Frieden und Konfliktmanagement in interkulturellen Räumen

Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie in der Frühen Neuzeit

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Nataša Štefanec

Institutional Control of Violence: Imperial Peace and Local Wars on the Slavonian Border in the Second Half of the 16th Century

Imperial peace contracts agreed in Istanbul and Vienna often had a modest impact on everyday life on the Habsburg-Ottoman borderland (krajina, serhat). Ongoing “small war” on imperial borderlands in form of frequent raids and plunder was displayed by both sides,¹ as well as various mechanisms developed by the local population to avoid its devastating consequences. On the Croatian Border these mechanisms were numerous and one could trace them from the 16th until the 18th centuries.² On the neighbouring Slavonian Border there were due to a variety of reasons fewer such practices in the 16th century. This paper will focus on the Slavonian Border in the second half of the 16th century. Based on the source material the author would elaborate on several problems.

First, she would compare if, when and to what extent there existed cross-border cooperation among local population on the Croatian-Ottoman and Slavonian-Ottoman border, in order to provide background for the presentation of concrete cases. Second, she would indicate institutional mechanisms of discovering, investigating

¹ Numerous protest letters, preserved in the Kriegsarchiv in Vienna, were exchanged between the High Ports and the Viennese court, that is, between the Habsburg centers and Grand Viziers, enlisted raids and plunder of the opposite side and urging for the maintenance of peace and friendship between the empires. See, for example: Gisler, Mislav/Kovačev, Neven/Štefanec, Nataša: Prilozi za povijest diplomacije i vojnarstva u 16. stoljeću [Contributions for the History of Diplomacy and Warfare on the Military Border in the 16th Century]. In: Hrvatski zbornik 63/1 (2010), 169-189. See also numerous published contemporary letters reporting on plunder and robberies: Luskić, Radišan: Spomenici Hrvatske krajine, 1479-1610 [Sources from the Croatian Border, 1479-1610]. Vol. I. Zagreb 1884, passim. Lopatić’s collection of sources also contains one interesting report in German, listing major Ottoman raids to the Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom from 1578 until 1892 (p. 22-23). – Ižem: Prilozi za povijest Hrvata XVI. i XVII. veka [Contributions to the history of Croatia from the 16th and 17th century]. In: Starih JAZU 19 (1887), 1-80. – Bončić, Ivan: Izvješća o kretanju turske vojske uz hrvatsku granicu u drugoj polovici XVI. veka [Reports on the movements of the Turkish army along the Croatian Border in the second half of the 16th century]. In: Vjesnik Kr. Hrvatsko-slavensko-dalmatinska arhiva 16 (1914), 49-101.

and sanctioning unsolicited violence in order to preserve peace among Empires and present several indicative practices of local violence frequently employed on the Slavonian Border by the military towards the Ottomans. Third, she would provide interpretation of data with regard to studies of early modern violence in Europe.

1. Croatian-Ottoman Border vs. Slavonian-Ottoman Border

The Croatian-Slavonian Kingdom was from the end of the 15th century exposed to depopulation and massive migrations. It was undergoing transformation or complete disappearance of medieval social stratification, and the creation of a new one based on requirements of constant war. During the 16th century, new imperial military and civil institutions based in Vienna and Graz were gradually introduced into this territory and imposed upon the existing, autochthonous ones. There were differences between the two border sections.

The Croatian Border was mountainous, covered in thick woods and difficult to approach. It was much more demanding for military authorities in Vienna and Graz to impose control over its wide stretches. Transport of supplies, weapons and ammunition to the Croatian Border required much better planning and organization. Despite such efforts, the practical results achieved by military authorities in the 16th century were still inadequate. They had to handle geographical and climatic obstacles along with constant “small war” (raids, plunder) and smuggling activities. Furthermore, due to the Ottomans, the feudal structures in Croatia had disintegrated. A great deal more than in Slavonia, functioning well only in a narrow northern stretch of the territory belonging mostly to families Zrinški and Frankopani. Civil authorities of the Kingdom almost completely lost their control in the Croatian region. Finally, patterns of migrations and settlement on the Croatian Border with the Ottomans favoured smaller groups of migrants. Most migrants who came into the area were likewise cattle breeders, with similar religious practices. This familiarity resulted in their comparatively easy assimilation into the existing society and local culture. Despite migrations, border populations normally maintained cross-border family ties, and forms of life and sustenance based on cattle breeding, contra any agriculture, motivated herders to cross invisible imperial frontiers in search of pastures. Trade and the flow of goods continued, and smuggling was a way to support families on both sides.

All these practices stimulated the constant motion of people throughout the mountainous area, preventing efficient control by state authorities in Vienna and Graz. These circumstances opened up a wide space on the Croatian Border for un

3 Various elaborate plans were developed for the Croatian Border, while there was not so many of them for the Slavonian Border where fortresses were comparatively better interconnected. Proposals for the “Königliche Bestellung und Verstärkung der Croatischen Grenz[e] mit der Osm. Fron[te]”, Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, Handschriftenabteilung, No. 432, Universalland So ihr Püntl: D. Erzbischof Carl mit Soyer, Kämmer, Ciani, und Glar zu Prugg an der Muehr genhalten im 1578 Jahr, 52v–53v, 52v–86v, 87v–89v.

