

CHAPTER 19

The Conservative Order in Central and Eastern Europe

TIME LINE

1792-1835	Reign of Emperor Francis I of Austria
1797-1840	Reign of King Frederick William III of Prussia
1801-1825	Reign of Tsar Alexander I of Russia
1817	The German <i>Burschenschaften</i> hold the Wartburg celebration
1819	The German princes issue the Carlsbad Decrees
1825	The Decembrist Revolt breaks out in Russia Reign of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia
1830	A revolt breaks out in Russian Poland
1831	Giuseppe Mazzini establishes Young Italy
1835-1848	Reign of Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria
1840-1861	Reign of King Frederick William IV of Prussia
1853-1856	The Crimean War is fought

During the years after 1815, conservative rule appeared firmly established in Central and Eastern Europe.

In Central Europe, the period from 1815 to 1848 is known as the Age of Metternich. Prince Klemens von Metternich (1773-1859), the Austrian chancellor, dominated not only the Hapsburg Empire but also the German Confederation and the Italian states. Metternich devoted his energies to the preservation of the conservative order and efforts to prevent the spread of the new ideologies of liberalism and nationalism.

To the east, in Russia, Tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I maintained the autocracy and expanded their territorial holdings. However, the decision of Great Britain and France to intervene in the Crimean War of the mid-1850s blocked the further expansion of Russian power at the expense of the Ottoman Empire.

Nationalism

In Central Europe, nationalism was the most powerful ideology in the early nineteenth century. In Germany and Italy, nationalism proved to be a unifying force, as the Germans and Italians came increasingly to acquire a sense of being one people. In contrast, nationalism promoted the disintegration of the Austrian Empire, as the various subject peoples of the Hapsburg emperor came to acquire consciousness of their own nationalities.

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Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) was the great prophet of Central European nationalism. In his treatise *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity* (1784-1791), Herder defined nationalism in terms of a people's language, literature, and history, which gave them a sense of identity. While Herder's was primarily a cultural nationalism, it had political implications. As Germans, Italians, and the subject nationalities of the Hapsburgs acquired a greater sense of peoplehood through an appreciation of their language, literature, and history, they also came to desire a state of their own.

Austria: The Multinational Empire

In Austria after 1815, Metternich strove to maintain the absolute monarchy of the Hapsburg emperors Francis I (r. 1792-1835) and Ferdinand I (r. 1835-1848).

Metternich's Policy

Metternich believed that the new forces of liberalism and, especially, nationalism presented a serious threat to the survival of the Austrian Empire. The Hapsburg empire was a multinational state, inhabited by Germans, Magyars (Hungarians), Poles, Ruthenians (Ukrainians), Czechs, Slovaks, Rumanians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and others. In Metternich's view, any concessions to these national groups would begin a process that would inevitably result in the breakup of the empire. Furthermore, he believed, the introduction of liberal parliamentary government would provide the national groups with a new forum where they could fight their battles against one another and against their Hapsburg rulers. This, too, would weaken the monarchy.

The Development of Nationalism

Despite Metternich's efforts, liberal and nationalist ideas made some headway in the Austrian Empire in the years after 1815.

The Magyars

The threat to Hapsburg power was greatest in Hungary, where nationalism developed among the leaders of the Magyars. Some Magyar leaders, including Count Stephen Szechenyi (1791-1860), the greatest of the country's landowners, took a moderate approach, emphasizing the development of Magyar culture and the Hungarian economy. Others, such as the radical journalist Louis Kossuth (1802-1894), wanted Hungary to win its independence from Austria.

Other Subject Nationalities

Nationalism also emerged among other subject nationalities of the Hapsburgs, including the Czechs in Bohemia and the South Slavs (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes).

The German Confederation

The Congress of Vienna had created a German Confederation of thirty-nine states. The Austrian Empire, the largest of these states, held the permanent presidency of the confederation. Although each state was in principle independent, Metternich exercised his control over German affairs to block the spread of liberal and nationalist ideas.

Prussia

Prussia, the second-largest German state, generally accepted its position of subordination to Austria. However, Prussia began to promote the commercial integration of the German states. In 1819, Prussia launched the Zollverein (customs union) and began to conclude treaties, which provided for reductions of tariffs and other barriers to trade, with neighboring German states. By 1834, most of the members of the German Confederation, with the notable exception of Austria, had joined the Zollverein.

The Burschenschaften

The greatest challenge to the conservative order in the German Confederation came from university students who had been imbued with liberal and nationalist ideals. Dreaming of constitutional government and national unity, these students organized associations known as *Burschenschaften*.

In 1817, a *Burschenschaft* at the University of Jena staged a celebration at Wartburg Castle (where Martin Luther had worked on his translation of the Bible) in commemoration of the three-hundredth anniversary of Luther's Ninety-five Theses and the fourth anniversary of the Battle of the Nations. Two years later, in March 1819, Karl Sand, a member of a *Burschenschaft*, assassinated August von Kotzebue, a reactionary journalist. Sand was tried and executed.

