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Polish–Hungarian Tensions During the Kraków Negotiations on the Holy League (1596). A Perspective from Papal Sources

**Napięcia polsko-węgierskie podczas
krakowskich negocjacji w sprawie Ligi Świętej
(1596). Perspektywa źródeł papieskich**

Abstract

This article examines the convocation and course of the Kraków negotiations on the formation of the Holy League in 1596, with particular attention to papal sources, above all the diplomatic correspondence of Cardinal Enrico Caetani, the papal legate. Convened during the Third Austro–Turkish War (in Hungarian historiography called the Fifteen Years War, 1591/1593–1606), the congress was part of the Holy See’s broader effort to construct a wide-ranging anti-Ottoman coalition embracing the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Habsburg Empire, Spain, Venice, and Transylvania. Caetani’s central mission was to reconcile Poland and the Empire, divided primarily by disputes over the status of Moldavia and Wallachia. Yet the proceedings also exposed deeper Polish–Hungarian and Polish–Transylvanian frictions, rooted in earlier border conflicts and sharpened by the dynastic interests of the Habsburgs. Although Poland faced

the threat of Tatar incursions, it resisted immediate war with the Ottomans, instead prioritizing the maintenance of peace and control of Black Sea trade routes. Caetani's correspondence illuminates both the inner workings of the talks and his unsuccessful attempts to secure the meaningful participation of Sigismund Báthory. The negotiations ultimately collapsed: the parties disagreed over prior treaties, the conduct and aims of the war, and the projected duration of the league, while the deputies present lacked authority to commit to binding terms. Even so, Caetani persisted in his mission, convinced that the Commonwealth could yet serve as a cornerstone of Europe's defense against Ottoman expansion.

Keywords: Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Holy Roman Empire, Habsburgs, Ottoman Empire, Transylvania, Holy League.

Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia okoliczności zwołania i przebiegu krakowskich rokowań w sprawie utworzenia Ligi Świętej w 1596 r., ukazując je z perspektywy źródeł papieskich, przede wszystkim korespondencji dyplomatycznej legata kardynała Enrica Caetaniego. Kongres odbywał się w czasie III wojny austriacko-tureckiej (w historiografii węgierskiej zwanej wojną piętnastoletnią, 1591/1593–1606), gdy Stolica Apostolska dążyła do zawiązania szerokiej koalicji antytureckiej z udziałem Rzeczypospolitej, cesarstwa, Hiszpanii, Wenecji i Siedmiogrodu. Zadaniem Caetaniego było doprowadzenie do porozumienia Polski i cesarstwa, zwaśnionych ze sobą m.in. o status Mołdawii i Wołoszczyzny. W toku pertraktacji wyraźnie ujawniły się również napięcia polsko-węgierskie i polsko-siedmiogrodzkie, spotęgowane pamięcią o dawnych sporach granicznych, a także sprzecznymi interesami dynastycznymi Habsburgów. Polska, choć zagrożona najazdami tatarskimi, nie była gotowa do natychmiastowej wojny z Osmanami, dążąc do zachowania pokoju i kontroli szlaków czarnomorskich. Korespondencja Caetaniego odśłania zarówno kulisy rozmów, jak i jego zabiegi o zaangażowanie Zygmunta Batorego, którego udział w kongresie okazał się marginalny. Negocjacje zakończyły się fiaskiem – strony różniły się w ocenie dotychczasowych układów i porozumień, sposobu prowadzenia wojny i czasu trwania ligi, a zgromadzeni deputowani nie posiadali pełnomocnictw do zawarcia wiążącego układu. Mimo rozczarowania kardynał Caetani zdecydował się kontynuować swoją misję, wierząc, że Rzeczpospolita może odegrać kluczową rolę w systemie obrony Europy przed turecką ekspansją.

Słowa kluczowe: Rzeczpospolita, cesarstwo, Habsburgowie, Turcja, Siedmiogród, Liga Święta.

The Third Austro-Turkish War (1591/1593–1606), known in historiography as the Long Turkish War, began as a conflict between Emperor Rudolf II and the Ottoman Empire over dominance in the fragmented Kingdom of Hungary. Its western part remained under Habsburg rule, the central territories were directly controlled by the Ottomans, and the eastern region, as the Principality of Transylvania, retained relative autonomy under Ottoman suzerainty.¹ The conflict soon developed into a stage for shifting alliances and interventions by numerous European powers, each seeking to exploit the war for political or territorial advantage. In the second half of the 16th century, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth had become an important actor. Confronted with mounting Ottoman pressure, it experimented with various strategies of resistance. The Holy See took note of this shift away from Poland's earlier caution and, through nuncios and legates, sought to influence Polish policy in Central and Eastern Europe.² Papal diplomacy promoted the idea of a broad Christian coalition, modeled on earlier Holy Leagues.³ Alongside the Empire and the Commonwealth, the papal vision also included Spain, Venice, and Transylvania.⁴ Yet the formation of such an alliance required overcoming long-standing disputes and rivalries among the prospective

