

## LOUIS XIV IN THE OPINIONS OF THE POLISH NOBILITY – FROM FASCINATION TO FEAR OF *ABSOLUTUM* *DOMINIUM*<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

#### LOUIS XIV IN THE OPINIONS OF THE POLISH NOBILITY – FROM FASCINATION TO FEAR OF *ABSOLUTUM DOMINIUM*

Louis XIV, King of France (1643–1715), was variously perceived and assessed by the Polish nobility. The reception of his person and his concept of ruling the state by Polish noblemen was to change during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this period the nobles who visited France during their Grand Tours were generally fascinated by the glamour surrounding the monarch and the splendour of the palace of Versailles. They sought an opportunity to contact personally the Sun King and talk to him. Later Polish travellers sent to their homeland detailed relations from audiences by or meetings with Louis XIV. On the other hand, for a considerable part of the Polish nobility Louis XIV was the incarnation of *absolutum dominium* and a symbol of potential threat to the freedom beloved by the Polish “political nation”. These fears were fuelled by the activity of the king of France in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, especially his political and financial support for the followers of the French candidatures to the Polish throne and for the concept of election *vivente rege* promoted by Ludwika Maria Gonzaga, the queen of Poland of French descent. The reception of the person of the Sun King and the vision of his rule in the eyes of the Polish nobility changed in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most significantly, the motif of his person began to be used in the pro-royal propaganda at the time of Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764–1796), when the fear of *absolutum dominium* gradually lost meaning in the face of the necessity to reform the state.

**Key words:** Louis XIV, Polish gentry, *absolutum dominium*

The position of the Polish nobility in the early modern period was unique on the European scale.<sup>2</sup> It was, on the one hand, a result of the privileges granted consist-

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<sup>1</sup> The topic of this article was inspired by the book *Louis XIV: Outside In. Images of the Sun King beyond France*, eds. T. Claydon, Ch.-E. Levillain, Ashgate 2015.

<sup>2</sup> In the following paper, all the groups of Polish-Lithuanian nobles, be they magnates, the gentry or even the poorest lower gentry not differing much from the peasants in their economic situation (though differing a lot in terms of their political rights) will be referred to as the “nobility.”

ently by the Polish kings to the nobles from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and, on the other hand, the high sense of the responsibility of citizens (i.e., the nobles) for their state.<sup>3</sup> Yet during the reign of the Jagiellonian dynasty (1386–1572) the members of the Royal Council (*Consilium Regni*) representing the high nobility were to elect the persons of consecutive kings, but the real turn in the process of building the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was the birth of the highest legislative body (the Sejm) compound of 3 states: the king, the Senate (originating from the Royal Council) and the lower chamber, representing all the nobles (the Sejm *sensu strictiori*).<sup>4</sup> All the states collectively took decisions on crucial matters concerning the functioning of Poland-Lithuania; they took over and shared the sense of responsibility for the state and its citizens. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century the notion of nobles as a “political nation” was consolidated.<sup>5</sup> After the death of the last monarch from the Jagiellonian dynasty, Zygmunt August in 1572, all the members of the nobility eligible had the right to choose a new monarch during the procedure called “free election.”

From the viewpoint of this study it seems crucial that the Polish nobility not only constituted a relatively large portion of all society (approximately 8–10%) and controlled the state, but also that they dominated the political discourse from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The discussion about the functioning, evolution and changes of the state was limited to the nobles because of the lack of some opinion-forming newspapers and the weakness of the Polish burgesses.<sup>6</sup> As a result we have a lot of sources written by nobles with few created by townsmen or peasants, so the analysis presented in this article cannot be a comprehensive and exhausting presentation of Louis XIV in the eyes of the whole of Polish society. We can only trace individual sources created by the elites (editions of relations of voyage, private and public letters, political writings) and reconstruct on this base some ideas or notions existing and evolving within the body of the nobility.

To understand the mode of perceiving the reality by Polish nobles it is necessary to present some crucial elements from their system of values, in which freedom occupied a special place.<sup>7</sup> In the popular sense for citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Com-

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<sup>3</sup> The *Rzeczpospolita* (Commonwealth) took a special place in republican discourse: A. Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz, *Noble Republicanism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (an Attempt at Description)*, “Acta Poloniae Historica” 2011, 103, pp. 36–41.

<sup>4</sup> W. Uruszczak, *Historia państwa i prawa polskiego*, vol. 1: 966–1795, Warszawa 2015, pp. 136–141.

<sup>5</sup> The history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the rule of the Jagiellonian dynasty was recently presented by R. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, vol. 1: *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union 1385–1569*, Oxford 2015.

<sup>6</sup> On the birth and the role of the intelligensia in Poland on the example of Warsaw see: M. Janowski, *Warsaw and its Intelligensia: Urban Space and Social Change, 1750–1831*, “Acta Poloniae Historica” 2009, 100, pp. 57–77.

<sup>7</sup> The newest book about “freedom” in Polish political thought is A. Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz’s, *Queen Liberty. The Concept of Freedom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, Leiden–Boston 2012. See also: eadem, *Regina libertas. Wolność w polskiej myśli politycznej*, Gdańsk, 2006. The concept of “liberty” in Poland from the point of view of Western scholars can be found in: J.H. Shennan, *Liberty and Order in Early Modern Europe. The Subject and the State 1650–1800*, London–New York 1986, pp. 104–108. See also: A. Grzeškowiak-Krwawicz, *Deux libertés, l’ancienne et la nouvelle, dans la*

monwealth, the entire political system of their state was founded upon the virtue of freedom, which clearly distinguished it from the rest of Europe. Anna Grześkowiak-Krwawicz has written that: "Freedom was a key element of the political ideology of the nobility."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the makeup of the Polish kingdom was conceived by its citizens as being in contrast with the monarchic form of government dominating abroad. Unlike the rest of Europe, Poland was thought to have been granted an ideal form of monarchy, the so called "*monarchia mixta*," of which the Poles were proud. It was broadly believed that only a permanent balance between the king, the Sejm and the Senate guaranteed the stability of freedom and the immutability of the political system. In this concept of the "mixed government," the most essential was the popular conviction that every king was attempting to reinforce his authority, while the nobles, or "political nation," tended to hold off his aspirations.<sup>9</sup> This sort of fear, which was expressed in various forms ranging from anxiety to hysteria, may be observed throughout the period of the Polish-Lithuanian history that is considered to have been the time of the "mixed monarchical government" (1573–1795).<sup>10</sup>

