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THE HABSBURG RENEWAL: OTTO VON HABSBURG

Otto von Habsburg was born in 1912¹ and died in 2011. His life embraced the full 20th century as it is understood historically. And even beyond. He was born into a world where the rule of dynasties, including his own, was unquestionable. By the time of his death, the position of monarchies in the world had undergone huge changes and he was never given the chance of being crowned Emperor and King. What he had been born into, was gone and during his long life, unless he wanted to remain a hopeless relic of an old world, he had to reinterpret his own position and mission. Otto's career seems to suggest that he was led by two ideas throughout his public life – the power of the heritage of his family which radiates throughout his life and defines his role in society on the one hand, while a part of the same heritage as reinterpreted by him in accordance with the new conditions in Europe and therefore proven useful in practice on the other. Throughout his life, almost literally from his birth to his death, Otto von Habsburg was basically a homo politicus. Most of his life was devoted to political activity. Although he never ceased interpreting and reinterpreting the Habsburg legacy, he eventually transcended it when becoming a personal institution. From the hopeless pretender of a European dynasty, he became a significant European politician who was able to shape the given present and the possible future. Hungarians have reserved two places at best for Habsburgs in their pantheon: one for viceroy Joseph and another one for Queen Elizabeth. Perhaps a new place will open there in the future. If it will, it will possibly be reserved to Otto von Habsburg.

Key words: Otto von Habsburg, Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Europe, 20th century

1. A Panorama of Monarchies

A hundred years ago, most countries in Europe and the world as a whole were monarchies. Through their colonies, European monarchies extended their sphere of action to further continents. The thrones of emperors and kings had certainly appeared shaky for a long time, but eventually it was the events of the 20th century that put an end to an era when most of mankind had lived under monarchic rule.

The first big shock came in the early 20th century, including World War I and its immediate aftermath. In Europe alone, as a result of the world war, the monarchies of Russia, Austria Hungary, Germany and Montenegro ceased to exist. In 1922, the Turkish National Assembly abolished the Sultanate and as of 1923, the former Ottoman Empire was converted into the Republic of Turkey. Portugal, which at the time was one of the great colonial powers had changed its constitutional setup as early as before World War I. Nor was the situation very different in the Far East. 1910 signalled the end of the Ri dynasty in Korea, while the role of the Changs ended in China in 1912.

¹ His first names at birth: Francis, Joseph, Otto, Robert, Mary Anthony, Charles, Maximilian, Henry, Sixtus, Xaverius, Felix, Renatus, Louis, Gaetan, Pius, Ignatius.

After the retreat of monarchies and the ensuing apparent quiet in the transformation of forms of government, World War II was followed by another period of dynamic changes. Italy became a republic in 1946; communist takeovers stripped of their thrones the dynasties of Albania, Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria. Hungary adopted a republican constitution in 1946; the Greek monarchy ceased to exist in 1967.

The monarchic form of government was steadily losing ground in Asia and Africa as well. Not the least because independentist movements were gaining ground in the colonies. The process proved more or less unstoppable, as hundreds of rulers were ousted in the process, if we don't forget about the smaller monarchies of the Indian subcontinent.

In several cases, the changes in the form of government were the results of local political endeavours. In the Arab world, Colonel Nasser took power in Egypt, while Tunisia followed suit and became a republic a few years later. King Idris was overthrown in Libya by colonel Kadhafi in 1969. In the 1970s, the process was gaining ground in both Asia and Africa, as forms of government changed in 1973 in Afghanistan, while in 1974 in Ethiopia. As part of the same process, in the mid-70s communist movements put an end to the monarchies of Cambodia and Laos. The latest monarchy which has been abolished was the rule of the Shah of Iran – Reza Pahlavi was dethroned by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

In some uncharacteristic episodes which however do not contradict the big picture of the demise of monarchies in many parts of the world, monarchies were re-established in a few countries. The European example is that of Spain – in 1975 the vacant Spanish throne was occupied by Juan Carlos, while in Asia, the monarchy was restored when several decades of civil war were brought to an end in Cambodia.

Many tend to believe that republics are democratic, by contrast to monarchies which should be an authoritarian form of government.

As a matter of fact, however, the very loss of ground by the monarchies proves that there is no causal correlation between the form of government and the degree of democracy in a given country. In post-World War II Europe many people had personal experience of how the people's democratic form of government could be coupled with Communist dictatorship. Moreover, this form of republic did openly consider some measure of authoritarian rule as being substantial for its own existence. Africans in Uganda could also testify that for instance the republican presidential regime of Idi Amin Dada was every bit as blood-thirsty and arbitrary as the regime of Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Monarchy (where the republic has been since restored).

