

## The recent world



[9/11 Photos](#). [9/11 World Trade Center Attack](#)  
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## **1 The dissolution of communist block**



[Magnus Manske](#). [The fall of the Berlin Wall](#) (CC BY-SA)

## 1.1 The dissolution of the Soviet Union

Once Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982 he was succeeded by two leaders, who died shortly after getting the charge: Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko.



[Ria Novosti. Mikhail Gorbachev 1986 \(CC BY-SA\)](#)

The new Soviet leader was elected in 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev. He implemented some measures in order to open up the political panorama and to put and end the economic and political crisis:

- *Perestroika* (Reconstruction). It was a group of reforms that included the legalisation of political parties, free elections, economic reforms, and the creation of private companies. Hence, the State intervention was reduced.
- *Glasnost* (Openness). It meant to get transparency in politics and allowed freedom of speech, opinion, and press

The conservative communists showed a big opposition against these reforms, since they thought they would involve the end of communism. However, these measures failed to improve the social and economic situation. Gorbachev implemented more measures in 1991 to decentralise the State, which met the radical opposition of the army. A coup d'état was staged in August 1991 and Gorbachev was isolated in his Crimean house. The president of the Russian Republic, Boris Yeltsin, promoted the popular resistance against the coup d'état, which eventually failed.

From that moment onwards reforms accelerated across the USSR and the Communist Party was banned. The Soviet Republics proclaimed their independence from the USSR. The Warsaw Pact was also dissolved in 1991. The difficult transition to democracy and capitalist economy began in the former USSR and in East Europe.

## 1.2 The Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe

Once Gorbachev got the government of the USSR, some reforms were also implemented in the communist block of East Europe. Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan (President of the USA) agreed on withdrawing the Soviet troops from Eastern Europe in 1987. In 1989 there were very important reforms in these countries which allowed some free movement among them:

- Poland had major strikes led by the trade union Solidarity, controlled by Lech
- Walesa. The first free elections were held in August 1989, which allowed forming the first non-communist government in East Europe In Bulgaria the communist leader Zhivkhov resigned on 10th November 1989 and the first free elections were held in June 1990.
- In Romania there was a major revolution in December 1989, when the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena were captured and executed.
- The most symbolic change took place in East Germany:



*[The Pope John Paul II and Lech Walesa. 1983](#)*

Many East Germans had tried to go to West Germany since summer 1989 by crossing Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Austria. Erich Honecker resigned in October due to those massive flights.

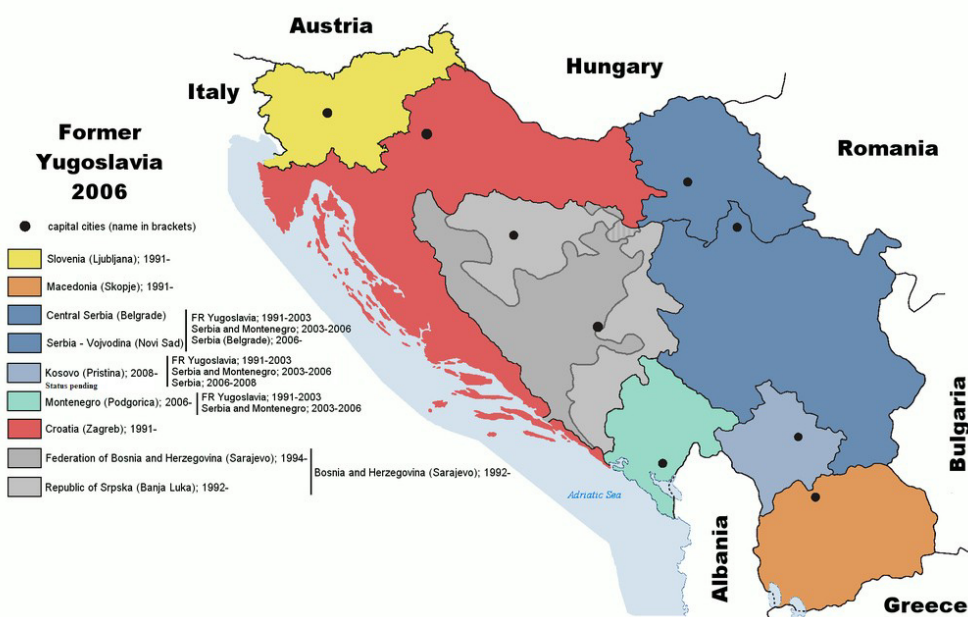
On 9th November 1989 the new communist government surprisingly announced that all the borders in Berlin should be opened for a free transit of citizens. Subsequently Berliners crossed the border for the first time in many years. Berliners themselves began to destroy the Berlin Wall on that same night with every tool they had.

