

OTTOMAN SUPREMACY AND THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE BALKAN AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN STATES

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ABSTRACT. The article deals with the nature of the political relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan states. The various forms of dependency led to varied limitations on the functioning of these states, especially in the field of their international politics. The Ottoman Empire's relations with weaker, allied, vassal and subordinate states were shaped by the following factors: the historical period, the political and legal nature of the mutual relations, religion, the current political and military situation. On the basis of analysis of the sources and scientific literature, it has been shown that the Ottoman Empire was unable to prevent more or less official policy by its subordinate centres, as long as they had any state structures (even if they were only of a self-governing nature). In the 14th century, most of the Balkan states found themselves as allies and tributaries of the Ottoman Empire. The alliance with the Ottomans did not limit political relations with countries uncommitted against the Ottomans. In the 15th century there was a process of more and more clearly political subordination of the Balkan states which added two important elements to earlier financial and military obligations — investment and obedience. In the 16th century, it was extremely important to surrender to the King of Hungary John Zápolya under the authority of Sultan Suleiman. It also resulted in the Ottoman Empire taking over direct political control of the Romanian principalities: Wallachia and Moldavia. The Sultan was not able to fully control them, they often carried out independent political activities, connected with the Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Holy Empire, and Transylvania. In the 18th century the process of building the Balkan nation states launched, albeit very slowly. In the 19th century, any independence, even very limited, was conducive to the rapid formation of their own independent statehood.

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For many centuries, the Ottoman Empire dominated large parts of Europe, West Asia and Africa, conquering and subjugating numerous political entities. Tracing all these connections, their nature, and the resulting political possibilities is a daunting endeavor, therefore this work shall focus only on the European aspect of the matter. This work shall take into account the relations of Ottoman Turkey with weaker states (i.e. those that entered into a conflict with it and did not win), allied states (based on the principle of a mutual offensive-resistant alliance), vassal states (previously existing states that were politically subordinated in the Middle Ages or the early modern era) and states that emerged mainly in the 19th century as a result of the emancipation of the Balkan nations from the Ottoman rule, but still remained under its formal authority for many decades.

When analyzing this matter, one should also realize that concepts that are familiar to European history, and are commonly transferred to the Ottoman context, are not entirely adequate to the social and political relations prevailing in the Ottoman Empire itself. However, due to the lack of more precise terminology, we shall also use the terms “vassal” and “tributary” in this article, trying to clarify their meaning in specific cases.¹

The relations of the Ottoman Empire with weaker, allied, vassal and subordinate states were shaped by the following factors:

- historical period,
- political and legal nature of their mutual relations: tributary, ancillary, vassal, and varying degrees of formal or actual subordination, and
- religion.

Additionally, Islamic and non-Islamic states were treated differently, and a noticeable principle was applied, such that lands once conquered in the name of Islam remain the property of Islam, even if they are temporarily handed over to a non-Islamic ruler. Unfortunately, many Christian rulers were not aware of this principle, which, over time, had a negative impact on their position of power. The contemporary political and military situation also had an impact on mutual relations, which is why we can observe large fluctuations in relations even within the same country.

¹ What is worth noting here, first of all, is Viorel Panaite’s research on the nature of the relations of the Ottoman Empire with other countries. They were divided into the so-called “house of peace” and “house of war”. The “house of peace” included countries burdened with a permanent tribute with which an agreement was concluded (ahidnâme). The next stage was to place these countries under the permanent protection of the Sultan, which, in practice, meant increasingly limited political freedom. The remaining countries constituted the so-called “house of war” and only periodic truces were concluded with those. V. Panaite, *Pace, război și comerț în islam. Țările române și dreptul otoman al popoarelor (secolele XV–XVII)*, București 1997, passim; idem, *The Legal and Political Status of Wallachia and Moldavia in Relation to the Ottoman Porte* [in:] *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević, Brill, Leiden–Boston 2013, p. 9.

14TH CENTURY: DOMINANCE OF TRIBUTARY AND ALLIED RELATIONS

In the first half of the 14th century, the Ottoman state was primarily a rapidly developing emirate in Asia Minor and was mainly interested in conquering the lands of Lesser Asia. Initially, Ottoman warriors found themselves in Europe by coincidence — as allies of the anti-emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, for whom they conquered territories belonging to the Byzantine emperor — John V Palaiologos. However, they encountered extremely favorable conditions here.

1. John VI Kantakouzenos failed to take back the Çimpe Castle (he was forced to abdicate and join a monastery).
2. An earthquake destroyed the neighboring important Byzantine fortress of Gallipoli, which encouraged the Ottomans to capture it and thus strengthen their position in the Balkans.
3. After the abdication of John VI, his son, Matthew Asen Kantakouzenos, continued to employ the Ottomans.
4. Almost all Balkan states were divided around the mid-14th century.²

Political fragmentation and the resulting conflicts encouraged the involvement of the ever-so-effective Ottoman warriors. And, those states that failed to defeat the Ottomans could not end the war without agreeing to a tribute payment. However, it should be clearly noted that the tribute itself was only a payment for peace and should not be immediately associated with establishing a vassal relationship, nor did it initially limit political relations with other countries in any way. Consent to the tribute payment was associated with the desire, or necessity, to establish peaceful relations, and at that time the Ottoman state did not generally conclude a lasting peace with Christians, proposing a truce for 1, 3 or 5 years, depending on the mutual relations. A more stable situation could have been ensured by entering into a truce arrangement. An alliance with the Ottomans ensured a relatively lasting peace and assistance against enemies, but it also often meant an obligation to provide military assistance at the sultan's request, also against one's own friends. Furthermore, the lands acquired together were treated as Islamic lands, although the allies often were given them under temporary management. The alliance with the Ottomans, however, did not limit political relations with non-aligned countries against the Ottomans.

