



Theatrum historiae 29 (2021)

DOI: 10.46585/th.2022.29.04

An Informal Approach to Interest-based Negotiations – Paul Anton Esterhazy and the “Cottage Coterie”

Katalin SCHREK

Abstract: *Paul Anton Esterhazy was a prominent figure of the Hungarian aristocracy and a leading Austro-Hungarian politician, as well as a highly qualified and internationally recognised diplomat, with an extensive network of personal relations within the British elite. Esterhazy was an ambassador of Austria to London from 1815 to 1842 and represented the interests of the Central European state. In the mid-1820s he was a member of the so-called “Cottage Coterie”, a group created by King George IV and inspired by the aim of counterbalancing the political influence of the new secretary of the Foreign Office, George Canning. The meetings of the group were political and social events as well. Esterhazy was connected with close (family and political) ties to George IV, and thus he was a well-trusted person in the royal court. My paper focuses on the activity and role of Esterhazy within the Cottage Coterie.*

Keywords: *Austrian diplomacy, Paul Anton Esterhazy (III), 1820s, Cottage Coterie, foreign policy of George Canning, George IV*

Although research on the history of diplomacy in the nineteenth century is characterised by an abundance of sources in general, there are forms of discussions and cooperation which are difficult to explore, as they go beyond formal negotiations and are not included in official documents, which makes it very challenging to describe these processes. One of these informal collaborations was the so-called “Cottage Coterie”, a grouping set up by King George IV (1820–1830) at the English royal court, the members of which aspired to take an active role in shaping British domestic and foreign policy. A member of this unofficial circle was Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy (1786–1866),¹ who had a distinguished diplomatic career and was Austria’s ambassador in the English capital. It was primarily Harold Temperley who studied the activity of the Cottage Coterie, but approaches from the participants’ personal point of view, perhaps with the exception

¹ He was the third member of the Esterhazy to bear this name.

of Dorothea Lieven, have not been widely presented yet.² For this reason i thought it would be worthwhile to examine Esterhazy's role in the years 1823 to 1825. In recent years, a significant part of my research has focused on British politics in the 1820s and 1830s, which is when Esterhazy's work came to my attention as well. Before that, i had only studied the prince's diplomatic activity in connection with the London conference on the question of the independent Greek state. It was during that period of my research that the emblematic group of the 1820s came to my attention. In my study, i will attempt to introduce a perspective on international affairs and interstate relations that is partly, but not entirely, outside the official scene, and present the initial results of my research.³

In the first section of my paper, i will try to highlight Esterhazy's involvement in the English court and political circles, showing the links he had with the Prince Regent, later King George IV, as well as the relationships he maintained with the local political elite and with members of the diplomatic corps of several countries in London. In the second section i would like to give a deeper description of the Cottage Coterie itself and its political roots. What was the function of this group, who were its members, what were the key motives of its operation, and what were the specific issues in which it was actively involved? Finally, in the third section, i will highlight how Esterhazy functioned within the group, in what sense his activities can be considered informal, and what put an end to the active political involvement of the royal circle.

By the time Esterhazy was appointed as head of the Austrian embassy in London, he had already built up a strong network of connections in Britain. He had previously served there as a diplomat in 1806⁴ and was also involved in the allied negotiations at Châtillon during the last phase of the Napoleonic Wars, not to mention the Congress of Vienna.⁵ No

2 Harold TEMPERLEY, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1820–1827*, in: Adolphus William Ward – George Peabody Gooch (eds.), *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy*, vol. II., Cambridge 1923, pp. 51–118; IDEM, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822–1827. England, the Neo-holy Alliance, and the New World*, London 1966, p. 690; IDEM, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, *The English Historical Review* 38, 1923, no. 150, pp. 206–225; IDEM (ed.), *The Unpublished Diary and Political Sketches of Princess Lieven Together with Some of Her Letters*, London 1925, p. 283.

3 Supported by the ÚNKP–20–4 New National Excellence Programme of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology from the source of the National Research, Development, and Innovation Fund (Hungary). The current study presents the first results of the initial phase of a new research project, which has been based on both published sources and archival material. It is important to emphasise, however, that the exploration of the topic is still far from complete, and a more thorough analysis of Esterhazy and the Cottage Coterie's activities requires further research, which will be part of the long-term plans for the upcoming years. The main focus of this study is therefore to outline the characteristics of a unique political and diplomatic milieu and the main issues related to it.

4 Imre RESS, *Herceg Esterházy Pál. a szent szövetségi diplomata és alkotmányos miniszter*, *Limes – Tudományos szemle* 12, 1999, no. 2, pp. 29–42, here p. 30.

5 István HAJNAL, *Le Journal du Paul Esterházy sur son Séjour en France en 1814*, *Revue des Études Hongroises* 7, 1929, pp. 32–38, here pp. 35–37.; I. RESS, *Herceg Esterházy Pál*, p. 32.

stranger to the local political scene, Esterhazy was a permanent and popular figure in high society, along with his wife, Princess Maria Theresa (a member of the Thurn und Taxis family). They were not merely members, but key figures in one of the most exclusive clubs of the Regency era, known as the Almack's Club, and were constant guests at the homes of leading dignitaries and the residence of the Prince of Wales. Furthermore, Esterhazy aimed to maintain good relations with members of the delegations of other countries, such as the representatives of the French, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch embassies. Esterhazy's circle of close confidants included another prominent figure of the Austrian embassy, Baron Philipp von Neumann, who was the prince's closest associate. Another important point of reference for the Austrian ambassador was the interaction with the Russian representative. At this time, the Russian Embassy in London was led by Count Christoph Andreyevich Lieven, whose wife – Dorothea Lieven, from the prominent Baltic German Benkendorff family – played a decisive role in shaping the diplomatic process behind the scenes. In addition, the Countess was one of the few foreign personalities who had a great influence in the social life of London.

