In my lecture, I will discuss how political representation and decision-making worked in Late Medieval Europe. I will focus on general assemblies or diets which were mostly attended by the ruler and a more or less well defined circle of nobles in order to debate and decide matters of the respective kingdom. My examples will be taken from the reigns of Casimir IV (1447-1492) of Poland, Matthias Hunyadi (1458-1490) of Hungary, and Frederick III. (1442-1493) of Germany. Main questions to be discussed will be:

- How did the organizational side of diets look like? Who convened them, how were they composed, who took part in them, was there a traditional place/site to hold them?
- How were political decisions reached? What were the main aspects to be discussed, how could one express his opinion, did any “rules” for convening exist, did the contemporaries regard themselves as part of a representative body?
- How did the contemporaries – be it involved people or just observers – perceive the assemblies? Did they see each diet as an individual event or did they develop an idea of continuities or even a historicity of diets?

The following sources should help to give a first impression of the topic; all of them are provided in their original language (Latin/German) and an English translation.

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S 1: Debate about the “first seat” in the diet (sejm) in Piotrków, 1449
[Jan Długośz, Annales seu cronicae incliti regni Poloniae..., Lib. 12; translated by Maurice Michael (1997)].

Having arranged matters in Lithuania, King Casimir returns to Poland and summons a general assembly to meet in Piotrków. He invites Cardinal Zbigniew to attend, but he at first refuses, but, learning that some of the nobles of Wielkopolska are threatening action against him, he changes his mind and arrives with a huge retinue in the middle of the proceedings. At this, Władysław Archbishop of Gniezno, afraid that now he will have to play second fiddle, takes his leave and with him go the Bishop of Poznań, two voivodes and a number of other personages, who are jealous of Zbigniew’s promotion. However, the King continues the assembly and a number of matters are settled. The King also receives envoys from Frederick, King of the Romans, and from Duke Conrad both demanding that he does not harass Władysław Duke of Mazovia, who is King Frederick’s uncle. King Casimir agrees to defer his demand for the return of the territory involved, so as to allow the matter to be settled judicially. The Archbishop and his supporters, chagrined that the King has settled the matter without them, demand a private discussion. The King agrees to see them without any Cracovians being present, other than the Castellan and Voivode of Cracow, Jan of Tęczyn, and the Voivode of Lwów, Peter Odrowąż. The Cracovian prelates and nobles feel that this humiliates them and blame Cardinal Olesiński for their humiliation. They even ask the King not to allow them to be treated in this way, but the King merely reiterates that time and again he has asked the Pope not to promote Bishop Zbigniew until all grounds for disagreement have been removed, but his wishes have been ignored.

