<https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/>  
Digital Edition of the Documents of the Congresses of Aix-la-Chapelle, Troppau/Opava, Laibach/Ljubljana and Verona 1818–1822

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Introduction

The congresses of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818), Troppau/Opava (1820), Laibach/Ljubljana (1821) and Verona (1822) were crucial for the formation and the functioning of the European State System in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, these gatherings are largely marginalized in historiographical perceptions. Although the representatives of the European powers – namely Austria, France, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia – deliberated on security issues as well as the slave trade, the fate of the Ottoman Empire and the constitution of the German Confederation, historical accounts of this period tend to simplify and to underestimate the results of these negotiations.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Different factors impeded research on and analysis of these congresses. In German historiography they are perceived as manifestations of reactionary political tendencies after the Congress of Vienna, which are summed up using the pejorative label “Holy Alliance”. Sometimes they are discerned as sequels of the Congress of Vienna, which brought no political innovation for the European community of states. And last but not least almost no written historical sources of these congresses were available in printed form. Over the years, some of the protocols and memoirs have been published, but are not easy to access due to the various places of publication. Therefore, scholars interested in this topic had to do extensive archival research and could not rely on printed editions.

This short paper presents the authors’ joint efforts to create a state-of-the-art digital edition of these important historical papers. The first part outlines the historical context and the thematic contents of the documents. In the second part we show how we dealt with the resources (technicalities of the transcriptions in TEI-flavoured XML, the development of multiple access paths as discovery tools, the technical platform we are using). The paper thus has two objectives: To further the use of our ‘Mächtekongresse’ application, thus initiating both an extended understanding of the historical source material, and – not less importantly – fostering new discourse on methodologies that make use of the digital paradigm.

The Congresses

The records of the Congresses of Aix-la-Chapelle, Troppau/Opava, Laibach/Ljubljana and Verona are kept in the Austrian state archives (Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv department), and have been transcribed in a series of FWF funded projects by Karin Schneider. This ensures easier access to the proceedings of the congresses, hence sparing the original papers documentation – and offering new access to resources on early nineteenth century European history in the context of what has been dubbed the ‘Concert of Europe’.

The Concert of Europe developed during the Napoleonic wars. In 1813, the powers contracted in the treaty of Chaumont not to make separate peace treaties with France but to fight Napoleon until his final defeat. Austria, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia renewed their alliance after Napoleon returned from Elba in March 1815, and transformed it in November of the same year into the so-called Quadruple alliance – the nucleus of the European Concert of Powers. Article 6 of this treaty stipulates the periodical convocation of congresses to deal with issues of common European interest. In 1818, France was accepted as partner in the alliance during the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle and completed the quintet of the five European great powers.

But the agenda of the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle included not only the reintegration of France into the European state system. It also provided a forum for problems already relevant at the Congress of Vienna which had not been solved in 1815. In other cases, the powers assumed the role of an arbitrator or an appeal body that mediated controversial issues.

On the one hand, the diplomats and statesmen present in Aix-la-Chapelle dealt with issues connected to the political upheavals which took place during the Napoleonic wars. These include negotiations about border and custom disputes within the German Confederation, the fate of the Bonaparte family, the question of the ceremonial rank in the diplomatic corps (which had already been discussed in Vienna in 1814/15), and the legal status of the Jews in the German Confederation. Moreover, the plenipotentiaries addressed the conflict between Denmark and Sweden regarding Swedish indemnity payments as part of the obligations contracted in the Treaty of Kiel in January 1814, as well as the complaints of the inhabitants of Monaco against the governmental system initiated by their new prince.

On the other hand, some topics negotiated in Aix-la-Chapelle also had a global or humanitarian character. Following up on their negotiations at the Vienna Congress, the plenipotentiaries discussed the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, the fight against the Barbary pirates and the liberation of their Christian prisoners. A new issue related to the global order was South America. The revolutions there as well as the conflict over Montevideo were important points on the agenda of the statesmen and diplomats assembled in Aix-la-Chapelle. Moreover, the plenipotentiaries dealt with the fate of the Swedish ex-queen and her family.

The congresses of Troppau/Opava and Laibach/Ljubljana (1820/21) differed from the negotiations in Aix-la-Chapelle, as there was only one issue on the agenda: the fear of new revolutions in Europa. In 1820, revolutions broke out in Spain, Portugal and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The new governments proclaimed the liberal constitution of Cádiz of 1812, which limited the rights of the monarchical sovereign and – in the view of conservative statesmen and traditional monarchs – posed a threat to peace and tranquillity in Europe. The discussions and negotiations in these years not only show the fear of revolution, but reflect the complex relations between the European powers in this era and the connection between foreign policy and internal political considerations as well. The governments of France and Great Britain both struggled with domestic problems and a strong opposition. Both states did not send official plenipotentiaries, but only observers to Troppau/Opava in order not to stir up liberal headwinds at home. Nevertheless, the diplomats and statesmen followed the proposal of Austria’s foreign minister Metternich and, in 1821, decided to suppress the revolution in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Furthermore, the plenipotentiaries decided to summon a new congress the following year to discuss the end of the military occupation of Naples.

