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# Metternich's League to Preserve Peace and the Conservative Elites' Doubts about the Functionality of the Post-Napoleonic Order<sup>‡</sup>

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## Abstract

Before 1848 not merely democrats and liberals criticized the post-Napoleonic order for their growing mistrust of its ability to protect the sovereignty of smaller countries and preserve the general peace. The predominantly conservative ruling elite, namely rulers, statesmen, and diplomats, raised the same criticism when the law-breaking and abuse of power made them similarly mistrustful of the state of European politics during the 1830s and 1840s. This became true even for some of the order's authors like Austrian chancellor Metternich who serves as a prominent example of this mistrust with his project of a league to preserve peace in Europe in August 1840. Metternich, who helped to create this order in 1815, found it defective and in need of improvement only a quarter of a century later. He certainly did not want to create a completely new international order and law of nations as some liberals and democrats desired at that time, but his idea was still, in a certain sense, revolutionary since its realization would have fundamentally modified the pillars on which the order had been founded at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

**Keywords:** Metternich; peace; Europe; 1840; Rhine Crisis; post-Napoleonic order

## Introduction

The last few recently published scholarly books<sup>1</sup> have rejected many of the myths associated with Austrian chancellor Clemens of Metternich and his time, thereby increasing the quantity of older revisionist literature that did the same during the previous few decades.<sup>2</sup> All of them have offered a more balanced account of his worldview, aims, and conduct, usually after thorough research of numerous archival and other primary sources that had often been neglected by previous generations of historians. Metternich's conduct within the post-Napoleonic order represents one of the most important topics in this revision, which is a logical outcome of his important role in its formation and development. The bicentennial anniversary of the Congress of Vienna also attracted greater attention from historians and political scholars offering new evaluations of the functioning of the same order, which also expanded the level of knowledge of Metternich.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this growing interest in both the Austrian chancellor and the post-Napoleonic states system, there is still one overlooked aspect: Metternich's approach toward the latter from the perspective of

<sup>‡</sup>This article has been updated since its original publication. A notice detailing this change can be found here: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237823000917>

<sup>1</sup>Barbora Pásztorová, *Metternich, the German Question and the Pursuit of Peace 1840–1848* (Oldenbourg, 2022); Miroslav Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question* (Pilsen, 2013); Miroslav Šedivý, *The Decline of the Congress System: Metternich, Italy and European Diplomacy* (London, 2018); Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary* (Cambridge, MA, 2019); Alan Sked, *Metternich and Austria: An Evaluation* (Basingstoke, 2008).

<sup>2</sup>Robert D. Billinger Jr., *Metternich and the German Question: State's Rights and Federal Duties, 1820–1834* (Newark, 1991); Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's German Policy*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1963 and 1983); Alan J. Reinerman, *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1979 and 1989).

<sup>3</sup>Beatrice de Graaf, Ido de Haan, and Brian Vick, eds., *Securing Europe after Napoleon: 1815 and the New European Security Culture* (Cambridge, 2019); Wolf D. Gruner, *Der Wiener Kongress 1814/1815* (Stuttgart, 2014); Reinhard Stauber, *Der Wiener Kongress* (Vienna, 2014); Brian Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

international law. This law was positivist rather than natural in its essence: its rules were based not on divine principles but on the treaties concluded by European countries to define their rights and duties. During disputes rulers, statesmen, politicians, and diplomats used these contracts as guidelines. The most important and most frequently mentioned for the post-Napoleonic order were the so-called 1815 Treaties, in particular the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna and the Second Treaty of Paris, but of course, there were many other agreements signed before and after that year which laid the foundations of the European states system. The omission of the legal perspective in historical research on Metternich is surprising given the value that he attributed to the preservation of legal norms in domestic, Austrian, as well as European and world affairs as is represented in the motto inscribed on his coat of arms: *Kraft im Recht* (Power in Law).<sup>4</sup> German historian Wolfram Siemann has clearly demonstrated this value particularly for internal and German politics in his outstanding biography of Metternich, and US historian Robert D. Billinger highlighted it in 1991 in the subtitle of his excellent monograph on the chancellor's German policy "Rights and Federal Duties." Despite some brief excursions into the topic, a systemic analysis of Metternich's emphasis on the *jus publicum Europaeum* (*Völkerrecht*)<sup>5</sup> in European affairs is still missing.<sup>6</sup>

The same omission exists in the scholarly literature on the functioning of the post-Napoleonic order in which Metternich occupied a prominent position. This is also surprising given the fact that references to international treaties and consequent legal obligations were omnipresent in diplomatic correspondence. Billinger fittingly mentioned in his review on the latest English monograph on Metternich's foreign policy that "diplomats are lawyers engaged in international affairs."<sup>7</sup> They often had to act as such especially after 1830 when Europe witnessed the first threats to or even clear violations of the public law in interstate relations, which contributed to the growing mistrust of the ability of the post-Napoleonic order to protect the sovereignty of smaller countries and preserve the general peace. That this became an important topic for liberals and democrats has already been reflected in scholarly texts.<sup>8</sup> However, the same criticism raised by the predominantly conservative ruling elite, namely rulers, statesmen, and diplomats, who also objected to the law-breaking and abuse of power, has been overlooked. Violations made these conservatives similarly mistrustful of the state of European politics during the 1830s and 1840s. Scholars dealing with the international politics of these two decades paid little attention to this conservative response, which led them to a political binary in their explanation of the decreasing popularity of the post-Napoleonic order due to the anti-liberal practices of Austria, Prussia, and Russia that undermined the faith of European liberals and democrats in its potential to not only accommodate political modernization but also ensure international equity. For conservative monarchs, statesmen, and diplomats scholars usually stressed the fear of revolution as the principal motivation of their conduct.<sup>9</sup> This article claims that this fear was only one factor influencing how conservative policymakers approached the post-Napoleonic period; they paid

<sup>4</sup>Siemann, *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary*, 44.

<sup>5</sup>Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York, 2006), 10.

<sup>6</sup>James R. Sofka, "Metternich's Theory of European Order: A Political Agenda for 'Perpetual Peace'," *The Review of Politics* 60, no. 1 (1998): 115–49; Karel Schelle, Miroslav Šedivý, Jaromír Tauchen, and Renata Veselá, eds., *Staat und Recht in der Zeit Metternichs (ausgewählte Kapitel)* (Munich, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>Robert D. Billinger Jr., "Pásztorová, Barbora: Metternich, the German Question and the Pursuit of Peace, 1840–1848," *Austrian History Yearbook* 54 (2023): 340–41.

<sup>8</sup>For the most recent instance, see Miroslav Šedivý, *Si vis pacem, para bellum: The Italian Response to International Insecurity 1830–1848* (Vienna, 2021).

<sup>9</sup>Patrick O. Cohrs, *The New Atlantic Order: The Transformation of International Politics, 1860–1933* (Cambridge, 2022), 51–53; Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca, 2005), 73–104; Günther Heydemann, *Konstitution gegen Revolution: Die britische Deutschland- und Italienpolitik 1815–1848* (Göttingen, 1995), 275–325; Günther Heydemann, "The Vienna System between 1815 and 1848 and the Disputed Antirevolutionary Strategy: Repression, Reforms, or Constitutions?" in "The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848": *Episode or Model in Modern History?*, eds. Peter Krüger and Paul W. Schroeder (Münster, 2002), 187–203; Harald Müller, *Im Widerstreit von Interventionsstrategie und Anpassungszwang: Die Außenpolitik Österreichs und Preußens zwischen dem Wiener Kongreß 1814/1815 und der Februarrevolution 1848* (Berlin, 1990), 621–47; Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848* (Oxford, 1994), 764–804; Matthias Schulz, *Normen und Praxis: Das Europäische Konzert der Großmächte als Sicherheitsrat, 1815–1860* (Munich, 2009), 622–40.

no less attention to the abuse of law and power that similarly shaped their viewpoints on international politics, security, and justice. With these abuses even their trust in the order faded, which was true even for some of its authors. Metternich serves as a prominent example with his approach in general and his project of a league to preserve peace in Europe of August 1840 in particular.

