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Poland as the Bastion of Christianity and the Issue of a Union with the Orthodox Church

ABSTRACT

When the Ottoman Turks began their conquest of further Balkan countries in the second half of the 14th century, they were opposed by Hungary, which came to known as the bastion of Christianity. The article analyses subsequent events of the 15th and 16th centuries when the term was first applied to the Kingdom of Poland. Poland's greatest involvement in the war against the Muslims was during the reign of Ladislaus III of Hungary, who died in 1444 at the Battle of Varna. Under his successor, Kazimierz Jagiellończyk, Poland managed to avoid military conflict with Turkey, though it waged constant war with their allies, the Tatars. The first Turkish invasions of Poland followed the defeat in Bukovina in the autumn of 1497. In the ensuing decades, Poland was forced to renew truces with Turkey every few years, which drained the state's coffers yet failed to protect it from the devastating Tartar invasions. After the fall of Hungary at the Battle of Mohács in 1526, Poland found itself on the front line, exposed to direct attack by the armies of the Padishah. The Holy See joined the defense against the Islamic threat, hoping to convince the Grand Duchy of Moscow to go to war with Turkey. Papal diplomacy was also centered on the followers of the Orthodox Church living within the borders of the Republic, which resulted in the Union of Brest in 1596.

KEYWORDS: Kingdom of Poland, Hungary, Turkey, bastion of Christianity, the Crusades

STRESZCZENIE

Polska jako przedmurze chrześcijaństwa i kwestia unii z Kościołem prawosławnym

Gdy w drugiej połowie XIV w. Turcy osmańscy rozpoczęli podbój kolejnych krajów na Bałkanach, przeciwstawiły im się Węgry, które z czasem zaczęto nazywać przedmurzem chrześcijaństwa. Artykuł analizuje późniejsze wydarzenia z XV i XVI w., które zdecydowały o tym, że określenia tego zaczęto

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używać także w stosunku do Królestwa Polskiego. Momentem największego zaangażowania się Polski w wojnę z muzułmanami były rządy Władysława III na Węgrzech, który zginął w 1444 r. pod Warną. Choć za jego następcy Kazimierza Jagiellończyka Polska unikała konfrontacji z Turcją, to prowadziła ciągłą wojnę z jej sojusznikami, Tatarami. Pierwsze najazdy tureckie na ziemie polskie nastąpiły po klęsce bukowińskiej jesienią 1497 r. W następnych dziesięcioleciach Polska zmuszona była odnawiać co kilka lat z Turcją rozejmy, co wiązało się z dużymi wydatkami z kasy państwowej, ale nie zabezpieczało przed niszczącymi najazdami Tatarów. Po upadku Węgier po bitwie pod Mohaczem w 1526 r. Polska stała się krajem frontowym narażonym na bezpośredni atak wojsk padyszacha. W obronę przed zagrożeniem islamskim włączyła się Stolica Apostolska, która widziała dużą szansę w pozyskaniu do idei wojny z Turcją Wielkiego Księstwa Moskiewskiego. Dyplomacja papieska swoje wysiłki koncentrowała również na wyznawcach Kościoła prawosławnego żyjących w granicach Rzeczypospolitej, co zaowocowało zawarciem w 1596 r. unii kościelnej w Brześciu.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Królestwo Polskie, Węgry, Turcja, przedmurze chrześcijaństwa, krucjaty

The issue of the Turkish threat was one of the most important problems in the late Middle Ages and the early-modern era in Europe. When in the middle of the fourteenth century Europe was attacked by Ottoman Turks, several Christian countries stood in its path. They were broken in turn, first Bulgaria, then Greek despotates and then Bosnia and Serbia. Finally, the Turks conquered Albania and the Crimean Tatars (Setton, 1976, pp. 16–63). The latter converted to Islam and they became loyal servants of the new masters carrying out all their orders and wishes (Inalcik, 1954, pp. 103–129). In the Balkan region, only the Kingdom of Hungary resisted the Turks, because the country did not want to renounce its Christian religion and culture. Hungary was perceived in the whole of Europe as the "Bulwark of Christianity," and so did the Hungarians (Tazbir, 1984, p. 169; Bárány, 2012, pp. 352–357; Housley, 2014, p. 151).

