

RECIPROCAL IMAGES AND ATTITUDES FROM WALLACHIA AND TRANSYLVANIA DURING THE EPOCH OF MATEI BASARAB AND THE RÁKÓCZY PRINCES

Abstract: In this article we intend to highlight the images and attitudes that emerged in Wallachia and Transylvania in the mid-17th century, in the context of the policy of alliance between the Wallachian Voivode Matei Basarab and the two Transylvanian Princes from the Rákóczy family. Numerous historical studies published to date have addressed the issue of the political, military and diplomatic relations between the Wallachian voivodeship and the Transylvanian principality. However, this topic has been scarcely approached from an imagological perspective. To understand the manner in which the two political partners perceived each other, as well as the environments to which they belonged, we have used a series of narrative testimonies from that period, especially chronicles, memoirs, correspondence and narrative works, which can highlight the subjective drives behind the political and the military events. The documentary sources have also not been neglected, in an attempt to outline a balanced picture of those reciprocal images and perceptions.

Keywords: Wallachia, Transylvania, Matei Basarab, George Rákóczy I, George Rákóczy II

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Most historical studies that have addressed the issue of the relations between Wallachia and Transylvania in the mid-17th century emphasised the fact that the relations of close alliance between the two countries represented the main direction of the foreign policy promoted by Matei Basarab and by Princes George Rákóczy I and George Rákóczy II.² This took the form of either close bilateral ties, aiming not only to ease the Turkish pressure, but also to establish a united front against Vasile Lupu's personal ambitions, or the form of an anti-Ottoman confederation. The way in which this policy of alliance was carried out may be captured at the level of diplomatic and

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² Ioan Sirbu, *Mateiu-vodă Basarab's auswärtige Beziehungen 1632-1654*, Leipzig, 1899; Ioan Lupaș, "Începutul domniei lui Matei Basarab și relațiunile lui cu Transilvania," in *Studii Istorice*, 1943, pp. 45-66; Victor Motogna, "Epoca lui Matei Basarab și Vasile Lupu," in *Cercetări Istorice*, XVI, 1940, pp. 453-544; Constantin Rezachevici, "Începutul epocii lui Matei Basarab și Vasile Lupu în lumina relațiilor cu Imperiul otoman și Transilvania," in *Revista de Istorie*, 1982, 35, no. 9, pp. 1003-1012; Nicolae Stoicescu, *Matei Basarab*, București, 1988, pp. 126-205. For the point of view of Hungarian historiography, see *Erdély története*, vol. II (1606-1830), Budapest, pp. 711-716; Sándor Szilágyi, *Okmánytár II. Rákóczy György diplomáciai összeköttetéseihez*, Budapest, 1874 (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Diplomataria*, vol. XXIII); Sándor Szilágyi, *A két Rákóczy György családi levelezése*, Budapest, 1875 (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Diplomataria*, vol. XXIV); Sándor Szilágyi, *Levelek és okiratok I. Rákóczy György keleti összeköttetései történetéhez*, Budapest, 1883; Sándor Szilágyi, *I. Rákóczi György*, Budapest, 1893, passim.

military actions, by examining the alliance “treaties”³ and how they were respected, the mutual military support granted or withheld in various circumstances, the diplomatic contacts with the Porte and with third partners.

Beyond these facts and analyses, many historians have insisted on the subjective factors underlying the aforementioned alliances. They have often drawn attention to the importance of the motivations underlying political decision-making, highlighting the relations, including of a personal nature, between Matei Basarab and the Transylvanian princes, correlated, of course, with attitudes towards a third protagonist, Vasile Lupu. Focusing on this subject, historians like Nicolae Iorga, Ioan Lupaş or Victor Motogna emphasised the features of those personalities, the differences or similarities of temperament between them, their bonds of friendship or the disillusionment they experienced on account of the relations they were engaged in under various circumstances. Starting from such suggestions, the aim of this paper is precisely to examine aspects concerning the weight and manifestation of certain subjective factors, of imagological import in the development of political relations between the two provinces.

Given the decision-making mechanism at work in the nobiliary and estate regime, in addressing such subjective factors we will not limit ourselves to discussing the personal whims of ruler or the prince in question. Their counsellors and close advisers, the great nobility and the boyars, the representatives of the estates, the Diet and the military categories, the officials and the courtiers on whom the authority of the Wallachian ruler or of the Prince of Transylvania was predicated – they all brought their specific contribution, acting according to their own interests and adopting a certain attitude, which should be taken into consideration.

The primary sources we shall resort to in outlining these attitudes and the subjective, personal factors that underlay the policy of alliance between Wallachia and Transylvania are primarily narrative sources. Due to the relevance of some of the sources that have been available to us and have been valorised to a lesser extent in the historiography of the problem, we have used primarily a series of narrative sources from Transylvania: chronicles, memoirs, correspondence and fictional works inspired of historical inspiration. Beyond the raw information, sometimes lacking precision, that they provide, they are valuable sources for the proposed investigation specifically because of their subjective nature. Revealing the attitude and the personal position of the person who drafted them in relation to various events, through an accumulation of traits and observations, these sources also offer a well-defined image of the other.

