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The reconciliation of the Emperor's son and the Republic of Austria¹

No photograph is more befitting of the reconciliation between the Republic of Austria and Otto von Habsburg than the historic handshake on 4 May 1972 between Bruno Kreisky, the Social Democratic Federal Chancellor in office from 1970 to 1983, and the Emperor's son. The meeting occurred at an event in Vienna celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Pan-European Union, at which Chancellor Kreisky gave a speech.

When, at the beginning of last summer, I visited the Foundation's archives in Budapest at the invitation of Ambassador Gergely Pröhle, after a moment's reflection, it became clear to me that the photograph of the meeting of the socialist Kreisky and Otto von Habsburg would be a very meaningful gift to the Foundation.

This handshake marked the end of the then Socialist Party's decades-long feud with the Habsburgs and Otto as head of the house. Ironically, this was repeatedly referred to as 'Habsburg cannibalism'².

Interestingly, as long as the Habsburg monarchy existed, relations between the imperial house and Austrian social democracy were not so bad. The Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) was loyal to the imperial house at the outbreak of the war in 1914 and regained its freedom of action with the reconvening of the Imperial Council (*Reichsrat*) in the spring of 1917 after Emperor Charles came to power. Charles had signalled his rapprochement with the Social Democrats, not least by granting amnesty to Friedrich Adler, the son of the party's founder, Viktor Adler (in 1916, in protest against the war absolutism of Emperor Franz Joseph, Friedrich Adler had shot the Imperial and Royal Prime Minister Graf Stürgkh and was sentenced to death

¹ The speech was delivered at the conference "*The Future of Central Europe - The Legacy of Otto von Habsburg*" at the Collegium Hungaricum, Vienna, on 24 January 2023.

² A phrase by Günther Nenning (1921-2003), an Austrian journalist, activist and SPÖ representative, uttered during the internal political debate on Otto von Habsburg's Austrian citizenship - referring to the politically divisive nature of the former heir to the throne.

for his actions). Even if the young Emperor's efforts to integrate social democracy were ultimately too hesitant and faltering - as was his entire reform programme - and the SDAP remained *"the unused reserve power of the empire"* (Anton Pelinka) until November 1918, Emperor Charles retained the possibility of dialogue with moderate party leaders such as Viktor Adler and Karl Renner.

Charles's relations with the SDAP only took a sudden turn for the worse when, after his resignation from the state on 12 November 1918, he refused to resign formally, and even at the beginning of 1919, he made no effort to leave the castle in Eckhartsau, where he moved after 12 November, in order to go abroad. British mediation was necessary to ensure that Charles would leave the country in the spring of 1919, still, he only departed after he withdrew his abdication of the throne at the Austro-Swiss border. In response, the parliament decided by a constitutional majority to deprive him of his property and expel him from the country. The Habsburgs had become the main enemy of social democracy, and this remained unchanged even after the death of Charles on Madeira and for a while after 1945.

At a meeting between Julius Raab and Otto, Charles' eldest and then head of the family, at the 1960 Munich Eucharistic Congress, the Federal Chancellor made it clear to the Emperor's son that his return to Austria would only be possible if he submitted a "declaration of renunciation" in accordance with the Habsburg laws adopted in 1919. Otto complied and, in May 1961, signed a document renouncing all claims to power deriving from his belonging to the Habsburg-Lorraine House and declaring himself a loyal citizen of the Republic. Although the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) acknowledged the formal correctness of the statement, it claimed that it was not a sufficient sign that Otto's attitude had changed and that he had become a loyal citizen of the Republic, and that, as the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) was a coalition partner in the government, it had prevented recognition of the announcement. This was due to the fact that government decisions in the Council of Ministers could only be passed unanimously. Otto then took legal action and appealed to the Austrian Constitutional Court (*Verfassungsgerichtshof*), as he had never formally received a decision rejecting the declaration. The Constitutional Court reacted evasively and replied that it had no jurisdiction in the matter - which was highly questionable from a legal point of view. Otto then appealed to the

Administrative Court of Justice (*Verwaltungsgerichtshof*), the second highest court, with a complaint against the federal government for failure to comply. In June 1963, the Administrative Court then recognised Otto's letter of resignation as sufficient. This escalated the political controversy. The SPÖ called it a legal coup, and the ÖVP insisted on respect for the Rule of Law. In the summer of 1963, an extraordinary meeting of the National Council (*Nationalrat*) passed a resolution against the government majority for the first time in the history of the Second Republic. The reason for this was that the SPÖ, along with the only opposition party at the time, the Freedom Party (FPÖ), had adopted a proposal for a decree, tabled by the FPÖ, that Otto should be deemed 'undesirable' in Austria. Consequently, the (German) national-liberal third camp, represented by the FPÖ, also took a pro-Otto position. The months-long 'Habsburg affair' (*Causa Habsburg*) became a heavy burden for the already faltering grand coalition of the ÖVP and SPÖ.

