

European History/Europe: 1945 to Present

European History

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Introduction

As Europe enters a new era, with two world wars still residing in the collective memory, peace and prosperity seems likely to continue. The Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, resulting in a Europe whose countries and borders have returned to their pre-WW2 state. Its nations, however, are faced with aging populations and falling birthrates, making it increasingly challenging to sustain expensive programs of social services. As the 21st century began, the continent is redefining itself with multiculturalism, a strengthening of Europe's common economic policies and the formation of a European parliament. The Europe of Nations, whose nationalistic sentiments led to two world wars during the last century, is viewing the federalism of the USA as a possible solution to forging a United Europe.

Western Europe 1945-Present

After World War II the countries of Europe were faced with finding ways to reconstruct their economies. Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland and Spain who had all remained neutral during the war fared slightly better. Sweden and Switzerland had provided banking and materials for the Nazi war effort and this meant that both countries had come out of the war relatively unscathed. Neutrality has its benefits but for those countries who were at the vanguard of military action the situation was far worse. Britain's industries had been almost exclusively dedicated to the war effort and coupled with the loss of economic and political influence amongst its former colonies the outlook for a quick recovery seemed unlikely. The countries that had been occupied by Germany had seen their industrial output directed to the German war effort and the influx of money and goods from occupied countries into the German economy meant that the shortages and austerity of war were not felt by the German population until the last year of the war. All over Europe the expectations was one of a return to normality and economic strength though it soon became obvious that this could only be achieved with American aid. In a speech given at Havard in 1947 by George C. Marshall, the American Secretary of State, proposed that the rebuilding of europe's economies including Germany's should in part be funded by American grants.

"The truth of the matter is that Europe's requirements for the next three or four years of foreign food and other essential products - principally from America - are so much greater than her present ability to pay that she must have substantial additional help or face economic, social, and political deterioration of a very grave character."

Excerpt from the Havard Speech given by George C. Marshall.

The Marshall Plan was passed into law by President Truman in April 1948 under the formal name of the "European Recovery Program". The Marshall Plan was to apply to all the areas of Europe that had been ravaged by war regardless of whether the recipient had been an Ally or member of the Axis. Stalin rejected the plan therefore ensuring that East Germany, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and other countries then under post-war Soviet occupation or influence were excluded.

Britain

Britain after the war was heavily in debt. The bombing of major urban centers and exhaustion of manpower due to war casualties further added to the financial difficulties. The damage to the economy led to rationing being extended into the next decade. From 1945 until 1951, the Labour Party and Prime Minister Attlee replaced the Conservative Party. Winston Churchill was considered by the general populace to be a "War Prime Minister" and though having lost the first post-war election did serve a further term as Prime Minister from 1951 to 1955. In August 1947, India became independent of Britain. From 1950 to 1980 Britain, now without the full economic benefit of its colonies, embraced the free-market capitalism advanced by the USA though more emphasis was given to social programs and state ownership of major utilities. In many respects America's involvement in the war had been conditional on Britain dismantling its colonial power base with the USA viewing it as an obstacle to their own ideas of trade and free-market capitalism. This had first been proposed by Roosevelt to Churchill at the August 1941 meeting where the future of post-war europe was being discussed. America had viewed Britain's colonial trade as monopolistic and though it was Pearl Harbour and Japanese aggression that led to the USA entering the war; the agenda for colonial independence remained. America the Colony who had fought a war against the English for independence was pre-disposed culturally and economically to make this request.

Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Party, became Prime Minister from 1979 until 1990. She was the first Western female leader of the modern era, and was faced with depression and "stagflation" - high unemployment and inflation resulting from high oil prices. Thatcher was closely allied with U.S. President Ronald Reagan and employed "trickle-down" supply-side economics, cutting taxes on the wealthy in hopes that they would spend the additional money to hire new workers and endorsing privatization and deregulation. Thatcher cut many other social programs including education, health care, and welfare, and sold off nationalized industries such as BritOil and British Airways. She also broke the power of the unions in Britain.

Thatcher also deployed a taskforce to regain control of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) after the invasion of the islands by Argentina in 1982.

