

Friedrich von Gentz (1786)

Abstract

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, politics and culture in the German territories were dominated by the conflict with revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Many German thinkers initially welcomed the French Revolution, only to reverse their judgment in the face of the terreur and the expansionist policies of Napoleon Bonaparte. Influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas of equality and the *volonté générale* (general will), the publicist, politician, and Prussian civil servant Friedrich von Gentz was an early supporter of the French Revolution. But his enthusiasm waned after he translated Irish philosopher Edmund Burke's anti-revolutionary *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) into German in 1793/94. The following year, he founded and assumed the editorship of *Neue deutsche Monatsschrift* [*New Germany Monthly*], a journal that was critical of the revolutionary French republic. Forced to steer a careful line on account of its alliance with France, the Prussian government dismissed Gentz from the civil service in 1802. He then went to Vienna, where he became a central figure in Austria's conservative reaction against revolutionary ideas and movements. In 1810, Clemens von Metternich (1773-1859), the new Austrian foreign minister, enlisted him as editor of the semi-official *Österreichische Beobachter* [*Austrian Observer*], which disseminated conservative, pro-regime thought and took aim against anti-absolutist German nationalists. In the ensuing years, Gentz became Metternich's friend and personal secretary; he also became one of the most influential political voices in the German territories.

Source



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Recommended Citation: Friedrich von Gentz (1786), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/the-holy-roman-empire-1648-1815/ghdi:image-2930>> [July 16, 2024].