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HANOVER/ENGLAND, SAXONY/POLAND. POLITICAL
RELATIONS BETWEEN STATES IN THE AGE OF PERSONAL
UNION: INSTITUTIONS AND PROCEDURES

The fundamental constitutional framework of relations within the two personal Unions was laid down by three sets of documents: for England-Hanover, by the so-called Act of Settlement (more properly, the “Act for the further Limitation of the Crown, and better securing the Rights and Liberties of the Subject”) of June 1701; for Poland-Saxony, by the *Pacta Conventa* sworn to by Augustus II in 1697 and Augustus III in 1733 and, again, in 1736 – although in the case of Poland-Saxony, it is appropriate to add the Treaty of Warsaw of November 1716, as affirmed by the so-called “Silent *Sejm*” of 1 February 1717.¹ Insofar as these can be regarded as the founding charters of their respective unions, it is clear that the concept of “Union” is highly qualified. The Act of Settlement and the *Pacta Conventa* have little to say about Hanover or Saxony, beyond registering the eventuality or fact of accession by a foreign ruler. Insofar as they demonstrate any interest in his own hereditary possessions, it is that those states should have no influence or say in the political processes of England or Poland. Foreign advisers were to be excluded from all policy-making decisions in the two states. In the case of England, any scope for evasion was particularly drastically reduced by the insistence that even naturalized subjects were to be excluded from all civil and military office and from grants of crown lands. But however little the Act of Settlement had to say about Hanover, it nonetheless created a dynastic Union, by the conscious choice of the Protestant heirs of Sophia, electress dowager of Hanover, to succeed Queen Anne. The future dynasty’s subjects promised *to stand to, maintain, and defend* it against all comers, for as long as the dynasty observed its duty to uphold the Protestant religion and England’s *laws and liberties*.

1 Statutes of the Realm, ed. by A. LUDERS und T.E. TOMLINS, 11 vols., London 1810-1828 [hereafter SR], vol. 7, pp. 636-638 (12 and 13 Will. III c. 2); Volumina legum, Prawa, konstytucje y przywileje Królestwa Polskiego y Wielkiego Xięstwa Litewskiego, 9 vols., St. Petersburg, Kraków 1860-1889 [hereafter VL], vol. 6, pp. 14-26; pp. 301-309. Treaty of Warsaw, *ibid.*, pp. 113-137.

While the *Pacta Conventa* manifest analogous concerns over liberties and religion, it is debatable to what extent the documents actually form the basis of a union. To England, the Protestant Hanoverian dynasty was fundamental. Without it, its religion and liberties were in peril. By contrast, it was axiomatic to the Polish political system that any monarch, foreign or native, posed an inevitable threat. One of the purposes of purely interregnal royal elections was precisely to correct *exorbitantia* – grievances against the previous incumbent. The electoral promises made by Friedrich August I and II, and attached to their *Pacta Conventa*, carried an explicit confirmation of the right of the nobility to withdraw obedience, should the kings undertake anything contrary to the *Pacta* and Poland's laws in general.² In the mind of the noble electorate, there was no question of any dynastic connexion and, indeed, the *Pacta* of both Augustus II and Augustus III – as of any Polish monarch – explicitly disavowed any intention to put a dynasty in place. Augustus III, of course, owed his accession entirely to the support of foreign powers. Without Austrian and, more particularly, without Russian military intervention, he would simply not have been placed on the Polish throne in 1733 (his further acceptance required another three years of Russian and Saxon military endeavour against an overwhelmingly hostile noble constituency). This was not so much a union, more a shotgun marriage.³

The mode of accession of the new monarchs helped create wholly different political atmospheres. In the case of the Hanoverian dynasty, thirteen years passed from the English decision in principle to accept the dynasty to the moment of implementation. The political Establishment on both sides had plenty of time to accustom itself to the new prospects and, in the case of the Act of Settlement, to make adjustments to its terms which allowed the normal political processes of both complexes of territory to continue to function smoothly (although Dieter Brosius' paper suggests the process was considerably less advanced in Hanover than in Britain). Thus the original ban on placeholders and pensioners serving under the Crown, and the stipulation that the chief business associated with the executive should be conducted in the Privy Council – which would have made Cabinet government impossible – due to come into force at George I's accession, were repealed in 1705-6, under the terms of the Regency

2 Ibid., pp. 23, 309.

3 There is a vast literature in Polish which deals with the circumstances of Augustus III's accession. More accessible to non-Polish readers are: PUTTKAMER, E. v., *Frankreich, Rußland und der polnische Thron 1733. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der französischen Ostpolitik, Königsberg 1937*; LUKOWSKI, J. T., *Liberty's Folly: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century*, London 1991, pp. 154-162.