1 Please note: Michael’s translation of Długosz’s Annales is a very abridged one; to understand the whole context, I printed the much longer Latin text here as well.
Ordinato terrarum Lithuaniæ statu Casimirus rex Polonie\(^1\) ex Lithuania processit et in Regnum suum Polonia venit et convencionem generalem omnium terrarum in opido Pyotrkow tenuit. Sbigneus autem cardinalis in insigniis cardinalatus una cum Sophia\(^m\) regina ante Kozyenице\(^e\) circa Vislam sibi occurrerit. Quem Casimirus\(^g\) cum omni caritate, veneracione et honore excipit\(^h\) et tractat, congadens plurimum de sua sublimacione et honore. Comitabatur autem Sbigneus cardinalis Casimurum Polonian\(^4\) regem usque in Radom, ubi rex ipsum convencionis future Pyotrcoviensi\(^7\) interesse renitentem, multa prece et suasione ad veniendum solicitavit et induxit. Casimiro igitur rege pro die sancti Nicolai in Pyotrkow veniente\(^50\), prelati, || principes et barones regni sui\(^a\) super rebus gravibus\(^b\) decisiones\(^c\) acturi conveniunt\(^e\). Quibus in huiusmodi deliberacionibus occupatis Sbigneus cardinalis magna amicorum\(^d\) et fratrum vallatus\(^e\) caterva\(^d\) supervenit (audierat enim quosdam barones\(^f\) Polonie Maioris\(^f\) quasdam minus et injurias adversus se locutos esse) et cum magna pompa et splendor curiam ingressus regiam, ad consilium regis descendit. Wladislaus autem Gnesensis archiepiscopus timens, ne locum inferioriorem tenere cogeretur, ex loco consiliis una cum Andrea\(^8\) Posnaniensi episcopo\(^8\), Luca Posnaniensi, Alberto Malski Lanciciensi, palatini et aliis dignitariis Maioris\(^h\) Polonia discersit. Qui male de amplitudine et promociione ipsius cardinalis contenti, ad injuriar quoque et depressionem eorum dignitatem hanc pontificii Cracoviensi allegabat collatum, ut locum superiorem et eminenciam archiepiscopalem sibi vendicaret et hac una, que restabant eis, excellencia terre Maioris Polonie nudarentur per Cracovensem, cum in omnibus aliiis præmeiatem et precedenciam occupassent. Diccedentibus autem prelatis et baronibus Maioris Poloniae ex consilio Casimirus rex nihilominus consilium non dissolvit, sed cum prefato Sbigno cardinali\(^1\) et baronibus\(^1\) parciis Cracoviensiis, Sandomierensiis Russie negocia queque deliberat et expedit. \textit{Sed et nuncius Friderici Romanorum digne transit}... Moleste autem ferentes Wladislaus archiepiscopus\(^1\), Andreas Posnaniensis episcopus cum baronibus parciis Maioris Poloniae post recessum suum a consilio deliberaciones de\(^d\) rebus gravibus\(^y\) in sui absencia fieri et Sbigneum cardinalem in regis consilio presidere,
missis nunciis, precibus a\textsuperscript{a} rege obtinent, ut privatum || consilium cum illis teneat. Rege itaque\textsuperscript{b} annuente in dotem plebani (ibi enim hospiciam archiepiscopale crat et illic parcum Maioris Polonie barones convenerant) itum est. Omnes tamen barones Cracoviensis par- cium, e\textsuperscript{-d} Joanne de Czyszow\textsuperscript{-d} castellano, e\textsuperscript{-} Joanne de Thanczin\textsuperscript{-e} palfino Cracoviensi et\textsuperscript{-e} Petro Odrowansch\textsuperscript{-f} Leopolensi palatino\textsuperscript{-f} duntaxat remanentibus, ab\textsuperscript{e} huiusmodi privato consilio excluduntur. Et exclusione facta, tristi voce et vultu queruntur se\textsuperscript{b} prelati et barones Maioris Polonie\textsuperscript{f} per dignitatem cardinalatus Sbigneo\textsuperscript{-f} Cracoviensi episcopo\textsuperscript{-i} collo- latam, depressos et vehementer diminutos esse omnemque\textsuperscript{k} culpam Sbigneo cardinali imponunt. Rogant regem\textsuperscript{i}, ne \textsuperscript{-m} in oprobrium\textsuperscript{-m} et contumeliam eorum permittat\textsuperscript{e} eis hanc injuriam irrogari. Casimirus autem\textsuperscript{g} rex huic eorum peticioni in hunc modum e regione respondit: \textquoteleft Precibus et persuasionibus ego quondam vestris motus, non literis solum sed et nunciis summum pontificem vexabam, ut capellum Sbigneo episcope Cracoviensi mittere distulisset in\textsuperscript{p} finem, ut discordiam, que verisimiliter oriri presumebatur, bono ordine com- posuisset. Verum ex quo pape alter visum est et capellus missus assumpit est\textsuperscript{i} et acceptus, non licet mihi contra \textsuperscript{-f} auctoritatem maiorem\textsuperscript{-f} calcitrare. Neque adeo potens sum, ut possim ipsi Sbigneo dignitatem suam legitime sibi collatam detrahere\textsuperscript{-m}. In hanc sentenciam et a castellano palatinoque Cracoviensisibus, item a palatino Leopolensi Petro Odrowansch itum est et pluribus respectibus et evidentissimis racionibus persuasum prelatis et baronibus Maioris\textsuperscript{e} Polonie, nihil illatum eis injurie esse et quod res hec nullo humano studio aut ingenio iuxta eorum conceptus abrogari aut variari possent\textsuperscript{i}. Hae responsione audita, maior dolore accenduntur. Credebat enim sue opinioni\textsuperscript{m} regem et hos, qui cum rege relieti erant, eciam\textsuperscript{e} parcum Cracoviensis barones favere magnopere debuisse. Dissolvit itaque con- silium huiusmodi privatum et prelati baronesque Maioris Polonie rem ipsam videntes undique contra suum propositem firmari, tepidius illam prosequuntur. Barones siquidem w\textsuperscript{-} parcum Cracoviensis\textsuperscript{-w} exclusione sua a consilio private plurimum irritati, omnes quasi vir unus in hospiciam Sbignei cardinalis conveniunt, ubi de exclusione sua et dedecore eis per Maioris Polonie consiliarios irrogato questi, pluribus sermonibus contra illos absentes tum\textsuperscript{e} investi sunt et concordi comunque consilio et voluntate firmant et conclusionem nullatenus permit- tere, ut aliqua adversitas deceterno\textsuperscript{e} cardinali irrotutur neque sine illo res publica tractentur\textsuperscript{b}, asserentes se non securi illius auctoritate\textsuperscript{e} frui velle et gaudere quam Maioris Polonie sui Gnesnensis metropolitani. Hec et plura alia privatim concepta in presencia regis et consiliariorum Maioris Polonie non sine indignacionis nota publice effundunt et, nisi deferatur in omnius\textsuperscript{e} cardinali, protestantur se omnes ex convencionis discessuros. Mitescere consiliarii Maioris Polonie his auditis et sensim de proposito cedere ceverunt. Ne tamen aliqua pars quie- quam suggellacionis aut dedecoris contraxisse videatur, precibus aput cardinalem\textsuperscript{e} obtentum est, quod et\textsuperscript{f} archiepiscopale Gnesnensi discedente, ex Pyotrkow discessit. Post quorum accessum super rebus publicis et presertim super defensione terrarum Russic et Podolie a Tar- taris, item super coercione spoliorum et eurorum, que plus solito in\textsuperscript{e} regis absencia Grassari ceverant, multi tractatus salubres habiti sunt. \textit{Sed et hic conclusione capta fuit, ut in singulis
S 2: Constitution “nihil novi” of the 1505 Sejm in Radom