Esterhazy's personal good relationship with the Prince Regent was well known at the time, as were his family ties. His wife was a direct relative of Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. However, Dorothea Lieven remarked on one occasion that Princess Esterhazy did not receive any special attention at court because of this: “(...) *a great niece of the Queen of England, through her mother, the Princess of Thurn und Taxis (...) this relationship gives her no sort of precedence here, as she is regarded as belonging to the corps diplomatique.*”⁶ It is worth noting, however, that the relationship between the two ladies was not always smooth, so it is possible that Countess Lieven's statement was rather an attempt to undermine her rival Princess Esterhazy's reputation, and thus her husband's prestige. Nevertheless, Paul Esterhazy, personally and together with his wife, did enjoy the trust and sympathy of George, and from the second half of the 1810s Esterhazy was part of the Prince Regent's close circle. Nothing proves that more than their regular invitations to the countryside residence, the “Cottage”, which is where the name Cottage Coterie came from.⁷ The Prince Regent's residence was in Windsor, not in the castle itself, but in a small countryside residence in a remote part of the estate (the Royal Lodge). This became the starting point and the main informal arena for the negotiations between Prince Esterhazy and the Coterie.⁸

6 E. BERESFORD, *Memorials of the St. James Street Together with the Annals of Almack's*, London 1922, p. 232.

7 Muriel E. CHAMBERLAIN, *Cottage Coterie*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [accessed 28 June 2021], doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/63269>.

8 Another alternative location for their discussions must have been Carlton House, which was George's London residence.

The Cottage Coterie can be considered as an interesting organisation in itself, even without its political aspects. It may come as no surprise that the monarch gathered an entourage and had a special interest in certain individuals. It was in fact a natural and self-evident part of everyday court life. This was especially true in the 1810s and 1820s, as George was known for his extraordinary lifestyle and appreciation of social life. Visits that took place outside the noise of the city of London were all part of this. Even during his reign, George did not despise the lighter forms of leisure, and Philipp von Neumann, the Austrian attaché, recorded several similar events in his diary, mentioning on one occasion that in his view that this kind of frivolous and dissolute lifestyle was completely at odds with the dignified image of great European monarchs in general.⁹ “*It is a curious sight in such a century as ours to see a king exhibiting in public his weaknesses (...)*”¹⁰ The social group known as the Cottage Coterie partially served the purpose of maintaining the King’s lifestyle, with the members regularly receiving invitations to George IV’s residence. This circle included, in addition to the aforementioned Paul Esterhazy: Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington; Dudley Ryder, the 1st Earl of Harrowby; John Fane, the 10th Earl of Westmorland; Lord Francis and Elisabeth Conyngham; Sir William Knighton; Prince Jules de Polignac; Count Ernst Friedrich Herbert von Münster; Christoph and Dorothea Lieven, and Baron Philip von Neumann.¹¹ If we glance through the names, we will basically notice that half of the list is made up of foreigners, all of whom were, without exception, members of the diplomatic corps of a given state. Prince Polignac, who joined the Coterie somewhat later than the others, was France’s ambassador to London, the Count of Münster was the official representative of Hanover, the Lieven couple of Russia, and Esterhazy and Neumann of Austria. Besides the relatively large number of participants, the Cottage Coterie also had a small inner circle as well, which included the Duke of Wellington and the ambassadors and officials mentioned above, and which, in addition to casual social gatherings, also had political functions. This policy had a pronounced orientation, with George Canning, the new British Foreign Secretary, himself at its core. Following Robert Castlereagh’s tragic death, the Foreign Office had a new leader,¹² with a completely different vision and approach to Britain’s international relations from his predecessor. Regardless of Castlereagh’s fate, there had been a decade-long conflict and rivalry between Castlereagh

9 Neumann, 11 May 1821, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann 1819–1850*, vol. I. (1819–1833), London 1928, p. 61.

10 Ibidem.

11 M. E. CHAMBERLAIN, *Cottage Coterie*; Judith Lissauer CROMWELL, *A Russian Princess in London and Paris, 1785–1857*, Jefferson – London 2007, p. 80.

12 H. TEMPERLEY, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1820–1827*, pp. 46–47; Paul BEW, *Enlightenment, War and Tyranny*, London 2011, pp. 545–557.

and Canning, who represented different segments of society and political attitudes.¹³ The new Foreign Secretary had a liberal approach to the British Empire’s international position and its relations with the conservative continental states. This change in policy and his somewhat unbalanced relationship with the monarch¹⁴ placed Canning at the very epicentre of the focus of attention of the Cottage Coterie.

But let us consider what exactly caused the tension between the head of the Foreign Office¹⁵ and the “royal circles” and what were the motives for George IV to become so active in government affairs. In order to identify the causes, we should explore several possible approaches. On the one hand, we have Britain, leaving behind the decades of commitment to war but still struggling to cope with the economic trends of the period of peace. The post-war depression and the change in the conditions of light industry and labour, along with the social consequences, acted as a heavy burden on the public mood in Britain and the leadership of St. James Street. On the other hand, Britain had to face new challenges in both continental and colonial affairs. The stability established in 1815 had certain elements of uncertainty, and, if London wanted to control them, it had to commit itself in the long term to the role of the problem-solving state within European diplomacy, which would have meant giving up its traditional isolationist approach. This formed the basis for Castlereagh’s Europe-centred foreign policy and was the main reason for the loss of trust in him in his last term of office.¹⁶

The new head of the Foreign Office took a very different approach to Britain’s international status and its relations with the conservative European monarchies, the latter with far less relevance than Robert Castlereagh had originally intended. It has already been pointed out that the predecessor was keen to maintain the cooperation based on the 1815 settlement, in which Austria’s role as one of the pillars of balance was highly valued. In addition to the foreign policy issues, British-Austrian relations were further strengthened

13 Robert Castlereagh and George Canning were real political rivals from the first decade of the 1800s, when both were members of the Portland cabinet. Castlereagh was the head of the War Ministry (1807–1809) and Canning was the secretary responsible for the Foreign Office (1807–1809). They had very different views on handling military situations during this period of the Napoleonic Wars and they came into conflict with each other. Their debate culminated in a duel. See: C. K. WEBSTER – Harold TEMPERLEY, *The Duel between Castlereagh and Canning in 1809*, *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 3, 1929, no. 1, pp. 83–95; C. K. WEBSTER – Harold TEMPERLEY, *British Policy in the Publication of Diplomatic Documents under Castlereagh and Canning*, *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 3, 1924, no. 2, pp. 158–169.

