"The Prague Peace Congress – an event full of paradoxes"

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Often, a particular historical event, phenomenon or process "defies" inclusion in a specific ideal type or terminology which we are used to using to indicate the particular event. One example of note is the Prague Peace Conference of 1813, which does not meet the "requirements" that a historian might make of a typical peace congress. This is even more reason not to be deterred from attempting to describe, structuralise and systematise it. In this regard, three interconnected paradoxical circumstances come to the fore. First of all, the above-noted conflict between expectation and reality. Secondly the paradox of historiographical disinterest in this "crucial event", and finally the misappropriation of an event taking place on Czech territory from Czech "national history" and our historical consciousness.

[Diplomacy; Prague Peace Congress; Metternich; Napoleonic Wars; Balance of Power]

"There has never been anything stranger than our so-called Congress. From the 12th to the 30th we have been idle; from the 30th to the 5th we shall spend our time discussing nothing; and from the 5th to the 10th we shall probably have before us all the motions on which the fate of Europe will depend."[2]

It is customary that wars enter historical consciousness not just through the dates of significant battles, but also through the location where peace is negotiated.[3] And sometimes this is the only information which emerges into standard discourse from the ocean of factual data. Looking at the multiplicity of peace congresses, acts which expand the simple signing of peace to incorporate several locally and personally restricted

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2 W. HUMBOLDT, *Politische Briefe, Bd. 1*, Berlin, Leipzig 1935, p. 402.

3 A. ADOLF, *Peace: A World History*, Cambridge 2009.

and institutionalised diplomatic negotiations, one stands out as differing significantly from the others.[4] This is the peace congress which took place in the second half of July and early August of 1813 in Prague. It was unusual from several perspectives. Not only did it not put an end to a military conflict, but it resulted in the even greater mobilisation of the opposing sides. One side was even made stronger by the input of the congress organiser, the "justice of the peace", which had no scruples in making very clear it had little interest in impartial negotiations. What was most intriguing about the whole event, however, was the fact that long before the congress had even begun, nobody was in any doubt about what the outcome would be once official negotiations had ended. Thus, the Prague Peace Congress is overshadowed in the company of other such congresses.[5] An exhaustive examination of the congress requires that we keep on asking the crucial questions: "Why did the congress take place at all?", "For whom was it organised?" (or perhaps rather "Who profited from it?"), and "What were the congress's actual objectives? Even with all the layers of ambiguities and anomalies, a careful observer should not succumb to scepticism over getting an answer. In the following study, I will attempt to structure the congress as far as I can, while focusing on the three paradoxes of the event which, as it turns out, are complementary and interconnected, and through which I would like to find an answer to the above-stated questions.

First of all, there is the conflict between real (realistic) expectations (and consequently results achieved) and the assumptions often made regarding peace congresses, while a second paradox is a related disinterest in the event. This is sometimes seen in the complete ignorance of it not just amongst the lay public, but even amongst Czech and surprisingly also international historiographers.[6] Thirdly, there is the paradox here present

4 For more on the importance of congresses on the establishment and function of the Concert of Europe, see M. SCHULZ, Wächter der Zivilisation. Institutionelle Merkmale und normative Grundlagen des europäischen Konzertes im 19. Jahrhundert, in: *Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke Gesellschaft*, 17, 2004, pp. 35–47.

5 On the English language version of the Wikipedia, the event "Prague Peace Congress" does not even have its own page.

6 As far as I know, no article or book has been published those deals exclusively with the event in question. A work by Jacques Norvins looking generally at the year of 1813 comes closest (J. M. NORVINS, *Portefeuille de 1813, ou Tableau politique et militaire renfermant, avec le récit des événements de cette époque, un choix de la correspondance inédite de l'empereur Napoléon et de celle de plusieurs personnages distingués, soit français, soit étrangers, pendant la première campagne de Saxe, l'armistice de Plesswitz, le congrès de Prague et la seconde campagne de Saxe*, Paris 1825).

in very indistinct contours of the geographical location of this bombastic event. What role does the second most important historical event of the Napoleonic Wars to take place within Czech territory after the Battle of Austerlitz actually plays within Czech "national" history?

We now have a topic, three questions, and three anomalies, or rather paradoxes. And if we focus on the last of these terms, the events of the Prague Peace Congress begin to be seen in an unusual light, as if they were a bizarre drama. An absurdist two-act drama incorporating everything such a drama should have: the scenery (East Bohemian castles for the first meeting, and Prague for the second meeting), the main star (Prince von Metternich), happenings behind the curtain (secret diplomatic negotiations), extras or side events (in the form of the acts of Bohemian Kingdom officials), a claque (the citizens of Prague and Bohemia) and theatre critics (in the form of historiographers).[7] I will therefore endeavour to tell the story of this play, and should I succeed the careful reader should be able to gain an understanding of the play and unravel those anomalies, and the answers to the questions should become clearer.

Before opening the curtain, let us first look at that cohort of critics: those who interpreted the play, and also those who wrote about it. As we have already mentioned the certain "disinterest" from Czech historiographers, it is no surprise that no comprehensive monograph has been written about this topic domestically. Even so, it is not an area which is completely untouched. Four Czech researchers have discussed the Prague Peace Congress in similarly sized articles and studies, three of which are classics of Czech historiography.[8] While these are older works, they do make an exhaustive study of available archive resources. It is highly unlikely that any other "crucial" sources of official provenance

7 For more about theatrical approach see E. GOFFMAN, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland 1952; J. C. ALEXANDER, Cultural Pragmatic. Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy, in: *Sociological Theory*, 22, 4, 2004, pp. 527–573.