Metternich prepared his project in reaction to the war scare provoked by France. The denomination of a “league to preserve peace” originated in 1930 when US historian Frederick Stanley Rodkey published relevant documents from the National Archives in Kew.<sup>10</sup> They long represented the only source of information about Metternich’s project while other documents remained undiscovered. In fact, historians have scarcely mentioned the project at all. This neglect is the first reason an elaborated analysis of the project is necessary, but it is certainly not the only or even not the most important one. A more significant reason is the false interpretation of the project as a new anti-revolutionary “Holy Alliance” from the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> This has recently been corrected by Wolfram Siemann, who fittingly summarized its role as “an institutionalised system of understanding under international law to permanently prevent wars in Europe.”<sup>12</sup> However, despite this useful rectification a more detailed insight into the project is needed, in particular to be able to explain not only Metternich’s aims but also its historical significance: it represented the above-mentioned mistrust of conservative elites in the functionality of the post-Napoleonic order. It revealed that even Metternich, who helped to create this order in 1815, found it defective and in need of improvement only a quarter of a century later. He certainly did not want to create a completely new international order and law of nations as some liberals and democrats desired at that time, but his idea was still, in a certain sense, revolutionary since its realization would have fundamentally modified the pillars on which the order had been founded at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

The principal goal of this article is to offer a more complex survey of the league and introduce it within the context of the declining confidence in the post-Napoleonic order among the conservative rulers, statesmen, and diplomats, not only in Austria and Germany but also in Italy and Scandinavia. Metternich’s project reflected this increasing lack of faith, but it simultaneously offered a normative, in other words transnational and internationalist, attempt to remedy it. It represented the opposite of a more ominous realist solution based on the quest for power using the concept of nationhood, advocated not only by liberals and democrats but also by some conservatives. Both reactions represented two contradictory methods by which contemporaries sought to remedy growing mistrust in the state of European politics. They resulted primarily not from a fear of revolution but the illegal and warmongering conduct of some European powers between 1830 and 1848. The most important examples were the French occupation of Ancona in February 1832, the undeclared British-Neapolitan Sulphur War in the spring of 1840 and the Rhine Crisis in the second half of the same year. These affairs will often be mentioned in the three parts of this article. The first deals with Metternich’s approach toward international law and violations of it. The second reveals that among European conservatives, who not only attentively observed the abuses of power but also formed their ambitions in response to them, he was not the only critic of those who violated the law. Having established the necessary context in first two sections, the third introduces the league’s project to preserve peace with the use of hitherto omitted contemporary sources.

### Metternich’s Emphasis on International Law

Historians have written a great deal about Metternich’s conservative principles, but these principles have often remained obscure in so far as they were not usually defined. In the sphere of international politics, one can summarize them briefly by the importance that he ascribed to international law based

<sup>10</sup>Frederick S. Rodkey, “Suggestions During the Crisis of 1840 for a ‘League’ to Preserve Peace,” *The American Historical Review* 35, no. 2 (1930): 308–16. The article contains Lord Beauvale’s report from Chateau Königswart on 29 August 1840 with the attached draft of the league and Count Ficquelmont’s French memorandum. These sources can also be found in the National Archives, Kew (TNA), in the section Foreign Office (FO) 7/291A and 120/189.

<sup>11</sup>Irmeline Veit-Brause, *Die deutsch-französische Krise von 1840: Studien zur deutschen Einheitsbewegung* (Cologne, 1967), 44–45.

<sup>12</sup>Wolfram Siemann, “Österreich, Metternich und die Heilige Allianz,” in *Die Heilige Allianz: Entstehung, Wirkung, Rezeption*, eds. Anselm Schubert and Wolfram Pyta (Stuttgart, 2018), 33–43, 42.

upon existing treaties. He certainly assumed this attitude because it suited the interests of the Austrian Empire. However, as Wolfram Siemann has convincingly proved in his *opus magnum*, Metternich's conviction about the necessity to act in compliance with legal norms was sincere and resulted from his view of the world formed in his youth.<sup>13</sup>

For Metternich conforming to these norms was necessary for the preservation of the credibility of the post-Napoleonic order, which also meant its functionality. They were to be applied in the same way toward bigger and smaller countries, in other words for dealing with both the powerful and weak. If five European powers were entitled to assume the principal role in managing international affairs due to their material strength and consequent responsibility, they had to proceed in compliance with the existing rules. The crucial factor was that the sovereignty of all countries had to be respected. A ruler did not necessarily have to be a monarch since Metternich easily coped with existing republics like Switzerland or the United States of America. For him, the representative of a sovereign country was its acknowledged government. A revolutionary government was excluded until the moment of its formal recognition, which was an important condition of his interventionist policy aimed at the suppression of revolutions. This policy was embodied in the well-known protocol concluded by Austria, Prussia, and Russia at the Congress of Troppau on 19 November 1820. The conservative powers agreed on the right of armed intervention in countries whose rulers were confronted with the open dissatisfaction of their subjects.<sup>14</sup> Although its principal author was Russian Foreign Minister Ioannis Kapodistrias, Metternich was basically satisfied with its contents because it enabled Austria to suppress the revolutions in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and in Piedmont with armed force in 1821. However, in connection with these military interventions in the territories of sovereign countries, it was crucial for Metternich that their legitimate monarchs gave their consent to them. Therefore, he tried to convince Tsar Alexander I to invite Ferdinand I from Naples to Ljubljana.<sup>15</sup> The king finally arrived in the Slovenian town and requested military intervention against his own kingdom. In the case of the revolution in Piedmont, the same demand was sent by its king directly to Vienna.<sup>16</sup>

Metternich continued to insist on the formal agreement of legitimate governments to interventions at the beginning of the following decade, when Austrian troops suppressed revolutions in Parma, Modena, and the Papal States in early 1831. It was particularly the pope's consent that he saw as essential for the Austrian army to enter his state. This respect for the sovereignty of a country affected by such an intervention is further proved by the contents of the treaty concluded by Austria, Prussia, and Russia in Berlin on 15 October 1833. This treaty is less known today than the Protocol of Troppau despite the fact that it was a significant complement to it. In the treaty, the three signatory powers acknowledged the right of each independent state to ask another independent state for military assistance against an internal as well as external threat; the petitioned country could accept or refuse to provide it and no great power had the right to oppose this decision. It was also established that any attempt to hinder the military assistance offered by one of the signatory powers would be regarded as an act of hostility against all of them. Contrary to the Troppau Protocol, the Treaty of Berlin allowed an intervention simply under the condition that it was requested by a legitimate government, which according to Metternich was an ideal situation entirely compatible with the existing legal norms.<sup>17</sup> He advocated the conclusion of the Treaty of Berlin with the right for intervention based upon the free will of independent countries: "So the treaty concluded in Münchengrätz and signed in Berlin on 15 October arrives at a settlement pure and simple of the least contestable rules of the law of nations."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Siemann, *Metternich: Strategist and Visionary*, 55–66.

<sup>14</sup>Protocol préliminaire, Troppau, 19 November 1821, in *Mächtekongresse 1818–1822: Digitale Edition*, eds. Karin Schneider and Stephan Kurz (Vienna, 2018). [https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/pages/show.html?document=Troppau\\_Prot\\_4.xml&directory=editions](https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/pages/show.html?document=Troppau_Prot_4.xml&directory=editions) [26 April 2023].

<sup>15</sup>Supplément au Protocole du 19 November 1820, *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Paul W. Schroeder, *Metternich's Diplomacy at Its Zenith 1820–1823* (New York, 1962), 81.

<sup>17</sup>Traité entre l'Autriche, la Prusse et la Russie, daté de Berlin, le 15 octobre, contre la non-intervention, in *Mémoires: Documents et écrits divers laissés par le Prince de Metternich Chancelier de cour et d'état*, vol. 5, ed. Richard von Metternich (Paris, 1882), 543; Müller, *Im Widerstreit von Interventionsstrategie und Anpassungszwang*, 355.

