

VÍKTOR KANÁSZ

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DIPLOMATIC
ACTIVITY OF THE HUNGARIAN KINGDOM
BETWEEN 1452 AND 1453*

The Hunyadi era is one of the most extensively investigated periods in the history of Hungary. Although a large amount of literature is dedicated to the campaigns of János Hunyadi and the reign of his son, King Matthias I, a survey of new evidence may improve or even modify our understanding of the era. Recently, some as yet unknown documents surfaced in the State Archives of Milan. Through investigating these letters, which were written between 1452 and 1453, we can refine our knowledge of the history of this period, and, in particular, of the diplomatic relations between the Hungarian Kingdom and the towns in Northern Italy.

The Hungarian Kingdom and Europe in the middle of the 15th century

The one and a half decade between the death of Vladislaus I (1444) and Matthias Hunyadi's ascension to the throne (1458) is one of the most troubled periods in the history of Hungary. The north-western part of the kingdom was controlled by the Bohemian Brethren under the leadership of Jan Jiskra, Frederick III invaded significant amount of lands in Sopron, Vas and Moson counties, and the Ottoman attacks became permanent in the south.¹ Although the kingdom had a legitimately crowned ruler in Ladislaus V, the infant king, living under the guardianship of Frederick III, could not exercise his power. In 1446, therefore, the diet elected the country's *homo novus*, János Hunyadi as the governor of the kingdom during the king's infancy.²

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¹ I. Bariska: *A Szent Koronáért elzálogosított Nyugat-Magyarország 1447–1647*, Szombathely: Vas Megyei Levéltár, 2007: 29.

² A. Kubinyi: *Matthias Rex*, Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008: 14.

Unfortunately, Hunyadi's governance was far from being successful: in 1448 he suffered defeat from the Ottomans at Kosovo Polje, he was not able to beat Jiskra, nor break the power of his chief enemy, Ulrich of Celje, whose influence extended to Western Hungary and Slavonia. Moreover, his increasing influence became more and more tedious for the aristocrats of the kingdom. Meanwhile, there were continuous negotiations with Frederick III on the release of Ladislaus V, but it was only the rebellion of the Austrian estates, led by Ulrich von Eyczing, which resulted in success. Returning from his imperial coronation in Rome in 1452, Frederick was besieged at Wiener Neustadt by the Austrian and Bohemian estates, thus he was forced to hand the king to Ladislaus' uncle, Ulrich von Celje on the 4th of September.³ Ladislaus V received the homage of the Hungarian delegation in Vienna.⁴

Subsequent to these events, Hunyadi had to renounce the position of governor, but was appointed as captain general (*supremus capitaneus regie maiestatis in regno Hungariae consitutus*) instead with the result that he continued to manage the royal domains and their revenues as well. Furthermore, the aristocrat received the hereditary title of count of Bistrița.⁵ The administration was also reorganized: the newly established privy chancellery (*cancellaria*) was led by the pro-Habsburg archbishop, Dénes Szécsi of Esztergom, while Hunyadi's supporter, János Vitéz headed the grand chancellery.⁶ Mainly due to Hunyadi's resistance, however, the king was not able to consolidate his power, which remained in the hands of the aristocrats. The reform plans of Vitéz were fruitless too.⁷

Under these internal circumstances it is not easy to judge the kingdom's foreign policy. Since the Turks appeared at the southern borders of the kingdom in 1390,

³ Pii Secundi pontificis maximi commentarii I., Textus, textum recensuerunt atque explicationibus, apparatu critico indiceque nominum ornauerunt I. Bellus & I. Boronkai, Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1993: 63. (1.25.)

⁴ A. Áldásy: 'A magyar országgyűlés követsége V. Lászlóhoz 1452 október havában', *Századok* 7, 1910: 554–562, p. 554.

⁵ E. Mályusz: *A magyar rendi állam Hunyadi korában*, Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1958: 50.

⁶ It has recently been demonstrated that the chancellor used the name Zrednai instead of Vitéz, (K. Pajorin: 'Vitéz János vezetéknévéről', in: Zs. Tamás (ed.): *Ritók Zsigmondné Szalay Ágnes 70. születésnapjára*, Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2001: 18–19). The latest literature refers to him as 'János Zrednai Vitéz', see I. Kristóf: *Egyházi középréteg a késő középkori Váradon*, Pécs: Pécsi Történettudományért Kulturális Egyesület, 2014: 59.

⁷ A. Kubinyi: 'Vitéz János: a jó humanista és rossz politikus', in: R. Nagy Mézes (ed.): *A magyar történelem vitatott személyiségei 2*, Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2003: 7–30, p. 16.

the Ottoman issue had played a definitive role in Hungarian foreign policy.⁸ As a consequence, diplomatic talks had always been aimed at surveying the partner's capability to assist against the Ottomans, while decision-makers had always taken into consideration whether, in case of an Ottoman attack against Hungary, a hostile state could take advantage of the kingdom's weakness or not.

It was also a significant problem that, due to his infancy, the king was not able to govern, so the control over foreign policy was in the hands of such powerful aristocrats as Ulrich von Celje and János Hunyadi. Similarly to the aristocratic leagues, the diplomatic relations between the states changed very frequently. In addition to the Ottomans and the Bohemian Hussites, the main challenge was Frederick III's open ambition to obtain the control over the Hungarian Kingdom.

