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Gustav III's coup d'état of 19 August 1772:

The end of the "Age of Liberty" in Sweden

Gustav III was without doubt one of the greatest rulers of Sweden in the eighteenth century. His personality left a powerful mark on the history of this country, just as Charles XII's had. The eldest son of Adolf Frederick (king of Sweden in the years 1751–1771) and Lovisa Ulrika of Prussia, Gustav III was born on 24 January / 4 February 1746, in Stockholm. From an early age he was strongly connected to his mother, who greatly contributed to the formation of her son's personality. The little prince inherited most of his character traits from his mother's family – the Hohenzollerns of Prussia. Throughout his life he was very violent, impulsive, quick-tempered and irritable. He was fit by a nature with a very active imagination. His mind was always filled with thousands of projects and activities; he could never sit still in one place. He was always moving, forever experiencing eternal fervor and anxiety of the soul. Nothing was able to keep his attention for long. Another dominant feature of his character was his loyalty and sincerity towards his friends. At a young age, however, he learned to hide his true feelings, initially in fear of his harsh and overbearing mother, and later, due to the echoes of political intrigues and violent party fighting which reach the royal court. Closing in on himself and hiding secrets from those around him even gave one of the biographers

of Gustav III cause to reach the conclusion that he had never told the truth and had never taken off his mask, not even to himself¹.

Gustav's unmistakable happiness was due to the fact that, from his earliest childhood, he was under the influence of outstanding teachers and tutors (Carl Gustaf Tessin, Olof von Dalin, Carl Fredrik Scheffer, Samuel Klingerstierna). Although the young prince was not a very diligent student and did not attach too much importance to learning areas that did not interest him, he devoted a lot of time to studying history and learning the French language. This language was mastered over time, although congenital dyslexia caused him continual difficulty with spelling. Very early he began to reveal a deep interest in literature, theater and visual arts, which undoubtedly resulted in the subsequent awakening of his tutors the aesthetic inclinations he had inherited from his mother. As successor to the throne (1751) Gustav was thoroughly prepared to take the government of the country. In addition to a practical look at the actions of the army and fleet (despite being refused military studies in the army of his uncle – Frederick II of Prussia, by the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdag – who saw it as a threat to the Swedish Constitution). By participating in the deliberations of the Senate (the Council of State), the young prince also gained firsthand experience of the functioning of the state administration. Initially, he was romantically involved with the party of „caps”. In the

¹ Cf. E. Lönnroth, *Gustavus III of Sweden: the Final Years. A Political Portrait*, in: idem, *Scandinavians. Selected Historical Essays*, Göteborg 1977, 101; B. Hennings, *Gustav III*, in: *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon [SBL]*, Bd XVII, Stockholm 1967–1969, 458–459; G. v. Proschwitz, *Introduction*, in: *Gustave III par ses lettres*, ed. par G. v. Proschwitz, Stockholm–Paris 1986, 12–13; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja szwedzka wobec kryzysu monarchii we Francji w latach 1787–1792*, Łódź 2000, 35; idem, *Edukacja oświeconego księcia. Wychowanie i wykształcenie szwedzkiego następcy tronu, królewicza Gustawa (późniejszego Gustawa III)*, in: *Między barokiem a oświeceniem. Edukacja, wykształcenie, wiedza*, ed. S. Achremczyk, Olsztyn 2005, 261–263.

Riksdag of 1762, under the influence of Carl Fredrik Scheffer, he came, however, over to the party of „hats”, gradually loosening his ties with the „caps”. On April 5, 1762, the heir to the throne of Sweden’s formal education was officially completed as the Kronprins reached the full age of sixteen years old².

His Mother and two of his tutors (Tessin and Scheffer) ensured that Gustav was brought up in the French spirit. He was interested in the literature and philosophy of the French Enlightenment and read avidly. He had a huge library, which included the latest releases. The ambassador of Sweden in Paris, Gustav Philip Creutz, maintained regular correspondence with the prince on cultural issues and sent him consecutive volumes of the Great French Encyclopedia. It is also worth noting that the absolutist beliefs that Gustav formed, among others, were developed under the influence of the French Physiocrats (their works lead him to read Carl Fredrik Scheffer) who thought the most appropriate form of government was an „enlightened despotism”. A book by Paul Pierre Mercier de la Rivière, “L'orde actuel et essentiel des sociétés politiques”, had a great impact on shaping the political views of Gustav. Reading “Henriade” by Voltaire and the French classical tragedies also contributed significantly to the formation of the literary tastes of the young prince. His fascination with France and its culture meant

