**The Congress of Vienna and the Emerging Rivalry between Austria and Prussia for Hegemony in Central Europe**

In the light of selected writings of contemporaries, historiographers and a comparison of economic potentials

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The rivalry for hegemony in the German Empire did not appear first at the Congress of Vienna. It was Frederick II who first challenged the hegemony of Habsburg Austria in the German Empire when he snatched Silesia at the occasion of Maria Theresia’s embattled succession of Emperor Charles VI. This challenge was confirmed by the outcome of the Seven Years War in which Prussia successfully defended the possession of Silesia against Austria and its allies. But it was through the territorial gains of the two Paris peace settlements and the Congress of Vienna that “Prussia finally became a great European power”[[1]](#footnote-1) with a position on an equal footing among the Big Four. The new political order in Europe and in the German *Reich* established by the congress of Vienna succeeded to contain the rivalry between Austria and Prussia in a framework that prevented military conflict until the final showdown in 1866. The purpose of this contribution is to evaluate some of the arrangements of the congress which shaped the political order in central Europe (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, East-central Europe) in the perspective of the course of events in the 19th century.

**Territorial arrangements**

In the lands of the defunct Holy Roman Empire the Congress of Vienna did not restore the territorial structure which had been established by the Westphalian Peace. To a considerable extent it recognized the order established by the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* (principal decree of the imperial deputation) of 1803 and by the alliance of the majority of German states with Napoleon in the Confederation of the Rhine. If the negotiations came close to failure at several points, in the end there was broad acceptance that the some 300 sovereign territories of 1648 were reduced to 37 (not including the 4 city states Hamburg, Bremen, Lübeck and Frankfurt).

Prussia significantly expanded its territory in the West through the acquisition of the Rhine provinces (the former electorates of Cologne and Trier), of Saarland, while it also gained two fifths of Saxony and kept its Polish possessions Posen and Thorn.

With the exception of Saxony, the medium sized states of the South (Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg) and Hanover also succeeded in expanding their territory.

Austria gave up its claims on the formerly Spanish Netherlands which it had held after 1715, and also its anterior possessions (*Vorlande,* Freiburg). In compensation, Austria got Salzburg from Bavaria. In addition to Lombardy which had been under Habsburg rule before the Napoleonic wars, Austria got Venice (including the *terra ferma* and Dalmatia) and the Litorale. It successfully defended the possession of Galicia against efforts of Tsar Alexander to establish a unified kingdom of Poland which had originally been supported by the Prussian King Frederick William III.

In Italy, Austria secured control over the duchies of Tuscany, Modena and Reggio Emilia through branches of the dynasty, while Parma was assigned to “Empress” Maria Luise (Napoleon’s second wife), whereas their son (the “King of Rome”, later *Herzog von Reichstadt*) was excluded from succession. With the support of Austria, a Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia was established which incorporated Genoa and parts of Savoy. In the middle and in the South the States of the Church were restored, as well as the Neapolitan “Kingdom of the two Sicilies” under the rule of the Bourbon dynasty.

**The German Confederation – the *Deutsche Bund***

Although a restoration of the Holy Roman Empire with a modernized internal structure was not completely out of reach, Emperor Francis had come to the conclusionlong before the Congress that this ancient form of organization was no more adequate to the new situation, nor was it in the interest of the Habsburg monarchy. In the first phase of the negotiations for a new political structure of the states of the defunct *Reich[[2]](#footnote-2)* Prussia had the initiative with its “41 Articles” of July 1814, and with the “Twelve Articles” presented at the start of the Congress in September 1814. According to this proposal, the member states of the Confederation would be sovereign entities, yet with their sovereignty restricted by the right of the Confederation to judicial and military interference under certain conditions. The proposal provided dominant positions of Austria and Prussia in the governing body of the Confederation. Originally, Austria supported the Prussian proposal, which was, however, vehemently opposed by the middle-sized and small states. It came to a stalemate, and for several months no official negotiations were held.

Meanwhile, Austria had withdrawn its support for the complete annexation of Saxony by Prussia, as a countermove to Prussia’s support for Tsar Alexander’s claim for the Kingdom of Poland in its historical borders, and it did not stand any more behind the Prussian proposal for a constitution of the Confederation. Austria now backed the demands of the middle- and small-sized states for more or less equal rights of all members of the Confederation, thereby taking a position of protecting especially the small states against tendencies of Prussia to expand its domination. After Napoleon’s return from Elba the intensity of conflicts among the Big Four diminished which also bettered the conditions for a settlement for a German constitution. The German Federal Act (*Bundesacte*) of June 1815 was accepted by 38 of the 41 member states, with Württemberg, Baden and Hessen-Homburg joining later. 11 of the 20 articles were also included in the Final Act of the Congress and signed by the signatory powers (Big Four plus France, Sweden, Spain and Portugal). Both Austria and Prussia had territories to which the Federal Act did not apply.

