



THE PRICE OF SUCCESSION: DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS AROUND THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GYÖRGY RÁKÓCZI II AS A PRINCE OF TRANSYLVANIA

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In the last decades, there has been a growing interest in historical research about the Ottoman Empire's relationship to its tributary states. Many documents that were fundamental in canonising the legal positions of the individual polities, as well as the sultan's expectations towards them, have been edited and analysed, and much of this research is available in English, French or German.¹ On the other hand, the studies that present the diplomatic activities of the individual tributaries at the Sublime Porte and the attempts of these tributaries to try the limits of their dependence or resist the new demands of Ottoman dignitaries

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¹ To name only the most comprehensive studies: Nicolaas H. Biegman, *The Turco-Ragusan Relationship According to the Firmāns of Murād III (1575–1595) Extant in the State Archives of Dubrovnik*, The Hague and Paris 1967; Mihai Maxim, *L'Empire Ottoman au nord du Danube et l'autonomie des Principautés Roumaines au XVI^e siècle: Études et documents*, Istanbul 1999; idem, *Romano-Ottomanica: Essays and Documents from the Turkish Archives*, Istanbul 2001; Viorel Panaite, *The Ottoman Law of War and Peace: The Ottoman Empire and Tribute Payers*, New York 2000; Sándor Papp, *Die Verleihungs-, Bekräftigungs- und Vertragsurkunden der Osmanen für Ungarn und Siebenbürgen: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*, Vienna 2003; idem, "Christian Vassals on the Northwest Border of the Ottoman Empire," in *The Turks*, vol. 3, *Ottomans*, Hasan Celal Güzel – C. Cem Oguz – Osman Karatay (eds), Ankara 2002, 719–730. A comprehensive overview of the legal status, diplomatic practices and Ottoman military co-operation of early modern tributaries has been recently published: *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries*, Gábor Kármán with Lovro Kunčević (eds), Leiden 2013.

with means of diplomacy largely remained within the frames of Croatian, Hungarian and Romanian national historiographies. Ironically enough, due to the differences of the survival of sources concerning the various tributary states, the least is known about Moldavia and Wallachia, where the exact conditions were quite frequently changed, whereas the rich holdings of the Ragusan archives could offer much material to this question—had the city state’s position not been relatively stable during the early modern period. The diplomatic activities of the Transylvanian princes at the Sublime Porte had traditionally not been a field of primary interest for the researchers of the principality’s past: only in the last decade a proliferation of case studies concerning this topic could be seen.² The relatively rich surviving documentation on the negotiations around the succession of Prince György Rákóczi II (1648–1660) offers an excellent opportunity for an in-depth study of Ottoman negotiation strategies as well as the potential of a tributary state to withstand the pressure coming from their side.

The succession of György Rákóczi I’s older son as prince of Transylvania was supposed to be a simple matter. His father, the ruler of the principality since 1630, made serious steps in the early 1640s to ascertain that he would be followed by György Junior by securing for him both necessary components of princely power: election by the Transylvanian diet and the consent of the sultan.³ In 1642 the diet elected the new prince, and after long and elaborate negotiations and offering a large amount of presents, the principality’s diplomats could convince the Sublime Porte to accept this decision. Their success was, however,

2 Sándor Papp, “II. Rákóczi György és a Porta” [György Rákóczi II and the Porte], in *Szerencsének elegyes forgása: II. Rákóczi György és kora*, Gábor Kármán with András Péter Szabó (eds), Budapest 2009, 99–170; idem, “Bethlen Gábor, a Magyar Királyság és a Porta” [Gábor Bethlen, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Porte], *Századok* 145 (2001), 915–974; Balázs Sudár with János B. Szabó, “‘Independens fejedelem az Portán kívül’: II. Rákóczi György oszmán kapcsolatai: Esettanulmány az Erdélyi Fejedelemség és az Oszmán Birodalom viszonyának kérdéséhez” [‘Independent Prince outside of the Porte’: The Ottoman Contacts of György Rákóczi II: A Case Study for the Question of the Relationship between the Principality of Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire], *Századok* 146 (2012), 1017–1048; 147 (2013), 931–999.

3 On the election of the princes 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), 214–244; Zsolt Trócsányi, *Az erdélyi fejedelemség korának országgyűlései (Adalék az erdélyi rendiség történetéhez)* [Diets in the Age of the Principality of Transylvania: Contributions to the History of the Transylvanian System of Estates], Budapest 1976.

only partial. Contrary to the earlier example of Catherine of Brandenburg, the wife of Gábor Bethlen (1613–1629), whose election as his husband's designated successor had been acknowledged in 1627 *vivente principe* by the sultan in a solemn document called *'ahdname-i hümayun*, Grand Vizier Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha could this time only be convinced to issue a *berat*, a document of much lower esteem. It also added to Rákóczi's concerns that his son only received some insignia of the princely power from the Porte: although the sword, the banner and the mace duly arrived, the grand vizier did not send the horse which was expected to complete the set of symbolic tools generally used on occasion of the Transylvanian princes' inaugurations.⁴ Thus, when his father died in October 1648, György Rákóczi II could not be sure about the security of his rule until he received full acknowledgment from the Sublime Porte in the form of an *'ahdname*. This proved to be rather complicated due to the conflicts with the Ottoman court that the young prince inherited from his father, concerning money issues, specifically the sum of the tribute the prince was supposed to pay to the sultan.