It is perhaps not necessary to quote further examples to acknowledge that any possible correlation between the republican form of government and the degree of democracy in the given political system, rather than being of logical in nature is at best of a historical character. When monarchies were overthrown in subsequent waves during the 20th century or were peacefully converted into republics, the populations of the countries concerned were probably led by the unfounded belief that they would gain a happier world instead of arbitrary rule.

With hindsight, that belief proved right in some cases and wrong in others. But it certainly was proven justified in less cases than the number of monarchies overthrown. Today's world numbers 29 sovereign monarchies and three states or organisations with a

special status which according to their declared principles may be considered to be monarchies. To see it from another viewpoint, about 13 to 15% of the world population, that is a strong minority live in monarchies, while 100 years ago, the subjects of monarchies represented the overwhelming majority of the world's population.²

To confine ourselves to our own continent, 10 out of the 29 monarchies are European ones and as are all three of the special status organisations. 40% of all monarchies of the world are European. These monarchies are almost without any exceptions democracies as well. (The only exception, where such a definition makes no sense, being the Vatican.) All this goes to show that in post-World War II European processes, the monarchic form of government could faultlessly satisfy the criteria of liberal democratic political systems that may have to ceaselessly be refined themselves. However, as I mentioned above, this is basically a correlation of historical rather than causal/logical nature.

In today's Europe, the role of the dynasties is to symbolically represent the unity of the state and of the nation. The executive is outside their competence. It is exercised everywhere by governments representing the majority of the elected parliament and is checked by the parliament itself and by independent institutions.

People, to confine ourselves again to Europe, seem to stick to their inherited monarchic form of government, for if they didn't, it would be very simple for them to abolish it. (After the decades of the dictatorship, as we saw, Spain chose the monarchic form of government, unlike Greece, which decided not to restore the institution of monarchy. That's another proof that the form of government depends on the will of the people and of its elected representatives.)

Today's European monarchies and the people upholding them with their votes have probably accepted in their own ways the idea Alexis de Tocqueville expressed in the first half of the 19th century, when writing about the political system of the United States.³ As he put it in fact, the American political system is so efficient because it is built on a healthy combination of three principles – the democratic, the aristocratic and the monarchic ones. The democratic principle being represented by the House of Representatives and the Senate; the aristocratic one being expressed by the lifelong tenure of the powerful Supreme Court judges; while the monarchic principal is embodied by the role of the President.

The citizens of European monarchies can hardly be suspected of daily readings from Tocqueville's works, nor do I suppose that the ideas of the 19th century French author can be simply applied to the monarchic systems of contemporary Europe. But his key thoughts are basically characteristic of today's monarchies – the Kings embody the monarchic principle; and these democracies are apparently able to uphold the values of stability and of symbolic unity in a world of changing governments, changing parliaments and changing popular moods.

² For the sake of accuracy, here's a list of the monarchies of our time: England (United Kingdom), Bahrein, Belgium, Bhutan, Brunei, Denmark, United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Japan, Jordan, Cambodia, Qatar, Kuwait, Lesotho, Lichtenstein, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Morocco, Monaco, Nepal, Norway, Oman, Spain, Sweden, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Swaziland, Thailand, Tonga. The three special state-like organisations to be considered as monarchies are Andorra, the Vatican and the Sovereign Order of Knights of Malta (the latter being based in Rome).

³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. The book was published in two volumes, the first in 1835, while the second in 1840.

It is perhaps worthwhile briefly to consider which were the dynasties that survived the century of the destruction of monarchies; which families took note of changing conditions and consequently assure the survival of the monarchies.⁴ England, that is the United Kingdom is ruled by the Windsors (the Hanovers, originally – they were renamed Saxe-Coburg-Gotha after Queen Victoria's marriage with Albert. The name of the Royal family was changed in 1917, when Great Britain was at war with Germany). The Belgian King is also a member of the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha dynasty; Denmark's sovereign descends from a branch of the Oldenburg dynasty, the Schleswig-Holstein-Sondenburg-Glücksburg family. Hollands kings are offspring of the family of Orange (it is no coincidence that the Dutch football team mostly wears orange shirts). Lichtenstein is ruled by the Grand Duke's homonymous family, while the Grand Duke of Luxembourg is a member of the Nassau dynasty. Monaco is ruled by the Grimaldi family, Norway by the Glücksbergs; Spain is an example of the historic continuity of the Bourbons, while Sweden's rulers are descendants of Napoleon's famous general Bernadotte whom he named King of Sweden. Andorra is ruled by co-princes, one of whom, as a rule, is the president of France, while another is chosen from among ecclesiastical personalities. The Knights of Malta elect their Grand Master, while the Vatican's head of state of course is the Pope.

