

Enlightened Absolutism

Frederick II of Prussia

Joseph II of Austria

Catherine II of Russia

Enlightened absolutists were rulers who implemented reforms based on the new ideas of the Enlightenment without any intention of diminishing their own monarchical power.

They were motivated by the desire to make their country stronger and wealthier, and to make their own rule more effective. For these rulers, the Enlightenment was a means to an end.

Frederick II of Prussia

Prussia had been transformed during the reign of Frederick William I into a powerful state. He allowed the Junker nobility to monopolize the officer corps in the military, thereby ensuring the nobility's loyalty to the king.

The most important values in Prussian society were duty, obedience, and sacrifice. Prussian society was highly stratified and militaristic.

Frederick II, attracted to Enlightenment ideas, inherited a well-disciplined military and bureaucracy. He reformed Prussian law codes, outlawed torture, granted freedom of speech, and religious toleration. These reforms were implemented alongside new taxes that increased the government's influence and commercial reforms that stimulated agricultural advances.

Frederick II gained new territory for Prussia in the War of the Austrian Succession and Seven Years' War. The First Partition of Poland united all of Prussia into a single territory.

Joseph II of Austria

Maria Theresa was a conservative Catholic, but her son Joseph II was inspired by the Enlightenment and desired reforms.

Joseph's reforms included the abolition of serfdom, equality under the law, restrictions on capital punishment, and religious toleration. He also made German the official language of the government bureaucracy.

Joseph's goal was to increase his power over the nobility and the church. He angered the nobility by abolishing serfdom and angered the Catholic Church by confiscating church land and diverting church revenues towards the state.

Joseph allowed freedom of the press and Vienna slowly began to resemble Paris and London in its cultural and intellectual sophistication.

Catherine II of Russia

Catherine was the German wife of Peter III who became the leader of Russia after Peter was murdered. She corresponded regularly with Voltaire and Diderot and wanted to reform Russia with Enlightenment ideas, but understood that her power depended on the support of the nobility.

She openly questioned serfdom and capital punishment, but her policies ultimately strengthened the power of the nobility. The new laws worsened the fate of the peasants and led to rebellions. Pugachev's Rebellion resulted in 1,500 estate owners being killed. Pugachev was executed and the privileges of the nobility were formalized in the Charter of the Nobility in 1785.

Catherine II defeated the Ottoman Turks and became the protector of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

She also gained new territory from the Partition of Poland.

I guess we'll mention Scandinavia too...
Gustavus III of Sweden

Gustavus III implemented many Enlightenment ideas such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and *laissez-faire* economics.

However, his reforms angered the nobility and he was assassinated.