

Gábor Kármán

# Confession and Politics in the Principality of Transylvania 1644-1657



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# **Confession and Politics in the Principality of Transylvania 1644–1657**

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## Preface

This study was originally written in Hungarian. I defended its first version as a doctoral dissertation at Eötvös Loránd University a decade ago, and more than five years have passed since it was published in Hungary in monograph form. In preparing the original manuscript, I received various forms of assistance from a number of colleagues, and – as is customary in such situations – while I was editing this English-language revision, several others confirmed for me that no account of history is ever definitive, offering me valuable comments which helped make the present text more precise than the Hungarian original. Likewise, in tailoring this text to conform to the expectations of a new audience – and in keeping with the primary emphasis of the series of publications in which it now appears – I eliminated certain sections, while giving other themes a more detailed treatment here. I would thus like to express my thanks to everyone whose contributions made it possible for this book to appear in its present form (some of whom are sadly no longer with us), including Robert Born, János B. Szabó, István Fazekas, Pál Fodor, István H. Németh, Ildikó Horn, Gáspár Katkó, László Kontler, Zsolt Kovács, Lidewij Nissen, Teréz Oborni, Sándor Papp, Katalin Péter, Ágnes R. Várkonyi, Balázs Sudár, András Péter Szabó, Péter Szabó, Kees Tezelszky, Gábor Várkonyi, Eszter Venásch, Magdolna Veres, and Márton Zászkaliczky. And insofar as this text resembles a book written in English, I would also like to thank the outstanding translator with whom I collaborated, Jason Vincz, who demonstrated great patience in finding ways to render some occasionally abstruse trains of thought into English while preserving some of the style of the Hungarian original.

Not only was I the beneficiary of such professional assistance, I also enjoyed several forms of material support which made it possible to give this text its present shape. A Central European University Doctoral Research Support Grant helped me to complete my research in England; with the aid of the Swedish Institute, the Kuno Klebelsberg Foundation, the Action Austria-Hungary program of the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD), and Hungary's National Research, Development and Innovation Office, I was able to continue my research

in the archives and libraries of Sweden, Germany, Austria, and Poland, respectively. The Institute of European History (IEG) in Mainz and the Leipzig Centre for the History and Culture of East-Central Europe (GWZO) provided me with the means to complete the lengthy process of forging the Hungarian original, while my present workplace, until a few weeks ago known as the Institute of History of the Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, enabled me to produce this English-language revision. I owe each of these institutions a debt of gratitude for their help.

Budapest, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## Introduction

1648 is a symbolic year in Europe's history: the peace treaties concluded in the Westphalian cities of Münster and Osnabrück brought an end to the thirty-year war which had raged in the middle of the continent. This military conflict, which had started as an internal affair of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, involved a number of other important European powers. For some, such as Sweden, the result of their participation was a brief elevation to the status of great powers, whereas for Spain, it brought the first signs of the deterioration of its dominance over the continent's politics. The masses who participated in the celebrations in Germany between 1648 and 1650, however, were surely less interested in this restructuring of Europe's power networks than in the hope that the signing of these treaties would make it possible for them to return to the peaceful, routine lives they had been forced to abandon so often during the decades of this conflict. The various territories of the Empire had suffered differing degrees of destruction, but the disappearance of the direct threat of marauding armies was welcomed with the same joy and festivities everywhere (Roeck: 1998; Gantet: 2001, 175–283).

In the eyes of posterity, the Peace of Westphalia is also more significant than just another set of treaties which codified important changes into the high politics between European states – even if it has been repeatedly questioned whether these symbolically important facets were indeed the relevant elements of this settlement. Scholars have recently (and repeatedly) pointed out that the 'Westphalian myth' of international-relations studies – the idea that the agreements signed in Münster and Osnabrück lay the foundation for the overcoming of the universal monarchy and the establishment of a system of equal sovereign states – is derived more from historiographic traditions than from the actual stipulations of these documents (Oslander: 2001; Croxton: 2013, 351–362). Nevertheless, despite the many reservations which have been voiced about the 'myth' attached to it, this peace settlement still serves as a convenient endpoint for longer narratives about religious wars and as an example of a political solution to armed conflicts between different denominational groups (Schilling: 1998; Wolgast: 2006; cf. Wilson: 2008).

