

The European
Commission
of the Danube,
1856–1948

*An Experiment in
International Administration*

Constantin Ardeleanu



The European Commission of the Danube, 1856–1948

Balkan Studies Library

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An Experiment in International Administration

By

Constantin Ardeleanu



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Cover illustration: 'Proposal for a service seal for the European Commission of the Danube', sketch by Karl Hermann Bitter, Prussia's commissioner (1856–1860). National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007–2013) / ERC Grant Agreement n. 615313.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at <http://catalog.loc.gov>
LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2019059235>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1877-6272

ISBN 978-90-04-41253-8 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-42596-5 (e-book)

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To Oana and David George



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Acknowledgments

This book is the result of my involvement in the ERC-funded project ‘Securing Europe, Fighting Its Enemies. The Making of a Security Culture in Europe and Beyond, 1815–1914’, led by Professor Beatrice de Graaf as Principal Investigator and hosted by Utrecht University (2014–2019). The project has allowed me to be part of an international team of scholars working to historicise security and to compare several security regimes in which Europe engaged globally in the long nineteenth century. I am greatly indebted to all my teammates, the first readers, assiduous critics and useful commentators of my draft chapters: Beatrice de Graaf, Ozan Ozavci, Joep Schenk, Susanne Keesman, Wouter Klem, Erik de Lange, Melle Lyklema and Jossie van Til-Duijsters. They all have been ideal colleagues, extremely generous with their time, constructively critical and encouraging of new perspectives.

My warmest appreciation goes to my colleagues and students from the University of the ‘Lower Danube’ in Galați, Romania, where I have been teaching for many years. Students have witnessed my clumsy attempts to make use of this research topic for didactical reasons. Professor Ion Cordoneanu, as Dean of the Faculty of History, Philosophy and Theology, and Professor Arthur Tuluș, as Director of the Department of History, deserve my gratitude for allowing me to spend most of my time in archives and libraries. Dr Adrian Pohrib, the Director of the Galați Branch of the National Archives of Romania, and Mrs Aida Dima, custodian of its reading room, helped me navigate through the rich archives of the European Commission of the Danube.

My special thanks go to my colleagues at the New Europe College, Institute for Advanced Study (NEC) in Bucharest. Professor Valentina Sandu-Dediu and Professor Anca Oroveanu in NEC’s academic department allowed me to present different chapters in front of the NEC fellows, who encouraged me to think and rethink my sources, approach and narrative. The entire NEC staff supported me in various ways for which I am deeply grateful.

Advice given by the three anonymous readers appointed by the publishing house has been immensely helpful in streamlining the main argument and improving the scholarship and readability of this book. My gratitude goes equally to the editors of this series, Professor Zoran Milutinović and Professor Alex Drace-Francis, as well as to Elizabeth Ramsey for her support in editing and proofreading the manuscript.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for allowing me to take the time to finish this volume at a very busy period in family life, when baby David George was born.

I dedicate the book to Oana and David George.

October 2019

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Introduction

1 An 'Experiment in International Administration'

By the early twentieth century Edward Benjamin Krehbiel was one of America's most prominent peace activists. Krehbiel had completed a PhD in medieval European history, but shortly after his appointment at Stanford University in 1908 he directed his research towards contemporary history, political science and international relations. Although his initial interest in peace came from his German Mennonite background, Krehbiel abandoned a religious approach and looked for pragmatic and 'scientific' solutions to peacemaking and peacekeeping. With imperial powers scrambling for territories and waterways around the globe, he strongly believed that international commissions endowed with large executive attributions could limit national jealousies and create a more secure world.¹

Krehbiel taught a pioneering course in international conciliation, and in 1916 authored a handbook entitled *Nationalism, War, and Society. A Study of Nationalism and its Concomitant, War, in Their Relation to Civilization; and of the Fundamentals and the Progress of the Opposition to War*. Nations, he thought, were gradually becoming anachronical, so their 'beneficial successor' was internationalism, based on the rule of international law and order. Krehbiel lobbied to keep the US out of the First World War, but he eventually supported President Woodrow Wilson's decision to take part in the conflict and attempt to impose his idealistic worldview.²

In 1917, Krehbiel became involved with the Inquiry, a body of experts who assisted the American administration in preparing the future peace negotiations. In his academic and political pieces, he often alluded to the 'exceptional' case of the European Commission of the Danube ('the Commission'), an organisation that embodied his views on transnational cooperation. In a paper presented at a meeting of the West Coast Branch of the American Historical Association in Berkeley (California) on 30 November 1917 and published in 1918, Krehbiel detailed the history of the Commission, which he penned to

1 Gerlof Homan, 'Edward Benjamin Krehbiel: Progressive Peace Advocate and "Professor of Eternal Peace,"' *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76.2 (2002): 189–214.

2 Ibid.

be ‘the most ambitious and the most successful experiment in international administration’.³

Krehbiel was not the first scholar to write extensively about the organisation’s history; he, however, was one of the early supporters of its being used as a model for post-war international organisations (IOs)⁴ around the globe. There was indeed an increasing variety of supranational entities, spanning from the Universal Postal Union and the Red Cross to International Sanitary Councils and the International Sugar Union, but Krehbiel believed that the Commission was, in many ways, special. It was the harbinger of a new age, one in which narrow national partisanships were to make room for expert cooperation with greater supranational benefits.

The Commission had been created in 1856 through a decision inscribed in the Paris Peace Treaty. Although meant to be a provisional institution with limited technical scope (removing the obstacles that hindered navigation along the Maritime Danube – see Fig. 1⁵), it had managed to survive and gradually extended its reach. By the early twentieth century it had acquired many of the attributes usually associated with an independent state: a ‘territory’ over which it exercised its ‘sovereignty’ based on a ‘constitution’ backed by Europe’s Great Powers, a self-governing bureaucracy and complete financial independence.

To Krehbiel, the Commission’s success came from the organisation focusing its resources on ‘a single problem’ – Danube navigation – which it managed to resolve efficiently. Its reach however was much greater: international administrative agents, a category for which the Commission was a functional prototype, contributed to the peaceful resolution of larger transnational problems in southeastern Europe and beyond. IOs needed to be allowed to evolve naturally from the simple to the more complex, and ‘each will develop a body of custom that will harden into law’. In time, they would develop ‘a whole body of rules which will in effect be the foundation of the super-state itself’.⁶

Krehbiel’s lecture in institutional Darwinism and his warm support for worldwide organisational reproduction were fuelled by the Commission’s

3 Edward Benjamin Krehbiel, ‘The European Commission of the Danube: An Experiment in International Administration,’ *Political Science Quarterly* 33.1 (1918): 38–55.

4 For simplicity, ‘international organisation’ (IO) will be used throughout this volume, though in a modern taxonomy the European Commission of the Danube would fit into the category of ‘intergovernmental organisations.’

5 The ‘Maritime Danube’ is the 170-kilometre long section of the river accessible to seagoing vessels. It stretches from the inland port of Brăila downstream to the Black Sea. References to the ‘Lower Danube’ relate to the entire river section stretching for about 900 kilometres from the Iron Gates gorge to the Black Sea. The ‘Fluvial Danube’ covers the rest of the ‘Lower Danube’ section, between the Iron Gates and Brăila.

6 Krehbiel, ‘The European Commission’: 55.



FIGURE 1 Map of the Danube Delta

SOURCE: [HTTPS://UPLOAD.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKIPEDIA/COMMONS/8/81/DANUBE_MOUTHS_1867.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/81/Danube_mouths_1867.jpg)

noteworthy history. As the offspring of Europe's Concert of Powers, it had long challenged the very meaning of 'territorial sovereignty', one of the cornerstones of the world order. To fulfil the complex tasks the Commission had received at a critical juncture in 1856, experts had pushed the boundaries of what an early IO could be, could have and could do. Imperial rivals agreed to closer cooperation,⁷ and their representatives in the Commission claimed attributions that turned the IO into a 'quasi-state'. The 1878 Berlin Treaty consecrated this status and decided that it was to function in complete independence of Romania's territorial authority.

As it happened, Krehbiel's scholarly piece, published at another critical juncture in 1918, proved equally influential in illuminating the Commission's past and shaping its future. An American historian writing about a techno-political

⁷ See the recent analysis of Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (eds.), *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870–1930: Empires and Encounters* (London and New York 2015).

organisation in Eastern Europe to influence decision-making at the end of a devastating global war was, after all, a feature of the new world order.

Beyond his laudatory, though rather static review of the organisation's 'powers and international character', Krehbiel captured some of the essential features which turned the Commission – then and now – into a remarkable object of academic research: the 'wonder' that the IO acquired 'such great powers as it did' – given the many national jealousies it encountered and local governments' natural reluctance to 'surrender of national sovereignty' – and its fruitful working as a forum of transnational cooperation, where 'nations can approach one another on the basis of common or united action, instead of as rivals'.⁸

Starting from Krehbiel's text – echoed in the title of this volume – and trying to contextualise his views, we aim to follow the Commission's institutional genesis and progress and assess its pioneering character and outcomes by answering questions such as: What were the forces, actors and junctures at play that allowed the Commission to evolve from a 'hand-to-mouth existence' to an 'exceptional' and 'experimental' organisation? Was it predominantly a top-down teleological construct coming from wise political masterminds or did it emerge via bottom-up professional expertise acting beyond imperial ambitions? Were there any voices silenced in the process? Was it as innovative and successful as Krehbiel and other authors claimed? What benchmarks and perspectives should one use to assess the degree of successfulness and experimentalism of such an early IO? Did it influence theoretical conceptualisations, such as those of British diplomat James Arthur Salter, who became a pioneer of IR functionalist theory⁹ (rendered more famous through David Mitrany's works) following his involvement with another 'experiment in international administration', the Allied Maritime Transport Council of 1917–1919?¹⁰ The focus will fall, in the chapters below, on the Commission's history from its onset in 1856 to the First World War, while the last chapter will look at its institutional metamorphoses during the interwar and early post-war years, as

8 Krehbiel, 'The European Commission': 49.

9 Leonie Holthaus and Jens Steffek, 'Experiments in International Administration: The Forgotten Functionalism of James Arthur Salter,' *Review of International Studies* 42.1 (2016): 114–135.

10 James Arthur Salter, *Allied Shipping Control: An Experiment in International Administration* (Oxford 1921); also Egon Ferdinand Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Administration* (Washington DC 1945) and for a similarly 'experimental' IO George Arthur Coddington, *The International Telecommunication Union: An Experiment in International Cooperation* (Leiden 1952).

it gradually lost its 'experimental' character and eventually fell, in 1948, under Soviet control.

2 Expert Mobilisation and the Study of International Rivers

Krehbiel was not the only academic who, a century ago, was interested in replicating the Commission and populating the world with similar entities. By 1917, as governments prepared for the coming peace congress, scholars in the humanities came to the fore in contributing to the discussion of their countries' interests.¹¹ Philosophers insisted that it was vital to set out the moral principles for a new and just world order; historians and linguists, geographers and jurists engaged to produce accounts that could help settle the myriad of open disputes between belligerents. After all, with nationalism as a driving force of war, knowledge about the history, literature, beliefs or political aspirations of nations around the world was essential in galvanising their support both during the conflict and at its end.

In France, Great Britain and the United States, academic centres for producing expert knowledge needed for the coming peace congress were fully functional by 1917. Eminent professors brainstormed on pressing global issues; they collected, organised and synthesised critical information into handbooks for the confidential use of their diplomats. Each of these scholarly groups relied on vast networks of experts and had access to some of the best research resources available in those times. The American team, for example, worked in the reading rooms of the New York Public Library under the academic supervision of philosopher Sidney Mezes. They later moved to the offices of the American Geographical Society and assembled under the guidance of geographer Isaiah Bowman.¹² The Inquiry, as it came to be known, divided its activity into five fields of analysis, representative of its internationalist approach to the new world order: the powers (friends, enemies, neutrals); debatable areas and unfortunate peoples (from Alsace-Lorraine to the Jews and the nationalities of Eastern Europe); international business; international law; and international cooperation.¹³

11 George T. Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington 1970), 16–33.

12 Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2003), 113–138.

13 Lawrence Emerson Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917–1919* (New Haven 1963), 347. A recent view on its contribution to international relations scholarship

Expert committees paid special attention to international rivers and the commissions for regulating navigation along Europe's largest transboundary waterways. The Rhine and the Danube had been bones of contention between states during the previous centuries, but disputes had been largely solved by transnational cooperation. Their 'lessons' deserved wider attention.

Thus, in Paris, London and New York, scholars wrote handbooks on the history and legal status of the Rhine and the Danube. Like Krehbiel, they advertised river commissions as efficient organisations to be multiplied around the globe's transboundary waterways. Joseph Perkins Chamberlain, a legal expert working for Columbia University, was the author of such a handbook on the Danube Question for the use of the US Department of State. Chamberlain employed a topical structure in his monograph, with references to Danube's geography, its diplomatic history, pending international issues and the hydro-technical projects along its watercourse, all with policy suggestions to be followed at the upcoming peace negotiations.¹⁴ Chamberlain would defend his PhD at Columbia in the early interwar years with a comparative study of the regime of the Rhine and the Danube, derived from his policy-oriented work. In his dissertation he focused on changes in international law and river organisations from a juridical perspective and reckoned that the main issue in the practical resolution of disputes was to reconcile the general common interest (i.e. free navigation for all flags) with each state's sovereign rights.¹⁵ By 1918, similar liberal ideas were entertained by the French historian Émile Bourgeois¹⁶ and the Belgian jurist Georges Kaeckenbeeck,¹⁷ scholars tasked in France and Britain respectively to deal with the study of international rivers.

The Commission's commendation among early IOs is remarkable and deserves more scholarly attention. For the proponents of internationalism writing in that period, such as political scientist Leonard Woolf, river commissions provided the first example of 'deliberate international legislation' which led to

in David M. McCourt, 'The *Inquiry* and the Birth of International Relations, 1917–19,' *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 63.3 (2017): 394–405.

14 Joseph P. Chamberlain, *The Danube. In Five Parts*, November 1, 1918 (Washington 1918).

15 Chamberlain, *The Regime of the International Rivers: Danube and Rhine* (New York 1923), 5–6.

16 Émile Bourgeois, *Liberté et neutralité de navigation du Danube*, in: *Travaux du Comité d'études, Questions européennes*, vol. II (Paris 1919), 663–682; the context in Olivier Lowczyk, *La fabrique de la paix: du Comité d'études à la Conférence de la Paix, l'élaboration par la France des traités de la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Paris 2010), 425.

17 Georges Kaeckenbeeck, *International Rivers: A Monograph Based on Diplomatic Documents* (London 1918), v–ix; the context in Erik Goldstein, 'Historians Outside the Academy: G.W. Prothero and the Experience of the Foreign Office Historical Section, 1917–20,' *Historical Research* 63.151 (1990): 195–211.

the 'creation of the first international executive in the Danube Commission'. 'Administrative nationalism', Woolf further stated, had gradually given way to an international administration, which, 'by reason of its superior efficiency, superseded the national'.¹⁸

In one of his confidential reports, William S. Monroe, another of the American experts tasked to advise on the political organisation of the Balkans at the forthcoming peace congress, insisted on several of the Commission's multilateral accomplishments. Those of a commercial nature were particularly impressive: following the organisation's hydraulic and administrative works, 'annual exportation of wheat from the Danube basin' and the total tonnage of ships frequenting the river increased five-fold, while the 'mean size of individual ships' calling at Danubian ports increased ten-fold. Monroe's own recommendations on the Commission (which he considered, in the line of Krehbiel's piece, as 'a signal success as an experiment in international administration') were to have its membership enlarged and 'its powers broadened'.¹⁹

The Commission was a handy example for such internationalist and institutionalist optimism at a time when 'experiments in international administration' were in great demand among the theorists of the new world order. As a long-lasting embodiment of Europe's Concert of Powers, the Commission was used to showcase that cooperation in pursuit of limited goals was possible and beneficial. As an organ endowed with 'substantial governing power' and which was 'met with generally acknowledged success', it was advertised, especially in the imperial western world, as a functionalist prototype for internationalising and securing some of the globe's most pressing issues.²⁰

In 1917, for instance, British legal scholar Coleman Phillipson and liberal politician Noel Buxton, an expert in Balkan affairs, considered that the Commission could serve as a model for a future International Commission of the Straits. They had in mind the Danube Commission's unprecedented legal status, which explained the efficiency and success of 'a remarkable precursor in the art of international government'.²¹ A British Foreign Office

18 Leonard Woolf, *International Government* (Westminster 1916), 26, 220; idem, *The Future of Constantinople* (London 1917), 37. More on his views in Peter Wilson, *The International Theory of Leonard Woolf: A Study in Twentieth-Century Idealism* (New York 2005), 42, 102.

19 W.S. Monroe, *Balkan Peninsula; The Danube and Its Internationalization* (10 April 1918), v & 12–13, in: *The Inquiry Papers* (MS 10). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, No. 138.

20 Francis Bowes Sayre, *Experiments in International Administration* (New York 1919), XI–XII, 38–47.

21 Coleman Phillipson and Noel Buxton, *The Question of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles* (London 1917), 241.

memorandum of November 1918, while discussing solutions for the organisation of the Caucasus region, concluded that Baku and its accompanying oil wells could fall directly under international control, 'on the model, perhaps, of the Danube Commission'.²²

David Hunter Miller, a member of the Inquiry and one of the American delegates in the Commission on Ports, Waterways and Railways assembled in Paris in 1919, repeatedly referred to 'the well-known precedent of the European Commission of the Danube' which was employed in setting up the legal basis of interwar international river commissions.²³ Numerous other scholars insisted in their works on the same leitmotifs: the Commission had proved to be a very efficient permanent international body and was a noteworthy example of a 'successful international administration'²⁴ at a time when world leaders were looking for prototypical organisation for the new global order. The case of the Commission was well known to Romanian-born David Mitrany, who would later use this example in his functionalist approach to international relations, contaminated with some less experimental interwar political context.²⁵

3 The Commission and Europe's Nascent Security Cooperation

Inspired by recent scholarship in transnational history, international relations and security studies, this volume aims to detail the creation and evolution of the Commission as an IO that crafted a 'security regime', based on rules and enforcing institutions (see below), along the maritime section of the Danube. To do so, it brings together three fields in which *security* is a key concept: 1) European diplomacy and international relations, 2) institutional history, and 3) river histories. On all these analytical layers, security²⁶ is understood as a) an objective, an ideal state of being free from risk, threat, or danger; and b) the proactive actions taken by actors to secure this ideal state by removing the sources of insecurity and uncertainty. In historicising security, in line

22 Alex Marshall, *The Caucasus under Soviet Rule* (London and New York 2010), 105.

23 David Hunter Miller, 'The International Regime of Ports, Waterways and Railways,' *American Journal of International Law* 13.4 (1919): 678.

24 Cecil Delisle Burns, *International Politics* (London 1920), 150.

25 David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System. An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organization* (London 1943), 30; more context in Jan Klabbers, 'The Emergence of Functionalism in International Institutional Law: Colonial Inspirations,' *European Journal of International Law* 25.3 (2014): 645–675.

26 Also in relation to the sectorial analysis as proposed in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder CO 2013).

with similar endeavours by colleagues from Utrecht University, this narrative goes beyond the realist, state-centred perspective in historical security studies and regards the Commission as one of the world's earliest IOs with a coherent security-oriented programme. Moreover, by its multi-layered and increasingly complex activity, the Commission contributed towards the creation of a 'European security culture', defined as 'a collective defence against and concomitant discourse regarding transnational threats'.²⁷

The *first* – outer – layer of analysis is the political and diplomatic environment, part of the so-called Danube Question, in relation to which the Commission was established and in the framework of which it acted. The Lower Danubian area was caught in the vortex of inter-imperial politics, as it was placed at the forefront of Russia's march against the Ottoman Empire. Since the 1830s, inland Danubian ports increasingly became busy hubs for capitalist grain traders. To them, political instability in the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (hereafter 'the Principalities'), in the backdrop of the Eastern Question, was translated into economic unpredictability. This impacted not only their own profits, but the replenishment of Western Europe's grain storehouses and thus the continent's food security. The construction of political and economic threats and interests at the Lower Danube comes within the classical narrative of a backward periphery integrated into the world market, with all the structural changes and disruptions that such a process entails for the regional economy.²⁸

Inter-imperial political competition will be analysed within Europe's new ideological framework – the gradual emergence of internationalism after the 1815 Vienna Congress, with an increasing number of conferences to settle interstate disputes and the making of a European system of law.²⁹ International rivers are especially relevant for such approaches, and much scholarship has

27 Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan and Brian Vick, 'Vienna 1815: Introducing a European Security Culture,' in: de Graaf, de Haan and Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge 2019), 1–18. See other recent theoretical contributions in Matthias Schulz, 'Cultures of Peace and Security from the Vienna Congress to the Twenty-First Century: 1815 and the New European Security Culture,' *ibid.*, 21–39 and Eckart Conze, 'Historicising a Security Culture: Peace, Security and the Vienna System in History and Politics,' *ibid.*, 40–55.

28 Giovanni Federico and Karl Gunnar Persson, 'Market Integration and Convergence in the World Wheat Market, 1800–2000,' in: Timothy J. Hatton, Kevin H. O'Rourke and Alan M. Taylor (eds.), *The New Comparative Economic History: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey G. Williamson* (Cambridge MA and London 2007), 87–113.

29 Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London 2012); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton 2015).

already been devoted to the emerging field of hydropolitics, defined as ‘the systematic study of conflict and cooperation between states over water resources that transcend international borders’.³⁰

On this layer of high international politics or historical hydropolitics, this approach aims to explain how shipping insecurity and commercial unpredictability were translated into inter-imperial political disputes, but also how they contributed to increasing cooperation between relevant state actors. Complex dynamics at the 1856 Paris Congress, another critical juncture in the making of the internationalist order, allowed Europe’s decision-makers³¹ to reinterpret the principle of free navigation on transboundary rivers and to reinforce it with more political and juridical authority. It marked the beginnings of an interesting episode in, to paraphrase a seminal article in economic history,³² the collective imperialism of free trade, which led to the creation of an informal collective colony in the Danube Delta.

The Danube made its way into European law and remained there for the next century, together with the IO that incarnated the victors’ liberal principle of free navigation on international waterways: the European Commission of the Danube. In its turn it was not only an object of imperial politics, but also a subject of regional security-making as a fully independent international organ and a source of stability in an insecure inter-imperial borderland.

The *second* – middle – layer of analysis is the institutionalist one, centring on the Commission’s metamorphosis into a functional IO. New institutionalist theories (rational choice, sociological, and historical) provide an excellent insight into how transnational cooperation is advanced via such IOs.³³ Historical institutionalism is the most relevant one, and the evolution of the Commission will follow, on the lines of Orfeo Fioretos’ approach, the story of

30 Arun P. Elhance, *Hydropolitics in the Third World: Conflict and Cooperation in International River Basins* (Washington DC 1999), 3; Susanne Schmeier, *Governing International Watercourses: River Basin Organizations and the Sustainable Governance of Internationally Shared Rivers and Lakes* (London 2015). Other major contributions to hydropolitics are: David LeMarquand, *International Rivers: The Politics of Cooperation* (Vancouver 1977); John Waterbury, *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley* (Syracuse NY 1979); Shlomi Dinar, *International Water Treaties. Negotiation and Cooperation along Transboundary Rivers* (London and New York 2008).

31 ‘Europe’ will define, in many circumstances related to international politics, the seven Great Powers signatories of the peace treaties and the multilateral conventions relevant for the Eastern Question.

32 John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade,’ *Economic History Review* 6.1 (1953): 1–15.

33 Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C.R. Taylor, ‘Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,’ *Political Studies* 44.5 (1996): 936–957.

the Commission with details of the 'legacies of founding moments in shaping long-term power relations and whether new ideas become consequential, the ubiquity of unintended consequences, and especially the prevalence of incremental reform over stasis and fundamental transformations'.³⁴ Lately, historians have joined in such attempts to historicise international relations in the nineteenth century, in the vein of Glenda Sluga's or Beatrice de Graaf's interest in, for example, transnational institutions that increased cooperation between state actors.³⁵

In order to determine the effectiveness of the Commission it is necessary to consider its general organisational characteristics (institutional scope, membership structure, degree of institutionalisation) and the governance solutions commissioners designed for the international river (decision-making mechanisms, dispute resolution procedures, funding).³⁶ Comparisons with other early IOs – such as the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine³⁷ – will help crystallise the distinctive features of the Commission in a busier constellation of transnational non-state agents.

Looking at the role of human resources at play in the Commission, two aspects are worth being investigated with their specialised conceptual instruments: IOs as bureaucracies and the making of 'communities of experts' within such organisations. It may be safely claimed that the Commission's success in establishing a security regime at the Lower Danube came with its gradual transformation into a bureaucratic institution. The Commission was not born as such, but it evolved organically into a complex bureaucracy and technocracy. The theoretical contributions of Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore on the relationships between bureaucracy and rulemaking illuminate important aspects for the Commission's corporate identity.³⁸ Created to

34 Orfeo Fioretos, 'Historical Institutionalism in International Relations,' *International Organization* 65.2 (2011): 369.

35 Glenda Sluga, 'Editorial – the Transnational History of International Institutions,' *Journal of Global History* 6.2 (2011): 219–222; de Graaf, 'Bringing Sense and Sensibility to the Continent: Vienna 1815 Revisited,' *Journal of Modern European History* 13.4 (2015): 447–457.

36 Schmeier, *Governing International Watercourses*, 59–60.

37 See the recent pieces by Hein A.M. Klemann, 'The Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine, 1815–1914. Nineteenth Century European Integration,' in: Ralf Banken and Ben Wubs (eds.), *The Rhine: A Transnational Economic History* (Baden-Baden 2017), 31–68 and Joep Schenk, 'The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine: A First Step towards European Economic Security?,' in: de Graaf, de Haan and Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe*, 75–94.

38 Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations,' *International Organization* 53.4 (1999): 699–732; eidem, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca 2004).

solve a technical mission, the Commission gradually turned into a community of experts³⁹ in transboundary rivers, a specialisation that combined knowledge in seamanship, international law, public administration and engineering. Since the nineteenth century such epistemic communities thrived, and specialised knowledge started to be produced and disseminated across national and disciplinary boundaries. Scholarship on epistemic communities and their transnational networks is as useful for showing how specialised knowledge translated security practices into actual regulations.⁴⁰

In terms of actual results of cooperation, the Commission contributed towards the establishment of navigational rules, norms and procedures for the Danube. For Stephen D. Krasner, regimes are 'principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures', and a security regime came into being with the creation of a coherent corpus of rules and its application.⁴¹ James C. Scott's view on the modern bureaucratic state's objective of imposing legibility and simplification is also relevant here,⁴² especially in proving that the Commission acted as a 'state' whose drive for standardisation was part of its logics of stability and security over its 'liquid' jurisdiction. As it did so, its state building measures were those of modern states, the Leviathan 2.0 based on new methods of governmentality,⁴³ with a view to 'order' an area that needed not only technological improvement, but also law, taxation procedures and communication systems. As in the case of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, the Commission contributed towards 'European economic security'⁴⁴ and European integration, as well as through the supranational character of its

39 Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2002); Martin Kohlrausch and Helmuth Trischler, *Building Europe on Expertise. Innovators, Organizers, Networkers* (Basingstoke 2014); Wolfram Kaiser and Johan W. Schot, *Writing the Rules for Europe: Experts, Cartels and International Organizations* (Basingstoke 2014).

40 Peter M. Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,' *International Organization* 46.1 (1992): 1–35; Mai'a K. Davis Cross, 'Rethinking Epistemic Communities Twenty Years Later,' *Review of International Studies* 39.1 (2013): 137–160.

41 Stephen D. Krasner, 'Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,' in: idem (ed.), *International Regimes* (Ithaca and London 1983), 2.

42 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London 1998).

43 Charles S. Maier, 'Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood,' in: Emily R. Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting. 1870–1945* (Cambridge MA and London 2012), 29–282.

44 Schenk, 'The Central Commission' cit.

decisions, voted for by a majority, but binding for all member states in relation to Danubian navigation.⁴⁵

The creation and development of the Commission was a lengthy political and institutional process, but also an intellectual and cultural one. The Commission evolved with the establishment of corporate symbols and rituals, and eventually bred a culture that was inherited within the organisation and spread beyond it. According to French anthropologist Marc Abélès, the production of an institutional culture takes place on two levels – an individual and an institutional one – when ‘the norms, practices and models that the institution creates are diffused beyond that institutional framework’.⁴⁶ Institutional anthropology and sociological analysis⁴⁷ on the Commission’s bureaucracy are relevant for understanding the spread of this organisational culture beyond the Maritime Danube towards, for example, the Rhine or the Suez. This culture had security as its core value. Created to deal with threats to the security of Danubian navigation and to the economic and political interests associated with free shipping, the Commission gradually turned into a ‘security community’ which designed efficient policies and control mechanisms to protect those interests.

The *third* – or inner – layer of analysis is the international river, the object of the Commission’s transformative programme. Turning the Danube into the commercial highway of southeastern Europe was a complex process, which started with removing physical insecurity from its lower section, the most sensitive portion of its course. This exercise in river history involved actors within and outside the Commission – diplomats and engineers, cartographers and bureaucrats, merchants and ship-owners – who joined forces to ‘correct’ the river and provide it with the proper legislation needed to make it a predictable and safe transportation artery.

Rationalising nature, governing and managing it for maximising economic benefits proved more complicated than originally believed when the Commission was established in 1856, and it was hardened into an efficient organisation by the very complexity of the Danube Delta. Understanding the river with its seasonal floods, predominant currents and winds was part of

45 Guido Thiemeyer and Isabel Tölle, ‘Supranationalität im 19. Jahrhundert? Die Beispiele der Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt und des Octroivertrages 1804–1851’, *Journal of European Integration History* 17.2 (2011): 177–196.

46 Marc Abélès and Henri-Pierre Jeudy (eds.), *Anthropologie du politique* (Paris 1997), 154–155.

47 Maria-Mădălina Toader, *De la jauge au stylo: Stratégies des commissaires européens du Danube entre 1856 et 1878. Essai d’anthropologie institutionnelle*, MA dissertation, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris 2014).

a transnational process of knowledge production and a prerequisite for the Commission's subsequent engineering programme. Hydrologic knowledge played a vital part in building dykes at Sulina which 'tamed' the Danube and turned it into a predictable and secure waterway.⁴⁸

The Commission's vast technical projects came with a price for both the environment and the riverain human communities, and this clash is relevant for understanding the dynamics of an early IO's encounter with 'human insecurity', regarded through an emerging paradigm that privileges the human rather than the national or state level as the proper referent for security-making.⁴⁹ As Richard White has put it, both river systems and human societies are dynamic forces rather than static entities clashing with one another; rivers are human creations (or *organic machines*) just as much as they preserve a sort of private, natural existence, beyond human control.⁵⁰ In other words, this third layer aims to touch upon issues related to river management, technology transfer and environmental history, relevant in securing for navigation one of Europe's largest international rivers. In all these fields, the Commission was one of the main transformative agents of nature on the western coast of the Black Sea, and it needed to adjust its policies and actions in connection to those of other local, regional, national or transnational actors. As the historical setting for one of Europe's earliest 'experimental' organisations, the peripheral riverscape of the Danube Delta area invites further comparison between the Danube and other rivers, in mainland Europe and in colonial areas, which were reshaped through human agency in the modern age.⁵¹

Security lies at the core of this three-dimensional approach. In the framework of Europe's Concert, the Great Powers followed diplomatic procedures designed to maintain peace and order on the continent.⁵² Beyond their

48 Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, 'Rivers in History and Historiography: An Introduction,' in: eidem (eds.), *Rivers in History: Perspectives on Waterways in Europe and North America* (Pittsburgh 2008), 1–10.

49 Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha Chenoy, *Human Security: Concepts and Implications* (London 2007).

50 Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York 1996).

51 Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815–2000* (Seattle and London 2002); David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York 2007); Sara B. Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge MA and London 2011); Peter Coates, *A Story of Six Rivers: History, Culture and Ecology* (London 2013).

52 Robert Jervis, 'From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation,' *World Politics* 38.1 (1985): 58–79 and Matthias Schulz, 'The Concert of Europe and International Security Governance: How Did It Operate, What Did It Accomplish, What

diverging interests, they cooperated well and managed to preserve stability at the Lower Danube and in the international system. They followed explicit rules of behaviour during their conference diplomacy and agreed on multilateral actions meant to contain the hydro-hegemonic claims of the eastern empires, which were members of the IO. As the Concert's institutional offspring, the Commission acted to remove insecurity from the Maritime Danube, but it greatly expanded and deepened the meaning of its security-driven programme. The Maritime Danube posed, through its peripheral position and the hydrographical features of its Delta, additional challenges to the Commission's modernising efforts, making the results even more commendable for the Commission's leadership and its supporters. Security might seem an elusive concept to cover such broad objects and actions, but it serves as a dynamic and flexible linchpin to connect the three analytical levels and to allow for studying not only the actors, but also the various threats and the referent objects identified, as well as the context, circumstances and instruments used when making decisions.⁵³

4 On Institutional Visibility, Corporate Branding and Expert Exposure

Branding itself as a model of fruitful transnational cooperation was one of the Commission's greatest accomplishments. Its visibility among diplomats, legal scholars and river experts was fostered by this need to be considered a successful organisation. It enjoyed large administrative privileges and had an autonomous (and later independent) status in relation to the territorial state which controlled the Danube Delta (i.e. the Ottoman Empire and, since 1878, Romania), so the Commission spread the word far and wide about its corporate efficiency.

The organisation published its main 'constitutional' charter in French and in other international languages,⁵⁴ and distributed it amongst the diplomatic and economic circles interested in Danubian navigation; it published several

Were Its Shortcomings, What Can We Learn?,' in: Harald Müller and Carsten Rauch (eds.), *Great Power Multilateralism and the Prevention of War. Debating a 21st-Century Concert of Powers* (London 2018), 26–45.

53 Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*, 32.

54 *Acte public relatif à la navigation des embouchures du Danube signé à Galatz, le 2 novembre 1865* (Galați 1866); *Public Act Relating to the Navigation of the Mouths of the Danube* (London 1871); *Acte public relatif à la navigation des embouchures du Danube. Guide pour la navigation du fleuve* (Galați 1876), etc.

collections of official diplomatic documents and institutional procedures;⁵⁵ its regulations and tariffs were included in some of the leading commercial journals of Europe and were printed as separate brochures.⁵⁶ If the latter publications had to do with the need to keep the Commission's clients (ship-owners, seafarers, merchants) informed on its navigational taxes and practices, the other texts were meant to convey an additional message about its organisational brand. Through communication facilitators in its Secretariat, the Commission invested in creating and maintaining a successful corporate identity: it was a pillar of security, stability and professionalism at the Lower Danube. As the IO's term had to be renewed periodically, this positive image was crucial for regime survival at critical junctures, when the Commission's activity was reviewed by Europe's top statesmen. One of the lessons that commissioners and bureaucrats in the organisation quickly learned was that communicating the Commission's achievements was as important as those accomplishments themselves. Consequently, the organisation insisted on the correlation between its extraordinary status and its out-of-the-ordinary results, both visible consequences of transnational cooperation.

The technical component of the Commission's works was popularised in equally well-disseminated volumes that included the reports of its lead engineers, accompanied by numerous tables, charts and maps.⁵⁷ The engineers made a habit of presenting their works at meetings of prestigious professional bodies, such as the Institution of Civil Engineers in London.⁵⁸ Thanks to

55 *Actes relatifs au Danube. Traités, conventions, protocoles et règlements* (Bucharest 1882); *Documents officiels relatifs à la Commission européenne du Danube. Traités, Acte public, Acte additionnel, Règlement intérieur* (Galați 1890), etc.

56 *Règlement de navigation et de police applicable au bas Danube. Tarif des droits de navigation. Guide du navigateur*, en français, italien, allemand, anglais, roumain, russe, grec et turc (Galați 1884); *Instructions au Capitaine du port de Sulina et à l'Inspecteur de la navigation du bas Danube*, en français et en italien (Galați 1884), etc.

57 *Mémoire sur les travaux d'amélioration exécutés aux embouchures du Danube par la Commission Européenne instituée en vertu de l'article 16 du Traité de Paris du 30 mars 1856, accompagné d'un atlas de 40 planches* (Galați 1867); *Mémoire sur l'achèvement des travaux d'amélioration exécutés aux embouchures du Danube par la Commission Européenne instituée en vertu de l'article 16 du Traité de Paris du 30 mars 1856, avec 3 cartes jointes au texte et un atlas de 59 planches* (Leipzig 1873), etc.

58 Charles Hartley, 'Description of the Delta of the Danube and of Works Recently Executed at the Sulina Mouth,' *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 21 (1862): 277–308; idem, 'On the Changes that Have Recently Taken Place along the Sea Coast of the Delta of the Danube and on the Consolidation of the Provisional Works at the Sulina Mouth,' *ibid.*, 36 (1873): 201–253; Charles Henry Leopold Kühl, 'Dredging on the Lower Danube,' *ibid.*, 65 (1881): 266–270; idem, 'The Sulina Mouth of the Danube,' *ibid.*, 91 (1888): 329–333, etc.

narratives of hydraulic success and the rich and colourful imagery of their publications, the Danube Delta and the port of Sulina became some of the world's best-documented cases where the long-term effects of the river-sea interactions could be followed. Influential engineers such as Frenchman François Philippe Voisin (Voisin Bey), one of the artisans of the Suez Canal as Ferdinand de Lesseps' right hand, wrote extensively about the Commission's technical accomplishments: they 'offered precious information for the art of engineering and also provided a very interesting example of a great work of public utility', which was executed and maintained through the imposition of moderate dues 'in exchange for multiple and serious advantages'.⁵⁹

Not least of all, the Commission published several eulogistic reports on its overall activity. They depicted the insecurity of the Lower Danube before its creation and its steps in gradually removing the artificial and natural hindrances that had endangered free and safe navigation.⁶⁰ Such volumes, accompanied by works published by several commissioners and bureaucrats, portrayed an effective IO which 'tamed' one of the 'wildest' channels of commerce in Europe. The memory of former insecure times was kept alive in official publications, which referred extensively to the sense of order and standard of civilisation⁶¹ it imposed over its jurisdiction.

But its visibility among scholars of peace studies, such as Krehbiel, is probably linked to the Commission's extraordinary status as an IO that functioned independently of the authority of its host state. It remained, even during the interwar period, 'a unique international organization' as it was 'a distinct international entity possessing sovereignty over the broad waters of the Danube'.⁶²

In the early 1880s, a political conflict between Romania and Austria-Hungary in relation to a new river organisation (which was to copy many of the Commission's vast attributions) generated a scholarly dispute between legal experts throughout the western world. Discussions about the international status of the Maritime Danube divided jurists into two main groups: the

59 François Philippe Voisin [Bey], 'Notice sur les travaux d'amélioration de l'embouchure du Danube et du bras de Soulina 1857–1891,' *Annales des ponts et chaussées. Mémoires et documents* 5 (1893): 6.

60 *Mémoire sur le régime administratif établi aux embouchures du Danube par la Commission européenne du Danube chargée d'en améliorer la navigabilité en exécution de l'article 16 du Traité de Paris du 30 mars 1856* (Galați 1867); *Des effets produits par l'amélioration de l'embouchure de Soulina sur le commerce d'exportation maritime* (Galați 1869).

61 Yuan (Joanne) Yao, "'Conquest from Barbarism': The Danube Commission, International Order and the Control of Nature as a Standard of Civilization,' *European Journal of International Relations* 25.2 (2019): 335–359.

62 Glen A. Blackburn, 'International Control of the River Danube,' *Current History and Forum* 32.6 (1930): 1154.

defendants of the smaller states' sovereign rights and the advocates of trans-imperial cooperation along international waterways crossing 'weak' states or 'uncivilised' territories. Several position papers on the topic were published in the influential *Revue de droit international et de législation comparée*, the bulletin of the Institut de Droit International which promoted the progress of international law and the peaceful resolution of disputes among states. These expert pieces further increased the fame of the Commission amongst legal scholars, and the Danube Question was later analysed by several jurists who authored monographs detailing the extraordinary legal regime of the Lower Danube, the large powers of the Commission and the economic prosperity brought to the area by its technical and normative activity.⁶³ The number of publications increased during the First World War, as the Commission continued its activity in 1914–1916, despite the degree of belligerence that existed between the states of many of its employees.

The knowledge early twentieth-century globalists like Krehbiel, Woolf, Francis Bowes Sayre or Miller had about the Commission and its accomplishments came from such generally positive exposure in the professional circles of legal experts, engineers, businessmen and statesmen. If the Commission was indeed a viable example to showcase the beneficial outcomes of transnational cooperation, its own employees deserve much credit for this successful institutional branding. As for the organisation's detractors, several of them Romanians, they were easily dismissed for their nationalistic and anachronistic views.

5 A Brief Historiographical Survey of the Commission

This part aims to review the rich historiography on the Commission published after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919–1920. The peace treaties that brought the First World War to an end and a series of multilateral conventions concluded in the early 1920s regulated the status of Europe's largest international rivers. Negotiations ended with the extension of the 1815 and 1856 liberal principles, though several decisions managed to alienate not only

63 André de Saint-Clair, *Le Danube. Étude de droit international* (Paris 1899); Gh. P. Cantili, *Le Danube sous le régime des traités* (Bucharest 1901); Jean-Constantin Maican, *La question du Danube. Étude de droit international. Thèse* (Paris 1904); Dimitrie A. Sturdza, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de la navigation du Danube* (Berlin 1904); Gustave Demorgny, *La question du Danube: Histoire politique du Bassin du Danube, Étude des divers régimes applicables à la navigation du Danube* (Paris 1911); Alexandre Georges Pitisteano, *La question du Danube* (Paris 1914), etc.

the defeated Central Powers, but also some of the young nation-states in central and southeastern Europe. Romania was one of them. Romania more than doubled its surface area and population after several provinces in the Russian and Austrian-Hungarian empires united with the 'Motherland' in 1918. At the Paris Peace Conference, Romanian diplomacy aimed to alter the Danube regime and establish its full territorial sovereignty over the Maritime Danube (more in Chapter 10). The best solution, according to the Romanians, was to abolish the Commission and unify the entire river regime under the jurisdiction of a single IO, on the model of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine.⁶⁴ Eventually, due to political and economic reasons, the river course was divided between two river commissions: the Commission was preserved, with a membership that gave the upper hand to European victors, while the rest of the river was to be regulated by an International Commission of the Danube, comprised of delegates from riparian states and the three major European victors. During the interwar period, Romanian authorities struggled to diminish the powers of the Commission, which came to be regarded as an 'anachronical organ' that hurt Greater Romania's sovereignty. In the context of the Second World War, the Commission was caught in further revisionist disputes, with Nazi Germany and the USSR seeking membership to protect their own regional interests. In post-war years 'the Danube for Danubian states' policy promoted by the Soviet Union resulted in the removal of non-riparian powers from the Commission and the establishment of the currently existing Danube Commission (based in Budapest), which was initially used as an instrument of promotion for Soviet interests during the Cold War.

The Commission attracted academic interest from several authors in the past century, but it was only since the 1980s that scholarship started to be freed from political bias. The IO has been usually analysed in relation to the so-called Danube Question (the rivalry for imperial hegemony over the Lower Danube), which was most often than not regarded with ideological goggles. A brief excursion through the historiography of the Commission and of the larger Danube Question is useful before referring to the objectives and structure of this volume.

Academic literature on the Commission can roughly be divided into three chronological phases, each with its own incentives to study the Commission and its role in southeastern Europe, and each with its form of political bias: the nationalist squabble of the interwar years, when Romania and its scholars fought to limit or even abolish the attributions of what they started to consider

64 Nicolae Dașcovici, *Regimul Dunării și al strâmtorilor în ultimele două decenii (cu o anexă documentară)* (Iași 1943), 15–16.

an ‘anachronical’ institution; the Second World War and the Cold War divide, when the Commission was caught in a larger ideological conflict between the different belligerent camps, and scholars targeted the IO as part of this dispute; and the integrative age of post-communist years, when the Commission has served to illustrate the beneficial or pernicious effects of European cooperation. As interest by Romanian scholars has remained high in the organisation during the past century, a further distinction will be made between Romanian and foreign authors studying the Commission.

During the interwar years, Romania and the other member states were engaged in political and legal discussions about the Commission’s status. This resulted in the publication of numerous papers by experts engaged with the issue or independent of it. Romanian authors were at the heart of the production and circulation of a highly partisan narrative on the Danube Question, with the Commission portrayed as an ‘anachronical’ and ‘parasitical’ organisation, an imposition that survived from former colonial times. For authors such as Grigore Antipa⁶⁵ (natural scientist and influential public intellectual), Eugeniu P. Botez⁶⁶ (navigation expert and fashionable novelist), Vintilă Brătianu⁶⁷ (leading liberal politician), Nicolae Daşcovici⁶⁸ and Henri Georges Meitani⁶⁹ (diplomats, policy advisors and professors of international law) or Gheorghe Popescu⁷⁰ (hydraulic engineer), the Commission was a gauge against which Romania’s great leap forward had to be measured. The IO had been a useful European bulwark when the Romanian state was too young and too weak to defend the freedom of navigation along the Maritime Danube. But things had changed, and Greater Romania was fully capable of protecting its own and larger European interests. The leitmotif of Romanian literature was that in the new historical context the Commission had been violating Romania’s sovereignty and dignity.⁷¹ As George Sofronie put it in one of his

65 Grigore Antipa, *Dunărea și problemele ei științifice, economice și politice* (Bucharest 1921).

66 Eugeniu P. Botez [Jean Bart], *Cum se desleagă chestiunea Dunării. Conferință* (Chișinău 1919); idem, *La question du Danube et sa solution* (Galați 1920).

67 Vintilă Brătianu, *Chestia Dunării (Expunere făcută în ședința Adunării Deputaților, 5 martie 1920)* (Bucharest 1920).

68 Daşcovici, *Dunărea noastră. O scurtă expunere până la zi a problemei dunărene, însoțită de textul Statutului de la Paris din anul 1921* (Bucharest 1927).

69 George Meitani, *Dunărea. Studiu de drept internațional* (Bucharest 1924).

70 Georges Popesco, *L'internationalisation des fleuves navigables: le Danube et la Roumanie* (Paris 1919); idem, *La liberté de communication sur les voies navigables et le régime du Danube* (Paris 1921).

71 Richard Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră. România, the Great Powers, and the Danube Question, 1914–1921* (Boulder and New York 1982), 117.

volumes on Romania's relations with the Commission, Romanians were convinced that

justice was on Romania's side. It emerges from the injured sovereignty of a territorial state, within which a veritable *fluvial state* exists; beyond all debates on the legal status of the European Commission of the Danube one cannot deny that, in the light of certain [diplomatic] texts that extend its territorial and judicial powers, it can be considered as *an international syndicate, endowed with a veritable [legal] personality, forming some sort of small state in itself*. [emphasis in the original text]⁷²

Non-Romanian authors were more ambivalent in their opinions, and they tended to contextualise the political character of the Commission. It was a techno-political organisation that remained rather singular in the interwar period, an age when the world was populated by an increasing number of IOs. But the Commission had always had a special character, and Romania's arguments resembled those entertained by the Ottoman government in the 1860s and the 1870s. During the 1920s two extremely valuable histories of the Lower Danube were authored by Henrik (Henry) Hajnal, a Hungarian expert in international law. Following a volume on the political and economic history of the Danube, Hajnal published a monograph on the juridical implications of a dispute around the Commission that the Permanent Court of International Justice had to advise upon.⁷³ Jurisconsults from around the world wrote dissertations about the uncommon case and its legal significance: Emilio Morpurgo,⁷⁴ a graduate of the University of Bologna; Alfred Lederle,⁷⁵ a German judge; and James Vallotton,⁷⁶ a Swiss lawyer. In an article that reviewed juridical debates on the Commission, jurist Voyslav M. Radovanovitch concluded that Romania was entitled to attempt removing foreign jurisdiction from its national territory, but added that 'the principle of the freedom of inland navigation should not

72 George Sofronie, *Contribuțiuni la cunoașterea relațiilor dintre România și Comisiunea Europeană a Dunării* (Cluj 1939), 7.

73 Henry Hajnal, *The Danube. Its Historical, Political and Economic Importance* (The Hague 1920); idem, 'Le conflit diplomatique entre le Gouvernement de Roumanie et la Commission européenne du Danube,' *Zeitschrift für Völkerrecht* 13.2 (1926): 398–415; idem, *Le droit du Danube international* (The Hague 1928).

74 Emilio Morpurgo, *Danubio. Saggio critico della questione danubiana* (Bologna 1923).

75 Alfred Lederle, *Die Donau und das internationale Schifffahrtsrecht* (Berlin 1928).

76 James Vallotton, *Le régime juridique du Danube maritime devant la Cour permanente de Justice internationale* (Lausanne 1928); idem, *Régime de la Navigation fluviale en Droit international*, présenté à la Session de New York de l'Institut de Droit International (Brussels 1929).

be regarded as a kind of imposition by non-riparian states [...] or as a positive international servitude, but rather as a conventional obligation, voluntarily granted by the territorially interested riparian states'.⁷⁷

In 1931, at the 75-year celebration since its creation, the Commission published a synthesis of its activity, edited by Carlo Rossetti, the Italian commissioner, and Francis Rey, the organisation's French secretary general. The chapters were authored by the different chiefs of services in the IO's complex bureaucracy, and the volume remains to this day, beyond its self-eulogising tone, the most comprehensive account of the Commission's inner structure and works.⁷⁸ Rossetti also published a different volume on the exceptional statute of the Danube in which he defended full internationality for trans-boundary rivers around the world.⁷⁹

From the late 1930s, the Lower Danube was caught in political turmoil, and literature on the Commission was even more politicised and partisan. Ideological options and, later, the Cold War divide are clearly visible in how scholars positioned themselves on the issue of international cooperation along the Danube. Before the coming of communism, Romanian authors such as legal experts Grigore Cotlaru,⁸⁰ Nicolae Daşcovici⁸¹ and George Sofronie⁸² were critical of the Commission, but still found its existence useful for the security of Danubian navigation. Since the late 1940s, Romanian legal scholars and historians switched to a Soviet-inspired narrative. In their view, the Commission was an imperialist organisation, proof of how the putrid Romanian bourgeoisie had sold the nation's independence to agents of capitalist empires.⁸³

Several non-Romanian authors wrote about the Commission during the late 1930s and 1940s. French historian and legal scholar Jean Duvernoy⁸⁴ published a 'classical' account of the Commission in its structure and arguments, but since the late 1940s most of the western literature on the Lower Danube looked at the post-war transformation of the Commission into a Soviet political

77 Voyslav M. Radovanovitch, 'Le Danube Maritime et le règlement du différend relatif aux compétences de la Commission Européenne sur le secteur Galatzi-Brăila,' *Revue de droit international et de législation comparée* s. III, 13.3 (1932): 564–631; idem, *Le Danube et l'application du principe de la liberté de la navigation fluviale* (Geneva 1925).

78 *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931).

79 Carlo Rossetti, *Il Danubio fiume internazionale* (Milan 1937).

80 Grigore Mich. Cotlaru, *C.E.D. și navigația pe Dunărea maritimă* (Galați 1936).

81 Daşcovici, *Regimul Dunării* cit.

82 Sofronie, *Contribuțiuni* cit.

83 Lucia Bădulescu, Gheorghe Canja and Edwin Glaser, *Contribuții la studiul istoriei regimului internațional al navigației pe Dunăre. Regimul de drept internațional al navigației pe Dunăre până la Convenția Dunării din 18 august 1948* (Bucharest 1957).

84 Jean Duvernoy, *Le régime international du Danube* (Paris 1941).

instrument. Stephen Gorove, a Hungarian-born jurist, started his career in international law with a PhD at Yale and a monograph on the hydropolitics of the Danube during the early communist times. To him, the Lower Danube remained part of a political power play between imperial hegemons.⁸⁵ As for the official Soviet narrative, it insisted on the predatory policies of ‘foreign conquerors, under whose yoke the Danubian peoples had languished for centuries’. Ottoman rule was largely removed in the nineteenth century, when the ‘age of capitalism’ had come with ‘new masters – the bourgeoisie of developed western countries’. The international regime of the Danube was a weapon of capitalist empires ‘aiming at seizing the economy and the political subordination of Danubian states’, which the Soviet Union was to liberate.⁸⁶

During the 1970s and 1980s, more balanced monographs were published both in Romania and abroad. In Romania, historians of international relations wrote a couple of general accounts of the Danube Question, insisting on Romania’s struggle for full territorial sovereignty. The IO was regarded as useful during the period of nation and state-building, as a sort of European protectorate-ship until modern Romania could take over the mission of safeguarding the mouths of the Danube.⁸⁷ At the same time, several historians wrote more professional and unbiased narratives on specific episodes of political and economic relations. Although Marxist overtones were present in their volumes, these contributions are solid, factual analyses of the Commission and of the political and economic environment in which it acted.⁸⁸

Several monographs published by non-Romanian scholars have been instrumental to a more balanced academic approach on the Commission’s activity. Three authors are worth mention here. Richard Frucht, an American historian, published a dissertation on the clash between Romania and the western powers on the Commission’s status in the early twentieth century and on how Romania’s national pride dictated its foreign policy when discussing the future of the Lower Danube during and in the aftermath of the Paris Peace Congress.⁸⁹ Another major contribution comes from a Greek-Romanian

85 Stephen Gorove, *Law and Politics of the Danube: An Interdisciplinary Study* (The Hague 1964), 155–156. Juridical interpretations from that period are also included in Giorgio Conetti, *Il regime internazionale della navigazione danubiana* (Milan 1970).

86 P.G. Fandikov, *Mezhdunarodno-pravovoi rezhim Dunaia: istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow 1955), 6–9

87 Paul Gogeanu, *Dunărea în relațiile internaționale* (Bucharest 1970); Iulian Cârțână and Ilie Seftiu, *Dunărea în istoria poporului român* (Bucharest 1972).

88 Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *Dunărea, Marea Neagră și Puterile Centrale, 1878–1898* (Cluj-Napoca 1982).

89 Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră* cit.

scholar, Spiridon G. Focas, who wrote an authoritative account of the diplomatic and juridical dimensions of the Danube Question. Over about 700 pages, Focas tried ‘to emphasize the struggle for ascendancy among the European Great Powers for a free navigation at the Mouth of the Danube, and the antagonism within the riparians of the Lower Danube River’.⁹⁰ Another vital dimension in the organisation’s activity was minutely covered in the work of agronomist Charles William Steward Hartley, a descendant of Charles Augustus Hartley, the celebrated engineer-in-chief of the Commission. In a dense biographical study, the author touched upon the main phases of his ancestor’s hydraulic activity and his gradual ‘taming’ of the Lower Danube.⁹¹

In the past three decades interest in the Commission has greatly increased in Romania, especially in relation to the first manifestations of the country’s sovereign rights⁹² and its European aspirations.⁹³ Its activity has been ‘sold’ as proof of the long-standing interest of ‘Europe’ in the Lower Danube, and comprehensive monographs of the organisation have been published by historians Ștefan Stanciu⁹⁴ and Alexandru Ioan Suciuciu.⁹⁵ Both are based on official sources from Romanian central and regional archives, and both follow a political-juridical narrative with Romania’s ‘moral’ and ‘just’ position placed at the core of their discourse. Other dissertations look at the Commission from the perspective of the economic or political interests of various member states, such as Great Britain or France.⁹⁶

90 Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River: In the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to 1948* (Boulder and New York 1987), IV.

91 C.W.S. Hartley, *A Biography of Sir Charles Hartley. Civil Engineer (1825–1915). The Father of the Danube*, two volumes (Lampeter 1989); another valuable paper on Hartley is David Turnock, ‘Sir Charles Hartley and the Development of Romania’s Lower Danube – Black Sea Commerce in the Late Nineteenth Century,’ in: *Anglo-Romanian Relations after 1821* (Iași 1983), 75–95.

92 Daniela Bușă, ‘Internaționalizarea Dunării, rolul CED și drepturile riveranilor (1856–1914),’ *Revista Istorică* n.s. 16.5–6 (2005): 11–24.

93 Alexandru Ghișă, ‘Stages in the Institutional Establishment of Danube Cooperation From the European Commission of the Danube to the Danube Commission,’ *Transylvanian Review* 19.4 (2010): 130–140; idem, ‘“L’affaire du Danube” et l’eupéanité de la Roumanie,’ *Danubius* 32 (2014): 223–248.

94 Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002).

95 Alexandru Ioan Suciuciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării (1856–1948)* (Constanța 2005).

96 Constantin Ardeleanu, *Evoluția intereselor economice și politice britanice la gurile Dunării (1829–1914)* (Brăila 2008); Mihaela Munteanu, *România, Marile Puteri și Problema Dunării*.

More recently the topic has been revisited by various scholars, who have employed modern approaches and contextualised the Commission's activity amongst similar examples of inter-imperial cooperation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁹⁷ Historian Luminița Gătejel has looked at various instances of cooperation within the Commission (presented as a 'collective actor'), mainly in relation to the hydraulic works for 'civilising' a backward river on Europe's periphery.⁹⁸ Geographers have insisted on the production of knowledge by an early IO, and the environmental results of the Commission's works in the Danube Delta, today an internationally protected ecosystem.⁹⁹ Anthropologists have scrutinised the memory of the Commission, an organisation associated in the town of Sulina with the local community's golden age.¹⁰⁰ Legal experts have placed the Commission among similar IOs involved in shaping international fluvial and maritime law.¹⁰¹ Political scientist Yuan (Joanne) Yao has examined the construction of the meaning of several international rivers, including the Danube, at the three critical junctures in European politics during the nineteenth century: the 1815 Congress of Vienna, the 1856 Peace of Paris and the 1885 Berlin Colonial Conference.¹⁰²

The conclusion of this brief historiographical review is that while there has been a continuous interest in the Commission, for most of the past century scholarship on this IO has been highly ideologised and partisan. Academic

Premisele unei opțiuni diplomatice (1878–1883), PhD dissertation, 'Nicolae Iorga' Institute of History (Bucharest 2016).

- 97 Thiemeyer, 'Die Integration der Donau-Schifffahrt als Problem der europäischen Zeitgeschichte,' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009): 303–318.
- 98 Luminița Gătejel, 'Verkehr, Warenfluss und Wissenstransfer. Überlegung zu einer internationalen Geschichte der Unteren Donau (1829–1918),' *Südost-Forschungen* 73.1 (2014): 414–428; eadem, 'Imperial Cooperation at the Margins of Europe: the European Commission of the Danube, 1856–65,' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 24.5 (2017): 781–800; eadem, 'Building a Better Passage to the Sea: Engineering and River Management at the Mouth of the Danube, 1829–61,' *Technology and Culture* 59.4 (2018): 925–953.
- 99 Ștefan Constantinescu, Liviu Giosan and Alfred Vespremeanu-Stroe, 'A Cartographical Perspective to the Engineering Works at the Sulina Mouth, the Danube Delta,' *Acta Geodaetica et Geophysica Hungarica* 45.1 (2010): 71–79.
- 100 K.V. Assche, Petruța Teampău, P. Devlieger and C. Suci, 'Liquid Boundaries in Marginal Marshes: Reconstructions of Identity in the Romanian Danube Delta,' *Studia Sociologia* 53.1 (2008): 115–133.
- 101 Marc de Decker, *Europees Internationaal Rivierenrecht* (Antwerp 2015), 191–207.
- 102 Yao, *Constructing the Ideal River: the 19th Century Origins of the First International Organizations*, PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science (London 2016); eadem, 'Conquest from Barbarism' cit.

works have generally followed a political-institutional narrative, wherein the multilateral activity of this institution has been rather thinly and narrowly depicted. Things have changed in the last quarter-century, and a growing number of scholars from around the world and from various academic disciplines have focussed on the Commission's multifaceted history. This book aims to make good use of this literature and, through further recourse to recent scholarship in transnational history, international relations and security studies, to produce an account of the creation and evolution of the Commission as an IO that crafted a functional security regime at the Maritime Danube. So rather than being a simple monograph of the Commission, this approach aims to illuminate its contribution to removing the sources of uncertainty that had turned navigation along the Maritime Danube into an unsafe and costly venture. The nexus between technology, commercial exchanges and the political sphere allows for a multi-semantic understanding of security as both an objective state and the proactive actions taken to enforce that ideal state. The institutional history of the Commission will be supplemented with a biographical approach, by integrating stories of key influential individuals who contributed to its making.

6 Outline of the Book

This monograph is divided into ten chapters, nine of which analyse different aspects of the Commission's history from its origins until the First World War, when the organisation entered a long transformative phase that would gradually alter its membership structure, powers, and ability to regulate and control navigation along the Maritime Danube. Rather than following a strict chronological order, these chapters are organised around topics, approaches and analytical layers relevant to the making of a security regime in the Danube Delta area.

In a brief outline, and having the Commission personified as the main protagonist, the volume will introduce the circumstances in which the organisation was born, the founding principles that fleshed it out, its maturation into a solid juridical person, the works done for 'taming' its physical environment, its sources of income, its gradual professionalisation and independence, and the modernisation of its habitation.

The first chapter details the forms of navigational insecurity and commercial uncertainty that ruled in the Russian Danube Delta in the context of emerging Russophobia on the continent. Russia's tight control of navigation in its territorial waters collided with the economic interests of western entrepreneurs,

involved in trading Danubian grain on the world markets. The chapter looks at the creation of shipping insecurity, epitomised by the little town of Sulina, the hometown of a troublesome 'piratical republic'.

Staying on this first diplomatic layer, the analysis of the international political context in which Europe's Great Powers found a solution to the Danube Question during and in the aftermath of the Crimean War follows in Chapter 2. The internationalisation and institutionalisation of Danube navigation created exceptional juridical instruments that added to previous interpretations of the 1815 Vienna Treaty. Such instruments contributed to broadening the institutional legacy of the Commission, taken as an example for further cooperation along international waterways.

The third chapter looks at the early history of the Commission and focuses on its relations with its host states, its inner structure, decision-making mechanisms, and its gradual transformation into an autonomous organ. Its authority increased over time with attributes acquired from below and relevant episodes are presented on the Commission's agency in bringing stability to the Danube Delta.

Chapter 4 looks at the organisation's technical programme of removing the physical obstacles along the Maritime Danube. Charles Augustus Hartley is the hero of this part: as the organisation's engineer-in-chief he coordinated the transnational efforts that 'civilised' the Danube and turned the Commission into a successful techno-political organisation. The clash between man and nature will thus move the reader between the second and the third layers of analysis.

Chapter 5 examines the Commission's funding and its struggle to become a financially independent organisation. To achieve this, it required a great European cooperative effort, but it also pushed the organisation onto a path of standardisation and simplification in its taxation practices.

Chapter 6 evaluates the many challenges that threatened the survival of the Commission in one of the most critical periods of its existence. Starting with rival economic ventures (from the construction of a railway and Romania's plan to have its own independent seaport all the way to the hegemonic aspirations of Europe's imperial powers), the Commission was threatened by external forces in its local and larger European political and economic environments. The presentation follows the efforts of John Stokes, Britain's commissioner, to safeguard the Commission against such systemic threats and allow it time to harden into a solid organ.

Chapter 7 details the inner structure of the Commission, one of the early examples of transnational bureaucracy. It further analyses the context in which the international civil service was created, and its work in regulating shipping

along the Danube through a comprehensive set of internationally accepted rules and procedures.

Chapter 8 discusses Romania's diplomatic struggles to impose its jurisdiction over its section of the Danube, threatened by its larger imperial neighbours, Russia and Austria-Hungary. Romania turned the Lower Danube into the core of its national programme, while the Commission assumed a new role, as a political actor in the international system.

Chapter 9 zooms in on the town of Sulina, the operational hometown of the Commission, and the place where the organisation played a major contribution in transforming the urban and security landscape of a cosmopolitan community. It analyses the instruments used by the Commission to impose law and order and how the organisation became a major provider in relation to other types of security that threatened both the local community and river navigation.

Lastly, Chapter 10 follows the history of the Commission throughout the twentieth century, allowing readers some general information about its institutional metamorphosis during the interwar period and in post-war times, when under Soviet leadership the 'Danube was returned to the Danubian states'. The Danube Commission,¹⁰³ now based in Budapest, is the Commission's legal offspring, though the Commission is perhaps the only example of an IO that functioned in exile in the heyday of the Cold War. The Commission is the main 'actor' of this volume, which follows its multifaceted history, little known among scholars looking at the origins of international cooperation.

103 See official website – <http://www.danubecommission.org/dc/en/>.

Russophobia, Free Trade and Maritime Insecurity

Unfortunately, no parties here in the Danube have any direct interest in clearing the bar or facilitating the navigation; or if they have, they have no direct influence with the Russian authorities.

Vice-Consul ST VINCENT LLOYD, 1853



1 Urquhart, Russophobia and Danube Navigation

By the summer of 1853 the ominous prediction of David Urquhart seemed to finally come true. For about two decades this ‘knight-errant of justice and liberty’¹ or rather frantic and megalomaniac Scottish publicist had been warning the British public against Russia’s imperial ambitions. With Russian troops marching into the Principalities, it was high time for Britain’s political leadership to acknowledge the threat, and hopefully defend European civilisation along its ultimate frontier – the Lower Danube.

Russia’s control of the Danube Delta had been one of Urquhart’s leitmotifs in fleshing out the Russian menace. In distant and thinly-populated oozing marshes, Russia concocted ingenious plans to subdue the world. With his flair for conspiracies, Urquhart had sensed the danger and fought against it with his strongest weapon: his pen. The Scotsman was extremely prolific in publishing anti-Russian texts, and his radical views had been so popular since the 1830s that he, more than any other author, is credited with shaping the character and tone of British Russophobia.² His contribution to the genesis and dissemination of stereotypes on Russia has often been reviewed by historians, who have, however, focussed their narratives on other of Urquhart’s favourite ‘targets’. As

1 Gertrude Robinson, *David Urquhart, Some Chapters in the Life of a Victorian Knight-Errant of Justice and Liberty* (Oxford 1920).

2 John Howse Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain 1815–1841* (Cambridge MA 1950), 286.

the main narrative voice of this chapter, Urquhart will guide readers through the tortuous waters of the Maritime Danube and the area's commercial uncertainty in pre-Crimean War times. Switching between the first and the third analytical layers, i.e. between international politics and the many threats of Danubian swamps, I will discuss this little-known episode of the Eastern Question, born with the coming of capitalism to the Black Sea area and nourished by Russia's failure to govern one of its peripheral territories. Insecurity, which had an important economic dimension,³ was epitomised by the little town of Sulina, where a tight community of transnational 'bandits' earned huge profits by taking advantage of local natural hindrances, when not purposely supplementing them with artificial ones. The rather detailed description of these hazards and of the state of anarchy in which local commercial circles conducted their business are intended to explain the victors' decision to establish the European Commission of the Danube in 1856.

Urquhart closely followed southeast European political and economic developments from the beginning of his public career. This started in 1833, when he published his first book, *Turkey and Its Resources*. Timing was perfect for his remarkable endeavour: the conclusion of the Russian-Ottoman Treaty of Hünkâr İskelessi (8 July 1833) had placed the Eastern Question high on Europe's diplomatic agenda. A war scare followed in the mid-1830s and a cold war dragged Britain and Russia further apart, while making the Ottoman Empire a vital component of Europe's security structure. With his well-timed publication, Urquhart became an authority in the pioneering field of what can now be termed 'Ottoman area studies'.⁴ His expertise was, nevertheless, deeply biased by his ideological beliefs and political opinions.

In the following couple of years Urquhart restlessly toured southeastern Europe and the Black Sea area in a state-sponsored mission aiming to encourage British commercial ventures in a little explored periphery of the Ottoman lands. He also got into closer contact with John Ponsonby, British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte since 1833. Urquhart's cooperation with the Foreign Office

3 For the role of economic insecurities in building a European security culture see Glenda Sluga, 'Economic Insecurity, "Securities" and a European Security Culture after the Napoleonic Wars,' in: Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan and Brian Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge 2019), 288–305.

4 Margaret Lamb, 'The Making of a Russophobe: David Urquhart: The Formative Years, 1825–1835,' *International History Review* 3 (1981): 351. This part is an abbreviation of a larger article, published in Constantin Ardeleanu, 'The Danube Navigation in the Making of David Urquhart's Russophobia (1833–1837),' *Transylvanian Review* 19 (2010), sup. 5: 337–352; the entire context is presented in Ardeleanu, *International Trade and Diplomacy at the Lower Danube. The Sulina Question and the Economic Premises of the Crimean War (1829–1853)* (Brăila 2014).

and the Board of Trade was formalised in September 1835, when he was appointed secretary of the British Embassy to Istanbul.

Given his radical views, Urquhart was hardly qualified for diplomatic service. In his public appearances he more often than not perorated on his own very strong anti-Russian ideas. In a magazine, edited since November 1835 in English and French (*The Portfolio, or a Collection of State Papers*), he and his associates went public and disclosed Russia's malefic plans. Everything was part of an intricate conspiracy to appeal to his Russophobe audience. This historical Wikileaks revealed Russian diplomatic correspondence that exposed Emperor Nicholas I's autocratic aims, a vital threat to Europe's political balance and peace. Although the leaks were supplied by Polish sources, Urquhart's diplomatic position made *The Portfolio* look like an official mouthpiece of the British Foreign Office,⁵ further crippling the already strained relations between the governments in London and St Petersburg.

Urquhart and his adepts saved a special place in their narrative for the Black Sea and the Lower Danube, both depicted as state-of-the-art laboratories of Russian intrigue. In the marshy islands of the Danube Delta, Urquhart claimed, Russia contrived and perfected the vicious means that were to be employed for accomplishing much more grandiose political aims.

The Scotsman had two main reasons to point to the Danube Delta and signal the vital interests Russia was threatening with its tighter control over an area barely known to British statesmen or the public alike. Firstly, the Lower Danube was a symbolic border between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Russia had reached the Danube in 1812, after annexing the eastern half of the principality of Moldavia, a territory that came to be called Bessarabia. In 1829 (through the provisions of the Treaty of Adrianople), imperial Russia took possession of the entire Danube Delta. For Urquhart, the Danube was a red line that Europe had to secure against Russia's territorial insatiability. The defence of Istanbul and of the Sublime Porte, a crucial counterweight for Europe's political stability, started in the two areas most exposed to Russia's direct pressure on both sides of the Black Sea: in the Principalities and in Circassia.⁶ Secondly, the economy of the Lower Danubian area was growing by leaps and bounds, fuelled by the introduction of steamship navigation on the river and the export of cheap grain crops from the Principalities. For Urquhart and his associates,

5 Charles K. Webster, 'Urquhart, Ponsonby and Palmerston,' *English Historical Review* 62 (1947): 331. More in Jean Marchand, '*The Portfolio* de David Urquhart. Une entreprise anglaise de divulgation des documents secrets russes (1835-1845),' *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 75 (1961): 136-144.

6 Charles King, 'Imagining Circassia: David Urquhart and the Making of North Caucasus Nationalism,' *Russian Review* 66.2 (2007): 238-255.

the Danube was fated to become, given the rich resources of its basin, one of the most important highways of European trade. Everything was, however, at the mercy of Russia, which had no interest in allowing the economic development of territories that started to trade 'raw materials which compete with her [Russia's] own produce'.⁷

Russian control in the Danube Delta was one of the favourite case studies of *The Portfolio* and of other similar Russophobe outlets popular in Western Europe. References to the commercial prospects of Danubian lands were accompanied by the exposure of Russia's malicious designs aiming to destroy its potential economic rivals. The Danube Delta was the ultimate battleground in the enduring conflict between good and evil, and Urquhart pictured himself as the augur fated to read the signs and omens of the future clash between imperial titans.

But he was not a mere soldier in a war of words. In 1835 Urquhart visited the Principalities and encouraged a more active anti-Russian political line. He supported direct economic initiatives, such as the activity of a commercial house established in Wallachia by two fellow Scotsmen, George Bell and Andrew Lockhart Anderson.⁸ To liberals such as Urquhart, free trade was one of the best solutions to checking Russia's advance towards the Turkish Straits: 'Let extensive depots of English wares be established on the Danube and at Trebizonde', he wrote, and 'Turkey will find in them better support than in fleets or armies'. Implanting western economic interests into two inter-imperial buffer zones across the Black Sea, in the Principalities and Circassia, was part of a clear anti-Russian political programme.⁹

In February 1836 Russia established a quarantine service along its Danubian border. This was necessary from a sanitary perspective, given the virulent plague and cholera epidemics that had been raging in that area during the previous decade. However, local merchants readily regarded the quarantine as a gratuitous obstacle in the way of unimpeded trade and shipping both towards and from the ports of the Principalities, which were Ottoman vassal states. Foreign captains complained that their ships were arbitrarily and aggressively

7 David Urquhart, *Turkey and Its Resources: Its Municipal Organisation and Free Trade; the State and Prospects of English Commerce in the East, the New Administration of Greece, Its Revenue and National Possessions* (London 1833), 164.

8 E.D. Tappe, 'Bell and Anderson: a Scottish Partnership in Wallachia,' *Balkan Studies* 12.2 (1971): 479–484; Cornelia Bodea, 'David Urquhart, the Principalities and the Romanian National Movement,' *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire* 7 (1985): 207–230; Paul Cernovodeanu, 'Implicațiile de ordin politic ale activității și falimentului casei de comerț "Bell & Anderson" din București (1834–1836),' *Studii și materiale de istorie modernă* 12 (1998): 4–5.

9 Urquhart, *Turkey and Its Resources*, 174.

approached by Russian gunboats, which, under sanitary pretences, 'boarded, visited, detained, examined and annoyed every vessel passing up the Danube'.¹⁰

At the same time, the depth of the only navigable mouth of the Danube, Sulina, gradually decreased. Russian Sulina was turned into the gateway of the Danube, which Russia could open or close according to its interests. For Russophobic circles, this was an experiment used to test international reactions. The ultimate gateway Russia aimed to master lay further south: it was the Turkish Straits.

Interpellations on Russia's quarantine followed in the British Parliament, apparently instigated by Urquhart himself,¹¹ and several MPs denounced Russia's open aggression on British and international trade.¹² British Foreign Secretary Viscount Palmerston referred to the articles of the 1815 Congress of Vienna guaranteeing free navigation to all nations.¹³ By July 1836, Palmerston sent to St Petersburg an official note of protest, in which he considered that the establishment of the quarantine was the first step of a larger plan to close off the Danube for international trade.¹⁴

Urquhart visited the Principalities again in the summer of 1836, when he probably orchestrated the attempt to overtly challenge Russia's possession of Circassia, with juridical implications for the entire Black Sea area.¹⁵ He was involved in organising the voyage of the British schooner 'Vixen', which attempted to take a cargo of Wallachian salt to the seaport of Sudzhuk-Kale

10 'Navigation of the Danube,' *Portfolio* 2 (1836): 468; Urquhart, *The Mystery of the Danube. Showing How through Secret Diplomacy That River Has Been Closed, Exportation from Turkey Arrested, and the Re-Opening of the Isthmus of Suez Prevented* (London 1851), 29. See also The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Foreign Office, FO 78/288, f. 80–81 (Consul R.G. Colquhoun to Viscount Palmerston, Bucharest, 30 April 1836).

11 Urquhart, *The Mystery*, 32; Gleason, *The Genesis*, 189.

12 Urquhart, *The Mystery*, 29; idem, *Progress of Russia in the West, North and South, by Opening the Sources of Opinion and Appropriating the Channels of Wealth and Power* (London 1853), 313.

13 *Hansard's Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 32, *House of Commons Debates*, 20 April 1836, 1260–1309. A modern view on the Vienna 1815 principles in Joep Schenk, 'National Interest Versus Common Interest: The Netherlands and the Liberalization of Rhine Navigation at the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815),' in: Ruud van Dijk, Samuël Kruizinga, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Rimko van der Maara (eds.), *Shaping the International Relations of the Netherlands, 1815–2000* (London 2018), 13–31.

14 Radu R. Florescu, *The Struggle against Russia in the Romanian Principalities: A Problem in Anglo-Turkish Diplomacy 1821–1854*, 2nd ed. (Iași 1997), 291–292.

15 G.H. Bolsover, 'Lord Ponsonby and the Eastern Question (1833–1839),' *Slavonic and East European Review* 13 (1934–1935): 111.

(present-day Novorossiysk, Russia). 'Vixen' was seized by a Russian warship,¹⁶ which sparked a diplomatic conflict, but did not end, as Urquhart had hoped, in open military confrontation. As Urquhart had increasing frictions with Ambassador Ponsonby (whose instructions the Scotsman openly defied), Palmerston decided to remove him from diplomatic service. Back in London, Urquhart had two stormy interviews with Palmerston (July 1837), which convinced him that the Foreign Secretary was a traitor, probably in the pay of the Russian government.¹⁷

To Urquhart, Russia was a despotic and tyrannical power, hungry to subdue the entire civilised world, and people needed to be informed about this vast conspiracy. Perhaps minor, unimportant or even unknown to many of his naïve countrymen, the Danube was illustrative of what was coming. With regular upsurges of anti-Russian feelings and prejudices throughout the western world, it is perhaps worth historicising the genesis of Russophobia along the lines drawn by American historians John Howse Gleason, Raymond T. McNally or Albert Resis.¹⁸ In the pre-Crimean War context, the Russian threat was constructed via successful authors like Urquhart or Frenchman Astolphe-Louis-Léonor, Marquis de Custine, who played a major role in mobilising public opinion in Britain and France. In Urquhart's narrative, portraying the true character of the enemy proved convincing exactly through his references to individual case studies, such as the complications of the Danubian quarantine, where Russia's actions were detrimental to general European commercial interests.

2 Grain and Steamship

Urquhart's radical political views were accompanied by a coherent economic vision. He was a liberal promoting free trade who believed that economic development contributed to building a better world. By the mid-1830s Urquhart was involved in drafting a new commercial treaty between Britain and the Ottoman Porte, which eventually led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Balta Liman (1838). While such a 'colonial' agreement is still controversial among scholars interested in its economic and political outcomes, it did manage to

16 Harold N. Ingle, *Nesselrode and the Russian Rapprochement with Britain, 1836-1844* (Berkeley 1976), 63-72.

17 Gleason, *The Genesis*, 197.

18 Gleason, *The Genesis* cit.; Raymond T. McNally, 'The Origins of Russophobia in France: 1812-1830,' *American Slavic and East European Review* 17.2 (1958): 173-189 and Albert Resis, 'Russophobia and the "Testament" of Peter the Great, 1812-1980,' *Slavic Review* 44.4 (1985): 681-693.

attract to the Ottoman Empire hordes of western entrepreneurs, who started to explore the resources of the Principalities (a privileged area of the Ottoman dominions) too. Two factors were already changing the economic fate of the region – steamship navigation and the large grain harvests of the Principalities – and Urquhart readily advertised them both in his texts.

Steam navigation was introduced on the upper river in 1830, and the success of the ‘Austrian Danube Steamship Company’ (*Erste Donau-Dampfschiffahrts-Gesellschaft*, hereafter DDSG) made its management operate by 1836 a safe, comfortable and continuous voyage between Vienna and Istanbul on board modern Austrian steamers. In 1844, after mediation by Chancellor Metternich, the maritime section of the route was taken over by the ‘Österreichischer Lloyd’, and the DDSG focused on its fluvial operations. From 1846 onwards a packet of the ‘Russian Steam Navigation Company’ ran between Odessa and Galați, making the Moldavian port-city of Galați a growing hub on the inter-imperial routes connecting the Austrian, Russian and Ottoman empires.¹⁹

By the provisions of the Treaty of Adrianople, the Principalities could pursue free trade, and their agricultural production and export capacities increased exponentially once their products started to be integrated into the capitalist world economy.²⁰ The inland ports of Brăila and Galați were the major centres of this prosperous grain trade. Soon, the two outlets were granted privileges (free port regimes) meant to further boost their economic development. If, initially, the Danube was mainly visited by Ottoman, Greek or Sardinian vessels involved in regional trading networks, by the 1840s ships from western and northern Europe were starting to rush to the Black Sea, which had become one of the largest grain-exporting basins in the world. Hundreds of Austrian and British ships, especially after the great famine in Ireland and the abolishment of the Corn Laws in Great Britain, loaded Danubian grain at Brăila and Galați. In quantitative data, from an average number of about ten British ships per year in the late 1830s, British shipping at the Lower Danube increased to annual averages of more than 250 ships in the early 1850s. About 40 per cent of all vessels clearing the mouths of the Danube carried grain directly to British ports.²¹

19 Ardeleanu, ‘From Vienna to Constantinople on Board the Vessels of the Austrian Danube Steam-Navigation Company (1834–1842);’ *Historical Yearbook* 6 (2009): 187–202 and idem, *International Trade*, 22–28.

20 Ardeleanu, *International Trade*, 53–56.

21 Cernovodeanu, Beatrice Marinescu and Irina Gavrilă, ‘Comerțul britanic prin Galați și Brăila între 1837–1852,’ *Revista de Istorie* 31.4 (1978): 634; Cernovodeanu and Marinescu, ‘British Trade in the Danubian Ports of Galatz and Braila between 1837 and 1853,’ *Journal of European Economic History* 8.3 (1979): 707–741; Constantin Ap. Vacalopoulos, ‘Données

In less than two decades, the Lower Danube became a busy waterway for thousands of travellers who voyaged between Central Europe and the thriving Ottoman and Russian outlets of the Black Sea. The area had been almost completely absent from travellers' routes before the mid-1830s, and references to local goods directed even more entrepreneurs to explore the commercial prospects of Brăila and Galați. On the mental maps of businessmen in Istanbul, Izmir, Trieste or Marseille and of statesmen in Vienna, London, Paris or Turin, the Lower Danube was Europe's new California, a land of milk and honey and grain. However, the route towards the Principalities passed through the Danube Delta, an underworld with moving sands and tortuous channels, jealously guarded by a monstrous Russian Cerberus.

The story of the Lower Danube in the 1830s is a perfect illustration of how economic and political interests rapidly emerge once an area gets connected to the routes of the world economy. Part of a contested Ottoman borderland and of a functional regional economy centred in Istanbul, Moldavia and Wallachia enjoyed a favourable constellation that challenged their role in Europe's eastern periphery. Raw materials could be freely circulated due to new liberal legislation and modern means of transportation. Merchants from Mediterranean and western deposit ports expanded their business to the Danubian outlets and included them in complex mercantile networks. Travellers visited the area and reported on its economic prospects, making even more entrepreneurs aware of its profitability. The growing businesses of Brăila and Galați made governments look closer to the Lower Danube, appoint consuls to represent their fellow tradesmen and require from them reports on the Principalities' political situation. With the Lower Danube representing an inter-imperial boundary and junction, geopolitical reasons also made their way into this equation in which economic and political interests were closely intertwined.

3 Danubian Hindrances

In 1829 Russia annexed the Danube Delta, and shipping towards the ports of Moldavia and Wallachia continued along the middle or Sulina branch of the river, sections of which fell completely within Russian territory. According to international agreements, Russia was responsible for keeping the channel navigable; however, during the following two decades shipping conditions in the Maritime Danube went from bad to worse. By the mid-1830s it was a widely

statistiques sur la prédominance du potentiel hellénique dans la navigation et le commerce au bas Danube (1837–1858); *Balkan Studies* 21 (1980): 107–116.

held belief among local merchants and diplomats that the Russian authorities aimed to 'strangle' Danubian shipping; thus they would limit the growth of Brăila and Galați, which threatened to become commercial rivals of Odessa and other outlets in the Ukrainian parts of the Russian Empire.

There were plenty of reasons to think that everything was part of a malefic plan. As no fortress could be erected along the Lower Danube, quarantine stations were allegedly provided with similar control and defence functions.²² The 'excessive' actions by Russia in taking sanitary precautions were doubled by an equally noticeable 'inaction' in keeping the Maritime Danube open for international navigation. The most difficult obstacle for shippers was the Sulina bar, the sandbank accumulated at the junction of river and sea, which made shipping more insecure and costly.²³

Austria and Britain were the states whose economic interests seemed most harmed by Russia's Danubian policy. The Habsburg government pursued a line of cooperation with Russia, and in 1836 secured simpler shipping procedures for vessels hoisting the Austrian flag. In 1840 a special convention was signed in St Petersburg, by which Danube's navigation was declared 'completely free' and the Russian government agreed to execute all the works necessary 'to stop the silting up of the Sulina Mouth and to make this passage practicable, so as to no longer be a hindrance to navigation'. Austrian ships were to pay a toll for covering the costs of engineering and maintenance works.²⁴ As the agreement was signed by the Russian Chancellor Nesselrode and enjoyed the backing of the Tsar, it looked like there existed the highest possible political commitment to resolve this question.

Britain, on the other hand, refused to accept the payment of a toll, and insisted on the application of the 1815 Vienna principles. Article 113 stipulated that each state 'shall maintain the necessary works in order that no obstruction shall be experienced by the navigation',²⁵ so Russia was responsible for keeping its section of an international waterway open for the navigation of all interested nations.

22 TNA, FO 78/290, f. 138 (Consul Samuel Gardner to Palmerston, Jassy, 18 October 1836).

23 Manfred Sauer, 'Österreich und die Sulina-Frage, 1829–1854,' *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* 40 (1987): 185–236 and 41 (1990): 72–137.

24 *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1839–1840, vol. 28 (London 1857), 1060–1063; Ștefan Stanciu and Alexandru Duță, *Traités, conventions et autres documents concernant le régime de la navigation du Danube maritime* (Galați 2003), 12–14. Also see 'Occupation of Sulina by Russia,' *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist* 91 (1851): 145–147; Vernon John Puryear, *International Economics and Diplomacy in the Near East. A Study of British Commercial Policy in the Levant 1834–1853* (Stanford 1935), 144–145; Ardeleanu, *Evoluția intereselor economice și politice britanice la gurile Dunării (1829–1914)* (Brăila 2008), 52–53.

25 Urquhart, *The Mystery*, 30.

The frustration of western diplomats increased in the late 1840s, when hundreds of ships loading grain at Brăila and Galați incurred great additional costs because of the low clearance depth over the Sulina bar. In London, Paris and Vienna it became clear that, despite its official commitments, Russia used its hold over the Danube Delta as a means of obstructing the prosperity of its commercial rivals upstream the Danube. With repeated references to the 1815 Vienna principles, the British Foreign Office suggested that it was perhaps advisable 'to have a meeting of representatives of the river-bordering states in the same manner as has been done for the Rhine and the Elbe'.²⁶

Besides trying to resolve the question through diplomatic avenues, interested parties also came up with several technical solutions. One such idea was proposed in December 1839 by merchants and ship-owners based in inland Danubian ports: they intended to establish a private company that was to purchase and operate a dredging machine and thus remove navigational obstacles along the Maritime Danube.²⁷ Another idea vehiculated since the 1830s was to bypass the embouchures of the Danube (and thus avoid Russian waters) by means of a canal or railway built in the narrowest area of Dobrudja.²⁸ Austrian, Prussian, British and Ottoman engineers and diplomats tried to estimate the viability of the canal project, and Urquhart was one of the strongest adepts of its materialisation.²⁹ Not least of all, after surveys conducted in the 1840s, it was proposed to open to international navigation the southern (St George) branch of the river, bordered by Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

26 *Correspondence with the Russian Government Respecting the Obstructions to the Navigation of the Sulina Channel of the Danube* (London 1853), 16–17 (Palmerston to John Bloomfield, London, 4 November 1850); more on this in Ardeleanu, 'Russian-British Rivalry Regarding Danube Navigation and the Origins of the Crimean War (1846–1853),' *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 19.2 (2010): 165–186 and idem, *International Trade*, 133–252.

27 *Prospectus of a Company to Keep Water on the Bar at the Soulina Mouth of the Danube at a Greater Depth* (TNA, FO 78/409. f. 224–227; FO 195/136, f. 535; FO 195/168, f. 473); Cernovodeanu, *Relațiile comerciale româno-engleze în contextul politicii orientale a Marii Britanii (1803–1878)* (Cluj-Napoca 1986), 95–96; Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River: In the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to the Conference of Belgrade of 1948* (Boulder and New York 1987), 195–197.

28 Stoica Lascu, 'Mărturii documentare privind elaborarea unor proiecte ale Canalului Dunăre – Marea Neagră,' *Revista de Istorie* 37.6 (1984): 534–555 and idem, 'Proiecte românești ale canalului Dunăre – Marea Neagră (1850–1940),' in: Valentin Ciorbea and Ovidiu Cușța (eds.), *Canalul Dunăre – Marea Neagră între istorie, actualitate și perspective* (Constanța 2008), 21–39.

29 Urquhart, *The Mystery*, 107. Similar remarks in idem, *Progress of Russia*, 353.

4 Banditry and Corruption in Russian Sulina

Geopolitical and military calculations made the Danube Delta a strategic hold on Russia's border with the Ottoman Empire. Economically, however, the area was too eccentric to the Russian Empire's southern provinces to enjoy any major relevance within the imperial economy. But being the 'gate' of the river, the Danube Delta was vital for the interests of riparian states and of their main commercial partners. Russia's top politicians were divided in how to best use this strategic position: Count Egor Kankrin (Russia's finance minister) and some of the commercial elites in Odessa favoured the use of the quarantine to hinder trade on the Danube; other Odessite merchants were, however, interested in taking advantage of the economic opportunities provided by the new Danubian market. This latter opinion seems to have been supported by statesmen such as Nicholas I, Chancellor Nesselrode and Count Mikhail Vorontsov, Governor-General of New Russia and Bessarabia, who also valued the importance of Russia's diplomatic entente with Austria.³⁰

As Vorontsov reported, the Russians could gain significant advantages by making good use of their Danubian gateway.³¹ His correspondence proves that he was keen to remove navigational hindrances, especially after concluding the July 1840 convention with Austria. In 1843, an Austrian agent, Ferdinand Mayerhofer von Grünbühel, inspected the Lower Danube and reported that the Russians had fulfilled most of their obligations, except for securing a convenient depth over the Sulina bar.³²

Sulina was the smallest of Danube's three branches, carrying only about 10 per cent of its flow. It had several problems along its extremely meandering course, but at its mouth its depth permitted medium and large vessels to enter and leave the river without lightening their cargo. Seasonal works for clearing the bar were, however, needed and such activities were reported in the late eighteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire controlled the region.

