

Original article

Poles in Belgium and the question of rebirth of an independent Polish state

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ABSTRACT

The issue of the participation of Polish political emigration in the struggle for freedom and its comprehensive activity in the political, scientific and cultural spheres are reflected in the Polish (European) history, thus providing valuable research material for future generations. Polish post-partition emigres, especially after the major national uprisings, was concentrated mainly in France, England and Belgium. Polish emigration in Belgium, similar to some extent to emigration in France – albeit smaller in number – was constituted by the Polish colony, represented, among others, by soldiers seeking refuge after the November Uprising (including several dozen officers, e.g. Ignacy Kruszewski, Feliks Prot de Pruszyński, Jan Zygmunt Skrzynecki, Władysław Zamoyski) and representatives of culture and science, Joachim Lelewel (an outstanding Polish historian, spiritual guide in an exile democratic camp), Stanisław Worcell (thinker and social activist of the Great Emigration) and many other outstanding Poles.

The aim of this article is to present the role of Polish emigration in Belgium, its contribution to the struggle for Poland's independence, and to draw attention to the scholarly dispute surrounding the Great Emigration between Polish and Belgian historians regarding the effects of "politics in exile" and the question of the heroism of Polish patriots in exile. These considerations are a contribution to a broader discussion and an encouragement to a deeper penetration of the literature (source materials) on the Great Emigration, especially, if it concerns Belgium, available in foreign languages – French and Dutch.

KEYWORDS

Great Emigration, patriotism, Polish political emigration, Belgium



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Introduction

Before proceeding with the present discussion, which covers Polish political emigration to Belgium and its contribution to the struggle for Poland's independence, it is worth noting the evaluation of scientific research on the problem, which, recalling the well-known Belgian researcher of Polish emigration Idesbald Goddeeris, requires some supplementation by both Polish and Belgian scholars dealing with this issue. This is because they inadequately

– according to Goddeeris – use the available historiographical materials. Radosław Żurawski vel Grajewski points out, which seems to be right, that Goddeeris – in addition to making apt observations (concerning the selectivity of the presented and analysed contents, certain repetitiveness, incomplete source basis) presents also those that may constitute a basis for a broader discussion. Goddeeris accuses the Polish authors, firstly, of a subjective approach which, according to him, gives the presented historical facts a heroic overtone and, secondly (as mentioned earlier), of not making full use of source materials (often available only in foreign languages; French and Dutch) [1, p. 106]. While the first objection can be partly explained by a cultural misunderstanding – having to do with emotions, tradition, and a sense of strong patriotism built up over centuries and passed down from generation to generation in Polish society – the second objection seems partly correct and, importantly, affects both Polish and Belgian historians. The researchers of the Great Emigration are faced with the challenge of a fuller penetration of foreign-language sources still largely unexplored today. Żurawski vel Grajewski, shows that despite the variety of sources used by Goddeeris, he did not take into account the works of Polish authors dealing with the problems of the Great Emigration, i.e. Alina Barszczewska-Krupa, Alina Witkowska, Maria Janion, and Marcelli Handelsman with his fundamental study on Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski [2, p. 321]. In response to the suggestions of the Polish historian, Goddeeris notices the gaps in his bibliography, although – as he claims – “they do not seem to him crucial from his specific Belgian point of view” [2, p. 322], although, as he admits, “some titles are indeed valuable” [2, p. 322]. It is worth mentioning at this point the leading Polish researchers of the past period – the list is not exhaustive – whose publications concerning the issues in question enjoy wide recognition and interest in scientific circles. These include the eminent Władysław Zajewski, Sławomir Kalembka (1936-2009), Stefan Kieniewicz (1907-1992), Bogusław Cygler, Maciej Kledzik, Marian Zgórnaiak, Jerzy Zdrada, Jerzy Skowronek, and many other highly regarded scholars who deal with the issue of the Great Emigration from a broad cognitive perspective, and, importantly, make use of foreign language materials, especially French.

