Chocim (Khotyn) 1621
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Poland and Turkey before the war broke out ............................................................... 2
  a) A short characteristics of the opponents .............................................................. 2
  b) Polish – Turkish relations before the break out of the war and the genesis of the conflict ... 2
The opponents’ forces .................................................................................................. 5
  Turkey ....................................................................................................................... 5
  Poland ...................................................................................................................... 8
The battlefield and the enemies’ positions ................................................................. 11
The battle .................................................................................................................... 14
After the battle .......................................................................................................... 24
Victory or disaster? ................................................................................................. 26
Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Ottoman Empire before the war broke out

a) A short characteristics of the opponents

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (map 1)

Territory – 1.1 mln km²
Population – aprox. 10 mln
Political system – a parliamentary monarchy, where the head of state was Sigismund III Vasa (born in 1566 AD; since 1587 the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania)

The Ottoman Empire

Territory – aprox. 6 mln km²
Population – aprox. 25 mln
Political system – an absolute monarchy, where the head of state was the Sultan Osman II (born in 1603 AD; since 1618 the Sultan)

Both countries were very powerful from the military point of view. Turkey, traditionally had been seen as a great empire, although at that time there were symptoms of its crisis.

In her east, P-L-C had just finished the war with Russia (1609-1618 AD), taking some 75 000 km² territory with its most important regional fortress of Smolensk. The title of Tsar of Russia remained in the Polish Prince’s (Władysław Vasa) hands as well.

In the west in 1619 AD the Polish interference in the 30 Years War (the Lisowczyks excursion and subsequent defeat of the Hungarian army in the battle of Humienne) forced these Hungarian insurgents to pack up their siege of Vienna. In their northern conflict the Lithuanians and the Poles had been fighting the Swedes efficiently.

A chain of victorious battles with more numerous enemies, representing both eastern and western military arts showed that the Polish and Lithuanian armies definitely led in the whole middle, eastern and northern regions of Europe.

b) Polish – Turkish relations before the break out of the war and the genesis of the conflict

Poland and Turkey were trying to be on good relations for the whole 16th c. and the beginning of the 17th c. Turkey did not see Poland as its main enemy. It preferred not to involve itself into a war with the next country as it was busy with the wars with Persia (in Asia) and in Europe with the Habsburgs. It was similar with Poland – in the east it was involved in wars with
Russia and at the beginning of the 17th c. also in a war in the north (with the Swedes). So Poland wanted to avoid the third front. In the 16th c. Poland and Turkey made and signed treaties of friendship. These were also repeated in the beginning of 17th c. However, there were fretful issues between the two countries, which finally led to a war.

The first source of conflict was the issue of mutual plundering organized and conducted by both subjects of the Turkish Sultan and the Polish King (map 2).

On one hand, the Tatars reached, with their cavalry raids, several hundreds kilometers inside the Commonwealth territories to plunder and capture slaves - jassir. Those incursions were very harmful to the south-eastern Polish economy and they hampered the colonization of wilder and depopulated Ukrainian lands. On the other hand, navy excursions of the Cossacks scared the Sultan’s subjects all over the Black Sea coasts. It was very harmful to the Ottoman Empire prestige in particularly because they reached into the close neighbourhood of the very Turkish capital and plundered it.

Several thousand or over several tens of thousands of people took part in the Tartar raids on P-L-C and the Cossacks ones to Ottoman Empire. Of course both countries prevented those excursions. They sent Polish and Turkish legations to each other. Both of them, however, blamed their “insubordinated” subjects and officially washed their hands of the issue, assuring the neighbour of their good will and that they would do anything to prevent them from the invading their subjects.

The second source of the conflict was the issue of Moldavia. The territory of that country, formally depending on Turkey, was for Poland a buffer zone, which was to protect southern Crown from the direct danger from the Ottoman Empire. For a long time there was an agreement between Poland and Turkey, on behalf of which a sultan gave a title of ‘hospodar’ of Moldavia (that is, a ruler of Moldavia) to a candidate pointed out by the Polish king. The whole time of that agreement though, Poland and Turkey were trying to deprive the respective neighbour of their influence from that country and take a full control of it.

The last problem provoking the breach of relationship between Turkey and Poland was both countries’ attitude towards the Hapsburgs. Turkey, a traditional enemy of Austrian emperor, was observing with growing anxiety the progress of tightening of the Polish-Austrian alignment.

Within a few years preluding the outbreak of the war, in both pettish areas a visible aggravation of Polish activity occurred. Cossacks sea escapades achieved unbelievable scale. The Cossacks’ flotillas were destroying Turkish fleets, plundering Turkish coastal towns and cities and in 1620 they attacked the very vicinity of the capital, Istanbul, again. The Polish interference in the Thirty Years’ War and the Polish army escapades to Moldavia were also perceived inconveniently. The increase of tension led to Turkish military demonstrations both in 1617 and 1618. Polish and Turkish armies faced each other. More importantly combats took place as well, but at that time the treaties and good will prevented the demonstrations from turning into the open and full scale war.
In 1620 there occurred the next Polish escapade to Moldavia, which ended as the major military disaster in the history of the 17th century Poland. Some 3000-3100 soldiers came back from Moldavia, which is about 30% of all the army that had gone on this campaign. As the effect of this ill-fated escapade, a lot of quarter army was destroyed; the Grand Crown Hetman was killed and the Field Crown Hetman was taken in the Turkish captivity. In Turkey, those events were interpreted as a sign of Polish weakness. Despite that, a war with P-L-C was not very popular among the Turkish society. The French ambassador received information from the Turkish capital that in order to avoid the outbreak of the war, the wealthy Turkish elites were ready to pay for all the military costs incurred and to compensate for the destruction that Cossacks had already caused. Even vizier Ali pasha dissuaded Sultan from attack Poland. But young Osman II, dreaming of equal military fame and achievements as Suleiman the Great, preferred to listen these advisers, who encouraged him to prepare for war.

