

BRIGITTA SCHVÉD

**“TO PRESERVE THAT BALANCE OF POWER ON WHICH
THE HAPPINESS AND PROSPERITY OF EUROPE DEPEND” –
DISCOURSE ON THE FIRST PARTITION OF POLAND
AND THE EUROPEAN BALANCE OF POWER IN LONDON
NEWSPAPERS (1771–1774)¹**

Like most English press reports on the first partition of Poland, the author of an opinion piece from 1773, published in the *Public Advertiser* under the pseudonym “Tullius”, believed that of the three powers dividing Poland, the Prussian interest could be the most dangerous both for the national interest of Britain and for the future of the European balance of power. It is significant that in almost all cases where the interests of Britain and the question of intervention were invoked in English opinion pieces, the defence of the continent’s political balance appeared as a strong argument. Through a critical discourse analysis of relevant opinion pieces published in London newspapers between 1771 and 1774, I point out how the authors used similar or different balance-of-power rhetoric, while occasionally deeper, polemical balance-of-power discourse to reflect their views. I illustrate that the authors of these articles have applied the concept essentially in relation to the following three themes: (1) the “diabolical alliance” of the partitioning powers, (2) the issue of British intervention, and (3) the criticism of the idle British government. One of the main conclusions of my analysis is that the balance-of-power discourse is most prominent in relation to the third issue, sometimes even leading to a general questioning of the legitimacy of the contemporary balance-of-power policy.

Keywords: partition of Poland, balance of power, Britain, newspapers, political discourse, conceptual history

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INTRODUCTION

One of the very first English-language newspapers to report on the plans for the partition of Poland – almost a year and a half before the first partition treaty was concluded in August 1772 – was, unusually, the *Public Register, or The Freeman's Journal*.² As Ireland's longest-running national newspaper, it dedicated a special feature to the news from London in almost all its issues; therefore, it is no coincidence that its news from the capital of 6 March 1771 included the rumour, later proved to be completely unfounded, that, on hearing of the planned partition of his country, King Stanislaus II Augustus of Poland (1764–1795) was preparing to leave for Britain in exchange for a generous pension: “We hear that a Treaty of Partition, with Regard to Poland, is on the Carpet, between the Courts of Russia, Vienna and Prussia. The King is to retire to England, upon a Pension of four hundred thousand per Ann[um].”³ It was surely not by chance that an Irish newspaper was spreading this rumour, which was considered unlikely even at the time; it was most probably a deliberate reference to the Polish monarch's English connections.⁴

Within the present study, however, I will be focusing exclusively on English press products, specifically on opinion pieces published in London newspapers around the first partition. In the European, especially British

2 *Public Register, or The Freeman's Journal* was an Irish national newspaper published in Dublin continuously from 1763 to 1924, which was associated with the “patriot” opposition in the Irish parliament in its early years.

3 “News,” *Public Register, or The Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, March 9–12, 1771), 330. As Dorota Dukwicz's recent work on the diplomatic history of the first partition certainly proves, Russia's final decision to implement the partition plan was indeed taken as early as March 1771; nevertheless, until 1772, Russian diplomacy made remarkable efforts to keep the diplomatic world and the European public in ignorance of its plans; see more recently DOROTA DUKWICZ, *Na drodze do pierwszego rozbioru. Rosja i Prusy wobec Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1768–1771* (Warsawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2022), 359–82; 423–40; 470–81. Therefore, the 1771 Irish press product cited above was actually well informed and presented factual data in this respect.

4 Stanisław Antoni Poniatowski, the future King of Poland travelled to Berlin in 1750, where he met British diplomat Charles Hanbury Williams, who became his mentor and friend. In 1755, Poniatowski was sent to St Petersburg in the service of Williams, who was then appointed as British Ambassador to the Russian Empire. Later, Poniatowski also became secretary of the Polish embassy in Britain, and for his contribution to the arts and sciences, he was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1766, becoming the first Fellow outside British royalty; see: RICHARD BUTTERWICK, *Poland's Last King and English Culture: Stanisław August Poniatowski, 1732–1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 86–87, 92–94, 124–40; JERZY MICHAŁSKI, *Stanisław August Poniatowski* (Warsawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2009), 612–14, 634.

press coverage of the development of the Polish cause, one can frequently find speculation about the impact of the division on European foreign policy, especially the political balance of the European states.⁵ The use of balance-of-power rhetoric was by then far from unusual in English political thought, since England had already seen itself as the hand that held the balance in the continent since the end of the seventeenth century.⁶ This notion became a prominent feature of eighteenth-century European politics and political publicism, a key concept in the theory of interstate relations and in the peace treaties of the period, while balance-of-power politics also became a fundamental element of British diplomacy in the decades following the establishment of the Utrecht peace settlement (1713–1714).⁷ Despite, or perhaps because of all this, several scholars believe that early modern balance of power is “a cloudy and indefinite” concept, “complex, prone to change,”⁸ misinterpretation and misappropriation, “but popular with contemporaries, thus important and inescapable for us as *useful rhetoric*.”⁹ However, more recently Morten S. Andersen argued that it is worth treating the concept as a so-called “practical category” while he proposed a “genealogical” conceptual history of it.¹⁰ When approached in this way, it becomes clear that the term was not just a rhetorical device, but was in many cases a key political concept and an important element of contemporary political discourse, used by many authors as a central concept in their political practice.

5 HANS-JÜRGEN BÖMELBURG, ANDREAS GESTRICH, HELGA SCHNABEL-SCHÜLE, “Die Teilungen Polen-Litauens als Zäsur einer europäischen Strukturgeschichte. Komparative Überlegungen jenseits der Nationalgeschichtsschreibung”, in *Die Teilungen Polen-Litauens. Inklusions- und Exklusionsmechanismen – Traditionsbildung – Vergleichsebenen*, hrsg. HANS-JÜRGEN BÖMELBURG et al. (Osnabrück: fibre, 2013), 9–35, here: 24–28.

6 CHRISTOPH KAMPMANN, “Die englische Krone als ‘Arbiter of Christendom’? Die ‘Balance of Europe’ in der politischen Diskussion der späten Stuart-Ära (1660–1714)”, *Historisches Jahrbuch* 116 (1996): 321–66, here: 328–32.

