

chapter 12

Empires of Eastern Europe: Austria-Hungary and Russia to 1914



Austria and Russia, the two great empires of Eastern Europe, shared certain important characteristics during this period of history. Both were members of the Holy Alliance, which had been established to preserve traditional monarchies like their own. Both were large, unwieldy landmasses (although Russia was much larger) and thus somewhat difficult to control. Both had large standing armies. Both suffered as a result of the Napoleonic Wars. Neither showed any willingness to establish any type of popular representation in government.

Although liberal conditions prevailed in Austria, the monarchy was conservative at heart. Emperor Joseph II did not dream of ruling as a constitutional monarch, nor of sharing his powers with other branches of a government. As a representative of the Hapsburgs, a family that had ruled European kingdoms for centuries, Joseph believed that he was the person best fitted to rule his own realm. Traditions of divine right, family honor, and class superiority all affected

his thinking. However, Joseph's actual policies were enlightened and benevolent; his subjects enjoyed many rights and freedoms that were unusual for the time.

Russia continued to develop along political and social lines that differed greatly from those prevalent in the nations of Western Europe. Because a Russian czar was an absolute ruler of the old style, the welfare of Russian society was heavily dependent on his personality—a factor that was less weighty in nations like France, where others exercised some restraints on the monarch's power. As had been the case in France, unlimited autocracy would eventually lead to revolution in Russia.

CHAPTER 12 OBJECTIVES

- Describe conditions in Austria under Joseph II.
- Explain how the Kingdom of Austria became the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- Describe political and social conditions in Russia during the nineteenth century.
- Describe the causes and effects of the 1905 Russian Revolution.

Chapter 12 Time Line

- 1804 Austrian Empire founded
- 1815 Congress of Vienna
- 1825 Nicholas I becomes czar of Russia
- 1853 Crimean War begins
- 1861 Emancipation of serfs in Russia
- 1867 Creation of dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary
- 1905 Russo-Japanese War; First Russian Revolution
- 1908 Austria-Hungary annexes Bosnia

Austria: From Kingdom to Empire

Austria was a kingdom within the Holy Roman Empire in 1780, when Joseph II Hapsburg assumed full power. Before that date he had ruled jointly with Empress Maria Theresa, his mother. (See Chapter 6.)

Both Maria Theresa and Joseph were enlightened monarchs, more forward-looking in their policies than most other European rulers. For example, they abolished judicial use of torture in 1776. They also cut back on the ostentatious spending that was a feature of most European courts, as exemplified by Versailles. Joseph especially preferred a simpler style of living. He often described himself as “first servant of the state.” However, being the “first servant” did not make Joseph less of an autocrat. The difference between him and a monarch like Peter the Great or Louis XIV (see Chapter 6) was that Joseph intended to be a benevolent despot. He believed that it was his duty to oversee his subjects just as a loving father would care for his family. Just as the father considered himself the wisest and most mature individual in the home, thus deserving of total authority, Joseph II believed his royal birth made him the person best fitted to run his own kingdom.

The Hapsburgs were generous patrons of the arts. Vienna, Austria’s largest and most important city, was perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in Europe in the late 1700s. Vienna saw the birth of the Rococo style of architecture, which was lighter and more fanciful than the Baroque style that had preceded it. Rococo buildings were easily recognized for their elaborate decoration, carvings, and trim; interiors were spacious and airy, furniture was delicate in shape and weight, and color schemes were light and pretty. Vienna was the center of the musical world, with composers Christoph Willibald Gluck, Franz Josef Haydn, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart all being major figures who enjoyed court patronage. Ludwig van Beethoven also spent much of his musical life in Vienna.

Maria Theresa and Joseph were both inclined toward social reform. When Joseph assumed full power in 1780, he quickly relaxed censorship, causing an immediate rise in the number of published books. In 1781, he abolished serfdom throughout Austria; he also took charge of the Austrian civil service, reorganizing it into an efficiently functioning bureaucracy.

