

GREAT POWERS IN EUROPE IN THE EARLY 1900'S

GERMANY



Germany was formally a “**Constitutional Monarchy**” but its system was very *authoritarian*. It was the Kaiser that had the last saying in most questions. The power of the parliament (the Reichstag) was limited.

ECONOMY: Germany was the **strongest industrial power in Europe** (Second in the world after the US)

SOCIAL PROBLEMS: a large urban working class, a growing middle class and a ruling upper class (Junkers) led to tension!

FOREIGN POLICY under Bismarck – the **ALLIANCE SYSTEM!** One of the main long-term causes was the Bismarckian “*Alliance System*”. After

Prussia defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War 1870-71 Germany was founded. This new country needed to be protected. That's why Bismarck created the “*Alliance System*”. His main ideas were:

- *Keep France diplomatically isolated*
- *Keep a balance of power in Europe (Germany should always have an alliance with at least two of the main powers of Europe)*
- *Try to keep Austria-Hungary and Russia calm – not to close and not to distant*

So Bismarck formed several different alliances the coming years:

- **Dreikaiserbund** (1873 – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia)
- **Dual Alliance** (1879 – Germany, Austria-Hungary)
- **Three Emperors' Alliance** (1881 – continuation of the “*Dreikaiserbund*” – but weaker)
- **Triple Alliance** (1882 – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy)
- **Reinsurance Treaty** (1887 – Germany, Russia – **SECRET!**)

In 1890 Bismarck was forced to step down from the position as Germany's Chancellor. The new government did not renew the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. Instead they started a “*new*” foreign policy – **Colonization and Naval expansion** (= “*Weltpolitik*”). This policy led to international tension especially with Great Britain. The German government was very ambivalent about their relation towards Great Britain – should they work with or against Britain?

FRANCE

In France we had the “**Third Republic**”. The nation was divided between the **pacifist left wing** and the **revanchist right wing**. Short-lived weak coalitions ruled the country and it swung between the leftist and rightist policies depending on which government it had for the moment.

ECONOMY: France was a **wealthy nation** with a **large gold reserve** and **several overseas investments** (especially in *Russia*). Most of the population lived and worked with **agriculture** but France had a fair size industry. Some historians describe the industrialization as a bit backward.

FOREIGN POLICY: France was defeated in the **Franco-Prussian War 1870-71**. France lost the district of Alsace-Lorraine (see the map on the left)

France also:

- had to pay a war indemnity of 5 billion marks
- suffered from German occupation of parts of France (until the indemnity had been paid)
- suffered the humiliation of a Prussian victory march through Paris
- suffered the humiliation of having the German Empire being proclaimed in the Mirror Hall of the Palace of Versailles

After this defeat France wanted to:

- reverse the humiliation of this war
- protect French security
- restore France to a position of influence in international politics

...but after the Franco-Prussian war France was diplomatically isolated

- Because of domestic instability (Paris Commune, etc...)
- Because of the Bismarckian diplomacy

The new German foreign policy 1890 ended the diplomatic isolation of France. Russia was not a natural ally but it was a great power that was available:

- France curtailed the activities of exiled Russian nihilists in France



- France let Russia borrow money (over 400 million pounds)

This led to a “new understanding” between the two countries:

- France signed a military agreement with Russia 1892 (about joint military actions)
- France signed an alliance with Russia 1894

IMPERIALISM: The declaration of a French protectorate over Tunisia (1881) led to even more diplomatic problems – with Italy (who claimed the same area). The Italian premier Crispi was anti-French which made Italy seek an alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary (**TRIPLE ALLIANCE**). France focused on increasing its colonial possessions. This led to increasing British suspicion. In 1898 war between the countries was closed due to the

Fashoda Crisis (Sudan). After some diplomatic work France backed out of the conflict. Both countries realized they needed to solve some of their colonial conflicts which led to more diplomatic contacts. In April 1904 France signed a treaty with Great Britain – **ENTENTE CORDIALE**

- France let go of Egypt and Britain supported French claims over Morocco
- Great Britain was disturbed by the German navy building program
- Great Britain was also disturbed by Wilhelm II's support of the Boers before the Boer War (1899-1902 – actually the Second Boer War) This German support was expressed in the Kruger telegram of 1896 (From Wilhelm II to the Boer President of Transvaal)

In 1907 France, Russia and Great Britain agreed on an alliance – the **TRIPLE ENTENTE!** Now both big alliances had been formed – the **TRIPLE ALLIANCE** (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) against the **TRIPLE ENTENTE** (France, Russia, Great Britain).



