”THE IDEA OF EUROPE IN CLASSICAL WEIMAR: THE CASE OF GOETHE, SCHILLER, HERDER AND WIELAND (D.Eggel)”

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1. Abstract

The Idea of Europe in Classical Weimar: The Case of Goethe, Schiller, Herder and Wieland (D.Eggel)

The Idea of Europe in Classical Weimar: The Case of Goethe, Schiller, Herder and Wieland emphasizes the importance of the concept of Europe as a source of meaning and object of contested discursive battles during the fundamental transition towards modernity of the Sattelzeit (1750-1850). At the end of the eighteenth century, the age of "Old Europe", based on dynasties, elite culture and balance of power politics, was indeed profoundly shaken, if not destroyed, by a series of profound structural transformations and the international instability provoked by the French Revolution. Whereas older models of collective representation were wavering and the nation – not to speak of the nation-state – had not yet attained its later quasi-hegemonic status as a marker of identity, Europe presented an attractive space of cultural and political projection, offering modes of interpretation and paradigmatic alternatives to contemporary witnesses appalled by the pace and scope of social, economic and political change.

Far from operating in a historical void, the Weimar Classics were thus confronting concrete socio-political and spatial settings in which Europe played an important role as one of several "intermediate" collective identities – including the Holy Roman Empire and the concept of the nation – arbitrating between atomistic individuality and all-encompassing Humanität. The Weimar Classics made important contributions both to Enlightenment debates about Europe and to the discursive battles about the continent taking place in the context of heightened epistemic uncertainty and ideological confrontation of the French Revolution and the ensuing Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The thesis concludes that the concept of Europe underwent a series of processes at the end of the eighteenth century (democratization, ideologization, temporalization and politicization) that were, according to Reinhart Koselleck, paradigmatic for the Grundbegriffe of the Sattelzeit.
2. The idea of Europe: a diachronic overview from the Renaissance to the Congress of Vienna (1815)

Since the Renaissance, Europe increasingly gained in conceptual thickness, as the continent underwent a process of self-assertion that had been initiated by the fall of Constantinople (1453) and the discovery of the New World (1492). Humanist interest for Europe found expression in many fields such as cartography, iconography, painting, tapestry and sculpture; essentially in the form of anthropomorphic representations and maps illustrating Europe's new-found place in the world and sense of ascendancy (Schmale 2005, 20). During the Renaissance, this newly gained continental consciousness, however, remained confined to a small intellectual elite and the concept of Europe never trickled down into the consciousness of the broader masses.

After the Westphalian Treaties (1648), analysts increasingly described Europe as a single family of states composed of a multiplicity of independent political actors. In the seventeenth century a horizontal conception of the political organization of Europe thus definitely replaced the earlier, vertical paradigm of *monarchia universalis*, as the Reformation and ensuing religious wars had seriously called into question Europe's spiritual and political unity and undermined the credibility of the notion of *respublica christiana*. During the Age of Enlightenment, Europe entered the mental maps and everyday vocabulary of a broader stratum of population and definitively superseded the older terminology of Christendom in most contexts (Duroselle 1965, 105). Just how omnipresent and mundane the concept of Europe had become in the eighteenth century is attested by the considerable space contemporary dictionaries and encyclopedias devoted to it (Gollwitzer 1964, 53). In the eighteenth century, Europe furthermore experienced a great leap forward in terms of structural integration as much improved means of communication and transportation provoked a massive increase in professional and leisurely travel, continental and colonial trade, and cultural exchange.

On the level of the *Europe pensée*, an Enlightenment doxa asserting Europe's superiority by reverting to stadial theories and a cosmopolitan rhetoric was facing a few dissonant voices under the leadership of Rousseau, Raynal and Diderot questioning the moral probity of Europe's colonial relations and the universality of European standards. On the political level, a majority of Enlightenment authors defended Europe's multipolar state system with its
corollaries of state sovereignty, balance of power and timidly emerging normative framework. A few idealist minds, however, such as Kant or the Abbé de Saint Pierre, dissatisfied with the status quo and wary of Europe's incessant wars, conceived of audacious federal schemes aimed to pacify the continent for good (Thompson 1994, 57).