8 The first of these is Antonín Rezek in 1910 (A. REZEK, Praha a Čechy roku 1813, in: *Český časopis historický*, 16, 1, 1910, pp. 1–12), followed by Antonín Novotný during the 1930s (A. NOVOTNÝ, Kolem Pražského kongresu, in: *Kniha o Praze – Pražský almanach III.*, Praha 1932, pp. 149–166), Jaroslav Prokeš five years later (J. PROKEŠ, Pražský mírový kongres 1813, in: *Časopis národního muzea*, 112, 1938, pp. 15–33) and Josef Polišenský in the 1970s (J. POLIŠENSKÝ, *Napoleon a srdce Evropy*, Praha 1971), while the issue is also looked at by Russian studies scholar Milan Švankmajer in his unfinished study on the final years of the Napoleonic era (M. ŠVANKMAJER, *Čechy na sklonku napoleonských válek*, Praha 2004).

could be found apart from the archives contained in the collections of the Prague Gubernium.[9] Furthermore, Prince von Metternich noted the lack of relevant sources, particularly, those directly related to diplomatic negotiations.[10] He notes that diplomatic activities in 1813 were limited to a small space and an even smaller circle of people – high-ranking negotiators who were granted decision-making power. In a case like this, official diplomatic correspondence, under other circumstances absolutely essential, becomes de facto unnecessary.[11] This means that we might find additional relevant information through extensive study of extant materials of a private nature, i.e. memoirs, correspondence or the notes of the persons involved.[12]

For the sake of completeness, it should be said at the end of a passage on Czech historiography that there is a thesis from the start of this century which also looks at the Prague Peace Congress, but apart from including several interesting documents it did not add anything new to the works by the above-mentioned authors.[13]

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9 Národní archiv Praha (further as NAP), Pražské gubernium (further as PG) – period 1811–1815, Box nr. 858, 853, also Fascicles: 20b/62, 20b/64 a 15c/189, PG – Militaire, Nr. 1183, Box nr. 584.

10 W. SIEMANN, *Metternich. Stratege und Visionär. Eine Biographie*, München 2017, passim.

11 *"Only the most important acts and agreements were put down in writing, mainly in their final form, while no minutes were made of the course of the many preceding oral meetings and confidential discussions which were held very frequently at various social occasions"* (POLIŠENSKÝ, p. 173), Jaroslav Prokeš also notes the lack of official documents from diplomatic negotiations and notes laconically that "nothing actually happened" (PROKEŠ, p. 16).

12 For example: from unpublished documents: NAP, Rodinný archiv Metternichů – Acta Clementina (further as RAM – AC) 8,12, Nr. 33, 40, Box nr. 5, 7. From printed sources: *Aus Metternichs nachgelassenen Papieren, 2. Theil*, Wien 1880; *Metternich Denkwürdigkeiten, mit einer Einleitung und mit Anmerkungen herausgegeben von Otto H. Brandt, 1. Theil,* München 1921; *Bon jour, mon amie, Milostné dopisy knížete Metternicha a kněžny Zaháňské*, Brno 1977; F. GENTZ, *Gesammelte Schriften, XI/3 Band*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 2002. For more on the discussions at the East Bohemian castles, see Státní oblastní archiv (further as SOA) Zámrsk, RA Colloredo, Berichte des Opočnoer Amtmannes Wokurka von 15. bis 21. Juni 1813 über die Ankunft S.M. des Kaisers von Russland und der Grossfürstinen, des Königs von Preussen, Grafen Metternich und anderen [Reports of the Opočno bailiff Wokurka from 15 to 21 June 1813 on the arrival of H.M. the Emperor of Russia and the Grand Duchesses, the King of Prussia, Count Metternich and others].

13 See J. BENEŠOVÁ, *Pražský mírový kongres*. Magister thesis, Institut of World History, Charles University Praha 2000.

Now the curtains open and the first act begins. It is the start of 1813, and the Austrian Empire finds itself in an unusual and unprecedented position. It is the vassal of a foreign state which is at war with another power. Austrian troops are retreating in a relatively ordered manner in the face of the Russian campaign, and ambivalence and uncertainty were felt not just by them, but also by the entire Habsburg court, and it was not covered even by the sincere lament of the commander-in-chief of the Austrian expeditionary corps,[14] Prince Schwarzenberg, in a letter to his wife: *"[…] I just wish these colossuses could just weaken further, and if both are dangerous then it would indeed be a fortunate event for humanity, if he who was at this moment more dangerous could meet such an exemplary fate."*[15] Even after the extent of the catastrophe that had befallen Napoleon's soldiers in Russia was evident even in Vienna, Metternich was not able to unequivocally follow the Prussian example, and nor did he want to.[16] If he allowed Austria to leave the French emperor's side, nothing would prevent Russian hegemony, something the Prince feared just as much as he despised the French patronage.[17] And since it was entirely evident that Napoleon was not going to voluntarily give up his rule over Europe, the only viable option at the time was the risky path of so-called armed neutrality, an option which later proved to be an extremely pragmatic one.

Let us look for a while at the figure of Prince von Metternich. In our drama, he plays a crucial role, and not just because he is a central figure in the story, but also because he is its dramatist and dramaturge, the author of the play and the head of the troupe of actors. However, and this is the essence of the first anomaly, not even he believed in his own stillborn

14 For more on the tasks of the corps, see H. KISSINGER, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–1822*, Boston 1957; Ibid., Grossmacht *Diplomatie, Von der Staatskunst Castelreaghs und Metterichs*, Düsseldorf und Wien 1972, p. 123; M. v. ANGELI, Feldzug 1812: die Teilnahme des k. und k. österreichischen Auxiliarkorps unter dem Kommando des Generals der Kavallerie Fürsten Carl zu Schwarzenberg im Feldzug Napoleon I. gegen Russland, in: *Mitteilungen des k. k. Kriegsarchivs*, 9, 4, 1884, pp. 1–87; W. v. GEBLER, *Das k. k. österreichische Auxiliarcorps in russischen Feldzuge 1812*, Wien 1863; L. v. WELDEN, *Der Feldzug der Oesterreicher gegen Russland im jahre 1812*, Wien 1870.

15 K. P. SCHWAREZNBERG, *Briefe des Feldmarschalls Fürsten Schwarzenberg an seine Frau 1799–1816*, Wien 1913, p. 296.

16 For more on Prussia switching sides against Napoleon, see E. FEHRENBACH, *Vom Ancien Régime zum Winer Kongress*, München 1986, p. 123.

17 K. OBERMANN, Diplomatie und Aussenpolitik in Jahre 1813, unter besonderer Berücksichtiung der Rolle Metternichs, in: *Das Jahr 1813*, Berlin 1963, p. 137.

child, i.e. the peace congress in Prague.[18] At a time when the Duke of Vicenza, the designated principal French negotiator, was arriving in Prague, Metternich mandated his assistant, Freiherr Friedrich von Gentz, to sign the Austrian war manifesto. And so the congress, at whose beginning, or rather at the beginning of official negotiations, a war manifesto was issued and whose venue was in a state of feverish war preparedness, could not be home to greater contradictions.