4 For elaboration, see a paper read at the Third Congress of Croatian Historians in Split-Superior, Fall 2008. Štefanac, Nataša: Statusa Valachorum in 1630. godine i habsburška vjeska politika a regii od 1570ih do 1600ih godina [Statusa Valachorum from 1630 and Habsburg Confessional Policy in the Region from 1570s until 1630s]. The article is in print.

official cross-border contacts. Faced with constant war, this shattered society regenerated itself based on new principles of border society (krjažka društe). Decades of insecurity encouraged the local population on the Croatian-Ottoman border to develop various local mechanisms of violence control that were valid on both sides of the border – like special border code of honor (vira krjažka) or blood brotherhood (pobretnistvo), well researched by Wendy Bracewell.

This kind of cross-border cooperation and small-war were much less prevalent on the Slavonian Border – increasingly fading over the course of the 16th century. Despite marshy and woody areas, the territory was comparatively much easier to access and control. The autochthonous population on the Slavonian Border did not practice intensive transhumant cattle-breeding, but rather agriculture that tied it to one fertile place as home. Also, the absence of important trade and smuggling routes on the Slavonian-Ottoman border inhibited comparable types of cross-border movements and communication. Moreover, in the Slavonian Kingdom the feudal system in the main continued to function. This stability was manifested in a clearer demarcation between peasants/serfs and the military, one stratum being tied to feudal landlords and the other to their commanders. Given these differences, on the Slavonian Border/Kingdom, the military as well as civil hierarchies were much stronger. During the 16th century small groups of migrants from the adjacent territory with a similar way of life came to the Slavonian Border. However, from the 1590s, by thousands of newcomers (so-called Vlachs) that came from deeper Balkan area started to be settled on the Slavonian Border. They aspired to avoid feudal jurisdictions by entering the Habsburg military service. Their assimilation was difficult. Settlement lasted for several decades and provoked huge conflicts along feudal/military lines. On the Slavonian Border the authorities were forced to find ways to control the situation and get a handle on thousands of soldiers so their orders were implemented more strictly and in a timely fashion.

The Viennese court had its interests in both of these different border regions. These were in short: control of the military hierarchy that would be dependant on Habsburg authorities in Vienna and Graz, rather than on local institutions of the Kingdom; settlement of anti-Ottoman border by the military that would increasingly be compensated by land and booty, rather than being paid in cash; a balanced and conciliatory approach towards local noblemen who were enanged by the newcomers taking their land and refusing to submit to feudal terms; realization of Habsburg confessional interests in the region where Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox failits intermingled.

The Protestant estates suffered a large defeat by 1629. In 1630, as soon as the circumstances allowed, the Vlachs were put under state control. Emperor Ferdinand II through the Statusa Valachorum and the Autic War Councils in Graz and Vienna proscribed and imposed efficient control over the military on the Slavonian
Border. Unlike on the Croatian Border, where the Habsburgs could not for various reasons impose Statuta, it ensured special status for the Slavonian, mostly unpaid, military; an elaborate code of regulations was imposed on them. The larger civil population in the Slavonian territory remained under the control of local (counties, Diet, Ban), and royal civil authorities that mostly functioned in a traditional way. Consequently, on the Slavonian Border there was no need to cultivate locally based codes of behaviour, blood-brotherhoods and other practices to compensate for the missing state authority. With a body of legal regulations in place, the authorities in Slavonian region could fight unwanted occurrences with much more vigour and success, especially from the 17th century onwards. The Slavonian Border in the 16th century can be used as an exemplary case-study for investigating the steady pace by which an early modern state attempted to control violence through its emerging institutions.

2. Unsolicited Violence in Practice

From the 1520s, the military system on the Croatian and Slavonian Border underwent steady growth in the number of soldiers, fortresses and armaments. The support for this required ever more finances and constant improvement in organization logistics. These financial investments as well as potential military losses brought various interests into collision. All parties involved reacted to these conflicts with their own increased need to control the situation. The strongest player in financial and organisational terms were the Habsburgs and Austrian Estates. Throughout the 16th century, the military administration in Vienna and Graz (from 1578) sought to introduce various forms of control over the paid and unpaid army. The majority of military troops in the Croatian-Slavonian Kingdom subsequently came under their control, along with the everyday functioning of the Croatian and Slavonian Border.

In the first half of the 16th century, there existed local insurrection army and traditional royal troops consisting of contractors and mercenaries that did not have stable quarters and were rather undisciplined. They were gradually replaced by two basic types of frontiersmen, paid and unpaid. The paid frontiersmen were divided into ordinary and extraordinary units (from 2,500 to 3,000 soldiers at each border


7 For example: “Aft die Zwölf Prociounirto Vikokeno heiliger, So den Vanzoloten Vorgehen Monatlich 24.” Kriegsarchiv Wien. Akte Feldakte (AFA), 1576-12-2, 3v: 1577-12-2, 75r.

