

# Europe as a Pentarchy? - Peacekeeping, Balance of Power, and the Congress System as Early Forms of European Integration

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## Abstract

*This paper discusses the cooperative potential of the great power system in post-Napoleonic Europe – the Pentarchy – and argues that the predominant policies of peacekeeping and “balance of power” as well as the short period of regular diplomatic congresses after 1815 point towards an early form of European integration. It thereby challenges the prevalent narrative of the process of European unification as a unique development that only began after World War II. The possibilities for and tendencies towards inter-state cooperation and supranational governance within the framework of the Pentarchy are shown by examining three of its successive core characteristics: firstly, a general understanding to avoid bellicose conflicts to keep the peace and ensure political stability during the monarchist restoration; secondly, a highly dynamic balance of power policy to facilitate peacekeeping and to counter hegemonic ambitions of any great power; and thirdly, the institutionalised format of the Congress system to jointly resolve European affairs and balance great power interests during regular meetings. Based on diplomatic documents and treaties as well as the observations of statesmen, politicians and political commentators, the analysis shows how the Pentarchy created spaces for increased cooperation between European states and conservative governments with concurrent interests. Consequently, the paper dismisses the topos of the nineteenth century as the era of the isolated nation-state and argues that the Pentarchy system functioned as a precursor of modern European integration.*

## Introduction

European integration is often understood as a process of post-1945 unification, which is primarily a consequence of the devastating wars of the first half of the twentieth century. It is seen as a project meant to ensure peace and prosperity in the form of a continually intensifying cooperation between European states.<sup>251</sup> This narrative is mainly based on economic and politico-economic institutions and depicts the development from the European Coal and Steel Community towards the European Union as an almost teleological pattern in history. There is no room in this story for the developments before 1945, without which European integration can hardly be explained. The demarcation of European integration in the post-war period from European history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is still clearly recognisable in historiography, thus still makes the current political unification process appear as a unique phenomenon anchored exclusively in contemporary history.<sup>252</sup>

In this paper, I transfer the idea of a political union of Europe into the nineteenth century and discuss the so-called *Pentarchy*<sup>253</sup> of the great powers as a precursor of modern European integration. Of course, the state system created after 1815 cannot be equated with the numerous supranational institutions of the EU. But the politics of balance of power and transnational congresses of the post-Napoleonic *Concert of Europe*<sup>254</sup> are connected to a relatively peaceful

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<sup>251</sup> See e.g. Bruno Zandonella, "Europäische Integration," in *Pocket Europa. EU-Begriffe und Länderdaten*, ed. Bruno Zandonella (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), accessed September 15, 2022, <https://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/lexika/pocket-europa/16687/europaeische-integration>; or Otto Schmuck, "Motive und Leitbilder der europäischen Einigung," *Informationen zur politischen Bildung* 279 (2015): 7-16.

<sup>252</sup> Wolfram Kaiser criticises the lack of "connections across World War II," see Wolfram Kaiser, "From Isolation to Centrality. Contemporary History Meets European Studies," in *European Union History. Themes and Debates*, ed. Wolfram Kaiser and Antonio Varsori (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 45-65, here 50.

<sup>253</sup> The terms "Pentarchy" and "Concert of Europe" are often used interchangeably (see footnote 4), but the former is less common and could describe any rule of five. It is used as a description of the European state system e.g. in Irby C. Nichols, *The European Pentarchy and the Congress of Verona, 1822* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971); or in Hugo Hantsch, "Metternich und Europa," *Der Donauraum. Zeitschrift des Instituts für den Donauraum und Mitteleuropa* 10, no. 4 (1965): 193-203, here 197; or in Paul W. Schroeder, "Did the Vienna Settlement Rest on a Balance of Power?" *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (1992): 683-706, here 688.

<sup>254</sup> "Concert of Europe" is the prevalent term describing the European Pentarchy in the nineteenth century and is often used in the historiography of international relations, see e.g. Richard B. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe. A

era, and they bore institutionalised features – which this paper will argue can be seen as an early form of European integration.

