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*Metternich and the Suez Canal:
Informal Diplomacy in the Interests of Central Europe*

A reader might well pose the question what Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich's interest in the Suez Canal project had in common with the history of Central Europe and why anyone should devote time to the topic when Austria's role in its successful accomplishment was of secondary importance, with Metternich dying just shortly after construction of the canal began. The answer is simple: the topic primarily relates to Central European rather than Near Eastern history in that it reveals the Austrian elites' strong interest in Ottoman and overseas regions in the mid 19th century and enhances the revisionist appraisal of the prominent statesman whose deep involvement in the project over a period of two decades has been seriously neglected by historians.

The construction of the Suez Canal has usually been analysed in connection with French and British history, in the first case due to the roles of Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin and Ferdinand de Lesseps and the support of Napoleon III, and in the second case owing to Britain's opposition to its construction. In general surveys and biographies on the subject, research on the activities of Central Europeans, for example Austrians and Germans, has been very limited in its scope and they have hardly been mentioned at all; the only exception to this rule is the deserved attention paid to the author of the canal's technical plan, Alois Negrelli. Nevertheless, even in scholarly texts on this Austrian engineer, the role of the Habsburg Monarchy is often introduced in a fragmentary and sometimes even erroneous way. As for Metternich, his support is often entirely omitted,¹ not only in general surveys on the construction of the canal and in

¹ Charles Beatty, *Ferdinand de Lesseps: Der Erbauer des Suezkanals. Die Geschichte einer Vision und Tat* (Bern, Stuttgart, Vienna: Scherz, 1956); John Pudney, *Suez: De Lesseps' Canal* (London: J. M. Dent, 1968); Walter Paul Kirsch, *Luigi Negrelli: Ein Genie, seine Zeit, sein Leben und sein Wirken* (Vienna, Munich: Jugend-und-Volk-

biographies of Lesseps but also in books and articles dealing with Austrian participation, and if he is mentioned, then mostly for his supportive instructions from 1843 and 1844² while his later role, particularly in the 1850s, has generally been overlooked.³ The most striking neglect for that decade was demonstrated by Austrian historian Rudolf Agstner who accorded prominent roles to only Negrelli, Diplomat and Minister of Finance Karl Ludwig von Bruck with the Trieste merchant Pasquale von Revoltella being “the third Austrian in the group” without mentioning Metternich at all.⁴ The latest and certainly excellent overview of Austria’s role in the construction of the canal in which another Austrian historian Stefan Malfèr offers little information on Metternich in the 1840s and glosses over his activities in the following decade by describing him as merely a “partner in the discussions” (*Gesprächspartner*).⁵ This

Verlagsgesellschaft, 1971); Angelo Sammarco, *Luigi de Negrelli: La mirabile vita del creatore del Canale di Suez. Con un'appendice su gli Italiani in Egitto* (Rome: L'Instituto Fascista dell'africa italiana, 1939); Ernesto Kienitz, *Der Suezkanal: Seine Geschichte, wirtschaftliche Bedeutung und politische Problematik* (Berlin: Reimer, 1957); Zachary Karabell, *Parting the Desert: The Creation of the Suez Canal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

² Gerhard Herrmann, *Der Suez-Kanal* (Leipzig: Goldmann, 1939), 19; Roman Gundacker, “Alois Negrelli Ritter von Moldelbe und der Suezkanal,” in *Egypt and Austria I: Proceedings of the Symposium. Institute of Egyptology August 31st to September 2nd*, 2004, ed. Johanna Holaubek and Hana Navrátilová (Prague: Setout, 2005), 44.

³ Adam Wandruszka, “Die Habsburgermonarchie und das Projekt des Suezkanals,” in *Luigi Negrelli ingegnere e il canale di Suez*, ed. Andrea Leonardi (Trento: TEMI, 1990), 178; Percy Eckstein, *Ferdinand von Lesseps: Triumph und Tragödie eines Optimisten* (Vienna: Luckmann, 1947), 24-25; Gerhard Konzelmann, *Suez: Der Kanal im Streit der Strategen, Diplomaten, Ingenieure* (Munich: Desch, 1975), 50; Giuseppe Lo Giudice, *L'Austria ed il Canale di Suez* (Catania: Università degli Studi, 1981), 46-51.

⁴ Rudolf Agstner, *125 Jahre Suezkanal: Österreich (-Ungarn) und seine Präsenz am Isthmus von Suez* (Cairo: Österreichisches Kulturinstitut, 1995), 30.

⁵ Stefan Malfèr, “Suez: Kein österreichischer Kanal,” in *Orient und Okzident: Begegnungen und Wahrnehmungen aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Barbara Haider-Wilson and Maximilian Graf (Vienna: Neue Welt Verlag, 2016), 397.

downplaying of Metternich's involvement by Agstner, Malfèr and other historians mostly results from their omission of relevant primary sources.

The existing state of research fully corresponds with the prevailing lack of interest in the relations between Central Europe and the Ottoman Empire around the mid 19th century in general and the former's involvement in the Eastern Question in particular when the Suez Canal project represented a chapter in the history of both issues. Although some scholars have recently revealed the significance of Ottoman regions for the economic progress of Austria and the German states from various points of view, for example for the rise of the industrial revolution originally dependent on the important of Egyptian cotton, or for the popular interest in Near Eastern affairs with strong repercussions on the situation in Germany like the Rhine Crisis of 1840, or for the development of geopolitical views leading to the rise of the concept of *Mitteleuropa* in the early 1840s, they have scarcely exploited the information contained in the vast number of archival documents.⁶ Consequently, several broad surveys usually based on secondary sources overlook the wider dimension of not only the political but also the economic, social and cultural interrelationship between Central Europe and the Ottoman Empire.⁷ The same disconsolate state also exists if one limits one's own focus on Austria with her extensive interests to just beyond her long south-eastern border. Of course, excellent books on diplomatic

⁶ For relevant scholarly literature see references below.

⁷ Bertrand M. Buchmann, *Österreich und das Osmanische Reich: Eine bilaterale Geschichte* (Vienna: WUV, 1999); Robert-Tarek Fischer, *Österreich im Nahen Osten: Die Großmachtpolitik der Habsburgermonarchie im Arabischen Orient 1633–1918* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2006); Karl Pröhl, *Die Bedeutung preussischer Politik in den Phasen der orientalischen Frage: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung deutsch-türkischer Beziehungen von 1606 bis 1871* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986).

history dealing with Austrian position during the Crimean War⁸ do exist and a voluminous monograph on Metternich's Near Eastern policy has recently been published although its narration ends in 1841, so before the canal became a topic at the Viennese Chancellery.⁹ Nevertheless, there are many themes and narratives left to explore with regard to the numerous and important relations between the Austrian and Ottoman Empires including the economic ones, and Metternich's interest in the Suez Canal and the steps he undertook before as well as after 1848 represented an important part of the broad range of his and Austria's activities in the Eastern Question.

The principal objective of this paper is to explain the motivation and role of the Austrian elites in general and Metternich's in particular in the Suez Canal project. Its aim is neither to say that they played the most important role nor to repeat the well-known story of Alois Negrelli's part in its technical realisation. Rather it should reveal and explain the keen interest they paid to Oriental affairs, which made Vienna a truly "*porta orientis*"¹⁰ for Germany, and show how Metternich networked with other Europeans and Ottomans as a result. France and Britain were not the only great powers to cultivate close relations with high-ranking officials in Constantinople and Alexandria in the mid 19th century, and it was not to Paris or London but Vienna where Ottoman foreign minister and reformer, Mustafa Reshid Pasha, sent his secret project for imposing reforms on the sultan in early 1841¹¹ and where Ottoman

⁸ Paul W. Schroeder, *Austria, Great Britain and the Crimean War: The Destruction of the European Concert* (Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1972); Bernhard Unckel, *Österreich und der Krimkrieg: Studien zur Politik der Donaumonarchie in den Jahren 1852–1856* (Lübeck: Matthiesen Verlag, 1969).

⁹ Miroslav Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question* (Pilsen: ZČU, 2013).

¹⁰ Eva Eßlinger, "Stifters Orient: Dichtung und Diplomatie im "Haidedorf"," *Poetica* 46, no. 1/2 (2014): 209.

