

# Reading Essentials and Study Guide



## Conflict and Absolutism in Europe, 1550–1715

### Lesson 3 Absolutism in Europe

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

*How does the exercise of absolute power affect a country?*

#### Reading HELPDESK

##### Academic Vocabulary

**stability** the state of being stable; strong enough to endure

**authority** power; person in command

**emerge** to become manifest; to become known

##### Content Vocabulary

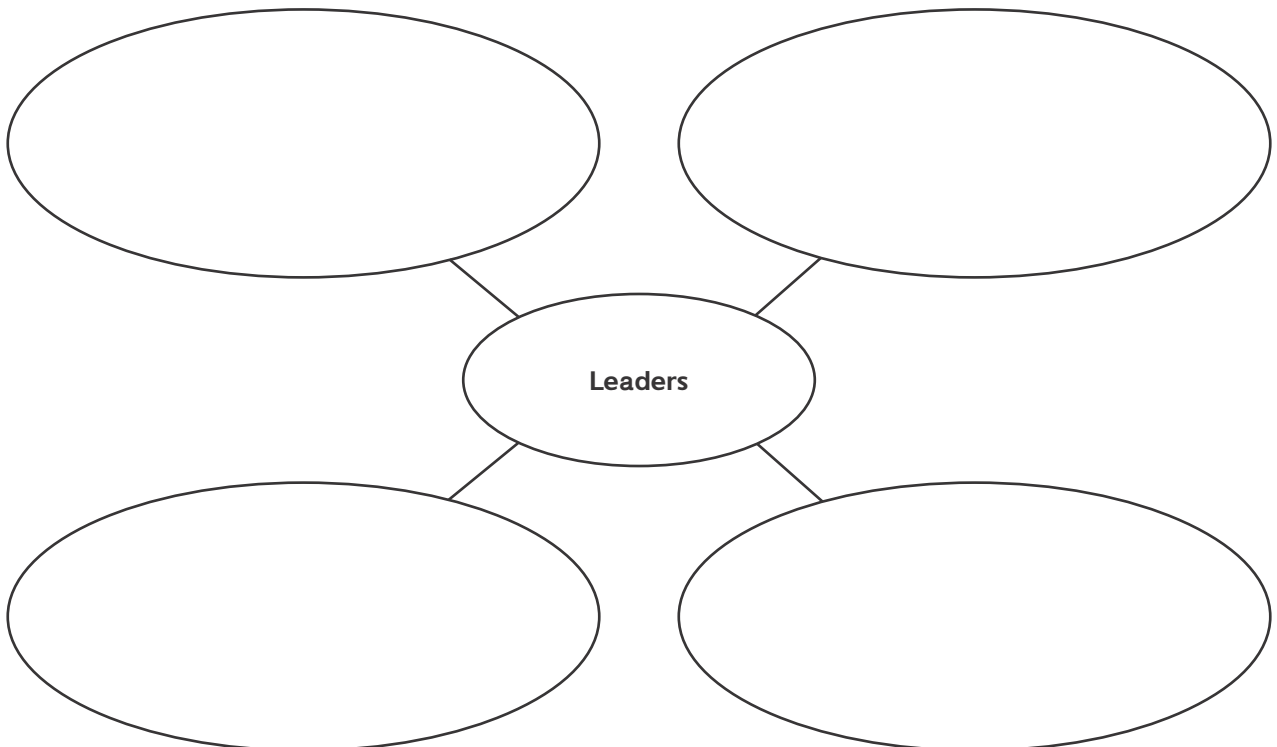
**absolutism** a political system in which a ruler holds total power

**czar** Russian for caesar; the title used by Russian emperors

**boyar** a Russian noble

#### TAKING NOTES: *Identifying*

**ACTIVITY** As you read, complete a chart like the one below identifying the accomplishments of European leaders.



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The logo for 'networks' features the word in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network pattern.

## Conflict and Absolutism in Europe, 1550–1715

### Lesson 3 Absolutism in Europe, *continued*

#### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

There were many crises during the seventeenth century. Absolute monarchs ruled in several European nations at this time. Louis XIV's reign of France is considered the best example of absolute monarchy. He waged many wars and lived an extravagant lifestyle. During this century, Prussia, Austria, and Russia were becoming major European powers. They, too, were under monarchs' leadership. At the same time, Spain was declining in power.

#### France Under Louis XIV

**Guiding Question** *Why is the reign of Louis XIV regarded as the best example of absolutism in the seventeenth century?*

In response to the crises of the seventeenth century, countries wanted more **stability**, or order, and an end to constant change. They believed that if they increased the power of the monarch, they could gain more stability. The result was what historians call absolutism.

**Absolutism** is a system in which a ruler holds total power. In seventeenth-century Europe, absolutism was connected to the idea of the divine right of kings. In this theory, monarchs received their power from God, and they were responsible to God only. Monarchs had the power to make laws, levy taxes, administer justice, control officials, and make foreign policy.

The reign of Louis XIV has long been thought of as the best example of absolutism during the seventeenth century. During his reign, French culture, language, and manners spread to all levels of European society. French diplomacy and wars dominated the political affairs of Europe. The court of Louis XIV was copied throughout Europe.