² G. Ostrogorski, *Dzieje Bizancjum*, Warszawa 1968; H. Inalcik, *Imperium Osmańskie. Epoka klasyczna 1300–1600*, translated by J. Hunia, Kraków 2006; K. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire*, Istanbul 1990 and its Macedonian translation: К. Имбер, *Османската империја 1300–1481*, Скопје 2002; A. Decsi, *Istoria imperiului otoman*, București 1974; И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV век*, vol. 1, София 2006; К. Јиреček, *Историја Срба*, vol. 1, Београд 1952; Д.Т. Багаковић, *Нова историја српског народа*, Београд 2010.

By 1389, almost all Balkan states had entered, temporarily or permanently, into one of these relations with the Ottoman state (tributary, periodic truce or alliance), or, most often, into all of them. The mentioned date brought very significant changes due to the death of Murad I. His son and successor, Bayezid I, undertook a completely different policy — a policy of stronger dependence and territorial annexations.³ In the last decade of the 14th century, numerous Balkan states were liquidated, and the following were taken over: Bulgaria's Tarnovo and probably Vidin, Dobruja, the states of king Marko and prince Konstantin Dragaš in Macedonia.

The 15th century brought a new quality in the relations of the Balkan countries with the Ottoman Empire. After a temporary weakening of pressure during the first dozen or so years caused by the civil war, there was a process of increasingly visible political subordination of the Balkan states — their actual vassalization — which added two important elements to the previous financial and military obligations: investiture and obedience. However, the Ottoman aspirations to completely subjugate the Balkan states encountered opposition — the most serious of which was Hungary, but the influence of Venice and Naples was also noticeable. Therefore, double or even triple vassal or vassal-tributary dependency were quite common. In the first half of the 15th century, Serbia, Wallachia, Bosnia and Dubrovnik were in a situation of double dependency, while Herzegovina had three suzerains. Such dependencies must have limited the possibility of independent political action — but the possibility of control was also limited. Of course, functioning in such conditions was difficult, especially when both suzerains were at war; in peacetime, however, the state's situation was determined by agreements between the suzerains.

In the first half of the 15th century, Hungary generally held a dominant position: it dictated its own political direction and the Ottoman state was satisfied with their tribute. However even a momentary weakening of Hungary's power was immediately exploited, an example of which was the imposition of political supremacy on the Wallachian prince Vlad II Dracul,⁴ or the attempt to get rid of the Serbian despot in 1439, after he failed to fulfill the requested obedience. The return of the despot Đurađ Branković in 1444 meant his complete political dependence on the sultan.⁵

In the second half of the 15th century, Ottoman domination became increasingly visible, despite spectacular Hungarian victories (Battle of Belgrade, 1456) and the actual strengthening of the Hungarian state under Matthias Corvinus. Hungary was unable to prevent the liquidation not only of the countries located further away, such as Byzantium, the post-Latin principalities in Greece, or the Albanian principalities, but

³ More: I. Czamańska, *Wasale, trybutariusze, sojusznicy. Charakter relacji państw bałkańskich z Turcją osmańską w XIV wieku*, "Slavia Meridionalis" 2011, vol. 11, p. 37–62.

⁴ V. Ciocîltan, *Între sultan și împărat: Vlad Dracul în 1438*, "Revista de Istorie" 1976, vol. 29, no. 11, p. 1777; I. Czamańska, *Moldavia i Wołoszczyzna wobec Polski, Węgier i Turcji w XIV–XV wieku*, Poznań 1996, p. 328.

⁵ M. Спремић, *Деспот Ђурађ Бранковић и негово доба*, Београд 1999, p. 357.

also the liquidation of countries belonging to its own domain, such as Serbia, Bosnia or Herzegovina.

Starting from 1469, the Crimean Khanate also began to enter the orbit of Ottoman influence. The involvement of the Ottomans in internal fighting in Crimea after the death of Hacı I Giray resulted in their expansion to the northern and western coasts of the Black Sea. The capture of the Genoese colonies in Crimea and on the coast of the Sea of Azov in 1475 gave the Tatars a kind of a symbolic watch-outpost, but on the other hand, it enabled strong economic ties between the Khanate and the Ottoman Empire. In 1478, a khan was appointed for the first time by sultan Mehmed II — it was Meñli I Giray, who had previously been in captivity of the sultan. From then on, the sultans considered themselves the only ones entitled to the investiture of khans, although up until 1523 the formal election of the khan by the beys was still retained. In addition to designating the khan, the sultan demanded that the khan participated in his wars at any request. However, the Crimean Khanate was never obliged to pay tribute, nor did it have any special restrictions on its foreign policy, unless it was in direct contradiction to Ottoman policy. The khans freely concluded bilateral agreements with the Polish-Lithuanian state and with Moscow, and entered into arrangements and alliances on their own. There were situations when the khans were in opposition and they had to be persuaded to cooperate, and sometimes even bribed (such as in 1595). In general, however, the condition of the khanate was closely related to the condition of the Ottoman state; the disruption of this political relationship in the 18th century led to the rapid decline of the khanate.⁶

