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THE REVIVALS OF THE JAGIELLONIAN IDEA: POLITICAL AND NORMATIVE CONTEXTS

ABSTRACT

The article has two major aims. First, it provides a short analysis of three revivals of the Jagiellonian idea which took place in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in different historical and political circumstances. Second, it locates these revivals within the political and normative contexts of the time, and looks at different reasons that explain the persistence of the concept. The article also addresses more general questions, such as the ways that the Jagiellonian idea can be conceptualized, debates over its practicality and usefulness and its lasting presence in Polish national memory. Although there does not seem to be an agreement on the very meaning of the Jagiellonian idea, it certainly has enough normative or symbolic potential to animate strategic policy visions even in the twenty-first century.

Key words: the Jagiellonian idea, Polish-Lithuanian union, historical memory, Oskar Halecki

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to discuss three different revivals of the Jagiellonian idea and reflect upon its meaning, its normative and instrumental aspects, as well as its presence in the political discourse in Poland. This leads to a wider consideration of the persistence of ideas of the national past and their rhetorical and symbolic validity. The Jagiellonian idea is a concept developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the historical reality it refers to is much earlier and concerns the Polish-Jagiellonian union initiated at Krewo (1385) and Horodlo (1413) and completed at Lublin (1569). As a concept, however, it was a product of Polish historiography and mythology,¹ which in

¹ J. Maternicki, "Początki mitu jagiellońskiego w historiografii i publicystyce polskiej XIX wieku: Karol Szajnocha i Julian Klaczko", *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, vol. 32, no. 11/12 (1988), p. 34.

the nineteenth century and in the interwar period played an important role in shaping political awareness of the geopolitical and strategic goals of Poland.

The 'Jagiellonian idea' can be used in two different though not completely separate ways. The first way is to apply the concept to a historical and political vision of a union that was embodied in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its lasting success was proved by the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the two nations until 1795. The union resulted in a remarkable cultural and political development that marked especially the Polish golden age of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.² On this reading, the Jagiellonian idea is a paradigm of historical development, a political union that took place in specific circumstances, had its own dynamics and functioned for a long period of time to the benefit of the parties of the union. When the concept was born in the nineteenth century, however, it not only referred to the historical reality of the past, but also to an inspiration for the future revival of the Polish statehood. The intention to use it in the first place was not that of a historian only interested in the Jagiellonian epoch and its aftermath, but also of a researcher who uncovers an idea that might be inspiring for his own generation. The Jagiellonian idea thus became a concept, very loosely defined, of a paradigmatic political development that is based on a voluntary union of free nations willing to build their political future together. And thus it could serve different purposes of political writers and political leaders in different epochs. The category was present in historical memory and was revived when there was a need to rethink fundamental issues of the future political and especially geopolitical development of the Polish nation or the Polish state. Consequently, the major revival of the Jagiellonian idea in the second meaning took place shortly after Poland regained independence in 1918, when the resurrected Polish state undertook the difficult task of reshaping its territorial borders and defining its own space in East-Central Europe. The first meaning of the Jagiellonian idea refers more to political and social practice and the mechanisms that regulated the practice of Poland, Lithuania and Ruthenia living together. The second meaning is much more concerned with an idea or a vision of desirable political development and geopolitical strategy that is inspired by the historical experience.³ It is often a projection of certain expectations or visions into the present circumstances that can be read as an attribute of a political discourse or a national mythology. It is not the aim of this article to provide a clear definition of the Jagiellonian idea that would fit all three contexts. I believe there cannot be such a definition. What instead is worth considering is different attempts at utilizing the very category for different purposes.

The two ways in which the Jagiellonian idea can be conceptualized has to date led to two different types of criticism. The first would stress that it is only a product of Polish historiography (which does not have an equivalent elsewhere, especially in Lith-

² Here I agree with Oskar Halecki that the Polish renaissance and its golden age came already in the fifteenth century that began politically with the union of Horodlo.

