

## Russia – Huge Empire

### Milestones in Russian history:

The origins of Russia date back to 882 when Oleg (Rurik dynasty) conquered Kyiv and established **Kievan Rus'**.

At the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century the most powerful successor state of Kievan Rus' was the **Grand Duchy of Moscow**.

Union of Russian dukes led to **defeat of Mongol-Tatar horde in 1480**. As a result Moscow state became fully independent.

**Ivan IV the Terrible (1553 – 1584)**: In 1547 crowned the first Tsar of Russia. During his long reign, Ivan IV nearly doubled the already large Russian territory by annexing the three Tatar khanates (Siberian Khanate among them). Thus by the end of the 16th century Russia was transformed into a multiethnic, multi-confessional and transcontinental state.

**The Romanov Dynasty** acceded the throne in 1613.

**Peter I the Great (1689 - 1725)**: Peter defeated Sweden in the **Great Northern War (1700 – 1721)** and gained access to the Baltic Sea and sea trade. On the Baltic Sea Peter I founded a new capital called Saint Petersburg, later known as Russia's "Window to Europe". Peter the Great's reforms brought considerable Western European cultural influences to Russia. Peter I ruled with hard fist, as an absolutist monarch.

**Catherine II the Great (1762 - 1796)**: Incorporated most of territories of Poland into Russia during the Partitions of Poland, pushing the Russian frontier westward into Central Europe (gain of areas of Ukraine, Belarus). In the south, after successful Russo-Turkish Wars against the Ottoman Empire, Catherine **advanced Russia's boundary to the Black Sea**, defeating the Crimean khanate. Extensive colonization of sparsely inhabited areas of the Empire.

### 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Statistics for 1914	
Population of Russia	159 million
Russia's army	1 200 000 soldiers
Russia's navy	166 ships

### Main characteristics of the Empire:

The biggest, but also the most undeveloped European power (absolutism, poor economy, serfdom: majority of Russians were serfs, laborers bound to the land and to masters who controlled their fates)

Russia was very rich in minerals – oil, coal, iron ore, gold, etc – but these were not much used. She had a huge population but most people lived in the western half of the country. Hardly anyone at all lived in Siberia.

Russia had great amounts of land but much of it was too cold for farming. She had a long coastline, but most of it was frozen half the year, making sea transport impossible.

Empire of many peoples, each speaking a different language, from the Finns in the north to the Caucasians in the south and the Poles in the west. This made Russia hard to govern

Most Russians lived and worked in dreadful conditions. Workers in the towns labored for up to 14 hours a day for very low wages. Their homes were crowded and unhealthy. Workers like these had little reason to support the Tsar. Many were ready to rebel against him. Nearly 8 out of 10 Russians were poor peasants farming on the small pieces of land.

Russia had no overseas colonies.

**Alexander I (1801 – 1825):** In alliances with various European countries, Russia fought against Napoleon's France.

Alexander I headed Russia's delegation at the **Congress of Vienna** that defined the map of post-Napoleonic Europe.

The officers of the Napoleonic Wars brought **ideas of liberalism** back to Russia with them and attempted to curtail the tsar's powers. In 1821 established **Southern alliance in Ukraine**, leader P. I. Pestel, in 1822 **Northern alliance in S. Petersburg**, leader N. Muravjov. Both alliances asked for abolition of serfdom and some liberal reforms.

**Nicholas I (1825 – 1855):** Culmination of the revolt during conservative reign of Nicholas I in the abortive **Decembrist revolt of 1825**: requirement of Constitution, abolition of serfdom, civil rights. Decembrist revolt ended up in the blood, revolutionaries defeated.

Signs of reign: supervision of secret police, serfdom, absolutism, limited access to education,...

At the end of Nicholas's I reign (1825–55) a zenith period of Russia's power and influence in Europe was disrupted by defeat in the **Crimean War (1853 – 1856)**: The war was part of a long-running contest between the major European powers for influence over territories of the **declining Ottoman Empire**. Russia opened the war by attacking the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia under Ottoman sovereignty. France and Great Britain helped Ottoman Empire (from 1855 also Kingdom of Sardinia) because they wanted to keep the Ottoman Empire alive as a barrier to huge Russia. In 1855 allied troops landed in the Crimea and besieged the city of **Sevastopol**, home of the Tsar's Black Sea Fleet. Sevastopol defeated in 1855. **Peace agreement from Paris (1856)**: Tsar and the Sultan agreed not to establish any naval or military arsenal on the Black Sea coast. The Black Sea clauses represented a tremendous disadvantage to Russia, for they greatly diminished the naval threat it posed to the Turks. Moreover, all the Great Powers pledged to respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Black sea was declared to be a neutral area.