The German Federal Act was a “weak compromise”. It paid generous consideration to the demands of the medium- and small-sized states which essentially preserved their internal and external sovereign rights[[3]](#footnote-3). The treaty provided only for a loose confederation in order to maintain the internal and external security of Germany as well as the independence and the inviolability of the individual states’ sovereignty. The Federal Diet was the only governing body, in which Austria had the presidency, and every member had at least one of the 69 votes. An “inner council” was established to manage current affairs. For federal laws a majority of two thirds of the votes was required, unanimity for principal legislation and decisions, and also for the creation of new institutions and matters of religion. Member states had the right to form international alliances if they were not against the security of the Confederation, and they were not allowed to conclude separate peace agreements. Under Article 13 each sovereign was obliged to grant a constitution to his subjects, but the wording was deliberately ambiguous: “*Landständische Verfassung”* (corporative constitution)*.*

There was widespread disappointment about the German Federal Act among those circles which had hoped that it would be a major step towards political unity of Germany – mainly among the intellectual middle class, where hopes had also been entertained for a constitution which granted political rights and proportional representation to all (male) citizens. For different reasons, Prussia was disappointed because it had aimed for a political structure closer to a federal state (*Bundesstaat*) which would have given more leverage to efforts for a unified national state, instead of the loose confederation (*Staatenbund*) which preserved the fragmentation of the German nation.

**Metternich’s political concept for Germany and Central Europe**

Born in Koblenz (1773) into a noble family with landed estates in the Rhineland, Clemens Wenzel Metternich was not Austrian by origin. Having married Eleonore von Kaunitz (in 1795) Metternich, whose family had lost its possessions after the French army had taken over the Rhine provinces, entered Austria’s diplomatic service when he was appointed to the country’s envoy in Dresden in 1801. He was appointed minister of foreign affairs 1809 after Austria’s defeat in the war against France. From the beginning, he was the chief architect of not only of Austria’s external policies, but he was appointed to the superior position of State Chancellor (*Staatskanzler*) only in 1821.

As “plenipotentiary” of Austria which was host country of the Vienna Congress, he occupied a central position in the negotiations for the new order in Europe and in Germany as well. As a flexible, sometimes sneaky negotiator he was able to change positions and alliances, while at the same time he consistently pursued his general political and social concepts according to which he tried to secure a strong position of the Habsburg monarchy in the European system of states.

At the European level, Metternich was a strong supporter of the idea of establishing a sustainable system of balance between major European powers. Therefore, he pleaded for a peace treaty of “moderation, which did not result from weakness, but was based on the intention to ensure permanent peace in Europe”[[4]](#footnote-4). The new borders in Europe should be drawn based on the principle of restitution and compensation, and not revengeful conquest. Prussia acquired new territories in Western Germany. Yet, Metternich resisted Prussian ambitions for additional territorial gains in the negotiations for the second Paris peace treaty of November 1815[[5]](#footnote-5). He easily renounced Austria’s claims for Belgium and the anterior possessions because in order to prevent “Jacobin” ideas from spilling over into Austria across common borders (p. 331). Instead, he preferred compensation by territories in Northern Italy and on the Balkan which had the advantage of providing the Habsburg monarchy with a consolidated territory. With respect to Germany, the loose confederation established by the new constitution of the *Bund* conformed to Austria’s interests as well as to Metternich’s political convictions. He hoped to contain Prussia’s expansionist tendencies, to counteract nationalistic sentiments of aristocratic or democratic nature[[6]](#footnote-6), and to support traditional forms of dynastic government based on the principle of “legitimacy” against the demands for a constitution.

Metternich originally planned to establish a regime similar to the German Confederation – a *Lega Italica -* in Italy[[7]](#footnote-7). With the Lombardy and Venice and other territories directly or indirectly under Habsburg rule, Austria would have been the presidential power of the Italian Federation. This arrangement would have given mutual support for the type of *ancien regime* which Metternich intended to establish in central Europe.

Metternich emphasized the special character of Austria which had become an Empire (*Kaisertum Österreich)* when Francis II. (I. in Austria) assumed this title shortly before resigning as head of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. The Austrian Empire had been built over several centuries “not through military conquest but through hereditary succession, marriage and peaceful accession”. (Vol. 1, p. 329) As a consequence, the Empire comprised crownlands with a variety of different traditional political statutes, to which Emperors had always paid full respect, with the sole exception of Emperor Joseph II, whose efforts for centralization had failed spectacularly. The Emperor was “absolute in the modern sense, but his rule was limited in varying degree by the individual constitutions of the crownlands.” This peculiar structure rested “on the interest of the crownlands in the unity of the Empire”. (p. 331)