After annexing the Danube Delta and moving its *cordon sanitaire* along the Sulina branch, Russia invested in developing the homonymous town of Sulina. Soon after its 'formal' rebirth in 1836, it became the *de facto* transhipment

30 Valentin Tomuleț and Andrei Emilciuc. 'Un document inedit despre măsurile guvernului rus de contracarare a concurenței porturilor Galați și Brăila în favoarea comerțului prin portul Odessa,' *Analele Universității "Dunărea de Jos" din Galați. Istorie* 11 (2012): 35–55.

31 *Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova*, vol. 40 (Moscow 1895), 213 (Count M. Vorontsov to Chancellor Nesselrode, Odessa, 26 February 1837).

32 Sauer, 'Österreich,' II: 98–99.

centre of Danubian trade.³³ By the late 1840s, Sulina was ‘made of 120 houses settled on the right bank of the river without the smallest regularity’. A Russian garrison was quartered there, but it was outnumbered by new inhabitants, ‘traffickers or owners of small lighters’, who made the most of the busy river trade and shipping.³⁴ Later in the 1850s a British traveller would call Sulina a ‘veritable American Eden’, where an entire community flourished due to the navigational problems of the vessels calling at the Danube.³⁵

With the growth of international navigation toward the rich grain outlets of the Principalities, Russian Sulina became the haven and heaven of several hundred entrepreneurs who exploited the changing depth of the Sulina bar. Through its strategic position, Sulina became, to paraphrase Valeska Huber, a sort of mini-Suez, a global locality as an imperial relay station for merchants and ship-owners active in Danubian businesses.³⁶ Two businesses were extremely remunerative: lighterage and piloting, and both left room for numerous complaints from seafarers, who paid huge costs for such unruly services in Russian waters. It was this state of utter arbitrariness and disorder in relation to commercial practices that deprived trade of the most elementary guarantees of security.

A large fleet of lighters was employed along the Lower Danube to carry grain from upstream ports. Sources reported the fraudulent conduct of lightermen along the Maritime Danube: many of them were Greek sailors ‘who were little better than pirates’ and used all sorts of devices and practices to rob the cargoes entrusted to them.³⁷

The cost of lighterage depended on cargo, but profits were significant: the transportation of a cargo along the 100-mile long section of the Maritime Danube (from Brăila to Sulina) would cost at least a quarter of the freight from Sulina to London, a distance of more than 3,000 nautical miles. Such

33 As prophesied by Adolphus Slade, *Travels in Germany and Russia, Including a Steam Voyage by the Danube and the Euxine from Vienna to Constantinople, in 1838–39* (London 1840), 198.

34 Xavier Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse, exécuté par ordre du gouvernement français pendant les années 1846, 1847 et 1848*, vol. 1 (Paris 1854), 214–215. The same information in John Reynell Morell, *The Neighbours of Russia, and History of the Present War to the Siege of Sebastopol* (London, Edinburgh and New York 1854), 78–79.

35 The name was coined by Laurence Oliphant, *The Russian Shores of the Black Sea in the Autumn of 1852 with a Voyage Down the Volga, and a Tour through the Country of the Don Cossacks* (Edinburgh and London 1853), 339.

36 Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge and New York 2013).

37 John Stokes, ‘The Danube and Its Trade,’ *Journal of the Society of Arts* 38.1954 (2 May 1890): 563.

gains attracted local Russians officials, who, consular sources further claimed, took control of lighterage and eventually monopolised it. The officer in charge at Sulina, 'Major Soluviov, the nephew of General Fedorov, the Governor of Bessarabia', allegedly owned no fewer than 300 lighters. Interested parties were convinced that the officers at Sulina lived entirely from the misfortune of commercial vessels³⁸ and that they were responsible for the bad state of the Sulina passage.³⁹

As the British vice-consul to the Danube Delta would repeatedly state in his reports,

no parties here in the Danube have any direct interest in clearing the bar or facilitating the navigation [...]. The bar of Sulina furnishes the means of existence to the inhabitants of Sulina, by the employment of lighters, pilots, and the expenses incurred by the vessels during their detention.⁴⁰

Other problems emerged in relation to the decreasing depth of the navigable channel over the Sulina bar. To cope with local navigational hazards, shipmasters were advised to employ pilots. However, the profession was not clearly regulated, and accusations abounded about 'fake pilots' who purposely wrecked the ships they steered, working in collusion with onerous lightermen who immediately offered to rescue distressed vessels.

After 1846, most of the ships that loaded grain in the Principalities were detained at the economic choke point of Sulina. Shipmasters needed to hire lighters, onto which they transferred at least part of their cargo, and reloaded it in the roadstead. It was a difficult and dangerous operation. In fact, the frequency of shipwrecks earned the local roadstead its reputation as 'a veritable cemetery of ships'.⁴¹ Weather conditions prevalent in the Black Sea were blamed for

38 TNA, FO 195/136, f. 540 ('Report on the navigation of the Danube ...' drafted by Charles Cunningham, Galați, 6 February 1840); other details, according to an Austrian source, in Tudose Tatu, *Cheia Dunării împărătești. Sulina cea mălită* (Galați 2013), 152–155.

39 J.D. de Bois-Robert, *Nil et Danube. Souvenirs d'un touriste. Égypte, Turquie, Crimée, Provinces-Danubiennes* (Paris 1855), 319.

40 *Correspondence*, 50 (St Vincent Lloyd to Stratford Canning, Sulina, 4 June 1853). "It is not the interest of any parties, either of the local authorities themselves, or of the inhabitants of Sulina, that the obstacles to the navigation should be removed" – *ibid.*, 7 (Lloyd to Consul John Neale, Tulcea, 30 January 1850). See also Cernovodeanu, *Relațiile*, 132–133.

41 Thibault Lefebvre, *Études diplomatiques et économiques sur la Valachie* (Paris 1858), 358. The phrase was used in 'The Mouth of the Danube,' *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 26 July 1853. A list of vessels lost or damaged at Sulina in 1853 and 1854 – TNA, PRO 30–22/12C (Lord John Russell Papers), unnumbered (The Earl of Clarendon to Canning, London, 10 April 1855).

many disasters. A terrible gale in 1855 provoked the wrecking of 24 commercial ships and 60 lighters, with a toll of about 300 human casualties.⁴²

Western ship-owners and merchants accused the Russian authorities of being morally guilty for other disasters by refusing or being unable to remove the navigational obstacles from Sulina. On the one hand they alluded to the formal commitments of the Russian government to keep the Danube Delta safe for international trade and shipping, and on the other they denounced the community of corrupt Russian officials and unscrupulous transnational entrepreneurs whose unlawful and arbitrary behaviour increased natural insecurity.

The Russian government conducted several investigations into the political and military authorities of Sulina, who allegedly tolerated all these mistreatments.⁴³ In 1847, Nicholas I even sent to the Principalities and to Sulina a personal investigator, Radofnikin, who promised to solve all problems within a few months.⁴⁴ Hardly anything changed over the course of the coming years.

One has to mention though that through its position in relation to Russia, the Ottoman Empire and the Principalities, in a completely peripheral and unhealthy environment, Sulina and the Danube Delta were a paradise for all 'entrepreneurs' interested in maximising profits, irrespective of the official regulations that were designed to establish a climate of order and legality. Such 'pirates' are, in fact, illustrative of an unregulated market in a far-off imperial periphery. Unscrupulous profiteers in both private and official positions used informal networks and illicit practices to increase their benefits. This form of economic banditry is directly related to the development of the capitalist world system and it even had its own positive outcome in the penetration of capitalism to a marshy borderland.⁴⁵ But in the Russophobic environment of the time, the direct connection which could be made between the decreasing depth of the navigable channel and Russia's interests to protect its own ports was proof that Russia had no intention of removing the obstacles that hindered commercial navigation along the Maritime Danube.

42 'The Sulina Mouth of the Danube,' *Household Words, a Weekly Journal*, no. 307 (9 February 1856): 75–76; Charles Hartley, 'Description of the Delta of the Danube and of Works Recently Executed at the Sulina Mouth,' *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 21 (1862): 291.

43 Sauer, 'Österreich,' II: 102.

44 *The Education of a Russian Statesman: The Memoirs of Nicholas Karlovich Giers*, edited by Charles and Barbara Jelavich (Berkeley 1962), 221.

45 Thomas W. Gallant, 'Brigandage, Piracy, Capitalism, and State-Formation: Transnational Crime from a Historical World-Systems Perspective,' in: Josiah McC. Heyman (ed.), *States and Illegal Practices* (Oxford and New York 1999), 25–62.

5 'Mistrust', 'Remonstrances', 'Vexations'

'The whole and chief difficulty of the navigation of the Danube' was, according to a mid-nineteenth century account, 'that at its mouth the water is not always of a sufficient depth to admit large vessels' without lightering part of their cargo.⁴⁶

Reduced to only about 11 feet, frequently not more than 9 feet and sometimes measuring only 7 feet, from a reported depth of 15 feet in good, old Ottoman times, physical impediments resulted in considerable financial injuries for international shipping. This came from both the expense of transshipping the cargoes into lighters and from the dangers to which vessels and cargoes were exposed. The growth of British navigation after 1846 determined a proportional increase in the number of complaints regarding the state of the Sulina bar, which was causing losses amounting to at least £100,000 a year. The most prejudiced, on account of the superior size and draught of their vessels, were the British and Austrian ship-owners, whereas the main beneficiaries were the merchants of Odessa: additional expenses, determined by the cost of lighterage and the higher rates of insurance, increased the price of Danubian grain enough to place it on disadvantageous terms in comparison with that exported from the Russian Empire's southern ports.⁴⁷

When forwarded to the Russian government in St Petersburg, these complaints received positive replies, with Chancellor Nesselrode giving formal assurances that local authorities had clear orders to remove all obstacles. However, 'all that was required could not be effected as speedily as we [the British] seemed to expect'.⁴⁸ In the early 1850s a British manufactured steam dredging machine worked at the Sulina mouth to clear the passageway, but its activity rendered insufficient results, especially as the Russians lacked qualified personnel to properly operate the machine.

Prior to the Crimean War, the Sulina bar controversy played an important part in the diplomatic conflict between the British and Russian cabinets. Viscount Palmerston sent repeated dispatches to St Petersburg, referring to the Russian government's juridical responsibility, according to the provisions established at the Congress of Vienna, to guarantee the freedom of navigation on the Danube.⁴⁹ In the autumn of 1851, diplomatic relations were strained

46 'Occupation of Sulina': 145.

47 *Ibid.*, 145–146.

48 *Correspondence*, 5 (Bloomfield to Palmerston, St Petersburg, 30 October 1849).

49 *Ibid.*, 14 (Palmerston to Bloomfield, London, 4 October 1850).

enough to make Ambassador George Hamilton Seymour in St Petersburg consider that it was more appropriate not to act upon Palmerston's instructions, as 'fresh remonstrances' generated by British 'mistrust' of Russia's intentions 'would only produce an angry reply from the Russian Chancellor'.⁵⁰

As mentioned before, diplomatic circles in St Petersburg seem to have had real intentions to solve the Sulina Question. In April 1852, Nesselrode bitterly referred to the fact that the dredger no longer worked at Sulina, ordering its immediate return to the mouth of the Danube, so as not to 'gravely compromise ourselves in front of Austria and England'.⁵¹ However, the seemingly good intentions of Russia's central authorities were subject to the indifference or adverse priorities of the local circles in Sulina.

British economic and political circles were not the only ones discontented with the obstructions from the Maritime Danube. The Austrian, French and Sardinian vice-consuls reported in the same vein. In 1850, Russia's failure to respect its obligation to clear the Sulina mouth, as assumed by the 1840 St Petersburg Convention, led to Austrian plans to open a new channel of communication between the Danube and the Black Sea.⁵² The French press reported on the renewal of the convention, which Austria conditioned on the immediate clearance of Sulina and the removal of the quarantine and of the other obstacles that limited free navigation of international ships;⁵³ however, the Austrian government resumed its negotiations with the Ottomans for the prospected canal across Dobrudja.⁵⁴ Russia and Austria gave the 1840 Convention a one-year respite, but it still did not reach the purpose desired in Vienna, as shipping conditions along the Maritime Danube went from bad to worse.⁵⁵

50 Ibid., 39 (G.H. Seymour to Palmerston, St Petersburg, 20 October 1851).

51 *Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova*, vol. 40, 433–434 (Nesselrode to Vorontsov, St Petersburg, 17 April 1852).

52 Dimitrie Bodin, *Documente privitoare la legăturile economice dintre Principatele Române și Regatul Sardiniei* (Bucharest 1941), 218 (Stefano Berzolese to Massimo d'Azeglio, Galați, 17 October 1850).

53 'France. Paris, 7 Juillet,' *Journal de débats politiques et littéraires*, Paris, 8 July 1850.

54 'France. Paris, 19 Juillet,' *ibid.*, Paris, 20 July 1850.

55 Henry Hajnal, *The Danube. Its Historical, Political and Economic Importance* (The Hague 1920), 63; also in Carey Goodman, 'Austria's Danubian Diplomacy during the Crimean War,' in: June K. Burton and Carolyn W. White (eds.), *Essays in European History: Selected from the Annual Meetings of the Southern Historical Association, 1988–1989*, vol. II (Lanham 1996), 213.

6 The Apogee of Russian 'Neglect' and the Conspiracy to Close Off the Danube

Returning to Urquhart, from the late 1830s he directed his anger in relation to Danubian navigation both at Russia and Palmerston's pacific foreign policy. In 1851, Urquhart's new book *The Mystery of the Danube* was a renewed revelation of the conspiracy orchestrated from St Petersburg. Though no man is a prophet in his own land, Urquhart's accusations were not the mere figment of an alienated Russophobe mind, and by 1853 many people concurred with his views.

In July 1853, Russian troops occupied the Principalities, an episode that later developed into the Crimean War. As with all previous Russian military occupations (in 1828–1834 and 1848–1851), this came with direct consequences for the flourishing trade of Moldavia and Wallachia, and for European interests in the area. By 1853, the commerce between Britain and the Principalities had grown to such a point that the provinces were supplying about 600,000 quarters of grain a year, i.e. more grain than any other Ottoman province except for Egypt. Also, one third of all ships calling at the Danubian ports were either British or Britain bound.⁵⁶

At the same time, another of Urquhart's long due predictions seemed to come true: with only about 7 feet of water over the Sulina bar, Danube navigation was virtually closed. More than 30 vessels (among them fifteen Austrian and eleven British) were blocked at Sulina in July 1853, unable to sail over the bar into open sea. Dozens of other vessels bound up in the river waited in the roadstead.⁵⁷ The Earl of Clarendon, the British Foreign Secretary, instructed Ambassador Seymour in St Petersburg 'to call the attention of Count Nesselrode to the great loss and inconvenience occasioned by the existing state of things to commerce in general, and especially to that of England', on account of the obstructions at Sulina.⁵⁸ A couple of days later, the question was raised in the House of Commons by Henry Liddell, an interpellation to which Palmerston, as Home Secretary, gave a very elaborate reply. He referred to the weather conditions which temporarily amplified the obstructions, as well as Sulina's historical context where

for a great many years past, Her Majesty's Government have had great reason to complain of the neglect of the Government of Russia to perform

56 Florescu, *The Struggle*, 287–289; Cernovodeanu, Marinescu, Gavrilă, 'Comerțul britanic': 631–633.

57 TNA, FO 78/948, f. 271 (Cunningham to Clarendon, Galați, 30 July 1853).

58 *Correspondence*, 48 (Clarendon to Seymour, London, 5 July 1853).

those duties which belong to it as the possessor of the territory where the delta of the Danube is situated, to clear and maintain clear that particular branch.⁵⁹

On 21 July, Lord Dudley Stuart resumed the interpellation, inquiring whether the British authorities would demand compensation from Russia for merchant losses inflicted by the culpable neglect of the Russian government and demanding access to the correspondence on the subject.⁶⁰

The publication of British-Russian confidential diplomatic dispatches added fuel to the fire, as the volume seemed to fully prove Russia's dishonesty in improving the conditions prevalent at the Maritime Danube. Fragments from the English blue book were scattered throughout the European press. The protests of the diplomatic and consular agents were doubled by overt criticism in the daily press, as the steamers plying between Galați and Istanbul remained blocked at Sulina. It was no longer only a mercantile issue since it affected a very busy transport route in southeastern Europe. As one newspaper put it, the mud and sand from the Maritime Danube 'had leagued with the czar and thrown up a rampart which gives him as effectual control over the stranded vessels as if he had them in actual possession'.⁶¹

When Irishman Patrick O'Brien visited Sulina in September 1853, it was not an attractive sight for the hundreds of voyagers aboard the Austrian steamers plying from Istanbul to the Danubian port-cities of Galați and Brăila:

I counted more than two hundred vessels of different sizes at anchor in the river. Some had been there for three months, unable to get over the bar! almost every attempt to get to sea had proved fatal since the beginning of the month of June; and all efforts to cut a channel through the bar, appear to have been abandoned.

For British adepts, removing such obstacles seemed simple enough. With a little good will on all sides, continued O'Brien, 'nothing would be easier than to keep a passage open through the bar, of from fourteen to sixteen feet deep, through simple hydraulic works.'⁶²

59 *Hansard's Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 128 (London 1853), *House of Commons Debates*, 7 July 1853, 1373–1375.

60 *Ibid.*, vol. 129 (London 1853), *House of Commons Debates*, 21 July 1853, 543–544.

61 'The Trap in the Danube – Who Made It?', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Dublin, 7 July 1853.

62 Patrick O'Brien, *Journal of a Residence in the Danubian Principalities in the Autumn and Winter of 1853* (London 1854), 8–10.

In fact, the Irish agent stated things that many foreign merchants and diplomats active in the Danubian ports kept repeating for more than two decades: the navigable depth over the Sulina bar was gradually decreasing, and the Russian authorities in control of the Danube Delta had merely pretended to remove the obstacles that impeded proper navigation.

7 Conclusions

The increasing British focus on the Lower Danube region was related to the activity of two very active British vice-consuls at Galați and Brăila. Charles Cunningham was based at Galați between 1836 and 1860 and usually filled his reports with diatribes against the Russians. As he was also employed by western insurance companies such as Lloyd's, he often travelled to the Danube Delta and reported on the causes of shipping accidents. Cunningham insisted in his reports (some published in the British press) on the idea that maintaining a navigable depth at Sulina was a cheap and undemanding technical accomplishment. Russian ill-will had to be blamed for the huge losses incurred by foreign merchants. Similar reports came from St Vincent Lloyd, the vice-consul in Brăila, whom in the late 1840s Palmerston moved closer to the Danube Delta, in the Ottoman town of Tulcea and then to the Russian port of Ismail, as the Russians did not accept his being quartered at Sulina. He reported on the anarchy which ruled in the Danube Delta, a situation that had become of visible material harm to British and international economic interests. Palmerston was gradually converted to this view, as Russia's lack of interest in improving Danube navigation could easily be construed as a deliberate action meant to disfavour an economic rival.

A recent paper focuses on the role of British diplomatic staff and merchants in the Principalities as an 'epistemic community' who exerted a path-dependent influence at a critical juncture (the 1856 Paris Congress). In their correspondence, merchants stressed specific epistemic claims to illustrate Russia's wilful neglect by referring to the good condition of the Sulina bar during Ottoman times. Their language demonstrated a moral indignation at Russia, which arose from the 'injustice of a service paid for but not delivered – a violation of commercial codes everywhere'.⁶³ Furthermore, control and exploitation of

63 Yuan (Joanne) Yao, 'Standing at the Confluence: Institutional Emergence and the Case of the European Commission of the Danube,' working paper, ECPR General Conference Glasgow September 2014, online at <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/g02daa1a-b2a2-4b78-adb4-36aa663c9c01.pdf> (visited on 14 March 2018); also in eadem, *Constructing*

nature developed at that time as a ‘standard of civilisation’, allowing states to claim membership in a civilised European society. It would have both demonstrated the exercise of internal territorial control and respect for international agreements with other actors, both of which Russia disgracefully failed to do.⁶⁴

This chapter has also touched upon the conspiracy-security nexus in historicising international relations.⁶⁵ Urquhart had all the ‘qualities’ to embark upon the task of constructing a credible conspiracy. His megalomaniac character and paranoid style were doubled by the semi-official documents that he kept leaking and by the compelling force of his literature. His success as a publicist came from mastering the new means of information in the form of political journals and by feeding his thirsty audience with a master narrative that identified clear heroes and villains. Conspiracies are about dark forces operating behind the scenes, and it was hardly difficult to portray the Russians as the civilised world’s greatest enemy. The Danube was a convenient example to showcase how much Russia’s actions affected international trade and shipping.

According to information from Russian sources, twenty shipwrecks were recorded in the Russian section of the Maritime Danube in 1850 – three on the river and seventeen at the Sulina mouth. 42 ships were wrecked in 1851 (22 on the river and twenty at the Sulina mouth), 25 in 1853 and eight in 1854, when, due to the war, only 71 vessels entered the Danube.⁶⁶ With such staggering accident rates – caused by the insufficient depth of the navigable channel, adverse weather conditions and human error or failure of ship equipment – shipping on the Maritime Danube was increasingly insecure and costly. Skippers, however, continued to call at the inland Danubian outlets where grain prices allowed them to make highly profitable transactions. The hydrographical conditions of an unengineered river, tortuous and, at several sites, shallow, were exacerbated by Russia’s alleged inaction in removing or minimising the sources of uncertainty. The officials appointed to secure a navigable passage at Sulina indulged themselves, colluding with an entire community of transnational ‘pirates’ in ‘milking’ ship-owners of a large part of their profit. Moral outrage against this

the Ideal River: the 19th Century Origins of the First International Organizations, PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science (London 2016).

64 Yao, ‘“Conquest from Barbarism”: The Danube Commission, International Order and the Control of Nature as a Standard of Civilization,’ *European Journal of International Relations* 25,2 (2019): 335–359.

65 Beatrice de Graaf and Cornel Zwierlein, ‘Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive,’ *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 38,1 (2013): 46–64.

66 Emilciuc, ‘The Trade of Galați and Brăila in the Reports of Russian Officials from Sulina Quarantine Station,’ in: Ardeleanu and Andreas Lyberatos (eds.), *Port Cities of the Western Black Sea Coast and the Danube. Economic and Social Development in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Corfu 2016), 89–90.

state of affairs was conveyed from mercantile circles to diplomatic ones, and the Sulina Question had shipping insecurity at its core. This insecurity impacted not only the gains of traders and skippers in the inland ports of Brăila and Galați, but also the replenishment of Western Europe's grain storehouses and thus the continent's food security. With the Danube as one of Europe's largest international rivers, shipping insecurity and commercial unpredictability were translated into inter-imperial political disputes, inflated by the Russophobe views perorated by Urquhart and his adepts.

At the outbreak of the crisis that was to turn into what historians call the Crimean War, the Sulina Question was one of the major controversies separating Russia and western cabinets. While it was not the cause for the outbreak of the conflict, by late 1853 'the river was nonetheless uppermost in the minds of Europe's statesmen, diplomats, and military planners',⁶⁷ who were determined to remove from the Maritime Danube 'the moral and material obstacles' which 'prejudices the commerce of all nations'.⁶⁸ Doing this would make European diplomats look for innovative solutions, which included the creation of river institutions on the model of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, the world's first international organisation. The next chapter will explain how diverging imperial interests became balanced before, during and in the aftermath of the 1856 Paris Peace Congress and why the establishment of the Commission was an innovation in international law.

67 Richard Frucht, 'War, Peace, and Internationality: The Danube, 1789–1916,' in Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, Constantinos D. Svolopoulos and Béla K. Király (eds.), *Southeast European Maritime Commerce and Naval Policies from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to 1914* (Boulder and Highland Lakes 1988), 85.

68 Heinrich F. Geffcken, *La Question du Danube* (Berlin 1883), 8–9.

The Danube Question and the Making of Two River Commissions

The more modern supersedes the more ancient stipulation, [...] 1815 must give way to 1856.

Ambassador GEORGE HAMILTON SEYMOUR, 1857



1 A German View on the Freedom of the Danube

Christian Friedrich Wurm (1803–1859) was, in many ways, Urquhart’s moderate, continental, German counterpart. He shared the Scotsman’s anti-Russian bias and published several pieces in his *Portfolio*; he was equally interested in the entanglements of the Eastern Question and wrote in support of free trade. As a contributor to several German newspapers and magazines, Wurm often voiced his liberal opinions, and as professor of history at the Academic Gymnasium in the Hanseatic port-city of Hamburg he did extensive research on the close connection between economic systems and political regimes. But, first and foremost, he was a true patriot, eager to contribute to his fatherland’s well-being. No wonder that Wurm praised the benefits of the Zollverein in shaping the German nation-state and took an active part in the revolution of 1848.¹

In the context of the Crimean War, Wurm followed closely the public debates on the status of the Danube, and in early 1855 published in Leipzig a brochure – *Vier Briefe über die freie Donau-Schiffahrt*. This collection of articles was a chronological presentation of Russia’s Danubian intrusions during the first half of the nineteenth century. Several of his main arguments are similar

¹ Adolf Wohlwill, ‘Wurm, Christian Friedrich,’ in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 44 (Leipzig 1898), 326–332, digital version available at the address https://de.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=ADB:Wurm,_Christian_Friedrich&oldid=2521888 (visited on 17 October 2018).

to Urquhart's line of reasoning, though Wurm's approach displays more mildness and narrative subtlety. According to Wurm, Russia's policy at the Maritime Danube received a weak response from European cabinets, which had been lulled by the reassurances of the government in St Petersburg. Russia had never denied its obligation to keep the Danube open, but failed to effectively do so exactly when steamship navigation secured a direct and uninterrupted connection between the Levant and the German lands on the Upper Danube. As the allied powers' ultimatum addressed to Russia in December 1854 was to be followed by diplomatic negotiations in Vienna, Wurm advocated for a fair representation of German interests in relation to the new status of the Danube.²

Three years later, in 1858, Wurm published another collection of articles – *Fünf Briefe über die Freiheit der Flussschiffahrt, und über die Donau-Akte vom 7 Nov. 1857*. The brochure was a more detailed analysis of international law on the navigation of transboundary rivers, a hot issue following recent international developments. His articles touched on various facets, from the juridical innovations of the 1856 Paris Treaty to the sovereign rights of riparian states in accordance with the provisions of the 1815 Vienna Act. Wurm's narrative was meant as an expert opinion before a new ambassadorial conference, summoned to Paris in May 1858, which was to discuss – among other pending aspects of the Eastern Question – the future organisation of Danube navigation and hopefully harmonise the two opposing views on the status of international rivers.³

This chapter will analyse the international context between the publication of Wurm's two brochures, a period in which Europe's Great Powers found a (provisional) solution to the Danube Question during and in the aftermath of the Crimean War. The internationalisation and institutionalisation of Danube navigation through the stipulations of the 1856 Paris Treaty created exceptional juridical instruments that added to previous interpretations of the 1815 Vienna Treaty. Such legal instruments, it will be showed throughout this chapter and volume, contributed to broadening the institutional legacy of the European Commission of the Danube, taken as an example for further cooperation along international waterways.

2 Christian Friedrich Wurm, *Vier Briefe über die freie Donau-Schiffahrt* (Leipzig 1855).

3 Wurm, *Fünf Briefe über die Freiheit der Flussschiffahrt, und über die Donau-Akte vom 7 Nov. 1857* (Leipzig 1858); Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons and Command, *Reports from Committees, Stade Tolls; Harbours of Refuge. Session 3 December 1857–2 August 1858*, vol. 17 (London 1858), 1.

2 The Danube Question

Wurm's brochures are illustrative of the larger public interest in what had already become the Danube Question, a diplomatic dispute caused by the divergent views of European statesmen on the status of the river. At the outbreak of the Crimean War, one of the major political aims of the western powers was to remove Russia's exclusive control over the Maritime Danube. The intention was to establish a system of security and predictability for commercial exchanges along a strategic waterway that had a similar function, at a regional level, to that enjoyed by the Straits of Gibraltar, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus for Mediterranean and Black Sea trade.

Control over its maritime section stood at the core of the Danube Question, as the area had become an inter-imperial junction, situated on the political and symbolic border between the Russian and Ottoman empires, and regarded as a vital economic artery by traders from states like Austria, Great Britain, France, Sardinia and Greece. The Sulina Question, as presented in the previous chapter, was an object of conflict and cooperation between the governments of Russia, Austria and Great Britain. However, a larger Danube Question was forged in the diplomatic cauldron of 1854–1855, when navigation through Russia's Danubian waters stood high on the agenda of the negotiators gathered in Vienna. As a diplomatic quagmire, it was extracted, during the Crimean War, from the larger Eastern Question, and stood in direct kinship with the international regime of the Black Sea or the political status of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.

This chapter aims to present the birth and growth of the Danube Question during the period 1855–1858 and to show how the diverging views in Europe's Concert of Powers over a strategic inter-imperial contact zone resulted in the formulation of new juridical principles, international norms and transnational institutions. Much scholarship in diplomatic history or the history of international relations has analysed such individual questions (the Straits Question or the Polish Question), but it is rarely possible to document the process that, at critical junctures, transforms political or economic interests into juridical principles.⁴

During that period, all seven signatories of the 1856 Paris Treaty and several other European cabinets agreed that 'internationalisation' was the proper

4 For a recent theoretisation of 'questions,' see Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton and Oxford 2018).

solution for turning the Danube into a stream of prosperity for the nations living along its banks and beyond them. There was something extremely appealing in this concept, which had survived murky revolutionary times and made it into international legislation in 1815.⁵ The 1815 Vienna Act stipulated that navigation along the entire navigable course of 'international rivers' (those touching on the territory of two or more states) had to be entirely free, not prohibited, 'in respect to commerce', to anyone.⁶ A liberal principle regarded international waterways as avenues of economic prosperity and of more peaceful interactions among nations. It stemmed from the *laissez-faire* doctrine popular at the time in industrialised Western Europe, but it had to stay in harmony with the sovereign rights of territorial powers, responsible for maintaining the navigability of transboundary waterways.

It took a long time to clarify what 'internationality' truly meant. Firstly, it implied the 'nationalisation' of sovereignty, which called for consistent domestic debates on the role of transboundary waterways for national development; policies of economic integration at regional and state level soon followed. Injured local communities had to be properly compensated and supported to find new opportunities in the more open economic environment of post-Napoleonic Europe. Through complex diplomatic bargaining between riparian states, these rivers (the Rhine, the Elbe and the Weser) were eventually internationalised, meaning that navigation along their course followed more unitary rules, arbitrated by river commissions that acted as agencies of order, stability and security for seafarers and merchants of all nations.

When, in the context of the Crimean War, European diplomats contemplated extending the benefits of internationalisation to the Danube, none of the preliminary conditions that existed for other continental transboundary rivers were met. The Danube was navigable for almost 2,500 kilometres, two thirds of which passed through the German states of Württemberg and Bavaria, and through Habsburg territories. Bavaria and Austria had signed a treaty in

5 Georges Kaeckenbeeck, *International Rivers: a Monograph Based on Diplomatic Documents* (London 1918), 1–4.

6 For the 1815 decision and its results on the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, see Robert Mark Spaulding, 'Anarchy, Hegemony, Cooperation: International Control of the Rhine River,' online at https://www.ccr-zkr.org/files/histoireCCNR/21_anarchy-hegemony-cooperation.pdf (visited on 15 August 2018); Hein A.M. Klemann, 'The Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine, 1815–1914. Nineteenth Century European Integration,' in: Ralf Banken and Ben Wubs (eds.), *The Rhine: A Transnational Economic History* (Baden-Baden 2017), 31–68; Joep Schenk, 'The Central Commission for Navigation of the Rhine. A First Step towards European Economic Security?,' in: Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan and Brian Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge 2019), 75–94.

December 1851, which declared navigation on the Danube and its tributaries free for all nations, but they reserved for themselves the monopoly of a regular service of ships plying between the ports of their respective territorial waters. They also pledged to draft uniform regulations for trading and policing of navigation which were not, however, completed within the next four years. In 1855 Württemberg subscribed to this treaty, which was protracted in February 1856,⁷ at a time when the Paris Peace Congress was about to start.

If navigation on the Upper and Middle Danube was regulated according to such mutual agreements, the status of the Lower Danube remained to be clarified. Geographical impediments hindered navigation in several river sections, mainly through the Iron Gates gorge and in the Danube Delta, and territorial states in those regions were hardly able or willing to redress the situation. Russia, which owned the Danube Delta, gained little economic benefit from keeping the channel navigable, and in the previous quarter-century its officials had done little to effectively remove navigational barriers on the empire's southern border. The other riparian states along the Lower Danube were not really qualified to conduct the technical and normative works necessary to remedy navigation. The Sublime Porte did not have enough hydraulic expertise and financial resources to complete such a task, which was not economically vital for the northern Balkan provinces that the Ottoman government administered directly. The riparian states which could benefit most from engineering works in the Danube Delta were vassal Moldavia and Wallachia. The Principalities enjoyed a large domestic autonomy, the result of almost a century of successful anti-Ottoman campaigns by Russia. With a young bourgeois elite educated in Western Europe, they were fully engaged in the process of nation- and state-building. These processes further complicated their relations with both the Porte and Russia, the latter being the legal custodian of their special status.

When the question of internationalisation was formulated in 1854–1855 by negotiators from Austria, France and Great Britain, they understood it in opposing ways, biased by their own political and economic interests in relation to the Lower Danube, especially its most economically productive part, the Maritime Danube. Just as the core of the Eastern Question was about maintaining a strategic balance of interests over the Turkish Straits, the Danube Question implied a similar objective – a neutralised and navigable Maritime Danube. Non-riparian powers asked for a voice in the regulation of river

7 For both documents, see *Nouveau recueil général de traités, conventions et autres transactions remarquables, servant à la connaissance des relations étrangères des puissances et états dans leurs rapports mutuels*, edited by Charles Samwer, vol. 16, no. 2 (Göttingen 1860), 63–74.

navigation because of their vital interests in that area, and they wanted this in a direct way, not through their 'informal control' over the Ottoman government.

This narrative looks at the making of international law and how it was forged in diplomatic furnaces at the critical juncture that followed a large European war. Its general focus is at a systemic level, following the new regional geopolitical rearrangements concluded by Europe's top statesmen. They negotiated their countries' interests to the best of their abilities, and overall their bargaining tendencies show them to be rational actors. Once those principles were validated in the sacrosanct text of a peace treaty, a new conflict emerged. Experts were called in to explain the 'true meaning' of these principles. This proved extremely complicated, as statesmen had relied on imprecise geographical information about southeastern Europe, and the text of the 1856 Paris Treaty was ambiguous and controversial. When read by jurists, journalists or the wider public, still judging things with a bellicose mindset, it resulted in several phases of diplomatic conflict over the execution of the 1856 Paris Treaty. The construction of international law is a complicated process, especially when it involves elastic principles that amalgamate classical concepts of Roman jurisprudence and revolutionary innovations. The legal status of transboundary rivers was shaped from such subjective and relative interpretations,⁸ and Wurm and other public facilitators contributed to make them accessible to larger audiences.

It was in this complex legislative maelstrom that the Commission came into existence, kept alive by the vague or ambivalent principles included in the 1856 Paris Treaty. Before looking at the inner structure and proceedings of this international organisation (in Chapter 3), it is necessary to refer to the principles that supported it and to the interests that shaped these principles.

3 Crimean War Diplomacy and the Internationalisation of the Danube

The Congress of Paris (1856) represents a milestone in the international law of transboundary rivers. The final Peace Treaty was the result of preliminary negotiations that took place in Vienna in March 1855, in anticipation of the allies' successful military campaign in the Crimea. The preliminary draft was signed in Vienna on 1 February 1856 by the plenipotentiaries of Austria, Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Diplomatic bargaining on the Danube

⁸ Ralph W. Johnson, 'Freedom of Navigation on International Rivers: What Does It Mean?' *Michigan Law Review* 62 (1963–1964): 465–484.

Question continued in late February and March 1856. The final decisions were inscribed into five articles of the Paris Peace Treaty signed on 30 March 1856 by the seven contracting powers, which also included Prussia and Sardinia.⁹

Article 15 stipulated that the principles of the 1815 Vienna Treaty regarding the navigation of international rivers should also be applied to the Danube. This arrangement was considered to form part of Europe's public law, being placed under the protection of the seven signatory states. No toll could be levied founded solely upon the navigation of the Danube, and no duty could be charged on the goods carried by commercial vessels. Future regulations for policing and quarantining had to facilitate, as much as possible, the passage of vessels and no other obstacle was to hinder free navigation.

Articles 16 to 18 created the organs that were to carry out these principles. A European Commission of the Danube comprised of seven delegates (one for each contracting power) was

charged to designate and to cause to be executed the works necessary below Isatcha, to clear the mouths of the Danube, as well as the neighbouring parts of the sea, from the sands and other impediments which obstruct them, in order to put that part of the river and the said parts of the sea in the best possible state for navigation.

It was to determine fixed duties to be levied to cover the costs of the works and establishments that secured and facilitated navigation at the mouths of the Danube. The Commission had a term of two years to complete its tasks.

A second organisation was also created, the Riverain Commission, composed of four 'delegates' (one for each sovereign riparian state – Austria, Bavaria, the Ottoman Empire and Württemberg) and three 'commissioners' from the vassal principalities of Serbia, Wallachia, and Moldavia. The tasks of this organisation were: 1. to 'prepare regulations of navigation and river police'; 2. to 'remove the impediments, of whatever nature they may be, which still prevent the application to the Danube of the arrangements of the Treaty of Vienna'; 3. 'to order and cause to be executed the necessary works throughout the whole course of the river'; 4. after the dissolution of the European Commission of the Danube, to see to maintaining the mouths of the Danube and the neighbouring parts of the sea in a navigable state. The first two points were to be completed within a term of two years. The contracting powers of the 1856 Paris Treaty would then assemble in conference and pronounce the

⁹ The treaty in *Congrès de Paris 1856* (Paris 1856). Articles 15 to 19 at pages 10–12.

dissolution of the European Commission of the Danube, whose powers were to be taken over by the Riverain Commission.

Article 19 stipulated that, to ensure the execution of the regulations established by common agreement, each of the contracting powers had the right 'to station, at all times, two light vessels at the mouths of the Danube'.

As clear as they might seem, these provisions would cause intense diplomatic bargaining during the following couple of years. In fact, in 1859, Count Walewski, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, acknowledged the ambiguity of articles 15 and 16,¹⁰ a confession that was hardly a secret for the diplomats, experts and the public acquainted with the difficulties in the application of these stipulations.

Three hot issues occupied most of the negotiations between contracting parties in 1855–1856 and their solutions were, as detailed below, the seeds of subsequent disputes: a) the territorial termini of the internationalised river and Austria's struggle for 'special and exclusive advantages' over its Danubian watercourse; b) the right of non-riparian Great Powers to regulate the Danube's navigation; and c) Russia's riparian status and the territorial changes needed to provide additional guarantees of security to Danubian trade and shipping.

4 Austria's Struggle for 'Special and Exclusive Advantages'

Two views existed in relation to the application of the 1815 principles to the Danube. At the Vienna ambassadorial conference, on 21 and 23 March 1855, one of the Austrian plenipotentiaries, Baron Prokesch-Osten, proposed that the 1815 principles were to be applied 'on the lower course of the Danube, starting from the point where the river becomes common to Austria and the Ottoman Empire, downstream to the sea'. In other words, the Austrian government wanted to internationalise a river section that was only tangent to Habsburg territorial waters and shared at that moment by the Ottoman Empire (together with its vassal states) and Russia. The logic behind this intention was to permit the river commission to focus on the problematic river section. As there were no complaints related to navigation upstream of the Iron Gates, the regime of the Middle and Upper Danube, regulated by mutual agreements between riparian states, needed no intervention.¹¹

10 Henry Hajnal, *Le droit du Danube international* (The Hague 1928), 56, note 5.

11 Annexes to Protocols nos. 4 and 5 of 21 and 23 March 1855, in Dimitrie A. Sturdza, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de navigation du Danube* (Berlin 1904), 15–17 and 21–23.

The second view was that of France and Great Britain, presented by Count Walewski during the 6 March sitting of the Paris Peace Congress in 1856. The 1815 principles needed to be applied to the entire Danube and at its mouths, and the commissions appointed to regulate different aspects of its navigation had equal jurisdiction over the entire river course. Austria's Foreign Minister Buol saw no reason in extending such regulations to sections where no conflicts existed.¹² His position was consistent with the hydro-hegemonic opinions of Emperor Franz Joseph and of other leading Austrian statesmen, as discussed in Vienna in February 1856. A clear distinction existed, according to Austrian interests, between the Lower Danube (primarily its maritime section) and the rest of the river. Franz Joseph argued that 'on the former all the Powers have equal rights, whereas, on the latter, only the Riparian States have got a say in the matter'.¹³ Interferences by non-riparian actors upstream of the Iron Gates were intolerable, being in violation of Austria's national sovereignty.

Buol resumed the same considerations on 12 March, but British Foreign Secretary Clarendon rejected such a narrow interpretation that would have granted Austria unacceptable 'special and exclusive advantages'.¹⁴ In their message to Vienna, the Austrian plenipotentiaries in Paris referred to the difficulties in 'trying to keep the Upper Danube beyond the pale of the Conference and of the Commission about to be organized'. Faced with strong opposition, the Austrians could not respond satisfactorily to 'some of the arguments with which they [the other plenipotentiaries] assailed us' and 'had a stiff fight against the French proposal which was strongly backed by Great Britain'.¹⁵ In a private dispatch sent to Franz Joseph, Buol added that it was

a moral impossibility to assert that the principles of the [1815] Vienna Congress can never be applied to the Danube. Such an assertion would call forth a unanimous cry of displeasure, it might even frustrate the whole work of the Peace Conference, and rob us of the fruits of the freedom of the mouths of the Danube, with our possible exclusion from

12 Protocol no. 5 of 6 March 1856, *ibid.*, 25–27.

13 Hajnal, *The Danube. Its Historical, Political and Economic Importance* (The Hague 1920), 72; for Austria's position on the Danube Question during the Crimean War, see Emil Palotás, *A nemzetközi Duna-hajózás a Habsburg-monarchia diplomáciájában 1856–1883* (Budapest 1984), 9–22 and *idem*, 'The Problems of International Navigation on the Danube in Austro-Hungarian Politics during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,' in Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, Constantinos D. Svolopoulos and Béla Király (eds.), *Southeast European Maritime Commerce and Naval Policies from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to 1914* (Boulder and Highland Lakes 1988), 99–101.

14 Protocol no. 8 of 12 March 1856, in Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 27–29.

15 Quoted by Hajnal, *The Danube*, 74.

participation in the regulation of the Eastern question. [...] In conclusion, I humbly beg Your Majesty to bear in mind that it is better far to grant this freedom of our own will and accord, than to wait till we are forced to do so. Why should the conditions which have had such beneficial results on the Rhine and the Elbe not be introduced on the Danube?¹⁶

Austria's reluctance to include its part of the river in the arrangement had a lot to do with the shipping monopoly of the DDSG, the privileged steamboat shipping company, which the imperial government had extended until 1880. However, with the territorial changes Austria requested at the Lower Danube, Habsburg shipping companies could have encountered strong hostility in Ottoman waters. As Buol further added, the British delegates made it clear that unless the Upper Danube was declared free in accordance with the 1815 principles, 'the Lower Danube would be closed for Austrian ships, and also for the ships of the Privileged Danube Steam Navigation Company, as far as the Turkish frontier'.¹⁷

Franz Joseph finally consented, and on 18 March Buol informed his colleagues of Austria's acceptance of what can be termed 'one Danube policy'.¹⁸ The 1856 Paris Treaty stated that the 1815 principles with regard to the navigation of international rivers were to be applied to the entire course of the river. However, the interpretation of what this really meant remained an open question, as Austria soon reshuffled its Danubian policy. Equally, it tried to take advantage of this stipulation by building upon existing jurisprudence in relation to the structure and agenda of the river commissions appointed to regulate international waterways.

5 The Right of Non-riparian Countries to Regulate Danube Navigation

This was a corollary of the previous point, and the solution agreed to was a compromise between the two opposing views. In Prokesch-Osten's memorandum of 21 March 1855, a commission of sovereign riverain states touching on the Lower Danube (the Porte, Russia and Austria) was to remove the obstacles impeding navigation along the Maritime Danube. John Russell, one of the British plenipotentiaries at these preliminary negotiations, made it clear that

¹⁶ Ibid., 77.

¹⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹⁸ Protocol no. 10 of 18 March 1856, in Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 29.

his country wanted, given its large interests in the trade of the Principalities, to be part of the institutional framework and of the agency that regulated navigation along this river section.¹⁹

The model of two separate river organisations was introduced and defining their tasks and executive mandates was the object of heated bargaining between Austria and its western allies. The European Commission was established with a limited term, both chronologically and geographically, as an embodiment of Europe's collective interests in a strategic inter-imperial junction. The European Commission was mainly envisaged as a temporary technical committee that would intervene in an emergency to remove acute navigational obstacles along the Maritime Danube. The Austrians insisted on its limited scope and on the independence of the Riverain Commission, whereas the Brits managed to convince Vienna that the European Commission was only to be disbanded with the mutual consent of all contracting powers.²⁰ As for the Riverain Commission, it was to include all riparian states (sovereign or vassal) stretching along the navigable course of the Danube. The provisions related to these two organs marked a significant deviation from the 1815 Vienna Act, which reserved no place in river commissions for non-riverain states although the representatives of non-riparian powers (such as Lord Clancarty for Britain) had contributed to drafting those rules in Vienna.

The extension of the 1815 principles to the Danube, their inclusion in Europe's public law and the vague role Britain and France were able to save for themselves in 1855 and then again in 1856 established a legal precedent used to justify the participation of non-riparian states in the regulation of rivers where they had major economic interests. This marked a new view on the navigation of international waterways. Equality of treatment for riparian and non-riparian countries alike was included in conventional laws that sovereign territorial powers could grant for the benefit of all interested parties. Perfect equality for all flags was regarded as a more liberal understanding of the freedom of navigation, expressly conferred through an international agreement.²¹

The special position of riverain states was implicit and respected, but there were cases where representatives of non-riparian states had to be accepted into river commissions. Sometimes, as in the situation of the Lower Danube, the sovereignty of riparian states had to be limited in their own interest, as the presence of external actors could either minimise friction between territorial

19 Protocol no. 4 of 21 March 1855 and Prokesch-Osten's Memorandum, *ibid.*, 12–17.

20 Protocol no. 5 of 23 March 1855 and the development of the second point, *ibid.*, 17–23.

21 Ruth E. Bacon, 'British and American Policy and the Right of Fluvial Navigation,' *British Yearbook of International Law* 13 (1932): 77.

powers or provide them with expertise which they did not possess.²² It was, in many ways, an internationally legalised technical intervention.

6 Removing Russia from the Maritime Danube – Territorial Cessions, Imperial Honour and Revisionism

In an early stage of the Eastern Crisis, European statesmen were convinced that Russia's 'interested indifference' was to blame for the improper conditions of navigation in the Danube Delta. In Prokesch-Osten's memorandum (21 March 1855), one of the solutions envisioned by the Austrians was to neutralise the Danube Delta and repeal quarantine procedures along the Sulina branch. Russia could keep its jurisdiction over the subjects of the demilitarised zone and the Habsburgs would guarantee free navigation by establishing their own garrison at the mouths of the Danube. It meant, in fact, to maintain the *status quo*, as Austria had occupied Sulina in 1855 and was imposing its own legislation in the area. The western allies, however, intended to cancel several stipulations of the 1829 Adrianople Treaty, with the view of returning the Danube Delta to the Ottoman Empire.²³

An additional safety measure for avoiding future malign Russian impositions was to force an ampler territorial rectification at the Lower Danube. In exchange for the Russian territories under allied occupation, Russia was asked to accept a border change in its southern province of Bessarabia, with the view of returning (at least a part of) it to Moldavia and thus cease being riverain to the Danube. The intention was discussed at Vienna and included, with clearer geographical limits, in the text of an Austrian-French agreement dated 14 November 1855.²⁴ The British considered this part of the Habsburgs' policy to secure a safer military border with Russia in expectation of the annexation of Moldavia and Wallachia, which Austrian troops had occupied in the summer of 1854.²⁵ There were several downsides to such territorial expansion in

22 Lionel William Lyde, 'The International Rivers of Europe,' *Geographical Journal* 54.5 (1919): 310.

23 Protocols nos. 4 and 5 of 21 and 23 March 1855 and their annexes, in Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 12–23.

24 Winfried Baumgart (ed.), *Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs*, series 1, vol. 3, *Österreichische Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs. 10. September 1855 bis 24. Mai 1856* (Munich 1979), 106 (doc. no. 34).

25 *Ibid.*, series III, vol. 4, *Englische Akten zur Geschichte des Krimkriegs*, 10. September 1855 bis 23. Juli 1856 (Munich 1988), 353–354 (doc. no. 184).

the Danube Delta and in Bessarabia, but for London (and Paris equally) it was vital to keep Vienna close to the western alliance.²⁶

The demand was officially submitted to Russia's Chancellor Nesselrode in December 1855. The ultimatum mentioned, among other things, the neutralisation of the Black Sea, territorial cessions in Bessarabia and the Danube Delta, and free navigation on the Danube. The Russians tried to bargain and avoid the loss of Bessarabia, but a second ultimatum followed in January 1856. On 15 January, after an extraordinary meeting with his councillors, Tsar Alexander II accepted the allies' terms and Russia's participation in the peace negotiations convened in Paris.²⁷

During the formal and informal meetings held in the French capital, Russian plenipotentiaries tried to save as much of Bessarabia as possible. Tsar Alexander's honour was at stake, and Russian dignity was defended by Emperor Napoleon III, who was interested in keeping Russia as a strategic partner for France's political ambitions in the Eastern Question. Napoleon III felt it was a good moment to prove his sympathy and persuaded his British allies to renegotiate the Bessarabian border.²⁸

From London, Prime Minister Palmerston instructed his diplomats to follow an uncompromising line of action and preserve the strategic relevance of the territorial cession: Russia *must* be removed from the Danube. With repeated messages to Paris to stick to their agreement and thinly-veiled threats that Britain had 'the means to continue the war' by itself, Palmerston convinced Napoleon III to send the Russian cabinet a new ultimatum calling for the immediate acknowledgment of the territorial cession in Bessarabia. However, the French Emperor managed to elicit several concessions which further reduced the territory that Russia would retrocede.²⁹

The compromise was presented to the Congress on 10 March 1856, and four days later Count Orlov, one of the Russian plenipotentiaries, announced his government's agreement to the territorial rectification.³⁰ Although Russia lost less territory than originally planned, the strategic objective of removing it from the Lower Danube and the lower section of the Prut River was achieved. This provision was included in Article 20 of the Peace Treaty, which stated that

26 Ibid., 399–400 (doc. no. 212).

27 Harold Temperley, 'The Treaty of Paris of 1856 and Its Execution [1]', *Journal of Modern History* 4.3 (1932): 389–394.

28 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Public Record Office, FO 27/1164, f. 56–59 & 78 (Earl of Clarendon to Viscount Palmerston, Paris, 23 and 25 February 1856).

29 Temperley, 'The Treaty of Paris,' 1: 404–405.

30 Protocols 7 and 9, 10 and 14 March 1856, *Congrès de Paris*, 65–68 and 74–77.

the retrocession of Southern Bessarabia was meant 'to better secure the freedom of navigation of the Danube'.³¹

The territorial loss in Bessarabia and the neutralisation of the Black Sea were the most humiliating stipulations of the 1856 Treaty, making Russia a revisionist state in relation to the new international status of the river.³² As mentioned above, and as an exception to the neutral regime of the Black Sea, the seven contracting powers were allowed to station two light warships at the mouths of the Danube to ensure the observance of all international navigational regulations.³³

Russia grudgingly accepted the loss of Southern Bessarabia, but soon tried to speculate on the many ambiguities of the 1856 Paris Treaty. Two issues were used by Chancellor Gorchakov as the spike meant to split the western alliance and by Palmerston as a barometer of Britain's relations with France: the status of Serpent Island and sovereignty in the Danube Delta.

The 1856 Treaty included no reference to Serpent Island, a small rock about 20 miles off Sulina. Considering that their country remained the rightful owner of this territory, the Russians dispatched to the island a small garrison for restoring the local lighthouse, a crucial landmark for the seafarers who sailed towards the Danube or the ports in southern Ukraine. However, the island had already been occupied by Ottoman soldiers, supported by the British navy.³⁴

In the subsequent diplomatic dispute over the rock, Walewski thought that it had no strategic value: the Russians could keep it, while the lighthouse would be managed by the Danube Commission. Palmerston rejected Russia's claim. The island had to stick to the Danube Delta, which had been taken from Russia. The British fleet was ordered to defend a sovereign territory of the Porte and to remove the Russian garrison. The Russian cabinet requested a reconvening of European negotiators and a collective decision of the seven contracting powers on the fate of Serpent Island. With a visible rapprochement in Russian-French relations, Britain tried to avoid such a complication.³⁵

31 Ibid., 12–13.

32 Barbara Jelavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question. 1870–1887* (Bloomington 1973), 9.

33 *Congrès de Paris*, 12.

34 W.E. Mosse, 'Britain, Russia and the Question of Serpents Island and Bolgrad. Two Incidents in the Execution of the Treaty of Paris,' *Slavonic and East European Review* 29.72 (1950): 86–131 (the same text is included in idem, *The Rise and Fall of the Crimean System, 1855–71: The Story of a Peace Settlement* (London 1963), 55–104); Dumitru Vitcu, 'The Treaty of Paris and the Bolgrad Crisis of Its Execution,' *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «A.D. Xenopol»* 43–44 (2006–2007): 335–353.

35 British correspondence on both the Serpent Island and Bolgrad cases was published in several blue books: *Correspondence Relative to the Execution of the Treaty of Paris*, vol. I–V,

On 6 January 1857, the seven plenipotentiaries concluded a new agreement to resolve the pending issues related to the execution of the 1856 Treaty: Serpent Island was returned to the Porte, and Russia received territorial compensations in the area of Lake Yalpuq, but without having any contact with the Danube.³⁶

Another decision intended to clarify and simplify the new status of the Maritime Danube was to transfer the Danube Delta from Moldavia to the Ottoman Empire. The ambiguity lay in the text of article 21 of the 1856 Paris Treaty, which stipulated that the territory retroceded by Russia was to be annexed by Moldavia, under the sovereignty of the Sublime Porte.³⁷ The issue was complicated by the fact that Moldavia, an autonomous principality, was seeking political union with Wallachia as a way of establishing an independent buffer state between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In August 1856, the Porte officially informed the Moldavian and Wallachian governments of the decisions taken in Paris, including taking into possession the Danube Delta. National elites in the Principalities protested, and a memorandum signed by Wallachian General Gheorghe Magheru was submitted to the seven signatories of the Paris Treaty.³⁸ In order to avoid any future disputes, on 6 January 1857 European plenipotentiaries changed the status of the Danube Delta, placing it under the direct sovereignty of the Porte.³⁹

All these arrangements were later included in an appendix to the 1856 Paris Treaty, signed on 19 June 1857.⁴⁰ The territorial complications connected to the Danube Question seemed resolved. There were, however, some vying interpretations of the 1856 juridical innovations that required the attention of legal experts and diplomats throughout Europe.

April 1856–January 1857 (London 1856–1857). French sources are preserved in the Archive of the French Foreign Ministry, Fond Mémoires et documents, Roumanie, vol. IV, 1856–1857. Some documents were published by Lucia Taftă, ‘Marile puteri și Gurile Dunării în secolul al XIX-lea,’ *Revista Istorică* 22.1–2 (2011): 61–69 and Constantin Ardeleanu, ‘Sfârșitul Războiului Crimeii și chestiunea Basarabiei (1856),’ in: Gheorghe Cliveti and Gheorghe Cojocaru (eds.), *Basarabia – 1812: Problemă națională, implicații internaționale: materialele Conferinței Științifice Internaționale 14–16 mai 2012, Chișinău-Iași* (Bucharest 2012), 501–516.

36 The protocol of 6 January 1857 in *Hertslet's Commercial Treaties: A Collection of Treaties and Conventions, Between Great Britain and Foreign Powers*, vol. 10 (London 1859), 553–554.

37 *Congrès de Paris*, 13.

38 Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River: In the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to the Conference of Belgrade of 1948* (Boulder and New York 1987), 245–246.

39 *Hertslet's Commercial Treaties*, 10, 553–554.

40 *Ibid.*, 959–961.

7 The Riverain Commission and the Making of the 1857 Navigation Act

According to the 1856 Paris Treaty, two river commissions were to convene readily and start the urgent task of regulating Danube navigation. The Commission was to take care of removing physical obstacles along the Maritime Danube, and its seven members assembled in the Moldavian port of Galați, the largest 'civilised' city near the Danube Delta. The first meeting took place on 4 November 1856 and its early proceedings will be detailed in the next chapter.

The Riverain Commission, a permanent institution composed of representatives of the seven riparian states, was to 'prepare regulations of navigation and river police' for the entire course of the Danube, and to 'remove the impediments, of whatever nature they may be, which still prevent the application to the Danube of the arrangements of the Treaty of Vienna'. Its members gathered in Vienna, and the first meeting took place on 29 November 1856. The Austrian delegate, François Serafin Blumfeld, a councillor at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Public Works, was elected president of the conference. Most of his colleagues had some experience in river navigation, either with a focus on international law or with riverain trade and hydraulic works.

For expediency, they decided to complete the regulation of navigation and then draft the provisions for river policing. Activities were divided into three committees (free navigation, abolition of privileges and navigation patents; financial provisions and customs regulations; and securing Danube's navigability),⁴¹ but all plenipotentiaries focussed on the hot issue: how to harmonise national rights with the internationalised status of the river.

On 22 December 1856, after three sittings, the Wallachian commissioner, Nicolae Rosetti, reported to Bucharest about the view supported by the representatives of Bavaria, Württemberg and Moldavia (François Sebastien de Daxenberger, Adolfe Müller and Panait Donici respectively), who advocated absolute freedom of trade and navigation on the Danube, as it resulted from a literal and liberal interpretation of the Paris Treaty. This meant to allow 'foreign nations to lease establishments and wharves on the Danube's banks' and to grant them equal rights for inland navigation. Austria's Blumfeld rejected this opinion, as being highly detrimental to the economic interests and sovereign rights of riparian states. Rosetti acknowledged that, for the Principalities,

41 *Donau-Schiffahrtsacte – Acte de navigation pour le Danube. Donaudampfschiffahrts – Acte & Protokolle 1856–1857* (Vienna 1856–1857), Protocols 1 to 3, 29 November, 3 and 10 December 1856 – *ibid.*, 1–8.

absolute freedom, even on a limited section of the Lower Danube, could be 'extremely useful' for their 'trade, civilisation and future political development'.⁴²

But he was not sure if such an opinion would be appropriate in that political context. It was the first time that representatives of the Principalities took part, with the consent of their suzerain power, in international diplomatic negotiations. It was an historic success for their national struggle, and more was expected to come in the following months. The Principalities had been governed since June 1856 by *kaymakams*, governors appointed by the Porte to execute the provisions of the Paris Treaty relative to their future organisation. Moldavia and Wallachia were to enjoy 'independent and national administration', delegates of the European powers would enquire into their situation, and nationwide representative assemblies (*Ad hoc Divans*) were to state the popular views on the definitive organisation of the two states. The Principalities were still occupied by Austrian troops and were the scene of intense political battle. National forces fought for convincing their fellow citizens and European powers of the benefits of a political union of the Principalities, a solution warmly supported by Napoleon III and as firmly opposed by Austria and the Sublime Porte.⁴³

In this volatile political context, Rosetti had to be extremely careful. He needed to follow the instructions of his government, to stay close to the Ottoman delegate and keep an eye on the political intrigues that were unfolding in Vienna. He waited for the instructions of his government, but also studied the behaviour of the Ottoman delegate, Garabed Artin Davoud Oghlou, and wondered secretly how he could vote against the Austrian delegate, whose opinion was supported by the actual situation of navigation on Europe's rivers. Inactivity seemed a better choice in those circumstances: 'Until now I'm in no hurry; on the contrary, I slow down, and I avoid working'.⁴⁴

In January 1857, after receiving instructions from Istanbul, Davoud Oghlou presented his government's greatest concern – the various interpretations of the Paris Treaty concerning the collection of navigation duties. Article 15 stated that no toll could be levied founded solely upon the navigation of the Danube, and no duty could be charged on the goods carried by commercial vessels. As it owned a long river section where important hydraulic works had to be carried out, the Porte insisted that it had the right to collect a regular tax on shipping,

42 Ioan C. Filitti, 'Un raport diplomatic muntean din 1856,' *Revista Istorică* 10.4–6 (1923): 75–79.

43 For this, see the classic accounts of W.G. East, *The Union of Moldavia and Wallachia, 1859, an Episode in Diplomatic History* (Cambridge 1929) and T.W. Riker, *The Making of Roumania: A Study of an International Problem 1856–1866* (London 1931).

44 Filitti, 'Un raport': 79.

intended to cover the costs of maintaining river navigability. He also defended the Austrian view that there existed a clear distinction between inland and maritime navigation and considered that the first had to be reserved to riparian states. This fact derived from 'their sovereign rights over the Danube', as clearly stated in the 1815 Vienna Act.⁴⁵

After 31 sessions, the parties finally reached a compromise in late August 1857, when the text of a Navigation Act, with a total of 47 articles, was completed. It removed all exclusive privileges which prevented the application on the Danube of the 1815 Vienna Act, and declared that navigation between river and sea was free and equal to vessels of all nations. However, inland navigation was 'reserved for the vessels of riparian countries'. The rest of the document referred in detail to public safety measures, the categories of tolls levied by riparian states, quarantine regulations, procedures in cases of shipwrecks, and other shipping accidents and piloting regulations etc. The Riverain Commission was to appoint experts who would navigate along the Danube, study the nature of the physical obstacles hindering navigation and indicate the hydrotechnical works necessary for removing them. The Riverain Commission would analyse these technical results, but the actual works had to be done by riparian states, as in the case of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine. The Navigation Act was to come into force starting on 1 January 1858.⁴⁶

Beyond drafting this very useful document, a real benefit of this expert meeting was that the Riverain Commission managed to collect a vast amount of knowledge on the Danube. From the beginning of their activity the seven plenipotentiaries required from their governments maps of the river and of its banks, details on physical obstacles, statements of expenditure recently incurred by their states in constructions and works for the improvement of Danube navigation and description of duties paid on navigation.⁴⁷ This shared expertise seemed to represent a good start for regulating navigation along a river that, by 1857, still lacked a reliable map.

In September 1857, the Riverain Commission met to work on river policing regulations, and again the convention of the Rhine and Elbe, as well as a Bavarian project for the Danube, served as initial models. The representatives of Württemberg and Moldavia were appointed to prepare a preliminary version, a part of which was drafted within a fortnight. Moldavia's Ludovic Steege was assisted by Georg Gottlieb Schirges, the archivist of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine in Mainz, whereas Württemberg's

45 Annex to protocol no. 5, 7 January 1857 – *Donau-Schiffahrtsacte*, 23–27.

46 Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 51–66.

47 Protocols 2 and 3, 3 and 10 December 1856 – *Donau-Schiffahrtsacte*, 5–7.

Müller got precious input from a certain Meyer, an inspector of the DDSG.⁴⁸ The three initial chapters (construction, equipment, crew and loading of vessels; duties of ship captains and crews; and piloting) were to be completed after getting the feedback of riverain states on details such as: laws, regulations and customs on fluvial police, where they were applied, to what types of vessels, other interested administrative and technical authorities or companies, places where piloting was necessary, and current rules for piloting and pilots.⁴⁹

But the apparent peace of the Riverain Commission was ruined on 7 November 1857, when plenipotentiaries assembled to vote on the Navigation Act. Serbia's Filip Hristić was instructed by his government to demand the modification of several articles, but all three commissioners (from Serbia, Wallachia and Moldavia) were refused the right to sign the document on an equal footing with the delegates of independent states. The commissioners protested and concluded separate minutes of the meeting, to reflect their own view on what had happened.⁵⁰ Eventually, stating that it was 'natural to sign together an act that was negotiated together', they were given the right to sign, but the act had only four original texts, as vassal states would receive copies from the Porte. These tensions were exploited by the national(ist) parties in the Principalities, which required the support of the ambassadorial conference to be convened in Paris in 1858 for deciding on the future organisation of Moldavia and Wallachia.⁵¹ But, by then, the non-riparian powers represented in the European Commission had their own complaints in relation to the works of the Riverain Commission and it suited them perfectly to add some more grievances from three diplomatically 'silenced voices'.

8 A Juridical Conflict between 1815 and 1856

The developments of the Crimean War attracted many western capitalists to invest in the economic resources of the Black Sea area. By the end of the conflict, tens of British, French and Austrian entrepreneurs were busy proposing the construction of bridges, railways, canals and harbours. The Lower Danube and its tributaries figured on the investment maps of such capitalists, as fluvial

48 Protocol 33, 16 October 1857 – *ibid.*, 241–242.

49 *Ibid.*, 243–255.

50 Focas, *The Lower Danube River*, 100.

51 Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Documente diplomatice*, edited by George Macoveanu, Dinu C. Giurescu and Constantin I. Turcu (Bucharest 1972), 70–71.

steam navigation companies, harbour infrastructure and railways to connect the Danube with inland territories seemed a very profitable business.

Martin Samuelson, a large investor in shipbuilding in the British port of Hull, came up with the idea of establishing a company to run steamers between Britain and the Black Sea, and further upstream the Danube. In March 1857, Samuelson wrote to the British Foreign Office for clarification on the grant he needed from the Viennese government to navigate in Austrian territorial waters. Little information was available at the time and Ambassador George Hamilton Seymour could get no details in Vienna.⁵²

By March 1857 the Riverain Commission had already concluded ten protocols, though its proceedings were conducted with much confidentiality. The European Commission sent copies of their own documents to Vienna,⁵³ but the Riverain Commission refused to engage in any institutional correspondence with its organisational sibling.⁵⁴ However, several plenipotentiaries later stated that their governments authorised them to communicate and exchange with the European Commission details and protocols of their meetings.⁵⁵

Further complications arose as the commissions looked for ways to execute their tasks. In April 1857, the British Foreign Office drafted a detailed 'Memorandum on the Danubian Commissions under the Treaty of March 30, 1856'. The document provided a legal interpretation of the proceedings of the two organs, mainly of the one in Galați, whose activities came into direct collision with Ottoman sovereign rights in the Danube Delta. The author considered that both institutions should report to a future ambassadorial conference on their results, 'not, however, that the Conference should ratify or confirm what they have done, but should merely record the fact of its having been done'.⁵⁶ When communicated to Buol in Vienna, the Austrian minister fully concurred with this opinion.⁵⁷

By June, information on the Riverain Commission's preliminary decisions made Ambassador Seymour worry that by reserving inland navigation for themselves, riparian states gave rise to a legal issue. Article 109 of the 1815

52 TNA, FO 78/3242, unnumbered (hereafter unn.) ('Mem. as to Austrian grants for trade upon the Danube,' 5 March 1857 and Ambassador George Hamilton Seymour to Clarendon, Vienna, 23 March 1857).

53 National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocol 10, 12 January 1857.

54 Protocol 14 of the Riverain Commission, 11 March 1857 – *Donau-Schiffahrtsacte*, 85–86.

55 Protocol 15, 30 March 1857 – *ibid.*, 95–96.

56 TNA, FO 78/3242, unn. ('Memorandum respecting the Danubian Commission under the treaty of March 30, 1856,' Foreign Office, London, 23 April 1857).

57 *Ibid.* (Seymour to Clarendon, Vienna, 25 May 1857).

Vienna Act seemed to be in direct contradiction with the stipulations of the Paris Treaty, 'in which case I submit that the more modern supersedes the more ancient stipulation, that 1815 must give way to 1856'.⁵⁸ The French ambassador to Vienna, François-Adolphe de Bourqueney, was actively involved in defending the view that the regulation set out by the Riverain Commission was merely a draft which had no validity until sanctioned by the Concert of Europe in an ambassadorial conference.⁵⁹

Analysed by the British Privy Council of Trade in a document signed by Sir James Emmerson Tennent, the permanent secretary of the Board of Trade, the Riverain Commission's preliminary stipulations were considered injurious to British interests, as their effect 'will be practically to exclude Great Britain from any commercial advantages in this branch of trade'. There were ample grounds for contesting the validity of the very principles upon which these regulations had been framed, as the 1815 Vienna Act had been mistakenly applied on the Rhine, the Elbe and other European rivers.⁶⁰ A similar opinion was formulated when European cabinets got a copy of the Navigation Act drafted by the Riverain Commission in late August 1857. An additional reason to consider its basic principle (inland navigation reserved to riverain states) illegal was the fact that Britain and other countries had rights resulting from bilateral treaties, such as those concluded in 1838 between Britain, Austria and the Porte.⁶¹

In Istanbul, Ambassador Stratford Canning tried to persuade the Porte to postpone signing the 1857 Vienna Navigation Act, but Foreign Minister Aali Pasha defended his acceptance with the answer that the Ottoman signature would not invalidate a collective decision of all signatories of the Paris Treaty.⁶²

A new analysis by the Privy Council of Trade insisted on the legal conflict between the 1815 principles and how they were implemented on Europe's international rivers. Britain could not acquiesce to the application of principles to the Danube that it considered 'to be at variance with the proper construction of that Treaty and which would defeat the primary commercial objects of the western powers in providing by the Treaty of Paris for the free navigation of the Danube'.⁶³

58 Ibid. (the same, 27 June 1857).

59 Ibid. (the same, 14 and 27 July 1857).

60 Ibid. (Report from the Office of Committee of Privy Council for Trade, London, 30 July 1857).

61 Ibid. (Report from the Office of Committee of Privy Council for Trade, London, 19 October 1857).

62 Ibid. (Stratford Canning to Clarendon, Istanbul, 8 October 1857).

63 Ibid. (Report from the Office of Committee of Privy Council for Trade, London, 28 October 1857).

The signing of the Navigation Act in 'unpleasant circumstances' gave non-riparian powers additional reasons to contest the validity of the agreement.⁶⁴ Britain contested three main points (the document's silence on Danube's tributaries, the exclusion of non-riparian states from inland navigation, and its overriding existing treaties),⁶⁵ but it also used diplomatic channels to bargain for a compromise. Buol spoke of 'sovereign rights and national dignity' and used the very arguments of the Foreign Office: an ambassadorial conference could only take note of the regulation. However, he insisted that more could be gained through mutual bargaining.⁶⁶

The Austrian position was communicated in a long memorandum, whose main argument stemmed from the legal authority of the 1815 Vienna Act. Non-riparian states could have a say only in the Danube Delta, where vital hydrotechnical works had to be carried out through a collective effort by Europe. This was an extraordinary and transitory measure, and the area was later to return to the application of common law. The 1856 Treaty mentioned the special position of riverain states, and their view was similar to the execution of the same principles on the Elbe, Weser or Rhine. The Viennese cabinet also rejected the right of an ambassadorial conference to validate the Riverain Commission's regulations, as such an acceptance would infringe upon the sovereignty of riparian states. 'It would be a gratuitous humiliation to have four sovereign states wait for formal approval from the plenipotentiaries of five other states before ratifying an international convention they concluded, relative to the navigation of a river they shared.'⁶⁷

The Porte stood by its decision to ratify the Navigation Act, despite increasing pressure from Britain and France to reject it. In a memorandum sent to London on 16 January 1858, Fuad Pasha considered that the Navigation Act corresponded entirely with the principles of the Vienna Congress on the issue of fluvial navigation. Similar riparian commissions were consecrated on Europe's rivers by decisions of riparian countries, which needed to defend their sovereign rights and national interests.⁶⁸

In the following months, the other contracting powers provided their interpretation of the Navigation Act, making this a very interesting case of international juridical bargaining. The French memorandum questioned if the 1815 Vienna principles 'necessarily implied the exclusion of non-riparian flags

64 Ibid. (Seymour to Clarendon, Vienna, 8, 11 and 18 November 1857).

65 Ibid. (Report from the Office of Committee of Privy Council for Trade, London, 5 December 1857).

66 Ibid. (Seymour to Clarendon, Vienna, 9 and 16 December 1857).

67 Ibid., FO 881/731 (version printed for the use of the Foreign Office on 22 April 1858).

68 Ibid., FO 881/734 (version printed for the use of the Foreign Office on 23 April 1858).

on the rivers subjected to the free regime'. At the same time, the 1831 Mainz Convention which defined the rights of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine could not be considered as 'the invariable and compulsory rule'.⁶⁹

The Russians contested the very basis of Austria's position: that of comparing the Danube with any other international river. The Danube was, politically and economically, special, as 'the interests of the West are linked by the Danube with those of the Levant'. The Riverain Commission's regulations and the dissolution of the European Commission needed the unanimous adhesion of all contracting powers, as it required common supervision of Danubian navigation adopted by the Concert of Powers. The 1857 Vienna Act could not be the proper rule for the Danube, whose lower course from Belgrade to the Black Sea traversed riparian states with special social and political situations. Serbia, Wallachia and Moldavia were vassal states which had the Ottoman Empire as suzerain and Christian Europe as guarantor. The 1815 Vienna principles had been modified according to the political conditions from the Lower Danube, and Europe had to safeguard their rights which had not been properly defended in Vienna in 1856–1857.⁷⁰

The Sardinian government referred to the 1857 Act's problems of form and content. The ambassadorial conference had the right and obligation to examine the Riverain Commission's work, to modify and even reject it, if it was not in accordance 'in its entirety or in part with the dispositions of the Paris Treaty and its spirit'. Free navigation was one of the guarantees of peace, and the signatory powers were obliged to see to its application. The 1857 Vienna Act was contrary to the 1856 Paris Treaty (as it raised obstacles to Danubian navigation) and to the rights granted by the Porte to several powers either by public treaties or by customary law.⁷¹

Finally, the Prussian memorandum defended the right of an ambassadorial conference to analyse and veto the 1857 Navigation Act, whose articles were contrary to the mutual interests of European powers.⁷²

The diplomatic dispute was exacerbated by its presentation in the daily press and by public positions of nationalist agitators or expert voices, such as Wurm. Rarely did such authors differ from the official position of their governments. Analysis of this journalistic dispute reveals the increasing public interest in decision-making processes involving such delicate concepts as nation, sovereignty and dignity.

69 Ibid., FO 881/732 (version printed for the use of the Foreign Office on 23 April 1858).

70 Ibid., FO 881/736 (version printed for the use of the Foreign Office on 27 April 1858).

71 Ibid., FO 881/735 (version printed for the use of the Foreign Office on 23 April 1858).

72 Ibid., FO 881/733 (version printed for the use of the Foreign Office on 23 April 1858).

In late 1857 – early 1858 when western governments pressured the Porte to refuse the ratification of the Vienna Navigation Act, the British press covered the story in plenty of detail. A correspondent of London's *The Times* reported from Vienna on 29 December 1857, condemning the narrow view of riverain states. As for their great privileges on rivers such as the Elbe and Weser, 'the sooner they are abolished the better it will be for Europe at large'.⁷³ A week later, quoting an Austrian newspaper that portrayed the Habsburgs as defenders of the Porte's integrity and sovereignty, the reporter believed that the Viennese cabinet would eventually acknowledge the justice of western claims.⁷⁴ Faced with Austrian 'illiberalism' and 'selfishness', Britain and France had to stay strong. By yielding in this matter

would they not appear ridiculous in the eyes of surrounding nations? Would they not have been used as "cat's paws" by Austria? They dislodged the Russians from the mouths of the Danube, but it was not for the advantage of Austria and the other Riverain Powers alone that they undertook and accomplished such a difficult task. England, France, and Russia would do well to put the spur into the flank of the European Commission for the navigation of the Danube will not be free until its labours are completed.⁷⁵

Media coverage remained consistent throughout the first half of 1858, and the daily press was fed with 'leaks' of the different memoranda drafted by interested governments. Several brochures were published throughout Europe, among which a French memorandum with a detailed historical and juridical presentation of the entire issue.⁷⁶ Wurm's collection of articles published in his second brochure was perfectly timed.

9 Riparians vs. Non-riparians at the 1858 Paris Ambassadorial Conference

In these circumstances, diplomatic discussions on the Navigation Act sustained such public positions. The Paris conference convened in 1858 to complete the future organisation of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia,

73 'Austria,' *The Times*, 1 January 1858: 7.

74 *Ibid.*, 7 January 1858: 7.

75 *Ibid.*, 11 January 1858: 8.

76 *Mémoire sur la liberté du Danube et sur l'acte de navigation du 7 novembre* (Paris 1858).

which were eventually granted a constitution and allowed to have a formal union.

The Danube Question was discussed during the sittings of 9, 16 and 19 August 1858. On 9 August, the 1857 Navigation Act was officially communicated to the European plenipotentiaries. Discussions on its contents started one week later and Britain led the 'alliance' of non-riparian interventionists. Cowley, Britain's Ambassador to Paris, objected to the Act for not including proper guarantees for safeguarding free trade and navigation on the Danube. As the document was 'conceived in a more exclusive spirit, and one more favourable to the Riverain States', Cowley demanded the abolishment or substitution of about a third of its articles and wanted subsequent alterations of the Act to have the consent of all contracting powers. Walewski backed him on these points and further required the extension of free navigation to Danube's tributaries. The Prussian, Russian and Sardinian delegates were in favour of all the proposals of non-riparian states.⁷⁷

The Austrian delegate, Baron Hübner, defended the legality and validity of the 1857 Act. He referred to the principles and stipulations of the 1815 and 1856 peace settlements, which did not imply an absolute freedom of navigation for the flags of all nations. With ample references to the proceedings of 1815, he considered that the 1857 Vienna Act maintained the clear distinction between riverain and non-riverain states which was upheld in the 1856 Paris Treaty. Only the Danube Delta area received an extraordinary status, and the Maritime Danube remained completely free for the commercial traffic of all flags. Citing the cases of the Rhine and the Elbe, he considered that absolute freedom for all flags could only be applied to the Maritime Danube.⁷⁸

The Ottoman plenipotentiary also defended the Act drafted in Vienna in 1857, which conformed with the peace treaties of 1815 and 1856. Hübner and Fuad Pasha consented to forward all opinions to their governments to be taken 'into consideration, and come to an agreement about them with the other riverain governments, in order that deference may be shown to the wishes of the Powers, without infringing on the sovereign rights of the riverain States'. The enforcement of the Navigation Act was contested in the absence of a collective decision, and the Porte yielded and agreed to wait for the observations of the contracting powers before applying the Riverain Commission's Navigation Act.⁷⁹

77 Protocol no. 18 of 16 August 1858, in Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 67–77.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

With the Riverain Commission contested by the five non-riparian countries, the term of the European Commission had to be prolonged. On 19 August 1858, the seven plenipotentiaries decided to extend it until the completion of the works which had started at Sulina.⁸⁰ This was again a very ambiguous decision, which opened the way for future prolongations.

In the following months, the four sovereign delegates in the Riverain Commission worked in Vienna to modify the Navigation Act. On 1 March 1859, they signed the Additional Articles to the 1857 Act, which included significant changes to the initial agreement. Riparian states could introduce exceptions from the general rule, and thus allow shipping companies of non-riparian countries inland navigation. Freedom of navigation was extended to Danube's tributaries, while other changes referred to the more liberal organisation of navigation and trade.⁸¹

Austria started to apply the Navigation Act in its waters in 1858 and tried to convince the other riverain states to do the same. The pro-Austrian provisional government of Moldavia agreed to introduce preliminary measures, but a new cabinet terminated this in April 1859, after the Porte suspended its application in its own territorial waters.⁸² European powers rejected the 1859 Additional Articles, and Austria, defeated in the war against France and Sardinia, had other priorities on its diplomatic agenda. By 1859 the Riverain Commission formally ceased to exist, although the Austrians tried to resurrect it several times in the ensuing decades and used it at other critical junctures to counterbalance the claims of non-riparian states.

10 Conclusions

The European Commission survived as the only organ that represented the collective will of Europe's Concert of Powers. All seven governments accepted the special status of the Maritime Danube, part of a peripheral region where the Russian authorities could not or would not remove the natural and artificial sources of shipping insecurity. This status was confirmed at the 1856 Paris Peace Congress not only by transferring the Danube Delta from defeated Russia, but also by adding to it a portion of Southern Bessarabia, which broke any territorial connections between Russia and the Danube.

80 Protocol no. 19 of 19 August 1858, *ibid.*, 77.

81 *Ibid.*, 78–79.

82 Focas, *The Lower Danube River*, 262.

The internationalisation and institutionalisation of Danube navigation through the stipulations of the 1856 Paris Treaty created exceptional juridical instruments that added to previous interpretations of the 1815 Vienna Treaty. The Commission was such an innovation, motivated by the exceptional situation of the region where it would act. The Commission was established as an executive technical institution, an agency for showcasing the Great Powers' direct involvement in turning the Maritime Danube into a safe and reliable transportation infrastructure. As riparian states along the Lower Danube did not have the hydraulic expertise and the financial resources to complete such a task, Europe's support was even more remarkable. The western victors had direct economic interests in the region, but multilateral involvement seemed a fair solution given the crucial importance of establishing a system of security and predictability for commercial exchanges along the most strategic portion of an international river. At the same time, it can be added that the European Commission was one of the several commissions appointed through the 1856 Paris Treaty to enforce some of the most complex decisions of Europe's Great Powers. A 'Special Commission' had to investigate the present state of the Principalities and to propose bases for their future constitutional organisation, while the same states were to send 'delegates' to decide on the course of the new Russian-Ottoman borderline. As part of this framework, the European Commission was one of the means of quickly executing the terms of the treaty.

With the western powers united in their determination to be part of the institutional framework that was to regulate navigation along the Maritime Danube, they secured their voice in a temporary organ, terminable by common consent, whose jurisdiction was limited to the region where shipping insecurity was acute.⁸³ The principle of internationalisation as understood by the non-riparian victors was applied only in the Danube Delta area, i.e. in Ottoman territorial waters. The rest of the river followed the jurisdiction of each riparian state, so eventually the Danube ended up being less uniform than before the Crimean War.

The proceedings of the Riverain Commission proved that after Russia's removal from the Danube, Austria acted as the new hydro-hegemon. Its passive-aggressive programme was veiled under a discourse privileging the 'sovereign rights' and 'national interests' of riparian states. But for the western powers the Riverain Commission was, in Viennese hands, just an instrument for further political and economic expansion. The asymmetric power relation along the Danube's valley made Austria the 'usual suspect' for such hegemonic plans

83 Bacon, 'British Policy and the Regulation of European Rivers of International Concern,' *British Yearbook of International Law* 10 (1929): 168.

and, in fact, prevented the Riverain Commission from reconvening and resuming works after the failure of its plans in the first years after 1856.

The Danube remained outside a fully internationalised regime and lacked a central regulating agency for its navigation, but its maritime section received a special status that was served by a similarly exceptional organisation, the Commission. Its resilience in such troubled waters depended on the ingenuity of the delegates based at Galați to instil a security regime in the marshy waters of the Danube Delta.

A Quest for Authority and Autonomy

In order to compensate for its [the Sublime Porte's] inexperience, its notorious impotence, even its ill-will, the [Great Powers'] governments deemed it expedient to invest their plenipotentiaries with a part of their sovereign rights.

ÉDOUARD-PHILIPPE ENGELHARDT, 1866



1 On Dual Institutional Hosting

The relationships between international organisations and their host cities and states are multifarious and complex. Since the 1870s, when Scottish law professor James Lorimer discussed the ‘want of an international locality’ which would belong ‘to all nations and to none’ in particular and which would serve as a ‘centre of international life’, the study of IOs’ location and status has been pursued from several perspectives by legal experts, international relations scholars and economists.¹ Some authors referred to the incentives of states to create ‘internationalised zones’ and attract IOs to their national territory, which would provide host states with economic and political advantages. Others have looked at the interests of IOs, as their agents negotiate headquarters agreements guaranteeing a large degree of independence for their secretariat and staff, together with privileges and immunities for the organisation and its employees. Not least of all, local authorities are significant actors in

1 Clarence Wilfred Jenks, *The Headquarters of International Institutions – A Study of Their Location and Status* (London 1945); A.S. Muller, *International Organizations and Their Host States: Aspects of Their Legal Relationship* (The Hague, London and Boston 1995); Niels Blokker, ‘The Independence of International Organizations from Their Host States: From Theory to Practice,’ online on the website of the Council of Europe (<https://rm.coe.int/1680oc093e>) (visited on 27 April 2018).

the acquisition and maintenance of IOs,² which can contribute to shaping or strengthening their cosmopolitan and liberal identity.³

By the time Lorimer published his essay the world was populated with only a handful of IOs. However, one of them had managed to secure a great level of autonomy; in fact, it was seated in two localities, one of which enjoyed the status of being an ‘internationalised zone’, where legal security for its headquarters, assets and staff was guaranteed by an agreement between Europe’s Great Powers. This peculiar outcome was the result of a complex historical process in which an instrument of ‘collective imperialism’ (the European Commission of the Danube)⁴ met with weak states struggling to control a vital portion of their territory – the Danube Delta. The Commission thus came to assume a larger role than that envisioned by its creators, and it gradually gained autonomy and authority in the region as a way of fulfilling its technical function.

This section will briefly discuss how the Commission came to settle its headquarters in the Danubian port-cities of Galați and Sulina, and how this decision shaped both the IO’s identity and the history of its two locations. Further on, the chapter will detail, along the institutionalist analytical layer, the early history of the Commission, with a focus on its inner structure, decision-making mechanisms and gradual transformation into an autonomous organ. The organisation’s authority increased over time with attributes acquired from below, and relevant episodes are presented on its agency in bringing stability to the Danube Delta. The making of a transnational ‘community of experts’ in the navigation of international waterways will also be approached. These experts established a functional security regime with rules and enforcing organs along the Maritime Danube but equally, they disseminated their knowledge beyond the region and contributed, as was the case with the supranational character of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine,⁵ towards further European integration. All in all, the chapter will present how, in the first decade of its existence, the Commission acquired skilled human resources, drafted a constitutional charter and got the Great Powers’ approval

2 Herman van der Wusten, ‘“Legal Capital of the World”: Political Centre-Formation in The Hague,’ *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 97:3 (2006): 253–266.

3 Thore Newmann and Anne Peters, ‘Switzerland,’ in: August Reinisch (ed.), *The Privileges and Immunities of International Organizations in Domestic Courts* (Oxford 2013), 241.

4 Constantin Iordachi, ‘Collective Imperialism: The European Commission of the Danube, 1856–1918/1920,’ paper presented at the Fifth European Congress on World and Global History, Budapest, 31 August–3 September 2017.

5 Guido Thieme and Isabel Tölle, ‘Supranationalität im 19. Jahrhundert? Die Beispiele der Zentralkommission für die Rheinschiffahrt und des Octroivertrages 1804–1851,’ *Journal of European Integration History* 17.2 (2011): 177–196.

to extend its mission from regulating navigation along the Maritime Danube to that of acting as a pillar of order and security in an area still unsettled after the territorial and demographic shifts brought by the Crimean War.

The first point of discussion is the headquarters issue. The choice of an initial meeting place for the seven European envoys was a rather simple decision for the governments who participated in the 1856 Paris Congress. They ordered their delegates to convene in the commercial capital of the Lower Danube, the Moldavian port-city of Galați, which stood about 100 miles inland from the Black Sea coast. The place lay about 30 miles outside the jurisdiction of the Commission, though the logic behind its works was to allow seagoing ships easier and safer access to the ports of Galați and Brăila, the outlets of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. This situation of commissioners sitting in Moldavia to regulate navigation on a river section in the Ottoman Empire would bring complications and attempts to either move the Commission to its territorial jurisdiction or to extend the latter all the way to (at least) Galați. The extension was eventually decided through the 1878 Berlin Treaty (Chapter 8).

Galați was relatively well connected to Tulcea (the administrative capital of the Ottoman province that included the Danube Delta) and Sulina by steam packets plying regularly to Istanbul. A city of about 30,000 inhabitants in 1856, Galați had rapidly grown due to its prosperous grain trade. It had the appearance of a 'topsy-turvy' and busy Oriental city, but consuls, local officials and well-off merchants had built 'European' houses in new districts that displayed, according to some accounts, 'taste and elegance'. For Patrick O'Brien, the Irish traveller who visited it in 1853, Galați was a prosperous city, with good and tolerably well-paved roads; 'in the principal streets are some handsome shops', he added, 'and there is everywhere a pleasing appearance of bustle and prosperity'.⁶ Karl Hermann Bitter (1813–1885), the first Prussian commissioner to the Commission, noticed 'its grey roofs, white houses, churches with their towers sparkling in the sun, the whirling dust-clouds, the forest of masts along its harbour', and its many rascals and criminals of all nations.⁷ From all perspectives, Galați was a busy Levantine commercial hub, where East met West.

Galați was chosen to host the sittings of the Commission as, in the words of John Stokes, the first British commissioner, it was the nearest town to the

6 Patrick O'Brien, *Journal of a Residence in the Danubian Principalities in the Autumn and Winter of 1853* (London 1854), 23–24.

7 Karl Hermann Bitter, *Skizzen und Bilder aus den Ländern an den unteren Donau und aus dem europäischen Orient aus den Jahren 1856 bis 1858*, in: Heinz-Peter Mielke, *Karl Hermann Bitter. Stationen eines Staatsmannes* (Minden 1981), 40, 48.

Danube Delta ‘with any pretensions to western civilization’.⁸ It was a convenient seat for diplomatic negotiations between the seven delegates, who could find relatively decent accommodation and living conditions for them and their families. Galați was also well served by regular steamers, allowing delegates and their staff to easily proceed to the Danube Delta, but also to reach major European communication hubs, such as Istanbul or Vienna. A telegraph line connected it to the capitals of the two Principalities and to the world at large, permitting delegates to be in touch with their countries’ foreign offices. Galați also seemed like an appropriate choice given the uncertainty as to which branch of the Danube was to be improved. Until a choice was made between Chilia,⁹ Sulina and St George, commissioners and the Commission’s increasing bureaucratic staff could enjoy the better life of a, by local standards, modern city.

