

# Reforms of the Soviet Union

The economic reforms of *perestroika* and the political and cultural reforms of *glasnost*, initiated by Mikhail **Gorbachev**, were intended to revive support for the Communist Party.

Prior to Gorbachev's reforms, the Communist Party *was* the state government, and the leader of the Soviet Union was simply the First Secretary of the Communist Party.

After Gorbachev's reforms, the state government (ex: the presidency), was separated from the Communist Party. In 1988, other political parties were legalized and elections would choose the members of a Soviet parliament.

Gorbachev also shifted away from the foreign policy of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which promised Soviet intervention to preserve Communist governments in Eastern Europe.

# Challenges to the Soviet Union

Within the Soviet Union itself, ethnic minorities that desired self-determination began to promote the creation of independent nation-states.

Soviet republics such as Latvia, Estonia, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania promoted independence between 1988 – 1990.

In 1988, the **Solidarity Movement** in **Poland** demanded free elections and the Communist government agreed. The Red Army did not intervene and this sparked widespread movements throughout Eastern Europe.

In November 1989, in one of the most emotional moments in European history since 1945, the government of East Germany ordered the opening of the Berlin Wall. Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of West Germany, promoted reunification.

The Communist governments in **Hungary**, **Czechoslovakia**, and **Romania** collapsed in the face of popular demands for democratic elections.

# Disintegration of the Soviet Union

In 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected the first president of the Soviet Union.

In 1991, Boris **Yeltsin** was elected the president of the Russian Republic within the Soviet Union.

In the face of Eastern Europe becoming independent of Soviet influence and the rise of nationalist movements within the Soviet Union, a conservative (meaning die-hard Communist) *coup d'état* was attempted in August 1991.

Gorbachev refused to cooperate with the conservatives and Yeltsin led a resistance effort in Moscow. The conservative effort failed, and the instability caused by the attempted *coup* enabled more Soviet republics to declare independence from Moscow.

In December 1991, **Ukraine** voted for independence and the Soviet Union became a voluntary **Commonwealth of Independent States**. Gorbachev resigned and the political structure of the Soviet Union ceased to exist. All of the former Soviet republics that made up the Soviet Union were now **fifteen** independent **nation-states**.



# Post-Soviet Russia

Yeltsin aimed to introduce a free market economy and pass a new constitution.

Both tasks proved challenging as inequality and corruption plagued the new economy, and resistance to the new constitution required the use of the military to maintain order.

Yeltsin was re-elected in 1996. He resigned in 1999 due to health problems and was replaced by Vladimir **Putin**.

Putin took a more assertive approach to foreign policy, but continued the liberalization of the economy begun under Yeltsin.

Putin attempted to regain order and stability within Russia and revitalize Russia's identity as a powerful nation-state, but doing so led him to centralize his own political power and restrict freedom of speech. Thus, a trade-off occurred between political freedom and economics and political stability.

# Post-Soviet Ideas

The collapse of the Communist Party and the abandonment of communism within the Soviet Union concluded the era of Marxist socialism that began in the 1870s when the German socialists adopted Marxism as their political philosophy.

The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 that brought Marxism to Russia seemed to validate Marxism, and Lenin and Stalin sought to export Marxism abroad.

With the Soviet Union and the communist governments of Eastern Europe gone, and their command economies abandoned, Marxist socialism has been discredited in the eyes of most people.

