

The Uskoks: Habsburg's Pirates in the Mediterranean

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Introduction

In the decades around 1600, navigation on the Adriatic was marked by a central theme in addition to the ongoing 'Turkish threat': the activities of the Uskoks. The population displaced by the Ottomans and integrated by the Habsburgs, more precisely by the regents of Inner Austria, within the framework of frontier defence was notorious for raids. Muslim but also Christian and Jewish ships had become victims of Uskok assaults before they were moved away from the Adriatic coast to the hinterland. Contemporaries and later historians have repeatedly and intensively dealt with this intriguing topic, developing a stereotypical Uskok image. David Abulafia calls them "the Robin Hood figures of Croatian folk epics".¹

The main purpose of the following considerations is not to retell the activities of the Uskoks and their role under the Habsburg regime in the tradition of a widespread narrative, but rather to link the problem of the Uskoks with the recent debate concerning a Habsburg Mediterranean. With the settlement of the Uskoks on the eastern Adriatic coast and their military use on sea, the Adriatic, as an integral part of the Mediterranean, for the first time came into the focus of the politics of the German branch of the *Casa de Austria*.

The name Uskok is derived from the Croatian word *uskočiti*, which means as much as to flee,² but also contains connotations of desertion and rebellion.³ In the early modern period, the name refers to refugees from the Christian Balkan countries affected by the Ottoman expansion, especially Serbia and Bosnia.⁴

¹ David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 455.

² Edgar Hösch, *Geschichte der Balkanländer: Von der Frühzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 90; Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, "Uskokken", in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, ed. Friedrich Jaeger, vol. 13 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2011), 1147–49, 1147.

³ Stevka Šmitran, *Gli uscocchi: pirati, ribelli, guerrieri tra gli imperi ottomano e asburgico e la Repubblica di Venezia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), 1–2.

⁴ Lucassen and Lucassen, "Uskokken", 1147; T. G. Jackson, *Dalmatia: The Quarnero and Istria*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), 175.

There is some controversy as to when the term was coined.⁵ Historians such as Adanir and Longworth see the Uskoks more as deserters or soldiers from the Ottoman side, who were recruited by the Habsburgs as border warriors.⁶ The central event in this context is the battle of Mohács in 1526, after which the Uskoks are said to have switched sides to the Habsburgs.⁷ Elsewhere, Mortoloses/Martoloses or Vlachs were names given to this very heterogeneous group.⁸

Grünfelder refers in her dissertation to three streams of refugees.⁹ The most famous group are the Uskoks of Segna (Senj in Croatian; in German Zengg), who had initially taken over defensive tasks in the border fortress of Clissa (Klis).¹⁰ After the conquest of this stronghold in 1537 by the Ottomans, the Uskoks fled and settled on several Habsburg coastal sites, such as Fiume (Rijeka), Novi, Buccari (Bakar),¹¹ but above all in Segna, which they turned into their main base.¹² Segna was an old harbour town on the gulf of Quarnero below the steeply sloping Velebit, located opposite the southern tip of the then Venetian island of Veglia (Krk), where important trade and ship routes passed.¹³ It was one of the key fortresses of the Croatian military border defence system, so that already in

⁵ Heinrich Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1986), 275, refers to 1568. The year 1526, indicated by Lucassen and Lucassen, “Uskoken”, 1148, seems to be more realistic.

⁶ Fikret Adanir, “Heiduckentum und osmanische Herrschaft: Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der Diskussion um das frühneuzeitliche Räuberwesen in Südosteuropa”, *Südost-Forschungen* 16 (1982): 43–116, 85; Philip Longworth, “The Senj Uskoks Reconsidered”, *Slavonic and East European Review* 57,3 (1979): 348–68, 352.

⁷ Lucassen and Lucassen, “Uskoken”, 1148.

⁸ Adanir, “Heiduckentum”, 85; Longworth, “The Senj Uskoks Reconsidered”, 350. Cf. Rudolf and Ekkehard Eickhoff, “Die Uskoken in der Adria: Ein Kapitel südosteuropäischer Seegeschichte”, *Annales Universitatis Saraviensis: Phil. Abt.* 5 (1956): 196–226, 202; Gunther E. Rothenberg, “Venice and the Uskoks of Senj”, *The Journal of Modern History* 33,2 (1961): 148–56, 148, says they did not have any special ethnic characteristics.

⁹ Annemarie Grünfelder, *Studie zur Geschichte der Uskoken* (Innsbruck: unpublished PhD thesis of the University of Innsbruck, 1974), 2.

¹⁰ Jackson, *Dalmatia*, 175.

¹¹ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskoken in der Adria”, 198–99.

¹² Rothenberg, “Venice and the Uskoks of Senj”, 148; idem, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522–1747* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), 54. Longworth “The Senj Uskoks Reconsidered”, 350–51, however, writes that before 1549 there was no mention of the Uskoks in Segna.

¹³ Klaus-Peter Matschke, *Das Kreuz und der Halbmond: Die Geschichte der Türkenkriege* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2004), 306.

