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Rákóczi's Insurrection and Minorities in Hungary

“Everybody knows that laws divide the Hungarian nation into four orders. For the people, after having taken advantage of the edict proclaiming a crusade and rebelling against their nobles, were subdued, crushed, and pushed into so severe a subjugation and the nobles gained so unlimited powers over their serfs that, under law, the serf has no other possession but his own soul. Part of the people, made up of Slavs and Ruthenians, endure under this yoke rather patiently, but the Hungarian serfs hate their nobles and the whole nobility so badly that it seems they want nothing else but to take revenge for their lost freedom.”¹

The two sentences quoted from *Emlékiratok* [Memoirs] are among the rare comments of Rákóczi, prince of Transylvania, on the ethnic differences in Hungary. As it is widely known, great numbers of Hungarian serfs, whom he accused of thirst for revenge against their masters, joined the insurrection of Rákóczi, which could thus evolve into the movement of widest support in Hungarian society ever. Prior to it, the feudal and independence struggles of the 17th century, which were usually launched and led by the princes of Transylvania, managed to mobilise privileged layers of society but not the serfs and peasants who had been deprived of their rights. Some 150 years after the insurrection of Rákóczi, the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49 mobilised them as well but could not win the support of the ethnic groups. As opposed to that, Rákóczi's insurrection roused the sympathy of the non-Hungarian population of the homeland as well, the majority of whom supported him in arms (with the exception of the Southern Slavs). Hungarian historiography does not question the fact of the joining of forces within society, although its development was far from being a smooth process, and not only because of the above mentioned reason, that is, the hatred of serfs towards their masters. As we might know, it was not a serfs' rebellion Rákóczi wanted to lead. During his exile in Poland, he asked contribution from Louis XIV so that he could pay for a mercenary army. Upon his return, the fact that masses joined his movement was a surprise to him. His first reaction was more of a disappointment than satisfaction. He made comments about the first ones who joined him both in his *Vallomások* [Confessions] and in his *Memoirs*. In the latter, he wrote: “Instead of five hundred, there were hardly two hundred footsoldiers there, equipped with inferior guns and fifty horsemen with them...”² The prince did not have confidence in the combat efficiency of undisciplined serf troops. At the same time, he feared – and

¹ II. Rákóczi Ferenc *Emlékiratai* [Memoirs of Ferenc Rákóczi Ferenc II.]. Bp. 1948. 63.

² II. Rákóczi, Ferenc: *Fejezetek a Vallomásokból* [Chapters from the Confessions]. Bukarest, 1977. 223. – *Emlékiratok* 32–33.

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the first weeks of his movement justified this fear – that the participation of the serfs would be an obstacle in winning the support of the nobles.

Yet, the fast expansion of his army had positive outcomes. Those in the border castles, the privileged military orders, and the light cavalry, which had been so successfully used in the war against the Turkish, joined the cause of Rákóczi in large masses. This helped convince Louis XIV about the seriousness of the movement, and provided sufficient evidence demanded by the king prior to considering any further financial support. What is more, due to his rapidly increasing forces, Rákóczi could argue that he would need to hire less foreign soldiers, meaning that he would need smaller sums of money. His first military successes dismantled the reservations of the nobles as well. The counties of North-eastern Hungary joined his movement almost in an organised manner.

Despite the wide-ranged support, the feudal perception of the age prevailed in the military and political organisations (institutions) of Rákóczi's war of independence. Those who joined him could expect a position in the movement that corresponded to their place in the hierarchy of feudal society and state administration. His generals and chief officials were members of the aristocracy, and people of non-noble origin could only make it into lower offices. Rákóczi remarked at the joining of Count Antal Esterházy, imperial lieutenant-general, to the movement: "I made him general because of his background." Sándor Károlyi became general a few days after his joining as well. He was ordered to "lead the Jazygians and Cumanians", even though he had "never served [in the army] before." Rákóczi believed that only the authority of the nobles could command forces made up of serfs; this was the reason why he wanted nobles to be his officers. This idea could have been strengthened by the fact that noble leadership had no real alternative back then, since the nobles had adequate military and administrative experience only. Neither the serfs nor the burghers had had a chance to acquire the knowledge needed in warfare or to perform the duties of a public office. Social prejudice played its role as well. The nobles who joined expected a leading role corresponding to their social standing. Rákóczi himself always emphasised his noble ties, although in his writings he insisted on having launched the movement for the sake of the oppressed peoples. In the case of an envoy, a certain János Majos, who was sent to him in Poland, he found it important to remark that he was a "brave, yet poor nobleman."³

Unlike the social standing of the participants, ethnic belonging is rarely mentioned in the records of Rákóczi or the historiography of future generations. The prince, who found it so important to stress that nobles joined his movement, remained silent about the ethnicity of his supporters. Contemporary sources found it important to allude to the differences when it came to the discussion of those who opposed the

³ We have to add that a few pages later, the *Memoirs* inform us that Rákóczi was not pleased with János Majos after all, for "he sought to command them [the peasants] by the privilege of his nobility; yet, he was a drunkard, an insolent and unsociable young man. Therefore, he was not suited for this position." *Ibid.* 33.

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movement. It was for this reason that the Serbs play a particular role in the sources. The ethnic attachment of those who joined Rákóczi remained usually in obscurity. The primary reason for this is that a feudal conception of the nation prevailed in those times, and it associated the nation with the nobility. Therefore, it considered all of the population *Hungarus*, regardless of ethnicity and mother tongue. Following the expulsion of the Turks, the bulk of the nobility in Hungary consisted of Hungarians indeed. The Croatian nobility was an exception to this. However, the division of the 150 years that followed, the Turkish expansion, the significant wars, and the continuous incursions and plundering even in peaceful periods, had changed the ethnic composition of the country at the expense of the Hungarians. For the ethnicities living in the mountainous regions of the border regions were not so affected by the Ottoman conquest, and their settlements could pull through damages of war more easily as well. At the beginning of the 18th century, probably only about half of the 4 million people in Hungary were Hungarians. We have no direct data on the ethnic division of this population.⁴ We know its economic activities and social structure better.

