

## ASPECTS OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN TRANSYLVANIA AND THE POLISH- LITHUANIAN UNION BETWEEN 1613 AND 1618

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**ABSTRACT:**

*THE REIGN OF GABRIEL BETHLEN (1613 – 1629) COINCIDES WITH A PERIOD IN WHICH THE PRINCIPALITY OF TRANSYLVANIA HAD ITS GOLDEN AGE. DURING THE SAME TIME, THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN UNION, LED BY KING SIGISMUND III VASA, WAS A RISING STATE DESPITE THE NUMEROUS CONFLICTS CONFRONTED OVER POWER WITH ITS NEIGHBOURING STATES SWEDEN, RUSSIA AND OTTOMAN EMPIRE. UNDER OTTOMAN SUZERANITY, THE PRINCIPALITY OF TRANSYLVANIA, PURSUED, IN GENERAL, FOREIGN POLICIES WITHIN THE LIMITS DICTATED BY THE LATTER. THE POLITICAL RELATIONS OF TRANSYLVANIA WITH ITS GREAT NORTHERN NEIGHBOR WERE NOT ONLY INFLUENCED BY THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BUT WERE ALSO INFLUENCED BY THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE’S INTERESTS OR THE ROMAN-GERMAN EMPIRE, WHOSE RELATIONS WERE STRONG TO THESE STATES. PRIOR TO THE START OF THE 30 YEARS WAR, IN WHICH THE TRANSYLVANIAN PRINCE PARTICIPATED, ALONG THE GREAT POWERS AND THE OTTOMANS AGAINST THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN UNION, GABRIEL BETHLEN STRENGTHENED ITS RULE DURING 1613-1618. THE HABSBURGS, WHO DICTATED FROM VIENNA, WERE THE DIRECT ENEMIES OF THE PRINCE. THE STATE GABRIEL BETHLEN RULED WAS CONSIDERED BY THE HABSBURG AS THEIR STATE OVER WHICH HAD THE INHERENT RIGHT TO RULE. HOWEVER, THE VERY SAME HABSBURG RULERS WERE THE ONLY ALLIES OF THE KING SIGISMUND III. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, SIGISMUND HAD OFFERED LIMITED INDIRECT SUPPORT TO BETHLEN’S OPPONENTS OF FEAR OF BREAKING OUT A CONFLICT WITH THE SUZERAIN POWER OF TRANSYLVANIA.*

**KEY WORDS:** TRANSYLVANIA, POLISH-LITHUANIAN UNION, POLITICAL RELATIONS, THE PRINCE GABRIEL BETHLEN, SUZERAIN POWER.

Transylvania’s political relations with the Polish- Lithuanian Union during the reign of Gabriel Bethlen were influenced by the anti-Habsburg policy of the Transylvanian prince and also by the pro-Habsburg policy of the Polish king. To this added the tendencies of southward expansion of Poland and the conflicts triggered with the Ottoman Empire, the suzerain of this space, conflicts that Transylvania had to attend, according vassal obligations. Attempts by the Polish-Lithuanian Union and some of the Polish nobility from the beginning of the seventeenth century to impose upon the throne of Iasi a ruler in favor of the nobility

Republic reopened conflict with the Ottoman Empire, under whose sovereignty Moldova was. In this context, the prince of Transylvania, a subject of the Sultan, was forced to participate directly in the conflicts between the two powers, or to contribute by sending food and materials needed for the maintenance of the Ottoman army.

By appointing Gabriel Bethlen (1613-1629) on the throne of Transylvania and of pro-Ottoman rulers in Wallachia and Moldova, the Ottoman Porte wanted to reassert its authority over the entire Transylvania and the Carpathian- Danubian area, in response to Polish interference in Moldova's problems [1]. The edict given by Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617), on confirmation of Gabriel Bethlen, asked him not to allow the king of the Polish-Lithuanian Union and the rulers of the Romanian principalities to buy property in the cities of Transylvania [2].

