

PERSPECTIVES ON COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND HUNGARY AS SEEN BY ENGLISH TRAVELLERS IN THE 1830s

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"I am deeply interested in the welfare of Hungary, and I have thought that one great means of promoting it would be to extend the knowledge of that country in the west of Europe, and more especially in England,"¹ wrote John Paget in the introduction to his book published in London in 1839.

His book, *Hungary and Transylvania with Remarks on their Condition, Social, Political and Economical*, published in two volumes, was not the only, but certainly the best known among the writings partly or wholly dedicated to Hungary in this period.

John Paget committed his experiences to writing for the love he felt towards his later wife, Polixena Wesselényi, the liberal politician Miklós Wesselényi's cousin; however, other English travellers too had journeyed to Reform Era Hungary and their number included some who later published their impressions not from some emotional fancy, but rather from economic or political considerations.

Until the 19th century the number of written accounts which were published in England and in Western Europe by Englishmen who had personally made the long journey to Hungary was few and far between, and thus the increase of visits beginning with the 1830s is highly conspicuous.²

This growing interest can—to a greater or lesser extent—be traced to the twists and turns of the political situation in Europe, to the incentives for wider travel offered by the development of the road and railway network, as well as to the liberal sentiments of the English public that made it sympathetic to the cause of the revolutions in Europe.

Following the Napoleonic wars, British industry underwent an extraordinary development reflected by an increase in the volume of exportable goods and, concomitantly, a growing demand for processable raw materials.

The industrial scene was still dominated by the textile industry; its supremacy was only challenged by the machine industry in the mid-century. In the first half of the century the bulk of exported textile commodities was still directed to the Continent and North America. A good 60% of cotton goods was absorbed by these markets, whilst other countries only received about 40%. In 1848 only 29.5% were traded in Europe and North America, in other words, the withdrawal of British cotton goods from the European markets can be dated to the twenty years between 1820 and 1840.

Britain was, at the same time, the greatest consumer of international trade. Between 1815 and 1845 70% of her import consisted of raw materials—that were later exported after processing—and about 24% of various foodstuffs.³ While the

textile industry still dominated the scene her major imports were wool and, to a lesser extent, raw cotton. Australian wool only ousted Europe from the British markets much later, from the 1840s.

The changes in the direction of the export and import can be primarily traced to the turns in the economical-political situation in Britain.

After the close of the Napoleonic wars Britain could not yet boast her later markets even though shadowy outlines of her later empire could already be discerned. During the 20s and the 30s the Cape of Good Hope, lying on the southernmost tip of Africa, was just another port of call on the journey to India, and albeit Australia was nominally already part of the British Crown, British colonist had in fact only gained a foothold in and around Sidney. The New Zealand Company was only formed in 1837 and only as late as 1839 did the Durham Report, outlining the political framework of the later empire, arrive from Canada. The organisation of the British Empire had begun in earnest, but the process itself and its ultimate result, the establishment of the British colonial empire had not in the 20s and the 30s really taken root even in official political thought. At that time British trade and capital turned its attention to the European markets, even more so since advances in communication, the establishment of a railway network had, on the one hand, made accesible regions that had formerly been unreachable in terms of overland transport, while on the other hand, incipient industrialization offered excellent possibilities for investment. These regions included Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and their importance increased considerably after Russia, Britain's former eastern trade partner introduced a system of protective duties to encourage her industry in 1824. The establishment of trade relations with Eastern Europe could replace lost markets owing to roughly similar natural resources.⁴

An awakening to the significance of Eastern Europe and the Balkans was, however, not brought about by economic considerations, but rather by the so-called Eastern Question. Even though the foreign policy charted by Castlereagh and Canning dissociated itself sharply from the absolutistic regimes in Europe, from the policy of the Holy Alliance formed in 1815—and with the exception of the Greek Question it cautioned and withdrew from an active participation in the political turmoils of Eastern Europe—it was nonetheless the Treaty of Adrianople drawn up in 1829—coercing a reluctant Turkish acceptance of Greek independence and closing the Greek War of Independence supported by Britain—that signalled the first warning of the growing success of Russian expansionism.