With the crumbling of the ancien régime as a consequence of the French Revolution, however, the whole Enlightenment discourse about Europe was put to question and, in a context of epistemic crisis, the debates about the continent gained in intensity, virulence, depth and scope. During the discursive battles taking place at the turn of the nineteenth century, the concept of Europe was indeed instrumentalized as a flagship for a whole series of conflicting political agendas and served as a platform and catalyst for countless political and civilizational continental projects. Romantics such as Novalis and the Schlegel brothers articulated flamboyant visions for Europe, blending nostalgic longings for past unity with transcendental projections for the future. French revolutionaries and their followers, such as Anacharsis Cloots, elaborated ambitious schemes to transform Europe into a universal democracy and Napoleon later attempted to subject the continent to French imperial hegemony. Conservative authors, such as Burke, Gentz and de Maistre, had to reflect upon, readjust and reinvent their ideas of Europe, if they did not want to see their political aspirations relegated to the meanders of history. At the end of the eighteenth century, Europe thus played a central role in a wide range of competing discourses, as on both sides of the barricades the actors were convinced of the superiority of the continent's civilization (Barnavi 2001, 29) and the French Revolution had clearly shown that the challenges raised by the transition towards modernity could not be dealt with exclusively in national frameworks.

3. Geographic aspects of the Weimar Classics' idea of Europe

As a geographic marker, Europe was clearly part of the Weimar Classics' everyday vocabulary and occupied a central place in their linguistic repertoires and mental maps. The Weimar Classics used the terms Europa, Europäer, europäisch very frequently for purposes of spatial location, collective identification, comparison, value judgment and ethnographic demarcation and did not hesitate to revert to a whole series of anthropomorphic metaphors in which the continent was alternatively flooded, set on fire and raped, or presented as a tribunal of reason and historical witness. In the mental maps of the Weimar Classics, Europe had thus
clearly superseded conceptual competitors such as *Occident, Abendland, and Christenheit*, which they reserved for specific historic, biblical and religious contexts.

Arguments about Europe's geographic and climatic specificity were the *sine qua non* of the Enlightenment's exceptionalist discourses celebrating the continent's civilizational achievements. Following this major Enlightenment paradigm, the Weimar Classics – with the exception of Schiller who stressed the mental faculties, adaptability and will of the Europeans – rationalized Europe's civilizational success by referring to the continent's favorable geographic environment. According to the Weimar Classics, Europe's fortunate cocktail of geological and climatic factors included an indented coastline ensuring exposure to the world; a moderate climate allowing for the right combination of inventiveness, virility and industriousness; mountains and lakes warranting division and diversity; and an extended river system fostering communication and connectivity. Compared to other regions of the world where heat, cold, isolation, uniformity or lushness had prevented civilization, Europe constituted, in the view of the Weimar Classics, an ideal terrain for technological and economic competition, cultural diversity and government by laws. It should, however, be pointed out that although the Weimar Classics took over the main precepts of climatic determinism as defined by Bodin and Montesquieu, they also referred to a whole series of alternative factors influencing the development of a people, such as its learning potential, cultural exchanges and migration history.

