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## **The First Partition of Poland and the Issue of the European Balance of Power in Contemporary English Media (1772–1774)\***

Prussia, Russia, and Austria gradually divided the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in three stages between 1772 and 1795. In their partition policy, Prussia and Russia managed to make Austria take sides with them on the first, as well as the third occasion, and during these partitions, the Western powers such as France or Great Britain – although fully opposing such violent breach of Polish–Lithuanian statehood – did not act against them. A new kind of balancing policy and partition diplomacy materialized in these partitions of Poland (*rozbiory Polski*) and the loss of Polish sovereignty. The present paper seeks to explore the roots of this peculiarly balancing constellation of great powers, analysing the political environment that led to the first division of Poland in 1772, while investigating the opinion of Great Britain on the partition. The first part of the study places the 18<sup>th</sup>-century European political scene in an ideo-historical context, presenting the concepts of ‘reason of state’ and ‘balance of power’ that motivated the dynamics of diplomatic negotiations. In light of this, the second part describes the motivations and key events of Polish (domestic) and European (great power) politics in the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the time of the first partition, while the main part analyses the English press reaction to the division, its visual sources and the relevant pamphlet literature of 1772–1774.

*Keywords:* partition of Poland, balance of power, Anglo–Polish relations, Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, English press, English pamphlets, political iconography, Edmund Burke, John Lind



### **Introduction**

The Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire, and the Habsburg Empire gradually divided the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in three stages between 1772 and 1795. These partitions took place at negotiating tables through diplomatic agreements, without any of the neighbouring great powers getting embroiled in war with each other, or with

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Poland.<sup>1</sup> Even most contemporary reactions believed that a new kind of balancing policy of the European great powers based on partition diplomacy materialized in the partitions of Poland (*rozbiory Polski*) and the loss of Polish sovereignty. Beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the two emerging great powers, Prussia and Russia intervened in Polish–Lithuanian affairs more and more often and in an increasingly forceful manner, pursuing an intensive interventionist policy in Poland. Considering their expansive power interests, they wanted to secure the weaknesses of the factious Polish government in the long run, thus making the Polish–Lithuanian state ineffective.

This paper seeks to explore the roots of this peculiarly balancing constellation of great powers based on partition diplomacy, analysing in detail the internal and external political environment that led to the first division of Poland in 1772, while presenting the opinion of Great Britain<sup>2</sup> on the partition. The maritime great power was especially interested in the evolution of the European balance of power and had a particularly good view – given its characteristics as an island nation – of the constant change in the balance of the continent. The first part of the study places the scenes of 18<sup>th</sup> century European politics in the context of the history of ideas, presenting the concepts of ‘reason of state’ and ‘balance of power’ that motivated the dynamics of diplomatic negotiations. The second part presents the key events of Polish domestic, as well as European great power policies from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, demonstrating the path to the first partition of Poland in 1772. The third part analyses English press reactions to the first division from 1773, as well as the relevant pamphlet literature and political satires and allegories from 1772–1774.

## **1. The role of the concepts of ‘reason of state’ and ‘balance of power’ during the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

International relations were defined basically by the concept of ‘reason of state’ and the principle of ‘balance of power’ by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted a highly competitive European state system.<sup>3</sup> In an era which ranked states by their area and population, the struggle for domination placed an increasing emphasis on the established military power.<sup>4</sup> Expansive foreign policy became the basis of international relations, which essentially meant that states with small territories are insignificant and weak, making them unlikely to survive. On this basis, contemporaries thought that weak states such as Poland, which was large in territory but was not functioning efficiently from either administrative or military point of view, do not deserve survival at all.<sup>5</sup>

One of the important alleviating forces that could prevent the violence – called into existence by national interest – from becoming the only tool of international communication was the concept of balance of power. The

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *Poland* and *Polish* will refer to the Polish–Lithuanian state in the entire study.

<sup>2</sup> Through the Acts of Union of 1706 and 1707, England (including Wales) and Scotland united their kingdoms into a new political unit (i.e., Great Britain). Therefore, any mention of *England* or *English* refer to Great Britain in the entire study.

<sup>3</sup> SHEEHAN 1996. p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> SOREL 1969. p. 42–44; PHILLIPSON 2005. p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> SOREL 1969. p. 45–46.

principle had become an integral part of political discourse by the 17<sup>th</sup> century; in the decades following the treaties of Westphalia (1648), the idea of a European balance of power was increasingly seen as a possible tool for maintaining the *status quo* and protecting relations between dynastic states in the continent.<sup>6</sup> The concept had become gradually incorporated in European as well as English political language by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in a geopolitical sense, as “dividing” or “(counter)balancing” the power of individual states to prevent excessive power. The widespread use of the concept and its successful integration into the diplomatic sphere are best indicated by the treaties of Utrecht (1713–1714), the individual treaties of which were the first that explicitly included the term “European balance of power”.<sup>7</sup>

With the development of the Utrecht system, European powers declared their intention to strengthen the peace and tranquillity of the Christian world by trying to maintain a fair balance of power.<sup>8</sup> Maintaining balance meant that no one state, or alliance of states can be allowed to become too strong, so that it would represent a threat to the peace of Europe. If it did happen, the other states may reduce the power of the state that had gained too much dominance by joining forces to maintain the balance.<sup>9</sup> However, the emergence of new players – such as Russia and Prussia – on the European palette of great powers and their “entry to the game” in the following decades began to disturb the former system of political relations, which ultimately, through the so-called ‘Diplomatic Revolution’ of 1756, disrupted the order established by then.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of European influence, there were five great powers by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, namely France, Austria, Great Britain, Russia, and Prussia, which were generally considered almost equal in terms of power. If any of these states sought or gained dominance, it alarmed the others and brought to life the practical application of balance-of-power mechanism. However, this policy ultimately did not work in all cases as a suitable legal guarantee, because while they were eager to apply it to control aggression, the great powers rarely provided real assistance to weaker or smaller states. For all these reasons, it could happen in practice that balance of power favoured stronger, more offensive states through the so-called ‘partition diplomacy’.<sup>11</sup>

In essence, partition diplomacy meant that if a state could not be prevented from gaining territory at the expense of a weaker neighbour, then other neighbouring states were also entitled to make a gain of a(n almost) similar degree for their own benefit in order to maintain the existing balance of power. The most cost-effective way to do this was when the state in question did not wage an expensive war against its equal and strong neighbours but rather offered a share from the “spoils” to its neighbours through a preliminary agreement and the joint division of the territory of the victim state.<sup>12</sup> The first partition of Poland – followed by two more – is the best example of this type of

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<sup>6</sup> SCHRÖDER 2017, p. 91–93.

