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The Union of Lublin and its Historic Meaning

The Polish-Lithuanian agreement reached in Lublin at the end of June 1569 was the coping stone of mutual relations between these states which had lasted for almost two hundred years. It was the greatest achievement of the Jagiellonian dynasty, as Henryk Łowmiański wrote. For many previous years, despite mutual declarations about the need for the tightening of the relations, they had never materialized. Among the obstacles were, first of all, substantial differences in the composition of the social forces in both states and the Lithuanians' fear of the dominance of the Poles over them. Also Sigismund August was reluctant to convene the common *Sejm* and to restructure the previous relations. In 1559 he left for Lithuania and the matters regarding the future union receded into the background, while tensions over them led to the crisis within the Jagiellonian monarchy. The king, however, did not have a successor, which questioned the future of the continuity of the rule in the monarchy where the hereditary throne of the Grand Duke of Lithuania guaranteed the election for the king of Poland. This made him change his stand on this issue.

The war over Livonia and an increasing threat from Muscovy as well as aspirations of Lithuanian boyars to be granted privileges similar to those possessed by the Polish lesser nobility (Pol. *szlachta*), caused changing the configuration of the political power in Lithuania and adopting a new stance on the union. The programme, formulated at the assembly of the levy in masse of the boyars near Vitebsk on the 13th of September 1562, determined the conditions for those closer relations which could be accepted by the Lithuanians. They agreed to have a single ruler and one election for both Poland and Lithuania, a common parliament (Pol. *Sejm*) and the defense policy, though the territorial identity of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania would be retained as well as its separate laws, treasury and administration. This programme was on the agenda during the sessions of the Lithuanian *Sejm* in 1563-1567, and it was also discussed by the Polish

Sejm, which was attended by Lithuanian deputations. The talks protracted, while the impatient Poles who in Lublin at the end of 1566 demanded the stance of the Lithuanian *Sejm* on the union were given this answer by Mikołaj Naruszewicz: ‘‘great things do not happen at once’’.

Meanwhile, thorough administrative, judiciary and legal reforms were carried out in Lithuania. They all, together with the land reform known as *pomiara włóczna*, contributed to the modernization of the local economy and society, and to the shaping of a political nation there. At that time the division of the country was made into 13 voivodships and 30 second-level local administration units (Pol. *powiaty*), which became basic administrative-territorial units. Within them landed courts (Pol. *sądy ziemskie*) and *podkomorskie* courts [courts for settling border claims – transl. note], which were uniform for the boyars and aristocrats, were established. In the second-level administrative units regional diets were to be convened, where officials and members of the *Sejm* were to be elected. Also the levy in mass was to be mobilized within the *powiaty*. All these reforms were endorsed by the Second Lithuanian Statute, issued in 1566.

These reforms changed the Lithuanian monarchy and made it resemble the system of government of the Kingdom of Poland. They also weakened the camp of the hard-liners, refusing closer bonds with Poland, who had been dominant in the previous period. The number of the boyars who initiated the Europeization of the political elite of the multinational state and constituted only 9 per cent of the society also increased. They supported closer relations with Poland, while maintaining a national identity of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Grand Ducal Council and magnates still opposed it. Moreover, in 1563 Sigismund August issued a privilege in which he equalized the rights of the Orthodox believers and of the Catholics. Simultaneously, the consolidation in Poland of the religious tolerance and the activity of the parliamentary members who were advocates of the reformation during the *Sejm* sessions positively influenced the previously distrustful attitude of the Orthodox lesser nobility and Ruthenian magnates towards the Crown and the union with it. These were the reasons, sometimes underestimated by historians, which facilitated the plans for the union.

Another important reason was the decision taken by king Sigismund August, who on the 13th of March 1564 combined his hereditary title of the Grand Duke of Lithuania with the title of the King of Poland, while recommending the future election of the ruler of both states at the same time.

