BETWEEN PARTNERSHIP AND INFLUENCE: AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE BALKANS DURING WORLD WAR I

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Abstract: The key question of this chapter is: Was cultural diplomacy at the start of the 20th century comparable to what we practice a hundred years later? The answer emerges from a review of the case study on Austria-Hungary's cultural diplomacy in the Balkans during World War I. Wartime conditions limited the number of target countries to the two regional allies of the Central Powers' political and military bloc – the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Several initiatives in the field of cultural diplomacy are examined in the context of bilateral relations. Among the most notable are the founding of a dormitory for Bulgarian university students in Vienna, a school for Bulgarian children in Budapest, the accommodation of Bulgarian orphans in Temesvár/Timișoara, and a proposed Austrian and Hungarian palace of culture in Sofia, following the success of an art exhibition there. The rivalry with Germany – the dominant partner in the alliance – serves as the backdrop against which the Dual Monarchy's actions are considered. A comparison of the Ottoman Empire's and Bulgaria's responses to these initiatives from Vienna and Budapest reveals how both Balkan states perceived the potential benefits of closer cultural ties with Austria-Hungary.

Keywords: Austria-Hungary, Balkans, Bulgaria, Ottoman Empire, World War I

Cultural diplomacy, like other terms in humanities, lacks a rigid definition. Its multidisciplinary coverage in the field of cultural studies, history, literature, political science, sociology, and international relations provides for a variety of meanings depending on the concrete case study and app-

roach. Another reason for this is the specific character of cultural diplomacy which can be conducted by both states (and their respective institutions), official international organizations, and private associations (i.e. NGOs), not excluding individuals. As David Carter points out, a dominant paradigm across much of the humanities remains anti-governmental, especially when 'culture' is a term in the equation. He argues instead for a positive relationship between humanities, academics/intellectuals and the governmental agendas of cultural diplomacy, and for ways of accommodating critical perspectives on both the concept of 'the national interest' and the instrumentalisation of culture (Carter, 478).[1] In a similar context, some authors tend to identify cultural diplomacy with cultural relations and new public diplomacy (Melissen, 25). At the centre of it are two related terms: so-called soft power and cultural propaganda, both laying in the domain of state politics. Cultural diplomacy can be both public (not necessarily in the form of propaganda) and secret, as both forms are inherent to diplomacy. Admittedly, diplomacy in general, as old as societies, includes the (mostly state) practice of managing international relations through official and/or semi-official representatives. It is primarily conducted through negotiations, summits and treaties, to resolve conflicts, maintain peace, and promote national interests. At the intersection of culture and traditional diplomacy, cultural diplomacy only partially overlaps with the related concept of cultural policy, understood as the implementation and promotion of specific

[1] See also Clarke, D. "Theorising the role of cultural products in cultural diplomacy from a cultural studies perspective." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2016, pp. 147-163; Felski, R. "Suspicious minds." *Poetics today*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2011, pp. 215–234; Cavaliero, R. E. "Cultural diplomacy: The diplomacy of influence." *The Round Table,* vol. 75, no. 298, 1986, pp. 139-144; Figueira, C. "Cultural diplomacy and cultural imperialism: European perspective(s)." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2014, et al.

cultural practices and goals. On the other hand, closely related – though not identical – is the term *external cultural policy*. Between 2017-2020, the renowned *International Journal of Cultural Policy* dedicated four special issues to international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy, distinguishing between them. An analogous distinction is evident in the title of the collected volume *Cultural Diplomacy and International Cultural Relations* edited by Oliver Bennett (2019). The list of similar combinations could be further extended, but doing so goes beyond the main objective of this study.

Among the various interpretations of cultural diplomacy, for the purposes of this text, cultural diplomacy will be understood as acts of fostering mutual understanding and strengthening relationships between states through cultural engagement, both within the home country and in the partner state. In this sense, it encompasses the use of cultural initiatives such as educational politics, displays of projects for the presence of cultural institutions in the partner country, art exhibitions, fairs, concerts, etc. – as well as visits to promote mutual rapprochement, build trust, and enhance a nation's soft power. A specific feature of cultural diplomacy – the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce – will be regarded in particular. By engaging in cultural exchanges and showcasing national cultural achievements, as Joseph Nye notes, countries aim to build long-term relationships, influence foreign audiences, and create a favourable environment for political and economic cooperation (Nye, 2004), as will be evident from the case study that follows.

The series of events that led to World War I are well known. It started on July 28, 1914**,** when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia following the unfulfilled ultimatum after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. The long feared war erupted

after many years of tensions between the two neighbouring states, which had reached a peak during the Annexation Crisis of 1908-1909 (Ćorović, 185-1014). The declaration of war on Serbia sparked reactions among the allied nations and ultimately ignited an unprecedented global war. In support of Serbia, Montenegro – first among the Balkan states – declared war on Austria-Hungary on 6 August 1914. Meanwhile, on 2 August 1914**,** the Ottoman Empire signed a secret treaty of alliance with Germany, the nation driving the momentum of the Central Powers. Only three months later, on 29 October 1914, the Ottoman navy launched a surprise attack on Russian ports in the Black Sea. In response, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 1 November 1914. Subsequently, Britain and France, the other members of the opposing political and military block, called the Entente, declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 5 November 1914. In the early autumn of 1915, Bulgaria – desired as an ally by both hostile military camps – joined the Central Powers after receiving the promise to regain territories lost in the Second Balkan War of 1913. Maintaining neutrality at first, Romania then entered the conflict on the Entente's side by declaring war on Austria-Hungary on 27 August 1916, with the hope of annexing territories of the Dual Monarchy that were populated with Romanians. Greece joined the Entente on 29 June 1917, the last country in the Balkans to enter the war.[2] Thus, in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary ended up with only two allies: the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria.