14 In relation to the King’s planned divorce, George Canning had disagreed with the legal process started against Queen Caroline in August 1820. In this way, he opposed George IV, and, besides this fact, he had a close personal relationship with Caroline. See: Eric J. EVANS, *Britain before the Reform Act: Politics and Society 1815–1832*, London – New York 1991, p. 30.

15 George Canning was appointed to the Foreign Office for the second time in 1822.

16 H. TEMPERLEY, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1820–1827*, p. 48.

by the extraordinarily close professional relationship between Metternich and Castlereagh.¹⁷ The government in Vienna had found a partner that created an advantageous position for enforcing the Empire's interests.¹⁸ The new Foreign Minister brought some change to that as well. While Canning considered it important to maintain good relations with the European powers, he did not make Britain's foreign policy actions entirely dependent on them. The aim was exactly the opposite, to provide a neutral room for manoeuvre, free of any commitment, which was not in the interest of either the Russian or the Austrian side. Both Paul Esterhazy and Christoph Lieven were interested in steering the Foreign Minister in the desired direction.

It is hard to tell if this political circle, self-organised around George IV, started to collaborate in accordance with a predetermined and well-defined policy or took advantage of the situation to serve as a potential counterweight to the new foreign minister. In any case, one of the motives of the circle of confidants formed by the monarch and the representatives of foreign delegations was mainly to interfere with George Canning's foreign policy. We now need to clarify the questions concerning which the Cottage Coterie's activity against Canning manifested itself and the role of Prince Esterhazy in these cases.

This period was a turbulent time for European diplomacy. The revolutionary wave that swept through the early 1820s reached Paris through an intermezzo, though its greatest impact was in Spain, Portugal, and Italy. The removal from power of King Ferdinand VII of Spain (1813–1833) was not only a significant milestone, but also a strong signal. The chances of maintaining the conservative monarchy against the revolutionaries fighting for the establishment of a constitutional order were highly doubtful. Similar demands were formulated by the opponents fighting against the political structure of the Kingdom of Naples, who also demanded the introduction of a liberal constitution.¹⁹ The common feature in those is that both situations went beyond a simple domestic political crisis and the longer these crises lasted, the greater the possibility of external intervention seemed. While maintaining the continental order and balance, the defence of the principles of the Holy Alliance (Austro-Prussian-Russian ideas) became part of the diplomatic discourse on the relevant issues. The congresses of Troppau-Laibach and Verona became the scene of clashing arguments and contradictory concepts, and the pro-intervention voices prevailed in both cases.²⁰ The settlement of the situation in Italy was about protecting the Austrian

17 Barbara JELAVICH, *The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs, 1814–1918*, Chicago 1969, p. 35; F. R. BRIDGE, *The Habsburg Monarchy among the Great Powers, 1815–1918*, New York – Oxford – Munich 1990, p. 32.

18 I. RESS, *Herceg Esterházy Pál*, p. 33.

19 Mária ORMOS – István MAJOROS, *Európa a nemzetközi küzdőtéren*, Budapest 2003, p. 35.

20 Paul SCHOREDER, *Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848*, Oxford 1996, pp. 608–614, 621–626.

sphere of influence and about restoring the legitimacy of the monarchy.²¹ Besides European affairs, however, a more complex issue was raised in the context of intervention in Spain – the question of the independence and economic resources of Latin America. In Madrid, not only the internal stability of the country was at stake, but also the management of the vast and disintegrating colonial empire, which from an economic perspective had made the Atlantic powers and the United States equally interested in shaping the future destiny of the Spanish Empire.

The complexity of the situation was clearly reflected in the diplomatic negotiations around the Spanish intervention in 1822–1823. As to what George Canning’s specific intentions were during this period, there are differing views among historians. According to Norihito Yamada, the foreign policy attitude of the Foreign Secretary was strongly dominated by the view formulated by Harold Temperley, stating that Canning’s aim was to break the European alliance system, thus restoring the policy of isolationism.²² In his research on Britain’s negotiations with France, Yamada has attempted to argue and clarify some of these views, thus shedding new light on the behaviour of the Foreign Office.²³ The starting point was the Conference of Vienna, held prior to the Congress of Verona, where the London government was represented by the Duke of Wellington.²⁴ In addition, the conservative continental powers did not fully agree on the methods to be used for crisis management in Spain, and in addition to diplomatic pressure, an armed settlement was also on the agenda for France.

There were several unknown factors in the whole picture, so George Canning kept several potential scenarios up his sleeve. One of the scenarios was the plan to prevent a French intervention. Britain would not have benefited from a Franco-Spanish war, since it would force the British government to take a stand and push Britain into military involvement, depending on the situation. Another option was to offer the tried and tested role of a mediator to settle the differences between Paris and Madrid, which could prevent an armed conflict, while at the same time giving London a central role in coordinating the process, not only to reinforce the protection of colonial interests and the Franco-British

21 B. JELAVICH, *The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs*, pp. 32–33; in relation to Metternich’s Italian policy after 1815 see Miroslav ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System: Metternich, Italy and European Diplomacy*, New York 2020, pp. 23–37.

