

UDK: 27(436+439)''16''

2-772(497.5)''1611/...''

Original Research Article

Received: May 5, 2023

Accepted: November 12, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.22586/6hcp0e71>

HABSBURG RELIGIOUS POLITICS IN CROATIAN AND SLAVONIAN MILITARY FRONTIER DURING THE THIRTY YEARS WAR

Zlatko KUDELIC*

The author analyzes the impact of the Thirty Years War on the ecclesiastical policies of the Vienna Court in the Military Frontier, particularly in relation to the Roman Curia's plans to support the ecclesiastical union of Orthodox Frontiersmen ("Vlachs") with the Catholic Church. He emphasises the role of the bishops of Zagreb bishopric and representatives of the Roman Curia in this process, and describes the reactions of Orthodox Frontiersmen ("Vlachs") and Habsburg military authorities to the proposals made by Catholic representatives.

Keywords: Habsburgs, ecclesiastical union, Military Frontier, Vlachs, Zagreb bishops, Vlach/Uniate bishopric of Marča, patriarchate of Peć (Ipek), Orthodox Christians, Ottoman Empire

Introduction

The Thirty Years War, which began as a religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant European states and developed into an international struggle among the great powers of the time,¹ significantly influenced Habsburg

* Zlatko Kudelić, PhD, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb, Croatia; zkudelic@isp.hr

¹ Recent literature on the Thirty years war (cf. the literature cited there): Georg Schmidt, *Die Reiter der Apokalypse: Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (München: C. H. Beck, 2018); Claire Gantet, "Kein Religionskrieg. Der Dreißigjährige Krieg, ein Konflikt mit europäischen Dimensionen", *Historische Zeitschrift* 309 (2019) 3: 668-679, <https://doi.org/10.1515/hzhz-2019-0036>; Marc Hengerer, *Making Peace in the Age of War: Emperor Ferdinand III (1608-1657)* (Purdue University Press, 2019); Alexander Querengässer, "Heeresverfassung und

religious policy in Military Frontier,² especially regarding the ecclesiastical union of Orthodox frontiersmen (Vlachs/Rascians/Uskoks/Ilirians/"shismatics")³ with the Catholic Church in the Varaždin and Karlovac Generalcies during the 17th century.

Herrschaftsverdichtung in Europa in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts", *Historische Zeitschrift* 310 (2019) 1: 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/hzhz-2020-0001>; Gregory Hanlon, *European Military Rivalry 1500-1750* (Routledge, 2020); John Pike, *The Thirty Years War, 1618-1648: The First Global War and the end of Habsburg Supremacy* (Yorkshire and Philadelphia: Pen and Sword Military, 2023).

² Zlatko Kudelić, "Hrvatsko-slavonska historiografija u novijoj historiografiji: dva stoljeća istraživanja i otvorenih pitanja," in: *Historiografija/povijest u suvremenom društvu. Zbornik radova s okruglog stola održanog 11. i 12. listopada 2011. u Zagrebu*, eds. Gordan Ravančić, Mislav Gregl, Ivana Horbec, Vlasta Švoger, Dinko Župan (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2014), 35-50.

³ In the 1990s and 2000s, polemics arose regarding the meaning of the terms *Vlach/Vlachs*, *Uskoks*, *Illyrians*, *Greeks*, which appear in various documents referring to the Orthodox population from the Ottoman Empire who had settled in the Military Frontier as frontiersmen (Grenzers). In most documents, Orthodox Christians were called *Vlachs*, but other designations also appeared, such as *Uskok*, *Illyricus*, *Graecus*, *Rascianus*, *Servianus*, *Tracianus*, and *hereticus*. Serbian historians have generally interpreted all these names as markers of Serbian national identity already from the 16th century. In this article, we use the term *Vlach/Vlachs* for Orthodox frontiersmen of diverse ethnic origin, following the approach of Z. Blažević in her study. Other authors, however, have offered different interpretations: while Rothenberg in 1960 argued that the Vlachs were of Serbian origin; Kursar pointed to a possible confessional meaning of the term in the writings of Bosnian Franciscans in the 18th century; Molnár concluded that, although of various ethnic origins, they were collectively regarded (mainly for legal purposes) as *Vlachs*, while in his text he simultaneously speaks of Serbs; and some Croatian historians have suggested that the term designated ethnic origin. Cf. Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522-1747* (University of Illinois Press, 1960); Mirko Valentić, "O etničkom korijenu hrvatskih i bosanskih Srba", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 24 (1992) 3: 1-21; Zef Mirdita, *Vlasi u historiografiji* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2004); Wendy Bracewell, "The historiography of the Triplex Confinium, 16th-18th Centuries", in: *Frontiers and writing of history, 1500-1850*, eds. Steven G. Ellis, Raingard Esser (Hanover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2007), 211-227; Zlatko Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija. Habsburgovci, pravoslavlje i crkvena unija u Hrvatsko-slavonskoj vojnoj krajini (1611.-1755.)* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2007), 57-73; Marko Šarić, "Inter-confessional Relations and (In)tolerance among the Vlachs (16th-17th Centuries)," in: *Tolerance and Intolerance on the Triplex Confinium. Approaching the "Other" on the Borderlands: Eastern Adriatic and beyond 1500-1800*, eds. Egidio Ivetić and Drago Roksanđić (Padua: Cleup, 2007), 171-180; Zrinka Blažević, *Ilirizam prije ilirizma* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2008), 217, 336; Zef Mirdita, *Vlasi u historiografiji* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institute za povijest, 2004); Inoslav Bešker, "O povijesnoj posebnosti 'Vlaja' zvanih i 'Morlaci'," in: *Spomenica Josipa Adamčeka*, eds. Drago Roksanđić, Damir Agičić (Zagreb: FF Press, 2009), 451-464; Zef Mirdita, *Vlasi starobalkanski narod* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2009); Hrvoje Petrić, *Pogranična društva i okoliš. Varaždinski generalat i Križevačka županija u 17. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Meridijani, 2012), 139-160, 170-230; Vjeran Kursar, "Being an Ottoman Vlach: on Vlach Identity(ies). Role and Status in Western Parts of the Ottoman Balkans (15th-18th Centuries)," OTAM. Ankara Üniversitesi