The town of Sulina was home to the Commission’s Technical Department. As Sulina was, in 1856, the only navigable branch of the Danube, the small town at the junction of river and sea housed the engineering staff studying the area and the bureaucrats involved in enforcing the IO’s early regulations. The Sulina mouth was eventually chosen for provisional and permanent improvement, and it remained the home base for the Commission’s hydraulic and navigational operations.

The 1860s was a period of extreme uncertainty for the Commission, whose prolongation depended upon a unanimous agreement of its seven member states. Its term was extended by five years in 1866, and by twelve more years in 1871. By then, its inner regulations had changed a lot, and the Commission’s daily business was run by an Executive Committee comprised of two commissioners. It was in this context that further debates emerged in relation to the Commission’s seat.

In April 1871, a proposal was made to build a modern headquarters at Galați, as the Commission’s services were housed in improper conditions for the size and social status of its staff.¹⁰ Discussions continued in July 1871, when Baron Adolphe d’Avril, the French commissioner, inquired into the possibility of moving the IO’s seat to Ottoman territory, to Tulcea or Sulina. Stokes, the long-standing British delegate, replied by mentioning the three advantages of keeping the Commission at Galați: it provided better communication with the

8 John Stokes, *Autobiography* (s.l. s.a.), 63.

9 The Romanian form ‘Chilia’ will be used throughout this volume. In nineteenth-century English and French sources ‘Kilia’ was used, whereas in Ukrainian the name is now transliterated as ‘Kiliya.’

10 National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocol 253, 24 April 1871.

commissioners who held other diplomatic functions, it allowed them to regularly meet, and the organisation worked amidst the mercantile community that benefited most directly from its technical works. Ismail Bey, the Ottoman delegate, pledged his government's support in improving communications with Sulina and his personal involvement with the Executive Committee in case of a change,¹¹ but most delegates considered that Galați better served the needs of the Commission's diplomatic and administrative branches.¹² Ismail Bey resumed the debate in April 1872, insisting that by moving the seat to Sulina, the Commission would significantly reduce its expenses, allowing commissioners closer supervision of the institution's navigational and technical departments. Several commissioners supported him,¹³ but their governments' political decision was to stick to Galați as the Commission's Central Office (with the Secretariat) and to have Sulina as the operational base for most of the executive services.¹⁴

Given the complicated political relations between the Ottoman Porte and its vassal state, there was no formal agreement with Moldavia (and later with Romania) to host the organisation. The central and local authorities in Moldavia were informed about the Commission's initial meeting in 1856 and were urged to give it any necessary support. This, however, did not transpire and the commissioners kept complaining about the Moldavian authorities' lack of deference for their activity. The organisation may not have received due consideration during its early days, but the commissioners did start to blend socially with the cosmopolitan elite of the busy commercial port-city.

Things gradually changed, and with Romania joining the quasi-permanent IO in 1878 the Romanian commissioners further positioned the Commission into a central role within local communal life. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the Commission continued to invest in shaping its image, the Commission's 'administrative palace' in Galați (completed in the mid-1890s—see Fig. 12) became a fashionable hot spot for local elites, which included 'the consuls, the heads of big shipping houses, bankers of different nationalities, landed proprietors and army officers'.¹⁵

For Ethel Greening Pantazzi, the young Canadian wife of a Romanian naval officer,

11 Ibid., Protocol 256, 4 July 1871.

12 Ibid., Protocol 262, 2 November 1871.

13 Ibid., Protocol 268, 30 April 1872.

14 Ibid., Protocol 276, 11 November 1872.

15 Ethel Greening Pantazzi, *Roumania in Light & Shadow* (Toronto 1921), 79.

Galatz has a charm of its own; it is quite different from any other Roumanian town, chiefly because it is the residence of the European Commission of the Danube. The eight Commissioners represent Britain, France, Italy, Austria, Germany, Turkey, Russia and Roumania, and, with the exception of the French delegate, have residences in Galatz and remain the year round. They are the natural leaders of their colonies, and do a good deal of entertaining, which has the charm of the unexpected, for one meets people from the four corners of the earth. Besides receiving in their own homes, they give, collectively, balls and other fetes every spring and autumn in the palace of the Commission, a large building where their meetings are held.¹⁶

If at Galați the Commission's headquarters had become a trendy meeting place for the elites of a busy commercial hub (whose population numbered about 70,000 inhabitants in the early 1900s), the Commission was even more central to communal life in Sulina. With hundreds of Commission employees amongst the 7,000 or so local inhabitants, and with the rest making their living from commercial and shipping ventures in the local harbour, the IO was 'the supreme source of Sulina's prosperity'.¹⁷ This centrality is visible in the Commission's involvement in almost every aspect of communal life, from Sulina's urban planning to its role in the educational or religious development of the town (see Chapter 9).

A marked difference existed between the two seats throughout the Commission's long history. Galați was the diplomatic and administrative centre, a corporate head office that dealt with managerial aspects such as strategic planning, decision-making, governance, communication, human resources and funding. Sulina was the Commission's main working place, serving as the operational centre wherefrom navigational safety was coordinated. A hierarchical relation developed between the two, with Sulina as the peripheral and 'colonial' branch in which, however, the Commission's privileged status was fully recognised. The Commission represents a special case in which an IO settled its provisional headquarters in two separate political entities and set a firmer spatial hold as its term got extended and it eventually became a quasi-permanent institution. Bridged between its diplomatic corporate offices in Galați and its operational base in Sulina, the Commission managed to balance its increasingly complex functions as the protector of the Maritime Danube's shipping security.

16 Ibid., 77–78.

17 Ibid., 125.

2 On Appointing Commissioners and the Role of Expertise

The maiden commissioners appointed to the Commission played a crucial role in its institutional survival and development. Delegates shaped the organisation to suit their states' interests, but also their own expertise and personality traits. At the same time, the shared experience of crafting an organisation from scratch and dealing with the many dimensions involved in this process broadened the commissioners' competencies. Some of them would gradually become part of a larger 'community of experts' in transboundary rivers, and their knowledge spread around the world. The stories of the seven maiden delegates are perhaps illustrative of the quality of the human resources involved in the early regulation of the Maritime Danube and of how they benefited from new skills after their Danubian careers.

Prussia's Bitter found it difficult to adapt to living in Galați. He had studied law and public administration, and for almost two decades had worked as public servant in different Prussian provincial administrations. He was familiar with regulating inland navigation and in the early 1850s was involved with the commission for the navigation of the Weser. But his too liberal convictions made him undesirable to his superiors, and his appointment to the Commission was more like a disciplinary measure than a promotion. Galați was not the place where Bitter could indulge his passion for Bach, Mozart, Handel or Wagner, on whose music he later published several books. But he had the liberty to paint, leaving numerous sketches of Danubian daily life (see Figs. 5–6 below). Bitter was an experienced official, and his bureaucratic 'pencil' is visible in the Commission's drive towards law and order. Bitter's expertise in international rivers secured his transfer in 1860 to the Rhine Commission (which he tried to reform on the Danube Commission's model) and his access to higher political offices. By the 1870s he held top governmental and administrative positions in Prussia and the German Empire, including that of Finance Minister in one of Bismarck's cabinets.¹⁸

His Austrian colleague, Franz Karl von Becke (1818–1870), would later serve as Finance Minister of the Double Monarchy. He was a law graduate who had joined the Viennese Foreign Office as a career diplomat. By the late 1840s Becke had been appointed to various positions at the consulates of Galați and Alexandria, and before the Crimean War worked for the Austrian Ministry of Commerce. His nomination to the Commission was as a result of his juridical and diplomatic expertise, but also his knowledge of the Lower Danube. After six years spent in Galați, he was appointed Vice-President of the Austrian

¹⁸ Mielke, *Karl Hermann Bitter*, 16, 24.

Maritime Authority in Trieste in 1862 and later crawled his way up to the capital's political elite.¹⁹

Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt (1828–1916) was a young diplomat when he joined the Commission in November 1856. He had studied law in Strasbourg, and soon after graduation joined the French consular service. Until 1856 he held several minor positions at the French consulates in Mainz and London. At the former he became familiar with the activity of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, and such expertise might have influenced the French Foreign Office's decision to appoint him to the position at the Maritime Danube.²⁰ He was in London in June 1856 when he received his nomination²¹ to the Commission. As will be detailed below, Engelhardt remained in Galați for eleven years, and his expertise made him one of the leading European authorities in international fluvial law.

John Stokes (1822–1902) was another key protagonist in the Commission's gradual metamorphosis into an autonomous IO. He had studied at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich and the Military Engineering School in Chatham, and served in South Africa in the 1840s. He was an instructor in surveying and field works in Woolwich and, as a military engineer, was entrusted in 1854–1855 with forming an Engineer Corps that was to assist an Ottoman contingent in the anti-Russian campaign. His energy and administrative efficiency brought him the appointment to the Commission, a decision that changed his whole life. Stokes became one of Britain's most influential experts in the regulation of international waterways and was later appointed vice-president of the Suez Canal Company Board (more on him in Chapter 6).²²

The other three commissioners were military and naval officers invested by their governments with administrative and diplomatic duties. Ömer Fevzi Pasha (1818–1878) had served in the Ottoman army during the Crimean War and became governor of the Ottoman sandjak of Tulcea. After his province incorporated the Danube Delta in 1856–1857, Ömer Pasha commuted to Galați from his headquarters at Tulcea to attend the Commission's meetings.

19 Wolfgang Fritz, *Für Kaiser und Republik: Österreichs Finanzminister seit 1848* (Vienna 2003), 50–51.

20 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve (CADC), *Personnel dossiers individuels*, Éd. Engelhardt; Albert Ronsin, *Les Vosgiens célèbres: dictionnaire biographique illustré* (Louis 1990), 128.

21 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), Représentant de la France auprès de la Commission Européenne du Danube, Série B, File 7, f. 2 (Count Walewski to Engelhardt, Paris, 3 June 1856).

22 *The Dictionary of National Biography: 1901–1911*, edited by Sidney Lee (Oxford 1912), 424–426; *Who Was Who*, vol. 1, 1897–1916 (London 1920), 68.



FIGURES 2-3 Group photos of the Danubian commissioners (ca. 1857-1859 and 1912)
SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

Henrik d'Offenberg, Baron of Courland (1821–1888) was equally familiar with the Lower Danubian area, but as a diplomat he had to fulfil other responsibilities at the Russian consulate in Bucharest.²³ Alessandro d'Aste Ricci (1814–1881) was an experienced seafarer in the Sardinian navy and had held the position of director of the Naval School in Genoa. His appointment to the Commission was linked most probably to his skills in seamanship.²⁴

These brief biographical notes indicate some of the reasons governments had for appointing their maiden delegates to the Commission. They all had some knowledge related to one of the multiple dimensions of shipping (juridical, hydraulic, administrative or naval). They were involved in the regulation of other European rivers (the Weser and the Rhine) or had diplomatic experience in the Levant. The expertise commissioners acquired in Galați proved highly valuable to their cabinets' growing interest in the regulation of international rivers and canals in Europe, and around the world. Many of these early delegates became authorities in international waterways and formed a 'community of experts'²⁵ that further disseminated their knowledge to the Rhine, the Suez Canal or to other waterways and ports. They were often involved in the selection or training of their successors, whose diplomatic skills needed to be accompanied by proper knowledge of the regulation of conventional rivers. They became role models in the organisation and contributed to the gradual formation of an institutional culture.²⁶ Not least of all, they equally used their proficiency to be promoted to more influential diplomatic or governmental positions, in which they continued to support European cooperation.

3 Early Decision-Making Mechanisms

Several theories on decision-making in IOs have tried to account for the ways in which such organs function as corporate entities. Regarded as 'black boxes' that convert the states' inputs (demands or interests) into outputs

23 Lee B. Crost, Asleigh Albrecht, Emily Cluff and Erica Resmer, *The Ambassadors: U.S. to Russia/Russia to U.S.* (Phoenix 2010), 119–120.

24 Details available at 'Alessandro d'Aste. Tenente di vascello, Medaglia d'oro al Valor Militare,' online at <http://www.marina.difesa.it/noi-siamo-la-marina/storia/la-nostra-storia/medaglie/Pagine/Dastealessandro.aspx> (visited on 20 January 2019).

25 More on this in Luminița Gătejel, 'Imperial Cooperation at the Margins of Europe: the European Commission of the Danube, 1856–65,' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 24.5 (2017): 781–800.

26 Marc Abélès and Henri-Pierre Jeudy (eds.), *Anthropologie du politique* (Paris 1997), 154–155.

(international agreements), IOs are structures whose behaviour is worth following in terms of processes such as agenda setting, deliberations on pending issues, voting procedures and outcomes etc.²⁷ This empirical study is illustrative of the history of decision-making mechanisms in nineteenth-century IOs, and it is equally relevant for understanding how the Commission managed to survive for such a long time. The entire organisational structure depended on the concurrence of several treaty provisions, on diplomatic best practices, and on a lot of common sense in assuming the best solutions for the difficult conditions of navigation along the Maritime Danube.

The seven commissioners convened in Galați on 4 November 1856 and immediately decided to draft an internal regulation to set the order of the Commission's works.²⁸ Prussia's Bitter with his bureaucratic experience compiled it, and the regulation was discussed and approved in late November 1856. The Commission functioned as a diplomatic assembly in which decisions were made by a majority of votes. Unanimity, however, was needed in all questions of principle. As delegate of the territorial power, Ömer Fevzi Pasha was elected president and Bitter became his assistant. With Ömer Pasha often away in his other administrative obligations (as he was governor of the Danube Delta area), Bitter played a leading role in the coordination of the Commission's daily business.

For expediency, the commissioners divided their work into several collegial committees, operating as ministries with shared administration. The technical committee consisted of d'Aste, Offenberg and Stokes, and it was charged with the coordination of the Commission's hydraulic programme, from planning the works to providing for the human and material resources necessary for completing them. The administrative committee, with Becke, Bitter and Engelhardt, had to decide on the normative component of rulemaking and prepare a set of coherent navigation regulations. The tariff committee (d'Aste, Becke and Stokes) was to study shipping practices at the Lower Danube and on other European rivers, and propose a reasonable tariff that was to provide the financial means needed for the administration of Danube navigation. Bitter was acting 'finance minister', responsible for the Commission's treasury. Each

27 Bob Reinalda, 'Decision Making within International Organizations. An Overview of Approaches and Case Studies,' paper delivered at a European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Workshop, 2001, 13–15 (online at <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/6161c44f-f398-45ef-a48f-02da2d6f6cc9.pdf>) (visited on 7 April 2018). See also Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek, 'The Issue of Decision Making within International Organizations,' in: eidem (eds.), *Decision Making within International Organizations* (London and New York 2006), 16–18.

28 PECD, Protocols 1, 4 and 5, 4, 28 and 29 November 1856.

committee regulated in its field of responsibility, but decisions were taken *in plenum* by a majority of the seven delegates.²⁹ It was this majority voting that would turn the Commission into a functional and efficient organ, capable of making sensitive decisions that were eventually accepted by all its member states.

At the same time, after preliminary research of the source material, financial and human resources available at Galați and a tour in the Danube Delta, the seven delegates became fully aware that a complex hydraulic and normative mission lay ahead of them. They decided to organise several services that were to support the Commission in the complex task of regulating river navigation. It should be reminded that innumerable obstacles impeded proper navigation along the Maritime Danube. The Danube Delta had no clear status, being occupied by Austrian troops, while its sovereignty was disputed between vassal Moldavia and the Ottoman Porte. Sulina was the only navigable river branch, but it was in a deplorable condition. The depth over the bar was insufficient, and commercial traffic continued by means of lighters owned by transnational 'pirates'. Despite Austrian attempts to impose control, anarchy and disorder ruled at Sulina, which remained the haven of numerous adventurers in search of easy profits (see Chapter 9).³⁰ Commissioners understood that they needed more than their diplomatic talents to solve these problems, and planted the roots of a complex bureaucratic structure when they founded a Secretariat to take care of the Commission's official correspondence and a Technical Department for the coordination of its hydraulic works.

The initial collegial system stayed in use for two busy years, during which the seven delegates worked tirelessly to regulate Danube navigation. A total of 89 protocols were concluded in 24 months, with commissioners meeting at Galați on a daily basis. However, in August 1858 the ambassadorial conference of Paris prolonged the organisation's term until the completion of its Sulina works, and as several delegates received from their governments other diplomatic/administrative duties, a more flexible 'charter' was voted in November 1858. The Commission was to convene *in plenum* once a week and daily activities were directed by an Executive Committee. It was made up of two commissioners, one responsible for the organisation's Secretariat (Administration Delegate), the other for its Cash Office (Finance Delegate). Apart from the Ottoman president, whose functions were protocolary, the other six delegates rotated monthly in these offices, in alphabetical order of their countries' names.³¹

29 *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 66–67.

30 *Ibid.*, 563.

31 PECD, appendix to Protocol 89, 4 November 1858.

The commissioners' involvement in the institution was unequal. It depended on three main factors: their states' interest in securing international control over the Maritime Danube, their own vision of the Commission's role and future, and the other diplomatic duties they received from their governments. Due to their countries' political and economic interests, Stokes, Engelhardt and Becke were the most active commissioners, together with Prussia's Bitter, whose imposing character made him assume leadership. Offenberg fulfilled his duties fairly, though Russia formally refused to play any key role in an organisation that resulted from its defeat in the Crimean War and regulated navigation in former Russian imperial waters. In March 1859, d'Aste returned to the Italian peninsula and a new Sardinian (Italian) delegate was appointed only in August 1860: Annibale Strambio, his country's Agent and General Consul to Bucharest, was to commute from Wallachia's capital to Galați to attend the Commission's meetings. Bitter left in October 1860 and was replaced by Jules Alexander Aloyse de Saint-Pierre, Prussia's Agent and General Consul to Bucharest, who attended the Commission's meetings from May 1861. As Offenberg was also based in Wallachia's capital, the three delegates who resided at Galați (called 'resident commissioners') – Becke, Engelhardt and Stokes – dominated the Executive Committee during the early 1860s.

Becke was his country's consul to Galați, and Austria launched the model of employing consuls in Moldavia's port-city to also serve as commissioners. Stokes was appointed Britain's General Consul for the Danube Delta, and Engelhardt requested a similar position along the Middle and Lower Danube, as consular powers granted commissioners more authority in relation to their fellow countrymen. A reorganisation of the position of France's Danubian commissionership occurred in 1867, when Engelhardt was appointed French Consul to Belgrade, and Baron Adolphe d'Avril, French General Consul to Bucharest, took over his responsibilities in the Commission. By the early 1880s Britain also merged the position of Danubian commissioner with that of consul to Galați.

A new step towards the flexibilisation of the Commission was taken in 1864, when the seven delegates decided to have two plenary sessions per year, in spring and autumn. Other changes followed, with the view of allowing non-resident delegates a more active involvement in the organisation's transactions.³² All major decisions were to be taken during plenary sessions, while the Executive Committee and chiefs of services ran the organisation's daily business. A further professionalisation of delegates is visible once the Commission turned into a quasi-permanent institution and local consuls were

32 *La Commission*, 66–67.

TABLE 1 List of European commissioners, 1856–1916

Austria (Austria-Hungary)

Franz Karl von Becke (1856–1862)
 Alfred von Kremer (1862–1869)
 Nicholas Zulauf von Pottenburg (1869–1871)
 Ottocar Freiherr Schlechta Wehrhrd
 (1871–1872)
 Gustav Ritter v. Gröller (1874–1875)
 Ernst von Haan (1875–1882)
 Karl von Boleslawski (1882–1889)
 Karl Ritter von Gsiller (1890–1895)
 Moritz Freiherr Czikann-Wahlborn (1896)
 Hugo II Logothetti (1897–1898)
 Viktorin von Borhek (1899–1911)
 Alfons Felner von der Arl (1912–1916)

France

Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt (1856–1867)
 Adolphe d'Avril (1867–1876)
 Jules Herbette (1877–1879)
 Camille Barrère (1880–1883)
 André Lavertujon (1883–1885)
 Frederic Guéau, Marquis de Reverseaux de
 Rouvray (1885–1890)
 Comte L. d'Aubigny (1891)
 Georges Cogordan (1891–1894)
 Joseph Adam Sienkiewicz (1894–1895)
 Constantin Jules Paillard-Ducléré
 (1896–1902)
 Marcellin Pellet (1902–1906)
 Pierre de Margerie (1906–1907)
 Gabriel Pierre Deville (1907–1908)
 André Soulange-Bodin (1909–1911)
 Jean Marie August Guillemin (1911–1916)

Great Britain

John Stokes (1856–1871)
 Charles Gordon (1872–1873)
 Herbert Taylor Siborne (1874–1881)
 Percy Sanderson (1882–1894)
 Henry Trotter (1894–1906)
 Hamilton Browne (1907–1912)
 John Baldwin (1913–1916)

Ottoman Empire

Ömer Fevzi Pasha (1856–1863)
 Rashid Pasha (1863)
 Mehmed Sabri Pasha (1864)
 Ahmed Rassim Pasha (1864–1867)
 Suleyman Pasha (1867–1869)
 Ismail Kemal Bey Vlora (1870–1872)
 Fahri Bey (1873–1875)
 Madjid Bey (1876)
 Aali Bey (1876)
 Mehmed Said Pasha (1877)
 Constantin Effendi Et. Caratheodory
 (1878–1885)
 Artin Effendi (1886–1887)
 Maxime Effendi Varhaliti (1888–1889)
 Manuk Azarian Effendi (1890–1908)
 Ihsan Hüsnü Effendi (1908–1911)
 Hassan Haydar Bey (1911–1916)

TABLE 1 List of European commissioners, 1856–1916 (*cont.*)**Prussia (Germany)**

Karl Hermann Bitter (1856–1860)
 Jules Alexandre Aloyse de Saint-Pierre
 (1860–1867)
 Heinrich Keyserling Rautenburg (1868–1869)
 Joseph Maria von Radowitz (1870–1872)
 von Pfuel (1873–1875)
 Friedrich Johann von Alvensleben (1876–1877)
 Johannes Arendt (1878–1885)
 Franz von Aichberger (1886–1888)
 Raffauf (1891–1894)
 De Loehr (1895–1902)
 Marheinecke (1902–1916)

Romania

G. Râșcanu (1878)
 Eustație Pencovici (1879–1885)
 Grigore I. Ghica (1886–1888)
 A. Teriaki (1888)
 Eustație Pencovici (1889)
 Ion Bălăceanu (1889–1892)
 Eustație Pencovici (1893–1903)
 Trandafir G. Djuvara (1904)
 Gheorghe G. Bengescu (1905–1906)
 Constantin C. Nanu (1906–1909)
 Duiliu Zamfirescu (1909–1916)

Russia

Henrik d'Offenberg (1856–1871)
 Ivan Zinoviev (1872–1875)
 Dimitri Stuart (1876–1877)
 Alexander Romanenko (1878–1892)
 Nicolai de Lodygensky (1892–1901)
 Anatol Lobanow Rostowski (1902–1903)
 Piotr Kartamishev (1904–1916)

Sardinia (Italy)

Alessandro d'Aste Ricci (1856–1859)
 Annibale Strambio (1860–1865)
 Francesco Teccio de Bayo (1866)
 Romano Susinno (1867–1868)
 Berrio (1868–1872)
 Cesare Durando (1873–1876)
 Charles Albert Seysel d'Aix de
 Sommariva (1877)
 Melchiorre Simondetti (1878–1880)
 Nicola Revest (1881–1886)
 Giovanni Paolo De Riva (1887–1888)
 G. Pascali Corte (1888–1889)
 Giulio Tesi (1890–1899)
 Saint Martin (1899)
 Nicolas Domenico Pappalepore
 (1900–1905)
 Lodovico Centurione (1906)
 Enrico Acton (1907–1908)
 Monzani (1908)
 Giuliano de Visart (1909–1914)
 Alessandro Leoni (1915–1916)

appointed to represent their countries' interests in Danubian navigation. By the late nineteenth century, most commissioners (see Table 1) also served as consuls to Galați, so they devoted a large part of their time and energy to issues related to Danubian navigation and trade.

A gradual bureaucratisation of procedures was enforced, as the Commission's Secretariat matured into a fully reliable service (see Chapter 7). It coordinated with the rotating presidency, the Executive Committee and all commissioners on agenda setting, and organised deliberations on pending issues to maximise the organisation's efficiency during its plenary sessions. The majority vote rule allowed daily business to be conducted robustly, and in all issues of principle requiring unanimity, bargaining resulted in reasonable compromises. All in all, decision-making procedures imposed in the early phase of the Commission's existence survived into the twentieth century, while its most significant decisions were examined and approved by national governments, oftentimes in multilateral conferences. Such was the case with the 1865 Public Act (see below), which was sanctioned by an ambassadorial conference in Paris in 1866, further proof that the Commission acted as an institutional embodiment of Europe's Concert of Powers.

4 Diverging Views on the Binding Force of the Commission's Regulations

One of the Commission's first challenges was to impose its decisions throughout its territorial jurisdiction. Commissioners were quick in adopting tens of regulations, but the IO's authority to do so was questioned by several foreign merchants, ship captains and consuls based in the Danube Delta area.

The latter justified their position in several ways. Firstly, they contested the Commission's role in drafting administrative regulations, as the organisation was formally a technical institution tasked to remove the physical obstacles that hindered river navigation. Secondly, foreign subjects enjoyed, according to the capitulatory regime, a privileged status in the Ottoman dominions. Vincent Lloyd, the British vice-consul to Sulina, led the resistance against the Commission, and Stokes struggled to make the local British community accept the IO's regulations and authority. Stokes petitioned the Foreign Office several times and tried to find a diplomatic solution, which in fact meant that the Danube Delta was removed outside the Ottoman territories where the Capitulations were valid. In other words, the international order instituted by the Commission overruled the privileged position that individual states enjoyed in the Ottoman Empire.

It took Stokes a long time to convince the Foreign Office to issue a formal statement of support for the Commission. Following a royal decision dated 6 January 1862 it was ordered that ‘all rules, orders, and regulations’ made and to be made by the Commission should ‘be binding and in force’, and should have ‘the force and effect of law, upon and against all British subjects’ within the dominions of the Sublime Ottoman Porte.³³ By a further order of 21 March 1862, the same was extended to the rules, orders and regulations

concerning the navigation of the River Danube, or concerning the conduct and government of masters, seamen, or others navigating the same, or concerning the imposition, levying, or payment of tolls or duties to be taken or levied in respect of the navigation of the said river, or concerning the imposition and enforcing of penalties for the breach of such rules, orders, and regulations, respectively.³⁴

The orders were amended in November 1864 and in April 1866, when British consular representatives in Ottoman territories were empowered to enforce the 1865 Public Act, as amended by the 1866 Paris Conference.³⁵ As a result, the British government granted the Commission, as other governments had also done, the right to act in its name, an important contribution to the making of functional IOs.

Although politically disposed to grant such large attributions to a supranational entity, the British government was faced with a drawback when the issue got to a court of law. The vessel *Mars* of the Austrian DDSG and the *Smyrna*, a steamer of the British ‘Greek and Oriental Steam Navigation Company’, came into violent collision on 6 November 1860 close to the right bank of the Danube, about 12 miles upstream of Sulina. ‘The result was very disastrous. The *Mars* was nearly cut in two by the stern of the *Smyrna*, and she almost immediately sank’. In January 1861, the DDSG sued the British company, blaming the *Smyrna* for the loss. The main argument was that the Commission’s June 1860 regulation, in use when the accident occurred, stated that when two vessels met ‘whilst proceeding in different directions, the one ascending stream must steer towards the left bank, and the vessel descending towards the right bank’. The lawyers from the Austrian company contended that the Commission’s

33 Originally published in *The London Gazette*, No. 22587, 7 January 1862.

34 *Ibid.*, No. 22611, 25 March 1862.

35 *Hertslet's Commercial Treaties: A Complete Collection of the Treaties and Conventions, and Reciprocal Regulations, at Present Subsisting Between Great Britain and Foreign Powers*, vol. 12 (London 1871), 871–873, 920–924.

regulations were binding, and the *Smyrna*, ascending the river, 'ought therefore to have kept on the left or Russian [i.e. northern – C.A.] side of the river'.³⁶

The case was judged, according to the Capitulations, by the Consular Court of Galați, which admitted, in September 1861, the two parties' petitions and declared that 'the issue to be tried was, whether the collision was caused by the fault or neglect of the *Smyrna*'. The Court decided in favour of the British defendants, as it refused to attribute any binding force to the Commission's regulations, and 'gave its judgment on the merits of the case as if no such regulations had ever been made'. On appeal, the Supreme Consular Court of Istanbul confirmed the decision on the same grounds, adding the additional point that even if the regulations were valid, they had not been duly published. It was proved that at the time of the collision the master and pilot of the *Smyrna* were not aware of the Commission's regulations, which were not generally known to local pilots.³⁷

The DDSG further appealed to a British court of law, and the appeal was judged in June 1864. The main dispute related to the question of whether the Commission had any authority to make these regulations, and all preliminary courts had agreed that it had not. The 1856 Paris Treaty did not specifically confer such an attribution to the Commission, but only invested it with technical functions. The British court of law decided that the organisation 'had no authority to issue such a code, and the regulations are therefore void'. The judges equally rejected the opinion that even if the Commission had no power to draft such documents, they 'would have validity as emanating from the sovereign of the state [i.e. the Porte – C.A.] traversed by the river'. Thus, the case was

decided on the laws and practice of navigation on the Danube as they existed before the publication of these regulations, and it is unnecessary for us to consider whether there had or had not been such a publication of them as was required in order to give them validity if there had been authority in the European Commission to make them.³⁸

Looking to the case independently of the Commission's regulations and recollecting that the question was whether the collision occurred through the fault or negligence of the *Smyrna*, the decision went in favour of the British master and his pilot, who had proceeded according to prudence and wisdom.

36 *Reports of the Cases Relating to Maritime Law: Decided by the Court of Admiralty, and by All the Superior Courts of Law and Equity; Savage Awards*, vol. 2 (London 1868), 94.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, 94–95.

In conclusion, from a juridical perspective, the Commission had no power to issue provisional regulations as to the navigation of vessels in the river. Also, the IO's regulations were not valid merely because the Porte was one of the powers represented in the Commission, and the river traversed Ottoman territories.³⁹

Stokes was in a difficult position, caught between this juridical decision and his government's clear political support for the Commission. Britain's commitment to the organisation was vital, given the large number of British ships that navigated on the Maritime Danube, and Stokes insisted that British seafarers were instructed to comply with the Commission's regulations. However, although the sentence rejected the IO's legislative attributions, they were confirmed by subsequent international agreements, mainly by the 1865 Public Act, amended by the 1866 Paris Conference (see below). By a new royal order dated 9 April 1866, all rules, orders and regulations contained in the Public Act and its appendices were 'binding and in force' and had 'the force of law upon and against all British subjects' and other British protégées in the Danube Delta area.⁴⁰ By the mid-1860s the Commission's decisions were 'binding and in force', not only for subjects of the seven member states that had delegates in the organisation, but for all those who came to value the increased security of Danubian shipping.

5 Migration and Human Insecurity in a Russian-Ottoman Borderland

The territorial changes brought by the Crimean War (mentioned in Chapter 2) greatly influenced human mobility and insecurity at the Lower Danube. This was duly noticed by European commissioners. They reported such movements of population to their governments as they could disrupt the Commission's works and thus obstruct a decision of Europe's Concert of Powers. At the same time, the Ottoman government attempted to strengthen its hold of the region that it had gained in 1856–1857.

Stokes wrote to London that in 1860 Tartars started to migrate from the Crimea into Dobrudja and Bulgaria. In 1861 this mobility was accompanied

by an emigration from Turkey of the people living in the districts in which the Tartars have been located, thus great numbers of Bulgarians have gone over to the Crimea to take the place of the Tartars – and the Russian and German colonies in the Dobrudscha are for the most part

39 Ibid., 95–97.

40 *Hertslet's Commercial Treaties*, vol. 12, 920–924.

leaving their comfortable homesteads, the former to return into South Russia, the latter to settle in the Moldavian Bessarabia, where a want of population has been created by the flight of the Bulgarian colonies. These colonies settled in Bessarabia in the early part of the present century, but having been oppressed by the Moldavian Government, now seek to escape its rule.

As some of the Russian and German workers employed by the Commission to quarry stone and hew timber in the Danube Delta area were among those who left, the organisation had 'to import Montenegrins and Transylvanians for the quarries'.⁴¹ The resettled Bulgarians were not happy with living conditions in the Crimea, so many of them tried to return to their original villages. In June 1862, 7,000 Bulgarians were brought to Sulina by the Ottoman authorities and shipped inland in barely humane conditions.⁴² The Tartar emigration came with similar human insecurity in the Ottoman province of the Lower Danube, as allegedly the

Turkish Government never made the slightest preparation for the thousands that were known to be coming, and when the first instalment arrived at Kustendjie, no food had been prepared, no shelter provided, and not even a bullock cart in readiness to move the poor creatures from the sea-beach where they were landed.⁴³

The Ottoman government did make some preparations to colonise Muslims in the Lower Danube province, whose governor served as a Danube commissioner. Muslim settlements were viewed as a human bulwark against the Russian threat. If preparations were deemed as insufficient, this might have had to do with the scale of migration and the Porte's financial means. As early as 1857, with the view to preventing foreigners from settling and buying estates in the region (especially in urban localities such as Sulina), properties were 'nationalised' and included into the Sultan's private estates. Pieces of land could be rented to those interested, but the idea was to strengthen the Ottoman Empire's security with a 'cordon of Muslim inhabitants, like Russia did with

41 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Public Record Office, FO 78/3217, unnumbered (hereafter unn.) (John Stokes to Earl Russell, Galați, 19 November 1861).

42 Ibid., FO 78/3218, unn. (the same, London, 8 July 1862).

43 Henry C. Barkley, *Between the Danube and the Black Sea; or, Five Years in Bulgaria* (London 1876), 227.

its Cossacks'.⁴⁴ The colonisation programme started in 1857,⁴⁵ and a year later 500–600 households from Lazistan (in the current day Turkish provinces of Rize and Artvin) were encouraged to migrate to the district of Tulcea, where they were granted free land and other privileges.⁴⁶

More incentives and careful negotiation skills were needed to make colonisers stay. Nogai settlers came to Dobrudja in the post-Crimean War years, but they soon requested a return to their homelands, feeling that they were discriminated against by the Ottoman authorities. The Porte was paying salaries and gave rewards to leaders of the Tartar communities, while Nogai chieftains complained about the precarious condition of their brethren. As 'Tatars and Nogais are in rivalry', the Ottoman authorities decided to repair the 'injustice', and the political and religious leaders of the Nogai settlers were also properly remunerated and honoured.⁴⁷ At the same time, the Porte was trying to prevent the settlement of colonists whose allegiance was more questionable. This was the case with several Cossack families and their priests from Anapa, who were allegedly steered towards Dobrudja by pro-Russian agents.⁴⁸

As all these movements of population happened in or close to their area of jurisdiction, commissioners kept reporting on these demographic factors that risked increasing regional instability and disrupting their works. Soon they had to shift their observer status by actively trying to solve some of the issues. In this context, the story of the Lipovan fishermen of Vylkove is relevant both for the transformation of the Danube Delta into a hub of human insecurity and for the Commission's metamorphosis into an agent of regional order and stability.

6 The Fishermen of Vylkove, Border Disputes and the Commission as a Conflict Mediator

Esngelhardt had a special interest in the ethnic and religious diversity of the Danube Delta, which he described in his official reports and in one of his volumes.⁴⁹ Lipovans or Old Believers were among the most interesting inhabitants of the region. They had migrated westwards from the Ukrainian

44 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı (Republic of Turkey Presidential State Archives, formerly known as Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi – hereafter BOA), HR.SYS 1604/55 (5 February 1857).

45 Ibid., A.MKT.MHM 117/100 (11 S 1274) (1 October 1857).

46 Ibid., A.AMD 89/99 (29 Z 1274) (10 August 1858).

47 Ibid., i.MVL 480/21755 (17 B 1279) (8 January 1863).

48 Ibid., A.MKT.MHM 396/61 (21 Ş 1284) (15 December 1867).

49 Éd. Esngelhardt, *Études sur les embouchures du Danube* (Galați 1862), 35–50.

provinces during the eighteenth century, fleeing religious persecution by the Russian authorities. Some families had settled in the Danube Delta, on the fluid and winding border between medieval Moldavia and its suzerain power, the Ottoman Empire. The Lipovans lived on fishing and a large community was that of Vylkove (Vâlcov), the main hub of the Lower Danubian fishing industry. When Russia annexed the eastern half of Moldavia in 1812 and took over the entire Delta in 1829, the Lipovans returned under Russian control. A new border change occurred after the Crimean War, which further aggravated the already difficult conditions of this fishing community. Situated on the left bank of the Danube, Vylkove became part of Moldavia in 1856, but the village was doubly disconnected from its fishing grounds (taken over by the Ottomans), and from its main markets – Bessarabia and the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire.

The Moldavian and Ottoman authorities lost no time in imposing their sovereignty on the territories they acquired in 1856. In both cases territorial control and sovereignty took an economic form, that of farming out different monopolies to private contractors who secured quick revenues for state budgets. In Moldavia, fishing was farmed out to a contractor who imposed a tithe of 10 per cent on the catch and had a monopoly on the fish trade. The Lipovan community of Vylkove strongly opposed these conditions, and their petitions were eventually successful in March 1860 when the tithe was provisionally suspended.⁵⁰ The border between Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire in the Danube Delta was as burdensome. As Vylkovians fished in Ottoman waters, imperial authorities made them pay a high tithe, while customs duties had to be paid to both Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire when the catch was brought to Vylkove (see Fig. 4). All in all, the fishermen paid taxes amounting to 32.9 per cent for the fish caught in Ottoman waters and sold in Moldavia, and 40.4 per cent for the catch further exported and sold in the Russian Empire. Moreover, the Lipovans lost other significant privileges, such as the right to cut firewood and to harvest reeds in the Danube Delta, advantages forbidden or heavily taxed by the Ottomans.⁵¹

The Vylkovians complained that their situation had become even more miserable than during Russian times, and the community considered migrating towards more hospitable lands. They petitioned the Moldavian and Ottoman authorities and asked for redress, but without much success. However, for the

50 *Procès-verbal des discussions de la Commission Européenne du Danube relatives à la délimitation entre la Turquie et la Moldavie sur le bras de Kilia, et aux droits de pêche de la Commune de Wilkov* (122^e Protocole de la Commission) (Galați 1861), 3.

51 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

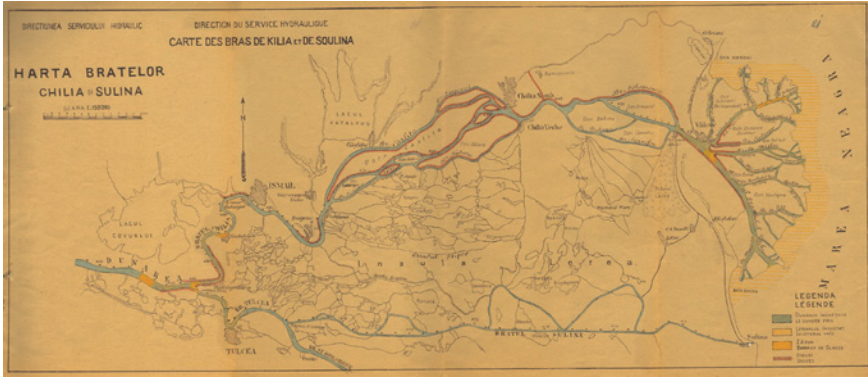


FIGURE 4 Map of the Chilia and Sulina branches of the Danube
SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

Moldavian authorities their cry for help proved useful as an exercise in nation- and state-building.

The question of the Ottoman-Moldavian border in the Danube Delta was raised in 1857 in Moldavia's new provisional 'Parliament', the *Ad hoc Divan*. A petition was drafted and sent to Europe's Great Powers, but it received little attention during the negotiations which resulted in the adoption of the 1858 Paris Convention, the United Principalities' new constitutional charter.⁵² As the Vylkovians' misfortune and protests had grown during those years, the episode was used by the Moldavian authorities to prove the practical downsides of the Ottoman appropriation of the entire Danube Delta. Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza made this a topic in his relations with the Ottoman Empire, in his attempt to both expose the Porte's abuses and to strengthen his country's individual (i.e. independent) existence.

Cuza relied on Emperor Napoleon III's benevolence to include the question on the Great Powers' agenda.⁵³ With French backing, Cuza intended to renegotiate the borderline, which would have served several of his country's political and economic priorities. Given its alleged Romanian and Christian character, the Danube Delta was part of the lost territories claimed by the Romanian motherland, but Cuza was mainly interested in gaining access to a navigable waterway, much needed to boost the economic development of the United

52 French commissioner Engelhardt reported on the border issue, stating that a more independent and national administration would protest against the Porte's confiscation of the entire Danube Delta – CADN, CED/B/10, f. 147–149 (no. 67, 23 July 1858).

53 R.V. Bossy, *Agenția diplomatică a României în Paris și legăturile politice franco-române sub Cuza-Vodă* (Bucharest 1931), 127–128.

Principalities. French support was based on a report sent from Galați by commissioner Engelhardt,⁵⁴ who was working to advance his country's political interests in Eastern Europe. Cuza raised the question officially and addressed a memorandum to the United Principalities' seven protectors. The Ottoman authorities, Cuza maintained, had disregarded their own practice of having the thalweg (the middle of the chief navigable channel of a waterway) as state border along the entire Lower Danube. This abuse of power by the Ottomans prevented local fishing communities from enjoying their legal rights, which was Cuza's duty to protect.⁵⁵

By late August 1860, Costache Negri, Cuza's diplomatic representative to Istanbul, reported to his prince that their request for an analysis of the border delimitation along the Maritime Danube was accepted by the Great Powers. During a meeting held at the residence of Henry Bulwer, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, European plenipotentiaries agreed to have the problem analysed by the Commission.⁵⁶ From the sources available, it is unclear if this arbitration was decided following Cuza's lobbying through French channels or through the internationalisation of the Vylkovians' cause when Russia started to promote it. The Ottoman Porte accepted an international mediation, in an attempt to avoid being both judge and defendant in the dispute with its vassal state. Through the ambassadorial decision taken in Istanbul, the Commission was entrusted with new powers, eventually turning it into a source of order, security and justice in the Danube Delta.

Discussions on the case (with its two interconnected components – the border delimitation and the Vylkovians' plight) started in November 1860, but they were soon adjourned so as to allow the delegates time to procure the original map used in Paris in 1856–1857, to get more information on the topics and wait for instructions from their governments.⁵⁷ The debates were resumed on 20 May 1861, after the fishermen sent two more petitions and threatened to emigrate if their case was not resolved.⁵⁸

54 Ibid., 187 (No. XIX, 12 February 1860). Engelhardt reported to Paris with details on Cuza's intention to ask for a new delimitation – CADN, CED/B/10, f. 213–214 (no. 98, 8 October 1859).

55 Bossy, *Agenția diplomatică*, 127.

56 Bossy, *L'Autriche et les Principautés-Unies* (Bucharest 1938), 162–163 and 276 (no. CI, 21 September 1861).

57 *Procès-verbal*, sittings of 15 November and 1 December 1860; Engelhardt's opinions in CADN, CED/B/10, f. 259–263 (nos. 123, 124 and 126, 20 November, 2 and 18 December 1860).

58 *Procès-verbal*, sitting of 3 May 1861.

Concerning the border issue, two main opinions were formulated in the Commission. The French delegate, Engelhardt, considered that the thalweg of the navigable course was the legal borderline between the United Principalities and the Ottoman Empire. The current border was an error, also caused by the misrepresentation of the Belgorod branch of the Danube, which on the map used in Paris in 1857 appeared as being similar in size to the Sulina branch, though it was in fact thirteen times smaller.⁵⁹ Justice and equity required a resettlement of the border along the thalweg of the navigable course of the Chilia branch, going downstream from the Tchatal (Fork) of Ismail to the mouth of the Stari Stambul sub-branch. The United Principalities were entitled to receive several islands in the northern part of the Chilia Delta, a solution which would also solve the fishermen's claims and secure the United Principalities a navigable connection with the Black Sea. His position was supported by Strambio, the Italian commissioner, whose country followed on the trail of French diplomacy.

The second point of view was that the Porte had been granted direct sovereignty over the entire Danube Delta, including the sub-delta of the Chilia branch, and its right of property covered the whole watercourse. The territory of Moldavia (the United Principalities) started with the *terra firma* beyond the Delta itself. The delegates from Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia and the Ottoman Empire supported this view. They all sympathised with the poor Lipovan community, which was treated unjustly in the aftermath of the Crimean War. Their interest was, however, not entirely innocent. If Russia's interest in the Lipovan community was linked to the ethnic character of the fishermen, Austria was mainly concerned with their religious identity. The Habsburgs were trying to act as guardians of their religious rights,⁶⁰ and in the border question Becke did not want to contribute to the progress of the Romanian national cause, a threat to all its imperial neighbours.

The position of the Moldavian government was presented by Prince Alexandru Cantacuzino, the prefect of Covurlui County. Cantacuzino sent two memoranda to the Commission, in which he insisted on his country's autonomy and on the fact that the 1857 Protocol hurt Moldavia's historical rights in the Danube Delta. Juridically, the thalweg principle had to be imposed, as the Danube's thalweg separated the Principalities from the Ottoman Empire for several hundred kilometres along the entire course of the river below the Iron

59 Ibid., sitting of 20 May 1861. CADN, CED/B/10, Engelhardt's Memorandum – *Note sur l'état d'innavigabilité du bras secondaire de la Kilia désignée sur le nom de Belgorod*, f. 280–284.

60 Arhiereul dr. Veniamin Pocitan Ploșteanu, *Momente din viața și activitatea lui Melchisedec între anii 1856–1861* (Bucharest 1936), 70–72.

Gates.⁶¹ His solution, which would have solved the local inhabitants' claims, was to settle the border along the middle or the Sulina branch of the Danube.⁶²

It became clear that geographical knowledge and its interpretation played a major part in this dispute. One of the dissensions was related to the status of the Belgorod sub-branch. From his visits to the area, Engelhardt stated that it was very shallow (i.e. unnavigable), and Strambio denied that it was in fact a separate branch of the Danube. Offenberg opposed these views, as Belgorod discharged its waters into the Black Sea, and seasonally its course was very deep. Stokes mentioned his own visit to the area in the spring of 1861, when he found 12 feet of water at the entrance into the sub-branch, 7–15 feet along its course, and 4½ feet at its mouth, conditions which were only a little inferior to those of the Oceakov sub-branch.⁶³ It was clearly an impasse. The commissioners had collected a huge amount of information on the local geography and hydrography of the Danube Delta, but they could not agree on things like: What characteristics define the separate 'identity' of a branch of a river in such a labyrinthic area? How deep should a waterway be to be considered navigable? For how many months a year should its physical characteristics be recorded?

A decision was eventually taken by majority vote: the border should be the thalweg of 'the most northern branch of the Danube', which excluded 'all and every one of the Islands of the Delta from Moldavia'.⁶⁴ As for the Vylkovians' petitions, a compromise was reached on 31 July 1861, when the seven commissioners decided to urge Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire to conclude an agreement and protect the Danubian fishermen's rights. The Porte was to grant them full customs and tithe exemption for catches fished within the limits of their communal fishery. A fixed annual sum replaced all other taxes for fish caught in Ottoman waters outside the limits of their concession. They could cut firewood and harvest reed in the islands of the Chilia Delta. The Moldavian government granted them exemption from paying import duties for their fishery products, and full equality of treatment was applied to this commune, in

61 *Procès-verbal, Appendix IV, Mémoire du Gouvernement Moldave, présente à l'Honorable Commission Européenne du Danube, par le Prince Alexandre Cantacuzène, 10/22 May 1861.*

62 *Documente privind domnia lui Alexandru Ioan Cuza*, edited by Dan Berindei, Elisabeta Oprescu and Valeriu Stan (Bucharest 1989), 288–290 (no. 382, 29 July 1861).

63 TNA, FO 78/3217, unn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 13 April 1861); CADN, CED/B/8, f. 51–52 and 64–65 (nos. 4 and 5, 9 August and 27 September 1861).

64 TNA, FO 78/3217, unn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 1 August 1861); CADN, CED/B/10, f. 276–277 (no. 137, 22 July 1861).

relation to domestic taxes of all kinds, transit and export duties. The monopoly granted for the sale of fish was abolished.⁶⁵

The episode is relevant for the progress of the Commission at a time when it was trying to clarify its prerogatives at the Maritime Danube. While regulating Danubian shipping, the IO claimed for itself several attributions that in fact belonged to the territorial power, the Ottoman Empire. The early 1860s was a period when the status of the organisation was still unclear, and this arbitration gave it additional prestige as a source of law and order in an inter-imperial contact zone. The Commission did manage to act as an intermediary between local and national actors and contributed to the production of specialised knowledge and to decision-making in its area of expertise. Maps were extremely important in this, and the settlement showed how they could be used or abused as political tools.

The border question returned to public attention in the mid-1870s, during the Eastern Crisis, when Romania insisted on reaching a convenient solution in its dispute with the Porte. When the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin were signed in 1878, Russian diplomats took the precaution of clearly mentioning the new configuration of the Russian Empire's southern border (more in Chapter 8). Russia reannexed Southern Bessarabia, Romania received the province of Dobrudja and the Danube Delta, while the borderline along the Maritime Danube was to follow the thalweg of the Chilia branch and the mouth of the Stari Stambul. Even more importantly, the Commission was granted, with Russia's approval, the right to arbitrate the division of waters and fisheries between two sovereign states, Romania and the Russian Empire.⁶⁶

7 A Transnational 'Constitution' – the 1865 Public Act

In 1861, with the success of the provisional works in Sulina, several commissioners considered that the Commission had fulfilled its mission and could be disbanded, according to the provisions of the 1856 Paris Treaty. The proposal came from Engelhardt and Offenberg, who on 21 May 1861 also referred to the need to conclude a Public Act that was to include 'the main results of the activity of the European Commission and the guarantees which Governments consider appropriate in order to safeguard their interests during the interim

65 *Procès-verbal*, sitting of 29 June 1861; details on the arrangement in Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomație. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002), 75–77.

66 *Les grands traités politiques. Recueil des principaux textes diplomatique depuis 1815 jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris 1912), 224.

regime'.⁶⁷ Discussions continued a month later, when Austria's Becke supported such an Act, which was to mark the conclusion of the first period in the Commission's activity, but which also signalled that its work was not complete. The document had to make reference to the works done and to their results, and include an abstract of the rights and obligations assumed by all interested parties, the financial state of the organisation and the situation of the international staff that was still needed at the Maritime Danube.⁶⁸ Becke also announced that his government opposed the dissolution of the Commission, as at that moment the Riparian Commission (that was to succeed the European Commission) was not ready to take over the administration of the Danube.⁶⁹

Becke and Engelhardt were appointed to draft the Act, and their colleagues assisted with various other documents.⁷⁰ Discussions started in the autumn of 1861, and negotiations proved extremely complicated due to the strong opposition of the Porte, which considered that several of the Act's articles violated Ottoman sovereignty in the Danube Delta.⁷¹ Prejudiced by their experience with working with allegedly corrupt Ottoman bureaucrats, the six non-Ottoman commissioners wanted to be in charge of naming the officials who were to be entrusted with imposing the Commission's regulations at Sulina and along the Maritime Danube. Legally, it was the Porte's right to appoint such officials in Ottoman territory, but as the Danube Delta was a 'gift' from Europe to the Ottoman Empire, 'it would hardly be a great sacrifice on her [the Porte's] part to concede to Europe an entirely international administration of the navigation.'⁷²

The Sublime Porte naturally feared that the Act would allow the Commission to 'interfere with her authority on the Danube'. As the project of the Public Act was accepted with minor changes by all interested governments, the six commissioners wrote to their ambassadors in Istanbul to press the Porte into accepting the document. The commissioners considered that their precaution was 'directed solely towards the protection of the public revenue of the navigation from spoliation, and towards the maintenance of that strict order in the river, without which there can be no security for property'.⁷³ It was equally

67 PECD, Protocol 129, 21 May 1861.

68 Ibid., 20 June 1861.

69 Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River: In the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to the Conference of Belgrade of 1948* (Boulder and New York 1987), 294.

70 PECD, Protocol 129, 22 June 1861.

71 Early opinions of Ottoman commissioner Ömer Fevzi Pasha at BOA, i.HR 186/10349 (21 M 1278) (29 July 1861).

72 TNA, FO 78/3218, unn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 25 January 1862).

73 Ibid., unn. (the same, London, 21 August 1862).

important in order to regulate the relations between the Commission and local and consular authorities in the Danube Delta during a period when, as presented above, the Commission's powers and the compulsory character of its regulations were still being questioned.⁷⁴

The Ottoman counterproposals were discussed on 17 October 1862 and they altered the character of the Public Act. The Ottoman Empire claimed full sovereignty in the Danube Delta in its capacity as territorial power. The other six commissioners tried to accommodate the Porte's alterations with their own interests, and the example of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine was given to prove that international cooperation was possible in similar organisations.⁷⁵ Further discussions took place in Galați in 1863,⁷⁶ but the most important negotiations followed in Istanbul between Ottoman ministers and the Great Powers' ambassadors. Eventually, an agreement was reached, and the document was signed by the seven commissioners on 2 November 1865.⁷⁷

The Public Act contained three parts. Title I included the provisions relating to the material conditions of navigation. It placed all the Commission's works and establishments under 'the guarantee and protection of international law'. It reserved 'the power to design and cause to be carried out' all other hydraulic and regulatory works necessary for the security of navigation along its jurisdiction. The Porte allowed the Commission to use the left bank of the river at Sulina to host its mechanical workshops, and granted it land for its administrative buildings on the opposite bank. It also agreed to communicate with the Commission and accept its control in relation to any public or private constructions such as landing jetties, quays or other similar establishments, which could in any way 'compromise the effect of the works of improvement' coordinated by the IO. The provisions relating to the administrative control of navigation (Part 2) were as important. Local navigation was governed by the 'Regulation of Navigation and Police', enacted by the Commission. The regulation was binding as law, not only in relation to the river police, but also for the judgments of cases of civil procedure arising from the exercise of the navigation.

The exercise of navigation on the Maritime Danube was placed under the authority and the superintendence of the Inspector General of the Lower Danube, and of the Captain of the Port of Sulina. These two executive agents

74 PECD, Protocol 146, 12 September 1862.

75 Ibid., 17 October 1862; TNA, FO 78/3218, unnn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 28 October 1862).

76 TNA, FO 78/3219, unnn. (the same, 7 November 1863).

77 For its significance according to Ottoman and Austrian sources, see İlhan Ekinçi, *Tuna Komisyonu ve Tuna'da Ticaret (1856–1883)*, PhD dissertation, University of Samsun (Samsun 1998), 180–188 and Gâtejel, 'Imperial Cooperation': 790–793.

were named by the Sublime Porte, but they were to conform all their acts to European regulations. Sentences emanating from their authority were pronounced in the name of the Sultan. The Act further detailed proceedings in case of delinquency or offence by these agents, with the Commission being allowed to take part in the enquiries, and 'when the culpability of the accused shall have been duly proved, the Sublime Porte will provide without delay for his being replaced'. The agents were to act 'under the superintendence of the Commission and were to be paid by the Ottoman Government', having been chosen from competent persons.

The two agents' authority was exercised towards all flags without distinction. Merchant captains, of whatever nationality, were bound to obey the orders given to them by virtue of the Regulation of Navigation and Police. Enforcement of the Regulation of Navigation and Police, as well as the application of the Commission's tariff, was insured by the action of the vessels of war stationed at the mouths of the Danube. Each naval force acted upon its own vessels, and upon those whose flag it was called upon to protect. In the absence of a vessel of war qualified to interfere, the executive agents could have recourse to the warships of the territorial power.

The tariff of navigation dues was drawn by virtue of the right to impose a toll of a rate suited to cover the expenses of the works and establishments mentioned above. It furnished the Commission with the resources necessary for the completion of the Sulina works, and it was expressly agreed that the tariff was binding for the future. It also stated how the proceeds of the tax were to be used (see Chapter 5). At the expiration of every five-year term, and with a view to diminishing, if possible, the burdens imposed upon the navigation, delegates of the seven powers were to revise its provisions, and the amount of the toll was to be reduced as much as possible, always, however, maintaining the mean revenue judged necessary for covering the Commission's expenses.

It detailed how tolls were to be collected and how the Navigation Cash Office of Sulina was administered. The agent charged with the collection of tolls was appointed by the Commission and acted under its immediate orders. The general control of the transactions of the Cash Office was exercised by an Ottoman auditor. A balance sheet of the Commission's financial operations had to be published annually in the official journals of the different powers interested, together with a statement, making known the distribution and appropriation of the proceeds of the tariff. The Commission was to pay its fair share to the General Administration of the Lighthouses of the Ottoman Empire.

The Public Act further regulated the Danubian quarantine. The sanitary measures applicable to the mouths of the Danube were regulated by the Superior Board of Health in Istanbul, in which various foreign missions accredited to

the Sublime Porte were represented by delegates. These measures were to be framed so as to conciliate to a just degree security for the public health with the requirements of free maritime trade.

According to Part 3, the works and establishments of all kinds created by the Commission, particularly the Navigation Cash Office at Sulina, enjoyed the neutrality stipulated by Article 11 of the Paris Treaty 'and shall be, in case of war, equally respected by all the belligerents'. The benefits of neutrality were extended to the General Inspectorate of Navigation, to the administration of the port of Sulina, to the staff of the Navigation Cash Office and the Seamen's Hospital, and, lastly, to the technical staff charged with the superintendence of the Commission's hydraulic works.⁷⁸

The Public Act was accompanied by two updated versions of the Commission's most important regulations: 'The Regulation of Navigation and Police Relative to the Lower Danube' and the 'Tariff of Navigation Dues to be Levied at the Mouth of the Danube', as well as by an arrangement relative to the repayment of the advances made by the Sublime Porte for the improvement of the navigation of the mouths of the Danube in 1856–1860.⁷⁹

The Public Act was examined and sanctioned in March 1866 in the framework of an ambassadorial conference summoned to Paris to discuss Romania's situation after Prince Cuza's forced abdication following a coup d'état in Bucharest. The Public Act was sanctioned without much discussion, and the Commission's term was extended by five more years, to allow its engineer-in-chief to complete the permanent works from Sulina. The request to extend the IO's jurisdiction from Isaccea to Brăila, which would have allowed the Commission to exercise its attributions over the entire Maritime Danube, was, however, rejected: the Ottoman delegate, Safvet Pasha, considered that it infringed upon the sovereign rights of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰

The Public Act was presented in the national parliaments of member states. In Britain it was discussed in February 1867 and some of the criticism in the local press is illustrative of how international cooperation was regarded at the time. The 1866 Paris ambassadorial conference acted 'like the Parliament of England or the Congress of the United States, without reference to the constituencies that created it, or to the Laws which it has to administer', thus in open contempt of Britain's national laws. As for the Public Act, its unusually ambiguous language allegedly favoured Russia, the power defeated in

78 The text in *Acte public relatif à la navigation des embouchures du Danube signé à Galatz, le 2 novembre 1865* (Galați [1865]); also in Dimitrie A. Sturdza, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de navigation du Danube* (Berlin 1904), 80–89.

79 *London Gazette*, No. 23105, 24 April 1866.

80 *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 57 (London 1871), 546–553.

the Crimean War. Article I charged the Commission or the organisation to succeed it

with all authority which the requirements of the navigation may demand, to the exclusion of 'all interference whatever'. That is to say, that whatever the Commission may do, the Porte must not presume to object. In short, the temporary European Commission, of which Russia is a member, is to be permanent, and the permanent River Commission of Articles XVII and XVIII of the Treaty of Paris, of which Russia was not to be a member, vanishes out of sight.

Further criticism referred to the attributions of the two international executive agents. The conclusion of the article returned to the Russophobic spirit that still affected British public opinion: 'the European Commission of the Danube is a fulfilment of all that was said beforehand by Lord Ponsonby and Mr Urquhart of the perfidy of the Crimean War'.⁸¹

In the end, the irony was that the Public Act, which several commissioners wanted to conclude before disbanding the Commission, contributed to strengthening the institution. It served as its 'Constitution' and clearly defined its legislative, executive and juridical functions in its territorial jurisdiction, where its staff and assets enjoyed a neutral status and numerous privileges. Or to switch perspective, to a Soviet historian, the document 'legitimised the undisguised conduct of foreign imperialists at the mouths of the Danube'.⁸²

As the Riverain Commission was still not ready to take over the administration of Danubian navigation, the Commission assumed larger attributions which allowed it to fulfil its, by now, techno-political tasks. Just how large the Commission's powers were is evident in a report authored by France's commissioner Engelhardt; preceding the conclusions, it demonstrates how much the organisation had progressed during the period 1856–1866.

8 On the Commission's Exceptional Character

Engelhardt was the youngest of the seven 'founding fathers' of the Commission and its first secretary, entrusted with drafting the organisation's protocols. This mission fitted well with his passion for writing and sense of order. Engelhardt

81 'The European Commission at the Mouth of the Danube,' *Diplomatic Review* 16.3 (4 March 1868): 38–40.

82 M.V. Pochkaeva, *Mezhdunarodno-pravovoi rezhim sudokhodstva na Dunae* (Moscow 1951), 18.

came to Galați for two years and stayed for eleven, and his juridical knowledge contributed enormously to turning a temporary commission into an IO that closely resembled a sovereign state. His long stay in the Danube Delta area and his dealings with the Commission's business turned him into a legal expert with innovative views on the structure and rules that governed the international system. The Frenchman was recognised as an authority in the international law of transboundary rivers (which he discussed in several publications⁸³), but also in colonial issues, an extension of his experience in the Ottoman lands, which he greatly used during the 1884–1885 'Congo Conference' in Berlin.

In 1866, ten years after the establishment of the Commission, Engelhardt published several memoranda on the activity and achievements of the organisation, which had managed to transcend the temporal and jurisdictional limits of the 1856 Paris Treaty. He briefly referred to the circumstances which caused the Commission to turn into a transnational organ that enjoyed an exceptional position in the international system. Endowed with attributions that derived from the principles of sovereignty, extraterritoriality and neutrality, the Commission was virtually an independent state whose mission was to safeguard freedom of navigation on the Maritime Danube, one of the main decisions of Europe's Concert of Powers in 1856.⁸⁴

Commissions established for international rivers, such as the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, were deliberative bodies of riparian states. They negotiated collective interests and their decisions were compulsory once ratified by all member states, which also enforced their application along the territorial waters of each signatory country. Supervision and control belonged to a permanent organisation which, however, had only limited attributions in relation to sovereign riparian states. The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine and other river commissions kept national sovereignty as one of their guiding values. It encouraged supranational cooperation only as much as it did not infringe upon the sovereign rights of member states, and this synergy was meant firstly for the benefit of riparian countries.

To Engelhardt, the Commission was a different type of river commission, which was meant to regulate on a different dimension. As a deliberative body, it could decide on anything that concerned commercial navigation along its territory of competence, i.e. the course of the Maritime Danube. It drafted regulations governing navigation and river police, it decided the rate of the navigation tolls to be paid by ships of all nations and planned the hydraulic works

83 Engelhardt, *Du régime conventionnel des fleuves internationaux, avec une introduction historique* (Paris 1879); idem, *Histoire du droit fluvial conventionnel* (Paris 1889).

84 Engelhardt, *Second mémoire sur les travaux de la Commission Européenne du Danube* (Galați 1866).

it deemed necessary. Once voted in the Commission, these decisions became mandatory, and the Commission issued them publicly and on behalf of itself. To carry out its task, the organisation had a secretary general, an engineer-in-chief and many other employees, who were not appointed by member states, but whom the Commission itself could freely choose and revoke.

As an executive authority, it applied its own regulations, tariffs and hydraulic plans. To do this, it relied on its own staff, which included an inspector general, four sub-inspectors, a harbour master and a treasurer, all of whom took an oath of allegiance in front of the seven commissioners. The Commission drafted and promulgated laws governing navigation on the Maritime Danube, supervised and enforced their execution, but also judged any offences against these laws. As a court of appeal, it could annul, change or confirm the sentences pronounced, in the name of the Sultan, by its agents, who acted as judges in the first instance. The Commission's decisions were final, and by 1866 several European states had already decided that they were valid within their national boundaries.⁸⁵

In many respects, the Commission had the attributes of an autonomous government. It had concluded an arrangement which regulated its relations with the Ottoman Empire, the formal owner of the Danube Delta, and it established direct 'diplomatic' relations with neighbouring states. By the mid-1860s, the Commission had an income of about 900,000 francs a year and drafted a budget of incomes and expenses. To complete massive infrastructure works, it had contracted loans from international banks and even issued bonds; it thus managed to collect more than 4,000,000 francs, which it invested in the hydro-technical works and regulatory establishments along the Maritime Danube. The Commission enjoyed postal, telegraphic and customs immunities in the Ottoman Empire and Romania, the main beneficiaries of its improvements. It owned, in its name, estates totalling more than fifteen hectares, buildings worth about 500,000 francs, and a fleet of about thirty service ships. These vessels hoisted the Commission's own flag, and their official papers were issued by the Commission, not by the territorial authority.⁸⁶

All these large prerogatives seemed contrary to common law, and the Commission had already been described as 'a state within a state'. But in having reserved so many attributions for this IO, Engelhardt and his associates had taken into consideration the exceptional circumstances within which the Commission had to fulfil its task. The independence to which the commissioners aspired to from the very beginning was 'legitimate and necessary', given the disorder, anarchy and arbitrariness that ruled in the Danube Delta

85 Ibid., 28–29.

86 Ibid., 30.

before and after the Crimean War. The Porte, which had received this territory in 1856–1857 through the resolution of the western victors, could not provide the ‘guarantees of order and security which European navigation imperiously needed’, and so the Commission assumed such supranational attributions as needed to enforce the stipulations of the 1856 Paris Treaty.⁸⁷

Engelhardt was happy with this organisation, a Commission wisely ruled by a European septumvirate, which attempted to bring ‘order and security’ through proper knowledge and modern statehood techniques⁸⁸ in a far-off Ottoman periphery. Their republic was a juridical innovation designed to enact the generous and liberal principles of 1856, and it had succeeded thanks to the diplomatic, administrative and technical skills of a few visionaries who managed to convince their governments, the Sublime Porte and local economic circles that the Commission could institute and preserve free navigation along the Maritime Danube.

9 Conclusions

By 1866 the Commission was a functional organisation that had gradually evolved beyond the temporary and jurisdictional scope envisioned by the artisans of the 1856 Peace Treaty. Although the seven delegates acted according to the instructions received from their governments, the Commission came to stand for something more than the narrow interests of each member state. The organisation took decisions that were observed by the shipmasters of various other countries. In 1864, just before Engelhardt published his memoranda, the Maritime Danube was visited by vessels under twenty-one national flags (Austria, Belgium, Bremen, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hanover, the Ionian Islands, Italy, Mecklenburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Oldenburg, the Ottoman Empire, Prussia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sweden and the United States).⁸⁹ The Commission was an efficient technocratic and bureaucratic structure that planned and executed complex hydraulic works along the Sulina branch of the Danube. It also devised rules and was applying them effectively and impartially, turning the river into a secure waterway.

Engelhardt’s account was certainly subjective and self-eulogising. The Commission was an embodiment of western influence in the Ottoman Empire, and the Porte had to accept supranational control over a portion of its sovereign

87 Ibid., 31–32.

88 Charles S. Maier, ‘Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood,’ in: Emily R. Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting. 1870–1945* (Cambridge MA and London 2012), 29–282.

89 PECD, *Statistique de la navigation* (Galați 1864).

territory. This form of shared multi-imperial control over a strategic European waterway started as a provisional solution while transferring to the Ottoman Empire a strip of land disputed by Russia and Austria. This was, in some ways, similar to the status of the Principalities, which in 1856 were maintained under Ottoman suzerainty, but were at the same time placed under the collective guarantee of Europe's Concert. Soon enough, non-riparian powers witnessed the renewed hydro-hegemonic tendencies of Austria and the 'anarchy' in the Danube Delta, as the government in Istanbul could hardly control the region better than the Russians had done before 1854 or the Austrians in 1855–1857. Their 'informal collective imperialism' resulted in the Commission gradually assuming larger attributions, to which all seven signatory powers of the 1856 Paris Treaty were associated. The Commission was a functional instrument of 'collective imperialism',⁹⁰ and it gradually turned from an international technical advisory board into an executive organ that was to govern navigation along the Maritime Danube.

'Governance' and 'governmentality'⁹¹ are appropriate concepts to cover the Commission's work in bringing law and order to the Danube Delta. In an area where the Ottoman state was gradually imposing its sovereignty, agents of Europe's Concert of Powers came with their modern ideas about efficient and reliable administration. In attempting to put an end to arbitrary policy-making, unaccountable officials or impracticable legal provisions, commissioners started to impose 'good governance', based on the rule of 'European' law. International governance stemmed from the commissioners' complete mistrust in the Ottomans' ability to administer international navigation along the Danube, which, according to the 1856 Paris Treaty, had become 'a part of the Public Law of Europe' and was under the Great Powers' guarantee (Chapter 2). Ottoman sovereignty was supplemented with European governmentality, as corpuses of knowledge and governing techniques were implanted in the Danube Delta. They were shaped through the decision-making mechanisms presented above and were directed towards 'disciplining' both the local entrepreneurial community and the Ottoman officials, all regarded through orientalisng spectacles. The mixture between modern administrative practices and the establishment of European policies and institutions was already functional in the first decade of the Commission's existence, turning the Danube Delta into a laboratory of collective imperial governance, based on a hybrid of transnational governmentality.

⁹⁰ Iordachi, 'Collective Imperialism' cit.

⁹¹ Ruud Janssens, 'Governance' and Renault Payre, 'Governing Science,' in Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History. From the Mid-19th Century to the Present Day* (Basingstoke 2009), 465–466 and 466–470.

‘Civilising and Disciplining Nature’

One cannot deny that these results [of the Commission’s hydraulic works] represent a veritable triumph of peaceful international work, conceived with the support of science and conducted with constancy, assurance and loyalty.

DIMITRIE A. STURDZA, 1908



1 ‘The Father of the Danube’

By the end of his life, Charles Augustus Hartley (1825–1915) was an accomplished man, with a remarkable career in fluvial and maritime engineering. Perhaps the best recognition of his technical mastery was the ‘Albert Medal’ which he received in 1903, in the same decade as Alexander Graham Bell, Andrew Noble and Marie Curie,

in recognition of his services, extending over forty-four years, as Engineer to the International Commission of the Danube, which have resulted in the opening up of the navigation of that river to ships of all nations, and of his similar services, extending over twenty years, as British Commissioner on the International Technical Commission of the Suez Canal.¹

Hartley’s professional path is illustrative of the internationalisation of hydraulic projects in the nineteenth century. He was involved in engineering works on four continents, but his most durable and probably greatest accomplishment was that completed along the Maritime Danube in his capacity as engineer-in-chief of the European Commission of the Danube. Paraphrasing David Blackbourn’s chapter on the celebrated Johann Gottfried Tulla, the engineer who accomplished the straightening of the Rhine, Hartley was ‘the man who

1 ‘Albert Medal,’ *Journal of the Society for Arts* 51.2636 (29 May 1903): 593.

tamed the wild Danube'² or, as he was dubbed in Romania, 'the Father of the Danube'.³

This chapter is about the Maritime Danube and the people who 'corrected' it to shape it to the needs of global trade and shipping. It aims to present how the hydraulic projects of the Commission were designed and put into practice and the key role Hartley played in this. Gliding between the second and third layers of analysis as presented in the introduction to this volume, it will focus on the three main actors involved in 'remaking' the Danube: the Commission, its lead engineer and the riverain environment itself. For an organisation endowed with a technical mission and whose institutional fate was linked to this accomplishment, designing and completing a hydraulic project in one of Europe's least developed peripheries was a remarkable episode in transnational technopolitics.⁴ It was this entanglement of technology and politics that allowed the Commission to brand itself as a successful organisation and which eventually secured its survival. The narrative will further explore decision-making mechanisms within the Commission and the formation of networks of experts⁵ in river improvements. Hartley's accession to a global authority in hydraulic works was tied to his Danubian experience and to his views on the rationalisation, governance and management of nature for maximising the economic benefits of waterways.

This drive towards rationalisation involved removing the artificial or natural sources of insecurity and turning the river into a predictable transportation infrastructure. The Commission's work was part of a security-driven programme which included a 'hardware' component, related to completing (material) engineering tasks, and a 'software' one, consisting of establishing shipping norms, procedures and enforcing institutions. Existential threats to navigation, such as sandbanks or the Sulina bar, were securitised since pre-Crimean War times, and emergency measures were taken by the organisation acting as an instrument of 'Europe's will'.

2 David Blackburn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York 2007), 72–120.

3 See his biography in C.W.S. Hartley, *A Biography of Sir Charles Hartley, Civil Engineer (1825–1915): the Father of the Danube*, vol. 1–2 (Lampeter 1989) and a shorter account of his Danubian works in David Turnock, 'Sir Charles Hartley and the Development of Romania's Lower Danube – Black Sea Commerce in the Late Nineteenth Century,' in: *Anglo-Romanian Relations after 1821* (Iași 1983), 75–98.

4 Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2002).

5 Martin Kohlrusch and Helmuth Trischler, *Building Europe on Expertise. Innovators, Organizers, Networkers* (Basingstoke 2014); Wolfram Kaiser and Johan W. Schot, *Writing the Rules for Europe: Experts, Cartels and International Organizations* (Basingstoke 2014).

But establishing a security regime for trade and shipping along the Maritime Danube proved more complicated than originally believed when the Commission was founded in 1856, and the Commission was hardened into a durable organisation by the complexity of the finely tuned ‘organic machine’, the Danube Delta, which it was supposed to improve for human needs.⁶ As a ‘river history’⁷ or, to quote Mark Cioc, a river ‘eco-biography’,⁸ this chapter will also highlight, on the trail of Sara B. Pritchard’s approach, the links between science and technology studies, environmental scholarship and political history.⁹

2 Post-Crimean War Transnational River Expertise

Hartley joined the Commission’s Technical Department from the early days of the organisation. When he agreed to work in the Danube Delta, he was already an experienced civil engineer. His formal technical education consisted of ‘a practical course of instruction in mining and railway engineering’, followed by a decade of actual fieldwork. As a contractors’ district agent (1845–1848), he coordinated the construction of a key section of the Scottish Central Railway. He successfully coped with tunnels, bridges, river diversions, level crossings and drainage works. For the next six years (1848–1854), Hartley supervised the construction of a new harbour in Plymouth and became familiar with the latest engineering techniques used in hydraulics. In 1855 he enrolled as an engineer in the corps conducted by Major John Stokes, under whose command he served in the Crimean War in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire. Stokes appreciated Hartley’s technical skills and perseverance, and literally the second day after his nomination as Britain’s delegate to the Commission, Stokes requested that ‘Charles Hartley, Esq., late Captain in the Turkish Contingent Engineers’ be one of the three engineers to assist him. In December 1856, with the approval of his fellow commissioners, Stokes officially invited him to serve as the Commission’s engineer-in-chief.¹⁰

6 Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York 1996).

7 See two recent historiographic papers: Paula Schönach, ‘River Histories: A Thematic Review,’ *Water History* 9.3 (2017): 233–257 and Matthew Evenden, ‘Beyond the Organic Machine? New Approaches in River Historiography,’ *Environmental History* 23.4 (2018): 698–720.

8 Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815–2000* (Seattle and London 2002).

9 Sara B. Pritchard: *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge MA and London 2011).

10 Hartley, *A Biography*, 5–116.

At the time, after decades of Russian mastery, the river was portrayed as economically degraded and in need of urgent technical rescue.¹¹ Hartley got to Sulina in early 1857 and quickly found out that it took more than the removal of Russia to turn the Maritime Danube into a secure waterway. He started by acquainting himself with the variable local geography and hydrography as he wanted to collect solid scientific data on depths, flows, winds, currents and tides before proposing the most suitable channel of the Danube's three main branches and the appropriate technical solution for its improvement. At the same time, he started to look for the means of procuring and transporting construction materials (stone and timber), and for gathering the human resources who were to carry out these works under his coordination. He was scrupulous in collecting data and in drafting a solid technical project that he could execute in one of Europe's poorest peripheries. Six months after his arrival in the Danube Delta, his scientific – and necessarily dilatory – approach started to alarm his impatient employers, who did not lack ideas about what needed to be done,¹² as at least half a dozen other experts kept proposing improvement projects. Time was of the essence in this process, but understanding nature's own time, with the cyclicity of the Danube's flows and a long-term 'Braudelian' perspective on changes in its hydrography, was certainly a lengthy process. Hartley felt he needed to bond with the river; he needed to 'think' like a river.¹³

Thomas Abel Brimage Spratt was a reputed hydrographer sent by the British navy to sound and chart the Danube Delta. Together with the crew of HMS *Medina*, Spratt surveyed the Chilia and St George mouths of the river in 1856–1857 and drafted detailed maps which he presented to the Commission during one of its meetings.¹⁴ George Rennie, an equally distinguished British mechanical engineer (who in the late 1840s had provided the Russians with the ill-fated dredging machine mentioned in Chapter 1), submitted his own very simple technical plan for improving the Sulina bar by means of wooden jetties splayed towards the sea. Charles Blacker Vignoles, a railway engineer who in the 1840s and 1850s conducted technical works in the Russian Empire and could pretend to be familiar with the area, suggested diverting water from

11 This may be compared to the 'Histories of the Dead River' as it was common for environmental historians in the 1990s – see Terge Tvedt and Eva Jakobsson, 'Introduction: Water History Is World History,' in: eidem (eds.), *A History of Water, vol. 1, Water Control and River Biographies* (London and New York 2006), xix–xx.

12 Hartley, *A Biography*, 117–131.

13 Jared S. Taber, *Thinking Like a Floodplain: Water, Work, and Time in the Connecticut River Valley, 1790–1870*, PhD dissertation, University of Kansas (Lawrence 2016).

14 T.A.B. Spratt, *Report on the Delta of the Danube with Plans and Sections* (London 1857).

the St George into the Sulina branch and to use raking to remove the Sulina bar. Two Austrian engineers joined in the ad hoc club of technical advisers and presented plans based on recent surveys conducted during the Austrian occupation of the Danube Delta in 1855–1857: Gustave Ritter von Wex was the engineer-in-chief for the navigation of the Danube in Austrian waters and, based on his experience, he considered that St George was a better solution than Sulina: it had a broader course, could be shortened more easily and had higher banks, allowing the construction of a port at its mouth. Florian Ritter von Pasetti, his colleague, agreed to the choice of the southern branch, but came up with a different technical solution.¹⁵

Hartley's biggest challenge came from Eduard Adolph Nobiling, the engineer-in-chief for the Rhine at Coblenz, who came to the Danube in June 1857 to provide hydraulic assistance to Prussia's commissioner, Karl Hermann Bitter. Nobiling stayed in the Danube Delta for about six weeks, drafted six memoranda on its morphology and provided improvement plans for both Sulina and St George. His conclusion was that Sulina was the best choice, and proposed the construction of two piers which could be turned from temporary into permanent works.¹⁶

Despite this inflation in technical counselling, Hartley systematically 'declined to make any project until he had satisfied himself as to the general conditions and the correctness of the surveys of the river'.¹⁷ He considered that available surveys were not sufficiently accurate and wanted to base his engineering on scientific soundings made by Robert Hansford, a professional surveyor who was busily collecting data in the Danube Delta. With hydrography regarded as a 'crucial articulation of state administrative rule', as Giacomo Parrinello has recently argued in relation to the environmental history of the Po River,¹⁸ Hartley missed reliable state authorities in his peripheral marshland. He wanted more time for his preliminary research, but several commissioners accused him of 'unnecessary delays' in issuing his report.¹⁹

15 Some of them are included in the volume *Projects for the Improvement of the Lower Danube* (Leipzig 1857); discussions in Hartley, *A Biography*, 120–125.

16 Included in *Projects for the Improvement* cit.; Hartley, *A Biography*, 125–128.

17 John Stokes, *Autobiography* (s.l. s.a.), 66.

18 Giacomo Parrinello, 'Charting the Flow: Water Science and State Hydrography in the Po Watershed, 1872–1917,' *Environment and History* 23.1 (2017): 65–96.

19 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 66.

3 Logistical Challenges in the Periphery

Hartley faced additional pressure from the economic and consular circles in inland Danubian ports. Convinced that Russia had been behind the attempts to close off Danube navigation, they insisted that the Commission should employ the simple, cheap and efficient method which the Ottoman authorities had allegedly used to clear the sandbank from Sulina before 1829. It sufficed to tow a scraper or a rake over the bar and the sand would be easily carried away by the stream. Charles Cunningham, Britain's long-standing vice-consul to Galați, was no engineer, but he kept reporting about the problems from Sulina for more than two decades. His detailed accounts made him a credible source, and Hartley had to try the rake method, though he was convinced that its employment by the Ottomans was merely an 'urban legend' that would be of little help.²⁰

Other issues of hydraulic management occupied Hartley's mind. The Commission had decided to make the technical works on its own account, with human and material resources employed and supervised by the organisation itself. There was logic behind this important choice. In the Danube Delta area there were very few qualified people, foremen and skilled workers, available for employment. Local entrepreneurs were not entirely reliable and those from Western Europe had too little information to easily apply for carrying out these works. The urgency of the Commission's task – given that the 1856 Paris Treaty allowed it two years to complete the works – dictated that the organisation should act without delay once the commissioners decided on an improvement plan. By coordinating the hydraulic works on the Commission's own account, the delegates expected the support of local governments, which could provide them with free labour and facilitate access to material resources.²¹

This seemed like a better choice for the duration and cost of works, but it burdened the commissioners and their staff with innumerable problems. Qualified personnel were scouted throughout Europe and unskilled workers were employed in the Lower Danubian provinces, but the short-term nature of contracts and harsh living conditions in the Danube Delta contributed to a rather low number of applicants. Salaries had to be raised, and the Commission

20 Stokes, 'On the Mouths of the Danube and the Improvement of the Mouths of Rivers in Non-Tidal Seas,' in: *Papers on Subjects Connected with the Duties of the Corps of Royal Engineers*, new series, vol. 13 (Woolwich 1864), 37.

21 The National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch (NAR), Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocol 8, 24 December 1856; The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Public Record Office, FO 78/3212, unnumbered (hereafter unn.) (John Stokes to the Earl of Clarendon, Galați, 16 January 1857).

was busily occupied with providing this workforce with proper accommodation and food supplies.²²

Access to necessary building materials was as difficult. The Ottoman government allowed Hartley to inspect the area in search of stone and timber, which he could find relatively close to the mouths of the river. However, he lacked the human resources and material means to extract and transport them, so the Commission's Technical Department needed to invest in developing a supply infrastructure. By March 1857 the Commission established a deposit in the Ottoman town of Tulcea, where materials were stored for future use either at Sulina or at St George, depending on the commissioners' choice of the mouth to be improved.²³

4 Techno-political Power Play

In October 1857, pressed by his employers, Hartley presented his 'Report on the improvement of navigation on the Lower Danube'. The engineer based his observations on records of the discharge of water and its velocity at various sites and depths, on wind directions and sea currents, on tides and sea level variations. It was the first fully scientific description of how Danubian bars shifted depending on the severity of annual floods, wind direction and the effect of river and sea currents. Hartley minutely described the hydrography of the Danube Delta, with details on the relative and absolute advantages of each of its three main branches, but with a special focus on Sulina and St George. Along the river, the St George branch had the advantage of a bigger and more uniform depth, a greater width, and 'freedom from shoals', but at its mouth Sulina was about 4 feet deeper than St George. Hartley considered that St George was a better, though more expensive option for the long-term development of Danube navigation, as it allowed a wider entrance, larger room for quays, protection from gales and safer entry into the port in bad weather. He drafted plans for his technical solution to increase the depth over the bar at the Sulina and St George mouths: the construction of parallel jetties, whose direction and length depended on the configuration of each mouth. For Sulina, the cost was estimated at 1.4–1.5 million ducats, for St George at 1.9–2.1 million ducats.²⁴

²² PECD, Protocol 27, 27 April 1857.

²³ *Ibid.*, Protocol 18, 7 March 1857.

²⁴ *Projects for the Improvement*, 1–73; the engineer's own remarks were published in C.A. Hartley, 'Description of the Delta of the Danube and of Works Recently Executed at the

Commissioners were impressed with Hartley's work, but the choice of a mouth and a hydraulic solution proved extremely difficult. They discussed the two options for almost four months, with the delegates from Britain, Sardinia and the Ottoman Empire being generally in favour of St George,²⁵ according to Hartley's project, while those of France and Prussia defended the permanent improvement of Sulina, as proposed by Nobiling. Russia preferred the northern branch of Chilia, but eventually joined the Sulina group. Austria's delegate Franz Karl von Becke personally preferred St George, but his government instructed him to vote for Sulina.²⁶ Karl Hermann Bitter even found artistic inspiration in the dispute between the two 'coalitions of interests',²⁷ which he depicted in several of his sketches, with Hartley in the role of Don Quixote (see Figs. 5–6). Political grounds influenced the commissioners' choices, during a period when the 1857 Navigation Act of the Riverain Commission (Chapter 2) sparked tensions between European cabinets. As voting procedures required unanimity for such a decision, the IO seemed deadlocked. Eventually, by February 1858 the seven commissioners agreed that irrespective of their choice for permanent improvement, Hartley was to begin provisional works at Sulina, according to his own technical views.²⁸ Although firmly convinced that St George was a better choice, the engineer-in-chief started provisional works at Sulina in April 1858, aware that their success would eventually compromise the better St George solution.

By early 1858 European cabinets were alarmed by their delegates' indecision and required further advice from 'professional men of experience'. Four Great Powers (Britain, France, Prussia and Sardinia) agreed to send engineers to an International Technical Commission that convened in Paris in 1858, in the framework of the ambassadorial conference that was to discuss the Principalities' political organisation and the Commission's future. After strongly criticising Hartley's hydraulic plans, the four engineers came up with their own technical solution, which was completely different from those of the engineers who had visited the river: they advised governments to push

Sulina Mouth,' *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 21 (1862): 277–308; a modern approach in Hartley, *A Biography*, 117–137.

25 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı (Republic of Turkey Presidential State Archives, formerly known as Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi), HR.TO 384/9 (1 January 1858) and HR.SYS 1606/45 (27 July 1858).

26 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 69.

27 Luminița Gătejel, 'Building a Better Passage to the Sea: Engineering and River Management at the Mouth of the Danube, 1829–61,' *Technology and Culture* 59.4 (2018): 927.

28 PECD, Protocol 66, 11 December 1857–13 February 1858.

for the improvement of the St George mouth by means of river locks.²⁹ The four European experts, regarded by scholars as a proto-epistemic community³⁰ or an example of ‘science diplomacy’,³¹ concluded that the provisional works from Sulina had ‘to be immediately abandoned, if already started, as they will not only be useless for its intended purpose, but also because the dykes built will be quickly destroyed by the force of the waves due to their impoverished section’. Moreover, they would cause ‘a total loss of large sums of money and even would impede the current navigation’.³²

In August 1858 several governments instructed their delegates to the Commission to immediately terminate the Sulina works and to begin improving the St George mouth. Commissioners requested that Hartley draft new estimates according to the technical views of the Paris Technical Commission of experts but, in the meantime, the engineer-in-chief continued the provisional works at Sulina. With similar support from other commissioners, the Sulina works went on, despite the governments’ request to have them stopped. For Edward Benjamin Krehbiel, the situation placed commissioners such as Stokes in a quandary between their national and their international duty. ‘Legally he [Stokes] was clearly bound to execute the mandate of his nation; morally he – and his nation – were bound by his vote as a commissioner’. The incident, Krehbiel concluded, was ‘a poignant illustration of the tendency of a joint agent of nations to determine the action of its constituents’.³³

29 *Rapport de la Commission technique internationale convoquée à Paris pour l'examen des questions relatives à l'amélioration des bouches du Danube* (Paris 1858); Hartley, ‘Description’: 284; Stokes, ‘The Danube and Its Trade,’ *Journal of the Society of Arts* 38.1954 (2 May 1890): 565.

30 A discussion on this in Gätejel, ‘Imperial Cooperation at the Margins of Europe: the European Commission of the Danube, 1856–65,’ *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 24.5 (2017): 788–790.

31 Barbara Curli, ‘Science Diplomacy in History. From the Suez Canal to a Synchrotron in the Middle East,’ online at <http://www.fondazionepopoli.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/BarbaraCurli.pdf> (visited on 10 December 2018); more on the nexus between science and diplomacy in John Krige and Kai-Henrik Barth, ‘Introduction: Science, Technology, and International Affairs,’ *Osiris* 21.1 (2006): 1–21.

32 Stokes, ‘The Danube’: 570.

33 Edward Benjamin Krehbiel, ‘The European Commission of the Danube: An Experiment in International Administration,’ *Political Science Quarterly* 33.1 (1918): 45.



FIGURES 5-6 Sketches by Karl Hermann Bitter, Prussia's commissioner (ca. 1859)
SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

5 A European Hydraulic Triumph

In the next three years, Hartley focused on the provisional Sulina works, which were to be completed 'for the smallest sum and with the greatest speed'. There is little need to point out that he worked under extremely stressful conditions, lacking proper financial, material and human resources. The technical solution he chose was to erect two piers that were to carry the stream to deeper levels of the sea, so that the force of the current would sweep the bar and provide a deeper navigable channel.