Keeping with the theatrical parallel, we need to realise that Bohemia is just the set, and the Czech nation is the audience, the extras offering a great welcome. They only cared that through "actions for peace" the subjects of the Bohemian Kingdom could maintain their faith in the peaceful nature of the House of Habsburg to the greatest extent possible. Folk writer František Vavák, for example, wrote that *"from all sides it is known that our monarch, Francis I, is the greatest means to achieve Holy peace throughout Europe"*.[19] To be fair, however, we do need to re-examine the idea of the "passivity" of the Czech environment.

For many years, Prague had been a literal centre for those opposed to the French Emperor. Freiherr Heinrich von Gentz resided there until 1809, and he was then replaced by Freiherr von und zum Stein. Their circle of friends and sympathisers included in particular the highest-ranked burgrave, Count Kolowrat, the House of Clam-Gallas, the House of Clam-Martinic, the House of Sternberg (Kaspar and Franz) and the House of Lobkowitz, Graf Czernin and also Josef Dobrovský. The list of figures in science, arts, politics and the military who opposed Napoleon and who were resident in Prague, or Bohemia, to 1813 was much larger, however.[20] This group also includes a large number of refugees who hoped that they could find peace within "pro-French" Habsburg Monarchy territory, and those who merely took advantage of the local

18 In one of his descriptions to his father, the Prince notes: *"Prague is only for the public* […] *shall we have war or not? Nobody can decide on this question before 10 August, and I say nobody, including Napoleon"* (cit. by: J. ŠEDIVÝ, *Metternich kontra Napoleon*, Praha 2005, p. 132).

19 F. J. VAVÁK, *Paměti Františka Jana Vaváka, souseda a rychtáře milčického z let 1770–1816*, *VI,* Praha 2009, p. 191.

20 For example: diplomat and biographer Varnhagen von Ense, poet and translator Johan Ludwig Tieck, banker and philanthropist Abraham Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, composer Karl Maria Weber, poet Clemens Brentano, Prince Wilhelm Bentheim, Wilhelm Humboldt, Count Cristian Bernstof, later Prussian general Wilhelm Willisen. The vast majority of those listed regularly met up in Malá Strana on the second floor of Raymann's house in Augusta Bredová's apartment, who was also a German exile.

hospitality.[21] Not all of them, however, were politically indifferent. One of the most active was Grand Duchess Catherine, Alexander I's sister, and the Duke of Oldenburg's widow. During her stay in Prague, she did not hide her opposition to Napoleon, causing particular difficulties during the period of truce when she openly compromised with Austrian officers and embarrassed the highest regional officials as well. She forced the highest-ranked burgrave, Count Kolowrat, to nimbly correspond both with Police Commissioner Hager and Prince von Metternich. Kolowrat himself did not want to decide on whether to observe the prescribed degree of ceremony considering that Austria was officially still an ally of France, which was at war with the Russian Emperor.[22]

Another woman of beauty supported Russia, however, specifically the Duchess of Sagan. *"At that time she vehemently opposed Metternich's Francophile policy, finding fault with him for so long as to work her way into his bedroom. She was wealthy (…) and Metternich had a soft spot for politics, women and wealth. And here he had all of that in a single and truly appealing form."*[23] If we dare to describe Metternich as the main figure in this drama, then Katharina Wilhelmine, Duchess of Sagan, forms the core romantic theme of the work.[24] Metternich sought a feeling of security and support in her during the most difficult of moments, while he fulfilled her desires for the destruction of the hated Emperor of France.

Of the characters to appear on stage during the first act, those which are the noblest stand out for political reasons. Specifically, this was King Frederick Augustus of Saxony. From the very start of the year, Metternich had attempted diplomacy on the Saxon court. Following initial probing and cautious steps from the timid Saxon king, eventually, a pact of neutrality was signed between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Saxony. King Frederick Augustus could no longer disregard the anti-French opposition which had spread amongst his people and

21 Similarly in list form: Frankfurt banker Rotschield, German politician Freiherr von Gagern, Baroness Stein, Prussian minister Goltz, Prince Hessen-Homburg, French ambassador Count Saint Marsam, Saxon General von Lecoq, Prince of Coburg, Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel, Archduke Ferdinand, Grand Duke of Wirttemberg and last but not least also Emperor Alexander's sisters, Maria of Saxe-Weimar and the below mentioned Catherine of Oldenburg.

22 H. v. SRBIK, *Metternich. Der Staatsmann und der Mensch, Bd. I,* München 1925, p. 160.

23 ŠEDIVÝ, p. 91.

24 For correspondence between Prince von Metternich and the Duchess of Sagan, see *Clemens Metternich – Wilhelmine von Sagen, Ein Briefwechsel 1813 bis 1815*, Graz, Köln 1966; resp. *Bon jour, mon amie*.

– all the more alarming – within military circles in particular.[25] What was significant for diplomacy then, especially Metternich's diplomacy, was the fact that the day before the signature of the pact, Kolowrat had received a court decree on the arrival of the Saxon king and his family, part of his court and his whole guard in Bohemia.[26] Thus, the Saxon monarch was able to enjoy a ceremonial welcome when he arrived in Prague on 27 April.[27] He passed by Prague's garrisons, guilds, burgher associations and schoolchildren on his way to Prague castle. His journey leaving Prague was not so ceremonial, however. Following his victory at the Battle of Lützen on 2 May,[28] Napoleon called Frederick Augustus back to Dresden, in his case rather the "Walk to Canossa". And so, whether he liked it or not, the French Emperor's "subordinate" was forced to cancel the recently signed Austro-Saxon agreement, and again take his place at the side of his "Dresden guest".

It wasn't just prominent figures who were arriving in Bohemia in the spring of 1813, however. Austria was a de facto oasis of peace and quiet, and as such a wave of refugees began crossing the border from Silesia to Bohemia, escaping from Russian Cossacks and others. Initially, Kolowrat was not at all concerned about the situation, with only standard official measures being taken.[29] The state administrator's calm and collected perspective was at the time in evident conflict with the general public perception. Concern was rising amongst the population not just because of rising food prices[30], but also due to the spread of "assured news", in

25 There were even requests to be released from duty and to cross over to the enemy's side from amongst the most senior commanders. See POLIŠENSKÝ, p. 166; NAP, PG – period 1811–1815, fasc. 1411.

26 He received an unofficial message on 18 April in a letter from the Austrian envoy to the Saxon court, of Paul, Prince Esterházy.

27 On 21 April, Kolowrat called on city governor, Jan Limbeck of Lilienau, that he should use the Schwarzenberg and Trautmannsdorf palaces to accommodate the visitors who were to arrive in Prague, for whom Prague Castle was not large enough, and the Prague Chapter was also asked to make available its vacant Archbishop's Palace.