1648 was also a year of historical changes in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania. Prince György Rákóczi I of Transylvania died that year; Rákóczi had followed in the footsteps of the previous prince, Gábor Bethlen, in playing a successful role in the Thirty Years' War, and with the 1645 Peace of Linz, his achievements for the Protestants of Hungary surpassed those of his predecessor. Even so, Hungarian historians have not traditionally considered 1648 to be a turning point, and it is true that the ascension to the throne of Rákóczi's eldest son did not precipitate any sudden changes. The violent turmoil that so often accompanied succession in Transylvania was missing this time: having been elected prince in 1642, when his father was still alive, and then confirmed by Sultan Ibrahim, György Rákóczi II did not have to fight for the throne.

The changes in Hungary and Transylvania were thus not as sudden and spectacular as those in the territories affected by the Treaties of Westphalia, although even in the latter case, it took years for the terms of those agreements to become reality. Even so, precisely because of the effect of the Peace of Westphalia on the international context, there was an important change in the field of foreign policy which would have a serious impact on Hungarian and Transylvanian politics. The predecessors of György Rákóczi II were quite ambitious in their foreign policies: their envoys visited important European courts regularly, their diplomats negotiated with the leading political actors of the continent, and the principality's army repeatedly participated in military actions outside the borders of Transylvania. Nevertheless, the young prince could not simply maintain his father's successful policies. The theatre of politics had been restructured by the peace settlement, and thus the new Transylvanian prince had to rethink his political goals and his means of achieving them. György Rákóczi I was the last Transylvanian prince to wage war against the king of Hungary in defence of Hungarian Protestants, and this is primarily (though not exclusively) the result of the changes in the European international system brought on by the Peace of Westphalia.

The aim of this book is to elaborate on this correlation by describing how Transylvanian foreign policy changed after 1648 and the levels on which it followed the restructuring of the European international system. In order to draw these elements into sharper relief, I have focused on the function of the confessional element in Transylvanian foreign policy, since it seems to have been of fundamental importance during the Thirty Years' War and then relegated to the background under the new prince, György Rákóczi II. This focus has determined the chronological framework of my survey. In order to illustrate the changes which took place after 1648, I have begun with an analysis of György Rákóczi I's campaigns in 1644 and 1645 and closed with György Rákóczi II's most ambitious endeavour, the invasion of Poland in 1657. Further political developments, in-

cluding the failure of this war and the years the prince spent struggling to survive the Ottomans' punitive campaigns against him, are outside the scope of the current project.

## Historiographical framework and methodological considerations

The functions of confessional identity in early modern Europe have been the focus of a great deal of research in recent decades. The paradigm of confessionalisation, which originated among German historians, has become particularly influential. Thanks to the many controversies and myriad case studies which have helped fine-tune the paradigmatic presentation of this theory, the basic ideas that Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard presented in the 1980s still retain their heuristic power (see, e. g., Reinhard: 1989; Merz: 1994; Kauffman: 1996; Schmidt: 1997; Reinhard: 1999; Schilling: 1999; Schorn-Schütte: 1999; Brady: 2004). The strong structural connections between the confessional, social, and political fields, the interwoven developments of the disciplining of church and society, and the building of the modern state still provide food for thought, especially for historians working on territories outside the Holy Roman Empire. Recent research initiatives have included attempts to see whether the confessionalisation paradigm could be helpful in understanding non-Christian groups on the fringes of early modern Europe, such as religious communities in the Ottoman Empire (Krstić: 2009; Pohlig: 2011; Krstić: 2018). Only a very broad definition of confessionalisation would be relevant to such a framework, however, and even then its application would be quite limited. East-Central European examples might be better suited to this paradigm, although a series of studies has shown that even in this region, a number of important restrictions would apply to the original description of the process, especially with respect to the role of centralized political authority, which is known to have been quite limited there (Winkelbauer: 1992; Plaggenborg: 2003; Deventer 2004; Müller: 2010).

