

## THE COMING OF FERDINAND HAPSBURG TO THE CROATIAN THRONE

**Neven Budak - University of Zagreb**

Charles V grew up in Flanders, and his younger brother Ferdinand in Spain. Because of this, there was a serious danger of Ferdinand taking over not only the Spanish throne, but also the German empire. To avoid possible conflicts between brothers, the consensual division of power was agreed upon, first in 1521 at the Diet of Worms, and a year later in Brussels. According to the agreement, Ferdinand held power over the Austrian lands and Würtemberg, and Charles held power over the rest of the territory. Both brothers soon faced various difficulties in their countries. Charles got involved in a violent war with Frances I, king of France, over Italy. After the Emperor's great victory at Pavia in 1525, and the notorious plundering of Rome by his mercenaries in 1527, he was crowned Emperor in Bologna. This was the last coronation in which the Pope took part, because the succeeding emperors adopted Maximilian's decision to exclude the Pope from the coronation ceremony. Charles V was also the last emperor of the medieval kind, who believed in the possibility of a unified Christian empire, headed by him as a Catholic ruler. Too many obstacles were in the way of the realization of this idea. Beside the war over Italy and the fights with the Turks, which he led himself or by subsidizing his brother with money and troops, from 1517 Charles V had to face the problems caused by the Lutheran Reformation, and then the German Peasant War. These last two events also affected Ferdinand, who was still dealing with the last leaders of the peasants in his countries, when he was crowned king of Bohemia; suppressing the Reformation, along with the wars with the Turks, would be his primary concern for a long time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The number of footnotes in this article is limited in the way that the reader interested in more details can easily find further reading quoted in the listed literature. Most of the events related to Austrian or Hungarian history can be found in any handbook dealing with the period. As for the history of the Hapsburgs at the beginning of the sixteenth century, among others: Jean Bérenger, *A history of the Habsburg Empire 1273-1700*, London/New York: Longman 1994, 139-195; Erich Zöllner, *Geschichte Österreichs*, Wien/München: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik/Oldenbourg 1990, 161-165, 187-196.

Charles's Spanish branch was far from Croatian land, but it still established firm and close relations with the Republic of Dubrovnik, of which he was a true protector throughout his reign. In 1518 he confirmed all the privileges of the Republic of Dubrovnik, which was extremely important for the city, primarily because of the trade with the kingdom of Naples. The influence of Dubrovnik in southern Italy was reinforced in 1534, with Charles's confirmation of the rights granted earlier.<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1530s ships from Dubrovnik were part of the Spanish-Genovese fleet fighting the Turks; they participated in the conquering of Tunis in 1535, and the failed attack on Algiers in 1541. Considering that the Republic of Dubrovnik was in a vassal position towards Turkey, an alliance with Spain, no matter how valuable, could have been fatal, so the ingenious Dubrovnik diplomats managed to persuade Charles V not to include their ships in his military operations. However, the Republic was never in full control of the ships under its flag, because some ships were part of the Republic's fleet, while some had private arrangements with the Spanish. Such behaviour of the inhabitants of Dubrovnik was facilitated by the fact that many merchant ships, which were relatively easily converted into war-ships, were already in Spanish service, which gave them admission to the huge market under the Hapsburg rule. If truth were told, the Spanish admirals, for instance, the famous Genoese Andrea Doria, sometimes used Ragusan ships and included them in their fleets by force. On the other hand, Charles took Dubrovnik under his protection in very difficult times, during the Venetian-Turkish war 1538-1540 (when Charles, Ferdinand and his Uskoks, together with the Pope and Venice, established the Holy League), when the Venetians intended to conquer the Republic of Dubrovnik.<sup>3</sup>

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For an overview of the Reformation: Heinrich Lutz, *Reformation und Gegenreformation*, Wien/München: Oldenburg 1982, 1-61.

<sup>2</sup> Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, vol. II, Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske 1980, 7-48.

<sup>3</sup> Zdenko Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come. The Counter-Reformation, the Republic of Dubrovnik, and the Liberation of the Balkan Slavs*, New York: Boulder 1992, 261-262; Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj. Piracy, Banditry, and the Holy War in the Sixteenth-century Adriatic*, Cornell University Press 1992 (Croatian translation: *Senjski uskoci. Piratstvo, razbojništvo i sveti rat na Jadranu u šesnaestom stoljeću*, Zagreb: Barbat 1997).

Although both Charles and Ferdinand were Catholics, they were not fanatic advocates of the Pope's politics and complete annihilation of the Reformation, and they were definitely willing to make certain compromises with their Protestant subjects. However, when it became clear that the appeasement, because of the weakness of the Catholic side, would go too far, and that his countries would finally be divided on religious grounds, Charles abdicated from the throne and withdrew to a monastery in Spain. He wanted the crown to belong to his son Phillip II, but the Princes Electors gave their votes to Ferdinand, because Phillip was a stranger to them, while they accepted the Austrian Archduke and the king of Bohemia as one of their own. Thus in 1556 Ferdinand added to his titles the title of the elected emperor of the Roman (German) empire.

In 1555 Ferdinand, in attempt to bring the conflicts in Germany under control, countersigned the Peace of Augsburg. The famous Croatian Protestant theologian Matija Vlačić Ilirik (Matthias Flacius Illyricus) fiercely attacked the treaty, because the Protestants gave up some of their principles; he then became the leader of the radical Lutheran followers.<sup>4</sup> Even after the Peace of Augsburg Ferdinand worked on the reconciliation of the two sides, and in 1562 he sent his personal emissary, Juraj Drašković, the bishop of Pécs and later of Zagreb, to the Tridentine Council, where he tried, unfortunately without any success, to bring Catholics and Protestants closer together.<sup>5</sup>

Protestantism also had great success in Hungary, and later it became one of the stumbling blocks between the Hungarian nobility and Catholic Hapsburgs.<sup>6</sup> Some noblemen in Croatia and Slavonia, like Zrinski, and some of the inhabitants of the towns accepted the new religion, but the danger of the Turks made most of the Croats keep the religion of their Catholic rulers.<sup>7</sup> Thus in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism

<sup>4</sup> Mijo Mirković, *Matija Vlačić Ilirik*, Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Jozo Sopta, "Juraj II Drašković", in: *Hrvatski biografski leksikon 3*, Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža" 1993, 591-594.

