

THE 'ADRIA' POSTAL MARKINGS IN MALTA

Dr. Giovanni Bonello LL.D.

Letters to and from Malta posted on ships authorised to receive mail arouse a degree of interest in postal historians and Malta's maritime mail has attracted a great deal of attention. Some of the *Adria* markings, besides throwing light on the workings of the postal system, can be visually attractive too.

What we today call *Adria* in reality refers to the "Adria Royal Hungarian Steam Navigation Co.", or, in Italian, the "*Regia Ungarica Società Anonima di Navigazione Marittima Adria*" based on Fiume, a city-port in the Adriatic which up to 1919 belonged to Hungary, was incorporated with Italy in 1924 and joined the former Yugoslavia in 1947. It now forms part of Croatia. The company also used French letterheads in francophone areas: "*Adria Compagnie Royale Hongroise de Navigation Maritime*".

With the change of sovereignty in 1924, the company became "*Società Anonima di Navigazione Marittima Adria*". It operated steamships to various ports in the Mediterranean, including Spain, France, Italy, Gibraltar, Tunis and Malta. The *Tirrenia* line absorbed the *Adria* in 1938.

The Malta Study Circle handbook (1980) and its supplement (1985) list two *Adria* steamers which cancelled Maltese mail with special handstamps: the SS *Carola* and SS *Rakoczy*. To these I would add another three: the SS *Andrassy*, SS *Szapary* and the SS *Arpad*, all named after prominent Hungarians: Gyula Grof Andrassy (1823 - 90), statesman and Prime Minister of Hungary, supporter of Kossuth; Geza Szapary (1827 - 98) governor of Fiume and the Hungarian-Croatian sea areas, and Arpad (? - 907) the Hungarian national hero, who founded the royal dynasty that bore his name. Rakoczy was a distinguished Hungarian family, many of whose members played a part in history, the best known of whom was Ferenc II Rakoczy (1676 - 1735), legendary hero of the Hungarian rebellion against the Hapsburgs.

Letters or cards handed to the purser for posting acquired different handstamps on board. First, a generic one: either *Kikotoben*, which means 'delivered in harbour', or *Tengeren*, 'delivered on the high seas'. They could also receive the *Paquebot* cachet exclusive to the *Adria* (in two versions, both in lower case: one underlined, the other not) and also, on landing, the ordinary *PAQUEBOT*, in italic capitals. The *Adria* ones were applied in a rainbow of colours: bright red, blue, purple, lilac, grey, green.

All the letters I have seen show either Maltese or Italian adhesive stamps; this implies, for incoming mail, that the last port of call was necessarily Italian.

One of the problems with *Adria* letters is that the handstamps have no date. Unless a supplementary dated cachet applied at the port of landing clarifies matters, or the postal item happens to have an indication of the date, there remains no way of finding out when the posting took place.

It seems that *Adria* markings started being applied on maritime mail round 1897, although the steamship company had an office in Malta at least since 1892, run by Arturo Kohen. In

1895 it won the contract for a yearly government subsidy of £6000, for a daily passenger and postal service to Syracuse, which the company operated by means of the SS *Carola*, built in 1892. The ship “drew severe criticism for the quality of its service and accommodation”. It sunk in July 1916 after a collision.

The ship left Malta at 4.30 a.m., and arrived in Syracuse at 1.00 p.m. in time for the passengers to catch the train heading north. A *Carola*’s first-class ticket to Naples cost two pounds, and fifteen shillings in third class.

Adria used various cachets to cancel adhesives and mark the postal item. Apart from those already mentioned (*Paquebot, Kikotoben, Tengeren*) I would mention the following:

- M.K. ADRIA (Magyar Kiralyi) in a straight line between two comets, seen stamped in red and in purple (57 mm).
- A fouled anchor on the letter ‘A’ surmounted by St Stephen’s crown, over a scroll with the words HAZANAK HASZNALJ, the official emblem of the company, applied in various colours, including green.
- A spectacular masted ship, unfortunately often a faint impression.
- A large fouled anchor surrounded by the three circular frames containing ADRIA UNGHERESE in at least three sizes: 31, 33 and 35 mm.
- A smaller version within one circular frame with: ADRIA UNGHERESE (22 mm).
- An anchor in a lozenge surrounded by dots.
- A large TRIESTE straight line stamp cancellation (38 mm).