1. Around the research on the Great Emigration in Belgium in the context of emerging scientific controversies

Among the problems of Polish emigration in the post-uprising period, two seem to be particularly important, i.e. the effectiveness of Polish political action in exile to regain Polish independence and the attitude of the host country authorities (in this case Belgium) towards Polish political exiles. The evaluation of these issues is not unequivocal in the opinion of both Polish and Belgian historians. Goddeeris, a researcher recognised also by the Polish scientific community, takes a somewhat skeptical stance as to, for example, the Polonophile sympathies of the Belgian society [3, p. 318-319], which, as he notes, could have appeared in literature, building a kind of myth about Belgian hospitality [1, p. 105, 115]. According to Goddeeris (also Reginald de Schryver or Liesbeth Vandersteene) [1, p. 106], the political class in Belgium at that time, in order to achieve their own goals, consciously used the Polish issue as a tool to achieve their own political intentions, i.e. within Belgian ideas for building an independent state, as well as for strengthening and internationalising their own vision [1, p. 115]. Goddeeris takes the position, not denying, as he claims, “genuine” then, “strong and sincere sympathy for Poles” [2, p. 325] that it would be too naive to “explain such emotions by support for the Polish cause” [2, p. 325] because – concludes the researcher – “own interests play a greater role in politics” [2, p. 325]. In a sense, one can agree with Goddeeris’s pragmatic approach to the issues discussed, but it should be noted that apart from this

hard-line policy, there were other (additional) points of contact that linked these two countries. The same national desires and ambitions: disagreement with “the disregard of their «Poles and Belgians’» national aspirations, a blatant violation of the will of the people, and the undisguised imperial dreams of the European powers” [4, p. 92]. In “Le Courrier Belge” it was written: “the Polish revolution has so many similarities with ours down to the smallest detail that we can anticipate the same successful solution” [4, p. 97]. Also on the eighth anniversary of the November Uprising, François de Gronckel, a representative of the youth of the Free University of Brussels, said: “Noble Poles! Your cause is also our cause, after all, you fought for us as well. [...] Perhaps the «fight» will soon flare up on other battlefields, perhaps it will be Belgium’s turn to shed blood for the common cause of the independence of nations. [...] Because we have learned from you how to fight in a just cause, bear misfortunes with dignity, convinced that we serve you as well as us” [5, p. 121].

Among the great friends of Poles – who are symbolically worth recalling – ardent defenders of the Polish cause, there were men of significant moral authority, members of the Provisional Government of Belgium proclaiming the independence of their country in September 1830: Louis de Potter, Alexander Gondebien, Charles Rogier [4, p. 202]. A number of Belgian sources indicate sympathy and even admiration for the Poles fighting for independence, as the following words may attest: “until this moment it was «written» the Poles’ uprising was seen as a heroic daring, but today it is to be seen as a great national sacrifice which will bring them freedom and independence. There is nothing more great and admirable in the annals of modern history” [6, p. 252]. Władysław Zajewski, an excellent expert on Polish-Belgian relations of the past period, presents the historical testimonies of Belgian sympathies for the Polish cause [1, p. 106] using, which is important in relation to Goddeeris’s allegations, source materials obtained in Belgian and French archives and libraries [7]. Zajewski writes: “A wave of adoration for the fighting Poland passed through Belgium and countless praises were given to its small, fearless army, whose successes were compared with the greatest successes of Napoleon Bonaparte. Belgian public opinion most intensively called on the whole of Europe to defend Poland” [4, p. 62-76]. At the same time, the historian emphasises the full awareness of Belgians of the achievements of Poles. In the excerpt from an article from 7 July 1831 in *Le Moniteur Belge*, which he quoted, we read: “Belgium owes Poland more than just admiration, it owes her life. Let us recall that it was Poland who laid its spade between Russia and us at the moment when the autocrat ‘Nicholas I’ hurled threats of war against Congress, and that it was Poland that defended us and still does against the blows of that emperor who dreams of exterminating the Belgians and subjugating Europe” [4, p. 14]. It is worth emphasising at this point – as Zajewski writes in his work – that the army of the Kingdom of Poland, “although small in number (40,000 soldiers and officers), was excellently trained and was ranked as one of the best on the European continent” [4, p. 14], while the Belgian army, as French Marshal Auguste-Daniel Belliard noted in a report of 6 March 1831, “is generally poorly organised, undisciplined, lacking in battalion chiefs and officers” [4, p. 93]. As General Daine informed the authorities in Brussels at that time, from November 1830 to June 1831, the Belgian army took part in the shooting exercises only once [4, p. 93]. The fact is that Polish soldiers and NCOs participated and gained experience in the Napoleonic Wars. Many of them were awarded the Legion of Honor by Napoleon. General Chłopicki was highly valued, and General Skrzynecki was also praised [8, p. 468]. The prominent Belgian historian F. van Kalken claimed that the armed revolution in Warsaw on November 29 saved Belgium from armed intervention of Russia, another one – F. de Lannoy – that thanks to Poland the Russian military forces were immobilised for long months [4, p. 21].