The yearly payment of the tribute was probably the most important element of the relationship between the Principality of Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire. During the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries there was an oscillation in the intensity of the principality's Ottoman dependence and the degree of Istanbul's influence on the princes' foreign affairs changed quite frequently. By paying the tribute, however, the princes acknowledged their fealty towards the sultan each year. The suspension of payment unambiguously meant the prince's attempt to release himself from his bond to the sultan, as it happened during the rule of Prince Zsigmond Báthori in the last decade of the late sixteenth century. It is thus no surprise that the sultan quite rarely renounced the tribute payment voluntarily, even for a short period of time. Such cases are known

⁴ On the negotiations at the Sublime Porte see Papp, "II. Rákóczi György", 99–121. On the insignia in general see János B. Szabó, "Insignia of the Transylvanian Princes" *Majestas* 4 (1996), 85–105; János B. Szabó with Péter Erdősi, "Ceremonies Marking the Transfer of Power in the Principality of Transylvania in East European Context" *Majestas* 11 (2003), 111–160; János B. Szabó, "The Insignia of the Princes of Transylvania" in *Turkish Flowers: Studies in Ottoman Art in Hungary*, Ibolya Gerelyes (ed), Budapest 2005, 131–142. On the documents issued about the acknowledgment of princely successors see Sándor Papp, "The System of Autonomous Muslim and Christian Communities, Churches, and States in the Ottoman Empire" in Kármán – Kunčević (eds), *The European Tributary States*, 375–419 at 409.

from the second stage of the Long Turkish War at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: three-years moratoria were granted to András Báthori in 1599, and Zsigmond Báthori in 1601, whereas in 1604 the *‘ahdname* given to the “Hungarian lords who escaped to Turkey” promised that the sultan would not expect the payment of tribute in the next ten years.⁵ In all these cases the Sublime Porte made references to the great poverty of the principality due to the wars, but the main motivation behind the sultans’ lenience was quite obviously their aspiration to re-establish their influence upon the country. Only one case is known when a prince was able to achieve a moratorium of tribute payment with only diplomatic means: in 1617 Prince Gábor Bethlen was granted such a concession with respect to having delivered the castle of Lippa (today Lipova, Romania) to Ottoman hands in the previous year and supporting their Polish campaign.⁶

Gábor Bethlen was also the only prince who could successfully negotiate a reduction of the tribute from the Sublime Porte. The sum the prince was supposed to pay was originally 10,000 gold coins, raised to 15,000 when the sultan acknowledged István Báthori as prince of Transylvania in 1575. At the turn of June 1625 Bethlen managed to get an imperial letter (*ferman*) from Sultan

⁵ An overview of Transylvania’s tribute payment until the end of György Rákóczi I’s rule: Cristina Feneşan, “Der *Harac* Siebenbürgens in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts,” *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 34/ 1–2 (1996), 97–106. See also János Lipták, *A portai adó története az erdélyi fejedelemségben*, Késmárk 1911. On the *‘ahdname* granted to András Báthori, see Gábor Kármán, “Báthori András *ahdnáméja*” [The *‘ahdname* of András Báthori], *Fons: Forráskutatás és Segéd tudományok* 14 (2007), 339–348. The *‘ahdname* of Sultan Mehmed III to Zsigmond Báthori (11 August 1601) as well as that of Ahmed I to the “Hungarian lords who escaped to Turkey” (between 30 March and 28 April 1604) were published by Sándor Papp, *Die Verleihungs-, Bekräftigungs- und Vertragsurkunden*, 252–254, resp. 258–259 (Nos. 51 and 52). The text of the appointment charter for Mózes Székely in 1602 has not been preserved, but it also granted a moratorium for tribute payment, see *ibid.* 116; Sándor Papp, “Székely Mózes erdélyi fejedelem hatalomra kerülésének diplomáciai tanulságai és egy nagyvezíri előterjesztés (*telhis*) keletkezése” [Diplomatic Conclusions Concerning Mózes Székely’s Assumption of the Rule over Transylvania and the Formation of a *Telhis* by the Grand Vizier], *Aetas* 14/4 (1999), 71–85, here 79.

⁶ Feneşan, “Der *Harac*” 103. On Bethlen’s (actually quite meagre) contribution to Iskender Pasha’s Polish campaign see recently Balázs Sudár, “Iskender and Gábor Bethlen: The Pasha and the Prince” in *Europe and the Ottoman World: Exchanges and Conflicts (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)*, Gábor Kármán with Radu G. Păun (eds), Istanbul 2013, 141–169 at 158–162.

