

Dorota Dukwicz

**THE INTERNAL SITUATION IN THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN
COMMONWEALTH (1769–1771) AND THE ORIGINS
OF THE FIRST PARTITION
(IN THE LIGHT OF RUSSIAN SOURCES)**

Since the turn of the nineteenth century both amongst eyewitnesses to the events as well as subsequently in the historiography and ultimately even in the widespread historical consciousness, there is repeated the claim as to the close cause-and-effect link connecting the Confederacy of Bar with the First Partition. As far as researchers are concerned not many have supported the above claim with a deeper analysis of the facts themselves. One of the most eminent historians of the epoch, Emanuel Rostworowski, in referring to the causes of the First Partition has repeated the old thesis regarding the Confederacy of Bar as the cause of the partition. He has, however, developed it in a somewhat different way to his predecessors. He has shown that despite the fact that the Confederacy ‘threw the country into total political chaos’, decisive for the intervention of Poland’s neighbours, it turned out to be not so much the growing anarchy that ensued as ‘the shaking of the tsarist tutelage – caused by the Confederacy ... [which] constituted grist to the mill of Prussian partitionist aspirations’. ‘It appears an unquestionable fact – the researcher summarises his considerations – that if it had not been for the Confederacy of Bar there would not have occurred at this time the First Partition’.¹ We are dealing therefore with, on the one hand, an emphasising of Prussian annexationist aspirations. The route for their

¹ Emanuel Rostworowski, ‘Polska w układzie sił politycznych Europy XVIII w.’, in Bogusław Leśnodorski (ed.), *Polska w epoce Oświecenia: państwo – społeczeństwo – kultura* (Konfrontacje Historyczne, Warsaw, 1971), 55. One should possibly assume that the specific vocabulary used resulted from the presence of the censorship of the time.

realisation, and therefore their acceptance by St Petersburg, was opened up by the chaos caused by the Confederacy resulting in a growing crisis for Russian domination within the Commonwealth. On the other hand, we also have the claims that it was in fact the Confederacy of Bar that was the factor determining the Partition at the beginning of the 1770s.

On the occasion of research into the *Sejm* (parliament) in Warsaw for the period 1773–5 I started to examine sources of the partition decision. I was interested in when and in what circumstances the decision was taken in St Petersburg. The procedures adopted by Prussia and Austria in relation to the partition have been elucidated by historiography – although, in my opinion, in a manner that still requires elaboration. I also returned to the question as to what degree the Confederacy of Bar influenced St Petersburg’s decision to instigate the First Partition of the Commonwealth. The below considerations concerning St Petersburg’s Polish policy and the Commonwealth’s internal situation for the period 1769–71 (a period key to the matter of partition) are a summary of conclusions drawn up on the basis of subject literature and diplomatic correspondence published at the turn of the twentieth century (particularly Russian and Prussian).² It is worth adding that the international circumstances underlying the partition decision equally require further research for we do not have even a complete factual framework of proceedings within the Russian, Prussian and Austrian triangle. This is chiefly a result of failure to utilise Russian sources, including published editions. The present article will, however, merely indicate the international aspects of the partition decision, in particular those whose confirmation I have found in researched sources. I am, however, of the opinion that on the basis of the source materials utilised, the scheme of events leading to the First Partition may be now, and therefore without recourse to research in Russian archives, provisionally verified and that its direct causes may be indicated afresh, including the significance of the Confederacy of Bar.

² As an aside one should add that an analysis of Russian military sources would possibly give a somewhat different picture of the situation. However, given the difficulties with regard to access, and that those sources from the period of interest to us have been researched by nobody, I have adopted the *a priori* premise that diplomatic correspondence gives a better insight into the motives for political decisions.

Following the *Sejm* of 1767/8, at which Russia forced Poland to accept the imposed guarantee of political order, the hitherto existing system of Russian domination within the Commonwealth collapsed. The reply to Russian intervention in the internal matters of the country was, on the one hand, the Confederacy of Bar, on the other – the still poorly researched, and in my opinion highly significant in relation to the question of partition, attempt at political emancipation undertaken by Stanislas Augustus basing himself on the support of the Czartoryskis' party (*Familia*).³ As the basis of this new compromise with Russia they demanded a partial withdrawal of the guarantee of Polish political order as well as concessions on the dissident question, something Catherine II consistently refused.