The anti-Habsburg policy of Prince Gabriel Bethlen was, in the first decades of the XVII century, one of the basic components of the defense policy of Transylvania [3]. The expansionist tendencies of the Habsburgs and the methods used by the Court of Vienna to undermine the growing power of prince Gabriel Bethlen and his attempts to centralize the state maintained the policy of alliance with the Turks, as a prerequisite of the anti-Habsburg fight [4].

Gabriel Bethlen's relationship with the Polish- Lithuanian Union had not started under the best auspices. In a letter of 13 September 1613 of the Harley to Queen Maria de Medici and Puysieulx, we find that the armed Poles were at the border, ready to help Gabriel Báthory, although in a letter of late July to the sultan, King Sigismund III (1587-1632) had apologized for the damages made in these areas, arguing that "it is constrained by the power of his people" [5]. The war actions of the Poles was in line with the policy of the Court of Vienna, which saw in the ascension to the throne of Gabriel Bethlen an opportunity to take over some Transylvanian fortresses (Chioar, Ecsed and Tășnad) and to contest the election (appointment) by supporting a number of pro-Habsburg candidates. Faced with this challenge, Bethlen addressed the sovereign power, thus Sultan Ahmed I announced King Mathias I (king of Hungary from 1608, king of Bohemia from 1611 and emperor from 1612 to 1619) that he will not tolerate such actions. The strengthening of Gabriel Bethlen's rule of and the military successes achieved against internal and external rivals forced the Habsburgs to conclude the treaty of May 6, 1615, from Trnava, by which they returned to Bethlen the occupied cities, but did not recognize him the title of ruler of Transylvania [6]. The Ottomans' request to receive the cities of Lipova and Ineu determined Bethlen to sign a secret treaty as well, in which he pledges to help the king against the Turks [7]. In this context, the relations with Poland seemed to move in the right direction. The modification of Vienna's policy, by supporting the counter candidates of Bethlen, will bring the direct consequence of also worsening relations with King Sigismund II, who toyed with the idea of having on the throne a of Transylvania a Catholic prince.

Under pressure from George Drugeth Homonnay's actions, supported directly by the Court in Vienna and indirectly by the Warsaw Court, Prince Gabriel Bethlen was forced to cede Lipova to the Turks in order to further get their support. Homonnay entered Transylvania, but his army was easily dispersed by Bethlen, in order to prevent other such attempts, advanced into the territory of the Hungarian king [8]. About the entry of Homonnay in Transylvania with 10000 (number obviously exaggerated) soldiers and about his rejection with the aid of the Buda pasha, Alli, there is also an account in a report to the Doge of Venice

