

Prisoners of Geography Reading Guide for Chapter 4, Western Europe

This chapter is a challenge because it requires some background historical knowledge about Europe. This reading guide will provide that historical background.

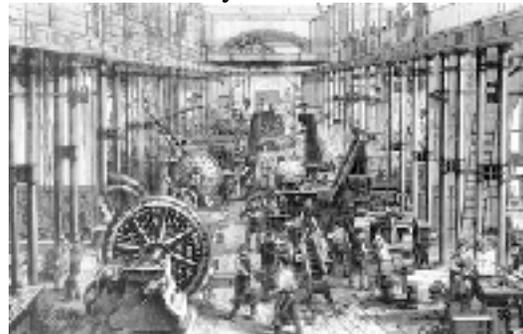
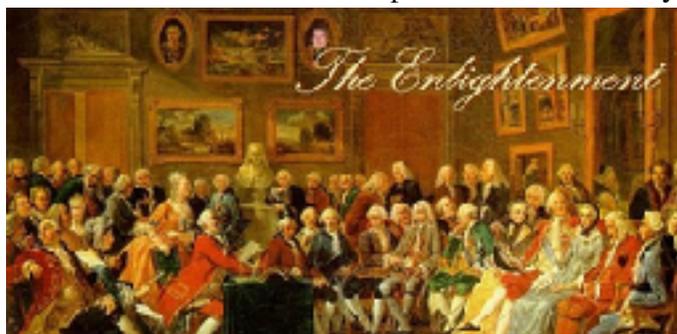
A major challenge currently facing European nations is about how much cooperation they should engage in. Globalism or nationalism? Should Europe be working towards a “United States of Europe” political model so that it can compete with the United States and China economically, thereby relinquishing individual autonomy and perhaps national/cultural distinctiveness? Or should each country preserve its autonomy and national uniqueness and put itself first? This tension is evident all over the world today, but Europe’s history with nationalism produced the bloodiest century in history, and since its nations began cooperating economically and politically after World War II it has been--with the exception of the Balkans in the 1990s--at peace. Now, voices all over Europe are calling for greater nationalism and less cooperation.

“For those who didn’t live through [World War II] themselves and who especially now in the crisis are asking what benefits Europe’s unity brings, the answer despite the unprecedented European period of peace lasting more than 65 years and despite the problems and difficulties we must still overcome is: peace.”

--Helmut Kohl, former Chancellor of Germany (1982-1998)

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p. 92. “The modern world, for better or worse, springs from Europe.” The **Enlightenment** & the **Industrial Revolution** are responsible for the lifestyles we live in today.



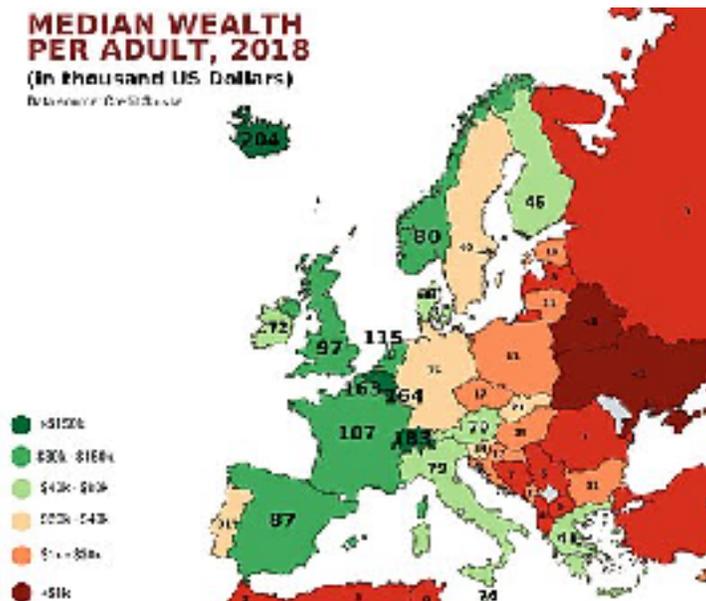
p. 92-98 An overview of the climates and physical geography of Western Europe that proved beneficial to certain parts, detrimental to others. Rivers, mountain ranges, ports and seas...

p. 95 The unprovable but popular theory that the **Protestant Work Ethic** accelerated growth in northern Europe while Catholicism held the south back...

p. 95-98 Brief summaries of various countries’ development – France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey

Who was Francisco Franco of Spain?

p. 98 The north prospers and the south struggles, & this is at least partly because of geography. Inside the European Union, there a split between north and south, with rich nations like Germany and France supporting struggling nations like Greece.