Following the dismissal from the embassy in the Commonwealth of Nikolai Repnin, his place was taken in June 1769 by Mikhail Volkonskii. This diplomatic mission – to date underestimated by researchers – is of key significance for an undertaking of the partition decision. It was emphasised in Volkonskii's instructions that the greatest enemy within the Commonwealth in relation to Russian interests was not the Confederacy of Bar but France striving to overthrow Stanislas Augustus and the placing on the throne of her own candidate. This was a threat that this might lead to the creation by the confederates of a formal governing body of the Confederacy – the Generality and to the declaration of an interregnum. As a consequence of which – despite the fruitless attempts from the spring of 1768 for an anti-Bar counter-confederacy endorsed by the king and (or) the Czartoryskis – the maintenance, at any cost, of Stanislas Augustus as king was indicated as the fundamental element of Russian policy. The Czartoryskis were to remain the chief political power in the Commonwealth, while the ambassador was to strive to strengthen their position in the country through Russian support without a resulting real increase in power for the king or the *Familia*. Volkonskii was,

³ The fundamental work on the subject of the internal situation for the period of interest to us is Władysław Konopczyński's monograph, *Konfederacja Barska*, 2 vols. (Warsaw, 1936–8); for the requirements of the present work I have made use of the reedition (Warsaw, 1991), in which is preserved the page numeration from the volumes 1 and 2. I have therefore not given the volume number in relation to references made. A summing up of the situation is contained in Władysław Konopczyński's work, *Pierwszy rozbiór Polski* (Cracow, 2010), published over 60 years after it was written.

therefore, to negotiate with the Czartoryskis, which meant that after the experiences with the Confederacy of Radom (1767) (the heads of which partially found themselves among the Bar leaders) Russia had returned to a policy that counted on the Czartoryskis.⁴

However, already at the beginning of his diplomatic mission the new ambassador was disenchanted with the possibilities of cooperating with the Czartoryskis, who, in a similar way to dealings with Repnin, categorically demanded a withdrawal of the guarantee of the political system and pro-dissident legislative acts. These conditions were wholly unacceptable to St Petersburg. Consequently Volkonskiĭ started to look for cooperation with the opposition. He saw in this a pillar of future pro-Russian counter-confederacy, the calling into being of which became the main aim of the ambassador's strivings, particularly after the creation of 'the Generality'.

From August 1769, the majority of Volkonskiĭ's efforts were concentrated on the preparation of a pro-Russian confederacy, without hiding the fact that it was to be *circa majestatem*.⁵ Despite his endeavours the ambassador was unable to either organise such a union or to contain the king and the Czartoryskis from summoning at the turn of October 1769 the Council of Senate. In the face of growing tension in the Commonwealth's relations with Russia and the War of Bar, the Council decided to appeal to England and Holland for mediation as well as announcing a search for French interposition. The convocation of the Council and its resolutions were interpreted in St Petersburg as a manifestation of the emancipatory policies of Stanislas Augustus and 'the uncles'⁶ aimed at Russia. Volkonskiĭ himself considered these events to constitute the beginning of separation from Russia.⁷ Here it is worth noting that – particularly in the later period – St Petersburg

⁴ On Volkonskiĭ's mission see first and foremost Nikolai F. Dubrovin, 'Knyaz' N. Volkonskiĭ i ego donosheniya iz Pol'shi – 1764–70 g.', *Vestnik Evropy*, 6 (1868), 543–94; *idem*, 'Nakanune pervogo razdela Pol'shi 1770 g.', *Vestnik Evropy*, 8 (1870), 191–251; a cursory description of the instructions for Volkonskiĭ: Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 177–8; Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 76–92; Instructions for Volkonskiĭ, 31 March [11 April] 1769, *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva* (hereafter: SIRIO), vol. 87 (St Petersburg, 1896), 372–404.

⁵ Dubrovin, 'Knyaz', 567–73; Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 274.

⁶ The term 'uncles' or 'old dukes' refers to the leaders of the *Familia* party: August Aleksander Czartoryski and Michał Fryderyk Czartoryski.

⁷ Dubrovin, 'Knyaz', 576–83; Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 273–6.

perceived a difference between the position of Stanislas Augustus and that of the Czartoryskis. The old dukes were accused of a 'hardening' in the king's position and implacability, at a time when the monarch's behaviour – of peculiar passivity – gave hope that it would be possible to persuade Stanislas Augustus to return to cooperation with Russia.

However, the ambassador's efforts failed to bring the desired effects for Russia. Volkonskiĭ's failures proved that besides the Bar on the one hand, and the king and the Czartoryskis on the other, there were no significant political forces in Poland. Therefore in November 1769 we may find for the first time in Russian diplomatic correspondence a signal of fundamental change in St Petersburg's Polish policy. The head of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, Nikita Panin, indicated, or rather reminded, that the Russian guiding principle was the maintenance of anarchy within the Commonwealth, but he stated a definite split with the Czartoryskis and a restoring of Russian domination in the Commonwealth, obviously with the aid of the pro-Russian confederacy. The current monarch was to be maintained on the throne.⁸ Somewhat later Catherine II even expressed willingness to confirm – through settlements with the future pro-Russian confederacy – the territorial integrity and inviolability of the political system of the Commonwealth, in order to consolidate the political *status quo* of 1767/8, the one optimal for Russia.⁹ In November 1769 Panin also foresaw that if the monarch did not give up on cooperation with the Czartoryskis and did not subject himself to Russia, there would be the possibility of dethroning Stanislas Augustus and his replacement by another 'Piast'¹⁰ (Petersburg did not have a concrete candidate, it just wanted to be certain that the throne did not fall to a member of any of the European dynasties, e.g. the Wettin). Change on the Polish throne could be carried out solely by St Petersburg, which reserved exclusively for itself control over the internal situation in the Commonwealth. Domination in this state was – according to Panin – absolutely essential to maintain Russia's imperialistic

⁸ Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 31 Oct. [11 Nov.] 1769, SIRIO, vol. 87, pp. 512–17; the correspondence is cited and discussed but without deeper analysis, Dubrovin, 'Knyaz', 587–90.

