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THERE WAS NOT ONE CAUSA EFFICIENS
OF POLAND’S PARTITIONS

There was not and perhaps could not be one causa efficiens of the collapse and the partitions of the Polish Republic. Neither traditionally interpreted relations nor the so-called sufficient conditions can explain the problem. This does not only concern this specific event. To the contrary, it is of broader interest for the whole puzzling issue of the fall of certain state systems and the rise of others. It is too often in such cases that scholars resort to conjectures or highly exaggerated principal factors analyzed separately. It is also all too often that we apply the so-called counterfactual questions and inferences. While relativized to certain conditions, they are formulated in the following manner: “would it have been so and so if this or that had happened?” (e.g., absolutism in Poland in modern times) or “what would have happened if this or that had occurred.”¹ It is not enough to reach back to a “disturbing factor” of a system that is closed to a certain extent and that is composed of the institutions, politics and culture of the Sarmatians. This is not enough even if we adopt the view that this factor (I am referring to an act of external aggression) became particularly active on the territory of Poland as well, and that it affected all remaining conditions of historical background that were favorable to it. In the system of active components, we should be interested in a longer process of accumulation, which is not merely in a certain framework of separately definable components, but in their dialectic and integrating set, specified by tensions and feedbacks that are significant for it. Our interest should be not only in a certain course of events but in a historical time proper for the epoch.²

¹ Giedymin (1965), p. 23.
² For an excellent introduction into these problems, see Lange (1964); Seberg (1964); and Topolski (1965), pp. 5f.

This does not mean that one must necessarily embrace unrestrained pluralism and enter the grounds of interactionism that is so characteristic of the functionalist school, according to which everything, therefore in our case the “whole” of collapse of our former state, would be determined with equal force by the all operating elements. All the elements engaged in that process, as we perceive it, would then be treated as equally valid. It seems that even if one does not relapse into the extremes of economic materialism, the priority should be awarded to elements of economics, that is production forces and relations of production as well as their derivations, i.e., social structures. However, it would be by no means synonymous with further diminution of the importance of institutions, ideas, culture. This is because only all the macrocomponents of the macrosystem under consideration or, in other words, the sphere, make up a network of linkages that is discussed in the present study. Even if one does not separate the so-called internal and external causes of the collapse, which would be nonsense, it is not possible not to award a logical priority to causes of the first type. These causes, however, must be conditioned by the general system of forces and developments in Europe. We should be constantly aware of the fact that while conducting the entire reasoning we are not after photographing events. Rather, we pursue the task of scientific reconstruction. The circumstances which are subject to the present analysis and which have occurred for at least the past two centuries include: the territory and its physical and geographical as well as demographic diversity; the division of Europe; the economic and social structures; the culture of the masses of nobility as a sum of prevailing patterns of thinking and political conduct in over a long period of time; and the degeneration and corruption of the initially admirably interesting institutions, which in the 16th and 17th century strived to provide an alternative the absolutism developing in other countries. Once we have properly reconstructed the entire feedback of those components, we will find a proper place for the effective role of the military aggression and political penetration of the three powers that partitioned Poland.

The aggression was the immediate direct component of the macrosystem under discussion. All kinds of tendencies found its expression in it. The partitioning powers started the aggression upon Poland and Lithuania after a longer period of internal transformations and in the course of consolidating the system of enlightened absolutism. Hence, the conditions for the development of Russia emerged upon encouragement on the part of the people gathered around Peter the Great, especially since the first two decades of the 18th century, and then during