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British Empire and the Polish Constitution of 3. May and attempts to reform the political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Prof. Aleksander Głogowski PhD., DSc.

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The aim of this article is to show the attitude of Great Britain to the process of political reforms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the culmination of which was the adoption of the Government Act, commonly known as the Constitution of 3 May, on 3 May 1791 by the confederated Sejm. A clear distinction should be made here between the attitude of the British government, which it headed in the period in question (from 19 December 1783 until 14 March 1801), William Pitt (the younger) representing the liberal wing of the Tory party than the opinion on Polish-Lithuanian political reforms expressed by one of the most prominent conservative thinkers, Edmund Burke, a member of the opposition Whig party. Although the views of the prime minister and the eminent political philosopher towards the political reforms in the Republic of Poland are common in many places, their motives were different. William Pitt was the head of government, a diplomat, and therefore an active politician. For obvious reasons, his views were closely related to the political activity he conducted in practice. His perception of the British raison d'état can be assessed through the prism of specific actions, one of the directions of which (undoubtedly less important, complementary to the main assumptions) was policy towards the Republic of Poland, which was then in a chronic political crisis. Particularly important for the study of the title issue is the activity of the British envoy at the royal court in Warsaw in the years 1788-1791, Daniel Hailes. He prepared reports addressed to the authorities in London, which have survived to this day, showing both his opinion on the events in Poland, and in particular on the Constitution of 3 May, from which one can also "read" what was the official position of London towards attempts at political reforms in the Republic of Poland. As a person observing the course of events, he was the most important source of information about the situation in the Republic of Poland, and his reports had a significant impact on the position of his superiors and the decisions made by them. It is crucial to understand his point of view to know that he was a strong opponent of the French Revolution both for ideological reasons and for the threats it posed to Britain's interests. The latter in particular means that his views cannot be assessed as 'Polonophile', despite his strong sympathy for the Polish-Lithuanian reformist camp (at a time when this political environment was consistently striving for the adoption of the Constitution of 3 May). His attitude to the Republic of Poland and his attempts to reform its system resulted directly from the political line of the government in London and the specifically perceived strategic, geopolitical interest of Great Britain, which will be discussed later in the article. The basic source for learning about Daniel Hailes' views and activities is Daniel Stone's article "Daniel Hales and the Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791", published in No. 2 (26) of 1981 in The Polish Review. Edmund Burke, as a political philosopher, had much greater opportunities to freely and intellectually assess the attempt at political reforms in Poland against the background of and in comparison to the political changes that took place in the process initiated by the French Revolution. Like the diplomat Daniel Hailes, he was an implacable critic of the events south of the English Channel, but his analysis resulted from much deeper and more ideological motives. He saw the events in Poland as a source of reflection on possible reforms that should take place in his homeland (here it is necessary to stipulate that although Burke was Irish by birth and to some extent and with some reservations he was in favor of Irish independence, his views position him by today's standards as a British loyalist, not as an independence republican, therefore, for the purposes of this article, he is treated as a British political philosopher). These reformist views are also the subject of dispute between the majority supporters of considering Burke to be the "father of modern conservatism" and authors who advocate the thesis that Burke is a conservative liberal (especially since he later joined the ranks of the liberal party) rather than a "clinical" conservative. The author will not deal with this issue in this article, but mentions this "dilemma" for the

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record. Burke's views on political reforms in Poland are best illustrated in the collection "Reference from the New to the Old Whigs" published in Poland by the Centre for Political Thought in 2015. Of course, it does not exhaust the subject of Edmund Burke's political thought, of which probably the most important example is the work "On the Spirit and Nature of the Revolution", published in Polish in 2012, also by the Centre for Political Thought.

Both exemplary positions: the analyses of Daniel Hailes, representing His Majesty's Government, and the outstanding representative of the opposition at the time, Edmund Burke, are therefore linked by both frontal criticism of the French Revolution and support for attempts at political reforms in Poland. Therefore, they can be considered representative of the views of the then political elites of Great Britain towards "Polish affairs".

