

The Spirit of Poland's History

The text below is an abstract of a book by Antoni Chołoniewski entitled *Duch dziejów Polski* (*The Spirit of Poland's History*, 2nd edition, Kraków 1918). Bolded headlines correspond to the chapters of the book. We hope that our selection of quotes gives a good view of this spirit of Poland's history, the strong spirit of freedom, which comes from the truth "*that Poland is a 'great thing'*".

Here is a part of the motto by M. Mochnecki:

*We don't build a fantastic edifice without plan and architects,
but dredge up an ancient building from rubble.
Resurrection of the spirit of those institutions, rights and customs,
which once adorned the republican monarchy of the Polish nation,
carries a great idea of political restoration.*

These words were written more than a century ago, when Poland as a state was rising from non-existence. Nowadays, having gone through German Nazi and Russian Stalinist occupation, while western capital runs rampant – they are still true, the more so in the context of the war in Ukraine. Good reading!

Poland of Tomorrow, www.polska-jutra.eu

Introduction

"The goal of this work is to set out in short the most important manifestations of Polish historical thought. (...) Poland, if not attacked from abroad, would easily cure its own weaknesses, for which it was striving from the middle of the 18th century, and which it proved by the Czartoryski reform in 1764 (...) and by the May 3 Constitution (1791); and having filled in the gaps in its form of government, (...) the Polish noble social-classes-organized Commonwealth would become exemplary modern republic."

"The political thought of the Polish nation matured in the middle of the 15th century. Since then it began to flow along another stream than in most of Europe. We consider this moment as the starting point... (...) Let's take a look at the main spiritual bindings of this (...) political construction, which called itself the Polish Commonwealth."

The idea of collective life

"At the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries Europe begins to step more and more in the period of modern absolutism. (...) French kings were as early as in the 16th century called (...) kings of slaves. (...) The state is me! (...) Autocracy balked any participation of populaces in public life... (...) In Poland things turned quite differently. (...) Poland through all the time of its state existence managed not only to defend and maintain but also to develop the principle inherited from the Middle Ages: the principle of society's participation in power. Two streams flow in opposite directions: the development of the state system of the European continent and the state system development of the Polish Commonwealth."

"Here, with continuous shifting of power into the hands of the nation, a type of free citizen arises, who expresses his attitude to the state in the form of a proud and more importantly right principle: 'nil de nobis sine nobis' - nothing about us without us.

Since the beginning of the 15th century the Polish nation develops citizen and political freedom in its country with incredible speed."

And the author lists the following:

1. *“In 1422, in the privilege act from Czerwińsk, Polish nobility gains the right of inviolability of property: from now the king cannot deprive anyone of his private property without court judgment.”*
2. *The year 1425 brings the important right of personal inviolability, expressed in the memorable cardinal law ‘Neminem captivabimus nisi jure victum’, which guaranteed that a noble citizen won’t be imprisoned without legally valid court judgment, except when caught red-handed... (...)This Polish ‘Habeas corpus’, which by many centuries preceded the development of such laws on the European continent, and which was dutifully respected so that no one ventured to breach it, was later extended by the Polish Commonwealth to townspeople (1791) and to Jews (1792).”*
3. *The privilege from 1588 guarantees inviolability of homestead, deciding that the household of a noble man cannot be subject to on-site inspection, even when an outlaw is there in hiding.”*
4. *Any citizen of the Polish Commonwealth has, without any special permissions, the freedom to establish associations and to express beliefs in word and writing, and cannot be persecuted in any form because of his opinion on public affairs. Who sues a fellow citizen because of him expressing even the most illegitimate views, is punished as a destroyer of inner peace and oppressor of civil liberties.”*

Summarizing the above:

“The today’s so called constitutional principles: personal inviolability, inviolability of property, inviolability of homestead (toft), freedom to establish associations and freedom to express beliefs – the principles, which elsewhere in the 19th century were the object of battles fought with bloodshed and were won amid violent internal turbulences - in Poland were implemented as early as the 15th and 16th centuries and survived up to the end of the Polish Commonwealth’s existence, whereas in Europe the most severe lawlessness prevailed.”

“Simultaneously, strictly political liberties are extended in Poland. Their basis is the Statute of Nieszawa issued by King Kazimierz Jagiellończyk in 1454. In it the king pledges neither to edict new laws nor to order new military expeditions without the consent of nobility assembled at local diets. Since then the noble class obtained access to legislative power.”

“From the nebula of thus developed concepts there emerges the Polish parliamentary system. In the second half of 15th century, periodic knights' rallies and the Assistant Crown Council transform into a GENERAL ASSEMBLY (Sejm Walny), from then on a permanent and first-rate element of public life; its final introduction takes place in 1493. In 1505, the Sejm (parliamentary meeting) in Radom obtains a legal basis for its organisation and at the same time carries out the big political reform in the fundamental law ‘Nihil novi constitui...’ (The king pledges: we won’t decide upon any new things unless with common acceptance of the Council and local deputies).”

For three centuries, until the enactment of the 3rd-May Constitution, the ‘Nihil novi’ constitution was the basis of the Poland’s political system, establishing the principle, *“which in effect had been generally respected for a long time - the principle that law cannot be established by one person, by crowned ruler and suzerain, but it must be enacted together with commonalty, so that the nation is the real source of laws regulating the public life...”*

“Up to the latest times, such combination of royal authority with representation of the nation in one consistent system apart from Poland existed only in the constitution of England.”

Members of the chamber of deputies come from election: the gentry elect 'land deputies' during election assemblies, or sejmiks (...), townspeople elect city deputies."

"Sejm deliberations were held in public, with open doors (...) During the whole time of Sejm deliberations, deputies and senators are inviolable and free from judicial liability: any proceeded lawsuits, which affect them, are temporarily suspended..."

"After the Sejm meeting ends, its members, deputies, must stand in front of their voters and report their activities at the so called report-sejmiks (report-meetings)."

"Voivodships (provinces) and several dozen of 'lands' retained a wide range of self-government. They had an appropriate, separate local legislative body called 'country assembly', where the nobility could fix different administrative or tax issues, set up taxes for local needs and collect them through their officials; voivodships even maintained their own armed forces. These voivodships were like small republics within a big one, which combined them into a common whole entity by means of central authorities and the General Sejm. When in the age of the collapse under the Saxons the central power almost disappeared and the centre of gravity of power moved to local self-government bodies, whose overgrowth posed a threat to state unity, the Polish Commonwealth became a kind of loose federation of such republics-voivodships, uncoordinated with one another."

"The Polish monarch could not recklessly, for personal or family reasons, ignite the conflagration of war, because the most important of rights, the right to draw weapons, was vested in the nation itself, which reserved the right of consideration whether war or peace were in its interest..."

"An extremely strong emphasis on the right of the individual found its expression in the principle of unanimity of resolutions, which was characteristic of the Polish political system (...) Every legally binding resolution of the Sejm had to be passed by all votes (...) ('Liberum veto') (...) The core of this principle was the idea that no majority should automatically impose its will on minority. A member of the Polish Sejm wanted to be convinced rather than outvoted. This doctrine, called by the nobility 'the nucleus of freedom', withstood the trial of life victoriously for a long time.