Captain Blackadder explains the purpose of the alliance system to Baldrick:

Captain Blackadder: You see, Baldrick, in order to prevent war in Europe, two superblocks developed: us, the French and the Russians on one side, and the Germans and Austria-Hungary on the other. The idea was to have two vast opposing armies, each acting as the other's deterrent. That way there could never be a war.

Baldrick: But this is sort of a war, isn't it, sir?

Captain Blackadder: Yes, that's right. You see, there was a tiny flaw in the plan.

Baldrick: What was that, sir?

Captain Blackadder: It was bollocks!

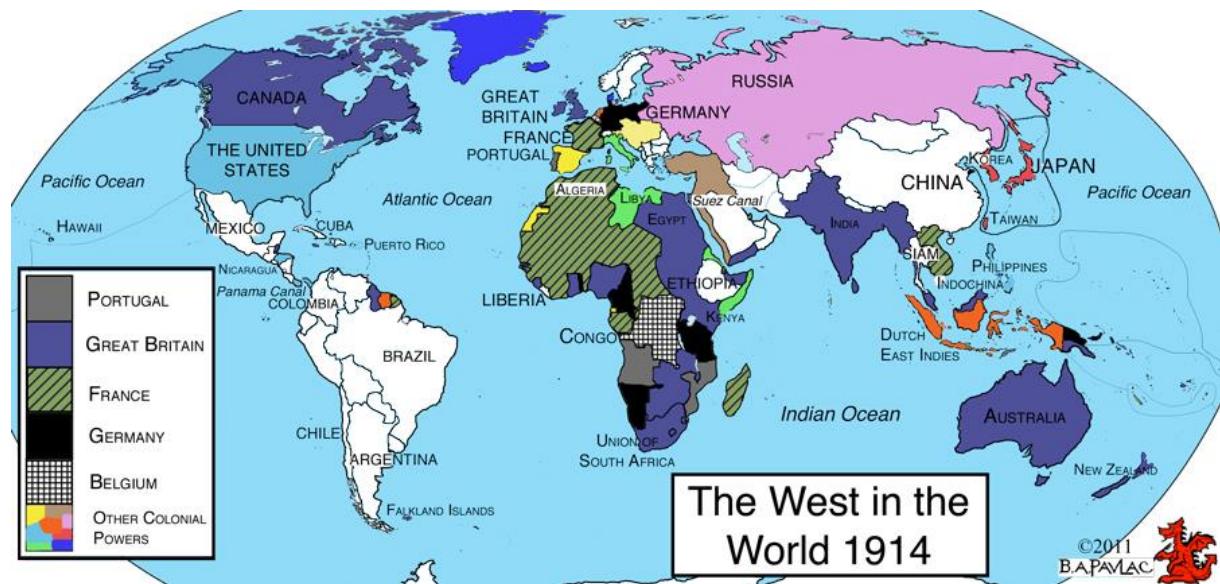
GREAT BRITAIN

Great Britain had a well-established Constitutional Monarchy. The House of Commons dominated British politics.

ECONOMY: Britain was the first industrialized country in the world. During most of the 19th century Great Britain was the number one economy in the world but by the end of the century both the US and Germany had passed Britain. Now the economy was a bit in decline – still the country was one of the top economies of the world.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS: The huge urban work force faced many problems: low wages, far too many working hours, poor living conditions and poor working environment. This led to tension in the British society.

EMPIRE! – IMPERIALISM: Great Britain had built up a vast overseas empire. It was the biggest colonial power in the world! Here is a map that shows the leading colonial powers in 1914:



During many years Great Britain isolated herself from the other European countries. Her concern was the Empire! By the end of the 19th century we start to see a change in the British foreign policy – from “splendid isolation” to accepting allies... The economic as well as the political competition from USA and Germany made Britain start to look for allies.