The expansionist policy initiated by Catherine (1792–1796), aimed at seizing control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the Mediterranean, and the Danubian countries of Eastern Europe scored its first major victory in the seemingly peaceful period following the Napoleonic wars.

The peace treaty closing the Russo-Turkish war of 1828–29 weakened the Turkish Empire that was struggling with internal crises and was exhausted by the Greek War of Independence. In the Treaty of Adrianople, the mouth of the Danube was handed over to Russia who thus came into possession of the only navigable channel of the Danube, the Sulina channel; Moldavia and Wallachia, which had formerly belonged to Turkey, were granted nominal autonomy, but

in fact came under Russian suzerainty, and Turkey was forced to open the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to Russian ships.

The next victory of Russian ambitions was the treaty negotiated at Unkiar Skelessi (1833), another major step towards assuming control over the Mediterranean. One antecedent of the treaty was that the hitherto anti-Turkish Russian policy clothed in the guise of liberalism, became fearful of the weakening of her influence and now, in the hope of various advantages, took the side of Turkey against the threats posed by Mohamed Ali of Egypt. The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi explicitly stated that Turkey should allow the passage of Russian ships through the Straits even in times of war, whilst the naval route would be closed to other nations.

It was this Russian expansion that turned the Balkans, that had under the long centuries of Turkish overlordship been of little or no importance, into an important factor of European politics.

In the course of the lively diplomatic activity that began in the area agents and diplomats representing British interest made their appearance in this hitherto unexplored region. The checking of Russian expansion and the safeguarding of Levantine trade and the British trade routes leading to India became a question of vital importance for Britain. One possible course was the support of Turkey. The political importance and natural resources of Moldavia and Wallachia that for the time being stood under Russian influence did not escape the notice of British politicians in their wishing to cure "the sick man of Europe" through the benefits of trade, and an appraisal of the transport possibilities between Britain and Turkey called attention to the Danube, a major waterway that flowed, for the greater part, through Austria and also to the raw materials and markets of the Danubian provinces, exactly at the same time as regular steamship service was founded,⁵ and when Count Széchenyi of Hungary began devoting a considerable portion of his energies on rendering the entire section of the Danube navigable.⁶

The political and commercial factors and interests gradually intermingled; David Urquhart, the diplomat who later officially represented Britain in Constantinople, and who since 1833 had travelled extensively in the region on a secret assignment in pursuit of possible markets, urged a definite anti-Russian political course as a precondition to the establishment of commercial relations, and considered a more extensive trade with the Balkans and Eastern Europe as a necessary preliminary to a more favourable political situation.⁷

To all appearances Lord Palmerston who followed Canning in the Foreign Office was unable to grasp the significance of the Eastern Question. His answer to the opposition calling for an active stand against the Treaty of Adrianople was "that the peace of Europe and the honour of England were not to be sacrificed on account of unpronounceable fortresses on the Danube."⁸ In 1832, at the time of Mohamed Ali's attack, the Porte turned to him for help in vain, Palmerston was apparently exclusively concerned with Western Europe. The diplomats and agents who had travelled to the region tried through series of pamphlets, reports and books to focus the attention of Palmerstonian foreign policy—that was by all means liberal in comparison to the regimes of the Holy Alliance and that endeavoured, as far as British political interests would allow, to cherish its ideals in European politics—to the dangers menacing British interests and, at the same

time, called for urgent remedying. The British political attitude that now took shape bore its bitter fruits for the Hungarian cause in 1848–49. Palmerston, who was acting as foreign secretary, feared the weakening of Austrian power that had until then been able to check the Russian expansion, and refused to support the Hungarian revolution in spite of his obvious distaste for the methods employed by Austrian absolutism.

