

A Special Form of Diplomatic Encounter: Negotiations in Constantinople (1625–1626)*

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In this article, I present a case study of a special form of diplomatic encounter that took place as secret negotiations between the resident ambassadors of France, England, Holland, and Venice and the Transylvanian envoys in Constantinople in 1625–1626 about a prospective alliance between Prince Gábor Bethlen and the anti-Habsburg powers during the Danish phase of the Thirty Years' War. My analysis of this special form of negotiation offers a comprehensive overview of the practices deriving from the most characteristic circumstances and setbacks of diplomatic activity in Constantinople, i.e., what solutions (if any) were found to resolve problems of precedence, information brokerage, poor economic conditions, and bribery and corruption. I address, furthermore, the private interests of the participating Transylvanian diplomats and consider the extent to which these interests corresponded to the interests of their sending polity and especially of Gábor Bethlen. My discussion sheds light on the ways in which, in general, everyday challenges and networks of relations in Constantinople influenced the diplomacy of small states in the Ottoman orbit, specifically Transylvania in this case, when entering into an alliance with major powers outside the bonds of their Ottoman tributary status.

Keywords: diplomacy, Constantinople, Gábor Bethlen, Principality of Transylvania, Ottoman Empire

An Ottoman Tributary State in the Thirty Years' War

The princes of Transylvania participated¹ in the Thirty Years' War on four occasions, belonging to different anti-Habsburg coalitions. Three of these interventions came about under the reign of Prince Gábor Bethlen (1580–1629, ruled from 1613), who from the first moment engaged in the conflict on the side

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1 On the different aspects, see the articles in the volume edited by Gábor Kármán, *The Princes of Transylvania*.

of the Winter King, Frederick of the Palatinate.² In his first military campaign, he entered the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary in September 1619, and in November, he participated in the unsuccessful siege of Vienna. By January 1620, the estates of the Kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia had entered into an alliance with those of Austria. Bethlen was elected king of Hungary in August 1620, but due to his allies' defeat at the Battle of White Mountain in November of the same year, he started negotiations with Ferdinand II and concluded peace by January 1622, renouncing his royal title. His second intervention was of a much smaller scale: although he constantly negotiated with Frederick through emigrants from the Palatinate, it was not possible to join his army with those of Frederick's generals after he reached as far as Moravia during his second military campaign of autumn 1623. Therefore, in May 1624, he concluded peace with Ferdinand II again.

His last effort to join an anti-Habsburg coalition was made in 1626, and this time the preparations seemed more fruitful than they had been three years earlier. An international coalition of Protestant powers to help the Winter King regain his throne and title was created in the form of the League of The Hague in December 1625 with the participation of England, Denmark, and Holland. The participants invited other interested states to join their coalition, such as the Principality of Transylvania and France. As for Transylvania, Prince Gábor Bethlen made a great step to become a member of the anti-Habsburg league by marrying Catherine, sister of the Elector of Brandenburg, in the spring of 1626.³ He started military maneuvers against Ferdinand II shortly afterward, in the summer of 1626, but joined the alliance officially only later, between November 1626 and February 1627 by the signature of the Treaty of Westminster and its ratification by Holland and Denmark.⁴ By this time, however, much to the disdain of his new allies, he had already concluded the peace of Pozsony/Bratislava with the emperor. As for France, despite the support it gave in the form of indirect warfare against the Habsburgs and the dynastic connection with England,⁵ both

2 On the history of the Rhine Palatinate at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, see Wiczorek, "Europäische Allianzen und pfälzische Katastrophen."

3 Deák, "The wedding festivities"; Kármán, "Bajor követ."

4 The texts of The Hague and Westminster treaties are found in Szilágyi, *Adalékok*, 78–83.

5 The overture with Protestant German princes was originally suggested by the superintendent of finances, the Marquis Charles de La Vieuville, and taken up by Cardinal Richelieu after his fall from grace, see Petitfils, *Louis XIII*, 352–69. The army of Frederick of the Palatinate, led by Ernst von Mansfeld, was financed together with England for a short period at the turn of 1624 and 1625, following from the marriage of Charles I to the sister of Louis XIII. Krüssmann, *Ernst von Mansfeld*, 542–44, 559–70.

confessional and internal political tensions, which reached their climax with the Huguenot uprising starting in 1625, prevented its adherence to the League of The Hague.⁶

Direct contacts between Transylvania and interested parties such as England, France, Venice, Holland, Sweden, and Denmark were maintained during the 1620s through formal and informal channels with the help of public and secret envoys. However, the Principality of Transylvania as a small state in the Ottoman orbit was not able to build anything resembling the networks of permanent embassies throughout Europe that the main players in international diplomacy had started to build. The only exception was Constantinople where, following from Transylvania's status as an Ottoman tributary, a resident envoy called a *kapitiba* was always present beside the occasional, more solemn embassies discussing current affairs or bringing the yearly tribute to the Porte.⁷ Constantinople had a special status in European and Transylvanian diplomacy as a center for information exchange,⁸ which in practice meant the permanent diplomatic presence of all major and minor powers. It is thus hardly surprising that, from the middle of the sixteenth century, negotiations at the Porte played a crucial role in maintaining contacts between the Western states and Transylvania.⁹ From the perspective of the historian, this means that, in contrast with the negotiations conducted sporadically through direct contacts, the practices and methods used during these negotiations and the personal interests of the individuals and polities involved can be more easily reconstructed and analyzed, since the negotiations themselves were continuous and some of the parties left behind a well-preserved corpus of diplomatic correspondence.

