

The Paris Peace Conference of 1919

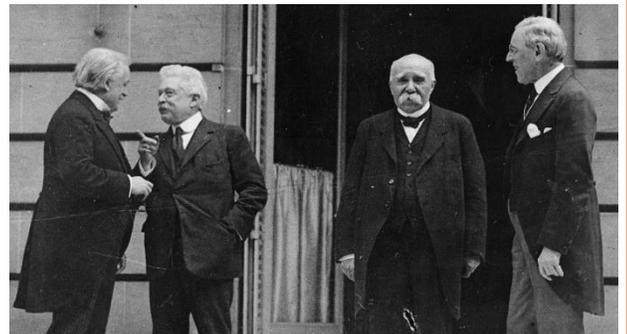
The End of The Great War

On November 11, 1918, The Great War, more commonly referred to today as World War I, came to an end. Germany had become bereft of both manpower and supplies, and with American troops now bolstering the Allied Powers on the Western Front, Germany faced little alternative to signing an armistice. Only seven days prior, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had also agreed to sign the Armistice of Villa Giusti. Over nine million combatants and seven million civilians died as a result of the war, with an additional 21 million soldiers left wounded. The victorious Allied Powers decided to convene in January of 1919 to set the peace terms for the defeated Central Powers.

Representatives at The Conference and Their Goals

The peace conference following the conclusion of The Great War was attended by representatives of 32 countries and nationalities. The Central Powers—Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire—were not allowed to attend the conference until after the details of all the peace treaties had been decided and agreed upon. The “Big Four” powers—the U.S., Britain, Italy, and France—dominated the Conference, and were represented by Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Georges Clemenceau, respectively. These four men nearly single-handedly set the terms for the war’s conclusion.

Woodrow Wilson entered the discussions with highly idealistic goals in mind. Outlined in his “Fourteen Points” address to Congress, January 8, 1918, Wilson hoped for a future of international transparency, free trade and navigation, fair colonialism and for the establishment of the League of Nations.¹ These notions were welcomed by European citizens but were met with skepticism by the other Allied leaders. Woodrow Wilson’s main opposition came from Clemenceau and Orlando who felt that Wilson had been too idealistic in his ambitions.² Rather, they desired to see extremely heavy reparations paid by the Central Powers, as well as a total disarmament of the German military and redistribution of their overseas possessions, or “mandates,” to the Allied Powers. David Lloyd George was a moderate power at the conference who did not wish to see the German economy and government destroyed by excessively harsh consequences for fear that heavy reparations could potentially lead to further conflict in the future. In a 1919 address to the British Parliament, David Lloyd George stated, “We want a peace which will be just, but not vindictive... Above all, we want to protect the future against a repetition of the horrors of this war.”³



*David Lloyd George, UK (far left)
Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Italy (2nd left) Georges
Clemenceau, France (2nd right)
Woodrow Wilson, USA (far right)*

Effects of the War on the Eastern Front

The Great War’s Eastern Theater stretched from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south and included most of Eastern Europe as well as much of Central Europe. Russia supported the

¹ “Wilson’s Fourteen Points.” *Yale Law School*. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp.

² “World War One: Fourteen Points.” https://www.ducksters.com/history/world_war_i/fourteen_points.php

³ The Aims of ‘the Big Three’ http://www.johndclare.net/peace_treaties3.htm

Allied Powers in Eastern Europe until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 when it signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers. Allied Romania was forced to surrender as well and signed a similar treaty in May 1918. Both treaties provided the surrendering nations with large territorial concessions, but were nullified when the Central Powers surrendered in November 1918.

Major Casualties and Loss of Manpower

One of the most obvious effects of any war is a massive loss in both combatant and civilian life. Exact estimates as to the number of East European casualties are difficult to make due to the poor quality of available statistics, but it is estimated that at least 3.9 million soldiers and 2 million civilians died as a result of the conflict.

