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Józef Retinger – a Polish Link in the European Unification

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JÓZEF RETINGER – A POLISH LINK IN THE EUROPEAN UNIFICATION

Józef Retinger (1888–1960) was one of the most eminent figures as far as efforts to unite Europe are concerned¹. He, like, among others, Duke Adam Jerzy Czartoryski and Wojciech Bogumił Jastrzębowski – a combatant who took part in the November Uprising and then authored *Konstytucja dla Europy* [Constitution for Europe]², was a Polish dreamer who acted in support of a European federation. Because of his political connections, Retinger remains quite a mysterious figure. Both in Poland and abroad several books were written about him as well as many papers and press articles that not infrequently contained fictitious, thriller-like stories³. He produced around himself an aura of mys-

¹ The following paper was prepared basing mainly on J. Pomian's works (1972, 1990, 1994).

² *Konstytucja dla Europy* was published in three language versions: W.B. Jastrzębowski, *Constitution of Europe* (trans. by E.A. Mierzwa); *Une Constitution pour L'Europe par W.B. Jastrzębowski* (trans. by W. Gilewski) and *Verfassung für Europa von W.B. Jastrzębowski* (trans. by E. Łabińska), in: „Kontrola Państwowa”, Special Issue, December 2007, pp. 137–214 and was handed in to the European Parliament deputies and the European Union's administration in Brussels in January of 2008.

³ The Retinger archival materials, including lots of correspondence, are stored among others at Biblioteka Główna Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie (Main Library of the Economic University in Cracow). Among the most important materials that are stored there, one should list: J. Retinger, *The Bildenberg Group*, Hertfordshire 1959; idem, *Conrad and his contemporaries Selections. Retinger Joseph Hieronim*, 1975; idem, *The European Continent?*, London 1946; Th. Grosbois, *L'action de Józef Retinger en faveur de l'idée européenne 1940–46*, „Revue européenne d'histoire” 1999, vol. 6, no. 34; *In remembrance of Joseph Retinger 1988–1960, Initiator of the European League for Economic Cooperation*, Brussels 1996; *Tribute to a Great European J.H. Retinger*, Centre Européen de la Culture, Genève 1961. The Polish historiography perceives as the most authoritative, which does not free us from criticism in the reception of the materials, some of works by the long-term Retinger's secretary – Jan Pomian,

tory until the end of his life exercising power behind the throne. He never commented upon even greatest nonsense that had been written about him. On one occasion he was asked by his friend Denis de Rougemont⁴: „– Tell me, Joseph – they say that you are a free mason, an agent of Intelligence Service, of CIA and of Vatican as well as a supporter of communism. Sometimes they even add that you are a Jew and a gay...” „– What am I to say to this – chuckled Retinger. Tell them that this is not all” (Bąkowski 2004). He skillfully selected his friends and was rarely mistaken in his choices. His political views were close to those of Christian socialists but he was not a member of any political party, having been too much of an individualist to let himself be forced in the frames of any group. Never had he accepted any awards, even from General Władysław Sikorski, who wanted to award him with the Virtuti Militari Cross for his brave action owing to which he succeeded in „smuggling” the General to southern France in June of 1944.

He was born in Cracow in the family of a successful barrister. His mother, Maria Krystyna Czyrmińska, had been a daughter of a Jagiellonian University rector. Józef, having been orphaned at the age of