<sup>7</sup> SASHALMI 2015, p. 23–24.

<sup>8</sup> BLACK 1983, p. 55–58; THOMPSON 2011, p. 267.

<sup>9</sup> SCHROEDER 1994, p. 5–11.

<sup>10</sup> ANDERSON 1970, p. 196–198; ANDERSON 1987, p. 295–298; BLACK 1990, p. 301.

<sup>11</sup> SOREL 1969, p. 60; ANDERSON 1987, p. 247–250.

<sup>12</sup> SOREL 1969, p. 65–68.

diplomatic solution. However, it must be noted that the application of the partition plans cannot be exclusively observed in the policies of the three great powers active in the partitions of Poland; the idea of partitions constituted an integral part of contemporary diplomatic protocol during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. The path to the first partition of Poland (1772) – The development of European balance of power regarding the situation of Poland from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1772**

In addition to the dynamics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century European foreign policy, the political structure of Poland and its internal weaknesses also played a major role in the disappearance of the state from the maps of Europe by 1795. The Polish–Lithuanian union became one of the largest states in contemporary Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> century; however, the Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*)<sup>14</sup> was almost paralyzed by its peculiar political system. The Polish monarch was elected by the large nobility, and only the Sejm (estates' assembly or parliament) held legislative power. Thanks to the institution of *liberum veto*, even a single “nay” vote at the parliament was enough to make a bill fail.<sup>15</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it had become a common saying that “Poland subsists on anarchy” (*Polska nierządem stoi*), which prevented the implementation of governmental and military reforms in the country.<sup>16</sup> However, many contemporaries, including most Polish nobles thought that precisely *this* internal anarchy – the Polish state “paralyzed by the *liberum veto*”<sup>17</sup> – was one of the main guarantees of the balance of power in Europe and the *status quo* of the great powers. In their opinion, the existence of a weak Polish ‘buffer state’ was expressly advantageous for the neighbours of the Polish state, because it held up against an attack by a potentially rival great power, while always receiving support from different countries.<sup>18</sup>

Up until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this opinion had also been shared by several French and English diplomats, who thought that this anarchy also met the interests of France and Great Britain, since it prevented the individual Central Eastern European great powers from increasing their territory at the expense of Poland. However, by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, due mainly to the political changes following the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the European balance of power had undergone a substantial change.<sup>19</sup> In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, two dynamically developing states with a seriously expansive foreign policy emerged at the same time in the neighbourhood of Poland. After the 1740s, the aggressive Russian, as well as Prussian foreign policies were severely hindered

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<sup>13</sup> Soós 2009, p. 119–120.

<sup>14</sup> The noun *rzeczpospolita* is a calque of Latin *res publica*, but it did not mean republic in the era, only indicated the fact that the Polish–Lithuanian state is a parliamentary monarchy, the ruler of which can be elected. This name is today in use for Poland (the official name of the Polish state is *Rzeczpospolita Polska*).

<sup>15</sup> LUKOWSKI 1999, p. 2–7, 8–10.

<sup>16</sup> SZOKOLAY 1996, p. 69–70.

<sup>17</sup> RING 2001, p. 9–10.

<sup>18</sup> DAVIES 2006, p. 396–397.

<sup>19</sup> LUKOWSKI 1999, p. 28–29.

by the weak Polish state that “lay in their way”.<sup>20</sup> The various European great powers, especially the Russian, the Prussian, and to a lesser extent the Austrian leadership, had become increasingly influential in shaping Polish domestic and foreign policy already from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The vying for power of Polish noble groups increased the tension in domestic policy, together with social and religious tensions,<sup>21</sup> which the Polish ruler was unable to deal with without Russian support.<sup>22</sup>

Upon the Polish king, Augustus II's death in 1733, the doubtful development of Polish succession became not only a domestic issue but also a serious problem from the point of view of European great power policies. During the ensuing War of the Polish Succession (*Wojna o sukcesję polską*, 1733–1738), the mentioned new type of interventionist policy of the great powers of Europe manifested. The struggle for succession to the throne started the process that essentially determined the evolution of Polish politics in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in line with their great power ambitions, Russia and Prussia were able to pull almost the whole of Poland into their respective spheres of influence.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, Russian help secured the Polish throne for Augustus II's son, who became the new ruler of Poland in 1733 as Augustus III (1733–1763). His efforts for domestic political stabilization failed due to resistance from the Polish nobility; the components of the country shattered at all levels. A warning example of the serious domestic crisis was that due to the paralyzing exercise of the institution of *liberum veto*, no parliamentary session could be successfully concluded between 1736 and 1763.<sup>24</sup> By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish state had become the battleground of various noble groups that represented diverse political and economic interests.<sup>25</sup>

Internal conflicts between the individual noble groups and various spheres of interest had become increasingly tense already before Augustus III's death in 1763, especially regarding the election of the new king. Catherine II, Empress of Russia (1762–1796) supported the confederation of the pro-Russia Czartoryski family only if the new Polish ruler would be Stanisław Antoni Poniatowski, who had a close relationship with both the mentioned Polish family and the Russian leadership;<sup>26</sup> he had formerly served as a diplomat at the court in Saint Petersburg.<sup>27</sup>

Eventually, the last election of the Polish king before the partitions was fully in line with the constellation of great powers that threatened to divide the great powers of Europe into two camps after the Seven Years' War. Count Nikita Ivanovich Panin, foreign minister of Russia between 1762 and 1764 made several attempts to form an alliance with the participation of Great Britain,

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<sup>20</sup> RING 2001. p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> On the religious tensions in Poland in these decades see among others: LUKOWSKI 1999. p. 20–24, 34–36.

<sup>22</sup> RING 2001. p. 153–156.

<sup>23</sup> LUKOWSKI 1991. p. 157–158.

<sup>24</sup> Soós 2009. p. 124.

<sup>25</sup> Soós 2009. p. 124–125.

<sup>26</sup> RING 2001. p. 161–162.

<sup>27</sup> Poniatowski was also secretary of the Polish embassy in England and formerly a lover of the future Russian Empress Catherine II. BUTTERWICK 2001. p. 195.