Hungarian foreign policy in the first part of the 1450s

The Hungarian Kingdom had numerous bonds even with the most distant countries of Christian Europe of that time. I do not aim to cover all states Hungary had diplomatic relations with, only the most relevant ones will be surveyed here.⁹

Hungary's most important economic and diplomatic partner was the neighbouring Holy Roman Empire. Connections, between Germany and Hungary were, however, ambivalent. Frederick III persistently and tenaciously strove to obtain Austria, Bohemia and Hungary, and, in order to accomplish this goal, he kept archduke Sigismund of Austria and Ladislaus V under his guardianship. The rebellion of the Tyrolese estates forced him to release Sigismund in 1446, but Ladislaus kept staying in his court. In 1452, Frederick was crowned as emperor in Rome by Pope Nicholas V.¹⁰ Ladislaus V was attempted to be abducted already

⁸ P. Fodor: 'A Szimurg és a sárkány: az Oszmán Birodalom és Magyarország (1390–1550)', in: I. Zombori (ed.): *Közép-Európa harca a török ellen a 16. század első felében*, Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség (METEM), 2004: 9–35, p. 9.

⁹ Despite its active anti-Ottoman policy I do not intend to discuss the case of Burgundy here. See S. Csernus: 'Jehan de Wavrin krónikája: angol történelem, francia történetírás és kereszties hadjárat. Burgundiak az Al-Dunán (1444–1445)', in: A. Györkös & G. Kiss (eds.): *Francia–magyar kapcsolatok a középkorban (Speculum Historiae Debreceniense 13)*, Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2013: 127–149; A. Györkös: 'V. László francia házassági terve: diplomáciai fordulat 1457-ben?', in: A. Györkös & G. Kiss (eds.): *Francia–magyar kapcsolatok a középkorban, op.cit.*: 271–287.

¹⁰ M. Jászay: *Velence és Magyarország, egy szomszédság küzdelmes története*, Budapest: Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1990: 132; Carvajal was member of the emperor's escort for a short time, cf. L. G. Canedo: *Don Juan de Carvajal: un español al servicio de la Santa Sede: cardenal de Sant'Angelo legado en Alemania y Hungría: 1399?–1469*, Madrid, 1947: 128.

in Rome, and later in Florence, but these efforts succeeded only one year later in Wiener Neustadt. Frederick III, who was always in short of money, aimed to take as much advantage of the complicated Hungarian situation as he could. With the king and the Holy Crown of Hungary kept in his own court, he had all the opportunities to profit from the crisis.

The diplomatic relations between the numerous principalities of the Italian peninsula were far from transparent, as signalled by their frequent hostility and quick reconciliations. The Papal States, the Kingdom of Naples, Florence, Milan and Venice were the most powerful of them, but the Holy Roman Empire and France were also concerned with the peninsula's issues, which manifested in their recurring interference in Italian politics.

The papal throne was occupied by Nicholas V between 1447 and 1445. In this period, the papacy's policy was defined mainly by two factors: the pope was the head of the universal church and, at the same time, the leader of the Papal States.¹¹ Therefore he had to represent his interests both in the Italian and the universal Christian diplomacy simultaneously. The expulsion of the Ottomans from Europe was one of his chief goals. In order to achieve this, he needed a strong Kingdom of Hungary, for which he was willing to take measures as well, among others, through his legates.¹² This special attention is demonstrated by the numerous bulls and briefs related with Hungary, or the notes of Pope Pius II that often mention Hungarians.¹³

In spite of their significant economic connections, the political relations between Hungary and Venice, the era's most important commercial centre, were rather cold.¹⁴ This was aggravated by the city-state's expansive policy, which made

¹¹ A. Kubinyi: 'Diplomáciai érintkezések a Jagelló kori magyar állam és a pápaság között (1490–1526)', in: A. Kubinyi (ed.): *Főpápok, egyháziak, intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon*, Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Munkaközösség (METEM), 1999: 107–122, p. 107.

¹² P. E. Kovács: 'A Szentszék, a török és Magyarország a Hunyadiak alatt (1437–1490)', in: I. Zombori (ed.): *Magyarország és a Szentszék kapcsolatának 1000 éve*, 1996: 97–117, pp. 100–101; G. Nemes: 'Elszálasztott lehetőségek. VII. Kelemen pápa és II. Lajos országainak belpolitikája (1523–526)', *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* 4, 2014: 3–19, p. 3.

¹³ See G. Nemes (ed.): *Brevia Clementina. VII. Kelemen pápa magyar vonatkozású brévái (1523–1526)*, Budapest–Győr–Róma: MTA–PPKE 'Lendület' Egyháztörténeti Kutatócsoport & Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2015; Pii Secundi pontificis maximi commentarii... *op.cit.: passim*.. For more on this relationship, see J. Marton: 'Enea Silvio Piccolomini's Contacts with Hungary', in: P. E. Kovács & K. Szovák (eds.): *Infima Aetas Pannonica: Studies in Late Medieval Hungarian history*, Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2009: 194–225.

