

CHAPTER 17 SECTION ONE

Landforms and Rivers

Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus cover about 12% of the world's land area. Russia extends more than 6,000 miles. The huge country stretches across **Eurasia**. A name given to Europe and Asia when they are considered one land mass. Russia is the world's largest country in area.

The Ural Mts. Divide the region. Areas west of the Ural Mts are in Europe. The lands east of the Ural Mts are in Asia. The part of Russia east of the mountains is called **Siberia**. In the Caucasus Mts of southern region are the countries of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Mount Elbrus is the highest elevation of the region at 18,510 ft. An active tectonic zone the Caucasus region suffers many severe earthquakes.

Ice-age glaciers and long-term erosion shaped the broad plains that are region's major landform. European areas share the Northern European Plain. Belarus has no point over 1,135ft above sea level. **Pripet Marshes** are the largest swamplands in Europe.

Russia's Ural Mts are more like rolling hills. West of the Urals, the gently rolling terrain of the Volga River basin dominates the heart of Russia. East of the Urals is the thinly populated West Siberian Plain. The Ob River creates a huge swamp area there. Beyond Central Siberian Plateau, are snowy mountain ranges. These are active volcanoes of the Kamchatka Peninsula.

The Don, Dnieper and Volga are three of the largest south-flowing rivers in the European region. These are important shipping channels and they also provide hydroelectricity. The major Siberian rivers are the Ob, Yenisey, and Lena. These flow northward to the Arctic Ocean. Russia's Lake Baikal is the deepest lake in the world. It holds about one-fifth of the world's freshwater. It is also one of the most polluted waters in the world.

Climate and Vegetation

Much of the country lies in the humid continental, sub arctic and tundra climate regions. During the years five coldest months, rivers, canals and seaports freeze. In the region's northern areas **permafrost** is widespread and deep. Harsh conditions prevail in the areas eastern two-thirds. Siberia's winters often bring temperatures below -40 degrees. The lowest record temperature was -90 degrees.

The region's European third has the mildest climates. The soil is better suited for agriculture and settlements. The cold climate and small amount of warm coastline reduce Russia's access to the sea. The Arctic Ocean can freeze all the way to Russia's northern shores. Ships and barge traffic there require using icebreakers.

Differences in climate cause plant life to vary from north to south. Tundra vegetation grows along the northern coast. Shrubs, mosses and wildflowers are common there. To the south is the taiga, a forest of mainly evergreen trees that cover half of Russia. Further south, in Belarus and in European Russia deciduous and coniferous forest cover the land.

Still farther south is the drier grassland known as the steppe. Rich soil called **chernozem** (black earth) has built up on the steppe. It has become one of the world's major grain producing areas.

Natural Resources

Russia's forest, energy, and mineral resources are among the richest in the world. The taiga provides wood for building and paper pulp. Eastern Siberia also has gold and diamond mines. Coal, hydroelectricity, natural gas and oil are the region's main energy resources. All the countries around the sea are tapping huge oil reserves in the Caspian Sea area. Oil and gas fields between the Volga River and the Ural Mts have been crucial to the region's development. Large reserves east of the Urals and Ob River basin now supply most of Russia's oil and gas. Sakhalin Island and Kamchatka Peninsula also have geothermal energy that is used. Russia and Ukraine have many large coal mines. The region is also rich in metals, such as copper, gold, iron ore, manganese, nickel, and platinum.

CHAPTER 17 SECTION 2

History and Culture

The root of the Russian Empire lies in the grassy plains of the south. For thousands of years, people moved across the steppe. The main people were the Slavs. In 800 AD Kiev became the most important center of trade. These people were Scandinavian traders called Rus. Russia comes from this word. Merchants traveled northward building fortified cities. Moscow was one. The walled area they built was called the **Kremlin**. Today the Kremlin is the home of churches, palaces and government buildings. During the 1100s the Eastern Orthodox Church was the religion of Kiev, later was later changed to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Conquest and Expansion

The Mongols remained strong in the south, but to the north an emerging power centered in Muscovy was starting. In 1547 Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) crowned himself Czar (caesar/emperor) of Russia. Cossacks, who were Russian fur traders established settlements in an eastward direction. Czar Peter the Great in the early 1700s conquered lands in the Baltic region and tried to westernize his nation. In the late 1700 Catherine the Great gained lands along the Black Sea coast. She also conquered the Muslim groups of central Asia and the Caucasus region. By 1860 Russia had reached its greatest size only to lose land after being defeated by the Japanese in 1904–1905 war.

Czar's Decline

Russia had a feudal society until 1860 when the system was abandoned for industrialization. Though the serfs were now free their poverty was still great. The nation experienced food shortages, economic depression, lost land in the war with Japan, and great casualties in WWI. After the war with Japan the people rebelled only to be brutally crushed by the Czar's army. The Czar was forced to abdicate in 1917; a Republic style government was setup but was weak. In

October of 1917 the Bolsheviks overthrew the government – **Russian Revolution**. They then killed Czar Nicolas II and his family.

