

## Absolutism and Enlightenment. Wie eine Philosophie die europäischen Kräfteverhältnisse revolutionierte (S II)

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Cover of Thomas Hobbes' "Leviathan" (1651)

In Europa ist der Übergang vom Absolutismus zur Aufklärung geprägt von revolutionären Umwälzungen, philosophischen Strömungen und sozio-ökonomischen Entwicklungen, die insbesondere das gesamte 18. Jahrhundert dominieren. Immanuel Kant gilt, zumindest im deutschsprachigen Raum, als der „Vater“ der Aufklärung. Aber war es nur die Macht der Worte, die hier wirkte? Oder waren nicht auch die politischen und sozialen Entwicklungen wesentliche Wirkungs-faktoren? Und welcher Zeitaltergeist prägt die anti-aufklärerischen Strömungen des 18. Jahrhunderts angesichts populistischer und rechtslastiger Überzeugungen? In dieser Unterrichtseinheit werden zunächst die historischen Prozesse analysiert, die den Absolutismus im Sinne der Aufklärung überwinden und relevante Protagonisten vorgestellt. Die Schüler erhalten aber auch die Gelegenheit, sich mit gegenwärtigen Tendenzen auseinanderzusetzen, die die demokratischen Errungenschaften im Zeitalter der Globalisierung infrage stellen oder gefährden.

**Klassenstufe:** Sekundarstufe II

**Dauer:** ca. 16 Stunden

**Bereich:** Geschichte des Absolutismus und der Aufklärung, Demokratie-konzepte, Menschenrechte

**Kompetenzen:**

- Dokumente analysieren und in ihrem historischen Kontext interpretieren
- Absolutismus und Aufklärung als Katalysatoren gesellschaftlicher Umwälzungen diskutieren
- historische Zusammenhänge und aktuelle Deutungen kritisch analysieren
- eigene Standpunkte erarbeiten und vertreten

## Materialübersicht

### 1./2. Stunde: Concepts – Absolutism

- M 1 (Bi/Tx) L'état c'est moi  
M 2 (Ab/Fi) European Perspectives

### 3./4. Stunde: Concepts – Enlightenment

- M 3 (Tx) Hobbes versus Locke  
M 4 (Tx) Catalyst for Revolutions

### 5./6. Stunde: Great Thinkers and Philosophers (1)

- M 5 (Tx) Immanuel Kant  
M 6 (Tx) English Philosophers

### 7./8. Stunde: Great Thinkers and Philosophers (2)

- M 7 (Tx) French Thinkers  
M 8 (Tx) Frederick the Great and Voltaire

### 9./10. Stunde: Europe under Pressure – the French Revolution

- M 9 (Ab/Tx) The French Revolution  
M 10 (Ab/Fo) Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

### 11./12. Stunde: Europe under Pressure – the Napoleonic Wars and Restoration

- M 11 (Tx) The Napoleonic Wars  
M 12 (Ka/Tx) The Congress of Vienna

### 13./14. Stunde: Survival of the Enlightenment?

- M 13 (Ab/Tx) German Revolution 1848

### 15./16. Stunde: The Legacy of the Enlightenment

- M 14 (Bi/Tx) Human Rights and Migration

### Lernerfolgskontrolle

- M 15 (LER) Quiz (digitales Zusatzmaterial in *RAAbits Geschichte online*  
[https://www.raabits.de/geschichte/topic/Bilingual\\_nbsp\\_Geschichte](https://www.raabits.de/geschichte/topic/Bilingual_nbsp_Geschichte))



**Ab:** Arbeitsblatt – **Bi:** Bildimpuls – **Fi:** Film(sequenz) – **Fo:** Folie – **Ka:** Karte – **Lek:** Lernerfolgskontrolle – **Tx:** Text

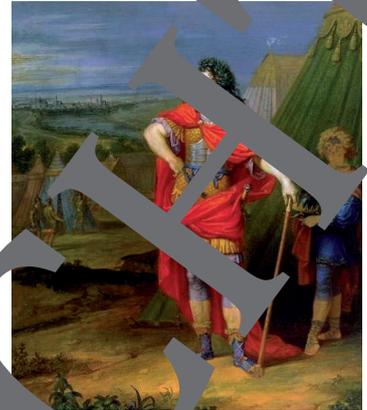
## M 1 Concepts – “L'état c'est moi”

Read about the many faces of an absolute monarchy and its justification.