6 Sources concerning the reservations of Richelieu and French foreign policy towards the Protestant cause are published in Avenel, *Lettres*, 41, 49, 148–49, 198–99, 250–52. For a short summary of French foreign politics of the same period see Parker, *The Thirty Years' War*, 63–64, 69–76; Bireley, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years' War*, 63–64.

7 On Transylvania's representation in Constantinople in general, see Bíró, *Erdélyi követek; Kármán, "Sovereignty and Representation."*

8 In this respect, see Hiller, "Feind im Frieden."

9 Hungarian historiography traditionally focused on the details of Transylvanian contacts with England and the role played by English ambassadors at the Porte in their formation. On the period of the Long Ottoman War see Várkonyi, "Edward Barton." For a general overview, see Angyal, *Erdély*. On the era of Gábor Bethlen's rule, see Zarnóczki, "Anglia"; Kellner, "A tökéletes követ"; Kellner, "Interested affections." On the French contacts of Gábor Bethlen, see the works of Dénes Harai and Zsuzsanna Hámori Nagy.

Negotiating in Constantinople: Challenges and Solutions

Constantinople was the primary scene to reach one of Gábor Bethlen's main foreign political goals in the mid-1620s: the granting of permission by his Ottoman overlord to enter an alliance with anti-Habsburg European partners and engage in military actions within these frames. The resident ambassadors at the Porte were Philippe de Harlay, count of Césy¹⁰ of France, Sir Thomas Roe¹¹ of England, Cornelis Haga¹² of Holland, Zorzi Giustiniani¹³ of Venice, and László Balásházy¹⁴ of Transylvania. They worked together closely to this end in the summer of 1625. The participants worked diligently at the requests of their sovereigns, whose political interests happened to coincide with those of the prince of Transylvania for a short time. However, their collaboration was made difficult by problems of diplomatic precedence and questions of bribery and treason, and they ended with dubious results.

An investigation of the first factor (disputes over precedence and especially the competition between the French and English resident ambassadors) prompts reconsideration of the widely accepted view in the Hungarian secondary literature concerning the primary role of Thomas Roe in supporting Bethlen's efforts at the Porte. As it is well known, in addition to the diplomatic ranks of different envoys, the order in which Western powers established diplomatic contacts with the Ottoman Empire also had an informal impact on encounters among diplomats in Constantinople.¹⁵ It was the task of the permanent French ambassador to guard his own declared precedence, which was constantly challenged by the others. Césy was accused by his successor at the post of resident ambassador, Henry de Gournay, Count of Marcheville, of having allowed the Venetian *bailo* to proceed at his right and having let the ambassador of Holland to represent Transylvanian, Moldavian, Wallachian, Swedish, and Polish interests.¹⁶ On the eve of the negotiations with the Transylvanian resident, Césy was outraged by

10 Flament, "Philippe de Harlay"; Tongas, *Les relations*.

11 Richardson, *The Negotiations*.

12 Groot, *The Ottoman Empire*; Van der Sloot, *Cornelis Haga*

13 Óváry, *Oklevéltár*.

14 Bíró, *Erdély követei*, 121.

15 Venice and Genoa maintained commercial relationships with Constantinople from Byzantine times, whereas the official contracts regulating commerce with the Ottoman Empire were signed only later with France (1536), England (1580), Holland (1612). Charrière, *Négociations*; Testa, *Recueil*; Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations*, 264–73; Groot, "7. The Dutch Capitulation of 1612. Translation and Text."

16 "Mémoire sur l'ambassade de France à Constantinople en 1634." Ad, 133CP4, Fol. 239.

the cooperation never seen before of the Venetian bailo and Thomas Roe in some ecclesiastical appointments, which caused further disappointment when Giustiniani was not willing to pay him a visit together with the newly arrived Venetian ambassador, Simone Contarini, in April 1625.¹⁷

Temporary enmities and conflicts of interest gave rise to short-lived coalitions among the diplomatic players in Constantinople, while political confrontation was sometimes overridden by confessional interests. One of the most typical dividing lines was of a denominational nature. Over the course of the 1620s and 1630s, the opposing parties formed by the French and Habsburg resident ambassadors against those of England and Holland were trying to outbid one another in their negotiations with the Ottoman authorities in order to remove or keep in position the Greek patriarch of Constantinople, who was known to have accepted Protestant doctrines.¹⁸ In contrast, the long-lasting conflict between French and Habsburg interests on the European political scene made the ambassadors of the rival powers enemies, a situation in which English support was not always provided to the French despite the dynastic ties formed in 1625. Thomas Roe was equally missing personally from the coalition of the French, Venetian, and Dutch ambassadors, who conspired against the Spanish agent arriving at the Porte in the summer of 1625, as well as from their conferences with the Transylvanian resident during the same period.¹⁹ Roe's personal absence was not the consequence of the plague raging in Constantinople that summer but rather was part of a practice he followed to avoid Césy and thus answer the problem of rivalry. Césy also adopted this practice from the very beginning of Roe's mission: although he ordered twelve torchbearers to accompany Roe when entering Constantinople, they both avoided public encounters and met only on private occasions.²⁰

This throws into question Roe's primary role in the negotiations of 1625, which he contended was "the main motive and actor of the present affair."²¹ While Roe was constantly informed through the other residents' letters and acted

17 Césy to Ville-aux-Clercs, 10 April 1625. Ad, 133CP3, Fol. 138-139.

18 Harai, "Une chaire" ; Tongas, *Les relations*, 130–35 ; Van der Sloot, *Cornelis Haga*, 196–200.

19 Césy to Ville-aux-Clercs and to Louis XIII. 13 July and 10 August 1625. BnF, Ms. fr. 16150, Fol. 416 and 421. Roe was ordered to oppose the Spanish-Ottoman treaty in November 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 461–62.

