

THE GREAT POWERS AND POLAND:
THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS BEHIND
THE FIRST PARTITION OF POLAND

A Master's Thesis

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September 2014

To future, Ege

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Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the factors behind the first partition of Poland in 1772. The interaction of the national dynamics of Poland and the balance of power in Eastern Europe during the period from the election of Poniatowski in 1764 with Russian and Prussian support until the first partition of Poland will be examined. The occurrence of the Polish nationalist reaction with the Russian and Prussian interference into Poland's internal affairs will be analyzed. The internationalization of the Polish problem with the start of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, which occurred through the spread of Polish civil war to neighboring countries will be assessed. The diplomatic maneuvering of the other two powers of Eastern Europe, Austria and Prussia, on the course of the Russo-Ottoman War will be emphasized. It enquire how it was that factors of regional balancing culminated in the first partition of Poland.

Keywords: First Partition of Poland, Balance of Power, Eastern Europe.

ÖZET

BÜYÜK GÜÇLER VE POLONYA: POLONYA’NIN İLK TAKSİMİNİN ARDINDAKİ ULUSAL VE ULUSLARARASI DİNAMİKLER

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Bu çalışma, Polonya’nın Prusya, Rusya ve Avusturya tarafından 1772 yılında gerçekleştirilen ilk taksimindeki etmenleri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Poniatowski’nin 1764 yılında Rusya ve Prusya’nın desteğiyle Polonya Kralı seçilmesinden Polonya’nın ilk taksimine kadar olan dönemde Polonya’nın iç dinamikleri ile Doğu Avrupa’daki güçler dengesi arasındaki etkileşim irdelenecektir. Rusya ve Prusya’nın Polonya içişlerine müdahalesiyle Polonya’da ortaya çıkan milliyetçi reaksiyonun oluşumuna değinilecektir. Polonya’da yaşanan iç savaşın çevre ülkelere sıçrayarak neden olduğu Osmanlı-Rus Savaşının, Leh sorununu nasıl uluslararasılaştığı incelenecektir. Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı süresince, Doğu Avrupa’nın diğer iki büyük devleti Prusya ve Avusturya’nın diplomatik manevraları ele alınacaktır. Bölgedeki güçler dengesinin Polonya’nın taksimine nasıl neden olduğu sorgulanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polonya’nın İlk Taksimi, Güçler Dengesi, Doğu Avrupa.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“I reflect with dread upon the perils which surround us. What forces have we to resist our neighbors? Do we trust to the faith of treaties? (...) We imagine that our neighbors are interested in our preservation by their mutual jealousies, a vain prejudice which deceives us, a ridiculous infatuation, which (...) will surely deprive us of ours [liberty] (...) Our turn will come, no doubt, and either we shall be the prey of some famous conqueror or the neighboring Powers will combine to divide our States”.

Stanisław Leszczyński¹

Any diplomatic historian in Turkey writing about 18th century Turkish – Polish relations, is bound to think of the famous sentence said to have been uttered by the Ottoman chiefs of protocol in the following century: “Has the legate of Lechistan arrived?”² This thesis is no exception.

¹ Stanisław Leszczyński was the king of Poland between 1733-1736. James Fletcher, *The History of Poland from the Earliest to the Present Time*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 209.

² Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 304.

The Ottoman Empire was perhaps the only country in Eastern Europe which had a direct interest in seeing Poland's survival. Ottoman Polish relations went back over three and a half centuries at the time of the First Partition, indeed this year (2014) marks the 600th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Poland. In 1414, two envoys from Poland visited Mehmet Çelebi, who was then on the Ottoman throne.³ Poland was the country that sent the highest number of envoys to the Porte⁴ before the abolition of the Polish State. Turkey was directly involved and vehemently opposed to the partitions, and never recognized the final partition and extinction of Poland, enabling the ancient neighbors today to claim continuous diplomatic relations over 600 years.

The Ottoman Empire was not one of the countries which threatened Poland in the eighteenth century. Three mighty eighteenth century monarchies, Russia, Prussia and Austria, surrounded the geographically doomed, hard-to-defend territories of Poland. No other European large state had to contend with three much more powerful neighbors at once. Furthermore the Kingdom of Poland lacked anything which could be called natural boundaries apart from its Baltic Coast in the north and the Carpathian Mountains to its south. These facts of geography were one of the reasons of the partition of Poland. Yet, they fail to explain fully why its neighbors were able to dismember a state bigger than France without having first gone to war with it and without bloodshed among themselves after three separate acts of partition.

Poland's three adversaries were powerful autocratic monarchies, playing a

³ Jan Dlugosz, *The Annals of Jan Dlugosz Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae, an English Abridgement*, trans. Michae Maurie, (Chichester: IM Publications, 1997), 419.

⁴ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi Vol. 2*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), 481.

complex power game between them which was going to persist until World War One. One of them, Austria, had been a first-rank European power for several centuries but was now less dynamic and in some respects even beginning to be on the defensive – as will be seen in its unenthusiastic attitude towards the First Partition. The other two, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Russian Empire were both expansionary or ‘revisionist’ powers which, by the mid-18th century, were eager to exploit any opportunities they could find. Prussia was basically content to live with a mosaic of neighbors in what is now Germany and was not large or strong enough to challenge its Habsburg neighbors. Poland, and particularly Danzig, offered the main opportunities.

Russia, with its vast territory and its Byzantine and Roman imperial pretensions, was a country which was remote from the power centers of Western Europe and faced relatively weak neighbors on three sides. Russia had no Great Power rivals in the 18th century when it expanded south into Ottoman territories. However, the process of expansion was a slow one. The Russian Empire was itself a much weaker and less developed state than the big powers of Western Europe and it had only limited military resources to deploy. So its expansion happened in bursts and it could not easily cope with war on two fronts at once, e.g. Poland and the Ottomans.

As a nominally independent satellite, Poland remained problematic, liable to internal upheavals and possible attempts to detach itself from Russian domination. One great advantage of absorbing its territories through partition for Russia was that they could be directly administered and policed.

Austria, Prussia and Russia partitioned Poland for the first time in 1772,

leading to its final demise only less than thirty years after the first partition. The collapse of a national state in Poland during the 18th century as a result of partition by three powerful neighbours is a unique episode in European history. The break-up of Poland was a *sui generis* event for Europe, possible only under the particular circumstances of the 18th century and the particular sequence in which they took place.

The factors leading to Poland's partition may be roughly reduced to two headings. The first consists of Poland's internal weaknesses, as a result of the political evolution of the state. A weak central administration, always under the influence of a strong and selfish nobility that was not willing to share its power in governance, the 'Noble Democracy' as it was called, coupled with the limited size of the army in comparison with the armies of the neighboring countries led the Republic to fall prey to its neighbors. The inability and selfishness of the ruling Polish nobility, the *szlachta*, and *szlachta*'s infamous *liberum veto*, and the "right to resist", i.e the right to organize armed confederations in order to fight against a government that was thought to be unjust, coupled with weak central administration led to disorder, chaos and eventually civil wars, known as the "Polish anarchy" and made Poland unable to keep up with the changes of 18th century European power politics and respond to it. But this explanation, though related and important, is too simple and too general to answer the questions of how or why the first partition happened or if there was any other alternative than the partition.

The second category of factors leading to Poland's partition was related to the balance of power system in Eastern Europe in general and the politics of its

neighbors resulting from this system. The simultaneous decline of Poland and Sweden at the beginning of the century, the French focus on Great Britain rather than Eastern Europe especially after the Seven Years' Wars, left Russia, Prussia and Austria as the only pillars of the delicate balance of power system in the region.

The preservation of the balance between these three countries was considered by them to be vital. The common view of how to preserve this balance was simple: none of these three powers would allow the other to become the hegemonic power in the region. Any unilateral gain by one country had to be counter-balanced by the other two through a bargaining process. So this thesis will look at how the First Partition happened and the working of the international system which produced this outcome, studying the interaction of Poland's internal weaknesses (such as its institutions, its nobility, the Sejm, and the *Liberum Veto*) and its failure in the early 18th century to build a strong centralized absolute monarchy, and consider how these interacted dynamically with the European Great Power Politics to produce a downwards vortex from which Poland could not escape. It will show how its efforts at reform and resistance to outside interference only made its situation worse.

In this thesis, it is argued that the partitions and the eventual destruction of Poland were the result of the counter-balancing politics of Austria and Prussia against Russian expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 and that this occurred precisely because of the internationalization of the Polish problem. Yet the confusing developments of the first partition cannot be properly understood unless we consider the fact that

Poland's internal weaknesses were systematically exploited by her neighbors on the course of the balancing politics.

So the politics of balance by the Eastern European powers, beginning from the Polish royal election in 1764 up until the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, will be analyzed within the perspective of the balancing politics of Poland's neighbors. This study divides the process of the First Partition of Poland into two phases.

A preliminary chapter on Eastern Europe in the decades before the run up to the partition will examine the development of the five countries involved—Russia growing stronger and more internationally assertive after the reign of Peter the Great but delayed by the weakness of his immediate successors, Austria still in the front league of European powers but now relatively sidelined by the global expansion of France and England; Poland failing to achieve reforms and also a bystander to developments in Europe; and Prussia, coming from relative obscurity to become a first class European power with formidable and growing military strength. It was Poland's failure to progress while its immediate neighbors grew ever stronger which was the source of its vulnerability, lack of prestige, and eventual loss of independence. A similar story is also true of the Ottoman Empire, still able to inflict defeats on Russia in the Ukraine in the early part of the 18th century but gradually falling behind. Though it experimented with military reforms, it refused to consider the administrative and social reforms which were needed to ensure it could compete effectively in the European political system and like Poland, its antiquated institutions and government life left it increasingly vulnerable but this was a lesson the Sultan and his generals had

yet to learn.

The first section analyzes how Poland's political weakness opened the country up for foreign influence within the starting with the process of the Polish royal election in 1764 right up until the Russo-Turkish War of 1768. Then the impact of the Prusso-Russian alliance on the Polish royal election will be discussed. This will be followed by an examination of responses within Poland, i.e. the reform movements there and their impact on neighboring countries will be studied. This leads on to discussion of the increased foreign intervention into Poland, further internal reactions within the country and the full internationalization of the Polish problem, through the formation of an armed Confederation, and the simultaneous effects that events in Poland had on Russia's relations with the Ottoman Empire.

In the second and final phase of events leading up to the Partition, the impact of the Russian expansion into the Ottoman Empire and the reverberation of the Russian victories upon the balance of power in Eastern Europe in general will be studied. It will be argued that these developments cleared the way for bargaining among the three partitioning powers about the upset of the balance in the region and ways to restore it through a partition of Poland.

CHAPTER II

EASTERN EUROPE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

“It is extremely worthy of remark, that one of the partitioning powers, Prussia, was formerly in a state of vassalage to the Republic; Russia once saw its capital and throne possessed by the Poles; and Austria, scarcely a century ago, was indebted to a sovereign of this country for the preservation of its metropolis, and almost for its very existence”.

William Coxe⁵

2.1 The Balance of Power in Eastern Europe until 1764

The last two decades of the 17th century witnessed one of the biggest coalitions formed till then against a state, the Ottoman Empire, in Europe. This coalition, made up of Poland, Austria, Russia and Venice, under the banner of the Papacy, was known as the Holy Alliance. Thanks to the military brilliance of the Polish

⁵ William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark: Interspersed with Historical Relations and Political Inquiries*, (Dublin: T. Cadell, 1784), 55-56.

King Jan III Sobieski, the Ottoman Armies were stopped at the gates of Vienna. The Turks, after a series of severe defeats lost territories and power on their northern frontier in Hungary, which was culminated in the humiliating Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, and in the Treaty of İstanbul in 1700.⁶ The defeat of the Turks, who lost portions of their Balkan possessions to Austria, Poland and Venice and the port of Azov, a direct access to the Black Sea, to Russia, was to shatter the balance of power in Eastern Europe, simply because there was not a strong enough power to counterbalance both Austria and Russia at the same time.⁷ Arguably Poland paid the price for its victory against the Turks with its own political death less than a century later.⁸ Jan III Sobieski's decision to concentrate all his resources on the Turkish threat, at the cost of the Republic's other foreign concerns, left the Russians in possession of much of Ukraine; exhausted his troops to rescuing Vienna and abandoned the original idea of checking the Prussian rise to power. Thus the costs far outweighed the gains. The Habsburgs retained their super-power status; the Prussians gained international recognition for their independent kingdom; and the Muscovites started to build a Russian Empire, all of which were destined to dominate Eastern Europe in the following century, ironically, directly at the expense of the Polish realm.⁹

⁶ Jeremy Black, *The Rise of the European Powers, 1679-1793*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 9-15.

⁷ Micheal Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence 1683-1797*, (London: Longman, 2003), 153 – 157.

⁸ Oscar Halecki, *A History of Poland*, (New York: Roy Publishers, 1976), 171-174.

⁹ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 266-267.

