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Count Matthias Johann von der Schulenburg (1661 - 1747)

A European Field Marshal and his time.

(spoken word, as presented in Corfu in the garden of the municipal gallery)

Mr. Giourgas, Mrs. Onisto, dear All,

thank you for giving me the chance to briefly honour one of our most famous family members in this wonderful environment. I am PWS and not a historian. I only collected stories about Johann Matthias during my 30 years period of being the chairman of the family association. Stories and history about a famous man do very often have the rank of myths. As you all know: Myths is a set of lies people have agreed upon. I am sure we have a great group of specialists in this garden here tonight, for example Sybil v. der Schulenburg, daughter of the poet Werner v. der Schulenburg. His biography about Johann Matthias von der Schulenburg, a novel called "Der König von Korfu" (The King of Corfu), published in the 1950s, somewhat romanticises him rather than portraying him as a leader and role model. When you don't agree with my version, please inform me!! But after the presentation.

According to the program I am now the 6th speaker for tonight. And a keynote speaker. What does that mean?

Firstly: Horrible for all, who are waiting for a cocktail.

Secondly: We have a wording: If the floor is open to him or her a Schulenburg will never stop talking.

Finally: My presentation in German and English was given to the organizers in December last year. I do accept that they now only want me to give you a brief summary of this presentation, because a keynote speaker has to reduce his presentation to a few arguments of principle relevance. That I will do now – for the next two hours.

Let me start with three statements so that you know when I will come to an end.

1. **Matthias Johann`s life reflects successes and defeats of a European nobleman in the 18th century**
2. **Europe to – day can learn from the situation 300 years ago.**
3. **Matthias Johann`s life allows conclusions for today.**

1. Matthias Johann`s life reflects successes and defeats

Matthias Johann v. der Schulenburg was born 1661 at a small and after the 30 years war relatively impoverished estate near Magdeburg. He was the eldest son of an old-established noble family. One of his younger sisters was to become the mistress of Electoral Prince of Hanover who later was crowned King George I of England, whom we will hear about later - with relevance to Corfu.

His father was a man with limited assets, although he later held significant positions in the service of the Great Electors of Brandenburg. Thus, he was able to provide his children with a relatively good education.

So Matthias Johann and his younger brother received private tutoring, university education at a local university and in Saumur/France, studying mathematics, French and Latin until he was 24 years old.

During his time in France, Central Europe was attacked on two fronts: from the West by Louis XIV and from the south by the Ottoman Empire. But the brothers didn`t care about that and continued their studies in Paris, and I quote: "to complete their formal and cultural education" with the result, that MJ was arrested for three months until his brother had paid off their schooling debts. However, this constellation of political and military power influenced the life of Matthias Johann for the next 62 years.

These 62 years can be divided in two parts:

- The first 30 years military experiences on behalf of four sovereigns: Brunswick, Savoyen, Saxonia- Poland and Holy Roman Empire with military

actions against the Ottoman Empire, France, Sweden, Bavaria as allies of France.

- The second part with 32 years of service for the Republic of Venice mainly against the Ottoman Empire. After his triumph here in Corfu he concentrated on a strategy, that is extremely modern: defence by deterrence. He put all his energy into the further fortification of Corfu, he convinced the Venetian Serenissima to start a developing program with olivetrees which by the end was the begin of a very good economic development of Corfu until today. And he enjoyed contacts and diplomatic actions on European level and became one of the leading art collectors of the 18th century on European level in 20 years only..

Let me show his first 30 years in 4 steps:

1. **1685 – 1697, 12 years in the service of the Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel court**

Against his father's expressed wishes and without his permission, Schulenburg joined the Duke of Brunswick's army and went 1686 on to fight for the **Imperial Army** in Hungary against **the Turks who in those days where the principal threat to Europe. He was successful.** So as a young man he took his own infantry, which was part of the Imperial Army's Brunswick quota, to the Rhine region and Flanders against the **French armies. Again he was successful.**

In 1690 Schulenburg (29) was promoted to the rank of major and by his Duke of Brunswick assigned to **diplomatic mission into European capitals, But he also continued his career as condottieri.**

In 1697 - after **several victories as young colonel with his dragoons against the French at the Rhine and Flanders** - he attended the Rejswijk Peace Congress which ended the war of **Palatine succession.** At this congress he was persuaded by the envoy of the Duke of Savoy, to enter into Savoy's service in Torino. He agreed.

2. 1697 - 1701, 4 years service in the Duke of Savoy's army, Turin

36-year-old Major General Schulenburg was given command of a German infantry regiment to take to Piedmont and fight the Waldensian rebels, which ended in a **bloody victory** in 1699 successfully. To his own disgust he didn't like to fight this group of protestants but the real reason was that they refused to pay salt tax to the Duke of Savoy.