As to the handstamps of named ships, the one that takes the lion’s share is the SS *Carola*. This vessel identified its mail by a large circular cachet (32 mm) or by a straight-line *Carola* (25 mm).

SS *Andrassy* used a straight-line marking (40 mm).

SS *Arpad* had a framed oval cachet (44 mm) with the company’s designation in Italian enclosing the ship’s name in a straight line at the centre.

SS. *Szapary* employed a circular framed cachet (35 mm) with the name of the ship surrounded by that of the navigation company in Italian.

I am here illustrating various items from my collection, starting with the official letterhead in Hungarian of the *Adria*, used in Malta in 1892, with its subtitle in English (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1

A fine early letter (1898) from Malta to Fiume shows (Figure 2) five Queen Victoria halfpenny greens cancelled by the fouled anchor and crown in dark green, the *Kikotoben* and *Paquebot* straight-line cachets, the first in red, the second in purple.

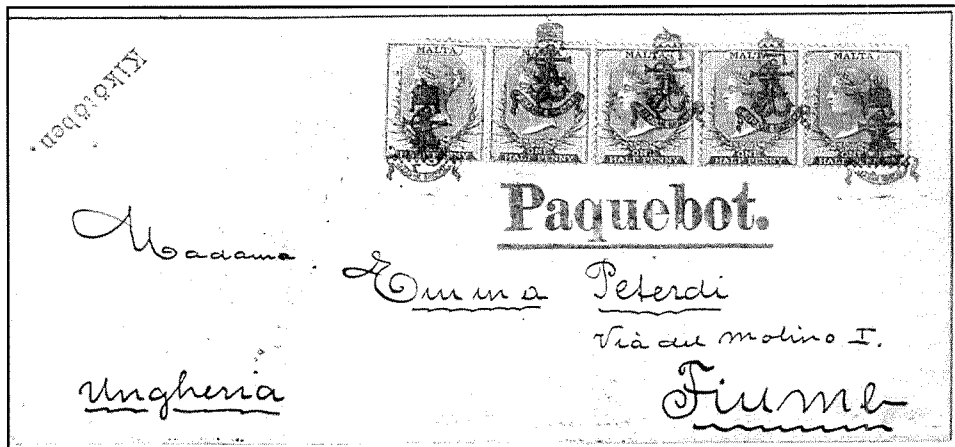


Figure 2

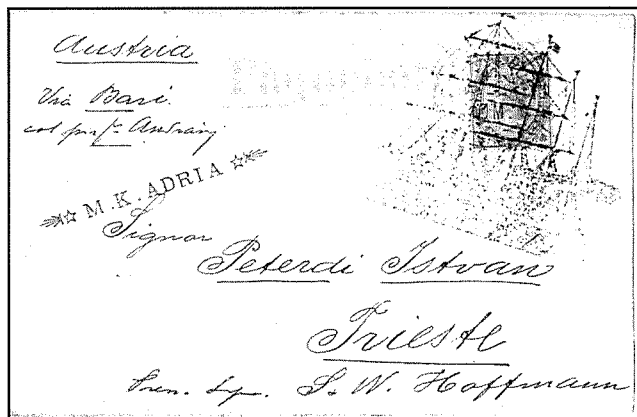


Figure 3

Figure 3 illustrates an earlier letter (1898) from Malta to Trieste, with three handstamps: the M.K. ADRIA straight-line in red, *Paquebot* in faint grey, and the large masted vessel in purple cancelling the two pence halfpenny Victoria blue, while Figure 4 has similar markings on a letter

to Naples. Another letter sent the same year, was carried by SS *Andrassy* from Malta to Riposto in Sicily for onward forwarding to Messina (Figure 5).