7 JEREMY BLACK, “British Foreign Policy in the Eighteenth Century: A Survey,” *Journal of British Studies* 26, no. 1 (1987), 26–53, here: 48.

8 Quoted from MATTHEW S. ANDERSON, “Eighteenth-Century Theories of the Balance of Power,” in *Studies in Diplomatic History: Essays in Memory of David B. Horn*, ed. RAGNHILD HATTON, MATTHEW S. ANDERSON (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970), 183–98, here: 183.

9 Quoted from ELLEN M. WICKLUM, *Britain and the Second and Third Partitions of Poland* (PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1999), 7, note 2. (My emphasis – B.S.)

10 MORTEN S. ANDERSEN, *A Genealogy of the Balance of Power* (PhD thesis, Department of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2016), esp. 5–8, 11–12, 50–52.

London weeklies expressed special interest in the content of the first partition treaty in the form of news reports – usually adapted from European news agencies – as well as opinion pieces,¹¹ and in some cases pamphlets,¹² analysing its likely consequences regarding the *status quo* in Central Europe.¹³ The present study focuses on the themes and contexts in which the concept of balance of power has come to the fore in the opinion pieces dealing with the first division of Poland. Through a critical discourse analysis of relevant findings in London newspapers published between 1771 and 1774, extracted from the Burney Newspapers Collection,¹⁴ I shall point out how the authors of opinion pieces used similar or different balance-of-power rhetoric, and occasionally deeper, polemical balance-of-power discourse in order to reflect their views.

BALANCE OF POWER IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN POLITICAL CONFLICTS

The principle of balance of power became the cornerstone of diplomatic practice and interstate relations for decades after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), creating a relative balance in the continent's political practice.¹⁵ By the seventeenth century, the idea of a political balance

11 In a certain – and broader – sense, each of the following categories is an opinion piece: *op-eds* (referring to articles written *opposite the editorial page*) are different from both *editorials* (opinion pieces submitted by editorial board members) and *letters to the editor* (opinion pieces submitted by readers). The present study will focus on each of these types.

12 On the British pamphlet literature relating to the first partition, specifically the pamphlets written by John Lind, published in 1773, see: ANNA PLASSART, “Edmund Burke, Poland, and the Commonwealth of Europe,” *The Historical Journal* 63, no. 4 (2020): 885–910, here: 895–97; BRIGITTA SCHVÉD, “The First Partition of Poland and the Issue of the European Balance of Power in Contemporary English Media (1772–1774),” *Specimina Nova Pars Prima Sectio Mediaevalis* 11 (2021): 203–25, here: 214–16.

13 JEREMY BLACK, *English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London–Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), 277–308; HANNAH BARKER, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 43–72.

14 The Burney Newspapers is the largest single collection of early modern English press products held at the British Library, originally gathered by Rev. Charles Burney (1757–1817). In recent years, the British Library has digitised the entire collection in partnership with Gale. Thus, it is now available to researchers in full-text searchable digital format: <https://www.gale.com/intl/c/17th-and-18th-century-burney-newspapers-collection> (Accessed July 4, 2023).

15 More recently: STELLA GHERVAS, “Balance of Power vs. Perpetual Peace: Paradigms of European Order from Utrecht to Vienna, 1713–1815,” *The International History Review* 39,

between European states became an integral part of political language across Western Europe, especially in England; in geopolitical terms, it was gradually incorporated into the political language by the early eighteenth century as dividing or (counter)balancing the power of individual states to prevent excessive dominance.¹⁶ Its widespread use and successful incorporation into the diplomatic sphere is most clearly illustrated by the Peace of Utrecht, which was the first to include – now explicitly – the term *balance of power* within its treaties.¹⁷ European powers declared their intention to consolidate peace and tranquillity in the Christian world by “preserving a just balance of power,” meaning that no state – or alliance of states – could be allowed to become too powerful and threaten the peace of Europe.¹⁸ With the establishment of the Utrecht system, no state had dominance over the whole of Europe; but the emergence of relatively new players on the European power scene, such as Russia and Prussia, began to disrupt and upset the established political order, which eventually – by 1756, through the so-called “diplomatic revolution” – completely disrupted the established order.¹⁹

The attempt to establish and maintain this balancing system did not always work as a suitable legal guarantee, since – while it was used to restrain aggressive powers – it rarely provided real assistance to weaker or smaller states. In practice, therefore, balance of power sometimes favoured the stronger, more aggressive states through what is known as partition diplomacy.²⁰ The first partition of Poland in 1772 and the two subsequent, eventually complete divisions of it in 1793 and 1795 are one

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- no. 3 (2016): 404–25, esp. 412; IZIDOR JANŽEKVIČ, “The Balance of Power from the Thirty Years’ War and the Peace of Westphalia (1648) to the War of the Spanish Succession and the Peace of Utrecht (1713),” *History of European Ideas* 49, no. 3 (2023): 561–79, here: 563–65.
- 16 Cf. ARNO STROHMEYER, “Balance of power”, in *Encyclopedia of Early Modern History Online*, ed. GRAEME DUNPHY, ANDREW GOW (Brill, 2015).
- 17 JOHANNES BURKHARDT, BENJAMIN DURST, “Friedenskongresse”, in *Handbuch Frieden im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit / Handbook of Peace in Early Modern Europe*, ed. IRENE DINGEL et al. (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 437–54, here: 446.
- 18 RANDALL LESAFFER, “The Peace of Utrecht, the Balance of Power and the Law of Nations,” in *The 1713 Peace of Utrecht and its Enduring Effects*, ed. ALFRED H.A. SOONS (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2019), 67–89, here: 68–70, 84–88.
- 19 PAUL W. SCHROEDER, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 5–11; cf. JEREMY BLACK, “Essay and Reflection: On the ‘Old System’ and the ‘Diplomatic Revolution’ of the Eighteenth Century,” *The International History Review* 12, no. 2 (1990): 301–23.
- 20 MATTHEW S. ANDERSON, *Europe in the Eighteenth Century, 1713–1783* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 226–28, 245–52.

