



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

# THE EASTERN EUROPE AND THE USSR

- After the defeat of Germany in World War Two Eastern European countries were left without government. Some countries had their **governments in exile**. If not, it was obvious that the new governments would be created from the **local resistance organizations** which fought the Nazis during the war. However, there was often more than one resistance group, usually one of them **communist**, usually **supported by the USSR**.
- The help from the USSR was usually appreciated because the Eastern European countries needed to restore law and order and recover their economies. If they protested, **the USSR was ready to use force**. It was even easier because these countries were freed from Nazism by the Red Army.
- At the **Yalta Conference (1945)** it was agreed that the Eastern European countries would have **free elections** after the war.
- By 1948 **Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania were communist**. They became **Soviet satellites**. (Yugoslavia was communist too but its leader Josip Broz Tito refused to obey Stalin and Yugoslavia left the Soviet communist bloc.)
- In **1947 the Cominform** (the Communist Information Bureau) was set up. Its purpose was to coordinate (and command) the various communist governments in Eastern Europe.
- **The Berlin blockade and airlift 1948-1949**
  - As a result of the Yalta Conference, Germany and Berlin were divided among the four victorious powers. Stalin did not want the new Germany to be strong. But the USA, Britain and France introduced a new currency, the Deutschmark, in their zones.  
**TASK 1: What was the Berlin Airlift and why was it introduced?**
  - As a consequence, in September **1949** the western **Federal Republic of Germany (BRD)** was founded. The capital was **Bonn** and **Konrad Adenauer** became its chancellor.
  - And in October the eastern **German Democratic Republic** was founded by the communists (as a Soviet satellite).
- When the USA offered economic help in the form of Marshall Aid in 1947, the USSR forbade the Eastern European countries to accept it. Instead, in **1949** Stalin founded the **Comecon** (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) to coordinate the industry and trade of the Eastern European countries. However, this organization preferred the interests of Russian economy.
- **Nikita Khrushchev**
  - In **1953 Joseph Stalin died** and was replaced by **Nikita Khrushchev** who preferred a more tolerant and peaceful line of policy.
  - In **1956 Khrushchev criticized Stalin** at the 20<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress and introduced his programme of **de-Stalinization**.

- **Hungarian revolt of 1956**

- However, Khrushchev's policy encouraged radical reformist movements in Eastern Europe.
- Hungary was led by hard-line communists. After Khrushchev's speech a group of **reformist** communists stood up against them.
- After a brief rebellion in June **1956** a **new government** led by **Imre Nagy** was formed. At first, it seemed Khrushchev would tolerate the Hungarian management of affairs but when Hungary planned to leave the Warsaw Pact and demanded the Soviet troops to be withdrawn from Hungary, he started to act.
- In October thousands of **Soviet troops and tanks invaded Hungary and entered Budapest**. After two weeks of fighting and 30,000 dead Hungarians, **Imre Nagy** and his government were imprisoned and **executed**.
- As a new leader of Hungary, Khrushchev appointed **János Kádár** who remained loyal to the Warsaw Pact.

- **1961 - The Berlin Wall**

- West Germany became richer than East Germany very quickly because it had accepted Marshall Aid. West Berlin was like a showcase to the people of East Berlin who tried to escape to the West in high numbers. Many of these people were highly educated (scientists, teachers, engineers, etc.). The Soviets were also afraid that West Berlin served as a "listening post" for spying on East Germany.
- In **1961** the USSR reacted and gave the western powers an ultimatum to withdraw from Germany. They refused, so on 13 August a barbed-wire barrier was put up to separate the West and East Berlin. In less than a week a **wall was built**. No civilians were allowed to cross it and those who tried were usually shot. (But many people tried anyway.)
- The Berlin Wall became a **symbol of the division between the West and the East**.



- **Ostpolitik**

- It was a policy friendly to the East Germany. It was introduced by the West German chancellor **Willy Brandt** and it relaxed the relations with the communist Germany.

- **Leonid Illych Brezhnev**

- Leader of the USSR 1964 – 1982
- He believed in a hard-line policy and tough approach to the West and any reformist communists in the East.

**TASK 2: What did the Brezhnev Doctrine say?**





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- **The Prague Spring of 1968**

- In the spring of 1968 it still seemed that the relations within the Warsaw Pact were relaxing. This encouraged the reformist communists in Czechoslovakia to promote more freedom in politics, economy and culture. They were led by **Alexander Dubček**.
- However, this was seen as great danger by Brezhnev. In August he threatened to use force if the communist leadership did not take control again. Because Dubček refused to give up, armies of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia, restored tough communist order and Soviet troops remained in the country until 1991.