But by the 30s, the British public had, either through the official straining of the Eastern Question, or from the reports of British travellers who journeyed to Hungary personally owing to the lively interest towards this region, become informed for the first time in the course of long centuries of the very existence of Hungary, had become acquainted with Hungarian Reform efforts and even though there had not been established trade relations as intensive as those envisaged by travellers to Hungary, the sympathies aroused towards Hungary nonetheless resulted in that in 1848, in contrast with Palmerston's policy, the British public mostly took a stand on the Hungarian cause.

Of the British travellers who had visited Hungary in the 1830s John Paget is undoubtedly the best known, although scholarly research has tended to analyse his work from a literary and cultural viewpoint, rather than in terms of his political objectives and program.

The scholarly English doctor, John Paget, spent one and a half years in Hungary in 1835–36. In 1837 he married Polixena Wesselényi; he was an *aide-de-camp* to Bem, a Polish general in command of the Hungarian army during the 1848 revolution and for this reason he was compelled to return to Britain in 1849, but then again moved to Transylvania in 1853. He died there and his grave lies in the Házsongárd cemetery in Kolozsvár. His book was published in 1839 in London. The first edition of his book has a portrait of István Széchenyi on the frontispiece. The political sentiments of the author are set down clearly in the introduction. "Why or wherefore, I know not, but nothing can exceed the horror with which a true Austrian regards both Hungary and its inhabitants. I have sometimes suspected that the bugbear with which a Vienna mother frightens her squaller to sleep, must be a Hungarian bugbear; for in no other way can I account for the inbred and absurd fear which they entertain for such near neighbours. It is true, the Hungarians do sometimes talk about liberty, constitutional rights, and other such terrible things, to which no well-disposed ears should ever be open, and to which the ears of the Viennese are religiously closed."

One objective of Paget's book was to stimulate the establishment of trade relations between the two countries by eliciting sympathy towards Hungary and also to pave the road for the negotiation of a British–Hungarian (British–Austrian) alliance. He seized every opportunity to stress the liberal nature of the Hungarian reform movement, but not necessarily always with propagandistic aims.

John Paget, who advocated and honestly believed in the possibility of establishing commercial relations was convinced that the economic and political changes necessary for these would eventually take place, in other words, he believed that the Reformists led by Széchenyi would eventually triumph. His two volume book contains a detailed description of Austrian economic policies blocking trade, the laws ensuring feudal privileges and their consequences: the road conditions making transport extremely costly, the lack of capital, the

primitive state of trade—but he was nonetheless convinced that the reform generation would brush these obstacles aside.

In the chapter on trade Paget lists the natural resources of Hungary and Transylvania that could be sold on the British market and then goes on to describe trade relations:

“We have already said so much of mines and mining, that it is scarcely necessary to state here how extensive the veins of gold and silver are which run through the whole country. It has been stated by Beudant,⁹ that there is more gold and silver found in Hungary than in all the rest of Europe besides. The privilege of working the mines is open to every one on the payment of a tenth of the produce to the Crown; the only other restriction being the obligation to have the precious metals coined in the country, for which a small per-centage is charged. From the number of places in which we have seen iron hammers, it must be evident that iron abounds throughout extensive districts; but hitherto the iron mines have been very badly worked, and the iron so ill-wrought as to be extremely dear. For the erection of the new chain-bridge at Pest, it has been found cheaper to have the iron-work cast in England, sent by water to Fiume or Trieste, and from thence by land to Pest, than to have it manufactured either in Hungary or in any other part of the Austrian dominions. Such is the advantage which commercial habits and scientific knowledge give over cheap labour. I have heard it stated that the iron of Hungary possesses qualities superior to that of any other part of Europe, except Sweden, for conversion into steel; yet it is so badly wrought that worse cutlery cannot exist than that of Hungary. Hungarian iron is quite unknown in the English market.”

