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## THE JAGIELLONIAN IDEA AND THE PROJECT FOR THE FUTURE

*In memoriam Thaddaei Łepkowski (1927-1989)*

### ABSTRACT

The Polish community suffers from weakening national bonds and therefore it has difficulties with defining its identity. Grandiose declarations are an embarrassing confirmation of this fact. No great idea capable of raising a future project for Poland is apparent. Is the Jagiellonian Idea capable of strengthening bonds, perhaps of giving impulse to a metamorphosis? Can it offer a project for tomorrow? Only what will be accepted by collective recognition as a project designed to ensure the existence of the national community has future. And by 'existence' I mean not only a verbalized identity, but also the capacity to carry out necessary changes independently. The article presents the view that the Jagiellonian Idea does not rest on facts, but on an imagined picture of the one-time *Rzeczpospolita*. It presents a thesis about the connection between the flourishing of that state and the acceleration of transformations tied to the dialogic vortex generated by the Baltic-Black Sea axis of concentration. The failure of that project is ascribed to the changed circumstances, and perhaps to the insufficient energy elicited by this dialogic vortex. The experience of the *Rzeczpospolita* as a European project, in turn, indicates the road we may take today toward the completion of the transformation begun in 1989.

**Key words:** Jagiellonian idea, *Rzeczpospolita*, Baltic-Black Sea Axis, dialogics, civilization

Why do we need the Jagiellonian idea? The idea as grasped by publicists, and particularly as present in discussions on social forums, is not taken seriously. Nonetheless, the task of addressing the heritage of Jagiellonian Poland is a serious one.<sup>1</sup> The most difficult thing is to define the role of the idea and its heritage in the debate about Poland. Historians do not find this idea useful, and politicians do not make much of history. The Jagiellonian idea would have to be an instrument of current politics, and yet historians are neither summoned to that end, nor does anyone await their opinions. Therefore, can we reflect – or: is it worth reflecting – on the Jagiellonian idea in the context of Poland's present role in her region? This way of presenting matters forces us to ask about Poland's civilizational prospects.

Meanwhile, the weakening of national bonds hinders defining our identity. Doubts in this regard are aggravated by the fact that the political transformation begun in the late '80s was not fully carried out. I do not refer to whether or not the transformation was well thought-out and executed properly, but rather to the mere fact that Poland has remained in a peripheral sphere of the global economy. And this has had a crucial influence on the further weakening of national bonds.<sup>2</sup> The matter can be summed up thus: today we do not know whether we need to, and if so, how to choose civilizational affiliation. Do we defend our identity, or do we go on searching for it?

This diagnosis of course needs substantiation, for which there is not enough space here. However, I need to at least sketch such substantiation if I wish to prove the fruitlessness of the Jagiellonian idea as a project for the future – in other words, as a project founding the nation.

Let me make a couple of introductory explanations. In speaking about national identity I am not thinking only of a set of features or values recognized as Polish. The belief that it is possible to establish such a model is of course understandable, and it results for instance from our age-old quarrels over Poland. And they were something natural. They were significant and indicated the endurance of Polishness. I am using the past tense in my uncertainty, not knowing if we want to and know how to continue them. The disappearance of quarrels over Poland proves the weakening of bonds. It is then a dispute *for* Poland that predominates;<sup>3</sup> a dispute that often devolves into pettiness.

<sup>1</sup> M. Mackiewicz, "Uwagi nad ideą jagiellońską w historiografii polskiej przełomu XIX i XX wieku" [Thoughts on the Jagiellonian idea in Polish historiography ca. 1900], *Folia Iuridica Wratislaviensis*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2014), pp. 9-24.

<sup>2</sup> In 1991 I formulated my pessimistic forecasts in a paper entitled, "Przejście i przekształcenie. Perspektywy rozwoju Polski na przełomie XX i XXI wieku" [Transition and transformation. The prospects for Poland's development ca. 2000], in J. Kieniewicz, *Ekspansja, kolonializm, cywilizacja* [Expansion, Colonialism, Civilization], Warszawa 2008, pp. 175-191.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, "Najpierw trzeba kraj ocalić... Polskie zmagania czy zmagania o Polskę?" [First we need save the country... Polish struggles or struggles for Poland?], in J. Kochanowski, M. Kuruś (eds.), *Quo vadis Polonia? W drodze do demokratycznego państwa prawa. Polska 1989-2009* [Quo vadis, Polonia? En route to a democratic state of law. Poland 1989-2009], Warszawa 2010, pp. 655-663 [conference, June 3, 2009] (*Biuletyn RPO*, 5).

I understand national identity as the ability of a human community acknowledged by itself as a nation to exist.<sup>4</sup> I will repeat my position as stated thirty years ago: our national identity is Polishness.<sup>5</sup> My conviction of the weakening national bonds was based on the sad experience of the 1980s in Poland; however, today I do not see any improvement, but something quite opposite. Nor is there any evident project which would unite Poles above all the many apparent divisions. After 1989, when Poland began its transformation, the idea of solidarity was squandered<sup>6</sup> – and since 2004, when Poland entered the European Union, we have not been able to convince the majority that being a Pole requires the feeling of being a European just as well. Today it may seem that the place of ‘great collective duty’ was taken by great collective emotions. Contrary to appearances, this does not serve our national bond.

At the same time we face difficulty in concluding the transformations which were supposed to lead us out from peripheral status.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps we take umbrage at them. Above all, we do not see which great idea could today become a foundation for a future project for Poland. The astounding request of Pope John Paul II to accept ‘all this spiritual heritage, whose name is Poland’ was forgotten.<sup>8</sup> Instead we are left with only the shouting that mobilizes us against each other. Can the Jagiellonian idea in these circumstances prove useful? That is, is it capable of strengthening bonds, and can it prompt metamorphosis? Can it, in any understanding, be a project for the future? I have expressed my doubts, but that does not mean I am belittling the problem. The matter concerns our common future, after all.

The future holds only what is going to be accepted by collective recognition as a project sustaining the existence of the national community. The project can, of course, take the form of an idea. However, for it to show self-agency, it has to find a ‘translation’ into collective behaviors: it has to put people into action. Political sloganeering and chanting during demonstrations are utterly ineffective here. It is also true that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the deficit of ideas is a universal phenomenon. Perhaps that is fitting, considering the past century’s horrid outcomes in giving ideas flesh. Reflecting again on the Polish ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we may arrive at the conclusion that the more

<sup>4</sup> This is a systemic approach that I apply in civilizational research, see idem, “Ekohistoryk wobec wyzwań przyszłości” [An eco-historian vis-à-vis the challenges of the future], *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, vol. 58, no. 1 (2014), p. 68; idem, *Wprowadzenie do historii cywilizacji Wschodu i Zachodu* [Introduction to the history of civilization of East and West], Warszawa 2003. Cf. T. Paleczny, *Socjologia tożsamości* [The sociology of identity], Kraków 2008.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kieniewicz, “Zagrożenia polskości” [Threats to Polishness], a paper delivered at the History of Culture Talkshop, 18 October 1986, published in *Ekspansja, kolonializm...*, p. 146. I returned to this question in 2004, when it seemed that we had crossed a point of no return, idem, “Polskość po przejściach” [Poland with traumatic past], *Przegląd Powszechny*, no. 12 (2004), pp. 442–460. I concluded by asking, *what have we done with our Polishness?* That cautious doubt today seems naïve.

