

FIGHT FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE DURING THE FIRST POLISH INTERREGNUM (1572-1573)

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Abstract: *As the Reformation progressed in the 16th century, Poland became increasingly populated by representatives of Protestant denominations. Because political elites and nobility disagreed on religious matters, the issue of religious tolerance required appropriate formal and legal solutions. That was particularly important during the first interregnum following the death of King Sigismund Augustus, when the spectre of anarchy loomed over the state. The Warsaw Confederation Act was introduced during the Convocation Sejm to preserve order in the country during the interregnum. This document also included provisions on religious tolerance, which remained a source of dispute for both supporters and opponents of religious peace for many years.*

This article addresses the first stage of the struggle for formal recognition of religious tolerance, which occurred between the death of the last monarch of the Jagiellonian dynasty (7 July 1572) and the end of the session of the Convocation Sejm during the first interregnum (28 January 1573). The study was built on 16th-century historiography - the works of Marcin Bielski, Świętosław Orzelski and Reinhold Heidenstein. The paper aims to reconstruct the events that led to the creation of the Warsaw Confederation Act. Moreover, the sources reflect the atmosphere prevailing in the country at that time, which is undoubtedly significant in capturing the topic under consideration.

The paper is a three-part inquiry that, aside from research methodologies, displays the historical context in the introduction while the remainder of the text is a comparative analysis of the source material, from which relevant conclusions were drawn.

Keywords: *Convocation Sejm, Warsaw Confederation, Polish-Lithuanian Common-*

wealth, Interregnum, religious tolerance, Reinhold Heidenstein, Świętosław Orzelski, Marcin Bielski

Rezumat: Lupta pentru libertate religioasă în timpul primului Interregnum polonez (1572-1573). *Pe măsură ce Reforma se răspândise în secolul al XVI-lea, reprezentanții confesiunilor protestante deveniseră din ce în ce mai numeroși în Polonia. Deoarece elitele politice și nobilimea nu căzuseră de acord asupra unor chestiuni religioase, problema toleranței religioase a necesitat introducerea unor soluții formale și legale adecvate. Acest fapt s-a ilustrat ca fiind deosebit de important în timpul primului interregnum polonez, de după moartea regelui Sigismund Augustus, când spectrul anarhiei plana asupra statului. Actul Confederației de la Varșovia a fost adoptat în vremea convocării Seim-ului, în vederea menținerii ordinii în țară în timpul interregnum-ului. Documentul includea diverse prevederi privind toleranța religioasă, rămânând timp de mulți ani o sursă de dispută atât pentru susținătorii, cât și pentru oponenții păcii religioase.*

Articolul abordează prima etapă a luptei pentru recunoașterea formală a toleranței religioase, care a avut loc între moartea ultimului monarh al dinastiei Jageloniene (7 iulie 1572) și sfârșitul sesiunii Seimului convocat în timpul primului interregnum (28 ianuarie 1573). Demersul științific se bazează preponderent pe lucrările unor reprezentanți de marcă ai istoriografiei polone din secolul al XVI-lea – Marcin Bielski, Świętosław Orzelski și Reinhold Heidenstein. Lucrarea noastră își propune să reconstituie evenimentele care au dus la crearea Actului Confederației de la Varșovia. Sursele consultate reflectă atmosfera care predomina în țară la acea vreme, fapt semnificativ pentru înțelegerea subiectului în discuție.

Articolul este, practic, o investigație în trei părți care, în afară de metodologiile de cercetare, reliefează în introducere contextul istoric, restul textului fiind o analiză comparativă a materialului sursă, pe baza căreia au fost obținute concluzii relevante.

INTRODUCTION

In the 14th century, following the incorporation of the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia into Poland by Casimir III the Great, the country became home to large numbers of Orthodox Christians. Casimir, the last king of the Piast dynasty, decided to respect religious distinctness, hoping that he would win the support of the Russian elites for his territorial ambitions. This decision laid the foundations for centuries of religious tolerance in Poland, which made this country, and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, stand out from other European Catholic countries. In the course of history, not only Orthodox Christians but also Crimean Karaites, Jews, Tatars and Armenians have enjoyed peaceful religious coexistence in Poland. In the 16th century, due to the development of the Reformation in Europe, representatives of different Protestant denominations added to

Poland's religious mix. As a result, the country's political elites and the nobility became religiously diverse, which, in turn, called for appropriate formal and legal solutions. This need became especially pressing in the time of the first *interregnum* after the death of Sigismund II Augustus when the threat of anarchy loomed over the country. The fear of a potential civil war or an international conflict was so strong at that time that political actors were often ready for various compromises, in religion, as well as other areas to maintain peace. That led to the formulation of the Act of the Warsaw Confederation at the Convocation Sejm, which included clauses guaranteeing religious tolerance. These clauses later became the major bone of contention in the conflict between the supporters and opponents of religious peace.