The sources of this popular conviction of the kings' attempts on freedom were, on the one hand, practical observations of other countries (such as remote France<sup>11</sup>), and, on the other, a large spectrum of experiences resulting from steps taken by consecutive kings who wanted – in the opinion of nobles – to increase their power and extend their competences. The Polish nobles viewed all of these efforts on the part of the kings as attempts to curb their beloved freedom, especially when the monarchs were trying to achieve their aims by circumventing the constitutional and political principles that were considered the foundations of the state. As A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz has written: "Gradually, though, a subjective conviction was gaining ground according to which any king, by virtue of his nature, would always try to suppress freedom, and by virtue of their birth a monarch would always show hostility towards their subjects liberty, rights and happiness."<sup>12</sup> This real and emotional struggle between the king and the nobles caused a gradual increase in the general mistrust towards the person of king and, as a consequence, a rising anxiety about freedom constantly being threatened by the king. Over the course of time, this anxiety turned into an obsessive fear of *absolutum dominium*, identified not very precisely, with strong royal power. Therefore, consecutive kings of Poland were suspected of attempts to introduce *ab-*

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*pensée politique polonaise du XVIIIe siècle* [in:] *Liberté: héritage du passé ou idée des Lumières*, eds. A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, I. Zatorska, Kraków–Warszawa 2003, pp. 44–59.

<sup>8</sup> A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Noble Republicanism...*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> On the role of the Polish nobility in the state, see J. Lukowski, *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century*, New York 2003, pp. 41–42.

<sup>10</sup> A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Anti-monarchism in Polish Republicanism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (hereafter: *Anti-monarchism in Poland*) [in:] *Republicanism. A Shared European Heritage*, eds. M. van Gelderen, Q. Skinner, vol. 1, Cambridge 2002, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> An excellent example was also Denmark, where absolute royal rule had been established after the coup of 1661. Denmark was used as a warning against the consequences of any alliance between the king and the lower orders.

<sup>12</sup> *Anti-monarchism in Poland*, p. 51.

*solutum dominium* even if their intentions were innocent and salutary.<sup>13</sup> That was why “Even the best king was a danger to liberty.”<sup>14</sup>

Both the theories and political practices existing in France and in Poland in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries distinguished the two countries rather than made them alike.<sup>15</sup> However, the different political systems and disparate experiences with the power of the monarch did not exclude the existence of all possible forms of contacts between the French and the Polish nobles especially social and diplomatic relations that allowed for the creation of common, sometimes stereotypical, opinions about the other country as well as its institutions. Nevertheless, as the level of knowledge about Poland in France and vice-versa was surprisingly low, the range of mutual misunderstanding was quite large. For example, when Louis XIV wanted to marry Henri Jules Bourbon to Anna Henrietta, a niece of Queen Ludwika Maria Gonzaga of Poland, he addressed an appropriate formal request to the Senate of Poland-Lithuania. He believed erroneously that the Polish kings could not make decisions in their personal affairs without the official permission of the High Chamber. This conviction of the French monarch was absolutely unfounded and his action provoked some consternation among the Polish political elite, which was hesitant about the mode of reaction.<sup>16</sup>

The king of France, Louis XIV, himself expressed his personal opinions about the Polish nobility and the course of Polish history several times, approaching the stereotype of “*la Pologne malheureuse*.” In 1709 he stated “*on ne peut que plaindre les malheurs de la Nation Polonoise accablée en mesme temps de tant de maux*.” Two years earlier, he had said: “*Ce serait cependant un nouveau malheur pour la Pologne, si la nation procéderait à une nouvelle élection*.” A definite stand on this question was taken by Jean Baptiste Colbert, Marquis de Torcy: “*Il n’y a guère de nation qui soit presentement plus malheureuse que la Polonoise [...]*.”<sup>17</sup> Generally, the Poles were regarded by the French as a reckless people whose political thought was at very low level, while the degeneration of the nation as a result of the domination of private interests in the state was advanced.

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<sup>13</sup> See Biblioteka XX. Czartoryskich in Cracow (hereafter: B.Czart.), ms. 425, p. 276, “Examen wolności polskiej.”

<sup>14</sup> *Anti-monarchism in Poland*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> On the position of the king in Poland see J. Lukowski, *Disorderly Liberty. The Political Culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century*, London–New York, 2010, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> *List pana Reklewskiego cześnika sandomirskiego 27 Octobris 1663. Respons na to* [in:] *Pisma polityczne z czasów panowania Jana Kazimierza Wazy 1648–1668* (hereafter: *Pisma polityczne*), vol. 2, ed. S. Ochmann-Staniszevska, Wrocław–Warszawa 1989–1991, p. 193.

<sup>17</sup> See J.A. Gierowski, *La Pologne malheureuse. Geneza stereotypu* [in:] *Na szlakach Rzeczypospolitej w nowożytnej Europie*, ed. A.K. Link-Lenczowski, Kraków 2008, p. 316. A less stereotypical view in M. Komarzyński, *La cour de Jean III Sobieski aux yeux des Français (1674–1696)* [in:] *Les expressions de l’identité sociale en Europe depuis la Renaissance*, ed. M. Serwański, Poznań 1990, pp. 39–47.

## 1. THE ASPECTS OF FASCINATION WITH THE SUN KING

### 1.1. Travellers

This fascination appears particularly in the case of people who had the opportunity to have personal contact with the king of France. These circumstances, on the one hand, evoked in Polish travellers great excitement and, on the other, they probably enabled them to look at the person of Louis XIV, his achievements and the splendour surrounding him from a different, more European and less Polish, perspective. An opportunity to express a sort of fascination or increased interest in the person of Louis XIV could have been a visit to his court, sometimes made in unexpected and somewhat extravagant circumstances. When Teresa Słuszkowa was sent to Brussels with Teresa Kunegunda Sobieska in 1695, she left her companion and by herself paid a visit to Louis XIV, who even staged an opera at Versailles in her honour.<sup>18</sup>

The visit to Paris, and especially to Versailles, was an obligatory part of the typical voyage of Polish magnates' sons to western Europe, known as "grand tour."<sup>19</sup> The compulsory character of this visit was codified in the numerous (not all) *Instructions* prepared for the nobles' sons before the beginning of their voyages. Sometimes, the young people were warned not to trust the French due to their national features such as their recklessness, instability and effusiveness in conversation.<sup>20</sup> It was inevitable for them to see the residence of Louis XIV, try and meet the Sun King and consequently give a detailed account of their impressions and reflections, which was very often sent back to the family in Poland. These accounts were full of details, for example Karol Radziwiłł in 1685 wrote: "*A 5 heures nous fumes à l'opéra de Roland le furieux dont le prologue applaudit tout à fait à la paix qui se vient de faire. Le Roi était assis vis-à-vis de nous, après le lui était assis Monseigneur et Madame le Dauphine [...]. Mercredi nous fumes à 9 heures au levé du Roi où nous avons vu ce que vous savez qu'il se passe ordinairement.*"<sup>21</sup> In Radziwiłł's relations, the possibility to see Louis XIV at the theatre was the axis of the account. The importance for young peo-

<sup>18</sup> A. Rachuba, *Sapieżyna z Gosiewskich Teresa* [w:] *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXXV, Kraków 1994, pp. 173–174.

