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TO RESCUE THE KING OF FRANCE. THE ACTIONS OF THE STOCKHOLM COURT ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE IN THE YEARS 1791-1792

**Na ratunek władcy Francji. Działania dworu sztokholmskiego na arenie
międzynarodowej w latach 1791-1792**

Abstrakt

W artykule opisano próby ratowania monarchii francuskiej podejmowane przez Gustawa III, ówczesną sytuację polityczną w Europie oraz stosunek poszczególnych mocarstw europejskich do rewolucji francuskiej. Autorzy starają się ukazać wzajemne powiązania polityki dworu sztokholmskiego wobec rewolucyjnej Francji oraz działań króla Szwecji w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. Artykuł wykorzystuje często pomijane źródła, jak korespondencja szwedzkich dyplomatów z Petersburga, Madrytu i Warszawy, czy też archiwalia z Rikssarkivet w Sztokholmie. Stanowi tym samym cenne uzupełnienie badań prowadzonych nad opisywanym problemem przez współczesnych badaczy zagadnienia.

Słowa kluczowe: Gustaw III; Ludwik XVI; rewolucja francuska; historia Szwecji

Abstract

The article describes Gustav III's attempts to save the French monarchy, the then political situation in Europe, and the attitude of individual European powers to the French Revolution. The authors try to show a close relation between the policy of the Stockholm court towards revolutionary France and the actions of the king of Sweden in Central and Eastern Europe.

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The study uses hitherto neglected sources such as correspondence of Swedish diplomats from St Petersburg, Madrid and Warsaw, or records found in the Riksarkivet in Stockholm. Thus, the presented article should fill the existing research gap in the abovementioned area of interest.

Keywords: Gustav III; Louis XVI; French Revolution; history of Sweden

Introduction

The policy of King Gustav III of Sweden towards the French Revolution has long drawn the attention of scholars. It is worth mentioning the classic works of Auguste Geffroy³ – the first scholar to characterize Swedish-French relations during the reign of Gustav III; Rudolf Klinckowström,⁴ the publisher of Count Hans Axel von Fersen's diary and letters; Nils Åkeson,⁵ the author of the book on the Swedish diplomacy in the era of the Great French Revolution; or Alma Söderhjelm,⁶ who published several papers devoted to the Count Fersen and Marie Antoinette, as well as wrote a monumental monograph in which she discussed Swedish-French relations during the French Revolution. Munro Price,⁷ in turn, mainly on the basis of the correspondence of Gustav III with the Baron de Breteuil, presented the Stockholm court relations with the French royal couple in the last months of Gustav III's reign. He later described those issues in one chapter of his book on the fall of the French monarchy in 1792. However, Munro Price mainly concentrated on the French royal couple and their internal as well as foreign policy, not on the policy of Gustav III towards revolutionary France. Also one of the last non-Swedish biographers of Gustav III, Claude Nordmann,⁸ only signalled an attitude of the king of Sweden to the French Revolution. More recently, Leif Landen⁹ and Hans van Koningsbrugge¹⁰ have described Gustav III's life. Yet, they have not addressed issues discussed in the very article.

The authors of the present article concentrate especially on the crisis of the French monarchy in the years 1789-1792. A lot of attention is paid to Gustav III's unsuccessful attempts to build an anti-French and anti-revolutionary coalition of European monarchs. As it turns out, in the current literature of the subject the Swedish king's intention to organize an armed crusade against revolutionary France is usually omitted or only briefly described.

³ A. Geffroy, *Gustave III et la cour de France. Suivi d'une étude critique sur Marie-Antoinette et Louis XVI apocryphes*, 2 vols, Paris 1867.

⁴ *Le comte de Fersen et la cour de France. Extraits des papiers du grand maréchal de Suède, comte Jean Axel de Fersen*, 2 vols, ed. R.M. Klinckowström, Paris 1877.

⁵ N. Åkeson, *Gustaf III:s förhållande till franska revolutionen*, 2 vols, Lund 1885.

⁶ *Axel von Fensens dagbok*, 4 vols, ed. A. Söderhjelm, Stockholm 1925; A. Söderhjelm, *Fersen et Marie-Antoinette. Journal intime et correspondance du comte Axel de Fersen*, Paris 1939; eadem, *Sverige och den franska revolutionen. Bidrag till kännedom om Sveriges och Frankrikes inbördes förhållande I slutet av 1700-talet*, 2 vols, Stockholm 1920.

⁷ M. Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy. Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette and the baron de Breteuil*, Sydney 2003; idem, *Louis XVI and Gustavus III: Secret Diplomacy and Counter-revolution, 1791-1792*, "The Historical Journal", 1999, vol. 42(2), p. 436-438.

⁸ C. Nordmann, *Gustave III un démocrate couronné*, Lille 1986.

⁹ L. Landen, *Gustaf III. En biografi*, Michigan 2004.

¹⁰ J. v. Koningsbrugge, *Gustav III: tyrant or martyr?*, in: *Trade, diplomacy and cultural exchange: continuity and change in the North Sea area and the Baltic c. 1350-1750*, ed. H. Brand, Utrecht 2005, p. 211-219.

