



2004 Entering the European Family Impact for Italy



Europe divided into sphere of influence

At The End of World War II (1945), Europe was devastated and divided into spheres of influence:

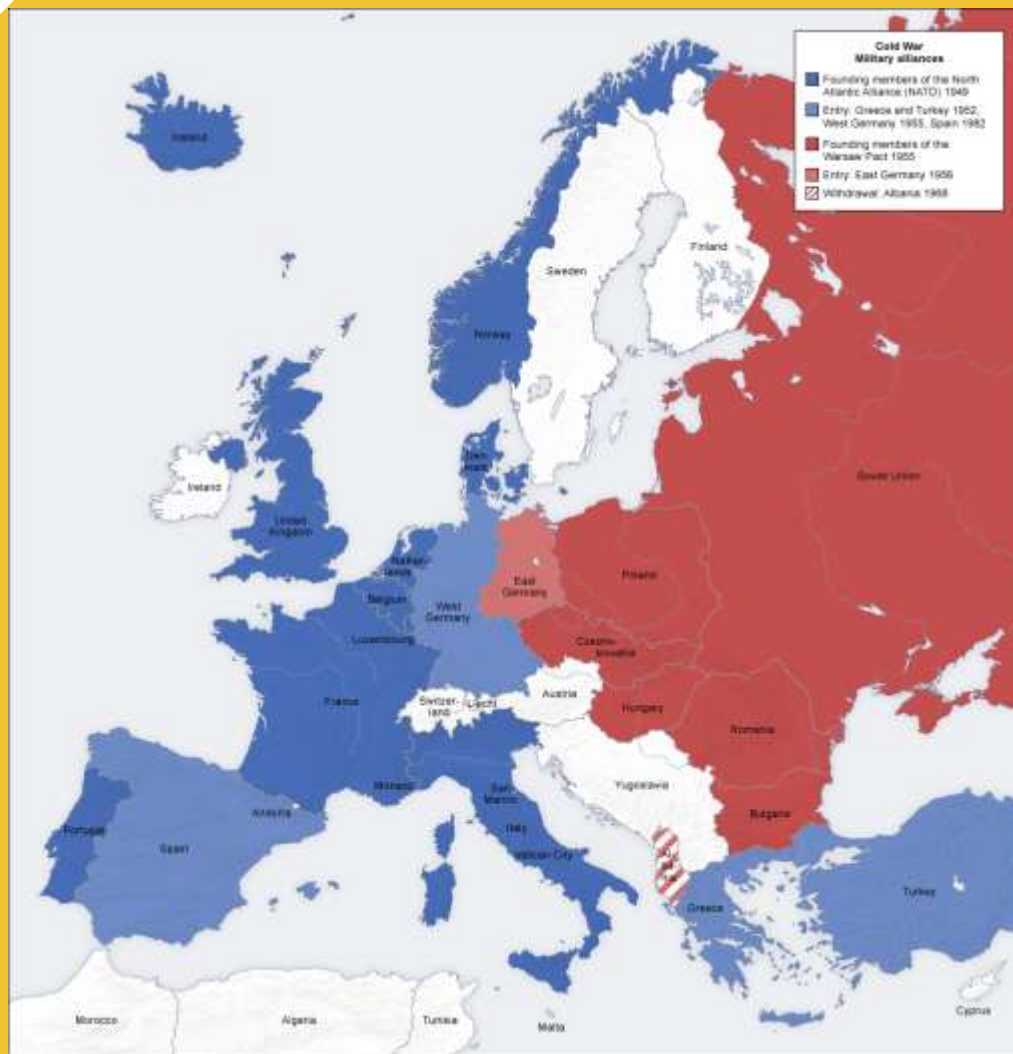
West: liberal-capitalist systems, supported by USA, UK, France.

East: one-party regimes under Soviet control.

→1949: Foundation of NATO (West) and Warsaw Pact (East).

→1961: Construction of the Berlin Wall – symbol of the Cold War.

Division of Europe in blocks



In blu: NATO members

In red: Warsaw Pact members

In white/grey: neutral states or not aligned (for instance Austria, Svezia, Svizzera, Jugoslavia).

Albania is represented with diagonal red lines, as it was initially part of the Warsaw Pact but left it in 1968, adopting an isolationist and autonomous position.

1970s–1980s

A period started of easing of tensions between USA and USSR. Agreements were signed with the aim of ensuring security, cooperation, and respect for human rights. West Germany's pursued a policy towards the East called Ostpolitik. Meanwhile, Eastern Europe faced economic crisis and calls for reform.

On November 9, 1989, the borders of East Germany were opened to West Germany, particularly the crossings between East Berlin and West Berlin.

This event represented the symbolic conclusion of the Cold War and the beginning of the German reunification process: Germany became a single state on October 3, 1990.

The Dissolution of the USSR and End of the Cold War (1991)

- 1991: Dissolution of the Soviet Union
- Eastern Europe moved toward democracy and the West.
- Eastern enlargement: some of the former communist countries begin the process of joining the European Union (established in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty)
- In 2004, seven countries belonging to the former Soviet bloc (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) one from the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia),Cipro and Malta became part of the European Union.

In blu le countries that became part of EU in 2004



Accession of Eastern European Countries to the EU

Consequences of enlargement:

- Greater political and economic cooperation.
- Overcoming historic divisions.
- Challenges: economic gaps, borders, migration.

Main Benefits

1. Economic Growth and Convergence

The countries that joined the EU in 2004 experienced a significant rise in GDP per capita.

The EU itself benefited as well, gaining new markets, consumers, and stronger trade and investment flows.

1. Improved Social, Environmental and Governance Standards

Mobility increased sharply: more students and workers were able to move freely and seek opportunities across Europe.

1. Political Stability and Stronger EU Geopolitical Role

Key Challenges and Critical Issues

1. Persistent Gaps in Competitiveness and Income
2. Migration and Labor Mobility
3. Institutional Overload and Governance Complexity
4. Dependence on EU Funds and Reform Slowdown

Italy and the EU enlargement in 2004

- ❖ Italy, as a founding member and strong supporter of European unity, closely followed the Eastern Enlargement process, recognizing its importance for building a Europe without barriers. Through its diplomacy, Italy promoted reconciliation and economic cooperation, actively encouraging the integration of Central and Eastern European countries.
- ❖ Italy viewed the Eastern Enlargement as both an opportunity and a challenge. Politically and diplomatically, it supported the process, aware that integration would strengthen peace and stability in Europe. Italian institutions, regions, and companies played an active role in negotiations, assistance programs, and partnerships aimed at promoting economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and institutional development.
- ❖ For Italy, the enlargement opened new export markets and investment opportunities, particularly in Central Europe. It boosted trade in manufacturing, agri-food, and infrastructure, while expanding networks across Eastern Europe and enhancing Italy's influence in Mediterranean and Balkan policies. However, it also posed challenges — including industrial relocations, stronger competition for small and medium-sized enterprises, and the need to adapt the labor market to new migration patterns and competition within an enlarged EU.