<sup>19</sup> "Grand tour" was a typical stage of education for the sons of the Polish magnates and rich gentry, which took the form of a journey to the West of Europe (France, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, England) to enrich their knowledge, polish their languages, visit other countries and make acquaintances.

<sup>20</sup> *Pisma do wieku i spraw Jana Sobieskiego*, vol. I, ed. F. Kluczycki, Kraków 1880 (hereafter: *Pisma do wieku i spraw*), p. 30 (Instruction written by Jakub Sobieski for his sons in 1645). In the opinion of the Papal Nuncio to Poland, Galeazzo Maescotti, who served in 1670–1671, the Poles rather did not like Frenchmen and Germans; at the same time, they were proud and had high self-esteem. On the contrary, they very much liked Italians. See *Relacje nuncjuszów apostolskich i innych osób o Polsce od roku 1548 do 1690*, vol. 2, Berlin–Poznań 1864 (hereafter: *Relacje nuncjuszów*), p. 366 and M. Serwański, *Le stéréotype du Français dans la Pologne des XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles* [in:] *Amis et ennemis héréditaires: Les stéréotypes nationaux*, eds. M. Forzycki, M. Serwański, Poznań 2006, pp. 45–53.

<sup>21</sup> Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych in Warsaw (hereafter: AGAD), Archiwum Radziwiłłów IV, vol. 19, envelope 234, a letter from K.S. Radziwiłł to NN, Paris, 2 III 1685.

ple from Poland to see or meet the king of France is shown in a phrase written by Jan Kazimierz Denhoff in 1670: "I have not been yet to the French king and the Prince de Conti because I don't know the language. If one of them spoke to me in this situation, I would feel immense shame." He also added: "before visiting them, I have to learn some French."<sup>22</sup> This was why in the *Instructions* the nobles' sons were given some strategic pointers for observing court life: first from a distance, then participate in official ceremonies such as mass or royal visits to the theatre, and, finally, after learning French, be presented at court and strike up an acquaintance with the Sun King.<sup>23</sup>

From amongst those elements concerning the person of Louis XIV of fascination for the Polish gentry and magnates, the most important was the splendour surrounding him. There was a huge difference between France and Poland, where the king did not possess enough money to organise a prestigious court with a lot of courtiers and distribute benefits. That was probably why travellers noticed many details relating to Louis XIV and his everyday life. When Karol Stanisław Radziwiłł vividly described the royal apartments at Versailles, he not only presented the interiors, but he tried to relate them to their captivating function in the ritualisation of court life. He wrote, for example, "*dans la chambre où le Roy couche, mais fort rarement, il y a un lit qui n'est pas des plus riches, mais à l'entour il y a une balustrade qui est fort belle. Dans une autre chambre, où le Roi donne audiences aux Ambassadeurs il y a un trône [...]*"<sup>24</sup> Then, he added a description of the Grand Gallery: "*En haut il y a de très belles peintures dans lesquelles on voit l'histoire de toutes les belles actions du Roi.*"<sup>25</sup> This kind of perception of the king and the elements surrounding him, typical for Polish nobles, was probably an effect of their fascination with the differences between the models for holding power by the king in France and Poland. It was a pure fascination, deprived of any sort of fear, which, on the contrary, underlay the on-going discussions in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. What is interesting is that this fascination survived the Sun King, but after his death it was transferred onto his works, especially executive buildings. For example, when Felicjan Junosza Piaskowski visited Versailles in 1718, he was quite astonished by the architecture of the "*château*" and the other buildings, and their picturesque surroundings. He wrote with emphasis: "the stables there are more beautiful than a lot of palaces in the possessions of European princes."<sup>26</sup> In his enthusiastic opinion, "Versailles is a summary of the miracles of the world and is more precious than all [other] palaces in Europe."<sup>27</sup>

Meeting Louis XIV, or precisely the possibility of being introduced to the king's court always turned out the most important moment for Polish travellers. In May 1685, Aleksander Jan and Jan Stanisław Jabłonowskis were presented there by the

<sup>22</sup> B.Czart., ms. 3622 III, p. 34, J.K. Denhoff to his father, Paris, 28 XI 1670.

<sup>23</sup> *Pisma do wieku i spraw*, p. 30 (Instruction written by Jakub Sobieski for his sons in 1645).

<sup>24</sup> AGAD, Archiwum Radziwiłłów IV, vol. 19, envelope 234, K.S. Radziwiłł to NN, Paris, 2 III 1685. The letter was published in: K.S. Radziwiłł, *Diariusz peregrynacji europejskiej (1684–1687)*, ed. A. Kucharski, Toruń 2011, p. 229.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> *Pamiętnik Felicjana Junoszy Piaskowskiego*, Lwów 1865, p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 84.

bishop of Beauvais, and subsequently were able to benefit from the newly established relations and be hosted by the members of court society. During these visits they could speak personally with the king, which was scrupulously noted in the diary of their voyage: “*Ivimus deinde ad hortum palatii, ubi Regem deambulatam invenimus, qui nobiscum collocutus est sat longo tempore.*”<sup>28</sup> Versailles offered so many different attractions that the author of the instruction for the young Jablonowskis warned them not to use this offer too frequently. The aim of their tour – education – was clear; thus he came to the conclusion that young princes should arrive at Versailles on Saturday, and return to Paris on Sunday in order not to waste precious study time.<sup>29</sup>

After returning to Poland, the travellers served as one of the possible sources of knowledge about France, its monarch and institutions. On home ground, some elements of the king’s splendour were more appealing than others. It is possible that in this group a special position was taken by the French monarch’s magical capability of healing the scrofula. The presence of representatives of some Polish nobles during this ritual was very likely and could have, in a natural way, evoked in their minds reflections on the different bases of royal power in Poland and France. This ritual was perceived as very curious and constituted a sort of magical phenomenon. Although Walenty Kochowski, one of the diarists from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, noted that the monarch healed some ill people, there was undoubtedly a grain of disbelief in his relations about “the ritual of touching.”<sup>30</sup>

