

The Imperial War Constitution [*Reichskriegsverfassung*] (1681-82)

Abstract

In response to two threats – the Ottoman advance against Austria and Louis XIV's aggressive annexationist policy along the Holy Roman Empire's western border – this resolution mandated the raising and maintenance (though not on a permanent or standing basis) of an Imperial Army of 40,000-60,000 men. The ten Imperial Circles [*Reichskreise*] assumed major responsibility for financing their respective units of this force. The resolution was given to the emperor for ratification; he obliged and declared it a binding resolution of the Empire. Its proclamation proved to be the Holy Roman Empire's last important structural reform measure.

Source

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In keeping with the commission decree issued on January 17 by His Roman Imperial Majesty, our Most Gracious Lord, the councillors, ambassadors, and envoys here of the electors, princes, and estates have dutifully accepted it [the decree]. In order to secure and enjoy the beloved peace, the decree most graciously demands that we consider with all necessary effort the point of imperial security [*Punctum Securitatis Imperii*], especially how to forcibly avert all dangers that may be posed to the empire or its members, especially those dangers from the Turks. The decree also demands that we announce by way of a most submissive imperial report what we find advisable in this case. First, [we] now present our dutiful and most submissive gratitude for the fatherly care of His aforementioned Most Supreme Imperial Majesty for the fatherland and the entire [Holy] Roman Empire (regarding this matter), and we do not question that the respect and security of the entire Holy Roman Empire consists primarily of this same defensive arrangement [*Verfassung*]. Therefore, we have not failed to consider thoroughly these points regarding the conservation of the general well-being [*Wohlwesens*], in keeping with their importance.

And although it is entirely hoped that the [Holy] Roman Empire will be left undisturbed by everyone in its hard won peace and calm [*Ruhestand*], and also, in keeping with His Imperial Majesty's Most Gracious intention, that the Turkish danger posed to the Kingdom of Hungary and the [Holy] Roman Empire can be restrained, and having now provided all areas with the times and procedures in such a way that [they] have a watchful eye on the security of the fatherland, it is considered necessary and was decided in all three imperial committees [*Collegiis*] to establish to this end a correct configuration according to the imperial constitution and edicts. Therefore, above and beyond the troops offered for just this purpose by His Imperial Majesty, and to be maintained by him, 40,000 men are to be promptly mustered from the empire, and namely 10,000 cavalry, 2,000 dragoons, and 28,000 infantry, all recruited, good, and well-trained men. This is to be subsequently continued unless one finds that the empire's necessity and security no longer demand it, in which case it could be reduced or entirely eliminated, with the corollary that if the empire should need a larger army in exigent circumstances, then the number should be increased by 20,000 men. The estates hereby commit to this in the eventuality that they may thereby restrain and powerfully resist all unforeseen danger and emerging violence.

Source: Hanns Hubert Hofmann, ed., *Quellen zum Verfassungsorganismus des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation 1495–1815*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976, p. 233 f; Reprinted in Helmut Neuhaus, ed., *Zeitalter des Absolutismus 1648-1789*. Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung, ed. Rainer A. Müller, Volume 5. Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1997, pp. 73–74.

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