Act.⁴ Likewise, in 1715 the restriction on the monarch's right to leave Britain without the consent of Parliament was removed.⁵ Indeed, the single most important political and constitutional consequence of the decision to plump for the Hanoverian dynasty took place well before George I's accession: the Treaty and Act of Union with Scotland of 1706-1707. For, strictly speaking, the Act of Settlement applied only to *England, France* [sic!] *and Ireland*, although it actually used the term "England" in the same way as it is often used (or abused) today, to the entirely understandable irritation of the Scots – as though it subsumed Scotland. The Treaty of Union went on to extend the original prohibition on the monarch's right to leave "England" to "Scotland"; and Scots, unlike other foreigners, were not barred from official appointments.⁶ Nonetheless, English politicians all too readily took the survival of their other dynastic union – the Stuart Anglo-Scottish one – for granted. The Scottish reaction to English high-handedness and arrogance was the "Act for Security" of August 1703, which opened up the serious possibility that the Hanoverians would not in fact accede to the throne of Scotland:⁷ a truly horrific prospect for English and Hanoverian politicians, particularly against the prevailing international background. Of course, the Hanoverian dynasty aroused xenophobic passions in Britain (foreigners always have done) but the erratic nature of support for Catholic, Stuart legitimism pointed to the fundamental security of the new dynasty. By contrast, while the Wettins had had their eye on the Polish crown from at least 1693,⁸ the manner of their acquisition of it – a sordid combination of bribery and military coup – contributed to and created tensions in Polish politics far more divisive and destructive than anything that Jacobitism could foster in Britain.

Yet for all the limitations imposed on monarchs in what might be viewed as the founding charters of the new unions, the creation of a political Chinese Wall between the union members was not a realistic possibility. The policy of mutual non-interference came closest to being realized in the Hanoverian Union. Two basic factors help explain this. Firstly, both Hanover and Britain were effective,

4 SR, vol. 8, pp. 502-3 (4 & 5 Annæ c. 20).

5 Statutes at Large [hereafter SL], 9 vols., London 1758-1773, vol. 4, p. 125 (1 Geo. I, stat. 2, cap. 51).

6 SR, vol. 8, pp. 566-577 (6 Annæ c. 11).

7 The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, London 1824, vol. 9, pp. 67-74. See also LENMAN, B., *The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689-1746*, London 1980, pp. 72-76; SUNDSTROM, R. A., *Sidney Godolphin: Servant of the State*, Newark 1992, pp. 101-104, 127-129.

8 STASZEWSKI, J., *O miejsce w Europie. Stosunki Polski i Saksonii z Francją na przełomie XVII i XVIII wieku*, Warsaw 1973, pp. 69-70.

functioning states. They possessed institutions and forms of government which, for all their differences, were capable of effective legislative and executive action. Both were politically viable organisms in their own right. Georg Ludwig's *Regierungsreglement* of 1714 quite consciously reaffirmed for Hanover the standing of structures and procedures created by the *Reglement* of 1680.⁹ Otherwise, the small German chancellery in London, the person of the monarch and informal ministerial contacts were quite sufficient to ensure the union was an effective force. Secondly, by and large, certainly up until 1756, there was a basic congruence of interests, or, at the very least, such a congruence of interests could be created, between the two states. Britain needed a counterweight to France on the continent; Hanover, as demonstrated in the wars against Louis XIV, was part of that counterweight. Yet Britain and Hanover could develop in their own way (in a manner inconceivable across the Anglo-Scottish divide) because they were each effective political mechanisms in their own right and because of the simple fact of geographical distance. Separate development was no doubt much facilitated by the comparatively little interest that British and Hanoverian ministers exhibited in the internal workings and even policy concerns of their partner-state. The Hanoverian connexion was sufficiently useful to British interests to be worth preserving; conversely, until the Seven Years War, Hanoverian politicians saw the British connexion in similar light, even if they had to accept their subordinate status within the relationship, something to which the Hanoverian *Geheimer Rat* was reconciled even before Georg Ludwig left to become George I.¹⁰ Had they appreciated just how much importance Britain attached to its colonies, disillusion and alarm may have set in considerably before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War.¹¹ The viable, self-sufficient nature of the two polities was certainly recognized by the first two Georges, who, at different times, were prepared to contemplate a future separation of the dynastic Union; paradoxically, it was the George who gloried "in the name of Briton" who finally proved resolutely bent on maintaining the Union.¹²

9 DANN, U., *Hanover and Great Britain 1740-1760: Diplomacy and Survival*, Leicester 1991, pp. 5-7. See also the article of Brosius in this volume.