The economic activity of the majority of the nationalities in Hungary was similar to that of the Hungarians, which reduced the likelihood of conflicts. Most of the Slovaks and Ruthenians were peasants who tried to increase the modest income from the poor soil of the hilly country through the exploitation of the forests. The Romanians raised sheep and goats by grazing them in the river valleys in the winter and driving them up to the alpine pastures in the summer. Only the semi-nomadic cattle and horse-breeding lifestyle of the Serbs was a source of conflict, since this type of animal husbandry required pastures of great extension, which often led to conflicts with their neighbours. The majority of Germans (Saxons in Transylvania and Upper Hungary) lived in cities and the Slovaks lived in cities in relatively great number as well. Most of the ethnic groups in Hungary lived in "incomplete societies", which had neither a nobility of feudal character nor a secular intellectual stratum; their priests took upon the role of spiritual and social leadership. This was characteristic primarily of the Orthodox Serbs and Romanians, and the Greek Catholic Ruthenians and Romanians. Although religious belonging was in connection to ethnic identity only indirectly, it exerted a strong influence on the coherence of the given population. (This helped the development of the Serb and, to a certain extent, the Romanian identity.) The territorially scattered character of the Germans, who were characterised by relatively advanced civil developments and mostly Lutheran religion, prevented the formation of their

⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century Ignác Acsády tried to establish the population circumstances on the basis of the 1715/20 censuses. He estimated the total population was 2.5 million. Hungarians made up 45%, the Romanians, the largest ethnic group in Hungary, 19%, the Slovaks 15%, the Germans 13%, the Southern Slavs 4%, and Ruthenians 3%. According to recent research, the censuses Acsády took into consideration did not include a great part of the population, especially not in the central part of the country (in those times inhabited mainly by Hungarians) formerly under Turkish occupation. Therefore, we can assume that the proportion of the Hungarians reached the 50%. Dávid, Zoltán: *Az 1715–20. évi összeírás [Censuses in 1715–20]*. In: Kovacsics József (ed.): *A történelmi statisztika forrásai*. Bp. 1957. 158–159.

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homogeneous identity. Slovaks were rather divided with respect to religion (with 70% being Catholic and 30% Lutheran), and their dialects separated them as well. They referred to themselves as Slavs without further distinction (the Slovak name derives from this), but we cannot really talk about any awareness of identity in their case either. Social conflicts (between landowners and serfs) had not as yet turned into conflicts between ethnic groups. Habsburg absolutism did not press equally heavily on all of them because of the differences between their economic activities and their religions. Yet, we cannot find a movement in Hungary after the expulsion of the Turkish that would have been organised on the basis of ethnicity.

Rákóczi and his supporters in command could duly expect every ethnic group living in Hungary to join their movement, and for this reason they did not find this worthy of mentioning. Still, we can find a few incidental references to the ethnicity of the participants in Rákóczi's *Confessions*. Most of the time these are not direct references; they indicate ethnicity through referring to religion. The majority of the prince's family possessions, the estate of Munkács (Mukacheve), or as he called it, the Principality of Munkács, was in a part of North-eastern Hungary, where most of the population consisted of Greek Catholic (this religion was called Russian in those times) Ruthenians. The campaigns of the Thököly era and the three-year-long imperial siege at the city of Munkács put great burdens on its population, which sided with the prince as one man. It is quite likely that the first peasant-envoys who visited Rákóczi in Poland in April 1703 were Ruthenians. The prince, who feared an attempt and wanted to hide that he was Hungarian, sent his stableman "familiar with their language and dressed in Polish clothes" to find out about their intentions. The stableman talked to the envoys making use of the similarities of Polish and Ruthenian. Ruthenians were the first followers, peasant soldiers of the prince, who, upon their arrival to the camp "spotting me from afar, kneeled and crossed themselves in the Russian way."⁵ Not much later, still in the summer of 1703, false rumour spread about the death of the prince during his stay in Munkács. The peasant soldiers "lamented with loud yells as was the custom of the Ruthenians that the mountains and valleys were filled with their laments."⁶ The focus of the war of independence soon moved towards the centre of the country. Rákóczi explains this with a rather subjective factor in his *Memoirs*: "I could not stay in the mountains any longer. For the spirit of Hungarian soldiers is such that the peoples from the Great Plain are shocked when they have to stay in the mountains for long." This move and the masses of Hungarians that joined the prince overshadowed the role of the Ruthenians who would gain importance once again during the last hours of the war. Rákóczi would try to call his faithful serfs to arms in January 1711, when he ordered the survey of the state of the fortress of Bercsé-

⁵ While Roman Catholics cross themselves from left to right, the Ruthenian peasants did the other way around, that is, from right to left.

⁶ II. Rákóczi Ferenc *Emlékiratai* 38.

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nyi in Ungvár (Uzhgorod).⁷ He ordered his envoy to “go to Ungvár and Homonna (Humenné, Homenau) counties at the grand disposition of His Majesty. First, he shall present his order to the Russians of Ungvár to gather an army of gunman and be at the disposal of His majesty. When they are all recruited and taken up arms, they are to depend on the order of the Commander-in-Chief and protect the above-mentioned two counties from wandering and thief soldiers. Should the enemy lay siege to the fortress, they are to cause damages to it according to their abilities and always keep up correspondence with those in the fortress.” In order to boost fighting mood, the envoy could promise the gunman that “they would have to meet no servile obligations as long as they are in arms, and especially not if they effectively demonstrate their patriotism and responsibility.”⁸

