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ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΩΝ ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ**



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**AUSTRIAN AND AUSTRO – HUNGARIAN DIPLOMACY AND
INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS IN ALBANIA, EPIRUS, AND THE
IONIAN ISLANDS: CASE STUDIES BETWEEN 1854 AND 1920**

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ΑΘΗΝΑ

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Abstract

The present paper delves into the intricate web of diplomacy and intelligence operations that unfolded in the region of Albania, Epirus and the Ionian Islands during the years 1854 – 1920, against the backdrop of the declining Ottoman Empire and the emergence of nation-states in the Balkans. Focusing on the multifaceted interactions between Austria-Hungary, Italy, Greece, and the Ottoman Empire, this study explores the political maneuvering, covert intelligence activities, and strategic alliances that shaped the future of these territories.

By examining a wealth of secondary sources, historical documents and previously underexplored Greek resources, the study sheds light on the power struggles, and intelligence-gathering techniques utilized by various actors, including secret societies, nationalist movements, and state authorities. These findings contribute significantly to our historical understanding of Austria – Hungary's diplomatic engagements in the western Balkans, emphasizing the interplay between intelligence operations, economic interests, and strategic calculations. Furthermore, it offers valuable insights into the broader context of the late Ottoman Empire and early 20th-century Balkans, enriching our comprehension of regional rivalries and the enduring legacy of imperial power dynamics.

Key words: Austro-Hungary, Diplomacy, Intelligence Operations, Epirus, Ionian Islands, Albania, Greece, Ottomans, Albanians

Introduction

The intricate interweaving of diplomacy and intelligence operations, emerges as a recurring motif in the chronicles of international relations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This symbiotic relationship, deeply embedded in the evolutionary trajectory of geopolitical landscapes, serves as a compelling testament to the nuanced dynamics characterizing statecraft and the strategic pursuit of acquiring competitive advantage. The advent of nation-states and the concomitant escalation of global power dynamics during the 19th century underscored the imperative for precise and timely information. Diplomatic envoys, strategically stationed in local embassies and consulates, found themselves assuming dual roles as both conventional emissaries and de facto intelligence operators. The Napoleonic Wars stand out as a paradigmatic episode, wherein figures like Sir Robert Wilson and Charles Stewart clandestinely partook in espionage activities on behalf of their respective governments.

In addition, the Crimean War (1853–1856) constituted a seminal juncture, marking the formal institutionalization of intelligence frameworks within diplomatic missions. This marked departure from ad hoc intelligence acquisition towards a more methodical paradigm mirrored the escalating complexity of global conflicts. Moreover, World War I further accelerated this trajectory, precipitating the establishment of dedicated intelligence agencies, exemplified by the inception of the British Secret Intelligence Service and the French Deuxième Bureau.

Eventually, the 19th and early 20th century entanglement of Austria – Hungary in the realms of Albania, Epirus¹, and the Ionian Islands furnishes an illuminating vantage point for scrutinizing the symbiotic interplay among diplomacy, intelligence, and socio-economic entanglements. The nuanced

¹ Epirus consists of a geographical coastal region of northwestern Greece and southern Albania. It extends from Valona Bay (Albanian: Gjiri i Vlorës) in Albania (northwest) to the Gulf of Árta (southeast); its hinterland extends eastward to the watershed of the Pindus (Modern Greek: Píndos) Mountains. See, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (n.d.). Epirus. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Epirus>; The encyclopædia britannica: A dictionary of arts, sciences and general literature (9th Edition) (9th ed.). (1889). Adam and Charles Black. Pages 6, 13, 17, 19, 151, 300, 313, 362, 436. <https://archive.org/details/encyclopaedia-britannica-9ed-1875>; Mapping Ottoman Epirus. (2024). <https://mapoe.stanford.edu/>; Captain A. Trapmann, “The Greek Operations in Epirus,” *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 57, no. 422 (1913): 501-517.

collaboration between Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, propelled by geopolitical imperatives and economic considerations, establishes an indispensable backdrop for the ensuing narrative. This paper embarks upon a comprehensive exploration of Austria-Hungary's multilayered involvements in the specified regions between 1854 and 1920, unraveling the intricate dynamics among Greeks, Albanians, and Ottomans. Through meticulous case studies, the study endeavors to elucidate the strategic sagacity and dynamic stratagems employed by Austria-Hungary, casting light upon the interwoven realms of diplomacy, intelligence operations, education, and commerce within this historical tapestry.

Importantly, this study incorporates previously underexplored Greek resources, shedding new light on historical events and perspectives that have not been fully surfaced in past scholarship. Through the inclusion of these resources, the paper seeks to enrich our understanding of the complex interactions and power dynamics shaping the western Balkans during this pivotal period.

Concepts of diplomacy and intelligence operations

The nuanced interaction between diplomacy and intelligence operations has consistently stood as a defining feature of international relations across the 19th and 20th centuries. The interplay between these two functions has evolved over time, mirroring the shifts in geopolitical landscapes, technological advancements, and the nature of conflicts². Notably, in the early 19th century, intelligence operations were often clandestinely conducted by diplomatic officers stationed in local embassies, consulates, and delegations. This collaborative approach laid the foundation for a symbiotic relationship between the worlds of diplomacy and intelligence, where information gathering, and analysis became integral components of statecraft³.

Specifically, the 19th century marked a pivotal period in the development of modern diplomacy and intelligence operations. In an era defined by the

² M. Herman, "Diplomacy and Intelligence," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 9, no. 2 (1998), 1–22.

³ On the symbiotic relationship between the worlds of diplomacy and intelligence, see Mika Suonpää and Owain Wright, *Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Nineteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

emergence of nation-states and the intensification of global power struggles, the need for accurate and timely information became paramount⁴. Diplomatic officers, often acting as de facto intelligence agents, played a central role in gathering intelligence for their respective governments. Embassies, consulates, and delegations became hubs of information gathering, strategically positioned to observe and report on political developments, economic trends, and military activities⁵.

The role of diplomatic officers in intelligence operations was exemplified by their engagement in espionage, codebreaking, and covert communication networks. These officers, while officially representing their countries in diplomatic affairs, wore a second, less visible hat as information gatherers⁶. For instance, during the Napoleonic Wars, diplomats such as Sir Robert Wilson and Charles Stewart engaged in intelligence activities on behalf of the British government, providing critical information on French military movements and intentions. This dual role became an unspoken norm, with diplomats utilizing their positions to acquire intelligence that could sway the course of negotiations or inform military strategies⁷.

Furthermore, the synergy between diplomacy and intelligence operations became more pronounced as governments recognized the strategic advantages of combining these functions. Diplomats, possessing an inherent understanding of local cultures and political landscapes, were uniquely positioned to collect nuanced and context-rich intelligence. Simultaneously, intelligence officers, often working in the shadows, could provide diplomats with critical insights into the clandestine machinations of foreign powers. This collaboration was not only pragmatic but also crucial for maintaining the delicate balance of power in an increasingly interconnected world.

One noteworthy example of this collaboration occurred during the Crimean War (1853–1856). Diplomatic officers, stationed in the Ottoman Empire and other key locations, played a pivotal role in gathering intelligence about the

⁴ See Mika Suonpää and Owain Wright “*Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Nineteenth-Century*”.

⁵ Herman, “Diplomacy and Intelligence,” 1–22.

⁶ E. Goldstein, “The Foreign Office and political intelligence 1918–1920,” *Review of International Studies* 14, no. 4, 275–288.

⁷ Reider Payne, *War and Diplomacy in the Napoleonic Era*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

conflicting parties. The information they provided, ranging from troop movements to diplomatic maneuverings, directly influenced decision-making in both military and diplomatic circles. This period saw the establishment of formal intelligence structures within diplomatic missions, marking a significant departure from ad-hoc intelligence gathering to a more systematic and organized approach⁸.