John Major was the Conservative Prime Minister from 1990 until 1997. Tony Blair was the New Labour Prime Minister from 1997 until 2007. The Iraq invasion and Afghanistan conflicts. Gordon Brown was briefly the Prime Minister. After the general election of 2010 no political party had an overall majority in the House of Commons and a coalition was formed between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, with David Cameron as Prime Minister and Nick Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister. By the next general election in 2015, however, the popularity of the Liberal Democrats had fallen significantly, many would argue as a result of decisions taken within the coalition government, and the Conservative party gained a small and unexpected majority with the Labour party making no significant gains, in fact losing some representation. David Cameron would continue as Prime Minister of the majority Conservative government until the referendum of leaving the European Union when he resigned after failing to secure a remain vote, he was then swiftly replaced by Theresa May.

France

The Vichy regime installed by the Nazis after their invasion of France during World War II was replaced in 1946 by the Fourth Republic, which lasted until 1958. The Fourth Republic consisted of a strong Parliament with a Premier chosen by the majority party. There was also a weak ceremonial President. Charles De Gaulle, who led the Free French Resistance movement against the Nazis during their occupation of France in World War II, was elected but refused to participate and thus resigned. After World War II, France decolonized Indochina, Morocco, Tunisia, and the rest of West Africa. The Fourth Republic also allowed women's suffrage.

Violent conflict arose in Algeria, still a french colony. Bombings, terrorism, and the death of nearly one million people during anti-french actions led to this conflict taking center stage in French politics. When senior officers of the French military in Algeria rebelled in May 1958 and fears of a coup d'état spread among the members of the government, the latter called upon Charles De Gaulle to resolve the problem. De Gaulle refused to take power unless the government would allow for a stronger Presidential position.

The people of France conceded, and in 1958 the Fifth Republic was formed with a strong authoritarian President. However, De Gaulle's solution to the problem was to simply free Algeria. In 1968, university students protest over their conditions, leading to a mass working-class strike. After the failed "régionalisation" referendum, De Gaulle resigned in 1969. He was followed by two right wing presidents: Georges Pompidou (elected in 1969 and deceased in 1974), and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (elected in 1974). Abortion became legal under Giscard's rule.

From 1981 until 1995, François Mitterrand served as President of France. He was a Socialist, and implemented numerous social programs. He abolished the death penalty. He instituted nationalized banks, insurance industries, and defense industries. Workers' wages increased during his tenure and working hours were reduced. However, when the French economy lagged, he abandoned socialism in 1984 and the French economy revived. In 1986, the right won the parliamentary elections, leading to the first "cohabitation" period, where the president and prime minister were not from the same political side. Jacques Chirac, mayor of Paris and founder of the RPR Gullist party, was chosen as prime minister. Mitterrand was re-elected in 1988, but had to face a second "cohabitation" from 1993 to 1995, with Édouard Balladur as a prime minister.

In 1995, Jacques Chirac, became President. He also had to face the third "cohabitation", with the socialist Lionel Jospin as prime minister from 1997 to 2002. Chirac was easily re-elected in 2002 against the extreme-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, who had unexpectedly reached the runoff, eliminating Lionel Jospin at the first round. Jacques Chirac then founded a new party, the UMP, uniting the majority of the right wing. Jacques Chirac was followed by Nicolas Sarkozy, president of the UMP in 2007.

In 2012, Nicolas Sarkozy, very unpopular and having to deal with the economic crisis, was defeated by a socialist candidate, François Hollande.

Germany

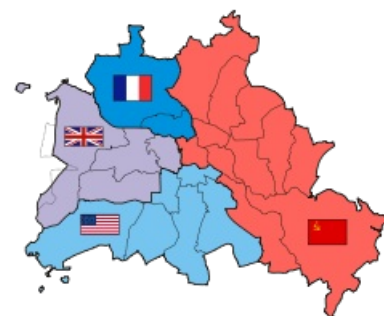
After World War II, Germany was divided into zones according to agreements reached between the ally powers. Western zones were placed under American and Western European control, while the eastern zones came under the control of the Soviet Union. Germany was to be occupied by the allies until some point in the future; how this was to be achieved itself became a source of conflict between the allies. This division of Germany also mirrored the presence of Allied troops in the now liberated countries of Europe. The Soviet army maintained a military presence in Poland, Romania and other eastern european states. American troops were still stationed in many western european states. With the war at an end the concord between the USA and Russia was now faltering and Germany and many of its neighbours were soon to become the center stage for an ideological battle between these once allies. The division of Berlin was a precursor to the Cold War;



British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

the first post-war arena for the entrenched differences between Russia and the USA and an ominous sign for the later conflicts of Vietnam and Korea.