³ Cf. S.M. Kuczyński, "Idea jagiellońska", in *Pamiętnik VIII Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Krakowie 14-17 września 1958 r. Referaty*, part 2, Warszawa 1958, pp. 322-333.

uania) and the Jagiellons were unaware of it or they never called their political programme using the term.⁴ The act of Krewa, as some contemporary historians argue, was not a union, but only *a memorandum of intentions which was meant to serve in forming a new international relationship between Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania*.⁵ The second type of criticism was raised by those who saw in the Jagiellonian idea Polish aspirations to rebuild its leading position in East-Central Europe in radically different historical circumstance from those which gave rise to the first union – federation. Its revival in the late nineteenth century, in the 1920s and after 1989 would only serve the political rhetoric of the time and fuel certain myths, including the myth of Poland's leading position in East-Central Europe.⁶

The revivals of the Jagiellonian idea need to be seen as an aspect of the process of the very persistence of ideas in national histories. Certain ideas and concepts created in specific historical circumstances tend to animate historical memory and shape historical imagination and political culture. If nations are imagined communities⁷ they always rely on certain narratives that are powerful enough to be revived in different historical circumstances in order to strengthen a new political or cultural vision or public philosophy. National histories may cherish certain moments or periods for their special contribution to the political, social, and cultural development.⁸ This may include an institutional design, a public act of lasting significance (e.g. the American Declaration of Independence) or a certain political choice of positive consequences (like the Polish-Lithuanian union). Such acts, institutions or decisions become a part of a narrative that is created in order to search for their meaning and consequences as well as for ideas that animated them in the first place.

Witold Kamieniecki defined the Jagiellonian idea in 1929 as *the political system that consists in attracting neighbouring territories situated between the Baltic Sea and the Carpathian Mountains to the Polish state*.⁹ The advantage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was its institutional order including the character of the union which retained autonomy of the parts, administration performed by local citizens, equality of the two languages, religious toleration, the growth of citizens' civic liberties, and a lasting contribution to western civilization.¹⁰ The Jagiellonian idea can be interpreted as

⁴ Especially M. Bobrzyński, W. Konopczyński, S.M. Kuczyński.

⁵ Z. Kiaupa, J. Kiaupienė, A. Kuncevičius, *The History of Lithuania before 1795*, transl. by I. Zujienė et al., Vilnius 2000, p. 130.

⁶ See e.g. J. Kłoczowski, "Koncepcje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej Oskara Haleckiego w kontekście przemian politycznych ostatniego stulecia i lat bieżących", in M. Dąbrowska (ed.), *Oskar Halecki i jego wizja Europy*, vol. 2, Warszawa–Łódź 2014.

⁷ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London–New York 1991.

⁸ Cf. P. Biliński (ed.), *Przeszłość we współczesnej narracji kulturowej. Studia i szkice kulturoznawcze*, vol. 1, Kraków 2011.

⁹ W. Kamieniecki, *Ponad zgiełkiem walk narodowościowych. Idea jagiellońska*, Warszawa 1929.

¹⁰ O. Halecki, "Idea jagiellońska", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 51, no. 1-2 (1937), pp. 486-510 [repr. in: *Antemurale* (Romae), vol. 13 (1969)].

a successful attempt at creating a peaceful union of political communities or political nations which gain mutual support, and established a peaceful and fruitful coexistence and a common political and normative framework that also respects their key differences, such as language, local administration and symbols. The union had also a civilizational dimension which in the case of Poland-Lithuania was related to Christianity and the republican ideals of a free political community that cherished liberty of the citizens, political representation and *communitas regni*. An eminent Polish historian of the twentieth century, Oskar Halecki, traced the origin of East Central Europe to the fourteenth century union of Poland and Lithuania and especially to the significant role in that union that was played by Jadwiga of Anjou who was crowned as King of Poland in 1384.¹¹ The union created an alliance and a federation of peoples who would share a commitment to Catholic faith after Lithuania was converted and favoured a peaceful federation for the sake of their political and cultural development: *A great state was thereby formed, capable of resisting both Germanism and the East, those two perils which since the dawn of history had threatened the nations that were henceforth to be federated.*¹² Halecki saw the origin of East Central Europe in these common geopolitical goals and strategies that became clear in the fourteenth century. The Jagiellonian idea was read by him as the final definition of the last will of Sigismund Augustus.¹³ More broadly, it was a project that embedded the method of federalism which was supposed to guarantee, better than other methods, security of various countries of central and eastern Europe.¹⁴ Relatively early, *the nations themselves became interested in such possibilities of closer cooperation, and there was at least one federal system which contributed for centuries to a better political organization, and also to the cultural progress of those parts of central-eastern Europe which remained free from foreign rule or from autocratic forms of government and at the same time were closely associated with western culture.*¹⁵ Halecki, in all his works, stressed the positive aspects of the Polish-Lithuanian union which was not a widely shared view among Polish historians, especially in the nineteenth century. Some, for example Joachim Lelewel, argued that the union weakened political institutions and social cohesion which was typical for virtually all empires.¹⁶ Such criticism, however, does not undermine Halecki's claim that because of the union and federation established

¹¹ Idem, *Jadwiga of Anjou and the Rise of East Central Europe*, ed. with introduction by T.V. Gromada, Boulder 1991.