The monarchs of our age perform their duties in surroundings which are worthy of their ceremonial role, but they have largely assimilated to the civic world. They attend schools accessible to the citizenry; they abide by the same rules as ordinary citizens and apart from very few exceptions, they have no privileges left. If they break the speed limit, they are fined like any other citizen. If their children are not good at school, they will fail their exams.

Today's European monarchs usually make good use of democratic public speech. They are not just rulers of their country but in a certain sense its cultural icons as well. Their family events are followed by public interest, as exemplified by the vicissitudes of the Royal family in the United Kingdom, with the relationship between Prince Charles and Princess Diana and of course the role Diana played in society in an era of mass communication. But we could equally mention the royal wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton which was followed by 2 billion people on television throughout the world. Such a number of viewers would have been impossible had it not been a royal wedding. Such an event allows monarchic ceremoniality to become part of the world of mass cultural norms and those norms, from a given country irradiate throughout the world.

Descendants of onetime European monarchic families also appear in public here and there; and sometimes even play public roles. After 2001, the former Tsar of Bulgaria was elected prime minister of this country. The King of Romania often visited his country from Switzerland where he lived, until his funeral in Bucharest became a huge public event attended by the highest representatives of the Romanian state, at which occasion prominent politicians went so far as raising the unprecedented idea of restoring the monarchy in Romania. Alexander Karadžević, a descendant of the Serbian Royal family also built close relations with Serbia after the wars in former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, generally speaking, members of former dynasties merely represent colourful expressions with their public roles and they have virtually no political weight whatsoever. Among them, because

⁴ Tibor Celler, *A világ uralkodócsaládjai*, Budapest 2002.

of his life history, his personal qualities and his political role, Otto von Habsburg, who died in 2011 at the age of 99 and who played an important role in connection with Hungary, represents a notable exception.

2. A Throneless Heir to the Throne

Otto von Habsburg's father ruled as Charles I, Emperor of Austria and as Charles IV, King of Hungary. Despite being the heir to the throne, Otto didn't inherit anything. After the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the legal continuity of Habsburg rule was severed, although under different circumstances, by Austria and Hungary alike.⁵

As a matter of fact, the Habsburgs ruled in Europe for 645 years. In a way, this is in itself a considerable performance, especially in comparison with the history of other dynasties. Neither the Romanovs, nor the Hohenzollerns or the Hanover/Windsor dynasty have had such a long past on the throne. To see it from another angle, Hitler's Third Reich which was planned to last 1000 years, lived hardly more than 12, while the Soviet Union crumbled before reaching the 80th anniversary of its birth.

The Habsburgs marked almost 700 years of European history; Europe was unimaginable without them. They became a European phenomenon. Otto's career seems to suggest that he was led by two ideas throughout his public life – the power of the heritage of his family which radiates throughout his life and defines his role in society on the one hand, while a part of the same heritage as reinterpreted by him in accordance with the new conditions in Europe and therefore proven useful in practice on the other.

Throughout his life, almost literally from his birth to his death, Otto von Habsburg was basically a *homo politicus*.⁶ Most of his life was devoted to political activity. The various elements of his family heritage could well be traced in his cultural attitudes and his thinking alike, but were varying in intensity and order of importance.

His first public appearance was his presence in Francis Joseph's funeral procession in November 1916. That was the first time he found himself in the focus of public attention – at the age of four. At the crowning ceremony of his father, in late 1916, he was already present as the heir apparent.⁷ He was 10 when his father died in exile and, mostly under his mother's, Zita's influence, his education and later actions were determined by the conviction that it was his duty to do his utmost to regain the throne.

⁵ In a characteristic remark by a man who could encompass long historical trends; who never reneged on the past but could view it with wisdom and irony, once he told me: "Our family ruled for nearly 700 years in Europe. The past 80 to 90 years may have just been an intermezzo."