[2] On World War I in the Balkans in general see Höpken, W. und Wim van Meurs (Hrsg.) *Der Erste Weltkrieg auf dem Balkan: Ereignis, Erfahrung und Erinnerung*. Peter Lang, 2018; Pezi, E. „Das lange Krisen- und Kriegsjahrzent als herrschaftspolitische Zeitenwende, 1908-1922/23." K. Clewing, H. Grandits, E. Pezo (Hrsg.) *Handbuch zur Geschichte Südosteuropas. Band 3. Staatlichkeit und Politik in Südosteuropa nach 1800*. De Gruyter 2025, pp. 219-286.

Consequently, the choice to fight on the side of the Central Powers or the Entente clearly defined the camps of allies and enemies. The prohibition of imports and exports that followed, along with certain forms of censorship, significantly limited the country's existing and potential partners in both cultural and economic relations. The state of war also severely restricted opportunities for various public activities. Propaganda from the warring parties further contributed to this situation.

Under these circumstances, the relations between Bulgaria and the Dual Monarchy became more intensive, especially in the sphere of culture and trade. A relatively long list of events that highlighted them includes an Austrian fashion exhibition of the Viennese Fashion Society (*Wiener Modegesellschaft*)[3], a visit of an Austrian ship with samples of different goods to the Bulgarian harbours on the Danube and the Black Sea coast, art exhibitions, presentations of war memories, several concerts, a visit of the secretary of the *Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, and many others. They reflect the public's attitude toward the situation, which fostered a sense of imperative closeness that went beyond efforts to simulate normal civilian life during the war. What follows are a few outstanding and well-documented actions, considered as telling examples of Austro-Hungarian cultural diplomacy.

Within the efforts of the Dual Monarchy to consolidate relations between the two partners in the Balkans, the sphere of education received particular attention. In this field, it faced strong French dominance. Reportedly, at the outbreak of the war, there were 12 German schools compared to 600 French

[3] *Wiener Modegesellschaft* was founded in 1915. It operated its own fashion house in Vienna, published the "Modealmanach" and contributed to the development of an artistically sophisticated fashion style.

ones in the Ottoman Empire whose government showed growing discontent with foreign influence in education. In a memorandum to the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry under the title "The expansion of Reichs-German and Austrian science in Turkey", dated 18 September 1915, the Secretary of the *Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, Erich Pistor, emphasized how important it was to spread German and Austrian cultural and scientific influence in Turkey. According to him, several institutions were involved in achieving this goal. Among them, he mentioned the *Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Association of Handicrafts in Lower Austria, the Export Academy* and the newly established *Vienna Institute for Cultural Studies.*[4] In contrast to his view, the diplomatic representative of the Dual Monarchy in Constantinople, Marquess (Markgraf) Johann von Pallavicini preferred to focus on strengthening economic relations with Turkey, while Germany's primary activities in the Ottoman Empire were military missions and railway construction. In his view, attracting the maximum number of young Turks to Austria-Hungary was of paramount importance to achieving this goal. He recalled the *Fund for the Education of Ottomans* (*Studienfonds für Ottomanen*), established by the *Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry* before World War I, on the occasion of a visit by Austrian industrialists to the Ottoman Empire in 1911. The *Fund* was to be developed on a large scale, according to him. In June of 1916, ambassador Pallavicini submitted a memorandum of

[4] In the official correspondence, Ottoman Empire and Turkey are used synonymously. Klein, F. „Der Einfluß Deutschlands und Österreich-Ungarns auf das türkische Bildungswesen in den Jahren des Ersten Weltkrieges." R. G. Plaschka, K. Mack (Hrsg.) *Wegenetz europäischen Geistes. Wissenschaftszentren und geistige Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Mittel- und Südosteuropa vom Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*. Verlag für Geschichte und Politik Wien, 1983, pp. 422-425.

the Austro-Hungarian authorities to the Sublime Porte with the proposal to establish an *Ottoman-Austrian Institute*, intended for the education of Turkish students in Vienna. The diplomatic correspondence reveals that this action was intended to counterbalance similar activities carried out by the financially powerful group of industrial and banking representatives, who founded the *German-Turkish Association* in 1914 at the suggestion of the German Foreign Ministry. These ideas within Viennese circles were not realized due to the controversies between the Austrian and Ottoman governments on the selection and supervision of the students. In April 1917, the *Austrian Society for the Orient and Overseas* (*K. K. Österreichische Orient- und Überseegesellschaft*) changed the initial agreement and proposed annually sending fifty to sixty Turkish students between the ages of ten to thirteen years to study in Austria. The plan was to accommodate them together with Austrian students of the same age in non-religious boarding schools in smaller towns in the region of Lower Austria. After completing the first year, they would have to take an exam and, depending on the result, could continue their education in higher or professional schools. The Secretary General of the Austrian *Society for the Orient and the Overseas*, Prof. Dr. Alois Musil, professor of Biblical Studies and Arabic at the University of Vienna, worked on projects for the education of young Turks in Austria and personally participated in the selection of students. However, the development of military operations limited the campaign to the short period of one academic year, from the autumn of 1917 to the summer of 1918. In a letter from the *Society for the Orient and Overseas* to the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Professor Musil emphasized that if the students campaign had been carried out systematically and with all due attention to the education of

Mohammedan students in Austria, in a few years the country would have had many influential friends in Turkey, and this could only have been beneficial for the economic and political influence of Austria. Not only the timing, but also the ongoing contradictions between the Turkish and Austrian authorities regarding the selection of young people to be sent to study in Austria, hindered the successful development of this initiative. Similarly, the German authorities were forced to abandon their plans to open schools in the Ottoman Empire and establish a university in Constantinople, following a request from the "national-chauvinistic" Young Turks, according to Pallavicini. For the same reason, in March 1918 the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister withdrew his order to the ambassador in Constantinople (from January 1916) to stand up for the appointment of some Austrian professors in the Ottoman Empire (Klein, 425-431; Gardos, 295-296).

