Pragmatism and improvisation. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's policy towards the Crimean Khanate in 1632–1637 in the light of Stanisław Koniecpolski's correspondence

Keywords

Stanisław Koniecpolski, Crimean Khanate, eastern policy, south-eastern borderlands, Commonwealth diplomacy, Budjak Horde

Abstract

This article examines Polish–Tatar relations in 1632–1637 in the light of Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski's correspondence. It reassesses the traditional view of relations with the Crimean Khanate, revealing pragmatic diplomatic manoeuvring in which the Horde sometimes proved a valuable ally, notably during the Smolensk War. The analysis confirms that, given the Commonwealth's own difficulties, responsibility for its eastern policy fell to Stanisław Koniecpolski. Drawing on his personal authority, intelligence network and private funds, the hetman skilfully manoeuvred between the great powers and the hordes competing for power (including during the flight of the Budjak Horde in 1637). His actions, which combined the pursuit of state interests with the protection of his own vast estates in the borderlands, amounted to effective improvisation born of necessity, masking the inadequacies of the state apparatus.

Introduction

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was compelled to pursue a foreign policy on several fronts, balancing threats from Muscovy, Sweden and the Ottoman Empire. Popular accounts of Polish-Tatar relations in this period have tended to view them primarily through the lens of devastating raids, a perspective particularly justified by the circumstances of the twenties of the seventeenth century[1]. An analysis of the correspondence

[1] A. Gliwa, *Szlachta i sejmik ziem lwowskiej, przemyskiej i sanockiej w Sądowej Wiszni wobec wzrastającego zagrożenia militarnego ze strony ord tatarskich w latach 20. XVII wieku*, [in:] *Na sejmikach i sejmach. Szlachta ziemi przemyskiej w życiu politycznym Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVIII wieku*, ed. D. Kupisz,

of Grand Crown Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski, however, reveals a much more complex picture. Particularly in the thirties of the seventeenth century, amid the Smolensk War, Abaza Pasha's invasion and tensions in Zaporozhia, the Crimean Khanate repeatedly emerged not only as an enemy but also as a pragmatic partner in diplomatic negotiations.

This subject has generated an extensive body of scholarship. Our understanding of Polish-Tatar relations rests on works ranging from Bohdan Baranowski's classic *Stosunki polsko-tatarskie w latach 1632–1648*[2] and the syntheses by Leszek Podhorodecki, *Chanat Krymski i jego stosunki z Polską w XV–XVIII w.*[3], and Dariusz Skorupa, *Stosunki polsko-tatarskie 1595–1623*[4], through Dariusz Kołodziejczyk's[5] modern diplomatic approach, to Andrzej Gliwa's recent analytical studies of the economic consequences of raids[6] and Achmet Szejchumierow's two-volume work on the military affairs of the Horde[7]. At the same time, Przemysław Gawron's[8] research has deepened our understanding of Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski's own position within the Commonwealth's constitutional system.

Despite this substantial body of scholarship, aspects of the dynamics of Polish-Tatar relations in 1632–1637 still call for reinterpre-

Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warsaw 2021; idem, *Kraina upartych niepogód. Zniszczenia wojenne na obszarze ziemi przemyskiej w XVII wieku*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, Przemyśl 2013, pp. 205–353, 660.

2 B. Baranowski, *Stosunki polsko-tatarskie w latach 1632–1648*, Uniwersytet Łódzki, Łódź 1949, pp. 27–30.

3 L. Podhorodecki, *Chanat Krymski i jego stosunki z Polską w XV–XVIII w.*, Bellona, Warsaw 1987.

4 D. Skorupa, S*tosunki polsko-tatarskie 1595–1623*, Neriton, Warsaw 2004.

5 D. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th Century). A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents*, Leiden 2011.