Historiography has traditionally focused on issues important to military history, such as diplomatic history, military tactics, unrests among the Frontiersmen, biographies of distinguished military commanders, and Catholic-Protestant relations and religious politics in the Habsburg Lands and in Europe.⁴ However, the presence of Orthodox frontiersmen in a Catholic realm ruled by Catholic monarchs, as well as the reactions of the Catholic Church and the local population to Orthodox settlers from the Ottoman Empire, has received far less attention from historians. Many relied on erroneous informations from 19th-century authors, despite the fact that 20th-century Catholic and Orthodox Church historians published various collections of documents that remain little known to Croatian and foreign historians of the Military Frontier.⁵

Osmanli Taruhu Anaştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi/Journal of the Center for Otoman Studies 34 (2013) 34: 115-161; Nenad Močanin, "Nastanak muslimanskog plemstva u Bosni i Hercegovini: zanemareni aspekti," *Radovi Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, Razred za društvene znanosti* 52 (2017): 73-94, 78; Vjeran Kursar, "Ambiguous Subjects and Uneasy Neighbours: Bosnian Franciscans' Attitudes toward the Ottoman State, 'Turks', and Vlachs," in: *Disliking Others: Loathing, Hostility, and Distrust in Premodern Ottoman Lands*, eds. Hakan T. Karateke, Erdem H. Çipa, Helga Anetshofer (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018), 148-186; Antal Molnár, "The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Attempts of Union with Rome in the 17th Century", in: *Confessionalization on the Frontier. The Balkan Catholics between Roman Reform and Ottoman Reality*, ed. Antal Molnár (Roma: Viella, 2019), 163.

⁴ Selected literature focused on Croatian and Slavonian Frontier: Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, *Borba Hrvatah u Tridesetoljetnom ratu* (Zagreb: Lj. Gaj, 1874); Ernest Bauer, *Hrvati u Tridesetogodišnjem ratu* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1941); Josip Adamček, *Bune i otpori* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986); Alexander Buczynski, "Freiheitsvorstellungen an der kroatischen Grenze," *Kollektive Freiheitsvorstellungen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa (1400-1850)*, eds. Georg Schmidt, Martin van Gelderen, Christopher Schnigula (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 251-265; Nataša Štefanec, "Vjerska politika u habsburškim zemljama u srednjoj Europi (od 20-ih godina 16. st. do 30-ih 17. Stoljeća," in: *Tridentska baština. Katolička obnova i konfesionalizacija u hrvatskim zemljama*, eds. Zrinka Blažević-Lahorka Plejić Poje (Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 2016), 43-65; Filip Hren, "Juraj Rattkay o/u Tridesetogodišnjem ratu," in: *Juraj Rattkay (1613-1666) i njegovo doba. Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa "Juraj Rattkay (1613-1666) i njegovo doba"*, eds. Maja Matasović, Tamara Tvrtković (Zagreb: Hrvatski studiji, 2019), 67-85.

⁵ For example, the book of Greek Catholic bishop Janko Šimrak (†1945), published in 1926 and containing documents on the ecclesiastical union in the Military Frontier between 1607 and 1648, remained largely unnoticed in Croatia after 1945, although Serbian historians included documents from this volume in their collections of sources on Serbian history. Erich Rothenberg and Karl Kaser also relied on erroneous information concerning the church history of the Military Frontier in the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries. Cf. August Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta Slavorum Meridionalium historiam illustrantia*, Vol. 2 (Zagrabiae, 1875); Nicolaus Nilles, *Symbolae ad illustrandam historiam Ecclesiae orientalis in terris coronae S. Stephani*, I-II (Oeniponte, 1885); Aleksa Ivić, "Iz istorije crkve hrvatsko-slavonskih Srba tokom XVII. Veka," *Vjesnik Kraljevskog hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinskog zemaljskog arkiva*

This paper explores how the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) influenced the religious policy of the Habsburg Monarchy in the Military Frontier, particularly focusing on the efforts to unite the Orthodox Christian settlers with the Catholic Church through the establishment and evolution of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) Diocese of Marča.

