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The Congress System (Concert of Europe), 1818-1825

Questions to ponder

1. Examine the achievement of Congress System in Europe.
2. Account for the Congress System by 1830
3. Why did the congress system die out?
4. Why did the Congress System collapse by 1830?
5. "Disagreements between Metternish and Alexander led to the collapse of the Congress System". Discuss.
6. The Congress System collapse because of its poor foundation." Discuss.
7. "National selfish interest led to the collapse of Congress System." Discuss.
8. "The British isolationist policy of non-intervention led to the collapse of the congress System." Discuss.

Summary of the Vienna Congress and treaty, 1814-1815

The Congress System, also known as the Concert of Europe, was a diplomatic framework established after the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) to maintain the balance of power and prevent future conflicts in Europe. Here are some key points:

1. **Participants:** The system was dominated by the five great powers of Europe: Austria, France, Prussia, Russia, and the United Kingdom.
2. **Regular Congresses:** The great powers held regular congresses to resolve potential disputes and maintain stability. These congresses were held on an ad hoc basis and included meetings at Aix-la-Chapelle (1818), Troppau (1820), Laibach (1821), and Verona (1822).
3. **Objectives:** The main goal was to preserve the territorial and political status quo established by the Congress of Vienna and to prevent revolutionary and liberal movements from disrupting the conservative order.
4. **Intervention:** The great powers used the system to intervene in the internal affairs of states threatened by internal rebellion, such as the uprisings in Italy and Spain.
5. **Decline:** The Congress System began to decline in the 1820s due to divergent aims among its members and the rise of nationalism and liberal movements.

Aims and Objectives of the Congress System

The **Congress System**, also known as the **Concert of Europe**, had several key aims and objectives:

1. **Maintain Balance of Power:** To preserve the balance of power established by the Congress of Vienna, ensuring that no single country could dominate Europe and thereby maintaining peace and stability.
2. **Prevent Future Conflicts:** To prevent the outbreak of future wars by resolving disputes through diplomacy and regular congresses among the great powers.
3. **Suppress Revolutionary Movements:** To restrain or eliminate revolutionary and nationalist movements that threatened the conservative order and the established monarchies.
4. **Support Legitimate Monarchies:** To uphold the principle of legitimacy by supporting existing monarchies and preventing the rise of republican and democratic regimes that could destabilize Europe.
5. **Foster Cooperation among Great Powers:** To promote cooperation and mutual trust among the leading European powers (Austria, Prussia, Russia, the United Kingdom, and later France) by addressing common concerns through dialogue and joint action.

Achievements of the Congress system

The **Congress System** (Concert of Europe) achieved several notable successes:

1. **Maintaining Peace:** The system helped maintain relative peace in Europe for nearly four decades, preventing major conflicts and wars among the great powers.
2. **Resolving Disputes Diplomatically:** Regular congresses allowed the great powers to resolve disputes through diplomacy rather than military confrontation.
3. **Restoring Stability:** The system played a key role in restoring stability and order in Europe after the upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars.
4. **Supporting Legitimate Monarchies:** The Congress System upheld the principle of legitimacy, supporting the restoration and maintenance of traditional monarchies.
5. **Foreshadowing Future International Organizations:** The cooperative framework of the Congress System foreshadowed later international peacekeeping efforts, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations.
6. **The inter-State political and economic cooperation.** Freedom of navigation on all big water bodies like Mediterranean Sea was assured.
7. **Congress made efforts to settle the debt problems between Sweden and Denmark.** Denmark cleared its debt leading to reconciling of Sweden and Denmark.
8. **A new map of Europe was redrawn and maintained**
9. The congress system maintained and promoted constitutionalism in the continental Europe.

Failures and weaknesses of the Congress System

The **Congress System** (Concert of Europe) had several notable failures and weaknesses:

1. **Nationalism:** The system failed to address the rising tide of nationalism, which eventually led to significant uprisings and movements for unification in countries like Germany and Italy.
2. **Suppression of Liberal Movements:** While the Congress System aimed to suppress revolutionary and liberal movements, these ideas continued to spread and gain traction, leading to major political changes, including the Revolutions of 1848.
3. **Divergent Interests:** The great powers often had conflicting interests and priorities, which made it difficult to maintain a unified approach to European stability.
4. **Short-term Solutions:** Many of the agreements and interventions were short-term fixes that did not address underlying issues, leading to recurring conflicts and tensions.
5. **Decline of Influence:** Over time, the influence of the Congress System waned as new political and social forces emerged, and the system struggled to adapt to these changes.
6. **The congress failed to create a joint force that would enforce its resolutions.** It suggested by Tsar alexander of Russia but resisted by British foreign minister, Stewart Castlereagh.
7. **The congress system protected dictatorial leaders** such as Ferdinand I of Naples and Ferdinand VII of Spain.
8. The congress System sidelined weak states.
9. Congress System failed to eliminate slave trade

Reasons for the collapse of the Congress System

The **Congress System** (Concert of Europe) ultimately collapsed due to several key reasons:

1. **National Interests:** Once the common enemy (Napoleon) was defeated, the great powers began to prioritize their own national interests over collective European stability.
2. **Divergent Goals:** Conflicting goals and ambitions among the great powers, such as territorial disputes and power vacuums, led to tensions and disagreements.
3. **Rise of Nationalism:** The growing nationalist movements in various European countries challenged the conservative order established by the Congress System, leading to uprisings and demands for independence.
4. **Liberal Movements:** The spread of liberal and revolutionary ideas continued to undermine the conservative principles upheld by the Congress System, culminating in events like the Revolutions of 1848.

5. **Decline of Cooperation:** The great powers struggled to maintain cooperation and unity, with increasing divisions and rivalries emerging among them.
6. **Lack of experience leaders of the congress** led to its downfall.
7. **Vienna Settlement restored some of the worst legitimate rulers in Europe.** These included Charles X in France who disregarded the 1814 constitutional charter and the Dictators Ferdinand I in Naples and Ferdinand VII in Spain weakened the popularity of the congress system.

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