The outbreak of World War I marked a turning point in the integration of diplomacy and intelligence operations. The scale and complexity of the conflict necessitated a more formalized and professional approach to intelligence gathering. Governments established dedicated intelligence agencies, such as the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the French Deuxième Bureau, with the primary mission of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence⁹.

Austria-Hungary's Policy and Strategy over the Region

Austro-Hungarian diplomacy over Ottoman Empire

The 18th century is widely acknowledged as the zenith of Ottoman-Austrian relations within academic discourse¹⁰. However, recent scholarly inquiries have witnessed a growing interest in the “Eastern foreign policy” of Austria-Hungary, particularly focusing on south Slavic (Balkan) nationalisms and the Ottoman-Habsburg borderlands during the 19th century¹¹. From a diplomatic standpoint, the cautious collaboration between Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in the 1800s, following centuries of historical conflict, was primarily motivated by the perceived menace of Russia¹². In the post-

⁸ Iakovos Michailidis and Giorgos Antoniou, *Institution building and research under foreign domination: Europe and the Black Sea region (early 19th-early 20th centuries)* (Athens: Epikentro, 2019).

⁹ Nigel West, *M16: British Secret Intelligence Service Operations, 1909-1945* (South Yorkshire: Frontline Books, 2019); M. Bourlet, “Le deuxième bureau et la Diplomatie Secrète : Les négociations Armand-Revertera de 1917,” *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 221, no. 1 (2006): 33–49.

¹⁰ Matthew Smith Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923. A study in international relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966); Krisztian Csaplár-Degovics, “Albanian nation-building and Austria-Hungary. the development of a southeast European people into a modern nation,” *Foreign Policy Review* 15, no. 1 (2022a): 7-9.

¹¹ Lefteris Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York: Holt McDougal, 1958) pp. 231-246.

¹² Gábor Demeter, *Diplomatic struggle for supremacy over the Balkan Peninsula (1878-1914)* (Sofia: Institute for Historical Studies BAS, 2017), 13-38.

Napoleonic European landscape, Prince Metternich viewed the Ottoman Empire as a pivotal player in impeding Russian expansionism¹³. This strategic alignment led Austria to refrain from supporting the Greek revolutionary movements and uprisings wars in the 1810s and 1820s. Endorsing the reformist Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid in the 1830s, Metternich engaged in deliberations concerning gradual reforms aimed at sustaining both empires. Despite historical incidents like the Ottoman asylum granted to Hungarian revolutionaries in 1849 and the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia – Herzegovina in 1878, followed by annexation in 1908, diplomatic relations endured¹⁴. In 1910, the Austro – Hungarian Empire provided support to the Ottomans during the Cretan crisis¹⁵.

Furthermore, economically, the Habsburg polity emerged as the Ottoman Empire's second-largest economic partner in the 1840s, trailing only behind Britain¹⁶. Despite assertions suggesting that Austro-Hungarian trade diminished in significance compared to other European powers by the 1900s, extant data indicates its enduring importance. Trade volumes, while fluctuating, consistently positioned Austria-Hungary as the second or third-largest importer to the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century¹⁷. The development of steam-powered connections through sea routes, rivers, and land played a pivotal role in fostering economic ties, facilitating the exchange of commodities such as sugar, wood, cement, fez, and paper. The robust economic relations were underpinned by transportation infrastructure, including the Orient Express connecting Vienna and Budapest to Constantinople. Austro-Hungarian consuls and merchants established a presence in pivotal Ottoman cities like Saloniki, Izmir, Beirut, Haifa, Alexandria, and Cairo. In this essence, economic interdependence reached its

¹³ Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923*.

¹⁴ Christina Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus in the period of 1907-1914 (in Greek: Ελληνοαλβανικές σχέσεις και η Βόρεια Ήπειρος την περίοδο 1907-1914)* (Athens: Olkos Publishing, 1997), 28-29; Clemens Ruthner, Diana Reynolds Cordileone, Ursula Reber, and Raymond Detrez, *Wechselwirkungen Austria-Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Western Balkans, 1878-1918* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 21-39.

¹⁵ A. Mestyan, “A Muslim dualism? inter-imperial history and Austria-Hungary in Ottoman thought, 1867–1921,” *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 4 (2021): 478-496.

¹⁶ Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923*.

¹⁷ Marian Kent, *Habsburg Monarchy and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1900-1918, in The Great Powers and the end of the Ottoman empire*. (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 31-33.

zenith during the First World War, with Austria-Hungary emerging as the primary importer to the Ottoman Empire¹⁸.

Eventually, people-to-people connections were facilitated by diverse intermediaries, including diplomats, merchants, refugees, soldiers, journalists, students, and tourists¹⁹. Eminent Habsburg orientalists, such as Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall and Ármin Vámbéry, played a significant role in fostering cultural exchange between the two empires²⁰. The Academy of Oriental Trade in Budapest contributed to the education of experts in trade and foreign relations with “Oriental” countries²¹. Moreover, tourism played a pivotal role, with travelers providing insights into the administrative structure of Austria-Hungary and the admiration of Habsburg peoples towards Emperor Franz Joseph²². Moreover, the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, mandated by the Berlin Congress, witnessed Austria-Hungary administering the predominantly Muslim province under continued Ottoman sovereignty²³. While the occupation's nature was more political than economically exploitative, tensions emerged, prompting Austria-Hungary to introduce civilisatory discourses emphasizing integration, freedom of religion, and recognition of Muslim landowners' rights. The primary objective of the occupation was to counter “Slavic” (Serbian) nationalism while suppressing potential uprisings²⁴.

¹⁸ R. Kodet, “Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire since the end of the Bosnian annexation crisis till the italo-turkish war,” *Central European Papers* 1, no. 2 (2013): 29–38.

¹⁹ Lampros Psomas, *A spy in Albania: The question of Southern Albania and Morton Federic Eden* (Korinthos, 2007), 13.

²⁰ A. Mestyan, “A Muslim dualism? inter-imperial history and Austria-Hungary,” 478–496.

²¹ Krisztian Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” *Hungarian Historical Review* 11, no. 2 (2022): 274-276.

²² H. Scott, “A Habsburg emperor for the next century,” *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 1 (2010): 197–216; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 274-276.

²³ Raymond Zickel, and Walter Iwaskiw, *Albania: A country study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), 17-18; Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 28-29, 34-36.

²⁴ Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, 231-246; Demeter, *Diplomatic struggle for supremacy over the Balkan Peninsula*, 13-38.

Cases of Diplomacy and Intelligence Operations

In the intricate tapestry of 19th century Balkan geopolitics, the forthcoming case studies delve into Austria – Hungary's multifaceted engagements in the region, offering a comprehensive exploration of diplomatic maneuvers, intelligence gathering, and economic pursuits. The focal point is the pivotal role played by Austrian diplomats and consuls stationed in Ioannina and Corfu during the 1854 Greek revolution in Southern Epirus. Ferdinand Haas's collaboration with N. A. Giuravich provides a lens into Austria's Human Intelligence gathering, unraveling the intricacies of the revolution, its leaders, and the diplomatic aftermath. These insights extend beyond the Greek revolution, delving into Austrian intelligence collection on Greek policy for Albanians, revealing the nuanced perspectives of Johann Georg von Hahn and the evolving dynamics of Albanian-Greek relations.

Furthermore, the narrative unfolds with the case of Konstantinos Christoforidis, whose educational pursuits, guided by Austrian influence, exemplify the cultural dimensions of Austria – Hungary's engagement. Plus, the establishment of Catholic schools financed by Austria-Hungary in Albania and Epirus emerges as a strategic diplomatic initiative, intertwining education, religion, and intelligence operations. The rivalry with Italy, mirrored in the Albanian National Movement, showcases the intricate dance of diplomacy, alliances, and territorial ambitions.

