

## STUDIES

### A NEOREALIST INTERPRETATION OF OTTOMAN WARS IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE:

#### THE CASE OF KÖPRÜLÜ MEHMED PASHA (1656–1661)

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Ottoman Grand Vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha has been often portrayed as the key Ottoman figure epitomising the revival of the Ottoman political and military strength in the middle of the seventeenth century. A number of successful military campaigns undertaken during his incumbency on various European frontiers of the Ottoman Empire have contributed much to this image. Accordingly, his foreign policy toward Europe has been subjected to various explanations by historians; yet, a theoretical analysis is lacking. Using offensive realism as an explanatory tool, the present study argues that Köprülü Mehmed's military expansionism at the expense of Poland-Lithuania and Transylvania stemmed from his concern to preserve the status quo in eastern and central Europe. In 1657, he ordered Ottoman troops to intercept the Transylvanian Prince's intervention in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in order to prevent the partition of Polish-Lithuanian territories among a number of eastern European powers, the most powerful of which was Russia. This was, in a way, the Ottoman shift from "buck-passing" to "balancing" in Poland-Lithuania with regard to the increasing Russian threat. Köprülü Mehmed's direct involvement in Transylvania and occupation of the northwestern Transylvanian territories between 1658 and 1660, on the other hand, was more than a punishment of the rebellious prince. The pasha's aim was to isolate the principality from the Viennese court and undermine any possible aggrandisement of the Habsburgs in central Europe. Hence, the pasha's annexation of Transylvanian territories in line with the "calculated aggression" tenet helped check the Habsburgs.

Keywords: Eastern Europe. Central Europe. Foreign Policy Analysis. Offensive Realism. Early Modern Ottoman Empire. Grand Vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha.

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## Introduction

In 1657-58, Ottoman grand vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha took consecutive military actions in eastern and central Europe, reacting to a series of foreign policy developments in the region. In 1657, he ordered the Crimean Khanate, an Ottoman tributary state, to lead a punitive campaign against another Ottoman tributary, the Transylvanian Prince, who had been conducting unauthorised military operations inside Polish-Lithuanian territory. The following year, the grand vizier personally led a military expedition into Transylvania and incorporated portions of its territory (Yanova/Jenő/Ineu) directly into the Ottoman administrative system.<sup>1</sup> By all appearances, the grand vizier was in a struggle against one of the empire's own tributaries instead of dealing with any independent neighbouring state. This was puzzling on at least two accounts: why was the Ottoman central administration not condoning an operation against its neighbour, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose weakening position could have very well been exploited to increase Ottoman standing in eastern Europe? And, instead of focusing his attention on the more pressing foreign policy concerns of the empire (such as the ongoing siege of Candia -between 1645 and 1669-), why was Köprülü Mehmed Pasha diverting the empire's resources to a new front in Transylvania?

Throughout the last half of a century, there have been sporadic attempts to render the pasha's northern policy meaningful. Personal grudges between the pasha and the Transylvanian ruler; the pasha's pecuniary motivations for conquest or a general trend of Ottoman expansionism in the name of religion have been offered as possible causes of territorial aggrandisement.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, these available analyses have remained consigned to the field of history; that is to say, there is no analytical assessment of the pasha's foreign policy from the perspective of International Relations (IR), which is, or should be, the primarily related field of inquiry. Such an attempt is required to highlight the structural vectors determining the Ottoman foreign policy in the mid-seventeenth century instead of investing a single person, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, with too much agency.

- 1 KOLÇAK. A Transylvanian Ruler in the Talons of the 'Hawks': György Rákóczi and Köprülü Mehmed Pasha in NITU et al., eds. *IBAC-Book Series 4, Turkey&Romania: A History of Partnership and Collaboration in the Balkans*. İstanbul 2016, pp. 341-360.
- 2 KUNT. 17. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Kuzey Politikası Üzerine Bir Yorum. In *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Dergisi*, 1976-1977, Vols. 4-5, pp. 111-116; KOLÇAK, A Transylvanian Ruler; KOLÇAK. Köprülü enterprises in Yanova ([Boros]Jenő/Ineu) and Varad ([Nagy]Várad/ Oradea): Consolidating Ottoman power and accumulating family wealth (1657-1664). In *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 2020, vol. 37, pp. 69-86; BAER. *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe*. Oxford 2007; WHITEHEAD. The Early Career of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha: An Archival Reconstruction. In *Review of Middle East Studies*, 2023, 57, 1, pp. 80-81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2024.18>.

The present study seeks to offer a new theoretical perception of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's northern policy. By utilising contemporary newspapers and diplomatic reports, it argues that the pasha's decision to actively intervene in the Polish and Transylvanian affairs can also be explained by the "offensive" approach of the neorealism school. In order to ensure the security of the Ottoman frontiers in Europe, the pasha regarded the territorial integrity of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a necessity in counterbalancing the rising Russian threat. Hence, the temporary collapse of Poland-Lithuania led the pasha to have recourse to offensive action, stepping in as a balancer against this threat. Similarly, the nexus between Transylvania and the Habsburgs of Austria had to be carefully severed lest the latter exert influence inside the Transylvanian territory. Accordingly, this study argues, even though Mehmed Pasha's target was seemingly Transylvania between 1657 and 1661, his measures were intended to counterbalance Russian and Austrian influence on the Ottoman northern frontiers.

The following pages will first provide a brief explanation of (offensive) neorealism as an international relations theory and endorse its applicability to early modern history, a point already advocated by previous scholarship. It will then sketch the main foreign policy developments which were of concern to the Ottoman Empire during the grand vizierate of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha in the latter half of the 1650s. Lastly, the Ottoman intervention in Poland-Lithuania and Transylvania will be evaluated respectively from the perspective of offensive neorealism. The concluding section argues that Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's offensive actions were aimed at preserving the status-quo in central and eastern Europe to safeguard long-term Ottoman interests.

### **Offensive Realism as Theoretical Framework**

The recent trend followed by International Relations researchers to combine the discipline of history with their field, or at least to recalibrate the main tenets of IR around a historical axis, has resulted in the formation of the subfield Historical IR.<sup>3</sup> And it would not be unfair to claim that this subfield is dominated by *constructivist* theories for the last four decades. Constructivist approach, in turn, criticised the viability of neorealism in explaining IR due to its so-called problematic ahistoricism, which regarded the "structural determinist" explanations of neorealism to be insensitive to historical variation.<sup>4</sup> This is in itself an implicit call for realist scholarship to focus more on history. Furthermore, non-European IR, the fresh approach with a concern for dismantling the central assumptions

3 For the reference work, see DE CARVALHO; LOPEZ; LEIRA, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*. London 2021.

4 LEIRA and DE CARVALHO. Construction Time Again: History in Constructivist IR Scholarship. In *ERIS – European Review of International Studies*, 2016, Vol. 3, no. 3, p. 104.

of Eurocentric international relations, goes hand in hand with Historical IR in many cases and emerges as the most prominent venue where the mention of the pre-modern Ottoman Empire comes up.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the present attempt is not to be approached within the ambit of non-European IR. To the contrary, it tries to situate an episode of early modern Ottoman history inside the neorealist, perhaps one can say Eurocentric, framework. Such an endeavour is a necessity given the “problematic ahistoricism” arguments the constructivists direct at realists and due to the actual underrepresentation of historical case studies within the realist paradigm, which inevitably suggest that neorealism is indeed in need of fresh studies making use of history. Then, what is neorealism?