⁶ There is not much in the literature about the nature of Ottoman suzerainty over the Crimean Khanate. An article devoted entirely to this problem was written by Natalia Królikowska, *Sovereignty and Subordination in Crimean-Ottoman Relations (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)* [in:] *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, op. cit., p. 43–66. However, the author herself draws attention to documentary shortcomings that make an in-depth examination of this problem difficult. It is also touched upon to a greater or lesser extent by numerous general studies of the history of the Crimean Khanate. Despite the passage of time, the works of W. Smirnov are still the best sources: В.Д. Смирновъ, *Крымское Ханство подъ верховенствомъ Оттоманской Порты до начала XVIII века*, С-Петербургъ 1887; idem, *Крымское Ханство подъ верховенствомъ Оттоманской Порты в XVIII столѣтїи*, Одесса 1889. However, they are dominated by a description of mutual Crimean-Ottoman relations, often very detailed, but there is no analysis of the political and legal situation. Other Russian works devote even less attention to this matter. For example, A.R. Andreyev's *History of Crimea* published in 2002 (А.Р. Андреев, *История Крыма*, Москва 2002), although it contains an entire chapter entitled "The Crimean Khanate under the authority of the Ottoman Port", it is rather mainly devoted to the Crimea-Moscow and the Crimea-Lithuanian relations. Against this background, the popular work by L. Podhorodecki, *The Khanate of Crimea*, in which the author tried to show the specificity of Ottoman supremacy over the Khanate, looks relatively good in this context, but it is difficult to require in-depth research in this type of work. A clear and orderly lecture on the history of the Crimean Khanate intended for a general readership was given by Oleksa Gajvoronsky (О. Гайворонский, *Повелители двух материков*, vol. 1 (*Крымские ханы XV–XVI столетий и борьба за наследство Великой Орды*), Киев–Бахчисарай 2007, vol. 2 (*Крымские ханы первой половины XVII столетия в борьбе за самостоятельность и единовластие*), Киев–Бахчисарай 2009), there is also a lot of information about the dependencies of individual khans.

In the second half of the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire also expanded towards the mouth of the Danube and the mouth of the Dniester. The capture of Kiliia and Belgorod in 1484 was of great strategic import, as it sealed the Ottoman influence on the Romanian states, and strengthened it in the Crimean Khanate.⁷

The Romanian states in the 15th century were an example of mixed political unions. The Principality of Wallachia was formally a Hungarian fief, but also a tributary to the Ottoman Empire. Over time, Ottoman influences dominated Hungarian influences, as evidenced by the fact that in the 2nd half of the 15th century, every prince who took power there, regardless of whose help he used when fighting for the throne, ultimately tried to gain the sultan's acceptance. Despite this, they still had political presence and conducted foreign policy, including *ahidnâme* agreements with the Ottoman state.

The Principality of Moldavia was formally a Polish fief from 1387, but from 1456 it became a tributary to the Ottoman Empire. The tribute was initially symbolic and a typical payment for peace; indeed, for a long time the Moldavian state remained free from direct Ottoman attacks. The prince was formally subordinate to the Polish king and should consult all his actions with him, but in practice, especially Stephen the Great, pursued a policy that was completely independent and even directed against his suzerain — the Polish king. This independent activity of the prince led to his open conflict with the Ottoman Empire, which in turn forced him into a closer alliance with Hungary. The latter have not been able to come to terms with the loss of the Moldavian fief since the 14th century, and launched a political and diplomatic offensive in order to take over the authority over Moldavia. The transfer of two districts within the Kingdom of Hungary to the Moldavian prince as a fief was presented internationally as the transition of Moldavia to the Hungarian suzerainty. From the mid-1470s, we can describe these as a tripartite political connections and the actual political independence of the prince.⁸

Bayezid's control of Kiliia and Belgrade forced the prince to change his policy. It was held in check by the Ottoman Empire to a greater extent, and only a closer connection with Hungary could provide it with some real defense against it. Despite the homage paid to the Polish king in September 1485,⁹ as the following year, Stephen the

⁷ O. Górka, *Białogród i Kilia a wyprawa r. 1497* [in:] *Sprawozdania z posiedzeń TNW*, wyd. II, Warszawa 1933.

⁸ There is enormous literature on this topic, best examples include: M. Berza, *Haraciul Moldovei și Țării Românești în sec. XV–XIX*, “Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie” 1957, vol. 2, p. 7–47; V. Ciobanu, *Țările române și Polonia. Secolele XIV–XVI*, București 1985; Ș. Gorovei, *Pacea moldo-otomană din 1486. Observații pe marginea unor texte*, “Revista de istorie” 1982, vol. 35, no. 7, p. 816; S. Gorovei, *Autour de la paix moldo-turque de 1489*, “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire” 1974, vol. 13, no. 3, p. 543; T. Gemil, *Quelques observations concernant la conclusion de la paix entre la Moldavie et l'Empire Ottoman (1486) et de la délimitation de leur frontière*, “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire” 1983, vol. 22, p. 225–238; I. Czamańska, *Moldawia i Wołoszczyzna wobec Polski, Węgier i Turcji w XIV–XV wieku*, op. cit.

