



Ian D. Armour

# A HISTORY OF EASTERN EUROPE 1740-1918

EMPIRES, NATIONS AND MODERNISATION

Second Edition

BLOOMSBURY

**A History of Eastern Europe  
1740–1918**

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Empires, Nations and Modernisation

SECOND EDITION

Ian D. Armour

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC

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# Preface

It is now over five years since *A History of Eastern Europe* was first published by Hodder Arnold, and I am grateful to Bloomsbury Publishing for the opportunity to update it for a second edition. I am also grateful to Bloomsbury for agreeing to restore the original subtitle, which neatly summarises the book's underlying thematic preoccupations.

Writing a general textbook of this nature is a sure-fire antidote to academic hubris. While the freedom to range far and wide, rummaging about in other people's specialisms, is in many respects liberating, the further one goes down this route, the more obvious it becomes how limited is one's own knowledge and understanding. At the end of several years' labour on this inherently impossible packaging exercise, I could only hope, in 2006, that readers would bear in mind the difficulties of the genre, and that students in particular would find the book of use. As it has since been adopted as a recommended text by several history departments teaching East European history, it appears to be filling a particular need.

The book had its origins in my experience teaching the survey course 'Quest for Modernity', on Eastern Europe since 1740, at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in London between 1993 and 1996. I shall always be grateful to Dr Mark Wheeler, who initially asked me to help with the teaching of the course, and to the late Professor Lindsey Hughes, then head of department, who gave me the opportunity to continue teaching it on my own when Mark Wheeler left SSEES. At the time it struck both me and my students that while twentieth-century Eastern Europe was already well served by a number of texts, the preceding, but crucially formative, century and a half or so was less adequately covered. The present text is the result.

Rather against the wise advice of one of Hodder Arnold's readers of the original proposal, who commented that a thematic or conceptual approach would have made the task easier, I opted for an essentially narrative structure, dealing with individual empires or regions in turn, in the belief that a textbook must fulfil certain practical and informative functions, and that a primarily undergraduate readership would profit from this most. While the structure of the book has not been changed for this second edition, I have to some extent expanded the discussion of nationalism, and of how multinational empires coped with nationalism, to take account of some of the more recent literature on these subjects. In addition, the notes and bibliography have been substantially added to, a reflection of the volume of new work that continues to appear in this field. I am grateful to the four anonymous readers of the revised text, whose helpful suggestions have been incorporated as far as possible.



## Preface

Many people assisted in translating the original idea into publishable form. I am grateful to Christopher Wheeler, commissioning editor for what was then Edward Arnold, for positively inviting me to undertake the project, and to a succession of Hodder Arnold editors for their indulgence, notably Jamilah Ahmed, Tiara Misquitta and Liz Wilson. Former colleagues at Staffordshire University, especially Martin Brown and Don MacIver, were generous with constructive criticisms, and I was indebted to the History team at SSEES (by then part of University College London) for providing a temporary but extremely congenial academic home during 2005–6. Thanks also go to Esther MacKay for repeatedly putting up with me on research trips to London. At Grant MacEwan College, now Grant MacEwan University, since 2006, I have benefited from the stimulating and friendly company, not only of the History team but also of colleagues from other disciplines, as well as from the excellent resources of the institution. It is also worth noting that the second edition has profited from being used as the set text for three successive versions of my course on 'Nationalism *vs.* Empire: The Multinational Empires of Eastern Europe 1804–1918'; I am also indebted to the excellent work done by many of my students on this course. The team at Bloomsbury, in particular Emily Salz and Jennifer Dodd, has been extremely helpful as well as patient over the past year, as this second edition took shape.

Finally, my wife Jane Leaper was a constant intellectual companion in the writing of this book as well as a searching critic of successive chapters; her patent scepticism as to whether I would ever finish was a major stimulus to doing so. As the book goes into its second edition, I can only apologise to her for the fact that it has not yet funded our early retirement. Can-Can, Kissy, Spud and Small all helped by leaving their paw-prints on the original manuscript; Spud and the obnoxious newcomer, Zed, continue to supply all our cat needs.

Ian D. Armour  
Edmonton, Alberta  
7 July 2011

# Introduction

## DEFINITION

Where is Eastern Europe? Does the term have any meaning at all, now that the cold war has ended and the literally physical division of Europe between East and West has disappeared? The premise of this book is that the answer to the latter question must still be 'yes'. Why that is so, however, depends on how one answers the first question, on the definition of Eastern Europe.

For the purposes of this book, Eastern Europe is defined as the area stretching from the present-day Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania south to Greece. This includes, on an east–west axis, present-day Poland, Belarus and Ukraine; Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania; and Albania, Bulgaria and the states of the former Yugoslavia. It excludes, largely on grounds of space and practicality, Finland and those parts of Russia inhabited mainly by ethnic Russians.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of today's political boundaries, the above definition is a geographical one only. The governments of some of the states listed above, not to mention their inhabitants, would object bitterly to being classified as part of Eastern Europe. Put differently, therefore, the present work is a 'pre-history' of those states which emerged in this region by, or since, 1918 and of their peoples.

It was only in the twentieth century that the concept of Eastern Europe was formulated, when it was generally perceived that this area was different from Western, and to some extent Central, Europe. This was not just because of the foundation or expansion of states on territory formerly subsumed within the much larger empires of Germany, Austria–Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. It was also because, in economic and social terms, Eastern Europe was increasingly perceived as backward, less industrialised and hence less modern than much of Western and Central Europe. In strategic and political terms, Eastern Europe in the twentieth century was an area no longer belonging formally to any regional great power, whatever the fluctuating hegemony of Germany, the Soviet Union or the West. In the phrase used by one scholar for a title, Eastern Europe has been, and remains, 'the lands between'.<sup>2</sup>

The rationale for the present work is that this East European difference was forged in the century and a half preceding 1918, in a period when, conceptually at least, Eastern Europe did not exist. Instead, the area was originally divided between conglomerate, multinational empires. Yet throughout the period in question, all these empires – and the nation-states and nationalities which with time emerged from them – had to come to terms with their backwardness as powers as well as their own rivalries and the way in which the nationalism

of their constituent peoples complicated both internal affairs and international relations.

