

**ON THE ISSUE OF THE 16<sup>th</sup> AND 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY  
CONFESSIONALISATION IN THE EXAMPLE  
OF EAST-SLOVAKIAN TOWNS**

MARIE MAREČKOVÁ

*V zemích habsburské monarchie úsilí protestantských komunit o legální toleranci nebo uznání státem a vytvoření vlastních církevních organizací ovlivňovalo sociálně politické poměry v 16. a 17. století. Evangelíci na území Slovenska během 17. století byli vystaveni rekatolizaci, protihabsburským povstáním uherských a sedmhradských stavů (Štěpána Bočkaje, Gabriela Bethlena, Jiřího I. Rákócziho, Imricha Thökölyho a Františka II. Rákócziho) a válkami s Turky.*

*Klíčová slova: Konfesionalizace; východoslovenská města; 16. a 17. století*

In the countries of the Habsburg Monarchy, the endeavour of protestant communities to obtain legal tolerance or recognition by the state and to create their own religious organizations influenced the socio-political situation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century Evangelicals in “Upper Hungary” (Slovakia) had to face recatholisation, anti-Hapsburg uprisings of the Hungarian and Transylvanian estates (Stephen Bocskay, Gabriel Bethlen, George I. Rákóczi, Imre Thököly and Francis II. Rákóczi) and the wars against the Turks.

In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, due to the reformation spreading, the religious conscience of vast parts of European society was activated. The plurality of conscience and religious tolerance was reflected in the transformation processes of modernisation and democratisation. The ongoing process of confessionalisation of society simultaneously actuated the role of the state in solving religious issues. Individual churches specified both their confessions and tolerance to other confessions and, in particular, dealt with the relationship between the church and the state. This problem gradually grew into a constitutional struggle in which different concepts of state characteristics collided, i.e., the dualistic concept of an estate monarchy and the absolute concept on a centralised monarchy.

Following the principle cuius region eius religio, the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 designated the patronal and ownership law as a criterion of religious conflicts in Germany. Even if it did not concern the countries of the Habsburg Crown, the Hungarian nobility and commons applied it for decision-making on the patronal law to churches situated on their territory and, in particular, to the right of the assembly, as the political representation of the country, to solve religious issues.<sup>1</sup>

Every constitutional conflict concerning religious tolerance in Hungary during the 17<sup>th</sup> century originated from these assembly resolutions of 1608. Their validity was confirmed both by the Peace of Nikolsburg 1621 after the uprising of Gabriel Bethlen and by the Peace of Linz 1645 after the uprising of Francis Rákóczi, and also by assemblies in Sopron 1622 and in

<sup>1</sup> DANIEL, D. P.: *Konfesionalizácia reformácie a spoločenský význam augsburského vyznania v strednej a východnej Európe*. In: Prvé augsburské vyznanie viery na Slovensku a Bardejov. Prešov 2000, p. 15 ff. SCHILLING, H.: *Das konfessionelle Europa. Die Konfessionalisierung der europäischen Ländern seit Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts und ihre Folgen für Kirche, Staat, Gesellschaft und Kultur*. In: Konfessionalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa. Stuttgart 1999, pp. 13–62.

Bratislava 1647. From the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, after the conversion of the majority of Hungarian aristocracy to the Catholic Church, the suzerain competence in ordination of local religious relations (private-legal institute) was applied.<sup>2</sup>

The situation in Prešov evolved in a dramatic way. After the discovery of the Wesselényi Conspiracy in May 1670, Prešov was occupied by the emperor's army. The confiscation of Evangelical churches and property and the repression of the emperor's army strengthened the positive feelings of Prešov's population towards the Kuruc uprising and following the receipt of news about the successful progress of the uprising, it caused the population of Prešov to join the uprising, restore the activities of the collegium, and establish freedom of belief in accordance with the situation of 1670. At the end of September 1672 they greeted the soldiers of the uprising as liberators, and only at the end of December 1672, after the soldiers of the uprising had left, did they surrender the town to the emperor's army. With the help of the army, Catholic members were installed on the town council and all three churches were taken from the Evangelicals.<sup>3</sup>

The Sopron Council of 1681 accepted the religious laws of 1608 and emphasized the necessity of respecting the patronal law of the suzerain, at that time an overwhelmingly Catholic one. In every administrative region it was permitted to build two new Evangelical churches, so-called "articular churches", and other churches at set locations mainly in the suburbs of royal and mining towns.<sup>4</sup>