² Cf. B. Hennings, *Gustav III som kronprins*, Uppsala 1935, 20–49, 50–98, 143 f., 159–184, 270 f., 308–349; eadem, *Gustav III. En biografi*, Stockholm 1957, 12–38; eadem, *Gustav III*, 458–459; G. v. Proschwitz, *op. cit.*, 15; B. Sallnäs, *Tessin Carl Gustaf*, in: *Svenska Män och Kvinnor. Biografisk Uppslagsbok [SMoK]*, Bd VII, Stockholm 1954, 491; O. Sylwan, *Dalin von Olof*, in: *SBL*, Bd IX, Stockholm 1931, 50–65; H. Ehrencrona, *Scheffer Carl Fredrik*, in: *SMoK*, Bd VI, Stockholm 1949, 542; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 35–36; idem, *Edukacja...*, 263–274; idem, *W cieniu rosyjskiego imperium. Zarys dziejów wewnętrznych i polityki zagranicznej Szwecji w latach 1718–1751*, „Acta Universitatis Lodziensis”, Folia historica 69, 2000, 5–36; and idem, *Partia „czapek” i początki liberalizmu w Szwecji*, in: *Liberalizm w Europie*, ed. E. Wiśniewski, Łódź 2008, s. 21–39.

that Gustav used the French language more easily than Swedish. So, in relation to his interest in French culture and his love for France itself, he can be compared with his uncle, Frederick II of Prussia, and his older cousin, Empress Catherine II (the queen mother of Russia, Joan Elizabeth was a sister of Adolf Frederick, father of the Swedish successor of the throne); however, Gustav's love for France was, if not more honest, at least more stable. Looking into the patterns of Versailles, reading the history of the reign of the kings of France – Henry IV and Louis XIV, admiring Gustav Vasa, Charles XII, and – above all – Gustav II Adolf, the Swedish Kronprins also strove consistently for a significant strengthening of royal power in his own country. His close political relationship with France, however, concerns the period of the 1765–1766 Riksdag, when there was a definitive break of the royal court with the party of „caps”³.

Stockholm court decisions on the reorientation of its domestic policy coincided with the emergence of new political plans in the French capital. One of the roads leading to the empowerment of the court of Versailles in the North had become the restoration of the international importance of Sweden by the restitution of a strong Swedish royal power in the country. In this situation, prince Gustav, dreaming about the strengthening the position of the Crown, could count on strong support from the Louis XV. Furthermore, in April 1766, the decision was made at

³ Cf. B. Hennings, *Gustav III. En biografi*, 80; A. Geffroy, *Gustave III et la cour de France. Suivi d'une étude critique sur Marie-Antoinette et Louis XVI apocryphes*, vol. I, Paris 1867, 74–101; R.N. Bain, *Gustavus III and his Contemporaries 1746–1792. An Overlooked Chapter of Eighteenth Century History*, Vol. I, London 1894, 13–27; 35–40, 216–220; H.A. Barton, *Gustav III of Sweden and the Enlightenment*, „Eighteenth Century Studies. An Interdisciplinary Journal”, Vol. VI, No 1, Berkeley (University of California) 1972–1973, 1–5; G. v. Proschwitz, *op. cit.*, 9; N. Forsell, *Gustav III:s politiska debut. Bidrag till belysning av 1766–1769 års kris i Sveriges historia*, „Personhistorisk Tidskrift”, Bd XXI, 1920, [print: Stockholm 1921], 111–131; Z. Anusik, *Diplomacja...*, 36–37; idem, *Edukacja...*, 274–275.

Versailles to strengthen the Swedish Crown at the expense of both of the parliamentary parties. In March 1768, Prince Gustav, under the influence of incentives from the court of Versailles initiated work on a new monarchist constitution. In May of the same year, Adolf Frederick, pushed by his son, asked the French minister of foreign affairs (Etienne François prince de Choiseul) in a personal letter to send to Stockholm a new diplomat (the former ambassador, Louis Auguste Le Tonnelier baron de Breteuil, did not enjoy the confidence of the royal family) with full powers to act in the monarchist spirit. The request of the King of Sweden was of course cordially received at the court of Louis XV. Instructions for the new French ambassador in Stockholm, François Charles de Raimond count de Modène, directly advised him to maintain the friendship of the king of Sweden. As it was also desirable from the point of view of Versailles, instructions pointed to „unite all attributions of supreme power in the person of the king over all branches of the government”⁴.