<sup>18</sup>Metternich to Hügel, Vienna, 22 October 1833, Metternich, *Mémoires*, 541.

The conservative powers concluded the Treaty of Berlin in response to the non-interventionist doctrine propagated by the French July Monarchy in the early 1830s. Metternich disliked this doctrine not only because its practical effect was to encourage the revolutionaries' ambitions but also because it was incompatible with the sovereign rights as they were acknowledged by European countries including France itself. The French government not only refused to acknowledge the rights of other countries to ask for foreign military support but even threatened the cabinet in Turin that it would send French troops through Piedmont even if its king would not allow their passage against an Austrian army intervening in another Italian state. Even the French diplomats found the doctrine so absurd that they refused to defend it on the legal battlefield.<sup>19</sup> From the other side of the political barricade, Metternich sharply criticized it precisely for its incompatibility with the sovereignty of European countries.<sup>20</sup>

The non-intervention doctrine resulted in a legal disaster when French troops seized the pope's coastal town of Ancona during the night from 22 to 23 February 1832 and raised their flag there.<sup>21</sup> They occupied the town not to support revolution but to counterbalance the Austrian influence in the Papal States. The principal difference lay in the fact that while the pope formally invited the Austrian army to his territory, the French arrived against his will. In this case, the government in Paris had acted contrary to international law and Metternich condemned the occupation as "a clear violation of the least questionable principles of the law of nations."<sup>22</sup> He started a legal controversy with the French government when he officially denounced the occupation as a blow to the whole post-Napoleonic order: "The attack against Ancona is an attack [*attentat*] against the Holy Father's sovereignty . . . it is not an attack against Austria; it is one against the principles of the law of nations and against the courts protecting this law as much to their benefit as to the benefit of society as a whole."<sup>23</sup>

According to Metternich, the law was to be applied equally among all sovereign countries regardless not only of their power but also the religious faith of their inhabitants. Therefore, he respected the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire that was often regarded by Europeans as situated outside not only civilized Europe but also its legal boundaries. The fact that the sultan had not signed the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna contributed to this opinion.<sup>24</sup> Although Metternich supported the sultan against the insurgent Greeks in the 1820s for various reasons, he also used a legal argument to condemn the diplomatic and later even military interference of Britain, France, and Russia on behalf of the Greeks. Since his legal standpoint did not differ from those applied in other international affairs, it can be regarded as sincere and compatible with Metternich's general political-legal worldview. He simply saw no reason why European countries could not apply the same legal rules toward the Ottoman Empire as they generally accepted among themselves if they wanted to maintain the very stability of the European states system and if they expected the Ottoman Empire to act according to the same law in return. As a Prussian envoy in Vienna reported in connection with the Greek Revolution in June 1827: "Metternich strongly opposes the principle introduced by the French government that, in the matter of the distinction between suzerainty and sovereignty, it is not necessary to define them so precisely with the Turks who do not understand the difference themselves; he thinks that if one believes one can deviate from the treaties and from the principles of law with regard to the

<sup>19</sup>Nicolas Jolicœur, "La politique étrangère de la France au début de la monarchie de juillet: De la non-intervention à la contre-intervention (1830–1832)," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 121, (2008): 11–29; Miroslav Šedivý, "The Principle of Non-Intervention Reconsidered: The French July Monarchy, the Public Law of Europe and the Limited Sovereignty of Secondary Countries," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 103, no. 1 (2019): 75–108.

<sup>20</sup>See Metternich's long political-legal deliberation about France's non-intervention doctrine in his *Le principe de la non-intervention*, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna (HHStA), Staatskanzlei (StK), Rom 43.

<sup>21</sup>Francesca Falaschi, "L'occupazione francese di Ancona del 1832," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 15 (1928): 118–42; Giuseppe Leti, "La Monarchia del luglio e la spedizione francese del 1832 in Ancona," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 16 (1929): 55–78.

<sup>22</sup>Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 29 February 1832, HHStA, Staatenabteilungen (StA), England 199. See also Franz Wolfram, "Besetzung und Räumung Ankonas durch Frankreich 1832–1838" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1930), 40.

<sup>23</sup>Metternich to Apponyi, Vienna, 29 February 1832, HHStA, StA, Frankreich 284.

<sup>24</sup>Ozan Ozavci, "A Priceless Grace? The Congress of Vienna of 1815, the Ottoman Empire and Historicising the Eastern Question," *The English Historical Review* 136, no. 583 (2021): 1450–76.

Turks, one no longer has the right to demand of the Porte [the Ottoman government] that it observes them on its part.”<sup>25</sup>

In his legal standpoint, Metternich criticized the duplicity of the Allied Powers’ conduct when they “infringed the sovereignty of another country in a manner scarcely justifiable according to the simplest principles of respect to the independence of countries”<sup>26</sup> that, moreover, they would never have allowed to be used against themselves in a similar case: “What would England or Russia say to an agreement . . . which would take place between France and Austria and which would basically establish that His British Majesty or the Russian Emperor would be deprived of an insurgent Ireland or Finland?”<sup>27</sup> That he was serious in his criticism of the double standards becomes obvious from his note in the margin of an article of French journalist and politician Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne written in 1841 about France’s relations with the “half-savage governments . . . for whom the law of nations is still an empty word.” Metternich underlined the part on the law and wrote in the margin: “M. D. de H. should tell us what value *the law of nations* has in his eyes [the emphasis of Metternich’s own words in original]!”<sup>28</sup>

Metternich’s legal statements often touched on international affairs that had nothing to do with revolutions. He sharply rejected the French invasion into Ottoman Algeria in 1830 that was a simple act of aggression and territorial conquest at the expense of another sovereign country.<sup>29</sup> He saw the same aggression in the British seizure of Neapolitan commercial vessels in the spring of 1840 when the former wanted to enforce their conditions on the government in Naples in the export of Sicilian sulfur. According to Metternich, Britain was abusing its power, and he claimed that its conduct was “about predominance but not about justice!”<sup>30</sup> He found in this measure a serious violation of international law and as the capture of the Neapolitan ships happened without the formal declaration of war, he saw in it even an act of piracy.<sup>31</sup>

### The Impact of Law-Breaking on Conservative Policymakers

Given his strong emphasis on respect for international legal norms, Metternich was sensitive to violations of them. The same can be said about other conservative European statesmen, rulers, and diplomats. The French occupation of Ancona horrified them. Austrian Emperor Francis I called it an act that “belonged in front of the European tribunal,”<sup>32</sup> and his ambassador in Rome Count Rudolf von Lützow compared it to the well-known brutal kidnapping of the Duke of Enghien by Napoleon.<sup>33</sup> Prussian Secretary of State Johann Peter Friedrich Ancillon entirely agreed with Metternich when he wrote that “from the political point of view the Ancona affair is undoubtedly a question between the pope and the French government, but from the point of view of the principles which serve as a basis and a guarantee of the existence and independence of all states this question is a European one. All Powers [read: states], large as well as small, are equally interested in the preservation of the law of nations.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Maltzan to Frederick William III, Vienna, 10 June 1827, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (GStA PK), Hauptabteilung (HA) III, Ministerium des Auswärtigen (Mda) I, 6008.

<sup>26</sup>Metternich’s remarks to the Protocol of 4 April 1826, attached to Metternich to Esterházy, Vienna, 4 June 1826, HHStA, StA, England 175.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne, “De la Convention du 13 Juillet et de la Situation actuelle de la France,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 27 (1841), 669–723, 711; Chancellor Metternich’s Library, Chateau Königswart, book number 15-C-21.

<sup>29</sup>Miroslav Šedivý, “Metternich and the French Expedition to Algeria (1830),” *Archiv orientální: Quarterly Journal of African and Asian Studies* 76, no. 1 (2008): 15–37.