- **Poland in the 1980s**

- In the 1970s Poland suffered a severe economic crisis as a result of the Comecon policy.
- In **1980** a free trade union called **Solidarity** was founded. It was led by **Lech Wałęsa** and it grew very quickly. Solidarity soon threatened to take power from the communist government led by **Wojciech Jaruzelski**.
- Brezhnev ordered Jaruzelski to regain control of the situation and sent the Soviet army to the Polish border.
- In December 1981 **Wałęsa** and ten thousand other reformists were **arrested** and **Solidarity was suspended**. Wałęsa then became a symbol of the Eastern European struggle against communist oppression. In 1983 he even won the Nobel Peace Prize.

- **Mikhail Gorbachev**

- After Brezhnev's death in 1982 the USSR was led by two leaders, Andropov and Chernenko in quick succession. Both were very old and lived a short time so they did not influence the international politics very much.
- In **1985 Mikhail Gorbachev** became the new party leader. He immediately started **reforming the old Soviet system** and **improving relations with the USA**.
- The economy of the USSR was in crisis when he became leader (the arms race, Afghanistan, bad economic policy). The economic system guaranteed people a job but did not motivate them. Alcoholism was a big problem too and life expectancy declined. The quality of Soviet products was appalling.
- Gorbachev's key ideas were **glasnost** (openness) and **perestrojka** (restructuring).
- He called for an open debate on government policy and problems. In 1987 a **market economy** was introduced. The army budget was reduced.
- The new attitude and a new, relaxed policy on Eastern Europe improved Soviet international relations. In 1990 Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

## Collapse of the communist regimes

- Communist regimes in Eastern Europe saw what was going on in the USSR. They were also warned that their communist governments would be no longer supported by the military force from the USSR. The mood changed and led to the collapse in a **domino effect**.
- **Poland - 1989**
  - In June there were first free elections since WWII and Solidarity won most of the seats. Lech Wałęsa became the first non-communist leader in Eastern Europe.
- **East Germany - 1989**
  - Masses of people refused to return from holiday in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Then through Austria they escaped to West Germany.
  - In October there were mass demonstrations and the East German leader, **Erich Honecker**, was advised to reform. He refused and ordered the army to shoot at the demonstrators but they refused. Gorbachev refused to send Soviet tanks to restore the regime.
  - In November people **marched to the Berlin Wall and dismantled it**. The guards did not defend it.
  - In **1990 Germany was united** by the West German chancellor **Helmut Kohl**.
- **Czechoslovakia – 1989**
  - After a great student demonstration on 17 November more huge demonstrations broke out all over the country. **The Velvet Revolution led by Václav Havel** then spread. The Czech borders with the West were opened and other political parties were allowed to form. A new government was formed. (for further details see your notes on Czech history)

**TASK 3: Why was the revolution called “velvet”?**
- **Romania – 1989**
  - In December there was a short but bloody revolution which **overthrew the dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu**. He was executed.
- **Hungary – 1989**
  - In May the Hungarians dismantled the fence between Hungary and Austria.
  - In December the Communist Party renamed itself to the Socialist Party.
  - In 1990 free elections were held.
- **Bulgaria – 1989**
  - In December there were huge demonstrations against the communist government.
  - Free elections were promised for 1990.



*Berlin Wall, November 1989*



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- **The Baltic republics – 1990**

- Latvia was the first to declare independence from the USSR, Estonia and Lithuania followed.

- **The Soviet Union – 1991**

- In **1989** a new **parliament** was formed in every republic of the Union.
- **Gorbachev** started losing support in the USSR, opposed by both the democrats and hard-line communists.
- To save the Union, in **1990** he established the Presidency and became **President** of the USSR.
- In **1991 the Russian Federation** was founded, with **Boris Jelcin** as President.
- In 1991 the conservative communists organized a coup which was crushed. Jelcin won and the **Communist Party was banned**.
- In 1991 the independence of the Baltic republics was recognized. Ukraine declared independence.
- In December 1991 **the Soviet Union was dissolved**.



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**REVISION:**

**TASK 4:**

**Was the prevalence of communism in the Eastern European countries inevitable after World War Two? Justify your answer.**

**TASK 5:**

**Why did the communist regimes in the Eastern Europe collapse?**

**TASK 6:**

**What was the role of Mikhail Gorbachev in the collapse of communism?**