Major attempts to construct and (re-)order international society have been made after the Napoleonic Wars and after the First as well as the Second World War. Though the analogy may seem crude, in these three cases, political decision-makers were adamant not to restore, but to repair and improve the international order with a view to avoiding conflicts and errors of the past. And despite the idiosyncrasies of the order created at the Congress of Vienna, it is only fair to say that this new order did a remarkable job in stabilising the European state system, especially in contrast to both eighteenth-century peace treaties and the international order established in 1919. As the American historian Paul W. Schroeder has argued, a seminal transformation of the European international system had occurred around 1814/1815. To characterise the reach, the duration and the limitations of this transformation that profoundly modernised the European state system and enhanced its stability, I have framed the notion of a «culture of peace» and argued that a culture of collective responsibility for peace has been created within the framework of the Vienna international order. Rooted in a growing awareness of the leading monarchs and their councillors that Europe constituted a shared, closely interrelated legal and security space, and embedded in a growing
literary reflection about Europe, the quest for peace was central to the international order emerging in 1815.

Towards a New Culture of Peace

In line with the new cultural history of international relations, diplomatic practice and peace orders, this essay sheds light on how the relationship between power, law, communication, and security was transformed around 1815. Cultural and normative approaches to international history can explain why some societies tend to adhere to binding international rules and norms. These approaches focus on underlining the growing awareness of elites for the societal benefits that can be reaped from regimes and international institutions, which help to avoid armed conflict. Others, especially historians of imperialism, depict normative and legal discourse instead as a device to impose hegemonic power in international relations, and as an affirmation of (national or imperial) cultural values. From my point of view, prior to the hegemonic abuse of legal discourse in the age of imperialism (i.e. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), legal argument had to be broadly accepted as a basis of international relations. Only once legal discourse formed an integral part of the code of diplomatic interaction, it could also become a tool for hegemonic powers to frame a political argument to their advantage. I argue that it was precisely the post-Napoleonic period during which political elites and public opinion internalised the idea that international relations should be oriented toward peace and based upon international law. Vienna was the starting point because the Vienna Final Act was the first general peace concluded as a multilateral treaty, instead of through a series of bilateral treaties, and thus considered as a kind of «constitutional» order of Europe. Upon this foundation, new basic norms were established, and normative reasoning and procedural practices were widely internalised by decision-makers.

To those who understand the Vienna Congress simply as a tool of great power self-aggrandisement to the detriment of smaller states and peoples, I advise caution and provide a few safeguards to prevent misunderstandings. Firstly, I argue against the historiographical tradition that considers the formation of nation-states in Europe as a necessary outcome of the liberal movements of the pre-March era and that accuses the Vienna Congress of 1814/15 of having «restored» an anti-revolutionary, pre-national order that inevitably had to repress liberal nationalism. This interpretation seems teleological in the sense that it implicitly considers the nation-state as the final achieve-


ment of an inevitable historical process. Of course, the order established in 1815 was pre-national, and this in a dual sense: on the one hand, the domestic political systems after 1815 were based on monarchical, rather than peoples’ sovereignty; on the other hand, neither the German nor the Polish, Italian, Swiss and Low countries were organised as culturally or ethnically homogeneous nation-states. However, there is sufficient evidence to counter the widespread belief that liberal democracy – which did not exist anywhere at the time, not even in the United States – can only be realised in a culturally homogeneous nation-state (take for example the cases of Switzerland and India). In addition, cultural historians have explained the emergence of imagined national communities as a long and complex process of interaction between cultural elites, state policies and political systemic change, which was far from being completed in 1815.  

So, if the historiography on nationalism contends that nationalist movements in central Europe were, by and large, still in their infancy in 1815, it is anachronistic to criticise the decision-makers of the Vienna Congress for their alleged failure to anticipate the nation-state as it has emerged in central Europe since the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the order of 1815 was more anti-Napoleonic and anti-revolutionary than it was anti-national and anti-reform. After all, Poland, although it came under Tsarist rule, was provided with national institutions, and the German states were furnished with a confederal band which was supposed to, and did, assure their security against outside interference.

