

Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0775-7263>

Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences

**A POLISH SATTELZEIT?
NEW CONCEPTS IN THE POLITICAL LANGUAGE
AT THE TWILIGHT OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN
COMMONWEALTH***

Abstract

The political discourse in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth changed deeply in the second half of the eighteenth century. New concepts, terms and notions were integrated into it, some of them drawn from the vocabularies of Western philosophers. The article tries to answer the question what these concepts or notions were, and how their adaptation informed the language itself and the descriptions of the political world and political-system projects formulated in it. Based on the analysis of theoretical treatises as well as writings produced as part of current political debate of the years 1764–92, the author seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the political disputants of King Stanislaus Augustus's time endeavoured to face the state's crisis through introducing new words and ideas, and in which the language was adapting to the challenges of the changing socio-political situation. She argues that the concepts which appeared in the last quarter of the century in the Polish political language were fundamental to the description and view of the world – to the extent that a breakthrough in Polish discussion on society and state is identifiable along these lines.

Keywords: Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, eighteenth century, political discourse, history of ideas, conceptual history

* This article is a sort of summary of my research hitherto; see *The Political Discourse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Concepts and Ideas*, transl. Daniel Sax (New York–London, 2021); 'O niektórych zmianach w języku politycznym czasów stanisławowskich', in Piotr Ugniewski (ed.), "*Sklócony naród, król niepewny, szlachta dzika*"? *Polska Stanisławowska w świetle najnowszych badań* (Warszawa, 2020), 11–32.

This article intends to show the major concepts or notions which were integrated into the discourse in the late years of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and tries to answer the question of how their adaptation influenced the language itself and the descriptions of the political world and political-system projects formulated in it. In the *Begriffsgeschichte* school's research, the term *Sattelzeit* refers to the fundamental changes that were taking place over a more extended period, reflecting a far-reaching social transition.¹ Herein, the matter in question is confined in a shorter period, and the changes under discussion are probably not as thorough. The title question is deliberately posed somewhat exaggeratedly, thus pointing to the importance of the period for the formation of Polish political language.

I

In the search for a language that would have helped them to face and tackle the crisis of the state, the political disputants of King Stanislaus Augustus's time introduced a whole lot of new concepts and terms, quitting or redefining some other ones. These developments are possibly comparable only with the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century – the moment the Polish nobility sought for words with which to name their political projects and ambitions. However, insofar as the language was created at that time, now, in the late eighteenth century, it called for reviving, getting freed from the corset of clichés and patterns in which it had been stuck since the late seventeenth century. It lacked the concepts that would have enabled it to describe or propose the change, or transition, that was already taking place or needed to be made in the social structure and the country's political and institutional framework.

¹ The authors of the *Begriffsgeschichte* point to such breakthrough period for German-speaking countries in the years 1750–1850, and for France in 1680–1820. In their opinion, it was in these respective periods that the border appeared between the early modern period and modernity; they did not explore any of the earlier periods. For more on the school's concepts, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1979). Also, see Rolf Reichardt, 'Historische Semantik zwischen Lexicometrie und New Cultural History. Einführende Bemerkungen zur Standortbestimmung', in *id.* (ed.), *Aufklärung und Historische Semantik: interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur westeuropäischen Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin, 1998), 7–44; Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural. An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York–Oxford, 2012).

Those who attempted to tackle the problem in question, at least initially, were authors of extensive works, and it is these works that will be primarily analysed in the following paragraphs. Not all of these texts influenced the then-current discussions – and not surprisingly so, since some of them were intended as school textbooks, or educational aids, rather than contributions to the ongoing political debate. In any case, it is in these texts – many of them not-quite-original, and not necessarily outstanding – that one may observe the most important changes in the political language. Even if the tools of description of the political world proposed by them were initially used to a minimal degree, it is a matter of fact that their appearance in the discourse was owed to authors such as Józef Wybicki, Antoni Popławski, Hieronim Stroynowski, and others. Another source of importance that enables to follow the novelties in the political language are the writings produced as part of ongoing discussions, particularly in the Four Years' Sejm period (1788–92), when the language was improved and enriched in the course of hot political disputes.

Albeit the reign of Stanislaus Augustus is the real focus here, an apparent change in the way the state was referred to becomes evident only in the mid-1770s, as if in response to the upheaval of the Confederation of Bar (1768) and subsequently the first partition of Poland-Lithuania. While a few interesting reform proposals of political system came out earlier on, their authors still used the traditional political language. The best example are the works by Stanisław Konarski, who was able to describe a daring conception of political reform without introducing any new terms or concepts.² A change in this respect appeared with representatives of the next generation, among whom Konarski's Piarist confreres stood out: Wincenty Skrzetuski and Antoni Popławski; somewhat later, Hieronim Stroynowski, Konstantyn Bogusławski, Remigiusz Ładowski; alongside them, Karol Wyrwicz, Franciszek Bieliński, and, above all, Józef Wybicki. Apart from Wybicki, these authors were not entirely original; some of them (Ładowski, Wyrwicz) mostly adapted foreign theories. Stroynowski, the most interesting among them, loyally followed the teachings of French physiocrats.³

² For a broader take, see Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, “‘Nowe wino w starych butelkach’. O języku politycznym Stanisława Konarskiego”, *Wiek Oświecenia*, xxxii (2016), 11–28.

³ For more on their views, see Władysław Konopczyński, *Polscy pisarze polityczni XVIII w. (do Sejmu Czteroletniego)* (Warszawa, 1966), 331–51, 411–14; Kazimierz

It was them, however, who introduced in their political language the concepts that not only changed the way of talking about state and society but also altered the view of the political world.

