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A 'Rump' Statehood and the Polish Liberalism

Abstract

This article is revised version of speech that was given at Oxford University. It deals with the origins of polish liberalism. Author states that there are two sources of liberalism that look like globular clusters. The first one sprung from a tradition of ancient feudal liberties. And the second source: liberalism stemmed from an opposition both to a practice of absolutist state and to the political ideology of absolutism. Finally, article tracks down the intellectual history of Polish liberalism.

Keywords: *Poland, liberalism, political philosophy, political theory*

Introduction

Let's take a glimpse on the Polish Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita) in 18th Century. It is worth recalling that the 1st Republic was a vast country, having embraced territories of contemporary Poland, save for provinces of Pomerania and Silesia, three-fourth of Ukraine, all Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Latvian lands, significant parts of Estonia, Moldavia, and Slovakia. In 1618 the Commonwealth reached its maximal growth that accounted for almost 1 mln. square kilometers. More than two weeks were needed to wander on horse about the country. 14 million population inhabited multinational and multicultural Poland just before the first partition. The Polish nobles being of 8-10% of the population enjoyed civil rights and political freedom. Thanks to the Cassovia Privilege of 1374 Louis called the Great, Hungarian and Polish king sanctioned rights of nobles and contributed to the development of the law, the parliament, and a functioning system of taxation. The political system worked quite smoothly till the second half of 17th century.

But, during 18th C. the 1st Republic went gradually into decline due to the anarchic political system and numberless invasions, and after three partitions in 1772, 1792, 1795 lost her independence. The last two took place after an awakening of the civic spirit that resulted in the proclamation of the Constitution of 3rd May, 1791 and the Kosciuszko's insurrection. In the age of absolutism the Polish Commonwealth disappeared from political maps.. The cartographic skills could have been mastered in delineating new contours of the continental Europe. If we, by art of *anamorphosis*, imagine Central-Eastern European territories *à la perspective curieuse*, in a way the map of Central Europe had Charles V commissioned in 1560 showed up, it enabled us to see that this part of Europe could be literally converted into emblems of monarchical power as rivers, plateaux, mountains, and towns recomposed the body of three eagles: the heraldic emblems of the Habsburg emperors, Russian tsars, and Prussian kings. The white eagle being the cartographic

representation of the Polish Republic almost disappeared for 123 years. The emblematic sign of subservience could be perceived in the coat-of-arms that represented the Polish Kingdom. The black double-headed eagle of the Romanov dynasty dominated over the shield with the white eagle. But in 1870, as a result of the January Uprising of 1863, even this small representation of the Polish nation was erased.

Political culture of the Polish Commonwealth had, however, remained after some proto-liberal ideas that rendered services as a matter for forming a spiral arm of liberal galaxy. It was like *Scutum Sobiecianum* that had some open clusters of ideas that referred to the nobles' comprehension of liberty as political freedom linked to personal rights; specific noble individualism warranted by the *liberum veto*, *liberum peto* rule and the "free election" of the king; the constitutional monarchy based upon the Diet (bicameral parliament) and regional councils (*sejmiki ziemskie*). The noble democracy as a form of government that recalled to *aequalitas* left open a question of a role the Polish nobility played in the political and constitutional history.

One step back – the “Rump” Statehood

The first constellation can be explained as 'a lexicographic turn' that occurred at the beginning of the 19th century. And eventually, the lexical breakthrough put a 'doctrine' into shape, gathering later on a circle of Polish 'doctrinaires'.

Generally speaking there are two sources of liberalism that look like globular clusters. The first one sprung from a tradition of ancient feudal liberties. And, at least, this remark made by Mme de Staël: "In France, liberty is ancient; despotism is modern", is applicable to other parts of Europe. But in

the Polish case, it opened a path for the specific form of government: the noble republic. Economic and political strength of Polish nobility was so great that it was, as turned out in the 18th and 19th centuries, detrimental to a rise of middle classes.

Thus, there are several elements that can be considered as 'proto-liberal'. After liberty had become the first political value, it fostered individual liberties as well as a participation in the public life. However, its extreme forms impeded a development of the idea of national sovereignty and the modern state generally. As a consequence, the executive branch of the government was obsolete in the Polish Commonwealth. However, an idea of two king's bodies was institutionalized in the political practice of the *Polonia regnum*. Liberties could be still regarded as privileges of the first estate, but they also promoted establishing very acute sense of citizenship. It was the Polish noble that became a social carrier of liberal values in early 19th century.

