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A HISTORY OF EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY 1815-1914

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EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY
1815-1914

PREFACE

Now that foreign affairs are, as Disraeli said, merely Britain's domestic affairs in foreign parts, it is the duty of every citizen to know about them and to reflect upon them. Things apparently remote from foreign policy must be regarded in the light of our external relations as well as of our internal situation. And it is not merely the relations of Britain to other countries that the British citizen must know about; he must understand the dealings of the other states of Europe and of the world with each other; for the affairs of all the nations are so interwoven that no nation, and no part of any nation, can for a moment live unto itself.

It is with the modest aim of contributing something towards political education that this book has been written. I have tried to continue in a more accessible form the admirable work accomplished by the Strasbourg Professor Koch, author of the *Histoire abrégé des traités de paix*, for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In England we have for the nineteenth century the grand collection of Hertslet—treaties and maps, with neither comment nor narrative: a great repository of truth, but of use mainly for scholars. In France M. Bourgeois, in his *Manuel historique de politique étrangère*, and M. Debidour, in his *Histoire diplomatique*, have placed before their public the results of long study and wide observation. I have aimed at doing something like this for the British citizen: to place before him a hundred years of the diplomatic relations of the chief Powers of Europe, including Great Britain, and so to give him the means of following the stream of history that flows before his own eyes from day to day, and of forming sound judgments about it.

In the quiet of an Oxford College a historian can reasonably profess to write "without hatred and partisanship," *sine ira et studio*. If he still believes in the honour and dignity of his country, it is because study and observation confirm him in this view. The

aim of diplomacy is peace and good-fellowship : the normal diplomatist has always been an honourable man ; and this is true, on the whole, both of Continental and of British diplomacy. Practical experience of British diplomacy at a significant period of this country's history has confirmed the conclusion formed from study, namely that British men of affairs, the statesmen, diplomatists, and administrators, have the same standard of conduct in managing international affairs as they have in their private dealings. But they cannot go on with their work and maintain its honourable standard unless the people behind them know that they are honest and will honestly support them. Such is the idea which, I trust, will be gleaned from this book.

R. B. MOWAT.

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CONTENTS

PART I.—FROM THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA TO THE CONGRESS OF PARIS

CHAP.	PAGE
I THE DIPLOMATIC PROFESSION.	1
II THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA	4
III THE CONCERT OF EUROPE	20
§ 1. The Second Peace of Paris	20
§ 2. The Holy and Quadruple Alliances	20
IV AIX-LA-CHAPELLE	28
V THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW	32
VI THE INDEPENDENCE OF GREECE	46
VII EAST AND WEST	54
VIII BELGIUM AND SPAIN	70
§ 1. Belgium	70
§ 2. The Iberian Peninsula	75
§ 3. The Spanish Marriages	78
IX THE DIVIDING YEARS: GERMANY AND AUSTRIA	85
§ 1. The Revolutions	85
§ 2. The Imperial Crown	88
§ 3. Olmütz	90
§ 4. Dresden	92
X THE CRIMEAN WAR	94
§ 1. The Holy Places	95
§ 2. The Protectorate of the Greek Church	96
§ 3. The First Conference of Vienna	99
§ 4. The Franco-British Alliance	101
§ 5. The Seymour Conversations	102
§ 6. The Second Conference of Vienna	105
§ 7. The Congress of Paris	108

PART II.—THE UNION OF ITALY

XI ITALY FROM THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA TO THE FAIL- URE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT OF 1848	115
XII THE LIQUIDATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT OF 1848	120
XIII THE ITALIAN QUESTION BEFORE EUROPE	125

A HISTORY OF EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY, 1815-1914

PART I

From the Congress of Vienna to the Congress of
Paris

CHAPTER I

THE DIPLOMATIC PROFESSION

"There is a European atmosphere. The same ideas are spread everywhere: they are all French, and find naturally in France their most perfect expression."¹ This European atmosphere is the greatest achievement of civilisation; and in spite of wars and furious national rivalries it has existed since the eleventh century. It is evinced in the common observances of religious worship, in community of scholarship and learning, and in a definite standard of conduct and manners. It is this European atmosphere that has led the Powers of Europe to regard themselves as a society of States, who in normal times conduct themselves towards one another with the same courtesy and morality as individuals within a State observe in their mutual transactions. The manners of this society of States is what we mean by Diplomacy.