<sup>30</sup>Metternich to Ficquelmont, Vienna, 13 July 1840, Státní oblastní archiv, Litoměřice, pobočka Děčín, Rodinný archiv Clary-Aldringenů 375.

<sup>31</sup>O’Sullivan to Lebeau, Vienna, 28 April 1840, Archives diplomatiques et africaines, Brussels, Correspondance politique, Autriche 7; Lerchenfeld to Ludwig I of Bavaria, Vienna, 20 April and 11 May 1840, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich (BHStA), Ministerium des Äußern (MA), Österreich 2409; Gagliati to Scilla, Vienna, 20 April 1840, Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Ministero Affari Esteri, Questione per gli zolfi 4130.

<sup>32</sup>Anton Prokesch von Osten, *Mein Verhältniß zum Herzog von Reichstadt: Zwei Sendungen nach Italien* (Stuttgart, 1878), 187.

<sup>33</sup>Wolfram, “Besetzung und Räumung Ankonas,” 40.

<sup>34</sup>Ancillon to Maltzan, Berlin, 14 March 1832, GStA PK, HA III, Mda I, 6018.

The British conduct in the Sulphur War provoked no less a negative response across the continent. The Austrian ambassador in St. Petersburg, Count Karl Ludwig von Ficquelmont, adopted the view that Britain promoted its own interests at the expense of the public law of Europe.<sup>35</sup> It is appropriate to pay greater attention to this close collaborator of Metternich since he was a coauthor of the project of the league to preserve peace. Ficquelmont was four years younger and although of French origin had loyally served the Austrian Empire since the early 1790s. He shared many of Metternich's legal views and criticism of the violations of legal norms they witnessed during their lives. Both compared the seizure of Neapolitan merchant ships to examples of older commencement of hostilities without the formal declaration of war: the British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, the destruction of the sultan's fleet in the Navarino Bay in 1827, and the occupation of Ancona in 1832. Metternich made the comparisons in 1840 in his correspondence and verbally with talks with other diplomats.<sup>36</sup> Ficquelmont repeated this criticism in the 1850s in his two books, *Lord Palmerston, England und der Continent* and *Pensées et réflexions morales et politiques (Moral and Political Thoughts and Reflections)*, in which he denounced Britain's foreign policy in the first half of the nineteenth century for the unscrupulous assertion of its own interests. He labeled its conduct in Copenhagen, Navarino, and the Sulphur War as examples of the readiness to violate the international law.<sup>37</sup>

The law-breaking in the Ancona and Sulphur affairs was condemned even more by the governments of smaller countries exposed to the arbitrariness of the great powers. In their case not only the culprit but also other great powers which did nothing for the victim became the object of criticism. Altogether these violations contributed to the growing mistrust of the post-Napoleonic order's ability to protect the rights of weaker countries. In his response to the Sulphur War, the Sardinian envoy in London, Guiseppe Nomis di Pollone, criticized the great powers' scant respect of the interests of the states of second and third order: "Since 1814, according to my observations, the principles of justice on the part of the dominant powers in confrontation with the secondary powers have gradually but rapidly weakened. When a secondary power does not immediately bow down to the former, there is no attempt to search for reasoning or arguments to persuade her; it is more convenient to say to her 'we are more powerful,' an argument that, in fact, considerably shortens the discussion. If the secondary states do not pay solicitous attention to this tendency towards the adoption of this new code of international laws, they will eventually disappear to the benefit of their powerful neighbours."<sup>38</sup> His colleague in Vienna, Count Vittorio Balbo Bertone di Sambuy, entirely shared this opinion about the arrogant dominance of the European powers: "The Neapolitan affair has just offered a new confirmation of this fact, and no one does anything for this country that is the victim of the British dominance . . . The conclusion that can be drawn from the events in Naples is that a Great Power can demand whatever she wants from another less powerful one, that no one will do anything to prevent it, and that she will do with the latter as she pleases."<sup>39</sup> He continued: "Since the Congress of Vienna we have become quite accustomed to count only five Great Powers in Europe. They have arrogated to themselves the monopoly of high politics and the general government of the world, and they have occupied themselves not only with their own affairs but also with those of others, even if the latter have not asked them to do so. The majority of the small countries have bent under this yoke, and our sovereigns are the last who wanted to recognise this right of supremacy that is a real usurpation to the detriment of each state's independence."<sup>40</sup> The Bavarian envoy in Turin, Johann Franz Anton

<sup>35</sup>Ficquelmont to Metternich, St Petersburg, 19 May 1840, HHStA, StA, Russland III, 119.

<sup>36</sup>Metternich to Neumann, Vienna, 25 April 1840, HHStA, StA, England 230. See also Lerchenfeld to Ludwig I of Bavaria, Vienna, 11 May 1840, BHStA, MA, Österreich 2409.

<sup>37</sup>Ludwig Karl Ficquelmont, *Lord Palmerston, England und der Continent* (Vienna, 1852), 171; Ludwig Karl Ficquelmont, *Pensées et réflexions morales et politiques* (Paris, 1859), 313.

<sup>38</sup>Nello Rosselli, *Inghilterra e regno di Sardegna dal 1815 al 1847* (Turin, 1954), 743.

<sup>39</sup>Sambuy to Solaro, Vienna, 18 May 1840, Archivio di Stato di Torino (AST), Lettere ministry (LM), Austria 137.

<sup>40</sup>Sambuy to Solaro, Vienna, 21 May 1840, in *La politica estera del Piemonte sotto Carlo Alberto Secondo il carteggio diplomatico del Conte Vittorio Amedeo Balbo Bertone di Sambuy ministro di Sardegna a Vienna (1835-1846)*, vol. 2, ed. Mario degli Alberti (Turin, 1915), 261.

von Olry, reacted with the same pessimism to this affair in which no European powers came to the assistance of the king in Naples: "It is, moreover, impossible that the states of the second and third order everywhere will not be forced to a similar conclusion vis-à-vis the European Pentarchy! . . . The great powers of which this pentarchy is composed . . . conspire to make at the expense of other states the harshest, most arbitrary and for those other states the most alarming concessions."<sup>41</sup>

These abuses of power provoked not only criticism but also practical reactions. If the former led to mistrust of the whole post-Napoleonic order, the latter could lead it to suffer real negative consequences. The interference of the great powers in Italian affairs and the occupation of Ancona moved Ferdinand II in Naples, the grandson of Ferdinand I, to propose a league of Italian rulers to unite in the defense of their sovereignty. Austria was to be excluded from this league. This idea represented an obvious lack of faith in the order's capability of ensuring security and justice of smaller countries.<sup>42</sup> More ominous was an identically negative estimation of the order assumed by the king of Piedmont, Charles Albert, at the same time. The occupation of Ancona by France and its toleration by other European powers made him hostile to the political-legal heritage of the Congress of Vienna. Charles Albert himself labeled the invasion of Ancona as "an act of aggression against the independence of all Italian sovereigns."<sup>43</sup> He became convinced that he could trust only himself and his own army, which made him focus on the improvement of his armed forces and expansion in northern Italy to make his kingdom bigger and therefore stronger. In the late 1830s, he and his mostly conservative ministers and diplomats intended to achieve this aim with the support of other Italian rulers through the appeal for their pan-Italian solidarity; in the 1840s, they came to a tacit agreement with moderate Italian nationalists for the same purpose.<sup>44</sup> The Sulphur War confirmed the correctness of the expectation of little from the post-Napoleonic order. Ferdinand II revived his idea of an Italian league<sup>45</sup> and in Turin Clemente Solaro della Margarita, the conservative foreign minister, claimed that "in all circumstances the king should not count on anybody except himself."<sup>46</sup>

The Rhine Crisis further confirmed the inadequacies of the post-Napoleonic order. It broke out owing to the dissenting attitude between France and other four European powers toward the solution of an internal conflict in the Ottoman Empire. When France was omitted from a Convention signed in London on 15 July 1840 between Austria, Prussia, Britain, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire on the settlement of this conflict, the French felt offended and started to talk about their revenge. It was to be executed not in the Near East but on the Rhine where the French public wished to conquer the left bank of the river. The government in Paris started to prepare its land and naval forces for war with other European powers although neither the king nor his ministers actually wanted to wage one. No war finally broke out and, therefore, no law was violated. However, even the threat of conquest provoked doubts about the post-Napoleonic order's ability to protect not only the rights of smaller countries but also general peace. Twenty-five years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Rhine Crisis served as a *memento mori* experience as it showed that a great armed conflict was still possible.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Olry to Ludwig I of Bavaria, Turin, 21 April 1840, BHStA, MA, Sardinien 2884. For similar opinions of German diplomats, see also Fleischmann to William I of Württemberg, Paris, 8 April 1840, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart (HStAS), E 70 a Bü 193c; Mandelsloh to William I of Württemberg, London, 21 April 1840, HStAS, E 50/13 Bü 71; Blomberg to William I of Württemberg, Vienna, 10 May 1840, HStAS, E 50/02 Bü 153.