After his arrival in Stockholm, count de Modène quickly became a confidant and close collaborator of the successor to the Swedish throne. The latter decided to take advantage of the growing internal crisis to conduct a monarchist coup d'état. December 12, 1768, the heir to the throne read before the Council of State (Riksråd) a statement containing the royal protest against a further reduction of the monarch's power. Prince Gustav also demanded, in the name of his father, the immediate convening of the Riksdag. In view of the refusal of the Council dominated by the „caps” party, the king himself appeared in the Senate on December 15, threatening

⁴ Cf. W. Konopczyński, *Polska a Szwecja. Od pokoju oliwskiego do upadku Rzeczypospolitej 1660–1795*, Warszawa 1924, 194; W. Kalinka, *Ostatnie lata panowania Stanisława Augusta*, vol. I, Kraków 1891, 54; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 48–53; B. Hennings, *Gustav III. En biografi*, 45; H.A. Barton, *op. cit.*, 4; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 38; idem, *Edukacja...*, 276–277.

abdication and declaring that henceforth he would cease to perform his constitutional duties. At the same time, prince Gustav, in agreement with the French diplomat, was preparing for a violent overthrow of the constitution. Gustav's parents, who remembered the humiliation which they had suffered after the detection of anti-constitutional conspiracy in 1756, were, however, staunch opponents of any violent measures. Adolf Frederick and Lovisa Ulrika demanded only the convening of States, hoping that together with the „hats” they could cause the failure of the party of „caps” in the election. The attitude of the royal couple forced the heir to the throne to cancel his significantly advanced preparations for the coup. However, as the demand made by the king for the immediate convening of the Riksdag was supported by officials of the central government and the troops stationed in the capital, the State Council was forced to make concessions. On 20 December 1768, it finally decided to announce the election of a new state assembly. This being the situation, Adolf Frederick again proceeded to carry out his constitutional duties the next day⁵.

The French Embassy promised a few million livres to the „hats” for the cost of the election campaign, provided that after the victory they would make modifications of the Swedish constitution in the monarchical spirit. A huge disappointment was awaiting both the French and the Swedish royal family. The „hats” gladly accepted the court's help in the fight against the „caps”, but after the victory they did not fulfill their previous commitments. Moreover, against attempts to strengthen royal power in Sweden, representatives of Russia, Denmark and England protested in solidarity in

⁵ Cf. R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 45–49; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 107; I. de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, New Haven–London 1981, 215; J. Brown, *Les cours du Nord ou mémoires originaux sur les souverains de la Suède et le Danemarck depuis 1766*, vol. II, Paris 1820, 22; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 39; idem, *Edukacja...*, 278–279; idem, *Między Rosją i Francją. Zarys dziejów wewnętrznych i polityki zagranicznej Szwecji w latach 1751–1772*, „Przegląd Nauk Historycznych” 2002, R. I, nr 2, 49–50.

Stockholm. Back in power, the noble party of „hats” also led to the re-tightening of social antagonisms by reviving the age-old dispute between the nobility and the three other lower States. Quarrels between the representatives of the nobility with the three lower States completely dominated the last years of the reign of Adolf Frederick. In Sweden, a serious internal crisis was growing. The government of the “hats” increased common discontent. The admission of the representatives of the three lower States to hold higher offices was commonly called for. This drew widespread criticism of the unfortunate decisions of the State Council on social and economic policy. Against the „hats” were supporters of the court and the party of „caps” financed by the Russian court. The party fight led Sweden to a state of complete anarchy in late 1770 and early 1771⁶.

