



## German History in Documents and Images

Volume 2. From Absolutism to Napoleon, 1648-1815  
Political Testament of Frederick II ("the Great") (1752)

In 1768, Frederick revised this document, meant only for his eventual successor's eyes, to take into account changed circumstances, but otherwise it stands as an incisive political self-portrait. Notable is his stoical, rationalist, and absolutist conception of the royal office. So, too, are his views on Prussia's "national spirit" and the Prussian nobility's relation to it, his inclination to protect the peasantry, and his rejection of his father's collegial organization of the bureaucracy. When, in Bismarck's day, this testament emerged from the archival dust, its amoral Machiavellism concerning foreign policy, and especially territorial annexations advantageous to Prussia, persuaded the Iron Chancellor to have it edited before publication. The full text appeared in print only in 1920, after the Hohenzollerns' fall.

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### *On Certain Maxims of Policy Relating to the Nobility*

An object of policy of the sovereign of this State is to preserve his noble class; for whatever change may come about, he might perhaps have one which was richer, but never one more valorous and more loyal. To enable them to maintain themselves in their possessions, it is necessary to prevent non-nobles from acquiring noble estates and to compel them to put their money into commerce, so that if some gentleman is forced to sell his lands, he may find only gentlemen to buy them.

It is also necessary to prevent noblemen from taking service abroad, to inspire them with an *esprit de corps* and a national spirit: this is what I have worked for, and why, in the course of the first war, I did everything possible to spread the name of "Prussian," in order to teach the officers that, whatever province they came from, they were all counted as Prussians, and that for that reason all the provinces, however separated from one another, form a united body.

It is right that a nobleman should prefer to devote his services to his own country, rather than to any other Power whatever. For this reason, severe edicts have been published against nobles who take service elsewhere without having obtained permission. But since many gentlemen prefer an idle and degraded life to service under arms, it is necessary to draw distinctions and to give preference to those who serve, to the exclusion of those who do not serve, and from time to time to collect together the young gentlemen, in Pomerania, in Prussia, and in Upper Silesia, to put them into cadet schools, and after, to post them to units.

### *On towns and burghers*

I have left the towns in the old provinces the privilege of electing their own magistrates, and have not interfered with these elections unless they were misused and some families of burghers monopolized all the authority to the prejudice of the rest. In Silesia I have deprived them of the franchise, for fear of their filling the councils with men who are devoted to Austria. With time, and when the present generation has passed away, it will be possible to restore the electoral system in Silesia without danger.

### *On the peasants*

I have relaxed [on the Crown estates] the services which the peasants used to perform; instead of six days labor service a week, they now have to perform only three. This has provoked the nobles' peasants, and in several places they have resisted their lords. The sovereign should hold the balance even between the peasant and the gentleman, so that they do not ruin one another. In Silesia the peasants, outside Upper Silesia, are very well placed; in Upper Silesia they are serfs. One will have to try to free them in due course. I have set the example on my Crown lands, where I have begun putting them on the same footing as the Lower Silesians. One should further prevent peasants from buying nobles' lands, or nobles, peasants', because peasants cannot serve as officers in the army, and if the nobles convert peasant holdings into demesne farms, they diminish the number of inhabitants and cultivators.

### *That a Sovereign Should Carry on the Government Himself*

In a State such as this it is necessary for the sovereign to conduct his business himself, because he will, if he is wise, pursue only the public interest, which is his own, while a Minister's view is always slanted on matters that affect his own interests, so that instead of promoting deserving persons he will fill the places with his own creatures, and will try to strengthen his own position by the number of persons whom he makes dependent on his fortunes; whereas the sovereign will support the nobility, confine the clergy within due limits, not allow the Princes of the blood to indulge in intrigues and cabals, and will reward merit without those considerations of interest which Ministers secretly entertain in all their doings.

But if it is necessary for the Prince to conduct the internal administration of his State himself, how much more necessary is it that he should direct his own [foreign] policy, conclude those alliances which suit his purposes, form his own plans, and take up his own line in delicate and difficult situations.

Finance, internal administration, policy and defense are so closely interlinked that it is impossible to deal with one of these branches while passing over the others. If that happens, the Prince is in difficulties. In France, the kingdom is governed by four Ministers: the Minister of

Finance, who is called *Contrôleurgénéral*, and the Ministers of Marine, War, and Foreign Affairs. The four “kings” never harmonize or agree; hence all the contradictions which we see in the government of France: the one pulls down out of jealousy what the other has put up with skill; no system, no planning. Chance governs, and everything in France is done according to the pleasure of Court intrigues: the English know everything that is discussed in Versailles; no secrecy and, consequently, no policy.