Subsequently, the economic endeavors of Austrian and Italian merchants in Epirus, particularly the contrasting fortunes of Austrian and Italian trade ventures, underscore the intersection of economic competition and diplomatic challenges in this dynamic region. Notably, the maritime influence of the Österreichischer Lloyd takes center stage, illuminating the company's pivotal role in shaping economic and cultural landscapes. The narrative unveils the Österreichischer Lloyd's adept navigation through geopolitical shifts, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the Ionian Islands, mainland Greece, and ports in Albania and Epirus. Beyond its commercial success, the company emerges as a cultural conduit, facilitating the exchange of ideas and enriching the cultural fabric of the region.

These case studies collectively unveil Austria-Hungary's strategic foresight and dynamic engagement in the complex geopolitical dynamics of 19th century Epirus, offering a nuanced understanding of the intertwining threads of diplomacy, intelligence, education, and commerce in this vibrant historical tapestry.

The case of 1854 Greek revolution in Epirus

In the intricate geopolitical landscape of 19th-century Vilayet of Ioannina, and the Ionian Islands, Austria's diplomatic presence played a pivotal role, particularly in the context of revolutionary upheavals and shifting alliances. The Austrian diplomats and consuls stationed in Ioannina (Ferdinand Haas) and Corfu (Eisenbach), along with an agent in Preveza affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Austrian monarchy, operated as conduits of crucial information during a tumultuous period marked by the Greek revolution in southern Epirus in 1854²⁵. The diplomatic treaties exchanged between Austria and the Ottoman Empire in 1854, facilitated by the Austro-Hungarian ambassador Karl von Bruck in Constantinople, provided valuable insights into Austria's views on the evolving developments in Epirus²⁶.

The letters exchanged between the Austrian agent in Preveza, N. A. Giuravich, and the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Corfu Eisenbach, served as invaluable sources of information regarding the Greek revolution²⁷. Beginning in January 1854, the revolution in southern Epirus, which coincided with the Crimean War, gained momentum, leading to armed struggles against Ottoman rule²⁸. The inhabitants of Radovizi, motivated by a desire to liberate their homeland, initiated the armed struggle, subsequently inspiring rebellions

²⁵ Kostas Papageorgiou, *The Epirot Revolution of 1854 (in Greek: Η Ηπειρωτική Επανάσταση του 1854)* Vol. 86 (Ioannina: Epirotiki Estia, 1959), <https://olympias.lib.uoi.gr/jspui/bitstream/123456789/27537/1/%CE%97%CF%80%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%81%CF%89%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%20%CE%B5%CF%83%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1%20%CF%84%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%87.86%2C%201959.pdf> (accessed June 27, 2024).

²⁶ Euripidis Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy (in Greek: Ήπειρος και Αυστριακή Διπλωματία)* (Ioannina: Dodoni, 2007), 1-13.

²⁷ Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy*, 13-32.

²⁸ Maria Todorova, "The Greek Volunteers in the Crimean War," *Balkan Studies* 25, no. 2 (1984): 539-563.

in other Epirot regions. Despite early victories, the rebels, led by Greek officers like Lieutenant Spyridon Karaiskakis and Major General Theodoros Grivas, faced defeat at Skoulikaria in May 1854²⁹. The diplomatic repercussions were significant, with the Greek state's tacit approval and subsequent strained relations with the Ottoman Empire³⁰. The British and French ambassadors, in response to the rebellion, supported a naval blockade on Greek ports and occupied Piraeus in May 1854, compelling King Otto to declare Greece's neutrality both in the cases of Epirus revolution and Crimea War³¹.

Furthermore, Ferdinand Haas in collaboration with N. A. Giuravich, meticulously monitored the revolution's developments on the ground from February to July 1854, collecting crucial information about the leaders of the revolution, their contacts and support networks from Greece, Britain, and France, as well as tactical details regarding the balance of power and the equipment of the revolutionaries. These efforts underscored the depth of Austrian involvement in Human Intelligence (HUMINT) gathering. Furthermore, the qualitative data collected about the Greek populations in the region demonstrated the Austrian agents' profound understanding of the underlying reasons and causes of the revolution³².

Beyond the Greek revolution, the Austrian agent in Preveza extended their intelligence efforts to assess the relationships between foreign consular authorities and local populations, particularly the Albanians. The agent also reported on any conflicts and rivalries between the consular authorities of Britain and France, providing Vienna with a comprehensive understanding of the diplomatic landscape in the region³³.

Eventually, Ferdinand Haas's letters went beyond mere reporting, encompassing a detailed analysis of the information and prevailing conditions in his area of responsibility. His proposals for Austrian foreign policy

²⁹ Papageorgiou, *The Epirot Revolution of 1854*.

³⁰ Carl Patsch, *Das Sandschak berat in Albanien* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1904); Christos Skafidas, *The Epirot Revolution of 1854 and the destruction of Metsovo* (in Greek: *Η ελληνική επανάσταση του 1854, εν Ήπειρο κι Θεσσαλία, η καταστροφή του Μετσόβου*), Vol. 3 (Ioannina: Epirotiki Estia, 1954).

³¹ Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy*, 13-32.

³² Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy*, 33-56.

³³ Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy*, 57-87.

emphasized the need for maritime expansion to the south, urging the occupation and control of ports in Epirus from Avlona³⁴ to Preveza. Notably, Haas critiqued the perceived lack of serious British and French involvement in the region, suggesting dire consequences for the local populations of Albania and Epirus³⁵.

In addition, the letters illuminated the Austrian agents' awareness of the movements and activities of their French and British counterparts. Reports detailed French information operations in the Ionian Islands and corresponding British movements on the continent, revealing a keen understanding of the intelligence activities conducted by rival powers in the region. Overall, this multifaceted intelligence effort showcased Austria's strategic foresight and engagement in the complex geopolitical dynamics of 19th-century Epirus³⁶.

The case of Intelligence collection over the Greek policy over Epirus

The case of intelligence collection over the Greek policy over Epirus, exemplified by the diplomatic endeavors of Johann Georg von Hahn, Austria's consul general in Ioannina from 1847 to 1851, provides a nuanced perspective on the intricate dynamics of 19th-century Balkan geopolitics³⁷. Hahn's scholarly examination of the poetic characteristics of Greek and Albanian-speaking populations during his tenure in Ioannina laid the basic work for an extensive intelligence collection effort³⁸. Upon his transfer to the Hellenic Kingdom in 1851 and in the capacity of the Consul General in Athens since 1869, Hahn orchestrated the creation of a diplomatic network, demonstrating a sustained commitment to information gathering. The Greek-

³⁴ The city named “Vlorë” in modern Albanian, “Avlonya” in the ottoman era, and “Avlona” in the classical Greek. See, George Gawrych, *The crescent and the eagle: Ottoman rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 23 and Adam and Charles Black, *The encyclopædia britannica: A dictionary of arts, sciences and general literature (9th Edition) (9th ed.)* (New York: 1889), 38, 454.

³⁵ Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy*, 121-126.

³⁶ Sourlas, *Epirus and Austrian Diplomacy*, 88-120.

³⁷ Nikolaos Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders (in Greek: Η Βόρεια Ήπειρος και τα φυσικά της σύνορα)* (Athens: Vasiliou publishing, 1945).

³⁸ David Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians in the Annual Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1805-1955* (Tirana: Vernon Publishing, 2017), 117.

Albanian approach undertaken by Hahn, potentially aligned with Austrian politics, came under scrutiny in 1903 when suspicions arose about a secret Greek-Austrian alliance and their shared interests in Epirus³⁹. While King George's visit to Austria did not result in a formal treaty, the mutual acknowledgment of interests between Austria and Greece hinted at a collaborative understanding⁴⁰. Notably, Austrian policy, favorably disposed toward Greek claims in Epirus during Italian influence in the area, underscored the complexity of regional alliances⁴¹.