Analysing early forms of integration is not a new field of historical research, especially regarding the nineteenth century. I refer to the works of Hartmut Kaelble, Claude Conter, Ulrich Lappenküper, Guido Thiemeyer and Isabel Tölle.<sup>255</sup> In many cases, research focuses on a cultural or social history of Europe, the emergence of a European self-perception, or the economic coalescence of the continent. The political perspective, however, is somewhat neglected – the nineteenth century is perceived as the era of national movements and nation-states inhibiting any form of integration. René Girault observes the principle that the stronger the nation-states get, the more Europe falls apart.<sup>256</sup>

This statement can hardly be rejected in the face of the national wars of unification in the nineteenth century and the world wars of the twentieth century. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that the European state system of the nineteenth century functioned as a Concert with certain patterns of interstate cooperation, and even a policy of international congresses to settle European issues.<sup>257</sup> So even if national interests were paramount: diplomacy and policies on the European level remain an indispensable field of research to understand the

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Fresh Look at an International System,” *World Politics* 28, no. 2 (1976): 159-174; Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe,” *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991): 114-161; Branislav L. Slantchev, “Territory and Commitment. The Concert of Europe as Self-Enforcing Equilibrium,” *Security Studies* 14, no. 4 (2005); see also Claude D. Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten und Modeeuropäer. Antriebskräfte des Europadiskurses zwischen 1815 und 1848,” in *Europäische Einigung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Akteure und Antriebskräfte*, ed. Ulrich Lappenküper and Guido Thiemeyer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), 23-43, here 30-32.

<sup>255</sup> See e.g. Hartmut Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa. Die Entstehung des europäischen Selbstverständnisses im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2001); Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten”; Guido Thiemeyer and Isabel Tölle, “Supranationalität im 19. Jahrhundert? Die Beispiele der Zentralkommission für die Rheinschifffahrt und des Octroivertrages 1804-1851,” *Journal of European Integration History* 17, no. 2 (2011): 177-196.

<sup>256</sup> “[...] eine für lange Zeit gültige Gesetzmäßigkeit [...]: je mehr sich der Nationalstaat konsolidiert, desto mehr fällt Europa auseinander und desto weniger können europäische Institutionen gegründet werden,” René Girault, “Das Europa der Historiker,” in *Europa im Blick der Historiker*, ed. Rainer Hudemann, Hartmut Kaelble and Klaus Schwabe (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 1995), 55-90, here 63. Translation done by the author.

<sup>257</sup> Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 30-32.

history and origins of modern European integration processes. It is in this sense that Eric Hobsbawm writes about the emergence of Europe as a community of states as well as an idea: “First, it emerged as an international state system”.<sup>258</sup>

I want to discuss three characteristics of the integrative potential of the state system created after 1815. Firstly, I will focus on peacekeeping as a main objective of the Concert of Europe and as a cooperation basis for European governments; secondly, I want to highlight the balance of power politics within the Pentarchy as the guiding principle to facilitate the collaboration of the great powers; and thirdly, I will discuss the already mentioned policy of international congresses as an institutionalised supranational format of negotiation. These three aspects cannot be discussed in all their complexity – the goal is to show their neglected European dimension. Although the Pentarchy and the Concert of Europe persisted in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century respectively, I will only focus on the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>259</sup> As primary sources, I use mostly diplomatic documents presenting the cooperation within the Pentarchy, or political observations by German-speaking critics of the post-Napoleonic state-system.

### **Peacekeeping and restoration as a pan-European task**

After the Napoleonic wars, a system of states was established in Europe that was largely controlled by five great powers. This Pentarchy consisted of the “Big Four and France”<sup>260</sup>, i.e. the most important members of the anti-Napoleonic alliance – Russia, Prussia, Austria and Great Britain – as well as France, whose status as a great power was preserved (or restored) in the course of the Congress of Vienna.<sup>261</sup> At this Congress, the European states not only redrew

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<sup>258</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 225.

<sup>259</sup> More explicitly, this means the years between 1815 and 1853. The Crimean War (1853-56) was the first major war between European great powers since the Napoleonic Wars, and is considered a turning point, if not the end of the European Concert, see Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts,” 122; or Slantchev, “Territory,” 601-604.

<sup>260</sup> Slantchev, “Territory,” 585.