Sweden, Saxony, Poland, and Prussia (*northern system*). In contrast, French Secretary of State Étienne François de Choiseul worked on creating a system of alliance between France, Spain, the Italian city-states, and the Habsburg Empire (*southern system*).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the problems surrounding the 1764 election of a new Polish king after the death of Augustus III essentially constituted an important part of the great power policy of France, the Habsburg Empire, and the Russian Empire, namely the development of the European balance of power.<sup>29</sup> Catherine II's nominee, Stanisław Poniatowski was elected as Polish king (Stanislaus II Augustus, 1764–1795) in September 1764 with the participation of a small portion of the Polish nobility and in the intimidating presence of the Russian army.<sup>30</sup>

The Prussian–Russian agreement of April 1764 expressly supported Poniatowski's nomination and provided a joint guarantee for preserving the *liberum veto* system – maintaining the anarchic Polish domestic conditions, to exploit the internal weakness of the Polish state. The agreement clearly jeopardized the positions of the Habsburg Empire in the region, since the Prussian and Russian rulers also agreed that if needed, they would mutually support each other with their armies on Polish territory. This constellation clearly indicated that the combination of Prussian, Russian, and Austrian great power interests would decide the fate of Poland. France and Britain, aware of the Prussian–Russian alliance and considering the strength of the Russian troops stationed in Polish territories, did not wish to take clear positions regarding the issue of the Polish royal election.<sup>31</sup>

Surprisingly, Stanislaus Augustus embarked on an intensive reform policy. The new Polish monarch studied the constitution of the United States of America closely, and saw the ideal form of government in the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain and his own country.<sup>32</sup> His reformist efforts met not only Prussian and Russian but also internal resistance, as the power and authority of most Polish magnates also depended on Prussian or Russian interests. The increasingly weak governance, the strengthening of the internal opposition, and the political and religious divisions finally resulted in the fact that the country sunk into a state of total anarchy by early 1767. It seemed that the Russian imperial court successfully strengthened its positions in Poland, but the turn of events in domestic and foreign policy soon prompted Empress Catherine II to re-evaluate her policy in Poland. In 1768, another confederation was formed in the town of Bar in Podolia against the Polish king and the Russians, in defence of noble privileges and national independence.<sup>33</sup> As a result of the initial successes of the Bar Confederation and the outbreak of a new Russo–Turkish War (1768–1774), both the Polish domestic situation and

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<sup>28</sup> DAVIES 2006, p. 409.

<sup>29</sup> LUKOWSKI 1985, p. 570–574.

<sup>30</sup> RING 2001, p. 161.

<sup>31</sup> LUKOWSKI 1985, p. 570–574; SCOTT 1976, p. 53–54.

<sup>32</sup> On the English relations and literacy of Stanislaus II Augustus see among others: BUTTERWICK 1998.

<sup>33</sup> LUKOWSKI 1999, p. 44–47.

the political scene of the great powers urged the Russian Empress to regroup her forces.<sup>34</sup>

In the changed political and military situation, the Russian court was ready to accept the Prussians' first offer in 1768 for the partition of Poland, and they soon involved Austria in the negotiations as well. Stanislaus Augustus himself asked the Austrian troops to march into Spiš (Polish *Spisz*, Hungarian *Szepes*) and temporarily occupy the areas bordering Poland in 1769, to suppress the strength of the Bar Confederation forces.<sup>35</sup> Maria Theresa's son, Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor (1765–1790) retook the towns in Spiš of 1769, which had been formerly pawned by Sigismund of Luxembourg (inter alia, King of Hungary, 1387–1437 and Holy Roman Emperor, 1433–1437), to counterbalance the power relations changed after the occupation of Silesia. In 1770, he eagerly "helped" the Polish ruler, Stanislaus Augustus and occupied the border regions of neighbouring Galicia.<sup>36</sup>

The plan of territorial settlements concerning Poland was also part of the power policy of Russia. From the Austrian perspective, it was not Maria Theresa, Queen of Hungary but her son, Joseph II<sup>37</sup> who urged the most the case of partitioning Poland. He believed regarding the Polish situation that the civil war and the anarchic conditions of the Polish state seriously threatened the borders of the Habsburg Empire.<sup>38</sup> The first Prussian plan for the acquisition of lands was drafted in 1769 in Berlin.<sup>39</sup> The essence of this plan was that Austria and Prussia should join forces and provide support for the Russian Empire against its war with the Turks, and in return for this support, Austria should acquire Galicia and Lemberg (Lviv), while Prussia would gain protectorate over Ermland and Gdańsk.<sup>40</sup> The implementation of this plan was eventually prevented by the aforementioned Austrian troops marching into Spiš, as Frederick II was sceptical about the Austrian annexation of this territories. It meant that the Habsburg Empire had significantly increased its power in the region, which seriously threatened Prussian interests.<sup>41</sup>

By reason of the Austrian annexations in Spiš, Frederick II proposed talks to Emperor Joseph II, who first negotiated in August 1769 in the Silesian town of Neisse. The parties successfully clarified the issue of the deployment of Austrian troops in Spiš; Austria promised that it would not threaten or

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<sup>34</sup> RING 2001. p. 165–167.

<sup>35</sup> The formerly Hungarian *Szepes* county shared borders with Poland; after the dismemberment of Poland, the border was adjacent with the Austrian province of Galicia. On the pledge policy of Sigismund of Luxembourg see: INCZE 2016.

<sup>36</sup> RING 2001. p. 167–168; LUKOWSKI 1999. p. 56–60.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to his title of Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II was later also King of Hungary and of Bohemia between 1780 and 1790. When he ascended the Hungarian throne, Joseph II renounced the coronation and the associated oath of his own volition. Therefore, he was called the "King with hat", a sobriquet that became a commonplace in Hungarian literature. Thus, he was freed from all the constraints that came from the agreements of his predecessors, which was essential to transform the state system according to his own ideas.

<sup>38</sup> Soós 2009. p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> LUKOWSKI 1999. p. 65–67.

<sup>40</sup> In addition, Russia would get hold of any part of Poland it chooses to cover the costs of the Russo-Turkish War.

<sup>41</sup> Soós 2009. p. 130.

jeopardize the interests of Prussia in the region.<sup>42</sup> Another meeting took place between them in September 1770 in the Moravian town of Uničov (Neustadt), which was mainly justified by the progress of the Russo–Turkish war and the successes of the Tsar’s troops against the Ottoman army. It now proved essential in terms of the Prussian and Austrian territorial demands to also deal with the newly released Russian forces. Frederick II openly took a stand on the partition of Poland by then, arguing that the Commonwealth had weakened to an extent that the Polish inner political situation and anarchic conditions were now threatening the stability of the international situation and the balance of power between the great powers. The Prussian king also expounded that in his opinion, such “arbitrary” measures as the deployment of Austrian troops in Spiš did not serve the solution of the Polish problems. He believed that only partitions implemented under “lawful” agreements between the great powers could put an end to individual states gaining excessive power in an arbitrary manner. Frederick’s opinion was also supported by Emperor Joseph II.<sup>43</sup>

An agreement in principle was concluded between Prussia and Russia in June 1771, and an actual convention on the partition was signed between them in early 1772. Ultimately, after long hesitation, Maria Theresa also joined the division plan in March 1772.<sup>44</sup> Next, the three great powers settled the Polish question within a mere five months, agreeing on the exact drafting of the treaty that met the demands of each of them.<sup>45</sup> The final partition treaty was signed in Vienna on 25 July or 5 August 1772.<sup>46</sup> Prussia acquired Eastern Pomerania (without the towns of Gdańsk and Toruń), instantly gaining control over 80% of the Commonwealth’s total foreign trade. Russia consolidated its authority over Courland (Kurland), as well as it annexed Polish Livonia and the territories east of the Dvina and Dnieper rivers. Austria gained the most: the southern part of the Kraków and Sandomierz Voivodeships, as well as Red Ruthenia. By the partition, the Commonwealth lost about one third of its territory and half of its population.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Soós 2009, p. 129–131.