Secondly, with respect to the social and economic order, the leading statesmen of 1814/15 – Tsar Alexander (and his advisors), Lord Castlereagh, Prince Metternich, King Frederick William III and Humboldt – sought to respond to local political situations, rather than to follow a secret conservative plan of restoration. Domestic reforms introduced by the French had either already been dismantled in part by Napoleon himself (Switzerland), or were preserved by post-Napoleonic governments (most successor states of the Confederation of the Rhine). In those cases where reforms were dismantled immediately after Napoleon, for example in Spain and most of the Italian states, this was generally done upon the initiative of ruling princes and not imposed by the main victorious Powers. The pre-revolutionary mercantilist system, guilds and servitude were not restored, while new elements of a liberal domestic and external economic order were mostly preserved or even enhanced. The foundation of the Commission for Navigation on the Rhine river system envisaged by the Vienna Congress and the continuation of reform as well as the establishment of a liberal customs regime in Prussia are examples of this process and generally strengthened the economic bourgeoisie and economic progress. The variegated possibilities for domestic development that existed in 1815, including the introduction of constitutional systems in numerous states,
demonstrate that domestic developments were less dependent on a shared conservatism by the Great Powers than on the preferences of domestic elites and power struggles.

Thirdly, the general dissatisfaction that spread after 1815 was initially neither caused by the new territorial order nor by the primacy of monarchical sovereignty. Rather, it was precipitated by an event whose consequences were neither foreseeable nor avoidable, nor understood at the time. This was the eruption of the volcano Tambora on the island Sumbawa (between 5 and 17 April 1815) – the largest natural catastrophe in recorded times. The eruption reduced the height of the volcano from around 4200 to 2850 meters, spread ashes and aerosols across the earth’s atmosphere, caused a notable decline in average temperatures during three years, heavily increased precipitation, and provoked bad harvests and famines in Western Europe, parts of China and North America. The people who had been heavily affected by the alimentary crisis as well as the liberal elites turned against the political leadership. Since the rulers were unable to solve the food crisis and were deeply afraid of potential revolutions they opted for repression as the only alternative for managing the growing discontent.

Finally, while I emphasise the modernising impulses inherent in the Vienna international order, I do not claim that the Vienna Congress created an ideal security system. Nor did it dissolve rivalries among great powers. Rather, by consolidating great power cooperation with a view to handling security issues and managing rivalries, the Vienna Congress contributed to the renewal of the Quadruple Alliance as the foundation of a «directorial tradition» of security management. And this can be regarded as one of the major modernisations of the international system. After all, the great powers, which had traditionally been guilty of initiating major wars, assumed a collective responsibility for peace for the first time in the modern age. However, by excluding small and middle-sized states, the system quickly developed its own contradictions and dilemmas, some of which still persist in the form of the primacy of the great powers in the United Nation Security Council today. Thus, the European Concert of Great Powers can – without anachronism – be considered as a kind of «genealogical» precursor in terms of the innovative practices, consultative and ordering functions it exercised, and the multiple forms of diplomatic, police and military interventions it developed with respect to security issues.

My objective, then, is to understand the modernising impulse of the Vienna Congress for the international system, without, however, underestimating its flaws and contradictions. To develop my argument, I will first explain what I understand by a «culture of peace». Secondly, I will examine several seminal changes, which have contributed to creating a European culture of peace that did not exist in the decades before

1814: the legalisation of a certain idea of balance, the new structural foundations for security, the constitutional character of the Vienna order, and new cultural practices of communicative interaction, including the establishment of institutional forms of cooperation, which characterised the post-Napoleonic international system.