Metternich acted against what he regarded as dangerous agitation. In September 1819, he induced the German princes to issue the Carlsbad Decrees, which outlawed the *Burschenschaften* and restricted academic freedom.

While the forces of liberalism and nationalism were suppressed in Germany, they were not destroyed.

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Italy

The Austrians remained dominant in Italian affairs after 1815 and strove to maintain reactionary rule throughout the peninsula. Relatives of the Austrian emperor governed the northern Italian states of Parma, Modena, and Tuscany, while an Austrian archduchess was married to the Bourbon king of the Two Sicilies. Lombardy and Venetia were an integral part of the Austrian Empire.

Reactionary Rulers

The northern Italian state of Sardinia-Piedmont was not directly controlled by the Austrians, but the Piedmontese kings of the House of Savoy were committed to reactionary policies. King Victor Emmanuel I (r. 1802-1821) was hostile to everything French and abolished most of the reforms established during the French occupation of his country, including freedom of religion and the Napoleonic civil and criminal codes.

Italian Nationalism

Despite the enforcement of reactionary policies, liberal and national ideas continued to influence many Italian radicals. The *Carbonari* ("charcoal burners") were the most active radical group in the years following 1815. They dreamed of freeing Italy from the tyranny of the Austrians and the Italian princes and of achieving national unity. The *Carbonari* launched abortive revolts in 1820-1821 and 1831.

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882)

The failure of these revolts discredited the *Carbonari*. Mazzini, who established the organization known as Young Italy in 1831, now emerged as the leading figure among Italy's revolutionary republicans. Mazzini's goals were the same as those of the *Carbonari*: eliminate Austria's domination of Italian affairs, overthrow the Italian tyrants, and unite Italy as a liberal and democratic republic. Garibaldi was Mazzini's best-known follower. Together, they led repeated unsuccessful revolts against the tyranny of the Austrians and the Italian princes.

Russia

Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825)

During the early years of his reign, Tsar Alexander I showed some interest in proposals for reform. In 1808, he named Michael Speransky (1772-1839) to advise him on administrative reforms. Speransky drafted a proposal for

constitutional government that included an elected legislative body. He also proposed a gradual abolition of serfdom. However, Speransky's projects proved too far-reaching for the tsar to consider.

Alexander I also carried out the traditional tsarist policy of territorial expansion. In 1801, he conquered part of northwestern Persia and also annexed Georgia in the Caucasus. During the Napoleonic wars, Russia absorbed Finland in 1809 and Bessarabia in 1812. The Congress of Vienna confirmed these gains and also granted the Russians additional Polish territory (see Chapter 16).

The Decembrist Revolt

Tsar Alexander I died in mid-December 1825. The late tsar's younger brother, the Grand Duke Nicholas, succeeded to the throne.

For several days, however, there was uncertainty about the succession. A group of younger army officers who had embraced liberal ideas staged a revolt in St. Petersburg. The leaders of this Decembrist Revolt called for reforms, including the introduction of a liberal constitution and the abolition of serfdom. The new tsar, Nicholas I, suppressed the revolt with little difficulty. In succeeding years, the example of the Decembrists served as an inspiration for Russian radicals.

Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855)

The Decembrist Revolt had terrified Nicholas I, and he exaggerated the revolutionary threat. In order to root out revolutionaries and suspected revolutionaries more effectively, he placed the secret police under his direct control as the Third Section of his chancery.

“Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism”

Count Sergei S. Uvarov (1786-1855), Nicholas I's minister of education from 1833 to 1849, promoted a program of Official Nationality, which was summed up in the words “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationalism.” The principle of Orthodoxy involved increasing the control of the Orthodox Church over Russia's educational system and intellectual life and encouraging the non-Orthodox to convert, while the principle of Autocracy emphasized the absolute political authority of the tsar. The principle of Nationalism stressed the uniqueness of Russia – its language, religion, culture, and customs – which caused it to stand apart from the West. In practice, this led to discrimination against members of the non-Russian nationalities and to a policy of Russification, designed to compel them to adopt Russian culture.

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Limited Reforms

While Nicholas I was a staunch reactionary, he did push through programs of reform that appealed to his understanding. He directed a reorganization of state finances, and he authorized Michael Speransky to prepare a systematic code of Russian law, which was published in 1833.

The Problem of Serfdom

Nicholas did nothing, however, about Russia's greatest national problem: serfdom. Well over 90 percent of the Russian people were serfs, who enjoyed virtually no personal freedom and lived in poverty.

Discontent mounted among the serfs, and more than seven hundred serf uprisings took place during Nicholas's reign.

Suppression of the Polish Revolt

In 1815, the Russians granted a constitution to Russian Poland that established a limited degree of Polish autonomy, although ultimate control remained in Russia's hands.

