



The Prochaska Affair Revisited: Towards a Revaluation of Austria-Hungary's Balkan Consuls

Sven Mörsdorf

European University Institute, Florence

svn.moersdorf@eui.eu

Consuls and consular diplomacy in the long nineteenth century are enjoying a growing interest across various historiographies. This article explores the prominent case of the Austro-Hungarian consul Oskar Prochaska in an effort to offer insight into consular officials as actors of diplomacy and empire in a Habsburg setting. Prochaska, who famously got caught up in a major diplomatic crisis during the First Balkan War in 1912, has never been studied as a protagonist in the events that came to be known as the Prochaska Affair. This calls for an analysis of Prochaska's diplomatic activity as consul, understood here as his social interaction with his counterparts and adversaries on the ground in Prizren, Kosovo. Adopting a local perspective on a crisis of European and global importance, the article argues for a revaluation of consuls and their bureaucracy as a promising subject for cultural and social histories of the Habsburg Empire and its foreign policy, both in the Balkans and around the world.

Keywords: diplomacy, consuls, Balkan Wars 1912–13, Serbia, Austria-Hungary

Story

It began with a mistake. When Oskar Prochaska, the Habsburg representative in Prizren, heard of the approaching horrors of the battlefield, he should have known better than to write any letters home. In the early days of the First Balkan War, the consul should have realized that his courier could be intercepted and his correspondence seized. This is indeed what happened on October 24, 1912 on the road between Prizren and the post office at Ferizovik (Ferizaj, Ferizović/Uroševac).¹ That afternoon in Kosovo, the finer points of diplomatic custom did not impress a Serbian cavalry patrol. Nor did civilian concerns have much bearing on the soldiers' superiors. They broke the seals and read the letters. Any

1 See the reports written by Prochaska and forwarded via telegraph by his immediate superior Consul Heimroth in Üsküp to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, November 26–27, 1912, no. 104, 106–107. These became part of a voluminous internal dossier which can be found in *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* Vienna, *Politisches Archiv* (hereafter cited as HHStA PA) XII 415; for the three reports, see fol. 101–106 and 117–120.

resistance, any information that could aid the enemy, had to be suppressed.² With his own written words, the consul, too, had revealed himself to be an enemy.

A week later, when Serbian forces finally reached Prizren, Prochaska may have anticipated what was coming. Unlike his Russian colleague, the only other foreign consul who had stayed behind, Prochaska did not greet the new rulers at the gates, nor did he show up at their celebrations of victory, waiting instead for instructions from Vienna to arrive. As time went by, none would. The Serbian military now controlled all lines of communication between the war zone and the world. Or rather, all means except for word of mouth. Rumors spread through town and country: Had the Austrian consul organized resistance, handed out weapons to the locals? Had shots been fired from the attic of his consulate, had the consul even fired at the Serbian soldiers himself? In Prizren, there were people willing to attest to this, and Prochaska's silence seemed to confirm his guilt. So did his hiding behind the consulate's high walls and his refusal to visit with the new commanding general, Božidar Janković, or any Serb official.³ With his own lack of action, the stranded diplomat had isolated himself even more.

Meanwhile, the consul's lost letters traveled up their captors' chain of command, from desk to desk and from Kosovo to Belgrade, and briefly even to Saint Petersburg.⁴ The many officers, government officials, and diplomats who

2 Circulating information on violent transgressions (whether real or alleged) was common during the Balkan Wars, as belligerents sought to mobilize support for their own causes and condemn their opponents; see Çetinkaya, "Atrocity Propaganda." On the heightened brutality of the conflict, which displayed "elements of a civil strife," see Delis, "Violence and Civilians." The political function of violence during and after the Balkan Wars in a broader perspective is discussed in Biondich, "Balkan Wars." For a long-term perspective on everyday violence in Ottoman Kosovo up to and including 1912–13, see Frantz, *Genvalt und Koexistenz*.

3 General Janković in Prizren to Army High Command in Skopje, November 7–20, 1912, no. 661. DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 255.

4 Passages in DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 255 and 464 indicate that Prochaska's original letters and/or copies passed from the hands of General Božidar Janković (Third Army) via Živojin O. Dačić (civil servant and author) to Crown Prince Aleksandar (First Army) and later, after an excursion to Russia, to Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nikola Pašić, who intended to keep them. In addition, there are several documents in Miloš Bogičević's edition of Serbian sources (Boghitschewitsch, *Auswärtige Politik*) which detail how the letters were sent in secret between Serbia and Russia. They also contain a passage in which Pašić writes that "we will, if necessary, make use of them [i.e. Prochaska's letters], but of course only if we can say that we found them accidentally and not that they have been taken from the courier." (*Ibid.*, vol. 1, no. 227–229, 232–234, quote on 234.) One must add, however, that Bogičević, a disgraced former Serbian diplomat, is known to have manipulated and falsified documents in his edition very frequently, which calls into question the assumption that the passages on Prochaska's letters are genuine. Nonetheless, the underlying intention to keep and use them seems credible enough and shines through in the much more reliably edited documents in DSPKS as well.

saw them never publicly acknowledged their existence. What precisely it was that Prochaska wrote to his mother in Vienna and his brother in Brno (Brünn) is not known, but a Serbian internal report summarizes what irritated the letters' unintended audience so much: "Mr. Prohaska [...] says that our army bombed and set fire to Priština and massacred its inhabitants, that Serbs and Montenegrins are *die Wilden*, and many other untruths."⁵ This says it all. Frank in expression and careless in delivery, Prochaska's words betrayed his private feelings to a very partial public in the Serbian military and government, convincing "the savages" as he called them that the rumors of his scheming must be true.

