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THE SEPARATIST TENDENCIES IN THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA IN THE 17th CENTURY

The legal nature of the Polish–Lithuanian union established at the memorable *Sejm* (parliament) in Lublin in 1569 has been given various interpretations in Polish and foreign historiography. As is usual in such cases, the interpretations have depended not only on scholarly considerations but also on the scholars' political opinions and, generally speaking, on the political reality existing at the time, when a respective study was written. Oswald Balzer, a prominent Polish historian of political systems and law, wrote more than fifty years ago that "from 1569 the entire Polish–Lithuanian state constituted one entity, with unified laws. Lithuania was only one of the components of the state, like Little Poland or Great Poland"¹. These opinions were clearly echoed at the Congress of Polish Historians, held in Poznań in September 1984. Balzer had even earlier expressed the opinion that the 1569 union should be called a federal union rather than a real union, a name used after Stanisław Kutrzeba by many historians².

Among the latest researchers into this question special mention should be made of Juliusz Bardach and Henryk Wisner. The former said in a thorough though small study: "The Polish–Lithuanian union in the shape it was finally given at Lublin was a compromise ensuring the stability of a political connexion in the interest of both nations, a compromise which at the same time guaranteed the internal independence of the Grand Duchy within the multinational Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth"³. Henryk Wisner has stated clearly and emphatically that: "The Lublin Union did not abolish the separateness of the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It did not mark the end of the Lithuanian state. The concept of the Commonwealth embraced one nation of the gentry and two distrustful, if not ill-disposed to each other, states"⁴.

¹ O. Balzer, *Tradycje dziejowe unii polsko–litewskiej (The Historical Tradition of Polish–Lithuanian Union)*, Lwów 1919, p. 16.

² J. Ochmański, *Historia Litwy (The History of Lithuania)*, 2nd ed., Wrocław 1982, p. 136.

³ J. Bardach, *Krew i Lublin. Z problemów unii polsko–litewskiej (Krew and Lublin. From the problems of Polish–Lithuanian Union)*, «Kwartalnik Historyczny», 1969, No. 3, p. 615.

⁴ H. Wisner, *Wielkie księstwo Litewskie — Korona Polska — Rzeczpospolita (Grand Duchy of Lithuania — The Crown of Poland — The Commonwealth)*, «Przegląd Historyczny», 1976, No. 4, p. 575. The same point of view in this author's another paper: *Najjaśniejsza Rzeczpospolita. Szkice z dziejów Polski szlacheckiej XVI–XVII wieku (Serenissima Respublica. The Essays from the History of Noblemen's Poland 16th–17th centuries)*, Warszawa 1978, p. 13.

It is not our task to discuss in detail the legal aspects of the Lublin Union and the historians' discussion on this question. Let us only point out that neither the letter nor the spirit of the memorable act concluded in Lublin on July 1, 1569 was always observed in the 16th and 17th centuries. This applies not only to Lithuania's internal affairs. As is well known, the Lublin *Sejm* established that the two states would, among other things, have a common foreign policy. But even with regard to this delicate question departures from this principle occurred already in the first decade after 1569, the apogee having been reached in 1655, when the well known accord with the Swedes was signed at Kiejdany.

A common policy of Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy in the international arena was to be one of the main foundations of the union. This was not impaired by the legal rights of the Lithuanian Chancellors, who had competence over diplomatic relations with the Muscovite state. It was the Lithuanian Chancellors who reported on the diplomatic relations with the Commonwealth's eastern neighbour at the councils of the Senate (*senatus consilia*) and who dealt with the technical aspect of these relations. In addition to the Lithuanian Chancellors, the Lithuanian Hetmans (commanders-in-chief), too, tried to usurp the right to conduct foreign policy, not only towards Muscovy, and they frequently succeeded in their attempts.

No serious decentralizing trends, either in internal or in external policy, could be observed in Lithuania in the first few decades after the Lublin union. At the beginning of the war between the Commonwealth and Sweden (1617–1622), Krzysztof Radziwiłł (1585–1640), the later Castellan and Voivode of Wilno and Grand Hetman of Lithuania, entered the political scene in Lithuania. It is noteworthy that during his first public appearance in Wilno in 1605 the young Prince presented himself as a strong supporter of a close union between Poland and Lithuania, and as a defender of the rights of the *Sejm* and of the mass of the nobility. He said then: "The Poles may not decide anything about us without us, nor may we about them, and I will even say more: we may not decide anything about ourselves without them, nor they without us"⁵.

