

**How to Rebuild the World?**  
**The The Backward Poland at the Turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and the Clash with  
the West-European Economic Thought, in the Context of the Reception of French  
Commercial and Contract Law in the Polish Territories in the First Half of the 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century**

Michał Gałędek and Anna Klimaszewska  
University of Gdańsk, Poland

Abstract

The objective of these papers are to look back on a fervent discussion within Polish economic thought that continued until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its main concern was to find the optimal way of transforming the economic system, against the background of the reforms of the feudal society and the anachronic state. That period was a favourable time for comprehensive analysis of the theories and of the legal and political solutions that had been crystallising in Europe. With time they adopted a classical form, creating a canon of the capitalist heritage. The reforms taking place under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, which resulted in legislative works of the Four-Year Sejm, ceased with the fall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795. They had, however, excited interest in different aspects of European thought and led to both selective reception and creative adaptation thereof to the specific Polish feudal environment. The reforms created a backbone for the future development of 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish transformational thought.

The second stage of the reforms started with the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807 and the adoption of numerous legal institutions, characteristic of the capitalist relations present in Napoleonic France, which meant the implementation of the whole of both Napoleon's Code and Commercial Code. After the fall of Napoleon the Duchy of Warsaw was replaced with the Kingdom of Poland, whose creators combined the traditions of the Polish Enlightenment with the maintenance of French law and some of the Napoleonic institutions.

The participation of the Polish political elite, first in the creation of the Duchy and later in the creation of the Kingdom, combined with their experience and their vivid interest in mercantilism, cameralism, physiocracy, and classic liberalism, enabled them to form mature social and economic concepts adjusted to the Polish realities. Critical analysis of the different economic concepts of this dynamically changing world and assessment of their usefulness in the specific Central European environment created by the Polish intellectual elite of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is an interesting aspect of the discussion on whether and to what extent Western European economic and legal thought could have been applied in this region of the world.

Therefore, our papers analyze the subject from two different angles. One touches on the issues of the exchange of ideas and mixing legal cultures; it also attempts to evaluate certain doctrine assumptions and institutional solutions that originated in France and other European countries, especially in the United Kingdom and on the German lands. There is also the much more specific issue of the practical outcome of the discussion of the ideas that eventually focused only on French law. Thus, we thought it wise to present the research subject in two separate papers: the first one being a general overview of the issues presented in the abstract ("The Backward Poland at the Turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and the Clash with the West-European Economic Thought," by Michał Gałędek) and the other focusing on a detailed analysis of the adoption of French law ("The Reception of the French Commercial Law in the Polish Lands in the First Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," by Anna Klimaszewska).