Aside from precious metals, he mentions copper, sulphur, lead, potash, salt, soda and alum.

“Coal, as I have already said, is found in several districts, and I believe it is the only coal in Europe which can contest the field with that of England for the use of steam-engines. That is at present as dear as English coal imported via Constantinople is entirely attributable to bad, or rather dishonest management.

Of wood, Hungary, and the neighbouring countries, Bosnia and Serbia, are capable of furnishing vast stores. At present, England receives a large portion of her timber from the Baltic, which might as well be obtained from these countries by Fiume or the Black Sea, and the navy of England would then be no longer dependent for its supply on the country which is most likely to place itself in rivalry with her. The forests of Hungary, particularly the Bakonyer, are almost entirely composed of oak, which is of two kinds—the red, quick-growing soft wood, of little use except for firing; and the white, a firm lasting timber, well adapted for ship building, or other purposes requiring durability. In those parts of the country where the roads are too allow of the transport of large blocks of timber, the wood might be cut into staves, for which there is always a great demand, and so conveyed to the coast in smaller loads for exportation. A considerable trade is already carried on in this article between Fiume and Marseilles, most of the staves being procured from Bosnia and brought by land-carriage to Fiume. [...]

Another article connected with our shipping interest, to which we have already alluded, is hemp. All the hemp used in the navy is of Russian growth, and it is

one of the chief of our imports from that country. The hemp of Hungary is both cheaper and better; and instead of taking it from a rival, we should take it from a safe ally.

Hides and tallow are also articles of Russian commerce in which Hungary might prove a formidable rival. [...]

Horse-hair, bristles, gall-nuts and rags, are all articles of Hungarian commerce; and of the latter very large exportations to this country already take place annually." According to Paget Hungarian wine, especially if prepared with more care could be another article sold on the British market.

"Wool is at present one of the chief articles of Hungarian commerce, chiefly because its exportation is untaxed. It is scarcely twenty years since the Merino sheep have been introduced into Hungary, and the quantity of fine wool now produced may be judged from the fact, that at the last Pest fair there were no less than 80,000 centners offered for sale. The greater part of this wool is bought by the German merchants, and much of it is said to go ultimately to England, after having passed by land quite across Europe to Hamburg. Of late years a few English merchants have made their appearance at the Pest fairs, which are held four times in the year; but I have not yet heard of any wool being sent to England by the Danube and the Black Sea. Besides the Merino wool, there is a considerable quantity of a long coarse wool grown, which is chiefly sold for the manufacture of the thick white cloth worn by the peasants, and which might be found very serviceable for our carpet fabrics.

A still more important article of Hungarian produce is corn, and it is one from which, it is to be hoped, England ere long, by the abolition of her corn laws, will enable herself to derive the full benefit. At present, the quantity of grain annually produced in Hungary is reckoned at from sixty to eighty millions of Presburg metzen. This calculation, however, is of little importance, as at present scarcely any is grown for exportation; but, were a market once opened, it is beyond doubt that the produce might be doubled or trebled without any difficulty. I have heard it stated by one well able to judge, that at the present time one quarter of the whole country is uncultivated, although the greater part of it is capable of furnishing the richest crops at a very slight cost. The wheat of Hungary is allowed to be of an excellent quality. Where the land has little or no value for other purposes, and the labour costs nothing, it is difficult to see how it can be produced any where at a cheaper rate than here."

Paget envisaged trade in terms of contemporary British practice that had evolved in consequence of the high level of British industry: Hungary would supply raw materials and would purchase finished goods—cutlery, agricultural implements of iron and brass, china and fine earthenware. He was convinced that it would be unwise for Hungary to develop her industry in view of her situation: a low population and fertile tract of land.