Since the end of the 17th century, with the decrease in the moral level of the society, the principle of unanimity became a convenient tool for external stirring of unrest or for those who opposed any reforms – and so it started to serve for breaking Sejm sessions..."

Let's name the above mentioned decrease in moral level explicitly: there were many recreants, sold-outs to enemies, and traitors to the interests of Poland.

"This continuous, long-lasting, three centuries' practice created a political culture, which became a habit of the Polish nobility. Public affairs (...) absorbed them, were their favourite and honourable activities, just as in ancient Greek republics. (...) The nobility was constantly preoccupied with self-government or taking care of state interests, during Sejm assemblies – be it ordinary ones, called mandatorily every two years, or extraordinary ones, convened when necessary, as well as countless local county and provincial meetings (including pre-Sejm, election, deputy-choosing, local management, after-Sejm report meetings and general), in elected judicial tribunals and in many public offices."

"Eventually Poland developed a noble-democratic and noble-republican political system. The name 'Rzeczpospolita' ('Res publica', commonwealth) appears spontaneously in the language of the nation as a description of thus formed state, a name which faithfully reflects the spirit of its public system and rapidly spreads as a non-formal denotation of the Polish constitutional monarchy."

The nation and king

“From the end of Middle Ages up to the end of its existence, the Polish political society holds to the principle that people should be subjects only to the authority they selected from among themselves. (...)

In relation to the person of the king, the Polish nobleman retains a full sense of dignity, as a citizen and a human being. ‘He respected the king – says historian Kalinka – as a serious moral reference, as the head of noblemen federation, of which he considered himself as a member, but he was not afraid of the king (...) He was glad to win his favour, but he could do without it if necessary. What he was, he was not thanks to the king, but to himself.’ As opposed to that, in France the cult of the monarch has reached the peak of perversion.”

“The Polish nobleman has a proud feeling that he not only is an ‘elector of kings’, but he also has the right to bear the crown himself. The way to the throne is open for every member of the large crowd of noble class, if the trust of his co-citizens induced by his extraordinary talents and merits leads to his election. This happens four times in the history of Poland... [e.g. the kings Sobieski and Leszczyński]. Both of them, having reached the throne, didn't feel like some supernatural beings, but like people grown out of the flesh and blood of the society (...), and they felt noble pride in being able to exercise power in a state based on freedom and law.”

“The attitude of the nation to the king was determined by the political system of the Polish Commonwealth itself, which to prevent the tyranny of the individual shifted the focus of political life to the Sejm assembly (...) and instilled in the blood of the nation a sense of responsibility for the course of public affairs.”

“Since 1573 elective Sejm assemblies submit fundamental laws (Articuli Henriciani) and conditions of government (pacta conventa) for adoption to the monarchs ascending to the throne, in order to distinguish the duties and rights of the king from the duties and rights of the people. The King approves this agreement by taking an oath. After normalizing mutual relations (...) the Polish king begins to perform his duties (...) as the highest representative of executive power and the first citizen of the state, (...) – indeed – as the president of the republic...”

“Should the king openly and evidently violate the sworn law, then he is to be warned three times by a resolution of the Senate and to be reprimanded by the primate of Poland; and only ‘if their admonition is ignored’, in case of notorious damage, the Sejm may terminate the agreement (...) This relationship of conditional loyalty to the ruler could in practice lead to abuses. However, this was prevented by Polish legislation, which provided for the most severe punishments for troublemakers who incited unrest under the pretence that the king ‘was plotting with the intention to harm the Commonwealth’. The article ‘de non praestenda oboedientia’ testifies to the high reverence for law in Poland and preferring it over the royal person. (...) However, the king of such moral strength as Stefan Batory was not prevented from ruling with an iron fist and punishing the most powerful magnates with decapitation, when they were proven to have broken the laws; the general public stood in solidarity with the king who did not allow for trampling the laws and himself observed them truly. Such attitude of citizens to the royal person (...) is at that time something unknown in the history of the rest of Europe that alternately humbles itself in the dust in face of the wildest antics of its rulers and lets them trample on itself, or throws them at its feet, harasses them, imprisons them, poisons them, cuts off their heads, etc. The Polish society settles its scores with the monarch honestly and clearly, as befits free people.”

“The king in Poland did not need to surround himself with guards either, he dwelt among his people boldly and freely (...)The heroic liberator of Vienna [1683], John III Sobieski, (...) didn’t hesitate to dance among a crowd at the wedding of a simple blacksmith, as a free man among free people. This eminently characteristic feature of Polish people never to deal with their rulers in an insidious and rogue way, but openly and chivalrously, could only be created at the place, where also openly and publicly the principle that the nation doesn’t exist for a king, but a king exists for the nation was preached - a thoroughly modern principle which was professed in Poland at that time when the European states surrounding Poland were increasingly descending to the level of private property of their monarchs.”

The Polish nobility

„The nobility wasn’t here [in Poland], like elsewhere, only a thin upper layer of society, but they represented (...) such a large part of the nation as in no other country of Europe. Whereas France at the end of the 18th century had 140.000 noble people per 20 million inhabitants (0.7%), Polish Commonwealth at the same time counted more than one million nobles (some historians mention 1.3 million) per 10 million inhabitants, i.e. 10-13%.”

“Between different layers of Polish nobility, separated by huge differences in wealth, (...) the famous and proudly professed principle of ‘noble equality’ is shared (...) This aspect of the nation’s spirit is expressed in a popular and favourite proverb (...) ‘a nobleman on his farmstead is equal to voivode’.”

“The spirit of the Polish ‘noble nation’ was therefore both republican and democratic in the full sense of these words. This noble nation, proud of their freedoms which weren’t found in any other country on the continent, sometimes just intoxicated with them, never closed themselves completely to the inflow from other strata of the population, except the depraved generation from the end of 17th and the first half of 18th century. The Polish nobility did not succumb to the danger of degenerating into an absolutely ossified caste but retained the features of a constantly renewing organism; whereby the way to this privileged state led not through wealth and influence, but through chivalric merit, which was also available to the poorest people. This is all the more significant in characterising the national spirit, because since the mid-16th century the right of ennoblement in Poland was held not by the king but by the Sejm, and thus by the ‘nation’ itself.(...)A well-known phenomenon was collective ennoblement of entire peasant villages for brave acts of war (...),many peasants serving in the army were ennobled after the expulsion of the Swedes during the time of King John Casimir as a reward for liberating the country from the enemy. During the time of King Sigismund Augustus, many townspeople received noble status. Professors of the Cracow Academy gained it automatically.”

Unions

„Over time the internal political system, based on highly developed freedom and guaranteeing such a wide range of civil rights and freedoms, began attract and influence other nations and resulted in the growth of the Polish state into a superpower. A relatively small state under the Piast dynasty, it keeps to extend its area in a specifically Polish way, found nowhere else in this form - the way of the union with neighbouring countries and peoples. Neighbouring nations, at home subject to the iron fist of autocracy or oligarchic lawlessness, while lured by the magic of the rule of law and freedoms that Polish society was able to develop at home, begin to gravitate towards it and they voluntarily declare their

accession to the union with Poland. Over two centuries - from the beginning of the 15th century till the end of the 16th century - a number of these unprecedented accessions take place, which over time makes the Republic of Poland grow to the size of the largest power in Europe.”

