

## PARTICIPATION OF THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN NAVY IN THE CRETE OPERATION 1897–1898

### SODELOVANJE AVSTRO-OGRSKE VOJNE MORNARICE V OPERACIJI NA KRETI 1897–1898

Izvirni znanstveni članek

**Povzetek** Čeprav Avstro-Ogrska v Evropi ni bila priznana kot pomorska sila, je vendarle imela zelo pomembno vlogo v vojaški misiji na Kreti od leta 1897 do 1898. Izrednega pomena ni bilo le uradno sodelovanje avstro-ogrskih pomorskih sil, temveč tudi pripravljenost najvišjih državnih organov, da si prizadevajo za mir in stabilnost v regiji. Tako je avstro-ogrška vojna mornarica, skupaj z drugimi, uspela vzpostaviti pomorsko blokado otoka Krete. Takšna izolacija spora je bila odločilna. Še pomembnejša pa je bila vloga avstro-ogrskih kopenskih sil, natančneje 2. bataljona 87. pehotnega polka, in sicer pri transportu, logistični podpori, morebitni ognjeni podpori in poveljevanju.

**Ključne besede** *Avstro-ogrška vojna mornarica, Kreta, pomorska blokada.*

**Abstract** Although Austro-Hungary was not recognised as a naval power in Europe, it played a very important role in the military mission to Crete in 1897–1898. Not only was the formal participation of the Austro-Hungarian naval forces extremely important, but also the will of the highest state authorities for peace and stability in the region. Therefore, the Austro-Hungary Navy, along with other navies, was able to provide a naval blockade of the island of Crete. This isolation of the conflict was crucial, but the more important role was transportation, logistical support, possible firepower assistance and command of the Austro-Hungarian ground forces – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

**Key words** *Austro-Hungarian navy, Crete, naval blockade.*

**Introduction** The Austro-Hungarian participation in the international operation on and around Crete in 1897–98 was an intervention by naval forces in the interest of foreign policy, both from the point of view of the Dual Monarchy as well as from a wider European perspective. This intervention was organised by the “Concert of Europe”, consisting

then of the six major European powers: Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia.<sup>1</sup> This was “naval diplomacy”, i.e. the use of naval forces for diplomatic aims.<sup>2</sup>

Naval forces appear particularly well suited for intervention in crises because they are mobile and able to remain operational over long periods. They are easily deployable outside of a country’s own territorial waters, but can also be withdrawn in case of need without excessive “loss of face”. Even their mere presence, short of actual intervention, can exert a certain influence by creating a sort of “passive force”, moving the decision (and the blame) of escalating the conflict by “firing the first shot” to the other side.<sup>3</sup>

For the Austro-Hungarian Navy – officially called the Imperial & Royal (I&R, or *k.u.k.* in German) Navy<sup>4</sup> – the main operational area was the Eastern Mediterranean. Participation in the Crete mission was the last operation of its kind in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also the longest and most important intervention undertaken by the Austro-Hungarian fleet.

## 1 THE WAY TO THE INTERNATIONAL BLOCKADE

The Ottoman Empire conquered the island of Crete in a long and bloody campaign between 1645 and 1669, culminating in the three-year long siege of Candia. Following the Greek War of Independence after 1821, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece in 1830, several uprisings against Ottoman domination took place. A large majority of the population was Greek-Orthodox: in 1900, 271,000 out of 310,000 inhabitants were Orthodox, and only 32,000 Muslims. Many Muslims were not ethnic Turks, but of Greek origin, who had converted to Islam at some point. Most Greek-Cretans demanded independence and union with the Hellenic state. The Sultan, however, was not willing to renounce this strategically important island.

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich von Gentz coined this term in 1806 in his book *Fragmente aus der Geschichte des politischen Gleichgewichts von Europa* (Fragments from the History of Political Balance in Europe). The basis for the Concert of Europe was the Treaty of Chaumont, signed on 1 March 1814 between Great Britain, Austria, Russia and Prussia. Later, France and Italy acceded to this treaty. Gentz himself (born 2 May 1764 in Breslau, died 9 June 1832 in Weinhaus near Vienna) joined the Austrian civil service in 1802 and was assistant to Prince Metternich, the Austrian State Chancellor, who was also referred to as „Secretary of Europe“ during the Congress of Vienna (1814–15).

<sup>2</sup> See Lennart Souchon, »Seestreitkräfte und maritime Machtpolitik: Eine Untersuchung zur Wechselwirkung von Seemacht und Außenpolitik«, in: Heinrich Walle (ed.), *Der Einsatz von Seestreitkräften im Dienste der auswärtigen Politik, Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Marine Instituts 3* (Herford 1983), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wilfried Hofmann, »Die Rolle von Seestreitkräften in der Außenpolitik«, in: *ibid.*, 139.