IR literature accepts Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979) as the fundamental work of neorealism (in other words, structural realism), in which the author postulated the international system to be anarchical since the late medieval period. This created a “self-help” setting in which states had to fend for themselves, regarding other states as potential threat factors, and they had to establish a balance of power.<sup>6</sup> With its relatively optimistic perception of states which are satiable in their search for power and ready to settle for the maintenance of the existing balance of power, Waltz’s approach was later termed “defensive realism”.<sup>7</sup> Building upon Waltz, John Mearsheimer developed the concept of “offensive realism”, most significantly in his 2001 book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Accordingly, great powers in this anarchical system act as power maximisers and try to establish hegemony, since power is the best tool for survival.<sup>8</sup>

Among the semantic coins offered by offensive realism, “buck-passing” and “balancing” are relevant to the subject at hand. The term “buck-passing” refers to a scenario whereby a great power prompts another state to absorb the aggression of a threatening state.<sup>9</sup> As Wang observed, in systems of multipolarity, “*great powers are more likely to buck-pass*”, especially when there is no common border with the aggressor state.<sup>10</sup> “Balancing”, on the other hand, is actively stepping in to help another state against the aggressor so that the existing distribution

5 RINGMAR. *History of International Relations: A Non-European Perspective*. Cambridge, UK 2019; ZARAKOL. *Before the West The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders*. Cambridge 2022.

6 BROWN and AINLEY. *Understanding International Relations*. Basingstoke and New York 2005, p. 42-43; WALTZ. *Theory of International Politics*. Long Grove 2010, p. 193.

7 SNYDER. Mearsheimer’s World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay. In *International Security*, 2002, vol. 27, no. 1, p. 151-153.

8 MEARSHEIMER. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York; London 2001, p. 35-36.

9 MEARSHEIMER, *The Tragedy*, p. 13.

10 WANG. Offensive realism and the rise of China. In *Issues & Studies*, 2004, vol. 40, no. 1, p.179.

of power can be preserved. It is the preferred option when there is a territorial border between the protagonists.<sup>11</sup> Offensive actions and territorial expansion, in this respect, might emerge as balancing strategies.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, when great powers resort to hostile activities, offensive realism suggests, their behaviour is that of a “calculated aggression”. That is to say, the anticipated benefits of military aggression should outweigh the predicted costs for the great power to launch the offensive.<sup>13</sup>

How viable is it, however, to approach early modern politics from the neorealist perspective? Unaccustomed as it might sound to apply an IR theory for historical analysis, criticism has recently emerged regarding the short-sighted scope of these theories. It has been noted, for example, that quantitative studies have mostly failed to address developments chronologically earlier than the Battle of Waterloo, making it impossible for IR theories to suggest any significance outside a rather limited period and geography, i.e., the modern West.<sup>14</sup> This is a gap that modern studies need to, and recently have started to, bridge in order to strengthen the bases for such theories be it from the realist or constructivist sides of the spectrum, as argued above.<sup>15</sup> But at this point, one can take note of Kadercan’s remark that due to its “transhistorical scope,” structural realism is supposed to explain thousands of years of political interaction between states with its two basic assumptions of “anarchy” and “state survival”.<sup>16</sup>

Continuing on this strand of thought, another suggestion is that earlier international systems can be analysed particularly from the neorealist perspective with respect to Europe: the international system has an evolutionary quality in which offensive realism gradually left its place to defensive realism over the five centuries between 1450 and 1995. Particularly after the Second World War, conquests became more difficult and illegitimate, inevitably enforcing the states to opt for status-quo preserving defensive realist policies.<sup>17</sup> Such an

11 SNYDER, Mearsheimer’s World, p. 161-162.

12 ÜNALAN. *Neorealizm Perspektifinden Rusya’nın Kırım’ı İlhakı*. MA Thesis, Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, 2022, p. 6.

13 MEARSHEIMER, *The Tragedy*, p. 37.

14 MOTIN. Great Power Politics in World History: Balance of Power and Central Wars Since Antiquity. In *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 2022, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 176.

15 ECKSTEIN. *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California 2006; GRYGIEL. The Primacy of Premodern History. In *Security Studies*, 2013, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 1-32; KADERCAN. Territorial design and grand strategy in the Ottoman Empire. In *Territory, Politics and Governance*, 2017, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 158-176; ZARAKOL, *Before the West*, pp. 7-8.

16 KADERCAN. Making sense of survival: refining the treatment of state preferences in neorealist theory. In *Review of International Studies*, 2013, vol. 39, p. 1016-1017.

17 TANG. Social evolution of international politics: From Mearsheimer to Jervis. In *European Journal of International Relations*, 2010, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 43.

observation inherently confirms that the early modern international system, or more precisely the seventeenth century that this study focuses on for that matter, is best scrutinised through offensive realism.

Speaking of the early modern states system, it is possible to acknowledge realism's assumption of an anarchical setting. Although there is a variety of arguments in the scholarship as to when the modern international order started, the present study will stick to the tradition which argues that there has been a world order involving great powers since the Pax Mongolica (ca. 1250–1350).<sup>18</sup> And defining “great power” as a state with “relative self-sufficiency with respect to security, including invulnerability against secondary states, and the ability to project military power beyond its borders in pursuit of its interests,” Levy carries the chronology slightly forward and suggests that the great power system emerged at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Early modern Europe was, hence, a multipolar system, with the following great powers at play in the seventeenth century: Austria, Spain, England, the Netherlands, Sweden and France.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, the Ottoman Empire is also accepted to be a great power after the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 until the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699.<sup>21</sup> The only objection to raise herein is that the Muscovite State (Russian Tsardom) must also be granted the status of “great power” since it had great potential, and actual, influence on eastern Europe as will be shown below. In short, by the time Köprülü Mehmed Pasha acted as the grand vizier between 1656 and 1661, the Ottoman Empire was one among a number of great powers in a multipolar state system.<sup>22</sup>

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- 18 MENZEL. *Die Ordnung der Welt*. In *Jahrbuch 2012 der Braunschweigischen Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft*, 2013, p. 168. It seems that Menzel gets the idea of starting the states system not with Westphalia (1648), but with the aftermath of the Chinggisid expansion in the thirteenth century from ABU-LUGHOD. *Before European Hegemony. The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. New York and Oxford 1989. A similar idea is propagated by Ayşe Zarakol in 2022, ZARAKOL. *Before the West*. Erik Ringmar also brings forth the idea of an “international system of khanates” in the same period, RINGMAR, *History of International Relations*, p. 116. Both Zarakol and Ringmar refer to WEATHERFORD. *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. New York 2004.
- 19 LEVY. *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975*. Lexington, Kentucky 1983, p. 14. We can keep in mind that Kennedy also started his work on global politics similarly with the year 1500, KENNEDY. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London 1988.
- 20 LEVY, *War in the Modern Great Power System*, p. 46–47.
- 21 MOTIN, Great Power Politics, p. 189–190; LEVY, *War in the Modern Great Power System*, p. 35–37.
- 22 Hence, even though the theory might also be applied to early modern Ottoman foreign policy before 1699 in general, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha is specifically chosen within the scope of the present study as he epitomises the brief revival of increased Ottoman military presence in Europe during the so-called Köprülü period.

With such a multipolar character, this study advocates, it was the state system that determined the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period in general. In particular, as will be shown below, the main political controversies of the 1650s with which the Ottomans had to deal had longer term causes, dating back to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Therefore, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's foreign policy in the mid-century was shaped more by systemic imperatives than the pasha's own statesmanship. Accordingly, neorealism is adopted as the explanatory tool due to its capacity to offer a better long-term analysis.

