

A PAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract: *The history of the Principality of Transylvania was marked by great political unrest. The small region was coveted on one hand by the Turks and on the other hand by the Hapsburgs. The internal policy led by the princes of Ardeal contributed for Transylvania to keep pace with the evolved Occident. Through the participation in the War of 30 years, the small principality asserted itself as a power that should be taken into consideration at the demarcation between Central and South-Eastern Europe.*

Key words: *principality, religious reform, autonomy, politico-diplomatic arbitration.*

1. Introduction

The historical period of Transylvania, comprised between 1540-1699, is known under the name of Principality. This is the period when the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the central part of Europe reaches a maximum level. The Turkish army led by the sultan Soliman the First conquered Serbia and great part of Hungary, following the victory from Buda 1540. The Turks' initial intention was to further advance towards the centre of Europe, however they came across the Hapsburg Empire. This way, in the middle of the 16th century, great part of Hungary had been transformed into pashalik (province of the Ottoman Empire) and Transylvania, through the policy of its princes, had managed to maintain its autonomy. Its status was as autonomous Principality under Ottoman suzerainty and it paid tribute to the Porte. This situation, was however, much more advantageous than the one of Hungary. Under this situation, Transylvania will turn into a place of refuge for great part of the

Hungarian nobility and the policy of the princes from Ardeal was quite permissive in this respect. The nobility that had taken shelter there had stated for all that period that in Transylvania there was being remade part of the lost kingdom of Hungary. The policy of the princes from Ardeal within the external framework led to the positioning of the small Principality among the great European powers of the time and to the participation in the War of 30 years. These actions were also accompanied by a powerful cultural effervescence manifested through the dissemination of the Reform in Transylvania, through the development of education and of the printing houses.

2. Principality of Transylvania between Autonomy and the Intervention of the House of Hapsburg

2.1. Policy Led by the Emperors of the House of Austria

The Hapsburg Empire represented a danger for the independent Principality, reformed and reorganized from the

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interior. That one carried on negotiations with the Ottoman Empire with respect to Transylvania and Hungary. The result of the Austrian reforms was their offensive in the 17th century against the Turks.

This way **Maximilian the First**, regent at 1486 and emperor between 1508-1519 aimed first of all at solving the financial situation. That one was to be subordinated to the *Hofkammer*. His entire policy was based on a strong centralization and on a strong control of the provinces. In the middle of the 16th century, there were felt within the Empire, as well as in the majority of the European countries, the effects of the Reform. Rough measures against the Protestants were taken by **Ferdinand the First** (1531-1564). During his entire reign, he had to face the reaction of the protestant noblemen, powerful and numerous in Superior Austria and Steiermark. He even attempted at achieving conciliation with the Protestants in the framework of the Council of the Protestants from Trient, however with no result. Ferdinand's death made the empire to be theoretically divided among his three sons: Maximilian- who would control the Austrian lands of the Danube, Bohemia and Hungary; Ferdinand- Tirol and Carol- the areas within Austria.

Also supported by influent people from the Court, the elder son **Maximilian the Second** would become emperor between 1564-1576.

His main energy was channelled towards the efforts of fighting against the Turks (that was the moment of the Turks' great offensive under the leadership of Soliman the Magnificent) and towards the attempt at controlling Transylvania. A second side of his activity was the fight against the Protestants (he led rough actions, he imprisoned the supporters and confiscated their wealth).

His reign suddenly stopped and there came to the throne **Rudolf the 2nd**

(1575-1612), who would reign in parallel with his brother Mathias. Rudolf was a great lover of the arts, of the beauty by excellence. He fully developed this taste by edifying another capital at Prague. That time was a very tense period between the Catholics and the Protestants, and the army had to face the frequent wars with the Turks. Finally, Rudolf made a compromise and elaborated in 1619 a decree with respect to the Protestants' liberty within the empire.

2.2. *The War of 30 Years and its Consequences for the House of Hapsburg*

In the framework of that European conflict there were involved two branches of the House of Hapsburg: the one from Vienna and the one from Madrid. At the leadership of the Spanish universal monarchy there was Carol and at Vienna there were successively **Ferdinand the 2nd** and **Ferdinand the 3rd**. Mathias' main policy was to drastically control the provinces and to enforce the Catholicism. That last direction was one with small momentarily concessions, such as the *Majesty Letter* from 1619, through whose intermediary there were given some political liberties to the Reformed Czechs. However, their rights were not observed and that automatically determined the outburst of a conflict.