At a time when a railway was also being built between the Danube and the Black Sea (see Chapter 7), merchants in Danubian ports put additional pressure on the Commission to complete its provisional works and render the river fully navigable as soon as possible. The fruits of success ripened with the extension of the piers Hartley was busily erecting at Sulina, and from a depth of below 9 feet in 1856, 15–17 feet was measured in 1861. It marked the beginnings of a technical success that completely transformed Hartley's life and career.³⁴

The Sulina piers, which many engineers thought useless, proved their might in clearing, provisionally at least, the bar. Beyond their hydraulic function, they were as impressive as a symbol of technological power in an inter-imperial borderland.³⁵ They still stand as a stone fortress against the forces of nature, but also as a material legacy of Europe's Concert of Powers and a technoscientific monument of common European action to rationalise nature.

Hartley had 'tamed' the wild river and had removed the biggest threat to shipping security. But the favourable outcome from Sulina sealed the fate of St George, although the engineer-in-chief was convinced that it was the best choice for the long-term development of Danube navigation.³⁶ Stokes also strived to resuscitate the interest for the St George project on several occasions (Chapter 6), but a majority of his colleagues opposed it for various reasons, ranging from its costs to the Commission's temporary status.³⁷

The completion of the first phase of the Sulina works was a great hydraulic triumph, possible through close European cooperation. At the level of decision-makers, commissioners and their governments managed to push forward a project which seemed as blocked as the Danube itself. A dispute between experts with different types of professional know-how ended with a reasonable

34 Hartley, *A Biography*, 147–166.

35 Karen Bakker, 'Water: Political, Biopolitical, Material,' *Social Studies of Science* 42.4 (2012): 616–623.

36 PECD, Protocol 128, 13 May 1861.

37 *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 204.

solution, by allowing specialists with direct knowledge of the Maritime Danube to carry out their projects. This was a success for the Commission as a reliable IO, making it clear that it was capable of competently running its business.

In terms of the technical expertise employed in planning the Sulina works, it was equally a pan-European achievement. Tens of engineers, hydrographers and shipping experts from all over Europe referred to the Danube in published or confidential reports and forwarded their specialised opinions to the Commission. Before 1856, the geography and hydrography of the Maritime Danube were largely unknown. By the early 1860s the Danube Delta had already been the focus of numerous scholarly and engineering papers that started to explain the metamorphoses of a river flowing into a tideless sea. Hartley perused this entire corpus of knowledge, which was used in planning the Sulina works. The Commission's engineers and commissioners with a technical interest closely followed engineering works carried out at the mouths of rivers around Europe. As the Paris International Commission of Engineers alluded to the case of improvement works with a lateral canal on the Vistula and Elbe, Stokes visited these places in the winter of 1858 and managed to procure 'tracings of all the plans of these works which had been taken at intervals for more than a hundred years'.³⁸ Hartley and several commissioners also took 'study tours' at the mouths of these rivers in 1859.³⁹ Their conclusion was that the conditions which had led to the success of improvement works on those rivers were different from those the Commission had to consider, giving credit to Hartley's own technical vision. Throughout the period the lead engineer also received, through the commissioners' mediation, maps and detailed plans of the works conducted by national governments on several European rivers. Over these years, Hartley managed to assemble a valuable documentary library that allowed him to become an authority on hydraulic works.

Not least of all, the improvement of the Sulina bar was a great transnational, though highly asymmetric, accomplishment in view of the human resources involved in its works. Specialised surveys at the mouth and along the Sulina branch were conducted by English and Prussian surveyors under the coordination of Hartley and of a certain Richrath, a Prussian engineer employed at the Maritime Danube for fluvial works. The material resources were purchased by the Commission's agents in Istanbul, Budapest, Vienna and London, and necessary timber and stone was stored in the deposit of Tulcea, run by a Polish officer, Oberst von Malinowski, aka Emin Bey, in the service of the Porte. The

38 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 74.

39 PECD, Protocol 94, 2 February 1859.

actual works were carried out, under the supervision of British and Prussian foremen, by Moldavian, Turkish and Bulgarian workers.

6 Celebrating a European Monument of Civilisation

Rivers have often been integrated into an overarching national or ideological discourse. The 'German Rhine', the 'French Rhône', 'Mother Volga' or 'The Father of Waters' Mississippi are perhaps the most celebrated examples of 'national rivers'.⁴⁰ With the Commission's hydraulic works and rulemaking, the Danube started to be imagined and promoted as a 'European river'. The Commission contributed directly to this transnational branding which was integrated into a larger success story of the Great Powers' cooperation.

By the summer of 1861, with the navigable depth over the Sulina bar measuring about 15 feet, the Commission decided to celebrate its accomplishment in a large public festivity. For some commissioners, this was to mark the symbolic conclusion of the Commission's main task; for others, it was just the beginning of a much more complex hydraulic project. With different thoughts and the Public Act (Chapter 3) on their minds, they felt the world needed to know about their innovative works.

On 3 September 1861, the *Mercur*, a steamer owned by the Austrian Lloyd, hosted almost two hundred guests who arrived in Sulina from Istanbul, Vienna, Odessa, Bucharest and Galați. The engineering works were inaugurated with the packet 'steaming through the flag-dressed alley of shipping into the outer roadstead beyond the piers'. The mollah of Sulina and the Orthodox archbishop of Tulcea prayed for the solidity of Hartley's jetties (see Fig. 7), and the notabilities proceeded to the northern pier. After a solemn discourse prepared by secretary general Edmond Mohler on behalf of the Commission, 'at a signal from the flag-staff of the little light house at this point, the whole of the Turkish and foreign gunboats in the inner harbour thundered forth salutes in honour of the day's events'.⁴¹

In the evening, the 177 official guests were seated around seven tables, and more festive speeches followed. Their list is illustrative of how many

40 Tricia Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities* (Syracuse NY 2010); Pritchard, 'Reconstructing the Rhône: The Cultural Politics of Nature and Nation in Contemporary France, 1945–1997,' *French Historical Studies* 27.4 (2004): 765–799; Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, *Rivers, Memory, and Nation-Building: A History of the Volga and Mississippi Rivers* (New York and Oxford 2014).

41 'The Inauguration Fête at Sulina,' *Levant Herald*, 18 September 1861, cited in Hartley, *A Biography*, 162–163.



FIGURE 7 Sulina mouth of the Danube, sketch by Charles Augustus Hartley (1861)
 SOURCE: [HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:C._E._HARTLEY_-_SULINA,_MOUTHS_OF_THE_DANUBE.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C._E._Hartley_-_Sulina,_mouths_of_the_Danube.jpg)

actors were interested in the Commission's works. Britain's Stokes toasted Sultan Abdülaziz I and 'the success of a European enterprise'; Russia's Henrik d'Offenberg extended greetings to all European royalties whose states formed the Commission; Italy's Annibale Strambio thanked Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the United Principalities, the host state of the Commission's main headquarters; Rashid Pasha, a special envoy of Ottoman commissioner Ömer Fevzi Pasha (absent on medical leave), saluted the Commission and its pioneering work on the safety of Danube navigation; Radocanachi, an influential Greek merchant and a delegate of the mercantile community from Lower Danubian ports, thanked the Commission and its engineer-in-chief; Austria's Becke, replying in the Commission's name, summed up the organisation's many accomplishments, praised free trade, and thanked the bankers who had supported it in fulfilling its technical task; France's Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt toasted the captains of the European warships stationed at Sulina, whose support had been vital in fulfilling the Commission's administrative duties; Hallington, the commander of the French naval station at Sulina, thanked in return the Commission's technical works which increased the safety of Danube and Black Sea navigation; Prussia's Jules Alexander Aloyse de Saint-Pierre complimented the local consuls, and Ghioni, the Greek consul to Galați and dean of the local consular corps, returned the thanks to the Commission;

Becke toasted Hartley, who extended his gratitude to all those present and to his diligent assistants and employees; and Henri Mathieu, a French author who published several volumes on Ottoman realities, concluded the long list of speakers with a salute to the Commission, 'a monument of Europe's love for the oriental peoples'. Mathieu spared no epithet in praising the great work of art completed at Sulina, which directly contributed to closer cooperation between European nations. The security of transportation infrastructures made economic exchanges more frequent, and the prosperity the Commission contributed to creating was part of the modern civilisation.⁴²

In this sea of joyous officials, Apostol Arsachi, Wallachia's Foreign Minister and Prince Cuza's special envoy to the Commission's fête, had reason to be unhappy with his public performance. A petty incident related to his speech is, in many ways, indicative of what the Commission represented, and how 'Europe' stood as a larger concept meant to reduce the frictions and ambitions of individual states. In his pre-prepared speech, which he circulated to (at least) several commissioners, Arsachi praised the Principalities' foreign protectors – the same states that were represented in the Commission – and vowed that his country would imitate the 'free trading tendencies of France and England'. When he recited his discourse at Sulina, England alone was mentioned. Engelhardt spotted the omission and presumed that Stokes, his rival in the Commission, was to blame. Engelhardt complained to Arsachi about his unhappy exclusion, mentioned Stokes' antipathy towards all things French, and plainly asked Arsachi to undo the change in the published version of his speech. An even better solution was duly accepted by an already uncomfortable Arsachi: 'You have deleted France; delete England too, and replace Europe for the two powers'.⁴³ To Arsachi and his countrymen, 'Europe' was definitely the perfect keyword not only to contain such vanity, but also to promote their country's interests. This permits us to highlight once again the special relation between Europe's political support for the Principalities, which favoured their unification as modern Romania, and its technical assistance in opening up the Danube for international trade and shipping, under the aegis of the Commission. Both decisions increased Romania's viability as a buffer-state and a source of stability in between imperial rivals.

42 PECD, Protocol 135, 7 September 1861.

43 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes, Représentant de la France auprès de la Commission Européenne du Danube (CED), Série B, File 10, f. 290–291 (Éd. Engelhardt to the French Foreign Office, Galați, 10 September 1861).

7 Hartley's Professional Prestige

Hartley was the hero of the hour and in September 1861 was decorated on behalf of Sultan Abdülaziz I, a distinction that he had to reject according to British law.⁴⁴ In 1862, however, he was honoured in Britain with a knighthood that further increased his prestige.⁴⁵ By then he was already a personality among his peers after having presented, in March 1862, a paper on the Sulina works in London, at the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), the world's most prestigious professional body of engineering experts. In his detailed lecture, he explained his choice for the system of parallel jetties, though he acknowledged that, 'to keep pace with the formation of new sand banks, or the growth of old ones', the piers needed to be consolidated and prolonged in the coming years.⁴⁶ Hartley proved his competence in theoretical and practical river studies in front of some of Britain's most eminent engineers and earned a great deal of professional distinction. Later that year the ICE granted him its highest award, the Telford Medal, together with a Manby Premium and a Stephenson Prize.⁴⁷

By the early 1860s, Hartley started to be invited as a consultant for improvement works on rivers, ports and canals around the world. In 1862 the Austrian cabinet appointed a commission, presided over by former Commission commissioner Becke, to modernise the port of Trieste, and Hartley served as technical expert. He further advised the Russian authorities on the improvement of river access towards the inland port of Rostov on the Don. In 1865 he participated in an international competition organised by the Russian authorities which sought plans to extend the port of Odessa, following the construction of a railway connecting it to the inland provinces of the empire. Hartley won the contest and his plans were considered 'fit to serve as a guide for the works'. In May 1867 the engineer was invited by the British Foreign Office 'to inquire and report' on a technical dispute between Belgium and the Netherlands, following the Dutch cabinet's intention to dam the Eastern Scheldt with the effect of running a railway in the area.⁴⁸

Hartley travelled extensively during the 1860s, but his home base remained in the small Danubian town of Sulina (Chapter 9). He continued to coordinate the Commission's technical works, although it had limited financial resources to complete them, and to turn them into permanent works. Thanks to

44 Stokes, 'The Danube': 567.

45 Hartley, *A Biography*, 165–166.

46 Hartley, 'Description': 292.

47 Hartley, *A Biography*, 210–211.

48 *Ibid.*, 184–203.

his engineering, Sulina was a must-see destination for engineers building hydraulic works around the world. In 1864, Hugh Leonard, a British civil engineer in charge of the works on the Hooghly River in West Bengal, visited Europe for research. At the Danube he had ‘the opportunity of examining the works done for the improvement of the entrance to the river and for the removal of some shallows in the Sulina Channel’ and asked for Hartley’s opinion on the improvement of the Indian river. Leonard further headed to the Po, the Vistula, the Rhine, the Adour, the Tyne, the Wear, the Tees, the Clyde, the Severn, and the Ribble, and his reports show that there was a tight network of river experts aware of the hydraulic works carried around the world and that Hartley was a respected authority in the field of inland and harbour works.⁴⁹ Such fluxes of hydraulic knowledge and technical experts moved around Europe and the globe⁵⁰ in all directions, proving the dynamism of modern engineering and the fact that peripheral areas sometimes served as hubs of technological innovation.

After the Commission’s term was prolonged in 1871, the contract between Hartley and his employers was renegotiated. From 1872, he remained in charge of the Danube works as a consulting engineer, with the obligation to come to Sulina once a year and whenever urgently needed. His assistant, the Danish engineer Charles (Karl) Leopold Kühl, was appointed resident engineer. Kühl lived in Sulina and acted under the Commission’s direct orders until his retirement in 1907.⁵¹

Kühl and his assistant, Danish Eugene Magnussen (resident engineer between 1908 and 1919), worked under the supervision of Hartley and continued to present the results of their works to the British ICE. In 1872, Hartley delivered another paper, a remarkable account of the changes which had occurred in the Danube Delta in the previous decade because of both natural causes and the construction of the jetties. Similar papers were presented and published by Kühl in 1881, 1888 and 1891, making the Danube Delta a well-documented example, then and now, in understanding the evolution of deltaic systems.⁵² As

49 Hugh Leonard, *Report on the River Hooghly, Bengal. 1865* (London 1865), 3.

50 Pritchard, ‘From Hydroimperialism to Hydrocapitalism: ‘French’ Hydraulics in France, North Africa, and Beyond,’ *Social Studies of Science* 42.4 (2012): 591–615.

51 PECD, Protocols 254 and 274, 25 April 1871 and 4 May 1872; Hartley, *A Biography*, 290; Constantin Ardeleanu, ‘Prelungirea activităţii părintelui Dunării, inginerul britanic Ch. Hartley, un episod puţin cunoscut din istoria Comisiei Europene a Dunării (1871–1872),’ in: Ştefan Stanciu and Costin Croitoru (eds.), *Perspective asupra istoriei locale în viziunea tinerilor cercetători (II)* (Galaţi 2006), 71–77.

52 C.A. Hartley, ‘On the Changes That Have Recently Taken Place along the Sea Coast of the Delta of the Danube, and on the Consolidation of the Provisional Works at the Sulina Mouth,’ *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 36 (1873): 201–253;

detailed in the introduction, this politics of publication spread the word about the Commission's efficiency.

8 Exhibiting Transnational Hydraulic Success

The Commission had several reasons to advertise the success of its technical programme. The organisation had produced valuable knowledge on the Danube Delta and was looking for ways to disseminate this to larger audiences. Daily bathymetric measurements were made at different points of the river and sea, and data were interpreted and included on charts and maps produced by its Technical Department. In July 1861 the first triangulation of the Sulina mouth was completed, and accurate maps could be produced for the use of both the Commission and seafarers. The Commission made different types of cartographic products, from those accompanying technical memos to 3D maps used for exhibitions and public presentations.⁵³

While discussing the conclusion of the Public Act in the mid-1860s, commissioners decided to publish a historical account of the Commission's administrative and technical works. They considered that such a document would provide future engineers with 'the fullest and most authentic data' about the Maritime Danube. The technical report was eventually printed in 1867 with F.A. Brockhaus, a publisher from Leipzig, in the form of an atlas, accompanied by 164 high-quality maps and charts drawn by two of Hartley's aides, Robert Hansford and M.L. Dollfus de Meric. A similar atlas was published in 1873, allowing experts from around the world to visually follow the works accomplished by Hartley and his team.⁵⁴

Charles Henry Leopold Kühl, 'Dredging on the Lower Danube,' *ibid.*, 65 (1881): 266–270; *idem*, 'The Sulina Mouth of the Danube (Includes Plates and Appendices),' *ibid.*, 91 (1888): 329–341; *idem*, 'The Sulina Branch of the Danube (Includes Plates and Appendices),' *ibid.*, 106 (1891): 238–247; L. Harcourt, 'The Survey of the Delta of the Danube in 1894 (Abstracted from the Report of Sir Charles Hartley, KCMG, MICE),' *ibid.*, 122 (1895): 336–342.

- 53 Ștefan Constantinescu, Liviu Giosan and Alfred Vespremeanu-Stroe, 'A Cartographical Perspective to the Engineering Works at the Sulina Mouth, the Danube Delta,' *Acta Geodaetica et Geophysica Hungarica* 45.1 (2010): 71–79; Marius Budileanu, 'Tipuri de produse cartografice specifice guriilor Sulina, din perspectiva Comisiunii Europene a Dunării,' *Geographia Napocensis* 7.2 (2013): 59–70; Ștefan Constantinescu, 'Various Approaches to the Danube Delta. From Maps to Reality,' in: Constantin Iordachi and Kristof Van Assche (eds.), *The Bio-Politics of the Danube Delta: Nature, History, Policies* (Lanham 2015), 155–181.
- 54 *Mémoire sur les travaux d'amélioration exécutés aux embouchures du Danube par la Commission Européenne instituée en vertu de l'article 16 du Traité de Paris du 30 mars 1856, accompagné d'un atlas de 40 planches* (Galați 1867); *Mémoire sur l'achèvement des travaux*

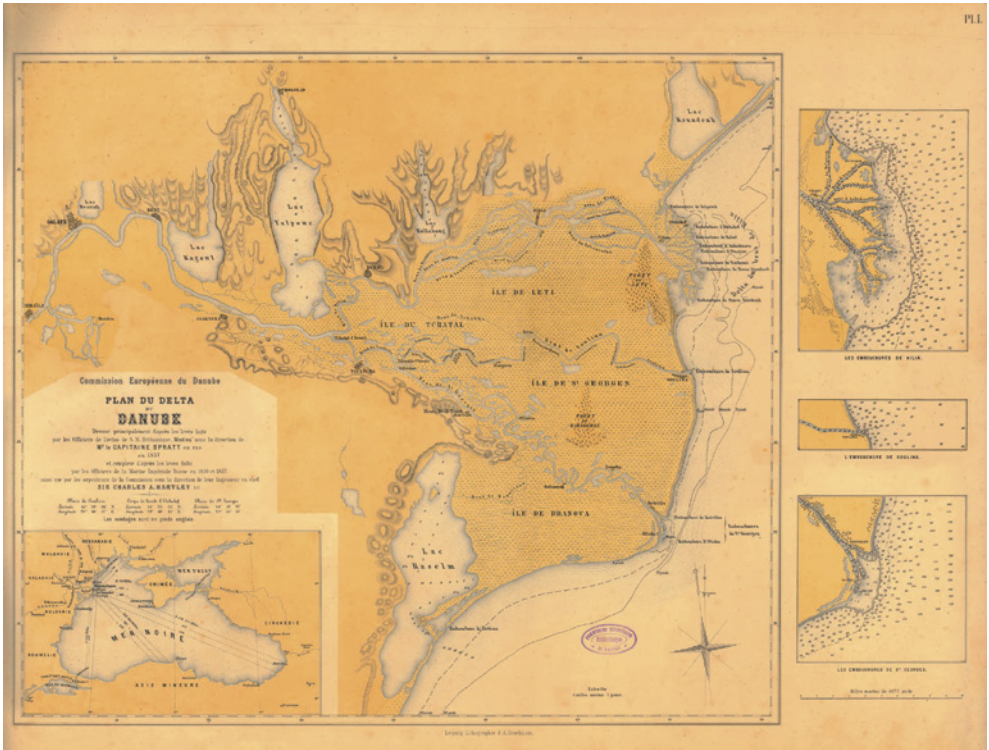


FIGURE 8 Plan of the Danube Delta

SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

Copies of the first atlas were sent to governments and professional bodies from around the globe, and the Commission also discussed displaying its works at the 1867 Paris World Exhibition. A political debate ensued about the proper pavilion to host such transnational products, as several commissioners considered that it was not fair 'to place the results of an international undertaking among the productions of any one power'. The decision reached was to have the Ottoman commissioner obtain permission from his government to send the atlas and memoranda directly to the Exhibition in the Commission's own

d'amélioration exécutés aux embouchures du Danube par la Commission Européenne instituée en vertu de l'article 16 du Traité de Paris du 30 mars 1856, avec 3 cartes jointes au texte et un atlas de 59 planches (Leipzig 1873).

name.⁵⁵ This became a regular practice, and the Commission sent their products to other world fairs, such as that of Vienna in 1873.⁵⁶

Further technical memoranda were published in 1888, 1906 and 1912, each accompanied by detailed maps, tables and high-quality plates. They contributed to keeping hydraulic experts updated on the progress of the Commission's technical works but were also used to consolidate and legitimise its claims as the *de facto* technopolitical authority in the Danube Delta.⁵⁷ The Commission's maps, as well its other products such as trade and shipping statistics, were instruments of communication, persuasion and power, serving and projecting the interests of the organisation.⁵⁸

9 Deepening the Sulina Bar

Jetties of various sizes and shapes had been built at the mouths of rivers such as the Oder, the Vistula and the Rhône, and Hartley had these examples in mind when he started planning his engineering projects at St George and Sulina. He lacked, nevertheless, solid knowledge on the hydrographical features of the river and sea in which his piers were to be constructed. In the following decades Hartley played a thrilling chess game with the deltaic environment. He calculated his moves based on continuous surveys of the river and started his works after understanding the 'temperament' of the river-sea system. He credited nature with 'a powerful agency',⁵⁹ as the river reacted to Hartley's works by continuous changes in its structure, which oftentimes posed additional hydraulic challenges. It took a long time to document the large seasonal variations of the Danube, as well as the winds, waves and ice which eroded Hartley's works. In one of his lectures, he mentioned how large such seasonal variations were:

the volume of water discharged by the Sulina arm varies from 1 to 13, and the velocity of the current varies from ½ mile to 4 ½ miles an hour, the weight of sediment carried in suspension varies from a minimum of

55 TNA, FO 78/3223, unnn. (Stokes to Lord Stanley, Galați, 20 May 1867); PECD, Protocol 192, 24 April 1867.

56 PECD, Protocols 267 and 282, 30 April 1872 and 16 September 1873.

57 A discussion of this relation in Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge 2014).

58 Denis Wood and John Fels, *The Power of Maps* (New York and London 1992); Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 9.

59 Gătejel, 'Building a Better Passage': 942–943.

12 grains to a maximum of 840 grains per cubic foot of water, or 1 to 70. The mean annual discharge of sediment by the Sulina is 5,000,000 tons, the proportion in weight to that of water giving an average of about 1/3000.⁶⁰

The Sulina bar was the greatest challenge he had to cope with at the junction of river and sea. He needed to understand its composition, the ratio of river alluvia and sea sand that formed it, the forces that created it, shaped it and removed it. His first task was a purely scientific one and explaining the formation of bars in tideless seas is one of his lasting academic contributions.

Hartley experimented a lot with the composition and length of the Sulina jetties in his attempts to find the best technical solution, suited to the particularities of the Danube Delta, the budget and the material resources available for his works. He initially used wood but in 1865 European commissioners required Hartley to turn these provisional structures into permanent ones. With funding from a loan taken in 1868, Hartley consolidated the piers, and in 1871 the navigable depth over the Sulina bar reached about 20 feet, a depth which was preserved over the next couple of decades. In completing these works, Hartley faced many challenges not only in acquiring proper building materials, but also in manipulating them. Gantries, block-making machines, concrete mixers and steam-engines were built by Hartley and his team, and a Goliath crane was used to move huge stone blocks of up to 20 tons each. The lead engineer used pioneering building materials and techniques in his works, such as Portland cement, Pozzolana concrete and underwater divers.⁶¹

In 1894, owing to the constantly increasing size of vessels calling at the Danube, it was necessary to further deepen the entrance. Hartley and Kühl built two parallel piers between the main jetties, reducing the breadth of the river to 500 feet and thereby increasing the scour. Dredging between the piers continued until the First World War, and a depth of about 24 feet was maintained at the Sulina mouth.⁶² This was as good as it could get, given the Danube's hydrographical features. Hartley's piers, extended in the twentieth century, and regular dredging have maintained about the same navigable depth at the Sulina bar, which now measures 25 feet.

60 C.A. Hartley, 'Inland Navigation in Europe,' in: *The Theory and Practice of Hydro-Mechanics: A Series of Lectures Delivered at the Institution of Civil Engineers, Session 1884–85* (London 1885), 149–150.

61 Hartley, *A Biography*, 257–269.

62 Dimitrie A. Sturza, 'Însemnătatea lucrărilor Comisiunii Europene de la Gurile Dunării, 1856–1912,' *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile secțiunii istorice* 2nd series 35 (1913): 261.

10 Mobile Property and Memory Politics

The Commission's technical staff needed suitable service ships for their works. In its early period, the organisation relied on tugs and dredgers provided by the Ottoman state, vessels which proved rather inappropriate for the needs of such a busy river. From the early 1860s onwards, commissioners invested in purchasing more appropriate ships for the multiple tasks the Commission had to fulfil. In 1861 a tug was ordered in a London shipyard, subsequently named the *Europa*, to fit with the cooperative spirit in which the Commission was completing its 'civilising' mission.⁶³

The Ottoman authorities protested when the Commission decided to have its own signal flag hoisted aboard the ship.⁶⁴ The flag (Fig. 15) was apparently invented by a British store-keeper in Sulina in the late 1850s, and the Commission started using it as a form of showcasing its autonomy.⁶⁵ To minimise protests, the Ottoman flag was used alongside it on the Commission's ships and buildings. After 1878, however, when the Commission became an independent organisation from the authority of the new territorial power (Romania), the flag was used as a marker of the Commission's new status.⁶⁶

From the 1870s, dredging became an important part of the engineers' solution to increasing the depth in several shallow river sections. The organisation needed more powerful dredging machines, and its mechanical engineers tried to make good use of the vessels in their possession. By the early 1880s, the Commission had an old 16 HP dredger inherited from Ottoman times, a 40 HP (80 IHP) one – the *Sulina* – which had been built at Trieste according to Hartley's own specifications, and a 180 IHP one, the *Delta*, built in England at Barrow-in-Furness.⁶⁷

In the early 1890s, when systematic dredging started at the Sulina bar, even more powerful machines became necessary, and in 1891 a new 250 IHP dredger was added to the fleet. With it the Commission inaugurated the habit of naming these vessels after influential personalities who contributed to the success of its technical works. The new dredger was named the *Hartley*. In the

63 PECD, Protocol 147, 13 September 1862.

64 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve, Représentant de la France auprès de la Commission Européenne du Danube (CED), File 10, f. 15–17 (Engelhardt to Drouyn de Lhuys, Galați, 15 April 1863).

65 Hartley, *A Biography*, 442.

66 Louis Savadogo, 'Les navires battant pavillon d'une organisation internationale,' *Annuaire français de droit international* 53.1 (2007): 662–663.

67 Hartley, *A Biography*, 473.

following decades, *Percy Sanderson* (Britain's long-standing commissioner⁶⁸), *Dimitrie A. Sturdza* (Romania's former prime minister and a great supporter of the Commission's technical work) and *Karl Kühn* named other dredgers, while *Carolus Primus* was the IO's protocolary yacht named to honour Romania's King Charles I (Carol I).⁶⁹ The Commission's corporate identity was by now fully established, and the organisation used its mobile property not only to showcase its independence, but also to perpetuate the memory of some of its most cherished supporters. With it the Commission added another dimension to its increasingly coherent memory politics.

11 Environmental Challenges in the Danube Delta Area

As Ashley Carse has recently argued in the case of the Panama Canal, large infrastructure projects rework regional ecologies in ways that serve some economic or political priorities, but disadvantage other enterprises.⁷⁰ This was also the case in the Danube Delta area, as the Commission's hydraulic works created many new economic opportunities, but affected local communities and disrupted businesses, too.

One of Hartley's early challenges was to find proper building materials to fit his technical vision and budget. Ottoman commissioners mediated the Commission's access to the resources of the neighbouring province of Dobrudja, which were duly inspected and assessed in 1857. Good timber, especially hornbeam, was available in local forests, but oak and pine had to be sought further away in the forests of the Carpathian Mountains. As for stone, the Commission could quarry it in Ottoman Dobrudja. This granted Hartley access to large quantities of limestone of a suitable size.⁷¹

The logistics of Hartley's works were extremely complex, as he needed large quantities of timber and stone at Sulina and along the river. Systematic deforestation, however, impacted the Ottoman Empire's security in its northern borderland. The Commission paid increasing attention to its providers, who oftentimes took advantage of the IO's privileged position in the area to engage in remunerative transactions for their private purse. Ottoman sources mention the high level of waste in the forests of Dobrudja, and Salih Bey, a military official appointed to assess the situation, blamed it on the insufficient number

68 Ibid., 533–534.

69 *La Commission*, 254–259.

70 Ashley Carse, *Beyond the Big Ditch: Politics, Ecology, and Infrastructure at the Panama Canal* (Cambridge MA 2014).

71 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 69.

of Ottoman guards dispatched to protect imperial interests.⁷² Such discussions made the Commission more attentive to environmental concerns in its jurisdiction, especially when they touched on security matters.

Another dispute was related to fishing rights in the Danube Delta. The 'Somova Girla' (creek) connected the Commission's stone quarries with the Danube, and open access was vital for the transportation of stone blocks. However, a fish farmer who had a fishing monopoly in the area threw a weir across the creek, obstructing the traffic of the stone-laden barges. A conflict ensued between the organisation and the local Ottoman authorities, and the farmer demanded huge compensation of about 2,000 ducats (£1,000) to remove the gear. The Commission felt that it was being blackmailed. By 1869, however, as Hartley badly needed stone for his works, the Commission paid the fish farmer, but reserved 'the right to deduct the amount from its debt to the Porte'.⁷³ This made the Commission interested in clearly specifying its privileges in the Danube Delta and to secure unobstructed access to its resources.

Environmental awareness grew in the coming decades, both within riparian states and in the Commission. In the context of an increasingly precarious state of Danubian fish stocks, Romanian biologist Grigore Antipa drew up detailed memoranda and published several books exposing the dangers, from economic, biological and ecological perspectives, of unregulated fishing. While the Chilia and St George branches were leased to private entrepreneurs who used fishing gear that harmed the most economically rewarding species (mainly the sturgeon from which black caviar is harvested), the Sulina branch allowed free passage to migratory fish species, whose natural habitats were, however, affected by intensive navigation.⁷⁴ Eventually a fishing law was adopted in 1896, which brought changes in the organisation of Danubian fisheries, and which the Commission also took into account.⁷⁵ The Commission's transportation infrastructure created new environmental connections and ruptures,⁷⁶ and it was this special status of the Sulina branch, guaranteed by a European organisation, that allowed the unimpeded circulation of both ships and fish.

72 Selçuk Dursun, 'Forest Security in the Balkans in the Nineteenth Century,' presentation at the colloquium *Securing the World. Global Perspectives on Security History in the Long Nineteenth Century*, KNAW, Amsterdam, 25–27 September 2017.

73 PECD, Protocol 222, 30 October 1868; Hartley, *A Biography*, 281–282.

74 Grigore Antipa, *Studii asupra pescărilor din România* (Bucharest 1895), 43.

75 More on the context and regional fishing in Ardeleanu, 'Fishing in the Lower Danube and Its Floodplain from the Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century,' in: Tonnes Bekker-Nielsen and Ruthy Gertwagen (eds.), *The Inland Seas. Towards an Ecohistory of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea* (Stuttgart 2016), 333–334.

76 Per Högselius, Arne Kaijser and Erik Van der Vleuten, *Europe's Infrastructure Transition: Economy, War, Nature* (Basingstoke 2015), 14.

12 'Civilising and Disciplining' the River

Hartley paid equal attention to improving the river channel along the Maritime Danube. A course of about 100 miles separated the inland ports of Brăila and Galați from the Black Sea, and the area was encumbered with numerous obstacles. There were several problems related to the carcasses of shipwrecked vessels, but most hindrances stemmed from natural factors, such as sandbanks. The Danube carries a huge quantity of alluvia and detritus, divided between the three main branches of the river. Sulina, for example, carries more than 5,000,000 tons per annum. It was not so much the average quantity, but its huge seasonal variations that created problems.⁷⁷

Hartley started corrections on the river in August 1857 at the Argagni shoal, and in the next decade he managed to increase the minimum depth along the river to 11 feet. Many obstacles were permanently dealt with by the construction of groynes, or training works, which reduced the river width and increased the depth. The shoals were subject to constant change, increasing during floods and gradually wearing down during low-water seasons. Other problems resulted from the fact that the Sulina branch was very tortuous which did, however, allow ample room for shortening and straightening its course by suppressing sharp bends. Works were done in the 1860s to remove several shoals, and dredging was used to clear the sandbanks that kept forming along the waterway.

Sulina's original length of 45 miles was impeded by eleven bends, each with a radius of less than 1,000 feet, besides numerous others of a somewhat larger radius, and its bed was encumbered by ten shifting shoals, varying from 8–13 feet at low water. Through a series of restraining walls, groynes thrown out from the banks, revetments of the banks and dredging, all done to narrow the river, a minimum depth of 11 feet was attained in 1865, which was further increased to 13 feet in 1871 and 15 feet in 1886. A series of cuttings between 1886 and 1902⁷⁸ (see Fig. 9 and Table 2) shortened the length of the Sulina channel by 11 nautical miles, eliminating all the difficult bends and shoals, and provided an almost straight, 34-mile long waterway with a minimum depth of 20 feet when the river was at its lowest.⁷⁹ As an engineering accomplishment, it was,

77 Kühl, 'Dredging on the Lower Danube': 266.

78 Ministerul Afacerilor Străine, *Îmbunătățirea navigațiunei pe Dunăre (1888–1890) și pe Prut (1887–1890). Importul în România al mărfurilor naționaliste în Elveția și în Olanda: (documente prezentate Corpurilor Legiutóre în sesiunea ordinară din 1890–91)* (Bucharest 1891), 1–99.

79 *La Commission*, 213–216.

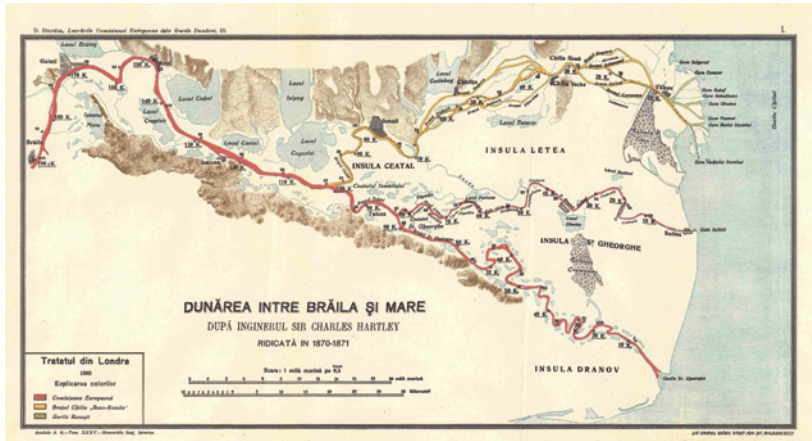


FIGURE 9 Map of the Maritime Danube (1870s–1880s)
 SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

TABLE 2 Cutting works of the Commission, 1886–1902

Name	Date	Length (m)	Quantity removed (m ³)	Shortening achieved (m)	Bends removed
Little Argagnis	1886–1887	792	650,755	181	3
Masurale	1888–1889	1,359	950,739	238	2
Large Inferior “M”	1890–1893	9,708	5,926,136	7,826	3
Gorgova Veniko	1894–1897	6,646	5,246,331	2,530	4
Argagnis	1894–1898	1,982	1,622,452	396	1
Large Superior “M”	1898–1902	10,424	7,540,279	7,098	3
Total		30,911	21,936,692	18,269	16

SOURCE: DIMITRIE A. STURDZA, ‘ÎNSEMŢĂȚATEA LUCRĂRIILOR COMISIUNII EUROPEANE DE LA GURILE DUNĂREI, 1856 LA 1912 (III),’ *ANALELE ACADEMIEI ROMĂNE, MEMORIILE SECȚIUNII ISTORICE* 35 (1913): 200

to quote Chandra Mukerji’s work on the Midi Canal in Southern France, ‘a silent demonstration of disciplinary power over the earth.’⁸⁰

80 Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton and Oxford 2009), 2.

Hartley marked out the channel, and milestones were placed on the left bank. The banks were lined with bollards and bridges thrown over 'girdas' to ensure the continuity of the towpath. Another important decision to facilitate navigation was marking the Sulina mouth by means of buoys, an operation which started in 1857. Other works were done in 1868–1869, when access towards the Portița Bay was signalled with a fixed beacon and buoys. Along the river, the channel was marked by red conical and black flat buoys. The red buoys indicated that the channel went between them and the right bank, the black buoys that it ran between them and the left bank. During the winter, they were replaced by spars of the same colour, so as not to be washed away by the ice. In several places, the direction of the deeper channel was indicated by pairs of triangular alignment markers established on the banks. Poles with reversed anchors indicated where it was forbidden to anchor.⁸¹ All these navigational aids were laid down after decisions made by commissioners, thus contributing to the global spread of a material toolbox and symbolic language for safe shipping on the world's rivers, seas and oceans.

When hydraulic works on the river were completed in 1902, they were inaugurated during a celebration attended by Prince Ferdinand and Princess Marie, the heirs to Romania's throne. Hartley was not present, which allowed resident engineer Kühl to fully enjoy the fruits of their success. Victor de Borhek, Austria-Hungary's commissioner and president of the autumn session, hosted the ceremony and his official speech insisted on the importance of the organisation's technical works, which 'civilised and disciplined nature'.⁸² An article in *The Times* mentioned Hartley's remarkable works in the Maritime Danube and the successful experiment of 'giving direct and absolute control over a definite territory to an international body invested with sovereign powers'.⁸³

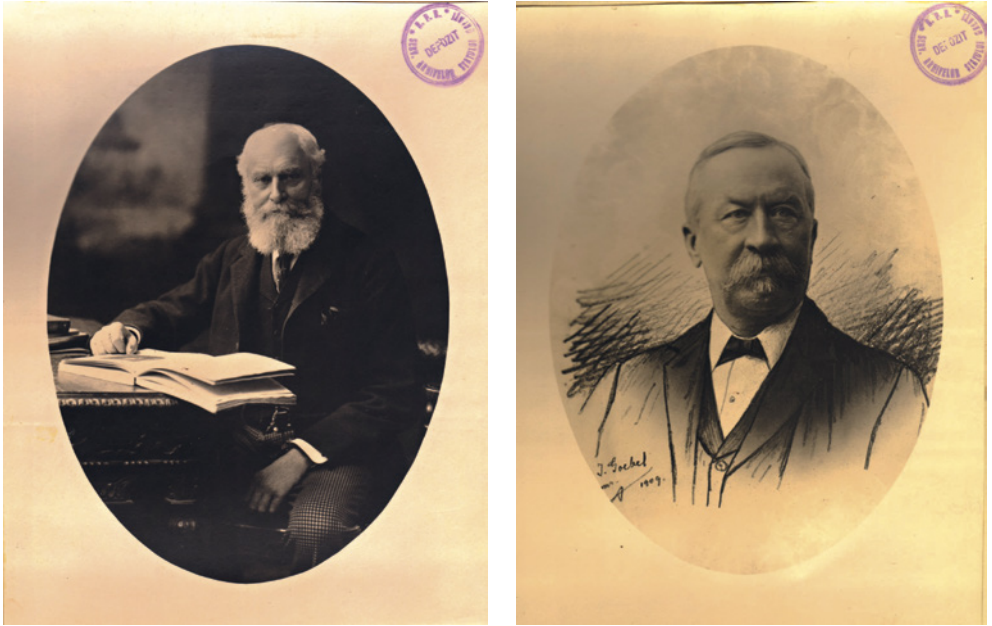
Different infrastructures combine in such a complex 'enviro-technical system'.⁸⁴ Infrastructure was built to stabilise the Danube's banks, which allowed for a smooth and predictable functioning of a busy transportation infrastructure. With this the river was 'disciplined' and its 'bad habits' corrected. But technology is not only used by political actors to attain their ends; technology

81 *La Commission*, 324–327.

82 PECD, Protocol 651, appendix 1, 21 October 1902. For a modern approach on controlling and exploiting nature as a 'standard of civilisation,' see Yuan (Joanne) Yao, "Conquest from Barbarism": The Danube Commission, International Order and the Control of Nature as a Standard of Civilization,' *European Journal of International Relations* 25.2 (2019): 335–359.

83 'The New Cutting in the Sulina Branch of the Danube (from a Correspondent),' *The Times* 36932, 22 November 1902: 5.

84 Pritchard, *Confluence*, 19.



FIGURES 10–11 Photos of Charles Augustus Hartley and Charles (Karl) Leopold Kühl
SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

itself exerts political force and thus contributes to preserving stability in its area.⁸⁵ The proper working of the Danube as a 'civilised' transportation infrastructure stabilised the Commission as a reliable organisation of the Maritime Danube. The milestones, buoys, beacons and bollards also deserve mention as markers of a 'civilised' transportation infrastructure. It was this combination of hydraulic works, navigational aids and shipping regulations that would eventually remove the defects of nature⁸⁶ and turn the Danube into a secure river.

13 Protecting Hydraulic Works in Times of War

The significance of the environment for wars and the environmental effects of military conflicts have been duly analysed by environmental historians.⁸⁷ Rivers are important for naval warfare, and as an inter-imperial borderline the

85 Wiebe E. Bijker, 'Dikes and Dams, Thick with Politics,' *Isis* 98.1 (2007): 109–123.

86 Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 15.

87 See for instance Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell, *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of War* (Corvallis 2004).

Danube was often caught in regional conflicts. But after the establishment of the Commission and its attainment of a neutral status, a different sort of institutional actor stood in between imperial rivals.

Worries about war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire made European commissioners insist on the Commission's neutrality, as inscribed in the 1865 Public Act. Their fears came true in 1877, when geopolitical interests during the Balkan crisis attracted Russia into the conflict. The Lower Danube was caught in the crossfire, and the Commission's hydraulic works risked being affected by naval operations.

To prevent the movement of Ottoman gunboats, the Russians built a dam close to the St George's Chatal (fork) in an area subject to shoaling. The dam was built 'by means of sunken vessels filled with stones and of stones heaped on top of them'. Rumours mentioned a further consolidation of the dam during the summer months of 1877, with fears that commercial shipping on the Danube would be completely closed.

Hartley hoped the Commission's staff and works would be protected and he published a piece in *The Times* on 25 July 1877. If the dam was not 'speedily removed', he claimed, 'it will render nugatory the labours of the Commission'.⁸⁸ The Russians did promise to remove all artificial obstructions at the end of the war. Meanwhile, defensive torpedo mines were placed along the river. Even more troublesome for the Commission were the Russian attempts to occupy Sulina, and the Ottomans' efforts to use the IO's neutrality as a shield to defend the town. The *Cockatrice*, a British warship, stood for the Commission's neutrality when the town was attacked by the Russians in October 1877. Engineer Kühl remained at Sulina during the entire conflict and mediated with both parties to spare European property. The town was damaged during the battle, but the Commission's properties and works were not affected.⁸⁹ All in all, the presence of the organisation saved Sulina from destruction.

Commissioners met in Galați in November 1877 and agreed to intervene to restore river navigation. To the engineers' relief, the Russian dam was not as bad as believed, and Kühl managed to remove it in a short time. Torpedoes were also cleared, so that by April 1878 the Danube was open for business as usual. The Commission claimed compensation for its loss but was never able to cover the entire cost of the clearing operations.⁹⁰

88 C. Hartley, 'The Sulina Branch of the Danube,' *The Times* 29003, 25 July 1877: 8; Hartley, *A Biography*, 444–445.

89 PECD, Protocol 315, 7 November 1877.

90 TNA, FO 881/3374 (H.T. Siborne to the Earl of Derby, Galați, 17 November 1877); the diplomatic correspondence is published in FO 881/3552: *Correspondence respecting the Sinking of the Dam in the Sulina Mouth of the Danube by the Russians, 1877–78* (London 1878).

While its hydraulic works on the river were affected by the conflict, the damage was not irreparable. Naval operations were carried out with more consideration for 'European property' and for minimising the toll paid by commercial ships. The Commission had made good use of its neutral status and in the end strengthened its position as a mediator between belligerent troops and, from 1878, as a fully independent organ and source of regional security in between rival empires.

14 Techno-political Intrusions in the 'Organic Machine'

Hartley's works had completely changed the hydrography of the Danube Delta and showed the dynamic forces at work in that 'organic machine'. With the enormous quantity of alluvium which the Danube carries and deposits into the sea, the structure of the Black Sea's northwestern coast changes continuously. Although the land generally gains onto the sea, this extension is variable and depends on other natural factors; in other areas, the opposite occurs, and the sea advances into the mainland by eroding the coast. To map these changes, general surveys of the Delta coast were made in 1830, 1856, 1871, 1883, 1894 and 1906. In 30 years, the Danube carried and deposited into the sea the huge amount of about 2.5 billion tons of solid material, distributed between its three main branches. Chilia was the largest of the three branches, carrying about two thirds of the Danube's flow. Hartley was aware that the advance of Chilia's sub-delta would eventually threaten Sulina. In 1872 he estimated its advance to be 70 metres per year, and later updated it to 84 metres a year. The Musura Bay started to close into a lagoon north of Hartley's jetties, and alluvia still threaten to close the navigable passage over the Sulina bar. In the epic battle against the forces of nature, the river has not been completely 'disciplined'.

As an 'enviro-technical system', the Danube Delta required coordinated fine tuning in order not to unsettle a fragile balance that could further affect the environment and its riverain human communities. Political challenges complicated this question. Russia returned to the Danube in 1878, when it reannexed Southern Bessarabia, including most of Chilia's sub-delta. Romania was granted the province of Dobrudja and the largest part of the Danube Delta, and thus became the host state in whose territory the Commission functioned (Chapter 8).

In December 1879, Alexander Romanenko, Russia's Danube commissioner, discussed in the Commission the removal of the Chilia branch from the Commission's jurisdiction. He claimed that the IO had abandoned it in 1857–1858, when it started regulating the Sulina branch and mouth, and thus the two

territorial powers, Russia and Romania, could enjoy full sovereignty over their national waters. The other commissioners rejected the claim,⁹¹ but during the following years it was clear that Russia would eventually denounce European jurisdiction over the Chilia branch.

In 1882 Russia launched a scientific survey of the Danube Delta's advance into the Black Sea, with a special interest in the Chilia sub-branch. The survey was to be carried out by Russian experts, acting independently of the Commission.⁹² Expecting opposition in the Commission, an article in a Russian journal, *Novoye Vremia*, questioned the authority of an organ which violated an empire's sovereign rights in its national territory.⁹³ When the prolongation of the Commission's term was discussed at the London Conference in 1883, Russia made it clear that it would accept a further extension of the Commission's term only if Chilia received special status. The Great Powers agreed to return the Chilia branch under the administration of territorial states, which were, however, to apply European regulations drafted by the Commission. Its executive agents could move along the Chilia branch and the plans for local hydraulic works had to be communicated to the Commission, which was to determine whether they injured in any way the navigability of the Sulina branch.⁹⁴ As Romanian historian Ștefan Stanciu put it, the Chilia branch became Russian territory with European legislation.⁹⁵

In the 1890s, Russia attempted to open a different exit to the sea. Russian engineers Theschovici and L. von Rummel were commissioned to study the navigability of the Chilia branch, and in 1893–1894 a Russian warship surveyed the waters of the Stari Stambul sub-branch and drafted a new map of the area.⁹⁶ Romania opposed such intentions, which it considered to be part of Russia's renewed hydro-hegemonic claims in the Danube Delta. Dependence on the Sulina branch as a transportation highway made the Romanian government regard the Commission as a techno-political bulwark against Russia's imperial aims. As a zero-sum environmental system, hydraulic improvements in the

91 PECD, Protocol 345, 8 and 12 December 1879.

92 NAR, Galați Branch, European Commission of the Danube. The English Delegate Fund, File 17, f. 24 (Percy Sanderson to Earl Granville, Galați, 29 September 1882).

93 Constantin I. Băicoianu, *Le Danube. Aperçu historique, économique et politique* (avec une préface par Vintila I. Bratiano) (Paris 1917), 130–131, note 1.

94 Sturdza, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de la navigation du Danube* (Berlin 1904), 451–452.

95 Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002), 136.

96 Grigore Antipa, *Dunărea și problemele ei științifice, economice și politice* (Bucharest 1921), 147–149; Ion Ionescu, 'Chestiunea Stari-Stambul, o tentativă de violare a frontierelor tânărului stat independent român,' *Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Române* 29.8 (1998): 69–72.

Russian section of the river risked threatening the stability of the Commission's own works. However, due to economic reasons, Russia did not insist on 'correcting' its own waters in the late nineteenth century, but did it later in the twentieth century, in Soviet times. Such discussions in the Danubian 'organic machine' continue to be relevant today, when Ukraine's plans to make hydraulic works in its part of the Danube Delta have been contested for their environmental effects.⁹⁷

15 Conclusions

As a 'river of empires',⁹⁸ to paraphrase another seminal work in environmental history, the Danube was remade through an experiment in which Europe's Great Powers invested human capital and know-how to modernise a vital continental transport infrastructure which was encumbered with innumerable natural and artificial sources of insecurity.

The Commission was invested with a technical mission, which was accomplished under the coordination of an international team of experts led by engineer-in-chief Hartley. He based his technical plans on a fully scientific vision, and his success contributed to turning him into an authority in hydraulic works. Hartley started his surveys in the Russophobe environment of the post Crimean War years, but he soon realised that he was confronting the forces of nature. Understanding the Danube with its seasonal floods, predominant currents and winds was part of a long transnational process of knowledge production and the prerequisite for a successful engineering programme. Hydrologic knowledge played a vital part in building jetties at Sulina which 'tamed' the Danube and turned it into a predictable and secure waterway, a veritable 'river of riches'.⁹⁹

Scholars consider rivers to be active agents that have the capacity to influence processes and outcomes as driving forces in history.¹⁰⁰ In recent centuries

97 Tanya Richardson, 'Where the Water Sheds: Disputed Deposits at the Ends of the Danube,' in: Marijeta Bozovic and Matthew Miller (eds.), *Watersheds: The Poetics and Politics of the Danube River* (Boston 2016), 307–336; Andrei Șarfi, *Dunărea, fluviul imperiilor*, Romanian translation by Maria Sîrghe (Iași 2017), 145–146.

98 Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (New York 1985).

99 Peter Coates, *A Story of Six Rivers: History, Culture and Ecology* (London 2013), 10.

100 Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, 'Rivers in History and Historiography: An Introduction,' in: eidem (eds.), *Rivers in History: Perspectives on Waterways in Europe and North America* (Pittsburgh 2008), 7.

rivers have been continuously reshaped through the interplay of artificial and natural forces. As 'organic machines', 'enviro-technical systems' or 'socio-natural sites',¹⁰¹ they are the result of complex, bidirectional human-nature interactions. And they are, in their pristine state, sources of navigational insecurity which engineers have tried to remove, improve and correct. Technology was the solution used to rationalise nature, which was manipulated, controlled and governed for economic benefits. The Maritime Danube was eventually turned into a safe transportation infrastructure, free from natural sources of insecurity.

As for Hartley's professional career, from the 1860s he was involved in fluvial and maritime engineering works around the world: on other rivers (the Dnieper, Don, Hooghly, Mississippi and Scheldt), canals (Suez), and ports (Burgas, Constanța, Durban, Odessa, Trieste and Varna). He had a constant interest in and got involved with some of the most daring nineteenth-century projects of international waterways, such as the construction and development of the Suez and Panama canals. Eventually, after Great Britain took control of the Suez Canal Company, Hartley was appointed as a member of its Technical Committee and used his authority to advise on engineering works on this commercially vital waterway.

Hartley was emotionally attached to the Danube, where he remained in charge of hydraulic works until 1907, half a century after his employment. For Romania's prime minister at the time, Dimitrie A. Sturdza, one of Hartley's admirers and friends, the improvement of navigation in the Maritime Danube represented 'a veritable triumph of peaceful international work, conceived with the support of science and conducted with constancy, assurance and loyalty'.¹⁰² To Sturdza, Hartley and the Commission shared all these qualities, which contributed to the success of the organisation as a whole.

101 Verena Winiwarter, M. Schmid, S. Hohensinner and G. Haidvogel, 'The Environmental History of the Danube River Basin as an Issue of Long-Term Socio-Ecological Research,' in: S.J. Singh, H. Haberrl, M. Chertow, M. Mirtl and M. Schmid (eds.), *Long Term Socio-Ecological Research* (Dordrecht 2013), 103–122.

102 PECD, Protocol 749, 4 May 1908. Sturdza also published a volume on the Commission's works: *Les Travaux de la Commission Européenne des bouches du Danube, 1859 à 1911. Actes et documents* (Vienne 1913).

On Money, Tolls and Standards

I believe that the European commission of the Danube is the first instance on record of a commission composed of delegates from non-riverain powers having executive power, and administering a revenues as well as carrying on extensive works in an European river.

JOHN STOKES, 1866



1 A Tour for Collecting Multilateral Financial Guarantees

On 25 December 1868, Edward James Standen, the private secretary of John Stokes, Britain's delegate in the European Commission of the Danube (Commission), landed in Istanbul after a three-day voyage on board an Austrian steamer plying between the Danube and the Golden Horn. After attending religious and social meetings on Christmas Day, Standen proceeded with his mission – to obtain the signatures of various European statesmen on a contract guaranteeing the loan that the Commission had secured for funding its technical works in the Danube Delta. On Sunday 27 December, he called at the British, French and Italian embassies, and eventually, on 30 December, Safvet Pasha signed and sealed the guarantee on behalf of the Ottoman cabinet.¹

Standen left Istanbul on 2 January and travelled, via Syra, Corfu and Brindisi, to Florence. Official business did not keep him very busy, as the contract was readily signed after an interview with Count Luigi Federico Menabrea, Italy's prime minister and minister for Foreign Affairs. The envoy revelled in some of the city's rich architectural and artistic heritage before setting off for Paris on 14 January with a 'bad cold and fearful headache'. Baron Adolphe d'Avril, France's delegate to the Commission, mediated the signing of the contract at

¹ Edward James Standen, *A Diplomatic Mission, 1868 with Various Diversions to Some Capital Cities of Europe*, an archived version online at <https://web.archive.org/web/20180501034619/http://www.ourfamilymoves.org.uk/individual.php?pid=19&ged=bouck-standen> (visited on 15 December 2018).

the French Foreign Ministry, and on 20 January Standen continued his journey to Berlin. Otto von Bismarck's signature was expected to follow in a couple of days, allowing Standen just enough time for sightseeing and social meetings. One final stop to go – London – in the special envoy's one-month *tour de force* was planned to secure the financial means necessary for completing the hydraulic works that had started at Sulina more than a decade earlier.²

Getting enough funding for these works took about the same amount of time, concluded by several European commissioners in September 1868 with a loan agreement with the London bankers Bischoffheim and Goldschmidt. Given the status of the debtor – an international organisation with a rather unique legal status and serving for a limited term – European delegates agreed amongst themselves to ask for the backing of their governments. It was not only a condition required by most creditors whom they had contacted, but also a great financial advantage for the international agency: it would 'reduce the interest to some 3 or 4 per cent', from 10–12 per cent in the absence of such support, and thus 'make the burden lighter' for repaying the loan.³

By the time the 1868 loan was contracted, the Commission had already become a financially independent institution, able to procure the financial means for its everyday activities, to draw its own annual budget, and to effectively use this financial self-reliance to further prolong its existence at the Maritime Danube. It is the aim of this chapter to detail the experimental financial dimension of the Commission's early history and to explain, along the second analytical layer – that of institutional history – the Commission's quest to become financially independent. Money collected for its security-driven programme contributed not only to completing hydraulic works in the river, but also to securing the IO's survival and its self-branding as a successful transnational organ.

This story also reveals a little-known episode of inter-imperial cooperation in one of Europe's peripheries, which resulted in irreversible steps being taken towards standardisation in global maritime shipping and trade. The Commission's example is relevant to current debates regarding the funding of IOs and their (in)dependence in relation to member states. As few of the world's current IOs are self-funded,⁴ details on the evolution of the Commission will contribute to putting recent discussions of taxing global

² Ibid.

³ John Stokes, *Autobiography* (s.l. s.a.), 93.

⁴ As it is now the case, to a large extent, with the World Intellectual Property Organization and the International Seabed Authority – Thordis Ingadóttir, 'Financing International Institutions,' in: Jan Klabbers and Åsa Wallendahl (eds.), *Research Handbook on the Law of International Organizations* (Cheltenham 2011), 121–122.

commons for increasing international cooperation into historical context.⁵ Not least of all, money itself has, as Madeleine Herren put it, a ‘border crossing and networking function’,⁶ placing the Commission’s financial transactions into the realm of transnational history.

2 The Sublime Porte’s Financial Advances

The 1856 Paris Treaty established Ottoman sovereignty in the Danube Delta, and during a meeting of European plenipotentiaries (27 March 1856) the Porte’s delegates, Aali Pasha and Mehmed Djemil, pledged that the imperial government would gladly provide the financial advances needed to cover the Commission’s technical works.⁷ When the seven commissioners convened at Galați in November 1856, the Ottoman delegate Ömer Fevzi Pasha made a similar pledge. There was no need to look for money elsewhere, as suggested by the Austrian agent, Franz Karl von Becke, who had proposed sharing the costs between the seven Great Powers.⁸

Ömer Pasha reserved for his government the right to pay for the hydraulic works completed on Ottoman territory, but his colleagues insisted that the Commission maintained its full autonomy in asking for whatever amount of money was needed to complete its task and in directing its spending. After a quick estimate, a committee of the British, Russian and Sardinian delegates requested from the Porte an advance of 100,000 ducats (about 1,200,000 francs), half for immediate expenses and half for the works that were to start in early 1857. The first allowance served to organise the institution’s Secretariat and Technical Department and to purchase equipment and materials, such as dredging machines, steam tugs, hydraulic instruments and coal.⁹ Karl Hermann Bitter, the Prussian delegate, was elected to serve as the Commission’s treasurer,

5 See for example Richard Bird, *Global Taxes and International Taxation: Mirage and Reality*, ICTD Working Paper 28 (Brighton 2015).

6 Madeleine Herren, ‘“They Already Exist”: Don’t They? Conjuring Global Networks Along the Flow of Money,’ in: Isabella Löhr and Roland Wenzlhuemer (eds.), *The Nation State and Beyond: Governing Globalization Processes in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Dordrecht 2012), 43–62.

7 *Congrès de Paris 1856* (Paris 1856), 9–10.

8 The National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocol 2 (and appendix), 5 November 1856.

9 *Ibid.*, Protocol 3 (and appendix), 7 November 1856.

and his colleagues acted as auditors until qualified bureaucrats could take over such financial duties.

To secure the institution's much needed cash-flow and to run current financial operations, Bitter mediated an agreement with Joseph Hamperk, a Danish subject and the manager of a bank in Moldavia. Hamperk agreed to lend small amounts of money to the Commission (at 5 per cent interest and ½ per cent commission) and to deposit its cash (at 4 per cent interest).¹⁰ However, the Ottoman Treasury sent its first advances in 1857 through a rival Moldavian entrepreneur, who was also available to act as the organisation's 'official' banker.¹¹

Despite the commissioners' repeated protests, by June 1857 the Porte had only advanced about 20,000 ducats (240,000 francs),¹² while the Commission made orders and paid for state-of-the-art hydraulic equipment in London, Vienna and Budapest, relying on borrowed funds that amounted to 20,775 ducats (ca. 250,000 francs). Including salaries already paid, the Commission was in default. Hamperk eventually denounced the preliminary agreement, the Commission sent an official letter of protest to the Porte, and Britain's commissioner Stokes left to seek ambassadorial support in Istanbul.¹³

The commissioners needed more than the Ottomans' verbal benevolence to keep the institution running. Its administrative bureau already numbered sixteen employees (secretaries, archivists, clerks), and as many again were working in the Technical Department. Their salaries plus the material costs of offices, supplies, correspondence and travel etc. were estimated at 34,000 ducats (408,000 francs) a year,¹⁴ a total that did not include the Commission's main operational task: to install hydraulic works in the Maritime Danube.

Financial relations with the Ottoman government continued along similar lines until 1860. The Commission submitted regular payment requests, which the Porte covered with great tardiness, usually after the intervention of European ambassadors to Istanbul. Trying to limit the financial burden on the imperial Treasury, the Ottoman authorities started to account for all supplies (coal and timber) provided in kind, and even to take over the acquisition (at lower prices, it was hoped) of the equipment ordered by the Commission.

10 Ibid., Protocols 7 and 16, 17 December 1856 and 26 February 1857.

11 Ibid., Protocols 10 and 11, 12 January and 3 February 1857.

12 Ibid., Protocols 18, 26, 27 and 35, 7 March, 16 April, 27 April and 16 June 1857.

13 Ibid., Protocol 41, 29 June 1857.

14 Ibid., Protocol 43 (and appendix), 11 July 1857.

3 Perspectives on Financial (In)Security

In reply to the continuous pleas for stability and predictability in the organisation's budget, the tribute that the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia owed to their suzerain power, the Ottoman Empire, was assigned for the Commission's expenses. Nevertheless, there were no clear procedures regarding its payment, and things barely improved, as the two vassal governments insisted that they had already paid to the Porte more than the value of their due obligations. The Commission secured its cash-flow with money borrowed from local bankers, more often than not on onerous terms. In September 1859, the commissioners discussed the financial issue once more, and pleaded, yet again, for regular funding. The Commission's current shortage was 'a serious obstacle which could compromise the institution's [provisional] works', then underway at Sulina.¹⁵

Several solutions were taken into consideration: Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt, the French delegate, proposed inducing the Ottoman government to take a special loan for the exclusive use of the Commission; Britain's Stokes advised contracting a loan collectively guaranteed by the seven powers; Russia's Henrik d'Offenberg believed that all financial requests had to be directed to the Ottoman Treasury, which was bound to pay its dues.¹⁶ Preference was given to the British commissioner's proposal, as it was vital to have the money run by 'European' agents, and not rely on sluggish and unreliable Ottoman methods. If that solution was unsuccessful, the others were to be tried.

Faced with permanent financial insecurity, the Commission managed to carry out its technical programme through the commissioners' ability to borrow private money, and by pressing the Porte to pay the bills of change already issued for the technical equipment purchased or for the works completed at Sulina. All in all, between November 1856 and June 1860 the Ottoman Treasury spent on the Commission's account a total of about 317,000 ducats (3,740,000 francs), money that covered the IO's administrative costs, its preliminary technical studies, and the provisional works underway at Sulina.¹⁷

The Porte had good reason to retard and even question paying for all these costs. When in 1856, in good faith, its diplomats pledged to advance funds for the Commission's expenses, the general belief was that the hydraulic works to be done in the Danube Delta were simple and inexpensive, and that the

¹⁵ Ibid., Protocol 108, 7 November 1859.

¹⁶ Ibid., Protocols 100 and 103, 29 July and 2 September 1859.

¹⁷ *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 121–122.

Commission would terminate them in two years. In fact, the Ottoman Treasury came to pay for an increasingly robust and bureaucratic organisation, with several dozen well-paid European employees, who all had reason to state that their agenda was more complicated than anticipated and to claim that they needed more time (and money) to complete their tasks. It pretty much looked like ‘extorting’ imperial money for well-paid bureaucrats and experts working in a borderland where foreign interests greatly exceeded Ottoman ones.

The Ottoman compliance with these financial requests is even more remarkable given the great problems that the imperial budget had at the time. It was an early phase of the first external borrowing period (1854–1876),¹⁸ and the Porte was faced with large deficits. To advance the Commission’s agenda, which was a collective venture of Europe’s Concert of Powers, European ambassadors to Istanbul acted as an Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA) *avant la lettre*.¹⁹ Their constant pressure in this informally institutionalised environment was fuelled by the dispatches regularly received from Galați. Ambassadors did make the Porte pay the external debt that it owed for removing navigational insecurity from the Lower Danube, but at the price of weakening the Ottoman state even more.

4 The Making of the Navigation Tariff

The 1856 Paris Treaty stipulated that the Commission was to determine fixed duties to be levied for covering the costs of works and establishments needed ‘for the facility and security of navigation’. The commissioners discussed the question several times but decided to postpone the introduction of a tax until the organisation could improve the state of the Sulina channel, and thus make shipmasters pay for services and benefits they would actually get. The debates had some moral overtones, but there was solid economic reasoning in trying to keep the Maritime Danube as a low-priced alternative for the export of grain at a time when the construction of a railway between the Danube and the Black Sea seemed to deprive the river of its most lucrative business (see Chapter 6).²⁰

18 Sevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913: Trade, Investment and Production* (Cambridge 1987), 59–60.

19 For the OPDA, see Murat Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London and New York 2010) and Giampaolo Conte and Gaetano Sabatini, ‘The Ottoman External Debt and Its Features under European Financial Control (1881–1914),’ *Journal of European Economic History* 43.3 (2014): 69–96.

20 John H. Jensen and Gerhard Rosegger, ‘British Railway Builders along the Lower Danube, 1856–1869,’ *Slavonic and East European Review* 44.106 (1968): 105–128.

A provisional tariff was drafted in 1858, but it was only in 1860 that the effects of the engineer-in-chief's works resulted in a visible increase of the navigable depth over the Sulina bar. It was a difficult period for the Commission's treasury, and the commissioners decided to introduce a tax that would provide the institution with a small, but regular income. This revenue could serve as a guarantee for a larger loan, which the local branch of a British bank seemed willing to give.

The tariff was designed following constructive discussions between the seven commissioners and, in the end, it was a simple and just system for international shipping.²¹ It was based on a double sliding scale, 'varying according to the size of the vessels and the depth of the entrance'. Commercial ships were classified depending 'on their draught of water as represented by their tonnage', and classes of ships were taxed in relation to the depth of water over the Sulina bar.²² The dues varied between 0.75 and 3.25 francs per ton, depending on the size of the vessel, and the commissioners stuck to the equally moral and economic principle that vessels had to pay 'according to the extent to which they are benefited by the works'.²³ The shipping tariff was to include the other dues paid at Sulina (compulsory pilotage and the lighthouse service), and it was to be applied from September 1860 onwards.²⁴

The IO's real success was being able to collect the taxes on its own account. The Navigation Cash Office in Sulina had to be administered by an agent appointed by the Commission, and its accounts were audited by the Ottoman government.²⁵ 'European administration' was one of the conditions imposed by the British bank with which the Commission negotiated a loan, which stemmed from the commissioners' total mistrust in the integrity and professionalism of Ottoman employees. Ömer Pasha and the Porte accepted the arrangement on a provisional basis, to avoid new accusations that they were hindering the completion of the Commission's technical programme²⁶ and to save the already overburdened Ottoman budget.

Financial autonomy, provisional as it was, changed the way the Commission acted in relation to its overall institutional identity. Not only had it to be more active in disseminating information on its activity, regulations and tariffs to

21 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Foreign Office, FO 78/3216, unnumbered (hereafter unn.) (John Stokes to Earl Russell, Galați, 11 July 1860).

22 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 79.

23 Stokes, 'The Danube and Its Trade,' *Journal of the Society of Arts* 38.1954 (2 May 1890): 575.

24 PECD, Protocols 114 and 116 (and appendix), 15 June and 5 July 1860.

25 TNA, FO 78/3216, unn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 11 July 1860); *La Commission*, 89.

26 PECD, Protocol 116, 25 July 1860.

the entrepreneurial community trading in the Black Sea basin, but it also had to carefully consider its sources of income and make cost-effective choices in its expenses. With the creation (1861) of the Inspectorate of Navigation (a department that supervised shipping on the section under the Commission's jurisdiction – see Chapter 7), a new, though much smaller source of income was represented by the fines paid by the shipmasters that violated the IO's regulations.

Since 1861, the Commission operated based on an annual budget of revenues and expenses. Income varied considerably. In the 1860s, for example, natural factors, such as bad crops due to floods or droughts, were doubled by the instability in the United Principalities (Romania), during a period of agrarian reforms and political unrest, and on the world grain market.²⁷ This tied the organisation to the political and economic stability of territories in the Danubian basin, and especially to the young nation-states along the Lower Danube. Commissioners had such large geopolitical considerations in mind, but they also looked for further standardisation in how the organisation collected its taxes.

5 Standardising the European Tonnage Measurement

Imposing the tariff and making shipmasters pay was one of the Commission's most difficult tasks, and it took a while to create proper international legislation, accepted by all powers interested in Danubian navigation. Another issue stemmed from the need to have a fair and proportionate taxation for all flags, as stipulated by the 1856 Paris Treaty. In the 1860 tariff, tolls were based on the ships' size, and several categories of tonnage were introduced. However, as there were no uniform standards for measuring a ship's tonnage in Europe and vessels arriving in Sulina presented papers issued by various national maritime authorities, it became vital to agree on a clear methodology for tonnage measurement.

In fact, deciding on a proper measurement of commercial ships was a thorny issue for all maritime nations. A British governmental commission led by George Moorsom was appointed in 1849 to establish rules for securing greater uniformity in the measurement and registration of vessels, at a time when the steamship industry was booming, and differences between sailing ships and steamers created problems for all port authorities. The Commission's recommendations (the so-called 'Moorsom system') were legalised in Great Britain in

²⁷ See *infra*.

1854. The basic principle was to have ships taxed according to their tonnage or cargo capacity. As an average English ton of cargo (1,015 kg) occupied a volume of about 100 cubic feet (2.8 m³), a ship's gross register tonnage was represented by its total internal volume (in cubic feet) divided by 100. The net register tonnage was the commercially productive part of a ship after deducting from the gross register tonnage the volume of the space used for the vessel's machinery and boiler spaces.²⁸

In 1860 the Commission introduced this system, based on the information provided in the ships' papers. In the absence of proper documents, estimates were made by the Sulina Harbour Master, with the concurrence of local consular authorities and support of two other shipmasters (one preferably of the same nationality as the measured ship's master). A conversion table between different European units of measurement was also provided.²⁹

However, skippers complained of inequities resulting from this system of calculation, and European commissioners asked for the support of their governments in solving the disparity. Stokes, for example, persuaded the British Board of Trade 'to take measurements according to English rules, of the vessels of foreign nations, so as to establish a comparison between the English tonnage and that of other nations'. He further worked to compile a conversion table, which allowed for a comparative view on ships' sizes.³⁰

The conversion table was revised in May 1862 according to the measurements done in British ports to determine the proportion between the English register tonnage and that adopted in other countries. A total of 1,757 vessels of eighteen different flags were measured according to the two methods used in Great Britain: rule I applied for empty ships (for 442 vessels) and rule II for laden ships (for 1,315 vessels). The new table showed the average of the calculations between the tonnage indicated in their national certificate and the one issued in Britain.³¹ The table was periodically revised by the Navigation Chest at Sulina, as the correction coefficients became more accurate due to the increased number of vessels measured. This, however, did not change the need for further international standardisation, as

28 Aji Vasudevan, *Tonnage Measurement of Ships: Historical Evolution, Current Issues and Proposals for the Way Forward*, MA dissertation, World Maritime University (Malmö 2010), 18–19 (online at http://commons.wmu.se/all_dissertations/214, visited on 15 September 2018).

29 PECD, Protocol 116 (appendix), 5 July 1860.

30 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 79–81.

31 PECD, Protocol 143, 8 May 1862.

the real remedy for these inequalities will be found in the adoption by all nations of one system of measurement so that the register ton will have but one meaning. A mixed scientific commission might be ordered to examine the different system, and having reported upon the best, a common understating might be come to, and a date fixed after which shipowners should be bound to have all their vessels remeasured.³²

When the Greek authorities introduced the Moorsom system, and the Italians chose the French one, the Commission analysed the desirability 'of an official communication being made to it of any change in the system of measuring vessels which may hereafter be adopted by any country'.³³ Such a meeting did take place when, in 1873, an International Tonnage Commission assembled in Istanbul to settle uniform measurement rules for the tonnage of ships passing through the Suez Canal. Stokes was one of the British delegates, as it 'had always been a work that interested me very much'. His experience in running IOs proved helpful, and together with Baron d'Avril, the French delegate in both the Commission and the Istanbul Tonnage Commission, Stokes imposed the Danube Commission's procedures for 'the guidance of our discussions in this big Commission', which numbered twenty-four delegates from the world's leading twelve maritime nations. After lengthy discussions, most of the delegates voted for applying to the Suez a version of the so-called 'Danube Rule', and Stokes bargained for a compromise acceptable to the Suez Canal Company's management, its shareholders and the community of international ship-owners.³⁴

It took a long time to achieve global standardisation in tonnage measurement, but it is worth mentioning that the Commission pushed in the direction of a voluntary consensus.³⁵ At a time when governments, companies and private individuals required, for different reasons, more uniformity in how the

32 TNA, FO 78/3218, unnn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 25 March 1862); Stokes, *Autobiography*, 79–81.

33 TNA, FO 78/3223, unnn. (Stokes to Lord Stanley, Galați, 30 December 1867).

34 Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, *The Great Canal at Suez. Its Political, Engineering, and Financial History*, vol. II (London 1876), 131–243 (Chapter xvii, *The Tonnage Question*); Stokes, *Autobiography*, 110–112; Joseph A. Obieta, *The International Status of the Suez Canal* (The Hague 1970), 56.

35 On consensus, see Craig N. Murphy and JoAnne Yates, *The International Organization for Standardization (ISO): Global Governance through Voluntary Consensus* (London and New York 2009); for the introduction of the Moorsom system in the Ottoman Empire and the role of the 1873 Istanbul conference, see İlhan Ekinç, 'Osmanlı deniz ticaretinde ölçü birimlerinin batılılaşmasına bir örnek: kile'den tonilatoya, Moorsom usulü'nün uygulanması,' *Journal of International Social Research* 4.17 (2011): 311–324.

world was to be imagined and measured,³⁶ one of the earliest IOs was doing the same. The drive came from economic rationality³⁷ and the commissioners' interest in consolidating the finances of the organisation.

With unpredictable sources of income in its early history and faced with many uncertainties regarding its future, the Commission's bureaucrats started to collect statistics as a way of proving the efficiency of the institution's technical and normative works. Organising the thousands of ships that called at Sulina each year into meaningful categories proved extremely difficult. When the tariff was introduced in 1860, it needed to be based on an accepted standard. The natural choice was the British norm, that of the largest maritime power of the time. With this translated into costs, the commissioners felt it was their duty to invite governments to cooperate, both for the benefit of their own merchants and ship-owners, and for that of the Commission itself.

Reliable statistics, in which not only the number, but also the tonnage of ships was recorded, were vital in pro-active institutional thinking. They started to play an important role in shaping the budget of the organisation and its policies. As Stokes put it in his memoirs, his detailed statistical reports 'very much influenced the decisions of my colleagues'.³⁸ The Commission collected relevant data from all over Europe and designed conversion tables that encouraged further research from interested private and governmental parties. By employing its own surveyors to gauge ships, the organisation underlined its objective to fairly tax all its clients and contribute to having more uniformity in tonnage measurement.

As 'standards' are considered 'central mechanisms of international governance',³⁹ this example proves how institutionalising tonnage measurement⁴⁰ set an example, soon adopted by larger international maritime ventures, such as the Suez and Panama Canal companies.

36 See for example Martin H. Geyer, 'One Language for the World. The Metric System, International Coinage and the Rise of Internationalism, 1850–1900,' in: Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism in the Nineteenth Century. Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford 2001), 55–92 and Bob Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (Abingdon and New York 2009), 96–106.

37 Sidney Pollard, 'Capitalism and Rationality: A Study of Measurements in British Coal Mining, ca. 1750–1850,' *Explorations in Economic History* 20.1 (1983): 110–129.

38 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 100.

39 Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, 'International "Standards" and International Governance,' *Journal of European Public Policy* 8.3 (2001): 345–370.

40 Stefan Timmermans and Steven Epstein, 'A World of Standards but Not a Standard World: Toward a Sociology of Standards and Standardization,' *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 69–89.

6 An International Organisation on the Capital Market

During the period 1856–1860, the Commission managed to secure its cash-flow thanks to small loans from private banks in Galați. This system was nevertheless inappropriate for getting a bigger loan that would allow the engineer-in-chief to complete the provisional works he had started at Sulina. The seasonality of the Danubian grain trade, with increased shipping (and consequently more revenues) in the summer and autumn months, added further financial pressure, as the hydraulic works had to be started in spring, when the Commission's treasury was usually empty.

The commissioners had discussed the possibility of contracting a bigger loan, but the organisation lacked the material securities requested by capitalists. In July 1860, when the Commission voted to impose the tariff and use this steady income as a guarantee for a loan, preliminary arrangements had been made with two British entrepreneurs based in Galați, A.L. Powell and H.A. Jackson, the local director and manager respectively of the Ottoman Bank, the largest financial house active in the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ It is possible that personal relations between the two capitalists and some of the commissioners assisted in concluding the agreement, as Jackson was later to serve as director of the Commission's Navigation Chest for fifteen years (1874–1889). The bank agreed to lend to the Commission a sum of 60,000 ducats (about 711,000 francs), at an interest rate of 12 per cent per annum, and 1 per cent commission. The Commission pledged to introduce the navigation tariff and to collect shipping dues on its own account. All available resources, after saving the sums for institutional costs, were used to repay the loan. If the revenues were not sufficient, the Sublime Porte had to cover the difference, until the Ottoman Bank was fully reimbursed of both the capital and interest.⁴² The conditions were onerous, but the loan secured the lead engineer with the funds needed for completing the provisional dykes at Sulina. Two additional contracts led to the bank supplementing the original amount, reaching a total of about 1,370,000 francs lent to the Commission in 1860 and 1861.⁴³

The technical works were opened during a ceremony in September 1861 (Chapter 4), but they were far from being completed. This was not only due to their provisional nature, but also the need to secure a deeper passage for the

41 For the Ottoman Bank and the state debt, see Edhem Eldem, 'Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe: Foreign Loans, the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman Public Debt,' *European Review* 13.3 (2005): 431–445.

42 PECD, Protocol 116 (appendix 3), 25 July 1860.

43 *La Commission*, 165–166.

increasing size of commercial ships with the transition of the global fleet from sail to steam. It was a period of great uncertainty regarding the Commission's future, and more money was needed for its ongoing expenses. As the Ottoman Bank was unwilling to increase its stipends, the commissioners looked unsuccessfully for funds on the capital markets of Vienna, Paris and London. An offer came from the Nord Deutsche Bank of Hamburg, willing to lend the amount of 800,000 mark banco (about 1,500,000 francs). A confidential agent of the bank, a juridical expert called Octavio Schröder, took part in one of the Commission's meetings, but he objected to the commissioners' lack of clear authority from their governments to raise loans. His request was that they obtain their cabinets' approval of the protocol to which the loan contract was annexed. As Stokes wrote to the British Foreign Office, 'it was distinctly understood that such approval should not imply a guarantee of the loan, but simply a formal recognition of the power of the commission to contract loans, and to engage the produce of the Sulina tariff to their repayment'.⁴⁴ The financial conditions were more convenient than for the previous loan (an interest rate of 6 per cent per annum and 5 per cent commission), and the Commission granted the bank a pre-emption right on the taxes collected at Sulina, and mortgaged its movable and immovable properties to guarantee the loan.⁴⁵

In November 1865, a Public Act was finally accepted by all seven commissioners, after four years of bargaining with the Ottoman delegate. It was a veritable 'Constitution' (Chapter 3), endowing the Commission with supranational attributions that were in clear violation of the Porte's sovereignty. It also referred to the proceeds of the Sulina tariff, which were to be used: a) by priority and preference for the repayment of the loans contracted by the Commission for its works; b) to cover the expenses of the Commission's administration and maintenance of the works and establishments; and c) 'to the liquidation of the advances made to the Commission by the Sublime Porte'. Any surplus was to be held in reserve for future expenses with the prolongation of the Sulina piers or by the carrying out of other works decided by the Commission or the authority that was to succeed it.⁴⁶ This statement of the organisation's financial priority was meant to support its further access to the capital market, by officialising the use of the Sulina revenues as collateral for its loans.

44 TNA, FO 78/3218, unnn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 6 June 1862).

45 PECD, Protocol 144 (and the appendix), 20 May 1862.

46 *Hertslet's Commercial Treaties: A Complete Collection of the Treaties and Conventions, and Reciprocal Regulations, at Present Subsisting Between Great Britain and Foreign Powers*, vol. 12 (London 1871), 889.

Faced with a shortage of revenues in 1865, the Commission contracted a small loan in December 1865, when Henry Maynard of London, a relative of Stokes, agreed to advance to the Commission about 250,000 francs. The interest rate was 8 per cent per annum, and the loan was guaranteed with the proceeds of the Sulina tariff.⁴⁷ This secured the Commission its short-term cash-flow, but it needed to get a larger loan of about 3,000,000 francs to fund the completion of the Sulina works.

7 Political Turmoil and a Test on the International Bond Market

Things seemed to progress favourably, and the Commission was close to getting an advantageous loan in Germany, when the ousting of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the political unrest that ensued in Romania in February 1866 'brought matters to a stand-still, as capitalists are unwilling to send their capital into an unsettled country'. Although the Commission had no direct connection with the Romanian state, its financial resources depended 'intimately and directly on the welfare and prosperity' of that country.⁴⁸ In March 1866 things did not look very promising for the Commission, which desperately needed cash to fund the works scheduled for the spring season.

Optimism returned in April, when the Nord Deutsche Bank of Hamburg offered a loan of 60,000 ducats, with an interest rate of 6 per cent, to be repaid in five years starting on 1 January 1867. However, in a complicated international context, the loan depended on the preservation of peace on the continent.⁴⁹ Eventually, with the start of the Prussian-Austrian war, the contract was broken off, and the commissioners had to find another source of funding.

The solution was to raise the needed cash by issuing bonds with an interest rate of 10 per cent per annum, redeemable in two years and bearing interest every six months. They were announced on 30 May 1866 but met with little response from the public. Bonds to the amount of 15,000 ducats were purchased in the following couple of months, mostly by employees of the Commission or their relatives, friends and acquaintances across Europe. A local banker, Abramovitz, offered to take bonds to the amount of 20,000 ducats, on condition that 12,000 ducats were paid in Romanian Treasury bonds issued in 1864 and 1865 and redeemable in the next year. Although this alternative was extremely

47 TNA, FO 78/3222, unn. (Stokes to the Earl of Clarendon, Galați, 1 February 1866).

48 *Ibid.*, unn. (the same, 29 March 1866).

49 *Ibid.*, unn. (the same, 7 April 1866).

distasteful to the commissioners, the offer was accepted.⁵⁰ This system of raising capital continued during the next year, so all in all the Commission got a total of about 1,558,800 francs by issuing bonds.⁵¹

Recent studies on the beginnings and emergence of the international bond market in the nineteenth century focus on governmental bonds and the security clauses associated with state guaranteed loans, such as the Greek loans of 1833 and 1898, the Ottoman loan of 1855, the Egyptian loan of 1885, and the Chinese loan of 1895.⁵² No reference, however, is made to the case of the Commission, which, from the early 1860s onwards, enjoyed a large degree of financial autonomy and state-like behaviour in its liquid jurisdiction.

8 Towards Collective Financial Security

Negotiations for the loan continued, but they proceeded with difficulty as bankers were interested in the hard assets that the Commission could use as guarantees. In the autumn of 1866, the commissioners decided to ask for the support of their governments, faced with the futility 'of again attempting negotiations for a loan without the aid of the governments':

We are well aware that up to the present time each government has distinctly disclaimed any pecuniary responsibility in the loans effected by the Commission and that the great part of the Powers have refused to become guarantors for a loan for the Danube Works. On the other hand, the Governments have decided, in approval of the recommendation of the Conference of their Ambassadors at Paris on the 28th of March of this year, that the permanent works for ensuring and extending the improvements already effected in the Sulina mouth and channel, are to be terminated and the European commission dissolved, in five years from the spring of 1866. To give effect to this double decision, the Commission must have money.⁵³

50 Ibid., unnn. (the same, 20 June 1866).

51 *La Commission*, 167.

52 See for example Rui Pedro Esteves and Ali Coşkun Tunçer, 'Eurobonds Past and Present: A Comparative Review on Debt Mutualization in Europe,' *Review of Law & Economics* 12.3 (2016): 659–688.

53 PECD, Protocol 189 (and the appendix), 15 October 1866; see also the report of Engelhardt to the French Foreign Office, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes, Représentant de la France auprès de la Commission Européenne du Danube, Série B, file 10, f. 453–454 (29 October 1866).

Instructed not to engage their governments' pecuniary responsibilities, the commissioners felt obliged to submit a joint memorandum to their superiors, with a view to obtaining a collective guarantee for the required loan. In his report to London, Stokes referred to the very small amount of liability that such a guarantee would require, if ever needed, as well as to the uniqueness of the creditor (see motto above), which eliminated the risks of similar requests being made.⁵⁴

The memorandum was not favourably received by European cabinets, and all attempts to get an unguaranteed loan failed. Stokes visited London in May 1867 and discussed at the Foreign Office and Board of Trade the possibility of convincing interested governments to pay themselves for the works in exchange for the reduction of Danubian tolls, as they had done for the redemption of the Stade dues in 1861 and the Scheldt toll in 1863. His proposal to have a contribution regulated in accordance with British interests in the Danube's navigation was, however, a complicated solution, although the Board of Trade seemed interested in the offer.⁵⁵

Stokes discussed this proposal in Paris and Vienna, but he was not very encouraged by the response. Becke, Austria's Finance Minister and former Danube commissioner, considered the solution reasonable, but given his country's difficult financial situation, found it hard to obtain 'the consent of the Austrian and Hungarian chambers' for it.⁵⁶ A common action for getting a collective guarantee by the three powers seemed more appropriate.

Negotiations continued throughout 1867 but offers were far from satisfactory. It was clear that governmental support would reduce the interest rate and the term of repayment from about twenty to twelve years.⁵⁷ By January 1868, with the involvement of its new commissioner, Baron d'Avril, France supported the idea of a collective guarantee, and d'Avril discussed it in Vienna with Becke, who also agreed to it, even if it would only be supported by Britain, France and Austria-Hungary.⁵⁸

54 TNA, FO 78/3222, unnn. (Stokes to Stanley, Galați, 2 November 1866).

55 Ibid., FO 78/3223, unnn. (the same, 17 May 1867).

56 Ibid., unnn. (the same, Vienna, 29 September 1867).

57 Ibid., FO 78/3224, unnn. (the same, 14 January 1868).

58 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve (CADC), *Commission Européenne de Danube* (CED), File 9, f. 26–27 (Vienna, 26 January 1868).

D'Avril proceeded to Galați, while his government continued to work towards securing larger diplomatic support for a collective guarantee. The response from Berlin was encouraging: although Prussia was not so directly interested in Danube navigation, its government would support the Commission to complete the task established by common consent in 1856. Similar pledges came from Florence and Istanbul, while Russia withheld from any action, though it did not intend to hinder a European agreement to this end.⁵⁹

In February 1868 the commissioners of Austria-Hungary, France and Great Britain convened to conclude a convention defining and recording the extent of the obligations to be incurred by the supporting powers. This was an instrument to be 'submitted to the parliaments or chambers of the countries undertaking the guarantee for their assent, and eventually will form the basis of the conditions under which the loan will be raised'.⁶⁰ The negotiators were endowed with full powers from their governments, and also looked at the example of the common statement between the British and French governments relative to the 1855 Ottoman loan. The preliminary agreement was concluded in March 1868, which specified the financial details of the loan, the term for which the guarantee would hold good, and the annuity for which the governments would be responsible. The document was signed on 30 April 1868 by six commissioners (bar the Russian one), and on 2 May 1868 the Commission analysed the bank's offer which its agent, Henry Maynard, had been negotiating. The loan was granted by the London bank of Bischoffheim and Goldschmidt, who agreed to lend a total of 3,375,800 francs for the completion of the Sulina works. The money was to be paid in six instalments and carried an interest rate of 4 per cent per annum, plus a commission of 1 per cent for the middleman.⁶¹

The loan agreement was voted for in the national parliaments of the signatory powers, a decision which further contributed to spreading the word about the organisation's accomplishments. In the French Parliament, the rapporteur of the commission that analysed the government's proposal, Pierre Albert de Dalmas, considered that France could not stay away from such an 'important and civilising work', and insisted on the need for further international cooperation on monetary policies.⁶² His interest came, most probably, from another

59 Ibid., f. 52–61.

60 TNA, FO 78/3224, unnn. (Stokes to Stanley, Galați, 15 February 1868).

61 PECD, Protocol 214 (and the appendix), 3 August 1868; *La Commission*, 167–168. The full text in *Convention for the Guarantee of a Loan to Complete the Works at the Sulina Mouth and Branches of the Danube* (London 1868).

62 CADC, CED, File 9, f. 174–179 ('Rapport fait au nom de la Commission chargée d'examiner le projet de loi relatif à la garantie de l'emprunt à contracter par la Commission européenne du Danube').

important initiative concerning the establishment of international standards, the creation of the Latin Monetary Union in 1865 and the need for further economic integration.⁶³

The convention was ratified in the following months, but by the autumn of 1868 the bankers insisted on having the act of guarantee signed by a member of each government, not only by their Danube commissioners.⁶⁴ By November, the details of Standen's tour around Europe were set, as presented in the introduction to this chapter.

This story is relevant for the effects of formal governmental guarantees on the so-called 'empire effect'. According to some economic historians, British colonies could access the capital market in London more easily and borrow at lower interest rates as compared with other independent countries.⁶⁵ Other scholars look for the 'guarantee effect', the interest rate advantage that independent (non-colony) countries had if the British government provided guarantees for their bonds.⁶⁶ In the case of the Commission, as this narrative shows, such an effect clearly existed. In their efforts to secure sufficient resources for the completion of the hydraulic works completed at Sulina, European commissioners managed to mobilise both state support and private money for a transnational hydraulic accomplishment that represented a further guarantee for the IO's survival.