as well as: A. Bąkowski, *Józef Retinger – nieznanego bohatera Europy*, „Palestra” 2004, nos 3–4; O. Terlecki, *Barwne życie szarej eminencji*, Kraków 1981; idem, *Kuzynek Diabła*, Kraków 1988; G. Witkowski, *Józef Retinger – polski inicjator integracji europejskiej*, Stowarzyszenie Współpracy Narodów Europy Wschodniej ZBLIŻENIE, Warszawa 2000; E. Raczyński, *W sojusznicy Londynie*, Londyn 1960; M. Celt, *Z Retingerem do Warszawy i z powrotem: Raport z Podziemia 1944*, Łomianki, LTW 2006; J. Drużyńska, S.M. Jankowski, *Niespełniona misja Józefa Hieronima Retingera* [in:] *Wyklęte życiorysy*, Poznań, Rebis, 2009; W. Bułhak, *Wokół misji Józefa Retingera do kraju, kwiecień–lipiec 1944 r.*, „Zeszyty Historyczne”, no. 168, Paryż 2009; A. Pieczewski, *Józef H. Retinger – pomysłodawca i współtwórca Grupy Bilderbergu*, „Studia Politologiczne”, 2000, no. 10, pp. 203–208; P. Świeboda, *Józef Hieronim Retinger*, „Europa” 1998, no. 2, pp. 64–65; A. Bąkowski, *Józef Retinger – nieznanego bohatera Europy*, „Palestra” 2004, nos 3/4, pp. 149–154; J. Ciechanowski, *Józef Retinger (1888–1957) w świetle raportów brytyjskiego wywiadu z lat 1913 do 1941*, „Zeszyty Historyczne” 1982, z. 59; A. Janta, *Refleksje retingerowskie*, „Wiadomości”, no. 1325, Londyn, 22 VII 1971; T. Kochanowicz, *Retinger – jakim go znam*, „Życie Literackie” 1972, no. 34; Z.S. Siemaszko, *Retinger w Polsce w 1944 r.*, „Zeszyty Historyczne” 1967, z. 12; M. Biskupski, *Spy, Patriot or Internationalist? The Early Career of Józef Retinger, Polish Patriarch of European Union*, „The Polish Review” 1998, no. 1.

⁴ D. de Rougemont (1906–1985), a Swiss writer, literary critic and thinker, supporter of the idea of European federation, founder and director of Centre Européen de la Culture in Geneva.

nine, was raised by Count Władysław Zamoyski, his father's friend. By the way, Retinger senior had begun his excellent but short career of lawyer with the sensational case in which Count Zamoyski had sued Hungary about *Morskie Oko* lake, which he had won.

Count Zamoyski prepared young Retinger for a political career, providing him with comprehensive education and excellent linguistic competences. He mastered several European languages and a few Asian ones, which was to facilitate his contacts in the future as well as successes in his activities in the international forum. Having lost his parents, against the will of his guardian, he decided to devote his life to a spiritual career and began his novitiate with the Jesuits in Rome. However, Count Zamoyski's arguments prevailed. He started studies at *École des Sciences Politiques* in Paris and next studied in Munich and Florence. In 1908, being twenty, he received the title of *docteur des lettres* from Sorbonne. Then he moved to London where he studied comparative psychology of nations which in the future proved very useful. In London, he got acquainted with Józef Conrad-Korzeniowski, English cultural and political elites and masonry.

After he came back to Cracow in 1911, he married Otylia Zubrzycka, got involved in national-democratic circles, founded and edited „*Miesięcznik Literacki i Artystyczny*” [Literary and Artistic Monthly], in which he published works by eminent poets and men of letters, Polish and foreign.

In 1912, he was back in London, where, inspired by Count Zamoyski, he established *Biuro Polskie* [Polish Bureau] and tried to win support of West European politicians and public opinion for the idea of Poland's rebirth. He published a lot, organised pro-Polish manifestations, supported Polish emigres in Great Britain. Owing to his undeniable intellectual merits, linguistic competence, nice looks and protection by Count Zamoyski and the Godebski family to which he was related, the young Retinger was a frequent guest at Parisian and London parlours. It was then that he made many acquaintances and friends with eminent representatives of the world of culture, politics and business. He made acquaintance among others with Paul Valery, André Gide, Maurice Ravel, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, the British Marshall Horatio Herbert Lord Kitchener, Winston Churchill, the subsequent British ambassador in Moscow Stafford Cripps and many other prominent persons. Later, he took advantage of those acquaintances many times, including when before World War I he was trying to persuade Prime Minister Clemenceau to support

a plan to unify Eastern Europe by means of unification of Austria, Hungary and the Polish territories in a three-national monarchy under the hegemony of the Jesuit Order. Being in no doubt that that plan had originated in the Vatican circles, Clemenceau rejected it, while Retinger earned a solid and not too glorious label of a Vatican agent. The easiness with which he was able to get in touch with various prominent personages surprised even most experienced diplomatic veterans. During his funeral in 1960, Sir Edward Bedington-Behrens, a wealthy American financier, secretary to the European Movement and Retinger's friend, recalled: „I remember when Retinger was in the United States, it was enough for him to lift the receiver and he was being contacted with President who had a meeting with him and in Europe doors were open for him in all political circles”.

During World War I he carried out various diplomatic missions, acting both in Central States and Entente States – many of those activities have been kept secret till today. In France, he prepared a political ground for the creation of Gen. Józef Haller's Blue Army.