The country was involved in the war against the Ottoman Empire from the very beginning of its appearance in Europe, as early as the middle of the 14th century. Hungary made strenuous efforts to restrain the Turkish conquest during the long reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387–1437). Many volunteers from Poland took part in those battles, treating them as a holy war in defense of the faith. Unfortunately, despite their support, and the volunteers from different countries, all those attempts ended in failure (Knoll, 1974, pp. 397–398; Grygiel, 1992, pp. 75–85; Smołucha, 1999, p. 15).

We should keep in mind one more thing. The Kingdom of Poland was also committed to defending Europe against Turkey, but on the different frontline and in a different way. In the fifteenth century, not only Hungary but primarily the remaining Greek states with their capital in Constantinople were exposed to the Turkish threat. This city was practically besieged by Turkish forces for many years and it was a matter of time before it fell into their hands (Setton, 1978, pp. 12–137). This issue was discussed at the Council of Florence in 1439, where representatives of the Roman church signed a church union with the Greeks, one of the conditions of which was to provide Western aid to Byzantium (Geanakoplos, 1955, pp. 324–346). Isidor, the Metropolitan of Kiev who was Greek by origin, was appointed cardinal at the council and was sent with the mission to announce the church union in Central and Eastern Europe (Philippides & Hanak, 2018, pp. 79ff).

His mission to the Polish-Lithuanian state was only partially successful due to the lack of recognition of Eugene IV and the sympathies towards the Council of Basel of some church elites, including Bishop Matthias of Vilnius, who did not recognize the Florentine Union and considered Isidore an intruder (Graff, 2008, pp. 289–291; 2017, pp. 95–107). However, the young king – 17-year-old Wladyslaw III from Jagellon dynasty, accepted the decisions reached in Florence and declared his assistance in promoting the church union. Both the Holy See and the Polish King hoped that the union would mobilize Orthodox believers to give greater support to the idea of defending Constantinople and all of Greece. One of the cardinals' aims was to announce the union within the territory of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. However, he was met there with great resistance, and even he was temporarily imprisoned by its ruler Vasily the Blind (Halecki, 1958, pp. 46–65).[1]

At the same time, after the death of Sigismund of Luxemburg in 1437, the war with Turkey was continued by his son-in-law, Albrecht II of the Habsburg. He unexpectedly died in fall 1439 during the return journey from the military expedition to the southern border (Setton, 1978, p. 58). In the atmosphere of threat and confusion caused by the Turkish invasion, Hungarian nobility elected Wladyslaw III the King of Poland, to the throne in Buda. Wladyslaw accepted this choice as an act of loyalty to the Holy See, which resulted in close cooperation with the papal legate in Hungary, cardinal Giuliano Cesarini (Jefferson, 2012, pp. 168ff; Setton, 1978, pp. 74–81). Not everyone in Poland supported this royal choice. Some even blamed the ruler of youthful carelessness and the desire to

1 Regarding the fate of the Cardinal Isidore's mission to Moscow see Cherniavsky, 1955, pp. 347–359.

gain the fame of a crusading warrior at the expense of the interests of the state. Their opposition was so strong that the Kingdom of Poland did not officially declare the war against Turkey (Graff, 2008, pp. 349–364). As a result, king Wladyslaw did not receive the full support of his subjects. For instance, he was accompanied on his journey to Buda by volunteers only, who numbered about two thousand soldiers. Most of them were the Knights of the same age as a king and shared with him the same ideas, desires, and dreams. The Hungarians expected the new king would help them in their war against the Ottoman Turkey. The king achieved some military success in the campaigns against the Muslims in the first years of his rule in Hungary (Jefferson, 2012, pp. 295ff; Pálosfalvi, 2018, pp. 105–120). Encouraged by that initial success, in 1444 he decided to give the Turks a final challenge, he wanted to strike them and throw them out of Europe forever. To achieve his goal, he broke with the Sultan, a ten-year-long truce signed in the city of Szeged, concluded shortly before. This decision was persuaded to him by Giuliano Cesarini, the papal legate present in Buda. He convinced the king that the oath made to the infidels was invalid. Not everybody supported the king in his decision and some of his advisors warned the ruler of bad consequences. Using this as an excuse, the Serbian despot Brankowić with his army of thousands of soldiers withdrew his military support. Despite this, the Polish and Hungarian king in the summer of 1444 led Christian troops against the Turks. He arrived with his army up to the Black Sea coast. The Turks were waiting for him near Varna. The battle fought on November 10, 1444, ended in disaster for the Christian army.[2] The king and almost all Polish knights who accompanied him were killed on the battlefield. Many were taken prisoners and never returned to their homeland (Knoll, 1974, p. 398; Jefferson, 2012, pp. 468–487; Bak, 2004, pp. 116–127; Housley, 2014, pp. 149–164).

