



Surveilling the Danube: The Austrian Consulate in Vidin (1848–1878)*

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This article examines the establishment and expansion of the Austrian consular network in the Lower Danube region with a focus on the town of Vidin in the period between the Hungarian and Wallachian Revolutions and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. In the 1830s, the Habsburg Empire established a firm consular presence on the left bank of the Lower Danube in the Danubian Principalities, but over the course of the next decades and particularly in the 1850s, it also progressively expanded into the northernmost part of the Ottoman Empire south of the river. The article seeks to illuminate the significance of one hitherto insufficiently examined node in this nascent Austrian consular network, the vice-consulate/consulate in Vidin, the second most populous Ottoman settlement on the Lower Danube (after the rapidly advancing Ruse farther downstream). This Austrian extraterritorial office, the article argues, served as a crucial information, commercial, political, and diplomatic agency in a region characterized by economic growth and marred by episodes of international warfare in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: consuls, Balkans, Vidin, Hungarian Revolution, Danube, Ottoman Empire

The introduction of steamboat transportation to the Danube River in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century completely transformed the complex commercial, political, and diplomatic history of the region. The new technology brought about intensified connections between Danubian ports and hinterlands, increasing the exchange of people, ideas, and goods across the borders of the different political entities that populated the region. The river had played a crucial strategic role in the historical evolution of the imperial states that still dominated the political landscape in the middle of the nineteenth century (the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian Empires), but it also attracted the interest of the new nation states of Serbia, Wallachia, and Moldavia (after 1859, Romania),

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which were emerging as important regional actors. With the development and sophistication of steamboat transportation, it became incumbent upon the different regional actors to gain access to the technology and harness it in their imperial or national projects.¹

Naturally, as it had control over large parts of the Upper Danube and also a technological edge over its regional rivals, the Habsburg Empire stood to gain the most from the steamboat transportation advancements in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The foundations of its expanding control over Danubian steamboat transportation were laid in the 1830s, when the Erste Donau-Dampfschiffahrts-Gesellschaft (DDSG) and the Austrian Lloyd began establishing Habsburg dominance over ever larger stretches of the Danube. Their operations were facilitated by a relatively peaceful period among the respective Danubian states after the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829 and the Greek Revolution of 1821–1829. The confluence of international peace and technological innovation created the conditions for the construction of a new political and diplomatic infrastructure in the Danubian region, which would in turn further promote economic development.²

As one of the leading and more prosperous regional players, Austria realized the numerous opportunities presented by this new constellation of peace and progress and sought to take advantage of them. Given the flow of the river itself and the course of political affairs in the 1820s and 1830s, Austrian officials and merchants concentrated on the Lower Danube, a site of exchange, contention, and conflict between the Ottomans, Serbia, Wallachia, Moldavia, and Russia. As Prussia and Italy were realizing their ambitions for national unification, their advancing political projects came at the cost of diminishing Austrian influence and territories along its western borders, which naturally prompted Austrian officials and merchants to shift their attention to the east. Meanwhile, the promulgation of new Ottoman reforms in the wake of the so-called Tanzimat opened economic opportunities for Austrian entrepreneurs to enter the lucrative and vast markets of the Balkans and the Levant.³

At the intersection of these complex processes, which have been vigorously studied in a large and still expanding field of scholarly inquiries, a less noticeable process took place: the evolution of the Austrian consular network along the

1 Ardeleanu, *Steamboat Modernity*.

2 Ardeleanu, *International Trade and Diplomacy at the Lower Danube*.

3 Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922*; Alloul and Martykánová, “Introduction: Charting New Ground in the Study of Ottoman Foreign Relations.”

Danube.⁴ In the 1830s, this network established a firm presence on the left banks of the Lower Danube, in the Danubian Principalities, but over the course of the next decades and particularly in the 1850s, it would also progressively expand into the northernmost part of the Ottoman Empire, an area locked between the Balkan mountain range and the Danube that currently comprises, and in the mid-nineteenth century was often referred as, Northern Bulgaria.⁵ This article seeks to illuminate the significance of one node in this nascent Austrian consular network, the Austrian vice consulate/consulate in Vidin, the second most populous Ottoman settlement on the Lower Danube (after the rapidly advancing Ruse farther downstream), from the first consular operations in 1849 through the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878.⁶ This largely neglected Austrian extra-territorial office, the article argues, served as a crucial information, commercial, political, and diplomatic agency in a region characterized by economic growth and marred by episodes of international warfare in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁷

The Creation of an Austrian Consular Network on the Lower Danube

The integration of the Lower Danube into Austrian commercial networks was followed quickly by the placement of the first Austrian consular officials in Ruse and Vidin. In 1845, Adolphe-Salvador Tedeschi, a French Jewish merchant from Marseilles,⁸ was appointed Austrian consular agent under the direct supervision of the consul-general in Constantinople, with jurisdiction covering the settlements of Varna, Balchik, Kavarna, Mangalia, Kostence, and Messembria. With

4 Matsch, *Geschichte des Auswärtigen Dienstes von Österreich(-Ungarn)*, 1720–1920; Deusch, *Die effektiven Konsuln Österreich(-Ungarns) v. 1825–1918*; Agstner, *Handbuch des k.k. / k.u.k. Konsulardienstes*; Минцев, “Дипломатическото дело на Австро-Унгария (1867–1918 г.): Институционални аспекти”; Симеонов, “Австрийското вицеконсулство.”

5 Roussev, “Old Glory Returns,” 79; Florescu, “Lord Strangford and the Problem of the Danubian Principalities, 1821–4”; Florescu, “R. G. Colquhoun, Ion Câmpineanu and the Pro-Western Opposition in Wallachia, 1834–1840”; Ardeleanu, *International Trade and Diplomacy at the Lower Danube*; Агетнер, *България-Австрия 125 години дипломатически отношения и 160 години представителства на Австрия (Австро-Унгария) в България*.

6 On Ruse’s rise in this period, see Плетньов, *Мидхат Паши и управлението на Дунавския вилает*; Бакърджиева, *На крачка пред времето*.

7 On the significance of consular establishments as surveillance and information agencies, see Aliprantis, “Transnational Policing after the 1848–1849 Revolutions: The Habsburg Empire in the Mediterranean”; Симеонов, “Австрийското вицеконсулство.”

8 Roussev, “Old Glory Returns,” 80–81.

the exception of Messembria, these settlements were located on the Black Sea coast north of Varna, and they linked Varna to the Danubian delta, while Messembria connected it to Constantinople. Clearly, Tedeschi's jurisdiction meant to secure the safety and growth of Austrian commercial interests, including those of the DDSG and the Austrian Lloyd, along the section of the western Black Sea linking the Danube to the imperial capital.⁹ Established in Varna, Tedeschi's missions naturally privileged maritime interests linked to growing trade between the Ottoman Empire and other European maritime powers, and his reports reflect the increasing turnover of exports such as wheat, barley, corn, tallow, wool, butter, cheese, firewood, poultry, and flour, as well as imports such as coffee, cotton yarn, draperies, sugar, and pepper.¹⁰

The growth of trade in Varna suggested the necessity of establishing a stronger presence on the Danube, where many of the goods traded in the port town (including many Austrian goods) were transiting.¹¹ There was another important reason for efforts to nurture Austrian interests in the region: the protection of the rights of transhumant shepherds (*mocani*) from Transylvania, who used the fertile pastures of Dobrudja to feed their large herds of sheep.¹² These mass seasonal migrations prompted Christian Wilhelm Huber, the Habsburg consul in Galatz, to travel to Constantinople in search of a solution to the plights arising from the unregulated crossing (or, to the Ottoman authorities, trespassing) of the international border along the Danube. Having negotiated an agreement with the Ottomans in 1845, Huber pressed for a more durable institutional solution to the issues of transhumant pasturing and steamboat transportation via the creation of a network of consulates in Vidin, Ruse, Tulcea, and Varna.¹³

Against this backdrop of international negotiation, the first Austrian consul, the Viennese Emmanuel Edler von Rössler, established himself on the southern shores of the Lower Danube, in the Ottoman town of Ruse, in 1848. Rössler, who laid the groundwork for the consular activities in the period around the Hungarian and Wallachian Revolutions, argued for a denser consular presence in the area flanked by the Danube and the Balkan mountain range. In his view, the

9 Паскалева, "Икономическото проникване на Австрия."

10 Roussev, "Old Glory Returns," 83–90.

11 Other important routes for Austrian goods included the land routes stretching across the borders between the two empires in the Balkans. See, for instance, Паскалева, *Македония през погледа на австрийски консули*, *passim*.