The authors try to look at the problem from a broader perspective, showing a close relation between the policy of the Stockholm court towards revolutionary France and the actions of the king of Sweden in Central and Eastern Europe. Among other things, they discuss how the efforts of Gustav III for the Polish crown, as well as his relations with Russia, influenced Sweden's policy of that time.

The presented study is an article on the history of diplomacy and as such it is based on extensive source material. It is based on records found in the Riksarkivet in Stockholm (e.g. Gallica, Hispanica, Muscovitica, I. Handskriftsamlingen: Gustaf III, Evert Taubes Samling, Hans Axel von Fersens Samling), as well as numerous printed sources and studies, both modern and contemporary. The study of hitherto neglected sources such as correspondence of Swedish diplomats from St Petersburg, Madrid and Warsaw should fill the existing research gap in the abovementioned area of interest.

Sweden and its relations with France between 1771 and 1791

Gustav III (reigning from 1771 to 92) was one of the most important representatives of the so-called "Enlightened absolutism" as well as the last Swedish ruler who successfully fought against Russia. Almost every historical book describes him as the king who made the monarchist *coup d'état* in August 1772, breaking the power of the Swedish parliament (the *Riksdag*) and putting an end to the "Age of Liberty" in the history of Sweden. Gustav III's plans and actions in 1791-92 did not spring from nowhere: they should be understood in the context and as the continued evolution of his earlier policies, which will be briefly sketched below.

After the coup of August 19, 1772, it was Versailles that prevented the intervention of Russia, Prussia and Denmark in Sweden. Thus, on February 27, 1773, the three-year secret subsidy treaty between Sweden and France was signed in Paris. When Louis XV died on May 10, 1774, his twenty-year old grandson, Louis XVI, did not change France's policy towards Sweden. Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, a former ambassador in Stockholm and the co-founder of the August coup, became France's new *Ministre des Affaires Étrangères* and on September 25, 1775, the subsidy treaty with Sweden was renewed for another three years.¹¹ Then, on December 2, 1778, France and Sweden signed a new subsidy treaty in Versailles. When it expired on July 19, 1784, Gustav III and Louis XVI signed a secret convention on friendship and subsidies. The treaty was to remain in force for five years, starting from July 1.¹²

At the end of the 1780s Gustav III was clearly aiming at an armed conflict. The new head of the French diplomacy, Armand Marc de Montmorin (Charles de Vergennes died on February 13, 1787), advised the ruler of Sweden against starting a war without France's consent. Nevertheless, at the end of June 1788, Gustav III provoked an incident on the Russian

¹¹ Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja szwedzka wobec kryzysu monarchii we Francji w latach 1787-1792*, Łódź 2000, p. 72-80; R.N. Bain, *Gustavus III and his Contemporaries 1746-1792. An Overlooked Chapter of Eighteenth Century History*, vol. 1, London 1894, p. 135-136, 196-198; A. Geffroy, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 169-183, 204-287; A. Söderhjelm, *Sverige och den...*, vol. 1, p. 40, 43-44; *Projet d'un traité d'alliance entre le Roi Très Chrétienne et le Roi de Suède*, (8bre 1772), Riksarkivet in Stockholm (hereafter RA), Gallica 555.

¹² Z. Anusik, *France in Sweden's Foreign Policy in the Era of Gustav III's Reign 1771-1791*, Łódź 2016, p. 83-98; O. Jägerskiöld, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, vol. 2, part 2, Stockholm 1957, p. 272, 278; C.T. Odhner, *Gustaf III och Katarina II åren 1783-1784*, Stockholm 1879; *Pacte d'union entre S.M. le Roi de Suède et S.M. Très Chrétienne fait à Versailles le 19 Julliet 1784* (copie), RA, Gallica vol. 558.

border. Yet, as early as at the end of August 1788, the Swedish king's situation was almost tragic. He was saved, however, by the Danish invasion on Sweden that was stopped already in November thanks to the intervention of English and Prussian diplomats. The king cunningly convinced the three lower estates to join him in the fight against both the Danes and the noble rebels. On February 21, 1789, Gustav III presented to the *Riksdag* an amendment to the constitution of 1772, that was adopted by acclamation. On April 28, the monarch dissolved the *Riksdag* and abolished the State Council on May 11, 1789. From that moment on, no-one was the slightest doubt that all power was concentrated in the king's hands.¹³

Since the outbreak of the Swedish-Russian war the internal situation of France had not been the main point of interest of Gustav III, who was observing French events through the prism of his own military failures. He expected a regular payment of subsidies from his ally, as well as diplomatic intervention in St Petersburg and Copenhagen. When he realized that France would not support him, he turned to the Triple Alliance (England, Prussia and Holland). Jacques Necker's appointment to the post of the *Directeur Général des Finances* did not impress him much, as on September 15, 1788, he wrote to his favourite trusted adviser and friend, Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, that he believed neither the fact that France would overcome its internal crisis soon, nor that under the new minister's rule the French foreign policy would be activated.¹⁴

