Chapter 9: The Emergence of Austria, Prussia, and Russia

In Central and Eastern Europe, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of three major powers: Austria, Prussia, and Russia.
In the late seventeenth century, the Hapsburg family continued to control the title of Holy Roman emperor. While the Holy Roman Empire contained within its borders most of the German lands of central Europe, it was a loose union of over three hundred virtually independent states. However, the Hapsburgs possessed a power base within their own personal domains, which included Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary. Hapsburg power and influence in Europe was based on these domains, rather than on their possession of the imperial title.
In northern Germany, the Hohenzollern family began to create a strong power base of its own in Brandenburg, one of the states of the
Holy Roman Empire. By the early eighteenth century, the Hohenzollerns had made Prussia into one of the major powers of Europe.
Farther to the east, in Russia, the Romanov dynasty came to power in 1613. Michael Romanov and his successors established a powerful monarchy, and by the time of Peter the Great, Russia had entered the ranks of the great powers of Europe.

The Emergence of Austria

The Austrian Hapsburgs faced many problems in consolidating power in their domains, which varied considerably in language and traditions. While Austria was inhabited primarily by Germans, the Czechs were the dominant nationality in Bohemia. The Magyars were predominant in Hungary. In addition, the Hapsburg domains included Slovaks, Croatians, Slovenes, Rumanians, Italians, and by the late eighteenth century, Poles.

Leopold I (r. 1657-1705)

In the late seventeenth century, Leopold I successfully resisted both the Ottoman Empire and King Louis XIV of France. In 1683, the Turks laid siege to Vienna. In September, following a two-months' siege, a force of imperial troops and a Polish army, led by Poland's king, John Sobieski (r. 1674-1696), came to the aid of Vienna, and the Turks were driven back. The Hapsburg army then took the offensive against the Turks, capturing Budapest, Hungary's capital, in 1686, Under the terms of the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), Leopold acquired virtually all of Hungary. Leopold succeeded in imposing his authority over Hungary's Magyar aristocracy.

The war against the Turks marked the emergence of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736) as the Hapsburgs' most eminent general. In 1704, during the War of the Spanish Succession, Prince Eugene joined forces with the Duke of Marlborough, his English ally, to win a decisive victory over the French at the Battle of Blenheim. This victory, coming on the eve of Leopold 1's death in 1705, confirmed Austria's position as one of the great powers of Europe.

Charles VI (r. 1711-1740) and the Pragmatic Sanction

At his death in 1705, Leopold I was succeeded by Joseph I (r. 1705-1711), who continued his predecessor's policies. Prince Eugene won additional victories over the French as the War of the Spanish Succession entered its final years. In 1711, Charles VI succeeded his brother as Holy Roman emperor and ruler of Austria. Although the Hapsburgs failed in their effort to prevent a Bourbon from acquiring the Spanish throne, the peace settlement of 1713-1714 awarded the Hapsburgs the Spanish Netherlands and Spain's holdings in Italy as compensation.
Charles VI failed to produce a male heir and to avoid a conflict over the succession, sought to win the support of his nobility and the great powers of Europe for the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713. The Pragmatic Sanction provided for the inheritance of the Hapsburg holdings by his daughter, Maria Theresa. Following the death of Charles VI, however, Frederick the Great of Prussia invaded Austrian Silesia, beginning the War of the Austrian Succession.

Maria Theresa (r. 1740-1780)

During the War of the Austrian Succession from 1740 to 1748, Maria Theresa successfully defended her right to inherit the Austrian Hapsburg domains, although she lost Silesia to the Prussians. While her husband, Francis of Lorraine, received the title of Holy Roman Emperor Francis I (r. 1745-1765), he took relatively little interest in the government, leaving Maria Theresa in control.
The war convinced Maria Theresa of the need to extend her control more completely over her domains. Although she did not attempt to abolish the regional diets dominated by the local nobility, she succeeded in stripping them of most of their administrative functions, creating a centralized bureaucracy to control local affairs. German became the language of administration throughout Austria, and taxes were imposed on the nobility and clergy. Although Maria Theresa was

personally devout, she established the state's control over the administration of the Roman Catholic Church.