So what results have the debates around confessionalisation produced concerning the relationships between politics and religion? Even if most of the critiques of this paradigm have problematized the relationship between confessional developments and the state, no one has questioned the relevance of confessional identity to interstate relations. Johannes Merz, who has expressed serious doubts about the paradigm's clear definition and segregation of the three major confessions, has noted that the only field in which the terms 'Catholic', 'Calvinist', and 'Lutheran' are indisputably relevant is foreign policy (Merz: 1994, 67). At the same time, precisely because the connection between them seems obvious, the impact of confessionalisation on political struggles between rulers has received scant attention: this has been the field in which the fewest fresh

results could be expected. The only reason the confessional element of foreign policy has not been neglected entirely is that the confessionalisation paradigm has intersected with another research trend which has been important in German historiography since the 1970s, namely the attempt to write a structural history of politics.

Johannes Kunisch's 1979 study of the genesis of conflicts between early modern states might be considered a starting point for attempts to reintegrate the history of politics into the historiographical mainstream – which in that period was dominated by structuralist social history – and to present a generalised image of the birth of interstate conflicts in the eighteenth century. His analysis of the dynastic element of foreign policy paved the way for a number of further studies focusing on various elements in the background of interstate conflicts, peace-keeping mechanisms, and the formation of international systems – which concentrate on general trends rather than the particulars of individual case studies (Burkhardt: 1997, 509–511; Hochedlinger: 1998). Opportunities for introducing the vocabulary of modern political science into early modern history have proven to be limited, though these attempts have enriched the thematic scope of such analyses (Schilling: 1993).

This trend has also produced some important insights into the role of the confessional element in politics. Johannes Burkhardt has suggested that confessional struggles might have had such an impact on early modern European politics because the states of that era had yet to consolidate their legitimacy as political players and thus had to seek auxiliary sources of legitimization, thereby opening the way for conflicts between denominations that hoped to influence political action (Burkhardt: 1997, 548–555). Heinz Schilling has suggested that the formation of the first international system was a result of the confessionalisation process: this development was a necessary condition of replacing earlier, dynastically-based, temporary coalitions with a more or less stable system in which each player had an easily recognizable identity that would determine how it chose sides (Schilling: 1993; Schilling: 1996). Furthermore, the confessional element also had the potential to override other components of identity, such as subjects' loyalties to their rulers. This situation is illustrated by a much-quoted statement from a member of the Guise party in France, who wrote to his king in 1565 that “Catholic rulers can no longer act as they have done before. Friends and enemies were once separated by the borders of provinces and kingdoms...but today we have to speak about Catholics and heretics; and a Catholic ruler has to regard the Catholics of any region as his friends, and the heretics can regard each heretic as their friend and vassal, no matter whether it is their vassal or that of someone else” (Gräf: 1993, 37).

The confessional camps which developed in the early modern era were nevertheless separated not only by their denominational loyalties, but also by their

basic attitudes toward political action. Although few case studies have been published, those which have appeared seem to validate the assumption that Calvinism had a more international character than Lutheranism, including in the field of foreign policy. The exhortation to maintain strong bonds with their fellow congregations in other countries was common not only in the churches which adopted the Helvetic Confession, but also among the rulers of Calvinist states, who were much more sensitive to the harm done to their co-religionists in other countries than Lutheran leaders were. A comparison of Calvinist Hessen-Kassel and Lutheran Württemberg clearly demonstrates this pattern (Gotthard: 1995, 84). Such conclusions are also supported by the example of Saxony, the largest Lutheran principality, which for the better part of the 'Thirty Years' War did not fight on the side one might have expected given its confessional character. The political leaders of the Electorate of Saxony considered the maintenance of order within the Empire more important than the protection of religious freedom, and thus ended up on the emperor's side. Ultimately, they were not exaggerating when they said, 'Politically we are Papists' (Gotthard: 1993). In contrast, the rulers of Hessen-Kassel not only managed their affairs in accordance with their confessional belonging, but also used the Collegium Mauritanum, a school established there in the late sixteenth century, to educate generations of Calvinist diplomats for the entirety of Europe (Gräf: 1997).

