Europe’s Uncertain Path
1814–1914

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Europe’s Uncertain Path is an introduction to Europe’s turbulent history from 1814 to 1914. It presents a clear narrative of the major political events, set against the backdrop of social, economic, and cultural change.

Alexander offers balanced coverage of Eastern, Western, and Central Europe. He explains the causes and outcomes of major events: the effect of the emergence of mass politics; the evolution of political ideologies; the link between foreign and domestic policy; and the breakdown of the states system. The emphasis throughout is on the relation between state formation and growth in civil society, and the differences and similarities of this experience across countries.

Enhanced by illustrations, maps, and figures, Europe’s Uncertain Path provides a thorough background for anyone interested in modern European history.

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Europe’s Uncertain Path 1814–1914
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1814–1914
State Formation and Civil Society

R. S. Alexander
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The book that follows is a political narrative. Why focus on political history rather than the other subdisciplines? In governing, rulers and politicians have to take military, diplomatic, economic, social, and cultural developments into account. For this reason, political history constitutes a nexus; all the other subdisciplines are connected by, and related, to it. Knowledge of political history thus provides a starting point for more advanced study of the other subdisciplines and, better yet, underlines the limitations of viewing any of them in isolation. Why should a student care about politics? Even if you do not take much interest in those who govern you, you can be certain that they take interest in you and that their decisions affect you from the cradle to the grave. Study of nineteenth-century Europe helps to explain why states have become so influential, for better and worse, in the lives of all citizens.

Europe’s Uncertain Path is divided into ten chapters and a conclusion. Two thematic chapters are dedicated specifically to discussion of demographic, economic, social, and cultural trends. Their function is to supplement the other chapters through consideration of how major trends affected government. International (including military) and domestic political developments are analysed in eight narrative chapters organized along chronological lines so that the reader can trace how they evolved. By carefully situating decision-making within its long- and short-term contexts, we can better understand the motivation of leading political figures and assess the consequences of what they did. Politics is a product of ideology (a more or less coherent system of ideals or values) and pursuit of material interest through the acquisition of power. Thus to comprehend politics we need to know the leading ideologies of the period. In assessing our own contemporary politicians, few of us would however be content to look solely at the ideals they express in campaign speeches, public addresses, or legislative debates. Rhetoric tells us something; yet there is much to be said for the adage that action speaks louder than words. What did political figures actually do? We cannot cover everything of consequence, but a major objective of this book is to provide the reader with sufficiently broad knowledge of principal developments that he or she will be prepared to undertake more specialized reading in the future.
In discussing politics, I have tried to give due consideration to both inter-state relations and domestic developments. The period 1815–1914 was framed by vast international wars; nevertheless, with several important exceptions, it was primarily one of peace. The foundations for the states system were put in place at the start of our period and came to be known as the Concert of Europe. In formal terms, the Concert consisted of meetings of representatives of the great powers to discuss crises wherein their interests might come into potentially dangerous conflict. More important than formal conventions however were a number of informal practices derived from prior experience during the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Wars. Foremost among the latter were recognition that war among the powers might bring the destruction of participating regimes, and that peaceful diplomacy required genuine consideration of the vital interests of other powers. Despite moments of stress, the Concert system largely succeeded until the Crimean War of 1854–56 commenced an intense period of wars that ended in 1871. Thereafter the powers avoided war among themselves until 1914, although the states system and the character of diplomacy had dramatically changed.