On the other hand, Polish and Lithuanian society, tired of 20 years of constant wars in all other fronts, did not show even little enthusiasm for the war with Turkey too. The king, hetman and Cossacks were blamed for provoking the war. Diplomatic action which occurred after the Moldavian escapade, did not bring any desirable effect. Turkey was preparing herself for the war with P-L-C with a great verve and energy.
The opponents’ forces

Ottoman Empire

For a long period of time, the amount of the Turkish army of Chocim had been overestimated. Turkish 20th cent. historians were writing about 200 000 Turks (excluding the Tatars). Polish, Ukrainian and Russian 20th cent. historians, basing on Teofil Szemberg’s report, spoke of 160 000 Ottoman soldiers and 60 000 Tatars. Polish diaries, written by the people who took part in the battle, very often spoke of 300 000 Turks and 100 000 Tatars, quoting the data coming from Turkey. In turn, fugitives from the Turkish camp estimated 30 000 Sipahis, 20 000 janissary soldiers and 100 000 populace. 60 000 Tatars were supposed to join.

How large was the Turkish army of Chocim? Paradoxically, each of the sources gave the right number, but not of the Turkish army. An explanation of that paradox was found in “The Diary of the Turkish War in Wallachia” by Jan Ostroróg. In the beginning of his diary he says, as many Polish participants of that campaign, that:

“Turkish Emperor came with 300 000 soldiers, apart from Tatars [...].”

In the end of his diary he specifies that number:

“[…] including the Tatars, there were more than 400 000 Turkish soldiers.”

Along with Żeleński, who was a legate to the Turks, it said that:

“That [Żeleński] hearing and seeing the Turks and Tatars, claimed that there were over 150 000 Turks and over 60 000 Tatars. [...] And the reason for that small number was that he counted them in our, Polish way, which differs from the Turkish one, because in the Turkish army they count each living creature separately, so when a knight is sitting on his horse and has got another horse, a mule or a camel, then it is all counted separately and that is why there was such a great number of everything [...].”

That method of counting the number of army was also proved by Krzysztof Zbaraski who after that war was a legate to Turkey and left some interesting points about Turkish military frame from that times. What is more interesting, the Turks did not use that method to count their losses, they used it just to count the amount of their army. Ostroróg comments a further argument:

“[…] that’s why when there are 10 000 Polish soldiers, there’ll be more soldiers than counting 20 000 or even 30 000 of Turks.”
It is worth noticing, what that method of counting the army served for. It would be most logical to consider it as a psychological effect that they wanted to achieve. When the Turks went on their enemy they sent the rumour about their huge number of the army. It must have had a paralysing effect on their enemy’s soldiers and very motivating on their own soldiers. In the times, when the biggest European field armies counted much less than 100 000 soldiers, 400 000 Turks and Tatars must have shocked. Obviously there is one more possibility regarding the Turkish soldiers number’ counting. Perhaps when counting the army they summed up both animals and people together for the purpose of better logistics.

Knowing the Turkish specific way of counting the army, we can now interpret the sources correctly. It appears that all of them match with each other. When the diarists write about 300 000 army, quoting the Turkish data, it was in the reality the number of all the people and animals in the Turkish army. When they write about 150 000 – 160 000 army, it was just the number of people in the Turkish army. It should be also underlined that the number of soldiers was not equal with the number of all the people in the camp. Apart from the soldiers, in every army then there were also crowds of servants. That is why, the number of the Turkish soldiers needs to be reduced. How much?

At present, Polish historians approach that Turkish soldiers counting with different data than we did above. Leszek Podhorodecki’s counting is shown underneath.

Basing on the relation of a captured Turk and the relation of Naima, L. Podhorodecki quantifies and values Turkish provinces, which were sending their soldiers to the war. The amount of the army from those provinces L. Podhorodecki describes on the data established by Paul Rycaut, who had the access to the Turkish archives in the 60s of the 17th c. The second source for the knowledge of that amount of forces of the individual provinces is “The description of the Turkish monarchy in the times of Ahmed I” by Ayn Ali.

„The description of the monarchy…“ gives the news which are a few years earlier than the time of Chocim battle which we are interested in. The data from both of the sources are quite compatible, so we can accept it also for the year 1621. On that base, L.P. claims that to the battle of Chocim went about:

- 14 000 soldiers from Anatolia under beylerbey Hassan command
- 18 000 soldiers from Rumelia under beylerbey Jusuf pasha command
- 2 000 soldiers from Aleppo under Tayyar bey command
- 1 400 soldiers from Diyarbekir under Dilawer pasha command
- 5 000-6 000 soldiers from Bosnia under Husein pasha command
- over 1 000 soldiers from Tripoli
- 6 000 soldiers from Sivas
- 4 000 soldiers from Karaman
- 1 000 soldiers from Maraş under Abazy pasha command
- 2 500 soldiers from Kaffa (Feodosiya)
- 1 000 volunteers from Dobruja
- 2 000-3 000 soldiers from Rakka (Ar-Raqqah)
- back up from 5 000 nomads and guards of Turkish dignitaries
- 4 000 soldiers from Buda (Budin) under Qaraqash Mehmed pasha command (they arrived during the Chocim battle)

It is about 68 000 soldiers all together. That number includes the fact that not all the vassals from individual provinces could go to war (because of diseases and empty vacancies). A theoretical number should have been a few percents higher\(^1\). What needs to be explained here is that armies from those provinces were in fact a common levy of the vassals who were obliged to serve in the army.

