

**The relation between Miklós Bercsényi and Sándor Károlyi
during the Rákóczi's War of Independence**

Julianna Baráth

Academic supervisor: Ágnes Kovács, Dr.

University of Debrecen

History and Ethnography PhD program

Debrecen, 2010

I.

Choice of the topic and aims of the research

Nowadays the Rákóczi's War of Independence is among the most popular themes in the history of Hungary. Studies published on the history of the uprising of Ferenc Rákóczi, II can alone fill in a library, but there many unanswered questions still exist in relation to the War of Independence, old-fashioned statements coming from old fashioned viewpoints and evaluations. In spite of the fact that owing to our knowledge regarding the era some of the questions can already be answered and some of the statements can already be corrected. Among these issues is the biography of Miklós Bercsényi who was the second most important person in the War of Independence.

Being a Hungarian living in Beregszász I have been fascinated for years with the personality of the long-ago lord lieutenant of Ung county and with the role he played in the Rákóczi's War of Independence. However, Kálmán Thaly in his extensive work commemorates Bercsényi as a politician, general, and diplomat still his portrayal can hardly be regarded accurate. Writing up the biography of Bercsényi by applying up-to-date sources, to my mind, would go beyond the limits of a PhD study therefore I narrowed down my topic to introduce one of the most relevant relations of Bercsényi, namely that one with Sándor Károlyi.

Almost every historian emphasizes that the relation between Bercsényi and Károlyi was burdened with conflicts but up to this time no separate study dealt with the topic. My aim is to examine their relationship on the basis of the way they judged actual military and political circumstances and the way they carried out various tasks. I attempted to introduce the reasons lying behind co-operations and conflicts between Bercsényi and Károlyi and exhibit how their cooperation or their lack of cooperation had an impact on the course of the War of Independence. I was also interested in how the War of Independence affected their personality and what role the eight-year struggle had in that the initially lurking and only rarely exhibited antipathy turned into open enmity between them by the end of the struggle.

II.

Methods applied and resources exploited during the research

Missilises served as the primary sources of the study. Found in the consistency of the Rákóczi's War of Independence archive I examined mainly the chancellery of Miklós Bercsényi hilfgeneral (National Archives of Hungary, sections G 24 and G 28) in which I have found several letters that were written by Bercsényi to Rákóczi and that have not been published yet. Besides I reviewed all the letters that I found in the family archive of the Károlyis and in their archive in Fót (National Archives of Hungary, sections P 396 and P398) that were written by Bercsényi to Károlyi, which were published by Kálmán Thaly in his second volume of the 'Rákóczi Tár' in 1868 although there documents needed verification by now. Among the archive sources documents from both the Prince's Chancellery (section G

19) and from the Prince's Council (section G 17) contained relevant pieces of information from the point of view of my research topic.

The majority of the documents in the archive of Rákóczi's War of Independence have already been published. From these written proceedings I have made use of the Archivum Rákóczianum and Károlyi's records and letters written from him to his wife. The correspondence between Bercsényi and Károlyi contains mainly official data, and are very rarely personal. Opinions they had of each other are expressed in their letters to the Prince or other people close to them.

The most popular genre of the 18th century was memoirs, diaries and autobiographies. Ferenc Rákóczi, II. demanded his followers to keep diaries. Károlyi's autobiography and diary notes proved to be relevant from the point of view of my research topic but unfortunately I have not found writings of that kind written by Bercsényi. I have made use of diplomats' diaries and the diets' journals too. The *Memoirs* of Ferenc Rákóczi, II and the archive of the peace of Szatmár also contained valuable pieces of information.

Naturally, I have tried to review the majority of the literature published by now. I paid attention mainly to the literature referring to Bercsényi and Károlyi, biographies and studies analyzing certain events of the War of Independence and comprehensive works on the topic. The first chapter of my dissertation introduces the judgement of Bercsényi's and Károlyi's personality in a chronological order and their relation as reflected in the Hungarian historiography.

