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THE NATIONS OF THE POLISH–LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH. CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS

The complex ethnic and ethno–political structure of the old Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth has fascinated many researchers. Questions concerning this structure have gained popularity in particular in the last few years when Poland's eastern neighbours with whom the Poles shared fate in a multinational state had achieved independence. In taking up this subject we must first of all ask which nations of the Commonwealth participated in the formation of that state, which were (or were not) tolerated, and whether these were the only variants. A mere enumeration of the nations of each category, even if reasons were given for such a categorization, would however be a banal undertaking. Let me therefore linger a little longer on questions which, perhaps too arbitrarily, I regard as controversial[1].

The Poles and the Lithuanians must be recognized as the unquestionable co–masters of the Commonwealth during that period. What can be disputable is only the symmetry of this co–mastership. The research conducted during the last twenty years has shown, however, that Lithuania enjoyed a very large degree of independence and that the Lithuanians knew how to make use of it[2]. It has been frequently stated that the Union of Lublin

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[1] I have consulted sources and literature concerning the years 1569–1648, but most of my remarks also apply to a slightly later period (up to the end of the 17th century).

[2] A rich literature discusses the distinctive features of Lithuania. Following are recent works whose authors deal with questions discussed in this article. See J. B a r d a c h , *Zatwierdzenie III Statutu Litewskiego przez Zygmunta II Wazę (The Endorsement of the Third Lithuanian Statute by Sigismund III Vasa)*, "Czasopismo Prawno–Historyczne" 1978, vol. 30, N° 2; J. O c h m a ń s k i , *The National Idea in Lithuania from the 16th to the First Half of the 19th Century*, "Harvard Ukrainian Studies" 1986, vol. 10; T. W a s i l e w s k i , *Litewskie rady senatu w XVII wieku (The Senate's Lithuanian Debates in the 17th Century)*, in: *Studia z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, Wrocław 1988; H. W i s n e r , *Unia Lubelska i statut litewski z roku 1588 (The Union of Lublin and the Lithuanian Statute of 1588)*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" 1986, vol. 51, N° 1; i d e m , Posłowie i poselstwa litewskie w czasach Zygmunta III i Władysława IV *(Lithuanian Envoys and Legations during the Reign of Sigismund III and Vladislaus IV)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", 1981, vol. 88, N° 3.

created a new state organism, and this cannot be denied. It is worth adding, however, that the Union did not liquidate the two previously existing states. Most of the state institutions remained either Lithuanian or Polish, the king was a king of both Lithuania and Poland, only the Sejm was a parliament of the whole Commonwealth. This duality was a result of a compromise. Before the unification Sejm, Poland strove to incorporate Lithuania, while the latter wanted to preserve its *status quo*. The differences were gradually overcome and the final compromise was a success for the Lithuanians from the national point of view for they retained their statehood; it was also a triumph of the executionist party from the point of view of its social programme for it paved the way to the emancipation of the Lithuanian middle nobility (the executionist party demanded the implementation of all established laws relating to the privileges of the nobility). But the two sides suffered heavy setbacks in other fields. The Lithuanians lost a large part of their territory and were forced to agree to far–reaching innovations in their political system, while the executionist party's plan to create an integral state of the nobility did not materialize. Contrary to the lofty words of the Act of Union about "one Commonwealth which has joined and brought together two states and nations into one"[3], Lithuania remained a separate political entity in internal relations, retained a large, frequently abused, measure of independence in foreign policy, in particular with regard to Muscovy, as well as instruments protecting it against the inflow of Polish noblemen.

As has been said above, the Lithuanians knew how to make use of the new opportunities; they restrained Lithuanian separatism during the first and second interregna, and this resulted in Sigismund III Vasa endorsing in 1588 the Third Lithuanian Statute which treated the Grand Duchy as a fully separate state and did not even mention the Union. Admittedly, in the formulas sanctioning the Act the young monarch stipulated that the Statute "shall in no way be incompatible with the Union", but this did not change the fact that it emphasizes the separateness of two organisms[4]. In the years that followed, the Lithuanians almost revived their own parliament by setting up the Wilno convocations[5]. They also frequently pursued their own foreign policy, as is proved by the facts that they concluded a separate armistice with Sweden in 1627 and sent their own missions abroad during the interregna of 1632 and 1648[6]. The history of 17th century Sejms, many of which have recently been described by scholars from Wrocław and Opole,

[3] *Volumina legum*, ed. J. O h r y z k o , Petersburg 1859–1889, vol. 2, p. 90.

[4] H. W i s n e r , *Unia lubelska*, pp. 38–41, the quotation is on p. 40.

[5] I d e m ,*Konwokacja wileńska (The Wilno Convocation)*,"Czasopismo Prawno–Historyczne" 1968, № 2, pp. 75–80.

[6] I d e m , *Posłowie i poselstwa*, pp. 630–631, 634.

shows that Lithuanian deputies were able to block the initiatives which in their view ran counter to the interests of the Grand Duchy[7]. Even if we assume that Lithuania was a weaker partner in the union, we must conclude that it retained sufficient influence on events to bear co–responsibility for its history.

Many professional historians repeat the well known theory launched 40 years ago by the writer Paweł J a s i e n i c a that the main setback of the Commonwealth was that it failed to transform itself into a state not of two, but of three nations. Such a view may lead to ahistorical reflections (caused by attempts to demonstrate that what should have been would have been better than what actually was); but the theory stems from the right observation of the important role played by the Ruthenes in the state.