The prince was usually not deluded with respect to his expectations towards the Ruthenians. His success was due partly to the fact that the serfs of his inherited properties looked at their landlord with unshakable respect and partly probably to the fact that the Roman Catholic Rákóczi did not want to cut off their relations with the Greek Catholic Church. The government of Leopold I managed to make the Greek Catholic Ruthenians of the Carpathian Basin (also called as Carpathian Ukrainians) form union with the Roman Catholics in 1692. (The Church formed by them is called the Greek Catholic Church). Their priests enjoyed the same treatment as Roman Catholic priests, and their religious leader, the “bishop” of Munkács, was put under the authority of the bishop of Eger.⁹ The appointment of bishops was an important political step, and it led to an open confrontation during Rákóczi’s insurrection. The pope appointed a bishop called Vinniczki at the head of the diocese, which was against the interests of the sovereign in Vienna and the advowson of Rákóczi. The court would have wanted the protégée of the Jesuits, a certain Hodermarski to become bishop, while the prince supported Petronius Kaminski.¹⁰ Rákóczi’s intention to leave the right of the consecration of the bishop to the metropolitan of Kiev increased his popularity especially because the Habsburgs believed that this right belonged to the archbishop of Esztergom.¹¹ The court

⁷ *Archivum Rákóczianum*. II. Rákóczi Ferenc levéltára. Székesi gróf Bercsényi Miklós főhadvezér és fejedelmi helytartó leveleskönyvei s más emlékezetre méltó iratai [*Archivum Rákóczianum*. The Archives of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Collected Letters and Other Memorable Documents of Commander-in-Chief and Governor Count Miklós Bercsényi of Székes] 1705–1711 VIII. Published by Kálmán Thaly, Bp. 1882. 410. – Captain Imre Bezegh was assigned for the task but he, referring to the need to protect his family, sent Brigadier János Szent-Iványi to carry out the task on 11 January. According to the letter, the “leaders of the Russians” were: Szopkó Vaszilo, Pásztéliek, Olexa Marczin, Kohlanics, the priest of Bukócz, Nitkulicze, Hlivko, Moysze, Penyák Fedor, Dobe, Hancsarik, Dolhányi Hriczo, Szteczko “and all the rest like them”. These names clearly denote leaders of Ruthenian origin.

⁸ *Ibid.* 408–409.

⁹ Arató, Endre: *A feudális nemzetiségtől a polgári nemzetig* [From Feudal Nationality to the Civil Nation]. Bp. 1975. 123.

¹⁰ Esze, Tamás: Rákóczi valláspolitikája [Ecclesiastical Policy of Rákóczi]. In: Benda Kálmán (ed.): *Európa és a Rákóczi-szabadságharc*. Bp. 1980. 289.

¹¹ Tófik Iszlamo: Társadalmi és nemzetiségi kérdések a szabadságharcban [Social and Ethnic Issues during the War of Independence]. In: Benda op. cit. 152.

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even tried to turn the Ruthenians against the prince. The bishop designate of Vienna was entrusted with the task at the meeting of the War Council to instigate a rebellion among the Ruthenians against Rákóczi. He was to proclaim that should the people take up arms against the prince, they would be granted the same freedoms that then belonged to the Serb border guards.¹² However, this did not make the Ruthenians turn against their landlord and prince whom they overwhelmed with all signs of their love and concern when the insurrection broke out and whom they would continue to support until the very last days of the war.

Rákóczi mentions the Slovaks more rarely than the Ruthenians. Yet, when the pro-Rákóczi Kuruc arrived in territories in Upper Hungary inhabited by Slovaks, many of these joined the movement as well. The Turkish occupation of Hungary left a less visible mark on the Slovaks than on the Hungarian population of the Great Plain. However, the absolutism of Leopold and the brutal campaigns aimed at the suppression of the outlaw movement antagonised both peoples. Almost 25 years ago, the renowned expert of the history of Slovaks in Hungary, István Käfer remarked that “the ethnic character of Rákóczi’s insurrection was most homogeneous with respect to the Hungarian–Slovak populations.”¹³ Miklós Bercsényi assured the prince of the joining of the Slovaks in a report he wrote in September 1704: “4000 rebelled only in the Slovak district of Szent-Kereszt (Povazany) and Zsarnóca (Žarnovica), and joined me. As I hurried toward Léva (Levice), they had already reached Kis-Tapolcsán (Turda).”¹⁴ On 9 December he suggested that Rákóczi, “His Majesty, should command the Slovak counties: a thousand good foot-soldiers could be recruited from Árva (Orava), Túrócz (Turiec), and Liptó (Liptó).”¹⁵ The list of burghers of Kassa (Kosice) (including many Slovak and German names) who switched to the side of Rákóczi dated on 2 November 1704 proves that city-dweller Slovaks joined the movement.¹⁶ We can encounter numerous Slovak names in other documents, orders, and decrees of the Kuruc soldiers. For example, Bercsényi authorised Brigadier Ferenc Babócsay in a letter sent from

¹² Esze, Tamás op. cit. 289.

¹³ Käfer, István: Magyarország nem-magyar népeinek részvétele a szabadságharcban [The Participation of Non-Hungarian Nations in the War of Independence]. In: Benda op. cit. 213.

¹⁴ *Archivum Rákóczianum*. II. Rákóczi Ferenc levéltára. Székesi gróf Bercsényi Miklós főhadvezér és fejedelmi helytartó levelei Rákóczi fejedelemhez [*Archivum Rákóczianum*. The Archives of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Collected Letters and Other Memorable Documents of Commander-in-Chief and Governor Count Miklós Bercsényi of Székes] 1704–1712 IV. Vol. I. 1704–1705. Published by Kálmán Thaly, Bp. 1875. 132. – The “tót” name used to denote the Slovaks did not have a pejorative connotation back then.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* IV. 210.

¹⁶ The register is published by Imre Bánkúti. *A Rákóczi-szabadságharc történetének dokumentumai 1703–1704* [Documents of the History of Rákóczi’s War of Independence 1703–1704]. Collected, selected and introduction by Imre Bánkúti, Miskolc, 1989. 145–152. Cristophorus Menzell among the senators is German for certain, while the name of the chief constable, Gregorius Lukácsik, indicates Slovak nationality. The following German names figure among the elected officials: Joannes Kikker, Joannes Holub, Leopoldus Hotter, Franciscus Grasz, Joannes Tréger, Paulus Roth, szlovákok: Fernandus Urbán, Joannes Zavatkai, Paulus Sztropkai, Georgius Pánkoviczky, Petrus Dvornikovics.