The first phase of the battle for legal sanctioning of religious tolerance occurred between the death of the last Jagiellonian king (July 7, 1572) and the conclusion of the Convocation Sejm session of the first *interregnum* (January 28, 1573). The reconstruction of the events that led to the creation of the Act of the Warsaw Confederation is made possible by 16th-century historiography, i. e. works by Marcin Bielski, Świętosław Orzelski and Reinhold Heidenstein. The aim of this article, in addition to retracing the course of the above-mentioned events, is also to capture their atmosphere. A comparative analysis of the sources has allowed the creation of a detailed description, which is undeniably an important contribution to the scientific queries into the long-lasting fight for the legal sanctioning of religious tolerance in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The article is based on summarized fragments of sources written by the above-mentioned chroniclers, selected in such a way as to reconstruct the described events in the most detailed way by complementing each other. The source excerpts were not only cited, but also compared, showing the similarities and differences between them, as well as the problems emphasized by each of the authors. However, the research considerations would not be complete without referring to the scientific literature dealing with the subject covered by this research.

There are numerous publications on the question of the Warsaw Confederation and religious tolerance in Polish historiography. One of the most famous works on this matter was written by Józef Siemieński¹ during the interwar period. The subject he addressed was developed by Mirosław Korolko in the second

¹ Józef Siemieński, *Drugi akt konfederacji warszawskiej 1573 roku. Przyczynek archiwalny do historii ustroju Polski* [The second act of the Warsaw Confederation in 1573. Archival contribution to the history of the Polish political system], Kraków, Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1930.

half of the 20th century. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning Janusz Tazbir, an outstanding specialist in this field, whose works were published in the second half of the 20th and 21st centuries. Religious issues in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are also addressed by Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz, who is specialized in the history of the political system of this country. The above-mentioned authors of scientific publications are not the only Polish historians who examined the matter of the religious situation in the Polish-Lithuanian state. However, historical heritage is so abundant that addressing this issue in a single scientific article is nearly impossible.

In terms of foreign historiography, the scientific heritage on the topic is not as extensive as that of Polish historians. Norman Davies, a British researcher addressed the issue of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the first volume of *God's Playground. A history of Poland* and the book *Europe*. It is worth noting that the first of these two publications has been widely praised by the scientific historical community as one of the best foreign-language books on Polish history. In addition, in 2001 Daniel Stone published a work illustrating the history of the Polish-Lithuanian state.

RESEARCH PROBLEM ANALYSIS

When the last king of the Jagiellonian dynasty was approaching the end of his life, Poland's political elites were conscious of the country's internal instability. The king did not have a male heir, so his contemporaries were aware that after his death, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth would face a *viritim* election² preceded by an *interregnum*. The prospect of the *interregnum* was very concerning for society, as described by Andrzej Lubieniecki, a witness of those events: "*The citizens of our states, both noblemen and common people, having lost their hope for the king's heir, were awaiting the interregnum just as anyone with a guilty conscience would await the Doomsday. When the king's death was close, anytime a few clergymen, or lay people, or senators, or the nobility, or even merchants gathered, they never failed to speak about the looming interregnum, and it*

² The Viritim Election is a king's election in which every nobleman has the right to vote. The final formula of this procedure was established during the Convocation Sejm in 1573. Henri de Valois was the first king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth elected according to the established rules (May 11, 1573). Sebastian Adamkiewicz, *Skąd się wzięła elekcja viritim?* [Where did the viritim election come from?], <https://histmag.org/Skad-sie-wziela-elekcja-viritim-1661> (Accessed on 30.08.2022).

was always done with great fear and anxiety."³

The specificity and uniqueness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's political system, which, as we know, provided the nobility with a 'golden liberty,' may well have contributed to this concern. The nobility was therefore concerned that a foreigner would be elected king and would not understand how the country functioned. Such a king, moreover, might not accept the status quo and try to change it, thus strengthening his power, which would obviously threaten the interests of the nobility.