The founder of absolute monarchy: The reign of France's **Louis XIV** (1638–1715), known as the Sun King, lasted for 72 years, longer than that of any other known European sovereign. In that time, he transformed the monarchy, ushered<sup>1</sup> in a golden age of art and literature, presided over a dazzling royal court at Versailles, annexed key territories and established his country as the dominant European power.

His absolute reign and lavish<sup>2</sup> lifestyle were imitated by many European rulers, namely Frederick II (the Great) and his Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam.

Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/france/louis-xiv>.



Louis XIV depicted as Alexander the Great

**Absolutism** is a political theory and form of government where unlimited, complete power is held by a centralized sovereign individual, with no checks or balances from any other part of the nation or government. In effect, the ruling individual has “absolute” power with no legal, electoral, or other challenges to that power. In practice, historians argue about whether Europe saw any true absolutist governments, or how far certain governments were absolute. The most common theory used to underpin the early modern absolutist monarchs was “the divine right of kings,” which derived from medieval ideas of kingship. This claimed that monarchs held their authority directly from God, that the king in his kingdom was as God in his creation, and enabled the absolutist monarchs to even challenge the power of the church.

Source: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-was-absolutism-1221593>



Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855)

Tsar Nicholas I's Russia was one of absolutism and inequalities, not a country that encouraged liberal ideas and open criticism. When the first year of his reign, in December 1825, had seen a revolt, Nicholas I had vowed to control Russia with a tight fist. A network of spies and informers infiltrated every part of the nation. The government was centralised and firmly in the hands of the tsar. Strong censorship restricted every written word from poems to newspaper articles, and a system of surveillance made sure that any liberal ideas were suppressed. Those who spoke against the tsar or the government were promptly deported to Siberia. Nicholas I regarded himself as the guardian<sup>4</sup> against revolutions

Source: Wulf, Andrea (2015): The Invention of Nature. London: John Murray Publishers, p. 72.

### Tasks

1. On our own, outline the political theory of Absolutism and its claim to be a government by divine right (“Gottesgnadentum”).
2. In groups of four, analyse the implications of state control and ruling “with a tight fist”.
3. In plenary, discuss who would have regarded this period as “golden”.

### Annotations

1 to usher in: to begin – 2 lavish: excessive – 3 unlimited: lacking any controls – 4 guardian: watchman

## M 9 Europe under Pressure – the French Revolution

Find out about the events that marked the course of the French Revolution and its aftermath.

The French Revolution in its early days had as its aim the creation of a constitutional monarchy like England's. The reformers got their chance because in the 1780s the monarch was close to bankruptcy. The leaders of the assembly (*Estates General* – National Assembly 1789) were men of the Enlightenment; they had very clear liberal and egalitarian<sup>1</sup> principles. Their slogan was "*liberté, égalité et fraternité*". The assembly issued its manifesto under the title *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*; these were rights not just for the French, they were rights for all mankind.



the French Revolution in 1789



Maximilien de Robespierre  
(1758–1794)

But only within four years there was a Jacobin dictatorship ruling by the guillotine; when Robespierre looked for continuing to rule in the same way, even though the war crisis had passed, he was overthrown and executed. Moderate republicans<sup>2</sup> tried to stabilise the revolution, to keep out the common people and the supporters of a return to monarchy, who had a large following. The government had to use force against both these opponents to survive and lost all credibility. This gave Bonaparte his chance.