of the most obvious examples of the practice of partition diplomacy of the time, marking a major landmark in European political history.²¹ The initial successes of the Bar Confederation and the outbreak of the First Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774) forced Catherine II, Empress of Russia (1762–1796) to reconsider her politics regarding Poland.²² By the end of the 1760s, she was increasingly inclined to accept the first partitioning offer made by King Frederick II of Prussia (1740–1786) in 1768, who soon brought the Habsburg Monarchy into the negotiations too. Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor (1765–1790) supported the partition of Poland from the beginning, but Maria Theresa, Holy Roman Empress (1745–1765) and Queen of Hungary (1740–1780) was reluctant to accept the idea for a time.²³ Following the tripartite agreement signed on August 5, 1772, which was succeeded by a forced Polish ratification (April–September 1773)²⁴ and the Treaties of Warsaw (September 18, 1773), most contemporary commentators already believed that the partitioning of the Commonwealth and the loss of Polish sovereignty embodied a new kind of balancing policy.²⁵

21 SHARON KORMAN, *The Right of Conquest: The Acquisition of Territory by Force in International Law and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 73–75; BÖMELBURG, GESTRICH, SCHNABEL-SCHÜLE, “Die Teilungen Polen-Litauens,” 17. However, the use of partition schemes is not exclusive to the policies of the three powers active in the Polish partition; throughout the eighteenth century, the idea of divisions was an integral part of diplomatic protocol; cf. ISTVÁN SOÓS, “A lengyel anarchia, Lengyelország felosztásai (1772, 1793, 1795),” in *A kora újkor története*, ed. JÁNOS POÓR (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2009), 119–39, here: 119–20.

22 BRIAN L. DAVIES, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768–1774: Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London–New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3–10.

23 ÉVA RING, “‘Lengyelországot az anarchia tartja fenn?’ A nemesi köztársaság válságának anatómiája” (Budapest: Eötvös Kiadó, 2001), 167–68.

24 The Partition Sejm (Polish: *Sejm Rozbiorowy*, 1773–1775) began in April and formally ratified the first partition treaty on 30 September 1773; see: JACEK JĘDRUCH, *Constitutions, Elections, and Legislatures of Poland, 1493–1977: A Guide to Their History* (New York: EJJ Books/Hippocrene Books, 1998), 159–63.

25 HAMISH M. SCOTT, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756–1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11–31; MICHAEL G. MÜLLER, “Die Erste Teilung Polens und ihre Folgen,” in *Polen in der europäischen Geschichte. Band 2: Frühe Neuzeit. 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. MICHAEL G. MÜLLER, HANS-JÜRGEN BÖMELBURG (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2012), 513–28; cf. DOROTA DUKWICZ, “The Internal Situation in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (1769–1771) and the Origins of the First Partition (In the Light of Russian Sources),” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 103 (2011): 67–84; HEIDI HEIN-KIRCHNER, MICHAEL G. MÜLLER, “Polen-Litauen in der europäischen Mächtepolitik, von der Endphase des Großen Nordischen Kriegs bis zur letzten Königswahl (1717–1763),” in *Polen in der europäischen Geschichte*, 443–63.

The English public followed the moves of the partitioning powers with great attention, and news reports as well as opinion pieces were especially concerned about how the threat to Poland's sovereignty would affect and upset the continent's power structure.²⁶ News reports basically sought to remain objective and unemotional, but opinion pieces quite often viewed the partition as a shameful crime. The official media tended to reflect on the consequences of the tripartite treaty as *partition*, while opposition and radical press products often referred to it with negative, more emotional overtones, for example as *dismemberment*. Essentially, the analysed press corpus contains opinion pieces on three distinct themes related to the balance of power, which in some cases are intrinsically linked to the concept and can even be considered as early "political analyses." All three themes involve the use of the concept: on the one hand, a general balance-of-power rhetoric, which was quite common, and on the other, a less frequent but more profound and argumentative discourse on the future of European balance of power.

I. "They shall not long enjoy the plunder!" – The Diabolical Alliance of the Dividing Powers

In the London newspapers of the period, the negative effects of the partition on the European balance of power were most often discussed in the context of the diabolical alliance of the partitioning powers. Much more frequent and pronounced than the demonstration of the Russian threat was the harsh criticism of the actions of Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy; in most cases, the authors mentioned the Austrian interest together with the Prussian motives, and thus often discussed "German interest(s)" jointly.²⁷ Some examples, however, condemned only the political ambitions and actions of the Habsburg Monarchy, questioning the credibility of Joseph II, while in many cases excusing Maria Theresa from

26 BLACK, *English Press in the Eighteenth Century*, 197–99.

27 The role of the Russian Empire in the period of the first partition was not yet explicitly condemned or evaluated by the British public and was sometimes even defended in opinion pieces. However, this situation was reversed during and after the second and third partitions, when, based on the great power constellation and the alliance systems, British authors became more lenient towards the Austrian and Prussian leadership; see: WICKLUM, *Britain and the Second and Third Partitions of Poland*; cf. ENDRE SASHALMI, "The Late-Eighteenth Century European Balance of Power and Russophobia in the English Media: The Ochakov Crisis (1791)," *RussianStudiesHu* 4, no. 2 (2022): 111–22.

responsibility.²⁸ The anonymous author of the first opinion piece published in the “Postscript” of the *Middlesex Journal*²⁹ of 21–23 January 1773 argued against the Habsburg Monarchy’s actions in a separate paragraph, and even the difficult situation of the Kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary played an important role in the author’s anti-Austrian argument:

“The house of Austria, like the river Danube, rises from a mean and contemptible spring: but by powerful alliances, and frequent invasions of its neighbours [*sic*] liberties, has obtained its present intolerable arrogance and spirit of universal empire. The house, or rather the county of Hapsburgh [*sic*], [...] have ever been foes to freedom; and avowed their tyrannical principle, by the seizure and subversion of the Elective and Protestant kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary.”³⁰

The author continues by linking Austrian and Prussian interests, but with a much stronger criticism of Joseph II and the change in the policy of the Viennese court. The treatise uses a biblical quotation to illustrate that Joseph’s “natural benevolence” has lately been perverted and his “connection with Frederick has obliterated every prior sentiment of friendship and humanity for the unfortunate Stanislaus,”³¹ pointing out that Joseph II “seems even desirous to excel his [i.e., Frederick II’s] great pattern in every act of perfidy and encroachment.”³²

28 There are several examples of the English press exonerating the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa, who was well known to have had strong objections to the partition and who had traditionally been well regarded by the English public since the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1740, when the Empress was actively supported in the defence of her succession to the throne. A long opinion piece in the London weekly *Craftsman*, for example, goes into detail regarding Maria Theresa’s doubts about the partition, but does not excuse the political practices of the Austrian court as they were implemented; see: ‘SCIPIO NASICA,’ “To the Printer,” *Craftsman, or Say’s Weekly Journal* (London, October 9, 1773), [1].