Such attitudes and assessments are not encountered solely in narrative sources, but also in official, documentary texts. They occur primarily in diplomatic correspondence, which, with all its official character, also includes references to the authors’ personal attitudes and to the image of the other. Imagological references can be found even in the text of certain official documents, such as alliance treaties or Dietal rulings. Even in these sources, the customary protocolar formulas often fail to conceal the intentions, political attitudes and personal sentiments of the signatories.

³ Throughout this article, I have used the modernised term of “treaties.” In fact, the legal instruments that sanctioned the agreements between the two parties were letters patent or so-called *diplomas* (*diplome*) issued by the chancery of the prince or by the Diet and charters (*hrisoave*) issued by the Wallachian ruler.

1. The beginnings of the alliance

One aspect that can be detached from the contemporaries' testimonies refers to the finding that the politics of alliance between Wallachia and Transylvania was based on the old ties of friendship between Matei Basarab and George Rákóczy I, extended then onto the latter's successor as well. Thus, Miron Costin, a connoisseur of the period, noted that Vasile Lupu was in a rapport of inferiority to Matei primarily due to the relations of friendship between the Wallachian ruler and the Transylvanian princes: "Matei Voivode so overwhelmed Vasile Voivode and was great friends with the neighbours, especially with the Hungarians [i.e. the Princes of Transylvania]. And with no neighbour was Vasile Voivode on goods terms... nor did any of the neighbours pay him his due respect."⁴ The Saxon chronicler Georg Kraus notes, in turn, that Matei was "an honest neighbour, he remained loyal both to him [George Rákóczy I] and to his son, George Rákóczy II, and to the land of Transylvania, until his death."⁵ Similar terms were used by the Hungarian chronicler János Szalárdi, who wrote from a perspective close to that of the Transylvanian prince, saying that Rákóczy and his country were in "good neighbouring relations and in alliance with Matei Basarab and Wallachia."⁶

The same viewpoint was adopted by neutral observers, who were more detached from the events than those mentioned above. Information about the good relations and the friendship between the prince and the voivode frequently circulated in the diplomatic circles of the time, as attested, for instance, by a letter the King of Poland sent his ambassador to the Porte, in 1640, or by another, sent by the imperial resident in Istanbul in 1650.⁷ In 1636, the Vizier of Buda feared Matei's actions, knowing that he was "a good friend of Rákóczy's"⁸ and, in 1640, the Venetian agent to the Porte, an extremely knowledgeable diplomat, said that "tra il Ragozzi et il Mattei Principe di Valachia passa gran confidenza et si intendono bene insieme."⁹ All these formulations stress, therefore, the existence of extremely tight relations, which may have exceeded the limits of regular diplomatic alliances.

We could also find the origins of these relations in the years of Matei's exile in Transylvania, 1630-1632, when his first contact with the Transylvanian prince probably occurred. Describing this period, the *Cantacuzino Chronicle* (*Letopisețul cantacuzinesc*) states that Matei and the exiled boyars were well received in Transylvania, welcomed with "great honour and deference" by Rákóczy,¹⁰ the Hungarian nobleman Dávid Zólyomi (whose pro-Romanian attitude might have been due to the fact that he was the brother-in-law of Gavrilăș Movilă, the former ruler of

⁴ Miron Costin, *Opere*, București, 1958, p. 113.

⁵ Georg Kraus, *Cronica Transilvaniei. 1608-1665*, București, 1965, p. 87.

⁶ János Szalárdi, *Síralmas magyar krónikája*, Budapest, 1978, p. 324.

⁷ Andrei Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, vol. X, București, 1938, pp. 218-219.

⁸ Kraus, *Cronica*, p. 120.

⁹ Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki, *Fragmente din istoria românilor*, vol. III, București, 1900, p. 24.

¹⁰ *Istoria Țării Românești. 1290-1690. Letopisețul cantacuzinesc*, București, 1960, p. 96.

Moldavia – according to the historian Andrei Veress)¹¹ and by “all neighbours.” Szalárdi’s *Chronicle* also addresses this period, stating that Agha Matei, being among Rákóczy’s “clientele,” was hosted in Alba Iulia, where, as the chronicler puts it, “he lived and revelled under the protection of the prince.”¹²

The reference to the revelries held in Alba Iulia, which was intended to highlight the links established between Agha Matei and the prince, was not without importance in the context of the diplomatic practices of the time. A somewhat similar episode is reported in Kraus’s *Chronicle*: in 1653, while Rákóczy II was secretly preparing the expedition for the removal of Vasile Lupu, the prince sent the Moldavian prince “two barrels of Hungarian wine” beforehand, as a gift brought by the noble János Boros, a good acquaintance of Lupu’s. Boros had the mission “to drink this Hungarian wine with him and keep him in place until Kemény arrived from the mountains with his army.” This plan which succeeded and Lupu was taken aback by the advancement of the Transylvanian troops.¹³