Nevertheless, the same Prince fell into conflict with King Sigismund III during the war with Sweden at the end of the 1620s and the beginning of the 1630s. This conflict between the King and the Lithuanian Field Hetman may, with some reservations, be called an argument between the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. The war was discontinued by the armistice concluded at Mitawa in 1622. The main architect of this armistice on the part of the Commonwealth was Krzysztof Radziwiłł, who availed himself of that opportunity to meet the Swedish King, Gustavus Adolphus. This led to a violent reaction from Sigismund III, who told the Hetman in a letter that his conduct had angered him and that he did not recognize the armistice concluded by the Hetman. The Hetman gave the King tit for tat and in his reply (August 30, 1622) asserted that the

⁵ H. Wisner, *Król i książę. Konflikt między Zygmuntem III Wazą i Krzysztofem Radziwiłłem (The King and the Prince. The Conflict between Sigismund III Vasa and Krzysztof Radziwiłł)*, «Rocznik Białostocki», vol. 9, 1972, pp. 55–56.

armistice with Sweden was in no way detrimental to the King or the Commonwealth.

Krzysztof Radziwiłł did not hesitate to dot the i's and cross the t's. When the King asked him on what terms peace could be concluded with Gustavus Adolphus, he replied that the main condition was for Sigismund III to renounce his rights to the Swedish throne. There was yet another important element in the Hetman's reply. He stressed that the recovery of the throne in Scandinavia would greatly enhance the King's position and power, and consequently endanger the freedoms of the nobility in the Commonwealth. This was probably the most important elements of Prince Radziwiłł's memorial.

Sigismund III took an even greater dislike to the Lithuanian Hetman, but this did not help much and the King's war plans fell through at the *Sejm* in 1624. Even more important than this thwarting of the royal plans, which after all turned out to be temporary, was the joint statement made at the same parliament by the Lithuanian deputies led by Krzysztof Radziwiłł. They demanded that the *Sejm* adopt a law obligating the debating estates to accept the Swedish proposal for peace negotiations and to appoint commissioners for the talks.

The setbacks and defeats suffered by the Lithuanian troops induced Lew Sapieha, who was then Grand Hetman of Lithuania, to sign in March 1626 a Swedish–Lithuanian armistice which was to last until June 15. The armistice was signed without the consent and knowledge of the King who, resentful of this conduct, wrote to the Hetman in April, demanding: "Your Grace should see to it that neither Your Grace yourself nor any of Your Grace's representatives dare in the future conclude such an armistice or cease-fire with the enemy, without Our explicit consent"⁶.

In spite of this, on January 19, 1627 the Lithuanian commissioners headed by Mikołaj Korff, Voivode of Wenden, and Walter Plettenberg, *Starosta* (Head) of Nowogródek, signed a new truce valid until June 11 with Swedish representatives at Baldemojza. To my mind, that step could no longer be regarded as a manifestation of opposition to the King by one magnate or another, or by some magnatial coterie. That was a clear manifestation of Lithuanian separatism or particularism. The Polish Kingdom, whose military and political situation was difficult, strongly opposed the Lithuanian–Swedish armistice. The Lithuanian senators' letter to the Archbishop of Gniezno Jakub Weżyk, signed by Grand Hetman Sapieha, the Bishop of Wilno Eustachy Wołłowicz, the Voivode of Troki Krzysztof Chodkiewicz and Treasurer Krzysztof Naruszewicz, met with decisive disapproval and, what was the most important, the conclusion of the armistice was considered to be a violation of the Polish–Lithuanian union. The King stated explicitly that the armistice had been signed in defiance of his will and without his knowledge. The matter was put the most expressively by the Castellan of Cracow, Jerzy Zbarski who, writing to the Lithuanian magnates on

⁶ King Sigismund III to Lew Sapieha, Warsaw, 26 IV 1626. See H. Wisner, *Dyplomacja polska w latach 1572–1648 (The Polish Diplomacy in the Years 1572–1648)*, in: *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, vol. II, 1572–1795, ed. Z. Wójcik, Warszawa 1982, p. 49.

February 28, 1627, said: "This savours very much of a violation of the ties which the Polish Kingdom has with the Lithuanian Duchy"⁷.