1523 the Habsburgs installed a garrison of mercenaries there.¹⁴ However, the importance of Segna is questioned by Fernand Braudel:

The city behind this adventure was neither Segna nor Fiume [...] but Trieste, the great centre for selling and reselling, whether Turkish slaves whom the grand duke of Tuscany bought for his galleys, or fine cloth of gold and camlets stolen from the Venetians.¹⁵

Segna was well protected by the stormy sea with its dangerous reefs and the surrounding mountains and forests. However, the fact that there was no immediate hinterland which belonged to them did not allow the Uskoks to engage in agriculture. These conditions meant that the Uskoks only had recourse to military endeavours as a form of employment. As a matter of fact, they were assigned the specific task of defending the military border of the Adriatic Sea by the Habsburg rulers. These facts provided the conditions for making their living later by means of robberies.¹⁶ They had no alternatives given the fact that the Habsburg rulers did not pay any wages or, if at all, only after enormous delays. The piracy of the Uskoks can therefore be regarded as at least authoritatively tolerated, although not explicitly promoted by state organs or the sovereigns themselves. The Uskoks are thus to a certain degree comparable to groups of corsairs, privateers or buccaneers.¹⁷ They can be classified as a society on the periphery of the Habsburg territories where the frontiers with the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice were fluid and permeable.¹⁸ The Uskoks were orthodox Christians.¹⁹ They spoke Wallachian and used the Glagolitic script in

¹⁴ Rothenberg, "Venice and the Uskoks of Senj", 148; Jakob Amstadt, *Die k. k. Militärgrenze 1522–1881* (Würzburg: unpublished PhD dissertation of the University of Würzburg, 1969), 40.

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, vol. 1: *La part du milieu* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 154; *La métropole qui anime cette aventure, ce n'est ni Segna ni Fiume [...] mais Trieste où tout se vend et se revend: les esclaves turcs qu'achète pour ses galères le grand-duc de Toscane, les beaux draps d'or et les camelots volés aux Vénitiens.*

¹⁶ Jackson, *Dalmatia*, 173; Rothenberg, "Venice and the Uskoks of Senj", 149; Longworth, "The Senj Uskoks Reconsidered", 356.

¹⁷ Robert Bohn, "Korsaren", in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, ed. Friedrich Jaeger, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2008), 80–83, 80; idem, "Freibeuter", in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, eds. Friedrich Jaeger, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2006), 1123–29, 1124.

¹⁸ As a matter of fact, a third invisible border line should be stated between the coastal zone, populated by the Uskoks, and the rural hinterland, the populations of which suffered also from the attacks of the Uskoks, see Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 10.

¹⁹ Karl Kaser, "Siedler an der habsburgischen Militärgrenze seit der Frühen Neuzeit", in *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa: Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Klaus

liturgical matters, Cyrillic letters when dealing with Ottoman authorities and Latin script for everyday usage.²⁰ In the part Paolo Sarpi added to Minucci's famous *Storia degli Uscocchi*, the Uskoks of Segna are divided into three groups: the *casalini*, who had been resident for several generations and totalled about 100 individuals; the occupation troops, the *stipendiati*, some 200 people officially in receipt of pay; and recent immigrants from the south, the *venturieri*, some 2000 men.²¹ Many European powers endeavoured to employ these mercenaries known for their military prestige. Among others, they served Venice in different military contexts,²² but also the grand duke of Tuscany²³ and the Spanish crown.²⁴

State of Research²⁵

For a long time, the scientific study of the Uskok conflict, which led to a war between Inner Austria and Venice (1615–17), has been almost exclusively influenced by sources of the Venetian foes and the Habsburg patrons.²⁶ Bracewell states: "How the Uskoks become defined depends on who was speaking".²⁷ The *Storia degli Uscocchi*²⁸ written by Minuccio Minucci (1551–1604), archbishop of Zara (Zadar),²⁹ around 1600 and continued by Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623), member of

J. Bade et al. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 985–90, 986; Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*, 53.

²⁰ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*, 50–51.

²¹ Paolo Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia, la Casa d'Austria e gli Uscocchi: aggiunta e supplimento all'Istoria degli Uscocchi. Trattato di pace e accomodamento*, eds. Gaetano Cozzi and Luisa Cozzi (Bari: Laterza, 1965), 52–53.

²² In the naval battle of Lepanto they distinguished themselves and were afterwards called the best Venetian mercenaries. Eickhoff and Eickhoff, "Die Uskokken in der Adria", 202; Lucassen and Lucassen, "Uskokken", 1148.

²³ Šmitran, *Gli uscocchi*, 74.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ References to sources can be found in Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*, passim, and Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*, 15–18.

²⁶ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, "Die Uskokken in der Adria", 224.

²⁷ Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*, 9.

²⁸ Minuccio Minucci, *Historia degli Uscocchi* (no place: no printer, no year, c. 1615). For the additional parts I used Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*.

²⁹ For this figure see Alexander Koller, "Minucci, Minuccio", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, vol. 74 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2010), 710–14. Minucci's extensive estate is in the possession of the German Historical Institute of Rome, cf. Alexander Koller, Pier P. Piergentili and Gianni Venditti, eds., *I Codici Minucciani dell'Istituto Storico Germanico: inventario* (Rome: German Historical Institute Rome, 2009, published online: www.dhi-roma.it/codici_minucciani.html).

the Servite order, famous Venetian state historian and protagonist of the conflict between Venice and Rome during the papal interdict, was responsible for creating a negative narrative of the Uskoks.³⁰ In contrast, sources of Austrian provenance emphasize above all the function of the Uskoks as defenders of Christianity and the character of a military elite unit. The documents of the Roman Curia show a somewhat more neutral position, as can be seen in the *Monumenta historiam Usocchorum illustrantia*, a publication of documents, mainly based on material of the Vatican archives.³¹ For those interested in the problem of Uskoks, this edition presents important source material, as curial diplomacy plays a central role in this context, not only in Venice. The main instructions given to the papal diplomats during the pontificates of Clement VIII Aldobrandini (1592–1605) and Paul V Borghese (1605–21), which are now published,³² point in the same direction. In total four nunciatures were engaged in the Uskok conflict in addition to the papal representation in Venice, that at the imperial court, in Inner Austria and finally in Madrid and Paris, since in the course of the Uskok war, Spain and France mediated between the conflicting parties.³³ From a diplomatic point of view, the nunciature in Inner Austria, based in Graz, occupied a monopolistic position, since the pope was the only European prince who had permanent representation at the court of the archdukes of Styria, the sovereigns of the Uskoks. Research on the nunciature of Graz has made major advances in recent years through scholarly editions of official correspondence,³⁴ which has also benefited the Uskok topic.