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Kassa on 15 June 1709 that a certain “Company Captain Márton Malesznik of the regiment of Sándor Luzsénszky, cross the Vág River with 20–30 soldiers who know the area well and perform useful duty there.” Later on, in another letter, he reports on the Vág-crossing of Luzsénszky and his captains in a way that in another “order of his [it was to be observed that] they had to abstain from causing damage in churches, to priests, in mills and other things alike.”¹⁷ On 22 June 1709, Bercsényi called upon General Pál Andrássy to set free the “helping man of a [certain] post master Koretinszky.”¹⁸ We know that the Slovak Daniel Krman, Lutheran archdeacon, who conducted research on the origins of the Slavs, held a rousing speech at the consecration of part of the Kuruc flags, and Rákóczi sent Krman as his envoy to the court of King Charles XII of Sweden. Krman was a supporter of *Hungarus* patriotism as well.¹⁹

Yet, the participation of the Slovaks in the war did not turn out to be as unambiguous as that of the Ruthenians. Slovak (and in part German) miners were the victims of the volley that suppressed the discontent of the miners in Selmec (Banská Stiaavnica, Schemnitz) in 1707.²⁰ Miners began armed struggle in a number of locations across Upper Hungary for increased wages (these movements followed from similar initiatives of the past). They demanded to be paid in silver (“fejér”) coins instead of receiving their pay in coppers (called *libertas* after its inscription) in circulation since the spring of 1704. It was increasingly difficult to use coppers in trade and their purchase value was much below their face value. Following a few local moves, the miners of Selmezbánya sent a delegation to Rákóczi in November 1706. The prince directed them to Johann Gottfried Hellenbach, administrator of the chamber of the mines, who rejected their demands. The repressed discontent burst into an open struggle on 17 March 1707. The miners stopped work, and put the foot soldiers sent to suppress them to flight by throwing stones at them (even the administrator was injured on the head). The miners achieved momentary concessions but they were constrained to go on strike again in several locations in September 1707. The leadership of the mine would not let the 100-member delegation of the miners of Selmec to go to Rákóczi, and local negotiations did not bear any results. On 3 October, The mine directors rebutted the miners who had marched to Szélakna (Windschacht) with a volley killing and injuring many workers. At the end of the conflict the miners could once more take an oath of allegiance, which was worded partly in German and partly in Slovak, an indication of the participants’ ethnicity. The Kuruc leaders were shocked at the volley, for which the mine directors and the army both sought to shift the responsibility to the other. Even

¹⁷ *Archivum Rákóczianum* VIII. op. cit. 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 77.

¹⁹ H. Balázs, Éva – Makkai, László (eds.): *Magyarország története* [The History of Hungary]. Vol. II/2. 1526–1790. Bp. 1957. 468.; Käfer op. cit. 213.

²⁰ On details see: Heckenast, Gusztáv: Az 1706–1708. évi bányászmozgalmakról [On the miners’ movements in 1706–1708]. In: Köpeczi, Béla – Hopp, Lajos – R. Várkonyi, Ágnes (eds.): *Rákóczi-tanulmányok*. Bp. 1980. 79–85.

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Bercsényi, who was not too sensitive to social issues, stated that “not the ore is hit in the mines but men.” When the miners of Szomolnok (Smolník, Schmöllnitz) presented their complaints in March 1708, Rákóczi had their case examined and ordered that the plaintiffs should receive their pay in silver.

The consequences of the volley in Selmecbánya seem to determine the opinion of future generations. While the majority of the Slovak peasants joined the war enthusiastically and their descendants remembered the Kuruc legacy in folksongs, the sacrifice of the Slovak miners served as a pretext for Slovak historiography to turn against the entire movement. Most of the Slovak historians take the position that the prince rose up in arms for the protection of the privileges of Hungarian nobility, and excluded “masses of Hungarian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Romanian peoples” from the movement. Rákóczi did not even get to curb the privileges of the nobility that afflicted the cities of Upper Hungary. Therefore, his movement brought not only wartime suffering but also a twofold oppression to the people.²¹

The participation of the Romanians in the Rákóczi's war of independence is not so explicit. Transylvanian society was rather divided and full of tensions at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. The disintegration and internal dissent of the Székely communities and the Saxons' attempts at independence intensified the traditional conflict between landlords and serfs. Following 150 years of independence, the population of Transylvania was not pleased to see the integration into the Habsburg Empire and its consequences. Especially not because it was reluctant to observe the advantages that the *Diploma Leopoldinum* had promised to the Transylvanians in 1690. (The operation of Transylvanian government bodies was limited, former laws were disregarded, taxes set formerly were increased. Mihály Apafi II was prevented from taking his throne, although the promise that referred to this was rather ambiguously states in the diploma.) Transylvaniam, the idea of an independent Transylvania, grew stronger in the principality and both the supporters and opponents of Rákóczi embraced it during the insurrection.²² The Rákóczi name was not too popular in those times, since the saying “Patak consumed our money” was still in vogue. It referred to the practice of György Rákóczi I, who sent a significant portion of the income coming from the principality to his wife, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, to Sárospatak. The Turkish and Tartar incursions of 1658–1662 that the stubbornness of György Rákóczi II brought upon the region were remembered as well. Although the Transylvanian assembly elected the grandson Ferenc Rákóczi prince in 1704 and inaugurated him in 1707, it established certain conditions that Rákóczi could never accept. The wrangling between the sovereign and the orders resulted in a conflict at last exactly because the prince did not *de facto* rule in Transylvania.

Rákóczi's insurrection divided the Romanians, just as it did the Hungarians, partly because of the religious division of the Romanians. Theophilus, bishop of

²¹ Cf. with the above-mentioned study of István Käfer.

²² On the circumstances in Transylvania see: Trócsányi, Zsolt: II. Rákóczi Ferenc erdélyi kormányzata [The Administration of Ferenc Rákóczi in Transylvania]. In: Köpeczi – Hopp – Várkonyi op. cit. 113–122.