On 3th October 1990 Germany reunified as a single country as the German Democratic Republic was dissolved

### 1.3 The breakup of former Yugoslavia: the Yugoslav Wars

Once Tito died in 1980 a major crisis began in Yugoslavia, where a collective presidency was created in order to represent the six republics that composed the state. Serbia tried to rule over the other republics after the nationalist parties seized the power. Other nationalist parties also accessed to the governments of the other republics.

Slovenia and Croatia reacted by proclaiming their independence on 25th June 1991. The Yugoslav army invaded Slovenia; although 10 days later it withdrew and the Slovenian independence was accepted (it was the Ten-Day War).



[Direktor. Former Yugoslavia \(CC BY\)](#)

A full-scale war took place in Croatia, where there was a major group of Serbs, mostly in the East and close to Bosnia and Herzegovina. An independent Serbian state was created within Croatia: Krajina. Many Croatian cities were bombed and attacked by the Serbian army. A ceasefire was signed in 1992, but hostilities went on. The eventual peace was signed in 1995 by the Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, and the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic. Krajina was re-taken over by the Croatian government in 1995.

The most dramatic case took place once Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaimed its independence from Yugoslavia on 29th February 1992. There were three major ethnic groups

in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Serbs (31%), Croats (17%), and Muslim Bosniaks (44%). The two latter groups did not want to live in a Yugoslavia controlled by Serbia (Serboslavia).

Serbs did not accept the independence of the country and declared war on the new state. Furthermore they created an independent state within Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Republika Srpska, led by Radovan Karadzic. The Serbian army began the so-called ethnic cleansing by killing the non-Serbs. Croats acted in the same way. The international community reacting by seizing weapons to former Yugoslavia. The end of this war was reached once the Dayton Agreement was signed on 21 December 1995.

It was signed by Franjo Tudjman (Croatian president), Slobodan Milosevic (Serbian president), and Alija Izetbegovic (Bosnian president):

- Bosnia and Herzegovina became an independent federal state.
- The new country had two states: Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, mostly inhabited by Croatian Bosniaks and Muslim Bosniaks. And Republika Srpska. It is mostly inhabited by Serbs.

Macedonia also declared its independence on 25th September 1991, but they did not suffer any war since Serbia announced that it would not intervene in the new state. Serbia and Montenegro were the only republics that composed the new Yugoslavia, but there were further problems. Montenegro held a referendum for its independence in 2006 which was promoted by the UN. It eventually declared its independence once its inhabitants voted for it.

Kosovo was a region within Serbia that was mostly inhabited by Albanians, who were discriminated by the Serbian administration. Slobodan Milosevic attacked Kosovo and persecuted Kosovar Albanians in the late 1990s. The NATO reacted by bombing Serbia and sending a peace force to protect the region. In 2008 the regional government proclaimed a unilateral declaration of independence, which has not been acknowledged by many states. Hence, its international status is still pending.

## 2 European Union



[rockcohen. European Union Flag \(CC BY-SA\)](#)

### 2.1 Integration

The European Union is an economic and political association of 28 democratic European countries that has grown with many treaties after the signing of the Treaty of Rome (25th March 1957).