12 Deusch, *Die effektiven Konsuln*, 307, 353. See also Тодоров, *Овчарската аристокрация*.

13 Deusch, *Die effektiven Konsuln*, 352–53.

central office in that region should be in Ruse, with subordinate vice-consulates in Vidin and Varna. He strongly emphasized the importance of ensuring that the “Bulgarian” consulates remain outside the hierarchical structure of those established in Romania, for instance the consulate-general in Galatz.¹⁴ Rössler also asked the Ottoman authorities for a *tezkere* (an official permit to travel) allowing one of his servants to visit Silistra, the previous eyalet capital and an important Danubian center. But the events of 1849 also proved the necessity of the Austrian consular network reaching into the Balkan interior, for example to important administrative and commercial towns like Shumen/Shumla.¹⁵ To ensure that the network fulfilled its potential, Rössler asked the Austrian authorities for a special fund on which he could draw in order to pay trusted informers (spies), who could supply reliable information confidentially and professionally. In fact, this approach had enabled Rössler to navigate the complex events of 1849–1850, but the intensification of trade and the military buildup in the region put a premium on the regular acquisition of reliable information through a trusted group of informers.¹⁶

The Austrian Consulate at Vidin: Personnel, Profile, and Significance

One finds clear evidence of the emergence of an Austrian network on the right bank of the Lower Danube in the middle of the nineteenth century not merely in the designs of Viennese authorities or the imperial internunciature, but also in the career trajectories of the consular officials who staffed the growing number of extraterritorial establishments. Emmanuel Edler von Rössler, who laid the foundations of the Austrian consular network in the region, set a precedent for his consular subordinates and peers in Vidin by entering the consular ranks after having served in various imperial provincial governments (in Prague, Venice, and Graz). His knowledge of Serbian proved important in his appointment to the position of chancellor at the Habsburg consulate in Belgrade in 1842, after which he obtained an appointment as vice-consul in Ruse in 1848. After a promotion to the rank of consul in 1850, largely due to his services during the

14 Симеонов, “Австрийското вицеконсулство.”

15 Симеонов, “Списъкът на Рьослер.”

16 See Арато [Arató], “Принос към историята на описанието на град Шумен,” as well as the literature cited there. Rössler seems at one point to have suggested moving the consulate to Shumen, but this is probably due to the novelty of the Ruse consulate and his unfamiliarity with the town and region. I would like to thank Gábor Demeter and Imre Rössler for their help in surveying the secondary literature, as well as their help with the preparation of the current manuscript.

Hungarian and Wallachian Revolutions, he married Therese, née Baroness von Margelik and assumed the position of consul-general in Sarajevo in 1857, an office he held until rumors of homosexual acts precipitated his recall three years later.

Rössler's successor, the jurist August Lenk von Wolfsberg, was born in Bratislava and worked as a junior clerk in the Royal Revenue Administration for Galatz before joining the Ministries of Finance and Commerce. With his solid command of foreign languages, he began work as a chancellor at the consulate in Galatz before receiving a vice-consular appointment in Vidin in March 1851, a position he held until 1859. He rose to the rank of consul in Trabzon and consul-general in Jerusalem before returning to the Balkans in 1864 and serving as a diplomatic agent in Salonica, a deputy consul-general in Belgrade, as well as consul-general in Corfu and diplomatic agent in Ioannina in the end of the 1860s. Lenk ended his career as a consul-general in Barcelona and Marseille. The career of Vidin's second Austrian consul, the Viennese Leopold Walcher von Moltheim, was remarkably similar. He, too, began his career in the Royal Revenue Administration, but unlike Lenk, his station was responsible for Upper and Lower Austria and Salzburg. After passing his consular examinations, he held short-term appointments in the administrations in Leipzig and Trieste before assuming similarly short-term positions in the consular chancelleries in Izmir, Trabzon, Galati, and Alexandria in the 1850s. Like Lenk, Walcher worked at the Vidin consulate for several years before moving to the consulate-general of Jerusalem and returning to Europe, with employment opportunities arising in Palermo and Paris.

The career trajectories of the vice-consuls who served in the decades prior to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 ossified into predictable patterns. The short tenure of Svetozar Theodorović von Szentendre in Vidin raises several questions, which shed light on the operation of the consular system, proving that everyday practice did not always coincide with that suggested by official documents. According to historian Engelbert Deusch, Theodorović first had military training, followed by a decade-long career in Belgrade, which saw him rise from the rank of vice-chancellor to that of chancellor. He was then appointed and served as vice-consul in Vidin in 1868–1869. However, the biographical data published by Deusch are contradictory, and based on other historical sources, Theodorović did not take the position in Vidin but rather remained at the Consulate General in Belgrade throughout the period.