10 HATTON, R. M., *England and Hanover 1714-1837*, in: *England und Hannover. England and Hanover*, ed. by A. M. BIRKE and K. KLUXEN (Prince Albert Studies 4), München, London, New York 1986, pp. 17-31, p. 18; WELLENREUTHER, H., *Die Bedeutung des Siebenjährigen Krieges für die englisch-hannoveranischen Beziehungen*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 145-175, here p. 149; DANN, *Hanover and Great Britain* (see note 9), pp. 132-134.

11 DANN, *Hanover and Great Britain* (see note 9), pp. 137-139; WELLENREUTHER, *Die Bedeutung* (see note 10), pp. 149-51, 157-163.

12 DANN, *Hanover and Great Britain* (see note 9), pp. 132-135; HATTON, *England and Hanover* (see note 10), pp. 18-21; WELLENREUTHER, *Die Bedeutung* (see note 10), pp. 169-173;

The Polish-Saxon connexion was very different. The problem here is obvious: while Saxony was a well-ruled state, Poland-Lithuania was not and, probably, could not be. Saxony, without Poland, might have been more important than Hanover without Britain, but, positioned inside the jaws of the Habsburgs and the Hohenzollern, it was much more vulnerable. The accomplishment of a thoroughgoing Saxon-Polish union had the potential not only to elevate the Wettins into the ranks of the premier dynasties of Europe, but also to convert their exposed electorate into the dominant force of Eastern Europe, certainly overshadowing Prussia and perhaps even Austria. But only the potential: its realization could not come from the Poles; if it was to happen at all, it had to be driven from Saxony. And Saxony, for all its wealth, lacked the resources to do so – even if the powerful Saxon estates had shown any interest in supporting such schemes, which they never did. On the contrary, the estates were deeply suspicious of the personal union, if only on religious grounds. The strength of the Saxon *Stände* allowed them to obstruct successfully even policies which followed almost naturally from the Union, although at other times, with regard to Saxony's own internal needs, in the field of finances they could be co-operative to a degree of which Augustus II could only dream in Poland.

Compared with Saxony (and, of course, Britain and Hanover) the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania was a highly dysfunctional state. Its primary *raison d'être*, the preservation of noble liberties and privileges, was utterly incompatible with the growingly insistent pressures on all European states to evolve active foreign policies. By almost any standards of comparison, save with the Holy Roman Empire as a whole, Poland-Lithuania was scarcely a sovereign entity. If Augustus II's reign was clearly to demonstrate the extent to which external powers were to play a decisive role in the shaping of Poland's politics, the manner of Augustus III's accession was to demonstrate that any such sovereignty was a fiction.

George I and his successors, as hereditary rulers, could simply step into the room left for them by the functioning machinery of government in Hanover and Britain. Friedrich August I and II could do so in their hereditary Saxon electorate. But as elected monarchs of Poland-Lithuania, they faced a problem of a wholly different order: how to make of the Commonwealth a viable state and force in European politics, as opposed to a constitutional carapace for the preservation of *szlachta* liberties. Even Augustus II's *Pacta Conventa* implicitly raise the issue, for they contain a commitment by the monarch to recover the so-

BLANNING, T. C. W., "That Horrid Electorate" or "Ma patrie Germanique"? George III, Hanover and the Fürstenbund of 1785, in: *Historical Journal* 20/2 (1977), pp. 311-344.

called *avulsa*, the lands lost to Russia and Sweden during the course of the seventeenth century. Was Augustus to do this out of his own resources, or out of Poland's? Augustus III's *Pacta* contain the same commitment, albeit suitably modified as a result of his father's disastrous military ventures, to recover the *avulsa* by peaceful means. Either way, the accomplishment of such objectives, by force or diplomacy, required making of the Polish polity something very different to what it was. Even if one were to discount the promises contained in the *Pacta*, the modernization of the Polish state in order to make it capable of meeting the challenges which the new century was to throw at it remained an issue which no monarch who took his *métier* seriously could afford to ignore. To pretend that, to all intents and purposes, there was no union, was not a realistic option. From the point of view of the neighbouring powers, the Polish-Saxon Union was a potential menace. From the Wettins' point of view, the whole purpose of the Union was, after all, to make them major players on the European stage. In this, their subjects, Saxon and Polish, must have felt that they succeeded only too well.