⁹ Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 4 [15] Dec. 1769, SIRIO, vol. 87, p. 543.

¹⁰ The term 'Piast' referred to a Polish king, not from a foreign dynasty.

position. Control over the Commonwealth in addition stabilised the 'northern system', which was treated by Russia as an instrument strengthening its superpower position. It is worth adding that the Russian minister still pointed to French intrigues as the chief threat to Russian interests in Poland.¹¹

Meanwhile, the king and the Czartoryskis (still acting together) did not want to cooperate with Russia without gaining concessions in questions of the political order and the dissidents.¹² Behind the backs of these 'defiant interlocutors' Volkonskii throughout the entire winter of 1769/70 unsuccessfully sought individuals to organise confederation in the voievodships under the cover of the Russian army in order to cleanse in this way the country of the Confederacy of Bar. He anticipated in this that the members of the latter, recruited from people nursing hatred for the king and the Czartoryskis, would be able to join this new union. However, the former Saxon supporters, like the former Court Marshal of the Crown Jerzy Mniszech, who exclusively were able to involve themselves in the creation of a new confederacy and upon whom the ambassador was counting, were disillusioned following the experiences of Radom and were waiting for the development of events.¹³

In January 1770 St Petersburg feared that a nightmare scenario was about to unfold. There fell into Russian hands materials exposing secret attempts on the part of the king and the Czartoryskis to reach an agreement with France. St Petersburg also knew that in this period Louis XV had decided that the aim of French involvement in matters Polish was the obtaining of an independent Commonwealth, which was understood to mean the elimination of Russian influences. Besides which it would not have escaped Russian attention that the Czartoryskis and the king with increasing intensity, and not without reciprocation, were looking for an agreement with the Confederacy of Bar.¹⁴ Russian anxiety was caused by the approach on Warsaw of the corps of confederate forces from Greater Poland (one of many operating within the country as a whole) in mid February 1770 under the

¹¹ See footnote 7.

¹² The demand to remove the Czartoryski family was presented to the king by Volkonskii at the latest at the beginning of 1770, cf. Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 77, footnote 42.

¹³ Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 295–8, 305, 363–4.

¹⁴ Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 315, 382–3, 385–7; Dubrovin, 'Nakanune', 202–3.

command of Ignacy Malczewski. Volkonskiĭ accused the Czartoryskis of summoning the corps to the capital.¹⁵ We should add that the Polish forces were smashed by the Russians.

In April 1770 Panin and Catherine II admitted that the situation in the Commonwealth forced the undertaking of critical steps.¹⁶ The decision concerning the dethroning of Stanislas Augustus and his replacement by a more obedient 'Piast' became increasingly likely. However, in St Petersburg it was understood that the placing on the throne of a new ruler would not automatically mean the end of Russia's problems. It was also feared that France and Saxony cooperating with it would make use of the interregnum for their own ends. As a consequence this could result in a deepening of the destabilisation of the 'northern system' and a further weakening of Russia's influence in the Commonwealth. At such a dramatic moment from St Petersburg's perspective one of the seemingly most startling decisions was taken, i.e. the decision to grant Ambassador Volkonskiĭ leave to travel to take the waters. In my opinion this is the first signal of the decision at partition – certainly the final decisions had not been taken yet at this time but one may suppose that the balance at the Russian court was being swung towards the partition party, connected with the Chernyshev faction (Volkonskiĭ also belonged to it). From the twilight of Augustus III's reign they had sought an opportunity to annex a part of Commonwealth territory. Initially they meant annexation, not partition.

Before the fate of the Commonwealth was finally decided on in St Petersburg, Russia tried once more a solution of force, which – I consider – was to have determined the conditions in which a partition would be carried out. The ambassador on leave was to be replaced by the head commander of the Russian forces in the Commonwealth, General Ivan Weimarn, and his task was to pacify the Commonwealth as quickly as possible (if Konopczyński is correct in linking him with the Chernyshev faction, then this is an additional factor confirming my conjectures). *Nota bene*, in the instructions for

¹⁵ Dubrovin, 'Nakanune', 204, 209–10.

¹⁶ Catherine II to Volkonskiĭ, 31 March [11 April] 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97 (St Petersburg, 1896), 44–50; Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 3 [14 April] 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 54–7 – in this same post were sent three letters from Panin dated the same, and this correspondence we examine together.