## 1.2. The Dream of Power

In Polish political thought, Louis XIV was not only the incarnation of *absolutum dominium*, but also, especially during the first period of his reign, the personification of the dream of power and a real hope for changing the situation in Poland. This was a huge paradox, but in 1672 the absolute monarch of France turned out to be a potential ally for the factions opposing the legal king of Poland, Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1669–1673), at least in the eyes of the leaders of the “malcontents” party.<sup>31</sup> In 1672, taking advantage of the outrage of the heads of several noble families who were disappointed by the policies of the Polish king, they wrote a series of letters addressed to Louis XIV in which they suggested that the king of France should intervene in Poland, particularly by sending a candidate to the Polish crown, even if Michał Korybut had not yet been dethroned. The leaders of the “malcontents” certainly believed in the military power and prestige of Louis XIV, so in the official correspondence they emphasised: “*unicum reliquum experimur auxilii et conservationis*

<sup>28</sup> B.Czart., ms. 1152 II, pp. 505–506.

<sup>29</sup> B.Czart., ms. 1162 II, p. 627 (“Raptularz domu Jabłonowskich”).

<sup>30</sup> W. Kochowski, *Historia panowania Jana Kazimierza*, ed. E. Raczyński, vol. I, Poznań 1859, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> The “Malcontents” party or French party was a group of opponents to the king Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki including Primate Mikołaj Prażmowski and the leader of the opposition, the future king Jan Sobieski.

*Reipublicae in suis cardinibus modum, utpote gloriam, opes ac vires potentissimi hoc seculo in Europa Monarchae, Serenissimi Galliarum Regis, a limitibus Regni huius remotioris.*"<sup>32</sup> This text was signed, among others, by the primate of Poland Mikołaj Prażmowski, the voivode of Kraków Aleksander Lubomirski and the great Crown *hetman*<sup>33</sup> Jan Sobieski. The latter, along with Primate Prażmowski honoured the king of France with the appellation: "*nobis salutare futurum.*"<sup>34</sup> In the extreme opinion of Piotr Kochanowski, the *starosta*<sup>35</sup> of Radom, in this situation Poland should be incorporated into France.<sup>36</sup> The Polish magnates looking for the help of the king of France were not even discouraged by his silence, and his later firm refusal to intervene. They still preserved a conviction of the extraordinary role played by the Sun King in European politics.

In the sources, particularly those dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, we can find a lot of information showing that Louis XIV, as the monarch of France, was considered an important political and military player in Western Europe. In this context, the most significant fact observed from the Polish perspective was that Louis XIV became a guarantor of the Treaty of Oliwa, which was signed in 1660 and established the peace between Sweden and Poland. That was why in a letter distributed in 1667 in Poland, the French king was favoured with the epithet "young and avid of glory." The author also noted his "*magnanimitas,*" which means "generosity" or "magnanimity," indeed very positive features. The Polish gentry were highly impressed with the expedition of the French navy to Africa "*ad distrahendas vires Otomanicas.*"<sup>37</sup> Consequently, when the famous Polish author, politician and poet Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski worked out a plan for a military campaign against the Ottoman Empire in the 1670s, he thought about engaging the French and English naval forces as one of the indispensable means of efficient sabotage in North Africa.<sup>38</sup> From the perspective of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the royal French Navy being at Louis XIV's permanent disposal did not allow France to be disregarded as an important force in Western and Southern Europe. In the same letter, Lubomirski added with a sort of mistrust: "But the French (which is to say Louis XIV) cannot make any claims to us and tangle us in their suspicious interests."<sup>39</sup>

The last aspect of fascination with the person of the Sun King was the most noticeable during the reign of the kings of Poland Jan III Sobieski (1674–1696) and August II "the Strong" Mocny (1697–1733). There is no doubt that Jan III Sobieski was

<sup>32</sup> *Pisma do wieku i spraw*, vol. II, pp. 1001–1005.

<sup>33</sup> *Hetman* was in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth the highest military rank and the leader of the Polish army in the event of war.

<sup>34</sup> *Pisma do wieku i spraw*, vol. II, pp. 1008–1009.

<sup>35</sup> *Starosta* – the administrative official of a specific territorial unit (called "starostwo") nominated by the Polish king and representing his power in land.

<sup>36</sup> A. Przyboś, *Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki 1640–1673*, Kraków 2007, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> *Dyskurs pewny terazniejszy czasowi służący okolo posiłków* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. III, p. 208.

<sup>38</sup> *Stanisława Herakliusza Lubomirskiego mowy sejmowe z 1670 i 1673 roku...*, ed. K. Przyboś, Kraków 2010, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

trying to imitate Louis XIV, especially in the forms of royal propaganda. That was why he included simple, vivid references to the Sun – the clearest of the symbols of the French king’s magnificence – into a whole range of motifs proving the greatness of the king and his reign.<sup>40</sup> During his nearly 30-year reign, August II Mocny strove to imitate or copy the magnificence of the court life at Versailles in Dresden and Warsaw. He not only concentrated on architectural programmes (like the construction of the Zwinger), but also introduced in the royal Saxon court a ceremonial patterned on the French model and attached importance to grand carnival celebrations.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. ATTITUDES OF MISTRUST TOWARDS LOUIS XIV

Enthusiasm towards the person of the French king and his potential in the political arena was not as common as we could conclude according to the particular opinions of representatives of the Polish nobility and magnates. Before presenting the person of Louis XIV as an incarnation of *absolutum dominium*, I will analyse some additional, more negative connotations attached to the Sun King,<sup>42</sup> arising due to his character, the possible arrangement of the Polish-French alliance in the context of the geographic distance dividing the two countries and an exploiting of French motifs in the anti-foreigners campaign of 1669–1673.

There was no doubt that some authors attributed to Louis XIV characteristics less typical of the aforementioned dominant image. In 1657, one of them stressed his recklessness. The form of this letter was very interesting, as the description of the king of France was presented as a part of wine tasting by the Polish king Jan Kazimierz Waza (1648–1668). During this ceremony, France and its king were represented by one sort of wine, which turned out to be “*fort légère et change de couleur*.” A court jester accompanying the Polish king explicated this metaphor saying that the French wine played the role of a symbol of the instability and recklessness of Louis XIV.<sup>43</sup> Attribution of less positive features to Louis XIV was not atypical in Poland. In the final period of the Swedish invasion of Poland (1655–1660), the author of the *Political discourse before the Warsaw Sejm*... pondered an essential problem: wheth-

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<sup>40</sup> A. Czarniecka, “Nikt nie słucha mnie za życia...” *Jan III Sobieski w walce z opozycyjną propagandą (1684–1696)*, Warszawa 2009, p. 65; H. Widacka, *Lew Lechistanu*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 278–279, 308–309 (and others).

