

Between centre and periphery: the role of connecting Transylvania to the Telegraph Network of the Habsburg Monarchy in the Mid- Nineteenth Century*

Zwischen Zentrum und Peripherie: die Rolle der Anschluss Siebenbürgens an der Telegraph-Netzwerk der Habsburgermonarchie in der Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts

Iosif Marin Balog

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Abstract

One of the wonders of nineteenth century technology, telegraph, has reached Transylvania province, in the years 1850, in a period when the world has achieved intercontinental connection that would change the communications from that time.

The possibility of information transmission almost instantly made telegraph to be placed in administrative and military purposes, but it has imposed very quickly, including economic and commercial needs. In conditions that although Transylvania was a province of the Danube Monarchy, in the early 19th century of 50s, it was located in of transport and communications terms in a peripheral, both from the capital Vienna, and other regions of the Monarchy.

In 1854 telegraph reached the province of Transylvania. Under state monopoly, it was extended for administrative and military reasons around and during the Crimean War.

The aim of this study is to analyze that evolution in a historical-social perspective and at the same time, to answer the following questions:

- What were the economic and political factors that have contributed to this process?
- How has the introduction of telegraph changed administrative, economic and political relations between the capital of the empire and local authorities?
- How was received the introduction of telegraph by elites and the general public and which was its impact on changing perceptions about the news and their movement?

After the passing of the 1848-1849 revolutionary confrontations that have profoundly marked all the provinces, the Habsburg Monarchy moved to a substantial reorganization of the state and administration in all its levels. If on the political level we are dealing with a centralist-conservative regime which aimed fencing the political expression possibilities of the provinces and population, on the economic level the

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authorities in Vienna have preferred a more pragmatic approach, of liberal essence¹. The purpose of the new economic policies should be considered from two perspectives: one in which the Habsburg state intended to overcome the relative economic backwardness compared to the occidental countries and the second to create tools and strategies able to alleviate the extremely uneven development between different regions and provinces and more than that, to limit the process begun at least a century earlier within into the Monarchy already emerged on economic level, different center-periphery relationships.

Through the new type of government established in 1849, administrative and economic center of decision firmly establishes in Vienna. The new administration based on a bureaucratic system particularly well-formed is now installed on the same principles of organization, in all provinces, including those that until 1848 retained the old legal and administrative structures based on the powerful noble classes that were not always willing to take into account the decisions of Vienna². Track terms of Transylvania, the eastern province and the most far away from Vienna is now framed in the new administrative-bureaucratic structure of the Monarchy and for this purpose have been brought many functionars (Beamten) from the other provinces of the Empire because in the province was a lack of specific qualified personnel, or even if there was, it was not always willing to transpose promptly and with the necessary impartiality in the local level the decisions, viewing the multi-ethnic character of the province and the multiple trauma caused, on this level, by the revolution³.

In these coordinates, and economic life of the Transylvanian Society entered a new stage, obviously conditioned by the state intentions, by the capital flows, by the effort for expanding the internal market and introducing a uniformed and efficient administration.

¹ See, Alois Brusatti, (Hrsg.) *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Bd. 1. Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1973.

² Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1765-1918. From Enlightenment to Eclipse*, London: Macmillan Press, 2001; Joseph Redlich, *Das Österreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem. Geschichte der inneren Politik der Habsburgischen Monarchie von 1848 bis zum Untergang des Reiches*, Leipzig, 1920; Also see: Eva Kreisky, „Zur Genesis der politischen und sozialen Funktion der Bürokratie“, in: *Der Politische System Österreichs*, hrsg. Heinz Fischer, 2. Auflage, Wien, 1978, p. 196-199.

³ Iosif Marin Balog, “The Fiscal Policy of Vienna in Transylvania at the Middle of 19th Century: between Bureaucratic centralism and Regional Modernization.” In *Political options of the Eastern Central European Peoples in the 19th Century*, ed. by Teodor Pavel and Iosif Marin Balog, Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2006, p. 212-241.

Which were the mechanisms by which these objectives were achieved? Those analysis reveals that we are dealing with classical forms in which the state was involved in supporting a modern economic growth in the 19th century and which have been implemented in most Western countries, the creation of new institutions converged with the time requirements, the abolition of the old feudal structures, the development of direct forms of control through the rates, fees and concessions⁴ and especially in the case of Central and Eastern Europe, the state involvement in the construction of an essential infrastructure to lower the cost of transport and communication and of the production and to integrate the local markets into a broader economic circuit.