<sup>261</sup> See Ulrich Lappenküper, “Frühformen politischer Einigung Europas. Metternich und das Europäische Konzert,” in *Europäische Einigung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Akteure und Antriebskräfte*, ed. Ulrich

the political borders of the continent – they also began the process of establishing a European system of peacekeeping and equilibrium, carried by the five great powers, to counter revolutionary upheavals as well as hegemonic aspirations of any single power.<sup>262</sup>

This already hints at the balance of power policy explained below. In any case, securing the status quo of the Congress of Vienna was an objective to be achieved by avoiding bellicose conflicts and suppressing revolutionary tendencies. The twenty-five years of conflict during and after the French Revolution had highlighted the transnational nature of war and revolution throughout Europe, which is why equally international cooperation of conservative and monarchist forces seemed necessary to avoid them.<sup>263</sup> Prince Metternich, often regarded as the architect of the “Vienna Settlement”<sup>264</sup>, therefore considered the cooperation of European governments to be indispensable for the preservation of peace, especially in terms of the suppression of revolutionary movements:

It is time for all the governments of Europe, whatever their constitutional form, to realise that solitary action is no longer equal to the gravity of the malady; that the common cause of them all is at stake; that they must act, in the same spirit and by joint measures [...] and that the necessity of their self-preservation imposes upon them the duty of helping each other of their own free will [...].<sup>265</sup>

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Lappenküper and Guido Thiemeyer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), 117-135, here 119; for a detailed description see Henry Kissinger, “The Congress of Vienna. A Reappraisal,” *World Politics* 8, no. 2 (1956): 264-280, here 268, 276.

<sup>262</sup> Günter Wollstein, “Europa unter Modernisierungsdruck,” *Informationen zur politischen Bildung* 265 (2010): par. 13, accessed September 16, 2022, <http://www.bpb.de/izpb/9870/europa-unter-modernisierungsdruck?p=all>.

<sup>263</sup> See e.g. Lappenküper, “Frühformen,” 124-29. A good example is the “Circulaire finale” of the Congress of Verona, “Kongress von Verona IX. Circulaire finale,” in *Mächtekongresse 1818–1822*, ed. Karin Schneider (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018), accessed September 17, 2022, [https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/pages/show.html?document=Verona\\_IX\\_1.xml&directory=editions](https://maechtekongresse.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/pages/show.html?document=Verona_IX_1.xml&directory=editions).

<sup>264</sup> Schroeder, “Vienna Settlement,” 638; see also Slantchev, “Territory,” 569.

<sup>265</sup> “*Es ist Zeit, daß alle Regierungen Europas, welches auch immer ihre Verfassungsform sein mag, zu der Einsicht gelangen, daß isolierte Maßnahmen der Schwere des Übels nicht mehr gewachsen sind; daß es um ihrer aller gemeinsame Sache geht; daß sie handeln müssen, im gleichen Geist und durch gemeinsame Maßnahmen [...] und daß die Notwendigkeit ihrer Selbsterhaltung ihnen die Pflicht auferlegt, einander aus freien Stücken zu helfen [...]*,” “Instruktion Metternichs an den österreichischen Gesandten in der Schweiz Baron von Binder,” June 9, 1826, in *Quellen zur Ära Metternich*, ed. Elisabeth Droß (Darmstadt: wbg Academic, 1999), 124-125, here 125. Translation done by the author.

The differences between the Pentarchy states are thus emphasised far less than their similarities, and the latter are justified by the commitment against a common enemy in the form of revolutionary movements.<sup>266</sup> The suppression of democratic and liberal forces in the course of the conservative-monarchical restoration was particularly severe in Prussia, Russia and Austria: After the victory over France, the three monarchies concluded the so-called Holy Alliance “to protect religion, peace and justice”.<sup>267</sup> Although the actual influence of this alliance has often been overestimated, the fact that all European states except Great Britain and the Papal States joined the alliance shows that there was a general agreement and willingness to cooperate between them, even to the point of creating political treaties and rules<sup>268</sup> – although it should be noted that the treaty of the monarchs merely formulated a rather vague “rule of conduct”.<sup>269</sup> This policy of internal repression and external peace advocated by these governments was opposed by liberals and nationalists who doubted the stability of the Viennese order and saw in nation-states a greater chance for a peaceful and secure political framework for Europe.<sup>270</sup> This was particularly the case in central Europe, since the German Confederation created in 1815 did not satisfy the expectations regarding a unified German state. According to Wollstein, the loose, federal architecture of the Confederation made it a “buffer in the centre of Europe”<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> The “Circulaire” of Verona laments the way in which the “honest and sincere intentions of the monarchs” are perceived and misinterpreted: “[...] *les fausses alarmes, les interprétations hostiles, les prédictions sinistres que l'ignorance et la mauvaise foi avaient fait retentir en Europe pour égarer l'opinion des peuples sur les intentions franches et loyales des Monarques!*”, and continues to describe the objective of the monarchs: “*résister à la révolution; prévenir les désordres, les crimes, les calamités innombrables [...]; y rétablir l'ordre et la paix [...]* – tel a été l'unique objet des pensées et des efforts des Monarques,” see “Kongress von Verona IX. Circulaire finale”. Translation done by the author.

