



COMMUN X
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE

Congress of Vienna

Background Guide

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to COMMUN X! My name is Wiliam Washko, and it is an absolute honor to be your chair for this year's General Assembly Committee on the Congress of Vienna. I am a senior, and aside from having chaired COMMUN committees in the past, I am an active member of Commonwealth's Model UN and Model Congress.

Over the course of this conference, it will be each delegate's job to represent diverse, sometimes conflicting viewpoints, debate complex ideas and pass legislation to address the situation in Europe. I hope you will gain a greater understanding of how the Congress of Vienna functioned by exploring how the major powers of Europe balanced their competing interests with a desire to create a lasting peace, while also grappling with the emerging tensions between monarchies and liberal movements. I also hope this experience helps you gain a deeper understanding of how the Congress operated and the delicate diplomacy that was at play. I also look forward to seeing delegates refine their writing, communication, research, and public speaking skills throughout the conference.

I want to ensure that every delegate understands the role they are assigned in order for conference debate to run smoothly and effectively and for every delegate to get the most out of this conference. Due to this, **we will be requiring all delegates to write a position paper for their role** in order to be eligible for awards. For examples of previous position papers and other resources to aid your research, please visit [COMMUN's Resources Page](#).

I can't wait to meet all of you and read more about your positions! If you have any questions, please feel free to email me!

Sincerely,

Will Washko,

Chair, The Congress of Vienna

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Introduction

Delegates, 1814 is upon you all! Napoleon Bonaparte has finally been defeated, ending his fifteen year reign of terror over Europe. You can rest easy, but only for a moment. Napoleon's conquests have left the established power structures of Europe in ruins, and it is up to you to restore it. The thousand year old Holy Roman Empire has collapsed, and been carved up by the powers of Europe. Your goal as delegates is to try and mold the continent of Europe into something that benefits you, as well as supports your ideals. Will you follow the traditional structures of power, and restore Europe to what it once was? Will you bow to the demands of revolutionaries, and redesign Europe as a coalition of republics? Or, will you step off the beaten path, and create something entirely new? Only one thing is certain, after this Congress, Europe will never be the same again.

Important Definitions

- Absolutism: *A monarchy with complete control over all aspects of the state.*
- Liberalism: *An often elite political movement, which viewed people as inherently free and equal. This meant that liberals supported constitutions and checks on monarchs' powers (though they did not always support full democracy). They argued for an unregulated capitalist economy.*

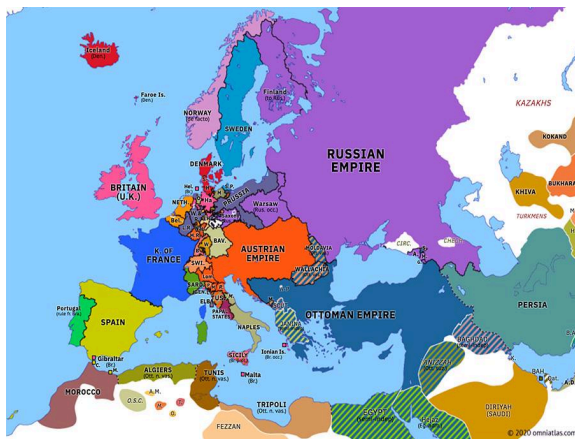
- Monarchism/Conservatism: *A movement seeking to preserve the old political order in Europe, with countries governed by absolute rulers, who obtain their right to rule not from their subjects (as in liberalism) but from God.*
- Nationalism: *A political movement that sees the nation as the chief identity of the individual (above class or allegiance to a monarch, for example). Nation here does not refer to a country, but to a group of people, united by a shared history, culture, and language. The Hungarian Empire was a country, but contained multiple nations. Conversely, the German Confederation contained many countries, but most of the population was arguably a single nationality: German. Nationalists believe that national and country borders should align. So each country should be a nation-state, containing people of only a specific nationality.*
- Republic: *A system of government, in which the head of state is appointed by a constitution instead of inheriting the title.*
- Socialism: *A popular (as opposed to elite) political movement, advocating for worker control of industry and the economy. Socialism was supposed to be an international movement, transcending political and ethnic borders.*
- Napoleonic Wars: *A series of conflicts between Napoleonic France and fluctuating coalitions of European powers, resulting in a short-lived French hegemony across much of Europe.*