Alexandri Regis Decreta in Cimitis Radomiensibus Anno 1505

Radomiensem autem conventionem, Nos Alexander Rex, anno 1505 habuimus et celebravimus quae eo ipso anno pro Dominica Conductus Paschae [30 III] per nos indicta, propter consiliarios Lithuaniae ac Prussiae terrarum expectatos in testimonio praesentium scriptos, aliosque magnae importantiae eventus, usque ad diem sabbathi post Octavam Sacratissimi Corporis Christi [31 V] continuata fuit, in eaque reverendissimis et reverendis in Christo patribus ac magni fisci, venerabilibus, generosis et nobilibus, praelatis et baronibus consiliariis nostris ac terrarum nuntiis in fine privilegi iusti communis scriptis moderantibus et consentientibus, nostras scripsimus constitutiones infra scriptas.

[1]. De non faciendis constitutionibus sine consensu consiliariorum et nuntiorum terrestrum.

Quoniam iura communia et constitutiones publicae non unum, sed communem populum afficiunt, itaque in hac Radomiensi conventione cum universis Regni nostri praelatis, consiliariis, baronibus et nuntiis terrarum, aequum et rationabile censuimus ac etiam statuimus, ut deinceps futurus temporibus perpetuis, nihil novi constitui debeat per nos et successores nostros sine communis consiliariorum et nuntiorum terrestrum consensu, quod fieret in praejudicium gravamenque Reipublicae, et damnum atque incommodum cuilibet privatum, ad innovationemque iuris communis et publicae libertatis.

Constitution of the Sejm in Radom in 1505

[1] On not passing laws without the consensus of senators and land deputies

Since general laws and public acts apply not to a single person but to the whole nation, therefore at this general Sejm in Radom, together with all prelates, councils and land deputies of our Kingdom, we have found it right and justifi ed, as well as decided that from now on nothing new (nihil novi) may be decided by us and our successors, without a common consensus of senators and land deputies, that would be detrimental or burdensome to the Commonwealth and harmful to anyone or that would alter the general law and public freedom.
S 3: King Aleksander in the Sejm.
[Coloured woodcut in the law collection Commune incliti Polonie Regni privilegium... (so-called “Statute of Jan Łaski”). Printed in Cracow, 1506].
S 4: Letter of King Matthias to Albert, Duke of Austria (1462)

Matthias’s letter to Albert, the brother of Emperor Frederick III., deals with the negotiations between Matthias and Frederick on the surrendering of the crown of St Stephen; due to the quarrels about the Hungarian throne in the 1440s, Frederick III. had been in possession of that crown since then.