The actions of Austrian business and political bodies were mirrored on the Hungarian side, reflecting the growing rivalry between the two parts of the Dual Monarchy. Already in December 1915, the Hungarian Prime Minister István Tisza had justified (in an official note to the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Stefan Burián) the establishment of a *Turkish-Hungarian Association*, a *Hungarian Historical and Archaeological Institute* in the Ottoman capital, the excavation of the archaeological remains of a city from the classical era in Asia Minor, and the establishment of a Hungarian-Turkish school in Constantinople with instruction in Turkish and Hungarian. The mixed school was to prepare those Turkish young men who might later wish to further their studies at Hungarian educational institutions. A mission of experts led by the nobleman and politician Count Miklós Bánffy would be sent to work on these tasks. In addition to these projects, the director of the Agricultural School in Halkali (near

Constantinople), Caraczony, a Hungarian citizen, proposed to accommodate several hundred young Turks from Anatolia, at the expense of his government, with Hungarian peasant families for the purpose of practical training in agriculture (Klein, 426-428). Reportedly, a Hungarian cultural centre in Istanbul was indeed opened in 1916 (Egeresi). There is no evidence that the other aforementioned ideas were realized. In a broader context, these initiatives reveal a secondary layer in the competition for influence in the Ottoman Empire, not only between Austria and Hungary but also in the rivalry between the Dual Monarchy and Germany.

The goal of the Austrian and Hungarian activities was more than obvious: to create a network of future supporters who would promote the interests of the Dual Monarchy in the Ottoman Empire. These projects and initiatives in the field of educational policy towards the Ottoman Empire were launched by a wide range of interested parties, including businessmen, politicians, academic circles, and others, all supported by the state. However, they were not part of a systematically developed program due to the wartime context, where military considerations took absolute priority. The development of concrete measures depended on the situation at the frontlines and the reactions of the targeted partner country.

While the outcomes of the Austrian and Hungarian educational efforts aimed at the Ottoman Empire may have been dubious, analogous campaigns in Bulgaria developed successfully. Education had been especially attractive for many young Bulgarians since the 19th century (Preshlenova). After the outbreak of the war, several initiatives from Austrian and Hungarian academic, aristocratic, and business circles aimed at facilitating their access to universities and other educational institutions in the Dual Monarchy (Bachmaier,

430-443). Most of these projects and events were public and not formally organized, but were instead supported by the respective governments.

In the autumn of 1917, the principles of Austria-Hungary's educational policy towards Bulgaria were officially and publicly proclaimed. This was initiated through the state-funded publication of the book *"Educational Institutions, Institutes of Science and Art in Vienna and Lower Austria"* in Bulgarian. This was an adapted version of *Unterrichtsanstalten, wissenschaftliche und Kunstinstitute in Wien und Niederösterreich* published in the summer of 1917. Moreover, 1,000 copies of the map of Vienna were also prepared to be adapted specifically for the Bulgarian edition. It is worth noting that, due to the lack of a specific budget, the idea of translating the excerpt on specialized training into Turkish remained unresolved, i.e. unrealized (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 56, K. 16, Z. 3678/22.9.1917; Z.3955/10.4.1918). The fundamental difference in the attitudes of the Bulgarian and Turkish governments towards the educational initiatives of Vienna and Budapest likely played a significant role in this decision.

Along with some purely technical inclusions, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry made important substantive additions to the book, which explicitly targeted a Bulgarian audience. In their essence, they unambiguously reflected Vienna's concept of encouraging the education of young Bulgarians in the Dual Monarchy. The more significant ones eloquently illustrate this:

1. The conditions for admission of Bulgarians to study in Austria were essentially equalized with those for local students.

2. The admission of Bulgarians to Austrian universities was greatly facilitated by special provisions allowing easier

access to law and state law, medicine and pharmacy, as well as philosophy. These provisions were intended to remain in effect until the 1921/1922 academic year.

3. Regarding the admission of students from Bulgaria to vocational schools, the Ministry of Public Works declared its readiness to exempt them from the prescribed, often considerable, tuition fees for foreigners.

4. Since the dormitories were not state-funded but financed through private means, such as religious organizations (monasteries, orders, etc.), municipalities, associations, or individuals, free accommodations for Bulgarian students could not be offered. The efforts of the authorities in this regard were limited to influencing the management of such institutions to be as responsive as possible to applicants from Bulgaria by providing discounts.

The Foreign Ministry in Vienna attached particular importance to the last point relating to the provision of free places in Austrian dormitories, which offered the best opportunities for affordable and reliable accommodation for Bulgarian students. The Austrian Ministry of Education considered this problem particularly difficult. To give greater weight to the act and maximize its political impact, it was planned that, during the presentation of the Bulgarian edition of the book, emphasis would be placed on the assurance that all relevant Austrian authorities would diligently support Bulgarian students both financially and materially, ensuring they had good opportunities for education in Austria (*Ibid*).

