Research Article

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“People”, “Peoples” - How the May 3, 1791 Constitution framers defined what the People is and handled the duality of the Commonwealth of the Two Nations

Abstract: In the Commonwealth of the Two Nations, significant legal texts were implemented under the rule of King Stanislaw August, the most important being the Constitution of May 3, 1791, adopted during the Four-Year Sejm (1788-1792). Its framers faced numerous challenges, first, because then only nobles were considered as constituting the Republic, one was to define who should be considered as a member of the People, who could be elected deputy to the Sejm, and at which condition. Second, since the 1569 Union of Lublin the Commonwealth is made of two distinct states: Poland (the Crown) and the Grand-Duchy of Lithuania, drafters had to handle Lithuanian statehood in a Constitution, which was primarily seen as a way to enhance unification of the two nations. Third, the Grand-Duchy of Lithuania having its own legislation, enclosed in the Lithuanian statute, (adopted in 1529, followed with a Second Statute in 1566, and a Third Statute in 1588), the question of its maintaining or not too had to be taken into consideration by framers. We hope that considering how these different issues were handled will shed a new light on the permanence of Lithuanian laws and political tradition in the May 3 Constitution.

Keywords: Commonwealth of the Two Nations; May 3 1791 Constitution; voting rights

1 Introduction

Under the rule of King Stanislaw August, significant reforms took place in the Commonwealth of the Two Nations, a “republica mixta”, showing monarchy, aristocracy and democracy features1. During the Four-Year Sejm (1788-1792) important legal acts were adopted, the most important being the Constitution of May 3 1791. For its drafters one of the most uneasy tasks to deal with was to define who was a member of the People. Indeed, in the second half of the 18th century, the People took more and more place in political thought among Enlightenment thinkers. In the Commonwealth, where only nobles were considered as constituting the Republic, the commoners being supposed not to take part to politics, the question was all the more sensible. Moreover, a problem came from the dual nature of the Commonwealth, made of two distinct states, Poland (the Crown) and the Grand-Duchy of Lithuania, created in 1569 with the Union of Lublin. Within the Commonwealth Lithuania had been successful in maintaining its statehood independence: a separate territory, its own administration, judiciary and army, and a separate Treasury to fund them. In 1773 an education institution common to the Crown and the Grand-Duchy, the Commission of National Education (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej - held the first of this kind in history), was founded, Poland and Lithuania had each their

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own department within the Commission. Maintaining this separateness while coping with a modernization of the whole state was a challenge for Lithuanian envoys seating at the Sejm. Finally, once the People was defined, it was necessary to determine who could have the voting rights, who could candidate to be an envoy of the sejmik, and under which conditions.

To examine these issues, we will take into consideration the works of some of the most prominent thinkers of the Commonwealth of the last quarter of the 18th c., as well as the proposals made by French thinkers to reform the regime. Innovations implemented in contemporary parliamentary states will also be taken into consideration. Then the Constitution will be examined to see which conceptions have been retained. To get a broader view we will have recourse to diverse historiographies (Polish, Lithuanian, American, British and French). In so doing, we hope that this study will shed a new light on political ideas history in the Commonwealth of the two nations in the Age of Enlightenment. We will hereafter consider: I) Two nations in search of a common future, II). Voting and representation rights.

2 Two nations in search of a common future

2.1 Defining the nature of People

The last decades of 18th c. witnessed a complete reassessment of the relationship between rulers and ruled. In France, with the progress of Enlightenment ideas, the meaning of the word “People” (“le peuple”) changed. If in 1765, the Encyclopédie defined “People” as peasants and workers, who are “the most numerous and the most necessary part of the nation”, in 1789 in the abbot of Sieyès’s (1748–1836) famous pamphlet What is the Third Estate? (Qu’est-ce que le tiers-Etat?) “people” is defined as all those, who are not members of the aristocracy. Such a conception was implemented into the 26 August 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Indeed, the first article stresses on that: “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be founded only on the common good”, and the third one: “The principle of any sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exert authority which does not emanate expressly from it”.