¹¹ Miroslav Šedivý, "Metternich and Mustafa Reshid Pasha's Fall in 1841," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (2012): 259-82.

government ministers made the Austrian civil servant Valentin von Huszár their own representative;¹² finally, it was Metternich whom Egyptian Governor Mohammed Ali asked for assistance in achieving independence for Egypt in 1838¹³ and from whom the same pasha sought advice in the Suez affair several years later. All this enabled Metternich to pursue a semi-official policy in the Suez project before his downfall in March 1848 and a kind of personal diplomacy in the 1850s.¹⁴ During this decade the informal nature of his approach corresponded not only with the fact that he no longer held office but also that the whole project and its realisation by Lesseps was actually a large private business venture with the Frenchman working for himself and not for France. Although European governments influenced the course of construction, the creation of the canal basically resulted from the activities of private individuals, companies and societies, Metternich surely counting among them.¹⁵ Last but not least, Metternich's proceeding in the Suez affair offers another evidence for the revisionist historiography depicting him as a moderate man whose opinions often were far from being reactionary and whose peaceful and consensual Near Eastern policy offered a certain alternative to more aggressive and imperialist proceedings of other European powers involved in the Eastern Question, namely Great Britain, France and Russia.¹⁶

¹² Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, 713.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 730.

¹⁴ For this opinion see also Zara Olivia Algardi, "L'Italia e il Canale di Suez," *Nuova Antologia* 123, no. 2166 (1988): 255.

¹⁵ Malfèr, "Suez: Kein österreichischer Kanal," 398.

¹⁶ Robert D. Billinger Jr, *Metternich and the German Question: State's Rights and Federal Duties, 1820–1834* (Newark (NJ): University of Delaware Press, 1991); Alan J. Reinerman, *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich*, 2 vols. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1979 and 1989); Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2019).

To be able to tell the story, it was necessary to bring to light new archival documents, housed in the Austrian States Archives in Vienna and the Czech National Archives in Prague which have escaped if not the attention of historians then at least systematic exploitation by them. No less important was a box containing correspondence on the Suez Canal that was long buried in the library of West Bohemian Chateau Königswart, once owned by Metternich, and completely unknown even to its employees.¹⁷

That the creation of the Suez Canal was in the interest of Central Europe can be proved by the opinions and activities of Germans in this affair as well as their overall interest in geopolitical and economic affairs of the Ottoman Empire and even more distant world. Since the late 1830s they paid attention to the great powers' quarrelling in the empire and became convinced especially after the Rhine Crisis that their geopolitical security also depended on the situation in the Near East.¹⁸ The same conviction held for their economic welfare, especially

¹⁷ The documents used are housed in Vienna in the Austrian States Archives in two collections, namely in a box with the documents inherited from the Chancellery (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Ministerium des Äußern, Administrative Registratur F13-2; henceforth: AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2) and two boxes originally collected in the Imperial Treasury (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv 1170–1918, Präsidialakten der k. k. Hofkammer und des k. k. Finanzministeriums 1797–1918, Finanzministerium – geheime Präsidialreihen 1814–1857 135 and 136; henceforth: AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135 and 136); as the correspondence was forwarded between the Chancellery and the Imperial Treasury the documents are sometimes duplicated. In the Czech National Archives in Prague the correspondence is scattered in several boxes of Metternich's private manuscript collection (National Archives, Rodinný archiv Metternichů-Acta Clementina; henceforth: NA, RAM-AC) which are referred to below. In Chateau Königswart the box with the letters has the pressmark 33.C.13.b and is entitled *Manuscripte über die Suez Canal Angelegenheit* (henceforth: Königswart, 33.C.13.b, or other pressmark belonging to printed items housed in the chateau library).

¹⁸ Steffen L. Schwarz, *Despoten, Barbaren, Wirtschaftspartner: Die Allgemeine Zeitung und der Diskurs über das Osmanische Reich 1821–1840* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016); Miroslav Šedivý, *Crisis among the Great Powers: The Concert of Europe and the Eastern Question* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

when the industrial revolution moved them to search new markets and secure commercial routes. It especially was the Danube that won extraordinary importance as an artery for the export of manufactured goods not only to the Balkans and the Black Sea area but also farther to Persia and the Eastern Mediterranean, and its significance was stressed by connecting the Danube with the Main and the Rhine in 1846. Its value and the desire to free its delta from the direct control of the Russians gave rise to the *Mittleuropa* concept aiming at German conquest of the river to the Black Sea.¹⁹ The British victory in the Opium War with China in 1842 provoked a similar imperialist reaction: to win their share in the Chinese market, some Germans wished to follow the British in economic expansion,²⁰ and they also dreamed about their own colonies and mighty war fleet to be able to keep up with European powers and the United States of America in the global economic competition.²¹

All the affairs mentioned above contributed to the popularity of the idea of the Suez Canal in Germany, and it particularly was Austria whom Germans ascribed important role in them. It was a logical outcome of the Austrian Empire's geographical position, the possession of numerous merchant navy and small war fleet, and extensive commerce with the Ottoman Empire. For Austrian commercial shipping, manufactures and nascent industry the Ottoman market was of vital importance: before the mid 19th century, the Austrian shipowners were

¹⁹ Klaus Thörner, „Der ganze Südosten ist unser Hinterland“: *Deutsche Südosteuropapläne von 1840 bis 1945* (Freiburg: ça ira Verlag, 2008), 19-47.

²⁰ Cord Eberspächer, “Profiteure des Opiumkriegs: Preußische Initiativen und deutsche Konsulate in China 1842–1859,” in *Preußen, Deutschland und China: Entwicklungslinien und Akteure (1842–1911)*, ed. Mechthild Leutner (Münster: LIT, 2014), 33-34.

²¹ Frank Lorenz Müller, “Der Traum von der Weltmacht: Imperialistische Ziele in der deutschen Nationalbewegung von der Rheinkrise bis zum Ende der Paulskirche,” *Jahrbuch der Hambach Gesellschaft* 6 (1996/97): 99-129.

strongly dependent on the coastal navigation in Ottoman seaports, the welfare of Trieste primarily resulted from Ottoman and Black Sea trade, and Austrian textile factories could boom only due to the import of Egyptian cotton.²²

For Metternich Austria's interests went far beyond Central Europe and he strongly supported her economic penetration to the Balkans and overseas regions: he did his best to improve the navigability on the Danube, concluded a treaty with Russia in 1840 aimed at the improvement of shipping in its delta, did his best for the overseas trade with Trieste and unceasingly backed Austrian steam navigation companies on the waters of the Danube and the Mediterranean Sea.²³ He did all this because he thought that such a commercial expansion served not only Austrian but also German interests, and he shared the conviction of a considerable number of Germans that Trieste was not merely Austrian but all-German gateway for world commerce. Consequently, he looked forward to connecting the Austrian river networks with the German one through the Rhein-Main-Danube canal and constructing the railway to Trieste to facilitate the transport of goods between this seaport and all German Confederation. Metternich's active participation in the effort to create the water way through the Isthmus of Suez was a logical continuation of this effort, especially when he also paid attention to commercial opportunities in more remote regions of the Middle and Far East, to which the British victory in the First Opium War significantly contributed.²⁴

²² Walter Sauer, "Schwarz-Gelb in Afrika: Habsburgermonarchie und koloniale Frage," in *K. u. k. colonial: Habsburgermonarchie und europäische Herrschaft in Afrika*, ed. Walter Sauer (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau 2002), 27.

²³ Richard E. Coons, *Steamships, Statesmen, and Bureaucrats: Austrian Policy towards the Steam Navigation Company of the Austrian Lloyd 1836–1848* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975), 25-91.

²⁴ Hans-Werner Hahn, *Geschichte des Deutschen Zollvereins* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 70 and 130.

It was characteristic for Metternich that his assistance to Austrian commercial development was never followed by aggressive commercial policy. The regards for the navigation on the Danube did not make him an adherent of the *Mittleuropa* concept, he also never dreamed about overseas colonies, a topic being discussed and rejected at the Viennese Chancellery around 1834,²⁵ and he was not ready to use the force of arms for the interests of Trieste and the Austrian Lloyd. This position corresponded with his peacefulness, pragmatism and respect for the sovereign rights of other countries, in this case the Ottoman Empire towards which he always proceeded with considerable respect in economic, political and religious affairs. With his behaviour he often differed to the policies of Great Britain, France and Russia as well as the younger generations of Germans propagating the conquests on the Danube and overseas regions. One can conclude that Metternich was an active but moderate player in the Ottoman affairs because he did not want to offend the sultan's sovereign rights and provoke pointless quarrels, crises or even wars with other great powers.²⁶ It also was the way how he proceeded in the Suez affair, and the same can be said about most of Austrian statesmen, diplomats and consuls who behaved under more or less direct influence of the Oriental Academy in Vienna that was officially supervised by Metternich and that contributed to not only high interest paid by them to Ottoman affairs but also to their respect to the rights and cultures of non-Christians.²⁷

²⁵ Hrvatski Državni Arhiv, Zagreb, 750, Obitelj Ottenfels 18, Franz von Ottenfels, *Observation sur le commerce de l'Autriche dans le Levant et plus parti entièrement sur la navigation du Danube*, attached to *Memoari*, a31.