The question of frontiers has always been of the highest importance for any definition of Europe (Mikkeli 1998, 135). Defining Europe's frontiers, both internally and externally, indeed triggers complex processes of inclusion and exclusion, of self-definition and othering, of belonging and segregation. The main ambiguity about Europe's boundaries in the eighteenth century stemmed from the continent's vast eastern frontier, including the Ottoman-dominated regions of the Balkans and the Greek island-universe. Both Russia and the Ottoman Empire were, because of their obvious pluri-continentality, at least partly located on the European continent. If, geographically, the Weimar Classics admitted the presence of the Ottoman Empire on European soil, they unanimously – and often quite bluntly – cast the Turks beyond Europe's civilizational and political frontiers. With respect to Russia, the Weimar Classics generally acknowledged the double nature of the Tsarist Empire, partaking both of Europe and of Asia. Although geographically including it to Europe, the Weimar Classics, like most of their Enlightenment contemporaries, adopted an ambiguous attitude
towards Russia's civilizational status; initial reformist hopes, as in the case of Herder, often giving way to sentiments of fear and resentment towards the ever more powerful neighbor in the East.

The most important European frontier for the Weimar Classics was, however, internal, namely the cultural fault line that divided the continent into a northern and a southern half. The Weimar Classics were indeed obsessed by a European North-South divide that directly appealed to their identitarian anxiety (Gutjahr 2000, 116) and, albeit under slightly different auspices, also ran through the German nation itself. Nostalgic for not having been born in a Southern arcadia corresponding to their aesthetic ambitions, the Weimar Classics resented the cold climate and harsh winters of their native northern regions and nurtured an inferiority complex towards the South that was reinforced by Winkelmann's postulation of the superiority of the plastic arts and cultural achievements of Greco-Roman Antiquity.

To overcome their personal distress about living in Europe's artistically sterile North, the Weimar Classics dedicated a lot of energy to rehabilitating a northern mythology (Edda, Nibelungen, Ossian) and literary pantheon (Shakespeare) and presented Europe's North as the realm of Protestant industriousness, political liberty and stringent ethics. If the Weimar Classics iterated again and again that they were unable to equal the artistic masterpieces of Antiquity, they compensated for this inferiority by insisting that it was the mission of Europe's North – and thus themselves – to revive a classical legacy of which Europe's contemporary South had shown itself unworthy. Goethe, for example, married Faust, the curious, industrious and inventive representative of the modern North to Helene, the beautiful and aesthetic incarnation of classical Greece, giving them a son: Euphorion (Chabannes, 1978, 204)

4. Civilizational aspects of the Weimar Classics' idea of Europe

Both the European république des lettres and its aristocratic counterpart were dominated by French language, literature and culture, to such an extent that many perceived them as thinly veiled forms of French cultural imperialism or hegemony (Pomian 1990, 106). Ever since France had taken over cultural leadership from Italy in the seventeenth century, the norms of aristocratic Europe were indeed set in Paris and French served as its lingua franca. The
république des lettres was thus often confused with a particular form of "French cosmopolitanism", and bards of French cultural primacy such as Caraccioli and Rivarol, were quick to mistake Europe for France and France for Europe. All the Weimar Classics claimed membership in the European république des lettres, were profoundly influenced by the French literary canon and acknowledged various degrees of Francophilia. The Weimar Classics nevertheless recognized that England was in the process of taking over European leadership from France on the political and cultural level and contributed very actively to emancipating the German nation from French cultural hegemony. By praising alternative cultural models such as that of Greek Antiquity and fostering the establishment of an independent German cultural nation, the Weimar Classics hence contributed, in the end, to undermining the universalizing aspirations of the Europe française.

Much as in the eighteenth century France was often mistaken for Europe, many Enlightenment thinkers, especially those subscribing to the cosmopolitan credo, tended to conflate Europe with the world (Hay 1968, 117). Considering themselves as Weltbürger, the Weimar Classics, with the exception of Herder who rejected cosmopolitan rationales from the outset, subscribed to a moral cosmopolitanism characterized by a focus on personal ethical values and the solidarity of a transnational intellectual elite. None of the Weimar Classics, however, elaborated, like Kant, ambitious political schemes for reforming the international state system from a cosmopolitan perspective. In their determination to think in universal anthropological categories, Schiller and Wieland often fell into the trap of Eurocentrism by, mostly unwittingly, mistaking Europe for the world. Whereas Schiller and Wieland were convinced of the beneficial effects of a unilateral transfer of civilization from the center to the periphery, Goethe and Herder, more suspicious of cosmopolitan discourses and better aware of Europe's internal diversity, preferred to conceive Europe's relation to the other parts of the world in terms of cooperation and exchange. Fearful of cosmopolitanism's homogenizing tendencies, Herder thus elaborated on the concept of Humanität and Goethe on that of Weltliteratur, as alternative ways of conceiving the relation between the universal and the particular.