In 1822, the representatives of the European powers gathered in Verona. However in the meantime, the results of the congresses of Troppau/Opava and Laibach/Ljubljana had been overtaken by the course of events: After the revolution of 1820 Spain was in fact in a state akin to civil war. Out of the perspective of the French government, these conditions threatened peace and security in France. Therefore, the most important topic on the agenda was the envisaged French military intervention on the Iberian Peninsula. But the plenipotentiaries deliberated not only on the difficult situation in Spain, but also on political questions regarding Italy, too. In particular, they discussed the withdrawal of the occupation forces from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and from the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, after the 1821 revolutions. Similar to the proceedings of Aix-la-Chapelle, the diplomats and statesmen assembled in Verona dealt with several political, humanitarian and economic issues of European interest, e.g. the constraint relations between the Ottoman Empire and – closely connected – the Greek war of independence, the Atlantic slave trade, the relation between the European Powers and the former colonies in South America, custom-free river transport as well as the fate and the abode of members of the Bonaparte and Murat family, and legal claims deriving from the Napoleonic era.

The Congress of Verona was the last gathering on the basis of article 6 of the treaty of the quadruple alliance from 1815. Seven years after the Congress of Vienna, this form of consultation practice came to an end. The reasons for this development are complex and may be found in the personalities of the actors, the shift of the political focus from Western and Southern Europe towards Southeastern Europe. The Greek insurrection and the reaction of the powers clearly showed their divergent interests in this part of the world.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nevertheless, the European powers continued their close cooperation and consultation. During the nineteenth century, several multilateral conferences on different diplomatic levels took place to deliberate on and regulate international conflicts. On more than 15 occasions, the representatives of the powers discussed mediation strategies, practiced conflict management and took concerted measures to increase diplomatic pressure to forestall military confrontation and to secure peace.[[3]](#footnote-3) Even though the Concert of Europe was not based on firm, institutionalised structures but mainly on the commitment of leading statesmen and monarchs, it continued to exist and function up at least until the Crimean War that started in 1853. At the same time, in the second half of the nineteenth century several conferences and consultation meetings took place to regulate European affairs – this only came to an end when World War I brought a decisive break.

The congresses can be interpreted as diplomatic manifestations of a new approach towards international relations in the first decades of the nineteenth century. As Paul W. Schroeder has pointed out, the European system of powers moved towards cooperation and consensus in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars.[[4]](#footnote-4) The European Concert of Powers institutionalized international conferences to discuss problems concerning Europe and to mediate between conflicting parties to secure peace and tranquillity on the continent. The four congresses after the Congress of Vienna were – besides several ambassadorial conferences – means to achieve these ends.

Preliminary works and Cooperation partners

The transcription of the documents related to the congresses started in 2009 as part of the FWF-funded project “Der Wiener Kongress und sein europäisches Friedenssystem”, headed by Reinhard Stauber (University of Klagenfurt). Karin Schneider finished this work in the scope of her project “Die Kongresse von Troppau und Laibach 1820/21”, funded by the FWF, too. Initially it was intended to publish the documents in a printed edition in the series of the “Kommission für die neuere Geschichte Österreichs”. But given the advantages of digital editions this plan was discarded. Two arguments justify the edition – the first aiming for general accessibility of reliable transcripts of the Congresses’ respective records (which could have been tackled by a ‘traditional’ paper-based edition as well), the second expanding that to online accessibility without the need to physically move to either the archives or a library holding a paper edition.

Workshops about digital editing at the ÖAW provided important input and facilitated this decision, namely the ACDH Tool Gallery 3.1 “XML, TEI, OXYGEN: Einführung und Praxis” (Daniel Schopper and Ulrike Czeitschner) and the Summer School at the Institute for Modern and Contemporary Historical Research (INZ) in October 2017.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Moreover, the ÖAW-ACDH, which serves as a service institution within the Austrian Academy of Sciences, provided technical support and a suitable infrastructure.

Transcriptions in XML

Following widespread good practice of digital scholarly editing, the transcriptions were prepared using the XML schema proposed by the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI P5).[[6]](#footnote-6) Given that in almost all cases there are only singular archival records available as source materials, this is an adequate solution that did not require too much additional manual markup effort.[[7]](#footnote-7)

From the perspective of editorial scholarship, the ‘Mächtekongresse’ edition does follow the guidelines and good standard practices necessary to produce accurate textual representation of the documents.