History

The first inklings of the Congress of Vienna began with the weakening of Napoleon's regime. The once-uncontested power of the French Empire had been crushed with Napoleon I's

abdication in mid-1814, and in its wake, the monarchs of Europe, the main powers responsible for Napoleon's fall—Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain—decided to convene a congress to reshape the political landscape of Europe. The purpose was not only to restore the balance of power but also to ensure that no single state could again rise to dominate the continent as Napoleon had done. The Congress, held from September 1814 to June 1815, sought to stabilize Europe through territorial adjustments, restoring monarchies, and creating a diplomatic framework that would prevent future conflicts on such a scale. The decisions made at Vienna laid the groundwork for European diplomacy for nearly a century, guiding international relations through the turbulent 19th century and contributing to relative peace in Europe until the outbreak of World War I.

The Rise & Formation of the CoV:



The Congress of Vienna, established in 1814, still stands today as one of the most significant diplomatic gatherings and decisions made in European History. Its objective was simple: reestablish peace, conformity, and order in Europe following the chaos caused by the multiple French Revolutions as well as Napoleon and The

Napoleonic Wars. The French Revolution, which began in 1789, was a pivotal moment in European history. It not only suspended the traditional socio-economic and political structures of France, but set off a wave of revolutionary fervor across Europe. The French monarchy was overthrown, its supporters executed, and a series of radical political changes followed. After a series of weak governments, France was taken over by a young general named Napoleon

Bonaparte in 1799, who would eventually declare himself the emperor of France in 1804. What followed was a period of incredibly aggressive expansion which massively disrupted the national borders which traditionally held Europe in a balance of powers. Over the next decade, he built the French Empire into a dominant military force, defeating numerous coalitions of European monarchies. Napoleon's forces swept through much of Europe, and his military successes, combined with the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, led to profound changes in European politics. These came to be known as the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), and were characterized by a constant state of warfare between Napoleon and various coalitions of European powers, especially Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia.

Even before this, Napoleon's rise to power and his expansionist policies led to a series of conflicts known as the Wars of the Coalition. These wars were fought between Napoleon's French Empire and various coalitions of European powers who sought to curb his influence. The first coalition, which lasted from 1792 to 1797, was defeated by France, but subsequent coalitions—composed of Austria, Britain, Russia, and Prussia—fought against Napoleon in an attempt to restore the old order in Europe. In 1805, Napoleon decisively defeated the combined forces of Austria, Russia, and Britain at the Battle of Austerlitz, solidifying his control over much of Europe. The French Empire expanded to include large portions of Italy, Spain, and the Low Countries, while Napoleon reorganized the German states and placed family members on the thrones of many European nations, creating a network of dependent states loyal to France. However, no empire exists forever, and Napoleon's dominance began to wane in the early 1810s. The turning point was his disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812, which resulted in a catastrophic loss of men and resources. The coalition powers—now including Russia, Prussia, Austria, and

Britain—began to make significant headway against France. Napoleon was forced to retreat, and by 1814, the French Empire was collapsing.

After his defeat in 1814, the victorious monarchies of Europe, in a radical move, decided to come together and peacefully re-establish a balance of powers, limiting the possibility of any such uprising or change of political power again. The Treaty of Paris, signed in May 1814, had begun the process of restoring peace, but it was clear that a more comprehensive and lasting settlement was needed. This was the birth of the Congress of Vienna. Held in Vienna, Austria, because it was neutral ground and because of the city's central location in Europe, the Congress was chiefly led by Austrian Foreign Minister Klemens von Metternich. The congress aimed to bring together representatives of all the major European states, including Austria, Britain, Prussia, Russia, and the newly instituted monarchy of France.

Motives and Objectives:

Rebuilding peace and order in post-Napoleonic Europe was a challenging task. The goal was to establish clear territorial agreements and prevent future conflicts. To avoid further violence, the Congress of Vienna prioritized diplomacy among monarchs, ensuring long-term peace and preventing any single power, like Napoleon, from dominating Europe again. The territories were redistributed to balance the strength of European states, reducing the risk of future aggression. The Congress also reinstated the principle of legitimacy, restoring traditional monarchies and political institutions that had been overthrown by revolution or Napoleon. By affirming the legitimacy of autocratic rule, the Congress aimed to strengthen conservative forces and curb the spread of revolutionary ideals. Finally, to prevent France from threatening European stability again, buffer zones were created between France and its neighbors, and a new monarchy was established to address the roots of revolutionary ideology.