<sup>4</sup> With the Compromise Agreement (*Ausgleich*) of 1867, Austria and Hungary became two distinct countries united by the dynasty and certain »common« institutions such as the ministries of foreign affairs and of war. To distinguish the various institutions, »common« (i.e. Austro-Hungarian) affairs were officially called *kaiserlich und königlich* (i.e. Imperial [Austrian] and Royal [Hungarian]) or *k. und k.* (also *k.u.k.*) from October 1889 on (see *Normalverordnungsblatt für die k. und k. Kriegsmarine XXXII. Stück 1889, Nr. 51*). In contrast, “Austrian” institutions were referred to as *kaiserlich-königlich* or *k.k.* (i.e. Imperial [Austrian] – Royal [Bohemian, etc.]), whereas Hungarian ones were simply *königlich ungarisch* or *k.u.* (Royal Hungarian). The navy, as part of the “common” military establishment, was therefore *k.u.k.*

In late April 1866, the consuls of the European powers on Crete reported on a reuniting of dissidents who were discussing future action.<sup>5</sup> The dissidents wrote a petition demanding reforms, but promised to wait with further action until they had received an answer from the Porte. This answer never arrived, and the protesters eventually decided to take up arms, being encouraged to do so by promises of moral and military support from the Greek mainland. The uprising started in late 1866.<sup>6</sup>

The uprising forced the European Powers and the United States to intervene in order to prevent Greek interference in, and escalation of, the conflict. Austrian, British, French, Italian, Russian and US vessels patrolled the waters around Crete from late 1866 on, with an international station established in the Bay of Souda (Suda).<sup>7</sup> Austria first sent the frigate *Donau* (Danube), followed by the frigates *Radetzky* and *Adria* and several smaller vessels. The main task of the coalition forces was to protect citizens from the various European nations and to prevent shipments of arms from mainland Greece.<sup>8</sup> The international fleet continued its presence in the waters around Crete until the end of 1868. The Greek population of the island put up spirited resistance, and the Ottoman authorities only got the upper hand in 1868.

Ten years later, possible autonomy for Crete was among the issues discussed at the Congress of Berlin, but the Halepa Treaty of October 1878 failed to lead to a long-term solution of the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Two decades after the uprising of 1866, Greek inhabitants of the island started a new insurrection against Ottoman rule. Both sides committed outrageous brutalities, and war between Greece and Turkey appeared likely. Nevertheless, the European Powers once again decided to maintain stability in the Eastern Mediterranean by supporting the “sick man on the Bosphorus” – as the once powerful Ottoman Empire was then often referred to – against Greece.<sup>10</sup> British, Russian, Italian, German and Austro-Hungarian ships were again deployed to the region, assembled in an international squadron, under British command, in 1886.

The task of the international fleet was to prevent war between Greece and Turkey. Therefore, a blockade was organised, both for the Greek ports and for the island

<sup>5</sup> *About the activities of the consuls, cf. Leopold Kammerhofer, »Das Konsularwesen in der Habsburgermonarchie (1752–1918): Ein Überblick mit Schwerpunkt auf Südosteuropa«, in: Harald Heppner (ed.), Der Weg führt über Österreich ...: Zur Geschichte des Verkehrs- und Nachrichtenwesens von und nach Südosteuropa (18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart), Zur Kunde Südosteuropas II/21 (Wien 1996), 7–35.*

<sup>6</sup> *See Robert Wagner, Der kretische Aufstand 1866/67 bis zur Mission von Ali Paschas (Bern 1908); and Wolfgang Elz, Die europäischen Großmächte und der kretische Aufstand 1866-1867, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa 28 (Stuttgart 1988).*

<sup>7</sup> *In general, place names are spelt as they are in the contemporary sources.*

<sup>8</sup> *Peter Handel-Mazzetti, »Die Auslandsmissionen der einstigen k.k. Kriegsmarine von ihren Anfängen bis zur Auflösung der Donaumonarchie«, in: Nauticus: Jahrbuch für Deutschlands Seeinteressen 26 (Berlin 1943).*

<sup>9</sup> *See Daniel Nikolopoulos, »Die völkerrechts-historische Entwicklung Kretas« (unpubl. staatswissenschaftl. Diss., University of Vienna 1966).*

<sup>10</sup> *About this and further international actions, see Stephan Verosta, Kollektivaktionen der Mächte des Europäischen Konzerts 1886–1914 (Wien 1988).*

itself, to prevent escalation of the conflict. Austria-Hungary contributed several ships, under the command of Rear Admiral Hermann Spaun.<sup>11</sup> From 9 May to 7 June 1886, this squadron, with *Kaiser Max* (Emperor Max) as flagship, patrolled the Bay of Volos in Greece (situated about halfway between Athens and Saloniki).<sup>12</sup> The Austro-Hungarian units included the then newly introduced torpedo boats, which proved well suited to patrols in coastal waters. Eventually, Greece had to back down in the face of action by the Powers and reduced the size of its army in the summer. By August, the Austro-Hungarian ships had left Cretan waters again – and few people would have expected that a new intervention was about to take place within only a few years.

In 1895, the so-called “Reform Committee” for Crete was founded in Vamos.<sup>13</sup> This committee did not immediately aim at full independence, nor at a union with Greece, but rather opted for the consensual granting of a certain autonomy status within the Ottoman Empire. This movement had a rather conservative character, partly because many Cretans had lost their illusions after so many uprisings had failed. Therefore, the leaders of the Reform Committee hoped for a peaceful resolution of the conflict with Turkey, and hoped to achieve a compromise in negotiations. This was contrary to the aims of the Greek government, however, which supported the more radical followers of the advocate Eleftherios Venizelos.<sup>14</sup> Because it maintained the long-term vision of the full unification of Crete with mainland Greece, the Greek government even demanded the dissolution of the moderate Reform Committee as being opposed to Greek interests.