²⁶ Miroslav Šedivý, "Österreichs Beziehungen mit dem Osmanischen Reich im Vormärz: Eine alternative Politik in der Orientalischen Frage," in *Orient und Okzident: Begegnungen und Wahrnehmungen aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Barbara Haider-Wilson and Maximilian Graf (Vienna: NeueWeltVerlag, 2016), 353-74.

²⁷ Paula Sutter Fichtner, *Terror and Toleration: The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam, 1526–1850* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 130.

From Austrian statesmen and diplomats sharing Metternich's interest in world economics and closely cooperating with him in the Suez affair these men must be mentioned: Negrelli, Bruck and Revoltella named above, Karl Friedrich von Kübeck, as the head of the Imperial Treasury (*Hofkammer*), Internuncios in Constantinople August von Koller and Anton Prokesch von Osten, Consuls General in Alexandria Anton von Laurin and Christian Wilhelm Huber, Diplomat and graduate of the Oriental Academy and Negrelli's brother in law Victor Weiss von Starkenfels, Diplomat Karl von Hummelauer, Diplomat and Statesman Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont and last but not least the high official deeply engaged in the development of Austrian railway and the navigation on the Danube, Karl von Czörnig. What connected them was not only personal contact and their relationship with Metternich but also their desire to increase Austria's economic and geopolitical importance in European and world affairs and make her a centre of German trade with both the Near and Far East through technological innovations like the railway connection between Trieste and Germany and steam navigation on the Danube. Of course, sometimes they differed in the extent of these ambitions – for example, Metternich never inclined to Bruck's imperialist dream of *Mitteleuropa*, but their eventual differences in opinion played no role in their cooperation in favour of the Suez Canal.²⁸

It is easy to understand the motivation for Metternich's positive attitude towards the Suez project but not so easy to determine when his interest began. Some contemporary texts and statements from the 1850s offer indirect evidence that it went back to the 1820s or early 1830s.²⁹ In May 1855 Bruck wrote to Lesseps: "I must inform you, moreover, in confidence

²⁸ Wilhelm Treue, "Das österreichisch, mitteldeutsche und das norddeutsche staats- und privatwirtschaftliche Interesse am Bau des Suez-Kanals," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 57, no. 4 (1970): 536-38.

²⁹ For direct evidence from the text of Ernest Desplaces see the quotation at the end of this paper. Ernest Desplaces, *Le Canal de Suez, épisode de l'histoire du XIXe siècle* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1858), 144 and 177.

that Prince Metternich has been dealing with the Suez question for more than thirty years, always promoting its success, and that even now he is even dealing with an interesting memoir intended to clarify everything that has taken place since 1821.”³⁰ Three years later Czörnig placed the first signs of Metternich’s interest to around 1830.³¹ This cannot be ruled out but there is no direct proof either for Metternich’s earlier or his later interest allegedly instigated by debate with Negrelli at the end 1842.³² Metternich’s deeper interest and simultaneously his active involvement can be assumed for the beginning of 1843 when he received Laurin’s December report about Mohammed Ali’s intention to create the canal between the Mediterranean and Red Seas, with additional information about the canal design prepared by Louis Maurice Adolphe Linant de Bellefonds despatched by Laurin to Vienna in February and May 1843.³³

The idea immediately met with the chancellor’s support for the reasons which he gave in his instructions to Laurin on 25 April 1843 and which remained the same until his death. Therefore, his attitude can be summarised with the use of this as well as later texts. He considered the creation of the canal to be one of “the greatest global interests”³⁴ and especially for those of Austria and Germany because “the value of the project speaks for itself. What influence its execution will have on world trade, and especially on that of our empire, needs no special clarification. Trieste and Venice will rise up as trading centres and take over the

³⁰ Jules Charles-Roux, *L’Isthme et le Canal de Suez: Historique – état actuel, vol. 1* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1901), 235-36.

³¹ Karl Freiherr von Czörnig, *Über die Durchstechung der Landenge von Suez* (Wien: M. Auer, 1858), 35.

³² Tindaro Gatani, *Luigi Negrelli: Ingegnere trentino ed europeo* (Messina: EDAS, 2000), 238-39.

³³ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Cairo, 24 December 1842, Alexandria, 1 February and 25 May 1843.

³⁴ Metternich to Laurin, Vienna, 25 April 1843, *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 6, ed. Richard Metternich-Winneburg (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1883), 665.

mediation of the export and import trade between all the German territories and the north on the one hand and India, China and the Pacific on the other, places which cannot be exposed to the risk of changing fortunes because they are assigned this purpose by nature, namely by virtue of the geographical position of the countries so that it can therefore never be permanently taken from them.”³⁵ What the map dating from 1858 that Metternich possessed clearly reveals is that the route over Suez would shorten the distance between Trieste and India more than from French and British seaports and could mean for Austria a greater share in world trade.³⁶ At the same time she would become an important trade route for Switzerland, Germany, Poland and Russia, which would increase her economic and political significance in Central Europe. The explicitly expressed opinion that the canal would be useful for Austria, Germany and all of Central Europe was shared in both the Chancellery and the Imperial Treasury where Metternich forwarded Laurin’s December report in January 1843.³⁷ With this step he extended the scope of the individuals involved in the project of whom the most prominent was Kübeck and to whom the chancellor summarised his opinion in April: “I see it as an international event of the first magnitude, [and] I place it in the series of those events which mark epochs of great developments; I am convinced that a future fitting for Austria will open to her in which the imperial state is called to join the ranks of the most excellent trading countries, and the more I

³⁵ Metternich, “Die Geschichte der Durchstechung der Erdzunge von Suez,” 1855, *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 8, ed. Richard Metternich-Winneburg (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1884), 581-82.

³⁶ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, The map contained in *Procès-verbaux: Compagnie universelle du canal maritime de Suez*, November 1858.

³⁷ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Fries to Metternich, Vienna, 24 March 1844, Metternich to Laurin, Ischl, 6 August 1844; AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 26 January 1843.

recognise the importance of this issue debated here, and the more I am inspired by it, the more I feel called to devote my serious attention to it.”³⁸

That the plan was technologically and economically feasible was for Metternich beyond doubt already in 1843,³⁹ and he also agreed with Mohammed Ali’s right to build the canal and collect dues for the ships and goods passing through it; he just insisted on the same conditions for all countries.⁴⁰ He also shared the pasha’s apprehension of Britain’s opposition to his attempt to create “an Egyptian Bosphorus.”⁴¹ This feeling explains why Mohammed Ali turned to Metternich: he feared British and even French interference in the affair and considered cooperation with Austria and Germany to be less dangerous claiming that “proposals from German capitalists under the protection of the German powers are all the more likely to be well received.”⁴² His son, Ibrahim Pasha, explicitly told Laurin that the pasha feared “being constantly troubled by the frictions of European rivals, and in the end even being robbed of his country.”⁴³

Metternich considered Mohammed Ali’s fears to be well-founded because he understood from the very beginning that though the canal was legally an internal affair between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, its success depended on the attitudes of European powers and above all Britain. In his opinion she could raise three questions to the canal: (1) Would it have negative consequences for the British Isles, especially for their connection with their Asian possessions? (2) Would British shipping be compromised? (3) Would Britain’s Indian

³⁸ Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 28 April 1843, *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 6, 667-68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 667.

⁴⁰ Metternich to Laurin, Vienna, 25 April 1843, *Aus Metternich’s nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 6, 665-66.

⁴¹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Cairo, 24 December 1842.

⁴² Treue, 540.

⁴³ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Fries to Metternich, Vienna, 24 March 1844.

possessions be endangered? The chancellor considered the third question to be the most serious, and all the Austrians involved in the project expected the overall negative reaction of Britain. Consequently, this became an important topic of debate between not only Metternich and his diplomats but also the Chancellery and the Imperial Treasury.⁴⁴ In 1843 Ficquelmont, a former ambassador in St Petersburg responsible for the negotiations on the navigation on the Danube, summarised where Britain's opposition could lead. Like Mohammed Ali he considered it possible that after the construction of the canal "England would like to erect doors there and take the keys"⁴⁵ and predicted that not as much for economic as for strategic reasons she would conquer Egypt to protect her route to India.⁴⁶ This concern provoked two fundamental reactions in Vienna. First, it went hand in hand with the desire to promote stronger German interests and ensure the involvement of the two German powers.⁴⁷ Second, and more important, the cabinet became convinced that it would be necessary "to place the canal and its use under the guarantee of international law"⁴⁸ and in this way protect Egypt and the interests of other countries.