A key to this transformation of the states system was recognition by several leading statesmen that nationalism could be put to the purpose of buttressing the regimes they served. Foreign war was the means by which Count Cavour and Otto von Bismarck (respectively) unified Italy and Germany. Unification enhanced the power of the monarchs of Piedmont-Sardinia and Prussia and enabled Cavour and Bismarck to establish Italian and German states that denied the aspirations of democratic nationalists. Equally important was the way Cavour, Bismarck, and the French Emperor Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte based their diplomacy on real politik. The latter gave short shrift to belief that peace among the powers was necessarily conducive to the stability or interests of a particular state. Worse still, each of these statesmen employed deceit to achieve their objectives, undermining trust. Peace after 1871 rested far more heavily on calculations of military force in the formation of alliances. The leaders of nationalist movements seldom exercised direct influence over governments; yet the temptation remained for states to act aggressively in foreign relations to secure the support of the growing number of nationalists. For a time, overseas imperialism was something of a safety valve for rivalry among the powers in that the rest of the globe provided plenty of opportunity for expansion with limited risk of direct conflict in Europe. By the turn of the century, however, the number of potential “prizes” had diminished, and thereafter rivalry came to be focused closer to home – in North Africa and the Balkans. As tensions rose, resort to great power conferences was renewed; unfortunately the informal understandings that had made the Concert of Europe successful prior to the Crimean War no longer existed.

Few phenomena have as much impact on the lives of citizens as modern wars and hence examination of how and why the Concert system was gradually eroded presents itself as a principal concern for this study. Diplomacy was not however conducted in isolation; domestic and foreign policies often were closely
interwined. Thus tracing the connections between foreign and domestic policy constitutes a second theme for detailed analysis. Victory in war could lend prestige to a regime and thereby fortify it, but defeat could open the door to dramatic change by means of revolution or reform.

Partly due to the way in which I have conceived of this work, hard decisions have had to be made as to which states will be given consideration in terms of domestic politics. One of my objectives is to provide sustained discussion throughout the entire period. Touching upon individual states incidentally, and only in so much as to demonstrate overarching themes, is inadequate for tracing how they progressed from one point to another and can leave the reader wondering about the period between the two points of discussion. Sustained discussion comes at a cost and while I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible, there are regrettable omissions. In selecting Britain, France, Spain, Italy, and the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires for sustained analysis, I have included the leading states and sought to give adequate representation to west, central, and east Europe. Other states do come up for discussion, but only in relation to particular topics.

Europe is the subject of this book; yet the period was characterized by the emergence of the nation state. Partly due to overseas imperialism, belief in a European identity, based largely on cultural characteristics such as religion, language, and ethnicity, gained ground. Nevertheless, conception of European boundaries was fluid and frequently ambiguous. Whereas the orient could be defined as “other” with relative ease, where to place the Slavs of central and eastern Europe remained problematic and the Balkans region was viewed as a bridge or crossroad between Europe and the Islamic world. Moreover, Europe as a source of identity was utterly overshadowed by the growth of nationalism and the century was dominated by boundary setting within Europe. Similarly, while cultural organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church or political movements such as socialism and feminism had an international character, it was the institutions of the nation state that increasingly imposed themselves upon the consciousness of the average citizen or subject. Still, the objective here is not to write a fragmented account of separate nations. To avoid the latter outcome, continuous comparison will be made of the ways in which the various regimes developed. Toward this end, I have grouped the states on the basis of rough constitutional similarities.

At least as difficult as the selection of states for consideration is the task of identifying the main themes of domestic politics. The nineteenth century was prolific in the formulation of new ideologies and discussion of the leading “isms” is obviously essential. While these ideologies will be largely familiar to many readers, they may not be entirely so. Liberalism, for example, arose in a certain historical context and thereafter evolved as context changed. Moreover, the character of liberalism varied according to where one looks. Although simplistic working definitions have a purpose, study of history provides opportunity for deeper understanding. People change, as do the “isms” they espouse, and rigid formulations often obscure the complexity of real life.
All the same, generalization is necessary, if only for the sake of brevity. In reflecting on how the nineteenth century constituted a transition from earlier times to the twentieth century, I have identified a number of principal themes that will be traced through the entirety of this book.