In 1948, the Berlin Airlift took place. Berlin was in the eastern part of Germany administered by the Soviets though the city itself was administered by France, America, Britain and the Soviets. The western Allies had merged the three occupation zones they possessed after the end of World War II. The prelude to the blockade involved a gradual escalation of tension. At first the Soviets moved troops to borders and this itself prompted American intelligence to consider that the Soviets may be seeking further territorial expansion. The Russians then issued orders to General Dratvin (Russian command in Berlin) that all trains entering Berlin would now need to be inspected and the appropriate paperwork must be present. This was relayed to General Clay (US command in Berlin) who cabled the letter to Washington. The Washington administration came to the conclusion that imminent invasion of West Germany was highly unlikely and that the purpose of the recent Russian movement was aimed at removing the Allied powers from Berlin itself. The Russians increased the pressure with new inspection posts on roads and canals into Berlin. In March 1948 nine British registered barges were held at Buchhorst and in April British and American military trains were detained at Marienborn on the basis that the Russians had not been allowed to inspect them. The autobahns also came under pressure with the Russians insisting that Britain evacuate two Emergency Aid stations on the Berlin to Helmstedt autobahn. On the 18th June 1948 the Allies issued a new currency called the Deutsche Mark which replaced the Reichsmark and on the same day Russia suspends all road and train travel to and from Berlin. On the 4th August the Allies officially started the airlift to supply Berlin.



Allied occupation zones in post-war Berlin

In 1949, the two areas were formally split into the Federal Republic in the West and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East. In addition, the Basic Law, Germany's constitution, came into effect in 1949.

From 1949 until 1963, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, a member of the Christian Democrat Party (CDU), came to power in West Germany and pursued a policy of integration with NATO and the US led Western alliance. Adenauer successfully resisted domestic political pressures for Germany to adopt a policy of neutrality between the Cold War blocs as a path to reunification. Under him West Germany encountered the *Wirtschaftswunder*, or Economic Miracle, with great recovery throughout the nation. The country underwent denazification which involved censoring of fascist ideas and the showing of films taken at Dachau and other concentration camps to German cinema audiences. The education system in Germany was also subject to denazification with text books discarded due to their inclusion of Nazi propaganda. The Nuremberg Trials is the most visible example of denazification during this period since it involved the highest Nazi party members though thousands were tried at a local level by the Allies. One of the problems the Allies faced with denazification was that to remove all Nazis would have left a Germany struggling to reconstruct itself. In many respects Germans who had been complicit in Hitler's pogroms had escaped retribution because either they hadn't come to the attention of the Allies or they were part of the balancing act of German reconstruction.

In 1961, East German authorities, with Soviet backing, erected the Berlin Wall to stop the flood of refugees escaping to the west. Both Adenauer and his parliamentary opponents, the Social Democrats, considered the GDR to be an occupied part of a legally unified German nation, but were not in a position to change these circumstances because of the Cold War confrontation between the US and USSR. Berlin's importance as the first arena of the Cold War is reflected in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Released classified documents about the Cuban Crisis show an American administration worried that any sign of weakness during the Cuban Crisis may lead to Soviet aggression in Berlin. The zones of 1945 had become a border by 1962 and Berlin had a wall of concrete and barbed wire. This is where the Cold War started and this is where it would have to end.

From 1963 until 1966, Chancellor Ludwig Erhard of the CDU served, followed by Kurt Georg Kiesinger.

From 1969 until 1974, Chancellor Willy Brandt, of the Social Democrats (SPD) came to power. He enacted *Ostpolitik*, a policy of economic friendship and trade with the eastern bloc and East Germany. Though he supported the NATO alliance, Brandt's overtures to the east earned him suspicion in some Western circles that he might trade off the alliance for German unification. Ironically, Brandt's government fell in a scandal over an East German spy within his office. His successor as chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, was also from the SPD (1974-1982).

