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## Gábor Bethlen and the Treaty of Nagyszombat (1615)

Gábor Bethlen made efforts at establishing a diplomatic relationship with the king of Hungary immediately after his accession, for he was as aware as his predecessors that, alongside the support of the Sultan, he should also gain recognition from the ruler of the other empire, the head of the Habsburg Monarchy. It was at the end of a difficult and conflict-ridden series of negotiations that the treaty of Nagyszombat was signed on May 6, 1615. This put an end to the military and political hostilities which had thus far torn the regions along the frontier and thereby averted the outbreak of a major armed conflict. On the other hand, it determined the legal relationship between Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary until the anti-Habsburg campaign of Bethlen in 1619. In the secret agreement attached to the treaty Bethlen accepted the legal arrangement, first set out in the Treaty of Speyer in 1570 and subsequently confirmed several times by Bethlen's princely predecessors, according to which Transylvania was a member (*membrum*) of the Hungarian Crown, and her prince exerted his authority there with the approval of the Hungarian king.

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The Principality of Transylvania started along the path towards becoming a separate state in 1542, following the breakup of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary and the fall of Buda. This evolutionary process took approximately three decades, until the Treaty of Speyer (1570/71) proclaimed the existence of a distinct state formation, albeit one still linked with the Hungarian kingdom and the Hungarian Holy Crown.<sup>1</sup> While the Transylvanian state existed in a state of dependency as a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, it was bound by close ties to the Kingdom of Hungary.

The Treaty of Nagyszombat was one of a series of treaties that beginning in 1570 the Habsburg kings of Hungary and the princes of Transylvania concluded for the purpose of defining the constitutional relationship between the two

1 The present study is an abbreviated version of an article in Hungarian that appeared in *Századok* 145, no. 4 (2011): 877–914; for the background, see Gábor Barta, “The First Period of the Principality of Transylvania (1526–1606),” in *History of Transylvania*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning to 1606*, ed. László Makkai and Andras Mócsy (Boulder: Colo., 2001), 593–770; Cristina Feneşan, *Constituirea principatului autonom al Transilvaniei*, (Bucureşti: Editura enciclopedică, 1997); Teréz Oborni, “From Province to Principality: Continuity and Change in Transylvania in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Fight Against the Turk in Central Europe in the First Half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Istvan Zombori (Budapest: METEM, 2004), 165–80.

parts of the country and the two rulers.<sup>2</sup> Although these treaties are known, and historical summaries list them one by one, their contents have yet to be analyzed in detail. Yet the treaties not only resolved a given political or military conflict between the two parts of the country but also bore an even greater constitutional significance.

A consensus prevails in both the Hungarian and international specialist literature that the Principality of Transylvania existed in a state of dependency and was a tribute-paying vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. Yet at the same time, the principality's connection with the Kingdom of Hungary, from the eastern half of which the new state itself came into existence, never ceased to exist. While Bethlen's Transylvania was also indisputably a country subject to the Ottoman sultan, in the Treaty of Nagyszombat in 1615 the prince acknowledged the king of Hungary as standing above him and Transylvania as a member of the Hungarian Holy Crown. It is my contention that the Principality of Transylvania existed in a dual dependency, and the sovereignty of the principality was restricted not only by the sultans but also (to varying degrees, depending on the era) the Hungarian kings. My aim, therefore, is twofold: first I will present, through an analysis of the Treaty of Nagyszombat and the negotiations leading up to it, the political and diplomatic maneuvers implemented by the king of Hungary to remove Bethlen, and those implemented by the prince in the interests of maintaining his own position; secondly, I will describe one side of that dual dependency, the constitutional relationship between the Transylvanian state and the kingdom during the initial phase of the prince's reign.

Bethlen's accession to the throne (1613), achieved with strong military and political backing of the Ottomans, provoked enormous resistance in the Habsburg court. A series of laborious negotiations lasting nearly two years was needed to bring about the Treaty of Nagyszombat in 1615, which settled the constitutional relationship between Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary and created a transitional *modus vivendi* of sorts between Bethlen and the Habsburg king of Hungary, Matthias II, which, however, lasted only until

1619, when Bethlen launched an attack against the Hungarian king, overturning the earlier agreement.

### *Clashes on the Border between the Principality and the Kingdom*

Bethlen's coming to power resulted in serious troubles in the relationship between the Principality of Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary. The Hungarian king, Matthias II, declared the agreement reached in Pozsony in the spring of 1613,<sup>3</sup> essentially a treaty of mutual assistance and cooperation against the Turks, null and void, and he saw the time was right to reoccupy the *Partes adnexae* or Partium, which were under the control of the Transylvanian state. In fact he was weaving even bolder plans: he believed that Transylvania itself could be reunited with the kingdom. Because the Porte had put Bethlen in his office, he was considered the Ottoman regime's man and, even worse, a governor designated by them; thus it was unsurprising that he was received with hostility in the *Hofburg*.<sup>4</sup>

Following Bethlen's election, on orders from above the military forces of the royal castles along the border immediately commenced operations against the principality's borderlands, the territories of the Partium.<sup>5</sup> By a decree of Archduke Ferdinand issued in November 1613, the royal officials attempted to separate first of all the Báthory castles (Ecsed, Huszt, Kővár, Nagybánya, Tasnád).<sup>6</sup> In yet another letter Ferdinand instructed András Dóczy, captain general of Szatmár (1609–1618), to retake Várad and the counties lying outside of Transylvania proper.<sup>7</sup> In the initial period Palatine György Thurzó (1609–1616) also displayed considerable suspicion towards the prince, who was committed to

3 *Österreichische Staatsverträge. Fürstentum Siebenbürgen (1526–1690)*, ed. Roderich Gooss, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Neuere Geschichte Österreichs 9 (Vienna: Adolf Holzhausen–Wilhelm Engelman, 1911), 416–19; cf. Teréz Oborni, “Báthory Gábor megállapodásai a Magyar Királysággal”, in *Báthory Gábor és kora*, ed. Klára Papp, Annamária Jeney-Tóth, and Attila Ulrich (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete, 2009), 111–22.

4 Numerous biographies are available starting from the second half of the nineteenth century. See most recently Lajos Demény, *Bethlen Gábor és kora* (Bucharest: Politikai Könyvkiadó, 1982), 19–20; Elek Csetri, *Bethlen Gábor életútja* (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1992), 52–68.

5 Imre Lukinich, *Erdély területi változásai a török hódítás korában 1541–1711* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1918), 232.

6 Archduke Ferdinand's orders to András Dóczy, November 3, 1613, in *Történelmi Tár* 2 (1879): 219.

7 Archduke Ferdinand's orders to András Dóczy, November 10, 1613, in Lukinich, *Erdély területi változásai*, 232.

2 Teréz Oborni, “Between Vienna and Constantinople: Notes on the Legal Status of the Principality of Transylvania,” in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2013), 67–89; Gábor Kármán, “Transylvania between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires,” in *Statehood Before and Beyond Ethnicity: Minor States in Northern and Eastern Europe 1600–2000*, ed. Linas Eriksonas and Leos Müller (Brussels, PIE–Peter Lang, 2005), 151–8.; Călin Felezeu, “The Legal Status of Transylvania in its Relations with the Ottoman Porte,” in *History of Transylvania*, vol. 2, *From 1541 to 1711*, ed. Ioan Aurel Pop, Thomas Nägler, and András Magyar (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, Center for Transylvanian Studies, Romanian Cultural Institute, 2009), 49–74.

the Ottomans.<sup>8</sup> Thurzó himself professed that he would be glad to see the four counties, previously belonging to the kingdom but now under Transylvania's control, reattached to the kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Bethlen immediately recognized that the Habsburg military leadership would try to reoccupy the counties of the Partium for Hungary, but he also saw clearly that if they were not careful, a war with the Turks could easily ensue from this. For his part, he declared that he would cede nothing to the kingdom, would defend Transylvania's borders, and as for Várad, which his opponents tried by all means possible to deliver into royal hands, he would retain it.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, by the end of 1613 the castles along the border had for the most part been detached from Transylvania.<sup>11</sup> However, the crucially important stronghold of Várad was firmly held by Bethlen's kinsman and adherent, Captain Ferenc Rhédey.<sup>12</sup>

Bethlen was aware that in addition to the sultan he must also have his rule recognized by the "other power" as well; in other words, he needed to obtain the consent of the Hungarian king and Holy Roman emperor. In the difficult domestic and international situation of the first years following his accession to the throne a military clash with the Kingdom of Hungary would not have been beneficial to the prince in any way.