The success of the Polish army over the Russians in April, which could be read about in “Le Courrier Belge”, “filled our entire «Belgian» nation with joy. [...] Yesterday before the opening of the National Congress, our deputies had already learned the news, congratulated each other, hugged each other. All of them see in these victories the success of the most beautiful cause, a sure guarantee of European freedom, and especially the announcement of a quick and happy solution of the cause of the Belgian revolution” [4, p. 30]. Another Brussels daily wrote about Poland as “one of the bravest nations in the world” and hoped that it would “take its rightful place in Europe” [4, p. 30]. A sense of brotherhood and unity with the Poles on the part of the Belgian people was visible at almost every step. The opinions about Poland and Poles quoted (only fragmentarily) seem to confirm the existence of sympathy, mutual understanding, but also existing affinity (fight for independence, lack of consent for enslavement), which linked the two nations – Polish and Belgian. This does not deny, however, that apart from the sympathy of the Belgians, there was a tough policy, which could also have a different, less reassuring face for Poles [3; 9]. In the period of the surge of emigrants after the defeat of the Krakow Uprising and in later years (1848-1849), the situation of Poles in Belgium deteriorated significantly. Joachim Lelewel wrote about it in a letter to his friend, “A strange coldness came over, and what is more, a repulsion, an aversion. What have we done to Belgium? And this one has put itself in a hostile state since February” [4, p. 445].

2. The problem of Polish refugees’ activity: between political and economic emigration

A particularly important area of “disagreement” between Polish and Belgian scholars of the Great Emigration is the question of the political activity of Polish exiles. It seems that we are dealing here with extremely different descriptions of this activity, taking into account a number of – especially older – indigenous publications and Belgian scientific studies, among others by the already mentioned Idesbald Goddeeris [10]. In the polemic between Żurawski vel Grajewski and Goddeeris, there is a justified fear on the part of the Polish historian (who does not question the achievements of the Belgian scholar and the merits of his books) that the Belgian scholar’s attempt to deheroise the image of Polish exiles fighting for the freedom of their homeland can lead to an assessment of the Great Emigration in categories of purely economic exile [4, p. 521], or to treat the history of political refugees – as Goddeeris suggests – “through the prism of a sympathetic author writing about it” [11, p. 173]. It is difficult at this point not to refer to the Belgian scholar’s opinion regarding Polish historiography related to political refugees (“authoritatively unanimously positive”) [11, p. 174], which he calls “a kind of distinct historiographical tradition”. “In this tradition, «the researcher» tries to prove the existence of the influence of environments in exile – names and examples are given, and cases of Polish refugees who contributed to this or the other development of the situation are discussed in detail” [11, p. 174]. Perhaps we are dealing here with a misunderstanding (as mentioned earlier) by the speaker of the fullness of Polish culture, its traditions, values honored for centuries, the deep concern of Poles for their homeland, their attachment to it. This misunderstanding seems to confirm the researcher’s observation about bringing to Poland the ashes of great Polish patriots. In one of his works we read: “The cult of the refugees was so strong that even their remains were brought back to their homeland after death. Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki were reburied in the crypt at Wawel Cathedral in Cracow (even before 1914); some other exiles were buried in newly built mausoleums (e.g. General Józef Bem in Tarnów) or in honored places (e.g. Joachim Lelewel in Vilnius), and after

1989 the postwar exiles (e.g. gen. Sikorski) were also brought back to Poland” [11, p. 174-175]. Such recognition for refugees is not unique to Poles, as Goddeeris emphasises, “other nations also pay tribute to former exiles, if only because of their passive role as guardians of national independence or democratic traditions” [11, p. 174-175].