The failings of Polish institutions provided a power vacuum which Augustus II inevitably tried to fill. The situation in the *Rzeczpospolita* was inherently far more complicated than in the British Isles. Precisely because of Poland's internal weaknesses, other powers took it as an axiom of policy that they were entitled to intervene in its domestic political affairs. Sweden and Brandenburg, since 1667, were committed between themselves by treaty to the preservation of Poland's political machinery and processes; Russia, since the Treaty of Moscow of 1686, enjoyed the right to intervene following appeals from the Orthodox inhabitants of Poland – admittedly, the Polish *Sejm* had yet to ratify that treaty at Augustus II's accession, but Moscow certainly had no doubts of its rights in the matter.¹³ Thus, the Polish Election of 1697 produced a Union which was all too highly permeable by external influences. From a strictly constitutional standpoint, Wettin rule was a far greater threat to Poland than the policies of the Hohenzollern or the Romanovs. Augustus II (and III) had not only to define their own interests and objectives vis-à-vis their Polish subjects, but also vis-à-vis the powers who, as a matter of right, felt themselves entitled to a say in the politics of the Commonwealth, an entitlement which, in practice, those Polish subjects endorsed, whenever they felt it expedient to do so.

The best chances of success for modernizing reform in Poland, insofar as they existed at all, as evinced by Augustus II's reign, lay in the manipulation of crisis. The sole effective counter to the *liberum veto* lay in the creation of Confederacies – noble leagues which accepted the programmes laid down by the leader-

13 The text of the Treaty of Moscow, ratified from the *Sejm* in 1710, in: VL, vol. 6, pp. 73-84.

ship of these confederacies, in practice by the weight of majority opinion within the leadership councils. Thus Augustus II was able to use the circumstances of Swedish invasion to push through eminently desirable programmes of fiscal-military reform under the aegis of the Confederacy of Sandomierz. Unfortunately, these ran into the twin barriers of raging warfare and the inherent dysfunctionality of the state: at the local level, the constituency assemblies, the *sejmiki*, regularly refused to accept the dictates of the centre.¹⁴

The struggle for the spoils of office and patronage were common to both Poland and Britain, but in Poland, "politics" and the structures of the state allowed of hardly anything else. In Britain, the political structures facilitated positive achievement in virtually any field. In political and constitutional terms, little needed to be done to maintain Britain as an effective power. Constitutionally, the two biggest changes which George I's reign brought to Britain were the introduction of the Riot Act in 1715, widely accepted as a necessary measure to guard against destabilizing Jacobite influences; and, much more importantly, the Septennial Act of 1718, which scrapped the existing three year parliamentary term in favour of a seven-year one.¹⁵ Once the latter was in place, politics could continue to produce genuine policy. Britain was all but impervious to external political factors. For all the wider unpopularity of the Act of Union in Scotland, the country's establishment was firmly ranged behind it.¹⁶ Compared to the problems the Wettins encountered in Poland-Lithuania, the fact that in England, the Georges were unable on every occasion to secure the ministers they wished (in glaring contrast to their position in Hanover), but had to reconcile themselves to a minister who could command a parliamentary majority, was of minor moment. It was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to build up a comparable relationship between Saxony and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was not at all clear which of the two parties, Saxony or Poland, was to be the "stronger" in the relationship. Saxony clearly had by far the much more effective government – but it had no Jan Koniecpolski to assure the new monarch that his family estates were larger than his new ruler's electorate.¹⁷

Augustus II tried every option. Both in Saxony and in Poland he sought to secure a degree of independence of the estates by either creating (the *Geheimes*

14 OLSZEWSKI, H., *Doktryny prawno-ustrojowe czasów saskich. 1697-1740*, Warsaw 1961, pp. 74-80, 86-88, 113-141.

15 SL, vol. 4, pp. 56-58 (1 Geo. I, stat. 2, cap. 5); *ibid.*, p. 118 (1 Geo. I, stat. 2, cap. 38). HATTON, R. M., *George I: Elector and King*, London 1978, p. 211.

