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**GÁBOR BETHLEN'S FOREIGN POLITICS AND FRENCH DIPLOMACY
IN THE THIRTY YEARS WAR
(1619–1629)**

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The aim of the dissertation

The objective of the dissertation is to place Gábor Bethlen's intervention in the Thirty Years War into a European context and provide its thorough analysis from the perspective of the diplomatic relations between France and Transylvania. It is exactly these connections and the analysis of new diplomatic sources that makes it possible to identify the aim of Gábor Bethlen's foreign politics in his strife for the international recognition of his state and his person. Furthermore, contrary to his well-known image in Hungarian historiography, his foreign politics was not bound exclusively and mainly to his Ottoman overlord but he sought the protection of his state and his personal recognition outside the bonds of vassalage, by the involvement of Western partners.

The dissertation aims at presenting that the recognition of the Principality of Transylvania had to be achieved through its inclusion in an international treaty, which was the main criterion of the era: Gábor Bethlen demanded that France and England guarantee the protection of his state, mainly in the form of an asylum against the Emperor. The international recognition of his person as a ruler is taken into account by the dissertation as his entering the society of princes („*société des princes*”). This could be achieved through the obtaining of titles such as elected king (of Bohemia, Hungary, Poland) or prince of the Holy Roman Empire, as well as through the establishment of kinship (matrimony, god-parentage, wardship). The rhetoric used by Gábor Bethlen in his diplomacy also underlines his efforts to enter the society of princes: he referred to himself as prince of the Holy Roman Empire several times, as most probably he intended to lessen the significance of his being an Ottoman vassal and descendant of a non-princely family. The results of the inquiry of the dissertation prove that Gábor Bethlen's foreign political goals were only partially reached. He did not manage to guarantee the protection of Louis XIII for his state, nor conclude an alliance with the French king. On the other hand, he achieved the recognition of his person and family by the public audience of his nephew Péter Bethlen in Paris.

Theories and sources

During the research conducted for my thesis, I applied aspects and sources that differ from those that we have previously been accustomed to, which ultimately offered quite a number of

novelties about the foreign policy of Prince of Transylvania Gábor (Gabriel) Bethlen, as compared to the knowledge that had been available before.

In addition to the theory of confessionalization concerning the denominational antagonism accompanying the Thirty Years' War, I also focused on the state-building nature of the wars of the era, as well as the claim for guaranteeing the recognition of these states at the time of entering into international treaties. In Subchapter II.1, I have examined the possible interpretations of the Thirty Years' War, which provides the world history background for my topic, highlighting the key trends in the available international literature on the subject. As a starting point, I have discussed the confessionalization theory most known by Hungarian historians, i.e. that of Heinz Schilling, and I have analyzed the presence and the fading of the denominational element at the time of forging alliances during the Thirty Years' War, based on the periodization of the German author. It should be pointed out that at this time, the management of foreign policy was not exclusively dominated by denominational motivations any more but the dynastic conflicts that characterized the entire early modern period, or the various legitimacy motives came to play an ever increasing role by this time. I have specifically discussed the Valois-Habsburg dynastic antagonism first, then the Bourbon-Habsburg contrast, which inevitably brought about the opening of French foreign policy toward the Ottomans. The situation is that the diplomatic relations between France and Transylvania at any time are to be examined against the backdrop of the alliances forged "in the back of the Habsburgs", i.e. the policy of *alliance de revers*.

In my dissertation, from among the theories of the historical peace research (*Friedensforschung*) carried out from the second half of the 20th century, I have applied the theory of Johannes Burkhart regarding the era and the subject. According to this theory, wars are the consequence of the weakness and underdevelopment of the states of the early modern period. As a consequence, the Thirty Years' War can be regarded as a state-building war as much as a religious war, in which the ending of the protracted conflict posed a security risk to the underdeveloped states. On the other hand, from the conceptual history approach taken by Reinhard Koselleck, it is already familiar that, in the view of the contemporaries, the different alliances and peace treaties had to guarantee the security of the states, which was thus realized in international treaties. Thus, according to the presented theories, the foreign policy motivations of Gábor Bethlen cannot exclusively be examined on the basis of the denominational element, i.e. Protestant solidarity. His foreign policy aspirations for guaranteeing the security and international recognition of the Transylvanian Principality came as absolutely natural in the period.