Joseph II was a Roman Catholic like all the Hapsburgs before him; however, unlike many of his predecessors, he understood the importance of tolerance in creating a stable realm. In 1781, Joseph issued the Toleration Edicts, which

expanded civil rights for Protestants, Orthodox Catholics, and Jews throughout Austria (although social customs continued to pressure Austria's Jewish citizens to assimilate). Joseph closed numerous monasteries throughout the empire and used their funds to reorganize and improve the Church organization, bringing it under the authority of the government. In a true union of church and state, the clergy became civil servants, their salaries paid by the government. Joseph also instituted a mandatory level of education for priests.

Among his other social reforms, Joseph founded Austria's General Hospital—the first of its kind in Europe—and one of Europe's first free public school systems. He passed agricultural reforms that made conditions much easier for individual small farmers. It was no wonder that ordinary Austrians, particularly those of the poorer classes, came to regard Joseph as their defender and protector.

Given his liberal social policies, it is not surprising that Joseph aroused strong opposition from the Austrian nobility. The aristocrats did not welcome his attempts to establish a certain measure of equality in society; they preferred to keep their special privileges and status for themselves. The Church hierarchy did not offer Joseph much support either, resenting what they perceived as interference. In 1790, Joseph reluctantly revoked numerous reforms in the Hungarian region, realizing how unpopular they were with the powerful classes.

Upon his death in 1790, Joseph II was succeeded by his brother, who would rule as Leopold II. Leopold had ruled Tuscany as its Grand Duke since 1765. He shared the reforming instincts of his mother and brother but had generally instituted new programs more slowly and cautiously. Leopold restored certain features of pre-Josephine Austria, particularly as regarded special privileges for the landlords of great estates.

Francis II succeeded his father Leopold II on the latter's death in 1792. By this time, the French Revolution had made all hereditary monarchs rather apprehensive. Francis was more openly conservative than either his father or his uncle; however, he did not undo the progress that had been made toward modernization. In fact, he oversaw the passage of advanced, enlightened criminal and civil law codes in 1803 and 1811.

Francis was distracted from domestic programs by a 1792 declaration of war from France. The fighting lasted off and on for nearly twenty years, with Austria coming off the worse throughout. In 1792, France's primary goal was to subdue Belgium and the Rhine region; it did not issue direct threats against Austria until 1800.

The Kingdom of Austria officially became the Austrian Empire in 1804, the year in which Napoleon declared himself emperor of the French. Many hereditary European rulers took this as a personal affront, since Napoleon was not of royal blood and therefore, in their eyes, had no right to assume such a title. Francis's claim to the title "Emperor of Austria" was largely a symbolic gesture, intended as a reminder of the long-standing status of the Hapsburgs as Holy Roman emperors and kings. Francis's assumption of the title did not change Austria's type of government, nor its national borders.

In 1805, Napoleon and the Grand Army marched into Vienna; later that year they won a major victory at the town of Austerlitz. As part of the treaty that ended this stage of the fighting, Austria gained the territory of Salzburg; in return, however, it gave up its rights to other territories, and Francis II finally, officially, and permanently dissolved the Holy Roman Empire (which had existed only as a formality since the days of the Thirty Years' War).

By 1810 Austria had practically been reduced to the status of a French satellite, and in 1812 Napoleon commandeered thirty thousand Austrians to serve in the Grand Army in its march on Russia. Naturally, Austrians were deeply hostile toward France and its rule; they felt no incentive to serve Napoleon. The fact that the Grand Army had comparatively few French troops is one reason for its downfall in Russia. By 1912, it was composed largely of German, Italian, Polish, Czech, and Austrian soldiers from countries Napoleon had subdued.

The Congress of Vienna made the Austrian Empire a unified, contiguous landmass for the first time in its history. This new Austrian Empire included Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, the Czech states of Bohemia and Moravia, and the Italian states of Lombardy and Venetia. Austria was also given the responsibility of overseeing the confederation of German states created at the Congress.