9 Complete Financial Independence

The Commission funded its hydraulic works with money taken from the loans mentioned above, and by the early 1870s, at the completion of its first technical programme, its budget was in constant surplus (Table 3). The 1868 loan, not due to be returned until 1883, was one of the main reasons for the prolongation of the Commission when its previous term expired in 1871.

63 Marc Flandreau, 'The Economics and Politics of Monetary Unions: A Reassessment of the Latin Monetary Union, 1865–71,' *Financial History Review* 7.1 (2000): 25–44.

64 TNA, FO 78/3224, unnn. (Stokes to Stanley, Galați, 12 October 1868).

65 Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick, 'The Empire Effect: The Determinants of Country Risk in the First Age of Globalization, 1880–1913,' *Journal of Economic History* 66 (2006): 283–312.

66 Huseyin Al, 'Was There a Guarantee Effect for the Ottoman Loans in the Nineteenth Century?,' *Australian Economic History Review* 52.2 (2012): 191–208.

In 1878, the Berlin Treaty transferred the Danube Delta from the Ottoman Empire to newly independent Romania, which was also accepted as a member state in the Commission. The organisation preserved its former rights, prerogatives and obligations 'in complete independence of the territorial authority'.⁶⁷ Its large financial autonomy turned into fully-fledged independence, as the Ottoman auditors were replaced with those of the Commission itself. An international conference hosted in London in 1883 further prolonged the Commission, which became a *de facto* permanent IO (Chapter 8).⁶⁸ The repayment of the 1868 loan was terminated in December 1882, whereas the Ottoman advances were fully repaid by 1887. With a large annual financial surplus, the organisation started a second hydraulic programme in the 1880s, designed to deepen the navigable channel along the entire Maritime Danube (Chapter 4).

European commissioners used the tariff to balance the Commission's budget and changes in taxation were introduced in 1863, 1865, 1867, 1870, 1880, 1882, 1884, 1887, 1889, 1902 and 1908. Regularly updating the tariff was a complex process, which had to consider several economic and political factors, such as the transition from sail to steam, the larger tonnage of commercial steamers, the competition of railways and the economic policies of local states.⁶⁹

Most of the Commission's revenues (about 96 per cent) came from the navigation tariff, and the rest from fines and interest on the organisation's reserves. As for its expenses, a large share of the money went for operational costs (Table 3): about 55 per cent for the hydrotechnical works at Sulina and along the river, and 25 per cent for the services responsible for shipping safety along the Maritime Danube. This explains to a large extent why the Commission was regarded as a successful international organ that managed to collect and spend financial resources efficiently.⁷⁰

67 The text of the Berlin Treaty in *Documents Diplomatiques. Affaires d'Orient. Congrès de Berlin 1878* (Paris 1878), 291–293; Dimitrie A. Sturdza, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de navigation du Danube* (Berlin 1904), 123–124.

68 *Navigaton du Danube. Conférence et Traité de Londres. Février-Mars 1883* (Paris 1883), 65–68; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 472–474.

69 *La Commission*, 138–151.

70 Soviet historiography had a rather different reading of the Commission's financial efficiency – M.V. Pochkaeva, *Mezhdunarodno-pravovoi rezhim sudokhodstva na Dunae* (Moscow 1951), 24.

TABLE 3 Financial situation of the Commission, 1861–1914 (annual average, francs)

Period	Revenues	Expenses	Balance
1861–1865	1,082,603	1,894,950	-812,347
1866–1870	1,358,264	1,805,604	-447,340
1871–1875	1,386,746	1,131,077	255,670
1876–1880	1,777,989	1,074,717	703,272
1881–1885	1,966,559	1,470,807	495,752
1886–1890	1,916,301	1,718,327	197,974
1891–1895	2,467,679	2,537,807	-70,128
1896–1900	1,983,268	2,073,073	-89,805
1901–1905	2,439,263	2,291,889	147,374
1906–1910	2,527,111	2,576,962	-49,851
1911–1914	2,662,529	2,768,859	-106,329

SOURCE: *LA COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE DU DANUBE ET SON ŒUVRE DE 1856 À 1931* (PARIS 1931), 498–499 (ANNEXE III)

TABLE 4 Expenses of the Commission, 1861–1914 (francs)

Expenses	Amount	Per cent
Internal administration	7,210,574	6.94
Navigation establishments ^a	26,033,721	25.04
Hospital	2,776,767	2.67
Technical services ^b	41,660,107	40.08
Definitive works voted in 1865	3,375,000	3.25
Cuttings (second hydraulic programme)	11,820,376	11.37
Other expenses	5,518,028	5.31
Interest and costs for loans	4,234,671	4.07
Telegraph line built in 1857	88,870	0.09
Subventions for the employees' pensions fund	1,233,382	1.19
Total	103,951,496	100

a It includes the internal services of the Commission, such as the Navigation Inspection, Harbour Master Office, Navigation Chest, pilotage and lighthouses.

b Regular works at Sulina and the maintenance of river navigability along the Sulina branch.

SOURCE: *LA COMMISSION*, 494–497 (ANNEXE II)

10 Conclusions

The case study presented in this chapter is illustrative of the financial dimension of a security regime. Security expenditure, one of the most difficult aspects of international cooperation, requires fairly sharing the costs between partners. The Commission avoided this problem when it became financially autonomous and then independent. This status was necessary given the unpredictability and unreliability of financial advances made by local governments. With total mistrust in the capacities of Ottoman and Romanian officials to coordinate the financial activities of the Commission, commissioners looked for autonomy in financial decision-making, and gradually got it, due to the tedious ways in which the Ottoman Treasury covered its requests for funding. The Commission smartly speculated on the several ambiguities in the text of the 1856 Paris Treaty and imposed a tariff that was used to fund the hydraulic works at Sulina. This deprived the Ottoman state of its sovereign rights and a steady source of income, but it secured necessary funding for the organisation, which had the resources to further experiment in international administration. After all, a solid relation links money and sovereignty.⁷¹

With this status accepted by the Ottoman state, commissioners could seek the support of their governments in what would become a remarkable episode of imperial cooperation. Everything started with the initiative of several commissioners, who convinced their cabinets of the importance, but also of the cost-free impact for national budgets of such cooperation on behalf of a civilising hydraulic mission. When, in 1868, governments and national parliaments of Europe's Great Powers discussed the loan agreement for the Commission, they also came into closer contact with the works that the organisation was doing in the Danube Delta. If until then such information was confined to state departments, in 1868 they reached a broader political audience, with beneficial results for regime survival at the Maritime Danube.

This financial independence relied on keeping the Commission's main clients – shipmasters and merchants – happy with its activity. The introduction of the tariff in 1860 was another instance of fruitful transnational cooperation between the seven commissioners, the IO's bureaucrats and the commercial circles from the Lower Danube. The attempt to maintain perfect equality for all flags, as stipulated by the Paris Treaty, made all parties interested in sticking to the moral grounds that the tariff invoked: the idea that one paid exactly for the shipping safety one got. It needed to be profitable to pay taxes, and

71 John Grahl, 'Money as Sovereignty: The Economics of Michel Aglietta,' *New Political Economy* 5.2 (2000): 291–316.

this required commissioners to look for harmonising international practices related to the measurement of ships' tonnage. It was a thorny issue at the time amongst maritime nations, complicated by the transition from sail to steam. The solution imposed by the Commission was to look for further transnational cooperation on the topic and to establish a perfect equivalency among different flags. Professional measurement of ships all over Europe and the standardisation of measurement procedures followed suit. The Commission strongly encouraged a trans-governmental exchange of information, though a more durable agreement on the topic was only possible later in the nineteenth century, after the completion of the Suez Canal.

The lasting contribution of the Commission was that it secured Europe as a whole by creating norms and regulations, including in financial terms, regarding the navigation of international waterways that were later transposed into the national laws of member states and of other countries around the globe. Through their bottom-up actions, European commissioners proved that international cooperation was possible and profitable in pursuit of limited but manageable ends.

Threats, Opportunities and Institutional Survival

All matters connected with the Danube were constantly referred to me by the Government, and I attended meetings of the Committee of the Cabinet which was considering the Danube questions in relation to the Conference.

JOHN STOKES, [1902]



1 An Hydraulic Expert

John Stokes (1825–1902) was in his early thirties when, in 1856, he was appointed Britain's commissioner to the European Commission of the Danube. A graduate of the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich, where he 'learnt all practical military work', Stokes also attended the Military Engineering School in Chatham and went 'through the practical military course of drill, surveying, field works, pontooning, etc.'. Ordered to go to South Africa in 1845, the young officer fought in the Zulu Wars and completed engineering works meant to strengthen Britain's newly conquered positions in the colony of Kaffraria. He returned to Britain in 1851, and later served as an Assistant Instructor in Surveying and Field Works at the Royal Marines Academy. Captain Stokes volunteered for the East after his country's involvement in the Crimean War, and in 1855 was entrusted with establishing an Engineer Corps, including both military and civil engineers, that were to support the Ottomans on the Russian front.¹

1 The quotes are taken from John Stokes, *Autobiography* (s.l. s.a.), 5–7, online at www.archive.org (visited on 25 March 2017). See also Constantin Ardeleanu, 'The Little-Known Autobiography of Sir John Stokes, the First British Representative in the European Commission of the Danube (1856–1871)', *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos Galați, Istorie* 2 (2003): 87–102 and 3 (2004): 79–90. Presentations of his life and activity in Sidney Lee (ed.), *The Dictionary of National Biography: 1901–1911* (Oxford 1912), 424–426 and *Who Was Who*, vol. 1, 1897–1916 (London 1920), 681.

While in Istanbul in July 1856, Ambassador Stratford Canning offered him the position of British delegate to the Commission, a proposal stemming from his engineering expertise. Stokes accepted the office, which fitted well with his technical skills, military training and diplomatic ambitions. It was a decision that, Stokes claimed, 'changed my whole life', as he remained at the Danube until the early 1870s, and his subsequent public career was related to the governance of international waterways.²

Stokes' technical background made him quickly understand that the Commission required capable engineers and large financial resources to fulfil its task. He invited Charles Augustus Hartley to become engineer-in-chief (Chapter 4), and Hartley spent most of 1857 completing scientific surveys in the Danube Delta which permitted him to base his technical proposals on solid and relevant empirical data for the river's seasonal variations. Stokes supported the engineering solutions proposed by Hartley and, as detailed in Chapter 5, played a decisive role in finding the financial means for the completion of the Commission's hydraulic works in the Maritime Danube. He, more than any of the other commissioners, deserves credit for the determination with which he fought to turn the Commission into a permanent institution.

The survival of the Commission, a temporary international organisation with a limited technical mission, is a complex story that goes beyond cooperation and disputes amongst the governments of member states or commissioners themselves. In previous chapters it was shown how the Commission acted as a conflict mediator and a source of security in its jurisdiction. But as an institutional actor in a highly unstable political and economic environment, the organisation was threatened by many factors. From rival infrastructural projects that aimed to absorb the Maritime Danube's share in the profitable grain trade to contestations of its technical reputation, the Commission faced challenges that tested its very existence. By managing such extra-organisational confrontations in its regional setting, it consolidated its public position and proved to be a reliable organ, worthy of being reproduced elsewhere. This chapter aims to follow, by looking at the larger international and regional context, several of the extra-organisational challenges that the Commission faced in the uncertain decade of the 1860s and early 1870s, a crucial period for its survival. Stokes will be guiding this excursion, and he is also an excellent example to showcase the influence of the Commission beyond the Maritime Danube.

² Stokes, *Autobiography*, 57.

2 Canal vs. Railway vs. River

By 1859, the Commission's works and future was threatened by serious competition from a similarly daring project in the Lower Danubian area – a railway across the province of Dobrudja which was intended to carry Romanian grain via a more secure open seaport. The expected success of this private initiative questioned the very existence of the Commission, so commissioners paid due attention to the first railway to be completed in the Ottoman Empire.

The Crimean War made dozens of western entrepreneurs look for profitable investments in the Black Sea area. One of them was Thomas Wilson, a British capitalist interested in taking advantage of the rich mineral and agricultural products available in the Principalities. In 1855 he published a brochure detailing the economic prospects of the Lower Danube and encouraged the colonisation of 'a most fertile part of Europe'. The Ottoman provinces in the northern Balkans and the Principalities could accommodate millions of lucrative westerners, who were looking for their fortune on continents far away from their European homeland. Such a transfer of population, knowledge and institutions would ensure the prosperity of Europe's southeastern periphery and, with growing commercial links between this area and Western Europe, 'an insurmountable barrier against Russia' would be erected.³

Wilson's ideas were vast and ambitious, and they were not mere fantasies. One of his most concrete proposals was the construction of a canal between the Danube and the Black Sea, in Ottoman Dobrudja. According to several contemporary accounts, such a technical enterprise seemed favoured by several natural lakes, a presumptive canal dug by the Romans, and another mouth of the Danube, which would have silted up through the centuries.⁴

After travelling to Dobrudja, Wilson drew up a technical plan and a financial memorandum. He later established a consortium of international investors and sent a certain Forbes Campbell as envoy to Istanbul to get the Ottoman government's consent. An updated technical plan and financial memorandum were backed by allied ambassadors in Istanbul, and eventually the Porte agreed to grant Wilson the right to open the canal and establish free ports at its termini, on the banks of the Danube and of the Black Sea.⁵

3 Thomas Wilson, *The Low-Lands of the Danube: Their Reclamation by a Canal from Rassova to Kustandje* (London 1855), v–ix.

4 Stoica Lascu, 'Mărturiile documentare privind elaborarea unor proiecte ale Canalului Dunăre – Marea Neagră,' *Revista de Istorie* 37.6 (1984): 534–555.

5 'The Danube Ship Canal, and a Free Port in the Black Sea,' *Leeds Mercury*, 10, 17 and 24 November 1855; Gheorghe Platon, 'Un episod din istoria canalului Dunărea-Marea Neagră.'

However, by the time Wilson was struggling to get the concession, other British entrepreneurs started to lobby the Porte for a rival project. Charles Liddell, Lewis Gordon and John Trevor Barkley visited the provinces of the Lower Danube and produced a detailed report on the advantages of building a railway across Dobrudja. With a length of only 65 km, it could be easily and cheaply completed. An investment of only £200,000 for the railway and the harbour works at Cernavodă, plus £100,000 for modernising the harbour of Constanța made this a very profitable project, as it could absorb a great part of the grain that followed the winding and shallow course of the Danube. The plans were well received by capitalists in London, Manchester, Nottingham and Newcastle, who set up a consortium, 'The Danube and Black Sea Railway and Kustendje Harbour Co.' (DBSR), to deal with the investment.⁶

Following renewed negotiations, the Porte cancelled the canal concession in September 1857 and decided to go with the railway project.⁷ The entrepreneurs pledged to build the line within three years, and the harbour of Constanța had to be fully operational in five years. The Ottoman government was to provide the DBSR with the free concession of public land and expropriate private properties, at the investors' expense. It was to approve the technical plans and the railway tariff, which could not be altered without its prior consent. At Constanța, the DBSR levied a toll from ships on an equal footing for all flags. Shareholders considered that the contract was highly profitable, and that the railway was capable of revolutionising regional trade and bringing it into the age of predictability.⁸

Construction works started in early 1858 and lasted for two-and-a-half years. Although relatively short and built on flat land, the railway was not easy to complete. Skilled labourers were hard to find and technical materials were

Documente privind proiectul din 1855,' *Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis. Anuarul Muzeului de Istorie Vaslui 2* (1980): 335–352 and Stela Mărieș, 'Unveröffentlichte Dokumente in deutschen Archiven über das Projekt des Donau-Meers-Kanalbau (1855–1856),' *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 26.3 (1987): 229–243.

6 Charles Liddell and Lewis Gordon, *Report on the Proposed Railway between the Danube and the Black Sea, (from Tchernavoda to Kustendjie) and the Free Port of Kustendjie* (London 1857).

7 Constantin I. Băicoianu, *Sforțările politice comerciale a Angliei pentru cucerirea Dunării de Jos. Importanța economică a portului Constanța de la Marea Neagră, în trecut și prezent. – O contribuție la politica feroviară și de căi de navigație a României*, in: idem, *Studii economice, politice și sociale (1898–1940)* (Bucharest 1941), 348–349; John H. Jensen and Gerhard Rosegger, 'British Railway Builders along the Lower Danube, 1856–1869,' *Slavonic and East European Review* 46.106 (1968): 105–128.

8 Gheorghe N. Rugină, *Începuturi feroviare pe pământ românesc. 1841–1881* (Bucharest 1994), 180–185.

expensive. Wetlands posed problems with the stabilisation of the embankment and improving the harbour at Constanța proved more costly than estimated.⁹

The works alarmed the entrepreneurs in Brăila and Galați, who feared that their business would be affected by a structural change in regional trade patterns. Several commissioners were also concerned that the railway would influence Danubian navigation. At a sitting of the Commission, Prussia's commissioner Karl Hermann Bitter started a discussion, and the plenum decided to make a preliminary investigation into the effects of the railway on Danubian trade. Engineer-in-chief Hartley and a certain Fahrenholtz from the Accounting Service were charged with determining if the railway could become a serious competitor for the Danube routeway.¹⁰

Hartley's report was completed in late October 1859. The railway had several advantages, as it shortened the distance to Istanbul by about 250 miles, and was considered a rather simple technical accomplishment. Constanța had a good harbour, though the hydraulic works for its modernisation and the construction of workshops and warehouses were far from completed. Without denying the importance of the railway, stating that 'wherever railways were built, they had the effect of increasing agricultural and industrial production at a rate of 75 to 350 per cent', Hartley concluded that a branch of the Danube had to be improved, as its traffic was guaranteed. He proposed the continuation of the provisional works that the Commission had started at Sulina, although he considered that improving the St George branch was a better solution. The conclusion was self-interested, but there was something true in it. As for Fahrenholtz, his report was a detailed financial analysis of the grain trade during the years 1855–1858, with the conclusion that the railway was expected to be a great success and thus a serious threat to Danubian trade and to the Commission's task.¹¹

The reports were presented to the Commission on 9 November 1859, and commissioners were divided in their opinion about how to proceed with their works. The St George option was again discussed, but as there was a lack of consensus, commissioners decided to request instructions from their governments. There was no denying that the railway could have a major influence on the Commission's revenues, as

9 Henry C. Barkley, *Between the Danube and the Black Sea; or, Five Years in Bulgaria* (London 1876); Const. Botez, Dem. Urma, Ion Saizu, *Epopoea feroviară românească* (Bucharest 1977), 99–102; Dumitru P. Ionescu, 'Construirea și răscumpărarea liniei ferate Constanța-Cernavodă,' *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie «A.D. Xenopol»* 25.2 (1988): 206–209.

10 The National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocol 101, 21 August 1859.

11 The reports are attached to *ibid.*, Protocol 109, 9 November 1859.

Every quarter of grain that passes by the rail diminishes the revenue of the river – and as the quantity that passes out by the river decreases, so to keep up the revenue must the tax increase, which again will have the effect of sending away more vessels to Kustendjeh.

Stokes considered it important to go on with the St George project, which had more chance of successfully competing against the railway.¹² But his colleagues were convinced that the Commission would be seriously affected by the railway and demanded the postponement of the Sulina works until it was possible to assess its exact effects on river trade. In March 1860, Stokes was informed that the French government suggested the cancellation of the Sulina works and the introduction of a toll before determining the effects of the railway. Stokes wanted his government to back the St George solution, and he repeatedly emphasised in his report that the French cabinet had no genuine interest in Danubian navigation and were trying to find the easiest solution to get rid of the problem.¹³

In September 1860, France's commissioner, Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt, proposed postponing the improvements at St George and extending the Sulina works. Commissioners from Austria, Prussia, Russia and Sardinia agreed, while the Ottoman delegate requested instructions from his government. Stokes, who was absent at that meeting, later rejected the decision, but it was to no avail.¹⁴ The St George solution was compromised, and Stokes had to gradually give it up. However, with the success of the Sulina works Hartley and Stokes considered that they had proved the utility of building jetties to improve navigation at the St George mouth. Stokes was alone in this battle, and accused the commissioners from France, Prussia and Russia of covering 'political motivations with technical arguments' to demonstrate the superiority of Sulina and of being unwilling to offer 'the prospect that Europe benefits of the Treaty of Paris'.¹⁵ He received little support from the British Foreign Office, and in May 1861 Stokes agreed to delay works on the southern arm of St George, as it was not appropriate to ask for further financial sacrifices from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶

12 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Foreign Office, FO 78/3215, unnumbered (hereafter unn.) (John Stokes to Earl Russell, Galați, 1 December 1859).

13 Ibid., FO 78/3216 (the same, 29 November 1860).

14 PECD, Protocol 119, 7 September 1860.

15 Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002), 70–71.

16 PECD, Protocol 128, 13 May 1861.

As for the railway, it did not have the expected economic success. Several reasons accounted for this, including the large transshipment costs at Cernavodă and Constanța, as well as the state of the harbour in Constanța. Over the following decades, the railway managed to attract part of the Danubian grain trade, but not as much as the investors had hoped.¹⁷

The St George solution resurfaced several times. In 1862, Hartley drew up new plans, building on the experience gained at Sulina, and Stokes tried to find the necessary funding by attracting traders from Brăila, Galați and Ismail to back the project. The proposal was again buried by the opposition of several commissioners. Eventually, as these works 'required the assent of all the Powers, and considerable outlay of money for which H.M. Government is unwilling to incur liability', the British cabinet decided it was more important to permit interested governments to give stability to the temporary works in Sulina.¹⁸ The railway contributed to sealing the fate of the St George project and ended a long debate between commissioners.

The competition between river and railway, both aiming to attract Danubian grain into global routes, was influenced by the different status of the two ventures. The Commission enjoyed direct support from Europe's Great Powers, and the Ottoman commissioner eased the IO's relations with local authorities and the government in Istanbul; a private company, on the other hand, received less assistance from the Ottoman authorities and was dependent on their goodwill, sometimes paying dearly. As important was the fact that the entire commercial and financial infrastructure in the United Principalities (Romania) converged towards the mouths of the Danube; the Commission took advantage of this, as merchants in the Danubian ports of Brăila and Galați did not hurry to adapt their business practices to the opportunities provided by the railway.¹⁹

The first round in the competition between the traditional mode of communication (fluvial and maritime navigation) and the 'intruder' (the railway), but also in the race between a political initiative coordinated by a state-backed IO and an economic venture managed by a private consortium (DBSR), both trying to transfer and implant western technology in the periphery, seemed to

17 Ardeleanu, 'Efectele construirii căii ferate Cernavodă-Constanța asupra navigației dunărene (1859–1860)', *Analele Universității Ovidius din Constanța – Seria Istorie* 3 (2006): 41–54.

18 C.W.S. Hartley, *A Biography of Sir Charles Hartley, Civil Engineer (1825–1915): the Father of the Danube*, vol. 1 (Lampeter 1989), 145.

19 Jensen and Rosegger, 'British Railway Builders': 105–128; eidem, 'Transferring Technology to a Peripheral Economy: The Case of the Lower Danube Transport Development, 1856–1928,' *Technology and Culture* 19 (1978): 680–686.

have been won by the former. But it was the pressure of the railway that made the Commission speed up its hydraulic works at Sulina. The Commission could claim it won the battle, but its ‘triumph’ came by adopting the cheapest and most expedient, rather than the best, solution for the long-term development of Danubian navigation.

Another lesson learnt by the commissioners was that, as a transportation infrastructure, the Maritime Danube was part of a very dynamic system. The Commission’s techno-political task of regulating river navigation had to stay embedded in this larger commercial framework, and spending money on improving the river needed to have a rational economic base. This made the Commission a close observer of regional political and economic developments and a pro-active organ in fulfilling its institutional task.

The railway did better once the province of Dobrudja was integrated into the Romanian state, which invested heavily in modernising the port of Constanța and in connecting it, via a bridge across the Danube, to the Romanian corn-growing mainland. With these huge infrastructural and functional changes in the early twentieth century, the Maritime Danube (and the Commission) had a strong rival in absorbing the regional grain trade.²⁰

As for the canal, proposals for its construction were advanced throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They took a more articulate form during the First World War, when Dobrudja was integrated into the Central Powers’ war machine, and at the end of the Second World War, when it served not only as a strategic transportation infrastructure of the Soviet bloc, but also as a means of political cleansing in communist Romania. The project was completed in the 1980s, with the support of Romania’s dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, who returned to the same line of reasoning as when the idea was first floated in the nineteenth century – to allow for unobstructed navigation between the Romanian mainland and the Black Sea.²¹

20 Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis, ‘Romanian Danubian and Black Sea Ports during the Nineteenth Century. A Quest for Modernization,’ in: Heleni Porfyriou and Marichela Sepe (eds.), *Waterfronts Revisited: European Ports in a Historic and Global Perspective* (New York 2016), 44–58; idem, ‘“International” and “National” Ports. The Competition between the Ports of Brăila/Galați and Constanța during the Period 1878–1914,’ in: Ardeleanu and Andreas Lyberatos (eds.), *Port Cities of the Western Black Sea Coast and the Danube. Economic and Social Development in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Corfu 2016), 95–128.

21 On the construction of the canal, see David Turnock, ‘The Danube-Black Sea Canal and Its Impact on Southern Romania,’ *GeoJournal* 12.1 (1986): 65–79 and Wim van Meurs, ‘Der Donau-Schwarzmeer-Kanal, eine Großbaustelle des Kommunismus,’ *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung* 20 (2012): 113–128.

3 An International Organisation and a National Seaport

Another issue that threatened the Commission's plans came from the attempts of the Romanian state to set up a seaport on the small expanse of seacoast it owned in Southern Bessarabia. In a message to the Romanian Parliament in late 1864, Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza stated 'that commercial and political needs require the establishment of a [Romanian] Black Sea port',²² through which the country could export its grain resources without the hindrances and taxes of the Maritime Danube. The Romanians wanted Hartley to draw up plans for such a seaport but the engineer initially discouraged the idea for technical and financial reasons. Eventually, he drafted a scheme for a harbour in high seas, at Gibrieni. Stokes was extremely unhappy with the Romanian proposal, wondering why the government wanted a 'harbour in a faraway corner of the country, on a narrow coast away from the fertile counties that export products and difficultly accessible on land or water'.²³

The project was continued by Cuza's successor, Prince Charles I (Carol) of Romania. In 1867, during one of his visits to the mouths of the Danube, Charles I discussed his plans for the improvement of the Gibrieni Lake, wherefrom 'one could build a canal to the sea, thus getting Romania a sea exit, and a port that would raise the importance of the new Bessarabian districts' that the country acquired in 1856. Financial shortages prevented the execution of the project, although in 1868 the Parliament voted in a law to have the seaport built.²⁴

Stokes accused the Romanians of pursuing the seaport as a result of their 'pure jealousy and hostility to Turkey'. Moreover, they wanted to evade European control over their grain exports. Despite such opposition from his close partner Stokes, Hartley continued his collaboration with the Romanians, to whom he gave technical advice. In July 1869, Hartley presented his plans to Prince Charles I and estimated the costs of constructing the seaport at twenty million francs.²⁵

Discussions continued into the mid-1870s, when Hartley's plans for the 'Charles I' port were presented to the Romanian Parliament. The project aimed to link the Black Sea, via a railway, to the rich corn-growing Moldavian districts that lacked good transportation infrastructure. By developing that peripheral region of the country, the port would be able to compete with the

22 Constantin C. Giurescu, *Viața și opera lui Cuza Vodă* (Bucharest 1966), 396.

23 TNA, FO 78/3221, unnn. (Stokes to Russell, Galați, 16 March 1865); Hartley, *A Biography*, 182–184 and 403–404; Petre Covacef, *Cimitirul viu de la Sulina* (Constanța 2003), 94–95.

24 Dimitrie A. Sturdza, 'Însemnătatea lucrărilor Comisiunii Europene de la Gurile Dunării, 1856–1912,' *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile secțiunii istorice* 35 (1913): 204.

25 Ibid.

commercial traffic of Odessa without injuring the prosperity of Brăila and Galați. Beyond the seaport's technical challenges, Hartley agreed that the whole project was a 'nationalist' dream of Romania, which could have better improved the Maritime Danube, the country's most vital commercial highway. Discussions around the Gibrieni project continued in the following months, but the outbreak of the war in the Balkans switched the focus away from the seaport. In 1878 Romania lost Southern Bessarabia, but at the same time gained the province of Dobrudja, including the seaport of Constanța, which had been developed by the DBSR. Constanța was to become the new 'Charles I' seaport, getting large investments from the Romanian government that would eventually turn it into a threat to the prosperity of inland Danubian ports.

As for Stokes, his opposition to Gibrieni came from his belief that the Commission had to stay strong by absorbing all local trade and channelling it through the Sulina branch. As in the case of the Constanța railway, every quarter of grain that passed along an alternative export route diminished the revenue of the river and the Commission. In Stokes' calculation, the Danube enjoyed an additional advantage. As an international river with a status regulated by inter-imperial agreements, it was a safer choice for western interests than a domestic port in sovereign waters, where foreign shipping had to follow national legislation.

4 In Defence of Organisational Reputation

Antoine Émile Ernest Desjardins was a famous French geographer and historian, and the author of several volumes of historical geography. In 1867 he visited the Lower Danube as an envoy of the French state. He accompanied Prince Charles I in his Danubian tour, advised him on the proposed Gibrieni port, and inspected the Commission's works. Besides reporting to the appropriate French authorities, Desjardins presented his research in front of the French Geographical Society. His view on the Maritime Danube was based on his academic expertise and previous knowledge of the Nile and the Rhône.²⁶ He was fascinated by the identification of ancient settlements, which allowed him to draw conclusions on the long-term variations of the mouths of the respective waterways. In his public speeches, the geographer alluded to the Commission's hydraulic works, and even challenged several of the organisation's technical choices. With such a large living environment as the Danube Delta, the

26 Ernest Desjardins, 'Les embouchures du Danube,' *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 14 (1867): 129–143.

'beautiful maps of the European Commission, made since such a short time, are already far from being accurate today', Desjardins claimed. As for the project of removing the bar by building parallel jetties at Sulina, the geographer did not consider it to be enough. The only viable solution was the maritime canalisation of the Danube. He also thought that Chilia had several advantages over the other two branches of the river.²⁷

When Desjardins' papers were published, the Commission felt the need to respond to such defamatory opinions, and letters were sent to the French Geographical Society. Many of Desjardins' assertions were amended in relation to the depth over the Sulina bar, the solution of a maritime canal independent of natural exits, and the differences between the Danube and the Rhône.²⁸ Desjardins responded back and referred to several complaints by local merchants as to the quality of the IO's works. He further alluded to the large insurance costs of shipping in the Maritime Danube, as skippers sometimes paid, for a trip from Sulina to Galați, 'a premium almost equal to that paid from Marseille to Sulina'. Desjardins again criticised the choice of branch but praised Hartley's intelligence and diligence.²⁹

The Commission replied once more, as Desjardins also did,³⁰ this time, however, accusing Hartley of plagiarising the project for the Gibrieni seaport. A new response attempted to settle the dispute and referred to Hartley's original plans that dated back to 1864, i.e. 'three years before the birth of the priority right claimed by Mr Ernest Desjardins'.³¹

A similar defamatory opinion was published in *The Globe*, a journal from Geneva, which criticised the Commission's dealings, citing the opinion of one of the DBSR's engineers.³² Commissioners felt that they needed to defend their work against such unfair incriminations, and Stokes was again the main guardian of the organisation's reputation. Not that everything that the Commission was doing was perfect. But given the difficult conditions in which the Commission had been working, it needed to be defended, as allegations

27 'Note sur la mission de M. Ernest Desjardins aux Bouches du Danube (1)', *ibid.* 15 (Janvier–June 1868): 90–91, 98.

28 'Note au sujet d'une communication de M. Ernest Desjardins sur les embouchures du Danube,' *ibid.*: 268–270.

29 'Réponse de M. Ernest Desjardins à la note de la Commission Internationale des Bouches du Danube,' *ibid.*: 271–277.

30 'Lettre de la Commission Européenne du Danube à M. Antoine d'Abbadie, de l'Institut, Président de la Commission Centrale,' *ibid.*: 488–492; 'Réponse à la Lettre de la Commission Européenne du Danube, par M. Ernest Desjardins,' *ibid.*: 492–493.

31 Hartley, *A Biography*, 273–274.

32 P. Chaix, 'Le Danube, son cours et ses embouchures,' *Le Globe. Revue genevoise de géographie* 7 (1868): 137–151.

risked affecting its image and might make governments decide on its closure. At the same time the Commission was busily engaged in securing a loan for its works (Chapter 5), and public image was crucial in negotiating the term of the agreement. The Commission learnt from such criticism to always respond to accusations and keep the public informed on its own version of things. In time, the Commission's Secretariat acquired a public relations component, important for maintaining a positive and favourable image among stakeholders about the organisation and its works.

5 Narratives of Institutional Success

In November 1869 the Commission published a brochure entitled *Des effets produits par l'amélioration de l'embouchure de Soulina sur le commerce d'exportation maritime* in response to similar contestations from local commercial circles. The memorandum was meant to review the commercial profitability of the Commission's activities, and it serves as a good introduction to the problems that Danubian navigation and trade had faced on the eve of and in the decade that followed the IO's creation in 1856. Though unsigned and assumed collectively by the Commission, its narrative structure and main arguments point to Stokes as one of its main authors.

In fact, from early on in the organisation's history the British delegate insisted on the need to collect detailed statistical information and organise it into coherent series. Commissioners made good use of such data when the Commission prepared the introduction of the tariff in 1860; statistics were also used to prove the progress of navigation – and thus the Commission's efficiency – after the start of its hydraulic and normative works.³³ Like maps, statistics are instruments of communication, persuasion and power, serving and projecting organisational interests.³⁴ Since the late 1850s, the Commission had started to amass and publish detailed statistics on Danubian shipping, which pushed towards further transnational standardisation in the collection of data and compilation of meaningful quantitative series. They cover a large variety of aspects, from data on the number and tonnage of ships calling at the Maritime Danube to the main goods carried by these vessels and the taxes collected from shipping accidents recorded in its jurisdiction. As interesting

33 PECD, Protocols 89 and 139, 4 November 1858 and 14 November 1861.

34 Denis Wood and John Fels, *The Power of Maps* (New York and London 1992); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2002), 9.

are the series on patients in the Commission's hospital or the average temperatures recorded in Sulina and the periods in which the river became frozen.

International commerce on the Lower Danube consisted to a large degree of the foreign trade of the United Principalities (Romania). The exportation of grain was its most rewarding component. As bordering countries did not generally consume foreign grain, Romania's surplus was directed towards seaborne destinations, and Istanbul, Marseille and British ports received 'the most considerable part of the wheat, corn, and barley exported from Galați and Brăila'.³⁵ The Danube was the natural transportation channel for this trade. The river and its tributaries served to collect the crops of Wallachia and Lower Moldavia at Brăila and Galați, whence grain was shipped further towards its destinations. An annual average of 2.9 million quarters had been exported for the past four years (1865–1868) through the mouths of the Danube, and about two thirds of this amount came from Romania. Exports were expected to grow considerably, under the 'double impetus given to agricultural production by the new rural law [1864] and the construction of railways and rural roads' in the country. Romania, it was further stated, was the main beneficiary of the Commission's works. The 1856 Paris Treaty had favoured not only the Principalities' political future, but also their economic fate.³⁶

The brochure started its analysis of the profitability of the Commission's works by referring to the difficult state of Danubian navigation before 1856. Based on information from a local commercial house, the depth of the Sulina bar in pre-Crimean War times was reviewed, along with data on its annual variations and the record low depth of 1853. The Commission contributed to deepening the navigable channel at the Sulina bar to more than 16 feet after the completion of the provisional Sulina piers in 1861, while the navigable depth along the Maritime Danube was increased by about 4 feet. The perils of the shallow waterway were aggravated by the unfavourable position of the Sulina roadstead and the busy lighterage operations carried out in the open sea. With a depth that rarely exceeded 11 feet, most seagoing ships had to lighter at least a part of their cargo. While waiting to reload these goods, ships were exposed to sudden gales, especially in autumn. Seagoing ships were condemned 'to an inevitable shipwreck, and their lighters often shared the same fate'.³⁷

The Commission had greatly improved this bleak picture. In the late 1860s Sulina was the best port of refuge on the western coast of the Black Sea, and

35 *Des effets produits par l'amélioration de l'embouchure de Soulina sur le commerce d'exportation maritime* (Galați 1869), 3.

36 *Ibid.*, 4–5.

37 *Ibid.*, 9.

statistics from shipping accidents prove the increased protection it provided to ships (Chapter 7). The organisation had created a lifesaving service in the event of disasters, and there had been no loss of human life recorded in the past decade. However, despite a considerable reduction of the risks to which navigation of the Maritime Danube was exposed, insurance companies failed to make a proportional reduction in the rate of premiums for Danubian shipping, so 'these premiums are always higher than those paid on goods loaded at Kustendje, whose port is much less secure and spacious than that of Sulina'.³⁸

As for the savings made thanks to the Commission's works, the brochure calculated them starting with the losses incurred by traders before 1856. Consular data estimated the average annual expenditure made by captains to lighter their ships at £62,500, though it was much higher in the exceptional circumstances of the Crimean War. Lighterage fluctuated tremendously depending on demand and the state of the Sulina bar. Skippers also complained about misstatements regarding the capacity of lighters, an issue duly solved by the Commission through its regulations. Unpredictability had been one of the greatest plagues of Danubian navigation that the Commission had to cope with:

It is easy to understand that because of such fluctuations in the rate of lighterage, it was practically impossible for shipowners to evaluate the cost of a voyage to Lower Danubian ports, and it sometimes happened that ships refused to run the risk, even with the prospect of finding cargo for the return to England at the exorbitant rate of 35s. per quarter.³⁹

In actual value, a ship of 400 tons carrying 2,800 quarters of grain paid 3,821 francs for lighterage, lighthouse and pilotage dues at the Danube before 1856 or an average of 1.36 francs per quarter. After the introduction of the Commission's toll in 1860, a similar vessel would pay 1,320 francs. If it needed to lighter in the river, about 750 francs had to be added, bringing the total cost to 2,070 francs or 0.73 francs per quarter. The organisation could thus claim that its works resulted in a saving of at least 0.60 francs per quarter. This saving was expected to increase to 0.90 francs once the Commission removed the sandbanks and secured a minimum depth of 15 feet along the river.⁴⁰

The number of lighters in the river diminished after 1856, but in the 1860s there were many large seagoing vessels who waited for their cargo at Sulina,

38 *Ibid.*, 10.

39 *Ibid.*, 11.

40 *Ibid.*, 11–13.

where grain was brought on board fluvial barges, towed in convoy from inland ports. A total of 48 ships loaded their cargo at Sulina in 1861, but in 1868 their number increased to 366. 'These seagoing ships made, thanks to the Commission's works, an even more considerable economy', as they enjoyed a reduction of 0.50 francs per ton on the taxes paid by seagoing ships that ascended the river.

The Commission's works gave navigation several other advantages. It enabled larger seagoing vessels to call at inland Danubian ports, and thus reduce their overall shipping costs. Ships of 300–400 tons had rarely visited the Danube before the 1860s, but in 1869 ships larger than 1,000 tons crossed the bar without the need to lighter. Another advantage was the shorter duration of trips, as ships were 'no longer held at Sulina because of the lack of lighters when they cleared the river', and towage was available at fair prices. Rates previously demanded by tugboats to drive a vessel from the harbour of Sulina or in cases of emergencies were exorbitant. Captains complained that they had paid more than 1,000 francs for a service which in 1869 was provided for a tenth of this sum. The Commission contributed to lowering prices by having a tug specially assigned to assist ship captains with the passage of the Sulina bar for a fixed fee of 60 francs. It was finally the time for predictable voyages, for a new 'politics of calculations',⁴¹ as

the shipowner and the merchant can now estimate with sufficient accuracy the expenses of a ship sent to the Danube, and estimate the probable benefits of the journey, which was almost impossible for them when lighterage costs varied between 90 and 1,000 francs for a thousand kilas⁴² and when they saw ships ready to go to sea blocked for more than three months at Sulina before being able to cross the bar.⁴³

Freight costs had been the clearest proof of the deplorable state of navigation in the Maritime Danube. According to information from local commercial houses, the average cost of the freight paid for first class ships bound from the Danube to British ports was, before the inauguration of the Sulina jetties in 1861 (and leaving aside the extraordinary rates of the Crimean War period), 10s 6d. In the 1860s, it decreased to 9s.⁴⁴

41 Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 8–9.

42 A *kila* in Galați equalled 1 ½ quarters, and a *kila* in Brăila 2 ¼ quarters. A quarter was equal to 2.90 hl of grain – Paul Cernovodeanu, Beatrice Marinescu and Irina Gavrilă, 'Comerțul britanic prin Galați și Brăila între 1837–1852,' *Revista de Istorie* 31.1 (1978), 631, note 6.

43 *Des effets*, 13–14.

44 *Ibid.*, 15–18.

Other advantages had to do with the damage to the grain cargoes placed on board lighters, which suffered a loss of 7–8 per cent and were sometimes totally compromised for export. The facility by which ships cleared to sea enabled them to dispose of their cargo more quickly, and thus make more frequent and more profitable use of their capital. Before the Commission's hydraulic works, uncertainty reigned in this respect, too. In August 1855, for example, two ships were loaded for England by a commercial house in Galați and left the port five days apart. The first arrived at its destination in November, and the sale of its cargo brought a profit of £800; the second was held for four months at Sulina and only reached England in June 1856 – the price of grain had fallen, and the grain was sold with a loss of £3,500.⁴⁵

The authors of the brochure found it difficult to estimate, with any degree of accuracy, the annual benefit that the Commission's technical works and administrative regime brought to Romania's foreign trade. If one made a base estimate of an average exportation of three million quarters and a diminution of costs of two francs per quarter, the profit was larger than the Commission's total expenditure. After the completion of the Commission's works (planned for 1871), its total expenses would reach about sixteen million francs. Beyond the advances paid by the Ottoman state in 1856–1860, the Commission covered its costs through the proceeds of the taxes it levied at Sulina. It was clear that no burden had been placed on Romania to open an easy outlet for its exports, which could fully enjoy the commercial advantages afforded by the 1856 Paris Treaty. The benefits would further increase after the completion of its works, when the Commission predicted a reduction of its tolls.⁴⁶

The entire brochure breathes an image of corporate success, comparing pre-Crimean War insecurity and the new age of predictability brought by the Commission. Quantitative data was heavily used to showcase economic profitability, which again recall Stokes' opinions on the power of information: after his careful study of the Commission's statistics, 'which were very interesting in showing the growth of trade and its importance to different countries, I was able from time to time to present reports upon them which very much influenced the decisions of my colleagues.'⁴⁷

45 Ibid., 19.

46 Ibid., 20–21.

47 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 100.

6 Opening Up River Tributaries and the Establishment of a Sibling International Organisation

The Commission rejected the project that diverted the Romanian grain to alternative export routes such as Gibrieni, but several commissioners were interested in strengthening the organisation by opening several of the Danube's larger tributaries up to navigation. By increasing traffic on these rivers, the share of inland Danubian ports in the global grain trade and in the Commission's budget was expected to grow.

The Prut River, stretching over 953 kilometres in Austrian, Russian and Romanian territory and passing through rich corn-growing areas, was important for developing Moldavia's grain export capacities. There had been several attempts to navigate it during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Ottomans, Russians and Austrians. In the 1840s the Moldavian government invited a French engineer, Ignace Xavier Morand Hommaire de Hell, to propose a solution for its improvement, and several projects to introduce steamers on the Prut were made. They all failed due to the huge variations in the river's flow and to the many obstacles in its channel. In the post-Crimean War context, a French company tried to open navigation on both the Prut and Siret Rivers, but the initiative was blocked due to a conflict between the Moldavian government and the Ottoman Empire in relation to which authority had the right to grant such a privilege. A shipping company, 'I. Polihroniadi și M.E. Colognomo', was eventually established, and the Moldavian (Romanian) government hired a certain Süren, an engineer who had worked for the Commission, to advise on the technical works to be conducted along the Prut. Süren had to make preliminary studies for river works, as well as for bridges and roads. The engineer stayed in close contact with the Commission, from which he also rented or purchased different materials needed for his works.⁴⁸ By 1864 the Commission allowed Hartley to advise the Romanian government on improving the Prut.⁴⁹

Several commissioners were looking at ways of developing regional trade. Stokes was involved in this and, after visiting the Prut in 1861, estimated that by opening up its navigation 250,000–300,000 quarters of grain could be added to Moldavia's annual export. The Danube's overall trade would thus increase by one tenth. But there was a catch, as by making the Prut navigable, Russia would

48 More on the JCP in Theodor Smeu, *Comisia Mixtă a Prutului 1870–1918*, PhD dissertation, University of Bucharest (Bucharest 2015); idem, 'Obținerea dreptului Principatelor Române de a încheia convenții: înființarea Comisiei Mixte a Prutului,' *Analele Științifice ale Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iași. Istorie* 16 (2015): 265–281.

49 Hartley, *A Biography*, 184.

return as a riparian state to the Danube. It was, however, highly improbable that a fleet of warships could be maintained on such a small stream, though Russia could claim certain rights according to international law. Stokes visited the Prut again in 1862 and encouraged a Moldovan-Greek-English company to invest in the area.⁵⁰

During the following years negotiations for the establishment of a Joint Commission of the Prut (JCP) intensified. They were led by Henrik d'Offenberg, Russia's Danube commissioner, who discussed the idea with Romanian politicians. Austria was also interested in being part of the project, based on its riparian rights. For the government in Bucharest, the initiative had great political relevance, as it could result in Romania, a vassal country, being recognised as member of an IO on an equal footing with its larger imperial neighbours. An agreement, 'Stipulations on the Navigation of the Prut', was signed in Bucharest on 15 December 1866. Navigation on the Prut was liberalised according to article 16 of the 1856 Paris Treaty. It took several years to have the convention ratified, and the first meeting of the JCP took place on 3 October 1870 at the headquarters of Romania's Foreign Ministry in Bucharest. Russia and Austria-Hungary were represented by their Commission commissioners, Offenberg and Nicholas Zulauf von Pottenburg, and Romania by Panait Donici, the General Inspector of Romanian Railways. In August 1871, an 'Organic Regulation' was adopted, followed by several other internal regulations, all drafted by Edmond Mohler, the Commission's secretary general, paid to support the establishment of the younger organisation.⁵¹

The permanent seat of the JCP was settled in Galați, and the Commission was an important supporter of its sibling institution. The JCP carried out hydraulic works for the improvement of the Prut riverbed, but they did not go very well due to the organisation's financial shortages. Despite a slight increase in navigation and trade on the Prut, the JCP was far from being as profitable as the Commission.⁵² This precariousness shaped the structure of its bureaucracy, with the JCP's engineer, a certain Guido Edler von Toncourt, also acting as its Navigation Inspector.

The Commission provided the JCP with important favours. It allowed its bureaucrats and technocrats to work extra time for the smaller organisation. Expertise and technical equipment were provided at a fair price, so the

50 PECD, Protocol 134, 23 July 1861; NAR, Galați Branch, The European Commission of the Danube, the English Delegate Fund, File 7, f. 46–49.

51 Smeu, *Comisia Mixtă a Prutului*, 91–92.

52 Alexandru Duță and Stanciu, 'Amenajarea pentru navigație a râului Prut la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului al XX-lea,' *Danubius* 11–12 (1986): 190.

Commission contributed tremendously, together with the three state actors involved in the JCP, to the activity of its younger sibling. The JCP was eventually abolished at the end of the First World War when, following territorial changes in southeastern Europe, the entire navigable section of the Prut River became part of Greater Romania.

7 The London Conference (1871) and the Prolongation of the Commission

Running the Commission's daily business, Stokes added to his technical background a solid understanding of the juridical, administrative and nautical aspects of inland navigation. In dealing with the Ottoman authorities in the Danube Delta and Istanbul, he also perfected his expertise in Oriental politics and diplomacy. He was a persevering author of detailed reports with which he bombarded his superiors, who initially paid little attention to them. But in Istanbul, Vienna and Galați, Stokes was regarded as one of the most qualified experts in European inland navigation.

When Russia denounced the neutralisation of the Black Sea in the context of the French-German war of 1870, Stokes

wrote very strongly to Lord Granville [the Foreign Secretary] on the subject, setting forth the view that English interests were of such paramount importance in the Danube that Great Britain ought to maintain its share in the control of the river, which, under present arrangements, was only extended to the Spring of 1871. I urged that this was an excellent opportunity, while conceding points to Russia, for insisting on our permanent hold upon the Danube.⁵³

In December 1870 Stokes proceeded to Vienna, having been invited there to discuss the Danube Question by representatives of the Austrian cabinet.⁵⁴ It was 'a great compliment to me' and an overt recognition of his expertise. He met top statesmen in the Hungarian and Austrian capitals, and they agreed

53 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 102.

54 TNA, FO 78/3226, unnn. (Stokes to Earl Granville, Galați, 6 December 1870 and Vienna, 11 December 1870).

that 'if the Russian power was to be re-instated in the Black Sea, the European control over the mouths of the Danube ought certainly to be perpetuated'.⁵⁵

Stokes left for London and, after a cold welcome, his relations with the Foreign Office became 'of the most frequent and satisfactory character'. His services came to be highly appreciated by his superiors and, as quoted in the motto above, played a vital part in pushing all parties towards an agreement. Eventually, Stokes 'drafted the Articles of the Treaty [13 March 1871] which embodied the rules for the maintenance of the Danube control'. Bargaining for mutual concessions between imperial powers secured a good agreement, which extended the Commission until 24 May 1883, allowing it enough time to repay the loan taken out in 1868. Other provisions were: the functioning of the Riverain Commission could be decided through a preliminary understanding among riparian states; Austria and the Ottoman Empire could conduct necessary works at the Iron Gates; the operations, establishments and vessels of the Commission were declared neutral and its administrative and technical staff enjoyed immunity; and the Ottoman Empire, as a territorial power, was exempted from the neutrality regime.⁵⁶

The London Conference was yet another event that can be analysed within Europe's new ideological framework – the gradual emergence of internationalism after 1815, with an increasing number of conferences to settle disputes and which contributed to the making of a European system of law.⁵⁷ In larger inter-imperial political struggles, the Maritime Danube and the Commission were used as bargaining chips for securing Europe's balance of power. Smaller vassal states in the area, Serbia and Romania, took advantage of the diplomatic gathering and tried to make their voices and causes heard by their imperial guarantors, although without much success.⁵⁸

8 Gordon's Disinterest in the Commission

By the early 1870s the Commission was a functional organisation that had created a security regime along the Maritime Danube. According to the 1865 Public

55 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 103. His official correspondence from this period in TNA, FO 78, file 3227.

56 *Treaties and Other Documents relating to the Navigation of the Danube. 1856–1875* (London 1878), 37–38.

57 Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London 2012).

58 Ian D. Armour, 'The Sensitivities of Small, Backward Nations: Austria-Hungary, Serbia, and the Regulation of the Danube 1870–71,' *Canadian Journal of History* 47.3 (2012): 515–544.

Act it enjoyed legislative, executive, administrative and juridical powers that made it capable of regulating and controlling navigation over its jurisdiction. Stokes was one of the main craftsmen of this transnational organ which 'held the somewhat unusual position of legislating for the navigation, administering the laws by its agents and, finally, judging the cases on appeal'.⁵⁹ After fifteen years at Galați, Stokes could boast that he was controlling the Commission, as 'the long experience gained since 1856 gave me a preponderating influence at our council'.⁶⁰

Thrilled by his long expected and fully deserved diplomatic success, Stokes decided it was time to leave his post, but not before a suitable replacement was found and appointed. When 'Col. Gordon R.E., of Chinese fame' accepted the position, Stokes had good reason to see British interests in safe hands.⁶¹

By the summer of 1871, Stokes and Hartley had affirmed the official appointment of a new British commissioner, Charles George Gordon (1833–1885), another officer with technical training that had proved useful during the Crimean War, when Gordon surveyed enemy positions in the Crimea. Gordon's technical abilities had secured him an appointment as a consultant in the international commissions that in 1856–1858 settled the new Russian-Ottoman border in Bessarabia and Asia Minor. After a short stay in Britain, he volunteered for China, where he contributed decisively to crushing the Taiping Rebellion. He returned home as a hero but enjoyed little popularity among the local elites due to his peculiar social and religious views.⁶²

Gordon arrived at Galați in late 1871 to find out he had accepted an office that required different qualities than those which had made him famous. In December, Stokes reported that Gordon was busily studying the Commission's archives and getting ready for his post.⁶³ But, as Stokes started to fear, such an adventurer found 'too little to exert his energies upon' in the diplomatic routine of an IO. Moreover, Gordon was not 'in favour of English predominance' in the Commission.⁶⁴ As soon as Stokes left, Gordon gave vent to his true feelings, and in private letters and public discussions started to deride Stokes, whose

59 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 84.

60 *Ibid.*, 101,

61 *Ibid.*, 105.

62 Details on Gordon's life in Baron Godfrey Elton, *General Gordon* (London 1954). His connections to the Lower Danube in E.D. Tappe, 'General Gordon in Rumania,' *Slavonic and East European Review* 35 (1956–1957): 566–572.

63 Hartley, *A Biography*, 292.

64 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 106; Hartley, *A Biography*, 292.

mind 'was quite warped as to the import of the place which makes me wonder the Government care to keep an officer here'.⁶⁵

Gordon's temperament made him less interested in preserving a strong British voice in the Commission's affairs. Hartley was the first victim of Gordon's egalitarian views when the new commissioner got upset with the terms of the engineer's contract. Hartley accepted a renegotiation of his appointment, and Gordon gradually came to appreciate Hartley's technical abilities and balanced temperament.⁶⁶

Gordon despised the Commission and the boring work he had to do in an organisation that treasured order and bureaucratic monotony. He eventually moved from Stokes' former house and spent most of his time in the seclusion of the Danube Delta. He even wanted to move the Commission's headquarters to Sulina, a proposal duly rejected by the Foreign Office (Chapter 3). His thoughts were elsewhere, and he showed no interest in Danubian shipping or in promoting the cause of his organisation.⁶⁷ Gordon seized the earliest opportunity to leave, and when he went to Africa in 1873, few people at the Danube regretted his departure. Stokes himself was relieved to know that his institutional heritage would hopefully go to safer hands.

9 Stokes' Epistemic Communities

Stokes' example is illustrative of the making of experts during the second half of the nineteenth century. Several factors made their knowledge extremely sought after by European decision-makers. It was a period of intense colonial expansion, fuelled to a large extent by the development of railways and steam shipping. Central governments and private investors went hand in hand in connecting the West and the rest of the world in formal and informal empires, and in many regions inter-imperial cooperation for specialised 'domains or issue areas' was vital in diminishing the risk of conflict. Huge infrastructure projects aimed to remodel geographical landscapes and shape them according to transnational economic needs, and they required cooperation between imperial authorities and local actors. Negotiating interests in all these vitally important peripheral areas involved not only diplomatic skills but also expertise.

65 Hartley, *A Biography*, 293.

66 Ibid., 294–300; the new conditions in PECD, Protocols 274 and 283, 4 May 1872 and 16 September 1873.

67 Hartley, *A Biography*, 302–303.

Stokes is a good example of what such expertise meant in the late nineteenth century. He was appointed to the Commission for his engineering background but soon enough, he and the other commissioners shifted their focus from technical aspects to administration, trying to establish a stable and secure political environment in an anarchical peripheral Ottoman province. The Commission started to draft legislation for an international river and in doing so, commissioners and bureaucrats needed to align it with Ottoman law, the privileges of foreign citizens in the Ottoman Empire and their own national legislation. This imposed a great degree of cooperation at a pan-European level and information exchange with governments, private companies and academics around Europe.

Stokes knew how professional knowledge was produced and he enjoyed being a 'technical adviser' on matters related to hydraulic projects and colonial rule in the Ottoman Empire. His government, however, 'discovered' him and his expertise only at a critical juncture, when the British authorities needed to make a decision about the remilitarisation of the Black Sea in 1870–1871. In this, Stokes followed in the footsteps of several of his colleagues, whose expertise was employed by their governments in the regulation of inland navigation, such as Karl Hermann Bitter, the Prussian commissioner who was transferred to the Rhine Commission in 1860, or Austria's Franz Karl von Becke, employed to administer the port of Trieste. Stokes managed to convince his government of the importance of the Maritime Danube for British and larger European interests. Later in his life, this knowledge made him part of numerous other expert communities connected to every aspect of international rivers, canals, harbours, navigation tariffs and tonnage.

In 1873, Stokes was appointed as one of the two British commissioners in the International Tonnage Commission that assembled in Istanbul for settling uniform measurement rules for the tonnage of ships passing through the Suez Canal (Chapter 5). A compromise was reached, which marked the beginning of a fruitful cooperation between Stokes and Ferdinand de Lesseps. While in the Ottoman Empire, the British government ordered him to report on the condition and administration of the Suez Canal Company (SCC), and Stokes advised on the desirability of transferring its administration and maintenance from the hands of a private company to the direction of a public authority.⁶⁸

In January 1875, Stokes was appointed Commanding Engineer at Chatham, allowing him to unite his functions at the Foreign Office with those of a military nature. However, the government was soon informed about the

68 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 119–123; Obieta, *The International Status*, 56.

financial difficulties of the Egyptian Khedive, who was negotiating with various French capitalists over the sale of his SCC shares. Lord Tenterden, the permanent under-secretary of the British Foreign Office, consulted him on the advisability of purchasing these shares, and Stokes attended a meeting of the British cabinet. When called upon to give an opinion as to whether a purchase should be made, he 'strongly advocated this course' and then 'put in a strong Memorandum giving full particulars of the Canal Company and of the Khedive's financial needs'.⁶⁹

Stokes was instrumental in Britain's acquisition of the SCC shares. In his memoirs, he proudly referred to his activity as a 'technical adviser' to the British government in all matters connected with the Suez Canal.⁷⁰ Stokes later visited Egypt and eventually convinced F. de Lesseps to sign an agreement, under which the latter withdrew his protest against European powers, on condition that the British cabinet could get the Great Powers to accept that compromise. Lesseps also agreed to have three directors in the SCC appointed by the London cabinet, and Stokes was one of them. The second was Rivers Wilson, appointed by the Treasury to represent Britain's financial interests, and the third was Edward James Standen, who had been Stokes' private secretary for his entire term as British representative in the Danube Commission and whom we met in Chapter 5:

The technical knowledge which he [Standen] had acquired on all matters connected with the Danube works during his long service with me and his acquaintance with the French language pointed him out as a valuable man to name as Director to reside in Paris and look constantly and closely into all matters of the Suez Canal Company.⁷¹

Stokes remained a director of the SCC until his death in 1902, and his contribution to solving things satisfactorily for British interests secured him a knighthood (КСВ). During the last decades of the nineteenth century, he was involved in many other projects where his expertise seemed useful: he took part in the Panama Congress promoted by F. de Lesseps; he led an international commission (which assembled in Paris in 1880) appointed to examine the works necessary for the improvement of the port of Alexandria and decide on a fair tariff on shipping; he was a member of the British Royal Commission on Tonnage Measurement, in continuation of his expertise from the Danube

69 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 127–128.

70 *Ibid.*, 128.

71 *Ibid.*, 135.

and the Suez; he served as an advisor for the Royal Commission of Colonial Defence on matters related to the Suez Canal; he was a member of a committee appointed by the Secretary of State for War 'to enquire into certain points in connection with a proposed Sub-Marine Tunnel to connect, for railway purposes, the English and French coasts'; and he served as board member for a company aiming to cut a canal deepening the passage through the straits between Ceylon and India, in order to shorten the voyage to Calcutta. In 1887 Stokes was made a vice-president of the SCC and was later allowed to remain in office after his 70th birthday, as the British cabinet recognised that there was no successor who could have a similar influence in the company.⁷² Indeed, his example clearly shows that, as pointed out by Canay Ozden, hydraulic science moved between colonial centres and its bearers carried with them not only expert knowledge, but also a colonial mindset that governed their drive for 'civilising' both society and nature.⁷³

10 Conclusions

The survival of the Commission in the uncertain decade of the 1860s was a complex story in which political decisions of member states (such as at the 1871 London Conference) played an important role. But the organisation itself, including its diplomatic leadership (commissioners) and its executive layer (bureaucrats), deserves much credit for its institutional resilience. This chapter alluded to two ways in which the Commission acted to showcase its efficiency and defend its image: investments in the commercial potential of the Maritime Danube and building up a reputation of professionalism.

The first resulted from the organisation's role within the regional economic system. The Commission worked to streamline navigation along a transportation highway which competed with other infrastructures for a share of the profitable grain trade. The Cernavodă-Constanța railway and the Romanian plans to open a new seaport in Southern Bessarabia rivalled the prospects of the Maritime Danube, and the Commission closely followed these projects which eventually influenced the commissioners' hydraulic decisions. At the same time, the Commission got involved in initiatives designed to increase the

⁷² Ibid., 188.

⁷³ Canay Ozden, 'The Pontifex Minimus: William Willcocks and Engineering British Colonialism,' *Annals of Science* 71.2 (2014): 183–205; see also Jessica B. Teisch, *Engineering Nature: Water, Development and the Global Spread of American Environmental Expertise* (Chapel Hill 2011).

commercial output of the Maritime Danube by opening up the trade of other rivers, such as the Prut. This resulted in the establishment of a sibling IO, the JCP, supported by all commissioners, as it gathered together the two imperial powers, Russia and Austria-Hungary, who contested the articles of the 1856 Paris Treaty which stood at the foundation of the Commission.

The second has to do with public image and the importance of saving reputation at a time when the Commission was trying to secure a larger international loan for its hydraulic works. The organisation decided to respond to public articles which incriminated its technical choices and works in the Danube Delta and, at the same time, started to publish brochures in which it exhibited its efficiency, based on detailed quantitative data. The quality of the Commission's hydraulic programme and its normative works, commissioners claimed, clearly resulted from statistics that aimed to show that Danubian skippers and merchants, the taxpayers of the Commission's budget, had made large profits out of the IO's activity.

The survival of the Commission was equally the result of personal commitment from some of its founding fathers, who sincerely believed in this supranational project. Stokes and several colleagues in the Commission (both in the diplomatic service and the bureaucratic apparatus) devoted much of their knowledge and energy to the organisation. As happens in such cases of organisational commitment, this institutional craftsmanship nourished their emotional needs for professional achievement, and completely transformed their future careers. Stokes, the hero of this chapter, came to develop paternal feelings for his institutional offspring and remained attached to the Commission throughout his life.

Stokes is equally representative of the Commission's gradual evolution into a 'community of experts'⁷⁴ in transboundary rivers, a specialisation that combined knowledge in seamanship, international law and engineering.⁷⁵ Stokes used well the expertise he gained at the Danube and carried it with him towards other colonial areas where he was appointed to serve British and larger transnational interests: the Suez, Alexandria and India.

74 Martin Kohlrausch and Helmuth Trischler, *Building Europe on Expertise. Innovators, Organizers, Networkers* (Basingstoke 2014); Wolfram Kaiser and Johan W. Schot, *Writing the Rules for Europe: Experts, Cartels and International Organizations* (Basingstoke 2014).

75 More on this in Luminița Gătejel, 'Imperial Cooperation at the Margins of Europe: the European Commission of the Danube, 1856–65,' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 24.5 (2017): 781–800.

On Transnational Bureaucrats and Rulemaking

Employed by the intermediaries of the main European powers and having consecrated their works, according to their forces, in achieving a work of European interest, the employees of the Commission believe that they could expect from the community of powers something that none of them would refuse to their former servants.

Memorandum of the Commission's employees, 1868



1 An Early International Civil Service

On 2 October 1861, Colonel Fedor von Drygalski, newly appointed Inspector General of Navigation by the European Commission of the Danube, took an oath 'to conscientiously and with fidelity fulfil' his responsibilities and 'to devote loyally all my efforts to the accomplishment of the duties of my office'.¹ Drygalski was one of the first employees to pledge allegiance to an international organisation, which wanted its officials to defend more than their own nation's interests.

Drygalski's career qualified him for such an international office. A Prussian Pole by birth, he served as an officer in the Prussian army, which he left due to pecuniary difficulties. He went to India and earned a living surveying, and later entered the Austrian army when it needed troops to crush the Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849. He then moved to Istanbul and was employed as an instructor in the local military school, from where he joined Ömer Fevzi Pasha as his secretary when the latter was appointed governor of the Danube Delta region and Ottoman delegate to the Commission. Following salary payment problems by the Ottoman authorities, Drygalski happily accepted the position of Inspector General which fitted well with his profile at a time when the Ottoman Empire and other member states were debating the

1 National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocol 138, appendix 2, 2 October 1861.

criteria for appointing officials in executive positions within the Commission's bureaucracy.

As a 'European' in Ottoman service, Drygalski was a good compromise. Two years after his appointment, John Stokes, the British commissioner, conceded that he had many merits 'in introducing order on the Lower Danube', though Stokes also criticised his philo-Austrian sentiments. But at the same time, Drygalski possessed most of the qualities needed for his office: 'bodily and mental activity', knowledge of several languages, legal literacy, 'an impartial strictness in enforcing the regulations confided to his superintendence and a scrupulous accuracy in not overstepping the limits laid down for him'. Drygalski was, however, an ambitious man, and commissioners needed to keep a firm hand on him.² Despite his fiercely independent character, the Inspector had to accept working under a pseudo-nominal Ottoman sovereignty.³ He was, beyond all appearances, a suitable occupant for this historic position in the early days of the International Civil Service (ICS).

The Commission owed a great deal of its success to the organisation and efficiency of its staff. Its complex bureaucratic apparatus did not result from any arrangement between member states, but was nourished by the increasing needs of navigation, as sensed by the seven (rising to eight in 1878) commissioners and by the organisation's bureaucratic leadership. This drive towards bureaucratisation was significantly aided by the Commission's political and financial autonomy, which allowed the organ to follow an independent staff recruitment policy. In fact, the independence of the Commission's employees was an important factor in marking the beginnings of the ICS. The ICS consists of the people who work for an IO on either a temporary or permanent basis and who, during their employment, are expected, regardless of their national origin, to place the interests of the organisation employing them above all else.⁴

In connection with such discussions about dual loyalties and the importance of norms and rules, this chapter aims to detail, along the institutional layer of analysis, the inner structure of the Commission, one of the early examples of transnational bureaucracies. This invokes the theoretical contributions

2 National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Public Record Office, Foreign Office, FO 78/3220, unnumbered (hereafter unn.) (John Stokes to Earl Russell, Galați, 11 January 1864).

3 Wilhelm Brennecke, *Die Länder an der unteren Donau und Konstantinopel: Reise-Erinnerungen aus dem Herbst 1868* (Hannover 1870), 77–81.

4 L.C. Green, 'The Status of the International Civil Service,' *Current Legal Problems* 7.1 (1954): 192. A newer article without reference to the Commission in Dobromir Mihajlov, 'The Origin and the Early Development of International Civil Service,' *Miskolc Journal of International Law* 1.2 (2004): 79–87.

of Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore on the relationship between bureaucracy and rulemaking.⁵ The chapter further analyses the context in which the Commission's departments were created, as well as their work in regulating shipping along the Maritime Danube. For Stephen D. Krasner, regimes are 'principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures', and this chapter claims that a security regime came into being with the creation of a coherent corpus of rules and its subsequent application.⁶ James C. Scott's view on the modern bureaucratic state's objective of imposing legibility and simplification is also relevant here,⁷ especially in proving that the Commission acted as a 'state' whose drive for standardising shipping practices was part of its logics of stability and security over its 'liquid' jurisdiction. As relevant is the 'technocratic internationalism' framework and the analysis of how transnational experts regarded rulemaking as a cornerstone of a new order.⁸

In 1889 a total of 198 people worked for the Commission, increasing to 359 by 1930. They represented eleven states in 1889 and fourteen nationalities in 1931. Employees were part of seven departments (services) in which the Commission structured its activities and were organised into four categories of staff. In 1931, the organisation hired other 746 workers on a temporary basis, so more than 1,100 people were paid by this transnational organ in the interwar period.⁹

From the beginnings of the organisation, commissioners felt the need to have a bureaucratic structure to support them in fulfilling the task which the Commission had received from Europe's Concert of Powers. By December 1856, they had already decided to establish a Secretariat and a Technical Department. The delegates from France, Prussia and Austria were to invite applicants for the Secretariat, while those from Britain and Prussia were to recruit suitable staff for the Technical Department.¹⁰ Given the short initial term of the Commission (two years) and the harsh living conditions in the Danube Delta,

5 Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations,' *International Organization* 53.4 (1999): 699–732; eidem, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca 2004).

6 Stephen D. Krasner, 'Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,' in: idem (ed.), *International Regimes* (Ithaca and London 1983), 2.

7 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London 1998).

8 Wolfram Kaiser and Johan W. Schot, *Writing the Rules for Europe: Experts, Cartels and International Organizations* (Basingstoke 2014), 6–8.

9 TNA, Public Record Office, FO 881 (Foreign Office: Confidential Print), File 5874, *Danube Commission. Questions Raised by the Ottoman and Italian Delegates. December 1888 to June 1889*, f. 31; *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 109.

10 PECD, Protocol 6, 2 December 1856.

qualified human personnel had to be well paid to accept the available positions. By July 1857, the Commission had 32 employees in its two departments: a Frenchman, Edmond Mohler, oversaw the Central Office (*Bureau Central*) as secretary general, working together with fifteen other secretaries, copyists, translators and accountants of various origins. The Technical Department numbered sixteen positions, occupied by engineers, surveyors, hydrographers and drafters, and was run by British engineer-in-chief Charles Augustus Hartley.¹¹

The Commission's Central Office in Galați remained the organisation's main bureaucratic department. Its size varied depending on need. By 1862, it had nine employees. Mohler was still its secretary general, and a German, E. de Wolf, acted as accounting secretary. There were two other secretaries, an archivist, two printers, two clerks and a maid. In 1872, the Internal Administration, as the Central Office was rebranded, had five employees: a secretary general, an accounting secretary, an archivist, a clerk and a maid. A decade later, its staff consisted, again, of ten employees.¹²

With institutional consolidation, clearer procedures regulated the activities of the Commission's complex staff. Employees were part of seven departments called 'services', each led by a head of service. Decisions relating to recruitment of staff, employment and promotion were taken by commissioners during their plenary sessions, while daily business was directed by the Executive Committee, in which commissioners rotated monthly according to a preliminary agreed schedule. The Executive Committee was made up of at least two commissioners, one tasked with administrative matters (Administration Delegate) and the other with financial ones (Finance Delegate). Commissioners periodically inspected the activity of subordinated staff and reported on the various problems they encountered.

Sometimes, such inspections led to serious arguments within the Commission. On 12 October 1888, Maxime Effendi, a newly appointed Ottoman commissioner, started on a tour of inspection. In the report he submitted to his colleagues, Maxime touched upon several dysfunctionalities, from the too-simple furniture in the organisation's office at Tulcea to the procedures involving recording goods in ledgers in the Commission's storehouses and workshops at Sulina. He interviewed workers and checked their timesheets, enquired into their salaries, counted money, and inspected ledgers in the Cash Office. His inexperience with the Commission's practices fuelled a clash

11 Ibid., Protocol 43, 11 July 1857.

12 Ibid., Protocol 151, appendix no. 2, Budget for 1863, 13 November 1862; Protocol 278, appendix no. 1, Budget for 1873, 11 November 1872; Protocol 399, appendix no. 1, Budget for 1883, 21 November 1882.

with Henry A. Jackson, the director of the Cash Office in Sulina and a veteran employee, who resigned in protest at the commissioner's excessive zeal.¹³ Maxime's colleagues were not impressed with his highly critical account and paid equal attention to employees' complaints. Things eventually cooled down when the Ottoman commissioner was removed from his position by his government. The episode is relevant in illustrating the balance that was preserved between the Commission's legislative-managerial layer (commissioners) and the bureaucratic-executive one, consisting of the organisation's chiefs of services, who were competent professionals, usually with lifelong experience in the organisation.

2 The Internal Administration of the Commission

The Commission reorganised its internal administration several times, and its staff was employed in one of seven services that coordinated the activities deemed vital for the security of navigation along the Maritime Danube.

Over the decades, the responsibilities of the Secretariat were clarified and codified, and the secretary general was placed under the direct authority of the Executive Committee, which ran the Commission's daily business. The secretary general assisted the Administration Delegate in his functions and even replaced him in case of absence. He resided at the Commission's main headquarters in Galați (Fig. 12) and oversaw drafting, printing and distributing protocols of plenary sessions and other official publications. He attended the plenary sittings and the meetings of the Executive Committee and was responsible for the execution of decisions. He sent monthly reports to non-resident delegates and oversaw all institutional correspondence and the Commission's archive and library.¹⁴

The position of secretary general was an influential and well-paid one. Mohler remained in office, with a break of several years, for almost two decades (1857–1873, 1879–1883). He graduated from a French law school and, given his duties, became well-versed in international law and fluvial shipping. In fact, he deserves a lot of credit for the organisation's bureaucratic efficiency. Given the need for a perfect command of French, Frenchmen had been usually appointed to this position. Several interesting characters held it until the First World War. August Gauvain, for example, was a distinguished French

13 TNA, FO 881/5874, f. 1 (Consul-General Percy Sanderson to the Marquis of Salisbury, Galați, 3 December 1889) and f. 2–7 (Report by the Turkish Commissioner, with Observations thereon).

14 *La Commission*, 82–85.

journalist and diplomat. He studied law and worked as editor for the *Journal des débats* before joining the Commission in 1892. He remained in Galați until 1903, when he was appointed secretary of the Central Office for International Transport by Railways in Bern. The organisation was inaugurated in 1893 for the internationalisation of cargo traffic,¹⁵ and Gauvain's prior expertise in an IO might have helped him get the job. He returned to journalism as an expert in international relations and wrote extensively about the Eastern Question and the Great War.¹⁶ J.M. Savoye, Gaston Donnet and Gustave Demorgny, who succeeded him, followed similar professional paths, becoming experts in international rivers, and made good use of their direct knowledge of the Eastern Question. They may be good examples to fit into the growing category of experts in international rivers, part of influential transnational communities of professionals who used their expertise to influence decision-making in states, IOs or private companies.¹⁷

Comparisons with other early IOs are useful and may illuminate the role of bureaucracy in the efficiency of such organs. The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine had a complex secretariat with eight employees as early as 1816,¹⁸ but it never became as influential as the Commission. The International Telegraph Union, on the contrary, owed its development to the establishment of a permanent central secretariat under a very diligent director, Charles Louis Curchod.¹⁹

The Commission's fiscal services evolved in relation to the organisation's financial independence. In 1856, a Prussian accountant, Rütbling, was appointed to watch over the organisation's funds and act as cashier at the Central Office in Galați. Two branches were later opened in Sulina and Tulcea for local financial operations, and a Cash Office (or Navigation Chest) was established in Sulina for collecting navigation dues. Bureaucratic experiments were made during the following decades, and financial coordination moved

15 A. Waldis, 'Internationale Eisenbahnorganisationen und die Schweiz,' in: M. Burri et al. (eds.), *Die Internationalität der Eisenbahn 1850–1970* (Zürich 2003), 245–256.

16 For information on his life and public works, see his profile http://data.bnf.fr/12768819/auguste_gauvain/ (visited on 17 March 2018).

17 Peter M. Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,' *International Organization* 46.1 (1992): 1–35; Mai'a K. Davis Cross, 'Rethinking Epistemic Communities Twenty Years Later,' *Review of International Studies* 39.1 (2013): 137–160.

18 Jean-Marie Woehrling, 'L'administration de la Commission Centrale pour la Navigation du Rhin,' *Revue française d'administration publique* 126.2 (2008): 346, note 7.

19 Simone Fari and Gabriele Balbi, 'Curchod, Charles Louis,' in *IO BIO, Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations*, edited by Bob Reinalda, Kent J. Kille and Jaci Eisenberg, online at www.ru.nl/fm/iobio (visited on 15 January 2019).



FIGURE 12 The Commission's palace in Galați (1930)

SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

between Sulina, where taxes were collected, and Galați, where payments were made and accounting records kept. Structural changes were imposed by the need to have trustworthy employees in charge of these services. From 1879, an Accounting Service, based at the Commission's headquarters in Galați, was responsible for all financial operations. Its employees dealt with revenues and expenditures, from drawing up the annual budget to the conclusion of payment orders. Financial transactions carried out by the director of the service were approved by the Commission, and the Finance Delegate in the Executive Committee was responsible for directing and overseeing all aspects of the

Commission's financial business.²⁰ Until the First World War, this service was directed by three Germans, an Austrian, a Frenchman and a Brit, all trustworthy and experienced employees of the organisation (see Table 5).

At Sulina, the Navigation Chest was managed by a director nominated by the Commission and acting under its exclusive orders, although financial operations were audited by an official appointed by and acting on behalf of the Ottoman government. This changed after 1878, when the Commission became an independent organ and could conduct its own audits. The Navigation Chest collected different types of taxes, from navigation tolls and fines to taxes for the Health Office. It also compiled statistics about the trade and navigation of the Maritime Danube, and provided monthly and quarterly statistical reports, published as abstracts in the Commission's annual statements. The director of the Navigation Chest oversaw the Commission's administrative headquarters in Sulina.²¹

TABLE 5 Heads of the Commission's services, 1856–1916

Service	Chief	Nationality	Period
General Secretariat	E. Mohler	France	1857–1873, 1879–1883
	E. de Wolf	Germany	1874–1878
	Henri Bellanger	France	1888–1892
	A. Gauvain	France	1892–1903
	J.M. Savoye	France	1903–1906
	Gaston Donnet	France	1906–1908
	Gustave Demorgny	France	1908–1911
	Francis Rey	France	1911–1938
Accounting Service	Ruthling	Prussia	1857–1861
	E de Wolf	Prussia	1861–1865
	E. Sulzer	Austria-Hungary	1866–1873
	E de Wolf	Germany	1874–1891
	W. Eagle	Great Britain	1891–1906
	Ch. Forgués	France	1906–1911
	F. Keim	Germany	1912–1915

²⁰ *La Commission*, 85–88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88–90.

TABLE 5 Heads of the Commission's services, 1856–1916 (*cont.*)

Service	Chief	Nationality	Period
Navigation Chest	Jacobsen	Belgium	1860–1869
	E de Wolf	Prussia/Germany	1869–1873
	H.A. Jackson	Great Britain	1874–1889
	W. Eagle	Great Britain	1889–1891
	A. Velasty	Romania	1891–1904
	P. Keim	Germany	1904–1911
	G. Mateucci	Italy	1912–1931
Technical Service	Ch. Hartley	Great Britain	1856–1871
	Karl Kühn	Denmark	1872–1907
	E. Magnussen	Denmark	1908–1919
Navigation Inspectorate	F. Drygalski	Ottoman Empire	1861–1877
	Ch. Dethier	Germany	1878–1897
	F.C. Horn	Germany	1897–1902
	G. Neitzke	Germany	1902–1905
	H. Lienau	Germany	1905–1916
Harbour Master's Office	Hussein Bey	Ottoman Empire	1857
	Ahmed Bey	Ottoman Empire	1857
	Jacoub Captan	Ottoman Empire	1857
	Costaki Effendi (C. Sartinski)	Ottoman Empire	1857–1860
	Fotius	Ottoman Empire	1860–1863
	Suleiman Effendi	Ottoman Empire	1863–1865
	Ahmet Bey	Ottoman Empire	1865–1875
	Mehmed Bey	Ottoman Empire	1875–1877
	Ali Sinan Effendi	Ottoman Empire	1877–1879
	D. Pavlovich	Austria-Hungary	1879–1896
	C. Suhor	Austria-Hungary	1896–1903
	F. Wilfan	Austria-Hungary	1903–1918
	Medical Service (after 1902 also included a chief surgeon)	Engelhardt	France
Jellinek		Prussia / Germany	1858–1870
Vignard		France	1870–1887
Romalo		Romania	1887–1890
Petrescu		Romania	1890–1921
G. Rolando		Italy	1902–1905
G. Martone	Italy	1905–1921	

SOURCE: *LA COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE DU DANUBE ET SON ŒUVRE DE 1856 À 1931* (PARIS 1931), 104–107, AMENDED WITH OTHER INFORMATION

The Technical Department was formed in 1856 to cope with the Commission's hydraulic task. It was the Commission's most complex service and had a flexible structure, often being reorganised according to institutional needs. Over the following decades, it was to include, besides the staff employed in engineering works at Sulina and along the river, labourers working at the stone quarries in Dobrudja and the Commission's workshops in Tulcea and Sulina. In 1862, it had an engineer-in-chief, his assistant engineer and a surveyor based in Sulina. Five employees worked at the Tulcea workshops, three of whom dealt with the reception and transportation of stone from the Dobrudja quarries, while three others were employed at the Sulina workshops. By 1882, the Technical Department, a veritable 'hydraulic bureaucracy',²² had two engineers, a deputy engineer, a mechanical inspector, a draftsman, a secretary accountant and two clerks.²³

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, Hartley decided to retire in 1871, but continued to oversee the works as consulting engineer. He was to advise on the measures to be taken along the Danube and at the Sulina mouth, and, if necessary, on the opening of another mouth for navigation. He was assisted by a resident engineer, who was the head of the Technical Department and served as an interface between Hartley and the Commission. However, as part of the staff, the resident engineer was responsible for all technical and financial aspects related to the Commission's hydraulic programme. A Danish engineer, Charles (Karl) Leopold Kühl, held this position at the organisation's base in Sulina. According to later instructions, the resident engineer was responsible for maintaining the navigability of the river and its proper signalling by buoys and other navigational aids. He was in charge of the construction, maintenance and repair of the organisation's buildings and properties (offices, dwelling houses and the workshops in Galați, Tulcea and Sulina), as well as the maintenance of its floating equipment (boats, dredges, barges and pontoons) and its lighthouses. Kühl remained in office until 1907, when he replaced Hartley as consulting engineer. His position was filled by another Danish engineer, Eugene Magnussen, a long-time employee of the Commission.²⁴

The Commission felt the need to provide medical assistance to its employees because of the unhealthy climate and absolute lack of medical facilities in the Danube Delta region. Two hospitals, one at Tulcea and the other at Sulina,

22 F. Molle, P. Mollinga and P. Wester, 'Hydraulic Bureaucracies and the Hydraulic Mission: Flows of Water, Flows of Power,' *Water Alternatives* 2.3 (2009): 328–349.

23 PECD, Protocol 151, appendix no. 2, Budget for 1863, 13 November 1862 and Protocol 399, appendix no. 1, Budget for 1883, 21 November 1882.

24 *La Commission*, 90–94.

were set up as early as 1857 by what became the Commission's Medical Service. The Tulcea hospital was closed in 1865, when the organisation ended the activity of its technical workshops in Tulcea, but the Sulina hospital was further developed to serve the medical needs of the organisation's staff and their families, local inhabitants, and seafarers of all nations. More details about its activity will be provided in Chapter 9.²⁵

The Harbour Master Office in Sulina was vital for the success of the Commission's mission, as one of its two executive agencies. In February 1857, when the Ottoman Empire took over sovereignty in the Danube Delta, the Commission concluded an agreement with the Porte, aiming to settle the appointment and attributions of the officials responsible for regulating Danube navigation. Despite an apparent initial understanding, disputes followed in relation to how the Captain of the Port was to be nominated and paid.²⁶ Hussein Bey became the first Captain (appointed by the Porte, and accepted by the Commission), and received detailed instructions as to his duties from the IO. His office was to consist of an interpreter, a treasurer, several clerks and the crews to work on board several service ships placed at his disposal. The office was open from sunrise to sunset, and was required to monitor shipping within the roadstead and port of Sulina. The Captain also supervised the corps of pilots, lighterage operations and the lighthouse service, and the treasurer was entrusted with cashing in the taxes for pilotage and the lighthouse service.²⁷ The nomination procedure and salaries for staff were fixed during a subsequent session,²⁸ and a provisional regulation for the port police and roadstead was drafted in June 1857. The port was divided into five sections, each to host a special type of maritime operation, and clear navigation rules were introduced (see below).²⁹

Not long after his appointment, Hussein was in open conflict with the commissioners, after the cashier of Sulina's Master Office, a certain Radechia, accused Hussein of embezzlement and blackmail. Hussein allegedly appropriated

25 Ibid., 102–103.

26 PECD, *Projet d'arrangement destiné à régler les rapports de la Commission Européenne du Danube avec l'Autorité territoriale*, appendix to Protocol 12, 4 February 1857; discussions also in Protocols 13 to 16, 4 to 26 February 1857; *La Commission*, 98–99.

27 PECD, *Instructions provisoires pour le capitaine du port de Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 17, 28 February 1857.

28 Ibid., Protocol 20, 27 March 1857.

29 The first version was *Projet de Règlement Provisoire pour la police du port de Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 33, 10 June 1857, later modified by *Dispositions complémentaires au Règlement Provisoire pour la police du port de Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 106, 19 October 1859 and *Règlement Provisoire pour la police du port et de la rade de Soulina*, Protocol 117, 9 July 1860.

the tax paid by several skippers and instructed the cashier to falsify the official ledgers. Commissioners started an investigation and found him guilty. The Ottoman commissioner, however, rejected the sentence until a 'proper' inquiry could be conducted by representatives of the Ottoman government, who found Hussein innocent.³⁰ This increased the mistrust of 'European' commissioners in Ottoman officials and motivated them to look for employees not contaminated with 'Oriental' mores. An opportunity came soon enough, with the creation of a new office – that of Inspector of Navigation.

According to the 1856 Paris Treaty, the Riparian Commission had to draft navigation regulations for the entire Danube. However, as the western victors rejected Austria's hydro-hegemonic intentions, visible in the Riverain Commission, the Commission analysed the possibility of appointing an agent for monitoring navigation and imposing its rules over the river section between Isaccea and Sulina.³¹ A regulation for the creation of this executive agency, the Inspectorate General of Navigation, was presented in May 1861,³² to which the Ottoman commissioner consented with several amendments.³³ As mentioned above, Drygalski was appointed as head of this Inspectorate, supported by several overseers (superintendents) placed along various sections of the river. Drygalski took an oath to serve the Commission, the first oath to be taken by an international civil servant. The 1865 Public Act clarified the double subordination of the Captain and of the Inspector: they were named and paid by the Porte, in whose name they exercised their authority, but they acted under the superintendence of the Commission.³⁴

This system was changed after 1878. Following the Treaty of Berlin, the new Inspector of Navigation was appointed and paid by the Commission, which could also dismiss him. Additional regulations defined the duties of the two

30 PECD, Protocols 32 (6, 9, 12, 24 and 29 June 1857) and 46 (21 July 1857).

31 *La Commission*, 95.

32 Several regulations were drafted for the area: *Projet d'un Règlement provisoire pour la police de la navigation sur le Bas Danube, entre Isaktcha et Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 110, 12 November 1859; *Règlement provisoire pour la police de la navigation sur le Bas Danube, entre Isaktcha et Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 115, 27 June 1860; *Règlement sur la création d'un inspectorat général de navigation pour la partie du Danube situé en aval d'Isaktcha*, appendix to Protocol 126, 1 May 1861; *Règlement provisoire sur la création d'un inspectorat général de navigation pour la partie du Danube située en aval d'Isaktcha*, Protocol 138, 2 October 1861; *Règlement provisoire de navigation et de police applicable au Bas Danube*, Protocol 162, 15 July 1864.

33 The opinion of the Ottoman commissioner in Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı (Republic of Turkey Presidential State Archives, formerly known as Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi), i.HR 186/10349 (21 M 1278) (29 July 1861).

34 PECD, *Acte public*, 2 November 1865, article 8.

executive services of the Commission: the Inspectorate of Navigation and the Sulina Harbour Master Office. The former was run by the Inspector of Navigation, entrusted with overseeing the navigation police of the Maritime Danube, exclusive to the port of Sulina. He was responsible for applying the Commission's navigation and police regulations and, in the event of a contravention, to prosecute and convict the offenders as a judge of first instance. He organised the river pilotage service, intervened in cases of emergency and coordinated hydrographical surveys along his jurisdiction. His residence was at Tulcea, halfway between Galați and Sulina, and in the discharge of his duties was assisted by a deputy inspector, several clerks and four river superintendents, stationed at different points along the Danube, who watched over the good conduct of navigation regulations and ensured that the river was properly signalled.³⁵ The Sulina Captain had similar attributions over its jurisdiction, the harbour and roadstead of Sulina. He coordinated the local pilots, the lighthouse and fog service, and oversaw the ship gauging department.³⁶ In 1882, the Inspectorate of Navigation had twelve employees, and the Harbour Master Office ten employees, plus twelve guards for the lighthouses maintained by the Commission.³⁷

This very complex bureaucratic system evolved in time and was fully functional by the late 1870s, when the Commission became an independent IO. As visible in Table 5, the Commission's seven services were headed by a relatively low number of people. Each chief spent on average almost a decade in charge of his service, but some of them remained for their entire professional life in the organisation and became veritable models of corporate expertise. It can be concluded that the bureaucratic structure solidified the organisation into an efficient institution through promotion procedures which privileged loyalty to the Commission and seniority in the organisation.

3 In Search of Juridical Powers

European commissioners discussed several times the possibility of establishing a Mixed Court for dealing with infractions committed by foreign nationals in relation to ligherage operations within the Commission's jurisdiction. When organising navigation on the Maritime Danube, it was unclear, given the nature of the Capitulations and the attempts of the Commission to overrule

35 *La Commission*, 96–98.

36 *Ibid.*, 100–102.