Besides all this, I attached key significance to the long ignored dynastic aspects, too, which offered numerous legitimacy motives in that era and established the society of princes (*"société des princes"*) with their own representational and rhetorical elements. When discussing dynastic foreign policy, on the one hand, it should be pointed out that putting an emphasis on this and securing the survival of the dynasty were absolutely valid and natural criteria in that era, also beyond the confessional dividing lines, contributing to the formation of the slowly emerging territorial states from behind the sovereign dynasties. The history of international relations can basically be described by the mutual relations between the dynasties and the princes, in the course of which the dynastic alliances formed especially through marriages created the closed world of the monarchs, i.e. the society of princes. On the other hand, the different degrees of kinship, the actually owned titles, or just the maintained territorial claims appeared in communication, correspondence, and ceremonies in the form of different addresses and titles. Furthermore, the newly emerging dynasties endeavored to ensure their own legitimacy and international recognition.

Gábor Bethlen's endeavors to enter the society of princes can be traced in the foreign policy considerations in choosing his second wife, as he sought to increase his own personal recognition by proposing marriage to the female members of families which were much higher ranking than his own. It should also be mentioned here that he had ambitious plans and aspirations to obtain and acquire recognition for such desired or actual titles that also contributed (would have contributed) to increasing his own personal recognition, such as the Czech or Hungarian royal title, or the title of the prince of the Holy Roman Empire. However, a more in-depth examination of his marriage policy shows that the prince eventually still had to relinquish his dynastic desires concerning the Bethlen family, while he could merely use some of his titles or addresses on the level of rhetoric. However, comparing the evolution of his French and English relations related to the Grand Tour of Péter Bethlen nuances the mostly negative view in that, in my opinion, the symbolic recognition of the name Bethlen by France in fact happened, so the entrance of the prince to the society of European princes could at least be partially realized.

I have filled up the theoretical framework developed on the basis of the above by relying on such manuscript sources from France that have never been scrutinized by Hungarian historians before. In addition to this, I have also used some other sources that had been available before, which, however, have not yet been adequately exploited by the historians dealing with the foreign policy of Gábor Bethlen. In the enumeration of the sources, it should also be noted that hardly any sources of the direct contact between France and Transylvania have remained,

while the Principality of Transylvania, unlike the extensive system of European envoys of France, was only able to maintain a permanent mission to a limited extent, i.e. merely in Constantinople. Thus, for studying the relations between Transylvania and France, it is equally essential to explore the sources of the officially functioning diplomatic apparatus, and to trace the movements of the envoys and agents who were employed for maintaining diplomatic relations, through diaries or private correspondence. Accordingly, the backbone of the sources applied in my paper is constituted by the diplomatic correspondence regarding the individual states and administrative centers such as Hungary-Transylvania, Constantinople, Vienna, or Venice, which is available in the Paris-based Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. From the aspect of Transylvania, on the other hand, what is of key importance is the correspondence of Transylvanian prince Gábor Bethlen and the documents of the Transylvanian diplomatic missions in Constantinople.

Results

In my dissertation, I have dealt with the following topics, in a breakdown to chapters, and I have drawn the following conclusions.

