



The 1990s, the Unification of Western and Eastern Europe

**Cold War and Détente
with focus on Italy's role and influence**



The End of World War II

1945

Europe is devastated and divided into spheres of influence.

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

East: one-party regimes under Soviet control.

1947: Start of the Cold War

Truman Doctrine: containment of communism.

Marshall Plan: reconstruction of Western Europe.

Italy was one of the largest beneficiaries of the Marshall Plan, accelerating its recovery

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

Italy was a founding member of NATO, hosting major US bases

Churchill spoke of an 'Iron Curtain' dividing Europe.

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

Italy's security was directly tied to NATO during this division.

Division of Europe in blocks



In blu: NATO members

In red: Warsaw Pact members

In white/grey: neutral states or not aligned (es. 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.

The Détente and Early Signs of Change 1970s-1980s

- A period called Détente started: easing of tensions between USA and USSR.
- Agreements were signed: SALT I (1972), SALT II (1979) which limited strategic arms.
- 1975: Helsinki Final Act: It represents one of the main expressions of the détente process between the blocs, as it originated from the East-West dialogue promoted by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, with the aim of ensuring security, cooperation, and respect for human rights.
Italy played an active role in the Helsinki process, supporting dialogue East-West.
- Ostpolitik: West Germany's policy towards the East.
- Meanwhile, Eastern Europe faced economic crisis and calls for reform.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall 1989

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.

For Italy, the fall of the Wall reinforced European integration projects and its role in the European Community.

The Dissolution of the USSR

End of the Cold War

1991

- Dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991
- Eastern Europe moved toward democracy and the West.
- Eastern enlargement: former communist countries begin the process of joining the European Union (established in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty)

Italy strongly supported Eastern enlargement, promoting stability and new economic opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

- Italy was a major beneficiary of the Marshall Plan which fueled its post-war recovery and played a key role in the Western alliance as a founding member of NATO
- During the Détente, Italy supported dialogue and cooperation through the Helsinki process, promoting human rights and East-West understanding.
- The fall of the Berlin Wall reinforced Italy's commitment to European unity: Italy actively backed the Eastern enlargement of the European Union, seeing it as essential for continental stability, democracy, and prosperity.
- Overall, Italy was both a driving force behind and a beneficiary of Europe's transformation from a divided continent into a unified and cooperative Union.