<sup>267</sup> “[...] *pour protéger la religion, la paix et la justice,*” “Sainte Alliance entre L. L. M. M. l'Empereur de toutes les Russies, l'Empereur d'Autriche et le Roi de Prusse, signé à Paris le 26 Septembre 1815,” in *Corpus iuris Confoederationis Germanicae oder Staatsacten für Geschichte und öffentliches Recht des Deutschen Bundes*, 1: Staatsverträge, ed. Philipp A. G. Meyer (Frankfurt a.M.: H. L. Brönnner, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1858), 290-291, here 290. Translation done by the author.

<sup>268</sup> Lappenküper, “Frühformen,” 122-123; Stella Ghervas, “Ein Palimpsest für den Frieden. Die Heilige Allianz und das Ende des französischen Empire,” in *Die Heilige Allianz. Entstehung - Wirkung - Rezeption*, ed. Anselm Schubert and Wolfram Pyta (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2018), 61-78, here 61, 64, 77.

<sup>269</sup> “[...] *règle de leur conduit,*” “Sainte Alliance,” 290. Translation done by the author.

<sup>270</sup> Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa*, 55-56.

<sup>271</sup> “[...] *Puffer in der Mitte Europas,*” Wollstein, “Europa,” par. 15. Translation done by the author.

which had been used as a repressive instrument by Metternich since 1819 at the latest. The German Confederation certainly corresponded to the restorative approach of the Pentarchy and its restrained foreign policy, but in the eyes of the national movement it remained a danger for the entire continent: the liberal German writer and politician Johann Georg August Wirth wrote that without a unified Germany there could be no stable organisation and salvation for Europe: “without it [i.e. the political unity of Germany] there is [...] no prospect of a durable organisation of this part of the world and no salvation for Europe!”<sup>272</sup>

It is certainly possible to interpret the fear of national unrest and revolution as a driving force behind the political actions of the European cabinets, which subsequently depended on a general peacekeeping policy. According to Richard Elwood, the great powers thus had “the responsibility of preserving the peace of Europe and of protecting a European society menaced by revolutionary principles”<sup>273</sup>. Whether a European society existed as such, or whether the cabinets and statesmen perceived themselves and their political agenda primarily as “European” is highly debatable – but the necessity of peace and the implementation of a pan-European peacekeeping policy certainly had an integrative effect. According to Conter, the European elites made genuinely European decisions<sup>274</sup> that contributed to securing peace on the continent. Probably the most important cornerstone of this peace order was the balance of power between the great powers. In the following section, the balance of power within the Pentarchy will therefore be explained in more detail.

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<sup>272</sup> “[...] ohne sie [i.e. die politische Einheit Deutschlands] giebt es [...] keine Aussicht zu dauerhafter Organisation des Welttheils und kein Heil für Europa!” Johann G. A. Wirth, *Die politische Reform Deutschlands. Noch ein dringendes Wort an die deutschen Volksfreunde* (Strasbourg: privately printed, 1832), 15; see also Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa*, 55-56. Translation done by the author.

<sup>273</sup> Elrod, “The Concert of Europe,” 164.

<sup>274</sup> “[...] genuin europäische Entscheidungen,” Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 30. Translation done by the author.

## **Balance of Power as a security strategy**

However necessary inter-state cooperation was to preserve peace and the status quo – there remained a strong reluctance towards a supranational European unity, as Hartmut Kaelble explains.<sup>275</sup> This was due to the widespread fear, amplified by the Napoleonic campaigns, of a hegemonic country under the guise of European unification. Such apprehensions gave rise to the Pentarchy after 1815, a multipolar system in which the ambitions of individual great powers were kept in check by the others. The character of this system has been much debated – and it remains unclear whether the emerging Concert of the five great powers was a self-perpetuating system of equilibrium without political vision, a conservative restoration project supported by active balance politics, or whether there were actually five great powers involved at all.<sup>276</sup>

What is undisputed, however, is the general observation that there was a balance of power based on several states. This should not obscure the fact that terms such as *equilibrium* or *balance of power* are highly problematic: Randall Schweller calls the latter “a notoriously slippery, murky, and protean term, endlessly debated and variously defined”<sup>277</sup> and refers to seven different meanings, while Paul W. Schroeder even lists eleven possible interpretations.<sup>278</sup> In view of the small scope of this paper, I will consider *balance of power* according to a brief and simple definition by Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, who refers to its processual character and explains it as follows: “a policy to prevent a bid for hegemony of one of the Great Powers, by

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<sup>275</sup> “[...] Zurückhaltung [...] gegenüber einer supranationalen Einheit Europas,” Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa*, 58. Translation done by the author.