A well-conducted government must have a system as coherent as a system of philosophy; all measures taken must be based on sound reasoning, and finance, policy, and military must collaborate toward one aim, the strengthening of the State and the increase of its power. But a system can be the product of only one brain; it must consequently be that of the sovereign's. Idleness, self-indulgence, or weakness are the causes which prevent a Prince from working on the noble task of creating the happiness of his peoples. Such sovereigns make themselves so contemptible that they become the butts and laughingstocks of their contemporaries, and in history books their names are useful only for the dates. They vegetate on thrones that they are unworthy to occupy, absorbed as they are in self-indulgence. A sovereign has not been raised to his high rank, the supreme power has not been conferred on him, to live softly, to grow fat on the substance of the people, to be happy while all others suffer. The sovereign is the first servant of the State. He is well-paid, so that he can support the dignity of his quality; but it is required of him that he shall work effectively for the good of the State and direct at least the chief affairs with attention. He needs, of course, help: he cannot enter into all details, but he should listen to all complaints and procure prompt justice for those threatened by oppression. A woman came to a King of Epirus with a petition; he snubbed her, telling her to leave him in peace. “And why are you King,” she replied, “if not to procure justice for me?” A good saying, which Princes should always keep in mind.

We have here the Directorate General, the Colleges of Justice, and the Ministers of the Cabinet, who daily submit their reports to the sovereign with most detailed memoranda on the questions which call for his decision. In controversial or difficult questions, the Ministers themselves set out the pros and cons, which makes it possible for the sovereign to take his decision at a glance, provided that he takes the trouble to read and understand the matter in question. A sound intellect easily grasps the essential point of a question. This method of dealing with business is preferable to the conciliar system practiced elsewhere, because it is not from big assemblages that wise advice comes, for Ministers are mutually divided by intrigues, private hatreds and passions intrude into the affairs of State, the system of debating questions by dispute is often too lively, casting shadows instead of bringing light, and, finally, secrecy, which is the soul of business, is never well kept by so many people.

It may be well for a Prince, when uncertain, to consult the Minister whom he judges to be the wisest and the most experienced; if he wants to consult a second, this should be done separately so as to avoid sowing the seeds of an ineradicable jealousy by preferring the advice of one man to another's. I shut up my secrets in my own mind; I keep only one secretary (of whose loyalty I am satisfied); without corrupting me personally, it is impossible to guess my

designs. The Ministers here are charged only with Imperial [sic] affairs; all important negotiations, treaties, or alliances pass through my hands.

### *On Foreign Policy*

[ . . . ]

*[When he turns to foreign policy, Frederick points out that “by our geographical position, we are neighbors of the greatest Princes of Europe; all these neighbors alike are jealous of us and secret enemies of our power. The geographical situation of their countries, their ambitions, their interests, all these different combinations determine the principles of their policies, which are more or less hidden according to time and circumstance.”*

*Frederick then surveys the list of Prussia’s enemies: Austria– by far the most ambitious, and also “of all the European Powers the one which we have offended most deeply, which will never forget either the loss of Silesia or that part of her authority which we divide with her in Germany”; England, via Hanover; Russia–only “an accidental enemy” through the personal policy of her chancellor, Bestuzhev (if he could be gotten rid of, “things would revert to their natural condition”); Saxony–“a vessel without a compass; the Netherlands–“without sufficient discernment to know whom they should love and whom hate.” Against these, Prussia’s natural allies are headed by France, but Frederick includes among them also some other minor powers, principally those which feel themselves threatened by Austria. He goes on:]*

In view of the present situation, you can easily see that Prussia will never lack for allies. To choose them, one must divest oneself of any personal hatred and of any prejudice, favorable or unfavorable. The interest of the State is the only consideration that should decide the counsel of a Prince. Our present interest, especially since the acquisition of Silesia, is to remain united with France, as with all the enemies of Austria. Silesia and Lorraine are two sisters, of whom Prussia has married the elder and France the younger. This alliance forces them to follow the same policy. Prussia could not watch unmoved while Alsace and Lorraine were taken from France, and Prussia’s diversions in favor of France are efficacious, because they carry the war immediately into the heart of the Hereditary Provinces [of Austria]. France, for similar reasons, cannot suffer Austria to recover Silesia, because that would weaken too greatly an ally of France, which is useful to her for the affairs of the North and of the Empire and whose diversions (as I have just said) provide certain safety for Lorraine and Alsace, in case of acute and unforeseen danger. [ . . . ]

I should add one thing to these considerations: if we were allied with England and the House of Austria (not to mention that it would be against our interests), we could not promise ourselves any aggrandizement from that side, whereas, united with France, we can hope for acquisitions in case of war, if good fortune attends the efforts of our arms.