6 A. Gliwa, *Szlachta i sejmik*…, op. cit.; idem, *Kraina upartych niepogód*…, op. cit.

7 A. Szejchumierow, *Armia Chanatu Krymskiego. Organizacja i taktyka (XV–XVIII w.)*, INFORTeditions, Tarnowskie Góry 2022; idem, *Armia Chanatu Krymskiego. Strategia, organizacja kampanii, życie codzienne i stosunki z sąsiadami (XV–XVIII w.)*, INFORTeditions, Tarnowskie Góry 2024.

8 P. Gawron, *Hetman Koronny w systemie ustrojowym Rzeczpospolitej w latach 1581–1646*, Neriton, Warsaw 2010.

tation. Anna Biedrzycka's edition of the hetman's[9] correspondence provides invaluable epistolary material, allowing eastern policy to be viewed through the routine, everyday practice of frontier diplomacy rather than through decisions taken centrally by the Sejm.

This article seeks to illuminate precisely these dynamics. The letters from 1632–1637 reveal Koniecpolski's considerable autonomy in shaping eastern policy. Any analysis of the hetman's correspondence must acknowledge the elements of magnate self-fashioning and political lobbying embedded in it, both characteristic of the period. In this article, however, I argue that these elements are more than mere rhetorical baggage – they function as deliberately employed diplomatic instruments in their own right. His portrayal of himself as the sole guarantor of the Commonwealth's security was inseparable from his cool pragmatism, driven both by the interests of the state and by the need to protect his private estates. The improvisation referred to in the title, meanwhile, denotes not an absence of strategy but operational resourcefulness necessitated by the breakdown of the state apparatus. Faced with the inertia of central institutions and an empty treasury, Koniecpolski could adapt rapidly to changing international circumstances, resorting to informal, ad hoc solutions and compensating for the state's shortcomings through his own authority and personal credit.

Tatar-Polish cooperation during the Smolensk War (1632–1634)

The early thirties of the seventeenth century brought a combination of threats to the Commonwealth: Muscovite aggression[10] at the particularly vulnerable moment of the interregnum following the death of Sigismund III Vasa (d. 30 April 1632), followed somewhat later by the outbreak of fighting on the southern frontier[11]. These conflicts had a distinctive feature: despite the ongoing war against Turkish forces, the Crimean Khanate – formally a vassal of the Porte

[9] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego hetmana wielkiego koronnego 1632–1646,* ed. A. Biedrzycka, Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego "Societas Vistulana", Kraków 2005.

[10] D. Kupisz, *Smoleńsk 1632–34,* Bellona, Warsaw 2001, p. 93.

[11] L. Podhorodecki, *Wojna polsko-turecka 1633–1634 r.*, "Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości" 1976, vol. 20, p. 35.

– did not support the diversionary attack against the Polish-Lithuanian state. The Commonwealth owed this turn of events to its active foreign policy[12].

One manifestation of this policy was the effort to secure assistance against Muscovy from the Ottoman vassal, Khan Djanibek Giray, (who ruled intermittently between 1610 and 1635)[13]. This was a risky move, but one dictated by strategic calculation. The Commonwealth benefited from the fact that the decision to attack Muscovy had already been taken in Bakhchisaray in February 1632, with the khan disregarding Constantinople's current interests and directives[14]. In letters written in the summer of 1633, the khan and his vizier explicitly confirmed the alliance. Djanibek Giray wrote to Koniecpolski: "At Your Lordship's request, we have sent our army into Muscovy, although we had lived in friendship with them and received lavish gifts from them. We have done this above all to demonstrate that we will not tolerate your enemies"[15].

