Introduction

As Europe approached the modern era, war no longer plagued most of Europe, and peace and prosperity seemed likely to continue. The Soviet Union fell in 1991, resulting in a Europe that is, for the most part, democratic and unified. Its nations, however, are faced with ageing populations and falling birthrates, making it increasingly challenging to sustain expensive programs of social services. As the twenty-first century began, the continent was troubled by restiveness among its millions of immigrants, mostly from Islamic nations, who often occupied low economic positions and did not seek or desire cultural assimilation. Incidents of conflict and violence were on the rise, while the stream of those wanting to enter continued unabated.

Western Europe 1945-Present

After World War II, West Germany, Italy, and France revived so rapidly with rates of growth as high as 8% that it was known as the "Economic Miracle." Britain, which was devastated by war and lost its colonial empire, retained its antiquated industrial factories and experienced slow growth and a punishing depression in the 1970s and 1980s. Spain, Portugal, Greece, and other similar nations lagged behind. Most countries in Western Europe experienced an influx of "guest workers" from India, Pakistan, Africa (primarily Algeria and Morocco), and Turkey. The Italian government remained corrupt and ineffective, with coalitions forming and rapidly falling apart.
Britain

Britain was the hardest-hit of the Western Allies after World War II. In August 1947, India became independent, arguably the greatest part of the former British Empire to be lost by Britain. Deeply in debt, Britain saw the United States supersede her as the pre-eminent political and economic power of the Western world. From 1945 until 1951, the Labour Party and Prime Minister Attlee replaced the Conservative Party and Winston Churchill as the majority party, as the British people desired more social welfare programs and nationalized industry. The former model of free-market capitalism for much of the world, Britain from 1950 to 1980 embraced much of the domestic program of a social democratic state, while remaining a staunch ally of the United States in the Cold War.

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.

France

The collaborator 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, with bombings, terrorism, and the death of nearly one million people. When senior officers of the French military in Algeria rebelled in May of 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.
From 1981 until 1995, François Mitterand served as President of France. He was a Socialist, and implemented numerous socialized programs. 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 1995, Jacques Chirac became President as a member of the conservative Gaullist party. Currently, the French president is Nicolas Sarkozy, in office since 2007.

Germany

After World War II, Germany became divided into East and West Germany. West Germany, formally the Federal Republic of Germany, aligned itself with the West, while East Germany was possessed by the Soviet Union.

In 1948, the Berlin Airlift took place. The western Allies merged the three occupation zones they possessed after the end of World War II and issued a new Deutschmark. The Soviets under Stalin blockaded land access to Berlin in response, requiring the Allies to supply the city by air for nine months.

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 U.S.-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, strictly denying Nazis the right to participate in the new democracy, censoring fascist ideas, and trying ex-Nazis in the Nuremberg trials.

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 U.S. and USSR.

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 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

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

For centuries, Europe was plagued with frequent and destructive wars, particularly the Franco-Prussian War, World War I, and World War II. European leaders, out of a desire to secure a lasting peace in Europe, agreed that the best method to do so was to unite the nations economically and politically. Thus began the European Union (EU).

Members

There are currently 27 members of the European Union. The original six members were France, (West) Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, 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. Croatia, Macedonia, 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 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.

The Soviet Union and Its Fall

After the rise of the Soviet Union, the United States enacted a post-war economic plan called the Marshall Plan, which offered financial aid to Germany for rebuilding the allied countries of Europe and repelling communism after World War II. The Marshall Plan offered the same aid to the Soviet Union and its allies, if they would make political reforms and accept certain outside controls. Out of fear of having the Soviet Union take advantage of the plan, the Americans made the terms deliberately difficult for the Soviet Union to accept. As a result, the Soviets denounced these actions as imperialistic, and responded by enacting Comecon, or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.
This was an economic organization of communist states and a kind of Eastern Bloc equivalent to—but more inclusive than—the European Economic Community.

During the same time period, a large portion of the so-called "free world" formed NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which was intended to be used so that if the USSR and its allies launched an attack against any of the NATO members, it would be treated as if it was an attack on all member states. The Soviet Union responded by forming the Warsaw Pact, which was the equivalent agreement among Communist states.

**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 U.S.S.R. 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 curved 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, or the fact that each nation had enough power to completely obliterate the other. 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 battled a Vietnam-like war in Afghanistan. The USSR was crushed by this smaller nation, and the Soviet War in Afghanistan has been compared to the Vietnam War of America in terms of their victories by the underdogs.

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
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 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, closed inefficient plants, 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.

**Revolutions of 1988-1990**

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

In 1989, a number of Soviet 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 wall was torn down on November 9, 1989. In Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, a brutal Stalinist dictator, was executed on December 25th 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 Fall 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 free elections since 1917 were held for the Soviet Congress. Boris Yeltsin was elected and became the 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 and August 20, 1991, a coup of communist hard-liners occurred while Gorbachev was in the Crimea. Yeltsin faced down the coup on top of a tank in front of the Russian Parliament. On August 24, 1991, the Communist Party was banned in Russia and the KGB dissolved. Lenin statutes were torn down, and the new Russian flag went up. December 31, 1991 marked the end of the Soviet Union.
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