The first consists of state formation. What did governments do? Over the course of the period the size, power, and scope of the state expanded significantly, partly due to the wealth generated by industrialization and commercial expansion, and partly because states spent relatively less of their revenues on the military. Initially states expanded in a traditional field of activity – provision of law and order; underlining this development was, however, a shift toward preventing disorder rather than simply reacting to it once it had occurred. Especially after the revolutions of 1848, states became increasingly involved in the provision of education systems, development of transportation and communications infrastructure, and urban renewal. Thereafter regulation of economic (particularly industrial) relations and rudimentary provision of social welfare came to the fore. In sum, the influence the state exercised over the lives of Europeans increased dramatically, although it did not reach the levels attained in the twentieth century.

Why did such vast change occur? In analyzing state expansion, we can trace the development of several related general causes. Running throughout the nineteenth century like an electric current was preoccupation with social order. Often inflated accounts of mob violence and the brutality of the Terror during the French Revolution exacerbated fear of what might happen if control over the masses were lost. Traditional sources of authority such as the society of orders had been weakened during previous centuries, and they were badly damaged, or even destroyed, during the Revolutionary-Napoleonic era. Slowly but surely the state filled this vacuum and the process was sustained by anxieties over what contemporaries viewed as bewilderingly rapid economic, social, and cultural change.

From the 1820s onwards, scholars, writers, and journalists were preoccupied by what became known as the “social question.” Rural poverty, exacerbated by rapid demographic growth, was in fact endemic; yet it was the swelling ranks of urban poor who drew most attention. Frequently composed of recent migrants from the countryside and sometimes identified as alien, “dangerous classes,” the urban poor sparked a mixture of fear and sympathy. Concern that the urban poor had become detached from traditional sources of morality contributed to growing conviction that the state must do more to prevent social conflict. In consequence governments increased their efforts to promote economic expansion, built mass education systems, and reshaped the urban landscape.

Perhaps the most powerful inducement for increased intervention on behalf of the poor was the argument that all of society would benefit by it. The novelist Charles Dickens was just one of many authors who believed that disease and corruption born of physical or moral squalor could not be confined and would inevitably spread throughout society. Following the opinions of contemporary experts, the public saw moral and physical hygiene as closely linked, and state
attempts to promote public health through increased regulation grew. Along similar lines, arguments that an educated, healthy workforce would be more disciplined and productive could be deployed in favour of state regulation of economic relations and provision of at least minimal levels of social welfare. Finally, towards the turn of the century, the spread of nationalism and imperialism also fostered arguments that in a world in which only the fittest survive the state must promote a healthy and robust populace.

A second grand theme is the gradual emergence of mass politics through the establishment of political rights and institutions. A starting point in this process was the creation of elective bodies which possessed powers independent of the state executive. A second stage consisted of extension of the franchise so that greater numbers could participate formally in the political system, strengthening the legitimacy of claims to represent the nation. At the start of our period regimes were either autocratic (with no sharing of powers by the monarchy with a representative body) or plutocratic (wherein the members of a representative body were chosen by a small, male, elite). By 1914 most states had representative institutions of one sort or another, although the powers held by these bodies, especially the ability to hold governments accountable, varied considerably. None of the states was fully democratic; women were still excluded and the proportion of enfranchised adult males also varied from state to state. But even when these limitations are taken into account, the process of democratization remains striking.

Mass politics does not consist simply of enfranchisement; rights of expression, assembly, and association are also fundamental. In recent times historians have paid growing attention to the emergence of what is termed “civil society” – in essence, the establishment of nongovernmental organizations and institutions that contribute to the formation of public opinion. Here we find a progression that ran roughly parallel to the process of democratization. Until the revolutions of 1848, and then again in the 1850s, rights of expression were narrowly restricted in most states. In consequence, opposition often took the path of clandestine publication or indirect allusion. Nevertheless, several long-term developments corroded the ability of regimes to repress criticism or control opinion. Expanding literacy spread political consciousness. Technological and marketing innovations reduced the costs of publication and improvements in transportation and communications facilitated dissemination. Economic growth increased the number of individuals or families who possessed sufficient wealth and leisure time to become better informed, and who believed themselves qualified to have some say in matters of government. The impact of such developments was gradual and more pronounced in some states than in others; all the same, the ability of states to control opinion through censorship or restrictions on publishing rights had dramatically declined by the Great War.