Murad IV in which the padishah reset the tribute of the land to the original 10,000 gold coins.⁷ Bethlen's successor, György Rákóczi I continued to pay this sum and for him the most important task was not to achieve a further reduction, but rather to convince the Ottoman elite not to demand a raise again.

It seems the Sublime Porte announced that they would again expect a tribute of 15,000 gold coins from Transylvania during the negotiations concerning the acknowledgment of György Rákóczi Junior's succession.⁸ As an immediate response, György Rákóczi I brought up the argument to be often used in the following years, that according to the formulation of the "very beautiful letter" given to Gábor Bethlen (which in all likelihood referred to the *ferman* of 1625) the concession concerning the tribute was not given to a specific prince, but to the country. Therefore, Rákóczi argued, the Ottoman dignitaries had no reason to expect the higher sum again after Bethlen's death.⁹ For a while, this argument seems to have worked: in the next year there is no mention of raising the tribute, and the only problem was caused by the fact that the prince sent the sum in silver talers, so his diplomats had to arrange that the Jewish merchants in Istanbul exchanged it for gold coins.¹⁰

In a short time, however, the Porte had the chance to use the prince's request for a favour in order to start a new discussion of the tribute's scale, since György Rákóczi I had to ask for the sultan's consent to start his anti-Habsburg warfare in alliance with the crowns of Sweden and France in the last phase of the

⁷ The document, in contemporary Hungarian translation is published in Áron Szilády with Sándor Szilágyi (eds), *Török-magyarkori állam-okmánytár* [State Documents from the Turkish-Hungarian Age], vol. 1, Pest 1868, 427–430. See also Feneşan, *op.cit.*, 103–104.

⁸ István Rácz's letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 2 June 1642) Sándor Szilágyi (ed), *Levelek és okiratok I. Rákóczy György keleti összeköttetései történetéhez* [Letters and Documents Concerning the History of György Rákóczi I's Eastern Contacts], Budapest 1883, 674.

⁹ György Rákóczi I's letter to István Rácz (Alvinc, 8 July 1642) Sándor Beke with Samu Barabás (eds), *I. Rákóczy György és a Porta: Levelek és iratok* [György Rákóczi I and the Porte: Letters and Documents], Budapest 1888, 594. In 1647, Rákóczi even sent a copy of the imperial letter to the Porte in order to prove his point, see his letter to István Szalánczi (Várad, 24 January 1647) Szilágyi (ed), *op.cit.*, 821.

¹⁰ Mihály Maurer's letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 11 December 1643) Beke with Barabás (eds), *op.cit.*, 643. The payment was generally expected in gold coins, and it was only possible in extraordinary situations to pay in silver talers, see Feneşan, *op.cit.*, 104–105.

Thirty Years War.¹¹ Grand Vizier Semin Mehmed Pasha complained to Chief Ambassador István Serédy, who had accompanied the principality's tribute for the year 1644 to Istanbul, that although the prince's wishes had been fulfilled and consent had been given to Rákóczi's campaign, the Porte did not receive even the regular tribute in return (under which the grand vizier meant the sum of 15,000 gold coins), in spite of his repeated reminders about the Transylvanian ruler's duties.¹² What is more, the Sublime Porte added another financial demand to the earlier ones in 1644. In the early phase of his campaign, György Rákóczi I managed to conquer thirteen Hungarian counties, and thus he could reasonably hope to be able to conclude a peace similar to that of his predecessor, Gábor Bethlen, who secured his control over a significant part of Eastern Hungary in repeated peace treaties in the 1620s. Following the example set by Bethlen, Rákóczi also requested an *'ahdname* for his rule over the counties in order to secure Ottoman support for his plans.¹³ In exchange for issuing the document according to the blueprint he had submitted, the prince offered to send a present of 20,000 talers (10,000 gold coins). However, the new grand vizier, Sultanzade Mehmed Pasha thought that there was more money to

¹¹ Katalin Péter, "The Golden Age of the Principality" in *The History of Transylvania*, vol. 2, *From 1606 to 1830*, László Makkai with Zoltán Szász (eds), Boulder 2002, 100–130. See also Ioan Hudiță, *Histoire de relations diplomatiques entre la France et la Transylvanie au XVII^e siècle (1635–1683)*, Paris 1927, 34–82; Kálmán Benda, "Les relations diplomatiques entre la France et la Transylvanie" in *Les relations franco-autrichiennes sous Louis XIV: Siège de Vienne (1683): Colloque à propos du Tricentenaire du siège de Vienne 9–11 Mars 1983*, Jean Béranger (ed), Saint Cyr 1983; Jean Nouzille, "Les relations entre la France et Transylvanie pendant la guerre de trente ans: La difficile recherche d'une alliance de revers" *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 36 (1997), 176–182. On the prince's diplomatic activities in order to achieve the Porte's consent for his campaign see Papp, "II. Rákóczi György", 122–124.