The code was supposed to be officially published and presented to the army on the Croatian, Slovenian, and Kosovan Border, along with other Bruck decisions regarding the reorganization of the Military Border. It was done by several commissioners (among the most prestigious members of the Styrian Estates) nominated by the newly established Aulic War Council in Graz. The code was delivered in July, 1578 to the Slovenian Border. In traversing the Border, the commissioners visited every fortress and unit. Every soldier had to appear at the designated place at the designated time. The Commissioners would upon arriving at a particular fortress, first make publicly read the royal patent on the appointment of the Archduke as the general commander, and submit written orders of the Archduke along with all other important documents to the commanding personnel. They would then publicly read the Archduke’s letter of obedience (Gehorsambrief) obliging the head commander of the respective border section to serve in the Emperor’s and Archduke’s name. This was followed by a public reading of the military code in front of the

army, which was then required to confirm it understood the content of the code by taking an oath in front of commissioners. Finally, all the army could be mustered, which was now to occur more often than previously. For the Musterung the army was to gather at the appointed place, and the commissioners would inspect troops, make notes of irregularities found in their equipment and suggest the dismissal of inadequately equipped and armed soldiers. Masterschreiber would conscript and enrol soldiers into yearly service. The so-called Musterliste, a roll of a specific border section, would include names and surnames of soldiers, their commanders, place of service, monthly pay, type of unit, etc. Prior to Bruck these ritualized procedures were partially and inconsistently performed. After 1578, the military administration insisted on official sanctioning and public reading of the mentioned documents in front of the entire armed army, as well as on the public pledge of obedience.

The code formally proscribed ways of conduct along with punishments for disobedience, the death penalty being the most often mentioned. It was deemed appropriate for various types of treason and espionage, theft, plunder, assaults on merchants, leaving the watch, misrepresentation and falsification of name and surname and for desertion and escape in front of enemy. If an accused person was found guilty the execution should follow immediately. It was often done in cases of treason, espionage or desertion. In other official documents like instructions for commanders it was underscored that people accused of espionage or double-espionage should be killed immediately because they could give away vital strategic and tactical information.

It is of particular importance for this paper that the code stated the following as well: the infantry and cavalry were explicitly told that nobody was allowed to attack
the enemy or to go pillaging without the knowledge of their superiors. Attacking
and engagement in disputes (concursum et sedicionem) with people of other nations
was now to be punished by death. Unsolicited raids and pillaging were therefore
strongly prohibited.

For infantry it was stated that one should be punished by death for any kind of
talks or communication with the enemy, while cavalry should not communicate
with the enemy without the permission of their superiors. This distinction was
drawn probably because a great number of hussars were recruited from the nobility
and routinely corresponded with Ottoman commanders in various personal

Compared to the first half of the 16th century, one could remark a great rise in a
number of very precise and detailed official documents (oaths included) compiled
by the military to command and control their soldiers actions. However, the actual
application of set rules was still rather tentative, especially if an influential person
committed an offence, which was often the case.

Within the frames of the so-called “small war” there were many instances of unsolici
ted violence in form of raids and plunder into the enemy territory. These were
the most common kind of disobedience on the Border, challenging both the inner
affairs of the Habsburg Monarchy and its wider imperial relations. In the early 16th
century they became less and less wanted by the authorities. Still, they continued
despite the peace-treaties that particularly forbade them.

I will present one case on the Slavonian Border that was well documented in
contemporary official correspondence among various levels of hierarchy between
Vienna, Graz, Koprivnica and Varazdin.

At the end of 1571, Jurej Zrinski, one of the mightiest magnates in the Hungarian
Kingdom, persuaded Hans Globizer (Hungarian high officer and the captain of a
large fortress Koprivnica) to join him in a raid on the Ottoman territory. Zrinski
did not have to exert too much effort to talk Globizer into it. Some 500 people under
Zrinski’s command, as well as Globizer’s regular army from Koprivnica (paid by
the Inner-Austrian Autic War Council), were joined by the troops of local voivods
from Koprivnica, Drniš, Legrad and Topolovac, who were influenced by Globizer
and by horsemen belonging to the neighbouring Styrian baron and husar captain
Jacob Zlki (Szlki). Troops of Hans Keller, captain of Đurđevac fortress joined
too. Together, they all crossed to the Ottoman side and burned four villages near
Berence. The territory previously belonged to the Zrinski family and was still
predominantly inhabited by Christians. Several dozens of people (apparently mostly
women and children and several male peasants) were captured or killed and a lot of
goods, cattle and stallions “that these Vlachs16 were using for work” were looted
and captured.17 In January 1572 Pasha of Budim issued an official protest against
such a drastic breach of peace treaty.18

It was a time of peace, as the Emperor strongly highlighted in his letters, but
both sides were involved in such raids.19 On 6 January – earlier the same month –
Vei von Halleg,20 head captain of the Slavonian Border, wrote to the Styrian es
tates telling how Zrinski had warned him how the “Turks” who were not so numer-
ous, attacked the village Molnari and took away about 30 people.21 The official
administration quite rightly urged for peace, but the Ottomans’ retribution for Zrin-
ski’s raid were already prepared in the beginning of February. They sailed up the
river Drava towards Virovitica and Brezovica, preparing for a serious attack at the
Slavonian Border.22 In April 1572, Ottoman army faced down fortress Klostar
Ivanic, raided neighboring villages and attacked smaller fortress Topolovac.23 On
15 January, Emperor Maximilian wrote to Vei von Halleg, emphasizing that he
had always and continued to believe one should keep peace with the Sultan, and
could not allow his army to raid the enemy territory; once again he commanded the

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16 The term was used for people living in mountainous areas as transhumant cattle breeders and
17 LA, LAA A, Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuler 38, 1572-2-17; 1572-2-28 (several letters from
18 Klarč (c.f. n. 14), 335f.
19 The first peace-treaty in Edine was signed in 1547, the second peace-treaty, also in Edine, in
20 Vei von Halleg zu Rusnov was very influential and respected officer. He was the Oberst-
21 LA, LAA A, Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuler 38, 1572-2-6, Varazdin.
22 LA, LAA A, Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuler 38, 1572 II-13, Kreuz.
23 Hovor, Rudolf: Povijest Hrvatske. Knjiga 1. od najstarije doba do g. 1657 (History of Croatia.
24 Zagreb 1925, 252.
maintenance of peace in all possible ways. Despite so many back and forth raids during the winter, encouraged by the low levels of the bordering river Mur, such a large enterprise involving participation of so many Habsburg commanders could not be ignored. The affair started.

