The Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian honorary consulate in Helsingfors 1882 - 1914

The Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) consular service has its origin in article 5 of the Trade Treaty, concluded on 17 July 1718 in Passarowitz (Pozarevac, Serbia) between the plenipotentiaries of Emperor Charles VI and of Sultan Selim III. It granted the Habsburg rulers the right to establish consulates in those ports of the Ottoman Empire, where foreign consuls already resided – that is those of Venice, France, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Spain. Empress Maria Theresia ordered consulates to be established in the West, along the Adriatic and Mediterranean, as well as the Atlantic coasts of France and Spain. The consular network reached the Baltic shores in 1782, when honorary consulates were established in Kopenhagen and Helsingör, followed by St. Petersburg in 1783, Riga in 1794, Danzig/Gdansk in 1832, Stockholm in 1844, Reval/Tallinn in 1867 and Kronstadt in 1881.

In 1860, “merchant John Sergeeff from Helsingfors” had applied for the post of Austrian honorary consul to be established there. Ambassador Count Thun-Hohenstein, while seeing no need for such a consular office, forwarded the application to Vienna. The Central Maritime Authority in Trieste concluded “that in view of the lack of Austrian trade relations with Helsingfors there is no need at present for the suggested consular representation, and in addition, the candidate would not have the required qualifications for a consular post.” No action was taken, as was shortly afterwards when the Hannoverian honorary consul in Wyborg, J. Dippel, applied for the post of Austrian honorary consul.
The Austro-Hungarian consular – and merchant marine – flag (1868-1918)
Coat of arms shield of an Imperial & Royal Austro-Hungarian Consulate (before 1900)

Paper seal of the Imperial & Royal Austro-Hungarian (honorary) consulate Helsingfors
It was only in 1881, that the Vienna Chamber of Trade suggested establishing an honorary consular office in Helsingfors, “whose wealthy population of 43,000 souls and very important import trade could open a new and profitable market namely for Austrian and Hungarian wines and a whole series of manufactured goods and haberdashery [...]”. On 13 January 1882 German merchant Carl Max Otto ( * Trier, Germany 25 April 1853 + Helsinki 13 June 1926) was appointed Imperial & Royal Austro-Hungarian honorary vice-consul in Helsingfors by Emperor Franz Joseph I. With only one consular post Austro-Hungarian consular presence in Finland was rather poor compared to Germany’s consulate-general in Helsingfors and 11 honorary consular offices. During Otto’s tenure the consulate was located at Glogata 6, business hours were from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

By Imperial resolution of 8 June 1902 the vice-consulate was upgraded to consulate, and Otto was promoted from honorary consul ad personam – which he had been made in 1892 after ten years in office - to honorary consul-general ad personam. The reason was that by 1902 most foreign powers had, “in view of the commercial importance of Helsingfors and the easy access of Finnish markets to foreign trade” upgraded their vice-consulates to consulates or consulates-general, leaving only Austria-Hungary, the US and Brazil to follow this example, “which would enhance the prestige of the office with the population and the administration […]”

The 12 archive boxes of the honorary consulate Helsingfors disclose that between 1894 and 1914 only 110 male Austrian and Hungarian citizens had registered with the consulate, whose main task was to facilitate their stay; only a limited number stayed for a longer period, one remained forever. On 12 April 1914 the consulate reported „that the Hungarian citizen, musician Victor Novacek from Temesvar (Timisoara, Romania) had shot himself on 3 March in Helsingfors […], his estate consisting of two suitcases.” Novacek had for 15 years lives as a repetiteur in Turku and was buried in Helsinki’s Gamla cemetery.

As Carl Max Otto was severely ill, he spent, starting in summer of 1909, several years in a warmer climate, staying at Lake Starnberg (Germany) and Meran (Merano), Görz (Gorizia) and Bozen (Bolzano) in Austria. On 10 August 1909 he handed over the consulate’s business to Kurt Mitterhusen ( * Lübeck, Germany 12 December 1861 + Helsinki 30 October 1921), a resident of Helsingfors since 1885, where he became director of C.M.Otto & Co. and honorary chancellor of the Austro-
Hungarian vice-consulate. He was appointed honorary vice-consul on 24 May 1910 and requested to carry on as caretaker. He resigned at the end of 1913; the resignation was accepted by the Emperor on 23 January 1914, and he carried on until the new honorary consul took over in July 1914.