- “In 1386, the first personal union of Poland and Lithuania was entered into by appointing the Grand Duke of Lithuania Jagiełło, to the Polish throne and his marriage to Queen Jadwiga of Poland. When concluding the union with Lithuania, Poland applied a principle of timeless simplicity: ‘the free with the free and the equal with the equal’...”
- “In 1413, the Union of Horodlo came to fruition, in which both nations guaranteed a lasting agreement on the succession to the throne, and the Lithuanian nobility received a first part of freedoms and political rights that the Polish nobility already had.”
- “In 1454, the Prussian estates, including the cities (...) and the nobility (...) threw off their allegiance to the oligarchic rule of the Teutonic Order and asked Poland to incorporate them. (...) ...since 1466 Prussian Gdańsk-Pomerania was an integral part of the Polish Commonwealth...”
- “In 1525, with the extinction of the Piast dynasty, the Duchy of Masovia renounced its independence and entered into a voluntary union with the Polish state...”
- “In 1561, Livonia declared its accession to the Polish Commonwealth. (...) Incorporated into the Republic of Poland, Livonia, in addition to full religious freedom, retained separate authorities, its own judiciary system, and initially a separate Sejm.”
- 156 years after the Horodelian Union, " at the Sejm of Lublin in 1569 the final, this time real union of Poland with Lithuania took place, which was to survive intact until the violence from outside overthrew the magnificent building, raised by the wisdom of our forefathers.”
“...thanks to the freedoms that united them, the inhabitants of both countries - of course, we are talking about the social strata endowed with political rights - felt primarily citizens of the shared Commonwealth.”

“But in addition to territorial autonomy, Poland also grants autonomy to allochthonous groups that did not occupy one single area anywhere. Armenians, living in the southern cities of the Commonwealth, had their own courts and a separate Armenian Statute, approved by the Polish authorities... (...) For many centuries, Jews in Poland had their completely independent organization of social life, equipped even with central bodies.”

“The diverse population of the Polish Commonwealth until the end of its existence, in addition to the distinctiveness their political systems, enjoyed total freedom of language.”

“Poland had never ‘denationalized’ anyone. (...) [It is necessary] to bring to the historical light the slanderous false claims of certain Russian and German writers, that the old Poland ‘oppressed the national minorities’ united with the Polish Commonwealth.(...) Poles referred to (...)languages of different peoples with the same respect for distinctiveness that we met in so many other fields. Denationalization simply was not a Polish specialty. (...) Polonization was voluntary. Its source was not only the attracting force of our culture in the common and narrow sense of the word, i.e. ‘intellectual culture’, which stood so high under both Sigismunds, but above all ‘the attracting force of the Polish political culture’.

The fact that ideological factors exerted a firm influence here, that it was the deepest and noblest assimilation – through Freedom - is evidenced by the fact that not only the top Ruthenian-Lithuanian strata, but also the German nobility in the western and northern borderlands were linguistically polonized (...)...

“Therefore, the essential feature of our statehood was freedom and political tolerance for all manifestations of historical, civilizational or even just tribal and linguistic distinctiveness. Every crystallized human community enjoyed full rights to life within the borders of the Polish Commonwealth and could develop freely.

On the basis of thus developed political system, a state patriotism evolved in Poland, quite unlike what we see elsewhere today, the patriotism of an almost modern type. Broad and plentiful political freedoms, bound every citizen firmly to the state and made him value ‘Her Majesty the Republic’ as a warrant of numerous freedoms. (...)The Polish nobleman, a co-ruler of his country, proud of his legally secured position as a truly free man, looked with pity at his autocratically ruled neighbours in the west, (...) at the enslaved and subjugated nations of the nearest east, and he had to estimate the political organism of his own country all the higher.”

“Upon the huge areas from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, among the different ethnic and cultural elements, leaning either towards Latin or Byzantine civilization, there was one strongly marked state patriotism – the Polish one...”

“Throughout long generations, history had shown not a single attempt to break that glorious union of states and peoples produced by the Polish historical genius. The association of Poland and Lithuania (...) stands as an isolated phenomenon in all history.”

“The only [greater] dissonance in the field of coexistence of peoples inhabiting the Polish Commonwealth was the Cossack uprising in the mid-17th century.(...) In 1658 the agreement in Hadiacz between Poland and Ukraine took place. It expanded the Union of Lublin and transformed the Jagiellonian Republic into a Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian federal union, in which Ukraine had a similar relation with the [Polish] Crown as Lithuania. But unfortunately this act came too late. Moscow destroyed it to the detriment of both Poland and Ukraine.”

“How strong coherence Poland was able to create (...) among the peoples federated by it, what stability the Polish unions showed, is evidenced by the fact that (...) for the last 120 years [written in 1918] Lithuania has remained faithfully at the side of Poland during all its struggles to regain freedom.(...) In 1863 the uprising again engulfs both countries, and a year earlier, an unprecedented procession of two nations meets in Horodlo to solemnly renew the ancient vows of union in this historic place.”

“The tragic Rejtan, who desperately protested at the Warsaw Sejm against the partition of Poland, was a son of Lithuania. Tadeusz Kościuszko, the man (...) who swore to expel the invaders from Poland on the Krakow market square, was also a Lithuanian. A strongman of the Polish spirit (...), [the poet] Adam Mickiewicz, whose remains were buried by Poland among royal graves at Wawel, was a Lithuanian as well. The descendants of those who once swore by the name of Lithuania the eternal faithfulness to the common Republic, the historical families of the Radziwiłł, Sapieha, Czartoryski, Czetwertyński, Sanguszko and dozens, hundreds and thousands of others, have remained faithful to this day, unswerving in their sense of unity with Poland.”

Religious tolerance

„In the west, pyres were built, on which ‘heretics’ were burnt. Blood flowed in streams ‘for the glory of God’. Tens of thousands of people were murdered on scaffolds for executions, more tens of thousands, hunted like wild animals, fled from country to country. No torture of the Inquisition was seen in Poland. Polish Commonwealth did not rape people’s conscience; it did not start religious wars. Bloody persecution of religious dissenters was not known in this Catholic country.”

“The right to freely profess a religion was widely and generously established by the Polish Commonwealth at the memorable Convocation Sejm of 1573, which wonderfully documented the political and cultural maturity of Poland. At a time when fanaticism was raging in the West (...), the memorable Polish Sejm Act (...) of January 28, 1573 (...) ensured equal rights to all religions in the country and ruled that absolutely no one in Poland could be persecuted because of their religious beliefs. The concept of religious tolerance entered the Constitution of the Republic of Poland; it became one of the basic laws that from then on every king swore when taking power.”

“In Europe, flooded with torrents of blood during religious wars, Poland looked like a unique, unprecedented phenomenon.”

“...in the face of the rights and freedoms which the Polish nation exercised, the eyes of all those who suffered for their religious convictions turned to them from neighbouring and even distant countries. Just after the night of St. Bartholomew, the Huguenots in France demanded that the French king should follow ‘an l'exemple de Poulogne’ [the example of Poland]. Erasmus of Rotterdam praised the freedom of thought in Poland... (...)In the turbulent period of the great Reformation, Poland turned into a refuge for those persecuted in the West... (...) The Czech Brothers, after their exile from Bohemia, took refuge en masse in Wielkopolska [Greater Poland] in 1548. (...) In the 17th century (...) a lot of Germans settled along the western border of the Republic of Poland; in hospitable Poland they hid from persecution for their faith in their own motherland.”