II

Among the big group of concepts and the political ideas they described, which became part of the period's discourse, 'natural law' and 'social contract', the latter most frequently called 'common covenant' (*ugoda pospolita*), should be regarded as the two major ones. While the former concept was not novel, it had somewhat fallen into oblivion since the sixteenth century; initially, in its classical version, it occupied a considerable space in the commentaries of Renaissance humanists such as Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski or Andrzej Wolan. The modern breakthrough in the reflection upon the natural law proposed by authors such as Johannes Althusius or Hugo Grotius passed virtually unnoticed.

The latter idea mentioned above, though present in European considerations at least since the middle of the seventeenth century, took its deserved place in Polish authors' opinions only in the mid-1770s. It was presented in different ways, as influenced by diverse philosophers: from the earlier theoreticians like Grotius and Samuel von Pufendorf, through to Locke and, subsequently, French physiocrats and Rousseau. Depending on the source they drew from, Polish authors emphasised the role of contract in the emergence of power or in the formation of a community. For our present purpose, rather than details related to the contract's form, sources and objectives,⁴ of importance is the

Opalek, *Prawo natury u polskich fizjokratów* (Warszawa, 1953); Irena Stasiewicz-Jasiukowa, *Człowiek i obywatel w piśmiennictwie naukowym i podręcznikach polskiego oświecenia* (Warszawa, 1979), 82–141; Marek Błaszke, 'A. Popławski: Fizjokratyzm, wizja jednostki i społeczeństwa', *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, xxxiii (1989), 305–35; *id.*, 'Poglądy społeczno-polityczne Hieronima Stroynowskiego', in *Historia i współczesność. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Władysławowi Ćwikowi w pięćdziesięciolecie pracy naukowej* (Zamość, 2005), 329–41; Wojciech Giza, 'Hieronim Stroynowski jako czołowy przedstawiciel fizjokratyzmu w Polsce', *Zeszyty Naukowe / Akademia Ekonomiczna w Krakowie*, dcxxxii (2004), 113–22; Emanuel Rostworowski, 'Myśli polityczne Józefa Wybickiego', in Andrzej Bukowski (ed.), *Józef Wybicki. Księga pamiątkowa* (Gdańsk, 1975), 11–34.

⁴ Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, 'O recepcji idei umowy społecznej w czasach stanisławowskich', *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne*, xlii, 1–2 (2000), 109–26.

fact that it embraced all the members of society. Basically, none of those who referred to the contract theory would doubt that all “the people have agreed to a common life”,⁵ the “entire community” has entered into an agreement (however the latter would be understood), all the participants co-forming the thus-formed society. Even those authors whose vision was confined to the nobility-dominated Commonwealth, admitted that all the people “merged into a society”⁶ whenever referring to ‘contract’ as the theory or merely as a slogan – though the ‘society’ aspect was not entirely of interest to them. No further-reaching conclusions were drawn, either, by authors describing the general theory of emergence of societies and power – including Wyrwicz, Ładowski, or Bieliński – who usually simply quoted foreign definitions of ‘contract’. It is a matter of fact, though, that along with the concept of ‘contract’, they introduced into Polish discourse new concepts such as ‘society’ (*towarzystwo*, based on the French *société*), ‘civil community’ (*społeczność cywilna*), ‘the state of community’.⁷ These same concepts allowed the authors such as Popławski, Skrzetuski, Stroynowski (to recall the best-known ones) not only to enrich their political language but also the image of the society depicted in their considerations. In short, the concept included society in its entirety, rather than its noble citizens only.

This did not have to imply any further-reaching propositions for social reform. When reading the considerations from the 1770s and 1780s, one might infer that their authors were only learning how to use the new language, not being fully able yet to transfer it from the level

⁵ Karol Wyrwicz, *Geografia powszechna czasów teraźniejszych* (Warszawa, 1773), 79; similarly, Józef Wybicki, *Mysli polityczne o wolności cywilnej*, ed. by Zbigniew Nowak (Gdańsk, 1984), 55; Józef Wybicki, *Listy patriotyczne*, ed. by Kazimierz Opalek (Wrocław, 1955), 14.

⁶ *Bezstronne zastanowienie się nad proponowaną ustawą następstwa tronu w Polsce* (s.l., 1789), 27; Michał Wielhorski, *O przywróceniu dawnego rządu: według pierwiastkowych Rzeczypospolitej ustaw...* (s.l., 1775), 86; Dyzma Bończa Tomaszewski, ‘Nad Konstytucją i rewolucją dnia 3 maja roku 1791 uwagi’, in Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz (ed.), *Za czy przeciw Ustawie rządowej. Walka publicystyczna o Konstytucję 3 Maja* (Warszawa, 1992), 162.

⁷ “In such a state of commonality”: [Remigiusz Ładowski], *Krótkie zebranie trzech praw początkowych, to jest prawa natury, politycznego i narodów z różnych autorów wyjęte* (Lwów, 1780), 66; “union of community” (*związek społeczności*): [Franciszek Bieliński], *Sposób edukacji w XV listach opisany* (Warszawa, 1775), 113 (following Holbach); “in the society”: Wyrwicz, *Geografia*, 631.

of theoretical consideration to analysis of their surrounding reality.⁸ Based on their use, they did draw conclusions with respect to their own community, but rarely referred such concepts directly to it. Moreover, it was easier for them to integrate the new words into considerations on social aspects, as opposed to proposed solutions relating to the political or constitutional system; this is attested by the two books by Wybicki as well as by Popławski's *Zbiór niektórych materji politycznych* [Collection of Some Political Matters].

