

For Immediate Release

Europolitician and Imperial Heir Otto von Habsburg Dies at Age 98

Pöcking, Germany, July 4th 2011: Otto von Habsburg, eldest son of the last regnant Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, long-time member of the European Parliament and Honorary President of the International Paneuropean Union died in the early morning of July 4th 2011 at his residence in Pöcking, Upper Bavaria at the age of 98.

Otto von Habsburg was born November 20th in 1912 in Reichenau in Lower Austria as son of Archduke Charles, later Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary und Archduchess Zita, born Princess of Bourbon-Parma. After the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918, the Imperial family went into Swiss exile and later to Madeira where the Emperor died in 1922, leaving his widow and their eight children in difficult circumstances. The eldest son, Otto von Habsburg, grew up in Spain and Belgium. He received his doctorate in 1933 from the Catholic University of Louvain/Belgium. In the following years, he concentrated on the fight against National Socialism and the “Anschluss” (annexation) of Austria to the German Reich. Hitler targeted Otto von Habsburg as a significant threat to Nazi designs for Central Europe and so feared Habsburg resurgence that Austrian invasion plans were code named “Operation Otto.” Von Habsburg fled to the United States during World War II, where he continued his mission for the liberation and re-establishment of Austria and the other countries of the former monarchy with President Roosevelt.

At the end of the war, he returned to Europe and devoted himself to the unification of the continent. He worked with the founder of the Paneuropean Union, Richard Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, and subsequently succeeded him as President of the Union, serving from 1973 to 2004. After 48 years of exile, he was only able to re-enter Austria in 1966 following a five-year lawsuit against the Austrian government.

Otto von Habsburg represented the Bavarian Christian Social Union Party (CSU) as an elected member of the European Parliament from 1979 to 1999, where he served on several committees including the Committee for Foreign Affairs. Von Habsburg particularly condemned the exploitation of peoples behind the Iron Curtain and supported the self-determination of nations, minority rights, and a rapid enlargement of the EU after the collapse of communism. He was the author of several books on politics and history, and countless magazine and newspaper articles. In 1989, he initiated the “Paneuropean Picnic” held at the Austrian-Hungarian border, which was a cover operation to allow over 600 East Germans in Hungary escape to the West. The event is historically considered one of the significant moments in the dissolution of a divided Germany and ultimately the Eastern Bloc.

Even after his retirement from the European Parliament in 1999, Otto von Habsburg remained in demand internationally as a speaker and political critic. He was the recipient of numerous national and international orders and awards.

Otto von Habsburg was married to Princess Regina von Sachsen-Meiningen who died February 3rd 2010. The couple had lived in the town of Pöcking in Upper Bavaria since 1954.

They are survived by seven children, 22 grand children and two great-grand children. The head of the Habsburg family is the oldest son Karl Habsburg-Lothringen, who lives in Austria.

Karl Habsburg has released this statement on the passing of his father:

“My father was a most exceptional man. We have lost a great European, who impressed and influenced his children for life.”

Otto von Habsburg will be entombed in the resting place of the Austro-Hungarian monarchs and their family members, the Capuchin Crypt in Vienna. The last family member to be laid to rest there was Otto von Habsburg’s mother Zita, the long exiled Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary who died at age 96 in 1989.

Details of the funeral ceremonies will be communicated at a later date.

For further information

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Please find current information shortly on our website:

www.ottovonhabsburg.org.

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