22 Norihito YAMADA, *George Canning and the Spanish Question, September 1822 to March 1823*, *The Historical Journal* 52, 2009, no. 2, pp. 343–344.

23 *Ibidem*, pp. 343–362.

24 Royal Collection Trust – Collection of George IV (Private Papers). I. George IV’s Correspondence, 1821–1830. GEO/MAIN/25005: Letter from George Canning to George IV recommending Sir Henry Wellesley as successor to the Marquess of Londonderry at the Court of Vienna, Foreign Office, 10 October 1822.

relationship, but also to remove Paris from the influence of the European allies.²⁵ France vacillated, with the Prime Minister, Jean-Baptiste de Villèle, opting for a less drastic solution, attempting to keep at bay internal political circles calling for intervention. At the same time, there was an inconsistency between the government and the diplomatic corps negotiating in Verona. Mathieu de Montmorency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who negotiated with the Allies along with Chateaubriand, was in favour of an armed intervention.²⁶ The negotiations lasted for months on both the British and the French sides; their key points have already been well covered in the history literature. Therefore, instead of going into details, we will present an outline of the major changes and trends, which will serve as a point of reference for grasping the conflict between George Canning and King George IV's circle, the Cottage Coterie.

The main challenge for Canning was how to manage the issue of the Latin American territories simultaneously with the Spanish affair in Europe. Britain was bound to the region, embarking on the path of independence in the 1810s, through basic economic interests.²⁷ In 1816–1817 Argentina and Chile, and from 1819 Venezuela and Colombia too, gained their independence from the Spanish crown,²⁸ but their international status was still unsettled. The year 1821 brought further successes for Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín's struggle for independence, while Mexico took another step towards autonomy with the declaration of the Treaty of Córdoba.²⁹ For British traders, the recognition of the newly created states would have made a great difference, as it would have removed the restrictive measures used by the Spanish authorities to prevent trade between Britain and the territories under the new administrations.³⁰ The Spanish authorities, for instance, confiscated the ship *Lord Collingwood* for trading with the Buenos Aires government, and piracy, a growing problem in the Caribbean, was also a matter of dispute between London and Madrid.³¹ The issue of recognition of the Latin American states was a complex problem, made even more difficult by their recognition by the United States in 1822.³²

25 N. YAMADA, *George Canning and the Spanish Question*, p. 347; H. TEMPERLEY, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1820–1827*, pp. 56–57.

26 N. YAMADA, *George Canning and the Spanish Question*, p. 350.

27 Already during the Napoleonic Wars, Britain paid special attention to the Latin American region. See: Rafe BLAUFARB, *The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence*, *The American Historical Review* 112, 2007, no. 3, pp. 742–763, here pp. 744–745.

28 M. ORMOS – I. MAJOROS, *Európa a nemzetközi küzdőtérén*, p. 38.

29 D. A. G. WADDELL, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the “Pacification of America” during the “Constitutional Triennium”, 1820–1823*, *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 46, 1989, pp. 455–486, here pp. 462–463.

30 N. YAMADA, *George Canning and the Spanish Question*, p. 353; H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, p. 219.

31 D. A. G. WADDELL, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the “Pacification of America”*, pp. 474–475.

32 *Ibidem*, pp. 463–464; James E. LEWIS JR., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783–1829*, Chapel Hill 1998, pp. 155–156.

During Castlereagh's era, the Foreign Office endeavoured to create a balance in its relations with the Spanish colonies and the Madrid government. This meant that Britain made concessions on trade with Latin America, mainly under economic pressure through the amendment of the navigation law, but at the same time emphasised that the formalisation of economic relations did not imply political recognition. In this respect, Castlereagh wanted to cooperate with the European powers and not give in to sudden American pressure.³³ George Canning approached the issue in a more assertive style. International recognition was a pre-designed part of Canning's foreign policy, but its timing was crucial, as he wanted to synchronise it with the management of the Spanish question at the Continent.³⁴ It required a delicate balancing act between the two tasks.

In his discussions with the Villèle government regarding the situation in Spain in the winter of 1822, Canning appeared to be open to the above-mentioned proposals, depending on the Paris cabinet's position in the negotiations with the powers of the Holy Alliance. In early 1823, however, the hesitant French attitude began to be replaced by a more assertive approach, in which the French Foreign Ministry, while aspiring to maintain a partnership with London, rejected Canning's proposal for mediation, and thus French interference in Spain seemed more and more probable.³⁵ The British interests seemed to be compromised not only because of the loss of control over the course of events, but also because France, with similar intentions to those of the British monarchy, was showing a readiness to open up the question of the Spanish colonies in Latin America. Canning's policy changed direction at the same time, and the former neutrality was replaced by pro-war rhetoric. In the event of the outbreak of a Franco-Spanish war, Britain would be ready to turn against France.³⁶ While Canning was directing the public discourse towards such an outcome, he did not have the full support of the political elite. Prominent politicians opposed the idea of giving up neutrality. Among the debaters were the Duke of Wellington, Lord Westmorland, and Lord Harrowby, as well as Robert Peel, not to mention the monarch himself.³⁷

33 D. A. G. WADDELL, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the “Pacification of America”*, pp. 466–476.

34 N. YAMADA, *George Canning and the Spanish Question*, p. 353.

35 *Ibidem*, pp. 354–357.