- 1 On the Long War, see Sándor László Tóth, *A mezőkeresztesi csata és a tizenöt éves háború* (Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2000); Jan Paul Niederkorn, *Die europäischen Mächte und der "Lange Türkenkrieg" Kaiser Rudolfs II. (1593–1606)* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1993); Caroline Finkel, *The Administration of Warfare. The Ottoman Military Campaigns in Hungary, 1593–1606* (Wien: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1988); Josef Macůrek, *Zápas Polska a Habsburků o přístup k Černému moři na sklonku 16. století* (Praha: Nákl. Filosofické fakulty University Karlovy, 1931).
- 2 For further discussion, see Dorota Gregorowicz, *Tiara w grze o koronę. Stolica Apostolska wobec wolnych elekcji w Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w drugiej połowie XVI wieku* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2019).
- 3 Aleksandra Barwicka, "Rzeczpospolita w planach dyplomacji papieskiej i habsburskiej w okresie wojny austriacko-tureckiej 1593–1606," in *Polska wobec wielkich konfliktów w Europie nowożytnej. Z dziejów dyplomacji i stosunków międzynarodowych w XV–XVIII wieku*, ed. Ryszard Skowron (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2009), 297–307; on the Holy Leagues of the 16th century and attempts to involve the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, see: Marko Jačov, *Europa i Osmanie w okresie Lig Świętych. Polska między Wschodem a Zachodem w okresie Lig Świętych* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2003).
- 4 After the outbreak of the Long War, papal diplomacy, in considering the organization of a new anti-Ottoman League, envisaged including not only Catholic but also Orthodox states: Muscovy, Moldavia, and Wallachia. The latter two were in fact Ottoman vassals, which illustrates the scope of Rome's attempts to coordinate anti-Ottoman cooperation. *Ibidem*, 47–51; Jan Paul Niederkorn, "Die Verhandlungen über den Beitritt Polens zu einer antiosmanischen Liga in den Jahren 1595 bis 1597," *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne* 121 (1996): 81.

partners. From a Polish perspective, since the war was fought mainly in the Pannonian Plain, Upper Hungary, and adjacent parts of Transylvania, it was essential to resolve historical antagonisms and normalize relations with Hungary.

Polish–Hungarian relations at the end of the sixteenth century unfolded in a particularly complex political environment. The election of the Transylvanian prince Stephen Báthory to the Polish throne in 1576 fundamentally altered the balance of power in Central and Eastern Europe. For the Habsburgs, this was a serious blow: instead of an ally in the struggle against the Ottomans, they faced a Poland under Báthory that pursued an independent policy, focused on the war with Muscovy while maintaining correct relations with the Ottoman Empire. His reign effectively linked Poland, Transylvania, and indirectly the Ottomans into a single bloc, illustrating how closely Hungary's fate depended on political decisions made in Kraków and Gyulafehérvár (present day Alba Julia in Romania). The Holy See supported most of Báthory's initiatives, hoping they would ultimately lead to a decisive confrontation with the Turks.⁵ His death in 1586, however, ended this period of cooperation and mutual understanding.⁶ Papal diplomacy anticipated a revival after the initial Habsburg defeats in Hungary in 1593–1594 and in the face of intensifying Tatar raids and unrest in Moldavia and Wallachia. Both Hungarians and Poles, after all, faced the same threat of Ottoman expansion. Yet the political realities of the Commonwealth and of Hungary – divided

5 King Stephen Báthory, in agreement with the Holy See, sought to realize an ambitious plan aimed at concentrating power – through the union of the Polish, Muscovite, and Hungarian thrones – in order to enable war against the Ottoman Empire (cf. Ludwik Boratyński, *Stefan Batory i plan ligi przeciw Turkom (1576–1584)*, Kraków: Nakładem Akademii Umiejętności, 1903). Some scholars, while not questioning the existence of such plans, argue that Báthory treated them primarily as an instrument to strengthen his position vis-à-vis Muscovy and the Habsburgs, rather than as a realistic project for war with the Ottomans. See: Kazimierz Dopierała, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski z Turcją za Stefana Batorego* (Warszawa: 1986); *idem*, “Liga antyturecka w planach Stefana Batorego,” in *Polska, Niemcy, Europa. Studia z dziejów myśli politycznej i stosunków międzynarodowych*, ed. Antoni Czubiński (Poznań: UAM, 1977), 101–110.