⁹ Materials related to the tribute to Stephen the Great: AGAD, doc. Perg. 5405; Jagiellonian Library in Kraków [pol. *BJ*], manuscript 107, 180–185 and *BJ*, manuscript 114, 104–108; В.А. Уляницкий,

Great got so close to Hungary, that Moldavia was included in the renewed Hungarian-Turkish armistice treaty among the countries of the Hungarian domain, to which the sultan guaranteed inviolability and the maintaining of their current status.¹⁰ Matthias Corvinus acted as an intermediary in the Moldavian prince concluding an agreement with the sultan, ending the long-standing conflict (the prince appears in this treaty as a political subject). The second consequence of this was Stephen the Great's formal submission to the political authority of the Hungarian king. The Ottoman state also recognized this state of affairs,¹¹ and the protests of the Polish king were of no avail. As one can see, even though Moldavia was not a sovereign state, its rulers somehow still selected their own suzerains. Hungarian supremacy over Moldavia was maintained despite the accession of the Hungarian throne by Vladislaus II, and was further strengthened by the defeat of John I Albert in 1497 and the policy of Sigismund the Old, who was very conciliatory towards his older brother. In the long run, this had disastrous consequences.

The death of Louis II of Hungary near Mohács in 1526 and the devastating war between John Zápolya and Ferdinand I devastated Hungary, depriving the Romanian principalities of Hungarian protection, and, what is more, Hungary soon found itself in the position of an Ottoman vassal. The recognition of sultan Suleiman's supremacy by John Zápolya in 1528 undoubtedly increased his chances in the fight against Ferdinand I. Undoubtedly, it was in Suleiman's interest to maintain Zápolya's authority as the king of Hungary, hence his authority was rather in the form of protection. The investiture was combined with the return of the stolen coronation insignia. Initially no tribute was demanded, but over time it did take on a symbolic character. The Hungarian king also had almost unlimited opportunities to conduct his own foreign policy (although, of course, he did not flaunt negotiations and agreements with Ferdinand I). The most humiliating thing for the Hungarian king must have been the sultan's public ceremonial show of obedience and the oath of allegiance.¹²

Материалы для истории взаимных отношени Россіи, Польши, Молдавіи, Валахіи и Турціи въ XIV–XV вв., Москва 1887, no. 100; E. Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. 2, p. 2, București 1891, p. 710–711; I. Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, vol. 2, București 1914, p. 372–376, *Codex epistolaris saeculi decimi quinti*, vol. 3, Kraków 1876, p. 332–337. *Volumina Legum*, vol. 1, Petersburg 1859, p. 237–239; J.U. Niemcewicz, *Zbiór pamiętników historycznych o dawnej Polsce*, vol. 1, Lipsk 1838, p. 228–230; V. Eskenasy, *Omagiul lui Ștefan cel Mare de la Colomeea (1485). Note pe marginea unui ceremonial medieval*, AIA "A. D. Xenopol", vol. 20, 1983, p. 257–267.

¹⁰ Matthias Corvinus to Bayezid II, NDA [ca. 1485] — Vilmos Fraknói, *Mátyás király levelei*, vol. 1, Budapest 1893, p. 293–294.

¹¹ G. Hazai, *Eine türkische Urkunde zur Geschichte der ungarisch-türkischen Beziehungen im XV. Jh.*, "Ural-Altische Jahrbücher" 1965, vol. 36, no. 3–4, p. 335–339; Ștefan Gorovei, *Pacea moldo-otomană din 1486. Observații pe marginea unor texte*, "Revista de istorie" 1982, vol. 35, no. 7, p. 818.

¹² A description of this celebration was given by Mustafa Celâlzade in: M. Guboglu, M. Mehmet, *Cronici turcești privind țările române*, vol. I, București 1966, p. 259–260. However, in the light of this account, it can be seen that John Zápolya also presented demands, including the return of the capital and the crown previously robbed by the Turks, which he received.

While Hungary, at least in the initial period, did not experience strong Ottoman supremacy, it was immediately felt by its Romanian principalities. According to the tradition of local chroniclers, the first Moldavian prince who agreed to pay tribute to the Ottomans was Bogdan III, who reigned in the years 1504–1517.¹³ This was not entirely true, because, as we know, this tribute was already paid by his two predecessors: Peter Aron and his father Stephen the Great himself. The fact is that during his rule, the position of Moldavia in relation to the Ottoman Empire deteriorated. This was significantly influenced by the civil war in the Ottoman state between the ailing Bayezid II and his younger son Selim, who wanted to take over his father's power and influence. Feeling threatened in the summer of 1511, Bayezid II demanded from the Moldavian prince not only a systematic tribute payment, but also his military assistance. It is difficult to say today to what extent this was real help and to what extent it was feigned. In any case, Selim's troops, retreating to the Crimea after the lost battle of Çorlu, did not suffer any major losses from the Moldavia, and Bogdan himself soon realized that this ambitious and cunning challenger had the best chance of the final victory. Thus, in January 1512, he submitted under Selim's protection,¹⁴ who deposed his father from the throne three months later. This protected the Moldavian prince from unpleasant consequences and allowed him to maintain his position. According to Dimitrie Cantemir, Bogdan was to pay 4,000 ducats, 40 horses and 25 sables (or rather sable furs, because it takes 40 animals to sew one sable shuba) each year, and send 4,000 soldiers when the sultan goes to war.¹⁵

This did not prevent Bogdan from maintaining diplomatic relations and asking for help from Poland, Hungary, Maximilian I, and even Pope Julius II himself.¹⁶ The situation was also similar during the times of his son and successor, Stephen IV.