It is perfectly reasonable to point out that this perception of Eastern Europe as backward was to some extent the ‘invention’ of West Europeans who, from the eighteenth century, were happy to see the region as the ‘complementary other half’ of their own ‘enlightened’ civilisation.<sup>3</sup> At the very least, students should be aware that the very idea of ‘Eastern Europe’ is a contested concept; as Robin Okey wittily put it, ‘Central/Eastern Europe is no place for the tidy-minded.’<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the perception that the region was somehow different was endorsed by an increasing number of East Europeans themselves. Long before the idea of Eastern Europe became common, in other words, Eastern Europe had a certain historical reality as a region with certain shared characteristics, as ‘a space of intersecting historical legacies’.<sup>5</sup> It is the identifiability of those characteristics which sets Eastern Europe apart in the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the First World War, just as it sets the region apart in the main twentieth century.

### THEMES

Such a claim might seem far-fetched, given the vast diversity of Eastern Europe’s peoples, economic and social conditions, political systems and so on. Yet the things that East European states and societies had in common, for all their differences, offer a thematic unity which this introduction aims to emphasise. A summary of these main themes will also serve to explain the chronological span chosen for this history.

The first main theme and in some respects the dominant one is that of *modernisation* or, conversely, backwardness and the stratagems chosen to overcome it. Throughout the period in question, starting with the initial attempts at reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, rulers and leaders of all descriptions in Eastern Europe were aware that their states compared increasingly ill with certain competitors.<sup>6</sup> Early in the eighteenth century the perceived disparities were not all that great. Prussia’s superiority over Austria in the 1740s, for instance, was more a matter of organisational flair, concentrated military power and individual genius than one of an innately better socio-economic or political ‘system’. In the same way, the enlightened reforms of the last Polish king later in the century were a response to the obvious threat posed by huge standing armies on Poland’s borders; in other respects Poland was not markedly inferior to its predators.

In this initial stage, modernisation was essentially about becoming more efficient, about rationalising the financial resources of government and in other ways making polities ‘enlightened’. By the end of the century, however, modernity was acquiring other attributes. The French Revolution spread the concepts of individual liberty and civil rights, giving rise to the conviction, on the part of some, that the truly modern state was also a liberal, constitutional one. Even more explosive a legacy of the French Revolution was the ideology

known as nationalism, to which further space will be devoted shortly. Later still, the gradual spread of industrialisation from Britain to the European continent, in the nineteenth century, created the ultimate template for modernity, against which Eastern Europe has been measured ever since. Modernisation now meant an industrialised economy, an efficient bureaucratic structure for managing the fruits of that economy and, if not a liberal then, at the very least a constitutional political system which was able to maintain order within society and ensure that its energies could be directed at goals deemed appropriate by the country's political leadership.

The efforts to modernise made by rulers and elites in Eastern Europe ran into increasing difficulties as the societies in question became more complex. At the outset of our period the assumption of the so-called enlightened absolutist rulers was that modernisation could be ordained. Precisely because it was so rational an agenda, modernisation did not require the consent of the governed and indeed might have to be imposed against their will. Yet even in the eighteenth century a moderniser like Joseph II encountered the vested interests of historic classes such as the Hungarian nobility. The effect of the French Revolution was to complicate this picture by introducing demands for political representation which went far beyond those of the earlier period. In addition, what modernisation was achieved in Eastern Europe, in economic terms, gradually contributed to a greater social diversity in the areas affected. The rise of a native merchant class and the slow growth of towns made possible in turn the emergence of political opposition to East European rulers. It is characteristic of the gap between Eastern and Western Europe that this potential liberal class was everywhere tiny. Nevertheless it constituted both an impediment to and an argument for further modernisation.

Equally tiny, to begin with, but nevertheless a growing presence in different parts of Eastern Europe from at least the early nineteenth century, was an industrial proletariat, or factory working class, which often coexisted uneasily with the declining class of artisans or handicraft workers. The spread of industrialisation meant that the artisans were increasingly marginalised and impoverished, and in Eastern Europe, as elsewhere, it was largely artisans who provided the shock troops of violent revolutions in 1848–49 and the voting-fodder for radical political movements, either of the Left or the Right, later in the century. The industrial working class, by contrast, concentrated in Eastern Europe's few big cities and certain other pockets of industry such as the Bohemian Sudetenland, or Silesia, or in late tsarist Russia, the Ukraine and the western borderlands of the Russian Empire, proved fertile recruiting ground for revolutionary socialism and anarchism, ideologies dedicated to a violent overthrowing of the entire social and political order. In response to this phenomenon, small though it still was, governments and socio-economic elites had two options: repress or accommodate. Rarely did they get it right, and as a result working-class radical movements sprang up across the region, despite its prevailing 'backwardness'.

Modernisation also triggered ructions among the majority of Eastern Europe's inhabitants, the peasant masses. By the late nineteenth century what is often misleadingly termed 'populism', but is more accurately called 'peasantism', consisted of political movements dedicated to empowering peasants, on the ground that they constituted the only important class in society as a whole, the true producers on whom all else depended. Peasantism also identified readily with the new ideology of nationalism; indeed peasantist leaders habitually stressed that the peasants *were* the nation.