It is not quite clear what exactly he meant by this from his work, but a study on Hungary in the 1837 issue of the *Portfolio*, whose contents and composition make it likely that it was written by Paget anonymously, shed more light on this matter. The number of Hungary's inhabitants is so low as only to be able to cultivate about one-half of the arable land. Industrial production, by withdrawing

manpower from agriculture, would undoubtedly bring catastrophe upon this country that is basically endowed with agricultural potentials.

According to John Paget the major obstacle to trade is the Habsburgs' economic policy, and even more damaging is the law ensuring the inalienability of land since it practically makes the collection of debts extremely difficult or even impossible for the creditor or the tradesman, and thus both Hungarian and foreign entrepreneurs are understandably most reluctant to enter into business. Then too, British tradesmen know little, if anything, about Hungary.

"The ignorance of English merchants on the subject of Hungary is by no means a trifling impediment to their engaging in commerce with that country. The productions of Hungary are almost unknown, except in Austria and some parts of Germany; travelling in the country is difficult, and believed to be even more so than it is. The German language is as yet but little known among our merchants; and the reports which they hear from the Germans, who are anxious to keep the trade in their own hands, are so discouraging, that few have the courage to make a personal examination of their truth."

Apart from this, Austrian politics betrayed signs of rapprochement with Britain and the Diet, sitting at Pressburg proposed the appointment of an official consul for Hungarian trade in Britain, and thus Paget thought it most timely that the British Parliament should pay serious attention to this matter. The last few sentences of his book are in fact addressed to the government: they should establish a consulate in Pest, and the consul should be officially authorized to enter into contact with the British consulates along the Danube. In his opinion the relations established through trade would also prove useful politically and economically: this area could replace the Russian market for Britain and would also offer British economy some measure of independence from the markets of other countries that would sooner or later appear on the scene as potential rivals to Britain. His main objective was political in nature: the weakening of Russia, alternately referred to as Britain's rival and enemy, and the forging of a basically anti-Russian Austro-British political alliance that would be further strengthened by economic ties. Paget thus expected his country to engage in trade with Hungary and to enter into alliance with Austria; in other words, to support Hungarian reform efforts and to condemn Austria's absolutistic policy, while at the same time suggesting Austria as a possible ally to a liberal Britain. In 1848, however, it proved impossible to support both parties, and Britain, who apart from her sympathies with liberalism, harboured no political or economic interests towards Hungary, tacitly supported Austria, since her policies required the survival of the Austrian *status quo*.

Peter Evan Turnbull published his book entitled *Austria* in 1840,¹⁰ part of which had already been published anonymously under the title "British Diplomacy and Turkish Independence" a year before. He was a member of the Royal Society and in 1836 he spent several months in Hungary during which time he also met with the initiator of the reform movement, Count Széchenyi. Little more is known about him for the time being.

We have no idea whether he came to Eastern Europe on an official assignment, but his opinion and outlook definitely range him among the critics of Palmerston's Eastern European policy. Similarly to David Urquhart, a Member of Parliament,

and his other colleagues working on the *Portfolio* series that was primarily concerned with the political and economic situation of Eastern Europe, Turnbull considered the only course towards the defence of British trade interests to be an immediate and resolute British political action against the rival Russian expansionism. In his opinion Britain could rely on one single ally in Europe: Austria who appeared to be most threatened owing to her geographic position and who had adopted a pro-Turkish stand during the Greek War of Independence.

In his book on Austria he strove to present an unbiased and accurate picture of a country that enjoyed a fairly bad reputation in Britain and was also considered to be unreliable politically.