- Single European Act (February 1986). This agreement aims at getting full economic integration. Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty, 7th February 1992). It made the European Economic Community become the European Union,
- Treaty of Amsterdam (2th October 1997).
- Creation of the euro (1st January 1999). The single currency came into circulation in 2002 in many of the European countries, although it was used for financial transactions since 1999, when its value was fixed. The European Central Bank (ECB) is in charge of ruling the monetary policy within the eurozone. It guarantees the stability of prices and manages the euro
- Treaty of Nice (26th February 2001). It reformed the institutions of the EU and reinforced the division of powers with a view to the enlargement of the EU.
- Another major treaty was the Schengen Agreement, which established an area with no internal borders where people and goods can move freely.

## 2.2 Enlargement



*Spyder Monkey. European Union enlargement (CC BY-SA)*

## 2.3 Institutions

### European Parliament.

- It is composed of the members of the Parliament that have been elected in universal suffrage by the European citizens in the European elections held every five years. Now there are 754 MEPs.
- It exercises the legislative branch together with the Council of the European Union. It controls the work of the European Commission and approved the EU budget jointly with the Council. The Treaty of Lisbon has increased its powers on laws, budget and passing of international agreements.

### The Council

- Its main function is to guarantee the continuity of the Council's work and takes decisions about EU policy. The number of votes in the Council is based on the population of the country. that represent at least 65% of EU's population.
- The European Council is located in Brussels (Belgium).
- Its presidency rotates among the member countries every six months.

### European Commission..

- It is composed of a president (been elected by the EU governments basing on the results of the EU elections) and commissioners (one per state) who cover with some specific areas. This distribution will be until 2014, since then the number will be reduced to 2/3 of the member countries.
- It exercises the executive branch of power.
- Its main function is to present proposals for laws to the EU Parliament and Council. It also controls and implements common EU policies and manages the budget.
- It is located in Brussels.

### Court of Justice of the European Union.

- It is composed of one judge from each EU state appointed every six years.
- Its main function is to make sure that EU laws are interpreted and applied in the same way across the EU. The Treaty of Lisbon enlarges its power to police and judicial matters.
- It is located in Luxembourg.



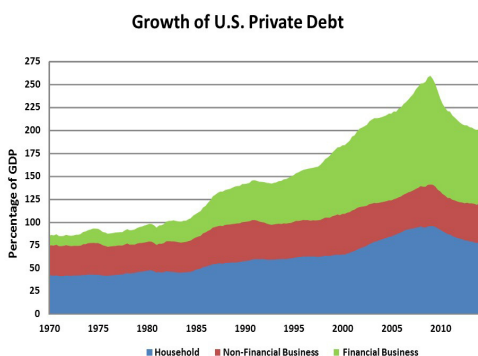
### 3 The USA

After the fall of communism, the USA has become the sole superpower in the world. Hence, Presidents George Bush Sr. (1989-1993), Bill Clinton (1993-2001), George W. Bush (2001-2009), and Barack Obama (2009-2017) have governed the USA from their position of global dominance.

The USA has declared its intention to defend peace, democracy, and freedom worldwide. It has reduced its military presence in Europe but it has increased it in the Caribbean, Asia, and the Pacific area. The Middle East has become a priority objective in order to protect its access to the oil reserves in the area.

There have been some wars where the USA has been involved since the 1990s:

- Gulf War (1990-1991). Iraq's ruler, Saddam Hussein, ordered the invasion of Kuwait on 2nd August 1990. The USA convinced the UN to protect the sovereignty of Kuwait. Iraq was defeated after a one-month attack and Kuwait re-gained its independence.
- Invasion of Afghanistan (2001). It was the reaction of the USA after the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City on 11th September 2001; War on Terror began. The internal situation of Afghanistan is still unresolved due to the presence of many members of Al Qaeda and Talibans.
- Invasion of Iraq (2003). The president of the USA, George W. Bush sustained that the Iraqi regime was producing weapons of mass destruction. The USA did not get the support of the UN. The invasion of Iraq was done by the American and the British armies. Saddam Hussein was eventually overthrown and executed after a trial. The international forces stayed in Iraq for ten years to pacify the situation, which is not safe enough yet.