Let us start by pointing out that in the opinion of the other inhabitants of the Commonwealth and the Ruthenians themselves, the Ruthenians were a single nation, irrespective of whether they came from Lithuania or Poland. "We, the Ruthenian nation", wrote the electors of Piotr Mohyla, the metropolitan of Kiev[8]. The act was signed by the nobility and clergy from the Wilno, Troki, Brześć, Witebsk, Kiev and other voivodships. Naturally, the Byelorussia–Ukraine division, engendered by the border line between Poland and Lithuania, was already manifest. But it was only the period of Cossack wars in the second half of the 17th century that deepened differences to such an extent that they were beginning to be realized by contemporaries[9]. If we analyze the period prior to 1648 and focus attention on the nobility, we must regard the Ruthenians as a third nation of the Commonwealth.

Since the times of Martel and Jabłonowski it has been accepted that the Ruthenian nobility became linguistically Polonized before 1569 in Red Ruthenia and at the beginning of the 17th century in Volhynia and Ukraine[10]. It would be difficult to polemize with these statements. Moreover, they are

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[7] Forty–one monographs on 17th century Sejms have already been published, some of them in the form of scholarly articles. With the exception of the studies on the Sejms held in 1605 (A. S t r z e l e c k i , Kraków 1921) and 1606 (W. S o b i e s k i , Warszawa 1913), they have been elaborated by a group of historians, mostly from Wrocław and Opole, disciples and heirs of Professor Czapliński. Lack of space does not allow me to give a full bibliography of these studies.

[8] "Electia na Metropolią o. Mohily", Biblioteka Ukrajins' koji Akademiji Nauk w Kyjevi 1441, p. 24.

[9] F. S y s y n , *Ukrainian–Polish Relations in the 17th Century. The Role of National Consciousness and National Conflict in the Khmelnytsky Movement*, in: *Poland and Ukraine. Past and Present*, Edmonton–Toronto 1980, p. 75.

[10] A. M a r t e l , *La langue polonaise dans les pays ruthènes Ukraine et Russie blanche 1569–1667*, Lille 1938, *passim*; A. J a b ł o n o w s k i , *Akademia Kijowsko–Mohylańska. Zarys historyczny na tle rozwoju ogólnego cywilizacji zachodniej (The Kiev–Mohylew Academy. An Historical Outline against the Background of the General Development of Western Civilization)*, Kraków 1900, *passim*.

documented by court records from these territories[11]. But let us add that the linguistic Polonization of the nobility was accompanied by the Ruthenization of the Tartars, Wallachians, Greeks and multitudes of peasants who flowed into Ukraine from Polish territories[12]. The cultural changes which took place among the elite were not reflected in the lower estates, which means that there was no planned Polonization. This may serve as indirect evidence that although the Polish language spread, it did not oust the Ruthenian language but occupied a place ahead of or beside it as a speech of state communication. Besides we know that the Volhynian nobility issued appeals in Polish calling for the preservation of the Ruthenian language in the practice of law courts and the administration, which proves that the Ruthenian nobility was bilingual, a fact confirmed by individual examples among the Orthodox Kisiels, the Arian Niemiryczes and the Catholic Wiśniowieckis[13].

It is quite common to identify Ruthenianness with the Orthodox faith. But this would make the Ruthenes of those times a deficient nation, a nation which based its identity mainly on adherence to a different religion. This view can and should be shaken. To begin with, the Uniates were also Ruthenian and the history of the Greek Catholic Church in the 17th century shows that the Uniate Church did not Polonize its believers despite its submission to occidentalization processes. In their dislike of, and even aversion to, the supporters of "Roman obedience", the *blahochestyvy* frequently used the argument of betrayal, but the argument concerned only religious matters. The Uniates had a sincere reverence for the Ruthenian language, what is more, they introduced it into the sermons and prayers in Orthodox churches, infuriating Orthodox believers by these "Roman novelties". They also invoked old Ruthenian traditions. Their hierarchy waged a stubborn struggle against the Latin episcopate for the right to publish the papal decision which forbade the Greek Catholics to change their rites, a demand which had national undertones. The Ruthenians owed the development of their national culture to the Uniates who maintained contact with Rome and who frequently studied in West European colleges; it was also due to them that Europe knew about the Ruthenians and included them in its great plans. The national character of the Uniate Church is also confirmed by the conversion from the Orthodox Church of unquestioned Ruthenian

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[11] H. L i t w i n , *The Catholicization among the Ruthenian Nobility and Assimilation Processes in the Ukraine during the years 1569–1648*, "Acta Poloniae Historica" 1987, vol. LV, p. 61.

[12] J. T a z b i r , *Polonization Processes in the Noblemen's Commonwealth*, "Acta Poloniae Historica" 1987, vol. LV, p. 35

[13] H. L i t w i n , *Catholicization*, p. 62.

patriots: Melecjusz Smotrycki (about 1578–1633), Kasjan Sakowicz (about 1576–1647) and Kiryɫ Trankwilion Stawrowiecki (d. 1647)[14].