“In Poland, and only here, the difficult job of reconciliation of the two churches, Eastern and Roman, was also accomplished, so many times undertaken elsewhere with negative results. (...)The memorable act was signed at the Synod of Brest-Litovsk in 1595. (...) The Polish Union of Brest showed such great power of endurance that three centuries later, in 1874 Russia, wanting to expand Orthodox Christianity in the plundered areas of the Polish Commonwealth, had to use rifles to convert the Uniates to their faith. ,

“...the fact that Polish tolerance came from deep spiritual layers and was the product of consciously acting thought is confirmed by the strikingly close link between the phenomenon of religious tolerance and the principle of broad freedom, which permeated the whole of Polish life. That the practical value of this principle in international competition can be (...) no worse than the value of fangs and claws (...), is evidenced by the enormous growth that Poland achieved...”

Law and life

“Throughout the political creativity of the Polish nation – through its state system derived from the principle ‘nothing about us without us’, through the free election emphasized by the article on renouncing obedience to the king, through unions and autonomies based on the foundations of comprehensive tolerance – there recurs a characteristic feature of Polish nature: disgust for coercion. (...)The author of the Four-Year Sejm, Kalinka, outlines the type

of Polish nobleman against the background of social environment as follows: 'While at office or in service, he never felt a subordinate, but a voluntary companion of work. Both in his private and public life, he was bound by faith, tradition, custom and hierarchy, but all this was acknowledged and accepted by him by choice; he did not understand coercion, he loathed it.'"

"Contrary to the common views of a state as a system of coercion, Poland existed with these concepts [principles] for hundreds of years. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Poland was powerful and could be dangerous: it set its victorious foot in Moscow (...), defended Christianity at Vienna, and broke the power of Turkey. And yet, 'the whole system of the Republic of Poland – says Kalinka – was based on the good will of the citizens'...(…) ...Officials performed their duties as an honourable civil service, and respect for the law was sufficient there for all the measures of rigor that today keep the general public in discipline."

"Thus, Poland, with its almost complete lack of coercion, had to set extremely high moral requirements for its citizens. Poles were able to meet these requirements throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, when the state was very strong, and to a large extent still in the 17th century, when we managed to defend ourselves against the simultaneous attack of almost all neighbours. Between the period of the greatest prosperity of the Republic of Poland in the 15th and 16th centuries until the mid-17th and the era of reforms of May 3, 1791, - between these two periods, in which the mechanism of Polish life functioned properly despite the lack of coercion, there is a span of about a hundred years, during which the original assumptions developed morbidly, freedom sometimes became lawlessness, excessive decentralization threatened to break up the whole, and the good will of the citizens turned to be too weak to keep the internal ties of the state together.(…) But even then how much higher the Polish nation stood than the despotically governed neighbouring societies."

"A nation which for centuries had not been imposed laws from on high, which was its own legislator, inevitably had to develop a higher sense of law than societies which, being subject to the self-will of an autocratic individual, did not take part in the formulation of legal norms of life."

"The history of Poland is marked by the absence of an era of the 'law of personal protection' (the law of the fist), that boom of real anarchy, when settling a dispute on one's own by means of physical violence... was actually considered as legal institution, when there was neither government nor court, and the arbitrary administration of justice was a privilege granted to every strong person. There have never been similar legal aberrations in Poland."

"In the entire legal field of Polish life, we see a reflection of those main principles on which the construction of the state was based: the cult of freedom – respect for individualism.(…) When, with the exception of England, all European monarchies favoured an inquisitorial investigative trial procedure, combined with a secret investigation based mainly on torture (...), in Polish court proceedings, at least towards one stratum of the nation, i.e. the nobility, we can see everywhere the observance of principles of openness, oral hearing, accusation and defence - those excellent principles which were not introduced in all European countries until the 19th century, under the influence of the great French Revolution.(…) In the population using these solutions, a legal modality quite different from that in the countries stuck in absolutism was therefore created."

"How deeply the law was rooted in the nation's creed is evidenced by the fact that in the 18th century some provisions of the Wiślica Statute from the 14th century were invoked in Polish courts."

“...Always, even in the midst of the bustle of passion, in the midst of insanity and political offence, reverence for the law was deep in the minds of Poles. They were capable of ‘having a fanatical head about the law,’ remarked in 1767 Russian ambassador Repnin, who had been in Warsaw for a long time and hated Poland. Especially firmly established, not only in the minds of the nobility, but in the instinct of the whole nation, was the concept of property.”

“ ‘Since – as Tadeusz Korzon rightly points out in 'The inner history of Poland in the times of Stanisław August' – public safety is the main and ultimate goal of any penal system, and this goal in Poland was achieved with admirable success, therefore in the system itself one should see unusual advantages...’ “

Polish wars

„Poland quickly grew out of a barbaric passion for wars, which anyway was never, even under the Piasts, its particularly outstanding quality; the instinct of the nation (...) made it satisfy its needs by its own labour rather than by plundering its neighbours; most of the Polish military actions were already in those days caused by the need to defend against the attacks of the Germans, Prussians, Lithuania [Turks, Tatars]. ‘The structure of Poland was raised on economic and creative work’, states economist H. Radziszewski ('Polish economic idea')... (...) ...for the last five centuries of its existence the Polish state has never waged intrusive wars. A rogue invasion of someone else's property, even if adorned with the cloak of the 'raison d'etat', was considered a wicked thing in this vast and resourceful state.(...) ...Polish legend at the root of the emerging more than a thousand years ago nation put the king-farmer Piast, the personification of creative, peaceful work. Equally telling is the fact that the only time in the history of Poland the nickname the Great was granted to the monarch, it was given by the nation not to an excellent warrior, of which there were plenty, but to the king who is remembered for issuing of a code of laws (Wiślica Statute) and who became famous for his righteousness, who founded the first university in the country (1364) and built a great deal of monumental buildings and entire cities, so that he is famed by posterity as the one who ' found Poland made of wood and left it made of stone'.”

“At the moment of the greatest rise of state power (...) the insane desire for 'world domination' (...) remained alien to the nature of the Polish nation, even though famous for its knightly bravado. 'In the midst of widespread plunder,' says Julian Klaczko, 'Poland remained pure from unjust pillage of other people's lands, free from any greed'...”

[Jan Zamoyski] cried out in the Sejm: 'All those who invade foreign lands are 'destroyers of the world' and enemies of the human tribe. Let us be ready to die in defence of our own homeland, let us set aside one half of the property to save the other, let us create an army for the security of our border, not for the invasion of other people's lands'.”

“Poles at that time (...) [reported]: ‘other nations say about us that the disposition of Poles is sweet’, and added with pride: ‘our customs full of elegance and sweetness abhor any cruelty, and our very nature, disposed to every kind of humanitarianism, avoids bloodthirstiness’ (W. Sobieski, 'Hugenoci').”

“The Polish armed force (...) almost until the end of the existence of the First Polish Republic was formed by the general militia (...) intended only for defence and accordingly they could not be taken outside the borders of the state. Every citizen-nobleman was obliged to report for service. (...)...those who did not appear at the summons were even subject to death penalty and confiscation of property.”