Generally we can say that in Transylvania's case the Austrian state addressed in a smaller or larger form, all these measures according to its financial possibilities, but also determined by long term political strategies. The Habsburg state involvement rule into the vast reforming project involved besides the necessary administrative mechanisms the availability of some substantial financial resources.

Or exactly in this case were major shortcomings. Although it was introduced a new tax system based on the obligativity to pay the taxes by all social classes, introduction of state monopolies, the resources were not sufficient to support the employment of large public expenditures in all provinces.

Moreover, the extent of administrative costs incurred by the state, the same as the military costs in the mid-50 led to a permanent re-thinking of public investment priorities and implementing measures which had only palliative role for that time, without resolving on long time and promptly the problems of infrastructure and communications. On the other hand the existence of serious differences between various regions of the Monarchy and in this point of view this complicated very much the situation since the failure to timely realize some essential works for cheaper transports and the possibility of technology import negatively burdened on the modernization process in entire 19th century. It brings to the paradoxical situation in which the state, although it had created the articulation mechanisms of an economic policy oriented to uniformity, to the promotion of the most dynamic sectors, it didn't have enough resources for the

⁴ Barry Supple, *The experience of economic growth: case studies in economic history*, New York: Random House, 1963.

implementation of the ambitious programs and to meet the expectations which most backwarded provinces, ignored or unfavored in the past by the mercantilist policy, were now facing the great meeting from new administrative structures in Vienna.

The above remarks are perfectly valid for the case of Transylvania in the second half of the 19th century⁵.

The intellectuals from Transylvania speech expressed in the press in various public occasions always drew evidently, particularly after 1850, the deplorable state of facts in affairs of transport and communications⁶. Facing a genuine discourse shaping the poverty and backwardness were listed as causes: the lack of credit and capital, the good roads, the railways and the telegraph, which all together made the entrepreneurial spirit to be very low.

To the local institutional level were noted the significant efforts of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry from Brasov and Cluj for starting as soon as possible the necessary steps to build the first telegraph lines and railways to connect the province to the economic, commercial and transportation circuit to the other provinces of the Monarchy and not the last, to the south-east toward the Danubian Principalities where there still was a busy trade even since the earlier centuries⁷.

In this respect, have been developed many argumentative studies, statements, statistical data have been advanced, have been raised deep motivations as *“If in Transylvania are still lacking modern transport and communication meanings, its inhabitants will continue to consider themselves as far away from Vienna as from the Atlantic shores”*⁸. “There was no lack of political and military arguments upon which the circles around Franz Josef and senior officers have proved far more sensitive especially if we think that the overheating of the Oriental Question and the opportunity of military cutting was imminent. In this context is decided the placing of the first telegraph lines in

⁵ See Béla Köpeczi et al., *History of Transylvania*, vol. III, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, cap. XII.

⁶ See the series of newspaper articles regarding to this topic published in „*Gazeta Transilvaniei*”. Bra^oov, XIV, 1851, nr. 16; XXV, 1862, nr. 41;

⁷ *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekamer in Kronstadt an das hohe k.k. Ministerium für Handel, Gewerbe und öffentliche Bauten im Jahre 1851*, Kronstadt: Johann Gött Verlag, 1853, p. 33.

⁸ George Bariþ *Memorial pentru cel dintâi drum de fier în România Unită*, Bra^oov: Tipografia Johann Gött, 1862; *Memoriul Camerei Comerciale și Industriale din Bra^oov pentru tragerea unui drum de fier de la Bra^oov în Para Românească până la Dunăre*, Bra^oov: Tipografia Johann Gött, 1855.

Transylvania, dictated primarily by the administrative and military reasons. Himself Emperor Franz Josef, known as a conservative when it was in discussion the technical innovation, was convinced when him was introduced the telegraph advantages on military level. The more evident perspective in the early 50th of Austria's involvement in a military adventure with a political stake and especially economical into the Lower Danube and the Balkans led the Vienna administrative bodies to move quickly to extend the telegraph lines to Transylvania with the possibility of future expansion in the Danubian principalities, too⁹.

Do not be omitted nor the repeated applications of the Transylvanian administration representatives claiming permanently difficulties in communicating with the capital situated at a so big distance (between Sibiu and Vienna are about 800 km.) in the fact that connecting Transylvania to the Empire railway network was not considered, yet.

In these circumstances, the state authorities have taken issue of the urgent introduction of the telegraph in Transylvania, too. Should be noted that in the Habsburg Monarchy, the telegraph was a state monopoly used at first only for official correspondence and for the railway services. To this end it was founded K.K. Staats Telegraphen¹⁰.