<sup>41</sup> K. Keller, *Dresden schien zu meiner Zeit ein rechtes bezaubertes Land... Zur Festkultur am Hofe August des Starken* [in:] *Von der Elbe bis an die Seine. Kulturtransfer zwischen Sachsen und Frankreich im 18. und 19. Jh.*, eds. M. Espagne, M. Middell, Leipzig 1993, pp. 52–74.

<sup>42</sup> One of the sources of mistrust towards Louis XIV could have been the anti-monarchism of the Polish nobles, which was very popular as a current in republicanism. On this matter, see: *Anti-monarchism in Poland*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> *Lapländzki doktor. Anno Domini 1657, 11 Augusti* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. I, p. 195. The stereotype of the French existing in 17<sup>th</sup> century Poland was identical. See M. Serwański, *Le stéréotype du Français...*, p. 49.

er the French guarantee appearing in the context of the future peace treaty could be acknowledged as reliable and stable. His conclusions were undoubtedly unfavourable to the image of Louis XIV as the guarantor of stability in this part of Europe. The author not only suggested that the king of France was not credible or even faithless as a political partner, but also added that if these anxieties turned out to be real, the Polish nobles would have no possibility to take revenge on the French king due to the distance impossible to cover.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as the archbishop of Gniezno, Andrzej Leszczyński, wrote: “The king of France, being an ally of the Swedes, cannot rescue us from them, unless by mediation and peace talks, for which we would have to pay with enormous damage to the Commonwealth.”<sup>45</sup>

Already in the 1650s, the major political writers considered the geographical distance between France and Poland to be too great and thus, potential profits from a Polish-French alliance were more than just doubtful. The author of an anonymous letter dating from 1667 aptly noted that any hopes for military support sent by Louis XIV to Poland against its enemies in Ukraine were merely a chimera. In such a case, the king of France would attempt to resolve this problem by engaging his Swedish allies, which would obviously be even worse for Poland than Turkish bondage.<sup>46</sup> The main cause of this situation was Louis XIV’s engagement in Western Europe. In one of the political letters, Louis XIV was supposed to have said, “I cannot play with you, because I started the game with someone else.”<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, the actual intentions of Louis XIV in the period 1660–1661, when he supported Louis de Bourbon, the prince of Condé as a candidate to the Polish throne, were critically assessed by the Polish nobles. They could hear the opinions that his engagement in Poland was only an effect of political realism and a cool calculation of French interests. One of them wrote about Louis XIV’s support: “He does not do it acting on a love to Condé, because he hates him, but he does it on account of his privacy and French interest.” In the opinion of the writer, Louis wanted to create a counterweight to the Habsburg influence in Eastern Europe that reached from Poland and Sweden. The long-term goal of French policy in this part of Europe was to deprive the Habsburgs of the Imperial crown.<sup>48</sup> This sort of noble view as to the true intentions of Louis XIV was rather permanent and present in Polish political throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Dyskurs polityczny przed sejmem wielkim warszawskim, z kim grontowniej zawrzeć pokój: czyli z Moskwinem albo z Szwedem* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. I, p. 214.

<sup>45</sup> R. Frost, *After the Deluge. Poland-Lithuania and the Second Northern War 1655–1660*, Cambridge 1993, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> *Zdanie Jednego Polaka ojczyźnie swojej przychylnego o terażniejszym jej niebezpieczeństwie* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. III, pp. 203–205.

<sup>47</sup> *Pikieta polska spisana pod nieszczęśliwego tyraństwa szwedzkiego...* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. I, p. 141.

<sup>48</sup> [Franz Paul von Lisola?], *Pewne puncta albo zdanie o elekcycy 1661* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. II, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Zdanie jednego Polaka ojczyźnie swojej przychylnego o terażniejszym jej niebezpieczeństwie* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. III, p. 203; *Dyskurs o ożenieniu K.Jmci Jana Kazimierza na obie strony po śmierci Królowej Jmci, jeśli potrzebne Rzeczypospolitej* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. III, p. 220.

The intensive and unsuccessful engagement of the Sun King into Polish matters at the beginning of his personal reign certainly influenced the creation of some anti-foreign attitudes in Poland, which were strongest during the reign of Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1669–1673). His election was a result of the nobles' disappointment with the international policies realised by his predecessor, Jan Kazimierz Waza, and general mistrust of the French option represented in the election camp by the candidature of Prince Condé. After the election, in the entourage of the “noble-king,” as Michał Korybut was popularly perceived, there were people whose bias towards France and its king was marked by a political aversion. An excellent example of this attitude was Marcin Dębicki, the *chorąży*<sup>50</sup> of Sandomierz, who not only openly criticised the envoy of Louis XIV, Louis De Lionne, but was also afraid “that this envoy would not be like a Magician, who could insidiously attach an image to the heart of the Polish king.”<sup>51</sup> The details of this “image” were not specified by Dębicki; it was rather a sort of metaphorical figure whose role consisted in sowing seeds of doubt towards the real intentions of the Sun King and his extraordinary competences in the minds of his contemporaries.

However, anti-foreign attitudes were exploited by the royal court in the current political and faction struggle. Partly due to authentic convictions and partly due to “cool” calculations, the court created its image as a representative of national matters, while its opponents were presented as intriguers in the permanent service of Louis XIV. As a result, all of the misfortunes and defeats of Poland in this period were presented as the total fault of the policies of Versailles, while some Polish nobles were described as “the agents and supporters of France.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the bishop of Chełm, Krzysztof Żegocki, was convinced that the head of the opposition party, Primate Michał Prażmowski, was already not Polish, and thus he wrote: “it is difficult to expect him to do something good, because he is completely French.”<sup>53</sup> Among the rumours spread across the country, one in particular was very interesting: the news that Prażmowski had already sold Gdańsk to the French and their navy had just entered the port.<sup>54</sup>

The Polish nobles equally had little regard for the international policies of Louis XIV in the 1680s. The discussions were dominated by “horror and public outrage”<sup>55</sup> because of steps taken by the king of France towards the Vatican, such as the annexation of Avignon and the war declared on the territory of Germany despite the Holy Roman Empire fulfilling the principles of the peace treaty. As we can see, the basis of

<sup>50</sup> *Chorąży* – a title of honour in early modern Poland connected with lands.

