

UNIVERSITY „BABEȘ-BOLYAI” CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

DOCTORATE THESIS

THE TRANSYLVANIAN RELATIONS WITH POLAND
DURING THE 17th CENTURY

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Key words:

The Transylvanian relations with Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Noble Republic, principality, sent, campaign, letter, treaty, King, 17th century

Abstract:

The current research proposed as doctoral thesis aims to present the relations between Transylvania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in the 17th century, during a period where significant changes took place in the European society. Without asking for an elaborate and an exhaustive analysis, this research wants to bring to light the relations between the Transylvanian principality and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from a perspective of the events that shaped the geo-political boundaries of Central and Eastern Europe during the 17th century. For the history of Transylvania, the 17th century represents a period associated with Michael the Brave and the instauration of the Habsburg regime. During the first half of the 17th century, Transylvania, safeguarded by the Ottoman Porte, managed to develop into a state with international voice, especially when important personalities, such as Gabriel Bethlen and George Rákóczi were at the helm of the state. What marks 17th century to be distinct is the emergence of somewhat equilibrium of powers that emerged from “state reason” and from the diversity of political tendencies. The equilibrium of power that existed between the Ottoman Empire, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Holy Roman Empire was favorable for Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia. The weakening or strengthening of either one would have determined changes in the existing state of affairs. The conflicts caused a strenuous effort of human casualties, material and economical losses, all these factors eliminated the potentiality of other states to gain inordinate power.

At the start of the 17th century, the Principality of Transylvania was a young state that oscillated between an orders’ regime and an authoritarian state, fact which lasted until the principality was captured by the Habsburgs and its power varied depending on the person in charge of the Principality and his personality. Because the Principality was part of the Dar al’Ahd, it enjoyed a privileged status allowing it to conduct active foreign policies, sure enough, within the limits permitted by the suzerain power. Likewise, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569) continued to evolve even after the extinction of the Jagiellonian dynasty

(1386-1572) and followed its “original path” towards a Noble Republic. According to the “viritim” principle, supported by the Chancellor Jan Zamoyski, all nobles had the right to vote for the king and to be elected. “Golden Liberty” like *liberum veto* or *rokosz*, drove the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to follow an opposite direction, instead of heading towards royal absolutism its nobility continued to weaken, leading ultimately to its collapse. Unlike the kings in the Commonwealth, the rulers of Transylvania managed, in generally, during the 17th century, to restrain the noble’s tendencies to create a state of order, whereby the Prince would have played a subordinate role. In addition, the Principality was under Ottoman suzerainty and the Shah wanted a single person to be in charge, not a group of questionable nobles who were difficult to control.

During 1601 and 1699, Central and Eastern Europe underwent fundamental changes which led to the reconfiguration of international relations in the region. The unforeseen changes that unfolded had an impact on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire as it deprived them from taking important roles in the military and political decisions of Central and Eastern Europe. I wanted to focus on the period 1630-1690, as it related to an age of rise and fall for both the Principality of Transylvania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. I believe that the time frame in which Gabriel Bethlen and Michael Apafi I ruled are great reference points which represent the beginning and the end. I considered appropriate to start the first two chapters with a brief presentation on these states from the 17th century in order to have a deeper understanding of their relations, similarities and organizational differences. Hereinafter, I have explained the nature and the manner in which both states function, insisting on the elements that coordinated or influenced the foreign policies of the principality and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. A particular chapter is dedicated exclusively to the political-military relations of these states with its neighboring states and with the most important powers in the continent, of whose existence and stability depended on them. I considered of outmost importance to introduce in this complex equation the “Cossacks’ affair”, which changed the destiny of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and of that of Eastern Europe. Equally important to add was the relations between Transylvania and Ottoman Empire, and the major powers trying to maximize national interest, as well as the position of Moldavia and Wallachia. In the last chapter, I tried to present the relations between Transylvania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, starting with a brief history on the political-military relations of the 17th century and continued to elaborate on

the connections between Gabriel Bethlen and the restoration of Habsburg authority in Transylvania. Both the Principality of Transylvania and the Commonwealth reached the climax of their development and consecration during the first half of the 17th century, only to find themselves on an irreversible decline during 1650 and 1660. The Noble Republic was virtually an important state who maintained the equilibrium of power in Central and Eastern Europe but after it began to wane and its influence slipping away the equilibrium of power in this part of the continent was affected. Transylvania instead, in its short-lived existence as an independent principality, while in its attempt to consolidate its status, the principality sought to become widely recognized internationally. In this context, the relations with its powerful northern neighbor seemed to be one of the solutions in order to attain that goal. In addition, the organizational model offered by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was agreeable to the neighboring noble states, all the more so for the Transylvanians, as a century ago, under the rule of Stephan Bathory, who became both Prince of Transylvania and King of Poland, united these states.