Four days after the seizure of Prešov by Imre Thököly's army on August 16, 1682, there was a restitution of religious freedom and property of the Evangelical Church and a return of the priests and teachers, and the election of an Evangelical town council took place. After the military defeat of the uprising on September 17, 1684, Prešov maintained the only rebel fortress in the East of Slovakia. It surrendered as late as one year later (on September 11, 1685) after a seven-week siege by the emperor's army and under the condition that the continuation of Evangelical Church, schools and the town committee would be granted.<sup>5</sup>

After the capture of Budia on September 2, 1686, the anti-reformation orientation of Habsburg policy and return to the solution of 1681 was established. The schools, churches and the town committees were headed by Catholics, and the Evangelists were given places for the building their churches and schools on the outskirts of the town.

A collection in aid of former professors of the university collegiums was the pretext for the formation of an extraordinary court with the aim of clarifying the preparations of the anti-Habsburg revolt with the centre in Prešov, the goal of which was allegedly the control of Hungary by the Turks. According to the general Antonio Caraffa, the commander of the Upper-Hungarian army, the 400 florins collected were intended for Thököly's wife, Helen Zrinski, in

<sup>2</sup> KOLÁROVSKÝ, P.: *Niektoré okolnosti a postavy Bratislavských súdov*. In: *Cesty hľadania. Zborník k 60. výročiu Evangelickej teologicko-pastorálnej fakulty Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave*. Bratislava 1994, p. 91 ff. ČORNEJOVÁ, I. – RAK, J. – VLAS, V.: *Ve stínu tvých křídel. Habsburkové v českých dějinách*. Praha 1995, p. 95 ff.

<sup>3</sup> State Archive Prešov, Archive of town Prešova, manuscript number 2118, year 1537–1676, f. 77; NÉMETH, István H.: *Mestská politika Uhorského kráľovstva v období raného novoveku*. In: Csukovits Enikő – Lengyelová, T. (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup> KÓNYA, P.: *Spoločnosť hornouhorských miest v 17. storočí*. In: Csukovits Enikő – Lengyelová, Tünde (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, pp. 269, 274–277, 283–284; KÓNYA, P.: *Prešov, Bardejov a Sabinov počas protireformácie a protihabsburských povstaní (1670–1711)*. Prešov 2000, p. 24 ff.

<sup>5</sup> NÉMETH, I. H.: *Mestská politika Uhorského kráľovstva v období raného novoveku*. In: Csukovits Enikő – Lengyelová, T. (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, tabulka p. 295; KÓNYA, P.: *Prešov, Bardejov a Sabinov počas protireformácie a protihabsburských povstaní (1670–1711)*. Prešov 2000, p. 88 ff. KÓNYA, P.: *Spoločnosť hornouhorských miest v 17. storočí*. In: Csukovits, Enikő – Lengyelová, T. (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, p. 267 ff.

besieged Mukachevo, whose letters to prominent Prešov burghers had reportedly been seized. The organiser of the collection, the collegium's curator and member of the Prešov town council Zikmund Zimmermann became one of the first four victims of Prešov sanguinary court, which from the March 5<sup>th</sup> to September 12<sup>th</sup> 1687 sentenced 24 protestant burghers and nobles to death. After this, the sessions of the Prešov court were terminated. At the Bratislava Assembly in October 1687 the Prešov court was nullified and the confiscated property was given back to the survivors of the executed<sup>6</sup>. At the assembly a compromise with the Habsburg policy was also negotiated. The assembly acknowledged the Hungarian throne as hereditary in the Habsburg dynasty and abolished "jus resistendi", i.e., the 31<sup>st</sup> article of the Golden Bull of Andrew II of the year 1222, which guaranteed nobles the right to armed resistance against unlawful acts of the monarch<sup>7</sup>, the article which all anti-Habsburg estate rebellions had cited. The royal towns were politically weakened by only one vote at the assembly. The freedom of confession was enacted by a resolution of the Sopron Assembly of the year 1681.<sup>8</sup>

The forming opposition, oriented towards an alliance with France and its coalition partners in the War of the Spanish Succession, exploited the popular uprisings of the Kurucs, yeomen and burghers, and on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1703 called the last anti-Habsburg uprising headed by Francis II Rákóczi. In his effort for the pacification of Hungary, the commander-in-chief of the emperor's army in Hungary, marshal Johann Pálffy, chose an agreement with the revolting nobles. Joseph I, the emperor, agreed with the amnesty, the return of confiscated property, respecting of all constitutional and state privileges and also religious freedom in accordance with the Sopron Assembly of the year 1681.

