



**SSIGSIM**  
**2021**

**THE CONGRESS**  
**OF VIENNA**

**THE FATE OF EUROPE**

**BACKGROUND GUIDE**

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# A LETTER FROM YOUR DIRECTOR

Dear delegates,

Thanks for taking interest in this committee! I'm excited to host a committee laser-focused on an extremely diplomatic event that came after one of the longest periods of constant conflict in modern European history. Learning about conferences like the Congress of Vienna can teach us about where modern multilateral negotiations originated from and what goes on in the direct aftermath of war.

I think this topic also presents a time period that sits firmly at a crossroads of the "ancien regime" of old and the modern industrial capitalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Few other snapshots of history could claim to be so outwardly diverse in levels of civic advancement. It naturally intrigues me to wonder in which direction you all will take this committee!

I personally am a fourth-year student at UTSG pursuing a Finance and Economics Specialisation in the Bachelor of Commerce program with a Focus in Data Science and a Minor in Economics. I have been involved in MUN for the past six years and in crisis committees specifically since 2018. Staffing crisis MUN has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my university career and I truly hope you all gather as much value from it as I have.

This background guide should provide some base knowledge for committee participation; expect to receive dedicated Character Sheets later on as a supplement. While I do not need you to memorize the information in this background guide, I do believe you will find most of it useful. Further research into the history and diplomatic situation is not only recommended but encouraged. Good luck and see you at the conference!

Sincerely,

Raza Akbari, Director of *Congress of Vienna: The Fate of Europe*

# INTRODUCTION

It is the fall of 1814 and all of the most important statesmen of Europe can be found in the capital city of the Austrian Empire, Vienna. At the invitation of the esteemed Prince Klemens von Metternich, Foreign Minister of the Austrian Empire, numerous delegations from all over the continent representing all manners of interests can be found at the Congress to discuss the future of Europe in the wake of Napoleon's collapse. The allure of the high-class entertainment promised in the form of parties, food, connections to noblemen and women, business proposals, palaces, and more has hyped up the Congress of Vienna to the point where it is by far the largest undertaking of its kind in history.

Do not, however, let the glamor fool you. At its core, the Congress of Vienna was called to discuss a host of complex geopolitical and economic issues caused by the collapse of the world's greatest power for the past few years. When it comes to answering such heavy questions, you can bet each and every participant will have some sort of vested interest even in the seemingly most mundane matters. The zeal with which some delegates are bound to pursue their goals means instances of private dealing and extensive negotiation followed by betrayal is all but guaranteed.

Vital questions remain unanswered but one thing is for certain: the fate of Europe is in extremely skilled hands at the Congress of Vienna.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## THE AGE OF ABSOLUTISM

After the death of perhaps the most prominent European absolute monarch ever - Louis XIV of France - in 1715, the age of absolute monarchism faced a growing threat from within. With the institution of the Catholic Church having been successfully challenged in the previous century by the Protestant League, the very concept of absolute authority managed to initially grow as a reaction to the desire for powerful leadership in the face of internal divisions. European society largely supported strong, centralized governance in exchange for safety not only from foreign nations, but from religious and political factions, too. However, with the reverence, glory, and allure of the Sun King's reign gone, the French population soon grew

disaffected with the so-called “ancien regime” (i.e. the system of feudal monarchy that existed in France and throughout Europe since the Middle Ages).

## **THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION**

The Scientific Revolution marked the start of the popularization of the scientific method as a reason for believing in the ability for humanity to advance substantially. As the Revolution’s effects took hold of Europe and the multinational culture of science began growing at an unprecedented rate, the land-owning middle classes began to find less use in having faith in a system of nobility and monarchy that ultimately controlled every aspect of a nation as if it were all private property. Over the course of the next few decades, through intellectual networks of salons across France, the middle class began to question the very fundamentals of the social fabric that had existed for centuries. What did it mean to be human? What value did a human life inherently have? And how did the structure of monarchy and government fit into the answers to those questions? For the first time on a large scale, it seemed as though the proclamations of English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon calling for human progress and focusing on a vision for the future rather than being nostalgic for a lost and forgotten golden age seemed to apply to more than just science. With wide scale social dissatisfaction brewing, food shortages and an economic crisis was just the right spark to ignite the initial flames of what would later be known as the French Revolution.