Returning to the years of Matei’s exile and the chronicle testimonies proving his connection with Rákóczy, we find other statements claiming that the Transylvanian prince had a decisive role in the enthronement of the Wallachian ruler. Thus, the *Cantacuzino Chronicle* (*Letopisețul cantacuzinesc*) contends that “after he took leave from Prince Racoți and all the nobles and the gentry,” he “set off to come here, in the country. And the prince, for the just service they rendered him when the Germans came upon him at Tocaia [the reference is to the participation of the exiled boyars in the Battle of Rakamaz, waged between Rákóczy and the Imperials], would not let him without men, but chose Captain Vaida Bun, with a number of troops, and starting from Caravan-Sebeș, on 2 August, they accompanied Matei-Agha with great honour.”¹⁴

Without giving further clarifications, Georg Kraus essentially upholds the same thing, saying that Matei was seated on the throne by Rákóczy. The Saxon chronicler wrongly places the event, however, in March 1633, after the death of Leon-Voivode, instead of August-September, as it happened in reality.¹⁵ Szalárdi’s *Chronicle* proves to be more accurate as regards Matei’s enthronement, saying it took place following Rákóczy’s diplomatic intervention at the Porte, but without mentioning anything about some military aid. On the other hand, the Transylvanian chronicler also omitted the episode of the Wallachian wanderers’ participation in the Battle of Rakamaz, probably in order to pass into silence the mutual support offered by the two future allies.¹⁶

Correlated, however, with stronger documentary evidence, the chroniclers’ testimonies concerning the military support Rákóczy allegedly granted Agha Matei at his enthronement prove to have been somewhat inexact. As the historian Ioan Sîrbu

¹¹ Veress, *Documente*, vol. IX, pp. 248-250.

¹² Szalárdi, *Síralmas krónikája*, p. 143.

¹³ Kraus, *Cronica*, p. 154; cf. Sîrbu, *Mateiu-vodă*, p. 327.

¹⁴ *Istoria Țării Românești*, p. 100.

¹⁵ Kraus, *Cronica*, p. 87.

¹⁶ Szalárdi, *Síralmas krónikája*, p. 150.

has shown, from a purely military standpoint, Matei gained access to the throne through his own forces, consisting of the entourage of wandering nobles, as well as of troops of Banatian Romanians led by Vaida Bona. These, in any case, were not made available by Rákóczy (according to a Dietal ruling of 1632, the population in the districts of Banat was exempt from military service, and the prince, who was engaged in a conflict with the Imperials, had no available troops at the time), but were recruited by the wandering boyars at their own expense.¹⁷ It may be ascertained that these recruitments were carried out with the tacit consent of the prince. Rákóczy's support materialised, however, as Szalárdi also stated, primarily through diplomatic interventions at the Porte, and not through military aid proper.

What then is the meaning of the somewhat conflicting statements from the texts of the aforecited chronicles, since it is clear that they are not simple errors of information? The explanation starts from the fact that they express certain political attitudes towards the recounted events. Kraus, who wrote from the perspective of a Transylvanian, naturally had a tendency to overrate the role played by his prince in the politics adopted by his southern neighbour. Szalárdi, who was operating as a clerk in the service of the princely chancery in 1633,¹⁸ expressed a point of view that I would call official. He also tended to emphasise the generosity and the high protection granted by Rákóczy to his future ally, which is why he glossed over the services Matei had rendered to the prince. At the same time, he did not venture to assert that the expedition of enthronement had benefited from any military help from Transylvania, as this would have contravened the principality's policy of sparing the Ottomans' sensitivities.

What remains most difficult to explain is the assertion referring to Rákóczy's military support in the *Cantacuzino Chronicle* (*Letopisețul cantacuzinesc*), given that, as mentioned above, this support was not actually granted; moreover, following the logic of reasoning in the Transylvanian chronicles, it would have had to be denied anyway if Matei's personal merits were to be emphasised. Whereas this support is not mentioned in the Wallachian chronicle, this is probably due to its author's intent to highlight the future line of Matei Basarab's policy, of close and permanent cooperation with Transylvania. Given the subsequent relations between the two leaders and, especially, the way in which Matei wanted to promote them, it was natural that such motivations should have been pushed into the foreground, in an attempt to highlight, in an exaggerated way even, the services that the two leaders had rendered each other over time, justifying thus the subsequent line of Wallachian foreign policy, predicated on constant alliance with Transylvania.

2. The Rákóczy princes' stance on their alliance with Matei Basarab

It can be safely ascertained that the policy of close alliance with Wallachia was a necessity for Transylvania, which had also been subjected to Ottoman pressures; at the same time, it represented a tradition in the principality's foreign policy orientation.

¹⁷ I. D. Suciú, *Unitatea poporului român. Contribuții istorice bănățene*, Timișoara, 1980, pp. 48-50; Sîrbu, *Mateiu-vodă*, pp. 21-23.

¹⁸ Detre Horváth, "Szalárdi János és siralmas krónikája," in *Századok*, 57, 1923, p. 99.

However, there was another tradition that vied with this tendency to form alliances and was targeted at establishing suzerainty and domination, which had been promoted especially by Gabriel Bethlen over the past few decades.