The French have always been the greatest exponents of the diplomatic art; and among the many gifts which that grand nation has conferred upon Europe there is none more fruitful than this. They have not shone with the same luminousness in the domain of International Law, which differs from, and stands in relation to, Diplomacy, in the same way as ordinary municipal law differs from,

¹ Sorel: *L'Europe et la Révolution Française* (1912), I, 147.

and is related to, private manners. But if the Dutch must be allowed to be supreme in the study of International Law, the French must be conceded the same prestige in the diplomatic art. If Diplomacy has any one language, it is French ; and this not merely because it is (or was) the most widespread ; but because of all modern tongues French is the most accurate instrument for putting ideas into words. In the conduct of international relations too much is at stake, to admit of any looseness of meaning ; and so French, in the evolution of the society of European States, has become the language of Diplomacy because it reduces to a minimum the friction, the estrangements, the wars even, that may ensue from misunderstandings of words.

It is unwise to despise the diplomatic art, or to think that, any more than other vocations, it can be followed without careful training and continuous experience. In the Middle Ages there were no diplomats by profession, yet the same people were usually employed in inter-state business—generally clerics, who possessed a common standard of education, manners, and moral outlook. Early in the seventeenth century a diplomatic profession appears almost as an established thing ; and this occurred practically contemporaneously in France and in England—for England, after France, has always in modern times been most distinguished in Diplomacy. Just as, in the reign of King James I, we find the modern Foreign Office beginning, in the Northern and Southern Departments of the Secretary of State, so in the same reign we recognise the regular Diplomatic Corps in Sir Henry Wotton,¹ Sir Thomas Roe,² and the other ambassadors, through whose commercial and political treaties England definitely took her place in the society of European States.

Every private person has a sensitive place in his nature, and a wrong word or an injudicious act may make a lifetime of misunderstanding. Governments and nations are sensitive too ; nations indeed are particularly and often unexpectedly so ; and any man who, in conducting the affairs of one State with another, goes the wrong way about the business, will make a lamentable failure of it. There is a right and a wrong way of doing everything ; and apart from the qualities of reasonableness, firmness, and tact, which all professions besides that of the diplomatist require, much actual knowledge is necessary—knowledge of history, of foreign Constitutions, of International Law, of languages, and also of a large

¹ 1568-1639.

² 1581-1644.

body of *technique*, that is, of the forms of diplomatic documents and the customs and regulations of court and official society.

The first formal treatise on Diplomacy is *L'Ambassadeur et Ses Fonctions* by Abraham Wicquefort,¹ Councillor of State of the Duke of Brunswick. This—published at the Hague in 1681—is a humane work, containing the fruits of a ripe experience. Wicquefort is quite decided about the value of a historical training for a diplomatist: good ambassadors have been good historians, for instance Macchiavelli and Philip de Commines. The ambassador should be college-trained, but not a pedant; he must know the common languages well—Latin and French. He must always be well-dressed, and never allow himself to be surprised in untidiness. The Comte d'Avaux² was so scrupulous that he was never seen, even by his servants, in clothes different from what he wore on the most solemn occasions: "he never left his bedroom without his mantle on his shoulders, and never put it off till he returned there to sleep." Yet the ambassador need not strive to be magnificent, for every one knows that this is no index of the real power of his State: no one thought the better of Spain because the Spanish ambassador at Rome, in accompanying the Pope on a country expedition, took six litters, six carriages (each with six horses), two hundred valets, and sixty baggage-carts.

Outward manners are merely the expression of one's inward state. The ambassador must have moral qualities. Servien,³ the French ambassador at the Congress of Westphalia, had great gifts, but by his hot temper he risked spoiling every negotiation. On the other hand, the President Jeannin⁴ (an earlier ambassador) not merely had moderation, he was moderation itself: it was *difficult* to withstand his reasoning, but to withstand the sweetness of his nature was not merely difficult, it was perfectly impossible. Such is Wicquefort's picture of the best type of ambassador: he is a benefactor to his State and to mankind. England has had men like this, at all times in the last hundred years. Lord Clarendon⁵ was such a man. And those who saw in practice the conduct of affairs by the British Foreign Secretary in the year 1919 could appreciate the worth of a diplomatist who possessed knowledge, intellect, integrity, and charm.