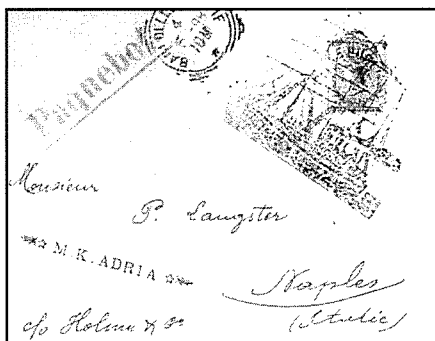


Figure 4



Figure 5

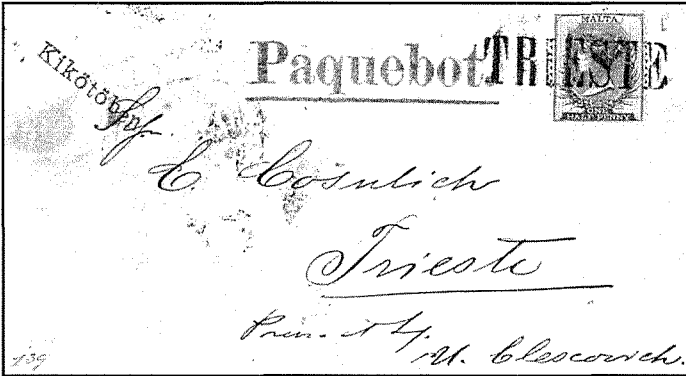


Figure 6

Two cachets in grey (SS ANDRASSY and Pauebot) cancel a Queen Victoria halfpenny green. Adria marked a 1899 letter from Malta to Trieste with a Kikotoben in red, a Pauebot in purple and a TRIESTE in black (Figure 6).

The Adria anchor in a lozenge surrounded by dots is illustrated in Figure 7.

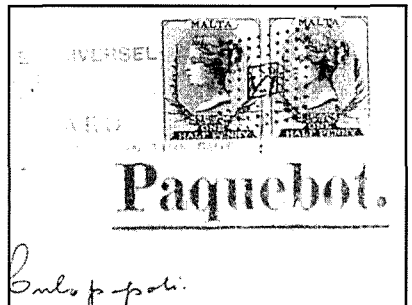


Figure 7

Two SS *Carola* handstamps survive. The first (**Figure 8**), seen here on a letter from Malta to Genova, with three King Edward VII stamps cancelled by a round CAROLA cachet.

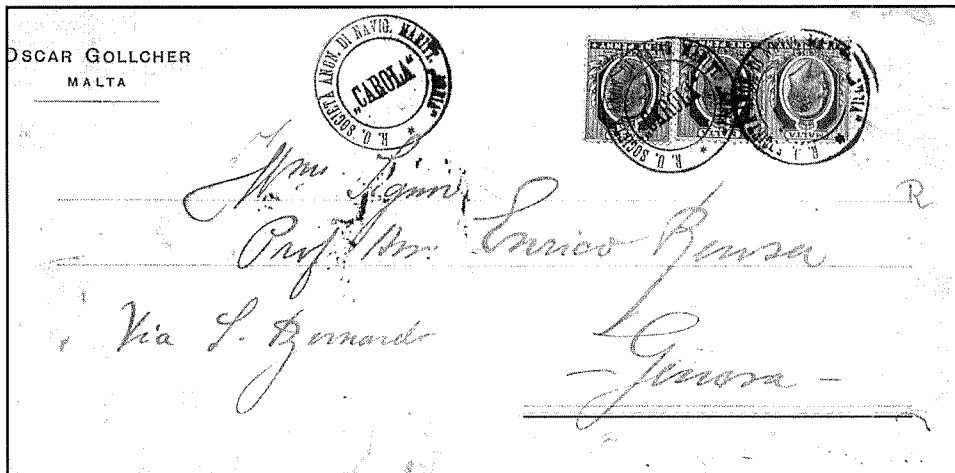


Figure 8



Figure 9

Another, on a postal card from Syracuse to Malta dated 1912 (**Figure 9**) which again shows the round CAROLA cachet accompanied by a *Paquebot*, both in purple and,

(**Figure 10**) a 1911 Italian postal card to Malta, this time with a straight-line *Carola* and *Paquebot*, both in purple.



Figure 10

The *Carola* had fine coloured postcards printed in Vienna, showing the ship in Grand Harbour, Malta, over a smaller vignette of Syracuse. The one illustrated here (**Figure 11**) comes from the Wickman collection. Although the *Carola* took thousands of passengers, this card, quite inexplicably, proves to be extremely rare.