36 H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, pp. 209–210.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 208.; Neumann, 27 February 1823, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann*, p. 116; Canning tried to create better political conditions for himself and wanted to involve Lord Francis Conyngham – a close friend of the King – in the work of the government. Dorothea Lieven wrote about the situation: “I hear from London that Canning went to Brighton to offer Lord Francis Conyngham the post of Under-Secretary of State. (...) It is not a bad idea; it establishes a relation between Canning and the King, and that may lead to something further; but it will not raise him in public esteem.” See: Dorothea Lieven to Metternich. Paris, 28 December 1822, in: Peter QUENNEL (ed.), *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich 1820–1826*, New York 1938, p. 214; furthermore: GEO/MAIN/25003: Letter from George Canning to George IV regarding the office of Under Secretary of State, 19 December 1822, Foreign Office; GEO/MAIN/25004: Letter from George IV to George

To support Spain in these circumstances would have been equivalent to an open confrontation with the continental powers, and even more so with the principles of the Holy Alliance, which King George IV did not agree with. The monarch's position concerning this question was presumably confirmed by Paul Esterhazy and Christoph Lieven, who, besides representing their governments, both sought to support the monarch's conservative position.³⁸

In this respect, the interests of Saint Petersburg and Vienna were shared, but this did not imply that being part of the Cottage Coterie meant unconditional cooperation between the participants. It is worth noting that Wellington, who is usually listed in the literature as a key figure of the Cottage Coterie, was not in all cases on the monarch's side, which does not imply that he was on Canning's side either. What is important is the critical approach he used to interpret not only Canning's relationship with George and his circle in a much broader context, but Britain's international relations as well. A nuanced assessment of the situation in the Austro-Russian context was also characteristic within the Cottage Coterie. Paul Esterhazy was just as interested as his Russian counterpart in representing his own country's international interests and keeping the monarch in line with the values of the Alliance. Besides the general and common policy, however, the two disagreed at many points, and their day-to-day direct relationship was characterised by distrust, which coincided with the unfolding of the Franco-Spanish issue. In January 1823, Prince Esterhazy asked Baron Neumann, his closest colleague, to treat the Lievens with caution and not to grant them unconditional trust.³⁹ Esterhazy's concern about a possible Franco-Russian collaboration seemed to echo Chancellor Metternich's similar concerns, which had some background of truth in fact. The Russian government, and more specifically Tsar Alexander I (1801–1825), wished to cooperate actively with the European courts in resolving the Spanish question, thus strengthening the European coalition and the Holy Alliance. Moreover, in April 1822, King Ferdinand VII of Spain requested Russia to provide military assistance,⁴⁰ which further confirmed the Tsar's determination to act, and although the idea of a European military force proposed by him earlier was not supported, he could advocate the interventionist position of French diplomacy to restore

Canning regarding a meeting at [Brighton] Pavilion to discuss the appointment of Secretary of State, [c.19 December 1822].

38 H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, p. 209. On the conservative character of Austrian and Russian foreign policy, see: Barbara JELAVICH, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, Philadelphia – New York 1964, pp. 50–51; Emil NIEDERHUSER – Imre GONDA, *Habsburgok. Egy európai jelenség*, Budapest 1987, p. 164.

39 Neumann, 10 January 1823, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann*, pp. 109–110.

40 P. SCHOREDER, *Transformation of European Politics*, p. 623.

the legitimate order.⁴¹ According to this logic, the Russian attitude and foreign policy could take a direction in which Russia, while emphasising its commitment to the Holy Alliance, could at the same time go against Austrian interests, an outcome which should be avoided at all costs. This form of cooperation between France and Russia could upset the balance of power within the European concert and tip the scales to the disadvantage of Britain and Austria.⁴² In one of his diary notes, Neumann also pointed out that Esterhazy, in his opinion, was aware of the dangers hidden in the Franco-Spanish cause, one of the concerns of which was the impact of the events on French internal politics, as they could lead to another French revolution, while the restoration of Ferdinand VII's absolute power could trigger an even greater revolution in his country.⁴³ Nevertheless, the structure of a constitutional monarchy “(...) *would be no less dangerous for the rest of Europe*”.⁴⁴ In fact, from the Austrian perspective, none of these options were preferred solutions. If the intervention took place, one of the concerns would be whether France would seize the opportunity to restore the power status it had before 1815 and the Bonapartist approach to foreign policy would be revived. And in the event that the intervention did not happen and they were to become reconciled with the revolutionary-constitutional forces, the faith in the principles and values of 1815 would be shattered as well. Austrian foreign policy, established in Vienna, had to walk this fine line, and Esterhazy had to keep these options in mind. On 26 January 1823, Esterhazy was in consultation with Wellington, when Wellington informed the Prince about the details of the correspondence with persons involved in the actual situation (Manuel Moreno and Miguel Ricardo de Álava).⁴⁵ Wellington shared the view that war should be avoided; the Cadiz constitution should be revised and changed and the Spanish government should not rely on England's subsidy,⁴⁶ since the latter would mean that Canning's position would prevail. Esterhazy's aim was to maintain the basic principles of Metternich's policy of the Holy Alliance. In Castlereagh's era, Austria and Britain were in agreement on the revolutionary events in Spain, and this consensus was reflected in their policy of non-intervention. However, this only concerned Spain with regard to Austrian diplomacy⁴⁷ (in November of the same year Metternich signed the Troppau Protocol, which proclaimed the principle of intervention in certain situations,

41 Нина Степановна КИНЯПИНА, *Внешняя политика России первой половины XIX века*, Москва 1963, p. 113.