The situation changed fundamentally after John Zápolya submitted to Suleiman's protection. Wallachia and Moldavia were considered as vassal states to the sultan, who now denied them any political subjectivity, the right to conduct any independent foreign policy nor conclude any international agreements. When, in 1530, the sultan received a complaint from the Polish king against the Moldavian prince Petru Rareș, Suleiman replied:

Who is he, unworthy of sending an envoy to you, sending such an envoy regardless, thus acting so shamelessly? For they, he and the Multan, both are our tributaries and slaves; We have therefore strictly ordered them not to send any more envoys to anyone, nor should any envoy come to them under such a name.¹⁷

¹³ This was to explain the Turkish name of Moldavia — Bogdania. In fact, this name is of Tatar origin and was used long before Bogdan III was born. It is undoubtedly associated with Bogdan I.

¹⁴ Gh. Gonța, *Când a devenit Țara Moldovei vasală a Imperiului Otoman?*, "Revista de istorie a Moldovei. Studii" 2015, no. 1, p. 28–30.

¹⁵ D. Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei*, București 1973, p. 199–200.

¹⁶ A. Simon, *Habsburg politics at the border of Christendom in the early 1500s*, "Banatica" 2011, vol. 21, p. 55–70.

¹⁷ Letter of sultan Suleiman to Sigismund the Old (translated into Polish), April–May 1531; E. Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, supl. 2, vol. 2, București 1893, p. 25.

The end of the process of political subordination of Moldavia by the Ottoman Empire took place in 1538 as a result of the armed intervention of sultan Suleiman, mainly caused by the conflict with Poland over the border region called Pokuttia,¹⁸ but there were also many other reasons for the sultan's decision: unacceptably independent actions in Transylvania, the death of Alvise Gritti, connivances with Ferdinand I and the desire of the Crimean Khanate to extend control over Budjak — inhabited mainly by Tatars, and belonging to Moldavia. The capture of part of Moldavia by the padishah's troops meant that the country began to be treated as having been conquered by the sword for Islam, and therefore completely subordinated to it.¹⁹ The territory of Budjak was directly incorporated into the Ottoman state, and a prince imposed by the Sultan — Stephen V Locust — was placed on the Moldavian throne. Although the imposed ruler did not stay on the throne for long, from then on the sultan became the main authority deciding who would rule in Moldavia. The return of Petru Rareș to the throne in 1541, this time as a ruler appointed by the sultan, was the final seal of Ottoman supremacy.²⁰

With regard to Wallachia, it is more difficult to establish such clear dates. Here, as early as the 15th century, sultans appointed, installed and supervised the investiture of the princes. It, however, did not prevent the latter from pursuing their own policies. The year 1462 is generally considered to be the beginning of permanent Ottoman domination, but it is difficult to treat it as a conventional date. Undoubtedly, although the sultan was already actually the steward of the prince's throne, the status of Wallachia was officially regulated in agreements with Hungary. After 1528, however, they completely lost their importance, and the sultan began to consider himself the only legal superior of the Principality of Wallachia.

The Wallachian and Moldavian princes were either directly nominated by the sultan and arrived in their capital surrounded by the Sultan's entourage, or they were elected on the spot by the boyars, and accepted by the sultan. The sultan's envoy then handed them a banner as a sign of authority and a *firman* — an edict appointing the prince. There were also cases where they gained power by force and, after some time, obtained the formal acceptance of the sultan. Everything depended on the current condition and direction of the Ottoman state's involvement, but in general, the possibilities of taking the throne without the initial support of the sultan were quite high, and many such cases can be cited in both principalities. Acceptance could also

¹⁸ *Praelium Polonorum cum Valachis ad fluuium Sereth prima Februarii. Anno 1538* — Kórnik Library, ms. 218, *Acta Tomiciana*, vol. 18; *Legatio a Sigismundo primo rege Poloniae ad Solimanum caesarem Thurcorum data Erasmo de Kretkow castellano Brestensi*, Kraków 7.5.1538; *ibidem*, *Supplicationis pro victoria de Valachis*, Pułtusk 20.7.1538; *ibidem*; Nicolae Zaharia, *Expediția lui Suleyman Magnificul asupra Moldovei — 1538*, "Muzeul Național" 2011, v. 23, p. 19–25.

¹⁹ L. Șimanschi, *Petru Rareș*, București 1978.

²⁰ Suleiman I to Sigismund the Old, [1541] — Ilie Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor din arhivele polone, sec. XVI*, București 1979, p. 35; Hussein Aga to Sigismund I, after 10th of March, 1541; *ibidem*, p. 36–37; V. Panaite, *The Legal and Political Status of Wallachia and Moldavia*, p. 16.

be obtained by using sufficiently large amounts of cash. When Rüstem Pasha was the Grand Vizier, a singular high fee was demanded for taking the throne, independent of paid tribute. In the mid-16th century, Mircea the Shepard paid 1,000,000 akçe for the throne, which corresponded to a total of approximately 16,950 ducats,²¹ and in the second half of the 17th century, Moldavian princes paid up to 500 money-bags, or 250,000 ducats.²² This led, especially later, to intentional, frequent changes in princes for financial reasons. In case of inability to pay and resignation from the throne, the unpaid amount was additionally charged to the next prince. Economic exploitation was the most severe consequence of Ottoman suzerainty over the Romanian principalities. Competitors in the fight for the throne raised the fees for the throne and tribute without taking into account the real possibilities of repaying them. At the end of the 16th century, both principalities were several million ducats in debt.