This raises our second major theme in Eastern Europe, the phenomenon of *nationalism*. It would be fair to say that this concept, which most historians agree emerged only in the late eighteenth century, played as little a role in the history of Eastern Europe, in this early period, as it did elsewhere. Nevertheless, the eighteenth century is very much the period of incubation for the idea of the nation, an idea which takes shape, in the writings of some European thinkers, with specific reference to the peoples of Eastern Europe. Once formulated, nationalism in the nineteenth century increasingly took centre stage in the affairs of East European states and societies, to the point where the unwary student might be pardoned for thinking that the whole of this period can be explained as the story of successive 'national' uprisings, 'national' struggles for recognition and 'national liberations' achieved through the formation of 'nation-states', a process broadly completed, according to this scenario, by 1918. No such interpretation could be less satisfactory as an account of historical events; yet there can be no denying that the nineteenth century was a period of increasingly visible nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

If we define nationalism, with some crudity, as loyalty to one's nation, and the strongly held conviction that membership in one's nation is a fundamental aspect of human identity, we are still left with the crucial question of what constitutes a nation. It is essential to the understanding of nationalism that the answer to this question is to be found to a large extent in artificial factors and depends on a good deal of subjectivity. In other words, nations have been identified according to a variety of criteria, and the decision as to whether a nation exists has always depended on how many people subscribe to the view that it exists. Historians and social scientists are also divided as to how far back one can date nationalism as an identifiably political ideology, or national consciousness as a form of group identity shared by significant numbers of people.<sup>8</sup>

Most so-called 'modernists' among theorists of nationalism argue that, in Western Europe from about 1500, it was relatively easy for the view to emerge that the peoples living in the unitary, centralised monarchies of this region – states with on the whole stable territorial boundaries like England, Scotland, Portugal, Spain and France – could be identified as nations. 'Nation' in this context meant the people living within a particular state; in short, it was a political definition. As a concept to which people expressed loyalty, however, the nation in this early modern period is still hard to identify. People's allegiance was still primarily to their monarch, or their religion, or to some

narrower, more regional definition of identity than the nation. It was only in the late eighteenth century that the first conscious appeals are made for loyalty to the idea of the nation. One sees this most strikingly in two commonly cited examples of early nationalism. One is the formation of the United States of America: a new entirely artificial state to which the inhabitants of the former British colonies agreed to owe allegiance. The other is the French Republic, which emerged from the French Revolution by 1792. For the first time in Europe, a deliberate attempt was made by the leaders of the new Republic to mobilise the entire population of France, all citizens of the Republic, in defence of the nation against foreign invaders. This was still a political definition of the nation, in that it equated the nation with the state: all loyal inhabitants of France were deemed members of the French nation. In both cases, the point at which significant numbers of Americans and Frenchmen started to think of themselves collectively as a nation was a key stage in the formation of what has been called the 'imagined community' of the nation.<sup>9</sup>

The applicability of this political definition of the word 'nation' to Eastern Europe, in the eighteenth century, and indeed to many other parts of the world, is much more difficult. What constituted a nation in the East European context had no obvious political units of reference, in other words states, by which nations could be identified. The peoples of Eastern Europe were scattered across, and among, the huge dynastic empires into which the region was divided: the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire. None of these institutions was clearly identified with a single people, even if the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, at least, was often wrongly referred to even in the eighteenth century as being exclusively 'Polish', and the Ottoman Empire was commonly, if inaccurately, described as 'Turkish'. Within the Habsburg Monarchy, it is true, the formerly independent Kingdom of Hungary, and within it the sub-kingdom of Croatia, retained a separate constitutional identity, and the representatives of these units undoubtedly thought of themselves as Hungarians and Croats. This, however, was a national consciousness almost entirely confined to a single social class, the nobility. In most of Eastern Europe, by contrast, nations could not be equated with states as they were in Western Europe, because any such potential nation-states had been extinguished in previous centuries or had never existed.

Yet the peoples of Eastern Europe were clearly many and varied, even to the most superficial observer; the multiplicity of spoken languages alone was ample testimony to this diversity. As a consequence, the first attempts to categorise the inhabitants of the region were made according to cultural criteria, like language, rather than political criteria. The most renowned exponent of this cultural definition of the nation was the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder who, precisely because he was German, was aware that the sources of a specific German identity were not to be sought in political terms, since Germans lived in a wide variety of states. For Herder, language was the most important identifier of nationality: it was something that made

all speakers of that language different from other peoples, and because language itself went back to the earliest origins of a community, it was also inextricably bound up with that people's history.<sup>10</sup> Herder, one of the first systematic linguistic philosophers, was an enthusiastic collector of German folk songs, as proof of this historical cultural identity of the German nation. He also, however, extended his principle of linguistic cultural identity to the other peoples of Eastern Europe. On the basis of language alone, Eastern Europe could no longer be seen as simply the territory of four huge states; it was also a kaleidoscope of nations.

The implications of this central insight – the multinational nature of Eastern Europe – were explosive, even if they were long-term. For clearly, if the members of individual nations were encouraged to see themselves as separate, even in a purely cultural sense, then this self-perception was likely to have political consequences, and not just in the internal affairs of the multinational states of the region. Herder was in fact the first person to use the term 'nationalism', in 1774, to describe the concept of loyalty to the nation, the 'conscious cherishing' of the nation's language, its cultural roots, its 'soul'.<sup>11</sup> With time, nationalism came to mean something else: the right of the nation to self-determination, in other words to a state of its own. The world, especially Eastern Europe, is still living with the murderous fallout from this ideology.