37 PECD, Protocol 399, appendix no. 1, Budget for 1883, 21 November 1882.

the authority of local consuls, which tribunal would decide in cases of theft committed by lightermen to the detriment of shipmasters. Stokes proposed establishing a Mixed Court to judge all contestations to the application of the Commission's regulations. It would be made up of members of the consular corps from Sulina and of navy officers from the light warships stationed there. The chief of the local Ottoman administration, the kaymakam of Sulina, would serve as president, and the court could include between two and six members. The consul of the defendant's party would assist at the trial, and the Captain of the Port of Sulina would act as public attorney. Stokes submitted the proposal to his government, which rejected it, as it constituted 'a serious innovation in the public law consecrated by the Capitulations'.³⁸

Discussions returned in 1861 when France's Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt proposed the establishment of a free port at Sulina. One of the institutions there needed to establish, as in the case of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine,³⁹ a special jurisdiction for all navigational litigations. This could be a mixed judiciary commission, based at Sulina and called to take decisions in cases of commercial disputes between foreigners. Austria's Franz Karl von Becke supported the idea, and the commissioners decided to discuss it with the members of the consular corps and see if it fitted with the different jurisdictions overlapping Ottoman territory according to the Capitulations.⁴⁰

From 1861, with the creation of the Inspectorate and the nomination of Drygalski, the Commission served as a *de facto* Mixed Court, as the commissioners judged appeals against decisions of the agents charged to execute the Commission's regulations.⁴¹ The 1865 Public Act consecrated the Commission as a court of appeal when the sentences of the two executive agents (as judges of first instance) were contested. Attempts to create a more elaborate Mixed Court continued, and in 1867 the Austrian commissioner, Alfred de Kremer, raised the issue of which court was to judge cases of damage to the Commission's works and properties. His own version of the Mixed Court was made up of three commandants of warships, who rotated their positions. It would be responsible for judging juridical cases by making nautical

38 Ibid., Protocol 85, 24 September 1858.

39 For the juridical powers of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, see Joseph P. Chamberlain, *The Regime of the International Rivers: Danube and Rhine* (New York 1923), 186–187, 301–303 and Henri Walther, 'La révision de la Convention de Mannheim pour la navigation du Rhin,' *Annuaire Français de Droit International* 11.1 (1965): 815–818.

40 PECD, Protocol 132, 29 June 1861.

41 Ibid., Protocol 141, 30 November 1861.

appreciations and assessing the circumstances of major force and damages to be paid.⁴² However, Stokes voted against it, at his government's instruction.⁴³ This, of course, had to do with decisions of a navigational nature relating to violations of the Commission's regulations, not any other types of crimes.

An example is perhaps relevant for the workings of the Commission's complex bureaucracy and for its juridical activity. On 9 April 1880, the *Flora*, a packet owned by the Austrian-Hungarian Lloyd, was travelling downstream the river. The weather was foggy, and in a dangerous bend of the river its captain considered it advisable to go from the left to the right bank and signal from time to time, according to shipping procedures. While crossing the river, the *Flora* struck the British steamer, the *Barita*, and the force of the collision sank the latter in about five minutes. Six people drowned in the tragic accident. The Inspector of Navigation, Charles Dethier, proceeded to the site the next day and then to Galați, to interview the survivors. He included in his initial report two written statements from the two registered pilots (Andrea Lucovich and Dimitri Musaki) of the Commission, who were on board the two ships. According to regulations, they had to report on the accident to their chief. Dethier further included in his report the statements of the two shipmasters and interviews with the two pilots. His report was completed on 11 April, but a decision was difficult, as the two parties involved had opposite versions of the accident. Dethier considered the captain of the *Flora* to be blameless, as he had followed the Commission's regulations exactly. At the request of the Commission's bureaucratic management, the Inspector conducted a further investigation and drafted a second report on 26 April. He interviewed twenty-four people who were on board the *Flora*, including the Commission's pilot, and four members of the *Barita* crew. Based on all these documents and the testimonies of three fishermen who happened to be close to the site of the disaster, Dethier concluded that the captain of the *Barita* was the guilty party, as he did not obey the Commission's regulations. Captain Lambert was guilty of not abiding to articles 32, 34 and 35 of the Commission's Regulation of Navigation and was fined 150 francs.

Lambert appealed the decision, alleging that the fishermen were making false allegations and had been bribed to testify against him. The commissioners judged the appeal and reached the same verdict as Dethier. The two parties involved their consulates in the dispute and, at a meeting of the Commission, British commissioner Herbert Taylor Siborne claimed that the master of the *Flora* had failed to comply with the directive to slow down. Further remarks

42 Ibid., Protocol 198, 2 November 1867.

43 Ibid., Protocol 210, 21 April 1868.

concerned weather conditions on that day, as regulations stated that ships had to stop when visibility was low. But the biggest problem was that derived from the Commission's authority in relation to its own executive agents. Siborne contended that the Inspector had neglected one of the essential elements of the investigation and failed to consider fully the circumstances of the incident. Commissioners discussed the issue and the Inspector's powers, but no decision was taken, and individual governments subsequently reached their own conclusions.⁴⁴ The French government, for example, analysed the case in its national commission for disasters, which agreed that the *Barita* was the guilty party.⁴⁵

This is one of the cases which the Inspector of Navigation judged in the first instance, and the Commission as the court of appeal. The organisation had instituted fines for offences against the provisions included in its regulations, which varied between 10 and 50 francs. There were also fines for abusive language and assaults against the Commission's executive agents. Maximum fines could be doubled in cases where the infraction was repeated, and skip-pers were personally responsible for the offences committed by their crews. Appeals against the agents' sentences were judged by the Commission, which acted as a court of appeal when at least three commissioners were present.⁴⁶ Both executive agents were kept busy by a multitude of incidents. Between 1862 and 1890, 93 cases alone occurred in the jurisdiction of Tulcea. Most of the cases, however, consisted of minor infractions, such as anchorage in forbidden places, refusal to leave those places and blocking the navigable channel.⁴⁷ According to available sources, shipmasters generally respected the Commission's authority, which had established a sense of order and predictability that served their economic interests.

Although less known than the Mixed Courts of Egypt,⁴⁸ this transnational juridical system emerged from the same sort of rationality aimed at regional economic development. As the existing juridical system was unequipped for the busy trade and shipping of an international transportation infrastructure

44 Ibid., Protocol 377, 3 January 1881.

45 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve, Représentant de la France auprès de la Commission Européenne du Danube, File 184, f. 402–403 (Camille Barrère to Saint Hilaire, Galați, 17 June 1881).

46 PECD, *Acte public*, 2 November 1865, Annexe A, *Règlement de navigation et de police applicable au Bas-Danube*, Titre VI, *Des contraventions* (art. 98–111).

47 *The Hague – Permanent Court of International Justice Publications*, vol. 13-4-2, *Jurisdiction of the European Commission of the Danube between Galatz and Brăila* (PCIJ ser. C, [7]) (Leiden 1927), 525–528.

48 Mark S.W. Hoyle, *The Mixed Courts of Egypt* (London 1991).

regulated by an IO, the Commission experimented in regulatory matters and this played an important role in imposing juridical order in a periphery of the Ottoman Empire. The system was innovative and, in many ways, violated the sovereignty of the territorial powers, the Ottoman Empire and Romania. But it was a functional system and skippers and merchants were generally happy with the security regime, based on law and order, that the Commission had established along the Maritime Danube.

4 The Modern Organisation of Pilotage

The disorganised nature of pilotage had been one of the main complaints of seafarers during pre-Crimean War times, so the creation of a modern pilotage service was a top priority for the Commission. Already established by November 1856, in February 1857 it was subordinated to the Captain of the Port of Sulina. It became compulsory for all ships entering the Danube to take a local pilot on board, and provisional regulations for the pilotage service were drafted in March 1857. According to an updated version, pilotage was not only compulsory, but also a monopoly of the Commission, and sanctions were imposed in case of infraction.⁴⁹

The corps of Sulina pilots (first-class pilots) consisted of a chief pilot, a deputy chief, 30 first-class pilots, and an undetermined number of auxiliary pilots. Suitable candidates had to prove, in addition to conditions of age and residence, experience aboard seagoing vessels, and had to pass an exam. Pilots wore a uniform and carried a notebook in which they recorded their activities. The pilotage tax covered the corps' administrative costs, necessary equipment (such as boats) and salaries. The amount collected was divided into sixty-seven equal shares, four parts being due to the chief pilot, three to his deputy, and two to each of the pilots. To safeguard their honesty, pilots were forbidden to accept any kind of material compensation or be involved in any type of local business.⁵⁰

River pilots (or second-class pilots) had to comply with the same conditions of expertise and discipline. Piloting was optional for vessels going upstream, being mandatory only when travelling downstream. The price for this optional

49 PECD, *Dispositions transitoires sur le pilotage à l'embouchure de la Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 21, 31 March 1857; *Règlement provisoire sur le pilotage sur le Bas Danube*, appendix to Protocol 56, 9 October 1857.

50 *Ibid.*, *Règlement provisoire pour le pilotage sur le Bas Danube*, appendix to Protocol 117, 9 July 1860.

component was regulated by open market rules, but several conditions were set to avoid disputes. By 1859, the Commission reorganised the corps of river pilots, later placed under the supervision of the Inspector of Navigation.⁵¹

The regulation of 1865 further detailed the activities of Danubian pilots. A description is useful to show the institutionalisation of procedures and the Commission's focus on navigational safety. The Sulina pilots were conveyed on board vessels coming towards the port from seawards as soon as the look-out on the lighthouse tower signalled their approach. When on board, they informed the ship captains of the depth of water on the bar, and the captains had to declare to the pilot the draught of water, and the tonnage of the lading of their vessels. Second-class pilots were placed under the authority of the Inspector General, and were directed by a chief pilot – who had three offices, in Galați, Brăila and Tulcea – and by a deputy residing in Sulina. Commercial vessels were not compelled to take a certified pilot when going up the river if the masters themselves effected the voyage, but in downstream navigation, vessels of above 60 tons, rafts or trains of wood had to take a qualified river pilot on board. The same was required for vessels above 60 tons going upstream without the master of the vessel on board. Masters were to arrange with river pilots their payment for piloting upstream, but in case of disputes a maximum amount was set. The pilotage tax for vessels going downstream was included in the navigation dues charged at Sulina. Disputes between certified pilots and shipmasters were judged by the Commission's two executive agents when their intervention was required.⁵²

Pilots were a central institution of the security regime established by the Commission after 1856. Piloting in Russian times was depicted in bleak terms, as part of a system of banditry and corruption which steered vessels towards destruction rather than safety. The Commission invested a lot of energy in establishing a corps of well-trained and honest pilots, who were the organisation's most visible interface with its customers. It took a long time to establish this corps, which was eventually absorbed into the Commission's staff. As shipping experts with both indigenous and institutionalised knowledge of the river, they contributed to turning the Maritime Danube into a safer waterway.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., *Règlement*, 1865, Titre IV, *Du service de pilotage à l'embouchure et dans le cours du fleuve* (art. 69–81).

5 Regulating Lighterage Operations

Before 1856 the lighter service had been one of the plagues of Danubian navigation, as the owners of lighters offered no guarantee of honesty and were often involved in theft. In addition, they acted arbitrarily in setting rates and enforcing their contracts. The Commission was quick in trying to regulate the service of lighters. In December 1856 a union of local lightermen even protested against the works of the Commission for threatening their business model.⁵³

According to March 1857 instructions, the Captain of the Sulina port was to supervise the activity of the service and to judge disputes between the shipmasters and the owners of lighters. In September 1858 the Commission established a draft regulation for lighters, and debates followed on the creation of a Mixed Court to deal with theft by the owners of lighters. A provisional regulation was adopted on 26 July 1860, which further clarified the lightermen's activity. They had to register their vessels at the Harbour Master Office and be provided with a certificate issued by that institution.⁵⁴

The 1865 regulation divided lighters on the Lower Danube into two classes: 1. those employed exclusively at the Sulina mouth or at any difficult passage along the waterway; and 2. those involved in lading at an interior port to discharge at Sulina or in its roadstead. No person could undertake any lighterage operation without a proper licence. A commission assessed the condition of the vessel and certified its capacity in tons and burden in kilos of Constantinople. This examination had to be repeated each year. Vessels furnished with regular ships' papers could be employed occasionally to lighter other vessels, but skipper were required to make a special declaration for each operation, and to deposit their papers either at the office of the Captain of Sulina or at the office of the Inspector General.⁵⁵

There were several clauses related to the honesty of the parties involved, and the Commission tried to invest in shaping the morality of Danubian entrepreneurs. Lighters were not permitted to have any vacant space in the hold except that which could be duly recognised by the Captain of the Port when the vessels were licensed. The shipmaster being lightered had the right to place, at his own cost, a guard on board the lighter he employed. No lighter could leave

53 Ibid., Protocol 7, 17 December 1856.

54 Ibid., *Projet de règlement provisoire concernant le service des allèges sur le Bas Danube*, appendix to Protocol 85, 24 November 1858; *Règlement provisoire pour le service des allèges sur le Bas Danube*, appendix to Protocol 118, 26 July 1860; details also in *La Commission*, 266–268.

55 Annexe A, Titre v, *Du service des allèges* (art. 82–97) of *Acte public relatif à la navigation des embouchures du Danube signé à Galatz, le 2 novembre 1865* (Galați [1865]).

the port of Sulina without the written permission of the Captain, and as a rule lighters had to leave the port together with the vessels that they had lightered. When the re-lading of goods was done on board the lightered vessel, the master was required to provide a written acceptance.⁵⁶

In cases of presumed fraud or false statement of the capacity of the lighter, the master of the commercial vessel could request the verification of the tonnage by a commission specially designated by the Captain of Sulina or by the Inspector General. The examination cost was paid by the captain who required it, unless the inexactness or false declaration was proved, in which case it was paid by the owner of the lighter. If the captain of a vessel lightered had reason to believe that part of its cargo was fraudulently appropriated on board the lighter he chartered, he had to report it either to the Captain of Sulina or to the Inspector General, the Commission's executive officials who were to take the measures prescribed by their special instructions. If the suspicion was unfounded, the costs were paid by the captain of the lightered vessel.⁵⁷

These rules, agreed upon by the representatives of the seven Great Powers, played a decisive role in 'civilising' Danube navigation and in introducing a climate of honesty in shipping operations in the Maritime Danube. If, in the case of piloting, the creation of a corps of professionals was the solution to removing corrupt practices, for lighterage the solution was to bureaucratise practices and to set up clear procedures and enforcing mechanisms. In the absence of strong state authorities in the Danube Delta, the Commission introduced a complex paperwork system that placed local business on more solid, documentary grounds. The Commission had good reason to boast about its success in 'taming' a service that had proved very detrimental to general navigation before 1856.

6 Pensions for International Civil Servants

By the mid-1860s, when it was decided that the Commission would continue for at least several more years, commissioners started to discuss the possibility of setting up a pension fund for the employees who had been in service for the last ten years. The proposal came from France's commissioner, Engelhardt, who considered that supporting the staff who had been working in difficult conditions at Galați and Sulina was itself an 'institution' meant to secure and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

facilitate navigation.⁵⁸ However, the proposal was rejected by the Ottoman government, unwilling to negotiate such a possibility for a temporary commission. Discussions continued in the coming years, but to little avail.

In April 1868, eight of the most senior employees wrote a letter to the European commissioners. They had given up good careers in their countries to join an IO and to work in a harsh climate that affected their health. If such works had been done by a single European country, they claimed, employees would have undoubtedly enjoyed pensions from the respective state. They further referred to the example of the Rhine Commission, where employees were entitled to a pension, and decided to forward the request, quoted in the motto of this chapter, to their respective governments.⁵⁹

Commissioners discussed a pensions project, but the Porte again opposed the establishment of such an indemnity.⁶⁰ The Commission decided, however, to reward its long-serving employees upon their retirement, or upon the dissolution of the IO, with a financial bonus.⁶¹ Eventually, as the Commission was extended once more in 1871, the Ottoman commissioner, Ismail Bey, withdrew his opposition and accepted the pensions scheme, on condition that allowances were constituted by the creation of a special fund supplied by deductions from the employees' salaries.⁶²

A regulation for the establishment of a pension fund for international employees was adopted in 1871.⁶³ Employees could retire after a certain period of service, and received an allowance based on a deduction of 3 per cent of their income. Retirement was possible after ten years in some medical or social cases. The retirement indemnity was fixed as the average salary for the last five years of service multiplied by the years of service and divided by seven. A maximum of 30 years was considered, or 35 for those in top managerial positions. An increase of one seventh of a year per year was granted for those who resided at Sulina, where living conditions were worse than at Galați or Tulcea. The indemnity was paid directly to the employee, his widow or children.⁶⁴ The pension scheme and other advantages mentioned below further consolidated

58 PECD, Protocol 173, 26 April 1865.

59 Ibid., Protocol 206, 15 April 1868.

60 Ibid., Protocols 221 and 226, 30 October 1868 and 21 April 1869.

61 Ibid., Protocol 230, 26 April 1869.

62 Ibid., Protocol 255, 25 April 1871.

63 Ibid., Protocols 259 and 261, 6 July and 1 November 1871.

64 *La Commission*, 109–114.

the Commission as a functional organisation. The system was later used for other IOs, such as the League of Nations.⁶⁵

7 Categories of Staff and Their Immunities

In the early phases of its history, the Commission engaged its employees through renewable short-term contracts, and changed their salaries according to very subjective decisions. In 1880, the IO started to regulate the status of its staff through provisions of a more general and permanent nature, but it was only in 1884 that the eight commissioners established a table of all positions, divided them into classes and fixed the minimum and maximum salary for each employee. There were seven employees in the first class (the heads of the Commission's services), twelve employees in the second class (secretaries, archivists, chancellors, surveyors, assistant engineers, accountants and draftsmen), and twelve employees in the third class. Annual salaries varied between a minimum of 2,500 francs for some third-class employees and 20,000 francs, the maximum salary (to be earned after fifteen years of service) for the Commission's resident engineer.⁶⁶

In the following decades, commissioners drafted and updated a 'Regulation for the classification, advancement and promotion of employees', accompanied by a table of salaries, called the 'Normal Table of Treatments'. As this system seemed arbitrary and led to numerous disputes, it was replaced by the classification of employees by the services they worked in. New regulations were voted for in the early twentieth century when the 'Normal Table' staff included 66 people. Even more detailed regulations fixed the recruitment, appointment and advancement of staff, as well as their salaries, indemnities, allowances, discipline rules and retirement conditions.⁶⁷

The staff of the 'Normal Table' consisted of the bureaucrats employed in the Commission's services. Pilots, intermediary and lower staff were initially excluded from this privileged bureaucracy. The intermediary and lower staff consisted of employees such as foremen, shipmasters, guards, domestic servants, lighthouse keepers, sailors and workmen in the Commission's workshops and shipyards. The status of these categories of staff was regulated in 1906, when

65 Norman L. Hill, 'The Personnel of International Administration,' *American Political Science Review* 23,4 (1929): 972–988.

66 PECD, Protocol 413, 15 May 1884.

67 *La Commission*, 111–112.

the Commission settled financial compensation to be granted at the cessation of their employment.⁶⁸

The Commission was mostly interested in its bureaucratic structure and closely regulated the status of the staff in its 'Normal Table'. Over the decades, the organisation settled several advantages for its administrative and technical staff and for its pilots. They received, when employed, a flat-rate allowance to cover travel expenses for themselves and their families, furniture and installation costs in their Danubian residences. The Commission owned houses in Tulcea and Sulina, where some of its employees were accommodated. The others received a housing allowance, according to a variable rate depending on the employee's place of residence and their marital status. They were also provided with a heating allowance proportional to their salary and marital status. The Commission covered the expenses of its agents when travelling for official business. The reimbursement included travel costs, per diem and a daily allowance for hotels and incidentals. Special rules concerned the travel allowance for pilots and sailors. A flat-rate allowance was paid to allow employees to travel to their homeland during their yearly leave. An additional amount was granted for wives and children when they accompanied the employee. The Commission provided free medical care to all its staff, including temporary employees, and to their families. Medical assistance was given by the Commission's own medical staff in Sulina, and at Galați, Brăila and Tulcea by doctors approved by the organisation. Paid leave for sickness was also granted. Its duration varied depending on the employee's category. An extraordinary allowance was granted to the staff members who needed to travel abroad for health reasons, if certified by a doctor approved by the Commission. The IO could grant advances on salaries and wages in justified cases. Employees were entitled to have paid leave, but the greatest advantage was the retirement allowance granted to staff members who were of the age and seniority required by the regulations.⁶⁹

Francis Rey, the long-standing secretary general of the Commission in the twentieth century and a member of the Institute of International Law, took a special interest in studying the status of international civil servants, and used his Commission knowledge to refer in detail to the rights and immunities of this new transnational bureaucracy.⁷⁰

68 Ibid., 116–119.

69 Ibid., 111–113 and 330–333. More on this in Gabriela Vulpe, 'Aspecte sociale ale activității Comisiei Europene a Dunării,' *Acta Bacoviensia* 5 (2010): 231–240.

70 Francis Rey, 'Les Immunités des Fonctionnaires Internationaux,' *Revue de Droit International Privé* 23 (1928): 265–267.

8 Appointment and Promotion Procedures

Many of the early employees of the Commission came by invitation, according to an initial agreement among the maiden commissioners. In subsequent years, procedures for advertising available positions were set up. Staff already in service were generally preferred for promotion, and new people were employed through open calls for applications disseminated throughout Europe.

There was no quota for member states, and usually employment and promotion of staff went smoothly in the plenary sessions of the Commission. However, several incidents occurred, which are relevant in showing how an early IO operated. Such a dispute was sparked by the appointment of a second marine surveyor (*officier vérificateur*) which the Commission wanted to employ to survey the tonnage of the increasing number of steamers that plied on the Maritime Danube in the late 1870s. The British commissioner Herbert Taylor Siborne recommended a young candidate, Reginald Neate, for the post but the Executive Committee preferred to promote a certain Angelo Corsanego, a bossman or sub-inspector of the port of Sulina. Corsanego had 'a merchant captain's certificate and was of mature age', but was preferred because of his experience and seniority within the organisation. Siborne considered Neate to be more competent at surveying ships, but eventually he had to yield to his colleagues' choice.⁷¹ A further dispute concerned the first surveyor, a German employee named Boy, whose status the German commissioner, Johannes Arendt, wanted to exalt and thus remove him from the subordination of the British-led Cash Office.⁷² This dispute was also solved by a compromise.

By 1889, the Italian government proposed Commendatore Carlo de Amezaga, 'ex-Deputy, retired Captain Royal Italian Navy', for the post of secretary general, as 'no Italian has yet been among higher officials of the Commission'. Discussions of principles followed, with the French commissioner, the Marquis of Reverseaux, stating that the Commission 'should look to capacity and length of service more than to nationality'. Several commissioners felt there was no immediate need to fill up this post, which had been vacant for some time. Britain's Percy Sanderson also contended that it was not possible to keep an exact proportion between the nationality of employees and the amount contributed to the Commission's budget by the shipping of that country, as the Italian commissioner, G. Pascali Corte, seemed to have implied. In such a scenario, the English should account for 70 per cent of the staff. The proposal was

⁷¹ TNA, FO 881/3876, f. 1-4 (Memorandum).

⁷² *Ibid.*, FO 881/3984.

eventually rejected,⁷³ but in the coming years Italian and Romanian subjects were appointed to head some of the Commission's services.

9 Administrative Works in Favour of Navigational Safety

The Commission assumed the difficult task of transforming the river into a modern waterway by its activity in two main areas: undertaking necessary engineering works to remove physical obstructions and imposing a set of regulations in a region that hitherto had lacked any kind of modern shipping legislation. As much as Hartley's hydraulic works in Sulina transformed Danubian navigability, these rules and the enforcing institutions were equally important in contributing to the establishment of a security regime for international shipping.⁷⁴

The Captain of Sulina and Inspector General were responsible for enforcing a complex set of regulations on the Lower Danube, the most important of which were related to navigational safety. Vessels arriving from sea and entering the Sulina roadstead were required to hoist the national flag and to respect the regulations imposed by the Commission. Ships had to anchor in the place indicated by the chief or sub-chief of the pilots of Sulina, and the shipmaster or his second officer had to present the ship's papers at the Harbour Master Office. No vessel of more than 60 registered tons could cross the bar at Sulina without a pilot licensed by the local authorities (steamers making regular voyages could use their own pilots). If, owing to stormy weather, the bar was judged impassable, a blue flag was hoisted on the tower of the lighthouse to show that the pilots were unable to meet vessels in the roadstead.⁷⁵

As for navigation along the rest of the Maritime Danube, vessels were forbidden to pass if going in the same direction, while those sailing in opposite directions were not permitted to cross in places where the channel did not afford sufficient breadth. When two vessels met while proceeding in different directions, the one ascending the river had to steer towards the left bank, and the vessel descending towards the right bank, so that both went to starboard, as was customary at sea. It was the same if the meeting took place between a steamship and a sailing vessel navigating with a fair wind. When a steamer wished to pass another going in the same direction, it had to signal before

73 Ibid., FO 881/5874, 8 (Salisbury to Sanderson, London, 20 May 1889).

74 For some more theories of international relations 'security regimes,' see Robert Jervis, 'Security Regimes,' *International Organization* 36.2 (1982): 357–378.

75 PECD, Annexe A, *Règlement de navigation et de police applicable au Bas-Danube*, Titre 1, *De la police de la rade et du port de Sulina* (art. 7–24).

doing so by means of five strokes on the bell or five whistles, and by waving a flag on the forecastle or by hoisting at half-mast a blue flag by day or a white light at night. Upon seeing these signals, the vessel in front had to steer to the left and allow the other to pass on the right. As soon as the vessel following was half a ship's length from the one it was about to pass, the latter had to slow down until it had been passed. Masters of heavily laden vessels, or of laden vessels of less than 60 registered tons, were required to keep out of the way of steamers as much as possible.⁷⁶

Clear rules were also set for towage.⁷⁷ The towing-path had to be kept free from all obstacles which hindered its use (such as bushes, trees, enclosures, houses or other constructions), and priorities were imposed for all cases that led to disputes: when vessels towed in opposite directions met on the same bank or when vessels towed by animals met vessels towed by men etc. As detailed were the rules for vessels at anchor, stipulating where they could moor and anchor.⁷⁸

All steamships navigating between sunset and sunrise had to carry a white light that was easily visible at a distance of at least two miles, hoisted on the foremast head, as well as a green light on the starboard side and a red light on the port side. The green and red lights had to be fitted with inboard screens to prevent them from being seen across the bow. Sailing vessels underway or being towed had to carry the same lights as steamers except for the white foremast head light, which they were forbidden to carry. Steamers towing other ships had to carry two bright white masthead lights vertically, in addition to their side lights, to distinguish them from other steamships. Sailing vessels, convoys in tow and rafts were not permitted to navigate unless both banks of the river were visible at the same time. In fog, steamers had to reduce speed. In addition, the ship's bell had to be rung continuously, while a whistle had to be sounded every five minutes. Masters were required to anchor if the fog became so thick that they could not see the bank they were following or towards which they were steering.⁷⁹

The rules concerning strandings and shipwrecks are also illustrative of how the Commission imposed modern legislation on the Maritime Danube in an

76 Ibid., Titre II, *De la police du fleuve*, Chapitre II, *Règles pour les bâtiments qui se croisent ou se dépassent* (art. 26–37).

77 The first such regulation was *Projet de règlement sur le halage dans la Soulina*, appendix to Protocol 90, 24 November 1858.

78 PECD, Annexe A, *Règlement*, 1865, Titre II, *De la police du fleuve*, Chapitre III, *Règles pour le remorquage* (art. 38–39), Chapitre IV, *Règles pour le halage* (art. 40–46) and Chapitre VI, *Règles pour les bâtiments au mouillage* (art. 51–54).

79 Ibid., Annexe A, *Règlement*, 1865, Chapitre V, *Règles pour la navigation pendant la nuit ou par un temps de brouillard* (art. 47–50).

attempt to reduce the frequency of such disasters.⁸⁰ The captain of a vessel or raft grounded in the Sulina channel was bound to station a lookout to hail vessels and rafts coming downstream in order to acquaint them with the nature and place of the accident at least half a nautical mile upstream of that vessel. Steamers had to slow down to half-speed when passing places where a vessel or raft had run aground or foundered. The pilot was personally responsible if a wreck was caused by bad management. The captain and crew of a wrecked vessel were required to remain on board or on the bank near the spot where the accident took place until a detailed report was drawn up. Immediately after the wreck, the pilot was obliged to inform the Inspector General through his nearest superintendent. If the official considered it necessary to take immediate measures in order to safeguard navigation, he had to summon the captain of the wrecked vessel, who was then bound either to declare on the spot that he had abandoned his vessel or to act with his crew under the orders of the Inspector General who had to superintend salvage up to the point where the work ceased to be of public concern.⁸¹

The discharge of ballast on such a shallow river was also resolved. A provisional regulation was introduced in April 1857, as many vessels going upstream had been discharging ballast and thus creating additional navigational obstacles. In order to apply these rules on the entire Maritime Danube, the IO negotiated with the governments of the Principalities, and the regulation was implemented from 29 April 1858. The rules were supplemented in November 1862, and then included in the 1865 Public Act.⁸² Vessels were absolutely forbidden to throw ballast into the bed of the stream or into the road of Sulina, and it was equally forbidden to discharge it at sea in the neighbourhood of the roads at a bottom level of less than 60 English feet. The discharge of ballast on land outside the port of Sulina could only be effected on certain points of the bank determined by the Inspector General and indicated by public notice. To ensure the execution of these stipulations, every vessel in ballast leaving the port of Sulina on its way upstream had to be furnished with a certificate from the Captain of the Port 'stating the draught of water produced

80 Details in Constantin Ardeleanu, 'The European Commission of the Danube and the Results of Its Technical and Administrative Activity on the Safety of Navigation,' *International Journal of Maritime History* 23 (2011): 73–94.

81 PECD, Annexe A, *Règlement*, 1865, Titre II, *De la police du fleuve*, Chapitre VII, *Règles pour le cas d'échouement ou de naufrage* (art. 55–63).

82 *Ibid.*, *Règlement provisoire sur le jet du lest*, Appendix to Protocol 27, 27 April 1857; *Projet de règlement provisoire sur le jet du lest*, appendix to Protocol 78, 29 April 1858; *Dispositions supplémentaires au règlement provisoire sur le jet du lest, du 29 avril 1858*, appendix to Protocol 151, 13 November 1862; *La Commission*, 265–266.

by the ballast'. This document was kept on board throughout the voyage, to be produced whenever required by the Inspector General or his agents.⁸³

Another important aspect that the Commission regulated was the functionality of the lighthouses from the area of the western Black Sea coast. Lighthouses have always been an important means of ensuring navigational guidance and security for seafarers on the world's seas and oceans. Wherever it is built and maintained, a 'Pharos' is a marker of institutionalised navigation, a beacon that regulates shipping and keeps it on a safe track. In the Danube Delta, as huge quantities of alluvia carried each second by the Danube are deposited at the junction between river and sea, a lighthouse is a reliable landmark to make sense of a dynamic geography, in which everything, including river and land, moves and changes.

In 1856, the three lighthouses in the area (at Sulina, Serpent Island, and Schobler Sagui, south of St George) were administered by a French company that leased them from the Ottoman government. However, the Commission organised its own lighthouse service, and set a lighthouse fee in the navigation tolls it collected at Sulina. In 1867, the commissioners learnt that the amounts it paid to the lessee were much higher than the cost of administering the respective lighthouses. The Commission reduced the duties to the amount needed to cover the real costs, and decided to no longer pay for the Schobler Sagui lighthouse, whose contribution to Danubian navigation was only indirect.⁸⁴

In 1859, as shipping accidents occurred at the St George mouth of the Danube, the Commission decided to erect, at the southern end of the respective mouth, a lighthouse which would have the advantage of allowing ships to reach the Sulina mouth without being obliged to turn away from their route and follow the next mark, the Serpent Island. The lighthouse was built by the Commission's Technical Department in 1863 and was functional by May 1865. From 1878, according to the provisions of the Berlin Treaty, the organisation claimed the administration and maintenance of the Sulina and Serpent Island lighthouses without waiting for the expiry of the concession, due in 1884. The concessionaires were compensated for their loss.⁸⁵

Another important decision to facilitate navigation was the marking of the Sulina mouth by means of buoys, as detailed in Chapter 4. Finally, in 1857, the Commission organised a Rescue Service (Fig. 14) at Sulina and purchased a rescue boat. The pilots at the bar were employed for this purpose until November 1890, when the Commission adopted a Regulation for the Rescue

83 PECD, Annexe A, *Règlement*, 1865, Titre II, *De la police du fleuve*, Chapitre VIII, *Règles pour le jet du lest* (art. 64–65).

84 *La Commission*, 319–320.

85 *Ibid.*, 320–323.



FIGURES 13-14 The lighthouse of Sulina and the Rescue Service (1930)
SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA,
GALAȚI BRANCH

Service and created, under the direction of an instructor, a special lifesaving unit which was always ready for rescue missions. A year later a medal was established for meritorious acts of lifesaving.⁸⁶

10 A Statistical Perspective on Shipping Security

The combined effect of the Commission's hydraulic and normative activity of rulemaking was visible in the decrease of the number of accidents in the Maritime Danube. From 1861, the organisation kept precise records of accidents within its jurisdiction, and after 1867 published detailed reports on their causes. Each year the Commission recorded a large number of shipping 'accidents', which included collision, grounding, foundering and the like. Those that resulted in the permanent loss of a ship are referred to as 'shipwrecks'. As Table 6 below shows, during the period 1855–1860 available statistics report an incredible total of 120 shipwrecks: 62 in the Sulina roadstead, 42 on the coast of the delta, 3 in the port of Sulina and 13 on the Danube. During the next half-century 'only' 124 wrecks were recorded: 50 (40.3 per cent) on the coast of the Danube Delta, 37 (29.8 per cent) in the Sulina roadstead, 6 (4.8 per cent) in the port of Sulina and 31 (25 per cent) in the Maritime Danube. Chronologically, 71 (57.2 per cent) took place in the 1860s and 30 (24.2 per cent) in the next decade, whereas only 23 (18.6 per cent) occurred in the following 34 years.

TABLE 6 Shipwrecks on the Maritime Danube by place of occurrence, 1861–1914

Period	River	Port of Sulina	Sulina roadstead	Coast of the Delta	Total	Annual average
1855–1860	13	3	62	42	120	20
1861–1870	17	4	25	25	71	7.1
1871–1880	8	1	5	16	30	3.0
1881–1890	5	1	4	6	16	1.6
1891–1900	1	–	–	3	4	0.4
1901–1910	–	–	1	–	1	0.2
1911–1914	–	–	2	–	2	0.5
Total 1861–1914	31	6	37	50	124	–

SOURCE: *LA COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE DU DANUBE ET SON ŒUVRE DE 1856 À 1931* (PARIS 1931), 501 (ANNEXE XXI)

86 Ibid., 315–316.

Besides the improvements brought about by the legislative and technical activity of the Commission, another factor which contributed to the decline in the number of accidents was the quality of the vessels navigating in the Danube. The transition from sail to steam after the 1870s provided increased security against the rapidly changing weather conditions of the Black Sea. However, the larger vessels that began to arrive on the Danube did not ease the congestion. As the large steamers awaited their cargoes in the roadstead, thus avoiding the river's shallow waters, grain was carried to Sulina by a flotilla of lighters and tugs, which made the central branch of the river a very busy transport corridor and increased the opportunities for accidents (Chapter 9).⁸⁷ Thus, besides the sinking of seagoing vessels, the Commission also recorded 46 shipwrecks of lighters. Most of the accidents took place after collisions with larger steamers, which made it necessary to establish special regulations for their operation, as presented above.

Accidents on the Black Sea coast were also due to the usual factors that are responsible for disasters in maritime navigation. In more than half the cases bad weather, thick fog and strong currents were to blame. The sudden storms which plagued the area were especially dangerous for sailing vessels, but there were also many instances in which vessels were damaged by navigational errors, fire, or design and equipment failures. For example, in December 1878 the Greek ship *Bethlehem*, bound for Sulina from Istanbul, sank south of Sulina due to fog and violent northeasterly winds. Eight members of the crew were lost, and only three made it ashore alive. In March 1879, the Russian *lotka Sveti Haralambi*, with 70 tons of cargo, was driven onto the coast by a violent north-east wind, causing the death of two seamen and the complete loss of the vessel. The Russian schooner *Svistoi Georghii* was caught by a storm in September 1881 while lying at anchor. Its chains were broken by the combined force of the wind and the violent sea; two of the crew managed to save themselves, but the master and two other seafarers perished. A violent storm was recorded in October 1882, when no fewer than four vessels were shipwrecked. Another tragic case was the British steamer *Red Star*, which was loading in the Sulina roadstead when a gale struck. Three of the crew drowned and the ship, with a cargo of barley, sank the same night.⁸⁸

All these climatic conditions were exacerbated by the fact that the coastal waters near the Danube mouths were shallow due to alluvial deposits borne by the river. At the same time, the northeasterly winds pushed the ships directly

87 See the detailed statistics in Ardeleanu, *Evoluția intereselor economice și politice britanice la gurile Dunării (1829–1914)* (Brăila 2008), 311–347.

88 PECD, *Statistique de la navigation à l'embouchure du Danube*, 1878, 1879, 1881 and 1882. "État no. 9: Naufrages survenus aux embouchure et dans le Bas-Danube."

towards the coast, where few harbours offered shelter. Fog, poor visibility and darkness increased the problems for navigators. Human error or unfamiliarity with the region was another important cause of accidents. In February 1871, the Italian barque *Alexandro Secondo* suffered severe damage at the Sulina mouth, which the captain tried to enter without a local pilot. Refloated and anchored ten miles south of Sulina, it was abandoned by the crew who felt it was in imminent danger of sinking. Their attempt led to another tragedy, as four men drowned after trying to escape by landing on the thin ice.⁸⁹

Collisions were another frequent cause of accidents. In June 1868, the Italian brig *Allesandrina* sank in the port of Sulina after colliding with a British steamer. In December 1878, an Ottoman ship carrying ammunition sank in the port of Sulina after colliding with the Austro-Hungarian steamer *Thetis*, while in September 1896 the British steamer *Kylemore* was struck about four miles from the mouth by the British steamer *March* which was inbound from Port Said. As a result, the *Kylemore* sank and a passenger drowned.⁹⁰

Fires, caused by human error or accidents, were another significant factor leading to shipwrecks. However, in about 75 per cent of the known cases of shipwrecks on the Maritime Danube, the accidents occurred as a result of collisions between two ships, between a vessel and the riverbanks or with sunken ships. In August 1896, one of the Commission's barges sank at the forty-eighth mile following a collision with the British steamer *Trevanion*; two crew members died and the barge could not be refloated. In several instances, vessels navigating in the Maritime Danube collided with the banks, spurs or sunken ships. The British steamer *Castanos*, carrying about 1,970 tons of maize, sank at the Ismail Fork in June 1893 after colliding with the remains of the wreck of the *Carlo*. After this incident, the Commission initiated an ambitious (and dangerous) plan to remove the numerous wrecks, mostly by using gunpowder and dynamite.⁹¹

The remarkable activity of the Commission in terms of hydraulic and normative works is clearly visible in the number of shipwrecks recorded at the Maritime Danube. From an annual average of twenty shipwrecks in the late 1850s, the number decreased to only three shipwrecks between 1901 and 1915, all in the Sulina roadstead. The Commission could boast that shipping along the Maritime Danube was completely safe.

89 Ibid., 1867 and 1871.

90 Ibid., 1868, 1878 and 1896.

91 Ibid., 1876, 1880, 1893, 1896, 1901 and 1914.

11 Conclusions

Two conclusions are self-evident at the end of this chapter. The first refers to the gradual professionalisation of the Commission staff, an efficient transnational bureaucracy that updated its practices simultaneously with the consolidation of the organisation's status. Some of the most important values promoted in the organisation were loyalty and continuity, both very well rewarded financially. Given the uncertainty related to the Commission's lifespan and to the difficult living conditions in the Danube Delta, as well as the need for qualified personnel that were not easily available in southeastern Europe, the Commission's top management, both at the level of commissioners and heads of services, designed procedures that allowed the organisation to simply recruit and promote staff, which at the same time nourished the employees' corporate identity.

The second refers to the Commission's drive towards standardisation and simplification in terms of rules, norms and procedures. The organisation drafted hundreds of regulations and directives, much like current European bureaucracy, turning the Maritime Danube into an experimental laboratory of international administration.

The results of this security regime are clear when looking at Danubian navigation. The Commission recorded detailed information on shipping accidents. A quantitative analysis of shipwrecks shows how much safer navigation came to be in the early twentieth century as compared to the early post-Crimean War years. Hydraulic works account for a larger portion of this increased safety, but the Commission's normative work is as important. Regulations and enforcing institutions, navigational aids and a functional juridical system all contributed to turning shipping into a more secure business. With the organisation of pilotage and ligherage, the Commission invested in an additional dimension that aimed to attract entrepreneurs to the Maritime Danube: a friendlier economic environment, with more honest and remunerative services.

The Lower Danube and Romanian Nation-Making

We accept the strictest regulations designed to ensure freedom for all flags, we accept the most rigorous control for the application of these regulations, but we want to see that in Romanian waters these regulations are applied by Romanian authorities.

KING CHARLES I OF ROMANIA, 1881



1 An Invitation to Transnational Expert Cooperation

On 17 September 1883, Friedrich Martens, an Estonian-born diplomat and law professor, better known as the editor of a large collection of Russian diplomatic documents and as an active supporter of international arbitration and conciliation, sent a letter to Alphonse Rivier, the Swiss scholar who at the time served as secretary general of the Institute of International Law (IIL). The organisation had been founded a decade earlier in Ghent (Belgium) by several dozen legal scholars who aimed ‘to contribute to the progress of international law and become the legal conscience of the civilised world’.¹ Martens’ missive, published in the Institute’s journal, *Revue de droit international et de législation comparée*, was an appeal for the IIL to get involved, according to its status, in settling the juridical principles ‘upon which the international regulation of navigable rivers accessible to all nations should be based’. Such a normative work would render ‘a great service both to the practice and to the science of international law’, given the ‘exceptional importance’ that the navigation of international rivers enjoyed at the time.²

Martens bolstered his intellectual endeavour with references to the deviations from the legal principles proclaimed in 1815 as part of the ‘public law

1 Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge 2001), 41.

2 ‘Lettre de M. de Martens concernant la navigation des fleuves internationaux,’ *Revue de droit international et de législation comparée* (hereafter RDILC) 15 (1883): 626–627.

of Europe'. Serious inconsistencies had resulted in 'conflicts of opinion and misunderstandings' that had erupted, especially during a recent ambassadorial conference hosted in London, 'between the great European powers, on the one hand, and Romania, on the other'. Martens alluded to the meeting of representatives of Europe's Great Powers in London, in February-March 1883, for settling the international regime of the Danube, in continuation of preliminary decisions taken at the 1878 Berlin Congress. However, Romania, one of Europe's youngest independent states, stubbornly refused to accept the compromise reached in Europe's Concert. This solution allegedly violated its sovereign rights as a riparian state on the Lower Danube. The press followed the story with great interest, and various juridical views were popularised throughout Europe. It was, according to Martens, a 'confusion of ideas' which 'could have very unfortunate consequences, and even provoke serious conflicts between nations'.³

The Institute accepted the request, and a study committee was soon created. With Martens himself, Rivier, Baron Franz von Holtzendorff (freshly elected president of the IIL at its 1883 Munich meeting), Egide Rodolphe Nicolas Arntz of Brussels University, Louis Renault from Paris, Donald James Mackay (Lord Reay), Sir Travers Twiss, and Lorenz von Stein, some of the world's brightest legal minds were set to analyse the issue at a time when the employment of international rivers was eyed by imperial powers around the world.

Juridical experts in transnational epistemic communities had also closely followed Romania's diplomatic conflict with its former protectors. It was, to them, an issue which could have major consequences for the stability of the international system due to the simple, but essential question that lay at its core: finding the proper balance between 'the rights of a small state' and the 'interests of a great power'.⁴

Starting from such premises, this chapter aims to follow Romania's fight to defend its territorial sovereignty in 1878–1883, and how this dispute influenced the situation of the European Commission of the Danube, the international organisation that gained new functions and further prestige on the Lower Danube. This involves diving deeply into international relations and Romanian domestic politics at a time when Europe's political-military alliances and Romania's political establishment were both undergoing structural

3 Ibid.

4 Franz von Holtzendorff, *Les droits riverains de la Roumanie sur le Danube: consultation de droit international* (Berlin 1884), 100. A recent work that illuminates 'the relations between the imperial powers of Western Europe and states and societies outside Europe' is also relevant in this case – see Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge MA 2018).

changes. In this fluid context, the Danube Question contributed to turning the Commission into a fully-fledged actor of the international system, whose agency was to prove vital in securing the stability of southeastern Europe. The chapter will navigate between the second and the third layers of analysis, aiming to show how an IO regarded larger European security issues and how they, in turn, influenced decisions taken at Galați.

2 'A Gift of the Danube' – Thinking Romania's Geopolitical Relevance

From several perspectives, the political career of Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891) epitomises the making of modern Romania. The scion of a wealthy Moldavian boyar family, Kogălniceanu was educated in Lunéville and Berlin, in environments filled with French revolutionary ideals and more temperate forms of German nationalism and reformism. His passion for history and scholarship was boosted by his meetings with personalities such as Alexander von Humboldt or Leopold von Ranke. An early advocate of Romanian nation-making, Kogălniceanu published a synthesis of Romanian history in 1837, and later returned to his native lands with many others in the young western-educated boyar elite who aimed to instil in the Principalities a rather strange mixture of enlightened, liberal and socialist ideas. From the 1840s, Kogălniceanu was actively involved in Moldavia's intellectual and political life, and in the 1860s, as prime minister of united Romania, he imposed one of the most transformative political programmes in the country's history, with agrarian and electoral reforms, an educational law, and the introduction of the Napoleonic code. Kogălniceanu survived the deposition of his princely partner, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and continued to hold high-ranking offices in several liberal governments that followed the enthronement of the Prussian Charles I (Carol) of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (r. 1866–1914) as Prince of Romania.⁵

One of the top priorities of Romania's political leadership was to remove the formal suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, and the Eastern Crisis of the mid-1870s was an opportunity to move the diplomatic agenda closer to state independence. Kogălniceanu served as Foreign Minister for a short term in April–July 1876, when war was raging in the Balkans. He tried to negotiate with the Porte about the pending issues that loomed over Romanian–Ottoman bilateral relations; one of them concerned the border settlement in the Danube Delta and Romania's aspirations to have unobstructed access to the sea. In a dispatch to Safvet Pasha, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Kogălniceanu referred *in extenso* to the Vylkovians' plight (Chapter 3) and urged for a compromise

⁵ Alexandru Zub, *Mihail Kogălniceanu: un arhitect al României moderne* (Iași 2005).

over a territory (the Danube Delta), which had been 'in Moldavia's patrimony for centuries'.⁶ However, Kogălniceanu's proactive and militant diplomacy risked fuelling the Balkan fire at an inexpedient time, and his party had him replaced with Nicolae Ionescu, a rather obscure politician, but a vowed adept of neutrality.

Diplomatic bargaining continued in Istanbul, where Romania's claims were regarded as unreasonable. With Russia preparing for war, Kogălniceanu was reinstated as Foreign Minister in April 1877, and he immediately signed a convention that allowed the passage of Russian troops through Romanian territory, which moved the battlefield further south to Bulgarian lands. Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 24 April 1877. Romania followed suit, and a month later proclaimed its state independence. Unexpectedly, the assistance of Romanian troops proved decisive for Russia's cause during the siege and fall of the strategic Ottoman stronghold of Plevna in Bulgaria, and with the nation spilling its sons' blood, the country had great expectations from the future peace conference. Besides international recognition of state independence and indemnities for its human and material loss, the government also contemplated the levelling of Ottoman citadels on the right bank of the Danube and the return of the Danube Delta, unjustly seized by the Porte.⁷

For Kogălniceanu, as for Romania's entire political elite, this decision of European statesmen in 1857 (Chapter 2) had been a mistake for very evident reasons. Modern Romania had been created as a buffer state between imperial rivals in southeastern Europe with the mission of guarding a symbolic border, the Lower Danube. The Romanian Question and the Danube Question had been two of the major disputes of the Crimean War diplomacy, which then divorced them by granting the Danube Delta to the Ottoman Empire. If, for larger geopolitical calculations and the balance of power on the continent, vassal Romania was just an Ottoman outpost, Romanian patriots thought it was high time to let the country fulfil its true function – that of an independent and neutral buffer state strategically placed in between empires. Their political model, both in terms of constitutional organisation and international status, was Belgium.⁸

What Romania lacked was control of the Maritime Danube, a vital section not only for the economic interests of Great Britain and Austria-Hungary, but for its own survival. Grain accounted for more than 80 per cent of Romania's

6 Ministerul Afacerilor Străine, *Documente oficiale: neutralitatea României, neutralizarea Dunării, diverse* (Bucharest 1876), 76–77, 84–88.

7 Ministerul Afacerilor Străine, *Documente oficiale din corespondența diplomatică de la 5/17 octombrie 1877 până la 15/27 septembrie 1878, prezentate Corpurilor Legiuitoare în sesiunea anului 1880–1881* (Bucharest 1880), 9–10.

8 Frederick Kellogg, *The Road to Romanian Independence* (West Lafayette 1995), 14.

exports, and the ports of Brăila and Galați were the ‘lungs’ of its economy. Without the Danube, Romania’s economy could not grow properly, although it was not completely suffocated, as had happened in Russian times before 1856. The Lower Danube was one of the pillars of modern Romania’s national existence, which buttressed the country’s economic prosperity and international political status. To Alexandru Lahovary, a vocal conservative politician during the 1880s, Herodotus’ simile applied perfectly to the Romanian case: just as ‘the Nile made Egypt, we can also say that the Danube created the political and economic importance of Romania.’⁹ The construction of Romania’s identity as a ‘gift of the Danube’ was completed by the 1870s, and European presence on the Maritime Danube, materialised in the Commission, was further proof that Romania and Europe shared similar interests in the general prosperity and stability of southeastern Europe.

3 Southern Bessarabia and the Securitisation of the Maritime Danube

The conclusion of the Russian-Ottoman armistice in January 1878 was a major blow to Russian-Romanian relations. Romania’s envoy was not invited to the negotiations, and Russian diplomats gave formal assurances that they would watch over the interests of their military ally. The Bucharest government’s worst fears came true after being notified that Russia would annex Southern Bessarabia, in exchange for which Romania was to receive ample territorial compensation. For Russia and for Alexander II personally, the reannexation of Southern Bessarabia was ‘a question of honour and national dignity’, which would remove the last stains of the ill-fated 1856 Paris Treaty. Romania, it was added, would earn more by accepting a very profitable deal without turning the issue into an international dispute.¹⁰

For Romanian statesmen, this was a difficult exercise in political realism. In a letter to General Ion G. Ghica, Romania’s diplomatic agent to St Petersburg, Kogălniceanu gave full vent to his countrymen’s dissatisfaction:

9 Alexandru Lahovary, *Interpelarea domnului Alexandru Lahovary în chestiunea Dunării* (Bucharest 1881), 3.

10 Barbara Jelavich, *Russia and the Formation of the Romanian National State, 1821–1878* (Cambridge 2004), 268; the context in Sorin Liviu Damean, *România și Congresul de Pace de la Berlin (1878)* (Bucharest 2005), 49–62.

It is unworthy of a great empire to thus deceive a country that had given up everything on the assurances alone that the word of an emperor is worth more than a treaty. If they had wanted to despoil the Romanians of a part of their patrimony, it would have been honest to tell them that before the conclusion of the convention of April 4, before we crossed the Danube, before we saved the imperial army and perhaps the emperor at Plevna ... Then it would have been better to let the Turks be victorious, for they certainly would not have taken from us some of Bessarabia in case of victory.¹¹

The Foreign Minister's counterfactual argument was much exaggerated and self-eulogising, but his frustration over the nation being unfairly treated after Romania's greatest military success yet was genuine and widespread among his compatriots.

To many diplomats around Europe, Russia's claims were hardly surprising. The recovery of Bessarabia was, in fact, one of Russia's few clear aims during the war,¹² and it had been duly communicated to Europe's powers in bilateral negotiations during the previous years. Both in the Reichstadt Agreement of July 1876 and the Budapest Convention of January 1877, Austria-Hungary agreed to Russia's intention of restoring its sovereignty over Southern Bessarabia. Statesmen in Bucharest were also fully aware of Russia's determination to put an end to the infamous 1856 Paris Treaty, but they hoped that Romania's active involvement in the war and Prince Charles' personal relations with the imperial family would save the much-disputed province. With his historical background and political experience, Kogălniceanu could easily guess that, without strong international support, Bessarabia was a lost cause, and that it was perhaps wiser to listen to Russia's offer and accept the spoils of war.

But, for now, the nation had to stand united against its former ally. With Russophobic sentiments ripening among the country's educated classes, this was hardly difficult. A motion against Russia's territorial rapaciousness was passed in the Parliament in February 1878 with unanimous support from both sides of the political aisle. The government sent a memorandum to the European powers explaining Romania's position, and the importance of its keeping Bessarabia and being granted the Danube Delta, given the country's mission 'to guard, with energy and steadiness, free navigation on the Danube'.¹³

11 Jelavich, *Russia*, 269–270.

12 A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918* (London, Oxford and New York 1971), 246.

13 Damean, *România*, 55–56.

The press was equally unanimous in its defence of Bessarabia, a territory which until that moment was completely peripheral in Romanian public opinion.¹⁴ Not only its southern part, but the entire province, annexed by Russia from Moldavia in 1812, became the focus of a nationalist, anti-Russian discourse.

One of the most critical voices of the time was that of Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889), nowadays regarded as Romania's greatest poet. As an editor at *Timpul*, the mouthpiece of the conservative opposition, Eminescu lost no opportunity in slamming the liberal government for its weakness in defending the country's national body. He wrote extensively about the loss of Bessarabia, which was 'a question of existence for the Romanian nation'. Russia was a 'large and powerful empire, and we are a small and weak country. If Tsar Alexander II is determined to take Bessarabia under his rule, it is lost for us'. But it was not so much a matter of losing or keeping a province: 'the question is how we lose it or how we keep it'. Romania stood not just to lose territory but 'the confidence in the stamina of the Romanian people'. By

losing the land that dominates the mouths of the Danube, Romania becomes an insignificant state, whose existence or nonexistence would no longer be of any interest. [...] With the country open to the north and facing a strong neighbour, our strength can only consist in the economic interests that the West has for the Danube waterway and the Black Sea. So, there is no equivalency for this strip of land placed on the left bank of the Danube.

The compensation that Russia offered, Ottoman Dobrudja in exchange for Bessarabia, was a poisonous gift.¹⁵ Public opinion was inflamed on this issue, and Romanian statesmen had their hands tied in negotiating with Russia. European support was vital, though it was highly improbable that any power would intervene to defend a small country tricked by its own ally. The only way of turning a national wound into an international question was to insist on the direct connection between political control over the Bessarabian districts and free navigation on the Danube. In 1856, Russia had been stripped of this territory by a decision of the western powers, which aimed to push the empire further away from the river to give additional security to the principle of free navigation. By reannexing Southern Bessarabia, Russia hurt not only its former

14 More in Andrei Cușco, *A Contested Borderland. Competing Russian and Romanian Visions of Bessarabia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (Budapest 2017).

15 Mihai Eminescu, *Opere*, vol. v, *Publicistică, 1 noiembrie 1877–15 februarie 1880, Timpul* (Bucharest 2010) (*În numărul nostru de vineri ...*, 19 February 1878), 133.

ally, but also major international economic and political interests in the Lower Danube. London and Vienna were the capitals where this message could effectively be delivered.

The San Stefano Peace Treaty (3 March 1878) was concluded amidst growing tensions between Europe's Great Powers. Romania, Serbia and Montenegro were recognised as independent states, but it was the creation of the autonomous principality of Greater Bulgaria, stretching all the way to the Aegean Sea, that seemed to completely unbalance the already unstable Balkans. Articles 12 and 13 referred to the neutral and international character of the Danube (with the preservation of all rights, obligations and prerogatives of the Commission), and Article 19 mentioned the reprehensible territorial exchange: Dobrudja and the Delta Islands in exchange for Southern Bessarabia.¹⁶

The British and Austrian-Hungarian cabinets were discontented with the overall results of the peace settlement, and the cabinet in Bucharest focussed its diplomatic efforts in these directions. Ion Bălăceanu, Romania's agent to Vienna, reported that diplomatic resistance in the Bessarabian/Danubian Question depended on the position of the London cabinet,¹⁷ which had to defend its large share of the Lower Danubian shipping. Political forces in Britain regarded Romania's frustration over Bessarabia as legitimate and useful for checking 'the expansion of Slavism' and considered that Romania, together with Greece, could act as agents of 'Western interests and civilisation' in south-eastern Europe.¹⁸ In a speech to the House of Commons in April 1878, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield, defended Romania's territorial rights and referred to Britain's own historical role in securing free navigation on the Danube:

The Clause in the Treaty of Paris with regard to the cession of Bessarabia was one on which Lord Palmerston placed the utmost stress, and to which he attached the greatest gravity. It involved, he said, the freedom of the Danube, and, accordingly, Lord Palmerston treated it as an Article, not of local, but of European interest. It was inserted in the original Preliminaries of the Treaty, and an attempt was made subsequently by Russia to evade it; but Lord Palmerston attached such importance to it

16 *Documents Diplomatiques. Affaires d'Orient. Congrès de Berlin 1878* (Paris 1878), 21–31.

17 Vasile Kogălniceanu (ed.), *Acte și documente din corespondența diplomatică a lui Mihail Kogălniceanu relative la războiul independenței României 1877–1878*, vol. 1, fasc. I (Bucharest 1893), 137–139.

18 Nicolae Iorga, *Correspondance diplomatique sous le roi Charles Ier (1866–1880)* (Bucharest 1938), 330–331; the international context in Dwight E. Lee, 'The Proposed Mediterranean League of 1878,' *Journal of Modern History* 3 (1931): 33–45.

that, at one time, the Congress of Paris was near breaking up because of the efforts made by Russia to escape from that Article.¹⁹

Similar sympathy came from the Liberals and William Ewart Gladstone, who protested 'the mutilation of Roumania' and expressed the hope that Russia would not 'stoop to this petty spoliation from a humble but brave ally'.²⁰

But beyond such formal support, there was little to be done, and by April Russia and the other Great Powers were busily bargaining on pending issues. Chancellor Alexander Gorchakov called for 'calm and moderation', explaining that the annexation of Southern Bessarabia was a mere return to a situation altered in 1856 for reasons that no longer needed to exist. There was no connection between the exchange of territories and the freedom of navigation on the Danube, guaranteed by an IO, and which was to be carried out on the territory of a sovereign state, Romania. In subsequent arrangements, Russia greatly reduced its claims in the Caucasus and accepted a significant trimming of Bulgaria's southern borders, but the Bessarabian restoration was non-negotiable. It was a question of 'national honour and dignity', which was to be resolved irrespective of the vilification of an ungracious former protegee that owed Russia not just its state independence, but its very political existence.²¹

With active bargaining throughout Europe's capitals, the provisions of the San Stefano Treaty were soon absorbed into the Great Powers' politics of multilateral concessions and compromises, and freedom of navigation on the Danube was included among the strategic issues that had to be regulated and safeguarded during the future European congress. Romanian diplomats were not fully aware of all stipulations included in the secret agreements that paved the way for the organisation of the Berlin Congress. But it was clear that disagreements would be solved by bargaining, and it became vital for the cabinet in Bucharest to be represented at the forthcoming congress and to convince the nation that its diplomats were fighting for the country's territorial integrity and historical rights.

19 *Hansard's Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 239 (London 1878), 771.

20 R.W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question. A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics* (London 1962), 489; more on Romanian-British relations in Andrei Căpușan, *Evoluția relațiilor româno-britanice*, vol. I, 1876–1880, vol. II, 1880–1886 (Bucharest 2003 and 2006) and Constantin Ardeleanu, *Evoluția intereselor economice și politice britanice la gurile Dunării (1829–1914)* (Brăila 2008).

21 Iorga, *Politica externă a regelui Carol* (Bucharest 1916), 270; Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River: In the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to 1948* (New York and Boulder 1987), 345–346.

The Maritime Danube played a central role in Romania's defence strategy in 1878. The country was fated to be the guardian of the Danube and of its free navigation, regarded as a vital European economic and political interest and threatened by the hegemonic tendencies of Russia and Austria-Hungary. This leitmotif was reinforced in the following years, and the Danube Question, as it unfolded in 1878–1883, contributed decisively to shaping Romanian nationalism.²²

4 Europe's Concert and the Danube Question

Europe's top statesmen were summoned to Berlin in mid-June 1878 to harmonise the 1856 Paris Peace Treaty with the new political realities of south-eastern Europe. Notwithstanding previous arrangements, opposition against Russia was not mere parade, and the Danube Question was discussed during several official meetings in Berlin. On 29 June, European plenipotentiaries analysed the articles concerning Romania in the San Stefano Peace Treaty. Lord Beaconsfield referred in detail to the reappropriation of Bessarabia by Russia, which was more than 'a simple exchange of territories between two countries'. Moreover, as the British government could find no guarantees for the free navigation of the Danube, Beaconsfield waited for Russia's pledges to safeguard it. Gorchakov saw no connection between the Bessarabian and the Danube Questions. Free navigation, which was indeed a 'European interest', was not to suffer after the return of Bessarabia. Count Pavel Shuvalov, Russia's second plenipotentiary, added that the recovery of Bessarabia could be considered 'a matter of ambition and interest', but also 'a matter of honour' which was not motivated by a desire 'to interfere with the free navigation of the river'. Bismarck recognised the importance of the free navigation principle but agreed that for lasting peace on the continent, Russia's reasonable claims had to be observed.²³

Romania's delegates, Prime Minister Ion C. Brătianu and Foreign Minister Kogălniceanu, presented the country's position on 1 July. In his long historical

22 Richard Frucht, 'War, Peace, and Internationality: The Danube, 1789–1916,' in: *Southeast European Maritime Commerce and Naval Policies from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to 1914*, edited by Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, Constantinos D. Svolopoulos and Béla K. Király (Boulder and Highland Lakes 1988), 79–97. The process is similar to that played by the Rhône in France – Sara B. Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge MA 2011), 10.

23 *Documents Diplomatiques*, 157–161; Dimitrie A. Sturdza, *Recueil de documents relatifs à la liberté de navigation du Danube* (Berlin 1904), 112–116 (Protocol 9, 29 June 1878).

and juridical exposé, Kogălniceanu requested, among other things, the maintenance of Romania's territorial integrity and the return of the Danube Delta to the Romanian nation, its true master, under the assurances that an independent and neutral Romania had no other ambition but to be 'the faithful guardian of Danube's freedom at its mouths' and to develop the country's institutions and material resources.²⁴

Discussions continued on 2 July, when Baron Heinrich Haymerle, Austria-Hungary's plenipotentiary, presented a new version of Article 12 of the San Stefano Peace Treaty, which outlined Vienna's Danubian policy after Russia's return as a riparian state to the Maritime Danube. Haymerle proposed the neutralisation of the Danube on the section downstream of the Iron Gates (i.e. outside the empire's territorial reach) and a new status for the Commission, which was to include Romania, but stay independent of its territorial authority. Navigation rules on the Fluvial Danube were to be harmonised with those drafted by the Commission, and Austria-Hungary requested an exclusive right to carry out the technical works necessary for improving the navigability of the Iron Gates and to levy charges for covering the costs of such works. Other plenipotentiaries required more time to study the proposals, whereas Bismarck opposed any further debates, as the congress was tasked to accept, reject or modify the San Stefano Treaty, not to analyse in detail the future organisation of the Danube's regime.²⁵

Two days later, Shuvalov came back with a counterproject which did not refer to the neutralisation of the Danube, but guaranteed freedom of navigation for all nations, and proposed maintaining the Commission and harmonisation of the 1865 Public Act through a special commission, with the participation of riparian states. The differences between the two projects required an agreement between Russia and Austria-Hungary, mediated by France. The compromise stood at the basis of the final decisions concerning the Danube inscribed in the Berlin Peace Treaty of 13 July 1878.²⁶

Beyond sanctioning the exchange of territories (Southern Bessarabia for Dobrudja and the Danube Delta), the treaty referred to the Danube Question in articles 47 and 52–57. Article 47 entrusted the Commission with mediating the delimitation of waterways and fisheries in the Danube Delta, and Article 52 mentioned the demolition of fortifications along the river downstream of the Iron Gates and prohibited the navigation of warships on this section, except

24 *Documents Diplomatiques*, 161–166 (Protocol 10, 1 July 1878).

25 *Ibid.*, 178–180; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 116–119 (Protocol 11, 2 July 1878).

26 *Documents Diplomatiques*, 192–194; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 119–122 (Protocol 12, 4 July 1878).

for the vessels for river police and customs services, as well as the Great Powers' light warships allowed on the Maritime Danube. According to Article 53, the Commission was to include Romania, maintaining its rights, prerogatives and obligations on the section downstream of Galați 'in complete independence of the territorial authority'. A year before the end of its term, member states could discuss its prorogation or other changes in its status (Article 54). The regulations concerning navigation, river police and surveillance for the section between the Iron Gates and Galați were to be drafted by the Commission, assisted by the delegates of riparian powers, and harmonised with those for the section under the direct supervision of the Commission (Article 55). The Commission was to directly administer the functioning of the lighthouse on Serpent Island, and Austria-Hungary was to carry out the Iron Gates works and had the right to levy a tax for covering the expenses incurred by these hydro-technical programmes (Articles 56–57).²⁷

The outcome of the Berlin Treaty in relation to the Danube Question was a reasonable compromise for all interested parties, godfathered by the 'honest broker', Bismarck. Russia reannexed Bessarabia and became riparian to the Danube's northern branch, Chilia. But it refrained from requesting the Danube Delta proper, a territory where the Commission had carried out significant engineering works to the benefit of all European nations. By allowing Romania to acquire the Danube Delta, Russia transferred to the government in Bucharest the task of coping with the presence of an IO that functioned in complete independence of the local territorial authority. The western powers accepted these territorial changes and the guarantees that they had little effect on the preservation of the free navigation principle, embodied by the Commission, the guarantor of Europe's interests in the area. Austria-Hungary managed to remove any form of international control from its territorial waters, upstream of the Iron Gates, and formalised its hegemonic claims over the Iron Gates river section and downstream of it.

5 The Berlin Congress as a Security Management Institution

Scholars of the history of international relations and security studies have analysed Europe's Concert of Powers as an international security management institution that facilitated 'a peaceful adaptation to changes in the international system'. It is usually argued that the Concert ended with the Crimean War, but it is safer to say that it lasted throughout the long nineteenth century, at least in

²⁷ The text in *Documents Diplomatiques*, 291–293; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 123–124.

relation to some of Europe's hot issues. The Eastern Question was one of them. As the Near East had great potential to destabilise the entire continent, diplomatic conferences often convened to deal with regional problems in its south-eastern periphery: in 1858 to grant the Principalities a constitution, in 1860 to pacify Syria, in 1863 for the Greek succession and annexation of the Ionian Islands, in 1869 for the Greek-Ottoman conflict, in 1871 for the Black Sea navigation, and in 1876 to pacify the Balkans.²⁸ In all these instances, the powers followed security procedures designed to maintain order and peace. Beyond their diverging interests, they cooperated well and managed to secure the stability of the area and of the international system. These states also followed explicit rules of behaviour during their conference diplomacy: territorial changes were approved amongst the powers, and the honour and susceptibilities of member states were not to be challenged. Mutual consultation and collective decision-making, the creation of buffer states and the clear delineation of interests and of areas of involvement, interventionism by multilateral action, pacific settlement of disputes, communication and the provision of advance notification were among the main procedures followed in dealing with the frail balance of southeastern Europe.²⁹

The Berlin Congress was such a security management institution, as Russia was quick to acknowledge, forced by the collective response of the other Great Powers that the San Stefano Peace Treaty was only a preliminary settlement to be negotiated in the Concert for coming to a lasting solution to Europe's general stability. The military conflict itself followed a failed diplomatic attempt in Istanbul, and in the aftermath of the war, Russia resumed diplomatic bargaining with the other powers to resettle a functional balance in the area. The Berlin Congress was preceded by bilateral agreements, and the Great Powers acted as if linked to the system by legal and moral obligations. Eventually, when top diplomats convened together, they negotiated their claims and managed to conclude a reasonable, peaceful settlement.

Such operational rules and behaviour were understood and accepted not only by the Great Powers, but also by lower-tier states. The attitude of Romanian statesmen and public opinion in the Bessarabian/Danube Question is illustrative of this. Romania was itself an offspring of Europe's Concert, and its diplomats understood concessions and compromises were being made to secure

28 Peter Macalister-Smith and Joachim Schwietzke, *Diplomatic Conferences and Congresses. A Bibliographical Compendium of State Practice 1642 to 1919* (Graz 2017).

29 Based on Louise Richardson, 'The Concert of Europe and Security Management in the Nineteenth Century,' in Helga Hatendorf, Robert O. Keohane and Celeste A. Wallander (eds.), *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford 1999), 48–80.

Europe's peace. Prince Charles I knew it all too well,³⁰ and he often shared his thoughts on the matter with his father and advisor, Prince Karl Anton of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, Bismarck's predecessor as Chancellor of Prussia. Romanian statesmen such as Brătianu and Kogălniceanu, both educated in Western Europe, were equally aware of the larger picture of regional and continental interests. What made their assent to the 1878 changes more difficult was the feeling of legal and moral injustice created by the situation of being 'robbed' by a former ally with whom they had concluded an agreement to prevent that very outcome. The loss of Bessarabia was a serious territorial amputation, which the western powers accepted, apparently regretfully, for the sake of Europe's security. They even felt morally obliged to ask for an extension of the territorial compensation granted to Romania in Southern Dobrudja.³¹

All in all, for the Romanians the Berlin Congress was a harsh encounter with Europe's Concert, which had new offspring to take care of. State independence was recognised by several powers, pending the fulfilment of several conditions, including the acceptance of the territorial exchange. Frustration ran high in Romania, but, unjust as it was, the system had allowed the creation and further development of smaller actors surrounded by imperial rivals. In October 1878, the Parliament eventually voted in all necessary legislation, and the Romanian administration withdrew from Bessarabia and took possession of the Danube Delta and Dobrudja.

As Eminescu noted in an article, few things changed for Romania's mission as the guard of the Lower Danube:

Bessarabia was given to us to indicate our role at the mouths of the Danube, and keeping that piece of land was for us a European mission. The same Europe that had given it to us found it appropriate to take it back and gave us Dobrudja, renewing a mandate it had quietly given to us under the Paris Treaty: that of guarding the freedom of the most important artery of Eastern trade, not so much through our own powers, but through the lack of interference of a great power, whatever that would be, whose predominance would become decisive through its exclusive control over the mouths of the Danube. Fated to be the owners of a good which all great powers want to freely use, our weakness is a guarantee.³²

30 *Memoriile Regelui Carol I al României: de un martor ocular*, vol. IV, edited by Stelian Neagoe (Bucharest 1994), 127.

31 *Documents Diplomatiques*, 161–166.

32 Eminescu, *Opere*, v, 214 (*Anexarea Dobrogei*, 19 August 1878).

6 'In Complete Independence of Territorial Authority'

In the autumn of 1878, the Commission convened at its headquarters to take cognisance of the alterations in its constitution and jurisdiction, as they resulted from the Berlin Treaty. Updating the Commission's regulations, and mainly its 'Constitution', the 1865 Public Act, had already become imperative, as its decisions were being openly questioned by interested parties.³³ Despite this apparent sense of urgency, it took delegates and their governments six plenary sessions and more than two-and-a-half years to complete this task. It was eventually done by drafting an Additional Article to the 1865 Public Act, a document signed in Galați on 28 May 1881. Each of its nine articles was the result of complex negotiations both amongst the powers and with the delegates from Romania and Russia, who aimed to limit the Commission's impositions of their territorial sovereignty.³⁴

The proposal to secure the Commission's independence came from Austria-Hungary's Haymerle, and was supported by all the Great Powers given the difficulties which the organisation had previously faced in its relations with the 'territorial jealousy' of the Ottoman Empire. Russia was aware that the Commission, an agency of Europe's Concert guaranteed by previous collective treaties, had to be preserved in the Danube Delta, at least until 1883, when its twelve-year-long extension would expire. Russia never openly questioned its existence and rights, and the Commission was the reason Russia did not insist on the return of the Danube Delta, which it had lost in 1856, at the same time as Southern Bessarabia. The western powers, in their turn, were more than happy to continue with an organisation that, beyond its role in boosting economic prosperity, acted as both actor and arena for mediating political stability in a complicated inter-imperial contact zone.

When granted by the Berlin Congress, this independence was motivated by practical reasons resulting from the effects of the 1877–1878 war on the Commission (Chapter 4). 'The works and establishments of all kinds' created by the Commission, including its executive agents, were granted 'neutrality' by the 1865 Public Act, which 'in case of war' had to be 'equally respected by all belligerents'. This 'institutional neutrality' was followed by the formal or

33 The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereafter TNA/FO), Fund 881 (Confidential Print. Numerical Series), File 3861, *Correspondence Respecting the Execution of the Provisions of the Treaty of Berlin with Regard to the Navigation of the Danube, 1878–1879*, f. 1 (No. 1, Herbert Taylor Siborne to the Marquess of Salisbury, Galați, 4 September 1878).

34 The National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Appendix to Protocol 384, 28 May 1881.

informal granting of several privileges which the organisation enjoyed in the port of Sulina and along the Maritime Danube (such as exemption from paying customs dues for the importation of necessary goods for its works or financial autonomy – see Chapter 9). In 1871, at the London ambassadorial conference that dealt with the navigation of the Black Sea, the Commission's 'neutrality' was extended to its 'entire administrative and technical personnel'. However, in 1877, during the Russian-Ottoman war, some of the Commission's agents employed by the Porte by virtue of its territorial sovereignty, violated this provision by supporting their own country. The belligerents conducted naval operations that affected commercial navigation in the area, so European diplomats felt the need to clarify the independent status of the IO. What it actually meant was rather vague according to international law, and it was the task of the eight commissioners to clarify the exact relations between the Commission and its new host state, Romania.³⁵

In its 1879 spring session, the Commission discussed and adopted a new Organic Regulation, formulated to adapt its proceedings to a new administrative structure. Commissioners were to rotate as president for one plenary session, a period during which they managed the organisation's activities. The independent regime was legislated in a fully-fledged collegial institution, which replaced the formal Ottoman presidency. Equally, it prevented the rather odd situation of having a delegation of Europe's Concert 'presided over by the delegate of such a small state as Romania'.³⁶ Decisions were taken by a majority of votes in matters of form and for changes of the navigation tariff, but unanimity was required for substantive matters. It further settled the attributions of the Executive Committee (which ran the institution between plenary sessions), and the auditing of the Commission's financial proceedings, now done by the employees of the organisation, not by those of the territorial state.³⁷

In March 1879, the Romanian cabinet published several regulations detailing the administrative organisation of its newly acquired territories, and disputes of jurisdiction followed in harmonising them with the Commission's rights, privileges and immunities. Serious incidents occurred when Romanian troops,

35 Joseph L. Kunz, 'Privileges and Immunities of International Organizations,' *American Journal of International Law* 41.4 (October 1947): 828–862; Tiina Pajuste, 'The Evolution of the Concept of Immunity of International Organisations,' *East-West Studies* 8 (2017): 7–10 (online at <http://publications.tlu.ee/index.php/eastwest/article/viewFile/641/486>, visited on 15 August 2018).

36 TNA, FO 881/3861, *Correspondence*, f. 4 (Inclosure 1 to no. 3, John Stokes to Salisbury, Chatham, 22 October 1878).

37 PECD, Protocols 324–326 and 328–329, 13, 14 and 20 May 1879. It was voted for on 10 November 1879 (Protocol 337, also in Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 127–135).

dispatched to maintain peace and order in Sulina, were themselves the cause of local instability. On 11 May 1879, armed soldiers boarded a British steamer, the *Dilston Castle*, and prevented its crew from completing the loading of cargo in the vessel's hold. On 6 June, a Romanian guard shot in the direction of a Russian boat, and three days later a Greek sailor was wounded in a similar incident. Moreover, shipping was forbidden in the port after eight o'clock in the evening, a decision that greatly hindered the economic life of a busy harbour. Discussed in the Commission, these incidents were considered 'an attack on the freedom of navigation' and a violation of the organisation's attributions in securing the policing of navigation on the Maritime Danube.³⁸ A Romanian investigation ensued and the officer responsible was dismissed. Furthermore, the government in Bucharest pledged to restructure local administration so as to maintain tranquillity in the town, but at the same time prevent any further disputes with the Commission.³⁹

Such problems were caused by Romania's plan to appoint a harbour master at Sulina, a right it claimed that the Ottoman Porte had previously enjoyed. However, the Commission insisted on its total independence from the territorial authority.⁴⁰ Romania's opposition was unsuccessful, and eventually the Commission imposed its right of appointing, dismissing and remunerating the Commission's executive agents (the Sulina Harbour Master and the Inspector General of Navigation). These employees were also judges of first instance for offences committed in relation to the policing of navigation, and their sentences were given on behalf of the Commission.

Sulina's 'exceptional status' was equally visible in relation to its fiscal facilities. Romania was trying to impose its new administration in the Danube Delta, but the stipulations of its new economic policy infringed upon the Commission's privileges. These included exemptions from paying customs and municipal dues at Sulina, and exemption of customs dues in the ports along its jurisdiction for the importation of materials and goods needed for the organisation's hydraulic works. The Commission enjoyed full possession of the estates it used for its works and administrative services, was exempted from paying taxes for these estates, and paid only a symbolic contribution as mentioned in the 1865 Public Act. It could use the stone quarries of Tulcea and Isaccea and benefited from postal and telegraphic exemptions for its official

38 PECD, Protocol 333, 13 June 1879.

39 Ibid., Protocol 336, 28 June 1879. Some details in Ana Maria Cheșcu, 'Afacerea de la Sulina (1879),' *Studii și articole* 1.1 (2016): 11–12.

40 PECD, Protocol 340, 21 November 1879.

communications.⁴¹ Such privileges were not limited to the organisation's staff or possessions, as the entire town of Sulina was a free port where goods were not taxed. When the Romanian authorities tried to impose customs dues at Sulina, the price of coal and provisions increased by 60 per cent, to the economic detriment of thousands of international ships that called there every year.⁴² After long negotiations, the Romanian government agreed to grant tax exemption for all products required by the Commission and its technical works, and a similar privilege was extended to employees of the organisation in Sulina (see Chapter 9).

By virtue of its complete independence, the Commission took upon itself the administration and maintenance of the lighthouses that formed the lighting system at the mouths of the Danube. This decision was motivated by the financial benefits of direct administration, resulting from a long dispute with the company that managed the lighthouses in the Ottoman Empire.⁴³

Equally vital for a proper balance between public safety and free navigation was the settlement of quarantine procedures at the Lower Danube, an area often stricken by deadly epidemics of cholera. According to the final agreement concluded between Romania and the Commission, health regulations were to be developed and modified by an International Health Council established in Bucharest. This institution was to decide on the appointment and remuneration of health personnel, the installation and operation of its offices, the establishment and maintenance of a lazaretto, methods of collecting sanitary taxes and the destination of this income.

Another provision of the 1881 Additional Article concerned the Commission's flag, a marker of the organisation's neutrality and full independence (see Fig. 15). For many years the Commission had been using a special signal flag for its fleet of ships. The Porte had accepted it on condition that pilot or police vessels also flew the Ottoman flag. This had been inconvenient during the 1877–1878 war, when the Commission pledged its complete neutrality.⁴⁴

All these rights, privileges and immunities turned the Commission into a rather unique organisation in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It had acquired an exceptional status in the attempt to compensate for the limits of its host state, which did not possess the human resources and technical means to conduct the hydraulic and administrative works necessary to secure free

41 Ibid., Protocol 348, 15 December 1879.

42 TNA, FO 881/3861, *Correspondence*, f. 58 (No. 40, Siborne to Salisbury, Thames Ditton, 13 January 1879).

43 *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 319–323.

44 TNA, FO 881/3861, *Correspondence*, f. 4 (Inclosure 1 to No. 3, Stokes to Salisbury, Chatham, 22 October 1878).



FIGURE 15 Flag of the European Commission of the Danube
SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI
BRANCH

and safe navigation for all interested nations. Political considerations were equally important, and this independence was a further guarantee for completing the organisation's mission to secure the political stability of an inter-imperial contact zone. The Commission could not prevent war in 1877–1878, but the presence of international employees in Sulina had reduced the usual destruction caused during previous conflicts.

The Commission understood its status as not only providing legal and practical guarantees which allowed it to fulfil its task, but also as acting independently of Romania's sovereign rights. With so many rights and immunities along the Maritime Danube and in its 'internationalised headquarters' at Sulina, the Commission took independence in a territorial sense and acted as a full person in international law, endowed with a form of statehood over its jurisdictional territory. A weak state at the beginnings of its independent existence, Romania accepted this violation of its national sovereignty given the Commission's role in limiting the hydro-hegemonic claims of neighbouring empires. Already in 1883, a Romanian statesman and former prime minister of

the country, Dimitrie Brătianu, noted that the Commission was a state within a state. The positive part was that 'at least the river is not under an exclusive domination, but under that of the whole of Europe'.⁴⁵

With growing nationalism in the early twentieth century and the development of Romania's abilities to better administer Danubian navigation, this became a topic of continuous conflict between the government in Bucharest and the Commission. In 1927, a dispute between the two parties was judged by the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The case presented was 'the particular territorial competence of an institution charged with managing the uses of an international river'. The Court ruled that although the Commission exercised its functions in complete independence of the territorial authority, it was not 'an organisation possessing exclusive territorial sovereignty'. As it was not 'a state, but an international institution with a special purpose, it only has the functions bestowed upon it [...] with a view to the fulfilment of that purpose, but it has the power to exercise those functions to their full extent, in so far as the [instrument] does not impose restrictions upon it'.⁴⁶ The question returned to the agenda of member states in the pre- and post-World War Two context, and its solution was yet another complicated question related to the political fate of southeastern Europe (see Chapter 10).

In 1881 the Commission concluded a process that had continued for the preceding 25 years – supplying itself with attributions that would allow it to fulfil its task. Its hydraulic programme had proved impossible to accomplish without financial and administrative prerogatives, which in turn had directed the early commissioners to look for legislative, executive and juridical powers to regulate navigation on the Maritime Danube. The 1865 Public Act marked the Porte's agreement to trade sovereignty in exchange for increased functionality. With Russia's remilitarisation of the Black Sea in 1871 and return to the Danube in 1878, the Commission also assumed an important political role, as a collective European bulwark in a disputed borderland. The IO was regarded as the creation of Europe's Concert, an offspring born in the aftermath of an inter-imperial conflict and collectively nourished by its seven creators. It violated in many ways the sovereignty of a young state, but it also helped it cope with the perils posed by its greater imperial neighbours.

45 *Națiunea*, 2:183 (30 January 1883): 1.

46 *Summaries of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders of the Permanent Court of International Justice* (New York 2012), 116–132; detailed discussions in *Répertoire des décisions et documents de la Cour de La Haye, série I, Cour permanente de justice internationale 1922–1945*, vol. IV, *Les compétences de l'État*, edited by Peter Hagggenmacher and Richard Perruchoud (Geneva 2004).

7 'The Freedom of the Danube Is a Key Condition for the Political and Economic Development of Riparian States'

On 27 November 1881, King Charles I presented his message at the opening session of the Romanian Parliament. It was his first address after Charles' festive crowning as King of Romania on 22 May, exactly fifteen years after his arrival in Bucharest. His reign had not been smooth, and he had many moments of despair and frustration with Romanian politics and mores. But with his brave attitude during Romania's Independence War and in the ensuing Bessarabian crisis, he was regarded as a great statesman, a perfect embodiment of German seriousness and rigour transferred to southeastern Europe. The year 1881 had been complicated, dominated by political disputes within the governing liberal factions and by diplomatic efforts to secure the international recognition of Romania's royal status. But the Danube Question was the main topic on the political and public agenda, and Charles I chose to tackle it directly in his address, as shown in the sub-heading above and quote below:

The Romanians have always expressed their gratitude to those who have contributed to the freedom of this river from any exclusive preponderance. The freedom of the Danube is a key condition for the political and economic development of riparian states. [...] We do not want to harm anyone. But we want, we are obliged and we want the absolute freedom of the Danube, at least in our waters, and we are ready, now as in the future, to make any necessary sacrifice for ensuring the absolute freedom of navigation for everyone.⁴⁷

The royal message was, from several perspectives, unusual. It was full of direct references to Austria-Hungary, whose hegemonic economic policies Romania was criticising at its highest political level. By the mid-1870s, while in search of state independence, the conservative government in Bucharest had concluded a commercial agreement with the Viennese cabinet in highly advantageous conditions for the much larger and industrialised imperial economy. Romania had virtually become an economic dependency of the double monarchy, with about half of imports coming from the empire, and a third of its exports going in the same direction.⁴⁸ After 1878, liberal forces aimed to provide the country

47 *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I*, vol. 1, 1866–1886, edited by Constantin C. Giurescu (Bucharest 1939), 372–380.

48 Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *Dunărea, Marea Neagră și Puterile Centrale 1878–1898* (Cluj-Napoca 1982), 32–87.

not only with political independence, but also economic freedom. The early buds of economic protectionism date from that period. The economic pressure coming from the double monarchy, visible in blocking Romania's land trading routes under pretences such as epizooty, had turned the Danube into a vital resource for the country's economy, and free navigation for all flags was a way of preserving independence from an exclusive Austrian-Hungarian hegemony. The intention of the Viennese cabinet to secure its control over an important section of the river, the Iron Gates-Galați stretch, was seen as part of Vienna's plans to completely subjugate the country.

The royal address was hailed in both chambers of the Parliament. Romania owed its political existence and economic prosperity to the Danube, and free navigation was the strongest guarantee for its future. The Chamber of Deputies pledged to support the government and 'protect the freedom of the Danube and Romania's sovereign rights from any prejudice, according to European public law'.⁴⁹ The Senate came up with a similar motion,⁵⁰ but it was the reply from the conservative opposition, read by Petre P. Carp, that is worth mentioning.

Carp had studied literature, politics and law at the universities of Berlin and Bonn, and was considered one of the brightest minds of *Junimea*, Romania's most influential intellectual circle of the 1860s–1870s. Together with several colleagues, Carp had joined the conservative group in Bucharest, and imposed himself as a gifted realist. In 1881, he contended that, in the Danube Question, the liberal government had blended popular emotions with reason. In dealing with such sensitive issues, absolute tranquillity and confidentiality were required, and passions had to be put aside. With the press reporting daily on Danubian affairs, and with both politicians and the larger public greatly aroused on the issue, 'the passionate movement of the masses can only be satisfied with diplomatic success or, in case of failure, with war'. Carp shared similar views on the Danube's importance, but this very relevance compelled the country and its leaders to be ready to make sacrifices for its defence: 'Let us sacrifice some of our sovereign rights to obtain the protection of the entire Europe and not be isolated from two powerful neighbours. And perhaps by stripping off part of our sovereignty, we will be stronger than by keeping a harmful pride'. What Carp envisaged was a temporal and geographical extension of the Commission's term beyond 1883, but his response was a clear message for political pragmatism and the need for bargaining.⁵¹

49 'Proiect de răspuns la discursul Tronului,' *Românul*, 2 December 1881.

50 The debates in Constantin I. Băicoianu, *Dunărea. Privire istorică, economică și politică* (Bucharest 1915), appendix XVIII, 243–280.

51 Petre P. Carp, *Discursuri parlamentare*, edited by Marcel Duță (Bucharest 2000), 136–137.

The royal message had a huge impact both on Romanian and international politics, and public opinion. The Viennese cabinet instructed its minister in Bucharest to break off diplomatic relations with Romania, and in Vienna and Budapest several newspapers launched a strong campaign against 'Romanian chauvinism'. Meanwhile, Charles I was hailed in Romania as a true patriot who took a public stand against the enemies of the state and nation. With millions of ethnic Romanians living in Austria-Hungary, the Danube Question added to the wounds of the 'national question', the growing alarm caused by the fate of the 'Transylvanian brethren' exploited in the Double Monarchy.

8 The Fluvial Danube – between Austrian Hydro-imperialism and European Multilateralism

The dispute between Romania and Austria-Hungary over the Danube Question was not new, and readers will be taken back in time to its origins. It had started in 1879, when the Viennese cabinet launched diplomatic negotiations with the view of applying Article 55 of the Berlin Treaty. This stipulated that the regulation concerning navigation, river police and surveillance for the Iron Gates-Galați section of the Danube was to be drafted by the Commission, assisted by delegates of riparian powers, and harmonised with those valid for the river section under the Commission's direct jurisdiction.

The Austrian-Hungarian statesmen proposed creating not just legislative instruments applicable to the Fluvial Danube, but also designed the executive body that was to impose them. The best way to secure this superintendence was to create a sub-commission or an inspectorate composed of representatives of the three riparian states (Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania), led by an Austrian president.⁵² The Viennese statesmen thought that it was 'not advisable to intrust the three states conterminous to the river the exclusive right of supervision, as practically they would then have to superintend themselves; on the other hand, it would be difficult to exclude them altogether'. The best plan was to create this separate organisation, presided over by the Viennese delegate, whose presence would provide a guarantee for the supervision being 'real and effectual'.⁵³ The solution went somewhat beyond the Berlin Treaty terms, and aimed to secure the Double Monarchy's control over a river section beyond its territorial reach, where it had vital economic interests to defend.

52 TNA, FO 881/4301, f. 71–72 (No. 43, Edwin H. Egerton to Salisbury, Vienna, 18 September 1879).

53 *Ibid.*, f. 86–88 (No. 52 and inclosures, Count Alajos Károlyi to Salisbury, London, 21 October 1879).