<sup>6</sup> J. Surdykowski, *Duch Rzeczypospolitej* [The spirit of the *Rzeczpospolita*], Warszawa 2001, pp. 316–317.

<sup>7</sup> See also I.T. Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944–1993. Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery*, Cambridge 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Spoken during Holy Mass at Kraków’s Fields (Krakowskie Błonia), June 10, 1979.

beautiful they were, the weaker influence they had.<sup>9</sup> What I have in mind are ideas devised for Poland's future.

Among them we have to include the federation idea in its original form undertaken by the Chief of State, Józef Piłsudski,<sup>10</sup> along with the Promethean idea,<sup>11</sup> the concept of the Intermarium,<sup>12</sup> and the Mieroszewski-Giedroyc vision of the ULB.<sup>13</sup> All of them proved to be ineffective as programs for Poland, but all left a trace in the intellectual heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> And as we know, they all were and are related to the Jagiellonian idea.

Occupying a separate place in the reflections on the future are ideas of a different origin, whether nationalist or socialist. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the project for Poland's future that was supposed to have the most influence was the vision 'national in form but socialist in content', at a certain point dubbed 'the Piast idea'.<sup>15</sup> This idea had just as little in common with the Piast dynasty as the Jagiellonian idea had with the Jagiellonian dynasty – nonetheless, the conviction of its effectiveness as propaganda was strong. Suggesting that the dynasts of the Kingdom of Poland, and later on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, were carried by some idea seems to me a misunderstanding. Moreover, the assumption that such an idea can be recreated for our own purposes needs to be treated as a risky delusion. The risk lies not only in the ease of transforming an idea into ideology, for I foresee greater danger in the ideological

<sup>9</sup> J. Kłoczowski (ed.), *Naród. Idee polskie. Antologia* [Nation. Polish ideas. An anthology], Kraków 2011.

<sup>10</sup> P. Okulewicz, *Koncepcja 'międzymorza' w myśli i praktyce politycznej obozu Józefa Piłsudskiego w latach 1918-1926* [The 'intermarium' concept in the thought and practice of Józef Piłsudski's camp, 1918-1926], Poznań 2001; A. Nowak, *Polska i trzy Rosje. Studium polityki wschodniej Józefa Piłsudskiego (do kwietnia 1920)* [Poland and the three Russias. A study of Józef Piłsudski's eastern policy], Kraków 2008.

<sup>11</sup> P. Libera (ed.), *II Rzeczpospolita wobec ruchu prometejskiego* [The Second Republic vis-à-vis the Promethean movement], Warszawa 2013; P. Ciepielucha, "Prometeizm i koncepcja Międzymorza w praktyce polityczno-prawnej oraz dyplomacji II RP" [Prometheanism and the intermarium concept in the politico-legal practice and diplomacy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic], *Studia Prawno-Ekonomiczne*, vol. 93 (2014), pp. 39-55.

<sup>12</sup> M. Papla, "Nieudane próby sfederalizowania Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XX wieku. Analiza przyczyn" [Unsuccessful efforts at federalization in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An analysis of causes], in D. Mikucka-Wójtowicz (ed.), *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość, przyszłość. Problemy badawcze młodych politologów* [The past, the present, the future. The research issues for young political scientists], Kraków 2010, pp. 145-153.

<sup>13</sup> Londyńczyk [J. Mieroszewski], "Między-absurdem i Między-morzem" [Inter-absurdity and the intermarium], *Kultura* (Paris), no. 5 (1951).

<sup>14</sup> R. Kuźniar, "Polityka wschodnia III RP – sukcesy pragmatyzmu, porażki prometeizmu" [The III Republic's eastern policy – the successes of pragmatism, the failures of Prometheanism], in A. Gil, T. Kapuśniak (eds.), *Polityka wschodnia Polski. Uwarunkowania, koncepcje, realizacja* [Poland's eastern policy. Conditions, concepts, implementation], Lublin–Warszawa 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Paweł Jasienica was among those who expressed this. Cf. A. Mękowski, "Między mitem a polityczną racjonalnością. Myśl historyczna Pawła Jasienicy i jej recepcja w dobie Polski Ludowej" [Between myth and political rationality. Historical thought of Paweł Jasienica in Popular Poland], *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 120, no. 1 (2013), pp. 55-97.

ecstasy which effectively blocks efforts on behalf of shaping a project for the future. It is also clear that what I call a common, great project for tomorrow,<sup>16</sup> after Ortega y Gasset, does not arise in government bureaus.

Here I must introduce a disambiguation. A project for the future is formed in the consciousness of citizens who by their free will create the national community. Therefore we have to keep in mind the symbiosis between the community and the project. We can put things this way: that political communities could arise thanks to the will of people motivated by ideas who established bonds by creating projects. This is how they became Citizens. And what are the representatives and leaders doing? The chosen representatives of the Nation fulfil their constitutional responsibilities, also as the authors of political programs. However, the leaders of the Nation arise from those Citizens who take the lead in pursuing the future. The Noble Citizenry of the Polish *Rzeczpospolita* did consider itself the nation – however, that was not a form of the modern nation, where all the social estates participate in the nation's life. That noble nation did sometimes define itself as Polish, but in a distant sense from the definition accepted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for instance in the II Republic. Nobility came from birth, citizenship resulted from accepting laws and obligations.<sup>17</sup> It may also be assumed that at that time a project was forming for the future of Poland. And when it went missing, degradation took place. This appears to me as an anachronism, a transposition backwards not only of wishes, but of ideas. Would any form of the Jagiellonian project entail such a noble project? I doubt it, but we shall see.