20 Flament, "Philippe de Harlay," 242.

21 Roe complained about the consecutive visits of the Transylvanian agent Bornemisza at Césy's, as he believed that it was the French ambassador who first got to know the aim of the Transylvanian mission. Ambassador János Gáspár, however, denied the allegations and contended that Bornemisza and Césy were

in Bethlen's favor separately from the others, it is important to note that Césy was also frequently absent due to illness in the summer of 1625. For the most part, it was Haga, Giustiniani, and Balásházy, together with different interpreters (more on them later), who were present at the negotiations. Gábor Bethlen had already asked Ottoman permission to seek protection from the friends of the Porte and ally with them against the Habsburgs, but this first license was given only "by word of mouth."²² The aim of the meetings of summer 1625 was to redact the text of a document granting this permission in line with the interests of the involved parties, who insisted that their sovereigns could not be explicitly named therein. Balásházy showed the others a draft that would have licensed Bethlen's alliance with them, encouraged him to wage war on the emperor, and offered military aid for such an enterprise.²³ The final draft was redacted by the bailo of Venice.²⁴ Despite the joint efforts, all the resident ambassadors were left dissatisfied, as the document that was sent to the prince of Transylvania mentioned the kings of France and England, the Republic of Venice, and the Netherlands as friends of the Porte with whom the prince of Transylvania was allowed to unite, but it made no reference to him waging war on the emperor.²⁵

The solution to this failure lay in the combination of two characteristics of Ottoman diplomacy. The first was the prevalent tendency for the Ottoman power to include something different in the documents it issued than had been previously agreed on. The second can simply be called the practice of bribery when it came to any political decision in Constantinople, which meant various

long-time friends. Their friendship is analyzed later in the essay, but Bornemisza condemned Roe for his "superfluous ambition." Bornemisza to Césy, end of April 1628 [1625]. Harai, *Gabriel Bethlen*, 249–50.

22 Roe to Conway, 28 May 1625, Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 400–1; Césy to Louis XIII, 22 June 1625. BnF, Ms fr. 16150, Fol. 408r.

23 Césy to Louis XIII and to Ville-aux-Clercs. 10 and 26 August 1625. BnF, Ms. fr. 16150, Fol. 421–426. Giustiniani to the Doge and Senate. 27 August 1625. Óváry, *Oklevéltár*, 586–87.

24 "The letter to Gabor from the Grand Signor required to license his Union with the princes of Christendom, corrected and sent by the Venetian ambassador." August 27, 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 434–35. This version is mistaken for the final by Angyal, *Erdély politikai érintkezése*, 56–57. A comparison of Roe's and Giustiniani's correspondence reveals that the final document redacted by the Ottoman chancellery dates September 4, 1625. Roe to Conway, September 24, 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 439. Giustiniani to the Doge and Senate. September 7, 1625. Óváry *Oklevéltár*, 590.

25 Ibid., 591. Italian translation of the sultan's letter to Gábor Bethlen, March 1, 1625. Ibid., 593–94. In order not to raise suspicion if intercepted, the letter written in September was deliberately dated earlier than the peace of Gyarmat concluded by the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires in May 1625 (but never ratified by the Ottoman party).

sums of money and gifts²⁶ for officeholders of every rank, from interpreters to scribes at the chancellery. In the particular case of Bethlen's license, the meaning was not lost in translation, but the ambassadors' refusal to pay the sums demanded by the Ottoman interpreter and head of scribes for the correct formulation of the text might have contributed to the problem. The direct approach of the chancellery would not necessarily have resulted in the right formulation of any document, however. For example, bribes paid to scribes resulted in only slight changes in the text of the *'ablname* sent from the Porte to Poland in October 1623.²⁷ No less could have been expected in the much smaller case of redacting a letter of permission, even if the sums requested had been paid.

When discussing the details of the text of the license, the resident ambassadors could count on their interpreters and to some extent themselves. Césy was sometimes represented by an interpreter named Olivier.²⁸ Balásházy, who spoke Latin (and probably Italian as well) translated some letters himself. Indeed, he considered it a dire mistake that Cornelis Haga “involved those beys” whose ignorance he blamed for the questionable outcome.²⁹ He must have been referring to Grand Dragoman Zülfikâr Ağa,³⁰ the Hungarian-born Ottoman interpreter employed by the Transylvanian embassy permanently during the first half of the seventeenth century, and Yusuf Ağa,³¹ who as *chiaux* served as an intermediary between Transylvania and the Porte. It was the *kaymakam* who ordered Zülfikâr to translate all documents brought by the Transylvanian envoy³² and thus it seems that the dragoman's presence in Transylvanian affairs could not be ignored in this case, as he emerged as some kind of expert on the region at the Porte.³³ Haga wrote to Roe upon first hearing Bethlen's demand about the license

26 On the different types of gifts that were not considered bribes see Papp, “Corruption, Bribe, or just Presents?”

27 The Ottoman practice of changing the text of the agreed *'abdnames*, with reference to the connection with the Habsburgs are described through the example of Polish ambassadors to the Porte Krzysztof Zbaraski and Krzysztof Serebkowicz in 1622–1623. Grygorieva, “Performative Practice,” 236–40.