Whatever we might expect from war, my present system is to prolong the peace, so far as this is possible, without shaking the majesty of the State, because France is in a condition of complete lethargy, the maladministration of her finances having rendered her almost incapable of presenting herself on the scene of Bellona [i.e., battle] with the power and dignity that become her, because Sweden is a name without power behind it, because France has been so neglectful as to lose her hold on Spain, which prevents us from making a diversion in Italy.

There are also other reasons. It is not in our interest to reopen the war; a lightning stroke, like the conquest of Silesia, is like a book the original of which is a success, while the imitations of it fall flat. We have brought on our heads the envy of all Europe through the acquisition of this fine Duchy, which has put all our neighbors on the alert. There is not one who does not distrust us. My life is too short to restore them to a sense of security advantageous to our interests.

For the rest, would war suit us while Russia stands powerfully armed on our frontiers and only awaits the moment to act against us (which, however, she could not do without help from English subsidies), and a diversion by that Power would upset all our plans at the very beginning of our operations? In such circumstances, the safest course is to let the peace run on and to await developments in readiness. For these developments to favor our enterprises, it would be necessary for Bestuzhev, that Minister-Emperor of Russia in the pay of the Austrian Court, to fall into disgrace, and for us to be able to win over his successor by corruption; for the death of the King of England to plunge England into the dissensions of a minority; for there to be a Suleiman on the throne of Constantinople and an ambitious and all-powerful Minister-President in France. Then, in such a conjuncture, is the time to act, although it is not necessary to be the first on the stage. My advice would be to let the belligerent parties fire their first shots and to take up arms only when the others have exhausted themselves by the struggle. This would suit us the better because we should by this circumspect conduct have put ourselves in a more advantageous position, and, while our financial resources would be unequal to a long war, we should still be able to last out the three or four final campaigns, following the maxim of Cardinal Fleury: he remains the master of his adversary who has the last crown in his pocket.

There are two kinds of war: those made out of vanity, and those made out of interest. They are madmen who undertake wars of the former kind; to engage in those of the latter it is necessary to have made the right preparations and not to divulge one's secret and one's objectives until peace becomes inevitable. He who reveals his designs prematurely renders them abortive, because he gives his enemies and his enviers time to oppose them. He who knows how to keep silent can make fine acquisitions, or at the worst, he does not lose prestige by being forced to make a peace less advantageous than he had hoped.

We must constantly watch Russia and the Austrians, Russia with respect to Polish and Swedish affairs and to the alliances which she might plan between Poland and the Court of Vienna. Austria, equally, calls for close attention, as the chief of our enemies, who is planning to place the Prince of Lorraine on the throne of Poland and would like to play the despot in the Empire, all things which we could not suffer. It will be asked—how prevent this? The means dictated by

good sense are these: to ally ourselves with the enemies of our enemies, that is, with France, Sweden, some Princes of the Empire, if possible, with the King of Sardinia, and the Turk himself; to work to break up the Polish Diets, dispensing some sums in the right quarters; to insinuate to the Poles that the Queen of Hungary and the Empress of Russia are dangerous enemies, whose ambition it is to dispose of the throne of Poland without taking heed of the Republic and to make the Duke of Lorraine sovereign, after having placed him on it; but above all, to make the Turks feel that it is contrary to their policy to allow Hungary and Poland to be united in the same family.