Equally consequential was expansion in the number and size of voluntary associations. Although most states initially sought to repress political organization, allegedly cultural associations often served as a cover for political discussion and
ambition. Formation of economic and professional organizations also could have significant political consequences. Attempts by the state to control such formations slowly declined, partly due to sheer force of numbers, and partly because elite elements often joined voluntary associations. By the 1870s much of Europe had contracted what came to be termed an “association mania” and the trend accelerated thereafter. Some theorists have posited that voluntary associations are inherently liberal in that they provide a counterpoint, and hence limit, to state authority. Not all such associations were necessarily tolerant of the right of others to organize however, and some lobbied for increase in state power. One way or another, increased freedom of expression and association made politics more complex by adding to the number of voices making at times conflicting demands upon governments.

Early in the century advocates of reform often saw in representative government the means to correct unjust government and rectify social problems. Much of the politics of the century thus consisted of battle to establish parliaments, to strengthen parliaments in relation to state executives, and to extend franchises. To establish a representative system of government was one thing, however; to make such a system effective in the provision of good government was another. It took time and experience to find an effective balance between the claims of the state and of representative bodies, and to develop parties capable of representing the masses in a disciplined fashion. Already by the 1880s anti-parliamentary mass movements had entered the scene. They would remain on the fringes of power until 1914; nevertheless they were an ominous portent that mass politics might not necessarily lead to democracy and representative government.

How did elites respond to the emergence of mass politics? The first point to note is that members of the socioeconomic elite were divided in their attitudes toward political regimes and ideological systems. While some individuals embraced, or accepted a need for, extension of political rights, others sought to resist. Among the latter, repression was initially the primary recourse, but especially after 1848 conservatives increasingly sought to accommodate demand for change by adopting systems that gave an appearance of representative government while denying its substance. Elections could be vitiated if the state managed to control them. Even where elections were free of state control, their import would be limited if representative institutions possessed little independent power. The Napoleonic formula of government allegedly for the people, but not by the people, remained much in evidence in 1914.

If the challenge of how best to adjust to mass politics remained unresolved, much had nevertheless changed. How did change come about? Alteration of political systems was achieved by two principal means – gradually by reform or rapidly by revolution. The paths of reform and revolution were not entirely separate and their relationship was complex. The cause of reform could be strengthened or weakened by the threat of revolution, and the possibility of revolution might be increased or diminished by reform. Whichever the means, the
chances of success were greatest when a combination of elite and non-elite elements challenged unpopular regimes. Yet even when the latter scenario existed, the position taken by the military, or the militaries of the great powers, could still prove determinant. Ultimately there was no single formula for change and much depended on specific context. It thus makes sense to start by considering the context in which the long nineteenth century began.
During the writing of this book my colleagues Penny Bryden, Simon Devereaux, Andrea McKenzie, Tom Saunders, and David Zimmerman offered helpful advice at various points, and Dr. Bryden also read the manuscript, seeking to reduce the number of errors and infelicities I had committed. I would also like to thank the three anonymous readers and general editor John Stevenson for their insightful and constructive criticism and suggestions. None of the above individuals are, of course, in any way responsible for any remaining imperfections, which are attributable solely to me. The work was much longer in the making than I had initially proposed and so I am especially grateful for the patience and forbearance shown me by Tessa Harvey, commissioning editor, and Gillian Kane, editorial assistant, and all of the people at Wiley-Blackwell with whom I have worked. Tenured faculty are fortunate creatures and I also very much appreciate the periods of sabbatical leave granted to me by the University of Victoria for the undertaking of this project. Above all, I wish to thank Penny and Lizzie, to whom this work is dedicated.
A World Half Restored
The Vienna Settlement and the Restoration Regimes