How nationalism developed in Eastern Europe will be charted below. Here it is enough merely to foreshadow this process, but with the important caveat that nationalism as an ideology, the idea of the nation in our modern sense, is not even thought of at the beginning of our period. Even in the late eighteenth century, after a decade of upheaval caused by the French Revolutionary Wars, nationalism in Eastern Europe, and arguably even in Western Europe, was very much a minority preoccupation.<sup>12</sup> It was a phenomenon observable, in the main, among some members of the educated elite of individual peoples – Hungarians, Poles, some scattered thinkers among the other Slav peoples and the Greeks – but it was not a mass movement. Nor could it be given the economic and hence social condition of the vast majority of people in the region.<sup>13</sup>

The third main theme of this study is directly related to the question of nationalism and could be regarded as nationalism's antithesis. This is the persistence throughout the whole period of *multinational or multiethnic states*. The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth disappeared before the end of the eighteenth century, partitioned among its neighbours Russia, Prussia and Austria. The other conglomerate empires, however, survived right down to 1918; indeed, most of them augmented their territory in Eastern Europe. Only the Ottoman Empire suffered a progressive rolling back of its territory in the Balkans, and even this process was not completed until the Balkan Wars of 1912–13.

Apart from their mere physical survival, however, there are other considerations which make the continued existence of such empires a matter of thematic importance. These were hardly moribund concerns. Whatever the

internal problems and international weaknesses of both Russia and the Habsburg Monarchy – and these were often severe – both states continued to play the role of great powers and were regarded by most of their subjects as permanent and solidly established authorities. Prussia's control over its Polish population was made all the more secure by its development into the German Empire in 1871. The Ottoman Empire was frequently referred to as 'the sick man' of Europe, where throughout the nineteenth century at least a series of revolts and breakaways succeeded in whittling down Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans.<sup>14</sup> But even here the 'sick man' epithet was misleading: not only was the Ottoman imperium a long time dying, but repeated efforts were made to reform it and gave it a vitality which continued to take its foes by surprise, and which ensured that the so-called 'Eastern question', of how to manage this long decline, was one of the most enduring problems of the entire period down to 1918.

The tendency to see the nineteenth century as an 'age of nationalism' has perhaps obscured this persistence of multinational empires and reinforced the view of them as ramshackle, unviable and doomed to disintegration, history's losers. Without in any way succumbing to an unhistorical nostalgia for such states, however, we should accept that it took the cataclysm of the First World War to overthrow them entirely. Moreover, until the war, which not only strained the resources of these states to the utmost but also opened up the hitherto almost unimaginable prospect of their possible destruction, very few inhabitants of Eastern Europe, with the exception of the Ottoman Empire's Christian subjects, thought in such apocalyptic terms. On the contrary, most people in the Habsburg Monarchy, the German Empire and Russia were resigned to living in them, indeed could probably imagine no alternative. Nationalism by the end of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly a greater force than ever before, but most peoples were not striving for independence from the empire in which they found themselves. Rather, their political aspirations, where they existed at all, were committed to achieving autonomy or some other form of self-determination within the framework of the existing state. Only a very few uncompromising nationalists were dedicated to what they fondly referred to as 'national' revolution and complete independence. In addition, the focus on nationalism has until recently obscured the persistence of what might be called residual loyalty to the state and the dynasty; recent research suggests that, at least in the Habsburg Monarchy, significant numbers of subjects were proud to exhibit such 'state patriotism'.<sup>15</sup> Even larger numbers, it now appears, stubbornly resisted being categorised as anything at all: in the words of Jeremy King, 'National indifference was an inconvenient fact that national leaders denied and minimized.'<sup>16</sup>

Not only was the degree of popular discontent with multinational empires relative, but the rulers of these empires, and the political and social elites whom the rulers increasingly co-opted to advise them, did what they could to reinforce loyalty to the state. Often this did not amount to much and we should not exaggerate its effects. A good deal depended on the will of rulers and elites



to promote such loyalty or even to admit that there was a problem. When Emperor Francis I of Austria was told that a certain individual was an Austrian patriot, he allegedly replied, 'But is he a patriot for *me*?' Francis felt he should be able to take his subjects' loyalty for granted; it was the first duty of any subject.<sup>17</sup> Other dynasts, however, were not so egotistic, and in their attempts to bind together their diverse realms they deployed a number of stratagems.

The most obvious of these was to inculcate loyalty, to the dynasty personally but also, by implication, to the concept of empire itself. This had mixed results and was arguably most successful in the Habsburg Monarchy, where *Habsburgtreue*, or loyalty to the Habsburgs, was not confined to Austrian Germans (the original base of the dynasty) but was also discernible in other nationalities, at least among certain classes and professions like the military and the bureaucracy. In the Russian Empire and in Prussia dynastic loyalty was much less likely among non-Russian or non-German minorities, although Baltic Germans at least were traditionally loyal subjects of the tsar. In the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire fealty to the sultan could not be taken for granted even in Muslims, whether of Turkish or non-Turkish ethnic origin, and was even more problematical among Christians.

In the course of the nineteenth century we can see the development of what has been termed 'official nationalism'. This was the attempt by the empires to promote loyalty specifically to the state, regardless of the subject's nationality. The most ambitious example of this state nationalism is the so-called 'Russification' campaign of the tsarist government in Russia in the late nineteenth century, but which was preceded by the proclamation of an 'official nationality' as early as the 1830s. Similar attempts were made by the Prussian government and by Hungarian governments after 1867, and by the reformist but also incipiently Turkish nationalist Young Turk movement in the Ottoman Empire after 1908. By and large this coercive approach was a failure and merely stirred up nationalist resentment among the subject peoples against whom it was directed. A notable side effect, however, was the creation of a modern nationalism among Russians, Germans, Hungarians and Turks.

The final stratagem to which the rulers of multinational empires resorted was to promote economic development. This was generally undertaken for the primary purpose of strengthening the state and, only secondarily, if at all, with an eye to averting social or nationalist unrest. Nevertheless, where modernisation was even partially achieved it had two seemingly contradictory effects. On the one hand, the greater social variegation which came in the wake of economic development made the emergence of nationalism all the more likely. On the other hand, greater prosperity gave all those classes, and nationalities, who shared in it a greater reason for regarding the status quo, in other words the preservation of the multinational state, as acceptable, not to say inevitable. Which of the two, nationalism or loyalty to the state, was likely, if at all, to come out uppermost remained a moot point short of some geopolitical upheaval, but, on balance, circumstances favoured the status quo.