Deusch also indirectly refers to the very peculiar case of Theodorović's double promotion in 1868, when he mentions that Theodorović was

simultaneously promoted to the position of Consul General in Belgrade.¹⁷ At the same time, however, historian Rudolf Agstner has provided additional information indicating that during Theodorović's term of office in Vidin, Samuel Pinkas, the local Jewish "Honorardragoman" (a locally appointed interpreter and intermediary who worked with foreign diplomatic missions in the Ottoman Empire), replaced him as "interimistischer Gerent," or interim representative, though Agstner does not specify the precise duration of this period.

The mystery surrounding Theodorović's dual appointment and the circumstances of Samuel Pinkas's long-term replacement in Vidin can be reconstructed from the diary of Benjamin Kállay, the Austro-Hungarian consul general in Belgrade (published in Serbian), who took his office in April 1868.¹⁸ Kállay, who had been sent to Belgrade to promote Hungary's national liberal Balkan policy objectives, insisted that Theodorović, who was well acquainted with Serbian affairs, should remain in Belgrade for an indefinite period despite his appointment as vice-consul in Vidin.¹⁹ Later, with the intervention of Béla Orczy, head of department (*Sectionschef*) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kállay again managed to have Teodorović's stay in Belgrade extended.²⁰ From the summer of 1868, Samuel Pinkas definitely served in Theodorović's stead in Vidin, because he sent important political reports on the situation on the Serbian-Bulgarian border to Kállay (serving as cause for Kállay's travels to Ottoman Bulgaria, Vidin, discussed in another study in this issue). We have evidence that Pinkas²¹ also sent information directly to Theodorović from Vidin about how the Circassians had plundered a Bulgarian village.²² This confirms that Theodorović could not have been staying

17 Deusch, *Die effektiven Konsuln*, "Generalkonsulatskanzler, May 2, 1868; V[ize]-K[anzler] in Vidin, May 2, 1868," 655. However, Deusch does not examine the circumstances and consequences of this unusual double appointment. He simply assumes that Theodorović took his post as vice-consul on the day of his appointment, as Deusch found no reference in Theodorović's personal file to a date of entry into service (Dienstantritt, abbreviated to DA) in Vidin other than the date of his appointment. A similar approach can be observed in another fundamental handbook, Rudolf Agstner's posthumous work *Handbuch des k.k. / k.u.k. Konsulardienstes*, in which Agstner also gives what are supposedly the exact dates of Theodorović's tenure as vice-consul in Vidin (April 23, 1868–April 29, 1869.) I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of this article for this important observation.

18 Radenić, *Dnevnik*.

19 Radenić, *Dnevnik*, May 5, 1868.

20 Radenić, *Dnevnik*, August 7, 1868.

21 Material on Pinkas is available at Administrativ Registratur. ÖStA, HHStA, MdÄ AR F4-260-1 (1864-1886).

22 Radenić, *Dnevnik*, January 15, 1869.

in Vidin. Finally, Kállay personally met Pinkas when he traveled to the Serbian-Bulgarian border region in September 1868, accompanied by Felix Kanitz.²³

Why was Theodorović retained in Belgrade despite his appointment? Dr. Svetozar Theodorović von Szentendre was the son of the Orthodox priest of Pomáz, a village in Hungary near Szentendre and Budapest. His father was a firm supporter of Benjámín Kállay in the parliamentary elections in Hungary. Therefore, Kállay, consul in Belgrade from 1868 on, strongly relied on this family and Theodorović's knowledge of Belgrade, and in addition to supporting Theodorović's career, he also wanted to retain him as his personal confidante in Belgrade, especially when he was traveling in distant places.²⁴

After his years in Belgrade, Theodorović took the position of consulate general of Sarajevo (1872) and, later, consulate general of Tunis (1878), where he won over the Muslim notables and defended the interests of Christians, only to end his career amidst allegations of corruption. The last Habsburg consul in Vidin on the eve of the Russo-Turkish War was Adolph Ritter von Schulz, a Viennese disciple of the Oriental Academy, who began his career as a dragoman at the Internunciature in Constantinople and continued as a chancellor at the consulate-general in Beirut and the consulate in Salonica. Like Theodorović, Schulz ascended to the consular ranks as a vice-consul in Vidin, a position he held for eight years before returning to Beirut as the Austro-Hungarian consul general in late 1877, amidst the ongoing war between the Ottoman and Russian Empires.

