

Press release

“The Peace of Westphalia also had its dark side”

The 52nd German Historians’ Convention (*Deutscher Historikertag*) is to reevaluate the peace agreement 370 years ago – “It was only with the Peace of Westphalia that the politics of colonization became possible” – “Its global historical dimensions have long been overlooked” – Two years after Steinmeier’s speech, the Historians’ Convention will also conduct an interim review of the debate “Peace of Westphalia as a model for the Middle East?”

Münster, 19. September 2018 (exc) According to historians, the Peace of Westphalia 370 years ago also had its dark side. “While the successful diplomatic negotiations in Osnabrück and Münster brought to the people of Europe the peace that they had long waited for, the newly pacified states turned their attention to the outside world, expanded their empire, and founded new colonies. Its global historical dimensions have long been overlooked by historians”, says the Dutch historian Beatrice de Graaf from the University of Utrecht in the run-up to the 52nd Historians’ Convention in Münster, which will discuss new historical evaluations of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. “With the peace agreement, there gradually emerged a collective European security culture and polity that made attacks by neighbours on the continent less likely, but also made it possible to expand outside of Europe”. Beatrice de Graaf and Tübingen historian Renate Dürr are organizing at the Convention the panel “Peace in Westphalia 1648/2018”, which aims to close “the divide between European, Imperial and Global History” on the Peace of Westphalia. The panel will also discuss whether the Peace of Westphalia can serve as a model for today’s peace processes in the Middle East. At the Historians’ Convention in Hamburg in 2016, the then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier initiated a debate on precisely this question.

“The peace agreement of 1648 was the beginning of far-reaching cooperation between the major European powers in terms of technology, trade and administration, and this became the basis for inter-imperial expansion”, says de Graaf. The new and sophisticated system of collective security created space for shared economic activity and the invention of technologies. “Maritime and military contemporary sources show clearly how cartographers, engineers, hydraulic experts, lawyers and the police created new epistemic communities where knowledge was shared and improved. Protocols from the negotiations show that the aim was now cooperation rather than conflict”. This common know-how was used until into the 19th and 20th centuries in expeditions on the Nile and the Congo, be it in the fight against epidemics and piracy, in ship navigation or in the construction of hydroelectric plants. “It was not until peace had been achieved in the 17th century that economic empires could emerge whose financial resources and technologies enabled the great expansion of the Netherlands in the 17th century, of England in the 18th and 19th centuries, and of the German Empire in the late 19th century. Spanish colonization in South America in the 15th century, for example, followed quite different lines, took place without this know-how, and was a purely Spanish affair”.

Hierarchization and “model for the Middle East”

According to de Graaf, the system of collective security created by the Peace of Westphalia was based on the hierarchization of states: “1648 saw the dawn of an era in which the European

states continued to compete; but, through numerous treaties, they were at the same time assigned a place in the hierarchy of the international system, which thereby gained more solidity and permanence". The idea went back to the medieval concept of *societas christiana*. "The Peace of 1648, but also the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713 and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, breathed new life into this concept. The treaties categorized the countries as powers of the first, second or third order, whereas the 2nd and 3rd rank powers just had to accept that ordering principle – and tried to find leverage to bandwagon with the larger ones", according to de Graaf. The typical European way of thinking in imperial and socially stratified categories of inclusion and exclusion, as well as of hierarchization, was inserted and consolidated into the international states' system from 1648 onwards, and was then projected strongly onto the non-European world from the 1815s on". In the 19th century, the international order was delineated along the lines of a European coalition, pivoting around the quintuple alliance of Prussia, England, Austria, France and Russia at the top, with non-European territories in Asia and Africa suffering the brunt of their mutual inter-imperial expansion".

Interim review two years after Steinmeier speech

Whether the peace agreement of 1648 can serve as a model for conflict resolution in the Middle East is a fiercely debated issue among historians, according to de Graaf – even now, two years after the Historians' Convention in Hamburg, when the then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier encouraged this debate in a much-publicized speech. De Graaf does not consider 1648 or 1815 to be quite a fitting blueprint, and points out that essential prerequisites that existed back then are not there today, such as the collective conviction of wanting to end poverty and misery together, the notion that this could only be accomplished collectively, by sidelining national interests, and – very important – by building on the common idea of at least the illusion of a *societas christiana*.

In contrast, the Marburg historian Christoph Kampmann, who is also speaking at the Historians' Convention in the "Peace in Westphalia 1648/2018" panel and who had helped trigger the debate, sees "remarkable parallels" between the Thirty Years' War and modern conflicts, especially with regard to the specific dynamics of conflict: "Then as now, these are asymmetrical conflicts that do not fit into the patterns of the classic state conflicts of the 19th century, such as with regard to interventions by major powers or the conflict-ridden role of religion". In asymmetrical conflicts, actors beyond the state level struggle over the structure of the state, which is already fragile. According to Kampmann, this means "that major powers intervene from outside without necessarily engaging directly in the struggle". During the Thirty Years' War, the Spanish, Swedish and French monarchies successively and at the request of conflict parties interfered in the conflicts in the Roman-German empire; in Syria, there are four major powers – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the USA – that pursue their own interests in the region.