¹ 1598-1682.

² 1595-1650.

³ 1595-1669.

⁴ 1540-1622.

⁵ 1800-1870.

CHAPTER II

THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

The year 1814 brought practically to an end the era of wars which the French Revolution had inaugurated and which Napoleon I had carried on. After the battles at Leipsic in 1813, and the invasion of France in the early months of 1814, the Bourbons were restored, and peace between the Allies and the French was made at Paris on May 30.¹ France was treated very generously; she was left with better frontiers (the frontiers of 1792), and larger territories, than those with which she had started the wars; and no indemnity was taken.

But the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had been something more than a struggle of the Allies (Great Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria, Sweden, Spain and Portugal) against France; they had been a European convulsion, which had obliterated old landmarks, and had left no state, no people, no family even, untouched by its effects. And so when the war had been fought to a finish, a Congress was gathered together to resettle the public affairs of Europe. Vienna was naturally chosen as the meeting-place, being a grand European city, the capital of one of the successful belligerents, and the seat of a Government which in a special sense represented tradition, law, order, and established institutions.

There are two outstanding points of the Congress of Vienna. In the first place, it was not a "Peace Congress," because peace had already been made at Paris, and all the questions at issue between France and the Allies had been definitely settled. The state of war had ceased both in fact and in law, and France, when the Congress of Vienna met, could claim to associate with the other Powers as a regular member of the European States-system.

The second outstanding point is that the Congress of Vienna did

¹ The "First Peace of Paris," so called to distinguish it from the "Second Peace of Paris," which was made after the Hundred Days, on November 20, 1815 (*see below*, pp. 20-22).

not meet to make a new world out of the old ; if anyone had said that in twenty years of warfare the old European system had collapsed beyond repair, the Congress Powers would have denied it ; they believed that the old European system had been a stable thing which on the whole had satisfied the needs of mankind, both for law and for liberty ; and so they meant not to reconstruct a new system, but to restore the old. This is why the period of the Congress of Vienna, and of the years which immediately follow it, is often called the *Restoration* ; but it was not mere mechanical restoration : this was impossible ; the European statesmen were by no means fools ; it was restoration with a good deal of improvement. It may be that more improvement could have been introduced ; certainly the statesmen of 1814-15 were modest in their efforts towards a millennium. Yet, though chipped and changed here and there in the next forty years, the Vienna settlement remained substantially intact till 1860, and gave Europe nearly half a century of comparative quiet.

Article 32 of the First Peace of Paris said, " All the Powers engaged on either side in the present war shall, within the space of two months, send plenipotentiaries to Vienna for the purpose of regulating in General Congress the arrangements which are to complete the provisions of the present treaty." But the Allies, though they had made peace with France, and promised to associate her in the Congress, could not bring themselves to consider her as a normal member. So a secret Article (to which France herself had to assent) stipulated that the settlement to be made at the Congress would be regulated by " the principles determined upon by the Allied Powers among themselves." This meant that the Congress of Vienna was to be effectively composed of, at most, the seven Powers (Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, Sweden, Spain and Portugal) who had signed the treaty with France. Yet even this number was considered too large, and a subsequent agreement among the big Powers limited the really effective part of the Congress to the " four Courts " ¹—that is to say, to Great Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia. Actually, when the Congress met, the French representative M. de Talleyrand, by his skilful diplomacy, gained admittance to the conferences of the Four, which thus became a Committee of Five—Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia and France.

¹ Webster, *The Congress of Vienna* (1919), p. 48, n. 4, quoting from F. O. Archives, Continent, S

This Committee of Five was *the* Congress of Vienna. The hundred or so plenipotentiaries of other Powers who, in addition to the original Eight, came to Vienna, did nothing, except those who were put into certain technical committees. The Congress as a whole never met. The Five deliberated together by themselves, and settled everything by their own decisions. There was not even a formal session of all the Congress, either at the beginning or the end, although at the conclusion the Eight (that is Sweden, Spain and Portugal, in addition to Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia and France) signed the Final Act.