<sup>51</sup> This quotation in: J. Matyasik, *Obóz polityczny króla Michała Korybuta Wiśniowieckiego*, Warszawa 2011, p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> Polish version: “faktorów i praktykantów francuskich.” Biblioteka Jagiellońska w Krakowie, ms. 108, p. 369 (“Przysięga dyrektora koła generalnego z pospolitym ruszeniem obranego”).

<sup>53</sup> *Diariusz sejmu warszawskiego w roku 1672 drugiego, zaczętego dnia 18 maja, zerwanego dnia 20 czerwca, a zakońzonego dnia 30 czerwca*, ed. F. Kluczycki, Kraków 1880, pp. 18–17.

<sup>54</sup> A. Przyboś, *Prażmowski Mikołaj* [in:] *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. XXVIII, Wrocław 1984, p. 387.

<sup>55</sup> *Relacje nuncjusów*, p. 463 (the letter of Nuncio Cantelmi to Cardinal Cybo of the 7 November 1688).

the attitude of mistrust toward Louis XIV was multi-layered enough to reach a wide audience of nobles and, as a consequence, was very efficient and long-lasting.

### 3. LOUIS XIV AS AN INCARNATION OF THE *ABSOLUTUM DOMINIUM*

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the public debate on royal power and the necessity of reforms played a very important role in Poland. Actually, this discussion touched on the question of freedom or not by the king. As early as the 1660s, Louis XIV appeared for the first time as an incarnation of the threat to the Polish law, especially to freedom. The process of creating the symbol of the Sun King as a personification of *absolutum dominium* was surprisingly fast, and was terminated during his reign.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, this symbol was often used during debates concerning royal power in the Polish-Lithuanian state.

A strong parallel between anxiety about freedom and the absolutist power of the king of France appeared in the 1660s, when, in connection with the plans of the election *vivente rege* supported strongly by the king Jan Kazimierz and his wife Ludwika Maria Gonzaga, Louis XIV promoted the candidature of the Prince de Condé to the Polish crown.<sup>57</sup> The range of emotions evoked by this plan was extremely broad. Some authors stressed that Condé would appear suddenly in Poland and in this way the free election would be endangered. When this rumour was denied, another was spread. According to it, Condé had a large fortune and thanks to his money he would bribe nobles (“*colligere*”) and thus create his own faction that would naturally act against Polish freedom.<sup>58</sup>

This motif was exploited in other ways during the reign of Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki. Some royalist nobles suspected that the aim of the French supporters in Poland could be the deposition of the monarch and his replacement by a candidate of Louis XIV’s. That was why the bishop of Chełm Krzysztof Żegocki, the *chorąży* of Sandomierz Marcin Dębicki, the voivode of Sieradz Szczęsny Kazimierz Potocki and the bishop of Poznań Stefan Wierzbowski drew the listener’s attention by presenting the “true” story about the huge sum of money that had been transported to Poland from France. They cited eyewitness who had seen the carts filled up with money, but they never gave their names or any details of this transport.<sup>59</sup> That was one of the rumours whose role was to heat up the political atmosphere. The other was more controversial. Instead of pensions, the malcontents were obliged by France to depose King Michał Korybut or even kill him! Admittedly, the name of the French

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<sup>56</sup> *Absolutum dominium* in France from the Polish perspective was partially analysed in Z. Kiereś, *Szlachta i magnateria Rzeczypospolitej wobec Francji w latach 1573–1660*, Wrocław 1985, pp. 174–175.

<sup>57</sup> On policies for the years 1658–1660, see R. Frost, *After the Deluge*, pp. 152–179.

<sup>58</sup> *Zdanie jednego Polaka ojczyźnie swojej przychylnego o teraźniejszym jej niebezpieczeństwie* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. III, p. 203.

<sup>59</sup> J. Matyasik, op. cit., p. 272.

pretender to the Polish throne who would have replaced Michał Korybut was not known, but an explanation was ready: even the conspirators were unaware of this choice because they had not made this decision yet! The names of the nephew of the Prince de Condé, Prince Charles comte de Saint Pol and prince de Longueville, the ex-king of Poland Jan Kazimierz Waza or someone else from France were whispered in the streets and in the royalists' homes. The speculation on the matter of his place of residence were multiplied, as were rumours about the march of the French army or the approach of Louis XIV's navy to the borders of Poland. Every arrival of a stranger from France or a sudden departure by a magnate suspected of supporting the opposition initiated an avalanche of questions and speculations.<sup>60</sup> In this atmosphere, any step to improve the image of Louis XIV in the eyes of the Polish nobles was doomed to failure.

In the process of the creation of his negative image, Louis XIV owed a great deal to Ludwika Maria, the Polish queen of French descent.<sup>61</sup> She was an active and energetic woman, with ambitious economic and political plans. The Polish nobility were scandalised by the Queen's meddling in politics and, in their eyes, Ludwika Maria represented the "mores" typical of the spoiled French court.<sup>62</sup> The expression "French" that referred to Queen Maria Kazimiera, the wife of Jan III Sobieski, was also marked by an ambiguously negative hue. Moreover, during the reign of this king, particularly in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, these stereotypes were intensified by rumours spread during the intense struggle between the king and opposition. The opponents of Jan III Sobieski attacked not only his alliance with the Sun King, but also the person of the French envoy in Poland, Melchior de Polignac, who apparently spent his time in the Royal Castle in Warsaw making decisions concerning Poland. That was why one of the authors noticed the phenomenon of "*externum dominium*," meaning that Louis' power extended to John III Sobieski's reign.<sup>63</sup>

The escalation of negative emotions towards Louis XIV came in 1696, when, after the death of Jan III Sobieski, one of the candidates to the Polish crown was François Louis de Bourbon, the Prince of Conti, officially supported by his king.<sup>64</sup> To

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 273 (here a review of sources and the subject literature).

<sup>61</sup> About the Queen see K. Targosz, *La cour savante de Louise Marie de Gonzague et ses liens scientifique avec la France (1646–1667)*, Wrocław 1982 and Z. Libiszowska, *Marie Louise de Gonzague, reine de Pologne (Une tentative de réforme d'Etat au XVII<sup>e</sup> s.)* [in:] eadem, *Certains aspects des rapports entre la France et la Pologne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Warszawa 1964, pp. 3–18.

