

## 28. Europe After the Cold War



### TEACHER BACKGROUND

The year 1992 was the first full year after the breakup of the Soviet Union. As a result, there were a number of new countries. Some were former Soviet republics, others were former satellite states. Once free, these states followed their own agendas. Two satellite countries split and one merged with its western counterpart. In each case, nationalism was a powerful influence. But in Western Europe, an economic change was challenging nationalism and moving long-established nations toward a union that was at least economic and possibly more.

When the Soviet Union ended in December of 1991, a number of Soviet Republics became countries. The largest of these was the Russian Federation. It inherited much of the Soviet Union's role in the world, including most of its nuclear arsenal and its United Nations Security Council membership. It also inherited an economy that was shrinking and that badly needed reform. Russian president Boris Yeltsin struggled to lead this, the largest country in the world, through a transition to capitalism and democracy.

The former Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania found the transition to independence easier. The Baltic states had been independent until absorbed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Each had clung to its historic links to the West in spite of pressures from the Soviet government.

The people of Belarus were Slavic, as were the Russians, but they were also heavily influenced by Polish culture. The Ukraine was a Slavic country but had a strong identity separate from Russia. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has always been separate from the Russian

Orthodox Church. The Ukraine was the Soviet Union's major farming region. Before the breakup, it supplied 20 per cent of the Soviet Union's food supply. The independent Ukraine has its coast on the Black Sea. This allowed it to inherit part of the old Soviet navy. It also had within its borders a number of nuclear missiles. The Ukrainian government announced its intention to become nuclear-free. The Ukraine negotiated with Russia about dividing the navy. Other issues remain, most notably, what currency to use.

The Transcaucasian republics of the Soviet Union became the new nations of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Each of them has a strong ethnic identity, and they were fighting among themselves before the Soviet Union broke up. They agreed to a cease-fire in 1994.

Some former Soviet satellites changed their status after the end of the Soviet Union. Romania lost its province of Bessarabia, which became the small agricultural country of Moldova. The people of Czechoslovakia pushed out communist control in their "velvet revolution"—a 10-day series of peaceful protests in November of 1989. But the country was not united. In December 1992, Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Yugoslavia was not a satellite, but it was affected by the end of the Cold War. The need to be strong enough to resist Soviet presence kept it together during the Cold War, but after that, ethnic tensions were too severe. Yugoslavia split into five countries—Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Yugoslavia. The country calling itself Yugoslavia is not

diplomatically recognized by any outside country. It is made up of Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia has assisted Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina in a vicious civil war. Both the United Nations and NATO have made peacekeeping efforts.

In Germany, the decline of the Soviet Union permitted a drive toward unity. In October of 1990, East Germany merged with West Germany. After a brief period of euphoria, problems set in. West Germany had been one of the strongest economies in the world. The East Germans were seriously behind in technology. Bringing them up to date and coping with the resulting unemployment and resentment was a distressing process. But the fact remains that this new Germany was the world's leading exporter in 1992.

During all these nationalistic developments, Western Europe has been building a powerful international structure. In 1990, the European Union had 12 member countries with a total population of 345 million and a gross domestic product of \$6 trillion. For comparison, in 1990 the United States GDP was \$5.5 trillion and the population was 248.7 million. The European Union has as its goal to become a completely unified economy with a common outer tariff, no inner tariffs or trade barriers, and even a common currency. It has been developing for some time. After World War II, a number of leaders in Europe realized that national borders created barriers that weakened their economy. They saw that the United States, a large area with no economic barriers to inside trade, was very efficient, so they talked of the goal of a United States of Europe. Six countries signed the first treaty and set up the European Coal and Steel Community on July 23, 1953. The same

six—Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands—signed two more treaties on March 25, 1957. The European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) was intended to develop nuclear power in Europe. The European Economic Community planned to set up a common outer tariff and eliminate inner trade barriers. As progress was made, new members joined. In 1973, Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom joined. Spain and Portugal joined in 1986. Greece followed in 1991 to make 12. While not strictly a “member,” East Germany joined when it merged with West Germany.

The European Union has, in fact, reduced inner trade barriers and established a common outer tariff. Its chief authority is a Council of Ministers from member governments, but it has a parliament elected by voters in each country. The parliament is largely advisory. There is also a Court of Justice, a flag, and even a tax that the European Union collects. The progress has not come easily.

Farmers seem to be constantly protesting the common agricultural policy, and some countries are dragging their feet about further economic integration. Voters in Denmark rejected one proposal carefully negotiated at a summit at Maastricht in the Netherlands. But the European Union has so many obvious economic advantages that even the states of Eastern Europe have considered joining.