# Maria Theresa's Political Testament (1749-50)

## Abstract

The extraordinary nature of this document justifies its being reproduced here at length. The document amounts to a political autobiography of Maria Theresa. Upon the unexpected death of her father Charles VI in 1740, an ill-prepared, 23-year-old Maria Theresa ascended to the Austrian throne only to be faced immediately with Frederick II ("the Great") of Prussia's ruthless military assault on the Habsburg state. Austria survived the ordeal, but at the cost of surrendering Silesia, one of its richest lands, to Prussia. Here, Maria Theresa offers her seasoned views on the strengths and weaknesses of her chief ministers and the errors her Habsburg predecessors made in ceding excessive power to the Catholic Church and the noble-dominated provincial estates. This document shows that rulers in early modern Europe walked along a knife-edge, with the abysses of bureaucratic, churchly, and aristocratic self-interest on one side and those of popular discontent and fiscal weakness on the other. In military crises like the one that exploded in 1740, a state ill-balanced between these domestic forces risked collapse. According to the pious empress, it was only through divine mercy that such a situation was averted in the Austrian case.

## Source

***First Memorandum***

*Instructions drawn up out of motherly solicitude for the especial benefit of my posterity. I have thought well to divide these in sections according to their importance.*

The first describes the situation of the Monarchy, both internal and international, as I found it when I began my reign.

The second, the abuses which had gradually crept into the said Monarchy under my predecessors.

The third, the measures introduced during the nine difficult years of the recent war, and the reasons which induced me to take them.

The fourth, the changes effected after the conclusion of general peace in the internal constitution of the Ministries and the Provinces, in accordance with the system established for the preservation of the Monarchy.

The fifth, the benefit that will accrue to my posterity from this reorganization, this being the only means of consolidating the Monarchy and preserving it for my posterity.

The sixth, the necessity of maintaining the institutions so established, to avert ruin, and what maxims my successors must follow to achieve this end.

When the unexpected and lamentable death of my father of blessed memory occurred, this being especially painful for me because I not only loved and honored him as a father, but, no less than the least of his vassals, looked on him as my lord, and thus felt a double loss and grief, and was at the time the more devoid of the experience and knowledge needful to rule dominions so extensive and so various because my father had never been pleased to initiate or inform me in the conduct of either internal or foreign affairs, I found myself suddenly without either money, troops, or counsel.

I had no experience in seeking such counsel, and my natural great timidity and diffidence, born of this inexperience, itself made the choice of this most necessary advice and information particularly difficult; as in the last ten unhappy years of His Majesty my father's reign I had only heard, like any other private person, the distress and laments which reached the public without knowing whence and why they came, since at that time everything was not, as it is today, put on the Ministers. I therefore resolved not to conceal my ignorance, but to listen to each in his own department and thus to inform myself properly. Count Sinzendorff, the Court Chancellor, was a great Minister, and later I came to feel his loss more deeply, but he did not possess my confidence. Count Starhemberg possessed it completely, and I venerated him greatly, although he had not so much political insight as the other. The former initiated me and informed me of all matters from the outset, but the latter possessed my full confidence. This went on quite smoothly and well until the arrival of Kinsky, who, with the best intentions, so distracted me and led me into such unrest and confusion that I quite lost this tranquility and brought much chagrin on myself.

At this juncture I got to know Bartenstein, who was brought to my notice by the Counts Starhemberg and Herberstein. At first I was strongly prejudiced against him, but then found him to be – as all who really know him must agree – a great statesman. Afterward I made much use of him to smooth out my tangles in the Ministry and to speak to one and the other, which, however, led me ever and again into fresh mazes and obscurities, so that presently I often became, contrary to my nature, undecided and mistrustful, and had God Himself not drawn a line by their all dying, I should never have been able to remedy this, for I preferred to suffer myself rather than to take violent decisions injurious to the honor and reputation of others – easily understandable, for these were all simply individual unpleasantnesses for me and they themselves all meant honorably; only they would not agree with each other, mostly out of ambition and because each wanted to have the bigger hand and voice in things. This mentality of theirs did affect policy, but never stopped me from deciding against them on central issues, in which Bartenstein gave me invaluable support and knew how to work on men's minds, which was why I depended very greatly on his advice and presentation of affairs and how he came to enjoy so much credit in my eyes, which he never abused, so that he was really my adviser in chief when I came to the throne.

From the outset I decided and made it my principle, for my own inner guidance, to apply myself, with a pure mind and instant prayer to God, to put aside all secondary considerations, arrogance, ambition, or other passions, having on many occasions examined myself in respect of these things, and to undertake the business of government incumbent on me quietly and resolutely – a principle that has, indeed, been the one guidance which saved me, with God's help, in my great need, and made me follow the resolutions taken by me, making it ever my chief maxim in all I did and left undone to trust only in God, Whose almighty hand singled me out for this position without move or desire of my own and Who would therefore also make me worthy through my conduct, principles, and intentions to fulfill properly the tasks laid on me, and thus to call down and preserve His almighty protection for myself and those He has set under me, which truth I had held daily before my eyes and maturely considered that my duty was not to myself personally but only to the public.

After I had each time well tested my intentions by this principle, I afterwards undertook each enterprise with great determination and strong resolution, and was consequently tranquil in my spirit in the greatest extremity as though the issue did not affect me personally at all; and with the same tranquility and pleasure, had Divine Providence so disposed, I would instantly have laid down the whole government and left it to the enemies who so beset me, had I believed that in so doing I should be doing my duty or promoting the best welfare of my lands, which two points have always been my chief maxims. And dearly as I love my family and children, so that I spare no effort, trouble, care, or labor for their sakes, yet I would always have put the general welfare of my dominions above them had I been convinced in my conscience that I should do this or that their welfare demanded it, seeing that I am the general and first mother of the said dominions.

I found myself in this situation, without money, without credit, without army, without experience and knowledge of my own and finally, also without any counsel, because each one of them at first wanted to wait and see what way things would develop. This was my position when I was attacked by the King of Prussia. This King's sweet words and vehement protestations misled even my Ministers, because they were unable and unwilling to believe that the King of Prussia would act as an enemy. The confidence of my Ministers, especially of Sinzendorff, and my own inexperience and good faith were the reason why the defensive preparations in Silesia, and the reinforcement of the garrison there by neighboring units, were largely neglected and the King in Prussia was thus left a free hand to overrun the Duchy of Silesia within six weeks.

Cotter was sent here by the King of Prussia when the latter had already reached Glogau, and soon after actually took Breslau. He proposed that I should cede all Silesia to his master, when he would immediately guarantee his help against all other claims to the succession, and also to secure the election of my dear husband to the Imperial Crown. Some of my Ministers – Sinzendorff, Harrach and Kinsky – advised treating with the King; the other Ministers, Starhemberg and Bartenstein, with whom I agreed, argued that the cession of any territory, even if only of a few Principalities, would be the more prejudicial to the dispositions of the Pragmatic Sanction because all the other Powers, as guarantors, would regard themselves as the less obliged to give a further guarantee because we should ourselves have broken the indivisible succession by concluding the treaty with Prussia, while the King, as soon as he had received part of Silesia by agreement, would probably claim the rest, or at least the greater part of it, as proportionate return for his help. The event proved that we were right and that the King's object was to acquire the whole of Silesia.