From the point of view of Bulgarian society, the Bulgarian edition of the book on Austrian educational institutions was a useful and valuable reference. From a political and scientific perspective, it systematized and illustrated the educational policy of Austria-Hungary towards Bulgaria – which had been developed over the previous decades and finally crystallized

in the last years of World War I. Its highlights reflect both the application of administrative measures (provisions for exceptional admission) and providing material benefits (exemption from tuition fees for foreigners and assistance with discounted or free accommodation in dormitories). The provision of other material benefits, primarily scholarships, was not included in the Austro-Hungarian Balkan educational policy – unlike the Russian one in the period from the Crimean War to the last quarter of the 19th century. Provoked by the enduring interest of the Bulgarian government in the institutions of higher education in the Dual Monarchy, as well as by the growing flow of Bulgarians studying there, the publication directly served the outlined goals of Vienna's diplomacy.

The aforementioned activities were designed to counterbalance German influence in Bulgaria and draw on the prior Russian experience, as outlined in a confidential report by the Austro-Hungarian consul in Sofia, Karl Bertoni, dated 24 August 1916. In the report, he emphasized the importance of educational activity in the overall scheme of the Austro-Hungarian policy towards young Bulgarians. Bertoni recalled that the graduates of Russian educational institutions constituted, supported and strengthened the Russophile parties in Bulgaria. In his view, the work on attracting young Bulgarians to Austrian and Hungarian educational institutions should be systematized and the assistance of the state should be ensured for the initiation of such actions. Going further, he underlined that he had already received inquiries from the so-called Austrophile circles in Bulgaria about possibilities to obtain state scholarships for completing education in Austria and Hungary (*Ibid*). Obviously, concrete knowledge of Bulgarian conditions provided grounds for updating Viennese diplomacy's stance in a new context with respectively new priorities.

The unhidden goal of the Dual Monarchy's educational policy in this wartime context was the conscious spread of its political, cultural and economic influence among the local population in Bulgaria, and not, as before, the education of their own subjects there. In 1917, one million crowns were allocated to further advance Austro-Hungarian cultural policy in the Middle East and the Balkans. These funds were to finance a large-scale action program, according to which the Catholic, cultural and educational activity of the Dual Monarchy would pave the way for its economic influence in the respective countries. For Bulgaria, the costs for such needs (excluding those for the Catholic clergy) increased threefold between 1912 and 1917. The largest share of these funds, which amounted to 9,000 crowns, was intended for the Catholic boys' school in Sofia, founded with a subsidy from the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry in 1880. Another 1,000 crowns were assigned for the girls' school in the same city. In addition to this, a lump sum of 25,000 crowns was allocated for the purchase of Anna Weinlich's private girls' school in Rousse, which turned it into an Austro-Hungarian educational institution. In its new role from September 1917 on, it was called "Sancta Maria" and consisted of a kindergarten, four departments, three junior high school classes, a two-year trade course and German language courses. By this time, 220 students attended the school. In order to compete with the nearby German school, "Sancta Maria" received Austrian teaching materials for 2,343 crowns in March 1918, again at the expense of the Foreign Ministry (Bachmaier, 432-440, 444-445).

As already mentioned, business circles in the Dual Monarchy also displayed serious wartime activity. The *Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry* sent its secretary Erich Pistor to Bulgaria and Turkey in April and May 1918 to study

the economic prospects for the two countries. In his report, Erich Pistor paid special attention to the need to strengthen Austro-Hungarian influence on education, especially in Bulgaria. The establishment of Catholic schools with German-language instruction in Bulgaria was raised as a key focus in the campaign to foster Catholic activities there, initiated by the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* (*Congregatio de propaganda fide*) in the early years of the war. The same responsibility was given to the *Society of the Word of God* (*Societas Verbi Divini*), based in St. Gabriel near Mödling. While the Vatican saw in it an opportunity to achieve union with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry aimed to occupy the positions vacated by the French Catholic missionaries in the country under wartime conditions. To this end, Ballhaus tried to coordinate missionary activity and to influence its direction as the main source of financing for Catholic activity. Although there was a notable increase in funds allocated for educational policy within the context of Catholic propaganda compared to previous years, these funds were still considered very modest in light of the strategic political goals, many of which remained unrealized.

In order to increase the cultural and educational significance of the Dual Monarchy for Bulgarians, another old idea was revived. In 1906, the law faculty of the German University in Prague requested the creation of a doctorate in political and legal sciences, respectively political and economic sciences, which Vienna University adopted in 1908. This was also the main idea in the letter of the *Austrian Society for the Orient* from 20 June 1906 to the Austrian Ministry of Trade, which called for aligning the admission requirements for students from Balkan countries with those applied to Austro-Hungarian subjects, especially for legal and politi-

cal sciences, for which young people from the Balkans most often went to France and Germany. Thus, according to the presidium of the association, the Dual Monarchy lost political and cultural influence in the region. In the beginning of 1917, the dean of the Faculty of Law at Vienna University, Professor Karl Grünberg, and the court advisor, Eugen von Philippovich, updated this initiative with the motive of providing students from the Balkan countries (many of whom had previously been directed to the Francophonie for education in political science) the opportunity to earn this degree in Austria-Hungary as well. It was proposed that these provisions would apply only to foreigners from Bulgaria and Turkey. At that time, citizens of enemy countries were prohibited from attending Austro-Hungarian universities.

