

The Partitions of Poland, 1772-1795

Abstract

This map shows the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, 1795 by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The first partition was based on a treaty signed by Russia, Prussia, and Austria on August 5, 1772, which was ratified by the Polish legislature Sejm on September 30, 1773. The agreement deprived the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth of approximately one third of its population and almost one-third of its land area. The background of the partition was a shift in the balance of power in Europe after Russian victories in the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774), which threatened the interests of the Habsburg Empire in the region. Frederick II, King of Prussia, who was instrumental in engineering the first partition, intended to prevent Austria from entering the war against Russia while counter-balancing Russia's growing power in Central Europe. Following the first partition, Poland, albeit weakened, continued to exist as a state.

During the first partition, Russia received the largest geographical area of Poland in the northeast. The Habsburg Empire gained the south-eastern part of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, including the area that became known as Galicia. Prussia gained the economically valuable and strategically important province of Royal Prussia, excluding the free cities of Gdańsk (Danzig) and Toruń (Thorn), and it also gained the northern portion of the historical region of Greater Poland. The Spiš lien, which had been occupied by the Habsburg Empire since 1769, was formally annexed by the Habsburgs in 1772.

The second partition of Poland in 1793 followed a period of popular political and legal reforms that culminated in the adoption of a liberal constitution in 1791. Both Russia and Prussia considered the reform movement as a threat. They sent troops to Poland to support the conservative opposition against the movement that intended to roll back the constitutional reforms (Targowica Confederation) and negotiated the second partition to suppress the nationalist reform movement. The partition transferred to Russia the major remnant of Lithuanian Belorussia and western Ukraine. Prussia incorporated the cities of Gdańsk and Toruń as well as the area known as Greater Poland.

A national uprising led the Polish officer Tadeusz Kościuszko, a veteran of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War in North America, formed in response to the second partition (March–November 1794). It became known as the Polish Revolution of 1794. Russia and Prussia intervened, suppressed the insurgency, and concluded an agreement with Austria that divided the remnants of Poland between themselves on October 24, 1795. Following the third partition, the independent state of Poland ceased to exist until it regained its independence after the end of World War I (although “Congress Poland,” formed by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, existed as a semi-autonomous polity).

Source



Source: Original cartography by Cherie Norton/Mapping Solutions, 2009, based on: Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002. Revised cartography (WCAG-compliant) by Gabriel Moss, 2022.

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