Because the Austrian Empire was not culturally homogeneous, the force of nationalism created political and social instability. Too many small ethnic groups within the empire wanted self-determination. Both the Italians and the Hungarians rose up in 1848. Although both rebellions were crushed by virtue of the Austrian state's military superiority, it was only a matter of time before some measure of independence would become a fact. In 1867, Austria and Hungary formally declared a dual monarchy; from that time, it was known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria would rule both kingdoms, and joint ministries oversaw the foreign affairs and finances of both kingdoms, but Hungary had a separate constitution and a separate legislature.

Having gained its own independence, Hungary now found itself in the same position as Austria: it was a large nation with a diverse population. Hungary granted Croatia a measure of self-determination in 1878. In Austria, ethnic Germans in Bohemia and Moravia were satisfied with the status quo, since Austria was officially a German-speaking nation, but ethnic Czechs in the region demanded greater independence.

Discussion among the Great Powers in 1878 led to Austria's making the Balkan nation of Bosnia into a protectorate. In 1908, in a move to protect Austrian control of certain trade routes, the empire officially annexed the protectorate. Bosnia's large and vocal Serbian population immediately began trying to regain Bosnian independence. This strong Serbian nationalism would contribute largely to the outbreak of World War I in 1914 (see Chapter 15).

The Russian Empire

If Austrian monarchs were conservative, Russian monarchs were far more so. The Russian government had been autocratic from the time the nation first drove the Tatars from power, and it would remain that way in the nineteenth century despite the passage of some degree of social reform. Liberalism was strong among Russian intellectuals, but they had little influence or power compared to the nobles, military officers, and high-ranking clergy, who were mainly conservative.

By 1818, serfs in the Baltic provinces had been emancipated. Alexander I then ordered his aides to draw up a plan for abolishing serfdom throughout Russia, but the idea was so unpopular that he abandoned it by 1820. However, the serfs did achieve some rights and privileges in the 1820s and 1830s: a measure of self-government, village schools, and health clinics. As was so often the case in Russia, all these reforms were chaotic in their administration, however neat they appeared on paper. Serfs in the Baltic were given no land, so in fact they gained only the freedom to move.

Alexander's brothers, Constantine and Nicholas, were each in a position to succeed him. Constantine, the elder of the two, had no desire to rule. He renounced his position in the line of succession in 1822, leaving Nicholas to become czar in 1825. Nicholas I soon proved himself an old-style autocrat, very different from his generally liberal brother Alexander I. Nicholas believed in Russian nationalism, Orthodox Christianity, keeping the lower classes in what he regarded as their proper place, and the rule of the absolute monarch

throughout Europe. Under his rule, only the nobility could attend secondary schools and universities, and the civil rights of religious and ethnic minorities within Russia were curtailed. In foreign affairs, Nicholas supported any monarch facing a popular uprising.

Both Alexander I and Nicholas I oversaw major territorial expansion. Russia had completed its westward march with the partitions of Poland, but it continued to expand to the south, reaching the Aral Sea in 1853 and as far south as the Afghanistan border in 1885. Russia also expanded south on its eastern border, taking over territory on the Pacific that allowed it to establish the port city of Vladivostok; for the first time Russia gained access to the East by water. The completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in 1904 made overland travel from Vladivostok to Moscow possible. These two developments were extremely important for trade.

In 1853, war broke out in the Crimea, a region controlled by the Ottoman Turks on the coast of the Black Sea. Nicholas I started the war with two goals. First, he wanted to take over Turkish-controlled provinces along the southern reaches of the Danube River. Second, he wanted to seize control of certain "Christian shrines" within the Ottoman Empire. The Russian invasion of the Crimea aroused the opposition of Britain and France, who had their own Mediterranean interests to protect. Historians agree that the Crimean War was disastrously mismanaged on all sides, particularly by the British commanders. Russia concluded a peace treaty with the Turks in 1856, but it did not last. Russia and Turkey were at war again by 1877.

Nicholas I died before the Crimean War was over. His son and successor Alexander II would rule until 1881. Alexander understood that the age of the autocratic ruler was over; he was determined to emancipate the serfs. This was a long and complex process. Since serfs owned no land, the government would have to provide it for them at the start. Changes to the judicial system and to local government would be needed. In addition, landowners argued that emancipation would deprive them of valuable property; Alexander and his aides would have to find a way to compensate them for the loss. In 1861, the serfs were officially freed from bondage.