**Theoretical Framework of «the Culture of Peace»**

By «culture of peace» I understand a system of normative ideas, rules, practices, institutions, and strategic compromises about power that emerges, either by design or spontaneously, with a view to preserving peace and that «regulates» the thinking and behaviour of state actors. Within this concept, peace is not understood negatively as the absence of war, but substantively as the product of social preferences and communicative interactions undertaken with a view to preserving what state actors envision as the values constituting peace. A culture of peace does not imply consensus on all normative ideas, but entails a degree of convergence, including a compromise between victors and vanquished. It implies that certain ideas, rules and practices with respect to the maintenance of peace prevail within the state system at a given time. Methodologically this culture of peace can be identified by a combination of context-grounded discourse analysis as well as an analysis of state practices, including the forms of interaction.

The notion of a culture of peace is closely tied to the rise of constructivism as a theory of international relations. While realist and neorealist thinking sees the international system as a security dilemma resulting from structural determinants – essentially the distribution of power and strategic advantages between states – constructivism rejects the notion that the state system is always characterised by a struggle for power. Instead, it explains the security dilemma as a variable, which is made up of cultural experiences, perceptions and communicative interactions between societies and state agents, and which can be altered by new patterns of experience. Constructivism does not ignore material facts and structural constraints, but places the emphasis upon the ideas, values and identities of societies and decision-makers as variables of international politics. According to constructivists, societies and decision-makers make sense of structures by attributing meanings to them based upon their experiences and the values of their own societies. Hence, national interests are not structurally predetermined but rather constructed through the ideas and values shared by a society and, above all, by a ruling class. Furthermore, constructivism assumes that increased communicative interaction may potentially foster mutual understanding and transform the
anarchical world of states into an international society governed by rules, norms and procedures, by means of juridification.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite its optimistic outlook, constructivism also makes room for the possibility that, due to changing patterns in communicative interaction, ideologies that embrace power and violence may prevail in the decision-makers’ framework of reference. Therefore, constructivism is open as far as the evolution of the state system is concerned. There is neither a permanent Hobbesian anarchy nor a cyclical balance of power system. Insecurity may well be a consequence of state interaction, but it does not have to be so, since the forms of interaction between the states and their expectations shape the character of international society. Trust and integration may as well be a consequence of interaction. Potentially then, states may overcome the security dilemma by means of communication and strategic compromises.\textsuperscript{17}

The new forms of interaction that the victorious powers began to practice just before, during and after the Vienna Congress went precisely into that direction. However, according to Gert Krell, constructivism does not alone explain why a new thinking does or does not emerge.\textsuperscript{18} To illustrate how a culture of peace develops, and how norms and rules begin to regulate state interactions, we have to go back to the experience of those agents that carry discourse power.\textsuperscript{19}

Seminal Changes and a New Equilibrium

In order to understand why a new culture of peace emerged in the context of the Vienna Congress it is useful to analyse how state agents perceived the collapse of the eighteenth-century balance of power system. According to Johannes Kunisch and Johannes Burckhardt, absolutism produced a bellicist disposition that prompted a series of wars of succession as well as maritime, commercial and colonial conflicts between European powers both inside and outside Europe. Divine rule and absolute power created a problem in a state system that had known neither effective forms of cooperation nor a clear hierarchy that had neither experienced a formal equality between its members nor clear borders.\textsuperscript{20} Diplomacy tried to reduce the security dilemma by offensive and defensive alliances, dynastic marriages and agreements on succession, but often to no avail.\textsuperscript{21} In the context of the latent threat of war and frequent violent conflicts, personal meetings between monarchs or members of government were an exception.\textsuperscript{22}
This perception of insecurity and lack of confidence caused some actors to seek hegemony, while others vied for the maintenance of a balance of power in order to safeguard their security. However, the balance of power mechanism did not provide stability in the state system. According to Evan Luard, it more often than not served as a pretext for war. Between the Silesian Wars of Succession and the Napoleonic Wars, the belligerency of European states during this era initiated a geopolitical revolution (John Darwin), i.e. a major redistribution of control over land and over the seas in favour of Europe, especially Britain, and to the detriment of Asia.\(^\text{23}\)