After the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, the treaties that constituted the Vienna Settlement redefined the borders of most European states, and in many cases determined the regimes that would rule those states. Consideration of the Settlement thus provides an opportunity to introduce nineteenth-century European politics. Domestic and foreign policies were intricately linked, and decision-making was restricted to narrow elites. Much as they might have liked to, statesmen could not, however, simply reverse all of the change that had occurred since the outbreak of the Revolution of 1789. Certain elements of the pre-1789 social and political order were so badly damaged or decayed that they could not be restored, and in some cases it was in the interests of the powers to maintain legacies of the Revolutionary-Napoleonic era. The powers thus created a new order that combined traditional elements of the ancien régime (old order) with institutions, laws, conventions and practices of more recent vintage.

When they gathered at Vienna in September 1814, delegates of the smaller states held great expectations. An article of the First Peace of Paris, signed on May 30, 1814, had called on the powers previously engaged in the Napoleonic Wars to convene for a congress that would reorganize Europe after the collapse of the French Empire. Many delegates thought they were summoned to a constituent assembly in which they could exercise influence. Although the four great powers (Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria) did want ratification by the other states, they had already agreed that they alone would make decisions as to territorial distribution. Emperor Francis I of Austria attempted to divert the delegates, sovereigns, princely families, and lobby groups of the lesser states with lavish entertainment organized by a festivals committee. Between 40 and 50 tables were set at the Hofburg Palace.
for banquets at which diners could plow their way through eight courses each evening. Nevertheless, frustrated dignitaries often wasted time quarreling over minor matters of precedence; given that they felt they had been invited under false pretences, endemic bickering was to be expected. They did have input in certain issues. Delegates from the minor powers participated in constitutional committees for Switzerland and a new German Confederation, and in a committee that developed new guidelines for diplomatic protocol. All the same, the great powers reserved the most vital considerations for themselves. Viewed from this perspective, the Congress of Vienna can be seen as a harbinger of a century in which regimes sought approval without accepting genuine accountability (Figure 1.1).

Initially there were four principal power brokers: Lord Castlereagh, the British foreign minister, Tsar Alexander I of Russia, Prince Metternich, the Austrian foreign minister, and Prince von Hardenberg, Prussian chancellor and foreign minister. Although Alexander’s mercurial temperament caused conflict, he was determined to maintain his prestige as the “liberator” of Europe and would compromise at crucial moments so as to avoid isolation. Due to the distance between Vienna and London, Castlereagh could act with considerable independence, but he adhered to broad policy outlines established well before the Congress. Given that Britain had no continental territorial ambitions, Castlereagh was well placed
to play the role of “honest broker”; nevertheless his self-righteousness was irritating – Alexander disliked being told that his policies were not in the interests of the Russian people. Metternich believed that his diplomatic cunning had brought the fall of Napoleon and was convinced that “error never had access to my mind.” Despite the machinations of rivals at the Austrian court, he had solid backing from his sovereign during confrontations with the Tsar. Having to contend with the devotion of King Frederick William III to Alexander, Hardenberg was more constrained in pursuing Prussian objectives. Prussia’s position as the weakest of the powers meant that while it was the most avid for gain, it was the least able to stand against the others. By January 1815 Prince Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the French foreign minister, had wormed his way into the decision-making of the great powers. Initially Talleyrand set himself up as the spokesman of the smaller states. While the other powers politely listened to his arguments, they were not swayed; it was a squabble among the four that gained Talleyrand a say. Once the directing council of four had become a council of five, Talleyrand happily dropped the guise of representing the smaller states.