The misfortune was that after I had resolved to repel the impact of Prussia's unjust force with just counter-force, dissidence and faction at once struck root among my Ministers, due exclusively to my own excessive goodness of heart and wish to do the best for all and to believe the best. And would to God I had been alone with Sinzendorff and Starhemberg, with Bartenstein; then much would have been avoided and averted. I must put this rather more fully. Sinzendorff was a great statesman, far superior to Starhemberg, but not always without *arrières pensées,* prejudices, and passions; I was never able to prove anything against him so long as he was serving me, yet his conduct with regard to Prussia was not always regular, and warnings against him which I received were the reason why I put my whole confidence in Starhemberg, who was a great man and a straightforward German. But he could never forget that under my father Sinzendorff had edged him out, and he tried to recover his old place under me, although never in a way that was dishonest or smacked of intrigue. He and Herberstein, who was at that time the Comptroller of my Household, and a thoroughly honest and capable man, introduced Bartenstein to me, against whom I had been strongly prejudiced when I came to the throne, but must in justice acknowledge that I owe to him alone the preservation of the Monarchy. Without him everything would have been lost, for Starhemberg was no longer active enough by himself, and I learned only long after that it was Bartenstein alone who prevented my Spanish marriage, which Sinzendorff favored; he alone devised and championed the co-Regency, advised my sister's marriage, and sought to procure everything conducive to the unity and consolidation of this dynasty, which was the foundation stone of all its being. I will not say that he had no faults: these arose out of his temperament, certainly not out of any lack of loyalty and zeal, nor out of ambition; for that I can vouch, and it is my duty toward him and his for all time to do so, as a duty, not a grace. I have had to set this down for my own satisfaction, to do these three Ministers justice, seeing that all evil arose solely out of their dissensions.

In the first, difficult years of my reign it was quite impossible for me personally to investigate the conditions and resources of the Provinces, so that I was obliged to follow my Ministers' advice not to ask any more help from the Provinces, either in money or men, especially since the Ministers constantly pretended that any such demands would make my reign deeply detested at its very outset. Consequently, there was no money to mobilize the few regiments earmarked for use against Prussia. And

when I found myself forced to ask for this purpose for some hundreds of thousands as loans or urgent grants in aid from private persons, I could not but see that the big men, and even the Ministers themselves, were plainly trying to spare their own pockets.

In general, the man chiefly responsible – in all innocence – for the sluggish and lukewarm defense arrangements was Kinsky, Supreme Chancellor of Bohemia on my accession, who especially set himself to persuade me, and did convince me, because it was undeniable, that the Bohemians were always overreached by the Austrians; and he made such an impression on me by his arguments and by many old documents and proofs which he produced, that I took him into the Ministry, against everyone's advice, with the laudable intention of proving myself the true mother of all the peoples under me.

Hardly had this been done when the vehemence of Kinsky's temperament became entirely uncontrollable. And although at first I flattered myself that my move would have good results, it presently became clear that all my hopes had been vain, for Kinsky was openly prejudiced in favor of his own nation, devoting all his efforts to getting advantages for it, and consequently simply acted as advocate of the Provinces in his charge and attacked all the others, alleging that his object was to establish an ideal proportion between the Bohemian and Austrian Provinces, under which the latter should pay more, and the former less.

This produced a deep enough split between Ministers, services, and peoples, which I did not notice early enough, and later, when it became very acute, did not deal with resolutely enough, because I was too good-hearted – moreover, the situation was very ticklish – but only applied palliatives, which only made matters worse. This was, in fact, the beginning of the trouble, for although I must pay all tribute to Kinsky's honesty and loyalty, it is certain that his temperament, vehemence, passions, and local feeling were the real sources and causes of the whole calamity, and carried away Kinsky himself, contrary to his own intentions, because when the war was carried into the Bohemian Provinces he refused to allow them to be flooded by too many troops, always expecting that we should be too much for the Prussians; moreover, the movement of the weak regiments quartered on the Turkish and Transylvanian frontiers proceeded very slowly, as the whole dispositions in those Provinces were extremely sluggish.

Matters got worse and worse, and owing to the division between the Provinces, none of the Ministers was really trying to rescue me and the State from this terrible embarrassment. At first, all proposals of nature to inflict the smallest hardship on any Province were immediately rejected by the officials in charge of that Province, and everyone cared only for his own interest, and I was not able to oppose this, knowing too little of the situation.

Khevenhüller and Neipperg were proposed for commanders of the force to be sent against the Prussians, but the former asked for many regiments and assured money for their pay. Neipperg's appointment was canvassed by the Supreme Chancellor of Bohemia, that is, the man who had undertaken to supply the army, and he refused to have anything to do with Khevenhüller. I therefore decided for Neipperg, especially as no one questioned his experience in the field.

Neipperg contented himself with a few very weak regiments, which he picked himself, as he did the Generals, with the result that some regiments were ordered up from very long distances, while others, much nearer at hand, were left in their stations.

I flattered myself that the good relations between the General commanding and the Chancellor in charge of provisioning the army would be very profitable, but this good understanding was very quickly broken.

It is true that Neipperg had no more than 14,000 combatant troops under him, but he thought that would suffice, and on the one hand, there was no money to mobilize more regiments, since no demands at all were to be made of the Provinces, the Chancellor, by an unbelievable error, believing that the Provinces

could not provision a larger number of troops without ruining themselves; on the other hand, although Count Uhlfeld, in Turkey, assured me that no danger threatened from that quarter, the Ministers were not entirely satisfied that the very recent peace would prove quite stable, and for that reason, and also out of mistrust of the Hungarians themselves, thought it inadvisable to take too many troops away from the Turkish frontier.

The general opinion was that this small force would be a match for the inexperienced Prussian army.

Some of the Ministers made no concealment of their wish to sit down and reach agreement with Prussia at any moment, at the first opportunity that presented itself, whether things in Silesia went well or ill. The hope of defeating Prussia was the more reasonable because we had good grounds for hoping that we could gain the assistance of Saxony and Hanover, and there was still a possibility of getting that of Russia.

The former hope would probably have been realized if the campaign in Silesia had been undertaken at the outset with larger forces, and more caution. But the factors mentioned above made the Ministers lukewarm. My notes on the later campaign in Bavaria will be found in the annexe.

I was beginning to appreciate the mistakes which the Ministry had made in my father's lifetime; nevertheless, although I made every effort to read the mind of each of them, I yet did not venture to oppose them directly on such important issues, especially since I knew how inexperienced I was. I rather tried to reconcile the differences and to achieve the greatest measure of common agreement possible. I did not always succeed in this –sometimes the opposite – but this was what I tried to bring about in the most important deliberations.

But these difficulties proved insurmountable because, under the Constitution as it then stood, each Minister played, as it were, the lord and master in the department under his charge, used his power to thwart any opposition and followed only the course which seemed good to him or agreed with his preconceived opinion.

I did, indeed, at once perceive this long-standing and deep-rooted abuse, which was present in practically every department, but hard as I fought against it, all my efforts were vain, and the situation at the time forbade me from forcibly remedying it at once.

Most of these Ministers had acquired great prestige, at home and abroad, in my father's day, and their long service and their own merits had brought them much experience and had also won them the respect and confidence of the public. I needed their experience, and most of them were Ministers of long standing, of undeniable merit, and honorable men. I could not do without them in those critical days without making matters worse still, and was consequently unable to rid myself at once of their excessive ascendancy, so that I had perforce to leave matters as they then stood, until times should become easier.