<sup>43</sup> Soós 2009, p. 130; LUKOWSKI 1999, p. 77–81.

<sup>44</sup> The Hungarian queen feared that the Habsburg Empire could in no case win so much with the partition as its rivals. Ultimately, she rather left the question entirely to her son, Emperor Joseph II, who was ready to exploit the political opportunity. Finally, despite all her worries, she signed the Austrian document urging for the partition of Poland on 4 March 1772, thereby making a definitive contribution to resolving the Polish issue. Her decision was largely influenced by the realization that the Turks’ weakness and the absence of France and Britain from the issue would eventually get the Habsburg Empire into a serious war with either Russia or Prussia – in the ultimate and worst case, with both great powers. On the Austrian reticence see among others: LUKOWSKI 1999, p. 67–70.

<sup>45</sup> DAVIES 2006, p. 414.

<sup>46</sup> The preamble of the treaty named, among others, “the spirit of discord” as the main reason that led to the act of partition, since this discord “had caused anarchy in Poland” and “threatened with the disintegration of the country”; besides, the Polish conditions jeopardized the peace of neighbouring powers and thus, the balance of power of Europe. DAVIES 2001, p. 269–277.

<sup>47</sup> LUKOWSKI 1999, p. 77–81.



### 3. Reactions to the first partition of Poland in English political media

#### 3.1. English press reactions to the first partition from 1773

This section intends to demonstrate the rhetoric of English press materials dealing with the first partition of Poland through the analysis of an annual publication, as well as selected daily and weekly political press from the year 1773.<sup>48</sup> The first partition took place thirteen years before the foundation of *The Daily Universal Register*, the predecessor of the famous British conservative daily, *The Times*.<sup>49</sup> The influence of the daily had diminished by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century due to the emergence of competitors such as *The Daily Telegraph* or *Morning Star*, but it had had a significant influence and readership until then. *The Times* is one of the oldest continuously operated newspapers in the world; however, there were some other dailies and weeklies, as well as periodicals in England that were established before 1785.<sup>50</sup>

One of these publications was the periodical called *The Annual Register*, which contained various parliamentary and governmental documents, treaties, speeches, as well as commentaries on important domestic and foreign events.<sup>51</sup> The *Register* was associated with Irish-born British politician Edmund Burke (1729–1797), and most issues of the periodical are linked to his name.<sup>52</sup> While *The Times* often criticized Burke's views, his opinion on the French Revolution (1789–1799) and the partitions of Poland were later shared by the paper.<sup>53</sup> The authorship of *The Annual Register for 1772*, which was published in the following year, is also attributed to Burke.<sup>54</sup> The chapter on European history of the *Register* from 1773 focuses on the most important issues of the European continent, naturally including the topic of the Polish partition. The author states right from the outset that the division of the Polish state poses a great deal of threat to both Poland and Europe, and he strongly condemns the partition of the Commonwealth:

“The present violent dismemberment and partition of Poland, without the pretence of war, or even the colour of right, is to be considered as the first very great breach in the modern political system of Europe. It is not

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<sup>48</sup> On the reception of the second and third Polish partitions in England see: WICKLUM 1999.

<sup>49</sup> The founder of *The Times*, John Walter published the first issue of the newspaper on 1 January 1785 under the name *The Daily Universal Register* but changed the title three years later to *The Times*. On the history of the early years of *The Times* see among others: BOWMAN 1931.

<sup>50</sup> The first English newspaper, *The London Gazette* was published in 1665. *The Daily Courant* (from 1702) was the first daily newspaper in England which reported mainly on political news, yet without commentary. From 1714, *The Evening Post* was published in the evenings, and this model was adopted by many other newspapers. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the specifically advertising daily papers also appeared throughout Great Britain, notably *The Daily Advertiser*. On the history of the English press in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries see among others: BLACK 1987, especially p. 197–244; BLACK 2019, especially p. 9–76.

<sup>51</sup> HORN 1945. p. 35.

<sup>52</sup> Edmund Burke (1729–1797) was a founder of modern British conservative politics, who had numerous ground-breaking works published on philosophical, aesthetic, as well as historical theory issues. Some of Burke's main works are *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757); *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791).

<sup>53</sup> LOCK 2006. p. 334.

<sup>54</sup> HORN 1945. p. 35.

(say the politicians of the continent) sapping by degrees the constitution of our great western republic, it is laying the axe at once to the root, in such a manner as threatens the total overthrow of the whole [...]. We now behold the destruction of a great kingdom, with the consequent disarrangement of power, dominion, and commerce, with as total an indifference and unconcern, as we could read an account of the exterminating one hord of Tartars by another (...).<sup>55</sup>

Burke declared that in effect, the partition of Poland had radically and violently changed the power relations of the European continent. The British monarch, George III (1760–1820) expressed a similar opinion in his memorandum regarding the Polish partition, referring to the unresolved and even more heated tension among the European great powers and the threat to the European balance of power:

“The very extraordinary phenomenon of a coalition of the Courts of Vienna, Petersburg, and Berlin to take what may suit their Separate conveniences of the Kingdom of Poland, is so subversive of every idea of their mutual jealousies, and of the balance of Europe that it of necessary must give rise to very extraordinary Alliances amongst the other Powers.”<sup>56</sup>

The British monarch stated that in his opinion Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France should form an alliance to counterbalance the alliance between the Prussians, the Russians, and the Austrians, as well as to “extricate Poland from the Tyranny that now seems impending”,<sup>57</sup> in the interest of Poland to endure and survive the pressurization and territorial demands suffered from its neighbours. Although the British monarch wished for a British–French–Dutch alliance in his memorandum to solve the issue, in practice, the British government was indolent about the partition of Poland. Although the monarch outlined the legislative plan of the government for the new parliamentary session in his November 1772 speech, there was no mention of the partition in the royal speech.<sup>58</sup>

The partition of Poland posed a serious threat to – the evidently mainly commercial – British interests in Central Eastern Europe; however, a major British action against Prussia and Austria would have jeopardized the monarch’s Hanoverian legacy.<sup>59</sup> The relevant part of the *Register* elaborates that the partition of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth has brought about a tremendous change in the balance of power, since Poland’s former role as a natural obstacle of Prussia and the Habsburg Empire against Russian ambitions and aggression has almost become irrelevant, and thus, the

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<sup>55</sup> [BURKE] 1773. p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> FORTESCUE 1927. nr. 1180.