28 Most probably a member of the dragoman family Olivieri who worked for both the French and the Venetian embassy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance*, 32.

29 Balásházy to Roe, September 17, 1625. TNA, SP 97/11, Fol. 81. I would like to thank Gábor Kármán for providing me with the photographs taken of the letters kept at the National Archives and found on the basis of research by Áron Zarnóczy.

30 The famous case related to the difference between the Ottoman and Latin versions of the peace of Zsitvatorok (1606) can also be connected to him. Kármán, “Grand Dragoman.”

31 B. Szabó, “A hatalom csúcsain,” 27.

32 János Gáspár arrived in April 1625.

33 On this and on his becoming an expert on the northeastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, see Kármán, “Grand Dragoman.”

that the three of them (himself, Giustiniani, and Césy) thought it appropriate to entrust Zülfikâr with the negotiations concerning the license and gave their word to pay him one hundred thalers each if the business was finished according to the expectations of the prince. Still, they did not find him trustworthy. Balásházy, however, convinced them that Bethlen had already rewarded him with a carriage and horses for his services.³⁴ After the fiasco, by emphasizing Haga's role in requesting Zülfikâr's help, Balásházy, as a representative of the Transylvanian embassy, probably wanted to dilute the blame for the disastrous outcome, which he saw as a consequence of having involved the grand dragoman.

Further complications arose from the fact that Zülfikâr and Yusuf, with Olivier as a witness, promised the head of scribes (*reisulkuttab*), who was acquaintance of theirs, another four hundred thalers in August 1625 when visiting him at his house. Balásházy offered to pay this latter sum in the name of his master, with the ambassadors paying their share of the other four hundred.³⁵ However, the Venetian and Dutch ambassadors informed Roe about their decision that they would only pay Zülfikâr once the business of the permission had been completed to their satisfaction. They explained their refusal with the contention that they had not been authorized by their sovereigns to make such payments.³⁶ The resident ambassadors do not seem to have had much faith in Zülfikâr's good intentions concerning the second four hundred thalers either, and they seem to have thought that he wanted it for himself. Sooner or later, however, and against their better judgment,³⁷ they all paid their original share of one hundred each in exchange for what they called the services of Zülfikâr in general.³⁸ The first one to pay was Roe, and Balásházy was clever enough to play on the sentiments of competition among the ambassadors when praising him as the one who "not only superseded but defeated the others." Upon hearing of Roe's contribution, the others also started to pay, first, some smaller portions

34 Balásházy argued that they could make use of Zülfikâr even against the Spanish treaty. Haga to Roe, August 3, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 46.

35 Balásházy to Roe, TNA SP 97/11, Fol 59v.

36 Giustiniani and Haga to Roe, August 23 and 29, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 66–67, 72–73.

37 "I cannot reasonably refuse, if you have already either acquainted him [Zülfikâr], or the Agent [Balásházy], with your purpose" versus "such small sums are cast away." Roe the Unknown, July 26, 1625. TNA SP 97/11, Fol. 47. "Havendo io consentito, quasi contra la mia intenzione di dar [...] Cente piastre" versus "non havendo nissun ordine di spender un aspro." Césy to Roe, 5 August 1625. TNA SP 97/11, Fol. 59r.

38 Giustiniani to the Doge and Senate, 1 December 1625. Óváry *Oklevéltár*, 607.

to Zülfikâr, and some money was even offered to Yusuf to compensate for his journey to present the letter of license to the prince.³⁹

As noted above, Haga, Giustiniani, and Césy originally insisted on waiting until the business had been successfully conducted in a manner that would meet the expectations of the prince of Transylvania before making any payments. Ultimately, the matter was indeed resolved and met the prince's expectations. No matter how much the ambassadors complained that the finalized document lacked any encouragement to Bethlen to wage war on the emperor but mentioned their masters,⁴⁰ Balásházy argued that Gábor Bethlen was pleased with the letter of license. All the more so, as he indicated that Bethlen had not made the request for permission “out of necessity but for his wellbeing,”⁴¹ which corresponded to his original request mentioning “security and caution.”⁴² It can also be said that the original draft was provided by Bethlen to Balásházy, and the Ottoman chancellery returned to this version from the one that the ambassadors presented.⁴³ This suggests that the aim of Bethlen in the summer of 1625 was to be permitted by his Ottoman overlord to adhere to the League of The Hague in formation, without actually starting any military maneuvers yet, for which he first needed to have his conditions fulfilled by his future allies.

Without elaborating on the details of the preliminaries of such a treaty, it is clear that they were discussed primarily by envoys who were sent directly to the involved parties, of which the ambassadors at the Porte knew very little. In this respect, Constantinople was a scene of secondary importance, as none of the resident ambassadors at the Porte had received any authorization to conclude a treaty of alliance with the Transylvanian envoys. Although Bethlen informed his emissaries in Constantinople about the preliminaries and sent them copies of his main stipulations to be discussed with the representatives of the anti-Habsburg party, several factors hindered the development of such negotiations at the

39 Balásházy to Roe, September 23 and 28, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 84 and 86. See also: Angyal, *Erdély politikai érintkezései*, 56–57. Haga to Roe, October 10 and 19, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 103 and 108.

40 Giustiniani to the Doge and Senate. September 7, 1625. Óváry *Oklevéltár*, 591. “That his majestie is therein named, is against my will, and the like error against all the other ambassadors.” Roe to Conway, September 19, 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 437. Roe's complaints to Balásházy, September 6, 1625, TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 74.