In the tense atmosphere of rampant corruption and an unproductive struggle with the government and representatives of the opposition, Adolf Frederick died suddenly on 12 February 1771. At that time, the successor to the throne, Prince Gustav was travelling in the countries of Western Europe. The news of his father's death reached him on 1 March in Paris (he was in the French capital incognito – as the count of Gotland from 4 February 1771). In Paris the monarchist coup d'état in Sweden was also being planned. Before leaving the French capital, Gustav

⁶ Cf. R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 49–51; H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia in the Revolutionary Era 1760–1815*, Minneapolis 1986, 64–65; I. de Madariaga, *op. cit.*, 216–218; L. Stavenow, *Geschichte Schwedens 1718–1772, Gesamtgeschichte Schwedens*, Bd. VII, Gotha 1908, 405 f.; idem, *Frihetstiden, Sveriges historia till våra dagar*, utg. av E. Hildebrand och L. Stavenow, Bd IX, Stockholm 1922, 419–429; W. Kalinka, *op. cit.*, 55; C.G. Malmström, *Sveriges politiska historia från konung Karl XII:s död till statshväfningen 1772*, uppl. 2, Bd VI, Stockholm 1901, 98–187; B. Hennings, *Gustav III som...*, 350–373; eadem, *Gustav III. En biografi*, 50; E. Amburger, *Russland und Schweden 1762–1772. Die Schwedische Verfassung und die Ruhe des Nordens*, Berlin 1934, 194 f.; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 38–40, 42–43; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 39–42; idem, *Między Rosją...*, 50–53.

III was encouraged in the violent overthrow of the constitution and – more importantly – he was given the promise of a payment of 10.5 million livres unpaid subsidies and the promise to transfer directly to his hands 1.5 million livres of annual subsidy. Since the new ruler's ascension to the throne required his formal election by the Riksdag, Gustav III sent a written oath of allegiance to the constitution to the Council of State on 15 March 1771. Three days later, on 18 March, the young king left the capital of France, and in early June he returned to Stockholm⁷.

His position was quite difficult. In the spring of 1771, the election to the Riksdag was held, which confirmed Gustav III's election. The Knights Chamber had almost exclusively been dominated by the party of „hats”. In the other three chambers, however, the party of “caps” had gained an advantage, which had occurred under close cooperation with the Russian ambassador in Stockholm, Ivan A. Ostermann. On 25 June 1771, Gustav III opened the meeting of the States, calling for harmony and patriotism among the members of Riksdag gathered in Stockholm. He sincerely hoped that he could strengthen his own position without needing to resort to force to overthrow the existing political and legal order. At the outset, however, the king was met with great disappointment. The party of „caps” broke an

⁷ Cf. C.T. Odhner, *Sveriges politiska historia under konung Gustaf III:s regering*, Bd I (1771–1778), Stockholm 1885, 1–13; L. Stavenow, *Frihetstiden*, 439 f.; idem, *Geschichte...*, 405–410; A. Söderhjelm. *Sverige och den franska revolutionen. Bidrag till kännedom om Sveriges och Frankrikes inbördes förhållande i slutet av 1700-talet*, Bd I (*Gustav III:s tid*), Stockholm 1920, 36–37; B. Hennings, *Gustav III. En biografi*, 53; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 107–125; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 53–60; H.A. Barton, *Gustav III...*, 6–10; I. de Madariaga, *op. cit.*, 218; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 43–44; idem, *Między Rosją...*, 54. Let us add here that even in Paris, prince Gustav arranged the collaboration with the monarchic disposed part of the “hats” party led by Fredric Carl Sinclair. It was because the confidence of the new ruler lost, fighting for a long time against the concept of extending the power of the Crown, the official leader of the party count Fredrik Axel von Fersen. Cf. B. Hennings, *Gustav III som...*, 374–389.

agreement with the “hats” which had been agreed upon under his own patronage and they took a majority of seats in the Secret Committee of Riksdag. The States also could not agree in any way about the views of the newly elected ruler’s commitments and the text of his coronation oath. The representatives of the three lower States began a massive attack on the system of aristocratic privilege. In an atmosphere of quarrels, confusion and growing tensions between the House of the Knights and the three other chambers, the Riksdag debate dragged on unproductively for several months. The fierce debate continued until 24 February 1772 without bringing any resolve to the struggle between the nobility and the representatives of the three lower States. It was only due to pressure from the Russian diplomat, when members of the “caps” party who sat in the House of the Knights agreed to some concessions that a slightly more modified compromise could be push through this chamber. A compromise it may have been, but the text of the new royal obligations was still very good for the three lower social classes. On 4 March Gustav III signed their commitments, not even bothering to read them carefully⁸.