¹⁴ Gy. Székely: 'Magyarország és Buda városa Velence és Genova között a 14–15. század fordulóján', *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából* 23, 1991: 9–19, p. 10.

it the largest state in northern Italy. Between 1418 and 1420 Venice occupied some Dalmatian towns which were under Hungarian supremacy. Moreover, since 1403 Venice had been refusing to pay the annual 7000 ducates laid down in the treaty of Turin, thus the relation of the two states deteriorated during the reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg.¹⁵ The Hungarian king tried to hamper Venice's economy with a commercial blockade. He also launched a campaign against the Republic without any permanent success.¹⁶ Although a lot of Hungarian immigrants lived in the Republic,¹⁷ the formerly important commercial relations became insignificant.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the city-state always paid particular attention to Hungarian affairs. This is not surprising at all, taken into consideration that the *Signoria* traditionally possessed the area's most extended diplomatic system.¹⁹

As one of Europe's most important commercial towns and cultural centres,²⁰ Florence maintained commercial interests from Constantinople to Mallorca.²¹ However, in the 1450s an important change occurred in the foreign policy of the city-state. Up to that point, as the ally of Venice, Milan was one of Florence's most significant enemies, but in 1452 Milan and Florence entered into an alliance. Although nominally it was a republic, Florence was led by Cosimo Medici, who did not hold any official titles. Seeing the increasing power of Venice, Cosimo supported Francesco Sforza in obtaining Milan.

Although the Florentine presence in Hungary has been well-known for a long time, recent research has unearthed some important witnesses of Hungarian–Florentine relations.²² Florence had good connections with the Hungarian sovereigns already in the Angevin era, and the relations flourished on during the reign of

¹⁵ W. von Stromer: 'Zsigmond császár Velence elleni kontinentális zárzata és a nemzetközi kereskedelmi utak áthelyeződése', *Századok* 4, 1987: 638–659, p. 642.

¹⁶ See, from recently, P. E. Kovács: 'Zsigmond isztriai hadjárata', in: L. Pósn & L. Veszprémy (eds.): *A hadtáp volt maga a fegyver. Tanulmányok a középkori hadszervezet és katonai logisztika kérdéseiről*, Budapest: Zrínyi Kiadó, 2013: 227–252.

¹⁷ Zs. Teke: "'Ongaria"-beli bevándorlók a középkori Velencében', in: G. Klaniczay & B. Nagy (eds.): *A középkor szeretete. Történeti tanulmányok Sz. Jónás Ilona tiszteletére*, Budapest: ELTE BTK Közép- és Korajkori Egyetemes Történeti Tanszék, 1999: 447–451, p. 447.

¹⁸ Zs. Teke: *Velencei–magyar kereskedelmi kapcsolatok a XIII–XV. században (Értekezések a történeti tudományok köréből 86)*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979: 58.

¹⁹ D. Kosáry: *Magyar külpolitika Mohács előtt*, Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1978: 5.

²⁰ See V. Breidecker: *Florenz oder „die Rede, die zum Auge spricht“: Kunst, Fest und Macht im Ambiente der Stadt*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1992.

²¹ M. M. du Jourdin: *Európa és a tenger* (tr. by J. Rácz), Budapest: Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, 2013: 109.

²² See for example, J. Koltay-Kastner: *Olasz–magyar művelődési kapcsolatok*, Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1941: 25–26.

Sigisimund.²³ Trade played a crucial role in the strengthening of the links between the two countries. Although it was not vital for Florence to be present on the Hungarian market, several Florentine families settled all over the kingdom.²⁴ Amongst the Florentine families the Scolari took the lead, particularly Filippo Scolari (Pipo Ozorai), who represented the influence of Florence.²⁵ The peak point of the Florentine diplomatic activity in Hungary was around the 1420s. Later, the relations between the two states deteriorated as a result of the death of Pipo Ozorai and the imprisonment of some Florentine merchants.²⁶ Around the end of Sigisimund's reign, the relations consolidated, but they could not reach their former intensity even in the 1450s.²⁷

Milan, another important city-state of northern Italy, was one of the major centres of the renaissance during the regency of the Visconti family. It did not have remarkable diplomatic and commercial bonds with Hungary, and the relations between the two states were peaceful.²⁸ Milan's traditional opponent was Florence, which was trying to countervail the power of Milan in alliance with Venice. However, it all changed in 1450 when, with the death of Filippo Maria Visconti, the family's male line died out. Milan was proclaimed to be a republic,

²³ E. Csukovits: 'Nagy Károly ivadékai. Az Anjou-ház Firenze levelezésében', in: A. Györkös & G. Kiss (eds.): *Francia–magyar kapcsolatok a középkorban*, op.cit.: 117–126, pp. 119–121.

²⁴ D. Huszti: *Olasz–magyar kereskedelmi kapcsolatok a középkorban*, Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1941: 108; K. Prajda: 'Andrea di Filippo Scolari váradi püspök és a firenzeiek a Zsigmond-kori Erdélyben', in: Zs. Kovács & J. Orbán (eds.): *Tűgülő horizont. Tanulmányok a fiatal művészettörténészek marosvásárhelyi konferenciájának előadásából*, Marosvásárhely & Kolozsvár: Maros Megyei Múzeum & Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület & Entz Géza Művelődéstörténeti Alapítvány, 2013: 2–32, p. 21.