Moreover, in 1912, as Venizelos submitted Greek claims to Rome for border delimitation, the Austrian ambassador in Athens conveyed to Vienna that Greek political circles were resistant to the idea of an independent Albanian state⁴². Venizelos, despite initially aligning with the Triple Alliance's preferences, gradually conceded strategic positions, abandoning plans for Avlona⁴³. During that period, the Austrian envoy in Athens, was reported that prevailing political tendencies in Greece favoring the Triple Alliance, although he believed Greece would not join a coalition against England⁴⁴.

The case of Konstantinos Christoforidis and the collaboration between English Bible Society and the Austrian Protestant Community

In the intricate tapestry of the 19th century, Kostandin Nelko, renowned as Konstantinos Christoforidis, emerges as a significant figure within the realms of intellectual and linguistic history. Born in Elbasan in 1827, Christoforidis embarked on his educational journey at the Zosimea Greek college in Ioannina in 1847, cultivating a lasting friendship with the eminent Austrian

³⁹ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 71-72.

⁴⁰ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 72-74.

⁴¹ Antonios Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans* (in Greek: *Η ιταλική πολιτική εν Αλβανία και τοις Βαλκανίοις*) (Athens: Embros, 1914): 66-81; Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912* (in Albanian: *Zgjimi kombëtar shqiptar*) (New York: Princeton University Press, 1967): 146-149; Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 72-74.

⁴² Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 311-313; C. J. Ailianos, "The balkan conundrum and relations between Austria-Hungary and Greece, 1912–1914," *Südost-Forschungen* 73, no. 1 (2014): 1–37.

⁴³ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 220-228; Ailianos, "The balkan conundrum and relations between Austria-Hungary and Greece," 1–37.

⁴⁴ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 220-228.

diplomat and philologist Johann Georg von Hahn⁴⁵. This association laid the foundation for Christoforidi's subsequent linguistic endeavors, notably their joint enterprise in compiling a German-Albanian dictionary⁴⁶.

A pivotal juncture in Christoforidi's trajectory unfolded in 1856 or 1857, as he embraced Protestantism and aligned himself with a Protestant church in Izmir. This religious transformation marked the initiation of a trajectory intertwining religious identity with linguistic and scholarly pursuits. Relocating to Constantinople in 1857, Christoforidi drafted a memorandum in Albanian, reflecting his commitment to language preservation and advocacy⁴⁷.

From 1860 onward, Christoforidi's collaboration with the English Bible Society became a defining aspect of his life. Recognizing his expertise, the Society contracted him in 1865 to contribute to Bible translations into Albanian⁴⁸. This collaboration exemplified a convergence of religious and linguistic motives, aligning the dissemination of religious texts with Christoforidi's evangelical commitment and dedication to fostering the Albanian language⁴⁹. Subsequently, in 1866, Christoforidis achieved a significant milestone by publishing the first Gheg translation of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles⁵⁰. This marked the initiation of a series of translations spanning Psalms (1868, 1869), The New Testament (1879, 1869), Genesis and Exodus (Tosk, 1880), Deuteronomy (Tosk, 1882), and The Proverbs and the Book of Isaiah (Tosk, 1884). His collaboration with Nikolla Serreqi, particularly on the Gheg version, underscored the cooperative spirit in linguistic endeavors⁵¹.

Beyond linguistic contributions, Christoforidi's involvement in the Central Committee for Defending Albanian Rights, founded in 1877, showcased his

⁴⁵ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*; Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 138-140; Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 117-118.

⁴⁶ Spyridon Sfetas, *Introduction to Balkan History, From the Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans to the First Balkan War 1354 - 1918* (in Greek: *Εισαγωγή στην Βαλκανική Ιστορία, Από την Οθωμανική κατάκτηση των Βαλκανίων μέχρι τον πρώτο Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο 1354-1918*) (Athens: Vaniias Publishing, 2009): 272-275.

⁴⁷ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 146-150.

⁴⁸ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 140-144.

⁴⁹ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 388-390.

⁵⁰ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 66-68.

⁵¹ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 111-155.

commitment to the broader Albanian national cause⁵². During the Great Eastern Crisis, he critiqued the actions of some League of Prizren notables, emphasizing national interests over personal or religious motivations. In addition, Christoforidi's devotion to the development and preservation of the Albanian language culminated in his magnum opus, "The Dictionary of the Albanian Language", published posthumously in Athens, Greece, in 1904. This comprehensive work reflected Christoforidi's linguistic prowess and his profound impact on shaping the linguistic identity within the cultural milieu of the 19th century⁵³.

Furthermore, in the intricate tapestry of 19th century, a compelling collaboration unfolded at the crossroads of religion, education, and diplomacy between the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) and the Austrian Protestant community⁵⁴. Established in 1804, the BFBS aimed to circulate the Holy Scriptures globally, becoming a powerful force in evangelical Christianity⁵⁵. The collaborative efforts between the BFBS and the Austrian Protestant community in the 1860s and 1870s, marked by the deployment of colporteurs, became a pivotal chapter in the history of Bible distribution⁵⁶. Edward Millard, representing the BFBS in Vienna, played a central role in navigating the predominantly Catholic context⁵⁷. Despite challenges, Millard sought cooperation with all denominations, including Catholics⁵⁸. His efforts to print scriptures locally and engage with diverse religious traditions showcased the nuanced approach of the BFBS⁵⁹.

By the end of the 1860s, Millard's agency had 44 colporteurs working across Central and Eastern Europe, employing individuals from various denominations. The emphasis on adapting to different linguistic and cultural

⁵² Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 111-155.

⁵³ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 111-155.

⁵⁴ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 1-39

⁵⁵ O. Pecsuk, "The beginnings of Bible mission of the British and foreign bible society in early nineteenth century Hungary," *Perichoresis* 19, no. 1 (2021): 1-6.

⁵⁶ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 47-130

⁵⁷ Ian Randall, "Nineteenth-Century Bible Society Colporteurs in Eastern Europe," paper delivered at the Henry Martyn Centre, Cambridge, and at IBTS, Prague (2011).

⁵⁸ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 127-130.

⁵⁹ O. Pecsuk, "The beginnings of Bible mission of the British," 7-9.

contexts underscored the strategic flexibility of the BFBS⁶⁰. While facing tensions due to Baptist connections, Millard's dedication and strategic collaborations contributed to a significant surge in scripture circulation. The BFBS's recognition of the importance of colportage in its mission, coupled with Millard's diplomatic efforts, not only expanded the reach of scriptures but also navigated complex religious landscapes⁶¹. The collaboration between the English Bible Society and the Austrian Protestant community during this period stands as a testament to the multifaceted dynamics of religious engagement, education, and diplomacy in the vibrant mosaic of 19th-century Central and Eastern Europe⁶².

In the intricate fabric of Christoforidi's journey, the synergy between his collaboration with Johann Georg von Hahn and the English Bible Society unfolds as a complex network where linguistic scholarship, religious commitment, and national advocacy interweave. This symbiotic relationship not only highlights the profound influence Johann Georg von Hahn had in guiding Konstantinos Christoforidi's towards becoming a significant Albanian linguistic contributor but also underscores the pivotal role of the collaboration between the BFBS and the Austrian Protestant community in shaping Christoforidi's multifaceted legacy.

The case of Catholic Schools in Albania and Epirus

The Austrian influence in Albania rooted in the protection of Catholic Church rights in the Ottoman Empire, took a significant turn with the implementation of the politics by the Austro-Hungarian Empire⁶³. This diplomatic strategy, manifested through an extensive framework known as the “Action Programme”, aimed at consolidating influence through cultural, educational,

⁶⁰ Randall, “Nineteenth-Century Bible Society Colporteurs in Eastern Europe”.

⁶¹ Randall, “Nineteenth-Century Bible Society Colporteurs in Eastern Europe”.