If the Weimar Classics differed in their attitudes towards cosmopolitanism, all of them agreed that eighteenth century Europe constituted a stunningly successful civilization defined by a shared heritage, political plurality, cultural diversity and economic prosperity. The Weimar Classics furthermore often reverted, albeit in slightly differing ways, to the ubiquitous stadial
theories in order to compare Europe favorably to a series of archetypical Others, such as frozen Eskimos, idle Tahitians, despotic Orientals or decadent Chinese. Admitting, like Voltaire, that the civilizational fault line also ran across the European continent, the Weimar Classics furthermore commented, often in a deprecating tone, upon a series of internal Others, such as the Gypsies, the Jews and the wild inhabitants of Europe's mountainous regions.

Rather than, like the Romantics, effacing the European self in an unconditional admiration for exotic Others, the Weimar Classics most often understood European alterity in terms of the self. If Schiller and Wieland were often uncompromising in their judgments about Europe's Others and regularly used them as a source of amusement or a peregrine décor for their plays and novels, they were also the most prepared among the Weimar Classics to civilize them and thus transform them into Europeans. Adopting a somewhat more differentiated attitude, Goethe and Herder insisted that each people was pursuing a different path to progress and that development could occur in diverse and sometimes asymmetrical ways. Finally, all the Weimar Classics agreed that a return to the life of mankind in its early stages was unrealistic and that if it was fine to admire noble savages for their unspoilt life in accordance with nature, it would be ludicrous for civilized Europeans to attempt to emulate them.

The Weimar Classics did not, however, simply stick to the Enlightenment's self-congratulatory European discourses but also situated themselves at the forefront of the critical continental self-reflection that followed Rousseau's comprehensive attack on European civilization. Herder and Wieland, for example, reveled in inverting perspectives and adopting contrapuntal approaches in order to question the universality of European standards. Going beyond the Enlightenment's usual fears about civilizational decline, the Weimar Classics also questioned some of the bleaker sides of modernization and European progress. One of the central concerns of the Weimar Classics was that the ascendancy of an abstract and mechanical conception of reason and society, devoid of human sentiments and ethical considerations, would alienate Europeans from nature and ultimately erode the cohesion of their political and social communities. As active protagonists of the Sturm und Drang movement, Schiller and Goethe thus unmasked the hypocrisy and shallowness of materialist discourses and aimed to restore the balance between human beings' rational and sensual sides.

The Weimar Classics further apprehended the formation of oversized bureaucratic states, likening them to fearsome Molochs stifling cultural diversity and individual freedom, and
argued, instead, in favour of more moderately sized political bodies. The anxiety of the Weimar Classics toward unbridled modernization also found expression in Herder's warnings about the cultural homogenization of the continent and Goethe's aversion to paper money and financial speculation as expressed in *Faust II*. Finally, not content with questioning the pitfalls of modernity, the Weimar Classics also situated themselves – with the exception of Goethe who adopted a more ambivalent position on the issue – at the forefront of eighteenth century anticolonial and abolitionist discourses.

5. Historical aspects of the Weimar Classics' idea of Europe

The Weimar Classics made a series of significant and original contributions to the theoretical and methodological reflections in the nascent discipline of history. In many respects the historical considerations of the Weimar Classics were astonishingly modern as they offered brilliant insights into the selectivity and subjectivity of historians and the constructed and fragmentary character of all history. Especially Goethe and Schiller insisted on the aesthetic aspects of historical writing as well as on the ideological preconceptions and contextual embeddedness of historians. Herder furthermore launched an attack on *histoire événementielle* by highlighting the importance of cultural, social and economic factors in history (Eggel 2006, 54) and Schiller similarly suggested a syncretic approach to universal history.