III.

Scientific outcomes of the dissertation

Miklós Bercsényi was born to be a child of one of the noble aristocrat families in Hungary. Owing to his mother, his native tongue was German and his environment was the world of imperial aristocrats. He was brought up in the court of the palatine Pál Esterházy and therefore received the best education of his age. Esterházy the bearer of the highest honour of public law with his educatedness and authority had exerted considerable influence on the young Bercsényi. In the palatinal court Bercsényi got acquainted with the most authoritative noble families.

At the age of 19, like his father did, Bercsényi chose the military career. He quickly moved up the hierarchy. Lipót I. placed him in charge of nationwide issues. His marriages also played significant roles in advancing his career. Due to his first two marriages he got into having family relations with almost each of the aristocrat families, furthermore, by the end of the century he became one of the most influential landowners in the country. At the outburst of the War of Independence he was already recognized all over in the country, he was considered as a nobleman with illustrious past experience and was also familiar with domestic affairs. It was owing to his authority that he dared to approach Ferenc Rákóczi, II Bercsényi had a dominant role in that the young princely offset got involved into the Hungarian political life.

Contrary to Bercsényi, Károlyi was born into a family with several children with only regional authority and possessing less considerable wealth than Bercsényi's family. He lost his mother at the age of three after which a miserable childhood was awaiting him. Due to the political events happening in the country at that time and the economic stance of the family, he did not receive regular education. At a very young age, at the age of 18, he was enrolled into the position of the Lord Lieutenant of Szatmár. After this event he was only concerned with the administration of the county. He got acquainted with Bercsényi, at the ceremony where Bercsényi's was appointed a commander-in-chief because the county of Szatmár belonged to Bercsényi's district.

Thus there dominant economic and social differences existed between Károlyi and Bercsényi before the year of 1703. Károlyi, unlike Bercsényi, did not have military experience before the War of Independence. He was known mainly at a regional level, being a Lord Lieutenant.

Their walk of life got interwoven during the Rákóczi's War of Independence. Roughly at the same time they both realized that, Vienna did not give up its absolutistic policy after 1697, therefore it became obvious for both of them that the dynasty can only be forced to respect the rights of the estates by force of arms. Bercsényi came to this conclusion earlier than Károlyi. Bercsényi, being the closest friend of Rákóczi actively participated in organizing the movement, thus it is not surprising that at the outburst of the War of Independence Rákóczi appointed him to the first general and put him in charge of organizing the army of the War of Independence. At the outbreak of the kuruc rebellion Károlyi did not join the rebels immediately. On the contrary, he assisted in suppressing their army initially but the attitude and the insensitivity the Imperial Court exhibited towards Hungarian offences decided him the necessity of the resistance of armed forces. After taking the loyalty oath the Prince appointed Károlyi a general.

During the War of Independence Bercsényi and Károlyi cooperated mainly in the military field. The Prince subordinated Károlyi to Bercsényi several times, which did not result in close cooperation in all of the cases. For instance, during the military expedition in Upper Northern Hungary they cooperated but during the attempts made to reconquer Transdanubia and Transylvania they did not. During the first joint military operation Bercsényi's distrust of Károlyi, whom he regularly ignored during the important military manoeuvres, was already observable. Later on, when Bercsényi became certain of Károlyi's suitability, he changed his attitude towards him and showed more confidence in him.

Bercsényi started the military expedition in Upper Northern Hungary skillfully and with vigour, but his activity as a general flattened out later. He did not dare to set off his army on serious movements, as he did not feel himself to be strong enough and did not trust the military worth of his army. It was a serious problem that Bercsényi was obsessed with panic on hearing that the enemy was approaching, and due to this his orders were characterized by inconsistency. Fortunately, his lieutenants, primarily Károlyi, perceived the importance of situations and seized initiatives. In this way, almost in two months they achieved important military success in Upper Northern Hungary. During their first joint military operation, the conceptual differences, that appeared later on as well between Bercsényi and Károlyi