2.1.1 The Great Northern Wars 1700 – 1721

The sequence of events in eighteenth century Eastern Europe did not start only with the decadence of the Turks. The power struggle between Sweden and Russia in the Baltic region, had turned into an Eastern European regional war as neighboring countries were drawn in. The Great Northern Wars, which started with the combined Russo-Polish attack on Sweden in 1700, lasted for 21 years and produced important consequences for the region.¹⁰ The initial years of the wars witnessed the success of the Swedish armies. The Swedish King, Charles XII successfully occupied the Polish Duchy of Courland. Poland was continuously unsuccessful against Sweden, losing its grip on Wilno, Warsaw and Cracow. The Swedish invasion was the start of the troubles of the Polish King Augustus II. Rival armed confederations were formed by the Polish nobility, *Szlachta*, adding civil war to foreign occupation. One Confederation relied heavily on Russian money and men; the other, backed by Sweden, produced its own contender for the Polish throne: Stanisław Leszczyński. In 1706 Charles XII marched into Saxony, forcing Augustus to renounce the Polish throne in favor of Leszczyński. Guaranteeing Leszczyński a safe rule, Charles XII set out to Russia to finish the campaign that had lasted for more than seven years. Instead of advancing to the well-fortified city of Moscow which would offer resistance, Charles XII decided to head south, hoping that he might get help from the *Hetman* of the Ukraine, Ivan Mazeppa and the Ottoman Sultan, Ahmed III.¹¹ Yet, the siege of the fortress of the Poltava proved disastrous for the Swedes who were outnumbered by a Russian

¹⁰ Black, *The Rise of the European Powers*, 21-28.

¹¹ Orest Subtelny, "Mazepists and Stanisławists: The First Ukrainian Emigres." In *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, edited by Peter Potichnyj, (Toronto: Webcom, 1980), 83-85.

army by two to one. The decisive Russian victory at the Battle of Poltava in 1709 substantially changed the balance of power in the Baltic.¹²

After this defeat, the Swedish King Charles XII sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire, something which caused a Russo-Ottoman War in 1710-1711¹³, in which the Ottomans were victorious.¹⁴ The peace treaty concluded after the war had a special impact on Ottoman – Polish – Russian relations. Russia would return all the lands it had conquered from the Ottomans, including the Azov Fortress, and would refrain from interfering in Poland's internal affairs.¹⁵

The Turkish victory demonstrated that the Ottoman Empire was still an important state in the Eastern European system of the balance of power. Nevertheless, the Russo – Ottoman peace treaty did not bring the Great Northern War to an end. The Russians quickly occupied Estonia and Livonia, consolidating their foothold on the Baltic shore.¹⁶ After these Baltic gains, Russian troops drove Leszczyński out of Poland. Peter the Great, backed by 18000 Russian troops, began mediation between his client-king Augustus and the *Szlachta*. Peter undertook to guarantee the peace settlement between the parties, having the right to interfere in Polish affairs and to prevent any alteration to the Polish constitution without Russian consent. The Dumb (or Silent) Sejm at its meeting in January 1717, in which it was surrounded by Russian soldiers, meekly accepted these

¹² Matthew Smith Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century 1713-1783* (New York: Longman, 1987), 259-260.

¹³ For detailed account of the war, see Nimet Akdes Kurat, *Prut Seferi ve Barışı*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, (1953).

¹⁴ Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*, (Harlow, Pearson Longman: 2007), 90-95.

¹⁵ İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi Vol. 4/1*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), 84.

¹⁶ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*, (London: Pimlico, 2002), 262.

proposals.¹⁷ Augustus was restored to his throne as a Russian client-king in return for a formal Polish acknowledgement of Russian rights to Kiev and Poland's eastern lands.¹⁸ With the Warsaw Treaty of 1717, which was ratified by the Polish Parliament, Russia guaranteed Polish independence. With this agreement, the Polish army was limited to a maximum of only 12,000 soldiers. Russia gained the right to maintain some garrisons in Poland. In theory, this was just friendly cooperation. In practice, it meant the transformation of Poland into a Russian vassal state.¹⁹

Hostilities continued in the Baltic until Charles was killed while campaigning against Denmark in 1718. In 1721, a peace treaty was concluded between Russia and Sweden, confirming Russian gains on the Baltic. At the end of the Great Northern Wars in 1721, Sweden was severely defeated and lost its place in the system for good. Poland counted for so little that it was not even asked to participate in the peace talks.²⁰ Swedish influence upon Poland gradually diminished while that of Russia rose in proportion to the Swedish decline.²¹ Russia filled the power vacuum caused by the decline of Sweden and thus became an important actor in Eastern Europe.

With the Treaty of Nystad, Peter the Great solved one of the three fundamental problems of Russian foreign relations: the Swedish. For a solution of

¹⁷ Mariusz Markiewicz, "The Functioning of the Monarchy during the Reigns of the Electors of Saxony, 1697-1763", in *The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, 1500-1795*, edited by Richard Butterwick, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 179-181.

¹⁸ John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World 1700 – 1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29.

¹⁹ Stanisław Arnold and Marian Zychowski, *Outline History of Poland: From the Beginning of the State to the Present Time*, (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1965), 63; Jerzy Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697–1795*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 7.

²⁰ Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107.

²¹ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World*, 227-230.

the Polish problem, Russia had to wait for Catherine the Great.²²

2.1.2 The War of the Polish Succession 1733-1738

Russian supremacy over Poland lasted until the death of the Polish King Augustus II. In the contest to find a successor, Stanisław Leszczyński, whose daughter was married to Louis XV, enjoyed the support of France and strong magnates like Czartoryski and Potocki. Leszczyński wanted to be the king of Poland after Augustus' death, something which might challenge the Russian control over the country.²³ The other main contender for the throne was Frederick August of Saxony, the son of August II and the son-in-law of Austrian Emperor Joseph I. The result was that the Polish election held after the death of Augustus sparked the War of the Polish Succession (1733–1738), as it was called, between Poland, Prussia, France, and Spain against Saxony, Austria, and Russia resulting in a series of battles across the continent. Ironically, the War of Polish Succession was mostly fought outside Poland and mostly over non-Polish issues.²⁴

As far as Poland's internal politics were concerned the War of the Polish Succession marked a change in the attitude of the Polish state towards the dissidents, i.e. its non-Catholic population. The dissidents' right to hold public offices was revoked, something which would become a hot topic after the election

²² Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 264.

²³ Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, 157-158.

²⁴ W. Konopczyński, "Later Saxon Period, 1733-1736", in *The Cambridge History of Poland: From Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)*, edited by W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1941), 25.

of Poniatowski in 1764, sparking the events leading to the first partition.²⁵ At the end of the war, France, which wanted to counter-balance Austrian influence in Eastern Europe, was defeated and so Augustus III, the Austrian-Russian candidate, for the Polish throne, was elected king of Poland.²⁶ The Poles, once again, were not consulted about the terms²⁷ and Russian supremacy over Poland was once again confirmed.

2.1.3 The Russo-Turkish and Austro-Turkish Wars

The close cooperation of Austria and Russia during the War of the Polish Succession led to the signing of a secret agreement between the two countries, binding Austria to join Russia in a possible future war against the Ottomans. The year 1735 brought temporary tranquility to the War of Polish Succession in Poland, if not in other fronts of the war. Russia, knowing about the Ottoman entanglement with Persian affairs, did not miss its chance and declared war on the Porte in May 1736, with the primary purpose of ending the troublesome Tartar raids into Russian territory.²⁸ The Russians army was fully mobilised, whereas the Ottoman army was not ready for war at all.²⁹ The Russians, this time, instead of focusing on the Balkans, decided to attack in the Crimea. This surprise attack was successful and the Russian army quickly advanced and captured Azak and Özü

²⁵ The course of events will be evaluated in the following chapter.

²⁶ Daniel Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 261; Adam Zamoyski, *The Polish Way: A Thousand-Year History of the Poles and Their Culture*, (New York: Franklin Watts, 1988), 221; Konopczyski, "Later Saxon Period", 26-29.

²⁷ Lukowski and Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland*, 111.

²⁸ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World*, 98-100.

²⁹ Virginia H. Aksan, "Ottoman War and Warfare 1453-1812." In *War and Warfare in the Early Modern World, 1450-1815*, edited by Jeremy Black, (London, Routledge: 1999), 165.

but could not hold onto the Crimea due to the difficulties of maintaining well-supplied garrisons in the region³⁰ and had to withdraw after an occupation of less than six months.³¹ Austria, which joined Russia in 1737 in its war against the Porte, too was initially very successful in the war in the Balkans. Nevertheless, by the end, it was unable to continue with the war due to the neglects in the army and concluded a separate peace treaty with the Ottomans, evacuating Little Wallachia, and northern Bosnia and Serbia.³²

Starting with the Treaty of Belgrade, the Ottoman Empire was not involved in any major European war and indeed there was a long period of peace until hostilities broke out with Russia in 1768. During this time, instead of focusing on domestic reforms as its rivals did, the Ottoman government sank back into lethargy, confident that its recent military successes had restored the Empire's fortunes and that nothing further needed to be done in the way of reform or modernization. This long peace period proved counter-productive for the Ottomans.³³

2.1.4 The War of the Austrian Succession and the Diplomatic Revolution

The end of the Russo-Turkish War did not mean that Eastern Europe would now enter a period of peace. On the contrary, a new European war, the War of the

³⁰ Virginia H. Aksan, "Manning a Black Sea Garrison in the Eighteenth Century: Ochakov and Concepts of Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Context", *International Journal of Turkish Studies* Vol. 8 No. 1 (2002): 65-66.

³¹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and Russians: A History*, (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 2011), 195.

³² Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire: 1526-1918*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 69.

³³ Andrina Stiles, *Russia, Poland and the Ottoman Empire 1725-1800*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 50-51.

Austrian Succession (1740–48), began. Prussia, which had seized most of Silesia into its dominions after the war, was turning out to be a major power of Eastern Europe.³⁴ Austria was losing a commercially important territory to its neighbor and so looked for ways to get it back and reviewed its foreign policy preferences in general and the Eastern European balance of power system in particular. It now considered Prussia rather than France as its prime enemy³⁵ a change which was later labelled the “Diplomatic Revolution”.³⁶

The Diplomatic Revolution referred to these unexpected alliances between traditional enemies. The term ‘Revolution’ refers to the extent of the astonishment that Austria and France created simply by forming an alliance. It was a total departure from the established pattern of the European international relations. It was partly brought about by Franco – British colonial rivalry, plus, the discontent of Austria and Russia at the rising power of Prussia in the East. The engineer of this “arithmetical method” of the alliance was Wenzel Anton, Prince of Kaunitz-Rietberg, the Austrian Chancellor between 1753 and 1793.³⁷ From 1748 Kaunitz regarded Frederick II as the greatest, most dangerous and most implacable enemy of Austria and thus, believed that Prussia, not France, should be the main target of Austrian foreign policy with the prime aim of recovering Silesia.³⁸ Francis I, too, considered Prussia as the main threat to his empire and so rested heavily upon the

³⁴ W. Mediger, “Great Britain, Hanover and the Rise of Prussia”, in *Studies in Diplomatic History*, edited by Ragnhild Hatton and Matthew Smith Anderson, (Great Britain, Archon Books: 1970), 200.

³⁵ Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, 330-333; H. M. Scott, “France and the Polish Throne”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* Vol. 53 No. 132 (1975): 376.

³⁶ Jeremy Black, “Essay and Reflection: On the 'Old System' and the 'Diplomatic Revolution' of the Eighteenth Century”, *The International History Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1990), 301.

³⁷ Matthew Smith Anderson, “Eighteenth Century Theories of Balance of Power”, in *Studies in Diplomatic History*, edited by Ragnhild Hatton and Matthew Smith Anderson, (Great Britain, Archon Books: 1970), 183

³⁸ Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 158-159.

French alliance and French influence on the Ottoman Porte against Prussia. He saw Russia as one of the most formidable powers in Europe and thus, it was important for Austria not to antagonize the Russians. According to Francis the Turks, together with their religion, courage and attitudes, were a very dangerous neighbour and a powerful enemy and thus, a Turkish war should be avoided. His desire to conclude a strong Austro–Russian alliance, also drove him against the Turks. Because of their common enemies, the Turks, Francis treated Russia as a natural ally.³⁹

The most important features of the Diplomatic Revolution were that it brought ancient enmities to an end to and destroyed the ‘Old System’, i.e. the anti-French Grand Alliance of Britain and Austria. In addition, it marked the beginning of a shift of political emphasis from the countries of Western Europe to those of the east, due to the declining involvement of Britain and France in continental European affairs, resulting from their concentration on developments overseas. The leading problems of Europe then became the fate of Poland, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the aggressive expansion of Russia and the growing enmity between Prussia and Austria.⁴⁰

2.1.5 The Seven Years’ Wars

Austria was the prime beneficiary from the new alliance since it meant that there were no French threats in Italy and Germany anymore. Furthermore, the long-

³⁹ Derek Beales, *Joseph II: In the Shadow of Maria Theresa 1741-1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 275-276.

