



The Baltic States

At the end of the war, the Soviet Union extended its border some 500 kilometres west. It did this by formally annexing Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which it had occupied during the war with Finland in 1939–40. It also kept control of the eastern half of Poland, which it had occupied as part of the Nazi–Soviet agreement in 1939 (although the Germans had occupied this area from 1941 to 1945).

Poland

At the request of Britain and the USA at the end of June 1945, Stalin included a few London Poles in the new Polish government. In January 1947, however, fresh (rigged) elections saw the return of a totally communist government. The leader of the London Poles, Mikolaczyk, fled from Poland, fearing for his life.

Romania

After the expulsion of the Nazis, a coalition government dominated by communists was set up. In February 1945 the Soviet Union forced the king of Romania to appoint a communist prime minister. By the middle of the year, communists were in control, and in 1947 the monarchy was abolished.

Greece

Here the communists were not successful. They fought a civil war against royalists supported by Britain and the USA. Stalin stuck by his promise to the western allies not to provide support for the Greek communists, who were finally defeated in 1949.

Bulgaria

In late 1944 a communist-dominated coalition government was set up. In November 1945 the communists won rigged elections, and in 1946 they abolished the monarchy.

Czechoslovakia

Following the war, a coalition government ruled Czechoslovakia. From 1946 the communists were the largest party in the coalition. In 1948 the communists used the army to seize control. Many non-communists were arrested and the non-communist foreign secretary, Jan Masaryk, was murdered. Rigged elections were held in which the communists won a landslide victory. Other political parties were then banned.

East Germany

The Soviet Union controlled the eastern section of Germany after the war. In 1949 it became a separate communist state, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

Hungary

In November 1945 free elections were held and the non-communist Smallholders' Party won the most seats. In August 1947 fresh (rigged) elections were held and the communists won total control. All other political parties were then banned.

Yugoslavia

In Yugoslavia the communist resistance had fought bravely against the Germans, and in 1945 its leader, Marshal Tito, was elected president. At first, Tito and Stalin got on well, but relations deteriorated as it became clear that Tito did not intend to follow orders from Moscow. Yugoslavia was expelled from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), and economic sanctions were applied against it by other communist countries. Tito countered this by taking aid from the West – much to the annoyance of Stalin.