Disease played a particularly crucial role in the loss of life on the Eastern Theater.⁴ It is believed that infection and disease were responsible for the deaths of four times as many combatants as direct conflict. On the western front, this ratio had only been three-to-one. Malaria, dysentery and cholera were commonplace in the cities and military camps at the time, however the deadliest condition was typhoid spotted fever transmitted by infected lice. The overflow of cities' populations due to an influx in refugees created unsanitary conditions and created the habitat in which the lice could breed. Ultimately, a sanitation program called *Santitätswesen* (Medical Affairs) was put into place to ensure that proper hygienic procedures were being carried out in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Neighborhoods known to be infected were quarantined and treated, while most citizens, both rural and urban, were required to visit delousing stations at their local military bathhouse.⁵

Armed conflict did, of course, also lead to major casualties on The Great War's Eastern Front. A unique development in combat of the First World War was the introduction of the military aircraft. At the beginning of the war, Russia, the largest Allied power in the east, had the world's most advanced air service, second only to France. The use of bomber planes and aircrafts equipped with machine guns allowed military conflict to take on a new and highly destructive aspect. Trench warfare was not used nearly as heavily in Eastern Europe as it had been on the Western Front due to the fact that battle lines were much longer in eastern offensives and far more fluid. Lower density lines of soldiers and poor communication networks also inhibited the development of trench warfare.⁶

One of the most lethal offensives in world history occurred in the Great War's Eastern Theater and lasted from June to September of 1916. The Brusilov Offensive, named for commanding Russian general Aleksei Brusilov, would pit the Russian military against the combined forces of Germany, Austria-Hungary and The Ottoman Empire. While Russia was successful in halting the advancing Central Powers, and ultimately convincing Romania to join the war on the side of the



Military hospitals were often cramped places where victims of both injury and disease sought treatment

⁴ "Typhus on The Eastern Front." *University of Kansas*. <http://www.kumc.edu/wwi/essays-on-first-world-war-medicine/index-of-essays/medicine/typhus-on-the-eastern-front.html>.

⁵ Eastern Front (World War I) [https://www.revolvy.com/page/Eastern-Front-\(World-War-I\)](https://www.revolvy.com/page/Eastern-Front-(World-War-I))

⁶ "Did Trench Warfare develop in the eastern front for WW I?" *Quora*. <https://www.quora.com/Did-Trench-Warfare-develop-in-the-eastern-front-for-WW-I>.

Allies, massive casualties were inflicted upon both sides. Over 500,000 Russian combatants perished alongside an additional approximately one million Central Power soldiers.⁷

It is estimated that nearly 20 percent of Russian industrial employees were conscripted into the military, and with such major casualties, the result was a massive gap in the traditional workforce of East European economies. In some situations, female participation in industrial employment increased by approximately 13.6% from pre-war levels. Following such a large loss of the male workforce, the developing role of women in industry aided in partially fulfilling demand for labor. There still existed major gaps, however, in some more labor-intensive industries that would prevent efficient production.⁸

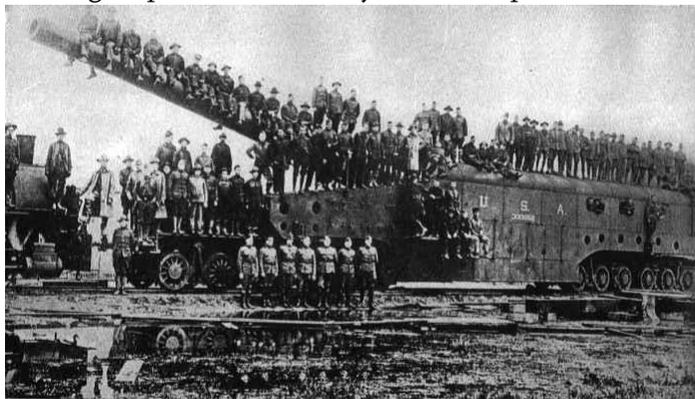


The Brusilov Offensive was so deadly, it is estimated that of the 48 men pictured here, only 20 were expected to survive

Destroyed infrastructure

The rapid industrialization that had occurred globally for approximately a half century prior to the onset of war brought about a new twist to a wartime strategy already practiced for millennia: the sabotage of infrastructure. A foundation set on railways, industry and oil had been set early on in the war, and to cut the opponent's supply at its source became a common plan of action.

Railroads served as the bloodline for both the Central Powers and the Allies on the Eastern Front. Sprawling systems of railways that had developed in the previous decades allowed for the efficient transportation of supplies, weapons and manpower to the areas that needed them most. Furthermore, locomotives themselves could be utilized as intense weaponry. The most powerful land-based weapons of The Great War were railway guns. Weighing dozens of tons apiece and utilizing surplus naval artillery, these weapons could bombard a city from over 100 kilometers away.