<sup>276</sup> See Maartje Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals. Great Power Politics, 1815-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 39-46; Paul W. Schroeder, “The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century International System. Changes in the Structure,” *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986): 1-26, here 9-10; Slantchev, “Territory,” 565-567, 573-575.

<sup>277</sup> Randall L. Schweller, “The Balance of Power in World Politics,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2016): 1-20, here 1.

<sup>278</sup> Schweller, “The Balance of Power,” 3-4; Paul W. Schroeder, “The nineteenth century system. Balance of power or political equilibrium?” *Review of International Studies* 15 (1989): 135-153, here 137.



the threat of the other Great Powers allying against it.”<sup>279</sup> Thus, the cooperation of the great powers was encouraged and enforced, even though their rivalry never ended.

This pattern of interpretation corresponds perfectly to the political situation after 1815.<sup>280</sup> Even at the Congress of Vienna, various camps and coalitions were formed that balanced each other out, and often the political balancing manoeuvres were characterised by cooperation and power struggle in equal measure.<sup>281</sup> It is hardly surprising that the national and democratic forces saw reason to criticise such diplomatic trade-offs and political moves: Wirth portrays the dynastic balance of power policy based on the equality of “physical masses” as ridiculous and nonsensical. In his view, a “natural” equilibrium could only be established through freedom and (national) identity of all peoples.<sup>282</sup>

However, there is no such balance of “physical masses” per se, at least when one considers the distribution of power between the individual great powers. Some historians have therefore further subdivided the European system of states; Maartje Abbenhuis, for example, assumes two hegemonic powers (Great Britain and Russia) and three middle powers (Austria, France, Prussia).<sup>283</sup> Prussia was the weakest great power, a fact that was not lost on contemporaries. The inferiority of the Prussian state in terms of area, demographics and military strength, especially in relation to its eastern neighbour, even led critics of the Hohenzollern monarchy to

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<sup>279</sup> Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, “Balance of Power, History of,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2015), 345-348, here 345.

<sup>280</sup> It should be noted that the principles of a European Pentarchy and equilibrium already shaped the political situation in eighteenth century Europe, see e.g. Wolfgang Schmale, “Europa als Topos der Geschichtsschreibung,” in *Auf der Suche nach einem Phantom? Widerspiegelungen Europas in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Georg Michels (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2003), 45-67, here 54-55; for a detailed overview of the developments in the eighteenth century I recommend Heinz Duchhardt, *Balance of Power und Pentarchie. Internationale Beziehungen 1700–1785* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997).

<sup>281</sup> An example is the Polish-Saxonian crisis of 1814, see Lappenküper, “Frühformen,” 119; Matthew Rendall, “Defensive realism and the Concert of Europe,” *Review of International Studies* 32 (2006): 523–540, here 526-530.

<sup>282</sup> “Das europäische Gleichgewicht, das die Dynastien bisher auf eine ebenso lächerliche als unsinnige Weise durch gleiches Abwägen physischer Massen herzustellen bemüht waren, hat alsdann in dem Prinzip der Freiheit und der Identität [...] aller Völker seinen natürlichen Stützpunkt gefunden,” Wirth, *Die politische Reform*, 326. Translation done by the author.

<sup>283</sup> Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals*, 41.

accuse it of being dominated by Russia. The Austrian politician Franz Schuselka wrote of Frederick II's successors that they had been reduced to Russian “wards”.<sup>284</sup> This statement, although exaggerated, is rather consistent with Abbenhuis' considerations.

Nevertheless, the balance of power policy succeeded in post-Napoleonic Europe because it created a dynamic security system based on cooperation and equilibrium rather than confrontation.<sup>285</sup> Matthew Rendall attributes the fact that any superiority of individual states was not transformed into a hegemonic position to the prevailing principle of “defensive realism”<sup>286</sup>, i.e. a restraint created solely by the fear of a hostile superiority. At the same time, some theorists argue that any balance, once created, is self-sustaining as an autopoietic system, since no community of roughly equal-ranking states allows the emergence of a hegemonic power.<sup>287</sup> The definition of the balance of power described above thus becomes a “natural” phenomenon functioning without any normative or ideological background. This focus on the self-interests of states as well as the logical self-preservation of the system naturally casts doubt on whether the order created after 1815 was anything more than a power struggle based on *realpolitik* and constant *zugzwang*.

