

# Collapse of the Soviet Union & Changes to European Borders

**Enduring Understanding:** Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world's attention no longer focuses on the tension between superpowers. Although problems rooted in the Middle East have captured the world's attention more consistently than the majority of current issues, or other concerns have moved to the forefront as well. To understand the modern world, you should summarize the political and social impacts of the collapse/dissolution of the Soviet Union and changes to European borders, including those of Russia and the independent Republics, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia; the breakup of Yugoslavia; the reunification of Germany; and the birth of the European Union (EU).



## Collapse of the USSR

In December of 1991, the Soviet Union officially collapsed and was dissolved. Tensions in the USSR worsened in June of 1991. The people of the USSR were frustrated with economic problems and lack of political rights. They turned to **Boris Yeltsin** to fix their problems. Yeltsin was the first person ever to be directly elected president of the Russian Federation. However, **Mikhail Gorbachev** remained president of the USSR.



In August of 1991, conservative communists attempted to overthrow Gorbachev's government and remove him from power, but were unsuccessful. However, following this unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Gorbachev, the Soviet party lost power. All fifteen Soviet republics declared independence. Those fifteen countries agreed to form the **Commonwealth of Independent States** (CIS) as a loose federation of former Soviet states. The formation of the CIS was the official end of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev officially resigned as president of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991.

# Commonwealth of Independent States

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is an interstate association of the former republics of the Soviet Union

## Active members



## History

8.12.1991	Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Belarus, Russia and Ukraine)
21.12.1991	Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan joined the CIS. The declaration on the purposes and principles of the CIS was signed
01.1993	The Charter of the CIS is adopted
3.12.1993	Georgia becomes an active member of the CIS
01.1996	Emblem and flag of the CIS are adopted
08.2005	Turkmenistan withdrew as an active member to become an associated member/observer of the CIS
2008	Afghanistan voices its wish to join the CIS
12.08.2008	Georgia announces its wish to withdraw from the CIS
18.08.2009	Georgia officially leaves the CIS

## Charter of the CIS

- Areas of member-states' joint activities:**
- Protecting people's rights and freedoms
  - Coordinating foreign policy
  - Cooperation in the formation of a common economic space, developing transport and communication systems
  - Healthcare and environmental protection
  - Social issues and immigration policies
  - Fighting organized crime
  - Cooperation in defense policies and guarding borders

As president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin adopted a plan known as “**shock therapy.**” This means that Russia immediately shifted to free market economics (capitalism). Shock Therapy led to outrageous inflation rates and hardships.

Yeltsin faced further difficulties when Chechnya declared and fought for independence in 1991. A cease-fire was declared between Russia and Chechnya in 1996, but war continued even as **Vladimir Putin** took over as Russian president in 1999.



### Section Review

1. When did the Soviet Union officially collapse?
2. Who was the first directly elected president of Russia?
3. Who was the last president of the Soviet Union?
4. What is the CIS?
5. Describe Shock Therapy.

## **Collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia**

In Czechoslovakia, the collapse of communism due to economic and political problems led to the split of Czechoslovakia into two nations: the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. Czechoslovakia had been made up of two groups: Czechs and Slovaks. Political problems arose between the Czechs and Slovaks. After World War II, the Soviet Union pressured and influenced Czechoslovakia into becoming a communist nation. The issues and problems between the Czechs and Slovaks were suppressed while Czechoslovakia was under communist rule. When communism collapsed, the political problems between the Czechs and Slovaks resurfaced. Czech and Slovak nationalism became stronger after the collapse of communism and the institution of a democratic system of government in Czechoslovakia. In order to address the increasing divisions between the Czechs and the Slovaks the government peacefully dissolved Czechoslovakia into two separate nations: The Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.



### **Section Review**

- 6. What were the two groups in Czechoslovakia?**
- 7. Why did problems resurface between the two groups in Czechoslovakia?**
- 8. How did the government of Czechoslovakia peacefully deal with the problems between the two groups?**

## **Collapse of Communism in Yugoslavia**

Political differences, economic concerns, and nationalism led to the breakup of Yugoslavia. Unlike Czechoslovakia, the breakup of Yugoslavia was not peaceful. Yugoslavia had a federal system with six republics: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro.