I do not begin with an attempt to format the concept called the Jagiellonian idea. As we know, it arose in response to the collapse of the *Rzeczpospolita* and to the challenges related to the evolution of great ideologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A crucial role has to be attributed to the pertinacious aspirations to form a national bond in the circumstances of statelessness.<sup>18</sup> This gave birth to a strong demand for ideas. The emergence of authentic chances for recovering statehood, as a result of the European conflict in the years 1914-1918, greatly intensified this pursuit. But I do not wish to recount that entire story. In particular, I will not refer to the disputes over the meaning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's existence.<sup>19</sup> The Commonwealth and its mythology were, before it was partitioned, an instrument of implementing the interests of

<sup>16</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset, *España invertebrada. Bosquejo de algunos pensamientos históricos*, Madrid 1982, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Appraisal of those structures, along with the judgments already expressed, according to our criteria serves (for better or for worse) solving today's problems and does little of any good for research, as is plain in the quarrels over the noblemen's democracy. Cf. D. Beauvois, "Nowoczesne manipulowanie sarmatyzmem – czy szlachcic na zagrodzie był obywatelem?" [Today's manipulation of Sarmatism – was the lord of the manor a citizen?], in P. Czapliński (ed.), *Nowoczesność i sarmatyzm* [Modernity and Sarmatism], Poznań 2011.

<sup>18</sup> T. Łepkowski, *Uparte trwanie polskości. Nostalgie, trwanie, nadzieje, wartości* [The stubborn lastingness of Polishness. Nostalgies, endurance, hopes, values], Londyn 1989.

<sup>19</sup> L. Korczak, "Litwini wobec unii z Polską w XV wieku (perspektywy badawcze)" [Lithuanians vis-à-vis the union with Poland in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (research perspectives)], in K. Ślusarek (ed.), *Europa unii i federacji. Idea jedności narodów i państw od średniowiecza do czasów współczesnych* [A Europe of unions

citizen-noblemen and not a foundation project. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, indeed the longest such in its duration, conclusively proved the possibility of such projects existing in a pre-national reality. But even if we have already entered the post-national era, federal and union ideas remain an anachronism.

The reason why I need to take a stand is the belief that various values ascribed to the Jagiellonian idea were and still are concepts formed by the circumstances of times. Formerly this concerned the circumstances of captivity, later it was about limited sovereignty, and today, I would argue, it concerns none other than the circumstances of an incomplete transformation. At the base of these concepts I see the complexity of our geopolitical situation, once buttressed by the trauma of partitions, and today, in contrast, by existential uncertainty. The peripheral situation of Poland, nursing the complex of being rebuffed by Europe, was considered obvious.<sup>20</sup> At the same time the threats from Germany and Russia were accepted as the tell-tale constant of our history, the pleasure in this being enriched by our complex of the West's betrayal.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile the *Rzeczpospolita* formed in a completely divergent geopolitical context: when neither Germany nor Russia existed. Moreover, during the time when modern Europe was forming, the division between the West and the East as separate formations did not exist.<sup>22</sup> If the past is to be any signpost for us, then we must free it from everything that was added to it in the last two hundred years. However, if we find this impossible, let us at least cut ourselves free from our complexes.

It seems that a crucial thread in history, one which triggered the appearance of this idea, was the might of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Looking at Europe's map from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century we may well get the impression that this state was the regional hegemon. The *Rzeczpospolita*, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, could impose this thinking not only on people weeping after 'their lost fatherland', but above all on their later grandchildren. There is also a second reason compelling us to closely consider the *Rzeczpospolita's* place in the heritage of the Jagiellonians – namely, its political system, because that is where the *Rzeczpospolita's* place in European civili-

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and federations. The idea of the unity of nations and states from the Middle Ages to modern times], Kraków 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Result of the worldwide impact of Immanuel Wallerstein theses.

<sup>21</sup> A. Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu. 1920 – zapomniany appeasement* [The West's first betrayal. 1920 – the forgotten appeasement], Kraków 2015.

<sup>22</sup> I have in mind the political concepts diving Europe, and then the world. The orientation of settlement, communication, the transfer of goods and ideas was shaped territorially, by the course of mountain ranges and river valleys, and maritime passages. Cf. A. Wyczański, "Granica na Łabie w XV-XVII wieku – wątpliwości historyka" [The border on the Elbe from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century: the doubts of a historian], in K. Mikulski, A. Zielińska-Nowicka (eds.), *Między Zachodem a Wschodem. Etniczne, kulturowe i religijne pogranicza Rzeczypospolitej w XVI-XVIII wieku* [Between the West and the East. The ethnic, cultural, and religious frontier lands of the *Rzeczpospolita* ca. 1500-1800], Toruń 2005, pp. 13-21.



zation emerged.<sup>23</sup> And it is mostly negative attributes that are ascribed to this political system, beginning with the accusation that it blocked the path to absolutism.<sup>24</sup>

The first fact disposes some today to interpret the *Rzeczpospolita* as an all-but colonial empire.<sup>25</sup> This is a mistaken interpretation, and it is not difficult to say why it is in some cases hypercritical.<sup>26</sup> The second fact is zealously denied by everyone. One group of people thinks that the Jagiellonian *Rzeczpospolita* was only an imperfect copy of Europe, whereas others would wish to see it as an unequalled model of democracy and tolerance.<sup>27</sup> For generations these extreme (and simplified) visions have tangled us up in endless disputes over the origins of the collapse of Poland and the place we should occupy in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Here we must make an objection. Might refers to the state; the place in Europe concerns people. Poles of that era defined themselves via choosing values and not as a result of adopting models of behavior. In this sense we can say that choosing civilizational affiliation was identical with defining nationality. I draw attention to this because modern political criteria are commonly applied while depicting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

So – what was the *Rzeczpospolita* if not a European work crafted by Poles? And here is where the feuding occurs. This is a dispute over the heritage we are entitled to, even though we dramatically differ in interpreting this resource whose name is Poland. This dispute is carried on even when we do not have any clue about this resource, and still base our thinking on incredibly simplified clichés. Naturally, this dispute is real, but the attempts at seeking the way in which Polish affairs really looked in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>23</sup> D. Pietrzak-Reeves, *Ład Rzeczypospolitej. Polska myśl polityczna XVI wieku a klasyczna tradycja republikańska* [The *Rzeczpospolita*'s order. Polish political thought in the 16<sup>th</sup> century vis-à-vis the classical republican tradition], Kraków 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Plain here is the anachronistic view regarding the connection between modernization and a strong state monopolizing the resources.

<sup>25</sup> M. Morys-Twarowski, *Polskie imperium. Wszystkie kraje podbite przez Rzeczpospolitą* [The Polish empire. All the countries conquered by the *Rzeczpospolita*], Kraków 2016. This is perhaps not a serious proposal, but it does showcase the presently influential tendency toward glorification. Cf. H.-J. Bömbelburg, "Czy Rzeczpospolita była imperium? Imperial turn w historiografii, struktury państwowe w Europie Środkowowschodniej i 'imperialna' warstwa pojęciowa w XVI-XVII wieku" [Was the *Rzeczpospolita* an empire? Imperial turn in historiography, state structures in Central and Eastern Europe, and the 'imperial' conceptual layer in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries], in B. Dybaś, P. Hanczewski, T. Kempa (eds.), *Rzeczpospolita w XVI-XVIII wieku. Państwo czy wspólnota? Zbiór studiów* [The *Rzeczpospolita* in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. A state or a community?], Toruń 2007, pp. 43-58.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Sowa's book *Fantomowe ciało króla* [The king's phantom body] is, by way of contrast, a serious work, although in its criticism it portrays the solutions adopted by the Polish Kingdom's elite as destructive tendencies, in particular the expansion eastward. This can hardly be agreed to.