Simultaneously to France, such reflection about People took place in the Commonwealth, where it even was one of the most recurrent words in political works. The Republic of the Two Nations, also called the “noble Republic”, was made of “Polish People“ (“narod polski”), which encompassed only the members of the szlachta, who defined themselves as the “Free People” (“wolny narod”) within the Republic. Moreover, this nation made of nobles identified itself with the State, contrary to Western countries (namely France), where the State was rather conceived as an abstract entity standing above the citizens. “Of what does the republic consist, if not of us ourselves?” asked Andrzej Zamoyski in the middle of the century.

6 « Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l’utilité commune ».
7 « Le principe de toute souveraineté réside essentiellement dans la Nation. Nul corps, nul individu ne peut exercer d’autorité qui n’en émane expressément ».
If we have a glance at French philosophers’ recommendations to reform the Republic, we observe there is no clear description of what the People should be made of. If Rousseau in his *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* had emphasized on the innate freedom of man, and in his *On the Social Contract* wrote that the community of citizens encompasses only those, who want to be member of it, nevertheless, in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland* written for Bar confederates, the author explains that the serfs (who formed the greatest part of the inhabitants of the Republic), only after a long process he exposes, will be entitled to civil rights. Mably, in his own advice to Confederates, also recommended a gradual emancipation of serfs.

Looking at the thinkers in the Commonwealth, we observe that Franciszek Sależy Jeziorski, when in 1789 translating the above-mentioned pamphlet of abbot of Sieyès into Polish, translated the term “Third Estate” ("Tiers-État") into “common people” (“pospólstwo”). For him, the People is composed of hard-working peoples as well as impoverished aristocracy, compelled to work. And since such people create the wealth of the country, they deserve to be the most prominent and constitute the nation. Later on in his “Selected words collected in alphabetic order and explained with pertinent remarks” (*Niektore wyrazy porządkiem abecadła zebrane*, Warszawa, 1791) wrote that People is “a union of individuals having a common language and habits, having a legislation common to all citizens”. Another thinker, Adam Rzewuski, in his “Thoughts on Republican Government” (*O formie rządu republikanskiego myśli*, Warszawa, 1790), asserts a noble can’t be deprived of his rights because of his poverty. In fact, generally speaking, thinkers were reluctant to give political rights to peasants, giving them civil rights and property rights was already a significant progress. Karp saw otherwise, for him the People was essentially made of peasantry: “Indeed, because the People, made of peasants, is the greatest and most numerous part of the Nation, in fact, that is the Nation itself, in which lies the might, strength, activity, resources of any country.” We may here observe that Karp, an enthusiastic follower of Rousseau, has a conception of People close to that of *Social Contract* and *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, whereas Rzewuski has one favorable to petty nobility, which reminds that of Rousseau in his *Considerations* (one has to remember that these Considerations were written for the nobles of Bar Confederacy). As often with Rousseau, his ideas are reused to quite different ends.
Looking now at the May 3 Constitution, we witness that the principle of the sovereignty of People is mentioned in article 5 (“Form of Government, or the Definition of public powers”): “All power in civil society should be derived from the will of the people [...]”, and in article 11 (“National Force, or the Army”): “The nation bears a duty to its own defense from attack and for the safeguarding of its integrity”. Nonetheless having a closer look at the constitution, we may observe that the word “People” has two meanings. In the preamble and the articles 26, 37 and 48, the term used does not mean any more “a republic of nobles” but a new People, made of nobles, bourgeois and peasants29. Besides, in the above-mentioned article 11 about national force, all the social classes are encompassed. Nevertheless, in article 6 (“The Diet, or the Legislative Power”): nobles are called “People” and “citizens”. Anyway, whatever the sense to give to “People” in the Constitution, ultimately, as historian Liudas Glemža has observed, the Constitution of May 3 (contrary to the French Constitution of September 3, 1791) has not suppressed inequality among people, neither class privileges30.

### 2.2 Conciliating Lithuanian specificity with Commonwealth regime modernization

In framing the constitution, one of the main difficulties was to define the relationship between the Crown and the Grand-Duchy31. With the Act of the Union of Lublin (1569), Poland and Lithuania had common institutions (the choice of the Sovereign and the Sejm), but each of them had its own law and executive power32. Ever since Lithuania had managed to maintain its specific character, if a legal and cultural unification process had been in progress, there was no, as have observed Zigmantas Kiaupa, ethnic or political polonization33. In the first project prepared by the Deputation for the Government Statute (Deputacja do Formy Rządu), relations between Poland and Lithuania were formulated this way: “the Republic of Poland and the Grand-Duchy of Lithuania always will be a federal state according the act of Union, which with all its contents is confirmed by the constitution”. Nevertheless, in the redaction of the last project, framed by Kollataj, nothing was written about relations between the Crown and Lithuania34. Another project, inspired by the king, rather supported a unitary state form35.