The compromise solutions were confirmed by the Peace of Szatmár on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1711.<sup>9</sup> It responded well to the political and economic interests of Hungarian nobles, who kept their estate privileges during the process of transformation of the Habsburg state into an absolute monarchy. Confessional aims were realised to a minimal extent in accordance with the assembly resolution of 1608, although religious tolerance reflected the monarch's rights. In every administrative region two new so-called articular churches were to be built and other ones at places situated on the outskirts of free royal and mining towns. The ongoing recatholisation pressure during the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not favour a violent form but utilised the systematic ideological activities of the privileged religion. Although tolerance was limited, with the governor's consent both Protestant churches could exist and spread their activities throughout Hungary.

The codification and application of national languages in church services and religious writings influenced the development and reception of cultural, national and civic consciousness

<sup>6</sup> KÓNYA, P.: *Prešovský krvavý súd z roku 1687*. Prešov 2001, p. 26 ff. KÓNYA, P.: *Prešovské evanjelické kollégium v politických zápasoch konca 17. a začiatku 18. storočia*. In: Kónya, Peter – Matlovič, René (eds.): *Prešovské evanjelické kolégium, jeho miesto a význam v kultúrnych dejinách strednej Európy*. Prešov 1997, pp. 21–24. NÉMETH, I. H.: *Mestská politika Uhorského kráľovstva v období raného novoveku*. In: Csukovits Enikő – Lengyelová, Tünde (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, p. 270.

<sup>7</sup> MIKULEC, J.: *Leopold I. Život a vláda barokního Habsburka*. Praha 1997, p. 85 ff. 9. KÓNYA, P.: *Generál Juraj Ottlyk v čase po trenčianskej bitke*. In: Segeš, Vladimír – Šeďová, Božena (eds.): *Neďaleko od Trenčína... Trenčianská Turná–Bratislava 2008*, p. 142 ff; MAREČKOVÁ, M.: *Východoslovenská města a měšťanstvo na prahu novověku*. Brno 1995, p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> KVAČALA, J.: *Dejiny reformácie na Slovensku. Liptovský sv. Mikuláš 1935*, p. 249; KOHÚTOVÁ, M.: *Uhorsko pred posledným stavovským povstaním*. In: Segeš, Vladimír – Šeďová, Božena (eds.): *Neďaleko od Trenčína... Trenčianská Turná–Bratislava 2008*, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> KOHÚTOVÁ, M.: *Uhorsko pred posledným stavovským povstaním*. In: Segeš, Vladimír – Šeďová, Božena (eds.): *Neďaleko od Trenčína... Trenčianská Turná–Bratislava 2008*, p. 54; NÉMETH, I. H.: *Mestská politika Uhorského kráľovstva v období raného novoveku*. In: Csukovits Enikő – Lengyelová, Tünde (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, p. 270.

and the system and values of the everyday life of the masses in society. In these spheres in the course of the specific process of Slovak civic and democratic society the activities of Slovak Evangelists were very important, even if the confessionalisation of European society at the time of the Enlightenment due to secularisation was gradually receding.<sup>10</sup>

The defeat of the last anti-Habsburg uprising, conclusion of the Peace of Szatmár and the growing dualism of political power influenced the transformation of the Hungarian state and its further development within the Habsburg monarchy. The Habsburgs succeeded in subordinating religious issues to the authority of the monarch and to the interests of the absolute state. However, they did not establish the elimination of the protestant denomination, and they did not renew the hegemony of Catholic religion, which together with the Catholic Church they had attempted at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the data on the number of non-Catholics and their percentage in individual East Slovakian free royal towns in the year 1777 we can see that a balanced proportion was maintained between the Protestants and Catholics in provincial towns which were losing the character of important centres of production and trade and where the immigration of new burghers was limited to the nearest surroundings. In Kežmarok the non-Catholics formed 59.0% of burghers, in Sabinov 51.2% and in Bardějov 46.2% of burghers. The situation was similar in Levoča, which in terms of the character of its social-economic structure had been approximating to those provincial towns with a more conservative burgher mentality from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and there were 36.7% of non-Catholics in 1777. The situation in the prosperous and well-developing towns of Košice and Prešov, where the non-Catholics represented one fifth of the population (19.1% and 20.6%), differed from this trend.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, on the whole this official data of the central records of the population from 1777 constitutes evidence of a certain progress during the 100 years of systematic recatholisation of East Slovakian towns and the influence of quality catholic monastic schools. In particular in Košice and Prešov, densely populated and economically prosperous towns with a developed social structure open to a flow of new burghers from both Slovak and foreign regions, the proportion of tolerated confessions gradually stabilised in favour of the state religion.