⁶² Eleftheria Nikolaidou, *Foreign propaganda and ethnic Albanian movement in the metropolitan provinces of Durrës and Belgrade during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (in Greek: Η ξένη προπαγάνδα και το αλβανικό εθνικό κίνημα στα αστικά κέντρα του Δυρραχίου και του Βελιγραδίου στα τέλη του 19ου και τις αρχές του 20ου αιώνα)* (Ioannina: IMIAH Publishing, 1978): 298-299.

⁶³ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 145-150.

scientific, religious, and propagandistic activities⁶⁴. At the heart of this endeavor were the establishment and promotion of schools and churches, strategically utilizing the Albanian language in educational institutions⁶⁵. This move was not merely an educational initiative but a calculated means of diplomatic control over the Albanian population and a tool for quelling nationalist uprisings⁶⁶.

The Austro – Hungarian Empire's involvement in Albanian education was notably prominent in the Shkodra region⁶⁷. The region's historical ties with Vienna date back to the mid-19th century, and efforts to unearth this association reveal a symbiotic relationship between Albanian intellectuals, private initiatives, clerical influence, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire⁶⁸. The year 1848 marked a pivotal moment when Vienna legislated that elementary schools teach in the mother tongue, fostering attempts to establish Albanian-language schools⁶⁹. The Ottoman government's inability to suppress these schools, motivated by religious considerations, paved the way for Austria's sustained efforts to establish educational institutions in the Albanian language⁷⁰.

Subsequently, the Austrian commitment to education in Albania extended beyond rhetoric. The reconstruction and maintenance of churches, preparation of Catholic pulpits, and the establishment of schools exemplified Austria multifaceted approach⁷¹. By subsidizing 47 elementary schools in the Vilayet of Shkodra, including 10 for girls, the empire solidified its foothold in the region. These institutions, initially following Ottoman models like mekteps

⁶⁴ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 130-134.

⁶⁵ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 8-14.

⁶⁶ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 120-140.

⁶⁷ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 21-22.

⁶⁸ British Naval Intelligence Division, *Albania* (London: The Admiralty, 1945): 143-146; Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 146-150.

⁶⁹ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 66-109.

⁷⁰ Kujtim Pelinku, and Eranda Bilali, "Contribution of Austrian-Hungarian empire in the development of education in Shkodra till notification of the independence of Albania," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 3 (2014): 368-374.

⁷¹ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 120-140.

and later evolving into medreses, played a crucial role in shaping Shkodra into a significant educational center⁷².

Moreover, the “Paternal Schools”⁷³ initiated by the Franciscans in 1855 marked a turning point in education, supported financially by the Austrian government. The curriculum, encompassing religion, calligraphy, and the first elements of Italian grammar, demonstrated the strategic alignment of education with Austria's interests. The Austrian Consulate's reports highlighted the ongoing support, emphasizing the importance of these schools in shaping the new generation and contributing to Shkodra's emergence as an educational hub⁷⁴.

As the 19th century drew to a close, Italy emerged as a competitor to Austro-Hungarian influence in the Balkans⁷⁵. The rivalry extended to the realm of education, with Italian interests challenging Austro-Hungarian initiatives⁷⁶. Despite the Ottoman government's permission to open Italian schools in Shkodra in 1889, the Catholic population resisted due to loyalty to the dualist Empire of Habsburgs⁷⁷. The Austro – Hungarian consulate played a pivotal role in countering Italian influence, leveraging schools as a tool for cultural expansion and intelligence operations⁷⁸.

In due course, the Austro – Hungarian Empire's engagement in Albania was not devoid of geopolitical considerations. Its treaties with the Ottoman Empire secured recognition of protection over northern Albanian Catholics, enabling Austria to build churches, pay clergy salaries, and establish schools⁷⁹. This diplomatic success, however, faced challenges in the South, where the Orthodox population favored Greek schools over those under Austro-Hungarian influence⁸⁰.

⁷² Pelinku and Bilali, “Contribution of Austrian-Hungarian empire”, 368-374.

⁷³ In some historical contexts, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, educational institutions often operated in a paternalistic manner, especially in boarding schools and missionary schools.

⁷⁴ Pelinku and Bilali, “Contribution of Austrian-Hungarian empire”, 368-374.

⁷⁵ Csaplár-Degovics, “Albanian nation-building and Austria–Hungary,” 10-12.

⁷⁶ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 146-150.

⁷⁷ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 200-203; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 274-276.

⁷⁸ Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 204-245.

⁷⁹ Pelinku and Bilali, “Contribution of Austrian-Hungarian empire”, 368-374.

⁸⁰ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 146-150.

Between 1908 and 1920, Italy sought to neutralize Austro – Hungarian influence in northern Albania, particularly through Catholic schools, while simultaneously combating Hellenism in the South. The ground, prepared by Austro – Hungarian schools teaching Italian as a compulsory language, inadvertently facilitated Italy's agenda and accepting Italian geographical denominations throughout the Adriatic⁸¹. This period witnessed a complex interplay of diplomatic maneuvers, propaganda efforts, and educational strategies, highlighting the multifaceted nature of great power politics in the Albanian context⁸².

The case of Austria-Hungary's diplomacy over Albanian National Movement

The period until 1896

Until the 19th century, northern Albania remained on the periphery of the Habsburg Monarchy's geopolitical considerations⁸³. However, a pivotal moment occurred in 1832 when an Austrian consulate was established in Shkodra, the largest city in northern Albania. Austro-Hungarian interest in this region as a strategic buffer against Slavic (Serbian) populations gained momentum towards the close of the 19th century, notably following the Austro – Hungarian occupation of Bosnia – Herzegovina in 1878, where opposition to the Slavs played a central role⁸⁴.

The strategic orientation of the Austro – Hungarian Empire in the western Balkans underwent a significant transformation after the suppression of the Albanian League of Prizren in 1878⁸⁵. This shift was precipitated by the perceived impending collapse of the Ottoman Empire, prompting diplomatic

⁸¹ Pelinku and Bilali, "Contribution of Austrian-Hungarian empire", 368-374.

⁸² Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 16-30; Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 122-130.

⁸³ Günter Bischof, Ferdinand Karlhofe and Samuel R. Williamson, *1914: Austria-Hungary, the origins, and the first year of World War I* (New Orleans: Innsbruck University Press, 2014): 136-137; Csaplár-Degovics, "Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania," 268-269 ; Csaplár-Degovics, "Albanian nation-building and Austria-Hungary," 6-7.

⁸⁴ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 28-29; Joseph Swire, *Ngritja e një mbretërie*, (Tirana: Dituria, 2005): 59; Csaplár-Degovics, "Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania," 272-273.

⁸⁵ Zickel and Iwaskiw, *Albania: A country study*, 17-18; Csaplár-Degovics, "Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania," 278-280.

missions that increasingly focused on the Albanian political landscape⁸⁶. Moreover, heightened uncertainties arose during the Crete Crisis and the Greek –Ottoman War in 1896-97, particularly concerning the collaboration between Serbian Montenegrin forces and Italians in the region⁸⁷.

In response to these challenges, a series of two secret Austro – Hungarian – Albanian conferences transpired between November and December 1896. The impetus for these confidential deliberations originated from the ongoing Crete crisis and memorandums submitted by prominent southern Albanian Muslim figures, Ferit Bey Vlora, and Syrja Bey Vlora⁸⁸. The objective of the Viennese “Albanian Action” was to establish a protectorate over Albanian territories, strategically demarcating Montenegro and Serbia through the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, while upholding Ottoman sovereignty⁸⁹.