Globizer, one of the highest commanders on the Border, hastened to apologize for his misconduct. He claimed that he had felt an obligation to follow Juraj Zrinski. Veiť von Halleg on January 27, 1572 wrote to Globizer that he simply could not accept his written apology regarding this event since the Emperor so strongly sought a preservation of peace (friedlichen anstand, fridstark). Even if there was no peace, he stressed, it would be wise and proper to reflect on incursions into the enemy territory and announce them to the authorities. Moreover, Veiť quite rightly noted that Globizer had not had any obligation to Juraj Zrinski inasmuch as "Zrinski did not appoint him to his service nor was he paying him and his troops". Veiť stated he could and would not tolerate Globizer’s conduct, deeming his lenience towards Zrinski completely inappropriate with regard to his accepted duties and subordination to the Emperor. Veiť acutely condemned the violent activities of so many paid soldiers at a time when the Emperor ordered maintenance of peace. He was especially annoyed that in addition to the troops from Koprinica, Globizer took along for the incursion a number of local voivods not under his command. These soldiers were under order to protect Koprinica and other fortresses as a part of regular paid border army.63

The story about the event was widely circulated. Veiť informed the Emperor and the Styrian Estates about the bloody event, notifying them that Globizer and Žák had sent their written apologies. They both hoped this would satisfy authorities. Žák claimed he did not know that his horses took part in this incident and threatened he would sue Globizer, while Globizer – as discussed above – said that he was talked into it. Veiť emphasized that he did not accept their apologies.64

The Emperor answered that he also could not forgive them, especially Zrinski, to whom he so frequently forbade such actions. He ordered punishments, which was not often the case. Both Zrinski and Globizer had to immediately return all the acquired booty and captured people to their homes. If they obeyed it could be damaging to their reputation and honour, especially in the case of Zrinski. Žák’s involved horsemen were to be fixed and his charges against Globizer presented at the court. One voivod who left the castle unattended had to be executed, and the other voivods had to return everything they took under the threat of a death sentence.65 Voivods wrote back to the Emperor in panic: "Globizer was our commander and we simply had to listen to him. When we asked him whether he has a permission to plunder he said 'Ersey Vanzer Obrykhit(v) vund haußt' and we spent our entire life waging wars on the Border and giving our lives and blood to the Emperor’s defence."

Veiť was determined to put an end to all these attempts to absolve or mitigate responsibility for what had happened, and invited all the culprits to his headquarters for a talk. This was not a normal practice and testifies to the severity of the situation. For this weighty occasion one Aulic War Councillor from Graz was also invited. Everybody came, including the captain of neighbouring fortress Đurđevac Hans Keller and Žák personally. Voivods presented additional claims against Globizer and it seems that the matter was settled – without the execution.66 Several voivods, Radoslav Bakoš, Emenrik from Boboča, Marko Vranković and Antal Kopriski were even listed in the Slavonian Muster list from 1577, some five years later. Žák remained in office. In the Muster list from 1577, Freiherr Jacob Zichkli is enumerated as the captain of an entire hussar unit.67 Hans Globizer remained in his high office too, although many citizens of Koprinica and his soldiers often complained about his behaviour. In one intermezzo in 1589, he was even appointed the head captain of an entire Slavonian Border. In 1574 Juraj Zrinski, who was 25 years old at the time, turned out to be one of the most significant persons in Habsburg military hierarchy – he became the chief commander of the Border section between river Drava and Balatons lake or the Lower Hungarian Border, as well as a captain of Kanizsa.68 Presumably, Zrinski and Globizer did not return the booty that was looted in the invasions since it would be humiliating for them.

Hence, towards the second half of the 16th century military institutions in Vienna and Graz developed a solid administrative and military hierarchy that could survey the behaviour of the military in Habsburg service, quickly transfer necessary information, react to irregularities and administer an investigation with authority. The procedures for discovering, investigating and punishing unsolicited army violence were at hand.

24 The same letter determines the salary and maintenance of Saitach-aga and discusses on other people who escaped from the Ottoman side (Priviogen) entering military service in the Christian army. The Emperor also stated: "Wir dar nit zuzegebaen zuhnen das von der Kirchs volckh dasz selbsch in des feindis divon zastraft nicht haben solle, Sonett ist nochmals vonner gedeigi besset das du deic deruner mehrmals nufereget, aller moglichkeit noch darob halset dari clam von derer sonst von der wrede den (ten alshe gebahnt oder zuzefallen Werde." StLA, Laa A Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuber 38, 1572-I-15, Wien.

25 "... zv dem se sin dir us dem herren Grütz, gat nich verna gen von der auf vebund... von deic nit bestellt, vll weniger samt olzem der Kirchs volckh zv Coprinicz vad desselt erfind in seiner besoldung, ..." StLA, Laa A Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuber 38, 1572-I-27, Varaždin.