“Mercenary troops played a relatively minor role compared to the general mobilization of the nobility. (...) The nobility passionately opposed the idea of a more substantial standing army, not intending to undertake wars of aggression against anyone, and accurately assessing that the standing army leads to absolutism... (...) ...Kościuszko, in his memorial written during the Four-Year Sejm, spoke in favour of imitating the American militia, so similar to the Polish general mobilization, and firmly declared himself against the standing army, because it would 'put shackles on the citizens'.”

“Despite the disgust for wars imminent to the Polish nature, (...) the military history of Poland is (...) full of great deeds. The chest of the Polish knights (...) crushed the largest military power in Europe at that time, the Teutonic Order... (...)... [] when the mark of the crescent moon terrorized Europe, (...) there was a conviction among the Polish knights that they were a living protective wall (...) against the fanatical power of the Ottomans. This task was perfectly fulfilled in the midst of heavy fighting.”

“The declaration of war in Poland in the past fell within the competence of the nation... (...) As early as in 1496, the right to call a general mobilization, up to then enjoyed by the king, was passed to the Sejm. (...) The decision of the people was a brake that made it difficult for the state to engage into conflicts... (...) As regards the possibility of human bloodshed, no country has ever been guided by such high moral scruples as the Polish one.”

“The act of the National Education Commission of 1785 ordained schools: ‘In the teaching of history, a teacher shall never use the name politics, i.e., the skill of government, or heroism, for what is cunning, betrayal, meanness, rape, violence, invasion and appropriation of someone else's property.’ We would not find such an official educational instruction anywhere else, not only then, but perhaps even today.”

“In the face of the general militarization of Europe and the predatory tendencies of other countries, this highly moral position later took terrible revenge on the Republic of Poland. However, that the Polish way of thought (...) was right (...) is proved by that monstrous loss of people and things that Europe lived to see at the beginning of the 20th century.”

Spreading freedom

„In its long historical existence, coming into contact with other nations Poland (...) brought them no bondage, but its unravelling, not a yoke, but the gift of freedom. (...) Above all, however, there was this radiation of Polish freedoms towards the vast lands of Lithuania and Rus. (...) Already under the influence of the initial unions, princely absolutism succumbs to limitations that gradually and constantly spread in ever wider circles. The boyars gain (...) personal and property freedom, from grand-ducal slaves they become citizens with rights...”

“Lithuania's resistance to the idea of the union, so emphasized by foreign historians, especially the Russian ones, was the resistance of but a handful of oligarchs, who were rightly afraid that (...) they would not be able to maintain their (...) privileged position. On the other hand, a large number of boyars pushed for the union with all their might, apparently attracted to the noble-democratic system of the Polish Crown...”

“Subsequently Poland tried to spread its mission of untying the bonds of absolutism, so successfully fulfilled in Lithuania, to the further east – Moscow. The impact of Poland on despotic Moscow began at the end of the 16th century, when, together with Poles coming in increasing numbers to the tsarist state, some concepts of civil rights and constitutional government began to penetrate there. 'Contacts with Poles', writes Peter Dolgorukov in his 'Verite sur la Russie' (Paris 1860), 'reminded the Moscow boyars of what a declining state of

slavery they had been brought to, being a frolic of the tsarist will, subject to tyranny and even carnal flogging. The Moscow nobility looked with envy at the many freedoms enjoyed by the Polish nobility.'

The first effect of this was the introduction of Polish solutions in Moscow under Dmitri the Self-Proclaimed (1605) and an attempt by the boyars to limit the absolute power of Tsar Vasyl Shuisky (1606-1610); (...)when taking over the government he (...) issued a 'paper' limiting the rights of the monarch in relation to the life and property of his subjects. 'This paper' – notes Kutrzeba – 'is indeed a reflection of the Articuli Henriciani from 1573; it is a Moscow pacta conventa in the Polish manner.

For a more certain introduction of freedoms to Moscow, the boyars decided to invite a Pole, Prince Władysław, to the Moscow throne. (...) A party of pro-liberty reforms was formed in Moscow, a 'Polish party', which strove to unite with the Republic of Poland and included the excellent boyar families of the Szachovsky, Saltykov, Trubetsky, Mstislavsky, Massalsky, Dolgoruki, Valuyevs, Sheremetyevs and others. This party carried out the election of Władysław in 1610, having knocked Szuyski off the throne (...).

The influence of Poland on Moscow reached its peak at that time and was expressed in deep instillation of concepts of civil and political freedoms in the upper strata. The Polish military leader Żółkiewski, who having defeated the troops of tsar Shuysky at Kłuszyn entered the gates of Moscow as a victor, did not carry the shackles of captivity there, but a wide-ranging federation program: the extension of the Polish-Lithuanian union to the Moscow state with all the freedoms that the Jagiellonian Republic had. In this respect, he continued the idea of Grand Chancellor Zamoyski, who as far back as in 1585 worked out a project to unite Polish and Lithuania with Moscow on the basis of equality. (...) Żółkiewski, who fully understood the magnitude of this task, (...) wrote: '(...) From these beginnings, which God has now given, things can come to perfection.'

At first these things went well, and it seemed that absolutism in vast areas of the Grand Duchy of Moscow would collapse under the Polish influence (...) Following the example of the Jagiellonian Commonwealth, Moscow established the representation of the nation in two chambers (boyar chamber and land chamber) (...) When Żółkiewski's plan crashed because of king Sigismund III's secret ambitions, his dull stubbornness and narrow-mindedness, and after two years of unsuccessful Moscow's waiting for the arrival of Prince Władysław, Michael I Romanov ascended to the throne, the boyars, taking advantage of his youth, forced him to take the oath of constitutional rule (...) But as soon as in 1618 the father of the newly elected ruler, Patriarch Filaret, having returned from Poland, where he had been a prisoner of war, took the regency at the side of the juvenile tsar and stood at the forefront of a reactionary party that hatefully and effectively began to destroy the first 'constitution' in Moscow. (...) Peter, the so-called 'Great', stifled the last traces of Jagiellonian sowing, replacing them completely with patterns transferred primarily from Germany."

"The attractiveness of Polish freedoms during the period under discussion was so strong in a certain part of the upper social strata of Moscow population that since the time of Ivan the Terrible a constant emigration of boyars took place. They repeatedly crossed the Polish borders in order to remain there forever."

"Even after the fall of the Republic of Poland the idea of freedom, this main component of Polish political culture, did not cease to radiate to foreign peoples. Throughout the 19th century, Poles either cause ferment or rush to help wherever it comes to overthrowing despotism. First of all they fight it at home, raising weapons against the forces subjugating their homeland in a series of bloody uprisings. They look at their persecutors, acting on the

orders of the occupying governments, with contempt and at the same time with pity, as at born slaves, and often drag the better elements to their side: like for example the numerous Polonized German clerical families succumbing to the charm of the Polish idea and providing our nation with the most faithful sons."

"In 1831, the soldiers of the November Uprising, going to battle with despotic Moscow, inscribe on their signs the most sublime slogan that has ever appeared on the banners of war: 'for our freedom and yours', in which the whole greatness of the historical Polish soul is reflected, capable of seeing in the enemy an unhappy degraded brother and wanting to raise him to human heights."