¹² Idem, *A History of Poland*, London–Henley 1978, p. 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁴ Idem, "The Historical Role of Central-Eastern Europe", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 232, no. 1 (1944), p. 12, at <<https://doi.org/10.1177/000271624423200103>>. See also H. Łowmiański, *Polityka Jagiellonów*, Poznań 1999, p. 55; Z. Norkus, *An Unproclaimed Empire. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania. From the Viewpoint of Comparative Historical Sociology of Empires*, part 1, transl. by A. Strunga, London 2017.

¹⁵ O. Halecki, "The Historical Role...", p. 12.

¹⁶ J. Lelewel, *Polska, dzieje i rzeczy jej*, vol. 3, Poznań 1855, p. 316; A.F. Grabski, "Joachima Lelewela koncepcja dziejów Polski", in idem, *Perspektywy przeszłości. Studia i szkice historyograficzne*, Lublin 1983, p. 182.

by the Jagiellons such a large part of East Central Europe developed a constitutional parliamentary system of government that persisted for a long time. The Jagiellonian system was successful because it combined two ideas: recognition of the rights of all its parts to free national development and the idea of common defense that they organized against eastern and western imperialism.¹⁷ Halecki's interpretation of the union was critically addressed especially by young Lithuanian historians in the 1920s and 1930s when Polish relations with independent Lithuania were particularly difficult.¹⁸

The union that gave rise to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – *Rzeczpospolita* of Two Nations – was a successful project undertaken by the Jagiellonian dynasty which was shaped in favourable historical and geopolitical circumstances. To many Poles who lived in later epochs, during or after the partitions, the union left a lasting heritage which happened to be called the Jagiellonian idea. According to the wishes of Jadwiga, the union was supposed to be built not only upon constitutional charters, but also on the basis of true fellowship. Thus, already after her death, the second act of union at Horodlo retained the previous positions according to which the provinces of Lithuania and Ruthenia were not supposed to be simply incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland, but retained their separate administration and heads of state, while at the same time strengthening significantly the union of the two nations whose elites were now equally included in the same noble ranks and participated in representative institutions. It gave rise to a participatory political culture for which the equal civic and political rights of the nobility of the two nations and the rise of parliamentarism were of great significance. The civic spirit (civility) of the Polish political culture attracted Lithuanians and facilitated the union between the two political communities.¹⁹ The historical context for the union was unique and as Władysław Konopczyński warned in the 1920s it was unlikely to be repeated again.²⁰ However, as perhaps the most successful and long-lasting geopolitical vision, the Jagiellonian idea, the idea of East Central Europe as Halecki would call it, proved to be inspiring not only in the Second, but also in the Third Polish Republic. This sentiment was not shared equally by the Lithuanians who after the 123-year forced absence of the two nations sought their independent political future first in the early 1920s and then in the 1990s without reference to the Jagiellonian project.

¹⁷ O. Halecki, "The Historical Role...", p. 14.

¹⁸ See, for example, A. Šapoka (ed.), *Jogaila*, Kaunas 1935; idem (ed.), *Lietuvos istorija*, Kaunas 1936; J. Matusas, *Švitrigaila Lietuvos didysis kunigaikštis*, Kaunas 1938. The historiography of the Polish-Lithuanian Union was revised again after 1990, see especially J. Kiaupienė, A. Zakrzewski, "Unie polsko-litewskie – próba nowego spojrzenia", in A. Jankiewicz (ed.), *Lex est Rex in Polonia et in Lithuania. Tradycje prawno-ustrojowe Rzeczypospolitej – doświadczenie i dziedzictwo*, Warszawa 2008; M. Jučas, *Lietuvos ir Lenkijos unija (XIV a. vid. – XIX a. pr.)*, Vilnius 2000.