from February 28, 1615 [9]. In these difficult times, Bethlen acted also in Istanbul, to induce the Ottomans to break peace with the Habsburgs and even open conflict with the Poles, by which to compel them to remain in their country to defend it [10]. Prince Gabriel Bethlen was not satisfied only with these protests sent to the sovereign power, but also tried to persuade King Sigismund III of the need to maintain friendly relations between Transylvania and the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Thus, in a document dated April 16, 1615, Prince Gabriel Bethlen asks King Sigismund III not to "listen to those who try to disturb the peace of the country", while bringing to their attention the invasion and the devastation that the principality was subject to by some enemies supported by neighbors. The causes of these challenges were disinformation and incitement of some people who did not want the good of the country. Despite their support by the Poles, Gabriel Bethlen was willing to maintain good relations with the King of Poland and to remain "loyal". In return, Sigismund had to prohibit any action meant to jeopardize Transylvania or lead to its conquest by the enemies of the Prince. Finally, Prince Gabriel Bethlen undertook to send, as soon as possible, another message to His Majesty, the King of Poland, in order to conclude an agreement that would satisfy both parties [11]. But despite this benevolent attitude of Bethlen, the relations between the two countries remained unstable due to the conflict between the Polish-Lithuanian Union and the Porte caused by the mixture of Polish nobles in Moldova, and especially by Cossack raids. The Prince had the obligation to assist the suzerain power, thus entering into conflict with the Poles. Despite opposition by hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski, magnates Mihail Wiśniowiecki and Samuil Koreki entered Moldova in order to appoint to the throne Alexandru Movila, their brother-in-law. They defeated Stefan Tomşa II, in the Battle of Tătăreni - Tăutești of November 22, 1615 [12]. As a result of this action, the sultan commanded that Mihnea Radu and Gabriel Bethlen join forces with the Ottoman forces, while other messengers were sent with protests and threats to Warsaw [13]. To reject these provocative actions from Moldova cooperation was needed between Ottoman forces on the Lower Danube and those of the Romanian principalities. In this regard, on 14 November 1615, Grand Vizier Damad Mahomet Pasha also sent a special messenger to Transylvania, with the order that Bethlen should go with Prince Radu Mihnea to help Stefan II Tomşa. Gabriel Bethlen watched with concern the actions of Polish troops from Moldova and the defeat of Stefan II Tomşa [14]. Even though Stefan Tomşa had helped Bethlen to remove Gabriel Báthory, he now accuses the excesses of his policy, of punishing the nobles and had a benevolent attitude towards Alexandru Movila, preferring not to participate in the campaign in Moldova, and especially in the conflicts with the Poles, where his enemies recruited soldiers from and where they always found refuge. In addition, Prince feared an attack from his pro-Habsburg opponents, while Mihnea Radu was now the enemy of Tomşa [15]. The fact that Polish troops entered Moldavia, in cooperation with Gheorghe Homonnay should not be neglected either [16]. Gabriel Bethlen became the opponent of Stefan II Tomşa and did not show himself in the camp of Ibrahim Pasha, the beilerbei of Silistra [17]. The victory assured by the troops arriving from Poland assured the throne for a few months for Alexandru Movila [18]. However, according to certain sources, along with Poles and Cossacks, also a large number of Hungarian infantry (Transylvanians) participated in the campaign of enthronement of Alexandru Movila in Moldova, about 3000 people [19]. On 28 November 1615, Sancy wrote to Puysieulx about the rush of Poles into Moldova and about a courier being sent to Transylvania to order the prince to prepare for the defense of the ruler of Moldova, at whose

border was a Polish army who wanted to install a different ruler [20]. But Gabriel Bethlen had other concerns than those to help the Turks against the Poles, who did not want him as prince of Transylvania, [21] and needed quiet outside the borders in order to be able to strengthen his authority internally.

The following year, there was a conspiracy against Gabriel Bethlen, organized by Ioan Benckner, Francis Koch and Martin Ohrendt, which again strained the relations between the prince and the new Polish-Lithuanian Union, even more so as it provided protection to those who wanted to remove him from the throne of the principality. Uncovered, two of them were caught and Francisk Koch fled to the Polish-Lithuanian Union, where he sought and obtained the protection of the Polish king. Later, with the support of King Sigismund III and other Polish nobles, he managed to obtain forgiveness from the prince and to return home after half a year [22]. Stopping Homonnay's actions and the pro-Polish policy of Moldova's rulers were major factors of concern for Gabriel Bethlen who, since January 1616, had expressed the fear that the Polish-Lithuanian Union targeted first the occupation of Moldova and then Transylvania [23]. On 4 February 1616, Bethlen sent secretary Stefan Kouaczocziom to the king to present the dangers of breach of peace by supporting Homonnay's insurgency who "boasted that he had prepared this with the permission of His Majesty" and by "introduction of foreign Polish soldiers". Bethlen spoke about violation, by these actions, of the existing treaty and about the insult against his Majesty, threatening that he sent messengers to Istanbul to ask for help [24]. In February 1616, the Poles were defeated by Stefan Tomsa with the aid of Turks and were forced to withdraw from Moldova. Gabriel Bethlen, whom the Porte had asked to participate in the expedition, arrived in Brasov only on 22 February and remained there until the end of month. In April, when the Poles came back, Bethlen was again asked for help, but he refused, fearing an attack from Homonnay and Radu Serban [25]. Prince fears were justified also by Homonnay's presence in Poland. Thus, on 7 March 1616, Bethlen asked Francis Daróczy to follow Homonnay, who sent Bishop István Csiky with 18,000 crowns to Poland, but not to raise armies, but for "devotiones causa" [26].