* * * * *

Although Article 32 of the First Peace of Paris had stipulated that the Congress should meet within two months, the Four did not all assemble at Vienna till September 13, 1814. They were, firstly, M. de Metternich, the most experienced and in some ways the most sagacious of European statesmen and diplomats, although still a comparatively young man, aged forty-one. Next may be mentioned the Tsar Alexander I, personally representing his own Empire, a man of ideas and impulses; Napoleon called him the "shifty Byzantine." Next comes Frederick William III of Prussia, well intentioned but weak. Finally to complete the Four was Lord Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary.¹ This hard-working and experienced statesman may have lacked imagination, but his good sense and honesty made him a worthy representative of Great Britain. And now to convert the Four into the Five, mention must be made of Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the most *rusé* of men. He was at this time at the climax of his extraordinary career. The other chief plenipotentiaries were still in the forties: Alexander I was only thirty-seven; Metternich was forty-one; Frederick William was forty-four (though Hardenberg, the effective Prussian delegate was sixty-four); and Castlereagh was forty-five. Talleyrand was already in his sixty-first year. He had begun his working life as a priest, rose early and easily, like any other clerical nobleman of the Ancien Régime, to be a bishop, and sat as such in the fateful States-General of 1789. In the Revolution he had given up his clerical profession, and obtained employment as a diplomatist.

¹ For Castlereagh's correspondence see Webster, *British Diplomacy, 1813-1815* (London, 1921), p. 189 ff. The volume consists of a splendid collection of Documents, from the Foreign Office archives, with a short but useful Introduction.

A mission to London in 1791 made him an admirer of England for life. He learned something too when an *émigré* for two and a half years in the United States (1793-5). He was Minister for Foreign Affairs under the Directory, and after their fall, served Napoleon faithfully till 1814; in that fateful year the great Emperor took leave of his supple friend with the words: "you would betray your own father." Talleyrand easily adapted himself to the Restoration, and saved his country from the vengeance of the Allies by drawing a distinction between Napoleonic France which had passed away, and Bourbon France which was not responsible for the late wars. The Congress of Vienna provided him with his most difficult task and gave scope for his greatest successes. He was undoubtedly a real patriot, and continued to serve his country with equal ease under the Bourbon, and later under the Orleans Monarchy. He had, *par excellence*, the manner of the typical French diplomatist—an easy bearing, and a great fund of ironical humour. He died in 1838 at the age of eighty-four.¹

When the representatives of the Four Powers had assembled at Vienna (September 13, 1814), they began settling the difficult European questions, quite informally, among themselves. The actual treaties, when drafted, were merely to register the decisions previously reached by the Four Allies. The larger Committee, the Eight (Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, Sweden, Spain, Portugal and France), did meet occasionally; but it had little to do. This did not satisfy Talleyrand, who had arrived on September 23, only to find France excluded from the inner councils of the Four. But he bided his time; he was always something of a friend to England; and now England, in the person of Castlereagh, showed herself a great friend to France. On December 24 the first formal meeting of the Congress (there had of course been many informal meetings)

¹ The representatives of the Great Powers were not limited to those mentioned above. Each State had a Delegation consisting of three or four envoys. The Duke of Wellington was associated with Castlereagh, till Napoleon's return from Elba sent him hurriedly off to command the Army. Nor must Frederick von Gentz (1764-1832) be forgotten. He was the most effective (and probably the most voluminous) writer of propaganda against Napoleon. Originally in the Prussian service he had transferred himself in 1802 to Austria, and from 1812 he was the "*âme damnée* of Metternich." Politically the two were inseparable. Gentz was Secretary to the Congress of Vienna, and to all subsequent Congresses till 1822. The Second Secretary of the Congress was G. F. von Martens, the eminent editor of the *Recueil de Traités*, the invaluable series which still goes on annually.

took place ; and at this, to the consternation of Russia and Prussia, Castlereagh and Metternich proposed and insisted that France should be admitted. The truth is that the Four Powers had nearly come to blows over the questions of Poland and Saxony ; and Great Britain and Austria, in quest of a peaceful solution, saw no other way than to associate France on their side, so as to outweigh the influence of Russia and Prussia, who were working together on the other side. When France's admittance was proposed by England and Austria, she could not decently be refused ; for after all, France was not now an enemy (the First Peace of Paris having been made months before), and moreover Talleyrand was threatening to rouse the Minor Powers to a sense of their due place at the Congress, if France was not treated as one of the Great Powers. So Russia and Austria yielded, and the Committee of Four was transformed into a Committee of Five, which made all the decisions of the Congress.