This brings me to

**Section II**

*viz., to the abuses in the Government of Austria which had gradually crept in under my predecessors.*

Seeing that piety is that basic principle in virtue whereof a Prince may hope to receive God's blessing, which my forbears had also most diligently pursued to the immortal glory of their memories – and so visibly was God's grace and His mighty support manifested in the extreme dangers which threatened the Monarchy with ruin, that the greater the danger, the more marvelous was the help that came from God, and I myself manifestly owe to it my whole salvation, and have further perceived, in the many quite extraordinary tribulations which pressed on me, how, trusting faithfully in Divine Providence I was in no

wise left unaided – I cannot therefore do otherwise than enjoin my successors, for their good, to follow most carefully the example of their forbears, and consequently on every occasion, above all else and at all times to set their whole confidence on God and on the hope of His mighty support, and in all things to keep a pure and uncorrupt mind.

By this I do not mean Pharisaicalness and hypocrisy unaccompanied by true diligence, work and care for the State and for the general good.

Here I will say a few words about my predecessors. Their great piety led them to donate many – most – of the Cameral estates and revenues, which at that time served good purpose in supporting religion and improving the position of the clergy. Since, however, God has now so blessed us in the German Hereditary Lands that both the Catholic religion is most flourishing and the condition of the clergy is good and assured, this principle no longer holds good. And it would not merely not be laudable, but would in my view rather be culpable to give and cede more to the clergy, for, firstly, they do not need it, and secondly, they do not – alas! – apply what they have as they should, and moreover, they constitute a heavy burden on the public. For no monastic House observes the limitations of its statutes, and many idlers are admitted; all of this will call for a great reform, which I propose to carry out in good time and after due consideration.

I except, however, from such measures the Kingdom of Hungary, where much still remains to be done for religion, in which task I shall require the clergy there to cooperate, but not work with them alone, but concert chiefly with laymen on the principles to be followed, the chief aim of which must be to introduce seminaries, colleges, academies, hospitals for the sick and injured, conservatories, as in Italy, for unmarried women, for the better instruction of the young, etc., taking careful pains to support and develop what is useful to the public, and not what profits the private advantage of the clergy, monks, and nuns in any Province, it being well understood that even this salutary intention cannot be realized until the military has been put completely on the footing necessary to secure the preservation of the Monarchy and the welfare of its Provinces and subjects.

I must also say something of the Crown revenues, out of which the requirements of the Court and the Embassies have to be met as is proper and necessary, and also of the public debt, on which the preservation of the Monarchy also depends, and without which no State can exist. When these necessities of State have been met, it is a Prince's duty to devote all his resources to the welfare and relief of his lands and subjects, and of the poor among them; not to waste the money coming in on frivolities, pomp and display.

And although I shall probably not live to see that happy day, yet I hope by constant laborious effort, care and toil to set affairs in such a state that in fifty years, or perhaps even earlier, the results will, with God's blessing, be showing themselves; and I rely confidently on my successors to continue in this path, adhering faithfully to the principles of virtue, piety, justice, and fatherly love, mercy and care for their lands and subjects, which I have tried to inculcate in them in their youth. Should – which God forbid – this not occur, I would wish and earnestly pray to God that if foreigners and even enemies were more deserving and cared better for their lands, it were a thousand times better they should have them.

But to come back to my forbears: not only did they give away most of the Crown estates, but on top of this, they took on themselves the debts of the properties confiscated in times of rebellion, a burden from which the exchequer is still not yet free. The Emperor Leopold found not much left to give away, but owing, presumably, to the large-scale wars of his reign, such Crown estates as remained were pledged and farmed out, and there came no improvement under his successors, so that the yield of the Crown revenues when I came to the throne hardly amounted to 80,000 gulden; moreover, under my forbears the Ministers received big emoluments from the Emperors themselves and from the Provinces, because not only did they succeed in making flattering appeals to the well-known liberality, grace, and Austrian

munificence, representing to each what fame his predecessors had acquired thereby, but also, since they usually possessed the ear of the Prince and of the clergy, got everything that they wanted. Their prestige became such that they were more feared and honored in their Provinces than the Prince himself. And when, in the end, the Crown's resources began to dry up, these Ministers turned for remuneration to the Provinces, in which they achieved enormous authority. And when at last complaints reached the Princes, yet they, out of goodness of heart and patience, let the practices go on awhile unchecked.

And although the possibilities of big donations had in this way been largely exhausted, yet under Joseph and Charles the Ministers took advantage of every opportunity to enrich themselves or their kinsfolk through donations or concessions.

Under all these Emperors, the position and prestige of these Ministers was unshakable because each Minister in practice played the sovereign in the department assigned to him. Such Ministers almost always, in any Province, enjoyed a free hand in dealing with the Estates; the Minister in charge of a Province was usually the biggest landowner in it and thus enjoyed the greatest respect and authority among the Estates, and for that reason, many of them received large annual remunerations from the Estates. If then the sovereign wished to obtain from the Provinces the subsidies necessary for the maintenance of his armies and the assurance of the general welfare, he was forced to grant the Ministers, who alone were able to secure these for him, whatever grace and favor they required.

This chance now gave the Ministers such prestige that the Monarch himself thought it expedient in his own interests to support them, having learned by experience that the greater the prestige enjoyed by the men at the heads of the Provinces, the easier it was for them to get their demands accepted by the Provinces.

The merciful and gracious disposition of the House of Austria, which forbade the removal of anyone from his post unless he had proved himself totally unworthy of it, emboldened many of them actually to oppose the Monarch and his interests in the Provinces, and so the Ministers enjoyed such authority that they flattered themselves that they were to be regarded not as mere "Ministers," as at other Courts, but as co-regents or at least as *pares curiae*.

The Emperor Leopold was the first of my forbears who kept a firm grip on his sovereign authority and insisted on maintaining it against all comers, which considerations led him often to change his Ministers and, under certain circumstances, disgrace them. But this only made the Ministers more cautious, and, since he did not change the old Constitution, he was unable to assert his authority to remedy the abuses which had crept in.

When a Minister was replaced, his successor had not, perhaps, the same prejudices, but always maintained the old main principles both of maintaining his own authority and securing advantages for his Province, so that such changes often only made matters worse. I myself have experienced cases in which such changes neither enhanced my own authority nor led to diminution of the abuses.

Such abuses really derive from two main causes: the first, the egotism and craving for power innate in most men, inasmuch as the Ministers were large landowners in their own Provinces, and for that reason even the new men followed the same principles of self-preservation and looked more to their own interest and that of their families than to the general welfare.

The other reason is that these Ministers and heads of Provinces represented the Provinces' acquired privileges and liberties to the Monarch in so formidable a light that the latter were often left powerless to safeguard the general welfare. In order somehow to get what was indispensably necessary out of the Estates, the Prince was forced to utilize the credit and prestige of his Ministers and to grant their demands with a good grace, if he was to save himself and the State from the threatened ruin.

These vaunted privileges are, when one looks at them closely, mostly founded on customary rights which were in fact only conceded tacitly and then confirmed by earlier Monarchs, which customs, in respect of their periodical confirmation, are attributable solely to the credit, prestige, and power of the Ministries, which ordinarily consisted exclusively of Estates. And since the formula of confirmation speaks expressly of “honorable, ancient customs,” the maintenance of them is rightly to be understood only as applying to those ancient customs which are good, not to the bad.

It is certain that in no country would the Estates ever have developed their freedoms so far, had they not been powerfully supported by the Ministers, since their authority and credit depended exclusively on this, and the Court was most to blame for this, for they brought it on themselves, and were willing to give and do anything to get money quickly; whereas, if the Prince had not felt himself dependent on the arbitrary *yes* or *no* of the Estates, he would not have needed to appeal to the prestige and authority of the Ministers to get his way.