In December 1917, through diplomatic channels with the stamp "urgent", the Foreign Ministry in Vienna inquired about the opinions of the Bulgarian and Turkish governments in order to establish whether the form of education requested by the Faculty of Law at Vienna University would correspond, in principle and aim, to the intentions of these governments and whether it seemed suitable to attract their students to Vienna University. The Turkish government did not send a response on this issue. However, the answer from Sofia was communicated confidentially by the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry to the Austrian Ministry of Education in the summer of 1918. The Bulgarian government expressed its readiness to recognize the proposed doctorate in political science if this academic title would also be available to Austrian and Hungarian subjects, and if it would be recognized within the Dual Monarchy. Bulgaria's position was motivated by its legal provisions which allowed the recognition of foreign diplomas only that were valid in the country in which they were issued and which could also be obtained by subjects

of the respective state. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry interpreted the Bulgarian position as reflecting a certain sensitivity toward an academic degree that was inaccessible to Austrian and Hungarian subjects, viewing it as something of little value and, in a way, a form of disregard.

A strong wish to attract more Bulgarian students was also expressed in a pathetic letter from the Austrian Minister of Education, Baron Dr. Max Hussarek von Heinlein, to the Foreign Ministry on 5 June 1917. In the letter, he emphasized that it would be highly desirable for Austria – rather than Russia or France – to become the primary spiritual and educational center for Bulgarian students. In this context, the plan progressed to create a dormitory (*Konvikt*) in Vienna, which would be managed by an Austrian curatorium. He assessed the project as important and promising – both for cultural and political relations and for the economic rapprochement of the two countries. The Viennese diplomacy discussed the problem of accommodating young Bulgarian students with the Austro-Hungarian War Ministry, the *Society for the Orient and Overseas* and other associations. The first facilities in this regard were aimed at children of Bulgarian officers placed for training at the Military Technical School in Mährisch Weißkirchen, and would be free of charge for the 1917/1918 school year. Another student at the same school, son of a civilian, was granted a scholarship for 2,000 crowns by the *Society for the Orient and Overseas*. It is reported that a Bulgarian department was established in this school by the Austro-Hungarian War Ministry. In 1917, 15 Bulgarian graduates were admitted there, and another 13 were accommodated in 1918. The Military Technical School in Mährisch Weißkirchen was a kind of practical boys' high school with a military profile, whose graduates could continue their education in a civilian school or, after graduation,

enter the Technical Military Academy in Vienna. The funds for their training were provided again by the aforementioned *Society for the Orient and Overseas*. It was also planned to place daughters of Bulgarian officers in special educational institutions established for daughters of Austro-Hungarian officers. These were two institutes, located in Vienna and Ödenburg, for training educators and teachers for state and municipal schools. Graduates could continue their studies as external university students and, upon passing an exam, qualify to become high school teachers.

Only a week after the notification to the Foreign Ministry, on 12 June 1917, Minister Hussarek announced the creation of the *Austrian Association for the Establishment and Maintenance of a Dormitory for Bulgarian Students in Vienna*. The official founding meeting of the association was held on 24 November 1917 in the large hall of the Ministry of Education in the Austro-Hungarian capital. The event venue clearly revealed its official character, as did the participants in it. The association included prominent figures such as Minister (without portfolio) Dr. Joseph Maria Baernreiter, Prince Franz von Liechtenstein, Count Leopold Berchtold von Ungarschitz, Dr. Richard Weiskirchner (the then mayor of Vienna), Wilhelm Kestranek (director general of the *Prague Iron and Steel Association*), Philipp Broch (director of the *Allgemeine Verkehrsbank*), etc. The governing body (board of trustees) consisted of the association's subsidizing members (those with contributions of at least 5,000 crowns for at least five years); three donors elected by all donors (members who have made a one-time donation of at least 5,000 crowns); three elected founders (with a one-time donation of at least 10,000 crowns) or three elected regular members (with an annual contribution of 20 crowns for individuals or 50 crowns for associations); two representatives each of the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Trade, who were regular members of the association and were nominated by the respective department; one representative of the government of Lower Austria and of the municipality of Vienna, who were regular members of the association.

The significance of this initiative and the seriousness with which it was undertaken are evident, not least from the fact that among its contributors to the creation of a dormitory for Bulgarian students were the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Karl I (10,000 crowns), the Archdukes Friedrich and Eugene as founders of the society (5,000 crowns each), Prince Johann von und zu Liechtenstein, and his brother Prince Franz von und zu Liechtenstein, who provided an annual subsidy of 8,000 and 5,000 crowns respectively. The Bulgarian Tsar Ferdinand allocated the sum of 20,000 crowns for the boarding school.

The Austrian government followed the project to create a dormitory for Bulgarian students in Vienna with particular interest. After a brief period, the association formed for this purpose submitted a report stating that the funding for the institute had been fully secured. Through donations from members and an extraordinary grant from the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry and the Vienna Municipality, the officially announced sum of 500,000 crowns had been raised. On this occasion, the newspaper "Neue freie Presse" noted that the Austro-Bulgarian union should be strengthened even in peacetime through the spiritual rapprochement of the two peoples. Thus, with the combined efforts of state institutions and local government bodies, whose participation undoubtedly motivated private capital as well, the association secured the opportunity to buy a representative three-story building (with a 2,000 m^2 garden) in a prestigious district of

Vienna, Döbling, as early as the beginning of 1918. Arthur Krupp and the *Central Union of Austrian Industrialists* were committed to deliver the necessary furniture. The association expressed its readiness to deliver teaching materials to those accommodated in the dormitory and to cover their tuition fees (*Tsentralen darzhaven arhiv*, f. 176k, op. 3, a.e. 658, l. 23). The Bulgarian government was invited to support the furnishing of the building with 25,000 crowns and to allocate 10-15,000 crowns annually for its maintenance. These amounts were assessed by the plenipotentiary envoy in Vienna, Andrey Toshev, as a modest contribution which he suggested be made (*Tsentralen darzhaven arhiv*, f. 177k, op. 1. a.e. 633, l. 96).

