CHAPTER FOUR

CIVIC RESILIENCE AND COHESION IN THE FACE OF MUSCOVITE OCCUPATION

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We have a king, but we are neither his inheritance nor patrimony... for he is granted to the citizens, and not the citizens to him. (Łukasz Opaliński, Polonia defensa contra Ioannum Barclaivm [Dantisci, 1648])

In the mid-seventeenth century, on the eve of a succession of invasions by Cossacks, Muscovites and Swedes, the majority of the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania lived in larger and smaller towns. Representative of these towns in the eastern Grand Duchy were Mohylew, Witebsk, Sluck, Polock and of course Wilno. Documents from the period inform us that the residents included large numbers of Belarusans, Lithuanians, Jews, and smaller groups of Poles, Germans, Tatars and Armenians, who confessed the Greek Orthodox, Uniate, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Muslim faiths. It was this multi-various and multi-vocal mix of cultures, religions and languages, cohabitating in relative tolerance and peace, that Muscovy regarded as a threat. The occupation of 1654 was a holy campaign of liberation to disrupt and destroy this order. In clear contrast to its neighbour

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2 The Russian historian Boris N. Floria wrote that by after occupying Wilno, the tsar declared his intention to march on Warsaw and Cracow. Never before, according to Floria, had Russia been so close to realising its long-standing historical mission of unifying all the Slavic lands west of Muscovy. It failed to do so only because of its fear that the Baltic was becoming a ‘Swedish lake’ and not due to any resistance on the part of the population. Boris N. Floria “Ot Potopa do Vilna. Russkaia Polityka po otosheniu k Reczi Pospolitoi w 1655–56gg,” Kwartalnik Historyczny, 110 (2003), 2, 25–49. Others have argued that the Commonwealth brought the occupation upon itself as a result of great injustices committed toward Muscovy: the desecration of the Kremlin and Orthodox churches during the smuta, support for the second False Dmitry at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the spilling of innocent blood and, adding insult to injury, the foundation of the Uniate church and corresponding restrictions
to the West, power in seventeenth century Muscovy was based on an
autocratic tsar ruling in consensus with the boyar elite, whose power
in turn rested on closeness to tsar and custom rather than on laws or
institutions. The patriarch of Jerusalem had appealed to the tsar to
liberate pious Orthodox Christians from the clutch of the infidels. Alexis
regarded foreign policy conducted in a zealous Orthodox context as a
sovereign’s chief concern. The Polish–Lithuanian electors, for their part,
firmly believed that they could bind their foreign rulers to a common
political culture and common parliament without jeopardising their
liberties. In the same way, the Greek Orthodox hierarchy in the Grand
Duchy believed that it could defend its position and liberties from the
Uniate church as well as foreign intruders. When king Jan Kazimierz
and Janusz Radziwiłł, hetman of the Lithuanian army, urged the
people of Wilno to take up arms against the Muscovites, they did not
evoke religious symbolism. Rather, they called on their fellow citizens
to defend their city as the capital and the custodian of all the rights
and privileges of its citizens.3

Aleksii Mikhailovich made no bones about his intentions when he
led the march on Smolensk in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He
first made it clear to Khmelnytsky and then repeated it often enough: “kas-
tielam nie byt’”—meaning there was to be no mercy for Roman Catholics,
primarily Poles; the second target group were the Uniates—“uniatom nie
byt’”; and “Zhydom v Belarusi nie byt’ i zhytia nikavo nie imiet’”—Jews were
not to be tolerated.4 These were the three religious groups that had
the most to fear from Muscovite occupation. Furthermore, the Greek
Orthodox population that was to be ‘liberated’, was also informed in
no unclear terms of the tsar’s guiding principle as far as ruler-subject
relations were concerned: “Poddannye prisiagait’ hosudariu, a nie hosudar
poddannym”—the subjects swear fealty to the ruler, and not the ruler to
the subjects. This principle stood in direct contrast to the ruling principle

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3 Pamiętnik lekarza króla Władysława IV., eds. Ewa Galos, Franciszek Mincer, Władysław
Czapliński (Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow, 1968), 186.
4 Akty, otnosiashchiesia k istorii Yuzhnoi i Zapadnoi Rossii, sobrannye i izdannye Archeograficheskoiu