<sup>6</sup> *Reformation und Gegenreformation im Pannonischen Raum*, Eisenstadt: Burgenländisches Landesmuseum 1999; Matija Murko, *Die Bedeutung der Reformation und Gegenreformation für das Geistige Leben der Südslaven*, Prag/Heidelberg: Česká grafická unie/Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung 1927; Franjo Šanjek, *Kršćanstvo na hrvatskom prostoru*, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost 1991, 264-274.

<sup>7</sup> Nataša Štefanec, *Heretik njegova veličanstva*, Zagreb: Barbat 2001, 199-224.

almost disappeared from Croatia. It lasted longer only in Medimurje, which was under the Diocese of Zagreb but politically belonged to Hungary, and the Protestants who lived there enjoyed the support of the Hungarian Parliament. Besides, there was a considerable number of Protestants among the German soldiers and officers who were sent by Hapsburgs to the border fortresses and towns in the Croatian Military Border area.

In the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom, exposed to the Turkish attacks for decades, the situation grew rapidly worse in 1521 when Suleiman the Magnificent finally succeeded in conquering Belgrade, the last Hungarian fortress on Danube.<sup>8</sup> The young Louis II, his brother-in-law, did not show any interest in defending the kingdom, and the resources he had at his disposal were insignificant, so he often had to borrow money for food or travel.

Faced with the king's neglect and poverty, the noblemen turned for protection elsewhere. They contacted the Pope, Venice, the Emperor, and the Archduke Ferdinand – mostly those who were also threatened by the Turks, but it was not easy to get help. A year after the fall of Belgrade Franjo Jožefić, the bishop of Šibenik, and the duke Bernardin Frankopan, went to the German Diet in Nuremberg, to ask the Emperor for financial and military help.<sup>9</sup> Bernardin's son Krsto was already serving in Ferdinand's army, and was distinguished for his military skills; the fact that Krsto's brother, the owner of the Ozalj castle, was also named Ferdinand, symbolically speaks about the relation between the Frankopans and the Hapsburgs.<sup>10</sup>

The pleas of Croatian noblemen were spoken at the right moment. In 1522 the Turks began the great offensive along the whole Croatian-Turkish front, conquering Knin and Skradin. The Croatian *ban* Ivan Karlović Krbavski resisted the Turks as much as he could, but he also had to fight with some Frankopans, who wanted to take advantage of the turbulent times and expand their property.<sup>11</sup> At first Ferdinand urged his

<sup>8</sup> *Die Geschichte Ungarns*, Budapest: Corvina 1971, 120-126.

<sup>9</sup> Vedran Gligo (ed.), *Govori protiv Turaka*, Split: Splitski književni krug 1983, 343-345.

<sup>10</sup> Petar Strčić, "Frankopan, Krsto I. Brinjski", in: *Hrvatski biografski leksikon* 4, Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod "Miroslav Krleža" 1998, 414-415.

<sup>11</sup> All events of this period are well described in Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povjest Hrvata od najstarijih vremena do svršetka XIX. stoljeća* II/3, Zagreb: L. Hartmann 1904, 289-358 and III/1 (1911), 3-245. If not otherwise mentioned, in the description of the internal

brother-in-law Louis II to finally take measures to defend the Croatian kingdom, but then, seeing there was no use of it, he sent his own troops commanded by German generals to Bihać and other towns along the border. He managed to repulse the Turkish attack, which could have been really disastrous for Croatia.<sup>12</sup>

Taught by this experience, Ferdinand even asked Louis to relinquish Croatia, which he could not or would not be responsible for, but Louis refused. In order to prevent sudden Turkish attacks on Austria, Ferdinand decided to keep a regular army in Croatia and develop an extended network of spies, something like the modern secret service, headed by the Croatian nobleman Bernardin Ričanin.

As time went by, the circumstances in Croatia became more complicated. With no resources for the defense of the cities, let alone the whole territory of Croatia, the brave *ban* Ivan Karlović resigned from his duty. The king then named Ivan Tahí *ban*, but Croatian noblemen would not accept him, so they turned to Ferdinand with the plea to appoint a new *ban*. They asked that the new *ban* was not a member of Croatian nobility, for they were, on the one hand, too weak to defend themselves, and, on the other hand, constantly trying to subjugate lesser nobility and turn them into their vassals. From this plea it is obvious how little influence the king had on Croatian circumstances, and that the Croats acted almost independently not only in the matters of the interior, but also in the relation to neighbouring rulers.<sup>13</sup>

Ferdinand did not grant this plea, because it seemed to be out of his jurisdiction to get involved in the matters of his brother-in-law's kingdom, but he continued to financially support Croatian noblemen like Frankopan, Ivan Karlović, and Stjepan Blagajski. Finally, on 22<sup>nd</sup> October

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struggles and wars against the Ottomans, I always refer to Klaić's work. The period from 1492 to 1526 was well presented in a number of articles written by Matija Mesić: "Hrvati na izmaku XV. i na početku XVI. vieka", in: *Književnik* 1 (1864), 401-431, 505-543, 2 (1865), 61-78, 197-217; "Banovanje Petra Berislavića", in: *Rad JAZU* 3 (1868), 1-64; "Hrvati nakon bana Berislavića do Mohačke bitke", in: *Rad JAZU* 18 (1872), 77-163, 22 (1873), 55-204 (all the three articles were reprinted in: Matija Mesić, *Hrvati na izmaku srednjega vijeka*, Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest, Odjel za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje 1996). See also *History of Transylvania*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1994, 247-259.