From 1982 through 1998, Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the CDU served. In 1989 he was in office when the Berlin Wall fell, as Gorbachev abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine of Soviet protection for other communist regimes. In 1990 the two portions of Germany reunified, but the East German economy lags far behind that of West Germany, even today. Chancellor Kohl, styling himself a conservative in a similar mold to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, cut welfare spending and taxes, helping the economy.

From 1998 through 2006, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of the SPD served. He is most prominently known for his adamant opposition to the US led invasion of Iraq as well as for largely abolishing unemployment insurance benefits in the so-called Hartz reforms.

After elections in 2006, Angela Merkel became Chancellor and is a member of the CDU.

The European Union

The Franco-Prussian War, World War I, and World War II have left an indelible mark on modern Europe. The ferocity and destruction of these wars has led to a concerted effort by European leaders to secure a lasting peace in Europe. At a political level it was agreed that the best method would be to unite the nations economically and politically. Thus began the European Union (EU).

Members

There are currently 28 members of the European Union. The original six members were France, (West) Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Between 1973 and 1986, Denmark, Ireland, Britain, Greece, Portugal, and Spain joined the EU. The emblem of the European Union is a blue flag with twelve gold stars on it. In 1995, Austria, Finland, and Sweden joined the EU. Nine years later ten countries were admitted - Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus. The number of EU members rose again in January 2007 with the addition of Romania and Bulgaria and in July 2013 when Croatia joined. Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey are currently in talks about future possible membership of the EU.

Background

In 1944 the Bretton Woods agreement created the World Trade Organization (WTO) that fights to eliminate tariffs and promote free trade. It established the World Bank, which provides loans to less-developed countries, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provides loans to countries in economic crisis to prevent the collapse of their government. The agreement also fixed exchange rates for currencies, which became floating exchange rates in 1971.

In 1945 the United Nations was established.

In 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established with Belgium, West Germany, Luxembourg, France, Italy, and the Netherlands as members.

In 1957, the Treaties of Rome established the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and the European Economic Community (EEC). The members removed trade barriers between themselves and formed a "Common Market."

In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht provided for cooperation in law enforcement, criminal justice, civil judicial matters, and asylum and immigration.

In 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta, and Cyprus were admitted into the EU.

In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria were admitted as members of the EU.

In 2013, Croatia was admitted as a member of the EU.



Flag of the European Union

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union after the war found itself in a position to secure its borders and to advance its own economic and political ideology into neighbouring states. They rejected the Marshall Plan and set up an alternative solution known as the Cominform. Russian troops had been first to enter Berlin and Stalin for all his faults was an astute politician who saw in this situation the chance to turn Russia into a world power. The Red Army was to maintain a presence in many of the countries it had liberated. The Americans who had wanted to extricate themselves from Europe's arena now found themselves drawn further into the tangled borders of Europe. The Cold War had started.

Nikita Khrushchev 1953-1964

Khrushchev reversed many of Stalin's policies through a process which became known as "Destalinization". This time period is known as "The Thaw", since tensions between the US and the USSR became more relaxed. The theory of peaceful coexistence, which believed that the communist nations could live in peace with the democracies of the West, was spread throughout the Soviet Union by Khrushchev, who attended peace summits in Geneva and Camp David. In addition, Khrushchev attempted to modernize Russia and to give its citizens more freedom. He rid the USSR of purges and eliminated show trials, replacing them with actual court systems. He gave more latitude to the 6 Eastern European states, and also allowed more freedom of speech and criticism of Stalin. At the 1956 XX Party Congress, Khrushchev announced that Stalin had indeed made many mistakes during his reign.

Khrushchev tried to reform collectivized agriculture and to shake up the Communist Party in order to remove inefficiency, so the Party forced him out in 1964.

The West regards Khrushchev as generally unpredictable, especially considering his actions in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982)

After Khrushchev's removal from office, Leonid Brezhnev came to power. He was widely seen as humorless, colorless, and unimaginative. He brought an end to destalinization and is blamed for bringing an era of stagnation to the Soviet Union.

Brezhnev is well known for his Brezhnev Doctrine, which promised to intervene if a socialist regime was threatened. During Brezhnev's reign, in 1968, there was revolution in Czechoslovakia. Alexander Dubček was elected leader of the communist party, and he called for free press, democracy, and other parties. In this sense he curbed repression, and he advocated "Socialism with a Human Face" in what has become known as the "Prague Spring" - that is, more rights, more consumer goods, and more freedom. However, the Soviets invaded the country and crushed this new government in August 1968.