If Metternich was convinced that in the Austrian monarchy „more efforts are necessary to maintain itself than in any other major European state (except for Prussia)” (Vol. 2, p. 13), he was referring to its diversity of nationalities and languages. Obviously, the task of preserving the coherence of the Empire had become more difficult with the acquisition of the Italian provinces Lombardy[[8]](#footnote-8) and Venice. The easy acceptability of this compensation was partly due to the Italian background of Emperor Francis. He had lived in Florence through his childhood and adolescence, and moved to Vienna only when his father Leopold succeeded Joseph II. as German Emperor in 1790. Yet, the main motive was geopolitical. Comparing Prussia and Austria, Metternich saw a similarity with respect to location, climate, ethnic composition and language, but he thought that “the parts of the Austrian monarchy are more solid, their geographical location is better, as a whole it forms a compact body.” (p. 50) He was aware that there was considerable opposition to Habsburg rule in the Italian provinces. At the same time, he thought that the movement for unification of the Italian nation which he called “sectarian” would not have sufficient support from the population nor from foreign governments such as Piedmont or France which themselves felt endangered by democratic currents. He “nurtured the hope” that “public opinion would turn in favour of Austria, dissatisfaction would recede, and Italians would eventually accept Austria as the only government able to guarantee public security and peace”, as soon as the “projects for sustainable improvement of social welfare were implemented.” (p. 44)

Metternich devoted intensive efforts to prevent that the promise of “corporative constitution” in Article 13 of the Final Act of the Congress would result in the establishment of bodies of central political representation in the member states of the German Confederation. If such constitutions had already been granted by the Kings of Bavaria and Württemberg, and by the Grand Duke of Baden in 1818/19, Metternich sought to dissuade the Prussian King Frederick William III. from such a step. For the Austria as “federative state” composed of provinces with divergent political structures, a joint body of Estates for the monarchy as a whole was out of question. The introduction of a central system of “pure representation” would inevitably result in disintegration not only of Austria, but also of the Prussian monarchy, given its heterogeneous composition. Instead, the corporative constitution should take the form of Estates to be established in each of the seven provinces[[9]](#footnote-9). (p. 50f) In the end, Metternich succeeded in convincing the king not to enact the constitution as proposed by chancellor Hardenberg.

Frederick William shared Metternich’s distaste for German nationalism as a form of Jacobinism which constituted a fundamental threat for the absolute monarchies of both Austria and Prussia. Therefore, Prussia supported Metternich’s initiative to dissolve student societies, introduce censorship of the German press, and appoint curators to supervise German universities, adopted by the German Confederation as Karlsbad Decrees “against demagogic diatribes” in 1819. Metternich’s relentless efforts to preserve the traditional social and political order guaranteed by the absolute monarchy were grounded in a – rather obscure – concept of “origin of the evil” in the “self conceit” (*Eigendünkel*) of the individual. This individual no more respects traditional convictions, institutions and laws, nor religious beliefs. Instead, “all elements upon which society rests are individualized” (p. 68f), with the consequence of equal rights for all individuals. Liberal agitators demand permanent social and political change and revolution, for which the broad popular masses have no sympathies. The latter have a preference for calm and peace, security of family and property, which must be protected by good practices of the legitimate government. (p. 76f)

**Wilhelm von Humboldt**

Wilhelm von Humboldt’s family belonged to the landed aristocracy in Prussia. Born in 1767 in Potsdam, he studied law at the universities of Frankfurt/Oder and Göttingen and entered civil service in 1790, which he left a year later to devote himself to philosophical and linguistic studies. His career as a diplomat started in 1801 as Prussian envoy to the Holy See. Humboldt’s fame primarily rests on his concept of university studies which he implemented as Counsellor of State, as part of the comprehensive reform program which was launched after the defeat against Napoleon in 1806. In 1810 he was appointed to Prussian envoy in Vienna. He was a member of the Prussian delegation at the Congress of Vienna. At the height of his career Humboldt became a member of the government under Chancellor Hardenberg in 1819. But he was dismissed in that same year because of differences of opinion with the Chancellor.

Humboldt’s memorandum of 1813[[10]](#footnote-10) was the basis of the Prussian proposals for a German constitution put forward at the Congress of Vienna. When it became evident that the smaller German states would not accept that Austria and Prussia hold a dominant position especially in matters of external relations and war, Humboldt tried hard for the establishment of a Federal court, yet without success, and also for a commitment of member states to enact a corporative constitution[[11]](#footnote-11).

In his comprehensive memorandum of 1817 addressed to State Chancellor Hardenberg[[12]](#footnote-12) Humboldt elaborated on questions how to position Prussia in the debates in the Diet of the German Confederation. He cautioned against overburdening the German constitution with expectations of establishing a unified German state which he considered unrealistic under existing conditions. Being the result of a compromise between patriotic sentiments and the insistence on sovereignty of individual member states, the Constitution is a construct halfway between federation (*Bundesstaat*) and confederation (*Staatenbund*) – rather resembling a federation with respect to external relations of the whole (p. 370f). Explicitly or implicitly, Humboldt often discusses issues under the aspect of the rivalry between Prussia and Austria. In the future, Prussia would have to live with the tension between its own ambitions for more political coherence of the Confederation, and Austria’s preference for a rather loose alliance of sovereign members, due to the fact that Austria had much stronger interests outside the German Confederation (p. 380f).