<sup>12</sup> On Bihać in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Neven Budak: "Uloga bihačke komune u obrani granice" in: *Historijski zbornik* 42 (1989), 163-170.

<sup>13</sup> Klaić, *Povjest* II/3, 315-330.

1524, an agreement was reached which would, in a way, be a foundation for the creation of the future Croatian Military Border, the main foothold of Hapsburg rule, not only in Croatia, but in the whole territory of the monarchy.<sup>14</sup> On that day, Nikola Zrinski arrived to Vienna and offered Ferdinand Novigrad and Dobra Njiva, his two towns on the river Una, on the condition that the Archduke placed his troops in them and returned them to Zrinski after two years. Nikola also received an annual salary with which he had to keep a cavalry unit of 50 horsemen. Ferdinand offered Zrinski an exchange: he proposed to give him Kastav and the county of Pazin for his fortress and the silver mine in Gvozdansko.<sup>15</sup> However, Louis II prevented this exchange, because the silver mines brought direct profit to him.

A year later the Croatian noblemen refused to attend the Croatian and Slavonian diet in Križevci, because they had already established close relations with Ferdinand. Instead of that they sent emissaries to the Archduke again, asking for help to prepare the defense. Although Ferdinand, faced with the problems in his own countries, did not have much money, he still gave 1000 florins to Ivan Karlović and Ivan Kobasić for the secret service. He also gave a property in Kranjska to Kobasić, and money for fortress repair and soldiers' wages to Croats.

The doors for the Hapsburgs' coming to the Croatian throne were widely open when on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1526 the Croatian and Slavonian Diet was assembled in Križevci. At the diet, under the leadership of Krsto Frankopan, it was decided to refuse obedience to king Louis, and to seek a new ruler. The nobility was divided into two groups: those favoring Ferdinand, and those who would rather be subordinate to Venice. The Republic of Venice was also interested in protecting Croatia from the Turks, because that was the best way to protect both their property in Dalmatia, and their own territory. Finally the majority decided in favour of the Hapsburg, about whom one Venetian emissary wrote he was interested in Croatia, but also wished to come to the Bosnian throne, since Bosnia was part of Croatia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A lot of books and articles were written about the Military Border. One of the most recent and very informative is: Karl Kaser, *Slobodan seljak i vojnik*, Zagreb: Naprijed 1997 (translated from German: Freier Bauer und Soldat, Graz: Südosteuropa Institut 1986).

<sup>15</sup> On the role of Gvozdansko Ivan Mirmik: *Srebra Nikole Zrinskog*, Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Klaić, *Povjest II/3*, 347.

The Croatian emissaries then went to Ferdinand in Augsburg, but he again refused to accept Croatia under his rule. Instead he sent his troops to the border with the Turks, and paid for their keeping for one year; he appointed the Croat Nikola Jurišić, who was in his service for some time, as the commander-in-chief. Since the Croatian *ban* at that time Franjo Bathjany (Bačani) did not even dare to come to Croatia, but stayed in Buda, Jurišić was an unofficial *ban* and Ferdinand's emissary in Croatia.<sup>17</sup>

When on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1526 the fateful battle of Mohac began, only individual Croatian soldiers fought together with the Hungarian army. Krsto Frankopan was contacted too late, so he was on the way when the battle between the armies of Louis and Suleiman began. The majority of Croats did not respond to the king's call-up, because, according to their agreement with Ferdinand, they decided to stay in Croatia and defend their threatened homeland. The Hungarian defeat and the death of the 20-year-old Louis thus passed without any significant participation of either Croatian nobility or army.

The death of the young king created the problem of choosing the new Hungarian-Croatian, but also Bohemian, ruler. There were only two serious candidates for the crown of St. Stephen: one of them was Ferdinand, and the other the Hungarian nobleman John Zapolya, who had the support of all those against being under the rule of a foreigner, especially a German. Among Zapolya's followers were many distinguished Croats, like his chancellor, the Paulist Juraj Utišenić, Antun Vramec (the bishop of Csanad), Stjepan Brodarić (the bishop of Srijem), Franjo Jožefić (the bishop of Senj), and the provost of Budapest, Ivan Statileo-Statilić.

The problem of the Bohemian inheritance was quickly resolved, providing Ferdinand with an additional advantage in the fight for the Hungarian-Croatian crown. Less than two months after Louis' death, Ferdinand was crowned king of Bohemia in Prague. Zapolya's response came quickly. Gathering his followers and having taken the crown of St. Stephen from the treasury, he proclaimed himself king on 11<sup>th</sup> November. Although Ferdinand acted in a similar way, summoning the diet of his

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Delfiner: "Nikolaus Jurischitz 1490-1543, Soldier Diplomat", in: East European Quarterly XXVIII, 1 (1994), 1-47.

followers in Bratislava in December, and having himself proclaimed king of Hungary, he was actually in a weaker position. Zapolya was in possession of the crown, so he was the legitimate ruler; besides that, he was elected by the majority of the noblemen, while Ferdinand could only act as opponent king. In this situation he decided to take radical measures in Croatia.