Joseph II (r. 1765-1790)

Maria Theresa's son, Joseph II, was elected Holy Roman emperor on his father's death in 1765. His personal rule of Austria did not begin, however, until his mother's death in 1780.

As Austria's ruler, Joseph II sought to govern in the spirit of enlightened despotism, initiating a far-reaching program of reforms. His goal was to modernize his instruments of government in an effort to increase the crown's authority over the diverse Hapsburg domains and in particular, to establish royal power more firmly over the church and the nobility.

Joseph II and the Catholic Church

While Joseph II was a practicing Catholic, he granted limited religious toleration to his other Christian subjects and removed some of the restrictions on the Jews. He abolished several hundred monasteries and convents and confiscated much of the land of the church, arguing that the church's use of this land was unproductive. Revenues that had previously gone to the church now went into the: state treasury, and the clergy became, in effect, employees of the state. He reduced the power of the papacy in Austria by requiring that all communications to and from Rome be forwarded through the government in Vienna. In addition, bishops and other high-ranking churchmen were required to swear obedience to the ruler.

Reforms of Joseph II

To promote trade, Joseph II eliminated many internal tariffs and encouraged road building and improvements in river transportation. He opposed serfdom, in the belief that, if the peasants were free, they would become more productive. A series of decrees issued in the early 1780s freed the serfs in Austria, Bohemia, Hungary, and Transylvania. In 1789, he abolished the robot, which obliged peasants to perform services for the landowning nobility. The service obligation was replaced with a tax. Only a part of the proceeds would go to the landowners; the state took the balance.

Leopold II (r. 1790-1792) and the End of Reform

The sweeping reforms of Joseph II came with little preparation and created much turmoil. In many areas, the peasants rose up in revolt to defend their new rights and to claim others, while the nobility protested reforms that worked to their disadvantage. Following Joseph II's death, the new emperor, Leopold II, repealed most of Joseph's reforms in an effort to conciliate the nobility. Serfdom and other feudal obligations, including the *robot*, remained in effect in most of the Hapsburg domains until 1848. Any hope for renewed reform were dashed by Leopold II's reactionary successor, who ruled first as Holy Roman Emperor Francis II (r. 1792-1806) and then, following Napoleon's abolition of the Holy Roman Empire, as the first emperor of Austria, Francis I (r. 1806-1835).

The Emergence of Prussia

In 1415, the Hohenzollern family began to rule as electors of Brandenburg in northern Germany. The Hohenzollerns gradually increased their holdings so that by the late seventeenth century their domains were second in size only to those of the Hapsburgs among the princes of the Holy Roman Empire. The Hohenzollerns now confronted the task of bringing their scattered lands together to form a single unified state.

Frederick William, the Great Elector (r. 1640-1688)

Frederick William, the Great Elector, began his rule at a time when the Hohenzollern domains had been devastated by the Thirty Years' War, which ended in 1648. Beginning the process of creating a modem state, the Great Elector reduced the autonomy of the Junkers (the nobility) and the estates (the nobles' assemblies). He established the civil service and the army as cornerstones of state power, compelling the nobility to pay taxes to support the army. He did not interfere, however, with the Junkers' complete control over the serfs who worked their land or with their dominance over the towns. Furthermore, the burden of taxes fell most heavily on the peasants and townspeople.

Alliance with the Junkers

The Great Elector recruited members of the nobility to serve in the civil service and as army officers. The Junkers came to dominate both the higher ranks of the civil service and the officer corps of the army. In this way, the power of the Hohenzollerns came to be based on the ruler's alliance with the aristocracy rather than on his opposition to it, as was the case in France and other countries.

Religious Toleration

In religious affairs, the Great Elector practiced a policy of toleration, welcoming to his domain some 20,000 French Huguenots, many Polish Jews, and other refugees from persecution..