Gustav III, in reality, strongly disapproved of the domestic and foreign policy of Louis XVI and his ministers. He was outraged by the fact that Versailles had failed to provide him with assistance in the war against Russia. He vented his frustration upon receiving information that the French Ambassador to Stockholm, Louis Marc, Marquis de Pons, had been ordered by the *Ministre des Affaires Étrangères* to return to Paris. Gustav III voiced his harsh criticism against France's recent policy in the letters to his Secretary of State, Ulric Gustaf Franc.¹⁵ He wrote to him on October 13, 1789:

France is nothing at the moment. I am not going to be a friend of this crowd of demagogues who have gathered at Versailles, and Louis XVI is such a nonentity as a doge of Venice deprived of everything

while the following day he noted on the message of U.G. Franc of September 30 that:¹⁶

Mr de Gaussen is a dignified representative of his king, who has no common sense. I have disowned the French and France since it became oligarchical and republican. As far as republicans are concerned, I much more prefer the English.

¹³ Z. Anusik, *Przykład szwedzki – konfederacja z Anjala*, in: *Król a prawo stanów do oporu*, ed. M. Markiewicz, E. Opaliński, R. Skowron, Kraków 2010, p. 163-180; L. Ericson, *Kriget till lands 1788-1790*, in: *Gustav III:s ryska*, ed. G. Artéus, Stockholm 1992, p. 80-83; J. Glete, *Kriget till sjöss 1788-1790*, in: *Gustav III:s ryska*, p. 141-148; I. de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, New Haven-London 1981, p. 401-403, 409; W. Tham, *Konung Gustaf III och rikets ständer vid 1789 års riksdag*, Stockholm 1866.

¹⁴ Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Leksand, 15 IX 1788, *Konung Gustaf III bref till friherre G.M. Armfelt* (hereafter *Bref till Armfelt*), in: *Historiska Handlingar*, vol. 12, ed. E. Tegnér, Stockholm 1883, p. 39.

¹⁵ Gustav III's note on U.G. Franc's letter of 26 IX 1789, Lovisa, 13 X 1789, *Kon. Gustaf III:s Bref till Riks-Drottsen Grefve Axel Wachtmeister och Stats-Sekreteraren Ulric Gustaf Franc, efter handskrifter på Trolle-Ljungby* (hereafter *Bref till Wachtmeister och Franc*), ed. G. Andersson, Örebro 1860, p. 146.

¹⁶ Gustav III's note on U.G. Franc's letter of 30 IX 1789, Lovisa, 14 X 1789, in: *Bref till Wachtmeister och Franc*, p. 147-148.

On November 11, 1789, Gustav III received the news about the October incidents in Versailles (the women's march on Versailles) and Paris (the transition of the headquarters of the court and of the *Assemblée nationale constituante* to Paris). He prepared the necessary orders for France the same day, requesting him to assure the French *chargé d'affaires* at Stockholm, the Chevalier de Gausson, that he was keenly interested in all that concerned the king of France, and that if he had not been so involved in the war with Russia, he would never have left his old friend to his own fate. He indeed could do very little for Louis XVI at that time. After the campaign of 1789, he was returning to Stockholm just to start preparations for the following year's military operation.¹⁷

The peace treaty with Russia signed on August 14, 1790, in Värälä did not solve any of Gustav III's problems. Sweden came out of the war with an empty treasury and the first symptoms of serious economic crisis. The Swedish noblemen abhorred their monarch and were bound to cause problems in the domestic policy. At this time Gustav III decided to interrupt the Stockholm negotiations with the representatives of the Triple Alliance that ruled out the possibility of a broad coalition of England, Prussia, Holland, Sweden, Turkey and the Republic of Poland against St Petersburg.¹⁸

Meanwhile, on October 19, 1790, Gustav III informed his envoy to Warsaw, Lars von Engeström, about his candidacy for the Polish crown. The Swedish king believed that Russia, embroiled in the war with Turkey, and the Prussian court, whose policy had frequently undermined the Poles' trust (e.g. the first partition of Poland), could not interfere with his plans.¹⁹ He desperately needed money to pay off the debts and finance his new political aspirations. Consequently, in case it was impossible to obtain the Polish crown, he did not rule out the possibility that Sweden would participate in an eventual partition of Poland. At the same time, the Swedish king was considering other possibilities of increasing his influence in the international arena. In early 1791, he presented St Petersburg and Copenhagen with a project of an alliance. It cannot be ruled out that Denmark and Russia, among other things, were to be his future allies in the war against revolutionary France.²⁰

As the abovementioned agreement had not been signed yet, in February 1791, Gustav III re-started negotiations with Berlin and London. His position in the international arena was undoubtedly strong at that time. In the spring of 1791, the royal envoy to St Petersburg, Curt von Stedingk, wrote as follows: "*The whole world thinks that Your Majesty maintains*

¹⁷ Gustav III's note on U.G. Franc's letter of 28 X 1789, Borgå, 11 XI 1789, in: *Bref till Wachtmeister och Franc*, p. 151.

¹⁸ B. Hennings, *Gustav III. En biografi*, Stockholm 1957, p. 299-302, 309.

¹⁹ The Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in August 1787. Yet, Russia's political situation was much better than that of 1768. Austria was now an ally, Poland seemed under control, France was destructed by its internal troubles and its defeat in the Low Countries, while Britain and Prussia, similarly occupied there, were eager to enter into an alliance. See P.W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*, New York 1996, p. 56-57.