This cooperation went beyond declarations, taking the form of concrete military operations that put pressure on Muscovy[16]. The khan's vizier, Mehmed Shah Agha, was even more explicit in his correspondence, informing the hetman of a strategic redeployment of forces: "I have redirected the Crimean troops, which had been ready to march on Poland, into Muscovy against your enemies.[17]"

This risky diplomatic initiative proved to yield tangible benefits. Not only was the Crimean Khanate neutralised, preventing it from

12 B. Baranowski, op. cit., pp. 27–30.

13 A. Szejchumierow, *Armia Chanatu Krymskiego*…, op. cit., p. 37; L. Podhorodecki, *Chanat Krymski i jego*…, op. cit., pp. 158–159. S. Koniecpolski also sought support from the Budjak Tatars; see B. Baranowski, op. cit., p. 21.

14 L. Podhorodecki, *Wojna polsko-turecka*…, op. cit., p. 33.

15 Djanibek Giray to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Bakhchisaray, July/August 1633, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 31, p. 128.

16 The papal nuncio Honorato Visconti attached considerable importance to the Tatar attacks in shaping the course of this conflict; see P. Duda, *Krzyż i karabela. Polityka zagraniczna Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w ocenie dyplomacji papieskiej w latach 1623–1635*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2019, p. 207.

17 Mehmed Shah Agha to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Bakhchisaray, July/August 1633, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 32, p. 129.

supporting the invasion by Abaza Pasha[18], the new beylerbey of Silistra, but Tatar military power was actually directed against Muscovy – the diplomatic instigator of the Turkish aggression[19]. The Khanate's involvement in the conflict with Muscovy meant that the Polish-Turkish War of 1633–1634[20], which followed directly from Abaza Pasha's[21] invasion, had to be fought without substantial participation

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[18] Abaza Mehmed Pasha replaced the more conciliatory Damat Murtaza Pasha in 1633. Abaza Pasha himself might be described as an adventurer – he rebelled against the Ottoman sultan three times: first during the (second) reign of Mustafa I (1622–1623), and twice during the reign of Murad IV (1623–1640). Murad IV, evidently holding Abaza Pasha's military abilities in high regard, pardoned the rebel. See S. Shaw, *History Of The Ottoman Empire And Modern Turkey*, Vol. 1, *Empire of the Gazis*: *The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280–1808*, Cambridge University, Cambridge 1976, pp. 193–195. For the broader context of crises and rebellions in the Ottoman Empire during the early decades of the seventeenth century, see S. White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge University, Cambridge 2011.

[19] The continuing presence of Muscovite envoys in Constantinople is documented in a letter from one of S. Koniecpolski's spies; see N.N. to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Constantinople, 22 June 1633, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 24, p. 107.

[20] The literature on the war itself is fairly extensive: L. Podhorodecki, *Wojna polsko-turecka 1633–1634 r*…., op. cit.; Ł. Pabich, *Wojna polsko-turecka w latach 1633–1634*, Napoleon V, Oświęcim 2019, A. Bożejewicz, *Bitwa pod Kamieńcem Podolskim 22 października 1633 roku – próba charakterystyki*, [in:] *Studia z historii politycznej i wojskowej*, eds. P. Budzyński, M. Dawczyk, K. Gryglewski et al., "Vade Nobiscum" 2019, vol. 20. The Moldavian position has been examined by Dariusz Milewski: D. Milewski, *Mołdawia wobec zatargu polsko-tureckiego w latach 1633–1634*, [in:] *Hortus bellicus. Studia z dziejów wojskowości nowożytnej. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Mirosławowi Nagielskiemu*, eds. K. Bobiatyński, P. Gawron, K. Kossarzecki et al., Neriton, Warsaw 2016. The Holy See's perspective has been studied by Paweł Duda: P. Duda, "*Jego Świątobliwość uznaje, że lepiej będzie kontynuować wojnę, tym bardziej kiedy jest nadzieja na zwycięstwo*". *Aktywność dyplomacji papieskiej podczas konfliktu polsko-tureckiego z lat 1633–1634*, "Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny" 2019, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 75–97.