The number 68 000 should be lowered because of the marching losses and the desertion. Leszek Podhorodecki estimates that about 50 000-55 000 soldiers could have managed to get to Chocim from those provinces.

Apart from the common levy from the individual lands, the Turks had also regular soldier regiments – kapikulu ortas. Among them there were janissaries and sipahis. The number of janissaries the sultan set off with was estimated by Leszek Podhorodecki to 18 000 (by De Cesy and Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki). However, he says that only about 12 000 janissaries managed to get to Chocim because of marching losses and desertion. Ottoman sources confirm huge scale of desertion among janissaries. According to Turkish historian Kadir Kasalak:

“The Janissaries and Timarli Sipahi received an order to finish their preparations as soon as possible and to get together on 'the fields of Dawut Pasha' near to Istambul. [...] According to the orders the Janissaries were leaving their homes saying 'that they were going to Istambul', but after spending a few days near Istambul, they returned home claiming that 'we were released from the war' - it was a certain escape from the campaign.”

By the end of August the Sultan came across some gossips that even half of the Janissaries were missing. He ordered a muster, which:

“convinced [the Sultan] that the gossips were right, and the Janissaries commanders were reprimanded.” (Naima efendi)

Sipahis of the sultan guard were leaving the capital their number was 12 000 soldiers, but only 8 000 managed to get to Chocim. Leszek Podhorodecki adds to those armies also the attendance of the Turkish artillery who numbered several hundred of people and Moldavian army under

\(^1\) Actually these numbers might be even 1 / 3 higher. Podhorodecki doesn't seem to notice Rycaut's point: “but this is calculated at the lowest rate, they may very well be reckoned to be one third more”.

7
Stefan Tomşa command (5 000 soldiers) and Wallachian army under Radu Mihnea command
(according to Leszek Podhorodecki – 7000 soldiers; according to Kadir Kasalak – 6 000 soldiers).

All together 110 000 Turks were to set off to Chocim, but only 82 000 – 87 000 managed
to get there because of the marching losses. So the rest (some 70 000 – 80 000 people) were
servants.

Apart from the Turkish army, there is a separate position for the Tatar army. As usually
in such cases, Polish reports overestimate their number and give the number of 60 000 to 100
000. But the khan informed the Sultan, that he had 'only' 50 000 men. It is certainly the number
of Tartar warriors and their (worse armed) servants.

Joined forces of the Ottoman Empire numbered over 100 000 soldiers and warriors (some
200 000 armed men) in the battle of Chocim. Those armies brought with them 62 cannons,
including 15 heavy siege cannons.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Let’s see the Polish and Lithuanian armies now, which were mobilized to that war. The
armies consisted of a few components:

1. enlisted armies
2. the Cossacks
3. private armies of the magnates and the common levy

As far as enlisted armies are concerned, the Commonwealth mobilized about 30 000 paid soldiers
in the second half of 1621. Not all of them fought in the battle of Chocim. From the given number,
about 1 670 portions (the number is given for first days of September, 1621) stayed in Lithuania
and Livonia to fight off Gustav Adolf who, using P-L-C involvement in the south, attacked the
Commonwealth from the north with 18 000 soldiers. The next 3 000 portions cast castles, cities
and towns in the south of Poland. In the battle of Chocim there were:

- 53 units of hussars (8520 portions all together)
- 66 units of Polish light cavalry (so called cossacks) and lisowczyks (8450 portions)
- 10 units of reiters (2160 portions)
- 5 regiments of German infantry (6450 portions)
- 29 units of Polish infantry (7600 portions)

All together, the paper strength of the army was 33 180 portions.

However the paper strength of the army is not the same as the number of soldiers. The thing
which diminished the actual number of soldiers was the method of payment to the officers from
"blind portions". To count the actual number of soldiers in the unit you have to deduct 10%
(because this is the percentage devoted to the officers’ payment) from its theoretical amount
(that is, from the number of “portions” of the individual unit). That method is used with the
whole Polish and Lithuanian cavalry and the German infantry. It was different however, with the
Polish infantry (so called hayduks), where the officers were paid the other way, which meant that the number of portions of the hayduk unit was equal to the number of hayduks of that unit. So, the number of enlisted soldiers who were directed to the Chocim camp was not 33,180 but 30,622. However, we should take into consideration that not all of them reached the camp. So, from the number given here we need to deduct the marching losses (desertion, diseases, etc.). Surely, the losses were smaller from the Turkish ones, because the Polish and Lithuanian units had a shorter distance to go than the the Turkish units. The marching losses of the Polish-Lithuanian army can be estimated of about 10% of the soldiers.

Finally, in the Polish-Lithuanian camp in Chocim there were about 27,000 enlisted soldiers of the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, as it was in the Turkish army and any other European army then, that number of soldiers was increased by many armed servants, which could take part in the defence of the camp as well as the other military actions, although the servants were not included in the number of soldiers. As far as the infantry is concerned, the number of servants was minimal, but in the Polish and Lithuanian cavalry there were 2 – 3 servants to one soldier average, which means that taking into consideration the marching losses, there were 30,000 – 45,000 additional armed people who could be used in the emergency actions.