The defeat, especially in Poland, came as a warning to the political establishment (Obara-Pawłowska, 2021, pp. 463–486). A blind acceptance of the Roman Curia's foreign policy could no longer be taken for granted as easily as before. The new king of Poland, Casimir IV Jagiellon, a younger brother of Wladyslaw, who had been killed at Varna, was especially consistent and tenacious in this regard (Stachoń, 1930, p. 106; Smołucha, 1995, p. 460; Smołucha, 2016, pp. 146–147).

The idea of challenging the Turks in combat was met in Poland with reluctance. That attitude did not change even after the fall of Constantinople. The city, the old capital of the Roman emperors, fell on 29 May 1453. The conqueror, Sultan Mehmed II proclaimed himself the new emperor

2 Regarding the circumstances which led to the Varna failure see Joannis Dlugossi, 2001, pp. 212–331; Jefferson, 2012, pp. 455–470; Olejnik, 1996, pp. 243ff.

and openly declared Rome to be his next goal (Babinger, 1978, pp. 90–95; Meuthen, 1983, pp. 1–35). As Turkey was not a naval power at that time, it was clear that the Sultan's army would attempt to march through the Balkans and Central Europe to reach the Eternal City. In many capitals of the region, the rulers began to realize the gravity of the situation – even in Krakow. It seems that the message was received in the whole country with a shock. It was particularly true in the case of the clergy and scholars associated with the University of Krakow. One of the contemporary historians, a famous chronicler Jan Długosz, wrote in his *Annales* following words: "Ex duobus Christianitatis oculis alter erutus, ex duabus manibus altera amputata, bibliothecis combustis et Grecarum litterarum doctrinis sine quibus nemo se doctum estimabat iri, exterminates." [From two eyes of Christianity, one was plucked out; from two hands, one was cut off; the libraries, and all Greek science, without which no one can consider himself a scholar, were burned and destroyed] (Joannis Dlugossi, 2003, p. 168).[3]

Unfortunately, those words fell on deaf ears. Still, for the majority of the inhabitants, not only in Poland but living also in others kingdoms in the West, this matter was of no interest. After ascending to the throne in Kraków, Cazimir IV made a firm decision to avoid any involvements in the war with Turkey, but it turned out in a very short time that the Muslim threat reached the borders of his kingdom (Tazbir, 1984, p. 169). More and more often, shortly after the fall of Constantinople, Tatars, who were the Turks' proxy warriors, began to invade eastern borders of the Polish--Lithuanian state. At that time, they were almost completely subordinated to the Sultan. They robbed property, stole cattle and kidnapped people whom they later sold at the Turkish slave market. Year after year thousands of people were taken to slavery, the man to the mines and galleys, and the women to the houses and harems, where they were quite often subjected to sexual exploitation. It was very humiliating for the Christian Kingdom, which was one of the biggest and strongest at that time in Europe. The Tatar raids forced the king Casimir to organize a defense of the eastern borders. He collected money for this purpose with the help of the Holy See by announcing special crusade indulgences. Thanks to these fees, the king could not only pay for soldiers but also build new castles and repair the old ones. One of the most important border strongholds, the castle in Kamianets-Podilskyi, was entirely built due to the crusade money.

However, it was only in 1484, after the Turks took over Kilia and Akkerman, the two very important ports on the Black Sea, that Poland

3 On the antiturkish literature created after the fall of Constantinople, see Hankins, 1995, pp. 112ff; Knoll, 1974, pp. 398–401.

changed its policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish army interrupted the trade routes and threatened the southern borders of the Kingdom. Polish policy makers realized the failure of their passive policy, and they decided to take control over Moldova – which was a contentious territory between Poland and Turkey. One of the interesting projects was to move the Teutonic Order from the Baltic Sea, where there were no infidels anymore, to the Black Sea area. They were supposed to fight the Muslims there (Thumser, 2000, pp. 145–150). The main policymaker at the royal court was a certain refugee from Italy. His name was Kallimach (Tazbir, 1984, p. 173).