News of the military conflict with the kingdom and the occupied castles naturally reached the Porte as well, from where they soon called on Matthias II to return the castles, while the Turkish officials in the area received orders to provide armed support to give Bethlen should the need arise.<sup>13</sup> For his part, the prince showed a willingness to resolve the situation peacefully, and to this end he commenced a vigorous diplomatic campaign. While the negotiations with the Hungarian king were conducted through his envoys over the course of the year 1614, he established contact with the palatine as well, in the hope that Thurzó could act to end the skirmishes along the border. He therefore sent Zsigmond Sarmasághy, András Kapy and the scribe Dávid Weihrauch, the second judge

of Kóhalomszék, on an embassy to the palatine.<sup>14</sup> In a letter to Johann (Anton) Barvitius, a councilor at the imperial court (*Reichshofrat*), in May 1614, he asked the latter also to intercede with the Habsburg ruler in the interest of returning the occupied border castles.<sup>15</sup> In November 1614 Bethlen and the Transylvanian estates in a joint diploma promised that while the negotiations took place they would not attack the castles along the border, take any hostile measures against the Hungarian king and his lands, nor would they encourage the Turks, Tatars and Vlachs to do so either.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, an internal opposition to the new prince also began to organize itself, the prime movers of which were the pro-Habsburg leaders of the Saxon towns.<sup>17</sup> A letter written by Johannes Benkner,<sup>18</sup> the second judge of Brassó, to Zsigmond Kornis<sup>19</sup> in 1614 sheds some light on the political background. Benkner believed that the Hungarian ruler was sending envoys to Bethlen only to gain time, the aim of which was to allow the king to reannex Transylvania to the kingdom, as had been the case in former times. He added that if necessary he could line up all the Saxons, and they could immediately rise up in Transylvania against the prince in support of the Holy Roman emperor.<sup>20</sup>

Johannes Benkner was a member of several Transylvanian deputations sent to the Hungarian king, and initially Melchior Khlesl (1550–1630; bishop of Vienna, 1598; cardinal, 1615), the most influential figure in Vienna's governmental policy, also had plans for him.<sup>21</sup> One of the imperial envoys, Erich Lassota (to

14 Gábor Bethlen to Palatine György Thurzó, Déva, May 28, 1614, in Szilágyi, "Bethlen Gábor levelei," 222–24.

15 Gábor Bethlen to Barvitius, Kolozsvár, May 17, 1614, in Georgius Pray and Iacobus Ferdinandus Miller, *Gabrielis Bethlebenii Principatus Transilvaniae coevis documentis illustratus*. Collegit et in seriem chronologicam digessit Georgius Pray, abbas B. N. V. de Tormova et caht eccl. M. Varadien. Canonicus. Tom. 1 (Pest, 1816), 7–9; On Barvitius himself, see more recently Stefan Ehrenpreis, *Kaiserliche Gerichtsbarkeit und Konfessionskonflikt. Der Reichshofrat unter Rudolf II. 1576–1612*, Schriftenreihe der Historischen Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 72 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2006), 291.

16 Dated Lippa, November 1, 1614; Pray and Miller, *Gabrielis Bethlebenii*, 20–25 (quoted passage on p. 24).

17 Rezső Lovas, "A száz kérdés Bethlen Gábor korában," *Századok* 78 (1944): 419–62.

18 On Benkner's role, see more recently Zsuzsanna Cziráki, *Autonóm közösség és központi hatalom. Udvar, fejedelem és város viszonya a Bethlen-kori Brassóban* (Budapest: ELTE, 2010), passim.

19 Zsigmond Kornis (1578–1648) at first belonged to Bethlen's opposition but later became his adherent, and through his connections in the kingdom one of his supporters there. About his life, see more recently Angelika T. Orgona, "A göncruszakai Kornisok. Két generáció túlélési stratégiái az erdélyi elitben" (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd University, 2007).

20 Royal Judge Johannes Benkner to Zsigmond Kornis, Brassó, June 10, 1614, in Szilágyi, "Bethlen Gábor levelei," 224–26.

21 Lovas, "A száz kérdés Bethlen Gábor korában," 434.

8 Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek* [hereafter cited as EOE] (1540–1699), vol. 6/21, 1608–1614 (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1880), 319; Thurzó's letter: *Történelmi Lapok*, ed. Miklós Papp K. 1 (1874): 838–40.

9 Palatine Thurzó to András Dóczy, November 12, 1613, in Lukinich, *Erdély területi változásai*, 232.

10 Gábor Bethlen to András Dóczy, Kolozsvár, November 8, 1613, in Sándor Szilágyi, "Bethlen Gábor levelei. 1–3", *Történelmi Tár* 8 (1885): 214–15.

11 Lukinich, *Erdély területi változásai*, 233.

12 András Komáromy, "Rhédey Ferenc várad kapitány", *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 7 (1894): 442–43.

13 Lukinich, *Erdély területi változásai*, 234–35.

be mentioned below), secretly made contact with the Saxons during his stay in Transylvania in the spring of 1614, even entering into a conspiracy with them to topple Bethlen. However, when the Porte unequivocally backed Bethlen, and the sultan's *abdname* confirming him arrived in the summer of the following year, the prince's position within Transylvania stabilized. He also succeeded in mitigating the Saxons' resistance by adopting an explicitly generous attitude to the Saxon community and confirming them in their ancient privileges.<sup>22</sup>

### *Transylvanian Envoys at the Court in Vienna*

Excerpts from the correspondence between Melchior Khlesl and Palatine Thurzó provide a clear picture of the opinions about the new prince at the Viennese court. In December 1613 Khlesl wrote the palatine that the ruler and his advisors believed the Turks through Bethlen were in fact seeking to acquire Transylvania.<sup>23</sup> They feared that in the event of a new war the Ottomans might acquire Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania and then from there lay claim to Upper Hungary as well; in just a few years the Kingdom of Hungary could lose as much as it had in total during the past century. To this Palatine Thurzó replied that in his opinion it was not as much the Turks as rather Matthias II who, following in his predecessors' footsteps, was striving to reacquire Transylvania, which the palatine for his part considered proper.<sup>24</sup>

Bethlen's first envoys after his election reached King Matthias II and Bishop Melchior Khlesl<sup>25</sup> in November 1613. The envoys were Councilor Zsigmond Sarmasághy, the *fiscalis director* (director of legal affairs) István Kassai and the aforementioned first senator of Brassó, Johannes Benkner.<sup>26</sup> The Transylvanian estates themselves informed Matthias II of the changes in Transylvania in a separate letter.<sup>27</sup> The embassy's primary purpose was to have the Hungarian king

accept Gábor Bethlen as prince. When the envoys did not find the Habsburg ruler in Vienna, they traveled on to Linz but were unable to gain access to the king.

