



Metternich's Diplomacy at its Zenith, 1820-1823: Austria and the Congresses of Troppau, Laibach, and Verona

Paul W. Schroeder

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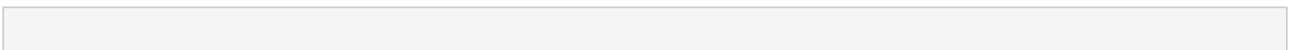
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What Metternich wanted at the peak of his career, why he wanted it, and the methods by which he achieved his goals are questions brilliantly answered in this survey and analysis of the Austrian chancellor's diplomacy during the period when he was the pre-eminent figure in European politics.

Metternich's single-minded objective during 1820–1823 was to preserve the Austrian hegemony he had gained in Central Europe after long wars, enormous effort, and great sacrifice. If the internal security and international-power position secured by Austria at the Congress of Vienna were to be defended against the impact of widespread revolution in Europe, it was imperative that peace in Europe and the status quo be maintained. This required an unyielding opposition to all political movements that might disturb the equilibrium, especially French chauvinism and the spread of French constitutional ideas.

A one-man distillate of the doctrine of absolute monarchy, Metternich was the relentless foe of any cause, just or unjust, that threatened European repose. Hence, when the revolution in Naples seriously menaced Austrian hegemony in Italy, Metternich determined that the constitutional regime in Naples must be overthrown by an Austrian armed force, an absolute monarchy restored, and an Austrian army of occupation kept there. Nor did he scruple to use duplicity, secret negotiation, trickery, or deceit against ally and adversary alike in his effort to enlist them in the common cause of all thrones. At the Congress of Troppau, Metternich succeeded not only in defeating Russian ideas for peaceful intervention and a moderate constitution at Naples, but also in converting Tsar Alexander to thoroughly conservative views, thereby making Russia a powerful supporter of Austrian policies and knowingly alienating England, formerly Austria's closest ally.

Paul W. Schroeder brings to this book exceptional scholarship and an objectivity hard to attain when dealing with a personality. Although Metternich, as Schroeder sees him, doubtless helped to maintain European peace and order, his real greatness consisted not in his European principles, but in his ability to defend Austrian interests under the guise of European principles. The evidence, gathered from documentary material in the Haus Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, has forced the author to the conclusion that Metternich was no real statesman. The very qualities that distinguished him as a brilliant diplomat—keen vision, cogent analysis, fertility of expedients, farsightedness, flexibility, and firmness of purpose—were converted into those of blindness to reality, superficial analysis, sterility of expedients, dogmatism, and failure of will when confronted with fundamental problems of state and society.



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