The establishment of a Greek Catholic Diocese of Marča

One of the very important, though largely overlooked, events in the history of the Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier at the beginning of the 17th century was the establishment of a Uniate (Greek Catholic) diocese on 21 November 1611. On that date, the Uniate bishop Simeon Vrantanja was confirmed in Rome, and the monastery of St. Michael at Marča, near today's town of Kloštar Ivanić in the Varaždin Generalcy (Slavonian Military Frontier), became the seat of the new Uniate/Greek Catholic bishopric.

According to the papal breve *Divinae Majestatis Arbitrio* of Pope Paul V, Simeon built a new church on the ruins of the old Catholic church of All Saints, which had been destroyed by the Turks in the 16th century, and established the Basilian monastery of St. Michael. In the document, Simeon was described as the "bishop of Catholic Rascians of the Greek rite settled within the borders of Hungary, Slavonia, Croatia, and remote parts of Carniola (i.e., Žumberak in present-day Croatia)." The areas mentioned in the document defined the jurisdictional territory of the new Uniate bishop, although Žumberak at that time formally belonged to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Aquileia.⁶

XVIII (1916) 2: 1-82; XIX (1917): 88-105; Janko Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium cum Sancta Romana Sede Apostolica saeculis XVII et XVIII* (Zagreb, 1926); Marko Jačov, *Spisi Kongregacije za propagandu vere u Rimu o Srbima 1622-1644*. Vol. I. (Beograd, 1986); Zlatko Kudelić, "Izvješće zagrebačkog biskupa Benedikta Vinkovića apostolskom nunciju Casparu Mattheiju o Marčanskoj biskupiji i Vlasima iz 1640. Godine," *Povijesni prilozi* 19 (2000): 153-179; Zlatko Kudelić, "Izvješće zagrebačkog biskupa Petra Petretića o Svidničkoj (Marčanskoj) biskupiji caru Leopoldu I. iz 1667. Godine," *Povijesni prilozi* 23 (2004) 26: 69-97; Slavko Gavrilović, *Građa za istoriju Vojne granice, knjiga III: Varaždinski generalat (1595-1704)* (Beograd, 2006); Zlatko Kudelić, "Isusovačko izvješće o krajiškim nemirima 1658. i 1666. godine i o marčanskom biskupu Gabrijelu Mijakiću (1663-1670)," *Povijesni prilozi* 26 (2007) 32: 119-182; Zlatko Kudelić, "Čaplovičeva povijest Marčanske biskupije," *Povijesni prilozi* 29 (2010) 38: 166-170.

⁶ The original document in Latin is preserved in the archives of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and was published by N. Nilles. A German translation of the document was published by N. Ikić in 1989, and a Croatian translation by D. Roksandić in 2004. C. Nilles, *Symbolae*, 1058-1059; Niko Ikić, *Der Begriff "Union"*

However, the name of the new Uniate bishopric was not mentioned in the Vatican documents, and the designation “of Marča” came into general use only in the 19th century, derived from the location of the episcopal seat at Marča, where the monastery had been built. In official Vatican documents during the Thirty Years’ War, the new Uniate bishopric was referred to as *episcopatus Montis Feletrii* (“bishopric of the Uskok mountains/Žumberak”) or as the “Vlach bishopric,” reflecting the common designation for Orthodox settlers. This terminology continued to be used in Rome until 1671, when the new bishop Paul Zorčić (1671–1685) was consecrated as *Plataeensis episcopus* (*episcopus Plataearum*). That title was officially conferred on all his successors until the mid-18th century.

Subsequently, Bishop Gabrijel Palković (1751–1759) was consecrated in Rome as *episcopus Drusipariensis*, and Basilije Božičković (1759–1785) as *episcopus Diocletianopolitanus*. In 1777, however, Empress Maria Theresa abolished the bishopric of Marča/Svidnica and established the new Greek Catholic bishopric of Križevci, with Božičković becoming the first Greek Catholic bishop of the Križevci diocese.