From a letter Matthias II wrote to Archduke Albert we learn the stance taken by the king concerning Bethlen and the question of Transylvania.<sup>28</sup> In the letter the king called Bethlen only *voivode*, thereby signaling his attitude from the very start. He knew that the Transylvanian envoys had come to ask his consent to the election of the new prince and secure his goodwill for themselves.<sup>29</sup> That he could not grant the envoys an audience, he justified by Bethlen's conduct: neither the previous prince [Gábor Báthory, 1608–1613] nor the province (*provincia*) of Transylvania had adhered to the Pozsony agreement of early 1613. Moreover, by having called in the Ottoman troops, Gábor Bethlen had caused damage to the homeland (*Patriae*) and the whole of Christendom (*reipublicae Christianae*). He had also placed him [the emperor] in an emergency situation, thus forcing him to take up arms. According to Matthias, the Pozsony agreement clearly stated that Transylvania, as a defensive bulwark, must be kept with the Kingdom of Hungary (to which it belonged) and, as a consequence, with Christendom; however, the opposite had happened: it had been placed under the rule of the Ottomans.<sup>30</sup> The Transylvanians had not informed him of the Ottomans' incursions and attacks and had thereby also turned the estates of the imperial provinces against granting military assistance. They had invited the Turks into Transylvania, assembled a diet on Iskender Pasha's orders and held a princely election, while also swearing an oath of loyalty to the Turks.<sup>31</sup>

As far as Bethlen himself was concerned, the king argued further, it was commonly known that, having repudiated his faith, he had lived for a long time among the Turks, and had devoted himself to perpetual service and allegiance to them. Concerning the circumstances of Bethlen's accession to the throne, it was his opinion that the Ottomans had extorted his election, and therefore he could no longer believe the Transylvanians unless they gave him and all of Christendom

22 Ernő Makkai, "Bethlen Gábor országépítő politikája," pt. 3, *Erdélyi Múzeum*, new series, no. 9 (1914): 143–67 (relevant section 156–57).

23 Khlesl to Palatine Thurzó, Linz, Dec. 4, 1613, in Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, *Khlesl's des Cardinals, Directors des geheimen Cabinetes Kaisers Mathias, Leben*, vol. 3, *Urkunden-sammlung zum dritten Bande* (Vienna: Prandel, 1850), 81.

24 György Thurzó to Khlesl, Biccse, December 19, 1613, in Hammer-Purgstall, *Khlesl's des Cardinals*, vol. 3, 83.

25 For an analysis of his life, with sources, see Hammer-Purgstall, *Khlesl's des Cardinals*, 4 vols. (Vienna: Prandel, 1847–51).

26 *EOE*, vol. 6, 374–76.

27 *Ibid.*, 376–79.

28 Matthias II to Archduke Albert, Budweis, February 5, 1614, in *Magyar történelmi okmánytár, a brüsseli országos levéltárból és a burgundi könyvtárból*, comp. Mihály Hatvani, vol. 4, 1608–1652, *Magyar Történelmi Emlékek I: Okmánytárak 4* (Pest: Eggenberger, 1859), 66–72 (hereafter *Brüsseli okmánytár*).

29 Memorandum of Matthias II to Archduke Albert, Budweis, February 5, 1614, in *Brüsseli okmánytár*, 4, 66–72 (quote on 67).

30 *Brüsseli okmánytár*, 4, 68.

31 Balázs Sudár, "Iskender and Gábor Bethlen: The Pasha and the Prince," in *Europe and the Ottoman World: Exchanges and Conflicts (Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries)*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Radu G. Păun (Istanbul: Isis, 2013), 143–52.

a guarantee of their loyalty in some fashion. Despite this, henceforth he would be willing to devote attention to the Transylvanian envoys.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, having moved from Vienna to Linz, the Transylvanian embassy did not succeed in its aims. The journey ended with Sarmasághy kept behind at the court, while the others were sent home to Transylvania. Word was sent with them that the king himself would dispatch envoys to discuss the terms under which he was willing to accept Gábor Bethlen as prince and the entire new situation in Transylvania.<sup>33</sup>

### *Negotiations in Transylvania*

King Matthias II soon sent Ferenc Daróczy of Deregyő, prefect of the Szepes Chamber (1613–1620),<sup>34</sup> and his Silesian-born councilor and diplomat Erich Lassota von Steblau, once the acting captain general of Upper Hungary (1603),<sup>35</sup> to Gábor Bethlen and the estates of the Province of Transylvania. Both men had traveled to Transylvania on various assignments at the time of the Fifteen Years' War (the "Long Turkish War"); in addition, Daróczy was the brother-in-law of the previously mentioned Zsigmond Kornis. Thus, both men were somewhat familiar with local conditions. For their journey they received one general and one secret instruction from Matthias.<sup>36</sup>

The general instruction in essence contained Matthias's personal position on Transylvania and his objections to its new prince, as outlined above.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the secret instruction declared that the prince could give proof of his goodwill by placing the castle of Várad under the king's control, and furthermore by promising to aid the Hungarian king in the fight against the Ottomans if necessary.<sup>38</sup> Matthias sent a separate letter to the Transylvanian estates in which he pledged his paternal support and expressed his hope that

the bond linking them to the country's Holy Crown would be made whole in all respects, with the sundered ties between Transylvania and the kingdom restored and strengthened.<sup>39</sup>

After the envoys had spent a few days in Kolozsvár, the negotiations in Transylvania commenced on April 26, 1614, at the partial diet of the Transylvanian estates in Marosvásárhely. In his remarks Daróczy enumerated before Bethlen and the estates the grievances suffered by the kingdom and called on the Transylvanians to place themselves under the rule of the Christian monarch rather than into the hands of the enemy.<sup>40</sup> Displaying the utmost formality and reserve, Bethlen thanked the king for his generous solicitude and willingness to continue the negotiations.<sup>41</sup>

The documents submitted by the envoys to the prince and the estates in writing enumerated in even more detail the grievances that the Habsburg court laid at the feet of the Transylvanians.<sup>42</sup> Among these, the most serious charge was that at the diet summoned by Iskender Pasha they had elected a prince on orders of the Turks and together with the new prince had taken (it was rumored) an oath of loyalty to the Turks. Abandoning the king of Hungary, not respecting the authority of the country's Holy Crown, and deviating from the agreements in force, they should not have concluded new alliances and peace treaties and held elections.<sup>43</sup>

After the first phase of negotiations and the first exchanges of documents, the subsequent talks continued at the diet of Kolozsvár in the first half of May 1614. Daróczy and Lassota handed the prince and the estates new documents articulating further resentments. The envoys had received news from the *Hofburg* that the prince had informed the sultan that the king was preparing to take up arms against Transylvania and was therefore requesting auxiliary troops. Even worse, Bethlen had written to the Porte that he had occupied Transylvania for the sultan, therefore now a *chians* was asking and urging the emperor to relinquish forever all rights of the Kingdom of Hungary affecting and applying to Transylvania and cede those rights to the sultan.<sup>44</sup> The envoys therefore asked the estates to declare whether they wanted to separate themselves from the king

32 *Brüsseli okmánytár*, 4, 69–70.

33 *EOE*, vol. 4, 324; Matthias II to András Dóczy, Linz, January 20, 1614, in Sándor Szilágyi, "Bethlen Gábor uralkodásának történetéhez," pt 1, *Történelmi Tár* 2 (1879): 221–22.

34 On the career of Ferenc Daróczy of Deregyő (1586–1620), see Zoltán Fallenbüchl, *Állami (királyi és császári) tisztségviselők a 17. századi Magyarországon. Adattár* (Budapest: Nemzeti téka, 2002), 72.