28 See G. NAFZIGER, *Lutzen and Bautzen: Napoleon's Spring Campaign of 1813*, Chicago 1992.

29 He gives the governors of the Bydžov, Boleslav and Litoměřice regions, for example, the order to take action in regard to the refugees, and to do so surreptitiously and without giving the impression that it is an official order. As many refugees as possible were to be moved into the state's interior and not to give cause to Russian irregular troops to cross the border (PROKEŠ, p. 21).

30 See C. A. FISCHER, *Zur Lehre vom Staatsbankrott*, Charleston 2009; A. PALMER, *Metternich. Der Staatsmann Europas, Eine Biographie*, Düsseldorf 1977, p. 135 or M. ŠVANK-

particular following Napoleon's spring victories in neighbouring Saxony. Incidentally, it may be noted that at this time Count Kolowrat received a strong reminder that French officers who were recovering in Bohemia should be treated with the same courtesy as Prussian and Russian officers. Another evident dichotomy of opinion between the most senior burgrave – i.e. the man dealing with the state's daily issues and common agenda – and Metternich, playing out the risks of international diplomacy in his head, was Count Kolowrat's anachronistic request to secure the integrity of borders in the spirit of Austria's current policy of neutrality.

What was the situation internationally at this time? A lot has been suggested and anticipated in the previous paragraphs, the characters and sides clearly sketched out, and all that remains to do is for the dramatist's pen, or the director's vision, to define the contours clearly so the story can fully begin.

Austria's Foreign Minister was evidently shocked by the situation in the winter of 1812/1813, but he was able to respond rapidly and with much improvisation. It is evident from extant sources that his vision of Austria as a neutral nation was outlined very early, and this was followed by steps taken leading to this proposed objective. Regarding his stance, apart from his private correspondence, the instructions he sent ex-post to Emperor Francis I at the very start of the Prague negotiations are a fascinating source of information.[31] In addition to specific steps and procedures which he planned to implement at the congress, these also include a comprehensive summary of the events of the previous months. These instructions imply that Metternich had never considered an alliance with the French Emperor during the whole of spring. He had always considered it essential to ally with his opponents should Napoleon reject the conditions on offer. Metternich recommended this be done even if Napoleon accepted the conditions. *"Remaining in armed neutrality would be a desperate protective measure in an emergency, which would also be considered a political humiliation."*[32]

According to Metternich, the fact that following his victorious battles Napoleon had reluctantly agreed to Austrian mediation due to the exhaustion of his armies and his need for more time to replenish his

MAJER, Čechy a příprava Rakouska k válce roku 1813, in: *Historie a vojenství*, 7, 4, 1958, pp. 586–606.

31 *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren, 1. Band*, Wien 1880, pp. 463–468.

32 BENEŠOVÁ, p. 55.

reserves sanctified Metternich's vision of Austria as a neutral power.[33] The French Emperor disagreed with such an interpretation, but with the prevailing constellation of forces, he could do nothing but take out his anger on envoy Count Bubna, who gave him the conditions for a truce on 16 May in Dresden.[34] In the end, this was agreed on 4 June in the small town of Peuschwitz. Napoleon, who resisted the proposal for a written declaration of conditions for peace and preferred oral proceedings at a congress, immediately began strengthening his cavalry. The allies also caught their second wind in Silesia.[35]

Metternich would not let himself be influenced by France's overtures, neither by the direct calls from Empress Marie Louise,[36] nor by Prussian temper[37] nor by calls for Austrian military pride. The discrepancy in the perception of Prince von Metternich's steps by the entirety of Prussian national (and then German) historiography should be noted here, however. Antonín Rezek looks at this problem in a large section of his article on the Prague Peace Congress. In this, he defends the Prince against the invective of Prussian historians, in particular against the relentless accusations of cowardice and spinelessness, and expresses dismay at the claim that Austria received "a lot for nothing".[38] Instead, he sees Metternich's cautious steps as saving the Kingdom of Prussia, which was driven by blind enthusiasm. There is also no doubt that Metternich saw

33 KISSINGER, *A World Restored*, p. 67.

34 Napoleon: *"What is going on over there? You are arming, against whom are you arming? It can only be against me, rather than the Austrian Emperor doing anything for me* […] *I don't want your armed mediation* […] *Leave me to deal with my matters with the Russian Emperor alone. I shall not give up anything, not even a single village, of that which was assigned to France according to constitution."* (Cit. by O. CRISTE, *Österreichs Beitritt zur Koalition*, Wien 1913, p. 72).

35 Ibid., pp. 86–87.

36 Following the Battle of Lützen, Emperor Francis's daughter told her father via French legation counsel Floret *"Napoleon's anger towards you shall be boundless, he will leave aside all his opponents and turn all his forces against Austria* […] *Be assured that you shall never have any benefit from war."* (Ibid., p. 71).

37 He could not have disagreed more than with Freiherr von und zum Stein, a leading figure in Prussian anti-French policy and the anti-Napoleon coalition, not only thanks to his influence on Russian Emperor Alexander in whom he instilled messianic ideas. Metternich was totally opposed to the "dangerous theory" on the role of the people in the fight against a usurper. See PALMER, pp. 132–133. *"Stein was a strict German nationalist, while Metternich was a European in the true sense of the word."* (Cit. by ŠEDIVÝ, p. 111).

38 CRISTE, p. 91.

the Hohenzollern dynasty as a natural ally for Austria, and he anticipated this to be the case in his plans. Nevertheless, this objective claim does not change the fact that German historiography generally focuses on the importance of Prussia and the phenomenon of "Befreiungskriege" when looking at this particular period and expresses its disdain towards Austria and its representatives.[39]

Concerning Russia, it was evident after the battle defeats that it was losing its leadership role in the anti-Napoleon coalition. A situation had come about which did not favour the Russian Emperor, because, from the moment the truce had been agreed, the outcome of the war depended much more on which of the battling sides gained Austria's support, rather than on the number of Russian regiments.