6 Ludwik Bazylow, *Siedmiogród a Polska 1576–1613* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), 39–49; Báthory's death was a serious blow to papal policy in Central and Eastern Europe, as it dashed hopes for the organization of a broad anti-Ottoman league. This is evident from the intensive diplomatic activity undertaken by the Vatican during the interregnum and the election of 1587, aimed at maintaining influence in the Commonwealth and securing its commitment to war against the Ottoman Empire. Czesław Nanke, *Z dziejów polityki kurii rzymskiej wobec Polski (1587–1589)* (Lwów: Nakładem Towarzystwa Naukowego, 1921), 6–32; Jan Władysław Woś, *Santa Sede e Corona polacca nella corrispondenza di Annibale di Capua (1586–1591)* (Trento: Dipartimento di Scienze Filologiche e Storiche, 2004), 37–60.

between Habsburg domains and Transylvania – made such hopes difficult to realize. Hungarian nobles tied to the Habsburg monarchy regarded Polish political and diplomatic initiatives with marked reserve, a caution further encouraged by the imperial court. The living memory of past border disputes in Upper Hungary and Spiš, as well as in Subcarpathia and Pokuttya, made the Hungarian estates unwilling to ratify the Bytom-Będzin treaties of 1589.⁷ In fact, the roots of tension stretched back to the Hungarian civil war following the death of Matthias Corvinus in 1490. The victorious faction then introduced legal and political measures that curtailed Polish influence in Hungary, particularly in the northern regions. These measures provoked recurring disputes that persisted even after the collapse and partition of the Hungarian kingdom following the defeat at Mohács in 1526. From the mid-16th century onward, the Hungarian estates increasingly demanded the restoration of the Spiš towns to the Crown of St. Stephen. The controversy over the Spiš pledge fueled numerous local conflicts and shaped relations between the Polish Crown and the Habsburg rulers of Hungary. By the second half of the sixteenth century, tensions had grown so acute that both sides attempted to address them through mixed border commissions.⁸ After the outbreak of the Long Turkish War, the Hungarian estates could count on the support of Archduke Maximilian Habsburg, who – despite Polish objections – was appointed commander-in-chief of imperial forces in Upper Hungary with a clear mandate to resist Ottoman incursions. Yet because he never renounced his claim to the Polish throne, there were persistent fears in the Commonwealth that, with Hungarian backing, he might once again press his claim to the crown on the Vistula.⁹

Similar tensions and disputes also characterized Poland's relations with Transylvania. Under the rule of Sigismund Báthory, an openly anti-Polish propaganda campaign was conducted there, fueled in large part by confessional divisions and hostility toward the Jesuit Order, which

7 Evidence of continuing border disputes on the Polish–Hungarian frontier can be found in the resolutions of the sejmik of the Ruthenian voivodeship, held in Wisznia in 1597. This is particularly reflected in the constitution entitled “Konstytucya około rozgraniczenia Podgórze i Pokucia z jednej strony, a węgierskich krajów z drugiej strony, tudzież około uczynienia sprawiedliwości z tegoż sąsiedztwa ukrzywdzonym, żeby ad effectum przywiedziona była.” *Scriptores Rerum Polonicarum*, vol. 20, ed. Eugeniusz Barwiński (Kraków: Nakładem Akademii Umiejętności, 1907), 386.

8 Szymon Brzeziński, *Tanulmányok a 16.–17. századi lengyel–erdélyi–magyar kapcsolattörténetéről* (Budapest: Komáromi Nyomda és Kiadó Kft, 2014), 15–16.

9 This occurred in violation of the Bytom-Będzin treaty, which prohibited Archduke Maximilian from approaching the Polish border. Josef Macůrek, *Zápas Polska a Habsburská o přístup k Černému moři na sklonku 16. století*, 88.

was strongly supported by Poland. Although personally sympathetic to the Jesuits, Sigismund did not hesitate to accuse the Commonwealth of obstructing the creation of a Christian alliance and even of favoring Ottoman interests. Beyond border issues, disputes also centered on competing claims to suzerainty over Moldavia and Wallachia. Particularly sharp attacks on Poland came after Hetman Jan Zamoyski's intervention in Moldavia in the summer of 1595.¹⁰ Another sensitive matter was the execution in 1594 of Baltazar Báthory – brother of Cardinal Andrew Báthory – condemned by Prince Sigismund for treason and for allegedly plotting to seize power in Transylvania with Ottoman support. As patron of the closest relatives of the late King Stephen Báthory, Zamoyski could not remain neutral and sided with Cardinal Andrew.