The political-legal standpoint became significant when Mohammed Ali raised the issue again. Although he was pleased with the positive reaction of the chancellor to his project in

⁴⁴ For all documents exchanged between the Chancellery and the Imperial Treasury at the beginning of the affair see AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Kübeck to Metternich, Vienna, 24 March and 30 June 1843, 20 March, 10 and 27 June 1844.

⁴⁵ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont, Considerations sur l'établissement d'un canal de navigation, qui réunirait la mer rouge à la méditerranée, Vienna, 2 March 1843.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135, Negrelli to Kübeck, Vienna, 9 July 1846 (forwarded to Metternich); Alois Negrelli, *Einige Andeutungen über die beabsichtigte Durchstechung der Landenge von Suez mittelst eines schiffbaren Canals*, Österreichische National Bibliothek, Vienna, pressmark ALB Port 252, 14b KAR.

⁴⁸ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Fries to Metternich, Vienna, 24 March 1844.

1843, it was not until May of the following year that he repeated to Laurin his intention to build the canal. However, as he emphasised, he would not start the construction until the European powers guaranteed him possession of the canal, and he asked Metternich for advice.⁴⁹ The response was sent from Vienna on 6 August. The chancellor repeated his opinion that Mohammed Ali's family's hereditary rule over Egypt entitled the pasha to decide on the construction of the canal and gave him the right of complete control over it. The problem was, as he continued, that in reality the affair was not purely domestic and that a guarantee from the European powers would be advantageous for securing the ownership of the canal, and such a guarantee could be given only to the sultan as the sovereign ruler. Therefore, Metternich advised the pasha to protect the canal against interference from foreign powers through an agreement with the sultan and then persuade the monarch and other countries to conclude the neutrality treaty recognising the sovereign rights of the Ottoman Empire, the rights of the owner, equal rights in the use of the canal for all foreign countries, and finally prohibiting the navigation of warships through the new waterway.⁵⁰ The principle of neutrality contained in the London Straits Convention of July 1841 would then be used on the Suez Canal that would be placed under the "protection of common international law."⁵¹ This goal became the essence of Metternich's proceedings, and although in 1843 he had already proposed to learn the attitudes of the other great powers, in August 1844 he openly suggested the pasha officially

⁴⁹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Alexandria, 16 and 19 May 1844.

⁵⁰ Metternich, "Die Geschichte der Durchstechung der Erdzunge von Suez," 1855, *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 8, 538.

⁵¹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Metternich to Laurin, Ischl, 6 August 1844.

request Austria's assistance in the negotiations with them.⁵² If accepted, Metternich would assume the role of mediator between the sultan and the European powers, especially Britain for whom the canal was a "vital matter" and, therefore, as he claimed, it was necessary to deal with her in advance and gain her confidence.⁵³

Italian historian Angelo Sammarco claimed that Laurin's reports from 6 and 9 September 1844 contained Mohammed Ali's consent with the offer that Metternich would assume a role of *de facto* his and *de jure* the sultan's advocate, but Metternich finally did nothing in this respect.⁵⁴ Actually, these two reports tell a very different story. The aged pasha suffered from severe infirmities and was unable to discuss the proposal for some time.⁵⁵ On 8 September when he reacted to Metternich's views with positive remarks, which were, however, more polite than really practical. The attending dragoman soon made Laurin understand that the pasha was in such a condition that what he was saying made no sense and let him continue talking without translating his words. When Laurin visited Mohammed Ali again on 12 September, the pasha was so debilitated that he was unable to talk about either the technical or legal aspects of the canal. The most that Laurin could learn was that the pasha disliked the idea of the sultan's involvement.⁵⁶

With such a reaction Metternich was obviously unable to start negotiations with other European powers and the sultan on the project. There was one more reason that moved him to

⁵² AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, The memorandum of Count Fries, Vienna, 13 June 1844; AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 13 June 1844; Metternich to Laurin, Vienna, 25 April 1843, *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 6, 666.

⁵³ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Metternich to Laurin, Ischl, 6 August 1844.

⁵⁴ Angelo Sammarco, *Les règnes de 'Abbas, de Sa'id et d'Isma'il (1848–1879): Avec un aperçu de l'histoire du Canal de Suez* (Rome: R. Soc. di geografia d'Egitto, 1935), 58–59.

⁵⁵ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Alexandria, 6 September 1844.

⁵⁶ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Alexandria, 19 September 1844.

support the project in an informal way until his political downfall: the plan to create the canal became known in Europe in 1844 and contributed to the competition of the French and British in Egypt, the former supporting the idea of the canal, the latter trying to prevent it with the project of the railway connection between the Mediterranean and Red Seas.⁵⁷ Due to his fear of foreign interference Mohammed Ali approved none of the plans and the conflict remained unresolved when he died in 1849.⁵⁸ That his fear of England played a prominent role in his inaction can also be proved by a report from early 1845 in which it was said that “*fear of England influences the pasha and I have found this fear everywhere,*” which Metternich underlined and added: “This feeling is very well founded.”⁵⁹

All this was an unwelcome turn of events for Metternich who wished to keep his understanding with Mohammed Ali secret and disliked the idea of turning the Mediterranean into either a political or economic battleground. He simply did not want to become involved in a matter that assumed the nature of private enterprise, especially when the initiative was adopted by British, French and German private companies.⁶⁰ The situation prompted him to write to Laurin on 27 March 1847 that the attention of European newspapers and merchants attached too much undesirable interest in the project, turning it from an official government

⁵⁷ Alfred Birk, *Alois von Negrelli, zweiter Band: 1848–1858* (Vienna, Leipzig: Braumüller, 1925), 191-92; Desider Galský, *Hazard pana Lessepse* (Prague: Svoboda, 1966), 39.

⁵⁸ AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 18 March 1845; AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Alexandria, 7 July 1847; Hugh Joseph Schonfield, *The Suez Canal in world affairs* (London: Constellation Books, 1952), 18-19.

⁵⁹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Abschrift eines Schreibens aus Cairo vom Februar 1845 die Anlegung des Canals von Suez betreffen, attached to Albert Dufour-Feronce, Gustav Harkort and Louis Sellier to Metternich, Leipzig, 25 April 1845.

⁶⁰ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, “Zusammenfassung,” [undated]; Metternich to Laurin, Vienna, 25 April 1843, *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 6, 666.

affair into a matter of private enterprise, and although he still regarded the project as important, he instructed the consul general to hold back, not to involve himself in the project in the name of the Austrian government and not to express his opinion in public.⁶¹

The diplomatic restraint, however, in no way meant the end of Metternich's active support. It merely made it less formal and more interconnected with other Europeans. Metternich was contacted by a group of German capitalists led by Leipzig banker Albert Dufour-Féronce who became involved in the project due to his family ties to French merchant François Barthélemy Arlès-Dufour, a friend of Enfantin. Whether Dufour-Féronce and his friends already knew that Metternich supported the project or not remains unclear, but it is certain that they sent him a letter on 25 April 1845 in which they claimed that it was in the interest of not only Britain and France but also Germany to create the canal and that the latter had to obtain the same rights in its use.⁶² It is also not clear whether it was this or another document that they gave to Alexander von Humboldt who handed it over to Metternich during a visit at the prince's chateau in Johannisberg at the end of the same year.⁶³ In any case, the personal involvement of Humboldt completed the circle because it was he who had already talked with Negrelli on the topic in Geneva in 1840.⁶⁴

⁶¹ HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Metternich to Laurin, 27 March 1847.

⁶² AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Albert Dufour-Féronce, Gustav Harkort and Louis Sellier to Metternich, Leipzig, 25 April 1845; Giudice, *L'Austria ed il Canale di Suez*, 53.

⁶³ Negrelli to Kübeck, Vienna, 9 July 1846, Gatani, 202.

⁶⁴ Josef Dultinger, *Alois Negrelli, Ritter von Moldelbe: das Schicksal eines großen Südtirolers* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1993), 65; Birk, 193.

Metternich agreed with the need for the Germans to participate in the enterprise and remained in contact with them.⁶⁵ The most striking aspect of their relationship was the fact that the chancellor was ready to agree with the Saint-Simonians whose activities he had observed with strong displeasure in the 1830s for he regarded their views as impractical and threatening the peace within the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁶ On the other hand, they also hardly considered him to be their political champion, but after the mid 1840s they found a way to deal with the elderly statesman, and Enfantin even dedicated his philosophical work *Correspondance Philosophique et Religion* to Metternich in 1847.⁶⁷

In this way Vienna became the unspoken capital of German involvement in the Suez project, especially when Albert Dufour-Féronce's request for support found no echo in Berlin,⁶⁸ and "the important participation of the most influential statesman in Vienna in the plan"⁶⁹ became well-known in Germany and appreciated as beneficial for not only Austrian but also German trade.⁷⁰ The opinion of Bavarian envoy in Vienna was shared by other Germans that it was a "magnificent enterprise" *magnifique entreprise* and together with the interconnection of the Rhine and Danube "one of the noblest conquests of modern times."⁷¹

⁶⁵ Albert Dufour-Féronce to Alexander von Humboldt, Leipzig, 10 December 1846, Albert Dufour-Féronce to Alexander von Humboldt, Leipzig, January 1847, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Suezkanals*, ed. Robert Georgi (Leipzig: Weicher, 1913), 33 and 43.