As is well known, the confessional element did not retain its paramount significance throughout the early modern period. The Peace of Westphalia was certainly a turning point, even if it was not as radical a shift as many have supposed. On the one hand, religion continued to be an important aspect of foreign-policy decisions; Johannes Burkhardt identified the Seven Years' War as the moment when Europe said farewell to religious wars and papal diplomacy ceased to be a determining factor in European politics (Burkhardt: 1985). The negotiators of the Peace of Westphalia identified 1624 as a *Normaljahr*, a point in time when the changes to the religious map of the empire were to be considered final, and thus defanged the snake of interstate confessional conflict. Thereafter, even the conversion of a ruler to another religion would not affect the internal and external peace of his or her country (Gräf: 1993, 43; Wolgast: 2006). Even so, references to confessional brotherhood still made regular appearances in the argumentation European rulers put forth in making foreign policy, and there were occasions when religion served as an important counterbalance to other factors. What actually happened was that the confessional element became an auxiliary argument, or in various cases a counter-ideology (Burkhardt: 1991, 145–147). The first signs of this change could already be observed during the peace negotiations in Westphalia. In the 1950s, Georg Schmid wrote a convincing survey analysing how argumentation based on confessional interests eventually gave way to the idea of the reason of state (Schmid: 1953). Schmid, who did not



conceal his Calvinist sympathies, regarded this process with evident disapproval, but it is worth recalling Heinz Schilling's assertion that the extreme confessional division of the European international system in the early seventeenth century required a purely political solution of this kind – *contra conscientiam et omnem theologiam* (“contrary to conscience and all theology”), as Melchior Khlesl said of the Augsburg Settlement (Wolgast: 2006, 59; Schilling: 1998, 15–32).

The only study which has been dedicated to the decline of the confessional element in a single country's foreign policy is Sven Göransson's study of Sweden, which juxtaposes that Nordic kingdom's church history and foreign policy between 1648 and 1660 (Göransson: 1956). The longest discussion of the impact of confessional politics on the activities of György Rákóczi II is a single paragraph in a late-nineteenth-century biography by Sándor Szilágyi, according to whom “Rákóczi, otherwise dry, cold and of an altogether pragmatic set of mind, was on this point an idealist – we can say that he was the last Protestant prince who subordinated his entire political activity to the interests of his religion. He aimed high; he wanted to rise and become a king, but only on one condition: that he would bring glory to his faith as a Protestant ruler. He could not see nor believe that ever since the death of Gustav Adolph in the second half of the Thirty Years' War, people had ceased to struggle for ideals and that political interest had become a more powerful motivation than confessional interest – and no disillusionment could cure him of this misperception” (Szilágyi: 1891, 116).

At the same time, other historians (as I will discuss in detail in the final chapter of this book) have attributed very little or no relevance at all to the confessional element in the prince's foreign policy – even Szilágyi, in his numerous publications about the Rákóczis, never remarked on this issue again. Every historian who has interpreted the prince's foreign policy seems to have chosen one or more aspects from the sources related to his actions and given them priority over the others. In several cases, even motives which were not derived from sources directly related to the prince, but are instead based on a general knowledge of the age, have been taken as fundamental to an interpretation of his activities. As it happens, however, these authors have very rarely elaborated on their precise reasons for choosing the specific aspects they selected.

If we turn back to the Germans' structuralist history of politics for guidance, we find that they faced a similar problem when interpreting early modern wars. Konrad Repgen has discussed the possibility of separating *Motive* from *Motivationen* (essentially, ‘motives’ from ‘justifications’). Like many of his contemporaries, Repgen intended to write a large-scale history of politics and point out general trends, but had trouble doing so in the case of wars, since specific rulers' reasons for starting campaigns proved controversial in each individual case. How can a reliable typology of the reasons for starting a war be assembled if historians sometimes attribute extremely divergent motives to individual deci-

sion-makers? Repgen found his way out by shifting his focus from the motives behind early modern wars to their legitimisation – that is, the strategies by means of which they were justified or condemned. Researching these legitimisation strategies did not provide him with a typology of actual reasons for starting wars, though it did contribute to historians' understanding of what the people of the early modern era saw as possible causes of war (Repgen: 1985). As Anuschka Tischer has pointed out in a recent monograph, systematic analysis of these legitimisation strategies has given researchers a better grasp of what early modern communities might have accepted as valid causes of war than has analysis of the treatises of political thinkers, who in many cases actually represented one or another party in the debates of their day (Tischer: 2012, 21–23).