Since the reign of Władysław Jagiełło, Poland had sought to maintain influence over the Danubian principalities, initially for economic and political reasons linked to control of the trade routes to the Black Sea. Only in the second half of the fifteenth century did these territories begin to acquire strategic importance as a buffer against the growing Ottoman threat. In the late 16th century, economic motives remained central to Poland's interest in the Danube Valley – above all the desire to control trade routes through Moldavia and Wallachia leading to the Black Sea ports and ultimately to Constantinople. In cooperation with Venice, plans were even made to use these routes to export Polish grain and other goods, such as honey, wax, meat, and hides, to Western markets. At the same time, Black Sea trade conducted under agreement with the Ottomans already brought the Commonwealth substantial financial returns.¹¹

In the 1590s, Chancellor Jan Zamoyski steered Polish policy toward balancing the need to defend the southeastern frontier from Tatar raids with the possibility of joining the Habsburgs in war against the Ottomans. He rejected the idea of immediate conflict, emphasizing instead

10 Dariusz Milewski, "A Campaign of the Great Hetman Jan Zamoyski in Moldavia (1595). Part I. Politico-diplomatic and military preliminaries," *Codrul Cosminului* 18/2 (2012): 261–286; *Idem*, "Une campagne du grand hetman Jan Zamoyski dans la Moldavie (1595). La II-ème partie. La bataille de Țuțora et ses conséquences," *Codrul Cosminului* 19/1 (2013): 57–76; Przemysław Gawron, "Jan Zamoyski, kanclerz i hetman wielki koronny, wobec zmagania turecko-habsburskich w latach 1593–1605/6," in *Polska wobec wielkich konfliktów w Europie nowożytnej. Z dziejów dyplomacji i stosunków międzynarodowych w XV–XVIII wieku*, ed. Ryszard Skowron (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2009), 33–36.

11 In 1591 the Venetian *bailo* in Constantinople, Lorenzo Bernardo, reported this project to his superiors after it had been presented to him by Krzysztof Dzierżek, the Polish ambassador to the Porte. Ovidiu Cristea, "Michael the Brave, the Long War and the Moldavian Road," *Revue des. Etudes Sud-Est Européennes* 51 (2013): 240–241.

the necessity of preserving peace and focusing on the Commonwealth's internal stability. As a result, despite facing a common threat, Poles and Hungarians failed to establish a lasting political understanding that might have formed the basis for an effective anti-Ottoman league. Additional obstacles came from Habsburg ambitions: after securing control of western Hungary, the dynasty also claimed rights to Transylvania and asserted overlordship over the Romanian principalities, generating tensions that hindered the creation of a united front against the Ottomans. This issue was among the most serious challenges faced by papal diplomacy during the pontificate of Clement VIII (1592–1605).¹²

To undertake this conciliatory mission, Clement appointed Cardinal Enrico Caetani – one of the most distinguished curial diplomats, renowned for his political skill and long experience. In a bull of 3 April 1596, the pope instructed him to persuade Poland's political leaders to support Hungary and Transylvania in their war against the Turks. He stressed the dangers pressing most heavily on Hungary and therefore resolved to initiate defensive measures, including the mobilization of troops and financial resources, extending also to Transylvania, which was under direct threat. Clement feared that if Poland failed to act, it might later find itself isolated against the Ottomans, since the Habsburgs and the Transylvanian prince, under pressure, could come to terms with the Ottomans.¹³

Caetani accepted the commission in the conviction that only the united action of all Central and Eastern European states could resist the rising Ottoman power. Central to this effort was achieving an understanding between the Habsburg Empire and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The task was difficult: as noted above, the two powers were divided by conflicting political and economic interests in the Lower Danube region. The Habsburgs also claimed Jagiellonian inheritance rights not only in Bohemia and Hungary but in Poland as well.¹⁴ The

12 The pope entrusted his nephew, Gianfrancesco Aldobrandini, with command of the papal troops and sent him to Hungary to lead the fight against the Turks. Florio Banfi, "Gianfrancesco Aldobrandini magyarországi hadivállalatai. Harmadik és befejező közlemény," *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 40 (1939): 1–33; Tamás Kruppa, "Gianfrancesco Aldobrandini pápai generális meghiúsult erdélyi hadivállalata 1595–1596 ban," *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 131 (2018): 662–677; *Pápai csapatok Magyarországon (1595–1597, 1601). The Correspondence of Gianfrancesco Aldobrandini*, ed. Tamás Kruppa (Budapest – Rome: GONDOLAT Kiadó, 2020).

13 Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1565, ff. 1r–8v.