⁶ Here is a list of publications in Hungarian about the life and career of Otto von Habsburg: Gordon Brook-Shepherd, *A megkoronázatlan király. Habsburg Ottó élete és kora*, Budapest 2003; Pál Huszár, *Történelmi háttérrel az egységes Európáért. Habsburg Ottó közéleti tevékenységéről*, Budapest é. n.; Patrick German, *Károly és Zita*, Budapest 2005; Róbert Fiziker, *Habsburg kontra Hitler. Legitimisták az Anschluss ellen, az önálló Ausztriáért*, Budapest 2010; László Pusztaszeri, *Habsburg Ottó élete és kora*, Budapest 1997; Stephan Baier – Eva Demmerle, *Habsburg Ottó élete*, Budapest 2003.

⁷ See the essay on Charles IV, in my volume on the Habsburgs.

3. The Hopeless Legacy of the Past

As we know, the restoration of the monarchy proved historically impossible, therefore the role assigned to Otto was in this sense utterly detached from reality. That was however what he was prompted by the domestic legacy. After Austria became a republic in November 1918, on April 3, 1919 the so-called Habsburg act decreeing the dethronement of the Habsburg-Lothringian dynasty was passed. Those members of the family who did not renounce their claim to the throne were exiled and deprived of their wealth. In other terms, the title or the act was misleading, for as to its content, it could well have been defined as an anti-Habsburg act.

Under the influence of the local legitimist forces, in the 1930s it became fashionable to grant Otto von Habsburg honorary citizenship in various settlements throughout Austria.⁸ A total of 58 settlements elected him their honorary citizen during that decade. Most of them are small in size but some are significant cities, like Salzburg, Eisenstadt or Traun. In 1932 a legitimist organisation was set up with the aim of restoring the Habsburg monarchy. Their endeavour was facilitated by the shift of the contemporary Austrian state towards an authoritarian system, and of course by the birth of the Nazi system in Germany under Adolf Hitler's leadership, who openly advocated the Anschluss, that is the accession of Austria to Germany. That development pushed the incumbent Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss who would later be assassinated and his successor, Kurt Schuschnigg to consider a potential Habsburg restoration as the best way to repel the German nationalist drive. Otto in fact had always rejected National Socialism and Hitler's regime. He clearly represented the idea of an independent Austria. Thus, Schuschnigg revoked the law on the expulsion of the Habsburgs and the confiscation of their wealth. The Chancellor did believe that another crucial European dictator, Mussolini, along of course with the Regent of Hungary, Miklós Horthy and his Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, had a vested interest in keeping independent Austria alive. At the site of the shifts in European politics, namely the strong reservations of the leaders of Great Britain and France against Habsburg restoration, the Chancellor of Austria became undecided and eventually, while remaining a monarchist personally, stopped pushing for bringing the Habsburgs back. From March 1938, the date of the Anschluss, the issue was taken off the agenda altogether.

The Nazis code-named the military plan of the Anschluss "Operation Otto". Hitler brought back the Habsburg acts (the anti-Habsburg acts, to be precise) into force. Austria became part of the Nazi empire.

⁸ Here's a list of settlements that have chosen Otto their honorary citizen: Ampass Tirol, Axams, Baumkirchen, Breitenbach am Inn, Dietrichschlag, Döllach, Dölsach, Eckatsau, Eisenstadt, Empersdorf, Erl/Tirol, Gaimberg, Gramatneusiedl, Großdorf, Großkirchen, Güssing, Heiligenblut, Hintersdorf, Hof bei Salzburg, Hollabrunn N. Ö., Innervillgraten, Kals, Kapelln N. Ö., Lanzenkirchen, Leogang, Lienz, Maria Lanzendorf, Maria Schmolln, Mariazell, Marktgemeinde Kirchberg an der Pielach, Matri am Brenner, Matri in Osttirol, Neudörfel, Neustift im Stubaital, Oberndorf bei Salzburg, Oberfuss, Obertilliach, Oeynhausn, Oggau, Perschling, Reichenau an der Rax, Rotenturm an der Pinka, Salzburg, Schwendau, Sieggarten, St. Andrä-Wörden, St. Veit am Vogau, Stams, Stattegg, Steinacham Brenner, Thannheim, Traun, Tulfes, Umbausen bei Innsbruck, Werndorf, Wies, Wartberg, Zwentendorf. I owe a debt of gratitude to Gusztáv Hittig who allowed me to reproduce his list of the settlement who granted honorary citizenship to Otto.

