Physical Geography

The Big Idea

The physical geography of Eastern Europe varies greatly from place to place.

Main Ideas

• The physical features of Eastern Europe include wide open plains, rugged mountain ranges, and many rivers.

• The climate and vegetation of Eastern Europe differ widely in the north and the south.
Main Idea 1: The physical features of Eastern Europe include wide open plains, rugged mountain ranges, and many rivers.

**Landforms**

- The Northern European Plain covers the northern area.
- The **Carpathians** mountain range stretches from the Alps to the Black Sea.
- The Great Hungarian Plain is a fertile area located mostly within Hungary.
- The Dinaric Alps and Balkan Mountains together cover most of the **Balkan Peninsula**, the largest peninsula in Europe.
Eastern Europe

Bodies of Water

Many are important transportation and trade routes.

- Adriatic Sea in southwest
- Black Sea in east
- Baltic Sea in north

**Danube River** begins in Germany and flows east.
  - Central to economy
  - Dams along its course generate much of the region’s electricity.
Main Idea 2: The climate and vegetation of Eastern Europe differ widely in the north and the south.

**Baltic Coast**
- Winters long, cold, and harsh
- Less rain than other areas, but fog is common
- Huge forests

**Interior Plains**
- Winters cold, but summers often pleasant and mild
- More rain in western parts than in east
- Huge forests in north; grassy plains in south
- Nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986 poisoned millions of acres of forest and soil across region.

**Balkan Coast**
- Mediterranean climate—warm summers, mild winters
- Beaches are popular tourist destinations.
- Shrubs and hardy trees that do not need much water
Poland and the Baltic Republics

The Big Idea

The histories of Poland and the Baltic Republics, both as free states and as areas dominated by the Soviet Union, still shape life there.

Main Ideas

• History ties Poland and the Baltic Republics together.
• The cultures of Poland and the Baltic Republics differ in language and religion but share common customs.
• Economic growth is a major issue in the region today.
Main Idea 1: History ties Poland and the Baltic Republics together.

**Early History**

- The area around the Baltic Sea was settled in ancient times by many different groups. They developed into the people who live in the region today.
  - Estonians
  - Latvians
  - Lithuanians
  - Polish
- By the Middle Ages the Baltics had many independent kingdoms.
- Up through the 1800s there were many invasions.
  - The large and strong kingdoms of Poland and Lithuania, invaded small kingdoms of Latvia and Estonia.
Twentieth Century History

World Wars

• World Wars I and II were devastating for the Baltic people.
• Poland was center of much fighting in World War I.
  – Millions of Poles—both soldiers and civilians—died.
  – Thousands more killed in Baltic countries
• World War II began when Poland was invaded.
  – Germans from west; Soviet Union from east
  – Millions of people were killed.
  – All countries occupied by Soviet army

Soviet Domination

• Soviet Union dominated Eastern Europe after World War II.
  – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became parts of the Soviet Union.
  – Poland free, but forced to accept Communist government
• Many Eastern Europeans opposed Communist rule.
• Communist governments eventually fell.
  – Poland rejected Communism and elected leaders in 1989.
  – Baltic Republics broke from Soviet Union and became independent in 1991.
Main Idea 2: The cultures of Poland and the Baltic Republics differ in language and religion but share common customs.

**Cultural Differences**
- Languages—because they were first settled by different groups, each country has its own language today
- Religion—trade patterns and invasions have affected religion
  - Poland and Lithuania—most are Catholic
  - Latvia and Estonia—most are Lutheran

**Cultural Similarities**
- Many of the same types of foods
- Practice many of the same crafts, including pottery, painting, and embroidery
- Love of music and dance
  - Famous Baltic musicians, such as Frédéric Chopin
Main Idea 3: Economic growth is a major issue in the region today.

• Economies of all four countries suffered after decades of Soviet rule.
  – Poor **infrastructure**—the set of resources, such as roads, airports, and factories, that a country needs in order to support economic activities.

• Today Poland and the Baltic Republics are working to rebuild and strengthen their economies.
  – Cities like **Warsaw**, the capital of Poland, have become major industrial centers.

• Seeking new sources of income
  – Tourism—people are drawn to the region by its fascinating cultures, cool summer climates, and historic sites.
Inland Eastern Europe

The Big Idea

The countries of inland Eastern Europe have varied histories and cultures but face many of the same issues today.

Main Ideas

• The histories and cultures of inland Eastern Europe vary from country to country.
• Most of inland Eastern Europe today has stable governments, strong economies, and influential cities.
Main Idea 1: The histories and cultures of inland Eastern Europe vary from country to country.

- Inland Eastern Europe consists of six countries
  - Czech Republic
  - Slovakia
  - Hungary
  - Ukraine
  - Belarus
  - Moldova
- Many different peoples have ruled those countries throughout history.
- Each ruling group influenced the culture and customs of the area.
Eastern Europe

History and Culture

Czech Republic and Slovakia
- Slavs founded many small kingdoms.
- Strong neighbors conquered Slavic kingdoms.
- After World War I Allies formed Czechoslovakia.
- In 1993 it split into Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- Western influences
- **Prague**, capital of the Czech Republic, reflects Western influences in architecture.