¹⁹ J. Lelewel, *Polska...*, pp. 165-167.

²⁰ W. Konopczyński, "O idei jagiellońskiej", in idem, *Umarli mówią. Szkice historyczno-polityczne*, Poznań 1929, p. 86.

THE FIRST REVIVAL

Władysław Konopczyński emphasized that the Jagiellonian idea in the historical reality of 1920s was the opposite of, on the one hand, predatory imperialism in foreign policy and, on the other hand, of the idea of a nation-state in domestic politics (their synthesis he called federalism), it assumed a significant role for local self-government and cultural development and expected peaceful coexistence of religious, national and language differences within one polity.²¹ The 'true Jagiellonian idea', however, was *the embodiment of a certain ideal (or sometimes just sentiments) in the real and changing historical-geographical circumstances of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries.*²²

The first revival of the Jagiellonian idea, which can also be seen as the moment when the very concept was born, took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, at the time when Poland did not exist as an independent state. The three hundredth anniversary of the Union of Lublin in 1859 was a good occasion to reflect upon one of the greatest moments of Polish history and its political and cultural heritage. A certain mythology of the Jagiellonian union and the Jagiellonian idea as a normative dimension of that union was developed in the works of Karol Szajnocha (1818-68), especially in his *Jadwiga i Jagiełło 1374-1413. Opowiadanie historyczne* and *Zdobycze pługa polskiego*. He saw the union with Lithuania as a vital aspect of Poland's historical mission in the East that brought western Christianity to pagan lands, but which also had important economic and strategic dimensions. Both Szajnocha and his follower Julian Klaczko contributed to the growth of a new historiography of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for which the Jagiellonian idea did not only have a symbolic meaning, but was a proof of the historical greatness of *Rzeczpospolita*, its territorial unity and its geopolitical visions.²³ All this served to remind observers of the motto of the union: 'the free with the free, the equal with the equal'.

The first reason for the revival of the Jagiellonian idea in the second half of the nineteenth century was nostalgia, which was to mobilize Poles against the various threats that they were facing under the rule of Prussia, Austria or Russia. It was especially apparent that the Jagiellonian past would be associated with a successful anti-Russian strategy and a civilizational mission. The Jagiellonian tradition was a weapon against tsarist Russia which after the Congress of Vienna occupied 82% of the former territory of *Rzeczpospolita*. This effort was criticized by the Krakow school of historians (above all Józef Szujski and Michał Bobrzyński) who had been stern opponents of the glorification of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The political context for the revival of the Jagiellonian idea was unfavourable in at least two respects. First, Poland did not exist as an independent polity and could not develop any strategic vision for its political development. Second, as Krakow historians argued, it was the grand project of Poland-

²¹ Ibid., pp. 75-86.

²² Ibid., p. 78.

²³ J. Maternicki, "Początki mitu jagiellońskiego...", pp. 33-48.

-Lithuania that proved to be too demanding for society and its institutions,²⁴ and this led to the loss of statehood at the end of the eighteenth century. The normative context was not entirely present either, but at the same time it was not surprising that the Jagiellonian vision was the one which was most likely to refer to the purpose of a national revival. It was well understood by Jan Matejko, the greatest proponent of the Jagiellonian idea in nineteenth-century art. Some of his greatest historical paintings were devoted to the Jagiellonian period: *Hold pruski* (Prussia's Tribute), *Stańczyk*, *Zawieszenie dzwonu Zygmunta* (Installation of the Sigismund Bell), *Unia Lubelska* (The Union of Lublin). They created a vision of the golden age which had a particularly significant impact upon mass consciousness.²⁵

THE SECOND REVIVAL: 1920S

The second and perhaps most important revival of the Jagiellonian idea took place shortly after Poland regained independence in 1918, at a time when the future of East-Central Europe was open, when many Poles *turned their attention toward federalism as a line of policy blessed by the tradition and success of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*.²⁶ The strategies of the past seemed the best source of political knowledge and could be attractive again, in a new geopolitical situation, which for some offered similar challenges and strategic choices as those made before. Various ideas of a new federation of Central Europe would be worked out not only in Poland, but also in America under President Wilson's administration and would also be suggested by the French Comité d'Etudes. Poland would play a significant role in those federative visions; they were, however, often juxtaposed with a vision (shared by the three Great Powers) of a strong, unified Russia whose role in the region would be much greater than that of Poland and which would grant cultural autonomy to her national minorities.²⁷ The Jagiellonian idea – translated into a new federative formula that would integrate Poland, the Baltic states, or at least Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus – was a matter of historical traditions and *deeply rooted habits of thought* and transmitted the memory that *for generations Poland has spent an infinite amount of effort in organizing and civilizing these eastern territories and defending them against the Swedes and the Muscovites, Turks, and Tartars*.²⁸