On the other hand, the European balance of power in the early nineteenth century can also be linked to a community of values: According to Kupchan and Kupchan, the European community of states after 1815 was a prime example of “collective security”<sup>288</sup>: Such a security arises when, firstly, no state becomes more powerful than a coalition of other states against it –

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<sup>284</sup> “[...] zuletzt gänzlich in die Stellung eines russischen Schützlings und Mündels herabgekommen,” Franz Schuselka, *Deutschland, Polen und Rußland* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1846), 193. Translation done by the author.

<sup>285</sup> An interesting contribution to the discussion about the failure of the balance of power politics was written by Stacie Goddard, although it regards the wars of German unification, which I cannot discuss in this paper. See Stacie E. Goddard, “When Might Makes Right. How Prussia Overturned the European Balance of Power,” *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 110-142.

<sup>286</sup> Rendall, “Defensive Realism,” 523 and the short explanation on 524.

<sup>287</sup> Slantchev calls it a “self-enforcing equilibrium,” Slantchev, “Territory,” 567.

<sup>288</sup> Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts,” 122-124.

this corresponds to the above-mentioned definition by van Benthem van den Bergh. But beyond that, collective security assumes, secondly, a rough convergence of political convictions in the participating states, and thirdly, it emphasises a certain degree of solidarity between governments.<sup>289</sup> The Pentarchy after the Congress of Vienna, which was concerned with peacekeeping and restoration, certainly fulfils these conditions: Not only did alliances such as the Holy Alliance and the Quadruple Alliance counter hegemonic aspirations of any great power in Europe, but the involved governments also shared many conservative, anti-revolutionary or monarchist views, and, as shown above, the threat of political upheaval ensured a degree of reactionary inter-governmental solidarity. The balance of powers policy thus created a security system of shared values.<sup>290</sup>

With regard to the theory-laden question of the natural self-preservation of a balanced power system as a consequence of a mutual blockade of competing states, I agree with Schweller's opinion: "From the policymaker's perspective, [...] balancing superior power and filling power vacuums hardly appear as laws of nature."<sup>291</sup> This statement is relevant at this point insofar as it does not simply question the predictability of a balancing system, but rather emphasises the actors: European monarchs and statesmen had to work actively to maintain balance and could not rely on regularities formulated in theory. One consequence of their efforts was the emergence of the congress principle, which was to further stabilise the international order and which I will briefly discuss in the next part of the paper.

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<sup>289</sup> Kupchan and Kupchan, "Concerts," 124-125.

<sup>290</sup> Regarding the Concert of Europe, Lappenküper mentions solidarity between the great powers for peacekeeping and suppressing liberal forces ("*Großmachtsolidarität zur Bewahrung des Friedens [...] und Unterdrückung der liberalen Kräfte*"), Lappenküper, "Frühformen," 124.

<sup>291</sup> Schweller, "The Balance of Power," 2.

## The Congress System as a European Institution

The balance policy was a fundamental principle of foreign policy that was pursued by the great powers primarily to maintain their own power, but at the same time was shaped by certain shared values and the recognition of the need for greater inter-state cooperation. But even if the balance of powers was a generally recognised and accepted guideline in foreign policy, it remained an informal principle not regulated by treaty: “Collective action emerged through informal negotiations, not through formal mechanisms [...]. Decisions were reached through consensus; there was no unanimity rule or veto.”<sup>292</sup> In the first years after the Congress of Vienna, however, the policy of balance and cooperation underwent a form of deliberate institutionalisation.

This took place not only through the establishment of the European Concert, but also through an official, treaty-based format: The so-called Quadruple Alliance of Napoleon's opponents formed the core of the emerging European state system and at the same time laid the foundation for the congress system that began after 1815. According to this system, the great powers were to meet at fixed times to jointly solve pan-European problems:

[...] the High Contracting Parties have agreed to renew their meetings at fixed periods [...] for the purpose of consulting upon their common interests, and for the consideration of the measures which [...] shall be considered the most salutary for the repose and prosperity of Nations, and for the maintenance of the Peace of Europe.<sup>293</sup>

Here, regular meetings of representatives of the great powers were planned, even if the formulation remains somewhat vague. In the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna, further

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<sup>292</sup> Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts,” 123; see also Slantchev, “Territory,” 566.