The episode is known in history as the *Defenestration from Prague*, in which 2 members of the Council of Regency were thrown out of the palace, in fact a reaction of the Czech noblemen against Catholicism and absolutism.

The **Czech period** (1618-1620) confronted two camps: Czechoslovakia which had on its side the German protestant princes (on whose side Gabriel Bethlen- the prince of Transylvania entered into conflict, in the hope he would conquer again the throne of Hungary) and Austria- Spain. On the throne of Austria,

there came in Aug. 1619 Ferdinand the 3rd, younger and more determined to do so that the balance would turn on the Catholics' side. Between the 2 camps, there began negotiations, the emperor also personally treated with Gabriel Bethlen and Vienna gained therefore time to defeat the Czechs at the White Mountain on the 8th of November 1620, a decisive victory, which again transformed Bohemia and Moravia in provinces of the empire. Here, Vienna would lead again a policy of forced catholicization.

The second stage of the war was the **Danish period** (1625-1629), which presented a much greater proportion of forces than at the beginning of the war. Against the Hapsburgs' interests, there gathered the great forces: England, the United Provinces, Denmark and Sweden. The allies' stake was not to allow the Hapsburgs to reach the Baltic Sea and prejudice the interests of Hansa. The most active power was Sweden. Ferdinand entrusted the leadership of the empire armies to Albert of Wallenstein- military with high ambitions and able politician (he introduced the policy of the maintenance of the armies by the territories in which they were cantoned, very profitable for the Austrians). Following the general's several defeats on the sea and on the land, Ferdinand could again harm the Protestants and issued an edict through whose intermediary all their assets should be confiscated. That would function only temporarily, as Vienna had to change its position in this respect in order not to lose its main allies-the German princes.

The Swedish period (1631-1635) created many difficulties for Vienna, through the intervention of the king of Sweden, Gustav Adolph, and of France, in Germany. Ferdinand appealed again to Wallenstein and, following small victories, the peace from Prague was clinched 1635.

The emperor apparently controlled the German spaces.

The French period (1635-1642). Ferdinand the 3rd moved to determined actions against France. That was the period when Transylvania, under the leadership of G. Rakozi the 1st, entered into war beside the French camp (however military actions were not led, because the prince of Transylvania had to correct his attitude in accordance with the Porte he depended on). Following several victories of Sweden, Austria was compelled to ask for peace.

The peace was clinched at **Westphalia**, in fact the treaties were clinched in two localities: **at Osnabrück and Münster**. That peace greatly meant the reorganization of the system of forces in Europe. Among the losers, there also was the Hapsburg Empire, which had to cede certain territories to France, respectively: the episcopates Metz, Toul and Verdun, beside Alsace. The emperor's authority power from the past was now diminished by the obligation to consult the German princes and the Diet. The Court from Vienna began being interested in the territories from the Danube and respectively in Transylvania. It enforced its possessions however outside Europe.

3. The Fights for the Throne in Transylvania during the 16-17th Centuries

3.1. The Principality of Transylvania after Ioan Zapolya's Death

Ioan Zapolya, after a few military actions, was recognized in 1526 as prince of Transylvania and as king of Hungary. The Principality would pay tribute to the Porte for the freedom of organization and leadership. Zapolya led a policy in favour of the young Principality, achieving a diplomatic balance between the Turks and the Hapsburgs. This way, in 1538 he clinched with the king Ferdinand the 2nd a

treaty at Oradea through whose intermediary Transylvania, after Zapolya's death, would revert to Austria. That would not be applied and, in 1570, Zapolya's son, **Ioan Sigismund** would come to the throne, helped by his mother, Isabela. During that period, the young prince clinched in his turn at Speyer- 16th of August 1570 a treaty with Maximilian the 2nd, through whose intermediary there would be acknowledged his title of prince of Transylvania and of Partium and the one of „Rex Hungarie”. In exchange, after his death, Transylvania had to revert to the Hapsburgs. His reign was not at all a calm period – the Hapsburg troops led by the general Castaldo alighted in Transylvania (1551-1556) a period which stood in fact for Austrian military occupation) and likewise those of Martinuzzi- who led the troops of the noblemen from Ardeal, to whom there also added the Turks. During the greatest part of his reign, Sigismund collaborated with the ranks in Transylvania.