Apart from the enlisted armies, the Cossacks took part in the battle of Chocim. Cossacks were people living in south-east of Kingdom of Poland (nowadays it is the territory of Ukraine), who we cannot unequivocally include to any group. They stepped out of any social division. They were neither peasants, nobility nor citizens, although they came from any of those social groups. It is also very difficult to name their nationality, but undoubtedly, most of them were of a Ruthenian nation. It was a real national and social melting pot. The thing which joined the Cossacks was the way of living and the feeling of social individuality. They were free (in the contrary to peasants), they made their living from steppe and rapacious rendering. That element of their lives – plundering – and fighting against Tatars, created a view of “a warrior of a steppe”. The Cossacks were the subjects of the Polish king. Some of them were given a pay by Kingdom of Poland, creating so called a register army. In 1621 there were 3,000 Cossacks in the register army. But it was only a small percentage of those Cossacks who took part in the campaign of 1621. Confronting the Turkish danger, the Polish king appealed to the Cossacks to join the defence of the common fatherland. The appeal was supported by the authority of the orthodox priesthood and as a result masses of Cossacks took part in the war. Their number was over 40,000 people, but not all of them fought in Chocim. Some of them were fighting against the Turks on the sea, the others died during the Cossacks hostilities in Moldavia which preceded the battle of Chocim. Some of the Cossacks remained in the Sich (Sich – the Cossacks abode) creating their garrison, and finally some of them should be counted out on the marching losses. It is estimated that in the battle of Chocim 30,000 Cossacks were fighting, whereas the number of servants in the Cossack armies was insignificant, as the Cossacks took the servants’ responsibilities, just like in the Polish infantry.
The next component of the army mobilized in 1621 was the private armies (including the royal guard) and the 'common levy' (levy of the landholders and cities). However, those armies did not take part in the battle, but they became strategic rearguard (those armies were situated near Lviv) for the army fighting in the battle of Chocim and they protected interior of the country from the Tatar invasion. According to Leszek Podhorodecki and Jan Wimmer, there were 28 000 soldiers of private armies and the Levy all together (the data for October, 1621). The bulk of them were cavalrymen, so they had a numerous train of armed servants. Auxent – Armenian translator who accompanied Polish-Lithuanian army at Chocim – noticed in his chronicle:

“1621, in the month of September His Majesty the King Sigismund III came with 40.000 men to Lviv, to hasten to the aid of his son against the infidel. And there were twice 100.000 men with him.”

In 1621, the Commonwealth mobilized about 100 000 soldiers all together, where about 57 000 soldiers were fighting in the battle of Chocim and about 30 000 – 45 000 servants supported them. So, the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack army was twice smaller than the Turkish-Tatar army in the battle of Chocim.

Over 160 000 soldiers were fighting on both sides in the battle of Chocim (soldiers and servants – some 300 000), at that time it was truly unique number of combatants. Perhaps it is enough to say that the biggest battle of TYW engaged less than 80 000 soldiers of both sides.
The battlefield and the enemies’ positions

The battlefield was situated in the fields close to Chocim castle where the Commonwealth army laid their fortified camp out (pic. 1, map 3, panorama 3, panorama 2, panorama 1).

The Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack army camp laid out in the west on the Dniester River, and Polish territory was behind. The place itself, where the battle took place, belonged to Moldavia.

That choice of the battlefield by commanders was due to two circumstances. Crossing the boundary Dniester River and laying their camps out on the Moldavia territory, commanders showed their determination to fight. It was a kind of demonstration towards the Cossacks who were afraid that in front of the enemy, hetman Chodkiewicz and commissioners could try to make a peace agreement with the Turks, at the cost of the Cossacks (we should remember that Turkey demanded from P-L-C to stop the Cossack plundering invasions and even Cossack extermination).

Entering regular armies on the Moldavia territory was then a signal for the Cossacks that ‘we are here to fight and not to negotiate’.

The second circumstance which was taken into consideration while laying the camp out on the Moldavian side of the Dniester River was that in that way they were to fight the Turks and the Tatars on the border, which was to avoid plundering of the Polish territory.

The armies positions were protected by a scarp from the north (pic2) and by the Dniester River and a rocky slope from the
east (pic3). An access to the camp was quite easy from the south (it is were the Cossack camp was laid out) and from the west, where the Polish-Lithuanian armies strengthened their defence by building ramparts during the battle and additional earthworks protruding from the fortification line of the main camp.

The main Polish-Lithuanian camp was surrounded by a high rampart which was 7 km long, in front of which a deep trench was dug. Two gates (Chodkiewicz’s and Lubomirski’s one) were made in that rampart and they were used by the Polish-Lithuanian armies when they led their soldiers to the battle in the foreground of their camp.

The Cossacks camp was fortified a lot worse. They came to the battlefield just a day before the Turks, that was why they did not have as much time as the Poles and the Lithuanians had to build more solid fortifications. At first, the Cossack positions were protected by two lines of wagons, filled with sand and a trench.

The Commonwealth camp was soon surrounded by the arriving Turkish armies.
The Sultan occupied a special place on a high hill (panorama 1). Even the Poles, who loved wealth and splendor themselves and whose tents were admired by German mercenary soldiers, were impressed by the Sultan's tent.

Not only the tent was admired but also the animals used to transport it. There were four elephants.

The place where the Sultan's tents were pitched is worth mentioning also for other reason. The Sultan observed a battle from there, he interrogated his prisoners and they were executed there – in the presence of the Sultan and on his command. Auxent wrote:

“I saw the spot where the Emperor had been sitting and watching the events during the battle and during the attacks. This spot was on the top of a high hill and was called Horodiszczne. The infidel Tartars had captured servants as they went unsuspecting to collect wood or hay in the vicinity of the camp. They brought the servants before the Emperor to serve him for source of information and that they were well-known people. The infidel Emperor questioned the captives and made them to be interrogated and ordered their throats to be cut in his presence and the killed men to be thrown down from the high hill. It was the same case with those who had fled from the Polish camp and surrendered to the infidel, they had also been interrogated and then slayed. And if anybody had wanted to abscond from their [the Turks'] camp to the Polish camp, he had also been beheaded and thrown down the hill, just as the captives they seized. Then we
saw these killed men, whose heads had rolled far away from the hill down to the valley, and their trunks lay there at the foot of the hill like pieces of log, in 2 – 3 places. At one place there were more than a hundred [dead] men lying, at the second spot more than 300, and likewise at the third spot. So the infidel Turks excercised ruthless tyranny, they had not fed a single captive and had left none of them alive. Our Polish nation on the other hand had not killed any of those that they had captured alive, but had taken them to Poland.”