Post card addressed to the Austro-Hungarian consulate Helsingfors, Russia! (1914)

In 1913 two candidates for the post of Austro-Hungarian consul were identified: Walther Ahlquist, a Swede, whose wife was a born Nobel, very rich, but living far away from Helsingfors, and German national Ferdinand G.W. Stamer (* Wira estate near St. Petersburg 3 July 1863 + Lübeck 18 March 1932), a resident of Helsingfors since 1889, where he ran an business importing coffee, cereals and flour, and in 1912 had established the company Ferd. Stamer & Co. On 8 March 1914, Emperor Franz Joseph I. appointed Ferdinand G.W. Stamer Austro-Hungarian honorary consul in Helsingfors; he took over on 21 July 1914 from caretaker Mitterhusen. As Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia on 6 August 1914, Stamer’s consular career in Helsingfors lasted only two weeks. He managed to escape to Sweden to avoid internment. Protection of Austro-Hungarian interests in Russia was entrusted to the United States, and in April 1917 to Denmark, and in some places to
Sweden. In February 1916 Stamer declared his willingness “to head, for the duration of the war, the Imperial German consulate in Lulea”; he was made “Imperial German consul” and acted as head of Germany’s honorary consulate from 7 April 1916 to autumn of 1917. From Wiesbaden, Germany, Stamer in February 1918 informed the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry of his intention to settle in Stockholm in March 1918, in order to return to Helsingfors “as the return of order now seems imminent”. However, contrary to Stamer’s expectations, he was not reinstated as honorary consul and until June of 1919 the Swedish consul in Helsingfors continued to protect Austrian and Hungarian interests.

The Imperial & Royal Austro-Hungarian Embassy in St. Petersburg reporting on Finland 1899-1914

Alexander Baron Musulin (* Zagreb 27 October 1868 + Fridau, Lower Austria 9 January 1947), who served as secretary of legation at the embassy in St. Petersburg from 1899 to 1900 and 1901 to 1903, and was head of the Department “Serbia” – known as “War Department” – in the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry from 1914 to 1917, was the only St. Petersburg-based diplomat later mentioning Finland in his memoirs, highlighting i.a. the Austro-Hungarian position towards the Grand-Duchy: “Disregarding the close environment of St. Petersburg, the islands, the parks of the imperial palaces in Peterhof, Gatschina and Zarsjkoje […] the only option for an excursion […] was across the Finnish border, which was less than an hour away from St. Petersburg. Such an excursion was of more than just scenic interest. The Finnish question was one of the main problems of Russian internal politics […]. Europe’s judgement of the actions of Russia’s rulers towards Finland was uniform in condemnation. Strangely enough the judgement of diplomats in St. Petersburg, which had the opportunity to study the situation on the spot, was far milder […]. It was indeed surprising to see that the mighty, high-handed and repressive Russia tolerated a customs boundary in immediate vicinity to its capital, where Finnish customs officials performed customs control in a by no means accommodating manner, that Russian money and Russian postage stamps had no value less than an hour from the capital […].” It should be remembered that the historic border between
the Holy Roman Empire, later Austrian Empire, and the Kingdom of Hungary until 1920 was a mere 37 km from Vienna at Bruck on the river Leitha.