In order to achieve this, a subset of the TEI namespace had to be used.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In this short overview, we cannot go into detail on the elements used, but we point out that the TEI files are readily available for download both from the individual document’s metadata header block and through RestXQ.

The most frequent textual phenomena encountered in the edition files include: contemporary additions and deletions, changes of scribes, recordings of paper damage and additions and supplements by the editor. To add to the functionality of the resulting web application and root linked data deep in the edition’s fabric, references to named entities such as persons, places and institutions have been added as well. The edition currently distinguishes between directly mentioned [pers|org|place]Names and references to the entity meant (e.g. persName is used if a part of a person’s proper name is mentioned, whereas a reference to the same person without explicit naming is encoded as rs type="person").[[9]](#footnote-9)

Up to three scientific apparatuses are displayed throughout the edition documents: the editorial apparatus including commentary and notes on context is being counted numerically (1, 2, 3, …). As soon as notes are present in the source documents, those are distinguished by alphabetical indexes (a, b, c, …). A third apparatus, indicated by lowercase roman numbering, is shown in cases where longer phrases have been transcribed as textual variants.

When we started to develop and adopt the viewer application, the transcripts were already in an almost publishable form, but had to be corrected (markup- and language-wise) and harmonised with respect to some XML elements.

Interfaces as access paths to historical documents

Besides the above-mentioned arguments for a digital edition there is an even more powerful advantage that the digital form entails: The edition’s web application enables users to access the edition data in new ways that transcend the scientific value of the standardised markup that constitutes the edition.

Tables of contents are constructed from the file listings. The underlying files are labelled and sorted by the places of the congresses and a consecutive numbering which depicts the chronological order of the congresses’ proceedings. This structure is used for the ordering of the documents themselves (“Dokumente”), the descriptions of the archival holdings (“Bestandsbeschreibungen”) and the abstracts (“Regesten”).

A spatial rendering of the origins of the edited documents is available directly at the landing page of the web application in the form of a map that gives the broader context of post-Napoleonic Europe.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Two additional chronological access paths make use of the @when attributes in the teiHeader metadata concerning the dating of the documents: a calendar view and a timeline view. While the calendar allows one to link the documents (and the events that led to them) to a structured understanding of time (from year to months and days of the week), the timeline view gives an overview of the temporal continuum that the documents relate to more from a bird’s eye.

The relatively deep tagging of named entities in the TEI files – mostly person and place data, only two institutions have been listed separately – enables access to the edition data by means of indices automatically created from the encoded files. The listPlace index of places includes geo data that allows for a spatial pinning not only of the places of document generation, but also of all places that are mentioned within the edition text. Furthermore, all places mentioned include GeoNames identifiers to ensure interoperability with other resources in a linked open data approach, and a representation on any given map (in the current version, our web application takes the shortcut of using contemporary GIS data via leaflet/OpenStreetMap).[[11]](#footnote-11) The same holds true for the reference data identifying persons, where we chose to use the norm data from the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) to disambiguate persons and link them to the documents in a machine-readable way. The web application also provides access through an API, through a simple Beacon file and through JSON-based autocomplete data.

Abstracts are provided to describe the actual contents of the documents. These are provided in a separate list through the table of contents submenu, but also in the head section of the individual documents’ views.

Conceptionally opposed to a structured semantic approach the web interface also offers a full text search (implemented in Apache Lucene); its results (displayed in a datatables view) can be narrowed down on the fly just by using a text input field.

Technicalities and Platform Choice

As the ÖAW-ACDH was already taking part in the HRSM-funded project *Kompetenznetzwerk Digitale Edition (KONDE)*, and our academic home institute, the Institute for Modern and Contemporary Historical Research (INZ) got involved in this network effort as well, our attention focused on choosing a technical solution for the web application from this environment. This predetermined our decision to use the dsebaseapp as a blueprint for developing an application for accessing the TEI edition data. dsebaseapp (dse stands for ‘digital scholarly edition’) was developed by Peter Andorfer at the ÖAW-ACDH as a starting point for edition interfaces, and it is especially suitable for epistolary material since it in itself stems from the application for the letters of Leo Thun-Hohenstein.[[12]](#footnote-12) With the assistance of a series of accompanying blog posts,[[13]](#footnote-13) we proceeded to implement maechtekongresse as an application for the eXist-db platform.[[14]](#footnote-14)

This choice has also been influenced by the fact that the amount of data in the edition is relatively small, as it does not include image data and spans a total of 115 XML documents only. Moreover, due to the fact that there was no additional funding available, the solution to be selected could not be other than “free” (as in software), and the ÖAW-ACDH already had server and network infrastructure in place for using an eXist-db approach. In addition, this infrastructure includes the possibility to archive the edition data in ARCHE (A Resource Centre for the HumanitiEs).[[15]](#footnote-15) Consequently, there were no viable alternatives available to this whole package.