16 LENMAN, *The Jacobite Risings* (see note 7), pp. 86-88, 119-125, 255-257, 264.

17 GIEROWSKI, J. A., *Koniecpolski Jan Aleksander*, in: PSB, vol. 13, Wrocław, Warsaw, Kraków 1967-1968, pp. 520-521.

Kabinett) or adapting and manipulating (the *Senatus Consilia*) bodies of more-or-less trusted, powerful advisers and magnates (cf. Mariusz Markiewicz's paper in this volume). Unfortunately, in Poland, this meant he almost immediately fell foul not only the *szlachta*'s chronic mistrust of royal power, but also their equally powerful mistrust of the magnates and of conflicts among the magnates themselves.¹⁸ Even Wettin attempts to modernize the administration of the royal demesne in Poland, the so-called Table Lands (*dobra stołowe*) provoked not only suspicion from the wider noble community and even outright armed resistance from tax defaulters and illegal settlers.¹⁹ It is hardly surprising that by 1714, Augustus and his advisers began seriously to consider, or consider afresh, the possibility of imposing reform on Poland by force. The Wettins' plans, inasmuch as they ever reached a final formulation, aimed less at the imposition of "absolutism" than of an effective estates-related government of the sort found in Saxony, or even, for that matter, Britain. Augustus II's two closest advisers, Roberto Taparelli, count of Lagnasco, and Jacob Heinrich von Flemming, envisaged, once the Swedish war was over, reducing the powers of the *Sejm*, the introduction of hereditary monarchy, abolition of the *liberum veto*, a reduction in the powers of the Polish generalissimos, the *hetmani*, and a strengthening of powers of more highly placed ministers and advisers.²⁰

Any possibilities of success that these plans might have had were completely scuppered by the transfer of the bulk of Saxon troops to Poland, simply to keep them in being. Their exactions provoked a massive backlash in the shape of the *szlachta*'s Confederacy of Tarnogród. Between November 1715 and November 1716, confederates and Saxon troops largely fought each other to a standstill and the outcome was the compromise Treaty of Warsaw of 3 November 1716, enacted into law by the so-called "Silent *Sejm*" of 1 February 1717.²¹ In practice, this settlement prevailed in Poland for much of the rest of the eighteenth

18 GIEROWSKI, J. A. and LESZCZYŃSKI, J., *Dyplomacja polska w dobie unii personalnej polsko-saskiej*, in: *Polska służba dyplomatyczna XVI-XVIII wieku*, ed. by Z. WÓJCIK, Warsaw 1966, pp. 373-374; PORAZIŃSKI, J., *Funkcje polityczne i ustrojowe rad senatu w latach 1697-1717*, in: KH 91 (1984), pp. 25-44.

19 STAŃCZAK, E., *Kamera saska za czasów Augusta III*, Warsaw 1973, pp. 28-30, 33-55, 59-86, 207-208.

20 GIEROWSKI, J., *Personal- oder Realunion? Zur Geschichte der polnisch-sächsischen Beziehungen nach Poltava*, in: *Um die polnische Krone. Sachsen und Polen während des Nordischen Krieges 1700-1721*, ed. by J. KALISCH und J. GIEROWSKI (Schriftenreihe d. Kommission d. Historiker der DDR u. Volkspolens 1), Berlin 1962, pp. 254-291, pp. 269-76.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 275-287. On the often much-exaggerated role of the Russians in this settlement, see *Id.*, *Wokół mediacji w traktacie warszawskim 1716 roku* (Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 206. Prace Historyczne 26), Kraków 1969, pp. 57-68.

century. It marked a kind of climacteric: as much reform as the Wettins could achieve and as much as the Polish-Lithuanian nobility were prepared to accept. The effect of the civil-military reforms carried through, principally regular pay and fixed billeting and supply areas for a small Polish army, independent of the vagaries of tax decisions by the local *sejmiki*, a closer regulation of the royal powers of appointment, might even have formed the platform of a closer co-operation between king and *szlachta*: this was certainly what outsiders expected.²² Any benefits were however undermined by the continuing suspicions of the executive power by substantial sections of *szlachta* society and the repeated intervention in Polish affairs of that unofficial, but effective, constitutional element, Russian policy.²³