But the consul Prochaska is not remembered only for having penned these outrageous letters. He is remembered as the man who caused the Prochaska Affair, a major diplomatic crisis on the European stage.⁶ Much like the precise contents of his letters, the details of his activity on the ground have remained elusive, and the local roots of the conflict remain unexplained. Cut off as he was from the world beyond Prizren, Prochaska found himself on his own and, as we will see, unable to cope. The world, in turn, began to wonder what had happened to Prochaska. Once again, rumors arose, but this time in Austria-Hungary and in the press, and now it was the consul who was portrayed as the victim. Had Prochaska been detained, insulted, injured, even executed? Had he—the most sensational claim of all—been castrated by the Serbs?⁷

For several weeks in the winter of 1912, war over the consul's sad fate seemed imminent and necessary to many in the Dual Monarchy. The passions stirred across the Habsburg Empire, and across Serbia in defiant reply, had turned a matter of diplomatic discretion into a raging public spectacle.⁸ While the two governments' internal investigations were conducted behind closed doors, Europe looked on in sympathy with one side or the other. By the time it transpired that Prochaska was well and unharmed, just as the Serbs had always maintained, the public agitation so long in the making would not simply go away. It turned against the Habsburg elites, especially the foreign minister and his top

5 See the previously cited report by Janković, point 9 and annex point 19. DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 255.

6 A useful overview can be found in the online encyclopedia article by Hall, "Prochaska Affair."

7 On the Prochaska Affair in two important Viennese newspapers, see Gulla, *Prestigeverlust oder Krieg?*, 64–82. The notions of "civilization" vs. "barbarism" in the press coverage of the Balkan Wars in a broader perspective are explored in Keisinger, *Unzivilisierte Kriege*, a short English version of which appears in Geppert et al., *Wars*, 343–58.

8 As Tamara Scheer has pointed out, issues of Austro-Hungarian domestic and foreign policy were closely intertwined both in government thinking and the press coverage of the Balkan Wars; the public perceived the events as anything but distant; see Scheer, "Public Sphere," 301–19.

officials, who appeared as warmongers and bullies against their tiny, innocent neighbor. Indeed, the pressure that Vienna had put on its adversaries in Belgrade forced them to back down. The Serbian government issued a public apology for its share in the escalation and quietly abandoned its most coveted aim, which was to gain a harbor on the Adriatic.⁹ In effect, however, this momentary victory cost the Habsburgs dearly. It antagonized the Serbs even further and deepened the impression already prevalent, both among European diplomats and in the public eye, that the Dual Monarchy always tried to cheat and manipulate its smaller Balkan rivals.¹⁰

Context

The Prochaska Affair shaped the political outcome of the Balkan War of 1912 for Austria-Hungary and Serbia and thus brought both one step closer to the Great War of 1914. Accordingly, Prochaska's name is found in many histories of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy, Habsburg-Serbian relations, and the build-up to World War I, though it is usually mentioned only in passing.¹¹ Apart from

9 The larger foreign political context is explored from an Austro-Hungarian and German perspective in Kos, *Interessen*. Prime Minister Pašić paid a personal visit to the Austro-Hungarian representative in Belgrade, Ugron, to express his regrets about the incident and also confided that his government had already resolved internally to give in on the harbor question. See Minister Ugron in Belgrade to Foreign Ministry in Vienna, December 21, 1912, no. 186 A–C. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 215–223.

10 For example, as late as July 21, 1914 in St. Petersburg, the French president Poincaré alluded to the Prochaska Affair (together with the similarly inflammatory Friedjung Affair of 1909) in a public exchange of words with Szapáry, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador to Russia. See Paléologue, *Ambassador's Memoirs*, vol. 1, 18.

11 Although offering different interpretations, various authors underscore the crisis's "manipulative" character (i.e. its alleged orchestration by various interest groups) as well as its place in the run-up to the First World War. See for example, Friedjung, *Zeitalter*, vol. 3, 222–27 (pro-war circles and the governments on both sides are to be blamed for fueling and delaying the resolution of the Prochaska Affair, while the Viennese press deliberately scandalized it in order to attack the Ballhausplatz's changed press policy). Seton-Watson, "Murder at Sarajevo," 491 ("the imaginary Prochaska incident was invented [by the Austrians] to prepare opinion for a war"). Ćorović, *Relations*, 553–56 and 575–76 (Prochaska was biased by his "hatred for the Serbs" and "these incidents were welcomed and deliberately exploited" by his government). Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, 283 and 445 ("a modest but inept exercise in media manipulation that provided further ammunition for those who claimed that Austria always argued with forged documents and false accusations"). Scheer, *Minimale Kosten*, 71–72 (given their "mistrust against Serbia" that had been nourished by years of alarming political reports, Habsburg officials were "certain that abuse [against Prochaska] could actually have occurred"). Rauchensteiner, *First World War*, 104 ("incompetence and a targeted campaign" resulting in a "loss of prestige and credibility" for the Habsburgs, a development which their rivals happily exploited). Bjelajac, "Humanitarian' Pretext," 133–35 (biased reportage created by Prochaska and his colleagues contributed to the spread of misinformation and atrocity propaganda against Serbia).

scattered references, very little original and in-depth work on the Prochaska Affair was published over the course of the past century. Moreover, there has hardly been any interest in Oskar Prochaska (1876–1945), the man and diplomat, so much so that he does not appear as a historical actor in the scholarship, or even just as an active participant in his own story.