On 29 May 1772, Gustav III was solemnly crowned in Stockholm’s Storkirken. But this did not in any way change his position in the state and did not led to an increase of the king’s influence on the course of the sessions of the Riksdag. The „caps” governed the country independently and began persecuting their opponents. The defeated party of „hats” definitely

⁸ Cf. C.T. Odhner, *op. cit.*, 18, 23, 25–69; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 61–80, 99–100; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 139–144; B. Hennings, *Gustav III. En biografi*, 55–56; H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia...*, 77–80; idem, *Gustav III...*, 11; D. Michellessi, *Rewolucya szwedzka sprawą Gustawa III dzisiejszego króla szwedzkiego w roku 1772 utworzona z przydatkiem formy nowego rządu i pism zaciągających się do tej odmiany, przez Xiędza ... napisana a z francuzkiego na oyczysty (j)ęzyk przełożona*, Warszawa 1778, 23; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 44–46; idem, *Między Rosją...*, 55–57.

lost the support of France and was in a state of total decay. Gustav tried to come to terms with the new government and tried to follow the principles of the constitution, but he encountered stiff resistance at every turn. Decisions were taken against the will and wishes of the monarch both in the Riksdag and in the Secret Committee. To make matters worse, in early August 1772, the ruling „caps” joined with the Russian ambassador to lay a draft treaty with the court of St. Petersburg, in which Russia had to guarantee all the Swedish freedoms⁹.

Gustav III was obviously not going to tolerate governments not liked by him: the „caps” and the highly influential Russian ambassador in Stockholm. When he realized the impossibility of reconciling the interests of the nobility with the aspirations of the disadvantaged classes, he decided to hold a coup d'état. The young king found his allies mainly among courtiers and officers of his own guard. Those around him gradually focused on a Swedish aristocracy, who did not intend to allow themselves to be pushed by a government run by the representatives of “caps”, derived largely from the plebeian classes. In the face of threats to their current position, the nobility were ready to look back at a king. Given the choice to protect their privileges of state or defend of the current system of government, a significant part of the nobility chose the former. On 19 August 1772, Gustav III held a bloodless coup d'état in Stockholm. On 21 August the king summoned a plenary session of the Riksdag in the Stockholm castle. The States' meeting place was surrounded by the army so that members could not show the appearance of the slightest resistance. Terrorized States not

⁹ Cf. C.G. Malmström, *op. cit.*, 210–343; L. Stavenow, *Frihetstiden*, 439–454; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 90–91; H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia...*, 80; B. Hennings, *Gustav III som...*, 365 f.; D. Michellessi, *op. cit.*, 41–42, 51, 160–165; W. Konopczyński, *op. cit.*, 204; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 46–47; idem, *Między Rosją...*, 57–58.

only performed the oath of allegiance to the king, but even sent a deputation to him with thanks for extracting the kingdom from anarchy. No wonder that in this atmosphere the members of the Riksdag accepted in its entirety the collapse of the existing system of government and on the same day, 21 August 1772, passed the proposal for a new constitution presented to them by the king¹⁰.

Two days later, Gustav III wrote about the incident to his mother: „I had absolute power in my hands by a voluntary submission of each of the States, but I thought it nobler, more generous and more appropriate to what I said before, and certainly better for my future government, if I limit the scope of royal power, leaving the people fundamental rights and freedoms, and retaining for myself only what is necessary to prevent of abuses”¹¹. After the totally submissive States fulfilled all the demands put forward by Gustav III (the king was most anxious to establish its tax proposals), he dissolved the Riksdag on 9 September 1772, making a solemn promise to

¹⁰ Cf. L. Bonneville de Marsagny, *Le comte de Vergennes: son ambassade en Suède 1771–1774*, Paris 1898; *Mémoire pour servir d'instruction au sieur comte de Vergennes allant en Suède pour y résider en qualité d'ambassadeur du Roi, 5 mai 1771*, in:] *Recueil des instructions donnés aux ambassadeurs et ministres de France depuis les traités de Westphalie jusqu'à la révolution française*, vol. II (Suède), ed. par A. Geffroy, Paris 1887, 432–442; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 131–135, 137–138, 150–154, 156–158, 160–166; A. Söderhjelm, *op. cit.*, 37–39; H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia...*, 78–79, 81; C.T. Odhner, *op. cit.*, 89 f., 95 f., 114–154; D. Michellessi, *op. cit.*, 60, 62–91, 214–217; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 81–126; B. Hennings, *Gustav III. En biografi*, 57–65; eadem, *Gustav III*, 458–460; L. Stavenow, *Geschichte...*, 426–433; G. Iverus, *Hertig Karl av Södermanland, Gustav III:s broder*, Bd I (*Till ryska kriget*), Uppsala 1925, 56–80; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 47–53; idem, *Między Rosją...*, 58–66.

