In 1593, after 25 years of relative calm, Hungary once again became the scene of a war against the Ottomans. The decision of the 21-year-old Transylvanian prince Zsigmond Báthori to join the Holy League was welcomed by the pope and Emperor Rudolf II, but the prince encountered determined resistance on the home front. While a majority of the estates were favoring peace and maintenance of the status quo, and were refusing to follow Zsigmond’s lead at the Diet at Torda in 1594, luck on the battlefield shifted away from the Christian allies; the vigorous counterattack of the grand vizier Sinan Pasha put an end, at least for the moment, to a string of victories by the Christian armies. Nevertheless, Zsigmond, who in the meantime had abdicated and then returned to power a few weeks later, finally prevailed over the opposing forces and removed their leaders. Transylvania’s membership in the Holy League was solemnized at Prague in the beginning of 1595.

The brutal manner in which Zsigmond Báthori ended the internal power struggle struck Transylvania’s Protestant elite to the quick; with the exception of Boldizsár Báthori (the prince’s cousin), the twelve most important leaders of the opposition who were executed on Báthori’s orders were all Protestants, indeed mostly Unitarians. Other Protestant nobles, too, were punished by confiscation of their property and by imprisonment, with the result that numerous Protestants, especially the families of the executed, converted to Catholicism for fear of reprisals.

1 Köpeczi, Erdély története, vol. 1, 522f. The monograph by Meinolf Arens, Habsburg und Siebenbürgen. Gewaltsame Eingliederungsversuche eines ostmitteleuropäischen Fürstentums in einen frühabsolutistischen Reichsverband (Cologne, 2001) is an excellent study of the Habsburgs’ efforts regarding Transylvania around the turn of the 17th century. Significant parts of this chapter, especially the historical narratives, are indebted to Arens’s work.

2 Boldizsár Szilvássy was arrested and became Catholic after being pardoned. István Kendy, son of the executed Sándor Kendy, did the same. The sons of the executed
Measures against the Sabbatarians

The decrees of the Diet at Gyulafehérvár on 16 April 1595 put additional pressure on radical Protestantism in Transylvania. Article 17 stipulated that those who remained outside the *religiones receptae* were to be hunted down and punished “by counts and royal judges [...] without regard to the rank of the person.” In contradistinction to the ban on innovation that was repeated seemingly pro forma by Diets before and after this date, the text of this article calls for the royal judges to participate in the persecution of religious innovators and their followers. Against the background of bitter power struggles in domestic politics, in which religious affiliation was part of the arsenal, the measures were directed against a strong radical Protestant faction around the Kornis family, András Eőssi, and Ferenc Balássi. Farkas Kornis especially, whom the Jesuit Possevino had accused of supporting heretics already in 1583 and who himself (together with Mihály Petki) had been a royal judge at the seat of Udvarhely since 1571, was a target of the attacks. (It is noteworthy that the same Diet adopted decrees that would enable the Jesuits to build up their presence in the country.) Writing in 1618–1620, the chronicler Tamás Borsos, who later served several Transylvanian princes in his career as a diplomat, described the measures decreed by the Diet at Gyulafehérvár in 1595 as being aimed explicitly against the Sabbatarians. He mentioned the *capitaneus* of Udvarhely, Benedek Mindszenti, as an energetic persecutor of Sabbatarians in the summer of 1595. This figure even appeared in a Sabbatarian song that tells how the “accursed captain” forced many Sabbatarians to leave their homeland. The persecution abated with the restoration of Szekler liberties by Báthori in September 1595 and the military clashes in Wallachia soon thereafter (in which Mindszenti was also involved).