14 At the time, a contentious issue in Polish-Habsburg relations was Archduke Maximilian's continued claim to the Polish crown, despite the Bytom-Będzin treaties of 1589, which he refused to honor. Aleksandra Barwicka-Makula, *Od wrogości*

main objectives of Caetani's legation were set out in a general instruction of 13 April 1596. Foremost was the creation, under papal patronage, of an anti-Ottoman Holy League. The legate was instructed to join the negotiations already underway – conducted by papal nuncios in Poland – between the royal court, the emperor, and the prince of Transylvania.¹⁵ Again, Clement VIII emphasized the urgency of Polish support for Hungary and Transylvania, referring to the dangers threatening Hungarian lands. He therefore resolved to organize defensive measures, including the raising of troops and financial aid for Transylvania. The pope warned that if Poland did not engage, it might ultimately face the Ottoman threat alone, as the Habsburgs and the Transylvanian prince could be forced to accept harsh conditions dictated by the Ottomans.¹⁶

The instructions given to Cardinal Enrico Caetani also reflected Poland's ambitions in Black Sea policy. He was informed that a major source of tension among the prospective allies was Hetman Jan Zamoyski's recent military intervention in Moldavia in the summer of 1595. By placing Ieremia Movilă on the hospodar's throne, Zamoyski provoked strong opposition both at the imperial court and in Transylvania. For the Habsburgs, this move infringed upon their claims of suzerainty over the Danubian principalities, while for Prince Sigismund Báthory it posed a serious threat to his own influence in Moldavia.¹⁷ Caetani was instructed to persuade the Poles to moderate their territorial ambitions, since a victorious war could open for the Kingdom of Poland the prospect of direct access to the Black Sea and control over its ports and

do przyjaźni: Habsburgowie austriaccy wobec Polski w latach 1587–1592 (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2019), 274–275; Dorota Gregorowicz, *Tiara w grze o koronę*, 209.

- 15 Beginning in the summer of 1592, the apostolic nuncio in the Commonwealth was Germanico Malaspina, bishop of San Severo, who was joined by Benedetto Mandina, bishop of Caserta in early 1596. Klaus Jaitner, *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII. für die Nuntien und Legaten an den europäischen Fürstenhöfen (1592–1605)*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984), 80; Klaus Jaitner, *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII für die Nuntien und Legaten an den europäischen Fürstenhöfen (1592–1605)*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984), 397–423; *Acta Nuntiaturae Poloniae*, vol. 15, ed. Leszek Jarmiński (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2000).
- 16 Klaus Jaitner, *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII.*, vol. 2, no. 52, 434–450; Jan Władysław Woś, "Istruzione al cardinale Enrico Caetani per la sua missione in Polonia negli anni 1596–1597," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, Serie III 6/3 (1976): 929–953.
- 17 Dariusz Milewski, "Między patronatem a współpracą – relacje Jana Zamoyskiego i hospodara moldawskiego Jeremiego Mohyły (1595–1605)," *Wiek Stary i Nowy* 9 (2012): 11–31; Jan Sas, "Wyprawa Zamojskiego na Mołdawię," *Przegląd Powszechny* 14/56 (1897): 74–89; Zygmunt Spieralski, *Awantury moldawskie* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1967), 144–147; Ludwik Bazylow, *Siedmiogród a Polska 1576–1613*, 82–85.

trading centers. Clearly, the pope anticipated that Poland would strive to strengthen its position in the Danubian region and in the Black Sea emporia, and sought to preemptively manage this through diplomacy.¹⁸

Cardinal Caetani departed for Poland in April 1596 and, from the outset, sent almost daily reports on the progress of his mission to the Roman Secretariat of State. His surviving correspondence amounts to more than one thousand documents. In addition to letters to Rome, the cardinal maintained regular contact with the Polish and Habsburg courts as well as with numerous ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries in the Commonwealth, in the emperor's lands, and even in Spain. An important portion of this exchange consisted of letters with other nuncios active in Central Europe, which allowed Caetani to coordinate papal diplomacy across the region. Of particular significance were his contacts with Alfonso Visconti, bishop of Cervia and nuncio in Transylvania since early 1595, who provided valuable information about the political and confessional situation in this strategically important principality.¹⁹

Caetani also corresponded directly with Prince Sigismund Báthory. On 13 May 1596, from Trent, he sent the prince a letter outlining the aims of his legation to Poland. He informed him of the pope's decision to send a consecrated sword as a token of recognition for his efforts thus far. The legate asked for guidance on possible cooperation and for information that might aid the success of his mission.²⁰ On the same day, he also wrote to the nuncio in Transylvania, explaining the purpose of his legation and his readiness to collaborate in organizing a league against the Turks. He asked the nuncio to convey this to Sigismund Báthory and to assure him of his full support and loyalty. He also requested regular updates on developments in Transylvania and disclosure of any important political intelligence that might facilitate his work.²¹

In a subsequent letter to nuncio Visconti, dated 30 May from Vienna, Caetani expressed hope for his continued service to the Holy See in this difficult post. He assured him of his support, even in the face of danger,

18 Klaus Jaitner, *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII*, vol. 2, 441–442; Jan Władysław Woś, "Istruzione al cardinale Enrico Caetani..." 945; Ovidiu Cristea, "Michael the Brave, the Long War and the Moldavian Road," 241.