Weimarn it is again the Czartoryskis' *Familia* that appears as the main source of Russian problems and not the Confederacy of Bar, something that is characteristic for the whole of Russian diplomatic correspondence right up until the late autumn of 1770.¹⁷ Obviously this is because they would have still constituted a real political force given a military defeat of the Confederacy. Such a view explains the order given in June 1770 for the ravaging of the land estates of Russia's political opponents, i.e. chiefly the *Familia* and its supporters.¹⁸ The scale of the operation was unprecedented, while its echo reverberated around the newspapers of Western Europe. Though the result was the opposite of that intended: the Czartoryskis did not change their position and did not resign from their posts (and therefore did not withdraw from political life, which through the attack on their estates Catherine II had tried to force them to do). In September 1770 there came about a tightening of the king's cooperation with the uncles, and at the turn of October Stanislas Augustus attempted to reach St Petersburg with his arguments behind the back of the Russian ambassador to Warsaw. As this was a violation of the principles of Russian domination the king's move remained ineffectual.¹⁹

An analysis of the Russian diplomatic correspondence from the period of Weimarn's activity reveals that a subsequent change in Russia's position in relation to the Commonwealth had occurred. In August 1770, in a rescript being a reaction to reports on progress in military pacification, we find evidence that the idea for dethroning had been abandoned. From now on the recommendations flowing

¹⁷ Panin to Weimarn, 30 April [11 May] 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 67–8.

¹⁸ Panin to Weimarn, 19 [30] June 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 82–6; Nikolai D. Chechulin, *Vneshnyaya politika Rossii v nachale carstvovaniya Ekateriny II 1762–1774* (St Petersburg, 1896), 314; Dubrovin claims that the action was preceded by an assessment of the estates and incomes of the Czartoryski family, see *idem*, 'Nakanune', 222–3. This does not mean that this repression affected only the *Familia*. Konopczyński notes that within the framework of the military action the estates of, i.a., Wessel, Radziwiłł, Pac, and Horain were affected. On the whole action see Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 401–7. The fact of the final split between Petersburg and the Czartoryski family – the manifestation of which was military pacification – is considered by Konopczyński as a decisive defeat for Russia in her aspiration to independently appease the situation in the Commonwealth, and with the same an element directly leading to the decision for partition. However, he has not further validated his claim. See *idem*, *Fryderyk Wielki a Polska* (Poznań, 1947), 137.

¹⁹ Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 28 Sept. [9 Oct.] 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 148–9.

into Warsaw demanded 'to keep Stanislas Augustus on the throne at any cost'.²⁰ Besides, in this correspondence significantly more space started to be devoted to the Confederacy of Bar; one may even say that by the late autumn of 1770 it had become the dominant subject. From the turn of December 1770, and therefore presumably already after the decisions as to the fate of the Commonwealth had been taken, Russia's main aim had become the pacification of moods and the suppression of the War of Bar.

Why did the option of dethroning become rejected? One must consider the most important reasons to be:

1. The tenacious attitude of the leaders of the *Familia* despite sustained military pressure, which must have made Russia aware of the king's and Czartoryskis' determination, as well as the possible scale of resistance; the forcing through of dethroning could have resulted in greater problems. For if it appears that the idea of partition had already been decided on there was no need to bring about dethroning.

2. Despite his 'passivism' Stanislas Augustus enacted certain concessions in relation to Volkonskiï: on Russia's demand he withdrew, just prior to the ambassador's departure on leave, from the plan to summon a sitting of the *sejm*.²¹ He also – despite the drawing out of the demand to revoke the Polish-Russian treaty of 1768 and just after the commencement of military action against the uncles – declared his willingness to return to cooperation with the ambassador.²² Therefore from St Petersburg's point of view the possibilities to act in cooperation with the king were not exhausted.

3. The intensification of French policy known to Russian intelligence: unofficially Versailles had proposed to the Austrian Chancellor Wenzel Kaunitz an offer for the joint pacification of the Commonwealth, the aim of which was the elimination of Russian influences within its territory and the undertaking of intense sabotage for Turkey.²³

One should also remember that Russia at this period remained under the pressure of close relations emerging between Prussia and

²⁰ Panin to Weimarn, 7 [18] Aug. 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, p. 127.

²¹ Dubrovin, 'Nakanune', 223–4; for the already sent diet's scheduled agenda and the reactions to it, see Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 404.

²² Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 407–8.

²³ France's efforts around the Polish question and Austrian-French negotiations from the end of May to August 1770 are described by Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 374–6, 379–80, 394–8.

Austria, which were a response to Russia's planned strengthening of its position thanks to acquisitions in the Balkans. After the meeting of Frederick II with Joseph II at Neisse in Silesia in 1769, from the spring of 1770 the planned subsequent conference at Neustadt in Moravia was known about in St Petersburg. Presumably it was also known that at the time when the plans for a joint mediation by Berlin and Vienna in the war between Russia and Turkey were discussed, Frederick II had spoken in Neisse with Chancellor Kaunitz about the possibility of joint Prussian-Austrian intervention in the matters of the Commonwealth. This was – according to Austrian premises – not only calculated to limit Russian influences but also to weaken the imperialistic position of St Petersburg.²⁴ Thus the discharging of Prussian-Austrian pressure through the partition of Poland must have presented itself to Catherine II as an increasingly tempting solution.

