Europe Since 1945

A Concise History

SECOND EDITION

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J. Robert Wegs

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MACMILLAN

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Preface

Europe Since 1945: A Concise History, Second Edition, provides comprehensive, yet succinct, coverage of a period that is often neglected in historical studies of twentieth-century Europe. In my fourteen years of teaching the history of Europe since 1945, I have found that the few studies that concentrate on the post-1945 period are either too encyclopedic, burying their theses under mountains of facts, or too brief. Objections often voiced by my students are that existing studies concentrate too much on politics and on developments in the major Western European states. The search for a broader thematic approach to postwar European history, one that pays greater attention to Eastern Europe and the minor states of Western Europe, led me to write this survey.

The book is organized both chronologically and thematically. The chapters on politics provide the basic chronological structure. Other chapters, primarily thematic, precede some political chapters and enhance their understanding. For example, the chapters on a bipolar world and on the Cold War and the Sovietization of Eastern Europe are fundamental to an understanding of the chapter on European politics from 1945 to 1948. The chapters on politics are tied to the thematic chapters by a common concern with the underlying socioeconomic causes of political change or continuity.

For the second edition two new chapters—a survey of thought and culture (chapter 14) and an epilogue (chapter 15)—have been added and chapter 13 has been enlarged and brought up to date. Major additions, deletions, and changes have been made in the previous chapters as well. The socioeconomic information in chapters 9–10 has been brought up to date and, in a few cases, altered to reflect changes that have occurred since the publication of the first edition in 1977. This new edition is not then merely an updating but a major renovation of the original work.

Throughout the study, I have favored conciseness over excessive attention to detail in order to highlight significant historical patterns. I have incorporated statistical material in many tables throughout the book to elaborate these patterns. Six maps help students to grasp fully the significance of

political and economic developments. An annotated list of selected readings at the end of each chapter guides students in research and further study.

The book naturally gives attention to the enormous impact of World War II in shaping the postwar world. For example, chapter 1 discusses the importance of the decline of German power after World War II in creating a power vacuum in central Europe that could only be filled by the two superpowers. However, I also treat developments in postwar Europe as the culmination of a chain of events stretching back to the turn of the century. For example, I explain the Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States as resulting in part from the growth of non-European power centers, beginning with the emergence of Japan and the United States in the late nineteenth century, and from the struggle between communism and capitalism that had been at work in domestic and international politics since 1917. According to this interpretation, the incorporation of Europe within a bipolar world after 1945 is primarily the result of the attainment of superpower status by the United States and the U.S.S.R. during the century. Similarly, the emergence of independent third-world countries in the postwar period is explained by both prewar factors—a three-stage revolutionary pattern stretching over nearly a century—and the impact of the war itself—specifically, the economic and military weaknesses suffered by the European powers during World War II.

In the chapters on economic and social developments, demographic and statistical data are interwoven with theories that have been advanced to explain postwar European society. Such phenomena as changing occupational structures, the spread of affluence, and the persistence of distinct social classes and governing elites are treated in depth. In dealing with these themes, I have given special attention to the smaller European states, since they have often been forerunners in the development of the postwar welfare state. For example, one must look to Scandinavia to understand the impact of socioeconomic policies that have been pursued by most Western European states since World War II. I have also examined the effect of economic modernization and communism on Soviet and Eastern European societies.

I wish to thank Professors Charles F. Delzell of Vanderbilt University, Gary Hamburg of the University of Notre Dame, James Friguglietti of Eastern Montana College, and Alvin D. Coox of San Diego State University for their reading and helpful suggestions for the second edition. A special debt of gratitude is owed my student assistant at the University of Notre Dame, Tony Ehler, for helping me track down recent works for reading and possible inclusion in the further reading sections. Finally, I want to express my thanks to Michael Weber and Ron Aldridge of St. Martin's Press for seeing the book through to its final form.

J. Robert Wegs

Contents

Preface	v
1 A Bipolar World	1
2 The Cold War and the Sovietization of Eastern Europe	27
3 From Left to Right: European Politics, 1945–1948	45
4 Economic Recovery in Western Europe	64
5 Western European Politics, 1948–1965	81
6 The End of European Empire	101
7 From Stalin to Andropov: The New Course and Polycentrism	122
8 European Unity	143
9 Postwar European Society: The Managed	159
10 Postwar European Society: The Managers	180
11 Economics and Society in the Communist World	199
12 1968: Year of Crisis	220
13 Political and Economic Trends Since the 1960s	237
14 Thought and Culture Since 1945	264
15 Epilogue	283
Index	289