The last three decades of the 16th century meant the coming to the throne of Transylvania of the **Bathory** family. The first among them, **Ştefan Bathory (1571-1583)**, created the Polish-Transylvanian union, and had a period of peace. He would make oath of faith to the emperor of Austria and he would also occupy the throne of Poland. He saw Transylvania „in the Polish-Russian-Swedish alliance in conflict for the Baltic sea and wanted the constitution of an empire from the Baltic sea to the Black Sea”[1]. From that position he let the leadership of Transylvania to his brother Cristoph. The most ambitious among the brothers was **Sigismund**; adventurer and ambitious, he many a time renounced the throne of Transylvania, in 1597 and 1599. those periods were marked by the intervention either of the Austrian troops, or of the Turks. He likewise had on his side leaders

of the noble factions from Transylvania (Jan Zamoyski, Polish, believed in the continuation of Stephen Bathory's and Istvan Csaky's plans). Sigismund adhered to the Christian League, joining the Principality to other anti-Ottoman powers. Very irresolute, he left the throne for the second time and as a result it was taken by Andrei Bathory: authoritative representative of the catholic camp, with a direct attitude, hostile to Michael the Brave. As regards Sigismund Bathory's reigns, we have several documents which enhance the anti-Ottoman policy he led, beside the emperor Rudolf the 2nd of Austria. (A.V. Hof. F. 95| 1 doc. 21, f. 203 r° - v° of the 28th of Oct. 1598 and r. Nr. 1, F. 1540-1614, f. 554 of the 5th of Dec. 1603). Likewise of a special linguistic beauty, there is the treaty between Sigismund's widow, Maria Cristina and Andrei Bathory, from 1599, through whose intermediary there was ratified an annual tax destined to maintaining her assets from Transylvania, representing 15.000 thalers (A.V. Hof. F. 95| 2, doc. 10, f. 256).

Michael the Brave's actions in Transylvania, from the fall of 1599-1600 determined that, for a little time, the Romanians' hopes to participate in the political life should be revived. However, Transylvania turned into scene of operations and the troops of the general Basta would stay there for a long time. There were there at least two powerful factions – the one around Moise Szekely and the one of Bocskai.

Moise Szekely „had as important objective the control of Transylvania, however he did not dispose of the financial means, he made appeal to the High Porte”[2]. And the armies of the general Basta were still in Transylvania. In the archive from Vienna, there still is a document, issued by the general Basta, in 1605, through whose intermediary he was named governor of Transylvania

(A.V. Hof. r. Nr. 1. 1540-1614, f. 891 r° and v°). The attitude of the privileged ranks was different towards those ones – the Saxons and the Szecklers from Transylvania had other interests than those from the counties. Moise Szekely was in connection with Sigismund Zapolya and planned to create a powerful protestant State in the Centre and East of Europe. With that period, there began in Transylvania the reformed policy.

3.2. The Moment Ștefan Bocksay (1604-1606)

Exponent of the nobility in Hungary, who hoped to keep his rights, he managed to defeat the factions who supported Szekely and Gabriel Bathory. He was likewise acknowledged by the Porte. He assembled a powerful army of mercenaries, in order to fight against the Turks, and in exchange of a substantial sum, the Sultan acknowledged him in 1604, as prince. Because of that anti-Ottoman policy, Bocksai was also well seen at Vienna. The Saxons from the districts Brașov and Bistrița and from the seats Sighișoara and Sebeș were against the Hapsburgs, and Sibiu was pro Hapsburg. The Szecklers were constantly part of the Romanian voivodes' armies. At 21 XI 1606, before his death, Bocksay signed against the Turks a treaty with Maximilian the 2nd, through whose intermediary there was recognized, for him and for his heirs, the title of King of Hungary. The groups around the catholic bishop and the great magnates who sought for various privileges were constantly faithful members of Vienna. The general Basta was obliged to leave Transylvania under the conditions in which he had no longer money so as to support his army. Vienna was weakened and therefore it clinched a treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1606 at *Zsitvatorok*. Likewise in 1605

there had been clinched the treaty with Țara Românească of Radu Șerban.

3.3. Gabriel Bathory (1608-1613)

During his few years of reign, he led an anti-Ottoman policy and he even clinched the first anti-Ottoman treaty of Transylvania during 1608, in parallel with Moldova and Țara Românească. His reign intermittently unfolded: in 1611 he returned to the throne of Transylvania after having punished the Saxons from Brașov who had betrayed him and he confronted himself with the allied armies of the imperials and the voivode from Muntenia Radu Șerban. The confrontation eventually led to Gabriel Bathory's death.