When the conflict arose between the two pretenders to the crown, Krsto Frankopan, once in Ferdinand's service, suddenly decided to take the side of Zapolya, and tried, using promises and threats, to persuade the Slavonian and Croatian nobility to support the Hungarian candidate. He succeeded in Slavonia, but in Croatia, traditionally devoted to the Hapsburgs, he had almost no success. Unlike him, Nikola Jurišić, Ferdinand's representative in Croatia, achieved much better results. Together with three more emissaries he summoned the Croatian diet in Cetin.<sup>18</sup>

The noblemen gathered on 31<sup>st</sup> December at the Franciscan monastery in Cetin (today Cetingrad). All Croatian noblemen except Krsto Frankopan were present, even his father Bernardin sent his emissaries, who were the only ones opposed to the election of Ferdinand. After two days of discussing the conditions under which the Croats would accept Ferdinand as their king, the participants of the diet pledged loyalty to the new ruler, and wrote a document verified with the seals of the noblemen and the Croatian national seal, which was then used for the first time. The contents of this document, one of the most important in Croatian history, read as follows:

"We, Andrija, the bishop of Knin and the abbot of Toplice by the power of God and the Holy Chair, the dukes Ivan Torkvat of Krbava, Nikola Zrinski, brothers Krsto and Vuk, and Juraj Frankopan of Senj, Krk, and Modruš, Stjepan Blagajski, Krsto Peranski, Bernard Tumpić Zečevski, Ivan Kobasić Brikovički, Pavao Janković, Gašpar Križanić, Toma Čipčić, Mihajlo Skoblić, Nikola Babonožić, Grgur Otmić, the noble judge of the Zagreb county, Antun Otmić, Ivan Novaković, Pavao Izačić, Gašpar Gusić, Stjepan Zimić, and other nobles and aristocrats, and all the folk of the noble counties, towns and districts, confess, acknowledge, and make it

<sup>18</sup> Ferdo Šišić, "Izbor Ferdinanda I. hrvatskim kraljem", in: *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, nova serija 1 (1927), 15-44; Lujko Margetić, "Cetinski sabori u 1527.", in: *Senjski zbornik* 17 (1990), 35-44.



known to everybody with this document! Since the splendid and mighty prince and lord Ferdinand, by the power of God the Bohemian and Croatian king, heir to the Spanish throne, Prince Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, Archduke of Austria, the duke of Burgundy, Brabant, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, Silesia, Würtemberg, etc., margrave of Moravia, Burg, etc., count of Tyrol, Celje, Gorica etc., master of the Slovenian border-land, Naonska luka and Solilo, the principle regent of the Holy Roman Empire, etc., our merciful lord and master, has sent to us His Holy Royal Highness's counselors and emissaries, the honourable father Pavao Oberstein, by the grace of God the prevost of Vienna, doctor of art, philosophy and both laws, the archduke Nikola Jurišić, the dukes Ivan Katzianer and Ivan Puchler, the town prefect Mehov, gentlemen and our special friends; they have, in the name of His Royal Highness, empowered by the same, asked us to acknowledge His Royal Highness as our legal master and king, and his consort Anna, the queen of Hungary, Bohemia, and Croatia, as our merciful mistress and queen, and pledge our loyalty to them. After careful consideration it has been proven that our splendid king and his aforesaid wife, the splendid queen, have by birth the hereditary right to the Hungarian crown, especially by virtue of incontestable contracts, which we have carefully reviewed, read and studied, and finally by virtue of the election held on 16<sup>th</sup> December of last year, under the laws of the Hungarian kingdom, at the diet of ranks and orders of the aforementioned kingdom, in the city of Pozsony, properly and legally conducted and proclaimed, and taking into consideration all those graces and blessings with which, among so many Christian rulers, only His Holy Royal Highness has presented us and our kingdom for many years, and protected us from the violent Turks, so that their violence would not force us to renounce our Christian faith and kingdom, and how His Royal Highness has favoured us with uncountable charities, and generously took interest in our rights; for these reasons we humbly and respectfully consent to the righteous and honourable demands of the noble emissaries, and today before lunch we, gathered at the diet, all together unanimously and by common consent, have elected and accepted, made, established, proclaimed, and made it known in the streets that the above mentioned splendid king Ferdinand is the rightful, legal and indisputable master and king of us and our country, as the aforementioned queen Anna is the rightful, legal and indisputable mistress and queen, and we, through this document, choose, acknowledge, make, establish, proclaim, and honour Their Royal Highnesses as our, as mentioned, master and king, and mistress and queen, and all this in a way, manner, right, custom, and ceremony as

much as we can and could to make it better, more cordial and more successful. We have also given, with the greatest joy, the pledge of due respect and loyalty, and have done it publicly, loudly and clearly and by raising our fingers and hands, following the lead of the aforementioned honourable provost of Vienna. Here is the text of the pledge word by word: "We swear and promise, from now on, to be always loyal and obedient to the splendid ruler and master Ferdinand, the king of Bohemia, and to his wife, splendid lady Anna, the queen of Hungary and Bohemia by birth, etc., to our blessed and generous masters as rightful, legal and natural heirs, and the king and queen of the kingdom of Croatia, and to their heirs, regents and *bans*; to be concerned for their profit and happiness and help them as much as we can, to avert and prevent damage and misery, and do everything else that is the duty and obligation of good subjects and loyal servants towards their masters, and we shall never seek or acknowledge any other masters but Their Royal Highnesses and their heirs. If we should ever, all together or individually, discover that one or more persons of clerical or secular rank or order intend to, against Their Highnesses' interests, by word or by action, become followers of some other ruler, we shall, as soon as we find out about these persons, immediately inform or warn Their Royal Highnesses or *bans* appointed by them, and take measures that such disobedient persons are duly punished, and we shall do this without any hypocrisy or cunning, so help us God and the Holy Gospel!" Then we sang devoutly in the church of the Visitation of St. Mary of the nearby Franciscan monastery in honour, glory and praise of the God Almighty the song "We Praise Thee Lord", with constant firing and bells ringing. Thus have we become, one and all, together with our children, descendants, and inheritors, forever and ever, the true, natural, legal, and indisputable subjects to the aforementioned splendid king and our splendid queen, and their future heirs. In order to make our declarations incontestable and fully credible, as a testimony we have composed and issued this document, and sealed it with these simple seals, partly our own, partly the general ones, so that it may be valid forever and ever. Done in the town of Cetin at our diet, held at the above mentioned monastery on the first day of January of the year 1527 after the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>19</sup>