Obviously, these claims did not actually appear as such in the texts of the treaties, being mentioned, at most, formally, as an extension of the chancery traditions entrenched in the practice of bilateral relations. The specific provisions of these treaties mentioned the duty of good neighbourliness, sincere friendship and the mutual support the prince was also bound to offer: "Wishing to keep good neighbourliness and true friendship with the great and honourable Voivode Matei... we will not be his enemies on any grounds and in any way, we will do no harm and will bring no offense either to him nor his country... But if someone should go against him, we will strive to turn him around, to the best of our ability."¹⁹ On the other hand, while taking great caution lest Matei should find out about this, the prince considered himself, unilaterally, to be the Wallachian voivode's overlord. In 1647, when he was contacted by Duke Radzywill for a crusade against the Ottomans, Rákóczy demanded the Poles not to conclude any agreement with the Wallachian ruler because the latter was his subordinate and his vassal.²⁰ Matei Basarab had never, in fact, assumed this vassalage.

With all its irritating character, this aspect of the relations between Wallachia and Transylvania was unlikely to affect the alliance too much: on the one hand, because Rákóczy lacked the means to impose his point of view and, on the other hand, because the Wallachian ruler proved to possess the necessary political tact, turning a blind eye to certain formal issues that had little bearing on the country's independence and maintaining a tone that expressed his full attachment in the private letters and the official documents he addressed to the prince.

Rákóczy understood the importance of his alliance with Wallachia, even on the grounds of equality, so he gave it due consideration, especially since it was to prove extremely useful to the principality, above all, in 1636, when Matei Basarab's unflagging support saved his ally's throne, threatened by a Turkish intervention. Such an attitude was frankly reciprocated by Rákóczy, as attested by a statement he made in 1646, not before his ally, but the Diet, in which he asserted that "Transylvania is inaccessible to the Turks thanks to Wallachia and Moldova."²¹

The delivery of such statements before the Diet was not haphazard, because many of the Transylvanian noble circles were in favour of a close political alliance with Wallachia and realised the importance of a community of interests between the two provinces against the Ottoman threat. By promoting such attitudes, some nobles developed, as we shall see, differences of opinion with the prince, who was more vacillating in his options for Matei Basarab. The recognition of Wallachia's strategic importance is attested by a letter sent in 1642 by Palatine Miklós Eszterházy to the Transylvanian nobleman Zsigmond Kornis, in which the Wallachian ruler was

¹⁹ Motogna, "Epoca lui Matei Basarab," p. 476.

²⁰ Stoicescu, *Matei Basarab*, pp. 127-128, note 8.

²¹ *Monumenta Comitialia Regni Transylvaniae. Erdélyi Országgyűlési Emlékek*, ed. Sándor Szilágyi, vol. X, p. 446.

deemed to represent a “sturdy wall” for Transylvania and the need to support him, with a view to defending Transylvania’s own interests, was reinforced.²²

The prince’s main counsellors supported, in fact, his collaboration with Matei Basarab. Thus, Zsigmond Kornis, General of the principality, upheld the idea of granting military aid to the Wallachian voivode, who attempted to overthrow Vasile Lupu, in 1637; Kornis adopted that stance against the opinions of his own prince, despite the latter’s authoritative position in decision-making situations.²³ Kornis showed that an intervention in favour of the voivode was necessary because it would have been shameful to abandon Matei, who had supported Transylvania so much in 1636, and the unrest in Wallachia would have negatively impacted Transylvania, too. Another of Rákóczy’s close advisers, István Serédy, considered the prince was bound to help the voivode, who was, as Serédy put it, Transylvania’s sole supporter, apart from God. As long as he remained on the throne, the principality would be defended; otherwise, it would become a theatre of war.²⁴

Awareness of such ideas was not, however, limited only to the great magnates responsible for Transylvania’s diplomacy, as they were shared by a wider range of social groups in Transylvania. Ordinary people, such as János Péter Bukovecky, a provost in Nikopol, or Captain István Horváth alerted Rákóczy, in 1642, about the plans of the Porte to attack Matei Basarab, in the aftermath of which Transylvania was to be devastated too.²⁵ The priest János Köröspataki, the author of narrative poems about Matei’s deeds of arms, claimed that the voivode’s disappearance would have entailed “great damage” to Transylvania, since for as long “as he has lived, he has been like a border fortress, so the Turks and the Tatars could not attack us easily.”²⁶ The chronicler Georg Kraus adopted similar terms in his accounts,²⁷ not to mention the Romanian peasants’ state of mind, as they had experienced directly the threat of Ottoman incursions and were bound to feel close to Matei Basarab, through their religious and ethnic solidarity or based on the consciousness of their identity of language and faith.

It can therefore be stated that the idea of solidarity with Wallachia had represented a constant attitude on the part of the various political and social factors in Transylvania, starting, of course, with the prince himself. To explain, though, why the latter did not adopt a firmer line of collaboration with Matei Basarab, which would really have produced a more efficient response to the Ottoman interferences, we should take several reasons into account, in all their complexity. One of these, detailed above, resided in Rákóczy’s claims of sovereignty and domination over his ally.

Another pertained to Transylvania’s international conjuncture, as well as to its foreign policy tradition. The principality was against the idea of an anti-Ottoman

²² Veress, *Documente*, vol. X, p. 127.

²³ *Monumenta Comitalia*, vol. X, pp. 116-120.

²⁴ Szilágyi, *Levelek és okiratok*, pp. 566-567.

²⁵ Veress, *Documente*, vol. X, p. 130.