This is the real reason why the authority and prestige of the Ministers became so inordinately high under my forbears, to the detriment of the Princely authority, and why, so long as this central Constitution was in force, it seemed inadvisable to impair or diminish it.

These Ministers also utilized the preferential influence which they had acquired over the Prince to secure such favors for the Province which was governed by them, and in which their own estates lay, that the other Provinces were treated unfairly and regarded, so to speak, as though they were foreign lands and not subjects of the same lord.

This was the sole reason why, as soon as my eyes were opened, I gradually took my steps to make a complete change in the form of government.

The perpetual and unintermittent envy, ill-feeling, and calumnies among the Ministers led to the most injurious animosities and consequently gave rise to incurable prejudices whereby the most salutary measures were thwarted, or when advice was given, it was usually colored by innumerable arbitrary prejudices, so that the Prince was often placed in a situation of extreme embarrassment.

And while many of my forbears have been accused of dilatoriness and indecision in the governance of their Provinces and State, the sole true reason for this was the constant disharmony between the Ministers and the obstinate insistence of each on his own opinion, which naturally could not fail to make the Monarch the more undecided, because he might suppose his own opinion to be mistaken.

This constant disunity of the Ministries, in every reign, has often plunged the whole system into extreme danger of collapse, from which only Divine Providence has extricated and saved our House.

After Ferdinand had crushed the Bohemian rebellion and lavished gifts and benefits on the Ministers who had remained true to him, and on others, the beneficiaries used their prestige in the new Constitution imposed on Bohemia more for the advantage of the Province than in the interest of the Monarch, although the country had been conquered by force of arms.

The office of Supreme Chancellor brought with it, in respect of the Bohemian Lands, the greatest embarrassments and the most detrimental effects for the Crown service, for the sovereign found himself hardly able to effect or enforce any measure in those Lands which seemed good to him or was advised by his other Ministers, unless the Supreme Chancellor was agreed. The natural consequence of this abuse was that the whole Chancellery showed itself readier to obey the orders of the Supreme Chancellor of the day than those of the Monarch, so that the power of the Bohemian Supreme Chancellor gradually became quite illimitable – and it was very obvious how incompatible this was with the authority and the service of the Crown.

This was exclusively the result of the indulgence and grace shown by my forbears to the great and mighty in those Provinces, although it was the same leniency and benevolence that had brought them to their high estate, especially since certain families pushed matters so far that so long as one member of them was there, these high offices always reverted to him, and thus these excessive powers were transmitted from father to son. The complete suppression of this office of Supreme Chancellor is thus most advantageous to the advancement of the service. It is true that the Bohemian Chancellery kept much better order than the Austrian, and did not lightly allow the Estates to encroach on its authority, but it itself had no scruples about keeping the internal government of the Provinces a secret from the sovereign, and seeing to it that he was not too exactly informed of it. This veil had to be drawn to prevent the Crown's financial services from interfering in the administration. And thus it was impossible to secure respect and obedience for the Crown's authority and orders without the consent of the Chancellor, and so the Supreme Chancellors were able continuously to strengthen their own influence and authority, and often to exercise it to the disadvantage of the other Provinces, which applied conversely to the Austrian Provinces when their heads were more influential than the men governing Bohemia.

And since the Ministry was usually composed of more Austrian Ministers than Bohemian, the former usually predominated over the latter.

These circumstances led to a deep-rooted and unremitting hatred between the two nations, which reached such a pitch that everyone in each national Ministry, down to the lowest member or Councillor, invariably used every possible lawful device to surpass the other. The Austrian team, however, got the better of all the others and were the most overbearing of all.

This was felt especially by the Hungarians, whom the others tried to keep in permanent subjection, and also excluded members of that nation from all services. The excuse given was the disorder and rebellions which prevailed in Hungary up to the time of Charles VI. But equity and fair policy require that the black sheep should be segregated from the rest, and thus those deserving of reward should not be kept in the same condemnation as the undeserving, which must necessarily drive them to depression and despair.

Such are the proofs that the Ministers of my predecessors in no wise followed a wise policy, conducive to the advantage of the service, but only used the power-positions which they had achieved to serve their own interests, to transmit the Ministerial offices to their families and friends, and to follow the old, deep-rooted practices of their forbears.

Another abuse, very detrimental to the service, was that the heads and Presidents were paid and remunerated by the Estates at their pleasure. They consequently remained in a state of constant dependence on the Estates, the more so because they were always trained up in these false principles.

It is surprising that under these conditions my ancestors were able to entrust the preservation of the Monarchy to them.

For proof of this it is only necessary to consider the condition of the Austrian Provinces on my accession. They had always governed themselves as they pleased, the Chancellery paying little or no regard to their interests, and the secret documents and Provincial accounts show that any threat of control, however minor, was often averted by lavish remunerations and donations, a share of which was often allotted to the Prince.

The chief evil was that at that time many Ministers were regarding each only the welfare of his own Province, and none of them had the courage or the will to draw down odium on himself, which aggravated the calamities that befell in the Italian and Hungarian wars the more because no Minister dared make further demands of the Province in his charge; and thus the others seized the occasion to attack him and hold him up to public contempt. So credit was hampered in every Province, and yet credit

was necessary to cover requirements of the State: the exchequer had no more funds or resources to draw on or pledge, so that everything had to be raised on the credit of the Provincial war tax, which brought little or no profit to the Prince or the paying common man, but great profit to a few private individuals. The long period of peace was used only to mislead the sovereign, to multiply factions, and to seek opportunity to realize the wretched Spanish plans, which were brought up again and again and were strongly favored by very many Ministers and also, assuredly, were not displeasing to the generous sentiments of the Monarch.

Thus when war broke out, all was in the greatest confusion, without any system or idea of inner or foreign policy, and this Monarchy was consequently exposed to the most extreme danger, especially as the internal domestic debt of the Austrian Provinces then amounted to over twenty-four million, the interest on which alone came to 1.2 million, which had necessarily to be deducted from the sum paid into the war chest; and this was the more irresponsible because, to spare the landowners, most of whom paid nothing at all, the earlier contributions to the Treasury had been paid out of borrowed capital.

These disturbing conditions justified me in deciding to be more cautious in how I trusted my Ministers and Councillors.

But all my caution was in vain until I found myself forced to alter the central constitutional structure.

The paralyzing disharmony between all departments was so great that I, like my predecessors, had to spend most of my time in smoothing over these wretched disputes. The Ministers were always particularly embittered against the Hofkammer, against which they made a common front, however much they disagreed between themselves.