In return, Ferdinand made certain promises to the Croats, for which Nikola Jurišić and other Austrian emissaries gave consent in the King's

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<sup>19</sup> The originally Latin charter was translated into English after the Croatian translation in Klaić, *Povjest III/1*, 65-66.

name. The obligations of the king, given in the coronation charter (although, of course, there was no actual coronation, because the Croatian crown vanished without a trace long ago), were also written down on this occasion:

“First, we promise that our splendid King shall, for the defense of His Kingdom of Croatia, keep in the aforementioned kingdom one thousand horsemen with the monthly salary of three ducats for each horseman, and two hundred soldiers, and in such a way that these soldiers and two hundred horsemen shall be led by the captain of His Royal Highness or somebody else appointed by His Royal Highness, and the aforementioned ranks and orders shall not oppose this; the remaining eight hundred horsemen shall be distributed among the aforementioned ranks and orders according to the honourable and fitting status of each of them. If, however, His Royal Highness orders that these horsemen be moved out of the kingdom, they shall have to serve for the salary of three ducats for the first month, and after that they shall receive the same salary as other horsemen.

Second. His Holy Highness shall keep an adequate number of soldiers on the Croatian border with the dukedom of Carniola.

Third. His Highness shall order the towns and fortresses in this kingdom to be inspected and supplied with the necessary provisions.

Fourth. We assure the aforementioned ranks and orders that His Holy Royal Highness shall inviolably keep, acknowledge and observe all their privileges, rights, freedoms and laws, bestowed upon the Kingdom of Croatia and its inhabitants, as well as those given and bestowed upon them by their previous splendid rulers, together with their old praiseworthy customs and habits, and during His lifetime He shall not leave the aforementioned ranks and orders without defense, but shall always defend and protect them and this glorious kingdom as much as possible, as it befits the greatest and the finest ruler.”<sup>20</sup>

When the taking of the oath was finished in the Franciscan church, and the news about the election made known in the streets of the small market town of Cetin, the noblemen, who had probably had lunch in the

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<sup>20</sup> The originally Latin charter was translated into English after the Croatian translation in Klaić, *Povjest III/1*, 66-67.

meantime, and continued the discussion with full stomachs, agreed on how to divide the approved horsemen among themselves. It is evident from the document on this agreement that some noblemen, who were not mentioned in the election charter, gave their consent to the election, so it can be supposed that the signatories of the charter represented them, as well as the lesser nobility, who did not attend the diets. The right to use Ferdinand's horsemen was also given to Budački, Drašković, Patačić, Ajtić, Tomašić, Farkašić and others.<sup>21</sup>

This event was of great importance for the strengthening of the independent position of Croatia inside the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom. It was for the first time that the Croatian diet, although not completely unanimous, made such an important decision, opposite to the one brought by the Hungarian diet. Thus the Croatian nobility showed that the idea of the special status of Croatia among the countries under the crown of St. Stephen did not die away, but had survived for more than four centuries of Croatian and Slavonian union with Hungary. More than that, we could say that thanks to the support which the Croats were getting from the Hapsburgs, the feeling of being special inside Hungary grew stronger, particularly if we consider the earlier agreement (1492) about Maximilian's right of succession to the Hungarian throne, in which the special position of Croatia and Slavonia was only hinted.<sup>22</sup>

Besides, the diet showed it was led by reason, because it had decided for the ruler who, at that moment, was the only one with reasons to defend the Croatian territory, but who also had the means needed to do it.

Ferdinand also profited from this election, because it considerably strengthened his position in the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom, since this election, unlike the one conducted in the incomplete Hungarian diet, was legitimate.

The French historian Jean Bérenger has reviewed this event as follows:

“Ferdinand had the wit to rally the Croatian nobility to his cause: they were only too happy to affirm their autonomy and to consolidate their state-right by electing him king of Croatia-Slavonia at Cetin on 1 January 1527. This was more than a minor

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<sup>21</sup> Klaić, *Povjest III/1*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Klaić, *Povjest II/3*, 183-184, IX-X.

episode in the formation of the monarchy because it marked the beginning of an alliance that would last four centuries, uniting the Croats and the Habsburg king in common cause against the Hungarian nobility. The Croats, who feared the influence of the Hungarian magnates in Slavonia, sought to strengthen their distinct position within the Hungarian state. This was the reason why they supported royal power providing the Habsburgs with faithful subjects and excellent soldiers; it was for the same reason that they remained Catholic in the face of the Hungarian Protestants."<sup>23</sup>

Although we could find some objections to this statement, basically it accurately presents the future relations between the Croats and their newly elected rulers. But, as it is known, this relation was not always ideal, and we should not forget Krsto Frankopan's words of warning: at the diet he declared that he had served a number of years under the Hapsburgs and he knew well what he got in return. One and a half century later, it was his family who paid dearly for the Hapsburg rule in Croatia, and thus showed the dark side of the Croatian-Hapsburg relations.<sup>24</sup>

Five days after the famous diet in Cetin, the duke Krsto Frankopan summoned the diet of Zapolya's followers in Dubrava, the market town of Zagreb bishop near Čazma. This diet mostly gathered Slavonian noblemen and aristocrats led by the Zagreb bishop Šimun Erdödy and vice-*ban* Emerik Bradač. After three days of discussions, and after Krsto referred to the decision of the Hungarian diet from 1505, which stated that a stranger could not be elected king, the Slavonian noblemen agreed to elect John Zapolya as the new ruler.<sup>25</sup> Thus the Croatian countries were divided into two sides. Although the Slavonian diet obligated Krsto, as the *ban* of Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia, to work on achieving peace between the two opponent rulers, the war was inevitable. This was the beginning of a series of tragedies that marked the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Croatia.