Presenting Polish post-uprising emigration, on the one hand, in the light of its heroic efforts for Polish independence or, on the other hand, attempting to deprive it of this heroism – which is after all, permanently inscribed in Polish history and well documented – is somehow in contradiction to the integrity of scientific research which, in the face of facts presented in this way, requires a certain historiographical balance and prudence. It therefore seems reasonable that Żurawski vel Grajewski’s thesis, which he presents, among other things, in one of his publications, that for a large part of the Polish exiles – certainly not for all of them – the Polish issue was a priority one. The researcher points out the number of forty committees, associations, and unions that operated between 1831 and 1862 and actively participated in political life to regain Poland’s independence. A prominent role, emphasises Żurawski vel Grajewski, was played by political magazines – from 121 to 130 titles – published in the period 1831-1863. It is also significant that 1.7 thousand titles of books and pamphlets of a similar character were published in exile and, it should be noted, they had their permanent recipients, which speaks for itself. Therefore, one can conclude, quoting a Polish historian, that “these data are sufficient evidence in favour of the thesis that a significant part of the exile, which until 1863 amounted to a total of approx. 15-16 thousand individuals was politically active. [...] The fact that 1848 is a caesura, both for the majority of press periodicals connected with various political groups, and often for the existence of these groups themselves, must be interpreted as a visible confirmation of the influence of politics on the life and activity of the Great Emigration” [12, p. 517]. Additionally, an important issue is the participation of Polish officers (soldiers) in exile, which will be discussed later, who formed military formations until 1863 thus giving evidence of their personal commitment to the Polish cause. Żurawski vel Grajewski rightly observes, in polemising with Goddeeris, that the participation of the Polish legions in fighting for their political ideas cannot be compared with legions of other nations fighting for freedom. It is also difficult to find, in analogy to Polish pro-freedom publications published for thirty years, similar “press titles [...] for emigres of other nations” [12, p. 517-518]. Thus, one cannot fully agree with the Belgian scholar that the representatives of the Great Emigration “resembled rather ordinary economic emigrants” and that “a considerable part of them did not constantly devote themselves to the Polish cause” [2, p. 323]. The very fact that the November Uprising differed significantly in scale (battles were fought for 325 days and these were battles conducted against the strongest power on the European continent at that time) from other military acts (the war in defense of the May 3 Constitution in 1792 lasted 70 days, the Kościuszko Insurrection – 200 days, and the Belgian resistance – for comparison – in the August war with the Netherlands – only 10 days) [4, p. 98] allows us to take the position that Polish heroism in the fight for independence is not a myth, and that the Polish cause was treated equally seriously by Poles living at home and those in exile. The Great Emigration in Belgium may not have been great in terms of the number of Polish refugees living within its borders, but it was certainly – as Kalembka, Kieniewicz, and Cygler emphasise – intellectually strong, hence great, and strongly influencing both compatriots and the Belgians themselves, which in the case of the latter is supported by examples [9, p. 61; 13, p. 23].

3. On the way to freedom – a Belgian emigrant accent

The character of Polish exile changed fundamentally by the end of the 18th century, when the very existence of the Polish state was threatened. At the same time, importantly, the awareness of Poles ready to defend their homeland increased. The origins of these new quality political emigrations date back to the defeat of the Bar Confederation and the lost Polish-Russian war of 1792 and the preparations for the Kosciuszko insurrection. Since then, until regaining independence in the 20th century, Polish political emigration was focused on the struggle for the freedom of the homeland. Its common goal, regardless of the political sympathies of the emigrants, was a sovereign Poland, whose vision involved all political forces both at home and abroad. This element essentially distinguished the Polish emigrations of the times of national uprisings from the more common emigrations resulting from struggles for power in more or less sovereign states [9, p. 194-252]. Poland of the era of national uprisings (1794-1863) was not the only, but certainly one of the largest countries of political exile. The tradition of political emigration from Poland, as indicated earlier, dates back to earlier years, but it was only the defeat of the November Uprising that “brought abroad at the same time a large group of politicians, military men, outstanding artists, and soldiers” [14, p. 137], which resulted in the creation of many organisations and institutions in exile of a political, scientific, cultural and self-help nature, a kind of Poland in exile. According to Kalemka, the Polish post-November emigration had a special national task, which was consciously accepted by most of its participants, influencing their activity on the way to Poland’s regaining independence [9, p. 194-252].