Although historians are agreed that the French Revolution started in 1789, they are divided on when it ended. A few historians argue for an end in 1795 with the creation of the Directory, some argue for an end in 1799 with the creation of the Consulate, while many more agree on in 1802, when Napoleon Bonaparte became Consul for Life, or 1804 when he became Emperor. Some continue to the restoration of the monarchy in 1814.

### 25 Pre-1789

social and political tensions build within France, financial crisis in the 1780s, caused by bad handling, poor revenue<sup>3</sup> management and royal over-spending, financial dent by French contribution to the American Revolutionary War, king and his ministers are desperate for a way to raise taxes and money, resort to historical gatherings of subjects for support

### 30 1789–1791

*Estates General* called to give the king consent<sup>4</sup> to sort out finances, controversy about whether the three estates can vote equally or proportionally; the *Estates General* takes radical action, dropping its name Legislative Assembly and seizing sovereignty; tearing down the old regime and creating a new France by passing a series of laws which abolish privileges

### 1792

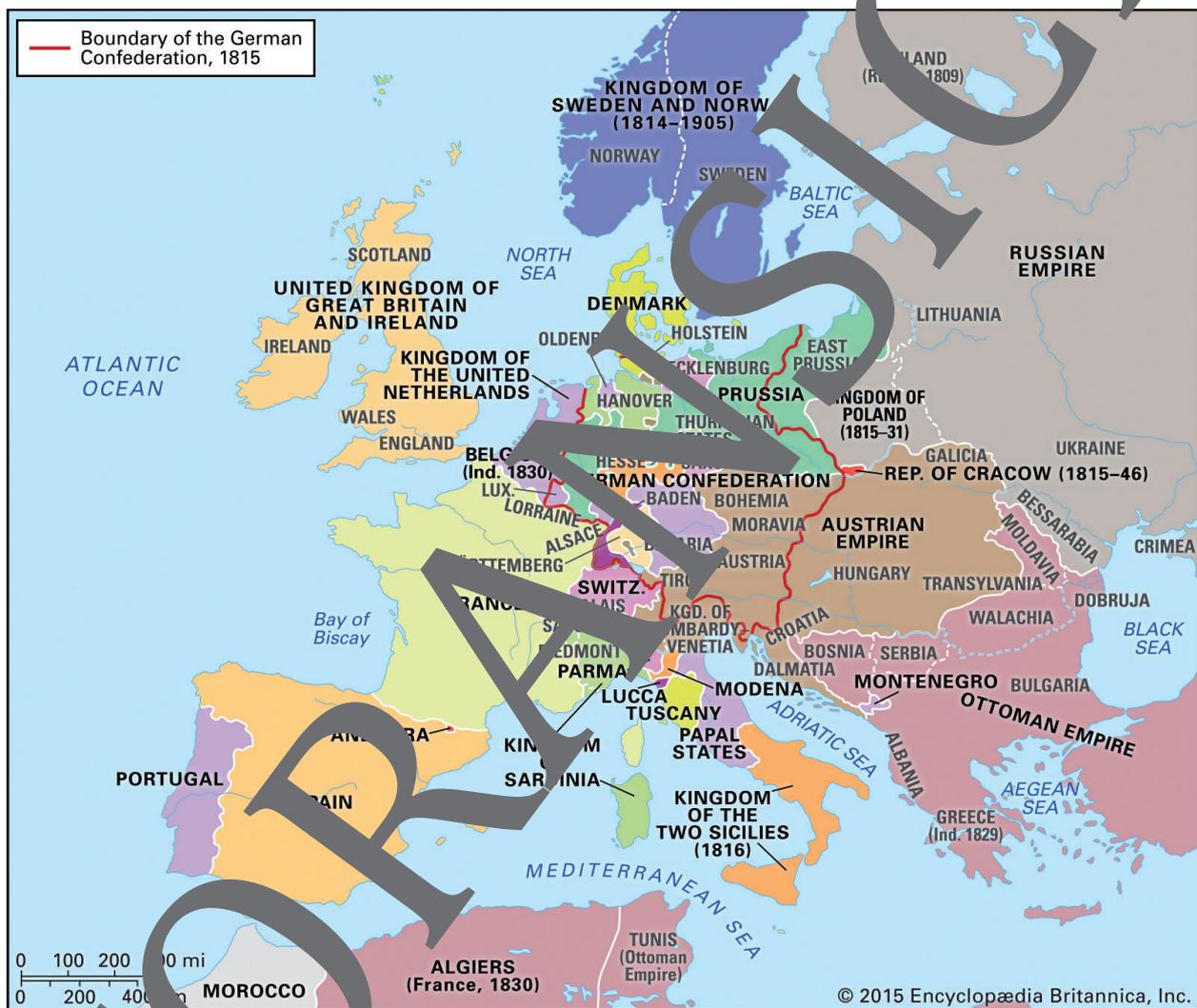
François being uneasy with his role in the revolution and vice versa; attempt to flee undermines his reputation; second revolution occurs, as Jacobins and sansculottes<sup>5</sup> force the creation of a French Republic; king is executed; Legislative Assembly replaced by the new National Convention