Meanwhile the concluding months of the year 1814 had slipped away,¹ and nothing substantial had been accomplished towards making a lasting settlement of Europe. *Le Congrès ne marche pas, il danse*, wrote the Prince de Ligne² to his friend La Garde.

You have come at the right moment. If you like fêtes and balls you will have enough of them ; the Congress does not *go*, it dances. There is, literally, a royal mob here. Everybody is crying out : peace ! justice ! balance of power ! indemnity ! As for me, I am a looker on. All the indemnity I shall ask for is a new hat ; I have worn mine out in taking it off to sovereigns whom I meet at the corner of every street.³

The distinguished old warrior and courtier had reason to be amused at the mass of royalties and their envoys who flocked to Vienna, hoping to be heard at the conferences of the mighty Four, or at least to see somehow that their interests were not entirely overlooked. Among many entertainments a *Ridotto* was given at the Burg by the Emperor in October :

Take notice of that graceful, martial figure walking with Eugène de Beauharnais ; that is the Emperor Alexander. And that tall, dignified man, with the lively Neapolitan on his arm, is the King of Prussia. . . . And there in that Venetian suit, the stiffness of which scarcely conceals

¹ One good piece of work was accomplished elsewhere than at the Congress. This was the Treaty of Peace between England and the United States of America, signed at Ghent on December 24, 1814.

² 1735-1814. Ligne was an Austrian Field-Marshal.

³ *The Prince de Ligne : His Memoirs, etc.* Selected and edited by K. P. Wormley (1899), II, 263.

his affability, is our own emperor,¹ the representative of the most paternal despotism that ever existed. Here is Maximilian, King of Bavaria, in whose frank countenance you can read the expression of his good heart. . . . Do you see that pale little man, with an aquiline nose, near to the King of Bavaria? That is the King of Denmark, whose cheerful humour and lively repartees enliven the royal parties—they call him the *lustig* of the sovereign brigade. Judging by his simple manners and the perfect happiness of his little kingdom, you would never suppose him to be the greatest autocrat in Europe. But he is, for all that. In Copenhagen the royal carriage is preceded by an equerry armed with a carbine, and the king as he drives along can, if he pleases, order any of his subjects to be shot. That colossal figure, leaning against the column, whose bulk is not lessened by the folds of his ample domino, is the King of Wurtemberg, and next to him is his son the prince-royal, whose affection for the Grand Duchess of Oldenburg has brought him to the Congress, rather than the settlement of public business that will soon be his own. All this crowd of personages who are buzzing round us, are either reigning princes, archdukes or great dignitaries from various countries. With the exception of a few Englishmen (easily distinguished by the richness of their clothes), I do not see anyone without a title to his name.² . . .

There was not merely a good deal of social life at the Congress, there was a lot of spying and informing as well. In this respect the Austrians had the greatest advantage, for they were in their own capital, and could employ all the resources of the Vienna police. The waste-paper baskets of all delegates were carefully searched each day, and full reports of everything that had been gleaned were sent regularly to the Emperor Francis.

When the Congress, or rather the Five, at last settled itself to transact the business for which it had met, it accomplished the work rapidly, and, on the whole, well. There were many problems to be settled, but in particular there were nine that were outstanding. These were the Saxo-Polish Question, the Question of the Rhine frontier, the Belgo-Dutch Question, the Dano-Swedish Question, the Questions of Switzerland, Italy, the Germanic Confederation, International Rivers and the Slave Trade.

The Saxo-Polish problem was far the worst. By the Treaty of Kalisch, February 28, 1813 (one of the many conventions made among the Allies during the war in order to satisfy each other), the extension of Prussian territory in North Germany had been promised, while Russia was, by implication, accorded a free hand in the dis-

¹ Francis I, Emperor of Austria, reigned from 1792 to 1835.