26 Ibid.

27 StLA, Laa A Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuber 38, 1572-I-28, Varaždin (two letters), 1572-I-28, Petnja.

28 StLA, Laa A Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuber 38, 1572-II-3, Wien. – Lonasc, Priolzi zu povest (cf. n. 1), 374.

29 Voivods signing the letter were Tomáš PreškoGlović, Jurko from Grcjan and Radoslav Bakoš – all those from Koprinica, Matjaž Dragovan – Voivod from Đurđevac, Emenrik from Boboča – Voivod in the new castle on Drava near Koprinica, Marko Vranković – Voivod from Topolovac and Antal Kopriski – Voivod from Ludburg. StLA, Laa A Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuber 38, 1572-III-2, Varaždin (letter No. 1).

30 StLA, Laa A Antiquum XIV, Militaria, Schuber 38, 1572-III-2, Varaždin (letter No. 2).


32 Ibid.

33 "Supremus capitanus partium regni Hungariae Transdanubiarum, Kreisberthjens eis deutsche der Donau; Dumb sti erzeg udnagaykapitány, supremus capitanus Canisienis, Grenzeoberth in Kanischb/Obere in Kanisch und dörhin udnagay Grenzen; Kanizsaak. főkapitány." PÁRTV (cf. n. 20), 269, 279.
In the major affair just recounted several articles from the Code were violated. A number of lower and higher paid officers attacked villages (populated by Christians) on enemy territory without knowledge or permission of their superiors. They also attacked civilians (of other nations). In the end the affair was settled and the Emperor and military administration showed that they started to take violations of the Code much more seriously than in the past. What should be stressed here, for the argument of this paper, is that they were not attempting to reduce violence per se, but rather to hamper unsolicited and uncontrolled violence that was harmful to state interests at a given moment.

Alongside the “small war” practices in the border region, there were also “friendlier” but nonetheless violent trials of strength rituals. During the Ottoman-Christian clash, heroes, noblemen and distinguished men on both sides of the border often staged group and individual fights between the two, called međanja, međunad or Kampf, a type of a duel.

Writing on European duels, Ure Frevert and V.G. Kiernan distinguished early modern duels that could be characterised as duels of honour as bearing only a vague resemblance to the feuds, judicial duels (trial by combat) and knightly tournaments of the medieval period. These duels spread from Italy and France all over Europe. One had to participate in a duel and put one’s life in danger for the sake of estate honour, while the end result was not as important as the symbolic act itself. The main reason for engagement in the duel was not victory, but rather preservation of honour and exhibition of courage and prowess. This sensibility remained characteristic of duels until the 19th century. As Kiernan pointed out: “In Europe the cult of nobility, with battle as its chief activity, placed a vision of Honour above desire for material gain. Something has always to be done to lend substance to such notions. Duelling was to take on very much of this function; the ideology of chivalry, in essence a cloak for power and privilege, helped to prepare the way.” In the 16th century, the prerequisite for a duel of honour was the equal social standing of the participants, who had the same values, shared a concept of honour and behavioural patterns. Challenge for a duel could be issued only among equals and had to be initiated for personal reasons – by an insult to honour. Therefore, one could speak of a private duel of honour. Refusal to participate resulted in social degradation, bringing shame. The duel was performed in accordance with established rules and with a ruler’s approval, though parties or seconds that were to ensure the observance of rules often entered the fight. Over the centuries the practice started to escape public and state control, sometimes transforming into pure vengeance, and gradually became prohibited by secular and religious authorities – with little practical effect. The second half of the 16th and first half of the 17th century were a times of chronic warfare, and witnessed an increase in the number of duels. V.G. Kiernan notes that duels, in a period of rising state power and the rule of law, could be viewed as a more decent way of settling account among the nobility. By the very ritual of a duel, private conflicts were lifted above the personal level.


Entering a duel, no matter how irrational the reasons, meant obeying and defending the corporate code of honour. Participants of the duel confirmed one to be worthy of membership in their class. Moreover, by putting their lives at stake, they confirmed their right to remain members of the privileged class.35

There were many cases of međunad on the Christian-Ottoman Border in Slavonia. For example, in 1545, after several years of fierce and incessant combats in which large parts of Slavonian Kingdom were taken by the Ottomans, the Ottoman army started yet another big raid. They marched from the neighbouring sancak of Požega, passing Ivanic and going towards Varadić and Krapina in Zagorje. They were pursued by the Christian army. Vjekoslav Klaić reveals that on May 4, 1545, near Selinca or Konjso (northern Slavonian Kingdom), domestic noblemen led by Nikola Zrinski IV suggested several smaller troops should engage in međunad instead of having a battle of entire armies. The Austrian commander Georg Wildenstein and local noblemen Pavao Rakitak opposed this proposal, but in vein. A short ceasefire was agreed and a hundred of warriors were selected by each side to “collide the spears” (kopla lome, scharmutes und capi prochen) in front of the rest. During that day, smaller troops and individuals fought among each other, with proper respect and conducting themselves honourably. In the meantime, some soldiers-spectators were bored and left the place. Two Ottoman commanders, Ulama-bey and Murat-bey, used the opportunity and suddenly breached the ceasefire. They started a large battle, attacking Zrinski and Wildenstein who were resting aside their men, forcing them to run for their lives and flee to an adjacent fortress.36