Repgen has emphasised that the documents which legitimise wars (writings which he generally calls manifestos) cannot be regarded as genuine expressions of motive. Other researchers have since scaled down his radical nominalism: Johannes Burkhardt, for instance, has argued that the divide between legitimisation strategies and true reasons is not necessarily very broad. That is, though justificatory texts may reveal only a portion of the true motives behind them, this fact does not necessarily render them dishonest. Moreover, even if a legitimising statement was not necessarily valid at the moment of its expression, it obliged the person who used it to act as though it were, even if the public's ability to hold such figures accountable for their claims was quite limited in the early modern period. Justifications were thus derived from motives, and if not, they became motives by having been used as rationales (Burkhardt: 1991, 144; Burkhardt: 1992, 137).

Of course, even this reduction of the historian's critical attitude toward his sources would not help in identifying those reasons for war which the people of the period under discussion did not openly confess, or those of which they were not even aware. The explanatory power of the latter, both in historiography and political theory, has been called into question by the Swedish political scientist Erik Ringmar. According to Ringmar, narratives which explain wars by referring to the material interests of individual states (sometimes including factors which the leaders of those states do not understand to be in their interest) lose sight of the fact that although the grounds for conflict can be prepared by impersonal forces and developments, the decision to start a campaign is always made by a particular group of people. Interpretations of this kind can reveal the framework in which such actions take place, but will never explain these decisions themselves (Ringmar: 1996, 19–43). That is to say, narratives of this sort can be useful in large-scale structural surveys, but will prove insufficient in case studies.

According to Ringmar, the most important task in determining the reasons for a war is not understanding the reality surrounding the decision to start it, but rather understanding how the concerned parties perceived this reality. The participants in this process do not necessarily react to their actual living con-

ditions, but rather to their experience of them: what they do depends on what they imagine themselves to be. And this can only be understood by reading what these participants have had to say about themselves: analysing their narrative identities will create a fundamental vision of the factors which spurred them to act (Ringmar: 1996, 17–91). In using this strategy, a historian runs the risk of arriving at quite reductionist conclusions (as is the case with Ringmar's own analysis of Sweden's entry into the Thirty Years' War), but this can be avoided if one studies not only the manifestos related to the specific event, but also other writings by the participants whose identities and perceptions of reality we are trying to understand. Stefan Troebst, who has also discussed the problem of the gap between reality and perception, has noted that the income which Sweden earned from the Russian market during the Thirty Years' War was of enormous importance, and yet no trace of this possible source of motivation can be found in the discourse surrounding their entry into the war. And even so, we are still entitled to come to the conclusion that it motivated their decision to fight because a number of proposals for collecting such income were put forth in the period around Sweden's entry into the war. And even if none of these proposals was actually put into practice by means of the 1629 invasion, their existence proves that the makers of Swedish foreign policy considered Russian markets to be important (Troebst: 1994, 488–489). And thus in order to provide sufficiently complex explanations for foreign-policy decisions, we have to base our analyses on a broader range of sources than Repgen and Ringmar have suggested.