<sup>293</sup> “[...] les hautes parties contractantes sont convenues de renouveler, à des époques déterminées, [...] des réunions consacrées aux grands intérêts communs et à l'examen de mesures qui [...] seront jugées les plus salutaires pour le repos et la prospérité des peuples et pour le maintien de la paix de l'Europe,” *Traité d'alliance entre les Cours d'Autriche, de la Grande-Bretagne, de la Prusse et de la Russie, signé à Paris le 20 novembre 1815,* in *Le Congrès de Vienne et les traités de 1815, précédé et suivi des actes diplomatiques qui s'y rattachent, avec une introduction historique*, part 2, ed. Jean B. H. R. Capéfigue (Paris: Amyot, 1863), 1636-1638, here 1637. Translation done by the author.

conferences of the great powers were organised, which took place at short intervals in the years up to 1822 - in Aachen (1818), Troppau/Opava (1820), Ljubljana (1821) and Verona (1822) political developments in Europe were discussed collectively.<sup>294</sup> It seems likely that the “numerous confidential communications that took place between the five courts”<sup>295</sup> were a form of institutionalisation in the sense of the formation of norms and modes of action, and their influence on the establishment of the Concert of Europe should not be underestimated.<sup>296</sup> This is also how Kaelble and Kirsch see it: they consider, among other things, the establishment of European political and legal institutions and the increasing orientation of national governments towards European questions as an important part of the early Europeanisation, referring explicitly to the European congresses since 1815.<sup>297</sup>

The fact that the congress system – in contrast to the Concert of Europe – nevertheless played only a marginal role in the history of Europe of the nineteenth century is probably due to its short-lived nature: at Verona, only seven years after Vienna, consensus-building failed due to resistance from Great Britain, whereupon the congress system lost its pan-European character.<sup>298</sup> Further developments towards an institutionalised European basis for communication and cooperation were thus prevented, although the opinions of historians vary greatly: Nichols delivers the most severe verdict: “For all practical purposes, the European Pentarchy died at Verona.”<sup>299</sup> In contrast, Claude Conter highlights the persistence of the

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<sup>294</sup> Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals*, 42.

<sup>295</sup> “[...] nombreuses communications confidentielles, qui ont eu lieu entre les cinq Cours,” “Kongress von Verona IX. Circulaire finale”. Translation done by the author.

<sup>296</sup> Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 31.

<sup>297</sup> Hartmut Kaelble and Martin Kirsch, “Einleitung. Zur Europäisierung des Selbstverständnisses und der Gesellschaft der Europäer im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Selbstverständnis und Gesellschaft der Europäer. Aspekte der sozialen und kulturellen Europäisierung im späten 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble and Martin Kirsch (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2008), 11-26, here 17.

<sup>298</sup> Lappenküper, “Frühformen,” 128-129.

<sup>299</sup> Nichols, *The European Pentarchy*, “ 135.

European congress system until the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and concludes that it was a successful instrument of European politics, though not well-liked by intellectuals.<sup>300</sup>

Ultimately, the verdict on the congresses hinges on the viewpoint in question – the reactionary, interventionist resolutions have often been criticised, as has the early failure of the joint conferences.<sup>301</sup> But however the congress policy is evaluated, it is evident that since the Congress of Vienna the idea of a common, consensual policy had taken root. Until World War I, the Concert of Europe remained the authoritative political framework, if not itself an institution for the way European states dealt with each other: “the Concert idea became the collective conscience of the European great powers.”<sup>302</sup> Conter again goes a step further, describing the Concert as a diplomatic system functioning as a quasi-European institution of peacekeeping.<sup>303</sup>

What is difficult to discern in these early forms of continental cooperation is a direct commitment to “Europe” as an idea or a topos in politics. Prussia, for example, was definitely understood as part of the European Pentarchy and was involved in all the alliances and congresses mentioned above. Yet the term “*Europa*” was first mentioned in the minutes of the Prussian Ministry of State (1817-1934/38) in 1843 – the only time it was mentioned in the period from 1817 to 1848!<sup>304</sup> Just how present an explicitly European self-perception was in

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<sup>300</sup> “[...] durchaus erfolgreiches, wenn auch von den Intellektuellen wenig geschätztes Instrument der Europapolitik,” Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 31. Translation done by the author.