⁴⁰ Black, *The Rise of the European Powers*, 109-110.

standing French alliance with the Ottomans was no longer directed against Austria.⁴¹ The signing of a convention between Britain and Prussia not only encouraged France to make an alliance with Austria, but at the same time angered Russia, driving it to draw up plans to attack Prussia, though these were pre-empted by the Prussian invasion of Saxony in August 1756.⁴²

With the help of the “Diplomatic Revolution”, a new coalition was formed against Prussia to check its rise in the region and Europe found itself once again strangled by another war. The Seven Years’ War (1754-1763) brought nothing but disaster to the belligerent parties and thus, forcing states to reconsider their decisions before taking up arms against each other in case of any dispute among them. The Seven Years War exhausted Prussia, Austria and Russia. It is not surprising, therefore, that during the following two decades, their attention was focused on domestic reform and the reorganization of the state. The objective of these reforms was to strengthen the state, particularly in the economic and military sphere in order to support the large armies required to maintain Great Power status, which depended on military power and the ability to use it. Nevertheless, Eastern European monarchies, instead of war, found it was best for their interests to settle their disputes through diplomacy and territorial adjustments.⁴³ Poland was the first victim of this so-called “peaceful expansion”⁴⁴ idea. The major states of Europe were to equalize their powers through the partitions of Poland. The Ottoman intervention in the Polish problem after the formation of the Bar

⁴¹ Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, 331.

⁴² Herbert H. Kaplan, *Russia and the Origins of the Seven Years' Wars*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 91-92.

⁴³ Albert Sorel, *Europe and the French Revolution: The Political Thinking of the Old Régime*, trans. Alfred Cobban and J. W. Hunt, (London: Collins, 1969), 1-7; Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, 346; Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, (London: Pimlico, 1997), 661-662;

⁴⁴ Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, 349.

Confederation in 1768 directly changed the nature of the problem and the Eastern European balance of power. Russian expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire was to be compensated by Austria and Prussia, in Poland through a partition.⁴⁵

2.2 Dynamics of the 18th Century

2.2.1 *Raison d'état*

The eighteenth century saw a shift in the motivation behind the foreign policies of European powers. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries religious and dynastic matters had been the most important priorities. In the eighteenth century, however, religion played no serious part in determining international policies among the major powers. Religious sentiment certainly existed. But religious differences did not prevent countries from the formation of alliances.⁴⁶ Yet, it was still sometimes used for propaganda purposes, as in Poland to justify aggression by Russia and Prussia in alleged support of the 'Dissidents' in the events leading up to the First Partition.

By the mid eighteenth century, international relations were conducted on the basis of the doctrine of *raison d'état*. This was the argument that the needs of the state dictated the political actions of its rulers. To do whatever was necessary

⁴⁵ The internationalization of the Polish problem and the events leading to the First Partition of Poland will be analyzed in Chapter IV.

⁴⁶ Micheal Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History & Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 100.

to further one's self-interest became the right course of action for a ruler. The general acceptance of this idea resulted in a competitive state system in Europe.⁴⁷ In an age which ranked states by the extent of their territory and population, the struggle for mastery on the Continent meant an increasing emphasis on the build-up of military power. The possession of a large standing army was the best diplomatic tool of the time. "Negotiations without arms produce as little impression as a musical score without instruments"⁴⁸ according to Frederick II and might was equated with right.

Thus, the idea of expansion became the whole basis of international relations in the eighteenth century. States with only small territories would be poor states, making them weak and perhaps unlikely to survive. The ultimate extension of this reasoning was that weak states, such as territorially big but administratively and militarily midget Poland, did not deserve to survive at all.⁴⁹

2.2.2 The Balance of Power

One restraining element that prevented violence becoming the only means of international communication in the eighteenth century was the concept of the balance of power.⁵⁰ Though it had been practiced in the late fifteenth century among the Italian city states, after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, it came to have much wider application to the whole of Europe. With the Treaty of Utrecht, the

⁴⁷ Sorel, *Europe and the French Revolution*, 42-44.

⁴⁸ Coleman Phillipson, *International Law and the Great War*, (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2005), 43.

⁴⁹ Sorel, *Europe and the French Revolution*, 45-46.

⁵⁰ Sheehan, *The Balance of Power*, 97-98.

European powers declared their intention to confirm the peace and tranquility of the Christian world through a just equilibrium of power. Preserving the balance meant that no single state or alliance of states could be allowed to become too powerful and thus a danger to the peace of Europe. If it did, then the other states would combine together to reduce its power.⁵¹

Yet, things did not work out as easily as this might sound. After all, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, there had been two main states, that is to say France and Habsburg Austria, to be counter-balanced. Minor states had supported one side or another in a changing pattern of alliances. After 1713, no one state had dominance over Europe and the arrival of new players, Russia and Prussia, in the power game began to disturb traditional policies. In 1756 the established order was totally shattered by the "Diplomatic Revolution".⁵²

By the mid-eighteenth century there were five major powers, France, Austria, Britain, Russia and Prussia, which were generally regarded as being of near equality in power. Any gains by one of these states alarmed the others and so invoked the balance of power mechanism to justify territorial aggrandizement of the kind practiced in Eastern Europe in the partitions of Poland. After all, the balance of power was not a principle of order. Nor was it a legal guarantee. It required that the aggressive powerful states should be contained while rarely offering help for weak ones, and so most of the time it worked to the advantage of the strong⁵³ through so-called "partition diplomacy".

⁵¹ Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 5-11; Davies, *Europe: A History*, 661.

⁵² Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, 295-298.

⁵³ Sorel, *Europe and the French Revolution*, 60; Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, 247-250.

Partition diplomacy meant that where one state could not be prevented from acquiring territory at the expense of a weaker neighbor, other adjoining states were entitled to make similar gains for themselves in order to maintain the existing balance of power. The cheapest way to achieve this was not to fight a costly war against an equal in order to obtain a share of the spoils, but by prior agreement, to jointly dismember the unresisting body of a victim state⁵⁴ - Poland would be the best example for the partition diplomacy.

⁵⁴ Sorel, *Europe and the French Revolution*, 65-68.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF THE POLISH PROBLEM

“Magnanimous Polish Gentlemen! You are a glorious republic, and have *Nie Pozwalam* [I do not allow] and strange methods of business and of behavior to your Kings and others. If your glorious Republic continues to be managed in such manner, not good will come of it, but evil. The day will arrive and is perhaps not far off, when it will get torn to shreds hither thither; be stuffed in the pockets of covetous neighbors, Brandenburg, Muscovy and Austria, and find itself reduced to zero, and abolished from the face of the world”.

Jan II Kazimierz⁵⁵

3.1 Poland in the Eighteenth Century

Apart from the dynamics of the eighteenth century international system, Poland's internal weaknesses also played an important role in the first partition. However,

⁵⁵ Polish King Jan II Kazimierz's speech to Polish nation in 1667, before retiring into private life. Eversley, *The Partitions of Poland*, 25.

Polish weaknesses did not just show up at the start of the century. On the contrary, they were engrained in Polish political traditions. One of the elements constituting Poland's soft belly was the weakness of the central government. The weakness of the central government rendered the country open to foreign intervention into Poland's internal affairs. However, one should not forget the role of the partitioning powers' constant promotion of Polish weaknesses in order to keep Poland in a weak state. Even though, many members of the *Szlachta*, Polish nobility, believed that it was precisely because of its political chaos, that Poland was still alive,⁵⁶ Poland needed to get rid of this chaotic system. Yet, attempts to reform the country were always hampered by surrounding powers.⁵⁷ Any attempts at reforms which aimed at getting rid of the shortcomings of the Polish political system would be perceived as threats by neighboring powers and thus lead to the destruction of Poland. Ironically, Poland might have survived for a longer period without any reform—though of course it would not have been a strong and viable entity.⁵⁸

3.2 *Szlachta*

One of the main reasons why the central government of Poland was weak was the fact that the *Szlachta*, the most populous class of nobility anywhere in eighteenth

⁵⁶ Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 217-221; Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 261.

⁵⁷ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 513.

⁵⁸ Jerzy Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland 1772, 1793, 1795*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 12; Davies, *Europe: A History*, 664.

century Europe⁵⁹, was uniquely strong vis-a-vis the kings of Poland. The Polish belonging to the *Szlachta* considered themselves as a unique race, an attitude which one might almost call a 'racism' of the nobility, claiming to have the most blue blood in all Europe.⁶⁰ Even though they had incredible inequality of wealth among each other, equal treatment of the members of the *Szlachta*, including women, might be considered as its distinctive feature comparing to other nobilities elsewhere in Europe. Polish women belonging to the *Szlachta* for instance, were able to own property.⁶¹

To a great extent the *Szlachta*, enjoyed freedom vis-a-vis the central government and ultimately it became the class ruling the country. In 1374, the *Szlachta* had been exempted from taxation. In 1505, the state lost the ability to legislate without first asking for the *Szlachta*'s consent, which was known as *Nihil Novi*. It was an unparalleled development in Continental Europe at that time and the *Szlachta* was not willing to share its influence in the country with any other groups of the society.⁶²

The Polish nobility, of course, was not just a single entity. Each big family of the *Szlachta* had their own agendas, political preferences and aims and disputes with other members of the *Szlachta*.⁶³ These differences among the members of the *Szlachta* would be used and abused by the neighboring powers of Poland in

⁵⁹ Jerzy Lukowski, *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.

⁶⁰ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 292.

⁶¹ Lukowski, *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, 179; Davies, *Europe: A History*, 585-586.

⁶² Jerzy Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty: The Political Culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York: Continuum, 2010), 125.

⁶³ Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, 23-25.

the eighteenth century eastern balance system.⁶⁴ Yet, at the same time, this love affair was not a platonic one. The *Szlachta*, too, would use and try to influence the balance in the region through the power vacuums in the system of balance of power and in accordance with their interests, they would ally themselves with Austria, Russia, the Ottoman Empire or other powers and thus act as an important player in Eastern European international system.⁶⁵ The recurrent problems which arose in the Polish political system, e.g. during the election of Poniatowski, or when the confederations were set up after the Dissidents' problem erupted in the government, or indeed in the organization of the movements against reform were not just caused by members of the *Szlachta*, but more importantly by the outside states interfering in it.⁶⁶

3.3 Elective Monarchy and *Pacta Conventa*

The Most Serene Commonwealth of the Two Nations, *Serenissima Respublica Poloniae*, was formed in 1569, with the Union of Lublin. Yet, despite the title, this Commonwealth was in fact a monarchy disguised as a republic or perhaps vice versa. The *Szlachta* were electing their leader through "democratic process" constituting the part of the republic, whereas, the elected leader was invested with

⁶⁴ Victor Sautin, "The First Partition of Poland." In *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, edited by Ales Skrivan and Arnold Suppan, (Prague: PBtisk, 2009), 119-120.

⁶⁵ Jerzy Lukowski, "Towards Partition: Polish Magnates and Russian Intervention in Poland during the Early Reign of Stanislas August Poniatowski." *The Historical Journal* Vol. 28 No. 3 (1985): 560.

⁶⁶ George Shaw-Lefevre Eversley, *The Partition of Poland*, (London: Fisher Unwin, 1915), 20.

the title of a king – though with little of the power of one.⁶⁷

After the death of Zygmunt II, the last king from the Jagiellonian dynasty in 1572, an interregnum of two years followed. The *Szlachta* increased its political power at expense of the central government. The nobles took the opportunity of the election of a king to conclude a new contract with him, further restraining his powers.⁶⁸ One of their innovations was the establishment of a permanent advisory board or council to the king, which limited his powers.⁶⁹ These arrangements were called the *pacta conventa*. After the death of Zygmunt the necessary requirement for a new king to be member of the ruling dynasty was abolished. With the election of Henry of Anjou, the brother of then reigning king of France, Charles IX, the *pacta conventa* was put into effect. Even though the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre had taken place less than a year prior to the election of Henry, tolerance was granted to all religious bodies in the society.⁷⁰ The sovereign was obliged to be a Catholic and Catholicism was designated as the state religion.

More importantly the king would have no voice in the election of his successor. The throne was made entirely elective and thus, opening the way for even foreigners to be the king of Poland.⁷¹ This turned the Polish elections into a struggle between foreign powers to have more influence in Poland. After 1573, the opportunities for foreign interference in an election were quite common. Many European countries were involved directly or indirectly in Polish elections and

⁶⁷ Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland*, 2.

⁶⁸ Lukowski, Jerzy. "The Szlachta and the Monarchy: Reflections on the Struggle *inter maiestatem ac libertatem*", in *The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, 1500-1795*, edited by Richard Butterwick, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 133-135.

⁶⁹ Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, 87.

⁷⁰ Nevin O. Winter, *Poland of Today and Yesterday*, (Boston: L.C. Page & Company, 1893), 51.

