just south of Kraków, east. side runs to north-east of Lvov.
3. Russia: Regions of Dvina, Druch and Dniepr.

Poland loses one quarter of population, 50,000 square miles, 4 million inhabitants out of 11.5 million

[Map]

### **III. Reform between First and Second Partitions**

1. Impact of the Enlightenment

Before early 1780's these ideas only influential at top of social scale. But increasingly became more and more widely dispensed. Importance of foreign travel. Development of periodical press. Ideas of enlightenment fostered by papers such as the *Monitor*. Development of free-masonry. But anti-clericalism not strong. Role of Jesuits in pioneering astronomy and experimental physics.

Development of educational system. This helped by agency set up in 1773 for purpose of taking over endowments and educational functions of dissolved Jesuits. 1783 National Education Commission reorganized and made responsible for whole of secondary and higher education as well as training of teachers

By 1792 some 70 schools with 40,000-50,000 pupils. Syllabus a great improvement on half-medieval, half-humanist and wholly Latin education previously provided by Jesuits. Difficulty came from lack of sufficient teachers. Role of commissioned textbooks in reforming Polish language. This gave rise to a literary revival

Role of King. Strong believer in enlightenment. Under his patronage that Warsaw became a classical city. Interest in history. Adam Naruszewicz (1733-1796), *History of the Polish Nation from the Times of its Conversion to Christianity*. 6 volumes – steeped in the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Role of Bishop Ignacy Krasicki.

## 2. Reforms

These hampered by hostility of Russia and by restrictions imposed by Confederation Sejm of 1767. But favoured by enlightened minority in Sejm and by fact

that in terms of legislation of 1767, matters governing material status (i.e., taxation, coinage, size of army, foreign affairs) governed by majority rule. In addition the device of confederation was used to escape liberum veto. New regulations of parliamentary procedure

Reforms have effect of causing some not of central government to emerge

Let us look at them in more detail.

### 1. Sejmiks

a. Fiscal powers restricted

b. Bound by will of majority when electing deputies to Sejm

c. Only landed szlachta eligible for membership. This diminishes influence of great magnates.

### 2. Administrative system reformed

a. Army and treasury commissions for kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania circumscribe powers of Hetman and Treasurers

b. 1773 Formation of Education Commission common to both areas

c. 1775 – Many of Crown's powers had been transferred to a permanent council of senators and deputies. This however dominated by Russian ambassador.

### 3. Tax system remodelled and as a result, revenue rises rapidly

1776-7	12 million
1788-9	15.5 million
1789-1790	43.5 million

1790-1791                      30 million

#### 4. Humanitarian reforms

- a. 1768 landlord forfeits *ius vitae et necis*
- b. 1776 Death penalty for witchcraft abolished
- c. 1776 Judicial torture abolished (importance of this in ritual murder trials)
- d. 1775 Szlachta to be able to take part in trade
- e. 1764, 1768 Rights of gentry and clergy in towns reduced

How far-reaching were these reforms?

#### 3. Economic developments

##### 1. Effects of partition very harsh

- a. Loss of territory
- b. Depredations caused by fighting with confederation of Bar.
- c. Polish - Prussian trade treaty of 1775.

This most disastrous. Its terms amount to the erection of a customs system designed to obtain from Poland primary commodities at minimum prices and to secure for Prussian manufactures markets in Poland. It also impose high transit duties:

Effects:

- 1. 1776 Commercial traffic between Poland and Danzig on the Vistula fell to 2/3rds of 1770 total

2. 1776 number of ships calling at Danzig harbor fell to half 1770 total
3. 1776 Grain exported via Danzig falls to 37% of 1769 figure.

Harshness of treaty somewhat modified after 1781. But deleterious effects remain.

Some improvement in Polish position because of development of export routes through Black Sea.

## 2. Attempts to develop industry

These largely unsuccessful:

1. Prussian competition
2. Lack of pool of free labour. Some factories used serf labour

Examples:

1. Those of king
  - a. Blast factories near Sambor
  - b. Cloth factory – S-E Poland
  - c. Belvedere pottery – Warsaw
  - d. Copper mine
  - e. Marble quarry

Most unsuccessful

2. Linen mill near Warsaw on benefice of Primate Michael Poniatowski.

Board half szlachta, half townspeople.

#### **IV. Second Partition**

##### 1. Attempts to cooperate with Russia

Cut off from Danzig, Poland increasingly graduates towards S-E. Two canals planned to connect Niemen and Vistula with Dniepr. But problems in this new orientation:

1. Turks unwilling to allow shipment of Polish grain down Dniester.
2. Catherine will not allow restoration of disused harbor at Poląga on the Lithuanian coast.

She also would not go in 1782 beyond a small reduction of tariff on Polish goods exported by land through Kherson on Black Sea, where a Polish magnate Prot Potocki had established his Black Sea Trading Company. King hopes to win Russian support for his program of reform by offering to help with conquest of Crimea. This offer refused in 1783.

Renewed in 1787. Poles hoped to acquire seaboard in Bessarabia. Spring 1787 Catherine and Poniatowski discuss joint action at Kaniv on Dniepr. September Russo-Turkish war breaks out. Poniatowski renews his proposals for alliance. After 9 months silence, Catherine accepts military aid, but refused to allow political reform or territorial acquisitions.

##### 2. Reform in alliance with Prussia

Russian refusal makes nonsense of Czartoryski plan for reform in collaboration

with Russia. New Sejm had moreover formed a loyalist confederation to augment state revenue and army. Prussia now offers an alliance. Disclaims any intention of interfering in Polish affairs. Induces king to withdraw proposal of alliance with Russia.

