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Maison de l'Europe
Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées



PARTENARIAT ÉDUCATIF GRUNDTVIG 2009-2011

Europe in 1945 after the Second World War

I. Human losses and material damages

1. Human losses

- **A bloody and traumatised Europe**

Estimates for the total casualties of the war range from 50 million to 60 million.

The majority of casualties was civilians, killed after bombings or died as a direct or indirect result of Nazi ideological policies: hostage executions, reprisal, total destruction of villages, massive deportations, deliberate genocide of around six million Jews during The Holocaust.

- **Demographic consequences**

Birth rate was declining because of the male over-mortality during the conflict.

Due to the disastrous human losses in most countries, the number of women and old people was more important, which led to the decrease of the active population.

Millions of people were deported during the conflict, especially in Germany, Poland, USSR and in central Europe. They were fleeing from battles, deportations, prisoners of war, populations in exile and transferred.

2. Destructions

- **A devastated Europe**

Material damages were huge. USSR, Poland and Yougoslavia, systematically robbed and devastated by the Nazis, were the most damaged. Most cities in Germany were destroyed.

- **Problems of reconstruction**

Factories and buildings had to be reconstructed, as well as transportation infrastructures. The production had to start over in a very difficult environment.

II. The conflict settlement

1. Defeated Nazi Germany

- **Divided and occupied**

While Italy was saved because it eventually declared war on Germany, U.S., British, and Soviet leaders met in Yalta and in Potsdam so as to agree on the occupation of post-war Germany. By declaring Germany to be the territory it had contained within its boundaries of December 31, 1937:

- the Sudetenland was reverted back to Czechoslovakia;
- Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France;
- Austria was separated from Germany (*Anschluss* was cancelled);
- Originally, Germany was to retain Stettin while the Poles were to annex East Prussia with Königsberg. Eventually, however, Stalin decided that he wanted Königsberg as a year-round warm water port for the Soviet Navy and argued that the Poles should receive Stettin instead.

- **Germany was demilitarized and divided.** Post-WWII occupation zones of Germany, in its 1937 borders, with territories east of the Oder-Neisse line shown as annexed by Poland and the Soviet Union, plus the Saar protectorate and divided Berlin. East Germany was formed by the Soviet Zone, while West Germany was formed by the American, British, and French zones in 1949 and the Saar in 1957.

The city of Berlin, which was situated in the Soviet zone, was jointly occupied by the Allied powers and subdivided into four sectors.

- **The Allies controlled Germany.**

The government was purged.

The Nuremberg Trials were a series of military tribunals, held by the main victorious Allied forces of World War II, most notable for the prosecution of prominent members of the political, military, and economic leadership of the defeated Nazi Germany. 12 defendants were sentenced to death.

Institutions were denazified and became more democratic.

- **Germany had to pay reparations.**

Germany was amounted to pay around US\$20 billion and factories, ships, machines and transportation materials were taken.

A key aim was to deconcentrate and decartelize the German economy.

Konzern and cartels, which had supported and helped finance Hitler and the Nazis and had taken part of 'the Final Solution', had to be dismantled.

2. Boundaries changes

- **The Soviet Union was spreading**

Every territories gained by the Soviet Union were confirmed :

- the Treaty of Riga (1921) was partitioning the disputed territories in Belarus and Ukraine given to Poland by Lenin and reconquered by Stlaine in 1939, according to a secret clause of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact;
- In 1940 the Soviet Union invaded and occupied the Baltic states - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania - and annexed them shortly thereafter;
- Carélie in Finland ;
- Romania's Bessarabia ;
- the Hungarian Ruthenes;
- the town Königsberg was part of Prussia, taken to Germany, and was renamed Kaliningrad.

- **The new boundaries of Poland**

To compensate the lost territories ‘regained’ by the USSR in the East, Poland spread in the West and in the North at the expense of Germany.

The Oder-Neisse line, the border between Germany and Poland, was drawn in the aftermath of World War II.

III. The decline of Europe

1. A weakened continent

- **Political divisions**

Some political divisions appeared between the Allies and the Axis, between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, and between the Western Allies themselves (between the French and the British for example).

Within the countries occupied by Germany during the war, the purge of former collaborators was very controversial and divided the political parties.

A bloody civil war erupted in Greece, in which the Soviet Union was backing the Greek Communist and the United Kingdom was backing the royalists.

- **A ruined economy**

Economic difficulties both touched the Allies and the Axis: national debts, inflation, food shortage, lack of work force, decreasing productivity.

- **Contested colonies**

The war enlighthened weaknesses and divisions of the colonies.

It awoke indigineous nationalisms, who protested more and more against the European countries domination (United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands):

- conflicts in India ;
- riots in the Sétif province in Algeria ;
- declarations of independance in Indochina and Indonesia.

2. Europe facing two big Powers

- **The threat of a break**

Despite the agreement written in ‘The Declaration of Liberated Europe’ ratified in Yalta on February 1945 and held by Roosevelt, Staline and Churchill, which planned to hold ‘free elections’, the new balance of power in Europe at the end of the war resulted from the respective spread of the French and British allied troops in the West, and of the Soviet troops in the East.

- **The growing influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe**

The immediate post-war period in Europe was characterised by the Soviet Union annexing or converting into Soviet Socialist Republics all the countries that the Red Army had taken over behind its own lines in driving the German invaders out of central and eastern Europe. Countries converted into Soviet Satellite states within the Eastern Bloc were: Poland; Bulgaria; Hungary; Czechoslovakia; Romania; Albania.

- **The growing influence of America in Eastern Europe**

At the end of the conflict, the US stopped her financial aid to the Soviet Union.

They gave up the idea of isolationism, which had characterized America of the 1920’s after the First World War.

They were getting ready to face new responsibilities in the world and especially in Europe.

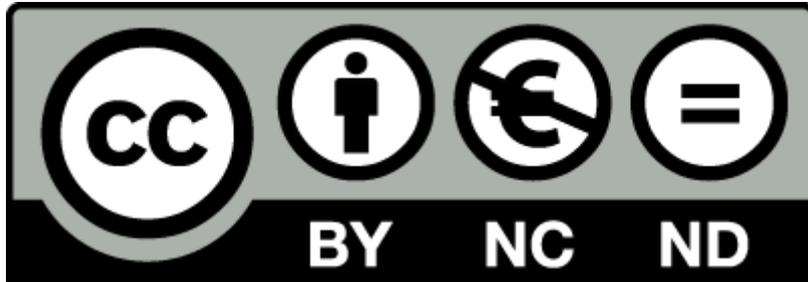


Conclusion

The Second World War reinforced Europe's decline triggered in the aftermath of World War I. Even if in 1945, Europe was associated to the creation of the United Nations Organization (UNO), in which United Kingdom and France were permanent members of the Security Council, Europe is weak and divided. It will become the site for many clashes between the two winners, the United States and the Soviet Union.

In terms of ideology, economy and politics, Europe will have to deal with a major and long lasting clash symbolized by the Iron Curtain that Churchill mentioned as of 1946 in the Fulton Speech. During the Cold War, the Iron Curtain will be one of the key issues in the US-Soviet conflict.

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