

Mowa do Szlachty polskiej (fragmenty) - Tłumaczenie angielskie

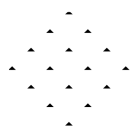
Our ancestors have obtained and left many privileges for you, Gentlemen and Brothers, but none of them is as great and worthy of your name as your rights, which are not only based on the sense of justice but also shining with the bizarre acuity and brightness of your generosity. It is so great that no nation or people have ever displayed a greater one. Since all of that generosity is included in the rights, nothing should appear as finer music to your ears and worthy of acquaintance than a speech about your rights, which make you superior to any other people living anywhere in the world. Other nations have things they can boast about, for example fortifications, cities, income or crops. For is there any state greater than Germany as far as cities are concerned? Where are the highest earnings if not in France? Which country is richer in gold than Hungary? And lastly, which one has more fertile fields, different crops and riches than Italy? Other nations beat us, Gentlemen and Brothers, when it comes to the fertility of lands, amount of gold and income, abundance of crops or greatness of fortifications. But freedom, the greatest of all goods, belongs to your kind and your name. It is so great that – compared to your freedom – the freedom of other nations would seem unbearable bondage for you. Admiring the bliss of this freedom, many provinces have joined you and submitted themselves to your rule thanks to not your military power but the greatness of your freedom.

Do you think that Ruthenia, a kingdom so vast and powerful, became your province because of their fear of your military superiority or because of their desire for freedom? Look around at the Polish borders, consider the strengths of your kingdom, notice that your nation does not spread across the Carpathian Mountains and the Vistula River and that its population is small compared to the greatness and vastness of Ruthenia. And have Prussia, the highly noble province, accepted your rule for your riches? By no means. For if you took a closer look at your soil, you would never think higher of your fields than of the riches of Prussia. And what should I say about Lithuania: it is twice as big as Poland and now has become its part because of your freedom. I will not even speak about Pomerania or Mazovia.



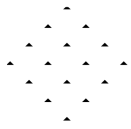
I will not mention Samogitia, Wallachia or Silesia. They rank higher than you when it comes to the abundance of everything, the vastness of their lands and the number of their inhabitants, and yet you conquer them with not military strength but the right to freedom. Allowing those people and nations to share this freedom, you have subjected to your rule and power everything located between the Paratethys and the Carpathian Mountains, as well as between Scythia and Germany. And although the traditions or even the faith of those people differ, your glorious freedom have made all of those in the Kingdom accept one law. Your name has become so famous that many nations have now grown into one country thanks to your freedom. You are now equal to other states in the vastness of your lands, number of your inhabitants and fertility of your fields. I am not inventing this, Gentlemen and Brothers, but talking about facts and remembering all those goods that your freedom has brought you, the freedom included in your rights and customs. [...]

Notice what cure your ancestors have prepared for you so that there never occurs any kind of bondage in Poland. They identified three ways of managing public affairs in human life and saw that any group of people can be ruled by an individual, a handful of those in power or the people. They did not consider any of those as good in itself. They thought that the rule of one person can easily turn into oppression, that the rule of minority can lead to the doom of others and that the rule of all – as turbulent as it can be – is dangerous for the common good. That is why for their republic they have selected a government that includes everything that is split between those three systems. Combining the three systems into one in a strange and extraordinary way has led to a type of government that is not a monarchy, a minority government or a country ruled by the people. If we were to describe your king, we could say that he is apparently just the voice of the kingdom, attached to you through your free right to choose so that he does not do, undertake or say anything else than what you yourselves deeply wish for.

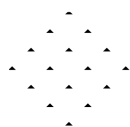


Even a senator, whose ancestors wanted to have a leader and guardian of freedom, serves the king to curb his ambitious aspirations, to stay close to the king when he pronounces a sentence and to advise him about what should be done and what decisions should be taken for the common good of all of you. This is all to make sure that the Polish senate is nothing else than a creative and advisory support for the royal council and to protect your freedom and its benefits and prevent the king from gaining excessive power. As far as your noble state is concerned, you have a similar say in both the senators' council and the royal power, which serves as a guarantee that the senators cannot settle anything or the king make a decision against your will. This ensures that everything you decide on according to your will with the senate's advice and through the king's law is ratified in Poland.

As a result, all of your rights reject what was of the highest value in the Roman state, where everything the king had a liking for became law, considering this as harmful to your freedom. And indeed, you want the law you pass together with the senate and the king to apply to the king himself, the senate and all of you. As far as the king is concerned, you have rights, courts and a certain prescribed way of keeping obedience. Is there anything more beautiful than the fact that the person who possesses the highest authority and who was not born but made king by you uses this sword you gave him only according to your will? Indeed, he might use a sword, as long as your freedom does not make you arrogant, become a constraint or introduce restrictive duties. This guarantees that your kingdom will last. For if there was anything that could lead to the demise of the kingdom, it would have to originate from king's rule, senate's fault or your lawlessness. And since your freedom restricts the king's power, and the king's power restricts your freedom, and the senate is a guardian and defender of both the king's power and your freedom, who shall hesitate about admitting that there is some inner danger lurking in your kingdom? With its allegiance and solemnity, the senate keeps a balance in what is based on your incredible freedom and falls under the king's authority.



This way, no party has any advantage over the other. Keeping your freedom means keeping strict obedience and authority. And when the kingdom lives by such rules, in which one can recognise the essence, spirit and idea of your freedom, then the king is the executor and the senate is the exponent of those rights you exclusively serve so that you can remain free with your king and your senate. You should not be surprised that other lands, which had never enjoyed a system like our republic, collapsed after suffering from an individual's rule, from oppression by a handful of magnates or from disagreement in their nation. You, on the other hand, will keep your state safe and alive by not diverting from your law, according to which your king reigns over you, the senate decides, and you enjoy a free spirit. For this reason, being aware of the greatness and usefulness of your rights, spare no effort to not only faithfully obey the laws but also learn and analyse them. For it would be great disgrace for you to boast about your freedom granted by rights that you do not know or whose value you cannot assess. I would like you to consider what you would say to someone asking you whether you, Poles, are free? What makes you free? You would say that your rights. But what are your rights?



If you answered that you do not know and if you could not prove that you are free, the rights you do not know could not protect your freedom because a weapon one does not know does not protect their lives. Your whole freedom is threatened by the ignorance of your rights. For man's freedom is not crushed through military violence but through treason and deceit. You have strong defence against military violence that you can use to take vengeance on your enemies for depriving you of your freedom or to challenge them. But it is only your rights that can protect you against deceit and treason. It is the only cure to be used for your republic, and if it does not seem effective against the venom that attacks the sincerity of our rights, then one cannot find any other cure to combat diseases affecting the republic. [...]

Since you are the creators of your rights, serve also as their teachers and put them in practice so that you remain responsible for how your rights benefit you in your republic. I do not call upon you to accept foreign teachings but admonish you to keep and foster those rights that your ancestors have left for you. It is this concern for law that your freedom depends on, the freedom that makes you greater than any other people. Let others collect gold, set tolls, show their fortifications and boast about their fertile lands. And you can cherish the rights you should value more than any riches. Gathered in one volume like in a beautiful monument, they should be pleasant and easy to learn. You should notice the state of your public affairs and the conditions of your freedom described in those rights. Jakub Przyłuski has wisely divided, grouped and written down all of them. We should all hope that we will maintain them for centuries and enjoy them in our free republic.

(Orzechowski, *Mowa do szlachty polskiej* [Appeal to the Polish noblemen] in Orzechowski, *Wybór pism* [Selection of works], ed. H. Wiszniewska [Kraków, 1972], pp. 98–114)