The incorporation of new concepts into the discussion on the political system and the vision of entire society described by them did not happen until a few years later, during the Four Years' Sejm, with the addresses given by Stanisław Staszic and Hugo Kołłątaj (to point to the highlights). Staszic, not without an influence from Rousseau, doubtlessly developed the contract and 'society' theory in the most extensive way, whereas Kołłątaj included the most coherently the new concepts and ideas into his constitutional programme as well as into direct political struggle.⁹ They were not the only ones at that time to observe and name more than the nobility's Commonwealth. Different words were used to talk and write about common people,¹⁰ society,¹¹ or civil community¹² by authors known by their names, such as Józef Pawlikowski, Tadeusz Morski, or Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, as well as anonymous political fighters of the time.

Not all of the terms they used were drawn from Enlightenment philosophers. It can be said that acceptance of new visions of society allowed to change the meanings also of certain concepts long present in the nobility's discourse. This did not happen with respect to 'the Commonwealth' (*Rzeczpospolita*), which was still perceived primarily

⁸ Jerzy Michalski drew attention to the 'shyness' of their social reform programme: "'Wolność" i "własność" chłopska w polskiej myśli reformatorskiej XVIII wieku', in *id.*, *Studia historyczne z XVIII i XIX wieku* (Warszawa, 2007), ii, 130–41.

⁹ Hugo Kołłątaj, *Uwagi nad pismem które wyszło z drukarni Dufourowskiej pt. Seweryna Rzewuskiego ... o sukcesji tronu w Polsce rzecz krótka* (Warszawa, 1790), 47.

¹⁰ [Ignacy Potocki?], *Odpowiedź JW. Sewerynowi Rzewuskiemu ... na Uwagi nad prawem, któreby szlachcice bez posesyi activitatem na sejmikach odbierało* (s.l., 1790), 4.

¹¹ Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, 'Bezstronne uwagi nad mową J.W. Jezierskiego ... dnia 15 grudnia 1789 przeciwko mieszczanom', in Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Rostworowski, and Janusz Woliński (eds), *Materiały do dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, ii (Wrocław, 1959), 431.

¹² *Odпис z Ukrainy na list z Warszawy do przyjaciela na wsi mieszkającego w materji formy rządowej* (Warszawa, 1790), 18.

as a noble community, but concepts such as ‘citizen’ and ‘nation’ gradually gained broader meanings.¹³ This is clearly visible in publications from the 1770s, both in the definitions – as in Popławski’s “a nation is nothing else than a smaller or larger gathering of people who enclose themselves within certain frontiers of their country, associated between themselves by means of union and common government”¹⁴ – and in the idea to include in the nation estates other than the nobility, or in describing their members as citizens.¹⁵ In the course of the Four Years’ Sejm, not only Stanisław Staszic and Franciszek Salezy Jezierski but also the increasingly numerous participants of political discussions found that the nation was more than the nobility. Among them were those who – like Pawlikowski, Puszet, and then, Morski, or Kołłątaj – postulated that the situation of the townspeople and peasants be improved,¹⁶ along with those who would not opt for bestowing rights to these social strata. It has to be borne in mind that not every instance of revoking a new concept, or an old one with its new meaning, meant necessarily a change in the way the society was perceived. Such concepts might as well have functioned as clichés embellishing the orations that would not go beyond the confines of description of the noble society.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, though, even such uses testify to a change taking place in the language.

¹³ Franciszek Peplowski, *Słownictwo i frazeologia polskiej publicystyki okresu Oświecenia i Romantyzmu* (Warszawa, 1961), 107; Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, ‘Koncepcja narodu w polskim dyskursie końca XVIII wieku. Rozważania nad Konstytucją 3 Maja’, in Łukasz Adamski (ed.), *O ziemię naszą, nie waszą. Ideowe aspekty procesów narodotwórczych w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej* (Warszawa, 2017), 143–51.

¹⁴ Antoni Popławski, *Zbiór niektórych materyi politycznych* (Warszawa, 1774), 274; Hieronim Stroynowski, *Nauka prawa przyrodzonego, politycznego, ekonomiki politycznej i prawa narodów* (Wilno, 1785), 239.

¹⁵ Popławski, *Zbiór*, 56–9; Wincenty Skrzetuski, *Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego*, ii (Warszawa, 1784), 81; Wybicki, *Listy*, 92.

¹⁶ Józef Puszet de Puget, *O uszczęśliwieniu narodów* (Warszawa, 1788), 71; Tadeusz Morski, *Uwagi nad pismem Seweryna Rzewuskiego ... o sukcesji tronu w Polsce* [Warszawa, 1790], 24; [Hugo Kołłątaj], ‘Krótka rada względem napisania dobrej konstytucji rządu’ (Warszawa, 1790), in Łukasz Kądziela (ed.), *Kołłątaj i inni* (Warszawa 1991), 151; Józef Pawlikowski, *Mysli polityczne dla Polski* (Kraków, 1789), 172 f.

¹⁷ *Bezstronne zastanowienie się nad proponowaną ustawą następstwa tronu w Polsce* (s.l., 1789) refers to ‘the contract’ (p. 27), natural freedom (p. 31), and more, whilst completely ignoring the social questions; its author focuses on defence of the election of the throne; similarly in [Kazimierz Konstanty Plater], *Kosmopolita do narodu polskiego* (s.l., 1790), 4.