Nor did access to a Protestant community mean denationalization for the Ruthenians. Common political interests and long co–operation of dis-uniates and dissidents in the Sejm and dietines brought these groups close together. If it is difficult to distinguish the Protestant from the Orthodox branch of the Hulewicz family and to unequivocally define the religion of some Ruthenian novelty–fans, such as the Hojskis, one can assume that Ruthenians could also be Protestants. Owing to the lack of sources and well documented individual examples (apart from Jerzy Niemirycz (1612–1659) whose patriotic motivation is questioned), it is difficult to propose conclusions.

The matter looks different in the case of Ruthenian Catholics. I can refer to an individual example which confirms that this possibility should not be disregarded. In the Jesuit archives in Rome there is a letter sent to the general of the Jesuit order by Remigian Jelec, a nobleman from the Kiev voivodship, co–founder of a college at Ksawerów (1635), whose proposal gives testimony to his Catholic faith and Ruthenian patriotism. Jelec suggested that a university should be opened at Ksawerów "to explain *altiora studia* to our Ruthenian youth in the Ruthenian Countries"[15]. The Jesuits adopted the same attitude in their missionary method, which was always based on knowledge of and adaptation to local conditions. Judging by the chronicles of the Jesuit centres at Ksawerów, Winnica, Ostróg and other places with an Orthodox majority, the Jesuits achieved considerable successes, increasing the number of Ruthenian Catholics in the Commonwealth[16].

To sum up these remarks on the Ruthenes' religious differentiation, let us say that the identification of Ruthenians with the Orthodox faith was until 1648 a propaganda trick of Orthodox believers rather than a description of the reality. When this identification was given the rank of almost a constitutional principle in the state created by the Cossacks after 1648, the Ruthenian nation lost this dissenting component. However, let us point out that this remark does not apply to the Uniates who managed to defend themselves against the planned liquidation decreed by the Union of Hadziacz and who already in the second half of the 17th century began to take over from the weakened Orthodox Church the role of the Ruthenes' spiritual leader in the Commonwealth[17].

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[14] The Uniates' close ties with Ukrainian culture have been recently presented comprehensively in a collective work *Berestejs'ka unija i ukrajins'ka kultura XVII stolittja*, ed. B. G u d z j a k , L'viv 1996.

[15] Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Polonia, № 77 II, 371 v.

[16] The chronicles of many Jesuit Ukrainian centres are kept in ARSI, Polonia 52, 66.

The theory launched some time ago by Janusz T a z b i r and Jarema
M a c i s z e w s k i that the Ruthenians of the Commonwealth did not invoke
their own state traditions and myths but contented themselves with Sarma-
tian ideology[18] should also be revised. An analysis of parliamentary rhetoric,
dietine instructions and religious polemics shows that this theory is not
correct. In the 17th century the Ruthenians had a compact mythical–histo-
riosophical system which differed from both the Polish and Moscow sys-
tems. Its essential elements were: the tracing back of the nation's origin to
Japheth, the legend that Ruthenia was Christianized already by St. Andrew,
cult of Rurik, founder of the Ruthenian dynasty, pride in Ruthenia's great-
ness under Vladimir and Yaroslav, the emphasis laid on the adoption of the
Christian faith from Byzantium and the stress laid on the half–sacred
metropolitan character of Kiev[19]. On the other hand, the ideology of Sar-
matism absorbed many Ruthenian symbols and traditions. S t a r o w o l s k i
mentions many Ruthenians among the Sarmatian warriors[20]. W a r s z e -
w i c k i includes Boris, Gleb and Parasceva in his dictionary of Sarmatian
(Polish) saints[21]. Ruthenian national and state tradition lived on, both as a
separate entity and as a fragment of the Sarmatian myth.

It is often forgotten that the Ruthenian territory was a legally separate
region in the Commonwealth; it was the Ruthenians' mainstay, a substitute
for a third element of the Commonwealth alongside Poland and the Grand
Duchy. I have in mind the territories called "the incorporated voivodships"
in historiography, not a very precise term. Their legal separateness was
established by two separate but, on the whole, identical acts issued by
Sigismund Augustus during the Lublin unification Sejm in 1569: one for
Volhynia and the Bracław region, and the other for the Kiev region. The
noblemen of these territories were granted all the privileges enjoyed by the
Polish nobility. The acts guaranteed the territorial integrity of these terri-
tories, recognized the Ruthenian princely titles and excluded these territories

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[17] Cf. fn. 13.

[18] J. M a c i s z e w s k i , *Szlachta polska i jej państwo (The Polish Nobility and Its State)*,
Warszawa 1960, p. 168; J. T a z b i r , *Świadomość narodowa*, in: i d e m , *Rzeczpospolita i świat.
Studia z dziejów kultury polskiej XVII wieku*, Wrocław 1971, p. 26.

[19] T. C h y n c z e w s k a – H e n n e l , *Świadomość narodowa szlachty ukraińskiej i kozaczyzny
od schyłku XVI do połowy XVII wieku (The National Consciousness of the Ukrainian Nobility and
Cossacks from the End of the 16th to the Middle of the 17th Century)*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 64–73;
F. S y s y n , *Concepts of Nationhood in Ukrainian History Writing 1620–1690*, "Harvard Ukrainian
Studies" 1986, vol. 10, *passim*.

[20] S. S t a r o w o l s k i , *Wojownicy sarmaccy (Sarmatian Warriors)*, ed. J. S t a r n a w s k i ,
Warszawa 1978, *passim*.