He was a very prolific humanist and scholar, and a former secretary of Pope Pius II. The king nominated him to be a tutor of his sons. It seems that he had a huge influence on the young princes, and especially on John Albert. Kallimach wrote many memoranda and treatises, such as *The History of King Wladislaw III*, in which he argued in favor of the war against Turkey (Domański, 1987, pp. 25–43); Baczkowski, 1997, pp. 73–90; Srodecki, Bagi, Barabás, & Máté, 2016, pp. 350–351). Many of those ideas stayed on paper only, but some of them were put into practice. I would mention in this context a *permanent defense* – paid military force – was organized on the vast eastern steppes. The king appointed John Albert, his son, to be the commander of those forces. He achieved several victories over Tatars, which made him famous as a young man and served as an inspiration to greater challenges.

After the death of King Casimir IV Jagiellon in 1492, John I Albert ascended the throne of Poland. From the very beginning, he aimed at strengthening his country's position in the Black Sea region. In particular, he intended to take back the ports of Kilia and Akkerman from the Turkish hands. However, there was a conflict of interests between the Polish plans and the economic and political strategy of Hungary (Smołucha, 1999, pp. 62–63). In order to achieve this purpose in 1497, the young King led a large army of about 80 000 soldiers towards the Black Sea (Thumser, 2000, pp. 155–176). Interesting thing is that he took on the expedition all the members of the Teutonic Order, whom he was going to settled down on the Black Sea coast after the successful war against the Turks. In August 1497, the Polish troops reached Moldavian territory. The country was under the rule of voivode Stephen III, known as Stephen the Great (Stefan cel Mare), who was a Polish vassal. Being under threat from the Polish army, he turned to the sultan for protection. At the same time, he demanded the withdrawal of the Polish forces from his territory. In return, Polish king proclaimed Stephen traitor and decided to wage an attack on Suceava, the capital of the country. But it was not an easy siege, as the Moldavian army was supported by the Turkish and Tatar troops. Having

no hopes to win the campaign, John I Albert decided to call a retreat after a weeks-long siege of Suceava. And then, on his way back home, his army suffered a spectacular defeat in the Bukovina Forest, where around 5 000 Polish soldiers were killed (Smołucha, 1999, pp. 65–69; Plewczyński, 2002, pp. 140–148).

The consequence of that military disaster was the first Ottoman raids onto Polish territory. During the spring and summer of 1498, vast areas of Red Ruthenia and Podolia were completely devastated. Some historians argue that the number of people who were taken in slavery reached hundred thousand. The Royal Court feared that even Krakow was exposed to the Ottoman threat (Spieralski, 1963, pp. 48ff; Smołucha, 1999, pp. 70–71). Therefore, it was ordered to strengthen the defensive walls and build additional fortifications called the Barbican in front of the main city gate. It exists to this day and reminds of those hard times. The next Turkish invasion, which took place in autumn of that same year, reached the River San. This time, however, it was nature itself that came to the country's rescue as the early onset of winter decimated the invaders and forced them to withdraw from Polish territory (Smołucha, 1999, pp. 71; Górka, 1933, p. 20). There is no doubt that an ambitious John Albert was going to seek revenge for the failures he had suffered over the past months. However, he needed some more time to straighten up national affairs and to reorganize the army. To achieve this, he dispatched Nicholas Firley to Istanbul, a diplomat highly skilled in dealing with eastern problems. On 25 February 1500, his embassy returned to Krakow with Turkish envoys, who were ready to sign an armistice on the Sultan's behalf. But the Turks refused to agree for a truce longer than one year. King John Albert accepted that proposal and signed the documents (Kołodziejczyk, 2000, p. 207; Dziubiński, 2005, p. 12; Smołucha, 1999, p. 80).

It set a precedent for future Poland's policy with the Turks because since then the Kingdom of Poland would renew truce with Turkey time and again for over 100 years. Traditional Polish historiography inaccurately claimed that Poland had a perennial peace with Turkey which lasted throughout the whole 16th century (Dziubiński, 1965, p. 232; 2005, pp. 95–102). I don't quite agree with this because a Koranic law obliges the Muslim rulers to sign short term armistices with infidels. In this case, Sultan could sign a truce only for 1 or 2 years, and it never lasted longer than 10 years (Panaite, 2019, p. 191). The Turks used similar diplomatic practice to all other Christian countries. If you wanted to prolong a truce you had to pay a tribute, which used to be higher and higher each year. The sum of money depended on an arbitrary will of the Sultan. This practice was so humiliating for Christians rulers that they kept it secret (Anderson, 1998, p. 241). The subjects were not informed about it. That was not only

the case with Poland, but the same thing was a common practice in many European countries such as Hungary, Austria, and many Italian states, and even Germany. It is a quite thought-provoking thing that even today that historical truth is completely unknown to many historians, lest not policymakers.