And the second source: liberalism stemmed from an opposition both to a practice of absolutist state and to the political ideology of absolutism. In Poland "the King" **was** "in the Parliament". Polish nobles succeeded in resisting any effort for establishing the *absolutum dominium*. Liberties, however, went off limits and turned into political anarchy. Absolutism was to be experienced, but after partitions, as of the foreign origins. A specific tradition of liberty was both strong and pathologically enhanced. Montesquieu in his *Spirit of Laws* put it into a famous sentence: "the independence of individuals is the end aimed at by the laws of Poland, thence results the oppression of the whole".¹

¹ Ch. Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, Book XI. *Of the Laws Which Establish Political Liberty, with Regard to the Constitution*, ch. 5

But before explaining Polish liberalism its initial state, we need to look into political circumstances of Poland that remained in a political condition properly described as the 'rump statehood'.

After the destruction of the old Polish Republic in 1795, the Republic's former citizens found themselves in a politically alien world. Although several attempts were made in the consecutive years to restore Polish statehood, none of the ephemeral creations of Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic diplomacy was endowed with true sovereignty. Neither the Duchy of Warsaw (1807-1815), nor the Congress Kingdom (1815-1864) could be rated "higher than autonomous dependencies of foreign government" (Norman Davies). The most crucifying experience for all Poles during five generations was one of political oppression by foreign rulers. Thus a fear of Prince – that most decisive ingredient in fertilizing the soil for liberalism – took a distinct trait under Polish political conditions.

Polish history in the nineteenth century cannot be approached in the same way as the state histories of Britain, France, or the histories of more fortunate countries like Germany and Italy, that actually won their statehood, or even Spain defending victoriously its independence during the Napoleon's invasion.

"For most of the period, 'Poland' was just an idea – a memory from the past, or a hope for the future." Hence, the essential sources of its history have to be sought uppermost in the realm of culture, literature, and religion – "in short, in the world of the Polish spirit." Poles lived their lives in spite of the established political order, and often in defiance of the law.² It means, that the next distinctive feature of the 'liberal halo': the rule of law, had a very specific tint.

² N. Davies, *Heart of Europe. A Short History of Poland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988, pp. 158-9.

The Russian victory spelt disaster for the Polish cause. At the Congress of Vienna the tsar was to rule over a separate Polish kingdom endowed with a modern, strikingly liberal constitution. The Parliament became the very school of political skills and ideas. But, on the other hand, in the age of Metternich the Polish nation was suspected of being among main carriers of contagion by heralding civil liberties and the liberal constitution. Of some import was a fact that Poles had been almost 'natural' allies to the Napoleonic cause, prone to receive new ideas emanating from France. Thus, when Napoleon created the Warsaw Duchy with its own administration, its own parliamentary constitution, hopes burst into enthusiasm. Moreover, the Napoleonic Code framed the civil order in the Polish society.

The Congress of Vienna obliged Emperor Alexander I of Russia, in his role as King of Poland, to issue a constitution to the newly recreated Polish state. It was a 'charte octroyée' signed by tsar on November 27, 1815. The new state would be one of the smallest Polish states ever. Because it was the Congress of Vienna which *de facto* created the Kingdom of Poland, it became unofficially known as the Congress Poland.

Although the text was edited by the Emperor himself and his advisors, Prince Adam Czartoryski, an intimate friend of Alexander I, was a good mentor for the Polish cause. The constitution was considered to be among the most liberal in contemporary Europe, reflecting much of the European Enlightenment (e.g. political rights were given to 100 000 men in the country with 3 mln population). It is worth recalling that France was after a hot dispute on the Charter of Constitution in which Benjamin Constant took decisive role. A liberal mood was in the air.

No wonder, that a tide of optimism, even enthusiasm, after enacting of the constitution warmed hearts. One of its reviewers symptomatically

expressed joy and excitement: "By now our existence is none of ideality, but by now it shall not depend on whiff of hateful fate [...]"³ Some most acute observers were, however, skeptic about the personal union with Russia. „As a little star revolving around the fiery ball, our tiny Poland soon devolves and fuses in this fire. All is bound to it”, noted Julian U. Niemcewicz in his *Memoirs*.

Alexander I, this ‘man of riddle’, once a supporter of limited liberalism, at the end of the year 1818 began to change his views. A revolutionary conspiracy among the officers of the guard, a foolish plot to kidnap him might have shaken the foundations of his liberal view. Yet, he ceased his flirtation with image of the enlightened king after the apparent triumph of the principles of disorder in the revolutions of Naples and Piedmont, combined with increasingly disquieting symptoms of discontent in France, Germany, and among his own people. The ascendancy of Metternich over the mind of the Russian Emperor became obvious. Thus, in the years 1819-21 a fundamental turn occurred in the Russian policy.