Another reason for anxiety, connected to some degree with the first, was the religious situation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The possibility that a fanatic Catholic would be elected king worried members of other religious denominations, as the potential bigotry of the future king might result in his not respecting the nobles' liberty, part of which was religious freedom. There was then the possibility of religious conflict, which in turn could spark a civil war.

There is no doubt that contemporary political activists were aware of this threat, as is proven by the conciliatory attitude of some influential Catholics towards Protestants and the resulting settlements designed to keep the country safe.

These were the problems that the society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had to face after July 7, 1572. The king's death, although expected, shattered the sense of security of the country's high-ranking inhabitants, causing anxiety or even panic among them. Reinhold Heidenstein, who later became the secretary of the Royal Chancellery of Stephen Báthory and Sigismund III Vasa, described the common views of the time. According to him, there were conflicting opinions about the last king of the Jagiellonian dynasty among the people of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, both servants who loved Sigismund II and those who hated him shared the same fear and concern for the fate of the country.⁴

According to Heidenstein, this fear arose due to the country's new and previously unknown situation. Although Heidenstein mentions the *interregnum* after the death of Louis I of Hungary, he underlines that how the king's successor was to be elected had already been agreed upon. "*Succeeding monarchs*, Heidenstein's history of Poland reads, *were also elected, but neither after Louis's*

³ Stanisław Płaza, *Wielkie bezkrólewia* [The Great Interregna], Kraków, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988, p. 2.

⁴ Reinhold Heidenstein, *Rajnolda Hejdensztejna sekretarza królewskiego dzieje Polski od śmierci Zygmunta Augusta do roku 1594* [The King's Secretary Reinhold Heidenstein's history of Poland from the death of Sigismund II Augustus to the year 1594], Vol. 1, Petersburg, 1857, p. 11.

death nor later, did anybody ever think about passing the crown to a foreigner.”⁵ This account clearly shows that it was not only the last king of the Jagiellonian dynasty dying heirless which worried people but also the possibility that a foreigner would rule Poland. People moreover feared a lack of agreement at Sejms and the prospect that the country’s territorial integrity would be threatened.⁶

Another contemporary chronicler, Witosaw Orzelski, provides a similar account. By addressing this issue, he pointed out that the majority of the late king’s most distinguished servants remained secretive despite profiting from the monarch’s favour. Because of this, it was barely possible to find willing people who would fulfil the duty regarding the monarch’s body. Furthermore, once the problem was solved, the news of Sigismund Augustus’s death caused chaos. People who anticipated the impending danger as a threat to their country were overwhelmed by fear, thus began accumulating weapons. This state of affairs significantly influenced the economic situation of the Polish-Lithuanian state due to an increase in the number of loans, as well as a rising shortage of military equipment available for purchase. In addition, the author of the source also drew attention to the correlation between the debt burden and an increase in the prices of weapons. Merchants and artisans engaged in warfare trade became highly desired during the interregnum than during peacetime because they were part of the production chain.⁷

Similar sentiments are described in Marcin Bielski’s *Chronicle of Poland*. At the beginning of the source fragment regarding the situation after the death of the last king of the Jagiellonian dynasty, the author mentions the concern which overtook almost the whole society. He attributes people’s omnipresent fear to the fact that the country was surrounded by enemies. Although according to the chronicler, the country might have faced external threats at any minute, God had blessed it with people who guarded internal peace. For that, the author expresses his gratitude to the Creator.⁸

It is easy to notice that Orzelski and Bielski’s accounts are somehow com-

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Świętosław Orzelski, *Bezkrólewia ksiąg ośmioro czyli dzieje Polski od zgonu Zygmunta Augusta r. 1572 aż do r. 1576* [Eight books of the interregnum, i.e. the history of Poland from the death of Sigismund II Augustus in 1572 to the year 1576], Vol. 1, Petersburg-Mohylew, 1856.