Both of the sides had built bridges over the Dniester River which was to let the Poles and the Lithuanians communicate with their own territory and the Turks - surround the Commonwealth armies completely.
The battle

The battle of Chocim lasted from September 2, 1621, when the forehead (vanguard) of the Turkish column approached Chocim, to October 9, 1621, when a beneficial peace for the Commonwealth was made.

September 2 – the forehead (vanguard) of the Turkish column approaches Chocim. The Polish-Lithuanian army comes out against them. Jan Karol Chodkiewicz (the Grand Hetman of Lithuania, and the commander-in-chief of the Polish–Lithuanian forces) tries to provoke the Turkish vanguard to fight, but they do not move. Instead of it, the Turks attack the Cossack camp which is not well-protected. The Cossacks fight them off bravely, backed up by the lisowczyks and the Polish-Lithuanian infantry. The fights stop in the evening, when the Lithuanian infantry finally ousts the Turks from the battlefield.

During that day some Tatars forded the Dniester River and went further into Poland to plunder. The Tatars secured the way from Chocim to Kamianets-Podilskyi. They also took the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep that were supposed to have been for the army of prince Władysław.

At night, September 2–3, more Turkish troops arrive. The Cossacks, the Poles and the Lithuanians use the interlude in fighting to strengthen their own earthworks.

September 3 – the Turks, at first simulating an attack on a Polish-Lithuanian camp, made the attack on the Cossack camp again. Three Turkish attacks against the Cossack camp were fought off, thanks to lisowczyks’ help and Lithuanian back up as well.

September 4 – the majority of Osman forces already had reached the battlefield. They surrounded the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack camps from three sides. To cut off food delivery from Poland for the soldiers in the besieged camps, other Tatar units ford the Dniester River and cut of the Commonwealth armies communication lines from the east. The Tatars sent their cavalry raids far into Poland. However, some units of the Polish army that had been left to defend the country would eventually take care of them.
The same day, the Turks, after serious artillery preparation (bombardment), attacked the Cossack camp with all their might and power. The Cossacks, again supported by the lisowczyks, the infantry, reitars and the volunteers from other Polish-Lithuanian banners (banners – units of Polish cavalry) repulsed four attacks, one by one. After the last Turkish assault, by the sunset, the Cossacks launched their own counterattack. It was quite effective at first. They penetrated the Osman camp but instead of routing those running away and demoralized Turks, they started plundering tents. Sultan’s soldiers took advantage of that, rallied and ousted the Cossacks from their own camp.

**September 5** – Some events which troubled the Commonwealth camp had place that day. They were:

“By the Chocim castle, in the ravine there were about 100 merchants [Moldavian], where our servants and other people were drinking, buying supplies either for money or for pledge.”

There were men, women and children among them. Those people, trusting assurances that they were safe, were attacked by the camp rabble who broadcast that it was an order of hetman Chodkiewicz. Innocent people accused of planning to burn Polish-Lithuanian camp. The real reason for attacking those people was to plunder them without punishment, because Chodkiewicz did not give any order.
In order not to leave any witness of the anarchy, the victims were brutally murdered:

“Tens were thrown from the bridge [...], women and children were not saved and even they had their arms and legs tied when thrown into the river, they did not drown quickly; they could swim anyway, so to kill them the rabble had to hit and shoot them with their muskets; the other were thrown from the high castle bridge.”

The guards were sent to catch the rabble, they captured them and hanged.

**September 5 – 6** – the Turks began to prepare themselves for a regular siege; they moved their camp and dug trenches around it. They also kept firing at Polish camp. The last units of prince Władysław contingent arrive at the camp.

**At night, September 6 – 7**, the Cossacks made a sally against the Tatars, causing lots of losses to the Tatars. The Cossacks were not repulsed until the Turkish relief force had arrived,

**September 7** – it was the battle culmination day. Untill the afternoon, the Turkish armies attacked the Cossack camp four times. Those assaults lasted five hours, including the time of shooting (artillery bombardment). All of them were repulsed by the Cossacks.
In the afternoon, the Turks changed their tactics. Seeing that the attacks on the Cossack camp did not bring any success, they decided to change the direction of the attack. So they attacked the line of junction between the Polish and the Lithuanian armies, which had not been bothered till that time. In that place, two infantry units (Życzewski’s and Śladkowski’s) were sleeping on the earthworks. Astonished infantry soldiers offered no serious opposition. Both units' commanders and about 100 soldiers died. The Turks, under Mustafa (pasha of Baghdad) command, climbed the ramparts where the battle flared up. Some of them were plundering the area.

The Sultan’s armies, however, did not taken advantage of that success. Polish cavalry counterattacked and repulsed the Turks, who having a lot of booty, did not show any interest in carrying any further fighting. Coming back to their own camp with a triumph, the Turkish soldiers informed the Sultan where the weakest point in the defence was. They decided to attack that place again the same day. It happened by the falling dusk.