Duellling rules can be reconstructed from the extant sources. Međunad were most often set in advance, for an agreed day and place. In case of fights between individuals, the respective troops came to support their representative, sometimes engaging in the fight. Colluding parties had their arbitrators or meditators based on sources; Vjekoslav Klaić states: “What were seconds (djeverovi) in the duel, these were zatodni in the međunad of those days – and each of two participants had one of them. Usually the fighting was held in front of two opposing armies or troops so that duel between the individuals could convert to combat between the two armies or troops. Hence, Hungarian kings and Turkish sultans frequently forbid međunad.”37

Older historiography on the topic mentions large međunad between the new Bosnian sancak-bey (wascha wonn wosen) Mehmed-Pasha Sokolović38 and Croatian-

37 “Še so izača kod dobraja djeverovi, bili so kod tužnih međunad zatodnički, te je svaki međunadža lamao po jednega. Obično se djelelo međunad na očigled dviju neprijateljstvih vojska ili četa, pa bi se događalo da se dvobojoj pojedinačna pomenutu u boju medju vojnicama ili četama. Zato su tako kralje krasni tako turski nalanše vše putu zabranjuVALI međunad.” Klaić (cf. n. 14), 649.
38 Sokolović Mehmed-Pasha or Mehmed-paša Sokolović was born between 1500 and 1510 (usually 1506 was cited) in the village Sokolovići, near Visoko, in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina. After he was enlisted among Janissaries and passed the training in Istanbul, he was swiftly
must wait for the Sultan’s permission to engage in the duel, and that the fight would not be staged near Đurđevac, but somewhere in Croatia. Older historiography claimed that Mehmed-Pasha was a coward who attempted to avoid the fight, but Lenković’s letter fails to confirm this account. In the end, commanders and even the Emperor advised Nikola to postpone the fight in fear of a greater Ottoman attack, but Nikola went ahead and wrote his will and appeared at the designated place along with other Christian high officers and their troops. Mehmed-Pasha did not appear.

There were also other cases of mejdan in the period under review. For example, in 1555, Ivan Margetić (Janosch Margetic), a known hero and distinguished voivod on the Slavonian Border, in a short letter asked the border captain Ivan Lenković to allow his duel with Budak-aga. He informed him that Budak-aga claimed the main reason for the mejdan was the defence of faith. Margetić stated that he felt compelled to agree to Budak-aga’s proposal and participate in the mejdan. During March and April, 1568, a highly positioned magnate, Franjo Frankopan Šlunjkić, wrote several times to Emperor Maximilian II in order to obtain permission for a duel (mejdan, mejdans) with Hamza, sancakebi of Bosnia. He was very eager to enter the fight, but each time the Emperor explicitly forbade it.

Mejdans or duels on the Christian-Ottoman border were held among competitors of equal social rank. The declared goal of these duels or mejdans was to defend one’s faith and honour by exhibiting martial skills, prowess, power and courage. Preparations and correspondence between the opposing sides and relevant authorities could last for months. Rivals needed permission of their rulers which was usually sought for through superior officers. From the last decades of the 16th century, imperial authorities started to oppose and forbid duels, with the obvious exception especially the Habsburgs that were prone to keep the peace and armistice because they were militarily weaker. During negotiations on the peace-treaty of Edirne (1568) both sides declared raids as well as mejdans were prohibited because they often resulted in larger battles. According to available sources, mejdans continued to occur on the Slavonian Border throughout the 16th century. Generally mejdans had all characteristics of European early modern duels of honour – but were uniquely fought in circumstances of cyclical war and tenuous peace.

During the 17th century the practice was increasingly limited to local wardrods in parts of the Croatian Border/Koravci Generalate, especially in the medieval Croatian area of Dalmatian hinterland (Dalmatinska zagora, Rivini koluti). It would be interesting to investigate if the outer appearance and regulations of mejdans changed in 17th century Croatia, and determine the extent to which they were serving as a mask for brutal killings and vengeance. As a part of traditional local prac.
tice, people in order to escape control began holding mejdan away from the eyes of secular and religious authorities. Still, mejdan were one of the most frequent motives depicted in folk songs. For example, a colourful fragment of one lyric:

Tad pogleda jedan na drugoga, i polet jedan na drugoga, ta so težka zametnili kavga: tajne zveze i junaci jede, jedan pase, a drugi dopane, nertvi s konja padaju junaci, a konji ih koplitarno gnežde. Da koi viša boja hestokoga ki reda i ki se zaklone; neće ostati oka za svjedoka. Do pojede se megdja dijele, a kadar je podstavio pote, pada magla od neba do tala; ne bi bilo brezna postojano. Jedva se je megdjan razmestio, jo se se ne magdan razmestio, ga je više ko d jeliti nema; izgubi elite junaci [...].47

Then one looks to another and one sets off to another commencing a hard brawl: blades echoing, heroes sacrificing, one falls down, second follows, dead heroes falling from the horse, smashed by horse hoofs. By seeing such a fierce combat, one could declare and swear: that an eyewitness could not survive. Fight was fought till noon, and during the afternoon fog enveloped the cities and the earth: brother would not know a brother. The fight was nearly over, but before it was over, not a soul remained to parake; valiant heroes died [...].