Terminological note: in the cited English literature, the term "Commonwealth" or "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" is used in relation to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Sometimes the name "Poland" also appears. In Polish scientific literature, it is also used interchangeably with the term "Poland" next to the term "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth". It should be taken into account, however, that the use of the term "Poland" in relation to the federal state, which in the Constitution of 3 May was to be further unified by eliminating institutions separate for the Crown and Lithuania, does not correspond to the right of the nations of contemporary Polish and Lithuania (as well as Belarus and Ukraine) to the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Therefore, in this article, the author will use the term "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" interchangeably with "Rzeczpospolita" as "traditional" and occurring at the time when the described events took place, and not referring to the later, tragic relations between the nations of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in particular those after 1864 and 1918. Similarly, in relation to the subjects of King George III, the author will use the term "British" in the sense of "members of a political nation – subjects of the monarch", and not "Englishman" or "Irishman", which had then and still has a specific, ethnic designation, often (as in the case of Edmund Burke) difficult to define unambiguously, because the person concerned often identified himself as both Irishman and Briton, although these two concepts are no longer the same (apart from the complex issue of self-identification of British citizens living in Northern Ireland, which is not the subject of this discussion).

1. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the British diplomacy of the government of W. Pitt (the Younger).

In order to better explain the interest of British diplomacy in the matter of political changes in the Commonwealth, it is necessary to first describe the situation in Great Britain and Europe in 1791. In 1783, under the Peace of Paris, Great Britain finally lost its colonies, which under the declaration of independence of July 4, 1776, created an independent state – the United States. The war, in which the rebellious colonies were supported by France, had a significant impact on the (as it later turned out, temporary) weakening of London's international position and the consolidation of hostility towards Paris (which had a centuries-old tradition, well-established by France's defeat in the Seven Years' War)[1]. The loss of economically important colonies in North America forced Great Britain to look for new markets for the supply of goods, considered strategic at the time: in particular, wood (necessary for the construction of ships, which were the basis of British military power) and grain. At that time, Russia was a natural trade partner in this area. However, Catherine II's policy of raising customs duties and fees on the export of these raw materials and striving for dominance in Central and Eastern Europe caused London to turn its interest towards Prussia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In 1787, the Triple Alliance was concluded between Great Britain, Prussia and the Netherlands, which was directed against both (traditionally) France and especially Russia[2]. Particularly hostility towards St. Petersburg caused the idea of Sweden and Turkey joining the alliance, as well as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which had been in alliance with Prussia since 1790. The attempt to create a strong bloc of Central European countries with the involvement of Great Britain was (not the first and not the last) attempt to implement the concept verbalized by David Hume in his work "On the Balance of Power": it was in London's interest that there should not be a single hegemon on the European continent, which would naturally threaten the

[1] H. Zins, Polityka zagraniczna Wielkiej Brytanii. Lublin 2001 p.48

[2] The issue of Great Britain's policy towards Russia and Prussia is analysed in detail by J. Łojek in the article: British Policy Towards Russia, 1790-1791., The Polish Review , 1983, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1983), pp. 3-17

