<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 functioning of the European system of powers in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, these gatherings are largely marginalized in historiographic perceptions. Although the representatives of the European powers—namely Austria, France, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia—deliberated on security issues as well as slave trade, the fate of the Ottoman Empire and the constitution of the German Confederation, historical accounts of this period tend to simplify and undervalue the results of these negotiations.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Various factors have 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 subsumed under the pejorative label “Holy Alliance”. Sometimes they are perceived as sequels of the Congress of Vienna that brought no political innovation for the European community of states. And last but not least, almost no written historical sources from these congresses were available in printed form. Over the years, some of the minutes and memoirs have been published, but they are not easy to access due to their different places of publication. Scholars interested in the topic therefore had to engage in 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 section outlines the historical context and the thematic contents of the documents. In the second section, we discuss how we processed the resources (technicalities of the transcriptions in TEI-flavoured XML, the development of multiple access paths as discovery tools, and the technical platform we are using). The paper thus pursues a two-part objective: to further the use of our “Mächtekongresse” application, thereby facilitating both an improved understanding of the historical source material and—no 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 by Karin Schneider in a series of FWF-funded projects. This spares handling of the original papers and provides easier access to the proceedings of the congresses—and thus 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 great powers contracted in the Treaty of Chaumont to not conclude separate peace treaties with France, but instead to fight Napoleon until his final defeat. Austria, Great Britain, Prussia and Russia renewed their alliance after Napoleon returned from Elba in March 1815, transforming 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 stipulated the periodical convocation of congresses to deal with issues of common European interest. In 1818, France was accepted into the alliance as a partner during the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, thus completing the quintet of the five European great powers.

But the agenda of the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle included not just the reintegration of France into the European state system. It also provided a forum for problems already relevant at the Congress of Vienna that 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 that had occurred during the Napoleonic Wars. This included negotiations on border and custom disputes within the German Confederation, the fate of the Bonaparte family, the question of 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. In addition, 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, certain topics negotiated in Aix-la-Chapelle also had a global or humanitarian character. Following up on the proceedings of the Congress of Vienna, the plenipotentiaries discussed the abolishment 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 negotiators dealt with the fate of the former Swedish queen and her family.

The congresses of Troppau/Opava and Laibach/Ljubljana (1820/21) differed from the negotiations in Aix-la-Chapelle in that there was only a single issue on the agenda: the fear of new revolutions in Europe. In 1820, revolutions had broken 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 monarchic 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 evidence the fear of revolution but also reflect the complex relations between the European powers during this period and the connection between foreign policy and internal political considerations. The governments of France and Great Britain were both struggling with domestic problems and a strong opposition. Neither state sent official plenipotentiaries to Troppau/Opava in order not to stir up liberal headwinds at home; instead they opted to dispatch only observers. Nevertheless, the diplomats and statesmen signed off 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 convene a new congress in the following year to discuss the end of the military occupation of Naples.

In 1822, the representatives of the European powers gathered in Verona. In the meantime, however, the results of the meetings at Troppau/Opava and Laibach/Ljubljana had been voided by the course of events: Following the revolution of 1820, Spain was in fact in a state on the brink of civil war, and from the perspective of the French government, this circumstance threatened peace and security in France. The most important topic on the agenda was thus the envisaged French military intervention on the Iberian Peninsula. But the plenipotentiaries deliberated not only on the difficult situation in Spain, they also dealt with political questions regarding Italy. In particular, they discussed the withdrawal of the occupation forces from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont after the revolutions of 1820 and 1821. Similar to the proceedings at Aix-la-Chapelle, the diplomats and statesmen assembled in Verona also spoke about various political, humanitarian and economic issues of European interest, e.g. the strained relations with the Ottoman Empire and —closely related—the Greek War of Independence, the Atlantic slave trade, the relationship between the European powers and the former colonies in South America, customs-free transport along rivers, and the fate and domiciles of members of the Bonaparte and Murat family along with legal claims deriving from the Napoleonic era.

The Congress of Verona was the last gathering on the basis of Article 6 of the 1815 treaty among the quadruple alliance. Seven years after the Congress of Vienna, this form of consultation practice had come to an end. The reasons for this development are complex and may be sought in the personalities of the actors and the shift of the political focus from Western and Southern Europe towards South-eastern Europe. The Greek insurrection and the reaction of the powers clearly showed their divergent interests in this part of the world.[[2]](#footnote-2) They nevertheless continued their close cooperation and consultation, however: During the nineteenth century, several multilateral conferences at different diplomatic levels took place to deliberate on and regulate international conflicts. On more than 15 occasions, the representatives of the European powers discussed mediation strategies, engaged in conflict management and took concerted measures to increase diplomatic pressure with the goal of forestalling military confrontations and securing the 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 at least until the Crimean War that began in 1853. Several conferences and consultation meetings to regulate European affairs still took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, however—the practice only came to an end when World War I and the founding of the League of Nations in 1920 brought a decisive break.

The congresses can be interpreted as diplomatic manifestations of a new approach to 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 Concert of Europe institutionalized international conferences to discuss problems concerning Europe and mediate between conflicting parties so as to secure peace and tranquillity on the continent. Besides several ambassadorial conferences, the four congresses convened after the Congress of Vienna were means to achieve these ends.