However, the Vienna court nominated the first two bishops, Simeon and his successor Maksim Predojević, as “bishops of Vratania/Vretania”. In 1642, however, Rome refused to confirm and consecrate the new bishop Gabriel Predojević (1642–1644) under this title, since his origins lay in the “schismatic” Patriarchate of Peć, which made him unacceptable to the Holy See. The Vienna court then decided, on the basis of the *ius supremi patronatus regis* – the traditional privilege of the Hungarian kings to appoint bishops in ten Hungarian dioceses independently of Rome – to nominate Gabriel Predojević as bishop of Svidnica (*episcopus Svidnicensis*), after a Roman Catholic bishopric located in Ottoman-controlled Hungary that at the time had no incumbent. Although Rome also rejected this proposal, explaining that a Greek Catholic bishop could not bear the title of a Roman Catholic bishopric, the Vienna court nevertheless continued to use this designation for the Greek Catholic bishops of Marča until the abolition of the bishopric in 1777. The actual ecclesiastical jurisdictions of successive bishops, however, encompassed varying territories, especially in the 18th century when boundaries and jurisdictions were altered.⁷

im Entstehungsprozeß der unierten Diözese von Marča (Križevci) (EOS Verlag, 1989), 161-163; Drago Rokсандić, *Etnos, konfesija, tolerancija* (Zagreb: Prosvjeta, 2004), 72-73; Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 159-173, 512-513.

⁷ According to Vatican documents, in the 17th century the jurisdiction of bishops Pavao Zorčić (1671–1685), Marko Zorčić (1685–1688), and Isaia Popović (1689–1699) extended over the Diocese of Zagreb. In the 18th century the same jurisdiction was assigned to bishops Gabriel Turčinović (1700–1707) and Raphael Marković (1710–1726), while the jurisdictions of

The general biographical details of Bishop Simeon Vratanja (1611–1630, †1634),⁸ whom Serbian historiography traditionally presents as a defender of Serbian national interests and identity, are uncertain. He was first confirmed as an Orthodox bishop in 1607 by an otherwise unknown Orthodox archbishop of the Peloponnese named Cosma, in the Hungarian town of Győr (Raab).⁹ Then, in 1609, Vratanja traveled to Peć (Ipek), the seat of the Serbian Patriarchate, where Patriarch Jovan (1592–1614) consecrated him as Orthodox bishop of the territory referred to as “Vratania/Vretania”. In the documents of the Orthodox patriarchs of Peć, this name denoted parts of Hungary and Croatia under Habsburg rule where Orthodox Christians from the Ottoman Empire had settled, primarily the Military Border in Croatia.¹⁰

Nothing is known about the period between Simeon’s consecration in Peć and his appearance in the Varaždin Generalcy in the spring of 1611, when he decided to accept union with the Catholic Church, most likely under the influence of the priest Martin Dobrović of Ivanić. Dobrović, described in documents as a “Vlach” or “Bosniak,” was educated in Graz, where he studied Catholic theology.¹¹ In 1609, Pope Paul V granted him permission to provide “spiritual guidance” to the Vlachs in Koprivnica and Križevci, as well as to serve as military chaplain for the German soldiers stationed in the town of Ivanić.

Although some historians have argued that Archduke Ferdinand’s German-language charter of 23 March 1611 (confirming Simeon as Uniate bishop of “Vlachs and Rascians in Croatia, Slavonia, and Žumberak” and obliging him to eradicate superstitious beliefs and heretical views opposed to the Catholic Church) can be regarded as evidence of Simeon’s acceptance of ecclesiastical union at that time, no other documents support this thesis. A similar interpretation has been advanced regarding the alleged acceptance of ecclesiastical union by Simeon and the Vlachs during an assembly at Marča

bishops Grgur Jugović (1707–1709), Grgur Vučinić (1727–1733), and Teophil Pašić (1738–1746) encompassed Croatia and Slavonia. Cf. Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 27-57, 167-169, 190, 350-355, 363-366, 370, 379-380, 392-399, 410, 426-427, 430-432, 433-447, 455-456, 477-479.

⁸ According to the report of Zagreb bishop Franjo Ergelski (1628–1637), written in 1634, Simeon died that same year. Cf. Kudelić, “Prvi marčanski,” 172.

⁹ Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium*, 23-24; Ikić, *Der Begriff Union*, 135-149.

¹⁰ In his 1662 report on the bishopric of Marča, Zagreb bishop Petar Petretić (1648–1667) explained that the term “Vratanja” in the “Vlach language” in fact referred to the Military Border, and that Simeon had been bishop of the entire Krajina, rather than a suffragan of the bishop of Zagreb, as he should have been according to canon law. Cf. Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium*, 1-20; Ikić, *Der Begriff Union*, 149-153, 176-193; Kudelić, “Prvi marčanski,” 172.

¹¹ Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 162-165.

on 24 March 1611, a theory long favored in Catholic circles and by some historians. However, most scholars view this claim with skepticism, noting that the document lacks the year of the meeting and makes no mention of ecclesiastical or religious negotiations concerning union. Instead, it records talks between representatives of Bishop Petar Domitrović of Zagreb and the Vlachs about proposals the bishop presented in 1613. In that year Domitrović lodged complaints against the Vlachs before the Vienna court. According to the document, the Vlachs rejected the bishop's proposals (which are not specified in the text), insisting that they would first await the opinion of the king's commissioners. Thus, they could not have been in dispute with state representatives about ecclesiastical union at that time.¹²