"Fighting against the tyrants of their own homeland, Poles understand that they are fighting at the same time for the happiness of all peoples and vice versa, carrying weapons against despotism in any corner of the world, they believe that they are fighting indirectly for freedom of Poland. (...)... today (...) we know that the only sure way to liberate Poland and the most effective guarantee of its independence is to rebuild the world on such fundamentals that each nation can decide upon its own fate."

"For a number of generations during the partitions, herein Poland we continue the tradition of active help for someone else's just cause. It is initiated by two national heroes, Kościuszko and Pulaski, who, unable to be temporarily useful to their own homeland, go to America to offer it their military skills in the fight for liberation. (...) Kościuszko in his libertarian concepts outpaces even such a great freedom idol as Washington, declaring himself (...) fervently for the liberation of the Negroes, which Washington does not yet understand. (...) To Franklin, Pulaski says simply: "In our nation there is disgust for all tyranny, so wherever freedom is fought for on the globe, we regard it as it were our own business." Since then on this thread is continued uninterrupted."

In the French army, in Dąbrowski's Legions, with Napoleon, in exile after the uprisings, in Hungary, Germany, Austria, Italy, Sicily, Ukraine and Lithuania – everywhere "Poles became the warriors of universal freedom. To a large extent, their blood has been paid for the rights that today are shared by the constitutionally governed and liberated nations of Europe."

"The political ideal, which was represented by subjugated Poland and Poland in the disintegration of emigration, made the Polish question universal especially around the mid-19th century. 'Young Europe' saw in its solution a condition for the across-the-board victory of freedom."

"The awareness of the close connection between the liberation of Poland and the overthrow of reaction forces was clearly expressed among the best minds of Russia, of whom, for example, in 1863 Alexander Hercen correctly predicted: 'The collapse of the Polish struggle will no doubt stop our Russian one'."

"The widespread current of popularity of the Polish cause, as synonymous with the pan-European cause of the peoples, galvanized also the Germans. The remains of our defeated army of 1831, leaving the country and heading west, were the object of universal adoration of the society in the passage through the German countries (at the same time, the Prussian government captured Polish emigrants and handed them over to Moscow). In 1848, a memorable scene took place in Berlin, when the crowd carried some Poles released from prison on their hands to the front of the royal castle and insisted on prostration before them, which also followed. The Germans of that time, embraced by the aspirations for freedom, repeatedly expressed the conviction that without the liberation of Poland there was no free

Europe. 'Free Poland', wrote the historian Karol Hagen, 'would yield the possibility of consolidating political freedom... (...) The question of freedom must be resolved in Poland'."

"According to the common belief of that time, European civilization and freedom, fought under the banner of the white [Polish] eagle,' stated Treitschke, a German historian hateful to Poland, many years later."

"...under the pressure of the tortures inflicted by the enemy, a mystical concept arises for a moment in the Polish consciousness, as a defensive reflex, as a source of further perseverance, that Poland is the 'Christ of nations', that like Him it suffers in order to save humanity. The emanation of this messianic mood is the poetry written at that time in exile by three national bards [Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Cyprian K. Norwid], so wonderful in the power of its inspiration."

"The whole modern role of Poles, not only rebelliously opposing the unrighteous power at home, but also inciting the desire for freedom and fighting for freedom all over the world, was deeply rooted in past times. It resulted from bringing up of the Polish nation for many centuries in accord with the main principle that there could be no dignified humanity without the possibility of freely deciding about oneself. (...) It was a logical result and continuation of the spirit of the old Polish Commonwealth, which five hundred years ago had already managed to create a political organism in the east of Europe, based on the great idea of the suzerainty of the nation..."

Heroic type

„Feliks Koneczny (...) states: 'In Poland, in order to be great, one must above all have a great character, a great heart, a magnificent soul. (...) here one does not reach the peak of historical recognition with a tainted conscience. (...) In a word: only the noble person can be great in Poland'. The 'greatness' of, say, the Moscow tsar Peter sounds to Polish ears (...) like a sarcastic epithet."

"Modern Poland had many excellent and remarkable citizen leaders. Such were: Zamoyski, Tarnowski, Chodkiewicz, Koniecpolski, (...) Czarniecki, (...) Sobieski, Prince Józef Poniatowski, Henryk Dąbrowski... (...) But the concept of heroism in the highest (...) sense of the word has clung in the memory of the nation to those who, victors or losers, by their actions have become exponents of the essential character of the national spirit. This kind of grandness was reached by hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski (...), [who is] an unsurpassed model of a perfect man, citizen and knight. All his military expeditions are linked to a great and ethically sublime historical thought. (...) He does not show any personal or private self-interest, not a trace of it, not a hint of low ambition. He does not know how to prostrate himself, he does not ask for anything; he does not boast about triumphs, he does not care about rewards. (...)... he measures everything around him by the measure of common good."

"At the turning point of its history, between the collapse of the state and the beginning of the era of captivity, Poland gives birth to a second heroic type of equal perfection in the person of Kościuszko. (...) A professionally trained military leader, he is however basically an opponent to both wars and the permanent maintenance of large armies: he is rather inclined towards the general military training of the nation. He builds the bravery of a soldier not only upon training, but also upon moral strength. In the Połaniec Manifesto, he exhorts: 'Let us put a powerful mass of free inhabitants in front of the crowd of slaves. He understands military craftsmanship only in the service of an idea, worthy of sacrifices (...)...he protests against the cult of his person. (...)Every Kościuszko's deed stems from the desire for happiness for all,

from the desire to abolish all kind of oppression and to consolidate the brotherhood of nations... (...) Jefferson testifies of him: 'He is the purest son of liberty among all I have ever known'."

"In the latest (...) epoch of Polish history, an excellent type of Polish heroism appeared in the person of Romuald Traugutt, the dictator of the 1863 January Uprising. (...) In his instructions to the army, he defines his views on what a Polish soldier should be like. In addition to the discipline that he himself knew how to guard so well in the camp, he demands from the commanders 'attempts to raise moral standards in the members of the armed forces'. 'Polish soldier... is to spread everywhere the purity of morals and unblemished virtue'. 'The national government', he says, 'looks at the military forces not only as defenders of the country, but also as guardians and executors of the law'."

"One of the organizers of the 1830 November Night, Piotr Wysocki, after three years of imprisonment and facing death sentence, when persuaded to ask for a pardon, (...) wrote these wonderful and proud words: 'I did not take up arms to ask the emperor for grace, but so that my people would never need it'."

"In addition to this essential feature, the steadfast agreement of the ideal with life, there are two further essential features in the Polish heroic type, which are inherent throughout all epochs in the historically created soul of the nation, but also gain a particularly vivid expression in the last, tragic era of Polish history. (...)... These positive aspects of Polish heroism [are]:

- *Rejecting violence.*
- *Fighting for the 'kingdom of God' – for Freedom."*

"Adam Mickiewicz, creating in part III of 'Dziady' [Forefathers] a vision of a great man, a dream saviour and reviver of the nation, imagined him as bringing liberation not only to Poland itself, (...) but to all those subjugated and suffering (...): 'He is the viceroy of Freedom on the Earth visible!'."

Outrunning Europe

„ In its development Poland (...) had outrun in many respects its contemporary European continent, by whole generations, sometimes by centuries. What other nations did not gain until the 19th or even 20th centuries, or what they are still striving for, in the Polish Commonwealth had often been introduced and legally secured for centuries."