Massive railway guns were able to bombard cities from dozens of miles away—railway sabotage would become a vital and effective form of resistance in occupied areas

Sabotaging enemy rail lines could act to cripple supply lines and forestall their advances. A famous example of railway sabotage during this period came from German-occupied Belgium (Belgium is often considered to be included in the Eastern Theater of the First World War), when citizens would adopt guerilla warfare techniques to resist against their invaders. Despite the consequence of death, many resistance groups gathered to demolish bridges and rail lines. The idea

⁷ "The Brusilov Offensive." <https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-one/battles-of-world-war-one/the-brusilov-offensive/>

⁸ Goldman, W. Z. (2002). *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia*. Cambridge: [Cambridge University Press](https://www.cambridge.org/9780521818724). pp. 10–11.

was simple, but it proved highly effective in preventing occupying forces from receiving and delivering much needed supplies and troops.⁹ The Great War was one of the first large-scale, international wars to heavily utilize industry. Mass production of weapons, locomotives, automobiles and other military supplies allowed both sides to build a well-stocked military prepared for prolonged conflict. As the war continued to drag on beyond either side's expected timeframe, however, entire cities and factories were destroyed in conflict and available resources began to diminish. Faltering industrial capacities struggled to meet the demand for supplies on the warfronts. Prior to America's entrance into the war, the U.S. had already played a key role in the Allies' war efforts and assisted them in their continued resistance. American banks made massive loans to France and Britain that would be used to buy munitions, raw materials and food from across the Atlantic.¹⁰

The increasing reliance on airplanes and automobiles during this period also led to an explosion in demand for oil. At the time, there was only one significant source of oil in Europe west of the Black Sea. This plot of land, the Ploiesti Oilfields in Romania, supplied much of the oil consumed in East Europe prior to the Great War. The region's oil production made it a prime target for the Central Powers during their invasion of Romania, however allied operations intentionally sabotaged the oil fields prior to their inevitable surrendering of the land. This act prevented the central powers from utilizing the land to its full capacity, but it also led to a shortage of oil in the region following the war's conclusion.¹¹

Refugees

Beginning in the earliest days of the conflict, The Great War was responsible for uprooting millions of civilian lives in Europe. Mass migration of innocents came about due to two main reasons: to escape conflict with invading and occupying powers, and because relocation was at times government mandated. In fear of the apparent dangers associated with military conflict, and of persecution by occupying powers, East European citizens were often forced to flee from their homelands in mass quantities. Less than a month into the conflict, the Russian military invaded and occupied East Prussia, forcing approximately one million German citizens to flee their homes. Similar situations



The rubble of Przemyśl Fortress following its six-month siege

would occur as Germany proceeded to occupy France, Belgium, Lithuania and Poland. In some incidents, entire cities were destroyed, and their populations forced to relocate. For example, in the Siege of Przemyśl, the longest siege of the Great War (Sept. 1914-March 1915), the fortress city of Przemyśl, Poland was nearly erased from the map by invading Austrian forces, leaving thousands of civilians without work, shelter or food.¹² Furthermore, Austria's invasion of Serbia in 1914 resulted in perhaps the greatest

humanitarian catastrophe of the war. As soldiers and civilians alike sought to escape the occupying regime, nearly a half million Serbians attempted to escape through the mountains to Albania.

⁹ Horne and Kramer (2001) *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*

¹⁰ "America in the First World War." *US History*. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/45.asp>.

¹¹ Burg, David F. (2010). *Almanac of World War I*. L. Edward Purcell. University Press of Kentucky. p. 336

¹² "Russians take Austrian garrison at Przemyśl." *History.com*. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/russians-take-austrian-garrison-at-przemysl>.

Approximately 200,000 died en-route, however, and many more would find themselves captured and forced into Austrian labor camps.¹³

At times, governments would also force their own civilians to relocate, be it for political reasons or for their own protection. The most dramatic example of this in the Eastern Theater took place along the west border of the Russian Empire where non-Russian minorities (Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Jews) were heavily concentrated. Their location on the western borderlands made them particularly vulnerable to attacks by invading forces, leading many to move further east into Russian homeland for protection. Many more, however, would be falsely accused by the tsarist military of aiding and abetting the enemy, and deported deep into the Russian interior. Mistrust between the government and various ethnic groups would lead to further issues down the line regarding nationalism and self-determination. Some estimates put the total number of wartime refugees in the Russian Empire at around six million, creating a multitude of complications for the cities that accepted them.