After the fall of the November Uprising, some Polish soldiers found refuge in Belgium. Among them, not right away¹ [15, p. 340], dozens of officers were accepted into the newly-formed Belgian army, which seems particularly significant, including in leadership positions. Their presence, according to sources, was subsequently highly valued [16]. One should mention here Ignacy Marcei Kruszewski, who was distinguished in the uprising (Colonel Kruszewski was admitted to the Belgian army on 30 April. He retained a military rank in the Polish army and was nominated as the commander of the 2nd regiment of mounted rifles), who in the years 1832-1852 commanded a Belgian cavalry division, or the chief of staff – in the same period – Lieutenant Colonel Feliks Prot de Pruszyński, who had to, among others, prepare lists of candidates for the formation of the Polish legion, which, incidentally, never came into existence [15, p. 341]. It is also worth mentioning that only as a result of a firm, negative reaction of Tsar Nicholas I, King Leopold I of Belgium refrained from appointing General Jan Zygmunt Skrzynecki as commander-in-chief [16]. General Skrzynecki, however, is an uneven character. By some Belgian historians he is shown as a great commander and a leader worthy of recognition, glorified for his personal bravery and merits in the battles of the Napoleonic period and the Polish-Russian war (1830-1831) [17-19]. According to Kledzik, such an assessment may have been influenced by the lack of knowledge of Polish sources and the opinions of Polish historians who were critical of the general. Jerzy Łojek, quoted by the researcher, described Skrzynecki in an extremely negative way: “he was a pathetic individual who was to squander and nullify the entire national effort” [15, p. 338]. According to Kledzik, an objective assessment of Skrzynecki could be provided by his contemporary, Stanisław Barzykowski,

¹ On 22 September 1831, a government law went into effect in Belgium regarding the admission into national service of as many foreign officers as were deemed useful and necessary for the good of the country. The law was created with French and English officers in mind. Polish military emigrants did not receive such an offer. This did not happen until the second half of February 1832.

an MP from Ostrołęka, a member of the National Government, an emigrant, a Knight of the Virtuti Militari Cross, and the author of a work of several volumes, "The History of the November Uprising" [20]. Barzykowski depicted Skrzynecki, on the one hand, as "lazy, sluggish, convenient, and without a sense of the value of time and accidents" [15, p. 339]; on the other, he paid him honor by writing of him as an "honorable, upright, religious" man [21, p. 339]. This religiousness, however, as he claimed, would lead Skrzynecki to "mysticism and fatalism". Barzykowski also saw merit in the general, pointing out that "he became a commander not by any intrigues, not by any efforts, but by his sword and valor" [20, p. 35-36]. The fact is that Gen. Skrzynecki, who was accused of lacking strategic vision and initiative and of squandering the chance to destroy the Russian Guard, was dismissed from his post of Commander-in-Chief on 12 August 1831, and five days later was expelled from the army. We also know the statement of Joachim Lelewel, an eminent Polish historian and spiritual leader of the democratic camp in exile, who spoke negatively about Skrzynecki. He was alleged to have said, "Gen. Skrzynecki was placed in the Belgian army in order to prevent and paralyse the uprising in the Polish lands" [21, p. 335]. On the other hand, Belgian military historians are unanimous in their opinions about Skrzynecki. They give him credit for the work he did for the benefit of their homeland. Skrzynecki, as we read, "created the Belgian army with a soldierly spirit with the help of Polish instructors, both officers and non-commissioned officers, who he brought as far as possible out of their misery in exile and called them to work with him" [22, p. 21-22].