If Prussia did “not enjoy trust and sympathy as it would deserve for what it has achieved for Germany” (p. 359), this could be attributed to the “peculiar character of the Prussian monarchy” which was widely seen as “a power that has not yet reached an equilibrium position.” Having steadily expanded its territory, possible further expansion constitutes a threat for its neighbours (p. 358). Hence, Prussia should undertake all efforts to gain the trust of the other members, and therefore be modest in its conduct. Most importantly, it should not appear as striving for superiority, nor deliver opportunities for Austria to act as protector of the small states (p. 361ff). In a secret memorandum addressed to the Austrian representative to the Diet, the Prussian envoy had proposed an agreement on separate spheres of influence in the Confederation, which had aroused outrage among the other members. Any such initiative should be strictly avoided, in order not to to provoke the formation of alliances between Austria and other German states against Prussia (p. 367).

Humboldt’s scepticism regarding the suitability of the Confederation as an instrument for strengthening German unity becomes evident when he argues that Prussia should be on the guard against Austrian ambitions to transmute the presidency “into a directorate” (p. 382). In general, Prussia should restrain activities of the Confederation to act as an entity of its own (p. 391), even block admission and accreditation of envoys of other European states. Neither should the Confederation make treaties with the Holy See in matters of religion (p. 402)[[13]](#footnote-13).

Instead, Prussia should try to improve its position among German states by acting as an “advocate of justice” and lawfulness (p. 362). Trust and respect could be augmented by keeping Prussia’s own house in good order with solid public finances, and by entertaining a military force not dependent on external support. Building up its strength by promoting its own progressive development, Prussia would also “instill fear among the other members to arouse its displeasure”, since in political relations “an imposing appearance is more effective than threatening and violence[[14]](#footnote-14).” (p. 365)

With respect to article 13 Humboldt takes a sceptical position. If the Prussian state as a whole does not have a corporative constitution, he could not see how general Estates of this kind could be easily established, to which he attribute the ruin of France. In any case, the “fundamental difference between Estates as they exist in Germany, and systems of (proportional) representation, which have been introduced and perished since the French revolution” must be observed. To imitate the latter would be in total contradiction with German political attitudes[[15]](#footnote-15) (p. 413).

There is an ambiguity in Humboldt’s memorandum of 1817: On the one hand, he recommends that the conduct of the Prussian representative to the Diet should be as moderate as possible, in order not to nurture suspicions among other states concerning expansionist desires of Prussia. On the other hand, Humboldt implicitly argues that Prussia could achieve superiority among German states by becoming a model for progressive development.

In a passage that deserves to be remembered, because in certain respects its relevance appears undiminished even in the present state of the European Union, Humboldt explicitly admits the necessity of the double nature of the Confederation as *Staatenbund* and *Bundesstaat*, as well as the guarantee of the Federal Act by all signatory states of the Final Acts of the Congress, since “the true purpose of the German Confederation is intertwined with European politics.” The supreme goal is to ensure calm and balance of power (“*Dieser Zweck ist Sicherung der Ruhe; das ganze Dasein des Bundes ist mithin auf Erhaltung des Gleichgewichts durch innewohnende Schwerkraft berechnet.“)* „This balance would be disturbed if, in addition to the [two] major German states, a new collective state would be established... Therafter, nobody could prevent that [such a] German [state] would become a state eager for conquest, which cannot be in the interest of any genuine German” (p. 374[[16]](#footnote-16)).

With his superior knowledge based on experience in international relations, Metternich came to more or less the same conclusion by pragmatic reasoning.

**Controversial judgments in German and Austrian historiography**

In much of German as well as Austrian historiography negative judgments about the achievements of the Congress of Vienna with respect to the German question prevail. From the viewpoint of the mainstream of late 19th century German historiography it is obvious that Austria, and Metternich in particular, were the chief villains who prevented that the momentum of the popular movement, which had emerged during war of liberation from Napoleon’s rule, could be used for swift and smooth realization of a unified Germany, for which the Congress of Vienna should have paved the way. In Heinrich Treitschke’s massive *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (volume 1 and 2, which cover the period from 1800 to 1819, appeared in 1879 and 1882, respectively) Prussia is the idealized agent of German patriotism.

The repressive measures against liberal and democratic aspirations have strongly influenced evaluations of the political order for Central Europe and Germany established by the Congress of Vienna. Many historiographers have condemned the results of the Congress in one broad sweep with the *System Metternich* embodied in the infamous Karlsbad Decrees, which has become a synonym for reactionary political attitudes.