## ORGANISATION

With these three themes in mind, then – modernisation, nationalism and the multinational state – the organisation of this book will become clear. The overall structure of the three main parts is chronological, but within each of these parts subject matter is necessarily broken down into chapters on specific areas and states. Each part is introduced by a thematic chapter which sets the scene and describes particular developments which span the whole or much of the period in question.

Part One covers the eighteenth-century background. This is an essential part of the story, since the conditions and events of this period not only help explain subsequent developments but also illustrate each of the key themes of the book. As far as modernisation is concerned, the eighteenth century saw the first serious attempts made outside Peter the Great's Russia to improve state efficiency, with the specific aim of closing a perceived gap between East European regimes and more modern competitors. The would-be modernisers here were Maria Theresa of Austria and her even more determinedly modernising sons, Joseph II and Leopold II. Some attention will also be paid to the comparable effort made in the final decades of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, even though, in the end, this effort was frustrated by partition. In this respect Poland offered a cautionary illustration to other states, such as the Ottoman Empire, of the potential penalty for failure to modernise.

The eighteenth century is also important, as already suggested, for an understanding of the origins and nature of nationalism, even if its full force was not felt until later. Some of the earliest expressions of East European nationalism will be described, together with an explanation of the narrower, gentry-based nationalism that distinguishes the Hungarian and Polish variants. The incendiary potential of nationalism, as demonstrated by the French Revolution, can also be said to be among the reasons for East European rulers' deliberate abandonment of modernisation, typified by the reaction of Francis I of Austria.

Finally, the eighteenth century was the first point at which all the major multinational empires of Eastern Europe came into direct conflict with one another. Russian encroachment on the Ottoman Empire began in earnest in this period; the Habsburg Monarchy was not only in conflict with the Ottomans but also became aware of the new Russian power; Austro-Prussian rivalry became a byword; and Poland–Lithuania was ground to pieces between its predatory neighbours.

In Part Two, the full impact of the eighteenth-century legacy in the period between 1804 and 1867 is discussed. This impact is broadly summarised as one of nationalism, revolution and state formation. The importance of the Napoleonic Empire in transmitting this impact is undeniable, since the conquests of Napoleon I, brief though they were, succeeded in turning much of Eastern Europe upside down and had an effect long after Napoleon's fall in 1815.<sup>18</sup> Although the following period was one of political reaction, it was

clear from the revolutions of 1848 that the genie of change could not be stuffed back into its bottle. By 1867, when the Habsburg Monarchy adopted certain wide-ranging constitutional changes, Eastern Europe as a whole had also been transformed by the emergence of nationalism, social as well as political revolution, and the appearance of entirely new states.

Nationalism, from being the preoccupation of the few, was by the end of this period increasingly seen as a mass motivator, an irresistible force of the age. This, it should be remembered, was the perception above all of committed nationalists, who tended everywhere to project their enthusiasm onto the whole of society; among those peoples whose population remained largely peasant, nationalism was still embryonic. Nevertheless, wars had been fought in Eastern Europe, and blood spilt, in the name of the nation, and the more this happened, the greater the number of people aware of their nationality. This had implications for the nature of political change within existing states and even greater implications for the viability of the international state system.

In terms of other political changes the period through to 1867 saw the long-term effects of the French Revolution itself rippling through Eastern Europe like the aftershocks of an earthquake. The concepts of political rights, equality, constitutionality and even social justice became issues among at least some classes of East Europeans. By the end of this period the form, if not the reality, of liberal constitutionalism was more common in Eastern Europe. In addition to political revolution, some societies of Eastern Europe were also beginning to be exposed to the effects of economic and social change. The fundamental precondition for this was the freeing of peasant labour from serfdom, in the Habsburg Monarchy by 1848, in Russia by 1861 and in the Ottoman Empire through the establishment of autonomous nation-states. This made possible in turn the beginnings of genuine modernisation, albeit with the gap between Eastern and Western Europe even greater than it had been in the eighteenth century.

The final feature of this period, the emergence of nation-states, was a phenomenon confined to the Ottoman Empire. This entailed a succession of international crises, and was indeed accomplished in each case only as a result of great power intervention, but was important for the intensification of nationalism and the creation of fresh sources of international conflict.

Part Three is about nationalism, independence and modernisation through to the end of the First World War. Put differently, this part can be seen as taking each of our three main themes to a sort of culmination or climactic point. Nationalism plays an increasingly eye-catching role in this third period. This is nowhere more so than in the Habsburg Monarchy, which became a byword for nationality disputes, and whose very existence as a great power came into question by 1914 as a result of the fatal symbiosis between the Monarchy's internal problems and its foreign relations. Nationalism also put paid to the Ottoman Empire, at least that portion of it in South-Eastern Europe. A less well-known aspect of nationalism in this period was its effect on the German and Russian empires. In the case of Germany this was exclusively a

Polish problem; in the case of Russia, Poles were only one of a multitude of subject nationalities increasingly unhappy with the tsarist regime. The increasing visibility of nationalism as a threat to these multinational states, however, also ensured that stratagems for countering or otherwise coping with nationalism were more conscious and more focused. It would be fair to say that, right down to the outbreak of the First World War, this was a struggle in which our multinational empires were holding their own, with the notable exception of the Ottoman Empire.