The general's silhouette indicates inconsistency in the assessment of Polish historians regarding the presented figures of that period, which allows us to presume and at the same time to deny the suspicion that they unanimously positively evaluate the participants of national uprisings, representatives of post-uprising emigration, etc. The profile of Gen. Skrzynecki has been the subject of many scientific studies, including some in French [18; 19; 23]. It is worth noting that the Polish history do not avoid difficult polemics, which have accompanied the Poles for centuries. So it is with the Great Migration – its effectiveness, the role it played, the representation of emigrants, the divisions, the mutual accusations, etc. Without entering into these disputes, it is worth noting that Polish emigration (also in Belgium), despite its divisions, made a lasting mark in Polish history, paving the way to independence. It is significant that the Polish political circles in exile, as Żurawski vel Grajewski rightly observes, were the so-called "weak players" in the confrontation with the European powers, found themselves in a new situation and, relatively speaking, sought by all means to reverse the pages of history. Hence, it seems that even the smallest successes of Polish emigration – not necessarily spectacular – are proof of Polish patriotism and disagreement with the enslavement of the homeland. As already mentioned, Belgian sympathies towards the arriving Polish emigrants were clearly defined. Especially in the years 1831-1832 Polish exiles (intellectuals, politicians) were strongly supported by Belgian patriots representing, significantly, different political beliefs [24]. In terms of numbers, Polish emigrants staying in Belgium in the post-uprising period (and later) are estimated inconsistently [9, p. 66-67]. Kalemka, citing data from "Kalendarz Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego na rok 1838" ("Calendar of Polish Pilgrimages for 1838"), indicates the number of about one hundred people who came to Belgium [9, p. 66-67], a similar number of emigrants is cited by Goddeeris, using a Polish magazine published in Brussels (1837). However, as the Belgian historian notes, some hesitation must be allowed in this regard, especially in the so-called peak moments of emigration between 1833-1834 and 1837-1839. The researcher also points to a certain underestimation of Polish emigration that appeared in Belgium after the Cracow Uprising (1846) and which was not counted. According to him, this is the number of about one hundred new post-uprising emigrants from Poland seeking refuge in Belgium [10].

The strong intellectual dimension of Polish emigration is indicated by both Polish and foreign scholars, including Goddeeris, Hahn, Kalembka [25, p. 265]. They refer to Joachim Lelewel, Jan Skrzynecki, Jan Ledochowski, Franciszek Trzcicki, Wincenty Tyszkiewicz, Stanisław Worcell and many others [25, p. 265]. The first exiles arrived in Belgium in 1832 settling mainly in Brussels (also in Huy, Ostend, Nieupoort, Ypres). From the very beginning Wincenty and Ludwik Tyszkiewicz, MP Ludwik Pietkiewicz, Stanisław Kunatt, later Bonawentura Niemojowski and Alojzy Biernacki stayed there. In July 1833, Stanisław Worcell, Jan Czyński, Kazimierz Aleksander Pułaski, and Tadeusz Krępowiecki joined the ranks of Polish emigrants. The latter took up the editorship of the magazine "La Voix du Peuple", which under their influence turned into a journal of democratic propaganda and Polish interests [9, p. 69].

Joachim Lelewel (who emigrated to Belgium in 1833) is a figure who definitely unites Polish and Belgian historians and it is worthwhile to devote more attention to him in this study. Also because the aim of the Great Pole in exile was to unite the whole – as he stated, quasi-democratic, exile multitude in order to preserve its political character and uniform influence on the country [26, p. 9]. Under his influence it was written: "Emigration should join with the past and the future – this knot will only be lasting, permanent, great, it will be a new aurora for our nation. When we agree on the future and the past, on history and its consequences, unification in its highest article will be accomplished, half of the mission of emigration will be completed" [26, p. 41] or "one should spread the word of democracy among the brethren, discuss, eliminate the principles, opinions of the age; demonstrate the historical aspiration of society; to lay the foundations of a new order of things for a reborn Poland; in a word – gather and order the elements of a new social synthesis based on the whole historical past of the Polish nation" [26, p. 2]. It is interesting and at the same time significant that, despite Lelewel's efforts throughout the emigration period, he failed to achieve his intended goal, the unification of the emigration community, which of course does not diminish the role he played in exile. Established by him – after many difficulties – in 1937, it had many ardent supporters presenting the ideas of the organisation (although, it should be noted, differing in their point of view on many issues) [27, passim], among others visible in the pages of such magazines as: "Polak" (published in France), "Sprawy Emigracji" ("Emigration Affairs") (in Belgium), "Poles in Exile" (in Belgium), "Korespondent Emigracji Polskiej" ("Correspondent of Polish Emigration" (in France) and others, which played an awareness-raising role in a short period of time (from one to two years), encouraging the emigration circles to debate on issues important to Poland [26, p. 69]. Paradoxically, however, as Kalembka writes, this multiplicity of writings, not infrequently their internal split and conflation [28, p. 107] did not provide a good example of the unifying ideas that were the main driving force behind Lelewel's efforts to unite the emigration and then work to regain Poland's independence.