The political context of this second revival was shaped by the unstable situation in Eastern and Central Europe after the First World War, and above all by the vision of the political leader of liberated Poland, Józef Piłsudski and his supporters. A vision

²⁴ J. Szujski, *Opowiadania i roztrząsania historyczne (pisane w latach 1875-1880)*, Warszawa 1882, pp. 369-414.

²⁵ H.M. Słoczyński, *Jan Matejko*, Kraków 2002, pp. 6-58.

²⁶ M.K. Dziewanowski, *Joseph Piłsudski. A European Federalist, 1918-1922*, Stanford 1969, p. 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁸ C.H. Haskins, R.H. Lord, *Some Problems of the Peace Conference*, Cambridge, Mass. 1920, pp. 164-165.

that was opposed by Roman Dmowski and National Democrats who considered Russia a potential ally against Germany, supported the right to national self-determination among national lines and saw a federation as a weakness, and hence rejected the federal programme altogether.²⁹ The Jagiellonian idea was now taken as a vision of a new political order in which nations who love freedom could be united again against Russian despotism. The Jagiellonian tradition proved to be a powerful example of a successful political vision which emphasized the vitality of political self-determination of free nations and the attractiveness of their political ideals (liberty, self-government, parliamentarism, the rule of law). I will not discuss the practical/political aspects of Piłsudski's vision, which has a very rich literature. I will instead focus on a more theoretical – or normative – and historical aspects of this second revival. I will refer to the works of Włodzimierz Wakar, Oskar Halecki, Władysław Konopczyński and Adolf Bocheński. Yet the practical, political context needs to be mentioned first and here the views and politics of Piłsudski are of primary importance.

The leader of the Polish state resurrected in the aftermath of World War I was raised in a federalist tradition and ethnically mixed environment understood the danger of the fragmentation of East Central Europe. Federalism was at the centre of Piłsudski's practical approach to politics. It was not a doctrine, but a practical and pragmatic vision which assumed that nations in this part of Europe were interconnected and needed mutual ties more than national sovereignty. If divided, the region would soon become vulnerable and would once again turn into a battleground for their more powerful neighbours. The power of a tradition that united the nations under the Jagiellonians was awakened and contradicted by new ideologies of bolshevism and nationalism. If Piłsudski's plan was indeed *a conscious attempt to provide the nations of the area with much-needed leadership, an effort to arouse the peoples of Eastern Europe to action so that in the future they would exist as subjects rather than objects of Great Power political diversion or a mere 'sphere of influence'*³⁰ then he needed much more understanding and support at home and abroad than he actually had, as well as more resources to fortify the borders of a new federation. Political expediency clashed with the reality which for possible partners opened different routes, especially the route of national self-determination. The conflict with Lithuania over Vilnius turned out to be a lasting obstacle to any further cooperation between the two, formerly united, nations, and the hopes for an independent Ukraine had to be abandoned. Both the normative and the political contexts were not favourable to the Jagiellonian idea.

One of the stern proponents of the Jagiellonian idea translated into the concept of an *intermarium* was Włodzimierz Wakar, who advocated a project of the Union of Liberated Nations in Central Europe situated between Russia, Germany and Austria. It seemed to be of vital importance for Poland to attract the new states – from Latvia to Yugoslavia and Greece – to the idea of the union that would protect them against

²⁹ M.K. Dziewanowski, *Joseph Piłsudski...*, p. 97.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

further attacks and territorial claims of the three powers.³¹ The union was supposed to have a political structure and clearly defined strategic goals of nations treated as equal partners.³² Wakar was in favour of Belarusian and Ukrainian independence, seeing their sovereign statehood as a necessary barrier to Russia's territorial aspirations. Although none of his postulates came close to realization in the early 1920s, he remained a great proponent of building alliances with small states in the region that would serve common security goals. Polish foreign policy was supposed to be focused upon using all possible means that would better contribute to political and economic cooperation with small neighbours, such as Czechoslovakia and Lithuania. This was his position in 1925 when he published yet another work on Polish foreign policy goals.³³