²⁶ János Köröspataki, “Az havasalföldi harcról való história,” in *Régi magyar költők tára*, vol. IX, Budapest, 1977, p. 95 sq.

²⁷ Kraus, *Cronica*, p. 87.

crusade and in favour of a policy of equilibrium between the Porte and the Imperials. The aid Rákóczy had granted to the wandering boyars and to Agha Matei on his enthronement was otherwise also related, at least in part, to this policy of equilibrium. The prince and the Diet were concerned about the rise of the Levantine higher nobility in Wallachia and Moldova, who evolved within the orrery of the Turks and, thus, risked upsetting the established balance, by excessively strengthening the Ottoman positions across the extra-Carpathian territories. By supporting the group of indigenous boyars, Transylvania attempted to restore the jeopardised balance.

That was due, on the one hand, to the terror inspired by the Ottoman pressure (through Vasile Lupu's Moldova and the Tatars to the east, and through the Pashalik of Buda to the west) and, on the other hand, to the fears of, and even to the policy of confrontation with, the Imperials (as was the case of Transylvania's participation in the Thirty Years' War). This orientation entailed, of course, a rapprochement to the Porte, the traditional enemy of the House of Habsburg in the Middle Danube Basin; hence, the lesser usefulness of the alliance with Wallachia.²⁸ In addition, a prince like Rákóczy, who was a defender of the faith, could add an ideological motivation to this policy of confrontation with the Imperials. The Calvinist principality attempted to find an ally in the Ottoman sultan (as well as in the Swedes) against the Catholic Habsburgs.

To these two major factors that determined Rákóczy's reluctance to engage in a closer political friendship with Matei Basarab was added a third, subjective aspect. More specifically, this was the prince's inconsistent behaviour, an aspect that often influenced his political attitude, especially in those times, when intrigues, the deceptive game of alliances and Machiavellianism largely characterised the practices of diplomacy.²⁹ It was a political mentality entrenched in the Renaissance heritage, perpetuated by the Venetian and Ottoman diplomacy, and anchored in Baroque attitudes, characterised by the fickleness of human relations and, in general, of the international reality, given the fear of aggression specific to certain endangered areas.³⁰ This mental climate, together with Rákóczy I's fickle character, could explain, to a certain extent, the duplicity the prince often evinced in his relations with Matei Basarab.

As regards Rákóczy II, who was described by the sources as more impetuous and less temperate than his father,³¹ the oscillations of his attitude were also due to his more impulsive character. In any case, they were less obvious, being outshone by the prince's obsessive plans to acquire the crown of Poland.

3. Other attitudes in Transylvania: the nobles and the chroniclers

We have so far seen the causes underlying the attitudes manifested by the Rákóczy princes in the policy they pursued towards their ally. What remains to be

²⁸ Szilágyi, *I. Rákóczi György*, passim.

²⁹ Tahsin Gemil, *Țările Române în contextul politic internațional 1621-1672*, București, 1979, passim.

³⁰ Răzvan Theodorescu, *Civilizația românilor între medieval și modern*, vol. I, București, 1987, chap.

“Gusturi și atitudini baroce la români înainte de 1700,” pp. 137-182.

³¹ Veress, *Documente*, vol. X, p. 424.

seen are the opinions of the princes' entourage as regards this policy; hence, we shall endeavour to capture several assessments thereof, focusing on how its image was perceived by their contemporaries. They express, of course, certain subjectivities, expressing the vantage of their own interests, but summed up together, they can provide a more complex image that is closer to the truth.

From among the prince's collaborators, we may distinguish a few, usually his closest confidants and counsellors, who, naturally, shared his views or even inspired them, positioning themselves on his side in regard to his vacillating conduct towards Matei Basarab. A typical example was István Kassay, his principal adviser: in the confidential letters he addressed to the prince, devoid of indiscretions that might have altered their content, Kassay expressed many doubts about Matei Basarab's policy, justifying thus the necessity of maintaining a cautious position on the part of the Transylvanians.

In 1637, for instance, only one year after the voivode had proved his loyalty and had offered Rákóczy decisive support, risking his own position, Kassay advised the prince on how he should deal with Matei Basarab, insisting that only time would show whether the Wallachian would take the side of the Turks or of Transylvania: "If Voivode Matei, together with his country, wishes to reach an agreement with Your Highness against the Turks, Your Highness should maintain him and not allow him to break away, in any way, either by practice or by heeding the Turks' urging; Your Highness should alienate him from the Turks in every way possible... And if Voivode Matei is drawn toward the Turks... Your Highness can put Your trust neither him, nor his country."³²

This is how Kassay also wrote in 1638, regarding the disputes between Matei and Vasile Lupu: his argument was that neither had been sincere to the Transylvanians.³³ When in 1639, danger of a Tatar and Moldovan invasion was looming over Wallachia, which would have entailed, according to the treaties, the obligation of Transylvanian support, the counsellor proposed that "Your Highness's army should act cautiously," remaining virtually on stand-by. Moreover, "if Matei's state begins to be questionable," the army should "not place itself in jeopardy, but preserve itself." "We need to help Matei," Kassay eventually conceded, "but in such a way that both he and we may remain together with the country and with Your Highness."³⁴

Besides Kassay, another promoter of such a duplicitous policy towards Wallachia was István Szalánczi, the Transylvanian agent to the Porte, who also advised the prince against strengthening the links with Matei Basarab too much, against trusting him and against acting on his intentions of launching an anti-Ottoman crusade, so as not to damage Transylvania's relations with the Turks.³⁵ Szalánczi's position was explicable from the standpoint of a more general option of Transylvanian politics; in addition to this, he was a diplomat accredited with one of

³² Veress, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³³ Veress, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³⁴ Veress, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁵ Veress, *op. cit.*, vol. IX, p. 323.

the major powers, who was eager, above all, to maintain his country's good relations with it.

