

The Czech king who tried to unite Europe – in 1464

Yes – in 1464 the Czech king George of Poděbrady proposed a league of European states with a parliament, a court and a common defense.



Five hundred years before anyone built such things, a king in Prague had them drafted, sealed and carried across Europe by ambassadors. The story deserves five minutes, ending included.

A heretic on a throne

George of Poděbrady became king of Bohemia in 1458, and nearly everything about him was irregular. He was not born to a throne; the Bohemian estates elected him. And he was a Hussite – a follower of the reform movement that had fought off five crusades a generation earlier – which meant the rest of Catholic Europe regarded his kingdom with suspicion and his person, in Rome's view, as a heresy problem awaiting solution.

He was also, by the accounts that survive, one of the ablest politicians of his century: a stocky, patient realist who ruled a country of two faiths without letting it tear itself apart. His weakness was external. The papacy wanted him gone, and to the southeast the Ottoman armies were advancing – Constantinople had fallen just five years before his coronation. Out of that squeeze came an idea that outlived everyone involved.

The document

Between 1462 and 1464, George's circle – the itinerant French-Italian diplomat Antonio Marini did much of the drafting and the selling – produced the *Tractatus pacis toti christianitati fiendae*, the Treaty on the Establishment of Peace throughout Christendom. For its time, its contents are barely believable. Not a crusade, not an empire under

one crown, but what a modern reader recognizes instantly as an international organization:

- A permanent assembly of member states, to convene in Basel in 1465 and then rotate its seat.
- Decisions by majority vote – a rule Europe would not actually adopt for another five centuries.
- A common court to judge disputes between rulers. War between members was banned; whoever started one would face all the rest.
- A shared budget and a common defense against the external threat, then the Ottomans.

Collective security, binding arbitration, shared institutions – page after page of things Europe built only after 1945, and some it has not finished building yet.

The embassy and the answer

The plan's intended anchor was France. In 1464 George sent a celebrated embassy, led by Albrecht Kostka of Postupice with Marini alongside, to Louis XI. The king received the Bohemians graciously, signed a treaty of friendship – and declined the league. Rome had worked against the project from the start, for an obvious reason: a club of monarchs that settled its own disputes had no need of papal arbitration, and its architect was a heretic besides.

The sequel was swift. In 1466 Pope Paul II excommunicated George and proclaimed a crusade against him. The man who had proposed permanent peace for Europe spent the rest of his reign defending his kingdom, and died in 1471 with the war still running.

Why the story matters now

Two reasons, neither nostalgic. First, the idea of uniting Europe by agreement is older than every institution now associated with it, and it did not originate in any of the capitals that run it today – it came from a small, embattled country in the middle, proposed by a ruler whom respectable Europe considered beyond the pale. The idea has been arriving from the margins ever since; the relay of its proposers runs through philosophers, exiles and prisoners.

Second, look at how it failed: nobody argued the design was wrong. Louis XI simply preferred his own game, and the institution whose power the plan diluted made sure it died. Five and a half centuries later, that remains a fair one-sentence summary of why Europe still isn't one country. The design was never the hard part.

[All questions →](#)

SOURCES

- Tractatus pacis toti christianitati fiendae (1462–1464), critical editions
- Records of the 1464 Bohemian embassy to Louis XI (Albrecht Kostka of Postupice; Antonio Marini's diplomacy)
- Papal politics: Pius II's opposition; excommunication by Paul II, 1466
- Odložilík, The Hussite King; Heymann, George of Bohemia: King of Heretics

FREQUENTLY ASKED

Who was George of Poděbrady?

King of Bohemia from 1458 – Europe's only elected king of his day, and a Hussite, which made him a heretic in Rome's eyes. He ruled a religiously divided country with notable skill.

What exactly did he propose?

A treaty creating a league of European states with a permanent assembly, majority voting, a common court to settle disputes between rulers, a ban on war between members and a shared defense – in 1464.

Why did the plan fail?

It bypassed the Pope, who worked to bury it, and France's Louis XI – the intended leader – signed a friendship treaty with Bohemia but declined the league. Sovereign self-interest beat collective design.

What happened to George afterwards?

Pope Paul II excommunicated him in 1466 and preached a crusade against him, led by his former son-in-law Matthias Corvinus of Hungary. The author of a perpetual peace plan spent his last years at war.

Is the document authentic and preserved?

Yes. The Tractatus pacis toti christianitati fiendae survives in archives, and historians treat it as the earliest fully worked-out design for a European union of states.