Most traditional histories of Austro-Hungarian foreign relations and the power politics of empire, even if they consider seemingly remote and unimportant places such as Prizren at all,¹² would still not pay much attention to people like Prochaska because he was merely a consul.¹³ The reasons for this neglect seem to lie in the late-Habsburg period itself. Even though, by the turn of the twentieth century, consular activity had long since become essential to the conduct of diplomacy, with hundreds of imperial-and-royal consulates dotting the globe,¹⁴ consular officials generally could not hope to be perceived as fully competent diplomats. As members of a predominantly bourgeois institution, most consuls were separated from their blue-blooded superiors by a wide social gulf in a division that reflected Habsburg society at large.¹⁵ Later observers, frequently drawing on anecdotal evidence, were led to believe that the rigid social hierarchies that pervaded the Habsburg foreign service precluded most consuls not only from socializing with their aristocratic “betters” (which is accurate)¹⁶ but also from engaging in actual diplomatic work.

12 Compare the comprehensive argument for “previously overlooked forms, venues, geographies, and levels” of international/diplomatic history from an Ottomanist perspective in Alloul and Martykánová, “New Ground.”

13 As exemplified by Helmut Rumpler’s brief and rather superficial but subsequently frequently cited assessment that the consular service had no form of political or diplomatic mandate and was therefore largely irrelevant except with regard to matters of trade. See Rumpler, “Rahmenbedingungen,” 48–50. On the misrepresentation of consuls in a broader historiographical perspective, see Leira and Neumann, “Past Lives.”

14 To give precise numbers, in 1900, Austria-Hungary maintained 414 consular representations around the world, most of them honorary offices. Among the 77 *effektive Ämter* (i.e. those staffed by salaried state officials), there were 24 consulates-general, 40 consulates, eleven vice-consulates, and two consular agencies. See Agstner: “Institutional History,” 39–40.

15 On the social and cultural history of the Austro-Hungarian foreign service (albeit with relatively few remarks on consuls), see William D. Godsey’s pathbreaking work in Godsey, *Aristocratic Redoubt* and Godsey, “Culture of Diplomacy.”

16 One popular anecdote comes from Paul von Hevesy (Hevesy Pál). In 1912, the year of the Prochaska Affair, Hevesy arrived at the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Constantinople as a newly appointed attaché. When Hevesy started spending time with colleagues from the consulate as well, his peers at the embassy intervened: “Either you socialize with us or with *them*.” This anecdote appears in works by several authors, including in Matsch, *Auswärtige Dienst*, 92.

Today, as actor-centric and socially-informed biographic approaches to diplomacy are gaining traction, historians are finally ready to perceive consuls as diplomats and actors of empire.¹⁷ Social practices and micro-level interactions come into focus, raising large-scale questions about the relations between “society,” “state,” and “empire” beyond the outdated national paradigm.¹⁸ Further inspiration can be found in new histories of the state administration. Here, too, scholars increasingly study state officials as actors, both individually and collectively.¹⁹ All three branches of the Habsburg foreign service (the central ministry; the diplomatic service; and the consular service) were part of the same bureaucratic organization and, as such, must be studied together. The hundreds of foreign-service officials employed in Vienna; at embassies and diplomatic missions; and at consulates answered to a common hierarchical structure and worked towards shared objectives, at least ideally.²⁰ That said, the foreign service was anything but lifeless and monolithic.²¹ Consuls, whose numbers grew rapidly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, added to the diversity of this bureaucracy and the Habsburg civil service at large with their varied backgrounds, skills, and career trajectories.²²

There is now a growing interest in consuls across different historiographies.²³ Notably, in the context of the Balkans in the long nineteenth century, Holly Case’s argument that the activity of foreign consuls in the Ottoman Empire led

17 On actor-centric and biographical approaches to diplomatic history and the history of empires, see e.g. Mösslang and Riotte, *Diplomats’ World*; Thiessen and Windler, *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen*; Tremml-Werner and Goetze, “Multitude of Actors”; Buchen and Rolf, *Eliten im Vielvölkerreich*; Hirschhausen, “New Imperial History?”; Nemes, *Another Hungary*.

18 For a comprehensive discussion of practice-based approaches to diplomatic history, see the introduction to Hennings and Sowerby, *Practices of Diplomacy*.

19 Adlgasser and Lindström, *Habsburg Civil Service*; Deak, *Multinational State*; Göderle, “De l’empire des Habsbourg”; Heindl, *Bürokratie und Beamte*.

20 For a study of intra-imperial policy rivalries in which consuls play a part, see Callaway: “Battle over Information.”

21 See Godsey’s works (as cited above) and more recently also Somogyi, “Influence of the Compromise.”

22 In recent years, two voluminous handbooks have been published by the most prolific scholars of the Habsburg consular service, Rudolf Agstner (posthumously) and Engelbert Deusch. Their many works are of mixed quality and reliability, as the two authors generally did not seek to place the rich source material they unearthed over many years in a larger context of analytical questions and academic debates. That said, both have created indispensable preconditions for further research, especially with their handbooks. See Agstner, *Handbuch* and Deusch, *Konsuln*.