Mathias etc. Illustri principi Alberto archiduci Austriæ et fratri charissimo salutem et fraternam benivolentiam. Illustri princeps, frater charissime. Accepius fraternitatis vestre litteras, propter viarum discrimina dupllicatas, quod postreditum ad vos Ewstachii Frodnacher 1) missa erat. Ex quibus intelleximus complura nova ac postulata, necnon etiam consultationes vestre fraternitatis, que omnia, quia jam cum tempore ipso, prout vos scitis, lapsa sunt, responisionem in scriptis non requirunt. Verum quia promiseramus eadem fraternitati vestre, tam per priores quam postea per alias litteras nostras significare de his, in quibus fidelis nobis dilectus Johannes episcopus ecclesie Waradiensis laboravit, promissioni nostre intendimus satisfacere per presentes. Nam, ut antea scripsisse meminimus, dictus dominus Johannes episcopus in Sclavoniæm per nos pro certis negotiis nostris disponendis fuit transmissus, inde non quidem e nostro mandato, ut ipse dicit, sed ex nonnullorum praelorum et barorum regni consilio, ad imperatorem romanorum divertens, nou nostro nomine sed eorum ex parte ibidem multa egit. Novissime illinc reversus certos habitorum tractatum articulos atutulit,2) quibus respondere et eos firmare aut infirmare, prout ab eo percepius, non est nostrum, cum non personam nostram, ut dicit, sed totius regni universitatem concernat; immo nec adhuc in specie nobis ostensi sunt, aut publicati, sed in hac proxima generali omnium regnicolarum nostrorum congregacione, qu hoc ipsum precipue advocata,3) sunt publicandi. Qua in re quidcumque tandem fuerit secutum, fraternitatem vestram reddemus continuo certiorem; nam ea que inter vestram fraternitatem et nos sunt conclusa, modo per vos servata sint, parte nostri salva erunt. Ceterum ante novae fraternitatis vestre hæc possimus
Ouch, genedigen hern, saget der koffman hy, der ausz Unger unde och von Pollen komet, daz der koneg von Ungern unde dy hern in Ungern uneyn seynd, unde der koneg von Ungern hat eyn tag mit en ghat, unde hat holffe unde rat von en begert, uff daz der seyn vorgenomen eym lande czu Bemen mochte czu eym gutten ende brengen. (...) 
Alzo habin sich dy hern eym lande czu Ungern besprochen, unde der beyschzoff von Gran hat eym eyne antwert gebin von der hern wegen, unde hat eym gesaget, daz sey eym vor geholffen habin unde hatten gemeynt her worde solchsz gelt an vorschoczczewing desz landesz czu Ungern gelet habin, alzo her wol merken konde, daz sey gedranget worden von den Torken; waz sey eym dorczu helffen solden, welden sy gerne thun, ader daz sy ander leut solden vorticidigen mit erem gelde, daz weren sy nicht gemeynt czu thun.
Alzo hette der konig gefraget, ab eym nicht eyne ander antwert worde oder gebin welde. Do hette der beschoff gesaget: neyn.
Alzo hette der koneg von Ungern dy hant uff gehabin, unde hette den beschoff an daz maul geschlagen; do hetten dy herren gesait, der slag solde nicht ungerochen bliben.

“Gracious lords, a tradesman coming from Hungary and Poland reported that the king of Hungary and the lords of Hungary are disagreeing; and the king has had an assembly with them, where he asked for their support and advice, for he wanted to bring the quarrel about Bohemia to a happy ending.