Thanks to the marshal of Lithuanian confederation Kazimierz Nestor Sapiega36, a compromise was reached, according which the model of a federal republic will be maintained. It was decided that every third Sejm will be held in Grodno and that there will be held Lithuanian territories’ sejmiks sessions, during which Lithuanian senators and deputies will consider draft laws affecting Lithuania, having the possibility to adopt their own positions before plenary sessions. A compromise was reached 17 June 1791, when a common police commission was set up, at the condition that one third of the members will be from the Duchy37.
In wishing to strengthen the Republic in its two components, concessions were unavoidable, especially knowing that conservative nobles were not pleased with the unitarian feature of the constitution\textsuperscript{38}, the delimitation of their freedoms and the strengthening of the prerogatives of the king. In the opinion of Lithuanian historian Adolfo Sapoka, the reasons of the opposition of Lithuanian deputies against the Constitution were definitely the same as those of the Polish ones. And since the king needed the widest possible base in the Sejm to support his reforms, he could not turn a deaf ear to Lithuanian envos expectations. That’s why he supported the demands submitted 20 October 1791 by Sapiega to the Sejm as a draft bill named Reciprocal Guarantee of the Two Nations (Zaręczenie Wzajemne Obojga Narodów)\textsuperscript{39}. According this Guarantee, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Crown will have an equal number of members in central authorities. Moreover, Lithuania and the Crown were granted an equal number of members in the War and Treasures commissions. In the Police Commission, 1/3 of the commissaries would be Lithuanian and 2/3 would be Polish. Also, Lithuania would be granted as many ministers and civil servants, with the same titles and competences, as those of the Crown. War and Treasury commissions, successively and for the same time will be headed by Lithuanian and Crown envoys, and the Lithuanian Treasury will stay in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Lithuanian citizens’ litigations with the Treasury would be handled in a separate Lithuanian Treasury court. This act also had a preamble, in which it was confirmed that the Republic was a dual state, based on the Union of Lublin. It is noteworthy that in France, the redactors of the newspaper Gazette nationale translated the Reciprocal Guarantee into French and reproduced it integrally, possibly because they saw it as a successful and exemplary constitutional text to follow\textsuperscript{40}.

In his work redacted while he was in emigration, On the Enactment and the Fall of the Polish Constitution of 3 May 1791 (O ustanowieniu i upadku Konstytucji polskiej 3 Maja 1791 roku), Kollontaj\textsuperscript{41} wrote about the Reciprocal Guarantee: “The noble or rather brotherly sacrifice of the Crown provinces facilitated everything. The holy vows of the Union between Lithuania and the Crown were renewed, and the memorable resolution was passed on the grounds that all government agendas were to be composed half of Lithuanian and half of Crown citizens, although Lithuania does not contribute even a third part of the population or the wealth of the Crown”\textsuperscript{42}.

Indeed, according to the Polish law historian Juliusz Bardach, this Reciprocal Guarantee crowned the endeavors of Lithuanian envoys in the Four-Year Sejm: “The political wit and cautiousness of the Polish and Lithuanian parliamentarians, capable of combining the struggle for external sovereignty and the reformation of the State organization with the tradition of the Union and the preservation of the autonomy of the Grand-Duchy, should be highly valued”\textsuperscript{43}. On the whole the Reciprocal Guarantee confirmed the duality of the Polish-Lithuanian State\textsuperscript{44} and the will of Lithuanian envos to maintain the Statehood of the Great-Duchy, without making too many concessions\textsuperscript{45}. It also shows that Lithuanian nobility was not completely polonized, as it has sometimes been written\textsuperscript{46}. At last, According Lithuanian constitutional law historian Vaidotas Vaičintis, because Reciprocal Guarantee, in which Poland and Lithuania are equal, is included into the Constitution, the latter may be held as part of Lithuanian constitutional history\textsuperscript{47}.