<sup>27</sup> Of course there are attempts at a balanced synthesis, as for instance in the University of Oxford's "The Jagiellonians: Dynasty, Memory and Identity in Central Europe" a 5-year research project (2013-2018), funded by a ERC Starting Grant and based at the History Faculty, led by Dr Natalia Nowakowska, or "Lendület" Research Group, at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the University of Debrecen, Hungary.

<sup>28</sup> A characteristic position is found in "Как Польшу превращают в новый таран против России", Накануне.ру, 16 August 2017, at <<http://www.nakanune.ru/articles/113170/>>.

are not! Besides, this dispute may well have ceased to interest anyone. The Common Wealth – that is, the matter shared by all citizens of the nobility – never was and still is nothing obvious.<sup>29</sup>

Everything began when we started treating our might and place as a constant attribute of Polishness – a Polishness understood by our concepts, or maybe our ignorance. In the times of the deepest collapse after the January Uprising of 1863, proclaiming aloft the pre-partitioned Poland, above all the then current policies of imperialisms and national egotisms, was understandable.

*There once was a country that expanded, there was a nation which drew to itself; there was a state which became mighty without lies, swindles, and treasons, without injury and rape, without appropriating and taking away others' property. There once was a country, a nation, a government which did not abuse God's name for its own violations, nor the name of law about its lawlessness; but it carried God's name and God's law where it was unknown in the world; secular, human, free rights were given to peoples with no rights, and because of this, with one act it expanded its borders. That is how it was, really was: that is reality, that is history.*<sup>30</sup> One hundred years later no one can write like that, but there is no shortage of people who want to listen.

Therefore, I must describe how I see that bygone Poland from which we can potentially draw an idea for the future. I mean that within the 'Jagiellonian Idea', special meaning is ascribed to the role of Polish culture in the East, to the union with Lithuania as a foundation of its might and the cause of its weakness, and to the European credentials that arose from the mission of *antemurale*. Free of the need to prove anything to myself – nor to others – I wish to connect reflection on might with an appraisal of Poland's civilizational affiliation.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century Poland began not only to accrete, but also to abound in seeking a place for its dynamics. Mightily held down from the west (Bohemia and Hungary) and the east (Lithuania and the Tatars), it found an outlet for its aspirations in the north and the south. The struggles with the Teutonic Order became overgrown with numerous myths that veil the obvious logic of efforts to include Toruń and Gdańsk into the Kingdom of Poland. The complexes and traumas of the last two hundred years cause us to think that the lords of Małopolska who lunged for Halicz and Włodzimierz [Володимир-Волинський] drew Poland into some insane scandal. Several generations after 1945 were taught that the eastern expansion cost us the loss of any chance to retrieve Silesia and Pomerania. But the fact is that Polish expansion went southwards! The beginning of our case precedes the Jagiellonians, and reaches the times of the great turning-point initiated by the Mongolian expansion. The Polish expansion north-

<sup>29</sup> The network of that day's political concepts is presented by E. Bem-Wiśniewska, "Wizja Rzeczypospolitej w epoce staropolskiej. Od historii języka do historii kultury" [The *Rzeczpospolita's* vision in the Old Poland period. From the history of language to the history of culture], in B. Dybaś, P. Hanczewski, T. Kempa (eds.), *Rzeczpospolita w XVI-XVIII wieku...*, pp. 11-42.

<sup>30</sup> S. Tarnowski, "Przedmowa do przekładu", in J. Kłaczko, *Unia Polski z Litwą* [Poland's Union with Lithuania], Kraków 1901, pp. 5-9, quotation from M. Mackiewicz, "Uwagi nad ideą jagiellońską...", p. 12.



wards and southwards, which formed the skeleton of modern Poland, resulted from the uniting kingdom settling on the great axis of concentration binding the Baltic with the Black Sea. It was a repercussion of the probably first world system's structure in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> The flow of ores, the conveyance of goods, and related demographic processes caused settlements to concentrate around the axis running from the north-west to the south-east. The axis of the Dniester and Vistula rivers attracted people and freed their initiative to set up villages and cities. 'Farmed lands' (*folwarki*) at first in the hands of peasants and reeves, only later owned by noblemen, took form as a rational measure for exploiting the economic situation. When Władysław Jagiełło's descendants took the throne in Krakow, maintaining control over this axis became the basis of all policies. Yet choices in politics can be different and not always successful.

This geopolitical orientation and its related military and economic practices were never named. However, they became the basis of later concepts named after that dynasty. This was similar as in the case of the Rhein valley axis which connected Italy to the Flanders, and Naples to Antwerp. It was rarely called Carolinian, but it is mostly remembered because of the French-German conflict that lasted centuries. It gave birth to Europe, however its significance was revealed not until Fernand Braudel came along.<sup>32</sup> He also pointed out the analogy with the Baltic-Black Sea axis.<sup>33</sup> We must take a look at the reality of the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century without emotions.

The Baltic-Black Sea axis of concentration<sup>34</sup> reveals itself at first as a plexus of trading interests connected to the existing communication trails. The Genoese were the first to notice that attractive eastern goods follow from the Silk Road northwards, from Trabzon to Caffa.<sup>35</sup> It was in Crimea where the trails of trading in Slavic slaves coincid-

<sup>31</sup> J.L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony. The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, Oxford 1989.

<sup>32</sup> F. Braudel, *Kultura materialna, gospodarka i kapitalizm XV-XVIII wiek* [Material culture and capitalism, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century], vol. 3: *Czas świata* [The time of the world], transl. by J. and J. Strzelecki, Warszawa 1992, ch. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Idem, *Morze Śródziemne i świat śródziemnomorski w epoce Filipa II* [The Mediterranean sea and the Mediterranean world during the epoch of Filip II], vol. 1, transl. by T. Mrówczyński, M. Ochab, Gdańsk 1976, pp. 214-222. Braudel talks about the Polish *isthme*, Marian Małowist used the definition 'eastern economic zone' – idem, *Wschód a Zachód Europy w XIII-XVI wieku. Konfrontacja struktur społeczno-gospodarczych* [Europe's East and West from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A confrontation of socio-economic structures], Warszawa 1973. See I. Kąkolewski, K. Olendzki, "Strefa południka 20: Mit czy rzeczywistość? Wokół problematyki badań porównawczych Mariana Małowista nad historią Europy Środkowowschodniej" [The 20° longitude zone: Myth or reality? On the hazards of researching the history of Central-Eastern Europe], *Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. 81, no. 1-2 (1990), pp. 301-312.

