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Republicanism in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the Rule of Augustus II (1697-1733) - An Illusion of Freedom

This report deals with the problem of why the attempts of the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to gain genuine and not only declared liberty at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century failed. It could be regarded as a paradox that such a final result followed the series of victories achieved by noble movement, called Republicans by contemporaries, in all the main conflicts in which it was involved. Republicans crushed the supremacy of the Sapieha family oligarchy in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the civil war (1697-1702). Republicans established an extraordinary form of government in Lithuania, which was frequently called ‘the Republic of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’. It was strong enough to prevent the restoration of the Sapieha supremacy. Republicans became the core of the anti-Swedish forces in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the Great Northern War (which was fought partly on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1701-1710) and so they participated in the final victory. In the postwar situation the ‘republican’ nobility managed to stop the attempts of Augustus II to reduce the nobility’s liberties and the sovereignty of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in favour of monarchical power and his hereditary electorate of Saxony. Yet the ideal of republican liberties and equality within the noble estate remained an illusion. In reality a new sort of oligarchy was

established, the power of the nobility's institutions of self-government was reduced and parliamentary institutions fell into deep crisis.