³⁰ See Antonella Barzazi, “Sarpi, Paolo (Pietro)”, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, vol. 90 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2010), 616–24.

³¹ Carolus Horvat, ed., *Monumenta historiam Usocchorum illustrantia*, 2 vols. (Zagreb: ex officina societatis typographicae, 1910–13).

³² Klaus Jaitner, ed., *Die Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII. für die Nuntien und Legaten an den europäischen Fürstenhöfen 1592–1605*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984); Silvano Giordano, ed., *Le istruzioni generali di Paolo V ai diplomatici pontifici 1605–1621* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003).

³³ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 221.

³⁴ Johann Rainer, ed., *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 2: *Nuntiatur des Germanico Malaspina und des Giovanni Andrea Caligari 1582–1587* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981); Johann Rainer, ed., *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 3: *Nuntiatur des Girolamo Portia und Korrespondenz des Hans Kobenzl 1592–1595* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001); Johann Rainer, ed., *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 4: *Nuntiatur des Girolamo Portia 1595–1598* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012); Elisabeth Zingerle, ed., *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5: *Nuntiatur des Girolamo Portia 1599–1602* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012).

However, a systematic evaluation of all five nunciatures mentioned with regard to the Uskoks awaits the attention of historians. Among the research literature primarily the Innsbruck dissertation submitted by Grünfelder in 1974 as well as the monograph by Bracewell from 1992 merits mention.³⁵

To sum up, previous research in connection with the Uskok question has mainly focused on the following aspects: origin, migration, piracy, border society, myth, diplomacy (especially papal diplomacy) and military activities up to the so-called Uskok war. Basically, there was no explicit link between the problem of the Uskoks and the fundamental question of free navigation in the Adriatic and Habsburg claims to the Mediterranean, although this question was already treated in the first historiographical work on the Uskoks, the *Storia degli Usocchi*. This issue therefore will not be neglected in this study.

The Conflict

In their activities against the Ottoman Empire, the Uskoks initially confined themselves to land-based operations, passing through Venetian or Ragusan territory, but soon began plundering Ottoman ships at sea. These activities are said to have contributed to the outbreak of the Great Turkish War in 1593.³⁶ In a further escalation, attacks on every type of ship took place, which also violated the interests of Jewish and Christian merchants of the Papal States, the Kingdom of Naples and especially the Republic of Venice.³⁷ For example, at the beginning of 1601, the Uskoks had looted goods from a Jewish merchant vessel coming from Ancona, a port of the Papal States. The Austrian commander of Segna, Joseph von Rabatta, then submitted the following proposal to the pope: to sell these goods and use the profit to fortify a city intended as the future residence of the Uskoks at Otočac in the Croatian hinterland.³⁸ The answer from Rome was remarkable. Clement VIII demanded the restitution of the Jewish goods with reference to the special property rights of the Jewish community of Ancona. There was, as Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini (1551–1610) wrote in the name of the pope, no

³⁵ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*; Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*.

³⁶ Minucci, *Historia degli Usocchi*, 18–20; see also Jan Paul Niederkorn, *Die europäischen Mächte und der "Lange Türkenkrieg" Kaiser Rudolfs II. (1593–1606)* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1993), 276–79.

³⁷ Rothenberg, "Venice and the Uskoks of Senj", 149; Eickhoff and Eickhoff, "Die Uskokken in der Adria", 204; Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*, 4. See also Aladár Fest, "Uskokken und Venezianer in der Geschichte von Fiume (1575–1618)", *Ungarische Revue* 12 (1892): 160–79, 245–65, 530–44, 673–709, here 247.

³⁸ For this project, see Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, XXIX–XXXVI.

sufficient reason (*legitimo titolo*) for the Uskoks to take these goods from the Jews or to withhold anything that they had robbed by mere injustice of piracy (*iniuria latrocinii*) and not in virtue of martial law (*iure belli*).³⁹

Venice especially could not tolerate the raids of the Uskoks for economic and political reasons as well as for the sake of their own reputation in the long run, particularly since the republic claimed unrestricted sovereignty over the Adriatic Sea. Thus, in the decades around 1600, a cycle of conflicts emerged, which can be described as acts of violence by the Uskoks on land and sea targeting and plundering the Venetian islands in the Adriatic, followed by punitive expeditions and blockades of the Habsburg ports by the Venetians with economic consequences in their wake for the whole maritime area under Habsburg control.⁴⁰ Finally, an investigation of the events, set up by the imperial or Styrian government, took place, but achieved no or no lasting effect. In the maritime skirmishes with Venice, the Uskoks had a clear advantage because they were familiar with the landing sites and the depths and shallows in the Dalmatian archipelago and were more capable of dealing with the dangers of the Bora, the notorious changeable northern wind in the Adriatic Sea. The Venetians were not able to stop the Uskoks from leaving the ports or to pursue them, as the rugged coast with its narrow bays offered refuge to the Uskoks and at the same time was out of reach of the large boats and galleys of the Venetians.⁴¹ Thus violence spiralled out of control and unleashed a military conflict in 1615. As early as 1599 violence broke out when Venice responded to Uskok acts of violence with military incursions into the areas of Fiume and Trieste.⁴² The forces of Inner Austria, however, were tied up by the siege of Kanizsa at the same time.⁴³ The Maritime Republic of Venice began the construction of a number of fortresses in order to control the movements of the Uskoks on strategic points of their islands at the northern tip of Veglia (Krk) opposite the bay of Buccari (Bakar), on Pago (Pag) southeast of Carlopago (Karlobag), one on Cherso (Cres) and in 1605 the Castello Venier north of Novigrad in the straits of Morlac.⁴⁴

The situation of the Uskoks can also be described as a predicament, since the lack of pay due to them from the Austrian rulers coupled with the precarious economic situation resulting from the Venetian blockade policy drove the Uskoks

³⁹ Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, 488.

