

The Society of Prince Francis II Rákóczi

European Princes, Statesmen, Diplomats, Military Leaders, and Hungary at the Beginning of the 18th Century

International Conference, Budapest, 8–9 October 2026

After the Great Turkish War (1683–1699), almost the entire territory of the Kingdom of Hungary was liberated from Ottoman rule thanks to broad European political, diplomatic, and military cooperation. At the same time, the Habsburg Monarchy successfully consolidated its power in Central Europe, while its Spanish branch stood on the brink of collapse. The turn of the 17th and 18th centuries marked the beginning of a new era in Europe. Beyond the centuries-old rivalry between the French Monarchy and the Habsburg Empire, the emergence of new powers—such as England (from 1707 Great Britain), Russia, and Prussia—transformed the previously bipolar world into a more complex reality within the great European power game. The War of the Spanish Succession (1700–1714) and the Great Northern War (1700–1721) further intensified the fragmentation of the European political landscape. Countries caught in the crossfire of great-power interests, especially smaller states, and their rulers also struggled to find their place in the “society of princes.”

In 2026, we commemorate the 350th anniversary of the birth of Francis II Rákóczi (1676–1735), which offers an excellent opportunity to examine the major issues of European politics and the role of historical actors in shaping events through the turbulent career of the last Prince of Transylvania.

Over the past centuries, a vast body of literature has been produced on the life of Francis II Rákóczi, the war of independence he led, and the broader Rákóczi era, while assessments of the historical events have continually evolved. Since the 19th century, nearly every historical period has developed its own image of Rákóczi, strongly influenced by major contemporary political and global historical developments. It is therefore no surprise that the “Most Serene Prince” has become one of the most popular national heroes in Hungarian history, whose memory is preserved in nearly every Hungarian settlement by a street, square, or institution. Francis II Rákóczi is not only a beloved figure in Hungarian history; he enjoys similar popularity in several European countries, such as Poland and France. Recent research into the Rákóczi War of Independence and the subsequent history of exile has yielded important results in many fields, particularly in diplomatic history, social history, and literary and cultural history.

Based on the latest research in this field, we propose to examine the specific characteristics of this period through concrete case studies presented by international experts. On this basis, four main lines of inquiry emerge:

1) Questions of the European balance of power.

This topic seeks to examine complex international issues that influenced the European balance of power and diplomatic relations. Who were the main political actors? How did they manage to seize and maintain power? What role did small states and uprisings play in relations among the great powers? How were these events represented in contemporary political publicity and propaganda in different countries? What were the specific characteristics of Prince Rákóczi's diplomatic efforts toward the great powers? To what extent did he pursue diplomatic activity with foreign powers during his exile?

2) Questions of war and peace.

The specific features of the war in Hungary deserve special attention, particularly as other military conflicts (e.g., the War of the Spanish Succession and the Great Northern War) and other political antagonisms (e.g., between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans) were taking place simultaneously and had possible impact on events in Hungary. What were the defining characteristics of the Hungarian war in the early 18th century? To what extent can we speak of asymmetric warfare in the Hungarian context? What roles did the various parties play on different fronts, both in military operations and in negotiations? How should the significance of peace negotiations and the role of foreign mediators be assessed? What was the local impact of the war, and how was it perceived internationally?

3) Parallel biographies.

The study of this period of European history reveals major turning points that affected the reigns of many princes. Who were the most outstanding historical figures in this age of change? Were there life paths similar to that of Francis II Rákóczi (e.g., James II Stuart, Stanisław Leszczyński, Ivan Mazepa, Dimitrie Cantemir, Charles XII of Sweden, etc.)? To what extent can we speak of a category of exiled princes in this period? What role did emigration play in the lives of these rulers? How were they viewed by public opinion in the centuries that followed?

4) Cultural and intercultural aspects of the princes' personal experiences.

The period under study is particularly rich in personal accounts (diaries, memoirs, correspondence, ego-documents, etc.). New research on Prince Rákóczi's autobiographical writings (Memoirs and Confessions) allows us to raise questions about the literary and cultural aspects of his works. What were their main sources and possible European models? What modes of writing were employed (choice of language, revisions, corrections, etc.), and who were the first readers of these works? What place do they occupy in Hungarian and European literary memory?

The conference will be held in Budapest on 8–9 October 2026.

Accommodation and travel expenses for international participants will be covered by the organizers, subject to availability.

The languages of the conference are French and English.

The organizers plan to publish the conference papers.

Paper proposals (provisional title + abstract of no more than 300 words) should be submitted electronically by 10 February 2026 to the following addresses:

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