In 1916 in Paris he made an acquaintance with an English politician, Arthur Capel, who put forward a plan for post-war close cooperation between Britain and France and basing on this – of establishing a world government. Retinger got fascinated by Capel's idea but the war time was not supportive of such „wishful thinking”. He got back to that idea in 1924, talking into co-operation one of the leaders of the British Labour Party, Edmund Dene Morel (Georges Eduard Pierre Achille Morel de Ville, 1873–1924). However, it turned out again that the spirit of the time was not conducive to such ideas.

In 1917 he went to Mexico where he became an advisor to President Elías Calles Plutarch, a radical socio-economic reformer, who had authored the so called peaceful Mexican revolution. Retinger persuaded Mexico's President to let a trade union movement develop and took part in economic negotiations with the United States on behalf of Mexico.

After World War I, he did not come back to the homeland country but acted in Poland's interests, published articles in the socialist „Robotnik” [Worker] and anti-Church and democratic „Wiadomości Literackie” [Literary News], he published a noteworthy book titled *Po-lacy w cywilizacji świata* [Poles in the world's civilisation] wanting to make his compatriots aware of the role played by Poland and the Polish nation in history and to encourage them to more active participation in the consolidation of post-war Europe as an alternative to the nascent German fascism. In the 1930s, he co-operated with Gen. Władysław

Sikorski, Wojciech Korfanty, Karol Popiel, Stanisław Kot, Wincenty Witos and Ignacy J. Paderewski to create *Front Morges* that in Retinger's plans was to unite democratic opposition, peasant leaders, and Christian socialists in order to counteract authoritarian tendencies in the political camp that governed the Polish state (*sanacja*). Since that time his friendship with Paderewski had been specially sincere.

Following the rise to power of Gen. Sikorski in 1939, when he became the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Sikorski nominated Retinger his political advisor. Retinger mediated contacts between the Polish government in the exile with the English since they recognised his authority. When France got defeated, he found dispirited Sikorski and on 19 June in 1940, using a RAF military aircraft he took General to London to have five-hour talks with Churchill. During that conversation, Gen. Sikorski asked Churchill this question: „– As Poles' leader I must ask you as the leader of British government, will you fail us or not?” With tears in his eyes Churchill answered: „– I believe you and you may always count on me. England will be loyal to Poles”. How loyal it was, Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam evidence, but Churchill was a British and he acted according to the British *raison d'État* (Bąkowski 2004).

When World War II broke out, Retinger played a significant role in the Polish-Soviet-English talks. He influenced Prime Minister Sikorski's decision, who, ignoring the resistance on part of a considerable part of the Polish government in London (President W. Raczkiewicz, Gen. K. Sosnkowski), made a compromise with Russia, called the Sikorski-Majski Treaty. He became the plenipotentiary to the Polish government as *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow. Owing to Retinger's efforts, Poles started to be sooner released from Soviet camps and the Polish army in the USSR began to be formed.

He also authored an initiative to create a post-war Central-Eastern European confederation in which Gen. Sikorski was interested too. Thanks to Retinger's initiative, a council was established of ministers for foreign affairs representing governments in exile. His activities materialised for instance in decisions taken by the Polish government abroad which tried to implement the idea of the federalist post-war Central Europe. One of its variants was a plan to create a Slavic federation. To elaborate the details of that plan an international task force had been set up consisting of representatives of Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Sorbs. On behalf of the Polish government in exile, Tadeusz Sulimirski, Jerzy Lerski and Józef Jasnowski participated in this

team. The Slavic task force published a high quality periodical „Ruch Zachodnio-Słowiański” [West-Slavic Movement]. The periodical animated discussions concerning forms of post-war co-operation⁵. In London, Retinger organised private meetings of prominent politicians, called „Retinger’s club”, during which he criticised the Soviet politics and sought support for his idea of post-war integration of Europe. It was during one of such meetings at Retinger’s that politicians from Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg came up with the idea of the economic union of post-war Benelux. However, the conception of unification of Central and Eastern Europe, as much as interesting, at that time did not stand any real chances since it had envisaged establishing of a „cordon” of Central European states as a barrier to the Soviet expansionism. Neither Great Britain nor the USA were interested in that then – they needed strong USSR as their partner. Retinger’s efforts to make the British and American decision-makers aware that Teheran and Yalta meant the Soviet victory that would then play the role of a „Trojan horse” in post-war Europe, came to nothing.