At the beginning of Chapter III, I outlined the Transylvanian and international events leading up to Gábor Bethlen's first military expedition to Hungary, then I gave a detailed analysis of the relations between Gábor Bethlen and the extraordinary French diplomatic mission to Vienna. By way of conclusion, I described his diplomatic negotiations with the Western powers that were the result of the last phase of his military campaign to Hungary and led to the second military expedition, which negotiations were conducted through the members of the Rheinpfalz emigration who had fled to him. In Subchapter III.1, I focused on the occupation of the throne by the prince, his embeddedness in the Ottoman elite and his initial fights with the Habsburg side. According to an envoy's order from the High Porte, it already occurred to him at that time that he might win both the Hungarian and the Czech thrones if the circumstances were favorable. At any rate, he cherished close relations with the leading power of the Protestant Union, i.e. the Rhenish (Pfalz) Palatinate as early as in the 1610s, through his Heidelberg-based peregrines. In Subchapter III.2, I explained the Protestant-Catholic antagonism that goes back to the early 1600s, as well as the breakout of the ensuing Thirty Years' War. I showed those ambitious plans in detail through which the anti-Habsburg powers

wanted to distribute the imperial, as well as the Czech and Hungarian thrones among themselves and which plans later Gábor Bethlen also shared, adding his own ideas.

In Subchapter III.3, I presented the activities of the extraordinary French diplomatic mission sent to the Central European region by King Louis XIII of France, the purpose of which was to make peace between Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II and his Czech and Hungarian subjects. The French-Transylvanian negotiations can be listed in two groups based on whether Gábor Bethlen negotiated with the peace-making delegation as a member of the Czech-Hungarian estate confederation, or already as an independent entity after the battle of Fehérhegy (Bilá Hora). In the analysis of the peace talks of Hainburg in the spring of 1621, besides explaining the opposing interests of the parties of the war, I also focused on discussing the issue of recognition, which I treated as a priority in my essay. As part of this, I described how much better image Gábor Bethlen managed to present of himself to the French envoys by putting emphasis on the symbolic peace-building elements than his peer Frederick V of the Palatinate. He managed to achieve this despite the fact that by their elected title of Czech and Hungarian kings, they both risked almost full international isolation from the very beginning of their respective rules.

Subchapter III.4 deals with the diplomatic background of Gábor Bethlen's second Hungarian military campaign. The roots of this expedition go back to the last phase of his first military campaign pursued in Moravia in 1621. Of the Rheinpfalz emigrants who went into his service, I have underlined the role of the outstanding agent for the Western war scene Matthias Quadt: fighting under Ernst Mansfeld and acting as his envoy, he very probably provided up-to-date information to Gábor Bethlen on the negotiations of the mercenary leader with France and Holland. The prince kept contact with Frederick V of the Palatinate chased from his Czech throne and the land of his ancestors through György (George) Petendi and Ehrenfried von Berbisdorf, while he strove to seek Ottoman support for a new anti-Habsburg military campaign through negotiations with Constantinople, through the general of the Winter King, Count Thurn, and the Transylvanian envoys.

Following his unsuccessful second military expedition in 1623, Gábor Bethlen now wanted to join any common military operation against the Habsburgs through a stable alliance rather than promises. Chapter IV details the diplomatic negotiations behind this effort, and the factors contributing to the failure of these talks. Subchapter IV.1 explains the formation of the Hague Alliance with the involvement of the Western European powers, starting out from the establishment and failure of the Anglo-French dynastic alliance. I gave a detailed analysis of the negotiations conducted between Ernst Mansfeld and James I and Charles I, as well as Louis

XIII. The point is that it was during these talks that the possibility of the French establishing diplomatic contacts with Gábor Bethlen for forging a potential alliance emerged for the first time. A further analogy concerning Transylvania is provided by the evolution of the relations between France and Brandenburg, which was going on in secret and almost exclusively in a verbal form. In addition to discussing the formation of the Hague Alliance in December 1625, which was achieved after lengthy negotiations, I have also touched upon the reasons why France ultimately did not join the common cause.