That organ was itself a lifeless body, forsaken by everyone. It always had to procure money, while the Chancelleries most often blocked every avenue through which it could obtain it. The progressive and unmanageable indebtedness of the Treasury and the extraordinary confusion prevailing in the Hofkammer, which was often intentionally aggravated out of ulterior motives, led the Hofkammer to take various false steps, against which the Ministries and the public appealed. Yet hardly ever was a Ministry itself prepared to supply the means of covering necessary expenditure, and it seemed likely that the incessant inter-Ministerial warfare would perpetuate itself until the Monarchy collapsed, unless I tried to grasp the evil by the root. I enlarge on this subject in the following

**Section III**

*viz., on the measures which I took during the late nine years' war and the reasons which led me to act as I did.*

In my first section I described the most unhappy situation at my accession, my inexperience, and the various factions, and in the second, how I was at first unable even to see the great and long-standing weaknesses which had crept into the system, much less remedy them completely, with the result that matters reached a state of chaos whence they could never have been extricated without visible miracle and the special help of God. I have already written that I would gladly have renounced all and become Grand Duchess of Tuscany had I believed such to be God's will. Since, however, He had chosen to lay on me the great burden of government, I resolved that so long as there was any help to be found, or any resources available, I would apply them, and that it was my duty to do so. This gave me such spiritual tranquility that I watched my own fate as though it had been a stranger's, and felt so little hate against my enemies that I grieved for the unhappy fate and death of the Bavarian Emperor and for the cold and discomfort endured by the French at the siege of Prague, and equally for the Prussians, but not for the King of Prussia, whom I did not, indeed, hate, but felt no sympathy for him since he never needed it, but always detested his false character.

Such was my state of mind during the war, up to the Peace of Dresden. I have made Bartenstein draw up a careful account of the whole development of affairs during this time, both political and internal, and have gone through it carefully, both for my own future justification, and for the instruction of my successor, that he may know the real history of events, about which there has been and still is so much discussion and search, and scrutiny of the records of the time will show why such and such was done, often necessarily. For every government is criticized by its successor.

Up to the Peace of Dresden I acted boldly, shrank from no risk, and spared no effort, for besides my motives of principle, as set out above, I had another spur, to wit, the conviction that no more unhappy fate could befall my poor dominions than to fall into Prussian hands; indeed, had I not been nearly always *enceinte*, no one could have stopped me from taking the field personally against my perjured enemy. But God willed it otherwise and it is easy to imagine, seeing with what love and tenderness I cared for my dominions, even placing them above myself and my children, how intolerably painful it must be to me to bear their – I will not say hatred, but – ingratitude.

And when I saw that I must put my hand to the Peace of Dresden, my state of mind suddenly changed, and I directed my whole attention to internal problems and to devising how the German Hereditary Lands could still be preserved and protected against two so mighty enemies, Prussia and the Turk, lacking fortresses and ready money, and with weakened armies.

The high policy of this House changed completely; formerly it was directed toward holding the balance of power against France. Now there was no more thought of that, only of internal consolidation, so that the Netherlands and Italy were no longer a reason to prolong the war; the objective had to be get well out of it, at any cost.

This was the reason why I concluded the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle so quickly. And after the Peace of Dresden my one endeavor was to inform myself of the situation and resources of each Province, and then to acquire a thorough understanding and picture of the abuses which had crept into them and their administrative services, resulting in the utmost confusion and distressfulness. Those who ought to have enlightened me on this were either unable or unwilling to do so.

Here, too, I am all-indebted to Bartenstein, who helped me greatly and lighted the true candle, following which I found certain individuals who brought me much material through the channel of my private secretary, Koch, who entered my service at the same time; he also took all pains to procure me privily secret information here and in the Provinces. Koch's equal for discretion would be hard to find, and he is also uncommonly honest, Christian, and free from intrigue. He stood on the same footing with me as Tarouca, who succeeded Herberstein when he died as my special confidant and adviser; furthermore, since he knew German, I made him summarize and report to me on military and Chancellery agenda and also on Provincial affairs, and also draft the decisions for me to see and approve.

In affairs of State I seldom used anyone else but followed Bartenstein alone, but I also availed myself of his counsel in all other questions, particularly my private affairs, troubles, and cares, and always profited by it. My chief maxim was: if man is not true to God, what can he expect from him? He shall not be blessed.

Bartenstein and Haugwitz gave me what I needed for the State and the preservation of the Monarchy. Tarouca and Koch supplied me with consolation, counsel and private information for my own knowledge and correction; and so long as I live I shall be mindful of them, their children, and their children's children for the services which they rendered to me and the State.

And I also enjoin those who come after me, ever to be mindful of their kinsfolk for all time, so long as there be any such in this world, since my chief motive in composing this record, besides that of informing

my successors, is that their names should be preserved after them and their offspring receive the mede which I could not render them sufficiently.

But to come back to the true course of events, I turn to

**Section IV**

*which shows the constitutional changes, in the Ministries and the Provinces, which I carried through after the conclusion of general peace in accordance with the system which I established for the preservation of the Monarchy.*

In the preceding section I have already described the defects and abuses of the Constitution then in effect, and felt myself the more compelled to abolish it, because Divine Providence had shown me clearly that the measures essential for the preservation of the Monarchy could not be combined with these old institutions, nor put into effect while they existed.

Each one of my Ministers readily agreed that if the Crown and scepter were to be preserved, it was most necessary to keep a standing force of over 100,000 men, and consequently indispensable to bring new system and order into the extreme confusion into which the finances had fallen.

To this end, I instructed the Ministers to put their views to me in writing, and to work out such a system as speedily as possible. When, however, no constructive idea emerged, my repeated reminders notwithstanding, and when I saw that the Ministers were more inclined to spread themselves in controversy and argument than genuinely to take the problem in hand – urgent as it was – that the work dragged on and on, and that no one was willing, or able, to attack the problem seriously, then, however, by the especial intervention and Providence of God, and to the salvation of these lands, I became acquainted with Count Haugwitz, who, out of loyalty and devotion, had left all in Silesia and stood by my side in time of trouble. He was presented to me first by H. M. the Emperor, and after him, Count Tarucca, who was always my consultant in private affairs, as well as in matters concerning the Italian Provinces and the Netherlands, and from whom I received much good advice and counsel in my inexperience; also, he brought me to a true understanding of affairs and men, without, however, ever interfering in Provincial and State affairs, only pointing out my course to me and showing me where I went wrong, which is most necessary for a ruler; yet there are very few willing to do it, most men refraining out of respect or self-interest. I should therefore wish that all my children might find his like, to give them such help, and I owe Tarucca a great debt, which I will always seek to repay to his children and enjoin my successors to do likewise.

But to come back to Haugwitz. He was truly sent to me by Providence, for to break the deadlock I needed such a man, honorable, disinterested, without predispositions, and with neither ambition nor hangers-on, who supported what was good because he saw it to be good, of magnanimous disinterestedness and attachment to his Monarch, unprejudiced, with great capacity and industry and untiring diligence, not afraid to come into the open or to draw on himself the unjust hatred of interested parties – indeed, Count Harrach, who, as I shall presently show, was his greatest opponent, often himself said to me that without Haugwitz things could never have been brought into order, that a man like him was necessary for this, and that no one but he alone would have ventured to undertake the task – and, verily, the special blessing of God's mighty hand has been over him in all and everything.

The situation had reached the very desperate pitch which I have described when, with the Emperor's approval, I instructed Koch to have Haugwitz draw up a plan for the maintenance of a force of 100,000 men, with all possible economy, eliminating all excessive demands by the military and providing all possible relief for the Provinces. Haugwitz carried out this commission in a way which earned my and His Majesty's special approval, because on the one hand it ensured that the Provinces were unmolested and

protected against all exactions by the military, and on the other, it provided for the greatest possible economy in the military budget, while yet allowing sufficiently for all essential expediture.

I had Haugwitz communicate this confidentially to the Supreme Chancellor, Count von Harrach. The latter actually told me that he entirely agreed with the main principles, and all the Ministers approved them almost entirely, except that some of them said that they must first examine the capacity of their Provinces to raise the necessary sums, a reasonable reservation which was generally met by drawing up complete balance sheets, which showed that when all forced levies, Provincial contributions, and other demands on the State and private individuals were added together, the total would infallibly exceed what was required for the system. This gained the proposals further adherents.