#### *Of the conduct to be adopted toward the European Powers*

A man well-versed in policy must have a conduct which is always different and always adapted to the circumstances in which he is placed and the persons with whom he has to deal. It is a grave political fault always to act haughtily, to want to decide everything by force, or, again, always to use softness and suppleness. A man who always follows a uniform conduct is soon penetrated, and one must not be penetrated. If your character is known, your enemies will say: "We will do this and that, then he will do that," and they will not be deceiving themselves; whereas if one changes and varies one's conduct, one misleads them and they deceive themselves on issues which they thought to have foreseen. But so prudent a conduct requires that one watch oneself constantly, and far from abandoning oneself to one's passions, follow slavishly the line which one's real interests dictate. The great art is to conceal one's designs, and for that one must veil one's character and reveal only a firmness measured and tempered by justice. [ . . . ]

*[After these words, Frederick describes in considerable detail the line of conduct he had followed in previous years in his negotiations with the various powers. "Thus," he ends this section, "each occasion, each person, calls for a different line of conduct. If it is time for a rupture, it is well to explain oneself firmly and haughtily; but the thunder must not growl unless the lightning falls at the same time. If one has many enemies, one must divide them, segregate the one which is the most irreconcilable, concentrate one's fire on him, negotiate with the others, lull them to sleep, conclude separate peaces, even at a loss, and, once the principal enemy has been crushed, there is always time to turn back and fall on the others, under the pretext that they have not fulfilled their engagements."]*

#### *Political Projects*

[ . . . ]

*[Now follow chapters on "the qualities of negotiators," on "corruptions which must be made and how to guard against them in one's own circle," and on "great political projects." This last ends:]*

All this shows that great projects undertaken prematurely never succeed, and that policy, being too much at the mercy of chance, does not allow the human spirit to control events unborn and all that falls within the field of future contingencies. Policy lies in profiting by favorable conjunctures, rather than in preparing them in advance. This is why I advise you not to conclude treaties formed in anticipation of uncertain events, and to keep your hands free, so that you can take your side according to the hour, the place, the situation of your affairs, in a word, as your interest then dictates to you. I served myself well by acting in this way in 1740, and I am doing the same at present in the Polish situation. I have warned France of the designs of the House of Austria, I have urged her to awaken the Turk, but I am taking care not to tie my hands by treaties, and I am waiting on events before taking up my line.

### *Political Pipe Dreams [Rêveries Politiques]*

So much for the substance and basis of the line that should be followed in this State. Let us pass to the world of fantasy. Politics has its own metaphysic, and just as there is no philosopher who does not amuse himself by constructing his system and explaining abstractions according to his own genius, so it is permissible for statesmen, also, to divert themselves in the spacious field of chimerical projects, which may sometimes become real if one does not lose sight of them, and if successive generations, marching toward the same goal, are sufficiently skilled to hide their designs deeply from the curious and penetrating eyes of the European Powers.

Machiavelli says that any disinterested Power which might be found among the ambitious Powers would certainly end by perishing. I regret it, but I am forced to admit that Machiavelli is right. Princes are bound to have ambition, but it must be prudent, measured, and illuminated by reason. If the desire of self-aggrandizement does not procure acquisitions for the prince-statesman, at least it sustains his power, because the same means which he prepares for offensive action are always there to defend the State if defense proves necessary, and if he is forced so to use them.

There are two ways by which aggrandizement is achieved: rich successions or conquests.  
[ . . . ]

### *Successions Which Could Revert to the Royal House*

[ . . . ]

*[This section enumerates the territories which the head of the House of Hohenzollern could claim as of hereditary right, on the extinction of the previous ruling line: these are the margravates of Bayreuth and Anspach, Prussia's claim to which is described as "incontestable" (in fact, they were united under one hand in 1769 and reverted to Prussia in 1791), and Mecklenburg, where Frederick admits his case to be more arguable, but the question is not*

*urgent, as the line is in no apparent danger of extinction. This section is followed by the much more controversial one which was the chief victim of Bismarck's blue pencil:]*

*Acquisitions by right of interest [par droit de bienséance]*

Of all the provinces of Europe there are none which would suit the State better than Saxony, Polish Prussia, and Swedish Pomerania, because all three round it off.

But Saxony would be the most useful: it would set the frontier back furthest, and would cover Berlin, that seat of empire, the residence of the Royal family, and the site of the treasury, the High Courts of Justice, the financial administration, and the mint, that capital which is too extensive to be defended, and the fortifications of which were dismantled, mistakenly, by my father. Saxony remedies the weakness of the capital and gives it double coverage, by the Elbe and by the mountains which separate it from Bohemia. If one were master of Saxony, it would be necessary to fortify Torgau, to build a fortress in the style of Hüningen near Wittenberg, but closer to the Elbe, to work on the height beyond Zittau and on the other height this side of Peterswald; by these two great forts one would block those two roads into Bohemia: there would remain to be defended only those leading to Carlsbad, Teplitz, and Gera, but those places would be harder for an Austrian army to pass because it would have to bring its supplies by cart along terrible, long, and almost impassable roads. A competent general would find it easy to defend these three last adits, and the Electorate would be covered and surrounded by a double barrier.