The period following the French Revolution witnessed – analogously to what was happening for the nations – the invention of a series of narratives about Europe's past and origins (Delanty 1995, 80). In sharp contrast to many Enlightenment historians who focused on Europe's civilizational achievements and abstract values, a new generation of historians thus filled the concept of Europe with concrete historical content and integrated it into their idealist narratives. At the end of the eighteenth century, Europe had thus become a historical discourse in its own right, to which the Weimar Classics contributed significantly. Especially Herder and Schiller proved instrumental in developing more elaborate proto-idealist historical narratives about Europe that constituted a transition between Enlightenment's somewhat sketchy and hesitant philosophies of history to the more full-fledged transcendental approach of later philosophers such as Hegel.

The Weimar Classics produced astonishingly similar narratives of Europe by structuring their historical accounts according to an East-West pattern positing the origin of mankind in Asia
and insisting on the world-historical importance of such early peoples as the Egyptians, the Hebrews and the Phoenicians. All the Weimar Classics, furthermore, gave a fundamentally positive account of Greece's contribution to civilization, claiming that the Greeks had succeeded in synthesizing and transcending all previous cultural achievements. The Weimar Classics also shared a common hatred for Rome's imperialism and warmongering but recognized the importance of Latin and Roman legislation for an early wave of structural European integration. The *Völkerwanderungen* were described by the Weimar Classics as a cataclysmic foundational moment, since it allowed for the productive encounter of northern – or Germanic – freedom with southern law and culture but also darkened Europe's skies by inaugurating the era of feudalism. The Weimar Classics furthermore shared similar views about the beneficial influence of early Christianity but despised the Vatican and the Crusades for their fanaticism and sterile hierarchy.

The Renaissance constituted for the Weimar Classics a highly beneficial period both on the economic and the cultural level and, as Protestants, they all welcomed the Reformation as another salutary step towards Europe's emancipation. Finally, the Weimar Classics acknowledged the fundamental importance for Europe of the Westphalian state system as well as the triumph of rationalist philosophy at the end of the seventeenth century. For all their shared views about Europe's past, the Weimar Classics nevertheless articulated contrasting approaches to the continent's history. Whereas Schiller and Herder provided early idealist narratives aiming to corroborate mankind's evolution towards *Humanität*, Wieland remained trapped in the anxieties and contradictions of Enlightenment historiography and Goethe stuck to a cynical and cyclical view of history.

5. **Politic aspects of the Weimar Classics' idea of Europe**

On the political level, the Weimar Classics recognized that since the Westphalian Peace Treaties multipolarity and the balance of power had been at the core of the European state system. Whereas Herder was a staunch opponent of dynastic power politics and ceaselessly denounced the mechanic rationale underlying the balance of power, Wieland and Schiller consistently defended the Westphalian state system. The Weimar Classics also were well aware of the epochal importance of the French Revolution and its tremendous impact on the European state system. If Herder and Wieland welcomed the French Revolution with
enthusiasm and high expectations, Schiller and Goethe adopted more reserved attitudes towards the epochal event. All the Weimar Classics, however, were bitterly disappointed with the way the French Revolution evolved and forthrightly condemned the imperialist strategies of the revolutionaries and the atrocities committed during the Reign of Terror. In the end, the blunders of the French Revolution reinforced the latent elitism of the Weimar Classics and brought the Weimar Classics to the conclusion that Europe's peoples were not yet ready to govern themselves, which is why they elaborated a series of solutions and programs for furthering education (*Bildung*) and reform.