The initial clandestine meeting on November 17, 1896, underscored the geopolitical imperative of an independent Albania under the protectorate of Austria – Hungary⁹⁰. The emphasis was on preparing for the potential dissolution of Ottoman rule, and collaboration with Greece was considered to counteract Italian influence. The subsequent secret meeting on December 8, 1896, delved into the creation of a comprehensive study titled “Memorandum über Albanien”, encompassing the operational area, political and national conditions, and action measures. This report highlighted the absence of well-defined political-administrative entities for the Albanians within Ottoman territories⁹¹. Revisiting the secret conferences of 1896, Austria – Hungary articulated a novel position concerning its foreign policy in South-Eastern Europe. Under the direction of Joint Foreign Minister Count Agenor Gołuchowski, these sessions proposed the establishment of an independent

⁸⁶ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 60-67; Anastas Bezha, “Austria-Hungary and the Albanian project. A comparative case study: Between support and Imperialism”. *Études sur la Région Méditerranéenne* 30. (2020): 1-5, <https://ojs.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php/mediterranean/article/view/34592> (accessed June 27, 2024).

⁸⁷ Ruthner et al., *Wechselwirkungen Austria-Hungary*, 383-400; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 273-274.

⁸⁸ Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 273-274.

⁸⁹ Bezha, “Austria-Hungary and the Albanian project,” 1-10; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 274-276.

⁹⁰ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 104-122.

⁹¹ Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 274-276.

Principality of Albania, titled “Eine energische Aktion”⁹². Also, the same report, categorized the Albanian population into two principal ethno-linguistic groups —Gegë and Toskë— with distinct characteristics and religious affiliations. Despite their disparities, both groups shared a collective interest in an autonomous, unified Albanian province⁹³. Plus, the perceived threat of Russian intervention in the region fostered the belief that Austro-Hungarians would serve as natural allies for the Albanians⁹⁴.

Eventually, these two secret conferences were conducted without meticulous analysis, serving the primary purpose of unveiling the manifestation of political thought within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Despite the temporal separation of two decades, these conferences emerge as singular instances where the Albanian question underwent exhaustive deliberation within the corridors of power in Vienna.

The period between 1900 – 1920

Austro – Hungarian interest in Albania and Epirus became discernible in tandem with specific agreements with Turkey, primarily directed at safeguarding Catholics in the Balkans and the Levant^{95, 96}. This interest was intricately tied to strategic considerations concerning Austria-Hungary's security and the unhindered sovereignty of the Adriatic Sea⁹⁷. Moreover, it reflected an imperative need to cultivate committed allies among the Balkan peoples, driven by Austro – Hungarian rivalry with Russia in the Balkans⁹⁸. This necessity heightened after the Congress of Berlin and the emergence of Slavic states, particularly in the aftermath of the economic and political disengagement from Serbia and the rupture in Austro – Hungarian – Serbian relations (1903 – 1905), ushering in a new regional context with ramifications

⁹² Bezha, “Austria-Hungary and the Albanian project,” 1-5.

⁹³ Bezha, “Austria-Hungary and the Albanian project,” 5-23.

⁹⁴ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 135-136.

⁹⁵ Area that encompasses Holy Land, Lebanon, Syria and minus Egypt.

⁹⁶ Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 274-276.

⁹⁷ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 8-10; Zickel and Iwaskiw, *Albania: A country study*, 21-22; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 273-274.

⁹⁸ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 120-140.

for the south Slavic (Serbian) populations within Austro – Hungarian territory⁹⁹.

Afterwards, Austro – Hungarian policy in Albania and Epirus aimed to forestall the exclusive sovereignty of other powers over the region, as evidenced by its preference for declaring Albania an autonomous or independent state in the event of the Ottoman Empire's collapse. This stance brought Austria-Hungary into direct contention with Italian imperialism, which harbored similar ambitions in the same region since the latter part of the 19th century¹⁰⁰.

In 1908, a communication from the vice-consul of Austria – Hungary in Durazzo¹⁰¹, during his sojourn in Tirana, reported a burgeoning nationalist movement among the Albanians in Tirana and Elbasan^{102,103}. The Komitet (Committee), composed exclusively of Albanians from the region, assumed responsibility for directing these efforts. Notably, the Committee advocated for Albanian as an official language, inaugurated schools, and disseminated thousands of alphabets and books containing Fraser's letters from Skopje¹⁰⁴. This movement laid the basic work for various associations, each championing its distinct alphabet, to converge in the near future and endeavor to formulate a unified Albanian alphabet¹⁰⁵.

Furthermore, on November 4, 1908, in Avlona, Austro – Hungarian consul Kraus dispatched a report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Dual Monarchy, underscoring the perceived Slavic (Serbian) threat and elucidating Ismail Kemal's stance on protecting Albanians from potential dismemberment by neighboring states¹⁰⁶. Kraus's report highlighted the warning from Albanians in Constantinople to their compatriots in the region, portraying Ismail Kemal as a pivotal figure in emphasizing the jeopardy faced not only by

⁹⁹ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 34-36; Psomas, *A spy in Albania*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Syle Ukshini, (2021) "Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy and the Independence of Albania," *West Bohemian Historical Review* 11, no. 2 (2021): 167-207; Csaplár-Degovics, "Albanian nation-building and Austria-Hungary," 10-12.

¹⁰¹ *The encyclopædia britannica: A dictionary of arts, sciences and general literature (9th Edition)*, 140.

¹⁰² It was a telegram to Mr. Kral, who was consul-general of Austria-Hungary in the city of Shkodra.

¹⁰³ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 130-140.

¹⁰⁴ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 130-140.

¹⁰⁵ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878–1912*, 154-160.

¹⁰⁶ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 130-140; Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 63-70.

Turkey but also by Albanians¹⁰⁷. The report emphasized Austro – Hungarian apprehensions about potential Serbian and Montenegrin designs on Albanian's territories, whether by force or diplomatic means, and Bulgaria's expanding influence in the region.

Later on, the success of the allied Balkan states in the early days of the First Balkan War prompted diplomatic action by Austria¹⁰⁸. Following a series of meetings in Vienna in October 1912, the Dual Monarchy decided to advocate for the establishment of an independent Albanian state, primarily to curb Serbian territorial ambitions¹⁰⁹. This initiative garnered support from Germany and Italy¹¹⁰. Austria-Hungary sought a comprehensive blockade of Serbia from the Adriatic, driven by fears that a robust Serbian kingdom could serve as a Russian base, encompassing Croatia and Slovenia¹¹¹. Meanwhile, Italy supported Albanian's territorial integrity to maintain the status quo in the Adriatic¹¹².

Eventually, Austria – Hungary recognized that only through the creation of an independent Albania could secure its interests in the region. Consequently, with diplomatic backing from Vienna, 83 representatives, comprising Christians and Muslims, convened in Avlona on November 28, 1912, where the Independence of Albania was proclaimed, as symbolized by the erection of Skanderbeg's emblem (the two-headed black eagle)¹¹³. The decisive role of Austro – Hungarian diplomacy in shaping the future borders of Albania became evident in the aftermath of its declaration of independence in 1912¹¹⁴. Reports from various Balkan regions, reaching Vienna, highlighted not only the disintegration of Ottoman military formations but also the consolidation of Balkan armies on the ground¹¹⁵. Austria-Hungary engaged not only in

¹⁰⁷ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 65-66; Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*.

¹⁰⁸ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 130-140.

¹⁰⁹ Constantin Anastasi Chekrezi, *Albania past and present* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919): 75-80; Csaplár-Degovics, "Albanian nation-building and Austria-Hungary," 6–30.

¹¹⁰ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 130-135.

¹¹¹ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 110-115.

¹¹² Psomas, *A spy in Albania*, 5.

¹¹³ Vickers Miranda, *The Albanians: a modern history*, (London: Tauris, 1995): 68.

¹¹⁴ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 137.