<sup>57</sup> FORTESCUE 1927. nr. 1180.

<sup>58</sup> SIMMS 2007. p. 567.

<sup>59</sup> SIMMS 2007. p. 566.

influence and power of Russia has greatly increased, which has created a potentially dangerous situation on the European continent.<sup>60</sup>

The thought of the partition had already occurred to Prussia in 1656, in 1720 and in 1733; for example, in his political testament written in 1752, Frederick II compared Poland to an artichoke, which is “consumed leaf by leaf”, indicating that the partition diplomacy was already considered conceivable by the Prussian court as early as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup> In his second testament, written in 1768, the Prussian king also suggested that he wanted to unite Royal Prussia and the bishopric of Ermland, thereby seeking to establish a land connection towards East Prussia – this was actually realized after the first partition.<sup>62</sup> In the context of the Polish partitions, the English press also wrote extensively about Frederick’s political testament in the 1780s and 1790s, as the testament was also published in English.

In the year following the first partition, the English daily and weekly newspapers frequently wrote about the partition treaty, of course in shorter news-releases compared to the analysis in the 1773 *Register*, as well as in short opinions and so-called op-eds.<sup>63</sup> The shorter news-releases remained objective and emotionless concerning the subject; however, each of the more specific op-eds considered the partition policy of Prussia, Russia, and Austria as a disgraceful sin. *Middlesex Journal*, a thrice-a-week evening paper in London, published an opinion in its issue of 21 January 1773 already mentioned in the foregoing, namely that “the maritime powers, however unaccountably indolent they may be about the partition of Poland, are highly concerned in its independence.”<sup>64</sup> While reflecting on the partition, the author also explains what a relief it could have been for Poland if the three neighbouring great powers had not been able to implement the partition, since that way, they would have been unable to avoid the outbreak of a major European war and ultimately, attacking each other: “Happy were it for Poland, if these royal *banditti* [viz. Prussia, Russia and Austria] would fall out in the division of the spoil [viz. Poland], and attack each other!”<sup>65</sup>

A later issue of the journal, while discussing the consequences of the Polish partition treaty, concludes that the only interest of Great Britain may be to side with Russia in the Polish question, along with the Spaniards, the French, and the Dutch. The author saw the Russian interest as the least destructive regarding the Polish partition policy; he opined that it is extremely important to remember that “the insatiable ambition of the Emperor [i.e., the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II] and King of Prussia will not be satisfied with Poland only.

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<sup>60</sup> [BURKE] 1773. p. 4–12.

<sup>61</sup> DIETRICH 1986. p. 654–655, CLARK 2006. p. 231.

<sup>62</sup> On Frederick II’s political testaments see among others: DIETRICH 1986, especially p. 369–375.

<sup>63</sup> An op-ed (short for *opposite the editorial page*) article expresses the opinion of an author usually not affiliated with the publication’s editorial board. Op-eds are usually printed opposite the page on which the editorial is printed; they are different from both *editorials* (opinion pieces submitted by editorial board members) and *letters to the editor* (opinion pieces submitted by readers). “Op-ed”: MWD (access 20 March 2021); “Meaning of op-ed”: CED (access 20 March 2021)

<sup>64</sup> “News”, *Middlesex Journal*, 21 January 1773 – 23 January 1773.

<sup>65</sup> “News”, *Middlesex Journal*, 21 January 1773 – 23 January 1773.

No; they seem too sensible of their own strength, and the ease with which the powers of Europe acquiesce in the unparalleled plunder of Poland.”<sup>66</sup>

The author of an op-ed article published in the issue of 16 April 1773 of the *Public Advertiser*<sup>67</sup> under the pseudonym of *Tullius* also believed that the Prussian interest is the most dangerous one in the formula, both in terms of the European balance of power and the English national interests:

“I have said [...] that every Accession of Territory to Prussia is against the Interest of England. [...] Can it be necessary to point out to the meanest of the Rabble, the Iniquity of the Partition of the unfortunate Kingdom of Poland, or the Necessity of our Interposition to avert those fatal Consequences which must inevitably attend the ambitious Views of Prussia, if we permit him to proceed in his Tyranny?”<sup>68</sup>

In the author’s opinion, the military intervention of England is unavoidable “to preserve that Balance of Power on which the Happiness and Prosperity of every State in Europe necessarily depend”.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.2. *The English pamphlet literature of the first partition from 1773*

Two particularly impressive English pamphlets were written and published in 1773 on the first partition of Poland, both by John Lind (1737–1781), who was an English barrister, political activist, and pamphleteer. After graduating from Oxford, he joined John Murray (1714–1775), the British ambassador in Constantinople in the 1760s, then went from Constantinople to Poland, where he spent several years in the service of King Stanislaus II Augustus.<sup>70</sup> He was initially a tutor to the monarch’s son, Prince Stanisław Poniatowski, then the king made him the governor of an institution for educating cadets and granted him the title of privy councillor. In 1773, after the first partition, he returned to England where in the ensuing years – as a political activist and pamphleteer – he sought to win over Western European states and his homeland, Great Britain to the Polish cause. According to a later description, during these years Lind was the unofficial “minister and more than the plenipotentiary” of the Polish monarch.<sup>71</sup>

Lind wrote two different pamphlets in 1773 concerning the first partition. In his *Letters concerning the present state of Poland* written under the pseudonym Gotlieb Pansmouzer, he described the division of Poland as a

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<sup>66</sup> “Arts and Culture”, *Middlesex Journal*, 9 February 1773 – 11 February 1773.

<sup>67</sup> *Public Advertiser*, or under its former name, *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, then simply *General Advertiser* consisted almost exclusively of commercials and advertisements, but also published op-ed articles and news after its publication was taken over by Henry Woodfall, who renamed the newspaper to *Public Advertiser*. “Woodfall, Henry Sampson”: [RAE 1885–1900](#). (access 18 March 2021)

<sup>68</sup> “News”, *Public Advertiser*, 16 April 1773.