In the Final Act, the ultimate statement of the Congress signed on June 9, 1815, the principle of “legitimacy” was strongly emphasized as a foundational principle. Espoused particularly by Talleyrand, an aristocratic former clergyman who had advocated state sequestration of Church lands during the Revolution and served Napoleon in typically treacherous fashion as foreign minister, “legitimacy” loosely implied that the regimes overthrown from 1789 onward should be reconstituted. However, while statement of the principle served rhetorically to repudiate all that had been created by the Revolution and Napoleon, “legitimacy” was set aside whenever it conflicted with more fundamental objectives. Three main priorities guided the Settlement: reduction of French power, rewards for the four great powers for their part in dethroning Bonaparte, and establishment of a rough equilibrium of power.

Reduction of French power occurred in two stages. The First Peace of Paris was lenient. The French would give up claims to lands beyond their 1792 borders, but they would retain certain acquisitions made after 1789 – Avignon, the Venaissin, and parts of Savoy, the Palatinate, and Belgium. Captured French colonies would be returned, although Britain would retain Tobago and Santa Lucia in the West Indies, and Mauritius, Rodriguez, and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. In granting generous terms, the powers had several considerations in mind. Having reinstalled the Bourbon dynasty, they wanted to enhance the regime’s prospects for maintaining rule in France. They also wanted to reconcile the French public to the new European order they envisaged; hence King Louis XVIII was obliged to grant a constitution that included provisions for a parliament. Finally, they also wanted to maintain a French state sufficiently strong that it could play a part in maintaining equilibrium of power on the Continent. Such calculations had to be adjusted after Napoleon re-established his rule at Paris on March 20, 1815. The statesmen gathered at Vienna carried on with their deliberations, refused to deal
with Bonaparte, and marshaled their forces for a second onslaught on the “usurper.” By June 18 the French army had been defeated at Waterloo, and on June 22 Napoleon was again forced to abdicate.

What to do with the French? The Second Peace of Paris, signed on November 20, 1815, fell somewhere between the leniency of the first treaty and the demands of the Prussians, who pressed for dismemberment. French borders would recede to those of 1790 and several fortresses on the northern and eastern frontiers would be yielded. The French must pay an indemnity of 700 million francs within three to five years, support an army of occupation of 150,000 men until final payment, and return previously looted art treasures. Subsequent French desire to revise the Vienna Settlement sprang partly from wounded pride, and partly from the fact that while forcing France to disgorge her acquisitions, the other powers consolidated or extended their own.

Before assessing territorial redistribution, it is instructive to note what was not on the table. The British had already ensured that there would be no discussion of their navy’s “right” to stop and search neutral shipping in times of war, and overseas colonies seized by the British would be considered only in so much as the British wished them to be. Similarly, Russian acquisition of Finland and Bessarabia were accepted as a fait accompli.

The main battles occurred over Poland and Saxony. Alexander wanted to reconstitute Napoleon’s Grand Duchy of Warsaw with himself as ruler. He did not intend to include the lands Russia had seized during the eighteenth-century partitions of Poland, although he pressed Prussia and Austria to yield the provinces they had taken. Given Russian presence in the Duchy, Alexander was strongly positioned, though he overstated the matter when he alleged “there can be no argument with six hundred thousand troops.” The Prussians were willing to agree, provided they were compensated in Saxony, which had made the mistake of realigning with Napoleon in mid-1813. Neither Russian expansion in Poland nor Prussian expansion in Saxony appealed, however, to Metternich, and Castlereagh wanted Prussia to be compensated in the Rhineland. Clashes between former allies turned ferocious and at one point Alexander gave Metternich a dressing down that, according to Talleyrand, “would have been thought extraordinary even toward one of one’s own servants.” It was this dangerous rift that enabled Talleyrand to gain France an alliance with Britain and Austria in early January 1815. Whether the alliance was more than a bluff is questionable; yet news of it soon convinced Alexander to compromise, mostly by sacrificing the demands of Prussia.