[21] As M.H. Cevrioğlu argues in his article, the authorities in Constantinople remained undecided, and orders for the invasion were withdrawn several times. It remains unclear whether the eventual orders to abandon the war against the Commonwealth failed to arrive or were ignored by the ambitious Abaza Pasha; see M.H. Cevrioğlu, *Sultan Murad IV'S Polish Campaign (1634)*, "Acta Poloniae Historica" 2020, vol. 122, pp. 212–215.

by Crimean forces[22]. Thus, while effectively fighting on two fronts, the Commonwealth managed to turn some of one potential enemy's forces against another.

This significant diplomatic success on the eastern front rested, however, on hard cash rather than political sentiment, quickly exposing the structural weaknesses of the Commonwealth's finances. Mehmed Shah Agha explicitly made further action conditional on the regular delivery of "gifts", threatening in his correspondence to make immediate peace with Muscovy and demanding the release of Islam Giray, who was being held in Poland[23]. Meanwhile, the state treasury was in crisis – its resources had been largely exhausted by the heavy financial demands of the Smolensk War[24]. The situation became critical in the winter of 1633–1634[25]. The Polish-Lithuanian state benefited from a temporary deterioration in Crimean-Ottoman relations, linked to Constantinople's involvement in the east[26], but Koniecpolski, well aware of frontier realities, warned Władysław IV in a letter dated 9 December 1633 that the unpaid Tatars might switch sides and invade the Commonwealth at any moment[27].

With Crown Court Treasurer Jerzy Ossoliński unable to raise the necessary funds quickly, the king authorised the hetman to take out

22 The Budjak and Dobrujan Hordes took part in the fighting, although Kantemir himself avoided participating; see L. Podhorodecki, *Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski*, Bellona, Warsaw 2011, p. 218; Ł. Pabich, *Wojna polsko-turecka*…, op. cit., p. 143.

23 Stanisław Koniecpolski to Mehmed Shah Agha, c. May–June 1633, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 100, pp. 200–201.

24 For more on public finances during the Smolensk War, see A. Filipczak-Kocur, *Skarbowość Rzeczypospolitej 1587–1648. Projekty – Ustawy – Realizacja*, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warsaw 2023, pp. 196–212.

25 The delay in delivering the gifts and the detention of an envoy even prompted the khan to promise support to Michael Romanov in his struggle against Władysław IV. Fortunately for the Commonwealth, the crisis was quickly resolved through a diplomatic mission undertaken by Sulejman Rubanow, an interpreter in the Crown Chancery. D. Kołodziejczyk, op. cit., p. 143; Ł. Pabich, *Wojna polsko-turecka*…, op. cit., p. 129.

26 Ł. Pabich, *Wojna polsko-turecka*…, op. cit., p. 140.

27 Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV, Brody, 9 December 1633, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 92, pp. 193–194.

a private loan of 10,000 thalers to pay the allies, promising subsequent reimbursement "from our privy purse"[28].

This episode vividly illustrates the realities of government at the time: given the inadequacy of central fiscal institutions and the cumbersome workings of the Sejm, it was Stanisław Koniecpolski's personal authority and private credit[29], rather than the state apparatus, that guaranteed the maintenance of strategic alliances and the security of the Commonwealth's borders. The hetman's standing is further confirmed by the fact that key correspondence from Muslim dignitaries was addressed directly to Koniecpolski, who had become one of the principal decision-makers in matters concerning the southeast. In overseeing the southern front, the hetman demonstrated not only military talent but also considerable skill in coordinating a network of informants along the frontier.

The image of the hetman as a selfless statesman guided solely by an idealised conception of the state's interests nevertheless requires some qualification. Koniecpolski's pragmatism, his determination to stabilise the frontier and his willingness to finance eastern policy through credit also had a strong economic rationale. Koniecpolski was one of the most powerful magnates in Ukraine. His landed estates, centred on Brody, lay immediately behind a potential theatre of war[30]. Every successful Tatar raid, disruption of trade routes or Cossack revolt meant the devastation of his estates, the flight of his subjects and a drastic fall in revenue. For him, therefore, restraining the Horde through diplomacy and later ruthlessly pacifying Zaporozhia were not only ways of implementing royal policy but also rational measures to protect his extensive Ukrainian estates. Indeed, the blurring of the boundary between the Commonwealth's public interest and a family's private interests was an inherent feature of the way the magnate elite operated at the time.

