The "Youngest Recess" [*jüngster Reichsabschied*] of the Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire in 1654 (May 17, 1654)

Abstract

This recess, or resolution, of the Imperial Estates – that is, the ecclesiastical and secular princes and Imperial Cities assembled in the Imperial Diet [*Reichstag*] – was important for the authorization it conveyed to them, in the emperor's name, to act autonomously to create military defenses for themselves and the Empire. This authorization was particularly important for the larger secular principalities. Historians have interpreted it as a warrant for absolutist standing armies.

Source

[§§ 170-177 concern the problems discussed in Article VIII, § 5 of the Peace of Osnabrück, regarding war debts, the moratorium on paying principle and interest, etc.]

§ 178. The electors and the estates also found, after many consultations and careful deliberations on the stabilization of peace and law, that the Holy Roman Empire might be secured against all external powers and various impending indignations and maintained in its tenuous state of peace. For many years past, and indeed since the oft-mentioned peace treaties of Münster and Osnabrück, as well as before, other warring parties' various violent actions were de facto undertaken and carried out against electors and estates of the empire, but principally against the electoral Rhineland, the upper Rhineland, and also the Westphalian Imperial Circles [*Reichskreise*]. Confronting without further hesitation and with tenacious earnestness such happenings, which are intolerable, as well as baleful and shameful to the Holy Roman Empire, demands the greatest urgency. When we heard this most obedient advice [from the electors and the estates], we agreed with them and they with us on this present resolution: We therefore issue anew the order (which was issued in the Imperial Recess of the year 1555 and thereafter repeated, augmented, and improved in the years 1559, 1564, 1566, 1570, 1576, 1582, and 1594) against the aforementioned and all other violations and indignations, wherever they happen. All such emergencies are to be followed up with appropriate assiduousness and diligence, and the suitable help and force unhesitatingly put to work with a truly strong hand. The aforementioned imperial order will be well known and held fast as an unmistakably correct legal principle in each and every point. To better ensure this, in all of the Holy Roman Imperial Circles, the offices and positions of the circle colonels [*Kreisobristen*] and deputies and subordinates should be re-seated immediately (indeed at the latest by the first of this September) through the means of working circle assemblies. This will be done so that in case of any emergency (as provided for and declared in the oft-mentioned order) they will come together at once at the head of the circle's first call, and so that they will remember attentively the demanded urgency.

§ 179. And if the circle colonel should fail to carry out his duties with the due attentiveness and consideration, then the deputies and subordinates shall be bound to do it. Those circle colonels who call for and receive aid will be directors of the aid sent, nonetheless, they are not empowered to undertake anything major without the notification, consultation, and acquiescence of the circle colonels, deputies, and subordinates who have come to their aid.

§ 180. And the aim of this very important resolution is the general welfare and the continued state of peace in the Holy Empire, from which no elector or estate, nor their subjects are to be exempt. Therefore,

in the event that someone resists the aforementioned order and desires to attempt to file against it some kind of lawsuit before our Imperial Aulic Council [*Reichshofrat*] or Imperial Chamber Court [*Kaiserliches Kammergericht*], such a suit is absolutely not to be heard, and instead, the suitor is to be directed to comply with the order, […] all electors, estates, subjects, and citizens are to helpfully contribute by obediently making themselves available to their territorial rulers, lords, and authorities for the occupation and maintenance of any imperial fortress, place, or garrison as needed.

§ 181. However, at this time we leave it to the electors and the estates in each circle to determine how large the necessary force should be (as the aforementioned past resolutions and orders contained particular numbers and instructions).

§ 182. If some circle, which is located close to the danger, wants to raise a greater force than the quota mandated by the order, then that circle will not be obliged to provide aid beyond its dutiful portion.

§ 183. In the negotiations within the circles regarding the forces associated with this order, the majority shall always rule, and the fewer voices shall be obliged to yield to the more numerous.

§ 184. Various estates, especially the Imperial Cities, do not want to agree to the indicated numbers until their contingent inquiry into the matter of adjusting their imperial tax assessment has been adjudicated. So that the necessary forces are not hindered by this, all possible efforts should be applied so that those inquiries (which are complaining of this necessary work) can be discussed by the first of September. Meanwhile, they shall be obliged to contribute according to the old imperial tax assessment.

§ 185. At this Imperial Diet, there was discussion about whether and how the aforementioned order could be improved and established in a more perfect way in keeping with the current state of the Holy Empire, especially how to maintain the parity in defensive forces in the mixed circles with different religions, as desired by those on the side of the Augsburg Confession. However, because there was not enough time to reach a resolution this time, every such circle should meet especially as soon as possible (and before this September), consider the urgency, and reach a consensus on a good solution. On the basis of their communication among themselves, they should send their solution first to us, as their overlord, and then also to our dear nephew, the elector of Mainz. Then it may be further considered, completely resolved, and recorded in an Imperial Resolution at the next Imperial Deputation or Imperial Diet, regarding which a message will follow hereafter.

Source: *Aller des Heiligen Römischen Reichs gehaltener Reichstäge Abschiede und Satzungen, sambt andern Kayserlichen und Königlichen Constitutionen.* Mainz, 1654, pp. 55–101.
Source of German translation: *Der jüngste Reichsabschied von 1654. Abschied der Römisch Kaiserlichen Majestät und gemeiner Stände, welcher auf dem Reichstag zu Regensburg im Jahr Christi 1654 aufgerichtet ist*. Edited by Adolf Laufs. Bern und Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1975, S. 86–89; reprinted in Helmut Neuhaus, ed., *Zeitalter des Absolutismus 1648–1789*. Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung, edited by Rainer A. Müller, vol. 5. Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1997, pp. 35–42.

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