

### The Congress of Vienna

Following the exile of Napoleon Bonaparte to Elba, the victorious Allied powers began a series of committee sessions in Vienna to sort out the problems of Europe.

The Big Four were Robert Castlereagh of Britain, Prince Clemons von Metternich of Austria, Frederick William III of Prussia and Alexander I of Russia, although the newly royalist France was invited to join later represented by Lord Charles Talleyrand. Metternich is seen as the leader of Europe during this period. The Age of Metternich lasted from 1815 to 1848.

At the Congress of Vienna, the key thing in the minds of the Allies was to organize a peace that would bring stability to Europe and contain, but not punish France. In a bid to improve the status of Louis XVIII, the Allies decided to avoid imposing damaging reparations on France and allowed her to keep her former colonies. Within Europe, she was forced back to her 1792 borders, which effectively meant the loss of only the Low Countries gained under Napoleon. To do this the members had to redraw the map of Europe.

While a workable peace was the ultimate objective, the Allies also wanted to restore the legitimate rulers of Europe to their pre-1792 thrones – this was known as *legitimacy*. They wanted this but not at the expense of disrupting the balance of power within the continent. The issue of minor nationalities being able to decide their own fate was also an important consideration.

France's representative at the Congress Lord Charles Talleyrand was at his best during the meetings and brilliantly worked on the distrust the Allies had for each other. His task was made easier by Prussia and Russia's plans for Saxony, which basically meant the former annexing the country in exchange for Russia gaining three-quarters of the Duchy of Warsaw. Austria would be thrown the remainder.

This, of course, made Austria nervous of a far stronger Russia and so Vienna sought a secret military alliance with Britain and France while mobilizing its troops. The possibility of renewed war in Europe, particularly between former allies, was enough to bring sense to the negotiations and they resolved the issues with more open minds. The creation of a Germanic Confederation of 39 states (including Prussia) was created from the previous 300 German states, under Austrian rule. Austria was given back territory it had lost recently. Norway and Sweden were joined as one country. The neutrality of Switzerland was guaranteed. Britain was given Cape Colony, South Africa, and various other colonies in Africa and Asia. Sardinia was given Piedmont, Nice, Savoy, and Genoa. And freedom of navigation was guaranteed for many rivers

The Duchy of Warsaw became a subject kingdom under the Russian Tsar; Holland was created and incorporated Belgium, while Austria regained control of various Italian territories. The return of Bonaparte and his triumphal move on Paris sped up the Congress's progress, although the final document was only signed nine days before the battle of Waterloo. The Congress was concluded in June 1815 (shortly before the Battle of Waterloo and the final defeat of Napoleon), with the signing of a treaty by Great Britain, Austria, France, Portugal, Prussia, Russia, Spain, and Sweden. While it dealt with the restoration of what was hoped would be stabilizing monarchies, by not dealing with the issues of nationalism the Congress sowed the seeds of a new revolutionary period.

1. What was the purpose of the Congress of Vienna?
2. What were some of the conditions of the Congress of Vienna? List FIVE.

A Transcript from the Congress of Vienna

Castlereagh: There is only one thing we can all agree on. Things have changed in Europe.

Talleyrand: Things—I'm not so sure I know what you mean. Aren't we back where we started before the Revolution? Haven't we turned back the clock to the good old days? Change has been wiped out!

Castlereagh: Don't be a fool, Talleyrand. (*He raises his voice slightly.*) Things will never be the same. We can try, but the French Revolution and Napoleon will always be with us.

Metternich: Don't say that! Thank god, Napoleon is gone. We've shipped him off to St. Helena; I could not sleep if he were as close as Elba. Put the man on the battlefield and you never know might happen. He took boys and gave them guns. Somehow he won ten battles in twenty days! That man is dangerous!

Talleyrand: I still dream of him escaping and rallying the mobs around him once again. What a nightmare! Never again will a man rise from nowhere and become an emperor, as Napoleon did. Only those born to the throne could be rulers.

(*Czar Alexander enters the room. He listens to Metternich*)

Metternich: You are right for once, Talleyrand. It was clever of us to choose old Louis, the dead king's brother, to sit on the throne of France. There is no question about him being the legitimate ruler. It was a blessing that there was at least one real Bourbon left in France.

Alexander: Not clever, Metternich—we were not clever at all. We are lucky that Louis happened to be available. The clever thing was making it look as if the French people were calling Louis back to the throne. What fools they were! Now he is Louis XVII. Stupidly, he thinks that he was made king of France by the grace of god!

Metternich: He looks like a fool and acts like a fool. But he is the king of France. And that's it! Revolutions are over! There will be no more changes in the governments of Europe. The common people will never rule our nations. They will never be given a chance to take control. We must keep the mob in its place! Legitimacy—inherited rank and privilege—is the answer! We must never forget that!

Castlereagh: I repeat: You cannot turn back the clock! We can try to hold back the hands of the clock; we can try to prevent changes. But gentlemen, the world is not the same, it can never be!

Metternich: (*angrily*) wrong again, Castlereagh! We are going to keep things exactly the way they are. We will insist upon it! Everything we have done here in Vienna has one goal: keep things as they are. The present order will remain forever; we have made future revolutions impossible.

Talleyrand: (*places a map of Europe on the table*). Look at this map of Europe. The countries of our continent are all locked in. There is simply no room for change. No new nations can ever rise. Notice how Italy is broken up into many states; each is weak and helpless. And don't forget how cleverly we divided Germany! There are now 39 weak states, and they're really controlled by Austria. No, there will never be a united Germany!

1. According to this transcript, what are the men fighting about?
2. What do the men of the Congress want?
3. How did these men weaken Europe?