¹¹ Gustav III to Lovisa Ulrika, Stockholm 23 VIII 1772, *Gustav III:s och Lovisa Ulrika brevväxling*, utg. av H. Schück, Bd II, Stockholm 1919, s. 255.

re-convene it in the next 6 years¹².

The new constitution (form of government) presented by Gustav III and approved by the Riksdag on 21 August 1772 fundamentally transformed the political system of the kingdom. The parties of „caps” and „hats” ultimately disappeared from the political scene of the country. Parties were prohibited from any activity. The young king did not intend to create a full autocracy. His dream was for the renewal of the political institutions in Sweden from the time of Gustav II Adolf. The constitution of August 1772 (full indeed of vague wording and internal contradictions) was therefore a compromise between the concept of enlightened absolutism and the old Swedish parliamentary tradition. Ideas of natural rights of man present in the document reflected that they were living in the age of Enlightenment. We can also find in it the clear influence of the legal and political views propounded by Mercier de la Rivière and Montesquieu. Gustav III’s form of government restored the balance between the throne and freedom. The king, who was responsible only to God and posterity, again became the highest organ of executive power. The State Council (Senate) lost its character of government and its role was limited to a consultative function. Gustav III introduced into the State Council a number of lawyers, because the new form of government gave the Riksdag the authority of a high judicial tribunal. Although the constitution also included a phrase that

¹² Cf. C.T. Odhner, *op. cit.*, 155; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 127–131, 136–138; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 166–167; H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia...*, 82–83; *Konung Gustaf III:s skrifter in politiska och vittra ämnen tillika med dess brevexling*, Bd I, Stockholm 1806, 88; *Collection des écrits politiques, littéraires et dramatiques de Gustave III, roi de Suède, suivie de son correspondance*, ed. par J.B. de Chaux, vol. I, Stockholm 1803, 103–107; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 53; idem, *Między Rosją...*, 65–66. Cf. also C.G. Malmström, *op. cit.*, 344–411; C.F. Sheridan, *A History of the Late Revolution in Sweden*, London 1788; L. Stavenow, *Frihetstiden*, 454–465; and H. Schück, *Gustaf III:s statsvälvning 1772 i berättande källor och äldre litteratur*, Historisk Archiv 4, Uppsala 1955.

appointments to all important government offices were to be made at the meetings of the Senate, in fact the Council of State did not have any impact on the staffing of ministerial posts. The same constitution granted the king unquestioned rights to appoint all officials according to his own wishes and appreciation¹³.

The functioning of the regime imposed in Sweden by Gustav III assumed harmonious cooperation between the executive power and legislature. The latter was in fact divided between the States and the king. The constitution of August 1772 introduced a number of changes in the organization and competence of the Riksdag. Their goal was to reduce the role of the States and strengthen the impact of the king on the course of events in all four chambers. The king was entitled exclusive rights regarding the States' assembly and its resolution, and the role of the Riksdag was seriously limited by the fact that the king decided to convene the States assembly, without being bound by any statutory deadlines. The king regained the right to appoint a marshal of the Knights Chamber and the chairmen of the House of Clergy, Burgesses and Peasants. Riksdag's Secret Committee was abolished. A similar fate befell all the other Riksdag's Committees determining the face of the Swedish parliament in „the Age of Freedom”. The Riksdag only had authority over two committees: the state and banking, both made up of representatives of the three higher classes.

¹³ Full text of the Swedish Constitution granted by Gustav III on 21 VIII, 1772, (57 Articles) translated into Polish Cf. D. Michellessi, *op. cit.*, 102–159. Translation of the same text into English Cf. W. Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark*, Vol. IV, London 1787, 429–447. Cf also H.A. Barton, *Gustav III...*, 11–12; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 56–57; idem, *Czy na pewno pierwsza? Kilka uwag o konstytucjach szwedzkich XVIII wieku*, in: *Konstytucja Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. Reminiscencje w 220. rocznicę uchwalenia*, ed. J.A. Daszyńska, Łódź 2009, 198–199.

