

The Congress of Vienna

1814-1815

The Congress of Vienna was held from September of 1814 to June of 1815. After the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte, this international conference was called to create a balance among the European powers in such a way so as to prevent future wars and maintain peace and stability on the European continent. The means of achieving this goal would be through a major reshaping of European interior borders.

Important People:

Though the conference opened with a series of glittery balls and conferences, the delegates soon got down to work. Mainly, the four major powers of Europe (Austria, Russia, Prussia, and Great Britain) were left to make most of the big decisions. Austria sent Prince Klemens von Metternich, the Austrian minister of State who was also acting as a president of the Congress. The Russian Empire was represented by Alexander I, the emperor of Russia. The main delegate from Prussia was Prince Karl August von Hardenberg, and Great Britain was represented by Lord Castlereagh, and later Arthur Wellesley, the first duke of Wellington. This group of major powers decided that France, Spain, and the smaller powers would have no voice in important decisions. However, the French diplomat, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, was successful in allowing France to have an equal voice in the negotiations. Talleyrand became the deciding vote in many of the decisions.

Important Decisions:

France was deprived of all territory conquered by Napoleon. The French monarchy was restored under the rule of Louis XVIII. Austria was given back most of the territory it had lost and was also given land in Germany and Italy (Lombardy and Venice). Russia got Finland and control over the new kingdom of Poland. Prussia was given much of Saxony and important parts of Westphalia and the Rhine Province. Britain got several strategic colonial territories, and they also gained control of the seas. The Dutch Republic was united with the Austrian Netherlands to form a single kingdom of the Netherlands under the House of Orange. Norway and Sweden were joined under a single ruler. Switzerland was declared neutral and Spain was restored under Ferdinand VII

Results of the meeting:

The goal of the congress was to re-establish a balance of power among the countries of Europe and have peace between the nations. The Congress proved to be highly successful in achieving its goal, for the peace in Europe was left almost undisturbed for nearly 40 years.

After Napoleon was defeated, it was necessary to make changes to the boundaries of Europe. Napoleon's conquered territories and puppet republics needed to be reviewed. The leaders of this congress intended to make France pay for all of the disruptions that Napoleon caused. The congress was chaired by Prince Metternich who at that time was the Austrian Prime Minister. Metternich was under orders from his emperor to make sure that the monarchy would be preserved as well it should be restored in France mainly because the emperor felt threatened in his own country. Since borders between countries would be re-written, Metternich would attempt to secure for Austria all its former territories and more if necessary.

The congress would undertake most of its policies in a very conservative way (it is better to exclude liberal ideas which would lead to revolution in Europe). The French Revolution would be criticized by the delegates at the congress mainly because of the legacy that it left behind (Nationalism and the execution of the monarchs).

The Conference of Vienna was based on three principles:

1. Legitimacy – this meant that only the legal rules of the European countries should be monarchs.
2. Compensation – France would have to pay more than 700 million francs to countries that Napoleon invaded and caused damage. France would have to give up any claim to conquered territories.
3. Security – it was decided that in order to prevent somebody like Napoleon from coming to power again, the great monarchies of Europe would enter into alliances with each other.

In 1815, the Holy Alliance came into effect, including Russia, Austria and Prussia. The Quadruple Alliance of Russia, Austria, Prussia and Britain was also formed in 1815. In 1818 the Quintuple Alliance would be formed, Russia, Prussia, Austria, Britain and France. This system of alliances was only a temporary measure and unfortunately it did not prevent war from happening in Europe.

Chief Territorial Agreements Made At Vienna, 1815

1. Napoleon's Confederation of the Rhine broke up. In its place the German Confederation with its thirty nine member states were allowed self government, Austria now dominates.
2. Most of Italy goes under Austrian control.
3. Prussia got part of Saxony and all Swedish Pomerania and the left bank of the Rhine River.
4. Russia gets Poland, a divided country.
5. Holland gets Austrian Netherlands while Austria got Lombardy and Venetia.
6. Switzerland becomes independent and is guaranteed neutrality.
7. Sweden gets Norway from Denmark, while Russia in turn gets Finland and Sweden.
8. Britain maintains control of all colonies, and gets Cape of Good Hope, Malta, Ceylon, Mauritius and former French West Indian possessions.