Ultimately, Lithuanian nobility was satisfied with the constitution. As we see with the sejmik of Szawle (Lithuanian: Šauliai) in the Grand-Duchy, where the nobles swore to defend the constitution: “All of us being caused with one spirit to laud the Law on Government passed on the third day of May last year [. . .], upon which alone have depended the
political existence, external independence, and internal liberty of our nation, a law made through the salutary design of the wise king and no less by the common will (wspolna wola) and participation of all estates assembled at the sejm, we have recognised it as a work of happiness, and reckoned it as a means to the strengthening of the Fatherland, so for the assurance of the obedience of all persons to this law, we have solemnly sworn to defend it with all our strength, from our lives and properties.” It is worth observing that if only 22 per cent of the Polish sejmiks swore an oath to the Constitution, they were 82 in the Grand-Duchy. Amazingly, it seems that Lithuanians looked less suspicious of royal power than their Polish counterparts.

3 Voting and representation rights

In any republican regime the definition of the People is correlated with the necessity to define who is entitled to vote, and who may be elected as a representative. For Enlightenment thinkers, representation was a recurrent issue. For instance, in the tom XIV of the Encyclopédie (released in 1765), the article “représentants” (“representatives”) states that in a modern state the General Will may be consulted only by representation. And since all the classes of the Nations have to be represented, citizens must frequently choose their envoys, to whom they will give an imperative mandate. The article also stresses on that citizenship is correlated with property. During the Four Year Sejm great attention was given to the reform of sejmiks. Constitution framers had to define under which conditions the right of vote and to be chosen as an envoy could be granted, as well as which kind of mandate would be applied: will it be a “mandatory mandate” (that is, when a representative is compelled to act according the instructions given to him by those who vote for him), or a "representative mandate" (that is, when the representative represents People as a whole, and the mandate is free and irrevocable)?

3.1 The suffrage

In the 18th century, as we saw with the above-mentioned Encyclopédie article, the idea of representation was usually entangled with the property owned. If we look at what French philosophers said about census suffrage in their advices to Bar Confederates, we read that Mably considered that an envoy has to be noble (but only one noble from a family can apply), have an impeccable reputation, and be aged of at least 30 years old. Moreover, he could not take part in two sessions successively. Mably stresses on the necessity that “every envoy must possess a certain quantity of land in his patalinate, and will not work as a servant in another noble man house, or in his lands”. His idea is, that landowners feel more concerned in public affairs because they can’t take their richness abroad. Also, because a man, even noble, who works for another man is not free, he can’t be entitled to participate to votes in a free men assembly. As for Pyrrhys de Varille, he asserts that the capacity to apply as a member of a sejmik must depend on his wealth level. Like Mably, he thinks that only nobles possessing land should take part in the sejmiks.


50 Leśnodorski B., Dzieło Sejmu Czteroletnio (1788-1792), Studium historyczno-prawne, Wrocław, 1951, p. 246.


52 César-Félicité Pyrrhys de Varille (1708-1800). In 1755 arrived with French Ambassador de Broglie to Poland, to work as a preceptor at Sanguszko house. Became acquainted with Stanislas Konarski, Ignoty Krasiński. He published: Lettre sur l’éducation d’un seigneur Polonais à Son Altesse Monsieur le Prince Jean Sanguszko (1757); Compendium politicum (1760-1761); Lettres historiques et politiques à son Altesse le Prince Jean Sanguszko sur les Intérêgnes de Pologne (1764); Réflexions politiques sur la Pologne (1765). See: Parent A., Francuzų abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkymo Stanislovo Augusto valdymo laikotarpio (1764-1795 m.), daktaro disertacija, Vilniaus Universitetas – Lietuvos Istorijos Institutas, Vilnius, 2018, p. 255-257.

Besides the advice of French philosophers, Commonwealth reformers had the faculty to look at contemporary parliamentary regimes to find some examples to follow. In England, in 1711, some specific property requirements for parliament members were put into force, higher than those required for voters. Such a decision aimed at favouring landowners (« the landed interest »). Entrepreneurs and financiers (« the moneyed interest ») could anyway purchase land54. As for the United States55, its Constitution (1787) provides that: “No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty five Years, and been seven years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen (Art. I, Sec. 2, cl. 2). Such a provision is quite wide. Nevertheless, it has to be remarked that there also existed a project according which legislative power would have defined property conditions for both Houses (Senate and House of Representatives). But for the Constitution framers, empowering the legislative body with such prerogative would have jeopardized the very nature of the regime. Also, if in principle the framers agreed on the relevancy to require a certain amount of property to be a representative, they could not agree on a level that could suit to the rather poor agricultural states in the west, and the opulent trading states of the East coast. That is to say, that the absence of conditions to be representative was more the result of wealth disparity between states than philosophical conceptions56.