41 “Nam Serenissimus Princeps noster voluit habere illas literas ab Imperatore non de necesse sed tantum de bene esse. Sua Serenitas illis est contenta [...]” Balásházy to Roe, September 17, 1625, TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 81. Quoted by Roe to Conway, September 24, 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 439.

42 “Sua sicurta e cautione.” Haga to Roe, August 3, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 46.

43 Roe to Conway, September 19, 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 437.

Porte. Apart from the great distances to be covered and the slow pace at which anything could be delivered using postal services (of which the ambassadors continuously complained), the presence of a traitor among the members of the Transylvanian delegation also caused many a problem during the crucial year of 1625.

The suspicion that there was a traitor in their midst arose first among the envoys in March 1625, when Césy, Roe, and Haga noticed the close contact between Balásházy and the imperial resident. Roe suspected that Balásházy was influenced in this not by any duplicity on Bethlen's part, but rather because of his own status as a member of the Catholic fold. They also heard rumors according to which Balásházy had displeased his lord and would be replaced. To answer the challenge of possible information leakage, they decided to write separately to the prince and forwarded the copy of the sultan's letter written to him by their own secret courier.⁴⁴ At the beginning of 1626, Césy wrote about Balásházy's treason as a fact and used it as a pretext to send his other interpreter, Tomaso Fornetti,⁴⁵ to Transylvania with instructions he believed to be in accordance with the direction of French foreign politics. I discuss this in more detail later in the essay, but is worth quoting Césy's complaint that he could not communicate with the ambassador of the prince without the resident being present; and when he was not there, the ambassador, who spoke neither Latin nor Italian, turned for help to the kaymakam's domestic interpreters, which had even more disastrous consequences from the point of view of information leakage.⁴⁶ Roe had a more balanced opinion and admitted that he had not managed, with his inquiries, to discover the identity of the traitor. Indeed, he stood by Balásházy, saying that he "hath suffered much affliction," but nothing had been proven against him, and he might well have been wrongly accused.⁴⁷

44 Césy to Ville-aux-Clercs, March 4, 1625. BnF, Ms fr 16150, Fol. 379. Roe to Conway, March 1, 1624 [1625]. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 356.

45 Member of the dragoman family Fornetti of Genoese origin, who were employed by the French embassy during the early modern era. Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance*, 53–54.

46 The mentioning of Latin and Italian in the context of the resident implies that Balásházy spoke both languages. Césy's detailed account of the circumstances of his negotiations with the Transylvanian envoys is contained in his letter to Louis XIII, January 12, 1626. Ad, 133CP3, Fol. 193–194. The Transylvanian ambassador mentioned in Césy's account was Pál Keresztesi, who delivered the annual tribute to the Porte. Szilágyi, *Levelek és acták*, 436–37, 633.

47 Roe to Bethlen, December 27, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 170. Published in Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 478–79. See also Szilágyi, *Erdélyország története*, 154.

Balásházy's perspective can be reconstructed with the help of his letters. In August 1625, the ambassadors confronted him with their finding that either he or the interpreter of the Transylvanian embassy was a traitor, as one of them had passed on all the secrets to the imperial party. In order to prove that he always spoke the truth, Balásházy offered to have Olivier translate all the documents that the prince had recently sent to the Porte and that had been read to the kaymakam, as well as the reply that was going to be sent in a few days. He also offered to investigate the possibility that perhaps a domestic servant or the interpreter was the traitor.⁴⁸ It is worth considering who this interpreter (not to be confused with the Dragoman Zülfikâr) might have been. The sources reveal that he was a man by the name of István Futó (referred to as "Stephanus alumnus" by Balásházy), who had studied at Bethlen's expense in Constantinople to become a Turkish scribe. Although there exists no information concerning when he entered into service, he might have taken up some tasks of interpretation during the pourparlers of the resident ambassadors. Habsburg diplomatic correspondence reveals that Futó was able to transfer information about Transylvanian affairs to the Habsburg embassy for years before 1626 when he finally left the Porte.⁴⁹

It is hard to determine the extent to which Balásházy was involved in this affair, but his silence could be interpreted as telling. There is no sign of any further mention of the issue of treason or of any investigation in his letters for about half a year, which suggests that he did not really launch any inquisitions or if he did, he concealed the findings. By December 1625, it was too late. He had lost all credit in the eyes of the resident ambassadors except for Roe, whose trust he especially held dear. A letter written to Roe reveals that both of them considered Yusuf Ağa the source of rumors concerning Balásházy's treason. When the resident confronted him with this in the presence of the Transylvanian ambassador Pál Keresztesi and the agent Bornemisza, Yusuf denied ever having said anything against him, but he said he had heard talk of István Futó having given Transylvanian letters to the Habsburg resident.⁵⁰ After this letter was written to Roe, Balásházy disappeared almost entirely from the sources, but he remained for eight more months at the Porte, probably hiding in shame. It was only in June 1626 that the prince appointed Tamás Borsos as a new

48 Balásházy to Roe, August 28, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 78.

49 On the profession of Turkish scribes in Transylvanian service and with reference to Futó see Kármán, "Translation" 262.

