

Die Protokolle des Cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918. Vol. 1, 1867. February 19, 1867–December 15, 1867. Edited by Stefan Malfèr. With an introduction by Thomas Kletečka, Stefan Malfèr, and Anatol Schmied-Kowarzik. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018; Die Protokolle des Cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918. Vol. II, 1868–1871. January 1–November 21, 1871. Edited by Thomas Kletečka and Reichard Lein. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2022; Die Protokolle des Cisleithanischen Ministerrates 1867–1918. Vol. III, 1871–1879. Part 1, November 25, 1871–April 23, 1872. Edited by Klaus Koch. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2022.

A few years ago, a project involving the publication of the minutes of the Austrian Council of Ministers between 1848 and 1867 wound to a close. This was a major undertaking which spanned several decades and gave considerable impetus to research on the history of the Habsburg Monarchy in the two decades after 1848, both inside and outside the borders of Austria. Stefan Malfèr, who has been organizing the series for the last few years, and Thomas Kletečka and Anatol Schmied-Kowarzik, the editors of the concluding volumes, have now embarked with several new colleagues on a new venture which will give them a good opportunity to draw on their experience in publishing and their knowledge of sources. They have undertaken the publication of the Austrian or, more precisely, the Cisleithanian Council of Ministers' minutes from 1867 to 1918, which will come, according to the original plans, to eleven volumes.

The leaders of the project have adopted the structure of the previous series. The precise texts of the minutes are supplemented by concise, informative notes concerning antecedents to any given issue and the ways in which the issue later played out. Each volume opens with a useful introduction touching on the main items on the Council of Ministers' agenda and providing background information concerning the various issues. This is followed by a bibliography, an index of abbreviations, an explanatory list of archaic terms and expressions, and a list of the people who took part in the deliberations of the Council of Ministers as permanent members or invited deputies or experts. The appendix contains a list of agendas for the meetings of the Council of Ministers and a combined index of subjects and persons.

This series poses an unusual challenge to the editors, despite the knowledge they have garnered over the decades and their experience in the world of source publications. The minutes are both incomplete and damaged as a consequence of the July Revolt of 1927, in the course of which the Vienna Palace of Justice was set aflame. There are other sources on the deliberations of the Council of Ministers, but for the most part they contain only the agenda items and the decisions made by the monarch. It is therefore important that these sources be properly annotated, supplemented with the necessary indexes, and published as soon as possible. Digital versions are being published as well, which will make it possible to attach additional documents and do searches for specific items of content, while the printed versions of the texts will make them more easily accessible and will ensure their long-term survival.

Three volumes in the series have been published so far. The 1867 minutes were completely destroyed, so all texts in the first volume have been published on the basis of copies made before 1927 by Josef Redlich. The second volume contains, for the most part, only the agenda items and the imperial decisions, as only 73 of the 618 minutes have survived, but fortunately, the minutes of meetings held under the chairmanship of Franz Joseph I at which important political questions were addressed could be partially replaced with other sources. With a few exceptions, the minutes from the period between April and August 1869 have survived, as have the minutes of meetings held in the autumn months of 1871. The latter are particularly important from the perspective of the government deliberations led by the conservative Count Karl Sigmund Hohenwart. The third volume, in contrast, for the most part contains minutes that have survived in their entirety, even if in a badly damaged state and thus with some missing passages. In only one case is the proceedings of a sitting missing entirely.

The first volume provides important information first and foremost on the background events in Austria of the Compromise of 1867. The record also shed light on how the politicians of the Austro-German liberal Constitutional Party were able to use their otherwise limited room for maneuver to push through some of their political demands for the further development of a constitutional state, which in the preceding years had been effectively hindered by the stubborn resistance of the ruler and his narrow circle of advisers.

