

Chapter 10 : "The European concert"

After the Napoleonic Wars, the displaced dynasties were to be reinstated. The French count Louis XVIII of Bourbon was reinstated May 30, 1814. The further discussions took place at the Congress of Vienna June 16, 1814 to July 11, 1815:

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Congress of Vienna

Before the Napoleonic Wars there were six European "empires": The British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Austrian and Russian. Other areas - the Holy Roman Empire, Italy and the Balkans - were divided into small states. Scandinavia had an intermediate position. In the 17th century, the Holy Roman Empire consisted of about 300 mini-states under a nominal "emperor", but thereafter its numbers diminished through dynastic marriages, conquests and political alliances. The biggest of them were Prussia, Austria and Bavaria. After Napoleon's victory in the Third of the Coalition Wars (1803-1806), the German-Roman Empire was dissolved and Prussia and Austria went their own ways. The other states were brought together in the "Rhine Confederation".

During the Congress of Vienna, the Rhine Confederation was reorganized into a "German Confederation" of 39 medium-sized states, 34 of which were monarchies. The Italian-Norwegian and Swedish-Norwegian peninsulas underwent the same process of forced mergers. Italy was reduced to about 10 states (depending on how one counts) and Sweden-Norway became a state, a political union between two equal states, an empire with a puppet state or a personal union depending on how one wants to describe the matter. Finland, the Baltic States, Bessarabia (Belarus; Belarus), Poland & Ukraine were recognized as belonging to Russia. The rest of Eastern Europe was part of the Austrian Empire. The Congress was a purely European affair. Since neither the "High Gate" nor the United States were invited, the Balkans or the American possessions were not affected.

The signatories to the Congress of Vienna were called "The Big Four" (United Kingdom, Austria, Prussia & Russia), "The Big Six" (plus France & Spain) and "The Eight" (plus Portugal & Sweden). In addition 216 mainly German-Roman Princely Houses were present to defend their interests. In the beginning "The Big Four" wanted to monopolize all decisions. This caused such conflicts among The Eight that all work stalled until November 1. In the meantime, the festivities for which the Congress has become famous were organized. In the words of Field Marshal Charles Joseph de Ligne: "Le congrès danse beaucoup, mais il ne marche pas." Napoleon's return from Elba February 26, 1815, greatly accelerated the pace of work, and the final document was ratified the week before the Battle of Waterloo June 19, 1815.

Karl Johan announced that he would participate in the negotiations. The Swedish delegation prepared for his arrival, but he never came. After his visit to Paris April 12-30, 1814, Karl Johan seems never to have left Sweden-Norway. He, along with other members of the Napoleonic clan, was exiled.

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One of the problems of the congress was how the monarchies would legitimize themselves after 25 years of uninterrupted war and revolutions. The level of debate was low. The princes dwelt on the French and English examples - hated the French example and misunderstood the English example, because they did not master the language. The French diplomat Talleyrand, representing the small states, had managed to get into the most important of the committees. He defended the new French constitutional monarchy with the need to separate power from legitimacy. Power (=autocracy) was no longer viable and the weakening of religion made it difficult to legitimize one self in that manner. The new secular approach meant that religion was a private matter, not a way of legitimizing the state. Monarchs must in the future become politicians, seek support from influential groups and be seen as guarantors of peace, freedom, progress, etc. Their future lay in not standing in the way of modernity and liberal freedoms. Not a popular message in this assembly of vindictive and backward harking satraps.

Everyone dragged their feet. It took two more revolutions - the July Revolution of 1830 and the February Revolution of 1848 - before all monarchies had a constitution similar to the French. Portugal received its Constitution in 1822. Russia 1832. Spain abolished the 1812 Constitution (after a French intervention) in 1823 and received no new constitution until 1834. Prussia and Austria continued without a constitution until 1848. I am not going to analyse all these constitutions. The most important thing was that they existed and could therefore be discussed. The Swedish Constitution of 6 June 1809 and the Norwegian Constitution of 17 May 1814 were long unknown outside diplomatic circles. There also seems to have been a language issue, but possibly also a lack of interest in balancing the influence of the king and parliament in the English spirit.

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Over time, the Norwegian constitution has been surrounded with such mythology that it is difficult to form an opinion about the act. General Magnus Björnstierna who led the Swedish Moss negotiations has described its creation thus:

”This ”masterly production” is, with a few modifications, a translation of the Constitution framed *at Cadiz* in 1812 by the Spanish Cortes, renewed in 1820, and of which we know the deplorable history and the still more painful end: whereas this Spanish constitution is itself a copy of the French constitution of the year 1791, which led, in the short time of two years, to that of the *National Convention* and of the *Comité du Salut Public*. To this groundwork was added whatever the Swedish Constitution of 1809 contained restrictive of the power of the crown. This may explain how “this production of a mastermind” could be framed in the rather short time of four days.”¹

Later writers have been more sympathetic.