The documents show only that Simeon and his companion, the priest Martin Dobrović, departed for Rome in September 1611. On their way, they stopped in Graz, where they met the apostolic nuncio Da Ponte,¹³ who provided them with letters of recommendation for Cardinal Borghese¹⁴ containing basic information about Simeon and Dobrović. After they left Graz, Da Ponte sent another letter to Borghese with more detailed information about Simeon, accompanied by a letter from the Jesuit Viller to Cardinal Robert Bellarmine. In Rome, on 19 November 1611, Simeon professed the Catholic faith in the presence of Cardinal Bellarmine, under the conditions prescribed for "Greeks".¹⁵ On the same day, after Simeon requested papal privileges for the monastery of Marča, Pope Paul V issued the aforementioned charter. Later, Bishop Petar Petretić of Zagreb (bishop 1648–1667), in his report on the "Vlach bishopric" written in April 1662 for Emperor Leopold I, recalled that, as a young student in Zagreb, he personally witnessed Bishop Simeon taking part in the *Corpus Christi* procession alongside Bishop Petar Domitrović of Zagreb.¹⁶

However, after Simeon's return from Rome, no further records survive about his role at the Marča monastery or about the reactions of the Vlachs, apart from a letter he sent to Archduke Ferdinand on 15 January 1615. In it,

¹² *Idem*, 163-166.

¹³ Pietro Antonio Da Ponte (1574–1622), Apostolic Nuncio in Graz from 9 October 1610 to 16 October 1613.

¹⁴ Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1577–1633), Archbishop of Bologna, papal legate, and collector of artworks.

¹⁵ Latin original of Bellarmine's document in Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 511, 514-515; Croatian translation in Goran Ivanišević, *Marčanska unija 1611. Ljetopis i pojmovnik* (Zagreb, 2012), 49; German translation in Ikić, *Der Begriff Union*, 153-160.

¹⁶ Zlatko Kudelić, "Povijest grkokatoličke Marčanske biskupije ("biskupije Vlaha") zagrebačkog biskupa Petra Petretića iz 1662. Godine," *Povijesni prilozi* 22 (2003) 25: 187-216, here 196.

Simeon complained about the conduct of military commanders, who compelled the Vlachs to perform both private errands and public duties. He requested that the archduke issue precise regulations defining their obligations, so that the Military Frontier might become more attractive to other Vlachs migrating from the Ottoman Empire. In 1618, the same year the Thirty Years' War began, Bishop Petar Domitrović of Zagreb¹⁷ granted Simeon a charter (11 February 1618) describing the boundaries of the lands belonging to the monastery at Marča. A decade later, on 19 June 1628, Simeon, styling himself "Vlach bishop", issued a charter to the settlers living on the monastery's estates (described as "people of the Greek faith"), defining the obligations they were required to fulfill.¹⁸

The Vlach Question

All the events and information described concerning the first bishop of Marča, Simeon, took place before the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in Europe. For almost the next fifteen years, no documents survive that shed light on possible reactions among the Vlachs after Simeon's return to Marča. Instead, during the first half of the 17th century, public life in Croatia was dominated by the so-called "Vlach question": the demands of the Croatian nobility and the bishops of Zagreb either to take control of the Military Frontier or to recover estates incorporated into the military zone, and to subject the Vlachs, especially those in the Varaždin Generalcy, to their authority.

This issue first emerged in 1599, when Bishop Nikola Zelnicaj Stepanić of Zagreb (1598–1602) complained to Vienna that the Vlachs settled on his estates in Ivanić – formerly belonging to the Zagreb bishopric but colonized by General Sigismund Herberstein – were refusing to fulfill their obligations to him as landlord, relying on the protection of the general and other com-

¹⁷ Some historians have explained Simeon's acceptance of union in Rome as being influenced by the allegedly Orthodox, even Serbian, origin of Zagreb bishop Petar Domitrović (born in 1580, bishop 1611–1628). However, Croatian historian Mijo Korade demonstrated that this conclusion was incorrect and derived from 18th-century works by Balthasar Adam Krčelić and Daniele Farlati. According to Korade, Vatican documents show that Domitrović was born in Hrvatsko Zagorje, near the fortress of Cesargrad, and not into an Orthodox family. Nevertheless, some researchers continue to repeat this erroneous information. Cf. Mijo Korade, "Petar Domitrović 1611-1628," in: *Zagrebački biskupi i nadbiskupi*, ed. Franko Mirošević (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1995), 297-298, 300-301; Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 41, bilj. 54; Željko Malešević, "Motivi vladike Simeona Vratanje za sklapanje Marčanske unije," *Zbornik za istoriju Matice srpske* 104 (2021) 2/21: 31-49.

¹⁸ Kudelić, "Prvi marčanski," 171-174; Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, p. 30, n. 38, pp. 162-163, n. 240, 196 and p. 512-513.

manders. The bishop regarded the behavior of state officials as alarming, since it threatened the permanent loss of these possessions to the Military Frontier. His appeal to Vienna, however, produced no results. The emperor referred the matter to Archduke Ferdinand, who ruled against the bishop's claims. Ferdinand justified his decision on the grounds that the Vlachs had been invited into the Military Frontier to serve as soldiers against the Turks, that they had cultivated land which had lain abandoned for forty years, and that the bishop had provided neither financial support for them nor for the Frontier. Thus, it was not considered necessary to violate the conditions promised to the Vlachs when they were encouraged to settle in the Monarchy, since the Vlachs could always return to the Ottoman Empire.