Preliminary Work and Cooperation Partners

Transcription of the documents related to the congresses began 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 task in the scope of her project “Die Kongresse von Troppau und Laibach 1820/21”, likewise funded by the FWF. It was initially 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 goal of general accessibility of reliable transcripts of the Congresses’ respective records (which could have been tackled in a ‘traditional’ paper-based edition as well), and the expansion to online accessibility without the need to physically travel to either the archives or a library owning a paper edition.

Two workshops on 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.

Transcription into XML

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

From the perspective of editorial scholarship, the “Mächtekongresse” edition adheres to the guidelines and good practice standards necessary to produce accurate textual representations 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 wish to point out that the TEI files are readily available for download both from the individual documents’ metadata header blocks 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 link data deeply within 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 indirect references to them (e.g. persName is used if a part of a person’s proper name is given, whereas a reference to the same person without explicit mention of their name 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 counted numerically (1, 2, 3, …). As soon as notes are present in the source documents, they are distinguished using alphabetical indices (a, b, c, …). A third apparatus, indicated by lowercase Roman numerals, is used in cases where longer phrases have been transcribed as textual variants.

When we began to develop and adapt the viewer application, the transcripts were already in an almost publishable form, but still needed to be corrected (in regard to markup and language) and harmonised with respect to certain XML elements.

Interfaces as Access Paths to Historical Documents

Besides the abovementioned arguments for a digital edition, there is an even more significant advantage provided by the digital format: The edition’s web application allows users to access the edition data in new ways that exceed the scientific value of the standardised markup constituting the edition.

Tables of contents are constructed from the file listings. The underlying files are labelled and sorted according to the locations of the congresses and a consecutive numbering that depicts the chronological order of the proceedings. This structure is used to arrange 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 on the landing page of the web application in the shape of a map showing 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 representing the dating of the documents: a calendar view and a timeline view. While the calendar allows the documents (and the events that led to them) to be linked to a structured understanding of time (from years to months and days of the week), the timeline view offers an overview of the temporal continuum to which the documents relate from more of a bird’s-eye view.

The relatively deep tagging of named entities in the TEI files—mostly person and place data, with only two institutions being listed separately—enables access to the edition data by means of indices created automatically from the encoded files. The listPlace index of places includes geodata that allows for a spatial pinning not only of the places where documents were generated, 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 as well as representation on any given map (in the current version, our web application makes use of the shortcut of contemporary GIS data via Leaflet/OpenStreetMap).[[11]](#footnote-11) The same applies to the reference data identifying persons, where we chose to use the authority filedata from the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) to disambiguate persons and link them to the documents in a machine-readable fashion. 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 as well as in the header section of the individual documents’ views.

Conceptually complementary to the 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 simply by using a text input field.

Technicalities and Platform Choice

Since 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), became involved in this network effort as well, our attention focused on choosing a technical solution from this environment for the web application. This predetermined our decision to use dsebaseapp as a blueprint for the development of 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; it is especially suitable for epistolary material since it is itself derived from the application designed for the letters of Leo Thun-Hohenstein.[[12]](#footnote-12) With the help 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 was also influenced by the fact that the amount of data in the edition is relatively small, since 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 software solution to be selected had to be “free” (as in software), and the ÖAW-ACDH already had server and network infrastructure in place to allow the use of an eXist-db approach. This infrastructure also 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 for our implementation.

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

The “Mächtekongresse” edition has been available online at <https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/> since September 2018. The digital edition licences all edition data under the 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 investigations into 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 the development of suitable tools that open up historical documents to new questions (and APIs).

Post Scriptum: 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, has still not been 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; these should therefore be consulted in cases where the HTML representation raises doubts.
* A network representation in GEFX format is in preparation; it is intended to depict the interrelations between congress sessions (and the resulting documents that form the edition) and the individuals taking part in them. Such a network view will allow the display of these relations in a chronotopical context.
* All of the edition’s documentary data has yet to be archived in the ARCHE service. Furthermore, the application’s code will soon be made public under the MIT licence at the KONDE GitHub.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The team is 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 (Munich 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, vol. 2 (Paris 1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Miroslav Šedivý, Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question (Pilsen 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Matthias Schulz, Normen und Praxis. Das Europäische Konzert der Großmächte als Sicherheitsrat 1815–1860 (Munich 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 co-organised by the FWF project “Die Medialität diplomatischer Kommunikation (17. Jahrhundert)” (P 30091), the Institute for History at Salzburg University, and the Centre for Information Modelling at the 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 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 with a differing textual source situation, cf. the representation of the records of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 that remodels textual events in a relational database: 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 given points in time. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This refers in particular to the following TEI modules: header, linking, core, textstructure, namesdates, transcr, textcrit, figures and msdescription. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Note on country: Only instances of place are recorded in the listPlace index. Historical names of countries are not georeferenced, 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 image for the entire web application. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This may be updated to a more accurate data set originating from the HistoGIS project involving the ÖAW-ACDH, <https://histogis.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/>, in a future feature release. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The latest iteration of this application can 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 within the Digital Humanities context for various reasons; our experiences have been 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)