The profiles of the consular officials in Vidin demonstrate both a degree of professionalization as well as dynamic regional (and trans-regional) mobility. Roughly half of them were Viennese-born Austrians, and another half were Habsburg subjects of a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Like other consuls in the region, they married relatively late, shortly after having received a promotion, with some consuls remarrying after the deaths of their spouses. Commercial and status considerations were clearly present in the first marriages of Lenk (von Wolfenberg) to the daughter of an imperial noble and of Walcher (von Moltheim), still *de jure* consul in Vidin, to Camilla Malanotti (1839–1872), the daughter of a Viennese silk merchant, in 1853. Both of them also married late in their lives, either shortly before or after turning forty, and they later remarried. However, none of

23 His travel notes were also published in Bulgarian by Petar Miyatev. Миятев, “Бенямин Калай (1868).”

24 Another study by Rudolf Agstner contains a wealth of information about the administrative history of the consulate in Vidin, which was not included in his posthumously published handbook. Agstner, “Österreich (-Ungarn) und seine Konsulate in Bulgarien 1844–1918.”

the consuls seems to have had familial connections to the others, a testament to the fact that the consular network largely operated upon meritocratic principles and that Vidin attracted well-trained consular officials with some previous experience, almost always in secretarial functions. In fact, the elevation of the office in Vidin to a consulate helped propel several of the incumbents into an ascendant imperial consular career.

If the revolutions of 1848–1849 bore witness to the inception of the Austrian consular network in the southern Lower Danube region, then the Crimean War of 1853–1856 marked its first important test.²⁵ The activities of the consulates produced hundreds of pages of correspondence with a focus on the military strength, capabilities, and maneuvers of the belligerent Ottoman and Russian armies. The Austrian consuls on both sides of the Danube provided important information on the occupation of the Danubian Principalities by the Russian army in June 1853, leading to an escalation of the military and diplomatic situation. Their reports reflect the concentration of Ottoman forces in Vidin and between Ruse and Tulcea, with the likely objective of an attack on the assembled Russian garrisons on the left side of the Danube. In the first months of the war at the end of 1853, the Austrian consul in Ruse reported the cannonading of a Russian boat carrying munitions from Isaccea to Braila and the capture of a Russian garrison on a Danubian island by an Ottoman force led by Omer Pasha. Afterwards, it was Lenk (von Wolfsberg), the Austrian consul in Vidin, who supplied crucial information to Vienna regarding the military activities in the region. The Ottoman army launched a daring campaign, using the adjacent Danubian islands as a spearhead for a massive attack on the Russian detachments in the area of Cetate. Consul Lenk followed the Ottoman forces despite the explicit orders by the local commander not to do so. In the first months of 1854, he informed the Viennese authorities about the course of the Ottoman expedition toward Calafat, a campaign involving approximately 50,000 soldiers and resulting in many casualties on both sides. His reports were invaluable to the Austrian authorities, as they reflected in a seemingly objective manner the strength, objectives, and prospects of the belligerent powers.²⁶ This information was of great significance to the decisions that the Austrian authorities had to make in the course of the conflict, namely, whether to remain neutral, aid their recent Russian allies, or join the growing coalition. This decision was by no

25 See Schroeder, “Austria and the Danubian Principalities, 1853–1856.”

26 Паскалева, “За Кримската война по Долния Дунав (1853–1854).”

means foreordained in the early period of the war, and Lenk played an important role in mediating information about Austria's potential involvement with the Ottoman authorities or subjects with whom he traveled and lived on a daily basis.²⁷

As had happened at the end of the Hungarian and Wallachian Revolutions, the close of the Crimean War brought about the institutionalization of several consular practices that had become common in wartime. For example, it reaffirmed the importance of systematic consular observation and reporting on troop strength and military maneuvers within their respective jurisdictions. Russia's defeat, the unification of Romania, and the creation of the European Commission of the Danube meant that the powers interested in maintaining or expanding their influence in the Lower Danube region had to adapt to the changing circumstances and protect their various interests against the threat of a new military confrontation.²⁸

The Austrian consular presence on the southern Lower Danube was distinguished from that of the other powers who sought to establish a consulate there by the remarkable experience of the revolutionary uprisings of 1848–1849, which accentuated the need for a coordinated approach to cases of individual or group migrations across the expanding network. Crucial to this endeavor was a heightened focus on the management of the people who entered various consular jurisdictions. In this regard, the experience of the Hungarian and Wallachian Revolutions clearly imprinted itself upon the consuls in Vidin and Ruse. The reports issued by these consuls over the following years were marked by counterrevolutionary considerations. The counterinsurgency measures of consul Rössler might not have prevented the migration of Lajos Kossuth's followers, but a few years later, the Habsburg consul in Belgrade contemplated adopting similar actions to combat "the trace left over by the Hungarian emigrants," whom he blamed for the disturbances around the Serbian dynastic crisis of 1853.²⁹