29 The *Middlesex Journal, or Chronicle of Liberty* was published three times a week in London between 1769 and 1778 (continued as the *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening-Post* from July 2, 1772, and as the *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* from November 30, 1773).

30 “Postscript,” *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening-Post* (London, January 21–23, 1773), [4].

31 Although Stanislaus protested the partition, he was unable to oppose it; he even considered resigning, but ultimately decided against this; see: MICHALSKI, *Stanisław August Poniatowski*, 619.

32 “Postscript,” *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening-Post* (London, January 21–23, 1773), [4].

Various opinion pieces have argued that the partition plan was not necessarily conceived by Russia, but rather by Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy. Although some of this may indeed be verified by diplomatic history, some opinion articles have exaggerated the idea that the Russian Empress was only involved in the partition out of defence concerns alone. For example, a lengthy treatise in the *London Chronicle*³³ of 29–31 July 1773 entitled *Retrospective View of the Conduct of the Court of Vienna* emphasised only the Prussian and Austrian plans, absolving the Russian Empress of responsibility, whilst at the same time employing rational political considerations:

"It is not indeed to be imagined that the present partition of Poland can be in any degree a favourite measure with the Empress of Russia, or that it at all corresponds with her original views in respect to that country. Her great object undoubtedly must have been to have kept that kingdom entire for the present; to have preserved, for some time, the name and appearance of its ancient form of government, [...] to continue in her hands the supreme direction and control of the whole."³⁴

The Russo-Turkish war, to which the author also referred later, was a matter of great concern to European as well as British interests, therefore the treatise also suggested that the Empress' original plans may have included maintaining a position in Poland in which she would be strengthened by her successful war with the Ottoman Empire. An excellent visual example of the conflict, and of opinion pieces emphasising the diabolical alliance of the partitioning powers, is the English engraving entitled *The Polish Plumb-Cake*³⁵ from the British Museum's collection, published in 1774.³⁶

33 The *London Chronicle* was an early family newspaper of Georgian London, published three times a week from 1756 to 1823 as an evening paper that covered world and national news as well as the capital's artistic, literary, and theatrical events.

34 "Retrospective View of the Conduct of the Court of Vienna", *London Chronicle* (London, July 29–31, 1773), 109.

35 JOHN LODGE, "The Polish Plumb-Cake" (London, 1774), British Museum (BM) Inv. 1868,0808.10063; MARY D. GEORGE, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum: Vol. V. 1771–1783* (London: Printed by Order of the Trustees, 1935), 167. As per the information given in the catalogue, this exact print from the British Museum's collection was published on the pages of the *Westminster Magazine* (Vol. II., 416.) on September 1, 1774, but the scanned copy available in the online catalogue has *August 1774* on it handwritten as a publication date.

36 The *plumb cake* may have been a clever reference to a cake popular in England as well as in other European countries, for example Poland (cf. *placek z sliwkami*, i.e., plum

(Fig. 1) John Lodge's work shows the three dividing powers with the King of France, criticising the neutrality of his politics.³⁷ In the background, Stanislaus is lamenting, and his crown – although not broken as in many other contemporary depictions – is almost falling off his head, a reference to the loss of the Polish territories. Under the tablecloth, a diabolical figure points to the King of Prussia; Lodge thus expressed the widespread belief that Frederick II was behind the grandiose and devilish plan to divide Poland, with Prussia pulling the strings.³⁸

The author of the *London Chronicle*'s aforementioned opinion piece also referred to the Viennese court's change of policy towards certain towns in the Spiš region (formerly Hungarian Szepes county, Polish: *Spisz*) which were returned to the Habsburg Monarchy at the time of the first partition.³⁹ The author introduced the subject as follows: "The first circumstance that seemed to indicate any change in the system of

pie). Contemporaries could also associate it with a *plumb bob* (a weight suspended from a string and used as a vertical reference line or *plumb line*); the engraving thus figuratively referred to the different "weights" for different states in the European balance of power, and also implicitly suggested that the unresolved nature of the first partition treaty could still cause serious problems for the Central European region's *status quo*. Furthermore, the term *plunder*, which is also mentioned in the accompanying text ("they shall not long enjoy the plunder!"), can also be considered as implying that the territories acquired through the partition agreement might not be held by the partitioning powers for long, or that subsequent military involvement might create further political problems for them, both at home and abroad.

37 It is worth noting the seemingly subtle difference between the weapons Lodge depicted each ruler holding, suggesting the degree of intervention by each country and even the style of their politics and warfare: in the centre sits the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II, a drawn sword in his hand; on the left is Empress Catherine II, holding a cleaver; on the right is King Frederick II, wearing a hat with a cockade, also holding a drawn sword; in the foreground, at the extreme end of the table sits the new King of France, with a knife in his hand. In the depiction, the French monarch's neutrality and indifference is shown by the fact that he holds only a knife in his hand, while everyone else is heavily armed; the swords of Frederick II and Joseph II are even touching, indicating the alliance of their countries and the intertwining of "German interests."

38 Beneath the image the following two-liner is engraved: "Thy Kingdom, Stanislaus, is now at stake, / To four such stomachs, 'tis a mere plumb-cake." The short poem uses an interesting and witty play on words: in the expression *plumb-cake*, the word *plumb* can be further associated with the meaning of the term *plunder* as robbery, spoil, prey or booty, which is also suggested by the text accompanying the engraving, saying that Frederick is "a King more savage than an Indian," who "lets the Emperor of Germany [i.e., Joseph II] and the Empress of Russia go snacks, while he offers the King of France a share to keep him from attacking Germany (i.e., the Habsburg Monarchy)," see: GEORGE, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires ... Vol. V. 1771–1783*, 167.