²⁵ K. Prajda: 'Egy firenzei szomszédság a Zsigmond kori Magyar Királyságban', in: Á. Tóth, I. H. Németh & E. Szívós (eds.): *A város és társadalma. Tanulmányok Bácskai Vera tiszteletére*, Budapest: Hajnal István Kör & Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2011: 441–449, p. 441. For a prosopographical database of the merchants, see K. Arany: 'Firenzei kereskedők, bankárok és hivatalviselők Magyarországon (1370–1450). Pozopográfiai adattár', *Fons* 3, 2007: 483–549.

²⁶ K. Prajda: 'A Magyar Királyság és a Firenzei Köztársaság diplomáciai kapcsolatai a Zsigmond-korban', in: A. Bárány & L. Pósan (eds.): *Causa unionis, causa fidei, causa reformationis in capite et membris. Tanulmányok a konstanzi zsinat 600. évfordulója alkalmából*, Debrecen: Print-Art Press, 2014: 161–175, p. 171.

²⁷ Zs. Teke: 'Firenze külpolitikája és Zsigmond (1409–1437)', in: F. Pitti & Gy. Szabados (eds.): *Magyaroknak eleiről. Ünnepi tanulmányok a hatvan esztendő Makk Ferenc tiszteletére*, Szeged: Szegedi Középkorász Műhely, 2000: 559–568, p. 568.

²⁸ This relationship is well illustrated by the entry of Sigismund to Milan in 1431, which, despite the careful preparations, was virtually neglected by duke Visconti. in: P. E. Kovács: 'Ceremonia és politika, Zsigmond bevonulása Itáliában 1431–1433', *Történelmi Szemle* 3, 2013: 351–380, p. 353.

but the fiancé of the former sovereign's daughter, Francesco Sforza, managed to seize power in the affluent city-state. Sforza's ambitions against Venice were supported by Frederick III and, influenced by Cosimo, Florence too.²⁹

This was followed by the establishment of a strong alliance between Florence and Milan apparently against Venice. As a consequence, Venice attempted to isolate Milan and Florence through negotiations with the Kingdom of Naples and the Holy Roman Empire. It was essential to the two city-states to find new alliances. They managed to win the French Kingdom and contacted with most powerful aristocrat of the Hungarian Kingdom, János Hunyadi. As a result, Venice launched a war against the two cities, but, fearing of the consequences of a possible French intervention, they signed a peace treaty in the Spring of 1454 in Lodi. After their reconciliation, the three city-states and the pope founded the Holy League against the Ottomans, which brought about a period of relative peace in northern Italy until the French campaign in 1494.

The delegation of 1452–1453

Until recently, Hungarian scholars knew only the fact that in 1452 a delegation was sent by the Hungarian estates to Frederick III with the participation of Ágoston archbishop of Győr, László Bátmonostori Töttös royal master of the cup-bearers and Albert Vetési. The delegation arrived in Florence in early April, but the emperor did not want to receive them, and the mission had to return without success.

Vilmos Fraknói was the first to write about the Milanese diplomatic mission, and his account serves as the basis of later references. According to him, "Vetési at that time [in 1452 – V. K.] did not return to his chapter. He entered to the service of János Hunyadi, became the secretary of the governor,³⁰ and, in the Spring of the next year [1453 – V. K.] he received another diplomatic assignment to Milan. There, after the death of the last member of the ducal family of the Viscontis, Francesco Sforza seized power. As he did not receive the imperial confirmation of emperor Frederick III, he instinctively strove to win the Hungarians and the Austrians, who opposed Frederick's rule. He entered into negotiations with them in 1452. He sent Jacobus Delbene to János Hunyadi, and Hunyadi's response was

²⁹ Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, the later Pope Pius II, as a diplomat of Frederick, tried to assert the interests of his sovereign, but only with little success. *Pii Secundi pontificis maximi commentarii...*, *op.cit.*: 53. (1.19.)

³⁰ He was addressed as "Secretarium nostrum" in the quoted letter.

delivered by Albert Vetési, who was invested with full authority to establish the alliance.”³¹ Fraknói added in a note that “the original copy of the letter of commission, written on the 20th of April in 1453, can be found in the State Archives in Milan.”³²

The letter cited by Fraknói is still kept in the archives of the city, together with some other evidence, of which, seemingly, the renowned 19th-century historian was not aware. A total of 11 letters can be linked to the diplomatic mission.

There are two letters from 1452: the first was written on the third Sunday of Lent “in castro nostro Sennegk”³³ by Ulrich von Celje. As for its genre, it can be considered as a letter of instruction.³⁴ We can read in the document that Ulrich von Celje was sending his secretary, Andreas “cum plena informatione [...] in maxima confidentia et distrectione” to Francesco Sforza in order to negotiate with him.

The other letter was written in the name of the governor, János Hunyadi, on the 1st of March in Vienna.³⁵ It is also a letter of instruction, probably dictated by János Vitéz, who was responsible for the diplomatic letters of Hunyadi.³⁶ The governor promised that he was going to send back the emissary of Sforza, Antonius de Magnis Bellamo, with the final proposal to Milan, after having reached an agreement with Ulrich von Celje. In other words, the governor was to send his answer to Milan only after reaching a common position with Ulrich von Celje.