However, the Austrian military forces were also gaining power at that time. At the start of May, Metternich had managed to get Emperor Francis to set up a hundred-and-twenty-thousand-strong army headed by Schwarzenberg, which was to be a tool for armed intervention to promote peace, and whose establishment meant that Metternich's measures were no longer purely diplomatic in nature.[40] Now, he could even dictate conditions. Those placed on the French Emperor at minimum entailed the abolition of the Duchy of Warsaw, the return of territory on the right bank of the Rhine, the abolition of the Confederation of the Rhine protectorate, the restoration of Prussia and the surrender of the Illyrian Provinces.[41]

Once specific conditions were on the table, negotiations could begin. For Metternich, this meant discussing with Prussia and Russia what Austria would be offered if the mentioned conditions were accepted by its former French ally, or at least if it was "boxed into a corner". Thus, the drama moved to the picturesque environment of the East Bohemian castles in Opočno, Ratibořice and Jičín. This negotiation was intentionally not kept secret from the French in the expectation that the French Emperor would respond and express his interest in meeting the Austrian Foreign Minister. But here we would be inappropriately running ahead of events.

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39 In this regard, Stein's comment on Metternich's address contained in a letter to Count Münster of 17 July is often quoted: "[…] *Metternich is shallow, immoral and duplicitous, he acts either as a traitor, or perhaps more likely, he has no power or enough personal influence to be able to lead and control the Emperor* […]" (OBERMANN, p. 155).

40 KISSINGER, *A World Restored*, pp. 63–64.

41 PALMER, p. 134.

On Metternich's advice, Emperor Francis set off to Jičín on 1 June.[42] That same day, arriving at the rooms of the former Wallenstein residential seat, he received Russian counsel Nesselrode. Nesselrode remained and agreed with Metternich on the proposed conditions for peace as mentioned above, which Napoleon naturally provisionally rejected. On 10–12 June, Metternich discussed these conditions in Opočno, where as well as with Nesselrode he also discussed them with Prussian Chancellor Hardenberg and the Count of Stadion.[43]

Metternich was in any case busy for the whole of June. It was a period of continuously moving around for him, so his coach was always ready to go. In particular, he travelled from Cheb to Prague, from where he went to Jičín, then he travelled for negotiations in Opočno, stayed over with the Duchess of Sagan in Ratibořice, then back to Prague, then on to Teplice, Louny and back to Prague again. In the meantime, the East Bohemian castles were hosting important figures. Their list is a lot more exclusive than the above-noted list of Prague guests.

The Russian Emperor arrived in Opočno with a huge entourage on 16 June, where he was the guest of the Count of Colloredo, and where the Emperor's sisters Maria and Catherine were also staying. A week later, however, the Emperor was heading for Ratibořice where he met not just Metternich, Stadion, Hardenberg, Gentz and Wilhelm Humboldt, who was the only one to stay there and did not leave after negotiations ended, but also with Princess Wilhelmine, Duchess of Sagan. This young woman inadvertently caused an even greater personal gulf between the Russian Emperor and the Austrian Foreign Minister. Their jealousy of each other and their hostility certainly did not help to calm the atmosphere during negotiations.

And a lot was on the line.[44] Metternich did his utmost to ensure the outcome would not go beyond the Austrian note to the French Emperor

42 He went through Znojmo, Jihlavu and Německý Brod and his entourage numbered over 80 people, including groom Count Trauttmansdorff, Lord Chamberlain, Count Vrbna, Field Marshall von Duca, Adjutant General Kutscher and State Counsel Stift.

43 SIEMANN, pp. 397–398.

44 In contrast to the Prague congress, we do have partial documents on the course of negotiations. This is given in a file in the Colloredo collection (SOA Zámrsk, RA Colloredo, Berichte des Opočnoer Amtmannes Wokurka von 15. bis 21. Juni 1813 über die Ankunft S. M. des Kaisers von Russland und der Grossfürstinen, des Königs von Preußen, Grafen Metternich und anderen [Reports of the Opočno bailiff Wokurka from 15 to 21 June 1813 on the arrival of H.M. the Emperor of Russia and the Grand Duchesses, the King of Prussia, Count Metternich and others]).

of early June. He had to deal with pressure from the Prussian and Russian negotiators who wanted to further expand the conditions, e.g. to incorporate the separation of Holland from France, the restitution of the Spanish Bourbons and the consolidation of the situation within the Italian peninsula. At the same time, it was crucial for his plan that the outcome of negotiations be unacceptable for Napoleon so that it would become clear to fearful and hesitant Emperor Francis that his son-in-law did not want peace. During negotiations, Metternich generally did not take on a very accommodating approach. In principle, he wanted to gain allies for a settlement based on his demands focused on applying a balance of power policy.

During the entire period of negotiations in Opočno and Ratibořice, Emperor Francis was residing in Jičín. This entirely contests the famed legend of three monarchs meeting at Ratibořice Castle. In essence, the Austrian Emperor did not want to make it obvious what side Metternich had chosen for Austria, and he endeavoured to hold on to an outward impression of neutrality. His original plan had been to move to the castle of Kosmonosy at the end of June, but the radical transformation in circumstances linked to Emperor Napoleon's invitation to a personal meeting in Dresden addressed to Metternich,[45] resulted in the Emperor moving to the castle in Brandýs nad Labem.[46]

The Austrian Foreign Minister's meeting with Napoleon in Dresden was a brilliant outcome of Metternich's diplomacy. There are some extant testimonies of the negotiations in Dresden.[47] If we disregard a certain

[45] This was a proposal by Emperor Napoleon for a personal meeting with Prince von Metternich. Metternich was so pleased about it that he immediately informed not just Emperor Francis, but also his lover, the Duchess of Sagan: *"Tonight I shall be travelling to Dresden, where I have been invited. I shall be there 24 hours and shall return to Jičín on Saturday (27 June). I need not tell you how pleased I am about the trip! I shall arrive there as a true Man of God, bearing the weight of the world on my shoulders."* (Cit. by *Bon jour, mon amie*, p. 37).

[46] In Jičín, the Emperor was in the company of Count Kolowrat. The Prince of Schwarzenberg was also there, who had recently discussed the allies' operational plans with Russia's General Toll. This plan, which took account of the comments of allied generals Toll and Knesebeck was adopted as the plan throughout Emperor Francis's cautious offensive actions. It then served as the basis for negotiations in the Silesian castle of Trachenberg on 11 and 12 July in the presence of the Russian Emperor, Prussian King and Swedish heir to the throne. Austria was represented by Count Stadion. NAP, PG – period 1811–1815, Fasc. 18/35, 18/38, 18/39.