²⁰ More information on Gustav III's aspirations to the Polish crown see Z. Anusik, *O polską koronę. Dwór sztokholmski wobec kwestii sukcesji tronu w Polsce w dobie Sejmu Czteroletniego*, in: *Studia i materiały z dziejów nowożytnych*, ed. K. Matwijowski, S. Ochmann-Staniszevska, Wrocław 1995, p. 147-167; idem, *Szwedzki rywal Fryderyka Augusta. Gustaw III wobec projektów sukcesji tronu w Polsce w latach 1790-1792*, "Rocznik Łódzki", 1997, vol. 44, p. 89-115. At the same time Gustav III began to toy with the idea of taking action against Denmark and conquering Norway. See O. Jägerskiöld, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 337-338; B. v. Schinkel, *Minnen ur Sveriges nyare historia samlade af...*, ed. C.W. Bergman, Stockholm 1852, p. 161-166.

a balance in his hands”.²¹ Yet, in the meantime, the parliament opposition in England paralyzed William Pitt’s plan to send a fleet to the Baltic Sea which, in turn, forced Prussia to retreat from the project, too.²² At the end of April 1791, it became obvious that the expected conflict would never break out. Soon after, the king received the news that the Diet in Warsaw had adopted the Constitution of May 3, and Frederick Augustus III, Elector of Saxony, was appointed the successor to Stanisław August Poniatowski. Efforts for the Polish crown had not been abandoned by the Swedish diplomacy until the summer of 1791, though.²³ Even after May 3, as late as June 26, 1791, the king of Sweden wrote to Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt: ²⁴

Polish affairs should be set aside, but I do not perceive them as a lost case. Still, there has not yet come the time when the fight for this new Helena [Elector Frederick Augustus III’s daughter, Maria Augusta Nepomucena of Saxony] will start, who should bring the crown to her future husband as her dowry.

The state of the Polish affairs spawned Gustav III’s growing interest in the ongoing French Revolution, and made him finally draw closer attention to the events taking place in France. Already on September 3, 1790, the Swedish king wrote to Evert Taube, his friend and main adviser on the foreign policy matters. In a bold simile, which reveals much about his education and imagination, Gustav III cast himself in an epic role:²⁵

It seems to me that the mess is at its highest there and such a league as the Greeks had organized against Troy should be arranged to restore order and avenge the honour of the crowned heads. I would love to be Agamemnon of that army.

For the first time Gustav III considered the possibility of organizing a large monarchist crusade against revolutionary France. He assumed that Hans Axel von Fersen, a friend of Marie Antoinette, would help him in achieving the goal. Born in Stockholm on September 4, 1755, he was a very handsome man and Marie Antoinette, who introduced him to a narrow circle of her closest friends, almost instantly fell in love with him. He was maintaining close relations with the queen for years. It was even rumoured that would-be Louis XVII born on March 27, 1785, was Fersen’s son.²⁶

Fersen revealed a project of Louis XVI’s escape from Paris to the king of Sweden already in his letter of January 7, 1790. As early as at the beginning of February 1790, he received letters authenticating him at the post of an ambassador in France in the place of Erik Magnus Staël von Holstein. The nomination, however, was secret and conditional. Fersen was to use

²¹ A fragment of the letter of C. v. Stedingk to Gustav III, R.H. Lord, *Drugi rozbiór Polski*, Warszawa 1973, p. 122.

²² Britain was the then ally of Prussia and the Dutch United Provinces. It was involved in a quarrel with Spain (France’s ally) over Nootka Sound on the north-west coast of North America and adopted the policy of strict neutrality in Europe. See P.W. Schroeder, op. cit., p. 58, 63, 70.

²³ Stanisław August Poniatowski to A. Deboli, Warsaw, 16 and 26 III 1791, *Rok nadziei i rok klęski: 1791-1792. Z korespondencji Stanisława Augusta z posłem polskim w Petersburgu Augustynem Deboli*, ed. J. Łojek, Warszawa 1964, p. 35, 37-38.

²⁴ Z. Anusik, *Misja polska w Sztokholmie w latach 1789-1795*, Łódź 1993, p. 119.

²⁵ Gustav III to E. Taube, 3 IX 1790, RA, Stafsundsarkivet, Evert Taubes Samling, vol. 1.