In revolutionary France, in 1789 the Assemblée constitutive had decided that only those who had a land property and paid a fee (un marc d’argent) could be elected to the Assemblée nationale57. Indeed, if the framers considered that voting rights had to be granted to any man, they considered that an elected office, because it was held in the name of society, could be granted only to those supposed the most competent. Nevertheless, because of the radicalization of the Revolution the fee requirement was abandoned in 1791 and replaced with a two-degrees election system. According this system, the voters would gather in primary assemblies (assemblées primaires) in their canton, where they would vote to choose the second-degree voters. Then, these second-degree voters would gather in the département (district) to elect the representatives (les représentants). Also, in 1789, the Assemblée constitutive established the fee for the second-degree voters, who had to pay a tax equal to ten days of work. In 1791 the fee and property requirements were abolished for the representatives, but only citizens paying the equivalent of forty days of work could be second-degree voters. In 1792, fees were abolished, but the indirect vote system was maintained. After the coming-back of Thermidorians in 1794, a fee for the second-degree was implemented58.

In Poland-Lithuania, thinkers thought about a tax-based suffrage based on land property. For instance, according Kollataj, poor people, not only because they are not enlightened, but also because they have no financial independence, may only subscribe to rich peoples’ political ideas. So, because they have no financial independence nor their own political ideas, they can’t be granted voting rights. That is to say, such rights should depend on their wealth level59. These ideas are quite close from those of Mably, Pyrrhs de Varille and the physiocrats. Besides, Kollataj shares physiocrats’ opinion that the soil is the only source of richness. For this reason, he thinks that the Republic should become a nation of landowners60, and petty nobles should be deprived of their political rights. Kollataj was one of the most progressive thinkers in the Republic, and his lack of support to equality between lords may appear strange. Nevertheless, it suits well with physiocratic ideas, according which there is no innate equality among people (differently from Enlightenment philosophers, who usually affirmed, that peoples were equal)61. As for the bourgeois, Kollataj agreed they could have deputies, and he proposed a bicameral system in which they would sit in a lower house, the nobles sitting in an upper

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55 Commonwealth thinkers were informed of American Revolution. See for instance: Siarczyński Fr., Historia polityczna rewolucji amerykańskiej teraźniejszej, przez sławnego Rainala w francuskim napisana języku, a teraz na polski przełożona, Warszawa, 1783. Quoted by Vilūnas D. op. cit., p. 70.
56 Manin B., op. cit., p. 137, 140-141.
house, on the example of British system (House of Commons and House of Lords). Nevertheless, he did not require political rights for bourgeois equal to those of nobles, and didn’t want them to have land.

Another thinker, Staszic, like Kollontaj promoted the conception of a People made of owners. And for him the free use of one’s property is a condition of liberty. Nonetheless Staszic being a member of the bourgeoisie with little inclination to a Republic made of nobles, he opposed the land-owning nobility and privileges, and demanded for the bourgeois half of the seats in the Sejm. In his work Warnings for Poland (Przestrogi dla Polski, 1790), he recommended establishing a tax quota for voting rights according the amount of payed taxes, and not according land property or the amount of received rents. In his opinion, each voivodship had to choose its deputies according their paid taxes.

In his work Przestrogi dla Polski (Warnings for Poland), Staszic advocated for the idea that voters could give instructions if they wished so, but they would have no binding force. In revolutionary France, during the colonial time and the first decade of Independence, instructions given to representatives were largely accepted. When the First United States Congress discussed the Bill of Rights that should be add to the Constitution, some of its members proposed to include the right to give instructions to the representatives, but such a proposition was turned out. It was then decided that voters could give instructions if they wished so, but they would have no binding force. In revolutionary France, in 1789, the Assemblée nationale banned imperative mandate. Later on, the Constitution of 1791 september 3 also forbade such mandate. At last, it has to be noticed that since 18th c., no representative government authorized such imperative mandate.