42 P. SCHOREDER, *Transformation of European Politics*, p. 626.

43 Neumann, 16 January 1823, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann*, p. 111.

44 Ibidem.

45 Ibidem, p. 113.

46 Ibidem.

47 B. JELAVICH, *The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs*, p. 32.

which was relevant in the case of Italy). On the British and Austrian side, however, the appointment of George Canning was a major turning point. While intervention in Spain was still something the Vienna government wanted to avoid, French and Russian pressure was mounting.⁴⁸ In a letter sent to Esterhazy on 20 March 1823, the Chancellor explained on what grounds he would consider France's intervention acceptable, if it was aimed at suppressing the revolution and establishing order and peace. In such a case Paris would be entitled to the support of the Allies.⁴⁹

In the meantime, the head of the Foreign Office was also trying to adapt to the changing international situation, and took a more assertive tone on the Spanish issue, with the monarch and his circle fearing that Canning would promise Spain help in the war against France. It was therefore necessary to get the British government to declare its neutrality with regard to the French intervention. In this context, the royal court and Vienna were in agreement, and Esterhazy was both the link between their shared vision and ideas and a channel of communication. Following the outbreak of war in early March, the Hungarian prince informed Wellington that the events in France were violating fundamental interests and communicated Metternich's dissatisfaction in this matter to the government in Paris.⁵⁰ The rhetoric of the Austrian side in this respect is rather curious. Canning asked Vienna for an opinion as to whether he could count on Austria's neutrality in the Franco-Spanish affair, on which Metternich wrote to Prince Esterhazy: "*The idea of neutrality in this struggle is incompatible with our political system. (...) The Emperor cannot claim to be neutral when it involves supporting a principle on which the existence of his empire and the well-being of its people depend.*"⁵¹ The contrasting nature of the statements made to Canning and Wellington was probably motivated by the need to preserve the flexibility of Austrian diplomacy in the negotiations with London and Paris.

By this time, Esterhazy had come to firmly believe that George IV wanted to remove George Canning from his position.⁵² This is the point that is often emphasised in relation to the Cottage Coterie in the literature: the aim of the monarch and the diplomatic corps was to remove the Foreign Minister. However, this assumption should not be taken so categorically, since the events were unfolding and changing in that direction gradually.

48 Ibidem, p. 35.

49 Metternich an Esterhazy, Wien, 20 März 1823, in: Richard METTERNICH–WINNEBURG (Hrsg.), *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen papieren, 1816–1848*, Band II., Wien 1881, pp. 35–36.

50 Wellington to The Right Hon. Canning, Brighton, 30 March 1823, in: THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON (ed.), *Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington. January 1823 to December 1825*, vol. II, London 1867, p. 78.

51 Metternich an Esterhazy, Wien, 20 März 1823, in: R. METTERNICH–WINNEBURG (Hrsg.), *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen papieren*, p. 35.

52 H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, p. 213.

The French action began in April 1823 and was successfully completed by October.⁵³ In the intermediate period – from March to July 1823 – the relationship between George IV and Canning grew tenser, while the French cabinet seemed to be keeping its promises and carrying out its military operations in Spain in the spirit of restoration. This was finally ensured by the Polignac Memorandum of October 1823.⁵⁴

Britain maintained its policy of non-intervention, but the neutral attitude did not mean a victory for the Cottage Coterie over Canning’s policy, as a newly arising problem kept the political rivalry unchanged. Before discussing in detail the second phase of the conflict between the Cottage Coterie and the Foreign Office, we must also mention how Esterhazy’s status and existential situation changed whilst maintaining his position within the court circle. In a letter dated 7 January 1823, Dorothea Lieven wrote to Metternich that Paul Esterhazy’s mother-in-law had asked George IV to intervene against the Prince’s request for a transfer. By that time, Esterhazy was firmly determined to leave his post if the circumstances were right, and he requested a new appointment from Vienna. Esterhazy’s intention was to take the place in the French capital of Baron Vincent, who had applied for his recall after several decades of diplomatic service, and it seemed that the Balhausplatz was supportive and did not present any obstacles to the transfer.⁵⁵ According to Countess Lieven, George IV had shown moderation and discretion in this matter, as he did not wish to interfere in Esterhazy’s private life. The monarch believed that the prince’s “(...) *desire to leave England proceeded from personal motives (...)*.”⁵⁶ Less than two months later, the Countess also raised the issue of Esterhazy’s situation in a letter, in which she wrote: “*The King spoke to me about you [Metternich – author’s note]. I do not think he has got back to his old footing with Esterhazy. (...) Whatever attentions he pays him are meant for his Court (the Court of Vienna – the author), and not as a personal favour. As for you, he is at least as fond of you as before. He sees his position and that of England very clearly and very correctly.*”⁵⁷ What exactly motivated Esterhazy in applying for his new mandate is not yet known. The personal motives raise a number of options, none of which we can be sure of at the moment. It was at this time that the so-called Bettera affair began to unfold, which may have affected the Prince’s mood and encouraged him to make preparations for his departure. Bettera

53 Ibidem, p. 211; D. A. G. WADDELL, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the Recognition of Spanish American Independence*, Anuario de Estudios Americanos 48, 1991, pp. 435–462, here p. 436.

54 D. A. G. WADDELL, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the “Pacification of America”*, p. 486.

55 Neumann confirmed this fact in his diary. Neumann, 15 July 1824, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann*, p. 128; furthermore Le Prince de Metternich to Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, Vienne, le 28 Octobre, 1824, in: THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON (ed.), *Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington*, pp. 327–328.

56 Dorothea Lieven to Metternich. Brighton, 7 January 1823, in: P. QUENNEL (ed.), *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, pp. 219–220.

