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President commemorates May 3 Constitution

"Our forefathers knew how to read the times in which Europe found itself, although they had so little time for reforms", President Bronisław Komorowski said in his address at Thursday's May 3rd Constitution anniversary celebrations on Warsaw's Zamkowy Square.

Bronisław Komorowski reminded that the May 3 Constitution, which introduced reforms aimed at leading Poland to modern statehood, was the first of its kind in Europe and the second in the world after the American Constitution of 1787. In his reminiscence of the political situation which led up to the May 3 act, the President warned that the present political turmoil in Poland resembled that in the years preceding the passing of the Constitution and the subsequent partitioning of the country.

"Does our political scene today resemble the Great Sejm or rather the nobility assemblies, which wasted away the work of generations? The fundamental Polish question today is: what has happened to our sense of responsibility? Do we (...) have the wisdom they had then? Do we have the wisdom and the courage to change the country and ourselves? Do we have the wisdom and the courage to cease our petty quarrels? Do we have the wisdom to perceive Poland's place in Europe and the world? Do we have the courage to persevere in our European goals and dreams? Is our political scene today closer or farther from the (...) Great Sejm which led Poland into modern Europe? Or does it perhaps resemble the nobility assemblies which ruined the achievements of generations, ridiculed greatness and wasted away heritage?" the president asked in his address.

In his comparison of the then and today's political opposition, Bronisław Komorowski especially referred to the infamous Targowica Confederation of Polish magnates who opposed the May 3 Constitution and sided with Russia in its partitioning of Poland. "The then opponents of the reforms concealed their private (...) interests under the slogans of patriotism and concern for the country, but the people saw through this falsehood and passed a terrible verdict - Targowice was branded as the high treason", President Komorowski stated.

Accompanying the President at the celebrations were Prime Minister Donald Tusk, the speakers of both parliament houses, the Defence Minister, the Head of the National Security Bureau Stanisław Koziej, Poland's military Chief-of-Staff and MPs.

Anniversary festivities also took place countrywide and in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.



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Adopted on May 3, 1791, the May 3 Constitution aimed to reform the long-standing political defects of the then Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, notably its "Golden Liberty" system which granted excessive rights to the nobility. The Constitution's adoption had been preceded by a strong campaign for reforms, the process beginning with the Convocation Sejm of 1764 and the election of Stanisław August Poniatowski as the Commonwealth's last king, and culminating in the legislation of the Great Sejm, which also passed the May 3 act.



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The Constitution's passage met with hostile responses from the Commonwealth's neighbors Prussia and Russia and culminated in the 1793 Second Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the 1795 demise of the Polish state for 123 years. The act, whose passage is celebrated annually, has remained a symbol of Poland's struggle for sovereignty.



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