<sup>42</sup>Niccolò Rodolico, "Un disegno di Lega italiana del 1833," *Archivio storico italiano* 93 (1935): 232–43.

<sup>43</sup>Bombelles to Metternich, Turin, 18 February 1832, in *Le relazioni diplomatiche fra l'Austria e il Regno di Sardegna, II serie: 1830–1848*, vol. 1, ed. Narciso Nada (Rome, 1972), 357.

<sup>44</sup>Miroslav Šedivý, "The Path to the Austro-Sardinian War: The Post-Napoleonic States System and the End of Peace in Europe in 1848," *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2019): 367–85.

<sup>45</sup>Broglià to Solaro, Rome, 15 August 1840, AST, LM, Roma 342; Broglià to Solaro, Rome, 3 November 1840, AST, LM, Roma 343; Ricci to Solaro, Naples, 15 November 1840, AST, LM, Due Sicilie 55.

<sup>46</sup>Francesco Lemmi, "Carlo Alberto e Francesco IV.: lettere inedite," *Il Risorgimento italiano* 20, no. 4 (1927): 305–73, 315.

<sup>47</sup>For the literature on the conflict in the Ottoman Empire in 1839–1841 and the resulting Rhine Crisis, see P. E. Caquet, "The Napoleonic Legend and the War Scare of 1840," *The International History Review* 35, no. 4 (2013): 702–22; Eugène de Guichen, *La crise d'Orient de 1839 à 1841 et l'Europe* (Paris, 1921); Adolf Hasencllever, *Die Orientalische Frage in den Jahren 1838–1841: Ursprung des Meerengenvertrages vom 13. Juli 1841* (Leipzig, 1914); Letitia W. Ufford, *The Pasha: How Mehemet Ali Defied the West, 1839–1841* (Jefferson, 2007); Veit-Brause, *Die deutsch-französische Krise von 1840*; Miroslav Šedivý, *Crisis among the Great Powers: The Concert of Europe and the Eastern Question* (London, 2017).



As in Italy earlier, now Scandinavia witnessed the ideas of practical solution. In September, the Swedish resident minister in London, Count Magnus Fredrik Ferdinand Björnstjerna, reacted to the Rhine Crisis with this statement: "It is certain that if the powers of the second and third order do not agree to forming a confederation to protect their rights and independence, at least for fifty years, all of them will be gobbled up by the Powers of the first order."<sup>48</sup> His King, Charles XIV John, a revolutionary in his youth, a marshal under Napoleon but an ultra-conservative when he became a ruler, was not a supporter of the Scandinavian movement striving for a political unity of Scandinavian countries but he advocated a Swedish-Norwegian-Danish alliance in the case of the outbreak of European war or an attack against his kingdom.<sup>49</sup> In January 1842, with the crisis in recent memory, the king told the French representative in Stockholm that the great powers should cooperate and not quarrel. He expressed his wish "that the leading cabinets in the European family should unite in a common effort against the enemy of all, and that this union should give powers of the second order the guarantees of security and influence which they need to act successfully in their smaller sphere."<sup>50</sup> His more liberal son and king from 1844, Oscar I, became a supporter of the Scandinavian movement aimed at increasing the security of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark situated among the European powers in whom the Scandinavians had little trust, which also made them critical of the whole post-Napoleonic order.<sup>51</sup>

If the visions of Charles XIV John resembled those of Ferdinand II, then there were German conservative monarchs and diplomats who during the Rhine Crisis came closer to the bellicosity and territorial ambitions of Charles Albert—an attitude entirely incompatible with the heritage of the 1815 treaties. Some of them wanted to deprive France of its eastern lands only in the case of its aggression and defeat. Ludwig I of Bavaria hungered for Strasbourg, which would be transformed into a federal fortress,<sup>52</sup> and his representative in Paris, Count Friedrich Christian Karl von Luxburg, demanded Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>53</sup> Threatened by a French invasion, others concluded that it was better not to wait for one and to instead attack France first. The representative of Württemberg in Paris, General August von Fleischmann, wrote in mid-December 1840 on the French: "If it is written in the books of fate that a third lesson is necessary to teach this rebellious nation to leave us in peace, I believe that the present time would be more favourable than any other, since we are united and free from internal embarrassments that could impede the development of our forces and our enemies would have (to fight) (at the same time) both England and Russia."<sup>54</sup> Fleischmann's colleague in Karlsruhe, Friedrich Wilhelm von Bismarck, assumed an identical attitude and also preferred to begin a war immediately when the situation was favorable for Germans.<sup>55</sup> A war against France was an opportunity to increase Germany's security through the conquest of Alsace, Lorraine, even Piedmont situated on French southeastern border, and "lead Belgium, among other things, into its natural relationship with Prussia, whereby this country would be restored to its old Germanic relationship . . . which at the same time would free the right flank of the German position."<sup>56</sup>

The desire for war made Bismarck critical of Metternich's policy of peace.<sup>57</sup> This criticism was well-founded insofar as the preservation of peace had truly been Metternich's principal goal since 1815. He

<sup>48</sup>Björnstjerna to Stierneld, London, 8 September 1840, The Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet), Stockholm, Beskickningsarkiv, Inkamna skrivelser, Kabinetet för utrikes brevväxlingen, London E2 D:426.

<sup>49</sup>De la Cour to Thiers, Stockholm, 7 and 14 August 1840, Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères, Paris (AMAE), Correspondance politique (CP), Suède 320; Engelhardt to Frederick William IV, Stockholm, 11 August 1840, GStA PK, HA III, MdA I, 6275.

<sup>50</sup>De la Cour to Guizot, Stockholm, 6 January 1842, AMAE, CP, Suède 321.

<sup>51</sup>Mircea-Cristian Ghenghea, "About Pan-Scandinavianism. Reference Points in the 19th Century (1815–1864)," *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2014): 127–45, 136–37.

<sup>52</sup>Dönhoff to Frederick William IV, Munich, 10 November 1840, GStA PK, HA III, MdA I, 2487.

<sup>53</sup>Luxburg to Ludwig I of Bavaria, Paris, 2 September 1840, BHStA, MA, Paris 2102/1.

<sup>54</sup>Fleischmann to Beroldingen, Paris, 16 December 1840, HStAS, E 70 a Bü 193c.

<sup>55</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm von Bismarck to William I of Württemberg, Karlsruhe, 1 December 1840, HStAS, E 70 f Bü 17; Friedrich Wilhelm von Bismarck to William I of Württemberg, Karlsruhe, 9 January 1841, HStAS, E 70 f Bü 17.

<sup>56</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm von Bismarck to William I of Württemberg, 7 January 1841, HStAS, E 70 f Bü 17.