We will not insist on the special importance it had the introduction of the telegraph in the 19th century on the European continent scale and than to the global one and which was illustrated in skilled and documented historical and other works¹¹. Only mention that the Central European area and implicitly the Danube Monarchy were connected rapidly to the expanding network, globally, if we consider that only 6-7 years from its discovery, the telegraph was in full expansion in different regions of the monarchy. The first experimental line was inserted between Vienna and Florisdorf (then separate localities today a Bezirk of Vienna) followed in the same year by a line to Brno, Prague in 1847 was connected. The work continued at a steady rate after the end of the

⁹ See Leonid Boicu, *Austria 'i Principatele române în vremea războiului Crimeei 1853-1856*, București: Editura Academiei, 1972.

¹⁰ Carl Freiherrn von Czoernig, *Oesterreichs Neugestaltung, 1848-1858*, Stuttgart und Augsburg: J.G. Cotta Verlag, 1858, p. 447-62.

¹¹ David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus. Technological Change and Industrial Revolution in Western Euorpe from 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969; Eric Hobsbawn, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, New York: Random House, 1987, Chapter I.

Revolution of 1848-1849, in exactly the year of the end of the revolution was linked Salzburg and in 1850 the line was reaching Innsbruck, Pest, Verona, Milan, Mantua, Agram; in 1851 followed Krakow, Lemberg. In 1853 the telegraph was rapidly approaching the Transylvanian province through Pest Szolnok line and then Püspök Ladány-Oradea-Timisoara-Arad¹².

In 1855 Vienna as the focal point was connected by telegraph network in all directions and all its provinces and of course with neighboring countries: to the north were the links with the provinces of Czech, Moravian and resorts around Prague, north-east were connected regions in Galicia and Bukovina to the borders with Russia, south-east are interconnected by lines over which became the second big junction where the lines went to Transylvania, Arad, Timisoara, Orsova and to Serbia, south-east with other Italian provinces of Lombardy, to the west of Bavaria and other German states. If in 1850 the total length was 487.2 miles of land lines in 1860 was 1161.9 miles long¹³.

In terms of management of these lines they were subordinated to the Ministry of Industry Commerce and Public Works as Department for the telegraph, and each province had a telegraph direction, before the body of the Governor. Since 1856 there were appointed to manage issues relating to telegraph a total of 9 regional inspectors. The one for Transylvania was located in Timisoara. The monitoring of the lines was ensured by the railway monitoring services and the main ways.

An important moment in the politics and the attitude towards the telegraph was the 1851 Vienna Conference on international issues on the telegraph. After this moment the Habsburg Monarchy telegraph services were open to the public and the rates were significantly reduced although we will see, they still remained quite expensive. One can say that after this conference, the telegraph was for the first time the issue placed on the first plan instead of rigid boundaries for the reason of need for communication and rapid transmission of political, commercial or private information. The proof is that beyond the inherent political and national animosities at that time existing in the European countries, they have got to go fast over them when the need for interconnection of telegraph lines for the long term, this openness has many more advantages than the animosities of time.

¹² Czoernig, op cit., 1858, p. 452-453.

¹³ At that time in Danube Monarchy was used „Austrian land mile“ (known as Postmeile, Landesmeile). 1 Austrian mile = 7,5859 km.

As stated before by the decision of connecting Transylvania to the telegraph network, the things advanced extremely quickly. The so-called Eastern line (Oestliche Richtung) that is Lugoj-Timisoara-Sibiu-Brasov with a length of 52.2 miles was completed in 1856. Then followed the line Sibiu-Sebes-Cluj-Suceava and afterwards other secondary ones. After less than a decade, in 1856 Transylvania benefited of 140.3 miles of telegraph lines¹⁴. The true age of the telegraph in Transylvania had to start again with the advance construction of railroads the most telegraph lines following the railway routes.

These were the circumstances in which Transylvania, the eastern peripheral province of the Empire was connected to the Monarchy's telegraph network and default to the continental and international. Next, we will examine some of the practical effects that this has had in the province life and its inhabitants. First, have to be mentioned that the telegraph contributed significantly to the modernization of society, has fostered rapid circulation of information and ideas, familiarized the world with ideas and news other time impossible to have it ready on time. The small Transylvanian towns were now connected with the great capital Vienna from where were arriving with an unimaginable speed all types of news. The local newspapers now have an exceptional means of information. Basically after only one day, in the Transylvanian newspapers there could be read the latest news from the capital and from any European city, the commercial information were transmitted on time, were known the latest trends in fashion and lifestyle in big cities of the Monarchy, adapted to the local possibilities¹⁵.