¹² István Serédy's letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 1 January 1645) Szilágyi (ed), *Levelek*, 827–828. In general, two types of diplomats were serving at the diplomatic representation of Transylvania at the Sublime Porte. The tribute was delivered to the sultan by the so-called chief ambassadors (*főkövet*), who left the Ottoman capital after their mission was completed; whereas the everyday tasks of diplomatic representation fell upon the orators (*kapitiha*), who replaced each other on a yearly basis. For more details, see my "Sovereignty and Representation: Tributary States in the Seventeenth-Century Diplomatic System of the Ottoman Empire" in Kármán – Kunčević (eds), *The European Tributary States*, 155–185 at 159–161.

¹³ On the *'ahdname* given to Bethlen concerning his rule over the seven Eastern Hungarian counties, see Papp, *op.cit.*, 129–130.

extract from this deal: he announced that the *‘ahdname* would only be issued once the money arrived and he also noted that the document should include the passage that Rákóczi should pay this sum of money on a yearly basis due to the enlarged territory under his rule.¹⁴ The chief ambassador of the prince, István Serédy paid the 20,000 talers to the sultan in May 1645, but the diverging interpretations concerning the nature of this sum lingered on, together with the debate about the scale of the tribute.¹⁵

The situation only got worse in the following years. György Rákóczi I was not willing to pay more than 10,000 gold coins as a tribute in the year 1646 either. This time he added to his reasoning the argument that it was not in his power to send a higher sum, as the tribute to the Porte was voted each year by the Transylvanian diet, over whose decisions he had no control whatsoever.¹⁶ This statement, however, failed to achieve the desired results. István Szalánczi, the chief ambassador of the principality, who had been sent to the Porte with the tribute in the beginning of 1645 and was forced to stay in the Ottoman capital, noted that the Ottoman dignitaries continued to blame Rákóczi exclusively, instead of his estates.¹⁷ Considering the weakness of the Transylvanian estates in any of their conflicts with the actual prince, the statement that György

¹⁴ See Serédy’s letter quoted in footnote 12, as well as the report of Mihály Maurer and György Hajdu to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 2 November 1644) Beke with Barabás (eds), *I. Rákóczy György*, 721–722. On more details concerning the *‘ahdname* requested for the Hungarian counties see Papp, *op.cit.*, 124–130.

¹⁵ István Serédy’s letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 3 May 1645) Szilágyi (ed), *op.cit.*, 838. See for instance Grand Vizier Nevesinli Salih Pasha’s letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, last decade of Cemaziyelahir 1056 / 5–14 July 1646), in which he acknowledges the payment of 1645, but reminds the prince that he failed to pay for the Hungarian counties in 1646, József Blaskovics, “Az ‘orta Madzsar’ (Orta Macar) és Erdély történetére vonatkozó török okiratok I. Rákóczi György fejedelem korából” [Turkish Documents Concerning the History of Orta Macar and Transylvania from the Period of György Rákóczi I’s Rule], *Borsod-Abaij-Zemplén Levéltári Évkönyve* 6 (1990), 285–287.

¹⁶ György Rákóczi I’s letter to his envoy at the Sublime Porte (Gyulafehérvár, 31 March 1646) Beke with Barabás (eds), *op.cit.*, 789. See also the prince’s letter to István Szalánczi (Szatmár, 19 June 1646) István Török, “Adatok I. Rákóczy György fejedelem uralkodása történetéhez” [Data Concerning the History of György Rákóczi I’s Rule], *Történelmi Tár* 27 (1904), 596–606, here 604.

¹⁷ István Szalánczi’s letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 29 March 1647) Beke with Barabás (eds), *I. Rákóczy György*, 833–834; Alexander Greiffenklau’s letter to Emperor Ferdinand III (Pera, 4 May 1647) Österreichisches Staatsarchiv Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (henceforth HHStA) Staatenabteilungen Türkei I. Kt. 120. Fasc. 60. Konv. C 1647 fol. 38.