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[28] Władysław IV to Stanisław Koniecpolski, camp beyond Smolensk at Bohdanowa Okolica, 28–29 January 1634, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 104, pp. 204–205.

[29] In treaty documents ('ahdnameler), Khan Djanibek Giray refers to the "hetman of Bar", namely S. Koniecpolski; see. *The 'ahdname sent by Khan Djanibek Giray to the Polish king; The 'ahdname sent by Khan Djanibek Giray to King Vladislaus IV,* [in:] D. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*…, op. cit., no. 49, pp. 885–893; no. 50, pp. 895–904.

[30] L. Podhorodecki, *Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski*…, op. cit., pp. 257–294.

This same pragmatism is evident in both the form and the content of Koniecpolski's correspondence. Letters emphasising his own role in maintaining frontier security were often carefully orchestrated attempts to put pressure on the court: "If [the enemy – RRM] persists in his advance, he will not find us as unprepared as he had hoped. The Chamberlain of Lwów has not yet received adequate funds from Your Majesty's treasury, and it would serve the interests of Your Majesty and the Commonwealth for him to set out on this journey without delay.[31]" In this passage, the hetman affirms his readiness, indicates that he knows what Abaza Pasha had expected and – presenting himself as a petitioner – stresses that he is acting in the Commonwealth's interests.

The ability to buy time soon proved invaluable to the hetman, as the end of the conflict with Muscovy opened a new chapter in relations to the south, dominated by shifts in the balance of power in the Middle East.

The impact of the Ottoman-Persian conflict on frontier stability (1635–1637)

The end of the Smolensk War and the signing of the Treaty of Polyanovka in 1634 formally brought to a close the period of direct military cooperation between the Commonwealth and the Tatars against Muscovy. This did not, however, mean an end to diplomatic contacts. The correspondence from 1635–1637 indicates that a certain *status quo* was maintained, made possible by international developments in the Middle East that favoured the Commonwealth.

The escalation of the Ottoman-Persian conflict became a key factor in stabilising the Commonwealth's southern flank. It forced the Sublime Porte to redeploy forces from Europe to Asia, a development immediately reflected in the reports reaching Hetman Koniecpolski. In April 1635, Inayet Giray[32] wrote to the hetman, assuring him of his wish to maintain friendly relations. The letter conveyed information

[31] Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV, camp near Kotuzany, 17 September 1633, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 47, p. 143.

[32] The manuscript, itself a translation, gives the name "Fety", but a note on the first leaf questions this identification: "Inayet G. was at the time." This was most likely a simple error; cf. Central Archives of Historical Records, Warsaw Crown Archive, ref. 1/3/0/32/63, folder 10, no. 468.

of fundamental strategic importance: Sultan Murad IV (1623–1640) had ordered Kantemir, leader of the Budjak Horde, to march with his troops to war against Persia[33].

This was highly welcome news for the Commonwealth. First, it temporarily neutralised the threat posed by the Budjak Horde, whose plundering raids had been the principal source of instability along the Ukrainian frontier. Second, it confirmed to the hetman that the Ottoman Empire was concentrating its military strength on the eastern front, assuring the Commonwealth that Turkey would remain passive towards developments on its south-eastern borders[34].

As an experienced strategist, Stanisław Koniecpolski fully understood that the Porte's involvement in the conflict with the Safavids gave the Commonwealth much-needed time to reorganise its army and ease tensions in Zaporozhia.

