Peace of Westphalia, 1648

The *Peace of Westphalia* resulted from the first modern diplomatic congress and initiated a new order in central Europe based on the concept of state sovereignty. **Westphalian sovereignty** is the concept of nation-state sovereignty based on two principles: territoriality and the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority structures.

Adherents to the concept of a Westphalian system trace it back to the Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, in which, it is claimed, the major European powers agreed to abide by the principle of territorial integrity. In the Westphalian system, the interests and goals of nation-states were widely assumed to transcend those of any individual citizen or even any ruler.

The Peace of Westphalia is said to have ended attempts at the imposition of any supranational authority on European states. The "Westphalian" doctrine of states as independent actors was bolstered by the rise in 19th century thought of nationalism, under which legitimate states were assumed to correspond to *nations*—groups of people united by language and culture. Benedict Anderson refers to these putative nations as "imagined communities."

The Westphalian system reached its apogee in the late 19th century. Although practical considerations still led powerful states to seek to influence the affairs of others, forcible intervention by one country in the domestic affairs of another was less frequent in the period between 1850 and 1900 than in most previous and subsequent periods.

The Peace of Westphalia is crucially important to modern international relations theory, with the Peace often being defined as the beginning of the international system with which the discipline deals.

International relations theorists have identified the Peace of Westphalia as having several key principles, which explain the Peace's significance and its impact on the world today:

1. The principle of the sovereignty of states and the fundamental right of political self determination
2. The principle of (legal) equality between states
3. The principle of non-intervention of one state in the internal affairs of another state

These principles are common to the way the "realist" international relations paradigm views the international system today, which explains why the system of states is referred to as "The Westphalian System".

Both the idea of Westphalian sovereignty and its applicability in practice have been questioned from the mid-20th century onwards from a variety of viewpoints. Much of the debate has turned on the ideas of internationalism and globalization which, in various interpretations, appear to conflict with Westphalian sovereignty.