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Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), accepted religious union with the Catholics at the 1697 synod of the Orthodox Church. The diploma issued by the court in 1699 (the administration of Leopold I generously granted charters that were usually called *Diploma Leopoldinum*) exempted convert priests from under subjection to a landlord and the burdens that afflicted them (tithe, socage). The charter of 1701 was to grant the Greek Catholic Romanians basically the status of a fourth nation in the empire. However, as the Transylvanian assembly rejected the charter, this would never be realised. The Romanians took up a position concerning the war depending on whether they accepted union or not. The majority of Greek Catholic supported Rákóczi, while the majority of the Orthodox did not.²³ Determination to join could be enhanced by the social purport the movement had in Transylvania because of the hesitation of the orders. According to the Diary of István Wesselényi, “a German captain said that this rebellion could be easily put down just by telling the peasants to kill the nobles and then they would cease to be serfs; should they have to pay some trifling taxes to the emperor only, they would calm down and settle.”²⁴ In lack of such a promise, many joined the movement. Most of them were, however, wild and riotous people from the lowest ranks of society. Rákóczi wrote about Pintea Gligor, leader of the raiding force in the Meszes Mountains (M.ții Mezesului) that “he wanted to demonstrate his loyalty and came down to the city of Nagybánya (Baia Mare), which is famous of its gold and silver mines but not in any other treasures. He wanted to conquer or win the city over in my name. The population surrendered and let him enter within the turreted walls. However, when the men of Pinthe started plundering, the inhabitants joined forces in defence of their families and properties, and killed Pinthe and his company. The city thereafter sent delegates to me to justify their actions and vow obedience to me.”²⁵

Following the letters patents (of Breán and Vetés) issued by Rákóczi, masses of serfs joined his movement from Máramaros county (Maramures) to Székelyföld (Secuime, Szeklerland) in the hope of a better life. However, due the absence of the main forces of the prince and the fact that many local landowners distanced themselves from Rákóczi (and withdrew into their castles and cities) their companies acted in complete independence at first. According to certain assumptions, some 20,000 rebels faced the imperial army of 9,000 troops of General Rabutin in the summer of 1704. We can find both Hungarians and Romanians in the ranks of the rebel officers.²⁶ Because of the great number of Romanians who fought in the

²³ Arató op. cit. 70.

²⁴ Wesselényi, István: *Sanyarú világ. Napló* [Miserable World. A Diary]. Vol. I. 1703–1705. Published by András Magyar. Bukarest 1983. 271. – Note from 4 November 1704.

²⁵ Rákóczi: *Emlékiratai*. 47. – Note from 1703.

²⁶ Magyar, András: Az erdélyi magyarok és románok együttműködése a szabadságharcban [Cooperation of Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania during the War of Independence]. In: Benda op. cit. 219. – The study mentions the following Romanians: Marcu Hategeanu from Hátszeg (Hațeg). He was in imperial service but switched to the side of the insurgents. Csurulea (Csurulya) János from the Szilágy-ság; Balica Nichita known in the area of Torda; Negru Vasile from Marosszék (Mures region); Bucur Cimpeanu who was active in Háromszék (Covasna county), and Sudricean Stefan from the Szilágy-ság.

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war, certain Romanian historians concluded that the Transylvanian front of Rákóczi's insurrection was clearly of Romanian character. This is disproved by the 1707 register of the Kuruc forces that supported Rákóczi, in which the place of origin of the soldiers was recorded as well. Romanians served in the regular army from Máramaros and Hunyad (Hunedoara) counties, where the majority of the population was Romanian, moreover from Fogarasföld (Fagaras), and in great numbers from the Partium, Inner Szolnok, Kolozs (Cluj), and Doboka counties, and Székelyföld.²⁷ The momentary victories of the Kuruc mobilised the nobility as well, while the defeats that followed encouraged the activity of the most radical groups only. Following the withdrawal of the nobility, the outlaw companies grew in number after 1707. Our sources remarked about the groups of Balica and Black Vasil that appeared in Columba in the Brassó (Brasov) area, in the Mezőség (Câmpia Transilvaniei), and other areas of Transylvania that "they called themselves Kuruc" but their ambitions were not appreciated. In 1708 we can still find traces of units of Colonel Dragul Farkas, who left the area of Arad and Borosjenő (Ineu) for Transylvania, and those of Captain Balica. However, the social base of the movement vanished altogether by 1709.²⁸

It is difficult to expand on the participation of Germans in the war. The privileged Saxon communities of Transylvania had often turned against their own princes in the 17th century in defence of their privileges. Following the fall of the independent principality, Transylvanianism gained ground among them as well, and it put them on their guard with respect to movements that started in Hungary. The Saxons of Upper Hungary were more sympathetic towards Hungarians, and we can find more traces of their participation indeed, as for example in the above-mentioned register of Kassa. From among the other ethnic groups, Rákóczi could not win the Croats. The ban of the independent Croatia, Count János Pálffy was a leading figure of the imperial troops²⁹, and became their commander-in-chief in the last phase of the war. This greatly influenced the position of the Croats, which was only further reinforced by the fact that their homogeneously Roman Catholic nobility was discontented with the tolerance the prince expressed toward the Protestants.³⁰ The participation of the Serbs was the neuralgic point of the ethnic story

²⁷ Demény, Lajos: A Rákóczi szabadságharc erdélyi hadairól 1707-ben [On the Transylvanian Forces of Rákóczi's War of Independence in 1707]. In: Pál Judit – Rűsz Fogarasi Enikő (eds.): *Magyar András Emlékkönyv*. Kolozsvár 2002. 313. – The register was prepared during the military inspection held at the castle of Harság (Hrabkov) near Szászmedgyes. 5690 soldiers followed the prince; more or less half of them were from Transylvania, and the other half from the Partium.

²⁸ Magyar op. cit. 220.

²⁹ In August 1706, János Bottyán incited the nobles of Zala county, every person above the age of 15, to take up arms against the Croatian and Serb forces that made incursions on them under the lead of the Croatian ban. They used "any possible means, on foot and on horse" to force out the enemy into Styria. *Archivum Rákócziánium X*. Additions and alphabetical index for the Vols I-IX. of the first class of the archives of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Ed. Kálmán Thaly, Bp. 1889. 22.