⁸ Joachim Bielski, *Kronika polska Marcina Bielskiego. Księgi VI Interregnum* [The Polish chronicle by Marcin Bielski. The 6th Interregnum Books], Vol. 18, no. 6, Warsaw, 1632, p. 7.

plementary to Heidenstein's description of the situation, as both sources describe not only the feelings of the inhabitants of the Commonwealth at the time of the first *interregnum* but also the consequences of the omnipresent fear. Orzelski's text deals directly with trade transactions in various weapons and war equipment. The population arming themselves shows how society perceived the security issues. What exactly they feared we learn from Heidenstein, who writes that "*The Sejm sittings were turbulent, and the neighbours' strength or greed could herald a terrible future for many.*"⁹ Today we know that after Sigismund II Augustus's death, there was no serious external threat to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. We are also aware that the more serious problem was internal political and religious antagonisms. This, however, does not mean that the fear people felt was groundless; in the case of internal conflict, it was likely that an external danger would appear, which Poland's subsequent history has amply demonstrated.

Luckily, this was only a potential situation which did not occur then. Nevertheless, the concern with the fragility of the internal peace was accompanied by a fear that the country's territorial integrity could be violated. Therefore, the representatives of the ruling elites who shared these sentiments strove to preserve the agreement.

This omnipresent anxiety was additionally fuelled by contemporary journalistic writing, which generally expressed the opinion that the public order had been shaken and the superpower status of the Commonwealth was coming to an end. People wrote that "*The king's demise took away the basic guarantee of peace and the country's security.*"¹⁰ The sources also mention officials losing their power and the effective discontinuation of a lawful state.

Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz rightly observes in one of her monographs that this situation, unknown before, posed new, pressing problems for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The basic one was devising a system for selecting a new monarch and then considering all of the candidates. Only after that would it be possible to conduct the election. At the same time, it was essential to maintain internal order and guard the country's external borders. These issues were often raised at both local and regional conventions of the nobility conducted until the Convocation Sejm.¹¹

⁹ Reinhold Heidenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Stanisław Płaza, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹¹ Ewa Dubas-Urwanowicz, *Koronne zjazdy szlacheckie w dwóch pierwszych bezkrólestwach po śmierci Zygmunta Augusta* [Crown Conventions of the Nobility During the First Two Interregna after Sigismund II Augustus's Death], Białystok, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 1998, p. 15-16.

Due to the thematic scope of this paper, only one of these assemblies will be mentioned here – one during which a certain political and religious matter was brought for consideration, which later turned out to be very important for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This assembly was held in Łowicz between July 16 and July 25, 1572.

According to Orzelski, the Primate Jakub Uchański, having learnt about King Sigismund II Augustus's deteriorating health, convened the nobility of the Wielkopolska region. The assembly, which started on 16 July, was attended both by those nobles from Wielkopolska whom the Primate wanted to see at the convention and those he knew would be able to come fast. Orzelski details the duration of the convention and mentions that it was extended by five days due to the long wait of the Małopolska participants. He also states that it was mainly the less important matters which were settled at the Łowicz Convention (and these only hastily) while solving the more important issues was postponed, which proved to be detrimental as time passed.¹²

Another account from that time reads: *"This convention brought the following advantages: people warned each other [against dangers –K. W.], it gave them new hope for the stabilisation of the situation in the country, those who did not take an active part in the convention learnt about the necessity of being alert to dangers, and several other things were done to retain both the internal and external peace at the borders."*¹³

The Łowicz Convention also brought to light a conflict over the office of the *interrex*, i. e. the person who would rule the country instead of a king during the *interregnum*. The Catholic senators from the Wielkopolska region wanted this function to be entrusted to the highest-ranking senator-clergyman, i. e. the Primate. Jan Firlej, the Grand Marshal of the Crown, was of a different opinion – he believed that it was he, the highest-ranking lay senator, who should serve as *interrex*. The fact that Firlej was the informal leader of Poland's Calvinists in all

¹² Świętosław Orzelski, *op. cit.*, p. 3-4.