Between the two world wars, endeavours to restore the Habsburg monarchy carried a markedly anti-Nazi meaning and took the shape of an anti-Hitler movement. Their drive was covertly supported by the highest circles of the political elite. Although it was unsuccessful, it did have a real political potential. It was not totally unrealistic but was lacking sufficient stimulus as a result of the rest of the political realities of the era.⁹

In the post-war Republic of Austria, the Social Democrats found it one of their most urgent tasks to confirm the Habsburg acts. What's more, those acts were later to be included in the Austrian State Treaty in 1955. Otto von Habsburg gave up his claim to the throne in 1961 and after some court wrangling could enter Austria in 1966. The Habsburg law was scrapped 10 days after his death, in June 2011.¹⁰

As far as Hungary is concerned, events unfolded somewhat differently. King Charles made two attempts to return to Hungary in 1921, and Regent Miklós Horthy resorted to military force to foil his second attempt. As demanded by the powers of the Entente Cordiale, the Hungarian National Assembly adopted Act number XLVI, decreeing the dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty in November 1921. Meanwhile, Hungary continued to be a kingdom rather than a republic, and in contrast to what had happened in Austria, the private property of the Habsburgs was not confiscated. Moreover, Grand Dukes Joseph or Frederick were among the respected figures of interwar Hungarian public life. Nevertheless, Horthy was considered a perjurer by Otto von Habsburg until the end of his life, just like by the Hungarian legitimist movement which gave regular "Otto dinners" in the interwar period. Horthy in fact, had taken the oath of allegiance to King Charles and such an oath was considered to be binding for a lifetime. Horthy did not meet that standard.

The legitimist movement was not our crucial force in interwar Hungary. Its organisational structures and political impact were varying from time to time. It had no real mass support, but represented a happy alloy of aristocratic and middle-class endeavours to offer a sort of conservative-liberal alternative to the Horthy-regime itself and also to German influence which was gaining increasing strength from the 1930s on.¹¹ Its representatives could count on support from an important section of the Catholic Church. The legitimist camp considered King Charles' son to be Otto II, legitimate king of Hungary and the ceiling of the Episcopal library at Szombathely was decorated with his portrait.¹² They kept in constant touch with their presumed heir apparent or rather King and regularly informed the Hungarian public about those ties. They considered the Royal Prince to be a future saviour and the exclusive embodiment of the good traits that characterised Prince Emerich, St Stephens son 900 years before. The Prince was in their eyes the embodiment

⁹ To draw this picture, I made use of works by Róbert Fiziker and Lajos Kerekes. See: Lajos Kerekes, *Ausztria hatvan éve. 1918-1978*, Budapest 1984.

¹⁰ Habsburg Act was the last discriminatory piece of law in the European Union.

¹¹ From 1938, the daily Magyar Nemzet, under editor-in-chief Sándor Pethő played a significant role in support of this movement. For an all-encompassing picture on interwar Hungarian legitimists, see: Márton Békés, "A legitimisták és a legitimizmus", in: Ignác Romsics (szerk.), *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány 1900-1948*, Budapest 2009, 214-242.

¹² Aba Ferenc Sill, – István Konkoly – Géza Kovács, *A szombathelyi Püspöki Palota*, Szombathely 2004.

of honour, loyalty and purity.¹³ A whole legend was created around his personality which, apart from his political role, was also reflected in children's literature.¹⁴

Between the two world wars, Hungary's legitimists understood that crowning a Habsburg was impossible under the given international circumstances, but they were nevertheless not discouraged from keeping Otto's claim to the throne alive. On November 20, 1930, when he reached majority, festive telegrams were sent to him and the citizenry of the capital was invited to hoist the national flag on the facades of their houses "on this historic day". A bronze medal was put out with the inscription "Otto II, eternal King of Hungary, 1922-1930".¹⁵

In the wake of another lost war, Hungary became a republic and monarchists were left with no room for manoeuvre. It became politically impossible to stand up for the restoration of the monarchy. Authorities put an end to the legitimist movement via systematic persecution. Some people were simply deported by the Soviets, others found their activities banned by law. Act number VII 1946¹⁶ declared the mere public discussion of the institution of monarchy a criminal act.

Otto von Habsburg didn't have to give up his family's claim to the Hungarian throne in a separate statement, for in the interwar period no Hungarian law required him to do so, while after the Second World War it became obvious Hungary had chosen a new form of government. The restoration of the monarchy was made impossible in both cases by political realities.