#### Richelieu

French history for the 50 years before Louis XIV was a period of struggle when French governments fought to avoid the breakdown of the state. Louis XIII and Louis XIV were only boys when they came to the throne. The government was controlled by royal ministers. In France, two ministers helped preserve the **authority**, or power, of the monarch. Cardinal Richelieu was Louis XIII's minister, and Cardinal Mazarin was Louis XIV's minister.

Cardinal Richelieu (RIH-shuh-loo) was Louis XIII's chief minister. He helped make the king's power stronger. Because the Huguenots were seen as a threat to the king, Richelieu took away their political and military rights. He did, however, preserve their religious rights. Richelieu also established a network of spies to discover plots against the king by nobles. He then crushed the conspiracies and executed the conspirators.

#### Louis in Power

Louis XIV was four years old when he came to the throne in 1643. As a result, another minister, Cardinal Mazarin, took control of the government. After Mazarin died in 1661, Louis XIV took over supreme power in France. He was 23, and he stated his desire to be a real king and the only ruler of France. Louis's mother laughed at him because she knew about her son's love of fun and games and his affairs with maids. Louis was serious, however. He kept a strict routine, or schedule. He also created the myth of himself as the Sun King—the source of light for all of his people.

One key to Louis's power was his control over the government officials who made policy for the entire country. He told his officials that all orders had to have his approval. He established a royal

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court at Versailles (vuhr•SY). The court at Versailles had three purposes. It was the king's personal household. In addition, the main offices of the state were there. Finally, Versailles was the place where powerful subjects had to come to get favors and offices for themselves.

The greatest danger to Louis's rule came from France's highest nobles and royal princes. They believed they should play a role in the government. Instead, Louis did the opposite. He removed them from the royal council. The council was the king's chief administrative body, which supervised the running of the government. At the same time, Louis tried to attract the nobles to come to his court. There he kept them busy with court life and kept them out of politics.

Louis's government ministers had to obey his every wish. Louis said that he had no intention of sharing authority with them. In this way, Louis had complete authority over the traditional areas of royal power: foreign policy, the church, and taxes. Louis had absolute authority over policy-making. However, his power was limited at the local level. Nobles, local officials, and town councils had more influence than the king on the daily operation of local governments. As a result, the king bribed important people in the provinces to see that his policies were followed.

Because Louis wanted to maintain religious harmony in France, he pursued an anti-Protestant policy. He wanted to convert the Huguenots to Catholicism so that all of France would be Catholic. Early in his reign, Louis ordered the destruction of Huguenot churches and the closing of their schools. As many as 200,000 Huguenots left France for England, the United Provinces, and the German states.

Finances were a crucial issue for Louis XIV. Building palaces, maintaining his court, and pursuing wars cost a great deal of money. He was fortunate to have Jean-Baptiste Colbert (kohl•BEHR) as controller-general of finances.

Colbert tried to increase France's wealth and power by following the policy of mercantilism. He wanted to decrease imports and increase exports, and so he gave money to help new industries. He built roads and canals to improve communication and make it easier to transport goods inside France. Colbert also raised tariffs, or taxes on goods that other countries wanted to sell in France. This was a way to directly decrease imports so that the French would buy more French-made goods. In addition, he established a merchant marine (fleet of ships used for business) to carry French-made goods to other countries.

Louis knew he needed a strong army to increase his royal power. He developed a standing (permanent) army that numbered 400,000 in time of war. He wanted the military glory that he felt was appropriate for the Sun King. Also, he worked to ensure that his Bourbon (the family name) dynasty dominated Europe. To achieve these goals, Louis waged four wars between 1667 and 1713. Many nations formed coalitions to stop him from dominating Europe. As a result of his wars, Louis added some territory to France. In addition, a member of his Bourbon dynasty became the ruler of Spain.

### Legacy of Louis XIV

In 1715, the Sun King died. He left France surrounded by enemies. Inside France, many people were very poor. On his deathbed, the 76-year-old monarch seemed sorry about events of his reign. He told his successor, his great-grandson, to live in peace with his neighbors and not to spend too much money.

Did Louis mean it? We do not know. In any case, his great-grandson probably did not remember this advice because he was only five years old.

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## Conflict and Absolutism in Europe, 1550–1715

### Lesson 3 Absolutism in Europe, *continued*



#### Reading Progress Check

**Classifying** How was the monarchy of Louis XIV characteristic of absolutism?

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## The Spread of Absolutism

**Guiding Question** *How did Prussia and Austria emerge as great powers in seventeenth- and eighteenth- century Europe?*

Absolutism failed in Spain, but it was more successful in central and eastern Europe. After the Thirty Years' War, there were over three hundred German states. Of these, Prussia and Austria **emerged** in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as two great European powers.

## The Decline of Spain

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Spain's empire had the largest population in the world. To most Europeans, Spain seemed the greatest power of the age. The reality was quite different, however.

