

# PEACE OF WESTPHALIA

## TREATY AT A GLANCE

### *Completed*

October 24, 1648, at Münster, Westphalia (in present-day Germany)

### *Signatories*

Holy Roman Empire (and allies) and France (and allies)

### *Overview*

The Peace of Westphalia was the culmination of a four-year peace process ending the last of the series of European wars known collectively as the Thirty Years' War. The Peace of Westphalia created an enduring compromise between Protestants and Roman Catholics by ending the Holy Roman Empire as a significant political entity, replacing it with a recognition of the virtual sovereignty of the German states. The treaty established France as the major European power, and it made Sweden the dominant Baltic nation.

## Historical Background

The long, debilitating conflict known as the Thirty Years' War was the last major European war of religion and the first struggle for secular power that engulfed virtually all of Europe, although it was fought mainly on German soil. It began as a religious struggle between rival leagues of Catholic and Protestant states within the Holy Roman Empire in 1618. The religious issues were essentially solved by the Peace of Prague in 1635 between the Lutheran states and the Hapsburgs, so the closing phase of the conflict, from 1635 to 1648, was primarily a struggle over secular power.

The series of wars began on May 23, 1618, with the so-called Defenestration of Prague, when a group of Protestant Bohemian nobles hurled two royal Catholic governors of their country out of the windows of the Hradcany Palace in protest of the absolutist and Catholic policies of their king, Ferdinand of Hapsburg, who would shortly be elected Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II. The Bohemian War was a holy war, with both sides convinced that defeat meant nothing less than annihilation. Thus motivated, the combatants scrambled for allies, quickly widening the conflict. The Bohemians appealed to Gabor Bethlen, Protestant prince of Transylvania, who, in turn, was encouraged to join the fray by his overlord, the Ottoman sultan of Turkey. The Ottomans saw this as a chance to wrest the crown of Hungary from the Hapsburgs. The Bohemians also elected Frederick V of the Palatinate as their new king, hoping thereby to secure the

support of Frederick's father-in-law, James I of England, and Frederick's uncle, Maurice of Nassau, who was virtual ruler of the United Provinces of the Netherlands. For his part, Ferdinand called on Poland for alliance and on his cousins Maximilian, duke of Bavaria and leader of the Catholic League of German princes, and Philip III, the Hapsburg king of Spain.

The first decisive battle in this early phase of the conflict came on November 8, 1620, when Maximilian's general, Count von Tilly, defeated Bohemian forces at White Mountain near Prague. The newly crowned Frederick summarily lost his crown (thereby earning the epithet of "the Winter King"), though he continued to wage war, using mercenary leaders (principally Ernst, count von Mansfeld) as well as troops sent by the English and Dutch. Nevertheless, in 1623 the Palatinate was overrun by Spanish and Bavarian troops, and Frederick's electoral vote was transferred to Maximilian of Bavaria.

In the meantime, in 1621 the Dutch and Spanish had renewed a war that had begun years earlier as the Revolt of the Netherlands. Spanish and Dutch hostilities ranged to the Caribbean, the South Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean. The Dutch captured the Gold Coast, parts of Angola, and half of Brazil from the Portuguese. The Dutch then lost both Angola and Brazil back to Portugal, after Portugal had reasserted its independence from Spain in 1640.

On the European continent, it was Dutch funds and Spanish professional soldiers who helped drive the war. Spanish troops fought in Germany, Italy, and

France, while the Dutch provided much-needed finance to their Protestant allies. In April 1626 Hapsburg loyalist Albrecht von Wallenstein, whose career would later become the subject of a famous play by German Romantic poet Friedrich Schiller, won a major victory against the mercenary Count von Mansfield, and in July Dutch-backed Denmark suffered a major defeat that prompted Emperor Ferdinand boldly to issue the Edict of Restitution on March 29, 1629, restoring to the Catholic Church all property taken by the Protestants since 1552. The vacuum left by Denmark's May 1629 withdrawal from the war, however, was soon filled by another Scandinavian power, Sweden, under Gustavus II Adolphus, who landed in Pomerania to begin a series of successful campaigns against the imperial armies, although he himself was killed in the process.

While these events were being played out, Louis XIII of Catholic France, traditional rival of the House of Hapsburg for dominance in Europe, grew increasingly concerned over the Hapsburg victories. At this point, the conflict ceased to be a religious struggle and had become a war for secular power. To be sure, France had been convulsed by civil war against its own Protestant subjects, the Huguenots, but once this group had been suppressed, France leaped into the Thirty Years' War against Spain in northern Italy. Following the death of Gustavus Adolphus and a major Swedish defeat at Nordlingen in September 1634, France formally declared war on Spain in 1635, allying itself with the United Provinces, Sweden, and some German Protestant princes.

With the complex of alliances in place, peace would not be easy to achieve, for no single treaty between any two states could end the war. Moreover, with religious allegiance replaced by political ends, even more combatants joined the fray. In 1640 both Catalonia and Portugal rebelled against Spain—although all three nations were Catholic. In 1643 the Protestant King Christian of Denmark sought to check the growing power of Protestant Sweden by reigniting the traditional rivalry for the control of the Sound (Øresund), the northwestern entrance to the Baltic. The Danes lost, relinquishing control over the Sound.

Wearily, diplomats started the tortuous peace process. Beginning in 1643, the combatants met in peace congresses in the Westphalian cities of Münster and Osnabrück. However, no side would consent to a truce during the negotiations; therefore, positions continually shifted according to the ongoing fortunes of war. The most comprehensive treaty, the Peace of Westphalia, was five years in the making, and the important TREATY OF THE PYRENEES, between France and Spain, was not forthcoming until 1659. Warfare between Sweden and Poland and between Sweden and Denmark was not finally quelled until 1660.

## Terms

The Peace of Westphalia was a compromise. The Holy Roman Emperor accepted French claims to Upper Alsace. Sweden obtained the bishoprics of Bremen and Verden and divided Pomerania with Brandenburg, whose prince-electoral also secured Magdeburg. Bavaria retained the Upper Palatinate and the Palatinate electorate, and Swiss independence was recognized. The German princes were granted virtual sovereignty, obtaining the right to make alliances and choose their religion for themselves and their subjects, thereby effectively bringing to an end the real power of the Holy Roman Empire. This most momentous historical event was conveyed not in some sweeping "declaration of independence" but primarily in a single unpretentious article—article LXIV—tucked among 128 very particular and exacting provisions.



### Peace Treaty between the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of France and Their Respective Allies

*In the name of the most holy and individual Trinity:* Be it known to all, and every one whom it may concern, or to whom in any manner it may belong, That for many Years past, Discords and Civil Divisions being stir'd up in the Roman Empire, which increas'd to such a degree, that not only all *Germany*, but also the neighbouring Kingdoms, and *France* particularly, have been involv'd in the Disorders of a long and cruel War: And in the first place, between the most Serene and most Puissant Prince and Lord, *Ferdinand* the Second, of famous Memory, elected Roman Emperor, always August, King of *Germany*, *Hungary*, *Bohemia*, *Dalmatia*, *Croatia*, *Slavonia*, Arch-Duke of *Austria*, Duke of *Burgundy*, *Brabant*, *Styria*, *Carinthia*, *Carniola*, Marquiss of *Moravia*, Duke of *Luxemburgh*, the Higher and Lower *Silesia*, of *Wirtemberg* and *Teck*, Prince of *Suabia*, Count of *Hapsburg*, *Tirol*, *Kyburg* and *Goritia*, Marquiss of the Sacred Roman Empire, Lord of *Burgovia*, of the Higher and Lower *Lusace*, of the Marquisate of *Slavonia*, of *Port Naon* and *Salines*, with his Allies and Adherents on one side; and the most Serene, and the most Puissant Prince, *Lewis* the Thirteenth, most Christian King of *France* and *Navarre*, with his Allies and Adherents on the other side. And after their Decease, between the most Serene and Puissant Prince and Lord, *Ferdinand* the Third, elected Roman Emperor, always August, King of *Germany*, *Hungary*, *Bohemia*, *Dalmatia*, *Croatia*, *Slavonia*, Arch-Duke of *Austria*, Duke of *Burgundy*, *Brabant*, *Styria*, *Carinthia*, *Carniola*, Marquiss of *Moravia*, Duke of *Luxemburg*, of the Higher and Lower *Silesia*, of *Wirtemberg* and *Teck*, Prince of *Suabia*, Count of *Hapsburg*, *Tirol*, *Kyburg* and *Goritia*, Marquiss of the Sacred Roman Empire, *Burgovia*, the Higher and Lower *Lusace*, Lord of the Marquisate of *Slavonia*, of *Port Naon* and *Salines*, with his Allies and Adherents on the one side; and the most Serene and most Puissant Prince and Lord, *Lewis* the Fourteenth, most Christian King of *France* and *Navarre*, with his Allies and Adherents on the other side: from whence ensu'd

what they shall act, or are now acting in Italy by Arms for the most Christian King.

## CXXVIII

In Testimony of all and each of these things, and for their greater Validity, the Ambassadors of their Imperial and most Christian Majestys, and the Deputys, in the name of all the Electors, Princes, and States of the Empire, sent particularly for this end (by virtue of what has been concluded the 13th of *October*, in the Year hereafter mention'd, and has been deliver'd to the Ambassador of *France* the very day of signing under the Seal of the Chancellor of *Mentz*) viz. For the Elector of *Mayence*, Monsieur *Nicolas George de Reigersberg*, Knight and Chancellor; for the Elector of *Bavaria*, Monsieur *John Adolph Krebs*, Privy Counsellor; for the Elector of *Brandenburg*, Monsieur *John Count of Sain and Witgenstein*, Lord of *Homburg* and *Vallendar*, Privy Counsellor.

In the Name of the House of *Austria*, *M. George Verie*, Count of *Wolkenstein*, Counsellor of the Emperor's Court; *M. Corneille Gobelius*, Counsellor of the Bishop of *Bamberg*; *M. Sebastian William Meel*, Privy Counsellor to the Bishop of *Wirtzburg*; *M. John Earnest*, Counsellor of the Duke of *Bavaria's* Court; *M. Wolff Conrad* of *Thumbshirn*, and *Augustus Carpzovius*, both Counsellors of the Court of *Saxe-Altenburg* and *Coburg*; *M. John Fromhold*, Privy Counsellor of the House of *Brandenburg-Culmbac*, and *Onolzbac*; *M. Henry Laugenbeck*, J.C. to the House of *Brunswick-Lunenburg*; *James Limpodius*, J.C. Counsellor of State to the Branch of *Calemburg*, and Vice-Chancellor of *Lunenburg*. In the Name of the Counts of the Bench of *Wetteraw*, *M. Matthews Wesembecius*, J. D. and Counsellor.

In the Name of the one and the other Bench, *M. Marc Ottoh* of *Strasburg*, *M. John James Wolff* of *Ratisbon*, *M. David Gloxinius* of *Lubeck*, and *M. Lewis Christopher Kres* of *Kressenstein*, all Syndick Senators, Counsellors and Advocates of the Republick of *Noremberg*; who with their proper Hands and Seals have sign'd and seal'd this present Treaty of Peace, and which said Deputys of the several Orders have engag'd to procure the Ratifications

of their Superiors in the prefix'd time, and in the manner it has been covenanted, leaving the liberty to the other Plenipotentiarys of States to sign it, if they think it convenient, and send for the Ratifications of their Superiors: And that on condition that by the Subscription of the abovesaid Ambassadors and Deputys, all and every one of the other States who shall abstain from signing and ratifying the present Treaty, shall be no less oblig'd to maintain and observe what is contain'd in this present Treaty of Pacification, than if they had subscrib'd and ratify'd it; and no Protestation or Contradiction of the Council of Direction in the *Roman Empire* shall be valid, or receiv'd in respect to the Subscription and said Deputys have made.

Done, pass'd and concluded at *Munster* in *Westphalia*, the 24th Day of *October*, 1648.



## Consequences

In addition to ending the hegemony of the Holy Roman Empire, the Peace of Westphalia made Sweden the dominant power in the Baltic and elevated France over Spain as the dominant power in western Europe.

The cost of the war was staggering and was borne not by princes but by their people. In Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, the Palatinate, Württemberg, and parts of Bavaria, it is estimated that more than half of the civilian population perished. In the language of the treaty, "Discords and Civil Divisions being stir'd up in the Roman Empire . . . increas'd to such a degree, that not only all Germany, but also the neighboring Kingdoms, and France particularly, have been involv'd in the Disorders of a long and cruel War."