III

'Laws of nature', more often called 'innate' or 'elemental' laws, were such cliché reappearing in public addresses, speeches or orations at or around the Four Years' Sejm. They appeared as a specific general construction or, more specifically, as "liberty, this most venerable and only attribute of mankind, the most concordant one, and stemming from the natural law".¹⁸ The phrase might have been used as an erudite ornament or outright confirmation of the perfectness of the solutions proposed in Poland, like in the afore-quoted pamphlet.¹⁹ However, it did also serve as an instrument to describe the rights due to all members of a 'civil community', which was once formed precisely to protect these rights. The authors who introduced the concept, with the theoretical background behind it – from Wybicki to Kołłątaj – emphasised, in line with the classical tradition and the then-most recent Western theories (especially, those of the physiocrats) that any statutory and codified laws had to remain in line with the natural law.²⁰ As Wybicki wrote, "all the verdicts of the legislative civil power are unjust if not founding themselves upon natural law".²¹ Together with the accompanying remark that "the law of nature is the law of everybody",²² one could no more limit himself to the laws or rights pertinent to only one of the several social estates. It can be said that whereas making the 'social contract' concept part of the discourse enabled the authors and commentators to talk about society in its entirety, the 'natural law' made them see the society as a group of individuals naturally, or innately, bestowed with equal

¹⁸ *Mysli patriotyczno-polityczne do Stanów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na sejm 1788 roku zgrupowanych* (Warszawa, 1788), 1.

¹⁹ For instance, [Seweryn Rzewuski], *Rozwagi o królach polskich, bezkrólewicach, elekcjach i sukcesji tronu* (Warszawa, 1790), 320; Wojciech Turski, *Mysli o królach, o sukcesji, o przeszłym i przyszłym rządzie* (Warszawa, 1790), 17; Bończa Tomaszewski, 'Nad Konstytucją', 163; earlier on, similarly, Wielhorski, *O przywróceniu*, X, XII, 1, 31.

²⁰ Stroynowski went the furthest in this respect, as he reckoned – following Quesnay and other physiocrats – that rather than making the laws, people basically discover the laws established by God in the natural order of things: Stroynowski, *Nauka*, 108, see Opalek, *Prawo natury*, 21 and 74.

²¹ Wybicki, *Listy*, 30; similarly in Konstantyn Bogusławski, *O doskonałym prawodawstwie* (Warszawa, 1786), 77; also, in Stroynowski, *Nauka*, 74; Popławski, *Zbiór*, 53; Skrzetuski, *Mowy*, 351.

²² Wybicki, *Listy*, 30.

rights; this is visible also in the later comments and opinions. Another new term, ‘the rights of man’, appeared in this context as well.²³ Whilst not becoming very popular, the concept was referred to by several adherents of social reform during the Four Years’ Sejm period, Kołłątaj in the first place; the latter resolutely claimed that “liberty of the people is nothing else than the right of man”.²⁴ The writings of Józef Pawlikowski are the most interesting example of perceiving the society from the standpoint of individuals: while he did refer to (the) nation as a whole, however, particularly in the treatise *O poddanych polskich* [On the Polish Subjects], his main focus of interest and care was ‘man’: his rights, nature, and felicity.

IV

References to the laws of nature and the social contract allowed to broaden the vision of society and contributed to the coining of certain new concepts and terms which had not existed or been not-quite-present in the political language. ‘Property’ was one such idea. Although in the Western discourse, it had been quite fundamental to talking and thinking about the state at least since the seventeenth century, it rarely appeared in the Commonwealth nobility’s political considerations, being much more secondary than the key concepts such as ‘liberty’, ‘law’, ‘virtue’, or ‘the Commonwealth’. Introduction of ‘property’ probably marked one of the most important changes, testifying to the political discourse’s revival, and modernisation. ‘Property’, not as richness, luxury, or even merely noblemen’s estates or wealth, but property in itself, as an essential element of the political world, appeared in the arguments of the authors from the late 1770s and early 1780s, multiply quoted herein. After all, it was one of the critical human natural rights. As Wybicki put it, “the right of ownership was founded upon nature. Together with nature did it have its origin, and respect too”.²⁵ Guaranteeing this right was one of the main objectives

²³ The concept first appeared in Wybicki, who accused his fellow citizens of “excepting Polish peasants from the rights of man”, *Listy*, 117.

²⁴ Hugo Kołłątaj, ‘Ostatnia przestroga dla Polski’ (Warszawa, 1790), in Kądziela (ed.), 116; “The rights of man, being the rights of free people, are surrounded with jeopardy”: Kołłątaj, *Uwagi*, 23; also, Stanisław Staszic, *Przestrogi dla Polski*, ed. by Stefan Czarnowski (Kraków, 1926), 17, Biblioteka Narodowa I, 98.

²⁵ Wybicki, *Listy*, 18.

or, for some of the authors, outright the only aim of the social contract. As Antoni Popławski believed, “proprietorship and security of private estate is the first-and-foremost condition, in every country, of the civil life”.²⁶ This view of the purpose of the “common union” formed out of the contract was shared by Hieronim Stroynowski²⁷ and, later on, Staszic, who briefly and expressly stated that “the society ensures property and liberty to each citizen”.²⁸ For all these authors, the property was already an indispensable element of political discourse. Without it, in their opinion, it would not be possible to speak about the state or society nor to describe their tasks and functioning.