Frederick I (r. 1688-1713)

Frederick I proved to be uncharacteristic of the Hohenzollerns, who typically focused their attention on the army and administration. A patron of the arts and learning, Frederick enjoyed living in luxury. He can, however, be credited with one major achievement in the development of Hohenzollern power. During the War of the Spanish Succession, he supported the Hapsburg Holy Roman emperor, who permitted him to assume the title

King in Prussia. On his death in 1713, Frederick I passed the royal title to his son.

Frederick William I (r. 1713-1740)

Frederick William I replaced the extravagances of his father with a policy of austerity, imposing strict economies and practicing sound management in an effort to maximize Prussia's limited resources. This policy led to a substantial increase in the state's income.

Increase of Military Power

Known as the "Sergeant King," Frederick William more than doubled the size of the Prussian army from about 40,000 in 1713 to over 80,000 in 1740. Prussia thus came to have the third- or fourth-largest army in Europe, although it was thirteenth in the size of its population. The army officers increasingly became a privileged social class, and the officer corps attracted the most talented sons of the Junkers.

While Frederick William was clearly a militarist, he sought to avoid war. The army was, above all, a sign of Prussian power rather than an instrument of aggression.

Frederick the Great (r. 1740-1786)

Frederick 11, who became known as Frederick the Great, established Russia's position among the great powers of Europe. Almost immediately after becoming king in 1740, he invaded Silesia, thereby beginning the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Frederick succeeded in retaining Silesia. Later in his reign, in 1772, he participated in the first partition of Poland (see Chapter 10).

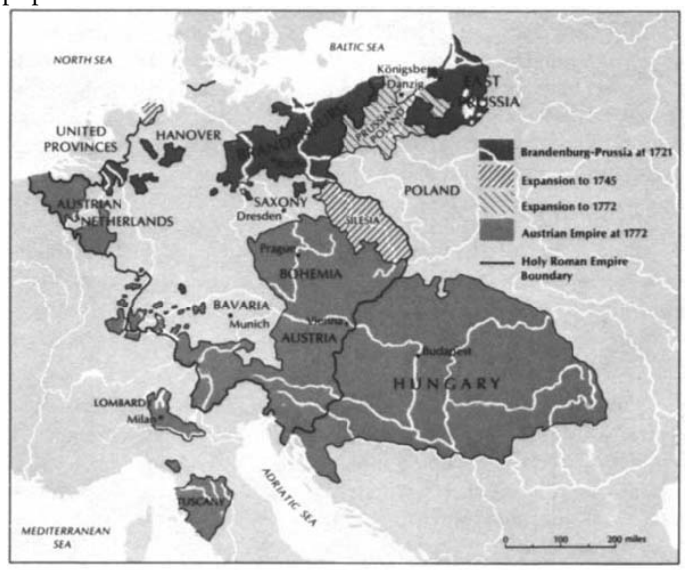
Reform Program

A successful enlightened despot, Frederick the Great was familiar with the ideas of the eighteenth-century reformers and a friend of Voltaire. His reform program was designed above all to increase the power of the Prussian monarchy. Modernizing his government, Frederick created a number of new agencies, including the bureaus of commerce and industry, excise and tolls, mines, and forestry. With the assistance of French experts, he reorganized the system of indirect taxes, which soon provided the state with more revenue than direct taxation on individuals. Frederick directed the codification of Prussian law and abolished the use of torture in legal proceedings.

Economic and Religious Policies

Frederick actively promoted economic development, encouraging the expansion of industry in Silesia and elsewhere. Tariffs were imposed to protect Prussia's young industries, while internal barriers to trade were reduced. The Bank of Berlin made credit available for economic development, and new canals were built. Swamps were drained to make more land available for agriculture. New crops were introduced, and for the first time, potatoes anti turnips were grown extensively.

In religious policy, Frederick the Great permitted Catholics to settle in predominantly Lutheran areas and respected the rights of the predominantly Catholic population of Silesia.