Yugoslavia had become communist in 1945 with Marshal Tito as president. President Tito died in 1980 and the stability of the communist government decreased. The six republics of Yugoslavia were having economic difficulties and wanted reforms. Nationalism amongst the republics continued to grow stronger. In 1990 the Yugoslav Communist Party split along ethnic lines, and throughout that year political reforms were introduced in some republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia. These reforms were often met with violent attacks from police and military support from the Communist regime. Violence increased throughout the 1990s as republics began demanding independence. Slovenia was the first republic to successfully secede or break away from Yugoslavia. Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia followed. In Serbia and Montenegro, **“ethnic cleansing,”** which is the mass expulsion or killing of members of an unwanted ethnic or religious group, led to mass atrocities as local militias within the republics came into conflict with nationalist minorities. One example of this ethnic cleansing occurred under the Serbian leadership of Slobodan Milosevic. After the arrest of Milosevic in 2001, Serbia and Montenegro were recognized by the United Nations once again, and in 2003 they were organized as a two-state federation. In 2006, Serbia and Montenegro were split into two independent nations. Ethnic violence also occurred in the former Serbian province of Kosovo as Albanians and Serbs fought for land.

### Section Review

9. What problems did the six republics of Yugoslavia have after President Tito died?
10. What was the first republic to gain independence from Yugoslavia?

## Collapse of Communism in East Germany

In East Germany, discontent arose over lack of economic prosperity and political rights. Demands and protests intensified in the late 1980s. The people of East Berlin looked to Poland and Hungary as models of change. In November of 1989, the Berlin Wall was torn down. This removed a symbol of division between communism and capitalism.



Collapse of the Berlin Wall



Newspaper Article Announcing the Collapse of the Berlin Wall



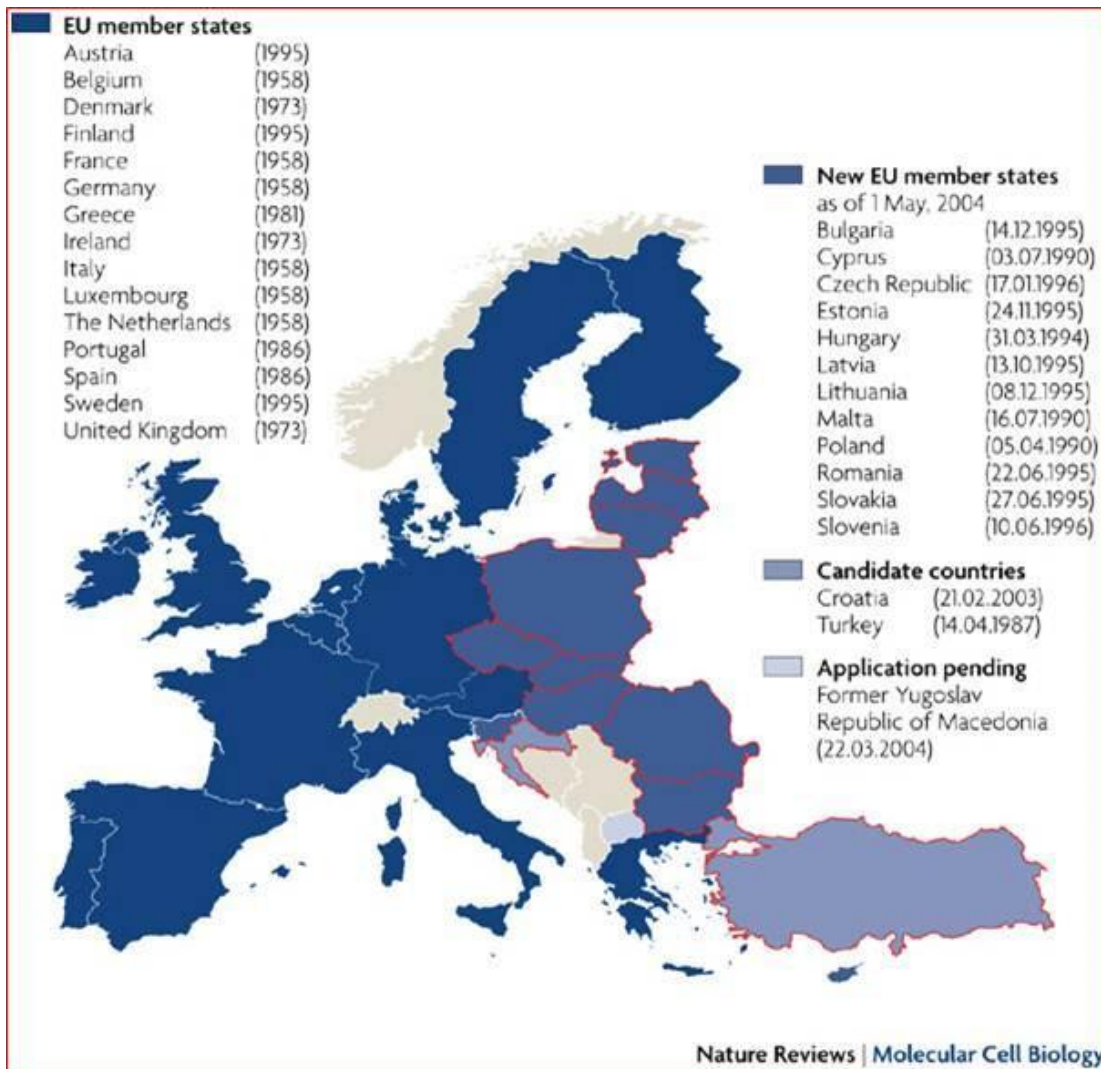
Celebrations after the Collapse of the Berlin Wall