There is no single chapter devoted to Hungary, but the sections reviewing the economy, finance, internal political structure and foreign policy of the empire often digress on the Hungarian situation. The chapters on internal and external trade also contain remarks on Hungarian trade relations. As regards the abundance of natural resources and the excellence of the arable land, he shares Paget's opinion: no other country in Europe can boast such a wealth of natural sources and other products. Nonetheless, in contrast to almost every other "traveller" and the authors of the articles published in the *Portfolio*, he rejects not only Austria and Hungary, but also other regions of Eastern Europe belonging to Turkey as possible trade partners to Britain. He considered Austrian export to be insignificant on the whole, stating that as a consequence of the backwardness of her industry, Austria can at the most hope to satisfy her internal demands only. Of her exported goods he only regarded cotton wool—even of inferior quality—as being of more significant volume. According to his data Austria exported cotton wool to the amount of 36,589,205 Viennese pounds, i.e. 297,473 cwt (cca 15,171,123 kg), and he had been informed of an expected increase in this amount. 12,000,000 of the 20,000,000 sheep in the Empire are to be found in Hungary and Transylvania—a considerable number to be sure, but only in continental relations. He cannot resist a comparison of data: Wales and Britain could, already in 1800, count 19,007,607 sheep.

He sees three basic reason for the backwardness of the industry: the unfavourable geographic endowments of the country, the trade policies pursued by neighbouring countries and the economic policy of the Austrian government. He illustrates the latter with a specific example: at the beginning of the 30s the export of timber through Fiume showed such an upswing (a fact also mentioned by Paget) that by 1835 89 shiploads of timber were transported to the other countries. As a consequence, Vienna not only wished to increase its duty, but also proposed that its amount should now be fixed by weight; moreover, only about one-half of the raised duty would have reached the Treasury, the other half would have been used to cover the expenses of weighing. According to Turnbull, it was exactly this shortsighted tax policy thinking only of the immediate benefits of the state that would eventually stifle this branch of industry that had just begun to develop with its high duties, and in spite of her mercantile policy directed towards the industrialization this policy renders Austria unable to engage in significant trade in the near future. (At the same time Turnbull also wished to illustrate the economic policy pursued by Austria in Hungary by choosing this example.)

He also took a gloomier view of the natural resources than Paget. He was of the opinion that Trieste and Fiume, belonging to Austria and Hungary respectively, shared an enormous disadvantage that both are sealed off from the arable land by practically unapproachable mountain chains. Often there is need to employ 18 to 20 horses or oxen to transport a cartload to the seaports. Thus, the cost of the transportation of a ton of cotton from Trieste to Vienna matches about that of transportation from Calcutta to Manchester. The situation could be remedied if there were a railroad leading to the Adriatic through the Hungarian plainland from Vienna, but Turnbull is sceptical that the Hungarian Diet would consent to the construction of a railway track leading to the Austrian Trieste through Transdanubia of Hungary, even if the development of Fiume would benefit from it.

Turnbull is even more pessimistic about the exploitation of Hungary's natural endowments, that was one of the main concerns of Paget. At the time of Turnbull's travels, the Danube was unnavigable between Vienna and Pressburg and between Moldavia and Cladova; and he is not convinced that the "sluggish, shallow, muddy stream" would be suitable for transporting larger amounts of cargo even if it were to be made navigable along its entire course. As regards trade policies of Austria's neighbours, Turnbull is of the opinion that they either imposed such heavy duties as to eliminate even former trade—one reason for the cessation of the export of wine from Hungary to Poland—or are on such a primitive level of development as to lack a market capable of absorbing goods, or efficient means of raw material transportation, as for example Wallachia and Serbia.

And even though Turnbull does not hesitate to dissuade his British readers from trade with Austria and the Balkans, he is nonetheless certain that a regular Danubian steamship service will have its profits—even if not for Britain, but Austria and Hungary will undoubtedly reap considerable advantages on the Balkans.

He sees the political benefits deriving from steam navigation as even greater than its trade profits:

"Through its channel [steam navigation] the tide of civilization will be gradually poured on the distant regions of Wallachia, Serbia and Bulgaria. It will introduce Hungary into the bosom of Europe. It will bring her hitherto secluded population with social intercourse with travellers from distant land. It will be the means of dispelling the clouds of prejudice, ignorance, and error, and auspicious alike to the vassal and his lord, it will improve the condition of man in every stage of society."