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interests and even existence of Great Britain[3]. The key to the implementation of this concept was to convince the Republic of Poland to cede the city of Gdańsk to Prussia, and Berlin to abolish/radically reduce customs duties on the transit of goods to Great Britain. The British interest in our country was primarily of an economic nature. The military potential of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was small at that time compared to its neighbors, which meant that its importance on the battlefield would be rather low. On the other hand, Polish and Lithuanian forest and agricultural resources would allow the United Kingdom to meet its needs in this area. It is therefore not surprising that the first surviving reports of Mr D. Hailes concerned economic issues. The authorities in London were interested, among other things, by the issue of agricultural economy, based on serfdom. The MP reported: "The Polish government has not taken any steps to improve their [peasants'] conditions, because the nobility controlling the Sejm would not allow it. (…) The ignorance of the people is so great, and so entrenched are their habits of servitude, that the offer of unconditional liberty will either not be understood, abused, or exploited ineffectually. The unfortunate experience of some enlightened nobles who tried to liberate their serfs prevents others from carrying out plans of a similar nature[4]." However, he noted that some attempts to change the situation "exceeded the expectations of the subjects and property owners expecting an improvement". He pointed out that the peasants liberated by the Lithuanian Vice-Chancellor Chreptowicz had passed "from a state of the most vile poverty to freedom and contentment". He noted that such attitudes and actions were not common, which resulted from "a lack of decisiveness, inability to take risks and waiting for the moment of changes in the way their assets are managed". Hailes perceived the then Republic of Poland as a backward state, and changing the state of affairs as very difficult, despite good contacts among the then Enlightenment elite of Warsaw. He also observed the growing aversion to Russia in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was intensified among the elites by the fear of possible peasant riots inspired by St. Petersburg. He pointed to the activity of "nearly 6,000 Russian emissaries, appearing under various disguises, and numerous Russian priests." He considered the activity of the 'Russian bishops' as 'criminal harm to Poland'. The British diplomat sharply criticized the activities of the Russian ambassador Magnus Stackelberg: "The despotic and humiliating way in which this minister ruled the Poles..., with the use of corruption, intrigues that he constantly used to influence the operation of the government, together with the great influence he had on His Majesty, make his removal from office highly advisable." In a letter to London, Hailes boasted that "as a result of my position and persuasion, the Speaker of the Sejm, Stanisław Małachowski, will not accept any Russian diplomat as an ambassador." Of course, it is difficult to admit that he was right that it was the British position, and not the departure from pro-Russian policy by the then authorities of the Republic of Poland, that contributed to Stackelberg's dismissal. The British ambassador also tried to persuade King Stanisław August to conclude a trade agreement with Great Britain, which would be a serious competition for the Russian economy and its current monopoly. In particular, he sought to conclude an agreement between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Prussia, which would enable duty-free transfer of goods to Great Britain. However, at this stage, he did not consider it appropriate to present the possibility of ceding Gdańsk in exchange for concluding a transit agreement beneficial to the Republic of Poland. In a letter to Foreign Secretary Lord Leeds, Hales wrote that it was in London's interest to have a "harmless and useful" Republic. He stated that "peace in Europe is threatened by feuds and internal problems of Poles". In particular, he pointed to "the revival of factions inspired by external powers, which should be liquidated by including Polish in the great alliance of England, the Netherlands and Prussia". However, he also stated that "in view of the restraint and indecisiveness of Prussia, it is better for Poland to remain under the yoke of Russia than to be sloppy and uncontrolled as it is now". As one of the reasons for this state of affairs, Hailes considered "an ill-advised and untimely proposal to replace the elective monarchy with a hereditary one". Much more important, in his opinion, was the creation of "a strong alliance that would ensure the political and civic existence of the state" and the preparation of "an easier digestible form of government", without specifying what it would be. He noted that "the new actions increase the intensity of Russian intrigues, increasing confusion and preventing the creation of an effective government. The Russian envoy received significant funds from St. Petersburg to pay his allies

[3] F. Gołembski, Polityka zagraniczna Wielkiej Brytanii. Warszawa 2001 p.12

[4] All quotations from D. Hailes' reports to London come from the publication: D. Stone, Daniel Hailes and the Polish Constitution of May 3 1791., The Polish Review , 1981, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1981), pp. 51-63,