‘Property’ was included in the discussions of the Four Years’ Sejm period, and it was then that in-depth analyses of the role of this category in life were formulated. The enormous credit goes to Staszic, for whom property was an indispensable constituent of considerations on the state – not only in the economic or social aspects but also as a theoretical concept, as well as in considerations regarding political and constitutional issues. Kołłątaj’s unquestionable contribution consisted, in turn, in appreciating ownership as the basis of a well-functioning free state. As he wrote, “all the conditions of a free government are only founded on man’s being the proprietor of his own self and his property, and a veritably free one”.²⁹ Rather than being general statements, these remarks expressly referred to the Commonwealth and led to no less concrete conclusions, which were quite radical indeed. The most important of them was founding the citizenship not upon social-estate affiliation but in association (as in Staszic and Kołłątaj) with owning a property.³⁰ Whilst it would be an exaggeration to say that the concept in question became fundamental to the debates of the Four Years’ Sejm period, it did gain deserved recognition.

²⁶ Popławski, *Zbiór*, 7.

²⁷ Stroynowski, *Nauka*, 100; also, see Piotr Bukowczyk, ‘Wpływ zachodniej myśli politycznej na polski fizjokratyzm’, *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensia*, xiii, 1 (2018), 79 f., <http://spwr.sjol.eu/preview/-9046> [Accessed: 1 July 2018].

²⁸ Stanisław Staszic, *Uwagi nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, ed. by Stefan Czarnowski (Kraków, 1926), 155. [These authors described ‘society’ using the word *towarzystwo*, which today means ‘association’, ‘social circle’ or ‘fellowship’; the modern equivalent is *społeczeństwo* [translator’s note]].

²⁹ Hugo Kołłątaj, *Listy Anonima*, in *id.*, *Listy Anonima i Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego*, ed. by Bogusław Leśnodorski and Helena Wereszycka (Warszawa, 1954), ii, 146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Hugo Kołłątaj, ‘Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego’, in *id.*, *Listy Anonima*, ii, 219; Staszic, *Uwagi*, 49.

V

This was not the only concept adapted into Polish political language together with the ‘natural law’ idea. Appearing alongside it, ‘civil liberty’ was understood as “free enjoyment of property, under the veil of laws”.³¹ I have repeatedly addressed the importance of this conceptual novelty and how it influenced the vision of freedom and society.³² Let me remind at this point that the authors who wanted to exceed the confines of liberty of the nobility’s community have thus been given – as civil liberty was owed to all the members of the society – a tool to describe the reality, taking into account the freedom of those who did not contribute to that community. Also, the more precise separation was thus enabled between individual freedoms of persons as human beings, and a person’s political freedoms as a citizen. Like the other concepts, ‘civil liberty’ was introduced into the discourse by the authors of the 1770s and 1780s, who described it, making frequent use of foreign definitions. Again, the concept gained popularity during the Four Years’ Sejm period – not to the extent ‘property’ did, though. Actually, there was a handful of authors who limited themselves to this particular concept. It was powerfully used, in the course of ongoing discussions, by Józef Pawlikowski (who was quite a singular author) and by an anonymous pamphleteer who defended the Third-of-May Constitution against Tomasz Dłuski’s attack.³³ For most of the speakers or authors referring to civil liberty, it was but one of the aspects of freedom which they still tended to perceive also – and, quite often, primarily – as a political value.

VI

This leads us to the subsequent issue – the changes that appeared in the language in which the political system of the Commonwealth,

³¹ Bogusławski, *O doskonałym*, 81; similarly, Popławski, *Zbiór*, 251; Kołłątaj, *Listy Anonima*, ii, 146.

³² *Inter alia*, Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej XVIII wieku* (Gdańsk, 2006), 70–81.

³³ *Uwagi nad pismem z druku wyszłym pod tytułem Usprawiedliwienie się JW. Dłuskiego* (s.l., 1791), a brochure possibly written by King Stanislaus Augustus; see Władysław Konopczyński, *Polscy pisarze polityczni XVIII wieku* (Kraków, 2012), 497 and fn. 6 on p. 562. Should this have been the case, quitting the political aspects of liberty seems quite natural.

rather than its society, were expressed. It is not about words enabling to present the earlier-imperceptible areas of reality but rather such concepts that would allow to formulate a programme for improvement of inefficient institutions and constitutional solutions. As it seems, the most important challenges faced by the political debaters in the sphere of language during Stanislaus Augustus's reign was to precisely describe the idea of nation's sovereignty and add the separation-of-powers principle to the political dictionary.

There were different responses to these challenges. As for sovereignty, initially, a specific inconsistency of the political language, in which attempts had been made since the sixteenth century (at least from the Zebrzydowski rebellion onwards) to formulate the conviction of sovereignty of Commonwealth – *Rzeczpospolita*, comprehended in terms of noble citizens in their entirety. Meanwhile, the highest authority was bestowed to the Commonwealth as a triple system-wide institutional construction composed of the king, the senate, and the knighthood. The concepts of mixed system and indivisible sovereignty were derived, so to put it, from two different political orders and political languages, which implied difficulties with a clear formulation of the idea of sovereignty and certain incoherencies in the discourse. The solution was brought about, on the one hand, by quitting the traditional *imperium mixtum* concept. Since the 1770s, the description 'mixed government' became somehow naturally disappearing from the political language. All the same, what is called today 'sovereignty of the nation' became naturally described in it – without using the word 'sovereignty', which was replaced by "independent [*udzielna*] and supreme authority",³⁴ "the supreme independence [*udzielność*]",³⁵ "majesty of the people",³⁶ and, "autocracy of the nation".³⁷ In a substantial majority of the statements (apart from the strictly theoretical ones), the 'people' (*lud*) still stood for the 'noble nation'. The descriptions and definitions, particularly in handbooks and mostly-theoretical treatises, are clearly marked by the influence of the theory of contract and, later on, 'common will'.³⁸ The latter was the most thoroughly analysed by

³⁴ Stroynowski, *Nauka*, 74.