⁷¹ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 119-120.

different combination of Russian, Prussian, Austrian, French, Swedish and Ottoman resources were used to influence the outcome. The election of the Ottoman-sponsored Stefan Batory in 1575 and the two Wars of Polish Succession (1587-1588 and 1733-1738) are the most specific instances of this foreign intervention and Poniatowski's election in 1764, too, would foster a similar kind of foreign intervention in Polish affairs.⁷²

3.4 *Liberum Veto*

Poland's laws aimed at protecting the independence of each individual but paradoxically the results of them were the oppression of all.⁷³ The ruling elite enjoyed extensive rights over legislative matters that were unparalleled in Europe at that time. The principle of unanimity of legislation of the *Szlachta* was an important element of Polish political life. The *liberum veto* was one of the most important of them. Put roughly the *liberum veto* meant unlimited power of any member of the *Szlachta* to stop any kind of legislation by simply uttering the words "*nie pozwalam*", (I do not allow it.) Behind the principle of the *liberum veto* was the conviction that all law must have the consent of all those who would enforce it.⁷⁴ This was enough to paralyze the whole Polish parliament. Simply because of the *liberum veto*, a mere three laws were passed by the Diet during the

⁷² Hacer Topaktaş, *Osmanlı – Lehistan Diplomatik İlişkileri: Franciszek Piotr Potocki'nin İstanbul Elçiliği (1788-1793)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 17.

⁷³ Jerzy Lukowski, "Political Ideas Among the Polish Nobility in the Eighteenth Century (to 1788)." *The Slavonic and East European Review* Vol.82 No.1 (2004): 2.

⁷⁴ Eversley, *The Partition of Poland*, 22-25.

reign of Augustus III, during the 30 years of his rule.⁷⁵

The *liberum veto*, an incredibly strong anti-legislation tool, was granted to all members of the nobility in the Polish parliament, the *Sejm*. Anyone somehow possessing noble blood, but not necessarily a noble lifestyle, was able to use it.⁷⁶ This gave ill-intentioned foreign powers the opportunity to exploit it. It was easy to find a backward and impoverished deputy to induce by a large bribe to utter veto in order to prevent the unwanted measures. The entire governmental system of administration was crippled by this obstacle. The weakness of the whole Polish parliamentary system was carefully fostered by the Republic's neighbors. Russia of course was one of them, applying it most frequently by easily buying off the not-so-well-off members of the *Szlachta*.⁷⁷ Once entangled with the Polish domestic affairs, it was Russia's primary aim to preserve the so called golden liberty of the *Szlachta*, i.e. the *liberum veto*.⁷⁸

3.5 The Right to Resistance – The Confederations

Along with the *liberum veto*, the right to form confederations was another element that paved the way for anarchy in Poland. The *Szlachta* had a legal 'right of resistance' to fight against an unjust ruler. The practice of Confederation – i.e. the formation of an armed league to correct a breach of the constitution- was an

⁷⁵ Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, 7; P. Skwarczyński, "The Constitution of Poland Before the Partitions", in *The Cambridge History of Poland: From Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)*, edited by W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1941), 52-53.

⁷⁶ Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland*, 4-6.

⁷⁷ Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 206.

⁷⁸ John T. Alexander, *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 112-113.

established part of the political life, later providing grounds for resistance to the imposed rule of foreign regimes.⁷⁹ Just like the *liberum veto*, this, too, was abused by foreign powers. Russia, for instance, had no difficulty in finding a group of the *szlachta* ready to gather to fight for Russian interests.⁸⁰ The armed confederations not only fought against the government but also against each other. Some confederations, having lost in their struggle sometimes fled to other countries and thus potentially internationalized the nature of the cause that they were fighting for.⁸¹ The events preceding the First Partition of Poland, for instance, included a further party to the ongoing clashes within the country – the Ottoman Empire, whose involvement sparked a war between it and Russia, the consequences of which would be devastating both for the Porte and the *Rzeczpospolita*.

3.6 The Dissidents

Even though the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1700 could generally be considered a religiously tolerant state⁸² this was no longer true by the start of the 18th century.⁸³ Poland had been converted to Christianity at the end of the 10th century, whereas Lithuania had remained pagan until the end of the 14th century. The marriage between the Jagiellon and Anjou dynasties imposed Christianity on

⁷⁹ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 260-261; Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 183-184.

⁸⁰ Skwarczyński, “The Constitution of Poland Before the Partitions”, 60; Sidney Harcave, *Russia: A History*, (New York: Lippincott Company, 1964), 144.

⁸¹ Herbert H. Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 91; W. F. Reddaway, “The First Partition”, in *The Cambridge History of Poland: From Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)*, edited by W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1941), 101-102.

⁸² Arnold and Zychowski, *Outline History of Poland*, 45-51; Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 87-88

⁸³ Ivan Rudnytsky, “Polish-Ukrainian Relations: The Burden of History” In *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, edited by Peter Potichnyj, (Toronto: Webcom, 1980), 5-9.

Lithuania, yet, the Lithuanians chose to adopt Orthodoxy. The 16th century reformation was followed by the introduction of Lutheranism into the German-speaking cities of west and north of Poland. Poland also happened to possess the largest Jewish population in Europe.⁸⁴

Yet, by the middle of the 17th century, Catholic Church had fully re-established itself in Poland. A Polish identity was increasingly defined by Catholicism. As a result of the success of the Counter Reformation in Poland, the country was fiercely Catholic and the state oppressed the relatively small number of non-Catholics, i.e the Orthodox in the east and the Lutherans in the north. The minorities were restricted and their civil and political rights were reduced. As a result of this harsh policy, some Orthodox Christians broke away from their church and accepted the Pope as their spiritual leader, while retaining their own Slavonic liturgy.⁸⁵ Yet, these Uniates, intermediate between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, were welcomed neither by the Catholic Church nor by society, being labelled as second-class Christians.⁸⁶ The Dissidents were also socially and politically disadvantaged and suffered some religious harassment, which led the dissidents living in Poland to ally themselves with neighboring powers.⁸⁷ Thus, the Uniates, the Orthodox and the Protestants living in the Commonwealth presented an easy pretext for foreign powers to intervene on the grounds of the

⁸⁴ Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty*, 205. Robert Howard Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland: A Study in Diplomatic History*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 26-27.

⁸⁵ Jozef Lobodowski, "A Polish View of Polish-Ukrainian Influences", in *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, edited by Peter Potichnyj, (Toronto: Webcom, 1980), 100.

⁸⁶ Skwarczyński, "The Constitution of Poland Before the Partitions", 67-68.

⁸⁷ Jaroslaw Pelenski, "Russia, Poland and Ukraine: Historical and Political Perspectives", in *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, edited by Peter Potichnyj, (Toronto: Webcom, 1980), 308-309.

restoration of their social and political rights.⁸⁸ Orthodox Ukrainians preferred Russian rule⁸⁹ and thus strongly opposed the Catholization and Polonization of the Republic.⁹⁰ Encouraged by Orthodox clergy inside Poland, Russia would intervene in Polish internal affairs on behalf of Orthodox believers several times.⁹¹

⁸⁸ R. J. W. Evans, "The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in International Context", in *The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, 1500-1795*, edited by Richard Butterwick, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 32-33.

⁸⁹ Ivan Rudnytsky, "Polish-Ukrainian Relations: The Burden of History", 13.

⁹⁰ Andrzej Kamiński, "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Its Citizens: Was the Commonwealth a Stepmother for Cossacs and Ruthenians", in *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, edited by Peter Potichnyj, (Toronto: Webcom, 1980), 43-44.

⁹¹ Hosking, *Russia and Russians*, 191.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROAD TO THE FIRST PARTITION

“One Pole – A Charmer, two Poles – a brawl;
Three Poles – ah, that’s the Polish Question!”

Voltaire⁹²

4.1 The Royal Election of 1764 and Its Aftermath

The death of Augustus III was the trigger for the events that lead up the partition of Poland. The Polish Royal Elections turned into a show of strength between the major powers of Eastern Europe, i.e. Prussia, Russia, and Austria. Fortunately the tension did not immediately escalate into a European war. Yet, the process of these Polish royal elections marked the first tilting in the Eastern European balance of power.

⁹² Norman Davies, *God’s Playground*, 511.

4.1.1 The Russo – Prussian Agreement on the Polish Election

Augustus III was the second Polish king to come from the House of Wettin of Saxony. His origins alone might have been enough to unite the enemies of Poland. Russia, on one hand, found it in her best interests to keep the "free" royal elections going in order to have a say in Polish internal affairs but consecutively Saxon kings all elected from the same family might potentially turn the Polish throne into a hereditary one for the Wettins, as Count Nikita Panin, Catherine's principal adviser in foreign affairs, was honest enough to admit.⁹³ Russia needed a weak and a divided Poland, of the kind which could be achieved through the election of a king who owed his throne to Russia and so was dependent on Catherine.⁹⁴ In addition, on her recent accession to Russian throne, Catherine required a foreign policy success to consolidate her power at home and abroad and she believed that if she managed to place a pro-Russian candidate on the Polish throne, she would accomplish this by placating possible critics inside Russia.⁹⁵

Prussia, on the other hand, did not want to see another Saxon King on the Polish throne, as the Saxons were serious regional rivals for Prussia and termination of the Saxon – Polish link would benefit Prussia by reducing Saxon power in the region.⁹⁶ Frederick fully realized the importance of Russia as an ally. For him, Russia was a power that would make all Europe tremble in half a

⁹³ W.F. Reddaway, "Great Britain and Poland 1762-1772", *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 3 (1934): 245.

⁹⁴ H. M. Scott, "Great Britain, Poland and the Russian Alliance, 1763-1767", *The Historical Journal* Vol. 19 No. 1 (1976): 56; Lukowski, "Towards Partition", 564.

⁹⁵ Richard Butterwick, "The Enlightened Monarchy of Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764-1795)." In *The Polish-Lithuanian Monarchy in European Context, 1500-1795*, edited by Richard Butterwick, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 195.

⁹⁶ Albert Sorel, *The Eastern Question in the Eighteenth Century: The Partition of Poland and the Treaty of Kainardji*, trans. F. C. Bramwell, (London: Methuen & Co, 1898), 13-14.

century.⁹⁷ In the Seven Years' War, it was the Russian armies that had caused Prussia to suffer serious defeats, especially at Zorndorf and Kunersdorf, and again, it was thanks to developments in Russia that the "Miracle of the House of Brandenburg" happened. Frederick knew very well that the friendship of Russia was the salvation of Prussia. He dreaded Russia most among other countries and he understood that he could not afford to be in collision with his country's big eastern neighbor again and so decided to join Russia on the Polish election.⁹⁸

These concerns drew Russia and Prussia together and an unexpected "divine favor"⁹⁹, as Catherine called it, occurred when the Saxon candidate, Frederick Christian died of smallpox at the end of 1763. His 13 year-old son was not eligible to rule and this left only Prince Xavier, the oldest brother of Frederick Christian as a possible candidate for the Polish throne.¹⁰⁰

Frederick II, by playing on Russia's worries about the intentions of its southern neighbor, the Ottoman Empire, managed to guarantee the Russian alliance on the Polish election. Rexin, the Prussian ambassador at Constantinople, proposed an alliance¹⁰¹ to the Ottoman Sultan, Mustafa III, against Russia, which he deliberately intended to be discovered by Prince Nikolay Repnin.¹⁰² He, at the same time attempted to provoke the Porte into a war against Russia, by claiming

⁹⁷ Norwood Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1919), 380.

⁹⁸ James Breck Perkins, "The Partition of Poland", *The American Historical Review* Vol.2 No.1 (1896): 81.

⁹⁹ Isabel De Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, (London: Phoenix, 2002), 190.

¹⁰⁰ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 30.

¹⁰¹ Kemal Beydilli, *1790 Osmanlı – Prusya İttifâkı: Meydana Gelişi, Tahlili, Tatbiki*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1984), 18.

¹⁰² Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 385-386; Salahattin Tansel, "Osmanlı–Leh Münasebetleri 1764-1768", *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* Vol. 4 No. 1 (1946): 72.

that the latter was conspiring to invade Poland.¹⁰³ Frederick's approaches to the Turks were intended to arouse anxiety in Russia and his intentions were fulfilled. Frederick persuaded Catherine, who was already afraid of a united Austrian-French-Turkish front against Russia,¹⁰⁴ to conclude a formal alliance in 1764, based on the earlier treaty between Frederick II and Peter III in 1762. The new treaty was to last for eight years, binding Frederick II to support the election of Stanisław August Poniatowski, whom Catherine proposed for the Polish throne, thereby enabling both Russia and Prussia also to protect the Dissidents, i.e. adherents of the Orthodox and Protestant confessions in Poland.¹⁰⁵

Along with their common cause, one of the reasons why Russia came to an understanding with Prussia was due to Panin's design for a so-called "Northern System", which was a set of alliances of the northern states of Europe, i.e. Russia, Prussia, Britain, Sweden and Poland, against the Bourbon – Habsburg league's Catholic alliance and to some extent also the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁶ It aimed to protect western frontiers of Russia, to provide security against Sweden through concluding an alliance with it and to maintain the Russian control over Poland. Yet, Britain was reluctant to commit itself to this system.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Russian insistence on the "Turkish Clause" of the treaty that was meant to be signed with Britain further alienated the latter from concluding an alliance with the former.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Salahattin Tansel, "1768 Seferi Hakkında Bir Araştırma", *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* Vol. 8 No. 4 (1950): 485.