Wakar's position illustrates a certain phenomenon which the revivals of the Jagiellonian ideas in the twentieth century are concerned with. Despite its anachronistic nature, the Jagiellonian inspiration has become an aspect of a vision, notably in foreign policy, that is no longer utopian, but which sees a realistic solution to the current geopolitical challenges, and is based on the assumption that only solidarity with other nation-states in East-Central Europe, support for their political and economic aspirations, and a wider platform for cooperation in the region, would strengthen the position of Poland and its partners located in the space between Russia and Germany in the long run. It should not be surprising that this aspect of the Jagiellonian idea returned again after 1989.

Apart from strategic visions of a practical character, in the interwar period the Jagiellonian idea attracted attention of Polish scholars, especially historians. The most eminent among them was Halecki, – mentioned above – a medieval historian and a great admirer of the Polish-Lithuanian union.³⁴ He saw the union as the best example of a voluntary settlement that led to a peaceful change of frontiers and a new state structure.³⁵ The long term effects of such a union were rather different from those of a military conquest. Halecki understood the union as a clear response to the geopolitical situation in East-Central Europe which made Poles and Lithuanians establish a strong alliance against Moscow and threats to Western Christianity that were coming from Asia. As *antemurale christianitas*, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was supposed to play an important civilizational role in Europe and thus the Jagiellonian idea which served that purpose had also an important 'external' dimension which was to be resurrected in

³¹ W. Wakar, *Związek Ludów Wyzwolonych (polityka ludowa)*, Warszawa 1919.

³² Idem, "Idea Jagiellońska w dobie współczesnej", part 1-2, *Wschód Polski*, no. 5, 6-7 (1920).

³³ Consulibus [W. Wakar], *Doświadczenia i błędy naszej polityki zagranicznej wobec zadań chwili*, Warszawa 1926.

³⁴ Halecki published numerous works on the subject including: *Dzieje Unii Jagiellońskiej*, vol. 1-2, Kraków 1919-1920; "Wcielenie i wznowienie państwa litewskiego przez Polskę 1386-1401", *Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. 21 (1917-1918), pp. 1-77; "Polska w epoce Jagiellonów", in J.S. Bystron et al. (eds.), *Polska, jej dzieje i kultura. Od czasów najdawniejszych do chwili obecnej*, vol. 2: *Od roku 1572-1795*, Warszawa 1930; *Historia Polski*, 1st ed., Warszawa 1933; *Jadwiga of Anjou...*

³⁵ O. Halecki, *Unia Lubelska. Wykład habilitacyjny wygłoszony na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 10 grudnia 1915 r.*, Kraków 1916.

the twentieth century. Halecki emphasized that the expansion of Polish frontiers in the East was not met with the hostility of the subordinated people as is often the case, but was welcome by them. In an article published in 1937 entitled *The Jagiellonian Idea*, Halecki tried to provide a solid historical and conceptual basis for the disputed category, which, remarkably, he set in its own context, the development of the Polish-Lithuanian union in the fifteenth century. The making of the union was seen by him as the expression of the 'Jagiellonian idea'.³⁶ It was a conception of a political development in the region based on the principles of toleration, compromise, and peaceful coexistence of nations attracted by the Polish culture and the political order of *res publicae*. The Jagiellonian idea was also concerned with a civilizational mission called *antemurale christianitas* embodied in a union or federation that was to protect the Christian West from the East.³⁷ Interestingly, there was no mention in the article of any practical or symbolic significance of the Jagiellonian idea for his present epoch.³⁸ Halecki, however, was perhaps the greatest proponent among Polish historians of the federalist conception as a model for the peaceful coexistence of nations in East-Central Europe after the First World War. His evaluation of the epochal significance of the Jagiellonian union was shared by other Polish historians before him and during his time.³⁹ It also had critics who saw the concept as dysfunctional and misleading in the new historical reality of Poland and offered instead a revision of the federalist option. One of them was Adolf Bocheński, a proponent of a 'neo-federalism' which assumed a modern vision of the Polish state interested in equal partnership with nations of similar cultural traditions and common political interests. Poland was supposed to completely abandon the old federalism with its imperial vision. The Jagiellonian idea was no longer useful, according to Bocheński, for in the memory of smaller nations in Eastern Europe it was always associated with Polish hegemony in the region.⁴⁰ It was the awareness of the role of history that shaped Bocheński's conservative views.⁴¹ History and historical analogies were not supposed to shape positive political programmes which should instead result not from sentiments and historical memory but from a logical analysis of current political and international

³⁶ Cf. R. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, vol. 1: *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385-1569*, Oxford 2015, pp. 47-48.