The Polish intervention in Muscovy at the beginning of the 17th century, during the "Time of Troubles", aroused great opposition and alarm in Lithuania. The Lithuanians' opposition was expressed the most firmly at the 1606 *Sejm* by the Lithuanian Grand Chancellor, Lew Sapieha. He said that since Lithuania was threatened by Muscovy, a debate should be held on defence. If the Crown of Poland did not agree to this, Lithuania would have no choice but to see to her own security. The Chancellor did not even hesitate to state that in the last resort the Grand Duchy might even decide to dissolve the union. Disgusted with the King's plans annexation against Moscow, the Chancellor became increasingly critical of the King's policy. He was against the plan for an expeditionary force to relieve the Polish unit which was besieged in the Kremlin by the Muscovite levy in mass. In a letter to his wife, written on June 20, 1612 he wrote: "It is more urgent, I think, to debate on how to stop Poland than on how to capture Muscovy"⁸.

The "Time of Troubles" showed beyond doubt that Lithuania opposed the adventurism of the false pretenders to the Muscovite throne and the war against Muscovy, especially when the policy of intervention in Russia began to suffer setbacks and defeats. The Lithuanians were unable to sustain the burden of the war and were constantly afraid of Russian revenge. This fear was groundless during the collapse of the tsars' state, but it became real later on.

The Lithuanian question became acute during the Swedish invasion of the Commonwealth in the middle of the 17th century. There is no doubt that the court in Stockholm was well aware of the situation in the Grand Duchy. Prince Janusz Radziwiłł, Voivode of Wilno and Grand Hetman of Lithuania, the most powerful magnate and dignitary in Lithuania at that time and leader of Lithuanian dissidents, strongly opposed John Casimir's court and sought foreign contacts with the King's various enemies, also in Stockholm. He was already thinking of severing the Jagiellonian union. At the end of 1653, Janusz and Bogusław Radziwiłł established contact with Transylvania, which savoured of treason to the state. There are direct unequivocal contemporary proofs that at the end of 1654 the party of the Radziwiłłs of Birża maintained contacts with Sweden and Transylvania, threatening Poland that they would detach Lithuania from the Polish Kingdom and subordinate the Grand Duchy to the Swedes.

On August 17 and October 20, 1655, Swedish-Lithuanian treaties were signed at Kiejdany in Samogitia. The October treaty meant in fact the break of the Jagiellonian union. It laid foundations for a new, unprecisely defined union

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

⁸ *Archiwum domu Radziwiłłów (The Archives of the House of the Radziwiłłs)*, ed. A. Sołowski, Kraków 1881, *Scriptores Rerum Polonicarum*, vol. VIII, p. 254. Cf. K. Tyszkowski, *Wojna o Smoleńsk 1613-1615 (War for Smoleńsk 1613-1615)*, Lwów 1932, p. 23 and J. Maciszewski, *Polska a Moskwa 1603-1618. Opinie i stanowiska szlachty polskiej (Poland and Muscovy 1613-1618. Opinions and Standpoints of Polish Nobility)*, Warszawa 1968, p. 248.

between Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. While not denying that the Lithuanian dissidents led the Radziwiłłs played an inspirational role in the preparation and conclusion of the agreement with the Swedes, let us strongly emphasize that they were backed not only by the majority of the Catholic nobility but also by a part the Roman Catholic clergy and by representatives of the Lithuanian episcopate, namely the Bishop of Samogitia, Piotr Parczewski, a signatory of the act of Kiejdany, and by the Bishop of Wilno, Jerzy Tyszkiewicz, Canon Jerzy Białozor having signed the document on the Bishop's behalf and in his own name.

If the treaties of Kiejdany had come into force, this would have annulled one of the greatest achievements in the history of medieval and modern Europe: the Polish–Lithuanian union. What is more, this was the first step towards the other steps and diplomatic measures taken during the Second Northern War, the aim of which was the annihilation of the Polish state (the treaty providing for the partition of Poland signed at Radnot in Hungary in December 1656). These two aspects should not be ignored when this issue is considered not only from Polish, but also from the scholarly point of view.

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that the agreement of Kiejdany was illegal in the light of the laws being in force in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, for it was concluded without the consent, knowledge and authorization not only of the *Sejm* but even of the Lithuanian Senate and the dietines of the Grand Duchy. This was realized by those Lithuanian dignitaries and citizens who came out against the Kiejdany treason. According to Wawrzyniec Rudawski, a Polish historian and chronicler of those days, their decision was that *ne pax fieret incio Rege ac Republica*⁹.