[21] M. Ż a r y n , *Dziełko Krzysztofa Warszewickiego o królach, świętych, wojownikach i pisa-
rzach (Krzysztof Warszewicki's Book on Kings, Saints, Warriors and Writers)*, "Odrodzenie i
Reformacja w Polsce" 1987, vol. 32, pp. 95–96.

from the executionist laws binding in Poland. The Second Lithuanian Statute was to be binding there, not the Polish law[22].

These guarantees were of a specific character for the incorporation privileges were in fact a bilateral agreement. It is said in their concluding clauses that the letter of the acts "shall not be impaired or denied by any privileges, statutes and laws adopted by the Sejm" and that the observance of these principles shall be guaranteed by the king's coronation oath[23]. Thus the acts became a constitutional norm, and the fact that they had to be confirmed by the king's oath turned them, in accordance with the logic of the Polish political system, into a social agreement (the breaking of the oath relieved the subjects from the duty of obedience). The special character of the Volhynian and Kiev privileges is clearly seen if we compare them with Podlasie's incorporation privilege which is usually stuffed into the same bag[24]. Whereas in the former privileges the king guaranteed separateness, in the latter he stipulated that restitution and reintegration were irrevocable and the concluding clauses did not mention the king's oath.

Historians often disregard the importance of these acts and confine themselves to calling the event by the simplified term of "incorporation". But the acts constitutionally decreed the territorial integrity of these regions, recognized their different social division (princely titles stemming from the Second Statute which recognized the existence of various categories within the privileged estate, in place of Polish egalitarianism), a different administration of justice and a different fiscal system (exclusion from executionist laws). Moreover the dietines secured local autonomy in the incorporated territories; all this shows that the incorporated territories enjoyed large–scale distinctness and that they only lacked a symbolic feature, namely Ruthenian state offices, to become a full–fledged element of the state union. In short, the territories separated from the Grand Duchy were given the greatest autonomy possible at that time. A greater autonomy would have demanded the creation of Ruthenian statehood, and this probably exceeded the capacity of the political nation in these territories and transcended the political vision of that time.

The above–mentioned differences existed not only on paper, even though they were gradually diluted. The king maintained a Ruthenian (Volhynian) chancellery which kept a separate register (up to 1673). In 1578 a separate tribunal of appeal with its seat in Łuck was set up for the three above–mentioned voivodships. The tribunal did not survive for a long time

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[22] *Volumina legum*, vol. 2, pp. 81–87.

[23] *Ibidem*, pp. 84, 87.

[24] *Ibidem*, pp. 77–80.

but the problems of these territories were later solved in Lublin at separate sessions. Lithuanian laws were consistently applied there, the three voivodships had a different administrative system (e.g. the starosts' jurisdiction was in the hands of the voivode) and a different hierarchy of district officials — elected standard–keepers (*chorąży*), the offices of stewards (*klucznik*), bailiffs (*ciwun*), bridge keepers (*nastawniczy*). The fact that the ordinances adopted by the Sejm in 1633 and 1635 extended "the law and statute of Kiev" to the Czernihów region wrested from Muscovy shows that the territorial integrity of the "incorporated voivodships" was recognized[25].

The conviction that the links of Volhynia and the Kiev region with Poland were a kind of union was widespread among the nobility of these territories. When the dietines invoked the specific status of Poland's eastern territories, they referred to the "privilege of the union"[26]. The nobility regarded their voivodships as an entity separate from Poland, called them Ruthenian or Ukrainian, or used such expressions as "our countries", "the countries whose laws are written in Ruthenian character"[27]. After 1635 these formulas were extended to include also the Czernihów region. Kiev was called "the capital city of the Ukraine"[28]. To make all this quite clear let us recall the words said by Adam Kisiel at the Sejm in 1641: "Our ancestors *Sarmatae Rossi ad Sarmatas Polonos libere accesserunt*"[29].

Did this legal distinctness play any practical role in politics? This depended on the activeness and stance of the persons concerned. The struggle to set up a legal Orthodox hierarchy ended in success. In 1638–1641 when a campaign for princely titles was waged in parliament, the Ruthenian nobility made use of its rights and succeeded in excluding the princely titles granted by the Giedymins and the Ruriks from the Sejm's law annulling all titles. The Ruthenian nobility could achieve these successes because it retained control over the local dietines and held a strong position among the borderland elite. This is confirmed by the dietines' instructions as well as by the composition of the deputies' delegations and the staff of officials in these territories[30].

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[25] *Ibidem*, vol. 3, pp. 179, 381–382, 410.

[26] Archiv Jugozapadnoj Rossii, Kijev 1861, part 2, vol. 1, pp. 106, 188.

[27] *Ibidem*, pp. 34, 67, 77, 155, 191, 203, 238.

[28] *The Kiev Dietine's Instructions for Deputies, March 27, 1640*, Centralnyj Derzavnyj Istorycnyj Archiv v Kijevi, Fond 11, N° 9, k. 265.

[29] Quoted after F. S y s y n, *Regionalism and Political Thought in Seventeenth–Century Ukraine: The Nobility's Grievances at the Diet of 1641*, "Harvard Ukrainian Studies", vol. VI, N° 2, June 1982, *Appendix*, p. 186.