Should be also noted that in Transylvania the introduction of the telegraph was well seen and welcomed by the population. It was considered a feature of which, soon, more and more people will enjoy. The favorable reception was due to the fact that already many intellectuals' interventions on this subject and media in particular, had made the people familiar about the advantages of the telegraph as a means of communication. There was another situation, for example, in the Danubian Principalities where the beginning of the telegraph was not well agreed and the telegraph was not only

¹⁴ *Statistisches Handbüchlein für die Oesterreichische Monarchie 1861*, Wien: k.k. Direction der administrativen Statistik, 1861, p. 84-85.

¹⁵ Josef Ullrich, „Kulturhistorische Skizzen aus Schäßburg“, in *Sächsisches Hausfreund*, XXX, Jahr, Kronstadt, 1868, p. 69 sqq.

boycotted, but there were tries to destroy even the transmission lines and stations, being considered the expression of the foreign occupation. In the context of the Crimean War, Austria occupied the Danubian Principalities in 1854 and thus here were built the first telegraph lines.

Of course, at first the access to this means of communication was limited for most Transylvanians because of the costs that were not at anyone's hand if we think that a simple dispatch costs between 1-7 florins depending on distance, compared with a simple letter that cost 0,3-0,9 fl., the telegraph was considered very expensive. In a short time the rates started to decrease gradually to more acceptable levels.

The usefulness of the telegraph for Transylvania in that age was easily noticed even from a simple look at the statistics: if in 1854-1855 the total numbers of dispatches sent in and from Transylvania didn't exceeded 5-6000 and were almost exclusively administrative and official¹⁶, in less than two decades their number was hundreds of thousands. No doubt that this contributed primarily to the increasing economical activities, investment and capital flows that experienced sustained rates in the age of Gründerzeit.

According to statistics in the years 1871-1873 were recorded the highest rate in using the telegraph¹⁷.

Only in 1871 the numbered dispatches sent in Transylvania was about 476.118 in 1872 to 513 109. In 1873, the year of the World Exhibition in Vienna but starting year of the Great Depression, the dispatches number reached the number 516.000 without taking into consideration the railroad ones. During the years of crisis their number decreased obviously, primarily due to the economic activities cutdown, such as in 1874 had a total of 428 249, in 1875 were 396 089, in 1876 were 440 267, in 1877 were 471 835 (see the table).

¹⁶ *Compaß für Siebenbürgen. Neuer vaterländischer Kalender für das Gemeinjahr 1854 zur Orientierung in wichtigen Angelegenheiten des häuslichen und öffentlichen Lebens*, Kronstadt: Iohann Gött Verlag, 1854.

¹⁷ *Bericht der Handels- und Gewerbekammer in Kronstadt an das hohe K.K. Ministerium für Handel Gewerbe und öffentliche Bauten über den Zustand der Gewerbe, des Handels und Verkehrsverhältnisse für die Jahre 1878-1879*, Kronstadt: Iohann Gött Verlag, 1881, p. 376-7; *Statistik des österreichischen Telegraphen in 1870-1871*, Wien, 1873, p. 1-10.

The evolution of Telegraph network and traffic (selective 1856-1877)

| Year | Total number of telegrams |
|------|---------------------------|
| 1856 | 5000-6000... |
| 1871 | 476118 |
| 1872 | 513109 |
| 1873 | 516600 |
| 1874 | 428249 |
| 1875 | 396089 |
| 1876 | 440267 |
| 1877 | 471835 |

Sources: *Tafeln... 1855, Tafel 11; Bericht, 1878, p. 374.*

| Name of the city | Delivered | | Received | | Number of employers in the telegraph station |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|--|
| | Private telegrams | State telegrams | Private telegrams | State telegrams | |
| Bra ^o ov/Kronstadt | 18514 | 346 | 17918 | 669 | 20 |
| Cluj/Klausenburg | 20130 | 475 | 21144 | 475 | 14 |
| Sibiu/Hermannstadt | 12050 | 1821 | 16222 | 1399 | 8 |
| Târgu Mure ^o /Neumarkt | 9804 | 206 | 8787 | 297 | 3 |
| Sighi ^o oara/Schäßburg | 2951 | 95 | 2779 | 181 | 2 |

Source: *Bericht...*, 1878, p. 376-377.