Wettin rule after 1719 and, even more so after 1736, became increasingly less ambitious and demonstrated a far greater readiness to work within existing systems, a point stressed by Mariusz Markiewicz's examination of Augustus II's later rule in Poland. The *Geheimes Kabinett* was willing to co-operate with Poland on matters of common interest, involving genuinely common goals, for example, the Thorn affair, but it was extremely circumspect in dealing with "purely" Commonwealth issues, such as the Courland succession. Policy goals were comparatively modest (at least, if looked at from outside Poland) – reform of the army and tax systems. The most far-reaching objective, securing the succession of another Wettin, was something, obviously, which exercised the *Geheimes Kabinett* but could not be officially raised with the Poles (unofficial contacts in this business were another matter altogether). The comparatively modest aims pursued by Augustus III and Heinrich Brühl in Poland were not just the effect of the learning experiences accumulated since 1697: they stemmed, too, from the formal obligation that Augustus had entered into with Russia and Austria, in return for their support for his election, to refrain from all constitutional innovation in Poland.²⁴ These agreements themselves represented both international reality and the outcome of the learning process. Augustus II had been able to think seriously in terms of radical change and mod-

22 *Id.*, Personal- oder Realunion (see note 20), pp. 289-291. For the full text of the Treaty of Warsaw and the consequential legislation of 1717, see VL, vol. 6, pp. 112-203.

23 LEWITTER, L. R., Poland, Russia and the Treaty of Vienna of 5 January 1719, in: *Historical Journal* 13 (1970), pp. 3-30. OLSZEWSKI, *Doktryny prawno-ustrojowe* (see note 14), pp. 178-188.

24 Secret article III of the Treaty of St. Petersburg between Saxony and Russia, 6 July 1733, in: *The Consolidated Treaty Series*, ed. by C. PARRY, vol. 34: 1732-1737, Dobbs Ferry/N. Y. 1969, pp. 59-60; article VI of the Treaty of Vienna between Saxony and Austria, 16 July 1733, *ibid.*, p. 79.

ernization for the *Rzeczpospolita*. Any such scope to do so for his successor was much more severely restricted.

Insofar as the Guelphs faced comparable problems in Britain, it was those associated with Jacobitism. But an inchoate nostalgia after the Stuarts and all they supposedly represented in legitimism and their-not-being-Hanoverians never approached the intensity and extent of *szlachta* atavism. Genuine Jacobites were always a minority and, for all the undoubted alarm and unpleasantness which accompanied the British civil wars/rebellions of 1715, 1719 and 1745-6, the troubles they caused could scarcely compare with the bloodshed and horrors of the Tarnogród period. Despite the unpopularity of the Anglo-Scottish Act of Union, there was clearly enough pressure and realism within both the Scottish and English establishments to make the Act function effectively. The result of the Jacobite Revolt of 1745-46 makes the point – with the brutal triumph of strong, centralizing government. In Britain, the commitment to orderly, strong monarchy was backed by a wider public consensus, which took in much of Scotland, the Lowlands in particular. Both the Jacobites of the '45 and the Polish-Lithuanian confederates of 1715 harked back to a mythical past, unencumbered by the prying attentions of excisemen and other central government bureaucrats. Such atavism was strong enough to survive and repel modernization in Poland-Lithuania (albeit with the assistance of that unofficial constitutional partner, Petrine Russia). It had little chance in the British Isles, where even before the Act of Union “Nobody seriously doubted that England would win a war against Scotland”²⁵ and where, of course, genuine, active support for a Stuart restoration was far more limited than the overwhelming attachment of the *szlachta* to their ancient rights and privileges. Had a Stuart restoration in Britain succeeded, it is just possible that, for a time at least, France might have played an analogous role to Russia's in British politics.

