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Anniversary Resolutions of the Polish Sejm and Senate as the Subject of Political Science Research¹

Abstract: Undoubtedly, memory studies can be included in the mainstream of contemporary political science. They encompass reflections on the politics of memory, and historical or collective memory. The political science literature has designated little space to examine anniversary resolutions of the Polish Sejm and Senate after 1989. Therefore, it has become the main focus of this article based on research conducted and funded by the National Science Centre. The research examined the place and role of anniversary resolutions of the Polish Sejm and Senate in the Polish politics of memory. It has been assumed that such resolutions express the will of the two chambers of the Polish Parliament to commemorate historical anniversaries related to events and people who, in the opinion of resolution promoters, play an important role in the history of the state and nation. Furthermore, it is understood that the anniversary resolutions, among other things, are an important tool of the authorities to implement the politics of memory. The aim of the publication is to present the main research findings. The findings are based on the analysis of 589 anniversary resolutions adopted by the Sejm and the Senate in 1989–2019. The article also draws attention to the significance and usefulness of the resolutions for political science research, not only those referring to memory studies.

Key words: anniversary resolutions, historical anniversaries, politics of memory, Polish Sejm and Senate

Introduction

In one of her articles, Anna Wolff-Powęska draws attention to disputes around the scientific identity of political science as a research discipline. She has rightly emphasised that the more sub-disciplines or research topics emerge within political science, the more intense controversy we have around the scientific autonomy of this field of knowledge. However, the diverse argumentation and some extreme attitudes question the sense of such disputes. Nevertheless, as the researcher assumes, the inter-disciplinary nature of contemporary political science, a science which is open to new achievements in the realm of social sciences and humanities, is an added value and a confirmation of global trends in this area (Wolff-Powęska, 2012, pp. 7–8).

The rapid development of political science in recent decades, in parallel with other related scientific disciplines (history, sociology, law, and economics) that study political, social, cultural, and other processes, has made the subject of research identical or hardly

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distinguishable. Since political science has gradually broadened its research horizon, it necessitated not only access to relevant sources but also to the use of new research methods (Sielezin, 2023, pp. 5–6). Moreover, it is worth emphasising that the attempts to define the boundaries of the discipline are the tradition of theoretical reflection and have major practical implications, chiefly in the formation of the identity of political science and the profession of a political scientist (Nocoń, 2010, p. 53).

One of the relatively new areas of political science is research into memory studies, which includes, for example, collective memory or its political instrumentalisation (Lipiński, 2012, pp. 43–55). In a broader context, the interest in collective memory emerged in social sciences and humanities in the 1970s (Kończal, Wawrzyniak, 2011, p. 11). Nevertheless, since then, in various scientific disciplines, the research into remembrance has flourished. One could even risk the statement that memory has become one of key concepts of contemporary humanities. The popularity of the research is evidenced by slogans that are often repeated in publications on memory studies, such as *memory boom* (Huysen, 1995, p. 5), *memory fever* (Huysen, 2003, p. 27) or *memory craze* (Megill, 1998, p. 37). It is also worth emphasising that nowadays memory cannot be confined within a single academic discipline. It is therefore a concept present in different disciplines, including broad social, political or media space.

In political science research, the concept of “the politics of memory” has acquired a particular significance. Most often, the politics of memory is one of the specific state policies, the essence of which boils down to the state authorities determining the content of collective memory. This is designed to produce specific effects that are beneficial for the survival of a given community and significant for the implementation of the current policy. In these areas, the politics of memory uses historical narratives to formulate specific content of collective and individual memories. With the help of the politics of memory, rulers arbitrarily decide what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten (Ratke-Majewska, 2018, p. 350; Nijakowski, 2008, *passim*). Therefore, the symbiosis of power and memory should be emphasised. Instruments of the politics of memory include the erection or demolition of monuments, renaming of streets, museum exhibitions, changes in school textbooks promoting a particular vision of the past, celebration of anniversaries or the adoption of commemorative acts. As far as the latter are concerned, anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and the Senate have been highlighted in this article.