[30] H. L i t w i n, *Napływ szlachty polskiej na Ukrainę 1569–1648 (The Inflow of Polish Noblemen into Ukraine 1569–1648)*, Instytut Historii PAN w Warszawie 1988, typescript, pp. 24–73.

It can therefore be said that there were good foundations for the Ruthenian nobility becoming a third nation of the Commonwealth. How is it that its position did not become formalized, that it was not inscribed in the constitution? The most frequent reply has been that this was due to the ill–will of the Polish side (the Lithuanian side has been usually forgotten); moreover, historians have tended to regard the Cossacks as the Ruthenian partners of the Commonwealth. But such a view ignores the existence of the Ruthenian nobility which, in accordance with the logic of the Common-wealth's political system and the mentality of the political class of those days, could be the only promoter of changes in the internal structure of the state. To come to an agreement with the Cossacks, the Polish–Lithuanian federation would have had to change the very core of its political system. If this was the only way of coming to an agreement with the Ruthenians, this means that there was no way at all.

I think, however, that there was one but it depended on the Ruthenian nobility's abilities. I do not agree with the assertion that the Ruthenian nobility became Polonized and, consequently, left the leadership of the Ruthenians to Chmielnicki's Cossacks (the first part of the statement is simply untrue); in my opinion, when the Ruthenian nobility had lost the battle for Ruthenian leadership to Zaporozhe, its majority found itself in conflict with the plebeian part of its own nation and as a result, became Polonized. The reasons for this setback have not yet been explained, and this is where one should look for the sources of the Ruthenians' tragic break with the Poles.

The Commonwealth of the Three Nations is a well known watchword which, even though it functions only as a proposal in historiography, reflects the popularity of the conviction that in fact only these three communities were political subjects in the Commonwealth. But let us not overlook other elements of this complex mosaic. Let us start with the Prussians. This is an exceptionally complicated question because of a possible confusion of the terms Pruthenians, Prussians and citizens of the Kingdom of Prussia, and because the term "Prussian" had many meanings in the 16th and 17th centuries. The beginning was made by Stanisław H e r b s t [31] but a number of studies have already been added to this nucleus; their conclusions allow us to state that in the 15th century the descendants of the Pruthenians, Pomeranians, Germans and Poles living in the state of the Teutonic Order were changing into a nation which is usually called the new–Prussian nation

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[31] S. H e r b s t, *Świadomość narodowa na ziemiach pruskich w XV–XVII w. (National Consciousness in Prussian Territories in the 15th–17th Centuries)*, "Komunikaty Mazursko–Warmiń-skie" 1962, Nº 1.

in historiography[32]. This evolution did not stop after the division of Prussia in 1466, and the consciousness of Prussian communion survived despite the split. In a study recently published in "Kwartalnik Historyczny", Marian B i s k u p says that the development of the new–Prussian nation was interrupted by the incorporation of Royal Prussia into Poland in 1569[33]. One can agree with the statement of this prominent expert, but let us point out that this process was not stopped at once and that this does not mean that other forms of Prussian consciousness did not survive, even though they were confined to that part of the country which was within the borders of the Commonwealth.

This sense of distinctness was based on Royal Prussia's legal status which guaranteed large–scale autonomy to its inhabitants even after the incorporation. The local Diet was transformed into the Estates of Royal Prussia, but since the Prussians always presented the laws adopted by the Sejm to their fellow countrymen, the Prussian Estates did not have much in common with other dietines for in fact, the laws passed by the Sejm did not come in force in Prussia until they had been endorsed by the Grudziądz assembly. Moreover, the province incorporated in 1569 had its own peculiarities, for its burghers also enjoyed political rights. The Prussian fiscal system was autonomous too, for the local treasurer retained control over the revenue derived from local taxes. The province had its own judiciary law (Chełmno law) and consequently had a different system of justice (assessors). Royal Prussia also had its own form of citizenship, the so–called *indigenatus*, which it cherished like the apple of its eye[34].

All this could not but sustain a sense of Prussian distinctness born in the previous century. However, this sense of being distinct evolved owing to the break with the electoral part of the Teutonic State's legacy. The emancipation of the nobility (the majority of which spoke Polish), the inflow of brother–noblemen from Poland and Poland's cultural influence had a similar effect; the result was that the German language was gradually losing its hegemonic position. The former Teutonic Prussians were becoming

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[32] This current in historiography has been recently summed up by M. B i s k u p, *Etniczno-demograficzne przemiany Prus Krzyżackich w rozwoju osadnictwa w średniowieczu /o tzw. nowym plemieniu Prusaków/ (Teutonic Prussia's Ethnodemographic Transformations during the Development of Settlement in the Middle Ages — concerning the so–called new Prussian tribe)*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1991, vol. 98, N⁰ 2.

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 65.

[34] Cf. J. M a ł ł e k, *Dwie części Prus (The Two Parts of Prussia)*, Olsztyn 1987, *passim*; S. S a l m o n o w i c z, *Prusy Królewskie w ustroju Rzeczypospolitej, 1569–1772 (Royal Prussia in the Commonwealth's Political System, 1569–1772)*, in: *Studia z dziejów, passim*; Z. N a w o r s k i, *Indygenat w Prusach Królewskich 1454–1772 (The So–called Indigenatus in Royal Prussia 1454–1772)*, "Czasopismo Prawno–Historyczne" 1983, vol. 35, N⁰ 1, *passim*.