The access paths outlined above are mostly based on preparatory work from the KONDE consortium, especially drawing from the aforementioned dsebaseapp package that reused XSLT transformation scripts written by Dario Kampkaspar (both are currently working at the ÖAW-ACDH). Since early 2018, the application was refined in close collaboration between ÖAW-ACDH and INZ.

The ‘Mächtekongresse’ edition is available online since September 2018 on <https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/>. The digital edition licences all the edition data under Creative Commons (CC-BY 4.0) licence, contributing to the digitally available research output of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and its Institute for Modern and Contemporary Historical Research.

With the publication of the ‘Mächtekongresse’ edition, we hope to have contributed to further historiographical investigation on a crucial period in European history following the Napoleonic wars and the Congress of Vienna, based on actual archival sources. On the technical and methodological flip side of our effort, we intend to continue furthering the development of suitable tools that open up historical documents to new questions (and APIs).

Postscriptum: Known Desiderata

* Sources in the bibliography (listBibl in listtreaties.xml and listWit in listwit.xml) are currently flat text, precluding programmatic access.
* Whitespace handling, especially in mixed content XML nodes that contain both text and child elements, is still not properly addressed. As a result, some links include trailing spaces preceding punctuation marks. In general, the authoritative version of the ‘Mächtekongresse’ edition is the one transcribed in the TEI XML files; those should be consulted in case the HTML representation raises doubts.
* A network representation in GEFX format is being prepared; it is intended to depict the interrelations between congress sessions (and the resulting documents that form the edition) and the individuals taking part therein. Such a network view will allow for grasping the relation in a chronotopical context.
* All of the edition’s documentary data is yet to be archived on the ARCHE service. Furthermore, the application’s code will soon be public under MIT licence on the KONDE GitHub.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The team are grateful for any feedback regarding the ‘Mächtekongresse’ digital edition.

1. Remarkable exceptions in recent years are: Mark Jarrett, The Congress of Vienna and Its Legacy. War and Great Power Diplomacy after Napoleon (London – New York 2013); Heinz Duchhardt, Der Aachener Kongress 1818. Ein europäisches Gipfeltreffen im Vormärz (München 2018); Paul W. Schroeder, Metternich’s Diplomacy at Its Zenith 1820–1823 (Austin 1962); Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, Metternich et la France après le Congrès de Vienne, Bd. 2 (Paris 1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Miroslav Šedivý, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question (Pilsen 2013). See Matthias Schulz, Normen und Praxis. Das Europäische Konzert der Großmächte als Sicherheitsrat 1815–1860 (München 2009), 684. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul W. Schroeder, The Transformation of European politics 1763–1848 (Oxford 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Summer school was organised between the FWF project “Die Medialität diplomatischer Kommunikation (17. Jahrhundert)” (P 30091), the Institute for History at Salzburg University, the Centre for Information Modelling at University of Graz in cooperation with the Institut für Dokumentologie und Editorik (IDE). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In fact, some documents had been transcribed using standard MS Word text processing, and then converted to TEI XML using the OxGarage tool <http://oxgarage.tei-c.org/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a different approach concerning a similar textual genre, but different textual source situation, cf. the representation of the records of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 that remodels textual events with a relational database, using the Quill Project (<https://www.quillproject.net/quill>). In this case, the negotiations underlying a collaboratively edited text like the US federal constitution are represented as different types of events that result in different states of textual snippets at a given point time. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In particular, this refers to the following TEI modules: header, linking, core, textstructure, namesdates, transcr, textcrit, figures and msdescription. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Note on country: Only places are recorded in the listPlace index, historical country names are not geo-referenced, but still marked up using the country tag. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The monochrome map is based on a CC-licenced map “Europe 1820” by Andreas Kunz, Wolf Röss and Joachim Robert Möschl (<https://www.ieg-maps.uni-mainz.de/mapsp/mappEu820Serie2.htm>); it has been edited by Stephan Kurz and forms the background graphics for the whole web application. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This might be updated to a more accurate data set stemming from the HistoGIS project that involves the ÖAW-ACDH, <https://histogis.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/>, in a future feature release. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The latest iteration of this application is to be found at <https://thun-korrespondenz.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/pages/index.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See <https://github.com/csae8092/posts/tree/master/digital-edition-web-app>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://exist-db.org/>. This toolset is notorious in the Digital Humanities context for various reasons – our experiences are positive for the most part. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/acdh/tools/arche/>, repository based on Fedora Commons. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://github.com/KONDE-AT/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)