57 Dorothea Lieven to Metternich. Brighton, 5 March 1823, in: Ibidem, p. 241.

was a person from Ragusa who made a financial claim against Paul Esterhazy.⁵⁸ In the early 1820s, Bettera approached the Prince many times, and according to Neumann's records, Esterhazy helped him on several occasions, but the demands did not cease. Bettera contacted Esterhazy again and again, and in January 1823 he publicly insulted him (although this happened later than the date of Dorothea Lieven's first letter reporting about the transfer). And in the spring of 1823, a difficult and complex legal dispute took place between Esterhazy and the St. James Street cabinet over the extent and nature of the legal support he was entitled to as a diplomat regarding the Bettera case. We are therefore not yet able to determine the specific reason for his intention to leave; to explore that may be the subject of further research. Concerning his involvement in the Cottage Coterie, it is worth mentioning that Esterhazy was away from England on several occasions in the years 1823 to 1825 (visits to Paris and Vienna) because of his transfer to France and other matters. We know from diary entries that he spent time on the continent from August 1823; for how long, we do not know exactly, but the Paris embassy was a major topic of discussion between him and Neumann before he left. Esterhazy tried to arrange for his attaché to accompany him after he had been awarded the post in Paris, as Neumann was also determined to leave England.⁵⁹ His actual appointment took place in June 1824 by Emperor Francis I,⁶⁰ but Esterhazy had the opportunity to stay in London until the next spring.⁶¹ However, despite Esterhazy's long-term plans, the engagements in Paris were, according to some sources, only temporary; the prince officially returned to London at the end of 1825. Commenting on this intriguing diplomatic manoeuvre, Dorothea Lieven stated the following: "At this period occurred the ridiculous spectacle offered by Esterházy. After the greatest efforts he had got himself named Ambassador to Paris. He had just obtained from the King his formal audience of farewell; and the official gazette had announced the return of his credentials. This took place before the death of the Emperor [Tsar Alexander – author's

58 The archival materials on the Bettera case are available at the Hungarian National Archives. See: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (Archives of the Hungarian National Archives, hereinafter MNL OL), P szekció. III. Eszterházy Pál herceg (1786–1866) iratai. P 136/49004. microfilm box.

59 Neumann, 8 August 1823, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann*, p. 127.

60 For Esterhazy's ambassadorial mandate, see: MNL OL – P szekció. III. Eszterházy Pál herceg (1786–1866) iratai. P 136/49002. microfilm box.; Neumann, 31 December 1825, in: E. BERESFORD (transl. and ed.), *The Diary of Philipp von Neumann*, p. 130. This was confirmed by the British newspapers published on 29 June. The Prince replaced Baron Vincent in the French capital, while Esterhazy was replaced by Antal Apponyi in London. *St. James Chronicle*, 29 June 1824; *Sun*, 29 June 1824, etc. The Hungarian newspaper "Magyar Kurír" published short articles on this subject with a significant delay. See: *Magyar Kurír*, 2 December 1825.

61 Le Prince de Metternich to Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, Vienne, le 28 Octobre, 1824, in: THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON (ed.), *Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington*, p. 327.

note], a few weeks after he had just asked the King to help him to regain the post. He waited and won the King over by sentiment and got him to write a letter to the Emperor of Austria in which the King asked him to give him back this Ambassador, instead of Apponyi, Ambassador designate. Prince Metternich, understanding this little comedy, hastened to fulfil the wishes of George IV, that is to say, he retained at his side at a very critical moment a very clever agent very intimate with the Court and the Cabinet.⁶² In the intermediate period and during his stay in Paris, Esterhazy remained loyal to the court circle, maintaining good relations with it and coordinating Austrian diplomatic endeavours accordingly. Another issue came up as part of the former debate on the recognition of the Spanish colonies in Latin America, in which the Coterie once again intervened. King George IV strongly opposed the recognition of the Spanish colonies as independent states, as it was not in tune with his conservative approach to European policy, and he believed it would have a negative connotation in the British Empire because of the unresolved Irish question.⁶³ With the needs of the mercantile circles in mind, Canning aimed to take Britain's cooperation with the Spanish colonies to the next level, and therefore urged the recognition of the republics.⁶⁴ At this point an interesting turn of events in the operations of the Cottage Coterie occurred: although Wellington mainly represented a different standpoint from that of the foreign minister's, they mainly agreed on the general objectives. At that point, however, Wellington began to distance himself from the conservative political axis of the Court and found agreement with Canning concerning the Latin American question, despite the fact that he favoured a slower and more restrained diplomatic approach than the Foreign Secretary. He intended to implement the formal recognition and official contact gradually, while Canning wanted to do it in one step.⁶⁵ Of particular interest is Paul Esterhazy's view on the geographical and commercial role of the Central and South American region. In the spring of 1825, Emperor Francis I delegated Prince Esterhazy to represent Austria at the coronation ceremony of King Charles X in Reims, so the Prince was in France as early as May 1825. Details of this were recorded by Count István Széchenyi, who was Esterhazy's close personal friend and a member of his entourage, and kept a diary in which he recorded the events of his stay in France.⁶⁶ A similar transcript reporting their trip together from Paris to Reims and their discussions on major political issues and future prospects has survived. On this occasion, Esterhazy expressed his views on the Latin

62 H. TEMPERLEY (ed.), *The Unpublished Diary and Political Sketches of Princess Lieven*, pp. 109–110; Magyar Kurír, 6 January 1826.

63 H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, p. 208.

64 D. A. G. WADDELL, *Anglo-Spanish Relations and the Recognition of Spanish American Independence*, p. 437–438.

65 H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, pp. 219–220.

66 Gyula VISZOTA (szerk), *Gróf Széchenyi István naplói. (1820–1825)*, II. kötet, Budapest 1926, pp. 541–542.

American question. The Prince believed that the main incentive for the political processes was capital, and “*This tendency explains England’s attitude in recognising Brazil, Mexico, Buenos Aires and Colombia! etc.*”⁶⁷ There are more opportunities in these new countries and “*Big gains are only possible in the New World (...)*”⁶⁸ Esterhazy thus saw the activation of British foreign policy in the region as legitimised in general, and at one point even mentioned that they (Hungarians) could also benefit from these processes, not necessarily in political, but in commercial terms, through channels and simpler administration.⁶⁹ This private opinion, however, was presumably not taken into account during the alignment with the Austrian foreign affairs directive. The position of the Holy Alliance on the question of colonies was that, as in the past, their future should be discussed at an international congress. The Foreign Office, by contrast, wanted to avoid interference by the European powers, especially France, in Latin America. It was as a result of this logic that the dispute between the Cottage Coterie and George Canning was reignited again. Representation of the Austrian position, however, was not a simple task, as Wellington’s differing views made things more difficult.⁷⁰ Besides, Esterhazy’s situation was made more complicated by the minor and major political issues in the background. These included, on the one hand, the changes in the perception of Austria among British political circles, which was very much influenced by the repayment problems Austria had encountered in connection with the British loans granted earlier.⁷¹ Another example is the incident of Lord Holland, who formulated sharp criticisms of the states of the Holy Alliance, especially towards Austria. The case was met with a negative response within government circles in Vienna and is said to have resulted in the ban on Lord Holland’s presence in Austria in the summer of 1824.⁷² It was picked up by the local English press and the Duke of Wellington also made fun of the situation during an exchange with Esterhazy. Dorothea Lieven recalled the scene as follows: “*There was an amusing scene in my house yesterday. Esterhazy had not been here for a week. In the interval, there had appeared that article in the papers about the exclusion of Lord Holland from the Austrian States (...) Esterhazy came to see me yesterday and mentioned the article. (...) While i was talking, the Duke of Wellington came in and began*