Key Decisions and Events

The Final Act, signed on June 9, 1815, established the territorial changes following the Napoleonic Wars. Russia gained most of the Duchy of Warsaw and retained Finland, while Prussia acquired significant portions of Saxony, the Duchy of Warsaw, and the Grand Duchy of the Lower Rhine. A new German Confederation was formed, consisting of 39 states under Austrian leadership. The Netherlands and Belgium were united under the House of Orange-Nassau, with Luxembourg joining the German Confederation. Territorial changes also affected Italy, with Austria regaining Lombardy-Venetia and several other regions, while various Italian duchies were restored or reallocated. Britain maintained control over several colonies, including the Cape Colony and Ceylon, while Sardinia regained control of Piedmont, Nice, and Savoy. The slave trade was condemned, and freedom of navigation on key rivers was guaranteed. The Final Act also addressed issues such as the reorganization of the Papal States and the restoration of several European monarchies. Although Spain did not sign the Act initially, it later ratified the provisions.

ROLES:

Austria

Klemens von Metternich:

Born in 1773 to a minor noble family, Metternich was well educated as a youth at elite universities in Strasbourg and Mainz. He rose to prominence through his work as a diplomat, and is regarded as one of the primary architects of Post-Napoleonic Europe. A traditional and conservative politician, he strongly opposed any and all attempts to shift the balance of power away from the royalty of Europe. In addition, Metternich believed in a system of loosely allied European monarchies, where if one monarch was struggling against an uprising in their domain,

the other monarchs of Europe would lend assistance to them. Metternich sought to repair diplomatic relations, strengthen Europe's monarchs, and establish a Confederation of the fractured German states.

Baron Johann von Wessenberg:

Born in 1773 to a family of educators in Dresden, von Wessenberg joined the civil service at a young age, serving as ambassador to a wide variety of states. In light of his excellent service and loyalty to Austria, von Wessenberg was named as the 2nd delegate of the Austrian state to the Congress of Vienna. He was deeply loyal to Metternich, and pushed very strongly for the German Confederation, seeing it as the best way to end the devastation of the Napoleonic Wars.

Emperor Francis I:

Born in 1768 to the noble family, Francis was raised at the Imperial Court in Vienna, where he was groomed to be the next Holy Roman Emperor. However, he would prove to be the final Holy Roman Emperor, as in 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte dissolved the Empire, stripping Francis of his title. In the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat, Francis hosted the Congress in Vienna, and took great advantage of this to spy on other delegates. Historically, he ended up making contact with France, and attempted to undermine the Russian and English delegates with a secret treaty.

England

Viscount Castlereagh:

Born in 1769 to a family of politicians in Ireland, Castlereagh distinguished himself as a young politician with his exceptional loyalty to the Crown and Parliament of England. Castlereagh

worked his way up through the government, eventually serving as Secretary of War for two Prime Ministers, but resigned in disgrace after fighting a duel. Castlereagh, one of the key figures behind Napoleon's defeat, was later invited to the Congress of Vienna, where he emphasized his belief in the monarchy's right to rule and the necessity of maintaining a strong social order. In light of these beliefs, he prevented harsh terms against France in the wake of the war, fearing they would spark retaliation and throw Europe into chaos once again.

King George III:

Born in 1738 as heir to the king's eldest son, George III ascended to the throne at the age of 22 in 1760. The British royal family had originally come from Hanover, Germany, and maintained indirect control of their territory there. Despite his advanced age, and worsening dementia, he put strong pressure on British delegates to promote the Electorate of Hanover into a Kingdom, and to improve his personal power in continental Europe.

Duke of Wellington Arthur Wellesley:

Having risen to prominence as a military leader during the Napoleonic Wars, particularly for his victory at the Battle of Waterloo, Wellesley brought his reputation for strategy and leadership to the negotiations at the Congress. Wellesley acted as Britain's first plenipotentiary, succeeding Lord Castlereagh. Wellesley acted to secure British interests, including maintaining a balance of power and opposing disruptive territorial change.