"The transition from the old to the newer forms of the state system in Poland took place in a much shorter period of time than in the rest of Europe, i.e. in decades, while Europe needed centuries for that. (...) [The development of Poland] went in the direction of developing ever growing predominance of the social factor, which in the Middle Ages more and more (...) demanded its share in power. Crushing it in favour of the princes, which took place in the West, was therefore a kind of breaking of the line of development (...), in contrast to the Polish line – going straight. When Europe finally enters a period of slavish dependence of societies on the will of an irresponsible individual, at the same time Poland is increasingly developing institutions that guarantee the rights and freedoms of citizens (...) By a separate and its own way (...) Poland approached the ideal of a modern state and reached it faster than other nations of the continent. (...) Jean-Jacques Rousseau ('Remarks on the Polish Government') (...) came to the conclusion that the principles of the system of the Polish Commonwealth are generally perfect and he did not hesitate to put (...) the Polish constitution higher than the English one."

"The German historian Karl von Rotteck (...) ('Allgemeine Geschichte') writes (...): 'At that time skills were at the service of despotism. The nation everywhere, except for a small number of republics, was considered a flock of cattle (...) in countries where the monarch's word was everything, and (...) was aimed only at the interest and unlimited greed of the ruling families. There was no other virtue than obedience.' How far ahead of this is contemporary Poland!"

And the author enumerates:

- "The personal freedom and security of the individual in the face of all arbitrariness on the part of the state are guaranteed by numerous laws..."*
- "The Polish judiciary system knows the principle of openness, oral hearing, prosecution and defence, which apart from England were found nowhere."*
- "The competences of the Polish Sejm (...) are so broad that in many aspects they have remained unsurpassed by many contemporary parliaments."*
- "... elsewhere (...) putting the country into a state of war [was and often is] beyond any control of the public and the life or death of hundreds of thousands of people depended on the beck and call of the individual – in Poland four centuries ago an effective barrier for this was set, by handing over the decision on war and peace to the sejms."*
- "The essentially republican form of government provides the nation with the opportunity to elect a head of state, and opens the way to this crowned presidency for every citizen."*
- "Cardinal element of the political system of the Polish Commonwealth (...) [is] the embodiment of the modern principle that a king exists for the nation, not the other way round..."*
- "The famous principle uttered in 1830 by Thiers: 'The King reigns and does not rule' (...) was formulated by Polish politicians as early as in 1607..."*
- "... here we should also mention the early separation of the king's personal income from the income of the public treasury (...) – the Sejm of 1505..."*
- "As a result of the wide participation of a significant part of the population in public affairs and its responsibility for these matters, the concept of homeland developed in Poland extremely early (...) while the rest of Europe was not able to go beyond the concept of the state for a long time. (...) When in Poland people had long been serving their 'homeland', they were still serving their 'master'."*

"... at the end of the 18th century, again ahead of most of Europe, Poland undertakes and carries out a great political reform (...), it puts an end to the exclusive use of civil rights by the nobility and extends them to further strata of the nation, and at the same time adapts the libertarian institutions of the Polish state to modern concepts and needs. This reform is the memorable Constitution of May 3, 1791."

"...the cardinal principle [of the power of the nation], on which the renewed Polish Commonwealth was still to be based, was solemnly expressed by the authors of the Constitution with the words 'All the power of human society has its origin in the will of the Nation'. (...) The Chamber of Deputies (...) together with the Senate is the only forge of laws binding on the nation. (...) Laws become legally binding when they are passed by the Sejm

(...) Neither the government nor the head of state can make laws on their own, impose taxes and conscriptions, incur public debts, declare wars without the consent of the people, or make diplomatic arrangements."

"The King (...) 'should not be an autocrat, but the father and head of the Nation, and the law and the present Constitution recognize and declare him as such.' The king is the supreme representative of the executive power and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. (...) At the side of the king stands the cabinet of ministers created in a modern fashion, which was given in Poland a beautiful (...) name: 'Guard of Rights'."

"... many of the provisions which Poland introduced in the Law of 3 May [1791] exhibit traits of superiority in comparison with the state of affairs not only in the majority of countries of that time, but even in many countries of Europe today with constitutional and parliamentary governance."

"... The Polish Constitution of 1791 (...) opened the gates for a fresh inflow to the [noble] estate. The right to ennoblement was automatically gained by soldiers and officials of certain ranks... (...) nobility became available to every individual of a certain social value; it turned into the citizenship of the Republic of Poland (...), opening an unprecedented prospect of gradual ennoblement of the entire nation. The burgher class as a whole received a sort of semi-nobility... (...) The peasant class, which according to (...) this law created the 'bravest force of the country', was given the legal protection."

"This constitution, to the detriment of the nobility, was passed by the Sejm consisting exclusively of the nobility. (...) The Polish nobility renounced its age-old prerogatives in favour of public power and freedom, without any pressure from the crown or other-than-noble classes, driven only by consideration of the common good" [K. Hoffman 'History of political reforms in Poland']. "This is the only incident of its kind that has never been repeated on such a grand scale in the history of mankind," says O. Balzer."

"...the Basic Law of 3 May was not supposed to be an ossified codification, but a living guideline for further development. Namely, a separate article of the act stipulated that every 25 years a special Sejm was to meet to revise and improve the constitution..."

"The great fundamental state reform: the constitution 'Nihil novi' of 1505 - which laid a solid foundation for the development of national representation and guaranteed those broad political freedoms which allowed Poland to cut itself off for three centuries from the growing and finally triumphant everywhere absolutism - came to fruition as a simple culmination of a series of previous gradual transformations. The Constitution of 3 May 1791, which adapted these achievements to modern needs, was also the result of the peaceful evolution of political thought. In that memorable year, Poland entered the path of extending human rights to the 'lower' strata. It did not cost a single drop of blood, not a single human tear, while the other nations of the continent had to pay for every step towards freedom with thousands of victims in more recent times. 'This', says Stefan Buszczyński, 'which elsewhere was forced by bloodshed, riots, rebellions, revolutions, civil wars, regicides, execution scaffolds, guillotines, the Polish nation received and peacefully kept, on the legal path'."

"A state that taught the youth that politics is not to be cunning, treason or the art of violence, (...) which within its borders did not know any forms of persecution of people for what they were and what they believed, which did not murder any of its kings, but also did not allow any of them to murder their subjects, which valued the splendour of the law more than the splendour of the crown, this state morally left far behind not only Europe of that time, but also Europe of today."

The fall of the state

“The Polish state collapsed. (...)... A political system which for centuries provided happiness and a high cultural level to a great nation – the idea of freedom and human dignity, which had warmed entire generations (...) with immense patriotism and which had hitherto guided the aspirations of nations – could not be condemned even if they really brought misery and suffering for a hundred years. The destruction of our thousand-year state existence was the work of physical superiority, an act of violence. (...)... The Prussian statesman of the Napoleonic era, Stein, when things were still called by name in Germany, said: ‘The division of Poland is a political crime’.”

“The factors that caused our downfall were presented clearly and simply. They boiled down to a common denominator – violence. It was only with time, under the influence of a triumphant reaction that the search for other ‘causes’ began. First of all, the perpetrators of the partitions themselves took care of it most carefully. In their official historiography there appeared first a cunning thesis, that was then distributed long and zealously, that Poland had succumbed to ‘internal decay’, that it had been lost by ‘anarchy’ (...), a thesis which, like counterfeit money, began to circulate around the world. (...) This comedy, which was directed with particular precision by Moscow writers, still has actors, a choir and grateful listeners. It takes place in ‘science’, in the press, in journalism, in parliaments.”