35 On Erich Lassota von Steblau (c. 1550–1616), see Erich Lassota von Steblau *Habsburgs and Zaporozhian Cossacks: The Diary of Erich Lassota von Steblau, 1594*, ed. Lubomyr Roman Wynar (Littleton, Colo., 1975).

36 For the general instructions: *EOE*, vol. 6, 391–94; for the secret instructions: *ibid.*, 395–99; both were dated Linz, January 20, 1614.

37 *EOE*, vol. 6, 393–94.

38 *Ibid.*, 397–99.

39 Matthias II to the Transylvanian estates, Linz, March 25, 1614, in *ibid.*, 431.

40 The envoys' verbal proposition: *EOE*, vol. 6, 447–49 (quoted passage on 448).

41 *EOE*, vol. 6, 449–50.

42 The documents submitted to the Transylvanians: *ibid.*, 450–56.

43 *Ibid.*, 456.

44 *EOE*, vol. 6, 459.

of Hungary, the Holy Crown and Christendom and submit themselves to the Turks forever?<sup>45</sup>

On this same day, May 6, the royal envoys forwarded yet another memorandum to the estates. In it, they promised in the king's name to protect the province, but for this they asked that Várad, which was the most suitable defensive bulwark for defending both Hungary and Transylvania and the Partium, be immediately handed over to the king, together with the estates and revenues pertaining thereto.<sup>46</sup>

To the royal envoys' proposition, submitted in four memoranda altogether, the Transylvanians prepared a lengthy reply memorandum. They did not consider the surrender of Várad to be acceptable in any form.<sup>47</sup> According to Daróczy, the negotiations proceeded in a cold atmosphere similar to the previous ones.<sup>48</sup> At the close of the negotiations Bethlen explained in a letter to Matthias that this exchange of envoys would have the desired result when the Hungarian king returned the previously occupied castles along the border.<sup>49</sup>

At the negotiations in Transylvania, at which the two sides' positions did not draw any nearer for the time being, ultimately a cease-fire agreement was reached as a stop-gap solution, dated May 15 and valid for three months.<sup>50</sup> Bethlen refused to promise military action against the Ottomans, citing the fact that his predecessors' secret accords with Ferdinand I or Maximilian against the Turks had all been revealed at the Porte, because it was impossible to trust the imperial-royal court to keep secrets. However, he did promise to try to provide the Hungarian ruler with his counsel in his campaigns against the Turks. In fact, he declared that if Christendom were to grow stronger and launch a war against them, he too would join in it.<sup>51</sup> In the following days the Transylvanian estates also wrote three different proposals to the king, asking in each that he return the occupied castles along the border to Transylvania for the sake of preserving the peace.<sup>52</sup>

In early 1614 letters from the Ottomans also arrived at the imperial court, calling on Matthias to give back the occupied castles and territories as soon as

possible.<sup>53</sup> It was common knowledge that the pashas of Buda, Temesvár and Eger would be ready to come to Bethlen's aid at any time. Matthias believed that in relinquishing the castles of the Partium all of Transylvania would also have to be relinquished once and for all, and the country might become a Turkish vilayet. The danger threatened that the Ottomans would seek to launch attacks from there against the rest of Hungary. According to the Hungarian councilors, the Transylvanians ought to be asked whether or not they had permanently broken with the Kingdom of Hungary and placed themselves under Ottoman authority. If they nevertheless decided in favor of the Christian king, they should hand over Várad as a token of their loyalty.<sup>54</sup>

### *The General Assembly of the Estates at Linz in the Summer of 1614*

Meanwhile, Emperor and King Matthias of Habsburg attempted to take the conflict over the question of Transylvania, which had arisen following Bethlen's succession to the throne and was continuing to expand, to a higher forum. This was the general assembly of the estates of the lands and provinces under the Habsburgs' rule, which was held between August 11 and 25, 1614.<sup>55</sup> Prior to this the Austrian estates had assembled in January in Linz, but their leader, Georg Erasmus Freiherr von Tschernembl,<sup>56</sup> had proposed convoking a general assembly to discuss the matters raised there. The same thing happened at the February gathering of the Bohemian estates held at Budweis (České Budějovice in Czech), which adjourned with their leading politician, Karl von Zierotin (Žerotín in Czech),<sup>57</sup> likewise pressing for the general assembly.

53 Lukinich, *Erdély területi változásai*, 234–35.

54 The opinion of Matthias's councilors is summarized by Sándor Szilágyi, *EOE*, vol. 6, 335–36.

55 On the assembly, see Kálmán Benda, "Habsburg-politika és rendi ellenállás a 17. század elején", *Történelmi Szemle* 13, no. 3 (1970): 404–27; see also Joachim Bahlcke, "Durch 'starke Konföderation wohl stabilisiert'. Ständische Defension und politisches Denken in der habsburgischen Ländergruppe am Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Kontakte und Konflikte. Böhmen, Mähren und Österreich: Aspekte eines Jahrtausends gemeinsamer Geschichte* Schriftenreihe des Waldviertler Heimatbundes 36, ed. Thomas Winkelbauer (Horn-Waidhofen an der Thaya: Waldviertler Heimatbund, 1993): 173–86.

56 On his life see Hans Sturmberger, *Georg Erasmus Tschernembl. Religion, Libertät und Widerstand. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Gegenreformation und des Landes ob der Enns*, Forschungen zur Geschichte Oberösterreichs 3 (Linz–Graz–Cologne: Böhlau, 1953).

57 On Žerotín, see more recently Tomáš Knoz, *Državy Karla staršího ze Žerotína po Bílé hoře. Osoby, příběhy, struktury*, Knihnice Matice Moravské 8. Opera Universitatis Masarykianae Brunensis, Facultas Philosophica 337 (Brno: Matice moravská, Masarykova univerzita, 2001).

45 Ibid., 460.

46 Ibid., 462–64.

47 Reply of the Transylvanian Diet, Kolozsvár, May 12, 1614, *EOE*, vol. 6, 469–90.

48 Ferenc Daróczy's report on the negotiations, Kolozsvár, May 7, 1614, in *ibid.*, 464.

49 Gábor Bethlen to Matthias II, Kolozsvár, May 12, 1614, in *ibid.*, 466.

50 Gooss, *Österreichische Staatsverträge*, 424–27, and *EOE*, vol. 6, 493–96.

51 Ferenc Daróczy's report to Matthias II, in the days prior to May 15, 1614, in *EOE*, vol. 6, 492.

52 Ibid., 499–502.

In the end the Bohemian and Moravian estates sent only observers to the general assembly in Linz, while the representatives of the Austrian hereditary lands, Silesia and Lusatia, as well as the Hungarian estates, the most affected by the issue, attended. Based on the questions raised there, the emerging differences of opinion between the estates and the Habsburg ruler were grouped around two main subjects: first, defense against the Turks, or more precisely, weighing the possibilities of launching a war against them; second, what action to take against Bethlen's assumption of the princely title, as well as how to reincorporate Transylvania into the Kingdom of Hungary. The most vehement representative of the interests of the court and the emperor, and most vigorous supporter of action against the estates, was Melchior Khlesl. He requested money and military support from the assembled estates for an attack against the Turks and to occupy Transylvania, since (as he claimed) Bethlen unlawfully called himself prince because he had removed from the princely throne by force the same Gábor Báthory who earlier had concluded a favorable agreement with the Hungarian king.