NAVY: Britain's major military power was its navy! A huge navy was necessary:

- *to protect and defend the British Isles*
- *to defend its sea-based trade*
- *to defend its Empire*

When Germany started to enlarge its fleet in the early 1900's Britain was alarmed. A new serious competitor was a threat so Britain also started to enlarge the already biggest fleet in the world. This is referred to as the “*Navy race*”!

Britain's foreign policy aims in the early 1900's:

1. *to dominate the seas*
2. *to preserve the balance of power in Europe*
3. *to defend the Indian trade routes*

INDIA: As mentioned above – one very important part of the British foreign policy was to defend the Indian trade routes. India had many different valuable items which Great Britain exploited. The enormous wealth the Indian trade brought to Britain was used to counter all the budget deficits the country faced in the 19th and early 20th century.



The Russian expansion east and southwards was therefore a problem for Britain. The closer Russia came to disturb the British trade routes to India the bigger the problem! In the early 1900s Persia (Iran) was a specific problem. In 1907 Russia and Great Britain agreed on the partition of influence in Persia. They divided the country into three different zones; a Russian zone in the north, a British zone in the southeast (closest towards India) and a Persian “neutral zone” in the middle. After that they formed the **TRIPLE ENTENTE** with France.

RUSSIA

Russia was an **autocracy** (= absolute monarchy). The Czar decided everything. The state was very bureaucratic and inefficient. The system was supported by the **Church** (Russian Orthodox Church), the **Nobility** and the **Army**.

ECONOMY: The Russian economy was backwards. It was totally depended on an old-fashioned agriculture sector. Agricultural products were the only export articles of Russia. In the late 1800's Russia went through the first industrial revolution. It was a rapid industrialization in a few areas – the rest of Russia remained a backward agricultural country. The new working class was poorly treated, poorly fed and poorly paid. This led to tension – social problems. The very small middle class was also discontent with the political system and they protested against it.

NATIONALISM: Russia was a victim of two sorts of nationalism. **Pan-Slavism** was an idea developed in the 19th century that expressed the idea of all Slavs **uniting** in **one big Slav nation**. The Russian version of Pan-Slavism saw Russia as the leader/ruler of this Slav nation. Pan-Slavism saw the Slav culture and philosophy as superior to the Western culture and philosophy. The second form of nationalism in Russia was the **splitting nationalism**. Several regions populated by different minority groups wanted to break away from the Russian Empire; **Ukrainians, Poles, Finns, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians...**

FOREIGN POLICY: At the beginning of the 19th century Russia together with her allies defeated Napoleon and France. After the Vienna Congress (1814-15) Russia often acted as the “gendarme” (policeman) of Europe. Several revolutionary situations in Europe were stopped by the efficient Russian army. At the same time Russia expanded towards the east in Asia. After the defeat in the Crimean War (1854-56) Russia was forced to step back a bit in Europe. For a while Russia focused on the development in East Asia (among other things Russia founded a city called Vladivostok at the coast of East Asia).

Disagreement over the regions of Wallachia and Moldavia led to the **Russo-Turkish War 1877-78**. Russia won the war but “*lost the peace*”. The first Peace Treaty (in **San Stefano**) 1878 favored Russian interest in the region. The great powers of Europe (Great Britain, France and Austria-Hungary) did not accept this treaty so a second treaty was outlined at the **Congress of Berlin 1878**. This forced agreement was a huge disappointment for Russia. The country only gained a little bit of the gains of San Stefano. The relation between Russia and the other great powers became strained, especially the relation with Russia's two allies – Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Once again Russia focused on the expansion in the East. This led to a clash with Japan – the **Russo-Japanese War 1904-05**. Russia was defeated which was a huge humiliation for a



country who had been counted as a great (if not the greatest) military power in the first half of the 19th century. In Russia a revolt (“revolution”) broke out 1905. This revolt led to some reforms in Russia but the apolitical system of Autocracy remained. The misfortunes in the East made Russia once more focus on the regions in the West – especially the South West – the Balkan region. Another country

had the same focus in her plans of expansion – that was the Double Monarchy of Austria-Hungary

DOUBLE MONARCHY OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

In 1867 Austria had to agree that Hungary became a separate kingdom with just some loose ties to Vienna although they shared a common foreign policy and common armed forces – the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary.. The Emperor officially ruled over the Austro-Hungarian Empire but both regions had their own independent parliaments. This led to confusion, lots of bureaucracy and inefficiency. The dual monarchy was a bureaucratic nightmare!