50 Balásházy to Roe, December 13, 1625. TNA SP 97/11 Fol. 162.

resident and dismissed Balásházy for “certain reasons.”⁵¹ For the last time, Roe stood by his colleague (or possibly friend) when he wrote a letter of testimony to Gábor Bethlen calling Balásházy the prince’s “true and faythfull servant,” whose abilities he found exceptional. Roe’s letter also reveals that the suspicions that fell on Balásházy “proceeded from an enemye” and that “Stephano” finally fled, for which Balásházy accused himself.⁵²

Contrary to Roe’s testimony, Borsos, Balásházy’s successor at the post of resident, reported that Balásházy, who had been condemned by everyone, “was not His Highness’ orator but that of the German emperor.” Furthermore, against Balásházy’s objections, he was only willing to take over the building of the Transylvanian embassy with an inventory, as he claimed to have found at least two hundred thalers worth of damage caused by his predecessor.⁵³ Balásházy was indeed imprisoned in the summer of 1627, and the amounts of money promised by him to several officers (including one hundred thalers for the head of scribes and a carriage to someone unknown) were ordered by the prince to be paid from his own holdings.⁵⁴ Incidents of residents at the Porte going bankrupt were not uncommon. Césy was also accused by his successor, Marcheville, of causing damage to the building of the ambassadorial residence,⁵⁵ and when Marcheville himself went into bankruptcy and fell into disgrace, Césy was still present in Constantinople and ready to continue his mission as resident ambassador, as he had not been able to leave the city between 1631 and 1634 because of his unpaid debts.⁵⁶

Harsh financial conditions, accumulation of debts, and unpaid salaries in the middle of the monetary crisis of the era affected larger and smaller players alike,⁵⁷ while definitely posing greater problems for such minor characters as Balásházy or even the Turkish scribe Futó. One cannot help but suspect this

51 Szilágyi, “Levelek és acták,” 656.

52 Roe to Bethlen, August 17, 1626. TNA SP 97/12 Fol. 153.

53 Borsos to István Bethlen, Gábor Bethlen’s brother, August 18, 1626. Gergely, “Adalék ‘Bethlen Gábor és a Porta’ című közleményhez. Harmadik és befejező közlemény,” 610–11.

54 Gábor Bethlen to Borsos, July 7, 1627. Szilágyi, *Bethlen Gábor fejedelem kiadatlan politikai levelei*, 445.

55 “Mémoire sur l’ambassade de France à Constantinople en 1634.” Ad, 133CP4, Fol. 239.

56 Hamilton, “To Divest the East.” Their intrigues are mentioned in the French traveler Jean-Baptist Tavernier’s travelogue. Everling and Máté, “*Úton Konstantinápolyba*,” 307.

57 For a comparative overview of the financial conditions and salaries of ambassadors in Constantinople based on the example of Césy and Balásházy, see Hámori Nagy, “A konstantinápolyi követek megélhetése.” On everyday life in Constantinople, see Mantran, *La vie quotidienne*. On the mid-1620s financial crisis and Bethlen’s solution, see Zimányi, “Bethlen Gábor gazdaságpolitikája”; Buza, “Pénzforgalom és árszabályozás.”

is what may have driven them to sell the property of the embassy or even some precious information. In a letter written by Futó in 1624, he desperately begged for money from his relative, the secretary of the prince, as he had none left. He was afraid of an approaching peril and said that if he did not get help soon, his soul would be corrupted.⁵⁸ This suggests a connection between his financial crisis and his passing on diplomatic documents to the imperial resident, which started in late 1624 or early 1625. As for Balásházy, no indications of any such correlation have been found in the sources so far, but he also might have been involved in the scheme to some extent. He otherwise seems to have been a talented diplomat who spoke languages, could argue convincingly, and navigated comfortably among the authorities and officials at the Porte, but his last effort to defend himself from the charges he faced was unsuccessful. In the long run, however, this incident did not break his career as a diplomat entirely, as he represented Prince György Rákóczi I as a member of his delegation at the negotiations concerning the Treaty of Eperjes/Prešov with Ferdinand II in 1633.⁵⁹

The Impact of Networks of Relations on Negotiating in Constantinople

The discussion so far has touched on several practices used in negotiations in Constantinople and the circumstances surrounding the negotiations. In the last section of this essay, I concentrate on how the resident ambassadors at the Porte reflected on the fact that the negotiations of a treaty of alliance with the prince of Transylvania were basically impossible in Constantinople. I also consider why, if they were aware of this fact, some of them still pursued these efforts without any authorization from home. As I will show, apart from practical reasons, this might have been due to interpersonal relationships similar to the apparent friendship between Roe and Balásházy. Césy's friendship with the Transylvanian nobleman Ferenc Bornemisza, Bethlen's agent at the Porte accompanying Transylvanian ambassadors to Constantinople three times in 1625–1626, can also be traced as a factor in the background.

There is a difference between the opinions of the representatives of the two greatest powers involved, that is the resident ambassadors of England and France, about maintaining contacts with Bethlen through Constantinople.

58 Futó to Péter Sári, October 28, 1624. Gergely, "Adalék 'Bethlen Gábor és a Porta' című közleményhez. Első közlemény," 467.

