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FREEDOM AS INSPIRING MOTIVATION IN PRINCE MICHAŁ KLEOFAS OGIŃSKI'S PUBLIC AND POLITICAL ENDEAVOUR

Incorporation of Belarus into the Russian Empire as a result of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth brought about significant changes in the political, public, social, economic, cultural and mental life of Belarusian people. Yet, due to extensive on-going activity of representatives of the Belarusian cultural elite, public and ethical problems remained topical in its social thinking; the main focus concentrated on an ideal of universal panhuman truth, national independence and freedom as key-notes of national and cultural renaissance.

A considerable contribution to the public, political and cultural life in Belarus in the nineteenth century was made by Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński, an acknowledged state and military figure in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and a composer. Profound love to his Motherland and self-sacrifice for its good constituted a basement of Prince Ogiński's world outlook and life philosophy. He believed in a creative potential of his nation and was optimistic about the aspiration of Slavic people for solidarity. Everything he would do was eventually focused on the ideas of striving for freedom, against social inequality.

The brightest example of the Prince's active aspirations was a creation of a plan of restitution of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania within the Russian Empire. The plan was submitted to Emperor Alexander the First in

1811 as a written memorandum and made provisions for autonomy in a form of extensive self-governing based on the commitment of the Belarussian-Lithuanian gentry to administrative and legal self-sufficiency of the country; abandonment of serfdom; and creation of a national army. However, the plan when carefully reviewed and analysed, unfortunately caused strong objections in the Russian society which discern in it an attempt of dismembering and weakening Russia already threatened by the prospect of war. Early in 1812, Alexander the First essentially gave up an idea of restitution of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Although not implemented, still Prince Ogiński's plan did play a certain role in shaping Russia's policy in its western provinces.