² Ligne to La Garde, vide Wormely, *loc. cit.*

position of Poland. This Convention was made the basis of a claim on the part of Russia to annex the whole of Poland, while Prussia was to be satisfied with the whole of Saxony—a country which was considered to be forfeit by reason of its king's fidelity to Napoleon. Metternich, however, was by no means anxious that Russia should absorb Galicia and hold Cracow and the line of the Vistula; while Castlereagh too was against this enormous increase of the Tsar's dominion, and was in sympathy with the claims of the Poles to be reconstituted as a State once more. Thus the Four Powers of the Congress were divided into two camps: on the one hand Russia and Prussia, on the other Austria and Great Britain. The unhappy King of Saxony, excluded from all participation in the debates that would settle the fate of his kingdom, could only stay at Pressburg,¹ anxiously waiting for news from day to day. Indeed it looked as though a fearful fratricidal war would start among the Allies, over the carcass of Saxony. The Russian autocrat was used not to be thwarted: "I have 200,000 soldiers in the Duchy of Warsaw; let them try and drive me from it. I have given Saxony to Prussia." So spoke the Tsar to Talleyrand on October 23 (1814). It was not difficult for the acute Frenchman to see that in this division among the Four, France would hold the balance. It was because of this that he confidently demanded admission to the Committee of Four; and it was because of this that Castlereagh and Metternich supported his demand. Admitted on December 24, Talleyrand threw his weight on the side of England and Austria.

In thus definitely choosing the Anglo-Austrian side, Talleyrand rejected the greatest opportunity ever offered to a French statesman. Russia and Prussia would have given almost anything for his support. On December 29, 1814, Hardenberg, acting in conjunction with the Tsar, proposed that if Prussia annexed the whole of Saxony the King of Saxony should, in compensation, be established in a new kingdom on the left bank of the Rhine.² This new State was to include the territory of the Duchy of Luxemburg, a portion of the Archbishopric of Trèves, the city of Bonn, and the Abbeys of Prüm, Stavelot, and Malmédy. It would have a population of 700,000.

Castlereagh and Metternich were both absolutely against this proposal—Metternich, because he did not wish Prussia to become too great by absorbing Saxony; Castlereagh, because he did not

¹ It is now called Bratislava.

² D'Angeberg: *Le Congrès de Vienne et les Traités de 1815*, pp. 1863, 1869.

wish to see a pro-French State established on the left bank of the Rhine, so near to Belgium. But it is difficult to see why Talleyrand was against the proposal too. The Elector of Saxony was a firm friend to France; the new State would have a Catholic and, in many respects, a Gallic population; its dynasty, remembering the loss of Saxony, would have been certain to be anti-Prussian for many years to come. The new State in fact would have been an admirable buffer between France and Germany, and might have prevented the terrible collisions of later years. If Talleyrand had supported the Prussian proposal of December 29, 1814, Great Britain and France would certainly have fought to prevent it. He preferred not to face this risk, and to accept instead the offer of an Anglo-Austrian Alliance, though this seemed equally likely to involve a war with Prussia and Austria.

On January 3, 1815, Castlereagh copied out with his own hand (so as to ensure secrecy) and signed a defensive treaty of alliance, to which Metternich and Talleyrand put their signatures. Each Power agreed to provide 150,000 men. The former bitter enemy of England and Austria was now their military ally!¹ Talleyrand had destroyed the coalition of Europe against France, and rescued her from her isolation. "Now, Sire, the coalition is dissolved, and for ever," he wrote to Louis XVIII (January 4, 1815).² In reality "France had only been admitted to the honour of fighting for the security of Austria, and for the triumph of English policy."³

Although the treaty of January 3 remained secret at the time, Alexander and Hardenberg could not help noticing the solidarity of England, Austria, and France. They preferred not to have another European war; they decided to compromise. So for the rest of the month of January (1815) the negotiations went better; and at last all parties were, more or less, satisfied.⁴ Saxony was not given to the Prussians; it was left as an independent kingdom, but it lost two-fifths of its territory—all the northern portion, with 800,000

¹ The treaty remained secret till Napoleon found the copy of Louis XVIII in the archives at Paris, during the Hundred Days, and published it. Talleyrand does not deal with the affair in his *Mémoires*, except to plume himself on the treaty of January 3, 1815. The *Correspondance inédite du Prince de Talleyrand et du roi Louis XVIII* (ed. Pallain) gives more details.

² Talleyrand, *Mémoires*, II, 556.

³ Houssaye, 1815: *La Première Restauration*, Livre I, chap. III, § II.

⁴ On January 5, Castlereagh was able to write to Lord Liverpool, "I have every reason to hope that the alarm of war is over." (Doc. in Webster, *British Diplomacy, 1813-1815*, p. 282.)