³⁵ Wielhorski, *O przywróceniu*, 310; Staszic, *Przestrogi*, 21.

³⁶ Kołłątaj, *Uwagi*, 101.

³⁷ Morski, *Uwagi*, 8; *List do autora pisma pod tytułem Ostrzeżenia publiczności względem Zasad formy rządu* (s.l., 1790), n.p., Av.

³⁸ Skrzetuski, *Mowy*, 208; Stroynowski, *Nauka*, 74.

Staszic.³⁹ In this case, however, the local tradition of thinking and talking about the state and, above all, the conviction that it is citizens that should have a decisive say on the community's matters, since "they have the omnipotence of the Commonwealth in their hands", was apparently more influential on descriptions of the nation's sovereignty, particularly in the comments involved in current political disputes.⁴⁰ The authors of these texts faced the concrete political reality, and it was the latter, rather than some fictional construction, that their remarks referred to. This was probably the basis for a smooth transition, as characteristic of the Polish discourse, from general remarks or comments about the nation's will to its legislative power. "The most splendid and essential honour of the reigning Commonwealth, which is omnipotence and legislation".⁴¹ One can outright infer that the authors of these utterances had a problem with precise differentiation between sovereignty and legislation, still holding before their eyes a vision of 'the legislative nation'.⁴²

VII

The separation of powers was yet another element that newly appeared in the political language of Stanislaus Augustus's time, unknown to the earlier concept of mixed government. Although the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century communications differentiated between the functions ascribed to the constituents forming a mixed government, it was a distribution of the roles, tasks, or privileges rather than attribution of power-sharing which was eventually proposed by the Western political thought in as early as the seventeenth century. The resulting troubles for the political theory were clearly reflected in all the propositions for reform of Poland's government during

³⁹ Staszic, *Przestrogi*, 21, 203 ff.

⁴⁰ Wielhorski, *O przywróceniu*, 268; similarly, the definition of 'commonwealths' in Stanisław Konarski, *O skutecznym rad sposobie*, ii (Warszawa, 1761), 166; see Jerzy Michalski, 'Z problematyki republikańskiego nurtu w polskiej reformatorskiej myśli politycznej w XVIII wieku', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xc, 2 (1983), 329, and *passim*.

⁴¹ *Rada przeciwko Radzie Patriotycznej* (s.l., 1771), n.p.; according to Konopczyński, the author was Ignacy Bohusz, see Władysław Konopczyński, *Konfederacja barska* (Warszawa, 1991), ii, 884.

⁴² The phrase is used by Tomasz Dłuski, see [T. Dłuski], *Refleksyje nad projektem pod tytułem "Zbiór praw sądowych..."* (s.l., 1780), n.p. (Introduction).

most of the eighteenth century. While their authors were able to quite precisely describe the foundations, tasks, and restrictions of the power of the diet (*Sejm*) as the law-making organ, they would find it basically problematic to identify and describe the executive power bodies. Probably the first to introduce Montesquieu's *trias politica* in the discourse was not a theoretician but a practical political fighter – namely, Andrzej Zamoyski. In his famous speech at the Convocation Sejm of 1764, he stated, following his French master: “In every country, there is a tripartite power, and that is, the ones of enactment, execution, and courts-of-law”⁴³ – and followed this statement in practice, using it as a basis for reforming the Polish government. Direct reference to the Montesquian triad was not a rule at that time yet;⁴⁴ much more often, only the legislative and executive powers were referred to. It has to be borne in mind that the author of *The Spirit of the Laws* was not the only or first one to use the concept of separation of powers, whilst the earlier theories frequently focused on just the two of them. Moreover, the problem of the judiciary as a separate power was not the object of dispute in Poland at the time, while the fact that the tribunal existed made the issue obvious, so to put it.⁴⁵

The power separation concept was used by all the authors of fair-sized dissertations expressing in the 1770s their opinions in the matters of state, getting well domesticated in the discourse in the Four Years' Sejm time.⁴⁶ Insofar as the concept of legislative power was fast and unproblematically adapted to the Polish conditions, almost

⁴³ Andrzej Zamoyski, ‘Mowa na sejmie convocationis dnia 16 maja 1764 roku w Warszawie miana’ [1764], in *Historia Polski 1764–1795. Wybór tekstów*, ed. by Jerzy Michalski (Warszawa, 1954), 68.

⁴⁴ The conception was primarily evoked by the authors who directly drew from Montesquieu, incl.: *Historycja polityczna państw starożytnych od pewnego towarzystwa napisana* (Warszawa, 1772), with an introduction by Karol Wyrwicz, 90, 126 (directly quoting *The Spirit of the Laws*, Book XI, 6); Wyrwicz, *Geografia*, 632; [Ignacy Łoborzewski], *Zaszczyt wolności polskiej angielskiej wyrównywający* [Warszawa, 1789], *passim*; see Władysław Smoleński, *Monteskiusz w Polsce* (Warszawa, 1927), 65–8, 80 f. and *passim*; see also Paweł Matyaszewski, *Monteskiusz w Polsce. Wczoraj i dziś* (Warszawa, 2018).

⁴⁵ Such was the argument in, *inter alia*, Popławski, *Zbiór*, 186.