Hungary
- Magyars invaded in the 900s.
- Conquered by the Austrians
- Magyars continued to influence culture
- Hungarian language is based on language of Magyars.
- People in Hungary today still refer to themselves as Magyars.

Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova
- Settled by Slavs and later invaded by other groups
- Rus settled in what is now **Kiev**, Ukraine, in the 800s and created empire.
- Late 1700s empire became part of Russia.
- 1920s made into Soviet republics
- Became independent after Soviet breakup in 1991
- Culture influenced by Russia
Main Idea 2: Most of inland Eastern Europe today has stable governments, strong economies, and influential cities.

**Government**

- Today, five are republics, and Belarus is a dictatorship that claims to be a republic.
- Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova belong to an international alliance, the **Commonwealth of Independent States** (CIS), which meets to discuss issues such as trade and immigration that affect former Soviet republics.
- Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary belong to EU.

**Economy**

- Development has been a major challenge since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine have been most successful.
  - Thriving industrial centers
  - Productive farmlands
Life in Eastern Europe is centered around cities.

Capitals are key economic and cultural centers.

Prague, Kiev, and Budapest, the capital of Hungary, are the most prosperous and important cities in the region.

Cities are popular tourist attractions—architectural and cultural sites draw visitors from all over the world.
The Balkan Countries

The Big Idea

Life in the Balkans reflects the region’s troubled past and its varied ethnic makeup.

Main Ideas

- The history of the Balkan countries is one of conquest and conflict.
- The cultures of the Balkan countries are shaped by the many ethnic groups who live there.
- Civil War and weak economies are major challenges to the region today.
Main Idea 1: The history of the Balkan countries is one of conquest and conflict.

- Ancient Greeks founded colonies on the northern Black Sea coast that were later conquered by the Romans.

- When the Roman Empire divided into west and east in AD 300s, the Balkan Peninsula became part of the Eastern, or Byzantine, Empire.
  - Under Byzantine rule many people of the Balkans became Orthodox Christians.

- About 1,000 years later Muslim Ottoman Turks conquered the Byzantine Empire.
  - Under Ottoman rule many people of the Balkans became Muslims.

- In the 1800s the people of the region rose up, drove the Ottomans out, and then created their own kingdoms.
Eastern Europe

World War I and After

World War I

• Trouble between Balkan kingdoms and their neighbors led to World War I.
  – In the late 1800s the Austro-Hungarian Empire took over part of the peninsula.
  – In protest a man from Serbia shot the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, sparking the war.

After the War

• Europe’s leaders divided the peninsula into new countries.
  – Included Yugoslavia, which combined many formerly independent countries under one government
• Yugoslavia broke up in the 1990s because of conflict between ethnic and religious groups.
Main Idea 2: The cultures of the Balkan countries are shaped by the many ethnic groups who live there.

**Religion**
- Most people of the Balkans are Christian.
  - Most belong to the Orthodox Church.
  - Many Roman Catholics in western part.
  - Many countries have large Protestant communities.
- Because of the Ottoman’s long rule, Islam is also common.

**Language**
- Many languages are spoken in the Balkans.
  - Most are Slavic languages, related to Russian.
  - In Romania, language developed from Latin.
  - Some speak Germanic languages.
  - Some are unique to the region, such as Albanian and Romany.
Main Idea 3: Civil War and weak economies are major challenges to the region today.

- Countries of the Balkan Peninsula were once run by Communist governments.
- Weak economic planning has left most of them poor and struggling to improve their economies.
  - Poorest area in Europe today
- Many areas have struggled with religious and ethnic conflicts.
  - When Yugoslavia broke apart, members of the largest religious or ethnic group in each country tried to get rid of all other groups who lived there.
  - Ethnic cleansing, the effort to remove all members of a group from a country or region, resulted in terrible violence.
- In 1995, countries around the world sent troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina to help bring an end to fighting.
- When the fighting between groups ended, eight countries shared the Balkan Peninsula.
# Countries of the Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Albania</strong></td>
<td>poorest country in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Macedonia</strong></td>
<td>only country to peacefully break from Yugoslavia</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Slovenia</strong></td>
<td>first Balkan country to join the EU</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Croatia</strong></td>
<td>struggled with fighting between Ethnic Croats and Serbs after breaking from Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bosnia and Herzegovina</strong></td>
<td>at peace and working to rebuild after years of ethnic and religious violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serbia and Montenegro</strong></td>
<td>has seen fighting among ethnic groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Romania</strong></td>
<td>largest of the Balkan states; working to recover from years of bad government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bulgaria</strong></td>
<td>working to develop a capitalist economy</td>
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