Within their state, princes had almost unlimited power, but they had to take into account the possibility of complaints from their subjects or neighbors. The outcome of these complaints could vary. The mildest was a summon to Istanbul to explain oneself, i.e. “kissing the skirt of the sultan’s robe” (which rarely applied), or, most often, it ended with forfeiture, i.e. the loss of the throne, and sometimes also their life.

Although the Ottoman Empire completely denied political subjectivity to the Romanian principalities from the second quarter of the 16th century, it was unable to completely enforce this ban. Both Romanian states, at all times, had a fully operational administrative and state apparatus, which was impossible to be fully controlled by a foreign power. This was especially difficult in relation to Moldavia, which was located further away, and still had many ties with Poland. In the 16th century, and partly also in the 17th century, in the diplomatic relations between Moldavia and Poland, we can see numerous relics of old vassal relations. These included, for example, agreements regulating mutual relations in the form of the prince’s oath taken to the Polish king before his envoy,²³ or the obligation imposed on the princes to provide special obedience to the Polish king’s envoys, in particular the great envoys to Turkey passing through their country.²⁴ Wallachian princes had no such obligation. The political activity of the Moldavian household in the Polish sector is evidenced by the fact that Polish writers are constantly kept in the Moldavian chancellery.

²¹ *Documente turcești privind istoria României*, ed. M.A. Mehmed, vol. 1, București 1976, p. 37–38.

²² M. Costin, *Latopis Ziemi Moldawskiej i inne utwory historyczne*, translation and edition I. Czamańska, Poznań 1998, p. 181.

²³ For many more oaths see: I. Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor din arhivele polone, sec. XVI*, p. 142–145, 166–172, 211–216ff.

²⁴ The Moldavian princes were obliged to ceremonially welcome the Polish envoy in front of the walls of their capital, and then the envoy was invited to a feast. This provided the opportunity for top-secret political meetings. Some Moldavian princes or dignitaries also acted as intermediaries in the shipment of correspondence, such as Miron Costin during Jan Gniński’s legation.

The maintenance, and even a periodic increase, of Polish influence in Moldavia was facilitated by good Polish-Ottoman relations after 1533. They even made it possible for the Ottoman Empire to accept some princes brought to the throne by Poles, such as Alexandru Lăpușneanu. Incidentally, the Turks most likely did not know about the secret vassal oath made by the same prince to the Polish king before taking power in Moldavia in the town of Bakota. In later relations with the prince, the Polish side repeatedly referred to the “Bakota Agreement”, without mentioning its content out of caution.²⁵ What is also worth mentioning during Alexandru’s first reign in Moldavia in the years 1552–1561, is the informal Polish-Ottoman condominium in Moldavia. It could only have functioned with great caution on both sides. When Alexandru’s son, Bogdan IV, cooperated with Poland too openly, he was removed from the throne. A similar condominium actually operated in the years 1595–1611, i.e. during the rule of the House Movilești. What is worth highlighting is yet another important element in the relations of vassal states with the Sublime Porte, namely the person of *kapıkâhaya*, i.e. a permanent resident in Istanbul, whose political skills were invaluable. Ieremia Movilă had an excellent *kapıkâhaya* in Istanbul — Ion Caraiman — thanks to whom he was able to get away with not only political and military cooperation with Poland, but also sending deputies to the Polish Diet, and even his vassal oath taken at the Polish Diet in 1602 — although made by the Diet’s representatives, but with a clear demand to free him from Turkish suzerainty. In 1611, when Constantin Movilă was removed from the throne, Caraiman was already dead, meanwhile a different *kapıkâhaya* was active in Istanbul, a representative of the Transylvanian prince Gabriel Báthory — Gabriel Bethlen, who was hostile to Movilă.²⁶

The Holy Roman Empire and Transylvania were also important political allies of the Romanian countries in the 16th–18th centuries. When talking about connections with the Empire, it is enough to mention the Moldavian prince Peter the Lamé, the Wallachian princes Michael the Brave, Radu Șerban and Șerban Cantacuzino, who, more or less officially, cooperated with the Holy Roman Emperor or benefited from his political support.

When talking about the Transylvanian principality, it is also worth returning to the division of Hungary. After the death of John Zápolya, Isabella Jagiellon was unable to maintain influence over his part of Hungary (opposing the Treaty of Nagyvárad). However, sultan Suleiman’s call for help ended up with the annexation of the center

²⁵ I. Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor, sec. XVI*, p. 166–172 and 183–186.