⁴⁶ Smoleński, *Monteskiusz*, 81–2; statements of the opponents of this solutions indirectly testify to it; “may the nation itself possess the legislative, judiciary, and executionary power”, Rzewuski postulated (for example): Seweryn Rzewuski, *Punkta do formy rządu* (s.l., 1790), A 5.

automatically extending them to the nobility gathering at dietine (*sejmiki*) sessions, or its representatives at the Sejm, the executive power caused large problems as to who would implement it and with regard to the scope of its privileges or powers. Diversity in the opinions is already visible in the arguments proposed in the 1770s,⁴⁷ but is best illustrated by the Four Years' Sejm discussions – beginning with the dispute on the Permanent Council, presented by its followers as a model implementation of executive power and by the opponents as an instrument of the monarch's despotism,⁴⁸ and ending with the dispute around the Constitution of 3 May 1791. It can be said that the previous distrust toward the king was transferred, in a sense, to the executive power, not without support from Rousseau, who was very careful about the executive aspect of power.⁴⁹ While this is a separate issue, the conclusion valid for the present considerations is that the introduction of new concepts implied higher precision of the political language, which enabled to tackle some of the problems that previously seemed unsolvable and to articulate somewhat daring political projects.

VIII

A description of the changes in the political language would be incomplete without mentioning one more term that appeared in the 1770s – namely, 'independence (of the country/state)' (*niepodległość*). To remind what I have written about it elsewhere: while the word was not yet in use, the idea was long present in the nobility's political discourse, contained by the notion of freedom.⁵⁰ However, with time,

⁴⁷ For instance, based on juxtaposition of the views of Wielhorski and Popławski, expressed respectively in Wielhorski, *O przywróceniu*, 310–11; Popławski, *Zbiór*, 174, 177 and *passim*; on Popławski's problems with determination of the role of the executive power, see Marek Błaszke, 'Antoniego Popławskiego program reform politycznych', *Rocznik Historii Filozofii Polskiej*, iv/v (2012), 72 f. <https://www.filozofiapolska.pl/rocznik/tom4/files/r4-2.pdf> [Accessed: 10 July 2018].

⁴⁸ Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *O formę rządu czy o rząd dusz? Publicystyka polityczna Sejmu Czteroletniego* (Warszawa, 2000), 99–108.

⁴⁹ Rousseau's influence on Staszic's views is evident; see Staszic, *Przestrogi*, 206; see Rafał Lis, *W poszukiwaniu prawdziwej Rzeczypospolitej. Główne nurty myśli politycznej Sejmu Czteroletniego* (Kraków, 2015), 161 f.

⁵⁰ Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Regina libertas*, 229–48.

lack of a dedicated concept apparently made it increasingly difficult to describe the deteriorating international situation of Poland. This is clearly visible in the statements from the Bar Confederation period, whose authors wrote not only about the king's despotism but also about the Russian bondage, still articulating their fight as one for 'freedom'. They would probably have been willing to use one word to differentiate the objectives which Kościuszko's insurgents, a few years later, were able to identify clearly. Actually, the word *niepodległość*, however rarely, did appear at the time.⁵¹

A few years later, at least the issue (if not the very word) of independence or sovereignty of the state and, in the first place, the possibility of losing it was discussed quite at length by authors such as Wybicki or Popławski;⁵² however, the shortest and most expressive reference in this respect was made by Wielhorski, former Bar Confederate, who expressed the hope that through following ancestors, "we shall again attain independence of the Commonwealth, reinforcement of its sovereignty [*udzielność*], and securing the national rights, freedoms, and dignities forever".⁵³ In this case, more than by adaptations of foreign theories, the political language was enriched by the painful local occurrences.⁵⁴ In the Four Years' Sejm discussions, *niepodległość* reappears permanently.⁵⁵ The thing was not only about the word: a clearer separation of 'independence' from a broader idea of liberty could lead, and such was the case with some authors, to a change in the system of political values consisting in placing the state's and nation's political existence on a par with (if not above) the citizens' individual freedoms. Staszic provided an extreme example in this respect.⁵⁶

⁵¹ For instance, the Confederation of Bar deed has "free and independent Polish nations": *Konfederacja barska. Wybór tekstów*, ed. by Władysław Konopczyński (Kraków, 1928), Biblioteka Narodowa I, 102, 5; *id.*, 'Narodziny nowoczesnej idei niepodległości w Polsce (1733–1775)', in *Pamiętnik V Zjazdu Historyków Polskich*, i (Lwów, 1930), 468.

⁵² Wybicki, *Listy*, 56 f., *id.*, *Myśli, passim*; Popławski, *Zbiór*, Part 3: *O zewnętrznym rządzie Rzeczypospolitej*; "each such nation is sovereign [*udzielny*] and independent upon any other nation": Stroynowski, *Nauka*, 239 f.; [F. Bieliński], *Sposób*, 113, 115.

⁵³ Wielhorski, *O przywróceniu*, XX.

⁵⁴ Contribution in this respect came also from the discussions of the idea of the law of nations (by Popławski, Stroynowski, and Ładowski).

⁵⁵ Franciszek Peplowski made a remark on this point in his *Słownictwo*, 45 f.

⁵⁶ Staszic, *Przestrogi*, 4, 209; *id.*, *Uwagi*, 52, 204 f.; see Stefan Czarnowski, 'Filozofia i myśl społeczna w Polsce w końcu XVIII i w początku XIX wieku', in *id.*, *Dziela*, ii (Warszawa, 1956), 452.