<sup>57</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm von Bismarck to William I of Württemberg, 13 December 1840, HStAS, E 70 f Bü 17.

wanted to free Europe of the horrors of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars which he had personally witnessed. Therefore, in 1831, he enthusiastically welcomed the French proposal for the at least partial disarmament of European powers.<sup>58</sup> After 15 July 1840, he found European peace seriously threatened although he did not suspect the French king and his cabinet of wanting to break it. Despite his conviction that France had no justified reason to start a war, he continued in his conciliatory and even friendly policy toward it.<sup>59</sup>

### The League to Preserve Peace

Like many of his contemporaries, Metternich was unpleasantly surprised by the tension that the conflict from the distant eastern Mediterranean cast over Europe. He considered the French threats to be completely unnecessary, as he did the possible outbreak of a war for which there was no compelling reason. He was shocked how little sufficed to threaten the general peace: an irrelevant affair concerning the distribution of power between the sultan and his Egyptian pasha in Syria that Europeans were hardly able to find on the map. This provoked a bellicose reaction in France where the king and his ministers talked about a possible outbreak of war while simultaneously proclaiming their personal desire to maintain peace. Metternich regarded the situation as absurd but admitted that it was still dangerous.<sup>60</sup>

Metternich learned about the London Convention and France's warmongering response in his Château Königswart (Kynžvart) in Western Bohemia. He was surrounded by the representatives of Prussia, France, Russia, Britain, the Papal States, and several Austrian diplomats who established a sort of informal conference. The preservation of peace was the most important topic of discussion. At the same time, Metternich wanted to overcome the gulf that had developed between France and other powers as well as create a bulwark against the former's eventual hostile conduct against other countries. In late August, Metternich, Ficquelmont, and the British ambassador to Austria, Lord Beauvale, elaborated a project for a defensive alliance of four powers against France and a considerably more interesting and far-reaching project for the league to preserve peace in Europe. The former was a simple defensive measure reacting to the current war scare. For Metternich, it was a rather ad hoc solution, a strategy he usually disliked because the alliances undermined the cooperation of European Concert and other countries. On 30 March 1847, he told Georg Klindworth, an agent sent to him from Paris:

I return to the question of alliances. I no longer accept the political alliances of the past; their time has passed, at least until one great power attacks another for the purpose of conquest or for reasons of rivalry. In such a case it must be said that it would require, as before 1814, a political concert of the other powers to repel such aggressions. Apart from this hypothetical situation, there are today and will be in the future only agreements, more or less general arrangements, which I will call associations for the preservation of the political status quo and for the peaceful development of modern societies. These associations of large states must, in their own interest, protect and sustain the small states around them. There is nothing more moral or just than their existence.<sup>61</sup>

The league, which Metternich favored over the simple defensive alliance, had a long-term orientation and was to forestall the outbreak of any war in Europe regardless of the aggressor. According to Beauvale, Metternich was "exceedingly warm upon the project, and would consider its realisation as

<sup>58</sup>Merrill Gray Berthrong, "Disarmament in European Diplomacy, 1816-1870" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1961), 23-58.

<sup>59</sup>Barbora Pásztorová, "Metternich's Peace Management, 1840-48: Anachronism or Vision?" *Austrian History Yearbook* 53 (2022): 75-89, 78-79.

<sup>60</sup>Šedivý, *Crisis among the Great Powers*, 77-78.

<sup>61</sup>Klindworth, *Conversations particulières avec Mr. le Prince de Metternich*, Paris, 28 April 1847, Archives nationales, Paris, François Guizot 68.

the greatest benefit that has ever been conferred upon Europe.”<sup>62</sup> It was a reaction to the situation when war threatened to break out in the heart of the Continent due to an unrelated affair in the distant Ottoman Empire. Ficquelmont wrote a memorandum containing this explanation and attached it to the proposal of the project. His memorandum also represented Metternich’s opinion and deserves to be quoted at length:

The league of all those who want peace, against anyone who alone wants war, would therefore be the principle which should be promulgated as the most certain safeguard of all the interests of Europe. The latest evidence of recent history proves that the isolated action of one or more powers is not enough to smooth out a complicated political situation; a more general cooperation is needed. It is always necessary to negotiate to settle a great affair of general interest. Is it not better to negotiate before a war than to end up negotiating afterwards? In the current situation, all the powers claim to want the same thing, all declaring equally their desire to maintain the peace, and yet all proclaiming the imminence of a war which they do not want. Those of a materialist nature in politics will not deny that it is to this principle that Europe owes the twenty-five years of peace which it still enjoys. If the treaties which have given it this benefit are weakened by the violations committed against them, would it not be useful to replace them with a new agreement conceived in the same spirit?<sup>63</sup>

A connection between the Congress of Vienna and the proposed league existed not only in Ficquelmont’s explicit mention of the 1815 treaties but also in the idea of a mutual guarantee of the territorial possessions, which some participants like Friedrich von Gentz, Metternich’s advisor, and the secretary of the Congress, wanted to conclude in 1814–15.<sup>64</sup> As US historian Mark Jarrett remarked, “if a general guarantee of all European borders had been issued and enforced, it would indeed have marked the dawn of a new epoch in world history.”<sup>65</sup> The same can be said about Metternich’s idea of 1840. Metternich, Ficquelmont, and Beauvale found it necessary to assure peace through a more complex measure than was found in the Congress of Vienna settlement, which they now regarded as inadequate. The project of the league, the eventual acceptance of which would significantly change European public law, consisted of six articles.<sup>66</sup> The first one obliged its members to solve the problems peacefully. According to the second one, if a problem arose between some members, it was to be solved at a conference. If a conciliatory approach failed, the third article committed the member states to defend with all the means at their disposal any country or countries attacked. The fourth article clearly stated that the obligation contained in the third one held true even in the case where an aggressor was a member country of the league. The fifth article stipulated that if no one asked for help, but peace in Europe was endangered, the great powers were to negotiate the problem as well and act if necessary for the preservation of general peace. The sixth and last article made it clear that all countries had the right to enter this association but that the great powers would retain exclusive rights to negotiate and act as was stipulated in the previous articles.<sup>67</sup>

The six articles offer sufficient evidence that the project was not an association of conservative powers against revolutionary France and certainly not a reversion to the Holy Alliance from 1815. Metternich was never in favor of this alliance, which he disliked for its impractical character from both political and legal perspectives. His claim that the Holy Alliance played no role in practical politics is confirmed not only by later international affairs but also by his own exclusive use of the term

<sup>62</sup>Beauvale to Palmerston, Königswart, 29 August 1840, TNA, FO 7/291A.

<sup>63</sup>Ficquelmont’s memorandum, August 1840, TNA, FO 7/291A.

<sup>64</sup>Mark Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy: War and Great Power Diplomacy after Napoleon* (London, 2013), 146–49.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>66</sup>The authors themselves stated that the project of the league would change international law. Beauvale labelled the project of league as the “First Project to Effect ‘A Change in the Public Law of Europe’,” TNA, FO 7/291A.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid. See also Rodkey, “Suggestions during the Crisis of 1840 for a ‘League’ to Preserve Peace,” 311–13; Florian Lorenz, “Karl Ludwig Graf Ficquelmont als Diplomat und Staatsmann: (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1966), 118–22.