3. Violence, society and state

Julius Ruff has synthesized a large archive of scholarship on violence in early modern Europe. Among various dimensions of interpretation, one can discern two important lines. One line questions the institutional abilities of the emerging "state" to control violence ascribing the increase/decrease of violence to various social factors and the complex restructuring of society, or to social disciplining.48 The other holds that various forms of civil and military violence decreased towards the 18th century due to steady development of state institutions that were able to control violent practices and ensure stability. In brief, violence decreased due to the civilising process, a theory introduced by Norbert Elias.

Ruff was mainly arguing on behalf of the latter theme. In the civilising process, the state was gradually monopolising the violence that was earlier still in the hands of the elites. In the course of the state-making process newly emerging states gradually replaced explicit forms of violence (criminalized behaviour like armed banditry, military attacks on civilians, homicide, assault, riots and rapes and not-criminalized like domestic violence) with various forms of institutional regulations of conflict, striving to enhance control over individuals.49

While recognising the existence of the latter process, Markku Peltonen rejected to explain it through paradigms of state control and civilising process.40 For example, his study on duelling, as well as mentioned studies by Fervort and Kiernan, shows that the duel was a social mechanism intended to direct, tame and control upper-class violence. It was especially important in European society at a time when the upper-classes had a monopoly over the use of weapons, of course potentially endangering themselves too. Subsuming it in the word politeens, historians mostly agree that towards the 18th century the higher echelons of society started to abandon violent practices as uncivilized; elites started to perceive violence as unsuitable to the changing code of honour and behaviour. However, according to Peltonen, this was not necessarily due to state intervention. Duel and similar forms of early modern violence mainly served to preserve horizontal honour among social equals who follow the same code of conduct and honour, or civility, whereas civility itself should not be restricted only to courtly culture. Also, stratification within the noble class did not prevent lesser nobles from seeking satisfaction from their "honours" if their honour was injured. Violent practices were, therefore, not intended to maintain vertical social hierarchy and stratification or to strengthen monarchical and state power. To the contrary – princes, monarchs and state institutions were often peripheral to them.51

Numerous complex explanatory models developed by mentioned historians could help in explanation of violent practices on the Habsburg-Ottoman Border:

a) As shown by Winfried Schulze, military threat gave an impetus to the state-making process on the Inner-Austrian territory. During the 16th century, the Habsburg military apparatus grew vastly. Numerous new powerful military institutions were developed for concentrating in their hands majority of finances in the region.52 The Estates elaborated resistance theories, attempting to legitimize their status in rapidly changing circumstances.53 Systems of recruiting and supervising paid and unpaid border military developed. Various types of regulations for the military as well as official regulations for the arrangement of the

48 Robert Shoemaker has closely explored the early modern population of London, and ascribed changes in the amount of violence to changing relationship between the community and individual in the course of urbanization. Social mobility and dispersion of social ties resulted in growing anonymity, with people increasingly ceasing to identify themselves with the neighbourhood and social community. There consequently was less reason to follow conventions imposed by the community or to participate in various violent acts implied by these conventions. The decrease of violence was in such cases influenced by changed social circumstances, and not by the state control or the civilising process. Op. Shoemaker, Robert: The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in the Eighteenth Century London. Hambleden-London 2004.
51 Ibid., 17–79, esp. 35–37 and 65–69.
entire Military Border increased in number. After these codes were carefully negotiated and formulated, they were increasingly written down and extensively publicised. These developing institutions explicitly strived to regulate (and direct) violent activities and were increasingly successful towards the 16th century. The Habsburgs were seeking to impose their homogeneous rule, aiming to achieve a coherent presentation of Habsburg military might and administrative abilities to the Ottoman Empire.

However, in the 16th century defence and penal systems as well as administration in general still abounded with deficiencies—they were still in the making. Payments to the border army were still irregular and military authorities had to allow raids and pillaging, though they formally forbade them. In the period of transition from the medieval court to modern state apparatus, there were still not enough schooled, trained and trusted, in other words, suitable professionals, to fill the military and administrative offices. One could not simply replace a commander who knew how the Border functions by heart and had served there for decades, even if corrupted like Gobrizer. One could not easily execute less significant local voivodes because one could not afford a riot or desertion, or did not have a replacement. Border defence still heavily relied on experienced individuals and local noblemen able to control their men, and not on obedient professionals without private proprietary interests. It would gradually change in following two centuries.

In the 1540s the sequence of events described above would not even have turned into an affair, whereas in the 1570s something had to be done. The ruler ordered punishments, but softened his decision in the process. The word the ruler could be stricter since the replacements would be available in satisfactory numbers. The military apparatus was still learning from the experience—it adjusted in accordance with the symbolic or practical strength that was exhibited by the parties involved. The Emperor had limited military potential in comparison to the Ottomans and was resolved to keeping the peace. He had to weigh his options carefully—keeping the authority, not losing experienced commanders and soldiers and maintaining the ideology of holy war against jihad that would thwart cross-border cooperation dangerous to the state. Regulations prohibiting violent activities could not be equally applied to all, and envisaged punishments could not always be executed—not for the next century, at least.54

Still, the growing state apparatus attempted to decrease some forms of violence and to monopolize the use of violence. What was the purpose?

b) In studies on violence, it is typically assumed (implicitly or explicitly present) that states or monarchs did not consider violence problematic per se. This is probably one of the main reasons why state-sponsored violence (war-waging being the most obvious of its manifestations) was comprehended as formally sanctioned violence, and thus did not figure more prominently in these studies. For example, Ruff did not analyse state-sponsored war-waging within the repertoire of violent activities. He included various forms of violent behaviour of military troops in times of peace or armistice, and the violence of military towards civilian; towards the 18th century logistics improved, and payments started to arrive regularly (state developed), resulting in a decrease in plunder and assaults on civilians, and thus violence generally.55 Though wars in the 18th century employed more human resources and destructive weaponry than ever, they were fought according to "universally" established military codes—therefore presumably being "civilized".