The rapprochement with the Khanate during the Smolensk War had also left a lasting legacy. Despite the conclusion of peace with Muscovy on the Polyanovka River, Tatar operations had acquired too much momentum to cease immediately. Driven by the desire for plunder and captives to enslave, independent Tatar raids into Muscovite territory continued until 1637[35]. From Warsaw's perspective, this was a highly favourable situation – its eastern neighbour remained under attack, while the Commonwealth's southern frontier enjoyed relative peace, secured by the hetman's diplomacy and a favourable balance of power in Constantinople.

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33 Fetih Giray to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Bender, delivered in Aleksandrów, 28 April 1635, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego…*, op. cit., no. 165, p. 278.

34 Ottoman offensives in Mesopotamia sought to restore the regional balance of power. This balance had been upset in 1623 when, during a dynastic crisis, the Ottoman garrison in Baghdad defected to the Shiite Safavids. The loss of Baghdad – crucial to Ottoman prestige and trade in the Persian Gulf – prompted Sultan Murad IV to make its recapture his highest priority. The concentration of forces on this front was facilitated by the fact that Europe was embroiled in its own internal wars between 1618 and 1648. R. Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare 1500–1700*, Taylor & Francis, Birmingham 1999, p. 4.

35 L. Podhorodecki, *Chanat Krymski i jego…*, op. cit., pp. 156–157.

The dynastic crisis in Crimea and the question of the Budjak refugees (1637)

The fragile stability along the frontier, sustained by the Porte's involvement in the east, collapsed abruptly in 1637. That year brought a profound internal crisis in the Crimean Khanate, confronting Polish diplomacy with a complex strategic dilemma that could, in theory, alter the regional balance of power. These developments originated in a Tatar civil war: Khan Inayet Giray (1635–1637) sought to eliminate his rival, Constantinople's protégé Kantemir, leader of the Budjak Horde, once and for all[36]. Signs of the impending crisis had reached the Commonwealth well in advance. As early as July 1636, Hetman Koniecpolski reported the substance of a Tatar embassy to Zbigniew Oleśnicki, writing "of the khan, who also sent his envoy to me, offering to place himself and all the hordes under His Majesty's protection and promising obedience and loyalty…"[37].

Subsequent letters, sent directly by Inayet[38] and his brother Husam[39], reiterated their desperate appeal for military reinforcements. In return, the Tatars offered a lasting alliance and expressed their willingness to serve as Poland's "bulwark" (*antemurale*) against the Ottoman Empire[40]. The Commonwealth was thus presented with a unique opportunity to extend its influence to Crimea.

The timing, however, proved particularly unfortunate for the Polish-Lithuanian state. The Commonwealth was paralysed internally by the outbreak of Pavlo Pavliuk's[41] Cossack uprising, while the fighting capacity of the Crown army under Field Hetman Mikołaj Potocki was further hampered by mutinous sentiment among its

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36 B. Baranowski, op. cit., pp. 54–55.

37 Stanisław Koniecpolski to Zbigniew Oleśnicki, 4 July 1636, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego…*, op. cit., no. 183, pp. 298–299.

38 Inayet Giray to Stanisław Koniecpolski, at the crossing at Mayak, c. 1 May 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego…*, op. cit., no. 234, pp. 356–357.

39 Husam Giray to Stanisław Koniecpolski, by Lake Betny, c. late April–early May 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego…*, op. cit., no. 233, pp. 355–356.

40 Stanisław Koniecpolski to the nobility assembled at the sejmiks on 9 December 1636, Bar, 18 October 1636, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława…*, op. cit., no. 219, pp. 338–343.

41 W. Serczyk, *Na dalekiej Ukrainie. Dzieje kozaczyzny do 1648 roku*, Kraków 1984, pp. 331–336.

unpaid companies. According to one report, soldiers frustrated by the lack of pay were "going from regiment to regiment with written messages, urging the troops to form a confederation"[42]. Although the hetman managed to avert the immediate crisis and lead his troops into battle, the Crown forces' involvement in suppressing the uprising, including at the Battle of Kumeiky[43], had disastrous consequences for eastern diplomacy – it prevented the Commonwealth from taking decisions at the most critical point in the political upheaval in Crimea[44].