After Sikorski’s death, Retinger lost his influences with the government in London. On 3 February in 1944, being 56, and despite his poor eyesight (he suffered from so called night-blindness that is characterised by fading vision after dark) and lacking whatsoever parachuting experience, Retinger got parachuted to Poland as a secret envoy (*cichociemny*). The purpose of his mission is not clear – one may guess that the emigre government sent him to the country to prevent the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. In London they realised that the significance of the uprising would be purely symbolic while the destruction enormous. At the same time – and this is no pure guess because it is confirmed by later circumstances, they wanted to get rid of Retinger from London for he had been the „man” of the murdered Gen. Sikorski. In Poland, an underground court sentenced Retinger to death on the assumption that he had acted as a secret agent. He avoided death only after personal intervention by Zbigniew Stypułkowski, a representative of Stronnictwo Narodowe [National Party] in Delegatura Rządu na Kraj [Government Delegation for Homeland].

Retinger returned to London on 26 July in 1944 when Russians had occupied the Lublin region. He made a report to Stanisław Mikołajczyk

⁵ I gathered the information about the activities of the Slavic team during the many conversations that I had had in London with my friend Professor Józef Jasnowski in the years 1980–1981, 1997 and 2003, 2005.

who was getting ready for his flight to talks in Moscow. He went to Poland again three times. The last time he had visited Poland was in 1946. Thanks to his personal influences with the British politicians, he succeeded in organising supplies of demobilised equipment worth about 4 mln old pounds sterling for the war-destroyed Poland. „Later – as J. Pomian writes in his book quoted above, in which he wrote down Retinger’s memories – I practically took no part in political activities of the Polish exiles and did not have contacts with the Warsaw government. Instead, I devoted my life almost exclusively to international work”.

Retinger, whom I dubbed a dreamer, was at the same time a man that liked concrete actions. In June of 1946, six years before the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community – the oldest of the three institutions of European integration, together with a Dutch baron, Paul van Zeeland (1893–1973), who later became the Netherlands’ Prime Minister, he co-founded in Brussels an Independent League for Economic Co-operation, which was headed by Van Zeeland. They both established affiliates of the League in Western Europe and the USA. In 1947 Retinger made his movement merge with other similar ones, creating an International Committee of European Movements (since 1949 – European Movement); he became its honorary secretary.

In May of 1948, Retinger’s committee, as it possibly may be called, organised a European Congress in the Hague, in which about 800 prominent West European politicians and leaders as well as representatives of Churches participated. Its proceedings were chaired by Winston Churchill. The Congress almost unanimously supported the idea to unite Europe. Its participants issued appeals to European governments urging them to call an assembly consisting of delegates from parliaments of the European states. One of their tasks was to be to work out a European Human Rights Charter. Following the petition voiced *inter alia* by Retinger, on 5 May in 1949 this Committee founded the Council of Europe. The Council was an association of democratic European states and was the first step in post-war Europe to integrate our Continent. Basing on Retinger’s proposal, a European Centre of Culture was created in Geneva as well as a European College in Bruges. Those were to be – as Retinger intended – additional, apolitical and free from suspicions bred e.g. by the USSR– frames for the European dialogue and mobilization of political and social forces, both in democratic states and the ones that were left under the rule of totalitarian regimes. The initiators of the European Movement included such personages as: Konrad

Adenauer, Winston Churchill, Harold MacMillan, François Mitterand, Paul-Henry Spaak, Altiero Spinelli.

In order to unite Europe, Retinger wanted also to take advantage of the Churches: Catholic and Protestant. „It is very important – he wrote – to have the religious forces on our side in the long run”. His plan entailed support for integrative tendencies also within Christianity, basing on ecumenical principles that were to complement political unification. In 1950, Retinger, together with a high representative of the Anglican Church, John Colins, had a hearing at Vatican. However, Vatican quickly withdrew its support for the idea of European Movement. This, I believe, made Retinger change his attitude to Vatican and redirect his interests towards economic circles and financiers.

The European Movement, being an antecedent of the present European Union, was premised upon two organisational structures: national councils in the European Union member states and non-governmental organizations and centres for European studies that promoted and supported the pan-European idea. The political goals and strategy of the Movement had been elaborated by its Federal Assembly. The Assembly elected its chairman, general secretary, members of General Assembly (31 persons) and Executive Committee (14 persons). Their term lasted for three years. Already since 1948 the European Movement stimulated the process of uniting the European Communities in the direction of transforming them into the future European Union.