regarding the way of warfares already appeared. Bercsényi was careful and was afraid of attacking the enemy, while Károlyi, in the beginning perhaps due to the desire to prove his excellence, was initiative, and urged shock-actions. Bercsényi's hesitant and nervy nature particularly troubled Károlyi but apart from this he carried out the orders of Bercsényi. Despite the fact that as the majority of the generals, Károlyi did not like it either if Bercsényi conducted a military operation, because Károlyi had no great opinion of his skills as a general. However, according to the contemporary way of thinking Károlyi accepted, moreover, he regarded it as natural, that Bercsényi is predestinated to the highest military ranks due to his social standing and his friendship with Rákóczi.

The cooperation between Bercsényi and Károlyi was not unclouded later on either. The commander-in-chief several times critiqued Károlyi's Transdanubian military manoeuvres which critiques did not turn out to be reasonable ones at each occassion. Bercsényi blamed only Károlyi for the failures, while he forgot about his own negligence. Due to this the tense atmosphere between them deepened, and to the apathy contributed the fact that the commander-in-chief charged Károlyi with self-interest seeking and claimed that Károlyi made raids only because of the possibility of finding preys. The Lord Lieutenant of Szatmár ascribed these charges as maliciousness aimed at his personage and regularly responded to it with spectacular resentment. It is a fact that during the shock-actions on enemies and the raids into the Austrian provinces, considerable gains could be made, but these manoeuvres were supported by the Prince. Partly these raids were useful for the intimidation of the enemy and for strength demonstration which were commonly applied techniques to support the badly supplied military forces to survive. Besides, it sounds reasonable that Károlyi preferred shock-actions, because he did not regard his army (and possibly not even himself) to be appropriate for pitched battles, and thus reserved from them.

Bercsényi, if occasionally after a successful manoeuvre praised Károlyi, did not hide his ironic expressions that were part of his character. Not only the fact that he looked down on people who were below him but his nature too contributed to his forming opinions. Contrary to Bercsényi, Károlyi could easily get into contact with anybody he could understand the soldiers of humble origin as well.

The Prince was soon convinced that neither of his generals was suitable for carrying out firm military actions. Bercsényi-despite his military past-did not recognize his faults as a general and was not keen on learning from his own faults. He could not adapt to the changed circumstances and insisted on keeping his position of a commander-in-chief. We have to agree with Mihály Horváth, who claims that "(Bercsényi's) start of the uprising, his faithful friendship with the Prince, and his vivid spirit among the allied estates so much ensured his priority right after the Prince, that nobody could, except involving his acceptance, stand in front of him in the hierarchy. But he had too much ambition, than to step back voluntarily, however his nature and uneducatedness regarding military studies made him inappropriate to lead battles".

On the contrary, Károlyi proved to be teachable, usually realized where and when he committed a fault and changed his existing tactics. Károlyi developed a lot personally during the war of independence—he was rather successful as a military organizer—however, his inadequacies resulting from his military uneducatedness he could never completely remedy. His successful undertaking to help the people defending the besieged castle of Érsekújvár won him Rákóczi's acknowledgement who began to have a high opinion of his general. The more Rákóczi's confidence in Károlyi developed, the less role was given to Bercsényi in leading the armies. Beginning with the fall of 1710 Bercsényi can be viewed only as a visionary leader of the kuruc army. The Prince, tactfully and using tactics, sent Bercsényi with a diplomatic assignment out of the country, which was not against the will of Bercsényi, who scared of the plague and was in a state of nerves at the time. Károlyi superseded him in the position of warfare management and his appreciation was growing due to perceptions of him and to the lack of field marshals suitable for leading armies (The militarily trained Simon Forgách has been in captivity since November 22, 1706, and János Bottyán died on September 26, 1709.).