## M 12 Restoration in Europe – the Congress of Vienna

Find out about the outcomes of the Congress of Vienna and the restoration of European power.

The Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) was a conference of the representatives of the different European states. Their purpose was to reorganise Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. The state leaders feared the principles and ideas of the French Revolution and opposed the liberal ideas of democratic government. To keep peace, a balance of power and a ring of strong states was created around the defeated France. The Congress believed that it was necessary to “re-draw the map of Europe”. It decided to make Prussia stronger and turned the Rhineland and Westphalia, a region soon to be the greatest industrial centre on the Continent, into Prussian provinces.

Map of Europe after the Congress of Vienna



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Congress-of-Vienna/media/628086/214576>

## M 14B The Legacy – Human Rights and Migration

### The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)



Eleanor Roosevelt with a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

After World War II, the UN passed the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". In it the member states pledged themselves to guarantee these rights worldwide and integrate them into their constitutions. The catalogue of human rights has been extended during the last decades. In addition to individual rights of freedom and equality, social and collective rights have been formulated. Also, there is a discussion about augmenting human rights by so-called human obligations.

### United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)

There are few moments in history where the world comes together to devise<sup>1</sup> a new plan that holds the promise of improving the lives of millions of people. The Global Compact<sup>2</sup> on Refugees – which has now been released<sup>3</sup> after two years of consultations with member states, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and refugees themselves – will be formally adopted by the UN General Assembly in the next couple of months – has the potential to be one of these moments.

Source: <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/why-canada-will-lead-the-charge-on-the-uns-global-refugee-plan/>

**The Marrakesh Compact** – as I believe the GCM or Compact may begin to be called – will remain THE reference for all future initiatives dealing with cross-border human mobility. For the first time in the history of the United Nations, we have been able to tackle<sup>4</sup> an issue that was long seen as out-of-bounds for a truly coordinated global effort. There is probably no principle more fundamental in the organization of international affairs than the geographic allocation<sup>5</sup> of space on this planet, confirmed by the universal recognition of state sovereignty.

Source: Closing remarks on GCM by Louise Arbour, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration; <http://www.un.org/isa/migration/assets/pdf/GCM-Statements/closingremarksarbour.pdf> (11/12/2018)

### Task

In a plenary activity, outline the historical and current context of the two documents concerning human rights. Evaluate why the GCM would be regarded as a completion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a plenary discussion.

### Annotations

1 **to devise**: to form – 2 **compact**: (here) agreement between two parties – 3 **to release**: to give permission for publication – 4 **to tackle**: to deal with – 5 **allocation**: set apart for special purposes