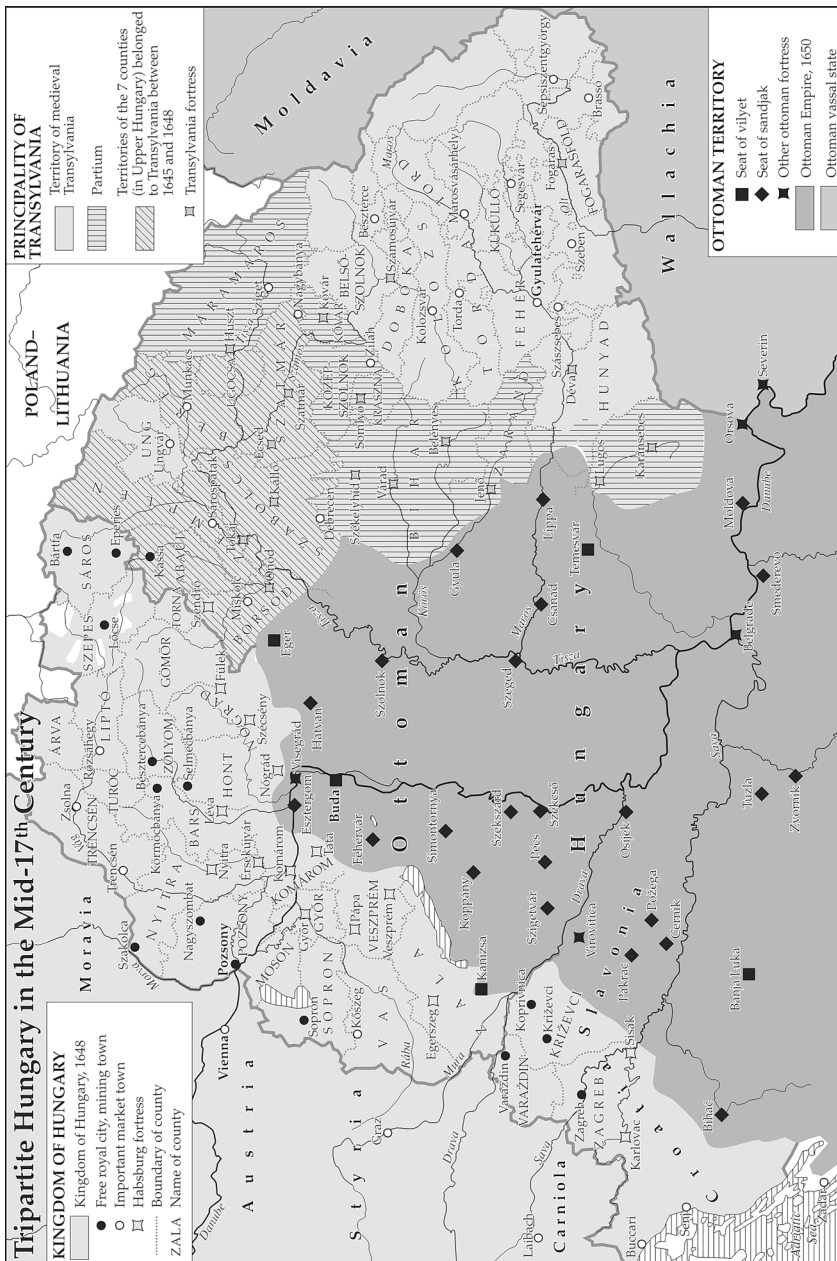
For a systematic survey of the kind I am proposing, the method of discourse analysis which Asser Amdisen has applied to early modern politics seems warranted. According to Amdisen, one should analyse four major aspects of the sum total of statements concerning a specific question within a given timeframe and geographical area. First, the participants in the discourse in question must be identified – namely, those people who had the authority and opportunity to voice an opinion on the topic in question. Second, the limits of the topic should be analysed: which points did these participants consider relevant to it and which lay beyond its scope? Where were the boundaries between the things which could be said and those which could not? Third, one should address the question of composition, meaning the form of the discourse and the participants' methods of communication. Finally, one has to address the choice of terminology, including the key concepts around which the discourse is structured and ways in which their meanings vary depending on their specific usage by individual participants. Hierarchies play an important role in each of these four aspects: not only do they organise the participants, they are also reflected by the limits of the topic, the forms of communication, and the choice of vocabulary (Amdisen: 2000, 6–9).

Amdisen used the scheme described above to provide a rigid structure for his analysis of the Danish political discourse of the late 1620s, though his level of

punctiliousness is not absolutely necessary. If, in interpreting specific policy decisions, we dedicate sufficient attention to the aspects outlined above – while also taking into consideration Ringmar’s insight that the audience for a specific statement is fundamentally important to its content (Ringmar: 1996, 73–83) – a systematic analysis based on such conscious sensitivities should lead to more convincing results than earlier attempts have. Systematic discourse analysis cannot be practiced unless there are enough argumentative writings associated with a specific foreign-policy decision; even so, this method of interpreting texts will be of significant value even in the sections of this book which function as a more traditional history of diplomacy.