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in Poland." Hailes expressed his very negative opinion about the elites of the Republic of Poland at that time, stating directly: "we may never be able to win the hearts of Poles, but we can control their wallets". However, he suggested that the proposal to expand trade interests could "reach the sense of interest of Poles more than bribes to the most vile part of the nation." In his report written on 1 May 1791, he completely omitted the details of the political reforms, focusing on their international implications. He pointed out that "Poland is completely defenseless." He stated that "the introduction of a hereditary monarchy cannot fail to cause interference by external powers", so the external threat should "induce the Sejm to seriously consider the proposal to conclude an alliance and trade agreements" with Prussia and Great Britain. On 3 May, he informed his superiors that "it is well known that the Elector of Saxony will not accept the Polish crown until he receives guarantees from the three neighbouring powers and the unanimous consent of the people". He also stated that "Poles are ready to take any risk, because they see themselves as abandoned on all sides, and any danger is better than returning to the Russian yoke." According to the British diplomat, "Polish reformers believed that as long as the Polish monarchy was elective, each subsequent interregnum would threaten with civil war, and the current situation is the only opportunity when the neighboring powers, busy with their own affairs, will allow this matter, so important for the Commonwealth, to be settled." He pointed out that the Polish army can ensure internal peace, but will be helpless in the face of external (implicitly: Russian) aggression. Therefore, only a strong ally can ensure the external security of the Republic of Poland. In his opinion, Prussia would be best suited for this role, because Russia was too "unpopular" among the local elites. He suggested that London should threaten Berlin with an alliance with Austria and Poland if it did not take on the task of defending the government in Warsaw and gave the new government (the Guardians of Rights) time to raise funds from customs and taxes for the planned strengthening of the army. In this context, he believed that the reforms of the Commonwealth's finances were more important at this point than starting a discussion on the possible cession of Gdańsk to Prussia. The new head of British diplomacy, Lord Grenville, assessed the shape of political reforms in Poland differently. He stated that the introduction of a hereditary monarchy would bring not only internal benefits, but also benefits for the neighboring powers, as power in the Commonwealth would gain the expected stability. Hailes was instructed to "persuade the interested parties to avoid returning to the idea of another partition of the Commonwealth", but "in such a way that it does not mean the involvement of His Majesty's Government on either side". Hailes sent a report to London in which he stated that "the prospect of a trade and political agreement between Great Britain, the Netherlands and Prussia with the involvement of the Republic of Poland is unrealistic in view of Warsaw's lack of interest in giving Gdańsk to Prussia, which was a sine qua non condition". In practice, this meant London's withdrawal from involvement in Central European affairs. In a 1792 report, Hailes stated that Prussia and Austria were "Polish's hidden enemies," while Russia was an open enemy. Berlin, on the other hand, according to him, was not interested in recreating the hereditary monarchy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, because it would excessively strengthen its competitor – Saxony. On the other hand, without the support of Berlin, Vienna and St. Petersburg, Polish diplomacy had no chance of persuading the Elector of Saxony to accept the crown of the Commonwealth. He also noted that the Polish-Lithuanian elites did not show enough commitment to implement other reforms adopted in the new constitution, and he described the actions taken by our politicians at that time as "ridiculous, if not even disgusting", without explaining what exactly he meant when formulating the above assessment. The British ambassador even suspected that Ignacy Potocki's visit to Berlin was not an attempt to obtain help from Prussia, but... an attempt to escape from a country threatened by war with Russia. His opinion of the Poles deteriorated even more when Stanisław August decided to join Targowica. The last telegram before Hailes left Warsaw concerned, in his opinion, the disastrous attitude and lack of discipline of the Commonwealth's troops in the fight against Russia, which "used too large forces in the fight in relation to those that were needed to overthrow the constitution". It is impossible to clearly assess to what extent D. Hailes's reports influenced the decision-making process of the British government during the Crimean War (1787–1792), and in particular during the siege of Ochakiv by the Russians in 1788 and later. Certainly, they showed Prime Minister W. Pitt that it was unrealistic to create an effective anti-Russian coalition, which would at the same time effectively help Turkey and contribute to the protection of the independent existence of the Republic of Poland, contributing to the permanent "pulling" of Central and South-Eastern Europe into the British sphere of influence. Hailes largely blamed the political elites of the Republic of Poland for the failure of the concept. From the opinions quoted