Ioan Kemeny states that, after returning from the Germans' camp, Homonnay wanted to be a prince of Transylvania, upon instigation of certain Transylvanian persons, "this happened in 1616," but his troops were defeated in the battle of Dej by Gabriel Bethlen [27]. The report of the ambassador from Vienna, of 24 July 1616 to the Doge of Venice, talks about the conflicts between, Homonnay supported by Catholics, and Gabriel Bethlen [28]. This is probably why Bethlen actually ignored the order coming from Iskender Pasha to whom he owed the throne and who was calling him to aid the rulers of Moldova and Wallachia, his allies against the Poles. Finally, no longer able to delay the departure of his army to Moldova, he came so late, that could only take part in the peace negotiations [29]. Moving Mihnea Radu from the throne of the Tara Romaneasca to the throne of Moldova aimed at easing the relations between the Porte and the Polish-Lithuanian Union, given that both powers were involved in other conflicts as well. Peace between the Polish-Lithuanian Union and Moldova, concluded at Braha on September 12, 1616 – to which the Porte will join as well - between representatives of the Polish king and Mihnea Radu, had precisely this role [30]. It seemed that through this agreement, peace between the Porte and the Polish-Lithuanian Union will be restored, but failure by King Sigismund III of the obligation to give annual *gifts* to the Crimean khan was followed by further plundering in the Polish-Lithuanian Union, in fact, in Ukraine. In response, the Cossacks intensified raids on the Black Sea,

causing the reaction of the Porte. Neither party wanted, in fact, an armed conflict between them, the more as both were involved in other conflicts. An Ottoman -Polish war would have been just as uncomfortable for Gabriel Bethlen as well, although the prince could have had reasons for discontent, because the Polish king had endorsed the attack conducted in 1616 by Gheorghe Homonnay [31]. If at the beginning of his reign Gabriel Bethlen acted in Istanbul against Poles, in 1616 his attitude changed amid peace with the Habsburgs, which is illustrated also in his correspondence with Gheorghe Thurzó, who wrote that an attack by the Turks "will be a danger not only for our country but for the whole of Christianity" [32]. Wishing to avoid a conflict with Transylvania, the Hungarian nobility sought a peaceful solution to end the conflict, which suited Bethlen as well. In 1617, between representatives of Transylvania and Mathias II a new treaty of peace was signed at Trnava, similar to the first one, with a few differences aimed at repressing elements contrary to peace [33]. At this point, Bethlen received a triple challenge from the Sultan: to return Ineu city, to pay tribute and to immediately join Iskender Pasha, who was preparing to go against Poland to punish the plunder made by the Cossacks. Wanting to escape, especially the third obligation, Bethlen wrote in reply to the Divan that "I find it very difficult to get my directions. The letters do not correspond to verbal orders", but the imperative answer of the Sultan: "I order you to immediately join our army" determined Bethlen to lead the army in August 1617 to join Iskender Pasha [34] who had been put in charge of Ottoman troops during this campaign against the Cossacks. But together with Prince Radu Mihnea, Bethlen did everything in his power to settle the conflict between the two powers [35]. According to Miron Costin, Bethlen's participation in 1617 with Iskender, the Tartars and armies of the Romanian principalities against Poland, was because "Gabriel Bethlen was no friend of the Poles" [36]. In a letter dated June 1, 1617 to the King of Poland, Gabriel Bethlen told him that even since the previous year he had predicted the movements of the Turks to Moldova and "upon a very urgent request from the Turks" he sent troops in Moldova. His action was not directed against the Polish soldiers who were defending in Moldova and "that cohort of Hungarian soldiers who intervened in the battle was led then by Radu Mihnea, ruler of Wallachia" [37]. Instead, Ioan Kemeny talks about the mandatory participation of Transylvania and of Gabriel Bethlen in the campaign of 1617, with Iskender Pasha. Bethlen, as a Christian Prince, got on well, according to him, with the Pole. If it came to war, Transylvania was to turn against the Ottomans and join the Poles. Finally, after analysis the alternatives, Gabriel Bethlen spoke in favor of peace, "and thus increased his prestige and credibility" [38]. In the second half of August, Bethlen started off with the army from Transylvania, but before arriving in Iasi, he announced the Poles through his messenger Ioan Kornis that his participation was more for show [39]. As a result of his participation with an army of 12,000 men, in the war between the Polish-Lithuanian Union and the Porte, Gabriel Bethlen managed to keep Ineu and obtain a new exemption from tribute [40]. Turkish chronicles also speak about the coming of Gabriel Bethlen near Soroca fortress in support of Iskender Pasha, but a Polish messenger and the Polish- Ottoman armistice prompted him to return to Transylvania, Bethlen , without having fought [41]. When the two armies met on the river Dniester, the Polish field hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski sent his envoy, Peter Ozga, to the Turkish camp for negotiations [42]. In turn, Iskender Pasha, eager to avoid armed confronting, was willing to start negotiations with Żółkiewski, an agreement that was supposed to open a new phase of the Polish-Ottoman relations [43]. The result of these negotiations was the Treaty of Jarucha (Busze) of