23 For an introduction to new approaches to consular history, see Ulbert and Prijac, *Consulship* and Melissen, “Consular Dimension.”

to a “quiet revolution” of the international order deserves wide discussion.²⁴ When it comes to Austria-Hungary, however, studies focused specifically on consular diplomacy, the consular bureaucracy, and consuls as agents of formal and informal empire are still few and far between. A quick review of important exceptions (Nicole Phelps writing on transatlantic migration and international law, Alison Frank Johnson on emotions and honor codes, Barbara Haider-Wilson on transnational entanglements, and Ellinor Forster on intermediaries and knowledge production) serves to underscore the potential of the field.²⁵

Given that the primary direction of Austria-Hungary’s imperial ambitions faced to the southeast, any exploration of Habsburg consuls as political actors should take into account the Balkan-Mediterranean region in which Prochaska and his colleagues were engaged.²⁶ So far, the great importance of this region to the k.u.k. imperial project contrasts with a dearth of in-depth studies on Habsburg consuls, whose names are usually limited to the footnotes (where their reports are cited) or who are portrayed as the featureless chess pieces of their distant masters. Once again, there are important exceptions: among them, Tamara Scheer’s book on the Habsburg “presence” in and around Taşlica (Plevla, Pljevlja) just north of Kosovo sheds much light on everyday life and local diplomacy at an Austro-Hungarian consulate;²⁷ an article by Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics traces in detail how consuls built local networks of informants and political clients in central Albania;²⁸ and Dušan Fundić’s recent monograph on Austria-Hungary and the creation of the Albanian state offers a complex view on consular activity.²⁹ It is no coincidence that these three works investigate the same part of the world and that two of them tackle the same context, specifically, the Habsburgs’ cultivation of relations with Albanians. Indeed, by 1900, this had become the primary political task for Prochaska and his colleagues in the central

24 Case, “Quiet Revolution.”

25 Phelps, *U.S.-Habsburg Relations*; Frank, “Bureaucracy of Honor”; Haider-Wilson, *Friedlicher Kreuzzug*; Forster, “Mapping and Appropriating.”

26 For an example of newer studies on this topic, see Brendel, “Drang nach Süden.” An overview of the political role of Austria-Hungary’s consuls in the Balkans is given in Kammerhofer, “Konsularwesen.” Further material on consuls as actors of empire can be found in Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft*.

27 Scheer, *Minimale Kosten*. While not formally a consulate, the Austro-Hungarian “civil commissariat” in Taşlica was always headed by a consular official and performed the regular duties of a consulate (on this, see *ibid.*, 107–18).

28 Csaplár-Degovics, “Interessendurchsetzung.”

29 Fundić, *Austrougarska i nastanak Albanije*.

Balkans. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that consuls' political roles were varied and not limited to this region alone.

The final academic work that needs to be discussed here is also the most important contribution on the Prochaska Affair. In the 1970s, the renowned Habsburg historian Robert Kann explored the topic in a lecture that was later published as a booklet.³⁰ This, in itself, was already fortunate. Without the help of Kann's erudite and stylish account, the Prochaska Affair might have faded from the memory of Habsburgists altogether. But Kann's short text also has its limitations. It remains firmly centered on Vienna and pays exclusive attention to elite actors at or near the foreign ministry. With much of the given space devoted to a discussion of the press coverage and public opinion, Kann's account offers little information on Prochaska in Prizren. On the contrary, Kann uses every opportunity to belittle the consul, depicting him as more of a curiosity than a serious subject of inquiry.³¹ While Kann's study offers considerable insight into the political events of the day and manages to place the Prochaska Affair in its diplomatic context on the highest level, it falls short in its overall failure to take a local dimension into consideration as well. To date, Kann's essay remains the only dedicated study of the Prochaska Affair, and while it continues to be highly useful and relevant, it should by no means be seen as definite.

It seems unsatisfactory, then, that we know nearly nothing about the situation in Prizren, where everything began. Let me therefore pose the simple question: What did Prochaska do during the Prochaska Affair?

A Local Affair

Events unfolded rapidly in Kosovo during the first weeks of the war. On October 17, 1912, Serbia joined its allies and declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Soon thereafter, Prochaska's letters were seized en route to the post office (as mentioned above) and the first detachments of the Serbian forces reached Prizren and captured it without a fight. Well before the end of the month, telegraphic contact between Vienna and its three consulates in Kosovo had been lost.³² On November 5, General Janković arrived in Prizren and established his administration. On November 8, the Serbian envoy in Vienna

30 Kann, *Prochaska-Affäre*. The text is 39 pages long.

31 *Ibid.*, 1 and especially 36–37.

32 Minister Ugron in Belgrade to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, October 19, 1912, no.112. HHStA PA 385. When Prochaska forwarded Tahy's report that Mitrovica was being cut off by the Serbian military, this

demanded that Prochaska be immediately recalled, leading the Ballhausplatz to push for an investigation that would allow an Austro-Hungarian consul to travel to Kosovo.³³ It took several weeks to agree on the particulars, during which time the Serbs began to gather information for their own purposes. Vienna spoke of deliberate delaying tactics, while the Pašić government blamed an uncooperative military.³⁴ In the end, both procedures ran parallel and separate from each other in another sign of the two governments' mutual distrust.

As part of the Serbian investigation, General Janković filed a first report on Prochaska's alleged activity on November 20.³⁵ This preliminary report mostly consisted of a long list of unlikely rumors and unfavorable interpretations of the consul's daily work with political clients, but it also included several points that seem more plausible. Four of them involve Nikolai Alekseevič Emelianov, the Russian consul, who had probably raised these allegations himself. According to the first one, Prochaska had stopped an Ottoman officer in the street shortly before Prizren was captured and berated him in public for his intention to seek Emelianov's protection. Prochaska had then led the officer (and the 6,000 lira he had intended to take to the Russian consul) to his own consulate. Another allegation notes how Prochaska had publicly exclaimed on two occasions (once in the presence of an unnamed foreign consul, who must have been Emelianov) that he was opposed to the offensive alliance of Montenegro and Serbia and that "Austria will never allow it!" meaning its success.³⁶ Finally, the third and fourth allegations contrast the two consuls' reactions to the arrival of the Serbian administration: Emelianov had established personal and official relations by visiting the general two times within 24 hours and had also taken part in a celebratory church service, whereas Prochaska had refused any contact whatsoever.³⁷

Complaints about Prochaska's discourteous behavior also set the tone in the general's second and longer report, dated December 19, with which the Serbian

was apparently also the last of his own telegrams to make it through to Vienna; see Consul Prochaska in Prizren to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, October 23, 1912, no. 74. HHStA PA 385.