Rákóczi I could not have forced them to pay even if he wanted them to do so sounds like a quite cynical attempt to shift responsibility. Nevertheless, it seems that the principality's diet did not want to give in easily to the Ottoman demands either: we know their letters to the prince, as well as to Szalánczi, in which they requested persistence in this question.¹⁸

The Sublime Porte, in turn, used more and more pressure to achieve its desired goals. None of the four grand viziers who replaced each other in the office up to 1648 granted permission for Szalánczi to leave Istanbul, and an increasing amount of comments were made about the possibility of replacing the Transylvanian prince with Mózes Székely Jr., a pretender kept in custody in the Ottoman capital. Grand Vizier Hezarpare Ahmed Pasha also made it clear that he was unwilling to make any steps to stop the raids of the Ottoman border garrisons in Transylvanian territory as long as the question of the tribute was not settled.¹⁹ The gravity of the situation can amply be illustrated with the panic of Szalánczi, who had been involved in the principality's negotiations with the Sublime Porte since the 1630s, and could thus by no means seen as a person who could easily be scared. This seasoned diplomat begged his prince in several letters that "it would be better to give this sum and thus achieve security for our homeland than to lose the homeland just for this petty money."²⁰ The prince did not give in and Szalánczi became the personal victim of this diplo-

¹⁸ The Transylvanian estates' memorandum (Gyulafehérvár, 9 April 1647) Sándor Szilágyi (ed), *Erdélyi országgyűlési emlékek történeti bevezetésekkel* [Documents of the Diets of Transylvania, with a Historical Introduction], vol. 10, 1637–1649, Budapest 1884, 461–463; as well as their letter to István Szalánczi (Gyula, 14 October 1647) Áron Szilágyi with Sándor Szilágyi (eds), *Török-magyarkori állam-okmánytár* [State Documents from the Turkish-Hungarian Age], vol. 3, Pest 1870, 403–405.

¹⁹ István Szalánczi's letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 24 November 1647) Szilágyi (ed), *Levelek*, 887–888. Mózes Székely has been kept in a sort of house arrest in the fortress of the Seven Towers since 1633 and used several times as an instrument of pressure against Prince György Rákóczi I, see Ildikó Horn, "Ifjabb Székely Mózes (1603–1658?)", in *Auxilium historiae: Tanulmányok a hetvenesztendős Bertényi Iván tiszteletére*, Tamás Körmendi with Gábor Thoroczkay (eds), Budapest 2009, 143–148.

²⁰ István Szalánczi's letter to György Rákóczi I (Istanbul, 2 March 1647) Szilágyi (ed), *op.cit.*, 878.

matic tug-of-war, as he could never return to Transylvania: he died in Istanbul in January 1648, three years after his arrival in the Ottoman capital.²¹

This was the situation György Rákóczi II inherited from his father. Ferenc Gyárfás, his resident envoy at the Sublime Porte suggested to the young prince that he should listen to the advice of Zülfikar ağa, the dragoman in the service of the Transylvanian embassy and not even try to pay 10,000 gold coins as tribute, but rather send the requested 15,000 right away.²² Rákóczi did not follow this counsel and sent a new chief ambassador, István Serédy on his way with the smaller sum. In order to support the argumentation presented by the prince's diplomat for preventing the raise of the tribute, the Transylvanian diet that was in session in the beginning of 1649 also sent envoys as representatives of the country's three privileged *nationes*.²³

Serédy's task was by no means easy: when he arrived at the Sublime Porte in March 1649 he had to face the fact that Grand Vizier Sofu Mehmed Pasha denied to grant him an audience and refused to accept any of the presents sent to him. The chief ambassador placed high hopes in the expected change of the grand vizier's person a month later, and indeed, the appointment of Kara Dev

²¹ For more about his person see Klára Jakó, "A Szaláncziak (Egy fejezet az erdélyi fejedelemség keleti diplomáciájának történetéből)" [The Szalánczis: A Chapter from the History of the Eastern Diplomacy of the Principality of Transylvania], in *Emlékkönyv Imreh István születésének nyolcvanadik évfordulójára*, András Kiss-Gyöngy Kovács Kiss-Ferenc Pozsony (eds), Kolozsvár 1999, 199–210. The grand vizier refused to grant permission for the Transylvanians to make his burial ceremony a public event by inviting the staff of other embassies; see the letter of Alexander Greiffenklau to Emperor Ferdinand III (Pera, 27 February 1648) HHStA Türkei I. Kt. 120. Fasc. 60. Konv. D 1648 fol. 36v.

²² Ferenc Gyárfás' letter to György Rákóczi II (Istanbul, 14 November 1648) Beke with Barabás (ed), *I. Rákóczy György*, 904. Grand Vizier Sofu Mehmed Pasha also ordered the payment of the "arrears" immediately after having received the news of György Rákóczi I's death; see the letter of Panaiotis Nicousios to Emperor Ferdinand III (13 November 1648) HHStA Türkei I. Kt. 120. Fasc. 60. Konv. D 1648 fol. 228r.

²³ Letter of the three Transylvanian nations to an unknown dignitary at the Porte (Gyulafehérvár, 18 February 1649) Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (State Archives of the Hungarian National Archives, henceforth MNL OL) Magyar Kamara Archivuma E 144 Történelmi emlékek 2. dob.