Several states formally achieved independence in this period well before 1914. The First World War, however, brought formal independence for even more states, or rather peoples, and in the process transformed the political map of Eastern Europe into more or less the outlines it has today. The great multinational empires disappeared, with the exception of the Soviet Union, the revolutionary Communist regime which took over the Russian Empire. The emergence of the so-called successor states in Eastern Europe and the establishment of the Soviet Union were the dominant features of the political landscape throughout most of the twentieth century.

As for modernisation, this is a part of the story which perhaps ought to be termed anticlimactic, for the societies of Eastern Europe in this third period remained backward by comparison with the rest of Europe. It is true that much of Eastern Europe experienced an accelerating industrialisation and consequently considerable social change. The vast majority of East Europeans, however, continued to live in an agrarian economy, even if one increasingly influenced (often negatively) by outside forces. Independence as a sovereign state, for instance, did not necessarily avert economic dependence. In a political sense, too, Eastern Europe remained backward. Despite the formal existence of constitutional government in most states (even Russia had a constitution after 1905) and the spread of political parties, governments and political institutions were on the whole authoritarian and in many ways unrepresentative and unresponsive to the needs of ordinary people. The catastrophe of the First World War added widespread physical destruction, loss of life and psychological traumatising to the factors keeping Eastern Europe behind.

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# Part One

The Eighteenth-Century Background  
1740–1804

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# 1

## Peoples, States and Societies

The purpose of this chapter is to describe eighteenth-century Eastern Europe in general terms at the outset of our period. This involves, first of all, the human geography of the region, the peoples inhabiting it. Second is a summary of the political geography: the states of Eastern Europe, including their historical evolution and the changing nature of their relationships with each other in this period. Third is a survey of economic and social conditions, and the way in which these determined political systems within individual states.

### PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

The sheer multiplicity of peoples in Eastern Europe is at first sight bewildering. Altogether there were eight major ethnic groups settled by the eighteenth century, speaking some two dozen languages and practising half a dozen religions. (See Map 1.)

One of the most important points to make about the ethnography of Eastern Europe (as of Western Europe) is that the region was settled for the most part by successive waves of peoples arriving from outside. For centuries Eastern Europe was used as a sort of doormat by Germanic, Slavic, Turkic and other peoples, all seeking entry to the region, fighting, conquering or expelling each other. Indigenous peoples, like the Greeks and Albanians, were either conquered or pressed to the mountainous margins of the region; sometimes territory could be reclaimed, sometimes the newcomers were assimilated by the conquered population, as happened with the Turkic Bulgars and their Slav subjects. The last major influx of people was the invasion of the Magyars in the ninth century, but recurrent wars and conquests ensured that the ethnographic balance was constantly being altered.

The results of this process were twofold. First, the peoples of the region were, by the eighteenth century, highly intermixed, in the sense that many areas contained numerous ethnic groups. Second, the centuries-long process of settlement and resettlement meant that very few peoples, let alone individuals, could claim any sort of direct, unbroken lineal descent from their





**Map 1** Languages of Eastern Europe

Source: 'Languages of Europe'. Palmer, R.R. and Colton, J., 1965, *A History of the Modern World*, 3rd edn, New York, 437.

ancient ancestors. The very languages that the inhabitants of the region spoke betrayed a complex, multi-ethnic inheritance. In Eastern Europe, as elsewhere, everyone was a mongrel.

Apart from Celtic and other early inhabitants of whom only archaeological traces remain, the *Greeks* were among the longest established peoples. The degree to which eighteenth-century Greeks, and the language they spoke, were descended from the ancient Greeks has been contested; what cannot be denied is that a belief in this link with the Hellenic past was to prove a powerful element in modern Greek nationalism. More important in the context of the eighteenth century was the fact that the Greek world was a far-flung one: Greek settlements were to be found across the region and the largest of these were in Constantinople and Smyrna, not in the Greek Peninsula.

Equally long established were the *Albanians*, an indigenous people originally inhabiting the Roman province of Illyria but gradually crowded into the mountains of the western Balkans by the arrival of new peoples. Converted in large numbers to Islam following the Ottoman conquest, Albanians became a favoured people in the Ottoman Balkans, and the area of Albanian settlement slowly spread into areas bordering on present-day Albania.

On the south-eastern shores of the Baltic, the peoples collectively known as *Balts* were one of the first groups of Indo-European language speakers to arrive in Europe, around 2000 BC. Two of these peoples, the Prussians and the Curonians, had been assimilated following the conquest of the Baltic shore by the Teutonic Knights in the Middle Ages; they left behind their names in the shape of the (German) Duchy of Prussia and the coastal area known as Courland. The other two peoples, Letts or Latvians and Lithuanians, survived, the Letts as a subject people of the Teutonic Knights and then Russia, the Lithuanians by uniting with Poland in the fourteenth century.

Two peoples, widely separated, represented the *Romance*, or Latin-based, group of languages. In the Istrian Peninsula and along the Adriatic coast lived substantial numbers of Italians, most of them still subjects of the Venetian Republic. On the other side of the Balkan Peninsula, the inhabitants of what was to become today's Romania claimed descent from the ancient Roman colonists of Dacia. Romanian is undoubtedly a Latinate language, though one showing heavy traces of Slavic, Turkic and other tongues.

The most numerous language group in Eastern Europe is that of the *Slavonic*-speaking peoples. Originating in the area between the Dniester and Vistula rivers, the Slavs were to begin with an undifferentiated mass of tribes, all of whom spoke essentially the same language. From the first to the sixth century onwards, however, the Slavs began to fan out in different directions, settling in what is now Russia proper, in the lands further to the west, and in the Balkans. The longer they remained settled in their respective new homelands, the further apart grew their languages, to the point where philologists nowadays distinguish between three main subgroups. The East Slavs speak Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian or White Russian. The West Slavs are the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles. The South Slavs include Slovenes, Croats, Serbs and Bulgarians. Croats, Serbs and Bulgarians all take their names from Iranian or Turkic peoples who imposed themselves on the Slavs already settled in the Balkans and were then assimilated by them.