The first letter of instruction from the year 1453 was issued on the 9th of March in Innsbruck, by archduke Sigismund of Austria.³⁷ The archduke informed the addressee that he had received the reply to one of his former letters from the envoys of Francesco Sforza, in which the sender had asked Sigismund to let his and Ladislaus V’s delegates pass freely through Sigismund’s territories, including Ulrich von Celje’s diplomats as well.

The next letter of the governor was written on the 20th of April, the Friday before Saint George’s day in Buda.³⁸ János Hunyadi announced that he had read

³¹ V. Fraknói: ‘Mátyás király magyar diplomatái: Vetési Albert, harmadik közlemény’, *Századok* 5, 1898: 385–404, p. 389.

³² *Idem*. Translation by Judit Skumát.

³³ It is bound to be one of their estates in Lower-Styria, Saneck (today Žovnek, Slovenia).

³⁴ Archivio di Stato di Milano [hereinafter ASMi], Sforzesco/642/1452.

³⁵ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1452.

³⁶ F. Szakály: ‘Vitéz János, a politikus és államférfi (Pályavázlat – kérdőjelekkel)’, in: *Vitéz János emlékkönyv. Esztergom évlapjai. Annales Strigonienses*, Esztergom: Balassa Bálint Társaság, 1990: 9–38, pp. 20–21.

³⁷ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/novembre.

³⁸ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/aprile. The transcript of the letter can be found in the Appendix.

the letter of Francesco Sforza, carried by Jacobus Delbene, and the answer was going to be delivered by Albert Vetési “utrisque iuris doctorem secretarium nostrum”, who enjoyed full authorization. Hunyadi sent another letter on the same day, again from Buda, reporting that he had audited the Florentine delegates and Delbene, then sent Albert Vetési to Milan with the Florentine delegates.³⁹ Curiously enough, Fraknói made use of only the first letter, which does not mention the Florentine delegates, scholars, therefore, did not take into consideration their presence.⁴⁰

On the 8th of May Ulrich wrote a letter in Vienna, announcing that he was sending his counsellor, Friedrich Lamberger to negotiate with Francesco Sforza.⁴¹ Soon, again in Vienna, another letter was issued by him, which contains the same report.⁴²

The content of other North Italian letters connected to the diplomatic activity in question, was less important from the point of view of the Hungarian issues. On the 3rd of July 1453 Franciscus vicecomes announced in a letter, issued in Cremona, that the Hungarian delegates had already begun their journey, but the rest of the letter is not relevant to our investigation.⁴³ The next letter, written by Delbene, was also dated on the 3rd of July 1453 in Cremona,⁴⁴ just as the one from the 9th of July.⁴⁵ The writer of the latter, Franciscus, who was probably identical with the author of the previous letter, reported that the Hungarian and Florentine delegates were waiting for Sforza’s reaction in certain cases.

The following two documents can be considered as one.⁴⁶ It was dated on the 22nd of July already in Milan, which means that the delegates were already there.⁴⁷ The writer of the letter, Angelus informed Sforza that he was to answer to the

³⁹ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/aprile. The transcript of the letter can be found in the Appendix.

⁴⁰ Fraknói also published the Hungarian translation of the letter. V. Fraknói: ‘A Hunyadiak és a Jagellók (1440–1526)’, in: S. Szilágyi (ed.): *A magyar nemzet története IV.*, Budapest: Athenaeum Irodalmi és Nyomdai Rt., 1895: 122.

⁴¹ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/maggio.

⁴² ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/maggio.

⁴³ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/luglio.

⁴⁴ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/luglio.

⁴⁵ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/luglio; I am very grateful to Hajnalka Kuffart for her support in the interpretation of the Italian letters.

⁴⁶ Only one of the two letters is dated, and its writer calls himself “Angelus”. The second document must be a postscript as the address is substituted by a “Datum ut litteris” formula, and the signature is “Idem Angelus sy”.

⁴⁷ ASMi, Sforzesco/642/1453/luglio.

Hungarians. Piero de Posterna⁴⁸ notified the sovereign that the delegate was going to stay until he gets an answer from the duke.

These letters definitely refine our knowledge by revealing several important facts: on the one hand, we can learn the names of the delegation's (1452) participants, while on the other hand, they make it evident that not only the delegates of Milan, but those of Florence as well came to Hungary in the year 1453. Moreover, it is very likely that the Italian mission had been sent jointly, which means that the same people represented the interests of both Milan and Florence.⁴⁹ It would not have been a unique case in the age that one delegate represented more legal entities. In these cases delegates received separate letters of instruction from each commissioner.⁵⁰ It is particularly noteworthy that we cannot find any signs hinting at the irreconcilable antagonism between Hunyadi and Ulrich von Celje. What is more, it seems as if the two aristocrats had sent their delegates together, after having agreed on a common standpoint.⁵¹

The letters also uncover important details of the mechanism of the diplomatic missions. In 1453 the Italian delegates went first to archduke Sigismund. A reference to a previous letter suggests that Sigismund and Francesco Sforza had already been in contact before. The envoys arrived in Innsbruck at the beginning of March.⁵² They asked for the permission of the archduke to ensure free passage to them as well as to the diplomats of the king and Ulrich von Celje. After receiving the permission, they continued their way to Hungary.

The delegation arrived in Buda around the middle of April, where, instead of Ladislaus V, they had talks with János Hunyadi. This definitely indicates who was in fact in possession of power in the kingdom. Jacobus Delbene handed over Sforza's letter to the captain, and the answer was delivered by Albert Vetési to Milan. Besides this letter, another was issued at the chancellery of Hunyadi on the

⁴⁸ Uncertain reading.