<sup>34</sup> I first used this term in: M. Tymowski, J. Kieniewicz, J. Holzer, *Historia Polski* [The history of Poland], Paryż 1986, p. 116.

<sup>35</sup> Marian Małowist wrote about this in: *Kaffa. Kolonia genueńska na Krymie i problem wschodni w latach 1453-1475* [Caffa. The Genoese colony on the Crimea], Warszawa 1946. See R. Hryszko, *Z Genui nad Morze Czarne. Z kart genueńskiej obecności gospodarczej na północno-zachodnich wybrzeżach Morza Czarnego u schyłku średniowiecza* [From Genoa to the Black Sea. From the pages of Genoese economic presence on the northwest littoral of the Black Sea at the close of the Middle Ages], Kraków 2004.

ed. The oldest route led to Kiev and Novgorod; in the early Middle Ages Ruthenia organized itself around it. In the modern era it became an object of Lithuanian-Muscovy confrontation. In the meantime it experienced the Mongolian invasion, and then came the Black Death Plague of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which completely changed the situation along the western border of the steppe.<sup>36</sup> Here in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Poland fought Lithuania and Hungary over ruling these lands. The dynasty's solution of marrying Jadwiga to Władysław, the Grand Prince of Lithuania, successfully allowed us to stifle Hungary and Lithuania's appetite for Ruthenia.

Volhynia and Podolia, along with Moldavia, were becoming an unusually attractive region for settlement, one which formed a hinterland along the frontier appointed with controlling the Wild Fields. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century a new factor was unveiled: the European thrust to the Baltic. Here the Teutonic Order created their modern state by exploiting, but also organizing settlement. The Hanseatic League of cities was more and more active here. Finally, at the same time the development of village and city settlements grew, which was related to the migrations heading exactly in the direction indicated by the above axis. This was not only Polish settlement, but also Vlach. The demand for agricultural and farming products, forest preserves and textile, did not occur suddenly together with the dynamics of European modern expansion, just as investments in mining ores and metals in the area of the Sudetes and the Carpathians were not a coincidence. Lastly, this area was not afflicted by the plagues of the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century in any degree comparable to the west and central part of the continent. None of this happened by coincidence. Somewhere here, from Pomorze to Muntenia, another European vortex began to form in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup>

Such a vortex, embodying a tension between people expressed by contradictions, by radical statements and negations, could only have formed because of the activity of free people. The number of towns and new villages founded on German law, the number of markets and church fairs, objectivize that the emergence of the nobility's republic – the *Rzeczpospolita* – was a logical result of the creative aptitudes of these people.<sup>38</sup> This process reveals certain analogies to western-European processes – however, it was distinct and brought diverse effects. The causes of this diverseness are the bones of contention in which what is preponderant is the urge to prove the coherence and compatibility of the Polish model with the completely imagined Western model. For me what is essential is rather the original causes behind the creation of solutions rooted in the same Christian tradition, yet open to new currents. We may of course say that in this vortex such people as Paweł Włodkowic, Wojciech of Brudzewo, John of Kęty, Nicolas

<sup>36</sup> Research into this matter focuses on relations with nomadic peoples and Russian expansion – see the debate on the books by W. Sunderland and M. Khodarkovsky, "The Russian Empire and the Steppe: An Exchange of Views", *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, no. 4 (2007).

<sup>37</sup> According to the concept of E. Morin, *Penser l'Europe*, Paris 1987, pp. 47-55.

<sup>38</sup> The issue of educating effective elites was perhaps best grasped by Janusz Ekes, although whereas I agree with his view on the role of horizontal ties and the meaning of the constitutional impulse of *Nibil novi*, I would not exaggerate the influence of the Jagiellonians. Idem, *Polska. Przyczyny słabości i podstawy nadziei* [The causes of weakness and the bases for hope], Warszawa 1994, pp. 37-45.

Copernicus, and Johannes Dantiscus were born and matured. We may also say that out of this vortex came the concepts: *de potestate papae et imperatoris respectu infidelium; neminem captivabimus nisi iure victum*; and *nihil novi sine communi consensu*. This is what enabled the heliocentric doctrine and the Warsaw Confederation. But we need to underline that found inside this civilizational variant was both the public activity of executioners and the model for the decent man. These were not contradictory phenomena, their oppositeness gave the noble citizens a feeling of power and the confidence of self-sufficiency. These dialogics of the European vortex allowed Poles and Lithuanians to build within one hundred years everything that, in subsequent generations, comprised the *Rzeczpospolita*.<sup>39</sup>

The endeavors of kings Kazimierz and Władysław to subordinate Red Ruthenia to Poland must therefore be seen as a consequence of a civilizational process. It consisted in combining the dynamics of the place, surely detectable intuitively, with the ability of dialogue, a conscious openness to confrontation. Similarly as things took place in the western part of the continent, people drawn into exuberant economic and demographical processes showed their willingness and ability to confront their identity (culture, religion, languages). They sought and found in the Kingdom the opportunities to satisfy their needs and ambitions, and at the same time they were ready to take and use everything they came across according to their own need. This was possible because of freedom. It would not have succeeded without energy.<sup>40</sup> Thus they created a European civilization in the East. Not a copy, but an independent version elicited from the same resource of values drawn from Latin Christianity.

The old and natural bond with Greek Christianity, the Byzantine world, had crucial meaning in this dialogue. Of equal importance were the relations established with the

<sup>39</sup> I have developed this point in a range of publications: "Ejes de integración, fronteras y divisiones de Sarmatia Europea", in J. Martínez Millán (ed.), *Felipe II (1527-1598). Europa y la Monarquía Católica*, vol. 1, ch. 1, Madrid 1999, pp. 451-462; "Civilizational Aspects of the Eastern Boundaries of Europe", in K. Trzcíński (ed.), *The State and Development in Africa and Other Regions. Past and Present. Studies and Essays in Honour of Professor Jan J. Milewski*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 255-269; "The Eastern Frontiers and the Civilisational Dimension of Europe", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 107 (2013), pp. 165-178; "Pogranicza i peryferie: o granicach cywilizacji europejskiej" [The frontier lands and peripheries: on the boundaries of European civilization], in M. Koźmiński (ed.), *Cywilizacja europejska. Różnorodności i podziały* [European civilization. Diversity and divisions], vol. 3, Kraków 2014, p. 81-96; "Wartości polityczne Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów a granice aksjologiczne cywilizacji europejskiej – kilka refleksji końcowych" [The political values of the Polish-Lithuanian *Rzeczpospolita* vis-à-vis the axiological borders of European civilization – several final conclusions], in A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz (ed.), *Wartości polityczne Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów. Struktury aksjologiczne i granice cywilizacyjne* [The political values of *Rzeczpospolita*. Axiological structures and civilizational boundaries], Warszawa 2017, pp. 291-308.