²⁶ Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja szwedzka...*, p. 108, 114-115, 117, 119, 266; H.A. Barton, *Count Hans Axel von Fersen. Aristocrat in an Age of Revolution*, Boston 1975, p. 38; A. Carlsson, E. Elstob, *Introduction*, in: A. v. Fersen, *Rescue the Queen. A Diary of the French Revolution 1789-1793*, ed. A. Carlsson, E. Elstob, London 1971, p. 3-6; *The Letters of Marie Antoinette, Fersen and Barnave*, ed. O.G. Heidenstam, London 1926, p. 1-26.

the letters in question only if the king's departure from Paris was successful. From that time on, he was responsible for managing the necessary contacts between the royal family in the Tuileries, the main adviser of the French royal couple, Louis Auguste Le Tonnelier, Baron de Breteuil, in Switzerland, and General François Claude Amour, Marquis de Bouillé, whose loyal army in Lorraine was Louis XVI's intended destination.²⁷

The Swedish king's first attempts to restore *ancien régime* in France

From the beginning of April 1791, Gustav III was up to date with all the actions his Paris conspirers undertook. In the meantime, the Swedish king was negotiating with Russia the latter's future intervention in France. On May 10, 1791, he wrote to his envoy to St Petersburg, Curt von Stedingk, that the events of April 18 and 19 (riots in front of the Tuileries Palace), had exposed Louis XVI to such an obvious danger that he himself resolved to help the king. He ended the letter with a statement that he invariably aimed at closing his negotiations with Catherine II.²⁸ Undoubtedly, the king was sincere at this point because at that time Gustav III was preparing to leave for Aachen from where he intended to follow the results of the conspiracy formed in Paris.

On May 17, 1791, a day before the arrival of the Russian ambassador, Otto Magnus von Stackelberg, Gustav III wrote an extensive letter from Stockholm to the Baron de Breteuil. Getting down to business, the ruler of Sweden offered 6,000 trained Swedish soldiers and six liners to restore *ancien régime* in France. In return, France was to provide him with the funds necessary to keep and transport the troops, as well as with unlimited command when on the battlefield. As soon as the previous rights of the French king were restored, the former Swedish-French alliances were to be restored. However, the amount of yearly subsidies should increase. If, however, Spain was to become interested in France's misfortunes in the near future, then it could provide the money needed for the whole operation. If Gustav III's proposal was accepted, the Baron de Breteuil should inform him which port near France would be at his disposal. Finally, the king of Sweden stressed that Louis XVI should not negotiate with his subjects. From his own experience, he perfectly knew what it meant to be surrounded by enemies and struggle against anarchy and insubordination at home.²⁹

Gustav III never intended to personally negotiate with the Russian envoy. He had already resolved to travel to Aachen where he intended to await the outcome of Louis XVI's escape. His entrusted informers, G.M. Armfelt and Ulric Franc, were supposed to complete the negotiations with the Russian ambassador Otto von Stackelberg. On May 24, 1791, they had signed the treaty and a secret convention on the mutual cooperation of the two courts against Prussia and England. Armfelt had also signed a secret protocol on the future mutual

²⁷ H.A. v. Fersen to E. Taube, Paris, 4 and 7 II 1790, RA, Stafsundsarkivet, Evert Taubes Samling 2; M. Price, *Louis XVI and...*, p. 436-438; T. Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, Cambridge 2003, p. 45-47.

²⁸ Gustav III to C. v. Stedingk, the Hague Palace, 10 V 1791, RA, Muscovitica vol. 489; Z. Anusik, *France in Sweden's...*, p. 301-302; H.A. Barton, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁹ Gustav III to L.A. de Breteuil, the Hague Palace, 17 V 1791 (copie), RA, *Kungl. arkiv I. Handskriftsamlingen: Gustaf III; Gustave III par ses lettres*, ed. G. v. Proschwitz, Göteborg-Paris 1986, p. 340-343; N. Åkeson, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 31, 42-43.

cooperation of Sweden and Russia against revolutionary France. Yet, all the documents still had to be ratified by the empress.³⁰

On June 9, 1791, the Baron de Breteuil responded to Gustav III's letter. Louis XVI's future success would be achieved owing to the domestic rather than foreign support. Still, as soon as the king was freed, the baron would inform Gustav III about a place convenient for setting up a military camp and a port appropriate for beaching the Swedish troops. The alliance with Stockholm comprised one of Louis XVI's political priorities. Finally, the Baron de Breteuil assured that Louis XVI had never seriously intended to negotiate with his subjects.³¹

The baron's reply was well received by Gustav III. Although Breteuil rejected the proposal of the Swedish military intervention in France, he did not exclude the possibility of cooperation with Stockholm the moment Louis XVI was ready to act on his own. The baron's letter opened the way for further negotiations, the fact which was of paramount importance for the Swedish king. It was obvious to Gustav III that before his negotiations with Catherine II were completed, he would be unable to undertake any actions against revolutionary France. In his letter to Armfelt and Franc dated June 19, 1791, the king announced that as soon as he received the news confirming the safe departure of the royal family from Paris, he would immediately send his new aide-de-camp to Stockholm. He also ordered Armfelt to start preparations for the Swedish military troops to be sent over to the French border. The whole undertaking was to be kept in secret, though. The troops were to be concentrated under the pretext of securing national borders in the face of a possible war between Russia and the Triple Alliance.³²

In the end of May 1791, the preparations for Louis XVI's escape from Paris were almost complete. On June 20, 1791, Gustav III received good news from Stockholm. Armfelt informed him about the decision of Empress Catherine II, who was ready to hand over the Nyslott fortress and sign an agreement on the cooperation of the two allies in order to bring back law and order in revolutionary France. Awaiting impatiently the effects of Louis XVI's escape, Gustav III was not worried by the possibility of the French royal family being arrested while escaping from Paris. He expected that it would cause such a deep crisis in international relations that St Petersburg would be forced to sign an alliance with Sweden immediately. In Gustav III's opinion, Berlin should be willing to support the cause of Louis XVI, too. The only obstacles on the way to restore *ancien régime* in France could be protests of England and the emperor against the Swedish-Russian alliance treaty. For the time being, however, on June 21, 1791, the king of Sweden left Aachen for Spa so as to stay closer to the "great affair" that was taking place in France.³³

³⁰ Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Rostock, 2 VI 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 177-179; Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Brunswick, 8 VI 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 179-181; C.T. Odhner, *Gustaf III och Katarina II efter freden i Värälä*, Stockholm 1895, p. 21-29; A. Söderhjelm, *Revolutionärer och emigranter*, Stockholm 1918, p. 81, 86.