Therefore, the lords in the country of Hungary discussed the matter, and the bishop of Esztergom gave him [=the king] an answer in the name of the lords; and he told him, that they had already helped him and they had thought, he [=the king] would spend the money they had given to him on the defense of the country of Hungary, because he must have noticed the Turks’ attacks. Should they be asked to help him here, they would dearly do so; but they would not agree to defend other people with their own money.

Then, the king asked whether they did not want to give him another answer. And the bishop answered: no. So the king of Hungary raised his arm and slapped the bishop on the mouth; the lords then said that they shall take revenge for this slap.”

In his further report Mohnhaupt tells the Saxonian Dukes that he heard a gossip about 16 Hungarian lords who went to the Polish king and asked him to make his son Prince Kazimierz king of Hungary; in return, they promised to give the Polish king some castles at the border. According to Mohnhaupt, the Polish king then sent 12.000 men to Hungary, to prove whether the Hungarian lords would keep their promise; if so, he seemed willingly to send his son to Hungary.
S 6. Resolution of the Hungarian diet of 1474, later approved by the king.

Nos prelati et barones ac electi nobiles regni Hungar[ie] in presenti congregatio[n]e Budensi [c]ongregati totum idem regn[um] representantes, significamus tenore presentium, quibus expedit uni[versis, quod cum] nos hibs diebus de voluntate et mandato serenissimi principis et domini. domini Mathie Dei gratia Hungarie, Bohemie etc. regis domini nostri naturalis in hanc civitatem Budensem ad tractandas diversas res regni et presentim factum defensionis fidei contra Turco[s], qui idem regnum Hungarie diversis predis et spoliis affecerunt et in futurum fortius, quam a[llas unquam] dilacere pretendent, concernentes convenissemus factaque et negotia atque necessitudinem prefati regni Hungarie diutius inter nos pertractassemus, devenimus tandem communiter in infrascriptos articulos, quos sicuti nunc pro utiliori statu, comoditate et necessitate totius ipsius regni Hungarie ac incolarum eiusdem utiliter convenire cognovimus, ita communi voluntate et parili consensu conclusimus et finaliter determinavimus.

We, Hungary’s prelates, barons and elected noblemen, representing the entire realm in the present diet convened in Buda, make known to all to whom it may concern through these presents that recently, when we assembled here in this city of Buda, by the will and order of the most serene prince and lord, lord Matthias, by the grace of God king of Hungary, Bohemia, etc., our natural lord, to discuss various matters of the realm, especially the defense of the faith against the Turks—who have been ravaging and plundering this kingdom of Hungary in different ways and will devastate her even more forcefully in the future—and, after having deliberated among ourselves at length about the affairs, business, and needs of the said kingdom of Hungary, we finally agreed on the following articles which we believed would be beneficial to the better state, advantage and needs of this entire kingdom of Hungary and her inhabitants, we finally agreed on and defined them in common agreement and uniform accord.
7.1. Response of the attendees of the Nuremberg diet to a Hungarian delegation that had at first asked for support while fighting the Turks; after being refused they demanded to convene another diet and a guarantee that all of the dukes and lords would attend it in person.


Dann was die gmain beruret, das solt durch die gemain beslossen und gehandelt werden. So zimet es sich auch nicht [...] das ain solche heiligs groß furnemen allain durch des heiligen reichs glider an ir haupt, das ist die kaiserlich majestat, solt gehandelt werden.

... auch bisher [sei] auf allen tegen, die im heiligen reich gehalten worden, solche promission nie evordert worden... Es wurde auch nicht fur erlich geacht und angesehen, denn die fursten der Deutschen nacion die glaubten iren oratoren, die sy zu solchem ieder dergleichen samelung schickten, in irem anbringen gnugsamich volgten auch dem, das durch sy und ander furgenommen und beslossen wurde, also daz in schimpflich wer solche promission zu tun.

„Because what affects the general public ought to be approved and done by the general public. It is therefore not proper that such a holy and enormous plan should be handled simply by the members of the Holy Empire without their head that is the imperial majesty. Such a promise has never been demanded during all the diets that have been held in the Holy Empire so far. ... It was not considered as honorable either, because the princes of the German nation trusted that the delegates they had sent to such diets would follow their instructions and the decisions made during such diets; it would therefore be shameful to promise such a thing.”