The Industrial Revolution, the British colonisation of India, Australia and the Pacific, the expulsion of France from the Americas, Trafalgar, Napoleon’s continental system, the burning of Moscow, the Peoples’ Battle of Leipzig, and Waterloo are the keywords of this secular, primarily Franco-British power struggle. Napoleon’s defeat put an end not only to two decades of war against French hegemony in Europe, but also to more than half a century of war for maritime supremacy and hegemony in Asia and America.

Upon the background of 22 years of revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, diplomats and philosophers had plenty of material to ponder the deficits of the old balance of power, which had all but destroyed the «divine» order of monarchical states. While many recognised its inherent instability, not all of them diagnosed its inefficiency and inapplicability, but rather considered its collapse as the root-cause of the problem. The old balance of power system was based upon the perceived distribution of power among the great states and upon the idea of mechanical adjustment of the system in the case of an aggrandisement of others, which required compensation or, as a last resort, war. In contrast, Friedrich von Gentz, Prussian diplomatic thinker, advisor of the Austrian minister of foreign affairs Clemens Prince of Metternich and secretary of the Vienna Congress, developed a new understanding of the balance, which encompassed a political and juridical notion of security for all members of the state system and not just for the great powers.\(^\text{24}\) Gentz did not reject the balance idea in principle but he believed that it had to rest on a new foundation, since an equal material balance could never be attained.\(^\text{25}\) Instead, a new balance had to be based upon a «true international legal constitution» as well as upon the equal right [of states] to independence and to «security of possession», and upon «just state principles».\(^\text{26}\) Any agreement with a view to damaging the rights of another state would have to be outlawed, whereas any alliance between princes would have to be directed at their reciprocal protection.

Thus, new attributes were ascribed to the idea of a balance and a new terminological expression was found in the French diplomatic term «equilibrium». A new political
and legal equilibrium should take the shape of the new territorial order and constitution of Europe that had been agreed to after the war. Indeed, in the eyes of British foreign minister Castlereagh, the Vienna order represented the legal form of European equilibrium.\textsuperscript{27} Consequently, the new equilibrium was no longer considered a function of the changing perceptions of the distribution of power, but seen as an embodiment of the territorial order agreed upon in 1815.

British thinking about the new equilibrium went a step further. It combined the initial anti-hegemonic and anti-French orientation with the legal concept of the independence of states, explicitly including smaller states. A violation of Dutch independence, for example, would trigger a British intervention, according to Castlereagh.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, the idea of a balance was rescued from damnation and rehabilitated through its new connection to a legal purpose, namely the respect for treaties and for the independence of states.

A third element of the new equilibrium was the «political equality of the five Great Powers»\textsuperscript{29}. It was accompanied by the obligation, freely consented upon, to consult each other about questions concerning European security, with a view towards protecting the legal order as well as the new equilibrium.\textsuperscript{30} Metternich’s idea of equilibrium included these aspects, yet in his mindset it encompassed a domestic dimension, too. For him, social order was also a balance that needed to be preserved. Indeed, the continuation of legitimate monarchical rule and the maintenance of the remaining aristocratic privileges lay, for him, at the heart of the new order and had to be defended against domestic attacks. In other words, for Metternich the social peace included keeping the so-called legitimate ruling classes in power and the other social classes in their place. This interpretation proved, however, impractical in the long run as it implied meddling in the affairs of other states with a view to keeping those princes in power that had failed to attract popular support. Furthermore, the British government from the outset resisted this reading of social order.

Accordingly, the peace of 1815 was connected to a juridical, political and social idea of equilibrium, although the latter dimension was contested from the outset. On the contrary, a material balance between the Great Powers was not established in 1815, and the Vienna order was less a product of logics of power than of the perception of what was necessary to obtain security from France.