⁴⁰ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 277.

⁴¹ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, "Die Uskoken in der Adria", 205–06.

⁴² Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, 22, 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XXXIV.

⁴⁴ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, "Die Uskoken in der Adria", 207–08.

into piracy. In the very last years of the sixteenth century, considerations took concrete shape to move the Uskoks inland to the fortress of Otočac on the Croatian plateau and to send a new, regular garrison of paid German soldiers to Segna.⁴⁵ But the crucial point was the question of how to finance this project which exceeded the budgetary capacity of Inner Austria.⁴⁶ So, Venice and the Papal States were also invited to contribute to the expenses. However, this plan was not implemented at that time, although, as the now available reports of the nuncios operating in Graz show, Clement VIII had pledged half of the 18,000 *forini* which were necessary to maintain the German garrison in Segna for one year.⁴⁷ The end of the Great Turkish War further aggravated the situation, because the Treaty of Zsitva-Torok (1606) prohibited the Uskoks from attacking Ottoman ships. At the same time the Uskoks lost their importance for the Habsburg rulers, as the defence of their territories against the Ottomans was no longer the top priority. Nonetheless, the Uskoks continued their raids and were initially able to do so largely unhindered, as the attention of the three major protagonists involved in the conflict was diverted due to recent political developments (the succession struggle in the House of Habsburg after the reigns of two childless emperors,⁴⁸ and the interdict crisis between Venice and the papacy⁴⁹). In 1612, the so-called Vienna agreement made a final attempt to settle the conflict peacefully. The Habsburg side undertook to forbid Uskok piracy by law, to punish violators with death or to expel notorious pirates and finally to replace the Uskok garrison of Segna with German mercenaries. Venice, on the other hand, committed herself to lifting the naval blockade, to allowing shipping to proceed unimpeded and to releasing Uskok prisoners.⁵⁰ The hopes placed in this agreement were not fulfilled however. As the Vienna agreement proved to be of no avail, the ongoing conflict led to a war between the emperor, Inner Austria and Venice in 1615, which is referred to in historiography as the Friulian or the Gradiscan War in view of the most important theatres of war.⁵¹ War of the Uskoks is another description

⁴⁵ Ibid., 208; Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, no. 51.1, 53.2, 54.1.

⁴⁶ Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, XXX.

⁴⁷ Ibid., XXXV, no. 165.1.

⁴⁸ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 38–39.

⁴⁹ Stefano Andretta, “Paolo V e Venezia”, in *Die Außenbeziehungen der römischen Kurie unter Paul V. Borghese (1605–1621)*, ed. Alexander Koller (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008), 231–47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 57–70; Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 214; Rothenberg, “Venice and the Uskoks of Senj”, 153; Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*, 285.

⁵¹ Riccardo Caimmi, *La Guerra del Friuli altrimenti nota come guerra di Gradisca o degli Uscocchi* (Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 2007); Peter H. Wilson, “The Uskok War and the Habsburg Succession 1615–17”, in *The Thirty Years War: Europe’s Tragedy*, ed.

for this conflict because one of the most spectacular acts of violence perpetrated by the Uskoks, the seizure of a Venetian galley and the assassination of captain Cristoforo Venier in May 1613, triggered the war.⁵² The battles, during which Albrecht von Wallenstein began his military career,⁵³ took place largely in Friuli, Gorizia and Istria. Segna, however, did not get involved. After two years, the conflicting parties ended the war for several reasons. There were high losses and only modest military success to Venice; it was necessary for the now elected King of Bohemia, Ferdinand of Inner Austria (1578–1637), to be unencumbered for the settlement of the succession issue at the head of the Holy Roman Empire; and in addition the confessional crisis in Central Europe was escalating.⁵⁴ The Treaty of Madrid in September 1617 largely adopted the provisions of the Vienna agreement. In addition, the Uskok ships were to be burned and the Uskoks resettled forty miles inland, whereas the Venetians were to assure the restitution of the occupied places.⁵⁵ The great era of the Uskoks had come to an end, not least because of new political developments. On the one hand, the confessional turn in Central Europe, which had led to the Thirty Years' War, made the Balkan area and the Adriatic a theatre of war of second rank at a time when the concept of an anti-Ottoman crusade was beginning to fade. On the other hand, the establishment of the early modern state left less and less room for mercenary groups, which stood outside the control of public military administration.

Peter H. Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 255–61; Helfried Valentinitich, “Ferdinand II., die innerösterreichischen Länder und der Gradiskanerkrieg 1615–1618”, in *Johannes Kepler 1571–1971*, eds. Paul Urban and Berthold Sutter (Graz: Leykam, 1975), 497–539.

⁵² Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 214–17; Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 279.

⁵³ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3., 282; Josef Polišenský and Josef Kollmann, *Wallenstein: Feldherr des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1979), 41–43; Golo Mann, *Wallenstein* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1971), 143–45; Antonín Kostlán, “Albrecht von Waldstein als Investor in sein eigenes Schicksal: Ökonomische Aspekte einer frühneuzeitlichen Karriere”, in *Albrecht von Waldstein: Inter arma silent musae?*, eds. Eliška Fučíková and Ladislav Čepička (Prague: Academia, 2007), 38–61, 42; Matthias Pfaffenbichler, “Waldstein als Kriegsunternehmer”, in *ibid.*, 263–70, 263.

