

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **THE POST-WAR SETTLEMENT: THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA, 1814 – 1815**

The Congress of Vienna met in 1814 and 1815 to redraw the map of Europe after the Napoleonic era and to provide some way of preserving the future peace of Europe. While Europe was spared a general war throughout the remainder of the 19th century, the failure of the statesmen who shaped the future in 1814 – 1815 to recognize the forces unleashed by the French Revolution such as nationalism and liberalism only postponed the ultimate confrontation between two views of the world: change and accommodation or maintaining the status quo.

### **3.1 PERSONALITIES**

#### **3.1.1 *The "Big Four"***

The Vienna settlement was the work of the representatives of the four nations that had done the most to defeat Napoleon: England, Austria, Russia and Prussia.

Prince Klemens Von Metternich, who represented Austria, epitomized conservative reactionism. He resisted change, and was generally unfavorable to ideas of liberals and reformers because of the impact such forces would have on the multinational Hapsburg Empire.

Lord Castlereagh was England's representative. His principal objective was to achieve a balance of power on the continent by surrounding France with larger and stronger states.

Karl Von Hardenberg, as chancellor, represented Prussia. His goal was to recover Prussian territory lost to Napoleon in 1807 and gain additional territory in northern Germany (Saxony).

Czar Alexander I represented Russia. He was a mercurial figure who vacillated between liberal and reactionary views. The one specific "non-negotiable" goal he advanced was a "free" and "independent" Poland with himself as its king.

While Perigord Talleyrand, the French Foreign Minister, was not initially included in the early deliberations, he became a mediator where the interests of Prussia and Russia clashed with those of England and Austria. He thereby brought France into the ranks of the principal powers.

### 3.1.2 *The "Dancing Congress"*

This European gathering was held amid much pageantry. Parties, balls, and banquets reminded the delegates what life had been like before 1789. This was intended to generate favorable "public opinion" and occupy the delegates, since they had little to do of any serious nature.

### **3.2 PRINCIPLES OF SETTLEMENT: LEGITIMACY, COMPENSATION, BALANCE OF POWER**

“Legitimacy” meant returning to power the ruling families deposed by more than two decades of revolutionary warfare. Bourbon rulers were restored in France, Spain and Naples. Dynasties were restored in Holland, Sardinia, Tuscany and Modena. Papal States were returned to the Pope.

“Compensation” meant territorially rewarding those states which had made considerable sacrifices to defeat Napoleon. England received far-flung naval bases (Malta, Ceylon, Cape of Good Hope). Austria recovered the Italian province of Lombardy and was awarded adjacent Venetia as well as Galicia (from Poland) and the Illyrian Provinces along the Adriatic. Russia was given most of Poland with the Czar as King, as well as Finland and Bessarabia. Prussia was awarded the Rhineland, three-fifths of Saxony and part of Poland. Sweden was given Norway.

“Balance of Power” meant arranging the map of Europe so that never again could one state (like France) upset the international order and cause a general war.

Encirclement of France was achieved through the following:

- 1) a strengthened Netherlands, by uniting Belgium (Austrian Netherlands) to Holland to form the Kingdom of the United Netherlands, a much larger state north of France;
- 2) Prussia receiving Rhenish lands bordering on the eastern French frontier;

- 3) Switzerland receiving a guarantee of perpetual neutrality;
- 4) enhancing Austrian influence over the Germanies by creating the German Confederation (Bund) of thirty-nine states with Austria designated as President of the Diet (Assembly) of the Confederation; and
- 5) Sardinia having its former territory restored, with the addition of Genoa.

### **3.3 ENFORCEMENT PROVISIONS (CONCERT OF EUROPE)**

Arrangements to guarantee the enforcement of the status quo as defined by the Vienna settlement now included two provisions:

- 1) The "Holy Alliance" of Czar Alexander I of Russia, which was an idealistic and unpractical plan, existed only on paper. No one except Alexander took it seriously.
- 2) The "Quadruple Alliance" of Russia, Prussia, Austria and England provided for concerted action to arrest any threat to the peace or balance of power.

England defined concerted action as the great powers meeting in "Congress" to solve each problem as it arose so that no state would act unilaterally and independently of the other great powers. France was always believed to be the possible violator of the Vienna settlement.

Austria believed concerted action meant the great powers defending the status quo as established at Vienna against any

change or threat to the system. Thus liberal or nationalist agitation was unhealthy for the body politic.