3.4. Gabriel Bethlen's death (1613-1629)

Through his long reign for that epoch, Gabriel Bethlen inscribed himself within the reformed princes. Within, he developed a dense administrative apparatus, but at the same time efficient. In the economic field, he led a mercantilist policy, encouraging the craftsmen and the tradesmen. He set up an Academy at Alba Iulia in 1622, and, following his initiative, there were published and printed books in German, Hungarian and Romanian. His prestige was nevertheless outstanding for his external policy. Through his marriage with Ekaterina of Brandenburg, he drew closer to the Protestants of whose camp he would be part until the end of his reign. He had very high ambitions, he wanted to remake the kingdom of the great Dacia under his crown and in this respect he entered into connection with the orthodox patriarch of Constantinople – Kiril Lukaris. His most important diplomatic action was driving Transylvania into the war of 30 Years.

Transylvania was part of the Protestant camp, and in 1619 the troops from Transylvania were defeated under the walls of Vienna. In order to consolidate his position, Gabriel Bethlen clinched in March 1620 a treaty with the Czechs. The imperials feared them more

therefore the emperor Ferdinand the 2nd clinched treaties with Transylvania, endeavouring to put it off the game: the one during Jan. 1620, through whom there were promised to Bethlen the counties from Partium and the one during 1622 at Mikulov, through whose intermediary Bethlen renounced the throne of Transylvania. Those ones would be renewed in 1623 and 1624. Until his death, he controlled Hungary several times. (the part pertaining to the imperials). His attributions were too great and in 1625 he clinched a treaty as defeated, in which there was however settled that after his death, the throne of Transylvania should revert to his wife Ekaterina of Brandenburg.

3.5. Rakozi Dynasty (1630-1660)

a. Rakozi The First (1630-1660) – policy of the personal assets

Supported by a strong faction of known magnates, he managed to reach to the leadership of Transylvania and he defeated Ştefan Bethlen (Gabriel Bethlen's son) at *Salonta* and in 1636 he received the confirmation of the Porte for his reign. Within, he led a policy of control of the taxation system, to the purpose of raising funds for the military actions; he confiscated the wealth of the political opponents and he brought again in the patrimony of the principality the monopoly of the salt and of gold. His main quality manifested however on the level of the political life, this way Rakozi the First was a mediator between Țara Românească and Moldavia, respectively between Vasile Lupu and Matei Basarab. He separately clinched with them treaties - in 1635 with Matei Basarab and in 1638 with Vasile Lupu. His ambition went beyond and he wanted to occupy the throne of Poland and to place his son Sigismund on it. He clinched an alliance with the Cossacks against Poland. Driven by ambition and by

the desire to place Transylvania among the European powers, he continued the immixture in the War of 30 years.

However, his actions from 1644, after he had clinched the previous year a treaty with Sweden, would be a failure, and the reaction of the Porte would be decisive. During that time, the administrative and fiscal policy was rough (A.V. Hof. r.Nr. 2, f. 245 are a series of fiscal registers for all the localities in the comitats, the assets of the capital who pertained to the diocese Alba). Likewise, the Bishop of Strigoniu G. Lippany complained on the 6th of June 1645 to the emperor of Vienna for the prejudices brought to Transylvania by the wars fought by Rakozy the 1st (A.V. H. H. St. A., F. 423 Konv A 1630-1647).

b. Rakozi the Second (1648-1657;1660)

He continued his father's policy, however of greater proportions: in 1649 he received firman of reign from the sultan. He clinched alliance treaties with Țara Românească, respectively with Matei Basarab and Constantin Şerban against Vasile Lupu and the Cossacks. He attempted through his actions at controlling the two voivodes: this way, in 1653 he helped Gheorghe Ştefan to reach the throne of Moldavia (but he would be defeated at *Popricani* during the same year by the armies of Vasile Lupu, who benefited from the Cossacks' help). In view of assembling the anti-Ottoman common front and after Matei Basarab's defeat, at the initiative of Rakozi the Second, there would be achieved in 1655 the alliance between the leaders: Constantin Şerban, Gheorghe Ştefan and Rakozi the 2nd.