27 Ibid.

28 On the European Commission of the Danube, see Ardeleanu, *The European Commission of the Danube, 1856–1948*.

29 Teodor Radosavljevič to Count Karl Ferdinand von Buol-Schauenstein, Belgrade, 25.07.1853, ÖStA, HHStA, Diplomatie und Außenpolitik (1848–1918). Ministerium des Äußern (1735–1924). Politisches Archiv 33 (1848–1918). Konsulate 1848–1918. Karton 98, Bulgarian National Archives, Sofia, KMF03/360/13 (microfilm).

Fears of potentially subversive migrants also marked the activities of the Austrian consulate in Vidin throughout the early period of its existence. “Recently several reports have been received here,” wrote consul Walcher (von Moltheim) to the Austrian Foreign Minister in 1864, “according to which many foreign subjects from Serbia are crossing over into Wallachia and are crossing the Danube at Cladowa in order to enter Wallachia directly at Turnu-Severin.” In view of the “unusual gathering of foreigners in the Danubian Principalities, especially of Polish, Hungarian and Italian nationality,” the consul desired to obtain “more precise information on a journey to Turnu-Severin about the foreign traffic taking place at the abovementioned Serbian–Wallachian point, and at the same time to extend the journey to the nearby Austrian cordon station of Orsova, in order, in agreement with the k.u.k. (Imperial-Royal) cordon command and by personal consultation, to promote mutual official assistance for the supervision of passersby.”³⁰ In 1873, consul Adolph Ritter von Schulz reported a similar collective movement that seemed suspicious. He wrote to Gyula Andrásy,

I have just learned, that the Wallachian peasants of the village of Bregawa, situated on the Serbian border, have recently acted against some Turkish security authorities in a manner that must all the more arouse attention, since until now the inhabitants of the Wallachian villages lying on Turkish territory, and mostly toward the Serbian border, have distinguished themselves by their correct [i.e., loyal to the Ottoman authorities] conduct.³¹

Another important aspect of the work of the consuls was the monitoring and stimulation of Austrian commercial activities in their jurisdictions. As a first prominent Ottoman port for Austrian boats navigating the Danube, Vidin gained a strategic significance within the Habsburg consular network, as it became a node of Europeanization and of the introduction of modern inventions into the Ottoman interior. It is important to note that the first phase of Austrian consular activity coincided with an expansion of trade with the Ottoman Empire, but the devastations of the Crimean War adversely impacted commercial exchange between the two empires. However, the end of the war brought

30 Walcher von Moltheim to Count Johann Bernhard von Rechberg und Rothenlöwen, Vidin, March 30, 1864. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

31 Adolph von Schulz to Gyula Andrásy, Vidin, April 27, 1873. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

substantial French and British investments in railroad and telegraph infrastructure, particularly in the Danubian delta, with the launch of Cerna voda-Constanza and Ruse-Varna railroad projects to expedite the transport connection between the Danube and the Black Sea.³² The foreign ministries of Paris and London also considered creating a consular network along the Lower Danube to facilitate these imperial projects. A French consul openly discussed these plans with his Austrian colleague, a testament to a certain collegiality and institutional culture that began to take root over the years of common service in the Bulgarian lands.³³

Though not included in these grand infrastructural projects, Vidin attracted the attention of the French and British authorities due to its strategic location, administrative significance, and military importance in the context of the Crimean War. Unlike their Habsburg peers, the French and British authorities did not establish a solid and continuous consular presence in the Danubian town in the 1850s, to the detriment of their commercial, political, and diplomatic interests. The absence of foreign consuls likely proved a blessing for the Austrian consular officials in Vidin in this period. Despite the missing prospects for cross-national cooperation (for example, in the areas of migration management, cultural exchange, and information distribution), there were also considerable risks associated with the different, at times opposing interests of the Western powers (as well as Russia) in the Lower Danube region. The Habsburg consuls in Ruse and Varna, for example, bemoaned the pro-revolutionary activities of their British colleague in the important Black Sea port, who had enabled the escape of prominent Hungarian revolutionaries from the tightening grip of the imperial officials.³⁴ In 1860s, there were frequent allegations of the newly installed Russian consul in Vidin inciting Bulgarians to emigrate to the Russian Empire. A strong presence of French or British consuls would have presented obstacles to Austrian interests in Vidin, not to mention increased commercial competition for the gradually recovering local markets in the wake of the Crimean War.