Source Data: Federal Reserve Economic Database (FRED)

Farcaster. *US private debt* (CC BY-SA)

A major economic crisis has affected the USA since 2008 and has spread all over the western world. It has been caused by overproduction, speculation, and the housing bubble. Banks could not get back their loans and they cut credits to other entities or people. In addition they did not trust each other and they lost big amounts of money. That credit crunch has affected the general economy and unemployment has grown. Taxes revenue decreased as unemployment benefits grew. Hence, state deficit has grown a lot.

## 4 The new power of China

Mao Zedong died in 1976 and his regime went on.



[Michael Mandiberg. Tiananmen Protest 1989 \(CC BY-SA\)](#)

There were some protests against communism within China between April and June 1989. Many people concentrated in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, which became the centre of the revolution. The Chinese government declared the martial law and the army controlled the situation. It is still unknown the actual figure of casualties in these protests.

The communist leader Deng Xiaoping implemented new measures to improve the Chinese economy: Market socialism. Communism and capitalism were combined. Communes were dismantled. The land was distributed among the farmers, who could sell their own products. Foreign businesses have been allowed to settle in China. The cheap workforce has made Chinese industry very competitive.

There has been a huge economic growth in China and it has become the second leading economic power. Xiaoping's followers, Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao have followed the same policy. China has re-taken over the British colony of Hong Kong (1997) and the Portuguese Macau (1999).

There are still some open conflicts in Tibet, where there are revolts that have claimed for its independence since the Chinese invasion in 1950. China also claims for the control of Taiwan, whose political and economic situation has been completely different since the Communist Revolution in 1949.

## 5 The Muslim World

The Muslim World has been quite unstable in the late 20th century and early 21st century.

Fundamentalism has emerged in many Muslim nations since the late 1990s and has used terrorism as a way to achieve their objectives. The main Fundamentalist terrorist group is Al Qaeda, which was founded and funded by the Saudi billionaire Osama Bin Laden, who was eventually killed by an American corps on 1st May 2011.

Nowadays, DAESH is the most important fundamentalist terrorist group.

There have been some revolutions in many Muslim countries in the early 2010s claiming for democratic regimes and the end of the dictatorships that have controlled the area for a long time; it is the so-called Arab Spring:

- Tunisia was the first country where a massive revolution managed to depose the government of Ben Ali in January 2011. A democratic regime has been established in the country.
- Egypt was the most populated country where a revolution took place in the Islamic world. After some weeks of revolution Hosni Mubarak (who had ruled the country since 1981) was eventually overthrown in February 2011. There is a quite instable and unresolved situation in Egypt at the moment.
- In Libya there had been a personal dictatorship by Muammar al-Gaddafi since 1969. Gaddafi was eventually captured and killed in October 2011. The Libyan situation is still quite unclear.
- In Yemen the revolution eventually managed to oust the government of Saleh in February 2012.
- In Syria there has been a civil war since March 2011.
- Other minor revolts have taken place in Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, and Jordan.

## 6 Russia



[Russavia. Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin](#)

[\(CC BY-SA\)](#)

Boris Yeltsin became the first democratically elected president of Russia in 1992. His government was marked by the transition to capitalism. Agricultural land and state-owned companies were privatised. Outdated industries were closed down. Public subsidies for housing, healthcare, electricity, and other services ended. These reforms initially made production fall, inflation rise and unemployment rise. I

In addition, there were very important social inequalities. There was also a political approach to the West, although there were some problems once the USA deployed missiles in Poland and in the Czech Republic.

Vladimir Putin has become the almighty president of Russia and has exerted a complete control over every sector of the country. His foreign policy led Russia to militar interventions in Ukraina and Syria.

## Webgrafía

"Prof. Jorge E. de la Peña" "History I. From Enlightenment to WWI.pdf", *Google Docs*, fecha de consulta 18 octubre 2016, en [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bwe1dU-54DkeZXRIVVI0X19xdkk/edit?pli=1&usp=embed\\_facebook](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bwe1dU-54DkeZXRIVVI0X19xdkk/edit?pli=1&usp=embed_facebook).

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