¹⁰⁴ Scott, "Great Britain, Poland and the Russian Alliance", 57.

¹⁰⁵ William Tooke, *The Life of Catherine II, Empress of Russia*, (London: New Bridge, 1800), 439; Harcave, *Russia: A History*, 153-154.

¹⁰⁶ Black, *The Rise of the European Powers*, 122; Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, 270-271.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Roberts, "Great Britain, Denmark and Russia, 1763-70", in *Studies in Diplomatic History*, edited by Ragnhild Hatton and Matthew Smith Anderson, (Great Britain, Archon Books: 1970), 236-237.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Smith Anderson, "Great Britain and the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74", *The English*

British reluctance to undertake to aid Russia in the event of a Turkish attack, pushed Russia and Prussia even closer, especially over events relating to Poland. To Britain matters relating to Poland alone were a very remote consideration.¹⁰⁹

News of the negotiations between Prussia and Russia and rumors about the intentions of Frederick and Catherine towards Poland in terms of a possible partition began to spread rapidly. Frederick's designs on Western Prussia were already known. In a treatise he wrote when he was twenty one, Frederick argued that the acquisition of this territory was necessary to link up the scattered lands of Prussia.¹¹⁰ His fanciful early thoughts on the eastward expansion of Prussia were not forgotten in his maturity. Even though Frederick already hinted at such plans in 1752 in his testament, depicting Poland as an artichoke, which was "ready to be consumed leaf by leaf", sometimes a city, sometimes a district, until all is eaten up¹¹¹, he was quick to deny such accusations in 1764. He assured the Austrian Ambassador that there was no plan for the partition of Poland by Russia and Prussia.¹¹² Catherine, too, disclaimed any such idea, stating that she never had any such intention, nor felt the need to extend the limits of the Russian Empire.¹¹³

Historical Review Vol. 69 No. 227 (1954): 39; Scott, "France and the Polish Throne", 372.

¹⁰⁹ H. M. Scott, "Great Britain, Poland and the Russian Alliance, 1763-1767", *The Historical Journal* Vol. 19 No. 1 (1976): 58-63.

¹¹⁰ Peter H. Wilson, "Prussia's Relations with the Holy Roman Empire, 1740-1786", *The Historical Journal* Vol. 51 No. 2 (2008): 339-341; Sebastian Haffner, *The Rise and Fall of Prussia*, trans. Ewald Osers, (London: Phoenix, 1998), 63.

¹¹¹ Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, 163; Sautin, "The First Partition of Poland", 123.

¹¹² Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 383; Eversley, *The Partition of Poland*, 43.

¹¹³ Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 228.

4.1.2 The Southern Stance

Unlike Russia and Prussia, Austria, France and the Ottoman Empire did not have a consensus on a common candidate for the Polish throne and therefore, they failed to present strong opposition to the Russo-Prussian candidate Poniatowski. The inability of the “Southern States” to unite was to have dire consequences for the upcoming elections for the Polish throne – the least troublesome election in the Republic’s history, according to the soon-to-be-elected king, Poniatowski.¹¹⁴

The reasons why Prussia did not want a Saxon king on the Polish throne were exactly the reasons why Austria wished to see one. A Saxon king on the Polish throne was in Austria’s interest, as Saxony was pro-Austria and Catholic and thus, would be a means to counterbalance Prussian influence in the region. For this reason, Austria at first declared its support for Prince Xavier. However, news of the arrival of Russian troops in Poland alarmed Austria, forcing Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, the Austrian Foreign Minister, to reconsider his country’s preferences.¹¹⁵

France had always regarded Poland as one of the pivots of French policy in Eastern Europe against the Habsburgs and Russia.¹¹⁶ Even though France had played an active role in the previous elections of Poland, this time, it was not its priority. France did not want to risk a war against Prussia and Russia; instead, it tried to influence its ally, the Ottoman Empire to intervene in the elections and

¹¹⁴ Özlem Akay, “Madame Geoffrin ile Yazışmaları Işığında Stanisław August Poniatowski’nin 1764-1768 Yılları Arasındaki Politik Portresi”, (Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2006), 23.

¹¹⁵ Saul K. Padover, “Prince Kaunitz and the First Partition of Poland”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* Vol.13 No.38 (1935): 384.

¹¹⁶ Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland*, 38.

thus, was half-hearted in its support for the Saxon candidate.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the French King Louis XV's system of *Secret du Roi* was another important factor, causing French influence over Poland to diminish. Apart from the regularly accredited representatives of France in European courts, the King himself had his own diplomatic system, consisting of secret agents, which directly corresponded with the king. The King's instructions to official representatives were most of the time in conflict with the ones sent to his *Secret du Roi* agents and thus, two opposing views tended to neutralize each other, with neither having any real impact on European courts.¹¹⁸ The Polish election is an excellent example of this debatable policy, as the French Secretary for Foreign Affairs used to ask "what do we care for that republic?" while the King's "secret diplomats" were trying to find a way to have an impact on the outcome of the election.¹¹⁹

The Porte declared that it would not tolerate any foreigner taking the Polish throne, as the king must be a native-born Pole.¹²⁰ Still, the Ottomans did not want to meddle with Polish internal affairs. Ahmed Resmi Efendi, when heading to Prussia after being appointed as the Ottoman envoy in Berlin, was instructed to go directly to Berlin without losing time in Poland on the occasion of the death of Augustus III,¹²¹ which might be considered an indication of the Ottoman reluctance to take an active part in the upcoming Polish elections.

¹¹⁷ Padover, "Prince Kaunitz and the First Partition of Poland", 384.

¹¹⁸ Scott, "France and the Polish Throne", 384-385.

¹¹⁹ Perkins, "The Partition of Poland", 78-79; Scott, "France and the Polish Throne", 381-383.

¹²⁰ Tansel, "Osmanlı-Leh Münasebetleri 1764-1768", 73-74; Tooke, *The Life of Catherine II, Empress of Russia*, 440.

¹²¹ Tansel, "1768 Seferi Hakkında Bir Araştırma", 489; Virginia H. Aksan, *Savaşta ve Barışta Bir Osmanlı Devlet Adamı: Ahmed Resmi Efendi (1700-1783)*, trans. Özden Arıkan. (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1997), 82-83.

A mere Ottoman declaration for a Piast candidate was not enough for Austria to risk a war against Russia over a candidate not favored by Russia. Austria showed no signs of going beyond diplomatic support.¹²² Since no money, troops or diplomatic support could be expected from any foreign power, Prince Xavier realized that he could not compete for the throne.¹²³ So he withdrew from the elections and thus leaving Poniatowski as the only candidate for the Polish throne.

4.2 A Failed Rival and the Results of the Elections

As the date of the Dietine convocations approached, the anti-Russian Polish Hetman Branicki looked around for possible foreign help to decrease the Russian impact on the elections. He sent a letter to the Porte, complaining about the number of Russian troops in Poland and asking to counterbalance Russia's activities. Hearing the news of the Hetman's letter, the pro-Russian Poles too sent a letter to İstanbul, repudiating the letter of the *Hetman*. As a result the Ottomans decided at this stage to adopt a policy of wait-and-see.¹²⁴

Seeing no proper support, along with Radziwills and Potockis, Branicki family decided to support Jan Klemens Branicki, the Grand Hetman of the Crown for the Polish throne against pro-Russian Czartoryski's, candidate, Stanislas August Poniatowski.¹²⁵ In April 1764, the Convocation Sejm met to choose the future king of Poland. Yet, the Russian troops whose presence was requested by

¹²² Sautin, "The First Partition of Poland", 125.

¹²³ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 32.

¹²⁴ Tansel, "Osmanlı-Leh Münasebetleri 1764-1768", 74-75.

¹²⁵ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 33.

Czartoryski's in order to support Poniatowski's candidature, were rapidly sent the rival candidate and his supporter away. Branicki had to seek refuge in Hungary, while Radziwiłł fled to the Ottoman Empire.¹²⁶ Catherine, ironically, was thanked by some members of *Szlachta* for defending Polish liberties. Catherine congratulated Panin "on the king we have made".¹²⁷ In September 13, Poniatowski signed the *pacta conventa* and he was crowned In November 25. The coronation took place, for the first time, in Warsaw, strangely enough, on Saint Catherine's day.¹²⁸

Russia and Prussia immediately recognized Poniatowski's election, whereas France declared that so long as the Ottoman Empire did not recognize Poniatowski as the legitimate king of Poland, France would not do so either.¹²⁹ In the Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, the result of the elections was not welcomed at all. Nor was the newly appointed Polish envoy to the Porte. The Polish envoy, who was meant to announce Poniatowski's victory, was held in abeyance for a long time before being allowed to enter İstanbul.¹³⁰ It took Austria almost a year to recognize Poniatowski as the legitimate king of Poland, and it was possible largely thanks to the connections of his brother, Andrzej Poniatowski, who was serving in the Austrian army at that time.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 41; Sautin, "The First Partition of Poland", 126.

¹²⁷ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 191.

¹²⁸ Adam Zamoyski, *The Last King of Poland*, (New York: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1998), 101.

¹²⁹ Hacer Topaktaş, "Avrupa'nın Ortak Derdi Polonya Tahtı: Stanisław August Poniatowski'nin Seçimi (1763-1764)", *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* Vol. 28 No. 1 (2011), 193.

¹³⁰ Tansel, "Osmanlı-Leh Münasebetleri 1764-1768", 79; "1768 Seferi Hakkında Bir Araştırma", 503.

¹³¹ Özlem Akay, "Stanisław August Poniatowski'nin Politik Portresi", 38.

4.3 Poniatowski, Reforms and the Dissident Question

Poniatowski had been born in 1732. Through his mother, he was one of the influential Czartoryskis known in Poland simply as “The Family”. He found the *Szlachta* generally dull, provincial and stupid. In 1755, he managed to escape from his surroundings, going to Russia, as Polish minister-plenipotentiary and there, thanks to his friend Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams, the British envoy at St. Petersburg, he met the young Grand Duchess Catherine for the first time, whose official lover he quickly became.¹³² This love affair was to have a dire impact on future Polish-Russian relations. Russia would become pro-Czartoryski and the Czartoryskis would be pro-Russian. He returned to Poland three years later and did not meet her again face to face for another 30 years.¹³³

Soon after his election, Poniatowski, in the early days of his reign, contrary to popular belief that he was merely a Russian puppet, surprised everyone with his reforming spirit.¹³⁴ Even the envoy of the Papal nuncio to Poland observed that Poniatowski possessed “a burning desire to reform the whole country in one day – if only he could- and the entire nation, in order to bring it up to the level of other, more advanced nations”.¹³⁵ He very well understood the sources of the inefficiency of the Polish state: Firstly, weak centralization of the government due to the *Szlachta's liberum veto*, and secondly, the lack of a strong, standing army. He could not abolish the *liberum veto* because he did not have an army to fight against its defenders. At the same time because he could not get rid of the *liberum*

¹³² Robert Nisbet Bain, *The Last King of Poland and His Contemporaries*, (New York: Putnam's Sons: 1909), 58.

¹³³ Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 222-224.

¹³⁴ Zamoyski, *The Last King of Poland*, 123.

¹³⁵ Lukowski, “Towards Partition”, 557.

veto, he could not establish a strong army. It was a vicious cycle that had to be broken.¹³⁶

The Polish army had less than 20000 troops ready to serve, a tiny number compared to its neighbors. Russia had around 300,000; Austria around 200,000; and Prussia around 200,000.¹³⁷ In order to reform the army, the *Szkola Rycerska*, literally ‘College of Chivalry’, the first entirely secular state-run academy for the training of administrative and military cadres, was established by Poniatowski on 15 March 1765 and it operated until the final partition of Poland, 1795. The very first of its students included Tadeusz Kosciuszko, who would later shine during the Kosciuszko uprising against the partitioning powers. The Academy was the first step towards the projected establishment of a strong Polish army to fight against the defenders of the *liberum veto*.¹³⁸

When the first Sejm of Poniatowski’s reign convened in 1766, the abolition of the *liberum veto* was on the agenda, but, due to the vested interests in the *Szlachta*, the abolition of the *liberum veto* was rejected. After all, “how could one abolish the *liberum veto* without someone exercising the *liberum veto*?”¹³⁹ The reforms tending towards the abolishment of the *liberum veto* were against the very spirit of the Russo – Prussian agreement of 1764. Both Prussia and Russia needed the *liberum veto* to keep their neighbor in a constant state of controllable chaos. According to Frederick with the abolition of the *liberum veto*, Poland might

¹³⁶ Vincent Trumpa, “The Disintegration of the Polih-Lithuanian Commonwealth.” *Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 10 No. 2 (1964).