<sup>69</sup> “News”, *Public Advertiser*, 16 April 1773.

<sup>70</sup> John Lind received his MA at the Balliol College of Oxford in 1761. While there he began an important friendship and association with jurist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), with whom he also cooperated later. “Lind, John (1737–1781)”: [COURTNEY 1885–1900](#). (access 22 February 2021)

<sup>71</sup> DE CHAMPS 2015. p. 35.

crime against the *ius gentium* and strongly attacked it. In addition, he was also probably the main author of a work that was published without naming its authors, and which soon became well-known across Europe.<sup>72</sup> The highly satirical work entitled *The Polish partition in seven dramattick dialogues*, also published in 1773, presented in a playful manner the absurd and hitherto unimaginable situation in which some rulers of continental Europe sacrifice Poland to satisfy their desire for power. Amid the Europe-wide debate that concerned actual international issues, the work was almost immediately translated also into French, Polish, Italian, and Dutch.<sup>73</sup>

As Lind's fame grew in Britain, his reputation also spread in France, as the French court, diplomacy, and political circles closely monitored both the partition of Poland and the so-called Tea Act (also enacted in 1773), and the resistance against it – for Lind opposed the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783), and he expressed this view in several pamphlets. Both events were closely monitored by official French circles, as they (could have) had a serious impact on the European balance of power. The *Letters* were almost immediately translated into French, just as the *Seven dramattick dialogues*. Lind's view in defence of Poland almost fully corresponded to the official position of the French government. Indeed, his attack in the *Seven dramattick dialogues* on philosophers, portrayed by the author as accomplices to the partition of Poland, was also in line with the political direction of the main French ministers, which was opposed to philosophers.<sup>74</sup>

The aim of the *Letters* was to explore the completely unlawful political measures through which King Frederick II of Prussia and Catherine II, Empress of Russia ruthlessly decided to divide Poland among each other, “breaking through every law of nations and of natural equity”.<sup>75</sup> The domestic publication of the *Letters* was financially supported by two British politicians, Lord Mansfield and David Murray, the Viscount Stormont.<sup>76</sup> While Lind's arguments in this work were largely of a legal and moral nature, addressing the more educated political audience, the strongly satirical *Seven dramattick dialogues* were written for a wider audience. In this latter, the author emphasized and caricatured the controversial situation where Frederick and Catherine openly supported the enlightened ideas, as opposed to their real, pragmatic politics – for the Prussian and Russian *realpolitik* was as far from the enlightened ideas of liberty, nation or reforms as possible.<sup>77</sup> To demonstrate the dangers of Prussian and Russian great power policies, Lind caricatured

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<sup>72</sup> HORN 1945, p. 29.

<sup>73</sup> The main characters of the play are the following interlocutors, whose royal titles were incomplete in the publication due to censorship: *The Empress of Hungary* (Maria Theresa, Queen of Hungary); *The Empress of Russia* (Catherine II of Russia); *The King of Prussia* (King Frederick II of Prussia); *Ephraim, Baron of Joppa*; *Sergeant Whiskerfeldt, the Ambassador*; *A Philosopher – a modern one*; *A Geographer* and *The King of Poland – now and then* (King Stanislaus II Augustus of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania).

<sup>74</sup> Both works were probably translated into French on behalf of Rayneval, a high-ranking official in the French Ministry of the Interior. (DE CHAMPS 2015, p. 38.)

<sup>75</sup> [LIND] 1773a, p. 174.

<sup>76</sup> “Murray, David, seventh Viscount Stormont and second earl of Mansfield (1727–1796)”: SCOTT 2008. (access 22 February 2021)

<sup>77</sup> DE CHAMPS 2015, p. 36.

several philosophers in the work, showing that their teachings justified all violations of moral and political principles on the level of pragmatic politics. For example, in one of the dialogues, the Prussian king tried to defend the diplomatic measure of the partition with the following argument:

“I have said already that our enterprise [viz. carving up Poland] is of a nature entirely *new*; but as it is highly advantageous to us all, and as *utility* with me is the standard of *morality*, I am fully satisfied with what we are soon to execute. I own, indeed, that according to the *old notions*, our convention is unjust, violent, barbarous, and abominable, and it is not easy to obliterate and efface these *old notions*; even *I* who have long got pretty well rid of them, find now and then some twitches of an irritable fibre on which my chaplain and my nurse made early impressions, which they called by the name of *conscience*,– but when I take a dose of the new *philosophy*, from the prescriptions of David H – E [viz. Hume], Helvetius, or Diderot, the spasm passes.”<sup>78</sup>

The author puts the following sentences into the mouth of the Prussian king, among the other interlocutors, illustrating the terrible injustice of the Polish division:

“Our project [viz. the first partition of Poland] certainly is an intrepid insult upon all the prejudices of education, upon the pretended rights of humanity, upon the common sense and patience of mankind. Nothing, at first sight, appears more odd, nay, more shocking than to deprive a sovereign of his dominions, without any other pretext than the dubious expressions of some obsolete legendary parchments, and pretensions that have been cancelled by the most solemn, clear, and recent treaties.”<sup>79</sup>

Reinforcing the idea of *injustice* and the *equal responsibility* of the three rulers, he adds:

“This insult upon, (what fanaticks call) heaven, upon the justice of the imaginary Being whom mortals continue more or less to respect, and upon the ancient and vulgar feelings of the human mind is so much the more striking, in that we, ourselves, *all three* have, but very lately declared, that we pretended no claim to possess, nor had any design to encroach upon the very smallest part of brother Poniatowsky’s territories.”<sup>80</sup>

### 3.3 *The first partition of Poland in English visual sources from 1772–1774*

The contemporary graphic media of the era form a separate field of study among media products, including satirical prints published in different

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<sup>78</sup> [LIND] 1773b. p. 11–12.

<sup>79</sup> [LIND] 1773b. p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> [LIND] 1773b. p. 12–13.

publications of English press. The inclusion of the study of visuality, particularly as regards the first partition of Poland, has largely been absent from the centre of interest of previous research, all the while the iconographical study of political engravings reflecting on the partition provide important contributions to contemporary perception. Regarding contemporary English satirical prints that reflected on, were related, or referred either directly or indirectly to the first partition of Poland, a total of five engravings are analysed within the framework of the present paper from the period 1772–1774; observing their political iconography, as well as the applicable patronage and the purposes of the political inspiration underlying the symbolic and allegorical content represented by them.