Whether one accepts this kind of argument or not, it remains reasonable to assert that the military institutions on the Habsburg-Ottoman Border were not concerned with the reduction of violence as such, whether it came in form of duels or raids, pillaging and war-waging, but rather with the control of violent activities. Violence per se was not problematic to the state. In order to protect large investments into the newly emerging state systems—not just financial investments—the authorities were under immense pressure to prevent as many forms of unsolicited violent activity as possible. A monopoly over violence ensured power and control prerequisite for the on-going state-making.

The greatest fear of imperial courts and military authorities over cases of small war and duels this paper has focused on aroise from their unsolicited character. If unrestrained, they could threaten the peace and diplomatic relations, and overall damage the ability of the state to control its inner and foreign affairs. In the analysed border zones, plunder of civilians and raids into the enemy territory were long considered by involved "states" as (semi-)official and desired methods of war waging, especially if they could be executed without consequences or retribution of the enemy. In the period of transition from the medieval to the modern state army such methods of war-waging weakened the enemy and provided earnings for exhausted local populations and masses of unpaid (paid by land or body) military in Habsburg service. They had increasingly served as the main Habsburg defence potential. Also, every kind of violence towards the Ottomans was justified by the ideology of the holy war, as described by Wendy Bracewell.

Hence, efforts of state institutions to control violence were directed primarily to reduction of unsolicited violence and secondly to employment of violent activities in state interests. These efforts were visible and showed results already in the second half of the 16th century. From the first decades of the 17th century the Slavonian Border (Varaždin Generalate) underwent further substantial demographic and organizational changes in the course of territorialization (delimitation of border territory from the civil one), along with the imposition of a much stronger institutional control from the Aulic War Councils in Graz and Vienna. These changes considerably diminished the possibility of an un-institutionalized violence and various everyday modes of cross-border cooperation and co-existence in this area. Numerous armed riots organized by the frontiersmen in the 17th and the first half of the 17th century in cases where their autonomy or acquired rights were endangered testifies to the on-going violent potential of a border society. The short duration and meager success of these uprisings testifies to the strength and better efficiency of military

54 After the conspiracy of Hungarian and Croatian magnates against the Habsburgs, several magnates were executed in 1671, despite their military power and the loyalty of their families in fighting the Ottomans for centuries.

55 Row (cf. n. 49), 44-72.
authorities and repressive apparatus of the state. If one could at all speak about the general reduction of violence on the Christian-Ottoman Border towards the end of the 18th century, it was a by-product of the attempts to reduce unsolicited violence, not the main goal.


c) It is important to stress the social dimension of violent activities (duels, mejdiams) on the imperial border. Almost all the studies mentioned until now were mainly focused on western and central Europe. Although western and central Europe experienced frequent wars, this experience could hardly be compared with the incessant centurial conflict between different faiths and civilisations that greatly modified or destroyed feudal social stratification in the border areas examined in this paper.

The elites on the border consisted of noblemen and distinguished military, often without noble background. On the one hand, these elites accepted specific border codes of honour that enabled various forms of cross-border cooperation and contact that were highly undesirable to state authorities. These structures were not analysed in this paper. On the other hand, these border elites also accepted a timeworn code of honour entrenched in ethics of honour, bravery and just religious war. As one could see from theoretical writings on duelling, the latter code of honour was in play throughout most of Europe.

Though border ethics and cross-border cooperation of the Croatian kind did not exist on the Slavonian-Ottoman Border, there too existed high social strata (on both sides) who, though at war, appreciated one another. They considered themselves exclusive possessors of military valour and military skills that separated them from the vast majority of simpler folk, Ottoman or Christian.

The warriors on the border accepted participation in duels in order to assert and uphold their social status—epitomized in honour, military might, ability to use arms, personal integrity and courage. Mejdiams between Christian and Ottoman warriors were for a long time practiced—and permitted by rulers—as a means of honourable settlement of dispute between “equals”. Only towards the end of the 16th century did authorities begin to withhold permission for cross-border duels, while duelling among Christian officers and noblemen continued in the rest of Europe. It should be emphasized that the bloody pillaging and looting in raids, practiced by both sides, were not instigated solely for the sake of booty or territorial gains. They also functioned to help maintain the social status and honour of noblemen and military as the leading social strata in these specific border zones: officers and leading noblemen were entitled to larger portions of the booty than the rest of frontiersmen. Due to their complex consequences state authorities had to treat duels and raids more severely, but they continued well into the 17th century.

Even if emerging state authorities started to interfere more substantially with violent practices on the military border during the course of the 16th century, one must conclude that the social mechanism behind them was similar to the one described by Peltonen and others. There were explicit attempts of involved social groups to tame and limit violence by reducing potential clashes of entire armies to smaller factions and individuals. They had to maintain horizontal honour, and to confirm themselves as worthy members of their respective social class. Despite the