The next manifestation of decentralizing trends in Lithuania could be noticed during the Polish–Muscovite peace negotiations at Niemież near Wilno. More and more Lithuanian magnates and noblemen thought that the wars against Russia should be stopped and a lasting understanding reached with her. This was the dominant trend in Lithuania during the entire second half of the 17th century and it had the decisive influence on the international orientation of the magnates and noblemen of the Grand Duchy.

The Lithuanians regarded an agreement with Russia as a great, and the only chance for recovering their territories occupied by Russian troops. The noblemen concerned (and not only they) exerted strong pressure on the Commonwealth's diplomats negotiating with the Russians at Niemież to bring the talks to a successful conclusion as soon as possible. A letter of those times reads: "The Honourable Gentlemen from the Polish Kingdom may certainly discourse, being in a better situation than we are... they no longer think of our salvation and it is said that they prefer the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to perish than to

⁹ L. J. Rudawski, *Historiarium Poloniae ab excessu Vladislai IV ad pacem oliviensem usque libri IX*, Varsovia 1754, p. 180.

suffer the smallest reduction in their possessions"¹⁰. Representatives of the embittered Lithuanian nobility asserted point-blank that if the commissioners of the Commonwealth did not conclude a peace with Russia, the Lithuanians would accept subordination to Muscovy.

The question of the attitude to Muscovy again came on the agenda in Lithuania in connection with the election of a new King, after the abdication of John Casimir (1668). Among the important candidates to the Polish and Lithuanian throne was a representative of the ruling Russian dynasty of the Romanovs. A personal representative of the Lithuanian Grand Hetman, Michał Pac, told Stiepan Polkov, a tsarist emissary then staying in Wilno, that the Hetman supported the Russian candidate to the Polish crown, and would not only back the candidature of the Tsar's son but was even ready to put Lithuanian troops at the disposal of Tsar Alexei and his son to facilitate their achievement of this aim. What was extremely important was the Hetman's assertion, repeated in Polkov's report that: "the Archbishop of Gniezno (Mikołaj Prażmowski) and other senators from the Polish Kingdom as well as all the Ruthenian voivodships up to the Vistula and the whole of Lithuania desire the son of His Majesty, Tsarevitsh and Grand Duke Alexei Alexeievich to become King of Poland"¹¹.

In the spring of 1678 a great legation of the King and the Commonwealth arrived in Moscow to conclude an eternal peace with Russia. The deputation comprised representatives of Poland and Lithuania. On arrival in the capital of the tsars, the secretary of the legation, Hieronim Komar, a judge of Orsza and expert in Muscovite affairs, had a talk with a special official of the *posolskij prikaz* (Muscovite Foreign Office) and told him that there were great differences of opinion between the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania concerning policy towards Turkey and Muscovy. The Lithuanian Grand Hetman, Michał Pac, and the entire army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were in favour of war with Turkey, in alliance with Russia, which was then waging a war against the Ottoman Empire. Representatives of the Polish Kingdom and King held a different view. Komar said that in this situation the Voivode of Połock, Kazimierz Jan Sapieha who was co-chairman of the deputation, and he himself, being representatives of Lithuania, had separate instructions from the Senate of the

¹⁰ Z. Wójcik, *Polska i Rosja wobec wspólnego niebezpieczeństwa szwedzkiego w okresie wojny północnej 1655–1660* (*Poland and Russia towards the Common Swedish Threat during the Northern War 1655–1660*), in: *Polska w okresie drugiej wojny północnej 1655–1660*, vol. I. Warszawa 1957, p. 365.

¹¹ Z. Wójcik, *Pacowie wobec kandydatury rosyjskiej na tron Polski w latach 1668–1669* (*Misja Polkowa na Litwie 1668*) (*The Pacs in Relation to the Russian Candidature to the Polish Throne in the Years 1668–1669* (Polkov's Mission to Lithuania 1668)), «Przegląd Historyczny», 1969, No. 1, pp. 149–150. About the Pacs' policy see the same author, *Między traktatem andruszowskim a wojną turecką. Stosunki polsko-rosyjskie 1667–1672* (*From the Treaty of Andrusovo to the Turkish War. Polish–Russian Relations 1667–1672*), Warszawa 1968, p. 126 and *Russian endeavors for the Polish crown in the seventeenth century*, «Slavic Review», vol. 41, No. 1, Spring 1982, p. 65.