Murad Pasha made the start of the negotiations possible.²⁴ However, the decisive moment of putting an end to the conflict was rather that György Rákóczi II gave in and sent the higher sum as tribute to the Porte. What is more, he also agreed to pay an aggregated 30,000 gold coins as the arrears for the last two years (when the grand viziers refused to accept the payments of 10,000 gold coins).²⁵

György Rákóczi II had good reasons to relinquish his initial reluctance and break with his father's policy of trying to convince the Sublime Porte with legal arguments about the injustice of their demands. The Ottoman threats of forcing Mózes Székely upon the country, expressed not only by the grand vizier also by the beylerbey of Buda during his negotiations with Transylvanian diplomats, were bad enough already, especially as Sofu Mehmed Pasha also used the Tatar menace in his talks with Serédy.²⁶ These intimidations were not new, since his father also had to face them; however, György Rákóczi II was in an altogether different position, as his rule over Transylvania could not be seen as secure until he received the sultan's acknowledgment in the form of the *'ahd-name* and the full set of insignia that he was refused back in 1642.

By maintaining the "ex lex" situation, the prince did not only risk his country's relationship towards the Sublime Porte, but also caused a breach in his control over the Transylvanian estates. In the diet that was in sitting between January and March 1649, the estates managed to secure unusually broad concessi-

²⁴ István Serédy's letters to György Rákóczi II (Istanbul, 12 April, respectively 12 May 1649): Sándor Szilágyi (ed), *Erdély és az északkeleti háború: Levelek és okiratok /Transsylvania et bellum boreo-orientale: Acta et documenta*, vol. 1, Budapest 1890, 74–75; respectively Sándor Szilágyi, "Levelek és okiratok II. Rákóczy György fejedelem diplomáciai összeköttetései történetéhez" [Letters and documents concerning the diplomatic contacts of Prince György Rákóczi II], *Történelmi Tár* 12 (1889), 326–353, 451–490, 637–677, here 330.

²⁵ Simon Reniger's report to Emperor Ferdinand III (Istanbul, 12 May 1649) HHStA Türkei I. Kt. 121. Fasc. 61. Konv. A fol. 98r. The grand vizier's letter, in which he acknowledged the payment of two years' tribute, was published by Jan Rypka, "Die türkischen Schutzbriefe für Georg II Rákóczi, Fürsten von Siebenbürgen, aus dem Jahre 1649" *Der Islam* 18 (1929), 213–235, here 217–219.

²⁶ György Lippay's letter to György Rákóczi II (Pozsony, 5 January 1649) Edit Izsépy (ed), *II. Rákóczi György levelezéséből 1646–1660* [From the Correspondence of György Rákóczi II], Budapest 1992, 19; István Serédy's letter to the prince (Istanbul, 2 May 1649) Sándor Szilágyi (ed), *Okmánytár II. Rákóczy György diplomáciai összeköttetéseihez* [A Collection of Documents Concerning the Diplomatic Contacts of György Rákóczi II], *Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Ser. I. Diplomataria*, nr. 23, Budapest 1874, 17.

ons from the prince: the rights of the central princely treasury were curtailed and several legal processes against important noblemen were suspended. Zsolt Trócsányi, the renowned historian of the Transylvanian diets even suggested that this was one of the largest crises of central power during the principality's existence.²⁷ The estates must have gained all these advantages through using their excellent bargaining position: if the prince wanted them to send an official embassy to the Sublime Porte in order to solve the tribute question, he had to make concessions in various other fields. This must have also been the reason why the arrears were not paid from the estates' pockets, which would have been the normal procedure, but rather from the prince's family treasury.²⁸ With the sultan granting the *'ahdname* to György Rákóczi II, the scope of the estates' action shrank again: in 1650 the list of the princely estates was codified, among them several that had earlier been confiscated by György Rákóczi I.

The promise to pay the two years' arrears did grant the young prince what he wanted: in June 1649 an *'ahdname* from Sultan Mehmed IV was drawn up for him and the *kapıcı başı* brought the document to Gyulafehérvár (today Alba Iulia, Romania) with a solemn legation.²⁹ When János Kemény, the leading

²⁷ Trócsányi, *Az erdélyi fejedelemség korának országgyűlései*, 198–199. The biographers of György Rákóczi II also called attention upon this unusual amount of concessions see Sándor Szilágyi, *II. Rákóczy György 1621–1660*, Budapest 1891, 50–51; János Kósa, *II. Rákóczi György*, Budapest 1942, 48–49.

²⁸ This was however also not an easy task: György Rákóczi II had a hard time convincing his mother, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, who had control over the family treasury about the payment's necessity. See the prince's letter to his brother, Zsigmond (Pese[?], 30 August 1649) MNL OL Magyar Kamara Archívuma E 190 Archivum Familiae Rákóczi de Felsővadász 43. d. 5. t. 681. sz. For more details see Gábor Kármán, *Erdélyi külpolitika a vesztfáliai béke után* [Transylvanian Foreign Policy after the Peace of Westphalia], Budapest 2011, 145. György Rákóczi II continued to pay this higher sum as a tribute until his first deposition in 1658, see, for instance, his letter to Constantin Șerban, voievod of Wallachia (Gyulafehérvár, 17 March 1656) Szilágyi (ed), *Okmánytár*, 333.