¹³ *Respons JMści księdza Arcybiskupa Gnieźnieńskiego od IMści Panów Rad Wielkiej Polski, dany JMści. posłom, którzy w Knyszynie byli* [The response of the Archbishop of Gniezno to the members of the Councils of the Great Poland handed to Delegates who were in Knyszyn], in Teodor Wierzbowski, *Uchańsciana czyli zbiór dokumentów wyjaśniających życie i działalność Jakuba Uchańskiego arcybiskupa gnieźnieńskiego, legata urodzonego, Królestwa Polskiego prymasa i pierwszego księcia* ['Uchańsciana', i. e. a collection of documents explaining the life and activity of Jakub Uchański, the Archbishop of Gniezno, the Legate, the Primate and the first Prince of the Kingdom of Poland], Vol. 4, Warsaw, Drukarnia K. Kowalewskiego, 1892, p. 270-273.

probability affected his standpoint on this matter.

Meanwhile, the faction of the Grand Marshal of the Crown was weakened by the activity of his fellow believer, Voivod of Sandomierz Piotr Zborowski. Eventually, the office of *interrex* was granted to Primate Uchański, which was finally confirmed at the Koło Convention in October 1572.¹⁴

This dispute did not escape the attention of contemporary historians, and although the solution had already been adopted, it was replayed at the Convocation Sejm, held from January 6 to January 29, 1573. Marcin Bielski writes in his chronicle that after hearing and sending away the delegations of Tatars, Lithuanians, the Prussian Prince and the Prince of Slutsk, the Sejm participants started solving the country's problems. However, the debate was obstructed by representatives of the knights' circle, who only wanted decisions regarding the time and place of the election to be made. This led to a disagreement with senators, at which point the nobility protested against giving power to the *interrex*. They did not question the Archbishop of Gniezno's precedence among all clergymen but thought – in line with the privilege issued by Casimir III the Great – that none of the bishops should serve as a Papal Legate or a Cardinal. The contemporary supporters of this law asserted that even their ancestors had thought such a concentration of church functions in the hands of one person threatened the nobility's liberty. On the other hand, those who opposed the Primate's rule at the Convocation Sejm believed that his role as *interrex* posed the worst threat to the liberty of nobility.

They argued that extending the period of interregnum for as long as possible lay in Uchański's interest because, by the time a new monarch was elected, the regal prerogatives would stay in his hands. The Archbishop of Gniezno would therefore be able to appoint a marshal of his choice, who would have undivided power over the country for the whole period of the *interregnum*. The nobles also feared that the Primate, having such broad prerogatives, would deprive them of the right to choose the king and grant it solely to himself. They, therefore, wrote a protest against the Archbishop of Gniezno's serving as *interrex* in the Warsaw Town Books.¹⁵

It is not clear, however, whether such a situation could have taken place at all since the prerogatives of the *interrex* were limited. He had the right to repre-

¹⁴ Mirosław Korolko, Janusz Tazbir, *Konfederacja warszawska 1573 roku. Wielka karta polskiej tolerancji* [The Warsaw Confederation of 1573. A big charter of Polish tolerance], Warsaw, 1980, p. 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

sent the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the international arena, but when it came to the country's internal affairs, he had administrative powers only. He could also convene and preside over a Convocation or Election Sejm, but otherwise, his prerogatives were limited by the confederations of the nobility, with whom he had to share his power based on their class privileges.¹⁶ Therefore, it is clear that the Primate had limited power to deliberately extend the *interregnum* or appoint his own officials. Taking all this into consideration, the above-mentioned fears of the nobility seem exaggerated. And here the question arises: was the nobility truly afraid of such potential danger, or were the accusations against the Archbishop of Gniezno merely an element of anti-Uchański propaganda?

Primate Uchański's defence speech may be found in the sources documenting these events. Reinhold Heidenstein's work contains a quote from the public proclamation in which the Archbishop of Gniezno defended his prerogatives. According to this source, Uchański observed that restless people who were inclined to start social unrest thought it right that after the monarch's death, all the offices should be cancelled, including the temporary rule of the *interrex*. He emphasised that his short-term service as the head of the country should not breed hatred, as he, in contrast to what ill-intentioned people said about him, did not intend to appropriate the regal power. He also stressed that even the rule of a king should not be met with aversion, and reminded his audience that the temporary rule of an *interrex* was not absolute, but depended on the Senate. Therefore, he asserted, there was no reason to suspect him of guile or surround him with hatred. Despite these arguments, he said, his opponents tried hard to humiliate him, which, if they succeeded, would make it much easier to ruin other state offices and bring anarchy to the Commonwealth.¹⁷