The proposal was communicated to interested governments, which seemed willing to accept the Inspectorate as a temporary measure.⁵⁴ During its 17 December 1879 sitting, the Commission agreed to set up a committee (composed of the delegates of Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy), which was to draw up a preliminary draft of the regulations mentioned in Article 55.⁵⁵ The draft, completed in May 1880, stipulated the creation of the new organ, dubbed the Mixed Commission of the Lower Danube (MCLD), an agency with its headquarters in Ruse, Bulgaria, halfway along the Lower Danube. It was made up of four commissioners, three local ones and an Austrian-Hungarian delegate, who served as president and had a casting vote in case of equal votes. The MCLD was to have large attributions, influenced by the Commission's own status: navigation and port officials in riparian countries were its subordinates, and it approved the construction of public works which could affect river navigation. It was also loosely connected with the Commission, which was to judge in final instance disputes and complaints regarding navigation.⁵⁶

The Berlin Treaty had recognised Vienna's vital interests in carrying out hydraulic works for the improvement of the Iron Gates (i.e. beyond its territorial reach), where riparian states had to give it every necessary facility. This was not dissimilar to how the western powers had used their economic and political interests to justify the creation of an extraordinary regime at the Maritime Danube, embodied by the Commission. With major economic stakes at the Iron Gates, Austria-Hungary bargained for a similar recognition of its interests and, in 1871, gained the right to improve the Iron Gates, further confirmed at Berlin in 1878. In 1879, based on a similar argument, it requested from Europe's Concert acceptance to extend this privileged economic space to the rest of the Lower Danube, downstream all the way to Galați, wherefrom the Commission imposed its own jurisdiction.⁵⁷ To Vienna and Budapest, the Lower Danube was a corridor of imperial expansion and hydro-capitalism, like the railways through which the monarchy pushed its economic interests in the area.⁵⁸

54 Ibid., f. 95–96 (No. 70, Salisbury to Károlyi, London, 1 November 1879 and No. 71, Odo Russell to Salisbury, Berlin, 30 October 1879).

55 PECD, Protocol 349, 17 December 1879.

56 *Cestiunea Dunării. Acte și documente* (Bucharest 1883), 570–583.

57 The Viennese Foreign Office accepted this solution after disputes with the representatives of the local Board of Trade – details in Emil Palotás, 'The Problems of International Navigation on the Danube in Austro-Hungarian Politics during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,' in: *Southeast European Maritime Commerce and Naval Policies from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to 1914*, edited by Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, Constantinos D. Svolopoulos and Béla K. Király (Boulder and Highland Lakes 1988), 104–106.

58 Gerhard Rosegger and John H. Jensen. 'Transylvanian Railways and Access to the Lower Danube, 1856–1914,' *East European Quarterly* 29.4 (1995): 427–448; Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge

Two opposing visions on the role of commerce collided in the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Romania. For the Viennese statesmen, extending imperial control over the fluvial section was a civilising and moralising mission, like that pursued by other empires in their extra-European colonies. The Danube was the natural way to spread wealth and civilisation to backward territories, which already orbited around the industrialised imperial core. There were political reasons for this, too, as closer economic ties with neighbouring nation-states could reduce disparities and secure both prosperity and security in the empire's borderlands. Economic imperialism and the establishment of 'commercial colonies' in Europe's southeastern periphery was a way of turning states such as Serbia and Romania into stronger actors in complicated inter-imperial areas. The Danube needed hydraulic works, but also legislative and executive mechanisms beneficial not only for Vienna, but also for these small and weak states, which did not have the human and material resources to conclude such modernising programmes.

In Romania, such plans were analysed through colonial lenses. The cabinet had long fought for state independence and for having its full sovereignty recognised by Europe's Concert. Several remnants of foreign intervention were preserved in the Berlin Treaty in relation to the Jewish minority and to consular jurisdiction, but the nation was ready to claim its full independence. Romania owed its very existence to Western Europe's interests in having unobstructed access to a rich granary, and agricultural goods stood at the basis of its current prosperity. Economic nationalism gradually made its way into governmental programmes, but it came with sincere internationalism and openness in the country's foreign trade. It was vital for Romania to rely on free navigation in exporting its rich raw output, and the Danube was Romania's only natural waterway. In 1878, the seaport of Constanța in Dobruđja was granted to Romania, and this opened new perspectives of development, though at the time the new province was not connected to the Romanian mainland.⁵⁹ If, on the Viennese side, imperial economics was used to advance economic interests downstream of its territorial reach, on the Bucharest one defending a non-hegemonic, collective and international economic environment was part of the country's plan for preserving state independence.

2010); Pritchard, 'From Hydroimperialism to Hydrocapitalism: 'French' Hydraulics in France, North Africa, and Beyond,' *Social Studies of Science* 42.4 (2012): 591–615.

59 More in Constantin Iordachi, 'The California of the Romanians: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea into Romania, 1878–1913,' in: *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*, edited by Balázs Trencsényi, Dragoș Petrescu and Cristina Petrescu (Budapest and Iași 2001), 121–152.



FIGURE 16 Group photo of the Danubian Commissioners (1882)

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

In its June 1880 sessions, the Commission analysed the draft that envisaged the creation of the MCLD, and the IO soon became an arena of intense diplomatic negotiations.⁶⁰ What further complicated things was the provision to invite delegates of riverbank states. Based on the decision of interested governments, Serbia and Bulgaria were invited to have a deliberative voice, as resulting regulations were to become part of their national legislation.⁶¹ Giving equal voice to three new states (Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria, the latter not even a sovereign state) in an organism that represented Europe's Concert was an interesting and rather unique experiment at that time. And their silenced voices were soon to be heard loud and clear.

To the Romanians, the draft proposal contained 'symptomatic similarities' with the 1857 Navigation Act of the Riparian Commission, a document strongly opposed at the time by the western powers. Statesmen were, however, divided in their opinions and readiness for negotiations. During a visit to Berlin,

60 PECD, Protocol 364, 4 and 7 June 1880.

61 TNA, FO 881/3861, f. 248–249 (No. 194, Memorandum of Károlyi communicated to Granville, London, 4 May 1880).

Charles I was advised to come to terms with the Viennese project and conclude an agreement that was more remunerative for Romania's interests. Diplomats were advised to stay on the defensive and be ready to bargain, but Romania's more radical and nationalist ambassadors protested against this conciliatory policy of Foreign Minister Vasile Boerescu and demanded to openly resist Austria-Hungary's claims. In London, Nicolae Callimachi-Catargiu violently attacked Vienna's plans for economic and political hegemony, while in Paris Kogălniceanu was equally aggressive in making clear Romania's vital interests in the Danube Question:

We have plenty of goodwill, we feel all the need to have good relations with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. We very much value the goodwill of the Imperial-Royal government, but our rights, our interests, and our future do not allow us to accept a foreign hegemony in our waters! With all our desire to maintain close and neighbourly relations with the Viennese Court, *we cannot give in in this matter!* [emphasis in original]⁶²

The discourse of 1878 returned, with Russia replaced by Austria-Hungary as the imperial threat. The country was under assault, and it had to defend its sovereign rights. As the Viennese cabinet enjoyed the support of its allies, Germany and Italy, Romania needed to rely on Britain and France, and use the Commission as the guardian of Europe's interests. The Danube Question was inflated by the press, with both governmental and opposition papers insisting on the leitmotif that the 'freedom of the Danube is an indispensable condition for Romania's very existence'. The story of a small nation confronted with the hegemonic ambitions of an imperial neighbour was rewritten, with the hope that this time the country's moral and juridical rights would prevail.

Discussions on the project continued in the autumn and spring sessions of 1880–1881.⁶³ The Viennese government negotiated a compromise with the Great Powers and agreed to include in the regulation clearer references to the freedom of navigation and to the Commission's role as mediator between Europe's interests and the MCLD, which it considered reasonable to control. Western non-riparian states accepted the creation of the MCLD and Austria-Hungary's chairmanship, but by coupling it institutionally and

62 Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Cestiunea Dunării* (Bucharest 1882), 85.

63 PECD, *Elaboration des règlements prévus par l'article 55 du Traité de Berlin pour la partie du fleuve compris entre les Portes de Fer et Galatz*, Protocols 1 to 20, 4 December 1880 to 21 June 1881.

temporarily to the Commission they aimed at strengthening the latter organisation, whose term was due to expire in April 1883.⁶⁴

By early 1881, defending the Danube was Romania's most pressing political priority, and Eustațiu Pencovici (1836–1899), its commissioner since 1879, was busily fighting for the country's rights. After graduating from military school, he had pursued a career in the Romanian army, which brought him to the rank of colonel. But his greatest fight was that of defending his country's sovereign rights, a struggle that was closely followed and inflated by the press. One of Pencovici's strategies was to seek the cooperation of the delegates of the other two small riparian states, Serbia and Bulgaria. The Serbian agent, Alexander Nicolicić, consulted with his Romanian counterpart, and the Bulgarian delegate, Kiril Zankov, was allegedly secretly instructed to vote for the Romanian proposal.⁶⁵ But this entente between three of Europe's silenced diplomatic voices was only an apparent one, as the cabinets in Belgrade and Sofia were more willing to accept Vienna's (and Europe's) proposal in exchange for concessions in other issues.

A political crisis followed in Bucharest in early 1881 with the resignation of Prime Minister Brătianu. Although other reasons had been decisive, the Danube Question played an important part in this, allowing the new cabinet to distance itself from the too conciliatory Boerescu. Discussed in the Parliament in May 1881, the issue added new divisions not only with the conservative opposition, but also within the ruling liberal coalition. In such circumstances, the new cabinet resisted for only a couple of months before making room for the return of the radical liberals led by the same able politician, Ion C. Brătianu. A new scandal followed in the autumn of 1881, by the time of the royal address, when Callimachi-Catargiu, dismissed from his ambassadorial position and accused of not defending the country's interests, published a brochure containing his confidential correspondence with the Romanian Foreign Office and blaming the government's treasonous conciliation.⁶⁶

Negotiations in the Commission had also reached a dead end, so by the autumn of 1881 French commissioner Camille Barrère assumed, with

64 TNA, FO 881/4495, f. 1–7 (*Memorandum respecting Negotiations with Austria-Hungary relative to Regulations for Danube between the Iron Gates and Galatz*, drafted by F.L. Bertie, 7 September 1881, London).

65 Nicolae Dașcovici, *Dunărea noastră. O scurtă expunere până la zi a problemei dunărene, însoțită de textul Statutului de la Paris din anul 1921* (Bucharest 1922), 41; more on Bulgaria in Virginia Statelova, 'La Bulgarie et le problème danubienne (1879–1883); *Études Historiques* 6 (1973): 189–206.

66 Constantin Bacalbașa, *Bucureștii de altădată*, vol. 1, 1871–1884 (Bucharest 1927), 263–264, 273–274.

Austria-Hungary's blessing, the main role in finding a compromise within Europe's Concert.⁶⁷ Negotiations followed in the triangle between Barrère, Percy Sanderson (Britain's new delegate to the Commission) and Count Georg Wolkenstein (a special diplomatic envoy of the Viennese Foreign Office). Eventually, interested governments accepted the so-called Barrère solution.⁶⁸ Its main component was a new structure for the MCLD, which had four permanent members (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Austria-Hungary), and a fifth one was delegated alphabetically by the member states represented in the Commission. This solved the problem of parity of votes and Vienna's casting vote, while the presence of a Commission delegate was likely to contribute to the uniform application of navigation provisions by both organisations. Austria-Hungary had the permanent presidency, and the Commission was to approve the MCLD's regulations, but they were to be applied by agents appointed by the latter institution. The duration of both commissions was tied, and the Commission was to extend its jurisdictions upstream from Galați to Brăila, the terminus of maritime navigation.⁶⁹

The French project aroused the fury of Romanian politicians and public opinion. The same aggressive Kogălniceanu filed a motion in the Parliament and insisted on defending the country's sovereign rights. Stormy debates followed, but to no avail.⁷⁰ Romania came up with a new counterproposal: the regulation should be drafted by the Commission, its execution granted to riparian states, and supervision given to a delegate of the Commission. The MCLD was to consist of the three riparian countries, plus two delegates appointed by the Commission, the only form of IO the country could accept.⁷¹ In early June 1882, the French proposal was approved by a majority vote in the Commission, despite stubborn opposition from Romania and Bulgaria, and objections from Russia.⁷² However, by now, Romania was isolated diplomatically and in open conflict with Europe's Concert. The government was aware that it had to negotiate, but again public pressure made compromises more difficult to conclude.

67 TNA, FO 881/4596, f. 87 (No. 20 and inclosures, F.O. Adams to Granville, Paris, 3 September 1881).

68 Ibid., FO 881/4742, f. 30–33 (No. 42 and inclosures, F.R. Plunkett to Granville, Paris, 24 March 1882); more with details from Barrère's correspondence in 1881 and 1882 at Centre des Archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve, *Commission Européenne de Danube*, Files 184 and 185.

69 *Cestiunea Dunării. Acte și documente*, 775–780; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 204–212 (Baron M.N. de Ring to Eugen Stătescu, Bucharest, 17 April 1882).

70 Băicoianu, *Dunărea*, appendix XVIII, 280–350.

71 Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 237–246.

72 PECD, *Elaboration des règlements*, Protocol 24 (2 June 1882).

By 1882, although about to expire in April 1883, the Commission's prestige strengthened following developments in the Danube Question. It had gradually turned from a technical organisation that had accomplished an impressive engineering and administrative programme into a political thermostat able to contribute to the stability and security of the Lower Danube and of Europe. Its attributions had been further consolidated by the approval of the Additional Act in May 1881, when its independent status became fully operational. It did so through negotiations between interested governments, but mainly through the pro-active involvement of commissioners themselves, who understood the benefits for regional security of such an IO.

With significant rearrangements in Europe's political and military alliances in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the Commission was a diplomatic arena in which Europe's powers tested the solidity of their agreements and facilitated a peaceful adaptation to changes in the international system. Beyond their diverging interests, the Great Powers cooperated well and managed to use the Commission as one of the valves for balancing the international system. Linked by a network of legal and moral obligations, the Commission was an embodiment of Europe's striving for stability. Austria-Hungary and Russia were the powers most interested in the region, and they negotiated compromises in other disputes such as the Egyptian and Tunisian crises, which interested Britain and France to a very great degree.⁷³ Barrère's commitment to finding a solution is illustrative of the Congress's functionality, although it is fair to add that France followed its own interests by acting as a political go-between.

9 The 1883 London Danubian Conference – a Story of Inclusion/Exclusion

In accordance with Article 54 of the Berlin Treaty, the western cabinets took the initiative to summon a conference and conclude an agreement for the extension of the Commission's term, due to expire in April 1883.⁷⁴ The conference was to convene in London in early 1883, and one of the major issues to be decided was the participation of the small riparian states. The case of Romania was the most complex one. Was Romania to have a voice in Europe's Concert,

73 Armand Levy, *Comment la liberté du Danube est un question européenne*, in: *La Roumanie et la liberté du Danube* (Paris 1883), XXI–XXIV.

74 *Cestiunea Dunării. Acte și documente*, 828–829; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 261–262 (Granville to Lord Lyons, London, 28 October 1882).

considering its Commission membership, or was the conference reserved to the signatory powers of the 1878 Berlin Treaty?

Romanian diplomats lobbied to be accepted into the London conference. The official position, as presented by Foreign Minister Dimitrie A. Sturdza, was that since Romania was a member of the Commission, it could not be excluded from a conference 'convened to determine the existence and organisation of the institution itself'. Legally, its participation resulted from the provisions of the 1818 Aix-la-Chapelle Congress, when the Great Powers stated that if a meeting of Europe's Concert would be of special concern for other states, their decisions would become compulsory only if those countries took part at that conference.⁷⁵ However, several governments objected to inviting Romania to have a deliberative vote, as the small state had proven to be a trouble-maker. Giving it an equal vote with Europe's Great Powers could prevent a unanimous agreement of cabinets, and thus ruin the meeting's peaceful outcomes. Serbia and Bulgaria had similar claims, simplified by the fact that they were not members of the Commission, and, in the Bulgarian case, that it was still a vassal state.

The London Conference opened on 8 February 1883, after preliminary bargaining on the most important issues.⁷⁶ The agenda included three points: the extension of the Commission's jurisdiction to Brăila, sanctioning the regulations drafted under Article 55 of the Berlin Treaty (i.e. the MCLD), and extending the term of the Commission beyond April 1883.⁷⁷ The admission of Romania and Serbia was discussed two days later. The decision was to invite them with a consultative vote, as the conference declared itself to be a continuation of the 1878 Berlin Congress. Bulgaria was to be notified of decisions through the Ottoman ambassador to London, on behalf of the Ottoman Porte, its lawful sovereign.⁷⁸

The participants agreed to extend the Commission's powers upstream to Brăila, thus including the entire section of the Maritime Danube under its jurisdiction. As Romania was the only riparian country on both banks of the river, it was a new breach of its territorial sovereignty. The river regulations drafted under Article 55 were equally confirmed, and the Austrian-Hungarian

75 Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 275–283 (Sturdza to Romania's diplomatic agents, 9 and 10 December 1882).

76 Leo Andrew Maher, *Great Britain and the International Control of the Danube, 1856–1883: A Study of British Policy in South-East Europe with Particular Reference to the European Commission of the Danube*, PhD dissertation, University of Oxford (Oxford 1968), 149–173.

77 *Navigation du Danube. Conférence et Traité de Londres. Février-Mars 1883* (Paris 1883), 5.

78 *Ibid.*, 11–13 (Protocol 2, 10 February 1883); İlhan Ekinci, *Tuna Komisyonu ve Tuna'da Ticaret (1856–1883)*, PhD dissertation, University of Samsun (Samsun 1998), 206–211.

plenipotentiary announced that his country would make further concessions to secure the acceptance of the MCLD by riparian states. Vienna waived its double vote, provided Bucharest reciprocated (when the Commission's delegate was an Austrian-Hungarian/Romanian diplomat), and accepted the appointment of commissioners as proposed by Romania and Bulgaria.⁷⁹ A couple of weeks later, Vienna made further concessions, proving its desire to come to terms with the smaller riparian countries.⁸⁰

The conference later debated the issue of extending the Commission's term. In principle, all powers agreed to the prolongation, but Russia's plenipotentiary, Baron Arthur von Mohrenheim, only consented on condition that the Concert accepted the special status of the Chilia branch, which Russia had bordered since 1878. As early as 1879, Russia's Danube commissioner had attempted to remove that river branch from the Commission's jurisdiction. According to the Russian interpretation, as the organisation had focused its hydrotechnical works on the Sulina branch, Chilia was abandoned and the Commission had lost its rights over the northern part of the Danube Delta. Russia resumed its claims in 1882, when the imperial government planned to conduct a scientific and technical study of the Chilia sub-delta, a survey coordinated by Russian experts who were to act independently of the Commission.⁸¹ In London, Mohrenheim requested a special status for Chilia, and the western powers negotiated a compromise. Eventually, it was agreed that navigation regulations for the Chilia arm had to be based on those drafted by the Commission, but they were applied by the riparian states themselves, not by the Commission. Local states had to notify the organisation if they planned any engineering works and state how this influenced the overall hydrology of the Lower Danube. The compromise was to have Chilia as Russian territory with European legislation.⁸² Once this was agreed, the Commission's term was prolonged for 21 years, at the end of which the IO was to be extended every three years by tacit consent, until one of the signatory powers demanded termination.⁸³ This never happened and the Commission continued as such into the First World War.

79 *Navigation du Danube*, 14–17, 25 (Protocols 2 and 3, 10 and 13 February 1883).

80 *Cestiunea Dunării. Acte și documente*, 841–845.

81 Focas, *The Lower Danube River*, 377–379.

82 Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002), 136; Russia's diplomatic efforts in 1883 are detailed in Maher, *Great Britain*, 166–172.

83 *Navigation du Danube*, 51; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 458–460 (Protocol 6, 1 March 1883).

The London Treaty was signed on 10 March 1883,⁸⁴ and the European press, which followed the proceedings closely, considered it a triumph of international compromise, in which Britain secured its control over the Suez Canal by allowing Austria-Hungary and Russia to satisfy their interests on the Lower Danube. With Europe's imperial powers concluding an advantageous agreement to the detriment of three weak states in the continent's southeastern periphery, the stormy political agitation in Romania was far from finished. Even before the conclusion of the treaty, motions were filed in the Parliament, and young students protested in Bucharest in defence of the national cause. An open letter was sent to Georges Clemenceau, the leader of the French radicals, by the Romanian students in Paris. France was denounced as 'the accomplice of Austria', who wanted to instil its economic hegemony over Romania.⁸⁵

By March 1883, the political elite and public opinion in Bucharest were unanimous in condemning the unjust decisions of the Great Powers. The official position of the government on the London Treaty was made public in May 1883. After a presentation about Romania's efforts to safeguard free navigation on the Lower Danube and the country's right to take part in the London conference, Foreign Minister Sturdza announced that Romania considered the treaty as not binding, and it refused to accept six of its nine articles.⁸⁶

But during the following months, a gradual shift in Romania's foreign policy started to become visible, and its diplomats were instructed not to take further steps in the Danube Question. Romania was to seek a direct agreement with Austria-Hungary and escape the isolation in which the country found itself. Germany encouraged such a rapprochement, beneficial for the consolidation of peace in Europe with 'happy results in the Danube Question'. Brătianu had talks with Bismarck and the Viennese Foreign Minister, Count Gustav Kálnoky, and by mid-September the Austrian-Hungarian cabinet decided to waive the application of the London Treaty, judging that Romania's pledges provided sufficient guarantees to preserve the empire's interests at the Lower Danube.⁸⁷ A secret defensive treaty was signed by Romania and Austria-Hungary on

84 *Navigation du Danube*, 65–68; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 472–474.

85 'Adresa studenților români din Paris către deputatul Clemenceau,' *Resboiul*, no. 2010, 14 February 1883: 2.

86 *Cestiunea Dunării. Acte și documente*, 905–912; Sturdza, *Recueil de documents*, 416a–416m (Sturdza to Ion Ghica, 24 May 1883).

87 Gheorghe Nicolae Căzan, 'La question du Danube et les relations roumano-austro-hongroises dans les années 1878–1883,' *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 18.1 (1979): 43–61; Căzan and Rădulescu-Zoner, *România și Tripla Alianță. 1878–1914* (Bucharest 1979), 93; *Documente Diplomatice Române*, series 1, vol. 11, 1883, edited by Alin Ciupală, Rudolf Dinu and Antal Lukács (Bucharest 2006), 398–399 (No. 388, Ion C. Brătianu to Sturdza, Gastein, 7 September 1883).

30 October 1883, to which Germany adhered the same day.⁸⁸ Russia was the unnamed enemy in a treaty which was prolonged several times during the next three decades, marking Romania's *de facto* adherence to the Triple Alliance. It can be stated that Romania's foreign policy was directed, to a large extent, by the government's decision to reach a satisfactory agreement in the complicated Danube Question. The alliance remained the secret of a handful of statesmen, never discussed or approved in the country's Parliament. It did not prevent, however, further disputes between Romania and Austria-Hungary, and by the mid-1880s the two states started a long customs war that marked a new stage in the construction of Romania's national economy. Throughout the following decades, relations with Vienna and Budapest further deteriorated, but Germany was the partner Romania really wanted. The 1883 deal was a functional solution to the Danube Question, as the MCLD was never created. Romania's sovereignty was respected, but many in the country, noticing the rapprochement between Bucharest and Vienna, felt that the cause of the Transylvanian brethren had been betrayed.

10 International Law and the Danube Question

Romania's resistance to the Great Powers' will in 1878–1883 was motivated by the belief that its cause was not only morally, but also juridically right. The case was followed with great interest and discussed by experts in international law and international relations, who considered it illustrative of the structure and workings of the international system.

Several legal opinions were formulated by some of Europe's leading experts. One of them was Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt, the former French delegate to the Commission. In several pieces, he insisted on the justice of Vienna's position, given its vital economic interests at the Iron Gates and along the Fluvial Danube. It was true that Austria-Hungary was not a riparian state on that river section, but given that Europe had charged the Double Monarchy with the task of improving that difficult passage, 'could we consider as normal, I would even say as equitable, an exclusion which would place the immense Austrian-Hungarian traffic under the control of three new states, one of which is not even sovereign, and which, with their commercial fleet, play an insignificant part in Danube's navigation?' Not only economic reasons, but juridical

88 *Documente Diplomatice Române*, 476–478 (No. 444); the context in Căzan and Rădulescu-Zoner, 'Tratatul secret de alianță între România și Austro-Ungaria (1883),' *Revista română de studii internaționale* 7.1 (1973): 175–194.

ones supported Vienna's claims. IOs such as the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, the Commission and the MCLD existed through a delegation of sovereignty to a collective authority, which was exactly what Austria-Hungary was requesting at the time.⁸⁹

To Georg Jellinek, an eminent professor of public law at Vienna University, the international system was about power relations and the pursuit of purpose. Interdependence pushed rational state actors into cooperation, which sometimes resulted in the delegation of sovereignty and creation of international institutions.⁹⁰ There was nothing wrong about Vienna looking to exercise a legitimate influence and reasonable preponderance, and it was completely imprudent for Romanian statesmen to isolate the country, instead of seeking cooperation with its more powerful neighbour. As long as the imperial hegemony was kept within proper limits, it could be regarded as a means of supporting the existence of weak riparian states rather than as an instrument to absorb them. Jellinek regarded Vienna's influence as positive for developing commerce and increasing the prosperity and security of small states. The future would belong to international organs, and general interests had to prevail over private ones through cooperation, as envisaged by the 1815 principles.⁹¹ Another Viennese legal expert, Leo Strisower, had placed the dispute in a similar framework: the selfish tendencies of backward states fighting against the influence of larger nations that struggled for free and unobstructed trade had to be combatted.⁹²

But such opinions were rejected not only by Romanian legal experts,⁹³ but also by many members of the Institute of International Law. One of them was German Baron Franz von Holtzendorff, elected president of the IIL at the organisation's Munich 1883 session. Holtzendorff was invited to provide juridical advice to the Romanian government and he was not short of criticism for the Great Powers. The international system was based on the idea of free consented agreements by states, and in international river commissions the recognition of their absolute rights as executive powers was vital. Romania's rights had been recognised by its acceptance into the Commission on an equal

89 Éd. Engelhardt, 'La Question du Danube. Étude critique,' *RDILC* 15 (1883): 5–16; idem, 'La question du Danube, après la Conférence de Londres,' *ibid.*: 340–347; idem, 'Le droit fluvial conventionnel et le Traité de Londres de 1883,' *ibid.*, 16 (1884): 360–373.

90 On his juridical views, see Koskeniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer*, 198–206.

91 Georg Jellinek, *Oesterreich-Ungarn und Rumänien in der Donaufrage: eine völkerrechtliche Untersuchung* (Vienna 1884).

92 Leo Strisower, 'Die Donaufrage,' *Zeitschrift für das Privat- und öffentliche Recht der Gegenwart* 11 (1884): 680–727.

93 Such as Valerian Ursiano, *L'Autriche-Hongrie et la Roumanie dans la question du Danube* (Iași 1882).

footing with Europe's Great Powers. Austria-Hungary had many legitimate rights but imposing them did not mean that other weak states had to sacrifice their own interests. After giving an historical account of the Danube Question, the German scholar discussed the main juridical implications of the case in the form of nine questions that focussed on the exceptional legal situation of the Lower Danube. These included complicated points such as the fact that recognition of a state's sovereignty could not be wholly or partly revoked and that a non-riparian state's rights could not be extended to the detriment of a riparian country.⁹⁴

For Theodor von Bunsen, a German diplomat, jurist and liberal politician, the conflict had a much larger international relevance than the usual strife between a small state and a Great Power, as it touched upon the very founding principles and functioning of Europe's Concert. The diplomatic meeting in London questioned the importance of international conferences, the decisions of the Great Powers, and the position of a state which opposed their general will: 'The supreme control of Europe's affairs by the Great Powers is the capital fact of nineteenth century politics', and the first step towards a closer organisation of European nations into a 'great family'. But the London Conference also proved that Europe's leading states used such meetings not for a greater general good, but mainly to advance their own political agenda to the detriment of smaller states. To Bunsen, who reviewed several volumes published on the topic by international scholars,⁹⁵ it was no bad sign that most of them, writing independently of the others, had arrived at the same opinion: in opposing the decisions of the 1883 Conference, Romania 'only maintains its right' and 'defends the principle of the freedom of navigation', threatened by the diverging interests of Europe's leading powers.⁹⁶

The interest in the Danube Question and the Commission was manifest at the time in the discussions at the Berlin Conference, convened to transpose Europe's models of cooperation to the African colonies. Fourteen states attended the conference between November 1884 and February 1885, and legal experts from the IIL were among them. The conference aimed to solve several important topics, including the establishment of freedom of commerce on the Congo River and freedom of navigation on the Congo and Niger Rivers. In their discussions, the Danube and its commissions were mentioned as models of

94 Holtzendorff, *Les droits riverains* cit.

95 Among them F.H. Geffcken, *La question du Danube* (Berlin 1883); F. Dahn, *Eine Lanze für Rumänien* (Leipzig 1883); E.-L. Cattelani, *La Navigazione fluviale e la questione del Danubio* (Turin 1883).

96 Theodor Bunsen, 'La Question du Danube,' *RDILC* 16 (1884): 551–567.

international cooperation, able to bring commercial rationality and civilisation to that area. In his opening remarks, Bismarck linked European exploration and commercial movements along the river to the service of peace and humanity. But the conference remained divided on how the Congo Commission would execute its vast attributions, in many ways similar to those of the Danube Commission, and the colonial organisation was never summoned.⁹⁷

This encouraged the IIL to continue its transnational epistemic work of discussing and codifying the rules for the management of international rivers. A proposal was made by Martens in 1885, concerning which riparian states were to carry out administrative tasks through river commissions.⁹⁸ Engelhardt had his own version, somewhat more exclusivist, as it reserved internal cabotage to riparian states, which could grant this right to the commercial fleets of other nations.⁹⁹ Discussions followed in 1887, at the institution's annual conference, when other jurists contributed their own comments and adjustments. Eventually, on 9 September 1887, the IIL voted on a regulation that followed Martens' view. The project defended the rights of riparian countries, with full observance of their national sovereignty. River management was to be entrusted to river commissions, whose attributions resembled the institutions active on the Rhine and Danube.¹⁰⁰ But the jurists' normative work was to have little practical influence, and it serves here to illustrate the making of professional networks of scholars, and their interest for encouraging cooperation between states and the peaceful resolution of international disputes.

Romania's political decision in 1883 was to move away from the tyranny of public opinion towards concessions made through secret diplomacy, conducted by an enlightened elite. As Carp, one of the artisans of the 1883 Treaty in his capacity as Romania's ambassador to Vienna, had noticed, popular sentiments were not necessarily oriented towards peace, and it took wise statesmen to steer the ship out of dangerous waters. The episode marks a more realist turn

97 Yuan (Joanne) Yao, *Constructing the Ideal River: the 19th Century Origins of the First International Organizations*, PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science (London 2016), 168–188.

98 'Projet de règlement international de navigation fluviale présenté à l'Institut de Droit International dans la session de 1885, par M. de Martens,' *RDILC* 19 (1887): 171–174.

99 'Projet de convention sur la navigation des fleuves internationaux présenté par M. Éd. Engelhardt et extrait de la seconde édition (non encore publiée) de son livre: "Du régime conventionnel des fleuves internationaux,"' *ibid.*: 253–257.

100 'Règlement international de navigation fluviale, adopté par l'Institut de Droit International,' *ibid.*, 355–360; see also *Resolutions of the Institute of International Law Dealing with the Law of Nations, with an Historical Introduction and Explanatory Notes*, collected and translated under the supervision of and edited by James Brown Scott (New York 1916), 63–64.

in Romanian politics, and an orientation towards stability that came with understanding that the country had a regional and European responsibility after gaining state independence.

Romanian statesmen agreed, beyond partisan politics, that the country belonged to the large family of European states. As many of them were educated in the juridical schools of Western Europe, they envisaged 'Europe' as an association of independent states, but also as a community based on common historical values and juridical principles. Europe's Concert was a legitimate institutional framework for mediating the balance of the international system, where decisions were taken during conferences, and through treaties and clear dispute-settlement procedures. It was in Romania's best interests to accept this mechanism which had guaranteed its political existence. Independence meant inclusion in this family of nations, ruled by asymmetric and sometimes unjust (as was the case with the 1883 London Treaty), but functional laws.

11 Conclusions

The Commission was an embodiment of Europe's Concert, and the Romanian decision-makers accepted its positive role in advancing the country's national interests not only through its hydraulic programme, but also by impeding an exclusive hydro-imperial domination in the area. The Commission had contributed tremendously to the economic development of Danubian port-cities, but from the 1870s onwards it also assumed a significant political role at the Maritime Danube. The 1878 Berlin Treaty reconfirmed this status and increased the Commission's role, to the detriment of Romania's sovereignty. But equally it made Romania a member of this IO and consecrated its new status in the family of independent states.

After the 1883 London Conference, the Commission became a *de facto* permanent organisation. No member state required its dissolution until the First World War, and in the early twentieth century several requests came from Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece to join in the institution. The eight commissioners continued to meet twice a year at Galați to decide on the daily business of the institution, whose budget continued to grow. One of its increasingly serious problems was, however, growing nationalism from some Romanian statesmen, who started to question the Commission's large attributions and its violations of Romania's sovereign rights.¹⁰¹ Such contestations from riparian states, as

101 Iorga, *A cui e Dunărea?* (*Conferință ținută la Giurgiu în ziua de 9 noiembrie 1908*) (Vălenii de Munte 1908).

Chapter 10 will show, continued into the interwar period and eventually transformed the Commission into an organisation that more closely resembled the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine.

Sovereignty has been an important component of this story. In the long nineteenth century, sovereignty came with a rhetoric of honour and virtue, both imbued with the idea of 'manliness'. Honour, virtue and prestige had been significant markers that shaped the attitude of both imperial powers and young nation-states in relation to their sovereignty. Russian statesmen reclaimed Bessarabia to heal their Tsar's wounded honour, and they could not accept a foreign presence on the Chilia branch, while Romania's honour was violated by the hydro-hegemonic claims of its imperial neighbours. But as the Carp put it, 'by stripping off part of our sovereignty' and by accepting a multilateral protectorate over Danube's navigation, Romania could be 'stronger than by keeping a harmful pride'.

Europolis – from a Piratical Republic to a Collective Colony

There was almost no dry land here. The reeds and marsh came right up to the river, and then little by little, according to the work to be done, a solid band was formed along the river by ballast discharged from ships, so the soil there is made up of samples from every quarter of the globe. Nothing could be more cosmopolitan.

HUBERT LYAUTEY, 1931



1 *Europolis* – from Literary to Scholarly Interest

A graduate of the Naval College in Galați, Eugeniu P. Botez (1874–1933) served as ‘maritime commissioner’ of Sulina. He was charged, on behalf of the Romanian state, between 1909 and 1913, with the attributions which were not carried out by the Captain of the Sulina Harbour appointed by the European Commission of the Danube. Botez was later promoted to the rank of commander in the Romanian navy.¹ In the interwar years, he was one of the country’s leading experts in seamanship, but also enjoyed national fame as a writer: he authored several literary volumes under the pseudonym ‘Jean Bart’, a seventeenth-century French naval commander and privateer. Botez was a pioneer in Romanian literature through his interest in seafarers and maritime stories. His masterpiece is a novel called *Europolis*, an account of life in Sulina in the early twentieth century as Botez witnessed during his employment there.

To Botez, the place was ‘a small global citadel, a cosmopolitan port-city, which, though almost unique worldwide, is extremely original and very little known’. The prospect of easy profits had attracted adventurers of all sorts who came to Sulina ‘to fish in the troubled waters of the Danube’. Sulina/*Europolis*

1 A biography in Constantin Mohanu, *Jean Bart (Eugeniu Botez). Viața și opera* (Bucharest 2001).

was a 'mosaic of all races, nations and languages', an exotic port at the junction of East and West, North and South, rendered even stranger by the international organisation – 'a Europe in miniature' – that regulated the rhythms of its existence.²

Botez published his novel in 1933, at the peak of the Great Depression, when Sulina was far from its previous prosperity. Things had changed tremendously in the past century, as the Danube Delta got caught in an inter-imperial political and military vortex. Sulina was annexed by Russia in 1829, destroyed by the British navy in 1854, occupied by the Austrians in 1855, given to the Moldavians in 1856, returned to the Ottomans in 1857, bombarded by the Russians in 1877, taken over by the Romanians in 1878, caught in the crossfire during the First World War and defended by the Russians in 1916. Local authorities changed as often. One of the few things that remained unaltered was Sulina's position as a relay station at the confluence of river and sea. It was this strategic position and the Commission's technical improvements that turned it into the operational headquarters of an experimental international organisation.

By the interwar period the river had been 'civilised' by state-of-the-art hydraulic works, brigands had been 'disciplined' by modern regulations, and the town provided modern services to its inhabitants. But 'civilisation' also brought an end to Sulina's heroic times, when cunning entrepreneurs could earn many a fortune from trade and shipping. Mercantile imagination and private initiative were replaced by routine and social benefits generously paid for by the Commission. The hundreds of petty businessmen who had made Sulina's prosperity in the mid- and late nineteenth century were long gone, replaced by as many employees of the Commission. The IO's staff amounted, in 1930, to 359 people, plus 746 temporary workers, most of them based at Sulina.³ The town was a 'safe' place for navigation and for its inhabitants, but social insecurity during a period of sharp economic decline and uncertainty for the long-term development of the place made its prospects look bad. It seemed that the rule of law and institutionalised trade had destroyed prosperity and replaced it with some sort of 'vulnerable stability'.

In the late 1930s the Commission lost most of its attributions, coveted by revisionist Romania, eager to claim back its wounded national sovereignty. In 1948, under the direction of the Soviet Union, the last remnants of an 'imperialist organisation' were dismantled. A new, 'democratic' Danube Commission, based in Budapest from 1954, took over the role of securing navigation on the river (see Chapter 10). With the coming of communism, most non-Romanian

² Jean Bart, *Europolis* (Bucharest s.a.).

³ *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 109.



FIGURES 17–18 Sulina – aerial views (1930)
SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

inhabitants left, and a new workforce was attracted from the Danube Delta to populate several small factories established in Sulina, serving as proof of the Romanian authorities' determination to industrialise the furthest corners of the country. Industry collapsed with the post-communist privatisation of the 1990s, and the town now tries to survive by rebranding itself as a touristic venue with a fabulous and cosmopolitan past.

The marked socio-economic decline of a formerly prosperous settlement which preserves a vivid memory of its past glory has attracted a lot of academic interest from scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Sulina and the Danube Delta do not lack fashionable and thought-provoking approaches fuelled by their unique mix of geographical and historical peculiarities. Cultural anthropologists describe Sulina as a hybrid of margin and centre, and consider it an illustrative example of an area where fluid or liquid boundaries (conceptual, social and spatial) intertwine and interconnect. The town was marginal from a geographical-territorial perspective, placed as it was in a marshland at the end of empires. At the same time, Sulina was central to several fluvial and maritime transportation networks that rendered it easily reachable from the Danubian outlets of Brăila and Galați, and from the major commercial centres of the Black Sea and Europe. Placed at a crossroads of steamboat lines, Sulina had direct economic relations with Istanbul and Odessa, Vienna and Piraeus, Trieste and Marseille, London and Rotterdam. At a certain time in its existence, it acquired some central functions, and attracted experts, capital and know-how because of the Commission, which invested not only in the hydraulic improvement of the Danube, but also in developing the political, commercial and cultural relevance of its host town. Sulina's singular position was constructed in relation 'to the interplay of centre, periphery and boundary', an equation in which its liminal position between East and West acted as 'a divider and connector for its cosmopolitan inhabitants'.⁴

Despite such rich scholarly interest, Sulina's history remains little-known and this chapter aims to reveal several episodes in its fascinating history as – to

4 See for example Kristof van Assche, Petruța Teampău, Patrick Devlieger and Cristian Suci, 'Liquid Boundaries in Marginal Marshes. Reconstructions of Identity in the Romanian Danube Delta,' *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Sociologia* 53.1 (2008): 115–133; van Assche, Devlieger, Teampău and Gert Verschraegen, 'Forgetting and Remembering in the Margins: Constructing Past and Future in the Romanian Danube Delta,' *Memory Studies* 22 (2009): 211–234; van Assche and Teampău, 'Layered Encounters: Performing Multiculturalism and the Urban Palimpsest at the "Gateway of Europe,"' *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27.1 (2009): 7–19; van Assche, Martijn Duineveld, Raoul Beunen and Teampău, 'Delineating Locals: Transformations of Knowledge/Power and the Governance of the Danube Delta,' *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 13.1 (2011): 1–21, etc.

borrow from Valeska Huber's description of Suez – an 'imperial relay station'.⁵ Since its creation in 1856, the Commission was the main source of stability and prosperity for Sulina, and three dimensions relevant for making a security regime for navigation will be presented below: the political/administrative component, with the establishment of law and order through close cooperation between the organisation and local authorities; economic aspects, with the Commission's contribution to the commercial progress of Sulina, which resulted in its transformation into a privileged, tax-free international enclosure and the busiest port on the Danube; and the social dimension, with a cosmopolitan population which grew through international colonisation⁶ and had to face the many threats of Sulina's exposed position as a global contact zone of various forms of mobility.⁷ By mapping how the Commission dealt with very dynamic and illusive threats and opportunities, this chapter will illuminate the special relationship that an early IO had with its host town – the perfect example of an 'international locality' envisioned by Scottish law professor James Lorimer in the 1870s (Chapter 3).

2 Imperial Security-Making and a 'Piratical Republic under Austrian Protection'

Establishing law and order in Sulina, a faraway border town in the wild, wild East, was never a simple task. A combination of factors accounted for that, from its eccentric geographical position and rough climate to its demographic structure and administrative leadership. Consular sources kept referring to the anarchy that ruled in Sulina in Russian times (Chapter 1) under the lax control of allegedly corrupt officials. This vivid image of sheer banditry was presented in many of the Commission's subsequent publications. It was a benchmark to showcase the organisation's contribution to the 'civilisation' of what came to be the Danube's busiest port. In the following pages, narrative sources will be used to portray this image of anarchical destitution and how the Commission gradually started to have a say in bringing law and order to the mouths of the Danube.

5 Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge and New York 2013), 35.

6 Huber, 'Connecting Colonial Seas: The "International Colonisation" of Port Said and the Suez Canal During and After the First World War,' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 19.1 (2012): 141–161.

7 Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 1.

Sulina had been the scene of heavy fighting during the summer of 1854, when, in the context of the Crimean War, the British navy attacked the town in an attempt to annihilate its batteries. Captain Hyde Parker of HMS *Firebrand* fell while leading his marines, but his comrades eventually took the town. According to a report by Commander Richard A. Powell of HMS *Vesuvius*, the Russian military quarter in Sulina, an enclosure of 'about 50 Government houses, stables, storehouses, and a magazine', was 'entirely demolished, the houses destroyed, and nothing now marks the spot but a heap of ruins'. Most of the town, except for its main street, was set on fire.⁸

Danubian trade quickly revived in the spring of 1855, nourished by the huge demand for agricultural produce at a time when Russian grain exports were blocked by the war. With it, Sulina returned to its anarchical state. The first entrepreneurs to go back were the same allegedly dishonest pilots and colluding lightermen who created and exploited navigational obstacles to their profit. Johann Baptist Coronini-Cronberg, the Austrian general who commanded the imperial forces in occupation of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, decided to intervene and restore order at the mouths of the Danube. In July 1855, two warships, the *Ceres* and the *Gyula*, were sent to Sulina under the command of Major Baumrucker, who acted as military commander of the town. About 50 commercial ships, which were blocked upstream of the bar, hailed the Austrian arrival, and Baumrucker started to draft and impose rules. A municipal administration was established with representatives of all local nationalities, the revenue of the commune was fixed, and its income covered by levying moderate taxes. The piloting service was regulated, the lighthouse repaired, several wrecks were removed from the fairway, and the navigable channel was buoyed. Some sort of law and order started to be enforced, and money collected from the booming trade was to be used for the establishment of a hospital, served by military physicians. Engineers surveyed the area with the view to choosing the most appropriate river branch and mouth for improvement.⁹ Habsburg efficiency seemed to have 'tamed' the terrible Danubian 'pirate den'.

In early 1856, Lieutenant Wilhelm von Tegetthoff (1827–1871), in command of the *Taurus*, took over the Sulina station. Tegetthoff, a promising naval officer and, later in his career, *Chef der Marinesektion* of the Habsburg Empire,

8 'Admiralty, July 27, 1854,' *London Gazette*, no. 21576, Friday 28 July 1854: 2321–2322; details on the context and the several military operations at Sulina in Tudose Tatu, *Sulina. Asalturi însângerate 26.06 – 08.07 – 17.07. 1854* (Galați 2009).

9 Alfons von Wimpffen, *Erinnerungen aus der Wallachei während der Besetzung durch die österreichischen Truppen in den Jahren 1854–1857* (Vienna 1878), 211.

vividly depicted life at Sulina in private letters sent to his father in Vienna. Only the lighthouse and Greek church had survived from Russian Sulina, a ‘nest of thieves and a rallying place for rogues’, a town rising from the surrounding swamp along a narrow strip of land as the Danube flowed into the Black Sea. It somehow resembled Venice in a very primitive phase of its evolution, and was worthy of its nickname – the ‘New California’. In this dreary place light-erage was extremely remunerative for crowds of transnational brigands, who continued their unlawful practices and robbed commercial vessels of their cargoes. There were no fancy houses in Sulina, only ‘small thatched huts’, each accommodating dozens of people. Houses and people seemed poor enough, but enormous fortunes were spent in equally wretched pubs and prices of daily goods soared. These were good reasons, Tegetthoff thought, for the comparison with California. A census recorded 234 houses and 1,755 inhabitants, almost all of them men.¹⁰

The lieutenant further mentioned the Austrian attempts to clear the Sulina bar, an initiative that had brought to the Maritime Danube several engineers, capitalists and officers. Major Joseph Mitesser von Dervent was one of them. Dervent was appointed in charge of the Sulina hydraulic works and Lieutenant Tegetthoff applauded his rival’s fiascos in trying to clear the bar. Beyond the official reports of Austrian agents, these private letters show that removing the natural and artificial obstacles that impeded Danubian navigation was not as simple as the Viennese officials had believed. It was vital for them to start gathering knowledge on local geography, hydrography and commercial practices before being able to come up with a long-term solution.¹¹

A similar opinion is suggested by other sources that refer to the state of ‘perfect anarchy’ that prevailed in 1856 at Sulina, where the inhabitants had returned and ‘lived in complete lawlessness’ in a sort of ‘piratical republic under Austrian protection’.¹² Rather than believing that the Austrians managed to rapidly discipline such an eclectic party of unruly entrepreneurs, it is more probable that they insisted on resuming mercantile operations at a time when the grain market was booming.

10 Adolf Beer, *Aus Wilhelm von Tegetthoff’s Nachlass* (Vienna 1882), 108–137.

11 Ibid. See more recently, for the Austrian occupation of the Danube Delta, Luminița Gătejel, ‘Building a Better Passage to the Sea: Engineering and River Management at the Mouth of the Danube, 1829–61,’ *Technology and Culture* 59.4 (2018): 933–935.

12 Dr Michelson, ‘Trade in Connection with the Navigation of the Danube,’ *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle for 1858. A Journal of Papers on Subjects Connected with Maritime Affairs* (London 1858), 242.

Sulina remained under Austrian rule throughout 1856, and its occupation was hailed by many contemporaries who considered it the best solution for 'civilising' the place and its inhabitants. The Crimean War victors, however, as discussed in previous chapters, granted the Danube Delta to Moldavia, under the sovereignty of the Sublime Porte,¹³ and in 1857 transferred it into the safer hands of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴ By February 1857, the Austrian troops withdrew from Sulina, and the Ottoman authorities took over the local administration throughout the Danube Delta. At the same time, the Commission, which convened at Galați in November 1856, was interested in establishing law and order in the port of Sulina, the most vital settlement for the progress of Danubian trade and shipping.

3 Law and Order in Early Ottoman Sulina

In 1857, Sulina became part of the Ottoman sanjak of the Danube Delta. Troops, administrators and ships were assigned for the security of local inhabitants, but it took a long time to impose anything resembling law and order over a marshland with an imprecise geography and a bad transportation infrastructure. Provincial authorities were based in the town of Tulcea, outside of the Delta proper, about 70 kilometres from Sulina, a town reachable to this day by water only.

There were innumerable problems to be solved to remedy the state of sheer uncertainty which reigned in Sulina. One of them concerned the status of properties. With the transfer of territory from Russia to the Ottoman Empire, this needed to be clarified. When Russia had annexed the Danube Delta in 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople incorporated Sulina into a demilitarised strip of land along the Russian-Ottoman borderline. As described in Chapter 1, only buildings serving quarantine purposes could be erected, and Sulina flourished around the quarantine station established there in the mid-1830s. But following the merchants' requests for clearer land property regulations in the 1840s and 1850s, local Russian authorities seemed more disposed to disregard the allegedly provisional character of the town.

As land was scarce, it was extremely valuable. New administrative decisions concerning estates were taken in Austrian times in 1855–1856, so the status of properties was even more unclear when the Ottomans settled in at Sulina

13 *Congrès de Paris 1856* (Paris 1856), 13.

14 *Hertslet's Commercial Treaties: A Collection of Treaties and Conventions, Between Great Britain and Foreign Powers*, vol. 10 (London 1859), 553–554.

in early 1857. Ottoman commissioner Ömer Fevzi Pasha, who also served as governor of the Danube Delta, reported to his government about the foreign merchants' requests to buy land. The only way to reject such petitions was 'to make these estates the private property of the Sultan' and allow them to be rented, but not sold.¹⁵ However, according to the 1856 Paris Peace Treaty, the inhabitants of the territory lost by Russia had a respite period of three years in which they were 'permitted to transfer their domicile elsewhere, disposing freely of their property'.¹⁶ Clarifying property rights was an important part in the execution of the treaty, and it allowed consuls to interfere in the process on behalf of their subjects. Soon, local inhabitants started to complain about being deprived of the land they had formerly occupied or of not being allowed 'to rebuild their burnt houses or to acquire ground and build elsewhere'. With complete urban chaos and very little land available on the marshy island where Sulina lies, the Ottoman authorities promised, by August 1857, to bring civil engineers to plan out the town, while an administrative board was to be appointed to investigate disputed property titles.¹⁷

By then there were about 3,000 inhabitants in the town, many of them Ionians with British protection. Thousands of seafarers, whose ships were often blocked at Sulina, added to a much larger floating population. Approximately 150 Ottoman troops were stationed in the port to keep order in Sulina, but they had difficulty controlling a hostile Christian population that had lived well in Russian and Austrian times. Violence was common and when, in May 1857, two Ottoman marines murdered a local Ionian, tensions were on the verge of exploding.¹⁸ When Rashid Bey, newly appointed kaymakam of Sulina, arrived at his residence in August 1857, he struggled to cope with the anarchy of a town in the making.

A contemporary narrative is perhaps best placed to portray living conditions in a settlement that was emerging from the oozing marshes of the Danube Delta. To German physician Wilhelm Haam, who arrived in Sulina in 1857, the place was much like Dante's inferno: a 'city of agony and condemnation' where voyagers should better 'abandon all hope'. Haam emphasised the material fragility of the entire town, where 'houses', or rather tents, were built

15 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı (Republic of Turkey Presidential State Archives, formerly known as Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi – hereafter BOA), HR.SYS 1604/55 (5 February 1857) and I.DH 413/27364 (25 S 1275) (4 October 1858).

16 *Congrès de Paris*, 13 (Article 21).

17 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Public Record Office, Foreign Office, Fund 195 (The Ottoman Empire), File 523, f. 583 (St Vincent Lloyd to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, Sulina, 20 August 1857).

18 *Ibid.*, f. 542–546 (the same, 27 May 1857).

from textiles, reeds or parts of shipwrecked vessels. The main street consisted of two long rows of such provisional huts, filled with the most diverse people one could imagine. But what stunned the visitor was the ‘unfathomable turmoil, the screaming, singing, laughing, whistling, calling, melody’ he encountered. Every building was at the same time ‘a shop, a tavern and a playroom’. ‘Craftsmen, peaceful citizens, families do not exist here’, in a place where ‘the dregs of entire Europe came together: runaway sailors, hunted pirates, escaped galley convicts, murderers, who hide from the law or from the blood revenge, gamblers who are too well-known everywhere else, deserters, crooks of every kind and category’. All found safe refuge under the lax local Ottoman authorities, as they had done in Russian times in a town which needed labour and where people could earn fortunes in lighterage operations.¹⁹

In a report sent to the Foreign Office, Joseph Hutton Dupuis (1827–1903), Britain’s vice-consul in Sulina from 1860–1872, provided more details on the nature of property claims in Ottoman Sulina. The Ottomans had become masters of the town, but most estates belonged to Christian subjects. Dupuis accused the local authorities of pursuing a systematic policy of spoliation, oppression and violence against the Christian inhabitants. They elected, nevertheless, four of the eight members of the local Medjlis, the ‘Legislative Council’ presided over by the *kadı*, but their political power was however extremely limited.²⁰

Returning to 1857, with a town in the making on the empire’s northern border, Ottoman authorities were no guarantee for the security of Danubian navigation.²¹ In such circumstances, commissioners from Galați felt they had to get involved in pacifying Sulina.²² They started to draft regulations for navigation, piloting and lighterage etc. and looked to impose them by using their formal and informal authority. The ambiguous legal situation of an Ottoman territory under an international jurisdiction proved helpful for turning Sulina into an administrative experiment. Even more helpful was a military force readily available for European delegates to enforce their authority.

19 Wilhelm Haam, *Südöstliche Steppen und Städte, nach einiger Anschauung geschildert* (Frankfurt am Main 1862), 61–87.

20 Captain S.G.B. St Clair and Charles A. Brophy, *A Residence in Bulgaria: Or, Notes on the Resources and Administration of Turkey* (London 1869), 271–274. An Ottoman view on the construction of two Muslim and one Christian neighbourhoods at BOA, i.DH 413/27362 (25 S 1275) (4 October 1858).

21 BOA, HR.MKT.MHM 120/24 (30 Ra 1274) (18 November 1857) and HR.SYS 1607/42 (31 December 1859).

22 TNA, FO 195/523, f. 519 (Lloyd to Stratford de Redcliffe, Sulina, 19 March 1857).

4 On the Beginnings of Peacekeeping Corps – European Warships at Sulina

Since Russia became riparian to the Black Sea in the eighteenth century, the issue of local naval bases and the passage of warships through the Turkish Straits had been the object of numerous international agreements. If the Russian-Ottoman Treaty of Hünkâr İskelessi (1833) opened the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to Russian warships in case of a general European war, the London Convention of 1841 cancelled this agreement and barred all military passage through the Straits. After Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the victors went one step further in their objective to limit Russian naval pressure on Istanbul, stipulating in Article 11 of the 1856 Paris Treaty that the Black Sea be neutralised. There were, however, two exceptions: one concerned 'the force and the number of light vessels' necessary for the 'services' (i.e. border, customs or sanitary control) of the two riparian empires; the other aimed to secure the execution of the regulations for Danubian navigation, so each power had 'the right to station, at all times, two light vessels at the Mouths of the Danube'.²³

The latter exception was, most probably, included in the treaty given the Austrians' experience in coping with the anarchy of Sulina. The presence of their warships at the Maritime Danube had been deemed vital for the security of the entire area. From 1856 all seven signatory powers acquired this right, which was mainly used by the countries that had economic interests to defend in the Black Sea area. In 1858, for example, the Austrians kept two steamers at Sulina, the *Taurus* and the *Croatia*, France had the *Auverne* and the *Meurtrière*, Great Britain the *Weser* and the *Boxer*, and the Sardinians the *Anthione*.²⁴ These light warships were not stationed permanently at Sulina, but plied between there and Galați for various missions or for ceremonial display during the Commission's plenary sessions, and rotated to their countries' naval bases in the Mediterranean.

The Commission discussed how to make good use of this force, and though there were many disagreements with the Ottoman Empire in its capacity as territorial power, the naval stations at Sulina were important not least in containing the subjects of each power. Moreover, in a town with few modern public services available, the crew on the *Auverne* proved decisive, in 1857, in extinguishing a fire that threatened to burn the entire locality.²⁵ British sources claimed that the warships' authority extended all the way along the Maritime

23 *Congrès de Paris*, 9–12.

24 'The Danube,' *Nautical Magazine* 27 (1858): 328–329.

25 *Ibid.*: 328.

Danube, as 'the officers and crews of our gunboats are the puzzle and terror of the subaltern authorities of Galatz'.²⁶ The light warships were equally useful for conducting scientific research in the Danube Delta or for allowing delegates increased mobility along the Danube and in the Black Sea. Later, the 1865 Public Act, known as the Commission's 'Constitution' (Chapter 3), stated that the execution of the organisation's regulations was ensured with the support of these warships:

Each naval station acts on the vessels of its nationality and on those whose flag it is called to protect, either by treaty or custom, or by general or special delegation. In the absence of a warship having a standing to intervene, the authorities in charge of the police of the river may resort to the warships of the territorial power.²⁷

After 1871, when Russia remilitarised the Black Sea, foreign warships assumed an even more important symbolic value as agents of Europe in an area that witnessed a resurrection of Russian bellicosity.

Given the structure of Danubian trade and large number of British vessels calling at Sulina, British warships were especially important in preserving law and order at the Maritime Danube. HMS *Cockatrice* was one of the light warships dispatched to the Danube from its home base in Malta. While at the Lower Danube in 1866, HMS *Cockatrice* had a crew of 40 seamen, who spent their spare time playing cricket, quoits or football.²⁸ A decade later, however, in the context of a looming conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the presence of international warships was essential for regional security. According to a report, 'the maritime working population of Sulina, composed of Greeks, Turks, and Tartars, is comparatively very considerable in number, and consists of the very lowest classes'. The Ottomans strengthened their military hold, as 'some sixty or seventy soldiers have arrived' to support local policemen. As there had been serious disturbances between Christians and Muslims, westerners requested the presence of a gunboat to be permanently

26 'The Lower Danube,' in *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle for 1859* (London 1859), 437.

27 *The London Gazette*, No. 23105, 24 April 1866.

28 'Marinarii englezi jucau fotbal lângă Dunăre încă din 1865!,' *Evenimentul zilei*, 8 September 2010 (online at <http://evz.ro/marinarii-englezi-jucau-fotbal-langa-dunare-inca-din-1865-905259.html>) (visited on 17 September 2017).

stationed at Sulina, ‘until such time as all apprehensions of disorder or danger shall be over’.²⁹

HMS *Cockatrice* was duly dispatched to Sulina and in October 1877, when the Russian navy attacked the Ottoman fleet, the British warship protected the Commission’s assets by virtue of the IO’s neutrality.³⁰ In fact, the Russians pre-warned the British commander of their imminent attack, and the Commission managed to convince the Ottoman military leadership to move their naval equipment which, by being a target for the enemy, threatened the organisation’s property. In early 1878, when Sulina was occupied by Russian troops, they were instructed not to breach the Commission’s rights and privileges.³¹

The 1878 Berlin Peace Treaty maintained the right of these warships to be stationed at the mouths of the Danube, and with the transfer of Dobrudja and the Danube Delta to Romania, the Romanian navy dispatched several warships to Sulina to defend its national interests and new subjects.³² Romania mobilised larger human and material resources to secure its hold on one of the country’s most strategic borders. By the 1880s, with its incorporation into the Romanian administrative system and more clearly regulated commercial practices, Sulina was a safer settlement. Warships continued to visit it, as presented in Chapter 3, but their protocolary function prevailed over their policing role.

The foreign warships and their crews may be considered some of the world’s earliest peacekeeping forces. Similar to the military observers that the Security Council of the United Nations has been deploying since 1948, the role of the Danubian light warships was to allow the execution of an international agreement. They did so mainly by monitoring, reporting and confidence-building on the ground, all decisive steps for bringing stability to an anarchy-torn region. In the past few decades, the UN has shifted and developed its field operations from ‘traditional’ missions involving observational tasks performed by military personnel to more complex and multidimensional enterprises, designed to implement ‘comprehensive peace agreements and assist in laying the foundations for sustainable peace’. Peacekeepers, now active in protecting civilians and supporting sustainable institutions of governance and restoring the rule of law, very often in ‘remote, uncertain operating environments and

29 *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Turkey*, presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty 1877 (London 1877), 449–450.

30 Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomație. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002), 98.

31 Nicolae Bîrdeanu and Dan Nicolaescu, *Contribuții la istoria marinei române* (Bucharest 1979).

32 Carmen Atanasiu, ‘Dunărea în sistemul de apărare națională. Din istoricul garnizoanei de marină Sulina,’ *Anuarul Muzeului Marinei Române* 14 (2011): 176–186.

volatile political contexts', have a little-known precursor in the naval stations of the Maritime Danube.³³

5 From Shipping Security to the Making of a Free-Trade Zone

A new town was gradually emerging at Sulina in the late 1850s, and the Commission contributed directly and decisively to its growth. One of the decisions that added to the town's economic prosperity related to the regulation and application of the customs regime within the Ottoman dominions.

Free-trade zones, known in the modern age as free ports or *porto franco*, are areas 'within which goods may be landed, handled, manufactured or reconfigured, and reexported without the intervention of the customs authorities. Only when the goods are moved to consumers within the country in which the zone is located do they become subject to the prevailing customs duties'.³⁴ Such free-trade zones are established nowadays around major transportation hubs (large seaports or international airports) or at state borders. In the Black Sea, the free port regime was introduced at Odessa in 1819, and it accounted for much of the Ukrainian outlet's commercial success. The inland Danubian ports of Brăila and Galați enjoyed a similar customs regime from 1835–1836, when they copied Odessa's status and witnessed an economic boom in the coming decades. Unsurprisingly, there were several requests in the 1830s to turn Sulina into a *porto franco*, but they were unacceptable given the international status of the Danube Delta, along a demilitarised inter-imperial borderline.

By the end of the Crimean War, consular parties in the Principalities resumed their demands to establish a free port at the mouth of the Danube, chosen to be improved for permanent navigation. The Commission discussed such a privileged status for Sulina, and Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt, the French commissioner, studied it in detail.³⁵ In a memorandum sent to his colleagues, he referred to some solutions that could reduce the threats that lighters and seagoing ships faced when loading grain in the Sulina roadstead. The

33 Details at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/>. See A.J. Bellamy, P.D. Williams and S. Griffin, *Understanding Peacekeeping* (Cambridge 2010) for an academic perspective on peacekeeping.

34 'Free Trade Zone,' online at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/free-trade-zone> (visited on 15 June 2018).

35 Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), *Représentant de la France auprès de la Commission Européenne du Danube (CED)*, Série B, file 10 (Minutes des dépêches du commissaire de France avec le ministère des Affaires étrangères), f. 296v–302 (No. 147 and appendixes, Édouard-Philippe Engelhardt to the French Foreign Office, Galați, 19 November 1861).

entrepreneurial community could have enjoyed better conditions in the local harbour, together with lower lighthouse and insurance costs, more employment in wintertime, and increased shipping security.³⁶ Engelhardt considered that such advantages could be secured if the Ottoman government would formally recognise Sulina as a free port, so that goods arriving in the privileged enclosure were stored there indefinitely and reshipped without being subject to any right of entry, exit or transit. As goods landed in the harbour were already exempt from customs duties for a limited amount of time, Engelhardt hoped for a positive response from the Ottoman authorities.³⁷

The initiative included the proposal to allow foreigners the right to build storehouses at Sulina, which was hardly straightforward, given the unclear status of land ownership and the available land estates in the area. But the Ottoman government had an additional reason to reject the French request for a free port: Engelhardt envisaged the creation of a Mixed Court for cases relating to foreign nationals,³⁸ a further violation of the territorial power's sovereign rights.

In 1869, Engelhardt's successor, Baron Adolphe d'Avril, asked his Ottoman colleague if foreign merchants could buy land and build storehouses and houses at Sulina, and if the goods unloaded in the harbour for re-exportation were exempt from customs dues. Commissioner Suleyman Pasha alluded to a new Ottoman law in use since 1867,³⁹ which allowed foreign subjects to acquire urban and rural land all over the empire, except for the holiest sites of Islam. Permission was granted on condition that they accepted equality with Ottoman citizens and were subject to Ottoman institutional and legal jurisdiction on all questions relating to property. While the law was passed under the pressure of European powers, it did, however, attempt to remove responsibility for land matters from the sphere of consular influence.⁴⁰

In this new legal context, the customs regime became open for negotiation, and eventually in April 1870 Sulina was declared a free port.⁴¹ The decision implied the establishment of a privileged enclosure where customs exemptions

36 The National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECD), Protocols 132 and 141, 29 June and 30 November 1861.

37 *La Commission*, 311–313.

38 PECD, Protocol 141, 30 November 1861.

39 *Ibid.*, Protocol 238, 2 November 1869.

40 Ruth Kark, 'Consequences of the Ottoman Land Law: Agrarian and Privatization Processes in Palestine, 1858–1918,' in Chand Raghbir, Etienne Louis Nel and Stanko Pelc (eds.), *Societies, Social Inequalities and Marginalization: Marginal Regions in the 21st Century* (Cham 2017), 101–119.

41 PECD, Protocol 241, 25 April 1870.

were applicable. As such delimitation was never done, the entire town was a *de facto* free trade zone.

When Romania acquired this territory in 1878, several disputes followed concerning the porto franco regime. The Parliament in Bucharest had already discussed the repeal of all of Romania's free ports, which no longer fitted the protectionist views of the country's political leadership. Sulina's privileged status was not as burdensome for the national economy but incorporating the town into the national body was a symbolic victory for the newly independent Romanian state. The Commission, at the same time, insisted on the strict preservation of all its previous rights, including the free port regime for Sulina.

Faced with international pressure, the Romanian government agreed, by January 1879, to maintain the customs exemptions for Sulina. Notwithstanding this promise, octroi taxes were levied by the municipality on all articles landed, even on those destined for the use of the Commission and its employees (Chapter 8). Although Sulina was a free port in relation to ordinary, state-imposed customs taxes, the Romanians considered that municipal authorities had the right to levy octroi taxes on all goods landed in the town. Several commissioners insisted on the 'exceptional status' of the town, which deserved 'exceptional rules', inasmuch 'as that port is itself an exception, an artificial creation of the Danube Commission, an establishment exclusively devoted to the service of the navigation'. French commissioner Jules Herbette drafted a new motion, which maintained that the complete exemption from all customs dues was a special privilege of the entire town.⁴²

Negotiations for a solution continued for the next couple of years. On the one hand the Commission was aware of the need to compromise but tried to bargain for as many of its benefits as possible. One of its main concerns had to do with its own financial situation. An excessive increase in the cost of living that affected its employees could unionise them and make them claim financial compensation. The grounds seemed reasonable enough: employees had been 'engaged at a time when the price of provisions in the town was far cheaper than at present' and they could now order goods from elsewhere which were admitted to Sulina duty free.⁴³ Another reason concerned naval stores and coal, which had turned Sulina into a cheap revictualling station for

42 Ibid., Protocol 331, 26 May 1879 and TNA, FO 881/4301, f. 41 (Herbert Taylor Siborne to the Marquis of Salisbury, Galați, 27 June 1879).

43 TNA, FO 881/4301, f. 77 (the same, 9 October 1879).

seagoing ships, so maritime powers had a direct interest in keeping naval provisions as inexpensive as possible.⁴⁴

In several of its meetings, the Commission discussed the issue, and the Romanian delegate, Eustațiu Pencovici, made it clear that his government accepted full immunity for the goods necessary for the organisation and for its employees, but wanted clearer verification procedures to avoid abuses.⁴⁵ Romanian authorities also agreed that octroi taxes be limited to a maximum of 5 per cent on articles necessary for revictualling shipping.⁴⁶ Eventually, in 1883 the Romanian government abolished the porto franco regime for all its ports. Sulina, however, continued to enjoy its privileged status as proof of Romania's honest cooperation with Europe.

In an analysis of free ports around Europe in the early twentieth century, Sulina was an exceptional case among the only thirteen ports on the continent that still enjoyed such a privilege: nine in Germany (Hamburg, Bremerhaven, Cuxhaven, Geestemünde and the free districts of Bremen, Emden, Stettin, Brake and Danzig), two in Austria-Hungary (Trieste and Fiume), and one in Denmark (Copenhagen).

The circumstances and arrangements at Sulina are peculiar. The whole port, a length of three miles of the central mouth of the Danube, is free. Its principal business is the transhipment and export of cereals from higher up the river; and there is a Customs inspection to enforce the export tax thereon. The only taxation on goods discharged is an octroi duty on goods for local consumption. The freedom of the port does not extend to coal, which must be placed in bond. The port is isolated by marshes, and there is practically no general import trade and no passage of goods from the port into the interior. It is interesting to learn from the Consular report for 1908 that whatever industries Sulina possesses it owes to the fact that it is a free port. The privileges of Sulina are due to the international character of the Danube. Those of the German and Austrian ports are an historical survival.⁴⁷

44 Ibid., FO 881/3861, f. 58–59 (the same, Thames Ditton, 13 January 1879) and FO 881/4301, f. 230–231 (the same, 28 February 1880).

45 PECD, Protocol 348, 15 September 1879; TNA, FO/4301, f. 195–196 (William White to Salisbury, Bucharest, 20 January 1880) and f. 230–231 (Siborne to Salisbury, Thames Ditton, 28 February 1880).

46 PECD, Protocols 386 and 391, 29 November and 4 December 1881.

47 'Hamburg and Other Free Ports,' *The Economist*, no. 3437, 10 July 1909: 59 and 'Free Ports; Liverpool and Hamburg,' *ibid.*, no. 3459, 11 December 1909: 1199.

This privileged status contributed to the prosperity of Sulina, a place where prices were much lower than in the rest of the country. To a Canadian visitor, everything was '30 per cent cheaper than up the river, as this is a free port'.⁴⁸ After the First World War, as smuggling duty-free goods to the mainland grew considerably, the Romanian government debated the best means of arresting it. In 1929, the Commission consented to the physical adjustment of the boundaries of the free port enclosure without affecting its legal regime. Eventually, the free port privilege was abolished in 1931. There were several attempts to restore it and, with it, the port's long-gone prosperity, but they all failed.⁴⁹

The free port status did not increase the security of shipping operations in the local harbour, as Engelhardt had hoped in the early 1860s. The main reason was land scarcity and the investors' reluctance to build warehouses for grain and other goods at a time (the 1870s) when the Commission's future was still uncertain. But the free port privilege strengthened the special bond between the Commission and its operational host town, whose wealth it secured by keeping prices of materials needed for its works, but also of everyday goods for its employees and the entire population, as low as possible.

Sulina is not usually included in the list of territories administered by international actors. The concept of internationalisation of territories dates back to the 1815 Vienna Congress, when Austria, Prussia and Russia decided to establish their shared authority over the Free City of Cracow. The experiment lasted until 1846, and a similar approach was used by the multinational administrations in Shanghai (1845–1944), Crete (1897–1909) and Tangier (1923–1957). The direct administration of territories by an IO emerged with the creation of the League of Nations, which was directly involved in the interwar years in the administration of the Saar Basin and the Free City of Danzig. In a post-war context, the practice of international territorial administration gained new traction in the realm of maintaining peace and security and has been successfully used in many areas around the globe.⁵⁰

Sulina's case fits into a special category. The organisation was tasked to do hydraulic works and, while based in a far-off marshland, its agents realised that the proper administration of their host town was crucial for the success

48 Ethel Greening Pantazzi, *Roumania in Light & Shadow* (Toronto 1921), 118. Other examples in I. Dragoslav, 'Sulina,' *Albina. Revistă enciclopedică populară* 17.32 (4 May 1914): 1260 and Constantin Bondar, Virginia Dima and Eugenia Iacovici Lungu, *Sulina: monografie*, vol. 11 (Bucharest 2010), 81.

49 Petru Zaharia, 'Sulina – porto franc (1870–1939),' *Peuce* 8 (1980): 520; Bondar et alii, *Sulina*, 11, 90.

50 Carsten Stahn, *The Law and Practice of International Territorial Administration: Versailles to Iraq and Beyond* (Cambridge 2008), 1–40.

of their mission. Whereas the Commission's authority was restricted to preserving law and order along the navigable fairway of the Danube, it used the hazy legal status of the area, controlled by weak territorial states (the Ottoman Empire and, after 1878, Romania), to gradually spread its authority in the town of Sulina. When the Berlin Treaty granted the Commission 'complete independence of the territorial authority', its hold on Sulina further strengthened as it took and exercised direct control over some of the town's central institutions (the Harbour Master's Office, the lighthouse and the hospital), all part of an 'international enclosure'. But the free port regime was, in Ottoman and Romanian times, the ultimate proof of how profitable this special relationship between the Commission and Sulina was for all its inhabitants, including the representatives of the territorial power. A *de facto* condominium existed at Sulina between the Commission and the local Ottoman/Romanian authorities, well aware of the true source of the town's status and prosperity. But outside Sulina, in inland Danubian ports and in Romania's capital, this close cooperation was not regarded equally well, and the Commission's image gradually eroded amongst nationalist groups eager to fully restore the country's injured sovereign rights.

6 Steaming to Profit – Commercial Opportunities at the Lower Danube in the Post-Crimean War Context

Since the late 1850s, the impressive hydraulic works conducted along the Sulina branch and at its mouth aimed to increase the depth of the river with a view to allowing seagoing ships to sail between the Black Sea and the large Danubian ports of Brăila and Galați. With the success of the Commission's technical and normative activity the town was expected to return to its role as navigational gateway and victualling station. Lighterage, the emergency solution for shipping in insecure times, was, however, far from being ruined. Quite the opposite.

In the post-Crimean War context, the entire Black Sea area became an attractive market for western investors. The story of Stephanos Xenos, a Greek entrepreneur based in London, is illustrative of both the advantages and the problems of the Danubian market in the late 1850s and early 1860s. In 1856 Xenos operated a line of sailing vessels from London to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea and thought it a profitable investment to replace his sailing packets with steamers.⁵¹ Business was going smoothly, given his privileged

51 Odile Wissmer-Kafkalidis, *Stephanos Xenos. Portrait d'une Grec romantique et cosmopolite (1821–1894)*, MA dissertation, University of Bourgogne (Dijon 1998).

contacts with Greek commercial houses in Britain and the Levant. By 1857 'The Greek and Oriental Steam Navigation Company' was flourishing and, according to its manager, 'yielded splendid profits'. Xenos had also started to import Danubian grain, shipped to Britain in sailing packets. When he sent the *Marco Bozzaris*, a powerful steamer of 1,000 tons he had just acquired, to Galați to load a cargo of Indian corn, the goods were rapidly 'sold in advance with a profit of £2000'.⁵²

But Xenos' revolutionary idea was to send to the Danube steam river barges of very shallow draught which he purchased in British shipyards. On seeing such a vessel in the shipyard of West Hartlepool,

a project at that moment shot through my brain. I said to myself, If I could send three such steam barges up the Danube into the shallow waters, let us say as far as Calafat and Oltenitza, where the markets are in which the grain is purchased that is brought down to Galatz and Ibraila in carts, I should be able to buy wheat and Indian corn at at least 5s. or 6s. less per quarter than they can be bought at Galatz or Ibraila. I could tranship this grain on board the large steamers at Sulina for England.⁵³

He did it, and soon the *Tzamados*, the *Botassis*, the *Bobolina*, the *Zaimi*, the *Colocotronis*, the *George Olympius*, the *Londos* and the *Rigas-Ferreos*, 'each of about 2,000 quarters of grain-carrying capacity and drawing a small draught of water', started to load grain all over the Lower Danube and transhipped it at Sulina on board larger steamers.⁵⁴ In a volume published after he went bankrupt, Xenos proudly exposed his bright commercial ventures: relying on his own steamers (not on chartered vessels), for the maritime stage of the voyage from the Danube to British ports, he shipped his grain through a more reliable, faster and safer means of transportation. River steamers secured his access to cheaper grain upstream the Danube and carried it in faster and better conditions to his seagoing packets.

Xenos' plan was 'comprehensive, and [its] success inevitable'. He lacked, however, the competent and trustworthy human resources to execute his innovative commercial ideas. His first agent in Galați, Henry Stokar, was 'to take the management of the Danube steamers, and buy the grain'. Stokar was an 'honest man', but a bad businessman. Disorganisation reigned in his accounting

52 Stephanos Th. Xenos, *Depredations: Or, Overend, Gurney & Co., and the Greek and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* (London 1869), 15.

53 *Ibid.*, 11.

54 *Ibid.*, 38–39.

books and in the commercial correspondence sent to London. Xenos decided to audit Stokar's affairs and sent two other agents to the Danube, a Greek from Smyrna named Theologos and a Scotsman, Alexander Carnegie, both more versed in commercial ventures than Stokar. Xenos was aware that his own success 'depended entirely on the capacity, the tact, and the good commercial management' of his agents.⁵⁵ But Theologos and Carnegie had plans of their own and used their position to embark upon large business transactions by 'cannibalising' their employer's ideas, steamers and capital. When Xenos could not pay his debts and lost his steamers to his creditors, Theologos and Carnegie took over the entire business network.⁵⁶ To Xenos this was a story about personal dishonesty and commercial breach of trust. To Theologos and Carnegie everything was about hard work and perseverance in a volatile market which required adaptability and versatility. To this narrative, it is about the arrival of river steamers and how they changed the entire commercial environment of the Lower Danube.

Carnegie ordered six similar vessels of between 200 and 300 registered tons to the Austrian shipyards of Linz and Vienna. The *Adder*, the *Bee*, the *Crane*, the *Duck*, the *Eagle* and the *Ferret* started to ply on the Lower Danube in 1864–1865, and it took some time to clarify the status of all these vessels. They were 'foreign' ships, and the British consulate in Galați provided them with provisional passes to attest to their identity and protect their interests.⁵⁷ This stood at the beginnings of transnational practices in shipbuilding and shipping along international waterways. Carnegie's vessels' exceptional status had to do with the fact that they were outside the provisions of the British Commercial Merchant Act of 1854, as it was not possible 'to apply the law made for seagoing vessels registered at British ports to vessels which were not registered, and which navigate exclusively the Lower Danube'.⁵⁸ Other investors copied the same business model and, from the 1860s, steamships started to gradually take over Danubian river traffic. It revolutionised the local market and gave Sulina a central role in Danubian trade and shipping.

55 Ibid., 39–49.

56 Ibid., 165.

57 TNA, FO 78/1883, f. 133–137 (George B. Ward to the Earl of Clarendon, Galați, 30 December 1865).

58 Ibid., f. 79–80 (Arthur Raby to John Russell, Galați, 29 May 1865), 102–107 and 139–140 (Ward to Russell, Galați, 14 July 1865).

7 On Schleps and Tariffs

Despite the Commission's great hydraulic and normative works, lighterage remained a defining feature of the Lower Danubian grain trade throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. Although the Commission managed to deepen the Sulina bar and the most dangerous passages along the Maritime Danube, it was more convenient for large seagoing vessels coming in ballast to wait for their cargoes in the Sulina roadstead. This decreased insurance costs and saved ships the time lost for navigating up a still tortuous and busy river channel. With the transition from sail to steam, more seagoing steamers of a large capacity stopped at Sulina.

The tariff introduced by the Commission in 1860 contributed to the success of riverain shipping with small draught lighters.⁵⁹ As detailed in Chapter 5, taxation was based on a double sliding scale, 'varying according to the size of the vessels and the depth of the entrance'.⁶⁰ Small lighters, designed to fit to the Danube's hydrography and the Commission's taxation rules, were exempt from duties, so they prospered along the entire Lower Danube: they loaded grain in upstream riverain ports and transhipped it not only at Brăila, but also at Sulina, directly on board large seagoing ships.

Business was facilitated by Sulina's integration into the Romanian economic system after 1878. Companies of river lighters were extremely active from the 1860s, and their position became quasi-hegemonic in the 1880s.⁶¹ But business flourished, and the fleet of river lighters continued to increase. By the early twentieth century there were about 500 barges (schleps) and 60 tugs carrying grain along the Lower Danube.⁶² The number of schleps recorded at Sulina averaged 1,200 for the period 1891–1895, 1,021 for 1896–1900, 1,483 for 1901–1905, 2,182 in 1906 and 2,092 in 1907.⁶³ This flotilla of rivercraft loaded grain in inland ports and carried it to the Black Sea, where it was transhipped on board large seagoing steamers either in the Sulina harbour or in its roadstead. Brăila was the administrative base of this fleet, as ship-owners and grain traders had their

59 Ibid., FO 78/3216, unnumbered files (John Stokes to Russell, Galați, 11 July 1860).

60 John Stokes, *Autobiography* (s.l. s.a.), 79.

61 Quoted in Gelina Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-Owned Shipping. The Making of an International Tramp Fleet, 1830 to the Present Day* (London 1996), 76–79.

62 Gustave Demorgny, *La question du Danube: Histoire politique du Bassin du Danube, étude des divers régimes applicables à la navigation du Danube* (Paris 1911), 136.

63 Constantin I. Băicoianu, *Le Danube. Aperçu historique, économique et politique* (Paris 1917), 118.

offices there, but Sulina was the largest operational centre for the transshipment of cargoes.⁶⁴

The Commission's taxation policy had much to do with its economic situation. According to the 1902 tariff, seagoing ships paid tax of 1.10 francs per register ton at Sulina but avoided the costs of ascending to Galați and Brăila (which incurred additional costs of 0.60 francs per register ton). Fluvial lighters paid no fees to the Commission, and the large investments by private owners in handling equipment made the transshipment of cargoes at Sulina convenient and cheap.

TABLE 7 Share of Sulina in overall shipping on the Maritime Danube, 1861–1915

Year	A. Ships loaded at Sulina		B. Ships loaded in an inland port		Share of Sulina in total Danubian navigation (%)	
	Number	Tonnage	Number	Tonnage	Number	Tonnage
1861–1865	1,403	478,379	12,786	1,648,333	9.89	22.49
1866–1870	2,003	827,915	10,524	1,827,441	15.99	31.18
1871–1875	1,385	786,492	8,371	1,831,431	14.20	30.04
1876–1880	991	889,788	7,351	2,198,872	11.88	28.81
1881–1885	1,433	1,608,805	5,978	2,512,688	19.34	39.03
1886–1890	1,347	1,644,457	7,179	4,855,490	15.80	25.30
1891–1895	1,312	1,728,482	7,079	6,278,542	15.64	21.59
1896–1900	1,290	1,842,253	5,323	5,149,593	19.51	26.35
1901–1905	1,691	3,059,484	4,831	6,349,789	25.93	32.52
1906–1910	1,712	3,408,350	4,141	6,429,576	29.25	34.65
1911–1915	1,571	3,187,161	2,719	4,513,319	36.62	41.39

SOURCE: LA COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE DU DANUBE ET SON ŒUVRE DE 1856 À 1931 (PARIS 1931), 512 (ANNEXE XXXIII), WITH SHARES RECALCULATED

64 Discussions on the role of the Commission in Sulina's development in Constantin Iordachi, 'Global Networks, Regional Hegemony, and Seaport Modernization at the Lower Danube,' in: Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz (eds.), *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day* (London 2010), 167–169; Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis, 'Romanian Danubian and Black Sea Ports during the Nineteenth Century: A Quest for Modernization,' in: Heleni Porfyriou and Marichela Sepe (eds.), *Waterfronts Revisited: European Ports in a Historic and Global Perspective* (New York 2016), 44–58 and Constantin Ardeleanu, 'Romania's Investments in Its Maritime Ports (1878–1914),' in: Ardeleanu and Andreas Lyberatos (eds.), *Port Cities of the Western Black Sea Coast and the Danube. Economic and Social Development in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Corfu 2016), 102–131.

With increasing protests from business associations in the inland ports of Brăila and Galați, Romania started to push the Commission to change the tariff. Commissioner Constantin Nanu insisted that it was unfair to exempt large river schleps from shipping dues and proposed an adjustment of the tariff by making it more advantageous for average steamers to call at inland harbours. The new tariff was eventually concluded in May 1908 and was applied from 1 July 1908. The regulation was good for the organisation's budget, but it hardly affected Sulina's prosperity, which remained the preferred grain transshipment station. In fact, Sulina provided better and quicker facilities for the mechanical handling of cargo than inland ports. Already in the early 1880s several modern elevators were available at the mouth of the Danube. Their number increased to ten in the 1890s and to twenty-six before the First World War.⁶⁵

Growing business opportunities brought to Sulina a large floating population employed in stevedoring. With hard labour conditions and poor payment, work conflicts and socialist propaganda gradually made their way into the cosmopolitan port. A local Workers' Club was established in 1897, and strikes followed in 1895, 1908 and 1913.⁶⁶ As Romania's maritime commissioner, Eugeniu P. Botez paid special attention to this aspect and tried to preserve social order by mediating agreements between stevedores, middlemen and traders. When, in 1910, a shipping company brought 150 stevedores to Sulina to speed up its loading operations, it sparked a conflict with local workers, but this also resulted in the Romanian official's quick and effective intervention.⁶⁷

The Commission was Sulina's most important source of prosperity. From many perspectives, through its role in the administration, economy and social life of the local community, Sulina had become the veritable 'company town' of an IO.⁶⁸ But this complete dependence on its harbour and grain trade operations also brought Sulina's ruin. The Maritime Danube took only a small share of Romania's growing oil exports, which since the late nineteenth century brought new commercial opportunities to the seaport of Constanța. To Botez, the simple explanation was that whereas other port-cities developed alternative economic functions, 'Sulina was only a port, not a city'.⁶⁹ When Black Sea

65 Maria Magdalena Tuluș, 'Aspecte privind evoluția porturilor și căpitaniiilor portuare dunărene între anii 1878–1916,' *Danubius* 26 (2008): 107.

66 Gh. I. Ioniță, 'Retrospective revoluționare tulcene (secvențe din cronica unor memorabile lupte trecute),' *Peuce* 4 (1973–1975): 305–316. Other details in Birdeanu, 'Greva muncitorilor portuari din Sulina – noiembrie, 1913,' *Studii și articole de istorie* (1967): 167–179.

67 Mohanu, *Jean Bart*, 129–130.

68 John Garner (ed.), *The Company Town: Architecture and Society in the Early Industrial Age* (Oxford 1992).

69 Botez, *Europolis*, 110.

shipping decreased during the Balkan Wars and then the Turkish Straits were closed after the Ottoman Empire joined the First World War, Sulina's prosperity was doomed.

8 From Transnational Brigands to European Bureaucrats

Demographic analysis is one of the many aspects which shows the huge transformation of Sulina during the long nineteenth century. The town numbered 1,755 inhabitants in 1856 and 2,875 in 1879, when the Romanian authorities conducted a census. Its population grew to about 4,500 people in the late 1890s and by the First World War, there were about 7,000 permanent residents. During the shipping season, the floating population was almost as high, with thousands of stevedores and seafarers coming to Sulina.

The town was targeted by several colonisation programmes, as both the Ottoman and Romanian authorities attempted to change its ethnic structure. Cosmopolitanism, however, remained one of Sulina's defining feature before and after the creation of the Commission. In 1879, the town numbered 2,875 inhabitants, including 1,653 Greeks, 250 Turks, 175 Armenians, 155 Russians, 150 Romanians, 150 Montenegrins, 140 Jews, 85 Brits, 45 Germans, 24 Italians, 15 Bulgarians, 15 Lipovans, 9 French, 6 Albanians and 3 Poles etc.⁷⁰ By the late nineteenth century, its ethnic composition comprised 2,400 Greeks, 450 Romanians, 450 Russians, 350 Germans, 230 Jews and 115 Armenians etc.⁷¹ As approximate as such categories are, with ethnicity and citizenship often deliberately confused, the gradual Romanianisation was already visible in 1912, when Romanians represented 2,891 people in a total population of 7,347, and in 1930, when 3,018 of the 6,399 inhabitants were Romanians.⁷²

But more than the quantitative growth, it was the professional structure of the population that changed greatly during this period. Sulina was always regarded as a 'pirate den', whose 'civilisation' by the rule of law was presented as one of the Commission's most important accomplishments. To a Canadian author writing in the early twentieth century, 'Sulina used to be a nest of pirates' or rather, it was full of petty entrepreneurs taking advantage of the existent navigational obstacles that were reduced, but never completely removed, by the Commission. When she lived in Sulina in the mid-1910s, 'the most remarkable citizen' was Don Giovanni, a cunning and enterprising Maltese man of

70 Ștefan Sturdza, *Expunerea situațiunei plasei Sulina judeciul Tulcea* (Tulcea 1880), 32–47.

71 Bondar et alii, *Sulina*, 11, 23.

72 *Ibid.*, 29–30.

about seventy years of age, whose wife and daughter dressed according to the latest Parisian fashions. His greatest source of wealth had been salvaging:

hanging about disabled ships like a vulture until they were obliged to call for his help; taking extraordinary risks in conveying cargoes in leaky tubs to Constantinople; even hauling barges and rafts of logs across the sea with a tiny tug of which he was the captain and the crew – if one can believe the legends.⁷³

The bold adventurers of the early period were gradually replaced by white-collar businessmen and European bureaucrats. Sulina was perhaps unique in terms of the large number of Romanian and international officials based in a town its size. In *Europolis*, Botez depicts how local hierarchies were easily visible in the seating options available in a fashionable taverna:

Near one of the windows, towards the quay, a large table was reserved for national authorities. It was the so-called table of local chiefs: Mayor, Head of Police, Chief of the Customs House, Chief of Post Office, Harbour Master, Officers, Doctor, Judge. The diplomatic table stood near the other window, to which career consuls and honorary consular agents came. Sometimes, very rarely, an official from the European Commission of the Danube would sit there. Certain prerogatives and privileges, inherited from the capitulatory regime active under the Ottoman Empire, rose in people's eyes the Commission's staff to the highest diplomatic level. Some distance, a discreet reserve, was always tactfully kept between the two worlds that met in the port-city's life. Then there were the tables of captains of steamers, of tugs, of barges, and the table of commercial agents. Stevedores and boatmen would not come into the elite's coffeehouse.⁷⁴

Ten states had consulates in Sulina in 1889 (Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, the Netherlands, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Spain, and Sweden & Norway), and eight were mentioned in 1902, as the latter two countries had closed their consular offices.⁷⁵ Honorary consuls were often involved in trade and shipping operations, as some form of consular prestige

73 Pantazzi, *Roumania*, 118–119; also see N. Ionescu-Johnson, *Însemnările unui marinar*, vol. 1 (Bucharest 1956).

74 Bart, *Europolis*, 12–13.

75 *Lista corpului consular în România* (Bucharest 1889) and *Liste de Messieurs les Membres du Corps Consulaire en Roumanie* (Bucharest 1902).

was always useful when doing business in the East. William Wright took over the office of Dutch vice-consul to Sulina in December 1880 from his father, and he remained in office for a long time, though his profession as ship chandler was thought incompatible with his consular attributions.⁷⁶ Similarly, the Belgian vice-consulate was granted to George Inglessi who came from a well-known commercial and ship-owning family.⁷⁷ Similar cases can be shown for most of the other 'diplomats'.

