



# Historic Committee

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## Welcome Letter

Welcome to MITMUNC XV! We are the chairs of the historical committee, a committee, with delegates representing countries, or sometimes delegates of a faction, debating around a topic, and resolving it through a resolution. Our goal as a committee is to allow you to learn about a historic event and tackle issues in a different way.

I'm Olivia, a first year at MIT from New York City. I do not have much past MUN experience but I can't wait to read your responses! Outside of classes, I enjoy videography, people watching, and cafe hopping.

I'm Evan, a second year at MIT from Southern Illinois. I participated as a delegate in Model United Nations when I was in high school, so I'm very excited to continue as a chair this time! As for hobbies, I enjoy reading, cycling, and traveling.

This weekend, you'll debate a major challenge within the historical committee: the Congress of Vienna, and reforming the historical committee itself.

You should submit your position papers five days prior to the beginning of the conference to the chairs at the following email: **[historic-mitmunc-2023@mit.edu](mailto:historic-mitmunc-2023@mit.edu)**.

Have fun and best of luck!

Olivia C & Evan E

## Introduction & History

### **Congress of Vienna (1815)**

The Congress of Vienna, or Concert of Europe, was an assembly organized in September 1814 through June 9th, 1815 with a goal to reorganize Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. When Emperor Napoleon was defeated in May 1814, the Great Powers (Russia, Britain, Austria and Prussia) invited other states of Europe to send delegates to Vienna for a peace conference. The congress was an attempt to restore the monarchies Napoleon had overthrown and to restore a balance of power. It was the first occasion in history where national representatives came together to create treaties and served as the framework for the League of Nations in 1919 and United Nations in 1945. The congress was also the first where eighteenth-century rulers personally attended meetings with the expectation that it might promote lasting peace rather than imminent war. The main motive of the Congress of Vienna was to settle territorial disputes: redrawing borders of German states, central Europe, central Italy, and Scandinavia. In addition there were other matters to settle: rights of German Jews, abolition of the slave trade and navigation on European rivers, restoration of the Bourbon royal family in France, Spain and Naples, constitution of Switzerland issues of diplomatic precedence, and foundation of a new German confederation. The congress created the embryo of international law by proclaiming the freedom of circulation on the large and small rivers of Europe, through the new rules for diplomacy and general abolition of the slave trade. France lost all of her conquests and was put under close surveillance by allied powers until the 1860s. The United Kingdom had complete control of trading routes and no rivals in the acquisition of colonies. Russia gained parts of Poland. Austria was authorized to occupy northern Italy and the Balkans. Prussia was allowed to keep the annexations it had made on the Rhine.

## Subtopics

### - **Past actions**

The Congress took steps to make the countries around France stronger: Switzerland was recognized as an independent nation, Kingdom of Sardinia in Italy gained Genoa, 39 German states joined the German Confederation, the Austrian Netherlands and Dutch Republic united to form the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Congress established and affirmed the principle of legitimacy. The Congress agreed to come to another's aid in case of threats to peace.

### - **Present situation**

The Congress of Vienna left a legacy of nationalism and a shift in power. The Congress of Vienna was also the framework for the establishment of the United Nations. Like the Congress of Vienna, the United Nations was formed by major powers after a war—World War II. These powers agreed to cooperate to reduce tensions and bring greater harmony to international relations. Throughout its history, the United Nations has used diplomacy as its chief method of keeping the peace.

### - **Challenges/Solutions**

The balance of power was a topic of struggle for the leaders of Europe at the conference. The great powers largely wished to redraw the borders in ways that benefitted themselves, but also could create a series of powers large enough to balance against any other power's expansionist desires. They wanted to weaken France but did

not want to leave France powerless as a severely punished France might rise up to take revenge. However, if France were broken up, then another country might become so strong that the Neopolean wars repeated.

The Congress of Vienna could not simply put Europe back again like before 1789 because the Napoleon wars had reorganized parts of Europe, creating new states while forcing old monarchies out of power and replacing them with new ones. Such examples include, Duchy of Warsaw, Principality of Saxony, the Netherlands, the Confederation of the Rhine, and the disunited Italian states.

The actions of the Congress were in favor of conservatives as monarchies resumed power. Most nations present saw republicanism as the key driving factor of the war, as France's revolution, the catalyst for the war, had been begotten by such ideology. To prevent the reemergence of liberalism, the great powers sought to establish monarchies and conservative, principles across Europe. Despite such desires, however, the powers themselves had vastly different systems of government. The United Kingdom and France were constitutional monarchies, while Prussia, Austria, and Russia were absolute monarchies. A key question during the conference was the restoration of France's monarchy. The Revolution had overthrown France's Bourbon dynasty, but several powers wished it would be restored under King Louis XVIII.

The actions of the Congress of Vienna had consequences beyond Europe. During the Neopolean war, after the fall of Spain, Spanish Americans seized control of the Spanish colonies in the Americas. When the Congress in Vienna restored the Spanish monarchy, the Spanish tried to regain control of the American colonies but was met with resistance.

## Possible Country Blocs and Positions

### Austria

Unlike many of the other powers, Austria had no desire for any significant territorial expansion. Austria sought to present herself as the defender of smaller states in Europe; by drawing this vast array of states onto her side, Austria could vastly increase her diplomatic leverage in the postwar period. A key issue to Austria was how to manage the German regions of Central Europe; the Holy Roman Empire had been a loose confederation among most German states for a thousand years, but the Napoleonic Conflicts had destroyed this institution. To replace it, Austria sought a loose confederation of German speaking states with itself at the forefront. Generally, Austria sought to help create a balance of power among European states to prevent any general European conflict from again occurring.