### **Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's Foreign Policy and Eastern European Politics**

The grand vizierates of the Köprülü family are traditionally regarded as a period of "restoration".<sup>23</sup> It was a relatively long period covering the incumbencies of three consecutive grand viziers: Köprülü Mehmed (1656–1661), his son Fazıl Ahmed (1661–1676) and his son-in-law Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha (1676–1683). The invigoration of the Ottoman political structure, stabilisation of the government offices and the expansion of the empire's territory during this period were the elements that earned the epithet "restoration". Nonetheless, one must not be misled to think that there was a century-long hiatus of Ottoman territorial expansion in Europe between the Köprülü grand vizierates and the better-known reign of Süleyman the Magnificent in the previous century (1520–1566): with the Treaty of Zsitvatorok in 1606, Eğri/Erlau and Kanije/Kanizsa in central Europe became proper Ottoman provinces (vilayets). Baghdad and Azov were recuperated between 1638 and 1642, while most of the Cretan territory fell under Ottoman authority after 1645. When he assumed power in 1656, therefore, one of the major problems Köprülü Mehmed Pasha had to deal with was the conquest of the island of Crete which placed a considerable burden on the Ottoman military might between 1645 and 1669.<sup>24</sup> To sum up, there was no shortage of Ottoman

23 KISSLING. Die Köprülü-Restauration. In *Internationales Kulturhistorisches Symposion Mogensdorf 1969, Österreich und die Türken*. Eisenstadt 1972, p. 75-84; ÇALIŞIR. *A Virtuous Grand Vizier: Politics and Patronage in the Ottoman Empire during the Grand Vizierate of Fazıl Ahmed Pasha (1661–1676)*. PhD Thesis, Georgetown University 2016, p. 8. Also see most recently, BEKAR. The Rise of the Köprülü Household: The Transformation of Patronage in the Ottoman Empire in the Seventeenth Century. In *Turkish Historical Review*, 2021, vol. 11, no. 2-3, pp. 229-56.

24 ÁGOSTON. *The Last Muslim Conquest: The Ottoman Empire and Its Wars in Europe*. Princeton 2021; EMECEN. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluş ve Yükseliş Tarihi (1300–1600)*. İstanbul 2016, pp. 343-386; KÜPELİ. *Osmanlı-Safevi Münasebetleri, 1612–1639*. İstanbul 2014; YÜKSEL. Don Kazalarının Azak'ı İşgalleri. In *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2011, vol. 30, no. 49, pp. 205-18; GÜLSOY. *Girit'in Fethi ve Osmanlı İdaresinin Kurulması, 1645–1670*. İstanbul 2004.

territorial expansion before the Köprülü period. The difference, however, lay in the fact that the Ottoman acquisition of land took place in shorter spans of time after the Köprülü started to wield the helm of state.

Köprülü Mehmed left a lasting imprint in the Ottoman historiography with his rather rash and effective military measures. To start with, he took pains to ensure the defence of imperial territories. In the framework of the struggle against the Venetians, two castles were erected (*Seddülbahir* and *Sultaniye*) at the mouth of the straits of Dardanelles once the pasha managed to break the naval blockade after 1657.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he ordered the construction of two sets of fortifications on the Dnieper and Don around 1660 in order to entrench the Ottoman presence in the northern Black Sea against Cossack naval incursions.<sup>26</sup>

But more important were the measures the pasha took to reform the land forces. As the Dutch representative in Istanbul remarked, after coming to power, he worked hard and managed “*what the former sultans failed to do*” by reducing the size of central cavalry (*altı bölük halkı*), whose numbers had swollen with people who found their way into the establishment despite their lack of proper merit.<sup>27</sup> The size of the cavalry corps had shrunk to some 15.000 troops by 1660 from at least 25.000 immediately before the pasha’s reign.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the pasha also managed to placate the notoriously recalcitrant janissaries, the French newspaper of the time suggested, “*who, instead of refusing to join the campaign as they had always done, now exhibited an extreme ardour to be employed*” for military expedition.<sup>29</sup> In short, Köprülü Mehmed used his best efforts to increase the offensive and defensive capacities of the Ottoman Empire.

25 PEIRCE. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York; Oxford 1993, p. 196, 211, 257.

26 AVAKOV; GUSACH; DEDIUL’KIN. Na Granitse Imperii: Osmanskii i Rossiiskii Ukrepleniia Severo-Vostochnogo Priazov’ia po Dannym Arkheologii. In BELYAEV and IURASOV, eds. *Ot Smuty k Imperii. Novye Otkrytiia v Oblasti Arkheologii i Istorii Rossii XVI–XVIII vv.* Moscow and Vologda 2016, pp. 380–381; CEVRİOĞLU. Grand Vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha’s Fortifications Along the Northern Black Sea Coast. In *Istoriya-History*, 2023, vol. 31, no. 2, p. 119–131.

27 Report dated 29 May 1659, Istanbul, see WARNER. *De Rebus Turcicis*. Ed. G. N. Du Rieu. Leiden 1883, p. 59–60. Warner’s report suggested that the corps was reduced to 12.000 from 70.000, the latter figure surely being an exaggeration. For a recent assessment of the central cavalry corps showing how it was disciplined on the immediate eve and during the office period of Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, see WHITEHEAD. The Veledeş Conflict: A Reassessment of the Mid-Seventeenth-Century Rebellions of the Altı Bölük Halkı. In *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Summer 2021, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 291–310.

28 UZUNÇARŞILI. *Osmalı Devleti Teşkilatından Kapukulu Ocakları II. Cebeci, Topcu, Top Arabacıları, Humbaracı, Lağımçı Ocakları ve Kapukulu Suvarileri*. Ankara 1988, p. 215.

29 News dated 30 April 1657, Venice. In *Recueil de Gazettes nouvelles*. Paris, 1658, p. 515.

Making a chronological survey of the pasha's military accomplishments might be worthwhile at this point. Having acquired the seal of the grand vizierate in 1656, the first foreign policy matter, as mentioned above, that Köprülü Mehmed Pasha turned his attention to was the war with the Venetians for the control of Crete. After ten years of fighting since 1645, the naval leg of the clash had turned out to be disastrous for the Ottomans: the Venetians almost entirely annihilated the Ottoman fleet and succeeded in blockading the Dardanelles in order to choke Istanbul by preventing the transportation of supplies from the Mediterranean in 1656. Furthermore, Tenedos/Bozcaada and Limnos/Limni were captured by the Venetian fleet, further weakening the Ottoman hold of the Aegean Sea.<sup>30</sup> The war with Venice, hence, was at the top of Köprülü Mehmed's foreign policy agenda in 1656. Therefore, as the Dutch resident in Istanbul related at the time, the pasha turned all his attention to preparations 'both on land and at sea' with perhaps the greatest assiduousness since the beginning of the war.<sup>31</sup> In his first months in office, therefore, Mehmed Pasha managed to get some fifty pieces of galleys and many more vessels of smaller size prepared.<sup>32</sup> In the summer 1657, he accordingly managed to push the Venetian fleet away from the Dardanelles and to re-establish Ottoman control in both Tenedos and Limnos.<sup>33</sup>