### 3.2 The Mandate

Generally speaking, imperative mandate was rejected because it deprived the representative from one’s autonomy. Montesquieu himself condemned it, and he admired the British system, in which the idea took hold that deputies represent the whole kingdom, not their constituency. In the beginning of the 19th c. there were some attempts to introduce “pledges”, that were quite like instructions, but without success. In America, during the colonial time and the first decades of Independence, instructions given to representatives were largely accepted. When the First United States Congress discussed the Bill of Rights that should be add to the Constitution, some of its members proposed to include the right to give instructions to the representatives, but such a proposition was turned out. It was then decided that voters could give instructions if they wished so, but they would have no binding force. In revolutionary France, in 1789, the Assemblée nationale banned imperative mandate. Later on, the Constitution of 1791 september 3 also forbade such mandate. At last, it has to be noticed that since 18th c., no representative government authorized such imperative mandate.

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63 Lis R., W poszukiwaniu prawdziwej rzeczypospolitej, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków, 2015, p. 146.
72 Manin B., op. cit., p. 211.
73 « Les représentants nommés dans les départements ne seront pas les représentants d’un département particulier, mais de la nation entière, et il ne pourra leur être donné aucun mandat », Chapitre premier: De l’assemblée nationale législative; Section III: Assemblées électorales. Nomination des représentants; Article 7.
If we now have a glance at French thinkers, who gave their advice on political reforms carried out in the Polish-Lithuanian Republic, we may observe that physiocrat Lemercier de la Rivière, Mably, and Pyrrhs de Varille supported the imperative mandate. Rousseau, though in principle opposed to representation, in his *Considérations* acknowledged its necessity because of the size of the republic. He believed that imperative mandate is necessary to a sound democracy and will be an effective way to guaranty the will of the sejmiks. Looking at Commonwealth thinkers, Karp, who considered that only a szlachćic could be chosen as an envoy, because magnates are too corrupted, firmly supported an imperative mandate. As for Kollataj in his *Anonym letters (Listy anonim*) and *Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego (Political right of the Polish People)*, he supported a representative mandate, Staszic and Lobarszewski shared such a point of view. So did the sovereign of the Republic, Stanislaw August, who was not convinced by Rousseau’s recipes to reform the Commonwealth. In his opinion the envoys had to vote according their own convictions and not according the will of those who vote for them.

### 3.3 Suffrage and mandate in the May 3 Constitution

Before looking at the changes made during the Four Year Sejm with regards to representation, let us remind here, that the Sejm ordinarily met every two years, for a duration of six weeks, and legislated by consensus. Instructions given by sejmiks to their envoys to the Sejm were quite important in Commonwealth parliamentary life. They were

75 Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de la Rivièr (1719 (1720 ?) - 1793 (1801?) ), 1747-1757 was member of Paris Parlement. 1759–1764 m. was sent as an intendent to Iles du Vent. In 1676 his book *Ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* was released, and in 1770: *L'intérêt général de l'Etat*. In the years 1771–1772 m. P. About Poland he wrote *L'intérêt commun des Polonais ou Mémoire sur les moyens de pacifier pour toujours les troubles actuels de la Pologne, en perfectionnant son gouvernement et concilant ses véritables intérêts avec les véritables intérêts des autres peuples*, which was not published. In 1772 was released his *Lettre sur les économistes* (1772). See: Parent A., Francuzai abiejų Tautų Respublikos pertvarkymo Stanislovo Augusto Valdymo laikotarpui (1764-1795 m.), daktaro disertacija, Vilnius, 2018, p. 253-254.

76 Si une diétine antécomitiale se séparait avant d'avoir élu ses nonces et dressé ses instructions [...]. See : Mably G. de, op. cit., p. 32.


80 Le second moyen est d’assujettir les représentants à suivre exactement leurs instructions et à rendre un compte sèrve à leurs constituants de leur conduite à la Diète. See : Rousseau, J.-J., *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne, et sur sa réformation projetée* (1772).

81 Not only magnates were corrupted, and often acted for foreign powers, but they also exercised their influence on nobles of lesser rank.

