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THE FIRST PARTITION OF POLAND IN THE GRIMALDI LETTERS

PIERWSZY ROZBIÓR POLSKI W LISTACH GRIMALDIEGO

Introduction

Carlos III was the King of Spain from 1759 to 1788. Pablo Jerónimo de Grimaldi and Pallavicini was one of his ministers and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1763 to 1766 and from 1774 to 1776.

A great number of letters written by Grimaldi have been preserved, which are currently in „El Archivo General de Indias” in Seville. These letters were written to Don Antonio María Bucarelli y Ursúa who was the Governor of Cuba and Viceroy of Mexico, with the letters being put into the file 1630 of the „Indiferente General”.

These letters were written from 26 May 1767 to 28 April 1777 and they provided us with an overview of American and European affairs.

In the letters, Grimaldi reported to Bucarelli who was separated from Europe by a huge Ocean. It took ships at least a month to cross it.

These letters give us a good idea about many topics such as English politics, the European system of alliance and Spanish problems. Of course the letters are subjective but it is clear that they were written by a Statesman.

Poland is mentioned in these letters because its partition had been decided then as a result of the war between Russia and Turkey. Some powerful countries wanted it. This astonished Western Europe. Everybody regretted it, but nobody stopped it.

The Poniatowski election

Augustus III was elected King of Poland in 1734. This election caused a lot of problems between Russia and France because these countries considered Poland to be a special zone of influence and there is no doubt that Russia was the country that benefited most from this situation.

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Forster¹ wrote that the reign of Augustus III was anarchic. The King died in 5 October 1763.

Stanislaw II August Poniatowski became the new King. Russia had to work very hard to win this election because Stanislaw was Catherine II's lover.

Catherine II herself said²: „It is essential to put someone on the Polish throne who is good for us; he must defend our interests; in a word he has to be grateful to us for winning the election”.

On the other hand, Catherine II knew how to eliminate all the dangerous international opposition and: „Russia and Prussia agreed to make Po[n]iatowsky the new King in a secret meeting in March 1764”³.

The Polish understood that his reign could not be peaceful. News sent from Warsaw and published in *El Mercurio Histórico Político*⁴, at the same time as a meeting of the Polish Diet was in progress. The newspaper said: „It would be surprising to believe that our King will be elected in a non-violent way. This would be very different to the appearances and it would be a miracle...Armed protectors are always to be feared, although they claim that they want peace; because the stronger they are, the more frightening they will look to us”.

The polish rebellion and the foreign interference

The Polish set up the Bar Confederation on 20 February 1768. Its slogan was „liberum vetum” because they supported the Catholic Union of Poland and the expulsion of the foreign armies. Joseph Pulaski and his sons were the leaders.

The war, as in the case of all civil wars, was very cruel.

The events which impeded the foreign interference of the European powers were indicated by Forster⁵: „Every day the Russian control grew in Poland and Russia expanded towards Turkey. This must have alarmed the other powers but they were worried about their own problems”

When Russia won the war against Turkey some countries decided to invade Poland. This intervention was terrible for Poland. A Russian manifesto in 1771 talked about the riots in the Poland kingdom. The allies had just found the reason for occupying this kingdom. Theoretically, they were trying to stop the riots.

The reason of state and the ethical reason of the poland problem

The first information of the partition of Poland was written in the Grimaldi letters in May 1772. Grimaldi speaks about the strange result to the war between

¹ C. Forster, *Historia de Polonia*, Imprenta del Guardia Nacional, Barcelona 1840, p 116.

² M. Luzscinski, *Historia de Polonia*, Surco. Barcelona 1945, p 207.

³ C. Forster, op. cit., p 119.

⁴ *El Mercurio Histórico Político* was a newspaper published in Madrid from 1738 and 1784.

⁵ C. Forster, op. cit., p 124.

Russia and Turkey. It ended at the expense of a third innocent country and he explains the agreement: „Vienna, Petersburg and Berlin have signed an agreement in which they have decided to share a large part of the Polish kingdom, each one of them took what they needed. They will allow that the new Polish King to continue in his throne, in the part that remained after the partition”.

Grimaldi does not understand this partition. He has an eighteenth-century mentality and he thinks that civilised men cannot commit this atrocity. He protests indignantly: „I do not believe that in History I have ever seen something like as this”⁶.

He is angry although he is worried not only about the moral consequences but also for the material consequences. He wrote on November 25, 1772: „The consequences suggest an interruption of the political system in the North and it might start a new war very soon”⁷

Grimaldi was afraid Russia would send its army towards the North and trying to take Sweden back.