⁴⁹ It is probable that Aenas Silvius Piccolomini referred to this delegation, when he mentioned a certain merchant from Venice ("de Florentino mercatore") on the 17th of April. R. Wolkan (ed.): *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini (Fontes Rerum austriacarum 68)*, 3/1, Wien: Hölder, 1918: 144.

⁵⁰ B. Iványi: 'Adalékok a nemzetközi érintkezéseink történetéhez a Jagelló-korban. I. közlemény', in: A. Komáromy (ed.): *Történelmi tár*, Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1906: 139–197, p. 164.

⁵¹ For the refutation of the traditionally accepted antagonism of the Garai–Celje League and the Hunyadi family, see T. Pálosfalvi: 'Tettes vagy áldozat? Hunyadi László halála', *Századok* 2, 2015: 383–441.

⁵² Innsbruck was Sigismund's seat. H. Bachmann: 'Innsbruck', in: F. Huter (ed.): *Handbuch der historischen stätten Österreich II. Alpenländer mit Südtirol*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1966: 455–461, p. 457.

20th of April, which clarifies that the delegation consisted not only of the envoys of Milan, but of Florence as well. Hunyadi sent Vetési to Milan with this delegation. Then, the delegates left for Vienna, where they arrived at the beginning of May. Here they visited Ulrich von Celje, who also sent his counsellor, Friedrich von Lamberger to Milan, most probably in the company of the returning Italian delegates. On the 3rd and 9th of July they were in Cremona, but by the 22nd of July they had arrived in Milan.

These letters make it clear who the most powerful decision-makers in Hungarian foreign policy were; it was not by coincidence that the delegation negotiated with János Hunyadi and Ulrich von Celje, instead of Ladislaus V. It seems, however, that they did not pay a visit to Dénes Szécsi, archbishop of Esztergom, palatine László Garai and Miklós Újlaki, voivode of Transylvania.

We do not know of the exact purpose of the delegation. Nevertheless, we may assume that, due to the growing crisis in Italia, Milan and Florence intended to seek for new alliances against Venice and Frederick III. It has been demonstrated that Hungary was a perfect ally, as the kingdom had a bad relationship with Frederick III and Venice, while its most influential aristocrat, Hunyadi, used to reside in the court of the late duke of Milan, Filippo Maria Visconti, from December 1431 until the end of 1433, where he had the opportunity to learn Sforza as well.⁵³ It seems that the Hungarian diplomacy did not easily give up its efforts to cross the emperor's plans, since we are aware of another Hungarian delegation to Italy. The delegation, commissioned by Ladislaus V, left Vienna on the 22nd of July in 1453 and headed to the papal court. The members of the mission included Simon of Treviso, *lector* of Esztergom, provost Simon of Klosterneuburg, Petrus, parson of Krems and two Austrian nobles. When they arrived in Rome on the 26th of August, the delegates started to take steps against the emperor again, demanding the withdrawal of a bull edicted by pope Nicholas V in favour of Frederick III.⁵⁴

It is possible that the envoys of the two aristocrats travelled together for a while in the mission to the pope, since the king's delegation had received the letter of

⁵³ In his work, published in 1916, Arisztid Oszvald was not yet sure that Hunyadi had resided in Milan (A. Oszvald: *Hunyadi ifjúsága*, Budapest, 1916: 63–65), but the investigations of the following decades proved this suspicion, see F. Banfi: 'Hunyadi János itáliai tartózkodása', *Erdélyi Múzeum* 39, 1934: 261–272, p. 267; M. Jászay: *Párhuzamok és keresztveződések. A magyar–olasz kapcsolatok történetéből*, Budapest: Ciceró Kiadó, 2000: 131–132; P. Engel: 'Hunyadi pályakezdése', in: E. Csukovits (ed.): *Honor, vár, ispánság*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2003: 512–526, p. 517.

⁵⁴ V. Fraknoi: 'Mátyás király és Simon patraszi érsek', *Századok* 29, 1895: 495–506; 500–501; N. C. Tóth: *Az esztergomi székeskáptalan a 15. században I. A kanonoki testület és az egyetemjárás*, Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Támogatott Kutatócsoportok Irodája, 2015: 58. I am very grateful to Norbert C. Tóth for calling my attention to these dates.

instruction on the 11th of March, while the delegate of Hunyadi did so only a few days earlier, on the first of March, and, furthermore, their goals were the same. In addition, the letter of the governor written in 1452 fits smoothly into the itinerary of János Hunyadi, published by Pál Engel, which shows that Hunyadi was in Vienna at the beginning of March.⁵⁵