Even before the war broke out, a number of Ferdinand's followers in Hungary and Slavonia went over to Zapolya's side, because the propaganda against the election of a stranger for king was very efficient

<sup>23</sup> Bérenger, *A History*, 159.

<sup>24</sup> In 1671 the last member of the family living in Croatia, Fran Krsto, was accused of conspiracy against Leopold I and executed in Wienerneustadt together with his brother-in-law Petar Zrinski.

<sup>25</sup> Klaić, *Povjest* III/1, 68-69.

among the noblemen. Only the Croats have mostly stood by the newly elected ruler, although he did not send them as much help as his emissaries at the diet in Cetin had promised, so Nikola Jurišić and Petar Kružić, the Captain of Senj, made great efforts to repulse frequent Turkish attacks. The weakness of defense of the Croatian kingdom, and especially of some of its noblemen, caused, in the spring of 1527, the fall of two important fortresses: Obrovac and Udbina. Ferdinand then called Croatian noblemen to give him all their towns, so that he would take care of their defense, but this never happened.

Instead, the Croats repeatedly complained of their tragic fate and Ferdinand's unfulfilled promises. Because they have accepted his rule, Slavonia separated from Croatia, Venice cut the Croats off from the sea, and the country suffered from famine. The Croatian nobility demanded not only the fulfillment of the obligations from the contract, but also the fulfillment of the verbal promise that Ferdinand would unite Croatia with his successive Austrian countries and thus separate it from the Hungarian kingdom. They hoped to get more help from Austria this way, and perhaps gain more independence. Their official letter, sent from the diet in Cetin, not even four months after the election, ended with following words:

“May Your Highness know that there has never been a ruler who could take Croatia over by force. After the death of our last king Zvonimir, whose memory we cherish, at our own free will we joined the Holy crown of the Hungarian Kingdom, and after that the kingdom of Your Highness.”<sup>26</sup>

Ferdinand replied that he could not send the troops, because he needed the soldiers for the war against Hungarian rebels, and furthermore, that he could not grant the request for the union of Croatia with Austria then, but that instead he had ordered Nikola Jurišić to organize the defense of Bihać, the key point and the capital of Croatia after the fall of Knin.<sup>27</sup>

In the second half of the year the situation improved for Ferdinand. During the siege of Varaždin, Zapolya's most important follower, Krsto Frankopan, was killed, and on the same day Zapolya's troops were defeated near Tokaj. Many of his followers came over to Ferdinand's

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<sup>26</sup> Klaić, *Povjest III/1*, 73-74.

<sup>27</sup> Radoslav Lopašić, *Bihać i bihaćka krajina*, Zagreb: Matica hrvatska <sup>2</sup>1943, 57-62.

side, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> November the Hapsburg was crowned with the legitimate crown in Szekesfehervar, thus becoming equally legitimate as Zapolya.

These circumstances, when two kings with equal rights ruled, finally made the Republic of Dubrovnik not to acknowledge any of them. The inhabitants of Dubrovnik, judging who was the true master of the western part of the Balkan peninsula, gradually started abandoning their ties with Ferdinand, and after 1536 acknowledged only the sovereignty of the Turkish sultan.<sup>28</sup>

The unhappy year ended in one more tragedy. Partly due to Ferdinand's negligence, Jajce and Banja Luka fell at the end of the year, and the way to Slavonia, as well as to Styria, was open to the Turks.<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime Zapolya took refuge in Poland, and worked on gathering his troops again, in order to launch a counter-attack. After the death of Krsto Frankopan, Simon Erdödy, the bishop of Zagreb, took the leadership of his followers in Slavonia, and Zapolya found another ally, though of a disputable value. In a seemingly hopeless situation, he turned to Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent for help; Suleiman promised him military support if Zapolya acknowledged him as his supreme ruler. Even if the Turkish military support seemed important in the beginning, it proved to be disadvantageous in the long run, since the Hungarian and Slavonian noblemen would not accept being even indirectly subordinate to their mortal enemy; because of this, Zapolya's followers started to drift away from him.

At the same time Ferdinand was making preparations for the war, bringing 1500 Spanish soldiers from his brother Charles. The memory of these troops was very bad, especially in Slavonia, because they plundered not only the lands of enemies, but also the allies' estates. There was enough money to raise an army, because the Austrian ranks were willing to finance a war against Zapolya, since Ferdinand's adversary was considered a Turkish ally.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Foretić, *Povijest* II, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Ljudevit Thallóczy, *Povijest banovine, grada i varoši Jajca 1450-1527*, Zagreb: Kraljevska zemaljska tiskara 1916 (second edition Zagreb: Dora Krupićeva 1998), 219-222.

<sup>30</sup> Klaić, *Povijest* III/1, 88.

The war in Slavonia reached its peak in 1529 in the battles around Zagreb. The bishop of Zagreb besieged Gradec (the royal part of Zagreb), in which there were 700 Spanish soldiers. But reinforcements of additional Spanish and Austrian troops soon came to help the defenders, and they started to besiege the bishop's part of Zagreb, called Kaptol. Fierce battles went on for almost two months, until it was rumored that a Turkish army was coming to help the bishop. When the bishop's soldiers raised an old flag on the cathedral, the attackers gathered that the Turks had already secretly entered the town, so they fled. Thus Gradec remained in Ferdinand's hands, and Kaptol in Zapolya's.<sup>31</sup>

The Sultan actually kept his promise and conquered Buda, handing the town over to Zapolya. The Turkish army then besieged Vienna, and among its defenders there was also the Croatian nobleman Petar Keglević.<sup>32</sup> The siege was not successful, but the entire Turkish campaign helped Zapolya to strengthen his positions in Hungary and Slavonia. However, the fact that the Turks supported him made Western rulers hostile to Zapolya, and the Pope even declared an anathema on him.