³¹ E.M. Staël v. Holstein to Gustav III, Paris, 9 VI 1791, RA, Gallica vol. 476; L.A. de Breteuil to Gustav III, Solothurn, 9 VI 1791, RA, Gallica vol. 524; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja szwedzka...*, p. 341-343; M. Price, *The Fall of...*, p. 176-177.

³² Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Aachen, 16 VI 1791; Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt and U.G. Franc, Aachen, 19 VI 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 182-185; E.M. Staël v. Holstein to Gustav III, Paris, 19 VI 1791, RA, Gallica vol. 476; N. Åkeson, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 31-32, 49-50.

³³ Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Aachen, 21 VI 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 185-187; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja szwedzka...*, p. 354-355; C.T. Odhner, *Gustaf III och Katarina II efter...*, p. 33-34.

The day before, late at night, Louis XVI, his family and their escort managed to slip out of the carelessly guarded Tuileries. The story of the flight of the king of France and his family to Varennes has often been told.³⁴ Suffice it to say that the recognized royal family was arrested around 11pm on June 21, 1791, while Louis XVI enjoyed his freedom for only about twenty-four hours. Fersen, as the only person among the participants of the royal escape from Paris, avoided being arrested in Varennes. This was so since as near as Bourguet he received an order from Louis XVI to straggle from the king's escort in order to deliver the monarch's letters to Monsieur – Louis, Comte de Provence, at that time escaping towards the Belgian border.

Sweden's policy towards revolutionary France after the Varennes incident

Louis XVI's arrest in Varennes significantly affected later Gustav III's actions. Until now, the king had been a passive observer of events taking place in France. From then on, he began to assemble the anti-French coalition with full conviction and determination, and started preparations for an armed intervention in France.

Almost immediately after receiving the news of the royal family's unsuccessful escape, the Swedish king resolved to return to Aachen where he impatiently awaited the arrival of the Russian envoy, General Peter A. von der Pahlen. The long-planned signing of the treaty with Catherine II now seemed the only way to save the French monarchy. In the meantime, on June 27, 1791, the monarch prepared new instructions for his ambassador to Paris, Eric Magnus Staël von Holstein. Staël was to maintain no diplomatic relations with any person unauthorized to act in person by Louis XVI. The aim of the Swedish new policy towards France was "*to wrench the hydra's neck and restore old order there*".³⁵ It seems that this quote fully reflects the king's beliefs at the time. He certainly wanted to stifle the revolution and restore power to the French monarch. However, Gustav III undoubtedly realized that without the help of other powers, especially Russia, he would not be able to accomplish such an ambitious task.

On June 30, General Pahlen appeared in Aachen. The same day both brothers of Louis XVI resolved that after their brother's imprisonment in Paris, Monsieur would temporarily become regent. Gustav III, who kept in touch with the princes after they moved to the Schönbornslust Castle near Koblenz, instantly approved of their decision. In his letter to Armfelt dated July 7, 1791, he called the comte de Provence the "French regent". He was carefully observing their efforts to obtain military reinforcements from German princes as he expected to lead that army. He even began to wonder whether it would not be better for him to openly opt for the emigrant party against the weak, wavering and inconsistent king of France. On July 10, 1791, he wrote to Curt von Stedingk that it should be seriously reconsidered who should reign in

³⁴ C. Aimond, *L'énigme de Varennes. Le dernier voyage du roi Louis XVI. Juin 1791*, Paris 1936; E. Bimbinet, *Fuite de Louis XVI à Varennes*, Paris 1854; J.Q. Craufurd, *Notices sur Marie Stuart, reine d'Ecosse, et sur Marie Antoinette, reine de France*, Paris 1819; V. Fournel, *L'événement de Varennes*, Paris 1890; G. Lenotre, *L'événement de Varennes*, Paris 1905; A. Mathiez, *La révolution française*, vol. 1, Paris 1928; M. Ozouf, *Varennes: la mort de la royauté (21 juin 1791)*, Paris 2005.

³⁵ Gustav III's instruction for E.M. Staël v. Holstein of 27 VI 1791, A. Söderhjelm, *Sverige och den...*, p. 256-257, 259-260.

France: Louis XVI or one of his brothers, Louis XVII and Charles X.³⁶ It seems that at that time Gustav III started to doubt his choices. Although since the outbreak of the revolution he was convinced that Louis XVI was a weak and incompetent ruler, he still believed in the stability of the French absolute monarchy. Yet, as to save the latter, he would probably even support another candidate for the French crown. Ultimately, however, he decided to start actions aimed at restoring both the *ancien régime* and Louis XVI's lost prerogatives.