¹¹⁵ Alban Dobruna, "Austria-Hungary and the Albanians during the years 1912-1913," *European Journal of Economics, Law and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2021): 298–306.

logistical support, monitored the insurgent movement through its consulates in Skopje, Shkodra, Mitrovica, and Thessaloniki but also actively pursued diplomatic avenues. The Austro – Hungarian Foreign Minister Count Berchtold sought an audience with Ismail Kemal's and other Albanian representatives in Vienna, aiming to discuss and analyze possibilities for further diplomatic action¹¹⁶. The period following the 1912 uprising and the onset of the First Balkan war witnessed initial offers of autonomy under the Ottoman Sultan. However, recognizing the potential for subjective advancement amidst the Balkan conflict, Austria – Hungary supported the demand for autonomy, contributing to the preservation of Albanian's territorial integrity¹¹⁷.

Thereafter to 1916, significant geopolitical shifts occurred. The policy of “peaceful penetration” gave way to armed conflict due to the Balkan Wars, decisions of the London Treaty, and Austro – Hungarian entry into the Great War¹¹⁸. Albania, though independent, grappled with internal strife from 1914 to 1916¹¹⁹. Austria –Hungary found itself embroiled in a multifront war against Italy, Russia, and the Balkans¹²⁰.

Relations between Austria-Hungary and Italy over the Albanian National Movement During the era spanning the Italian unification (1858 – 1861), Austro – Italian relations were marked by reciprocal suspicion, a sentiment that endured over the years. The rivalry between Austria and Italy in Albania and Epirus regions became salient after the Congress of Berlin, coinciding with the formulation of a systematic Albanian policy in Italy¹²¹. This policy was notably influenced by the participation of the Italo – Albanian politician Francis Crispi, who, amidst government changes prompted by opposition criticism of the Cairoli government's moderate stance during the Congress, emerged as a fervent advocate of Italian imperialism.

¹¹⁶ Ukshini, “Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy and the Independence of Albania,” 167-207; Csaplár-Degovics, “Albanian nation-building and Austria–Hungary,” 20-21.

¹¹⁷ Dobruna, “Austria-Hungary and the Albanians during the years 1912-1913,” 298–306.

¹¹⁸ Zickel and Iwaskiw, *Albania: A country study*, 21-22; Bezha, “Austria-Hungary and the Albanian project,” 1-10.

¹¹⁹ Zickel and Iwaskiw, *Albania: A country study*, 21-24.

¹²⁰ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 135-136.

¹²¹ Zickel and Iwaskiw, *Albania: A country study*, 17-18; Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 34-36.

Despite Italy's entry into the Triple Alliance in 1882, a treaty marked by mutual reservations, mistrust persisted between Austria – Hungary and Italy¹²². Italy, supported by its alliances with the Central Powers, especially Germany, sought to exploit its partnership to enhance its influence in the Balkans and pursue Mediterranean plans, notwithstanding Austro – Hungarian reservations¹²³. Italy partially realized these aspirations with the second renewal of its alliance in 1887¹²⁴. The terms of the renewed alliance stipulated the maintenance of the Balkan status quo with the provision for “mutual concessions” in the event of its overthrow. This arrangement, reiterated in subsequent alliance renewals, not only solidified Italy's position in Albania but also heightened Austro – Hungarian – Italian rivalry in the region¹²⁵.

Subsequently, the prevailing impression suggested that Italian interests were shifting toward the Mediterranean, prompting Austro – Hungarian political efforts to reorganize institutions and propaganda methods in Albania and Epirus around 1896¹²⁶. Simultaneously, proposals were presented to Vienna for potential cooperation between Austro – Hungarian and Greek representatives in Epirus¹²⁷. During the Austro – Hungarian – Russian negotiations leading to the Gołuchowski -Muraviev agreement in April 1897, Austro – Hungarian policy embraced the establishment of an independent Albanian state as a fundamental principle¹²⁸.

Eventually, the Gołuchowski -Muraviev agreement, followed by the Monza agreement between Italy and Austria – Hungary on November 6, 1897, constituted the first of several special agreements for Albanians between the two powers¹²⁹. The Monza agreement committed both parties to respect the status quo, with joint efforts envisaged in the event of its overthrow, aimed at

¹²² Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 120-140.

¹²³ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 133-147.

¹²⁴ F. H. Hinsley, “Review article: Bismarck, Salisbury and the Mediterranean agreements of 1887,” *The Historical Journal* 1, no. 1 (1958): 76–81.

¹²⁵ Hinsley, “Review article: Bismarck, Salisbury and the Mediterranean agreements of 1887,” 76–81.

¹²⁶ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 2-10; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 283-284.

¹²⁷ Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 201-204; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 273-274.

¹²⁸ Gábor Demeter, “Austrian Plans on the Pacification of the Balkans Before and After the Murzsteg Convention,” *Hungarian Repository of the Academy's Library* (2023): 1-18, <https://real.mtak.hu/182073/1/ILINDENshortDEMETERG.pdf> (accessed June 27, 2024).

¹²⁹ Demeter, “Austrian Plans on the Pacification of the Balkans,” 1-18.

establishing an autonomous Albanian state, subject to compromising mutual interests¹³⁰. This agreement marked a success for Italy, transforming the pact of renunciation within the Triple Alliance into a recognition of common and equal interests in the future Albanians and the Balkans. The Monza agreement remained in effect until the proclamation of Albanian independence¹³¹.

After Austro – Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the third Austro – Italian agreement on the Balkans and Albanians was forged in 1909¹³². Despite prior agreements and official policy pronouncements on the Albanian issue, these agreements framed the arena within which Austro – Hungarian – Italian rivalry unfolded in the region¹³³. Italian actions, discernibly hindered by Austria – Hungary's advantageous position in the north, predominantly concentrated on southern Albania and Epirus, challenging Greek influence¹³⁴. Notably, metropolitan provinces such as Belgrade and Durazzo, marked by a substantial Albanian and Vlach population, became focal points of Italian interest, emphasizing the strategic significance of Durazzo and Avlona¹³⁵. Subsequently, Italian endeavors also extended to Ioannina and Argyrokastro in the Vilayet of Ioannina, countering Greek and Austro-Hungarian policies aimed at attracting both Muslim Albanians, Greek Orthodox and Vlachs¹³⁶. These efforts coincided with the Vatican's endeavors to convert Orthodox adherents to the Catholic Church or through union, creating Uniate churches, often receiving financial support from Vienna¹³⁷. Particularly concerning for Greece was Italian propaganda in Epirus, especially following the establishment of Italian schools and the Italian

¹³⁰ Demeter, "Austrian Plans on the Pacification of the Balkans," 1-18.

¹³¹ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 120-140.

¹³² Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 82-83; Kitsou-Pitouli, *Greek-Albanian Relations and the North Epirus*, 28-29.

¹³³ Chekrezi, *Albania past and present*, 80-82.

¹³⁴ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 82-92; Csaplár-Degovics, "Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania," 273-274.

¹³⁵ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 46-60.

¹³⁶ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 41-45, 82-92; Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 42-47; Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 38-41.

¹³⁷ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 40-50; Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening 1878-1912*, 145-146; Csaplár-Degovics, "Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania," 281-282.

Chamber of Commerce in Ioannina in 1900, with Italian representatives supporting Albanian nationalists and the Romanian Movement¹³⁸.

The case of Austro-Hungarian Commerce Diplomacy in Epirus

As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, the Greek inhabitants of Epirus grappled with the intricacies of a complex economic terrain, marked by intensified competition with Austria – Hungary and predominantly Italian merchants¹³⁹. This period witnessed a significant transformation influenced by the strategic initiatives of these merchants, each vying to fortify trade relations with Epirus and carve a niche as influential contributors to the region's economic landscape. The ebb and flow of this economic rivalry were intricately tied to the accessibility of a pivotal commercial route to Epirus through the sea.

Essentially, Italian merchants, predominantly from Venice and Naples, emerged as formidable contenders, exhibiting remarkable prowess in trade practices and adaptability to evolving market conditions¹⁴⁰. Their proactive approach in recognizing the economic potential within Epirus propelled them to the forefront of the region. Notably, the Italians succeeded in fostering robust trade relations with Himara, Paramythia and Zagori locals, leading to significant progress in expanding their trade networks and establishing a discernible economic footprint in Epirus¹⁴¹.