[47] E.g., Metternich's report to the Emperor of 26 June (See *Aus Metternichs nachgelassenen Papieren*, 2. Theil, Wien 1880, pp. 462–463); Prince von Metternich's letter to his wife Eleonore of 28 June (see NAP, RAM – AC 12, Nr. 33, Box nr. 5), and Metternich's

degree of Metternich's self-portrayal in his reports, we in essence get a picture of a barely in control French despot facing a calm and composed Metternich aware of the fact he holds all the aces. Napoleon was even able to act as if he was offended and give a demonstrative gesture of departure. This was followed by another invitation from Napoleon to Dresden's Marcolini Palace, a summary of conditions for Austria's armed mediation, the convening of a peace conference in Prague, and also the extension of the truce until 10 August. This third condition was not approved by Emperor Alexander, and Metternich had to make use of all his skills of diplomacy to convince Alexander that time had been bought not because Austria was hoping for peace, but rather in order that arming could be completed. But neither did the French Emperor stand idly by. He was not unaware of Austria's position, as he had long ago ordered increased arms and military recruitment, in particular in the regions of South Germany and the Italian Kingdom.[48]

Now, nevertheless, the curtains close so that the drama's scenery can be changed. On stage, the palaces and salons of Prague appear. That section of the audience which lives in the Bohemian capital is thrilled by the magnificence and lustre of the act. But is this a "real" feeling when the significance of the event is not clear for most Prague citizens, and besides the parades, the pageant and the momentary excitement it gives them nothing at all? And nor does it in any way contribute to an awareness of the fact that "world events are happening right here and right now". The Czech people did not embrace the congress, because they were not a part of events on the stage; they could not take action and change the plot. They were down below in the audience, or they were technical assistants and they let events play out without any obvious interest. They were essentially little interested in the play, as it was neither written nor staged for them.

Officially, the Congress was to begin on 12 June. However, Prague and burgrave Count Kolowrat was in particular need of time to prepare for such an important event. Prague's citizens learnt about the honour they would receive from the newspapers on 6 June. That same day, Emperor Francis travelled from Jičín to Brandýs, where he was close enough to

memoirs (*Metternich Denkwürdigkeiten,* pp. 246–254.). A view from the other side is offered by the memoirs of the Emperor's secretary J. Fain: A. J. F. FAIN, *Manuscrit de mil huit cent Treize, 2. tome*, Paris 1824, pp. 36–44.

48 W. ONCKEN, *Allgemeine Geschichte, 1. Theil, 2. Band: Das Zeitalter der Revolution, des Kaisserreiches und der Befreiungskriege*, Berlin 1886, p. 653.

Prague but also far enough away from all those who might want to visit him. The burgrave immediately instructed Prague Castle's inspector to furnish all the buildings and palaces where all the negotiators had declared they would be staying with castle furnishings.[49]

Upon specific request, the Archbishop's Palace chapter made their palace available. Kolowrat made agreements with many of the owners of Malá Strana palaces to accommodate diplomats, their entourages and many other guests. Accommodation rules were even produced. The state's highest administrator was not responsible just for setting up a dignified framework for the entire congress, but he also had the delicate duty of ensuring the protection of congress participants and monitoring them.[50]

Outwardly, the entire event played out in all its glory. More guards were sent to Prague's celebratorily lit-up city gates, and entrance to the city was barred to anyone without special permission during the period the congress was being held.[51] Even so, Prague was "bursting at the seams", and the owners of hotels and guest houses were rubbing their hands in glee.[52]

On 3 July, Kolowrat received a letter from the Emperor,[53] in which he was informed that undesirable persons must be prevented from entering Prague,[54] and desirable persons were to be monitored. Scarcely a week later, a more official report came directly from Hager,[55] stating that Prague

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49 Russian privy counsellor, Baron Anstett, resided in Fürstenberg's house, British envoy Lord Cathcard in house no. 258 (Malostranské náměstí) and Baron Stein was said to have been rather bored at the Kolowrats (house no. 506 in the street U Sovových mlýnů), while Swedish envoy, Baron Löwenhelm made use of the Lobkowitz gardens (no. 347 in Karmelitská street). From 12 July, Metternich resided in Schönborn Palace, while the Wallensteins gave his right-hand man, Freiherr von Gentz, a beautiful room with a view of the gardens. It must have been very picturesque there, because shortly afterwards Gentz moved the Duchess of Sagan there, who departed the Windischgrätz house in Letenská street. The only person not to enjoy the beauty of Prague's centre was Schwarzenberg, who was headquartered in Libeň. (NAP, PG – 1811–1815, Fasc. 20b/62, 15c/189).

50 Hager to Kolowrat, 8 July 1813, NAP, PG – 1811–1815, Fasc. 20b/64.

51 *Betrachtung eines Deutschen über die Feldzüge der Francosen und ihrer Verbündetete gegen Russland und dessen Bundesgenossen in den Jahren 1812 und 1813*, Hamburg 1814, p. 120.

52 NOVOTNÝ, *Kolem pražského kongresu*, p. 91.

53 Emperor Francis I. to Kolowrat, 3 July 1813, NAP, PG – 1811–1815, Fasc. V/3/1813.

54 It is thanks to this instruction that we are aware of the case of a shop clerk from Saxony, a certain Friedrich Goldhammer who attempted three times to get to his shop in Prague, and who was three times forcibly removed outside of Prague's borders (NOVOTNÝ, *Kolem pražského kongresu*, p. 92).

55 Hager to Kolowrat, 8 July 1813, NAP, PG – 1811–1815, Fasc. 20b/64.

would become host to spies, and Prague City Governor Jan Limbeck of Lilienau should be instructed to mobilise the police apparatus and send regular reports to Vienna.

The other parties involved in discussions naturally also undertook intelligence and espionage measures. And, as in other congresses too, there was a conflict between intelligence authorities in Prague. Behind the curtain, the secret Austrian police successfully demonstrated that they were truly equal to their French counterpart. For courtesy reasons, Russian and Prussian emissaries and spies could not be fully focused on, and so when such individuals were uncovered, they were merely monitored, and not arrested.

Prague's police force logically took an entirely different attitude concerning its French adversaries.[56] And it did so not just within Prague. The activities of spies were often uncovered even before they arrived on Austrian territory. However, there were also French people whose presence was acknowledged with gratitude: on 20 June, Josef Fouché, Duc d'Otrante, at the time out of favour with Napoleon, stopped in Prague on his journey to Ljubljana.