7.2. Haug of Werdenberg's relation to the Emperor about the Nuremberg diet of 1480:
[Nr. 58, in: Actenstücke und Briefe zur Geschichte des Hauses Habsburg im Zeitalter Maximilians I. Dritter Band, ed. J. Chmel (Monumenta Habsburgica I/3), Wien 1858].

Item darauf so hab Ich den Curfürsten Fürsten und der gantzen versamung erzelt den grossen und swaren fall damit die heilig christenheit beladen ist mit dem Turkhen, mit den umbstenden und artigkel so dann sich darzu gepurd hat und voraus das Ir gnad wel ansehen die manigfaltigen tāg die man in dem heiligen reich so gar unfrucht- perlich gehalten hat, daraus erwagen ist die überhandt der Turkhen das sy nu an alles mittel an der deutschen nacion sein und der kaiserlichen Majestat landt nu wol xij jar überzogen hand und nu den negsten zug chawm zwon tagais von der Herren von Baiern landt gewesen, das alles nach notdurft erzelt.

And then I told the electors, princes and the whole diet about the enormous and hard pressure that was imposed on the holy Christendom by the Turks and the circumstances, as it has happened...; the result of all of the diets that have unsuccessfully been held in the holy empire so far is the superiority
of the Turks. They now get closer to the German nation without resistance; they have attacked the territories of the imperial majesty for twelve years, and have now done the next attack on a region just two day trips away from the territory of the Lords of Bavaria – this all documents the necessity to act!

Item darauf die Curfürsten Fürsten und die gantzen besamung ermant und gebeten als eristenlich kurfürsten und fürsten auch under tan der keiserlichen Maiestat und des heiligen reichs das sy wollen ansehen den almechtigen got den heiligen gelauben und die kaiserlich Maiestat als iren rechtten herrn und gesipten freundt und wollen dem heiligen glauben ewrer kaiserlichen Maiestat hilf und beistandt thun, damit die kaiserlich Maiestat und ire landt und lewt mitsammt dem Erztstift von Saltzburg nit von dem Turkhen also verdrugkht und von dem Kunig von Hungern von der dewtschen nation gedrungen werden, denn wo das beschehen sold das got verhuetten weil, mugen Ir aller gnaden und die gantz versamlung wol ermessent was grosser unwider brinlicher schad der cristenhait der dewtschen nation und In allen daraus erstund, das alles nach allerlenz mit den umbstenden und artigkel erzelt so dann notdurft darzu gewesen ist.

Then I admonished the electors, princes and the whole assembly and asked them as Christian electors and princes and subjects of the imperial majesty and the holy empire to consider God Almighty, the holy belief and the imperial majesty as their proper sovereign and friend; and I made a plea for supporting Your Majesty’s holy belief, so that the imperial majesty and her territories and people together with the archbishopric of Salzburg won’t be suppressed by the Turks and driven out of the German nation by the King of Hungary; because Heaven forbid! That such a thing should happen – Your Majesty and the whole assembly shall comprehend what enormous and irreversible damage for the Christendom, the German nation and all of us this would mean...

S 8: Letters of Enea Silvio Piccolomini to Cardinal Juan de Carvajal

8.1. Letter from 1444, written in the run-up to the diet of Nurnberg
Ego tibi ut verum fatear, non puto dietam hanc alii esse steriliorem. scis quid hoc verbo sentiam. fecunde sunt omnes diete, quellibet in ventre alteram habet.

I must confess, I do not believe that this diet will be much more infertile than others. You know what I mean? All diets are fertile – each of them is already pregnant with the next one.
8.2. Letter from 1454, written in the run-up to the diet of Regensburg

Timeo, ne more Theutonico propter absentiam cesaris ex dieta dietam habemus; sed nescimus, quid vesper vehat. nos intra biduum aut triduum iter arripiems; omnis festinatio nociva est et inimica consilii. multe lites sunt in Germania, que mihi non bonum animum faciunt ... habite sunt plures inter partes conventions neque concordatum est.

I fear that in the “German way” we will from one diet have another diet, due to the emperor’s absence; but we do not know what the evening brings. We take on travels between two and three days; the whole haste is harmful and a true enemy of negotiations... There are a lot of debates going on in Germany, towards which I am not disposed. Though several diets have already been held, no agreement was reached yet.