Effects of the Great War's refugee crisis extended beyond the lives of the displaced citizens, and affected the communities hosting them. In Russia, emergency accommodations were made in cinemas, train stations, monasteries and even prisons as some cities' populations would soon explode to nearly one in four citizens being a refugee. Initially, host cities treated refugees with sympathy, but hostility ensued as it became apparent that they lacked the financial means to pay for food and housing. A similar situation took place when the United Kingdom accepted 250,000 refugees from German occupied Belgium. The British citizens were very giving—over 2,500 committees existed providing charitable relief—but tension soon arose between the two groups. Many British citizens complained that “Belgianitis” had gone too far and the refugees had become entitled. One newspaper



The UK accepted 250,000 Belgian refugees during the Great War, making it the largest single influx in the country's history

went so far as to state that a refugee “won't work but goes about as if he was a duke.” The influx in the homeless populations also led to sanitation crises such as the aforementioned typhoid spotted fever epidemics.¹⁴

Following the conclusion of the war, most Belgian refugees were able to return to their homes, easing any tension that had arisen between the Belgian and British people. Meanwhile, the Serbians would return to an entirely new country: The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and

Slovenes, otherwise known as Yugoslavia. The refugee crisis of Russia, however, remained of high

¹³ “The Minor Powers During World War One – Serbia.” *First World War.com*. http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/minorpowers_serbia.htm.

¹⁴ “World War One: How 250,000 Belgian refugees didn't leave a trace.” *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-28857769>.

concern as rising nationalist and anti-Bolshevik sentiments led to civil war and war between Russia and Poland.¹⁵

A History of Borders in Eastern Europe



Prior to the Great War, Eastern Europe was composed of fewer nations than it is today. The reason for this has a long history that far predates the Great War, and even extends into Europe's Middle Ages. As empires, such as the Holy Roman Empire, would rise and fall, they would incorporate multiple kingdoms' lands into their own and eventually splinter off into new nations upon their demise. Land holdings of existing kingdoms were constantly shifting as well—most often due to incorporation by conquest and/or union by treaty. The most relevant example for this period would be the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867. In 1806,

following the fall of the Holy Roman Empire, the Austrian empire broke off and was comprised of many East European states, including Hungary, Slovakia and Bosnia, just to name a few. Following Napoleon's fall in 1815, Austria became the leader of the German States. In 1866, however, the Austro-Prussian War resulted in Austria's expulsion from the German Confederation. This, coupled with the fact that Hungarian citizens had already been rebellious within the Austrian empire for years, prompted Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph to look internally in order to bolster his power. The state of Hungary had long sought equal power to their commanding Austrian leaders, and following negotiations, achieved their goal via the *Ausgleich* (German: "Compromise") in 1867. From that point forward, the Austrian Empire became the more solidified state of Austria-Hungary.¹⁶

The history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its formation may seem confusing and difficult to follow, but that is because the nineteenth century was a highly tumultuous period for European statehood. Austria-Hungary stands as a striking example, but other states such as Bulgaria and Serbia faced similar hardships. Many of the socio-political effects of this chaotic atmosphere carried over well into the twentieth century and helped shape the path for the Great War. People of diverse backgrounds grew weary of being incorporated into multinational states where they felt that their interests were not being represented in the government. As the largest nation, Austria-Hungary had been composed of citizens who were ethnically Austrian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Romanian and Italian. The large states that formed in eastern Europe prevented borders from accurately depicting citizens' desires and ethnic divisions.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Europe on the move: refugees and World War One." *British Library*.

<https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/refugees-europe-on-the-move>.

¹⁶ "Austria-Hungary." *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Austria-Hungary>.

¹⁷ "Europe before World War One (1914)." *Diercke Atlas*.

<http://www.diercke.com/kartenansicht.xtp?artId=978-3-14-100790-9&seite=36&id=17469&kartennr=1>