### France

The Napoleonic Wars had initially begun as an attempt by other European powers to end the political instability resulting from the French Revolution. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, France had been at war for nearly twenty years. While defeated by a vast coalition of European powers, France was still among the great powers of Europe, possessing its second largest population and most capable military forces. France wished to reintegrate herself into the European order, and to minimize any political or territorial concessions that might be given to the other powers; this meant opposing efforts by other powers to weaken France.

### Portugal

Portugal had been invaded and occupied by France in 1807, and proved to be a significant theater of conflict during the Peninsular War, as both the French and Coalition forces

battled for control of the Iberian Peninsula. Despite emerging victorious, Portugal had been extremely destabilized by years of constant war and occupation. Especially worrying for Portugal were her colonial holdings: during the conflict, the Portuguese royal family had fled to Brazil; bringing with them to Brazil most of Portugal's institutions of governance, the colony then gained many of the institutions required for an independent state. Thus, Portugal, like the United Kingdom, needed to consolidate and reassert control over her colonial territories and ward off potential independence movements.

## Prussia

During the Napoleonic Wars, Prussia had been decisively defeated and conquered by France, and only came back as an independent power after the Russian campaign of 1812. Prussia, in 1814, was the smallest of all the great powers by both population and land area. Prussia desired to become a great power in the same league as the United Kingdom, France, Austria, and Russia, but could not do so while being quantitatively inferior to them in both size and population. To remedy this, Prussia sought vast territorial expansion in Central Europe, chiefly seeking the annexation of parts of Saxony, the Rhineland, and Poland. As Russia had emerged in a strong position after the war, Prussia sought to prevent Russia from becoming too powerful at its expense. Thus, Prussia also had a desire for a stable security system in Europe, largely to halt potential Russian expansion into Central Europe at its expense.

## Russia

The Russian Empire had turned the tide of the Napoleonic Wars. By 1812, most of Western and Central Europe had fallen under Napoleonic control. Yet, the French army then embarked on an invasion of Russia that ended in disaster; as more and more nations like Prussia, Austria, and Sweden turned against Napoleon thereafter, so turned the tide of the Napoleonic



Wars, resulting in France's eventual defeat. Seeking concessions coming from its key role in defeating Napoleon, Russia sought the westward expansion of its borders via the annexation of the Duchy of Warsaw. Further, wanting to avoid the volatile instability of the Napoleonic Wars, Russia desires the creation of a stable security system in Europe, to prevent any individual power from wild expansion like that of France previously.

## Spain

Spain had been a significant theater of conflict during the Napoleonic Wars; in 1812, Napoleon had attempted to overthrow its monarchy with his own brother, but this only brought about a savage, years long guerilla war across Iberia, known as the Peninsular War. Much like Portugal, although emerging victorious, Spain had been ravaged and destroyed by such years of constant warfare on her territory, and desired stability above all in the postwar period. Furthermore, Spain's colonias in the America's had begun witnessing large-scale revolts in 1808; to prevent the independence of her colonial holdings, Spain urgently needed to refocus her attention away from Europe and towards Latin America. To do so, Spain desired the swift creation of a stable order in Europe that would enable her to focus on suppressing these colonial uprisings.

## Sweden

Sweden had fought in various coalitions against France throughout the Napoleonic Wars, and emerged as a victor. Having lost its territory of Finland to Russia, Sweden desired territorial compensation in the form of Norway, previously having belonged to Denmark, as compensation.

## United Kingdom

The United Kingdom emerged in a very strong position after the Napoleonic Wars. Being the world's foremost naval, colonial, and industrial power, the preservation of the current order

was in her interest. The United Kingdom wishes for the restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy and monarchism more generally, and for a balance of power to be created in Europe to prevent any power from dominating the Continent. Having acquired many new colonial territories during the Napoleonic Wars, the UK now wished to focus on consolidating its newly acquired territories, and the further expansion into new territories across the world. The UK believed that by preventing any power from dominating the continent, then she would be entirely free to focus on her expansion. To help ensure her security, the UK also desires the creation of a large and independent Kingdom of the Netherlands, to prevent any continental power from using the Channel Coast as a staging ground for an invasion of the UK.

## Conclusion/Raised Questions to Consider

As the historical committee, you have the chance to change the course of history; you can expect our debates to involve many great details and complexities. Your role will be to think critically about the roles and motivations of the actors involved in the Congress of Vienna, as well as those yet to get involved. Disagreements between parties are especially present in this case, but this highlights the importance of finding clever agreements and methods of working together to reach a productive solution. As such, the chairs would look favorably upon agreements and collaboration as opposed to repeated vetoes from the permanent members!

Here are some key questions and ideas to think about before the debates:

- There are large underlying tensions between former nobles and new states. How will you foster a mindset of collaboration and assuage conflicting concerns between parties involved while rearranging boundaries?

- What actions will your resolutions take to address the abolition of slave trade and navigation on European rivers?
- Will you account for the rights of German Jews in your progress to a solution, and if so, how will you guard this right?
- How will you handle the restoration of the Bourbon royal family in France, Spain and Naples, constitution of Switzerland issues of diplomatic precedence, and foundation of a new German confederation?
- How will your actions set a precedent for future organizations?
- How will your actions ensure the balance of power and uphold the principles in which the Congress of Vienna was founded?

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