19 The general instruction for Bishop Alfonso Visconti was issued in December 1594. Klaus Jaitner, *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII*, vol. 1, no. 41, 320–345.

20 Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1562, ff. 7v–9v.

21 *Ibidem*, ff. 70v–72r; *Relationes nuntiorum apostolicorum in Transsilvaniam missorum a Clemente VIII: 1592–1600*, ed. Endre Verres, *Monumenta Vaticana historiam regni Hungariae illustrantia*, ser. II, vol. 3 (Budapest: Typographia Regiae Universitatis Hungaricae, 1909), no. 134, 210–211.

while acknowledging his own limitations – illustrating the point with the Latin phrase *quid valeant humeri, quid ferre recusant* (what the shoulders can bear, and what they refuse to carry). He thanked Visconti for his prudent and skillful advice, which had been of great value to his mission. Caetani also referred to troubling reports that Prince Sigismund Báthory was seeking an accommodation with the Turks. He asked the bishop to verify these rumors, hoping they were unfounded and that Sigismund would “not allow such actions to tarnish the luster and glory he had won in his struggle with one of the greatest powers in the world.”²²

Despite the many obligations that fell upon him after arriving in Poland in mid-June, Caetani did not neglect his correspondence with the nuncio in Transylvania. In a letter of 18 June, he informed Visconti of the details of his arrival in Kraków. The cardinal expressed his desire to meet King Sigismund III Vasa as soon as possible. The king, however, was in Warsaw and urged the legate to remain in Kraków, as the conditions there were inadequate for receiving such a distinguished guest. In the remainder of the letter, Caetani outlined his plans for the forthcoming negotiations on the Holy League, lamenting the absence of a representative of Sigismund Báthory. In his view, this was a serious mistake, as the prince could have derived considerable benefit from such participation. He emphasized the necessity of Báthory’s active involvement and asked the nuncio to take steps in this regard. He concluded by pledging his full support for the prince of Transylvania and requested that Visconti keep him regularly informed of his plans and expectations.²³

Only at the end of June did the deputies appointed by the Sejm and Senate of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth begin to arrive in Kraków. Shortly afterward came the envoys of Emperor Rudolf II Habsburg. At their head stood Andreas Jerin, bishop of Wrocław and general starost of Silesia. The delegation also included Hungarian representatives such as János Kutassy, bishop of Győr and chancellor of the Kingdom of Hungary; Miklós Istvánffy de Baranyavár et Kisasszonyfalva, vice-palatine of Hungary; and the jurist Baron János Joó de Kazahaza.²⁴

22 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Fondo Pio 115, ff. 38r–39r; Biblioteca Casanatense Roma 1562, ff. 103v–106v; *Relationes nuntiorum apostolicorum in Transsilvaniam missorum a Clemente VIII: 1592–1600*, no. 139, 216–217.

23 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Fondo Pio 115, ff. 39r–39v; Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1562, ff. 107r–108v; *Relationes nuntiorum apostolicorum in Transsilvaniam missorum a Clemente VIII: 1592–1600*, no. 148, 224.

24 The diplomatic activity and degree of involvement of the Hungarian dignitaries in the afore-mentioned deputation are difficult to assess, since most of the surviving source material is signed primarily by the head of the imperial delegation, Bishop Andreas Jerin of Wrocław. See: The instruction for the imperial envoys and the principal documents

On 5 July 1596 Cardinal Caetani sent another letter to the nuncio in Transylvania. He reported receiving two letters – dated 8 and 17 June – and expressed joy at the good news of Sigismund Báthory's successes. In the ornate style typical of curial Latin and late 16th-century Italian epistolography, he stressed that in such troubled times Christendom had need of a wise and devout defender of the true faith. He assured the nuncio of his readiness to support Prince Sigismund in all just undertakings. Turning to affairs in Kraków, Caetani explained that the king remained in Warsaw, occupied with diplomatic and military measures intended to prevent the Tatars from crossing Commonwealth territory into Hungary. The legate expressed hope that this goal could soon be achieved through his efforts. He planned to meet both the king and Grand Chancellor Jan Zamoyski on the matter. He also reported that negotiations on the League were scheduled to open on 25 July but lamented the continued absence of a Transylvanian representative. He emphasized that it would be both useful and honorable for Sigismund Báthory to have a delegate present.²⁵

Because of delays caused by the absence of key participants, the Kraków congress did not begin until 8 August.²⁶ From Caetani's preserved correspondence we learn that the long-awaited Transylvanian envoy had arrived only the previous day, which is an important detail that illustrates the course and atmosphere of the negotiations. Confidential discussions with this envoy are mentioned in a letter of 8 August to nuncio Visconti, though Caetani confined himself to brief remarks, convinced that the prince's representative should report the details directly.²⁷

from their correspondence. *Scriptores Rerum Polonicarum*, vol. 20, 240–322; Jan Paul Niederkorn, "Die Verhandlungen über den Beitritt Polens zu einer antiosmanischen Liga in den Jahren 1595 bis 1597," 90–92; *Erdély és a Szentszék a Báthory korszakban — Kiadatlan iratok (1574–1599)*, ed. Tamás Kruppa (Szeged: University of Szeged, 2004), 151.