39 The thirteen towns and three castles of Spiš were pledged by Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg (also King of Hungary, 1387–1437) to the Polish monarch in



Fig. 1: *The Polish Plumb-Cake* (1774)

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the Court of Vienna, was the throwing out of some hint of some ancient claims which the States of Hungary were said to have upon Poland.”⁴⁰ In the same paragraph, the treatise also mentioned a letter written by Maria Theresa to the Polish monarch in January 1771, in which she assured the king that “she never had entertained a thought of seizing any part of

1412, only to be returned to the Habsburg Monarchy in 1772, at the time of the first partition, when the Monarchy acquired the south-eastern part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was incorporated into the Habsburg hereditary territories as Galicia-Lodomeria; see more recently: PATRIK DINNYÉS, “Egy zálog ‘kiváltása.’ A szepességi városok visszaszerzése (1769–1772),” in “Politika, életrajz, divat, oktatás...” *Tanulmányok Magyarország történetéből a középkortól napjainkig*, ed. CSABA KIS et al. (Eger, 2018), 95–109.

40 “Retrospective ... of Vienna”, *London Chronicle* (London, July 29–31, 1773), 109.

his dominions, nor would ever suffer any other power to do so.”⁴¹ In the article, moreover, Chancellor Kaunitz himself is exonerated by the author:

“It would seem as if the Court of Vienna had been at first either ashamed of the infamy, or shocked at the enormity of this transaction; for it is said, that Count Kaunitz, the Imperial Prime Minister, upon the question being closely put to him near two months after by some of the foreign Ministers, denied it in the strongest and most solemn terms.”⁴²

This opinion piece thus emphasises the plans of Emperor Joseph II only, which are supported by his aggressive foreign policy activities, including his active negotiations with Frederick II⁴³ – in this respect, one is able therefore to give the anonymous author the benefit of hindsight.

II. “The balance of the grand European republic must be preserved” – The Question of British Intervention

The possibility of British intervention as well as joint Western European diplomatic actions had already been considered early in a memorandum by George III, King of Great Britain (1760–1820) in 1772. Although to a lesser extent, there were also opinion pieces published in the London press calling for intervention or action to be taken in conjunction with European allies. A first example of this – a very early one, by all accounts – is to be found in the *Middlesex Journal* of 11–13 August 1772, which quoted an analysis from the *Gazetteer*, according to which the British government’s interest at that time was still a policy of non-intervention in the continental war; but using a firm balance-of-power rhetoric, the author supported that “the balance of the grand European republic must, at all times, be preserved, by the several members which immediately compose it.”⁴⁴

The same author considered British intervention permissible and, indeed, to be expected in two cases. One of these is the event of either Russia or France attempting to acquire territory that would be detrimental to British economic and maritime interests; the other is Russian or French

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Soós, “A lengyel anarchia,” 130.

⁴⁴ “Literary Chronicle, Aug. 12. / In the *Gazetteer*,” *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening Post* (London, August 11–13, 1772), [1]. (My emphasis – B.S.)

forces becoming "so formidable" that they would be dangerous to the freedom "of the Germanic body" (i.e., Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy).⁴⁵ In connection with the latter, the author also mentioned potentially positive consequences of the partition, such as the possibility that it could, if necessary, ease the continent's political tensions; no example of such positive perception can be found in the English press after the forced Polish ratification of the partition treaty in the autumn of 1773.⁴⁶

However, following the ratification of the treaty by all parties, the question of intervention or even retaliation arose on several occasions in London newspapers.⁴⁷ In connection with the official diplomatic manoeuvring, some of the press articles suggested that the only course of action that was in Britain's interest was, or could have been, to ally itself with Spain, France, and the Netherlands, or, if necessary, to have all these Western European states on Russia's side in the Polish question. One of the main reasons for this was that from March 1773, a serious diplomatic crisis began to unfold because of Russia's excessive political weight in the Russo-Turkish war, which was by then nearing its end and eventually resulted in a major Russian success.⁴⁸

In the *Middlesex Journal* of 9–11 February 1773, one of the authors of an opinion piece still saw Russian interests as the least destructive regarding the partition. Nevertheless, the piece also drew attention to the political failings of Western European states, pointing out that "the insatiable ambitions of the Emperor [i.e., Joseph II] and King of Prussia will not be satisfied with Poland only. No; they seem too sensible of their own strength, and the ease with which the powers of Europe acquiesce in the unparalled [*sic*] plunder of Poland."⁴⁹ The author believed that a joint Western European intervention with British participation would

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ JULIUSZ BARDACH, BOGUSŁAW LEŚNODORSKI, MICHAŁ PIETRZAK, *Historia państwa i prawa polskiego* (Warsawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1987), 297–98; cf. more recently: DOROTA DUKWICZ, *Rosja wobec sejmu rozbiorowego warszawskiego (1772–1775)* (Warsawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2015).

⁴⁷ SCOTT, *The Emergence of the Eastern Powers*, 223–24.

⁴⁸ DAVIES, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768–1774*, 205–08; more recently, focusing on the aftermath of the war: KATALIN SCHREK, "Changes in the Diplomatic Measures of the Russian Empire in the Balkans after the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji (1774)," *Hungarian Historical Review* 12, no. 2 (2023): 310–38, here: 312–13.

⁴⁹ "Wednesday, February 10 / Literary Chronicle, From the Choicest Essays in all the Public Papers / Public Advertiser / To the Printer," *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening-Post* (London, February 9–11, 1773), [1].

have prevented the triple alliance of the partitioning powers, and thus the division of the Commonwealth.

In the early months, English public opinion still generally attributed a greater role to the Prussian side than to Russian policy in the Polish question. For example, in an opinion piece published in April 1773,⁵⁰ an author writing under the pseudonym “Tullius,” considered the Prussian interest to be the most dangerous both for the balance of Europe and for the British national interest; he also called for British intervention, with harsh epithets for Prussian policy and the practice of partition:

“[...] every Accession of Territory to Prussia is against the Interest of England. [...] Can it be necessary to point out to the meanest of the Rabble [i.e., the King of Prussia], the Iniquity of the Partition of the unfortunate Kingdom of Poland, or the Necessity of our Interposition to avert those fatal Consequences which must inevitably attend the ambitious Views of Prussia, if we permit him to proceed in his Tyranny?”⁵¹

It is symptomatic that in almost every case where Britain’s intervention was invoked, defence of the European balance of power was put forward as a strong argument; this is also the case with “Tullius,” who considered that Britain’s participation would be essential in order “[...] to preserve that Balance of Power on which the Happiness and Prosperity of every State in Europe necessarily depend.”⁵²

The previously mentioned treatise in the *Middlesex Journal* of January 1773 also explained, in addition to the possible dangers of the Austrian interest, that Britain and her allies were seriously concerned about their commercial interests and the future of Europe, directly pointing out their interest in the independence of the Polish state. The article proceeded by highlighting economic interests while also pointing out the practicalities of the Russian alliance:

50 The opinion piece was published in the pages of the London-printed *Public Advertiser*, formerly known as the *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, then simply as the *General Advertiser*, which consisted more or less exclusively of advertisements, but also published opinion pieces and news after Henry Woodfall took it over and renamed the paper to the *Public Advertiser*.