²⁹ The *'adnname*, dated from the first decade of Cemaziyelahir 1059 (between 13 and 22 June 1649) was published by Franz Babinger, "Zwei türkische Schutzbriefe für Georg II Rákóczi, Fürsten von Siebenbürgen, aus den Jahre 1649" *Le Monde Orientale* 14 (1920), 115–151, here 140–149. See also Dan Prodan, "Mid-17th Century Transylvania and Franz Babinger: On a Berät and an 'Ahdnâme Handed to Prince Gheorghe Rákóczi II in 1649" *Transylvanian Review* 3, no. 2 (1994), 127–134. The reception of the *kapıcı başı* was planned for 20/21 July, but eventually had to be postponed to the 26th, see György Rákóczi II' invitations to the Transylvanian aristocrats János Rhédey and Ferenc Bethlen (Gyulafehérvár, 7 July 1649) MNL OL Családi levéltárak P 1868 Rhédey család levéltára

personality in the princely council heard about the new, lenient attitude of the Sublime Porte, he expressed his hopes that the payment of the higher tribute may motivate the Ottomans to drop their claims for the money related to the Eastern Hungarian counties.³⁰ He was bound to be disappointed: the Porte did not give in and urged the prince to send 60,000 talers, a three-year aggregate of the expected payment for the counties. During the negotiations the Transylvanian diplomats emphasised that their lord should not be expected to pay for territories that he had never ruled over: according to the Peace of Linz (1645), the counties were bound to be returned to the Kingdom of Hungary after the death of György Rákóczi I, and the handover did in fact take place in the first half of 1649.³¹ Nonetheless, they had to acknowledge that two counties, Szabolcs and Szatmár remained under the Rákóczi's rule, and the Sublime Porte kept on demanding a tribute after them.³²

The determination of the Ottoman state administration can also be illustrated by the fact that a *çavuş* was sent to Gyulafehérvár to remind György Rákóczi II of his alleged duties. Ottoman diplomacy usually adhered to the method of sending envoys only in extraordinary situations.³³ When the *çavuş* returned to Istanbul during the spring 1650, he could only deliver further excuses. The prince called the attention of the Sublime Porte upon the fact that although the counties in question had indeed been part of his father's inheritance, they were not under his jurisdiction, but were ruled by his younger brother and mother (who did in fact stay in Hungary during this period). Thus, he claimed, it would be unjust to expect him to pay for them. On the other hand, György Rákóczi II tried to maintain further the argument of his father: the princes of Transylvania

14. cs. 75. t; resp. Arhivele Naționale Direcția Județeană Cluj [National Archives, Province Directorate Cluj] Fond familial Bethlen din Criș Nr. 15. fol. 250; also the prince's *resolutio* to János Törös (Gyulafehérvár, 25 July 1649) MNL OL E 190 Nr. 5392.

³⁰ János Kemény's letter to György Rákóczi II (Gerend, 18 May 1649) MNL OL E 190 Nr. 5378.

³¹ Kármán, *Erdélyi külpolitika*, 148–150.

³² Simon Reniger's letter to Ferdinand III (Istanbul, 15 February 1650) HHStA Türkei I. Kt. 122. Fasc. 61/b. Konv. A fol. 73r.

³³ On sending the *çavuş* see *ibid.* On the peculiar character of the early modern Ottoman diplomacy, see Bülent Arı, "Early Ottoman Diplomacy: Ad Hoc Period;" and G.R. Berridge, "Diplomatic Integration with Europe before Selim III" both in *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional?*, A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed), Houndmills 2004, 36–65, resp. 114–130.

had never promised that they would pay a yearly tribute to the sultan for these territories.³⁴ The conflict was eventually solved with a compromise: the grand vizier consented to receive money for the counties only as a single instalment and not as a yearly tribute; moreover, the sum to be paid was set (with the active mediation of Zülfikar ağa) in 20,000 talers.³⁵ For this amount, the Transylvanian prince could buy the benevolence of the Ottoman state administration. The issue of a tribute for the Eastern Hungarian counties was never raised again after the summer of 1650, and when György Rákóczi II fell seriously ill in 1652 and the Transylvanian diet elected his son Ferenc as a prince, the confirmation of this act was rather easily obtained from the Sublime Porte.³⁶