²⁶ M. Maxim, *L'autonomie de la Moldavie et de la Valachie dans les actes officiels de la Porte au cours de la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle*, “Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes” 1977, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 207–230; idem, *Les statuts des pays roumains envers la Porte Ottomane aux XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles*, “Revue Roumaine d’Histoire” 1985, vol. 24, no. 1–2, p. 29–50; V. Panaite, *Pace, război și comerț în islam*, p. 293ff.; I. Czamańska, *Between Poland and Ottoman Empire. The Political and juridical status of Moldavia in the 15th–18th century* [in:] *Turkey and Romania. A history of partnership and collaboration in the Balkans*, Istanbul 2016, p. 181–192.

of Hungary by the Ottoman Empire. From this part of Hungary, which remained intermittently in the possession of Isabella Jagiellon and her son John Sigismund Zápolya, the Principality of Transylvania was created in 1571, which was supposed to come under the rule of the House Habsburg after the end of the Zápolya line of succession. The unexpected and childless death of John Sigismund made the matter relevant immediately after the creation of the principality, which caused a reaction from the Hungarians, who decided to choose their own prince and renew the relationship with Ottoman Turkey. The basic principles of mutual relations between the Ottoman Empire and Transylvania were contained in the *ahidnâme* documents from 1571–1575. They guaranteed relatively good conditions and the obligations were light. The principality was obliged to pay tribute as a symbol of subordination to the padishah, administrative and military cooperation with Ottoman officials, and securing roads for the Ottoman army in the event of an armed conflict. The principality was guaranteed the freedom to choose a prince, territorial integrity and military assistance.²⁷ Most of the time, the principality paid a symbolic tribute,²⁸ and elected a prince at its assembly. The choice of the prince should always be accepted by the sultan, who made the final appointment by gifting a lavishly equipped horse, together with a caftan, a cap, a sword and a banner.²⁹ In Transylvania, attempts to buy the princely dignity were unsuccessful, even with the promise of double tribute, but each prince was obliged to additionally provide gifts to the Grand Vizier, members of the Divan and the Dragoman of the Sublime Porte. In the first year of the prince's rule, it was an amount corresponding to the amount of the tribute, and in the following years it was half as much.³⁰

Until 1657, the Principality of Transylvania had actual political and military near-independence status. It concluded agreements, military alliances and carried out military operations without always consulting the headquarters in Istanbul. Gabriel Bethlen and George I Rákóczi were actively involved in the Thirty Years' War, also concluding peace agreements with the empire. The Ottoman Empire often supported the aspirations of the Transylvanian princes to take over the royal crown of Hungary and unite the Principality of Transylvania with the Habsburg Kingdom of Hungary. However, while the competition with House Habsburg was looked upon favorably at the sultan's court, attempts to strengthen the principality at the expense of other neighbors were less eagerly perceived there. The Transylvanian princes felt they were the

²⁷ C. Feneşan, *Constituirea principatului autonom al Transilvaniei*, Bucureşti 2000, p. 208–209.

²⁸ John Sigismund Zápolya paid 10,000 forints a year, Stephen Báthory 15,000. Only after the disastrous political mistake of George II Rákóczi and his defeat, during the rule of Michael I Apafi, the tribute increased rapidly to 40,000 forints per year; G. Ágoston, T. Oborni, *A tizenhetedik század története*, "Pannonica Kiadó" 2000, p. 46–47.

²⁹ Eosdem, *Between Vienna and Constantinople: notes on the legal status of the principality of Transylvania* [in:] *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, op. cit., p. 67–89, p. 73.

³⁰ C. Feneşan, *Constituirea principatului autonom al Transilvaniei*, p. 218.

heirs of the Hungarian kings and tried several times to subjugate the Romanian principalities. The first such attempt was made in 1594–1595 by Sigismund Báthory, one of the few princes who abandoned the traditional pro-Ottoman policy of the principality.³¹ The result was the sultan's decision to liquidate the Romanian principalities, which fortunately did not come into force. George I Rákóczi fared much more effectively. He not only managed to stay on the throne, even though the Sublime Porte initially supported István Bethlen, but also helped the Wallachian prince Matthias Basarab take the throne, and entered into a close alliance with him. A few years later, the politically subjugated this prince, who agreed to pay him an annual tribute of 5,000 ducats and gift of a richly-equipped horse.³² Standing up for him, George I Rákóczi forced the Moldavian prince Vasile Lupu to withdraw from the armed attack on Wallachia.³³

His father's political line was also continued by George II Rákóczi, who, after intervening in Moldavia in 1653, installed his own prince Gheorghe Ștefan there, and after intervening in Wallachia in 1655 in defense of prince Constantin Șerban, he also subjugated this ruler. As a result, after another completely independent political treaty, this time with Sweden, Brandenburg, the Cossacks and Bogusław Radziwiłł in Radnot, he invaded Poland together with the princes in 1657.³⁴

As Veniamin Ciobanu rightly noted, the actions of George II Rákóczi threatened the political destabilization of the entire region, so they had to trigger the reaction of the Turkish suzerain. Not only did Transylvania suffer from this, but the status of all Ottoman tributaries deteriorated. The Principality of Transylvania lost the ability to freely choose princes, was burdened with high tribute and almost deprived of political subjectivity.³⁵ Paradoxically, this fact later made it easier for House Habsburg to take over it, and the weakened principality was unable to oppose it. Princes were imposed on Wallachia and Moldavia, financial exploitation increased, and significant political restrictions were introduced. Further difficulties were caused by the creation of the Podolia Eyalet in 1672, as it enabled tighter control of the Romanian principalities.

³¹ *Baranyai Decsi János magyar históriája 1592–1598*, Budapest 1982, passim; L. Bazyłow, *Siedmiogród a Polska 1576–1613*, Warszawa 1967, p. 59–89.