Grand Duchy for the negotiations in Moscow¹². No separate Lithuanian–Muscovite negotiations were held at that time, but it is confirmed in many sources that the Lithuanians undoubtedly conducted a different policy from that of Poland towards Turkey and Russia, striving for a war against the former and peace with the latter. The same trend could be clearly noticed in Lithuanian policy during the final negotiations between the Commonwealth and the Muscovite state in 1686, which, as is well known, ended with an eternal peace treaty, very unfavourable to Poland¹³.

During the second half of the reign of King John Sobieski the Sapieha oligarchy in Lithuania, supported by many Polish magnates and noblemen, led not only to a rule of terror and oppression in that country but also — and we say this without any hesitation — to a specific secession of the Grand Duchy which in practice was ruled by a powerful family. In foreign policy the Sapieha family and their adherents in the Polish Realm followed a line which was independent of the King, and hatched international intrigues. Their conduct was based on a very simple principle: they always opposed the policy pursued by the King at a given time¹⁴.

What we have called a “specific secession” of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania assumed particularly dangerous dimensions in 1694 in connection with the conflict between the Bishop of Wilno, Konstanty Brzostowski, and the Lithuanian Grand Hetman, Kazimierz Jan Sapieha. A delegation of the Grand Hetman’s adherents came to see the King in January 1694 to explain their point of view. It was presented in such a manner that Sobieski rightly considered it to be a step aimed against the Polish–Lithuanian union, and he bluntly pointed this out to his interlocutors¹⁵.

The developments in Lithuania’s internal and especially her external affairs in the 17th century confront us with the fundamental question of whether this was merely magnatial lawlessness, what the Polish historian Bogusław Leśnodorski has once called “the decentralization of sovereignty”, or whether it was a phenomenon of a much greater importance, namely Lithuanian separatism. It seems that at the present stage of research it is not easy to give an unequivocal answer to this question.

In the 17th century Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, many a magnate, many a magnatial–noblemen group or party, also in the Polish Kingdom, tried to pursue a foreign policy of their own and established contact with foreign courts. This was evident particularly strongly during the Swedish invasion, during the successive royal elections, especially in the years 1648, 1669 and 1674, and first and foremost during Lubomirski’s rebellion (1665–1666) and

¹² Z. Wójcik, *Rzeczpospolita wobec Turcji i Rosji 1674–1679. Studium z dziejów polskiej polityki zagranicznej* (*The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in Relation to Turkey and Russia 1674–1679. A Study from the History of Polish Foreign Policy*), Wrocław 1976, p. 153.

¹³ For details see A. Wójcik, *Jan Sobieski 1629–1696*, Warszawa 1983, p. 375 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 415 ff.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 485–486.

the stormy years of Michael Korybut's reign (1669–1673). Consequently it can be said that the activities of the Lubomirskis, Opalińskis, Radziejowskis and Mniszechs and the nobility supporting them in the Polish Kingdom did not differ from the oppositional activities of the Radziwiłłs, Pacs and Sapiehas and their clientele in Lithuania. They were both typical examples of the increased destructive role of the magnates in the life of the old Commonwealth, of a great weakening of royal authority, and of the emergence of many directing centres in the life of the state.

This is, however, only one side of the problem for we must not ignore facts which are not covered by this generalization.

I have in mind the Swedish–Lithuanian armistice in 1627 and especially the agreement concluded with Sweden at Kiejdany on October 20, 1655. But this is not all. We must also consider the threats expressed by the noblemen of the Grand Duchy in 1656 that they would seek protection of the Moscow Tsar unless the Polish representatives concluded a peace with Russia, and the activities of Sapieha's oligarchy at the end of that century, which bore all the marks of secessionist aspirations. In our opinion, these facts can by no means be regarded as empty threats. They were attempts to disrupt the Jagiellonian union and replace it by a union with some other state (e.g. with Sweden in 1655) or by the establishment of an independent Grand Duchy. John III Sobieski's statement that the Lithuanians had violated the foundations of the union is not only an expressive but also a highly competent testimony.

There is no doubt. I think, that the question raised by me is an exciting research problem which, hopefully, may soon attract the attention of historians and become a subject of scholarly discussions and exchange of views.