In the debates about the political reorganization of the European continent in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the Weimar Classics rejected all schemes aiming to impose unity or hegemony upon the continent. The Weimar Classics thus not only opposed *monarchia universalis*, which they associated with despotism, uniformity and Roman Catholic hierarchy, but also the rhapsodic schemes for universal democracy of revolutionary prophets such as Anacharsis Cloots. The Weimar Classics particularly scorned, from a historical perspective, the temporal ambitions of the Catholic clergy and the imperial ambitions of the Hapsburg emperors. As Protestants and defenders of a secular view of politics, all the Weimar Classics thus kept their distance from the more extravagant Romantic ideas of Europe projecting a return of papal rule or eschatological salvation. Finally, the Weimar Classics, despite sometimes nourishing – as in the case of Wieland and Goethe – personal admiration for Napoleon, also condemned the hegemonic schemes of the emperor by contending that, ultimately, he would be punished by the eternal law of Nemesis for his disproportionate ambition and hubris. Contrary to the conservatives and the Romantics, the Weimar Classics thus consistently stuck to the view that Europe's freedom and dynamism could only be preserved if the continent remained politically divided.

The Weimar Classics did not elaborate much on eighteenth century federal peace projects such as those of St-Pierre and Kant, even though they were prepared to consider the creation of some loose supranational structures designed to ensure Europe's peace. Schiller was concerned about the frailty and corruptibility of federal institutions and Herder was fearful of their inherent tendency toward bureaucratization and homogenization. Wieland, in an alleged 1806 contribution to the *Neue Teutsche Merkur*, was thus the only Weimar Classic who suggested a concrete – although very short and sketchy – federal project suggesting the creation of a European court of arbitration. Like the other Weimar Classics, however,
Wieland would not have subscribed to more ambitious schemes for European political integration. As for the Holy Roman Empire, which, in the wake of Leibniz had often been invoked as a model for European federal projects, Goethe and Wieland showed continuous sympathy for it and still hoped, after the Empire's dissolution in 1806, that some of its federal structures might be revived through Napoleon's European policies. Herder and Schiller, on the contrary, insisted that the Holy Roman Empire could not serve as a model for the political construction of Europe, since its archaic structures were no longer adapted to the conditions of modernity.

Politically, Herder articulated the most subversive idea of Europe if the Weimar Classics by aiming at the ultimate replacement of the extant dynastic state system with a peaceful Europe of nations. Neither Schiller and Wieland, who adopted more realist positions and maintained their confidence in the state, nor Goethe, who was afraid of an increased democratization of societies, could, in the end, subscribe to Herder's idealist scheme of an irenic association of nations. If all the Weimar Classics praised a series of merits and virtues of the German nation – most often in a compensatory reflex aiming to offset past humiliations – none of them, with the exception of Schiller, shared the messianic approach of Romantics such as Novalis and F. Schlegel postulating a German redemptive mission for the continent.

Except for Herder, who wished for a complete overhaul of the extant European state system, the Weimar Classics came, in many respects, close to the views of moderate conservatives such as Burke and Gentz. After the French Revolution, all the Weimar Classics had indeed come to prefer peaceful evolution and reform over abrupt ruptures and violent change. Schiller and Wieland consistently defended the maintenance of Europe's multipolar state system and balance of power, which they deemed essential to the continent's political stability and freedom. Goethe, and to some extent also Wieland, defended the paradigm of enlightened despotism and were ready to accommodate more paternalistic forms of government. The Weimar Classics, were, however, too progressive to be considered as outright conservatives, since, even though they disagreed over how much change and democratization was needed, they shared a decided commitment to internal reforms that would, they hoped, in turn impact upon the behavior of states on the international level.
6. Conclusion

Comparatively, it can be concluded that Goethe and Herder were more genuinely critical of Enlightenment rationales than Schiller and Wieland and pursued many similar European agendas such as the unfolding of Humanität, cultural diversity and dialogue between nations. Both Herder and Goethe furthermore remained skeptical of international politics, Herder loathing the extant European state system for its despotic structures and Goethe largely ignoring it, whereas Schiller and Wieland remained faithful to the Westphalian state system and the balance of power. Goethe, however, did not subscribe to Herder's idealist agenda of a Europe of nations, which was far too progressive and subversive for his instinctively conservative worldview. Wieland consistently remained faithful to the Enlightenment's discourses about Europe, be it on the historical, civilizational or political level, which is why his European views often differed from those of his Weimar colleagues, who took more liberties with the Enlightenment canon.