The parliament was supposed to have been called into session every two years, but in fact had only four sessions (1818, 1820, 1826, and 1830; the last two sessions being kept in secrecy, closed to the public). This disregard for the promised rights, among other factors, led to increasing discontent within Poland, eventually culminating in the failed November Uprising of 1830.

One may say with Wilhelm von Humboldt that the Polish public, after Four Years’ Parliament well into 19th century has been gradually losing political opportunities for finding *Ideen zu einen Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen*. And the reason was simple: the statehood became an alien experience. There emerged a clear distinction

³ *Uwagi obywatela polskiego nad Konstytucyją tegoż Królestwa (Remarks of a Polish Citizen on a Constitution of the Kingdom)*, „Pamiętnik Warszawski”, Jan.-April 1816, vol. IV, p. 208.

between the nation and the state. Instead to concentrate on essential political questions – e.g. the civil government, Polish thinkers were forced to think in terms of the independent nation.

The political reality brings forth some consequences. The rump statehood culminates in a feeble, ‘rump’ doctrine. Of particular import was a relative lack of debates on the state, constitution and rule of law. The basic dilemma of liberalism, as J.S.Mills put it, a relation between liberty and the political power, was poorly expressed in Polish political circumstances instead of focusing on establishing the liberal state, the Polish intelligentsia primarily had to consider a question of nation. So, ‘the liberalism of fear’ (J. Shklar) took a completely different shape.

It is an intriguing case that these men of reason and cold calculation let themselves be infatuated with revolutionary zeal. Independence was closely linked to political freedom and became more important than civil and political rights. What is more, the quest for independence was identified with the political freedom. And so, the political goal overshadowed core liberal issues.

It will have been of serious consequence for intellectual climate of the public debate in the late twenties of the 19th century. One of the most common metaphors, that was much loved by Polish writers, depicted Poland as a the country that has been crucified, and its body descended into the Tomb, awaiting the Resurrection. Whereas most European countries basked in the Age of Improvement, of Expansion, and of Empire, the nineteenth century for Poland was the era of effacement – ‘the Babylonian Captivity’, ‘the Sojourn in the Wilderness’, ‘the Journey through Hell’, ‘the Time on the Cross’.⁴ The nation’s sufferings were a fertile soil for viewing history in terms of the collective victimology.

⁴ P. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975, p. 59.

To digress to Humboldt is purposefully to put the anachronic remark. Written in 1792, the Humboldt's masterpiece was published as early as in 1851. In the world of the arts, sciences and political ideas, the first three decades of the 19th century saw the culmination of the Polish Enlightenment. Most of the leading figures in Warsaw during the Napoleonic period and in the early years of Congress Kingdom was deeply impressed by political, social and economic reforms brought about in the age of revolutions, though appalled by fanaticism and violence of revolutionary movements.

Among them most influential were Stanisław Staszic, the president of the Friends of Society, Stanisław Kostka Potocki, Princes Ksawery Drucki-Lubecki and Adam Czartoryski. All of them were sons the Age of Reason. In politics, they were moderates, compromisers; in religious matters, skeptics; in artistic taste, classicists. Their main concerns, like those of the *philosophes*, were with scientific knowledge, secular education, and social and economic improvement. Liberal view were widely shared in this circle in which Polish nobles set the tone. Modernity brought forth the Polish liberalism by linking it directly with the Enlightenment project.

They regarded any form of social vortex: turmoil, upheavals, revolutions, with disdain, which, interestingly enough, could have an impact upon their artistic taste. They opted for classicist liking of restraint and balance. Wincenty Niemojowski, one of the most outstanding liberal thinkers, launched a campaign against Romanticism. He directed fiery attack against Romantic writers' predilection for "the beauty of chaos" (Polish equivalent for '*Sturm und Drang*'). He blamed Shakespeare for infatuating young people to such extent that they became "firebrands". A political dispute, just as in Britain and other countries, entered into the esthetic dimension.⁵

⁵ W.Niemojowski, *Myśli dorywcze o romantyczności i romantykach*. Kalisz 1830, s. 26-34.