Austro-Hungarian diplomats stationed in Russia’s capital mainly reported on Russia’s activities in the Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria) or Russian relations with France, Great Britain and Japan, and her designs on the Ottoman Empire or Persia, devoting their attention only to a limited extent to the situation in Finland. What makes these reports more important than others are the authors: Alois Lexa Baron Aehrenthal, ambassador in St. Petersburg from 1899 to 1906, became Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister from 1906 to 1912, his successor as ambassador, Leopold Count Berchtold (1906-1911) followed him as Foreign Minister from 1912 to 1915; his name is on the famous telegram sent on 28 July 1914 from Vienna to Belgrade, starting World War I. An important source of information was Austro-Hungarian honorary consul in Helsingfors, C.M. Otto, who regularly provided the embassy with detailed reports of 20 pages or more on the internal situation; as a merchant, he obviously concentrated on economic and trade aspects.
In the period 1899 to 1914, a total of 97 reports deal with the situation in Finland; their number reached 10 in 1904 and 14 in 1909, reflecting the increasing problems encountered by the Tsarist Government. Some of them are not related to Finland, as the meetings between German Emperor Wilhelm II and Tsar Nicholas II in Finnish ports. Austro-Hungarian diplomats reported on Russian attempts to modify the status of the Grand Duchy by introducing the Russian compulsory military service or Russian customs, the short life of the Finnish Landtag, and the problems encountered by the Tsarist Government, the danger of assimilation of the small Finnish nation or the admiration of Tsar Nicholas’ mother, Danish princess Dagmar, for the “valiant Finnish people” and her criticism of her son’s policies. When Russia’s Governor-General Bobrikow was murdered in 1904, Aehrenthal reported the sentiment prevailing in the Russian capital “that it was surprising that he was not assassinated earlier.” In 1912 caretaker von Szilassy felt “the pernicious effect of the lasted law adopted by the Duma [...]. It is only natural that as a practical result a major discontent manifests itself in Finland. The future appears in black [...].“ The following year, caretaker Otto Count Czernin, brother of the Foreign Minister of the years 1915-1918, noted that “even if all the local accusations poisoning the relations between Russia and Austria – Hungary would reflect the truth, they in no way come anywhere near what is devised here against Poland, Finland and all elements not complying with the wishes of Russian nationalism.”

The peace-treaty of 19 May 1918 and first diplomatic and consular contacts between Austria-Hungary and Finland

In January of 1918 a Finnish delegation was in Berlin to discuss the recognition of Finland by the German Reich. Desiring to proceed to Vienna, Austro-Hungarian administration acted swiftly. The Chief of Staff of the Austro-Hungarian Supreme Army Command on 8 January 1918 at 21.20 p.m. cabled the following instruction to the border-station between Germany and Austria at Teschen (Decin, Czech Republic): „Grant free passage to mission consisting of State Councillor Dr. Hjelt, Miss Lijequist-Hjelt, Prof. Erich, Director Sanoy, passing through Berlin-Bodenbach-Teschen on 9 January.“
The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Ottokar Count Czernin, then in Brest-Litowsk, instructed the first section chief of his ministry, Ludwig Baron von Flotow, on 9 January 1918 at 1 p.m. „to prepare an immediate submission to the Emperor requesting His Majesty „to pronounce, in the name of Austria-Hungary, the recognition of the independent Republic of Finland.” The Foreign Ministry was informed, by phone, the same day that “His Majesty approved the request in your Excellency’s immediate submission.”

On 7 March 1918 the peace treaty between the German Reich and Finland was signed in Berlin, Dr. Hjelt handing over a copy of the printed version to Austro-Hungarian ambassador Prince Hohenlohe on 13 March 1918. The following day, 14 March, Count Czernin, then in Budapest negotiating the peace treaty between Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire with Romania, learned of Germany’s peace treaty with Finland, he was under the impression that Germany had been acting behind the back of its Viennese ally. It turned out, that the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Berlin had not forwarded a German invitation to her ally to join in the peace talks to Vienna. This negligence resulted in the peace treaty between Austria-Hungary and Finland being concluded in Vienna on 29 May 1918 only. It was signed for Austria-Hungary by two Hungarians - Foreign Minister Stephan Count Burian and 1st section chief Kajetan Mérey von Kapos-Mere, and for Finland by her minister in Berlin Dr. Hjelt, and Dr. Allan Serlachius.

According to the Austrian and Hungarian constitutions, the Emperor had to authorize the Prime Ministers of the Austrian and the Hungarian parts of the Monarchy to submit the peace treaty to their respective parliaments for approval. In 13 July 1918 the Emperor, in Eckartsau near Vienna, approved the request by the Austrian Prime Minister, followed on 15 July 1918 by the identical Hungarian counterpart. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Stephan Count Burian on 27 September 1918 submitted the peace treaty of 29 May 1918 to Emperor and King Charles for ratification, drawing His Majesty’s attention to the fact that “the Finnish parliament already on 18 July 1918 had ratified the peace treaty, and that the Finnish Government had requested on several occasions its urgent ratification by Austria-Hungary, as the Finnish Government was attaching the greatest importance to establishing orderly political and economic relations […]”
Emperor Charles signed the instruments of ratification of the peace treaties with Finland and with Romania in his Villa Wartholz in Reichenau / Rax on 30 September 1918. Article II of the peace treaty stipulated that „immediately after ratification of the peace treaty […] diplomatic and consular relations“ are to be established.