Most of the Commission's services were based in Sulina, and their chiefs were visible members of the local elite. The Technical Service, led by the engineer-in-chief, was the most important one, as the office was held by Sulina's 'father', Sir Charles Augustus Hartley. He was succeeded by two Danish engineers, Charles (Karl) Leopold Kühl and Eugene Magnussen, both of whom spent their entire lives in Sulina. As a courtesy to the territorial power, the Harbour Master's Office was an Ottoman institution until 1878, and Austrian-Hungarian navy captains held the post once the Commission became a fully independent IO. The Navigation Chest and the Commission's Hospital were more cosmopolitan regarding their chiefs, as Belgian, English, French, German, Italian and Romanian subjects directed them from 1856 to 1916 (Chapter 7). Such bureaucrats and technocrats had fascinating life stories and used their professional expertise and life experience in service of their adoptive community. For instance, Henry A. Jackson, mentioned in Chapter 4, was an Englishman who settled in Galați in the late 1840s, and intermediated a loan for the Commission, eventually accepting the office of chief of the Navigation Chest. While in Sulina, he encouraged local cultural endeavours and pursued his scholarly interests, which resulted in the publication of a volume on Romanian history and literature.⁷⁸ Fran Vilfan (Franz Wilfan in German spelling) was a naval officer of Slovenian origin, who served as Sulina's harbour master from 1903 until the end of the First World War. Vilfan graduated in Trieste and attended the Naval Academy of Fiume before joining the Austrian-Hungarian navy. His warship was sent to the Far East as part of the joint naval expedition despatched to China after the Boxer Rebellion. In his post-Sulina career, Vilfan equally benefited from his Danubian expertise. He went to the Paris Peace Congress in 1919 as a naval expert in the Yugoslav delegation and was later a member of the International Commission of the Danube, the organisation that 'copied'

76 Nationaal Archief, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, *De Nederlandse Consulaire Vertegenwoordiging in Roemenië, 1860–1954*, Inv. no. 389.

77 *Lista corpului consular, v.*

78 Henry A. Jackson, *A Series of Lectures upon Roumanian History and Literature* (London 1884).

the Commission to regulate navigation on the Fluvial Danube in the interwar years.⁷⁹

Chief pilots were as important, and most of them were of Greek origin. According to data from 1901, 73 out of the 88 pilots licensed by the Commission were Greeks. Nicolas Barbatis joined the Commission in 1858 as deputy chief and was chief pilot from 1860 to 1900. He was followed by another legendary character, Spiru Baracioglu. A Greek born in Trabzon, Baracioglu married a Muslim woman and converted to Islam. He was an experienced seafarer and shipmaster when he joined the Commission in 1879, and in the interwar years Baracioglu was a pioneer of Romanian yachting, when this sport was little known in the Black Sea area.⁸⁰

The high salaries paid by the Commission were the main incentive to convince such people to settle in Sulina. Whereas the Romanian mayor of Sulina would earn 3,600 lei (francs) a year and a municipal copyist earned 1,200 lei, the resident engineer got 22,000 lei, and the harbour master and the director of the Navigation Chest 13,000 lei. The minimum wage for the Commission's lower staff was 1,200 lei.⁸¹

Another significant change, which impacted the development of local social and cultural life, was the arrival of women. In 1880 the population included 1,470 men, 545 women and 860 children, but by 1896 the number of women and children had almost doubled: 1,500 men, 957 women and 2,043 children.⁸² The settlement of women is perhaps a good indicator of the increased security and stability of Sulina, but also of the Commission's good matrimonial relations. An illustrative example is that of the Bigg-Withers. While in Britain in 1863, commissioner John Stokes met some relatives, who were anxious about the future of their grandson, Harris Bigg-Wither, 'a nice boy of about 16'. Stokes took him out to Sulina, where he worked for the Navigation Chest. He lived there for some time, and eventually married Constance, one of Stokes' daughters.⁸³ Harris Bigg-Wither was accompanied to Sulina by his sister Alice, where she met Danish engineer Kühl, Hartley's assistant and the Commission's resident engineer, whom she would later marry. The couple lived on the Lower Danube

79 *Österreichische Biographische Lexikon 1815–1950*, vol. 15 (Vienna 2017), 279–280 (online at http://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_V/Vilfan_Fran_1874_1931.xml) (visited on 19 September 2017).

80 NAR, Galați Branch, *Fond Comisia Europeană a Dunării, Secretariatul General (Dosare Personale)*, File 156.

81 *Bugetul de veniturile și cheltuielile comunei Sulina pe anul 1891–1892* (Sulina s.a.) and PECD, Protocol 471, 13 May 1890.

82 Sturdza, *Expunerea*, 32–47 and Bondar et alii, *Sulina*, II, 23.

83 Stokes, *Autobiography*, 84.

until Kühl's retirement in 1907 and Alice, 'a charming Englishwoman, refined and sympathetic [...] brought to her little Sulina cottage [...] all the comfort and homeliness of the British'.⁸⁴

In 1905, Giulio Martone became chief of the Commission's hospital, and his family moved from Naples to live with him in Sulina. Georgio Martone was five months old when he arrived at the Danube, where he spent the next ten years of his life. He returned to the Danube in 1924 and worked for the organisation for twenty years. In his memoirs, Martone depicted his happy childhood in that 'Babel of human races, languages and colours'. His mother, educated in Florence and fluent in both English and French, missed a cultural environment and invested in establishing, with support from Rome, an Italian cultural centre called 'Dante Alighieri'. In early twentieth-century Sulina, one could study Italian, learn different handicrafts or borrow a book.⁸⁵

Scholars have studied the relationship between gentrification and security in different historical, geographical and social contexts. At Sulina, excluding the foreign consuls and the Commission's employees, the population consisted 'almost entirely of ship agents, ship chandlers, stevedores, gangs of ships labourers, and tavern-keepers'.⁸⁶ After 1856 they did not face chronic anarchy, and their lives were no longer endangered by high levels of criminality, but there were other threats lurking in the neighbouring marshlands.

9 Urban Transformations – Geological Cosmopolitanism and Modern Public Services

Sulina's development in the second half of the nineteenth century was branded as an example of what European cooperation could achieve. In relation to the town's urban transformation, two complementary processes will be briefly analysed below: the growth of Sulina by land reclamation, and providing the town with regular urban planning and state-of-the-art public services.

84 Hartley, *A Biography*, 586–587.

85 Ion Calafeteanu, 'Sulina în amintirile unui italian,' in: Aurel-Daniel Stănică and Cristian Leonard Micu (eds.), *Istro-Pontica 2. Studii și comunicări de istorie a Dobrogei. Actele Sesiunii Naționale de Comunicări Științifice "Istro-Pontica. Tulcea – 505 ani de la prima atestare documentară", Tulcea, 28–30 septembrie 2011* (Brăila 2014), 67–70; Alina Dorojan, 'Italienii din spațiul românesc în secolele XIX și XX. Istorie, demografie, societate,' in: Bokor Zsuzsa (ed.), *În căutarea țărâmului promis: Italienii din România* (Cluj-Napoca 2017), 135.

86 *British Parliamentary Papers. Reports from Her Majesty's Consuls on the Manufactures, Commerce, &c. of Their Consular Districts* (London 1884), 742 (Report by Acting Vice-Consul Macdonald on the Trade and Navigation of the Danube, 1883).

The Commission was actively involved in both and, to paraphrase a recent volume on the Suez Canal, from this perspective Sulina was a symbol of international rule which secured the transformation of a marshland by means of modern technology.⁸⁷

Hubert Lyautey (1854–1934), the French army marshal and colonial administrator who earned global fame as French ‘empire builder’ in Indochina, Madagascar and especially Morocco, visited Sulina in May 1893, where he met Sir Charles. Both the distinguished engineer and his hydraulic masterpiece left a lasting impression on the Frenchman.⁸⁸ His reference to Sulina, quoted in the motto for this chapter, stands as a tribute to a sort of geological cosmopolitanism which enabled the town to emerge from the neighbouring marshlands. This remains to this day one of Sulina’s dearest labels, as a global geological platform capable of making all its motley crew of inhabitants feel at home.⁸⁹

Sulina developed unevenly on both banks of the Danube. In Russian times, the left shore was used to accommodate the quarantine station and the military quarters, and the right side was used for the civilian settlement. When the town started to develop after 1856, this distinction was maintained, as the right bank was better suited for land reclamation from the neighbouring marshland. Sulina developed by stretching the band of dry land along the river and widening it to allow the creation of streets parallel to the riverbank. According to available plans, in the late 1850s there were only two parallel streets, stretching for about 1.5 km along the right shore. In 1896 there were three parallel streets, and by 1900 a fourth one marked the town’s swamp limit. Sulina continued to expand during the twentieth century, and now has six parallel streets along the main, right shore settlement.⁹⁰

The Commission played the central role in Sulina’s urban revolution. Sir Charles had a hut in Sulina and while living there in the early 1860s, witnessed its many problems and helped to solve them. Sometimes his immediate intervention was rendered necessary by natural factors. A severe Black Sea storm in 1864 affected not only the Commission’s hydraulic works, but also private houses in Sulina. The town was often flooded, as occurred in 1865 when it risked being completely submerged. Hartley decided to intervene and built up

87 Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 4.

88 Michael P.M. Finch, ‘Imperial Connections: Frederick Lugard, Charles Hartley, and Hubert Lyautey’s English Influences,’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46.6 (2018): 1044–1066.

89 Hubert Lyautey, *Lettres de jeunesse : Italie – 1883; Danube – Grèce – Italie – 1893* (Paris 1931), 148–152 in the translation from Hartley, *A Biography*, 586.

90 Bondar et alii, *Sulina*, 11, 221–231.

the sides of the fissure with stones.⁹¹ Under his supervision, the town was reinforced by dykes on both banks, and in various portions the settlement was extended against the marshland. The Commission further cleared up marshy areas, changed the drainage channel of the muddy waters surrounding Sulina and built bridges to regulate circulation across these rivulets. At the request of the municipality, it used its dredgers to bring alluvium from the river and raise the floodable parts of the town. A solid tarmacked roadway was progressively built along the right shore all the way to mile 5, and a pedestrian walkway was demarcated along the quay in Sulina's busiest areas.⁹²

Such works highlight the Commission's unique qualities as an IO through its intimate involvement in the transformation of its host city.⁹³ Its staff was also involved in urban planning. By 1866, an order was issued by the Ottoman authorities to systematise downtown Sulina, in an area 'abutting on the river' and 'forming the market-place', where 'Greeks and other Christians' had their shops.⁹⁴ On the new city plans the Commission saved the central area for itself. On the left, 'industrial' bank, the Commission built a shipyard, workshops, storehouses, and offices for its technical and financial services, as well as several dwelling houses for its staff. Along the right, civilian shore, the Commission had its administrative headquarters, offices for the Technical Service, two hospitals, a lighthouse, and several more dwelling houses. In this more regular Sulina, the right bank was systematised on several layers, identified by activities and typologies of buildings and a transversal hierarchy. Streets parallel to the Danube were numbered on the American grid model, with the riverside being the main street. Street no. 1 hosted the administrative and economic quarter, with offices for shipping agencies, commercial houses and consular agencies. The residential quarters of different communities stretched along the other streets.⁹⁵

The Commission saved the best spots for itself, as part of an 'international enclosure'. Its most visible urban brand was the palace it completed in 1868, a charming neo-classical building. A contemporary account colourfully describes its 'columns, balconies', and the interior designed 'in the most sumptuous Victorian style'. It had a 'red room, a green room', according to 'the colour of the wallpaper and curtains. The President's office fascinated me. It was taped

91 Hartley, *A Biography*, 204–205.

92 *La Commission*, 344–346.

93 Bondar et alii, *Sulina*, 1, 64.

94 St Clair and Brophy, *A Residence*, 272.

95 Dorothee Rietsch, 'Sulina, ville dans le delta du Danube, Roumanie,' *ICOMOS 17th General Assembly, 2011-11-27 / 2011-12-02, Paris, France* (Paris 2012): 207–220 (online at http://open.archive.icomos.org/1153/1/1-3-Article8_Rietsch.pdf) (visited on 15 November 2018).

with rotten-cherry velvet. The furniture was mahogany, with leather caught in brass spikes, and a pedestal hosted a huge globe with Latin characters.⁹⁶

With such a variety of administrative and residential quarters, Sulina was a town of contrasts, rendered even more evident by its rather small size. To a British traveller who visited the town in the mid-1870s, Sulina was both a triumph of urban transformation and an image of desolation:

Sulina itself, with its two splendid piers, lighthouses, and harbour, is the creation of the Danube Commission, mutato nomine of Sir Charles Hartley. It is a desperately ugly little place, and appallingly dull. [...] Sulina impressed me as being at the end of the world – a little further Eastward, and surely we should tumble over the edge into space. It had a forlorn, fragmentary, chaotic aspect. [...] In a word, it was one of the last places on earth in which one would choose to live.⁹⁷

Despite Beatty-Kingston's disheartening conclusion, Sulina continued to change under the influence of its cosmopolitan inhabitants. The Commission contributed by connecting the town to the world and by introducing modern public services. As early as 1857, a telegraph line was established between Sulina and Galați. This was one of the earliest lines in the Ottoman Empire. Meant to secure a fast connection and coordination between the Commission's main headquarters in Galați and its operational centre at Sulina, the telegraph favoured the economic development of both ports. By the mid-1860s, Hartley built a timber quay on the right riverbank, so regular steamboats could land at Sulina. With institutional money, substantial quays were constructed on both shores, encouraging postal vessels and larger steamers to call at the local harbour.⁹⁸

Finally, the Commission contributed to Sulina's public lighting and drinking water supply. From 1903, oil lamps were used along the quay, and electric light was introduced in 1910. With a high subsidy paid by the Commission to the contractor, electricity expanded throughout the town and into private houses. The lack of good drinking water sources was a serious problem for local inhabitants and seafarers calling at Sulina, so construction of a modern water plant began in the 1890s, according to the recommendations of the International Health Conferences of Dresden (1893) and Venice (1897).⁹⁹

96 Gh. Jurgea-Negrilești, *Troica amintirilor: Sub patru regi* (Bucharest 2007), 166.

97 W. Beatty-Kingston, *A Wanderer's Notes*, vol. II (London 1888), 36–38.

98 *La Commission*, 346.

99 *Ibid.*, 346–347.



FIGURES 19–20 The Commission's palace in Sulina (1930)

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

To Lyautey, Hartley's transformation of the Lower Danube was an example for his own civilising mission as a colonial administrator. The engineer's diligence was equally visible in his river works that had 'tamed' the mighty Danube, and in his transformative contribution to turning Sulina from a collection of 'miserable huts' into 'a town and a port'.¹⁰⁰ But the praise for the engineer's genius was equally an acknowledgement of his great institutional supporter, the Commission, whose responsibility was to provide good working and living conditions for its employees involved in regulating the Danube.

10 Cholera, Malaria, Typhoid Fever – on the Danube Delta's Silent Threats

On 30 July 1865, an Ottoman transport steamer arrived from Istanbul in the roadstead of Sulina. Two men on board had died from cholera during the voyage. The crew disembarked at once, and as several people suffered from choleric symptoms the entire crew was isolated. Twelve new cases were recorded, and five people died during the next two days. On 2 August, Dr Jellinek, the Commission's chief physician, noticed a person sick with cholera among a group of labourers who had come from Galați. Another case, an employee in the service of the deputy governor, was discovered the same day. The epidemics would last for most of August 1865 and purged the entire settlement. Among its 3,000 inhabitants, half fled, but 300 of the 350 people who contracted the disease allegedly died.¹⁰¹ The town was devastated, and further action needed to be taken to combat the spread of the disease.

As a communication hub along major Black Sea and Danubian routes, Sulina was often confronted with such terrible, to borrow from Jürgen Osterhammel, 'mobile perils'.¹⁰² In Russian times, Sulina was chosen to host a quarantine station, but its sanitary regulations were considered 'burdensome in the extreme' to international trade and shipping. Article 15 of the 1856 Paris

100 Lyautey, *Lettres du Tonkin et de Madagascar (1894–1899)*, vol. 1 (Paris 1920), 291; references also in Hartley, *A Biography*, 586–589.

101 Jules Girette, *La civilisation et le choléra* (Paris 1867), 277–278 and *Reports from Commissioners, Inspectors, and Others*, vol. 40 (London 1875), 53. See also Hartley, *A Biography*, 207–208.

102 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton 2015), 185. Sulina can be compared with the situation of the Suez Canal, as described by Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 241–271.

Treaty stated that more balanced quarantine regulations had to be drafted, which should favour, as much as possible, ‘the circulation of ships’.¹⁰³

When cholera struck in 1865, health policies along the Maritime Danube were implemented by a Sanitary Service of the Mouths of the Danube, subordinated to the Istanbul-based Superior Health Council. This international institution was established in 1839 and aimed to regulate shipping in Ottoman ports.¹⁰⁴ At the Danube, it advised the imposition of more rigorous sanitary measures, which hindered both commercial navigation and the movements of river police during epidemic outbursts such as that of 1865.

The Commission was in a difficult position, forced to choose between more sanitary safety and its own survival, as its budget, technical works and institutional success depended on free circulation of ships along the Maritime Danube. The 1865 Public Act regulated quarantine procedures as a compromise between ‘the guarantees of [sanitary] security and the needs of the maritime trade’. It also detailed health procedures and the possibility of instituting additional quarantine establishments in case of new epidemics.¹⁰⁵

When Romania acquired the Danube Delta in 1878, sanitary regulations had to be updated. According to an agreement concluded in 1881, sanitary norms applicable at the Lower Danube (including sanitary tariffs) were drafted, together with the Commission, by an International Health Council based in Bucharest, which in fact was never established. As further proof of honest cooperation, the Romanian Health Office in Sulina was led by the same physician that directed the Commission’s hospitals, who made sure that health policies were accessible to both Romania and the Commission.¹⁰⁶

Sulina was exposed to many other sanitary hazards. Situated in a marshland with poor drinking water supplies, infected by miasmas, and tormented by mosquitoes, the town was often the victim of malaria and typhoid fever. Immediately after its establishment, the Commission set up a hospital in Sulina, and another one at Tulcea, although the latter closed in 1865. The first chief physician was a certain Engelhardt, probably a relative of the French commissioner, soon followed by Jellinek, a graduate of the Viennese medical school. That this was a very good position is shown by the number of doctors

103 *Congrès de Paris*, 11.

104 Birsan Bulmus, *Plague, Quarantines and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh 2005); Nermin Ersoy, Yuksel Gungor, and Aslihan Akpınar, ‘International Sanitary Conferences from the Ottoman Perspective (1851–1938),’ *Hygiea Internationalis* 10.1 (2011): 53–79.

105 *London Gazette*, No. 23105, 24 April 1866.

106 *La Commission*, 353–356.



FIGURE 21 The hospital of Sulina (1930)

SOURCE: THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ROMANIA, GALAȚI BRANCH

who sought to replace Jellinek, when he retired in 1870. Nineteen candidates applied for the position, and they were selected based on their ‘technical aptitudes’, ‘moral qualities and character’, and ‘knowledge of foreign languages in use at the Lower Danube’. Five applicants were preselected, and the winner was Frenchman Valentin Vignard, a physician formerly in the service of the *Messageries Impériales* shipping company. Vignard would live in Sulina for the next seventeen years.¹⁰⁷ Medical journals of the time published several of his scientific contributions, including an article entitled ‘De la nécessité dans l’état moderne de la création d’un Ministère de médecine publique’ (1880). After a brief interlude, a new chief physician, Romanian Petrescu Hagi-Stoica would stay in office for the next three decades, between 1890 and 1921.

In its initial stage, the Sulina hospital was hosted in a rented house and exclusively treated the Commission’s staff. In 1860, European commissioners decided to open the hospital to ship-owners and Ottoman employees of the local Harbour Master’s Office. In March 1861, a new regulation established that half

¹⁰⁷ CADN, CED/B/19 (Correspondence to Commissioner Adolphe d’Avril), f. 304–312 (Proceedings of the Executive Committee, 4 August 1870).

of the available beds were to be reserved for the treatment of international seafarers, and the other half for the Commission's lower staff. All patients admitted into the hospital had to pay a small daily fee, and the establishment was also open to local inhabitants. In 1863, the Commission decided to increase its tariff and use the extra income for opening the hospital to seamen of all nations. A proper building to serve as the naval hospital was completed in 1869, and it included an isolated pavilion for cholera cases. A new regulation was drafted, implementing free treatment for the Commission's pilots, lower staff and workers. Medical staff included a chief physician, assisted by a physician and two nurses. It functioned in this structure until 1893, when a separate hospital for epidemic diseases was built, in line with developments in medical science.¹⁰⁸

A good indicator of the efficiency of Sulina's public services can be seen in its malaria cases. Of the patients admitted into the hospital in 1868–1870, 31.2 per cent suffered from malaria, a proportion that fell to 25.33 per cent for 1871–1880, followed by 14.77 per cent, 7.94 per cent, 4.34 per cent and 3.13 per cent for the next four decades.¹⁰⁹ The Canadian traveller mentioned above referred to this when she visited the 'little gem of a hospital' on the Commission's property: 'Typhoid and dysentery used to take an annual toll of many lives until the fine new waterworks were installed and the water carefully filtered and oxygenated. Now these diseases are almost unknown. Malaria only gets the newcomers – the Sulinites seem immune'.¹¹⁰

But despite her optimistic conclusion, there was something utterly frail and unhealthy at Sulina. The introduction of public services and imposition of modern hygiene regulations improved the inhabitants' quality of life, but the neighbouring marshland left its imprint on everyone and everything, in human bones and house structures. Everything was damp, and houses were slowly sinking. Stone could hardly be used as a building material, as the dampness would immediately attack it. With ground water lying less than one metre deep, houses were as frail as the health of Sulina's inhabitants. Underneath Sulina's modern appearance lay an inconvenient structural weakness.¹¹¹

108 *La Commission*, 334–337.

109 *Ibid.*, 345.

110 Pantazzi, *Roumania*, 125.

111 F. Brunea-Fox, 'Farmecul Dunării: Sulina,' *Realitatea ilustrată* 83–84 (1934): 16–17.

TABLE 8 Movement of patients in Sulina's Central Hospital, 1861–1920

Period	Number of hospitalised patients			Days of hospitalisation	Categories of patients		
	Medical	Surgery	Total		Seamen	Pilots and Commission employees	Sulinites
1861–1870	1,860	–	1,860	18,850	1,273	587	–
1871–1880	2,320	–	2,320	26,420	1,423	524	373
1881–1890	2,689	–	2,689	35,605	990	787	912
1891–1900	4,640	–	4,640	43,920	1,133	1,373	2,134
1901–1910	3,080	2,258	5,338	58,987	1,318	1,378	2,642
1911–1920	3,217	2,874	6,091	71,896	2,104	1,812	2,175
Total	17,806	5,132	22,938	255,678	8,241	6,461	8,236

SOURCE: *LA COMMISSION*, 503 (ANNEXE XXIV)

11 Cosmopolitan Headstones and Their Stories of Insecurity

William Simpson was one of those who would fit well into this image of frailty. He was one of Hartley's close associates in the Technical Service, and upon his death, probably from malaria, a stone was erected in the local graveyard: 'Sacred to the memory of William Simpson who died at Sulina on the 28th July 1870 aged 46 years. This stone was erected by the European Commission of the Danube by whom Mr Simpson was employed for thirteen years as foreman of the works'.¹¹² The monument was a marker of social prestige for the deceased, and the cemetery where it was placed is symbolic of the organisation's interest in improving the life, and equally the death, of its employees.

The town had a small, wooden Eastern Orthodox church, spared by the British troops when they ravaged Russian Sulina in 1854. With the arrival of the Commission's employees, religious services became much more essential to local inhabitants. In 1863, the Commission decided to support a request from its Catholic employees and sponsored the establishment of a Roman Catholic house of God. In the following years, commissioners contributed

¹¹² Petre Covacef, *Cimitirul viu de la Sulina* (Constanța 2003), 15–17; Nick Thorpe, *The Danube: A Journey Upriver from the Black Sea to the Black Forest* ([New Haven] 2014), 17–18.

to the construction of a new Greek Orthodox church, a place of worship for old rite believers, an Anglican church, and a mosque. From 1868 onwards, the Commission paid, when its budget allowed, an annual subsidy for the support of all faiths.¹¹³ This marked a new understanding of the Commission's communal mission in relation to its own employees and the larger human environment in which they lived and worked. Being such a cosmopolitan organ, it was necessarily a very liberal one, making no distinction between race, ethnicity or religion.

Churches are religious institutions, but serve other communal needs of believers, too. The Anglican church, built with financial support from the Commission, the local English community and several benefactors throughout Europe, was consecrated in 1871, when it was visited by Bishop Harris of Gibraltar, who was touring the Anglican parishes of the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea area. An excellent schoolroom was built for the use of British children, chiefly through the exertions of Sir Charles.¹¹⁴ In 1883 a British Seaman's Institute was opened in the courtyard of the Anglican church, aiming to assist the large number of British seafarers calling at the Maritime Danube and prevent them from losing their spirit and money in the too numerous local tavernas.¹¹⁵

Given the shortage of land, burying the dead was problematic in Sulina, and the Commission got involved in solving this issue. In 1864 the organisation established a Christian graveyard on an estate granted by the municipality, and in 1871 extended it with an Islamic section. In this multi-ethnic and multi-religious cemetery, each of the six main religious groups (Anglican, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, old rite Lipovan and Muslim) had its own section.¹¹⁶ The graveyard stands to this day as proof of Sulina's tumultuous history, and its various headstones are an excellent source of documenting various instances of human insecurity. In the Anglican section, eleven Britons are buried, all young people (with an average age of less than 30) who died at Sulina. Most of them drowned or, in the case of a certain Peter McGregor, 'died from the effects of climate'. The Commission reserved its own section in the graveyard, and a headstone was erected 'in memory of William Webster, chief officer on board the S.S. *Adalia*, who nobly sacrificed his own life by endeavouring to save Margaret Anna Pringle from drowning at Sulina on the 21 of May 1868, aged

113 *La Commission*, 342–344.

114 'Notes of a Visitation by the Bishop of Gibraltar,' *Colonial Church Chronicle* (1869): 177–179; Hartley, *A Biography*, 279–280.

115 Pantazzi, *Roumania*, 114.

116 *La Commission*, 342–343.

25 years'. Katharina Smith, aged 31, 'the beloved wife of William Smith' died of cholera in June 1866, followed by her baby daughter Emily Rose Katharina in August 1866, and the grieving husband and father, aged 37, in December 1868.¹¹⁷

Sometimes, when epidemics were raging, there was hardly any time to bury the dead. Cholera reappeared in Sulina on 3 August 1893. Four days later, 27 cases had been recorded, and 39 on 9 August. Fear spread as quickly, and about 2,000 people fled the town. In its harbour, the British steamer the *Munificent* had seven cases of cholera in its crew, one so violent that the sick seaman was thrown into the sea. Of the 641 patients admitted into the Commission's hospital, 88 had cholera. Forty-one of them died, along with twelve from typhoid fever, six from tuberculosis, five from 'psychological misery', and four from pneumonia. A further 138 people died of cholera in the local lazaretto or in their homes.¹¹⁸ Some of these victims lie in the cosmopolitan graveyard, the stone-hewn symbol of Sulina's grandeur and decay, sometimes washed out by a violent storm in the neighbouring sea.

12 Conclusions

Security is a good analytical framework to look at Sulina's history between 1856 and 1914. A security regime was established in the Danube Delta in the aftermath of the 1856 Paris Peace Treaty, as Sulina was the transportation hub where unscrupulous entrepreneurs capitalised on the area's numerous natural and artificial obstacles. The arrival of the Commission transformed the professional structure of the town, and this cosmopolitan bureaucracy invested knowledge and money in reshaping the urban environment to fit a more 'civilised' model. Modern institutions and public services were part and parcel of the international town. Contemporaries insisted on Sulina's colonial character. From its urban aspect to the privileges of its inhabitants, it was a collective colonial experiment, in which international cooperation served as the building block of communal life.

Seven decades after the Commission's dissolution through the 1948 Belgrade Convention, Sulina faces serious challenges as the EU's most easterly point. With 3,661 inhabitants at the 2011 census (among whom 82 per cent are Romanians and 10 per cent Lipovans), it is far from its former ethnic diversity. In communist times Nicolae Ceaușescu promised to build a road between

¹¹⁷ Covacef, *Cimitirul*, 12–24.

¹¹⁸ Marin Ionescu-Dobrogianu, *Dobrogea în pragul veacului al XX-lea. Geografia matematică, fizică, politică, economică și militară* (Bucharest 1904), 300.

Tulcea and Sulina, but the project was eventually abandoned due to its huge financial and environmental costs. A steamboat runs daily from the district capital of Tulcea, and in about four hours tourists are taken to a natural paradise, a living ecosystem with wild horses, pelicans, sturgeon, water lilies and a fine beach.¹¹⁹ But local people complain they are the least protected species in this area listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. And, in their insecurity, they look back to the European beginnings of Sulina, in expectation of future support from the EU, in so many ways one of the Commission's heirs. Sir Charles' stone piers still stand to regulate the Danube's flow at the junction of river and sea, the Commission's palace continues to quarter the local fluvial administration, and the old lighthouse welcomes tourists with an exhibition featuring Sulina's 'European' golden times. Europe is wherever you look – back and ahead. But, for now, few benefits are visible for the Sulinites who feel trapped in a temporal and geographical bubble with no escape. As in Botez's *Europolis*, to Claudio Magris Sulina 'is a symphony of the End, in which the town that sets itself up as a miniature capital of Europe turns into a slum and an abandoned roadstead'.¹²⁰

119 Thede Kahl, *Natur und Mensch im Donaudelta* (Berlin 2018).

120 Claudio Magris, *Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea*, translated by Patrick Creagh (London 1997), 398.

Between Experimentalism and Anachronism – the Road to the Abolishment of the European Commission of the Danube

The European Commission of the Danube is a necessary evil and [...] it must be preserved [...]. But it should work according to instructions from the Romanian state, in the interest of the Romanian economy.

CONSTANTIN D. BUȘILĂ, 1936



Romania's entry into the First World War in August 1916 put a stop to a long period of peace and prosperity for the Maritime Danube, along which shipping was governed by the European Commission of the Danube. With an extraordinary international legal status inscribed in the Peace Treaties of Paris (1856) and Berlin (1878) and in other documents agreed within Europe's Concert of Powers in 1858, 1866, 1871 and 1883, the Commission had managed, as presented throughout this volume, to instil a security regime for international shipping along the Maritime Danube through its hydraulic works and rulemaking. In the early twentieth century this international organisation was the subject of much scholarly attention from the proponents of liberal internationalism. Some of them viewed the Commission as a noteworthy example of 'successful international administration',¹ which could be replicated around the globe. The status of the Danube was thoroughly discussed at the Paris Peace Congress, where decision-makers preserved the Commission as the institutional organ that was to regulate shipping along the Maritime Danube. But the solutions reached in Paris in 1919–1921 were far from the expectations of institutional globalists and represented a step back when compared to the nineteenth-century status of the IO. This marked the beginnings of a long period in which the Commission became an object in the geopolitical realignment of the Lower Danube during the interwar period, in the Second World War and in the early post-war years.

¹ Cecil Delisle Burns, *International Politics* (London 1920), 150.

This chapter aims to summarise the main political events that shaped the Commission during the first half of the twentieth century. It will not focus on aspects related to the organisation's hydraulic works and rulemaking, which continued along the same general lines as before 1916, though with increasing opposition from Romania, eager to restore its hurt territorial sovereignty. Eventually, the Commission was abolished and a new international organ, the Danube Commission, representative of post-war southeastern European realities, was established in the summer of 1948, exactly when the United Nations started organising seminars on 'world understanding' and the progress of internationalism.²

In concert with the previous nine chapters of this volume, this will hopefully allow interested readers to compare and contrast the status of Danubian river commissions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to assess how much a technopolitical organ switched back and forth between its technical and political components or between its 'innovative' and 'anachronical' character.

1 The Limits of Neutrality – the Commission during the First World War

The spectre of war overshadowed the Commission's bright prospects. The years 1910 and 1911 were two of the best for its finances, with incomes of more than 3 million francs a year and annual surpluses of about 800,000 francs. The Balkans Wars in 1912–1913 reduced the organisation's revenues and affected its hydraulic and administrative works after the mobilisation of the Romanian army. With the Great War looming on the horizon, the eight commissioners met at an extraordinary session in July 1914 and reaffirmed the Commission's neutrality in the event of military conflict.³

Romania did not join the war in 1914 and the Commission could claim a position of apparent neutrality and relative diplomatic immunity. Despite minor arguments between delegates from belligerent parties, the autumn and spring sessions of 1914 and 1915 continued with discussions of the organisation's daily business: the technical state of the Sulina mouth, the Commission's

2 Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia 2013), 1.

3 Iulian Cârțână and Ilie Seftiuc, *Dunărea în istoria poporului roman* (Bucharest 1972), 112; Richard Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră. Romania, the Great Powers, and the Danube Question. 1914–1921* (Boulder and New York 1982), 29.

budget, its statistical bulletins and the activity of the hospital.⁴ The closure of the Turkish Straits, however, after the Ottoman Empire joined the war in October 1914, diminished international navigation throughout the Black Sea basin, including along the Maritime Danube. Facing increasing financial shortages, the Commission suspended most of its hydraulic works. In 1915, at the commissioners' request, European governments subsidised the organisation, and Romania granted it several advances in 1915–1916 to allow it to pay salaries and carry out urgent works.⁵

The Commission's bureaucratic staff was directly affected by the general mobilisation in several European countries, which reduced available employees in all services. Growing divisions between nationals of belligerent countries were accompanied by gossip, rumours and fear. The Romanian secret police paid due attention to the strategic value of the mouths of the Danube and closely watched the foreign visitors who could threaten the security of this vital waterway.⁶

After political and military preparations, Romania joined the war in August 1916 on the side of the Entente, which could better secure its aspirations of union with the Romanians of Austria-Hungary. Commissioners of enemy states were asked to leave the country, while employees were interned in concentration camps. All the Commission's resources were to be used to advance the Entente's military cause.⁷

Romania's military campaign was brief and disastrous. By the end of November 1916, only three months after its triumphant declaration of war, the regions of Dobrudja and Wallachia (or two thirds of pre-war Romania) were occupied by troops of the Central Powers, and the Romanian royal family and government sought refuge in Iași, in the country's still free region of Moldavia. The port of Brăila in Wallachia was taken by the enemy, while Galați remained, ten miles downstream the Danube, in 'free Romania'. With the Commission's main headquarters in Galați threatened by an imminent attack, Duiliu Zamfirescu, Romania's commissioner, took part of the organisation's assets and archives

4 The National Archives of Romania, Galați Branch, Protocols of the European Commission of the Danube (hereafter PECDD), Protocols 869–878 (24 October–25 November 1914) and 879–888 (15–29 May 1915); Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră*, 30; Ștefan Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Diplomatie. Suveranitate. Cooperare internațională* (Galați 2002), 186–187.

5 *La Commission Européenne du Danube et son œuvre de 1856 à 1931* (Paris 1931), 493.

6 Ion Rîșnoveanu, 'Acțiuni de spionaj la Sulina la începutul Primului Război Mondial,' *Analele Universității Ovidius din Constanța – Seria Istorie* 5 (2008): 53–64.

7 Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră*, 34.

to Odessa, where he and Piotr Kartamishev, Russia's delegate, sought refuge.⁸ From early 1917, the *Carolus Primus*, the Commission's inspection yacht, served as the IO's seat from its mooring post in the harbour of Odessa. The Danish resident engineer, Eugene Magnussen, and the Romanian maritime commissioner remained in Sulina, while Russian warships controlled shipping in the Danube Delta. Russian authorities tried to keep the river navigable for securing communications with their troops quartered on the Moldavian front,⁹ but by late 1917 the Bolshevik revolution had let the Maritime Danube fall into the hands of the Quadruple Alliance.

According to a convention signed by the victors, hydraulic works along the Danube were to be coordinated by the 'Zentral Transport Leitung' (ZTL), an Austrian-Hungarian company established to nurture the former hydro-imperial claims of the Double Monarchy. Its agent at the Maritime Danube was Fran Vilfan, a former chief of service in the Commission as Captain of the Port of Sulina, who had been arrested by the Romanians in 1916.¹⁰ The Treaty of Bucharest, the separate peace treaty signed by Romania and the Central Powers in May 1918, referred to the general principles that were to reorganise navigation on the Danube.¹¹ A 'Commission of the Mouths of the Danube' would take over the powers, privileges and obligations of the Commission downstream of Brăila. It was to consist 'of delegates from riparian states to the Danube or the European shore of the Black Sea only', thus including Romania and the four allied Central Powers, which secured large economic and military benefits in Romanian territory for themselves. At the same time, the German and Austrian-Hungarian cabinets provided funds for resuming technical works on the Danube and making use of its waterway for military and economic purposes. The war ended in November 1918 without completing the much-needed engineering projects along the Maritime Danube. As Europe began to reclaim a sense of order, the Commission was reset in an attempt to instil the same in the Danube Delta and restore the full navigability of the Maritime Danube.¹²

8 The headquarters were bombed and most of the archives were lost: Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării*, 188.

9 Spiridon G. Focas, *The Lower Danube River: In the Southeastern European Political and Economic Complex from Antiquity to the Conference of Belgrade of 1948* (Boulder and New York 1987), 428–430.

10 Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră*, 40–44; Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 430–434.

11 Constantin I. Băicoianu, *Dunărea văzută prin prizma tractatului din București: o lămurire a concepției germane despre pace, de dreptate* (Bucharest 1921).

12 Joseph P. Chamberlain, *The Regime of the International Rivers: Danube and Rhine* (New York 1923), 127–128.

2 Internationalism and Exceptionalism – the Danube Regime at the Paris Peace Congress

At the Paris Peace Congress, Romania aimed to change the Danube regime and instate its full territorial sovereignty over the Maritime Danube. The best option was to abolish the Commission and unify the entire river under the jurisdiction of a single IO, on the model of the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine.¹³

Eventually, after complicated negotiations between the victors, transboundary rivers in Europe ended with a unified regime, except for the Danube. The Versailles Treaty stipulated that the Danube was internationalised from Ulm to the Black Sea, and free navigation was extended along the entire navigable waterway, including Danube's main tributaries. However, the river course was divided between two river commissions: the International Commission of the Danube, with jurisdiction over the entire navigable section of Danube (except for the Maritime Danube), and the Commission, with authority along the Maritime Danube. The International Commission of the Danube was to include delegates from all riparian countries, plus the three non-riparian European victorious powers (France, Great Britain and Italy). The Commission provisionally consisted of the delegates from Romania and the three non-riparian victors. The definitive regime of the Danube would be decided at a future conference, where delegates from all countries with interests in Danubian navigation were to take part, while defeated states could only send delegates to assist. Finally, the League of Nations was the superior legal forum for settling disputes between the two river commissions and riparian states.¹⁴

In 1920, the Barcelona Conference on the Permanent Organisation of Communication and Transit, Railways, Navigation and Ports assembled delegates from 41 states in a much more multilateral environment. Several resolutions and conventions were concluded, which laid down the general rules applicable to all international rivers and other specific elements for regulating international transportation infrastructure.¹⁵ In relation to transboundary waterways, each contracting state had to secure, in its own territorial jurisdiction,

13 Details in Stanciu, 'Problema Dunării în dezbaterile Conferinței de Pace de la Paris (1919–1920),' *Danubius* 18 (2001): 49–82 and Arthur Tuluș, 'Problema Dunării la Conferința de Pace de la Paris și în perioada imediat următoare,' *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați. Istorie* 7 (2008): 175–182.

14 Relevant articles in Gordon Sherman, 'International Organization of the Danube under the Peace Treaties,' *American Journal of International Law* 17.3 (1923): 457–459.

15 H. Fortuin, 'The Regime of Navigable Waterways of International Concern and the Statute of Barcelona,' *Netherlands International Law Review* 7.2 (1960): 125–143.

the free exercise of navigation for any other contracting power. At the same time, each riparian state could freely use its waterway as it best fitted its interests: for cabotage, it reserved the right for national authorities to transport cargo and people between its own ports, while states could establish and enforce laws, policing, customs, public health, emigration and immigration regulations, as well as ban goods for export or import. The Barcelona Convention established the right of riparian states to regulate navigation and supervise its application. There was however a derogation from this rule for the transboundary waterways managed by international commissions in which non-riparian states were included.¹⁶ The Danube fell into this special category.

The decision on the Danube regime was taken at another conference hosted in Paris in 1920–1921. Romanian delegates hoped to diminish the prerogatives of the Commission and prevent the organisation from doing hydraulic works in its territorial waters and river ports. They also wanted to be granted the right to draw up navigation and policing regulations and to appoint officers to apply them. There were several disputes between riparian and non-riparian states concerning both river commissions, so the International Commission of the Danube ended up having less powers than the Commission. The Convention for the Definitive Statute of the Danube was signed in Paris on 23 July 1921. The freedom of navigation and equality of flags were guaranteed along the entire river, including on its navigable tributaries. The Danube was divided into two sections, regulated by the two IOs: the fluvial section by the International Commission of the Danube and the Maritime Danube by the Commission. The Commission preserved its pre-war rights, prerogatives and immunities along the Maritime Danube, as well as its provisional membership structure, though

any European state that justifies in future sufficient commercial, maritime and European interests at the Mouths of the Danube, will be allowed, upon its request, to be represented in the Commission by a unanimous decision taken by the governments that are themselves represented.

The powers of the Commission could only end by an arrangement concluded between all member states.¹⁷

16 Carmen Atanasiu, *Problema suveranității României la Dunăre și "Naviagația Fluvială Română": 1919–1945* (Bucharest 2003), 95.

17 'Convention Instituting the Definitive Statute of the Danube,' *American Journal of International Law* 17.1 (1923): 13–27; Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră*, 75–111; Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 453–494.

To Otto Popper, the first secretary of the International Commission of the Danube, the 1921 statute was 'a somewhat unsatisfactory compromise between broad conceptions and narrow-mindedness'.¹⁸ The presence of the three non-riverain states and their powerful shipping companies¹⁹ stimulated the economic environment, although it took some time to turn the watercourse into the transportation backbone of successor states along the Middle Danube. All in all, during most of the interwar period the work of the two IOs was met with 'considerable success',²⁰ which had a lot to do with a 'fourth great power present' along the entire Danube: 'the spirit of modern technical science, represented by many outstanding personalities' who engaged upon important hydraulic projects that further transformed the river into an accessible stream for international navigation.²¹

In Romania, the Definitive Status was received with open antipathy. The Romanian authorities were trying to prove that the country had the financial means and technical abilities to manage the navigable waterway on its own and kept demanding the abolition of this 'anachronical organ'. Nicolae Titulescu, Romania's permanent representative to the League of Nations in Geneva, and a promoter of this nationalist internationalism, voiced the irritation of many Romanians: except for the Danube, 'no international river in the world is subject to the supervision of two commissions'.²²

3 'The Most Unbelievable Anachronism' – Revisionism along the Lower Danube

One of the disputes between Romania and the Commission concerned jurisdiction over the Galați-Brăila section of the Danube. The 1883 London Convention placed it under the Commission's authority, but Romania rejected this decision to which it was not party, while the IO did not push the delicate matter further in case it damaged relations with its host state (Chapter 8). The thorny issue returned in the 1920s, and a solution was sought in front of the Permanent

18 Otto Popper, 'The International Regime of the Danube,' *The Geographical Journal* 102.5–6 (1943): 244.

19 Alice Teichova and Penelope Ratcliffe, 'British Interests in Danube Navigation after 1918,' *Business History* 27.3 (1985): 283–300.

20 Stephen Gorove, 'Internationalization of the Danube: A Lesson in History,' *Journal of Public Law* 8 (1959): 135.

21 Popper, 'The International Regime': 244.

22 Nicolae Titulescu, *Discursuri* (Bucharest 1967), 547. More on the 'Statut Définitif and Romanian Public Opinion' in Frucht, *Dunărea Noastră*, 112–123.

International Court of Justice in The Hague.²³ Lengthy debates followed, and eventually partial agreements were reached in 1930 and 1933, with the two parties agreeing to refrain from further escalating the diplomatic conflict.²⁴

However, such compromises failed to satisfy Romanian hardliners, who were looking for solutions to diminish the Commission's powers and hopefully disband it altogether. At the Montreux Straits Conference in 1936, Titulescu, Romania's Foreign Minister at the time, supported Turkey's full jurisdiction over the Turkish Straits. Titulescu believed that it was high time for Romania to suppress the Commission, which was 'the most unbelievable anachronism, the most inadmissible [form of] foreign territorial control, responding internationally least to the goals for which it was created'. To him (and other nationalists in Romania), this was not about revising treaties, but about unifying a disjointed river regime. Titulescu did not overtly contest the international character of the Danube, but claimed the restoration of Romania's rights, which were severely injured by a parasitical organisation.²⁵

However, several Romanian statesmen rejected his 'revisionist' position, believing that the abolition or erosion of the Commission's powers was a serious mistake in that international context. With Nazi Germany's denouncement of the waterways clauses of the Versailles Treaty relative to the internationalisation of certain 'German' rivers (including the Danube), Romania's objectives shifted to a milder view of the Commission: the IO came to be regarded as a political bulwark for Romania's sovereignty, even for its territorial integrity.²⁶ Titulescu was soon replaced from office, and his successors acted to preserve the Commission. Romanian engineer and politician Constantin D. Buşilă

23 *Mémoire du Gouvernement roumain dans la question du Danube* (Bucharest 1925).

24 Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 495–514; Atanasiu, 'Activitatea României pentru desființarea Comisiei Europene a Dunării,' *Analele Dobrogei*, new series 6.1 (2000): 281–292; Agnieszka Kastory and Bogdan Zieliński, 'The Diplomatic Dispute over the Rights of the European Commission of the Danube during the Interwar Period,' *Politeja* 10.1 (2008): 165–174.

25 More on the period in Stanciu, 'Poziția României față de Marile Puteri în problema navigației pe Dunărea Maritimă în perioada premergătoare celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial,' *Danubius* 21 (2003): 79–100; on Titulescu and the Commission: Ardeleanu, 'Nicolae Titulescu și Comisia Europeană a Dunării. Câteva ecouri pe marginea interviului lui N. Titulescu din cotidianul "Le Temps" – iulie 1936,' *Danubius* 21 (2003): 67–77; Tuluș, 'Nicolae Titulescu's Position on the International Regime of Waterways. The International Straits Commission versus the European Commission of the Danube,' *Danubius* 35.2 (2017): 117–132.

26 Tuluș, *Dunărea maritimă între Aranjamentul de la Sinaia și Acordul de la Belgrad: (1938–1948)* (Galați 2008), 36–54.

clearly expressed the new Romanian view on the Commission, as quoted in the motto of this chapter.²⁷

Things became even more complicated with changes in the political geography of Danubian Europe. Romanian statesmen considered that it was in the country's best interests to stick to the Commission and to the 'principle of internationalisation with the participation of the Great Powers'. Another Romanian juridical expert, George Sofronie, believed that

from a legal and moral point of view, the European Commission is an anachronism. I would sympathise with its dissolution, but I see that it is not a happy solution at this time for Romania's interests. Certain expansionist tendencies make it necessary to have the Great Powers present at the mouths of the Danube. These states can exert an unbiased influence on the selfish tendencies of riparian states along the rest of the river.²⁸

The western powers were also trying to appease Romania's frustration and gave up some of the Commission's attributions that violated the host state's sovereignty. A preliminary agreement amongst member states was concluded in 1938 to amend the status of the Danube by cancelling the application of Article 53 of the 1878 Berlin Treaty (which established full independence for the Commission in relation to territorial power).²⁹ Nazi Germany also increased its pressure to join the Commission and had the support of its ally, Italy. Romania thus urged for the organisation of a conference of its current membership before Germany's imminent admission into the IO.

Delegates from France, Great Britain and Romania took part in the Sinaia Conference in August 1938. Romania's Foreign Minister, Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen, criticised the Commission for its violations of national sovereignty, but also referred to its important political role on the Lower Danube. The 'Sinaia Arrangement' put an end to the supranational powers which the Commission and its agents had been exercising over the Maritime Danube. Sulina lost its international character and returned under Romania's full territorial jurisdiction. Romania took over the Inspectorate of Navigation, the corps of pilots, the sanitary service, and the organisation's movable and immovable goods. The Commission was to draft regulations for policing and navigation, which were to be applied by Romania. Romanians were to be employed gradually in the offices of the Commission's bureaucratic and technocratic services.

²⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹ Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 520.

An autonomous service, called the Maritime Danube Directorate (MDD), was to draft and execute hydraulic works, levy taxes and spend the income to the benefit of navigation. The MDD's projects were vetted by a committee of European engineers, appointed by the Commission. Further arrangements were made to decide on the juridical situation, immunities and rights of the Commission's remaining staff.³⁰

The Italian government accepted the arrangement, its official position following consultations with its German ally. Eventually, in March 1939, in connection with the western powers' 'appeasement' policy, Germany was accepted as a full member state in the Commission, which had become a political organisation used by Europe's imperial powers to advance their political and military interests.

4 Between the Nazis and the Soviets – the Commission in the Second World War

After the outbreak of the Second World War, riparian states along the Danube vowed to preserve the river's neutrality. At the Lower Danube Romania tried the same, although it faced huge pressure from both belligerent camps. In October 1939, the Commission held its ordinary session, and all five commissioners participated. Although rivalries made themselves clearly visible, the organisation functioned normally and discussed the regular issues for an autumn session: its financial situation, payment of staff and placement of the Commission's funds. An extraordinary session was held in February 1940, when the five delegates analysed the IO's financial status. In May 1940, the Commission met once again and decided to prolong the river's neutrality.³¹

Larger military and geopolitical changes greatly affected the situation of the Commission and that of its institutional sibling, the International Commission of the Danube. In June 1940, the Soviet Union reannexed Bessarabia from Romania and thus returned as a riparian state to the Maritime Danube. In August 1940, at a favourable point in its military actions against the western

30 *Protocoles de la Conférence tenue à Sinaia du 8 au 18 août 1938 pour la modification du régime du Danube. Arrangement de Sinaia du 18 août 1938 relatif à l'exercice des pouvoirs de la Commission Européenne du Danube. Accord de Bucarest du 1er mars 1939* (Galați 1939). Details in: Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 520–531; Kastory, 'La Conférence de Sinaia consacrée à la Commission Européenne du Danube (août 1938)', *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 42.1–4 (2003): 293–304; Tuluș, *Dunărea maritimă*, 79–124.

31 Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării*, 309–313; Tuluș, *Dunărea maritimă*, 125–136.

powers, Germany requested the dissolution of the International Commission of the Danube, an organisation from which it had previously withdrawn its delegate. A Danubian Conference took place in Vienna in September 1940, where Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia participated. This formalised German hydro-hegemony along the internationalised Danube, between Bratislava and Brăila, in a newly established 'Council of the Fluvial Danube', while the section between Ulm and Bratislava remained exclusively under German jurisdiction.³²

At the Maritime Danube, however, Nazi Germany faced a much stronger competitor – the USSR. In September 1940, the Soviet government requested the dissolution of the Commission and 'the establishment of a single commission of riparian states, whose jurisdiction should extend from the mouths of the Danube upstream to Bratislava'. In the Danube Delta a joint Romanian-Soviet administration was to coordinate navigation along the Romanian part of the area. In October-December 1940, Bucharest hosted a Danubian Conference which was to decide on the new status of the Maritime Danube. Delegates from Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and Romania attended the negotiations. Romania relied on support from Berlin and Rome and successfully rejected Soviet pretensions. A new conference was organised in February 1941, with similar results. Negotiations were suspended in March 1941, with the Axis powers in expectation of their war against Soviet Russia.³³

The Commission continued to exist formally, but the political and military situation in Europe turned the entire Danube, including its lower section, into a highway for the transportation of German military equipment. After its initial military successes on the Eastern Front, Nazi Germany called for a new Danubian Conference, which was held in Bucharest in November 1942. The German delegate proposed abolishing the Commission and including a German official in the administration of the Maritime Danube. However, the Romanians delayed their compliance for as long as possible, and managed to maintain control over their national river section.³⁴

32 Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 542–543; Ottmar Trașcă, 'Problema Dunării în contextul relațiilor româno-germane din toamna anului 1940,' in: Vasile Docea (ed.), *Relații româno-germane. Studii istorice* (Cluj-Napoca 2003): 101–120; Alexandru Ghișa, '“L'affaire du Danube” et l'européanité de la Roumanie,' *Danubius* 32 (2014): 244–245.

33 Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 544–546; Stanciu, *România și Comisia Europeană a Dunării*, 321–326; Tuluș, *Dunărea maritimă*, 159–175.

34 Tuluș, 'Dunărea Maritimă în anii celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial (1941–1945),' *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați. Istorie* 5 (2006): 155–193.

5 'The Door Was Open to Come in; the Same Door Is Open to Go out' – the Danube under Soviet Hegemony

By the end of the war, the western powers tried to restore the interwar river regime. This, however, depended on the Soviet Union, which controlled the entire Middle and Lower Danube. In several statements, Soviet diplomats made it clear that they had a reorganisation of the Danube's regime based on the 1815 Vienna principles in mind, understood as reserving membership in river commissions to riparian states.³⁵

The United States led the coalition of states which demanded 'the greatest possible freedom of trade and navigation' along the Danube, regarded as 'the artery of all Central Europe'. Two opposing views made themselves clear during the negotiations for the conclusion of the peace treaties with Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. An identical clause relating to the Danube was included in the Paris Peace Treaty, signed on 10 February 1947:

Navigation on the Danube will be free and open to citizens, merchant vessels and goods of all states, on an equal footing, in terms of port and navigation duties and conditions to which commercial navigation is subjected. The above provisions do not apply to the cabotage between ports of the same state.³⁶

The rifts of the Cold War drew the two camps further apart and the future organisation of Danubian navigation was turned into a symbolic battle between them. This was to be discussed at a conference scheduled to take place in Belgrade. As Stephen Gorove justly noted, the conference provided 'an opportunity to test Russian good faith at an international gathering in which, for the first time, the Soviet Union and its satellites would command a clear majority'. For the Soviet Union, it was the perfect occasion to create 'a semblance of legality' for its political and economic control over the Middle and Lower Danube.³⁷

The Danubian Conference convened on 30 July 1948. Delegates from ten countries participated, and the result was clear given the new political realities in southeastern Europe. Andrey Vyshinsky was factotum, and had no problem in steering Moscow's satellite states towards the expected conclusion:

35 Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 586–588.

36 Cited in Joseph L. Kunz, 'The Danube Regime and the Belgrade Conference,' *American Journal of International Law* 43.1 (1949): 107.

37 Stephen Gorove, *Law and Politics of the Danube: an Interdisciplinary Study* (The Hague 1964), 124–125.

on 18 August 1948, the Belgrade Convention received seven votes (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, the Soviet Union, Ukraine and Yugoslavia) against one – that of the American delegate, Cavendish Cannon. The representatives from France and Great Britain had left the conference room and refused to vote on a document that they claimed failed to comply with international law. There were several issues on which the western powers tried to have a say, but they all ended with a Soviet imposition. The principle of freedom of navigation was included in the document, but cabotage was reserved to riparian states. A new organ, the Danube Commission, was to supervise navigation along the entire river. It consisted of commissioners from each signatory riparian state, among whom a president, vice-president and secretary were elected for a period of three years. The Danube Commission would have a permanent secretariat and all necessary services, and its staff would be recruited from citizens of member states. Each state was responsible for hydraulic works in its own territorial waters, while more complex engineering was conducted in coordination with the Danube Commission. Two special bilateral administrations (for the Iron Gates and the Danube Delta) were to improve navigation in the respective passages. Through an additional protocol, the 1921 Definitive Status was abolished, and the goods belonging to the Commission were transferred to the Romanian-Soviet Special Administration of the Maritime Danube.³⁸

Vyshinsky was not shy in making clear who the new master was. In fact, Moscow's control was so strict that the participants proposed no amendments, 'not even the change of a comma', to the Soviet preliminary proposal. Cannon tried to defend the western view, though the brutal reply came with little diplomatic gentleness: 'The door was open to come in; the same door is open to go out, if it is what you wish'.³⁹ Cannon stayed, to showcase the new type of relations within the communist block and with the western world.

Under the slogan 'The Danube for Danubian states', the Soviet Union accomplished larger strategic aims in central and southeastern Europe. To a Soviet author, the Belgrade Convention embodied 'the generally accepted principles and norms of international law' and was 'an expression of the peace-loving foreign policy of the Danubian democratic states'. The agreement expressed the desire of the Danubian peoples 'for peace and international cooperation' and created all necessary conditions for riparian countries to cooperate amongst themselves and with other states, 'based on the concept of the possibility of

38 Stanley M. Max, 'Cold War on the Danube: The Belgrade Conference of 1948 and Anglo-American Efforts to Reinternationalize the River,' *Diplomatic History* 7.1 (1983): 57–78; Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 595–630; Kastory, 'La conférence de Belgrade de 1948 et la nouvelle organisation de la navigation danubienne,' *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, 43.1–4 (2004): 289–302; Tuluş, *Dunărea maritimă*, 257–278.

39 John C. Campbell, 'Diplomacy on the Danube,' *Foreign Affairs* 27.2 (1949): 322.

peaceful coexistence between two social and economic systems subjected to mutual respect for the sovereign rights of states.⁴⁰ However, despite such propaganda, the Soviet Union had its wider plans of economic control, which were already underway through joint shipping and trading companies in which the USSR had the ruling vote.⁴¹

6 The Danube Commission – Inclusion and Exclusion

The Danube Commission continued to be hosted by the Commission's palace in Galați, but in 1954 it moved to Budapest, better placed midway along the Danube and friendlier for commissioners chosen from among diplomats in Hungary. During the communist period, the Danube Commission was a reliable thermometer of political relations within the communist bloc and beyond it. During the period of conflict between Stalin and Tito, Moscow refused to involve Yugoslavia into the Danube Commission's management (controlled by Director General Grigoriy Morozov), while the Yugoslavs delayed installing, until 1953, the Joint Administration of the Iron Gates.⁴² At the same time, the USSR intensively supported the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal and forced the Romanian state to spend enormous sums on completing it.⁴³

In the first phase of the Cold War, the Danube Commission did not cooperate with the UN and its specialised agencies. Gradually, the unification of navigation, customs and sanitary regulations of riparian states favoured commercial exchanges within the communist bloc. Additionally, Moscow limited the Danube's connection to the outside world through its lack of interest in the maintenance of the Sulina Canal. This branch, placed under a special Romanian-Soviet administration, was badly maintained, while the Soviet Union attached great importance to the development of its own waterway along the Chilia branch.⁴⁴ By the mid-1950s, with the abolition of mixed shipping societies, the USSR's exclusive control over Danubian navigation came to an end, and its authority continued to be exercised in more subtle ways.⁴⁵

40 P.G. Fandikov, *Mezhdunarodno-pravovoi rezhim Dunaia: istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow 1955), 21.

41 CAM, 'The Régime of the Danube,' *The World Today* 4 (9 September 1948): 368–375.

42 David T. Cattell, 'The Politics of the Danube Commission under Soviet Control,' *American Slavic and East European Review* 19.3 (1960): 384–386.

43 Nicolas Spulber, 'The Danube-Black Sea Canal and the Russian Control over the Danube,' *Economic Geography* 30.3 (1954): 236–245.

44 Cattell, 'The Politics': 387–388. Tamás Hardi, 'Danube Developments against the Backdrop of History and Geopolitics,' *Der Donauraum* 52.2 (2012): 269–276.

45 Mioara Anton, 'The End of Hegemony. The Joint Romanian-Soviet Commission and the Danube Question,' *Romanian Naval Museum Yearbook* 7 (2004): 196–202.

In response to the dissolution of the Commission in 1948, the authorities in London and Paris re-established the IO in exile, in Rome. Representatives from France, Great Britain, Italy and Greece gathered to defend the rights of former employees and seized the Commission's gold deposited in western banks.⁴⁶

By the late 1950s, the 'communist' Danube gradually started to be opened for trade relations with the West, firstly with Austria and Federal Germany. From June 1957, the two 'capitalist' states sent their representatives to participate as experts at the plenary sessions of the Danube Commission and at the works of its various standing subcommittees.⁴⁷ After an unsuccessful first attempt,⁴⁸ Austria joined the Danube Commission in January 1960. Bilateral agreements were signed between riparian governments for the improvement of navigation and the use of the river for joint economic projects.⁴⁹ Plans for large-scale irrigation and electricity production, in which Soviet and American models of river development were used, aimed to increase the economic prosperity of the area.⁵⁰

The end of the Cold War was a tumultuous period for Danubian Europe. The German unification, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the wars in Yugoslavia changed its membership structure, which is, at the same time an image of new Europe, as it is of Cold War age Europe. With a charter decided by Stalin's envoy in 1948, the Danube Commission includes eleven states: the ten Danubian republics and the Russian Federation, which has remained a member state, although Russia is no longer a riparian country. Seven member states of the Danube Commission are part of the European Union, and the other three have strong ties with the European bloc. Ten other states with economic interests in Danubian Europe and the Black Sea area have an observer status in the Danube Commission, so the prospects of turning the Danube into a 'highway' of prosperity for bordering nations seem to have more chance than ever before.

46 Focas, *The Lower Danube*, 629.

47 Catell, 'The Politics': 392–393.

48 Kastory, 'L'Autriche et ses premières tentatives pendant la période de l'après-guerre (1955–1956) pour une adhésion à la Commission Danubienne (d'après les documents britanniques et français),' *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 44.1–4 (2005): 279–292.

49 Guido G. Weigend, 'The Danube River: an Emerging Regional Bond,' *Geoforum* 6.2 (1975): 151–161; Guido Thiemeyer, 'Die Integration der Donau-Schifffahrt als Problem der europäischen Zeitgeschichte,' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009): 303–318.

50 Vincent Lagendijk, 'Divided Development: Post-War Ideas on River Utilisation and Their Influence on the Development of the Danube,' *International History Review* 37.1 (2015): 80–98.

Conclusions

This book is a history of the European Commission of the Danube, an international organisation established in 1856, consistently transformed in the interwar period and abolished in 1948, when the Soviet Union removed 'western imperialism' from Europe's largest international river. The focus falls on the context, mechanisms and actors that contributed to the creation and growth of the Commission from its foundation to the beginnings of the First World War. Only one chapter deals with post-1918 developments, a choice which is linked to the project from which this book emerged, but also because its character and role changed significantly in interwar Europe.

In recent years, academic interest in the Commission has grown considerably and scholars in various disciplines have focused on different aspects of the organisation's multifarious activities. Historians such as İlhan Ekinçi,¹ Luminița Gătejel,² Constantin Iordachi,³ Agnieszka Kastory⁴ and Arthur Tuluş⁵ have written about various political, economic and hydraulic forms of cooperation within and beyond the Commission itself; geographers and geologists⁶ have analysed the production of knowledge by an early IO, and the environmental results of the Commission's works in the Danube Delta, today

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- 1 İlhan Ekinçi, *Tuna Komisyonu ve Tuna'da Ticaret (1856–1883)*, PhD dissertation, University of Samsun (Samsun 1998).
 - 2 Luminița Gătejel, 'Imperial Cooperation at the Margins of Europe: the European Commission of the Danube, 1856–65,' *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 24.5 (2017): 781–800; eadem, 'Building a Better Passage to the Sea: Engineering and River Management at the Mouth of the Danube, 1829–61,' *Technology and Culture* 59.4 (2018): 925–953.
 - 3 Constantin Iordachi, 'Collective Imperialism: The European Commission of the Danube, 1856–1918/1920,' paper presented at the Fifth European Congress on World and Global History, Budapest, 31 August–3 September 2017.
 - 4 Agnieszka Kastory, 'La Conférence de Sinaia consacrée à la Commission Européenne du Danube (août 1938),' *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 42.1–4 (2003): 293–304; eadem, 'La conférence de Belgrade de 1948 et la nouvelle organisation de la navigation danubienne,' *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 43.1–4 (2004): 289–302.
 - 5 Arthur Tuluş, *Dunărea maritimă între Aranjamentul de la Sinaia și Acordul de la Belgrad (1938–1948)* (Galați 2008).
 - 6 Ștefan Constantinescu, Liviu Giosan and Alfred Vespremeanu-Stroe, 'A Cartographical Perspective to the Engineering Works at the Sulina Mouth, the Danube Delta,' *Acta Geodaetica et Geophysica Hungarica* 45.1 (2010): 71–79; Marius Budileanu, 'Tipuri de produse cartografice specifice guri Sulina, din perspectiva Comisiunii Europene a Dunării,' *Geographia Napocensis* 7.2 (2013): 59–70; Ștefan Constantinescu, 'Various Approaches to the Danube Delta. From Maps to Reality,' in: Iordachi and Kristof Van Assche (eds.), *The Bio-Politics of the Danube Delta: Nature, History, Policies* (Lanham 2015), 155–181.

an internationally protected ecosystem; anthropologists⁷ have scrutinised the legacy of the Commission, an organisation associated in its host town of Sulina with the local community's golden age; legal experts⁸ have placed the Commission among similar IOs involved in shaping international fluvial and maritime law, while political scientists⁹ have studied the Commission as a prototype of organisations tasked to regulate international rivers. Such interest makes this volume timely and hopefully useful for a group of scholars working in the humanities, social studies and political science who are interested in case studies of transnational and global history that, to paraphrase Jürgen Osterhammel,¹⁰ transformed the world in the nineteenth century.

The main claim of this book is that the Commission established a 'security regime' for Danubian navigation along an engineered river which it also provided with modern shipping rules and reliable enforcing institutions. Through its multi-layered and increasingly complex activities, coordinated by a network of experts in hydraulic works and inland navigation, the Commission contributed towards the creation of a 'European security culture' aiming to collectively fight transnational threats on the continent and beyond. When the European Commission of the Danube was established through a decision inscribed in the 1856 Paris Treaty, Europe's Concert of Powers proclaimed its collective will to remove the sources of insecurity which had plagued Danubian navigation in pre-Crimean War times. The Commission was charged with conducting the

7 See for example van Assche et al., 'Liquid Boundaries in Marginal Marshes. Reconstructions of Identity in the Romanian Danube Delta,' *Studia Sociologia* 53.1 (2008): 115–133; van Assche et al., 'Forgetting and Remembering in the Margins: Constructing Past and Future in the Romanian Danube Delta,' *Memory Studies* 22 (2009): 211–234; van Assche and Petruța Teampău, 'Layered Encounters: Performing Multiculturalism and the Urban Palimpsest at the "Gateway of Europe,"' *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27.1 (2009): 7–19; van Assche et al., 'Delineating Locals: Transformations of Knowledge/Power and the Governance of the Danube Delta,' *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 13.1 (2011): 1–21.

8 Marc de Decker, *Europees Internationaal Rivierenrecht* (Antwerp 2015).

9 Yuan (Joanne) Yao, 'Standing at the Confluence: Institutional Emergence and the Case of the European Commission of the Danube,' working paper, ECPR General Conference Glasgow September 2014, online at <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/902daa1a-b2a2-4b78-adb4-36aa663c9c01.pdf> (visited on 14 March 2018); eadem, *Constructing the Ideal River: the 19th Century Origins of the First International Organizations*, PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science (London 2016); eadem, "Conquest from Barbarism": The Danube Commission, International Order and the Control of Nature as a Standard of Civilization,' *European Journal of International Relations* 25.2 (2019): 335–359.

10 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton 2015).

works needed to clear the mouths of the Danube 'from the sands and other impediments which obstruct them', so as to turn the river into a fully and safely navigable waterway. It was also authorised to fix a toll, aimed at covering the costs of its works, for which a term of two years was assigned.

Three layers of analysis have been relevant in following the organisation's security-driven programme: a) international relations, with a focus on the international political environment and the IO's role as an object and later an actor of the Great Powers' politics; b) historical institutionalism, with the Commission portrayed as an experimental organisation that contributed to the creation of inner mechanisms, bureaucratic expertise and a corporate culture that eventually built trust in IOs as viable entities in the international system; and c) science, technology and environmental issues as part of a 'river history', with the Commission viewed in relation to its most extraordinary challenge – engineering one of Europe's largest rivers.

So rather than being a simple monograph of the Commission, this book aims to illuminate its contribution to removing the sources of uncertainty that had turned navigation along the Maritime Danube into an unsafe and costly venture. The nexus between technology, commercial exchanges and the political sphere allows for a multi-semantic understanding of security¹¹ as both an objective state and the proactive actions taken to enforce that ideal state. With this, the book follows in the footsteps of an increasing number of scholars who, like Eckard Conze, Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan, Matthias Schulz, Glenda Sluga or Brian Vick,¹² historicise security.

Touching on the first layer, the Commission's foundation in 1856 was aimed at removing shipping insecurity along the Maritime Danube. This had been constant in the Russian Danube Delta at a time when the Maritime Danube was a busy channel linking the inland ports of Brăila in Wallachia and Galați in Moldavia to the global markets, an episode in the market integration of an Ottoman periphery. In Russian times it was not just the want of hydraulic works that threatened commercial vessels calling at the Danube, but shipping rules and commercial practices were in a state of sheer anarchy throughout the Danube Delta. The little town of Sulina at the junction of river and sea epitomised what western informants described as Russia's politics on trade,

11 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder CO 2013).

12 See some of their most recent contributions in a collective volume: Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan and Brian Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe after Napoleon. 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge 2019).

conducted by corrupt officials colluding with greedy entrepreneurs who 'were little better than pirates'.

In highly popular pieces, proponents of conspiracy theories depicted the Danube Delta as a state-of-the-art laboratory of Russian intrigue, designed to eventually subdue the entire civilised world. Conspiracy and security work hand in hand, as Beatrice de Graaf and Cornel Zwierlein have recently stressed,¹³ and in the context of emerging Russophobia in Western Europe, natural and artificial hindrances along the Maritime Danube were regarded as outcomes of Russia's conspiratorial policies. They eventually grew to form a diplomatic rift between the governments of Austria, France and Great Britain on one side, and Russia on the other. The Sulina Question, as the conflict came to be known, was founded on the belief that maintaining a navigable depth at Sulina was an inexpensive and undemanding technical accomplishment. Russia's political ill-will was to be blamed for the loss of human life, not to mention the huge price paid by foreign merchants.

This moral indignation of international entrepreneurs against Russia's hindrances, apparently motivated by its protectionist economic views, was founded on a legal basis: Russia disrespected multilateral agreements, such as the 1815 Vienna Treaty which required it to keep an international river open for the trade and shipping of all nations. Russia responded by blaming the hydrographical features of an unengineered river – tortuous and, at several sites, shallow – oftentimes exacerbated by the violence of a harsh climate.

With increasing quantities of agricultural products needed in industrialising Western Europe, Danubian insecurity affected more than the profits of traders and skippers in inland Danubian ports – it also impacted the replenishment of Europe's grain storehouses and thus the continent's food security. So at the outbreak of the Crimean War, the Sulina Question was one of the diplomatic disputes between Russia and several European powers, which were looking for ways – of a political, legal and technical nature – to remove from the Maritime Danube 'the moral and material obstacles' which threatened the lives of seafarers and prejudiced the commerce of all nations.

Solving the Sulina Question and removing the sources of shipping insecurity and economic uncertainty along the Maritime Danube were analysed by interested governments before, during and after the Crimean War. One solution was to establish a river commission modelled after the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, the prototypical example for river basin cooperation and a subject of increasing academic interest, as proven by the recent works

13 Beatrice de Graaf and Cornel Zwierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive,' *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* (2013): 46–64.

of, among others, historians Hein A.M. Klemann,¹⁴ Joep Schenk,¹⁵ Robert Marc Spaulding,¹⁶ Isabel Tölle and Guido Thiemeyer.¹⁷ When discussed in Vienna in 1855 and Paris in 1856, Danubian navigation emerged as a major dispute between the non-riparian maritime Great Powers, France and Great Britain, and their riparian ally, Austria. This larger Danube Question was fuelled by what the western allies considered Austria's hydro-hegemonic claims and its monopolistic views on inland shipping.

Larger political and economic interests made the western victors aim at more direct involvement in the Lower Danubian region, which was a fragile inter-imperial borderland vital for the survival of the Ottoman Empire and the continent's peace. So when France and Great Britain requested a voice in the regulation of the Maritime Danube and agreed to look for ways of improving the political state of the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, they supported their claims through references to larger security concerns and Europe's balance of power. This interest in Europe's Concert and international security governance in the nineteenth century is a popular topic for historians and international relations scholars, like Robert Jervis,¹⁸ Louise Richardson¹⁹ or Matthias Schulz.²⁰

The Commission would come to life amidst such complex diplomatic debates. It was conceived as a techno-political institution, an agency to showcase the Great Powers' direct involvement in turning the Maritime Danube into a

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- 14 Hein A.M. Klemann, 'The Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine, 1815–1914. Nineteenth Century European Integration,' in: Ralf Banken and Ben Wubs (eds.), *The Rhine: A Transnational Economic History* (Baden-Baden 2017), 31–68.
- 15 Joep Schenk, 'The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine: A First Step towards European Economic Security?,' in: de Graaf, de Haan and Vick (eds.), *Securing Europe*, 75–94.
- 16 Robert Mark Spaulding, 'Anarchy, Hegemony, Cooperation: International Control of the Rhine River,' online at https://www.ccr-zkr.org/files/histoireCCNR/21_anarchy-hegemony-cooperation.pdf (visited on 15 August 2018).
- 17 Guido Thiemeyer and Isabel Tölle, 'Supranationalität im 19. Jahrhundert? Die Beispiele der Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt und des Octroivertrages 1804–1851,' *Journal of European Integration History* 17.2 (2011): 177–196.
- 18 Robert Jervis, 'From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation,' *World Politics* 38.1 (1985): 58–79.
- 19 Louise Richardson, 'The Concert of Europe and Security Management in the Nineteenth Century,' in: Helga Hatendorn, Robert O. Keohane and Celeste A. Wallander (eds.), *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford 1999), 48–80.
- 20 Matthias Schulz, 'The Concert of Europe and International Security Governance: How Did It Operate, What Did It Accomplish, What Were Its Shortcomings, What Can We Learn?,' in: Harald Müller and Carsten Rauch (eds.), *Great Power Multilateralism and the Prevention of War. Debating a 21st-Century Concert of Powers* (London 2018), 26–45.

safe and reliable transportation corridor, and a transnational infrastructure that fits into the general framework described by Per Högselius, Arne Kaijser and Erik Van der Vleuten.²¹ As riparian states along the Lower Danube did not have the hydraulic expertise or financial resources to complete such a task, the Concert's support was deemed as further proof of its interest in establishing a system of security and predictability for commercial exchanges along the most strategic portion of an international river.

As an offspring of the Great Powers, the Commission survived well beyond the time frame associated with the workings of this security cooperation mechanism. In fact, in dealings tangent to the Eastern Question, the seven signatory powers of the 1856 Paris Treaty continued to act collectively all the way to the First World War. At ambassadorial conferences and larger diplomatic gatherings (recently reviewed by Peter Macalister-Smith and Joachim Schwietzke),²² the Great Powers would gradually extend the lifespan and powers of the Commission, which, after 1878, acted in complete independence of Romania's territorial authority and in 1883 became a *de facto* permanent IO. With its consolidation and prolongation in the 1870s–1880s, the Commission was not only a conveyor belt of the Great Powers' security politics in its fragile environment filled with growing nationalisms, but a collective imperial actor in the international system in its own right.²³

The territorial reorganisation of the Maritime Danube region was directly linked to the existence of the Commission. Russia reannexed Southern Bessarabia in 1878,²⁴ but it did not claim the Danube Delta, which was also lost in 1856, as it did not want to be accused of interfering with the organisation and the larger international economic interests in the area. Modern Romania, as the territorial state which bordered the Lower Danube and was granted possession of the Danube Delta, developed complex relations with the Commission, which on the one hand violated its sovereign rights and on the other guaranteed its security against the imperial ambitions of Russia and Austria-Hungary. For Romania, the Commission was equally an arena to have its voice heard on some of the country's most vital interests and a marker of its own prestige as part of the family of 'civilised nations'.

21 Per Högselius, Arne Kaijser and Erik Van der Vleuten, *Europe's Infrastructure Transition: Economy, War, Nature* (Basingstoke 2015).

22 Peter Macalister-Smith and Joachim Schwietzke, *Diplomatic Conferences and Congresses. A Bibliographical Compendium of State Practice 1642 to 1919* (Graz 2017).

23 Iordachi, 'Collective Imperialism' cit.

24 Andrei Cuşco, *A Contested Borderland. Competing Russian and Romanian Visions of Bessarabia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (Budapest 2017).

The Commission's survival was enabled by significant innovations in international law, starting with the 1856 Paris Treaty and going all the way to the 1883 London Conference. Growing disputes between imperial powers and small nations brought the region to the attention of the Institute of International Law,²⁵ a body of juridical experts aiming to define the principles that were to govern international rivers and thus prevent further disputes in such strategic regions. This status of the Maritime Danube as an internationalised region, governed as a collective colony by agents of Europe's Great Powers, made its example relevant at the Berlin Conference which convened in 1884–1885 to transpose Europe's models of cooperation to Africa's international rivers. As Yuan (Joanne) Yao has recently shown in her PhD dissertation,²⁶ the Commission was often mentioned as a successful model of international cooperation, which brought commercial rationality and civilisation to the Maritime Danube.

Along the second layer of analysis, the internationalisation and institution-alisation of Danubian navigation through the stipulations of the 1856 Paris Treaty created exceptional juridical instruments that added to previous interpretations of the 1815 Vienna Treaty.²⁷ The Commission was perhaps the Concert's most innovative creation, fuelled by the belief that once ill-willed Russia was removed from the Danube, establishing a security regime along the Maritime Danube was a relatively simple and inexpensive task.

It took little time for the seven commissioners appointed by Europe's Great Powers to understand that their governments were too optimistic in their assessments. Hydraulic improvements needed to be conducted along the Danube and at its mouths but reaching a consensus on which branch was more appropriate for correction required preliminary surveys in an extremely complex and almost completely unknown deltaic system. Engineers and hydrographers from around Europe proposed improvement plans, but they all came up with different technical solutions, oftentimes motivated by political concerns. The Commission appointed an engineer-in-chief, Charles Augustus Hartley, but his hydraulic views were far from popular amongst European commissioners and their technical advisors. It became extremely clear that two years were not enough to complete the Commission's tasks.

By 1857 commissioners had already started turning a provisional commission into a bureaucratic organisation. Commissioners needed, besides a

25 Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870–1960* (Cambridge 2001); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London 2012).

26 Yao, *Constructing the Ideal River* cit.

27 Decker, *Europees Internationaal Rivierenrecht* cit.

technical department for the Commission's hydraulic projects, a body of bureaucrats tasked with gathering and organising the knowledge needed for its normative works of drafting shipping regulations. In ways that resemble the conclusions of Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore²⁸ on more recent IOs, commissioners voted for detailed internal regulations to govern their proceedings and employed people to serve as translators, secretaries, archivists and accountants. Organised into departments, they all drew up regulations for a diverse range of problems, from the organisation of the pilotage and light-erage services to rules for throwing ballast and the policing of navigation, all deemed as crucial for the security of Danubian shipping. Aiming to instil a sense of law and order along the river, 'European' (i.e. non-Ottoman) commissioners came to believe that this was impossible without implanting in the bordering region a sense of 'European' civilisation and morality, directed both towards the local mercantile community and the 'corrupt' Ottoman officials, all regarded through orientalisng spectacles.

Taking advantage of the region's unclear status and the anarchy that followed the Ottomans assuming political control in the Danube Delta, the Commission claimed powers that violated Ottoman sovereignty. This exceptional status was eventually inscribed into a 'Constitution', the 1865 Public Act which defined the Commission's attributions and consecrated some of its exceptional features derived from the principles of sovereignty, extraterritoriality and neutrality. The IO would gradually turn into a quasi-state, an experimental transnational organ that enjoyed a privileged position in the international system given the special status of its jurisdiction. As such, it worked, like all modern states, towards imposing legibility and simplification, both part of the Commission's logics of stability and security over its 'liquid' jurisdiction.²⁹

An historical institutionalist approach³⁰ describes in detail the internal structure of the Commission and its most innovative aspects. References to institutional practices and decision-making mechanisms captured the Commission's distinctive features into a busy constellation of transnational

28 Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations,' *International Organization* 53.4 (1999): 699–732; eidem, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca 2004).

29 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London 1998); Charles S. Maier, 'Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood,' in: Emily R. Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting. 1870–1945* (Cambridge MA and London 2012), 29–282.

30 Orfeo Fioretos, 'Historical Institutionalism in International Relations,' *International Organization* 65.2 (2011): 367–399.

non-state agents. This allows for interesting comparisons with other IOs, as proposed by Bob Reinalda and other political scientists.³¹

In terms of its actual regulatory results, the Commission established a complex corpus of navigational rules for the Maritime Danube. The Commission was quick to assume some form of legislative power in relation to river navigation, which it gradually extended to executive and juridical attributions. In this, commissioners relied on an increasingly complex international bureaucracy, regarded as one of the 'institutions' through which river navigation was to be improved and secured. As shown by Barnett and Finnemore, there is a strong connection between bureaucracy and rulemaking.³² The Commission organised its services within a complex bureaucratic apparatus. The creation of this early international civil service also brought new responsibilities for the Commission in relation to its employees who chose to work 'for Europe' in one of the continent's most unhealthy environments. Human resources were well paid by the Commission, which provided them with numerous additional rights and privileges, such as an innovative pensions scheme.

An important aspect that needs to be mentioned is the Commission's role in the making of communities of experts (or epistemic communities³³) in the navigation of international waterways. These networks of professionals, studied in other cases in the influential works of Timothy Mitchell,³⁴ Martin Kohlrausch and Helmuth Trischler,³⁵ Wolfram Kaiser and Johan W. Schot,³⁶ included a number of fascinating characters from amongst commissioners, engineers and bureaucrats who contributed to establishing a security regime along the Maritime Danube. They did this by collecting relevant data from around Europe and the world, and their expertise was further disseminated to other international undertakings, such as the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine and the Suez Canal Company.

31 Bob Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (Abingdon and New York 2009).

32 Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World* cit.

33 Peter M. Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,' *International Organization* 46.1 (1992): 1–35; Mai'a K. Davis Cross, 'Rethinking Epistemic Communities Twenty Years Later,' *Review of International Studies* 39.1 (2013): 137–160.

34 Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2002).

35 Martin Kohlrausch and Helmuth Trischler, *Building Europe on Expertise. Innovators, Organizers, Networkers* (Basingstoke 2014).

36 Wolfram Kaiser and Johan W. Schot, *Writing the Rules for Europe: Experts, Cartels and International Organizations* (Basingstoke 2014).

The creation and development of the Commission was a lengthy political and institutional process, but also an intellectual and cultural one.³⁷ The Commission evolved with the creation of corporate symbols and rituals, and it eventually bred a culture that was inherited within the organisation and spread beyond it. Created to deal with threats to the security of Danubian navigation and the economic and political interests associated with free shipping, the Commission would gradually turn into a security community which designed efficient policies and control mechanisms to protect those interests.

The efficiency of the Commission amongst its liberal internationalist supporters of the early twentieth century had a lot to do with its financial independence. This resulted from the poor assessment of the financial means needed for the completion of the works in the Danube Delta. Pressured by the other states to continue funding the organisation, the Sublime Porte agreed in 1860 to allow the Commission to collect navigation taxes on its own account and use these as collateral for a loan that was negotiated with an international bank for completing the Sulina provisional works. This independence turned the Commission into a reliable organisation in relation to its employees, suppliers and clients, but it also directed its attention towards its sources of income. Institutional survival depended on the political stability of the Lower Danubian area, and on the economic situation in Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. Statistics became extremely important for budgetary reasons, and the Commission needed to further standardise its procedures and base its calculation of tolls on fairer rules that applied to ships from all around Europe. The Commission was a pioneer in the standardisation of measurement units,³⁸ which it viewed as a moral duty, given the 1856 Paris Treaty's provision for taxation to be based on an equal footing for all flags. Financial independence came with many other challenges, with survival strategies on the financial market, and with a larger loan guaranteed by six European powers that recognised the unique international status of this experimental institutional construct of Europe's Concert of Powers.

The most spectacular results of the Commission's works are visible in relation to the third layer of analysis – that of 'river histories'. The organisation was invested with a technical mission, which was accomplished under

37 Marc Abélès and Henri-Pierre Jeudy (eds.), *Anthropologie du politique* (Paris 1997).

38 Martin H. Geyer, 'One Language for the World. The Metric System, International Coinage and the Rise of Internationalism, 1850–1900,' in: Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism in the Nineteenth Century. Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford 2001), 55–92 and Craig N. Murphy and JoAnne Yates, *The International Organization for Standardization (ISO): Global Governance through Voluntary Consensus* (London and New York 2009).

the coordination of an international team of engineers led by Hartley. Just as many scholars have noted with regard to other rivers,³⁹ the Danube was 'disciplined', though not by a state but through an experiment in which Europe's Great Powers invested human capital and know-how to modernise a vital continental transport infrastructure which was encumbered with innumerable natural and artificial sources of insecurity. Hartley based his technical plans on a scientific vision, after starting to understand the Danube, its environment and its climate. Hydrologic knowledge played a vital part in building the jetties at Sulina which eventually 'tamed' the Danube and turned it into a predictable and secure waterway. The success of the Sulina piers, a material symbol of European cooperation, turned Hartley into an authority on hydraulic works, and he would later use this expertise to regulate rivers and ports around the world.

The Commission 'civilised' not only the river, but also the most central town for its navigation – Sulina. From a ruin of the Crimean War, Sulina was erected anew by the same unruly transnational entrepreneurs who controlled it in Russian times, but it was gradually 'tamed' with the support of European warships and the Commission's bureaucracy. As the Commission's operational host town, Sulina welcomed the employees' families, and this new population gradually changed its urban fabric and equipped it with modern schools, churches and a cosmopolitan graveyard. Sulina hosted the Commission's services, workshops and one of its lighthouses, and because of pressure from commissioners it came to enjoy important fiscal immunities for all its inhabitants. As a collective European 'colony' or an international relay station that, to borrow from Valeska Huber,⁴⁰ acted as a sort of mini-Suez, Sulina saw major investments in its sanitation and modernisation from the Commission, which was the largest employer in town and an important source of economic prosperity for its inhabitants.

39 See, for example, Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York 1996); Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815–2000* (Seattle and London 2002); David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York 2007); Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton and Oxford 2009); Sara B. Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge MA and London 2011); Peter Coates, *A Story of Six Rivers: History, Culture and Ecology* (London 2013); Ashley Carse, *Beyond the Big Ditch: Politics, Ecology, and Infrastructure at the Panama Canal* (Cambridge MA 2014); Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, *Rivers, Memory, and Nation-Building: A History of the Volga and Mississippi Rivers* (New York and Oxford 2014).

40 Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge and New York 2013).

The Commission was regarded as a great success of internationalism in an age when territorial states in southeastern Europe were too weak to improve a vital European transportation infrastructure. Rival powers followed explicit rules of behaviour during their conference diplomacy and agreed on multilateral actions designed to contain the hydro-hegemonic claims of the eastern empires, which were themselves members of the IO. Through their cooperation, they increasingly relied on experts, who encouraged forms of cooperation with greater supranational benefit, similar to those described in the volume coordinated by Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski.⁴¹ The Commission itself evolved organically to adapt to the changes in its environment. In sustaining an international waterway as a viable alternative for the transportation of Danubian grain to the world markets, it had to compete against railways, ports and state policies. It was also required to update its procedures, be more transparent with its expenses, and convince its clients and the larger public about its efficiency. All in all, as an institutional offspring of Europe's Concert of Powers it did a good job at a time when IOs were multiplying around the world at a rapid pace.

The Commission's experimental character remained consistent all the way to the First World War, and six decades after its establishment, not only had it managed to survive its initial temporal and jurisdictional limitations, but came to be hailed by liberal internationalists such as American political scientist Edward Benjamin Krehbiel as a most 'successful experiment in international administration'.⁴² Looking ahead to the approaching peace congress, globalist scholars and statesmen proposed populating the world with similar transnational entities that could effectively administer larger collective interests. As a prototype for the category of international administrative agents, the Commission was hopefully heralding a new age in which narrow national partisanship would make room for expert cooperation with greater supranational benefits.

However, as Chapter 10 briefly shows, such hopes were dashed by the interwar structure of the Commission, which looked more towards satisfying the victors' interests than towards establishing a framework of multilateral technodiplomacy. Starting with the 1920s, the Commission got caught between resolving the Great Powers' imbroglios and Romania's calls for full territorial sovereignty. In 1948, it eventually made way for a revised Danube Commission, modelled on the Soviets' democratic views of international cooperation.

41 Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (eds.), *Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870–1930: Empires and Encounters* (London and New York 2015).

42 Edward Benjamin Krehbiel, 'The European Commission of the Danube: An Experiment in International Administration,' *Political Science Quarterly* 33.1 (1918): 38–55.

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