In Transylvania, however, there also existed, as mentioned above, nobiliary circles and political factors that appreciated the position of the Wallachian ruler in a more favourable light, upholding the idea of a closer and more sincere cooperation with him. They advocated these ideas before the prince, showing that Wallachia played the role of a defender of the principality against the Ottomans. In the circumstances mentioned before, in the years 1637-1638, foremost power holders of the principality, such as István Serédy, Zsigmond Kornis or János Kemény, supported this viewpoint, contrary to Kassay's fears.

Kemény, for instance, passed rather harsh judgement on Rákóczy in his memoirs, for his twofaced strategy of 1639, blaming both him and Kassay for having allowed themselves to fall prey to fear and accusing the prince of hypocrisy and dishonesty. Kemény led the army corps intended to station in Burzenland in order to make Matei believe that he would be helped, but, as he said in his *Memoirs* (*Memorii*), he was so disgusted with this hypocrisy that he required to leave the command and retired to Făgăraș, in order not to partake in such deceitful affairs.³⁶

To appreciate correctly these attitudes espoused by the advocates a policy of duplicity or of sincere alliance with Matei Basarab, we must consider several aspects concerning the position and the interests their protagonists expressed. Kemény, in particular, like other Transylvanian nobles like Kornis or Serédy, was an opponent of the Rákóczy princes' tendencies of strengthening the central authority and expanding the princely demesne at the expense of the nobiliary estates. It was, above all, for this policy that the memoirist later criticised Rákóczy I and his son, whose authoritarian tendencies were at odds with the influence Kemény had acquired.³⁷ From this perspective, there were, of course, other differences of opinion too, relating to foreign policy or to this antagonism between the authoritarian princely policy and the autonomous tendencies of the nobility, while Kassay or Tholdalaghy appeared as supporters of the princely policy, in all of its aspects.

Besides this political divergence, there also existed confessional and ideological dissensions. The Catholics generally supported the line of anti-Ottoman resistance (which involved close relations with Matei Basarab), as they relied or, at least, took into consideration the support provided by the Imperials, as they belonged to the same denomination. Kemény himself, as a prince, was to seek Leopold I's support against the Ottomans.³⁸ Zsigmond Kornis, General of the principality, was in the same position: he was yet another supporter of the alliance with Basarab and of resistance against the Ottomans, his ideas being inspired by Palatine Eszterházy, a representative of the Catholic circles in Northern Hungary and a partisan of the Habsburgs.³⁹

By contrast, Rákóczy, a fervent Protestant, was the supporter of good relations with the Ottomans, with a view to withstanding the Catholic Imperials. It is true that

³⁶ János Kemény, "Önéletírás," in *Kemény János és Bethlen Miklós művei*, Budapest, 1980, p. 120.

³⁷ Éva W. Windisch, afterword to the volume *Kemény János és Bethlen Miklós művei*, p. 366.

³⁸ Windisch, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

³⁹ Stoicescu, *Matei Basarab*, p. 152.

such alignments were not mandatory and there are numerous exceptions, but they often provided an ideological justification to some foreign policy orientations.

Closely linked to all of the above contradictions, a problem that lay at the basis of disputes emerging within the ruling circles of Transylvania, regarding the policy to be adopted towards Matei Basarab, was the inclusion of the Turks, as a possible enemy, in the treaties of alliance with the Wallachian ruler. Matei had always advocated that the obligation of mutual support between by the two parties should be extended against the Ottomans. The possible diplomatic complications such an agreement might have entailed could be easily avoided by concluding it in secret. Rákóczy, though, had always declined to do so, even at moments of maximum tension with the Porte, for fear of being drawn into unwanted complications. Thus, the Treaty of March 1635 stated that the prince offered to grant Wallachia assistance against any enemy, with the mention: "From all this we exempt the mighty emperor."⁴⁰ In May of the same year, Matei requested the prince in a letter to add the provision in question in the treaty: "If the Turks wanted to start something against the two countries, Your Highness should be with him [Matei] in all matters and He should be obliged to oppose them," which Rákóczy refused to do.⁴¹

In 1636, however, when the Turks were on the verge of ousting him from the throne, Rákóczy was almost ready to accept the Wallachian proposal; in any case, he received support from Matei, even though the alliance did not compel the Wallachian ruler to offer support against the Ottomans. Although at one point he made a more assertive statement ("I shall not forsake my reign for as long as I live... Better to leave my children a good name than to live without it"),⁴² fearing the Turks, the prince did not meet Matei's request even at this time. Still, as an expression of the tense relations with the Ottomans and as the result of firmer opinions expressed by the Diet, the Transylvanian estates assured the Wallachian voivode, when the alliance between them was renewed, that "understanding the Turks' dangerous thought during these troubled times," they were ready to assist him "in any fate and on every occasion," offering him shelter in case of defeat.⁴³