⁵⁴ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 281–83; Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*, 5.

⁵⁵ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 283; Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 222; Rothenberg, “Venice and the Uskoks of Senj”, 155–56.

The Protagonists

The problem of the Uskoks was determined above all by the policies of three European powers: the House of Habsburg, the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice. Bracewell rightly emphasizes: “The economic, political, and religious competition between the three empires that met in the Adriatic is the fundamental condition for the existence of the Uskoks”.⁵⁶

The Uskoks had settled on Habsburg territory since the 1540s. Since they were employed to defend the military border, the Uskoks were subordinate both to the emperor and the ruler of Inner Austria. In 1578, the military border between the Habsburg territories and the Ottoman Empire became divided into a Hungarian and a Wendish-Croatian section.⁵⁷ The latter fell under the jurisdiction of the regent of Styria (until 1590 Archduke Charles, from 1590 onwards Archduke Ferdinand, the later Emperor Ferdinand II), but overall responsibility remained with the emperor. These complex conditions led to problems in funding and jurisdiction. Inner Austria, however, also had several controversial borders with the Republic of Venice. The demarcation lines on the Istrian peninsula⁵⁸ and in Dalmatia⁵⁹ in particular played a role in the Uskok forays into foreign territory. The Habsburg authorities generally cast a blind eye over Uskok raids without interfering effectively, not least because they seldom paid salaries, if at all.⁶⁰ Imperial or Styrian investigations of Uskok activities usually had no consequences, especially as the Habsburg governments had no means of intervening at sea. The Habsburg representatives on the spot often took their share of the loot, and the

⁵⁶ Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj*, 7.

⁵⁷ Günther Probszt, “Die windisch-kroatische Militärgrenze und ihre Vorläufer”, *Sonderbände der Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Steiermark* 15 (1967): 17–39; Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Die österreichische Militärgrenze in Kroatien 1522 bis 1881* (Vienna and Munich: Herold, 1970); Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor, eds., *Ottomans, Hungarians, and Habsburgs in Central Europe: The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Archduke Ernst received the supreme command over the Hungarian part, whilst Archduke Charles was in charge of the Croatian and Slawonian part of the military border. Cf. Alexander Koller, ed., *Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland nebst ergänzenden Aktenstücken*, section III: 1572–1585, vol. 9: *Nuntiaturen des Giovanni Delfino und des Bartolomeo Portia (1577–1578)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 381; Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, XIV stresses the importance of the military border for the Italian territories.

⁵⁸ Šmitran, *Gli uscocchi*, 25–26. The mountainous area in the north, as well as the county of Pisino (Pasin/Mitterburg), were Habsburg possessions, whilst the south of the peninsula belonged to Venice. This part was often the target of Uskok attacks.

⁵⁹ Cf. the chapter of Eric R. Dursteler in this volume.

⁶⁰ Jackson, *Dalmatia*, vol. 3, 177.

government of Styria also benefitted from the raids.⁶¹ We can see here an interesting centre-periphery relation, which in the words of the Eickhoffs, developed into a case of “state within a state”.⁶² This development manifested itself in its most extreme form in the murder of the imperial commissioner of Segna, Joseph von Rabatta, by Uskoks in 1600,⁶³ a crime which was pursued neither by Graz nor by the imperial court due to false reports. In any case, a certain difference can be seen between Prague and Graz in handling the Uskok problem. The emperor tended generally to go harder on the Uskoks, in order to meet the demands of Venice, unlike the government of Inner Austria, who acted in a more conciliatory way.⁶⁴ As Sarpi points out, expulsion and resettlement of the Uskoks was rejected by the Habsburg side for a long time for humanitarian reasons and—with respect to the good of Christianity—for confessional and military reasons owing to their real task of defending Christian interests against the Ottomans.⁶⁵ The Spanish Habsburgs were also indirectly affected by this conflict. In an analogy to the Spanish Road on land (from Milan via Tyrol to the Netherlands) her maritime counterpart, the sea route from the Apulian ports to Istria and Trieste, touched also Venetian interests.⁶⁶ However, the viceroy of Naples acted in his naval operations without consulting Madrid.⁶⁷

The activities of the Uskoks impinged not only on the Ottoman Empire, but also on Venice. As the forays of the Uskoks against the Turks led overland across Venetian territory, the Republic of St Mark was accused of complicity by the Ottomans. The raids on Ottoman merchant ships caused protests directed against the Maritime Republic of Venice, as it had guaranteed free and safe merchant

⁶¹ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 132: *che dalli ministri austriaci sono stati ricettati, consentendogli dividere le cose rubate, e venderle e donarle a loro fautori*. Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 204.

⁶² Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 211.

⁶³ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*, 234–35; Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 208, 211. Joseph von Rabatta was a senior official of Inner Austria charged with administrative and military tasks such as the governorship of Gorizia and Carniola. For further details, see Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, 23, note 1.

⁶⁴ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 278–79; Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 84: *Ma avvenne quello che più volta era occorso regnante l'imperator Rodolfo, che nel consiglio cesareo fu presa buona risoluzione per rimediar al male, la qual in Gratz fu convertita sempre in quella sorte di medicina che lo fa peggiorare*.

⁶⁵ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 133.

⁶⁶ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 278.