If it proved impossible, after all, to annex the whole of Saxony, one could content oneself with Lusatia and take the course of the Elbe for frontier, which would fulfill the desired purpose, partly by rounding off the frontier, and by three fortresses and a river, presenting a formidable obstacle covering the capital against enemy assault.

You will no doubt think that it is not enough to indicate which are the countries which we should like to have: one must also suggest the means of acquiring them. Here they are: you must dissemble and hide your designs, profit by junctures, wait patiently for those favorable to us, and, when they arrive, act vigorously. What would facilitate this conquest would be if Saxony were in alliance with the Queen of Hungary and if that Princess or her descendants broke with Prussia. That would be a pretext to march into Saxony, disarm its troops, and establish oneself in force in the country. You could even tranquilize France by representing to her that it is contrary to good policy (when one is at war) to leave in one's rear an enemy so powerful as Saxony. It would be easy to disarm the Saxons. [ . . . ]

*[The next paragraphs consist of a purely technical plan of campaign to achieve this end. Then Frederick goes on:]*

For this plan to be completely successful, it would be necessary for Russia to be at war with Turkey while we are at war with Austria and Saxony, and it would also be necessary to incite as many enemies as possible against the Court of Vienna, so as not to have all its forces against us.

After having subdued Saxony, it would be necessary to carry the war into Moravia. A decisive victory won in that province would open the gates of Olmütz and Brünn and carry the war near the capital. It would be well, before the campaign is over, to raise 40,000 men in Saxony, to hire troops from the Princes of the Empire, and to procure new forces. During the following campaign one would work to raise Hungary. Twenty thousand men would enter Bohemia and would easily conquer that undefended kingdom. If, at that juncture, England was governed by an indolent King, it would be unnecessary to bother about the Electorate of Hanover; but if it happens to be a warlike Prince, one will have to persuade France to make a diversion (using auxiliary troops) in the Electorate, which will free Prussia's hands. This Hanoverian expedition would force England to accept the conditions imposed by France and its allies, and, under the peace, France would acquire Flanders, and Prussia would restore Moravia to the Queen of Hungary and would trade Bohemia against Saxony with the King of Poland.

I admit that this plan cannot be realized without a great deal of good luck; but if one fails in it, one has lost no prestige, provided that one has not divulged one's secret, and even if one did not gain the whole of Saxony at the first stroke, it is certain that it would be very easy to cut off part of it. The chief points would be that Russia and the Queen of Hungary would have to be engaged in a war against the Turks, France, and the King of Sardinia.

The province which would suit us best after Saxony would be Polish Prussia. It separates Prussia from Pomerania and prevents us from sending support to the former by the difficulties presented by the Vistula and by fear of inroads the Russians that might make through the port of Danzig. You will see this more plainly if you consider that the Kingdom of Poland cannot be attacked except by the Muscovites, that if they descend on Danzig, they cut the army of Prussia off from any connection with this country, and that, if that army was forced to retire, it would be necessary to send them a considerable force to help them cross the Vistula.

I do not think that the best way of adding this province to the Kingdom would be by force of arms, and I should be tempted to say to you what Victor Amadeus, King of Sardinia, said to Charles Emmanuel: *"My son, you must eat the Milanese up like artichokes, leaf by leaf."* Poland is an electoral Kingdom; when one of its Kings dies it is perpetually troubled by factions. You must profit from these and gain, in return for neutrality, sometimes a town, sometimes another district, until the whole has been eaten up.

Those who are fortunate enough to achieve this acquisition will no doubt fortify Thorn, Elbing, and Marienwerder, and will even strengthen the smallest places along the Vistula, which would frustrate all enterprises which Russia might launch against us. Their regular troops are certainly not to be feared, but their Kalmuks and Tartars bring fire and destruction, devastate

countrysides, carry away peoples into captivity, and burn all the places of which they make themselves masters. This is how they behaved in Finland, and this should make you try to avoid war with Russia so far as your reputation allows it.

The acquisitions which one makes by the pen are always preferable to those made by the sword. One runs fewer risks, and ruins neither one's purse nor one's army. I think that in making the pacific conquest of Prussia, it would be absolutely necessary to reserve Danzig for the last mouthful, because this acquisition would raise a great outcry among the Poles, who export all their wheat through Danzig, and would fear, with justice, being made dependent on Prussia by the taxes which Prussia could put, through the Vistula and the port of its discharge, on all the commodities which the Sarmatian lords sell to other countries.