His ambitions were however higher and they were connected to the throne of Poland. Like his father, he treated with Sweden and he accepted its plan of dividing Poland. Those plans he would relate in a testament from the 26th of December 1666, addressed to his son

Francisc Rakozi and to his wife Sophia Bathori, comprising much advice for the leadership of the country (A.V. H. H. St. A. F. 424 Konv. A 1648-1669). In the campaign of 1657 from Poland, the troops of Transylvania remained alone. The special expenses for the army and his extravagant plans brought him many enemies especially from among the noblemen, who at the Diet of Gherla, in 1657, chose and recognized as prince Francisc Rhedey. The Turks had likewise a candidate and they intervened in Transylvania, beside the Tartars and placed Acațiu Barcsai on the throne of Transylvania.

The principality turned into a scene of operations between the armies of Racozi the Second, and those of the noblemen. Racozi defeated the Turks at Lipova and would control the North-Western area of Transylvania, and within a year he would conquer the rest of Transylvania, however he would be killed at Florești in June 1660 during the confrontation with Acațiu Barcsai's armies.

Between 1660-1661, Ioan Kemeny was prince of Transylvania, who would be killed at Seleușu Mare, after he would have been acknowledged by the Hungarian noblemen and by the German towns.

3.6. Apaffistians Mihai Apaffy the First (1661- 1690) had to face the Hapsburgs' incursions and the imposition of supporting the Hapsburg troops. He gave frequent „indications” such as the instructions with measures against the armies led by Ștefan Bocskái at the 8th of March 1666 (A.V. H.HSt. A., F. 179, doc. 3).

4. Conclusions

The space of Transylvania witnessed numerous convulsions during the period 1540-1699. Placed at the confluence of the two empires, the principality managed to maintain a certain position towards the

great powers. Many times, however, during those years, the conflicts unfolded on the territory of Ardeal. A fact which determined that some periods of famine and pandemics should be felt during those two centuries. The population from Transylvania was in its turn divided according to the interests: the Saxons supported the Hapsburgs (starting from their German origin), the Szecklers supported their own candidates to the throne of Transylvania (such as Moise Szekely' case) and the Romanians, who saw in Michael the Brave's short presence in Transylvania, a possibility for the recognition of their rights. Unfortunately, the plan of the voivode from Muntenia was dismantled by the numerous interests of the nobility from Transylvania, who appealed to the House of Hapsburg and by the intervention of general Basta's troops in Transylvania. The ambitions of the princes from Ardeal were likewise a factor of political instability. Those in the family Bathory wanted to assemble a great kingdom through the fusion with Poland and at last, Andrei Bathory gave up the throne of the principality in favour of the Polish one. The princes from the Rakozi dynasty attracted Transylvania in a conflict which was meant to remove the Hapsburgs' pretensions and pressures with respect to the principality. The first years of the events in the so-called conflict of 30 years placed Transylvania in a good position, the second period was however a military disaster, which also attracted a difficult situation for Transylvania. The position of arbiter that the two princes had undertaken asserted itself also through the treaties that they separately clinched with the voivodes of Moldavia and Țara Româneasca. The ones in the Bathory family were suspected of accumulating outstanding wealth, a fact which attracted the envy of the nobility from Ardeal.

The history of the Principality of Transylvania also knew periods of quietness and prosperity during Gabriel Bethlen's reign. Adept of the religious reform, the prince Bethlen encouraged the development of the new confession, which led to his very positive internal image among the reformed Saxons and the Szecklers. He was not however seen the same way at the Court of Vienna. During his reign, education of all degrees developed. There were set primary schools in the villages on the domains pertaining to nobility, on the land of the kings and on the territory of the Szecklers. Those ones were supported through the partial expense of the State and that of the nobles on the domains, of the community within the settlements or by the Reformat Church. Under the prince's guidance, there came into being the College from Alba Iulia, with high school status, and the University of Cluj benefited from numerous funds. There were likewise developed numerous printing houses, among whom the greatest was placed in Alba Iulia. From the letter presses, under the beneficial influence of the reform, there appeared books in the languages of the nations within Transylvania: Hungarian, German, and Romanian. This was a period of cultural effervescence for Transylvania, with visible effects in time.

The political status of Transylvania during the second half of the 17th century turned deeply worse. The policy of the House of Hapsburgs as regarded

Transylvania became more aggressive, especially after the lessening of the Turks' authority in these areas, and the Austrians' increasing presence on the territory of the principality became a reality. That fact was facilitated by the particularly conciliating policy of the princes in the family Apaffy. Therefore, towards the end of the 17th century, in 1699, through the peace from Karlowitz clinched between the Turks and the Austrians, Transylvania would turn into a province of the Hapsburg Empire until 1918.

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