Matthias II, understandably from his own point of view, was unwilling to accept the fact that the "Province" of Transylvania was a territory under Ottoman suzerainty, and because of this the Transylvanians were negotiating on their choice of prince with the Porte and not with him. In a memorandum from in the fall of 1613, the president of the Court Chamber, Seifried Christoph Breuner, and his councilor, Karl Freiherr von Harrach, expressed a less hostile opinion on the situation of Transylvania and its prince. In their opinion, negotiations should be conducted with Bethlen, and he should be granted the title of prince in the territory guaranteed by the Peace of Vienna in 1606, while vis-à-vis the Ottomans only neutrality could be expected of them.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, Khlesl was a proponent of attacking Transylvania and tried to exert serious pressure on the assembled estates. The correspondence between the bishop and Palatine Thurzó throughout the duration of the assembly in Linz in August 1614 permits a more detailed look into the prelate-politician's ideas about Transylvania and Bethlen. Khlesl judged that in the time of the earlier princes never had such great Ottoman pressure descended upon Transylvania. The earlier princes, either secretly or openly, had all proclaimed their loyalty to the Hungarian king and had recognized their subjugation to him; now, however,

the Turks were interfering extremely intensively into the principality's affairs and sought to acquire Transylvania itself.<sup>59</sup> Khlesl believed that if they returned the *Partes annexae* of Hungary (the Partium) to the Turks' governor (i.e., Bethlen) at the Ottomans' request, they would achieved their aim, which was for Transylvania to belong to them in fact as well. He further recommended compromising with the Transylvanians in such a way that they would receive from the emperor what they sought from the Ottomans, and thus accept the emperor's supremacy over them. If therefore, he continued in his letter to the palatine, both he and Thurzó could agree on this, undoubtedly they would be able to convince Matthias also, and then they could remove Bethlen from the princely throne, reoccupy Transylvania and deftly postpone the war as well.<sup>60</sup>

At the Assembly of Linz the official imperial and royal proposition, drafted and presented mainly on the basis of Khlesl's conceptions, proposed taking military action against the Ottomans and "rescuing" Transylvania from the clutches of the Turks, but without negotiating with Bethlen, since his intentions could not be taken for certain.<sup>61</sup> The delegation of the Hungarian estates at the assembly was led by Demeter Napragi,<sup>62</sup> archbishop of Kalocsa (1608–1619) and former bishop of Transylvania (1594–1601), whom the king did not allow to deliver his address, obviously knowing in advance that the prelate would list arguments counter to the ruler's propositions in all respects. In their opinion, formulated under Thurzó's guidance, the Hungarian estates declared that Bethlen must be left alone, and what was mainly needed in fact was reinforcement of the anti-Turkish line of border defenses. Khlesl thereupon accused Thurzó of opposing the reoccupation of Transylvania, claiming the latter wanted to use the separate status of the principality and the prince against the court.<sup>63</sup>

The Austria, Silesian and Lusatian estates attending the assembly forwarded a joint opinion to György Thurzó. It was their opinion that the Hungarians should have the biggest say in deciding the issues that had been raised there, since it was in their country's territory that the war was raging, and their opinion

59 Khlesl to Palatine Thurzó, Linz, August 16, 1614, in Hammer-Purgstall, *Khlesl's des Cardinals*, vol. 3, 110.

60 Khlesl to Palatine Thurzó, Linz, August 16, 1614, in *ibid.*, 110.

61 Bálint Ila, "Az 1614-iki linzi egyetemes gyűlés," *A Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno Magyar Történetkutató Intézet Évkönyve* 4 (1934): 249–50.

62 Cf. Ferenc Jenei, "Az utolsó humanista főpap, Náprági Demeter," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 69 (1965): 137–51.

63 Ila, "Az 1614-iki linzi egyetemes gyűlés," 250.

58 Dávid Angyal, "Adalékok Bethlen Gábor történetéhez," *Századok* 63, no. 9–10 (1929): 353–64 (relevant section: 355–56).

must be heeded in the matter of Transylvania, too.<sup>64</sup> The estates made it clear that they should negotiate with the Transylvanians in any case, and seeing that Transylvania was located on the frontier of Christendom, they considered the Transylvanians as friends rather than enemies or opponents. As a consequence, it was unnecessary to expect them to state categorically that they stood united on the side of His Majesty while publicly declaring the Turks their enemies. Nor did they doubt, moreover, that the Transylvanians were loyal to Christendom and that they were more inclined towards the Christian world than towards heathendom, particularly those who were adherents of the Habsburg ruler. In summary, they suggested that it would be much more acceptable, praiseworthy and useful for the emperor and his lands to leave the Transylvanians in a kind of neutrality rather than completely alienate them.<sup>65</sup>

The leading figure of the Austrian estates, Georg Erasmus Tschernembl, himself drafted a short written summary of Transylvania's history since Mohács.<sup>66</sup> With this he sought to buttress the argument that Transylvania's autonomy in fact was not to the detriment of Christendom. In his work he explained that Transylvania was fulfilling a historically necessary mission, and the treaties concluded with the Porte represented no barrier whatsoever to internal development.

Thus, the estates attending the general assembly of Linz in the summer of 1614 in no way wished to undertake and provoke a war with Transylvania and the Ottomans to satisfy the wishes of the emperor and Melchior Khlesl. The estates of Styria, Carniola and Carinthia offered military aid, but only if the others also voted for this.<sup>67</sup> Because the archdukes of the ruling dynasty also agreed with the estates, in the end the emperor had no choice but to bow to the opinion of the estates, dissolving the assembly without passing a resolution and declaring that he would take the advice offered into consideration.<sup>68</sup>

64 “Opinio Austriacorum et Silesitarum ad questiones Sacratissimae Caesareae ac Regiae Maiestatis in conventu Lincziensi propositas.” Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [National Archives of Hungary; hereafter cited as MNL OL], Budapest; E 196, Magyar Kamara Archivuma, Archivum familiae Thurzó [hereafter cited as E 196], fasc. 5, nr. 42, fols. 145–49; *ibid.*, fol. 149.

65 *Ibid.*, fol. 146v.

66 The work, entitled “Verlauf mit Siebenbürgen, fürnemlich seit König Johannis de Zapolya Zeit bis hierer,” is published and analyzed by Imre Lukinich, “Geschichte Siebenbürgens von Baron Erasmus Georg Tschernembl,” *Bécsi Magyar Történelmi Intézet Évkönyve* 1 (1931): 133–60.

67 Ila, “Az 1614-iki linzi egyetemes gyűlés,” 252.

68 MNL OL E 196, fasc. 8, nr. 9.

On August 23, 1614 Matthias received the Transylvanian envoys at a final audience, where he declared that it was his chief wish to restore Transylvania and the neighboring provinces to their peaceful state.<sup>69</sup> He asked the Transylvanians not to involve the Turks in the negotiations with him in any way. For Emperor Matthias, the main problem was that the Turks regarded Transylvania as their own possession and Bethlen as if he were their governor; indeed, the Ottomans had asked him to relinquish Transylvania and allow them to freely install a pasha there.<sup>70</sup>

In the end the Habsburg ruler granted an additional three months to continue the negotiations. During this interval he saw to it that Zsigmond Forgách, captain general of Upper Hungary (1609–1618) and András Dóczy, captain of Szatmár, refrained from attacking Transylvania's borders. He asked Bethlen in turn to ensure that the Turks in Temesvár and Eger did not commit transgressions against the kingdom either.<sup>71</sup>

Following the conclusion of the Assembly of Linz, the course of the negotiations stalled somewhat. In the fall of 1614 virtually the entire border region was in arms, while Bethlen was gathering his forces at Várad. The negotiations would have continued at the Diet of Gyulafehérvár, opening in September of that year; however, the imperial-royal envoys failed to arrive, even though the Transylvanians had nominated their own delegation.