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earlier, a picture emerges of a state plunging into anarchy and unable to defend its own independence by force, and on the other hand, the elites ruling the Republic of Poland, consisting of corrupt politicians (representing foreign interests for purely economic reasons) and idealists who were guided more by "wishful thinking" than by a real, "cold" analysis of facts and external circumstances. However, in exactly the same way, "wishful thinking" can be used to describe the idea that it may be possible to bring about a Prussian-Austrian war, in which Berlin will gain Galicia and that it will want to give it to Poland in exchange for Gdańsk. History has shown that Prussia gained not only Gdańsk, but also Warsaw without firing a single shot... Undoubtedly, D. Hailes noted a few accurate observations about the internal situation in the Commonwealth, in particular about the corruption of some of the political elites and the activity of Russian diplomacy (or, as we would call it today, the secret service). It is also clear that the assessment of one of the main points of the reform of the Constitution of 3 May, i.e. the restoration of the hereditary monarchy, was influenced by the perspective of a politician/diplomat, and not an analyst of systemic issues. Hailes focused on whether such a change is feasible from the point of view of regional policy, and not on whether it is good from the point of view of the effectiveness of the state's functioning. Such a reflection was made by his superior, the chief of British diplomacy. Analyzing the position of the British government towards the events in Poland, it can be seen that it had some impact on creating the impression that Prussia was interested in preserving the statehood of the Republic of Poland, because London tried to integrate Warsaw into the political and economic alliance that was being created. The question to what extent the activity of MP Hailes influenced the decisions of Polish and Lithuanian politicians to attempt political reforms based on the announcement of a close alliance with Prussia and Great Britain remains unequivocally answered. It could certainly have played a role in "strengthening" wishful thinking about Berlin's good intentions. When assessing London's intentions, it should be borne in mind that it did not have a land military potential that could in any way change the position of the Republic of Poland in the war with Russia. Only Prussia had it, but it was not interested in using it. The only potential benefits that Poland could gain from participation in the alliance with the United Kingdom were related to the trade agreement, for the implementation of which Berlin's consent was also necessary. Only with his cooperation and after an effective reform of the tax system, the Republic of Poland could gain economic foundations to rebuild its military potential. As we can see, these were too many circumstances that would have to occur together to save the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Hailes' reports also give the impression that both he and his superiors were initially unaware of the degree of internal collapse of the Republic of Poland and underestimated the degree of dependence of our elites on external influences, spinning the concept of creating a great alliance between Great Britain and the countries of Central Europe. The more they became aware of the scale of the problems, the more their enthusiasm and commitment to this project decreased. This leads to the timeless conclusion that a state can count on effective alliances only if it is internally strong and has significant economic and military potential, constituting an "added value" for its allies, which they will be ready to defend. An internally weak state, on the other hand, is doomed to be only an object in the politics of the stronger powers.

2. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Edmund Burke's Reflections.

Edmund Burke, considered the "father of conservatism", became interested in the "Polish question" only as a result of the French Revolution. He did not hide it himself, stating that for him "Poland lies on the moon". Therefore, his flattering opinions on the reforms of the political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth should be analyzed in a broader international context. The internal aspect cannot be overlooked either: the debate on the direction and ways of changing the political system of Great Britain. The second aspect seems to be at least as important as the first. It should be remembered that England had its own tradition of revolutionary political changes, different from France. The first one is not considered as such in the literature, but it is worth mentioning. It is about the break of England in 1534 with the Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the Church of England, whose superior became the monarch. It was the beginning of a long process of political and theological upheavals, which included wars between pretenders to the throne who sought to restore Catholicism on the one hand, and to maintain the Protestant character of the state on the other, in which a Catholic king would be an insurmountable obstacle. The establishment of the Church of England eventually led to the so-called "Splendid Revolution" of 1688-89, as a result of which the deposed King James II Stuart was replaced on the throne by his Protestant daughter Mary II and her husband William III of Orange. The price for the new rulers taking over