Subsequent to the recuperation of Tenedos and Limnos, Köprülü Mehmed now targeted the Principality of Transylvania. Transylvania was an Ottoman tributary state since the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent; but its prince, György II Rákóczi (r. 1648–1660), had recently started to exhibit actions independent of the Ottoman central administration. Prince Rákóczi took the liberty of embarking on a (futile) military campaign in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the hope of becoming the King of Poland in 1657. As will be dealt with below, however, Köprülü Mehmed retaliated by starting in person a military operation to chastise the prince: Transylvanian territory of Yanova/Jenő/Ineu was annexed by the pasha into the Ottoman province of Temeşvar/Temesvár/Timisoara in 1658. During the subsequent campaigns against the prince, while Köprülü Mehmed was ordered back to Istanbul in order to suppress the Abaza Hasan Pasha revolt,<sup>34</sup> one of the grand vizier's commanders also took Varad/Nagyvárad/Oradea from Transylvania and transformed it into a proper Ottoman province in 1660.<sup>35</sup>

30 GÜLSOY, *Girit'in Fethi*, p. 94.

31 Report dated 24 January 1657, Istanbul. In WARNER, *De Rebus Turcicis*, p. 33.

32 News dated 21 April 1657, Venice. In *Recueil de Gazettes*, p. 473-474. Also see, GÜLSOY, *Girit'in Fethi*, p. 94-95.

33 SETTON, *Venice, Austria, and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century*. Philadelphia 1991, p. 184-186; ÁGOSTON, *The Last Muslim Conquest*, p. 464.

34 For this internal strife, the most accomplished account is İLGÜREL. *Abaza Hasan Paşa İsyanı. Hurûc Ale's-Sultân*. Ankara 2022, pp. 223-234.

35 ÁGOSTON, *The Last Muslim Conquest*, p. 478; KOLÇAK, Köprülü enterprises in Yanova

The pasha's incumbency as the grand vizier (1656–1661) corresponded to a relatively stable period regarding the empire's eastern frontiers, where the relations between the Sunni Ottomans and Shiite Safavids were pacified after the peace of Zuhab in 1639. Dealing with the local independence movements in Dagestan and Georgia kept the attention of rivalling Ottoman and Safavid parties away from each other.<sup>36</sup> And putting the old enmities behind to assume a pro-Safavid attitude throughout the better half of the seventeenth century after 1639 has also been interpreted as a deliberate Ottoman balancing over the Iranian territory against the Sunni Mughals.<sup>37</sup> It was, however, a rather politically tumultuous period when Köprülü Mehmed took office so far as eastern Europe was concerned. To begin with, the Cossacks (living in the geography of today's Ukraine) renounced the authority of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the guidance of their leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1596–1657) in 1654 and accepted the suzerainty of the Russian Tsardom. That the balance of power between the Russians and the Polish-Lithuanians was now tipped in favour of the former was a disconcerting development for the security of the Ottoman presence in eastern Europe. Even though the Ottoman central administration, the Porte, did not itself strike any binding deal with the regional actors against Muscovy, Ottoman policy-makers must have been well aware of the changing equilibrium of powers in the area. At least, the Ottoman tributary Crimean Khanate did make the necessary calculation and chose to support the Polish in order to counterbalance the Russians.<sup>38</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the Cossack subjugation to Muscovy, the allied Cossack-Russian forces started the invasion of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Now that the Russians were making headway westwards into Polish territory, the Swedish Kingdom, another regional power that had of late risen to great power status during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), became quickly alarmed that its own position in the Baltic was in jeopardy. Therefore, Swedish King Karl X Gustav (r. 1654–1660) also started a campaign into Polish

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([Boros]Jenő/Ineu) and Varad ([Nagy]Várád/Oradea), pp. 74-75, 77.

36 GÜNGÖRÜRLER. *The Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran, 1639–1682. Diplomacy and Borderlands in the Early Modern Middle East*. Edinburgh 2024, p. 122-3.

37 SAÇMALI. The Safavid Buffer: Co-Sectarian Rivalry in Early Modern Ottoman Diplomacy with Sunni Asia. In *Journal of Early Modern History*, 2024 (First View), pp. 1-23. Even though Saçmalı points to the challenges of separating religion and politics in a strict sense throughout the early modern period (pages 4-5), I believe the so-called ahistorical nature of realism offers the better solution in understanding why the Ottomans chose to protect their Shiite rivals (Safavids) in the face of an increasing Mughal threat, with whom the Ottomans shared the same confession. Neighbouring a weaker ideological enemy was more secure in the long run than living next door to a powerful polity despite the common confessional identification.

38 KURAT. *Rusya Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1917'ye Kadar*. Ankara 1987, pp. 229-231.

territory from the North in 1655 in order to curtail Russian progress. This chaotic showdown of great powers inside Polish territory was later named the Second Northern War (1655–1660) and became known as the “deluge” for the Polish in historiography.<sup>39</sup>

### **Intervention in Eastern Europe (1657)**

In 1657, two extraordinary issues concerning northern affairs were trying to find their way into Köprülü Mehmed Pasha’s busy foreign policy agenda. The first of these was a religious matter and related to the Greek Orthodox Church. As the dominant confession of Eastern Christianity, Orthodoxy was the shared creed of numerous non-Muslim peoples living in the Ottoman Empire (such as the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian and Wallachian-Moldavian) and many other eastern European peoples (such as the Russians and Cossacks). That Muscovy had an Orthodox Church of its own was a considerable threat to the Ottoman Empire: even though the Russian claims of protection over the Orthodox peoples in the Ottoman Empire are a well-known fact for later centuries, it is justified to assert that the Ottomans felt insecure about the possibility of such claims as early as mid-seventeenth century, i.e., when Köprülü Mehmed Pasha was the grand vizier.

The most tangible evidence in that respect was Köprülü Mehmed’s execution of Patriarch Parthenios III, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, in March 1657.<sup>40</sup> The reason behind the hanging of the patriarch, as the Dutch resident representative in Istanbul relayed, was his alleged collaboration with the Russian Tsar. As it was reputed, Patriarch Parthenios III had been in clandestine correspondence with Muscovy and the Cossacks in order to incite them to a common military campaign against the Ottomans. Having learnt about this correspondence, the Crimean Khanate had sent a special courier to the Porte, as a result of which the patriarch was hanged.<sup>41</sup> A figure less emphasised by historiography but with a similar fate was Gavril (d. 1659), the Serbian Patriarch of Pec, who visited the Russian court in 1654. Gavril tried to attract Russian interest to the fate of the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. Upon his return to the Ottoman Empire during Köprülü Mehmed’s grand vizierate years, Gavril was executed on charges of “*advising the tsar to start a war against the Ottomans*”.<sup>42</sup> Both executions attest to the Ottoman

39 KOTLJARCHUK. *In the Shadows of Poland and Russia: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Sweden in the European Crisis of the mid-17th Century*. PhD Thesis, Södertörns Högskola 2006, pp. 2, 7, 94.

40 RUNCIMAN. *The Great Church in Captivity*. Cambridge 1968, p. 344.

41 Report dated 31 March 1657, Istanbul. In WARNER, *De Rebus Turcicis*, pp. 35-36.

42 DOSTIAN. *Balkanskije Narody i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia v Iugo-Vostochnoi Evrope* (do 60-x gg. XVII V.). In LITARVIN, G.G. et al., eds. *Osmanskaia Imperiia i Strany Tsen-*

administration's apprehension of a potentially detrimental connection between the Orthodox subjects of the empire and Muscovy.