“Alliance” for the concert of four and after 1818 five European powers.<sup>68</sup> The difference between the Holy Alliance and Metternich’s project for the league is clearly visible at first sight; the former was an exalted declaration without any practical value in interstate relations, at least from a legal point of view, while the latter was a practical security measure attempting to strengthen the peaceful coexistence of European countries. In contrast to the Holy Alliance and the Troppau Protocol, the league was not a weapon of conservative policy. Of course, its fifth article enabling the member powers to solve any threats to peace without being invited to do so by a threatened country or countries seems to contain the essence of the principle of intervention, but since Metternich based the realization of the idea on the acceptance of Great Britain, telling Beauvale that he was even prepared to sign it without the participation of Russia and France (the core was to be formed at the beginning by Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, and the German Confederation), the project could hardly be intended to be the second Troppau Protocol simply because Henry John Temple 3rd Viscount Palmerston, British Foreign Secretary, or any other British minister would never accept it. Beauvale wrote to Palmerston about the league in this respect on 29 August: “Its direction, however, would be exclusively against aggression from without, neither interfering with the independence of nations nor with their efforts for internal improvement. This is so much in accordance not only with the material interests of nations, but with the opinions and speculative reasonings of the age, it is so peculiarly consonant to the ideas and feelings of England, and if practicable, would be considered as so great a benefit to humanity at large, that I entertain no doubt of its receiving the favourable consideration of Her Majesty’s Government.”<sup>69</sup>

The league was thus designed as a barrier against war and not revolution, although for Metternich these dangers often went hand in hand. The chancellor explained the purpose of the league during a conversation with a Prussian envoy in Vienna, Count Mortimer von Maltzan, on 10 September: “My treaty proposal is the opposite of the Holy Alliance, so to speak, in regard to what it covers. The Holy Alliance was essentially moral; my project is essentially material and practical. It is about building a bulwark against the tyranny of French egoism and against the whims of men like Mr. Thiers [French prime minister] who can be brought onto the political stage by constitutional reforms at any moment and who can easily obtain the power to shake the foundations of European politics. Consequently, it is about creating solid guarantees against possibilities of this kind. I see these guarantees in a treaty of a defensive nature that would be concluded not only among the four Powers but also all European governments which would want to participate in them. The nature of this defensive treaty would be practical . . . The governments would commit themselves to the preservation of peace, they would become guarantors of the integrity and independence of every member state of the alliance.”<sup>70</sup> And in April of the following year, he returned to the project when telling Beauvale: “What will exist in Europe when the Turco-Egyptian Affair is closed? The Alliance of the Five Powers no longer exists—that of the four will be dissolved—that of the three [Austria, Prussia, and Russia] will not be renewed. What then will replace these alliances? There will exist this great Central German Confederation whose principle is repose, and three independent Powers, England, France, and Russia, with their separate liberty of action. It will be open for any or all of these to associate themselves to this central pacific Confederation either by specific engagements or by community of interests and intentions, and in this line I think the [peaceful] objects and principles of Germany will be at once approved of and entered into by England.”<sup>71</sup> Beauvale was completely correct when he saw behind Metternich’s project the aim of “laying the basis of a general pacific system destined to inspire confidence throughout Europe.”<sup>72</sup>

The idea of the league to preserve peace ultimately failed when Palmerston, a man primarily responsible for the Sulphur War, refused to sanction it. He did so for three principal reasons. First, his policy

<sup>68</sup>Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, “Sainte Alliance et Alliance dans les conceptions de Metternich,” *Revue Historique* 223 (1960): 249–74.

<sup>69</sup>Beauvale to Palmerston, Königswart, 29 August 1840, TNA, FO 7/291A.

<sup>70</sup>Maltzan to Frederick William IV, Königswart, 11 September 1840, GStA PK, Rep. 81 Gesandtschaften (Residenturen) u. (General-) Konsulate nach 1807, Gesandtschaft Wien II, 201/3.

<sup>71</sup>Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 17 April 1841, TNA, FO 7/298.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

based on George Canning's famous motto "every nation for itself and God for us all"<sup>73</sup> made him reluctant to commit Great Britain on the continent. Second, even after the conclusion of the London Convention, he saw such a commitment as pointless since he considered the signatories of the Convention a sufficient force against France in the case of war. Third, he had mistrusted Metternich for years, and the chancellor's emphasis on peace and inclination to compromise solutions during the Rhine Crisis moved Palmerston to distrust him even more. When at the end of February 1841 Beauvale suggested an Austro-British defensive alliance against France to consolidate European peace, Palmerston rejected this idea with the explanation that he could not rely on Metternich for his wavering and timid conduct during the crisis.<sup>74</sup> That this also made him deaf to the project of the league in 1840 becomes obvious from his letter of 5 October to Beauvale in which he accused the Austrian chancellor of the same weaknesses and then mentioned the idea of a triple alliance between Austria, Prussia, and Britain that Beauvale had recently dispatched to him. He informed the ambassador that the project was seen by only three other British ministers: William Lamb 2nd Viscount Melbourne, Lord John William Russel, and Henry Vassall-Fox 3rd Baron Holland. This is the only discovered comment made by Palmerston on this project that obviously did not meet with the approval of the British government and, unsurprisingly, never became a topic of negotiations between London and Vienna.<sup>75</sup>

Despite its failure, the project is still of historical significance: it reveals that even the conservatives loyal to the post-Napoleonic order doubted its efficiency and were ready to improve it in 1840. Metternich and his colleagues were not the only ones. In 1836, French King Louis Philippe, who was personally conservative but ruled in liberal France, had proposed the convocation of a congress to draw up a treaty in accordance with which "no change, no alienation of territory, would have taken place in future without the concurrence of all the Powers—and I would then have realised the idea I have continually pursued of an entente of the five Powers for the solution of all the great political questions . . . for settling all those questions with a general and European interest . . . for guaranteeing the status quo of the territorial delimitation of Europe."<sup>76</sup> In November 1840, the king repeated this idea to the Austrian ambassador in Paris:

That is why I proposed with some insistence in 1833 [sic], if you remember, that the Great Powers unanimously come to an agreement on guaranteeing the territorial boundaries of all European countries through a solemn act, reinforced by their signatures. This idea to which I always return because of my conviction that it could remedy much harm has not been adopted; yet, in my opinion, the problems of the Levant could be prevented if we had wanted to adopt it! I will never abandon this project of the guarantee of the current boundaries of Europe since I regard it as the only means for avoiding the possibility of war and assuring a lasting peace for Europe.<sup>77</sup>

In October 1840, Prussian King Frederick William IV deliberated an idea similar to Metternich's league. He told the British ambassador in Berlin, Lord Georg Russell, that under the given unsettled conditions in Europe it would be convenient to conclude an alliance of four powers against France. After the end of the crisis, France and other countries could join it to defend the territorial status quo. When Russell replied that the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna was sufficient guarantee of

<sup>73</sup>Francis R. Bridge, "Allied Diplomacy in Peacetime: The Failure of the Congress 'System' 1815–23," in *Europe's Balance of Power, 1815–1848*, ed. Alan Sked (London, 1979), 53.

<sup>74</sup>Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 29 February 1841, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Palmerston Papers, General Correspondence PP/GC/BE/367-390; Palmerston to Beauvale, Carlton Terrace, 9 March 1841, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Palmerston Papers, General Correspondence PP/GC/BE/555-568.

<sup>75</sup>Palmerston to Beauvale, Carlton Terrace, 5 October 1840, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Palmerston Papers, General Correspondence PP/GC/BE/544-554.

<sup>76</sup>Sir Francis H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge, 1963), 215.

<sup>77</sup>Apponyi to Metternich, Paris, 18 November 1840, HHStA, StA, Frankreich 318.

the preservation of general peace, the king openly disagreed and expressed the same skepticism that Metternich had earlier displayed through his project of the league.<sup>78</sup>

The influence of Metternich's project on the king's idea is not documented but since the latter must have known about it through Maltzan's September report quoted above, it can be regarded as certain. However, the difference between them is obvious: Frederick William IV's proposal was merely a general idea expressed only in conversation, while in Königswart a detailed project with far-reaching consequences was prepared. Beauvale emphasized this fact in mid-November in a private letter for Palmerston: "Your opinion that for many years there will be danger of war from France is partaken both here and at Berlin and it is probable that this affair will not end without giving rise to propositions to meet the eventual danger. The proposition stated by Lord Russel to have been made to him by the King of Prussia for a defensive league against France is not the idea of Austria, which is more utopian, and looks to the creation of a mutual insurance company against war. Whether there is anything practical in this can hardly be decided till the idea is presented in a more ripened state. What to do and whether to do anything will be subjected for serious considerations in the wartime. I doubt the idea of a defensive league against France being seriously adopted by the Prussian cabinet if it came to be discussed in it."<sup>79</sup> In any case, the Prussian proposal met the same fate: Palmerston rejected it for the same reason as the Austrian one. He praised the idea containing "the principle of permanent peace" but he was not willing to commit Britain on the continent for its sake.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

Although Metternich's project was a minor episode in the context of nineteenth-century international relations and he himself never returned to it after it was rejected in London, it remains significant for historians for two principal reasons. First, it serves as an important testament of Metternich's political rationale which had little in common with moral theorization; what he stood for is symbolized not by the Holy Alliance but by the project for the league to preserve peace. The project reveals his conviction that an international order could ensure peace and justice only in the context of clearly defined and obeyed principles of international law. The constitution of the German Confederation offered him a pattern and it was no coincidence that the same Confederation served as a guideline when he argued on behalf of the league to preserve peace: both offered security to their members by prescribing not only their rights but also duties in their common defense. If accepted, the league would become a similar supranational peacekeeping organization and its members would operate according to the same rules. What further linked the Confederation and the league was their solely defensive character: both organizations were to ensure European peace through their obligation to defend their members while lacking the instrument of government to threaten other countries. All in all, in late 1840, Metternich took advantage of the given situation and tried to strengthen the pillars of the European States System in the same way Germany had been secured in 1815.