It was decided that the Bulgarian Ministry of Education would propose 25 candidates and the same number would be nominated by Sofia University. The *Society for the Construction and Maintenance of a Dormitory for Bulgarian Students in Vienna* recommended that young people be accommodated in it, distributed relatively evenly by major. Among them, the Austrian Ministry of Education would select 25 students to receive free housing and food in the dormitory. The accommodation of the first 25 to 30 Bulgarian students was planned for the next academic year. Alois Hayek, at that time a lecturer at the Seminar for the History of Eastern Europe at the Vienna University, was appointed prefect of the dormitory for Bulgarian students in the summer of 1918.

An unbiased analysis shows that the nature of the initiative, its implementation, and publicity undoubtedly pursued a political effect, despite the fact that it was directly driven by the practical problems faced by foreign students in Vienna. In a speech of Minister Hussarek at the founding of the *Society for the Construction and Maintenance of a Dormitory for Bulgarian Students in Vienna*, quoted by the *Correspondenz*

Bureau, it was stated, among other things, that intellectual commonality had been added to the brotherhood in arms and economic rapprochement. To understand the relative significance of the 25 available spots in the dormitory for Bulgarian university students, one can compare this number to the total number of Bulgarian students in Vienna at the time of its establishment. Their number exceeded 100 students in the 1917/1918 academic year. The dormitory could accommodate about a quarter of them. It is therefore logical to assume that the first to be accommodated should be the scholarship holders of the Bulgarian state, who by definition were poor and gifted young people. The new institution for accommodation of Bulgarian students was called by various names: boarding school, dormitory, student house, Konvikt. Within about a month after the announcement was published in the *State Gazette*, the Bulgarian Ministry of National Education received applications from 37 candidates. Naturally, those who were already in the Austro-Hungarian capital, immediately showed interest in the dormitory (*Tsentralen darzhaven arhiv*, f. 177k, op. 1, a.e. 585; f. 304k, op. 1, a.e. 164).

Budapest did not miss the opportunity to showcase similar gestures towards Bulgaria. One of the first initiatives in this regard was published in the Budapest newspaper "Pester Lloyd" on 10 January 1917 about the arrival of 56 Bulgarian invalids invited by the Hungarian committee in support of the *Bulgarian Red Cross*. The initiative received support at the government level. At the train station in Budapest, the Bulgarian invalids were met by the chairman of the committee Count Albert Apponyi, the Bulgarian Consul General in the Hungarian capital, Mr. Nedkov, and other prominent figures. The invalids were taken by car to the hospital to have prostheses made for them and to be trained for appropriate work (Raychevski, 146).

Education at all levels turned out to be the sphere in which rapprochement between Hungarians and Bulgarians was consistently sought, and the provision of benefits and privileges became its public expression. A correspondence from Budapest dated 25 February 1918 reported on the opening of the first Bulgarian school in Hungary, in which it was planned to educate Bulgarian children living there. The ceremony was attended by the Bulgarian Consul General – Minister Plenipotentiary Ivan Stoyanovich, the entire staff of the consulate, and the chairman of the *Hungarian-Bulgarian Society* Lazar Ivanov. The Bulgarian Consul General thanked the city of Budapest for providing the necessary premises for the school. Training began immediately with Konstantin Spirov, who was sent by the Bulgarian government as a teacher (Raychevski, 212). What followed was a visit to Bulgaria by the chairman of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and former Minister of Education, Albert Berzeviczy, whose impressions were synthesized in a laconic characterization of Bulgarians as a strong, rapidly developing and energetic people. In June of the same year, the city government of Budapest showed similar generosity towards the *Bulgarian Relief Society*, founded on 7 June 1918. Its chairman, Count Apponyi, revealed the aims of the society at the public founding meeting. According to him, Hungarian society strongly wished to support Bulgarians living in Hungary in fulfilling their cultural and social aspirations to open schools, churches and boarding houses for Bulgarian students who wished to attend Hungarian schools and universities. The mayor of Budapest, Dr. István Bárczy, announced the donation of land to the *Bulgarian Relief Society* for the construction of buildings for its needs (*Ibid*).

The educational, cultural, and charitable events aimed at fostering closer ties between Hungary and Bulgaria were not

confined to the capital, Budapest. The Hungarian Free City of Temesvár (today Timișoara), together with the local *Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, organized trade and crafts training courses for young people from the Balkans with the prospect of continuing their education at the Higher Commercial School in the same city. This opportunity aroused interest in Bulgaria. In February of 1917, the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Sofia sent a request to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna to assist in exempting the fifteen Bulgarian children sent to Temesvár with support from the *War Orphans Assistance Fund* from the annual tuition fee of 100 crowns per person, as well as to provide all possible assistance to them. The result was more than positive. With a note dated 31 May 1917, the municipal administration notified the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry about the relief provided to the Bulgarian orphans for their participation in the preparatory course. These included exemptions from tuition fees, a 50% discount for group travel of ten or more students, provided by the Directorate of the Hungarian Railways, etc. In addition, it was stated that the fifteen students who had been sent received only clothes and 40 leva per month for food from the *Bulgarian War Orphans Assistance Fund*. All other expenses were covered by the city and its *Chamber of Commerce and Industry*. For the next school year, they planned to create a dormitory for good accommodation, food, and supervision of the students, where priority would be given to Bulgarian students. Indeed, the city government expressed its readiness to organize a preparatory course for all young Bulgarians who would go to Hungary (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 56, K. 20, Z. 5693/1917).