⁶⁶ Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, 663-64.

⁶⁷ Albert Dufour-Féronce to Negrelli, Leipzig, 18 December 1847, Georgi, 103.

⁶⁸ Treue, 542.

⁶⁹ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Leipzig, no. 63, 4 March 1847, 555.

⁷⁰ Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, E 50/02 Bü 179, Linden to William I of Württemberg, Vienna, 25 January 1846; Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Ministerium des Äußern (henceforth: BHStA, MA), Österreich 2414, Jenison-Wallworth to Ludwig I of Bavaria, Vienna, 12 November 1846.

⁷¹ BHStA, MA, Österreich 2414, Jenison-Wallworth to Ludwig I of Bavaria, 5 January 1847.

une des plus nobles conquêtes des temps modernes The importance of Vienna in this affair was stressed by the fact that when *Société d'Études du Canal de Suez* was founded in Paris on 30 November 1846 by men like Infantin, Arlès-Dufour, Dufour-Féronce and Negrelli, it consisted of not only the French and British but also (Austro-)German group led by Negrelli and was located close to the Viennese Chancellery in Palais Modena in Herrengasse 27 (today 7) owned by the Austrian state.⁷²

With regard to the creation of this society, historians have often pointed out that Negrelli had to take time off to be able to go to Paris and that he negotiated in Vienna as a private individual.⁷³ In fact, this was simply due to the chancellor's unwillingness to be officially dragged into the affair; at the same time, he did not hesitate to agree with Negrelli's leave, which under the given circumstances must be regarded as an expression of glowing support. Moreover, Metternich and Kübeck did not lose touch with Negrelli,⁷⁴ and the closeness of their connection also explains why the engineer wrote a report on the result of negotiations on the same day the Society was founded.⁷⁵ And while Metternich did not seek to make Austria the predominant influence over either the society or Egypt as has sometimes been claimed by historians,⁷⁶ it is easy to presume that Negrelli's position in Paris was improved by the general awareness of Metternich's informal support.

⁷² Birk, 194.

⁷³ Edoardo Bordignon, *Luigi Negrelli* (Venice: Le Tre Venezie, 1941), 176; Malfèr, "Suez: Kein österreichischer Kanal," 54-55.

⁷⁴ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Kübeck to Metternich, Vienna, 29 July, 12 October 1846, Metternich to Kübeck, Königswart, 4 August 1846.

⁷⁵ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Negrelli to Kübeck, Paris, 30 November 1846, attached to Kübeck to Metternich, Vienna, 10 December 1846.

⁷⁶ For such an opinion see Peter Auer, "Die Erschließung der Meerenge von Suez vor dem Hintergrund österreichischer Außenhandelspolitik" (Diploma thesis, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, 2004), 36; Schonfield, 17.

When the Society was established, Metternich turned his attention back to Egypt. He approved the journey of Austrian engineers sent by Negrelli in the name of the Society in April 1847: they were to examine the part of the territory where the canal could be dug.⁷⁷ The chancellor actually did more for them even though their mission had a private status: when he was informed by Negrelli of its existence,⁷⁸ he immediately instructed Laurin on 27 March 1847 – so in the same instructions in which he ordered him to desist from official communications on the Suez Canal – to offer them all the necessary assistance and protection and inform the Chancellery about their proceedings. The consul general complied with his request during their entire stay in Egypt, including obtaining Mohammed Ali’s permission for their work and their reception by the pasha.⁷⁹ In the meantime Metternich and Kübeck exchanged numerous reports on the engineers’ proceedings and other issues concerning the canal.⁸⁰ Finally, at the beginning of 1848 Metternich approved Negrelli’s personal journey to

⁷⁷ Louis Linant de Bellefonds, *Mémoires sur les principaux travaux d’utilité publique exécutés en Egypte depuis la plus haute antiquité jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand Éditeur, 1872/73), 214; Christian F. Deihsen, “Alois Negrelli Ritter von Moldelbe und der österreichische Anteil an der Entstehung des Suezkanals” (PhD Diss., Universität Wien, 1991), 50-62.

⁷⁸ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 20 March 1847.

⁷⁹ AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 29 March 1847; AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Laurin to Metternich, Alexandria, 13, 19 and 27 April, 11 and 25 May, 22 June, 14 and 18 September 1847, 2 January 1848.

⁸⁰ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Kübeck to Metternich, Vienna, 6, 16 and 17 January, 9 February, 22 March, 12 April, 6, 16 and 30 May, 19 June, 16 August, 28 September, 17 October, 9 November, 7 December 1847, 15 and 21 January 1848, Metternich to Kübeck, Vídeň, 16 and 23 January, 9 and 14 February, 7 and 29 March, 18 and 30 April, 12, 18 and 27 May, 11 and 26 June, 17 July, 12 October, 3 November, 14 and 18 December 1847, 25 January 1848; AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 135, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 30 April, 12 and 18 May, 17 June, 17 July, 12 October 1847.

Egypt granting him necessary leave again.⁸¹ Metternich conducted a kind of informal diplomacy and continued to show an active interest in the Suez Canal project throughout the time he was in office.

The March Revolution in 1848 precluded Negrelli from going to Egypt and caused Metternich's downfall. However, it in no way ended either the prince's interest in the Suez Canal or his personal contacts with the Austrians and other Europeans involved in the project. Before his flight from Vienna he received a visit from Negrelli, for whom he promised to learn the attitudes of the British members of the group upon his arrival in London; the fragmentary sources prove that he had social contact there with some British promoters of the canal from whom he obtained a report and the maps of Suez in 1849.⁸² Metternich also did not lose his connection with Enfatin, preserved through Negrelli, and the Germans around Dufour-Féronce, who did not forget the ex-chancellor's support from the previous years.⁸³ On 15 October 1848 Dufour-Féronce wrote to Metternich that regardless of "of all the political storms" the project still survived, and added: "We hope this simple but sincere reminder of the high level of Y[our]

⁸¹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Kübeck to Metternich, Vienna, 15 and 21 January 1848, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 25 January 1848; AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 136, Metternich to Kübeck, Vienna, 15 February 1848.

⁸² For Metternich's earlier contact with some British supporters of the canal see AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Dietrichstein to Metternich, London, 20 February 1847, Metternich to Dietrichstein, Vienna, 29 March 1847; NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, La Compagnie Universelle du Canal de Suez to Metternich, London, 2 June 1849; Birk, 82; Nikolaus Negrelli-Moldelbe, *Die Lüge von Suez: Der Lebenskampf des deutschen Ingenieurs Alois von Negrelli* (Darmstadt, Berlin: Vorwerk, 1940), 139.

⁸³ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Negrelli to Enfantin, Vienna, 15 August 1848, Enfantin to Negrelli, Paris, 24 August 1848; Albert Dufour-Féronce to Martin Escher, Leipzig, 29 August 1848, Georgi, 111.

H[ighness]’ participation in the plan we all so valued will prove to You that the feeling that keeps the good in grateful memory has not yet completely faded.”⁸⁴

The revolutions in 1848 interrupted the intensive process aimed at starting the construction of the canal for several years. Even more important was the death of Mohammed Ali in 1849 because the short reign of the personally disinterested Abbas Pasha caused a hiatus until his death five years later. There is even an opinion that the political loss of Metternich and the personal loss of Mohammed Ali meant that in 1854 the parties involved in the project “had to start again from the beginning.”⁸⁵ In the case of Metternich, it seems to be exaggerated, but regarding the support he gave to the project before 1848 it is perhaps understandable.

With the accession of Mohammed Said as the governor of Egypt in 1854 plans were set in motion again, and it was Ferdinand de Lesseps who became the most active in the affair. He exploited his old friendship with the new pasha to obtain permission to create the canal in November. He proceeded independently from the Society, but as he tried to win political support in Europe, which he also obtained from the Viennese cabinet, he entered into contact with Bruck and Negrelli.⁸⁶ The latter even became a member of his new society *Commission Internationale du Canal Maritime de Suez* founded in 1855.⁸⁷ Consequently, when the personal network established already before 1848 brought Lesseps into contact with Metternich, the prince had no reason to refuse Lesseps the support that he had earlier given to Dufour-Féronce, and he met Lesseps several times after the mid 1850s. The ex-chancellor continued to be

⁸⁴ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Albert Dufour-Féronce, Gustav Harkort and Louis Sellier to Metternich, Leipzig, 15 October 1848.