According to the sources, further, in his speech, the Archbishop of Gniezno referred to history, arguing that it was common practice in many countries that the power during an *interregnum* was performed by a 'leading [person – R. H.] in the Senate'.¹⁸ In pagan countries, it was a lay person, whereas in Christian countries it was a clergyman. Then Uchański presented an outline of Poland's history, focusing on the process that led to the country's adoption of Christianity. He also

¹⁶ Łukasz Piernikarczyk, *Interrex = międzykról* [Interrex = the King in Between], in <https://polskiedzieje.pl/tablice-historyczne/interrex-krol-tymaczosowy.html> (Accessed on 30.05.2022).

¹⁷ Reinhold Heidenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

spoke about regal privileges that gave him the right to act as *interrex*.¹⁹

The conflict around the Primate's temporary rule was solved in the following way: he was granted the power to convene Sejms after the king's death and to appoint and crown the new king. The Grand Marshal of the Crown, on the other hand, was given the right to publicly announce the new monarch after he had been appointed by the *interrex* by universal consent.²⁰

When this disagreement was settled, the proper debate of the convocation started. Until then, as Orzelski writes, "*The time had passed without any results.*"²¹ First, all the matters connected to the election were agreed upon, which, however, is not the subject of this paper. Then, as the chronicler relates, several questions regarding future law were addressed. It was decided that all those not complying with the law should be regarded as traitors and enemies of the country. The authors of this proposal intended, for example, for all those who wanted to either inflict capital punishment on people for religious reasons or confiscate their assets or force them into exile for the same reasons, to be regarded as enemies of the Commonwealth. The supporters of this solution declared that they would not help the supreme authority to act against the representatives of any religious denomination. Furthermore, they declared their readiness to put anyone who would do anything like that on trial and decided that the possessions of particular churches should be given away only to their followers. As regards any controversial issues between clergymen and secular groups, it was decided that they would be settled by the future Ordinary Sejm.²²

Bielski devoted much less attention to this issue in his chronicle. However, despite the lack of details about the solutions connected to the clauses on inter-religious peace, his account states that "*It was decided that the agreement on religious issues would be made, but [Catholic – K. W.] clergymen protested against it.*"²³ The conflict around the religious confederation formulated at the Convocation Sejm is also replayed in Heidenstein's work. According to this source, the Castellans of Sandomierz and Biecz, Hieronim Ossoliński and Stanisław Szafraniec, together with Jakub Niemojewski and other supporters of the Reformation, decided to force through a resolution on religious peace similar to the one adopted in the German Empire.²⁴ They demanded that noblemen decide

¹⁹ Joachim Bielski, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁰ Reinhold Heidenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 51-52.

²¹ Świętosław Orzelski, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

²³ Joachim Bielski, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁴ Heidenstein meant here the provisions of the Peace of Augsburg from 1555, which

about the religious affiliation of their lands, just like the sovereigns of the German principalities. Supporters of this solution wanted to maintain peace between representatives of different denominations in the country. Because they feared the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth would suffer the same fate as other European kingdoms plagued by religious wars. The supporters of this solution opted to agree on its details in a private conversation and then presenting it at a public meeting. The Bishop of Kujawy, Stanisław Karnkowski, as well as Hieronim Ossoliński, Jakub Niemojewski and other senators and representatives of the nobility unnamed in the source, were delegated to a commission whose aim was to write the clauses of the resolution referring to religious peace. The document was drafted by Bishop Karnkowski, and then signed by both Catholic and Protestant senators as well as some delegates from particular voivodships. Heidenstein further writes how this document was received by the Archbishop of Gniezno. Primate Uchański hesitated for a long time before he finally opposed the provisions of the settlement. He justified this decision with his binding oath of loyalty to the Pope, the significance of his office and his feeling of duty towards the church. At the same time, the Primate declared that he would not neglect anything that could help maintain internal peace in the Commonwealth, and expressed his readiness, if necessary, to sacrifice everything and to embrace any suffering for the Catholic faith.