Historiography in Austria was divided between advocates of a “pan-German” (*großdeutsch)* perspective and an orientation that tried to establish a specifically Austrian imperial idea (ö*sterreichische Reichsidee*). Anton Heinrich Springer’s *Geschichte Österreichs seit dem Wiener Frieden von 1809* (2 vols, 1863) is an early example of the former. Springer[[17]](#footnote-17) (chapter 3, p. 254ff) heavily criticizes Austria for not keeping its promise to support Prussia’s acquisition of Saxony, and for acting as protector of the small German states, forming an alliance of “all against Prussia” (p. 258), which suffered only defeats at the Congress, whereas Austria emerged in its old glory, enlarged by rich Italian provinces. At the same time, he points to the unfavourable reception of the Austrian administration in Lombardy and Venice right after 1815, which foreshadowed the unhappy events of 1859. But Springer also criticizes Prussia’s conduct during the negotiations as too timid and little skilful. With his book *Metternich. Der Dämon Österreichs* (1936) Viktor Bibl[[18]](#footnote-18) is an even more pronounced example of the current in Austrian historiography with a German-nationalist orientation.

In his monumental biography of Metternich the Austrian historiographer Heinrich von Srbik[[19]](#footnote-19) aims at a rehabilitation of the achievements of the Congress of Vienna in the light of the later course of European history, and thereby of Metternich’s role in this context. Srbik does not deny that Metternich’s concept to establish a sustainable balance between the major powers in the spirit universal principles suffers from its orientation “towards the spirit of the past century”. In this respect “Stein and Humboldt had a much deeper relationship to [the ideas of] nation and state than Metternich.” (vol. 1, p. 229) But Metternich was in agreement with Humboldt – who had few personal sympathies for the Austrian minister – that the type of constitution for Germany preferred by Metternich was well suited “for the specialties of German character (*deutsche Eigenart*) and German culture”, and to whom “a powerful uniform German state appeared unnatural.” (p. 224) Metternich deserves credit and respect for treating the problem of an adequate constitution for Germany “as part of a greater European problem”. (p. 225) If the relationship between Austria and Prussia as leading powers in Central Europe was given the specific form of the German Confederation, Metternich considered this as part of a wider European arrangement among the Big Four (to be enlarged later to a Pentarchy through the inclusion of France) with the intention to secure a lasting peace based on a balance of powers (p. 227). Humboldt and Stein had a better understanding of the concept of “national state”, which, however, was still at an early stage of formation in 1815, while Metternich - as Srbik maintains – remained attached to the “universalist ideas (*weltbürgerliche Ideen*) of the 16th century” (ibidem). In any case, the order established by the Congress of Vienna was robust enough to survive the revolution of 1848 (p. 226), and to prevent the outbreak of a European war for almost 100 years. For a comparison of the Congress of Vienna and the peace treaty of Versailles of 1919, Srbik approvingly quotes the judgement of the Italian statesman Francesco Nitti, which undoubtedly favoured the settlements of 1815 (p. 726).

In the second half of the 20th century judgments about the settlement of the German question by the Congress of Vienna have been more favourable. After the double demise of German nationalism it became obvious that Bismarck’s aggressive wars against Austria and France, solution through which he sought a solution through “blood and iron”, brought with it the destruction of the balance of power with consequences of catastrophic dimensions. The most famous rehabilitation of the international order established by the Congress of Vienna is Henry Kissinger’s *A World Restored. Castlereagh, Metternich and the Restoration of Peace 1812-1822* (1954). Historians and biographers have shown a continuous interest in Metternich, especially in his role as central actor at the Congress. In this respect, evaluations of his achievements have been mostly on the positive side, whereas the opposite holds for his other role as architect of the repressive policies in Austria, Germany and Italy. It is beyond doubt that this regime was the major reason for the belated introduction of a liberal political system in the countries of central Europe[[20]](#footnote-20), and also for the failure of Austria to keep pace with the economic development of Prussia and other German states.

Most recently, a new biography of Metternich by Wolfram Siemann has confirmed Srbik’s and Nitti’s judgment that the peace order of the Congress of Vienna was far superior to that of the Versailles, Saint Germain and Trianon Peace Treaties.

**Comparison of economic potentials**

During the 19th century, Austria fell far behind Prussia and (after 1871) Germany in its economic development. However, in 1815 a comparison by available statistical data is far less unfavourable for Austria.

Table 1 shows that by total population Austria was almost twice as large as Prussia, three times as large, if Hungary is included.

**Table 1**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **total population** |
| Austria excluding Hungary | 20.578.459[[21]](#footnote-21) |
| Austria incl. Hungary | 35.047.525 |
| Prussia | 10.349.031[[22]](#footnote-22) |
| Germany excluding Prussia and Austria | 12.653.424[[23]](#footnote-23) |

As can be seen from table 2, Prussia accounted for less than half of the population of Germany (excluding Austrian provinces which were part of the territory of the German Confederation).