Prussia 1721–1772 and the Hapsburg Empire

The Emergence of Russia

In 1613, the boyars (Russian nobility) elected Michael Romanov (r. 1613-1654) as tsar. The Romanovs continued to rule Russia until the last tsar, Nicholas II, was overthrown in 1917. Michael Romanov and his successors reestablished stability following the turmoil of the Time of Troubles (1584-1613), although the boyars continued to challenge the tsar's authority, as did the *streltsi*, the guards of the Moscow garrison.

Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725)

Peter I, known to history as Peter the Great, became tsar at the age of ten, as co-ruler with his sickly half-brother, Ivan V (r. 1682-1696). Following Ivan V's death in 1696, Peter assumed full power.

As a young man, Peter was fascinated with Western Europe. In 1697, he became the first tsar ever to travel in the West, visiting Prussia, the Netherlands, and England, where he studied military organization, shipbuilding, commerce, and finance.

The *streltsi* took advantage of Peter's absence and rebelled in 1698. Rushing back to Russia, the tsar brutally suppressed the revolt. Some 1,200rebels were executed, and their corpses were placed on display as a warning to other would-be rebels.

Peter's visit to Western Europe increased his determination to westernize and modernize his country. He moved to establish his control over the boyars, and he set out to promote economic development, strengthen Russia's armed forces, reorganize the central administration, and extend state control over the Russian Orthodox Church.

Peter the Great and the Boyars

Peter began his campaign for westernization by ordering the boyars to be clean shaven and to adopt Western dress. He also ended the traditional seclusion of upper-class Russian women and demanded that they participate in social functions with men.

Peter insisted that the nobility serve the state in either the civil service or the military. In 1722, he issued the Table of Ranks, which provided that social position and privileges be based on an individual's rank in the bureaucracy or the military, rather than on his noble status.

Peter the Great and Economic Development

To promote the modernization of Russia's economy, Peter ordered the boyars to send their sons to Western Europe to learn technical skills, and he encouraged Western European craftsmen and technicians to settle in Russia. He established schools and hospitals and founded the Russian Academy of Science.

Peter provided subsidies to assist the expansion of industry by private operators and established state mines and factories to insure adequate supplies for his military endeavors.

Peter's westernization program and his wars were expensive, forcing the tsar to use every available means to raise money. He established a head tax on every male, known as the soul tax, and collected the income from monopolies on a wide variety of products, including caviar and salt.

While westernization modernized Russia, it also divided the Russian people between the small, semi-westernized upper class and the mass of the people, who were primarily peasants living in poverty and ignorance.

Peter the Great and the Administration

In reorganizing his central administration, Peter followed the model of Sweden, where government departments were headed by colleges consisting of several individuals rather than a single minister. Peter created nine colleges of eleven members each to administer foreign affairs, the army, the navy, commerce, mines and manufactures, income, expenditures, justice, and control. He also established a Senate of nine members, with the authority to supervise the administration and direct its operations when the tsar was absent. In 1711, Peter took a new title: Emperor of All Russia.

Peter the Great and the Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church was extremely conservative in both its theology and its attitudes toward westernization, To bring the church more completely under secular control, Peter abolished the office of patriarch. In place of the patriarchate, Peter established an agency that became known as the Holy Synod. The Holy Synod consisted of a committee of bishops, headed by a layman, the procurator-general.

The Wars of Peter the Great

In an attempt to gain territory on the Black Sea and the Baltic, Peter the Great fought wars against both the Ottoman Empire and Sweden. After going to war against the Turks in 1695, the Russians captured Azov on the Black Sea in 1696. In 171 1, however, the Turks regained the port.

Peter was more successful in his war against Sweden, the Great Northern War, which began in 1700. Sweden's King Charles XII (r. 1697-1718) quickly defeated the Russians at the Battle of Narva, but the Swedes failed to follow up this victory. In 1709, Peter won a major victory over the Swedes at the Battle of Poltava, but the war continued for several more years. The Peace of Nystad of 1721 confirmed Russia's acquisition of several Swedish provinces on the Baltic, including Karelia, Ingria, Estonia, and Livonia. While the war was still in progress, in 1703, Peter established his new capital of St. Petersburg on the Gulf of Finland. St. Petersburg served as Peter's "window on the West," a symbol of Russia's new Western orientation.

