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The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee

# ICOMOS Heritage Alert

## Government Palace and Quarter

### Helsinki, Finland

#### 23.2.2023

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

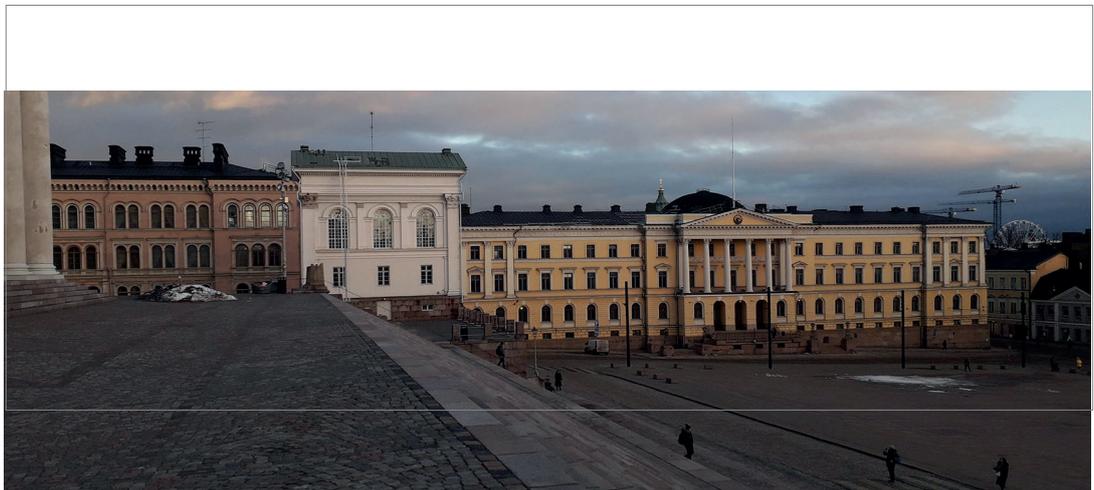
The Heritage of the most important historic quarter in the history of the Republic of Finland is currently under immediate threat. The Government Palace, the principal administrative building situated in the heart of the nation's capital, Helsinki, is in danger of losing the diversity of its heritage values. An already drafted design for a sizeable extension of office space threatens its integrity as it would necessitate the demolition of part of the Palace Quarter, namely the old printing works building, and denatures the courtyard that has until today preserved its original Empire style spatial characteristics.

Since its construction over two centuries ago, the Finnish state has added to, maintained and conserved the Government Palace with careful and respectful consideration for its profusion of historical, urban and architectural values. However, the realization of the proposed extension would irretrievably disrupt this timeline, breaking the exceptional historical continuum the Palace Quarter represents by removing historical layers in its courtyard, destroying the balance of volumes and disfiguring the historical roofscape. This would also waste the potential that these historical structures, which are still in use, possess.

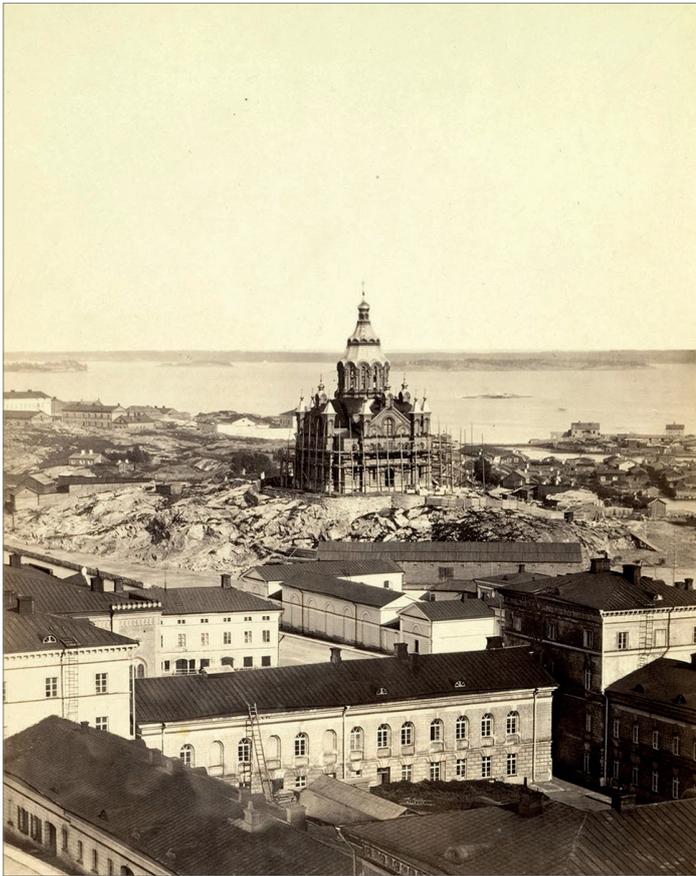
It is disappointing to note that the State and City authorities, who in the most exemplary and admirable ways have been at the forefront of the identification, protection and cherishing of the built heritage, now seem to have abandoned their long-term commitment to providing a role for heritage across a multitude of environments, from everyday heritage to the most emblematic places in the country's history.

By opening the possibility for protected cultural properties to have their protection removed and be demolished on the basis of short-term and unsustainable grounds, the present proposals represent a serious threat to the ability of current legislation to protect built heritage and put into question its credibility in general.

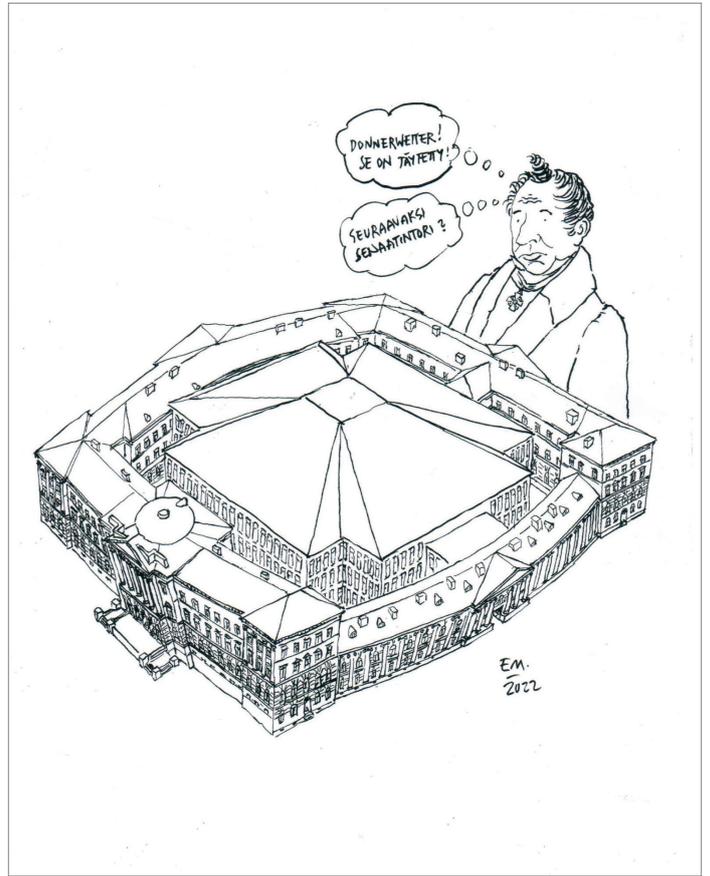
The Heritage Alert aims to draw attention to the diversity of values that the Palace Quarter and its courtyard exemplify and to prevent the implementation of current design and planning proposals that do not respect the values on which its protection is based.



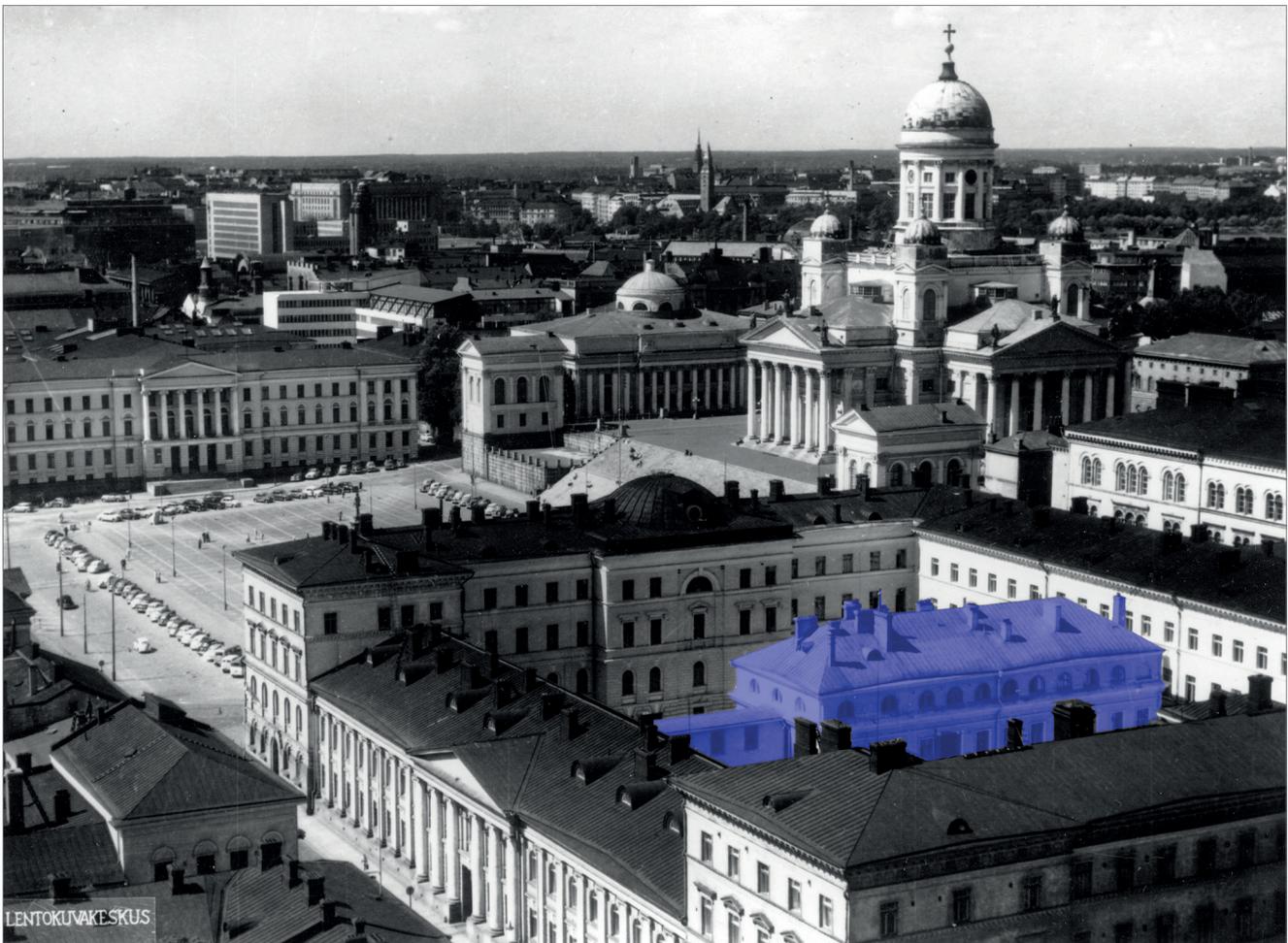
View from the top of the monumental stairs of the Cathedral eastwards; on the left the Cathedral's entrance, in the middle the university's former Department of Geology, and on the right the Government Palace along the Senate Square. © The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



A Panorama from the top of the cathedral showing the orthodox cathedral and the original open layout of the Government Palace's inner court, Eugen Hoffers, 1866. Helsinki City Museum



“Donnerwetter! It is finished! Next, Senate Square?”  
Picture Erkki Mäkiö. © The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Erkki Mäkiö



Aerial view of the Senate's Square from Southeast, the printing works in the low right hand corner in the middle of the Government Palace Quarter, The Finnish Airforce, 1956. Helsinki City Museum

## 1 Identity of Building

### 1-1 Current name and original name

Valtioneuvoston linna – Government Palace since 1918, originally House of the Senate, built 1822. The block is called Valtioneuvoston kortteli – the Government Quarter.

### 1-2 Location town, country, street

The Palace and encompassing urban block are located in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, immediately adjacent to the Senate Square, at the address Aleksanterinkatu 3, 00170 Helsinki, Finland.

### 1-3 Type of place

The Palace is a functioning administrative building belonging to the Finnish government. It is a high-status historical architectural monument of the state, and of national interest. The surrounding urban block is similarly a functioning and monumental quarter of the central administration of the state and of national interest.

### 1-4 Current heritage protection status

Historic buildings in Finland are protected in two ways: by means of a special law and through zoning. In town-plan areas, protection is realized primarily in plans. Interiors can be protected only when protected by means of a special protection law. Both protection instruments are used in the Government Palace.

Much of the Government Palace has recently (June 7, 2022) been protected by regulations of the Act on the Protection of the Built Heritage, but without mentioning the former printing works building situated in the courtyard of the Palace. In practice, since the 1980 decision, the printing works building situated in the courtyard of the Palace has been treated with the standard of a protected building.

The Palace is protected also by means of the regulations in the general plan and the town plan. Helsinki City Plan 2016 gives the Senate Square and the surrounding blocks the marking of C1. This in short means:

#### ***Business and Services Centre C1***

*A centre focused on services, business, and business premises, which will be developed as a functionally mixed area of trade and public services, offices, administration, housing, parks, recreation and sports services and urban culture. The ground floors of buildings and spaces opening onto the street must be designated as business space as a rule. The area is pedestrian oriented. The area stands out from its surroundings as more efficient and functionally versatile. In principle, the total amount of business and office space should not be reduced. In the case of changes in the purpose of use of the building or part of it, it must be ensured that the characteristic, functionally versatile and mixed structure of the city centre is preserved. In connection with changes in the purpose of use, a regional review must be carried out.*

*Centres (C1) are to be made more compact and developed as an urban city structure. When planning centres, special attention must be paid to the pedestrian scale and the functionality of pedestrian, cycling, parking, maintenance and public transport arrangements. Parking should primarily be placed in facilities and on the side of the*

*street. In the detailed planning, sufficient areas must be designated for appropriate public transport interchanges and access parking. Large retail units must be integrated with housing, services or other functions of its nature, and the ground-level floors of the buildings must open to the street space. Large units must rely on the public transport trunk connection. The starting point for the dimensioning of large units in the grocery trade should be local demand. The number of parking spaces is limited.*

Helsinki City Plan 2016 has already shown its inability to protect or preserve, since its novel idea is only to enable building and loosely determine general functions in different parts of the city. However, it is linked with previous inventories of preserved and protected zones. Unfortunately, these have been lately disregarded in actual processes.

In the Detail Plan Nr. 8980 (coming into law 12.2.1988), all the buildings of the quarter are protected by regulations in the town plan of 1988 as follows:

*The preservation mark "sr" obliges all the buildings in the detailed urban plan, including protected buildings "sk". This is due to a law-binding decree (sk) given for culturally and historically significant important buildings owned by the state. Protected buildings, their structures, fences, outer staircases, monuments, tree lines or pavings are not to be changed, torn or demolished in any manner that diminishes their cultural historical value.*

The whole area underground is protected as an archaeological area since the Antiquities Act was ratified on 1.7.1963.

The focus of the Heritage Alert is on the inner courtyard of the Government Palace, where a former state printing works building from 1897–1904 is protected by regulations in the detail plan and is still standing, but for which the special legislative protection will be removed by ratification of the protection of the Palace and on which a development project has been prepared. An amendment in the regulations of the detail plan is accordingly being prepared.

## 2 Statement of Significance and History

### 2-1 Statement of Significance of the Government Palace and its yard wing

The Palace is a prime heritage place in several heritage categories and on many levels of protection.



Aerial view of the Senate's Square from Southwest, the printing works on the right edge, 1940's. Helsinki City Museum

The heritage of the Palace is both material and immaterial. The quarter of the Government Palace is historically important since its initial design and construction phase in the 1810s and up to the present day as the seat of the government. It is architecturally unique and considered to be among the architect C.L. Engel's most important works.

The quarter is an irreplaceable part of the Senate Square, which is the most prestigious Empire-style urban ensemble in the country, as manifested in the floor plan, the facades of the surrounding buildings and their roofscape.

The ensemble is a major part of the historic administrative centre of the capital formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and nowadays an administrative campus.

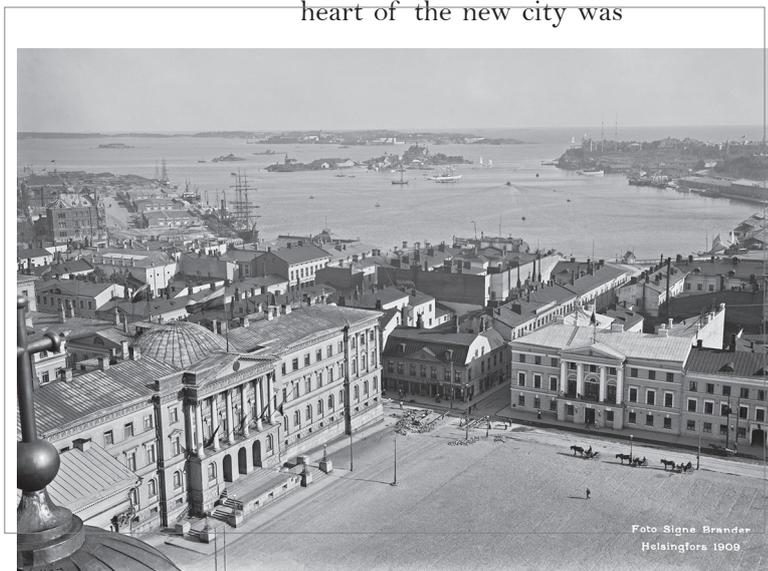
The place carries archaeological heritage from the time before the capital was first founded and built. The buildings present a continuum provided by the constant maintenance and restoration of various periods, and the careful adjustment of new parts within the historical context. In this respect, the former printing works building is part of the story of the administration, as all legislation used to be printed and distributed here.

The Palace and its grounds are the site of numerous historic events and political history since its creation.

The Palace quarter is a key to the first town plan of Helsinki as designed by J.A. Ehrenström, and a carrier of building protection for the heart of the city since the Old Town regulations of 1952.

## 2-2 The History of the Palace and its yard wing

Finland became a part of the Russian Empire in 1809 when Sweden lost the so-called Finnish War of 1808-9. Rather being fully integrated into Russia, this heralded the birth of the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, which then had to form a new central government for domestic purposes. This work was led from 1811 by count Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt. Already from the beginning, he understood the possibilities for a future independent administration and governance as these were already speculated about during the previous century amid the ongoing wars between Sweden and Russia since the founding of St. Petersburg in 1703. The long wars consumed large portions of the population in Finland. The burning of towns, looting of property and slave raiding for international slave markets by the Russians left a lasting mark, and thus Armfelt saw a chance to change the course of Finland. This new autonomous status required a new centre for governance and administration. In 1812 Armfelt persuaded Grand Duke Alexander I to move the previous administration from Turku in west Finland to Helsinki. Due to the war, Helsinki had already burned down in 1808, leaving a *carte blanche* situation for the planners. On the one hand, Helsinki became a representation of Russian Imperial power, while on the other hand the symbol of Finnish autonomy and its political ideology. The heart of the new city was



A Panorama from the top of the cathedral showing the inner court with the printing works (on the left edge), Signe Brander, 1909. Helsinki City Museum

the Senate Square, designed entirely by C.L. Engel, bringing together three powers – government, church and university – around the new capital's central square. On the north side of the square was the new St. Nicolas's Church (nowadays the Cathedral), on the east side the House of the Senate (i.e. the present Government Palace), and on the west side the main building of the university, together with its library. The south side and a few of its remaining buildings were remodelled to fit into this master plan. The entire new urban plan was designed to keep the street view as three stories high and loose with parks either as esplanades and boulevards, or as green and open spaces within the blocks.

### 2-3 Date of construction and finishing of work

The Senate side, that is, the western wing of the present Government Palace was built in 1812-1822, the completion of the construction was celebrated in August 1822. The southern wing was completed in 1824, and the eastern wing in 1828. The northern wing, by architect Ernst Lohrmann, was completed in 1853.

The Government Quarter has been modified and restored several times. From the 1880s to 1900, part of the northern wing was altered in accordance with a plan by architect Florentin Granholm, to make it the same height as the main façade. During that same process, the inner court terraces were demolished and the present two-storey printing works building, designed by architect Ricardo Björnberg, was added in the centre of the block with a north-south alignment. The architecture of this new addition followed the style of Engel's architecture since he was already the most celebrated and appreciated architect in Finland. Earlier changes in the nearby North Esplanade had at that time faced very strong opposition, when sober and distinct Empire-style facades had been remodelled into a style described as

Neo-Rococo. The building mass was also handled as more of a pavilion in a park than an additional wing, since the main mass was built as a separate volume and connected only much later (1940-1950s) by narrow bridges to the main wings to the north and south. However, the interiors were modern, with electric lighting, central heating, lifts and mechanical ventilation. This was indeed a mark of Björnberg's work altogether. In 1904 the printing works building was extended with an extra floor. Later, in 1917, the eastern wing was rebuilt and completed by architect Hjalmar Åberg. In the 1940s and 1950s garages were built in the courtyard.



Government Palace, the printing works' staff, 1926. Helsinki City Museum



Government Palace, the printing works' staff, 1926. Helsinki City Museum

### 2-4 C.L. Engel and other architects

At the time Finland became a Grand Duchy, there was no architect in the nation capable of rising to the major task of designing a new capital city. However, such a figure was imported from Prussia and authorized by the Russian tsar himself in 1816: Carl Ludvig Engel (1778 Berlin – 1840 Helsinki). Engel's main task was to implement the new master plan for Helsinki as started by senator and state councilor Johan Albrecht Ehrenström in 1812. Engel was the creator of the heart and symbolic centre of the new city, the master of the contemporary urban planning and architecture, and the most important developer in construction technology. Engel had

received his education in Berlin, and worked for a short period in Brandenburg, Tallinn, and St. Petersburg before arriving in Finland. He was responsible for bringing the then current architectural trends to the most peripheral and underdeveloped part of Europe of that time, and fashioning them according to the limited resources at hand. Engel was also responsible for creating and directing the later Board of Public Buildings, the responsibilities of which included educating future architects, before the advent of any organized education for architects. Later, professor of architecture history Nils Erik Wickberg described Engel as the Sir Christopher Wren of Finland.

Ricardo Björnberg spent his career as an architect in the Board of Public Buildings and was later Helsinki's first inspector of buildings. He spent ten years working with the House of the Senate and its upgrades. His family background in industry led to his interest in technical questions, and he also became an expert on building legislation.

## **2-6 Original and current use of the Palace and its courtyard wing**

The whole Government Quarter has been in the same use since it was constructed. The first owner of the entire property, including many of the neighbouring blocks, was the Grand Duchy of Finland, which was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1917. After Finnish independence in 1917, ownership changed to the newly formed Republic of Finland. This history of ownership applies to all other public buildings belonging to the state.

## **2-7 Changes and additions**

The Palace's southern wing on Aleksanterinkatu (the street named after Grand Duke Alexander I, who gave autonomy to Finland) and the adjoining corner pavilion were completed in 1824. The attic space was remodelled in 1914 to house more offices. The eastern wing on Ritarikatu (the street on the opposite side of which is the palace of the House of Nobility, one of the four estates of the realm before the modern reorganization of parliament in 1906) and its northern wing were constructed in 1842-45 in accordance with the original design by Engel (1825). The eastern wing was replaced by a modern office wing in 1916 that still followed the style and fashion of Engel's architecture.

## **2-8 Current condition and use**

The whole Government Quarter, including the House of the Senate, are exceptionally well preserved, and without any larger changes during the past century. All additions have been carried out respecting the original style so as to match the whole.

## **2-9 Original design intent and use**

The entire Government Quarter still retains its original function, symbolism, and architecture. This applies also to most of the other government buildings in the neighbourhood. Engel wrote to his Berliner friend Carl Herrlich in 1818 that the House of Senate will become unique, and will be preserved as a monument for further generations. This notion from the architect himself more than 200 years ago should also be remembered by the present-day generations that Engel implicitly referred to.

### Streetviews of the Government Palace in February 2023



The West facade of the Palace at the Senate Square. © The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



View along the Aleksanterinkatu street westward with the South facade of the Palace. © The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



View of the East facade of the Palace at Ritarikatu street. © The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



The North facade of the Palace at Hallituskatu street. © The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström

## 3 Descriptions

### 3-1 Physical description of the Palace

The Government Palace is an impressive neoclassical building complex with a Corinthian portico, domed interiors and monumental stairs. It was built in stages but stylistically in a unified way, mainly in the design language of St. Petersburg-inspired Empire style and Neoclassicism.

The west and east wings comprise three-storeys above a vaulted ground floor, while the north and south wings are two-storeys. A particular highlight are the taller corner pavilions. The facades are plastered and painted in yellow tones, and partly clad in granite. The elements of the actual architectural system, the mouldings and stucco decoration, stand out white against the yellow walls. The wide entrance staircase is made of dressed granite blocks.

The floor plan is based on a longitudinal central wall, a “core wall”, running along the centre line. The main interiors are the Senate Chamber and the impressive staircase, both on the central line of the building.

The façade facing the Senate Square incorporates an iconographic pattern that indicates the location, character and hierarchy of the interior. The throne room is located on the traditional banqueting floor, on the first floor, which is indicated in the exterior façade by a powerful central bay crowned by a pediment with full Corinthian columns and ceremonial balcony.

The central bay also houses the building’s main staircase, one of Engel’s finest spatial compositions and a structurally advanced structure. The columned arcade of the central bay is crowned by a dome, modelled on the Pantheon in Rome, which, as a symbol of the Roman Empire, emphasizes imperial power and the Senate. The different framing of the windows characterizes the status of the rooms within the whole. The role of the ceremonial passage leading to the throne room is taken by the main staircase.

The four wings of the building, dating from different periods, form an architecturally uniform, classically designed whole, enclosing a wide, paved courtyard. Each of the building’s wings have a street side and a courtyard side, both significant in their own hierarchy. In the centre of the courtyard is the former printing works building.

The current exterior dates from the early 1900s.

### **3-2 Construction system used in the Government Palace**

The Government Palace is mainly a brick structure. The vertical frame consists of load-bearing brick exterior walls and a “core wall” running along the centre line of the building. Brick has also been used for the internal walls. In Engel’s time, limestone slabs and, later, steel rails were used in the roof eaves.

The current intermediate floor structures reflect the development cycle of construction technology and materials that has taken place over two centuries. The wings and corner pavilions, built in the first half of the 1800s, comprise brick vaults and wooden beams as primary structures. Brick vaults can also be found, for example, in hallways and stairwells. There are also variations, in the form of cross and barrel vaults. Over the years, the wooden beams of the intermediate floors have been both renovated and replaced with new ones. Since the late 1800s, segmental barrel vaults built on steel rails have been built, and since around 1908, reinforced concrete structures.

Roof structures from Engel’s time have been preserved in the west wing and in the south and north corner pavilions. The pine wood elements of the roof trusses with rafter feet, a roof truss system adapted by Engel from the Finnish building tradition, were all hewn with an axe. Other wings largely feature roof trusses with rafter feet from the late 1800s or early 1900s. The rafters are supported directly on the outer walls and by the heart walls through the upper floor beams. The wooden domes of the Government Palace were Engel’s first experiments in dome construction in Finland, and served as a model for the design of larger domes.

The exterior walls and load-bearing interior walls of the printing works building are brick. The inner structural frame is largely based on an iron trabeated

system, by means of which a large open interior space was created. On the two middle floors there are six pairs of cast-iron columns, decorated with Doric and Corinthian capitals, that support the intermediate floors built on I-beams. Nowadays, the cast iron columns are only partly visible. The iron roof trusses date from 1904. The roof structures have remained above the concrete upper floor, built in the 1950s. The rafters have not remained completely untouched.

### 3-3 Physical context and setting

The context of the courtyard wing is the Government Palace, which is located in the “old power centre” of Helsinki, that is, the Senate Square, the capital’s main square, as part of an Empire style ensemble designed by C.L. Engel. Opposite the Government Palace, on the other side of the Senate Square, is the main building of the University of Helsinki, which has a similar neoclassical architectural character.

### 3-4 Social and cultural context and value of the Government Palace

The Government Palace is the country’s most important historical administrative building and part of the neoclassical ensemble of the Senate Square, which is an impressive demonstration of Engel’s design skills. The public buildings bordering the square embody the position of the central government, the church and the university in Finland in the 1800s.

#### Streetviews of the Government Palace in February 2023



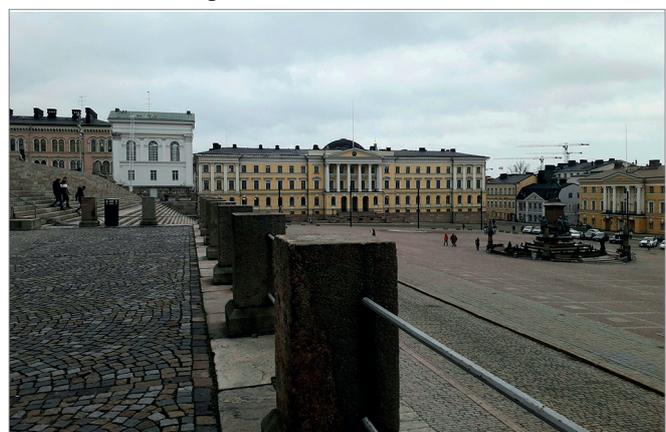
Senate Square from South West, Government Palace on the right.  
© The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



The South side of the Senate Square, buildings of the Aleksanterinkatu street.  
© The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



View from the terrace of the Cathedral across the Senate square, the university at the rear.  
© The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström



View from the terrace of the Cathedral across the Senate Square with the Government Palace at the rear.  
© The ICOMOS Finnish National Committee and Margaretha Ehrström

Originally, the Government Palace was the central administrative palace and office building of the Grand Duchy of Finland; the main space in the west wing comprised the emperor's throne room, i.e. the Senate Assembly Hall or Plenum Hall (nowadays the Presidential Room). By means of neoclassical architecture and the Corinthian order associated with the emperor and the state, Engel sought to exemplify the special quality of the building in its relation towards the square. He seems to have sought a similar associative effect with the building's expressly St. Petersburg-inspired exterior architecture, which is particularly reminiscent of Giacomo Quarenghi's Palladian neoclassicism. The architecture of the building embodies the mission of the Senate, that is, the administration.

The Senate Square is an internationally significant, well-preserved urban artistic creation, and as the centre of both the nation and Helsinki, the square has an established national symbolic status. The Senate Square is one of the city's best-known sights and a part of the image of Finland.

The courtyard wing of the Palace that used to house the state printing works is part of the historical continuity of the Palace. As a building, it is a rarity among building types in Finland, and was innovative in its time.

### **3-5 Materials and fabric**

The main materials in the Government Palace dating from Engel's time are: red brick, granite, limestone, lime paint, stucco, wrought iron (e.g. railings) and mahogany (e.g. doors). From the end of the 1800s, iron structures entered the range of materials, and in the 1900s reinforced concrete. The building has its original wooden windows. Part of the west wing has its original natural ventilation.

## **4 Source of Alert**

- 4-1** The Proposer of Heritage Alert is the Finnish National Committee of ICOMOS (ICOMOSin Suomen osasto ry), PL 535, Helsinki, Finland.
- 4-2** Groups supporting the Heritage Alert and/or its nomination are not yet given, but ICOMOS Finland will ask other groups for their support in the Heritage Alert, especially among national heritage organisations.
- 4-3** Stakeholders potentially against the Heritage Alert action can be found at the Finnish Heritage Agency (presenter of the new protection regulation), Senate Properties (owner and developer of the site), as well as the City of Helsinki (town planning authority).

### **4-4 Citations about the place**

**4-4-1** Description of the Government Palace conservation site / Finnish Heritage Agency / <https://www.museovirasto.fi/en/>

The Government Palace, originally the House of the Senate, has served for 200 years as the seat of first the Grand Duchy of Finland and then the central administration of the Republic of Finland, and has the status of a symbolic building of the state administration. The implementation of the building complex encompassing an entire city block began at the same time as the construction phase of the nation's capital, with the main wing designed by C.L. Engel facing westwards towards the Senate Square and the south wing facing the street Aleksanterinkatu. After the initial phase, the construction of the quarter continued as additional construction until the early decades of the 20th century and then, especially from

the 1970s onwards, as alteration and repair projects. While at first the House of the Senate practically accommodated the entire state central administration, the senate, its management boards and central agencies as well as some institutions (the National Archives and the Bank of Finland), the current users include the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and the Ministry of Finance. The most significant space in the Government Palace is the throne room, nowadays the Presidential Room, in the main wing, designed by Engel. The facade of the main wing is an imposing neoclassical design and an integral component in the overall architectural composition of the Senate Square, which embodies the building's status as the administrative palace of the central government.

**4-4-2** The nationally significant built cultural environment of the Senate Square and its surroundings / [www.rky.fi](http://www.rky.fi)

The Senate Square is the capital's main public square. The public buildings bordering the Senate Square embody the status of the central government, the church and the university in 19th century Finland. As the centre of both the nation and Helsinki, the square has an established national symbolic status. The square is an internationally significant, well-preserved urban artistic creation.

The Senate Square is one of the city's most famous attractions and an integral part of the image of Finland.



Aerial view of South Harbor and Kruunuhaka. In the center of the picture is the Senate Square's empire milieu (architect Carl Ludvig Engel, 1820s- 1830s). The square is bordered by the main building of the University of Helsinki (left), the National Library and the Suurkirkko (now Helsinki Cathedral). In the foreground you can see Kauppatori (Market Square) and behind it, along Pohjoisesplanadi, Helsinki City Hall (left), the Swedish Embassy and the Presidential Palace. Foto Roos, 1935. Helsinki City Museum

The structure of the square represents the pursuit of symmetry and axiality characteristic of classical urban planning. The whole relies upon architect C.L. Engel's neoclassical architecture. The Government Palace (formerly the House of the Senate) on the east side of the square, together with the main building of the University of Helsinki on the west side of the square, and the cathedral (St. Nicholas's Church) with its stepped terrace on the north side of the square are impressive examples of Engel's design skills, and at the same time the goals and means of expression that guided the capital's early construction.

The Senate Square's status in the capital of the Grand Duchy and the core of Imperial Finland is emphasized by the use of the classical orders in the monumental buildings, derived from ancient Greece and Rome, and in regard to the interiors, the throne room (nowadays the Presidential Room) and the university's festive hall, as well as the statue of Alexander II located in the centre of the square, [and the bust of Alexander I by Ivan Martos in the south courtyard of the university's library] (nowadays the National Library of Finland).

The cruciform-plan church, including the stepped terrace on which it stands, its tower culminating in a dome, the cross arms and Corinthian porticos, is an integral part of the city's silhouette as seen from the sea. Both state and university commemorative services are held in the cathedral. The Senate Square is an important location for public events, while the cathedral's grand staircase forms the stage as well as the grandstand for large events.

The Government Palace on the east side of the square is an impressive neoclassical creation, with its Corinthian portico, domes, and formal steps leading to the main entrance from the square. The most important interior spaces of the building are the Senate Assembly Hall on the main floor behind the portico, and the impressive stairwell on the central axis of the building. The four wings of the building complex, dating from different periods, form an architecturally cohesive, classically designed whole, enclosing a large courtyard. In the middle of the courtyard is the former printing works building. The Government Palace is the country's most important historical administrative building.

The University of Helsinki's main building situated on the opposite side of the Senate Square forms a symmetrical pair with the Government Palace. The university's main building comprises of two three-storied main wings: the so-called old part bordering the Senate Square, designed by Engel and completed in the 1830s, and the so-called new part along the street Fabianinkatu, built in the 1930s.

The new and old parts are connected by low wings on the street sides. In the middle of the plot is a tall, "hinged" part, which contains the building's most significant interiors, the festive hall and large lecture hall.

The views of the Senate Square include the University of Helsinki Museum (the former Department of Chemistry) in the northeast corner of the square and the National Library of Finland in the northwest corner of the square, along Unioninkatu. The library building and the Holy Trinity Church behind the Cathedral are an essential part of the ensemble of Empire-style public buildings along Unioninkatu which runs alongside the Senate Square.

The southern side of the square is partly made up of a row of burgher houses dating from the second half of the 1700s, which in its current appearance mostly reflects the goals of the architecture of the early 1800s. The Sederholm House has survived as a modest-looking building from the 1700s. The Governor-General's House, adapted from a burgher house by Engel, with its classical portico, on the other hand, ties the row of buildings on the south side of the square into the classical architecture of the other sides of the square.

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#### **4-7 Time constraints for advocacy**

Immediate action is necessary. As the amendment of the town plan is underway and will lead to activity following the ratification of the lesser protection, action towards the City of Helsinki's Urban Planning and Construction Department is necessary.

### **5 Recommended action**

**5-1** The Heritage Alert needs international and national distribution via ICOMOS.

**5-2** Letters should be addressed to the following authorities:

Ministry of Environment, Ympäristöministeriö, PL 35, 00023 Valtioneuvosto, Finland; email: kirjaamo.ym@gov.fi

Center for Economic, Development, Transport and the Environment of Uusimaa, Uudenmaan ELY-keskus, Kirjaamo, PL 36, 00521 HELSINKI, Finland; email: kirjaamo.uusimaa@ely-keskus.fi

Urban Environment Division of the City of Helsinki, Helsingin kaupunkiympäristö -toimiala, PL 10, 00099 Helsingin kaupunki, Finland; email: helsinki.kirjaamo@hel.fi

**5-3** Letters should be addressed to the following owner and user of the Palace:

Senate Properties, Senaatti-kiinteistöt, Lintulahdenkatu 5 A, PL 237, 00530

Helsinki, Finland; email: senaatti@senaatti.fi

Finnish Government, Valtioneuvoston kanslia, PL 23, 00023 Valtioneuvosto, Finland; email: kirjaamo.vnk@gov.fi

**5-4** ICOMOS website uploads: the Alert is uploaded onto the websites of ICOMOS Finland and ICOMOS International.

### **6 Desired outcome**

**6-1** The stakeholders comply with the legal protection afforded to the Government Palace in 1988 and abide by the protection practices adopted since then – and that the decisions to change its legal protection and related town planning regulation are reconsidered;

**6-2** The current design and planning proposals for the Government Palace, that alter the heritage and do not respect the values on which its protection is based, are withdrawn;

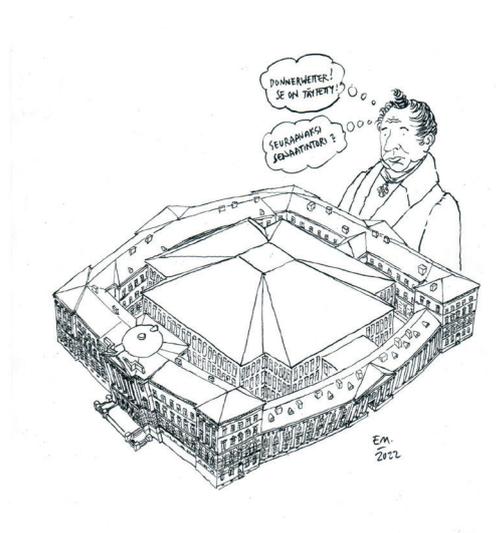
**6-3** No exemptions to building permits are applied, nor granted, for the demolition of buildings, in order to avoid irretrievable loss of the existing heritage.

**6-4** The parameters for design and planning of the Palace Quarter are set so that they fulfil both the needs of protection and functional improvements, respecting the exceptional diversity of values that the place represents;

**6-5** A modified extension project is drawn up, that preserves and protects, in their full diversity, all of the historical, archaeological, urban, architectural and aesthetic values to which the Government Palace bears witness – on the premises that:

- o The infill design for the courtyard includes the former printing works building;
- o New uses meet with the qualities of the protected buildings and not vice versa;
- o The overall volume of buildings is limited to the existing cubic metres and heights, so that the historic courtyard and roof landscape can be enjoyed by future generations.

**6-6** Acknowledging that until now conservation/restoration work, proper maintenance and the design of alterations and extensions have benefitted of an exemplary continuum in these state-owned buildings over a period of centuries, ICOMOS asks the State and City authorities to reaffirm their role and long-standing commitments to heritage protection, maintenance and conservation practice



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<sup>1</sup> E.g., conventions: The European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, the Venice Charter and subsequent charters and conventions.

**Annex:**

**Analyses of the planned demolition and extension project of the Senate Palace**



*Illustrative images of the planned new building in the middle of the historic quarter. The change of the block's detailed plan is being planned based on this project, and the block's protection has been weakened to enable demolition and construction. Source public information on the reference plan for the building project: [www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/liitteet/2022\\_kaava/5318\\_9\\_viitesuunnitelma.pdf](http://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/liitteet/2022_kaava/5318_9_viitesuunnitelma.pdf)*

In the historical centre of Helsinki, a process is underway to change the present detailed plan, which has been in effect since 1985, for the city block comprising the Senate Palace. The new detailed plan would weaken the protection of the historical complex and allow for demolition and additional construction in the city block.

In the middle of the palace's courtyard is a former printing works building, built between 1897 and 1904. The building is protected in the current detailed plan by a preservation mark, but this is due to be removed, allowing for the building to be demolished. The neoclassical building is in good condition, and an integral part of the valuable totality of the city block. The new detailed plan would allow the construction of a notably

large new office building in the middle of the courtyard on the site of the demolished building, with four floors above ground level. The new building would be connected directly to the north and south wings of the existing block, filling the current spacious courtyard such that only two small, shaft-like courtyards would remain. New spaces would also be built beneath the courtyard, and the remaining narrow courtyard areas would be covered with concrete decks, part of which would be raised by the height of one floor.

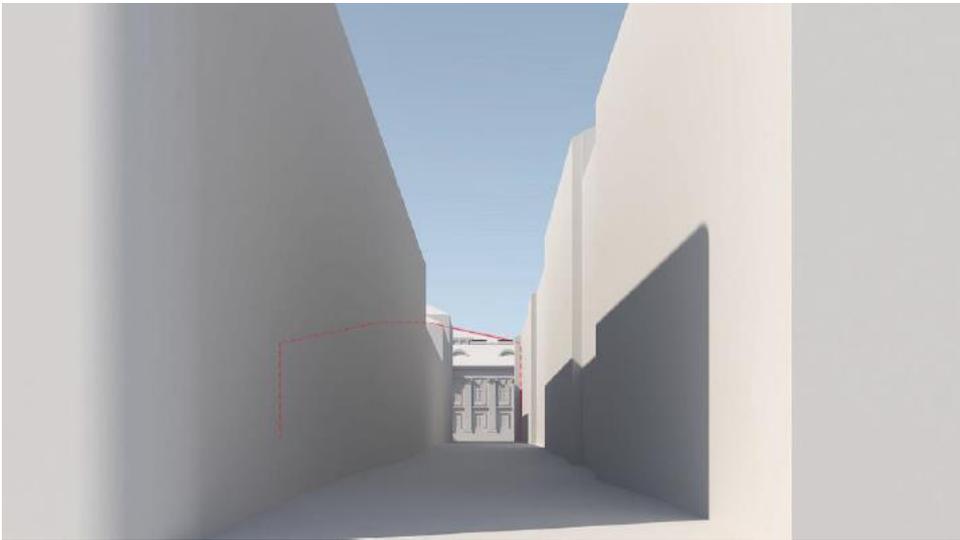
The large extension would irreversibly spoil the intact, neoclassical spatial structure, architectural hierarchy, views, and part of the existing facades of the inner courtyard – all of which are fundamental parts of the block complex. The changes would significantly weaken the architectural and cultural-historical value of the Senate Palace by distorting the historical layering of the architectural totality. Furthermore, the new office building would dominate the views from the windows of the wings of the existing building surrounding the courtyard and would reduce the brightness and pleasantness of the interior. The extension would also affect the surrounding cityscape, as the rooftop landscape would change, especially in the direction of the cathedral, Aleksanterinkatu and Helenankatu.

According to the planning description, the street views and vistas surrounding the block will remain unchanged despite the additional construction, thus justifying the demolition of the printing works building and the construction of the new extension. However, the planned demolition and new construction will have very significant effects on the integrity and hierarchy of the building block. The mere protection of street facades in a site protected by the Act on the Protection of the Built Heritage also violates the spirit of the protection decision made in 2022.

In the justifications offered for demolition and new construction in the planning description, the building-heritage values and the collective public interest are pitted against each other, while adding that the block is still in its original use by the central government. The necessity for demolition and new construction is argued for with the claim that it improves security. The justifications and the project-level reference plan do not specify why it would not be possible to preserve and convert all the existing buildings in the block to meet the necessary security requirements. The significant architectural and historical values of the Senate Palace block are a national cultural asset, the weakening of which would be detrimental to the general interests of society as a whole.

It is also worth noting that this large-scale project is being planned at a time when remote work is on the increase also in the state administration and workspaces are being reduced elsewhere by means of shared use. The Prime Minister's Office wants to concentrate more employees in the historical Senate Palace block by increasing the building density, without regard for its considerable architectural and cultural-historical value. And yet, at the same time, the state is selling its valuable real estate in the centre of Helsinki, including buildings near the Senate Palace, at a considerably low price, even though retaining such properties would make it possible to solve the need for office space.

ICOMOS wants to stress that the detailed plan for the Senate Palace block should not be changed from the current one, and that the protection building classification for a cultural-historically significant entity should not be removed from any part of the block. Demolition reduces the architectural and cultural-historical value of the site. The new construction planned on the courtyard and below it must be abandoned, and the entire city block – including the former printing works building located in the middle of the courtyard – must be safeguarded and renovated according to its unique historical and architectural value.



Illustrations of the planned extension. Source *public information on the reference plan for the building project*: [www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/liitteet/2022\\_kaava/5318\\_9\\_viitesuunnitelma.pdf](http://www.hel.fi/hel2/ksv/liitteet/2022_kaava/5318_9_viitesuunnitelma.pdf)