**Table 2**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **population** | **%** |
| Prussia | 10349031 | 45,0% |
| Slesvik-H | 816633 | 3,6% |
| El Hesse | 576212 | 2,5% |
| Nassau | 316787 | 1,4% |
| Bavaria | 3707966 | 16,1% |
| Saxony | 1178802 | 5,1% |
| Hannover | 1328351 | 5,8% |
| Württemberg | 1397477 | 6,1% |
| Baden | 993414 | 4,3% |
| Hesse | 587995 | 2,6% |
| Mecklenburg | 308166 | 1,3% |
| Brunswick | 245798 | 1,1% |
| Oldenburg | 221000 | 1,0% |
| Saxony Weimar | 193869 | 0,8% |
| Sax Meiningen | 115000 | 0,5% |
| Sax Coburg | 111989 | 0,5% |
| Sax Altenburg | 95855 | 0,4% |
| Anhalt | 120453 | 0,5% |
| Lippe | 89364 | 0,4% |
| Frankfurt | 47850 | 0,2% |
| Hamburg | 146109 | 0,6% |
| Bremen | 54334 | 0,2% |
| total | 23002455 | 100,0% |

Source: Flora (1983)

Of the other German states, Bavaria was by far the largest with a population of 3,7 million inhabitants. Only three other states (Württemberg, Hannover, Saxony) had a population of more than one million.

Of the population of Austria in 1834, 22% (4,6 million) are accounted for by the purely Italian provinces Lombardy and Venice. Almost half of the population was not German-speaking.

**Table 3**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **population 1834** |
| Vienna | 326.353 |
| Lower Austria | 1.017.299 |
| Upper Austria | 846.982 |
| Styria | 923.882 |
| Carinthia/Carniola | 743.217 |
| Litorale | 445.317 |
| Tyrol | 827.635 |
| Bohemia | 4.001.852 |
| Moravia | 2.110.141 |
| Galicia | 4.395.331 |
| Dalmatia | 364.933 |
| Lombardy | 2.495.929 |
| Venice | 2.079.588 |
| Austria total | 20.578.459 |
| Hungary | 11.404.350 |
| Transsylvania | 1.963.435 |
| Militärgrenze | 1.101.281 |

Source: Becher (1841)

Table 4 gives an overview of the regional distribution of “industrial production” (manufacturing in industry and small business) in the Austrian monarchy in 1841. Here, the share of the Italian provinces is 29%, even higher than their share in total population, due to the low level of industry in the Eastern provinces Galicia, Dalmatia. Main industries in Lombardy and Venice were silk and leather, in Venice also glass. Venice was rich, but its industry was rather stagnant, whereas the industry of the Lombardy was dynamic. For several decades, the two provinces were not integrated with the rest of the Austrian economy, there was a even a customs border to the neighbouring provinces.

**Table 4 Industrial production in Austria by provinces, 1841**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **gross production in 1000 fl** | **% of total** | **number of etablishments** |
| Vienna | 60915 | 9% | 25061 |
| Lower Austria | 46929 | 7% | 43405 |
| Upper Austria | 31854 | 5% | 45889 |
| Styria | 23317 | 3% | 31551 |
| Carinthia/Carniola | 23028 | 3% | 28444 |
| Litorale | 11947 | 2% | 11353 |
| Tyrol | 25014 | 4% | 27841 |
| Bohemia | 141680 | 20% | 126593 |
| Moravia | 79026 | 11% | 72645 |
| Galicia | 52020 | 7% | 49607 |
| Dalmatia | 3524 | 1% | 6790 |
| Lombardy | 122964 | 18% | 118722 |
| Venice | 73393 | 11% | 87014 |
| Austria total | 695611 | 100% | 674915 |

Source: Tafeln zur Statistik 1841

For comparison of industrial production in Austria and in Prussia, only a few figures are available for the early 19th century. For Prussia, the figures for “Germany” (in the meaning of the territory of 1870) can provide hints.

**Table 5**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **production indicators around 1825** | **Austria** | **Germany** |
| pig iron, 1000 metric tons | 73 | 85 |
| coal, 1000 metric tons | 95 | 1200 |
| cotton spindles, in 1000 | 800 | 626 |
| raw cotton imports, 1000 metric tons | 4,7 | .. |
| raw cotton imports (1839) | 12 | 8,9 |
| raw wool consumption, 1000 m. tons | 31 | 25,9 |

Source: Mitchell, European Historical Statistics

In the heavy industries, pig iron production was only 22.000 tons lower in Austria than in Germany, therefore most likely higher in Austria than in Prussia. Austria had very little coal, and there was no cheap way of transportation before the railway age. Prussia’s coal production was much higher, and there were canals for easy shipment.

