

*Summary*

Since the middle of the 16th century, the idea of the Lithuanian Republic (*Respublica Lituana*, *Res Lituana*) as the political community of the citizens was rather consistently promoted in the texts written in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Third Lithuanian Statute and the polemic and fugitive writings and historiography of the 16th-17th centuries turned the idea of the Republic into the cornerstone of the state ideology, which preserved its consolidating power and motivating influence upon the political attitude of the community even after the fall of the Commonwealth of the Both Nations.

The article discusses the sources of the idea of the Republic: e.g. what kind of political and legal prerequisites facilitated formation of the independent political community of nobility, identifying itself with the Lithuanian State, i.e. the society of the Grand Duchy (*communitas Magni Ducatus*), what course the development of relations between this society and the ruler took, how these relations and the political self-consciousness of the nobility were manifested in the first privileges issued by the rulers, letters and the earliest historical narrative, i.e. the Lithuanian Chronicles.

As early as 1413, the Horodle privilege issued by the Polish King Jogaila and the Great Lithuanian Duke Vytautas granted not only personal, but also political liberties and rights to the Catholic Lithuanian noblemen: e.g. the right of electing the ruler, of participating in the ruler's council when issues of the public welfare (*bonum publicum*) were discussed, of attending the general meetings or parliaments. Pursuing his goal of turning Lithuania into a kingdom, the Grand Duke Vytautas used to publicly defend the political rights of the Lithuanian nobility, i.e. the Lithuanian nation, to freely elect the ruler of the state. In the course of the 15th century the Lithuanian nobility, having inherited from the descendants of Gediminas the role of the promoter and defender of the Lithuanian statehood, attempted to implement the political program of Vytautas. In the privilege of the country issued in 1447, the Lithuanian ruler for the first time committed himself to another political subject, i.e. the Lithuanian nation and the noblemen as its representatives, to defend and expand the Lithuanian State. The privilege of the 1492 legitimated the Council of Lords of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the highest administrative power and the institution of the legal appeal. By this act, the common welfare of the country (*utilitas communis terrestris*) was recognized as an exclusive concern of the highest nobles of the state, or the lords councillors, charging them with obligation to advise the ruler in favour of the common welfare of Lithuania. The privilege of the 1492, dictated by the Lithuanian nobles, laid the legal foundations for the rule of the noble oligarchy in Lithuania. Since then, the Lithuanian Diet also turned into a permanent state institution, representing the Lithuanian lands. It was on the

turn of the 15th–16th centuries that the idea of the Lithuanian Republic also surfaced. In the official texts of this time Lithuania and its political community started acquiring the name of the Republic: *respublica Ducatus, respublica Lithuania*. The “republican” ideology of Vilnius was gradually shaped to form an antithesis of the absolute autocracy, i.e. the idea of unrestricted, despotic power of the ruler, developed in Moscow.

The political role of the Lithuanian nobility was consolidated in the historical narrative of the political kind, i.e. the *Chronicle of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Samogitia*, compiled in the beginning of the 16th century. As distinct from the historical narrative of the Muscovite state, it was created on the initiative of the nobles rather than that of the entourage of the ruler. The mythical story of the Roman descent of the Lithuanian nobles as well as the historical descriptions of the relations between the nobles and the grand dukes presented in this narrative supplied a solid foundation for the “republican” ideology of the Lithuanian State.