### **3.3.1 Congress System**

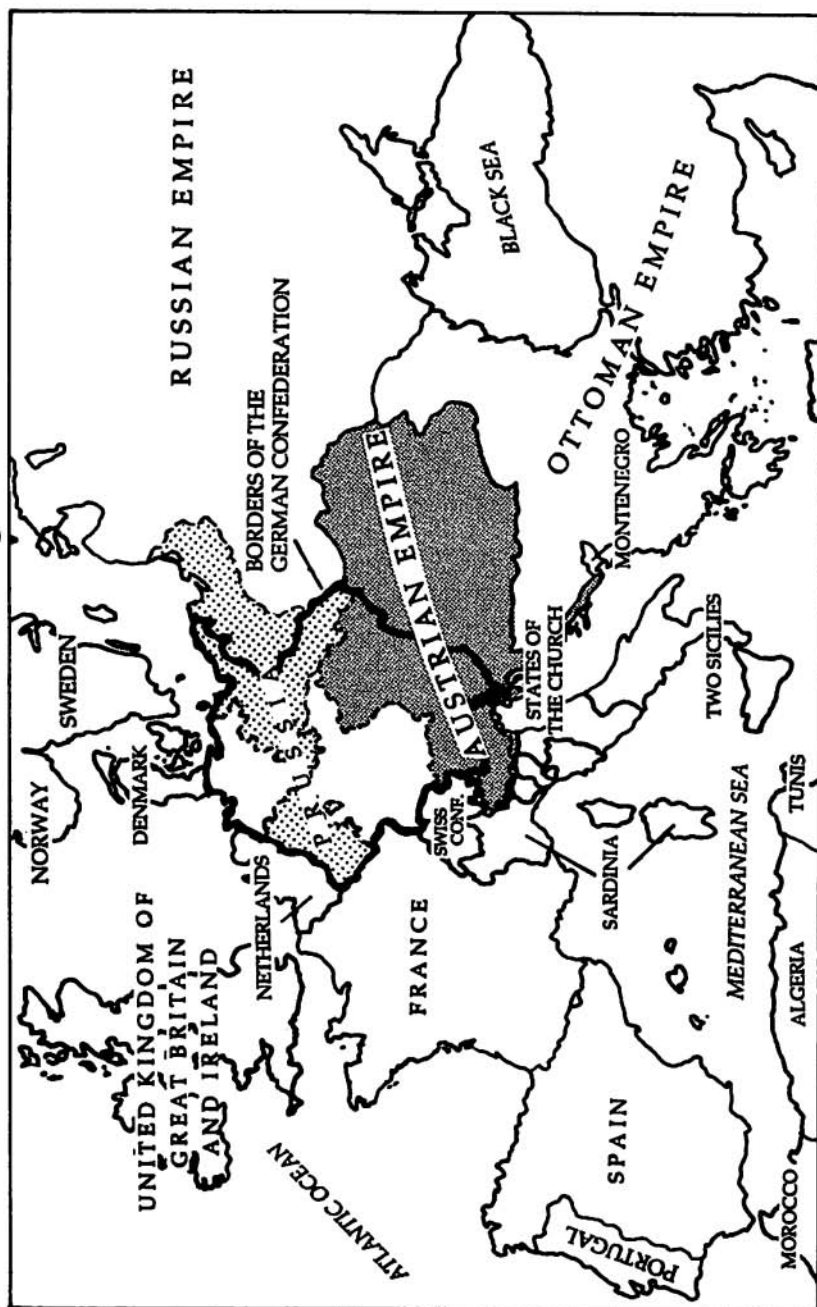
From 1815 to 1822 European international relations were controlled by the series of meetings held by the great powers to monitor and defend the status quo: the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818); the Congress of Troppau (1820); the Congress of Laibach (1821); and the Congress of Verona (1822).

The principle of collective security required unanimity among members of the Quadruple Alliance. The history of the Congress System points to the ultimate failure of this key provision in light of the serious challenges to the status quo after 1815 (See Chapter 6).

## **3.4 EVALUATION**

The Congress of Vienna has been criticized for ignoring the liberal and nationalist aspirations of so many peoples. Hindsight suggests the statesmen at Vienna may have been more successful in stabilizing the international system than we have been able to do in the 20th century. Not until the unification of Germany in 1870 – 71 was the balance of power upset; not until World War I in 1914 did Europe have another general war. But hindsight also instructs us that the leading statesmen at Vienna underestimated the new nationalism generated by the French Revolution, that they did not understand the change that citizen armies and national wars had effected among people in their attitude toward political problems. The men at Vienna in 1815 underestimated the growing liberalism of the age and failed to see that an industrial revolution was beginning to create a new alignment of social classes and create new needs and issues.

## EUROPE 1815 (After the Congress of Vienna)



## **CHAPTER 8**

# **EPILOGUE: THE VIEW FROM MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY EUROPE**

A new age was about to follow the Revolutions of 1848-1849 as Otto von Bismarck, one of the dominant political figures of the second half of the 19th century, was quick to realize. If the mistake of these years was to believe that great decisions could be brought about by speeches and parliamentary majorities, the sequel would soon show that in an industrial era new techniques involving ruthless force were all too readily available. The period of Realpolitik — of realistic, iron-fisted politics and diplomacy — was about to happen.

By 1850 all humankind was positioned to become part of a single worldwide interacting whole. Based on military technology and industrial productivity, no part of the world could prevent Europeans from imposing their will.

The half century after 1850 would witness the political consolidation and economic expansion that paved the way for the brief global domination of Europe. The conservative monarchies of Sardinia-Piedmont and Prussia united Italy and Ger-

many by military force and gave birth to new power relationships on the continent. Externalizing their rivalries produced conflict overseas in a new age of imperialism, which saw Africa and Asia fall under the domination of the West.

Nationalism overtook liberalism as the dominant force in human affairs after 1850. Nationalists would be less romantic and more hardheaded. The good of the nation and not the individual became the new creed. The state would be deified.

After 1848 – 1849 the middle class ceased to be revolutionary. It became concerned about protecting its hard-earned political power and property rights against radical political and social movements. And the working classes also adopted new tactics and organizations. They turned to trade unions and political parties to achieve their political and social goals.

A great era of human progress was about to begin — material, political, scientific, industrial, social and cultural — shaping of the contours of the world.