

“An admirable and enlightened example of international co-operation.” Does the congress System (1815-25) deserve to be so described?

When the Napoleonic Wars came to the end, the European countries held the Congress of Vienna to settle down the problems. After that, the European powers decided to hold conferences in the coming years to maintain the peace of Europe and solve the problems by talking, discussing, but not by wars. These congresses, which included Congress of Vienna (1814-15), Congress of Aix-la Chapelle (1818), Congress of Troppau (1820), Congress of Laibach (1821), and Congress of Verona (1822), formed the Congress System, which can be also called Metternich System or the Concert of Europe. This essay is going to have a look that if the Congress System is an admirable and enlightened example of international co-operation.

First of all, the definition of admirable and enlightened should be stated. Admirable means excellent, and deserves others to respect with pleasure and satisfaction. Enlightened means free from prejudice, ignorance. Based on these definitions, the Congress system should be admired if it had reached its aims, which were maintain the peace of Europe and solving the problems by discussing and without war, unless the latter was a necessary and unavoidable. The Metternich System was an enlightened one if it was a new system which is better than the ones in before.

Before find out could the Congress System maintain the peace of Europe or not, it is essential to know that the powers had different definition of the word “peace”. In the eyes of British statements, it means maintaining the balance of power and stick on the Vienna Settlement. However, the Russian, Prussian and Austrian statements did not share the same idea. They thought “peace” was no revolutions, for they thought the revolutions had an immediate danger threatens other countries, especially the multi-racial ones, such as themselves. In this essay, the meaning of “peace” is quite similar to the British one, but not the Austrian, Russian, Prussian ones as they were a little bit selfish on this point.

By that definition of the word “peace”, it was clearly, and should be no doubt, that the Congress System could help maintain the peace in Europe. Since the Congress System had started, there was no international war nearly for 40 years, until the Crimean War that started in 1853. Moreover, the map of Europe was exactly the same to the one constructed by the Congress of Vienna, until the 1830 when the Belgium became independence. There was no big changing of the map of Europe in the following 30 years.

How could the Congress system reach this? Firstly, in the first congress of the congress system, that's Congress of Vienna, the powers reconstructed the map of Europe. In the congress, the powers discussed and find out some rules that the reconstruction of the map should be follow. The rules included balance of power and defensive arrangements against France. The first rule prevented a country was too strong to attack others, or vice versa, a country was too weak and attracted her neighbours to attack her. The second rule prevented France, which was regarded as a warlike country that time, start wars again. These methods could prevent war break out again.

Moreover, the treaty wasn't harsh to France, especially when it was compared to the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed by Germany after the Great War. The purpose of the Second Treaty of Paris was security, but not revenge. The treaty asked France to cede the lands that she gained after 1789, the year of revolution started. She was also asked to pay small amount of reparation, and she had the right to keep the art treasure that she had gained when she got as a spoil of war when the Napoleonic Army attacked other countries. This generous treaty did not raise the resentment of the French and would not keep France an excuse to start a war again. There for the Congress of Vienna reached the aim of keeping peace.

Secondly, in the Congress of Aix la-Chapelle, the proposal of establishing an international fleet and an allied army in Belgium, and allowed the British Naval force to stop slave trading, were all rejected. Maybe some people thought the reject of the proposals was because of the selfishness of the powers and this action had no advantages for keeping peace of Europe. But there is a different view, if there was an allied army or international fleet, the peace in Europe will be destroyed. Due to the selfishness of the powers, the powers would take advantages of these armies and fleets for their own purpose, such as the Russian would try to influence the West Europe and Mediterranean Sea, etc. These actions would destroy the balance of power and could keep the Europe in a peaceful status.

There were some different views between the powers on some events, such as on the revolutions in Spain, the Spain colonies and Greece. The British preferred not to interfere with the internal affairs of other states, for her trading benefit, and the Austrian, Russian and Prussian preferred to suppress because themselves were multi-racial countries. The Congress System provided an opportunity for the powers to clearly express their views on these events. Nevertheless the views were a little bit different, the countries did not need to guess if the others countries would support her

or not. This could decrease the chance of misunderstanding, which would be a factor of provoking a war. Therefore, the Congress System could keep peace.

Besides the agreements of maintaining the peace of Europe, the Congress System also made some agreements for improving the world. For example, in the Congress of Vienna, the Congress condemned the slave trade as inconsistent with civilization and human rights. The powers agreed they would not sell or buy slaves anymore in the future.

Maybe there are some who said that the Congress of Vienna neglected the nationalism and liberalism, which led to some revolutions and endangered the peace in Europe. However, there were other factors that led to a revolution. For example, the revolution in the United Netherlands was mainly caused by the poor dominating of the House of Orange. The fatal cause was not caused by the Congress of Vienna.

Some people said that, "The Congress System led to some clashes between the powers." That wasn't true. The best example was the discussion about the Greek revolutions by the powers in the Congress of Verona. Russian Tsar Alexander I announced that he wanted to help the Greeks when the Metternich didn't want. These different views from the countries weren't caused by the Congress System. Would the views of Austria and Russia become the same if there was no Congress of Verona? It wouldn't. Moreover, as the before paragraph said that the Congress System gave the countries to discuss, showed their view clearly. The countries also tried to act together rather than took action themselves.

From the above, the Congress system can be confirmed as an admirable system as it helped to maintain the peace in Europe, at least there was no international war in the coming 40 years. Moreover, it has reached some agreements, such as the banning of the slave trade, that help the improvement of the world. It is clearly that the congress was an admirable one. So is the Congress System an enlightened one? This would be discussed in the below paragraphs.

The establishment of Congress System was a milestone in human history. Before the Congress of Vienna, there is no example of solving a problem between two or more countries by the method of discussing. The only method they knew to solve the problem is provoking a war, either a big one or a small one. The successful of Congress of Vienna and the Congress System let people know that powers could meet in a conference and confer to the way to solve problems instead of fighting in a war.

As every people know, a war will led to many problems, such as losing to life of people and the economy situation will turn bad, etc. The Congress system set up an example of solving a problem by discussing in a conference peacefully, which wouldn't have the above problems.

Secondly, before the congress system, powers didn't discuss the issues that all of them concern for, although the issues were not their business. For example, the revolution in Spain was discussed in the Congress of Aix-la Chapelle and other congresses. Spanish revolution was clearly an internal affairs of Spain, but not the powers, but the powers also discussed it. Although there were different views between the powers, the powers reached an agreement that they should not touch Spain in the Congress of Aix-la Chapelle, although this idea was changed in the Congress of Verona. It is clearly shown that the Congress changed the powers acting themselves to taking action together. This could prevent some wars.

As the Congress System succeeded, and it has a number of advantages, people later still adopt this system. Based on the congress system, there was Congress of Berlin, etc. Furthermore, the League of Nations, which was made after the Great War, and the United Nations nowadays have the same spirit as the Congress System, that's solving the problem by discussing instead of fighting.

Considering all the above, the Congress System could maintain the peace of Europe. It also set up a method, which was better than the one before, to solve the problems between the countries in Europe. Furthermore, its spirit still conquers today. Therefore, it deserves to be described as "An admirable and enlightened example of international co-operation."