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The Congressional system

In 1818-1822, four more congresses were held to discuss common European affairs: Aix-la-Chapelle (1818), Troppeau (1820), Laibach (1821) & Verona (1822). The meetings were called by the Big Four (United Kingdom, Austria, Prussia, and Russia) + France which was

¹ Björnstierna 1840: s. 5.

forgiven for its *pas sins* in 1818. The congress acted as arbitrator in the aftermath of the Vienna Congress. They would also prevent a repeat of the French Revolution. To that end the "Three Emperors' Union" Austria, Prussia and Russia formed the so-called "Holy Alliance" (1815) which also met during the congresses. The initiator Alexander I had envisioned a United States of Europe on a Christian basis (something like the medieval Holy Roman Empire), but the proposal was watered down in support of absolute monarchy by the grace of God.² Since all the participants, including Sweden, signed on, it has been difficult to distinguish between the congresses' ideological & practical function. For Charles John, the congress system led to some setbacks.

- The Treaty of Kiel provided for financial compensation to Denmark for the loss of Norway, the so-called liquidation issue. The Danish demand in 1815 was six million Rdr which according to Charles John the Norwegians themselves would pay. They responded by saying that they in such case wanted their exclaves Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and also part of the Danish West Indies back. As the great powers, including Russia, sided with Denmark, it looked as if Norway would return to the fold. The conflict, however, through Charles John's protestations became so long-drawn (read diplomatic evasions and twistings) that the great powers got tired of it & Norway 1820 got away with half the sum.
- In 1825, Charles John made an attempt to sell off some of his oldest warships, to get money to modernize the rest. Its customers were Colombia and Mexico, Spanish colonies that at the time were trying to break away. The sale took place at the same time as England recognized them as independent states & has been interpreted as an attempt by Charles John to break away from the Russian hold. Unfortunately for him Spain belonged to the Holy Alliance, Alexander I made their cause his & England was unwilling to take a stand in Sweden's self-inflicted troubles. Charles John was forced, under the threat that Spain would begin to hijack Swedish merchant ships, back under the Russian umbrella, where Sweden would remain until the Crimean War of 1853-56.
- The goal of the "Holy Alliance" was assumed in the contemporary debate also to be Charles John's goal & contributed to his bad reputation in liberal circles.

Alexander I's death in 1825 is usually considered the end point of the Congress system & "the Holy Alliance". After that, the interests of the major powers diverged too much to be regulated in this way. For example, the revolutions of 1848 never led to a joint Congress of the great powers. However, for issues outside the European balance of power, the congresses continued: London (1830, 1832 & 1838-39), Geneva (1864), Paris (1865), St. Petersburg (1868), Bern (1874), Berlin (1878), Berlin (1884-85), Brussels (1890), The Hague (1899) & The Hague (1907). These dealt with the division of the Netherlands, the Balkan question, the black & white slave trade, the African colonies, international law, martial law, field medical care, post- & telegraph system, etc. The Swedish royal house was deeply involved in the field medical care - what later became known as the Red Cross.

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² Herbermann 1910.

The Vienna Convention

The Vienna Congress discussed the organization of diplomatic relations between countries. It would be helpful if all countries had the same system of government - in this case monarchies - because, according to old tradition, the ambassadors did not represent the country but were the personal envoy of the Head of State. In fact, there were six main types of diplomats:

- Ambassador
- Envoy
- Minister
- Chargé d'affaire
- Consul
- Personal representative

The idea was that only the great powers (all of them monarchies) would send ambassadors. Mid-sized powers such as Sweden-Norway would send envoys. The smallest countries & republics such as the United States would send ministers. In practice, however, they all had the same function. Further down the diplomatic rank was the chargé d'affaire & consul. A chargé d'affaire represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and handled current affairs. The consul was also employed by the State Department, he was in charge of day-to-day business but did not represent the department.

All those who represented were accredited to their role in the host country. Ambassadors, envoys and ministers submitted their credentials to the Head of State. The Chargé d'affaire delivered his credentials to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The consuls are unclear, but since they usually dealt with local trade issues they may have been accredited to the governor, mayor or equivalent. Due to the slow communications, ambassadors, envoys and ministers were allowed to negotiate, but the decisions had to be ratified from home. Outside the system, the head of state could also send personal representatives and lobbyists who did not negotiate.

Good personal relations would contribute to stability. The royal houses married into each other and the diplomatic profession was a "noble reservation" with long, sometimes lifelong, terms of office. Posterity has been fascinated by how foreign policy through personal constellations & family gatherings came to get close to a family matter. The closed circuit contributed to a dysfunctional practice. A diplomatic agreement would consist of public clauses, secret clauses only known by those sworn to secrecy & oral agreements only known by those who negotiated.