The second issue was the Transylvania affair. As pointed out, the Principality of Transylvania was an Ottoman tributary state and had become a relatively effective node of power in eastern Europe during the reign of Prince György II Rákóczi. Between 1653 and 1657, Rákóczi extended his influence over the two Danubian tributaries of the Ottoman Empire, Wallachia and Moldavia. His campaign into Poland-Lithuania in January 1657 turned out to be the last step in a series of actions solidifying his self-asserted autonomy from the Ottoman central administration.<sup>43</sup> Rákóczi had built an alliance with the Swedish Kingdom, and in return for his contribution to the Swedish war efforts against Poland-Lithuania, he would not only incorporate certain portions of Polish territory into Transylvania but also acquire the Polish crown itself.<sup>44</sup>

Under such circumstances, the foreign policy matter of primary concern for Köprülü Mehmed Pasha in the spring of 1657 was first and foremost, to repeat, breaking out of the Venetian blockade in the Dardanelles. The pasha did eventually manage to breach the blockade in the summer of 1657. The second issue, the one more germane to the subject at hand, was the political turmoil in eastern Europe, meaning that there was a power vacuum in Poland-Lithuania that could eventually prove detrimental to the Ottoman interests. And the last was the headstrong actions of Prince Rákóczi in Poland-Lithuania which could be translated by the Porte as the prince's aspiration for an independent Transylvania. If Köprülü Mehmed took the side of the Swedes and the Transylvanians and condoned Rákóczi's actions, Poland-Lithuania would most probably collapse. Such a scenario was bound to invite two cardinal problems.

The first problem, the one the Ottoman historiography has been keen to emphasise, is the transformation Transylvania was supposed to undergo. Assuming that Rákóczi accepted the Polish crown as offered to him by the Swedes, would Transylvania become a vassal of the Swedish Kingdom or still remain a tributary of the Ottoman Empire? Or, would Rákóczi become the ruler of a gigantic self-standing eastern European political entity combining

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*tral'noi, Vostochnoi i Iugo-Vostochnoi Evropy v XVII v., Chast' I.* Moscow 1988. pp. 255, 261.

43 It has been noted that when Rákóczi entered Poland on 12 January 1657, he was leading an army of 20.000 Transylvanians and about 6.000 Wallachians and Moldavians. Soon enough 16.000 Cossacks joined him, too, SANIN. Rossiia, Ukraina i Transil'vaniia v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii serediny XVII veka. In ISLAMOV; ROGOJIN and KHAVANOVA, eds. *Gosudarstvennost', diplomatiia, kul'tura, v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evrope XI–XVIII vekov.* Moscow 2005, p. 117.

44 FROST. *After the Deluge: Poland-Lithuania and the Second Northern War, 1655–1660.* Cambridge 2003, p. 85; ÁGOSTON, *The Last Muslim Conquest*, p. 471.

Transylvanian and Polish crowns with an already established sphere of influence of Wallachia and Moldavia? Any transformation that Transylvania was to experience without Ottoman involvement was, as Kissling underlined years ago, unacceptable. Because it would mean the dissolution of the Danube-Sava defence line, considered “sacrosanct” for the Ottomans.<sup>45</sup> This view shares the same tenor with Metin Kunt’s approach, who regarded the Transylvanian territorial aggrandisement in eastern Europe as the “*total disintegration of the Ottoman defensive system beyond the Danube*”.<sup>46</sup> Lastly and quite similarly, Ágoston refers to this possibility as the jeopardisation of “*the empire’s Pontic defence ring against Cossacks, Muscovites and Poles*.”<sup>47</sup>

The second problem with the collapse of Poland-Lithuania, the one this study tries to bring to the fore, was the prospect of Moscow filling in the vacuum. Over the last century, Russians had become overly aggressive in pushing their boundaries across Eurasia. With the Swedes, the point of contestation was the control of the Baltic and they had been intermittently fighting over the control of Livonia since 1561. Even though the last truce was signed in 1617 (Treaty of Stolbova), Moscow coveted the eastern Baltic shores for an outlet into the sea.<sup>48</sup> With Poland-Lithuania, Russia had waged a fruitless two-year-long war for the control of Smolensk, ending with the Treaty of Polanovo in 1634.<sup>49</sup> And with the Ottomans, there had been a serious clash of interest over the Caucasus since the famous Ottoman campaign of Astrakhan in 1569 until 1603.<sup>50</sup> In short, Muscovy had already been pushing its boundaries in multiple directions across the Baltic-Caspian line. The Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s alliance with Moscow in 1654 (Treaty of Pereiaslav) had brought the Russian threat closer to Ottoman boundaries. And now that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was on the brink of collapse, the most assertive contestant to replace it appeared to be Moscow. This does not fall short of suggesting that Russia was in likely competition with the Ottomans to be the regional hegemon in eastern Europe. For Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, then, the aforementioned intelligence regarding the collaboration of the Russian Tsar and Patriarch Parthenios III was alarming in an excessive fashion, which might explain the pasha’s heavy-handed treatment of the patriarch in March 1657.

45 KISSLING, *Die Köprülü-Restauration*, p. 79.

46 KUNT, 17. *Yüzyılda Osmanlı Kuzey Politikası*, p. 114.

47 ÁGOSTON, *The Last Muslim Conquest*, pp. 472-73.

48 LOCKHART. *Sweden in the Seventeenth Century*. Basingstoke; New York 2004, p. 16.

49 KOŁODZIEJCZYK. *The Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th–18th Century): An Annotated Edition of `ahdnames and Other Documents*. Leiden 2000, p. 137.

50 YAŞAR. *The North Caucasus Borderland. Between Muscovy and the Ottoman Empire, 1555–1605*. Edinburgh 2022.

In the spring of 1657, then, Köprülü Mehmed had to arrive at a conclusion relating to Poland-Lithuania in a security environment that was exposed to an ever-increasing Russian danger. As a near-contemporary report made it clear, the Ottoman administration had already chosen to lend support to Poland in the form of Crimean Tatar assistance as early as 1655 due to its fear “of the Muscovite designs”.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the Köprülü Mehmed government must have felt the Russian threat even closer to home when the Transylvanian envoy at the Porte portrayed it on 27 May in such alarming terms as follows:

“[The Transylvanian Prince had] *entered an alliance with Sweden as the good friends of the sultan against Poland; because if they had not done so, Muscovy would have already occupied Poland in entirety and perhaps started a real war against the Ottomans by then. The four Greek Patriarchs*<sup>52</sup> *were continuously whispering the tsar in the ears ... and begging him to have mercy on the poor Christians under Turkish yoke and to help resurrect the Greek Empire. This was all the more noteworthy, because Moldavia, Walachia, Bosnia, Albania, Thrace, Macedonia and the rest of Turkey was full of Greek [i.e., Orthodox] people, who would immediately rise up as soon as Muscovy would come with its forces.*”<sup>53</sup>

Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, in 1657, felt obliged to take measures that could keep Moscow, the Ottoman peer competitor in eastern Europe, at bay: as a document from the Topkapı Palace archive reveals, he commanded the Ottoman Governor of Silistria (Özü), the province bordering Poland, and the Crimean Khan to debilitate Transylvanian operations in Poland. As the wording of the document suggests, “*Poland-Lithuania being under the protection of our Auspicious Padishah, ..., the Transylvanian Prince [was] not allowed*” to have his way in Poland.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the Transylvanian forces were attacked and enslaved by the

51 Report dated 24 April 1655, Istanbul: Battista Nani, ‘Avviso di Costantinopoli il di 24 Aprile 1655’. In HURMUZAKI ed. *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor, volumul IX, partea 1, 1650–1747*. Bucharest 1897, p. 61.