The French Revolution constituted a major challenge to the ideas of Europe of the Weimar Classics, since it called into question Herder's irenic conception of nations, Goethe's attachment to ancien régime values, Wieland's apolitical conception of cosmopolitanism and Schiller's linear view of historical progress. After the French Revolution, Herder thus moderated his civilizational criticism and accentuated, instead, the idealist rationales already present in his early work; Schiller exchanged the unsophisticated philosophy of history of his Antrittsvorlesung for the more idealist and complex one of the Aesthetische Briefe, subscribed to German messianism, adopted a more nuanced vision towards European alterity and overtly denounced the European colonial project; Wieland, for his part, tempered his cosmopolitan discourse by appealing to German Reichspatriotismus and exhorting his compatriots to contain the universal aspirations of the French revolutionaries; and Goethe, finally, was forced to confront the thematic of international politics, since it was disrupting the comfortable tranquility of his Weimarian microcosm.

Overall, however, with the notable exception of Schiller, who made considerable adjustments to his idea of Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the Weimar Classics remained faithful to their initial conceptions of the continent. Herder had developed his idea of a Europe of nations before the French Revolution, Wieland defended his pre-revolutionary program of a politically stable and increasingly enlightened Europe during the whole period
of revolutionary turmoil and Goethe was fortified in his belief about the deleterious influence of the materialist and democratic variants of French Enlightenment. After the French Revolution, all the Weimar Classics agreed that a simple return to the status quo ante was neither feasible nor desirable and argued in favor of comprehensive educational and societal reforms for Europe to enter modernity in good conditions. Whereas Wieland and Goethe remained skeptical toward transcendental rationales and insisted on incremental reforms, Herder and Schiller subscribed to idealist philosophies of history that presumed more radical transformations for the European continent.

After the revolutionary period and the Napoleonic Wars, it appeared, at the Congress of Vienna, that all the grand schemes for a complete overhaul of the European state system had ultimately failed (Thompson 1994, 57–8). A simple return to the earlier status quo, however, had also proven impossible, since the mentalities of Europeans as well as the administrative and economic structures of the continent had changed too much and definitively entered the era of modernity (Duchhardt 1992, 130). Europe's cultural and political multipolarity was preserved, since neither the French revolutionaries nor Napoleon had succeeded in imposing hegemony upon the continent. Russian soldiers, not the transcendental German nation, had turned out as the savior of Europe's freedom. Furthermore, years of wars and bitter infighting had not been propitious to further federal schemes for European integration and Saint-Simon's astonishingly modern *De la réorganisation de la société européenne* (1814) thus went largely unnoticed at the Congress of Vienna. The major concern of Europe's representatives at the Congress of Vienna was indeed how to restore and reinforce the continent's balance of power, to which purpose they undertook important territorial reshufflings and consolidations – most notably through the creation of the German Confederation.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars were, however, more than a simple parenthesis or interlude in the continuity of the Westphalian system, since they provoked the irruption of internal policy on the international stage and brought to the fore new actors such as the nations. If Europe's policy makers wanted to maintain their grip over the continent, they had to devise new strategies in order to counter efficiently the claims for political and social emancipation emanating from a heteroclite alliance of progressive forces. As Metternich had very well understood, after the Congress of Vienna, balance of power and international public law would no longer suffice to maintain peace and stability on the continent, which is why he
conceived, in the form of the Congress system, a policy of active intervention and joint management of European affairs by the continent's major powers.

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Further readings


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