<sup>301</sup> Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 32.

<sup>302</sup> Elrod, “The Concert of Europe,” 168.

<sup>303</sup> “[...] jenes Diplomatsystem, dass als quasi-europäische Institution der Friedenssicherung fungierte,” Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 31; Hantsch comes to a similar conclusion, he implies an institutionalisation of the Concert of Europe by referring to it as the areopag of great powers (“*Areopag der Großmächte*”), Hantsch, “Metternich,” 197. Translation done by the author.

<sup>304</sup> Interestingly, the session in question was not about balance or great power policy, but about a postage tax to be adapted to the regulations of the other European states, “Sitzung des Staatsministeriums am 28. Juni 1843,” in *Die Protokolle des Preussischen Staatsministeriums 1817–1934/38*, 3: June 9, 1840, to March 14, 1848, Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2000), 156.

the other governments remains to be seen, although historians such as Conter are convinced that a shared European consciousness<sup>305</sup> developed in the course of the Congress of Vienna.

## Conclusion

The characteristics of the political system in Europe presented above have shown that spaces (and constraints) for increased cooperation between the most important European states emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century. The resulting intensification of the cooperation between European states<sup>306</sup> can therefore be understood as an early form of integration. In summary, the three aspects discussed could be correlated as follows: in post-Napoleonic Europe, the main *objective* of the Pentarchy was internal and external stability, which encouraged their cooperation for peacekeeping; the *implementation* of these political goal took the form of a pan-European balance of powers as the guiding principle of foreign policy; this policy underwent a temporary *institutionalisation* in the form of the Congress System, although it relied on the less specific framework of the Concert of Europe after 1822.

The question formulated above – “Europe as a Pentarchy?” – thus has its justification, and it contrasts narratives such as Girault’s: the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compels him to assert that Europe is “damned to division and inner conflict”.<sup>307</sup> I do not agree with this view (though the statement is probably formulated in a deliberately strong manner), considering the political developments presented here. It is true that the Pentarchy never developed a complex set of rules, but remained at the level of consensual deliberation, but this by no means meant that Europe became a continent completely torn apart by national interests. In my opinion, the emergence of the nation-state and the construction of the European Concert

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<sup>305</sup> “[...] gemeineuropäisches Bewusstsein,” Conter, “Europakonstruktivisten,” 31. Translation done by the author.

<sup>306</sup> “[...] immer engere Zusammenarbeit europäischer Staaten,” Zandonella, “Europäische Integration”. Translation done by the author.

<sup>307</sup> “Ist Europa wirklich zur Teilung und zu inneren Konflikten verdammt? Seine Geschichte des 19. und der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts scheint zu einem Ja zu zwingen,” Girault, “Das Europa der Historiker,” 63; Kaelble makes a similar argument, see Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa*, 57-58. Translation done by the author.

or Pentarchy as a political institution should be seen as (partly) parallel developments that shaped European integration in the nineteenth century for decades.

Various important developments, especially cultural, social or economic ones, have been excluded from this work, although they had a determining influence on the formation of European institutions and supranational organisations – the main reason for this is the limited scope of this paper, which is restricted to the political level. Numerous open questions remain and call for further research, regarding, for example, the European sentiment of nineteenth century governments and their successors: one issue already noted above is the perception or Europeanisation of the self-image of cabinets, ministers and heads of state. Also unresolved is the continuity of the European cooperation policy shaped by the Pentarchy after the Crimean War into the twentieth century – are there, for example, ideational influences or influences shaped by political traditions of the Concert of Europe on the modern integration process up to the European Union?<sup>308</sup>

As this short paper has shown, diplomatic history and the history of international relations in the nineteenth century remain an important pillar of the study of modern European integration. I believe that to understand its preconditions, its early development and the preceding systems of diplomatic and intergovernmental exchange is ever more important in times of growing nationalist movements and renewed imperialist aggression in Europe. This paper has shown that integration processes unfolded much earlier than the narrative of the post-World War II integration suggests – at a time which is predominantly associated with the emergence of the nation-state instead of institutionalised inter-state cooperation on a European level. It is my

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<sup>308</sup> The insufficient embeddedness of the history of the EU in the European history of the modern era is denounced by Kaiser, see Kaiser, “From Isolation to Centrality,” 47, 50.



sincere hope that further research on these matters will allow us to further extend, question and adjust the historiography and narratives of European integration.

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