A detailed discussion of the delegates can also turn out to be rewarding. One of the most frequently mentioned delegates in the letters is Jacobus Delbene. The Delbene family was one of the most ancient Florentine families.⁵⁶ The clan, thanks to the activity of Jacopo di Francesco Delbene, became one of the most important commercial families of Florence until the middle of the 14th century. As far as we know, Bene di Jacopo Delbene was the first member of the family who contacted with Hungarians. In 1376 we find him as a delegate in Buda, where he died soon after his arrival.⁵⁷ Another member of the family who can be associated with Hungary was the father of Jacopo, Filippo Delbene, who worked for the local agency of the Spini bank in Hungary already in 1405.⁵⁸ Besides his commercial activity, he also undertook important diplomatic tasks as the delegate of the pope, Sigismund and Florence, therefore, among others, he participated in the resolution of the above mentioned conflict between Venice and Sigismund. He died before 1433, but his son, Jacopo, continued the family tradition. At the end of the 1430s, he worked as the “comes camerarum salium” (count of the salt chamber) of Szeged,⁵⁹ later he received the same title in Maramureş (Máramaros) and Székesfehérvár.⁶⁰ He obviously knew the affairs in Hungary thoroughly, and, thank to his position in the government, he had contacts to Hunyadi, which made him an ideal envoy for the Florentines.⁶¹

⁵⁵ P. Engel: ‘Hunyadi János kormányzó itineráriuma (1446–1452)’, *Századok* 5, 1984: 974–997, p. 986.

⁵⁶ K. Prajda: ‘Egy firenzei sírköve a középkori Budán. Bene di Jacopo del Bene szerencsétlenül végződött követjárása’, in: Á. Tóth (ed.): *„És az oszlopok tetején liliumok formáltattak vala”*. *Tanulmányok Bibó István 70. születésnapjára*, Budapest: Centrart, 2011: 53–59, p. 29.

⁵⁷ His tomb is still visible in Buda. K. Prajda: ‘Egy firenzei sírköve...’, *op.cit.*: 29.

⁵⁸ K. Arany: *Firenzei kereskedők, bankárok...*, *op.cit.*: 502.

⁵⁹ K. Arany: *Firenzei kereskedők, bankárok...*, *op.cit.*: 503.

⁶⁰ I. Draskóczy: ‘Olaszok a 15. századi Erdélyben’, in: I. Draskóczy (ed.): *Scripta manent. Ünnepi tanulmányok a 60. életévét betöltött Gericz József professzor tiszteletére*, Budapest, 1994: 125–136, p. 129; J. Mihályi: *Máramarosi diplomák a XIV. és XV. századból V.*, Máramaros-Sziget, 1900: 313; Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Diplomatikai Levéltár (hereinafter “DL”) 55199.

⁶¹ Neither his ancestry nor his profession meant an obstacle, as it is not the only case in the age when counts of the salt chamber received diplomatic tasks; see B. Iványi: *Adalékok a nemzetközi érintkezéseink történetéhez...*, *op.cit.*: 42.

Albert Vetési originated from a noble family of modest wealth in Szatmár county,⁶² and, according to the letters, he began his studies in Vienna, which he later continued in Padua, where he graduated as doctor of both laws.⁶³ In 1433 he participated in the escort of Sigismund to Rome.⁶⁴ In 1446 he became canon in Transylvania,⁶⁵ and later, in 1451, he received the title of the bishop's vicar.⁶⁶ It could be his first opportunity to meet the governor, who was the voivode of Transylvania. In 1452 he participated in the mission heading to Frederick III and the pope,⁶⁷ and although the assignment was not successful he became the secretary of Hunyadi.⁶⁸ According to Fraknói, he was still in Milan in January 1454.⁶⁹ Although we do not know when did he return home, in 1455 he was already in Hungary.⁷⁰ During the regency of Matthias he was assigned as bishop of Veszprém⁷¹ and he became one of the most important diplomats of the king, visiting Rome several times.⁷² His career before and after the year 1453 proves that thanks to his excellent education, language skills, his relations to Hunyadi and his previous Italian missions, he was able to fulfil his commissioners' expectations as a delegate.

⁶² E. Fügedi: *Uram, királyom...*, Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1974: 39.; P. Rainer: 'Vetési Albert püspök származása, családja, rokonsága', in: J. Gécz (ed.): *Vetési Albert (1410 k.–1486), Vetési László (15. század második fele)*, Vár ucca tizenhét, 1998: 71–78, p. 76.

⁶³ P. Erdő: *Egyházzog a középkori Magyarországon*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2001: 134.

⁶⁴ E. Csukovits: *Középkori magyar zarándokok*, Budapest: História & MTA, 2003: 164.

⁶⁵ J. Makkay: 'Vetési Albert veszprémi püspök', in: J. Gécz (ed.): *Vetési Albert...*, *op.cit.*: 13.

⁶⁶ V. Fraknói: *Mátyás király magyar diplomatái...*, *op.cit.*: 388.

⁶⁷ Their letter of instruction was issued on the 11th of March 1452 in Pozsony, cf. J. Teleki: *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon I–XII.*, 1852–1857. II.: 209.

⁶⁸ Frederick was not even willing to receive them in Florence. He undertook to pay the services of Miklós, bishop of Nyitra in the name of the prelate on 3 July at the Apostolic Chancellery in Rome. J. Lukcsics, P. Péter & T. Fedeles (eds.): *Cameralia Documenta Pontificia de Regnis Sacrae Coronae Hungariae (1297–1536) I.*, Budapest & Rome: Gondolat Kiadó, 2014: 356.

⁶⁹ V. Fraknói: *Mátyás király magyar diplomatái...*, *op.cit.*: 388.

⁷⁰ J. Makkay: *Vetési Albert...*, *op.cit.*: 13.