52 Referring to the Orthodox patriarchs of Istanbul, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria.

53 Report dated 12 June 1657, Istanbul: Simon Reniger von Reningen, ‘Aus Constantinopl von 12 Junij (1)657’. Published in MEIER and FAIZOV. *Politika Porty v Otnoshenii Rossii i Ukrainy v Seredine XVII v.* In MEIER; SEMENOVA; FLORIJA; KHAVANOVA and SCHWARTS. *Russkaia i Ukrainskaia Diplomatia v Mezhdunarodnykh Otnosheniakh v Evrope Serediny XVII v.* Moscow 2007, p. 428.

54 The document is undated, but the contents suggest that it must have been issued around July 1657, by the steward (Mahmud Aga) of the grand vizier’s son, Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Pasha. See, T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) [Ottoman Archives], Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi evrakları (TSMA.e) [Topkapı Palace Fonds.documents] 0560-91, verso, left column: ‘Hâlâ Tatar Han hazretleri Leh’e imdad için

Crimean troops in late July 1657 and Prince Rákóczi could hardly make it to Transylvania with only a small unit of his soldiers.<sup>55</sup> So, instead of letting Polish boundaries get reshaped, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha chose to preserve the balance of power in eastern Europe.

Historians have earlier attempted to analyse Köprülü Mehmed's decision to punish the Transylvanian prince for his 1657 Polish campaign. Kolçak, for example, suggests with accuracy that the Köprülü government's motivation was more than merely bringing the prince into line: suppressing the Transylvanian operations in Poland had more to do with the Ottoman concern of keeping the *status quo* in eastern Europe.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, in the subsequent years that Köprülü Mehmed was in office (1658–1661), Tatar forces opposed Russian southward expeditions against Poland-Lithuania and into the middle Dnieper region.<sup>57</sup> This was actually part of a general trend that preceded and succeeded Köprülü Mehmed's incumbency: as Gemil noted, between 1654 and 1666, the Porte followed a policy of supporting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth against the Russian Tsardom and placing the commonwealth into the Ottoman sphere of influence.<sup>58</sup> And this is entirely congruent with the traditional Ottoman northern policy of establishing a balance between Poland and Russia in eastern Europe during the early modern period.<sup>59</sup>

From the offensive realist point of view, Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's adverse reaction to the Transylvanian campaign against Poland in 1657 was brought about by the necessity to keep Poland intact against the rising Russian threat. In the face of a rising Russian power in the seventeenth century, the Porte had been passing the buck to Poland: the commonwealth had its territories adjacent to the tsardom and could perhaps contain the Russian expansion. The War of Smolensk between 1632 and 1634, in that respect, had resulted in a Polish victory and the Russian advance had been halted for a while. So, for a while, the Ottomans chose

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üzzerlerine memur olub, 'azimet ve revane olmuşdur. Ve Silistre muhafazasında olan sa'adetli ve devletli Melek Ahmed Paşa hazretleri dahi memur olub, 'azimet etmişlerdir. ... Ve lakin sa'adetli Padişah'ımızın Leh himayesinde olmağla ve Tatar Han hazretleri dahi geçen sene ... Erdel Kralı'na ruhsat vermediler.'

55 KOŁODZIEJCZYK. *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th Century) A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents*. Leiden 2011, p. 170.

56 KOLÇAK, A Transylvanian Ruler, p. 347–348.

57 PYLYPCHUK. On Participation of the Crimean Tatars in Campaigns of 1658–1665 in Ukraine. In *Tatarica*, 2018, vol. 11, p. 93, 99, 101, 105.

58 GEMIL. *Tarile Române în Contextul Politic Internațional, 1621–1672*. Bucharest 1979, p. 225.

59 KOŁODZIEJCZYK, *The Ottoman-Polish*, p. 145.

buck-passing as any relatively secure country with no fear of immediate invasion did in the face of a rising revisionist power.<sup>60</sup>

Ottoman buck-passing to Poland-Lithuania vis-a-vis Russia was, however, only so much successful. The gravitational force of the Muscovy on the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Balkans persisted as a looming threat to the Ottoman administration. And such concerns were perhaps not unfounded: in his search for Russian support to his separatist cause, Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky allegedly claimed in 1650 that “*once the Polish Commonwealth was dissolved, it [would] then be the time to move against the Ottomans*” to unite all the Orthodox population in the Balkans.<sup>61</sup> And the Cossack-Russian alliance in 1654 was in a way carrying this plan one step further. The rekindling of the Russian offensive in its aftermath now made it obvious that Russia could not be contained for long, which put the Ottoman security at stake in the long run. Accordingly, the Köprülü administration itself had to step in by launching military action in order to indirectly balance the Russian threat in the region. In other words, Köprülü administration’s course of action was external balancing, a state’s act to combine its own power with other states to form an alliance,<sup>62</sup> when the Ottomans started to side with the commonwealth to deter the Russian aggression in the long run. It had to ascertain that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth would not disintegrate and would continue balancing the Muscovite threat.

### Intervention in Central Europe (1658)

It is true that balancing in eastern Europe might have fitted well into the grand vizier’s plans for stabilising the northern borders. Nevertheless, it was not a panacea he applied for every situation. The pasha’s attitude toward central Europe, and particularly toward Prince György II Rákóczi, was conspicuously different. But in order to better understand the politics at play in 1658, a brief summary of early modern central European geography may prove useful.

The medieval Kingdom of Hungary had fallen apart after the Battle of Mohács in 1526; and in 1541, the former Hungarian territories were divided into three parts: the old capital Buda became the centre of administration for the Ottoman-controlled Hungarian territories; the eastern part of the kingdom now became an Ottoman vassal state, the Principality of Transylvania (along with Partes Annexae); and lastly, the western and northern territories belonged to the

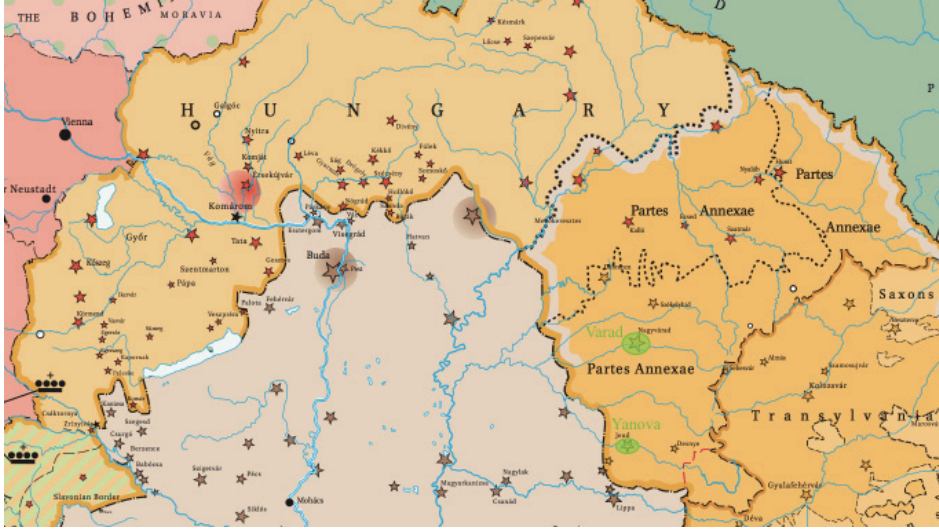
60 LIND. Pacificism or passing the buck? Testing Theories of Japanese Security Policy. In *International Security*, 2004, Vol. 29, no. 1, p. 104.