Subchapters IV.2-3 are about the evolution of the diplomatic relations between Transylvania and France in the narrowest sense of the word. What I did here was that I explained in detail why the negotiations conducted in 1625–1626 in two directions, namely directly on the one hand, and via the Ottoman Porte on the other hand, ran aground despite encouraging beginnings. Keeping direct contact was primarily the task of a French soldier called Sebastien de Breyant de Montalto, who traveled between Transylvania and France several times in the years under review, operating as a double envoy. Besides him, the details of a future alliance were negotiated by Ferenc Bornemissza from Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca, Romania, earlier called Klausenburg), in close cooperation with the French envoy to Constantinople Philippe de Harlay de Césy. What becomes visible from the mosaic-like sources is that the French party, for various reasons, was not able to fulfill the conditions set by Gábor Bethlen for joining the alliance, both from financial and other aspects. The latter considerations would have included the admission of the Transylvanian prince to the alliance started by the French ruler, guaranteeing the protection of the Principality of Transylvania, as well as the involvement of Gábor Bethlen and his state in the future universal peace treaty.

In parallel with the talks about the alliance, the resident of the Transylvanian prince at the Ottoman Porte László Balásházy and the Constantinople envoys of the anti-Habsburg powers were working in close cooperation on achieving that Gábor Bethlen win the Sultan's permission to enter the Hague Alliance, and that he receive military support for his campaign to be launched against Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II. However, applying for these permissions several times left the French envoy to the Ottoman Porte puzzled, first of all – his monarch would not have given consent to supporting the request for Ottoman auxiliary troops anyway. It is also worth mentioning here that, on the other hand, Césy provided highly efficient support to halting the colonial peace talks between the Sultan and the Emperor at the request of the Transylvanian prince, as in such a way, France would have been able to create uncertainty in the back of the Habsburgs without their having had to become committed in an alliance, or financially.

Despite his unsuccessful talks with the French, Gábor Bethlen became a member of the Hague Alliance in December 1626, however, the activities of this extended alliance had by then reached a disgraceful end, and a peace treaty had been entered into with Ferdinand II, which concluded the Transylvanian prince's third Hungarian military campaign. The deeper reasons for mutual disappointment are analyzed in Subchapter IV.4. These included, among others, that the allies paid hardly any of the military aid promised in the treaty; that the army led by Count Ernst Mansfeld to the Hungarian fighting scene was almost unable to fight from exhaustion and diseases; furthermore, the fact that Gábor Bethlen, masking his peace treaty with the Emperor as a truce, made his allies believe that the military campaign would be re-launched for almost six more months but he finally left the remaining allied forces, which were spending the winter in Silesia, alone.

After I had presented the difficulties faced by Gábor Bethlen in his efforts for gaining international recognition for the statehood of the Principality of Transylvania in the chapters so far, in Chapter V I discussed the issues of his personal recognition. The situation is that in the early modern period, the newly emerging rulers could enter the society of princes by pursuing a dynastic foreign policy, as well as insisting on keeping and rhetorically voicing their already obtained titles. In Subchapter V.1, I analyzed Gábor Bethlen's dynastic marriage policy: I tied his attempts at winning the hand of the Emperor's daughter to the history of the chivalric order *Militia christiana*, which was a crusade movement of the period. After discussing these failed aspirations, I presented his marriage with Catherine of Brandenburg: by relying on French sources unknown to date, I highlighted some new aspects of this dynastic relationship, which can mostly be defined by territorial claims. Following the detailed analysis of his marriage policy, in Subchapter V.2 I examined the titles of Gábor Bethlen; from among his titles of king (*rex*), prince of Transylvania and Hungary (*princeps*), prince of the Holy Roman Empire (*princeps*) and Duke of Opole and Racibórz (*dux*), he only proved to be a real and long-lasting owner of the title of the prince of Transylvania. However, in his rhetoric, used mainly towards France, he always endeavored to emphasize his Hungarian royal title and German prince's title in the system of the Holy Roman Empire. Although French diplomacy mostly did not react in any way whatsoever to his emphasizing these rhetoric elements, it can be concluded, based on what is contained by Subchapter V.3, that the family and "house" („*maison*") of Gábor Bethlen were recognized by Louis XIII at the time of the Grand Tour of his nephew Péter Bethlen.

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