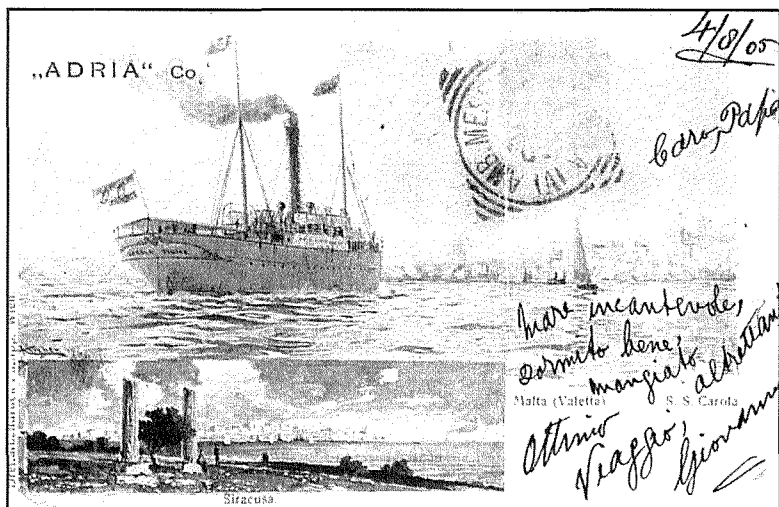


Figure 11

Two fine strikes of the round fouled anchor ADRIA UNGHERESE cachet (they are frequently quite smudged and indistinct) show on a 1906 letter from Catania to Malta (**Figure 12**) coupled with a *Paquebot* - all in purple. A different version of this handstamp can be seen on a 1906 postcard from Malta to France, cancelling a red and black one penny King Edward stamp (**Figure 13**).

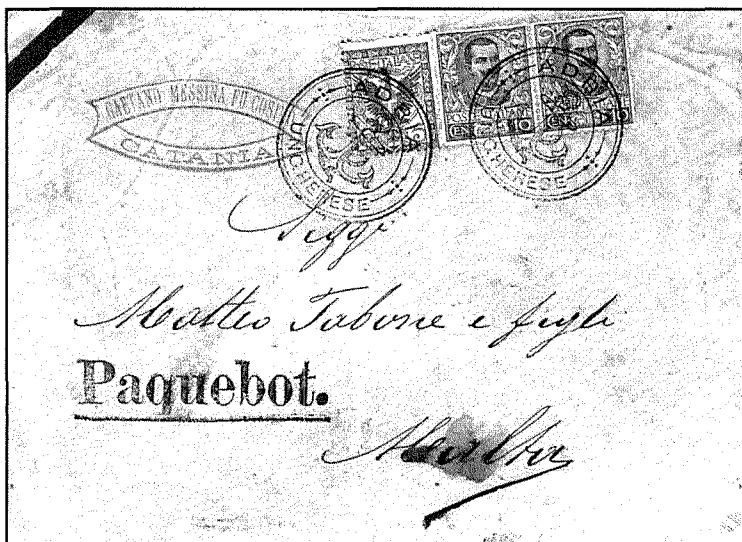


Figure 12

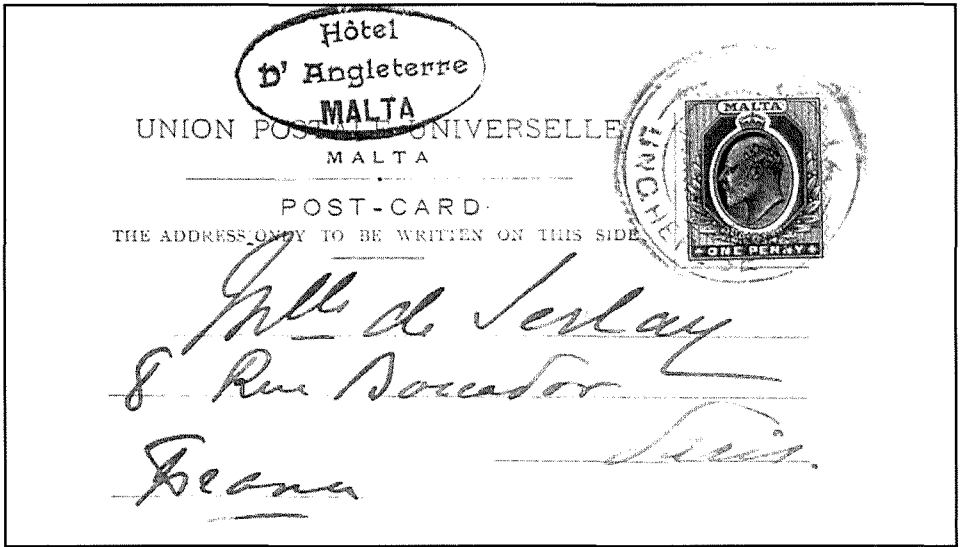


Figure 13

The much scarcer 22 mm circular ADRIA UNGHERESE cachet can be seen on a 1913 express cover to Malta stamped with two different *Paquebot* markings: the *Adria* one in lower-case and the General Post Office one in italic capitals (Figure 14).