The Finnish Government was the first to act. On 12 October 1918 the Finnish Legation in Berlin informed the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry of the appointment of Johannes Palmgren as Finnish consul in Vienna (see next chapter.)

On 15 October 1918 the Austro-Hungarian government asked for the agrément for Erich Baron Zwiedinek-Südenhorst (* 19 August 1870 +?) as minister resident. Zwiedinek had been counsellor at the Washington embassy since 1912, and – ambassador Dumba having been declared “persona non grata” – chargé d'affaires a.i. from 1 October 1915 to 8 April 1917, when Austria-Hungary broke relations with the US. He was serving in the Foreign Ministry, when Foreign Minister Count Burian in the middle of October 1918 prepared the following submission to the Emperor. “As the Peace Treaty [with Finland] has been ratified on 10 October and in view of the desirability to establish diplomatic relations with this state without delay, the appointment of a Minister Resident to the Finnish Government in Helsingfors is required.” Burian suggested appointing Erich Baron Zwiedinek-Südenhorst, and following the example of Germany, to grant him the title of Envoy extraordinary and Minister plenipotentiary. The submission never reached the Emperor, and Burian resigned on 24 October 1918. Nonetheless, Ambassador Prince Hohenlohe in Berlin was instructed on 15 October to seek the agrément for Zwiedinek from the Finnish Government thru the good offices of the Finnish legation. The Finnish government gave a positive response on 25th of October 1918. On 30 October, Hohenlohe cabled that “the Finnish Government welcomed the appointment of counsellor Zwiedinek as Imperial and Royal Minister Resident in Helsingfors.” It was too late – the following day the Kingdom of Hungary severed its ties to the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, bringing an end to Austria-Hungary. Zwiedinek never left Vienna; he was, from 26 April to 18 November 1919, chargé d'affaires of the Austro-Hungarian legation in liquidation in Copenhagen, and was pensioned on 31 October 1919.

On 31 October 1918 the chief of the general staff suggested to the chancery of the Emperor appointing Captain Franz Brandstetter Austro-Hungarian military attaché
in Finland. It was too late. On 6 November 1918 the Emperor initialled the following decision: “Until clarification of the political situation the appointment of a military attaché will not be considered.”

Under these conditions, no Austro-Hungarian diplomat, consul or military attaché was ever sent to Finland.

Note Verbale of the Finnish Legation in Berlin of 12 October 1918 concerning appointment of Johannes Palmgren as Finnish consul in Vienna
The Austrian consulate in Helsingfors and the Finnish consulate in Vienna between the Wars

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Austria and the Republic of Finland were dealt with by non-resident ministers. In the case of Finland its legation in Berlin was covering Austria from 1922 to 1933, and later the minister in Kopenhagen was accredited to Austria until 1938. In the case of Austria, the minister in Berlin was accredited to Finland since 1924; in 1927, responsibility for Finland was transferred to the newly established legation in Stockholm. In the absence of resident ministers, honorary consul-generals became the backbone of the bilateral relations.

The Finnish consulate-general in Vienna 1918-1938

In October of 1918, Finland appointed Johannes Palmgren (* Turku 1873? + Helsinki 28 October 1928) consul („consul missus“) in Vienna. Palmgren had for 25 years lived in St. Petersburg, where he ran a bookshop and represented Finnish companies; he fled to Sweden after the Communist takeover and became head of the commercial department of the Finnish legation in Stockholm. Palmgren’s appointment was duly taken note of and the Governor of Lower Austria, where Vienna is situated, informed. The file ends on 12 November 1918, date of the proclamation of the Republic of German Austria. Under the circumstances he was not granted the exequatur by Emperor Charles I. Palmgren established his office in Hotel Bristol next to the State Opera, he however left for Berlin on 14 November 1918, from where he looked after Finnish consular interests in Austria.