Prussians of the Commonwealth without losing their traditions. Even in the 17th century Prussian historians consistently referred to the legacy of the east Pomeranian duchies' statehood, to the Prussians' tribal community and their unity under the rule of the Teutonic Knights. Attempts were made to include this historiographical system in the Sarmatian current (Jan S c h u l t z – S z u l e c k i , 1662–1704), while the other side endeavoured to keep up the tradition of Teutonic Prussia's community (Krzysztof H a r t - k n o c h , 1644–1687). The supporters of the latter option were becoming less and less numerous, and in the second half of the 17th century they were completely isolated[35].

This does not change the fact that thanks to their distinctness based on the legal and political autonomy of their territory, their bilingualism and their attachment to their state traditions, the Prussians, even though their distinctness was fading away, can be regarded as a fourth nation of the Commonwealth, in any case until the middle of the 17th century.

What about a fifth nation, the Livonians? We know something about their territorial autonomy[36] but far less about cultural changes in this war–afflicted country. On the analogy of Prussia, one cannot entertain doubts about the existence of a separate political nation in Livonia. However, since research into the history of this region has been dominated by Germans and Russians, this aspect is not well known.

To keep to more or less the same subject, it would be worth while to consider whether the inhabitants of Gdańsk can be regarded as a separate "political nation". Such a view would be justified for Gdańsk had its own legal status (not only with regard to Poland but also to Royal Prussia) and its own official language; it invoked its own specific tradition as regards statehood and political system, and its position sometimes allowed the city to play the role of the Commonwealth's partner and an independent subject of foreign policy (especially during the war with Sweden in 1626–1629 and 1655–1660).

We have thus completed the catalogue of the nations which coexisted in the Commonwealth, if we have in mind those which had their own territory, enjoyed, at least partly, a different legal status and were conscious of their own state traditions. But I have doubts whether the remaining ethnic

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[35] Cf. J. D w o r z a c z k o w a , *Dziejopisarstwo gdańskie do połowy XVI w.* (*Gdańsk Historiography to the Middle of the 16th Century*), Gdańsk 1962, *passim*; L. M o k r z e c k i , *W kręgu prac historyków gdańskich XVII wieku* (*The Works of 17th Century Gdańsk Historians*), Gdańsk 1974, *passim*; i d e m , *Refleksje o historiografii gdańskiej XVII wieku* (*Reflections on Gdańsk 17th Century Historiography*), "Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Nauki Polskiej" 1977, vol. 6, *passim*.

[36] The collective work *Inflanty a Polska* (*Livonia and Poland*), Warszawa 1873, is still of fundamental importance in view of the lack of new literature on this subject.

communities living in the Commonwealth can be regarded as merely tolerated nations. After all the word "toleration" denotes lack of consent to ontological difference as well as acceptance of temporal coexistence with this difference. (It is perhaps worth recalling this primary definition now, when toleration is usually conceived as a principle of a spiritual and not of a practical nature). From this point of view one can distinguish tolerated nations from nations enjoying the hospitality of the Commonwealth. In a multinational state these groups can be distinguished only on the basis of religion.

A foreign Christian, irrespective of his descent, could be granted noblemen's or urban rights or become a full–fledged member of a rural community. This applied to the Germans, Czechs, Greeks, Moldavians, Wallachians, Italians, Dutchmen, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Hungarians and Russians who settled in Poland as religious or economic emigrants. Religious refugees sometimes lived isolated in their own community and remained in it from generation to generation, benefiting from the religious peace decreed in the Commonwealth. This applied to the Mennonite *Olędrowie* (immigrants from the Netherlands) and the Raskolniks from Muscovy. This was their own choice. However, even if a community had its own institutional forms (e.g. the assembly of representatives of the Scots living in the Commonwealth), kept up distinct customs, traditions and their mother tongue, the immigrants were slowly becoming Polonized, Ruthenized (e.g. some Greeks, Moldavians and Wallachians), Lithuanized (e.g. the Germans in Wilno, Tartars) and perhaps also Pruthenized. All these were guests of the Commonwealth.

Non–Christian nations were tolerated. This applies first and foremost to Jews. Since the times of Casimir the Great they had had the privilege of setting up their own self–government all over the country, enjoyed freedom of religious worship and the right to appeal to voivodes from the verdicts of urban and noblemen's courts. From 1539, when Sigismund I deprived the Jews living in private estates of the last–named privilege, their legal situation was defined by privileges issued by landowners. As a result, the Jews enjoyed cultural and religious freedom but, on the whole, lived in closed communities in separate socio–topographic niches (a Jewish street, district,

town)[37]. Religion was the essential barrier separating the Jews from their hosts, as is proved by the fact that converts had no difficulty in being admitted to the nobility. The Third Lithuanian Statute said: "if a Jew converts to Christianity, he and his progeny shall be recognized as noblemen"[38]. Conversion also opened access to the burgher estate.

Tolerance was a norm as far as the Jews were concerned, but there were exceptions. Many towns were granted *de non tolerandis Iudaeis* privilege. The nobility of Royal Prussia repeatedly ousted Jews from their province by virtue of resolutions adopted by the Estates General (1551, 1594, 1606, 1616)[39].