Despite this, in 1564-1568 the Lithuanians avoided taking decisions regarding the union matters and stalled for time. At the end of May 1565 the main opponent of the union, Mikołaj the Black Radziwiłł died. His cousin, Mikołaj the Red, who from March 1566 held the office of Grand Lithuanian Chancellor, became the leader of the grouping representing a hostile attitude to the relations with Poland. He tried maintaining his cousin's conception of the links with Poland. Negotiations concerning the union were conducted, and they were broken several times because of conflicting opinions between the Polish representatives who assumed the incorporation of Lithuania to the Kingdom of Poland and the Lithuanians defending the sovereignty of their state.

In summer 1568 the king convened the Lithuanian *Sejm* for the 9th of December in Vohyń in the Brest Land, and the Polish one in Lublin, where, in line with the king's decision both *Sejms* were to have a joint session over the union. The monarch ordered the session to be opened on the 23rd of December 1568. However, due to the Christmas period, the members of the *Sejm* did not start to arrive until the last days of that year. The leader of the Lithuanians, Mikołaj the Red Radziwiłł, accompanied by a number of his followers, came to Lublin only on the 31st of December.

The session of the joint *Sejm* began on the 10th of January 1569. Right from the start both parties sat in session separately, communicating by designated parliamentarians only. This session was difficult and complicated and 'the discord spirit prevailed' – as Zigmantas Kiaupa wrote. The negotiations, however, showed a great political culture of their participants as well as their reason, patience and prudence. The opinions remained to be different for some time. In the Polish *Sejm* the maximalist faction kept demanding the incorporation of Lithuania into Poland, even naming this country 'New Poland'. The Lithuanian party defended the idea of the independence of their state. This group included a large number of the opponents of a closer union.

An important function of the Speaker of the *Sejm* was given to Stanisław Czarnkowski, the Crown Referendary, who was a parliamentarian representing Greater Poland. He was a good speaker, who had received his education at Western universities. The king trusted him and he was a good mediator.

During January and February 1569 no compromise was reached in fundamental matters. The discrepancies concerned the status of the Grand Duchy in the new state, the way and location of the election of the monarch and the seat of the *Sejm*, one time in the Crown and one time in Lithuania, as the Lithuanians suggested. On the 15th of February the Lithuanians presented their own proposal of the union. It postulated that a limited union should be formed, being, as a matter of fact, a permanent defense alliance. However, it was recognized neither by the Polish party nor by the king. After a futile effort was made by the Lithuanians to convince the monarch to accept their proposals on the 28th of February, and when Sigismund August in consequence ordered them to join the Poles for further talks the next day (the 1st of March), the Lithuanians secretly left Lublin at night. They feared that they would have to accept the conditions of the Polish party. Later the leaders excused themselves to the king, explaining that they had been encouraged to do so by Mikołaj the Red Radziwiłł. As historians argue (Marek Ferenc), this was his biggest mistake as the departure was of no benefit to the Lithuanians and it was fraught with consequences. The king considered this as an act of disrespect for him and for the whole state.

Further talks continued only in the Polish *Sejm*. The election of the king in the Crown both by the Poles and Lithuanians was agreed, while after the election the monarch was to confirm in one document the rights and privileges of both states. The joint *Sejm* was to meet under his leadership. It was decided that the Poles would be allowed to acquire landed property in Lithuania and hold offices there, while the Lithuanians would be allowed the same in the Crown.

On the 5th of May 1569 the king, facing the arbitrary decision of the Lithuanians to leave Lublin, as many sources underscore, incorporated into Poland the Podlasie and Volhynia Provinces, which had been the subject of Polish-Lithuanian disputes for over one hundred years. He also ordered the officials and landowners from those territories

to arrive in Lublin on the 27th of March and take an oath of loyalty to the king and the Polish Crown. This date was later postponed several times because some landowners delayed their trip, and the final deadline was set for the 14th of May.