⁸⁵ Treue, 546.

⁸⁶ Richard Charmatz, *Minister Freiherr von Bruck: Der Vorkämpfer Mitteleuropas. Sein Lebensgang und seine Denkschriften* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1916), 106 and 123.

⁸⁷ Malfèr, “Suez: Kein österreichischer Kanal,” 377.

involved in the affair either through his direct relationship with the Austrian bureaucrats and diplomats, or through intermediaries like Negrelli with Dufour-Féronce, Arlès-Dufour, Infantin, or, most significantly, through both channels with Lesseps.⁸⁸ There was, however, a second very important person who tried to win the elderly statesman's attention and succeeded in doing so: Mohammed Said. While the relationship between Metternich and Lesseps is not entirely unknown, the one between the prince and pasha has been completely overlooked although it was no less significant. The three men formed three corners of a triangle and were all heading to the same goal: the construction of the canal.

Metternich's interest in the Suez affair from 1854 to 1859 was no less intensive than in the previous decade. The numerous texts like booklets, newspaper articles and maps on the topic, still preserved in the Chateau Königswart, easily prove it.⁸⁹ Some of them even bear the dedications of their authors to the prince,⁹⁰ including one from Lesseps.⁹¹ That Metternich read at least some of them is obvious from his personal remarks in the margins or the lines he marked

⁸⁸ NA, RAM-AC 7, 3, Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 28 January 1858; Königswart, 33.C.13.b, Arlès Dufour to Negrelli, Paris, 14 April 1855, Dufour Feronce to Negrelli, London, 14 and 18 April 1855; Sammarco, *Les règnes de 'Abbas, de Sa'id et d'Isma'il*, 74.

⁸⁹ For all see Königswart, 39.A.2, Ferdinand de Lesseps, *Percement de L'Isthme de Suez* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1855, 1856 and 1857); Königswart, 33.C.13.h, Baron Charles Dupin, *Canal maritime de Suez* (Paris: Académie des sciences, 1857); Königswart, 33.C.13.m, Frédéric de Coninck, *Lettres sur le percement de l'Isthme de Suez* (Havre: Alph. Lemale, 1858).

⁹⁰ Königswart, 33-C-13c, Baron Baude, *De l'Isthme de Suez, Extrait de la Revue des deux mondes* (Paris: J. Claye, 1855); Königswart, 33-C-13g, Franz Foetterle, *Bericht über die Durchstechung der Landenge von Suez an die K. Geographische Gesellschaft* (Wien: M. Auer, 1857).

⁹¹ NA, RAM-AC 7, 3, Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 18 June 1856, 3 August 1856; Königswart, 33.C.13.k, Compagnie universelle de Canal maritime de Suez, *Firman de concession et cahier des charges. Statuts* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1856).

off, like in the text given to him by Lesseps⁹² or in various press articles.⁹³ This collection also clearly demonstrates his active involvement that can be divided into three regional levels: Austrian, European and Ottoman/Egyptian. Of course, this is a necessary simplification because all three spheres were closely interconnected, in particular by the most important issue that Metternich tried to solve, namely Britain's hostility towards the canal, and in which he served as an unofficial adviser. In Austria he also counselled statesmen and diplomats in economic issues, in particular Bruck, Negrelli, Czörnig, but even Hummelauer, who personally visited him in Königswart for this reason in August 1855.⁹⁴ That he was asked for his advice shows that he was still regarded as an authority in this affair, an evaluation that can be further supported by the Austrian Ministerial Council in June 1858. It was there that Foreign Minister Karl Ferdinand von Buol-Schauenstein clearly did not want to upset the British government by actively promoting the canal.⁹⁵ The ministers discussed Lesseps' request for Austrian diplomatic support in Constantinople. During the debate Metternich was mentioned several times with respect although Buol was able to enforce his argument that the international situation had changed and it was therefore impossible to promote the project even if the canal

⁹² Königswart, 33.C.13.k, Compagnie universelle de Canal maritime de Suez, *Firman de concession et cahier des charges. Statuts* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1856), 12 and 21.

⁹³ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, *the supplement to Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 226, 14 August 1855, *Oesterreichische Zeitung*, no. 305, 15 August 1855.

⁹⁴ AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 136, Negrelli to Bruck, Verona, 18 June 1855; NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Hummelauer to Metternich, Vienna, 11 August 1855, Hummelauer to Bruck, Königswart, 15 August 1855; NA, RAM-AC 7, 2, Czörnig to Metternich, 5 July 1856.

⁹⁵ The Ministerial Conference, 1 and 14 June 1858, Stefan Malfèr, *Die Protokolle des österreichischen Ministerrates 1848–1867, Abteilung III, Das Ministerium Buol-Schauenstein, Bd. 7, 4. Mai 1858 – 12. Mai 1859* (Vienna: ÖAW, 2015), 40-53.

was beneficial for Austrian and world trade.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Metternich's unceasing support seemed to ensure at least that although Prokesch von Osten was instructed in Constantinople not to formally assist Lesseps, he was also told not to oppose his efforts.⁹⁷

One of the topics debated at the Ministerial Council was the neutrality of the Suez Canal which Buol regarded as pointless because it could not be enforced but which Metternich continued to advocate.⁹⁸ According to the ex-chancellor it was the only way to overcome the opposition of Britain with her objection to the prospect of foreign warships passing through Suez towards India. His idea was if not adopted then at least shared by Lesseps who wanted to use the Parisian Peace Conference after the Crimean War in early 1856 to solve this problem. The Frenchman proceeded in accordance with Metternich's views⁹⁹ and prepared the text that was to be signed by the conference participants, of which the most important part stipulated that "the signatory powers guarantee the neutrality of the Suez maritime canal at all times. No commercial building can ever be seized either along the canal or four leagues from the entrances to the two seas. Warships can only pass with the consent of the territorial government."¹⁰⁰ Backed by Metternich, Lesseps asked Buol to take the initiative at the conference and submit this proposal.¹⁰¹ Although the foreign minister was ready to comply

⁹⁶ The Ministerial Conference, 14 June 1858, *ibid.*, 46-48 and 51.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

⁹⁸ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Metternich to Bruck, August 1855; Königswart, 33.C.13.b, Metternich's message.

⁹⁹ Malfèr, *Die Protokolle des österreichischen Ministerrates*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Königswart, 33.C.13.b, *Projet de clauses à insérer dans le Traité de Paix*, attached to Lesseps to Metternich, 2 March 1856. For the same document see AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, attached to *Vortrag des Ministers der auswärtigen Angelegenheiten und des Hauses*, Vienna, 4 March 1856.

¹⁰¹ Lesseps to Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire, Trieste, 28 February 1856, Ferdinand de Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für deutsche Litteratur, 1888), 281-82; Ghislain de Diesbach, *Ferdinand de Lesseps* (Paris: Perrin, 1998), 149-50.

with Lesseps' request, he finally did not dare to put it on the agenda for fear of the hostile reaction of the British and the issue was never discussed during the peace talks.¹⁰²

Even after its failure in Paris Metternich did not abandon the attempt to establish the neutrality of the canal. In the summer of 1856, he told Lesseps that it was to be negotiated in Constantinople where Mohammed Said would be backed by the sultan, dividing the problem into the internal question of the canal's construction and the external one of its international status. Lesseps was able to proceed in both independently and solve at least the former problem faster.¹⁰³ According to French historian George Edgar-Bonnet, "the authority of the old minister accords fairly high esteem to his opinion. Lesseps is moreover fully in agreement on the necessary separation of the two sorts of different ideas."¹⁰⁴ Even this plan finally failed because Britain did not want the canal and was not ready to make any compromises, and Buol withdrew even his mild support of the project soon after the Crimean War.¹⁰⁵ Despite all that, Lesseps was grateful for the role Metternich played in the effort to overcome British opposition,¹⁰⁶ and the strangest thing was undoubtedly Infantin's praise of this "eminent man"¹⁰⁷ for this endeavour; the old Saint-Simonians ended it with these words: "The active involvement of Prince Metternich gave me great joy. It is glorious to crown this great political life with the peaceful and commercial work which is a magnificent symbol of the politics of the future."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Hans Hummel, *Vor dem Ziel steht England: Ferdinand de Lesseps* (Berlin: Vorwerk-Verl., 1939), 180.