³⁰ Arató op. cit. 11.

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behind Rákóczi's insurrection. Although the movement could not win every ethnic group fully, it was nevertheless a particular trait of the Serbs that they opposed it throughout; moreover, their actions could occasionally cause considerable damage both to the insurgents and the population as well. Our sources, including the *Memoirs* of Rákóczi, are full of complaints about the devastation caused by the Serbs. The prince expressed his shock by asking "where on earth all these Serbs come from, so many thousands of them" Vienna incited against us.³¹ Every initiative seeking a compromise failed; hostility was followed by devastations at both sides, retorsion, and revenge. We cannot explain all this on the basis of ethnic aspects only. The Serb question went beyond an ethnic problem; social and religious factors influenced it as well.

At the beginning of the 18th century, Southern Slavs, among them especially the Orthodox Serbs and Bosnians were called "Rác" [today: Serb]. Their settlement in the Carpathian Basin had started on a larger scale already during the Turkish rule. Their shepherding lifestyle granted them greater mobility and, therefore, greater chance for survival than what the sedentary agrarian Hungarian population had. They replaced in great numbers the killed and, in smaller part, fled Hungarians in the Southern Regions (Temesköz, Bácska [Bačka], Szerémség [Srem], and Southern Transdanubia). They sought to avoid the afflictions of devastation, which they too suffered, by moving on frequently. Their settlement was often followed by re-migration toward their original homes. Consequently, no continuity, attachment to a piece of land, and traditions could develop in their case. Since they performed well in arms, Vienna was eager to win them. Their settlement was promoted and they received privileges. To a great part, Vienna granted these privileges to them because it planned to assign them an important role in the suppression of the Hungarians. In 1690, as a consequence of the halt and withdrawal of the imperial troops in the Balkans, a larger group of Serbs arrived led by Patriarch Arsenije Črnjević of Ipek. Their numbers, based on the remarks of the patriarch, were estimated to be around 100,000, but according to recent studies they were in some 20-30,000. Leopold I issued a letters patent on 21 August 1691 and another on 20 August 1691 that made it possible for them to live in a closed military and political unit. They elected their own voivod and judges, did not pay public and ecclesiastic taxes, and did not have to house troops in their villages. The court received them in the hope of their return to the Balkans, where they could represent the influence and political authority of Vienna. However, due to the protracted war and the defeats suffered during the campaigns in the Balkans, the followers of Črnjević remained in Hungary.³² Nevertheless their privileges remained in force, which lifted them not only above the tax and annuity paying masses, but also above the jurisdiction of county

³¹ Wellmann, Imre: A népesség sorsa a szabadságharc idején [The Fate of the Population During the War of Independence]. In: Köpeczi – Hopp – Várkonyi op. cit. 38.

³² Darkó, Jenő: Lipót császár által a magyarországi szerbeknek adományozott kiváltságok háttere [The Background of the Privileges Granted to the Serbs in Hungary by Emperor Leopold]. In: *Végyvár és társadalom a visszafoglaló háborúk korában (1686-1699)*. Eger, 1989. 190–195.

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administration. Leopold I authorized, at the recommendation of the Royal War Council, already in April 1861 that the Serb troops be organised “for camp duty” under the command of a vice-despot.³³ Although the Royal Treasury, the Hofkammer, managed to prevent the appropriation of a block of land to Serbs because of financial reasons, the organisation of the border guard regions by the Sava, Danube, Theiss, and Maros rivers started in 1701 at the initiative of the War Council. Serb troops formed them and directly the Viennese War Council exercised jurisdiction over them with the exclusion of the Hungarian administrative bodies.³⁴ Their settlement, however, was not confined to the southern border regions. The settlements of the shepherding Serbs reached into Transdanubia and arrived at the southern shore of Lake Balaton, as far as Baja in the area between the Danube and the Theiss, and the Maros in the region beyond the Theiss. Their members working in commerce and industry founded settlements well beyond these areas (Ráckeve, Szentendre, Váradi-olaszi). Although earlier groups began to adapt themselves to Hungarian circumstances, the new arrivals had a difficult time getting used to the sedentary lifestyle and the constraints that accompanied the transforming ownership system of lands. They did not want to undertake the obligations that serfs had, so it is no wonder that the landlords who acquired land in the recaptured areas, were not happy about their settlement. Palatine Prince Pál Esterházy ordered it in a letter of his letter to the Hungarians settled in his plains in Tolna county that “they should not let Serbs among themselves.”³⁵ At the same time, their privileges irritated the Hungarians who were defenceless against the everyday offences committed by the Serbs as well.

The Serb-Hungarian armed conflict started before Rákóczi’s insurrection. The supporters of Thököly participated in skirmishes, the court sent Serbs to suppress the rebellion in Hegyalja, and, at last, Vienna threatened the communities behind in paying their taxes with Serb attacks. The City of Kecskemét received a letter declaring that “the chief general in Buda... would send out this and this many thousands of Serbs for the execution of orders to the disobedient elements.” The chief commissioner in Slavonia received the order that the southern parts of Transdanubia were to be cleared of Hungarians and given to the Serbs.³⁶

Yet, even the Serbs were discontent because of the uncertain situation that followed the reoccupation of the country and the political tension. Their newly arrived groups that settled far from the border were not placed among the privileged groups, and the state wanted to levy taxes on them. Because of this, Rákóczi, who considered their alliance important because of the military force they represented and their potential role in conflict solving, had some chance to win them over. Captain Longueval, who betrayed him and took a letter of his to Louis XIV, stated as

³³ Ibid. 193–194.

³⁴ Benda, Kálmán: Magyar–rác együttműködési törekvések a szabadságharc idején [Ambitions of Hungarian–Serb Co-operation During the War of Independence]. In: Kőpeczi – Hopp – Várkonyi op. cit. 142.

³⁵ Wellmann op. cit. 45.

³⁶ Ibid. 45.