### *The Negotiations Continue*

In January 1615 the Hungarian councilors of the kingdom urged the ruler to continue negotiations with Bethlen. From their correspondence we are able to learn the details of their discussions.<sup>72</sup> The proposition written by the ruler to the Hungarian estates on January 15 almost seethed with anti-Bethlen sentiment.<sup>73</sup> According to the king, Bethlen was personally dependent on the Turks and was the “creature” of the latter, and therefore he could not and would not tolerate him in the province and on the princely throne.<sup>74</sup> He sought the advice of the Hungarian estates regarding Bethlen's removal and explained that renewal of

69 *EOE*, vol. 7, 154.

70 *Ibid.*, 155.

71 *Ibid.*, 156.

72 *EOE*, vol. 7, 211–36.

73 MNL-OL E 196, fasc. 4, nr. 27, fol. 116–19.

74 *Ibid.*, fol. 116.



the Pozsony agreement also raised difficulties. As far as the princely title was concerned, he believed not even the Turks themselves had named Bethlen prince but rather *voivode* or governor.<sup>75</sup> Matthias II also declared that in the matter of Transylvania and the Partium he would pursue any negotiations with Bethlen and the Transylvanians exclusively, and in no way would he allow the Turks to interject. The Turks had never interfered in the affairs of the Parts of Hungary previously, as the old treaties proved in more detail.<sup>76</sup>

Because the Turks were treacherously preparing for battle, formally the king had to continue the negotiations; in reality, however, preparations had to be made for the armed confrontation. Although it was possible to discuss Transylvania, there was no need to relinquish the occupied castles to Bethlen. In every other way preparations had to be made against Transylvania, by taking up arms and by concluding alliances with István Kendy and György Homonnai Drugeth, both of whom coveted the princely title, as well as with the Moldavian voivode and the Saxons. Finally, he asked the Hungarian councilors whether they should continue the negotiations with Bethlen at all.<sup>77</sup>

The reply of the Hungarian councilors was also quite exhaustive and thorough. The essence of it was that the negotiations with Bethlen must be continued in any event. They believed, however, that Bethlen had not become prince through free election (*libera electio*), and therefore the Transylvanian estates should be called on to elect someone else for themselves, in a truly free princely election, and remove Bethlen, who in any event did not call himself prince either but rather *voivode* or governor.<sup>78</sup> They added that Bethlen must be made aware that the Turks must not be allowed into the negotiation process in any way whatsoever, and least of all Iskender Pasha, who insinuated himself into everything through his advice and activity.<sup>79</sup> They designated the location for the negotiations and the list of possible envoys.

Bethlen's political position concerning the entire negotiation process is superbly demonstrated in a letter to Khlesl, written from Fogaras and dated February 1614, in which he wrote about his own situation and that of Transylvania. In the lengthy letter he referred to the former agreements reached with the Ottomans, which had been concluded for the sake of avoiding war, and

noted that this was how Transylvania had acted earlier and how other Christian countries had acted, even the Habsburg emperor and king himself in numerous instances. Most recently Emperor Rudolf had gone so far as to adopt the current Turkish sultan as his son. Which, Bethlen wrote, had not counted as an act of dishonor on the part of these outstanding kings, emperors and countries, nor had it excluded them from the ranks of Christian countries. Why, therefore, should Transylvania alone be reproached, and scourged and condemned mercilessly for this?<sup>80</sup>

As for himself, Bethlen acknowledged that he had fled abroad to the territory of the Ottoman Empire when his life in Transylvania had been in jeopardy, but this had still not made him a Turk. He had not denied his Christian conscience, nor was he working to bring about the fall of the Christian countries. He claimed he had become prince through free election, since Transylvania had already obtained the right of free election from both the eastern and the western emperor.<sup>81</sup>

In mid-March 1615 Bethlen sent his envoys, Chancellor Simon Péchi, Judge Tamás Borsos of the Court of the Prince, Ferenc Balássy, the general of the Szeklers and captain of Udvarhelyszék, and Zsigmond Sarmasághy, all of whom were also members of the princely council, along with János Rehner, mayor of Nagyszeben, and Pál Veres, first senator of Segesvár, to proceed with the negotiations. All of them had participated in the various phases of the bargaining process with Matthias II from the beginning.

At first Galgóc was designated as the new venue for the negotiations, then upon instructions from the king it was transferred to Nagyszombat in April 1615. Negotiating on behalf of Matthias this time were Ferenc Daróczy, Archbishop Ferenc Forgách of Esztergom (1607–1615), and Johann von Mollart. The Habsburg ruler displayed a greater willingness to bargain, since he was compelled to make peace with the Ottomans and knew that to do so he would first have to come to an agreement with Bethlen. On behalf of the prince Chancellor Simon Péchi, the long-time diplomats Ferenc Balássy and Tamás Borsos, and mayors János Régeni and Pál Veres, of Nagyszeben and Segesvár respectively, set out

80 Gábor Bethlen to Khlesl, Fogaras, February 19, 1614, in "Bethlen Gábor politikai levelezése," *Történelmi Tár* 3 (1880): 461.

81 "Ad principatum vero quod ex Passis aliquis me promoverit, aemulorum criminatio sola est. Deus unicus et libera Statuum Ordinumque electio authores illius fuere, cum ex foederum ratione iam dudum Transsylvaniae ius liberae electionis ab utroque tam Orientis, quam Occidentis Imperatore obvenerat." *Ibid.*, 461–62.

75 *Ibid.*, fol. 117.

76 *Ibid.*, fol. 117.

77 *EOE*, vol. 7, 211–16.

78 *Ibid.*, 216–27 (quote on 217).

79 *Ibid.*, 223.

for Nagyszombat, to be joined by Zsigmond Sarmasághy, who until this time had been staying at the court in Vienna.

### *The Nagyszombat Agreement*

The text of the agreement known as the Treaty of Nagyszombat was dated May 6, 1615.<sup>82</sup> The major terms of the agreement that were made public declared the following: first of all, that the Transylvanian estates would retain their right to freely elect a prince. The elected prince (*electus*) and the province were obligated to adhere to the terms of the agreement. Transylvania and the Partium belonging to it, along with the fortifications and border fortresses, could never be alienated from the Hungarian Crown. They could never move against the king of Hungary, Matthias II, and his successors with hostile ambitions, indeed, they could not move against the freedom, peace and tranquility of Hungary, nor could they lay claim to the territories and revenues belonging to it either. Bethlen held the *Partes* in Hungary as lord (*dominus*) of those territories, by a right that his predecessors had received from the Hungarian kings. The Habsburg king and his successors committed themselves to aiding the elected prince and Transylvania in the event of an enemy attack and also confirmed the estates of Transylvania in their ancient privileges and rights. Bethlen and his legally elected successors were obligated to lend assistance to the Hungarian king and his successors against all enemies (except the Turks), and allow royal troops into the territory of Transylvania and the Partium if the need arose. It was declared that the terms of the Peace of Vienna must be observed in every respect, and the free practice of religion provided for in this treaty must remain in effect.<sup>83</sup>

The latter parts of the agreement contained provisions relating to commerce and specific property issues, which, however, were fundamental concerning where the settlements along the border belonged, since these had given rise to numerous differences of opinion in the preceding months. A separate record of these disputed possessory matters was compiled for a later conference to be held in Nagykároly.<sup>84</sup>

82 The documents of the negotiations and the agreement are published in Gooss, *Österreichische Staatsverträge*, 436–74; cf. Sándor Szilágyi, *Bethlen Gábor fejedelem trónfoglalása*, *Értekezések a történeti tudományok köréből* 6 (Pest: Eggenberger 1867), 70–74.

83 The copy ratified by Bethlen is published in Gooss, *Österreichische Staatsverträge*, 440–47.

84 *Ibid.*, 449–53.