However, the most monitored person in Prague at that time was undoubtedly the unofficial French envoy in Vienna, Count Narbonne-Lara. He arrived in Prague on 10 July, and one way his arrival drew attention was his 34-strong entourage, a rather large number for the time. His stay is noted for the considerable embarrassment it caused. He was the highest-status French diplomat to stay at that time in Prague for some time. While he enjoyed his exclusive status within society, he made it very clear that he had no official mission and he had essentially no interest in the congress.[57] A few days later, however, it became evident to the police that his tasks there were all espionage related. He endeavoured to hide his true face by playing the role of an ordinary traveller. He resided in Malá Strana in the inn U arcivévody Karla, but he visited Prague bookshops

56 When renowned French courier Cailletan arrived in Prague, on his journey from Dresden to Istanbul, all it took was a moment's distraction during his two-hour stay in Prague for the contents of his bag to be inspected. (A. NOVOTNÝ, *Staropražské sensace*, Praha 1937, pp. 91–92).

57 Gentz, who like Metternich did not know what to think of Narbonne's presence, wrote to his friend and Meternich's secretary, Joseph von Pilat: *"While Narbonne is in Prague, he does not want to know anything of the congress, he says that he is a mere traveller and shall remain in the inn* […]*."* (Cit. by *Breife von Friedrich von Gentz an Pilat, 1. Band*, Leipzig 1868, p. 36).

almost every day,[58] ostensibly admiring the sights of the city while spreading disinformation not just about Napoleon's successes in Spain, but also on disagreements amongst the allies. In the end, the Prague police's efforts at getting an informer near him paid off. The envoy himself was of assistance in this regard when in a desire to penetrate sources of information in Prague he took it upon himself to hire several people. As a result, a specially trained police informer became one of his confidants and was later rewarded by Kolowrat.[59] This informer was so successful that he brought specially written letters from the Prince of Schwarzenberg, General Radecký and others to the unsuspecting Count Narbonne which were designed to deceive him about the state of the Austrian army. And finally regarding the French envoy, at midnight on 10 August, at the time the congress was expected to end, Count Kolowrat had all of Count Narbonne's confidants who were being followed arrested.[60]

But now let us focus on the actual course of negotiations. The story of this play is drawing to its conclusion, and the tension is rising. We noted at the beginning that we lack official documentation. The only thing that can serve as a source is the ex-post-mediated testimony of participants. The question arises, however, as to what use official documents would have been since we know that basically, no negotiations took place, and if any did it was *a priori* evident what conclusions they were leading to. Diplomatic negotiations again open up space for the best actor to excel – the one who, as we have shown above, fulfils the role of playwright and director – i.e. Prince von Metternich. Metternich was aware that he had managed to give Austria a decisive position through the congress being held in Prague and his role at it. The analysis of the political situation mentioned in the introduction and approved by the Emperor served as the starting point for the prince and service instructions for the next stage in his activities.

58 The police machinery was working full out, and they did not miss anything Narbonne did in Prague. Governor Lilienau wrote to Kolowrat on 14 July, for example: *"The day before yesterday, Narbonne went into the city, where he stopped first at Haas's bookstore, and then at Tempský's bookstore. He bought books and maps here and there. He returned to the hotel, ate in his room and he did not make or receive any visits."* (Cit. by NOVOTNÝ, *Kolem Pražského kongresu*, p. 91).

59 Narbonne's ensnarement was the plan of the Prague governor's presidial secretary Willmann. (POLIŠENSKÝ, p. 183).

60 NAP, PG – period 1811–1815, fasc. 15a/70, 20b/64.

In full accordance with the construction of the drama, we find the traditional machinations which occur regarding the approach of the French. Since there was still no sight of an official French envoy, Metternich and the other congress participants were able to focus on more pleasant matters such as balls, mutual visits and parties. The Austrian Foreign Minister had his love Wilhelmine, Duchess of Sagan at his side and he was feeling happy. He focused on matters of protocol because the Prussian and Russian representatives were refusing to sit at the same desk with the French representatives during negotiations. But not only were no such representatives present, nor were they on their way, or rather it was not known who Napoleon would designate to represent him at the congress. Kolowrat and Lilienau also summarised many small details and marginal matters of police and administrative nature each day for the Prince. Last but not least, the Prince had to oversee military negotiations and preparations which brought Schwarzenberg out of his base in Libeň.

The allied military representatives did not just discuss strategic and tactical matters. Austrian representatives were blatant in exploiting delays in congress negotiations to plan economic viability for the allied troops, and methods of supplying provisions and medical supplies for the allied troops. This played out, of course, at a time when they were meant to be acting as justices of the peace between both sides. And so, at a time when it was meant to be hosting a peace congress, Prague was heavily fortified. Only from the northwest, of course, or roughly in the direction where the French Emperor's troops were concentrated.

Regarding the protocol problems, in the end it was decided that negotiations would not take place in plenary, but rather through an intermediary.[61] The French representatives were first to be informed of Austria's four conditions, and then the reservations of the allies in regard to full support for the Habsburgs. If France accepted these conditions, a preliminary peace was to be concluded. However, to even discuss these matters an authorised French representative needed to be present. Yet it was still only Narbonne that was in Prague. The Prussian and Russian emissaries accepted France's conduct with complete calm because they had not yet arrived in Prague either. The only one who could be out of sorts was Metternich.[62] Humboldt, for example, wrote to his wife on 14 July:

61 PALMER, p. 141.

62 He expressed his displeasure in a letter to his wife Eleonore of 26 July: *"We are still awaiting Caulaincourt's arrival. It is all becoming ridiculous and we would be shown up as real*

"Our work began yesterday; to this time there is no French representative here. It does not bother Anstett and me, because we did not come here to negotiate with the French. That alone is not flattering for Austria, to say the least."[63]

On 19 July, Metternich received a letter from the Duke of Bassano, French Foreign Minister dated the 16th of that month regarding the appointment of the Duke of Vicence and Count Narbonne as French representatives at negotiations.[64] But Armand Caulaincourt, the Duke of Vicence, did not arrive in Prague until 28 July, i.e. 16 days after negotiations had officially begun. His task was not to discuss peace, but rather to prevent Austria from joining the coalition, or at least forcing it to take up neutrality. On the same day that the Duke arrived, Metternich asked his media assistant Gentz to come up with an Austrian war manifesto. *"A congress, for which a war manifesto was prepared for its opening and whose venue was filled with military preparations was indeed not a peace congress!"*[65]

Caulaincourt, who resided at Schönborn Palace, undertook more activities during discussions than Narbonne. He was also convinced of the success of his mission, as he believed that Austria was too compromised to make the unprecedented move to the allied side. On 6 August, he asked to talk to Metternich and informed him in confidence that Napoleon was willing to agree to certain conditions, specifically giving up the Warsaw Grand Duchy, waiving claims to the Spanish throne and returning the Illyrian Provinces to Austria. Regarding Hanseatic cities and the Confederation of the Rhine, however, he rejected the idea of making any concessions. At France's request, this meeting was to be kept secret from the allied representatives, but through Emperor Francis, who was still residing in Brandýs nad Labem and who was receiving regular reports from Metternich, Anstett and Humboldt were informed of what was discussed. Two days later, Caulaincourt received a response, which he immediately forwarded to Napoleon in Dresden. It is clear that the French Emperor could not objectively respond in time and send his response by

idiots if we had not taken up the position we have taken without illusions, without exaggerated hopes. Narbonne is running around the city like a poisoned rat with huge calling cards on which Count of Narbonne, Representative to Congress is written. But because he has no instructions on how to proceed, it is as if he were not here." (NAP, RAM – AC 12, Nr. 33, Box nr. 5).