In modern textile production – i.e. cotton, Austria had a clear advantage over Prussia, also in the traditional wool industry.

**Conclusions**

The rivalry between Austria and Prussia for superiority and hegemony in Germany and in Central Europe was one of the main lines of multiple conflicts in the negotiations at the Congress of Vienna. After the Congress, disappointment and frustration were the dominant feelings in Prussia’s political circles and among its sympathizers in other German states, and even more so among the intellectual middle class. According to prevailing opinion, the country had been cheated of the fruits of its victories on the battlefield. Its demands for additional territorial gains at the expense of France had been blocked by Austria’s and England’s attitude of undue moderation. In Vienna, and also at the second Paris peace conference, Metternich’s skilful diplomatic intrigues had triumphed over Prussia’s Chancellor Hardenberg.

On the Austrian side, there was general satisfaction[[24]](#footnote-24) about the results of the Congress. If Austria had also been forced to make concessions, especially with respect to its Italian plans, the principal aims pursued by Metternich in the negotiations had been achieved:

1. A balance of power had been established in Europe which could be expected to contain the expansionist forces on the continent – France in the West, Prussia in the North, Russia in the East.
2. Within states, the *ancien regime* had beenrestored in Central Europe. Its preservation was to be assured by the “Holy Alliance”.

The prospects of this arrangement looked reasonably good in the light of the figures presented in the previous section – at least at their face value. Austria had a much larger population from which it could draft its military personnel. The development of modern industry had not yet fully started in either country, while Austria probably had an advantage in some of the old industries (e.g. iron and steel, luxuries). Metternich thought that Austria’s compact territory was an advantage over Prussia whose gains in the West were geographically separated from the Prussian and Polish provinces in the East. At face value, Lombardy and Venice amounted to a significant augmentation of Austria’s human and economic potential. The reach of Habsburg’s rule extended further to the South of the Italian peninsula through branch dynasties.

In the early 19th century, when the borders between European states were newly drawn at the Congress of Vienna, dynastic legitimacy was the guiding principle of the actors. The idea of nationality was rather alien to the thinking of the aristocratic political elites. It even had the touch of the abhorred Jacobinism. When *Turnvater Jahn* visited Vienna during the time of the Congress, he hardly attracted any attention.[[25]](#footnote-25) There was a wide gap between his “popular” German nationalism and Karl vom Stein’s aristocratic nationalism.

Metternich was aware of the heterogeneous character of the Austrian monarchy, for which the administrative centralism of national states such as France was unviable, as the experiment of Emperor Joseph II. had shown. Contrary to the conventional characterization of Austria as “multinational” state, recent literature has introduced the concept of “composite monarchy” as “an alternative to the anachronistic yardsticks of progress that have relentlessly highlighted the system’s presumed deficiencies. By ‘composite monarchy’ we mean a group of territories each continuing to maintain distinct rights, privileges and institutions under one ruler.” (Godsey 2015, p. 30f) The viability of this type of state had been demonstrated by Austria’s ability to mobilize its population in the victorious fight against Napoleon.

If Metternich had intended that the Congress’ arrangements for Central Europe would simultaneously ensure mutual sustainability of the Habsburg monarchy and of the *ancien regime* in Central Europe, he had underestimated the force of movements for national unification in Germany and in Italy, while he had been too confident with respect to the sustainability of the peculiar character of Austria as “composite monarchy” under constant pressure. Austria constantly had to fight against expansionist drives of neighbour states in the South and in the North. In Italy, Austria had to fight frequent revolts against regimes which depended on Austria’s military force, against opposition in Lombardy and Venice, and against Piedmont-Sardinia’s efforts to establish a unified Italian state by expanding its territory. In the North, Prussia pursued long term policies of reform of its systems of administration and education (Koselleck in Fischer Weltgeschichte 26) and of economic modernization to obtain a position of hegemony. If, in the formal sense the Confderation was an obstacle to this goal, it was circumvented as the example of the German customs union showed. Metternich was well aware of the danger of the customs union to Austria’s position in the Confederation, but in the 1830’s Austria was too weak either to exert its influence over other members not to join, “or else to undertake a radical reform of its own customs system.” (Henderson 1981/1968, p. 1094f) As an exception to his overall political orientation, Metternich had supported that Austria should liberalize its prohibitive regime of imports, but Austria’s industrialists were convinced that they could not stand up against competition to Germany.

What Metternich also seriously underestimated was the importance of economic factors (Nicolson 1961, p. 197). In addition to the lack of international competitiveness, the shaky position of Austria’s state finances is indicative of the increasing weakness of the Austrian economy. Whereas Prussia had been able to reduce its government debt by one third between 1815 and 1848 (Ritter 1981/1961, p. 1066), Austria’s debt increased steadily, mainly due to the high costs of military interventions on the Italian peninsula[[26]](#footnote-26). Convertibility of Austria’s currency, which had been arduously re-established during the 1820’s, broke down in 1848, with protracted consequences well into the 1870’s. Due to this financial vulnerability, Finance Minister Bruck’s ambitious Mediterranean project through which he tried to regain the economic initiative in the Confederation in the 1850’s never had a serious chance of realization. With increasing economic inferiority and internal political instability, the loss of both Italian provinces and the defeat against Prussia in 1866 appear almost an inevitable result of the unviability of Metternich’s conception of Empire.

