

Summary: Eastern Europe and Russia

The Breakup of the Soviet Union

Mikhail Gorbachev made reforms in the Soviet Union. But problems remained, and the economy got worse. Communists were not pleased when Gorbachev relaxed control in Eastern Europe.

A group of leaders tried to overthrow the Soviet government in 1991. They failed. The Soviet republics began to declare independence. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union did not exist. It had become 15 separate nations with their own governments.

Most Eastern European countries today are parliamentary republics. Some countries have created coalition governments, which are formed when small political parties work together.

Freedoms were limited under Soviet rule. The economies did not do well. Today, Eastern Europeans have gained freedom, but they face high prices and unemployment. The countries of Eastern Europe are shifting from command economies to free-market economies.

War in the Balkan Peninsula

Yugoslavia has had years of conflict. In 1997, Slobodan Milošević became the president of Yugoslavia. He was a Serb. He wanted the Serbs to rule Yugoslavia. The Serbs began fighting the Croats and Muslims who lived in Bosnia. They murdered many Muslims so that Serbs would be the majority. The Serbs called these killings of minority groups ethnic cleansing. The war finally ended when NATO launched an air war against Yugoslavia.

Modern Russia

The breakup of the Soviet Union has made life in Russia better, but the country still faces problems. Some leaders are dishonest. Economic changes are happening very slowly. Many Russians are still poor. The crime rate is growing. A war in Chechnya has caused much suffering.

However, most Russians are free to practice their beliefs. Russia has been moving toward a free-market economy. Citizens can own land. Foreign companies can do business with Russia.

Before You Read

Find and highlight each vocabulary word.

parliamentary republic

noun, a republic whose head of government is the leader of the political party that has the most members in parliament

coalition government

noun, a government formed by political parties joining together

ethnic cleansing

noun, the organized killing of members of an ethnic group

After You Read

REVIEW How did Eastern European governments change after the fall of the Soviet Union? Underline the ways Eastern European governments have changed.

REVIEW What were the causes of ethnic cleansing? Draw a box around the causes.

REVIEW What are the main problems that face Russia today? Circle the main problems.