³² A. Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, vol. 10: *Acte și scrisori 1637–1660*, p. 48–49.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 41–42; *Erdélyi Országvilési Emlékek*, ed. S. Szilágyi, vol. 10, Budapest 1884, p. 130–131; V. Ciobanu, *Politică și diplomație în secolul al XVII-lea, Țările Române în raporturile polono-otomano-habsburgice (1601–1634)*, București 1994, p. 226–227.

³⁴ Reports from the Venetian ambassador in Istanbul, Giovan Battista Nani, from September and November 1656 prove that the Sublime Porte was well informed about the preparations of George II Rákóczi and the hospodars to act against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth long before the conclusion of the Treaty of Radnot; its efforts to stop it were to no effect.; E. Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. 9, no. 1, București 1897, p. 79–80.

³⁵ V. Ciobanu, *România în politica est-central europeană 1648–1711*, Iași 1997, p. 53ff.

A chance to change this situation occurred after the Battle of Vienna, when Hungary was rebuilt under the rule of House Habsburg, with the liquidation of the Principality of Transylvania. The Romanian principalities became very politically active by entering into agreements with the Holy Roman Emperor and the Polish king,³⁶ with most of these arrangements, however, remaining only declarative for various reasons.

The 18th century, in Romanian countries, was associated with the so-called Phanariot regime. Princes, mostly of Greek origin, were often Ottoman agents, and over time became also Russian or Austrian agents. The Romanian countries have become an intelligence center working for the benefit of everyone around them.³⁷ Despite further limitation of the political independence of the Romanian principalities, strict control (after the liquidation of the Podolia Eyalet this role was fulfilled by Khotyn raya) and further financial exploitation, the Romanian principalities became a political school for the Greeks, creating opportunities for them to establish the necessary political contacts, which in the future would result in activities for Greek independence.³⁸ Russia began to play a role in the international contacts of not only the Romanian principalities, but also of all Balkan nationalities.

In the 18th century, the process of building nation states began very timidly in the Balkans. One of the first territories to emancipate from Ottoman rule were the lands around the Eparchy of Cetinje, in Montenegro. The local rulers were still formally subordinate to the Ottomans, but starting in 1711 they began to establish direct relations with Russia, the Empire and Venice.³⁹

In the 19th century, the emancipation of the Balkan states was already in full swing. The First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813), despite a general lack of educated people, produced a talented diplomat — Petar Ičko (1806). The Second Serbian Uprising (1815) gave the Serbs the desired autonomy through a diplomatic agreement; and the established Principality of Serbia after 1830 began to create its own diplomatic service.

³⁶ C. Giurescu, *Tractatul lui Cantemir cu Austrieci*, “Convorbiri literare” 1910, p. 277–280; Gh. Duznichevici, *Ceva nou asupra legăturilor lui Sobieski cu Moldavia*, AR MSI, ser. III, vol. 19, no. 21, București 1937; I. Czamańska, *Oswobodziciel czy najeźdźca? Polityka Jana III Sobieskiego wobec gospodarstw Moldawii i Wołoszczyzny*, “Roczniki Historyczne” 1989–1990, vol. 15–16, p. 151–177; eadem, *Jan III Sobieski wobec księstw rumuńskich i powstania węgierskiego*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne” 2019, vol. 146, no. 2, p. 347–362.

³⁷ H. Topaktaş, *What happened beyond the border: some reports of Moldavian and Wallachian voivods related to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1764–1795)* [in:] *Turkey and Romania*, op. cit., p. 271–286.

³⁸ V. Mischevca, P. Zavitsanos, *Principele Constantin Ypsilanti 1760–1816*, Chişinău 1999, p. 118ff.

³⁹ Н.И. Хитрова, *Русско-черногорские связи в XVIII веке (церковные и культурные)* [in:] *XVIII век: славянские и балканские народы и Россия*, Москва 1998, p. 6–26; *Историја Црне Горе*, ed. М. Буровић, vol. 3, Титоград 1975, passim; I. Czamańska, *Historia Serbii*, vol. 1, Poznań 2021, p. 196–203.

es.⁴⁰ They were also created after building their own state by the Greeks, who, unlike the Serbs, had a more numerous and a better prepared political staff.⁴¹

The Romanian principalities were in the relatively best situation, as they continuously had a fully operational state apparatus, which was gradually modernized. Immediately after the unification of the Romanian principalities in 1859, modern structures of international politics were built.⁴²

The Balkan states generally entered 1878 as independent, with extensive diplomatic structures, which were also immediately built by Bulgaria, formally dependent on Ottoman Turkey.

CONCLUSION

The huge variety of relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan states and the variety of dependencies resulted in greater or lesser restrictions in conducting their international policy. Nevertheless, even in the situation of the greatest dependence, while denying all rights to conduct its own foreign policy, as long as there were any state or even local government structures, the Ottoman Empire was not able to prevent politics from being conducted in a more or less official form.

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⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 212.

⁴¹ See: Г.Л. Арш, *Тайное общество „Филики этерия”*. Из истории борьбы Греции за свержение османского ига, Москва 1965.

⁴² J. Demel, *Aleksander Jan Cuza książę Rumunii*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1977; idem, *Historia Rumunii*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1970, p. 314ff.

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