⁶⁷ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 222; Antonio Battistelli, “Il Dominio del Golfo”, *Nuovo Archivio Storico* 35 (1918): 62–65.

shipping on the Adriatic.⁶⁸ Towards the end of the sixteenth century the sultan, too, wanted to build fortresses on the islands opposite Segna and send warships there. Venice however knew how to prevent this type of measure through the direct intervention of her ambassador, the *bailo*, in Istanbul.⁶⁹

The Maritime Republic initially responded to the machinations of the Uskoks by acting punitively against them. Later there were also border violations, and Austrian coastal towns were destroyed. From the end of the sixteenth century on Venice waged a veritable trade war against Habsburg as compensation for the damages suffered by the Uskoks. Venice imposed tariffs and port dues on hitherto unrestricted imports from Trieste, repeatedly blockading the port with warships as well as those of Fiume and Buccari, thus hindering the export of goods from Istria and Gorizia as well as imports from the papal provinces, Naples and Spain.⁷⁰ Kretschmayr writes of “intended economic damage on Austria”.⁷¹ Nonetheless, it remains to be stated that the Habsburgs themselves, by tolerating or commissioning the Uskok raids, had accepted approvingly the damage inflicted on Venetian trade. However, Venice avoided a war or major punitive action against the German branch of the Habsburgs for a long time in order not to provoke an attack of Venetian places by the Sublime Porte in return.

Even if only marginally involved, the papacy played an important role in this complex power constellation. The relationship between the Apostolic See and the Habsburgs was characterized by a double convergence of interests in relation to the Uskoks, since the Papal States, like the Habsburg territories, advocated free navigation on the Adriatic. The papacy supported resolutely the defence measures of the Habsburgs against the Ottomans and called for military actions against them in the tradition of the concept of a crusade.⁷² Some popes also supported the Uskoks with subsidies.⁷³ Through their nuncios at the imperial court, in Graz and Venice, popes repeatedly attempted to intervene in the conflict between Habsburg and Venice. Extraordinary nuncios were sent as well for this purpose. Flaminio

⁶⁸ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 205; see also Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 18.

⁶⁹ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskokken in der Adria”, 205.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁷¹ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 277.

⁷² The establishment of a permanent nunciature in Graz was not least due to this goal.

⁷³ Rinaldo Fulin and Federico Stefani, eds., *La legazione di Roma di Paolo Paruta (1592–1595)* (Venice: Regia deputazione veneta di storia patria, 1887), 140, note 1; Jaitner, *Hauptinstruktionen Clemens' VIII.*, 518.

Delfini's⁷⁴ mission, for example, was of particular importance.⁷⁵ He stayed at the imperial court in Prague from March 1599 to April 1600.⁷⁶ Proposals formulated in his instruction were almost identical to the provisions of the subsequent Treaty of Madrid. During the interdict conflict with Venice, Paul V considered recruiting Uskoks to protect the coasts of the Papal States.⁷⁷ This request was enthusiastically received by the Uskoks, but finally rejected by the Imperial War Council in Prague.⁷⁸ Until the definitive settlement of the Uskok conflict by the Treaty of Madrid, Pope Paul V played a central mediating role.

Background: Border Conflicts, Free Navigation versus *dominium gulfu*

There was a wider issue to these conflicts. The Uskok crisis was basically embedded in a greater struggle between Venice and Habsburg for political spheres of influence in Friuli, in Istria and in the Adriatic. Although agreements had been reached in Brussels (1516), Worms (1521), Bologna (1529) and Udine (1563),⁷⁹ the border between Inner Austria and the Republic of Venice continued to remain controversial, as Venice claimed Aquileia and the right bank of the Isonzo.⁸⁰ For the latter, the Venetians offered territorial compensation in Istria.⁸¹ But the question of navigation in the Adriatic was linked even closer to the Uskok problem. A constituent part of the Venetian concept of rulership was the claim to naval monopoly in the Adriatic (*dominium gulfu*), which probably occurred for the first time in writing in the twelfth century.⁸² On the other hand, the House of Habsburg, and also the popes, insisted on the principle of free navigation in the Adriatic for economic reasons. Both powers referred to agreements dating from 1510 and 1529 (Peace of Bologna).⁸³ The territorial and maritime issues between the Habsburgs and Venice were discussed intensively albeit without results, in

⁷⁴ Flaminio Delfini (1552–1605) was a military commander in Flanders under Alessandro Farnese and, later on, in Hungary during the great Turkish War. He also served as governor of Ferrara in 1603. For further details, see Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, 25–26, note 1.

⁷⁵ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskoken*, 206–07.

⁷⁶ Cf. Zingerle, *Grazer Nuntiatur*, vol. 5, no. 12.2, 12.3, 14.1, 15.2, 18.1.

⁷⁷ Horvat, *Monumenta historiam Usocchorum illustrantia*, vol. 2, 69–70.

⁷⁸ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskoken*, 249.

⁷⁹ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 276, 278.

⁸⁰ Eickhoff and Eickhoff, “Die Uskoken in der Adria”, 217.

⁸¹ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 276.

⁸² Battistelli, “Il Dominio del Golfo”, 5; Géraud Poumarède, *L'Empire de Venise et les Turcs, XVIe–XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020), 51–65.