Another significant element, which should be taken into consideration in a reconstruction of events, was the Russian-Turkish War. In the summer of 1770 Russia started to gain victories on the Turkish front, which was important not only from the military point of view but also and first and foremost from that of prestige: it strengthened St Petersburg's superpower position. Towards the very end of July 1770 Catherine II sent Frederick II an invitation for Prince Henry of Prussia to pay a visit to St Petersburg.²⁵ There are reasons for stating that the invitation of Prince Henry was not merely an attempt at sounding out the direction of Prussian policy but also a first step in drawing Prussia into cooperation with matters Polish at a moment when the Turkish conflict was just turning in favour of Russia.²⁶

²⁴ Adolf Beer, 'Die Zusammenkünfte Josefs II. und Friedrichs II. zu Neisse und Neustadt', *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte*, 47 (1871), 383–527.

²⁵ Albert Sorel states that the invitation was dated 19 July 1770, but does not take into consideration that this was a date according to the Old Style, see *idem*, *The Eastern Question in the Eighteenth Century: The Partition of Poland and the Treaty of Kainardji* (New York, 1969), 94; Gustav B. Volz, 'Prinz Heinrich von Preussen und die preussische Politik vor der ersten Theilung Polens', *Forschungen zur brandenburgische und preussische Geschichte*, 18 (1905), 155; letter with invitation: Catherine II to Frederick II, 19 July 1770 (Old Style), *Politische Correspondenz Friedrich's des Grossen* (hereafter: PC), vol. 30 (Berlin, 1905), 72.

²⁶ One of the factors pointing to the possibility of just such an interpretation – and at the same time another matter which it follows to interpret anew within the context of the turnabout in St Petersburg's Polish policy in the summer of 1770 – is the undertaking by Frederick II at the end of July 1770 of

Before Frederick II's brother arrived in Russia, in September 1770 an instruction was sent from St Petersburg for the ambassador in Warsaw to work in close collaboration with his Prussian counterpart.²⁷ Catherine II sent an invitation of cooperation to Frederick only in October 1770 when it was already known that the Patriotic Council formed by Volkonskiï from 'the most corruptible toadies' (according to Władysław Konopczyński's phrasing)²⁸ was unable to constitute a political back up for Russia's policies.²⁹ At the same time Russia declared its readiness in relation to Prussia to withdraw from the guarantee of territorial integrity afforded the Commonwealth in 1768 and with the same opened the route for Frederick II to territorial acquisitions.³⁰ This was a clear signal that the Chernyshevs' conceptions of policy were gaining the upper hand at the Russian court. Russia must have assumed that for Prussian help in matters Polish the price would be the territory of the Commonwealth itself. Here, however, it follows to emphasise that – independently of the Prussian-Austrian negotiations in Neisse, or the Prussian sounding out about partition – the decision as to the division of Commonwealth territory was taken in St Petersburg. Berlin and Vienna were acting in this case as Russian supplicants.

the decision to extend the sanitary cordon in Greater Poland, see Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 425–6; Frederick II to de Rohd, 25 July 1770, PC, vol. 30, pp. 43–4; Frederick II to Finckenstein and Hertzberg, 27 July 1770, PC, vol. 30, p. 46; the edict on the introduction of a cordon was given, dated 29 Aug. 1770, and therefore already after the Russian troops had entered into the Czartoryskis' estates and had received an invitation from Catherine II, see Tadeusz Srogosz, *Dżuma ujarzmiona? Walka z czarną śmiercią za Stanisława Augusta* (Wrocław, 1997), 31.

²⁷ Panin to Volkonskiï, 28 Sept. [9 Oct.] 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 144–8.

²⁸ For Volkonskiï's endeavours around the creation of a Patriotic Council and its failed – from the Russian point of view – actions from October 1770 to January 1771, see Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 469–75.

²⁹ Dubrovin, 'Nakanune', 228–9.

³⁰ The first important letter of Catherine II in this matter is from the beginning of October: Catherine II to Frederick II, 28 Sept. [9 Oct.] 1770, PC, vol. 30, pp. 221–3; however, of fundamental importance in the transmission of St Petersburg's position to the Prussians was the conversation that took place between Panin and the Prussian ambassador Victor Solms at the end of the month, see Solms to Frederick II, Petersburg 12 [23] Oct. 1770, Berlin, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Hauptabteilung I, Repositur 96 (Geheimes Zivilkabinett, ältere Periode), codex 57 E, no. 651.