<sup>62</sup> This was one of the arguments appearing during the election in 1668. See *Zwierciadło na elekcyją króla polskiego wystawione in casu abdicacionis anno 1668, w którym w Polsce trzeba by necessitates candidatos comitantes upatrować* [in:] *Pisma polityczne*, vol. III, p. 315.

<sup>63</sup> B.Czart., ms. 2218, 27–40, "Senatorskie votum na przyszłą da P. Bóg elekcyją wydane A. 1697." See also A. Czarniecka, op. cit., pp. 319, 358.

<sup>64</sup> A background of the candidature of the Prince de Conti and the motivation of the king of France can be found in J. Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly*, London 1991, p. 122. See also K. Piwarski, *Das Interregnum 1696/1697 in Polen und die politische Lage in Europa* [in:] *Um die polnische Krone. Sachsen und Polen während des Nordisches Krieges. 1700–1721*, eds. J. Kalisch, J. Gierowski, Berlin 1962. Almost all motifs appearing in the electoral camp in 1697 were analysed by A. Skrzypietz, *Wizja Francji i rządów francuskich w Polsce w literaturze politycznej bezkrólewia po śmierci Jana III Sobieskiego* [in:] *Staropolski ogląd świata*, eds. B. Rok, F. Wolański, Wrocław 2004, pp. 129–141.

the opponents of this candidature, an attack on Conti was tantamount to criticising Louis XIV as well as France in general. It stemmed from the presentation of Conti as the “*pro rex*” of Louis XIV, a passive executor of the Sun King’s orders.

This was also the first time that a complex image of Louis XIV was presented. According to it Louis was a monarch who reduced the rights of the parliaments, pillaged French princes, deprived towns of privileges and imposed high taxes. In the minds of the Polish nobles, the fact that the French were proud of their king and kingdom constituted a sort of an inexplicable phenomenon.<sup>65</sup> In the opinion of some political writers, the aims of the Sun King in Poland were clear – the imposition of the absolutism and, consequently, using Poland’s abundant reserves of military force and money. With Polish resources, Louis XIV could allegedly even defeat the emperor and create a universal monarchy made up of France and Poland. But the vision of the success in the international arena was not able to compensate for the victory of *absolutum dominium* in Poland, identical to the doom of freedom. Although the king of France resided in Paris, he could certainly meddle in Polish affairs, so one of the writers screamed dramatically: “O, poor Poland, whose defence would be taken on by the proud Gallia! O, poor freedom, whose arbiter and friend would be the Frenchman! Let’s hope the French’s song would not deceive us like siren song!”<sup>66</sup>

Some authors emphasised that in reality the French disregarded Polish laws and mocked the Polish kings, saying: “The Polish kings are like drudges or donkeys that have settled for eating miserable grass.”<sup>67</sup> According to another rumour, the French stated in taverns that Poland would need a new Lycurgus of Sparta, who would abolish the old Polish laws and introduce new and modern customs. Louis XIV would not have had any problem with breaking the rights of the Polish nobles, because as a typical Frenchman he was a natural-born perjurer. The Polish author had the proof to justify his thesis: the fate of Jan Kazimierz Waza. This king was induced by the French to abdicate in 1668, and Louis XIV then did not keep his promise to provide him with the proper level of living, so Jan Kazimierz had to become a monk. In the monastery, he was neither a king nor senator nor private person.<sup>68</sup>

For some nobles, Conti’s victory meant the loss of Polish independence and the deprivation of their privileges and freedom.<sup>69</sup> All decisions would be taken in consultation with Louis XIV; the Sejm would debate rather in Paris than in Warsaw and it

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<sup>65</sup> Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw (hereafter: BN), ms. 6646, pp. 358–375, M. Winkler, “Uwaga drukowana polityczna nad Responsem p. posła francuskiego im. ks. biskupowi kujawskiemu danym...”

<sup>66</sup> BN, ms. 6646, pp. 391v–398v, “Litterae cuiusdam sub nomine D. Episcopi Cujaviensis refutantes responsum D. Ablegati Gallici.”

<sup>67</sup> Archiwum Narodowe in Kraków, Archiwum Sanguszków 273, pp. 139–151, “Do ich mm. pp. senatorów, urzędników i całego stanu rycerskiego polskiego i litewskiego elektorów królewskich, jeżeli z nacyjej francuskiej obrać króla? Disquisitia poważna, gruntowna i potrzebna.”

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>69</sup> Louis XIV as danger to freedom appears in many texts, for example B.Czart., ms. 186, pp. 183–196, “Equitis Poloni examen literarum, quas mense octobri 1696 Excellentissimus Galiae Legatus abbas Polignacus ad Reverendissimum Episcopum Cuiaviensem anno 1696.” See also S. Orszulik, *Pisma polityczne bezkrólewia po śmierci Jana III*, vol. I, unpublished PhD dissertation, Jagiellonian University, 1982, p. 134.

would be summoned on behalf of the king of France. Conti would fulfil all of Louis' requirements to avoid the king's revenge on his sons, who remained in France. In case of opposition, the Poles would be punished with bombardment, as Genoa had been, while the Polish king would have to travel to France to beg the Sun King for forgiveness. Equally terrible for the Polish nobles was the intensive engagement of women in political life, following the example of Madame de Maintenon in France. These fears were fuelled by the intensive distribution of money exercised by Polignac and his agents. Owing to this fact, some representatives of the Polish nobles suggested that the nearest election would not take the form of a free election, but only be the Kingdom's purchase. In the opinion of one, the election of the legendary leader of the Huns, Attila, would be better for Poland than the disastrous choice of Conti, who was not officially, but in fact, steered by Louis XIV. Some arguments were rational, others populist. According to one of them, Conti's wife was widely famous for creating new styles in fashion. After the election she would come to Poland and instil her passion in the wives of Polish magnates and gentry, which would surely result in the ruin of their husbands.<sup>70</sup>

The polemics concerning the candidature of Conti to some degree reflected attitudes towards Louis XIV. Conti was presented as the "pro rex" in the name of the king of France.<sup>71</sup> On the demagogical level, the authors referred to various arguments, especially showing the disadvantages of Conti's election. Undoubtedly the letters, written opinions, manifestos and satires moulded public opinion in Poland into a spirit of very high mistrust toward Louis XIV and his model of rule, but the high number of votes for Conti's candidature can be interpreted as proof of the ineffectiveness of that sort of "black" propaganda. It was only the fear of *absolutum dominium* that survived. That was why under the rule of August II Mocny, the Saxon prince who finally won the election in 1697, Polish citizens were extremely suspicious towards the proposition of royal power being strengthened, discerning in this attempts by the monarch to create a poor substitute for the cursed absolutism.