Ferdinand's answer compelled the Croatian estates to continue their complaints to Vienna in the following years, even moderating their demands regarding the duties and obligations of the Vlachs. However, the opposition of commanders in the Varaždin Generalcy consistently thwarted the plans of the Zagreb bishop. In 1609, General Sigismund Trauttmansdorff appealed to Emperor Matthias II for protection against the Croatian estates and the Zagreb bishop, arguing that the primary concern had to be the liberation of occupied territories from the Turks, and that only afterward could question of Vlach obligations be addressed. He clashed with Bishop Petar Domitrović of Zagreb, who in 1613 initiated negotiations with the Viennese court, though without result. In 1618, a Vlach Commission was established to negotiate with the Vlachs, but its work was suspended in 1623 and resumed only in 1628, despite Ferdinand's promise of protection to the Vlachs of Croatia and Slavonia in 1627.

Further negotiations and demands from the Croatian estates in 1628 and 1629, supported by assurances from Emperor Ferdinand and General Trauttmansdorff to the new bishop of Zagreb, Franjo Erghely (1618–1637), seemed to promise a favorable outcome. However, the situation changed dramatically on 5 October 1630, when the Viennese court issued the *Statuta Valachorum*.¹⁹ This document regulated the duties and obligations of all frontiersmen, regardless of origin. It did not distinguish between "true Vlachs" (Orthodox immigrants from the Ottoman Empire), native Catholic settlers ("Slavonci") living in frontier villages, or Catholic immigrants from the Ottoman Empire ("Predavci"). By doing so, it rendered impossible the plans of the Croatian estates and the bishops of Zagreb, including their proposals for separating these three distinct groups of inhabitants within the Military Frontier.²⁰

¹⁹ Drago Roksandić, Čedomir Višnjić (eds.), *Statuta Valachorum: prilozi za kritičko izdanje* (Zagreb: SKD Prosvjeta, 1999), prevela Zrinka Blažević.

²⁰ Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border*, 65-71; Mirko Valentić, "Vojna krajina u 17. Stoljeću," in: *Povijest Hrvata. Druga knjiga: Od kraja 15. stoljeća do kraja Prvog svjetskog rata*,

Throughout these negotiations, religious or ecclesiastical issues were not addressed — least of all the presence of a Uniate bishop “consecrated in Rome”. The first reports reaching the Roman Curia concerning the Orthodox population (Vlachs) in the Military Frontier were in fact negative. In 1625, Ludovico Ludovisi, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide),²¹ instructed the papal nuncio in Vienna, Carlo Carafa,²² to convince Emperor Ferdinand II of the necessity of conducting an ecclesiastical visitation among the “Uskoks of the Greek rite” in the Military Frontier. Rome had been informed that these communities were receiving Orthodox priests sent by the “Patriarch of Istanbul”. On 1 November of the same year, Propaganda further recommended that Nuncio Carafa persuade the Emperor to appoint a person knowledgeable in the “Illyrian language” to the Military Frontier, in order to expel the existing Orthodox clergy through military authorities and replace them with Roman Catholic priests. Carafa, however, only succeeded in convincing Ferdinand II that it was first necessary to gather information from the bishops of Trieste, Ljubljana, and Zagreb regarding the Vlachs in their dioceses, and only then to decide how to respond to the demands of the Catholic Church.

Before the reports of the three bishops reached Rome, Propaganda had already received information about the Vlachs from Albert Pessler, *praepositus* of Novo Mesto (Slovenia), concerning the Vlachs in Žumberak. Pessler offered himself as commissary/trustee of Propaganda for the Vlachs, warning that they recognized no church authority, not even the Patriarch of Aquileia, who was officially their superior. According to him, they accepted Catholic priests who had been punished for breaches of church discipline, who then falsely presented themselves as Orthodox clergy and continued to live among the Vlachs. Almost all priests in the region, he claimed, performed their duties without authorization from higher church officials and lived in ways unacceptable to the Catholic Church. As a solution, Pessler proposed the arrest of such Catholic priests, the removal of Orthodox priests with the aid of military authorities, the appointment of new Catholic priests in their place, and the sending of Catholic clergy knowledgeable in the “Illyrian language.” Propaganda, however, replied that he should apply to the Patriarch of Aquileia for

eds. Mirko Valentić, Lovorka Čoralčić (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2005), 3-25, 111-121; Kudelić, “Prvi marčanski,” 165-169; Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 192; Štefanec, “Vjerska politika,” 43-65; Gabriela Erdély, “Confessional identity and models of aristocratic conversion in seventeenth- and eighteenth- century Hungary,” *Social History* 40 (2015) 4: 473-496, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2015.1080009>; Maja Čutić-Gorup, “Dekret nadvojvode Ferdinanda iz 1559. o izgonu protestanata,” *Croatica Christiana Periodica* 33 (2009) 63: 77-85.