One group of peoples who have nothing in common, linguistically, with their Indo-European neighbours are the *Finno-Ugrians*. This includes the Estonians, who had arrived on the north-east coast of the Baltic with their close relatives, the Finns, by Roman times; another related people, the Livs, left their name to the coastal area of Livonia after conquest by the Teutonic Knights. Much later, in the ninth century, the Magyars, or ethnic Hungarians, burst upon the European world from the east. They rampaged as far afield as Burgundy and northern Italy before settling down in the Pannonian Plain, which forms today's Hungary. In doing so, the Magyars drove a permanent

wedge between the West and South Slavs, over several of whom they gradually established a dominion in the early Middle Ages.

A special role had been played in Eastern Europe, for centuries, by the *Germans*. The various Germanic peoples had been knocking at the doors of the Roman Empire long before the Slavs, and by the end of the first millennium Germanic kingdoms, including the vast domain founded by Charles the Great (Charlemagne) in AD 800, which came to be known as the Holy Roman Empire, were part of the state structure of medieval Europe. The first German outpost in Eastern Europe was the Duchy of Austria, the 'eastern realm' (*Österreich*), created in the ninth century by Charlemagne as a buffer zone against barbarians from the east. Then, in the early Middle Ages, German influence was extended along the Baltic littoral when the Teutonic Knights undertook the 'northern crusades' against the pagan peoples of the region, exterminating some like the Prussians, subjugating and Christianising others. The final extension of German influence in Eastern Europe was more peaceful: throughout the late Middle Ages, there was a steady influx of German artisans and tradesmen, clerics and artists, many invited into kingdoms whose rulers were acutely conscious that their realms lacked such specialists. As a result German settlements could be found the length and breadth of Eastern Europe, from the Baltic ports to Transylvania, from western Bohemia to St Petersburg. Ethnic Germans were above all an urban class, although the oldest communities, such as the Saxons of Transylvania, were also agriculturists.

Among the latest entrants into the Balkans were the *Ottoman Turks*. This was a consequence of the conquest, by the late sixteenth century, of south-eastern Europe as far north as central Hungary by the Ottoman sultans, even though Hungary at least had been reclaimed for Christendom by 1699. Apart from the religious divide created by this subjection of the Balkans to an Islamic power, the dominance of the Ottomans for so long meant that by the start of our period a sizeable proportion of the population was ethnically different as well. The term 'Ottoman' denotes the Muslim ruling class rather than a single ethnic group; however, in so far as the Ottoman conquest brought in its wake large numbers of ethnic Turks in the form of administrators, soldiers and their hangers-on, it altered the demographic balance of the Balkans substantially.

As a result of their dispersion across the Mediterranean and European world since Roman times, *Jews* by the eighteenth century were to be found in many parts of Eastern Europe, and in several cases had been there for centuries. In most of the region Ashkenazis predominated, while in the Ottoman Empire there had been an influx of Sephardis from Western Europe in the sixteenth century. Virtually everywhere, with the partial exception of the Ottoman Empire, which tolerated monotheistic religions, Jewish communities were at best a tolerated minority within their 'host' society, at worst subject to appalling and repeated indignities and persecution. Jews' retention of a distinctive religious rite and customs meant that they remained a class apart,

repeatedly subjected to restrictions on their faith, where they lived, what occupations they could pursue. These very restrictions ensured that Jews, wherever they settled in Eastern Europe, tended to establish themselves as a commercial class. They made their often highly precarious livings as merchants, as craftsmen, as bailiffs for the landowner class and, above all, as moneylenders to rich and poor alike, and in the case of a select few lending millions to European princes.

Suffering an even worse plight than the Jews were Eastern Europe's *Gypsies* or Roma, an Indo-European people from India who had arrived in the Balkans via the Byzantine Empire by the eleventh century or even earlier. Gypsy communities spread across Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, working as metal craftsmen, musicians, even soldiers, but everywhere they were treated as aliens, the lowest of the low, and persecution forced on them a wandering, unsettled way of life. This in turn confirmed the Gypsies' image as rootless, and they remained trapped between the popular prejudice which excluded them and the inveterate desire of local rulers to regulate them and, by forcing them to settle, to make them taxable. In the Romanian principalities of the Ottoman Empire, Gypsies had for a long time been treated virtually as slaves, and although this was exceptional, the position of Gypsies elsewhere was generally invidious.

## STATES

The political geography of Eastern Europe in 1740 did not reflect the ethnic diversity outlined above. Instead, the region was divided between seven sovereign states, all multinational, all the product of complex historical developments. (See Map 2.)

Least significant was the city state of *Ragusa* (today's Dubrovnik). Though overshadowed throughout its long history by more powerful neighbours, Ragusa had profited from its strategic position at the southern end of the Adriatic and as the western end of major trade routes across the Balkans. The Ottoman conquest of the peninsula, while it spelt economic decline for the Venetian Republic and for much of the eastern Mediterranean, was by contrast an opportunity for Ragusa, which benefited from the fact that it posed no threat to Ottoman power and was at the same time a valuable conduit for trade and diplomacy. Largely populated by Slavs, in cultural character Ragusa had more in common with its fellow city states in Italy. Politically it was a republic, dominated in the eighteenth century by an oligarchy of leading merchant families.

The Republic of *Venice*, which still ruled over most of the Dalmatian coast to the north of Ragusa, was also a city state in decline, though more sizeable and a former regional great power. Much of its energies had been devoted to combating Ottoman encroachments on its very doorstep. Venice retained its grip on the Istrian Peninsula and the Dalmatian coast until the Ottoman threat was past, but by the eighteenth century it too was decrepit, its commerce



### Map 2 States of Eastern Europe in 1740

Source: 'Europe 1740'. Palmer, R.R. and Colton, J., 1965, *A History of the Modern World*, 3rd edn, New York, 304–5.

evaporated and its foothold on the eastern Adriatic dependent on the goodwill of the much more powerful Habsburg Monarchy.