Certainly, the relative prominence of Austrian consular interests in Vidin also benefitted from the development of imperial steamboat transportation

32 Platon, “Les intérêts français au Bas-Danube à la moitié du XIXe siècle à travers la correspondance commerciale du consul français Eugène Poujade (1849–1854).”

33 Roussev, “Le consul français: un intermédiaire de la modernisation occidentale dans les Balkans au XIXe siècle”; Roussev, “Les premiers pas de la pénétration consulaire française en Bulgarie.”

34 Симеонов, “Списъкът на Ръослер,” 148; Плетьов, “Русия и преселването на българи в Русия след 1862 г.,” 146–50.

across the Danube. Consul Rössler complained to the Viennese authorities about the unreliability of steamboat transportation, as he failed to intercept the migration of the thousands of Hungarian, Wallachian, Polish, and Italian exiles from Vidin to Shumen in November 1849, missing them by eight days. Therefore, he reported to the Austrian minister on November 9, “I will catch the steamboat arriving here on the 14th in the direction of Ruse, from whence I will undertake a land journey to Shumla, where I will arrive two or three days before the refugees.” Rössler anticipated saving several days by choosing steamboat navigation, since the “journey by foot to Shumla advances very slowly, at only four hours per day,” mostly due to poor roads and a particularly harsh winter.³⁵ Rössler believed that his ability to utilize the Austrian steamboat would provide a strategic advantage over the last group of rebels, who would arrive in Vidin later than he. He wrote,

It is not to be doubted, that after covering such a wide route (the journey should last up to 75 days, most [migrants] completing it on foot), all those already inclined to return would, considering the approaching harsh season and the absence of any comfort and of all essentials, be even more determined to undertake a return trip.

If that were indeed the case, Rössler stressed, he would provide all those willing to return but lacking the means to do so with the necessary money to depart from Shumla to Ruschuk, “from whence they would embark on a steamboat via Orsova to their homeland or wherever they were to be sent.” To act “swiftly and successfully,” however, the consul needed not only a significant “sum of money, but also, at his disposal, per official order, command over a steamboat at Ruschuk, which would transport the refugees to Austria.”³⁶ In the end, a delay in the departure of the Austrian ship caused the consul to lose vital time in mounting his horse, and his counter-insurgency efforts toward Shumen. He arrived there late on November 21, largely due to the unforeseen delay of his steamboat’s departure, missing Kossuth’s arrival by only two hours.³⁷

35 Consul Emanuel Edler von Rössler to Felix Ludwig Johann Friedrich, Prinz zu Schwarzenberg, Ruse, November 9, 1849. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

36 Emanuel Edler von Rössler to Felix Ludwig Johann Friedrich, Prinz zu Schwarzenberg, Ruse, November 10, 1849. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

37 Emanuel Edler von Rössler to Felix Ludwig Johann Friedrich, Prinz zu Schwarzenberg, Ruse, November 22, 1849. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

The expansion of steamboat transportation was a double-edged sword for the consuls, for it inevitably entangled the Habsburg monarchy in the nascent revolutionary struggles taking place on both sides of the Lower Danube. In October 1849, consul Rössler reported the movement of “traitors” on board the steamboat to Orsova, who allegedly sought to join the “Hungarian and Polish refugees [and] accompany them to Shumla.”³⁸ As steamboat transportation improved over the next years, Bulgarian revolutionaries in Romania made use of the new technology to navigate the river on their way to the homeland, at times inciting conflicts with captains or the Ottoman police closely monitoring their activities.³⁹ In 1867, a daring expedition by the rebel leaders Nikola Voyvodov and Tsvyatko Pavlovich, who boarded the Austrian steamer *Germania* at Galatz with the goal of revolutionizing the Bulgarian lands, was thwarted by the Ottoman police, and the two leaders were killed by the guards after a gunfight at the wharf in Ruse. It was very difficult for foreign consuls to avoid getting dragged into these confrontations, and the nascent Bulgarian national press vigorously reported on consuls’ actions on different occasions.⁴⁰ In fact, the involvement of imperial subjects in local revolutionary affairs continued after the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule. In 1880, merely two years after the end of the Russo-Turkish War, the Austrian consuls in Vidin and Ruse monitored the activities of a secret Macedonian committee in Bulgaria, which included an imperial subject in a highly influential position. The consuls communicated with the Austrian representative in Sofia to affect the quick deportation of their subject before the incident turned into a major debacle.⁴¹