Rákóczi relied on Bercsényi's and Károlyi's advice regarding not only military but political issues as well. At the beginning Bercsényi together with the Prince negotiated a lot with the Imperial Court about the possibility of a peace treaty. Bercsényi believed more in the first few negotiations than Károlyi whose attitude was rather sceptical to the Court's conciliatory intention. Károlyi charged the commander-in-chief with being too naïve and casted the suspicion on Bercsényi that he wanted to agree with the Imperial Court of Vienna on his own. His indignation was also fuelled by the fact that the initial negotiations directed the leaders' attention away from military issues and Bercsényi left him alone at the most critical moment during the Transdanubian operation. After the second meeting in Gyöngyös even the commander-in-chief admitted his fault when being in command of a huge army he chose negotiation over attack that did not lead to any result.

The peace conference in Nagyszombat had the highest probability of bringing about peace but it finally ended in failure. At this time Vienna considered Bercsényi to be the main barrier in the way of establishing peace. The mediation also recognized that Rákóczi was more keen on the conclusion of peace than Bercsényi. On the basis of Bercsényi's manifestations, the commander-in-chief claimed that he was not against the reconciliation but he lost his confidence in the representatives of the imperial court. According to the historians in Nagyszombat there was the possibility of bringing about a more favourable peace agreement than it was in Szatmár. Furthermore, the war would have ended up five years earlier.

To solve home political issues Rákóczi convened a diet in 1705 in Szécsény. At this first diet Bercsényi played a dominant role. Almost each of the initiative ideas came from him, however, Rákóczi made Bercsényi's recommendations his own. In Szécsény among others it was due to Bercsényi's initiative that the orders accepted the foundation of a confederation and the establishment of a 25-member senate. The orders elected Bercsényi to be the first senator. Károlyi, who secured the diet militarily, was elected in his absence into the senate, too.

Opinions expressed by Bercsényi and Károlyi at the senate sessions after the diet have several standpoints in common. Both agreed, that the problem with Lipót, I was not that he held on to the laws accepted in 1687 but that he claimed the country to be his heritage. Both of them emphasized the importance of Rákóczi's principality of Transylvania. Their viewpoints differed in terms of taxing and copper-money. Károlyi refused the taxation of the nobles on principle while Bercsényi supported public taxation.

The most important diet of the War of Independence was held in Ónod in 1707 where Bercsényi played a decisive role again. Due to his determined manner the orders agreed upon the introduction of public taxation and the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty. Károlyi also contributed to the acceptance of public taxation, however military issues called him back to the front, and could not even sit through the diet. At the beginning of the diet the shameful silencing of the opposition was his and Bercsényi's "merit". The Prince appreciated that Károlyi took a stand for him in public.

In organizing the last law-making diet of the kuruc army in Sárospatak besides Bercsényi Károlyi also took a significant role. The prince asked their opinion as for how to solve the military and economic problems of the War of Independence.

In the field of foreign affairs Bercsényi and Károlyi did not belong to similar classes. Bercsényi took part in each of the most important negotiations alongside Rákóczi and even sometimes entered into negotiations on his own. On the contrary Károlyi did not take part in diplomacy though he had a certain level of knowledge and opinion about world issues. It was Rákóczi's merit that he employed everybody where it was the most suitable for them. The degree to which Károlyi could intervene into foreign affairs did not only depend on his determination. Károlyi could not be an appropriate partner to Bercsényi in the field of diplomacy because of his lack of education and knowledge. By the end of the War of Independence, however, he has made considerable progress to reduce his disadvantage. His progress was partly due to his teachable nature as he gradually gained experience in the field of diplomacy too, and partly due to his promotion he got closer to the Prince he was forced to become observant. Károlyi was not really interested in foreign affairs because he was convinced that from the point of view of the outcome of the War of Independence the domestic situation and the relation between the Hungarians and the Habsburg dynasty are the key variables.

The largest difference between them lay in the judgment of Russia's foreign policy. Bercsényi, in contrary to Károlyi believed in the promises of czar Peter, I and believed in the possibility of Russian military support. Károlyi in his letters expressed sharp criticism concerning the support Bercsényi was given regarding his Russian policy which later truly turned out to be a diplomatic failure.