These divergences between the Diet and the prince on policy to be followed towards Matei Basarab seem to have reached a highpoint in 1640. After the moment of crisis in the Transylvanian-Wallachian relations in 1639, which had been triggered by the fact that Rákóczy had not granted his ally, in turn, out of favour with the sultan, the support the voivode had demanded in the face of the Tatar and Moldovan threat, Matei, who had safely escaped by his own forces, overcame the disappointment caused by the prince's defection with his usual diplomatic tact and took a new approach to strengthen bilateral ties. The message he sent to Alba Iulia in May 1640 expressed his desire not to be "separated from one another as during the previous autumn" and asked Rákóczy that

⁴⁰ Veress, *Documente*, vol. IX, pp. 343-344.

⁴¹ Veress, *Documente*, p. 346-347; cf. Rezachevici, "Începutul epocii," pp. 1010-1012.

⁴² The quotation after Nicolae Iorga, "O scrisoare a lui Matei Basarab către Gheorghe Rákóczy I, principele Ardealului," in *Studii și documente cu privire la istoria românilor*, IX, *Povestiri, scrisori și cronici*, București, 1905, p. 60.

⁴³ *Monumenta Comitalia*, vol. X, pp. 117-118.

the treaty should include no more exceptions for any potential enemy: in other words, that the Turks should also feature as potential enemy.⁴⁴ Perhaps as an expression of the Transylvanian current of opinion favourable to anti-Ottoman resistance, or only as a stratagem of the prince, the document issued by the Diet complied with Matei's request, making no reference to any exception among the potential enemies that might have exempted the Turks and the Tatars from the ranks thereof. However, in the document issued in Rákóczy's name, they were again exempted. Recounting the facts, Kemény said that the prince "has worked with guile."⁴⁵ It is not clear whether he had sought to deceive the Diet, which was, in this case, on Matei's side, or the Wallachian voivode. Most likely, through this duplicitous practice, he had attempted to offer some satisfaction to both parties.

Somewhat circumvented through such processes in the treaties concluded with Rákóczy I, the issue saw a new evolution in the documents issued by his son. In 1650, the treaty of alliance was renewed in its old form,⁴⁶ but Matei immediately sent an envoy to Alba Iulia, who pushed for the introduction of parity of rights and obligations in the new agreement, showing that the former prince had not complied with the previous ones.⁴⁷ The new treaty concluded with George Rákóczy II in 1651 undoubtedly represented a success from the vantage of the anti-Ottoman desideratum pursued by the Wallachian ruler. The prince undertook the obligation to help the ruler should "the Turks violate the conventions that the voivode and his country have with the Ottoman Porte."⁴⁸ As Nicolae Iorga noted, this was "the first acknowledgment of the fact that Wallachia was a self-standing state, having only certain agreements with the state of the sultans."⁴⁹ At the same time, in keeping with his traditional attitude, the Wallachian ruler also undertook to provide support against the Turks and the Tatars. Moreover, the manner in which Rákóczy II complied with these arrangements proved to be more favourable to Matei. The two leaders collaborated in 1653, during the Battle of Finta, as well as in the campaign for the removal of Vasile Lupu.

To complete the picture of the Transylvanian opinions about the alliance with the Wallachian ruler, what should also be noted is the somewhat singular position of János Kemény, between that of the prince and that of the nobles who supported the notion of anti-Ottoman resistance. As we have seen, Kemény was a greater opponent of the Turks, as he would prove later on, and as regards the relations with Matei Basarab, he was a partisan of supporting the Wallachian and of the correct enforcement of the obligations assumed under the treaties. However, when the alliance between Rákóczy I and Matei was concluded, although he accepted the general point of view, which demanded that the treaty should be signed, Kemény expressed a different opinion. Here is how he recounted the event: "He sent an envoy

⁴⁴ Veress, *Documente*, vol. X, pp. 73-75.

⁴⁵ Kemény, *Önéletírás*, p. 102; a Romanian translation in *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. V, București, 1973, p. 134.

⁴⁶ Ioan Lupăș, *Documente istorice transilvane*, vol. I, Cluj, 1940, p. 250.

⁴⁷ Stoicescu, *Matei Basarab*, p. 183.

⁴⁸ *Monumenta Comitalia*, vol. X, p. 134.

⁴⁹ Iorga, *O scrisoare*, p. 178.

and Voivode Matei snatched a new diploma from the prince and the Diet, concerning the alliance with them. I opposed this and when I had to sign, I protested, saying, 'I'll sign too, but not gladly... I believe that our alliance with the Romanians will be to our detriment, because both we and they are too weak to defend one another'.⁵⁰ Given his subsequent political evolution, we may assume that his view aimed to underline the weakness of the two countries and the precarious alliance between them, out of a desire to suggest thus that other alliances, more effective were needed, with the Imperials, in this case.