One of the first English political engravings directly related to the treacherous act of the partition of Poland is from the year of concluding the first partition treaty and is entitled “Picture of Europe for July 1772”.<sup>81</sup> According to the entry in the catalogue of the *British Museum*, the engraving is probably from a magazine, which is yet to be identified.<sup>82</sup> The satirical portrayal, which severely criticizes English diplomacy that failed to take any measures to prevent the partition, depicts the contemporary European situation of the great powers by reflecting on the tripartite conclusion of the first partition treaty on 25 July 1772 in Saint Petersburg, as well as on the events of the first Russo–Turkish War (1768–1774). On the engraving dated to July 1772, we can see seven monarchs, including the three central monarchs responsible for the first partition (Empress Catherine II, Emperor Joseph II and King Frederick II) sitting at a table with the *Map of the Kingdom of Poland* in their hands. Facing the three monarchs a king can be seen whose crown is broken, his head is bowed, and his hands are tied behind his back, who is none other than Stanisław August Poniatowski (Stanislaus II Augustus), the last monarch of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Behind the three partitioning monarchs studying the map, two standing figures look on with expressions of concern regarding the events of the partition; they are Louis XV (indicated by fleur-de-lys on top of his crown) and Charles III of Spain. In a chair on the extreme right, George III of Great Britain lies back fast asleep; his chair is inscribed *Brit*. Behind Stanislaus II Augustus sits a bearded man with a turban, whose wrists and ankles are chained; he probably represents the Ottoman Empire, referring to the fact that Empress Catherine II of Russia was at war with it at this time, which had a great impact on the development of the European balance of power and the Polish issue. Above the map of Poland hang scales inscribed “The Ballance of Power”; on the lighter scale is a label inscribed “Great Britain”. As already mentioned, George III was not, in fact, indifferent to Polish matters, and was by no means blind to the Polish question; however, the engraving portrays him as a ruler who was not interested in the interests of England.<sup>83</sup> His representation with eyes closed, in a sleeping state suggests that the monarch was blind, and that is why he could not see the European events. Thus, the creator of the engraving

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<sup>81</sup> ANON. 1772.

<sup>82</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 59.

<sup>83</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 59–60.

wanted to draw attention to the fact that the monarch and the government had not done any specific measures to prevent the partition of Poland.

The political engraving from 1 May 1773 entitled “The Political Dancing Bear. Music has charms to sooth a savage Beast”, published in the columns of the *London Magazine*,<sup>84</sup> offers an insight into the English diplomatic manoeuvres of the following year, also referring indirectly to the Polish issue. The engraving seeks to pinpoint the absurdity of the diplomatic situation where, according to contemporary rumours, Britain proposed to make an alliance with France and Spain to officially act against the tripartite invasion and partition of Poland. On the engraving, two men symbolizing France and Spain can be seen with a dancing bear which represents England. The fiddler is the French ambassador, Comte de Guînes, and the English bear is dancing to a French tune.<sup>85</sup> The two sovereigns in the background are those of Prussia and Austria who laugh with amusement at the folly of a triple alliance so unnatural – which was only in prospect at the time and did not materialize at all.

Indeed, George III did outline several drafts regarding the formation of a possible multilateral alliance in case the three partitioning powers could not agree with each other, and jealousies would arise between them. These drafts included an alliance between Great Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands against Austria, Russia, and Prussia. Another crisis began to emerge around March 1773, arising out of the fact that nearing the end of the Russo–Turkish War, the Russian Empire had gained too much political weight. It attracted little public notice, but in the last months of the Russo–Turkish War, France and Spain threatened to attack the now excessively dominant Russia, prompting Britain to make naval preparations for any necessary European intervention. This shows, in fact, how unfounded were the rumours of a triple alliance between England, France, and Spain in April 1773; although in the following year, especially in the power situation developing due to the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (July 1774), several French diplomats contemplated the possibility of persuading Britain to check Russia more effectively or possibly even attack the empire.<sup>86</sup>

On the engraving published in Great Britain by Robert Sayer entitled *The troelfth cake / Le gâteau des rois* – which was made sometime during 1772–1773 – we can see four monarchs inspecting a large map of Poland inscribed “Poland in 1772” (*Pologne en 1772*), spread out on a table.<sup>87</sup> The monarch sitting on the extreme left is Catherine II of Russia who points with both hands to the part of South Poland nearest the Russian frontier. The Empress looks up towards Stanislaus II Augustus of Poland who looks back at Catherine with a distraught expression. The Polish king stands with one hand on the map, while

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<sup>84</sup> ANON. 1773a.

<sup>85</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 115.

<sup>86</sup> The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, concluded in July 1774, ended the first Russo–Turkish War (1768–1774). As a result, the Russian side clearly gained a huge advantage; the Ottoman Empire was forced to recognize the independence of the Crimean Khanate, hitherto under Turkish rule, as well as the protectorate of the Russian Empire over Moldavia and Wallachia. Russia managed to acquire a long-coveted exit to the Black Sea, and the Kerch peninsula, as well as the territory between the Dnieper and the Southern Bug rivers also came under Russian rule. MAJOROS 1997. p. 59–60, 63.

<sup>87</sup> ANON. 1773b.



his other hand clutching his crown which is slipping from his head, referring to the fact that the Polish ruler is just losing the subject of his crown, the Polish state.

Opposite Catherine, at the right side of the table stands Frederick II of Prussia, in riding dress, his sword resting on the map near Danzig (spelled as *Dantzik* on the map), between Pomerania and Brandenburg. British monarch George III was depicted between the Polish and Prussian kings. George turns his back to the Polish monarch, turning completely towards Frederick, but he ignores where the sword of the Prussian ruler points, and looks away. The female figure representing France, blowing two trumpets, flies above and away from the four monarchs; this could indicate either that she turns away from the problem, or that she is spreading the hideous act of the partition throughout Europe.