33 Foreign Minister Berchtold in Vienna to Minister Ugron in Belgrade, November 8, 1912, draft. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 2–3.

34 On the protracted negotiations from the Austro-Hungarian point of view, see HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 2–17 and 39–41. The conflictual relationship between the Serbian civil government and the military is discussed in Newman, "Hollow Crown."

35 This is the previously cited DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 255.

36 DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 255, annex points 10 and 14.

37 *Ibid.*, annex point 20–21.

investigation came to a close.³⁸ After several pages which mostly repeated the previous allegations against Prochaska and added supporting testimony by townspeople, Janković's account took a sudden turn to the personal: "Apart from the above," wrote the general, "I consider it necessary that, for a more accurate assessment of the incorrect actions of Mr. Prochaska, I present his attitude towards me, as the commander of the army and the occupied area, and my relationship with him."³⁹ The remainder of the report suggests that Janković felt truly offended by Prochaska's every action: that the consul had not introduced himself, neither in an official capacity nor in private; that he had treated one of Janković's officers, whom the general had sent with what amounted to a formal invitation to meet, rudely; and overall, that Prochaska had refused to recognize the Serbian administration but at the same time had pestered Janković with all kinds of petitions in writing and by sending his consular messenger-interpreter (*dragoman*).⁴⁰ The general, in turn, took a corresponding stance and refused to deal with Prochaska's complaints. Instead, Janković informed his adversary through the dragoman that he was simply not acquainted with Prochaska on a personal level and that there was also no legal procedure in force that could compel him to acknowledge the consul's presence in an official capacity. He then let Prochaska know that this would not change until the consul visited with him directly.⁴¹

Faced with the general's ultimatum, Prochaska announced himself for November 17. This is how Janković described their meeting:

That same day, at 11.30 am, finally, after a whole thirteen days of demonstrations, Mr. Prochaska presented himself—a short, chubby, squinting, unsympathetic figure. As soon as my adjutant reported him, I let him in. When he entered the room, he introduced himself to me; I received him politely and seriously, greeted him with a handshake, building on the power of a benevolent God, as far as this was possible with this type. However, the following was characteristic of the man's upbringing and arrogance: as soon as I shook his hand and while I had not yet offered him a seat or sat down, he immediately sat down on the first chair closest to him, while I remained standing, looking at him from above with a questioning regard, which he fully understood

38 General Janković in Prizren to Army High Command in Skoplje, December 6/19, 1912, no. 796. DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 464.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

and, embarrassed, he stood up [again]. Only after this fiasco of his, I offered him to sit down and did so as well, and then our conversation began.⁴²

The rest of the meeting, according to Janković, brought only further embarrassment to Prochaska, since the general had the upper hand on all questions. (This impression is reinforced by Prochaska's own reportage, which only devoted a few inconclusive lines to their conversation.⁴³) Janković, it is obvious, had many reasons to mistrust Prochaska and found his suspicions confirmed in the consul's antagonistic behavior and rudeness in personal relations. There is a strong element of contempt in Janković's descriptions of Prochaska's person throughout his report. To give another example, when Prochaska decided to leave Prizren, Janković withdrew one of his higher-ranking officers from the military escort after he learned that the consul would be traveling with his "mistress." He also reported with visible satisfaction that Prochaska had been chased out of Prizren by an angry mob on the day he left town.⁴⁴

In sum, relations between the two officials were strained from the outset and only deteriorated when they met face to face. Prochaska made the worst possible impression on Janković by fumbling the rules of both official procedure and social courtesy. While Janković might have been biased against Prochaska, the representative of a hostile power, it seems that the consul, at least during this encounter, did not display the polished manners that were expected of a gentleman and diplomat. With that being said, Prochaska was also the victim of unfavorable circumstances. When the fog of war had cleared, the Serbian government acknowledged that its military had acted inappropriately when it hindered the consul's work and barred him from communicating with his colleagues and superiors.⁴⁵ There is also reason to believe that Prochaska's Russian counterpart, Emelianov, was in fact a bitter rival and in cahoots with Janković. In Prochaska's subsequent reportage, we read the following about the first days of the Serbian occupation:

42 Ibid.

43 Prochaska's report in Consul Heimroth in Üsküp to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, November 27, 1912, no. 106. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 104, 106.

44 DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 464.

45 The negotiations that resulted in the Serbian government's public apology are an interesting topic on their own: see various documents towards the end of the dossier on the Prochaska Affair in HHStA PA XII 415.

Local Russian representative Emelianov did not return my three consecutive visits, by now completely ignores this consulate and apparently regards himself not as a Russian representative but as a Serbian agent.⁴⁶

Prochaska felt humiliated and enraged by what he perceived as unjustified slander and chicanery against his person by Emelianov and especially the Serbs.⁴⁷ He was convinced that it had been the general and his officers who had arranged for the group of people who had harassed him in the street.⁴⁸ Even a decade later, writing in retrospect, Prochaska still felt very much aggrieved:

I was abused, threatened, marauding soldiery and *komitadjis* rioted in front of the consulate and threatened to put it on fire, I was blockaded inside, savaged soldiers were quartered (as guards!) in the consulate, who threatened to shoot if I left the house, my horses were stolen, every night those arrested during the day were massacred behind my garden, in short, those were three upsetting weeks, and I was cut off from the outside world and, due to the constant agitation in newspapers and pamphlets, in growing danger of life. At my departure, I was led like a prisoner right through a lane of soldiers and wild rabble, who kept screaming, among the worst abuse against the Monarchy and myself, that I should be killed, hurling large pebbles, petrol tankards and such against my carriage, so that it is a miracle that I got out alive. I can say without exaggeration that—at least before the World War—no consul has ever been treated like this.⁴⁹

Placed side by side, both the consul's and the general's comments about their mutual relationship express remarkably similar emotions.⁵⁰ What, then, are we to make of the two men and their grudge against each other? Recent works on diplomatic representation and interpersonal communication as well as “face-to-face diplomacy” suggest some analytical themes for further study.⁵¹

46 Prochaska's report in Consul Heimroth in Üsküp to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, November 26, 1912, no. 104. HHSStA PA XII 415, fol. 103.

47 Prochaska's report in Consul Heimroth in Üsküp to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, November 27, 1912, no. 107. HHSStA PA XII 415, fol. 118–9.

48 Ibid., fol. 119.

49 Letter, Prochaska in Brno to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, December 28, 1922. HHSStA MdÄ AR F4 272 Personalia Prochaska-Lachnit, Oskar.

50 Compare Prochaska's report (ibid.) with the entire second half of Janković's final report (DSPKS, vol. 5/3, no. 464).

51 Rack, *Unentbehrliche Vertreter*; Steller, *Diplomatie von Angesicht zu Angesicht*; Holmes and Wheeler, “Social Bonding”; Holmes, *Face-to-Face Diplomacy*; Trager, *Diplomacy*, especially “The Fruit of 1912 Diplomacy,” *ibid.*, 151–73.

More attention should also be paid to the third main protagonist, the Russian consul Emelianov, among many other local actors in the shared urban setting of Prizren.⁵² All this requires adding a decidedly local view to Prochaska's story and its diplomatic significance, which I have tried to sketch in brief and in only one of the many possible ways.⁵³ After all, if Prochaska and Janković had been ministers meeting in a palace or gilded drawing room, we would already have many volumes of analysis and portraiture.

This does not mean that only sources locally produced in Prizren are relevant. For example, historians have sometimes interpreted Prochaska's antagonistic behavior as a deliberate, officially sanctioned tactic to spark a diplomatic conflict.⁵⁴ Judging by the Habsburg foreign ministry's internal files, however, this ran counter to its intentions. In response to the Serbian complaints about Prochaska that had reached Vienna in early November, the ministry had immediately issued new instructions to its consuls in the occupation zone: "The situation brought about by the war," they began, "is merely *de facto* and lacks recognition under international law." Although the consuls were never to fail to observe this, they were also instructed to act in their own interest and "get in touch with the factual rulers and strive to maintain the best possible relations." The only line not to cross was to commit "acts that could be interpreted as the direct recognition of the sovereignty of any of the Balkan states or the annexation." Moreover, while all "contractual and customary rights" that consuls enjoyed under the Ottomans continued to be in force, exceptions might be tolerated on account of the ongoing war. In case of problems, consulates were to turn to the foreign ministry and their supervising embassy in Constantinople.⁵⁵ In other words, these were extremely flexible, practical guidelines. They insisted in principle on upholding the *status quo ante* but also acknowledged the demands of the evolving situation, encouraging consuls to interact with the new authorities in an amicable way.

Unfortunately for Prochaska (and Janković), this good advice never reached Prizren. Does this mean that Prochaska's poor performance can be excused because he simply did not get the circular? In order to answer this question, we

52 For an approach that places diplomatic actors in a shared urban social context, see Do Paço, "Trans-Imperial Familiarity." Cities as sites and consuls as actors are discussed in Leira and Carvalho, "Intercity Origins."

53 Compare the discussion in Ghobrial, "Global History and Microhistory."

54 See e.g. Bjelajac, "'Humanitarian' Pretext," which echoes traditional Serbian historiography.

55 Foreign Minister Berchtold in Vienna to Minister Ugron in Belgrade, November 8, 1912, no. 5042. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 4–6.

have to take a brief look at his colleagues in neighboring consulates and how they portrayed their own actions at the time. This is because Consul Heimroth in Üsküp (Shkup, Skopje, Skoplje) as well as Vice-consul Tahy and his Chancellery Secretary Umlauf in Mitrovica were cut off from communications in much the same way and faced similar difficulties, but seem to have managed much better.

One advantage that Consul Heimroth had was the benefit of collegial company in Üsküp, the provincial capital. After the Ottomans had lost the Battle of Kumanovo on October 23–24 and retreated in chaos, the remaining foreign consuls formed a provisional government council to try to maintain order and organize humanitarian relief. The consuls also ventured outside the city to meet the advancing Serbian army in the field and offer to surrender without bloodshed.⁵⁶ In their various ad-hoc measures, the consuls exceeded their mandate as neutral observers, choosing instead to rely on their combined authority to avert even greater disaster. There were also some tricky situations that Heimroth had to tackle on his own. Early on, a deputation of local notables asked the consul to hoist the flag of Austria-Hungary over the city, hoping that this would spare it from being shelled, but Heimroth refused on the grounds of international law. He also opened the doors of the consulate to refugees. When a group of Ottoman officers begged him for shelter, he allowed them in, too, but felt relieved when they changed their minds and left, since their presence might have compromised his own position. After the arrival of the Serbian army, Heimroth consented to the placement of a military guard inside his consulate, knowing that a refusal would put him in danger.⁵⁷ Overall, Heimroth's various choices seem quite appropriate and may have prevented further escalation.