The first big difficulty arose over the allocation of the payments among the different Provinces. Some Councillors appealed to an alleged traditional quota, which would have laid quite disproportionate burdens on the Inner Austrian Provinces, the poorest and most heavily burdened of all. The Supreme Chancellor, Count Harrach, who insisted on this most strongly, produced the idea of abolishing all Cameral and consumption surcharges in the Provinces – a sum amounting to many millions – in return for which the Estates were to be asked to vote all expenditure beyond what the few remaining Cameral resources could supply, both for the systematic upkeep of the 108,000 men and for the covering of the entire debt and the regular Cameral expenditure. I found, however, no one agreeing with this. Some thought it was completely impracticable, and must lead to the collapse of the “Banco” (which I was always most anxious to avoid), to expect the lands, even given these tax remissions, to produce increased revenues amounting to some twenty-seven million, especially since, if the consumers bore no share of the increased prices, the burden on the direct taxpayers would be impossibly heavy. On the other hand, neither I nor my other Ministers could take on ourselves the responsibility before posterity of letting the surcharges which my predecessors had already imposed and actually collected slip again out of my hands altogether, and thus leave Provincial revenue, the whole essence of the Prince’s authority, the whole material condition of its existence, dependent on the pleasure and arbitrary disposition of the Estates. This change would greatly have limited the power of the Crown, and while the Estates or some private persons might have profited from it, it would certainly not have promoted the general welfare; for strongly as I have asserted my authority where I have believed this necessary and salutary, so gladly and unhesitatingly would I have limited it or even renounced it altogether for myself and my successors if justice and equity and the general welfare would have been better served under the administration of the Estates. Since, however, I was entirely convinced of the contrary, and sure that even highly placed persons were only seeking to increase their advantage and repute on both sides by playing off the Crown against the Estates as they pleased, I could not possibly accept the idea.

It is true that Count von Harrach proposed to introduce far-reaching economic reforms which, he argued, would make it possible for the taxpayers to raise these huge sums, but since it would have taken more than ten years before these became effective, they could not have brought the taxpayers any perceptible immediate relief.

A conference accordingly rejected Count von Harrach’s proposal by a unanimous vote, which I had specially recorded, and since no one present was able to suggest anything different or better than Haugwitz’s draft plan, on which I had already decided, after private consultation with Bartenstein, I resolved to send Count Haugwitz to Moravia and Bohemia to sound the Estates there, whether they were prepared to adopt the principles of his plan as in their own best interest.

The Ministers, and particularly the Supreme Chancellor Count Harrach, had firmly convinced themselves that the Estates would never accept any such proposals; even wires were pulled, great efforts were made from Vienna to foment ill will among the Estates, which was the more to be feared because the Estates had been sent very misleading interpretations of the proposals.

Yet even as I had commended to Divine Providence, with sincere confidence, the execution of my idea for preserving the Monarchy, so I was now made visibly aware of the Divine help which I had expected, for in spite of all the obstacles put in his way from Vienna, Count von Haugwitz was successful in obtaining the consent of the Moravian Estates to the proposed military system and to the financial obligations involved. I therefore instructed him to make the same proposals in Bohemia. Here, it appeared, more difficulties were to be anticipated, since the Estates had been affected by the talk and minework from Vienna.

Nevertheless, the business was carried through quite successfully in Bohemia also, and the Deputies of the Bohemian and Moravian Estates arrived for the close of the Recess. Count von Harrach and some other Ministers maintained that the Estates in these two Provinces had been hurried into their decisions, or even corrupted (although I had neither given nor promised the smallest consideration in any Province, nor had any been asked), or ought at least to have stipulated other conditions on the lines of Harrach's own opinion.

I thereupon personally asked the Deputies of both Provinces to say on their consciences whether they thought Harrach's ideas preferable for their Provinces; and they assured me unanimously that Harrach's plan was quite impracticable, a simple chimera which could neither exist nor be realized, especially as most of the advantages Harrach was dangling before their eyes were only hypothetical and lacked any real basis.

Haugwitz, however, agreed with the Supreme Chancellor, and all the other Ministers concurred, that this military system would not advance the welfare of the Monarchy unless the debt and the Camera were, at the same time, put in order.

The Cameral funds were insufficient for these two purposes, and Count Harrach himself was the less able to deny this because he had himself undertaken to draw up an estimate of what was needed for the Cameral expenditure and the debt.

Even here, however, I was unable to fall in with his ideas, which would again have involved robbing the Bank of the greater part of its funds, which would have ruined it completely, since the hypotheses on which he based his speculations were, by universal consent and most plainly, nonexistent and incapable of realization.

I was therefore forced to apply to Count von Haugwitz again, to work out the system for the debt and the Camera, and this he finally succeeded in doing, in spite of the unimaginable confusion reigning in both departments. His conclusion, however, was that, after allowance had been made for essential Cameral expenditure, for the service of the existing debt at 6 per cent (5 per cent interest and 1 per cent amortization) and for obligations to the Bank, a deficit of about 2.5 million would be left. This sum, which was necessary for the consolidation of the main system, had to be asked of the Provinces, and since the Bohemian and Moravian Deputies were in Vienna, I myself approached them and explained the situation to them in detail. I thus persuaded them to undertake themselves to put my proposals before their colleagues, and they did so in the subsequent Diets, with the effect that Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia granted the Cameral quotas needed for the debt.

Count von Harrach was acting Landmarschall in Lower Austria. He could not bring himself to ask the Estates to grant the two million that fell to them under the plan, so I was forced to appoint Count von Haugwitz Commissioner and Count von Bräuner the new Landmarschall. Here, too, there was success; the Lower Austrian Estates most readily accepted their quota of two million, and a ten years' Recess was agreed with them, as with the Bohemian Provinces.

I had rather more difficulty in obtaining its million from Upper Austria, where I was unable to send Count

von Haugwitz. When, however, its Deputies appeared for the closure of the Recess, the matter was eventually settled satisfactorily.

The greatest difficulties came with the three Inner Austrian Provinces. All the Austrian Provinces, but particularly these three, had managed their affairs in so irresponsible and unbusinesslike a fashion that the Court – that is, the Chancelleries of the day – had allowed them to accumulate a so-called domestic debt of twenty-four million, the interest on which amounted to 200,000 gulden. It was the financial weakness of these lands that involved them in this big debt, and was also the reason why the quotas allocated to them were regarded in advance as impossibly high, and in certain cases could really be regarded as such.

The Inner Austrian Provinces had been treated with particular indulgence by my Government, and had often been allowed to give IOU's for sums due from them; they consequently found it much harder than any others to submit to the proposed orderly system. It was thus only possible to obtain from Styria a Recess of three years, and that with the utmost difficulty.

In Carniola we had to wait a whole year before we could achieve a three years' Recess, and that after remitting the sum due on the debt.

There was no doing anything in Carinthia, and after failing to bring the Estates to any kind of reason, I was compelled to collect the tax *jure regio*, although in order to help them I had, a year before, at Count von Haugwitz's suggestion, sent two Commissioners, to the latter of whom, Rudolph Count von Chotek, they gave their written consent to the Recess but withdrew it three weeks later. They were constantly lamenting that they could not raise the State tax, but refused to make any economies in their local or supplementary administration, and proposed – out of ignorance or malice – to increase the burdens of the unfree population. That is the reason why I had the sum collected myself, *jure regio* (i.e., by virtue of my supreme prerogative).