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the throne was a further expansion of the role of parliament in the legislative process, which effectively stopped the evolution of the system of England (later Great Britain) towards absolutism, which was developing in France, Prussia and Russia. In English history, the term revolution has also been used to describe the three civil wars of 1642-1651. During this time, there was an episodic period of Oliver Cromwell's reign, formally as Lord Protector from 1653 to 1658, and the death and murder of King Charles I of England on January 30, 1649. In the case of Cromwell's revolution, too, one of the motives was the English's aversion to absolutism. However, the experience of the period when England was a de facto republic caused subsequent generations to maintain far-reaching skepticism towards this form of government. Oliver Cromwell did not differ much from his predecessors in the way he exercised power, except for the lack of a formal coronation. The American Revolution of 1775-1783 can also be considered "initially British", as its original goal was to change the relations between the colonies in North America, but it led to the independence of the United States. This political and military humiliation deepened the resentment of the British majority towards the idea of revolution and, like earlier experiences, influenced the direction of the reformers of the political system in London. The supporters of the French Revolution were a minority in British public opinion, and especially in the elite. In the fundamental work of the radical liberal thinker Thomas Paine "Human Rights", the name "Poland" appears only in volume 2 and only in two places. The author shows the superiority of an elective monarchy over a hereditary one, at the same time noting some positives in the Constitution of 3 May: "However, I could go further and place also foreign wars, of any kind, on the same issue. By adding the evils of hereditary succession to the evils of monarchy, a permanent family interest is created, the constant aim of which is dominion and revenue. Poland, although an elective monarchy, had fewer wars than those that are hereditary; And it is the only government that voluntarily attempts, albeit a small one, to reform the situation of the country." He goes on to say: "Various forms of government styled themselves as republics. Poland calls itself a republic, but it is a hereditary aristocracy, with a so-called elective monarchy"[5]. This opinion is therefore a combination of a rather concise description of the political system of the Republic of Poland (before the Constitution of 3 May) with its generally critical opinion towards the monarchy as such. As a supporter of republicanism, he criticized all "reformed" forms of royal government as bad, and attempts to reform them as insufficient. Apparently, he did not read the content of the Government Act and the provision on the restoration of the hereditary status of the monarchy, which was already available in the English version at that time, or (realistically) decided that the principle of election would survive. However, he clearly did not recognize the events of 1791 as a revolution, because he did not use this term in relation to the Commonwealth. On the contrary, he considered this process as a "reform of the system" (which a priori considered bad because it was undemocratic), and not its overthrow. However, he stated that the changes in Poland are/may be part of the positive changes that took place at that time: "There has never been such a great opportunity for England and for the whole of Europe as it is caused by the two revolutions of America and France. In the first case, freedom has a national champion in the Western world; and through the latter in Europe. When another nation joins France, despotism and evil government do not dare to appear. To use a cliché expression, iron is getting hot all over Europe. An offended German and an enslaved Spaniard, a Rus and a Pole begin to think. This age will henceforth deserve to be called the Age of Reason, and this generation will appear to the future as the Adam of the new world." British supporters of Paine even organized a meeting on the occasion of the anniversary of the Constitution of 3 May, which took place in the London Mitre Court pub in Oldgate, but the attendance was "as much" as 60 people, Similarly, a year later, on the occasion of the anniversary of the French Revolution, a fundraiser was also organized in the London Tavern pub at Bishop's Gate to help Polish, but the sources do not say what amounts were collected[6]. The Whigs, who were in opposition to the government of W. Pitt, also perceived the events in Poland in the broader context of political changes in European countries. Formerly the "party of power", the party was then experiencing a period of internal divisions, the axis of which was the attitude towards the revolution in France and the shape/necessity of further reforms of the British system. The mainstream Whig party and its leader (former Prime Minister) Charles James Fox saw the events in Poland as part of the same process that

[5] T. Paine, Rights of Man. Part Second, Combining Principle and Practise. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3742/pg3742-images.html#link2H_4_0008

[6] Z. Libiszowska, Tomasz Paine a Polska stanisławowska. [in:] Annales Universitatis Mariae Skłodowska-Curie vol XXIX (10) 1974 p.p.111-112