The Soviet Union

Vladimir Lenin wanted to remake Russia under the philosophy of Karl Marx a German philosopher. His teachings brought communism to Russia. The outward look the workers would elect a local governing and lawmaking body called a **Soviet**. The empire was renamed the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic. This union was made up of 15 republics.

The Soviet Union was a one-party system controlled by the communist. Lenin established a totalitarian state, and after his death Joseph Stalin seized control in 1924. Stalin's brutal dictatorship lasted until 1953.

Soviet economic planners set up a command economy. They also followed a policy of autarky. Under this system a country tries to produce all the goods that it needs. The government ran large state farms, but agriculture faced constant problems that lead to low food production. Millions of peasants died of starvation or in prison during the forced change to the new farming methods.

Personal freedoms were strictly limited. People who disagreed with the Communist were jailed. Under Stalin, millions were sent to labor camps (prisons). These camps were called gulag. Soviet leaders also tried to stop religious worship. Churches were either closed or destroyed.

When Gorbachev was appointed in 1985 as the communist party leader he began to bring political and economic reform to the USSR. Resistance to his changes led to an attempted overthrow that caused a political collapse of the USSR in 1991. Each of the 15 Republics declared their independence.

Today political leaders are freely elected from the population. Religious freedoms have also been expanded, and the economic system has changed from communism to capitalism.

Culture

Russia, Ukraine and Belarus share a strong sense of cultural identity. There are many similarities in language, religion, and customs.

Language is an important source of national identity. At least 85% of Russians are Slavs and speak Slavic languages. The Slavic languages are written in Cyrillic alphabet. 95% of Ukrainians and about 98% of Belarusians are also Slavic. As the Russian Empire grew, it pulled in many non-Slavic peoples. These varied ethnic groups have their own customs and languages. Still in many of these areas Russian is a majority language. Some areas of ethnic control are fighting for independence. Chechnya has been in civil war with Russia for the last 7 years.

Religion is also varied throughout the country. Russian Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Muslim, and Judaism. These are a few of the religious background of the nation. There are some people who practice Buddhism.

Settlements

25% of Russia's land area is in Europe. About 80% of the population is living in this area. The population structure is declining. Some reasons for this are high death rate, heavy smoking, alcohol abuse, and inadequate health care.

CHAPTER 17 SECTION 3

Economic Development

Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine are changing their economies to compete in new markets. The countries are working to develop **light industries**. These type of industries focus on the production of consumer goods.

Moscow Region

Moscow, with its huge Kremlin, has symbolized Russia for centuries. The city became the home of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1300s and Russia's capital in the 1400s. Moscow is Russia's most important economic region. It is the national center of communications, education, culture, finance, politics, and transportation.

St. Petersburg Region

St. Petersburg represents the country's desire for western ideas and practices. St. Petersburg has good transportation facilities. Major products from the region include chemicals, machinery, ships, and textiles. Many cultural attractions and universities draw tourist and industries.

Volga and Urals Region

Heavy industry lines Russia's Volga River and the Ural Mountains. Hydroelectricity is abundant there. Nearly every important mineral except coal and oil has been discovered in the Urals. Copper and iron smelters, factories that process metal ore, are still important.

Siberia

Russians saw Siberia as a frontier treasure chest of furs, gold, and lumber. Opening this cold harsh region has been difficult. The trans-Siberian railroad connects Moscow to Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean coast. Lumbering, mining, and oil production are Siberia's most important industries.

Russia's Far East

Russia has a long coastline on the Pacific. In the Far East, much land remains heavily forested. Summer weather is mild enough for farming in the Amur River Valley. Khabarovsk the main inland city has factories that process lumber and mineral resources. Vladivostok is a naval base and the chief seaport and fishing center.

Sakhalin Island, with its oil and mineral resources, lies off the eastern coast of Siberia. Kuril Islands are important commercial fishing areas.

Ukraine and Kiev

Kiev is Ukraine's capital. Kiev is centrally located in a region rich with agricultural, energy, industrial, and human resources. Wheat, sunflowers, and sugar beets are common crops. Ukraine's heavy industry is based on coal, iron, manganese, and other metals.

Belarus and Minsk

Minsk is the capital city of Belarus. This country lacks mineral resources, and fertile soil. The country relies heavily on its educated population to support its economy. Peat is still used to create fuel for homes in the country.

Issues and Challenges

These countries are finding it difficult to make the transition from communism to democracy and free enterprise. Tension between supporters and opponents of reform, and among ethnic groups has grown. Unemployment and crime have increased.

Many economists argue that several features of the region's economies need to reform. Factories and transportation systems need to be repaired and modernized. Corrupt officials and managers should be replaced. Rules that limit movement of people, money and goods should be changed.

Environmental problems should be cleaned up and laws to protect the future of the environment should be made. Perhaps the worst example of environmental damage in the former Soviet Union is in Ukraine. In 1986 a disastrous accident happened at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl. The Soviet government tried to cover up the story but failed. Radiation from the explosion and fires contaminated millions of acres of forest and farmlands. Wind patterns carried radioactive particles into other parts of Europe causing environmental and economic damage.