## **THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

King Louis XVI, in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution, found himself at the helm of a financially beleaguered nation. In both conflicts he aimed to undermine the rise of British overseas dominance, either through direct intervention or supporting British enemies. Therefore, it is not a surprise that, after decades of a population boom and a largely-feudal economy, he oversaw an economic depression worse than anything France had experienced in a long time. The simultaneous rise of liberal capitalism as a potentially revolutionary ideology meant that, in the summer of 1789, Louis XVI felt that he was forced to call a convocation of the Estates General for the first time in about a hundred and seventy-five years. The Estates General was a legislative body called by the French monarch representing the three recognized groups of society: the clergy (First Estate), the nobility (Second Estate), and the common public (Third Estate). With the degree of social unrest present and the pressure from the Third Estate, the King decided to largely give in to demands and replace the Estates General with the National Constituent Assembly: a far more representative parliamentary structure created with the express purpose of drafting a French constitution. While this may have been a short-term victory for the revolutionaries, it was only the beginning in the big

picture. More fired up than ever, the revolutionaries began organizing into militias to oppose the monarchic rule, leading to the highly symbolic storming of the armory, fortress, and prison known as the Bastille.

## **THE REIGN OF TERROR**

Elements of this same fervor gave rise directly to the infamous Reign of Terror led by the radical Jacobin faction of the Revolution. After mass executions of “political dissidents” by the Committee of Public Safety, it is, in retrospect, ironic that the anti-absolutist liberal First Republic devolved so quickly into a bloody, violent, and unstable state of affairs run by political and religious cultists. After tens of thousands of killings, a large portion of which were extrajudicial, and a tiresome war against European neighbours, it is understandable why the French people would turn to reactionary salvation. In 1799, this salvation came in the form of Napoleon Bonaparte.

## **THE FIRST FRENCH EMPIRE**

Napoleon returned to France after a failed military expedition in Egypt and found himself very popular in contrast to the bankrupt Directory which found itself in a difficult position in its war against the Second Coalition. Therefore, it was relatively easy to, with a group of close political allies including Talleyrand, overthrow the Republic in the Coup of 18 Brumaire. The newly-established constitution gave the appearance of a republic under Napoleon’s rule as Consul for the first ten years, but it is much more accurate to describe it as a de facto military dictatorship. However, under the newly-established Consulate, France managed to quickly regain its footing in the ongoing wars and entered a period of relative internal stability. With Napoleon at the helm, the nation managed to accomplish several impressive military victories, creating client states throughout central Europe over the next decade or so.

## **THE WAR OF LIBERATION**

It was only during the War of the Sixth Coalition that this momentum significantly shifted. Through a complex web of alliances, much of Europe banded together to bring an end to Napoleonic hegemony in France. The French invasion of Russia was arguably the turning point in the Coalition Wars as an initially-successful blitz towards Moscow proved to be fatal for Napoleon’s forces once they were stretched too thin. By the spring of 1814, French forces were, for the first time, fighting desperately to defend Paris. The Allies celebrated victory with Emperor Napoleon-Bonaparte’s abdication on April 11, 1814.

## THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

Immediately following the French Empire's collapse, Louis XVIII was invited to the throne to begin the period known as the Bourbon Restoration. However, following this, there were a great deal of questions left to be answered. Napoleon had dramatically altered the map of Europe during his reign in trying to establish his ideal Continental System to completely and utterly blockade British trade. In doing so, territory had been exchanged, puppet republics were set up, the Holy Roman Empire was abolished (and dozens of German states along with it), and much more. Unlike other wars in history, it is not clear as to what the borders of Europe "should" look like as they have been in constant flux for more than two decades. To address these issues diplomatically, Prince Metternich, the Foreign Minister of Austria, invited a large number of foreign dignitaries to Vienna in the fall of 1814, promising extravagant social events alongside political negotiation. This diplomacy lasted almost a year and came to be known as the Congress of Vienna. Among many other issues, the Congress of Vienna addressed:

- Borders in France, the Netherlands, the Italian Peninsula, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Russia.
- Former Prussian possessions.
- The Polish-Saxon crisis.
- The future of the Papal States and former Italian kingdoms.
- The validity of the Treaty of Badajoz and Portuguese-Spanish land disputes.
- The divine right of monarchs.
- The future of Germany after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire.
- Economic development across Europe.
- Preventing a future outbreak of revolutionary liberalism.
- Establishing a balance of powers.

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