⁸³ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 278.

the conference held in Udine in 1563, including the question of payments of customs duties for the stopover of goods in Austrian ports and for the export of goods in Venetian ports.⁸⁴ The Austrian side insisted on freedom of navigation in the Adriatic Sea, which was violated by the Venetian blockade of Trieste and the Quarnero Bay during the last decade of the sixteenth century,⁸⁵ and alluded to their economic losses. The legal scholar Giacomo Chizzola (1502–80)⁸⁶ who represented the Republic of St Mark⁸⁷ however, flagged up the frequently mentioned legal concept of the maritime guardianship of Venice (*custodia maris*). Accordingly, the republic was authorized to defend the Adriatic Sea, which inevitably resulted in the submission of all foreign ships to Venetian rule based on her presumed maritime sovereignty on sea, similar to her dominion on the mainland.⁸⁸ Chizzola further argued that Venice had not deprived anyone of its title to the Adriatic, as Venice had acquired this part of the Mediterranean when she found it “abandoned” and “ownerless”.⁸⁹ In support of his thesis Chizzola finally referred to documents of various European princes, who clearly recognized the Venetian position, for example two letters from Emperor Frederick III (1415–93) written in 1458 and 1479, two by Matthias Corvinus (1443–90), King of Hungary, from 1482, and a request of Queen Anne of Hungary (1484–1506) from 1502.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 96.

⁸⁵ Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 277.

⁸⁶ Chizzola originated from Brescia. He was an eminent scholar, lawyer and economist, who also served the Republic of Venice several times as a diplomat. For further information, see Francesco Grasso Caprioli, “Camillo Tarello, Agostino Gallo, Giacomo Chizzola e l’Accademia di Rezzato”, *Rivista di Storia dell’Agricoltura* 22,2 (1982): 37–122.

⁸⁷ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 100: *Adonque concluse che se la republica è quel principe a chi appartenga dominare e proteggere l’Adriatico, segue necessariamente che chi lo naviga debbia stare soggetto alle sue leggi, non altrimenti che a quelle della regione terrestre che transita per quella.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 101: *[...] che doppo la declinazione dell’Impero constantinopolitano, ritrovandosi l’Adriatico per più anni abbandonato (come anco molte isole e città di quello stato) in modo che restava incustodito e senza protezione e governo di prencipe alcuno e sotto la giurisdizione di nessuno, fu dalla republica, che per ricever il vitto suo da quello era costretto mantenerlo netto, preso sotto la protezione sua, acquistatone il governo e dominio nel modo che per dritto naturale e delle genti le terre, mari e altre cose, che non sono sotto il dominio di alcuno, diventano di quello che primo le occupa; Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 277–78.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105–06. Sarpi must have meant Anne de Foix-Candale, who married Wladislaw II of Bohemia and Hungary in 1502, and not Anne of Hungary, daughter of Maximilian I and future Queen of Hungary, who was born in 1503.

It is no coincidence that Sarpi, at the end of his explanations on the *dominium gulfu*, referred to the meaningful rite of symbolic marriage by the Doge with the sea, where the significant formula is pronounced: *despondamus te mare in signum veri et perpetui dominii* (“We espouse thee, o sea, in token of our real and lasting dominion”).⁹¹ Despite the importance of the Adriatic question and the boundary regulations for the settlement of the problem of the Uskoks, even in the peace of Madrid there was no final solution to the two fundamental issues. The border lines and the ownership or control of the gulf of Venice remained unregulated for the time being.⁹²

The *Storia degli Uscocchi* by Minucci-Sarpi

Amongst all contemporary sources the *Storia degli Uscocchi* takes an outstanding place. The first part of the account, which covers the period up to 1602, was written by Minuccio Minucci. He came from the Venetian *terra ferma* and was later to become archbishop of Zara (Zadar) in Dalmatia. He had studied in Padua and enjoyed a remarkable career as nuncio and official at the Roman secretariat of State, but was also considered a protégé of the Bavarian dukes.⁹³ He wrote numerous theological and historico-political writings, among which the history of the Uskoks acquired the greatest importance owing to its large distribution and translation into several languages.⁹⁴ Minucci himself intervened as a mediator in the general conflict by order of Pope Clement VIII and was able to follow the events from close range as Archbishop of Zara from 1596 onwards. Grünfelder assumes that Minucci had been commissioned by the pope to draft the Uskok paper.⁹⁵ After Minucci's death in 1604 Paolo Sarpi added two parts to the treatise, the *Aggionta* and the *Supplimento* (which encompass the period 1603–13 and 1613–15, both published anonymously). The authorship of the Servite and Venetian state historian has been sometimes called into question, but there are many indications that point in the direction of Sarpi, among other things the

⁹¹ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 106.

⁹² Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, vol. 3, 283.

⁹³ Alexander Koller, “Minuccio Minucci (1551–1604): Ein Diplomat in päpstlichen und bayerischen Diensten”, in *Bayerische Römer – römische Bayern: Lebensgeschichten aus Vor- und Frühmoderne*, eds. Rainald Becker and Dieter Weiß (Sant Ottilien: EOS Editions, 2016), 249–73.

⁹⁴ The English translation, which the English ambassador in Venice, Henry Wotton (1568–1639), wanted to hand over to his government, did not survive according to Cozzi. Cf. Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 457, note 1.

⁹⁵ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*, 406.

relations between Sarpi and Marcantonio De Dominis (c. 1560–1623),⁹⁶ who was involved directly in the conflict as Bishop of Segna.⁹⁷ In this connection it is worth referring to the fact that in 1616 De Dominis had published Sarpi's famous story of the Council of Trent in London. But what is more, Sarpi was the author of a treatise on Venetian dominion in the Adriatic and therefore familiar with the issue.⁹⁸

Both Minucci and Sarpi claimed that the Habsburg side was greatly responsible for the escalation of the conflict, for which they blame not so much the Austrian rulers as their advisers.⁹⁹ In this context another thesis of Minucci needs to be mentioned, according to which the Protestants at the Styrian court had deliberately stoked the conflict in order to distract the regent and his Catholic counsellors from their anti-Protestant policies.¹⁰⁰ Although at least Minucci (not Sarpi) did not officially write on behalf of the Republic of St Mark, both his treatise and the later parts added by Sarpi can be understood to have been Venetian propaganda. In any case, they contributed significantly to the rise of a negative Uskok narrative. Increasingly, the Uskoks were called criminals,¹⁰¹ professional robbers, worse Christians than “the gypsies”,¹⁰² and their headquarters was described as a shameful nest.¹⁰³ While the Uskoks seemed to be allies of the devil,¹⁰⁴ divine mercy could always put an end to their misdeeds.¹⁰⁵ Again and again their crimes were described in gory detail, for example when Minucci referred to the production of

⁹⁶ Jesuit, professor of theology, later bishop of Segna and then of Spalato (Split). For further details, see Silvano Cavazza, “De Dominis, Marc’Antonio”, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, vol. 33 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1987), 642–50.