He was probably the only one among the discussants of the time to have gone this far, though putting liberty and “the nation’s existence and independence”⁵⁷ on an equal footing can be found in many an author – particularly, those who supported the succession to the throne and, later on, the Constitution of 3 May. As Kołłątaj wrote, “when a free nation is thoughtful about the security of each person in particular, then, out of equal incentives and upon equal rights, it must be thoughtful about the entirety of the community which has extended hands to one another in view of reciprocal defence against the other nations”.⁵⁸

IX

One has to emphasise that the picture shown herein is doubtlessly simplified. On the one hand, this article has sought to show the most important concepts and terms that appeared in the political language under the reign of Stanislaus Augustus, rather than to describe this language fully. On the other hand, whilst intending to show the most characteristic indications of the change, differences in the language of specified authors – quite considerable as they were – have not been analysed. It should be borne in mind that the changes concerned were diversely reflected (wherever reflected) in statements or opinions, remarks or comments of diverse authors. In certain extreme cases, an almost complete change in the language is observable, the traditional vocabulary and political values being rejected – and Hieronim Stroynowski’s *Nauka prawa* is the case in point. The treatises by Józef Pawlikowski and a few anonymous authors, peripheral to the current debates, rather clearly – though not as radically – diverted from the traditional discourse during the Four Years’ Sejm.⁵⁹ Another option was the not-quite-independent, rather mechanical, adaptation of the new concepts, poorly associated with descriptions of the Polish realities.

⁵⁷ *Coś nowego* (s.l. and s.d.), 16.

⁵⁸ Kołłątaj, *Listy anonima*, i, 266.

⁵⁹ For more on the dissimilarity of Pawlikowski’s concept in the context of the Four Years’ Sejm literature, see Emanuel Rostworowski, ‘Myśli polityczne Józefa Pawlikowskiego’, in *id.*, *Legendy i fakty XVIII w.* (Warszawa, 1963), 264 and *passim*; also, see Rafał Lis, *W poszukiwaniu*, 275–88. The anonymous works entitled *Poparcie Uwag nad życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, and, *Uwagi nad pismem z druku wyszłym pod tytułem Usprawiedliwienie się JW. Dłuskiego* were also written in a clearly different language.

As has been mentioned, it is best visible in the textbooks and theoretical treatises or dissertations of the 1770s and 1780s. Certainly, the most interesting proposition was the attempts to revive the earlier political language through the incorporation of new concepts and values without rejecting the traditional elements of talking and writing about the state or commonwealth. Wybicki was the first to make such attempts, while Kołłątaj mastered this trend; also, Staszic has his merit in this aspect, along with some less known and less eminent authors contributing to the political debates of the Four Years' Sejm.

Quite obviously, one more option remained: to keep the political language in its existing form. Before 1788, this was not a matter of conscious decisions but of natural use of the traditional language; as in the case of Konarski, this did not have to do with one's conservative views. In the Four Years' Sejm period, however, it might seem that this was a matter of choice for some of the speakers or discussants. Authors such as Szczęsny Potocki, Seweryn Rzewuski, and other defenders of old solutions, even if referring to the authority of the famous Western philosophers, felt no need to change the language; actually, such a thought caused them some concern. Otherwise, certain concepts or notions that appeared in their statements from time to time, even if basically ornamental, demonstrate that it was no more possible to ignore the occurring changes completely.

It seems that in the late 1770s and early 1780s, the political language already had the tools with which to aptly and precisely describe the socio-political situation and formulate a programme for modernisation of the country and state. The important question is, how far the authors were ready to use these tools; in other words, what the scope of the change concerned would be. As I have tentatively indicated, during the Four Years' Sejm the new concepts started to function also in some statements of political debaters and discussants. To fully answer this question, other sources – primarily, the speeches or orations delivered at the parliamentary sessions – would require to be analysed.⁶⁰ This article has sought principally to show

⁶⁰ The importance of this particular source has been demonstrated by the research done by Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski and Andrzej Rosner: Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, 'Political discourses of the Polish Revolution, 1788–92', *English Historical Review*, cxx (2005), 695–731; Andrzej Rosner, 'Uwagi o języku politycznym w Polsce czasów saskich', in Mieczysław Wrzosek (ed.), *Polska czasów saskich* (Białystok, 1986), 263–273.

the novelties that appeared in the political language in the last years of Poland-Lithuania; the extent of the change in question would be a matter of further study.

However, even without further research, one may risk a statement that the concepts and terms that appeared in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in Polish political language were fundamental to the description, and to the view of the world. Their adaptation was definitely an indicator and factor of the change. Even if not on a scale recorded by the *Begriffsgeschichte* authors, it indeed marked a breakthrough in Polish discussion on the state and society. The language was adapting to the challenges of the changing social and political situation. It is difficult to state what its development would be and along what lines the fundamental concepts would have extended in 'normal' conditions. The defeat in the war against Russia in 1792, the second partition of 1793, the 1794 Kościuszko Insurrection and, finally, the collapse of Poland-Lithuania in the year 1795, followed by more political upheavals up to the Napoleonic wars, had a radical impact on the shaping of the political language, adapting new concepts, and quitting some older ones. This, however, is a topic in itself.

transl. Tristan Korecki

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Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz – political thought of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, culture of the Enlightenment, eighteenth-century source editing; professor at the Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences, Head of the Department of Enlightenment Literature, President of the Polish Society for Eighteenth-century Studies; e-mail: anna.grzeskowiak-krwawicz@ibl.waw.pl