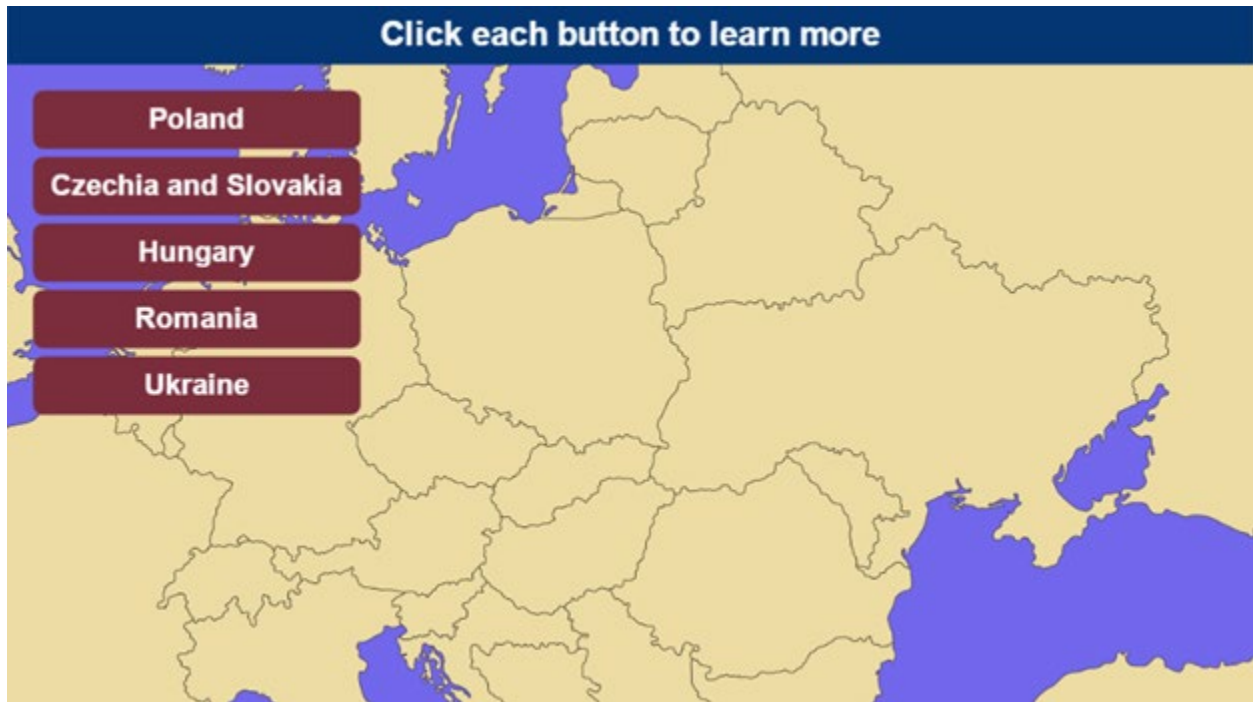**Eastern Europe**

Click next to begin.

Introduction

Eastern Europe is located between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. This region extends from Central and Mediterranean Europe to Russia. Eastern Europe contains the nations of Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Menu

Click each button to learn more.

Poland

Poland is located east of Germany on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. Poland was originally founded in the tenth century. It later formed part of a larger nation called the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. By the nineteenth century, other empires had conquered and divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Poland regained independence after the end of World War I. However, at the beginning of World War II, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invaded the country. Millions of Polish citizens were killed during the Second World War. This included 90% of Poland's Jewish population, who were victims of the Holocaust. The largest Nazi concentration and death camp, Auschwitz, was built in Poland.

After World War II, Poland became a communist satellite state of the Soviet Union. In 1989, after decades of communist rule, Poland peacefully reestablished itself as a democratic republic. Since then, Poland has joined NATO and the EU. Today, Poland has one of the strongest post-communist economies in Europe.

Czech Republic and Slovakia

Bratislava, Slovakia

The Czech Republic, also known as Czechia, is located southwest of Poland and north of Austria. Slovakia is located east of the Czech Republic and south of Poland. Both of these nations were a part of Austria-Hungary until the end of World War I. When Austria-Hungary broke up, ethnic Czechs and Slovaks formed a country called Czechoslovakia.

A communist government was established in Czechoslovakia after the end of World War II. It controlled the country throughout the Cold War. When the communist government collapsed in 1993, it was replaced by a democratic republic. In 1993, Czechoslovakia peacefully split into two nations: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Later, both nations became members of NATO and the EU.

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic. Ethnic Czechs make up two-thirds of the population, and Czech is the country's official language. Czechia is one of the least religious nations in the world. Almost 90% of the population identifies as having no religious affiliation.

Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia. Ethnic Slovaks make up about 80% of the population, and Slovak is the country's official language. More than half of the Slovak population identifies as Roman Catholic. One-fourth of the population has no religious affiliation.
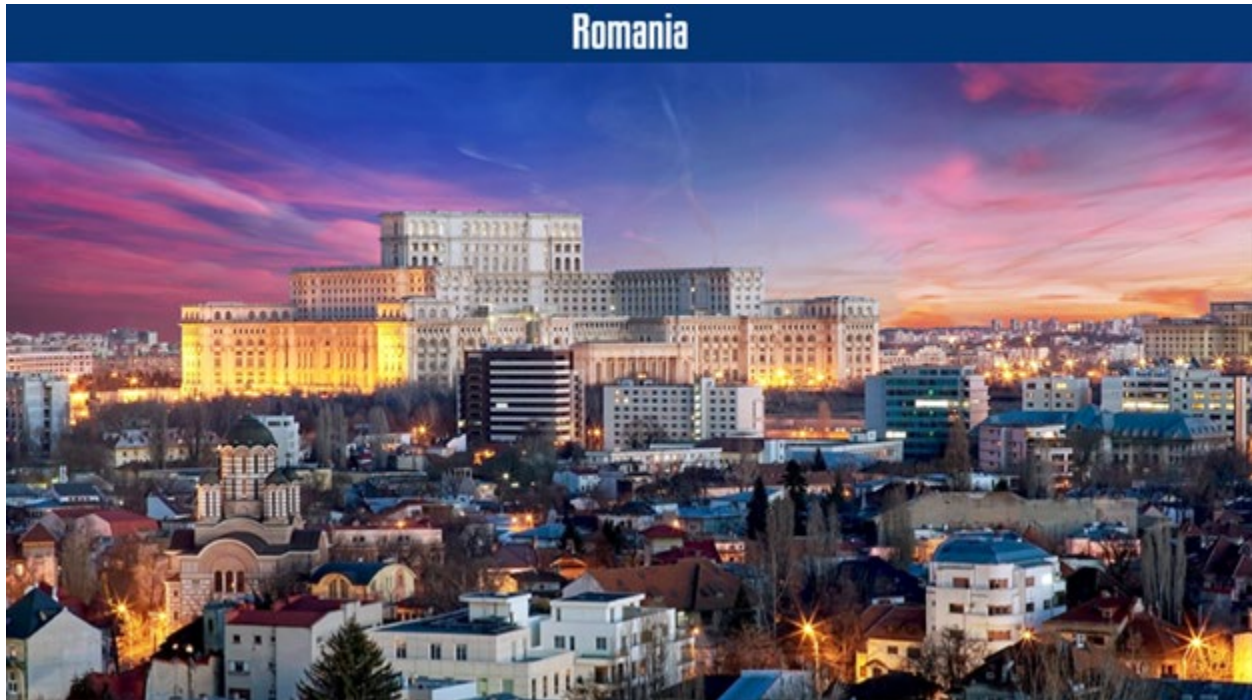
Hungary

Hungary is a landlocked country located east of Austria, south of Slovakia, and west of Romania. The city of Budapest is centrally located in the northern part of the country, on the Danube River. The Danube splits the city into two sections: Buda on the west bank and Pest on the east bank. Budapest is the capital and most populous city of Hungary. It is also an important center for commerce, finance, culture, technology, and education.

Budapest was once the co-capital of an empire called Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary allied with Germany during World War I, and was divided into multiple countries after losing the war. The nation of Hungary remained, but had lost much of its territory. During World War II, Hungary allied with Germany again. After Nazi Germany was defeated, Hungary became a satellite state of the Soviet Union. It remained under communist control until 1989. In the 1990s, Hungary peacefully shifted to a capitalist and democratic country. It later joined NATO and the EU.

Historically, Austria-Hungary was a diverse empire. However, when it was dissolved, Hungary became more homogenous. Today, 85% of the population is ethnic Hungarian. Hungarian is the country's official language. Roman Catholics make up about 37% of the population, while 40% has no religious affiliation.

Romania

Romania is located on the western coast of the Black Sea. The name Romania is derived from a Latin word that means "citizens of Rome." In the past, Romania was a part of the Roman Empire. The influence of Roman culture is reflected in the Romanian language. Romanian is a Romance language derived from Latin. This is fairly unique for Eastern Europe, since most countries in these regions speak Slavic languages.

The modern state of Romania was established in the late nineteenth century. During World War II, Romania allied with Germany and fought against the Soviet Union. After losing the war, Romania became a satellite state of the Soviet Union. The country was controlled by a repressive communist regime for many years. In 1989, Romania's dictator was overthrown in a violent revolution.

Romania has struggled to shift to a democratic capitalist society. Members of the former communist government stayed in power for several years after the revolution. Political corruption remains a major issue. The Romanian economy has also struggled to recover from decades of communism.

Ukraine

Ukraine is located on the northern coast of the Black Sea. Kiev is the capital and most populous city of Ukraine. It is centrally located in the northern part of the country, on the Dnieper River. Kiev is one of the oldest cities in Eastern Europe. One thousand years ago, Kiev functioned as the capital of Kievan Rus, which was the first Eastern Slavic state. Today, Kiev is an important center for commerce, science, and culture.

For most of the twentieth century, Ukraine was a republic of the Soviet Union. The country suffered a severe famine in the 1930s, and was heavily damaged during World War II. Despite this, Ukraine managed to recover during the 1950s. It became a major center for agriculture, industry, and technology in the Soviet Union. The country's fertile black soil, called chernozem, helped produce high crop yields. Manufacturing and technology industries expanded rapidly. This growth also created environmental problems. Excess farming led to soil erosion. Heavy industry polluted the air and water. Additionally, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded in 1986, releasing radioactive material.

Ukraine gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the country shifted to a democratic and capitalist society, political corruption has made progress slow. Ethnic Ukrainians make up about 77% of the population, while ethnic Russians make up about 17%. Ukrainian is the official language, but Russian is spoken by a significant part of the population.