The Estates' persistent representations that the burdens were too heavy for them, which were not without their force, although the fault lay in their own unbusinesslike methods, naturally led me to make provision for a better and more equitable management of the local finances. And I must insist that it is generally true that the prime cause of the decay of my Hereditary Lands lies in the over-great freedom the Estates had gradually usurped; for the Estates seldom behaved justly, their Presidents usually simply doing as their predecessors had done and furthering their private advantages, while refusing or rejecting any help that justice demanded should be given to the poor oppressed classes, and thus as a rule letting one Estate oppress another.

The final purpose of most of the so-called prerogatives of the Estates was simply to secure an arbitrary free hand for some of their members, who claimed an inordinate authority over the rest.

It was formerly the easier for all this to go on because the said overpowerful members of the Estates, who usually made common cause with the Ministers in charge of the Provinces, generally had in their hands the fortunes, both of the Crown and of the Estates themselves, and thus disposed of them according to their pleasure, for which very reason the Ministers here in Vienna gave every support to the prerogatives which brought them so much advantage.

And although the result was only detriment to the public interest, yet the Estates insisted on these prerogatives the more stubbornly because most of them failed to understand the position and easily allowed themselves to be hoodwinked by these their own representatives.

Neither do I myself wish, nor do I advise my successors, to encroach on the useful and legitimate privileges of the Estates, seeing that the welfare of my dominions is inexpressibly dear to me, and I cannot repeat often enough that if I had found their privileges so clear, or if they had conducted the

administration more justly than I or the Crown, I should not merely not have hesitated to submit and abrogate my authority entirely to them, I should rather myself have diminished and renounced or limited it for my successors, because I should always have placed the welfare and prosperity of the Provinces before my own or that of my family and children. But neither my own interest nor that of my successors, and least of all the public interest, can be sacrificed to illegitimate abuses which have taken root with the connivance of the Ministers; wherefore such alleged privileges as are founded on abuse and an evil tradition should not be confirmed without extreme caution and careful consideration, and I have often observed that Crown rights which have fallen into desuetude through the connivance of the Ministers are questioned with the object of tying the Monarch's hands in these respects also; this applies above all to the supervision of the Estates' domestic funds and the management of them, and also to the equalization and adjustment of taxation, which should be conscientiously undertaken in the interest of justice and of the general welfare.

The Austrian Provinces in particular have made every endeavor to exclude my supervision and disposition on these cardinal points.

For this purpose, I began with the Inner Austrian Provinces and insisted, the more firmly because their conduct of their own affairs had been so unbusinesslike, both on dictating to them their allocations for local expenditure and also, for my own satisfaction and that of the Provinces, on adjusting the taxation in accordance with the principles already observed, and have continued to give the completion of the operation my most careful attention.

In Upper Austria my opportunity to intervene more closely in the internal constitution and to establish there the principle of adjustment presented itself, since that Province, its credit being weak, had often appealed to me for a remission of its Recess quota. I gradually reached the decision to carry through a reform there also, and to reduce the Domestic Fund substantially.

My greatest difficulties were with the Lower Austrian Estates here, which had been particularly spoiled by the Ministers, who were especially well disposed toward them because they had advanced large sums on credit to the Court and in earlier emergencies had been exceedingly generous in every way. The Austrian Provinces knew excellently how to turn this to their own advantage. Nevertheless, I was not to be deterred from reaching my goal here also, and consequently from limiting the domestic expenditure for the benefit of the poor taxpayers, and also from carrying through and regulating equitably the adjustment – more necessary here than anywhere – and the extension of taxation to properties formerly exempt. I hope thereby not only to consolidate the uniform system – since I wish these principles to be observed equally in all Provinces – but also to attract the blessing of God on this my salutary intention.

As to the Tirol and the Vorlande, I had, indeed, had Count von Chotek carry through an enquiry here, but when the new system was introduced, the whole arrangements had to be entirely recast; there, too, however, I succeeded in obtaining the quota allocated to them under the system, which I also achieved in Transylvania and the Banat of Temesvár. Only in the Kingdom of Hungary did I think it better not to introduce any change, because it would have been inadvisable to attempt anything of the sort except at a legally convoked Diet, and special considerations apply in the case of the Hungarians, who are extremely sensitive on such points.

The system established for my German Hereditary Lands in respect of the defense forces, the Camera, and the public debt covers the Hungarian Lands, as well as the Bohemian and Austrian, and makes it possible for me, after deduction of Cameral expenditure and service of the debt, to maintain in them 110,000 men, and also gradually to economize a certain sum each year with which to keep my army ready to march immediately in case of enemy invasion, and thus to avoid a recurrence of the situation which – unfortunately – confronted me at the outset of my reign and was the real origin of all the subsequent trouble.

Twenty-four thousand are to be kept in the Netherlands and at least 26,000 in Italy, so that the grand total amounts to 150,000. My greatest difficulties at present are with Italy, but Count Pallavicini still hopes to get the plan through to my satisfaction.

I have also been at pains to have the Varasdin, Carlstadt, and Croat frontier districts divided into regiments and organized regularly. And although these troops rendered excellent service in the last war, I can hope for even better results in the future now that they are better organized, and the Ban of Croatia has established new regiments. The tables and inventories are attached.

Thus 24,000 men of these peoples are constantly ready to move anywhere at a word, while in peacetime, when they are at home, they cost my exchequer little more than 400,000 a year.

All this shows how greatly I labored to organize and put on a firm footing the military force which is so indispensable for the preservation of the Monarchy and, further, to put the artillery, with the expert help of Prince von Liechtenstein, on a proper footing, the object of this military system being to ensure that the Provincial contributions come in regularly every month, so that the forces are paid punctually, while extreme care is also taken to see that no extortions or exactions are practiced on the taxpayers and not even the smallest bribes or *douceurs* permitted, however gladly the Provinces would pay them or however much the military demand them, for this would only throw the whole system into confusion and open the door to the old exactions, which are generally beyond the capacity of the peasant at the present level of taxation, while certainly no lord would ever open his own purse. Beneficial and easy as this appeared, and strictly as I have forbidden the military to allow such exactions, yet it is most important to insist that not even everything that appears good can be put into effect without careful consideration. Finally, a two-volume manual on military discipline, drill and regulations, for which I am indebted to the wise and industrious efforts of General Daun, has been drawn up and is appended.

In order to put all this on a firm and lasting foundation, I found myself forced to depart from the old, traditional Constitution, with the detrimental qualities which it had acquired, and to enact such new measures as could be harmonized with the new system.

And to make it more solid still, I decided that I would myself, with H.M. the Emperor, attend the weekly sessions concerned with the establishment of the system, and thus personally control and enact the orders to be sent out to the Provinces. I had the material prepared by a Committee meeting under the chairmanship of Count von Haugwitz, and including a Councillor of the Bohemian Chancellery, another of the Austrian, a Councillor of the Hofkammer and someone from the General War Commissariat. In each of the Provinces I appointed a Deputation whose sole business it should be to collect and report on all material relevant to the system, whether financial or non-technical military.