#### 4. EPILOGUE – THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

As years passed by, these emotions became weaker and weaker, especially after Louis XIV's death in 1715. When Stanisław August Poniatowski, after being elected king of Poland in 1764, initiated a plan for the redevelopment of The Royal Castle in Warsaw, he chose for it a style typical of 17<sup>th</sup> century baroque art, which he had seen

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<sup>70</sup> B.Czart., ms. 1668, 120–134, "Refleksyja polityczna potrzebna nad responsem p. posła francuskiego obszernym, na list jmci ks. biskupa kujawskiego." See S. Orszulik, *Pisma polityczne...*, vol. I, pp. 130–131.

<sup>71</sup> In the opinion of J.A. Gierowski, this demagogical argument was close to the truth: "Conti was a man of mediocre talent, fit only to play the role of Louis XIV's tool." See J.A. Gierowski, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. From Anarchy to Well-Organized State*, trans. H. Leeming, Kraków 1996, p. 64.

during his journey to the capital of France in 1753 and 1754. These proposals for redevelopment made Polish society think of Versailles at the time of Louis XIV, and stressed a project for the reinforcement of the royal power, which was very strongly promoted by Stanisław August. The portrait of Stanisław August painted by Marcello Baciarelli was hung in the gallery of portraits of the Polish kings that was established in the Marble Room. In it, the king was presented in coronation dress; as a consequence, the form of presentation resembled the one used by Hyacinth Rigaud in the portraits of Louis XIV and Louis XV. This portrait, reflecting in the mirrors of The Marble Room, enhanced the impression that the king was striving for absolute power patterned on the model of Louis XIV.<sup>72</sup>

This was one of the proofs of the changing perceptions of the Sun King in Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The distance existing between Louis XIV's and Stanisław August's reigns allowed people to look at Louis XIV as an eminent monarch and the creator of French power. The most frequent features attributed to the king were: "great" and "famous." Moreover, Louis XIV was generally better assessed than Cardinal Richelieu, as his actions bore the hallmark or sign of glory, while his predecessor was directed by base impulses like a desire of glory.<sup>73</sup> Besides he would have used the methods of political fight for example exceptional cruelty, to which the king could never have stooped.<sup>74</sup> For a small number of writers, like Antoni Mikucki in "Speeches about the Form of the Government," the reign of Louis XIV was a time of extraordinary power for France and happiness for its people. Mikucki proved a thesis that the Sun King was the one absolute monarch who was able to act simultaneously in an absolutist and good way. However, it is necessary to emphasise that these sorts of opinions were not very popular. The authors who were favourably inclined towards the person of the Sun King generally noted his cultural successes and financial support for French artists and scholars.<sup>75</sup>

Although the assessment of Louis XIV was changing in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, his image in Polish political thought remained more negative than positive. His contemporaries critically evaluated the king's despotism and his desire for conquest. It was very popular in republican thought, which was represented, for example, by Gabriel Taszycki, to equate Louis XIV's war policies with his desire for grandeur. The king-invader was, in their understanding, a classic example of a bad monarch who contributed to the spread of expansionism in international relations.<sup>76</sup> As they

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<sup>72</sup> R. Butterwick, *Poland's Last King and English Culture. Stanisław August Poniatowski*, Oxford 1998, p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> A. Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, *Publicystyka stanisławowska o modelu rządów monarchii francuskiej*, Wrocław 1990 (hereafter: *Publicystyka stanisławowska*), p. 106. This tendency in describing the cardinal remained unchanged in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. See M. Serwański, *Znajomość ustroju i państwa francuskiego w Polsce w XVII wieku* [in:] *Polska – Niemcy – Europa*, ed. A. Czubiński, Poznań 1977, pp. 135–136 and J. Tazbir, *Staropolski obraz kardynała Richelieu* [in:] *Władza i społeczeństwo w XVI i XVII w.*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 136–143.

<sup>74</sup> *Publicystyka stanisławowska*, p. 106.

<sup>75</sup> *Abyśmy o Ojczyźnie naszej radzili. Antologia publicystyki doby stanisławowskiej*, ed. Z. Goliński, Warszawa 1984, pp. 325, 341, 357.

<sup>76</sup> *Publicystyka stanisławowska*, p. 72.

wrote: “*c’est à Louis XIV que remonte cette politique, dont le but et les moyens sont l’influence dans les cours et les nations étrangères.*”<sup>77</sup> The crisis of absolutism in France during the reign of Louis XV and XVI contributed to a rise on the Vistula of a few essential questions concerning the causes of this situation. The result of the analysis referring to the earlier period had a negative impact on the assessment of Louis XIV in Poland. This is why writers publishing their conclusions at the end of the 1780s stressed the power and glory of France during the reign of the Sun King, while their successors at the time of the Great Sejm (1788–1792) emphasized the social and economic price of Louis XIV’s successes, particularly exceptional exhaustion resulting from the permanent state of war.<sup>78</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Louis XIV could not have even suspected how important his role was in the Polish debate about royal power and the threat of *absolutum dominium*. In this debate, one of the motifs was particularly full of paradoxes: in the opinion of the Polish gentry, the king of France was too far away to provide efficient support for Poland, but, at the same time, although he lived in remote Paris or Versailles, he was still able to harm them dangerously and destroy their alleged “ideal” of freedom.

The Polish gentry were undoubtedly fascinated by the person of Louis XIV and the splendour that surrounded him, but it was rather a sort of interest of dissimilarity than a serious reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of absolute power. While French absolutism in France itself raised the nobles’ curiosity, the hallmark of *absolutum dominium* in Poland appeared to be disastrous and generated a whole range of anxieties, including the worst: the collapse of freedom.

The most essential was that the gentry commonly identified absolute power with the person of the French king, and, as a consequence, this motif appeared very often in the on-going debate, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Over the course of time, these emotions were naturally pacified and in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> they were replaced by a matter-of-fact and softened discussion on absolutism. This discussion was still present at the time of the partitions, and accompanied the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, which was indeed the real end of freedom.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, pp. 79, 84. At this time, the perception of the “positive” and “negative” freedom had a strong impact on the political decisions taken by the Great Sejm. R. Butterwick, *Positive and Negative Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Poland* [in:] *Liberté: héritage du passé...*, pp. 62–69.

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