Gustav III set forth the principles of his policy towards France in an extended letter to Armfelt and Franc of July 10, 1791. He wrote that his only aim at the moment was to prompt Catherine II's decision on Russia's help for French *émigrés*. Negotiations with St Petersburg remained the greatest concern of Gustav III. Russian subsidies comprised a *sine qua non* condition to succeed in the operation he had planned. Although on July 10, 1791, he still had no information on England's position towards the planned expedition, he was convinced that London would not interfere with his political plans towards France. Interestingly, Gustav III expected that the war would break out soon as he ordered the Stockholm government to start to consider the question of his regency when he was away. The government was also to assemble military troops bound to participate in the expedition, and provide the appropriate number of ships ready to take the king to the French border the moment the Russian treaty was signed.³⁷

On July 14, the king wrote another letter to Armfelt in which he expressed his predictions on the development of the affairs in the international arena. He totally rejected the possibility of signing an alliance with Copenhagen that his most trusted adviser, Anders Håkansson, suggested to him, although several months earlier he had been willing to accept it. On the other hand, he was inclined to sign a subsidy treaty with Spain. In his opinion, Madrid, faced with the escalating conflict with England and anxiously observing the development of the situation in France, would be interested in deepening its relations with Sweden and the latter's new ally, the empress of Russia.³⁸

Meanwhile, Gustav III was progressing with his plans to intervene in France. He met with the Marquis de Bouillé, who had already attempted to cooperate with Louis XVI's brothers in Aachen in mid-July 1791. During their meeting they discussed the details of the cooperation of the Swedish king and the French *émigrés* with Evert Taube. Normandy was chosen to be the beaching place for Gustav III's troops. If, however, beaching was impossible in any French port, then the Swedish troops were to land in Belgian Ostend. The king of Sweden expected that the excursion should begin as early as August 1791, especially as General de Bouillé was certain that Swedish troops would soon appear near the French border. Yet, the Stockholm negotiations had failed to bring expected effects. Catherine II was clearly playing for time and sent instructions to Stockholm, stiffening the position of her negotiators. Nevertheless, Armfelt wrote to the king that the Swedish army and navy would be ready for action as late as the end of October.³⁹

³⁶ Louis, Comte de Provence to Gustav III, Schönbornlust, 6 VII 1791, RA, Gallica vol. 521; Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Aachen, 7 VII 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 188-189; N. Åkeson, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 65, 84.

³⁷ Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt and U.G. Franc, Aachen, 10 VII 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 189-191; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja szwedzka...*, p. 361-362.

³⁸ E. Bergstedt to Gustav III, Paris, 6 VII 1791, RA, Gallica vol. 476; Gustav III to G.M. Armfelt, Aachen, 14 VII 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 192-193.

³⁹ G.M. Armfelt to Gustav III, Stockholm, 17 VII 1791, in: *Bref till Armfelt*, p. 189; C.T. Odhner, *Gustaf III och Katarina II efter...*, p. 34-37.

Before Armfelt's warnings reached Gustav III, already in mid-July 1791, the king started an extended diplomatic action. According to the previous arrangements, Count Fersen was sent to Vienna. Similarly, Baron Carl Gustaf Oxenstierna (a Swedish envoy to Regensburg), was authorized to support the French princes in their negotiations on hiring Charles Theodore, Elector Palatine of the Rhine and Bavaria's, troops. An equally important mission was entrusted to Evert Taube. He was sent to Koblenz where Louis XVI's both brothers stayed. Count Nils Anton Barck left for Kassel to negotiate the conditions of hiring William IX, Landgrave von Hesse-Kassel's, soldiers. That task proved extremely difficult for the young diplomat since it was London that provided funds for the undertaking. The point was, however, that Gustav III did not write to his envoy to London, Gustaf Adam von Nolcken, until July 18, 1791. The Swedish king also ordered Baron Carl Gustaf Oxenstierna to go to Munich to ask Charles Theodore for military reinforcements. Furthermore, on July 16, Gustav III wrote to the Spanish king, Charles IV, and asked for a subsidy of twelve million livres. The Swedish king did not forget about Prussia. On July 23, 1791, the king's envoy to Berlin, Christian Ehrenfried von Carisien, was to induce Prussia to join the league of rulers who wanted to claim Louis XVI's violated laws. James Quentin Craufurd (Crawford) received the same order with regard to the London court.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, none of the Swedish envoys managed to achieve the purpose of their mission. The only result of the large-scale diplomatic action involved signing the Drottningholm Treaty with Russia on October 19, 1791. Nevertheless, Gustav III was still convinced that he would lead his soldiers to Paris in the spring of the following year. He stayed in close contact with Louis XVI and his trusted representative in exile, the Baron de Breteuil. Despite permanent lack of money, the main goal of all his actions from that time on was to lead a monarchist crusade against revolutionary France and save the endangered French monarchy. However, over time, the king altered his views on military intervention in France. Although initially he believed that in order to save Louis XVI it would suffice to send a corps of a few thousand men, at the beginning of 1792, he was already planning a large-scale operation. Yet, in the meantime, there was a conspiracy on his life. On March 16, 1792, Gustav III was fatally wounded during a masked ball in the Stockholm Opera. It happened at the time when the Tuileries court, initially sceptical about the idea of an armed intervention in France, finally agreed on landing of the Swedish corps in Normandy, and organizing a new escape of the royal family from Paris. The king of Sweden never had the chance to read the Baron de Breteuil's letter of March 25, 1792. He died in Stockholm on March 29, 1792. His death ultimately put an end to all plans of an armed intervention in revolutionary France that the Stockholm court had been preparing for such a long time.⁴¹