### **The setting: the Principality of Transylvania in the mid-seventeenth century**

During its almost hundred-and-fifty-year-long existence, the Principality of Transylvania had an interesting double character. As a successor state to the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, it remained part of Christian Europe, but as a tributary state of the Ottoman Empire, it also was part of another international society, the fundamental principle of which was the sultan’s claim to universal dominion. The principality’s core was the Voivodate of Transylvania, the easternmost part of medieval Hungary, which enjoyed a certain level of self-government and was led by royally-appointed voivodes. After the disastrous defeat of Louis II’s Hungarian army at the battle of Mohács against Sultan Süleyman in 1526, one faction of Hungarian estates elected János Szapolyai, who was then the voivode of Transylvania and the leader of Hungary’s largest surviving army, to serve as their new king. Shortly afterwards, however, Archduke Ferdinand of Habsburg was elected king by another group, which led to further destabilisation: the ongoing Ottoman expansion was now coupled with a civil war. Szapolyai, as the ruler of the ‘eastern kingdom’, eventually sought assistance from the sultan and established a short-lived dynasty on the throne of this new Ottoman tributary. His line’s claim to the Hungarian crown was eventually dropped in 1570, which year is thus sometimes understood as the date of the establishment of the Transylvanian principality. This new state also survived the extinction of the Szapolyais themselves – when John’s son John Sigismund died childless in 1571, its diet elected the most prominent member of the Báthory family, István, to serve as their ruler; and Báthory then managed to secure the country’s effective separation from Habsburg-ruled Hungary. The territory of this new state consisted of two principal regions: as is suggested by its princes’ title, the *princeps Transylvaniae* and *dominus partium Regni Hungariae* ruled both the old Transyl-



vanian lands and the eastern parts of Hungary (Barta: 2002; Péter: 2002; Oborni: 2003).

The Habsburgs did not abandon their claim to these territories: a series of treaties with the princes of Transylvania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stipulated that the principality still belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. This remained, however, a legal fiction, since in peacetime the kings of Hungary had no direct impact on Transylvania's political life. The delegates of the eastern Hungarian counties under the princes' control were integrated into the estates of the Transylvanian diet, which essentially consisted of three 'political nations' – the Hungarian nobility, Saxon burghers, and the Szeklers, a Magyar-speaking group of borderland soldiers who enjoyed specific legal privileges. Since these 'nations' were not identified on the basis of ethnic belonging, but rather on that of legal status, the large Romanian population was not considered a separate nation. And though this did not make it impossible for individual Romanians to be integrated into the nobility, it did regularly lead to specific families' changing their language and confessional identity in relatively short periods of time (Oborni: 2013; Volkmer: 2015; Oborni: 2018).

The denominational character of the country was at least as diverse as its ethnic and legal composition. There were not less than four accepted (*receptae*) confessions in Transylvania: apart from Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, the Antitrinitarian denomination also enjoyed privileges within the principality. And though tradition holds that the 1568 diet of Torda established the principle of religious tolerance in Transylvania, recent research has demonstrated that this unique system involving four recognised religions was not fully formed until the 1580s, and that the survival of the Catholic church was mostly the result of the activities of the Báthory princes, who were members of that denomination (Balázs: 2013). Despite the many clear signs of imbalances between these individual groups (which I will detail in chapter one), this system survived until the principality was integrated into the Habsburg lands in the 1690s. The Orthodox faith of the Romanian population was tolerated, but was not granted the privileges of an accepted confession; in the seventeenth century, its administration was supervised by Calvinist authorities (Murdock: 2000; Keul: 2009).

Even if the Habsburgs' claims to this territory could not be realized, Transylvania remained connected to the Kingdom of Hungary by a myriad of threads. Several of its princes were originally magnates from the eastern part of the kingdom, including some of its most successful dynasties, such as the Báthorys and the Rákóczi (Barta: 2002; Péter: 2002; Murdock: 2003). This meant that these princes followed developments in the Kingdom with a keen eye and readily responded to requests for support which originated there. For example, in 1619, during the Thirty Years' War, Gábor Bethlen started a campaign and managed to bring the larger part of the Kingdom of Hungary under his control. He was even

elected king of Hungary by the estates in 1620. And even after the collapse of the Bohemian revolt against the Habsburgs, he continued to hold the territory he had acquired for another year before compromising and agreeing to the Peace of Nikolsburg in late 1621. He made two further attempts to regain the royal title he had been forced to cede, but neither of his 1623–1624 and 1626 campaigns was particularly consequential, and the peace treaties which ended them – in Vienna and Pozsony – mostly reproduced the results of the 1621 agreement. György Rákóczi I, who managed to secure the Transylvanian throne for himself in 1630 after the year of turmoil which followed Bethlen's death, hoped to re-enter the war, but failed for a long time to establish an alliance with Sweden and France (which in the meantime turned out to be the leading anti-Habsburg powers). It was only in 1644 that his troops took the field, and despite a certain level of success, he and Ferdinand III agreed to the Peace of Linz in the summer of 1645 (Péter: 2002, 60–127; Harai: 2013: 99–171).