51 ‘TULLIUS,’ “To the Printer of the Public Advertiser” (dated April 10, 1773), *Public Advertiser* (London, April 16, 1773), [2].

52 Ibid. (My emphasis – B.S.)

"The maritime powers, however unaccountably indolent they may be about the partition of Poland, are highly concerned in its independence, as it is the part of most naval shores, which Frederic, we may be sure, if he is once master of them, will monopolize, and retail at his own price. 'Tis therefore highly proper to send a fleet into the Baltic, and to demonstrate to the Court of Petersburg, and by menaces of joining the Turk, to compel Catherine to be just and generous; to whom the ghost of Peter the Third is said lately to have paid a visit, warning her to beware of the haemorrhoids."⁵³

The satirical reference to the violent death of the late Russian Emperor Peter III, Catherine's husband, is a rare example from the period of the Russian side being vilified alongside Prussia.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a great number of contemporary opinion articles suggested what a relief it would be for Poland as well as for Western Europe if the three partitioning powers were unable to guarantee their treaty and thus could not carry out a practical partition of the Polish territories without any Western European state interfering with their territorial expansion. In the words of the author quoted in the previous paragraph, the partitioning powers would thus be unable to avoid the outbreak of a major European war and would end up attacking each other: "Happy were it for Poland, if these royal banditti would fall out in the division of the spoil, and attack each other!"⁵⁵

The same idea appeared in numerous opinion pieces across the London press at the time, although in many cases merely as wishful thinking; in the *General Evening Post*,⁵⁶ for example, one author noted that the news of a prospective dispute between "the three potentates" over the partition is entirely groundless, because each of them guarantees the possession of the other, and bases the security of its claim on the constancy of their general agreement. However, the author went on to say that "it would

53 "Postscript / London," *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening-Post* (London, January 21–23, 1773), [4].

54 According to the official announcement, Emperor Peter III died of haemorrhoids, but this was greeted with deep scepticism both in Russia and abroad. The Emperor was assassinated by Orlov, the brother of one of Catherine's lovers, and Catherine took power after his death.

55 "Postscript," *Middlesex Journal, or Universal Evening-Post* (London, January 21–23, 1773), [4].

56 The *General Evening Post*, published three times a week in London, began with its 2 October 1733 issue, and ceased with its 2 February 1822 issue.

be happy for Poland, if the seeds of any disagreement could be sown amongst the illustrious free-booters who have made a tripartite prey of her territories, as in such a case their quarrel must inevitably fight her battle, and probably reinstate her in the possession of those dominions which have been so barbarously torn from her hands.”⁵⁷

The English engraving entitled *The Troelfth Cake / Le Gâteau des Rois*,⁵⁸ with a particularly rich iconography, is an excellent visual representation of the issue of Western European, specifically British intervention. (Fig. 2) The satirical print from the British Museum’s collection was most probably made in French style and was printed in London for Robert Sayer.⁵⁹ The creator of the original drawing was presumably the French draughtsman, illustrator and engraver Jean-Michel Moreau the Younger, whose composition is now known in multiple variants; one of the most famous of these is a French engraving by Noël Le Mire, whose work appeared in Paris in February 1773. Le Mire’s engraving was immensely influential on various other satirical works of its time and gained notoriety in contemporary Europe. Its distribution was banned in several countries, including France, which meant that many variants of this work have been anonymous – just as was the one from the Museum’s collection published also around 1773, printed in London for the aforementioned Sayer, repeating the composition of Le Mire’s famous engraving.⁶⁰

57 “Postscript / London,” *General Evening Post* (London, January 19–21, 1773), [4].

58 ANON., “The Troelfth Cake / Le Gâteau des Rois” (London: Printed for Robert Sayer; English/French [?] satirical print, c. 1772–73), BM Inv. J,4.178; GEORGE, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires ... Vol. V. 1771–1783*, 60.

59 GEORGE, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires ... Vol. V. 1771–1783*, 60.

60 One well-known surviving copy of Le Mire’s composition was done by Johannes E. Nilson; a copy of his work is preserved in Hungary’s national library: JOHANNES E. NILSON, “La Situation de La Pologne en MDCLXXIII/Die Lage des Königreichs Pohlen im Jahr 1773” (Augsburg, c. 1773), National Széchényi Library, Inv. TR 433/ST, 66, online: https://szechenyiterkepek.oszk.hu/szechenyi_terkepalkalmazas/flash.php?imageID=_06_TR_00433 (Accessed July 11, 2023). The Nilson engraving shows several modifications compared to the anonymous 1773 English engraving: the inner figure on the right is not George III but Joseph II, and the statesman next to Catherine is most probably Count Nikita Ivanovich Panin (1718–1783), the Russian diplomat who, as an influential political mentor to Catherine II in the beginning of her reign, played an important role in the events leading to the partition. In Nilson’s work, the Russian statesman points with a hypocritical expression to the messenger of heavenly approval, who, like an angel of peace, trumpets the welcome news of the partition across Europe. The three plaques next to the angel proclaim the legitimacy of the three partitioning powers’ actions, letting everyone know that they are civilised rulers who have fulfilled their mission as great powers by avoiding a possible war.