The reign of Philip IV came closest to being an absolute monarchy. A program of political reform tried to centralize the government of Spain under the control of the monarchy. However, unlike Louis XIV in France, the king was not able to limit the power of nobles. Expensive wars led to revolts. Spain was declining as a great power.

## The Emergence of Prussia

Frederick William the Great Elector laid the foundation for the Prussian state. He realized that Prussia was a small, open territory. It had no natural frontiers for defense, such as mountains or bodies of water to protect it from armies. So Frederick William built a large and efficient standing army. He had a force of 40,000 men, which made the Prussian army the fourth-largest in Europe.

After he had built the army, Frederick William needed to maintain it and his own power as well. As a result, he established the General War Commissariat, a group of commissioners, or officials. The job of the Commissariat was to levy taxes to support the army and to supervise the army's growth. It soon became an agency for civil (nonmilitary) government as well. Frederick William used this new group of officials to govern the state. Many in this new bureaucracy were members of the Prussian aristocracy called Junkers. The Junkers were important landowners, and many of them also served as officers in the army.

In 1701, Frederick William's son officially gained the title of king. Elector Frederick III of Holy Roman Empire became King Frederick I of Prussia.

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#### The New Austrian Empire

The Hapsburg family had long played a significant role in European politics. They were emperors in the Holy Roman Empire, and the family had ruled much of Europe in the 1500s under Charles V. The Hapsburgs had then split into two branches—the Spanish Hapsburgs and the Austrian Hapsburgs, in the east. The Austrian Hapsburgs, also called the imperial branch, hoped to create an empire in Germany. By the end of the Thirty Years' War, their hopes had been dashed. In the seventeenth century, however, they were able to create a new empire in eastern and southeastern Europe.

The center of the new Austrian Empire was the traditional Austrian lands. These are present-day Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. After the defeat of the Turks at Vienna in 1683, Austria took control of all of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slavonia. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Austrian Hapsburgs had gained a new empire of a large size.

The Austrian monarchy, however, never became a highly centralized, absolutist state. It was made up of too many different national groups. Instead, the Austrian Empire remained a collection of territories that were held together by the rule of the Hapsburg emperor. He was archduke of Austria, king of Bohemia, and king of Hungary. Each of these areas had its own laws and political life. There was no feeling of unity or connection among the regions. The ideal of service to the Hapsburgs was the main force that united the regions.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Comparing** How was the role of the military significant in Prussia and Austria?

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#### Peter the Great

**Guiding Question** *How did Russia emerge as a powerful state under Peter the Great?*

A new Russian state emerged in the fifteenth century under the principality of Muscovy and its grand dukes. In the sixteenth century, Ivan IV became the first ruler to take the title of **czar**, the Russian word for caesar (a title often given to powerful rulers; the title came from the ancient Roman leader Julius Caesar).

Ivan expanded the territories of Russia eastward. He also crushed the power of the Russian nobility, or **boyars**. He was known as Ivan the Terrible because of his ruthless actions. As one example, he stabbed his own son to death during a heated argument. After Ivan's dynasty ended in 1598, a period of anarchy known as the Time of Troubles followed. This period ended in 1613 when the zemsky sobor, or national assembly, chose Michael Romanov as the new czar.

The Romanov dynasty lasted until 1917. Peter the Great, who became czar in 1689, was a prominent member of the dynasty. Peter followed the tradition of the Romanov czars who had come before him. He was an absolute monarch who claimed a divine right to rule.

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After he became czar, Peter visited the West. He was determined to westernize, or Europeanize, Russia. He was especially eager to borrow European technology. To make Russia a great power, Peter needed to modernize the army and navy. Peter employed both Europeans and Russians as military officers. He drafted peasants and required them to serve in the army for twenty-five years. In this way, he built a standing army of 210,000 soldiers. By Peter's death in 1725, Russia was a great military power and an important European state.

After he had visited the West, Peter began to introduce Western customs, practices, and manners into Russia. He ordered the writing of the first Russian book of etiquette to teach the country Western manners. He insisted that Russian men shave their beards and shorten their coats to copy people in the West. He allowed upper-class women to remove their traditional face-covering veils.

Peter had a purpose for his domestic reforms. He planned not only to make Russia into a great state and military power but also to "open a window to the West." He wanted a port with easy access to Europe. Sweden, the most important power in northern Europe, controlled his only route—the Baltic Sea. After a long war with Sweden, Peter obtained the lands he needed. Peter began to build a new city on the Baltic in 1703, which was called St. Petersburg. It became a base for the new Russian navy and Russia's most important port. It remained the Russian capital until 1918.

To make the rule of the central government more effective, Peter divided Russia into provinces. He wanted to create a "police state." By this, he meant that he wanted Russia to be a well-ordered nation under the rule of law. However, most of the bureaucrats whose job it was to run the government did not share his idea of honest service and duty to the state. Peter's personality created fear in those in government, and his actions did not encourage feelings of civic duty among the nations' citizens. He wrote to one bureaucrat that he wanted the official to act on his orders, but not to try to interpret the meaning of the orders. Peter wanted the impossible: he wanted his administrators to be slaves and free persons at the same time.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Stating** In what ways did Peter the Great modernize both the culture and the military of Russia?

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