Prince Henry, who arrived in St Petersburg at the beginning of October 1770, started negotiations with Panin, i.a., on the conditions for the future pacification of Poland.³¹ It is characteristic that the Bar War almost did not appear in these negotiations: there was talk of pacification but chiefly in the broad political context. One should emphasise that from the beginnings of the discussions Russia accepted Prussia's proposal for Austria's participation in the whole undertaking. In November 1770 the conditions proposed by Panin were accepted as the basis for the future pacification. They referred to the clauses of the Polish-Russian treaty of 1768.³² Via the intermediacy of Berlin already in December 1770 these agreements were unofficially made known to Vienna.³³

It follows to emphasise that we do not have direct source proofs that it was then that the decision to partition the Commonwealth was arrived at, nevertheless we can conjecture that this was in fact the case. One of the reasons is the already mentioned shift of focus

³¹ The most detailed description of Henry's St Petersburg negotiations is given by Gustav B. Volz, 'Friedrich der Grosse und die erste Theilung Polens', *Forschungen zur brandenburgische und preussische Geschichte*, 23 (1910), 71–143; *idem*, 'Prinz Heinrich und die Vorgeschichte der ersten Theilung Polens', *Forschungen zur brandenburgische und preussische Geschichte*, 35 (1923), 193–211; also Adolf Beer, *Die erste Theilung Polens* (Wien, 1873), ii, 37–9; cf. additional findings: Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 91–110; very briefly on negotiations concerning the internal matters of the Commonwealth *idem*, *Geneza i ustanowienie Rady Nieustającej* (Cracow, 1917), 144–5; Herbert H. Kaplan has devoted some space to the St Petersburg negotiations and their Polish motif in *idem*, *The First Partition of Poland* (New York and London, 1962), 131–9, but the argument is superficial which results in a distortion in the analysis.

³² 'Precis des sentiments du Comte de Panin, qu'il a eu l'honneur de faire connoître à Son Altesse Royale Monseigneur le Prince Henri de Prusse, dans un entretien sur la pacification de la Pologne à Saint-Pétersbourg, 22 octobre [2 novembre] 1770', in Beer, *Die erste Theilung*, iii, 109–11 (here without a date); SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 150–7; as an appendix to Solms' letter to Frederick II, 3 Nov. 1770, PC, vol. 30, pp. 262–4.

³³ In November and December 1770, Frederick II conveyed on the Prussian ambassador in Vienna, Jakob de Rohd, a text of 'Précis' in order for him to be able, on the basis of the document, to gauge the intentions of Kaunitz, Frederick II to de Rohd, 14 and 15 Nov. and 12 Dec. 1770, PC, vol. 30, pp. 265–6, 314; for the Prussian king's conversations with the Austrian envoy to Berlin, Gottfried van Swieten, see Sorel, *Eastern Question*, 139–45; Beer, *Die erste Theilung*, ii, 66–9; Wolfgang Stribrny, *Die Russlandpolitik Friedrichs des Grossen 1764–1786* (Würzburg, 1966), 54–5; Alfred R. von Arneth, *Geschichte Maria Theresia's*, viii (Vienna, 1877), 293–308.

in the diplomatic correspondence directed towards Warsaw and the pressure placed on the matter of pacifying the Confederacy of Bar. In November 1770 St Petersburg stopped being interested in controlling the Commonwealth through a pro-Russian confederation, with the chief aim of Volkonskiĭ being the appeasement of moods and suppression of the Bar War.³⁴ One may even gain the impression that towards the end of 1770 the conditions for pacification – as roughly elaborated in Prince Henry’s negotiations with Panin – receded into the background, with St Petersburg being chiefly interested in preparing the ground so that the partition could be carried out with the least possible resistance (chiefly in the military sense). Money initially allocated to the pro-Russian confederation (which did not see fruition) then earmarked for dissociating from the Bar camp its most significant representatives was to be used for the termination of the Bar War. Besides, the empress personally drew up the amnesty for the confederates under the condition that there was an immediate cessation of fighting and the instigation of negotiations for the pacificatory treaty. In the case of failure she mentioned *en passant* the possibility of Prussian intervention.³⁵

Following the passing on of the new guidelines to the ambassador in Warsaw, St Petersburg fell silent for two months, until in February 1771 Volkonskiĭ was dismissed.³⁶ It is worth emphasising that such silence is characteristic for Russian diplomacy after the concluding of important decisions. Besides, one needs to take into consideration that each and every change of ambassador in Warsaw was connected with a change of policy. This time Volkonskiĭ was to be replaced by Caspar von Saldern, one of Panin’s closest advisers on Polish affairs. He was to arrive in Warsaw in the middle of April 1771.

³⁴ Dubrovin, ‘Nakanune’, 234–41; rescript of Catherine II for Volkonskiĭ, 7 [18] Nov. 1770, SIRIO, vol. 97, p. 167; Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 9 [20] Nov. 1770 (three letters for this date), SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 169–76; Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 10 [21] Nov. 1770 (three letters for this date), SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 177–82.

³⁵ Handwritten note of Catherine II, SIRIO, vol. 97, p. 176; the note was annotated with a comment, from which it results that it arose as an aside to a letter of Panin to Volkonskiĭ of 10 [21] Nov. 1770 (SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 177–80), but the content of the note, as equally that of the referred letter, shows that the note relates to a letter of Panin to Volkonskiĭ of 9 [20] Nov. 1770 (SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 169–75).

³⁶ Panin to Volkonskiĭ, 16 [27] Jan. 1771, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 195–7.