Steamboat navigation remained dangerous over the following decades for environmental reasons as well. In the early years of Austrian consular activities along the Danube, the Iron Gates (a stretch of the Danube where the river passes through a narrow gorge) presented an insurmountable barrier to steamboat transportation, an important limiting factor to an even greater consular presence. A report by consul Walcher on the sinking (and rescue) of an

38 Emanuel Edler von Rössler to Felix Ludwig Johann Friedrich, Prinz zu Schwarzenberg, Ruse, October 26, 1849. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

39 Simeonov, “Microhistory of a *Djemadan*.”

40 For more information on how consular activities in Ruse contributed to the tensions and national liberation struggle in the period of the Great Eastern Crisis, see Simeonov, “Microhistory of a *Djemadan*.”

41 Rudolf von Khevenhüller-Metsch to Heinrich Karl von Haymerle, Sofia, October 5, 1880. ÖStA, HHStA, Diplomatie und Außenpolitik 1848–1918 Politisches Archiv (PA) 1848–1918, PA XV Bulgarien 1879–1918; Bulgarian National Archives, KFM03, inventory no. 295b/2-3.

Ottoman government steamer named *Silistria* near Orsova in March 1864 demonstrated the risks of underestimating the geographic limitations on the expansion of steamboat navigation.⁴² This incident highlighted the importance of close collaboration between the Habsburg consuls and the imperial steamboat navigators. Numerous conflicts in the late nineteenth century attested to the necessity of having an imperial consul in Vidin, as well as a chancellor fluent in Bulgarian to ensure the swift and unproblematic resolution of conflicts.⁴³

Conclusion

The Habsburg consulate in Vidin established itself as an important node in the nascent imperial extraterritorial network that began to take shape in the Lower Danube region around the middle of the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, the creation of the network was precipitated by the expansion of Habsburg steamboat transportation, the recurrence of transhumant pasturing, and the overall economic penetration of imperial goods into the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat Era. But if these developments set the conditions for the establishment of an Austrian (vice) consulate in Ruse, then the kindling of revolutionary ferment in 1849 was ultimately the decisive factor for the completion of this endeavor. The Crimean War clearly demonstrated the utility of an imperial consulate in this seemingly peripheral location, inasmuch as Vidin, the adjacent region, and the lands on the opposite side of the Danube became an important, complex, and fiercely contested battleground in the early months of the military clashes.

While the Crimean War brought devastation to the region, the Austrian consulate continued its operations, helping promote the interests of its subjects, entrepreneurs, and steamboat operators in a period that witnessed the growth of imperial commercial interests in the area. A reorganization that took place after

42 Walcher von Moltheim to Count Johann Bernhard von Rechberg und Rothenlöwen, Vidin, March 11, 1864. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918, PA XXXVIII. Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KMF03, inventory no. 5 (microfilm).

43 See, for example, Stanislaus Ritter von Piliński to Gustav Kálnoky von Körös-Patak, February 27, 1888. ÖStA, HHStA, Politisches Archiv 1848–1918. PA XXXVIII – Konsulate; Bulgarian National Archives, KFM03, inventory no. 360/6. On the need for a chancellor to handle the increasing amount of work due to the navigation season, see Anton von Prokesch-Osten to Johann Bernhard von Rechberg und Rothenlöwen, May 16, 1860, Constantinople. ÖStA, HHStA, Diplomatie und Außenpolitik 1848–1918 Administrative Registratur 1848–1918 F 8 Kaiserliche Konsulate und Agentien, Karton 33; Bulgarian National Archives, KFM03, inventory no. 552/4, p. 256–262.

1859, when the consular system was attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also resulted in enhanced activity paired with greater efficiency. Even as Austrian consuls in Vidin helped promote imperial interests (and, indirectly, local economic recovery),⁴⁴ they consistently emphasized the importance of setting up a comprehensive surveillance regime across the Lower Danube region, as the river functioned as an artery that enabled revolutionary ideas to proliferate, against the designs of the reactionary officials. As shown in the discussion above, the Austrian consuls in Vidin managed to establish the consulate as an important node within a growing extraterritorial network. Their services helped advance the interests of the Habsburg Empire well beyond the conflicts that defined the late nineteenth century (i.e., the Hungarian and Wallachian Revolutions, the Crimean War, and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878). Finally, the article also corrected errors in the two major handbooks on Austrian consular activity, based on personal archival sources, thereby facilitating further research on these largely neglected extraterritorial establishments.

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44 See Симеонов, “Консулствата като фактори.”

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