²¹ Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (1595-1632), prefect from 1622 to 1632, archbishop of Bologna.

²² Carlo Carafa (1584-1644), papal nuntio in Vienna 1621-1628.

the position he sought. It also instructed Nuncio Carlo Carafa in Vienna to persuade Ferdinand II to send a Catholic priest familiar with the Illyrian language to the Vlachs and to order the expulsion of the Orthodox clergy, who were to be replaced by Catholic ones.²³

By the end of 1625, new reports about the Vlachs had reached Carafa. The first came from Bishop Renaldo of Trieste (10 December), and the second from Bishop Thomas Chrön of Ljubljana (31 December). Renaldo recommended that the bishop of Zagreb, Jesuits from the Zagreb seminary, and Capuchins from Styria be sent to the frontiersmen, given their knowledge of the language. He supported the expulsion of Orthodox priests, noting that they had refused to allow Latin prelates to conduct visitations. Bishop Chrön emphasized the problematic — even violent — nature of the Vlachs, and proposed that talented Vlach youths be educated in Catholic schools, initially twelve of them in Graz, who could eventually replace the Orthodox clergy and reduce the influence of the “Patriarch of Istanbul”.

After receiving these reports, Propaganda again instructed Carafa to renew his proposals to the Emperor. In February, Carafa received a third report, this one from Bishop Petar Domitrović of Zagreb, who stressed that Simeon, the first Uniate bishop, remained loyal to Rome, but that Orthodox monks arriving from monasteries in the Ottoman Empire, under the pretext of collecting alms, had stirred up the Vlachs against both Simeon and the authorities. According to Domitrović, the Vlachs were rude, superstitious, and uneducated, their clergy equally so – illiterate, without schools or institutions, and able to understand only texts written in their own language.²⁴ Carafa, after reviewing these reports, informed Propaganda that the Emperor opposed expelling Orthodox priests by force, fearing unrest among the Vlachs, who were indispensable for the defense against the Turks. Instead, Ferdinand proposed gathering more detailed information from military commanders about the feasibility of Propaganda’s plans. He also doubted the practicality of appointing a priest fluent in the “Vlach language,” since finding one would be difficult. Carafa further argued that dismissing Bishop Simeon — who had been consecrated and confirmed by Rome — was unacceptable, as he might leave the bishopric without a nominated successor. Carafa suggested instead that Propaganda provide Bishop Domitrović with detailed instructions on how to handle the situation in the *Krajina*, given his lack of experience. While Propaganda found this proposal acceptable, it postponed any final decision until Vienna received the reports of military commanders.

²³ Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium*, 37-43.

²⁴ Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium*, 40-44.

Around the same period, Captain Ernest Paradeiser of the Žumberak captaincy provided interesting observations in a report to the Aulic War Council in Graz. He noted that only three Orthodox (or “Vlach”) priests and one monk were active in the region, fulfilling church duties such as conducting the eight-month fast. Those inclined toward union with the Catholic Church, he reported, lived under pressure and fear from Vlachs who opposed it. Paradeiser rejected the idea of expelling Orthodox clergy, warning of possible rebellion, and instead proposed banning the arrival of new Orthodox priests and monks from the Ottoman Empire. He also observed that a bishop, very popular among the Vlachs (i.e., Simeon), was present in Marča, and urged the authorities to forbid him from ordaining young men as priests, since many were traditionally trained at home by their fathers rather than in schools overseen by ecclesiastical officials. Paradeiser hoped that this younger generation, once replacing the old clergy, might adopt the Latin liturgy. A similar idea was expressed by Ljubić, rector of the Jesuit college in Zagreb, who proposed opening a seminary for twelve young *Uskoks/Vlachs*.

Based on these reports, the Aulic War Council in Graz decided not to expel the Orthodox clergy but to forbid the arrival of new ones. It also emphasized the need to establish Catholic charitable foundations for the education of future clergy and concluded that the Vlachs did not need their own bishop, as they could be placed under the jurisdiction of the bishops of Ljubljana and Zagreb, with Jesuits carrying out missionary duties.

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²⁵ Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium*, 44-51; Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 176-179.