The reformed Riksdag retained the right of legislative initiative (sharing it with the king), sovereignty over the Riksbank (State Bank), and part of the old power regarding tax policy (Riksdag enacted taxes for a fixed period, and the king was obliged to submit before it the reports of government's expenditure). Without the consent of the Riksdag, no new rights could be established, nor any old rights or privileges removed. In domestic affairs, however, the king could give administrative regulations, and there was not a strict boundary between the king's regulations and Parliamentary Acts. Consent of the States was also required if the ruler intended to launch an offensive war. Without the consent of the Riksdag, the monarch also could not change the privileges granted by him in the constitution. Since in the State assembly he only had the right of precedent veto, he was forced to seek the support of the chambers for legislative proposals presented to them¹⁴.

Gustav III, for whom the ideal political system was an enlightened absolute monarchy, was a follower of the principle that political balance is based on a hierarchical social system. Therefore, he felt that a close alliance of the Crown with the nobility was an essential element of political and social stability of Sweden. Another reason for the king's closeness to the nobility was his interests in chivalry and reading chivalric literature. We also cannot forget that he made a coup d'état with the full support of the

¹⁴ Cf. C.T. Odhner, *op. cit.*, 155–157; L. Stavenow, *Den gustavianska tiden 1772–1789, Sveriges politiska historia till våra dagar*, utg. av E. Hildebrand och L. Stavenow, Bd X, Stockholm 1925, 12–17; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 131–132; H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia...*, 82–83; G. Landberg, *Den svenska riksdagen under den gustavianska tiden*, in: *Sveriges riksdag. Historisk och statsvetenskaplig framställning*, Bd VII, Stockholm 1932, 24–41; F. Almén, *Gustav III och hans rådgivare 1772–1789. Arbetssätt och meningsbrytningar i rådkammare och konseljer*, Uppsala 1940; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 57–58; idem, *Czy na pewno...*, 199–200.

aristocracy, based on the noble officer corps. Thus, one cannot say that the court of Gustav III, the ruler with vast ambitions and romantic fantasy, lover of theater, writing his own historical dramas, who continued correspondence with D'Alembert, Diderot and Voltaire, was devoid of elegance and fashion. There was the French spirit, and the compelling personality of the young ruler meant that it was one of the finest, in cultural terms, of European courts. The Stockholm court ceremony was closely modeled on Versailles, which was not so much the result of fascination with the court of Louis XV, but an intention to follow French political solutions. From the beginning of his reign, Gustav III flirted with and gave favours to the representatives of the nobility, clearly hoping to ensure that the Swedish aristocracy would be changed into court nobility and became a sort of Praetorian Guard for the monarchy. The opposition from the disadvantaged States increased with time; Gustav deftly disarmed the systematic knighting of its potential leaders. A new constitution granted the king the right to confer nobility on the people who had contributed to the state and the Crown. The real paradox in this situation was the fact that the aristocracy and nobility in Sweden were mostly a Republican and conservative political force, which was to be the biggest obstacle in the future when it came to implementing the widespread political plans of Gustav III – “king-knight-philosopher”¹⁵.

The bloodless coup d'état on 19 August 1772, brought to an end in the history of Sweden the „Age of Liberty” which had endured for over 50 years (1720–1772). This period played such a large role in the history of this country that we have to devote to it a few sentences of further

¹⁵ Cf. H.A. Barton, *Scandinavia...*, 99–100; A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 338–339; R.N. Bain, *op. cit.*, 138, 213–215; E. Rostworowski, *Historia powszechna. Wiek XVIII*, Warszawa 1977, 751; Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, 59–60; idem, *Czy na pewno...*, 200.

comment. The opinion of the „Age of Liberty” in Swedish historiography oscillates between extremely critical judgments on one hand, and opinions directed at the total rehabilitation of the image of political life in that era on the other. Formerly, historiography generally accepted unreservedly the monarchist propaganda of Gustav III. „The era of political parties” was condemned as a dark period in the history of Sweden. It was exposed as a time of corruption, anarchy and the interference of the foreign powers in the internal affairs of the country. According to many prominent Sweden historians, Gustav III, by holding a coup d'état, saved Sweden from succumbing to the fate of the Polish Republic, and the loss of independence resulting from partition between Russia and Denmark¹⁶.