Fig. 2: *The Troelfth Cake / Le Gâteau des Rois* (c. 1772–1773)

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The French title of the print, *Le Gâteau des Rois* ("The Cake of Kings") – which is known in Polish literature as *Kołacz królewski* ("Royal Cake") – excellently expresses the absurdity of the situation where the three partitioning powers "feasted on" Poland with as much noble simplicity, calmness, and arrogant indifference as if they were only sharing pieces of cake among each other at a tea party. The monarch sitting on the extreme left is Empress Catherine II. She is looking up towards Stanislaus, very subtly indicating that, despite everything, the greatest pressure on the Polish state was exerted by the Russian imperial forces.⁶¹ Opposite

⁶¹ Stanislaus stands with one hand on the map, while his other hand clutches the crown which is slipping from his head, referring to the fact that the monarch is about to lose

Catherine, at the right side of the table stands Frederick II, his sword resting on the map near *Dantzik* (Gdańsk). King George III was depicted between the King of Poland and Prussia on the print, but he's turning his back to Stanislaus while looking away and facing Frederick II, thus completely ignoring where the sword of Prussia points. Taking the imagery as a whole, the engraving appears to be propaganda, pure and simple, presenting Britain as latently hostile to Poland and careless in connection with the partition of the Commonwealth. It is possible that the creator (or the publisher) of the engraving was trying by this to prompt the British monarch and his government towards taking action jointly with France to prevent the division, or was maybe just hoping to secure the benevolent neutrality of Britain by representing George III as indolently acquiescing in the partition.⁶²

III. "The idea of supporting a balance of power has been carried to an extreme" – Criticism of the Inaction of British and European Diplomacy

One of the leading reference works of the period in Britain was the *Annual Register*, a periodical containing mainly parliamentary speeches, government documents, treaties, and commentaries on domestic and foreign politics. Most of the volumes of it can be attributed to Edmund Burke,⁶³ the famous Whig politician and political philosopher, whose views on the partitions of Poland and later on the French Revolution were shared by many political mediums across Britain as well as Europe.⁶⁴ The *Register's* series of articles on European history – first published in July 1773 – focused on the events of the previous year, specifically the partition

the subject of his crown, the Commonwealth itself. The same situation can be seen in the inverted French composition from the collection of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, the exact date of publication of which is unknown: Inv. RESERVE QB-201 (108)-FOL, online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8409860w> (Accessed July 11, 2023). Interestingly, with the Latin proverb at the top of the engraving (*Inter duos litigantes Tertius Gaudet*, meaning: "Between two quarrelling men, the third rejoices"), the engraver was referring to the same contemporary prediction, which was often cited also in English newspapers and prints, that the partitioning powers were likely to clash in their pursuit of plunder. However, the French engraving, unlike its English contemporaries, predicts a perceptible gain for Russia.

62 GEORGE, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires ... Vol. V. 1771–1783*, 60.

63 DAVID B. HORN, *British Public Opinion and the First Partition of Poland* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1945), 35.

64 PLASSART, "Edmund Burke, Poland, and the Commonwealth of Europe," 888–89, 896–97.

of the Commonwealth.⁶⁵ From the beginning of his treatise, Burke stated that the partition posed a great danger not only for Poland and Central Europe but also for the whole of the European continent. He strongly condemned the partitioning act, referring to it as a *dismemberment*, and pointed out the negative vision it poses for the future of Europe, threatening its political balance.

Burke linked the devastating illegitimacy of the partition and the ensuing collapse with, on the one hand, a critique of the indifference of European powers, including Britain, and on the other a critique of the balance-of-power policy in practice, which had rather few contemporary examples. In this context, he provided a lengthy analysis of the concept in the light of balance-of-power politics from a historical perspective. In Burke's view, the partition radically and violently altered the balance of power on the European continent, and in this context, he noted that "*the idea of supporting a balance of power has in some cases been carried to an extreme.*"⁶⁶ He saw the reason for this as lying mainly in the fact that the "German states" (i.e., Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy) had, in his view, interfered in the balance of power in Europe to a much greater extent than any other European state in the decades leading up to the partition. According to him, "if the partition of Poland takes place in its utmost extent, the existence of the Germanic body in its present form, for any length of time, will be a matter rather to be wished for than expected," and will create serious problems on the continent. He concluded that "the extraordinary power to which the houses of Austria and Brandenburg have risen within a few years, was already sufficiently alarming to the other parts of that body."⁶⁷

In his memorandum of 1772, already mentioned previously, King George III – similarly to Burke – underlined the threat to the balance of Europe in connection to the partition of Poland, referring to the dangers of unresolved tensions between the European powers, which, through the partition, would become even more inflamed:

65 Burke's *The History of Europe* published in the *Annual Register* of 1773 was also reprinted in several London newspapers, for example in the *General Evening Post* in three parts (in the issues of July 22–24, July 24–27, and July 27–29, 1773), thus his insights must have had an even greater impact on the authors of the opinion pieces of the time.

66 [EDMUND BURKE,] "The History of Europe," in *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1772* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall-Mall, 1773), 2. (My emphasis – B.S.)

67 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

“The very extraordinary phenomenon of a coalition of the Courts of Vienna, Petersburg, and Berlin to take what may suit their Separate conveniences of the Kingdom of Poland, is so subversive of every idea of their mutual jealousies, and of *the balance of Europe* that it of necessary [*sic* – i.e., necessity] must give rise to very extraordinary Alliances amongst the other Powers.”⁶⁸

He stated that in the interests of helping Poland to endure and survive the pressure and territorial demands it was coming under from its neighbours, Britain, the Netherlands, and France should form an alliance to counterbalance the partitioning coalition of Prussia, Russia and the Habsburg Monarchy as well as to “extricate Poland from the Tyranny that now seems impending.”⁶⁹ The British government, however, was inactive on the issue of intervention, and in his next speech to the Parliament in November 1772, George III laid out the government’s legislative plan for the new session but made no mention of the partition.⁷⁰ As a result, the opposition press were quite fond of portraying the King of Britain and his government as indifferent, and British diplomacy as ineffective and weightless, even in the form of satirical engravings.

The topos of the indifferent monarch can be seen, for example, on the satirical print entitled *Picture of Europe for July 1772*,⁷¹ which is both a clear criticism of the inert British diplomacy and an excellent example of the visual representation of the issue of contemporary political balance. (Fig. 3) The engraving, also from the British Museum’s collection, is the only find so far that directly applies the balance-of-power iconography, while one of its main themes is the first Polish partition. The imagery of the work reflects the European great power situation current at the time, reflecting on the conclusion of the tripartite treaty and the events of the Russo-Turkish War, explicitly applying an iconography reflecting on the principle of balance of power.

68 SIR JOHN FORTESCUE (ed.), *The Correspondence of King George the Third, From 1760 to December 1783. Printed from the Original Papers in the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle, in Six Volumes. Volume II: 1768 to June 1773* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), 428–29. (No. 1180) (My emphasis – B.S.)