But I soon saw that this still would not bring me realization of my main objective, especially as both Chancellors, besides the Hofkammer and nearly all the Ministers, were very hostile to this institution, to the great detriment of its authority and standing, and were only looking for a chance to think up suggestions and difficulties and so, sooner or later, to put things back on their old, bad footing; especially since those Ministers and the Councillors under them who should, owing to their positions, have been the chief supporters of the reform, were its greatest enemies, avowing their intention both openly and privately to destroy it, and poisoning public opinion against it. And always thinking as I was to provide not only for the present, but also the future, solidly, so that my children should not fall into the same labyrinth as I, I was for that very reason sometimes too precipitate and undertook too much at once, and thus set everyone against me, particularly those who were sitting at the fleshpots. And since it was impossible to grant any help or relief to the poor and oppressed, because of the urgency of the emergency, there was general discontent, which brought on me much unpopularity.

Consequently, after long and mature thought, having perceived that the root cause of my Monarchy's

troubles lay in the fact that each Minister and his staff was always satisfied to play the advocate and protector of the Province in his charge – often with only halfhearted regard to the general welfare and to the interests of the Crown – and to shift all burdens onto other Provinces, and next after this, to discredit the Cameral services so as to make them incapable of serving the public interest by gradually reducing their activities to the keeping of balance sheets and manipulation of figures – in spite of which, whenever a crisis arose, the Ministers always expected the Hofkammer to produce the money to meet any requirement, although they must have known how empty were its hands and how extremely limited its competences; furthermore that, instead of promoting the service by good agreement between the branches, they wasted time unconscionably in arguments and disputes to the neglect of any constructive work, with the result that practically every opportunity was always missed, having become alive to all this, I determined to alter the whole rotten Constitution, central and Provincial, completely and to set up new institutions of nature to put the system on a firm footing.

To this end I abolished altogether all the Cameral agenda of the former Hofkammer in the Austrian and Bohemian Provinces and limited its activities to Hungary and to the Court finance, the latter only for the lifetime of the present President, and abolished both Chancelleries and transferred all administrative and Cameral agenda, with the non-technical military, to the newly established Directorate.

For justice in the Bohemian and Austrian Provinces I established a single supreme instance (the staff lists, instructions, and plans of these two offices are attached), thus ensuring that the uniformity at which I was aiming should not be interrupted, nor any opportunity be left to look back at the harmful old Constitution.

To this end I abolished the title of Chancellor: the heads and deputy heads of the Directorate and Supreme Court were entitled Presidents. In the Provinces I set up everywhere “Representations” in charge of the administration, Cameral finance, and non-technical military business. The Provincial Military Commissioners were, in the interests of efficiency and uniformity, attached to the Representations. These bodies are responsible exclusively to the Directorate in Vienna, and similarly, the judicial instances in the Provinces report to the Supreme Court, which body is competent to decide any case according to its conscience, without reporting elsewhere.

Lists of all proposed decisions of the Directorate must, on the other hand, be drawn up weekly and submitted to me, and matters of importance are considered every Friday in a conference in the presence of myself and H.M. the Emperor. In general, I have laid down the rule that all business coming in each week must be dealt with immediately and nothing held back unless it needs much work, when it must be kept constantly under review.

I have, indeed, set up a separate Department of Commerce, subordinate to the Directorate, but this is composed chiefly of Councillors from the Directorate, and has also been instructed to concert most closely with that body in all matters involving administrative action, to which end its President attends a weekly meeting of the Directorate, and is also invited by me to the conference on internal policy.

I am convinced that these fixed institutions are the true foundation on which I can support the Monarchy entrusted to me by God, with the strong help which I hope, He will continue to give me, and preserve it to the best interest and profit of my successors. Seeing that such institutions give a Monarch the opportunity of acquiring personal knowledge of the nature of his dominions, discussing and examining their grievances and withal promoting a just relationship, such as is pleasing to God, between lords and their subjects, but especially of watching closely that the poor, and particularly the unfree population, be not oppressed by the rich and by their masters.

And as the system closely restricts the old excessive authority of the Ministers and higher officials, it may easily be appreciated that most of them, and also the great figures in the Provinces, regard these

measures as intolerable and will only gradually learn to admit the truth; meanwhile, they try to incite public feeling against the system, and launch stupid and angry attacks against it – which ought, indeed, to be severely censured. But thinking that these grumblings would gradually die away and the people be brought to a better frame of mind by seeing that the measures are all for their good, I generally disregarded and ignored such offensive utterances, even at the time; but it may well be necessary in the future to put some check on them, because I have observed only too plainly that they exercise a most harmful influence on the public and may therefore gradually lead to harmful consequences.

The military, on which this new system imposed orderly and proper restrictions, at first complained against it especially bitterly, because the officers found their opportunities of taking bribes in the Provinces cut off, yet every reasonable officer must admit that they have no cause to complain now that they receive their pay regularly every month. My chief worry was that the malpractices which had taken root among the troops would be very hard to eradicate, and I had decided to proceed here with the utmost severity. To my extreme relief, however, I managed things so that the Provinces made no complaints of excesses by the troops, but rather begged for more regiments to be quartered on them, who would buy what they had to sell.

I was also, indeed, at pains to introduce a uniform drill and proper military discipline everywhere among my troops. To that end they were to be concentrated in camps for two months each year. Who would believe that no sort of rule was in force among my troops? Each unit had a different order of marching, a different drill, etc. One practiced rapid fire, another slow. The same words of command were differently interpreted in each unit, and it is really no wonder that ten years before my accession the Emperor was defeated every time, and the subsequent state of the army beggars description.

In order to show my successors with what real care and motherly love I applied my whole heart to their welfare, allowing no difficulties to daunt me and overcoming every obstacle with patience and resolution […] [sentence incomplete]

My

**Section V**

*shows the benefits accruing to posterity from the reorganization, which was the only way of consolidating the Monarchy and preserving it for my successors.*

It is the less necessary to expatiate on this because I have described so fully the evils now passed, and the advantages of the present Constitution are as clear as day. For just as – everyone must agree – only a miracle was able to save the Monarchy in its previous condition of disintegration, confusion, and malpractices, so that I myself was constantly anticipating its end, so my successors will themselves understand that the measures and dispositions which I then took were the only way to preserve the Monarchy and transmit it to those who shall come after me. And here, in

**Section VI**

follows the necessity of maintaining these institutions, in self-preservation, and as for the maxims my successors have to follow to this end, I can give them no other counsel than not to allow themselves to be misled by anyone, for most people's advice is governed by their private ends and interests. I myself, when taking these most salutary measures, would have been led into confusion by the many insinuations and misleading accounts given me, had I not taken the utmost pains to acquaint myself through firsthand observation with the real nature of affairs, and this is why I feel myself obliged to enjoin my successors, for their own good and for the sake of the preservation of the Monarchy and its dominions, to alter nothing in the arrangements and Constitution laid down by me, but rather to preserve them as the apple of their eye, lest evil recur. And to this end they have especially to endeavor

to seek out honorable and efficient servants and, no less, to train up young men diligently, that from their youth up they may form a right picture of the work and through their zeal and application may fit themselves to render salutary, ample, and effective service according to the systematic order described above to their sovereign and to the public.

Source of English translation: C. A. Macartney, ed., *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. The Documentary History of Western Civilization. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 97-132. Introduction, editorial notes, chronology, translations by the editor; and compilation copyright © 1970 by C.A. Macartney. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Source of original German text: *Kaiserin Maria Theresias Politisches Testament* [*Empress Maria Theresa's Political Testament*], edited by Josef Kallbrunner. Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1952, pp. 25-73.

Recommended Citation: Maria Theresa’s Political Testament (1749-50), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/the-holy-roman-empire-1648-1815/ghdi:document-3533> [November 19, 2026].