On the one hand, the decision to incorporate Lithuania was an attempt to exert pressure on the Lithuanians so that they return to Lublin for further talks about the union. On the other hand, it calmed the demands of the maximalist faction in the Polish *Sejm*. The session continued and attempts were made to solve current problems by issuing top-down directives. On the 30th of March a privilege was issued, dated on the 24th of March, regarding the incorporation of the whole Grand Duchy to the Crown under compromise, as Henryk Łowmiański wrote years ago. The monarch was to retain the title of Grand Duke combined with the title of King of Poland, there was to be one *Sejm*, while the central offices in Lithuania, where the ‘execution of property’ (Pol. *egzekucja dóbr*) was to be applied, were to remain separate.

After these decisions, the Polish party expected the Lithuanians to return to the negotiating table. On the 20th of March a convention was held in Vilnius, where after long-lasting talks a decision was made that negotiations with the Polish party should be resumed. However, it was decided that only a delegation under Jan Hieronim Chodkiewicz would be sent to Lublin, which arrived there on the 5th of April, and the talks were continued. Separate state institutions in Lithuania were accepted and the emphasis was made that two equal nations, namely the Polish and the Lithuanian, ‘which should maintain ties of true friendship, and the union should be formed in recognition of their mutual equality’, reached this agreement. Both states were to be connected by only the common monarch. The Lithuanians asked the king to renounce the incorporation act.

Thus the stance of the Lithuanians became less stiff. Mikołaj the Red Radziwiłł did not come to Lublin himself, he only sent there his secretary, Andrzej Wolan, who in the letter to him of the 31st of May, describing his conversation with the king, quoted Sigismund August’s words ‘if only Your Lordship Voivode had stayed during the *Sejm*’s session a bit longer, such things would not have happened, which they had to

happen, and now, as I am the only one, I have nobody to rely on'. This is to say that the monarch blamed Radziwiłł for the course of events.

The negotiations taken in April prolonged until the beginning of June. Meanwhile in Lithuania, during the sessions of regional parliaments, new members of the *Sejm* were elected. They arrived in Lublin on the 4th – 5th June. Then, following the motion tabled by the parliamentarians from the Volhynia, the king extended the incorporated territory by the Duchy of Kiev and the Bratslav Province (Pol. *Braclawszczyzna*), i.e. the eastern part of Podolia. This act was announced on the 6th of June. This decision was justified by the need for a better co-ordination of defense actions against the raids of the Tatars and the aggression of Muscovy.

On the same day, negotiations, based on the privilege from the 24th of March, were taken. In mid-June a compromise was reached, and the next following weeks were devoted to discussing the details in the union act, prepared by the Bishop of Cracow Filip Padniewski and Vice-Chancellor Franciszek Krasiński.

On the 26th of June the Lithuanians accepted the content of this act, still hoping that the king would renounce the incorporation into the Crown of the detached territories. After analyzing its content on the next day, the union act was accepted on the 28th of June. It was then that Jan Hieronim Chodkiewicz gave his famous speech in which he asked the king to renounce the incorporation. He emphasised that the Lithuanian party had been made by the king to approve of this act. Then he addressed to the Poles with these words: 'I do not know what kind of union it will be as the lords from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania are present among you: you have already clipped our wings'. On that day details concerning the monarch's seal and the legal status of Livonia, which had been a Lithuanian fiefdom since 1562, were also specified. This territory was considered to be the Polish-Lithuanian *condominium*.

On the 29th of June, which was the patronal feast of the church belonging to the Bernardine monks in Lublin, a solemn thanksgiving mass for successful negotiations was celebrated. During the service Sigismund August intoned the *Te Deum*. On the 1st of July in the Lublin Castle the union was sworn in. Then the monarch, accompanied by a number of members of the *Sejm* and senators, despite heavy rain, went to St.

Stanislaus' church of the Dominicans, where further solemn thanksgiving services were celebrated for bringing the matter, which had been worked on for several years, to an end.