In Mitrovica, a small town bordering Serbian territory, Ladislaus von Tahy (Tahvári és Tarkeői Tahy László) found himself in an isolated position that is quite comparable to Prochaska's situation farther south. Tahy also experienced similar difficulties with the new Serbian administration. Unlike Prochaska, however, Tahy paid a visit to the Serbian military commander as soon as the latter had arrived on October 27.⁵⁸ During this meeting, Tahy argued that, as a diplomat accredited to the Ottoman authorities, he was not permitted to establish any official relations with the Serbian military but that he intended to carry on with his duties until new instructions would arrive. Unfortunately

56 Consul Heimroth in Üsküp to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, November 18, 1912, no. 125–126. HHStA PA XII 386, fol. 509–218 and 521–524.

57 Ibid.

58 Tahy's official daily chronicle (*Amtserinnerung*), November 6, 1912. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 20–24.

for Tahy, however, his initiative was not crowned with success. In the days that followed, his Serbian counterpart did not return the visit, which humiliated Tahy and caused him lasting emotional distress.⁵⁹ The Serbian authorities began to prevent the consul and his personnel as well as their clients from entering and leaving the consulate. Tensions rose to the point that Tahy decided to leave and return home on November 7.⁶⁰ In doing so, he probably chose wisely, since his regular activity had become impossible and his attempt to reach a compromise had obviously fallen on deaf ears.

Tahy left behind a caretaker, Chancellery Secretary Umlauf, who would rise to the occasion and display remarkable diplomatic capabilities.⁶¹ Umlauf's daily chronicle from that time gives the impression that he was aware that any argument or other small occurrence might cause trouble and create another diplomatic incident. Far from remaining passive, though, Umlauf acted on his newfound role as the sole representative of the Dual Monarchy in Mitrovica. As such, he entered into a protracted conflict with the local Catholic priest, who tried to shift away from Habsburg protection to a pro-Serbian course. Umlauf's quiet struggle with Don Nikola Mazarek culminated one Sunday towards the end of November. The consul went to attend mass and noticed that the Austria-Hungarian flag had been removed from its usual place near the altar. In response, Umlauf stood still in the middle of the church and did not take his seat until the priest had the flag brought back in. Other examples could be added, such as the skillful way in which Umlauf used procedural arguments during a meeting with the Serbian consul Milan Milojević to assert his position as a serious consular representative in all but official rank.⁶² In sum, Umlauf, the experienced chancellery official, used his understanding of a consul's ceremonial role and his technical knowledge to stand his ground successfully in an unprecedented situation.

This quick comparison of Prochaska's actions with those of his colleagues indicates that there were indeed different paths that the isolated consuls could take. Success required active communication and an ability to judge when proper procedure should be followed and when flexibility was preferable, which is

59 Minister Ugron in Belgrade to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, January 9, 1913, no. 17. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 301–302.

60 Tahy's official daily chronicle (*Amtserinnerung*), fol. 24.

61 Chancellery Secretary Umlauf in Mitrovica to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, January 3, 1913, no. 1 secret. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 260–274.

62 *Ibid.*, fol. 269–271.

exactly what the instructions from Vienna that never reached Kosovo had tried to suggest early on in the conflict. When the Ballhausplatz's internal investigation concluded in mid-December 1912, it did so with a mixed picture: clearly, Prochaska had been wronged on multiple occasions by the Serbian military, but he had also added to the tensions himself, and in some cases the picture remained quite murky.⁶³ In Belgrade, Minister Stephan von Ugron (Ábránfalvi Ugron István) thought that “calm cold-bloodedness and a tactful demeanour” on part of Prochaska and Tahy might have prevented the worst, and cited Heimroth's much more favorable example.⁶⁴ Likewise, Consul Heinrich Wildner, also in Belgrade, believed that his two colleagues should have met their adversaries with “tact and adaptability” to “repair” their strained relations with them. According to both Wildner and Ugron, the special privileges that foreign consuls enjoyed under Ottoman rule had given them an inflated sense of status and made them inflexible; indeed, perhaps it would be wise to recall the old guard and send fresh faces to the Balkans.⁶⁵

Conclusions

In this article, I have used the case of a single individual to try to make a larger point about Habsburg consuls as important but understudied actors of diplomacy and empire. In retrospect, Prochaska's lack of caution, social courtesy, and, altogether, diplomatic skill in the high-stakes setting of a town under military occupation created a cascade whose magnitude the consul himself could not even begin to comprehend while the communication blockade lasted. Prochaska cannot be held responsible for what others outside Kosovo—soldiers, diplomats, politicians, journalists—made of his predicament in pursuit of their own varied motives. The consul was, however, very much responsible for how it all had

63 Compare the marginal notes that Consul Theodor Edl added to an edited copy of Prochaska's previously cited three reports. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 145–50. Edl had been entrusted with carrying out the Ballhausplatz's investigation and had visited the Kosovo consulates to make his own appraisal. The debriefing meeting for which he prepared these notes took place on December 15 back in Vienna. The following day, the foreign ministry released a short, amicably-worded communiqué in which it informed the public that the conflict had been settled. On the disappointment and public outrage that followed, see Kann, *Prochaska-Affäre*, esp. 8–9 and 18–33.

64 Minister Ugron in Belgrade to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna, December 13, 1912, no. 400 res. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 143–144.

65 Consul Wildner as quoted in letter, Minister Ugron in Belgrade to Section Chief Macchio in Vienna, January 21, 1913. HHStA PA XII 415, fol. 323–324.

started, and he could have taken steps to defuse the situation later on. Therein lies his agency as a diplomat and his appeal as a subject of history-writing.