This article aims to present the main conclusions from the research into the above-mentioned resolutions. The term “anniversary resolution” refers to an act of will of a collegial body, specifically the Polish Sejm and the Senate, adopted to commemorate historical anniversaries related to persons and events that are of fundamental for the history of the state and nation. Anniversary resolutions serve various purposes and functions, but as they are non-binding, they are merely a symbolic form of parliamentary expression. One of the motives supporting the research is the conviction, preceded by a detailed examination of literature on the subject, that in political science these resolutions have not been given much attention and have not been the subject of broader research and scientific studies. The research material collected consists in 589 anniversary resolutions selected from all the commemorative resolutions adopted by the Sejm and the Senate in 1989–2019. The fundamental aim of the research is to identify parliamentary anniversary resolutions in the Polish politics of memory. The research problem focuses at the

political practice of the politics of memory and the exercise of political power, as well as the function and role it plays in broadly understood public life. The research involves hypotheses assuming that: 1) anniversary resolutions are a mechanism of the politics of memory in terms of commemorating events and people, as well as a tool for creating new national heroes, restoring memory, settling accounts with the past and condemning it; 2) the selection of historical anniversaries to be commemorated is converged with ideological principles and interests of political groupings; 3) anniversary resolutions do not create a coherent and consistent vision of the politics of memory, as they depend on ad hoc political and ideological needs. Then, research questions are as follows: Who adopts anniversary resolutions? Why? What and/or whom do they commemorate? What measures are used? Alongside the politics of memory, the theoretical context is subordinated to historical anniversaries and the relationship between memory and power.

Theoretical contexts

The concept of an “anniversary” plays an important role for the research. It has been commonly assumed that the anniversary is a day that falls one, two, five, one hundred, or more years after an event. Anniversaries therefore measure the time that passes since an event (birth, death, battle, war, independence, etc.). Furthermore, dictionary definitions distinguish between important, round, exceptional, great, national or state anniversaries. Therefore, remembered and celebrated anniversaries organise the past in the present by establishing a certain rhythm and meaning (Piotrowska, 2019, p. 249). Anniversaries that relate to specific events, such as a national uprising, commemoration of national heroes, distinguished leaders, people of science or culture are important for the state and the nation. There are also anniversaries that mark political and systemic changes. Those symbolic dates establish a new order, and the authorities – based on that new order – set a new calendar for public holidays. In this sense, the commemorated anniversaries, referred to as historical, state or national, become the vehicle of the politics of memory, and in a broader sense they become festivals of remembrance (Wolff-Powęska, 2009, p. 33).

An analysis of the historical anniversary calendar leads to conclusions regarding the role and significance which the authorities, shaping the politics of memory, attribute to specific events and people from the past. Actions taken by the authorities in this regard, as well as the forms of celebration, can be perceived as a specific and instrumentalised political manifestation of how events and people are commemorated. In other words, anniversaries commemorated by the authorities often serve to construct the image and memory of the past, to organise collective identity, to present the historical orientation of the state, to settle accounts with the past or to legitimise or delegitimise the existing political order.

In a sense, it is a truism that memory is important for power. Nonetheless, as Jacques Le Goff wrote years ago, it is collective memory that is at stake in the struggle for power, and the seizure of memory or forgetting it is one of the goals of the classes, groups and individuals that rule or have ruled historical societies (Le Goff, 2007, p. 104). From the point of view of this research, Jan Assmann’s concept of power and memory becomes

relevant. The scholar argues that power is a potent stimulator of memory. This relationship forms the basis for the management of collective memory. It can take two forms – memory or ignorance. Among other things, this translates into what the narrative of power is and what emerges from this narrative. On the one hand, J. Assmann emphasises that the power needs an origin, a retrospective aspect to associate with. The second aspect, on the other hand, has a prospective dimension. It refers not only to the usurpation of the right to develop narrative of the past, but also of the future. In this way, power legitimises itself retrospectively and immortalises itself prospectively, for example by erecting monuments to “its” national heroes or by enacting self-important acts that are part of the politics of memory. The third aspect of the alliance focuses on ignorance. The researcher points out that there are forms of power that used available means to obliterate effects historical factors might have on their continuity and balance (Assmann, 2008, pp. 85–86).

With regard to the above, it is worth noting that the commemoration of anniversaries, like the calendar of national holidays, co-determines both the shape and character of the identity of the national and political communities. In this sense, anniversary resolutions are interesting for research into not only Polish history and memory. The resolutions also form an interesting picture of relations with other states and nations, as they not infrequently generate conflicts in international relations.