Despite the fact that everyday Transylvanians almost never saw a Turk, their princes' political connections to the Ottomans were as important to them as the country's Christian roots. Tributary status created three important types of obligations for the principality. Its princes, who were theoretically freely elected by its diet, still had to be confirmed by Ottoman sultans; their rule was not secure until they received their insignia and an inauguration document (the so-called *ahdname*) from the Sublime Porte. Each year, the principality also had to send tribute to Constantinople consisting of 10,000 to 15,000 thalers and a generous quantity of gifts. Last, but not least, the principality was continually obliged to contribute troops (or at least provisions) to the sultan's military campaigns – though Transylvanian diplomats were repeatedly charged with the delicate task of sabotaging these orders. The same sort of cautious resistance also regularly manifested itself in efforts to subvert the sultan's attempts to supervise Transylvania's foreign policy; nevertheless, its princes always had to keep in mind that Ottoman state ideology classified their territory as part of the 'lands of the mighty emperor', and thus any failure to acquire the sultan's consent could produce dire consequences. In exchange, Ottoman rulers did not directly interfere in Transylvania's domestic political affairs and stationed no troops in the country; neither was there any influx of Muslim settlers (Papp: 2013, 404–412; B. Szabó: 2013). Given the focus of this book, the Transylvanians' diplomatic efforts in the sultan's lands will receive little attention, but one should bear in mind that the principality's close connection to the Ottoman Empire had a profound impact on its princes' room to manoeuvre (Papp: 2009; B. Szabó/Sudár: 2013).

Before moving on, I should remark on a few technicalities. Throughout this text, I have used dates as they appeared on the Gregorian calendar which Hungary and Transylvania still used in this era, unlike a number of countries in Protestant Europe. In cases where the correspondence I have cited used the Julian

calendar, I have indicated this in the notes and added the *stylo novo* dates in brackets. As for geographic names, which always pose a delicate problem for anyone writing about the history of the Eastern half of Europe, I have not found a universally applicable solution; in cases where there is no standard English place-name which would have applied in the seventeenth century, I will choose one version from the variants in various languages and give the other forms in the appendix.





## Chapter 1. The confessional element in the 1644–1645 campaign of György Rákóczi I

Historians have arrived at a fairly broad consensus about the military campaign György Rákóczi I launched in 1644–1645, generally agreeing that the prince followed in the footsteps of his predecessor and mentor, Gábor Bethlen. The differences of opinion mostly concern the question of whether Rákóczi also intended to follow Bethlen's lead in becoming king of Hungary. Even so, almost every author agrees that Rákóczi was quite pragmatic in specifying his goals: they were much more likely to be determined by opportunities of the moment than by principle (Nagy László: 1984, 172–173; Makkai: 1985, 919–920; Ágoston/Oborni: 2000, 55; Péter: 2002, 122–124).

In this chapter, I will examine Rákóczi's strategies for legitimising this campaign, including the arguments he considered valid and the rationales he wished to avoid. In order to scrutinize the latter, of course, I will also have to map the perspectives of his adversaries: in their understanding, Rákóczi's motivations for starting this war were – quite predictably – radically different from those the prince declared. I will also dedicate attention to the role of tradition, differentiating between arguments derived from the legitimisation strategies of Gábor Bethlen and his predecessors and those which were newly formulated by Rákóczi and his circle. Finally, I will offer some hypotheses about whether specific elements of this legitimisation rhetoric can be regarded as the prince's actual motives for the actions he took.

In 1985, in the course of summarising his methodological approach to the study of the legitimisation of war, Konrad Repgen suggested that researchers should move beyond the narrow category of war manifestos and examine a broader range of sources, considering numerous types of text as objects of study which provide arguments for or against starting specific wars. However, political pamphlets, a standard form of public discourse in seventeenth-century Western Europe, were almost entirely lacking in Hungary and Transylvania in that era (Bene: 1999, 326–391; G. Etényi: 2003, 31–62). Thus, in order to study strategies of legitimisation in this region, it is usually necessary to augment printed sources with other materials such as private correspondence. The 1644 campaign of