Little more than four decades after German unification under Prussian dominance the peace order established by the Congress of Vienna came to an end. European history between 1871 and 1945 has shown the relevance of Humboldt’s and Metternich’s approach to the German question: That “the true purpose of the German Confederation is intertwined with European politics”. *Mutatis mutandis* its relevance appears undiminished 200 years after the Congress of Vienna in the present critical situation of the European Union.

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1. Mazohl, p. 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The following is based on Treichel 2015 and Fournier 1907. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The following is mainly based on the entry „Bundesakte“ in Lexikon der deutschen Geschichte (1977), p. 173 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Metternich, Denkwürdigkeiten, vol. 1, p. 314. The following quotes are from this source, unless otherwise indicated. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Prussia acquired Saarland as additional territory. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. „Die seit dem Jahre 1806 aufgetauchten Aspirationen, welche teils in ausgesprochen demokratischer Richtung sich bewegten, teils nur durch die Benennung ‚deutschtümelnder Gelüste‘ bezeichnet werden konnten. In dem Kampfe, der sich entspann, spielte die aristokratisch-demokratische Richtung im Geiste des Freiherrn v. Stein eine eigene und hervorragende Rolle.“ (Vol. 1, p. 317) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The following is based on Srbik, Metternich, Vol. 1, p. 206ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. More precisely, the ancient Kingdom of Lombardy had come under the rule of the Austrian Habsburgs in 1713 after the War of Spanish Succession. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. According to Metternich’s list: Brandenburg, Preußen, Posen, Sachsen, Schlesien, Westfalen, Niederrhein (p. 51) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Denkschrift über die deutsche Verfassung an den Freiherrn vom Stein, in Werke, Vol. IV, pp. 302-322. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. According to Schaffstein, Wilhelm von Humboldt, p. 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Über die Behandlung der Angelegenheiten des Deutschen Bundes durch Preußen, in: Werke, Vol. IV, pp. 346-417. Page indications in the text refer to this memorandum. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Metternich’s efforts for a concordat between the Federation and the Holy See (Denkwürdigkeiten, Vol. 2, p. 25) were not successful. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. „Denn in allen politischen Verhältnissen wirkt eine imponierende Stellung weit mehr, als Drohung oder Gewalt.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. „Diese nachahmen zu wollen, wäre das Undeutscheste, was man in Deutschland beginnen könnte.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “… was kein ächter Deutsche wollen kann; da man bis jetzt wohl weiß, welche bedeutende Vorzüge in geistiger und wissenschaftlicher Bildung die deutsche Nation, solang sie keine politische Richtung nach außen hatte, erreicht hat, aber unausgemacht ist, wie eine solche Richtung auch in dieser Rücksicht wirken würde.“ (p. 374)” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Heinrich Anton Springer (born 1825 in Prague, died 1891 in Leipzig) acquired an early reputation with his lectures on age of revolution held at the University of Prague in 1848. Because of his liberal convictions, he had to leave Austria and habilitated in the history of art at the University of Bonn. He was appointed to a chair at the University of Leipzig in 1873. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Viktor Bibl (1870-1947) was appointed to professor of modern history at the University of Vienna in 1926. He joined the NSDAP before the occupation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On Srbik (1878-1951) and his ambivalent positions on the German Question see Fellner (2002), p. 330-345. Srbik became a member of the NSDAP after the *Anschluss,* but he was distrusted by the Nazis because of his contact to Carl Goerdeler, and also because of his efforts to preserve some scholarly independence for the Austrian Academy of sciences (Reinalter 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Between the Congress of Vienna and the revolution of 1848 “Germany fell behind the *Zeitgeist* even further than the Holy Roman Empire in its worst period of decline after the wars for Silesia.” (Kann 1974, p. 372f) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 1834, source: Becher (1841) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 1818, source: Flora (1983) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. various years (1818-18??), source: Flora [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. With few exceptions – most notably, Count Philipp Stadion’s opposition to Metternich’s preference for expansion of Austria towards the South in exchange for renunciation of territories in the North (*Vorlande/*Freiburg, Low Countries). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. As reported by Varnhagen, Denkwürdigkeiten, Vol. 2, p. 671f. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. As early as 1820, Austria had to intervene to secure the rule of the Bourbon branch dynasty. Before 1848, the Austrian army intervened also Sardinia (Novara 1821), in Modena, Parma, Romagna (1831). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Complementary 3rd volume published posthumously in 1954. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)