Despite the paid tribute, Polish lands were constantly invaded by Tatars, who were given from the Turks a green light to loot, rape, and enslave. In order to avoid this, Poland had to pay the double tribute, both to Turks and Tatars (Królikowska, 2013, pp. 48–51). Yet, notwithstanding the problems, the position of Poland as one of the key European players was growing with each decade of the XVIth century, especially in Eastern affairs.

As the spearhead of western civilization the Polish-Lithuanian state also had to face an increasingly aggressive Grand Duchy of Moscow. Not always could Polish diplomacy count on papacy's support. The Holy See was primarily interested in the expansion of its religious influence in the Ruthenian lands, and all the time was seeking to renew the Union of Florence (Halecki, 1958, pp. 33–140). For the pope the Union was not only an ecumenical act but also a political opportunity to unite all Christian forces, including the Orthodox believers, against Muslims. That union suffered a terrible blow with the subjugation of the Orthodox patriarchy to the Sultan after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (Papademetriou, 2015, p. 9ff). Also, Moscow was unwilling to accept that situation and was determined to have full ecclesiastical independence. That policy went together with the idea of unifying all of Ruthenia under Moscow's banner. This was particularly dangerous for the Polish-Lithuanian state, which was multireligious and multiconfessional. All rulers of the Jagiellonian dynasty supported the spread and development of the Catholic Church, but never at the cost of downgrading or weakening Orthodox believers. The law strongly protected not only their personal freedoms but also their church properties. For this reason it was extraordinarily rare for the Orthodox subjects to engage in acts of treason and disloyalty and transfer their loyalty and service to Moscow (Chodynicki, 1934, pp. 103–120; Fijałek, 1934, pp. 23–25).

What Moscow feared above all was that the Catholics would thrust upon them not only their liturgy and dogmas but also a different culture and political system. Not only the Grand Duke of Moscow and his court wished to avoid this. A large part of the population, supported by Orthodox monks was also strongly against it.[4] In those circumstances the idea of the so-called "Third Rome" was born and flourished. It was rooted in

4 The Orthodox monks had previously shown strong opposition during the first attempt at church unification in the fifteenth century, see Alef, 1961, pp. 389–401.

the conviction that the antique heritage of Greece and Rome had been transferred to Moscow, thus creating new imperial capital (Poe, 2001, pp. 412–419; Toumanoff, 1955, pp. 411–440; Ivanov, 2016, pp. 56–58). To strengthen that idea in January 1547 Ivan IV the Terrible, the Grand Duke of Moscow, adopted the title of Tsar. This name was associated with the name "Caesar," and it signified the elevation of Ivan the Terrible above other Ruthenian princes, and even the rulers of neighboring kingdoms. The new empire, which expanded at the cost of Mongol-Tartar possessions in the east, and Ruthenian lands at the expense of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, had no intention of engaging in open conflict against the Ottoman Empire, to which it was encouraged by Rome.[5] The Apostolic See anxiously observed the developments in Eastern Europe and it considered dangerous Moscow's policy to undermine the role of Rome as Christendom's center, and its rejection of religious union. In the end, it turned out the only country the Holy See could trust, besides the Habsburg empire, was the Polish-Lithuanian state. Therefore, in the second half of the 16th century, Rome put a lot of pressure on the imperial court in Vienna and Krakow to encourage good cooperation between the two states (Barwicka-Makuła, 2019; Gregorowicz, 2019, pp. 349–401).