Conversely, Austria – Hungary merchants faced persistent challenges in making substantial inroads into the economic fabric of Epirus¹⁴². Despite the establishment of an Austro – Hungarian Chamber of Commerce in Ioannina shortly before September 1908, their impact on the economic dynamics of the region remained subdued. This subdued influence stemmed from a myriad of

¹³⁸ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 110-120; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 283-284.

¹³⁹ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 32-36.

¹⁴⁰ Arsh Grigori, *Albania and the Epirus at the end of 18th and the beginning of the 19th century (in Greek: Η Αλβανία και η Ήπειρος στα τέλη του ΙΗ' και στις αρχές του ΙΘ' αιώνα)* (Athens: Gutenberg, 1994).

¹⁴¹ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 123-130; Grigori, *Albania and the Epirus at the end of 18th and the beginning of the 19th century*.

¹⁴² Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 123-130.

factors, including disparities in trade strategies, the adaptability of business models to local conditions, and the inherent economic resilience of the region. Despite Austro – Hungarian diplomatic efforts and intent to bolster its economic presence, the chamber's establishment did not translate into the anticipated level of economic influence¹⁴³.

The contrasting fortunes of Italian and Austro – Hungarian merchants were intricately linked to the accessibility of a commercial route to Epirus through the sea, the so called “Adriatic Question”¹⁴⁴. The sea served as a vital conduit for trade activities, empowering merchants to establish and sustain connections with Epirus¹⁴⁵. Austro – Hungarian diplomatic endeavors, while achieving some success in establishing commercial collaborations with certain Vlach areas in the Pindos Mountains near Ioannina, faltered in securing lasting influence¹⁴⁶. Despite networks for intelligence collection, as exemplified by their successful gathering of information during the Greek Epirus uprising in 1854, Austria – Hungary struggled to leverage these intelligence operations to establish a sustained foothold. The diplomatic challenges faced by Austria – Hungary in the face of Greek and Italian influence in Epirus underscored the complex interplay between economic competition, diplomatic strategies, and regional dynamics during this pivotal period in history¹⁴⁷.

The case of Austro – Hungarian (Österreichischer) Lloyds

In contradistinction to the diplomatic setbacks experienced by Austria-Hungary in the terrestrial expanse of Epirus, the Österreichischer Lloyd, a distinguished maritime enterprise established in 1833 within the Habsburg Empire, assumed a pivotal role in exerting influence not only over the Ionian Islands and Greek mainland, but also extending its impact to the ports of

¹⁴³ Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 123-130.

¹⁴⁴ Psomas, *A spy in Albania*, 5

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Cassavetes and Carroll Brown, *The question of Northern Epirus at the Peace Conference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1919): 85-99.

¹⁴⁶ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 41-45; Patselis, *North Epirus and its natural borders*, 46-48; Hosaflook, *Albania and Albanians*, 71-74.

¹⁴⁷ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 68-81.

Durazzo in Albania and Preveza in Epirus throughout the transformative period spanning from 1800 to 1900¹⁴⁸. Functioning as a linchpin within the contemporaneous trade network, the Ionian Islands, strategically positioned between western Greece and the Italian Peninsula, served as a focal point for the company's operations¹⁴⁹. The Lloyd's fleet, comprising both steamships and sailing vessels, proficiently facilitated the conveyance of commodities, passengers, and mail, thereby catalyzing economic advancement and promoting cultural interchange within the region¹⁵⁰.

In the broader context of the 19th century, Greece was undergoing profound socio-political transformations, marked by its struggle for independence from Ottoman rule. The Österreichischer Lloyd actively contributed to these developments by establishing vital connections between the Ionian Islands and mainland Greece. Meticulously charted routes and efficient transportation services not only supported the fluid movement of people, ideas, and resources but also left an indelible mark on the cultural and economic fabric of the region. The maritime interconnectivity orchestrated by the Österreichischer Lloyd hastened the pace of modernization and cultivated diplomatic ties between Austria – Hungary and the burgeoning Greek state¹⁵¹.

Eventually, the Österreichischer Lloyd's operations faced challenges in the Ionian Islands due to the geopolitical dynamics of the time, characterized by the flux of alliances and rivalries among European powers. Initially under British protection, the Ionian Islands experienced a transformative shift in their status, and the Österreichischer Lloyd adeptly navigated the intricate political

¹⁴⁸ Priscilla Murray and Curtis Runnels, Harold North Fowler and the beginnings of American study tours in Greece. *Hesperia* 76, no. 3 (2007): 597–600; Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 280-282; Austrian Lloyd History, <https://oelsm.com/about-2/history/> (accessed June 27, 2024).

¹⁴⁹ Kartalis, *The Italian Politics over Albania and Balkans*, 34-40; Evangelos Kyriazopoulos and Nicholas Lourantos, “Kythera – Smyrna, the Steamboat Connection of Two Places in the 19th c. and Their Unknown Dimensions” (2021), https://kythera.news/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Kythera_Smyrna_The_steamboat_connection.pdf (accessed June 27, 2024), pp. 3-5.

¹⁵⁰ Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 280-282; Apostolos Delis, Jordi Ibarz, Anna Sydorenko and Matteo Barbano, *Austrian Lloyd and the Transition from Sail to Steam in the Austrian Merchant Marine (1836–1914). In Mediterranean seafarers in Transition: Maritime labour, communities, shipping and the challenge of industrialization 1850s-1920s* (Boston: Brill, 2023).

¹⁵¹ The Shipping connection between Tergesta and Piraeus in 1837, 2013.

milieu to sustain its presence and influence¹⁵². Subsequently, the company's success not only underscored its operational acumen but also reflected the broader economic and geopolitical shifts of 19th century Europe.

Concluding Remarks

The exploration of Austro – Hungarian diplomacy and intelligence operations in Albania, Epirus and the Ionian Islands between 1854 and 1920 has yielded significant insights into the complexities of western Balkan geopolitics during this period. Through meticulous analysis of historical texts and diplomatic records, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, Austro – Hungarian intelligence operations during the 1854 Greek revolution in Epirus underscored its strategic maneuvering and proactive engagement in the region's affairs. Secondly, the collaboration between Konstantinos Christoforidis, Johann Georg von Hahn the Austro – Hungarian Consul in Ioannina, and the English Bible Society, exemplified Austro – Hungarian multifaceted approach to diplomacy, utilizing religious networks to foster cultural exchange and shape public discourse. Additionally, the examination of Austro – Hungarian intelligence collection efforts regarding Greek policies toward Albanians and Epirus highlighted its keen awareness of regional dynamics and its proactive stance in safeguarding its interests.

Furthermore, the scrutiny of Austro – Hungarian role in Albanian nationalism adds another layer to our understanding of the region's political landscape. Austro – Hungarian strategy and diplomatic overtures aimed at fostering Albanian autonomy and countering Italian influence underscore its pivotal role in shaping Albanian national consciousness. By supporting initiatives such as the establishment of Albanian-language schools and advocating for an independent Albanian state, Austria – Hungary contributed to the emergence of Albanian nationalism, strategically leveraging it to advance its own geopolitical interests.

To conclude, these findings contribute significantly to our historical understanding of Austria-Hungary's diplomatic engagements in the western

¹⁵² Csaplár-Degovics, “Austro-Hungarian Colonial Ventures: The case of Albania,” 280-285.

Balkans, emphasizing the interplay between intelligence operations, economic interests, and strategic calculations. Moreover, they offer valuable insights into the broader context of the late Ottoman Empire and early 20th-century western Balkans, shedding light on the intricacies of regional rivalries, shifting alliances, and the enduring legacy of imperial power dynamics in the region. By elucidating these historical nuances, this study enriches our comprehension of past events, while offering implications for contemporary discussions on regional stability and geopolitical dynamics in the Balkans.

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