

THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL MINORITY'S RELIGIOUS RIGHT ISSUES IN TRANSYLVANIA AT THE END OF THE 17TH CENTURY (1697-1704)

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Introduction

In order to increase its power in Transylvania the Habsburg court policy supported the expansion of the Catholic Church. One official way for achieving this was the union with the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Viennese diplomacy soon realized that with the disruption of the close cooperation between the three nations and four religions could open the door to seamless integration of Habsburg rule. After the change of the power the Saxons in Transylvania were getting to turn their attention to the Habsburg court. The Catholic Habsburgs decided to expand the Catholic Church in Transylvania. The political intention of the Habsburg court was hindered by two factors. The Saxons and the Catholics weren't so strong regarding their number and political influence like the protestant ones. The other important factor was the disposition laid down in Diploma Leopoldinum,¹ According to which the relation among the three nations and four religions had to remain unchanged, as it was at the time of the principality. It wasn't impossible to change the proportion of the three nations and four religions without offending the Leopoldinum Diploma. The only legitimate and viable way was to alter the nonstandard, but tolerated Romanian people from Greek Orthodox religion to the Catholic religion.

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¹ „Diploma Leopoldinum, (English: “Leopold’s Diploma”) decree issued in October 1690 by Leopold I, Holy Roman emperor and king of Hungary (1658–1705), after the Ottoman Turks had been driven from central Hungary in 1686. The decree established the political status and the freedoms of Transylvania, notably the freedom of observance for its four religions: Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Unitarianism. Until the defeat of the Turks, Transylvania had been virtually an independent state, under largely nominal Turkish suzerainty and ruled by elected Hungarian princes. The Diploma, which enshrined the agreement between the Habsburg emperor and the Transylvanian nobles, ensured the continuation of the autonomy of the province. It provided for a governor (to rule until the prince of Transylvania reached maturity) chosen by the estates from the so-called three nations (Hungarians, Szeklers, and Saxons) and endorsed by the emperor. The Diploma also adjusted the level of taxation and guaranteed free trade. The army was to be under the command of a general nominated by the emperor but who did not have a voice in public affairs. Introduced after years of anarchy and war, the Diploma offered the promise of internal order and cultural and vocational opportunities for all three nations of Transylvania in their own languages. It soon became apparent, however, that the Diploma had not secured autonomy for Transylvania, as the leadership of the principality came under the direct influence of the Vienna chancellery. Transylvania was therefore severed from Hungary for the next two centuries.” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1459175/Diploma-Leopoldinum>. (date of download: 11.19. 2022)

The establishment of romanian religious union

The initiator of the religious union of the Romanians in Transylvania and also the pathfinder was Paul Laszlo Baranyi S. J, pastor in Alba Iulia. He knew narrowly the religious and social circumstances of the Romanians in Transylvanian. He had a deliberation with Theophilus, the Greek Orthodox bishop of Transylvania during which he raised as an issue the possibility of the Union and its potential social and political benefits for the Romanians in Transylvania. This possibility of union had been also suggested by King Leopold I in his manuscript published in 1692 in which he addressed an open call to the Ruthenian Greek Orthodox priests from Highlands in connection with the union. He promised more allowances in that area. Those priests who accept the union were recognized as equivalent with those of the Latin ritual priests. The effect of this appeal met with a warm response among the Romanians in Transylvanian. Theophilus, the Greek Orthodox bishop of Transylvania convened a synod in Alba Julia (Gyulafehérvár) in 1697.² He explained that the Romanians in Transylvanian had to suffer much because of the constant harassment and pressure of the Protestants. The Reformed Church interfered into their church life and oppressed them and also afflicted them with taxes and serf services. Furthermore he revealed what opportunities and benefits could the union offer. The synod accepted that in the church services and governmental structure could not happen any changing, the Julian calendar is preserved and the Greek Orthodox religion can be no longer a tolerated religion in Transylvania.³

At the end of the synod all conditions of the union were accepted. Among the conditions can be mentioned: I. Dogmatic themes. 1st. The Pope is the head of the universal Church. 2nd. The Holy Communion under color of bread during is sufficient. 3rd. There is a cleaning place. 4th. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son. II. The priests and religious men should have the same privileges as the Roman Catholics. III. Officers should be appointed among the Romanians too. Their sons should enjoy foundations and scholarships. IV. The bishop should have sufficient income and he should appoint the priests.⁴

The decisions formulated by the synod had a great echo among the estates in Transylvania, the Saxons and the Greek Orthodox Church in Wallachia. A series of protests against the union began in Transylvania and Wallachia. The sudden death of the Bishop Theophilus, supporter of the union made the Protestant to act immediately. They became aware of that the agreement between Paul Laszlo Baranyi and bishop Theophilus concerning the union would radically change the religious, social and political conditions in Transylvania.