After the new union of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania on 1 July 1569, the new state known as the Republic of the Two Nations or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth grew into real regional power (Halecki, 1920, pp. 248–353; Bardach, 1969, pp. 612–616). The Vatican could not fail to see that change. Apostolic legates and nuncios began to play an active role in its support and promotion, and so did prominent representatives of the Jesuit order, such as Antonio Possevino (Halecki, 1958, pp. 199–223). Into this ideological framework, which took into account the interests of all of Christendom, were incorporated the military and political enterprises of King Stephen Batory (1576–1586). For this ruler of the Commonwealth, whose origins were in Transylvania, the most important goal was the liberation of all the countries in Southeastern Europe from the Ottoman occupation. The first step towards this goal was to strengthen the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth geopolitically by achieving a victory in the war against Moscow over the control of the Baltic Sea coast, the so-called the war over *dominium Maris Baltici*.[6] It is clear now, that

5 Towards the end of the fifteenth, beginning of the sixteenth century, Moscow even sought a political understanding with the Ottoman Empire. In this way, despite the declarations and imaginings of the West, it resigned from the defense of the Byzantine inheritance, see: Toumanoff, 1955, pp. 441–442.

6 In the course of a series of political and armed conflicts Moscow became the main enemy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at that time, see: Nagielski, 2013, pp. 97–100; Oakley, 1992, pp. 24–34; Stevens, 2007, pp. 85–93.

after successful campaigns against Moscow the king intended open conflict with the Ottomans (Smołucha, 2012, pp. 549–566). Still, during the war, the king supported the initiative to persuade Moscow to form a union with the Roman Church, which was undertaken by Antonio Possevino, the above mentioned Italian Jesuit. But the proposal he made to the tsar was rejected. In this situation, the Polish king could do nothing but implement his own project. These plans were frustrated by the unexpected death of Stephen Batory in December 1586, and later internal and international conflicts resulting from the election of his successor (Boratyński, 1903; Dopierała, 1977, pp. 101–110; 2012, pp. 67–70).

Despite suggestions from Rome, Polish political leaders did not want to consent to any Habsburg's candidacy for the Polish throne. They were afraid that Austria would drag Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into a war with the Ottomans. The election of Sigismund III, who was a Jagiellon on the maternal side, best reflected contemporary sentiments in Poland. Because the new king was an ardent supporter of the Catholic Church, the Holy See had justified hopes that he would continue the policy of his predecessor[7]. The political and religious situation in the East was even more complicated in 1589, when on the initiative of Tsar Fiodor, a separate patriarchate was established in Moscow (Vogüé, 1879, pp. 5–35; Podskalsky, 1989, pp. 421–437). The tsar did not hide that its purpose was to impose spiritual supremacy over all Orthodox believers. This aroused well-founded fears about attempted Muscovite interference in the affairs of the Orthodox population living in the Commonwealth. Moscow began to control the areas which were previously reserved for the jurisdiction of the patriarchate of Constantinople. Contrary to the latter, who was very week and subjected to the Sultan, Moscow could use real force and speak from the position of power. The Orthodox believers in the Commonwealth felt this strongly and sought to secure their church against the emerging threat. They wanted to find a safe space that would allow them to remain independent (Chodynicki, 1934, pp. 255–262).

It was against that background that, with support of the Holy See, the idea of a Catholic-Orthodox union within the Polish-Lithuanian state was revived (Gudziak, 1995, p. 220). The plans were based on the decisions made at the Council of Florence in 1439. The Uniate Church would acknowledge the supremacy of pope, but it would preserve the Orthodox liturgy and tradition. The Roman curia had a double purpose in mind in promoting the union: religious and political. As the second aim was

7 The most important matter of dispute arose between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Habsburgs in light of Maximilian Habsburg's attempts to gain the Polish throne after the death of Stephen Batory, see: Dubas-Urwanowicz, 2012, pp. 431–450.

concerned, the pope was more than eager to use Orthodox believers, including Cossacks, who were one of the best soldiers at that time, against the Turks (see more: Chodynicki, 1934, pp. 274–276; Smołucha, 2021, pp. 33–80).

The final decision was reached at the synod in Brest in October 1596. The Uniates as promised have always kept religious and cultural liberties that separated them from both Polish Catholics and Orthodox Muscovites. The union gave them a strong national identity which became the foundation of Ukrainian and Belarusian nations (Chodynicki, 1934, pp. 287–419).

Although the leaders of Polish policy could not be persuaded to join the Habsburgs in the war with the Ottomans, the social and religious atmosphere at the end of the 16th century prepared the ground for the future war with Turkey. When the first war of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth broke out with Turkey at the beginning of the 17th century, Catholics and Orthodox fought side by side. The Christians of both rites worked and fought together against the Islamic threat. But that unity did not last long. The decades which were to come, brought new problems, conflicts, and challenges, which weakened the Commonwealth, resulted in great Civil War and made it vulnerable in front of powerful enemies.

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