³⁷ Konopczyński suggested against Halecki that such a conception should be called the Polish and not the Jagiellonian idea. See W. Konopczyński, "O idei jagiellońskiej", pp. 86-92. Cf. A. Nowak, *Dzieje Polski*, vol. 3: *1340-1468. Królestwo zwycięskiego orła*, Kraków 2017.

³⁸ O. Halecki, "Idea jagiellońska".

³⁹ These included Józef Szujski, Antoni Prochalski, Stanisław Smolka, Wiktor Czeremka, Stanisław Kutrzeba, Kazimierz Chodźnicki, Ludwik Kolankowski. See K. Baczkowski, "Oskara Haleckiego jagiellońska wizja dziejów", in M. Dąbrowska (ed.), *Oskar Halecki i jego wizja Europy*, vol. 1, Warszawa-Łódź 2012.

⁴⁰ A. Bocheński, "Polski imperializm ideowy", *Polityka*, no. 3 (1938). See also idem, *Między Niemcami a Rosją*, Warszawa 1937; idem, "Aktualność idei jagiellońskiej", *Bunt Młodych*, no. 2 (1937).

⁴¹ K.M. Ujazdowski, "Polska państwem rewizjonistycznym. Koncepcje geopolityczne Adolfa Bocheńskiego", in J. Kłoczkowski (ed.), *Przekłęte miejsce Europy? Dylematy polskiej geopolityki*, Kraków 2009.

conditions.⁴² On this reading, the Jagiellonian idea was no longer a strategic vision of any practical significance, but rather a memory of the past.

THE THIRD REVIVAL

The new position of Poland in post-cold war Europe and above all new political choices that had to be made in 1989 and in later decades created a certain need for new narratives, historical models and reflection on geopolitical issues. For Polish foreign policy the major challenge was to take the right strategic steps in the entirely new situation. The new aspiration to 'rejoin' Europe and become member of both NATO and the EU required a lot of diplomatic, political, institutional and economic effort. Poland's role in the region of post-communist Europe posed yet another challenge. And it was this challenge that perhaps created a space for yet another revival of the Jagiellonian idea. It became especially apparent in 2004 during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine which was met with Polish support, and was seen in Moscow as the revival of Jagiellonian aspirations of Poland. Certain vital initiatives such as Eastern Partnership of the EU have been initiated by Poland in hope of better relations between EU and six Eastern European partners including Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia.

The political context for the third revival of the Jagiellonian idea is shaped by a debate on Poland's strategic choices as regards partnerships and alliances and its role in Europe including especially Eastern and Central Europe. There are two competing visions of Poland's role in Europe that have influenced foreign policy after 1989. The first is often called the 'Jagiellonian' vision which sees Poland as an important player in the region who can attract regional partners having similar interests in Europe and potentially in other parts of the world, such as the Caucasus, a region rich in energy resources.⁴³ The strategic reasons behind a strong alliance of states in East-Central Europe are still the same as they were in the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries and are meant to counterbalance as much as possible Russian influence in Europe. This vision has been rejected by those who, like former foreign minister Radek Sikorski, preferred to focus on modernization and reliance on the EU rather than on Poland's regional initiatives. On this vision, Poland's weakness could only be compensated by rapid modernization and needed to be followed by 'minimalism' of aspirations in Eastern Europe where Russian influence is a key factor.⁴⁴ Sikorski juxtaposed two different visions of foreign policy and strategy: the Piast vision and the Jagiellonian vision. In Tusk's government support for 'the Piast vision' concentrated on strategic cooperation of Poland with the western structures of the EU and NATO, and the participation of

⁴² A. Bocheński, "Argumenty historyczne w polityce zagranicznej", *Polityka*, no. 3-4 (1939).