² GYÁRFÁS, Elemér: *Bethlen Miklós kancellár*. Dicsőszentmárton, 1926. pp. 121-127

³ Ungarische Akten Specialia. Fasc. 364. Transylvanica separata. Konv. A. Privilegien und Angelegenheiten der griechisch-katolischen Kirche der Rumanen in Siebenbürgen (1659) 1689-1754. 21-22. fol.

⁴ GYÁRFÁS, Elemér: *Bethlen Miklós kancellár*. op.cit. pp. 121-127.

They were looking for a reliable Romanian bishop who is willing to make a loyalty oath to the Protestant bishop. Over against with Tirca John priest, as the majority of the Romanian priests from Hunedoara county openly expressed their reliance to the Calvinists. Anghel Popa was the son of a Romanian priest from Bobalna (Bábolna). According to Miklós Bethlen's testimony that "*it is our young boy from the school in Fejérvár the winner, who is also receiving a Calvinist upbringing. The gold from his father, the biggest part of which went to the governor, made him bishop.*"⁵ The vacant bishop chair in Romanian was occupied by Athanasius Angheleit. After his consecration as Bishop in Bucharest he returned to Alba Julia (Gyulafehérvár), where he had been waited by the order in council which was edited in 14th of April 1698 regarding the union of the Romanians in for him in the union of Transylvania. He threatened those who acted against the union.

The political pressure and the promising discounts had their results. At the Synod congregated by Bishop Athanasius on 7th of October 1698 in Alba Iulia the religious union with the Roman Catholic Church was adopted. Ensured the Romanian character to their Church, the rights of electing their own bishop, their independence from every other Christian church and it was also assured their church organization and religious ceremonies. The document was signed by Bishop Athanasius and 38 deans and then sent as a petition to Vienna. The Romanian delegates who took at that time part of the union appeared at the diet on 23rd of november 1698 in Alba Iulia. There it was presented the resolution adopted and were also submitted at the Synod.⁶

The Protestant majority Transylvanian orders after a long deliberation decided to investigate the matters and the Romanian clergy and the people were asked about the matters concerning the union. The diet expressed its concern about the Union. At the diet held on 20th of January 1699 in Schassburg (Sighisoara, Segesvár) the issue of union was discussed narrowly, because had not arrived any answer from Vienna. The Protestant majority parliament was still of the opinion to postpone the case until the arrival of the King-Emperor's reply. After the parliament was closed on 16th of February 1699, arrived Leopold I's diploma about the union.⁷ According to Vienna's firm view the issue of the union had been already decided. On 14th of July 1699 the Transylvanian Gubernium set up other 14 arguments pointing to the church and social disadvantages caused by the union.⁸ The Romanians possible used the union as a possibility to release from tributes and slavery. The constitutional spirit of Transylvania was based on the three nations and four recognized religions. This spirit was maintained by the conservatism of the Protestants and on the other

⁵ BETHLEN, Miklós: *Önéletírása*. Budapest, 1980. (Szerk. V. Windisch Éva) II. p. 202.

⁶ Ungarische Akten Specialia. Fasc. 364. Transylvanica separata. Konv. A. Privilegien und Angelegenheiten der griechisch-katolischen Kirche der Rumanen in Siebenbürgen (1659) 1689-1754. 21-22. fol.

⁷ Ungarische Akten Specialia. Fasc. 364. Transylvanica separata. Konv. A. Privilegien und Angelegenheiten der griechisch-katolischen Kirche der Rumanen in Siebenbürgen (1659) 1689-1754. I. Román Vallási Diploma Leopoldinum 1699. 02. 16. Wien. HHSTA.