The reports of the three bishops and the military commanders of the Frontier suggested that the ecclesiastical union was far less successful than hoped, since the Vlachs remained under the influence of Orthodox clergy and monks loyal to the Patriarch of Peć (often mistakenly called the “Patriarch of Istanbul/Constantinople” by contemporary authors). In May 1628, Cardinal Carafa informed Propaganda that Ferdinand II had ordered the Aulic War Council to seek a means of financing a bishop of the “Illyrian language” to serve the frontiersmen. In July, he reported to Francesco Ingo-li, prefect of Propaganda, that Bishop Simeon was old and ineffective, which risked fostering religious errors contrary to Catholic teaching. Carafa proposed Albert Rengjić, nominated in 1624 as bishop of Smederevo with his seat in Belgrade, as Simeon’s successor. Pope Urban VIII, however, responded that this solution could not be considered until Simeon had formally resigned, and in September Propaganda was compelled to request further information about Bishop Simeon.²⁶

The most detailed information about the situation among the Vlachs at this time reached Rome through the Ruthenian Greek-Catholic cleric Methodius Terleckyj (?-1669). A Greek-Catholic who had studied theology in Vienna in 1627–1628, he later served as supervisor of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. In the second half of 1628 he visited Žumberak and reported to Joseph Velamin Rutskiy (1574–1637), the Greek-Catholic Metropolitan of Kiev,²⁷ about the ongoing disputes concerning the bishopric of Marča.

Another factor raising the danger of Vlach rebellion was their fear that the Union represented a violation of their right to religious freedom and a covert attempt to reduce them to the serfdom of the bishops of Zagreb and the Croatian nobility. These suspicions, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, had been quietly supported by the military commanders in the *Krajina*. To address the issue, Ferdinand II, invoking the Habsburg rulers’ right of episcopal appointment in ten Hungarian dioceses, resolved the problem in May 1630 by confirming Maksim Predojević — a monk from the Marča monastery who had been accepted and recommended by both the frontiersmen and the military commandants — as the new Uniate bishop. Importantly, this

²⁶ Šimrak, *De relationibus Slavorum Meridionalium*, 50-52.

²⁷ Josef Macha, *Ecclesiastical unification. A Theoretical Framework Together with Case Studies From the History of Latin-Byzantine Relations* (Rome: Pont, 1974), 207-208, 211-267; Kudelić, *Marčanska biskupija*, 182-189; Francis J. Thomson, “The Legacy of SS. Cyril and Methodius in the Counterreformation. The Council of Trent and the Question of Scripture and Liturgy in the Vernacular, together with an account of the subsequent consequences for the Slavo-Latin (glagolitic) rite and the Bible in Croatian translation,” in: *Methodios und Kyrillos in ihrer europäischen Dimension*, ed. Evengelos Konstantinou (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 85-246.

was done without consultation with either the Catholic Church or the bishop of Zagreb.²⁸

The second issue — the demands of the Croatian nobility and the bishop of Zagreb — Ferdinand resolved in October of the same year by promulgating the *Statuta Valachorum*. This document regulated the obligations and rights of the frontiersmen while deliberately avoiding ecclesiastical or religious matters, thereby sidestepping confrontation with the Catholic Church or Rome.²⁹

The rationale behind these decisions, after years of negotiations with the Croatian nobility and the Catholic hierarchy, is to be sought in international politics. Ferdinand was preoccupied with two Italian wars — the Valtelline War (1620–1626) and the War of the Mantuan Succession (1628–1631) — as well as with his broader policy of maintaining peace with the Ottoman Empire during the Thirty Years' War. His orientation was made clear in 1629, when he rejected both Albrecht von Wallenstein's plan for a grand Balkan crusade against the Turks and a similar proposal advanced later by Ludwig von Schwarzenberg,³⁰ commander of the Military Frontier.

Conclusive Remarks

While the Habsburgs and Catholic Church attempted to integrate the Orthodox Vlach population into the Catholic Church through the establishment of a Greek Catholic bishopric in Marcha, these efforts remained unsuccessful in the short term, especially due to the strong resistance from the Orthodox clergy and local population. Furthermore, based on the available sources, the cautious imperial policy should be taken into account, prioritizing political stability and military defense over religious enforcement, especially due to the ongoing Thirty Years' War and the need to avoid provoking unrest or Ottoman retaliation. The situation was furthermore affected by the internal conflicts between the Church and secular authorities (the bishop of Zagreb, im-

²⁸ Jačov, *Spisi Kongregacije*, 189-190, 517-518.

²⁹ Buczynski, "Freiheitsvorstellungen" 251-265; Nenad Moačanin, "Militärgrenze und »Nationalcharakter« der Kroaten im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert," in: *Das Bild des Feindes. Konstruktion von Antagonismen und Kulturtransfer im Zeitalter der Türkenkriege. Ostmitteleuropa, Italien und Osmanisches Reich*, eds. Eckhard Leuschner, Thomas Wunsch (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2013), 51.-54; Hrvoje Petrić, "O iseljavanju vlaškog stanovništva iz zapadnog Papuka, Ravne Gore i Psnja te susjednih područja krajem 16. i početkom 17. Stoljeća," *Zbornik Jan-ković* 1 (2016) 1, 39-50.

³⁰ Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border*, 66-67; Henry Kamen, *Spain's road to empire* (London: Penguin books, 2003), 382-387.

perial court, Croatian estates, military commanders). The ecclesiastical union thus remained during the Early Modern Era fragile, contested, and depended more on political expedience than true religious integration, with Rome and Vienna often in odds in their goals and strategies.

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