The leaders of the Crete reform movement recognised that a peaceful solution could only be reached through the support of the European Powers and thus sought the assistance of the foreign consuls on the island. The Powers at first were still reluctant to sacrifice the status quo as late as 1895. Britain in particular feared a shift of power in the Mediterranean following a possible union of the island with Greece. However, in April 1896, new unrest broke out on Crete, leading to severe clashes between Greek and Turkish inhabitants. The European consuls in Chania (Canea) started consultations among themselves and with their foreign ministries. In June 1896, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Count Agenor Goluchowski, started an initiative for a joint

<sup>11</sup> Hermann Spaun (born 9 May 1833, died 7 June 1919 in Gorizia), later became Commander-in-Chief of the Navy in 1898 and retired in 1904. See Hans Hugo Sokol, *Des Kaisers Seemacht: Die k.k. österreichische Kriegsmarine 1848 bis 1914* (Wien 1980), 144.

<sup>12</sup> Lothar Höbelt, »Die Marine«, in: Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (eds.), *Die bewaffnete Macht, Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918, Vol. V* (Wien 1987), 762.

<sup>13</sup> See Anton Tuma v. Waldkampf, *Kreta und die neueste Phase der orientalischen Frage* (Leipzig 1897).

<sup>14</sup> Eleftherios Venizelos (born 23 August 1864 in Mournies/Crete, died 18 March 1936 in Paris) had spent part of his childhood in exile because his father had to flee the island after the rebellion of 1866. Since 1888, Venizelos fought actively for the unification of Crete with mainland Greece. He became minister of justice in Crete in 1899–1901, founded the Liberal Party in 1910 and served as Greek prime minister from 1910–15. In 1916, he led a successful revolt against the king, served as head of government again until 1920 and then went into exile. During his term as prime minister, Greece joined the Entente Powers in 1917. He became prime minister again in 1924, 1928–32 and 1932–33. Following yet another attempted coup (against the Tsaldaris government) in 1935, Venizelos went into exile again.

action by the Powers.<sup>15</sup> The Austro-Hungarian ambassadors in Paris and St. Petersburg signalled a positive reaction, but London still hesitated, eventually agreeing to a joint demarche of the powers, while excluding any direct intervention. Few people would have expected that the British government would actually initiate an armed intervention only eight months later, this time in agreement with the Porte, however.

The six Powers continued to search for a resolution of the Crete question. Their ambassadors in Constantinople met regularly for consultations. In August 1896, they presented a new ordinance for the island, establishing three international commissions: two for the re-organisation of the gendarmerie and the justice system, respectively, and a control commission consisting of the consuls of the Powers. The Porte reluctantly agreed to these demands, but – facing further uprisings in Armenia and other borderlands – feared that concessions for Crete might encourage other minority groups to demand more autonomy.

In January 1897, armed clashes between Orthodox/Greek and Muslim/Turkish groups on Crete broke out anew. On 31 January, Muslims in Chania killed a group of Greek notables. Christian inhabitants of Chania and Rethimno (Retimo) took up arms in revenge, and civil war soon spread to other parts of the island. The Austro-Hungarian consul Julius Pinter (himself a former intelligence officer who in general supported the demands of the Christian Cretans) asked for military support.<sup>16</sup> On 3 February, two Austro-Hungarian warships, the cruiser *Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia* (Empress and Queen Maria Theresia) and the torpedo boat *Sebenico* were ordered from Piraeus to Crete, where they arrived on the following day.<sup>17</sup> In cooperation with the consulate, the warships would guarantee the safety of Austrian and Hungarian as well as German citizens.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the other Powers sent ships to Crete.

The uprising continued to escalate. On 25 January, the Greek government issued an appeal to the “Cretan brothers”, calling for the island’s reunion with the Greek motherland. The ambassadors’ conference in Constantinople now also had to consider measures to prevent active Greek intervention in the conflict.<sup>19</sup> This soon materialised, when the Greek torpedo squadron, commanded by none less than Captain

<sup>15</sup> *Agenor Maria Adam Graf Goluchowski* (born 25 March 1849 in Lemberg (Lviv), died 28 March 1921 in Lemberg); Austro-Hungarian foreign minister 1895–1906.

<sup>16</sup> *Julius Pinter* (born 30 October 1852 in Pancsova/Hungary, died after 1927) attended the military academy at Wiener Neustadt, being commissioned in 1872. He served for thirteen years in the army, including positions in the general staff and the intelligence service. In 1886, he moved to the consular service of the foreign ministry, serving in Jassy (Romania), Philippopol/Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Warsaw and Janina/Ioannina (Greece). From 1892 until 1909, he was consul general for Crete, and then served at the consulate in Beirut until his retirement in 1913. In 1918, he became citizen of the SHS Kingdom (= Yugoslavia), residing in Warasdin (Pinter’s personnel files are in the Austrian State Archives in Vienna [Österreichisches Staatsarchiv = ÖStA]: Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv [= HHSStA], Adm. Reg. F 4/Karton 260; and Archiv der Republik [= AdR], Neue Adm. Reg. F 4/Karton 85).

<sup>17</sup> ÖStA: Kriegsarchiv [= KA], *Ship’s Diary »Maria Theresia«*, entry of 4 February 1897.

<sup>18</sup> As there was no German representative on the island, the Austro-Hungarian consul was also responsible for the protection of German interests.

<sup>19</sup> See: *Berthold Sutter*, ‘Die Großmächte und die Erhaltung des europäischen Friedens zu Beginn der Kreta-Krise von 1897’, in: *Südostforschungen* 21 (München 1962).

Prince George, the king's younger son,<sup>20</sup> was ordered to Crete on 10 February. The squadron, comprising the battleship *Hydra*, the cruiser *Miaulis* and six torpedo boats, reached Cretan waters on the next day. On 15 February, Greek troops commanded by Colonel Timoleon Vassos landed at Sitia.<sup>21</sup> Among Vassos' first acts was to issue a proclamation to the island's authorities, claiming the occupation of Crete in the name of King George of Greece. Joint action by the Powers now seemed unavoidable.

## 2 THE BLOCKADE OF THE ISLAND BY THE POWERS

Vassos' proclamation forced a reaction from the Powers. They immediately protested the unilateral annexation of the island by Greece as contrary to international law. The Austro-Hungarian delegate called for an immediate blockade of Greek ports by international forces.

On 16 February 1897, only one day after the landing of Vassos' Greek troops, naval landing detachments from the international ships took up positions in Chania, mainly to protect the international consulates. The landing parties comprised 100 ratings each from Britain, France, Italy and Russia, and 50 from Austria-Hungary. Colonel Vassos was informed that any action by him would force the international fleet to open fire. Within a few days, the international fleet was reinforced and eventually comprised sixty-seven ships: twenty-three Italian, nineteen British, nine each from Russia and Austria-Hungary, and seven from France. Later, a German cruiser joined the international fleet as well. The Austro-Hungarian squadron reached Crete on 22 February, under the command of Rear Admiral Johann von Hinke.<sup>22</sup>

Parallel to these military measures, the ambassadors' conference in Constantinople still tried to achieve a diplomatic solution. In late February, the situation on the island deteriorated when insurgent forces, supported by Vassos, blocked access to the capital city of Chandia on 23 February and occupied the important city of Akrotiri two days later. A growing number of Cretans, also from the interior parts of the island, joined the insurgents.

On 2 March, the ambassadors of the European Powers addressed joint demarches to both the Turkish and the Greek governments, stating that a union of the island with Greece was out of the question and that the only possible solution was to negotiate

<sup>20</sup> Prince George, (born 24 June 1869 Corfu, died 25 November 1957), commanded the Greek navy in the Aegean in 1897, high commissioner of Crete, 1898–1906.

<sup>21</sup> Timoleon (Timelnon) Vassos came from an old noble family of the Armatole, in the Rumelian Mountains. His father, General Vassos, had already gained a hero's reputation during the Greek War of Independence, and Timoleon Vassos started a political career in 1862. He studied in Greece and abroad, and was generally seen as one of Greece's most able officers, also enjoying the king's friendship. He was married to Baroness Testa, the daughter of an Austrian diplomat.

<sup>22</sup> Johann Evangelist Edler von Hinke (born in Verona on 3 June 1837, died in Vienna on 24 March 1904) attended the Naval Cadet College in Trieste, being commissioned as a cadet on 8 August 1853. He retired on 1 November 1901 as vice admiral. A detailed biography was published by Gilbert von Randich, »Johann Edler von Hinke – ein k.(u.)k. Admiral«, in: *Marine - Gestern, Heute* 13 (Wien 1986), 132 ff.

a state of autonomy for Crete. In order to implement a peace plan, the Powers demanded the withdrawal of all regular Greek forces from Crete. Greece opposed this, and Colonel Vassos continued to support the insurgents with military advisers and arms.

Therefore, the Powers saw themselves forced to order a blockade of all Greek ports, as well as the island of Crete, in order to prevent Greek supplies of arms or additional forces to the insurgents. When the Greek government ignored a renewed appeal to withdraw the Greek forces, the blockade of Crete started on 21 March 1897, at 8:00 in the morning.<sup>23</sup>

Two days before, on 19 March, the international commanders had reached an agreement for the implementation of the blockade. In the area between 34°45' and 35°48' North, and between 23°24' and 26°30' East, all ships and vessels were to be stopped and searched by warships of the international fleet.

Within this area, the Powers were assigned blockade zones. Thus, Austria-Hungary was responsible for the Bay of Kissamo and the Western coast as far as Elaphonisi. Russian ships patrolled between Cape Meleka and Cape Dia, British units from there to Cape Spinalonga, and French ships between Cape Spinalonga and Cape Plaka. Italian units covered the area between Cape Plaka and Kaloyeri. Chania and Souda Bay became an international *rayon d'action*, patrolled by a cruiser division comprising ships from all Powers, including the single German cruiser *Kaiserin Augusta* (Empress Augusta).<sup>24</sup>

By now, the international fleet had grown to seventy-three ships: twenty from Britain, eighteen from Italy, sixteen from Austria-Hungary, ten from France, eight from Russia and one from Germany.<sup>25</sup> In order to direct the operations of this international fleet, an "Admirals' Council" was established, consisting of the commanding officers from all six Powers. The presiding officer was – by seniority – the Italian admiral, with an Austro-Hungarian deputy. Discussions were in French, and decisions were agreed on unanimously. The meetings took place on different ships in turn.

The Admirals' Council was the highest authority for all ships and troops despatched to Crete. The mission was to re-establish and maintain peace and stability, and to protect the Turkish forces remaining on the island, along with consuls and any foreign citizens. The admirals maintained continuous contact with the Porte's representatives on the island, but also sought to act as mediators for the population. On

<sup>23</sup> Geza Dell'Adami, *Die k.u.k. Streitkräfte auf und vor Kreta 1897/98* (Wien 1901), 57.

<sup>24</sup> See: Hans-Otto Koellner, »Deutschlands Vertretung während der Unruhen auf Kreta 1897«, in: *Marine-Rundschau* 42 (Berlin 1937).

<sup>25</sup> For details about the German, French, Italian and Russian contingents, see: *ibid.*; H. De la Martinière, *La Marine Française en Crète* (Paris 1911); Rudolfo Puletti, "10 Anni a Creta", in: *Armi: Rivista d'informazione internazionale* (Milano 1987); Harald Fock, *Vom Zarenadler zum Roten Stern. Die Geschichte der russischen/sowjetischen Marine* (Herford 1985). The only German ship, the *Kaiserin Augusta*, left the Crete operation on 15 November 1897. It was replaced only in the course of 1898 by the *Oldenburg*.

the operational side, the Admirals' Council had to harmonise the blockade activities in order to establish a coordinated plan of action and rules of engagement.

In due course, the naval landing parties were replaced by army forces – eventually, the international force on Crete comprised close to 20,000 soldiers. To maintain security and take over functions no longer performed by the Turkish authorities, an Admirals' Council had to take over activities that we would nowadays summarise under the term “wider peacekeeping”, such as establishing the Admirals' Court (again, comprising representatives from all six Powers) and taking over police and justice functions on Crete.

At the same time, Greece and Turkey moved closer to war elsewhere. Fighting broke out in Thessaly and Epirus, and Greek forces moved into Macedonia to start an insurgency there. This Greek-Turkish War of 1897 ended with a swift Greek defeat, however. Upon an appeal by the Czar, the Sultan ordered a cease-fire on 20 May, and a peace agreement was signed in September. Greece had to agree to the handover of a part of Thessaly to Turkey, and pay an indemnity of four million pounds. These events obviously affected developments in Crete. The European Powers were involved in the peace treaty of September 1897 and could at least claim that their intervention on Crete had succeeded in keeping that island out of the war operations.

### 3 AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE CRETE OPERATION<sup>26</sup>

#### The Austro-Hungarian Squadron<sup>27</sup>

The flagship of the Austro-Hungarian squadron, the armed cruiser *Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia*, was based in Souda Bay along with the commanders' ships of the other Powers.

The main base for the Austro-Hungarian naval force, however, was Kissamo Bay, where Leodegar Kneissler von Maixdorf, commanding officer of the *Kronprinzessin Erzherzogin Stephanie* (Crown Princess Archduchess Stephanie), was in command.<sup>28</sup> The Austro-Hungarian blockade squadron was complete when altogether fifteen ships had arrived off Crete by the end of April 1897. In May, the depot ship *Cyclops* joined

<sup>26</sup> This is based on the official account by Dell'Adami, k.u.k. Streitkräfte, and on the sources in the War Archives in Vienna: ÖStA: KA, Marinesektion: Operationskanzlei, files 1897: X-8/2 (Blockade), 1897: X-8/3 (Entsendung der Truppen), 1898: X-8/1 (Konsularberichte), 1898: X-8/2 (Blockade), 1898: X-8/3 (Einberufung der Truppen), and 1898: X-8/5 (Internationale Truppen).

<sup>27</sup> See the list of ships in the annex.

<sup>28</sup> Leodegar Kneissler von Maixdorf (born on 21 November 1844 in Olomouc, died 20 February 1925 in St. Pölten) had a distinguished naval career. He joined the marines as a cadet on 8 April 1861, becoming a naval cadet on 10 October 1862. In 1866, he served during the sea battle of Lissa aboard the armoured frigate *Kaiser Max*. After serving on various ships and completing several courses, he was promoted to captain on 1 November 1895 and was given command of the *Stephanie* in February 1897. For his service during the Crete operation he was awarded the Order of the Iron Crown (3<sup>rd</sup> Class). In 1901, he was appointed commanding officer of the Trieste naval district and promoted to rear admiral. Promoted to vice admiral in 1905 and admiral in 1910, he retired in 1911. For a detailed biography, see Dieter Winkler, “Admiral Leodegar Kneissler von Maixdorf”, in: *Marine - Gestern, Heute 9* (Wien 1982), 1f.



the squadron, which made it easier to repair minor damage, as the Turkish arsenal in Souda had only limited capacities, and its equipment was largely outdated.

### **The Austro-Hungarian Blockade**

The radius of action of the Austro-Hungarian blockade reached from Cape Spatha in the North to Cape Elaphonisi (Elaphonist) in the South, thus including the complete western coastline. This stretch of some fifty-four nautical miles (100 kilometres), situated immediately opposite Greece, was divided into two parts by the Bay of Kissamo. It was considered a particularly demanding section of the blockade, because the many small bays and shallow waters made it difficult for larger ships to operate, while providing ample opportunities for the smaller fishing and transport boats used by Greek smugglers.

The Greeks used the small islands of Cerigo and Cerigotto, west of Agria Grabusa, as bases for their activities. The many reefs protected the small boats well against bad weather as well as the international ships. Pondikonisi, an uninhabited rock some seven nautical miles (ca. thirteen kilometres) west of Agria Grabusa, served as a depot for the arms, ammunition and food supplies that were unloaded there by Greek boats and collected by insurgents during the night. When the Austro-Hungarian ships started to use searchlights during night patrols, these activities swiftly ceased.

When a boat was intercepted by a ship of the coalition forces, it was inspected. If arms or ammunition were found on board, these were confiscated and the boat handed over to the “prize court” established by the admirals in Souda. However, in most cases the confiscated boat was eventually returned to its owners after some time.

During their patrols off Crete, the international ships mainly faced Greek civilian vessels, many of which were armed, however, and sometimes opened fire on the international patrols. These were restricted from using force to avoid further escalation or the accidental sinking of harmless civilian vessels, which would have given the Greek authorities a pretext to accuse the international force of crimes against humanity. Often, Greek vessels would display neutral flags, wait for the international ships to approach, and then quickly change the flags and open fire. In addition, international ships operating close to the coast were often shot at from insurgents on land, firing from well-camouflaged positions.

Eventually, partly because of the Greek defeat in the short war against Turkey, the smuggling activities gradually receded. As a consequence, the naval patrols close to the shore became less important, and the torpedo boats, which had been most useful for these operations, were recalled, the last ones leaving the squadron by the end of October. Whereas the original aim of the international intervention had been to prevent interference from mainland Greece, the focus shifted in the summer of 1897 to maintaining peace and stability on the island itself. The main purpose of the

operation now was to prevent armed clashes between Greek-Cretan insurgents and Turkish forces or Muslim civilians.

### The Deployment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment<sup>29</sup>

In early March 1897, the admirals of the naval forces assembled off Crete demanded that their governments immediately deploy land forces and that each Power should contribute one battalion of 600 men in order to maintain security in the major towns on the island.

In Vienna, three regiments – Nos. 22, 87 and 97<sup>30</sup> – were being considered to contribute an Austro-Hungarian battalion to the international force. Eventually, the authorities selected the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and its 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, as no suitable battalion commanders were available in the other regiments.<sup>31</sup> Colonel Leo Guzek was well-suited for this mission, not only because he was an experienced officer, but also a gifted linguist, speaking Polish, French, English and Spanish, besides German, and even having some basic knowledge of Turkish.<sup>32</sup>

The battalion was ordered to be completely equipped for field duty, with spare uniforms for each soldier and sufficient supplies of shirts, underwear and boots. Officers were authorised to take their “small baggage” as well as their full dress uniforms with them. Because of the climate on Crete, the soldiers were issued additional field blouses and field caps with neck covers from linen or wool at the end of April. These caps with neck covers proved less than ideal, however, and in May a tropical helmet (called H1) was introduced,<sup>33</sup> representing the first time that Austro-Hungarian soldiers had ever been issued such helmets.<sup>34</sup>

The soldiers had a supply of 300 rounds per rifle and 50 rounds per revolver. Further equipment consisted of one hay sack (empty), one pillow, four linen sheets, one winter and one summer blanket for each man. Only officers had complete beds. To house the soldiers, the battalion had thirty tents for thirty men each. There was also one medical barrack (of the Döcker model) and the necessary medical equipment. Dr. Karl Pavlecka from the 7<sup>th</sup> Garrison Hospital in Graz was attached to the battalion as its medical officer. The battalion was also issued maps of Crete.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the documents from the Emperor's Military Office: ÖStA: KA, Militärkanzlei Seiner Majestät (= MKSM), 1897 and 1898.

<sup>30</sup> Regiment 22 came from the Sinj (Senj) region on the Dalmatian coast, 87 from Cilli (Celje) and 97 from Trieste. Thus, all three regiments under consideration came from the immediate coastal region or its hinterland.

<sup>31</sup> ÖStA: KA, MKSM 69-3/1-1 ex 1897.

<sup>32</sup> Leo Guzek (born 5 April 1848 in Sanok/Galicia, died after 1914 probably in Krakow) served for most of his military career, which started in 1869, on the engineer staff. Promoted to major on 1 May 1890, he became a lieutenant colonel on 1 November 1893, and a full colonel on 1 May 1896. From 28 March 1895, he was seconded to the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry and eventually transferred to that regiment on 9 April 1897. Following the Crete operation, he was transferred to the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on 13 May 1898 and retired on 1 May 1900. See his personnel records in the ÖStA: KA, Qualifikationsliste (Karton 906), Pensionsprotokoll Oberste (Band 4, pag. 29), and Ruhestandsschematismus.

<sup>33</sup> ÖStA: KA, MKSM 6-1/2 ex 1897.

<sup>34</sup> Tropical helmets were issued to the navy, however, and were also issued to Austro-Hungarian troops in the Middle East during the First World War.

Transport from Trieste to Crete was aboard a steamship from the Austrian Lloyd company, which cost the Navy 25,000 florins.<sup>35</sup> From its arrival, the battalion served under orders of the commanding officer of SMS *Stephanie*. During their deployment on Crete, the navy regulations were in force for the soldiers as well.

On the island, one company formed part of the international force at Chania, whereas the other three companies served at Souda. Two companies were housed in the Turkish arsenal there, and one company protected the nearby telegraph station. This company also had two artillery pieces: one 70 mm landing gun from SMS *Maria Theresia* and one Italian 75 mm field gun.

### **Fighting the Insurgents**

A problem for the international force was that the majority of the insurgents – with the exceptions of Vassos’ regulars – consisted of irregular forces using small war tactics and were difficult to control.<sup>36</sup>

Among the tasks of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers was the protection of the road between Souda and Chania, where patrols often experienced clashes with insurgent forces. In addition, expeditions were sent to the interior to protect Muslim civilians besieged and attacked by insurgents. The first such action took place in mid-March 1897 to relieve Kandanos. This action prompted a letter of gratitude from the Turkish civilian governor, who thanked the Austrians, and Admiral Hinke in particular, who had initiated this action in the Admirals’ Council. To protect Kissamo, the main base for the Austro-Hungarian naval squadron, two blockhouses above the bay had to be destroyed in order to prevent them from being taken by the insurgents.

The operation on Crete demanded diplomatic skill in order to avoid any impression of partiality when dealing with the two sides. Eventually, the Austro-Hungarian soldiers gained the recognition of both the Turkish authorities and the insurgents.

## **4 PEACE PLANS, THE NEW HIGH COMMISSIONER AND THE REDEPLOYMENT OF THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN CONTINGENT**

For their peace initiative for Crete, the Powers could bring in experience gained in earlier similar cases. There existed two models for addressing the situation of non-Turkish populations in the Ottoman Empire: one was to grant autonomy as a “privileged province” within the framework of the Turkish constitution. The other was the concept of “suzerainty” – the region in question became a quasi-independent state that remained only formally within the Ottoman Empire, to be ruled by a governor nominally appointed by the Sultan, whose rule was recognised by the

<sup>35</sup> *ÖStA: KA, MKSM 69-3/1-8 ex 1897.*

<sup>36</sup> See: B. [?], »Gliederung und Kampfweise der Insurgenten auf Kreta (Originalbericht)«, in: *Streffleurs Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift, Volume II of 1897.*

annual payment of tribute. In reality, however, the state was independent except for the name, with certain limitations only in the realm of foreign relations.<sup>37</sup>

For Crete, the Powers preferred the second option, with a high commissioner acceptable to both sides in the conflict. Work on the Cretan autonomy statute started in March 1897, at the beginning of the military intervention. But the choice of governor proved contentious and eventually led to disharmony within the Concert of Europe by January 1898.

In late 1897, some Powers, notably France and Russia, appeared to favour the nomination of Prince George of Greece – the very same naval officer who had led the Greek naval forces during the early stages of the Cretan operations. Germany and Austria-Hungary opposed this option, and Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Count Goluchowski even threatened to end participation in the international operation and thus terminate cooperation with the Concert of Europe, because the appointment of a Greek prince would have meant a change in the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean, not to protect it. But France and Russia managed to convince Britain and Italy to support Prince George's candidature. The Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Constantinople, Calice, tried in vain to negotiate a compromise with his colleagues. His German counterpart, Baron von Marschall, reported in late February 1898 that the situation was a complete mess (*"in einem Stadium vollkommener Versumpfung"*).<sup>38</sup>

Eventually, Germany withdrew her contingent from Crete on 16 March 1898. A week later, Austria-Hungary followed, and the Austrian delegations in St. Petersburg, London, Paris, Rome and Berlin were advised on 23 March by their host governments that Austria-Hungary would withdraw her naval forces and the infantry battalion from the international operation.

**Conclusion** With the withdrawal of the German and Austro-Hungarian contingents in March 1898, the Crete operation partially lost its character as a joint effort by the Concert of Europe. However, the four Powers which remained – Britain, France, Italy and Russia, now referred to as the "Crete Powers" (*Kretamächte*) – continued to work toward a settlement and regularly informed Germany and Austria-Hungary about developments on the island. Both countries remained involved in diplomatic decision-making processes.

Prince George indeed became the high commissioner of Crete. By December 1898, the four Allied Powers felt that tensions had calmed down sufficiently to lift the blockade of March 1897 and to reduce the number of naval forces off Crete. The

<sup>37</sup> This concept was not limited to regions of the Ottoman Empire. Following the First Anglo-Boer War of 1881, for example, Transvaal was granted limited independence under the concept of suzerainty before achieving full independence as the South African Republic in 1884.

<sup>38</sup> Report by Freiherr von Marschall to Reichskanzler Fürst von Hohenlohe, Constantinople, 26 February 1898, in: *Alte und neue Balkanhändel 1896–1899, Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914, Vol. 12/2* (Berlin 1923), 486.

Greek defeat in the short war against Turkey also helped stabilise the situation, at least for some time.

But Greek-Turkish relations deteriorated again and new unrest broke out on Crete in 1905. Since 1898, Crete had had a flag of its own, symbolising the position of the island: it showed a Greek cross (in white on blue), but with the Turkish crescent and star (white on red) in the quarter. When Greek nationalists hoisted the Greek flag on the fortress of Chania to demonstrate their claims of union with the mainland, the four Powers strongly condemned this action, and the flag had to be removed immediately. In 1905, Price George resigned as high commissioner and was replaced by Alexandros Zaimis, a former Greek prime minister. After the formation of a new Cretan Constabulary, the coalition forces were reduced.

In 1908, the Young Turkish Revolt further weakened the Ottoman Empire. The “annexation crisis” over Bosnia and Herzegovina (Austria-Hungary’s ill-managed annexation of the two provinces, which had been occupied under a mandate of the Berlin Congress in 1878 but had formally remained part of the Ottoman Empire) triggered a new round in the development of the Cretan question. On 6 October 1908, the Cretan executive committee proclaimed independence and union with Greece. Although the Greek government had acted rather carefully until then, it now recognised this “window of opportunity” and accepted the decision of the Crete authorities.

The four Powers refused to recognise this step, however, and informed the Cretan executive committee of their decision to maintain the status quo in late October.<sup>39</sup> However, when Britain, France and Italy withdrew their forces from the international operation in August 1909, this prompted Greece and Turkey to renew their claims to the island. Crete became de facto part of Greece, although Turkey and the Powers did not recognise this formally. Eventually, the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 brought a final solution to the Crete question. Following the victorious operations of the Balkan allies – Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro – against the Ottoman forces, Turkey had to cede almost all of her remaining European territories in the London Peace Treaty of 30 May 1913. At the same time, Turkey renounced all claims to Crete, thereby officially accepting the union with Greece.

This was not the end of the Cretan question, however, as a significant Muslim/Turkish population group remained on the island. They were eventually resettled as part of the large-scale transfer of populations between Greece and Turkey after the First World War.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Werner Zürer, “Das Kreta-Problem 1908-1912: Über die Unfähigkeit zur diplomatischen Konfliktlösung vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg”, in: *Südostforschungen* 38 (München 1979), 40–87.

## **Annex The Austro-Hungarian Navy in the Crete Operation Command of the I&R Squadron and Staff:**

Squadron Commanding Officer: *Kontreadmiral* Johann Edler von Hinke

Staff: *Korvettenkapitän* Karl Skala (chief of staff)

*Korvettenkapitän* Victor Freiherr von Baselli von Süssenberg (head of gunnery)

*Linienschiffslieutenant* Hermann Janitti

*Hauptmann-Auditor* Eduard Reinhart (judge advocate general)

*Marine-Kaplan* Anton Pipan (priest)

*Korvettenkapitän* Alois Edler von Kunsti (an expert in naval law, attached to the staff for this operation. Kunsti was deputy director of the Naval Academy at Fiume.)

### **Ships<sup>40</sup>:**

**SMS** Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia

*Linienschiffskapitän* Gustav Ritter von Brosch

Belonged to the squadron from 4 February through 20 September 1897; flagship, housed the squadron's command between 23 February and 9 September 1897.

**SMS** Kronprinzessin Erzherzogin Stephanie

*Linienschiffskapitän* Leodegar Kneissler von Maixdorf

Belonged to the squadron, 4 February until 31 August 1897

**SMS** Tiger

*Fregattenkapitän* Gustav Ritter von Cimiotti-Steinberg

Belonged to the squadron, 9 March 1897 until 5 April 1898

**SMS** Leopard

*Fregattenkapitän* Géza Dell' Adami

Belonged to the squadron, 9 June 1897 until 30 April 1898

**SMS** Wien

*Linienschiffskapitän* Constantin Edler von Pott

Belonged to the squadron, 7 September 1897 until 30 April 1898

Replaced the *Maria Theresia* as flagship, housed the squadron's command from 9 September 1897.

**SMS** Kaiser Franz Joseph I

*Linienschiffskapitän* Leopold Ritter von Jedina

Belonged to the squadron, 15 August 1897 until 15 March 1898

**SMS** Satellit

*Korvettenkapitän* Eduard Thomann Edler von Montalmar

Belonged to the squadron, 17 February until 13 December 1897

**SMS** Blitz

*Korvettenkapitän* Eduard Danelutti

Belonged to the squadron, 23 March until 5 December 1897

**SMS** Komet

*Korvettenkapitän* Conrad Ritter von Wolff

<sup>40</sup> SMS = *Seiner Majestät Schiff* (His Majesty's Ship); SMTb = *Seiner Majestät Torpedoboot* (= His Majesty's Torpedo Boat).

- Belonged to the squadron, 10 April until 26 October 1897
- SMS Magnet**  
*Korvettenkapitän* Richard Lerch  
 Belonged to the squadron, 3 December 1897 until 16 April 1898
- SMS Sebenico**  
*Fregattenkapitän* Victor Ritter Bless von Sambuchi  
 Belonged to the squadron, 5 February until 4 May 1897
- SMTb Sperber**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Richard Ritter von Barry  
 Belonged to the squadron, 16 February until 16 May 1897
- SMTb Elster**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Maximilian Daublebsky  
 Belonged to the squadron, 16 February until 23 June 1897
- SMTb Kibitz**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Peter Risbeck von Gleichenheim  
 Belonged to the squadron, 16 February until 23 June 1897
- SMTb Harpie**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Edmund Brandmayer  
 Belonged to the squadron, 10 April until 23 June 1897
- SMTb Flamingo**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Karl Stahlberger  
 Belonged to the squadron, 10 April until 27 October 1897
- SMTb Marabu**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Friedrich Freiherr von Schleinitz  
 Belonged to the squadron, 10 April until 27 October 1897
- SMTb Krähe**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Oskar Lubich Edler von Milovan  
 Belonged to the squadron, 22 March until 30 October 1897
- SMTb Star**  
*Linienschiffsleutnant* Karl Kailer  
 Belonged to the squadron, 22 March until 30 October 1897
- SMS Cyclops**  
*Fregattenkapitän* Miecislaus Ritter Pietruski von Siemuszowa  
 Depot ship, belonged to the squadron, 7 May 1897 until 5 January 1898