Russia

Tsar Alexander I:

Born in 1777, Tsar Alexander I ascended to the throne after his father's murder in 1801, at the age of 24. His reign was marked by extensive dictatorial reforms and the repression of Western culture in favor of developing a new Russian culture. During the Congress of Vienna, Alexander had two main goals: to create a peace in Europe with Russia as the strongest land power and to ensure complete Russian control of Poland.

Count Karl Robert Nesselrode:

Born in 1780 as a member of the German aristocracy, Count Karl Robert Nesselrode moved to Russia at age 7, and joined the Russian Navy as an aide-de-camp a year later. Through a mixture of competence and nepotism, Nesselrode rose through the ranks of the Russian bureaucracy to eventually become State Secretary in 1814, the same year as the Congress. Given his new position, he was made a delegate, and echoed the Tsar's demands for peace in Europe, a powerful Russia, and a Russian-controlled Poland.

Prussia

Karl August von Hardenberg:

Born in 1750 to a noble Prussian family, Karl August von Hardenberg gradually rose through the Prussian aristocracy to become the Chancellor of Prussia. He was one of the foremost Prussian delegates. During the Congress of Vienna, von Hardenberg pushed very strongly for France to be punished with fines, a reduced military, and smaller borders. In addition, he demanded that the territory of Saxony be ceded to Prussia, along with other pieces of land and become part of the rapidly growing kingdom.

Wilhelm von Humboldt:

Born in 1767 to a noble German family, Wilhelm von Humboldt was educated as a philosopher rather than a statesman. As such, he had quite radical views on how citizens should be allowed to think and behave. Von Humboldt pushed very strongly for the expansion of the individual freedoms of the Enlightenment, like for people's freedoms only to be limited against harming other people. In addition, despite agreeing with the general Prussian policies of a punished France and an empowered, expanded Prussia, he was strongly opposed to the behavior of the Prussian government as a whole, criticizing their leadership and policies.

King Frederich Wilhelm III:

Born in 1770 as the heir to the Prussian throne, Frederich Wilhelm rose to the throne in 1797, at the age of 27. During the Congress of Vienna, his goals were much the same as those of his countrymen: to increase the size and power of Prussia by acquiring new territory, and to punish France for declaring war on all of Europe. However, he also had a secondary goal, which was to take control of all Protestant Churches within Prussia, which would put him in charge of Prussian religious life. Though this decision was controversial among many Protestants, the king was undeterred.

France:**Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord:**

Talleyrand played a pivotal role in the Congress of Vienna as France's chief negotiator. Following Napoleon's defeat and the restoration of the House of Bourbon, Talleyrand ensured that France was treated leniently in the Treaty of Paris. Despite being initially excluded from the

decision-making process, Talleyrand maneuvered to gain France's inclusion, alongside Spain, in the negotiations. He championed smaller countries' interests and navigated the conflicting ambitions of the great powers, particularly Austria, Prussia, and Russia. His diplomatic acumen led to a secret treaty in January 1815, cementing his influence at the conference.

Emmerich Joseph Wolfgang Heribert de Dalberg:

After Napoleon's defeat, Dalberg played a key role in the French provisional government. He was awarded the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honor in July 1814 by King Louis XVIII.

Dalberg left France during Napoleon's Hundred Days but returned after the second Bourbon Restoration, becoming a Peer of France and Minister of State in 1815. He supported the Charter of 1814 in the chamber of peers, advocating for constitutional monarchy promoted royal authority. Dalberg's positions in the Congress largely aligned with those of Talleyrand, focusing on lessening blame towards France and ensuring French prosperity.

Louis XVIII:

After Napoleon's exile, Louis XVIII was restored to the French throne, and his government sought to restore France's position in Europe while securing stability for the monarchy. At the Congress, Louis XVIII, worked to ensure France was not overly punished for Napoleon's wars, which was achieved by securing relatively moderate terms in the final settlement. Louis XVIII also pushed strongly against the expansion of Prussia and Bavaria, viewing them as future threats to France.

Spain

Pedro Gómez Labrador:

Born in 1764 in Spain, Labrador went into law and rose through the ranks to become a judge. As a result of his legal work establishing previous Spanish legal documents, he was sent to Vienna as Spain's delegate. While there, he pushed for tighter control over Spain's overseas territories, and for Spain to have a greater role in European affairs. Historically, he failed on both, but a skilled delegate could potentially reverse this fate.