25 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Fondo Pio 115, ff. 39v–40v; Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1562, ff. 109r–111r; *Relationes nuntiorum apostolicorum in Transsilvaniam missorum a Clemente VIII: 1592–1600*, no. 145, 221–222.

26 Janusz Smolucha, "Okoliczności rozpoczęcia w Krakowie w sierpniu 1596 r. pertraktacji w sprawie zawiązania przez papieża Klemensa VIII antytyreckiej Ligi Świętej," *Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne* 29 (2020): 35–38.

27 Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1562, ff. 250r–251v; Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Fondo Pio 115, ff. 90v–91r; the Hungarian editor of this letter, Endre Verres, identified the envoy of Prince Sigismund Báthory as his secretary Lestár Gyulaffi, who had come to Poland on embassy for the eleventh time. *Relationes nuntiorum apostolicorum in Transsilvaniam missorum a Clemente VIII: 1592–1600*, no. 160, 237; the Transylvanian envoy, in addition to matters connected with the anti-Ottoman League, also dealt with the issue of the dowry of Jan Zamoyski's late wife, Gryzelda Báthory, Sigismund's sister, which neither the king nor the chancellor was willing to release. Gyulaffi's second task was to obtain 30,000 thalers as compensation for a unicorn's horn (in fact, a narwhal

Much more is revealed in Caetani's letter of the following day to the secretary of state, Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini. There he gave a detailed account of the opening of the Holy League negotiations. The cardinal had already spoken at length with the emperor's representatives, including the Hungarian delegates. Their main difficulty lay in the Poles' principled stance: they demanded full guarantees from the emperor, above all regarding the level of financial support and the duration of mutual obligations in the event of war with the Ottomans. The Polish side further insisted that the League encompass not only the emperor's hereditary lands but also the wider territories of the Holy Roman Empire. Caetani doubted the emperor could agree without convening a Reichstag, which would mean lengthy negotiations of uncertain outcome. For this reason, he sought to persuade the Polish deputies to abandon such conditions, which in his view were less essential than they believed. He weighed the advantages and disadvantages of their demands, urging them to be satisfied with what the emperor could realistically promise. He also pressed them to state clearly and precisely the terms on which the Commonwealth would join the Holy League. Writing to Aldobrandini, he expressed hope that the Poles would heed his advice and return to the more moderate conditions proposed at the Kraków Sejm two years earlier. He added that he would wait to see the Poles' public position before deciding how best to direct his efforts. Caetani observed that each party naturally wished to appear better than it was and to cast its opponents in a poor light, since it reflected badly to refuse participation in so pious an enterprise as the Holy League. He noted too that those least committed often showed the greatest zeal, hiding their true intentions under a show of fervor, and he remarked that he hoped such actors would soon fall victim to their own intrigues. Turning to Hungarian affairs, Caetani reported that, at his personal request, Prince Sigismund Báthory had sent his secretary to Kraków in connection with the negotiations. He emphasized that the envoy had not come to take part directly in the talks – Sigismund, bound by his alliance with the emperor, left that entirely to him – but rather to discuss his own interests with the papal legate. Caetani stressed that the prince entrusted him with three matters of particular concern. First, he feared a Tatar passage through Polish and Moldavian territory into Hungary. Caetani assured the envoy that, thanks to his efforts with the king and chancellor, such a movement could likely be prevented. Second, Sigismund sought help in recovering sums owed him in Poland by

tusk) that had previously belonged to King Stephen Báthory. *Erdély és a Szentszék a Báthory korszakban — Kiadatlan iratok (1574–1599)*, 151.