⁹⁷ Among others as extraordinary nuncio in Graz and Prague, Minucci, *Historia degli Usocchi*, 32–34.

⁹⁸ Paolo Sarpi, *Il dominio del mar Adriatico*, ed. Roberto Cessi (Padova: Tolomei, 1945).

⁹⁹ Grünfelder, *Geschichte der Uskokken*, 407, 409, with reference to Gaetani Cozzi. It was also widely assumed within the Roman Curia that the Uskoks would have been assisted by corrupt ministers and other influential persons at the imperial and Inner Austrian courts. Cf. Jaitner, *Hauptinstruktionen Clemens’ VIII.*, 518, instructions for Ferrante Farnese, Rome, September 1597. Ibid. 515–19, the entire paragraph on the Uskoks, describes concisely the attitude of the Roman Curia concerning the Uskoks in c. 1600.

¹⁰⁰ Minucci, *Historia degli Usocchi*, 41–42, 56.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 18: *huomini scelleratissimi*.

¹⁰² Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 57.

¹⁰³ Minucci, *Historia degli Usocchi*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 31: *i diavoli*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 18, 20.

leather straps from the skin of murdered people,¹⁰⁶ but especially in connection with the killing of Venier, whom the Uskoks denied access to confession before slaughtering him, after which they are said to have devoured his heart and dipped their bread into his blood at the subsequent banquet (all without or without clear references to the sources).¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Uskok women were said to have acted in the same brutal way.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

The Uskok problem was an issue in the politics of the states bordering the Adriatic Sea in the decades around 1600. Two aspects of this issue can be felt today. The first is the question of how the Uskok migrants were integrated or not into specific social, denominational and political contexts. On the other hand, the debate over free navigation on the Adriatic has a contemporary relevance, given the present-day conflict between Slovenia and Croatia over maritime borders and the free navigation of Slovenian ships on the Adriatic. Studying the Uskoks seems to be worthwhile as the debate about the Uskoks reveals fundamental confessional, geopolitical, demographic, mercantile and maritime views from that period and beyond.

Finally, it is worthwhile returning to the question of what Uskok historiography means for the concept of the Habsburg Mediterranean. Basically, the conflicts concerning the Uskoks, who had been settled by the Habsburgs on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea and used to defend the maritime border against the Ottomans, are the starting point for the discovery and use of this maritime space by the Habsburg rulers in Central Europe. Habsburg maritime policy was thus initiated long before the beginning of the intense Adriatic trade activities of the eighteenth century, launched by Charles VI, who declared Trieste a free port in 1719, and which were further promoted by Maria Theresia and Joseph II. This also long preceded the beginning of an Austrian naval policy in the nineteenth century after achieving territorial gains in Istria and Dalmatia by the peace treaties of 1797 and the successive construction of naval ports in Pola (Pula) and Cattaro (Kotor). By defending the maritime external borders against the Ottoman Empire,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁷ Sarpi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 79: *Le quali cose furono vedute tutte dalle donne e dalli galeotti restati sopra il vassello, alcuni de' quali affermano anco che dimandò con molta pietà la confessione e li fosse negata. Altri dissero che gli mangiassero il cuore, altri che solo tingessero il pane nel sangue per certa superstizione tra loro radicata che il gustar insieme del sangue del nemico sia un arcano e stretta obbligazione di non abbandonarsi mai e correre la medesima fortuna.*

¹⁰⁸ Licking the blood from the wounds of the murdered, cf. Minucci, *Historia degli Usocchi*, 58.

but also by formulating interests and claims against Venice, the Adriatic Sea became a factor in Habsburg politics during the course of the sixteenth century. Not only did this part of the Mediterranean increasingly come into the focus of the Habsburg princes and governments, but the maritime powers of Venice and Ottoman Empire perceived clearly for the first time that (apart from the Spanish Habsburgs) the Habsburgs of Central Europe were also beginning to play an active role in the Mediterranean.

Within this network of actors, the Uskoks occupy a central position. The relationship between the Uskoks themselves and their Habsburg masters was highly complex and conflicting. However, their peripheral location gave the Uskoks wide legal leeway, so that Uskok areas were also called a state within the state. The uncertain legal area in which the Uskoks moved was further accentuated by a kind of two centres-periphery combination given the fact that the Uskoks fell under the jurisdiction of two competences, one direct (the Inner Austrian government) and one superior authority (the imperial government), which took different approaches in tackling Uskok piracy. Last but not least, it is also significant for the process of increasing interest of the House of Habsburg in the Adriatic that the initial local conflicts in connection with Uskok raids gradually took on an international dimension, when—in addition to the main opponents (Inner Austria and Venice)—the papacy, Spain and France entered the scene as mediators. All this contributed to the fact that a significant part of the Mediterranean became a considerable element of Habsburg politics on the eve of the Thirty Years' War.