⁷¹ About his activity in Veszprém see G. Dreska & B. Karlinszky (eds.): *Monumenta Ecclesiae Vesprimiensis 1437–1464. A Veszprémi Érseki és Főkáptalani Levéltár középkori oklevelei*, Veszprém: Veszprémi Főegyházmegye, 2014, and L. Solymosi: 'Konfliktuskezelés Vetési Albert egyházi és Újlaki Miklós világi földesúr birtokain', in: T. Kleinstenitz & I. Zombori (eds.): *Litterarum radices amarae, fructus dulces sunt. Tanulmányok Adriányi Gábor 80. születésnapjára*, Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2015: 49–64.

⁷² A. Kubinyi: 'Mátyás király és a magyar püspökök', in: *Főpapok, egyháziak, intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon*, Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Munkaközösség (METEM), 1999: 69–88, p. 79. Pope Pius II also mentions one of his visits in Rome: Pii Secundi pontificis maximi commentarii... *op.cit.*: 557. (11.25.)

The German Friedrich Lamberger was one of Ulrich von Celje's dependent *familiars*. As we have seen, he represented his lord as delegate. He participated in the rebellion against Hunyadi in the Spring of 1457;⁷³ however, later he went over to the side of Matthias, who denominated him as castellan of Csáktornya and Štrigova.⁷⁴ In 1464, he pawned to him the whole estate of Csáktornya for 24000 golden forints, with all of its appendices.⁷⁵ He held the title of the master of the doorkeepers between 1466 and 1468.⁷⁶

We do not know further data about Zoanne de Voirago, Piero de Posterna and Anthonius de Magnis Bellano, beyond those in the letter.

The above presented letters broaden our knowledge about Hungary with numerous pieces of information on the first part of the 1450s. They shed light upon the details of the mechanism of the diplomatic missions between the Hungarian Kingdom, Milan and Florence. They also offer additional information over Albert Vetési and Jacobus Delbene, and ensure insight into the early career of Friedrich Lamberger, a renowned diplomat of the future. We learn that not only Milan, but Florence allied with the Hungarian Kingdom too, which is perfectly in accordance with the new northern Italian political system, created by Francesco Sforza and Cosimo Medici. Above all, the delegation demonstrates perfectly that the two leaders of Hungarian diplomacy in the first half of the 1450s were János Hunyadi and Ulrich von Celje, who even preceded the palatine, the archbishop of Esztergom and the voivode of Transylvania. Apparently, the two figures, if their interests required, could take a common stand in the field of foreign affairs.

The goal of these further investigations is to explore and publish documented sources in the State Archives of Milan related to Hungary.

⁷³ A. Kubinyi: *Mátyás király*, Budapest: Vince Kiadó, 2001: 22.

⁷⁴ DL 15794.

⁷⁵ DL 15945.

⁷⁶ DL 16577, 32814.; Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, Királyi Könyvek 4.396/b (Magyar Kancelláriai Levéltár, Libri regii 4. tomus) 381–383.

Appendix

János Hunyadi to Francesco Sforza [Buda, 20th of April of 1453]

Imprint of a seal on paper

Address: Illustrissimo principi, domino Francisco Sforzia vicecomiti duci Mediolano, Papie Anglieque comiti ac Cremone domino nobis honorando.

Illustrissime princeps, domine nobis honorande! Accepimus litteras vestre dominationis per egregium Iacobum Delbene, oratorem vestrum nobis presentatas et contenta earum intelleximus, quibus diligenter intellectis venerabilem et egregium Albertum utriusque iuris doctorem secretarium nostrum incontinenti cum plena tractandi et concludendi facultatis potestate in factis eidem vestre dominationi peroptime notis erga ipsam vestram dominationem transmisimus. Datum Bude feria sexta proxima ante festum Beati Georgii martiris, anno Domini millesimo CCCC L tercio

Johannes de Hwnyad perpetuus comes Bystriciensis etc. ac supremus capitaneus regie maiestatis in regno Hungarie constitutus

János Hunyadi to Francesco Sforza [Buda, 20th of April of 1453]

Imprint of a seal on paper

Address: Illustrissimo principi, domino Francisco Sfforcia vicecomiti duci Mediolani, Papie Anglieque comiti ac Cremonae domino, domino nobis honorando.

Illustris princeps, domine nobis honorande! Accepimus litteras vestre illustris dominationis per egregium Iacobum Delbene, oratorem illustris communitatis Florentie utriusque Iacobum exaudivimus, quo exaudito litterisque intellectis in factis vestre illustris dominationis notissimis venerabilem Albertum utriusque iuris doctorem nostrum secretarium ad vestram illustrem dominationem cum omni plenitudine facultatis cum vestra illustri dominatione ac Florentinorum communitate seu cum hiis, qui ex ipsa communitate ad id faciendum missi fuerint, disponendi et agendi, tamquam si nos praesentes essemus, transmisimus, placeat igitur in referendis parte vestra, vestra illustri dominatio, eidem plenissimam fidem tamquam nobis adhibere. Datum Bude feria sexta proxima ante festum Beati Georgii martiris, anno Domini millesimo quadringentesimo Lmo tertio

Johannes de Hunyad comes perpetuus Bystriczensis etc. supremus capitaneus regie maiestatis in regno Hungariae constitutus