### Section Review

11. Why were people in East Germany unhappy/discontent?
12. Where did the people of East Germany get inspiration for change?
13. What did the Berlin Wall symbolize?

## Post-Cold War Organizations and Policies

The **European Economic Community** (EEC) developed during the Cold War. It was officially created in 1957 and sought to strengthen the economies of democratic nations in Europe by allowing for beneficial trade by lowering trade restrictions and increasing trade opportunities. The main idea was to create a “single market” in which member states could get rid of traditional barriers to trade, like tariffs. The **European Union** (EU) officially replaced the EEC in 1993. With the creation of the EU, the democratic nations of Europe became even more unified and closer.



One step in making these nations closer was the creation of a single monetary unit for all the member nations of the EU: the **Euro**.



Another step in strengthening the European Union was focusing on non-economic issues, such as democratic practices, foreign policy, and common defense policy. With the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the EU was able to expand beyond its traditional ties to Western Europe and many former communist nations in Eastern Europe have since joined the EU. Currently there are 27 member nations of the EU.



The same sort of economic philosophy occurred in the Americas in 1994 with the creation of the **North American Free Trade Association** (NAFTA). This trade agreement created the world's largest free trade area, between Canada, Mexico and the United States, marking another step towards true global interdependence and a global economy.

### **Section Review**

- 14. What did the European Union replace?**
- 15. What is the purpose of the European Union?**
- 16. How did the EU make its member nations closer?**
- 17. Describe NAFTA.**

## Sources:

Image 1: "Radio Netherlands Worldwide." *Fall of Communism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 2: "Baseball Song of the Day: March 2010." *Baseball Song of the Day: March 2010*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 3: "Photos." *Home*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 4: "Commonwealth of Independent States." *RIA Novosti*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 5: "Chechen ." *About World Languages*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 6: "The Czechoslovakian Uprising of 1968." *Early Cold War Events*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 7: "Where Slovakia Is Located and How You Can Find Us!" *Slovakiahiking\_net*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 8: "Blopaganda.blogspot.com." : *The Macedonian Problem for Dummies*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 9: Waterfield, Bruno. "Hungarian Leader Admits He Feared Deaths after Lifting Iron Curtain." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 19 Aug. 2009. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 10: "And the Wall Came Tumbling down." *ComingAnarchy.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 11: "At Berlin Wall Fall Celebration, Old Allies Ask Where Is Obama?" *The Christian Science Monitor*. The Christian Science Monitor, n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 12: *Nature.com*. Nature Publishing Group, n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

Image 13: "EU Resources." *Civitas: EU Facts and Resources*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.