After the Republic had been proclaimed, Palmgren was granted the exequatur by the Directorate of the State Council of the Republic of German Austria on 11 January 1919. In 1919 he lived in Turku, where he joined AB Merkator OY, whose managing director he was until his death. He also served at Latvian honorary consul in Turku.
Exequatur granted to Finnish consul Johannes Palmgren by the Republic of German Austria

As no Finnish consulate existed in Vienna for more than two years, in May of 1921 the Viennese Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Trade, in view of Finland having “energetically overcome bolshevism” and being on its way to establish a sound economy, suggested the Finnish Government may wish to establish an honorary consulate in Vienna and appoint Arthur Knöpfelmacher (‘Vienna 21 August 1873 + South America after 1938), formerly owner of a shoe factory, its honorary consul in Vienna. Helsinki apparently refused, and in 1922 Knöpfelmacher was made honorary consul general of Costa Rica. Of Jewish origin, he left Vienna on 15 December 1938 for an unknown destination, probably South America.
In its meeting of 17 February 1922 the Austrian Council of Ministers approved the request of the Austrian Foreign Minister Leopold Hennet to propose to the President the granting of the exequatur as consul-general of Finland to Konrad Georg Fazer (* Helsingfors 30 April 1864 + Helsinki 7 October 1940), who since 20 February 1922 lived on Stubenring 18. In 1897 K.G.Fazer had, together with R. E. Westerlund, bought Miss Melan’s music shop in Helsinki’s Aleksanderingatu 11, relocating it to the corner of Aleksanterin- and Fabianinkatu. In 1904 he became sole owner of the music store, transforming it into a joint-stock company in 1919.

Fazer remained barely a year in office. He was succeeded by Czechoslovak citizen Erwin Philipp (* Vienna 20 March 1873 +?) as Finnish honorary consul-general. Philipp was a director of Dynamit Nobel in Vienna, who established the
consulate on Kolowratring 6 (since 1928 Schubertring). As Jew, Philipp left Vienna on 12 March 1938 for nearby Bratislava in Czechoslovakia. In a note of the German Foreign Office of 30 July 1938 on the status of foreign consuls in Vienna – Germany was keen to terminate the activities of Jewish honorary consuls - Erwin Philipp is listed as “Czechoslovak, Jew, escaped”; however, he still figures in the consular list of 1 January 1939 as honorary consul-general, assisted by Kauko Supinen, vice-consul, at the address Trattnerhof 2.

The Austrian honorary consulate in Helsingfors 1921-1938

In October of 1921 German merchant Julius Fritz Achilles (* Lübeck 10 June 1877 + Helsinki 10 March 1952) was appointed Austrian honorary consul in Helsingfors. Achilles had settled in Finland in 1899, working for Emil Aspelund in Vaasa, and in 1902 had joined AB Sören Berner & Co., whose manager and co-owner he became in 1904 for the next 40 years. On a business trip in Scotland in August of 1914, he was interned there as enemy alien until 1919, when he returned to Helsinki. Appointed honorary consul in October of 1924, he was made honorary consul-general on 27 November 1925 and served in this capacity until 1 March 1938. During these years, the consulate was located at Södra Kajen 4 (1922), Västra Kajen 6 (1922-1929) and Södra Kajen 4 (1930-1938).

His deputy, honorary consul Leopold Klusacek-Jauregg (* Okrisko, Moravia / Czech Republic 1 November 1877 + Pressbaum, Lower Austria 8 December 1961) took over as caretaker on 1 March 1938. He was an ex Austro-Hungarian colonel, who had been pensioned in 1919; settling in Finland, he became director and 99% owner of AB Silvana in Helsinki. He had been honorary vice-consul since December of 1924 and honorary consul since December of 1925. In view of the Anschluss of Austria on 13 March 1938, neither Klusacek nor lawyer Erik Johan Sakavi Castrén, a partner of Jonas Castrén lawyers, was appointed Austrian honorary consul-general, nor was the official name of the post ever changed from “Helsingfors” to “Helsinki”. Klusacek’s company was nationalised in 1944, when he left for Stockholm; it became Soviet property in 1946.