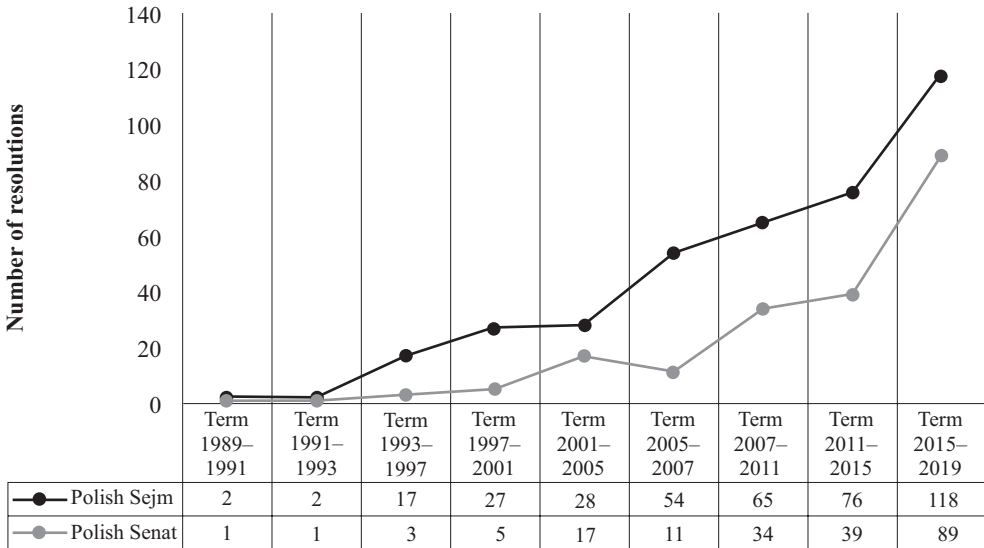
Analysis of research findings – selected aspects

Based on quantitative and qualitative analyses of the research material, as well as on the assumption that anniversary resolutions are a type of parliamentary commemorative resolutions, the research developed a definition of the anniversary resolution. It is an act of will of the Sejm and/or Senate to commemorate historical anniversaries related to events and persons who, according to the intention of the promoter of the resolution, are important for the history of the nation and the state. The essential feature of the anniversary resolution is its non-authoritative, non-binding and symbolic form. In the highly diversified legislative activity of the Sejm and Senate in 1989–2019 (10th–8th terms of the Sejm and 1st–9th terms of the Senate), which unambiguously referred in their title or content to the commemoration of a specific anniversary or anniversaries are deemed to be anniversary resolutions. As the research has proved, it should be noted that many resolutions commemorate more than one anniversary related to a given event or a person.

In the period concerned, i.e. the terms of the Sejm and Senate in 1989–2019, the two chambers adopted 589 anniversary resolutions. The results of the quantitative analysis of the research material are presented in the chart below.

According to the quantitative analysis, beginning from the 10th term of the Sejm and the 1st term of the Senate, the number of anniversary resolutions adopted by the two chambers of parliament has gradually increased. The only exception is the 6th term of the Senate (2005–2007), when fewer resolutions were adopted in comparison to the earlier term. However, this was due to the Sejm resolution to shorten the term in 2007. It is also worth noting that in the period concerned the Sejm adopted more resolutions commemorating historical anniversaries than the Senate. A significant increase in the

Chart 1. Anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland (1989–2019)



Source: Own elaboration.

number of legislative initiatives can be seen in the 2015–2019 term. This was related to the seizure of power by the Law and Justice (political camp of United Right) in 2015. This converged directly with the announcements the political party formulated during the election campaign for the Polish Sejm and Senate. The Law and Justice had expressed their vision of the politics of memory and new ways of implementing it. The research has also shown that during the period concerned the parliament was more likely to commemorate anniversaries of historical events than anniversaries associated with the people (Sejm: 206 anniversary resolutions related to events; 52.95% of the total; 183 anniversary resolutions related to people; 47.05% of the total; Senate: 114 anniversary resolutions related to events; 57.00% of the total; 86 anniversary resolutions related to people; 43% of the total).

In 1989–2019, events most frequently commemorated by anniversary resolutions included: the Silesian Uprising (11 resolutions), outbreak of the Greater Poland Uprising (10 resolutions), Katyń Massacre (10 resolutions), independence (9 resolutions), martial law (9 resolutions), outbreak of World War II (8 resolutions), restoration of local governments in 1990 (8 resolutions), Warsaw Uprising (6 resolutions), Poznań June 1956 (6 resolutions), Poland’s Wedding to the Sea (6 resolutions), return of Upper Silesia to Poland (6 resolutions), Lublin union (5 resolutions), December 1970 (5 resolutions), Baptism of Poland (4 resolutions), Battle of Warsaw (4 resolutions), and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (4 resolutions). On the other hand, the most frequently commemorated people included: John Paul II (16 resolutions), Father Jerzy Popiełuszko (8 resolutions), Ignacy Jan Paderewski (6 resolutions), Jan Karski (5 resolutions), Józef Piłsudski (4 resolutions), Maciej Rataj (4 resolutions), Wojciech Korfanty (3 resolutions), Gabriel Narutowicz (3 resolutions), Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (3 resolutions), and Frederic Chopin

(3 resolutions). These as well as the other events and people identified during the analysis form the official state canon important from the point of view of the nation and state history.