Another way Metternich wanted to improve the stability of the post-Napoleonic order through the league was the possibility of the Ottoman Empire's membership. Its exclusion from the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna made its political-legal position in the post-Napoleonic Europe more vulnerable to external threats, which finally also destabilized the order itself. The Rhine Crisis demonstrated this more than adequately. Although Metternich did not mention the Ottoman Empire in the project, his attempts to include it into the Final Act in 1814–15 and later together with his effort for a settlement of the Eastern Question between 1839 and 1841 from a political as well as legal point of view

<sup>78</sup>Russell to Palmerston, Berlin, 21 October 1840, TNA, FO 64/229.

<sup>79</sup>Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 14 November 1840, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Palmerston Papers, General Correspondence PP/GC/BE/351-66. The copy of this letter is also housed in the British Library, Western Manuscripts, Beauvale Papers, Add MS 60473: Vol. LXXV (ff. 160).

<sup>80</sup>Neumann to Metternich, London, 7 November 1840, HHSa, StA, England 229.

provide indirect but nonetheless compelling evidence that he counted on the sultan's entry into the league.<sup>81</sup>

Drawing on the subtitle of Wolfram Siemann's short German biography on Metternich as the "Statesman between Restoration and Modernity,"<sup>82</sup> the project of the league reveals that the chancellor's ideas were more compatible with 1949 than 1815. Its unambiguously practical content was in no way similar to the religiously conceived declaration of the Holy Alliance; rather, it conformed with the twentieth century's constructive attempts to ensure collective security, especially those of the North Atlantic Treaty of 4 April 1949,<sup>83</sup> whose fourteen articles prescribe the rights and duties of the member states as did Metternich's six articles. Moreover, in 1952, Turkey joined NATO as an important component of the security of democratic Europe, exactly as Metternich had regarded the Ottoman Empire as useful for bringing more stability into the post-Napoleonic order.<sup>84</sup>

That the project of the league expressed a certain mistrust of the existing legal order serves as its second historical significance. Historical and recent events warned Metternich of the serious defects inherent in the post-Napoleonic order. A similar or even stronger sense of the order's deficiencies also existed among other conservatives of his and younger generations, primarily because of the obvious unwillingness on the side of some great powers to improve it by self-limiting legal obligations. The examples introduced in this article reveal that this mistrust led to other ideas of strengthening collective security through improved transnational cooperation on European or at least regional, namely Italian and Scandinavian, levels. There also occurred another and for the post-Napoleonic order more dangerous response in the quest for material power that inevitably aimed at a more radical political and territorial transformation of Europe. In the 1830s, it originated at the court of Charles Albert and made Piedmont an ambitious state hungry for conquests that finally changed the post-Napoleonic order in the Apennines by unifying Italy. During the Rhine Crisis, a similar tendency started to flourish in Prussia. When Frederick William IV failed with his appeal to London to improve the order in the way proposed by Metternich in August, the king and his conservative advisor, General Joseph Maria von Radowitz, directed a proposal to Vienna for the significant military strengthening of the Confederation given the unsettled international situation. Metternich wanted to exploit the crisis to improve the Confederation's defensive capacity, and Beauvale reported that his "present notions for this purpose are chiefly Germanic, he has a vision that the solid union of the Confederation is to make it secure against the World."<sup>85</sup> Yet Metternich rejected the Prussian plan as needlessly and dangerously overexaggerated: it threatened Germany's neighbors in general and France in particular, and if it had been accepted, these countries would surely have reacted with their own armaments. In brief, it contained the seeds of a security dilemma that considerably weakened transnational cooperation in the late nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup>

Although the Prussian plan was finally rejected by Metternich and other German rulers, it remains important since it reveals the growing tendency in Prussia and all of Germany to demand power as the only guarantee of security when the legal one based on international norms seemed to be waning. With this tendency, the desire for Prussia's leadership in Germany and the latter's stronger position in Europe and the world went hand in hand. Radowitz advocated it at the expense of Austria and

<sup>81</sup>Miroslav Šedivý, "Metternich's Plan for a Viennese Conference in 1839," *Central European History* 44, no. 3 (2011): 397–419; Šedivý, *Metternich, the Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, 33–57.

<sup>82</sup>Wolfram Siemann, *Metternich: Staatsmann zwischen Restauration und Moderne* (Munich, 2010).

<sup>83</sup>For the full text of the North Atlantic Treaty, see [https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm) [26 April 2023].

<sup>84</sup>It is good to remember that contrary to Metternich's league and NATO, the Holy Alliance as a declaration of Christian rulers inevitably excluded the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>85</sup>Beauvale to Palmerston, Vienna, 17 April 1841, British Library, Western Manuscripts, Beauvale Papers, Add MS 60473: Vol. LXXV (ff. 160).

<sup>86</sup>Ludwig Ficquelmont, *Deutschland, Oesterreich und Preußen* (Vienna, 1851), 12–14; Dirk Blasius, *Friedrich Wilhelm IV. 1795–1861: Psychopathologie und Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1992), 96–99; Robert D. Billinger Jr., "They Sing the Best Songs Badly: Metternich, Frederick William IV, and the German Confederation during the War Scare of 1840–41," in *Deutscher Bund und deutsche Frage 1815–1866*, ed. Helmut Rumpler (Munich, 1990), 94–113.

Europe in 1848–49, to be followed for the same reason by the similarly conservative Otto von Bismarck.<sup>87</sup> Its outcome—the unification of Germany in 1871—was more fatal to the post-Napoleonic order than the creation of an Italian kingdom ten years earlier. Regardless of the exact date when the post-Napoleonic order ended, the unifications of Italy and Germany delivered its final fatal blow. Metternich’s league to preserve peace was intended to avoid this course of European history.

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<sup>87</sup>Josef von Radowitz, “Denkschrift über die vom deutschen Bunde zu ergreifenden Maßregeln, Berlin, 20 Nov. 1847,” in *Vormärz und Revolution 1840–1849*, ed. Hans Fenske (Darmstadt, 1976), 243–44; Konrad Canis, *Konstruktiv gegen die Revolution: Strategie und Politik der preußischen Regierung 1848 bis 1850/51* (Paderborn, 2022), 68; Michael Gehler, “Otto von Bismarck und die Europa-Ideen im Zeichen des nationalstaatlichen Prinzips,” in *Realpolitik für Europa: Bismarcks Weg*, eds. Ulrich Lappenküper and Karina Urbach (Paderborn, 2016), 87–117; Dominik Haffer, *Europa in den Augen Bismarcks: Bismarcks Vorstellungen von der Politik der europäischen Mächte und vom europäischen Staatensystem* (Paderborn, 2010), 644–47; Friedrich Meinecke, *Radowitz und die deutsche Revolution* (Berlin, 1913); Brendan Simms, “Nationalismus und Geopolitik in Deutschland vor 1847,” in *Recht, Geschichte, Nation*, eds. Vincenc Rajšp and Ernst Bruckmüller (Ljubljana, 1999), 397–403.