Liberalism – as a ‘thing’ and an ‘idea’

Thanks to classic studies on history of liberalism written by Guido de Ruggiero and Harold Laski, we know that liberalism as a ‘thing’ (*res*) has had a long, over 400 years tradition in the Western world. Locke, Blackstone, Montesquieu, Madison, Stanisław Leszczyński regarded liberalism for a ‘rule of law’ and the constitution based upon political liberty.⁶ Liberalism, as a word, and later on as a term, or even a label, was of fresher date. We know that a term “liberal” was in Spain coined c. 1810-1811 during the Napoleonic wars. In its French or Spanish version (*liberaux*, *liberals*) it begun to be revolved around Europe during the second decade of the century. Liberalism had its own ‘Machiavellian moment’: the Peninsular War. Of particular import for creating liberal constellations was a discussion concerning Don Pedro Caballos’ mission and republican overtones expressed in the ‘Edinburgh Review’. As a result, the “Quarterly Review” was set up; primarily to counter its influence on the public opinion. Soon the clash of ideas gave birth to the institutionalization of bipartisan system.

But the nineteenth century witnessed a development of the public space not without the initial impetus given by hot debates of the Enlightenment period. The press fastened a fluid flow of ideas across borders. A liberal platform presented by the “Edinburgh Review” found admirers across Europe having also set a pattern for the “Warsaw Memoir”, the most important liberal journal at Polish territories. Journals and magazines contributed to creating a halo around the new doctrine.

If one wanted to move about series of pictures that depict a process of formulating a doctrine, then an ideology, he cannot resist an impression that it resembles a formation of spiral galaxy. And the process of formulation the Spanish debates on constitution constituted a breaking point. Clouds of dust,

⁶ G. de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*. Boston 1959, Beacon Press, p. 1-2; H. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism*. London 1936, Allen and Unwin, p. 9.

raised in the air by Napoleonic wars, were also carrying ideas. Like freely circulating bodies and objects: words, terms, conceptions, hopes, beliefs, arguments, presuppositions, suppositions, hypotheses, theses, proprieties (in the Lockean sense); debates in societies, clubs, free-masonry circles, parties - that shall have been soon named 'liberal' - became components of new constellations of ideas. In the Polish case the Napoleonic Code (*Code civil*) led even to setting up a new university: Warsaw University.

While clusters of liberal ideas have been floating in the sky ever since Roman times, not until the 19th century they received a proper name. In the Western culture a tradition of liberty found the expression in Greek *eleutheria*. However, for Romans the term - in opposition to *libertas* - unbridles human desires and as the *hubris* may have led to anarchy. It is easy to forget, Sartori notices, that liberalism from the Roman times till the 18th century took pains at defending 'proprieties' as the undivided entirety. It took over 2000 years to work out liberalism in the semiotic landscape of *libertas* and liberties.⁷

And it became obvious that what was happening in the Cortes of 1810-1812 might have not led to conclusion, if liberal deputies had not the implicit support of the British who were protecting the city. Thus, the Machiavellian moment of liberalism run in the English manner. Even though Benjamin Constant, Mme de Staël, founding fathers of the 'La Pepa', Stanisław Kostka Potocki expressed it in their own language, the clusters of ideas were of the English origin. We can only note a constant inspiration and influence of England in case of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Stanisław August Poniatowski, French Ideologists, Mme de Staël, Constant, Spanish *liberales*, Stanisław Kostka Potocki. The time of the Anglicized mode of political thinking came eventually. An opening co-incidence took place in several countries, social

⁷ G. Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy*, p. 466

circles, and multidimensional space, but it was the British political system that set it in motion. It is very intriguing that not before midcentury the adjective “liberal” was taken up on British Isles as the English term with positive meaning. The term ‘liberal’ was not widely circulating in England in spite of her liberal political culture. Liberal proprieties formed a kind of nebula that waited for a strict expression that was first popularized in other countries.

To be ‘liberal’

But a new rising political galaxy needed a name. Inventing the term ‘liberal’ signified a lexicographic turn: *Liberales* commenced the debate on a constitution. Then, the second lexicographic turn was taking place: existing ideas, proprieties, and conceptions circumscribed a new conception of how to be ‘liberal’ and ‘a liberal’. It highlighted a doctrine in a process of making that several people were prone to take part of. It swung from proprieties and ideas forwards into a term; from the term to a name. The next, third lexicographic turn happened to be, when a name of ‘liberalism’ appeared. A semiotic history of the idea is tightly linked with lexicographic turns: the political ideology emerged, when ‘ism’ was added to adjective. The name (an abstract noun) was created some three centuries after the object/thing (*res*) had appeared. Liberalism produced the new world of interpreting the politics.⁸