In November 1830, a revolt broke out in Warsaw and soon spread to the countryside. The Russians sent troops into Poland to suppress the revolt, and in February 1832, Nicholas issued the Organic Statute, which suspended the Polish constitution and declared Poland an integral part of the Russian Empire. The Russians also initiated a policy of Russification in Poland.

Intervention in European Revolutions

Apart from the Polish revolution of 1830, Russia escaped the revolutionary turmoil that affected much of Europe, especially in 1848. In 1830, Nicholas I was prepared to intervene to assist in the suppression of the revolutions in France and Belgium, but he did not do so. In 1849, however, he did provide assistance to Austria's new emperor, Francis Joseph, in suppressing the Hungarian revolt.

The Growth of Radicalism in Russia

Westerners and Slavophiles

Beneath the surface of repression in Russia, there were voices of dissent. During the reign of Nicholas I, two major schools of reformist thought developed: the Westerners and the Slavophiles. The Westerners contended that Russia should follow the example of Western Europe in its political, economic, and social development. The Slavophiles, in contrast, insisted on the uniqueness of Russian culture and rejected Western European models. They believed that rather than imitate the West, Russia needed to reform itself within the context of its own traditions. Both the Westerners and Slavophiles

agreed in their opposition to the arbitrary rule of the tsarist bureaucracy, their advocacy of freedom of speech, and their calls for the abolition of serfdom.

Alexander Herzen (1812-1870)

Herzen emerged as Russia's most prominent radical during the reign of Nicholas I. He dreamed of a Russian peasant revolution and believed that the traditional village communes might provide the foundation for a new cooperative socialist society. Herzen left Russia in 1847 and spent the rest of his life in exile in Western Europe. There he established a Russian-language journal, *Kolokol* ("The Bell"), that was smuggled to intellectual dissidents in Russia.

The Decembrist Revolt, the debate between the Westerners and the Slavophiles, and the work of radicals such as Herzen helped give substance to the developing revolutionary movement in Russia.

Russian Expansion

The expansion of the Russian Empire continued during the reign of Nicholas I. In 1828, as a result of a war against Persia, Russia acquired part of Armenia in the Caucasus. A war against Turkey in 1828-1829 gave Russia additional territory along the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus, as well as land at the mouth of the Danube River. The Russians also continued their expansion in Central Asia and eastern Siberia.

The Crimean War (1853-1856)

Russia's continuing pressure on the declining Ottoman Empire, and in particular, Russia's claims to be the protector of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman sultan, led to the outbreak of the Crimean War. In July 1853, the Russians occupied the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia (later Rumania), and the Turks responded by declaring war in October. In March 1854, Great Britain and France declared war on Russia, and Piedmont soon joined the Allies. Prussia and Austria remained neutral.

British and French Intervention

The British and French intervened in the war primarily because they wanted to block any further expansion of Russian power and especially to prevent the Russians from acquiring control of the Turkish Straits, which would give the Russians access to the eastern Mediterranean. Napoleon III, the French emperor, also believed that an activist foreign policy would increase domestic political support for his regime. During the war, the allies concentrated on efforts to take the Russian fortress at Sebastopol in the

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Crimea. The siege of Sebastopol included the famous and tragic charge of the light brigade at Balaclava in late October 1854. Here British cavalry units charged recklessly into a natural amphitheater where they were mowed down by cannon fire on three sides. Of the 700 who began the charge, only 195 survived. Following a siege of eleven months, Sebastopol fell to the allies in September 1855.

Treaty of Paris (March 1856)

Following the death of Nicholas I in March 1855, the new tsar, Alexander II (r. 1855-1881) sued for peace. Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, Russia was compelled to return southern Bessarabia and the mouth of the Danube to the Turks. In the so-called Black Sea clauses, the Russians accepted the neutralization of the Black Sea, agreeing not to maintain any navy or coastal fortifications in the area. The Russians also renounced their claim to be the protector of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. (In 1870, when the attention of Europe was distracted by the Franco-German War, the Russians unilaterally abrogated the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty of Paris.)

In the years after 1815, forces of change were gradually eroding the conservative order that appeared to dominate Central and Eastern Europe. In the Austrian Empire, liberal and nationalist ideas won an increasing number of adherents, both among the German-Austrians and the subject nationalities. In divided Germany and Italy, too, the ideologies of liberalism and nationalism were spreading. The explosion came in 1848, when revolutions swept the Hapsburg Empire and the German and Italian states.

Apart from the abortive Decembrist Revolt, the Russian tsars faced the threat of open revolution only in Poland, where it was easily suppressed. Beneath the surface of the repressive tsarist censorship and secret police, however, the Westerners and Slavophiles conducted their clandestine debate about the true nature of Russia, while a growing number of radicals dreamed about revolution and the dawning of a new socialist age.