September 23, 1617, prepared in two versions: Polish and Turkish [44]. By this treaty, the Polish-Lithuanian Union returned the city of Hotin to Moldavia [45], promised to stop the Black Sea Cossack raids, to prevent raids by private Polish magnates Moldova and the Wallachia and to refuse any help and support for Gheorghe Homonnay, Radu Serban [46] and any claims to the thrones of the three countries. In exchange, the rulers in Iasi had to have a favorable attitude towards the Polish-Lithuanian Union's King [47]. In exchange for regular gifts to the Khan, the Ottomans pledged to stop their raids on Polish territories. The convention from Jarucha granted trade freedom to merchants of the Polish-Lithuanian Union in Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldova guaranteed peace at the Romanian-Polish border to the Porte. It contained equally Polish-Lithuanian Union's obligation not to attack and not to interfere in Transylvania, Moldova and the Wallachia [48]. The Treaty from Jarucha was seen by Polish lower aristocracy as a great defeat for the Republic [49]. The Polish-Lithuanian Union was obliged to conclude this treaty also because of the conflict with Moscow, being unable to fight simultaneously on two fronts and feared especially the possibility of a Russo-Ottoman alliance against it.

Despite the peace in 1617, Prince Gabriel Bethlen continued to be concerned about what happened in the Polish-Lithuanian Union and about the repercussions that events from there could have over Transylvania. This results from his letter to Francisc Rhedey, of 8 July 1618, in which he announced the death of the Khan in a battle with Cossacks. Following the destruction made by Tatars in the Polish-Lithuanian Union, Poles proclaimed a general insurrection, and the king went in person to Illyvo. The information above was provided to the Prince by Pavel Vesselenyi, a trustworthy person if we consider the fact that he was also a national of Poland [50]. In the next period, the employment of Gabriel Bethlen in 30 year-war with the Protestant camp held generally in compliance with the limits imposed by the Ottoman suzerainty [51] and the indirect support provided by King Sigismund III to the Catholic camp, led to worsening relations between Transylvania and the Polish-Lithuanian Union [52]. In conclusion we can say that the relations of Transylvania with the Polish-Lithuanian Union between 1613 and 1618 were influenced by the international context, by the interests of the great powers of the time, but also by the internal political situation of the two countries.

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