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Europe was dealing with in France. What distinguished them from radicals like Paine was the assumption that the Whig line of policy, based on a frontal critique of the absolutist desire for control of the executive by the king, although close in spirit to the idea of the French Revolution, nevertheless rejected violence as a weapon of war. The opposition's goal was to further limit the ruler's powers in favor of parliament in the spirit of the Enlightenment reforms, but without questioning the idea of monarchy as such. The Whigs were therefore not mostly republicans in the sense of the term at the time, but rather monarchist-reformists. In this approach, one can find the personal approach of Ch. Fox, who, although he held the office of Prime Minister from March to July 1782 and later from April to December 1783 as the head of British diplomacy, could not forget King George III that he removed him from power "by conspiring with his opponent, William Pitt, to remove the Whigs from power in favor of the Tories[7]. The attitude to the revolution in France, and indirectly to the Constitution of 3 May in Poland, led to a split in the Whig party. Edmund Burke, considered Fox's mentor, left the party, along with a group of supporters who later formed the Liberal Party. This group gave limited support to the policy of the Pitt government towards Polish. Of course, in Burke's case, this was due to his consistent criticism of the revolution in France, which, according to him, was the antithesis of the process of political reforms, whose symbol (and unfortunately the last chord) was the Polish Government Act. In a letter to his son, he wrote: "No matter in this world can be clearer in my eyes, or deserve my more fervent wishes for success than the cause of the Poles. In all respects, it is the opposite of what is happening in France[8]." He stated that "Poland followed the natural order of civilizational progress, striving for civil liberties, central authority and morality"[9]. Another motive for Burke's interest in the Commonwealth was to look at its internal problems from a broader legal and international perspective. This resulted in a consistent disagreement with the partitions as a "method of bringing order". He saw in them a dangerous precedent that could sooner or later also threaten Great Britain. He eloquently stated in a letter to Adrian von Borcke, writing about the first partition that "Poland was only breakfast"[10]. He warned: "The time will come when the new system will be seen in all its impotence and stupidity; And when the balance of power is destroyed, it will become clear what infinite consequences its behavior would have.[11]" He considered the reforms of the law in the Commonwealth not only as necessary for the Commonwealth itself, but above all as highly advisable for the whole of Europe. He quoted an argument often raised by... supporters of partitions, as well as by historians analyzing the causes of the fall of the Commonwealth: Because Poland lagged behind the rest of Europe in terms of civilization, order and freedom, it was not only a threat to itself, but also to European stability, by supporting and facilitating the aggressive ambitions of its neighbors. But now it has established a stronger and more secure executive branch and put an end to the instability and foreign intervention inherent in the previous system[12]. He also presented an apocalyptic and very prophetic vision of the further collapse of the state in the event of the failure of reforms: "A king without authority; nobility without a sense of connection or subordination; a nation without art, industry, commerce or freedom; lack of order inside; without an army; There is no effective public service, but foreign forces that have entered a defenseless country and at will and deprived it of everything at their own discretion"[13]. Burke often presented opinions "pleasing to the ears of Poles" such as: "No Cause in the world can be brighter in my eye or have more of my warm wishes than the Polish Cause". A letter to King Stanisław August Poniatowski dated 28 February 1792 can even be called a panegyric in honour of the monarch and constitutional reforms in

[7] J. Scott, Polish Whigs on the Moon: the Polish Revolution of 1791 and the British Wighs Party. https://ageofrevolutions.com/2023/02/27/polish-whigs-on-the-moon-the-polish-revolution-of-1791-and-the-british-whig-party/

[8] P. Henczewski, Edmund Burke o Rzeczypospolitej. W poszukiwaniu wolności i porządku. Kwartalnik Historyczny Rocznik CXXVII, 2020, 1

[9] Edmund Burke, 'Appeal from the new to the old whigs', [in:] P. J. Marshall and D. C. Bryant, (ed.)., The writings and speeches of Edmund Burke, IV (Oxford, 2015), p. 464

[10] Burke to Adrian Heinrich von Borcke, Jan. 1774, Burke, The correspondence of Edmund Burke, II, p. 514

[11] Edmund Burke, The speeches of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, in the House of Commons,
and in Westminster-Hall (4 vols., London, 1816), I, p. 245.

[12] A. Plassart, Edmund Burke, Poland and the Commonwealth of Europe. The Historical Journal,63, 4 (2020)

[13] Annual register for the year 1791, s. 462

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Poland[14]. However, the British political philosopher cannot be considered a Polonophile, because in the face of the failure of reforms and subsequent partitions, fulfilling his "dark prophecy", he stated: "Britain could not provide Poland with any help on its own, and an alliance with its old enemy – France was unthinkable as never before"[15]. The words "Poland could be considered a country on the moon, and its fall was a price worth paying for maintaining the European alliance against France" leave no doubt that Burke treated the Republic of Poland only as an element of a larger European policy, and this element was "not the most important", to put it mildly[16].

Summary.