The events, which took place in the dusky evening of September 7, gave rise to a legend of the hussars being the invincible cavalry. Auxent in his chronicle described this event in this way:

“Turks had put their ranks in order, [...] 15.000 men again drew up on the field and with a great force and great rapidity went straight against the gate of the Polish camp, where Field-Hetman [Stanislaw Lubomirski] was staying, as there were 2 gates on the Turkish side. At the other gate there stood the Crown-Hetman [Jan Karol Chodkiewicz]. There were stationed 3 rotas [companies] as day sentries at the gate of the Crown-Hetman, and they did not suspect anything. But seeing that the infidel went straight against the gate of the Field-Hetman [Lubomirski], the Crown-Hetman [Chodkiewicz] instantly started out on horseback against them. Then the 3 rotas having seen the great zeal of the Hetman [Chodkiewicz], did not let him go into fight. But in front castellanus of Połock [Mikołaj Zenowicz] and Prokop Sieniawski attacked the enemy with their banners [companies], and so did also the Crown-Hetman’s third banner which had been stationed there as reserve. Calling on God’s help the 300 men [hussars] engaged in fight, so that the lance of none was left empty, because with firm hands they encountered one another, straight from the side of the field and not frontally, and each knocked down 2 – 3 men, because there was such a throng. Then they drew out their pallashes [swords] and killed as many as they wished. When the infidel [Turks] saw this, they took to flight and trampled down each other. And our men pursued them hitting and killing them as far as the camp of the Turks. [...] As from among the Turks there had been killed some 1.200 man, more or less.”

In fact there are some errors in this description. According to what the Turks were telling after the battle, 10 000 soldiers (including a couple of thousands of Osman cavalry) was the number of forces which were sent by the Sultan against the Polish-Lithuanian camp.
Chodkiewicz (the Grand hetman of Lithuania) decided to face the enemy in an open battlefield. He took from the camp 6 units of the Polish-Lithuanian cavalry. Four banners (600 soldiers) were formed in an array, which attacked the Turks (map 4). The rest of the cavalry was held in reserve under Stanisław Lubomirski command. They did not take part in the fight. The hussar charge, which routed over 15 times bigger number of the enemies, was led by Chodkiewicz personally. Polish diaries note (taking the Turks as the source of information) that seeing such shocking disaster Sultan himself cried. However, falling dusk prevented the Chodkiewicz’s soldiers from taking advantage of the whole victory. About 500 Turks died on the battlefield, but the rest of the Osman army hid in their own camp. The Poles and Lithuanians lost in that attack 1 rotmistrz (castellan of Połock - Mikołaj Zenowicz), 22 comrades and 11 retainers.

**September 8 – 10** – encouraged by the success of September 7, Chodkiewicz marched out the Polish-Lithuanian armies in front of the camp, trying to provoke the Turks to fight in a battlefield, but all in vain. However, as a Polish participant in the battle wrote:

"the enemy seeing that the case with the hussars was a lot more different than he had expected [...], he sent all his forces against the Cossacks"

In fact, on those days the Turks were less active on the battlefield, directing their actions only towards the Cossacks. On **September 8**, they attacked the Cossacks’ camp three times.

The next day only one attack was held. On the **10th of September** there was no action.

The Osman command changed the tactics. Untill that time they were trying to break the Commonwealth defence through direct attacks. Those attacks brought only a lot of losses which lowered the morale of their own soldiers. Now they decided to force the armies of the Commonwealth to capitulate, shooting at the defenders and cutting off the roads of food and forage supplies. In order to do that, they built a bridge over the Dniester River (they began to build the bridge on the 4 IX), which a part of Turkish army crossed to support the Tatars who were already operating on the east side of the river. The war of exhaustion began.

**September 10** - “Then also our horses started to die, some of hunger, [some] of 'the air' [plague], so our soldiers [hussars] had to go on foot right after the banner, wielding lances.” (an anonymous Polish soldier)

**September 11** – Chodkiewicz got very seriously ill. It was going to be the first sign of his incoming death. However, he took out the Polish-Lithuanian army hoping to fight in an open field. This action elicited no response from the Turks who concentrated on shooting at the
Cossack army that day. Fights took place on the Dniester River side as well, where some units of Ottoman artillery crossed the brand new bridge and where a few thousands of Tatars attacked the bridge from the Polish side of the Dniester. 200 infantry were protecting the bridge from this side. When one of the attacking Tatars was killed and two others were wounded (by balls) 'immediately the Tatars went away'.

Seeing the passive behaviour of the Sultan’s soldiers, Polish-Lithuanian commanders decided to attack the Turkish camp at night, September 11 – 12. They took the enlisted infantry and the Cossacks from the camp to carry their plan. Also, the cavalry was taken, which a smaller part was to start the attack, and the bigger part was to wait in the background and cover the fighting infantry. Fortunately for the Turks, when those armies approached the Muslim camp, it started to rain heavily. That downpour made all infantrymen gunpowder wet, so they were ordered to retreat.

The nightly escapade was not discovered by the Turks. The Poles and the Lithuanians decided to repeat the whole action the next night. But the betrayal of a few mercenary infantry from Hungary who escaped to the Turkish camp and let the Turks know about Polish-Lithuanian plans made the whole action impossible.

September 12 – despite his illness, Chodkiewicz mounted his horse and tried to provoke the Turks to fight in an open battlefield again. Also this time it did not work. The Turks only shoot at Polish and Lithuanian soldiers which made them retreat to their own camp.

The Cossack camp was attacked a lot that day. It is said that the Sultan’s artillery shot at the Cossacks 2 000 times. It did not make any important losses, though.

That day angry Sultan exchanged the commander of the Jannisaries (so called 'aga’). Ali became a new aga.

September 13 – 14 – no significant action on both sides.

September 14 – Qaraqash Mehmed pasha arrived at the Osman camp with 4 000 Sipahis. At his urging, the Turkish armies went to fight the next day.

September 15 – the next try to gain the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack camp by force. The attack was preceded by heavy artillery bombardment at the Polish-Lithuanian and Cossack camp. In the afternoon, Qaraqash attacked ramparts of the Polish camp. The direction of the Turkish attack was pointed to by one of the infantry deserters (a hayduk), who assured that part was not well protected.