¹⁰³ Nasser Rahimi, "Österreich und der Suezkanal" (PhD diss., Universität Wien, 1968), 129-30.

¹⁰⁴ George Edgar-Bonnet, *Ferdinand de Lesseps: Le Diplomate: Le Créateur de Suez* (Paris: Plon, 1951), 274.

¹⁰⁵ Malfèr, "Suez: Kein österreichischer Kanal," 399-400; Treue, 550.

¹⁰⁶ Lesseps to Negrelli, London, 17 April 1856, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 301; Lesseps to Negrelli, Trieste, 28 July 1856, Georgi, 190.

¹⁰⁷ Königswart, 33.C.13.b, Infantin to Negrelli, Lyon, 16 April 1855.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

As Metternich had been well informed about the situation in the Ottoman Empire for decades and personally knew some Ottoman dignitaries, he also became a source of information for the Austrians and other Europeans in this respect.¹⁰⁹ This was useful since everything possible was needed to overcome the Ottoman government's reservations about the Suez Canal, resulting primarily from the fear of Britain, which in Constantinople was seen as a necessary ally against Russia during as well as after the Crimean War. As Baron Jules Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire admitted to Negrelli in January 1858, "I am very happy with Prince Metternich's opinion on the new Grand Vizier. It was what I had hoped for and I am proud to see my own opinion confirmed by the judgement of a man whom I regard in this matter as wisdom personified, not to mention a source of inexhaustible goodwill."¹¹⁰ Negrelli then told Metternich about the letters from Constantinople and Paris writing "Y.H. will see from this how in every phase of this international affair Your advice is guiding and authoritative. – I will answer Mr Lesseps."¹¹¹

All this explains why Metternich gave his advice on how to deal with grand viziers Mustafa Reshid Pasha and Mehmed Emin Aali Pasha, yet he simultaneously also counselled these Ottoman dignitaries. How much they respected his opinions is impossible to learn without visiting Turkish archives, but European documents indicate that they took them into account. In 1855 Koller used the longstanding relationship between Reshid Pasha and Metternich in his

¹⁰⁹ NA, RAM-AC 7, 3, Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire to Negrelli, Paris, 25 April 1856, 18 January 1858, Lesseps to Negrelli, Pera, 15 January 1858; NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Metternich to Bruck, Vienna, 13 June 1855; NA, RAM-AC 10, 12, Starkenfels to Metternich, Vienna, 30 September 1858; Lesseps to Negrelli, Alexandria, 19 November 1856 [obviously the correct date should be 19 January], Lesseps to Negrelli, Constantinople, 17 April 1858, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 270-71 and 460; Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 18 June 1856, Georgi, 189.

¹¹⁰ Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire to Negrelli, Paris, 18 January 1858, Georgi, 193.

¹¹¹ Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 24 January 1858, Georgi, p. 191.

attempts to convince the former of the benefits of the canal with a supportive letter from the prince.¹¹² During a conversation with Lesseps Aali Pasha recalled the debate “which he [Aali Pasha] cultivated with Prince Metternich on the Suez Canal, and that he considered the enterprise to be very advantageous for the Ottoman Empire.”¹¹³ The principal problem was that even if Reshid seemed to eventually favour the project, he died in January 1858, while Aali was too fearful of Britain to continue to support it.¹¹⁴

In Alexandria Metternich’s voice resonated even louder due to his personal relationship with Mohammed Said, and the two men even exchanged private letters which had never happened between the prince and Mohammed Ali. The first one was written by Said on 28 August 1854. The new pasha remembered how he had met Metternich in Vienna in 1852, and it was at this personal meeting where the source of Said’s cordiality may have originated: they met when Said felt threatened by Abbas Pasha but he received advice from the prince for which he remained grateful; what this advice actually was is not known.¹¹⁵ The flattering letter ended with this plea: “I hope that You will not refuse to lend me, on occasion, the benefit of Your advice and Your experience, to guide me in the so difficult art of governing.”¹¹⁶ Metternich answered on 25 October: he expressed his satisfaction with meeting Said personally and assured him of his readiness to be helpful.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Koller to Lesseps, Constantinople, 26 February 1855, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 102-103.

¹¹³ Lesseps to Negrelli, Paris, 21 March 1856, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 284.

¹¹⁴ Alfred Birk and Karl Hermann Müller-Hamburg, *Der Suezkanal: Seine Geschichte und seine wirtschaftspolitische Bedeutung für Europa, Indien und Ägypten* (Hamburg: Boysen & Maasch, 1925), 72.

¹¹⁵ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Huber to Bruck, Alexandria, 21 June 1855.

¹¹⁶ NA, RAM-AC 2, 2, Mohammed Said to Metternich, Constantinople, 22 August 1854, attached to Buol to Metternich, 28 October 1854.

¹¹⁷ NA, RAM-AC 2, 2, Metternich to Mohammed Said, Vienna, 25 October 1854. See also NA, RAM-AC 13, 3, Metternich to Mohammed Said, Vienna, 7 January 1855.

The Suez Canal was mentioned by Said for the first time on 19 March 1855 when he personally informed Metternich about his agreement with its construction; since Said knew about Metternich's support of the project and the high esteem the prince enjoyed at European cabinets, he wrote: "I come to ask You to kindly give me the benefit of Your powerful influence to neutralise the effect of certain manoeuvres which are aimed at hindering the success of this great and useful enterprise, and to smooth out, as far as possible, the difficulties which narrow and egoistic views put in the way of its execution."¹¹⁸ Metternich responded on 22 May with his statement that he had never ceased to be interested in the project, he recommended Bruck as a reliable man with the same concerns and advised Said "to hold firm to the idea of an enterprise in which the most obvious interests of international relations are met and to wait in perfect agreement with the Imperial Court of Austria for the moment which must come, when the agreement may be utilised."¹¹⁹

The existence of a certain kind of intimacy in their relationship can be derived from Said's reaction to the information that Metternich intended to visit Egypt, to which the pasha expressed his unconcealed joy that moved him to write a personal letter in May 1856 with the promise of the prince's friendly reception in Egypt.¹²⁰ Lesseps had already written to Negrelli informing him about Said's readiness "to receive the Prince and to pay him all the honours of Egypt."¹²¹ It is probably not necessary to add that this journey, if ever really planned, never materialised, due to Metternich's advancing age.

¹¹⁸ Königswart, 33.C.13.b, Mohammed Said to Metternich, Cairo, 19 March 1855.

¹¹⁹ Königswart, 33.C.13.b, Metternich to Mohammed Said, Vienna, 22 May 1855.

¹²⁰ NA, RAM-AC 10, 11, Mohammed Said to Metternich, Alexandria, 10 May 1856.

¹²¹ Königswart, 33.C.13.b, Lesseps to Negrelli, Alexandria, 3 February 1856, attached to Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 25 February 1856.

From mutual correspondence and other testimony it is possible to conclude that Said's requests for Metternich's advice, his reading of Metternich's letters and demonstrations of his own satisfaction were expressions of sincere respect for the elderly statesman.¹²² This had two practical outcomes. First, Metternich took advantage of the situation to provide his friends with letters of recommendations, as already seen above or in the case of Negrelli who travelled to Egypt in the autumn of 1855 and was warmly welcomed by Said; his visit was important for the acceptance of his technical solution of the construction of the Suez Canal in the following year.¹²³ When the prince recommended Revoltella in March 1858, Said answered personally and promised to welcome him and assured the prince that "I am glad to see that my views on the great enterprise in which Your Noble Highness is willing to take an interest are in agreement with Your own, and I am determined not to stray in this matter from the prudence and circumspection essential to its success," and he ended the letter "with the expression of my high esteem, the tribute of my respectful devotion."¹²⁴

Another practical outcome of the two men's understanding was Said's agreement with what Metternich proposed and which Lesseps delivered to him. Regardless of the failure of the neutrality plan at the Parisian peace conference, Lesseps continued to seek advice from "the

¹²² NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Huber to Bruck, Alexandria, 21 June 1855; Lesseps to Negrelli, Alexandria, 3 February 1856, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 273.

¹²³ NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Metternich to Mohammed Said, Vienna, 7 November 1855; Bordignon, 269-81; Eva Macho, *Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Bruck: Ein Wirtschaftsfachmann ohne Beamtenmentalität* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2013), 137; Arrigo von Fraus, *Österreich-Ungarn und der Suezkanal* (Vienna: Verlag des k. k. öster. Handelsmuseums, 1916), 8. After his return from Egypt Negrelli presented Metternich with the printed report entitled *Die gegenwärtigen Transport- und Kommunikationsmittel Egyptens mit Beziehung auf die beantragte Durchstechung der Landenge von Suez*, Abgedruckt aus der Wochenschrift „Austria“, Jahrgang 1856, Heft 17, Königswart, 33.C.13.e.