Although Hanover's *Landschaften* had to be consulted on major financial matters, they enjoyed nothing like the powers of the British parliament. Working with this body must have seemed almost as daunting a prospect to Georg Ludwig as working with the *Sejm* to Friedrich August. The fact remains, however, that simply because the British parliament functioned as a regularly effective body, the Guelphs had a much easier task in Britain than their Wettin counterparts in Poland-Lithuania. Theoretically, both the British Parliament and the Polish *Sejm* consisted of very similar elements (in Poland “estates”/

25 GOLDIE, M. M., Divergence and Union: Scotland and England 1660-1707, in: The British problem, c. 1534-1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago, ed. by B. BRADSHAW and J. MORRILL, Basingstoke 1996, p. 245.

stany): King/*król*; Lords/*Senat*; Commons/*szlachta*. But the differences are so great as to make any analogy almost redundant. Parliament was sufficiently confident of its place in the order of things to turn its energies outwards and focus on the business of government and legislation; whereas the preoccupation of the majority of the members of the *Sejm* lay in the preservation of the very privileges and liberties which made the *Rzeczpospolita* ungovernable. If the first two Georges had had to work either with Tory-dominated parliaments, or with a House of Commons whose political leadership had been prepared to abide by its own original Whig or "Revolutionary" principles, then the partnership of King in Parliament could well have been a highly uncomfortable one. On the other hand, the British monarch had far greater power vis-à-vis parliament than his Polish *confrère* with regard to the *Sejm*. The latter body had a virtually independent existence of its own, not only in that it had to be called every two years, but it also met twice during every interregnum: to correct the *exorbitantia* and frame the *Pacta Conventa*; and to elect the monarch, who was then confronted with a series of constitutional *faits accomplis* which emasculated him of constructive power and which he ignored at his peril. The summons, prorogation and dissolution of parliaments was a most valuable royal prerogative – as the *szlachta* well appreciated: Augustus II's efforts to reform the *Sejm* by introducing a form of adjournment or prorogation, the *limita*, were declared illegal in 1726.²⁶ The parliament which George I inherited from Anne, and which he dissolved on 15 January 1715, contained a Tory majority of 240; George did not have to work with it. A combination of electoral discontent with the Tories, fear of the reimposition of Catholicism under the Pretender, and, perhaps, above all, George's own unconcealed preference for the Whigs, secured a massive Whig majority of some 130 in the House of Commons.²⁷

If George felt any qualms at working with Parliament, then they must have been rapidly dissipated by the passage of the Septennial Act in May 1716, paving the way for a type of government with which the first two Georges were to make themselves fully comfortable and which, when due allowance has been made for the differences between Hanover and Britain, contributed to the creation of a kind of oligarchic polity not wholly dissimilar to Hanover's. Indeed, provided he could work with the English politicians – and, by and large, the first two Georges did, even though the kind of vitriol to which they were exposed from pamphleteers, politicians and public was unthinkable in the electorate –

26 VL, vol. 6, p. 209.

27 O'GORMAN, F., *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832*, London 1997, p. 66.

the King in Parliament remained one of the most powerful political forces in Europe. Whatever the excitements of local constituency politics, the electoral calamity which overtook the incumbent ministry in 1710 was not to be repeated under the Georges, a fact due as much to the effectiveness of governmental – i. e. king's and ministers' – patronage as that of accommodating borough patrons.²⁸

This remained the case even in the face of measures which, by continental standards, could be unsettlingly radical. There were very few states where a monarch and his ministers could override local, national and even individual rights and privileges as in Great Britain. The Act of Union with Scotland was flagrantly violated many times before the abolition of heritable jurisdictions in 1748 in the wake of the '45 rising.²⁹ Continental monarchs tampered with such features of their own realms at their peril. It is almost unimaginable that Augustus II would have attempted a similar exercise in Saxony, where he was frequently on the defensive, especially with regard to his religious policies. Between 1749 and 1763, Augustus III and Brühl tried to govern without reference to their *Landtag*, but in the wake of the Seven Years' War, they had little choice but to turn to it once more. As for Poland, the real frustration lay in that despite the presence of electioneering apparatuses possibly even more sophisticated than in Britain, the combination of *liberum veto* and innate *szlachta* mistrust of change, royal attempts to introduce even marginal reforms got nowhere. Months before the passage of the Septennial Act in London, the confederates of Tarnogród had starkly illustrated the narrow limits to royal power in Poland. Disorganized, chaotic and ruined though the Commonwealth may have been, in the final analysis, the electorate of Saxony quite lacked the resources (and the will) to enable its ruler to impose on the *Rzeczpospolita* in the way that the king and ministers could, if circumstances were right, in Westminster or the king in parliament at Westminster could on Scotland. At least Augustus and his successor learned the lesson. After 1716-17, they sought primarily to work within the system they found in Poland, not against it. Indeed, this also applied to Wettin rule in Saxony, where after 1717, Augustus II increasingly chose to work with, rather than against his estates – not that in reality he had ever been able to make himself as independent of them as he had wished early in his reign.³⁰

28 O'GORMAN, F., *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: the Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England*, Oxford 1989, pp. 22-25.