67 Ibidem, p. 542.

68 Ibidem.

69 Ibidem, pp. LXII, 541–542.

70 H. TEMPERLEY, *Canning, Wellington and George the Fourth*, pp. 216–217.

71 Irby C. NICHOLS, JR., *Britain and the Austrian War Debt, 1821–1823*, *The Historian* 20, 1958, no. 3, pp. 328–346, here p. 329.

72 Lord Holland had already attracted the attention of the Vienna government, as the salon he and his wife had established welcomed representatives of Italian literature and culture with open arms. In addition, Lord Holland was a supporter of the constitutional reform of the Kingdom of Naples, for instance, adopting a fundamentally anti-Austrian stance. See: Diego SAGLIA, *European Literatures in Britain, 1815–1832*, Cambridge 2019, p. 118.

on the same subject, saying: ‘Well, that is excellent; mark my words, no-one will ever again dream of saying a word against the Allied Sovereigns in Parliament’; then, turning to Esterhazy: ‘Prince, you must not say a word in reply. First, one should never flatter newspapers by entering into an argument with them; secondly, the facts are true because Prince Metternich told me so himself; third, and most important, it will have excellent results for everybody. It is the best way of shutting up talkative critics.’ Esterhazy went as red as a lobster. He looked at the clock, wriggled like an eel, suddenly said a hurried good-bye and bolted.⁷³

The colonies in Latin America were finally recognised by Britain in October 1824, and Canning was victorious over George IV in the dispute. At the same time, it became clear that, although the Foreign Secretary had strong opposition in the Cottage Coterie and outside in government circles, his position was still solid and unshakable. Along with the Prime Minister Lord Liverpool’s position, the fact that the liberal policy within the Tory government was controversial in theory but effective in the context of foreign policy also played a role. The initiatives of the Coterie and the negotiations and consultations between the members proved insufficient to counterbalance the successes of Canning, which in all cases had an economic aspect. It is no coincidence that in addition to declaring the independence of the Latin American states, he also lobbied for the recognition of Greece as an official belligerent in the Turkish-Greek war.⁷⁴

Throughout the active period of the Coterie, Paul Esterhazy remained a trusted confidant and a political supporter of the monarch, as well as a key representative of the principles of the Holy Alliance. The activities of the Cottage Coterie in the period 1823–1825 were in a state of fluctuation. Its varying effectiveness and the unsuccessful rivalry with George Canning consequently affected its members as well. As the above examples illustrate, Esterhazy tried to represent the interests of the Austrian foreign office even under difficult circumstances, and in this task his close relationship with George IV was of fundamental help to him. After the monarch withdrew from this kind of political involvement in the spring of 1825, Esterhazy still remained a member of the inner circle, but the Cottage was more of a social setting than an informal arena for policymaking. The nature of the group changed, but at the same time Esterhazy preserved his position among the leading foreign diplomats in London and remained an inescapable figure in the English political elite, in the Foreign Office and in St. James Street. While this suggests that the failure of the Cottage Coterie and the refusal to remove George Canning did not cause any major disruption to Esterhazy’s operations and diplomatic service, the Foreign Secretary wrote to Viscount Granville in a letter dated 11 March 1825 that if the ruling circle had succeeded

73 Dorothea Lieven to Metternich. 4 August 1824. in: P. QUENNEL (ed.), *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, p. 325.

74 H. TEMPERLEY, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1820–1827*, pp. 86–87.

in their efforts, it would have affected the perception of Esterhazy as well: “*I would have resigned upon the s. A. question: and i would have declared openly in the H. of C. (...) that i was driven from office by the Holy Alliance; and further, that the system, which i found established of personal communications between the Sovereign and the Foreign Ministers, was one under which no English Minister could do his duty. If, after such a denunciation and the debates which would have followed it, the L.’s and Esterhazy did not find London too hot for them, i know nothing of the present temper of the English nation.*”⁷⁵ In the same letter Canning also made a direct reference to his belief that it was the Austrian Chancellor who was behind the whole Cottage Coterie network and who was in fact pulling the strings, while suggesting to Esterhazy that his involvement in the Coterie should be constant but at the same time restrained.⁷⁶ It is possible that Esterhazy’s careful approach, as well as his cautiousness in immediate situations and confrontations, can be traced back to that. This is where his informality becomes most evident. The exact identification of this will be the focus of my further research in the near future. However, the fact that Esterhazy, unlike the Lievens, did not expose himself as one of the main coordinators of the group greatly helped to maintain his influence, authority, and balanced relationship with government circles.

Katalin Schrek, PhD

Institute of History, Department of World History, University of Debrecen

schrek.katalin@arts.unideb.hu

ORCID: 0000-0002-8601-6382

75 Mr. Canning to Viscount Granville. Foreign Office, 11 March 1825, in: Edward J. STAPLETON (ed.), *Some Official Correspondence of George Canning*, vol. I, London 1887, p. 258.

76 Ibidem.