NATIONALISM: In the 19th century one of the main political forces was nationalism. Some countries united (Germany and Italy) and other countries/empires suffered from splitting nationalism. One of the main victims of *splitting nationalism* was the dual monarchy! Some of the ethnic groups wanted to be treated as an equal to the Austrians and Hungarians, other ethnic groups wanted independency or a connection with another country (especially Italians and Serbs). The splitting nationalism was a HUGE problem for the dual monarchy! It was especially the rise of Slav nationalism that threatened the dual monarchy...

ECONOMY: The economic growth within the empire was slow. Most of the areas were agricultural. It was only the regions of Bohemia (the Czech region) that had gone through a larger industrial development. After 1866 the dual monarchy focused on a development towards the south-east. They started an economic penetration of the Balkans; railroad links were constructed between Austria-Hungary and Constantinople and the Aegean port of Salonika. As much control of the River Danube as possible and access to the Adriatic coast were also of fundamental economic importance for Austria-Hungary...

FOREIGN POLICY: Austria-Hungary was an Empire in decline. It started with the defeat against France in Italy 1859 and in the Austro-Prussian War 1866. The loss of influence over

Germany and Italy made Austria-Hungary focus on the Balkans. Austria's three different stages in their Balkan involvement;

1. Congress of Berlin 1878 – Austria-Hungary was permitted to occupy and administer the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Novibazar. The diplomacy with the renewal of the Triple Alliance (1887), publication of Germany's commitments to Austria-Hungary under the Dual Alliance (Germany and Austria-Hungary pledged to aid one another in case of an attack by Russia). Also, each state promised benevolent neutrality to the other if one of them was attacked by another European power), and an agreement 1887 between Austria-Hungary, Italy and Great Britain about preserving status quo around the shores of the Mediterranean.

2. The assassination of King Alexander of Serbia 1903. The new king (Peter I) was pro-Russian and he favored a policy of “South Slavism” (Yugoslavism) which meant the strive for Serbian dominance of the Balkan region. The Customs union between Serbia and Bulgaria 1904 deepened the Austrian-Hungarian worries about Serbian dominance. Austria-Hungary imposed prohibitive tariffs upon Serbian agricultural produce (Hungarian economic interest) which made the relation worse – the “Pig War” (because these tariffs included livestock)

3. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bosnian Crisis) 1908...

The Balkan region was one center of problems during the years before the outbreak of WWI!



THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The Ottoman Empire was often referred to as the “*sick man of Europe*”! It was an Empire in severe decline. The authority of the Sultan had been terminally undermined in most areas which either were under the influence of some other country/countries or ruled themselves independently. The remaining regime was corrupt and inefficient. It was an empire in **CHAOS**! Around 1900 the huge foreign debts (**ECONOMY**) and the political discontent meant that the empire was near a total **COLLAPSE**! After the revolution of the “Young

"Turks" in 1909 we can see some regaining strength of the Ottoman Empire but this revolution came far too late to change the development a few years later...

NATIONALISM: Just like the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary the Ottoman Empire suffered from splitting nationalism. At the beginning of the 19th century Greece had gained its independence (Greek independence war) and during this century several more nations were formed in the Balkan region (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria...).

RELIGION: Another splitting problem for the Ottoman Empire was religion. Different Christian Churches clashed with the majority of the Muslim majorities. The influence of some European great powers (esp. Austria-Hungary and Russia) in the Balkan region was therefore deeply resented by the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire.

EASTERN QUESTION: This was the question on what should be done with the declining Ottoman Empire in South-East Europe. After several ethnic groups managed to gain independency and due to the influence of Russia and Austria-Hungary the Balkan region “blow up” in war 1912 (the First Balkan War), 1913 (the Second Balkan War) and in 1914 (the July Crisis and WWI)...

THE BALKANS AFTER THE SECOND BALKAN WAR, 1913