Altogether, as we have seen, the procedures of the diplomatic negotiations clearly mirrored the unequal positions of the two partners. Asking for special favours, that is, the acknowledgment of György Junior's succession by the sultan, the prince of Transylvania became indebted to the Ottoman dignitaries. The Ottomans clearly regarded the payment of the higher tribute as a counter-service from György Rákóczi I, but as far as our current knowledge goes, this was never made explicit. The Ottoman officeholders, according to the testimony of the Transylvanian diplomats' reports, as well as their surviving letters to the prince, never connected the payment of 15,000 gold coins to the acknowledgment of the succession or the sultan's consent to the prince's anti-Habsburg war: they simply started to refer to this as the regular sum of the tribute György Rákóczi I was supposed to pay to the Sublime Porte. The *ferman* granted to Gábor Bethlen about the reduction of the tribute, which played a key role in the Transylvanian argumentation, seems to have received no attention from the Ottoman part: they did not openly question its authenticity, rather disregarded it altogether. This attitude was then completed with the demands concerning György Rákóczi I's rule over the seven Hungarian countries – in spite of

³⁴ Simon Reniger's letter to Ferdinand III (Istanbul, 3 April 1650) HHStA Türkei I. Kt. 122. Fasc. 61/b. Konv. A fol. 142r–v. Compared to the panicky atmosphere of 1647, the negotiations remained remarkably calm this time: the few survived reports of the Transylvanian orators do not mention this issue at all, see Szilágyi (ed), *Erdély*, vol. 1, 139–153.

³⁵ Simon Reniger's letters to Ferdinand III (Istanbul, 22 August and 26 October 1650) HHStA Türkei I. Kt. 122. Fasc. 61/b. Konv. B fol. 129r, resp. 259v. On the Porte's consent to the single-instalment payment see István Serédy's letter to György Rákóczi II (Istanbul, 12 May 1649) Szilágyi, "Levelek és okiratok" 329.

³⁶ On the election and confirmation of Ferenc Rákóczi I as a prince of Transylvania see Papp, "II. Rákóczi György" 138–144.

the fact that, as far as we can see from the sources, the prince never received an *ahdname* for these territories.

Such arbitrary conduct is also known from the history of other tributary states. In the critical situation after the Great Earthquake in Ragusa, which ruined the major part of the city in 1667, Kaymakam Kara Mustafa Pasha used the opportunity to try and extort an enormous sum of 150,000 ducats from the Republic citing the complaints of some Bosnian merchants about allegedly having been taxed illegally by the Ragusans. Like the Ottoman dignitaries in the 1640s, Kara Mustafa also showed no interest in the Ragusan argumentation which tried to present the irreconcilability of the demand with the sultan's charters granted to the city state. Some of the Republic's diplomats were kept in house arrest or even incarcerated, which offers another parallel to the Transylvanian case, and the fate of István Szalánczi.³⁷ Nevertheless, Ragusa did not give in and refused to pay the demanded "reparation". György Rákóczi II's decision to accept the higher tribute must have been motivated by his problems with the principality's estates who managed to capitalise on the uncertainty of their prince's rule. From the contemporary correspondence, it is clear that the Transylvanian elite was not convinced by the Ottoman arguments and continued to believe in their own justice, only decided – in the words of the prince's younger brother – that although "we should not give money to the Sublime Porte all too easily, but if there is no other way, we could come out of this with less now than later."³⁸

Zdenko Zlatar, writing about the Ragusan crisis after the Great Earthquake, attributes the aggressive Ottoman position specifically to the person of Kara Mustafa, a dignitary of the Sublime Porte much despised by contemporary European diplomats.³⁹ However, the fact that a series of successive grand viziers used practically the same strategy towards the principality's diplomats in the Transylvanian case points rather towards an interpretation on the system level. In the latter case it is even relatively easy to identify the motivation behind the

³⁷ Zdenko Zlatar, *Between the Double Eagle and the Crescent: The Republic of Dubrovnik and the Origins of the Eastern Question*, Boulder 1992, 104–127; Vesna Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istambulu* [Ragusan Diplomacy in Istanbul], Zagreb and Dubrovnik 2003, 141–167.

³⁸ Zsigmond Rákóczi's letter to Zsuzsanna Lorántffy (Daróc, 13 June 1650) MOL E 190 Nr. 5817.

³⁹ Zlatar, *Between the Double Eagle and the Crescent*, 108–118.

stubbornness shown by the Ottoman administration in the question of securing a higher income for the Treasury: the War of Candia with Venice, started in 1645, turned out to be a much longer military conflict than initially expected and caused enormous financial problems for the Empire.⁴⁰ In light of this it is quite understandable that the extra income expected from the prince of Transylvania was unlikely to be renounced. After a while, it also became a question of prestige that the Ottoman side would not allow their tributaries to resist. In the case of Ragusa, which took place parallel to the last Ottoman efforts to conquer the fortress of Candia and to end the war with Venice, we can legitimately suppose similar background motivations. Both examples demonstrate that it is helpful to understand the occasional arbitrary conduct of the Ottoman state administration in the context of the financial problems of maintaining early modern empires.

⁴⁰ Ekkehard Eickhoff, *Venedig, Wien und die Osmanen: Umbruch in Südosteuropa 1645–1700*, München 1970, 27–57; Kenneth Setton, *Venice, Austria and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century*, Philadelphia 1991, 104–171.