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early as 1701 that the prince got into contact with Patriarch Črnojević, who supposedly offered 40,000 soldiers to help in the insurrection against Vienna. Although the truth of this statement was never proved (Rákóczi denied it), the patriarch was summoned to Vienna, and he could not return to his followers.³⁷ The prince, who found refuge in Poland, stated among the reasons why he asked financial support from the French that he wanted to spend it on the pay of the Serbs. When the insurrection broke out, he issued a call in his camp in Székelyhíd (Săcueni) on 9 August 1703 “to all of the Serb nation living and fighting in this crippled Hungarian homeland, to all their officers, to all the Serbs under their command, and all their population,” in which Rákóczi ordered that “the Serb inhabitants of the Hungarian land who value their freedom shall take up arms and pledge to serve our dear homeland.” In exchange, he promised “to grant them liberties that would be inherited from father to son, including that they would not have to pay taxes to anybody; all Serb cities that now rise in arms for the liberty of our home, as well as other heyduck cities would be granted the freedom that they would have, to serve their homeland exclusively in arms in the future.” The letter, however, ends with a threat. For in case the Serbs did not join the fight for liberty, then they would be “killed and slayed without mercy, and even their children will be put to the sword.” Jovan Tököli-Popović, commander of the border regiment of Arad, received the proclamation as well.³⁸

The strong wording of the letter could be due to the past Serb–Hungarian conflicts that accompanied Rákóczi’s movement. Shortly after the outbreak of the insurrection, in July 1703, the Serb troops stationed in Várad-olaszi devastated the villages of Bihar (Bihar) county, which triggered the armed response of Rákóczi resulting in the slaying of the Serbs of Várad-olaszi.³⁹ The clashes of the two peoples continued with frightening cruelty throughout the war of independence. Those who surrendered, fell in captivity, and remained injured on the battlefield were mutually put to the sword, the settlements of the other group were devastated, and women or children were not spared either. The Serbs and the Kuruc hardly differed in this respect. There were a few things, however, in which the Serbs surpassed the Kuruc. Burning with religious fanaticism, they ignored the ecclesiastic right of sanctuary, they massacred the ones who fled to the churches and burnt down the churches when the people were inside. In the Southern region, instead of killing the soldiers they captured, they sold them as slaves to the Turkish. It happened often that Serb troops fled to Turkish territory to escape the Kuruc. No wonder that Rákóczi called the Serbs “natural enemies” of the Hungarians in his *Memoirs*. The devastation of the Serbs left a sour taste in the mouth of many generations among the inhabitants of the Great Plain, southern Transdanubia, and even in the Székelyföld.⁴⁰

Rákóczi attempted to re-establish peace with the Serbs on several occasion because of the constant threat they involved. When the Serbs surrendered Eger

³⁷ Benda op. cit. 143.

³⁸ Ibid. 144–145.

³⁹ Ibid. 144.

⁴⁰ Wellmann: op. cit. 41–44.

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Castle in April 1704, they could leave freely and they could even keep all their properties. The proclamation of Székelyhíd was followed by a series of others. General Bottyán “The Blind” wrote a letter to the Serbs in December 1704 and let them know that “His Majesty Our Prince, of his natural mercifulness, deigned to pardon in the letters patent issued not only the inhabitants and sons of this Homeland who deserted it, but also the whole Serb nation that lived beyond and at this side of the Danube, who would from now on stop take up arms against our armies... Moreover, he had granted the following to the above-mentioned Serb nation: whoever would want to enjoy the glory and freedom of our poor Homeland, they shall take up arms to promote the public cause we began and elect brave officers from among themselves, shall increase our Serb troops in number loyally to Our Lord; to these no less shall be given from month to month than what is the due of our valiant warriors who take pains in the fights for our Country and poor Nation – the pay that is their due at hand. It has been permitted that those who would want to live farming could return to their property, house, cities, and villages to do so.”⁴¹ However, mutual distrust undermined the confidence in these promises. Captain János Hellenpront wrote to Károlyi that it would lead to the destruction of the country if “they would not keep their word,”⁴² for in February 1704 “the Serbs that had surrendered and received privileges suffered attacks from the peasants of Bába, Szeremle, Kalocsa, Sárköz, were killed, tortured, and lost all their properties; at that, they took revenge on the Hungarians.”

In March 1705, Rákóczi asked János Bottyán to forward another letters patent⁴³ to the Serbs. In this, Rákóczi emphasised that “together with the restoration of the Hungarian homeland we want the restoration of the freedom of the whole Serb nation similarly.” For this reason, the Serbs “should send their envoys to us in Eger within there weeks.” The prince entrusted Bottyán with the twofold task of turning against the Serbs and, at the same time, mediating in their direction, because he had gotten into contact with them on several occasions during the struggles against the Turkish, and the Serbs “especially feared” him.

These tries, however, turned out to be unsuccessful. The Serbs did not want to become disloyal in exchange of the renewal of their earlier privileges. (The new sovereign, Joseph I, renewed every former letters patent on 15 September 1706.) The priests encouraged this attitude as well. Following the fall of the medieval Serb state the Orthodox Church remained a forum that substituted the statehood and kept the identity of the population alive. The attempts of the court to make the Serbs join the religious union failed utterly, and they were given up completely during the intricate

⁴¹ *Archivum Rákóczianum*. II. Rákóczi Ferenc levéltára. Bottyán János vezénylő tábornok levelezései s róla szóló más emlékezetre méltó iratok 1685–1716 [*Archivum Rákóczianum*. The Archives of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Letters and Other Memorable Documents on Commandin General János Bottyán 1685–1716.]. IX. Collected and published by Kálmán Thaly, Bp., 1883. 164–165.

⁴² *Rákóczi hadserege 1703–1711* [The Army of Rákóczi 1703-1711]. Selected and introduction by Imre Bánkúti. Bp., 1976. 59.

⁴³ *Archivum Rákóczianum*. IX. 171.