We can take for granted that the abstract noun with an ending ‘ism’ as a semantic complement opens a process of building-up the political ideology. But one is obliged to ask a question when and under what political or social conditions a political ideology would be petrified. As a rule, it does not stand still. It is like a bulge with a black hole, that revolves and rotate, absorbing new ideas and men. Thus, ‘liberalism’ as the political ideology refers to object/structure, and gradually went beyond history of men into objectified reality that appears even prior to human experience. It looks like ‘liberalism’ is

⁸ G.Sartori, *op. cit.*, the Polish ed., p. 453.

flying away from its founders to becoming a distinct set of ideas. It does not suffice to be a liberal, one needs to have liberalism. When liberalism internalize democratic values, and some conservative and socialist ideas, the next lexicographic and semantic stage shall come. As a result, specific new liberal constellations appear: social liberalism, conservative liberalism, neoliberalism, democratic liberalism, libertarianism.

The Polish liberalism

Yet a following question remains: at what stage do we locate beginnings of the Polish liberalism? An article published in the first issue of “Warsaw Memoir” of 1816 shed lights upon impetuous and spiral forces of ideas. It is legitimate to treat the article written by Stanisław Kostka Potocki *What do liberal conceptions mean?* as an emblematic event in the history of ideas. And it signifies the lexicographic turn that eventually led to the formation of a ‘doctrine’, and consequently, to the creation of a circle of Polish ‘doctrinaires’.

If we want to depict a rise of liberalism, we can do it with a distinct understanding that its components may be rotating in other direction than the main galaxy. If globular clusters of proto-liberal ideas became comprehensible only after forming constellations, some of them became peculiar against their national background.

Prince Stanisław Kostka-Potocki (1755-1821) was one of the most brilliant minds at the turn of 18 and 19th century. He participated in enacting the Constitution of 3rd May; got famous as a prolific writer and columnist; as bibliophile and generous Maecenas helped to set up Society of Friends of Science, collected enormous sample of pieces of arts in his palace in Wilanów; he was an architect, a minister of education, president of the Senate. Freemason. In his stature he resembled Thomas Jefferson.

He has begun his deliberation in typical way by revoking that Sartori called the 'metaphysical liberalism'. Before he put political freedom under scrutiny, he alludes to the Latin origin: *liberalis* is construed as "dignified of free man". With this word he linked another term: '*studia liberalia*,' for describing these fields of knowledge, that "for their lovers show up more noble goal of life than the personal interest." Such *studies* were blossoming "all but there, as in nations more or less civil and political freedom is tasted."⁹

He used up adjective 'liberal' in all meanings: social, ethical and political. He mentioned liberal arts, and a 'liberal' as a noun. He insisted that it was more than a French expression 'liberale'; otherwise, it can only be parallel to Latin word *munificus*. He coined a term 'liberalność' (liberality), resorted to a word of 'gentleman' and even invented a term 'liberal soul' to emphasize a distinct representative character. Liberal souls subdued Narcissist drives for the public good with no regret, were prone for acts of charity, he wrote. Their distinctive trait was magnanimity.

An unnamed was to rest unknown. The unnamed, thrown out of the public space, ceased to draw public attention. It was very interesting that, according to Potocki, a form of the political order was closely related to a semantic order. At the very beginning of his article he stressed the importance of finding a proper word for new opinions, at its end he cried for using univocal expressions. To be unequivocal, so to say, presupposes political order. He simply referred to that we call the symbolic order of the political domain. At the same time he warned out against slippery of meanings, since men of power were inclined to use up synonymous terms for protecting their position of power. It is worth of noticing that this cry for unity of lexicographic expressions turned back to the "metaphysical liberalism". Although he differentiated between political freedom and liberties, he firmly stated that liberal conceptions flew from "very nature of reason and righteous heart." Thus, the political power was also a *forma mentis*. As a fruits of righteous man, the liberal conceptions

⁹ One is tempted to compare his disquisitions with Leo Strauss' remarks on *liberal education*.

were hallmark of the “sound and mature political community.” And finished the paragraph crying: „What a happy nation! In which a constitution is a collection of liberal conceptions, and habits are their gage.”¹⁰

Once liberal conceptions had been named, Potocki commenced to line them up like ‘beads on a string’. Gravitationally aligned orbits of meanings with their axis of rotation started dragging in signs, words, terms, men, circles, journals, and public opinion. And strings of political thought, otherwise called political currents, were transformed by thinkers into alignments of spin axis that bring about new constellations. Once the term ‘liberal’ was adopted to Polish political conditions, eddy forces began to work. The Potocki’s article appeared in 1816, two years later during the first meeting of the Parliament (27 of March, 1818) the political club (Kaliszanie – from the Calisia province) got entangled in intellectual and political controversy. The new galaxy gave also birth to a constellation of the Polish liberalism.