Research has proven that the recatholisation in the East Slovakian burgher environment did not result in the expected religious unification. Whereas under Czech unified confessional conditions recatholisation succeeded within two generations, i.e., in the 1680s the non-Catholics formed a majority of the population, in the Hungarian environment during the 17<sup>th</sup> century a legal limited existence of protestant communities was possible. In the broader consequences it also influenced the formation of social elites in East-Slovakian towns at the time of National Revival and during the early capitalist industrialisation.

The results so far have shown that power-confessional struggles lead to an asymmetrical development of clerically juristic situations and mentalities in individual central European countries and immediately neighbouring regions.

The rapid and spontaneous response of the reformation in Slovakia, particularly in the aristocratic and burgher environment, gradually led to a fundamental rejection of Habsburg

<sup>10</sup> DANIEL, D. P.: *Konfesionalizácia reformácie a spoločenský význam augsburského vyznania v strednej a východnej Európe*. In: Prvé augsburské vyznanie viery na Slovensku a Bardejov. Prešov 2000, p. 23 ff. KVAČALA, J.: *Dejiny reformácie na Slovensku*. Liptovský sv. Mikuláš 1935, s. 249; ŠPIESZ, A.: *Svobodné kráľovské mestá na Slovensku v rokoch 1680–1780*. Košice 1983, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Magyar Országos Levéltár Budapest, Acta generalia A 39, 3219/1780; NÉMETH, I. H.: *Mestská politika Uhorského kráľovstva v období raného novoveku*. In: Csukovits Enikő – Lengyelová, Tünde (eds.): *Z Bardejova do Prešporku*. Prešov–Bratislava 2005, p. 294 ff; KÓNYA, P.: *Prešov, Bardejov a Sabinov počas protireformácie a protihabsburských povstaní (1670–1711)*. Prešov 2000, p. 121 ff.

Catholicism. During the course of the Thirty Years' War the Slovak, Hungarian and Transylvanian aristocracy and burghers became a direct ally to the European reformation and to the estates' struggle against the Habsburg concept of a Spanish-Catholic model of society.

The attempts of the Habsburgs to enforce the rigorous centralisation and confessional unification of the central European monarchy were not initially promising, but the defeat of the Czech estates' uprising made possible the establishment this concept.

Official data from the central records of the population from 1777 constitutes evidence of a certain progress during the one hundred years of systematic recatholisation of East Slovakian towns. Nevertheless it is undeniable that the recatholisation in the East Slovakian burgher environment did not result in the presupposed religious unification. Although in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Catholics in Bohemia did not predominate in terms of numbers, over two generations recatholisation was established, and around 1680 convinced Catholics formed the majority of the population.

## Shrnutí

### **K problematice konfesionalizace 16. a 17. století na příkladu východoslovenských měst**

Dosavadní výsledky ukazují, že mocensko-konfesijní zápasy vedly k asymetrickému vývoji církevně právních poměrů a mentalit v jednotlivých středoevropských zemích a oblastech, které spolu bezprostředně sousedily. Rychlý a spontánní ohlas reformace na Slovensku zejména ve šlechtickém a měšťanském prostředí vedl postupně k zásadnímu odmítnutí habsburského katolicismu. V průběhu třicetileté války se slovenská, uherská a sedmihradská šlechta i měšťanstvo staly bezprostředním spojencem evropské reformace a stavovského zápasu s habsburskou koncepcí španělsko-katolického modelu společnosti. Úsilí Habsburků o důslednou centralizaci a konfesijní unifikaci středoevropské monarchie nemělo zprvu nadějně vyhlídky, až porážka českého stavovského povstání umožnila úspěšné prosazení této koncepce.

Údaje ústřední evidence obyvatelstva pro rok 1777 jsou dokladem jistého postupu za sto let systematické rekatolizace východoslovenských měst, a to zejména v Košicích a v Prešově, lidnatých a prosperujících městech. Přesto je nesporné, že rekatolizace ve východoslovenském měšťanském prostředí nepřinesla očekávanou náboženskou unifikaci. Ačkoliv v polovině 17. století v Čechách byli nekatolíci zřejmě v početní převaze, za dvě generace se rekatolizace prosadila, neboť kolem roku 1680 přesvědčení katolíci tvořili většinu obyvatelstva.