The second volume shows how, within the legal framework created by the so-called December Constitution of 1867, the liberal state institutions of the new dual state were created by the so-called “Bürgerministerium”, the only

government in the history of the Monarchy that could call itself the government of the parliamentary majority. We also see how the opposing political parties tried to make the framework of the constitution more precise and also to expand it. The Austro-German liberal “constitutionalist” group pushed for more centralization, while the federalist camp, which in the center of the empire was largely conservative-aristocratic but had a much more diverse political profile in the provinces, sought to broaden provincial autonomy. The December Constitution contained both centralist and federalist elements, which gave both camps hope for further development. One can see very clearly how this led to fluctuations in the positions adopted by the imperial government. The minutes also make it possible to trace the history of the efforts to achieve a Bohemian compromise in the summer and autumn of 1871, which were initiated by and had the support of Emperor Franz Joseph, but which ultimately foundered. The arguments made by Austrian politicians, financiers, the Imperial Chancellor Count Beust, and Hungarian politicians both for and against the Bohemian Compromise are discussed in detail.

The third volume marks a return to a policy of centralization after the failure of this last great experiment in constitutional law. This move to achieve stabilization proved successful in the short term, but the fundamental political fault lines remained unchanged beneath the surface of daily political practice.

In addition to the discussions of the major political breaking points of the time, the royal statements found in the minutes are also very important, since they are virtually the only contemporary sources from which we can learn about Emperor Franz Joseph’s personal political positions. We see, for example, how he interpreted his role as a constitutional monarch and how he continued to play a decisive role in crucial political issues. He treated the legislature and the executive as centers of power that were independent of each other and had different responsibilities and prerogatives. He also consistently rejected the notion that the government was a political body subordinate to the will of parliament. On the contrary, he saw the relationship between the two as quite the reverse. For instance, when, in early 1872, at the start of the new session of the Cisleithanian parliament, the Reichsrat, the pro-government majority in the lower house of parliament included questions in its submissions that were not part of the announced government program, Franz Joseph declared that the Reichsrat majority, if it wanted to dictate the direction the government would take, misunderstood entirely what it meant to be a “government party.” The emperor also expected his ministers to ensure that, on an important political issue (such

as the Galician compromise), members of the government could guarantee in advance the adoption of a government bill in both houses of the Reichsrat. During the period of the “Bürgerministerium”, however, he saw himself as being held in the crosshairs by parliament and a government that consisted for the most part of politicians who relied on the parliamentary majority, whereas in his assessment, the government, as the executive power, should have regarded him as its primary point of orientation. He was thus compelled to sanction bills with which he did not agree, first and foremost legislation concerning the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state. As he stated in January 1872, he was determined to prevent a repetition of this, and beginning in April 1870, he consistently appointed a government of bureaucrats and experts who were far removed from parliamentary party politics. Francis Joseph’s conception of the constitutional role of the monarch would in the long term be a determining factor in domestic political processes in Cisleithania.

Franz Joseph also considered the rigid centralism of the Austro-German liberal camp an obstacle. As the minutes clearly show, in the case of Hungary, the Compromise of 1867 consolidated political relations for a time, if perhaps with minor changes, but in the other half of the empire, it took years to achieve comparable consolidation. Before the summer of 1867, the political forces in Austria had had no opportunity to exert any real influence on the transformation of public law in the empire, so the discussion of political conflicts, now within the framework of the constitutional compromise reached by the emperor and the Hungarian political elite, took part in parallel with the enactment of the December Constitution. It was a personal matter for Franz Joseph to force the Austro-German liberal camp to compromise, even at the cost of “reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*) with the Polish nationalist movement in Galicia and the Czech nationalist movement in Bohemia, which meant extending provincial autonomy. But he was not willing to repeat the way he had forced the agreement he had reached with the Hungarian political elite on Austrian politicians. Presumably, he saw the limits that had been placed on his power as too high a price to pay. The Czech politicians clearly would have expected this of him, as they overestimated their political weight, unlike the Polish leaders in Galicia, who, by limiting their demands, eventually won significant concessions on state rights and language use and thus contributed significantly to political consolidation that lasted for nearly a decade.

The new series thus makes available indispensable sources on the political conditions of the early years of the Dualist Era and, indeed, the entire history

of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Hopefully, it will give a similar boost to research on the history of the Habsburg Monarchy in the last half century of its existence as the publication of documents from 1849 to 1867 did for research on the post-1848 decades a few years ago.

Ágnes Deák
University of Szeged
deakagnes@yahoo.com