The following year the Turks invaded Croatia again. The Croatian nobility threatened Ferdinand they would seek another ruler if he did not take some effective defensive measures.<sup>33</sup> The King summoned Croatian emissaries to present their demands at the diet in Augsburg, and appointed the renown hero Johann Katzianer commander in chief of the Croatian army. Nikola Jurišić, the previous commander, was assigned new duties; he later became famous for the remarkable defense of Kőszeg, western Hungary, by which he prevented a new siege of inadequately defended Vienna. Although the Croatian emissary to Augsburg, Vuk Frankopan, gave a beautiful speech in Latin, he did not achieve much.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, the next year Ferdinand, after the death of Ivan Karlović, broke old Croatian laws and instead of a *ban*, he appointed Andrija Tuškanić, the bishop of Knin, a vice-*ban*. This was the first case of the violation of the Croatian constitution, but not the last. Ferdinand actually did this with the best intentions, to improve the defense and stop quarrels among the

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<sup>31</sup> Franjo Buntak, *Povijest Zagreba*, Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske 1996, 201-203.

<sup>32</sup> Klaić, *Povjest* III/1, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Klaić, *Povjest* III/1, 92-93.

<sup>34</sup> Gligo, *Govori*, 361-364.



nobility, but, with this negative precedent, he announced the way of ruling typical for the absolute rulers of centuries to come.

Worn out by constant fighting, in 1533 Ferdinand offered peace to Suleiman who, engaged in several conflicts, one of them with Charles V, accepted the offer, so the war officially ended. The battles continued only in Croatia, south of Velebit, where Klis, the last Ferdinand's foothold, held on, under the command of Petar Kružić. He and his Uskoks did not respect the agreement and attacked Turkish territory whenever possible. Klis was in a difficult position – on one side it was surrounded by Turkish territory, and on the other side by Venetian territory. Food and ammunition supply, as well as bringing in the reinforcements, depended solely on the mercy of Venice.<sup>35</sup>

After the Croatian Diet of Topusko in 1535, when Ferdinand was again threatened with the possibility of seeking a new ruler if he did not make an effort to improve the defense of Croatia, in 1537 the king sent 3000 soldiers, joined by 700 Papal soldiers, to help Klis. The battle of Klis ended with a complete defeat of the Christian army, headed by the renowned Petar Kružić, who also died in the battle. Thus Ferdinand lost his last foothold in Croatia south of Velebit.

The Turkish pressure on Croatian territory grew so much that year, that Ferdinand allowed two noblemen to open a special crossing over the river Mura, to accept the influx of refugees in their transition from Croatia and Slavonia to Hungary and Austria. Some of the refugees were on the run, while others were systematically moved by their masters from the estates near the border to their safer estates in the interior. The Croats who then settled in western Hungary, eastern Austria and southern Moravia are the ancestors of the Burgenland Croats.<sup>36</sup>

Ferdinand finally decided to take more determinate steps to suppress the Turks. Having received enough funds from the ranks and his brother Charles, he gathered an extraordinary army of 24000 horsemen and soldiers in a military camp near Koprivnica, and appointed Ivan Katzianer its commanding officer. The army started towards Osijek, the most important Turkish foothold in Slavonia, but hunger and epidemics weakened it so much that it could not besiege the town. Trying to

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<sup>35</sup> Bracewell, *Senjski uskoci*, 47-52.

<sup>36</sup> Stefan Geosits (ed.): *Die burgenländischen Kroaten im Wandel der Zeiten*, Wien: Edition Tusch 1986, 3-28.

withdraw through Gorjani, they came upon the swamps, and had to leave the equipment and cannons behind. After this Katzianer deserted with a number of soldiers and almost all commanders, and the count Louis Laudon led the remaining soldiers to battle against the Turks; in spite of their braveness, they suffered a disastrous defeat. The disaster at Gorjani crushed all hope of driving the Turks out of Slavonia. Moreover, it opened the door for the further Turkish conquest of the Požega county. Ferdinand imprisoned those guilty of the disaster, and again appointed Jurišić the commander-in-chief of Croatia. After a while Katzianer escaped from prison, and spent the next two years hiding at his manorial estate in Susedgrad-Stubica or at the Gvozdansko estate of the Zrinski counts, plotting against Ferdinand. Zrinski finally had him executed, wishing to win Ferdinand's favour.<sup>37</sup>

When a majority of Zapolya's followers, disappointed by his alliance with the Turks, went over to Ferdinand's side (Šimun Erdödy, the bishop of Zagreb, among them), the battles between the two sides decreased, so the conditions were made to negotiate peace. In 1538 in Veliki Varadin an agreement was reached, under which Ferdinand would get Croatia and Slavonia, and Zapolya would keep Transilvania. The two rulers also reached an agreement on the question of the succession to the Hungarian-Croatian throne in the case of extinction of one of the royal families. Two years later Zapolya died, leaving a widow and a newly born son John Sigismund. The fact that he had an heir would influence the destiny of the eastern Hungarian territories, which would be separated from the parts under the Hapsburg rule for a long time; this was, however, of little importance for Croatia, since the Zapolya family had almost no influence there anymore.

The Croats had other things to worry about. The defense of Croatia, inadequate as it was, was put to the test by a small war between the brothers Ivan and Nikola Zrinski on one side, and the bishop of Zagreb, Šimun Erdödy, on the other side; this was definitely not the only conflict among the nobility at that time. Although Nikola Zrinski later, as *ban*, did what he could to defend the country, just like the captain of Senj (later the captain-in-chief) Ivan Lenković, the border constantly moved westward. One after another, Valpovo (the last fortress in eastern Slavonia) was conquered in 1543, Virovitica and Čazma in 1552, and finally, in 1556 Kostajnica and Novigrad were conquered, which was a break of the Una

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<sup>37</sup> Klaić, *Povjest* III/1, 120-121, 138-139.

defense line. That year, only Marko Stančić Horvat was successful, having defended Siget.