The Karaites were in a similar situation. By virtue of special privileges they enjoyed religious freedom and had their own judicial self–government in several towns[40]. The Tartars living in towns enjoyed only religious freedom, their religious organization, dominated by the mullahs, acting as a kind of self–government[41].

The attitude to the Gypsies was different; they were not tolerated for they were regarded as a dangerous uncontrollable element of "suspicious faith". But the banishment edicts of 1557, 1565 and 1578 turned out to be ineffective. In 1607, the nobility of Podlasie secured the suspension of the edicts in their territory, which turned Podlasie into a specific Gypsy haven. In the second half of the 17th century attempts were made to ensure state control over this part of the population through the appointment of Gypsy

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[37] During the last few years many works have been published on the situation of the Jews in the Commonwealth in the 16th and 17th centuries. Special mention is due to the collective work *Żydzi w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej. Materiały z konferencji "Autonomia Żydów w Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej", 22–261X1986 (The Jews in the Old Commonwealth. Materials from the conference "The Jews' Autonomy in the Noblemen's Commonwealth", 22–26.09.1986)*, Wrocław 1991. See also: J. T a z b i r , *Żydzi w opinii staropolskiej (The Jews in Old Polish Public Opinion)*, in: i d e m , *Świat Panów Pasków (The World of Messrs. Pasek)*, Łódź 1986; D. T o l l e t , *Ludzie u władzy w miastach królewskich w Polsce Wazów 1588–1668. Szkic o gminach żydowskich w Krakowie i Poznaniu (The People in Power in Royal Towns in Poland during the Reign of the Vasas 1588–1668. Essay on Jewish Communes in Cracow and Poznań)*, "Społeczeństwo Staropolskie", vol. 4, Warszawa 1986; J. G o l d b e r g , *Żydowscy konwertyci w społeczeństwie staropolskim (Jewish Converts in Old Polish Society)*, ibidem; i d e m , *Władza dominalna Żydów–arendarzy dóbr ziemskich nad chłopami w XVII–XVIII wieku (The Domanial Power of Jewish Lease–Holders over Peasants in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1990, vol. 81, N° 1–2.

[38] Quoted after J. T a z b i r , *Żydzi w opinii staropolskiej*, in: i d e m , *Świat Panów Pasków*, Łódź 1986, p. 197.

[39] Quoted after J. T a z b i r , *Stosunek protestantów do Żydów (The Protestants' Attitude to the Jews)*, in: i d e m , *Świat Panów Pasków*, p. 205.

[40] Polish Karaites are the subject of a recent book by J. T y s z k i e w i c z , *Karaimi litewscy i polscy (The Lithuanian and Polish Karaites)*, Warszawa 1985.

[41] Cf. J. T y s z k i e w i c z , *Tatarzy na Litwie i w Polsce. Studia z dziejów XIII–XVIII w. (The Tartars in Lithuania and Poland. Studies in the History of the 13th–18th Centuries)*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 222–254.

"elders" or "kings". In practice this amounted to decreeing tolerance towards the Gypsy population[42].

The nations which were merely tolerated blended into their environment the most slowly and cases of assimilation were relatively rare in these groups. They did not fully identify themselves with the Commonwealth, though there were exceptions, particularly numerous among the Karaites.

Mention should also be made of three specific cases. The first concerns Tartars and the Lipkis, a Muslim quasi–nobility from the Crimean, Astrakhan and Kazan khanates and the Golden Horde. Even though they were not Christians, their position was too privileged to describe attitude to them as toleration. They owned land in return for military service (an attribute of the nobility) and were subject to the same law courts as the nobility. But they did not enjoy full political rights and were thus second category citizens. They assimilated rarely (more often in Lithuania than Poland), but most of them identified themselves with the Commonwealth[43].

Of all the wandering peoples it was the Armenians who were the most closely linked with the Commonwealth. Since many of them were ennobled, they constituted in fact a political nation, but they had no territorial base. The nobility of Armenian origin, a numerous group, adopted the Polish language, but retained their own cultural traditions. After the Union of Lwów, the Armenian burghers became co–masters in towns; they formed their own self–governing communities or became municipal citizens (e.g. in Zamość). Some researchers hold the view that the union of the Armenian Church with Rome was a manifestation of national discrimination. But this view does not stand the test of criticism if we recall the services rendered by the main promoters of the union, the Theatines, to Armenian culture. The arrivals from Transcaucasus were another example of a nation with such deep roots in the structures of the Commonwealth that toleration would not be a proper word to define the attitude towards them. Like the Tartars, they

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[42] As regards recent books on Gypsies in the Commonwealth see J. F i c o w s k i , *Cyganie na polskich drogach (Gypsies on Polish Roads)*, Kraków 1985; L. M r ó z , *Suplement do początku królów i starszych cygańskich w Polsce (Supplement to the Origin of Gypsy Kings and Elders in Poland)*, "Etnografia Polska" 1988, vol. 32, N° 1; i d e m , *Geneza Cyganów i ich kultury (The Genesis of the Gypsies and Their Culture)*, Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, typescript.