Szalárdi's *Chronicle* adopted a different position. Although he did not do so explicitly, but merely by omitting some facts and by euphemising less favourable aspects, he endeavoured, in fact, to justify the princely policy. Thus, the chronicler stated that Rákóczy was in good relations with Matei Basarab, to the extent that they did not bother the Porte,⁵¹ omitting or failing to detect the contradiction between these two attitudes, stemming from the fact that Matei saw the agreement with Transylvania as directed precisely against the Ottoman danger. Another time, recounting the events of 1639 (which he erroneously placed in 1640), characterised by the prince's duplicitous policy that Kemény had severely incriminated, Szalárdi (in a manner reminiscent, in fact, of the machinations of Vasile Lupu, who had tried to incite Rákóczy against Matei) found only words of praise to describe the policy of the prince, who had allegedly secretly supported Matei Basarab.⁵² It was obviously a distorted way of looking at things.

Similar artifices, specific to the narrative springs that are inherently marked by the subjectivity of their authors, are encountered in the chronicle of Georg Kraus, this time with reference to Rákóczy II. Thus, Kraus stated that in 1653, when the old ruler was attacked by Lupu and by the Cossacks of Timuș Hmelnițki, the prince ostensibly sent 5,000 soldiers to help him. The treacherous boyars, however, allegedly prevented these troops from crossing the mountains, which deprived Matei from the promised help.⁵³

This rather implausible story, invalidated by more credible sources, was aimed, according to the chronicler's intentions, perhaps, to excuse the prince for not having given Matei due support. Rákóczy also tried to exculpate himself, but in a different way. While he was in camp at Feldioara, keeping track of the events (like his father had done in 1639), he stated that Matei had written him that "there is no need to stand on positions, in the camp" and had rushed to defeat Lupu by himself,⁵⁴ which is difficult to believe. The truth, however, comes to surface from another letter, also belonging to the Prince of Transylvania, showing that the aid he had sent Matei had amounted to just 800 soldiers.⁵⁵ It was, in any case, more than Rákóczy I had done in 1639. The poem dedicated by the Transylvanian priest Köröspataki to the Battle of

⁵⁰ The translation of Kemény's account in *Călători străini*, vol. V, pp. 143-144.

⁵¹ Szalárdi, *Síralmas krónikája*, p. 324.

⁵² Szalárdi, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁵³ Kraus, *Cronica*, p. 160.

⁵⁴ Stoicescu, *Matei Basarab*, p. 198.

⁵⁵ Szilágyi, *A két Rákóczi György*, p. 324.

Finta had been occasioned precisely by the participation of this Transylvanian troop in that fight. Naturally for the specific rhetoric of such a narrative poem, Köröspataki also brought into relief the figure and the merits of Rákóczy II, who, we are told, had sent to the aid of Matei “his finest armies,” which defeated, together with the Wallachian troops, Lupu’s Moldavians and the Cossacks.⁵⁶

Despite all these construals, interpretations and differences in nuance, we should note that regardless of their political position towards prince or the idea of anti-Ottoman resistance, the vast majority of the Transylvanians who left testimonies about these matters commented in favourable or even laudatory terms on Matei Basarab’s actions, on his politics of independence and the stability of his throne, and on the military successes achieved against his adversaries. Kemény spoke of his brave troops and his dignified position in his diplomatic relations.⁵⁷ The poets Köröspataki and Malomfalvai extolled his military virtues and his courage in battle.⁵⁸ Even an enemy of his policy like Kassay referred to the voivode in his letters as the “good prince” of Wallachia.⁵⁹ “Voivode Matei passed on, much to the detriment of our country,” as the priest Köröspataki wrote, for “we would be happy if he were still alive, to our luck.”⁶⁰ Rákóczy II also expressed his reaction with complete sincerity, in a letter to his mother, Zsuzsánna Lórántffy: “Poor Voivode Matei died a week before... Would to God this tidings were untrue.”⁶¹

Statements like the ones above show that the majority of the political power holders in Transylvania positively valued the actions undertaken by the Wallachian ruler. Beyond the multiplicity of the most diverse positions and interests, the collaboration between Transylvania and Wallachia was a self-evident necessity.

The Ottoman pressure, felt either directly or through the destabilising actions undertaken by Vasile Lupu, affected both countries equally and demanded that they should close ranks in a common defence. The political attitudes we have captured here expressed precisely this tendency, noticeable at different levels. Its translation into practice, attempted through numerous efforts throughout the century, failed, however, to produce noticeable effects, due to the unfavourable external conditions.

⁵⁶ János Köröspataki, “Lupuj vajdáról való ének,” in *Régi magyar költők tára*, vol. IX (*A két Rákóczy György korának költészete*), passim.

⁵⁷ Kemény, “Önéletírás,” p. 101.

⁵⁸ In three historical poems in which there appears the figure of Matei Basarab, edited in *Régi magyar költők tára*, vol. IX.

⁵⁹ Veress, *Documente*, vol. X, p. 7.

⁶⁰ János Köröspataki, “Az havasalföldi hartzról,” in *Régi magyar költők tára*, vol. IX, p. 95.

⁶¹ Szilágyi, *A két Rákóczi György*, p. 480.