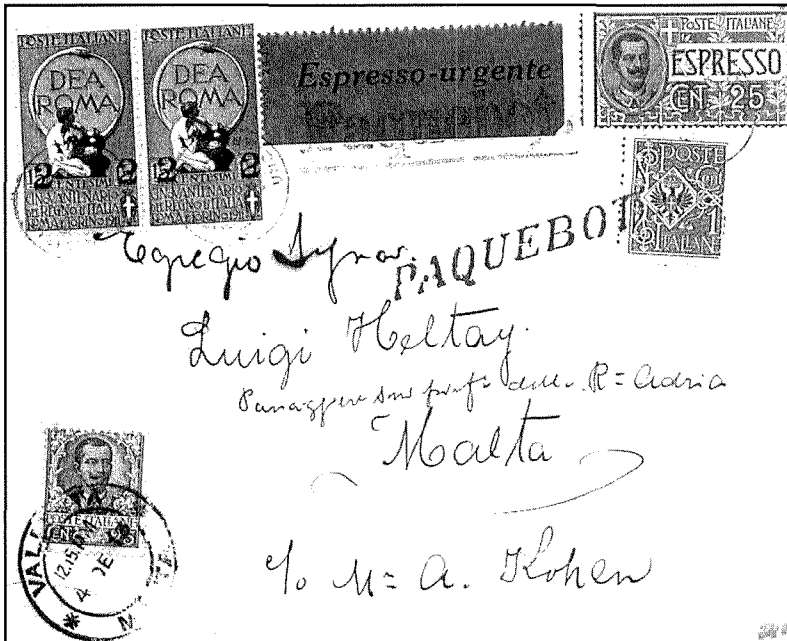


Figure 14

SS ARPAD cancelled a 1906 letter from Syracuse to Malta with her oval cachet in purple which, on the envelope is coupled with a G.P.O. *PAQUEBOT* in black (**Figure 15**).

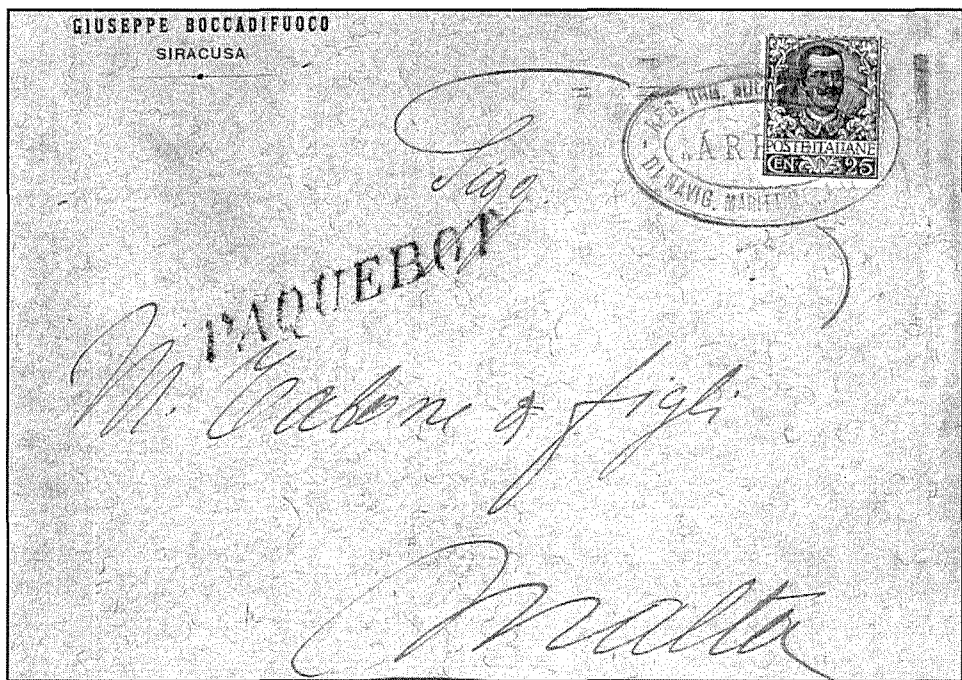


Figure 15

SS SZAPARY used her round cachet in purple on a 1906 letter from Catania to Malta in which the fouled anchor circular *ADRIA UNGHERESE* obliterated the Italian Vittorio Emanuele stamp. (**Figure 16**).