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political intertwining relations of the war of liberation. The tolerance of Rákóczi, instead of encouraging the Serbs, made them turn from him. Following his failed attempts, Rákóczi hoped to receive help from Czar Peter I in making peace with the Serbs. David Corbea, envoy of the czar, took upon the task of mediation in May 1707. His mandate included that “his Majesty, the Czar was willing to reconcile them [the Serbs] with the prince and win them to his side in the case he can be certain about the friendship of the prince.” Friendship, in this case, would have meant the acceptance of the Polish crown, which, with the resignation of King Augustus II (Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxon), was obtained by the pro-Swedish Stanislaus Leszczyński. Rákóczi seized the opportunity and urged the czar through a messenger to send his envoy to the Serbs. Envoy Sándor Nedeczky heard that the czar “would send out to Slavonia–Hungary three or four valiant men from among the Serbs here in the camp together with orthodox priests, including maybe even Dávid Korbe, although he had fallen ill on their way and was still feeling rather feeble.” According to the request of the czar, Rákóczi issued a new proclamation to the Serbs, in which he offered them an independent territory and independent administration in the area between the Drava and Sava rivers instead of their lost Serbia. However, envoy Corbea died and the czar did not want to irritate the Viennese court with the encouragement of the Serbs. Therefore, the Serb question was not included in the agreement Rákóczi signed with him in Warsaw in September 1707. (The Russian ambassador in Vienna was constrained to deny that the agreement existed at all.) The reconciliation with the Serbs does not figure in the mandate of the next envoy of Czar Peter I, Iemelian Ivanovitch Ukrainev either. Even those attempts remained unsuccessful that sought to make use of the mediation of the voivodes of Havasalföld (Muntenia) in 1708.⁴⁴

Accordingly, most of the documents of the war on the Serbs refer to the devastation they caused and the attempts at the prevention of these attacks. When Rákóczi and his highest officers considered the failure of reconciliation, they came to the conclusion that the Serbs acted not out of their free will but at the order of Vienna. This is reflected by the letter of Bercsényi dated on 19 April 1704 in Nagyszombat (Trnava, Tyrnau, Tyrnavia), in which he wrote to the prince ridiculing the Serbs: “the Serbs’ head is attached to the body of Haizter [Heister, imperial commander-in-chief]; let that be. I believe that neither the fellow Croatians will attack the Hungarian borders nor fellow Serbs will use violence against us. For they move only when the German puppeteer moves them.”⁴⁵ Bercsényi threw out the idea that the Serbs would have to be threatened with the Turkish in a letter of his sent from Majtény (Majcichov) in June 1704: “The Turkish should not be let any-

⁴⁴ Benda op. cit. 149–156.; Köpeczi Béla: *II. Rákóczi Ferenc külpolitikája* [Foreign Policy of Ferenc Rákóczi II]. Bp. 2002. 98.

⁴⁵ *Archivum Rákóczianum*. II. Rákóczi Ferenc levéltára. Székesi gróf Bercsényi Miklós főhadvezér és fejedelmi helytartó levelei Rákóczi fejedelemhez [*Archivum Rákóczianum*. The Archives of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Collected Letters and Other Memorable Documents of Commander-in-Chief and Governor Count Miklós Bercsényi of Székes] 1704–1712 IV. Vol. I. 1704–1705. Published by Thaly Kálmán, Bp. 1875. 12–13.

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where else but into Slavonia and, that way, our army would not need to be there from the direction of Croatia."⁴⁶ He reiterated his idea in another letter on 20 June: "Let us leave the Serbs to the Turkish..."⁴⁷

Bercsényi sent an order to General Bottyán at the beginning of 1705. "Since the Serbs of the Bácskaság ceased to be hostile in our direction and live peacefully", he asked Bottyán "to use every possible means to calm down the Serbs so that they would not be in conflict with us – even if they do not take up arms at our side; so that they would at least remain in peace and not at odds with us. At the same time, he should seek to recruit a Serb force, if no other places are suitable, then from the Bácskaság and surroundings, where the Serbs had already live reconciled." Bercsényi drew his attention to the fact that he should ensure that the joining Serb forces "would receive payment in silver coins... Should Farkas Mindszenty decide to recruit a Serb force beyond the Danube, he should be granted not only a captain's letter of appointment but money as well, as it had been commanded to Master Bezegh."⁴⁸ Bercsényi sent another order to Bottyán from his camp at Gutta on 29 September 1705 on the "operations in Transdanubia". He believed Bottyán should accompany the troops of Mihály Csáky, István Ebeczky, and Ádám Balogh and "visit certain Serbs and Croats in Szombathely" and "busily incite them." He demanded a different attitude in the direction of the inhabitants who were not in arms: "Besides this, keeping the love of his country always on his mind, he should not let the people of the land – making no distinctions between the Hungarian, Croatian, and German inhabitants who live in Hungary – under any circumstances be irritated, distressed and bothered. Instead, he should tame them and allure them with promising letters patents, and win them in any way to side with our troops..."⁴⁹ They called upon the local authorities to send accurate information to the Kuruc on the moves of foreign troops, especially the quick Serb forces.⁵⁰

In the end, it was not lack of support from the ethnic groups that caused the fall of Rákóczi's war of independence. The Hungarian forces turned out to be insufficient to fight the militarily much stronger Habsburg army. *The majority of the ethnic groups, afflicted with the same burdens as the Hungarians, joined the common cause with the Hungarians according the principle "everybody for his own homeland and nation"*. Ethnicity would become an issue because of real and invented conflicts only in the second half of the 18th century, wrecking the relationship between the various peoples. It would only be then that ideologies (theory of Romanian and Slav continuity, the treaty of King Coloman and the Croats, etc.) for the justification of mutual exclusion would emerge.

⁴⁶ Ibid. IV. 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid. IV. 65. Two days later, on 22 June, he would warn the prince from the Turkish who demanded the City of Szeged. Ibid. 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid. IV. 327–328. Mindszenty was captain of the Serbs.

⁴⁹ *Archivum Rákócziánum*. VIII. 10.

⁵⁰ Cf. with he documents in the Archives of Hajdú-Bihar County, Protocol of the City of Debrecen. IV. A. 1011/a 25.