59 Frankl, "Az eperjesi béke," 195.

Roe, though having spent less time in Constantinople than Césy, warned the Transylvanian ambassador János Gáspár in May 1625 that a treaty should not be concluded at the Porte, as the sole ambassador of England or France could not take upon himself the diverse interests of so many contracting parties, while the grand signor himself might have wanted to be admitted to such a league.⁶⁰ He also sensed that Bethlen “did only entertheyne us, and that his resolutions depended upon some other place.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, he was well aware of the significance of Bethlen’s prospective joining the anti-Habsburg coalition with respect to Frederick of the Palatinate and his wife, Elisabeth Stuart, so he related everything in connection with his moves and underlined the importance of winning him for the common cause. Both James I and Charles I were, however, unwilling to take up diplomatic relationships with the prince of Transylvania directly before the end of 1625, when the English party, partly at Roe’s urging, ultimately considered Constantinople quite a detour for correspondence with the prince.⁶²

As for Césy, a change of attitude can be noticed when considering his negotiations with Transylvanian envoys about the preliminaries of a future treaty. When giving an audience to Gáspár in May 1625, he showed a reserve similar to Roe’s and suggested that these matters should directly be discussed with the French court through the envoy who had already visited the prince.⁶³ The ambiguity of his instructions of October 1625, together with the delay caused by slow delivery by the post services and the information leakage to the Habsburg resident, however, pushed Césy to get in touch with Bethlen directly through his interpreter. In a letter of October 5 which Césy received in early 1626, Louis XIII wanted a confident person, i.e., Césy, to communicate his intentions regarding the preliminaries with the Transylvanian resident at the Porte. On October 30, he warned his ambassador to accept all propositions of a league from the other interested parties or from the Transylvanian resident but only to inform the sovereign and give an opinion about it.⁶⁴ By the time this

60 Roe to Conway, May 5, 1625. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 391–92.

61 Roe to Conway, June 8, 1625. *Ibid.*, 400.

62 On the changes in the English attitude towards Bethlen and Roe’s efforts to bring the two parties closer, see Zarnóczki, “Anglia és Bethlen Gábor,” 144–47; Kellner, “A tökéletes követ,” 105–12; Kellner, “Affectionate interests,” 165–82. See also Angyal, *Erdély politikai*, 39–40, 52–53.

63 Césy to Louis XIII, 5 June 1625. BnF, Ms. fr. 16150, Fol. 404. The French agent called Sebastien de Breyant de Montalto reached the princely court of Transylvania at the turn of 1624 and 1625. Hámori Nagy, “Francia követ,” 70.

64 Louis XIII to Césy, October 5 and 30, 1625. BnF, Ms fr 16156, Fol. 541 and 558.

latter message reached Césy at the beginning of February 1626, he had already sent Fornetti to Transylvania with the king's propositions, as he did not dare share them either with the resident Balásházy or the ambassador Keresztesi in December 1625, as the imperial party had already learned of some of the details.

As mentioned in his letter to Louis XIII, Césy's other reason for sending his own courier to Transylvania was his close connection with his friend and confidant Ferenc Bornemisza who, according to his instructions given to Fornetti, was the only person the interpreter should open up to when arriving at the princely court. Césy told Fornetti to let Bornemisza and Bornemisza only translate his instructions and to deal with Bethlen secretly, solely in Bornemisza's presence.⁶⁵ Ferenc, the Francophile scion of the wealthy Bornemisza family of Kolozsvár/Cluj most probably stayed for some time in France after studying in Olmütz/Olomouc and Freiburg. He and his brother László were employed in diplomatic missions under the reign of Gábor Bethlen, and they both traveled to the Porte several times, László in the 1610s and Ferenc in the 1620s.⁶⁶ Ferenc Bornemisza stayed by the side of János Gáspár in April–June 1625, when Bethlen's demands concerning the letter of permission and the first version of the preliminaries were declared to the resident ambassadors.⁶⁷ He is also mentioned together with Keresztesi in Balásházy's letter to Roe about Yusuf's allegations, which suggests that he was also present at the Porte in December 1625.⁶⁸ He returned as Bethlen's special emissary in May–June 1626 with the prince's approval of the conditions sent by Césy through Fornetti.⁶⁹

This last mission means that Bethlen granted what Césy had requested through Fornetti. Conforming to his demand, he delegated Bornemisza with credentials to the Porte to address the preliminaries of the treaty. The prince did so even though he had reservations about and expressed his distrust in Bornemisza

65 Fornetti's instructions, Szilágyi, "Levelek és acták," 644–47.

66 Dáné, "Egy cubicularius klán," 81, 88. Harai, "A francia–erdélyi," 43.

67 Bethlen to Césy, March 30, 1625. Szilágyi, "Levelek és acták," 628–29. Bornemisza's letters written to Césy during this journey and in Constantinople are mistakenly bound with Césy's correspondence of 1628, but the events referred to in Bornemisza's letters (such as setting the Transylvanian tribute to a lower amount) prove that they were written in 1625. Bornemisza to Césy, April 8 and 20 and late April 1628 [1625]. BnF, Ms fr. 15584, 72–74. Published with the wrong date by both Harai, *Gabriel Bethlen*, 247–50 and Hudița, *Recueil*, 48.

68 Although Césy does not mention him there, he might have been the special emissary to the Porte mentioned by Keresztesi during his audience with Césy. Césy to Ville-aux-Clercs, December 2, 1625. BnF, Ms Fr 16150, Fol. 443.