The relevant catalogue of the *British Museum* reveals that it was probably a British engraving made in French style.<sup>88</sup> The title of it was clearly incorrectly translated or translated back from an English reprint into French,<sup>89</sup> for *troelfth* was probably intended to be the English word *twelfth*. The French title *Le gâteau des rois* ("The Cake of Kings")<sup>90</sup> expresses excellently the absurdity of the situation where the three partitioning powers "feasted on" Poland with such a noble simplicity, calmness, and arrogant indifference as if they were only sharing pieces of cake among each other at a tea party. Besides, the engraving suggests clear propaganda in view of the latent hostility of England and its carelessness in connection with the partition of Poland. It is possible that the creator of the engraving tried to influence the English monarch this way that France and Britain should take joint action to prevent the partition; or maybe he just wanted to secure the benevolent neutrality of England by representing George III as indolently acquiescing in the partition.<sup>91</sup>

On the political engraving called *Merlin*, which can be dated 1 January 1774 and was published in the columns of *The Westminster Magazine*,<sup>92</sup> we can see a procession of the monarchs of Europe, as Merlin the wizard points to them from the left corner.<sup>93</sup> The procession starts with the Danish monarch, followed

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<sup>88</sup> The author of the original drawing is Jean-Michel Moreau the Younger (1741–1814), also called Moreau le Jeune, who was a French draughtsman, illustrator, and engraver. The strength of expression of his symbolic representation turned out to be so suggestive that it gained immense popularity in Europe and was repeatedly copied in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Several versions of Moreau's drawing were made, for example the print created and published by Johannes Esaias Nilson (1721–1788), an excellent 18<sup>th</sup>-century Augsburg engraver and publisher (NILSON 1773). One of the most famous engravings made based on Moreau's drawing is the one by Noël Le Mire, whose engraving appeared in Paris in February 1773. His composition was immensely influential on various other satirical works of its time and gained notoriety in contemporary Europe; its distribution was banned in several European countries, including France, which meant that many variants of this work have been anonymous. The engraving from the *British Museum* (ANON. 1773b) – which is similarly not signed, probably made by an anonymous English graphic, and published in Great Britain by Robert Sayer – repeats the composition of Le Mire's famous engraving.

<sup>89</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 60.

<sup>90</sup> The engraving is known in Polish literature as *Kołacz królewski*, which means „Royal cake”.

<sup>91</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> The British newspaper entitled *The Westminster Magazine* (with the subtitle *Pantheon of Taste*) was published in 13 volumes between 1773 and 1785.

<sup>93</sup> ANON. 1774.

by Empress Catherine II of Russia and Stanislaus II Augustus. Similarly, to earlier representations, the Polish king is depicted here as well with his crown breaking, referring to the first Polish partition and the endangerment of Polish statehood. Two monarchs are walking side by side behind Stanislaus Augustus, who can be identified as Emperor Joseph II and King Frederick II of Prussia. They are holding the map of Poland, discussing the process of implementing the partition of Poland.<sup>94</sup>

The last graphic to be analysed is John Lodge's engraving *The Polish Plumb-Cake*, which was published on 1 May 1774, also in *The Westminster Magazine*. On the engraving we can see four monarchs sitting around a table on which is a round "cake" – a representation of Poland – divided into four sections; marked Russia, Austria (titled as *Germany* in the engraving), Prussia, and France.<sup>95</sup> In the centre sits the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II, a drawn sword in his hand. On the left is Empress Catherine II, holding a cleaver. On the right is King Frederick II of Prussia, wearing a hat with a cockade; he also holds a drawn sword. In the foreground, at the extreme end of the table sits the new French king, Louis XVI, with a knife in his hand.<sup>96</sup> Behind is the king of Poland weeping, his crown about to fall from his head. On the right side, a man stands in a jewelled turban representing the Ottoman Empire, flourishing his sword. A devilish demon appears from under the tablecloth, pointing at the king of Prussia<sup>97</sup> – indicating that Frederick II stood behind the grandiose albeit completely diabolical plan of the partition of Poland, and the wires were pulled by Prussia. Beneath the design the following two-liner is engraved:

"Thy Kingdom, Stanis'us, is now at stake,  
To four such stomachs, 'tis a mere plumb-cake."<sup>98</sup>

The accompanying text explains that Frederick is "a King more savage than an Indian", who "lets the Emperor of Germany [i.e., Joseph II] and the Empress of Russia [i.e., Catherine II] go snacks, while he offers the King of France a share to keep him from attacking Germany (i.e., Austria)". The demon says, "though they have executed his design, they shall not long enjoy the plunder!"<sup>99</sup>

## Summary

Prussia, Russia and the Habsburg Empire successfully divided the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth among each other in 1772, which was only the first step in the practice of a new type of partition diplomacy, as a result

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<sup>94</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 162–163.

<sup>95</sup> LODGE 1774.

<sup>96</sup> The portrayal of the French king resembles more his predecessor, Louis XV, as Louis XVI assumed the French throne only at the time the engraving was made (in May 1774).

<sup>97</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 167.

<sup>98</sup> In the phrase *plumb-cake*, *plumb* can both mean 'absolute' and the metal 'lead', or by means of implication and further thinking, the term *plunder* can also be considered, which is mentioned in the accompanying text ("they shall not long enjoy the plunder!"); in addition, the compound phrase is also an entertaining play on words, as *plum cake* is a popular English cake made with raisins and sometimes also with plums.

<sup>99</sup> GEORGE 1935. p. 167.

of which Poland disappeared from the maps of Europe for a long time by 1795.<sup>100</sup> The Polish–Lithuanian state had been struggling with numerous internal problems during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the necessary reforms were significantly hindered not only by a significant portion of the Polish nobility, but also by the Prussian and Russian governments. Principally the Polish *liberum veto* created an excellent opportunity for the Prussian and Russian governments to keep the Polish–Lithuanian state weak; the two neighbouring powers prevented the internal reforms of Poland so that they would be able ultimately to eliminate the country easily, without a war.

The severe consequences of the first partition became apparent to contemporaries already a few years after the division. In his work entitled *The Prussian Monarchy Under Frederick the Great* (1788), the Count of Mirabeau expressed his opinion regarding the first Polish partition that it would be “impossible and inappropriate” to justify it. The count expressed that the first partition treaty “brought about only a senile peace for Europe”, so it did not resolve the issue of controlling the rise of the neighbouring great powers, especially Russia and Prussia.<sup>101</sup> Mirabeau demonstrated very well how much change the dynamics and mechanisms of European foreign policy – evolving in the name of the balance of power – had undergone by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This kind of negative opinion had become universal by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is also frequently found in contemporary French and English publications after 1772; yet contemporaries, of course, also emphasized the self-destructive role of Polish conditions.<sup>102</sup>

In their partition policy, Prussia and Russia managed to make Austria take sides with them on the first, as well as the third occasion, and during these partitions, the Western powers such as France or Great Britain – although fully opposing such violent breach of Polish–Lithuanian statehood – did not act against them. The partitioned territory was given a nominally independent form of state under the name *Duchy of Warsaw* in 1807, but this constellation was transformed into the similarly non-sovereign Kingdom of Poland in 1815, which condition lasted until 1918.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> DAVIES 2005. p. 410–411.

<sup>101</sup> DAVIES 2006. p. 416.

<sup>102</sup> For an overview of the historiography of the Polish partitions see among others: SEREJSKI 1970; MORLEY 1972; MÜLLER 2005.

<sup>103</sup> WANDYCZ 1993. p. 43–65.

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