

History of Europe

The **history of Europe** covers the peoples inhabiting the European continent after prehistoric times to the present. Some of the best-known civilizations of prehistoric Europe were the Minoan and the Mycenaean, which flourished during the Bronze Age until they collapsed in a short period of time around 1200 BC.

The period known as classical antiquity began with the rise of the city-states of Ancient Greece. Greek influence reached its zenith under the expansive empire of Alexander the Great, spreading throughout Asia. The Roman Empire came to dominate the entire Mediterranean basin in a vast empire based on Roman law and Roman legions. It promoted trade, tolerance, and Greek culture. By 300 AD the Roman Empire was divided into the Western and Eastern empires. During the 4th and 5th centuries, the Germanic peoples of northern Europe grew in strength and repeated attacks led to the Fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476, a date which traditionally marks the end of the classical period and the start of the Middle Ages.

During the Middle Ages, the Eastern Roman Empire survived, though modern historians refer to this state as the Byzantine Empire. In Western Europe, Germanic peoples moved into positions of power in the remnants of the former Western Roman Empire and established kingdoms and empires of their own. Of all of the Germanic peoples, the Franks would rise to a position of hegemony over western Europe, the Frankish Empire reaching its peak under Charlemagne around AD 800. This empire was later divided into several parts; West Francia would evolve into the Kingdom of France, while East Francia would evolve into the Holy Roman Empire, a precursor to modern Germany and Italy. The Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci introduced the Asian numeral system to the Western World. The British Isles were the site of several large-scale migrations. Native Celtic peoples had been marginalized during the period of Roman Britain, and when the Romans abandoned the British Isles during the 400s, waves of Germanic Anglo-Saxons migrated to southern Britain and established a series of petty kingdoms in what would eventually develop into the Kingdom of England by AD 927. During this period, the kingdoms of Poland, Hungary and Croatia were organized as well.



The birthplace of Europa, Tyre, Lebanon

The Viking Age, a period of migrations of Scandinavian peoples, occurred from the late 700s to the middle 1000s. Chief among the Viking states was the Empire of Cnut the Great, a Danish leader who would become king of England, Denmark, and Norway. The Normans, a Viking people who settled in Northern France and founded the Duchy of Normandy, would have a significant impact on many parts of Europe, from the Norman conquest of England to Southern Italy and Sicily. Another Scandinavian people, the Rus' people, would go on to found Kievan Rus', an early state which was a precursor for the modern country of Russia. As the Viking Age drew to a close, the period known as the Crusades, a series of religiously motivated military expeditions originally intended to bring the Levant back into Christian rule, began. Several Crusader states were founded in

the eastern Mediterranean. These were all short-lived. The Crusaders would have a profound impact on many parts of Europe. Their Sack of Constantinople in 1204 brought an abrupt end to the Byzantine Empire. Though it would later be re-established, it would never recover its former glory. The Crusaders would establish trade routes that would develop into the Silk Road and open the way for the merchant republics of Genoa and Venice to become major economic powers. Crusader missions to the Baltic lands would establish the State of the Teutonic Order. The Reconquista, a related movement, worked to reconquer Iberia for Christendom.

Eastern Europe in the High Middle Ages was dominated by the rise, and later fall, of the Mongol Empire. Led by Genghis Khan, the Mongols were a group of steppe nomads that established a decentralized empire that, at its height, extended from China in the east to the Black and Baltic seas in Europe. The Kievan Rus' state had broken up, replaced by several small warring states. In the face of the Mongol conquests, many of these states paid tribute to the Mongols, becoming effective vassals. As Mongol power waned towards the Late Middle Ages, the Grand Duchy of Moscow rose to become the strongest of the numerous Russian principalities and republics and would itself grow into the Tsardom of Russia in 1547. The Late Middle Ages represented a period of upheaval in Europe. The epidemic known as the Black Death and an associated famine caused demographic catastrophe in Europe as the population plummeted. Dynastic struggles and wars of conquest kept many of the states of Europe at war for much of the period. In Scandinavia, the Kalmar Union dominated the political landscape, while England fought with Scotland in the Wars of Scottish Independence and with France in the Hundred Years' War. In Central Europe, the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth became a large territorial empire, while the Holy Roman Empire, which was an elective monarchy, came to be dominated by the House of Habsburg, who would turn it into a hereditary position in all but name. Russia continued to expand southward and eastward into former Mongol lands as well. In the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, a Turkish state originating in Anatolia, encroached steadily on former Byzantine lands, culminating in the Fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Beginning roughly in the 14th century in Florence, and later spreading through Europe with the development of the printing press, a Renaissance of knowledge challenged traditional doctrines in science and theology, with the Arabic texts and thought bringing about rediscovery of classical Greek and Roman knowledge. Simultaneously, the Protestant Reformation under German Martin Luther questioned Papal authority. Henry VIII seized control of the English Church and its lands, allying in ensuing religious wars between German and Spanish rulers. The Reconquista of Portugal and Spain led to a series of oceanic explorations resulting in the Age of Discovery that established direct links with Africa, the Americas, and Asia, while religious wars continued to be fought in Europe, which ended in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia. The Spanish crown maintained its hegemony in Europe and was the leading power on the continent until the signing of the Treaty of the Pyrenees, which ended a conflict between Spain and France that had begun during the Thirty Years' War. An unprecedented series of major wars and political revolutions took place around Europe and indeed the world in the period between 1610 and 1700. Observers at the time, and many historians since, have argued that wars caused the revolutions. Many Italians were making significant contributions in various fields. Luca Pacio established accounting and Galileo Galilei invented the thermometer and the telescope, which allowed him to observe and describe the solar system. Leonardo Bruni divided the history into three periods and Alberico Gentili separated the secularism from canon law and Roman Catholic theology and also made essential works regarding international law.^[3] Francesco Redi founded the experimental biology and proved that