Although Alexander ruled as a moderate, many liberals in Russian society felt that his reforms did not go far enough. During the 1870s, violent demonstrations became common as students and other liberals tried to gain support for their political cause. This period of unrest ended abruptly in 1881 when a bomb hurled by an anarchist in a crowd exploded at the czar's feet. Severely wounded, Alexander died later that day.

Alexander III succeeded his father, Alexander II. He reacted to his father's assassination by suppressing all liberal tendencies in society, rather than giving in to liberal demands. His policies included strengthening the central bureaucracy, extending the powers of the police, and revoking freedom of the press.

The year 1905 was pivotal for Russia. The country lost the Russo-Japanese War, in which Japan flatly put a stop to Russian expansion into China. It was also the year of a major popular uprising that would eventually culminate in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

The 1905 revolution had several contributing causes. First, liberal, Marxist, and socialist ideas had traveled eastward to Russia, whose intellectuals and workers had enthusiastically espoused them. Second, the government had instituted widespread industrialization in Russia without understanding the consequences to either the peasants or the workers. Third, a severe famine in 1891 had taken its toll on the people.

Workers throughout Russia went on strike in 1905, establishing soviets—the word means “workers’ councils”—everywhere. These bodies, intended to serve as local governments, were based on the Marxist ideal of turning society over to the rule of the workers. They did not last, but would return in 1917. Peasants also rose up in fury over social conditions, especially the issue of land ownership. All of these issues would play into the Bolshevik Revolution and the end of the empire in 1917.

QUIZ

1. What was the major effect of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905?
 - A. The serfs of Russia gained their independence.
 - B. Russia established a port on its eastern border.
 - C. Russia's expansion into China was halted.
 - D. Russia annexed Japan.
2. The Russian _____ strongly opposed Alexander I's plan to emancipate the serfs.
 - A. nobility
 - B. civil service
 - C. legislature
 - D. military

- 3. What was the effect of Austria's Toleration Edicts of 1781?**
 - A. the suppression of nationalism within the empire
 - B. the establishment of universal free public education
 - C. government regulation of wages and worker safety in the factories
 - D. expanded civil rights for religious minorities

- 4. What was one reason for Vienna's status as Europe's most cosmopolitan city in the late 1700s?**
 - A. opposition from the clergy
 - B. royal patronage and support of the arts
 - C. the excellence of the Austrian education system
 - D. the establishment of the General Hospital

- 5. France declared war on Austria in 1792 with the purpose of**
 - A. recruiting soldiers for the Grand Army.
 - B. securing its alliance against Russia.
 - C. conquering Belgium and the Rhine region.
 - D. creating a joint Austro-French kingdom.

- 6. What effect did the Congress of Vienna have on Austria?**
 - A. It transformed Austria into the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary.
 - B. It unified Austria into one contiguous landmass.
 - C. It placed Austria under the authority of the Confederation of the Rhine.
 - D. It imposed liberal policies upon Austrian subjects.

- 7. Which best describes the trend or pattern of government in Russia during the nineteenth century?**
 - A. Liberal czars alternated with reactionary ones.
 - B. Reactionary czars ruled throughout the era.
 - C. Liberal czars ruled throughout the era.
 - D. Government gradually became more democratic.

- 8. All these factors helped bring about the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution except**
 - A. the spread of liberal and Marxist ideas.
 - B. the reactionary policies of the czar.
 - C. the effect of industrialization on the peasants.
 - D. the emancipation of the serfs.

9. _____ joined the Turks in opposition to Russia during the Crimean War.
- A. Britain and France
 - B. Austria and France
 - C. Austria
 - D. Poland
10. Which aspect of Joseph II's reign demonstrates his conservative views?
- A. establishment of a General Hospital and public school system
 - B. passage of the Toleration Edicts
 - C. belief in the monarch's fitness to rule absolutely
 - D. patronage of the arts