69 Césy to Louis XIII, May 18, 1626. BnF, Ms fr 16150, Fol. 508–11.

to the ambassador of Brandenburg present at his court in April 1626.⁷⁰ The reasons behind Bethlen's distrust are yet unknown. He may have thought that Bornemisza was involved in the scandalous case of Futó and Balásházy, who were still at the Porte at the time. In any case, by assigning Bornemisza the task of negotiating in Constantinople, Bethlen was able to remove someone he did not trust from his court. All the more so, as the Porte was a scene of only secondary importance with regard to the preliminaries of an anti-Habsburg treaty, and the prince continued to discuss the details through agents sent directly to the powers involved. When the direct negotiations reached a dead end with France in the middle of 1626 (just before Bethlen entered into war against Ferdinand II), Bornemisza was withdrawn from Constantinople. This, together with the news that Bethlen had directly sent his courier to France without informing his emissary in Constantinople earlier,⁷¹ was as much of a surprise for Bornemisza as for Césy and Fornetti, and it must have contributed to the development of feelings of mutual dissatisfaction. The Bornemisza family's hatred of Bethlen culminated in 1629 when they "no longer wanted the race of the prince."⁷² Still, their real loss of influence came about under the reign of György Rákóczi I, as a result of which Ferenc moved from Transylvania to the Kingdom of Hungary in the second half of the 1630s.⁷³ As for the relationship between the Bornemiszas and the dragoman family Fornetti, it survived until at least 1629, when Francesco Fornetti was involved in the correspondence and financial transactions between the Transylvanian brothers and the merchant Jean Scaich of Galata.⁷⁴

After Fornetti's fruitless mission in Transylvania in the spring of 1626, Césy also felt deceived and frustrated to see that the negotiations of a treaty of alliance were going on, but not through his mediation, and his role had been limited to that of an informant.⁷⁵ The fact that he had been personally misled probably contributed to his loss of faith in Bethlen's good will. When he learned of the instructions of the direct envoy sent by Bethlen to France, Césy considered some of the points lies. Furthermore, by judging the permission acquired in 1625 as

70 "1626. Conferenz mit dem Herzog von Siebenbürgen wegen vor seyender Confoederation im Haag" Marczali, "Újabb regesták," 794; Szabó, "Bethlen Gábor házassága," 645.

71 See Hámori Nagy, "Transylvania and France," 212–13.

72 Extraict d'une lettre du Sieur de Bornemisse à l'ambassadeur de France à Constantinople. September 17, 1629. Published by Hudíța, *Recueil*, 47.

73 Dáné, "Egy cubicularius," 88.

74 Scaich to one of the Bornemiszas, June 15, 1629. Archivele Naționale ale României, Direcția Județeană Cluj, Colecția Sándor Mike, No. 435.

75 Césy to Louis XIII, June 2, 1626. BnF, Ms fr 16150, Fol. 508–11, 516.

adequate, he was willing to obtain Bethlen's next license of summer 1626 to wage war on the emperor only half-heartedly, as he did not trust that Bethlen really wanted to attack Ferdinand II.⁷⁶ This time it was indeed Thomas Roe who played the primary role in convincing Ottoman dignitaries to give Bethlen permission to enter into war and in appointing auxiliary troops for him.⁷⁷ From the perspective of French diplomacy, it was right before the beginning of the military campaign of the prince of Transylvania that the court also questioned Bethlen's sincerity, but Louis XIII insisted that Césy continue to keep in touch with him in the most polite way.⁷⁸

Conclusions

As a comparison of the relevant diplomatic correspondence reveals, the negotiations over procurement from the Ottomans of permission for Gábor Bethlen to join the anti-Habsburg powers and the preliminary discussions of the details of a future treaty were marked by unique collaboration among otherwise unfriendly participants. This comparison also reveals, however, that this initially fruitful collaboration, which essentially resulted from a temporary overlap of the political interest of the participating powers, was limited by several down-to-earth factors, such as the sums demanded by the Ottoman interpreter and head of scribes and the information leakage to the Habsburg resident. European ambassadors in Constantinople relied mainly on information coming from the prince of Transylvania when intervening on his behalf at the Porte. This is probably why Gábor Bethlen was content with the resulting document of license, even though the resident ambassadors who had worked to obtain it were not, as their rulers were mentioned in the text redacted in the autumn of 1625. French diplomatic circles became definitively estranged from Transylvania by the summer of 1626 because of the recurring question of the permission given by the Ottomans, which, however, did not mean the end of collaboration with the English and Dutch resident ambassadors.

From the perspective of Transylvanian diplomacy, Constantinople was a scene of primary importance concerning issues related to its status as an Ottoman tributary state, which in this case was the question of obtaining the aforementioned permission. Although the resident ambassadors tried to help

76 Césy to Louis XIII, July 12 and 26, 1626. BnF, Ms. fr. 16150, Fol. 534–35, 547–48.

77 Roe to Conway, July 31, 1626. Richardson, *The Negotiations*, 536–38; Angyal, *Erdély politikai*, 62.

78 Louis XIII to Césy, 14 May 1627. Published by Hámori Nagy, "Francia követ," 82–83.

get such documents, they were mostly unaware of their real importance from the point of view of Bethlen as vassal of the sultan. As a scene of secondary importance, the Porte emerged merely as a place to exchange information on the preliminaries of a future treaty of alliance, but one that made it impossible to conclude anything due to the lack of detailed instructions and the information leakage to the imperial party. While negotiating his joining the anti-Habsburg coalition created in the form of the League of the Hague in December 1625, Gábor Bethlen paid attention and formally demanded the permission of his Ottoman overlord. His rhetoric during the Constantinople negotiations presented him as an influential player in international politics but also made it quite clear that his wellbeing depended upon the permission of his Ottoman suzerain. It was partly this ambiguity that can be blamed for the loss of trust among French diplomats in the Transylvanian prince's goodwill and the termination of their negotiations. Finally, this was complemented by the fact that the personal initiatives of the resident ambassadors, which were in part responses to practical challenges and derived in part from their rivalry, their sense of self-importance, and their personal relationships, were doomed to fail, which might have also contributed to their loss of faith in Bethlen's sincerity regarding his proposed aims.

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