¹³⁷ Hacer Topaktaş, “XVIII. Yüzyıl Ortalarında Türk-Leh İlişkilerinden Bir Kesit: Kapıcıbaşı Mehmed Ağa’nın Lehistan Elçiliği (1757-1758)”, *The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 29 (2007): 215

¹³⁸ Zamoyski, *The Polish Way*, 225.

¹³⁹ Davies, *Europe: A History*, 660.

become a power dangerous to its neighbors.¹⁴⁰ The Dissidents' access to political rights was important for Russia in order to create a strong party in Poland to be relied on.¹⁴¹ This political aim was Russia's chief motive in raising the Dissident question, which was clearly reflected in Panin's instruction of Repnin in 1767, August:

It is necessary to resolve the Dissident affairs not for the sake of propagating our faith and the Protestant in Poland, but for the sake of acquiring for ourselves, through our co-religionists and the Protestants, a firm and reliable party with the legal right to participate in all the affairs of Poland.¹⁴²

To this end a Protestant Confederation was proclaimed at Thorn with Russian and Prussian support and an Orthodox one in Slupsk in early 1767. In late 1767, another confederation in Radom emerged, which gradually spread into a countrywide General Confederation comprising around 80,000 members of all shades of opinions, including ones which supported the King and others who wanted to dethrone him. Yet, with its wide composition, the aims of the General Confederation were far from clear, as also was the future of Poland.¹⁴³ The Republic was dragged into a bloody civil war.

¹⁴⁰ Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 384.

¹⁴¹ Lord, *The Second Partition of Poland*, 49.

¹⁴² Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 67.

¹⁴³ Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, 191.

4.4 The Cardinal Laws

In order to deal with the unrest, an extraordinary meeting of the Sejm was called in February 1768. Far from appeasing the fighting parties, the decisions of the 1768 Sejm increased the brutality of the on-going civil war. “The Cardinal Laws”, *prawa kardynalne*, as they were called, confirmed the nobility’s monopoly in Polish politics, further confirmed that royal elections should be free and strictly rejected the abolition of the *liberum veto*. In addition, the Dissidents were granted freedom of worship and more importantly, the right to hold public offices. Russia and Poland signed a “Perpetual Treaty” comprising these “Cardinal Laws” and gave Russia the right to extend for all time its guarantee to maintain the constitution of Poland and its freedom. With this agreement, Poland was more firmly than ever under Russian control. “Polish Anarchy” was safe in Catherine’s hands. As the Empress wrote to her ambassador in Warsaw, Repnin, as long as Russia had the means of using the *liberum veto*, nothing that the Poles did mattered.¹⁴⁴

Yet, Catherine’s knowledge of Church – state relations in Poland, and that of her chief advisor Panin, was very superficial and limited. What had appeared to be the moment of Russian triumph was actually one which exposed its real failure. They could not foresee that The Dissident confederation would be countered by a Catholic one.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 197.

4.5 The Formation of the Bar Confederation

A number of nobles rejected the legality of the Sejm's decisions on the Dissidents and formed a new Confederation at the town of Bar in Podolia on February 28, 1768, with the aim of defending the Catholic faith and driving the Russians out of Poland.¹⁴⁶ Putting aside their political preferences, many rival families of the *Szlachta*, like Potocki, Spieha and Krasinski, came together to fight against the Russians. The manifesto of the Bar Confederation, written by Krasinski, stated that "We, the Councils of the Dignitaries (...) assemble to deliver the country, the faith, the liberties and the national laws and freedom from impending ruin".¹⁴⁷ This unification of the various different shades of political opinions under one banner, fighting against a common foreign enemy might be considered as an early nationalist reaction and the starting point of modern Polish nationalism.¹⁴⁸

The Bar Confederates were very well aware of their military shortcomings against their strong enemy and were looking abroad for military and diplomatic support, in France, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire. France encouraged the Porte by sending a huge sum of money for it to declare war on Russia.¹⁴⁹ The Austrian empress, Maria Theresa, chose not to interfere in Polish affairs. The Confederates asked several times for the support of neighboring Turkish leaders. Nevertheless, they were replied that their pleas for help would not be met until they could

¹⁴⁶ Reddaway, "The First Partition", 100; Corwin, Edward Levinski, *The Political History of Poland*, (New York: Polish Book Importing Company, 1917), 305.

¹⁴⁷ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 94.

¹⁴⁸ Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 519.

¹⁴⁹ Sorel, *The Eastern Question in the Eighteenth Century*, 24-25; Aksan, *Ahmed Resmi Efendi*, 117.

produce a unified organization.¹⁵⁰

Even though the Confederates began their struggle with certain advantages, things did not go as well as planned. A Confederation attempt to kidnap Poniatowski in order to dethrone him failed, due to the fact that the kidnappers lost their way soon after they succeeded in kidnapping the King. One of its members had second thoughts about what they were doing and allowed the King to escape.¹⁵¹ This almost-successful attempt to kidnap the King was a clear indication of the chaotic situation that Poland was now in and at the same time this farcical event led to questioning of the credibility of the Confederates. Anarchy was everywhere and Catherine made use of this “Polish anarchy” as a pretext to send more Russian troops into Poland. Yet, as the number of Russian soldiers increased in the Republic, so did the number of Poles, joining the Bar confederates. Russia lost control over Poland.

4.6 The Internationalization of the Polish Civil War

As other Polish provinces joined the Bar Confederation, the war spread to the southern parts of Poland. At first the Ottoman Empire gave public assurances that it would not intervene in Polish affairs. Ottoman provincial commanders were instructed not to get in touch with the Confederates.¹⁵² Bitter fighting and an orgy of killings took place among the Confederates and the Russians, especially after the involvement of the Russian Cossacks in the conflict. In July 1768, a band of

¹⁵⁰ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 95-98; Tansel, “Osmanlı–Leh Münasebetleri 1764-1768”, 82-83.

¹⁵¹ Bain, *The Last King of Poland*, 117-118.

¹⁵² Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 99.

Cossacks crossed into Crimean territory, in pursuit of Polish confederates and attacked the town of Balta. Aleksey Mikhailovic Obreskov, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, urged Prince Nikolay Repnin, the Russian ambassador to Poland, to put an end to the Confederate affair in order to stay on good terms with the Porte. After all, it was Repnin, who was responsible for the fate of Poland, not Poniatowski. Yet, his pleas to stop the violence fell on deaf ears.¹⁵³ The Porte issued an ultimatum to Russia demanding the evacuation of Poland, the withdrawal of the Russian guarantee of the Polish constitution and of Russian protection for the dissidents.¹⁵⁴ When the Russian envoy Obreskov declared that his government could not meet the demands of the ultimatum¹⁵⁵, he was locked up in the fort of the Yedikule in 8 October 1768¹⁵⁶ - the equivalent of a declaration of war, according to the Turkish practice of international law.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 100.

¹⁵⁴ Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt IV, Bölüm I, 370.

¹⁵⁵ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 196-197.

¹⁵⁶ Fatih Bozkurt ve Ahmet Arslantürk, “İlginç Bir Kadı Sicili: 1768–1772 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi’ne Dair Kayıtlar”, *History Studies* Vol. 4 No. 1 (2012): 53.

¹⁵⁷ Sorel, *The Eastern Question in the Eighteenth Century*, 26.

CHAPTER V

WAR, BALANCE AND PARTITION

“The declaration of war surprised and disconcerted all men – the Turks who had made it, the Russians who had provoked it, the French who had prompted it, the Prussians who had discouraged it, the Austrians who had lived in perpetual dread of it, even the English who pretended to be indifferent to it”.

Albert Sorel¹⁵⁸

5.1 The Russo – Turkish War of 1768 – 1774

The Turkish declaration of war on Russia was a turning point in the history of Eastern Europe. The civil war in Poland transcended the boundaries of the Republic and thus internationalized the nature of the Polish problem. Russia, having failed to suppress the rebellion in Poland, now had to deal with another problem, which would shatter the balance in the region.

¹⁵⁸ Sorel, *The Eastern Question in the Eighteenth Century*, 28.

Obviously, the Russo – Turkish war affected more than just those two countries. European countries dreaded the possibility that the conflict might spread to whole continent, in a way similar to the Seven Years' War. Great Britain immediately offered its good offices for mediation.¹⁵⁹ Nor did Austria want war. Maria Theresa would have been sorry to see the Turks victorious, yet, she also did not wish to see Catherine more powerful than she herself was.¹⁶⁰ Every single possible outcome of the war was against Austria. Friedrich desired peace no less than did Maria Theresa. Even though his scheme of Prussian expansion, including designs on Polish Prussia, still existed theoretically, he expressed no desire to go to war to obtain these ends.¹⁶¹

The Turkish declaration of war over the Polish question was considered to be real stupidity¹⁶² and also ignorance¹⁶³ by some. After all the Cossack razing of the city of Balta had not been done on Russia's directive or aims in mind and Russia had not desired this war since the chaos in Poland was already unmanageable¹⁶⁴ and thus the peace between Russia and Turkey could have been maintained if the Turks had acted more cautiously. On the other hand, the literature available suggests that the Polish affair was not the only reason for the Turkish declaration of war. The Turks had long been worried about the military activities of their northern neighbor. The construction and fortification of fortresses along the Turkish – Russian border was perceived as a sign of a future

¹⁵⁹ Anderson, *Great Britain and the Russo-Turkish War*, 41-43.

¹⁶⁰ Sautin, "The First Partition of Poland", 132; Padover, "Prince Kaunitz", 389.

¹⁶¹ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 110.

¹⁶² Roderick H. Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility: The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered", *Slavic Review* Vol. 35 No. 3 (1976): 483.

¹⁶³ Aksan, *Ahmed Resmi Efendi*, 122-123.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Jones, "Opposition to War and Expansion in the Late Eighteenth Century Russia", *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* Vol. 32 (1984): 38.

Russian offensive towards the Black Sea.¹⁶⁵ In addition, as the balance in Eastern Europe was already in favor of Russia, the election of the pro-Russian Poniatowski as king of Poland further increased the anxiety of the Ottomans about the safety and defense of their northern boundaries. The Polish affair was a further excuse for the Turks to check Russian expansionism.¹⁶⁶ The war itself may even be seen as a pre-emptive strike intended to remind Russia of its territorial limits on the Black Sea.¹⁶⁷

5.1.1 The Beginning

The Ottoman declaration of war was not a severe blow to Russia, since it took almost six months for the Ottoman army to mobilize fully and start the campaign.¹⁶⁸ Yet, for the following months, since the war diverted Russian troops from Poland, Russia had difficulty fighting against both the Ottomans and the Bar Confederates.

The Turkish campaign towards the Balkans or on the Black Sea was a great relief for the Poles, since the Ottoman advance meant the concentration of the Russian forces away from the Polish plains. The Ottomans provided a means of counterbalance against Poland's eastern and western neighbours.¹⁶⁹ So the Turkish war temporarily took the pressure off Poland causing the loosening of the Russian grip upon the Republic. Thanks to the Russo-Turkish War, the Bar

¹⁶⁵ Tansel, "1768 Seferi Hakkında Bir Araştırma", 476; Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi, Vol. V*, 368.

¹⁶⁶ Tansel, "Osmanlı-Leh Münasebetleri 1764-1768", 84.

¹⁶⁷ Virginia H. Aksan, "The One-Eyed Fighting the Blind: Mobilization, Supply and Command in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774", *International History Review* Vol. 15 No. 2 (1993): 225.

¹⁶⁸ Virginia H. Aksan, "Whatever Happened to the Janissaries? Mobilization for the 1768-1774 Russo-Ottoman War", *War in History* Vol. 5 No. 1 (1998): 23-36.

¹⁶⁹ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 304.

Confederates had the upper hand in their fight against Russia within Poland and along the Russian border.¹⁷⁰

5.2 The Polish Anarchy and Precautions of Austria and Prussia

Yet, things were not the same on the Austrian border. The Confederates were losing one battle after another. While being chased by the Russians, they often had to seek refuge in a neighboring country. Austria, knowing the causes of the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, took precautions in February 1769 to avoid the war approaching its borders.¹⁷¹ Austria's border with Poland and the Ottoman Empire was ill defined but the Austrians were quick to invade and plant their eagles at points wherever the ownership of the lands was doubtful and the county of Zips was one of these contested territories, which had been ceded to Poland in 1412.¹⁷²

The Austrian occupation of Zips gave Frederick the opportunity he desired to advance his designs upon Poland. Yet, at first, his efforts to push Russia to agree to a partition of Poland proved futile. Count Victor von Solms, his envoy in St. Petersburg, reported that Russia had no designs of conquest in any direction and the preservation of Poland was really held dear at heart at the Russian Court.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 131.

¹⁷¹ Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, 353-354; Sautin, "The First Partition of Poland", 133.

¹⁷² Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 163-164.