Portugal

Joaquim Lobo Silveira:

Born in 1771 to a family of Portuguese aristocrats, Silveira eventually found work as a diplomat to Sweden. As delegate for Portugal, Silveira pushed to expand Portuguese territory, and to weaken their Spanish neighbors.

Sweden

Count Carl Löwenhielm:

Born as the illegitimate son of King Charles XIII of Sweden, Löwenhielm worked his way up through the ranks of the Swedish army, eventually becoming a General. As delegate, he worked to weaken the other Scandinavian powers by gradually undermining them during the Congress.

Denmark

Niels Rosenkranz:

Born into a poor family, Rosenkranz came into money as a young man when a wealthy but distant relative left him his entire fortune. He became a diplomat, and after a series of successes,

(and one notable gap that resulted in him being banned from Russia) he was named as a delegate to the Congress, where he worked to expand Denmark's borders by annexing territory from Sweden.

King Frederick VI:

Born as the heir to both the thrones of Denmark and Norway, Frederick worked hard to repair the disastrous reign of his father which had significantly destabilized both countries. At the Congress, as one of Napoleon's former allies, he battled to keep his territory, and to prevent the Kingdom of Norway from becoming independent.

Netherlands

Earl of Clancarty:

Born to a family of Irish aristocrats, the Earl worked his way up through the British Bureaucracy to become the British ambassador to the Netherlands. His primary goal was both to expand Dutch territory into what is now modern day Belgium and to bring the country under the control of the British Royal Family and Parliament.

Baron Hans von Gagern:

Born in Germany, after a successful career as a diplomat Gagern retired to the Netherlands until he was eventually called up to be the Dutch delegate. His goal was to expand the Netherlands to include the ethnically Dutch territories which had become independent from the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and Napoleon's meddling, as well as modern day Belgium.

The Papal States

Ercole Consalvi:

Born in Rome to a wealthy family, Consalvi entered the service of the Church at an early age, climbing the ranks until he was eventually made a Cardinal. As the representative of the Papal States, his goals were twofold. He wanted to restore the Papal states, a small kingdom in Italy which would be controlled by the pope, and to reintroduce the Divine right of kingship. This would grant them a great deal of political power, since if someone wanted to be recognized as a legitimate king, they would have to first recognize the authority of the Church.

Bavaria**Maximillian Graf von Montgelas:**

Born to a wealthy German family, Montgelas entered public service and quickly rose through the ranks, moving from censoring books to advising the leader of Bavaria. Bavaria in question had conquered several pieces of land in 1806, about ten years before the Congress, expanding the kingdom significantly. Montgelas wanted to preserve these gains, and possibly to even ask for more.

Hanover**Graf Ernst zu Münster:**

Born to a wealthy family in Northern Germany, Münster received an elite education where he built strong connections to the Royal House of Hanover, who controlled both Hanover and Great Britain. The delegation of Hanover felt that it was high time for Hanover to be given a stronger voice in European politics, to be considered a kingdom, and for its territory to be significantly expanded. However, despite this idea of expansion they remained strongly allied with Great Britain, working together throughout the conference.

Switzerland

Charles Pictet de Rochemont:

Born in Geneva, Rochemont began his career in the service of the French Army, after which he became a politician back in Switzerland, where he struggled to solve the instability which plagued the country. Rochemont's main goal was to establish Switzerland's policy of neutrality and non-involvement in other European affairs. His other, more pressing goal, was to stabilize Switzerland as a state, since before the Congress it had only been a loose collection of small baronies prone to infighting.

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Note: This website also has good maps from previous years, which you can use to get a sense of general European geopolitics leading up to the Congress.

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Additional Resources:

"The CONGRESS of VIENNA, Explained [AP Euro Review—Unit 5 Topic 7]." Video. This is a short video which covers the Congress and its participants. Importantly, it is at a high school level, and references events like the Treaty of Westphalia which this background guide does not cover.

"Napoleonic Satires." *Library.brown.edu*, library.brown.edu/cds/napoleon/time7.html. This webpage provides a nice background on Napoleon's exile and the Congress's aims as a whole.