Two documents bearing the date of the 1st of July were issued: by the *Sejm* and the Crown estates and by the *Sejm* and the Lithuanian estates, while on the 4th of July Sigismund August issued his royal document. All these acts began with the proclamation that 'the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania make one, homogenous and inseparable body, and form one and the same Commonwealth which two nations and two countries turned into one nation and one state'. In practice, however, each state retained its separate territory, law, offices, treasury and army. The ruler was to be common, as well as the *Sejm*, consisting of senators and members of the Chamber of Deputies representing both countries. Foreign policy was also to be common.

As a consequence of the union of Lublin, the state was formed which was the second largest in Europe. In terms of territory it was second only to Muscovy. It was inhabited by over 8 million citizens, including the Poles, Lithuanians and Ruthenians. Later the latter gave birth to the Belarussian and Ukrainian nations. The territory of the state was inhabited by ethnic minorities: mostly Jews and Armenians. It should be emphasised at this state that the conditions of the union were not extorted by negotiated, even though Lithuanian historians have a slightly different opinion in this matter.

The king kept his promise given to the Lithuanians during their *Sejm* session in Wohyń at the end of 1568 and guaranteed they could go to Lublin only voluntarily and that they would not come under the authority of the Crown officials. If the union were not formed voluntarily, they would be allowed to return to their homes undisturbed.

The compromise reached in Lublin was a fruit of the political wisdom of all those who participated in long-lasting negotiations. It is worth mentioning that Sigismund August could get support in the Crown from the senators and the moderate faction of the members of the *Sejm*, while in Lithuania, first of all, from its members of the *Sejm*. The union formed a real bond which created a federated state, which gave its founders hope for finding efficient solutions to problems concerning international affairs in the region, and in particular as regarded opposing aggressive actions of Muscovy in the

East, protecting the unity of Livonia with the new state and the Ukrainian territories from the raids of the Tatars.

In this way, a historic act took place in Lublin in 1569, which for the next couple of centuries determined main targets of the new state, linking it with Eastern Europe. The durability of the union (until the 3rd of May 1791 Constitution) indicates, which is emphasised by numerous historians, that it was important for both parties, and this was achieved despite language and religious differences.

Thus the historic meaning of the Union of Lublin for East-Central Europe cannot be overestimated. First of all, one should emphasize that eastern territories of the Commonwealth became open to the influence of Western civilization, which has been visible until to-day. It is worth remembering the present state border between Belarus and Ukraine refers to the border established at that time between the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the next centuries, despite 'angers over the union', political and procedural disputes, the work taken up in Lublin was durable. However, already in mid-17th century stagnation and crises engulfed the new state. It required reforms, which, given the composition of political powers of the day, was very difficult to carry out. The reforms were blocked by the political elites of the Crown, who were afraid of the strengthening of the king's authority. The Lithuanian elites were also against them because they suspected the Poles of insincere intentions. The state was getting increasingly weak, which was utilized by its increasingly strong neighbours in the 18th century.

Recently in historical writing of all the nations which participated in the life of this Commonwealth there have been a prevailing number of positive opinions about the Polish-Lithuanian union. However, while putting stress on the reception of the European civilization by its citizens, especially in Lithuania, it is emphasised that a side effect of this process was the Polonization of the political and social elites of Lithuania and Ruthenia, which is regarded as a negative phenomenon. One has to notice, on the other hand, that neither the Polish language nor culture was forced. To sum up, it should be stressed that thanks to the Union of Lublin, the Commonwealth of Both Nations became the bridge and melting pot of civilizations where the Asian material culture intermingled

with the respect for the rights of an individual and the condemnation of all kinds of tyrannical acts. As Janusz Tazbir wrote twenty-three years ago: ‘without retaining a memory of the year 1569 it is difficult to understand the history of the state whose national cuisine included: Ukrainian borsch, Ruthenian dumplings, Lithuanian *kalduny*, and the Jewish style carp’.