The Succession to Peter the Great

Peter the Great was hostile to his son, Alexis, and had him imprisoned in 1718. Alexis died in prison under mysterious circumstances. Prior to his own death in 1725, Peter failed to designate a successor. For the next generation, the army and the nobility controlled the succession. A series of rulers proved ineffective, and the power of the crown declined. In 1762, the weak and incompetent Peter III became tsar. After only a few months on the throne, he was overthrown and murdered with the approval of his wife, Catherine, a German princess from Pomerania.

Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796)

Like Joseph II of Austria and Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine admired the reform ideas of the Enlightenment (see Chapter 12). She corresponded actively with Voltaire and other prominent eighteenth-century thinkers. Nevertheless, she did little to reform or modernize Russia. In 1767, Catherine established a Legislative Commission of over five hundred members to propose reforms in the legal system. The commission represented all classes in Russian society except the serfs, and in their deliberations, each faction seemed intent on promoting its own interests. The Legislative Commission accomplished little, and Catherine dismissed it in 1768.

In economic affairs, Catherine continued the program of development initiated by Peter the Great. She reduced internal barriers to trade, while Russia's exports of flax, furs, grain, and naval stores increased.

Catherine the Great and the Nobility

During the years following the death of Peter the Great, the nobility had escaped many of the restrictions that Peter had imposed on them. Their obligation to provide service to the state had been reduced, while their control over the serfs had been increased. Although Catherine desired to increase the crown's power, she owed her position to the nobility. She rewarded her supporters with grants of state lands inhabited by serfs who now became the property of the nobles.

From 1773 to 1775, Emelian Pugachev, a Don Cossack, led a great serf revolt in the Volga region. After Pugachev's capture and beheading, Catherine reorganized local government, creating fifty provinces in place of the twenty former provinces. The local nobility controlled the governments of the new provinces.

The Charter of the Nobility, issued in 1785, formally recognized the rights and privileges of the nobility, including exemption from taxes and military service and giving them total control over their estates and serfs.

The Wars of Catherine the Great

From 1769 to 1774, Russia fought a successful war against the Ottoman Empire. Under the terms of the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji (1774), Russia acquired most of the Ottoman lands on the northern coast of the Black Sea, as well as full access to the Turkish Straits joining the Black and Aegean seas. The treaty recognized the independence of the Crimea, which Russia proceeded to annex in 1783. The treaty also contained a vague clause recognizing Russia as the protector of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman sultan. This provided Russia with a pretext for later interventions in the Ottoman Empire. In its second war against the Turks from 1787 to 1792, Russia pushed its southwestern frontier to the Dniester River, acquiring the Turks' remaining lands along the northern Black Sea coast. Catherine also participated with the Prussians and Austrians in the partitions of Poland (see Chapter 10).

By the late eighteenth century, the Austrian Hapsburgs, Prussian Hohenzollerns, and Russian Romanovs had developed their countries into great powers in Central and Eastern Europe.

Three monarchs – Joseph II of Austria, Frederick the Great of Prussia, and Catherine the Great of Russia – are often described as enlightened despots. The term suggests that these absolute monarchs sought to use their power to carry out reforms, making their governments more modern and more efficient, while at the same time making their own authority more absolute.

While the reforms of Joseph II were progressive, they failed to become a permanent feature of Austrian life because they lacked any real base of support.

Frederick the Great pursued enlightened policies, modernizing the structure of his government, promoting economic development, and practicing toleration in religious affairs. Nevertheless, Frederick's reforms were designed primarily to enhance his own power and that of the Prussian state, rather than to promote individual freedom.

Of the three enlightened despots, Catherine the Great is least deserving of the title. Despite her interest in Enlightenment ideas, Catherine's position depended on the support of the reactionary nobility, and she felt compelled to curry favor with them. In Russia, Peter the Great was far more an enlightened despot than Catherine.