Thanks to Reinhold Heidenstein, it is also known that the bishops agreed with their superior, including Bishop Karnkowski, although he had formulated the clauses of the rejected agreement. The only one among the bishops who supported the settlement was Franciszek Krasiński, the Bishop of Kraków. Heidenstein rightly observes that in this situation, all attempts to reach an agreement on religious tolerance had failed to resolve the dispute.²⁵

The rejected provisions were designed to guarantee the continuation of the peaceful coexistence of representatives of different faiths in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The supporters of the agreement argued for a ban on waging religiously motivated wars, and for giving the nobility the right to decide about the faith of their subjects. However, reaching a compromise on this matter was still a long way ahead. The Act of the Warsaw Confederation was redrafted at the Election Sejm in 1573, and the provisions on religious tolerance were moved to the section of commitments to be confirmed by the new king.

granted the right to the rulers of German principalities to decide about the faith on their territories.

²⁵ Reinhold Heidenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 52-53.

This did not, however, end the fight for the legitimisation of religious tolerance, which continued long into the reign of Stephen Báthory.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The circumstances surrounding the death of the last monarch of the Jagiellonian dynasty in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth made his passing unusual, given the historical context of Europe at the time. At its core, there was undoubtedly Casimir the Great's stance on the religious denominations. He did not only recognize the need to respect worshippers of different religions on the territories annexed to Poland but also gave shelter to Jews, who were persecuted in the western part of the continent. This initiated a series of social changes, which led to the peaceful coexistence of different denominations. The nobility gradually received various state privileges during the Middle Ages and in the modern era. They also desired to have the option of choice in this area of their lives. Thus, the topic of religion was also associated with the so-called "golden freedom of the nobility". Such an opinion became one of the most important arguments for the supporters of the Warsaw Confederation Act. It was also essential to maintain domestic peace, and the founders of the Warsaw Confederation Act were ready to compromise on religious matters to achieve this purpose. Their conciliatory stance protected the country from a religious war even in such dramatic and uncertain circumstances as the interregnum of 1572-1573.

Other European countries experienced a different situation. A religious war occurred in the German Empire between 1552 and 1555, which ended with the Peace treaty of Augsburg between Emperor Charles V and the Protestant princes of the Reich. Although the peace treaty reduced inter-religious tensions, it did not solve all problems. Among other issues, it did not address the issue of equal rights for Anabaptists and Calvinists, who could fall victim to persecution from both Catholics and Lutherans. Furthermore, there were religious conflicts in France at that time, which took a tragic turn. One of the most famous examples is the so-called Night of St. Bartholomew, or the slaughter of Parisian Huguenots carried out by Catholics in August 1572. Religious wars were also waged in England, Scotland, the Netherlands and the Habsburg Empire. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) happened at a time when religious disputes were at their peak.

The Commonwealth, a country with a tradition of religious tolerance shaped over centuries, was unique in the Europe of its time. It is, therefore, understandable that the nobility, who valued their 'golden liberty', were afraid of an intolerant ruler who might have caused bloodshed through a lack of un-

derstanding and bigotry. However, the nobles' desire to avoid such a situation was motivated by more than just class solidarity. Those who had some political awareness were also afraid of a civil war, and, as Andrzej Lubieniecki relates, common people shared these concerns as well.

When analysing the sources dealing with religious issues in the period from the death of Sigismund II Augustus to the Convocation Sejm of the first *interregnum*, it is easy to notice that each contemporary author focused on a different aspect of the problem. Orzelski described the provisions of the Act of the Warsaw Confederation prepared during the Convocation Sejm, Bielski concentrated on the conflict around the Act, and Heidenstein focused on the process of creating and signing the document. The work of these historians has enabled a relatively detailed description of the provisions of religious peace and the fight for their ratification. What all these three sources have in common is a depiction of an atmosphere of fear and anxiety.

Religious issues were so important during the first *interregnum* that they affected important state decisions, such as the appointment of the *interrex*. Looking into the events that occurred later, after the period under investigation in this article, it should be observed that religious matters also had some effect on the election of the king.

The reconstruction of these events, which was possible based on contemporary historiography, demonstrates that both supporters and opponents of religious tolerance were very determined. It also highlights the complexities of such research since the provisions in consideration have had an impact on religious freedom, and also on internal security. Therefore, the universal fear of religious wars, similar to those that ravaged other parts of Europe in the modern era, was justified. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a country diverse both ethnically and religiously, avoided the destiny of other European countries such as France or the German Empire largely due to the determination and political awareness of supporters of the inter-religious agreement.

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