There is often repeated in the historiography a thesis that Saldern's embassy was a last chance mission to avoid partition.³⁷ In my opinion there are no bases to state this. Contrary to the claims of Władysław Konopczyński, the negotiations in St Petersburg concerning partition were not suspended for the duration of this mission, nor was Saldern given time to persuade the Czartoryskis to compromise. Already at the beginning of June 1771 Saldern learnt from the Prussian legate in Warsaw that not only had the final decision concerning partition been taken but that Russian-Prussian talks in St Petersburg were concerned with concrete territorial acquisitions. The Prussian diplomat, Gedeon Benoît learnt this from a letter of Frederick II written under the influence of the dispatch of the Prussian ambassador in Russia, Victor Friedrich von Solms, sent from St Petersburg on 17 May 1771.³⁸ Solms' dispatch was penned a month after Saldern's arrival in Warsaw. Taking into consideration the speed of letter transfer between Warsaw and St Petersburg, it must be accepted that the latest information which Saldern could have sent to St Petersburg prior to the alleged taking of the decision to partition must have been written on 7 or 8 May. One may therefore make the conjecture that the alleged last chance mission would have lasted 20 days – if one calculates it from the first talks held by the Russian ambassador with August Czartoryski (17 April)³⁹ or only seven – if we consider the first conference with

³⁷ On Saldern's mission, as a 'last chance mission' and its decisive nature see, first and foremost, Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 499–510. Konopczyński in writing that for the duration of Saldern's mission Panin suspended the partition negotiations, refers to Solov'ëv (Sergei Solov'ëv, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneishikh vremën*, <<http://www.kulichki.com/inkwell/text/special/history/soloviev/solovlec.htm>> [Accessed 20 June 2011]), but in the text of the Russian historian there is no assertion; Konopczyński's claims as to the last chance mission have been adopted by, e.g., Jerzy Michalski, 'Dyplomacja polska w latach 1764–1795', in Zbigniew Wójcik (ed.), *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, ii (Warsaw, 1982), 526, 541. In a subsequent work Konopczyński recalls 'the three-month wait, until Saldern had lost in Warsaw', *idem*, *Fryderyk Wielki*, 146; this passing statement in no way fits to the chronology which the same researcher has reconstructed in other places. What is interesting is that in the monograph on the First Partition, Konopczyński does not formulate such categorical claims on Saldern's mission, cf. *idem*, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 92 ff.

³⁸ Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 507.

³⁹ The first 'political' talks of the ambassador with one of the leaders of the *Familia*, a Ruthenian voivode, took place on 17 April 1771, see Władysław Konopczyński, 'Czartoryski Aleksander August', in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, iv (Cracow, 1938), 272–5.

the king (28 April)⁴⁰ to be its beginning. What is more, admittedly we do not know the contents of the first reports of the ambassador, but from the reply we may deduce that they all contained an optimistic vision of the situation from Russia's perspective.⁴¹

At this time the secret Russian-Prussian negotiations in St Petersburg continued uninterrupted although not swiftly, for from the end of 1770 there were expected the results of the Prussian-Austrian negotiations.⁴² Undoubtedly the famous talks of Catherine II and Chernyshev with Henry of Prussia of 8 January 1771⁴³ – in the course of which she pronounced the characteristic opinion: 'Why should everyone not have taken the same?' and the bishopric of Ermeland was offered to Prince Henry – should be examined within the context of these very negotiations. Besides we know that already in the February of 1771 Panin assured Prussia that the partition would not meet with resistance within the Commonwealth,⁴⁴ and in March 1771 the secret talks entered into the phase of establishing Prussia's territorial acquisitions.⁴⁵ While in May after Panin had obtained – as

⁴⁰ The welcoming audience at the king's for the new ambassador was on 28 April 1771, and two days later there was the first conference with the monarch, Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 502.

⁴¹ For certain we know that on 10 May Panin and Catherine II had at their disposal only the first of Saldern's reports from Warsaw. It must have contained some complaints about the headquarters of the Warsaw legation, because almost the entire reply concentrates around the need to change the residency and contains approval for Saldern to do in this matter everything that he considers appropriate. On matters political there is only mention that news had reached St Petersburg about new French reinforcements for the Bar confederates. The letter ends with the order to, with the king's agreement, create a joint Russian-Polish corps to fight the confederacy with Branicki at the head, see Panin to Saldern, 29 April [10 May] 1771, SIRIO, vol. 97, pp. 266–71.

⁴² Still towards the end of 1770 Panin inquired of Prince Henry if anything was already known on Vienna's position, see Prince Henry to Frederick II, 27 Nov. 1770, PC, vol. 30, pp. 316–17; in addition: Solms to Frederick II, 14 [25] Jan. 1771, SIRIO, vol. 37, pp. 350–5; the Prussian diplomat notices at the beginning of March 1771 an increased tension around the Polish matter, see Solms to Frederick II, 18 Feb. [1 March] 1771, SIRIO, vol. 37, pp. 388–90.

⁴³ Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 90–1.

⁴⁴ Solov'ev, *Istoriya*, vol. 28, chap. 3; on the earlier stages of Russian-Prussian negotiations see Konopczyński, *Pierwszy rozbiór*, 94–6.