the king and chancellor; Caetani promised to do all he could. Third, he pressed claims to Moldavian rule. On this point Caetani advised postponement, arguing that raising the matter with the Poles could jeopardize the central aim of the congress – the creation of the League. Even a minor quarrel between Transylvania and Poland, he warned, could ignite a major conflict. Alluding, it seems, to the execution of Baltazar Báthory and the political tensions it had aroused, he reminded the envoy that from the Holy See's perspective "the bonds of blood should go hand in hand with unity of hearts." In Caetani's opinion, Polish-Transylvanian relations might also be strained by the prince's recent adoption of the title of ruler of Wallachia, which the Poles resented. He advised that it would be prudent for His Highness to omit this title in letters to King Sigismund, since it conferred no real advantage, diminished neither his rank nor his dignity, and its omission would remove a cause of royal irritation. The cardinal pledged full support for Sigismund's interests, provided he followed this advice, which the secretary was to convey on returning to Transylvania. Caetani reported that the prince's secretary had furnished him with detailed information on his master's situation. In view of the Ottomans' intensive preparations, Sigismund Báthory had garrisoned and adequately supplied all his strongest fortresses and planned to take the field with a carefully chosen, light, and mobile army, able to operate wherever and whenever required. The letter also indicates that the prince's envoy left Kraków on 20 July. The legate further noted that, up to that time, no Ottoman forces had entered Transylvania, apart from a few scouting detachments near Timișoara. With regard to the anticipated Tatar raid, Caetani emphasized that since it had not yet occurred, there was reason to hope it would not take place that year. He observed that this would be advantageous, as Christendom would be spared further suffering and the prince would have an opportunity to strike the Turks offensively rather than being confined to defensive action. In closing his report, Caetani noted that Cardinal Andrew Báthory had announced his arrival in Kraków for 17 August. The legate intended to deliver to him a message from Pope Clement VIII, together with an exhortation to travel personally to Rome. Caetani attached great importance to this meeting and reminded the secretary of state of the promised sum of 10,000 scudi, which he planned to employ should Cardinal Báthory decide to undertake the journey to the Eternal City.²⁸

Despite the legate's many efforts, the negotiations, which lasted until the final days of August, failed to reach a final agreement, and

28 Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1563, ff. 122v–133r.

the projected Holy League was never realized. Cardinal Caetani's disappointment was so profound that he initially considered returning at once to Rome. Ultimately, however, at the pope's command, he remained in Poland to continue his diplomatic efforts toward the planned alliance despite every obstacle. In a letter from Kraków dated 28 August, he informed nuncio Visconti of the situation, adding a bitter remark about the unfavorable course of the negotiations. He reported that, under the prevailing circumstances, it would be impossible to provide assistance to Transylvania in the event of a Turkish attack, even if the League were concluded, because there was no time for preparations, let alone for the dispatch of troops, especially given the uncertainty of the talks' eventual outcome. He emphasized that the deputies assembled in Kraków lacked the authority to make binding decisions; they could only present proposals, listen to offers, and report them back to their monarchs. For this reason, he wrote, one should harbor no illusions. The contested status of Moldavia and Wallachia remained the principal obstacle to a Polish-Habsburg agreement, with both sides claiming suzerainty over the principalities. Although the Polish king presented his own conditions, the emperor refrained, insisting that he first wished to coordinate his position with Prince Sigismund Báthory. The matter remained unresolved, though Caetani stressed that it seemed essential to accept the Polish king's position: that no fundamental changes in Moldavia or Wallachia should be made without his consent.²⁹

In his final letter under analysis here to the nuncio in Transylvania, dated 30 August 1596, Caetani reported that the Kraków negotiations on the anti-Ottoman League had ended without binding results. In his view, the most serious difficulties concerned three issues: observance of the Bytom-Będzin agreement; the manner of conducting the war (with separate or joint forces); and the duration of the League, which Poland wished to tie to the length of the conflict, while the imperial side sought to limit it to three years. Caetani judged that under such conditions agreement was impossible, though he had not entirely lost hope and announced further talks in Warsaw. He also noted that throughout the Kraków negotiations Transylvanian affairs were treated together with imperial ones, owing to the agreement binding Sigismund Báthory to

29 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Fondo Pio 115, ff. 105r-106v; Biblioteca Casanatense Roma, Mss. 1562, ff. 288r-292r; *Relationes nuntiorum apostolicorum in Transsilvaniam missorum a Clemente VIII: 1592-1600*, no. 168, 243-244.

Rudolf II. Nevertheless, mindful of his promise, he assured that he had always kept Transylvania's interests in view.³⁰

The Kraków negotiations and Cardinal Enrico Caetani's active involvement in them offer a striking example of papal diplomacy in this period. They also demonstrate the complexity of attempts to forge international alliances in the face of a shared threat – Ottoman expansionism. This episode sheds light on the dynamics of international relations in Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century and constitutes an important chapter in the history of both papal and Central European diplomacy. Although the Kraków congress did not culminate in the formal establishment of the Holy League, its historical significance remains considerable. The event underscored not only the complexity of international relations in that period and diplomacy's role in the formation of alliances, but also the strategic position of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and a divided Hungary within Europe's defensive system. The idea of the 'Bulwark of Christendom' emerged here not only as a geopolitical necessity but also as a political construct deliberately cultivated by the Holy See, which, faced with the mounting Ottoman threat, sought to give it universal resonance. The Kraków congress, despite its lack of tangible outcomes, thus stands as a symbol of both the potential and the limitations of papal diplomacy at the close of the sixteenth century.

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