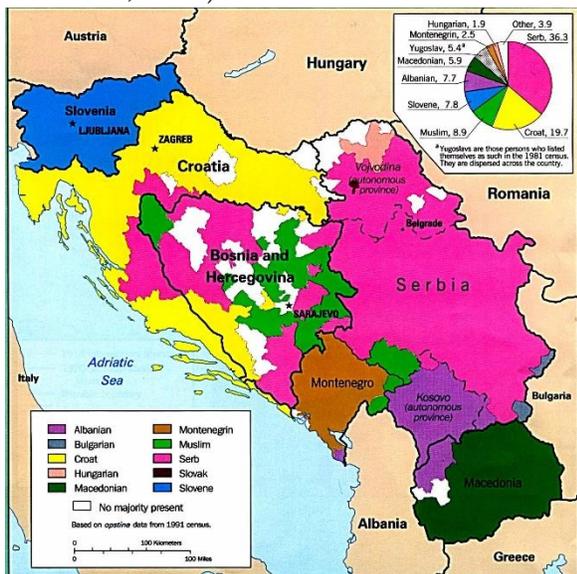


Current situation of borders in Eastern Europe

Ethnic Tension and Nationalism

Upon the conclusion of the Great War, the existence and continued formation of new large, multinational states resulted in tension as borders continued to fail in accurately reflecting the lines dividing ethnic homelands. In 1918, following the disintegration of Austro-Hungary, Slovenian, Serbian and Croatian representatives in the former

empire issued the *May Declaration* in which they sought to form a unified state alongside the previously independent kingdoms of Montenegro and Serbia. Compelled by the threat of Italy—who already occupied the neighboring lands of Primorska, Istria and some parts of Dalmatia—and by the kingdoms' already war-ravaged defenses, Montenegro and Serbia agreed, thus creating the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.¹⁸ (Yugoslavia, "Land of Southern Slavs," existed as a colloquial name for the state since its origins and was made the official name of the kingdom by King Alexander I on October 3, 1929.)



Tensions between the various groups within the nation were quick to arise, specifically between the Serbs and the Croats and Slovenes. The Serbs, who made up approximately 40% of the population, dominated politics, leading to deep resentment from the kingdom's two other largest ethnic groups. Serbian government and political policies were aggressive and often discriminatory, leading to a very uneasy coexistence between the groups—Assassinations of political figures were not an uncommon occurrence during this period. The Yugoslavian state government would be restructured, and landholdings shifted frequently, amidst the turmoil of the first and second World Wars. A common trend of increased tension between the groups, however, remained until they came to a boiling point following the collapse of the

This map of ethnic majorities in Yugoslavia displays the fact that East European borders of the 20th century failed dismally to represent traditional lines of ethnic heritage

¹⁸ "The State of Slovenes Croats and Serbs." Slovene government. <http://www.slovenia.si/slovenia/history/the-state-of-slovenes-croats-and-serbs/>.

Soviet Union in 1991. Mass killings of ethnic Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians arose and required western forceful intervention following failed peace negotiations.¹⁹

The nationalistic sentiments that arose within the various ethnic groups of Yugoslavia in the 20th century led to catastrophe as peoples of an individual identity were prevented from acquiring independence and opportunity for expression. Many modern historians believe that if borders had been decided to reflect the lines of ethnicity earlier, much of the tension, aggression and violence that occurred may have been prevented. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia is a prime example of this fact, but similar situations also occurred in other East European states such as the Republic of Czechoslovakia where people of Slovak heritage did not feel the federation served their interests.²⁰ The effects of the rising nationalistic sentiments of the early 20th century can be summarized by the fact that tensions arise when a group seeks a solidified identity through independent governance, but fails to earn it. Conflicts arising between dominant and subjugated peoples has been a fact of life for millennia, and the cosmopolitan states of post-WWI Eastern Europe provides us with an exceptional contemporary exhibit.

Questions to Consider

- How can we best begin to rebuild and recover from the destroyed infrastructure in East Europe?
- Who should be held responsible in paying for the recovery of East Europe's infrastructure and cities?
- How can nations best meet the rising demand for labor to rebuild given the crippled workforce?
- Whose, if anybody's, responsibility is it to provide protection and resources to those people who have been displaced by the war?
- How can we/should we support the rising nationalistic sentiments of east European ethnic groups?
- To what extent would redrawing national borders act as a solution to these rising sentiments? Would further support be necessary to aid these young nations in their establishment and development?
- Consider your nation's policy regarding imperialism during this period. Would redrawing borders in East Europe set a precedent that threatens your nation's holdings and provokes sentiments of independence in lands governed by foreign powers?

¹⁹ "Multi-Ethnic Conflict: Yugoslavia." <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/multi-ethnic-conflict-yugoslavia>.

²⁰ "The Role of Czech-Slovak Tensions in the Disintegration of Czechoslovakia." http://econc10.bu.edu/economic_systems/NatIdentity/EE/Czechoslovakia/czech_slovak_break.htm.