⁴⁵ From 12 March 1771 comes source information that Solms, in accordance with the recommendations of the Prussian king (Frederick II to Solms, 20 Feb. 1771, SIRIO, vol. 37, pp. 391–6) engaged in discussions with Panin

it appeared at the time – a favourable position on the part of Vienna, the matter of partition became the subject of a sitting of the Russian State Council.⁴⁶ Subsequently negotiations entered into their already known course.

As far as Saldern's mission itself is concerned – regardless of whether its goal was to dull Stanislas Augustus's vigilance, or to remove from the secret negotiating table in St Petersburg one of the main opponents of partition, i.e. Saldern (or possibly both of these aims simultaneously) – it must be admitted that the ambassador succeeded in a task that had been impossible for his predecessor. On 16 May 1771 as a result of an understanding reached between Saldern and Stanislas Augustus, Franciszek Ksawery Branicki and Weimarn signed an agreement, on the strength of which Branicki stood at the head of the Polish-Russian military corps which started the crackdown against the Confederacy. Three days later the Russian offensive under the command of General Alexander Suvorov began; Branicki, treated as a puppet, fulfilled, together with his forces, the role of a cover-up for the Russian military operation within the Commonwealth.⁴⁷

To sum up, the decision regarding partition lay within the discretion of St Petersburg. Following a confrontation of the hitherto knowledge on the subject with the information retrieved from Russian

about territorial acquisitions for Prussia, see Solms to Frederick II, 1 [12] Jan. 1771, SIRIO, vol. 37, pp. 402–6; it seems that researchers studying the partition have overlooked Solms' March dispatch. The majority of them, in writing about the earlier partition negotiations, have only touched the surface with regard to their origins by claiming that such decisions had yet to be taken. Given the dispatch's contents it is difficult to conceive of a situation whereby the Russian minister *expressis verbis* in enunciating permission for Prussian's annexation of a part of Poland's territory could have done so without first a decision being taken in St Petersburg as to whether the partition was to happen or not, cf., e.g., Sorel, *Eastern Question*, 140–45; Beer, *Die erste Theilung*, ii, 65–9; Stribny, *Die Russlandpolitik*, 55–9.

⁴⁶ Solov'ev is the first to attest that on 27 May 1771 the issue of the territorial extent of the Russian partition came up for debate at the State Council (*Istoriya*, vol. 28, chap. 3); Konopczyński claimed that the May sitting of the State Council took place on 31 May (*Konfederacja*, 509–10); for general discussion on the negotiations together with information that they began at the end of May, see Konopczyński, *Fryderyk Wielki*, 147–8.

⁴⁷ Konopczyński, *Konfederacja*, 504.

sources, it is beyond any doubt whatsoever. Prussian inspirations for partition are overestimated in the scholarly literature. One can clearly see that the conception as to how to deal with the rebellious Commonwealth crystallised in St Petersburg from April to November 1770. Regardless of when exactly the decision was taken, Catherine II took it, for she had started to lose her control over the Commonwealth. This occurred not so much as a result of the Bar Confederacy as from the growing independence of Stanislas Augustus as well as the lack of a base for Russian policy in Poland except for the Court and *Familia*. Therefore the partition was a reply to the king's attempt, supported by the Czartoryskis, to resist the constant limiting of the Commonwealth's sovereignty. For Volkonskiĭ's mission – as it appears one key for the future fate of the Commonwealth – proved the fruitlessness of the hitherto possibilities for independent action by Russia in Poland. This concerned rather the political than the military sphere. At the same time the Turkish War and the close relations taking shape between Austria and Prussia created a situation whereby the pacification of the Commonwealth would help to resolve the tension within the Austria–Prussia–Russia triangle.

As far as the matter of the significance of the Confederacy for the decision on partition is concerned, we shall reiterate: before Henry of Prussia's talks in St Petersburg the matter of the Confederacy of Bar in the diplomatic correspondence passing between Warsaw and St Petersburg took up only a little room in comparison with the problems connected with the resistance of Stanislas Augustus and the Czartoryskis towards Russia and the search for an alternative political camp upon which St Petersburg could base its policy in Poland. From the autumn of 1770 when – so it seems – the fate of the Commonwealth was already finally decided upon, there occurred a shift in accent, with the Bar Confederacy and in particular the need to suppress it, becoming the main concern of Panin and Volkonskiĭ, and subsequently Saldern. Thus the significance of the Confederacy of Bar lies not in the fact that – as is emphasised e.g. in the partition treatises – it was the main reason for the partition; it rather should be treated as a favourable situation which enabled Stanislas Augustus, supported by the uncles, to undertake an attempt at loosening the corset of Russian domination in the Commonwealth. Partition was a punishment for this attempt. Such a conclusion brings about a subsequent question: could the king have undertaken an

attempt at political emancipation without the Confederacy of Bar? It seems that the monarch, in being aware of his responsibility for the state, being an adherent of a policy of small controlled steps, would not have decided upon open resistance to Russia without being conscious that Russian concessions were imperative for appeasing the nation.

trans. Guy Torr