61 DOSTIAN, *Balkanskíe Narody i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia v Iugo-Vostochnoi Evrope* (do 60-x gg. XVII v.), p. 256.

62 MALLETT and JUNEAU. A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Overbalancing. In *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2023, Vol. 3, p. 1.

Habsburgs and came to be known as Royal Hungary. Royal Hungary functioned as “a highly militarised buffer zone to protect the Habsburg hereditary lands” against the Ottoman expansion in the one-and-a-half century that followed.<sup>63</sup> And while Royal Hungary was a buffer state for the Habsburgs, Transylvania partially served the same reason for the Ottomans against a possible Habsburg threat.

Figure 1: Central Europe by the middle of the seventeenth century



Source: H.H.A. Hötte, *Atlas of Southeast Europe. Geopolitics and History*, vol. 1: 1521-1699. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015, p. 95.

The Habsburgs, or to be more precise, the Habsburgs of Austria (since the family had been divided into a Spanish and an Austrian branch in the mid-sixteenth century) were the peer competitors of the Ottomans in central Europe: for centuries, Habsburg monarchs had also been continuously elected as Holy Roman Emperors and, therefore, the Ottoman-Habsburg conflict over Hungary can also be interpreted as one of an imperial struggle. The last round of military clashes between the Austrian Habsburgs and the Ottomans, the so-called Long Wars, had taken place at the turn of the century between 1593 and 1606.<sup>64</sup> And

63 MICHELS. *The Habsburg Empire under siege: Ottoman expansion and Hungarian revolt in the age of Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü (1661-76)*. Montreal&Kingston; London; Chicago 2021, p. xv.

64 TRACY. *The Habsburg Monarchy in Conflict with the Ottoman Empire, 1527–1593: A Clash*

it was marked by a fluctuating profile for both sides since Transylvania changed sides twice: when Transylvania joined the Habsburgs in 1595, Wallachia and Moldavia followed suit, further aggravating the Ottoman plight. When, however, Transylvania returned to Ottoman vassalage in 1604, the Ottomans got the upper hand and the ensuing Treaty of Zsitvatorok confirmed the Ottoman acquisition of two new provinces, Kanizsa (Kanije) and Agria (Eğri) in 1606.<sup>65</sup> One might hence deduct that controlling Transylvania was as much important for securing central Europe as it was for entrenching Ottoman rule over Wallachia and Moldavia.

Beginning with 1658, Köprülü Mehmed was personally involved in this theatre of conflict. As referred to above, the Transylvanian Prince György II Rákóczi himself had had a near escape when the Crimean forces targeted his army in Poland during the summer of 1657. In December 1657, he was deposed from the principality, meaning that he lost his official political power inside Transylvania. Nonetheless, this was not the end of his active participation in central European politics as a major magnate of the region.<sup>66</sup>

In early 1658, Rákóczi gathered his forces and got himself elected prince once more on 22 January. This audacious action was duly despised by Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, who retorted by leading Ottoman troops into the principality and invading the Transylvanian settlement of Jenő (Yanova), making it a proper Ottoman administrative unit subordinate to the Ottoman province of Temeşvar (Timisoara).<sup>67</sup> A new prince was throned and the principality had to cede two more castles to the Ottoman Empire (Lugos and Karánsebes), while the new prince was charged with the task of capturing Rákóczi.<sup>68</sup>

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of Civilizations. In *Austrian History Yearbook*, 2015, vol. 46, p. 1–26.

65 SETTON, Venice, Austria, and the Turks, p. 10-18.

66 Ottoman narrative accounts relating to the period in question are rich in certain details, but fail to portray the political framework in general, see DERİN. *Abdurrahman Abdi Paşa Vekayinamesi*. PhD Thesis, Istanbul University 1993, p. 102-109; TÜRKAL. *Silahdar Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, Zeyl-i Fezleke (1065-22 Ca.1106 / 1654-7 Şubat 1695)*. PhD Thesis, Marmara University 2012, p. 138-152.

67 Events taking place around Hungary between 1658 and 1660 are dealt with also in the following works: HUBER. Österreichs diplomatische Beziehungen zur Pforte, 1658–1664. In *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*, 1898, LXXXV, II. Hälfte, p. 515-532; KÁRMÁN. Die Krise des Fürstentums Siebenbürgen in den Jahren 1657 bis 1661. Eine Vorgeschichte des habsburgisch-osmanischen Krieges von 1663/64. In REICHL-HAM; NÖBAUER and Fröhlich, eds. *Das »Dreiecksverhältnis« zwischen Polen, Osmanen und Hamburgern*. Wien 2022, p. 89-94.

68 A recently catalogued document in the Ottoman archives reveals the promises Köprülü Mehmed received from the new Transylvanian prince, see BOA, MHD [Muahedeler], 484, f. 2r-v: “*Erdel Hakiminin Verdiği Yemin Temessüküdür; fi 16 Z [106]8 [tr. The copy of the oath taken by the ruler of Transylvania, 15 Sept 1658]*”. In article 2: “*Transylvani debent dare Nobis Sebes & Lugos; cum omnibus suis instrumentis bellicis, et armamentariis;*”;

Given the intertwined feudal structure of central Europe, Rákóczi had not just been the prince of Transylvania, but he had also had possessions inside Royal Hungary, that is, inside the Habsburg-controlled territories across the Transylvanian border. Furthermore, his rule over two Habsburg counties (Szabolcs and Szatmár) had also been recognised by Vienna.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, when Rákóczi was once more ousted from power, he fled to his Habsburg domains, where he replenished his forces for another come-back and re-initiated his campaign into Transylvania in 1659.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, his attempt did not bear fruit and news reaching Istanbul in December 1659 was informing the Ottoman capital that Rákóczi was utterly defeated by the Ottoman governor-general of the Buda Province and the new prince of Transylvania. However, Rákóczi fled to his domains on the Habsburg side of the frontier, wounded.<sup>71</sup> He eventually passed away (in June 1660) and the Ottoman forces occupied another strategic Transylvanian settlement, Varad (Nagyvárad/Oradea), in August 1660, turning it into an Ottoman province.<sup>72</sup>

Ottoman intervention in the Principality of Transylvania between 1658 and 1660 has been regarded as punishment of a vassal, who was trying to enlarge his power base in eastern Europe by spreading his influence on the neighbouring principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>73</sup>

But such an approach only interprets the events at face value and does not offer a structural understating of the Ottoman conquests. Or, Metin Kunt, looking at it from the Ottoman perspective, interpreted the Köprülü Mehmed government's management of the Transylvanian affair as the first step in an alleged Ottoman encirclement of the principality and its isolation from central Europe. For Kunt, annexations of Yanova/Jenő and Varad/Nagyvárad were the forerunning moves in the eventual transformation of Transylvania "into [a] regular Ottoman province", that is to say, an "inner region" with "a special

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and article 6: "Si Deo placuit, Georgium Rakoczium quamprimum capere curabitur." See also, SOYSAL, Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi'nde Tasnifi Tamamlanan Yeni Defterler Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme "Yeni Defterler/Yeni Ufuklar". In *Hazine-i Evrak*, 2020, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 219.