At the end of the War of Independence Károlyi was right on the opinion, that without appropriate domestic conditions the War of Independence cannot be continued and as the external circumstances suggested the same, he considered the conciliatory spirit of the Habsburgs as a favourable opportunity. Therefore, with the same intensity as Bercsényi began to deal with foreign policy from the fall of 1710, Károlyi began to deal with domestic affairs.

Both of them knew that the fate of the War of Independence was decided, Bercsényi still hoped that with the help of foreign support the struggle can be restarted, while Károlyi did not believe in this and considered it to be most important to reach a favorable agreement with the help of certain military forces.

The differences between Bercsényi and Károlyi culminated during the negotiations with Vienna. Bercsényi, who worked on the compromise until 1706 by 1711 became a tough opponent of compromise with the court. Károlyi, who at the beginning opposed the negotiations with the court, during the last months of the War of Independence did everything possible to convince Rákóczi to negotiate with the court, while Bercsényi did his best to dissuade him from it. The commander-in-chief charged Károlyi with supporting the agreement with Vienna only from self-interest and recommended the arrest of the general to Rákóczi several times.

At the end of the meeting in Salánk Rákóczi accepted the suggestion of the remaining members of the senate. According to their suggestion he entrusted Károlyi with leading the kuruc military force and he himself left for the negotiations with the Russians. In spring 1711 Károlyi arrived at a choice of alternatives, and as he found negotiation to be the most favourable option, he reached compromise with the imperial armies on his own (together with János Pálffy of course who was also striving for the same compromise). Károlyi, in fact tried to persuade Rákóczi to support reconciliation attempts until May, 1711.

The peace of Szatmár, as it is defined by many historians, saved the country from the military defeat and reached an optimal result that was possible in 1711. The treaty, however, completely put the figures of Bercsényi and Károlyi in opposition: while Bercsényi was loyal to Rákóczi and his own fantasmagories, Károlyi left the prince and went on his own way. In fact, the peace of Szatmár is beside the question, the point was the conceptual differences between them coming from their own personality. Károlyi, in contrary to Bercsényi never followed his emotions in politics. One of his features was to notice power relations quickly, for instance in the summer or fall of 1703, or the spring of 1711. His steps were the consequences of and not the reasons for power changes. Károlyi experienced considerable self-growth during the War of Independence and it was not by chance that by the end of the War of Independence he became the trustee of the Prince. In parallel with Károlyi's rising, at least at the level of operative tasks, Bercsényi was gradually forced to the background, but not even Károlyi managed to succeed him in his position.

Bringing about the peace of Szatmár completely alienated the two personalities from one another. Bercsényi, who refused to accept the peace agreement, continued his diplomatic activity in Poland, proving that it was not the confederation only Károlyi who agreed with the emperor. Bercsényi together with Rákóczi believed in that the Russian czar despite the existence of the peace agreement was still willing to help them.

IV.

Previous publications on the topic of the dissertation

—To the memory of unfurling the flag in Beregszász. Anno 1703. Quarterly of Military History, Budapest, year 2003 vol. 3, 947-950. (Co-author: Kálmán Mészáros).

—Miklós Bercsényi, the Lord Lieutenant of Ung county (1692-1710)-Acta Beregsasiensis, no. V vol. 1, year 2006, 79-85.

—The military cooperation between Miklós Bercsényi and Sándor Károlyi during the expedition in Upper Northern Hungary-Acta Universitatis Debreceniensis. Series Historica, (in press)

—The military cooperation between Miklós Bercsényi and Sándor Károlyi during the Transdanubian expeditions-Acta Universitatis Debreceniensis. Series Historica, (in press)

—The letters of the Count of Székes Miklós Bercsényi to Sándor Károlyi. Edited, annotated and indexed by: Julianna Baráth and Kálmán Mészáros. Rákóczi sources. (in press)