In Sweden, the Swedish-Russian Treaty of Turku - the "politics of 1812" - aroused tremendous attention when the details 50 years after the fact became known and what was included in the oral part of the agreement is still being discussed.

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Personal diplomacy

The system of personal envoys and personal contacts allowed the regent to conduct diplomacy without the knowledge of his parliament or even his government. Desirée had diplomatic status in order to exploit her proximity to Napoleon. Charles John explained his

political position in his letters to her and Napoleon's Foreign Minister Bassano dictated Napoleon's response. During the Crimean war of 1853-56, King Oscar I conducted secret negotiations with England to retake Finland. Only the princes & Oscar's political agents were informed about what was going on. His son Charles XV was a middleman. The English were uncomfortable with the secrecy, nothing seemed entrenched, but they played along. As king, Charles continued his father's example with personal promises he could not keep. In 1859, he promised to abolish the office of Governor of Norway. In 1863 he promised to come to the rescue of Denmark in the event of war. In 1864 he put out probes about a Danish-Swedish union. Nothing was entrenched & nothing came out of it. Later, King Oscar II became known for his diplomatic travels, in which he sought support for his policy of neutrality. However, these are too poorly documented to be accounted for.

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Victoria of Baden's attempt in 1914-15 to bring Sweden into the war on Germany's side was the most widely publicized. There are two studies.³ The conclusion was that Victoria wanted to use her German connections for the benefit of Sweden. Sweden would benefit of a strong monarchy, a strong defence and an alliance with Germany. Around 1911, therefore, a Swedish-German activist movement & "court camarilla" consisting of:

- Victoria: Cousin of Emperor William II & Gustaf's personal envoy.
- Ludvig Douglas (1849-1916): Grandson of Louis I, Grand Duke of Baden, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1895-1899 and Marshal of the Realm 1911-1916. His son Robert Douglas (1880-1955) was from time to time William II's personal envoy.
- Franz von Reichenau (1857-1940): German Minister in Stockholm 1911-1914.
- Eric Trolle (1863-1934): Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs 1905-1909, envoy in Berlin 1909-1912 and Marshal of the Realm 1930-1934.
- Arvid Taube (1853-1916): Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs 1909-1911 & envoy in Berlin 1900-1909, 1912-1916.

The most concrete effect of the activist movement was that both Gustaf, William II and their governments were misinformed by their diplomats about their country's views. Gustaf got the impression that Germany was more averse to Swedish neutrality than it was. William II had the impression that Sweden was more pro-German than it was. It ended with a diplomatic crisis: that in early 1915 the German minister Reichenau was declared undesirable and replaced with Hellmuth Lucius von Stodten (1869-1934). Victoria tried to get rid of Lucius by accusing him, in public during a Berlin visit (to a student delegation) of an irresponsible lifestyle, which was correct but ignored. The following year, Douglas & Taube died. Until the end of the war, Victoria used her personal relationship with William II, for example by sending a telegram in February 1918 asking him to refrain from occupying Åland and expelling the Swedes. William backed down so far that the Swedish ships that were there could remain.⁴

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What took place during balls, family meetings, sailing trips, hunting parties, spas, holiday stays etc. is unclear. It must be counted as representation & probes rather than diplomacy. The concept floats.

³ Carlgren 1962; Schubert 1981.

⁴ Hellner 1960: ss. 420-421.

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Dynastic policies

The small monarchic states were already by contemporaries perceived as the odd "fairy tale kingdoms". They were important though for the princes' private lives. If one wanted to avoid political complications, one married within one's own dynasty - risky though due to the inbreeding - or someone from a German mini-state. Dynastic marriages between major powers no longer existed. They belonged to the 18th century. For Sweden-Norway, however, they remained important during the 19th century as a form of diplomatic markers and proof that the Bernadotte dynasty was accepted as fully royal. The Swedish princes were married into the Danish, German (Bavaria, Nassau, Prussia), German-Dutch, German-English, whole-English & Russian royal houses. The Swedish princesses married into the Danish, Norwegian and German-Belgian royal houses. Louise, Ingrid, Margaretha, Märtha & Astrid became known as "Bernadotte Princesses as export items". The alternative for the host country would have been to choose German princesses, but it was after 1864 & 1914-18 no longer politically possible, and then Sweden suited them well. As the Balkan countries were recaptured, they also created career opportunities for those princes whose abilities matched the challenge.

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The system of hereditary monarchies came into disrepute after World War I on the grounds that the system was unable to deliver the stability that was its *raison d'être*. However, the criticism seems to be partly misguided. In 2014, Kokkonen & Sundel published a statistical study based on 961 monarchs in 42 European states 1000-1800 with the conclusion that a designated successor made rebellions, coups d'etats, etc. less likely because it was less risky for the claimant to await his turn. But even though the hereditary monarchy guaranteed internal stability, it certainly did not guarantee peace.

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