Two phenomena in connection with the wording of the agreement deserve mention: Bethlen was mentioned in the text of the treaty in two ways: as *electus* and as *illustrissimus dominus*, who was lord of the *Partes adnexae* of Hungary belonging to Transylvania. The expression “prince” (*princeps*) did not appear a single time in the text, and in every instance Transylvania was referred to as a “province” (*provincia*). In contrast, Bethlen in his diploma ratifying the treaty at the same time called Transylvania his country (*Regnum nostrum Transylvaniae*) and himself “prince,” and it was in this latter capacity that he committed himself and his successors to abide by the terms of the treaty.<sup>85</sup>

It was the terms of the secret agreement supplementing the treaty that defined the constitutional position of Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary in greater detail.<sup>86</sup> In this document the Habsburg ruler once again confirmed the Transylvanian estates in their right to freely elect the prince until the liberation of Buda and Eger from Ottoman rule, after which the former state of affairs would be restored, i.e., Transylvania would revert to the rule of the king of Hungary. It was further declared that the sides would attempt to adhere to the Peace of Zsitvatorok. In the areas located close to Transylvania Bethlen would be obligated to assist the king against the Ottomans as well, and the king too would reciprocate this, by contrast Transylvania was to give no aid of any kind to the Turks if they marched against the kingdom. If peace were to be concluded between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, it would happen with the involvement of Transylvania and the Partium. Lastly, the prince recognized the king of Hungary as the head of all Christendom, his principal and superior, and acknowledged Transylvania and the *Partes adnexae* as subject to him (i.e., the king) and an inseparable member of the Hungarian Crown.<sup>87</sup>

On May 18, 1615 Bethlen signed the terms of the secret agreement in Gyulafehérvár, and the diploma of the notables of the Transylvanian estates

85 *Ibid.*, 447.

86 For the secret agreement: *ibid.*, 449–53.

87 “Quod Sacratissimam Caesarem Regiamque Maiestatem eiusque legitimos successores pro capite totius Christianitatis et rege Hungariae, majoribus et superioribus suis agnoscant. Et Transylvaniam partesque ei subiectas pro inseparabili membro Coronae Regni Hungariae recolunt et recognoscunt, neque iuri coronae praeiudicabunt.” Gooss, *Österreichische Staatsverträge*, 452; Ferenc Eckhart, *A szentkorona-eszme története* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1941); József Kardos, *A Szent Korona és a Szentkorona-eszme története* (Budapest: Ikva, 1992); Kees Teszelszky, “The Holy Crown for a Nation: The Symbolic Meaning of the Holy Crown of Hungary and the Construction of the Idea of a Nation,” in *Building the Past/Konstruktion der eigenen Vergangenheit*, ed. Rudolf Suntrup and Jan. R. Veenstra (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 247–59.

on their adherence to the treaty was drafted at the diet held there on the same day.<sup>88</sup>

The above two treaties closely complemented one another, since together they regulated the relationship of Transylvania and its prince to the Kingdom of Hungary and its king. The document intended for the public was designed to resolve the given political and military situation, the main result of which was that it returned the Partium to Transylvania while respecting the principality's territorial integrity, and the king of Hungary continued to grant the Transylvanian estates the right to freely elect the prince. This point is also noteworthy because, as we know, it was John Sigismund, elected king of Hungary (*electus Rex Hungariae 1540–1571, Princeps Transylvaniae 1571*), who had first obtained the right to freely elect the prince from the Porte back in 1567. The Transylvanian estates held this right by the authority of the sultan and not the Hungarian king, which at the same time meant also that it was the sultan whom they recognized as having supremacy over Transylvania.<sup>89</sup> It was only later on, after the death of John Sigismund and the election of István Báthory (1571), that it also became customary for the Hungarian kings to give their consent to exercise this right.<sup>90</sup> In the Treaty of Nagyszombat, therefore, King Matthias II also granted this consent to Transylvania, on the condition, however, that the prince could rule the *Partes* of Hungary belonging to Transylvania only as *dominus*. The terms of the treaty intended for the public did not affect Transylvania's relationship to the Ottoman Porte.

The secret agreement signaled that the position of the court in Vienna was aligned to the centuries-old Hungarian constitutional situation, according to which Transylvania was a member (*membrum*) of the Hungarian Crown, and consequently the Hungarian king was its lord, and Bethlen held his dominion over the land only with the approval of the king of Hungary. Although the temporary separation of the principality was acknowledged in the Viennese court, it was emphasized that after the retaking of Buda and Eger Transylvania

would be reattached to the Crown immediately. The twelfth point of the secret treaty bears particular emphasis, since it agrees almost verbatim with the relevant passage in the Treaty of Speyer in 1570. Bethlen, like John Sigismund before him, acknowledged the Hungarian king as an authority above himself, which at the same time meant also that the (other) holder of supremacy over Transylvania was the king of Hungary.

By entering into this treaty under these terms, Bethlen had compromised, but at the given moment, in order to secure his rule both externally and internally, it was in the prince's own best interest to normalize his relations with the Hungarian king.

The Hungarian king, Matthias II, had also entered into the agreement only under duress. As has already been mentioned, by Bethlen's time it was an established custom for the new Transylvanian princes to also obtain the approval of the Hungarian kings and attempt, on every such occasion, to settle Transylvania's constitutional relationship to the kingdom in a new treaty. It must be emphasized, however, that these treaties in some cases and in some of their points did not record the actual state of affairs but rather articulated the legal claims upheld by the Hungarian kings to Transylvania. Also prompting Matthias to conclude the peace was the fact that his anti-Ottoman and anti-Bethlen plans had not gained support at the general assembly of Linz in the summer of 1614. The strong contemporary representation of the estates within the Habsburg Monarchy (and in particular the strikingly powerful position of the estates of the Hungarian kingdom, who were most affected by the Transylvanian question) did not make it possible<sup>91</sup> for the ruler to force an armed attack against either Bethlen or the Ottomans. Finally, we must not forget the enormous Ottoman force behind Bethlen, which the Habsburg court likewise had to acknowledge.

At the same time as the series of negotiations leading to the Nagyszombat agreement, parallel negotiations were underway with the Ottomans concerning the renewal of the Peace of Zsitvatorok in 1601. This was justified by the incursions and raids along the borders carried out by both sides, which could be interpreted as a violation of the peace. Following the Treaty of Nagyszombat, the court in Vienna also quickly reached an agreement with the Porte, in May 1615, and on July 15 the document reaffirming the Peace of Zsitvatorok was

88 The estates' diploma: *ibid.*, 453–56.

89 The first resolution of the diet in this matter was drafted at the Diet of Gyulafehérvár on September 8, 1567; *EOE*, vol. 2, 1556–1576, 335. See Graeme Murdock, "Freely Elected in Fear: Princely Elections and Political Power in Early Modern Transylvania," *Journal of Early Modern History* 7, no. 3–4 (2003): 214–44.

90 See Teréz Oborni, "Erdély közjogi helyzete a speyeri szerződés után (1571–1575)," in *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére*, ed. Pál Fodor, Géza Pálffy, and István György Tóth (Budapest: MTA TKI, 2002), 291–306; cf. Teréz Oborni, "Die Plane des Wiener Hofes zur Rückeroberung Siebenbürgens 1557–1563," in *Kaiser Ferdinand I: Ein mitteleuropäischer Herrscher*, Geschichte in der Epoche Karls V, vol. 5, ed. Martina Fuchs, Teréz Oborni, and Gábor Ujváry (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2005), 277–98.