Turnbull thus considered trade with the eastern half of Europe unimportant for Britain, but nonetheless expected the spread of liberalism from the trade conducted by the Danubian countries among each other. At the same time, he was fully aware of the political importance of the region, and he called attention to Austria in spite of her economic and political backwardness, since he clearly saw that Britain's imperial policy in the Mediterranean was menaced not only by Russian, but also by French interests, and that Austria was the only power which, though not a rival from this point of view, was perhaps most threatened by Russian expansionism. Then, too, Britain's naval supremacy could no longer guarantee a solution to the Eastern Question: the survival of Turkey would need a strong land

army—and Austria, one of the victors of the Napoleonic wars was still considered a major military power in the mid-30s.

The contradictory reports from this region—that Britain should support trade relations to promote her own economic interests; that she should ease the way for more liberal political systems; conversely, that she should only enter into political alliance with Austria—must have caused many a headache in the Foreign Office.

Palmerston's opposition pressing for a quick and efficient solution to the Eastern Question, considered him undecided even in the latter half of the 30s. All the same, a series of negotiations had begun in 1836 and, eventually, a British–Austrian commercial agreement was drawn up in 1838 in Milan. This agreement gave rise to great hopes in Hungary: it was believed that the commercial treaty would raise Austrian trade to a higher level thus exerting fruitful influence on Hungary by means of the steam navigation along the Danube.¹¹ Its aim, as implied by its formulation, was not so much the bolstering of trade between Britain and Austria, but rather the guarantee of trade between Britain and Turkey: the agreement involved the establishment of mutual British and Austrian shipping concessions. Its fourth article immediately drew bitter protest from the Palmerstonian opposition: "All Austrian vessels proceeding from the Harbours of the Danube as far as Galatz, inclusive, as well as their cargoes, may sail direct for the ports of Great Britain, and of all other possessions of her Britannic Majesty, as if they came direct from the Harbours of Austrian; and reciprocally, all English vessels, as well as their cargoes, shall be admitted into the Austrian Harbours, and depart therefrom with the same immunities as Austrian vessels."¹²

According to the parliamentary opposition of the Foreign Secretary the agreement—that was wholly attributed to Palmerston by the British—did not take into account the situation that had unfolded in the Danube delta in 1829, namely that the only navigable channel of the Danube stood under Russian control: the officials of the forts disguised as quarantines stopped and levied duty from all ships carrying commercial cargoes, and purposefully hindered the ship traffic of the region. Palmerston appeared to be unmoved: his public statements would imply that he did not perceive the interrelations between the Turkish Question and the Balkanic situation, and the role the Danube delta played; and fearful of upsetting of the precarious European power equilibrium he refused to interfere with Russia's Balkanic policy, and especially not for the sake of an unimportant, practically unnavigable river that played little, if any, role in British maritime trade. Thus, to the greatest indignation of the opposition rallying around Urquhart, even on the eve of the Crimean war, Palmerston considered the obstruction of British marchant vessels on the Danube to be little more than the conflict of petty local interests.¹³

In spite of the British–Austrian trade agreement, trade between Hungary, the Danubian countries of Eastern Europe and Britain that would undoubtedly also have stimulated the development of social relations never really took off. The reason for this should not only be sought in the economic backwardness of the countries in question, in the British navy that was more suited for maritime trade, in the Russian occupation of the Danube delta or in Palmerston's insistence that

the *status quo* must be preserved. Palmerston, who was reluctant to pick a quarrel with Russia after the latter's occupation of the mouth of the Danube, nonetheless expected a strengthening of Eastern European trade relations from the Austrian-British agreement, and the counterbalancing of Russian expansion. When in 1837 the Foreign Office suggested the reduction of the duties imposed on certain commodities to be transported to Austria, it met with Palmerston's whole-hearted approval:

"The insertion of British cotton goods, woolens, and hardwares in that List [the list of exportable goods] would be of great importance; and such a reduction of Duty on these Commodities, as might permit them to be consumed in the States of Hungary, and in the Southern Provinces of Austria, would be the only means of extending our intercourse with those Provinces."¹⁴

Neither can Palmerston be blamed for the stagnation of trade relations with Hungary. The Foreign Secretary had toyed with the idea of appointing a British consul to Budapest, but Prince Metternich, who considered the establishment of foreign consulates in Hungary as fuel to the separatists ambitions of the "rebel" Hungarians, had already in 1841 rejected the founding of an American consulate in Hungary. He had his doubts as to the desirability or utility of a consulate and finally decided that it would cause such grave damage as is the duty of his Cabinet to counteract.

"The necessity and utility of such an innovation do not appear in any manner demonstrated. It could on the contrary, produce inconveniences of a grave nature which is the duty of every government to avoid.

It is also for these reasons that the Imperial and Royal Court has already found itself obliged to decline definitively more than one proposition of this kind which has come to it from the side of other foreign Governments, and it could consequently, defer to the wish of the United States of America without justly exciting complaints and pretensions sufficiently embarrassing, on the part of the said Governments."¹⁵

Thus, neither was Britain permitted the establishment of a consulate in Hungary and in 1848 J. A. Blackwell, the diplomatic agent of the British Ambassador in Vienna—who had his eye on the post of the consul in vain—was the single British subject to semi-officially sojourn in Hungary and send reports of the events.¹⁶ It can be said that Palmerston had in fact devoted attention to the reports written by the agents, merchants and travellers who had journeyed to Eastern Europe, and that David Urquhart and his opposition was mistaken in assuming that the Foreign Secretary did not in the least take notice of Russia's expansionist policies.¹⁷ Palmerston agreed with the establishment of commercial relations and the increase of British influence. It was Chancellor Metternich to whom the official presence of foreign/British trade in Hungary would have been tantamount to the disruption of the given relationships of the kingdom, and who flatly refused cooperation and seized every opportunity to thwart all efforts that in his opinion endangered the unity of the Monarchy.

Notes

1. Paget, John: *Hungary and Transylvania with Remarks on their Condition, Social, Political and Economical* (London, 1839, John Murray).
2. Julia Pardoe (1836, 1839–40), Michael J. Quin (1835), George E. Hering (1836), G. R. Gleig (1837), C. B. Elliott (1838) and Palgrave Simpson (1846) visited Hungary at about this time, and a number of anonymously published books, such as *Sketches of Germany and the Germans with a Glance of Poland, Hungary* also reached the British public.
3. Hobsbawm, E. J.: *Industry and Empire. An Economic History of Britain since 1750*. (London, 1968, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.)
4. This opinion is echoed by several essays published in the *Portfolio*, appearing regularly since 1836, that featured various documents and articles discussing issues of foreign policy, as well as by the book of its editor David Urquhart. See *The Portfolio or a Collection of State Papers. Illustrative of the History of Our Times*. (London, James Ridgway) and Urquhart, D.: *Progress of Russia in the West, North, and South, by Opening the Sources of Opinion and Appropriating the Channels of Wealth and Power* (London, 1853, Trübner Co.).
5. The Danube Steamship Company of Austria was formed in 1829. According to D. Urquhart, British steam shipping on the Danube increased from two ships in 1834, to 15 ships in 1835, and their number practically doubled by the next year, 1836.
6. Széchenyi was appointed Superintendent of the Regulation of the Danube by Francis I in 1833.
7. Urquhart, D.: *Progress of Russia*.
8. Ibid.
9. Beudant, François-Dulpice: *Voyage minéralogique et géologique en Hongrie 1–4*. (Paris, 1822). It was published in English in 1823.
10. Turnbull, Peter Evan: *Austria. Narrative of Travels* 2 Vols. (London, MDCCCXL, John Murray).
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