When the ÖVP replaced the then Federal Chancellor Alfons Gorbach with the "reformer" Josef Klaus in February 1964, the SPÖ refused to agree to the change of chancellor until Klaus made it clear in a government statement issued when he took office that Otto would not be allowed to enter Austria. For Klaus, this was unthinkable - after all, his entire political activity was based on the premise of objectivity and the rule of law.

In this situation, the ÖVP had no choice but to send the second man in the party hierarchy, Hermann Withalm, the general secretary and parliamentary group leader, on a walk to Canossa to Pöcking. Withalm asked Otto not to use his right of entry to Austria to save the grand coalition once again, and Otto promised not to travel to Austria for the time being. This paved the way for a compromise within the government.

With the electoral victory of the ÖVP in the spring of 1966 and the formation of an independent government with an absolute majority in the National Council, the situation changed fundamentally. Josef Klaus - in accordance with his interpretation of the law - now permitted Otto to enter Austria. The SPÖ was relegated to the opposition benches and could do nothing about it. The Emperor's son returned to Austria for a few hours in 1966; and in 1967, during his visits to several municipalities in what he proverbially called the 'Holy Land'

(*Heiliges Land*) of the Tyrol, he was triumphantly welcomed by a friendly public. When the Kreisky government took office, left-wing opposition began to degenerate into radical fringe groups.

Throughout the 1970s, Otto became a welcome guest at numerous events in Austria. With his friendly charm, sharp wit, seasoned cosmopolitan eloquence and oratorical talent, he always knew how to captivate his audience. This became even more apparent when Franz Josef Strauß secured him a seat in the European Parliament in 1979 on behalf of the Bavarian CSU, and Otto now had considerable political clout.

I remember well and fondly several personal encounters with Otto von Habsburg, most recently in 2008 at the launch of an anthology on Bosnia-Herzegovina at the House of Industry (*Haus der Industrie*) on Schwarzenbergplatz in Vienna, where I participated as an author of a paper on the invasion of 1879. I treasure the autograph, which I greatly appreciated, as a lasting memory.

The part played by Otto in 1989 has already - and tonight - been covered in detail. First, this applies to the historic Pan-European picnic under his auspices and his initiatives extending far beyond that occasion. May I add that overcoming the division of Europe was a common goal that bound together Otto von Habsburg and Alois Mock, the second great European politician of the transition period around the *annus mirabilis* of 1989, with great mutual respect. Both were thinking in larger foreign policy dimensions. Accordingly, Otto von Habsburg supported both Mock's efforts for the independence of Slovenia and Croatia after the outbreak of hostilities in the former Yugoslavia in the summer of 1991, as well as his policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. He and Alois Mock's successor as Foreign Minister, the future Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schäussel, also had a mutual appreciation for each other, especially in the context of the 2004 EU enlargement and beyond.

Lastly, I would like to mention one of Otto's lesser-known achievements in relation to Austria, namely his support for Austria's accession to the EU as a Member of the European Parliament. In the European Parliament, Otto von Habsburg, who all political groups respected, was one

of Austria's most committed advocates and campaigned for the highest possible vote for Austria. After the successful conclusion of Austria's accession negotiations on the night of 1 to 2 March 1994, the European Parliament had to vote on the membership before the national referendum on 12 June 1994. The voting took place in the European Parliament on 4 May 1994. The approval was foreseeable, but not to the extent of the result: the overwhelming outcome – 378 votes in favour, 24 against, 61 abstentions – was, along with Austria's other supporters in the European Parliament, achieved partly by Otto, whose efforts, in reality, were hardly appreciated. The impressive parliamentary vote had a psychological repercussion, not to be underestimated, on the Austrian referendum, whose outcome was still highly uncertain in the spring of 1994.

After his passing in Pöcking in the summer of 2011, Otto's funeral in the Stephanskirche cathedral in Vienna and his final resting place in the Kapucinscript became a state, albeit informal, event. It was a sign of cross-party esteem in his homeland.

As a final note, after Russia invaded Ukraine, two of Otto's speeches last year received a lot of views and “spread like wildfire” on the internet in Austria for weeks. In the speeches in Bregenz in 2003 and Wolfurt in 2005, Otto cautioned in harsh words and unambiguous terms against Vladimir Putin's Russia, warning against its political methods and aggressive foreign policy intentions. From today's perspective, this was a prophetic statement, but we would probably all have been happier if Otto von Habsburg's words had not acquired the tragic topicality that they have since 24 February 2022.

Translated by Lili Herczeg