All in all, we can say that the monarchist movement was to some extent grounded in reality both in Austria and in Hungary but the positive impulses it received were far from what would have been necessary and sufficient to put the idea into practice. In other terms, when Otto von Habsburg took upon himself the role of the heir apparent, he didn't obey to a narrowminded atavistic drive, but represented something which had a dose of realism in it. That dose however was not sufficient to win a political battle inside those two countries and was absolutely not matched by international realities.

That is not to say that the ambitious projects launched by the international decision-makers of the time were very successful – they didn't prove viable either. The "cordon sanitaire" envisaged by France to contain the spread of Russian and then German expansionism proved to be a delusion. Similarly, the British endeavour to appease Nazi Germany was also a sad failure.¹⁷

¹³ Lajos Ady – Albert Apponyi – Jób Bánhegyi – Iván Csekonics – Imre Balassa (ed.), *Ottó. Az ifjú király élete*, Budapest 1931. In addition to Emmerich, Otto was also frequently compared to Prince Csaba, the legendary son of Attila. In a reaction to the legitimist movement, a National anti-Habsburg League was set up. See their manifesto: *Országos Habsburg-ellenes Liga kiáltványa*, Budapest 1930.

¹⁴ On this subject, see: Nikó Nagyllés, "A száműzött királyfi. Habsburg Ottó alakjának szimbolikája narratív megformálásai", in: Norbert Glässer – András Zima – Nagyllés (szerk.), *"A királyhűség jól bevált útján..." : Rendi és nemzeti kötődések szimbolikus változásai 1867 és 1918 között*, Szeged 2016, 457-468. The essay is primarily dedicated to a short story destined to young audiences by Mária Blaskó, *A Kiskirály*, Budapest 1924. Meanwhile it mentions the Catholic movement called Szívgyárda ("The Guard of the Heart") which was devoted to educating children in the spirit of Catholic values.

¹⁵ On this issue see: Zoltán Speidl, "A 'száműzött' és a 'mesebeli' király. IV. Károly és fia, Ottó – legitimista 'legendák'", in: Glässer – Zima – Nagyllés (szerk.), *"A királyhűség jól bevált útján..."*, 423-443. The part on Otto's coming to age: 439-441.

¹⁶ <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/VII46.htm>

¹⁷ See: István Diószegi, *Két világháború árnyékában – nemzetközi kapcsolatok története 1919-1939*, Budapest 1974.

The region was left at the mercy of German, then to Russian great power ambitions. I'm not implying of course that the restoration of the Habsburg monarchy would have been a better or worse option. I'm only suggesting that it was an option possible theoretically rather than in practice and the options that were put through in practice were at least as unsuccessful as Otto von Habsburg's ambition to put his claim to the throne through.

Otto von Habsburg interpreted his family legacy as being contrary to Nazism. That stance was not however shared by all members of the Habsburg family. Grand Duke Frederick, who lived in Hungary, was not a Nazi himself, but felt very positively about the National Socialist movement. To the extent that Hitler "in expression of his respect" sent a wreath to his funeral in 1936. Albrecht, Frederick's son intended to bolster his ambitions for the Hungarian throne by allying himself with the far right. He had a strong attraction to Nazism, although he was strongly compromised in the Frank forgery scandal and therefore could hardly play any real political role.

Nor was the Hohenzollern dynasty, the main ally of the Empire ruled by Otto's father an enemy of Nazism. Emperor William who was forced into exile in Holland after World War I was enthusiastic about the movement of the Führer, although Hitler had no intention to restore the monarchy. As to William's son, he became a fervent Nazi militant.

Seen in this context, Otto von Habsburg's anti-Nazism appears even more characteristic. In fact, National Socialism was antithetical to the cultural-political Habsburg legacy not only on account of the Anschluss, but also because of its whole system of social-political ideas. The Habsburgs could have never ruled a multilingual and multinational empire had they professed racist ideas.¹⁸ Otto von Habsburg's deep commitment to Christianity was also an important factor. As we know, Christianity is diametrically opposed to racism – as a matter of fact, they mutually exclude each other. Otto von Habsburg's consistent opposition to Hitler also shows that in interwar Europe anti-Nazism was not an option confined to left-wingers, but could also be taken on the basis of Conservative and Christian ideals.

The Anschluss and the issue of Nazism historically speaking were taken off the agenda in post-World War II Europe. Austria was restored to be an independent state and from 1955, the State Treaty guaranteed by the great powers pinned down the independent and neutral status of the Austrian state. Nazi Germany lost the war; Germany as a united state ceased to exist. Two German states were created.¹⁹ The structural changes that occurred in Europe left absolutely no space for any kind of successful restoration of Habsburg dynastic rule. Such an option ceased to have a meaning politically.