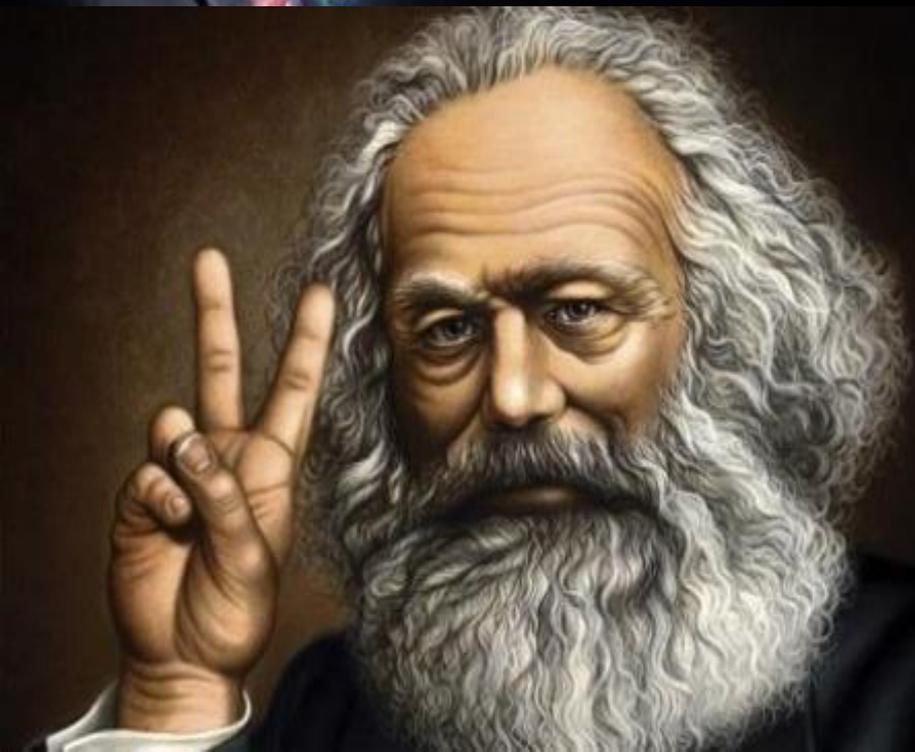
Non-Marxist or democratic socialism continued to develop within Western Europe, but even the socialist parties in Western Europe embraced capitalism as the source of economic growth that is necessary to create welfare states whose social policies are broadly-speaking “socialist.”

Marxism remains a useful form of cultural analysis used in a number of disciplines such as sociology, literature, philosophy, history, economics and communications.



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# Post-Soviet Eastern Europe

In 1990, the Solidarity Movement's leader **Lech Walesa** became the president of Poland and the country gradually transitioned to a free market economy and democracy.

In 1993, **Czechoslovakia** peacefully split into the **Czech Republic** and **Slovakia**. **Vaclav Havel**, a leader against the former Communist government, became the first president of the Czech Republic.

The division of Berlin ceased in 1989 and free elections were held in East Germany in 1990. By the end of the year, East and West Germany had been reunified both economically and politically.

**Yugoslavia** experienced the same type of disintegration as the Soviet Union. The republics within Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia, wanted independence. Slobodan **Milosevic**, a Serbian nationalist (yes, still causing problems!), refused to support the separatist movements.



# Disintegration of Yugoslavia

The **Balkans** has been a multi-ethnic region that has experienced political instability for many years. It was the site of imperial rivalry between Austria and Russia prior to World War I, and the ambitions of Serbian nationalists to construct a unified Slavic state led to the assassination that sparked the Great War.

After **World War I**, **Yugoslavia** was created to unite the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Bosnians, and Albanians into one nation-state. These ethnic groups are **Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Muslim**.

During World War II, Yugoslavia was occupied by the **Nazis**, but a **Communist** resistance movement developed that ultimately expelled the German army.

After World War II, Yugoslavia was ruled Josip **Tito**, leader of the Communist resistance movement. He ruled Yugoslavia as a Communist state that was independent from the Soviet Union until his death in 1980. Yugoslavia, which was made up of six republics, began to dissolve politically as each republic began to promote independence.

# War in Yugoslavia

In 1990, the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia pursued independence.

Slobodan Milosevic, leader of the Serbian Communist Party and a Serbian nationalist, rejected their requests.

Milosevic sent the Yugoslavian (Serbian?) army into Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 after they declared independence.

Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence in 1992 and by mid-1993 Serbian forces were carrying out “**ethnic cleansing**” within **Bosnia** to remove the **Muslim** population. **NATO**, led by the **Clinton** Administration, carried out air strikes against Serbian forces in Bosnia. A peace treaty split Bosnia into a Serb republic and Muslim-Croat Federation in 1995.

In 1999, the autonomous province of **Kosovo** within Yugoslavia, was invaded by Serbian forces who began to massacre ethnic Albanians. Again, NATO and the Clinton Administration carried out air strikes to force Milosevic to agree to a settlement.

# Eastern Europe and the Balkans Today

In 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. The United States and most members of the European Union recognized its independence, but the Russians (yes, still supporting Serbia!) condemned the declaration.

In 2008, Putin left the presidency at the end of his second term. Dmitri Medvedev became president, but Putin became prime minister. In 2012, Putin was again elected President of Russia.

Putin is a nationalist and has always strived to reassert Russia's position as a major regional and global power. Putin often publicly criticized the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe and former Soviet territory.

In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia (formerly part of Soviet Union) over territorial disputes in South Ossetia. The United States and the European Union did not respond to Russian aggression in a strong manner and Russia arguably succeeded in re-establishing its authority within its previous sphere of influence.

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea (formerly part of Ukraine) and is actively involved in aggressive actions within eastern Ukraine today.