**Alexander II (1855 – 1881):** killed by assassin. Defeat in Crimean war in 1856 led the tsar Alexander II to knowledge that reforms in the Empire are necessary.

Main reform: **abolition of serfdom (1861)** – personal freedom to peasants, but still no political rights

Other reforms: **Zemstva**: forms of local self-governments, judiciary: independence of judges, reduction of censorship, army – military service reduced from 25 to 6 years. Reforms led to industrialization and modernization of Russia.

Uprising of the Poles: 1863 – 1864: defeated

1867 Alaska sold to USA.

**Russian-Turkish War 1877**: fights for Balkan » **Berlin congress in 1878**: independence of Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro.

**Alexander III (1881 – 1894):** Assassins of Alexander II executed. Renewal of absolutism and censorship. Program of russification – different nations suppressed.

**Nicholas II (1894 – 1917)** – the last Russian tsar: was unable to prevent the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905, triggered by the unsuccessful Russo-Japanese War (1904 – 1905) and the demonstration incident known as Bloody Sunday. The uprising was put down, but the government was forced to concede major reforms, including granting the freedoms of speech and assembly, the legalization of political parties and the creation of an elected legislative body, the State Duma of the Russian Empire.

**The Russo-Japanese War (1904 –1905)** was a conflict that grew out of the rival imperial ambitions of the Russian Empire and Japanese Empire over **Manchuria and Korea**. The major theatres of operations were Southern Manchuria, the seas around Korea, Japan, and the Yellow Sea.

The Russians sought a warm water port on the Pacific Ocean, for their navy as well as for maritime trade. Vladivostok was only operational during the summer season, but Port Arthur would be operational all year. The

embarrassing string of defeats inflamed the Russian people's dissatisfaction with their inefficient and corrupt Tsarist government, and proved a major cause of the Russian Revolution of 1905.

**Bloody Sunday 1905 in St. Petersburg**, where unarmed, peaceful demonstrators marching to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II were shot by the Imperial Guard. The march was organized by Father Gapon. Bloody Sunday was an event with grave consequences for the Tsarist regime, as the disregard for ordinary people shown by the massacre undermined support for the state.

Bloody Sunday led to: **Revolution 1905 – 1907**: a wave of mass political unrest through vast areas of the Russian Empire. It included terrorism, worker strikes, peasant unrest, and military revolts. Result: revolt defeated with the use of military. 17 000 casualties. During revolution tsar forced to publish: **The October Manifesto (1905)** was a response to the Russian Revolution of 1905. The manifesto addressed the unrest in Russia and pledged to grant civil liberties to the people: including personal immunity, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association; a broad participation in the Duma; introduction of universal male suffrage; and a decree that no law should come into force without the consent of the state Duma (**The State Duma of the Russian Empire** was a legislative assembly, which met in St. Petersburg). The Manifesto was a precursor of the first ever Russian Constitution (1906). The Manifesto and the Constitution resulted in insignificant democratization as the Tsar continued to exercise veto power over the Duma, which he dissolved (first time in 1907) and reformed several times.

**The Stolypin agrarian reforms** were a series of changes to Imperial Russia's agricultural sector instituted during the tenure of **Pyotr Stolypin, Prime Minister**. Stolypin hoped, through his reforms, to stop peasant unrest by creating a class of **market-oriented smallholding landowners** (land as a private property). Stolypin was assassinated in 1911.

**Political stratification**: Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP): established in 1898. In 1903 RSDLP split into hostile Bolshevik (**Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, alias Lenin**) and Menshevik (Plechanov) political organizations. While both factions believed that a "bourgeois democratic" revolution was necessary, the Mensheviks generally tended to be more moderate and were more positive towards the "mainstream" liberal opposition. Bolsheviks were up to armed revolt (more radical than Mensheviks). Other political movements: Social revolutionists and Liberals.

**Trans-Siberian railway**: linking Moscow with Vladivostok, a distance of nearly 10 000 kilometers, built from 1891 to ± 1910.

Gregory **Rasputin**: Nicholas II was heavily influenced by poor advisers, the worst of these was a monk, G. Rasputin. Rasputin had hypnotic powers of healing over Nicholas's son, who had the incurable blood disease hemophilia.