The powers would create a new “Congress” Poland with Alexander as monarch. Austria would retain the province of Galicia, with Cracow constituted as a free city. Prussia would retain Danzig and the province of Posen, but yield the rest of her Polish acquisitions. Ultimately, Congress Poland amounted to about three-quarters the size of Napoleon’s Grand Duchy, itself a pale reflection of the former Polish state. The Prussians had to settle for taking roughly two-fifths of Saxony; the rest remained an independent state. Fortuitous Prussian acquisition of the former
Duchy of Westphalia and of lands on the left bank of the Rhine would, however, provide the base for subsequent industrial power.

Austria made gains principally in the Italian peninsula. Austria reacquired the province of Lombardy and annexed Venetia, including a strip of territory along the Dalmatian coast. Elsewhere highly dependent regimes were established, often with Habsburgs as rulers. Marie Louise, wife of Napoleon, but more importantly daughter of Austrian Emperor Francis I, became the ruler of Parma. Archduke Ferdinand, brother of Francis, was reinstated as Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Grand Duke Francis IV, a cousin of the Austrian Emperor, was re-established as ruler of Modena. Ferdinand IV of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, a Spanish Bourbon, was tied to the Habsburgs through marriage and owed his acquisition of Naples partly to a promise to Metternich that he would not grant the Neapolitans a constitution. Moreover Ferdinand rescinded a parliament previously gained, due to British influence, by Sicilian landowners. Austria also played the principal role in the Papacy’s recovery of most of its former possessions; Metternich would have to negotiate traditional Papal antipathy to Austrian domination of Italy, but he could hope that support from the Church would help secure conservative rule throughout Austria’s sphere of influence.

British policy reflected shrewd calculation of global interests. British gains consisted partly of securing recognition of far-flung maritime acquisitions that secured naval supremacy. Bases at Heligoland in the North Sea, Malta in the Mediterranean, the Cape Colony in the southern tip of Africa, Ceylon in the Indian Ocean, and Santa Lucia, Tobago, and Trinidad in the Caribbean provided opportunities to control trade routes. British interests were also pursued by Castlereagh’s efforts to ensure that no power could dominate the continent. Re-establishment of Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch independence worked to Britain’s advantage. Conversely, Castlereagh’s advocacy of abolition of the slave trade sprang from a humanitarian impulse. Lobbying at Vienna yielded a declaration condemning the practice, and various inducements led Holland and Sweden to join Britain and Denmark in decreeing total abolition in 1815. In pursuit of liberal support, Napoleon had decreed abolition in French colonies during his brief return, and thereafter Louis XVIII felt obliged to follow suit. Although Spain and Portugal proved harder nuts to crack, cash payments, beginning in 1817, induced them to sign agreements to suppress the trade, initially north of the equator, and then totally.

For a long time historians have argued that above all the great powers sought a balance of power, but this interpretation has been challenged by Paul W. Schroeder. The term “balance of power” has a liability in that it implies a system wherein the leading states have roughly the same amount of power. Such was not the case in 1815; Britain and Russia were significantly stronger than the other powers. What in fact was achieved was an equilibrium wherein none of the powers could unilaterally dominate the continent. Such equilibrium was fostered partly by creation of intermediary states whose independence was guaranteed in law by the great powers. Intermediary states could act as buffers between the powers, and their
mere existence would make any drive for hegemony more difficult. The notion of “equilibrium” is not, however, entirely novel; earlier historians tended to use the terms “balance” and “equilibrium” interchangeably, without clearly distinguishing between the two. Given this scenario, rather than eliminate use of the term “balance of power,” it seems more appropriate to employ Schroeder’s notion of equilibrium as a more precise definition of what balance of power actually meant.

Equilibrium was achieved partly by surrounding France with states better able to defend themselves. Prussian expansion in the Rhineland was directed toward this end; so too was Dutch acquisition of the southern Netherlands (Belgium), Luxembourg, and a small parcel of land along the left bank of the Rhine. Piedmont-Sardinia gained through annexation of the former Republic of Genoa. Switzerland added three cantons (Geneva, Valais and Neufchatel), and by adopting a constitution negotiated at Vienna acquired an international guarantee of her neutrality.