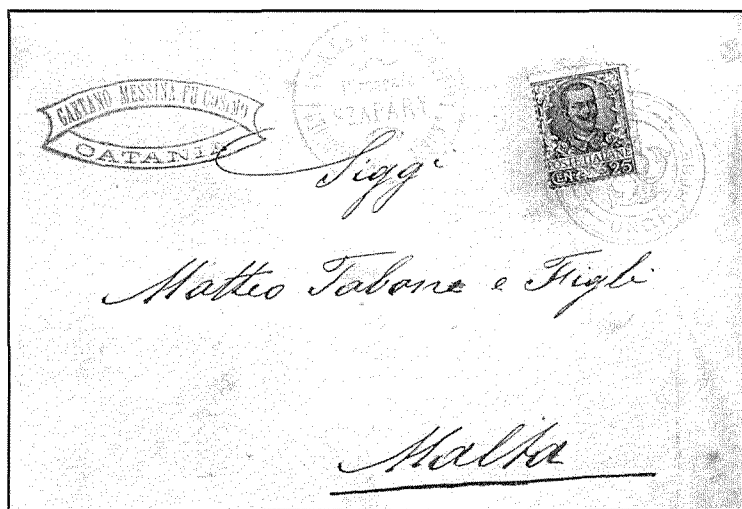


Figure 16

Figure 17 records the Malta letterhead of the company in Italian, while Figure 18 consists of a composite of four handstamps or seals found on official *Adria* documents in Malta, though not known used on correspondence.



Figure 17

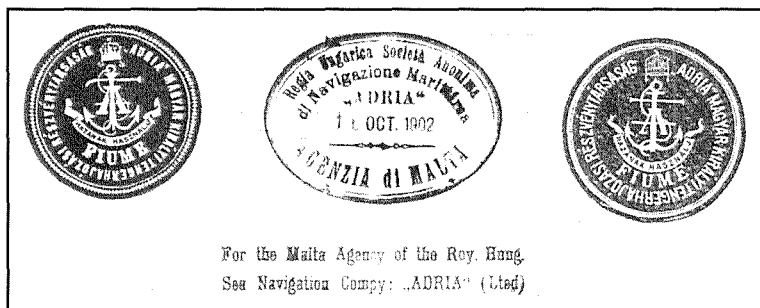


Figure 18

The last illustration is an advertisement for the service operated by the *Carola* concludes the illustrations (Figure 19).

ADVERTISEMENTS.

CAROLA

Leaving Malta 4. 30 a.m.
 Arrive Syracuse 1. 0 p.m.
 Leaving Syracuse 4. 30 p.m.
 Arrive Malta 12. 30 a.m.

Passengers arriving at Syracuse by the steamer will be in time for the train leaving at 1.55 p.m.

Passengers are disembarked from the steamer directly on the shore, by means of the gangway, which has been made for the purpose.

Naples	1st "	2 0 0
	3rd "	0 15 0
Genoa	1st "	2 10 0
	3rd "	1 0 0

Tickets from the Office of the Company or from Cook's Tourist Agency, Strada Reale, Valletta.

Figure 19

When Fiume became part of Italy in 1924, the names of Hungarian personalities disappeared from the *Adria* fleet. Its ships started being designated by famous Italian composers: *Verdi*, *Puccini* and *Rossini*. Cachets of these ships can also be found cancelling Maltese maritime mails - but that is another story.

(Unless otherwise stated, illustrations from the author's collection)

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Mr Victor Wickman, Mr Emanuel Magro-Conti of the Maritime Museum, Ms Theresa Vella of the National Museum of Fine Arts and Judge Andras Baka of the European Court of Human Rights, for their kind assistance.