The heir apparent had to reinvent the dynastic legacy, which meant reinterpreting it and giving it a new meaning.

¹⁸ It is no coincidence that anti-Semitism had a very limited impact on the interwar legitimist movement.

¹⁹ One had to live as long as Otto von Habsburg did to see the second German Empire transmute into the Nazi Third Empire, which was succeeded by the German Federal Republic in the West and the German Democratic Republic belonging to the Soviet bloc and finally they merged into one single Germany which doesn't conceive itself an empire and therefore is not expansive in its nature and does not want to annex Austria.

4. Rerouting

The Habsburg dynasty was a European phenomenon from the very start and Europeanism is thus an unquestionable part of the past of the Habsburgs. The question was how much space was available for that mission to be expressed in post-World War II Europe.

The Pan-European Movement²⁰ with its purpose of a united Europe had played an important role in Otto von Habsburg's life for a long time. He joined the organisation in 1936; became its vice president in 1957 and its president in 1973. He had thus an organisational "springboard" for repositioning the dynastic legacy. When he gave up his claim to the imperial throne of Austria, one could sense that he would grab the potential opportunity offered by pan-European perspectives. That became especially realistic when in the 1950s a new kind of European cooperation was institutionalised first in a few West European countries and then by an ever-growing number of countries and areas which was meant to be the embodiment of an idea of European unity first in the economy and then also at a political level.

That was the start of the story which eventually resulted in the creation of the European Union. Otto von Habsburg jumped on the bandwagon of this progression. In 1978 he was granted German citizenship and thanks to the Bavarian Christian Social Union and its voters he became a member of the European Parliament. His personality and human character enabled him to find partners in virtually all other MEPs. Party affiliations were of negligible importance; he had to and could find the joint values on the basis of which they could understand each other. Otto von Habsburg was particularly gifted in finding joint points of interest constructive cooperation could be based upon.

Strange as it may seem, the older he got, the more able he was to think in terms of the future. I attribute that to the fact that he had been able to reposition his thinking from an earlier attitude which was focused on his claim to the throne that is on the past, to a new approach centred around the great task of creating a united Europe. That new approach led him to focus on the future rather than on the past. The core of his personality remained the same, but his personality's flexibility was coupled with a flexible way of thinking. As he often said, "I am responsible for everything over several hundred years of history". That formula in reality reflected his sense of responsibility towards the future – a future he could contribute to shape.

As an MEP he put particular emphasis on securing room in progressively uniting Europe for countries still under Soviet influence. Partly because he was a convinced anti-Communist, but also because he felt responsibility for the peoples of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In 1989 when the Soviet bloc started crumbling, he entered into the politically happiest stage of his career. This is how he saw it himself both at the time and later on, in hindsight.

The pan-European picnic held on both the Hungarian and the Austrian sides of the border on August 19, 1989 had him as one of the chief patrons. The event was a symbol-

²⁰ The International Pan-European Union was founded by count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in 1923. Its goal was to create a supranational United European state. The basic principles of a united Europe as conceived by the movement were: free will; Christianity; social responsibility and commitment to European integration.

ic demonstration of ignoring the Iron Curtain which was still separating the two sides of Europe, since over 600 Germans, citizens of the German Democratic Republic took the opportunity to cross into Austria and the free world.

After the fall of Communism, Otto von Habsburg paid numerous visits to Hungary. The 52 settlements who elected him to be their honorary citizens, including the capital city of Budapest did so without the slightest inclination to restore the monarchy.²¹ It was even suggested that he should be elected President of the Republic.²²

He devoted special attention to Hungary's destiny and did his best to promote Hungary's accession to the European Union and its return to the mainstream of European history. So he did in the case of Croatia.

It is no coincidence that in the Capuchin crypt where his body is at rest, a short inscription beside the coffin points out his role in the unification of Europe. Nor it is a coincidence that while his body lays in Vienna, his heart – in accordance with this final will – is in custody at Pannonhalma.²³

* * *

Otto von Habsburg spent his life in a ceaseless reinterpretation of the role of the Habsburg legacy. The first stage of his career can be described as unsuccessful and a failure in comparison with to the goals set. He could not break out from the role of the heir apparent, nor was he able to recover the throne.²⁴ He remained an eternal Crown Prince without a crown.

Shakespeare says Hamlet would have made a great King. Had he died at the young age of 35, like his father, posterity perhaps wouldn't even mention Otto's name or perhaps would only say that he was the Habsburg heir to the throne who was opposed to Hitler.