Of course, the greatest share was owned by the major cities of Transylvania, for example in 1878 Brasov estimated 100.731 that is one fourth of the total, 45.808 recorded in Sibiu and Cluj-the administrative capital of Transylvania-an estimated number of 130.474 . Another relevant fact, clearly in statistics is that the private letters

owned the majority even if we talk about large or small towns or even small tourist resorts populated with tourists only in summer. It was the case of Borszék or Eliopatak customary intense with tourists in summer, for example in 1879 in Eliopatak a number of 1198 and in Borszék 1127¹⁸.

The economic impact of the introduction of the telegraph in Transylvania is not summarizing to simple statistical example that taken in isolation do not mean much if we do not take into account the complex issues related to macro-economic developments recorded in this period in the province. We will address these two issues through two examples: capital flows and investment.

In the mid 50th in Transylvania there were only five Credit Institutes, each with a capital of several thousands florins, as is rightly said that here the lack of credit and capital was a chronic reality, largely responsible for the extremely low industrialization level of the province, entrepreneurship, encouraging the usurers proliferation with adverse consequences both in trade as in the rural world. The authorities in Vienna have noticed this and tried to make a series of steps to open in Transylvania subsidiaries of the big Austrian banks, only that they were owned by the private capitals and depended on their calculations and decisions to invest and to expand in Transylvania. However, the signal was given by the central authorities through opening a branch of National Bank of Austria in Brasov in 1854, after long insistence of the traders and craftsmen in the city. The bank was capitalized with the amount of one million florins.

It was an important step, made exactly in the years when Brasov was connected to the telegraph network, indispensable for the banking and communication between the Central Bank and its subsidiary in the situation of the rail links lacked.

It was also, an important signal to the other investors, as confirmed by the establishment, after three years, in 1857, of a subsidiary of the major commercial bank Vienna Creditanstalt für Handel und Gewerbe that in the first years of activity has given promising results on the local capital market¹⁹. The establishment of these credit institutions, in addition to the existing local ones opened the way of the Austrian capital

¹⁸ *Bericht....*, 1878, p. 377.

¹⁹ Iosif Marin Balog, „Die Finanzpolitik Wiens zwischen der 1848-er Revolution und Dualismus: der Fall der kronstädtischen Filiale der Wiener Bank Creditanstalt“, in *Studia Germanica Napocensia*, 1, 2009, p. 205-220.

entering through investments in industry. The first more consistent Austrian capital investment were made in these years, too. The favorite branches to which this capital was targeted were the mining and steel industry, fields that enjoyed abundant local natural resources and the good price of finished products in the local markets and neighboring ones and not least, the prospect of quick profits. The same as in the other regions of the Empire, the industrial firms established by the Austrian capital during this period were joint stock companies created from the merger of smaller local companies or by acquiring new licenses from the state. The largest investment of its kind launched in these years was the Society of Mines and Furnaces from Brasov with an initial capital of 4 millions florins, increased at 11 millions²⁰. In the following years the foreign investment has been targeted to other areas, resulting somehow the dynamization of industrial sectors in Transylvania. Some companies and particularly the ones in the railway construction after 1867 were listed on the Vienna Stock Exchange and the telegraph had in this regard a particularly important role.

Without any other details of this problematics that have been the subject of some other studies, we highlight only some aspects as conclusions on the effects of introducing the telegraph in Transylvania in an era when the impact of new means of communication transformed the world on a globally scale.

First, from the administrative point of view have been changed the administrative relations between the capital of the empire and local authorities, resulting in an extremely short time the uniformization of the administration and the lift of its standard to the required standard of rigor and thoroughness of the well-known Austrian bureaucracy. Vienna decisions were now better implemented locally. We have already noted some economic effects and certainly the telegraph impact at that level was particularly important. One issue would be highlighted at this level, a negative one, is that that was not a needed synchronization with a sustained rhythm of construction of a railway network in order to connect Transylvania to the Monarchy's network, the essential requirement in that time for making profitable the import of modern technology required in the industrialization. The lack of coherence of the state policy in this respect, the

²⁰ Iosif Marin Balog, "The Exports of Austrian Capital in Transylvania in the 19th Century and its effects on the Industrialization. The case of the Anonymus Society of Mines and Furnances from Brasov (1856-1894)", in, *Transylvanian Review, Suppelment, nr. 1, 2009, p. 19-38*.

standing disputes in the province on one or other rail projects priority, the lack of private capital interested in investing in this area led to a postponement until 1867 of construction beginning that proved fatal for Transylvania. Accumulated economic modernization gap could not be eliminated in the coming years with all efforts.

The telegraph would had a far more obvious effect for Transylvania if it had been accompanied by other major and fast investments in the transport infrastructure and other areas essential to the process of modernization and urbanization in the 19th century.