The unusual prominence of Prochaska's case and its relevance to multiple historiographies make clear why consuls deserve our full attention. In my own work, I follow an actor-centric and practice-based approach, but the true strength of the contemporary scholarship on the Habsburg Empire lies in its polyphony and openness to experimentation.⁶⁶ Other methods and perspectives, and less obviously striking cases than the Prochaska Affair, should also be explored to allow us to gain a deeper and more varied understanding of Habsburg consuls as part of the foreign service and the imperial bureaucracy as a whole. If the same scrutiny and erudition that the best traditional diplomatic scholarship has produced were also to be applied to the study of consuls and extended to the broad variety of contexts beyond courts and capitals in which they were active we would glean many new insights into the local (or regional or "provincial") life-worlds of diplomacy and empire.⁶⁷ In the Balkans, Austria-Hungary's ambitions depended on its ever-widening network of consuls, and much the same can be suspected of its growing engagement across the world as an "empire without overseas colonies."⁶⁸ Prochaska, for instance, concluded his tarnished career at the consulate-general in Rio de Janeiro,⁶⁹ out of harm's way but still as a member of an imperial bureaucracy with a global presence and outlook.

There is a rich source tradition on which a cultural and social history of consuls and consular diplomacy in the Habsburg Empire could be founded. This includes both consular reports, which are already a principal source in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Balkan history,⁷⁰ and administrative papers, such as the consuls' personnel files. These often very messy boxes are rarely examined and always full of surprises. Prochaska knew this, too. Near the top of his personnel file, we find a request from 1922 in which the former consul

66 For a general perspective, see Feichtinger and Uhl, *Habsburg neu denken* and for various approaches to the history of diplomacy and international relations, Haider-Wilson et al., *Internationale Geschichte*.

67 Regrettably, consuls do not play any noticeable role in the most recent, highly detailed surveys of Habsburg foreign policy in the Dualist period; see Rauscher, *Fragile Großmacht* and Canis, *Bedrängte Großmacht*.

68 For a recent discussion of global approaches to late-Habsburg history, see Hirschhausen, "Habsburgermonarchie in globaler Perspektive?" side by side with Judson, "Global Empire"; and compare Sauer, "Habsburg Colonial."

69 Deusch summarizes and comments on Prochaska's time in Brazil and his return after World War I in *Konsuln*, 538–42.

70 On the value of consular reports as a source for Balkan history, see the introduction to Frantz and Schmitt, *Politik und Gesellschaft*.

asked if “possibly existing ‘*evrak i mużire*’—harmful papers” stemming from the Prizren incident could be removed from “this mysterious folder.” As a native of Moravia, Prochaska had become a Czechoslovak citizen (although he later opted for Austria), and he feared that his old file, when handed over to Prague, might get him in trouble again.⁷¹ The bulk of the paperwork that the Prochaska Affair had generated in the foreign ministry had, however, already been collected separately.⁷² It is quite possible that previously unknown documents could still be found, especially in the administrative collections, which diplomatic historians have usually not taken into account. Although archived separately from each other, political and administrative papers were produced by the same group of people in a shared bureaucratic setting.⁷³ When analyzed together, the two types sometimes complement and sometimes subvert each other, bringing diplomacy to life.

Over the course of the past century, generations of historians who took note of the Prochaska Affair never cared to portray the consul at its center as a complex protagonist and veritable (albeit catastrophic) diplomatic actor. I have attempted to offer a different perspective. In doing so, I have also tried to tell a good story.⁷⁴ Thanks to a thriving community of scholars, the stories we tell of the Habsburg Empire are transforming: studies on consuls and diplomacy can add to this common project.⁷⁵ My sincere hope, therefore, is that the curious case of Oskar Prochaska, dusted off a little, will inspire historians of the Habsburg Monarchy from various backgrounds and with varying interests to consider giving consuls a try in their work as well.

“For many years, we have lived without knowing that a certain Mr. Prochaska represented us,” wrote *Pesti Napló* on its front-page on November 27, 1912, at the height of the crisis. “One day, we reach for the newspaper and find that we have a new hero named Prochaska, whose shed blood calls for vengeance.”⁷⁶ Today, a

71 Typed extract from letter, Prochaska in Adamov (Adamsthal) to Consul-general Kraus in Vienna, June 25, 1922. HHStA MdÄ AR F4 272 Personalia Prochaska-Lachnit, Oskar.

72 In the previously cited dossier in HHStA PA XII 415.

73 Future studies on histories of knowledge in the Austro-Hungarian foreign service may find it useful to consult Wiedermayer, “Geschäftsgang” and to consider the methodological reflections with a special emphasis on Austrian/Habsburg archival contexts in Hochedlinger, *Aktenkunde*.

74 I believe that, for historians, engaging in storytelling (trying to tell engaging stories) is more than a matter of personal taste, but rather a professional responsibility and skill that we should actively seek to develop and experiment with; compare the extended reflections offered by Cronon, “Storytelling.”

75 See Judson, *Habsburg Empire* and, on the need for renewed interest in matters of “statecraft,” diplomacy, and foreign policy, Cole, “Visions and Revisions.”

76 *Pesti Napló*, November 27, 1912, 1 (my translation of Kann’s German translation of the Hungarian original as given in Kann, *Prochaska-Affäre*, 32).

diplomatic history freed from narratives of pride and pain can contribute essential insight into empires and nation states by recognizing the many and diverse people who inhabited and built them. It can dissolve strict dichotomies of thought, endeavoring to overcome rather than perpetuate divisive political and academic traditions. For many years, we have lived without knowing what a certain Mr. Prochaska could represent to us, and I hope that one day, we may reach for a new kind of Habsburg diplomatic history and find out so much more.

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