Under Brezhnev, the United States and the Soviet Union underwent *Détente*, which was in essence a relaxation of tensions between the two nations. This occurred primarily because both countries recognized the concept of *Mutually Assured Destruction*, which stems from a realisation that the proliferation of nuclear arms had ensured that each nation had enough warheads to guarantee each other's destruction. It was during this period that many countries witnessed the rise of campaigns for nuclear disarmament by the general public. These campaigns formed a defining social phenomena during the decades of the 60s and 70s, especially within the NATO countries, and in some part must have helped in the "thaw" of the Cold War.

In 1975 both NATO and Warsaw Pact members signed the Helsinki Accords. In these, the West recognized the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, and the Soviets promised to respect the civil rights of people living in the occupied territories.

Brezhnev had a great deal of trouble during his rule. In 1977 Czech dissidents, led by writer Václav Havel, signed a manifesto called the Charter 77 that demanded human rights, free expression, freedom of religion, and the right to organize. Then, from 1980 until 1989, the Soviet Union was engaged in military action in Afghanistan in support of the communist government who were fighting a war with Muslim anti-communists. The USSR eventually withdrew their troops after a stale-mate was reached and Russian casualties had mounted.

Brezhnev presided over the USSR for longer than any other but Stalin, and there was never a plot to take his position. He was allowed to grow old in office, and died on November 10, 1982 at the age of 75. He was succeeded by Yuri Andropov, then Konstantin Chernenko, both of whom ruled for only around a year, and had little real impact on the Soviet Union. Both were very physically unhealthy, died soon after being in office, and Chernenko was succeeded by the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev.

Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991)

With the Soviet Union on the verge of economic collapse, a young, vigorous, and creative General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, came to power. Gorbachev created the policy of *Glasnost*, or "Openness," which allowed criticism (albeit limited) of the system, examination of past mistakes, rehabilitated victims of the purge, and changed textbooks in the nation.

He also implemented *Perestroika*, or "Economic Restructuring." He decentralized the economy, offered incentives to managers for increased production and quality and allowed them to make more decisions, introduced elements of "working place democracy", and allowed peasants to lease their own land.

However, these economic policies actually failed, and the situation became increasingly worse. The Soviet Union encountered massive problems in the 1990s, including alcoholism, divorce, a high abortion rate, low life expectancy, and no consumer goods.



Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.

Revolutions of 1988-1990

In 1988 Lithuanian liberation movement - Sajudis, Latvian - Tautas fronte, Estonian - Rahvarinne were created and soon they started struggle for independence of the Baltic states.

In 1989, a number of Eastern bloc states began to revolt against Soviet authority.

The spark of it all occurred in 1989, when declining conditions in Poland forced Poland to legalize Lech Walesa's "Solidarity" Party. The party won control of the government in a landslide election. Gorbachev then told the Eastern Bloc satellite states that he cannot enforce the Brezhnev Doctrine. As a result, other nations followed Poland's lead. Hungary held elections, relaxed economic controls, and opened its door to the West. The Czechoslovakian and Bulgarian communist governments collapsed without bloodshed in what has become known as the "Velvet Revolution." In East Germany, Germans flooded to Hungary and then to the West. The Communist leader of East Germany, Honecker, was forced to step down, and the Berlin wall was torn down on November 9, 1989. In Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, a brutal Stalinist dictator, was executed on December 25, 1989. Ceaușescu was the only leader to be executed during the Eastern Bloc uprising and Romania itself the only country to violently overthrow its Communist regime.

The Break Up Of The Soviet Union

The failure of Glasnost and Perestroika to revive the situation in the Soviet Union resulted in its demise.

In 1989, the first competitive elections since 1917 were held for the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies. Boris Yeltsin was elected and became a leader of the opposition in the U.S.S.R. In 1990, other parties became officially tolerated, and in June 1991 Yeltsin was elected President of Russia. On August 19–21, 1991, a coup of communist hard-liners occurred while Gorbachev was in the Crimea. Yeltsin led non-violent resistance to the coup, which ultimately prevailed and saw all the coup leaders arrested or commit suicide. On August 24, 1991, the Communist Party was banned in Russia. December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist and was replaced with 15 independent states.

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