**Territorial Order and Security Thinking**
While Great Britain had already acquired territories overseas from France during the war, the other victorious powers – Russia, Sweden, Austria, Prussia and Bavaria – sought and gained territorial acquisitions in the Congress of Vienna. Those territories

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{29} Schulz, *Normen*, 592.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 596.
that were controlled by or had allied with Napoleon were to be redistributed: Northern Italy, Franconia, the Palatinat and other territories west of the Rhine, Westphalia, Northern Germany, Saxony and Norway. Yet the territorial distribution finally agreed upon was not shaped by the greed of the great powers but by their shared experience of vulnerability. Those regions most directly exposed to French expansionism during the preceding twenty years – the Netherlands, Switzerland, Piedmont and the regions in the West of Germany – were strengthened: The Northern Netherlands were united with the ancient Habsburg lands and Luxemburg in the South; Geneva, Valais and Neuchatel with Switzerland, and Savoy was largely restored to Piedmont. By agreeing upon a collective guarantee in favour of Swiss neutrality the main signatories followed the same logic, as well as they had done when strengthening the German territory. Firstly, two important German powers, Bavaria and Prussia, obtained the Southern Palatinate, the Northern Palatinate and Westphalia respectively, and were therefore obliged to carry the main responsibility for defending central Europe. Secondly, the German Confederation was essentially created to enhance the defensive capabilities of the German states. Its members were obliged to remain loyal to the Confederation and forbidden to conclude alliances against member states. Thus, the independence and the capability of the territories east of France to defend themselves as well as central Europe from a possible French attack were strengthened. Thirdly, the dynasties of Denmark, Britain and the Netherlands were integrated into the Confederation, creating a solidarity of interest between them and the German states.

As a result, the security dilemma was substantially reduced for the central European area, which had been subject to attacks for more than twenty years. Notwithstanding the deficits of the Vienna order with respect to the latter rise of the Italian national movement and to Polish concerns, its acceptance by all European governments (apart from Spain) bestowed legitimacy and legality to a new European territorial order that had never been accomplished before.

Besides establishing a new idea of equilibrium and reshaping the territorial order according to prevalent perceptions of vulnerability, and enshrining the new order in a new legal form (the multilateral treaty), the most important innovations of the Vienna Congress concerned normative and institutional aspects as well as communicative practices. Those aspects deepened the culture of peace. The decision-makers of 1814/15 conceived of their states as subjects to the *ius publicum europaeum*, a European legal space, and expected that the borders and rules in this space would be respected in the future. However, the chief allies were also aware that securing the peace against French hegemonic aspirations required continuing cooperation among them, even after the peace was concluded. Consequently, the victorious powers also established new cultural practices and institutions for regular communicative interactions, modernised norms and set up codes and rules.

In the realm of norm setting, the Vienna diplomatic protocol regulated conflicts about rank and prestige, which had for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centu-
ries hampered cooperation among diplomats accredited to the same court.\footnote{J. Burckhardt, «Die Friedlosigkeit der Frühen Neuzeit. Grundlegung einer Theorie der Bellizität Europas», in: Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung 24 (1997) 4, 509–574; and most recently H. Duchhardt, «Der Wiener Kongress und seine ‹Diplomatische Revolution›», in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 65 (2015) 22–24, 27–32.} In the realm of cultural practices, Johannes Paulmann has demonstrated that monarchical encounters, which had been practically absent from the eighteenth-century system, became common in the post-Napoleonic period. This was largely because they had become regular occurrences and had created a basis for monarchical solidarity during the final years of the Napoleonic Wars.\footnote{Paulmann, Pomp, 36–39.} In their declaration on the Holy Alliance, the three Eastern monarchs vaguely codified the normative idea of monarchical solidarity. This declaration did neither establish a defensive alliance nor an institution, but it actualised an imagined European brotherhood of monarchs committed to moderation and Christian solidarity in matters of foreign policy. All European governments or monarchs including Switzerland adhered to the Alliance, with the exception of Britain and the Vatican.