Retinger believed in establishing a zone of peace, co-operation and welfare and he believed that the world could be persuaded to make it come true. The road to such a world-union was in his view premised on close European-American collaboration, political and economic. For this purpose, in 1954 he created his *opus vitae*, so called Bilderberg Group (the name is derived from a hotel Bilderberg in Oosterbeck in the Netherlands where its founding meeting took place).⁶ What is the Bilderberg Group? In Retinger's project it was to be a discussion forum that aimed at forging the unity of Western Europe and the USA. The Bilderberg Group, or Club, brings together eminent figures from the world of politics, economy and science from both sides of the Atlantic. Retinger was its secretary. The membership of the Bilderberg Club included or includes inter alia: Bill Clinton, Gerald Ford, Henry Kis-

⁶ The information about the Bilderberg Group are based on: Retinger 1959. Its composition, organization and activities are presented at: <http://www.bilderberg.org/bilder.htm>.

singer, the US ambassador at the United Nations Richard Hollbrook, Al Gore (former vice-president of the USA), American secretaries for treasury Nicholas Brady, Robert Rubin, Lawrence Summers, the Chase Manhattan Bank's chairman David Rockefeller, Zbigniew Brzeziński, Andrzej Olechowski (a member of the Council of Batory Foundation) etc. The Club's meetings were attended by the European Union's leaders, among others – Jacques Santer, Leon Brittan, Emma Bonino, Mario Monti, Erkki Leekanen nad secretaries general of NATO: Lord Carrington, Manfred Woerner, Willi Claes, Javier Solana and George Robertson as well as the heads of European governments: Franz Vranitzky (Austria), Wilfried Martens (Belgium), Esko Aho (Finland), Laurent Fabius (France), Rud Lubbers (the Netherlands). Also, the presidents of the World Bank and central banks of various states as well as chairmen of private banks participated on a permanent basis – for example Alessandro Profumo, the president of Credito Italiano who bought out 52 percent the PEKAO SA shares a few years ago. In one of the meetings, in 1998, Hanna Suchocka (a member of the Council of Batory Foundation) participated.

Because of the secrecy of the Club's activities and a private character of its meetings, not disclosing the places and programmes of the meetings and not revealing them to mass media, an atmosphere of secrecy and suspicions has grown around the Group, breeding various conspiracy theories. Not only authors associated with the Right write about the Bilderberg Club, such as Professor Maciej Giertych („Opoka”) and a „New York Times” reporter, author of bestsellers such as *They rule the world* Jim Marrs who maintain that it is an organization of free masons. On the website BBC.polska.com we read among others: „The Bilderberg Group provokes many emotions. Sometimes it is described as a secret association that pulls the strings in the world business and politics”. Taking into account its composition, it is difficult not to agree with this judgement.

The Club's strategy is built on three pillars: New International Economic Order, New Political Order and New Religious Order. The aim of this strategy is to create a single all-world state in which all nationalities would disappear and the ruling religion would be some kind of a vague „new paganism”. Some authors, such as M. Giertych and J. Marrs, claim that the Club aims at „total destruction of Christianity, destroying families, spreading pornography, blasphemous «art» and homosexuality as well as killing unborn babies...”. When one does not have knowledge, one is left with confabulations.

Despite such misgivings, His Majesty Prince Bernhard of Holland stresses the enormously positive role played by Retinger and the Bildenberg Club in the process of international reconciliation. This is what Prince Bernhard wrote about Retinger: „The spirit of this man, to whom the free world is indebted so much and about whom one could say that despite his inconspicuous appearance he was truly great, has always inspired and will always inspire our association”. Retinger’s deeds were also positively evaluated in memoirs of the Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak: „He helped initiate discussions that we – Poles, Czechs, the Dutch, Norwegians and Belgians – had in order to establish new ties between us. Continuing his efforts after the war, he was one of the most ardent supporters of the European unity and deserves to be remembered as a pioneer of this enterprise.

Summing up, one could state with no exaggeration and without falling prey to polonocentrism that Retinger made a significant impact on the "fathers" of contemporary European Union who participated in the proceedings of both of the organizations that had been founded by Retinger. This is usually ignored and thus left out of the scope of attention of not only societies of the contemporary European Union but also of Euro-deputies, which I could verify during my visit at the European Parliament in Brussels when during some private talks I tested the knowledge of those facts.

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