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SOBIESKI — A POLITICIAN AND A STATESMAN

Polish people see king John III Sobieski as one of the best Polish kings and one of the most outstanding figures in our history. The glory of the great victorious leader is still vivid. Sobieski as a politician and a statesman is, however, less known.

The beginning of Sobieski's political education was connected with the period before the Swedish invasion. At that time he took part in a special mission of the great deputy to Turkey. During the invasion (1655) he supported Charles Gustav, like the majority of nobility, but the experience he gained in the Swedish camp proved to be useful in his later war practice.

After he had stepped back from Swedes (III, 1656) king John Casimirus forgave his "treason" and conferred the magnate with the dignity of crown standart-keeper.

At the royal court Sobieski met Marie Casimire de la Grange d'Arquien who linked him with the political party of John Casimirus and Marie Louise. Their school of diplomacy revealed to Sobieski the necessity of reforming the system and strengthening the power of the king. Thus, standing by the king's side Sobieski became active in the great political game.

The Lubomirski rebellion was the crucial moment in the political career of the future king. Fight between the royal reformist party and the conservative nobility led by Lubomirski forced Sobieski to choose between his duty as a minister, the pressure of the court and his own honesty. The fact that he took side of the court was the proof of his political maturity, although Marie Casimire also played an important part in his decision. This choice opened the way to the great career for Sobieski and the victory over joined Tartar and Cossak forces at Podhajce (X, 1667) made him also popular among nobility. King John Casimirus conferred him the dignity of the Great Crown Hetman (II, 1668).

After the abdication of John Casimirus (1669) Sobieski was one of the most active leaders of the "French" party against the new king Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki. However, the danger from Turks and Tartars made the necessity to defend the country the main task.

The glorious victory over Turks at Chocim (1673) and the death of Wiśniowiecki gave Sobieski the chance to become a king of Poland. At the beginning of his reign he tried to change radically the Polish foreign policy. Being aware of the threat from Brandenburg, Prussia and German Empire he aimed at signing the peace treaty with Turkey, improving the relationships with Russia and standing together with France and Sweden against Brandenburg in order to regain Duke's Prussia.

The, so called, Baltic policy was quite realistic and in spite of difficulties Sobieski gradually accomplished the stages of his plan. He signed the treaty with France in Jaworów, the truce with Turkey in Żórawno and the agreement with Sweden in Gdańsk. The Baltic policy was also linked with the possibility of introducing the internal reforms, among others, abolishment of the rule of electing the king. The developments in the international situation and internal opposition, which was afraid of strenghtening the power of the king destroyed the ambitious plans of king John III, forced him to shift his political options and turn again to Austria. This last move was crowned by the alliance signed in March 1683. On 12th September of the same year the allied forces defeated the Ottoman army which besieged Vienna. Sobieski continued the war within the "Holy League" still making the attempts to break up with unfortunate allies by getting the support of the nations dependant on Turkey, for instance Tartars. Signing the hereditary peace treaty with Moscow (1686) was the final failure of his policy.

Sobieski did not accomplish his political plans but no one would have been able to cope with the problems resulting from historical developments. There is no doubt that he was a great politician and statesman, his political plans bear witness to his right orientation in the European situation and his foresight as to real threats to Poland. The failure of his policy was historical tragedy of Poland.

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