<sup>40</sup> Lew Gumilew endeavoured to solve a similar problem by creating the concept of passionarity, but he embedded it in a cosmology and mysticism, which pushed the issue of the accumulation and release of human energy outside the scope of science – see Л. Гумилев, *Струна истории. Лекции по этнологии*, Москва 2008, pp. 147-156. In the meantime the energetic approach offers an opportunity for rather precise reconstructions of the balance of energy in a system, D.R. Tilley, "Howard T. Odum's Contribution to the Laws of Energy", *Ecological Modelling*, vol. 178, no. 1-2 (2004), pp. 121-125, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolmodel.2003.12.032>>.

Orient, and not only the Turkish Orient.<sup>41</sup> The next two centuries created a new political formation and social organization which were a logical result of these processes. Not delving into this history, it behoves us to underline that the positive influence of this axis of concentration is clear up until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This did not have anything in common with the loosely understood idea of the way of ruling or managing. Maintaining control over southern areas was a beneficial practice not only for Ruthenian families who were building an aristocratic position in Volhynia, Podolia and also in Left-Bank Ukraine. The influence of this dynamic reached far, not only in the form of creating positive economic situations for 'farmed lands' (*folwarki*). Without this, it is not possible to understand either the golden age, the religious tolerance, or the feeling of freedom those people had. 'A free Pole dances', that is how Orzechowski gave expression to the belief that the Citizen shapes his own life according to his own preferences and without restraints.<sup>42</sup> There was a lot of megalomania in this, but that did not then distinguish Poles from other Europeans.

There is no doubt that numerous benefits were derived from the movement of people and goods on the trade roads of the Levant, also when they were under Turkish control. Studies into the trade of the Levant,<sup>43</sup> just as studies of Polish-Turkish politics,<sup>44</sup> consolidate belief in the meaning of this activity's thrust. We speak similarly about the influence of the Baltic trade. When Caffa and Bilhogrod/Akerman fell in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Istanbul was becoming the fulcrum of the axis, just like Gdańsk in the north. At the same time this axis was strengthened by connections – crucial for Poland – with Silesia, Wrocław, Leipzig, and Nuremberg.<sup>45</sup> The potential of the Ottoman Empire in the south, the potential of the Netherlands in the north, created tensions that freed

<sup>41</sup> I present this in many studies concerning Polish Orientalness – see "Polish Orientalness", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 49 (1984), pp. 67-103.

<sup>42</sup> S. Orzechowski, "Quincunx wtóry" [Quincunx the second], in K. Koehler (ed.), *Stanisława Orzechowskiego i Augustyna Rotundusa Debata o Rzeczypospolitej* [The debate between Stanisław Orzechowski and Augustyn Rotundus on the *Rzeczypospolita*], Kraków 2009, p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> A. Dziubiński, *Na szlakach Orientu. Handel między Polską a Imperium Osmańskim w XVI-XVIII wieku* [On the Orient's trails. Trade between Poland and the Ottoman Empire from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century], Wrocław 1997.

<sup>44</sup> D. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania. International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century). A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents*, Leiden 2011; idem, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne polsko-tureckie w latach 1500-1572 w kontekście międzynarodowym* [Polish-Turkish diplomatic relations, 1500-1572, in the international context], Wrocław 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Grzegorz Myśliwski offers a new perspective in: "Strefa sudecko-karpacka i Lwów. Miejsce Śląska, Małopolski i Rusi Czerwonej w gospodarce Europy Zachodniej (połowa XIII – początek XVI wieku)" [The region of the Sudetes and Carpathians and Lviv. The place of Silesia, Małopolska, and Red Ruthenia in the economy of Western Europe (mid-13<sup>th</sup> century to 16<sup>th</sup> century)], in S. Gawlas (ed.), *Ziemie polskie wobec Zachodu. Studia nad rozwojem średniowiecznej Europy* [Polish lands vis-à-vis the West. Studies on the development of medieval Europe], Warszawa 2006. This is confirmed by the seminal monograph by J. Baszanowski, *Handel wołami w Polsce w XVI-XVIII wieku* [The oxen trade in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century Poland], Szczęśne 2017, pp. 268-270.

movement. This is perfectly visible in the flow of money.<sup>46</sup> But what drove this axis? May we recognize the agency of free citizens here?<sup>47</sup>

This reflection on old Poland is meant to lead to two conclusions. First I mean to demonstrate that the existence of the *Rzeczpospolita*/Commonwealth was possible only due to a skilled exploitation of what the economic situation offered. Thereafter, that this spectacular exploitation consisted in achieving a local variant of European civilization. The creative harnessing of the economy and the capability to independently make avail of opportunities in the interests of those people who throughout three centuries constituted none other than the Common Wealth, the republic shared by all citizens: the *res publica* of the chivalry, thereafter the nobility, and finally the landed gentry, who had an awareness of being responsible for the *regnum*, no matter if they called it the *mixtum* or *compuestum*.<sup>48</sup> This was aptly noticed by Władysław Konopczyński.<sup>49</sup> The economic situation related to the Baltic-Black Sea axis was unique, it appeared only once in a millennium. The union was a well-suited way of making use of it – a way, not a goal. The role of the union of the Polish Kingdom with Lithuania was disputed from the moment it was erected to the moment it was abolished in the Constitution of the Third of May, 1791, and thereafter for two centuries. The capability of constituting such a model was indeed unique in Europe during those times, however, it resulted from the open nature of the noble nation. It combined the noble nations of Poles and Lithuanians/Ruthenians in a common matter.<sup>50</sup> This idea was not suitable for modern nations, ones formed moreover without the support of their own state.

The *Rzeczpospolita* achieved a variant of European civilization, including within it all citizens regardless of their derivation, language, and religion. It should not offend us, or even surprise us, that this project did not include all people living in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The standards of a nation-state, all the more the standards of a democratic state of law, should not be collated. For in the *Rzeczpospolita*, *lex est rex*, but only in reference to citizens.

We have the impression that by analyzing this project we will discover the source of the failure. We ask about the uncompleted executive reforms and the elective system, about the loss of energy when it was needed in the times of the Thirty Years' War. Perhaps then was the opportunity to prevent the *calamitatis regni*. We think about the

<sup>46</sup> A. Attman, *The Bullion Flow between Europe and the East 1000-1750*, Göteborg 1981, ch. IV.