29 LENMAN, *The Jacobite Risings* (see note 7), pp. 93-8, 277-81. SL, vol. 5, pp. 575-582 (20 Geo. II, c. 43).

30 STASZEWSKI, J., *Zamach stanu w Saksonii w 1703 roku – Upadek Beichlinga*. "Portrait de la cour de Pologne et de Saxe", in: *Studia Historyczne* 12 (1969), pp. 53-80; ID., *August III Sas*, Wrocław, Warsaw, Kraków 1989, pp. 98-100.

It is a striking coincidence that in the history of both “unions”, the years 1716-18 mark something of a turning point: in Poland-Lithuania, with the creation of a constitutional settlement which was to survive for at least another fifty years, and, in some key respects, right up to 1788, well after the end of Wettin rule in the Commonwealth. In Britain, too, the enactment of the Septennial Act (repealed only in 1911), contributed enormously to laying the foundations of a stable king-aristocratic partnership, at least under the first two Georges. The “rage of party” of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was virtually asphyxiated. “The electoral system [...] had thus been created as a response to Whig party interests and the need to settle the country in the interests of the new dynasty” – giving striking birth to that British tradition of the return of large parliamentary majorities courtesy of the vote of electoral minorities.³¹

At the purely formal, institutional level, Poland-Lithuania and Saxony, just like Britain and Hanover, remained quite distinctive polities. Yet what is so striking is that although there was a genuine dynastic union between the latter two, they remained, in terms of their impact on each other’s internal political cultures, worlds apart. Yet in the case of Poland and Saxony, despite all the barriers and restrictions raised by the *Pacta Conventa* against foreign, Saxon penetration, that penetration, over more than sixty years went far deeper than anything between Britain and Hanover. After 1717, the only way in which the Wettins could hope to establish hereditary rule in Poland was by encouraging and cultivating informal and personal links between Saxony and the Commonwealth. The most striking examples are the *indygenaty* (ennoblements-cum-naturalizations) conferred on individual Saxons by the Poles, which enabled individuals such as the Flemmings and the Brühls to play leading roles in the domestic politics of the *Rzeczpospolita*, in a way utterly unthinkable of Hanoverian ministers in Britain, or, for that matter, of British ministers in Hanover. The numerous marriages across the Polish-Saxon divide testify to links which were at least as much personal as political. The most spectacular instance of this was, of course, the marriage between Augustus III’s son, Carl, and Franciszka Kasińska in March 1760. Lower down the scale and, if anything, even more telling, was the marriage of Jan Henryk Dąbrowski to Gustava von Rackel in 1780.³² Although doubtless much of this activity will be explored by other speakers, it is worth stressing that at the level of deep-seated, informal political

31 O’GORMAN, Voters (see note 28), p. 14.

32 KONOPCZYŃSKI, W., Brühl (von) Henryk, in: PSB, vol. 3, Kraków 1937, pp. 16-19 and ID., Fleming Jakub Henryk in: PSB, vol. 7, Kraków 1948-1958, pp. 32-35; STASZEWSKI, August III (see note 30), pp. 265-266; PACHOŃSKI, J., Generał Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, 1755-1818, Warsaw 1981, pp. 31-33.

contacts the Wettins worked extremely hard and successfully – so much so that in 1791 they were actually to be offered, by the Poles themselves, hereditary rule in the reformed Commonwealth: an offer, which of course, Friedrich August III was to refuse because he appreciated that the ever stronger extra-constitutional force, Russia, would not tolerate his accession.

While, in the end, the Wettins failed to convert a sporadic personal union into a genuine political and constitutional one, the task facing them was immeasurably more difficult than that facing the Hanoverians in Britain. The latter were embraced as a dynasty; the former were elected as individuals. And if their efforts at the reforms so necessary to modernize Poland made only the most modest progress, it has to be remembered that their native-born predecessors had also failed. The reforms of the 1763-4 interregnum were made possible only because the reform party was riding on the back of Russian troops; and once Russia realized what Stanisław August Poniatowski and the Czartoryskis were about, it acted swiftly to roll back all reform it found uncomfortable, just as under the Wettins it had acted to block all such initiative.