91 Concerning the period up to 1608, see Géza Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century* (Boulder, Colo.: Social Science Monographs, 2009).

drafted in Vienna. However, the sixty villages the Ottomans had occupied in the meantime were not restored to the kingdom.<sup>92</sup>

### *Consequences: the Renewal of the Treaty in the Spring of 1617*

Matthias II ratified the Treaty of Nagyszombat on May 15, 1615 in Vienna, following which the Transylvanian envoys departed for home. Bethlen in the meantime convoked a diet to await the arrival of the peace instruments. As soon as these arrived via courier, they immediately swore an oath on them, on May 18 in Gyulafehérvár. By late June the imperial-royal delegates led by Ferenc Daróczy had also arrived, and the estates solemnly repeated their oath to abide by the terms of the treaty in their presence. The envoys called the prince's attention particularly to the point guaranteeing the free practice of the Catholic faith. The peace treaty was a realistic compromise on the part of both sides, though the sincerity of the both parties could be called into question.<sup>93</sup>

The anti-Bethlen actions on the part of the kingdom did not cease, however. After the signing of the treaty it became evident that the castles and estates in the Partium would revert to Transylvania, and so they had been unable to crush Bethlen's rule in this way. Following this another "tactical device" in the area of anti-Transylvanian conspiracies received greater attention: the recruitment of new candidates for the princely throne. It is true that this had begun as early as January 1615 with the campaign of György Homonnai Drugeth, which the Habsburg court also supported. István Kendy, banished from Transylvania, and other lords of Upper Hungary also backed Homonnai Drugeth.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, Kendy himself emerged as a candidate for prince, as did Zsigmond Balassi, who enjoyed the support of the pasha of Buda, Kadızade Ali.<sup>95</sup> Bethlen declared that

he would move against the self-nominated candidates for the princely throne plotting against him.<sup>96</sup>

Although Bethlen thwarted Drugeth's designs in 1615, in the difficult situation that emerged at the Porte the prince had to make a sacrifice. Knowing that the Treaty of Nagyszombat had come to the Porte's attention, Bethlen could no longer delay in handing over the long-demanded Lippa and the villages and castles belonging to it; this occurred on June 12, 1616.<sup>97</sup> All this, however, he succeeded in portraying as a kind of "declaration of loyalty" towards the Porte.

The renewal of the Treaty of Nagyszombat took place in 1617. The princely protonotaries, Simon Péchi and István Fráter, the captain of Marosszék, Mihály Balássy, and the second judge of Kőhalomszék, scribe Dávid Weihrauch, were the prince's envoys at the new conference, held once more in Nagyszombat in July of that year. Péter Pázmány, archbishop of Esztergom (1616–1637), Johann von Mollart, president of the Court War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*), László Pethe, prefect of the Hungarian Chamber (1612–1617), and Hungarian royal councilor Pál Apponyi attended on behalf of King Matthias II. The resumption of relations had become necessary because of the atrocities that had occurred in the meantime, as well as Bethlen's need to obtain the princely title. The negotiations began on June 29 and lasted one month.

The closing document, dated July 31, declared that the earlier treaty must be kept in force, and the mutual attacks must cease. Bethlen continued to be styled *dominus*, and not a word was mentioned about the princely title.<sup>98</sup> Regarding the borders of the area of the country coming under Transylvanian authority, the borders in existence in the time of Zsigmond Báthory were declared valid by both sides. The minor property matters were scheduled for settlement at a conference to be held the following year at Nagykároly.

In Hungary, soon after the death of György Thurzó (1616) Zsigmond Forgách became palatine (1618–1621), while the latter's post of captain general of Upper Hungary was assumed by András Dóczy, the previous captain general of Szatmár and a fierce enemy of Bethlen. At the same time György Homonnai Drugeth became lord chief justice of the Kingdom of Hungary, and Miklós

92 Dávid Angyal, "Az 1615-iki bécsi török békének titkos pontjai," in *Emlékkönyv Dr. Gróf Klebelsberg Kuno negyedszázados kulturpolitikai működésének emlékére születésének ötvenedik évfordulóján*, (Budapest: Rákosi Jenő 1925), 368–82; and Ludwig Fekete, ed., *Türkische Schriften aus dem Archive des Palatinus Nicolaus Esterházy 1606–1645* (Budapest: n.p., 1932), 7–14, 213–22.

93 Cf. Gyula Szekfű, *Bethlen Gábor* (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság 1929), 59–61.; Géza Herczeg, "Bethlen Gábor külpolitikai törekvései," in *Bethlen Gábor állama és kora*, ed. Kálmán Kovács (Budapest: ELTE 1980), 37–48.

94 Sándor Szilágyi, "Oklevelek a Homonnai-féle mozgalom történetéhez 1616-ban," *Történelmi Tár* 4 (1881): 401–49.

95 For Balassi's candidacy as prince, see Szilágyi, "Bethlen Gábor fejedelem uralkodásának történetéhez," 229–33; Idem, "Balassa Zsigmond támadása," *Attack Történelmi Tár* 4 (1881): 551–68.

96 Gábor Bethlen to Ferenc Daróczy, prefect of the Szepes Chamber, Marosvásárhely, February 4, 1616, in Sándor Szilágyi, ed., *Bethlen Gábor fejedelem kiadatlan politikai levelei* (Budapest: M. Tud. Akadémia Könyvkiadó-Hivatala, 1879), 39–40.

97 Zsuzsanna J. Újváry "'Utolsó veszedelmünknek eltávoztatásáért' (Adalék Lippa 1616-os átadásának történetéhez)," *A Ráday Gyűjtemény Évkönyve* 10 (2002): 197–206; see also Sudár, "Iskender and Gábor Bethlen: The Pasha and the Prince."

98 Gooss, *Österreichische Staatsverträge*, 470–74.

Esterházy, who likewise numbered among the prince's foes, also appeared on the political scene.<sup>99</sup> It may have appeared that it was Bethlen's enemies who were multiplying in Upper Hungary. However, there was also a number of lords in this part of the country who turned to Bethlen for assistance, especially after the election of Ferdinand II in Pozsony (May 18, 1618). In August 1619, at the invitation of the Bohemian estates, though with the backing of the Estates of Hungary, Bethlen launched his attack against the Habsburg king of Hungary.

### Summary

Gábor Bethlen's election and installation as prince in the fall of 1613 took place with Ottoman support more vigorous than witnessed any time previously. Bethlen's accession to the Transylvanian throne was greeted with a mixture of rejection and fear in the *Hofburg*, where he was viewed as the governor of the Turks and where military action against him with the backing of the Hungarian and imperial estates was weighed, in the hope that in this way the Partium, and perhaps even Transylvania, could be successfully freed from Ottoman rule and reunited with the Kingdom of Hungary.

An outstanding practitioner of *Realpolitik*, Bethlen on the one hand recognized the danger inherent in the situation; on the other, he had learned alongside his predecessors that to rule as prince he had to obtain the approval of both emperors, and so he immediately established contact with King Matthias II. Two years of negotiations resulted in the Treaty of Nagyszombat, which both quelled the military clashes along the border (thereby averting the danger of a larger armed conflict) and defined the constitutional relationship between Transylvania and the Kingdom of Hungary until Gábor Bethlen's attack on the Habsburgs in 1619. In the secret conditions of the treaty Bethlen accepted the theoretical legal basis that had evolved over centuries in the Kingdom of Hungary, according to which Transylvania was a member of the Hungarian Crown, and its prince exercised his rule over the country with the approval of the Hungarian king. This step clearly reflects the reality that the principality's existence depended to a significant degree on the political clear-sightedness and aptitude of its leaders, Gábor Bethlen among them, as well as maintaining the balance between the two great powers.

<sup>99</sup> On his career, see Géza Pálffy, "Pozsony megyéből a Magyar Királyság élére. Karrierlehetőségek a magyar arisztokráciában a 16–17. század fordulóján (Az Esterházy, a Pálffy és az Illésházy család felemelkedése)," *Századok* 143, no. 4 (2009): 853–82, particularly 874–81.

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