⁸ BARITIU, George: *Parti alese din Istoria Transilvaniei pre doue sute de ani din urma*. Sibiu. W. Krafft. 1889. p. 155. – DRAGOMIR, Silviu: *Istoria Desrobirei Religioase*. Sibiu. 1920. Vol. I. p. 25.

hand by the fear of the Catholic orders from the changing of national relations. On 26th of August 1699 Vienna firmly rejected the Gubernium's petition. It consolidated the allowances included in the Diploma from 14th of February 1699 and also warned the Gubernium in Transylvania to respect it and follow it.⁹

After this warning the Gubernium made a very important decision. The Romanians had the freedom to join any recognized religion. It was ordered an investigation to find out which religion do they want to fuse with. The problems relating union rose an enormous among the Romanian Greek Orthodox churches. The first who opposed the union were the Greek Orthodox churches from Brasov. They were followed by the priests in Hatszeg who were supported by the Calvinist bishop and Reformed orders. The most famous anti-union protestant was nobleman Gábor Nagyszegi. He had converted to the Catholic Church came in the focus of the Romanian's attention. He drew attention to the dangers of union. Rabutin, the commander of the Habsburg army in Transylvania, was well aware of the relationship between Nagyszegi and the Protestant members of the gubernium, especially Chancellor Gábor Bethlen, who in secret supported his efforts.¹⁰ In order to reduce the favoritism with the Catholics, György Bánffy and Miklós Bethlen made the Ministerial in rebus Transilvanicis to accept the idea that the Orthodox priests should fuse with any of the recognized churches. After the fusion, they should get the status of the respective church ministry.¹¹

That's why gubernator György Bánffy and Chancellor Miklós Bethlen travelled to Wien in April 1698. The priests of the tolerated orthodox religion after the fusion win the status of the respective church ministry. In May 1699 the Gubernium took under his protection the Romanian reformed priests from Hatszeg, who were against the union. On 28th of november 1700 the Reformed Consistorium chaired by György Bánffy expended a protection.¹² The Protestant majority Transylvanian Gubernium and the parliament in Transilvania in September 1699 tried to adjust the issue of the union by enacting it. This intention didn't bring any important change. Neither the second religious diploma edited on 19th of March 1701 achieved further results regarding its efforts against union. According to the stringent regulations the Orthodox could only fuse with the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches could only provide protection for them.¹³

⁹ BOD, Péter: *A románok uniáltatásáról való rövid história*, Bibilioteca Centrala Universitatii din Cluj Napoca, (Bábes-Bolyai Tudományegyetem Központi Egyetemi Könyvtár Kolozsvár) Ms. F. a. pp. 23-33. GUDOR, Botond Kund: *Istoricul Bod Péter (1712-1769)*, Cluj–Napoca, 2008. p. 297.

¹⁰ Ana DUMITRAN – GUDOR, Botond – Pr. Nicolae DANILA: *Román-magyar felekezeti közti kapcsolatok Erdélyben (A XVI. Század közepe- a XVIII. Század első évtizedei között)*. Gyulafehérvár, 2000. pp. 279-281.

¹¹ Főkonzisztórium Levéltár az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Gyűjtőlevéltárában, Kolozsvárott. 3/1700.

¹² Főkonzisztórium Levéltár az Erdélyi Református Gyűjtőlevéltárában, Kolozsvárott. 4/1700, 7/1700. – SIPOS, Gábor: *Román református eklézsiák oltalomlevele 1700-ból*. Europa. Balcanica-Danubiana Carpathiaca. Annales 2/B Bp. 1995. pp.356-359.

¹³ SIPOS, Gábor: *Az Erdélyi Református Főkonzisztórium kialakulása. 1668-1713-(1736)*. (Erdélyi Tudományos Füzetek 230.) Kolozsvár, 2000. p. 37.

A good example was John Czirka an Orthodox priest, who was imprisoned because of his anti-union actions. In the autumn of 1700 he was taken by the Transylvanian Reformed Council (Consistorium) of the to the Romanian Church in Hateg (Hátszeg).¹⁴ In 1699, the Parliament legislated in order to prevent the progress of religious union, in which proclaimed that in each location only a limited number of Greek Catholic priests could be free of tributes. It was also mentioned that the bishop is obligated to establish schools in Hateg (Hátszeg) and Fagaras (Fogaras) to improve morality.¹⁵ The consolidation of the religious union of the Romanians depended on the Bishop Athanasius. The most important task was to determine the Bishop's person and its church status: his legal recognition by the pope and his confirmation/ ratification by King Leopold I. (1640-1705).