[43] As regards recent works about Tartars in the Commonwealth see J. T y s z k i e w i c z , *Tatarzy (Tartars)*; A. B. Z a k r z e w s k i , *O asymilacji Tatarów w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII w. (The Assimilation of Tartars in the Old Commonwealth in the 16th–18th Centuries)* in: *Tryumfy i porażki. Studia z dziejów kultury polskiej XVI–XVIII w.*, ed. M. B o g u c k a , Warszawa 1989; J. S o b c z a k , *Położenie prawne ludności tatarskiej w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim (The Legal Status of the Tartars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania)*, Warszawa 1984; P. B o r a w s k i , *Tatarzy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej (Tartars in the Old Commonwealth)*, Warszawa 1986.

were accepted as fellow countrymen, but not having a territory of their own, they could not enjoy political liberties[44].

The third specific case concerns a community which met many criteria required of a political nation — territory, a high degree of organization, its own traditions, common political interests and even its own military forces — but despite this was not tolerated by the Commonwealth. I have the Cossacks in mind. Their history is of course usually examined as a fragment of the history of Ukraine–Ruthenia, which is fully justified. I would, however, draw attention to the fact that this corporation was not recognized by the state which tried to liquidate it or cram it (through registration) into the framework of the existing order, that is, to deprive it of the role of a political nation which, according to the view of that time, a plebeian community could only usurp.

In summing up let us also deal with the Poles whom historians have often presented as hegemons in the Commonwealth. It seems, however, that this view should be modified. There is no doubt that Poland was the originator of the Union. It strove to achieve it by political measures, but first and foremost through the political system. The Commonwealth of many nations would not have existed had not the Poles worked out the concept of a state which was the product of a social agreement between the king and society (the political nation), a concept which was based on the works of Stanisław o f S k a r b i m i e r z and Paweł W ł o d k o w i c and the even earlier political aspirations of the nobility from the times of Casimir the Great and the Angevin dynasty[45]. It was the Poles who contributed most to the genesis of the Commonwealth. But things look different if we think of responsibility for the political history of the state after the Union. Let us refer again to the output of the Lower Silesian school and recall that in the first half of the 17th century the dietines from the Polish territories never imposed solutions dictated by their own national interests on the rest of the Commonwealth. It would be easier to find examples of a united front of the Lithuanians, Ruthenians or Prussians. Similar conclusions can be reached if we analyze external relations. The Commonwealth's main conflicts — the wars with Muscovy, the beginnings of the wars with Sweden — resulted from the necessity of defending non–Polish territories. It would therefore be

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[44] As regards recent books on Armenians in the Commonwealth see: M. Z a k r z e w s k a – D u - b a s o w a , *Ormianie w dawnej Polsce* (*Armenians in Old Poland*), Lublin 1982; J. B a r d a c h , *Ormianie na ziemiach dawnej Polski* (*Armenians in the Territories of Old Poland*), "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1983, vol. 90, Nº 1.

[45] Cf. H. L i t w i n , *W poszukiwaniu rodowodu demokracji szlacheckiej. Polska myśl polityczna w piśmiennictwie XV i początków XVI w.* (*In Search of the Genesis of the Noblemen's Democracy. Polish Political Thought in 15th and Early 16th Century Writings*), in: *Między monarchią a demokracją. Studia z dziejów Polski XV–XVIII wieku.* Warszawa 1994.

difficult to conclude that the Commonwealth was interested only in Poland's
raison d'état, as has usually been asserted. Such an assertion ignores the
situation in the 17th century and is a product of the conditions which
prevailed in the epoch when modern historiography was created.

In the 19th century Polish culture, which was developing more quickly
than the neighbouring countries' cultures, usurped, so to say, the history of
the Commonwealth and treated it as a fragment of the Poles' history. As a
result, the Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians, who experienced
their national revival a little later and in opposition to the Poles, repudiated,
contrary to logic, the traditions of the Commonwealth, recognizing them as
alien, and began to create their own historiographies on the basis of a
criticism of that state. This brought forth a reaction from Polish historians,
which in turn strengthened the opposition of the above–mentioned nations.
(Let us recall that the Ukrainians confined their 17th century national
tradition to the history of the Cossacks and the Orthodox Church; it is only
for a dozen years or so that emigré Ukrainian historians have included the
history of the Ruthenian nobility in their tradition; in Ukraine this has been
done for only the last few years). Both sides identified the Commonwealth
with Poland and regarded this as an unquestionable fact which required no
proof; this has not changed. But as I have tried to show, the other nations of
the Commonwealth exerted a great influence on the course of political
events and the fate of that state, and they had ample opportunities for cultural
development. The result could only be a synthesis of the values cherished
by the individual nations; a cultural hegemony of one of the nations of the
Commonwealth was out of the question. In this melting pot Polish traits
were subjected to a similar, though not the same, transformation as Ruthe-
nian, Lithuanian and Prussian traits. The Polish language was, of course, the
language of state–wide communication and Polish culture probably exerted
the strongest influence on the culture of the Commonwealth, but this does
not contradict the fact that this culture was a synthesis. This is why the
history and culture of the Commonwealth should, in my opinion, be treated
as a common legacy of the Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrai-
nians. So far each of these nations has been trying to tear away its own
fragments of history from this historical basis and usurp individual historical
personages. But without referring to our communion it is impossible to
understand even M i c k i e w i c z, to say nothing of his ancestors: S k o -
r y n a, O r z e c h o w s k i and S t r y j k o w s k i. We are still violating the
agreement concluded in the past by "freemen with free, equals with equal".

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)