maggots come from eggs of flies. Marcello Malpighi and Camillo Golgi's names were given to numerous biological systems. Leonardo da Vinci painted some of the most famous works of art in the world.^[4] Alessandro Volta invented the battery and Guglielmo Marconi was credited with the invention of the radio.

European overseas expansion led to the rise of colonial empires, producing the Columbian Exchange.^[6] The combination of resource inflows from the New World and the Industrial Revolution of Great Britain, allowed a new economy based on manufacturing instead of subsistence agriculture.^[7] Starting in 1775, British Empire colonies in America revolted to establish a representative government. Political change in continental Europe was spurred by the French Revolution under the motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. The ensuing French leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, conquered and enforced reforms through war up to 1815. Sake Dean Mahomed introduced the shampooing baths and South Asian cuisine in Europe, by providing therapeutic massage.

The period between 1815 and 1871 saw a large number of revolutionary attempts and independence wars. In France and the United Kingdom, socialism and trade union activity developed. The last vestiges of serfdom were abolished in Russia in 1861, and Balkan nations began to regain independence from the Ottoman Empire. After the Franco-Prussian War, Germany and Italy unified into nation states, and most European states had completed their Risorgimento nationalism becoming constitutional monarchies. The capture of Rome in 1870 ended the Papal temporal power. Rivalry in a scramble for empires spread in what is known as The Age of Empire. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 was precipitated by the rise of nationalism in Southeastern Europe as the Great Powers took up sides. The Allies, led by Britain and France, joined by Italy in 1915 and by the United States in 1917, defeated the Central Powers led by the German Empire and Austria-Hungary in 1918. During the Paris Peace Conference the Big Four imposed their terms in a series of treaties, especially the Treaty of Versailles. The human and material devastation was far greater than anyone dreamed. As Overy notes:

Anyone living in Russia, Italy, Germany or the new states carved out of the Austro-Hungarian empire knew that the great war had destroyed the old political order, overturned the class balance of the pre-1914 age, and generated ideological hatreds and race prejudices that reverberated down to the end of 1945 and even beyond.

Germany lost its overseas empire and several provinces, had to pay large reparations, and was humiliated by the victors. They in turn had large debts to the United States. The Great Depression broke out in 1929, and led to the collapse of democracy in state after state. The Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, rearmed Germany, and along with Mussolini's Italy sought to gain full control of the continent by demands and appeasement, and then by the Second World War.

Following the Allied victory in the Second World War, Europe was divided by the Iron Curtain. The Central-East was dominated by the Soviet Union, and the countries in that region became communist states. The rest was dominated by capitalist countries under the economic and military leadership of the United States. Both of the leading countries were superpowers. Most non-communist European countries joined a US-led military alliance (NATO) and formed the European Economic Community amongst themselves. The countries in the Soviet sphere of influence joined the military alliance known as the Warsaw Pact and the economic bloc called Comecon. A few small countries were neutral. Germany and Italy became two major industrialized countries again, due their post-war economic miracle, and joined the 1st G6

summit with the UK and France. The European Union involved the division of powers, with taxation, health and education handled by the nation states, while the EU had charge of market rules, competition, legal standards and environmentalism. Defense policy was handled by the nations through NATO, but the EU did have a role in setting foreign policies. The Soviet economic and political system collapsed in 1989-91, leading first to the end of communism in the satellite countries in 1989, and then to the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself in 1991. As a consequence, Germany was reunited, Europe's integration deepened, the continent became depolarised, and the European Union expanded to include many of the formerly communist European countries.

The European Union came under increasing pressure because of the worldwide recession after 2008. The major issues include financial aid to near-bankrupt countries, increasing intolerance of poorly assimilated immigrants, distrust of Germany's increasing power, tensions with Russia, rejection of Turkey's membership, and different views about the EU's future.