¹⁷³ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 113.

5.3 The Russian Victories & The Balance of Power Spoilt

The Russo-Turkish War was a fight between “the one-eyed and the blind” as it was well put by Frederick II, as neither side was ready for a war.¹⁷⁴ The Ottomans started the war with several advantages. They still controlled the Crimea and the Black Sea, which provided easy entry into Russian territory from the south, plus, enabling them to choose landing and supply points.¹⁷⁵ Yet, in the Ukraine, the Danube valley and the Crimea, the Ottomans suffered a series of major defeats. In September, Hotin fell, followed in November by Bogdan, and then in February 1770 by Wallachia.¹⁷⁶

The naval battles were no different. The Russian navy was also successful in action, despite the fact that the eastern Baltic was Russia’s only access route to the sea. Russia negotiated its first foreign loans to finance the Mediterranean expedition.¹⁷⁷ Thanks to the transportation of the Baltic fleet into the Aegean via Gibraltar, under their able admiral Aleksey Orlov, who had absolutely no previous experience of naval command, the Russians were successful in the sea battles too.¹⁷⁸ The Ottoman admiral Mandalzade Hüsametdin Pasha was outmaneuvered, withdrawing his fleet into the harbor of Çeşme, where the entire Ottoman fleet was destroyed between 5th and 7th July 1770 by Russians under Count Aleksey Orlov with the help of fire ships. The Battle of Çeşme ranks with Lepanto and

¹⁷⁴ George Agar-Ellis Dover, *The Life of Frederick the Second, King of Prussia*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), 246.

¹⁷⁵ Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 142-147.

¹⁷⁶ Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt IV, Bölüm I, 382-384.

¹⁷⁷ Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 131.

¹⁷⁸ Aleksandr B. Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Searching for a Place in the World*, trans. David Griffiths. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 249-251.

Trafalgar as a naval battle which marked the course of world history and created a national myth. After the victory, Aleksey Orlov was allowed to add Chesmensky to his name.¹⁷⁹ The Çeşme victory was Russia's first naval victory in nine hundred years, and would not have been possible without British logistical help.¹⁸⁰ In her correspondence with Voltaire, Catherine said that Count Orlov had reported that the harbor of Çeşme was stained with blood of the Turks. In commemoration of the triumph, she commissioned the construction of the Çeşme Palace in St. Petersburg.¹⁸¹

On the very same day of the Çeşme defeat, the Ottomans were severely defeated on the banks of Larga river too. Two weeks after the Battle of Larga, the battle of Kagul took place. After the Ottoman defeat in August 1770, the fortresses of İsmail, Kili, Bender, Akkerman fell one after another. The left bank of the Danube was abandoned to the Russians.¹⁸²

The Porte was left desperately looking for ways to come to terms and requested mediation from Vienna and Berlin.¹⁸³ The already-upset balance of power in Eastern Europe had been upset once again, this time in favor of Russia.

5.4 Balancing Politics of Austria and Prussia

These almost-decisive Russian victories against the Ottomans alarmed the other two pillars of the Eastern European balance of power system. Neither Austria nor

¹⁷⁹ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 211.

¹⁸⁰ Lieven, *Empire*, 269; Reddaway, "Great Britain and Poland", 257.

¹⁸¹ Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 132.

¹⁸² Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt IV, Bölüm I, 385-389.

¹⁸³ Kemal Beydilli, *Büyük Friedrich ve Osmanlılar – XVIII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı-Prusya Münasebetleri*. (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1985), 99; Köse, *Küçük Kaynarca Andlaşması*, 104-106.

Prussia was prepared to see Russia make unilateral gains at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸⁴ For Kaunitz, Austria had more to fear from Russia than Prussia. Austria was concerned about Russian gains in the Danubian principalities, while Prussia was anxious about the unbalancing consequences of an excessive growth of Russian power.¹⁸⁵ These twin concerns brought Austria and Prussia on the same side. Frederick and Joseph met in the first days of September 1770 at Neustadt. Kaunitz too was present in the meeting and declared that Austria would not allow Russia beyond the Danube. Frederick seconded his views but at the same time denied the possibility of any kind of military action because Russia and Prussia were theoretically allies.¹⁸⁶ So far, in the negotiations the Polish problem had hardly come up, even though it was the cause of the Russo-Turkish war.¹⁸⁷ On 4th of September, the Turkish request for mediation arrived.¹⁸⁸ In order to check Russian expansion, the offer of mediation was accepted and conveyed to the Empress in the following month.¹⁸⁹ This offer of mediation was in fact an implicit message to Catherine to show that Vienna and Berlin were on the same side against Russian expansionism. Yet, Russia, being simultaneously still victorious against the Turks and the Poles, was far from accepting the mediation of Austria and Prussia and thus allowing them to meddle in the affairs of Russia and Turkey. Catherine believed that the peace terms should be dictated to the Turks only by the Russians.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Eversley, *The Partition of Poland*, 31-34.

¹⁸⁵ Black, *The Rise of the European Powers*, 123.

¹⁸⁶ John S. C. Abbott, *History of the Frederick the Second Called Frederick the Great*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 545.

¹⁸⁷ Padover, "Prince Kaunitz and the First Partition of Poland", 392.

¹⁸⁸ Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 392.

¹⁸⁹ Padover, "Prince Kaunitz and the First Partition of Poland", 388.

¹⁹⁰ Martin Sicker, *The Islamic World in Decline from the Treaty of Karlowitz to the Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire*, (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 74.

5.4.1 The Prussian Stance

The Prussians did not have many options regarding the Russian victories over the Poles and the Ottomans. They could either stop the Russians and earn their enmity or join the Russian bandwagon hoping to extract advantage from the chaotic situation in Eastern Europe. Yet, joining up with the Russians might upset the Austrians and thus, lead the latter to join forces with the Ottomans and the Poles, which might even activate one of the two main alliances in Europe¹⁹¹, that is to say, a Franco – Austrian alliance against a Russo – Prussian one. This might then precipitate a general war in Europe, something which neither side desired.¹⁹² thus, refraining from entering into an anti-Russian alliance, Frederick decided to act unilaterally in Poland. Due to the plague then sweeping across Poland, Prussia announced that in order to protect the health of the Prussian people, Prussia would draw a cordon along the Polish frontier.¹⁹³ Yet, even unilateral Prussian action in Poland did not deter the Russians from advancing against the Turks.¹⁹⁴ Frederick, still remembering the battles of Zorndorf and Kunersdorf, could not risk a war against the Empress in order to preserve the balance of power in Eastern Europe.

¹⁹¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Life of Frederick the Great*, (New York: Useful Knowledge Publishing Company, 1882), 128; Eversley, *The Partition of Poland*, 45.

¹⁹² Charles Booth Brackenbury, *Frederick the Great*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1884), 251; Sautin, “The First Partition of Poland”, 131-132; Thomas Carlyle, *Frederick the Great*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), 95.

¹⁹³ Sorel, *The Eastern Question*, 49-50; Sautin, “The First Partition of Poland”, 136.

¹⁹⁴ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 220; Jones, “Late Eighteenth Century Russia”, 40.

5.4.2 The Austrian Stance

Unlike Prussia, Austria did not remain still. In Kaunitz's view Austria could never allow Russia to cross the Danube. The Austrians started secret negotiations with the Ottomans for an anti-Russian alliance in exchange for territorial compensation. On June 1771, Russian troops entered Orkapisı and advanced to the Crimea,¹⁹⁵ which accelerated the negotiation process. The agreement was concluded in July 1771. According to it, Turkey was to cede Little Wallachia to Austria in return for the latter's aid to the Turks in their war against the Russians. In the event of Russia persisting in its expansion southwards, Austria would undertake to intervene the war on the Ottoman side.¹⁹⁶ Maria Theresa, hated Catherine so much that she referred to her as "that woman"¹⁹⁷ and welcomed the rapprochement and cooperation with the Turks on the Polish question.¹⁹⁸ For Kaunitz, aspects such as religious differences could not be taken into consideration, when Austria's national interests were at stake.¹⁹⁹

5.5 Diplomatic Maneuvering

Even though the Austrians concluded the defensive alliance with the Turks, neither they nor the Prussians really wanted war. Frederick's solution was an

¹⁹⁵ Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 42-43.

¹⁹⁶ Saul K. Padover, "Prince Kaunitz' Résumé of His Eastern Policy, 1763-71, " *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 5 No. 3 (1933): 352; Roeder, *Austria's Eastern Question*, 120; Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi, Vol. VI/I*, 390.

¹⁹⁷ Winter, *Poland of Today and Yesterday*, 95.

¹⁹⁸ Reddaway, "Great Britain and Poland", 256.

¹⁹⁹ Sicker, *The Islamic World in Decline*, 71.

agreement to offset the threat to the balance of power in Eastern Europe posed by excessive Russian gains at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, by allowing Austria and Prussia a share with Russia in a partition of Poland.²⁰⁰ Frederick used the Austro-Turkish alliance as an argument to convince the Empress that Austria was dangerous and used the threat of a possible Prussian accord with Austria for a partition. He asserted that Russia could not obtain any compensation on the Danube without a war with Austria, suggesting that the partition of Poland was instead the best plan for compensating Russia for the cost of the Turkish war. Catherine thought that it was better for Russia to retain its hold over the whole of Poland.²⁰¹

The Austrian advance and the possibility of Prussia following the same course did influence Catherine. The Russian Empress was alarmed by Austria's threatening and belligerent attitude. Catherine, though victorious against the Turks and the Poles, could not afford to go to war against Austria without Prussian support and so, finally gave in.²⁰²

The Treaty of Partition was at length signed at St. Petersburg, on the 17th February 1772. As Frederick had foreseen, the agreement between Prussia and Russia forced the hand of Austria. Frederick wanted Austria to participate in the partition too, because he thought if Austria obtained no part of Poland and Prussia and Russia alone took some districts from the Poles, all the hatred of the Poles would be turned upon them.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Black, *The Rise of the European Powers*, 124.

²⁰¹ Perkins, "The Partition of Poland", 87.

²⁰² Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 393.

²⁰³ B. Dembinski, "The Age of Stanislas Augustus and the National Revival", in *The Cambridge History of Poland: From Augustus II to Pilsudski (1697-1935)*, edited by W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1941), 109-110; Beydilli,

Maria Theresa regarded a tripartite partition of Poland as a crime, yet, her Foreign Minister could not tolerate the idea of Russia and Prussia benefitting from the Partition without Austria.²⁰⁴ Pressured by her son Joseph as well, Maria Theresa gave in. Theresa wept because she showed consent for the partition. Yet, she was weeping and taking at the same time. The more she cried, the more she took, according to Frederick.²⁰⁵

Nevertheless, it took a full two months for the Austrians to renounce the treaty of alliance with the Ottomans. In April 1772, the Austrians withdrew from the defensive treaty.²⁰⁶ The Ottoman Porte, abandoned by its main ally against Russia, sued for peace in May 1772.²⁰⁷ The parties had to wait for another two years to conclude a decisive peace treaty, but Russia, having secured its southern frontier for the time being, signed the treaties of the First Partition of Poland with Prussia and Austria on July 25, 1772. From this moment, the First Partition was inevitable.

5.6 The First Partition

In early August, Austrian, Prussian and Russian troops simultaneously entered the Commonwealth and started to occupy the provinces agreed between them. Each sovereign tried to prove that his country had legitimate claims to a part of Poland and that the seizures were only a just resumption of sovereignty. Austria went

Büyük Frederick, 100; Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 396;

²⁰⁴ Franz A. J. Szabo, *Kaunitz and Enlightened Absolutism 1753-1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 109.

²⁰⁵ Young, *The Life of Frederick the Great*, 399.

²⁰⁶ Sicker, *The Islamic World in Decline*, 72.

²⁰⁷ Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, IV. Cilt, I. Bölüm, 414.

back more than three hundred and fifty years to establish her claims on Poland. Russia had always laid claim to the greater part of Lithuania, based on the large Orthodox population living there. Prussia's claims were based on the conquests of the Teutonic Knights, and the strip of Polish territory which divided the territory of Prussia into two parts. The sovereigns of the partitioning powers had the audacity to say that the partition was for the restoration of the prosperity of Poland.²⁰⁸

Even though the regiments of the Bar Confederations did not lay down their arms, there was nothing much left that they could do against the armies of the three countries. In 1773, a confederated *Sejm* met. Its sole purpose was to confirm the partition treaties.²⁰⁹ Suitable and compliant deputies had been elected, who were, just in case, also sweetened by foreign money and surrounded by foreign troops. Only a few members of the *Sejm* openly opposed ratifying the treaty. However, nothing changed in the end. In the summer of 1773 Poniatowski signed the necessary documents, ceding territory to the partitioning powers. The First Partition was complete.²¹⁰

All partitioning powers were satisfied with their shares. Frederick was elated with his success, while Kaunitz was especially happy with the large amount of territory Austria acquired and particularly with Wieliczka, which would enable Austria to have a salt monopoly in the region through its rich mines.²¹¹ Catherine declared that she had never signed a treaty with so much satisfaction.²¹² She had to wait for another two years before she signed another treaty with even more

²⁰⁸ Winter, *Poland of Today and Yesterday*, 96-98.