Prince Eugene of Savoy, commander in chief of the imperial armed forces, was the admired role model for Matthias Johann. But the first meeting between the two men wasn't exactly cordial. This meeting also shows us how confused the relationships between the leading sovereigns in those days were. The **Duke of Savoy** had switched **allegiance from the German Emperor to the King of France, Louis XIV**, which definitely was not in Matthias Johann's interest. But he had to be loyal to his Duke. So Schulenburg found himself in a curious situation: at the **Battle of Chiari** in northern Italy in 1701, serving in Savoy's army with his German infantry and fighting for the French King Louis XIV in the war of Spanish succession against the Austrians, i.e. the German army under Prince Eugene. Defeated and severely wounded, he left Savoy's services.

Schulenburg sought for a position. The emperor refused, because he already had Prince Eugene.

3. 1701– 1711, 10 Years Electoral Saxonian and Royal Polish service

So Schulenburg served as a Lieutenant-General in the Saxonian-Polish army and fought for August the Strong

- against 20-year-old Charles XII of Sweden in Poland. He suffered a defeat from the Swedish king
- as commander in Chief of the saxonian Quota within the imperial Army against Louis XIV at the Rhine

- and against the united French and Bavarian army at Höchststadt 1702, where he was defeated.

But important for his reputation Europe wide was: He became a specialist in rear-guard actions or retreat, which was important when he later joined the Venetian Army.

After the peace treaty which was not in favour for the Saxonian Polish king, he was active in diplomatic missions for August the strong.

From 1707 Schulenburg spent the next years **in Flanders with Prince Eugene and John Churchill, 1.Duke of Marlborough.**

He was appointed as Commander-in-Chief of **the Saxonian troops in the Imperial Army**, and he led 40 of Prince Eugene's infantry battalions from different countries into the famous battles of Oudenarde, Lille, Tuornai and finally **Malplaquet 1709 - where he won a victory! And he left the Saxonian Army.**

4. **1711 - 1715, a jobless period**

Schulenburg began to look for a new job in various European capitals: Vienna, den Haag, London: **There, too, his negotiations were unsuccessful.**

So he welcomed the offer from the Venetian envoy in Vienna in November 1714 for him to step in as the successor to his former Saxonian-Polish Commander-in-Chief, Count Steinau, **in the Venetian service.** The Venetian Republic was at war with the Ottoman Turks and had suffered several defeats on land and, especially, at sea. The negotiations with Schulenburg were lengthy because the Venetian Republic was reluctant to accept his terms. (I am sorry to say that Mrs. Onisto, but he also was a gambler, I presume). **It was not until Venice had been repeatedly defeated by the Turks and Prince Eugene intervned that an agreement was reached.** Schulenburg entered into the Venetian Republic's service on 15 October 1715 for an annual salary of 10,000 Venetian Zechinis as "Marshal of the Venetian Land Forces", initially for three years.

The second term of his professional life lasted for 32 years in Venetian service only.

1715 - 1747, in the service of the Venetian Republic

Schulenburg went to Venice, where he was ceremoniously presented to the Senate and the Doges, but quickly ended his ceremonial lifestyle to focus on war as a result of a new threat from the Turks. He demanded that the Venetian land forces should be increased in number from 18,000 to 40,000 and that defence efforts should initially centre around the island of Corfu, which belonged to Venice at that time, to protect the Adriatic from a Turkish invasion. He got into his first disagreements with the political leaders - and there was the usual conflict between politics and the military. He travelled to Corfu, where he encountered disillusioned troops and barely defensible fortifications. During the following six months he managed to boost troop morale and improve the fortifications, though it was a difficult task in light of the lack of skilled workers.

The battle with the far superior Ottoman Turks began in mid-July and ended on 21 August 1716. The fortunes of that war were shaky and threatening to turn against the Venetians. Despite enormous efforts on the part of Schulenburg, the losses were relatively high. On 14 August, eight English cargo vessels with 1,500 men arrived as reinforcements. Evidently Schulenburg's sister Ehrengard-Melusine, the mistress of the English King, had again used a "pillow talk" to persuade the King to help out her beloved brother. Their defences stabilised over the next few days, the English made a sally and Schulenburg personally joined his troops in six counter attacks. As a result, the Turks lost 5,000 of their 16,000 troops and a miracle happened! The artillery fire fell silent on the night of 21 August. Everyone believed that the Turks were going to launch their decisive attack. Venetian reconnaissance patrols cautiously inspected the deserted Turkish outposts. On the morning of 22th August, Schulenburg realised that the Turks had made a hasty retreat from the island. After a 45-day siege, the Turks had lost 8,000 men and the Venetians had lost 1,500. From then on, Schulenburg was known as the "Victor of Corfu"

Naturally, we have to ask ourselves why the Turks suddenly fled from Corfu. It cannot have only been for the reason that the Venetians under Schulenburg's command had fought so bravely, or that most of the Turkish fleet had been destroyed in a storm, organised by St. Spiridon. The fact that the English king had provided assistance wasn't the main reason either. The real reason was probably that two weeks previously, Prince Eugene had won a decisive battle against the main Turkish army in the Balkans at Peterwardein. Europe celebrated Prince Eugene. So Schulenburg's success was overshadowed by Prince Eugene's.