Swedish Pomerania is the province that would suit us best after those of which I have spoken. This acquisition could only be made by treaties. I think that the plan is even more chimeric than the others. It could, however, be brought off in the following way: Russia, as the most considerable northern Power, might bring Sweden into alliance with Prussia, to establish a counterweight in the balance of power. If, then, in a happy conjuncture when Russia had a war on her hands, and Sweden conceived the plan of recovering Livonia, why should Prussia not promise her help on condition that, when the operation had been carried through, Sweden ceded Prussia the part of Pomerania that lies beyond the Peene? The difficulty of attacking Russia from the side of Livonia and Estonia is that it is necessary to have superiority at sea. The Swedish fleet is weak, and we have not a single galley. It would thus be impossible to besiege Reval, Narva, and the other fortresses, not to mention that the problem of supplies might be entirely insuperable, and, even supposing Prussia to succeed in conquering Livonia, has it not been practically proved that Sweden would be unable to advance through Finland, prevented as she would be by the Russian fortresses which their sitings render impregnable? Thus, after much blood had been spilt, the end would be a draw, and each party would remain in possession of what it had possessed under the *status quo ante*.

This is about all that I can say to you on the subject of acquisitions which would profit us. If this House produces great Princes, if the discipline of the army is kept up to its present level, if the sovereigns economize in time of peace, so as to have the money in hand for war if they understand how to draw profit from events with skill and prudence, and, finally, if they are themselves clear in their purpose, I do not doubt that the State will continue to grow and expand and that with time Prussia will become one of the most considerable Powers of Europe. [ . . . ]

[After this, Frederick again sketches the present weaknesses of Prussia and once more surveys "the changes that might occur in Europe" a chapter that is largely repetitive, but contains the admission that his conscience "was not easy about his behavior toward Maria Theresa." He ends this chapter with the following passage:]

You will perhaps ask how I advise you to act in the event of all these changes that I foresee? I am not rash enough to give you advice about distant and uncertain events. These things are too

vague for me to be able to prescribe to you exact rules on what course you should follow. I content myself with repeating what I have already said to you in more detail. Keep a prudent control over your finances, so as to have money when you need it; make no alliances except with those who have exactly the same interests as yours; never make treaties binding you to act in contingencies which are remote, but wait for the case to arise before deciding on your line and acting accordingly; take good care not to place your trust in the number and good faith of your allies; count only on yourself; then you will never deceive yourself, and look on your allies and your treaties only as second strings. A large number of treaties harms more than it helps; conclude few of them, always to the point and of such nature that you have all the advantage from them and involve yourself in the least risks.

The policy of small princes is a tissue of cheatings; that of great princes consists of much prudence, of dissimulation, and of love of glory. It is a great mistake for a statesman to cheat always; he is soon seen through and despised. Keen-sighted spirits reckon on a consistent conduct; that is why one must, as much as one can, change one's game, disguise it and turn oneself into a Proteus, appearing now lively, now slow, now warlike, and now pacific. This is the way to confuse one's enemies and to make them circumspect in the designs they entertain against you. It is not only good to vary one's conduct: it must, above all, be framed to fit the situation of the moment, the time, the place, and the persons with whom one is dealing. Never threaten your enemies: a barking dog does not bite. Put pleasantness into your negotiations: soften down haughty or offensive expressions; never carry small disputes too far; count your own pride for nothing and the interest of the State for everything; be discreet in your business, and dissimulate your designs. If the glory of the State obliges you to draw the sword, see that the thunder and the lightning fall on your enemies simultaneously.

You must not break treaties except for important reasons. You may do so if you fear that your allies are making a separate peace, and if you have the means and the time to forestall them, if lack of money prevents you from continuing the war, or, finally, if important advantages demand it of you. Coups of this kind can be made once, or at most, twice in a lifetime, but they are not expedients to which one may resort every day.

Source of English translation: C.A. Macartney, ed., *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in *Documentary History of Western Civilization*. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 332-46. 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 French text: G.B. Volz, ed., *Politische Correspondenz. Ergänzungsband: Die politischen Testamente Friedrichs des Grossen [Political Correspondence. Supplementary Volume: The Political Testaments of Frederick the Great]*. Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1920, pp. 37-67. [The document appears here in the original French.]