69 KÁRMÁN, Die Krise des Fürstentums Siebenbürgen.

70 TÜRKAL, *Silahdar Findıklılı Mehmed Ağa*, p. 149.

71 Report dated 9 December 1659, Adrianople: Simon Reniger von Reningen, 'Copia d'una lettera scritta dal Residente Cesareo di Andrinopoli a Sua Maestà, di 9 Dicembre 1659'. In HURMUZAKI, ed. *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor*, p. 163; TÜRKAL, *Silahdar Findıklılı Mehmed Ağa*, p. 223-229.

72 HUBER, Österreichs diplomatische Beziehungen zur Pforte, p. 515-532; KÁRMÁN, Die Krise des Fürstentums Siebenbürgen, p. 89-94.

73 ÁGOSTON, *The Last Muslim Conquest*, p. 472-3.

*status*”.<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, Kunt fails to provide his readers with any proof regarding the possibility of such a project.

From an offensive realist angle, the principality’s strategic location as a buffer state between the Ottoman Hungary and Royal Hungary rendered it essential to ensure continued Ottoman influence in central Europe. The Ottomans became the aggressor and incorporated Yanova and Varad indeed into the imperial administrative system, with the intention to establish a secure zone controlled by the Porte between Transylvania and Royal Hungary. They were thus making it certain that no future Transylvanian prince could easily establish links with the Habsburg court. In this way, the fickle loyalties of the Transylvanian princes (as had been the case during the war of 1593–1606) could no longer overshadow Ottoman plans in central Europe.

An important matter in the establishment of security was the level of offensive action. Historical evidence suggests that the Porte brandished the threat of Transylvania’s total incorporation into the Ottoman Empire in 1658 during the negotiations between the grand vizierial executive and the Transylvanian peace delegates.<sup>75</sup> But this seems to be a mere rhetorical tool utilised by the grand vizier. Because if the Ottoman concern for security in central Europe was so pressing, then why did Köprülü Mehmed eventually stop at the incorporation of Yanova and Varad? The answer obviously lay across the frontier: a wholesale incorporation of Transylvania into the Ottoman central system could have instigated a greater resistance from the Viennese court which would regard it a *casus belli*. A contemporary *opinio* of the Royal Hungarian Council, for example, made it clear that even the siege of Varad evoked fear on the Habsburg side and was perceived to be the first step in an alleged Ottoman scheme to turn first Transylvania and then Wallachia and Moldavia into Ottoman provinces.<sup>76</sup>

It was probably due to such a concern that the Ottoman administration treaded very carefully in their struggle against Rákóczi. To begin with, the Ottoman armies quickly left Transylvania subsequent to the capture of Yanova, that is, within three weeks of the arrangement with the new prince. Hence, the Royal Hungarian Council did not even have time to decide if they were supposed to resort to a military undertaking lest the Ottomans cross the Transylvanian border into Royal Hungary.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, when the new prince was invested with power in Transylvania in late 1658, the Ottomans were cautious enough to send an official to Vienna with the suggestion that the Habsburg authorities should

74 KUNT. 17. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Kuzey Politikası, p. 114, 116.

75 ÁGOSTON, *The Last Muslim Conquest*, p. 475-476.

76 Report dated 27 July 1660, Graz: Aloise Molin, “*Opinio Dominorum Consiliariorum Hungarorum*”. In HURMUZAKI, ed. *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor*, p. 176-177.

77 News dated 9 October 1658, Vienna: *Wöchentliche Donnerstags Zeitung*, Anno 1658, no. 43.

also confirm the new prince and that the peace between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans should be reinforced by an exchange of ceremonial embassies.<sup>78</sup> So, the Ottomans had no plans of furthering their campaigns into Royal Hungary.

It is true that war did eventually break out in 1663, during the grand vizierate of Köprülü Mehmed's son, Fazıl Ahmed Pasha, as an offshoot of the father's intervention in Transylvania. However, for the 1658–1660 period, the Ottoman advance was restricted to Yanova and Varad. In line with the principles of offensive realism, the Porte followed an expansionist policy against Transylvania. But it occurred as a veritable example of “calculated aggression”, in which the Köprülü administration carefully drew a limited line of expansion in order not to trigger a wholesale Habsburg retaliation. So just as the Ottoman intervention in Polish-Lithuanian soil was a pre-emptive action against the rising Russian influence in the region, the partial annexation of Transylvanian territories had to do with the preservation of Ottoman superiority in central Europe over the Habsburgs, not an untimely once-and-for-all sweeping conquest.

## Conclusion

The present study tries to explain the Ottoman military undertakings in the mid-seventeenth century by attempting at an interpretation of the Ottoman military expansion in the early modern period. Through a case study from early modern Europe, it tries to build a nexus between history and foreign policy analysis studies. By referring to literature advocating the applicability of the “offensive” branch of structural realism to the early modern state system in general, the present study strove to examine the northern policy of grand vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, i.e., his active involvement in eastern and central European politics between 1656 and 1661.

The Köprülü Mehmed government's attitude toward the catastrophic turn of events in Poland-Lithuania during the Second Northern War (1655–1660) has traditionally been interpreted by historians in two ways. It was either the Porte's punishment of the vassal Transylvanian prince, who seemed to have forgotten his vassal status and undertook foreign policy operations without the consent of the Ottoman center. Or it was the Ottoman administration's attempt to preserve the *status quo* in the northern Black Sea by curbing the Transylvanian prince's accumulation of power. This study, however, builds on and furthers the latter argument by drawing attention to the imminence of the Russian threat over the Ottoman territories. And from the neorealist perspective, it asserts, Ottoman foreign policy in 1657 was marked by a transition from “buck-passing” to active “balancing”. In other words, the rising Russian threat in eastern Europe – with

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78 News dated 5 March 1659, Vienna: *Wöchentliche Donnerstags Zeitung*, Anno 1658, no. 12.

particular regard to Ottoman Orthodox subjects – was received with concern throughout the seventeenth century, but the Ottoman Empire was generally silent when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth could keep itself abreast against Moscow's aggression. However, when the collapse seemed inevitable for Poland-Lithuania in 1657, the pasha commanded Ottoman provincial and tributary forces to enter Poland and make sure that the commonwealth would not fall apart. This act of balancing tried to see to it that the eastern European power equilibrium could be preserved and Russia would not become a regional hegemon.

As for the pasha's intervention in Transylvania between 1658 and 1660, it fits well with the offensive realist principle of "calculated aggression". By invading Yanova and Varad, the Porte acquired a stronghold at the heart of Transylvania. For the Porte could never be sure about the Habsburg intentions in Transylvania, it was obliged to secure hegemony over the western part of the principality in order to achieve the prospect of a secure environment. Transylvanian sovereignty was now more restricted and the possibility of the principality's falling under the Habsburg influence became unlikely. And by the judicious decision of not subjugating Transylvania in its entirety, that is, by restricting the Ottoman aggression in the region, the Köprülü Mehmed administration avoided unmitigated Habsburg reprisal that could easily manifest itself in the form of open military conflict.

Köprülü Mehmed was making sure that the *status quo* in eastern and central Europe would not be disturbed by not allowing Poland-Lithuania's dissolution or Transylvania's slip into the Habsburg sphere of influence. In this way, the Köprülü administration deemed it more likely that the Ottoman Empire would enhance its likelihood of survival in the early modern anarchical system of international states. This is also a worthy example of showing that not all offensive strategies were inherently revisionist: they could also result in the preservation of the status quo. It is true that by 1700, the Russians reached the Black Sea possessions of the Ottomans, and Transylvania-Hungary was almost entirely lost to the Habsburgs. But these losses confirm the accuracy of the pasha's ardent offensive policy even though they proved to be insufficient in the long run.

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