The research has distinguished historical periods and relevant events and people whom anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and Senate refer to. The analysis shows that the period of the Second Republic is most frequently referred to in anniversary resolutions (32.05% of all resolutions), while the period of the First Republic is least represented (5.22%).

A quantitative and problem-based analysis of anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and Senate produced a typology of resolutions. Anniversary resolutions are grouped according to six criteria. These are included in the table below.

Table 1

Typology of anniversary resolutions

Criterion					
Subject	Object	Temporary	Spatial	Goal	Decision
1. Anniversary resolutions of the Polish Parliament 2. Anniversary resolutions of the Senate	1. Anniversary resolutions related to events 2. Anniversary resolutions related to people	1. Anniversary resolutions related to the period from the establishment of the Polish State until the First Republic 2. Anniversary resolutions related to the First Republic 3. Anniversary resolutions related to the period of the Republic under partitions 4. Anniversary resolutions related to the period of the Second Republic 5. Anniversary resolutions related to the Second World War 6. Anniversary resolutions related to the period of the Polish People's Republic 7. Anniversary resolutions related to the period of the 3rd Republic of Poland	1. National anniversary resolutions (internal) 2. International anniversary resolutions (external) 3. National and international anniversary resolutions (combined)	1. Commemoration of events and people 2. Reconstructing the past 3. Restoration of memory and/or prevention of forgetting 4. Settling accounts with and/or denouncing the past	1. Anniversary resolutions adopted by acclamation 2. Anniversary resolutions adopted by vote

Source: Own study (cf. also Secler, 2022, pp. 107–108).

The analysis of the research material helped to distinguish six functions of anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and Senate: 1) cognitive function (anniversary resolutions

carry information about historical events and people, promote knowledge, and provide knowledge about the past and reflect on its significance for the present, e.g. political or social dimension; 2) identity function (anniversary resolutions give importance to the past in the present and define its meaning for the future while promoting specific values and patterns of behaviour which may influence collective or individual memory; events and people are hardly neutral and involve a particular way of perceiving or interpreting them, e.g. political. This function may be important for strengthening the identity of the people in question); 3) integration function (anniversary resolutions show the bond between the individual/citizen and the state; this bond is based on common history or experience and involve the remembrance of past events and people. Moreover, the function is also important for the integration of political elites around historical events and people important for the state); 4) emotional function (anniversary resolutions are emotionally charged, their narratives pertaining to events and people use specific linguistic and rhetorical vehicles; they are designed to evoke certain reactions, e.g. joy, pride, sense of injustice, etc. They may obstruct the assessment of the past or the present in accordance with the intentions of the legislator and their particular ideology. This function is also present in political disputes about the past in relation to the content of anniversary resolutions); 5) mobilising function (anniversary resolutions motivate public and social institutions, churches and religious associations or groups to undertake commemorative actions, educational activity, and the organisation of exhibitions, days of remembrance promoting knowledge of past events and people. The main objective of such activities is to counteract forgetting and promoting memory of events and people); 6) legitimising and delegitimising function (anniversary resolutions are aimed at justifying and sanctioning a specific political order, acknowledging the legitimacy of a given political authority or a disapproval of a given political system, authority or specific individuals associated with it). More examples of the functions specified above can be found in the research material (Secler, 2022, pp. 113–114).

While referring to the above issues, it is worth emphasising that the research found answers to research questions and verified hypotheses. It should be noted that the Sejm and the Senate have been potent actors in the politics of memory since 1989. This applies first and foremost to their domestic role but also the international one. Although positions expressed in the resolutions has never had legally binding power, anniversary resolutions play an important role in the shaping of the politics of memory. Thus the resolutions are a mechanism used by the politics to commemorate past events and people. Being a symbolic act, they incorporated new heroes into the canon and restored the memory of historical events or facts. Moreover, the narratives contained in some of the anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and Senate have been used to settle accounts with the past, or sometimes condemning it. The research has shown that historical anniversaries to be commemorated through anniversary resolutions are correlated with ideological principles and interests of political groupings. Conclusions in this regard are based on the analysis of political agendas and draft resolutions and their justification, as well as transcripts from meetings of Sejm and Senate committees. In this context, it is worth highlighting that memory conflicts have been quite frequent. While juxtaposing this problem with Jan Assmann's concept of the memory and power alliance, it should be stated that the ruling political power sees anniversary resolutions