69 Ibid.

70 BRENDAN SIMMS, *Three Victories and a Defeat. The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 567.

71 ANON., “Picture of Europe for July 1772” (London, c. 1772), BM Inv. 1868,0808.10013; GEORGE, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires ... Vol. V. 1771–1783*, 59–60.

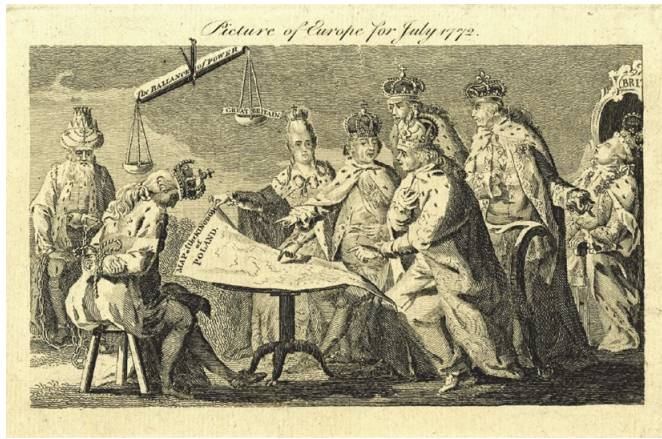


Fig. 3: *Picture of Europe for July 1772* (c. 1772)

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At the extreme right of the print, in a marginal position, King George III can be seen sitting in a chair with an inscription reading *British*, as he sleeps soundly. Above the map of Poland is a scale with the inscription *The Balance of Power*: the lighter pan of the scale reads *Great Britain*, a reference to the criticism that the country played a lightweight, insignificant role in shaping the course of events. George III and his government and diplomats were not, in fact, indifferent to the Polish cause, even though Britain ultimately did not take any firm action against the practice of partition. Nevertheless, the satirical portrayal of the monarch, with his eyes closed and asleep, was a strong criticism of the failure of the government to take real steps to prevent or retaliate against the partition of Poland.

The practical consequences of the partition for Britain were first and foremost a serious threat to her economic and (grain) trade interests. At the same time, acting more severely against Prussia would have jeopardised the Hanoverian legacy of the British monarch.⁷² Criticism of this was particularly evident in London newspapers, especially in opposition and radical opinion pieces, after the violent Polish ratification

⁷² JEREMY BLACK, *Debating Foreign Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 145–70.

of the partition in the autumn of 1773. In an opinion piece published in the *St. James's Chronicle*⁷³ in August 1774, the harsh criticism of Prussia's actions was accompanied by a strong focus on the problem of George III's Hanoverian commitment. According to the author, there was no legal basis for the King of Prussia's claim of Gdańsk. The treatise also argued that Frederick II – entertainingly referred to as the *Royal Macbeth* – may have had a sound claim to the reigning British monarch's own throne, implicitly suggesting that Britain may be anxious about the lengths to which Prussia would go in terms of the partition of Poland:

“It is impossible to say where these alarming Claims of this Northern Ravager [i.e., Frederick II] will stop. He has certainly a much better Title to the Crown of Great Britain than to the Cities of Dantzic [sic] or Hamburg; for he is Son of the Sister of his late Majesty King George the Second, and consequently related nearly to George the Third.”⁷⁴

In connection with this, the author noted sharply and with some concern that “this Royal Macbeth may one Day think it worth his While to pursue a Claim which is much better founded, or at least not so ridiculous, as many that he has made.”⁷⁵ Despite the serious concerns of the time, however, the British government managed to protect its commercial interests in the region for a time. Success was achieved, for example, in diplomatic efforts to retain Gdańsk, which did not fall into Prussian hands until the second partition in 1793.

CONCLUSION

The first partition treaty was a severe shock for Poland in all respects. Western European states, including Britain, were unwilling to enter military conflict with either the increasingly powerful Russian Empire or the Kingdom of Prussia, while the Habsburg Monarchy – which had previously been a sometimes more promising partner when it came to settling disputes in Central Europe – was condemned by British politics

73 Founded by Henry Baldwin and published in London, *St. James's Chronicle* began its long and successful run as a triweekly evening paper in 1761.

74 “Postscript / London,” *St. James's Chronicle, or British Evening-Post* (London, August 6–9, 1774), [4].

75 Ibid.

and public opinion, mainly on the grounds of Joseph II's plans. As with most Western European countries, Britain *in principle* refused to accept the partition and, as it has been pointed out in this paper, also constantly attacked it in its press. Despite this, however, the British monarch and his government did not veto the partition, and *in practice* acquiesced in the implementation of the partition agreement, while constantly monitoring the balance of power in Europe and watching with concern the increasing expansion of Poland's neighbouring powers. The opinion pieces in most London newspapers basically emphasised the diabolical alliance of the partitioning powers, and specifically the Prussian, sometimes Prussian *and* Austrian, lust for power (*Point I*). The other theme that can be found, the question of British intervention and the diplomatic steps taken by British and Western European diplomacy – initially desirable but already clearly considered absent in 1774 – and the harsh criticism of its failure, appeared more prominently in opposition press sources (*Point II*).

Closely related to this is the third theme, the image of an idle British diplomacy and an indolent monarch, and, from the autumn of 1773 onwards, how both of these came in for criticism. (*Point III*). Related opinion articles emphasise the damaged European political milieu caused by the partition and the threat to the balance of power in Europe, as well as to British national and economic interests. This theme can be observed in both governmental and opposition press coverage, along with opinion pieces in opposition and radical newspapers on the issue of King George III's Hanoverian commitment. From the analysis of the British monarch's memorandum from 1772 and Edmund Burke's article from 1773, it is also clear that this is the topic in which the balance-of-power discourse is most prominent and evident. Although the two aforementioned works are not opinion pieces in the strict sense of being published in newspapers – being rather a reference work and a memorandum – in Burke's case, London newspapers almost immediately republished excerpts from his article, meaning it certainly influenced the authors of the opinion pieces presented and quoted in the study. As well as British pamphleteers, politicians and diplomats, the publicists of London newspapers were also quite concerned about the excesses of Prussia at the time of the first partition, and specifically about the threat to the continent's balance of power. In some cases, as in Burke's article mentioned above, this even led to a general questioning of the legitimacy of the contemporary balance-of-power policy.

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