It is worth briefly referring to one of the periodicals founded on the initiative of Joachim Lelewel, "Sprawy Emigracji" ("Emigration Matters"), and then its continuation, i.e. magazine with the changed title, "Poles in Exile". "Sprawy Emigracji," intended for Poles residing in Belgium, France, and England (founded in Brussels in August 1837), was edited by Franciszek Gordaszewski and printed in a Polish company initiated by Lelewel. Gordaszewski, referring to Cygler, "deliberately brought to Brussels by young Poles as a former member of the Permanent Committee of Young Poland and one of its leading activists, and a former co-editor of Tygodnik Bezansoński" was a man of the pen, a person sought by the Brussels commune [27, p. 44]. The idea of the magazine, in its essence, can be described by recalling the words of its publisher: "It is not by divisions that we intend to win sympathy for ourselves, not by indulgence to attract Compatriots, but by truth, justice and pure morality. Not against persons, but

against vices we intend to fight” [27, p. 45]. From 15 January 1838, the magazine continued to operate under a changed title, “Polacy na Tułactwie” („Poles in the Exile”) (probably to confuse the French authorities, who were hostile to its distribution to France) [26, p. 45-46]. The idea of the journal, the purpose and the principles of its publication have not changed. The only significant change was that Walenty Zwierkowski, a Polish independence journalist, politician, participant in the Napoleonic wars and the November Uprising joined the team. It is worth noting that Lelewel did not publish his articles in the press. Today we would say that he embraced the journals with his patronage, influencing them indirectly [29, p. 156]. The common point of all the writings was the struggle for a free Poland, to which “the emigration should put the sword in hand, take on all enemies with its own breast [...] sacrifice itself” [27, p. 41]. Although the future Poland was seen from different perspectives, it seems that their visions were in many points tangential to each other. If we take into account, for example, democratic tendencies, Poland is seen – as a “democratic republic, one and indivisible, stretching from the Oder to the Dnieper and from the Baltic to the Carpathians [...] able to lead the whole Slavic region and bring real freedom to the peoples of Europe” [26, p. 4] – it had in some sense much in common with Lelewel’s picture of a future Poland. In the eyes of a great democrat, it appeared as “a state federation formed from a voluntary union of various nations united on the basis of a community of interests” [27, p. 49]. Lelewel became known in Belgium, already at the beginning of his stay in Brussels, which was one of the important ideological centers of the democratic camp (periodically also organisational), as an ardent advocate of the Polish cause and a great patriot. On 29 November 1833, he organised the first celebrations commemorating the November Uprising, at which independence ideas were proclaimed and followed by the entire emigration. It is worth noting that these celebrations organised by Lelewel had an impact on deepening Polish-Belgian friendship. They were often chaired by a great friend of the Poles, Alexander Gendebien, who was one of the main founders of Belgian independence and an activist in the committee providing assistance to political refugees. Quoting Mierzbach, “the godly tradition of ordination on 29 November lived for many years, until the death of Aleksander Gendebien in 1869. The funeral eulogies delivered over his coffin emphasised all that he had done for Poland” [30, p. 155-156].

The Belgian capital was the place where Polish emigration organisations were established. One of them was Ogół Brukselski (Brussels Assembly), another (secret) was Związek Dzieci Ludu Polskiego (Association of Children of the Polish People) (dispatch center directing the national activity of Young Poland), established by Joachim Lelewel, Wincenty Tyszkiewicz and Walenty Zwierkowski. The Brussels Assembly, which represented (as the BA Council claimed) all Poles in Belgium, contributed, among other things, to the creation of the United Polish Emigration, while the Association of the Children of the Polish People was famous for its emissary activities. He sent to Poland the most outstanding emissaries and conspirators of independence, such as Szymon Konarski. It is worth mentioning at this point that in the years 1839-1848 the main press organ of this organisation was published in Brussels with a significant title “Orzeł Biały” (“White Eagle”). Finally, on 11 July 1948, the Polish National Committee – managing the Union of Polish Emigration was established in the capital [9, p. 71]. Among the well-known Poles who settled in Belgium one can also mention the orientalist Aleksander Chodźko, the democratic priest Kazimierz Aleksander Walicki, Andrzej Towański, Ludwik Mierosławski, Wiktor Heltman, Ludwik Ozeasz Lubliner and many other Poles of merit for their homeland [31, p. 167].