Events now move fast in Poland:

October 1788: Sejm resolves to raise army of 100,000 men (target later limited to 65,000).

November 1788: Military Department of Permanent Council suppressed and replaced by Parliamentary Commission – this a violation both of fundamental laws and of Treaties of Guarantee with Russia (1775). Russia at war with Turkey and Sweden. Unable to do anything.

February 1789: Permanent council itself abolished. Its functions taken over by parliamentary commissions.

Spring 1789: Russia and Austria comply with Polish demand to withdraw their troops from Podolia.

May 1789: Attempt to win over British. Envoy sent to London to explore possibility of developing Anglo-Polish trade and by-passing Prussian customs barrier.

Key to new situation the Prusso-Polish Alliance

This slow to materialize: Prussia's original intention was to intervene in Poland on behalf of anti-Russian party and thus gain hold of Toruń and Danzig. Thus Prussia, in spite of offers of alliance, fundamentally uninterested in reform in Poland. Late 1789 Situation changes. Prussia now determined to attack Austria. Influence of Ewald Friedrich von Hertzberg, the Prussian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Attack planned for Spring 1790 Alliance with Poland now much more necessary.

Prussian offer reduction of tariff carrier in return for cession of Danzig and Toruń. This too much for Poles. Question thus deferred.

March 1790 Alliance concluded. Two countries agree to guarantee each other's territory. Prussians see treaty as useful only in case of war with Austria. But by summer 1790 conflict between Prussia and Austria has been settled by negotiation at Reichenbach. Thus ends Hertzberg's cherished scheme of obtaining Galicia from Austrians to be handed over to Poles in return for Danzig and Toruń

Thus position of Poles much weaker than then they were aware of.

### 3. Development of reform in Poland

September 1789: Parliamentary commission for reform of government formed.  
(cf. chronology to that of French revolution)

April 1790: Rights of royal boroughs increased.

September 1790: Territory of republic declared inviolable – Russian guarantee of 1775 repudiated. This impolitic in relation to Prussia. Hertzberg describes declaration as 'perfidious.'

November 1790: New elections to supplement Sejm. Of 180 deputies, 120 favour reform.

January 1791: Britain and Prussia demand from Russia a guarantee of status quo in Turkey.

Britain expresses willingness to enter a political and commercial agreement with Poland. But only with participation of Prussia, i.e. with cession of Danzig and Toruń.

Moreover mood in Britain against war with Russia. By end of March plan for

'Russian armament' had clearly failed. (This incident well-described in M.S. Anderson *Britain's Discovery of Russia 1553-1815*: ch VI)

Hope for successful coalition against Russia now ended. King and patriots now decide to act as quickly as possible to save what they could.

May 1791 New constitution passed. This a fascinating document. Related much more to social and political changes of period between 1763 and 1791 than to French precedents.

Description of new constitution

## 1. Government

Government to consist of 3 powers, legislative , executive, judicial. (Art V)

a. Legislative power – this vested in chamber of deputies and senate.

### 1. Senate

a. Made up of bishops, Wojewodowie, Castellans and some ministers

b. Had suspense veto on legislation

### 2. Chamber of Deputies

Could discuss all proposals concerning general laws and resolutions as to policy, especially those put forward by king.

a. To vote on matters of policy

b. Everything to be decided on majority vote

c. Powers of sejmiki reduced – deputies not bound by mandate

d. Institution of confederation abolished

e. 204 deputies in Chamber of Deputies

24 from towns – but had no vote

b. Executive Power

King in council

Council members: Primate, 5 ministers appointed by king, but removable by Sejm, 2

non-voting secretaries

Four Commissions:

a. Education

b. Police

c. Army

d. Treasury

c. Judicial power

Courts for landowners, towns, peasants.

2. Social clauses

1. Roman Catholic remains dominant faith – but freedom of worship guaranteed to adherent of other religions.

2. Rights and privileges of szlachta confirmed and declared unalterable. Landless szlachta (407,000 of 725,000) lose political rights.

3. Rights of towns increased

4. Serfdom maintained, but peasants brought under law in that any agreement between

landowners and peasants mutually binding and subject to government supervision\

## 5. Partition

Prussia considers reform releases it from treaty obligation to Poland. Early 1792 peace between Russia and Turkey. Prussian government now considers re-establishment of Russian influence.

March 1792 Leopold of Austria dies. This makes partition even more likely.

April 1792 Prussian envoy declares verbally that his government did not consider itself bound to defend new court.

May 1792 Catherin forms conservative confederation (Targowica.)

Russia invades; Prussia refuses to help

July 1792 king decides to compromise

January 1793 Prussia and Russia agree on partition. Austria forgoes share in return for Bavaria.

June 1793 Sejm at Grodno acquiesces under threat of force.

All that was left of Poland was a small Russian protectorate with a population of 4 million and an area of 80,000 square miles.

## **V. Third Partition**

Poles not reconciled to sit and Polish Army still in existence. Success of French revolution impressed people. Attempt to reduce size of army sparks off revolt. This led by Tadeusz Kościuszko.

Has some initial success. By end of April whole of territory left to Poland after Second partition cleared of foreign troops. May Prussians intervene. Situation now virtually hopeless. By November rising crushed

After some dispute, Russians again decide on partition. Terms of this cause difficulty. Finally settled in October 1795

Kościuszko rebellion had many new features. K himself not of noble birth, educated both in Poland and in Paris. Belief in common man. May 1794 – freed peasants from bondage, reduced corvée.

French revolution seen more as a help with forcing external enemies to withdraw than as a political inspiration. French could in fact give little help. Some 'Jacobins' in Warsaw.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Reasons for partitions