<sup>47</sup> This is described in detail by A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku* [Regina libertas. Freedom in Polish political thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> century], Gdańsk 2006.

<sup>48</sup> This has been expanded upon by Jan Dziegielewski, Wojciech Kriegseisen, Stefania Ochman, Edward Opaliński – and especially Janusz Ekes; cf. his *Trójpodział władzy i zgoda wszystkich. Naczelne zasady 'ustroju mieszanego' w staropolskiej refleksji politycznej* [The tripart division of power and the accord of all. The surpassing principles of 'mixed government' in Old Polish political thought], Siedlce 2001.

<sup>49</sup> W. Konopczyński, "O idei jagiellońskiej" [On the Jagiellonian idea], in idem, *Umarli mówią. Szkice historyczno-polityczne* [The dead speak. Historico-political sketches], Poznań 1929, p. 86.

<sup>50</sup> I have found this idea in the work by R. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, vol. 1: *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385-1569*, Oxford 2015, p. 494. I see that Jurate Kiaupienė draws attention to the same in review in *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, vol. 20 (2015).

causes of the collapse of this project also believing that in this way we will find a solution for ourselves. This false hope has dragged on for two hundred years, and because of the ineffectiveness of the lessons learned, we cease paying attention to that history. We practice fantasies that suit our preferences.

Even if we try to correct our perceptions about Jagiellonian Poland and verify our judgments about the political activities of Old Poland's citizens, I still see no real usefulness in it. The Jagiellonian idea's meaning as an attempt at a history lesson was such that we were proving to ourselves our ability to create a state exemplified by freedom and tolerance. This was supposed to give us the force to resist and the incentive to again create a state capable of averting fate and restoring our might. However, the matter is not only in asking about the reality of hope. The point is about whether we understand what comprised our 'power and glory'.

Accusations against those citizens for not having saved their country are pathetic. Let us first try to be so much wiser ourselves and save our own country! The Jagiellonian idea is weighed down by the simple fact of losing with Russia. The claim that that happened because of the union with Lithuania is not reasonable. And the belief that the *Rzeczpospolita's* heritage will provide us with a scenario for containing Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not legitimate. The economic situation of the 14<sup>th</sup> up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century favored Poland – and the nobility took advantage out of that.<sup>51</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the situation broke down, the state model that had been elaborated maintained itself by the force of inertia. It is said that this is the proof of the falseness of choice. That the prosperity of the landed gentry's life muted the old chivalry's virtue. When the state structures collapsed, the alternative turned out to be the model of the 'Prussian path to capitalism.' And certainly, the might of Germany grew out of industrial basins, and not on landed estates. About this, too, do we denounce those bygone Poles, for not having built cities, crafts, banks, and industry. In brief, we are offended that they did not accumulate capital.

However, the energetic consequences of the concentration axes are worth appreciating. They influenced the functioning of serf-based *folwarki*, where peasants' interests had to be considered.<sup>52</sup> Older historiography critically appraised these 'farmed lands' and the serfdom economy, yet Andrzej Wyczański and Jerzy Topolski sufficiently proved the rationality of this choice.<sup>53</sup> The case that the *Rzeczpospolita* had a kind

<sup>51</sup> A. Mączak, "Jedyna i nieporównywalna? Kwestia odrębności Rzeczypospolitej w Europie XVI-XVII wieku" [The one and incomparable? The matter of the distinctiveness of the *Rzeczpospolita* in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Europe], *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 100, no. 4 (1993), pp. 121-136.

<sup>52</sup> T. Wiślicz, "Chłopi wobec króla i Rzeczypospolitej w XVII-XVIII w." [Peasants vis-à-vis the king and the *Rzeczpospolita* in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries], in W. Kriegseisen (ed.), *My i oni. Społeczeństwo nowożytnej Rzeczypospolitej wobec państwa* [Us and them. The society of the modern era's *Rzeczpospolita* vis-à-vis the state], Warszawa 2016, pp. 243-258.

<sup>53</sup> J. Topolski, *Przełom gospodarczy w Polsce XVI wieku i jego następstwa* [Economic breakthrough in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Poland and its consequences], Poznań 2000.



of slavery economy is a misunderstanding.<sup>54</sup> Before constructing new interpretations, I recommend acquaintance with the heritage of the Polish economic history school. It was Witold Kula and Marian Małowist, both in their own way, who depicted the uniqueness of Polish solutions. It is always stressed that both were Marxists. But what a form of Marxism it was! What resulted from Kula's economic theory was that in the *Rzeczpospolita* it was not possible for capitalism to arise.<sup>55</sup> A long time before others he proved that capitalism was a particular case and not an inevitable stage of development. And what resulted from Małowist's 'model' was the obviousness of the multiplicity of ways of developing and the cohesion of the phenomenon of European expansion.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the above historians posited that the original model of the *Rzeczpospolita* was one of decline, underdevelopment, dependency, backwardness – in brief, the cause of the collapse. This pessimism was, after all, at the same time seeking to understand the historic twists of fate for Poland and the entire region. It was at an extreme distance from the masochistic Kraków school, but also far from the delusions of the Jagiellonian idea. I am not voicing in my reflection dissent with my teachers' conceptualizations.<sup>57</sup>

The Baltic-Black Sea axis was already fading by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, there was much more going on at the time – namely, after the Peace of Westphalia had been settled, the world-wide geopolitical axes were moved, in result of which the concept of Eastern Europe emerged. This was possible not because of the blindness of French philosophers, or because of the Sarmatian Polish gentry's overweening pride. Behind the new configuration there was much more than just the loss of citizens' energy.

In the optics of the Jagiellonian Idea the world looks simple. Perhaps that is why it is so attractive? East of the *Rzeczpospolita* there was Moscow, which Lithuania had to push back or subordinate. And we protected Europe by defending Lithuania. This was primarily about the Dnieper axis, essential to reintegrating Ruthenian statehood. But it did not prove to be an impulse for Lithuania to create might – likely because that axis became a borderline for the *Rzeczpospolita*. Nevertheless, the fighting over the Smolensk Gateway can be examined as an element of pursuing the maintenance

<sup>54</sup> This opinion, promulgated by schools in communist times, seems to rest foremost on the critical opinions of foreigners, ones Stanisław Kot was delighted to spread. Kot was a peasant activist by persuasion, an intriguer by hobby. See his marvellous essay *Rzeczpospolita Polska w literaturze politycznej Zachodu* [Poland's *Rzeczpospolita* in political literature], Kraków 1919.