“The saddest chapter of the Polish history, under the kings of the Saxon dynasty, is the period of lack of a strong executive guarding the strict execution of laws, which, however, existed and were in force. At the same time, Russia – and not only Russia – did not know any important concepts about the law at all, because for Moscow, every gesture of the tsar, every bloody whim of psychopaths on the throne like Ivan the Terrible and crowned harlots like Catherine of Anhalt-Zerbst was the law.”

“Everything contradicts the inference of the collapse of Poland from its internal ‘decay’. Firstly, history has not passed over the guiding ideas of the Polish history at all; on the contrary, it is increasingly emphasizing their validity. Secondly, the political system of the Polish Commonwealth had existed from its final crystallization for more than three centuries, so it had to have sufficient vital force, and this strength was all the greater because it was based only to a small extent on state coercion. Thirdly, the last two partitions occurred when Poland, by adapting to new concepts and needs, created for those times a model of a law-abiding state in the law of May 3, 1791, when it not only carried out excellent political, social and administrative reforms, but shone with thriftiness, the revival of industry and trade, so it re-submitted an irrefutable proof of comprehensive abilities for further life. In the face of these facts, justifying partitions of Poland with its ‘anarchy’ and its supposed ‘decay’, without ceasing to be despicable, becomes ridiculous.”

“The Polish nation has always consciously opposed tyranny wherever it may be. An old Confederate song from 1768 (four years before the first partition) (...) proclaimed: ‘we will never be in alliances with kings, we will never bend our necks before the yoke’ – with kings, that is, with autocracy, with absolutism. ‘The historic Poland’, states (...) the Russian writer Konstanty Balmont (‘Utro Rossii’, 1917), ‘was a country of freedom among despotic states. In the days of its fall, it possessed a sum of freedoms which no European state knew at the time.’ The contagious influence of these ideas was feared by the absolutism of the 18th century, which surrounded and skirted our Polish homeland.”

“ ‘This only great nation-power among the dynastic states was an anomaly at the time. Poland, despite its weakness, despite its seeming agony, had incomparably more vitality than all other European states in the midst of the uproar of war and courtly splendour. Throughout

Europe, nations and countries were the property of the rulers; they were a thing, a thoughtless instrument of the will of the stronger (...), while the Polish nation had never been a slave of their kings'. (Buszczyński)”

“In the newly (...) enacted constitution of May 3 (...) they neighbouring powers saw a dangerous temptation for their 'helots', kept in blind obedience. The revival of Poland by the May reforms and the strengthening of a state such as Poland could threaten the continuation of autocracy (...) and this threat had to be removed. This was done – through partitions. Poland collapsed because it did not conform to the neighbouring dictatorships, because (...) it was a country of freedom in the middle of states based on autocracy and the policy of iron fist. (...) It perished because it was, with all the momentary collapse of her spiritual strength, a more perfect and too highly as for those times developed political entity in comparison with what surrounded it.”

“...in the last cause, Poland collapsed due to a fact which in its naked and brutal essence is called a collective attack, exceeding the defence forces of the attacked unit. For the first time in the history of Christian states, it happened that a great nation with inexhaustible merits for civilization, a nation that had no hostile intentions towards anyone, was cornered in the middle of Europe with the intention of destroying it...”

“...the alliance that the Republic of Poland concluded with one of the Western countries in 1790 was trampled with all cynicism by an ostensible ally at the moment of the trial.”

“In any case, Poland faced a group conspiracy, a physical preponderance...”

The spirit of Polish history in the background of today (1918)

“The crime committed on Poland and continued systematically with full awareness of the evil committed, had an ominous impact on the history of the 19th century. (...)... and the reaction thus strengthened became a disaster for the peoples, whose empowerment it had put on hold for many long years.”

“Napoleon (...) admitted in his memoirs that he had made a cardinal mistake by not resurrecting Poland. After the fall of Napoleon, at the Congress of Vienna, a conspiracy called the 'holy covenant' was formed between the accomplices of the partitions of Poland, (...) which, having elevated the institution of the secret police to the rank of the most important organ in the state, for decades did in solidarity suppress with draconian means every libertarian movement wherever it manifested itself.”

“When ‘the most human nation’, in Michelet’s words, was ‘cast out of humankind’, the principle could have been put forward openly and with all cynicism that in international life important is not a moral law, but a ‘law of the stronger’, not an ethical code, but a fist.”

“All this (...) and the excessive growth of powers (...) became the impetus for the typical in the 19th century aspirations of many countries to arm themselves more and more.”

“‘Indirect and distant, but essential,’ as Lord Eversley calls it, consequence of the subjugation of a great and vital nation – the burden of ‘armed peace’ – complicating itself with other factors, has grown over time to enormous proportions and has for long time overwhelmed the cultural work of all the peoples of Europe. The arming efforts of one state fuelled the armaments of another. A race of war readiness ensued. (...)... at the end of the period leading up to the outbreak of the [first] world war, six million people in their prime, those who weigh the most in the societies’ economy, were constantly idly under arms, and arming and maintaining them at the expense of the rest of the population consumed billions of dollars

every year. The militarization of nations finally unloaded in the mass slaughter that flooded Europe with blood, in the destruction of the values that generations had contributed to. (...) The omnipotence of the state has invaded every crevice of life, extinguishing the last remnant of personal freedom.”

“So in the perspective of the past time a strange great republic shines here, so recently still alive, and so far living in the Polish souls, brutally destroyed, which centuries ago made many dreams of today's tormented humanity a reality, which amid the deluge of absolutism remained a proud island of freedom, for which the state was not the purpose, but a means....”

“And considering all these spiritual values that the genius of the Polish nation had created and experienced in the field of political tasks, let us be willing to assess – against the background of the monstrous reality of our time – how much humanity has lost by the incapacitation of such a national unit...”

“We are going undeniably towards the recognition of the right of self-determination of nations (...) – towards the realization of the postulate of a common moral criterion for the whole area of life. The slavery of nations must be overthrown (...)... the goal is: freedom... (...) It is also the most general direction of our Polish historical thought, crystallized for half a thousand years.”

“Aware that the captivity of Poland is only an episode in the constant movement of the human race and in the history of our nation, from generation to generation we are looking for ways to get out of this unusual, oppressive situation.”

“The vital interest of Poland, therefore, consists in the fact that universal development should soar ever faster and higher towards the ideal of freedom and brotherhood of peoples.”

“So our task is clear. It consists in the solidarity and most intense interaction of our liberation aspirations with the general aspirations for freedom, wherever they manifest themselves.”

“...With love and gratitude we can look in this crucial moment at our wonderful historical heritage, so great and so close to modern aspirations. It was what created our spiritual type, bringing it closer (...) to the level of the best collective types of humankind (...); it was bounding our nation together into a self-conscious whole through a century of being torn apart. It gave us the power to survive the attacks unheard of in the history of the world. (...) And this is what makes us capable today of (...) pursuing goals which, in their broader context, are nothing but a continuation of the essential elements of the Spirit of Polish History.”