An analysis of both the policy pursued during the period of constitutional reforms after the First Partition of the Republic of Poland, as well as the political writings of that period, leads to several conclusions. First of all, it would be a truism to say that at that time both His Majesty's government, the opposition and political writers looked at the events in Warsaw through the prism of London's interests. These interests had both an internal and international dimension. The first referred to the assessment of the French Revolution and its reception. Its main critic, Edmund Burke, contrasted the barbarism of the French Revolution with the evolutionary process of changes that had been undertaken in Poland. They were close to his reformist heart and reminded of the positive experiences of the times of the "Glorious Revolution" and the invitation to the British throne of the House of Hanover. British republicans, such as T. Paine, noted the right direction of changes in the Commonwealth, noting that it was a "step in the right direction", which was part of a broader, pan-European process that should also reach Great Britain. The assessment of the significance of the international reform of the Commonwealth's political system was more or less common to all diplomats and theoreticians dealing with it: the Commonwealth was perceived as the "sick man of Europe": badly managed, based on an archaic model of economy, a source of potential threats, a "field" for building superpower status for countries competing with Great Britain. Reforms, on the other hand, were considered advisable to maintain the balance of power on the European continent, i.e. to block the possibility of a single power on the continent, which would inevitably threaten the aspirations and even existence of Great Britain. The Commonwealth was also perceived as a "transitional state" between European civilization and Asian civilization, represented by Russia. The Commonwealth was therefore important to London only insofar as it had the appropriate "weight", which "placed on the scales" contributed to balancing the power perceived as "enemy number one" of France (regardless of the form of the government in Paris). When it turned out that the influence of the neighboring powers was too strong for the reforms to be effective, the British abandoned the Commonwealth without regret, accepting another partition and finally the complete liquidation of statehood. In this way, they chose the growth of Prussia as a continental power competing with France. At that time, Berlin gained economically important territories of the Republic of Poland, and Russia – only a space of little importance.

An analysis of the eighteenth-century British policy towards the Commonwealth and its reforms also leads to more general conclusions that should be taken into account when constructing our current foreign policy, in particular towards Great Britain or, more broadly, the Anglo-Saxon powers. First of all, in order for Poland to be treated seriously by London or Washington, it must have a strong government, capable of efficiently administering the state, and a strong army, significant in our region, as well as a developed economy. Moreover, we cannot take entirely seriously and in isolation from the context of political realism the flattering opinions about us presented by Anglo-Saxon politicians and the media, however "pleasing to our ears" they may be. The Anglo-Saxons have a centuries-old tradition of consistently defining and pursuing their own national interest, devoid of any sentiments. A proper reading of these interests should be crucial for the decisions made by our authorities whether/to what extent it is worth engaging in an alliance with the Anglo-Saxons. From our point of view, such an alliance makes sense if and only if there is a community of interests in a given historical coin, and there are no contradictions, or they are irrelevant from the point of view of our raison d'état. Whether we like the Anglo-Saxon culture, values, ideology of the ruling majority, etc., should not matter in the slightest. Such a realistic approach will save us further disappointments. When analyzing the policy of Great Britain towards the Polish-Lithuanian

[14] Burke to Richard Burke, 29 July 11792, The correspondence of Edmund Burke, VII, s.423

[15] https://teologiapolityczna.pl/list-edmunda-burke%E2%80%99a-do-stanislawa-augusta-poniatowskiego

[16] E. Burke, Observations on the conduct of the minority. p. 423

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Commonwealth, the Polish issue during the partitions, or the First and Second World Wars, we too often use terms such as "betrayal", which do not describe what we experienced. Such hyperbole results from a lack of understanding of the fundamental truth that the Anglo-Saxons will never sacrifice their own interest for the interest of another country (they have repeatedly wrongly defined their interest by betting on the wrong allies). And it is consistently striving to prevent the emergence of a single, competitive hegemon in Europe. This assumption is in itself close to our national interest, but London does not always consider the same country as the "lesser evil" worth supporting, which at a given moment in history is an existential threat to the Republic of Poland. Undoubtedly, we should learn from the Anglo-Saxons this political realism, which requires us to reject sentiments in politics in favor of the raison d'état and building one's own position.

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