He nevertheless received numerous congratulations and his annual salary was increased by 50% to 15,000 Venetian zecchins, plus an honorary sword worth 8,000 ducats. The Senate decided to have a statue made in his honour by a Venetian artist and it was erected on Corfu during Schulenburg's lifetime.

He spent the next 15 years building the Corfu fortress into one of Europe's strongest fortresses. Honours were lavished upon him everywhere he went. The Prussian king gave him the Order of the Black Eagle.

However, his active career was over. In the following 31 years of his life, all spent in Venetian service, he pursued a very modern objective: the use of military strength as a deterrent to ensure the safety of the Venetian Republic.

72-year-old Schulenburg had intended to retire in October 1733, when the war between the Kingdom of Sardinia and Austria broke out. He set up headquarters in Verona. Although he kept Venice out of the war, he was unable to prevent some Venetian territories being destroyed by French-Sardinian troops.

Without actively interfering in military operations of different wars in Europe at his time, Schulenburg lived out the rest of his days in Verona, where he died at the age of 85, always in loyalty with the Republic of Venice. He was given a ceremonial funeral at the San Giorgio Maggiore monastery in Venice. The Venetian Senate decided to build a tomb in his honour in the Venetian arsenal. So his body was moved there, and it has remained there up to the present day.

Conclusion: The life of Matthias Johann reflects defeat and success on European level.

2. Europe to – day can learn from the situation 300 years ago.

At the turn of the 17th /18th century Europe was extremely fragmented in states or independent regions..

Today we have about 30 states and several institutions of democratic origin.

At the turn of the 18th century wars within Europe were normal,

Today within the 30 States of Europe a war is beyond our imagination.

At the turn of the 18th century France and the Ottoman Empire were the dominant threats to central Europe.

To - day we feel a threat from Russia and Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire.

The means of warfare have been developed since 1700 – obviously.

300 years ago on the battlefield victory or defeat were dependent from the professional skills of the military leaders.

Today we have a battle for the minds - politically and religiously with smartphones and Internet. The Turks will no more come with swords, not per horses or per pedes, but with minibus, their families and their imams to quickly establish an Islamic infrastructure in their host countries. The Islam is still extremely successful with Prayer and Terror as “Peace Prize winner of the German Book Trade 2011”, Boualam Sansal stated, an Algerian poet, who – o wonder - is still alive.

What can we learn as conclusion?

It seems to me extremely important to have political leaders who accept the situation when a threat is posed on their country and accept a military leader in his professional excellence.

3. Matthias Johann`s life allows conclusions for today.

What are the conclusions of this life for us beyond the personal lifestyle of the nobility in those days? Extremely important for us is: he was born on an estate in the

poor Altmark, a little region in North Germany where our family has its sources. He was not a social climber! He started with an international education, he learned his profession from bottom up, he always had close relationship to the decision makers and solved their problems, he was personally involved in what he was doing, he enjoyed good health, which he attributed, I quote: "to moderation in all pleasures" and - for logical reasons – he was never married, but he had a great sense for his family, and he was loyal with his sovereigns. So he refused after his victory in Corfu the offers from the Courts in Vienna and Berlin to take over the command of their armed forces. He rather served the Republic of Venice with great loyalty, starting with the olive program here in Corfu and helping Venice in difficult diplomatic missions.

Conclusion:

Matthias Johann Count v. der Schulenburg was one of the very few European Field Marshalls who as Commanding Officer of a multinational army had protected Europe from an Ottoman invasion. Corfu and Germany have one experience in common: both never had been occupied by the Ottoman Empire, though this empire within the span of 1529 and 1791 tried for 80 years to occupy both. I hope this belongs to our collective memory and that we will find leading persons of Matthias Johann's statue in Europe who are able on short notice to protect us with modern means from the attack from two aggressive fronts: **Turkey as the successor of the Ottoman Empire and Russia as the successor of the Czar empire.** History is a good teacher. The life of Matthias Johann also.

Thank you for listening to my presentation, Ladies and Gentlemen.