

# REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE HELD IN FIUME-RIJEKA

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## Coronation of Napoleon Bonaparte

On December 2, 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte was crowned Emperor of France at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. He took the name Napoleon I. His wife Joséphine was also crowned Empress. The Pope made a special journey from Rome to attend the grand ceremony, which lasted over five hours. This event symbolized Napoleon's power and his break with the traditions of the old monarchy, and it became one of the most famous coronations in history.

Napoleon arranged for the painter Jacques-Louis David to attend the event and create a large painting of the coronation ceremony. The painting is over nine meters long, more than six meters high, and includes over 190 figures. It can be seen at the Louvre Museum in Paris, titled : *The Coronation of Emperor Napoleon I and the Coronation of Empress Joséphine* at the Church of Notre-Dame de Paris, December 2, 1804 (Musée du Château de Versailles).

## Preparation for the Coronation

After the coup-d'état of 1799, Napoleon became the First Consul of France. In 1804, the Senate approved a decree declaring France an Empire and Napoleon its Emperor. This was formally confirmed by a referendum, which had widespread public support.

Napoleon wanted to distinguish himself from traditional European monarchs. His coronation was a

blend of ancient Roman customs, revolutionary ideals, and new symbolism representing him.

## The Referendum

The referendum in France that confirmed Napoleon's title as "Emperor of the French" (Empereur des Français) took place in 1804 and marked a key political step in transforming France from a Consular Republic into an empire. It was part of Napoleon's strategy to legitimize his power through popular support and reinforce the Senate's decision.

## Referendum Organization

There was a single referendum question : whether voters supported the creation of an empire with Napoleon as Emperor. All men over 21 who met certain tax and social requirements were eligible to vote, according to the laws established during the Revolution. Votes were collected publicly by local officials.

## Results and Political Impact

Voter turnout was relatively low at around 47% of registered voters, but considered excellent for the time. The results were overwhelmingly favorable : Votes in favor: 3,572,329 - Votes against: 2,579.

Napoleon used the referendum to demonstrate that his power came from the people, not just the political elite or military force. Popular support served as a rebuttal to his opponents both domestically and across Europe.

( P.T.O.)

Paris, France - Louvre Museum, Coronation Ceremony by painter J-L David (1804).



The referendum allowed him to transition from revolutionary leader to Emperor while retaining the element of republican sovereignty - he was the "Emperor of the French," not the "King of France," a significant difference from the past monarchy.

The empire brought political stability after years of revolutionary turmoil. Napoleon showed Europe and its monarchies that his rule was not just the result of military conquest, but of popular choice, aiming to weaken hereditary dynasties. This period also saw the beginning of a national awakening that culminated in the European revolutions of 1848.

To prepare for the referendum, Napoleon used propaganda methods through newspapers, public posters, and actions by local authorities. The outcome was presented as a national act of unity and patriotism.

Though later criticized for potential result manipulation, the referendum set a precedent for using popular vote to legitimize autocratic government - a historical example of how political leaders have used formal public support to consolidate power and create new political legitimacy.

### Political and Historical Significance of the Coronation

The coronation, as a political act, had enormous significance and marked a turning point in European history. Key political aspects include :

1. *Strengthening Napoleon's Power and Legitimacy* - As a successful military leader and First Consul during the Revolution, Napoleon already had great power. The coronation elevated his position to that of Emperor - creating a modern monarchy not based on inheritance but on personal merit and political skill. It legitimized his rule not just in France but across Europe.

2. *Departure from Republican Ideals* - Although Napoleon claimed to uphold the Revolution's principles, his coronation marked the end of republican ideals and the return to monarchy - on new terms. His rule wasn't based on divine right but on personal merit and the will of the people.

3. *Independence from the Catholic Church* - One of the most famous moments was when Napoleon crowned himself instead of letting Pope Pius VII do it. This act symbolized his independence from traditional ecclesiastical authority and proclaimed that his power was self-bestowed, not granted by God via the Church.

4. *Creation of a New Dynasty* - Napoleon's coronation founded the Bonapartist dynasty, aiming to secure the continuity of power within his family. It was a move to stabilize France after years of revolutionary chaos.

5. *A Message to European Powers* - The coronation was a signal that France was no longer a revolutionary republic seeking to topple monarchies, but a strong empire with ambitions for dominance. France was back on the European stage as a dominant power.

6. *Importance for Propaganda* - The event was meticulously choreographed as a grand spectacle. Art, symbolism, and propaganda were used to establish and consolidate Napoleon's image as emperor among the people.

The coronation wasn't merely a ceremonial event - it was a strategic political move that institutionalized his personal power within the framework of the empire.

It marked a turning point in European history and laid the groundwork for future ambitions of conquest.

### Historical Significance

The coronation had importance not only for France but for all of Europe. Key historical aspects include :

1. *End of the French Revolution* - The coronation marked the end of the revolutionary period that began in 1789. Although the Revolution abolished the monarchy and attempted to create a republic, Napoleon's coronation signaled the return of authoritarian rule, albeit in a new imperial form.

2. *Creation of a Modern Empire* - Napoleon was the first French emperor after the fall of the Carolingians. His empire was not founded on divine right but on merit and popular legitimacy. This set a precedent for modern authoritarian regimes based on personal authority rather than hereditary or religious approval.

3. *Impact on European Order* - The coronation introduced a new phase in Napoleon's relationship with Europe's powers. It challenged traditional monarchies by proving that power could stem from revolutionary movements and not just noble lineage. His reign hastened the collapse of feudal structures and spurred modernization.

4. *Evolution of Church-State Relations* - By inviting Pope Pius VII yet crowning himself, Napoleon symbolically made it clear that secular power was independent from religious authority. This was a major shift in church-state relations, particularly for future secular state.

5. *Promotion of Meritocracy* - Napoleon symbolized a new type of leader - one who rose through ability rather than noble birth. His coronation was a symbol of this meritocratic ideal, which later became a cornerstone of modern society.

6. *Inspiration for National Movements* - Although Napoleon's empire was imperialist, the revolutionary ideas he spread - like legal equality and the abolition of feudal privileges - inspired future freedom and independence movements across Europe.

### Conclusion

Napoleon's coronation was not only a personal turning point, but also a landmark event that changed the course of European and global history. It marked the emergence of a new kind of leader - one who broke with tradition to shape new ideals and structures - with a lasting impact on political models. His empire left an indelible mark on European history, hastening the end of the old order and paving the way for modern Europe.