Conclusions

Polish emigration, as Maurycy Mochnacki wrote, “has its own separate, historical character, not similar to the emigration of any other contemporary people [...]. We are soldiers of the independence of our country, citizens of the future Poland” [32, p. 2]. Many years later, the Polish historian Sławomir Kalemka emphasised the rightful name – as he wrote – given to this history by researchers of political emigration, because “in terms of political mobility, wealth of cultural, ideological and journalistic output, and inspiring role towards the oppressed nation, it had and has few equals in the history of not only Poland, but also of the world” [9, p. 67]. Also another great researcher of Polish history, Władysław Zajewski, emphasised: “it turned out that the emigration recognised that it had lost the battle of 1831, but it had not lost the war [...]. It was the post-November emigration who once again brought the «Polish issue» before the tribunal of European opinion, demanding the rebuilding of a sovereign Polish state. Thanks to their tireless efforts and actions in 1832-1870, the «Polish issue» became an integral part of European politics, despite the non-existence of the Polish state” [4, p. 229]. According to Zajewski, the Polish post-November emigration turned out to be “an extraordinary phenomenon in the life of Europe, not only because of its numbers, high moral and intellectual values, but also because of its unprecedented political activity and its ability to oppose anti-Polish propaganda, financed by the diplomatic offices of the states participating in the partitions” [4, p. 229].

The Great Emigration described by Polish historians is called “unanimously positive” by Idesbald Goddeeris, and the words “huge”, “importance”, “role”, and “influence” in relation to European culture, politics, history, and also civilization, unnecessarily overused [11, p. 174-175]. According to him, the process of shaping the Polish nation (not all political activities were – as he claims – useless) was due to “internal disputes about strategies of political activities, Polish identity, social issues, emancipation ideas, etc., which had «democratising function»” [2, p. 325]. It seems that in the Polish evaluation of the Great Emigration, apart from the agreement about this “demokratisierungsfunktion” indicated by Goddeeris, there is another important element, accompanying Poles for ages, and related to the ideas of freedom, independence and “the necessity of the existence of a Polish state” [4, p. 235]. Artur Śliwiński, the Prime Minister of Poland in 1922 (senator of the 4th and 5th term in the 2nd Republic of Poland) understood it very well. He referred to the November Uprising saying: “What was initiated on 29 November 1830 – was finished on 11 November, 1918” [33, p. 760].

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The author declared no conflict of interests.


Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Polacy w Belgii wobec kwestii odrodzenia niepodległego państwa polskiego

STRESZCZENIE

Problematyka udziału polskiej emigracji politycznej w walkach wolnościowych oraz jej wszechstronna działalność w dziedzinie politycznej, naukowej oraz kulturalnej znajduje swoje odbicie na kartach historii Polski (Europy), stanowiąc tym samym cenny materiał badawczy dla kolejnych pokoleń. Polskie wychodźstwo porozbiorowe, zwłaszcza po największych powstaniach narodowych, koncentrowało się głównie we Francji, Anglii oraz Belgii. Polską emigrację w Belgii, podobną w pewnym stopniu do emigracji we Francji – aczkolwiek mniejszą liczebnie – stanowiła kolonia polska, którą reprezentowali m.in. żołnierze szukający schronienia po powstaniu listopadowym (wśród nich kilkudziesięciu oficerów, np. Ignacy Kruszewski, Feliks Prot de Pruszyński, Jan Zygmunt Skrzynecki, Władysław Zamoyski) oraz przedstawiciele kultury i nauki, Joachim Lelewel (wybitny polski historyk, duchowy przewodnik emigracyjnego obozu demokratycznego),

Stanisław Worcell (myśliciel i społecznik, aktywny działacz Wielkiej Emigracji) oraz wielu innych wybitnych Polaków.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie roli polskiej emigracji w Belgii, jej wkładu w walkę o odzyskanie niepodległości przez Polskę oraz zwrócenie uwagi na spór naukowy, jaki toczy się wokół Wielkiej Emigracji między polskimi a belgijskimi historykami odnośnie do efektów „polityki na wygnaniu” oraz kwestii heroizmu polskich patriotów na uchodźstwie. Niniejsze rozważania stanowią przyczynek do szerszej dyskusji i zachętę do głębszej penetracji literatury (materiałów źródłowych) dotyczącej Wielkiej Emigracji, zwłaszcza – jeżeli dotyczy Belgii – dostępnej w językach obcych – francuskim oraz niderlandzkim.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Wielka Emigracja, patriotyzm, polska emigracja polityczna, Belgia

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