After the election of John Sigismund for king, Ferdinand again tried to resolve his dispute with the Zapolyas by military actions. After the failed attack on Buda, where Jerome of Zadar, the commander of the royal navy on the Danube, died in battle, in 1541 the town was conquered by Turkish troops, and after that the complete area between the river Tisa and Balaton was conquered. The newly conquered territory was under their direct rule, and not Zapolya's. The long unsuccessful war with the Turks ended with a temporary peace treaty in 1547, according to which Ferdinand had to pay the Turks a significant tribute. In 1551 Ferdinand again tried to conquer Transylvania, i.e. the part of Hungary still under Zapolya's rule. When it seemed he would succeed, the Turkish army invaded from the South and conquered Temisvar. The injudicious murder of the Croatian Paulist Juraj Utišenić, a former leader of Zapolya's followers, who worked secretly on the surrender of Zapolya's countries to Ferdinand since 1542, provoked an anti-Hapsburg attitude among the Hungarians in Transylvania, so the project failed.<sup>38</sup>

Towards the end of his reign, Ferdinand was forced to make another humiliating peace treaty through his emissaries in Constantinople, according to which he was supposed to pay a significant tribute.<sup>39</sup>

The age of Ferdinand's and Charles's reign was an age of great changes in Europe. Besides the above mentioned Turkish invasions, which completely changed the map of Southeastern and Central Europe, and the religious schisms and wars under the influence of which the north of Europe started to separate from the south, another phenomenon significantly influenced the destiny of both rulers, and the destiny of European states.

Although the feeling of national affiliation already existed in a rudimentary, medieval form, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century it became very significant in the political life of the nobility and citizens. This feeling was particularly expressed by the middle and lower ranks of nobility, and it

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<sup>38</sup> Klaić, *Povjest III/1*, 182-184; *History of Transylvania*, 257-258.

<sup>39</sup> Zöllner, *Geschichte*, 191; Bérenger, *A History*, 186-191; Bérenger's interpretation of the conflicts between Hapsburgs and the Ottomans is, however, often very imprecise when referring to Croatia.

became obvious everywhere, in Germany, France, Italy, and, of utmost importance for Ferdinand, in Hungary and Croatia.<sup>40</sup> The Hungarian nobility, for the reasons of national affiliation, rejected his election for king, while the Croatian nobility, perhaps because of their "special status" inside the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom, almost unanimously accepted the new dynasty. As for Charles, in such conditions it became almost impossible to keep the anachronistic universal Holy Roman Empire, so the division into Austrian-German and Spanish-Italian parts was actually unavoidable, indicating the future creation of true national states. Croatia, as well as Hungary, was formally outside the borders of the Empire, because it did not belong to it, but they were firmly bonded to the Austrian-German part of the Hapsburg territory, and therefore to the Empire itself, through their joint ruler.

If the difficult and unfavourable circumstances under which the twenty-year-old Ferdinand ascended to the throne were taken into consideration, then we have to say he proved to be a great politician and ruler, and definitely one of the most prominent Hapsburgs. Soon after he became king, he conducted a number of reforms, setting a foundation for the administration and judicial system that continued to exist, with minor changes, in the Hapsburg countries until the revolution of 1848. The Court council, Secret council, Court war council, and the political, judicial, and military institutions were established in his time.<sup>41</sup> He also arranged the financing of the defense of Croatian countries, so that Styria and Carinthia contributed funds for the border in Slavonia, and Carniola for the border in Croatia. Besides, he also made sure that the border troops were under the command of experienced commanders, Croats if possible, like Jurišić, Ričanin, and Lenković. Ferdinand's decision of 1540 to place Croatia and Slavonia under the same *ban* was important for the unity of Croatian countries. Furthermore, in 1558 Croatian and Slavonian diets started to hold joint sessions regularly, and created a unified political body.<sup>42</sup>

The attempt to apply the reforms in the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom failed after a few years. Still, Ferdinand established the Hungarian chamber, which was in charge of the royal income, and also the tariffs and various taxes, like those on mines, among which, apart from the

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<sup>40</sup> Jenö Szücs: *Nation und Geschichte*, Köln/Wien: Böhlau 1981, 88-101.

<sup>41</sup> Bérenger, *A History*, 162-174.

<sup>42</sup> Ivan Beuc: *Povijest institucija državne vlasti Kraljevine Hrvatske, Slavonije i Dalmacije*, Zagreb: Pravni fakultet 1985, 190.

Gvozdanski mine, the copper mine in Rude near Samobor should also be mentioned.<sup>43</sup> With these reforms he initiated a process that would gradually lead to the absolutism characteristic for the Hapsburg rule till the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>44</sup>

Although the Croats were dissatisfied with him, and regretted his election for king after a few months, it is hard to imagine that they had a better choice. Without his military and financial help, as little and inadequate as it seemed to the Croats, and despite the terrible losses Croatia suffered in his time, the area between the river Drava and the sea would not hold out the incessant Turkish attacks. That is why we should attribute the salvation of "the remains of the remnants of the once-glorious Croatian kingdom" not only to the heroic and self-sacrificing Croats, but also to Ferdinand, and Austrian, German, and Bohemian funds. We should judge the decision of the Diet of Cetin from the viewpoint of the circumstances of that time, and not of the later developments, which the noblemen gathered on New Year's Day in the Franciscan monastery in Cetin could know nothing about.

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<sup>43</sup> Neven Budak: "Rudnik u Rudama kraj Samobora od XV. do kraja XVII. stoljeća", in: *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 27 (1994), 75-96.

<sup>44</sup> Orest Subtelny, *Domination of Eastern Europe. Native Nobilities and Foreign Absolutism, 1500-1715*, Kingston and Montreal/Gloucester: McGill-Queen's University Press/Alan Sutton 1986.