In the same context, one can also consider the report of the Budapest *Correspondenz Bureau* from 30 June 1917,

according to which compulsory study of the Bulgarian language was introduced at the Higher Commercial School in the capital, and the students showed brilliant results when taking the language exams (Raychevski, 171). Bulgarian language courses were opened in Budapest almost immediately after Bulgaria entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, in November 1915. Only one semester later, Václav Dobruský, who had worked in Bulgaria as a teacher, archaeologist and first director of the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia, started regular lectures in Bulgarian at the University of Prague (*Tsentralen darzhaven arhiv*, f. 176k, op. 3, a.e. 383, l. 1-3; Urban, 48). As a reciprocal gesture, the Hungarian government proposed to introduce Hungarian language teaching in Bulgarian secondary schools, which was accepted by the government in Sofia (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 56, K. 16, Z. 3678/22.9.1917; Z. 3955/10.4.1918). In this case, once again, fascinating plans were being drawn up with no apparent fear of an uncertain future, at least not as documented. It is evident that the aforementioned Hungarian initiatives were an unambiguous request for further, larger-scale actions to attract young Bulgarians for education.

Creating focal points of attraction for durable implementation did not apply only to education. Among the initiatives investigated during World War I, the attempt to establish a permanent Austro-Hungarian exhibition in Bulgaria, functioning as a lasting cultural institution, stands out. It was prompted by both countries' cultural policies and attracted attention for several reasons. First, this particular attempt was is well documented. Second, it gathered different interests and points of view of businessmen, intellectuals and ruling circles in the two countries. Finally, it again included the

problem of proportion of social (private) and governmental participation, as well as public representation.

At the end of May 1917, the Austro-Hungarian consul in Sofia, Karl Bertoni, reported to the Foreign Ministry in Vienna that Bulgarian politicians and businessmen repeatedly demanded a distinct improvement in cultural relations between their country and the Dual Monarchy. As a promising activity in this direction, he proposed an exhibition of Austrian arts and crafts. In addition, he asked the ministry to initiate necessary actions and to address the relevant institutions (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Zl. 49834). The government of Austria, the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the embassy of the Dual monarchy in Sofia discussed this potential event and clearly admired the idea. It was also approved by the Bulgarian prime-minister Vassil Radoslavov. The *Bulgarian Association for Cultural and Economic Rapprochement with Austria and Hungary* as well as the president of the Officers' Club in Sofia were invited to participate. The Bulgarian side accepted the proposal to make this a charity exhibition to benefit the *Bulgarian Red Cross*, aiding widows and orphans from the war (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Zl. 103746 and Zl. 4871).

On 4 March 1918, a joint meeting was held in the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry. Representatives of the Hungarian government took part in it, too. The topic for discussion was the planned exhibition in Bulgaria. For its organization, architect Otto Prutscher was appointed from the Austrian government, and the sculptor Géza Maróti as the respective deputy of the Hungarian government. The funding of the exhibition was to be covered entirely by public funds despite the deliberate goal to secure new markets for Austro-Hungarian exports. The intention of the Bulgarian

side – which it should be a charity exhibition – remained without a doubt (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Schreiben des K.u.k. Ministerium des kaiserl. und königl. Hauses und des Äußern o.Z.). The director of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry, Dr. Eduard Leisching, was assigned the preparatory work (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Zl. 35910).[5] He attached great importance to the publicity of the exhibition in the press, and to the involvement of ladies – primarily from the diplomatic corps. The Hungarian government was no less active. The minister of religion, Count János Zichy, informed the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry about the founding of a special Hungarian institution for this purpose named *Cultural Center for the Orient* (*Orientalische Kulturzentrale*). It aimed at the desired rapprochement between Bulgaria and Hungary (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Zl. 81746).

On 12 June 1918, the exhibition was festively opened in Sofia. Altogether 70 exhibitors took part in the event presenting ceramics, engravings, leather haberdashery, golden and silver articles, etc. According to the organizers, the main feature of the Austrian exhibits was the precise art manufacture; of the Hungarian ones – the natural forms and performances that were almost untouched by industrial technologies. The opening was attended by the Bulgarian prime-minister and all Bulgarian ministers who were present in the capital. The president and vice-president of the Bulgarian parliament were also in attendance. Official greetings made the president of the *Bulgarian Society for Rapprochement*

[5] At this time, Dr. Eduard Leisching was in Sofia for a lecture on Austrian art at Sofia University. Kann, R. A. und P. Leisching (Hrsg.) *Ein Leben für Kunst und Volksbildung. Eduard Leisching 1858-1938. Erinnerungen*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978, p. 192.

with Austria and Hungary, Professor Lyubomir Miletich, the main initiator of the event, and the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Sofia, Count Otto von Czernin, the patron of the exhibition. The festivities were attended by representatives of higher state and army institutions, by the entire diplomatic corps of the allied and neutral countries, by many people from the Austro-Hungarian colony in Sofia, and of course, by Sofia's elite society. Tsar Ferdinand, accompanied by Princess Eudokia and Princess Nadezhda, spent about two hours there. For a couple of days this event occupied the leading columns of the bilingual daily newspaper *Bulgarische Handelszeitung/Balgarski targovski vestnik* (Bulgarische Handelszeitung, Nr. 420-422, 12-15. Juni 1918).