Before the slow-moving machinery of the Sejm could address the Crimean offer, the tide of events on the steppe had turned. Khan Inayet Giray, at odds with the Sublime Porte over its support for Kantemir, had renounced his allegiance to the padishah[45], but by the summer of 1637, armed intervention by Ottoman forces had decided the civil war.

Inayet was defeated, and the Turks installed the pro-Ottoman Bahadir Giray (1637–1641) on the throne in Bakhchisaray. As a result, the deposed Inayet's allies – who had hitherto also been enemies of the Polish-Lithuanian state, namely the Budjak hordes led by Orak Mirza, Shalmash Mirza and Kantemir's sons – were forced to flee[46]. The entire Horde, numbering tens of thousands of people, entered the Commonwealth's territory, pleading for asylum and invoking the precedent of cooperation during the Smolensk War[47]. In an urgent letter to Koniecpolski, they declared: "Thus, with all our wives,

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42 N.N. to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Bila Tserkva, 2 December 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 307, pp. 440–442.

43 The tactical aspects of the battle have been analysed by Władysław Tomkiewicz; see W. Tomkiewicz, *Bitwa pod Kumejkami (16 XII 1637)*, "Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy" 1936, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 239–261.

44 S. Koniecpolski understood that no stable policy towards the Khanate would be possible without the thorough pacification of Zaporozhia, ultimately formalised by the Ordinance of 1638 and the rebuilding of Kodak. See A. Czołowski, Kudak. *Przyczyny do założenia i upadku twierdzy*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1926, vol. 40, p. 175; *Ordynacja woyska Zaporowskiego Regestrowego, w służbie Rzpltey będącego*, [in:] *Volumina Legum*, vol. 3, ed. J. Ohryzko, St Petersburg 1859, p. 440.

45 L. Podhorodecki, *Chanat Krymski i jego*…, op. cit., pp. 158–159.

46 Ibidem, pp. 159–160.

47 Malinowski to Stanisław Koniecpolski, [probably July 1637], [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 272, p. 395.

children and possessions, we have moved into your realms, laying our heads at the feet of Your Lordship and His Excellency Potocki, Field Hetman and Your Lordship's brother[48]", thereby seeking to emphasise the gravity of their appeal to the hetman.

Koniecpolski now faced a critical situation. On the one hand, a powerful Turkish army under Kenan Pasha had reached the frontier, threatening immediate invasion unless the refugees were handed over. On the other, the hetman's forces remained tied down in fighting against the Cossacks[49]. The correspondence from the autumn of 1637 nevertheless reveals Stanisław Koniecpolski's operational skill: despite serious illness, he acted as a coordinator of eastern policy, conducting a complex diplomatic manoeuvre to buy time.

Despite his initial scepticism about admitting "age-old enemies" (capitales hostes of Your Majesty's realms)[50], the hetman quickly recognised the presence of the Budjak Horde as a strategic asset. In a letter to Tomasz Zamoyski dated 24 August, he set out a pragmatic position: "It is better to turn these arms of theirs, which might harm us, against the Turks themselves.[51]" His plan was to direct the refugees towards the Dnieper, serving three purposes: blocking the crossing against any pursuit by the Crimean khan's troops, enabling the rebels to conduct diversionary operations in Crimea itself, and moving the turmoil away from his own estates in Ukraine.

In these actions, the hetman displayed considerable operational autonomy, independently directing the Tatars' movements ("I therefore sent word to them that they should (…) turn towards the Dnieper"). On the strategic question of formally accepting them as subjects, however, he strictly observed constitutional procedures, invoking the need to obtain the consent of the state's political elite ("ex senatus consulto"). This stance was intended to ensure "that the

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48 The Budjak mirzas to Stanisław Koniecpolski, delivered in Bar on 19 August 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 278, pp. 401–402.