⁴³ Ł. Warzecha, "O wypełnianiu przez Polskę jej potencjału", USA-UE, 21 June 2012, at <http://www.usa-ue.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=353:ukasz-warzecha-qo-wypenianiu-przez-polsk-jej-potencjauq&catid=13:teksty&Itemid=9>, 12 December 2017.

⁴⁴ R. Sikorski, "Lekcje historii, modernizacja i integracja", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 29 August 2009, p. 6.

Poland in the transatlantic alliance rather than on the Eastern dimension of Polish foreign policy.⁴⁵

The normative context today is only partly similar to that of Poland in early 1920s. It is no longer about the political and military attempts to shape future territorial borders of Poland or having impact on the shape of borders of neighbouring nations, nor about a possibility of building a strong federation of states that would include Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. Today such a federation is unthinkable (as it proved to be unthinkable in 1920s) not only because there is no political will to create such a union or federation, but also because Polish, Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian interests seem to diverge widely as well as their foreign policy goals. In today's context, however, the Jagiellonian idea is used as a reminder of a wise political strategy that should aim at building a system of alliances around Poland.⁴⁶ Such a system would naturally arise from the potential of the Polish state, its unique role between the West and the East, and the integrative role that it could play.

Maciej Mróz observed that historical experience of the First *Rzeczpospolita* had determined Polish Eastern policy after 1989: *a tradition of an imperial messianism, a distinctive civilizational mission in the East, not only in the cultural, but also in the political dimension, was deeply rooted in national identity of the citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in Polish mentality*. And despite the discontinuity of Poland's sovereign statehood this tradition *still persists in a modified and modernized form, shaping to a large extent national identity and collective mentality of Poles*.⁴⁷ Such a general claim is hard to prove and requires further investigation, but it does explain why the concept of the Jagiellonian vision called 'the Jagiellonian idea' was revived again in independent Poland and animates both the rhetoric and debates on the Polish role in East-Central Europe. The persistence of the Jagiellonian idea in political discourse goes hand in hand with a scholarly debate⁴⁸ on the meaning of the very concept, its geopolitical, imperial or anti-imperial sense.⁴⁹

It can be argued that the three revivals of the Jagiellonian idea seem to have a similar purpose even though they happened in different epochs and in different circumstances. The purpose is practical and not purely academic. A product of the nineteenth century historiography, the Jagiellonian vision can be still inspiring today, especially for those who are inclined to refer to the Polish heritage in search of viable models of develop-

⁴⁵ K. Szpak, "Założenia programowe polityki zagranicznej koalicji rządowej PO-PSL w latach 2007-2011", in P. Musiałek (ed.), *Główne kierunki polityki zagranicznej rządu Donalda Tuska w latach 2007-2011*, Kraków 2012, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ł. Wąrzecza, "O wypelnianiu przez Polskę..."

⁴⁷ M. Mróz, "Historyczne uwarunkowania polityki wschodniej III RP", in A. Gil, T. Kapuśniak (eds.), *Polityka wschodnia Polski. Uwarunkowania, koncepcje, realizacja*, Lublin-Warszawa 2009, p. 17.

⁴⁸ See for example M. Mackiewicz, "Uwagi nad ideą jagiellońską w historiografii polskiej przełomu XIX i XX wieku", *Folia Iuridica Wratislaviensis*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2014), pp. 9-23.

⁴⁹ A. Nowak, *Idea jagiellońska w polskiej pamięci i wyobraźni politycznej*, at <<http://studylibpl.com/doc/1243941/idea-jagiello%C5%84ska-w-polskiej-pami%C4%99ci-i-wyobra%C5%Bani>>, 10 December 2017.

ment and find Polish political tradition as the best source of inspiration. The Jagiellonian idea entered political discourse as a pragmatic vision of foreign relations in the region and still finds its proponents among policy-makers. This persistence is perhaps a result of the recognition of uniqueness of Polish history in the early modern and modern periods, which was a privileged moment for national political development that in a way had a decisive impact on later epochs, including the period during which Poland was deprived of its own independent statehood. That impact can be seen in a quest for national self-determination and its own models of development that have already been tried and proved successful. The major problem, however, is that such an approach encounters is the very applicability of models that were shaped in the past and can no longer respond to the same conditions. If the conditions become favourable, which can at least partly be the result of Polish efforts, the applicability of the vision might also increase.

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