²⁰⁹ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 174.

²¹⁰ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 181.

²¹¹ Corwin, *The Political History of Poland*, 312.

²¹² Perkins, "The Partition of Poland", 92.

satisfaction, this time with the Ottomans.

5.7 Results of the First Partition

The most obvious result of the Partition was that Poland lost some 30 per cent of its territory and 35 per cent of its population. The loss of control over the Lower Vistula, Poland's trade route to the Baltic coast and to the outside world, was very serious for trade and the economy.²¹³

Prussia gained Warmia, Kujawy and northern parts of Wielkopolska excluding Gdańsk and Toruń, 36.000 square kilometres with 580.000 inhabitants; Austria annexed Zator, Oświęcim, Sandomierz, Bochnia, Wieliczka, Galicia and some parts of Małopolska, 83.000 square kilometres with 2.650.000 inhabitants; and Russia took Witebsk, Polock, Mscislaw, as far as the rivers Dvina and Dnieper, 92.000 square kilometres with 1.300.000 inhabitants.

The three powers derived not only different amounts of land and population, but also contrasting advantages and benefits which had been carefully considered by the three Powers at the negotiating table. Prussia's smaller share should not be allowed to overshadow the fact that it received the most commercially important part of Poland, whereas Russia got the largest portion and Austria – the most populous.²¹⁴ Prussia's share, although the smallest, was the one which was most valuable to its new ruler. Not only did it contain the most economically developed areas, but also it gave Prussia control of much of the important commercial waterway of the Vistula. It also created the desired land bridge between East

²¹³ Reddaway, "The First Partition", 110-111.

²¹⁴ Coxe, *Travels into Poland*, 62.

Prussia and the rest of the kingdom linking Brandenburg to East Prussia. Frederick's primary ambition had been realized.²¹⁵

Because Prussia needed the Polish territories of West Prussia to consolidate its existing territory Russia had earlier had a growing fear that Prussia might proceed to a unilateral annexation of part of Poland. This and the war with the Ottomans, had obliged Russia to take part in the Partition. Though it was at heart opposed to any kind of partition, Austria could not afford to be at a disadvantage with respect to the others, if the balance of power was to be maintained.²¹⁶

Russia in many ways could be said to have gained the least. Instead of maintaining an undivided large state as its satellite, Russia now had to share its exclusive influence over Poland with two Germanic states. The first partition, at the same time, was a step closer towards having common frontiers with formidable neighbors as Prussia and Austria, as it started the process of the dissolution of a buffer state.²¹⁷

5.8 The End of the War and the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca

Between 1771 and 1773, Catherine had also to cope with the Turkish War, the plague in Moscow, the *coup* of Gustavus III in Sweden and the Pugachev rebellion.²¹⁸ Yet, she showed great unwillingness to finish the war until she

²¹⁵ Kaplan, *The First Partition of Poland*, 147-150.

²¹⁶ Padover, "Prince Kaunitz and the First Partition of Poland", 395-397.

²¹⁷ Anderson, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, 276.

²¹⁸ Hosking, *Russia and Russians*, 229-230.

achieved her aims in the Crimea, even if “the war lasted for another ten years”.²¹⁹ The most important Russian success was the occupation of the Crimea. Its ruler, Selim Giray Khan, escaped to the Ottoman Empire, leaving his successor to begin negotiations with Russia. In the following year, a treaty recognizing the nominal independence of the Crimea was signed. The treaty gave Russia the right to maintain garrisons in a number of Black Sea ports, including Kerch and Yenikale.²²⁰

In January 1774, the death of Sultan Mustafa III altered the situation and military operations came to an end after a Russian army crossed the Danube and captured the main Ottoman army camp at Shumen. Field-Marshal Aleksander Suvorov proved to be a brilliant commander, indeed one of the greatest generals in Russian history. The title of “Zadunaysky”, meaning “beyond the Danube”, was conferred on Pyotr Rumyantsev, the governor-general of Little Russia, to commemorate his exploits in Bulgaria which culminated in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca.²²¹ Peace had been achieved through military means. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was signed on 21 July 1774.²²² Catherine considered this day “one of the most fortunate in my [her] life, when the Empire has obtained the peace it so badly needed”.²²³

It was a resounding military and diplomatic defeat for the Ottomans, marking the formal beginning of the Empire’s decline on the world stage and the loss of important territory, ending its dominance over the Black Sea and the Straits of Azov. The independence of the Crimea from the Ottoman Empire was accepted.

²¹⁹ Bernard Pares, *A History of Russia*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), 300.

²²⁰ Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, 43-46.

²²¹ Madariaga, *Catherine the Great*, 235.

²²² Aksan, *Ahmet Resmi Efendi*, 164-165; Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt IV. Bölüm I, 422.

²²³ Alexander, *Catherine the Great*, 140.

Russian ships were granted the right of free navigation on the Black Sea and free passage through the Dardanelles. Article 7 was to prove the most important of the treaty. It was so ambiguously worded that it was later interpreted by Russian diplomats as giving them the right to speak and act on behalf of the Orthodox population anywhere in the Ottoman Empire.²²⁴

The First Partition of Poland and the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca seemed to put an end to the turmoil in Eastern Europe. In fact, it was just the beginning of chaos. Severely defeated by the Russians, the Ottomans would aim to recover the Crimea from Russia in the following years, whereas Catherine would start consolidating her gains on the shores of the Black Sea and Eastern Europe. Poland, on the other hand, would realize the fact that the country did not have the best administration system in the world and thus, start a reform program, which would alarm its neighbors leading them to further partitions and the eventual destruction of the Republic in the following two decades. In 1795, Poland would be wiped from the political map of Europe and its resurrection would take more than a century. The legate of Lechistan had to wait for 129 years to come back to Turkey. This time, the legate was to arrive not to İstanbul - but to Ankara.

²²⁴ Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility", 463.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

“Vous ne sauriez empêcher qu'ils ne vous engloutissent; faites au moins qu'ils ne puissent digérer”.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau²²⁵

In a Europe of assertive national states mostly ruled by royal autocrats, Poland was perhaps doomed from early in the century. It lacked the cohesion and the institutions (e.g. a strong monarchy, civil service, and army) which enabled the large countries of Europe to assert themselves. It was also the victim of its own geographical situation, stuck between three strong autocratic states, one of which had an obvious advantage in taking territory from it. The Prussians because of their interest in West Prussia seem to have envisaged partition or at least the acquisition of territory, which under the circumstances implied partition since it

²²⁵ “You may not prevent them from swallowing you up; see to it at least that they will not be able to digest you”; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne, et sur sa reformation projetée*, (Paris: A Londres, 1782), 16.

could not be done alone, half a century before it actually happened.

After the Silent Sejm of 1717, Poland lost much of its sovereignty and turned into a Russian protectorate—the only way to hold off a potential threat from Prussia. Not surprisingly Poland's vassal status did not diminish significantly throughout the wars of the 18th century, because, as a weak protectorate, it was never itself a leading military power in a position to enjoy gains from victory in war. On the contrary, especially after the War of Polish Succession, Russian control over Poland grew. The Russian envoys to Poland were more powerful in Polish internal affairs than the Polish kings, who in effect were acting almost as a Russian Minister of State in charge of Polish affairs. With the accession of Stanislas August Poniatowski, one of Catherine's ex-favourites, Russian supremacy over Poland was further consolidated.

That being the case, it is in a sense remarkable that in the decade after Poniatowski's accession to the Polish throne, Poland, despite being firmly under Russian domination with the protection that this should have implied, was partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria. One of the main reasons why the partition occurred was of course the weakness of the Polish central authority. At the background of this was the notorious way in which Polish Kings were elected from 1573 on and the fact that the King no longer even had to be Polish. Polish elections for the monarchy thus turned into an arena for a foreign struggle for influence in the region.

Intertwined with the decline of the monarchy, was another factor, weakening Polish central authority, the steadily increasing independence of the *Szlachta* in Polish politics. The *Szlachta* demanded more concessions through

Pacta Conventa from each king that was elected. The Szlachta, having secured its “Golden Freedoms” as the *liberum veto* and the right to maintain private armies, did not relinquish its privileges and blocked any attempts towards abolishing its privileged status in the society by forming armed confederations and fighting against the government and thus, keeping the country in a constant state of chaos.

Another important factor rendering Poland open to foreign intervention was the existence of non-Catholic elements in Polish society. Social, political and economical rights of the dissidents were limited in Poland and their status in Poland was an excuse for Prussia and Russia to intervene into the internal affairs of Poland on the grounds of the protection and restoration of the Dissidents’ rights.

Though important for understanding the first phase of the partition process, the above mentioned factors are not enough by themselves to explain why the partition happened. Though Poland was a very weak state compared to its neighbors, it did not partition itself even if it exposed itself to the danger. A careful examination of the policies of the partitioning powers towards Poland prior to the partition reveals further factors determining the partition process.

One was that the protection it enjoyed as a *de facto* Russian protectorate ceased to work in the middle of the century because of a combination of events in the region. Why did this happen when two out of three of its neighbours were not originally interested in abolishing it?

The role of Russian supremacy over Poland especially after pro-Russian Poniatowski’s accession to the Polish throne has already been already mentioned. Poland initially served as an important buffer state, protecting Russia against

Prussia and Austria. Exclusive Russian influence over Poland further limited the activities of Austria and Prussia in the region. Thus, the partitioning of Poland was not on the agenda of Russia. Even after the formation of the Bar Confederation and the Polish Civil War, it was still in Russia's best interest to keep Poland weak but united. A partition would bring an end to exclusive Russian supremacy inside Poland, something which Russia was not willing to share it with other powers in the region.

Poland's other large neighbour, Austria, just like Russia, was against a Polish partition from the start. Even though Austrian efforts in the Polish election of 1764 to secure the crown for its candidate proved futile, Poland was still a Catholic country and acted as a balancing factor against Protestant Prussia and Orthodox Russia. In addition, Poland, as a buffer state did not just protect Russia from Prussia and Austria, but at the same time, it was a barricade, limiting Russian influence in the region. Furthermore, after the devastating effects of the Seven Years' Wars, Austria did not have any resources to allocate on another costly war. Unfriendly towards Prussia and cynical of Russia, it seemed impossible for Austria to join the team partition of Poland.

Unlike Austria and Russia, Prussia did have strong reasons for partitioning the Republic which were considered in the previous chapter. It was conspiring to expand eastwards in order to unite the scattered lands of the Prussian realm. Central Prussia and East Prussia did not have a land link, and for a truly strong Prussia to come into being, these lands had to be joined. This created a delicate contest between Prussia and Poland, turning the Baltic region into a kind of a zero-sum game for both powers. After all, any Prussian gain could only mean

Polish loss. Nevertheless, as with Austria, Prussia, after the Seven Years' Wars, did not have sufficient resources to realize its dreams through an armed adventure. It would be, at the same time, a dangerous game for Prussia to play if it tried to expand at the expense of a state which was already under Russian influence.

Given the international conjuncture and the initial stance of the partitioning powers towards Poland, we argue that the partition took place due to an irreversible change in the balance between the three partitioning Powers. The Russian intervention into Polish affairs on behalf of the Dissidents provoked the formation of a reactionary proto-nationalist movement, the Bar Confederation, which caused a civil war in Poland. The civil war spread to the Ottoman Empire and thus internationalized the nature of the Polish problem, leading to a Russo-Turkish war.

The Russian victories were followed by an expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire which further threatened the balance in the region. Complicated short term interactions in power politics in Eastern Europe are thus the reason for the partition of Poland. Russia was so successful in the war against Turkey that Austria was alarmed for its position. Frederick the Great proposed the partition of a part of Poland as a way to satisfy Catherine's expansionist ambitions and at the same time to provide some kind of a balance in favor of Austria. This radical change in the international balance of power brought Austria and Prussia together against Russia. Austria approached the Porte and concluded an alliance against Russia. Prussia started an offensive against Poland on the pretext of creating a *cordon sanitaire*. Russia could not risk both a war against Prussia in Poland and also against Austria supported by the Ottoman Empire, so had to give up

temporarily its aim to obtain acquisitions in the Balkans and also gave its consent to share its exclusive influence in Poland with Austria and Prussia. With the conclusion of the partition treaty, Austria and Prussia were no longer a threat to Russia, something which enabled Russia to concentrate its forces on the Ottoman Empire and to finish the war in the following two years.

The first partition brought Poland enthusiasm for reform in the government. This reforming spirit of Poland created anxiety among its neighbors, forcing them to take measures against the Republic, which were two further partitions, until the total demise of the Republic. It would take 123 years for the *Rzeczpospolita* to rise again like a phoenix, something which would become possible only with another balancing game in Eastern Europe on the course of the First World War.

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