49 Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV, Bar, 24 August 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 279, pp. 402–404.

50 Ibidem.

51 Stanisław Koniecpolski to Tomasz Zamoyski, Bar, 24 August 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 280, pp. 404–405.

Turks, kept in suspense (…) would not be so quick to advance on Your Majesty's realms"[52].

Drawing on precise intelligence reports from Akkerman and Ochakov, the hetman accurately assessed the risks. He concluded that, despite the concentration of forces under Mehmed and Kenan Pashas, a full-scale invasion in the autumn of 1637 was unlikely. In a letter dated 1 October, he identified the factors paralysing the Turks: the lateness of the season, their involvement in the conflict over Azov[53], and a logistical breakdown – a shortage of horse fodder caused by the burning of grasslands and crop failure in Moldavia[54]. This cool calculation allowed him to pursue a risky course without fear of immediate Ottoman retaliation.

When the plan to secure the lasting allegiance of the entire Budjak Horde finally collapsed, and some mirzas (including Ali Bey), submitted once more to the khan under Turkish pressure[55], Koniecpolski refrained from aggression, allowing the remaining mirzas (Orak and Shalmash), to leave without a fight. In his report to the king, he emphasised that he had sent them on their way "with their goodwill towards Your Majesty wholly intact"[56], an investment in future relations and an attempt to preserve channels of influence over Tatar policy.

An assessment

An analysis of Stanisław Koniecpolski's correspondence from 1632–1637 provides firm grounds for rejecting a one-dimensional view of Polish-Tatar relations based exclusively on the ideology of the "bulwark of Christendom" and perpetual armed conflict. Against the backdrop of the threat from Muscovy and instability in

[52] Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV, Bar, 24 August 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 279, pp. 402–404.

[53] Ü. Karadeniz, A. Bizbirlik, *Azak Kalesi'nin İşgali ve İstirdadı (1637–1642)*. "Journal of Gazi Academic View" 2020, vol. 14, no. 27, pp. 221–241.

[54] Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV, Bar, 1 October 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 289, pp. 418–421.

[55] Ibidem, pp. 418–421; Mirzas Orak and Shalmash to Stanisław Koniecpolski, between 3 and 28 October 1637, *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 295, p. 425; Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV, Bar, 28 October 1637, [in:] *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*…, op. cit., no. 296, pp. 425–427.

[56] Stanisław Koniecpolski to Władysław IV…, op. cit.

Zaporozhia, relations with the Crimean Khanate emerge as a complex interplay of interests in which the Horde could assume the role of a pragmatic diplomatic partner.

The hetman's letters nevertheless make it abundantly clear that the burden of conducting these relations fell largely on one man rather than on the Commonwealth's central institutions. Stanisław Koniecpolski was not merely carrying out the wishes of the royal court. By controlling his own intelligence network, initiating negotiations with the mirzas and guaranteeing payments to allies from his private purse, the hetman effectively privatised eastern policy along the southern frontier. His actions combined pragmatism – dictated by the interests of the state and the need to protect his own vast Ukrainian estates – with improvisation born of necessity. Through his informal initiatives, Hetman Koniecpolski repeatedly concealed the structural failings of the Polish-Lithuanian state in decision-making and public finance.

The Crimean crisis of 1637 and the hetman's handling of the flight of the Budjak Horde demonstrated his tactical skill as a commander, but also exposed the state's strategic weakness. The model of eastern policy pursued in the thirties of the seventeenth century, based on expedient balancing, a magnate's personal authority and the concealment of financial shortfalls through skilful diplomacy, made it possible to maintain temporary stability in the south-eastern borderlands. The events of the following decade, however, would brutally expose the limits of this arrangement, demonstrating that improvisation – even in the capable hands of a hetman – could not replace an effective system of government in the long term.

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