Through the duration of the exhibition which ended in June 1918, some 6,500 visitors and about 1,000 teacher-supervised students visited it. The large attendance at the event led the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Sofia to assess it as "extremely successful" given the circumstances. The revenue from the sales was also impressive, amounting to 275,511 crowns. A quarter of this sum, according to the preliminary agreement, was paid to the *Bulgarian Society for Rapprochement with Austria and Hungary* and to the *Bulgarian Red Cross*. In his report from 15 June 1918, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Sofia stated with great contentment that the goal of the exhibition – to make Austro-Hungarian articles more popular in Bulgaria and to raise the prestige of the Dual Monarchy – was fully achieved (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Zl. 57246 and Bericht des Prof. Otto Prutscher vom 10.7.1918 o.Z.).

A similar reciprocal event organized by the Hungarian side took place soon after. Only two months later, on 16 August 1918, an Oriental Fair was opened in Budapest. It was

attended by many tradesmen from Bulgaria, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina – the latter being Austria-Hungary's "little Orient." Again, official government representation reached high levels – the Hungarian prime-minister Sándor Wekerle and other ministers from his government were welcomed at the Bulgarian exhibition there (Raychevski, 242).

Inspired by the great success of the Austro-Hungarian exhibition in Sofia, its commissars, professors Prutscher and Marotti, prepared a memorandum to the Dual Monarchy's ambassador there, Count Otto von Czernin, dated 18 June 1918. In it, they proposed the construction of a building for permanent exhibitions. The motives were to propagate the cultural, industrial, and commercial potential of the Dual Monarchy; to attract Bulgaria as a large future market in the Balkans; and to create a visible, significant cultural centre in Sofia. As a name for the new building, they proposed "Austrian and Hungarian Palace of Culture." It would be a place for exhibitions, fairs, lectures, different performances, and balls. Similar art centres, which permanently functioned at that time in Hungary, Germany, England, Russia, Belgium and Venice, were referenced in support of the project. As a target date for construction, the authors envisaged the time immediately after the conclusion of the peace treaty. The expenses were estimated at 700,000 to 800,000 crowns with a concert hall or 500,000 to 600,000 crowns without it, that is, if the construction site would be granted. By the way, these estimates significantly exceeded the expenses foreseen for the reconstruction of the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Sofia several years prior (Agstner, 71). On the other hand, in the proposal that did not include a concert hall, the amount did not significantly exceed the funds gathered for the establishment of the previously mentioned dormitory for Bulgarian students in Vienna. The sum would be provided either by

the Austrian and Hungarian governments or by a joint stock company supported by them. The authors of the memorandum emphasized the great sympathy and support for their initiative among the highest political circles in Bulgaria. In his respective report, the Dual Monarchy's consul in Sofia, Karl Bertoni, added that this initiative should immensely raise the economic and cultural influence of his country in Bulgaria (*Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur*, F 78, K. 3, Zl. 57246).

Meanwhile, on 16 June 1918, before the closure of the Austrian and Hungarian exhibition in Sofia, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Vassil Radoslavov resigned and a new government of the Democratic Party was established. Only three months later, it signed the capitulation of Bulgaria as a result of the unfavourable developments in the war. Under the conditions of the capitulation, the Entente included a clause that imposed the extradition of the Central Powers' embassies. This put an abrupt end to the plans for an Austro-Hungarian palace of culture in the Bulgarian capital.

In conclusion, it is evident that World War I led to a specific explosion of Austro-Hungarian cultural diplomacy towards their Balkan allies, with quite different intensity and outcomes. Strikingly, Bulgaria did not ever conclude a secret convention or a public, political treaty with the Dual Monarchy, in contrast to Serbia (1881), Romania (1883 and 1892), and Turkey (1917). On 22 March 1917, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire signed a secret treaty in Constantinople that served as an addendum to the German-Turkish Treaty of Alliance of 1915. This treaty regulated the abolition of the so-called capitulations – privileged legal positions and trading rights that had been granted to the European Great Powers in the Ottoman Empire in commercial treaties since the 16th century and systematically renewed thereafter. The

Ottoman Empire repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, tried to terminate these capitulations. By abolishing them, the Central Powers sought to strengthen their political and economic relations and establish an equally-weighted partnership. In the same year, 1917, Austria-Hungary developed a series of activities mobilizing cultural diplomacy in attracting Bulgaria as a partner beyond its military alliance. The highlights in this sphere, undoubtedly, were campaigns for the establishment of a dormitory for Bulgarian students in Vienna, and the elaborate planning for a palace of culture in Sofia. In these actions, private initiatives went hand in hand with the state institutions in both countries. Political rhetoric accompanied them, although only the cultural and charitable aspects were publicly staged. Due to the outcome of the war, the initiative failed to institutionally organize and establish a physical presence in the center of the Bulgarian capital, despite the underlying drive for closer relations between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, where the elites showed clear efforts toward development based on European models and standards. During the wartime, the fundamental question – whether it was an attempt at influence or rather a friendly interaction – received contrasting answers in the cases of the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. The other important question – who would benefit from the outcome – is rendered irrelevant by the harsh peace treaties imposed on Bulgaria and the Dual Monarchy by the victorious countries. Austria-Hungary was even completely disassembled. Last but not least, some of the Austro-Hungarian activities which can be regarded as cultural diplomacy stemmed not only from the genuine drive to establish closer relations with Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, but also from Germany’s increased activity in the Balkans.

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