¹²⁴ NA, RAM-AC 10, 11, Mohammed Said to Metternich, Alexandria, 20 July 1858.

illustrious doyen of diplomacy”¹²⁵ and used it to draft a note for the pasha on 8 July 1856. It contained the advice to obtain the consent of the sultan despite the fact that the pasha was entitled to proceed without it. If he did so, Egypt would improve her position towards the European powers which would instruct their diplomats in Constantinople to sign a convention¹²⁶ on the “lasting neutrality of the Suez Canal.”¹²⁷ Lesseps reported through Negrelli to Metternich that “the Viceroy of Egypt has taken the advice about the political solution to the Suez question given by Y.H. to such an extent that he wants to go to Constantinople personally to settle it accordingly.”¹²⁸ In the following months Said and Lesseps proceeded according to this plan with the aim of obtaining the consent of the sultan and the international guarantee of neutrality. Lesseps visited Constantinople and informed Grand Vizier Aali Pasha about it.¹²⁹ Aali Pasha told Prokesch that Metternich’s ideas deserved his special attention and he was in agreement with their practical value; he even requested them in a written copy.¹³⁰ Afterwards nothing further happened either in Constantinople or in Vienna

¹²⁵ NA, RAM-AC 7, 3, Lesseps to Metternich, Alexandria, 22 July 1856.

¹²⁶ NA, RAM-AC 7, 3, Opinion de S.A. le Prince de Metternich sur la solution politique de la question du Canal de Suez, 8 July 1856, (communiquée a S.A. le ViceRois d’Egypte par Mr. Ferd. de Lesseps), attached to Lesseps to Metternich, Alexandria, 22 July 1856.

¹²⁷ Ansicht des Fürsten Metternich, attached to [?] to Lesseps, Vienna, 8 July 1856, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 317.

¹²⁸ Negrelli to Metternich, Vienna, 3 August 1856, Georgi, p. 188.

¹²⁹ NA, RAM-AC 7, 3, Lesseps to Metternich, Alexandria, 22 July 1856, Lesseps to Negrelli, 28 July 1856; AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Toggenburg to Buol-Schauenstein, Vienna, 22 August 1856.

¹³⁰ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Prokesch to Buol-Schauenstein, Büyükdere, 1 October 1856.

where Lesseps tried in vain to win Buol's backing with reference to this plan.¹³¹ As the whole initiative came to a deadlock, Said abandoned the idea of visiting the sultan.¹³²

After this defeat Lesseps gave up the idea of neutrality but not his desire to build the canal nor his relationship with the prince. Despite the opposition of Britain and without the sultan's formal consent, Lesseps finally started the construction works on 25 April 1859.¹³³ On his way to Egypt he visited Metternich in Vienna on 21 February and they discussed the canal.¹³⁴ Although their conversation was not recorded, from fragmentary information it is possible to conclude that Metternich – well-known during his long career for circumspection – agreed with Lesseps's intention to start the construction works regardless of the attitudes of the Ottoman government and Great Britain, obviously since it was impossible to change them at that moment. With this position Metternich showed how much he wanted the task to be accomplished. Lesseps himself noted that Metternich "wished me luck on the 'manipulation of the Suez enterprise', which are his own words; he added that the success of the enterprise is assured by the irresistible force of truthfulness if one proceeds with caution and without delay. Incidentally, I will record the conversation with him in writing, which under the current circumstances has been extremely interesting."¹³⁵ After his arrival in Alexandria Lesseps told the Austrian consul general, Gustav von Schreiner, that during their February meeting Metternich had approved the beginning of the work on the canal.¹³⁶ This also was the prince's

¹³¹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Opinion de S.A. le Prince de Metternich sur la solution politique de la question du Canal de Suez, 8 July 1856, attached to Lesseps to Buol-Schauenstein, Paris, 21 October 1857.

¹³² AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F13-2, Buol to Prokesch, Vienna, 14 November 1857.

¹³³ Edgar-Bonnet, 274; D. A. Farnie, *East and West of Suez: The Suez Canal in History 1854–1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 55.

¹³⁴ Metternich to Buol, 21 February 1859, *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vol. 8, 597.

¹³⁵ Lesseps to Albufera, Vienna, 21 February 1859, Lesseps, *Vierzig Jahre Erinnerungen*, 491-92.

¹³⁶ AT-OeStA/FHKA Präs FM GP Akten 136, Schreiner to Buol, Alexandria, 7 March 1859.

final involvement in the affair, as he died on 11 June 1859. It was not until 29 October 1888 that an international treaty was signed in Constantinople in which the signatories committed to the absolute neutrality of shipping in the canal in times of peace and war although in contrast to Metternich's original idea not only commercial vessels but also warships had the right of passage.¹³⁷

Despite the fact that Metternich's involvement in the plans for the Suez Canal is hardly remembered today – and the continuing persistence of his efforts over a long period of time is virtually unknown, his contemporaries ascribed great merit to him for his lasting and unceasing support: he was acclaimed in various texts and public toasts even before his death. Ernest Desplaces wrote in 1858 that “as for Austria, who does not know her ardent sympathies for the Suez Canal project? As the Gazette de Vienne once reminded us, Metternich has been involved with the opening of the Suez Isthmus for more than thirty years, and it will not be one of the least glorious memories of the illustrious career of this statesman. His successors, faithful to his ideas, sometimes even inspired by his advice, have followed this wise policy, which Austria commands in the interest of Trieste and her navy in the Adriatic.”¹³⁸ In a report on the state of construction works on the canal written in Trieste on 10 November 1859 it was mentioned that it was Metternich “who was the first who raised the issue, and who until his death (had expressed himself) in favour of the same, saying indeed that the deal is worth a war.”¹³⁹

In retrospect it is possible to agree with these contemporary assessments. Metternich was certainly the European statesman who was first involved in the project and remained committed to it for almost two decades. He never deviated from his conviction that the canal

¹³⁷ Malfèr, “Suez: Kein österreichischer Kanal,” 384.

¹³⁸ Desplaces, 144.

¹³⁹ Giuseppe Lo Giudice, *Karl Ludwig von Bruck: un ministro liberale alla corte degli Asburgo* (Udine: Del Bianco, 2010), 250.

would open the door to modernity and prosperity and not only to Austria and Central Europe, which further proves that he was deeply involved in economic affairs which he evaluated not only in Austrian and European but also in global dimensions. He participated in many ways, often informal ones, which resulted before 1848 from his political circumspection and afterwards from the fact that he was just a private individual. **As in other Near Eastern affairs he wished to avoid the pointless and dangerous competition of European powers but his peacefulness and caution** did not preclude him from agreeing with Lesseps' bold decision to start the construction of the canal in 1859, which confirms how important the whole project was for the elderly statesman.

What the affair further discloses is how easily accessible Metternich was to all the men involved regardless of their nationality, political leanings and religion, which brought him into contact with Europeans as well as Ottomans, and conservatives as well as liberals and even Saint-Simonians. The relationship with the last group offers further evidence that despite his conservative principles he was a moderate and pragmatic men capable of negotiating with people who stood on the other side of political spectrum: even before his political downfall his opposing views played no meaningful role. Last but not least, the whole affair confirms that he was a man of great analytical skills and experience who was able to anticipate immediately any possible difficulties. This last characteristic even moved German historian Wilhelm Treue to refer to him as "brilliant Metternich."¹⁴⁰

From the Central European perspective Metternich's involvement is even more interesting: the Germans generally considered the Ottoman territories to be of the utmost economic and geopolitical importance resulting in a strong interconnection between the German Confederation and the Ottoman regions. That is why such a large number of prominent

¹⁴⁰ Treue, 553.

Austrians paid great attention to them, establishing an important network with Metternich literally at its head, and because of the chancellor Vienna became the capital of German interest in the creation of the canal. That Metternich's plans often failed changes nothing in this respect because it is more important that he created a platform on which it was possible to carry out technological projects and that he helped to connect the people involved in them, Lesseps being just one example although definitely the most important one in the 1850s. That the Frenchman himself was always grateful for Metternich's advice and encouragement¹⁴¹ can also be deduced when he founded the joint-stock company of the Suez Canal in late 1858: he prepared a list of the company's honorary presidents and promoters from among the Europeans who had supported him. The latter title was offered to Metternich. This honour to a man who was no longer in office serves as fitting evidence of the role Metternich played in the realisation of the Suez Canal project and how Lesseps himself evaluated it.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Edgar-Bonnet, 296.

¹⁴² NA, RAM-AC 8, 13, Lesseps to Metternich, Paris, 2 December 1858.