"Especially if we make no premature, inadmissible or unhistorical equations between the wars of the 17th century and today's conflicts, it is certainly possible to learn for today – for example, we can reflect better on the situation in Syria", says Kampmann. We can see, for example, that "the parties to the conflict in Syria are still a long way from clarifying and reconciling their respective security interests, and this was a prerequisite for a peace solution in 1648". Neither, unlike in 1648, is there agreement on the issue of what the principle state constitution of a post-war order should look like for Syria. "Unlike in central Europe in 1648, there are fundamental differences in Syria over the future state order". In addition, successful peace negotiations are only possible if all parties are involved, "including the many small actors, such as the Kurds, the weakened

Syrian government, and a good 20 rebel groups of different hues. If only one party feels excluded, then the war will simply continue”.

“Leaving points of conflict to do with religion to one side”

Religion then as now must also be taken seriously as a factor, since it played and still plays a central role in conflict resolution. “Until into the 1970s, it was thought that new wars were only pursued on account of ideologies or with regard to resources. Today, with Shiites and Sunnis, two denominations are again fighting each other in Syria”, explains Kampmann. The conflict between Catholics and Protestants could be solved in the peace negotiations because the negotiating parties left points of conflict to do with spiritual issues to one side. “The peace treaty contains a very pragmatic, secular solution for the coexistence of the denominations, and fixed their distribution in the territories and cities for a previously agreed date (*annus normalis*) and for all time”. That may well appear curious today, but it succeeded “because no side had to fear that the other would gain in influence later”, says Kampmann. The durability of the peace was also secured by the fact that the crimes and atrocities committed in the war could no longer be prosecuted – including even heavy devastation just before the peace agreement, such as that visited on Bavaria by Swedish troops. “Everything was subordinated to the peace – even truth and justice”.

“The 1648 Peace Congress should also be used as a role model insofar as the desire after decades of hardship led among all those involved to a high level of willingness to embrace innovative negotiating ideas”, says Kampmann. The fact that the horrors of war were deeply rooted in the collective memory had a stabilizing effect. “This gave rise to the will to hold talks without a previous truce and to try to resolve all individual conflicts”. The form that negotiations assumed saw new paths being taken, such as the still common spatial separation of the opposing delegations, then in Münster and Osnabrück. “The intensive exchange of opinions over the years enabled more realistic assessments of the other side, which facilitated compromises: in 1648, on the question of denomination, and today on the security interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia”. Curious from today’s point of view, but successful at that time, was the use of mediators who were partisan. “They were more committed than mediators who were not involved since they themselves suffered from the conflict”, says Kampmann. (maz/vvm)

Info box “Divided societies” – 52nd German Historians’ Convention in Münster

“Divided societies” in all epochs and continents is the theme of the 52nd German Historians’ Convention at the University of Münster from 25 to 28 September 2018. Around 3,500 researchers from Germany and abroad will exchange views on current research issues in more than 90 panels at the largest humanities congress in Europe. Wolfgang Schäuble, Christopher Clark, Herfried Münkler, Ulrich Raulff, Aladin El-Mafaalani and Birgit Schäbler are guest speakers. The host country of the Netherlands will be represented, for example, by the parliamentary speaker Khadija Arib and the author Geert Mak.

The panels will deal in many case studies with the social, economic, religious and ethnic divisions challenging not only the present, but also earlier eras. Points of discussion will be, for example, refugee debates from antiquity to the present day, the social, economic and legal exclusion of certain groups in different epochs, the question of whether the Peace of Westphalia can act as a model for the Middle East, economic divisions in the Federal Republic between, say, “Hartz IV families and helicopter parents”, and the political use of historical images in today’s divided societies such as Catalonia, Scotland and Kosovo. The organizers of the Convention are

the Association of German Historians (VHD), the Association of German History Teachers (VGD), and the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (WWU). (vhd/sca/vwm)

Please note: Those interested, as well as the media, can register at www.historikertag.de.

Image: Prof. Dr. Beatrice de Graaf, (Photo: Milette Raats, Universität Utrecht), Prof. Dr. Christoph Kampmann (Photo: Reinhold Eckstein, Universität Marburg)

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Some 200 academics from more than 20 disciplines of the humanities and social sciences and from 14 countries do research in the **Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”** of the University of Münster, the cooperation partner of the 52nd Meeting of German Historians in Münster. They deal with the complex relationship of religion and politics across epochs and cultures: from the ancient pantheon and Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages and the early modern period to the current situation in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 43 clusters of excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religions. The federal government and the state governments support the project in the second phase of the Excellence Initiative with 40.1 million euros from 2012 until 2018.

The **Verband der Historiker und Historikerinnen Deutschlands e. V.** (Association of German Historians) represents the interests of field of history to social organisations and state authorities, supports the international networking of history, advocates the promotion of young scholars, and organises the biennial Meeting of German Historians. The VHD currently has 3,300 members. The Meeting of German Historians is organised by the VHD and the Verband der Geschichtslehrer Deutschlands e. V. (German Association of History Teachers).