Another remarkable normative innovation was the acceptance of a code dedicated to the freedom of navigation on the Rhine fluvial system, which, together with the liberal customs tariffs adopted by the Netherlands and Prussia after the Vienna Congress, marked an important step towards ending mercantilism among the riverains. It further played a role in promoting industrial modernisation and, from the 1830s onwards, became a model for the transnational regulation of fluvial shipping.

In addition to those new rules and general normative ideas, the allied powers added security institutions, which were supposed to reduce the security dilemma within the state system and which have already been mentioned: the German Confederation, the Quadruple Alliance concluded against France and, last but not, least, the European Concert of Great Powers.

**Achievements and Deficiencies: The Case of the Concert**

The moderate territorial losses of France as well as its inclusion in the deliberations at the Congress of Vienna and at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818) expressed the victorious powers’ desire to minimise French adversity to the new order and to curtail French revisionism from the outset. They thus hoped to make a new French aggression and a European war, unlikely. In the following, the Concert system, which lived largely through ambassador conferences held in European capitals, contributed to European peace until the Crimean War, helped to isolate the Italian and German wars of unification, and to ordering the system from 1871 to the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. Contrary to common assumptions, it not only curtailed the ambitions of smaller states, but also contained the great powers and resolved numerous asymmetrical disputes and conflicts in favour of the weaker party (e.g. the Greek war of independence, the first Schleswig-Holstein crisis, the Crimean War, the Neuchatel dispute, the Luxembourg crisis). When major security issues were at stake, the Concert usually got involved to
conciliate parties, listened to those concerned (including Belgian revolutionaries and Greek separatists) and offered some sort of mediation in roughly forty cases between 1815 and 1913. The mediations were backed, when necessary, by collective representations, threats as well as military power in order to contain or end the conflict and reach negotiated settlements. Although rivalries among the powers persisted, wars for annexation were initially anathema within the new system.

Nonetheless, the European culture of peace and security that emerged from the Congress of Vienna was shaped and dominated by the great powers and operated to their advantage. They had conceived the new order in a way as to enhance their own status and to endow them with special responsibility. The new culture of peace thus soon generated its own paradoxes. The security arrangements and institutions concocted in 1814/15 did not promote social justice as a basis of peace as we would understand it today. It did not include a general guarantee of the status quo. Neither did it preserve peace disinterestedly. The exclusion of smaller powers cannot be reconciled with the alleged purpose of defending the independence of states. Furthermore, the exclusion of non-European powers began to pose a problem when the state system became global during the nineteenth century.

The early phase of the Concert was overshadowed by a major normative conflict pertaining to the right of intervention in third states when it came to preserving zones of influence. The middle phase of the Concert was overshadowed by a normative dispute about the right to national self-determination. And in the final phase, when the Africa Congress in Berlin (1884/85) invented the *terra nullius* doctrine, the Concert served to justify and «legalise» an unprecedented abuse of responsibility and power by great powers in order to facilitate their respective territorial enrichment. The directorial tradition therefore, while stabilising international relations in Europe, led to unjust practices globally, not least because the concert powers operated in a world in which the hierarchy of norms was by no means settled. And in the end, they sought to profit from their power by making the rules.

Notwithstanding, the modernisation of the international order by the Vienna Congress and the immediate post-Napoleonic years was impressive: by redefining the balance in a political and legal way, by giving the territorial order a new legal form through a multilateral treaty, by not antagonising France, by reducing the security dilemma through carefully arranged borders and innovative security institutions, by seeking varied local compromises between restoration and reform, and by transforming communicative interaction between states through monarchical encounters and ambassador conferences, the Vienna system enhanced the stability of the international system more than any other peace before in the modern era.

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