Arrangements in central Europe were guided by desire to provide security for the German states. There was no attempt to restore the three hundred or so states that had comprised the Holy Roman Empire; internal divisions had made the latter far too vulnerable to French expansion. Thus much of the concentration instigated by Napoleon, including significant enlargement of Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria, was retained. The remaining 38 states, including Prussia and Austria, would combine in a German Confederation headed by the Austrian Emperor. The Confederation was in essence an organization for mutual defense rather than a step toward creation of a unified German state.

The Nature of the Restored Regimes

Legitimacy thus played little part in territorial distribution. Nor did re-established regimes constitute a full-blooded reversion to the ancien régime. The latter point becomes obvious if we consider several legacies of the Revolutionary-Napoleonic era.

Although the Revolution began in France in 1789 as an attack on royal despotism, it soon extended into the realm of social relations. In their attempt to create a regime which could be held accountable, the revolutionaries started with the principle of national sovereignty. To delimit the function of the state, revolutionaries drew up a constitution that proclaimed certain “natural” rights, and divided power between the government and a legislature of elected representatives of the nation. Among these rights were freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of association. Simultaneously, the revolutionaries also attacked social privilege. One set of laws would apply to all social groups, entry into state office would be based on merit, all would be subject to taxation, and any remaining seigniorial obligations would be abolished. Pursuit of equality often entailed a drive for uniformity and hence the Revolution brought destruction to a
broad array of corporate privileges, ranging from guild monopolies to regional exemptions from taxes. It also inspired a secularizing trend that eroded the status of the Catholic Church. The ideal of equality had limited impact on gender relations; women did make gains in family law, but they were excluded from the political sphere. All the same, the Revolution enunciated a template of ideals that inspired advocates of change throughout the nineteenth century.

The Revolution also fostered increased expectations of what the state should do. Especially during the period of radical Jacobin ascendancy, governments began state provision of social services that included mass education and aid for the impoverished. Such programs collapsed under the strains of war, but their short-term existence provided examples for the future. More immediately consequential was a conservative backlash against the chaos that ensued from too much rapid change. As much of France (and a good deal of the rest of Europe) fell into virtual anarchy, desire rose for a state capable of maintaining order. Bonaparte exploited such desire to develop a state in which power was highly centralized. The Napoleonic model of government was by no means as intrusive as twentieth-century totalitarian regimes; nevertheless, a major part of Napoleonic rule lay in enhancing the repressive capacity of the state. Like his Revolutionary predecessors, Bonaparte spread French institutions and laws to conquered lands. The Revolution thus had extensive impact outside France, but in the long run political liberty advanced more as a shared ideal than as a practical reality.

Napoleon knew that prosperity served as an antidote to opposition and hence his administrators busied themselves with compiling information about society and the economy. The Imperial penchant for economic planning was far from the command economies of the twentieth century, and its inspiration can be located in the reforming impulse of enlightened despotism. All the same, the Napoleonic state was significantly more developed than its ancien régime predecessors, and its impulse to render the public docile through provision of material needs was stronger.\(^5\)

Using these three broad, and at times contradictory, Revolutionary-Napoleonic legacies—creation of liberal, if not democratic, rule, fostering of civil equality, and enhancement of state power, we now can turn to the Restoration regimes, asking to what extent they constituted a return to the pre-Revolutionary era.

### Constitutional Monarchies

With the exception of Switzerland, European states were organized as dynastic monarchies. Among the latter there was a rough division between autocracies and constitutional monarchies wherein rulers shared power with parliaments. The leading constitutional monarchies were Britain and France.

Of all the European states, the one least in need of “restoration” was Britain. The French Revolution had actually impeded political change, although the Act of