The partition had not been confirmed yet. Grimaldi hoped his fear was unfounded. He wrote these sentences in the same letter: „Nobody must believe the partition has been carried out until it is confirmed”

The evidence would come very soon and on 24 June 1772 he wrote: „The agreement about the Polish partition has just been signed by the three powers. It is a strange and unfair agreement. Nobody has ever seen anything like this”

The reaction to the great larceny

The other kingdoms declared their indignation about the ally betrayal. They protested although it was useless. Grimaldi wrote to Bucarelli⁸: „You will know the ignominy. I am sure that this is the right word in this case. The three Courts of Vienna, St. Petersburg and Berlin have just done. They have each taken a piece of the Polish kingdom”.

Once again Grimaldi shows his astonishment by the horrible events of the century in another letter written on November 25th.

El Mercurio Histórico Político backed Poland, so it is against the greed of the foreign powers. This was published in January 1773: „The adversities of this kingdom are well-known, so we are not going to describe them. The Polish have suffered an internal war. They have been exposed to the greed of foreign powers, and the Polish are not even allowed to feel desperate”.

The partition of Poland violated all international rights. The other kingdoms wanted to make something illegal, look legal, and a Diet was celebrated organised by Stanislaw II August Po[n]iatowski. The Diet confirmed the partition.

⁶ Grimaldi to Bucarelli on May 27, 1772 in Aranjuez. Archivo General de Indias, Indf. Gral. 1630.

⁷ Archivo General de Indias, Indf. Gral. 1630.

⁸ Grimaldi to Bucarelli on June 24, 1772 in Aranjuez.

The culmination of the partition

Although the countries regretted it, the partition was made.

Grimaldi wrote to Bucarelli on 24 December 1773 in Madrid: „The tsarina Catherine took advantage of the wish of the Prussian King of supporting them in Turkey and so she got more pieces of the Poland Kingdom. The other allies did the same although they had said that they were going to support Poland after the Po[n]iatowski election”.

The situation was clear for everybody. When this violent action finished, it would produce a big disaster. Grimaldi wrote: „The chaos will be terrible for all the powers in the future”.

The countries must carry out an armed fight. The balance of power had to be recovered in Europe. Grimaldi wrote: „England, France and Spain wanted to start the peace so they allowed Russia to do everything that Russia wanted”.

All the countries were hopeful in peace and Russia, Prussia and Austria got bigger and bigger pieces of Poland. Grimaldi wrote on 26 March 1774: „The usurper Courts are not happy with the piece of Poland that they have. They wanted to spread out their nets because who made a basket can make a hundred of them”.

The same idea is in another letter written on 25 May 1774: „The three usurpers of Poland took advantage of the events, they have forgotten equity and justice and they have expanded their borders in that kingdom. They have increased their robberies”.

At this moment, the peace between Russia and Turkey was signed but the three allies carried on with their objectives.

The last mention that Grimaldi made about the Polish partition was on 24 December 1774. He said: „The three powers became the Poland’s arbitrators and they spread their misappropriations”.

The usurpations finished with the extinction of Poland.

SOURCES

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Grimaldi to Bucarelli on June 24, 1772 in Aranjuez.

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El Mercurio Histórico Político was a newspaper published in Madrid from 1738 and 1784.

SUMMARY

Grimaldi's letters, written from 26 May 1767 to 28 April 1777, provide us with an overview of international affairs. They give us information about many topics such as English politics, the European system of alliance and Spanish problems. The author of the letters also mentions Poland because its partition had been decided then as a result of the war between Russia and Turkey. The author also focuses on the role of Catherine II in the election of Stanisław II August Poniatowski to become the new King of Poland and the influence of Russia on Polish politics.

Grimaldi does not believe in the partition of Poland until 24 June 1772 when the agreement about the Polish partition was signed by the three powers.

The following Grimaldi's letters describes the further history of Poland under rule of the invaders.

KEYWORDS: Grimaldi letters, first partition of Poland, Turkey, Russia, Europe, Stanisław II August Poniatowski, Catherine II

STRESZCZENIE

Listy Grimaldiego, napisane od 26 maja 1767 do 28 kwietnia 1777 roku, przedstawiają nam w ogólnych zarysach międzynarodowe wydarzenia. Informują nas o wielu tematach, takich jak angielska polityka, system sojuszu europejskiego i hiszpańskich problemach. Autor listów wspomina również Polskę, ponieważ jej rozbiór nastąpił w wyniku wojny między Rosją a Turcją. Autor koncentruje się także na roli Katarzyny II w wyborze Stanisława II Augusta Poniatowskiego na nowego króla Polski i na wpływie Rosji na polską politykę. Grimaldi nie wierzy w rozbiór Polski, aż do 24 czerwca 1772 roku, kiedy umowa o polskiej partycji została podpisana przez trzy mocarstwa. W kolejnych listach Grimaldi opisuje dalsze dzieje Polski pod panowaniem zaborców.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: listy Grimaldiego, pierwszy rozbiór Polski, Turcja, Rosja, Europa, Stanisław II August Poniatowski, Katarzyna II