Located north of Transylvania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, maintained, as one would expect naturally, good relations with its southern neighbor ranging from commercial and military specialists' exchanges, naturalization of Transylvanians in Poland, Polish settlements in Transylvania, cultural exchanges (Transylvanians attending at the University from Krakow and vice versa) etc. To this we add not only the safe passages from Transylvania to Poland or Baltic Sea from Ottoman Porte but also the political ties that existed between these countries from alliances to military conquests. The history of the Principality of Transylvania was closely related to Poland from the beginnings, through ties with Isabela Jagiello and then through Stephan Bathory who succeeded to ascend to Polish crown in 1575. At this Golden Age of the principality we associate the most important figures of Transylvania of the 17th century (Gabriel Báthory, Gabriel Bethlen, George I Rákóczi and George II Rákóczi) who considered legitimate to laid claim to the Polish crown as often as they sought an opportunity. Surely, the relations between these states were not only limited on the abovementioned aspects, but it comprised an entire realm of economic, social, political and cultural activity of the society. As followed, the most important princes of Transylvania in the 17th century aspired to ascend to Polish crown. The close relations between Warsaw and Vienna on the one hand and the anti-Habsburg policies, in general, manifested by the rulers of Gabriel Bethlen and George I Rákóczi on the other hand,

caused, during the first part of the 17th century, unfriendly relations between these two states. Continuing on the same note, the conflict between the Porte and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who raged on from 1617 to 1699, had influenced, to a certain extent, the relations between Transylvania, suzerain to Ottomans, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In contrast with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where the authority of the king was shaking after the rokosz of Nicolae Zebrzydowski, in Transylvania the royal authority became stronger when Gabriel Bethlen ascended the throne. The royal authority weakened, at the expense of szlachta, rapidly during the course of the 17th century and transformed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into a Noble Republic which was hard to control, especially during a period in which great European powers became absolutist monarchies. The decline of monarchical power and the lack of coherent foreign policies “isolated” gradually the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on an international level. Transylvania, who was at that time suzerain state in the Ottoman Empire, could only, by and large, play a limited role in the foreign affairs given the circumstances and adhere to foreign policies accepted by Istanbul. The position of Transylvania with regards to foreign policies suited the northern neighbor as it prevented the principality from altering their status and gave them a sense of equilibrium. At the same time, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was aware that a greater power for the principality or for Wallachia and Moldavia would have brought the Turks closer to Warsaw footsteps, thus every action of the Porte in relation with Romanian principalities was carefully monitored. During the first part of his rule, Gabriel Bethlen was concerned to strengthen the royal authority in Transylvania, and the support the Polish gave to their opponents caused tensions between Transylvania and the Commonwealth. We hereby add the anti-Habsburg policies of Gabriel Bethlen, which were in antithesis with the pro-Habsburgs policies promoted by Sigismund III Vasa. The involvement of Gabriel Bethlen in the Thirty Years’ War turned the already tensioned relations from bad to worse. King Sigismund III Vasa supported George Homonnay in his quest to lift the Siege of Vienna, at this stage the prince participated fully in the Siege, but also the reaction of the Porte who considered the attack as an offense to their authority. The conflict triggered between the Ottoman Empire and the Commonwealth following such diversions showed the complexity of political relations, during the 17th century, in generally, and between Transylvanian and Poland notably. Towards the end of his reign, Gabriel Bethlen comes to good terms with the Commonwealth and even showed his intentions to ascend

to throne after Sigismund's death. For Gabriel Bethlen and his followers to the throne of Alba Iulia, the alliance with the Commonwealth could guarantee to keep independence within the sphere of the Ottoman Empire and keep the Habsburgs, who laid claim to the lands which belonged to medieval Kingdom of Hungary, away.

The descendants of Gabriel Bethlen who ascended to the crown in Transylvania, the rulers of Rákóczi family continued the filo-ottomans and anti-Habsburgs policies, and it was regarded as the only solution in order to maintain the independence of the Principality. The tensed relations between George I Rákóczi and the Ottoman Porte, in the first part of his reign, and the pacifist policies promoted by King Władysław IV Vasa, during the 30s of the 17th century, draw closer the ties between the Commonwealth and the Transylvanian prince, which had always been a goal of his. The victory of Władysław IV Vasa against the Turks (1634), the favorable treaty signed with Moscow at Polanowo (1634), and the agreement made at Stumsdorf (1635) with the Swedes had brought not only important territorial gains for the Commonwealth but also the necessary peace in order to remake and consolidate the state. As expected, George I Rákóczi focused his attention on the great Kingdom and counted on the support of the Commonwealth should the Porte want to occupy the principality. Later on, the reconciliation of the Prince with the Porte and the involvement of Transylvania in the Thirty Years' War lead to tensions of their relations, only to seek once again good relations, during his last ruling year, to form a coalition against the Ottomans. The death of the Polish King and the highly tenses Cossacks' revolt would determine George I Rákóczi to aspire to Commonwealth crown, without taking in consideration that he professed a religion different from that of the majority of habitants of the country where he wanted to rule.

The difficulties facing the Commonwealth made the prince George II Rákóczi thought that his dream in becoming King of Poland might become a reality. Subsequently, his whole political agenda towards the Commonwealth focused on achieving such goal. However, in doing so, he neglected the interests of his family and that of his own state. He ventured into an unprecedented military campaign against the Commonwealth which resulted in a disastrous outcome of which he could never recover from it. The friendly promoted policies of Michel Apafi towards his neighbor brought conciliation between the states, who were seriously affected by the events occurred during the 6 decade of the 17th century. The occupation of Transylvania

by the Habsburgs, which became possible following the decline of the Commonwealth in the last part of the century, marked the end of the political relations between these two states. Thus and so the 17th century ends with the occupation of Transylvania by the Habsburgs whilst the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth virtually ceased to function as a coherent and genuine state, as a result of internal and international political struggles.