82 As for Kollataj in his *Anonym letters (Listy anonim*) and *Prawo polityczne narodu polskiego (Political right of the Polish People)* he shared such a point of view. So did the sovereign of the Republic, Stanislaw August, who was not convinced by Rousseau’s recipes to reform the Commonwealth. In his opinion the envoys had to vote according their own convictions and not according the will of those who vote for them.


mandatory\textsuperscript{89} and envoys had to comply with them. But in the second half of the century, namely in 1788 and 1790 we observe the possibility granted to envoys to act in an autonomy way, to “negotiate with the king’s will”. Instructions were of two kinds: those given to envoys sent to sejmiks, and those given to envoys sent to meet the king, or any other high-ranking official\textsuperscript{90}. The instructions of the first category were composed of three parts: answers to king’s proposal, proposals made to the king and requests concerning personalities or groups of people\textsuperscript{91}.

On 24 March 1791 the Sejm adopted a law on sejmiks\textsuperscript{92}, according to which voting rights were granted solely to nobles owning land, which became part of the May 3 Constitution\textsuperscript{93}. That is to say that the Four-Years Sejm adopted conceptions similar to Kollataj, Mably, Pyrrhs de Varille and physiocratic ideas. As for the bourgeois, the landed ones obtaining political rights, nobility was no more the only political subject in the Republic\textsuperscript{94}. Looking at the mandate, we observe that the representative one was retained (remember here that Stanislaw August and his proponents strongly opposed imperative mandates)\textsuperscript{95}. Indeed article 6 clearly stands, that envoys will represent not only the sejmiks, but all the People: “Inasmuch as legislation cannot be conducted by all, and the nation to that end employs as agents its freely elected representatives, or deputys, we determine that deputys elected at the regional sejms shall, in legislation and in general needs of the nation, be considered under the present constitution as representatives of the entire nation, being the repository of the general confidence”. It was a clear allusion to the British model\textsuperscript{96}.

4 Conclusion

The May 3 Constitution, contrary to United States 1787 and France 1791 Constitutions, maintained the inequality of rights between Commonwealth inhabitants. Concerning the suffrage, property conditions were applied, just like in Britain and in France, and mandate was free, like in the United-States, Britain and France. This implementation of representative mandate is without doubt one of the biggest enhancements of May 3 Constitution. Obviously, the Commonwealth clearly benefitted from its Sejm and sejmiks long parliamentary practice. It was all the more audacious and appreciable that enlightenment thinkers usually favored imperative mandates. Knowing that this kind of mandate prevails in today democracies, one has to acknowledge the far-sightedness of the Constitution framers, namely king Stanislaw. Unlike revolutionary France, one has to notice there was no, « clean-sweep » (\textit{table rase}), no renouncement of the past of the country, the conceptions of State and man were not abstract. It is true that contrary to the French Constitution, the Polish-Lithuanian one was not aimed at putting an end to a class society neither to establish a universal citizen. Hence, because they felt that the May 3 Constitution was akin to their own regimes, the American Thomas Paine and the British Edmund Burke considered it quite positively.

Indeed, with its specific constitutional feature (monarchic-republican), a binary state without equivalent, in-depth strengthened, unified and modernized institutions and administration, an exemplary educational system without match, the Commonwealth could envision its future with confidence. Indeed, the state disappeared because

\textsuperscript{89} Lis, R. op. cit., 2015, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{90} Butterwick-Pawlowski Richard, op. cit., p. 699; Jurgaitis R. (atsakingasis redaktorius), Lietuvos Didžiosios kunigaikštytės seimų instrukcijos (1788-1790), Fontes historiae parliamentorum lithuanorum 1, coll., Mykolo Romerio Universitetas, Vilnius, 2015, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{94} Rostworowski E., op. cit., p. 1436.
it was quickly (albeit late) and successfully reforming itself. Though neighboring countries congratulated Poles and Lithuanians for their constitutional achievements, they looked at such improvements with apprehension.

If Poland today honours the May 3, 1791 Constitution and Lithuania favours the Reciprocal Guarantee, does it matter? Since the Constitution and the Reciprocal Guarantee demonstrates the ability of Poles and Lithuanians to modernize their Commonwealth while keeping their identity, their ability to use foreign born ideas while adapting them to their own political tradition, these texts remain as an incorporeal but concrete “place of memory” to refer to when facing the ever renewing political and geopolitical challenges.

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