The second stage of this political career, although it doesn't follow an evenly ascendant line, can be judged as being successful. He realised that getting his throne back was an unrealistic project under the given circumstances and instead, he found a component in

²¹ Balatonboglár, Balatonlelle, Bánk, Budaörs, Budapest, Budapest XI., Budapest XXIII., Bugyi, Celldömölk, Császártöltés, Csehimindszent, Dombóvár, Dorog, Dunaföldvár, Eger, Fadd, Feked, Gödöllő, Gyula, Hévíz, Hódmezővásárhely, Jászberény, Keszthely, Kiskőrös, Kocsola, Letenye, Lulla, Makó, Mezőberény, Mezőkövesd, Nagyesztergár, Nagykőny, Nagymaros, Nagytevel, Ópályi, Oroszlány, Palotabozsok, Paloznak, Pomáz, Sósút, Szászvár, Szécsény, Szigetvár, Tiszadob, Tiszafüred, Tiszaújváros, Tokaj, Tótszentmárton, Und, Vaskeresztes, Velem, Veszprém.

²² The offer made by the since defunct Independent Smallholders and Civic Party was declined by Otto. He accepted however to chair the board of the Public Foundation for Research into the Era of the Habsburgs which was set up in 2003. I had the opportunity to meet him and talk to him in this capacity of his several times. I learned to appreciate in him an extremely wise man, with a high sense of irony and self-irony – a lovable person.

²³ <http://www.reformatus.hu/mutat/oekumenikus-aldassal-helyeztek-oeroek-nyugalomra-habsburg-otto-szivurnajat/>

²⁴ There is hardly anything in today's Hungarian public life that would attempt to pick up the heritage of the interwar Hungarian legitimist movement. For further information see: <http://regnumportal.hu/>. Members of the monarchic branch of the Habsburg-Lothringen dynasty are active participants of public life. The Habsburg-Lothringen St. George Order of Knights whose origins date back to the era of Rudolph Ist, that is to the 13th century is still active. It was banned by the Nazis but re-founded in 2008. Otto von Habsburg was among the founders. Today, the Grand Master of the order is Charles, Otto's eldest son.

his legacy which was in conformity with the European mainstream. He invested his historical, moral and political capital into an enterprise that was realistic and yielded tangible results. The ideal of a united Europe had never grown as muscular as in post-World War II Europe which was slowly recovering from the lethal conflict. He could join that process institutionally speaking thanks to his mandate as a member of the European Parliament, but that wouldn't have been enough, since in 1979 the European Parliament already had several hundreds of deputies. A personal weight and the power of a personality were also indispensable. Those things put together resulted in something more than just an institutional role played by someone with a historic name. They meant that Otto von Habsburg became an institution himself.²⁵

Charles, Otto's father died after a career which was successful in his personal faith, but unsuccessful politically. His son created a political role for himself from his personal spiritual drives and faith as well as his conviction which enabled him to reinterpret the Habsburg legacy, and was successful in that role.²⁶

Although he never ceased interpreting and reinterpreting the Habsburg legacy, he eventually transcended it when becoming a personal institution. Transcending meant realising that in contrast to the dynastic tradition, spiritual power is worth at least as much as actual political power – if not more. From the hopeless pretender of a European dynasty, he became a significant European politician who was able to shape the given present and the possible future.

That was something never anyone suspected within the Habsburg dynasty to happen as long as they wore the crown. Deprived of the possibility of ruling, Otto was compelled to rethink his inherited role and must be given credit for having done so. He remained part of his family's history while transcending it at the same time.

It looks like Hungarian society is not too generous towards the memory of its former Habsburg rulers. Patriotic hearts and souls are generally closed to the Habsburgs. Hungarians have reserved two places at best for Habsburgs in their pantheon: one for viceroy Joseph and another one for Queen Elizabeth. Perhaps a new place will open there in the future. If it will, it will possibly be reserved to Otto von Habsburg.

²⁵ Here is a list of his international honorary citizenships: Brandys nad Labem, Czech Republic; Františkovy Lazně, Czech Republic; Holič, Slovakia; Opatija, Croatia; Pöcking, Germany; Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina; Varazdin, Croatia.

²⁶ As stipulated by an agreement between the Habsburg family and the Hungarian state, Otto's personal archives will be transferred to Budapest. That would offer an unprecedented opportunity for Hungarian researchers to study his career which encompasses the whole of the 20th century.