Besides liberal education, that led to the moral philosophy: “more noble goal of life than the personal interest,” Potocki pointed out three other interesting motives. The esthetic one turns out to have had ethic overtones: liberals were ready to bear a beautiful, but modest garb; he obviously stood against an ostentatious consumption: “a stratification by wealth demeans all life values.” The next line of arguments was one of the Kantian provenance: a liberal man had to possess a good judgment based upon assumption that the man was a goal in himself. “Reason is in relation to the *liberal* spirit, as the grammar brings about in relation to oratory art.” He was almost ready to outline a grammar of politics.

The last motive brought forth the political aspects of the liberal doctrine. Potocki was deeply convinced that liberalism carried on both the theory and

¹⁰ St. K. Potocki, *Co znaczą wyobrażenia liberalne* (What do liberal conceptions mean?), „Pamiętnik Warszawski”, Jan.-April 1816, vol. IV, pp. 30-42.

practice of legal defense. And as individual political liberty was implanted in the constitutional state. He simply states: „a constitution transforms liberal conceptions into law”. He means that „the *liberal* constitution not only grants freedom to a nation, which its level of civilization allows for, but it also turns over liberty under the guard of glorious and noble sentiments. Main conditions for the *liberal* constitution are: mutual trust between government and the people, esteem for virtue and talent, good will for other nations.”

But liberal conceptions did not solely pose a question of language. Creating a new semantic landscape had, also, ontological and political consequences. The latter ones were easily to follow by making taxonomy of liberal organizations. But the ontological effects run as deep as beliefs or patterns of the political culture. The constitution transformed liberal concepts such as ‘the rule of law’ into legal order. Liberals, such as Potocki, deeply believed that a progress of liberal conceptions had set unstoppable pace.

The next consequence for the ontology of politics, Potocki argued, was a presence of opposition. Its influence radiated into rhetorical realm, since it provided civility in a manner of speaking, composure and reasonableness in a process of deliberation. But, it was a very essence of political obligation to spring from the opposition. This was the first political force that legitimized the government. The liberal opposition rendered services for the political system by “gaining for the government hearts of the people as well as an applause of the audience.”

But, Polish liberals were facing insurmountable dilemma that led to unavoidable split due to incoherence of their programme. They attempted to fuse modest political and social demands with radical postulates concerning habits of the heart. Those, who totally negated the Polish past: tradition and *moeurs* (an antagonism against the Polish Church was the most illuminating),

were gradually pushed into a corner. And it was not a case of the splendid isolation as Potocki was soon to find out.

It is a vocation of historian of ideas to defend men against ideational vertigo produced as an unavoidable cognitive effect by setting into motion the political ideology. Without vortex and spinning, one cannot perceive a process of its formation. The Polish liberalism, getting involved men and institutions, enlarged the public space. Yet this was ideas and concepts - these celestial bodies - that have formed a pattern or picture in the sky. A primary task of historian of ideas is to map them out to offer a credible map of ideational constellations.

We know for sure that after the lexicographic turn in 1816 a liberal constellation flashed highlighted by political treatises, disquisitions on political economy, moral philosophy, art and by the press: the "Warsaw Memoir", "Everyday Gazette", the "White Eagle". A. Smith's and Constant's ideas were discussed in the Lecture Society (1820); the liberal club in parliament took the bench of opposition. As a result, four basic constellations of Polish social thought appeared: those proposed by liberal landed aristocracy and gentry, by liberal democrats, conservatives and revolutionary democrats.¹¹

* * *

Even in hard times, ever since 1816 modes of thinking to be called 'liberal' have been lingering on the Polish soil. The communist régime, by violating political freedom, tried to destroy them. The very paradox of the contemporary intellectual and political life in Poland is that former communists pretend to be the most sincere liberals. And it provides the best comment to a presence and persistence of the liberal constellation in Poland.

¹¹ J. Jedlicki, *Obozy ideowe Królestwa wobec zmian społecznych*, w: *Przemiany społeczne w Królestwie Polskim 1815-1864 (Social Transformations in the Polish Kingdom, 1815-1864)*, [eds] W. Kula i K. Leskiewiczowa. Wrocław 1979, p. 464.

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