Of the remaining five states in Eastern Europe, two, the Ottoman Empire and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, can be characterised as states on the defensive, if not positively in decline. Both these powers, for varying reasons, had ceased to expand in terms of territory and were in fact seen as fields for expansion by their more predatory neighbours.

The *Ottoman Empire* was for centuries the terror of Christian Europe and, despite its manifold problems, was still a formidable military power in the eighteenth century. This absolute, military monarchy, whose ruler, the sultan, was regarded by his Muslim subjects as God's vassal on earth, had been a presence in the Balkan Peninsula since 1345. At its zenith, in the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottoman imperium stretched from Arabia to northern Hungary, and as late as 1683 the sultan's armies unsuccessfully besieged Vienna. In a series of stubborn campaigns thereafter, the Habsburg Monarchy had wrested Hungary from Ottoman control; later, the Habsburgs briefly held the core of modern-day Serbia (1718–39). In a sign that Ottoman power was not quite moribund, however, the sultan actually regained Serbia in 1739. The Ottoman dominions still covered the whole of the Balkan Peninsula south of Croatia and Hungary and west of Venetian Dalmatia and Ragusa; they included the vassal principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, and the Black Sea, despite Russian advances from the north-east, was still a Turkish lake.

One of the largest states in Europe in 1740, reaching from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea, was the '*Polish Commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania*'. This union of two medieval states dated from 1386, although it was not formalised until 1569, and included in the Commonwealth's borders not only Poles and Lithuanians but also Germans, Jews, Ukrainians and White Russians. By the early eighteenth century the balance of power had altered drastically in Poland–Lithuania's disfavour, and this, combined with its internal weaknesses, had already made it the plaything of its neighbours.

The *Habsburg Monarchy* was in many respects a more dynamic state than either Poland–Lithuania or the Ottoman Empire; nevertheless, the very nature of the Monarchy's historical development meant that it too was vulnerable. Its starting point was the Duchy of Austria, originally founded by the Holy Roman Empire as a defensive outpost against eastern barbarians. Ruled from the thirteenth century by the family of Habsburg, who also held the elective dignity of Holy Roman Emperor almost continuously from the fifteenth century, Austria became the nucleus of a vast agglomeration of principalities and kingdoms, most acquired through dynastic alliance rather than war. The Habsburg realm embraced the kingdoms of Hungary (including Croatia) and Bohemia and was a classic case of imperial 'overstretch', with territories and pretensions to hegemony in the Netherlands, Germany and Italy, as well as an uneasy relationship with its East European neighbours.

A state just beginning to play a more forceful role in Eastern Europe, despite being part of it for centuries, was the Kingdom of *Prussia*, an amalgam of the Margravate of Brandenburg and the Duchy of Prussia. Brandenburg had also been formed as a border territory of the Holy Roman Empire and was from an early point an entirely German principality, ruled from 1411 by the Hohenzollern dynasty. It was Prussia, however, as the original conquest of the crusading Teutonic Knights in the thirteenth century, which had made

the greatest impact on Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages. At its greatest extent, the 'State of the Order' (*Ordenstaat*) had occupied the whole of the Baltic coast and its hinterland, from Danzig to present-day Estonia. The area known as 'East Prussia' became Germanised, whereas 'West Prussia' was lost to Poland in the fifteenth century. In the Baltic provinces to the north, also lost to neighbouring states from the fifteenth century, the legacy of the Order's rule was more complex: colonisation by the Teutonic Knights created urban centres and a landowning class, which were largely German, but the peasant mass of the population remained Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian. Prussia itself came under the rule of the Hohenzollerns in 1511, and the modern Kingdom of Prussia, proclaimed in 1701, was thus a state in two halves, divided by Polish territory. Prussia was ruled by a dynasty which saw military strength, founded on the economic exploitation of the resources of the state, as the sole security of the state itself. This preoccupation had ominous implications for Prussia's neighbours in the region.

Finally, the *Russian Empire* was by 1740 firmly established as a regional great power. The earliest Slav state on the Russian Plain was formed in the ninth century but was overwhelmed by the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century. For the next two and a half centuries the eastern Slavs lived under Mongol domination, a period which saw the emergence of Russian, White Russian and Ukrainian as separate languages. In the fifteenth century the Principality of Muscovy, centred on Moscow, struggled free of the Mongol yoke and by 1584 had expanded north to the Arctic Ocean, east into Siberia and south-east as far as the Caspian Sea. In the seventeenth century, the tsars of the Romanov dynasty began to make inroads into the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth to the west; this included most of what is today Belarus and the area of the Ukraine east of the Dnieper. It was under Tsar Peter I (1682–1725) that Russia became a force to be feared in Eastern Europe. In a series of wars owing their success to Peter's determined modernisation of Russian arms and administration, Russia defeated the regional great power of the day, Sweden, and seized control of the Baltic coast from Riga to the Gulf of Finland. Russian interference in the affairs of the weakened Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth steadily increased, and Russia acquired its first permanent port on the Black Sea when it took Azov from the Ottoman Empire in 1696. The enlargement of this already huge, autocratically ruled state, at the expense of Poland–Lithuania and the Ottomans, looked set to continue.

## SOCIETIES

The handiest method for understanding East European societies in the eighteenth century is to explain the different classes into which they were divided, to grasp the profound gulf between urban and agrarian life, and to appreciate the importance of religious identities.

The last of these, *religion*, deserves mention first, as a factor which had shaped societies in the region since antiquity. The Roman Empire officially