63 A. v. SYDOW, *Wilhelm und Caroline von Humboldt in ihren Briefen, 4. Theil: Feder und Schwerten in den Freiheitskriegen*, Berlin 1910, p. 60.

64 NAP, RAM – AC 8, Nr. 40, Box nr. 7.

65 PROKEŠ, p. 31.

10 August, when negotiations were to end.[66] And so ended a Congress that never really met.[67]

As the anticipated date approached, tension rose in concerned circles. Metternich spent the last night of the congress with Gentz taking a long walk on Štvanice island. He then moved to the Duchess of Sagan's quarters in Wallenstein Palace. Here he was met by Humbolt and Anstett, Paul and Maria Theresia Esterházy, Leopoldine of Liechtenstein and the Prince of Schwarzenberg. At midnight, Metternich signed the declaration of war with France. Fire signals were immediately used to send the message to Bohemia's northeast borders that the allied troops waiting there could set out to march to the heart of the land. Preparing this type of signalling apparatus is certainly not a traditional part of the job of an impartial host of a peace conference. And so, at the very end of the play, we find an anticipated disaster in the form of a coming war. All the main actors on the stage full of tension had anticipated its conclusion, i.e. declaration of war with France. The notorious Godot never arrives, and peace was not concluded. And just as Godot never arrived, as those familiar with Beckett's work know, all the protagonists and the audience also knew that peace could not be expected in this play. Yet they still performed the play, and when the curtains fell after the great finale (i.e. after congress negotiations), everybody, it can be said, felt relieved: the actors (including those from France), the theatre employees and the audience. When Caulaincourt reported to Metternich the following day, he was strictly informed that from that moment on, France and Austria were at war, and he and Emperor Francis considered any further negotiations to be unnecessary.[68]

The play was over. Interested parties began riding the play's success to celebrate the premiere with the actors. Others, in contrast, left the room bitterly disappointed over its course. And so, Prague began to fill up with new distinguished guests, and this time the most distinguished of all. On 14 August, Emperor Francis left Brandýs nad Labem, definitively moving to Prague. Russian Emperor Alexander arrived the next day. A further two days later, the final of the allied monarchs, Frederick William III, arrived in Prague. Their arrival was greeted by lines of well-wishers, especially for

66 SRBIK, p. 161.

67 KISSINGER, *A World Restored*, p. 81.

68 *"Yesterday we were mediators, today no more. The French proposals must from now on be addressed to the three allied courts."* (Cit. by ŠEDIVÝ, p. 137).

the Russian Emperor, or rather for the exotic Cossacks who comprised his personal guard. In contrast, the French envoy, the Duke of Vicenza, departed Prague bitterly disappointed. He left on the same day that the previously mentioned Austrian war manifesto was published. His route, which was carefully observed by the Beroun regional governor's spies, took him towards Zbraslav.

Notably, Prague residents' enthusiasm for the events after 10 August was entirely in conflict with the attitude that the public took concerning possible war not even 14 days earlier. In mid-July, the majority of the population was still convinced that it was not desirable for Austria to join the war, and it would bring it no benefits.[69] Now, however, the Austrian army was moving against Napoleon's troops and the entire country was getting ready for war.[70] This was the third time now, and many contemporaneous observers were able to foretell, considering the circumstances, that this time the Habsburgs would see victory.

So why did the congress take place at all? Certainly, so that Austria could join the coalition which under the prevailing conditions promised it more than the other side, with the least damage possible to its "moral responsibility". Metternich wanted Emperor Francis to be steered onto the path which the Prince had laid out. The peace congress could give an impression not just to the Emperor, but also to the public, that everything was played out, and in the end, there was no other way, and no other way had ever been possible.

This allows us to partially answer the question of for whom the congress was held. I think we won't be far from the truth if we conclude that it was held for most of those who took part in it. Metternich needed it to clear his conscience. The Russian and Prussian representatives needed it so that their armies could get their second wind. And Emperor Napoleon needed it so he could build up his considerably thinned cavalry. And diplomats and other congress participants generally needed it to get their moment on the stage. But that was all. The play was not performed for the Prague public. We shouldn't forget the significant profits earned by Prague's hoteliers and restaurateurs, of course, but in general, the congress gave the citizens of Prague and the Bohemian lands nothing apart from a temporary release of societal tension (amplified by the endless years of war

69 POLIŠENSKÝ, p. 200.

70 See ŠVANKMAJER, *Čechy a příprava Rakouska k válce r. 1813*, pp. 586–606.

and hardship). Neither can we say that the citizens were disappointed. They simply didn't place any hope in it.

And here we have arrived at those paradoxes. Understanding the motivations and investments of individual actors and "stage protagonists", it is entirely evident that we have an unusual "congress". An absurd drama in which it was entirely evident that we cannot expect the desired result one might expect from a peace congress, i.e. peace. With this in mind, we can decipher the substance of the second anomaly of the historiographic disinterest. How could the audience, and then the professional critics (historiographers), accept this farce? Historiography and historical consciousness responded as theatre consumers would act. The disappointment of a play which leads nowhere merely shows that where the actors' performances are legible and the audience is not paying attention to events, the piece is consigned to oblivion. Perhaps in future, there may be somebody who, fascinated by its peculiarities, writes a more extensive critical monograph. However, whether the audience would accept it would be a question. Especially for the Czech audience, because the course of the play essentially "does not affect" Czech history, and nor does it fall within it. The play was neither written nor acted for Czechs, and despite the undoubted bombast and attractive settings, there is no reason to place it within national history, within Czech historical consciousness or in the history books.