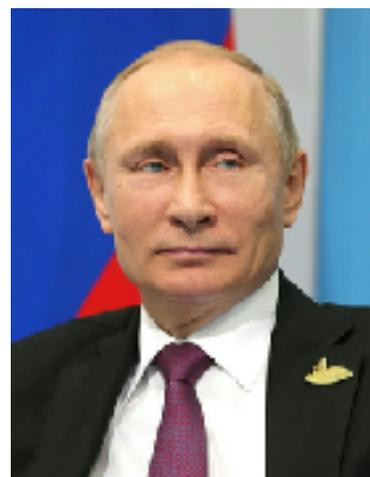


p. 98-99 And when the financial crash hit Europe in 2008, this split got worse. *Like a parent bailing out a teenaged son who overspent while away at college, Germany loaned Greece more money but demanded Greece go on a strict budget (“austerity measures”), and Greece resented it.* Austerity measures feel like a loss of autonomy.

p. 99-102 The tensions between the Europeans and the Russians, especially under Putin, could lead to conflict. Where? The **Northern European Plain** between the Baltic and the Carpathian Mountains. Poland has always been Europe’s battleground. Wide, flat, and stuck between two aggressive powers, Germany and Russia.

1999 Poland joined **NATO**, pushing the U.S.-led alliance 400 miles closer to Moscow. **Vladimir Putin** acted to thwart those potential incursions since he’s come to power.

**The Balkans** is a mix of peoples and religions. Serbs, Croats, Bosnians... Catholics, Orthodox Slavs, Muslims from when it was ruled by the Ottomans... Russia protects its Slavic cousins in Serbia and resents NATO’s bombing of Serbia in the Balkan wars of the mid-1990s.



Russia has also probed the defenses of Scandinavia (Sweden and Denmark).

p. 102-104 The EU & NATO must stay united to fend off Russia, and it is the French-German relationship that is key to that unity.



p. 103-104. These pages describe the tensions between the two. France’s fear of a united Germany in 1871, Germany’s fear of being attacked by both France and Russia... and the results of these tensions were World War I and World War II.

The World Wars devastated Europe. The solution? Get closer economically and politically so the nations depend on each other. How?

What began in 1951 as six-nation The European Coal & Steel Community (see graphic, below left) eventually became the 28-nation European Union in 1999. Nineteen of them use the same currency: the Euro.



p. 105-106 But in 1999 many of those nations weren’t ready to join the EU in full partnership because the stronger ones are always bailing out the weaker ones (like Greece). Read more about this in these pages. Greater cooperation means greater “pooling of sovereignty” by the

member states, and that means giving up autonomy. **Individual freedom or collective security? That is always the dilemma.**

Germany, despite the ghosts of WWII haunting it, is now Europe's indispensable power, the engine of Europe.

p. 107 **Great Britain**, also called the **UK** (United Kingdom = England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) has historically sought “splendid isolation...engaged in ensuring no power greater than it will rise in Europe.”

p. 108. Another unprovable theory about why British Democracy developed as it did. Marshall does assert that geography allowed Britain to become a global empire. It is a remarkable expansion of power from a relatively small island country.

The proximity of the **GIUK gap** is a strategic advantage. The British can watch over this **naval choke point** (like the Strait of Malacca and Strait of Hormuz), which is why the Scottish independence movement is a worry to the UK. Scotland is Britain's northernmost lands, the southern edge of the GIUK gap.



p. 109 “The British remain within Europe, and yet outside it.”

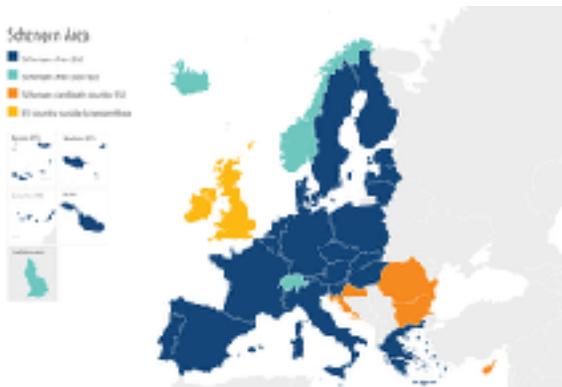
**The Brexit** is a major issue – a word that is used as a shorthand way of saying the UK leaving the EU - merging the words **Britain** and **exit** to get Brexit, in the same way as a possible Greek exit from the euro was dubbed Grexit in the past.

What is the Brexit? <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>

What are the two main issues for supporters of the Brexit? **Sovereignty** and **immigration**.

EU member states must follow EU rules, even if those rules were contrary to prior practice in the UK, and immigration between member states meant that lower-wage foreign workers migrated to the UK, and some British felt that the immigrants were taking away jobs from native Britons. Then, the wave of refugees from

the Middle East and Africa produced more anti-immigrant feelings.



p. 110-111. The EU's **Schengen Area** ... a new **Fortress Europe**, or **Fortress Nation State**. Fear among the white population that the infusion of Muslims and non-whites is destroying Britain's cultural distinctiveness.

p. 111 "NATO is fraying at the edges" also. If it continues, does Europe return to a Europe of nation states? "...We would all be back to the beginning of the twentieth century."

p. 112 This would be bad for France, as it wants to align with a restrained Germany. France can go it alone, as it has nuclear weapons ("**Force de Frappe**" - The French nuclear deterrence force developed by Charles de Gaulle.) and aircraft carriers, but Russia is a possible threat, and Germany might align with Russia if political circumstances change.

Europeans have begun recalculating their military spending, having depended for years on the U.S. carrying the military load in NATO, but shifting costs to the military would take money away from social programs.

p. 113 So why stay in the EU?

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