

From the pages of history...

A superpower in medieval Europe

In the early 13th century, Mindaugas, who was crowned Grand Duke, united the Lithuanian lands. Over the next century, Lithuania became a Baltic power, was able to resist the pressure of the Teutonic Knights in the west, and expanded considerably eastwards and southwards. In the 14th century the Belarus, was gradually taken over by Lithuania. A Royal Union with Poland was established in 1386 when Lithuania's Grand Duke Jogaila was crowned as the Polish King Wydaslaw II Jagiello in Krakow. In the 15th century, Lithuania flourished and expanded under Grand Duke Vytautas to reach its greatest extent stretching from the Baltic Sea in the west, Livonia in present-day Latvia in the north, 150km short of Moscow to the east and all the way through most of present-day Ukraine to the Black Sea in the south. At the same time, Poland defeated the Teutonic Knights and seized control of Pomerania and Prussia and the Jagiellonians were also kings of Bohemia and Hungary at the end of the 15th century and the start of the 16th century. By the middle of the 16th century, the Royal Union between Lithuania and Poland developed into a full Union of States. The Union of Lublin in 1569 created a Commonwealth, often known by its Polish name Rzeczpospolita, consisting of the two main countries Poland and Lithuania and their dependencies. Lithuania gradually became the junior partner as Poland asserted more and more power over Lithuania and Belarus. Meanwhile, Russia, under Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, was emerging as a new European superpower. Gradually it started to interfere in the affairs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which in turn started to decline. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth finally disappeared because of three partitions in 1772, 1793 and 1795, in which the entire state was divided between Russia and its allies, Austria and Prussia.

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