Results and discussion

Although initially Gustav III saw in France mainly a source of subsidies, he quickly realized that Louis XVI was dealing with the same opposition of the privileged as he himself had faced at least since the late 1770s. Yet, he certainly underestimated the scale of the French crisis, as he was still demanding from the Versailles court the regular payment of subsidies. On the other hand, situation in revolutionary France influenced his international policy

⁴⁰ N. Åkeson, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 68-69, 72-76, 80-81; A. Söderhjelm, *Sverige och den...*, p. 247, 250-251.

⁴¹ Z. Anusik, *Gustaw III wobec rewolucji francuskiej*, "Przegląd Nauk Historycznych", 2017, vol. 16, p. 103-131.

and even undermined some of his ambitious political plans. For example, actions taken by Gustav III to win the Polish crown, or his preparations for a conquest of Norway should be perceived in the context of rescuing the institutions of the French monarchy.

Among all European rulers, only Gustav III seemed to be truly interested in France's internal problems. He considered the French revolution a destructive force, threatening all the thrones. He was afraid that the example of France, where the position of the king was weakening with each passing month, could threaten other European monarchies. However, he also wanted to restore *ancien régime* as France's annual subsidies were still of key importance for the Sweden's budget. The war with Russia brought the royal finances to the ruins. Thus, although Gustav III was the only ruler who was ready for an armed invasion on France, he was constantly forced to look for allies. His plans assumed that it was Spain to provide funds, and Russia soldiers, for the project.

Yet, Russia had its own goals to achieve. The Tsaritsa was clearly playing for time as she was still at war with Turkey (the treaty preliminaries were signed as late as August 11, 1791, in Galați), and did not want to be involved in another international conflict at the time. At the end of his life, Gustav III looked with increasing concern at the St Petersburg court's actions. He began to suspect that Catherine II wanted to embroil other powers in a war against revolutionary France as to get freedom of movement in Central and Eastern Europe and, thus, to lead her army to Poland.

At the end of the 18th century all, without exception, states were guided by their own selfish interest. Moreover, surprise and indignation was elicited by the fact that the proposal to organize a monarchical league was made by the ruler of the state not belonging to one of the leading powers of the continent. Thus, for other European powers the revolution remained mainly a subject of observation and speculation. In spite of all Gustav III's hopes, the Austrians intended to do nothing to help Louis XVI, even though Frederick William II, having failed to reach an agreement with the Feuillants directed against Austria in late 1790, switched to insisting that the war with France was inevitable. As for Leopold II, he was in no hurry to intervene in France, not only because he did not want to prevent the revival of its power position. The dilatoriness of the Vienna court in French matters resulted mainly from the fact that the emperor simply did not trust Russia. He feared that the engagement in Western Europe would give Catherine II too much freedom in regard to both, Turkey and the Republic of Poland which was the key to Austria's relations with Prussia and Russia and, therefore, to the structure of European politics and peace.

The Anglo-Prussian-Dutch Triple Alliance, in turn, was initially to bar France from the Low Countries. The British tried to extract trade concessions from the Dutch and worried about Austrian influence in the United Provinces, while Prussia wanted to use the Triple Alliance against Austria. The latter, in turn, gave up on France as an ally after it proved useless over Belgium in 1789. A year later even Spain gave up on France and looked elsewhere for support when the French *Assemblée nationale* refused to help his former ally in its conflict with Britain.

On the other hand, one should bore in mind that plans of an armed intervention on France were extremely unpopular in Sweden. Most of the aristocracy and nobility strongly opposed it. This, in turn, led to the conspiracy and an attempt on the king's life on March 16, 1792. Nils Åkeson ended his book saying that dying Gustav III did not know that his plans for France no longer had much chance of implementation. Vienna had long treated the king with

undisguised dislike and contempt. The collapse of Florida Blanca shattered all the hopes for Spanish subsidies. Catherine II for a long time had not intended to participate in the French fuss. According to the authors of this article, however, those were not external factors that sealed the withdrawal of Sweden from active politics in the international arena. Conclusive in that regard was the will of the Regent, Charles, Duke of Södermanland, who had long belonged to the group of determined political opponents of his dead brother.

All in all, taking into account the attitude of both other European powers and Swedish nobility, it seems that even if the king of Sweden had survived an attempt on his life, it would have been extremely difficult for him to implement his ambitious plans and rescue Louis XVI. Thus the fate of the king of France seems to be sealed on the very day when the recognized royal family was arrested in Varennes.

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