27 000 Turkish soldiers (4000 soldiers of Qaraqash, 6000 Janissaries, 12 000 Rumelian sipahis, 5000 Anatolian sipahis) were attacking, with the majority dismounted.
At first, Qaraqash’ armies succeeded. Passing by well fortified Weyher’s earthworks, they attacked the place pointed by the traitor, which was protected by only one infantry unit. The defence broke down. Osman soldiers moved further into the camp. Fortunately, the Poles and the Lithuanians managed to launch a counterattack against them. Prince Władysław’s guards, Polish and Lithuanian cavalry from the camp and armed servants took part in it. What helped the defenders was the fact that vizier Husein pasha did not carry the main attack on Polish forces in other place, as it had been previously agreed before the attack. He did it on purpose, because of his hatred for Qaraqash. Lubomirski’s and Weyher’s infantry, protecting earthworks in front of the main rampart, attacked the Turks who were then ousted from the camp. It was then when a musket bullet reached brave Qaraqash’s heart. The loss of the commander weakened the Turkish eagerness to fight. They retreated helter-skelter to their own camp.

The consequence of an unsuccessful attack was the dismissal of the vizier Husein pasha. Dilawer pasha became a new vizier. There was also another consequence. According to Auxent:

“after the attack, they [Turks] immediately beheaded the hayduk, saying that ‘you led us to such a disastrous place, that we were lost’.”

**September 16** – in the late evening 1300 Cossack people and 300 Polish infantry forded the Dniester River and attacked the Turkish unit from the east (about 2 000 soldiers), who were protecting their bridge. After the dispersion of that unit and taking trophies, the soldiers came back to their camp.

**September 17** – no further action from both of the sides. Only the Kantemir’s Tartars were blocking the supplies for the Commonwealth soldiers successfully, intercepting one transport of food and the second one (with 100 wagons) forcing to retreat.

**September 18 – 19** – at night September 18 / 19, 4 000 Cossacks attacked Sivas’ and Karaman’ camp. After plundering their camp and seeing Rumelian soldiers ready to fight, the Cossacks return to their own camp with big trophies.

At night, **September 19 – 20**, a few hundred Cossacks made the next sally to the Turkish camp. The next were Lisowczyks. Both of the sallies were successful. They took trophies and food.

**September 20** – the sultan temporarily leaves the Turkish camp and goes to Prut to meet Halil pasha.

**September 21** – no further action from both of the sides
September 22 – the Turks passed their cavalry troops and 30 cannons to the east side of the Dniester River.

At night, September 22 – 23, the Cossacks attacked Turkish soldiers protecting their bridge again. The Turks were surprised again and they suffered a lot of loss. The Cossacks took the trophies and went back to their camp.

September 23 – the Cossacks, after preparing new ramparts inside their camp and destroying old ones, move to new positions. It shortened the defence line. It was important because of losses which they had till that time. The Poles also shortened the line of their ramparts (they destroyed the Weyher’s earthworks). The Grand Hetman of Lithuanian Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, lying on his bed and dying, gives the command over the entire army to the Pole, Stanislaw Lubomirski.

September 24 – a hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz dies in the castle (pic. 6, 7). That news was at first concealed from the soldiers, to not weaken their fighting spirit. The news about Chodkiewicz’ death came to the Turks.

September 25 – counting on a weakened morale of Christians after losing their charismatic leader, the Turks conducted another attack. After shootings, they attacked the Lisowczyks camp. Minor attacks were directed towards the Lithuanian camp. After hard combats, the Turks were repulsed during the combat but the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack soldiers found out about Chodkiewicz’ death. Yet it did not produce the expected reaction.

September 26 – 27 - no significant action from both sides.

September 27 – The first snow was falling.

September 28 – 29 – On those days the Sultan sent a raiding force into the interior of Poland. Taking 8 cannons, 500 janissaries and Tatar cavalry, they went to Paniowce (close to Kamianets-Podilskyi).
“After having arrived they bombarded the fortress all day, and fired at it from janissary-rifles but they could not do any damage, and all they could do was to kill a number of men, and then they returned [to the camp at Chocim] with a long face” (Auxent)

**September 28** – Since early morning 'till late evening stiff Turkish assaults were taking place where almost all the Turkish army was involved. The main forces were directed against Lisowczyks, minor attacks were directed towards both of the gates in the Polish-Lithuanian camp and the Cossacks. From the second side of the Dniester River the Tatars simulated an attack cross the river, counting on panic among the Commonwealth units. All the Turkish attempts failed. But by the end of the day Polish-Lithuanian army was left with one barrel of gunpowder. They were also short of bullets. By the end of the combats, Lisowczyks were shooting with pieces of metal and glass instead of bullets and artillery used some grass as a cannon wadding. Anyway, that grass usage made the Turks suspect the Poles of witchcraft.

Attacks on that day were the last ones in the battle of Chocim. They were carried on, because it was thought that the P-L-C soldiers were demoralized and weakened enough to give in. Perhaps what could have suggested such situation was the fact of shortening the defence lines of the Cossacks’ and the Poles'. Also the absence of Chodkiewicz weakened the morale of the Christians. In the Turkish camp, they were aware of awful situation of food supply for the Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack soldiers. The blocking of the camp had lasted for almost four weeks. The prices of food increased a lot in the besieged camp. There was also a shortage of fodder. According to one of the mercenary German soldiers, until the 29th September, 24 000 horses died of hunger in the Polish-Lithuanian camp. But not everybody could afford such 'rarity' as horse carrion. The situation of infantry was tragic, because they didn't take as many wagons of supplies as cavalry. An anonymous German soldier mentioned above described suicidal death of soldiers:

“As I found out from the reliable source, two people committed a suicide because of starvation. They came on the bridge, shouted 'Jesus' twice and jumped to the river and drowned.”