For the second time was ordered by the Transylvanian Diet to examine the bishop's and the Romanian clergy's standpoint about the union. At the synod held on 5th September 1700 the Transylvanian Romanians had to decide that they accept or not the union with the Catholic Church or rather they fuse with the reformed church, or they remain in the Greek Orthodox Church. At the synod it was finally declared the union with the Catholic Church.¹⁶

The document was signed by 54 deans and 1563 priests. Athanasius was consecrated as catholic bishop on 5th of February 1701 at St. Anne's Catholic Church in Vienna, after he made the loyalty oath and creed.¹⁷ In spite of this Leopold I edited the second diploma on 19th March 1701, in which Athanasius was confirmed as bishop and the approval of Rome.¹⁸ The first chapter of the Diploma contained that the Greeks are equal with those of the Latin rite. In the second Chapter their priest are released from personal services. The third section declares that they are considered no longer a tolerated nation, but placed under the protection of the laws as equal citizens. The fourth Chapter disposed the removal of the Reformed catechism (Heidelberg Catechism) and of the customs influenced by Calvinism. The fifth Chapter was the most important. It subordinates the bishop of the Greek United Church to the archbishop of Esztergom. The 12th chapter restrained the rights of electing the bishop (which was declared by the parliament in 1579) in the sense that the clergy could only appoint three suitable individuals to this dignity, but the final nomination was made by the emperor.¹⁹ A few months later on 25th of October 1701 was inaugurated in Alba Iulia as

¹⁴ BETHLEN, Miklós: *Önéletírása*, op.cit. p. 882.

¹⁵ CSEREI, Mihály: *Históriája*. Pest 1807. p. 286.

¹⁶ Ioan Micu MOLDOVEANU: *Acte sinodali ale baserecei romane de Alb'a Iulia si Fagarasiu*. Vol. 11. Blasiu, 1872. p. 86.

¹⁷ Hevenesi Gyűjtemény kézírata, A 6825/III. jelzet. Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára. Egyetemi Könyvtár, Budapest.

¹⁸ Ungarische Akten Specialia. Fasc. 364. Transylvanica separata. Konv. A. Privilegien und Angelegenheiten der griechisch-katholischen Kirche der Rumanen in Siebenbürgen (1659) 1689-1754. I. Lipót rendelete a román unió ügyében az Erdélyi Guberniumhoz. (latin másolat). Kiadva: Joseph FIEDLER: Die Union der Walachen in Siebenbürgen unter Kaiser Leopold I. In: Sitzungserichte er philosph.hist. Classe der k. Akademie der Wissenschaften XXVII (1858) p. 381. HHSTA.

¹⁹ GYÁRFÁS, Elemér: *Bethlen Miklós kancellár*. op.cit. 1924. p. 133.

Bishop. The religious union based on the two diplomas edited by Leopold I ensured for the Romanian priests in Transylvanian equal rights with the Catholic clergy. The bishop was pontificated and the church was taken out of being tolerated. The students who wished to study got the possibility for further education at the Catholic universities. As regarding the denominational distribution of leading posts (Gubernium, municipalities) in the mentioned period could be perceived a slow rise of the Catholics.

In Transylvanian nobleman István Apor had a very substantial political career. From 1693 he was a councilor of the Gubernium, three years later treasurer, and in 1703 he became suprem commander in Transylvania. The rise of the Catholics in the political life grew stronger and stronger. This process could be detected in the changing of the chairman of the orders and royal estate. Laszlo Szekely had got his charge at the time of Prince Mihály Apafi. the 2nd After his death (1692), the Protestant Elek Bethlen took over this post. The protestant Samuel Keresztesi was nominated by the diet to fill the vacant post. The prince did not confirm him in this post, so after long debates the Catholic Stephen Hallernwas elected in 1699. In 1691 among the four public dignities in Transylvanian reformed and only the treasurer was Catholic, but in 1703 the Chancellor and the gubernátor were reformed, the general and president of the orders were Catholics. This was compensated by Miklós Bethlen and György Bánffy's public authorites. Their political and religious influence in Transylvania was significantly greater than Istvan Apor and Istvan Haller's. Thanks to Miklós Bethlen's tireless work the Gubernium and the Diet remained in majority reformed.

Conclusions

In the first period of the Habsburg domination in Transylvanian (1685-1703) the eminent representatives of the protestant churches were able to maintain the important political and administrative positions in spite of that the Catholics became stronger and stronger. In these positions they could effectively work and be on the lookout on maintaining the protestant traditions in Transylvania in the 17th century. The synod held on the 5th of September 1700 represented a turning point concerning the religious and political future of the Romanians in Transylvania. Their crucial decision was: do they accept the union with the Catholic Church or rather they fuse with the Reformed Church, or they remain in the Greek Orthodox Church. At the synod finally it was declared their union with the Catholic Church. The Romanian priests were granted equal rights with the Catholic priests. Their bishop was pontificated and got the rank and rights of nobility and their church was taken out among tolerated religions. The students who wished to study had the opportunities for further education at different Western European and Hungarian Catholic universities. The Romanian nation in Transylvania due to the religious union from a tolerated political - and legal status joined the nations which formed the state in the 18th century.