<sup>55</sup> J. Kochanowicz, "La Théorie économique... après vingt ans", *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 56 (1987), pp. 187-211. Cf. A. Sosnowska, *Zrozumieć zacofanie. Spory historyków o Europę Wschodnią (1947-1994)* [To understand backwardness. Historians' quarrels over Eastern Europe (1947-1994)], Warszawa 2004.

<sup>56</sup> As best seen in the set of his essays *Europa i jej ekspansja XIV-XVII w.* [Europe and its expansion 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> cent.], A. Mączak, H. Zaremska (eds.), Warszawa 1993. Mączak correctly stresses that Małowist did not use the concept of 'model'. I, in turn, have the impression that he frowned when his students used it, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> I am guided here by the intention contained in the dedication in the volume by W. Kula, *Historia, zacofanie, rozwój* [History, backwardness, development], Warszawa 1983: *To Stefan, broodingly, about our developed-backward country Witold August 31, '83* [Stefanowi, z zadumą nad naszym rozwinięto-zacofanym krajem Witold 31 VIII 83].

of control over the Baltic-Black Sea axis. For the Jagiellonians this meant protecting Ruthenian lands – for Moscow it meant gaining potential access to a source of might. Hence Moscow's obstinacy in fighting for access to the Baltic Sea in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and to the Black Sea in the 18<sup>th</sup>. After the Treaty of Perpetual Peace, when Russia shoved the *Rzeczpospolita* back from the Dnieper, it proved the poor usability of this historic axis. It may have seemed that the need of power demands a departure from the Vistula-Dniester axis. However, once that had happened, a fundamental geopolitical pivot occurred. Instead of along the North-South axis, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century world began to orient itself along the East-West axis. We, enamored with revolution, do not pay attention to the dissolution of the Mediterranean world's unity and to the shift of its center to the Atlantic.

Therefore, the first partition of Poland in 1772 gave Russia the security of the Dnieper-Daugava axis, at the same time proving its fading usefulness. The second and third partitions revealed that the Baltic-Black Sea axis no longer played its inspirational role. Gdańsk could be left to the Prussians, and Lviv to the Austrians. The partitions ended the dispute over hegemony in the region by opening to Russia the prospect of entering Europe. The resolutions of the Congress of Vienna have to be seen in this context. After 1815 England and Russia, the two imperial powers, but also completely diverse civilizations, conditioned modern Europe's formation. When the Baltic-Black Sea axis of concentration stopped functioning, the new logic of power demanded something more than giving Russia control over Eastern Europe, which in the meantime had been invented.<sup>58</sup> Russia admittedly opened the Polish question in this way, yet in the new east-west vision at issue was not letting anyone else rebuild it.

In plotting this vision, I wish to indicate that the essence of the *Rzeczpospolita* did not lie in the size of the state, its might, and not even in a certain historic mission. What was really essential was contained in the fulfilment of the original variant of European civilization. It stood out in political culture, whose fundamentals were freedom and the law.

It is not important whether the Polish reform, Catholic and Protestant, created original solutions, or whether Polish authors were appreciated around the world. The success should be measured in the continuance of this model. The *Rzeczpospolita*'s failure to enter the path of growth and revolution is another matter entirely. After all, its model did not give any chance for capitalism to evolve. Yet this does not mean that it was doomed to backwardness. We can recall that progress sprang from poverty and not plenty.<sup>59</sup> There were many variants of civilization to arise from that same Latin Christianity. I recall the Andalusian variant, underlining that in time Catholic Spain also developed its own civilizational model.<sup>60</sup> It was not saved by the overseas empire, nor

<sup>58</sup> L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994. Cf. T. Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe*, London 2014.

<sup>59</sup> R. Wilkinson, *Poverty and Progress. An Ecological Model of Economic Development*, London 1973.

<sup>60</sup> J. Kieniewicz, "Andaluzja, Hiszpania i pogranicza cywilizacji: współczesna perspektywa historycznej konfrontacji" [Andalucía, Spain, and the frontiers of civilization: the contemporary prospect of histo-

by the absolute authority of the Habsburgs and the Bourbons. True, the *Rzeczpospolita* did not become famous for its urban culture, banking, or painting. Yet ultimately, capitalism and the industrial revolution were born in England, and not in Italy, France, or Austria.

The Jagiellonian Idea maintains that the *Rzeczpospolita* was a regional project for including into the sphere of European civilization peoples who settled on the eastern edges of the continent, at the same time defending Europe from eastern intrusion – a ‘*propugnaculum* of all Christianity’. At the same time, it suggests openness and dialogue, creating the chance for everyone to maintain their identity in a broader community. Some think that the price of this eastern orientation was the neglect of Polish interests, others assert that Polish imperialism thwarted the national processes in Lithuania and Ruthenia. In my opinion, the power of the *Rzeczpospolita* stemmed from its openness, from finding its own formula for European *unitas multiplex*.<sup>61</sup>

What results from this? At the bottom, no more than banalities. The post-partition ideas and interpretations are very interesting because they allow us to better understand the process of the formation of Polishness. They do not, however, help in seeking developmental impulses for today’s Poland, nor in the (by all means fitting) search for our heritage. The importance of the *Rzeczpospolita*’s heritage is in its willingness to show the capacity to make use of the economic situation and create an original form of European civilization. This may encourage us to search for independent paths of development; past examples can support the conscious formation of our uncompleted transformation. Studies into the bygone *Rzeczpospolita* are, therefore, a serious task. However, the belief in the transposition of ideas which refer to those experiences is a pipedream.<sup>62</sup> With one exception: it is well worth examining the capability of bygone Poles to make expedient use of the evolving economic situation. This is of utmost necessity for us right now.

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rical confrontation], in M. Koźmiński (ed.), *Cywilizacja europejska. Wykłady i eseje* [European civilization. Lectures and essays], 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. expanded, Warszawa 2005, pp. 77-87.

<sup>61</sup> As understood by E. Morin, *Penser l’Europe*, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> This foremost concerns the realm of research defined as ‘kresological discourse’ (*dyskurs kresoznawczy*), which acts as a lens for the whole gamut of complexes and emotions intrinsic to generations of Poles. Bogusław Bakula describes this at length in “Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia i jej (post)kolonialny świat” [Central-Eastern Europe and its (post)colonial world], in idem et al. (eds.), *Dyskurs postkolonialny we współczesnej literaturze i kulturze Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Polska, Ukraina, Węgry, Słowacja* [Postcolonial discourse in contemporary literature and culture of Central-Eastern Europe. Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia], Poznań 2015, pp. 13-97. Cf. also S. Andrusiw, “Relacje polsko-ukraińskie z perspektywy *postcolonial studies*” [Polish-Ukrainian relations from postcolonial studies perspective], *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, vol. 59, no. 7 (2011), pp. 61-69.

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