A lot of people were dying as well and many already deserted. However, the situation in the Turkish camp was not any better. For the Turks, coming autumn chills were especially difficult and dangerous. The awareness that they had not achieved any success have weakened the Muslims morale as well.
The Turkish commanders realizing that all, after the last try to decide about the battle by force, finally were willing to negotiate seriously for the end of the war. That decision was also influenced by the rumour spread by the Poles that 20 000 Don Cossacks were coming to help and support Christians in the battle of Chocim and so was the Polish king.

**September 29 – October 8** – on those days the activity of both sides decreased almost to null. The Poles and the Lithuanians celebrated the triumph over the Turks for three days. A few minor combats had place on October 4 and October 8, but they did not have any influence on the result of the war. What is more, on October 1, the Polish tabor with food and ammunition broke through the Tatar patrolling the east side of the river and arrived at the Chocim camp. The most important were negotiations which were held at that time. They were finished on the **8th of October** by signing pacts which finished up the war. Those pacts repeated in their general shape the Polish-Turkish agreements existing prior to the war. There were no territory changes and both sides pledged not to attack each other. The Poles promised that they would give the Moldavians their castle, Chocim, which was taken before the campaign in 1621.
After the battle

The battle of Chocim and the war of 1621 finished.

October 9, soldiers of both sides were visiting each other in their camps, trading and drinking (sic!), celebrating the ending of fightings. The Moldavian Miron Costin noted:

“there were trades among the Poles and the Ottomans. Many Poles were buying Turkish horses and tents for a very cheap prices. And the Ottomans were buying fabrics and pistols from the Poles.”

October 10, the Turkish soldiers marched away to their homes.

October 11, the Commonwealth soldiers moved on as well.

The losses of both sides were huge. Thanks to the registers which were written after the war, the exact losses of the Polish-Lithuanian soldiers are known. About 2 000 soldiers died in combat, another 3 000 died of wounds, diseases and hunger. About 2 400 soldiers were missed or deserted.

It is more difficult to estimate the losses of the Cossacks. L. Podhorodecki’s estimate is: about 3 000 Cossacks died in combat, another 3 000 died of wounds and hunger. All together, the losses of Polish-Lithuanian-Cossack army were about 14 000 soldiers.

Apart from soldiers, many servants died. People were in such bad shape that they died also in the way to their homes. Auxent noted that in his city, Kamianets-Podilskyi (One day of marching from Chocim) died 1700 men – German soldiers and servants.

Civilian casualties, who the Tartars hunted for, should also be included. Ottoman source (Naima efendi) claims that:

“About 100,000 infidels were killed in the battle, skirmishes and [Tatar] raids”
It might be a slight exaggeration. But total casualties of Commonwealth inhabitants (soldiers, servants, Cossacks, civilians) must have reached a few tens of thousands of killed people. A lot of horses died as well. According to Auxent:

“There were many who [before the war] had had 10 horses, and only 2 or 3 were left [alive], and there were others who were left without a single horse.”

The Turkish losses, according to Podhorodecki: about 14 000 soldiers killed in combat, at least 14 000 died of wounds and diseases and thousands of deserters. All together – 40 000 soldiers. Those numbers are confirmed by 2 Polish diaries.
Victory or disaster?

The question given in the title may be surprising. The case seems to be simple – the armies of the Commonwealth repulsed the huge Ottoman Empire attack and the subsequent agreements that were finally signed were not beneath Polish dignity. However, that was just one side of the campaign of 1621. Let’s look closer at how the war with Turkey influenced P-L-C situation.

On one side, the echo of the Commonwealth triumph went around the whole Europe, increasing its prestige. The result of combats foiled the possibility of the Turkish-Russian and Swedish-Russian alliances against the Commonwealth, albeit at the very last minute. What is more, danger from Turkey’s side also decreased. The Empire weakened by the Chocim war, ended up with a rebellion. Dissatisfied janissary soldiers killed the warlike sultan (a direct reason of his death was a plan to reform the army and the administration) and found another one who was ready to keep peace with P-L-C.

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was going through her own problems with dissatisfied soldiers as well. That dissatisfaction happened because of delayed payments for their service. It was true that the Seym decided on certain taxes in 1620, but the tax collection prolonged a lot. Unpaid soldiers made a confederation that demanded the money the soldiers earned and deserved. This striking army could not be used in Livonia, where the Swedes had been attacking.

Lithuanian field hetman, Krzysztof Radziwiłł stood up to the Swedish forces (about 18 000 soldiers) with his field army that had some 1500 soldiers. Despite such disproportion, he tried to provoke the Swedes to the battle. Gustav Adolf was not going to risk any confrontation in an open battlefield. Radziwiłł could only complain of this situation to the Polish king Sigismund III Vasa:

“Antiquity has its virtues; domestic methods have great value, but in military affairs less than in others: every century teaches soldiers some new trick; every campaign has its own discoveries; each school of war seeks its own remedies. Gustav's father Karolus, whenever he heard of the approach of our army, immediately abandoned his sieges and rushed into the field to fight a battle... But [Gustav], mindful of his father's defeats, conducts war in a new way, not risking field engagements; therefore one must fight him by taking account of his obstacles”

Gustav Adolf’s goal was the city of Riga that he surrounded and captured with no problem on 25 of September 1621. Radziwiłł could not have prevented that because he did not have enough soldiers at his disposal (especially infantry) that could have been able to attack the Swedish earthworks.

Lithuanian-Swedish campaign in Livonia 1621-1622 was finished with the truce leaving in Swedish hands the trophies they already had. It meant that the Commonwealth lost the northern Livonia – and it was the price that the P-L-C finally paid for the victorious war with the Ottoman Empire.