

in 1783, 'all the rivalries and prejudices which have been the cause of so many quarrels between province and province, nation and nation must cease. One thought should fill the mind.'⁶ But for some years Joseph refrained from major initiatives outside his Austro-Bohemian lands. Then, in spring 1784, he launched several lines of policy more or less together. The crown of St Stephen, symbol of Hungarian sovereignty – though Joseph had declined to be crowned, to avoid the constitutional oath – was brought from Presburg castle to Vienna. A reportedly to the sound of thunderclaps in the offended heavens. A Hungarian census was ordered as groundwork for the introduction of the Austrian system of military conscription, but since censuses were conventionally concerned with the assessment of taxable resources the unprecedented inclusion of hitherto untaxed nobles in the count made it still more ominous. In addition, German replaced Latin as Hungary's administrative language, all officials being given three years to learn it. Resistance to these innovations was immediate and deep, and included the Hungarian Chancellor himself, to whom Joseph scathingly replied that he would not be put off by side noises. He showed the same intransigence to the Tyrol where the military conscription system was also being introduced for the first time.

Initially, the hard line appeared to work. The disorder predicted by Joseph's advisers did not occur or rather, it came from a different quarter, from Transylvanian Romanian peasants under Horea, a peasant himself who had met Joseph and claimed to be acting in his name against the unjust lords. Their rising, easily crushed, led Joseph to extend his abolition of personal serfdom to Hungary (1785). Flushed with success he now turned against the Hungarian counties, forbidding their assemblies to meet without his permission and making their deputy sheriffs government nominees, subordinate to a new network of ten Royal Commissioners. The year 1784–85 is the turning-point in Joseph's reign, when initiatives piled on each other in domestic and foreign affairs. Judging by letters to his brother Leo, the bold Joseph interpreted this period very much along the lines of the pro-Enlightenment *Journal Général de l'Europe* in 1785:

It is not surprising that the reforms are undergoing contradictions and giving rise to murmurings. But an enlightened and firm government sets itself above such murmurings and continues to attend to the people's weal despite themselves.⁷

Later events were to show such nonchalance was premature.

The Crisis of Enlightened Absolutism – to 1795

In the middle years of Joseph's reign, while domestic opposition flamed inwardly, the foreign pot began to bubble. That Joseph's reforms were intended primarily to strengthen the state as the instrument of his own martial glory has been a commonplace first voiced by contemporaries. Was this not Frederick the Great's notorious rival, who said on his final leave-taking with his troops that his first desire had always been to be a soldier?⁸

Yet as so often with this complex man everything is not quite as it might seem. Joseph's letters from the campaign trail of the War of Bavarian Succession (1778–79) breathe a spirit of repugnance for war, 'a horrible thing . . . much worse than I had visualised . . . the ruin of so many innocent people'.⁹ Foreign diplomats in the 1780s believed that his martial appetite was in decline. It is likely, as with his favourite general Lacy, that Joseph was always more military administrator than pugnacious warlord, a man whose travels had told him that Hungarian linen socks issued to Austro-German troops gave them blisters and much more of the same. He had, it seems, no master plan in foreign affairs but sought opportunistically to profit from events to consolidate his territories. Here a key theme of Austrian policy applied, the need voiced by the great Habsburg general Prince Eugen of Savoy (1663–1736) to round off the scattered imperial lands. Thus the Austrian Netherlands and even Galicia were seen as potentially dispensable, while gains in Bavaria remained the most attractive goal, as the war of 1778–79 had indicated.

The diplomatic setting for these rather indefinite purposes left something to be desired. Prussia under Frederick II appeared an irremediable foe. France, which had replaced Britain as Austria's ally after the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756, remained a fickle friend. Russia under Catherine II, the other potential ally, was disconcertingly expansionist towards enfeebled Poland and Turkey. In these circumstances the defensive agreement concluded with Russia in May 1781 came to dominate the reign. It seemed to offer Austria protection against Prussia and the chance either to contain or profit from Catherine's designs. In fact, the limits on Austria's freedom of action imposed by her anti-Prussian fixation made her the weaker partner in the alliance and besides, eighteenth-century enlightened statecraft put little value on the depopulated, impoverished Balkan lands Austria would have gained from a partition of Turkey. Whether acquiring, say, Serbia and Bosnia at that time would have made the