as an instrument through which it can legitimise itself retrospectively, e.g. by interpreting the past in a way that converges with the ideology, as well as prospectively by undertaking acts of remembrance that they consider important. The research revealed alternative narratives that have been accused of falsifying history or rewriting it. Furthermore, the research has shown that anniversary resolutions do not create a coherent and consistent vision of the politics of memory. Instead, they remain dependent on current political and ideological needs of their authors (political parties and groupings or their representatives). The anniversary resolutions analysed are important from historical and political points of view. The parliamentary discourse on the procedure and adoption of anniversary resolutions is highly debatable, with the main axis of the dispute based on the pursuit of historical truth.

The anniversary resolutions of the Sejm and Senate are a highly diverse genre. Their analysis has revealed that many events and people formed the official state historical canon through parliamentary commemorative actions. An important feature of anniversary narratives is the use of numerous historical analogies, metaphors, lines of reasoning or sibilant associations. They also include references to national values and authorities. The particle “may” is frequently used (for example: “May the memory of Polish heroes last...”). In some of the anniversary resolutions, the Sejm and the Senate undertook to preserve the memory of national heroes and historical events.

Summary

As underlined above, according to the political science literature to date, anniversary resolutions have not received much attention. They have been noted, mostly in a fragmentary manner, on the occasion of research projects concerning the politics of memory, collective memory or other political issues or phenomena. The scarcity of research on anniversary resolutions in political science, as well as in other academic disciplines dealing with memory studies (e.g. sociology, history, law, anthropology) prompted to explore this underexploited research field.

In theoretical terms, the research has structured issues pertaining to memory, politics and power from a political science perspective. It also outlined prospects for new research related to the extensive use of “anniversary resolutions” in the state politics of memory. From the political science perspective, anniversary resolutions can be seen as an important factor of volatility on the political arena. They are, in a way, “witnesses” to changes on the Polish political scene and the diversity of views among parliamentarians, everything depending on the current setup of the political scene. In this context, the research findings may help to scientifically explain certain political phenomena and processes. The initiated research has also created potential for further comparative analyses of the resolutions adopted by the Sejm and Senate in subsequent terms (after 2019). Moreover, the research created opportunity for international comparative studies. In the case of other scientific disciplines that use different research approaches and methods, the findings may constitute an interesting point of reference.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Bartłomiej Secler

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Bartłomiej Secler

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Bartłomiej Secler

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Bartłomiej Secler

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Bartłomiej Secler

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Uchwały rocznicowe Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej jako przedmiot badań politologicznych

Streszczenie

Bez wątpienia, w nurt współczesnej politologii można włączyć badania pamięcioznawcze. Zwyczaj odnoszą się one do refleksji na temat polityki pamięci, polityki historycznej czy pamięci zbiorowej. Dotychczas, w literaturze przedmiotu z zakresu nauk o polityce, niewiele miejsca poświęcano problematyce uchwał rocznicowych Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej po 1989 roku, które są przedmiotem zainteresowania niniejszego artykułu. Opiera się on na badaniach przeprowadzonych i finansowanych ze środków Narodowego Centrum Nauki na temat miejsca i roli uchwał rocznicowych Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w polskiej polityce pamięci. Przyjęto, że uchwały te stanowią akt woli obu izb polskiego parlamentu w zakresie upamiętniania rocznic historycznych odnoszących się do wydarzeń i osób, które w opinii uchwałodawców, zajmują ważne miejsce w dziejach państwa i narodu. Ponadto przyjęto między innymi, że uchwały rocznicowe Sejmu i Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej są istotnym narzędziem władzy w zakresie realizowania założeń polityki pamięci. Celem publikacji jest prezentacja głównych ustaleń wynikających z realizowanych badań. Ich postawą była analiza materiału badawczego obejmującego 589 uchwał rocznicowych uchwalonych przez Sejm i Senat Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1989–2019. Niniejszy artykuł zwraca także uwagę na znaczenie i przydatność wyżej wskazanych uchwał polskiego parlamentu dla badań politologicznych – nie tylko tych, o charakterze pamięcioznawczym.

Słowa kluczowe: uchwały rocznicowe, rocznice historyczne, polityka pamięci, Sejm i Senat Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej