

Peace of Westphalia Is a Model for Today

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Editors' note: *In the context of the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire and Yossi Beilin's call for a "Madrid II" conference on Mideast peace, it is vital to emphasize the principles of the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War of 1618-48—religious wars which had ravaged Europe. We therefore reprint excerpts here of a speech given by Mrs. LaRouche to an EIR seminar in Washington on May 5, 1999, entitled "After the NATO Summit, What Next? The Post-Balkan War Perspective." Although addressed to the ongoing wars in the Balkans, the point has universal application. See also her longer historical overview of the Thirty Years' War and the peace treaty that ended it, in our History section. In this excerpt, emphasis has been added to highlight the crucial principles of the Treaty.)*

... The question is: If you want to create new institutions, new international law, a new order for peace and development that allows the survival of all nations of this planet, how could we get this peace together, given this condition of the Balkans—that they hate each other? The Kosovars hate the Serbs, the Serbs hate the Croats, the Bosnians hate the Serbs. And you have a war-torn area.

Let's be realistic. What do you do? . . .

The precedent is what was done after the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia. The end of the Thirty Years' War was in 1648; it was a war which rampaged in waves, like tornadoes, for 30 years, involving many European countries, including Germany, the Hapsburg Empire, France, Sweden, Bohemia, and Denmark.

After 30 years, there was enormous destruction—on average, 40% of the population and wealth, taken together, in Germany, were destroyed. Some areas were more than 66% wiped out; many others, more than 40%. So, it was like Oklahoma after the tornadoes. This destruction had ravaged Europe for a long time. This was a so-called religious war, Reformation against Counter-Reformation. The hatred on both sides was enormous.

The Peace of Westphalia, when all the war parties came together, was the first time that a European community of sovereign states was established. And it was only possible because all of its members recognized each other as having equal legal standing, and guaranteed each other their independence. They had to recognize their international legal treaties as binding, if they wanted to be an international

community of law.

It was clear that this not only required good will, but a minimum of efficient guarantees. Most important, was the idea that the *raison d'être*—the reason for its existence, the identity of this new alliance—of this community of states, could never be only its self-preservation. It would be morally justified only if it realized ideas and principles which had a higher unifying purpose than just the states themselves.

There is a precedent for this kind of thinking in American history; namely, the idea of John Quincy Adams, that the United States must work toward fostering a community of principle among nations of the world. I would say that the Peace of Westphalia was probably the most important predecessor of this idea.

Such principles exist in the treaties of 1648. Some were expressed for the first time in history. These negotiations lasted for four years, during 1644-48, and in the end, Protestants, Catholics, monarchies, and republican forms of government, were treated as having equal status in negotiations and in the treaty.

The peace treaty defined the principles of sovereignty and equality in numerous sub-contracts, and in this way became the constitution of the new system of states. It included mutual defense and support agreements.

I want to read it to you—and please forgive me for the somewhat awkward language, because I tried to translate it straight from German without going through an official editorial board, and it is ancient language, so it sounds awkward. But try to be patient and follow me.

Article I of the peace treaty starts like this: "A Christian general and permanent peace, and true and honest friendship, must rule between the Holy Imperial Majesty and the Holy All-Christian Majesty, as well as between all and every ally and follower of the mentioned Imperial Majesty, the House of Austria . . . and successors, but especially the Electors, Princes, and Corporate System of the Reich, on the one side, and all and each Heir and Successor of the mentioned All-Christian Majesty and their Heirs and Successor, first of all, Her Highness the Queen, and the Kingdom of Sweden and the Electors and Princes in Cooperative System. *And this Peace must be so honest and seriously guarded and nourished that each part furthers the advantage, honor, and benefit of the other*, and that both form, from the side of the entire Roman Reich with the Kingdom of France, as well as the other way around, form the Kingdom of France with the Roman Reich. A faithful neighborhood should be renewed and flourish for peace and friendship, and flourish again."

This is a very precious idea. It is essential to have peace. It is the idea of Nicolaus of Cusa, which he had in the 15th Century, that peace in the microcosm is only possible when you have the development of all microcosms. You can only have peace among different nations if each nation develops itself fully, and regards as its self-interest to develop the others fully, and vice-versa.

It is like the idea of a family, where each member of the family wants the other members of the family to have the best possible life.

You need to realize that the whole world wants President Clinton to be such a passionate lover of the international community of peoples. President Clinton could emerge to seize this historical moment, and do what all the poor, beaten-down countries in Africa and Ibero-America, and many parts of Asia, wish him to—to love the idea of an international community of peoples. And it needs passion. It needs passion for this, without which it will not be realized.

The damage is so great. We will not go back to peace in the world by bureaucrats, by who pays what, by nitty-gritty accountants who ruin the whole thing. We need extraordinary people who have a passion for mankind, as parents do for their children.

Article II of this treaty says: “On both sides, all should be forever forgotten and forgiven. What has from the beginning of the unrest, no matter how or where, from one side or the other, happened in terms of hostility, so that neither because of that, nor because of any other reason or pretext, should commit, or allow to happen, any hostility, unfriendliness, difficulty, or obstacle in respect to persons, the status, goods, or security himself, or through others, secretly or openly, directly or indirectly, under the pretense of the authority of the law, or by the way of violence within the Reich, or anywhere outside of it, and any earlier contradictory treaties should not stand against this.

“Instead, all and every, from here as well as from there, both before as well as during the war, committed insults, violent acts, hostilities, damages, and costs, without regard of the person or the issue, should be completely put aside, so that everything, whatever the one could demand from the other under his name, will be forgotten in eternity.”

This is really a bombshell, if you think about it, because the treaty talks about eternal peace, true friendship, and the permanent forgetting of the past. This notion of *Amnestia* of the second article, is not the modern idea of amnesty, meaning the abandonment of criminal prosecution. It is the noble idea of forgetting for the sake of peace.

Compare this idea, *In Amnestia Consista Substantia Pacis*, “In Forgiving Lies the Substance of Peace,” with the paragraph about war debt of the Versailles Treaty of 1919. The difference in conception is why Versailles and Trianon did not produce a peace order, but led to World War II, and is breeding further wars, as we see in the Balkans right now.



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Ratification of the Treaty of Westphalia in Münster in 1648. Ending the devastation of the Thirty Years' War, it was based on the principle of “the benefit of the other,” which, paradoxically, became the basis of national sovereignty. The era of nation-states is known as the “Westphalian era”—which today’s synarchists seek to destroy.

The Role of the State

The Treaty of the Peace of Westphalia states that peace is the highest goal of the community of states. It was the first time that the framework was created where a different principle from that of the limitless right of the victorious party was implemented.

The Peace of Westphalia was not perfect. It had some problems, because at that point, there still was a big influence of the Venetian Party, so to speak, or Venice directly, as a negotiator. So it led, among other things, to the cementing of the sovereignty of the princes in Germany, which definitely was a not-so-good development. Also, Germany, 40% of which was destroyed, was burdened from there on with a much larger influence of foreign powers which could ally with these sovereign princes, and so forth. So I am not saying that this peace treaty was perfect.

But, I think that the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War, and the Peace Treaty of Westphalia, were a gigantic step forward in international law, and also for another reason: that the amount of the destruction made necessary the role of the state in economic reconstruction. The state had to take control of this.

This had an enormous significance for the evolution of the theory of the state in Germany. And all of these ideas, like cameralism, or the ideas of Friedrich List, were the direct outcome of the experience of the requirements of reconstruction in this period. . . .