Attempt to rehabilitate the „Age of Liberty” has only taken by the representatives of the liberal and democratic mainstream of Swedish historiography. In their opinion, in 1772, there was no real threat to the independence of Sweden from Russia, Prussia or Denmark. A system of international relations decided in the final analysis of the success of the

¹⁶ A sharp judgment about the „Age of Liberty” gave especially C.G Malmström, whose work is still essential, the most comprehensive study of political history of Sweden at that time. L. Stavenow, student of Malmström, in its entirety shared the views of the master. Cf. C.G. Malmström, *op. cit.*, Bd I–VI, Stockholm 1893–1901, *passim*; L. Stavenow, *Frihetstiden*, 465–474; A. Kersten, *Historia Szwecji*, Wrocław 1973, 275; G. Olsson, „*Epoka wolności*” w *Szwecji (1718–1772)*. *Przegląd problematyki badawczej*, „*Zapiski Historyczne*” 1970, vol. XXXV, z. 3–4, 49–50. Position definitely reluctant to political system of the „Age of Liberty” on the ground of Polish historiography represents mainly W. Konopczyński. It should be immediately noted that he mainly affects all the excesses of the system, which consequently led to the degradation of the importance of Sweden in the international arena. It is through the prism of international relations Konopczyński also assess coup d'état of Gustav III, which undoubtedly contributed to the strengthening of the state and confirmed sovereignty of Sweden in relations with its powerful neighbors. Cf. *idem*, *Geneza i ustanowienie Rady Nieustającej*, Kraków 1937, 357. Cf. also Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, s. 54.

coup d'état of 19 August. Proponents of a positive evaluation of the „Age of Liberty”, condemn the coup d'état carried out by Gustav III, exhibiting in their works the gradually progressive blurring of distinctions among the classes, the introduction of the freedom of the press, the proclaimed limited tolerance for Calvinism, or governing responsibility given to society. They also stress the undeniable fact that at that time, Sweden was experiencing a period of economic prosperity and from the 1730s had opened wide to the ideas of the Enlightenment¹⁷.

Recognizing all of the positive developments that have occurred in the history of Sweden, in the present era it should be immediately noted that the fierce rivalry between the warring political factions led to serious distortions of the system and in fact resulted in the disintegration of Swedish state institutions. There is also no doubt that during this time Sweden roles the course of international politics decreased. We must look at this era as objectively as possible and reject any extreme views; both positive and negative effects of party government in Sweden must be considered. We have to state that this period was a very important experiment in the history of this state and nation. However, regardless of

¹⁷ This trend was initiated in the Swedish historiography by F. Lagerroth in 1915. A positive opinion about the “Age of Liberty” was recited also by the representatives of the younger generation of Swedish historians. Cf. F. Lagerroth, *Frihetstidens författning. En studie i den svenska konstitutionalismens historia*, Stockholm 1915, *passim*; G. Olsson, *op. cit.*, *passim*; idem, *Hattar och mössor. Studier över partiväsendet i Sverige 1751–1762*, Studia historica Gothoburgensia No 1, Göteborg 1963. Balanced and objective assessment of this period in the history of Sweden gives M. Roberts. Cf. idem, *The Age of Liberty 1719–1772. Sweden 1719–1772*, Cambridge 1986, *passim*. On the basis of Polish historiography a thorough supporter of “Age of Freedom” period rehabilitation was primarily A. Kersten. Cf. idem, *op. cit.*, 275. In terms of cultural and scientific achievements of Sweden in the “era of parties” Cf. among others A. Geffroy, *op. cit.*, 54–74; F. Arnhem, *Schweden*, Gotha 1917, 106–110. Cf. also Z. Anusik, *Dyplomacja...*, s. 55.

any subsequent evaluations of the „Age of Freedom”, one fact remains indisputable – the vast majority of the Swedish population does not regret the toppled political system¹⁸.

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¹⁸ H. Valentine makes a wide review of the historical literature devoted to the judgments of the “Age of Liberty”. Cf. idem, *Frihetstiden inför eftervärlden. Med kompletterande efterskrift av Birger Sallnäs*, uppl. 2, Stockholm 1964; With regard to the need to make an objective assessment of the “parties era” Cf. S. Carlsson, J. Rosén, *Svensk historia*, Bd II (*Tiden efter 1718*), Stockholm 1964, 198–202; and I. Andersson, *Dzieje Szwecji*, Warszawa 1967, 210–212.