

Chapter V

State Building

In the later 17th and early to mid-18th century a number of great powers began to enter periods of decline, others emerged, and some held their own. Not all the causes for this situation applied in every case. Roughly this was the situation.

Winners	Mixed	Losers
Britain	Austria	Spain
Prussia	France	Poland
Russia		Sweden
		Holland
		Holy Roman Empire
		Ottoman Empire

Winners:

- Strong leadership
- Strong central government, effective bureaucracy
- Effective sources of income
- Flexibility
- Diversified economies
- Large, modernized armies/navies
- Monarchy and aristocracy work out a mutually satisfactory relationship

Losers:

- Poor leadership
- Weak governmental institutions
- Rigidity
- Fragmented regions, intense local loyalties
- Narrowly focused economies
- Ineffective cooperation between monarchs and nobles

SPAIN

- Virtually no exports or manufacturing
- Resources of empire depleted
- Empire too far flung and fragmented to be ruled successfully by the system in place
- Poor leadership both from Habsburg and Bourbon kings
- Massive noble class many of whom were poor, not interested in government, and rigidly old fashioned (Hidalgos)
- Profligate spending of national resources without adequate returns

POLAND

- Perhaps the most disastrously organized state in Europe
- Dysfunctional elective monarchy
- Dysfunctional parliament (diet) – *liberum veto*
- Surrounded by ravenous and powerful states with no natural frontiers for protection
- Nobility too numerous (8% of population) and mostly poor
- Antiquated agricultural system and little commerce
- Gradually gobbled up by neighbors in a series of “Partitions” 1772, 1793, 1795

SWEDEN

- Empire too far flung
- Weak economy cannot sustain huge army
- Nobility and monarchy in conflict
- No successful ruler after Gustavus Adolphus (d. 1632)
- Recklessness of Charles XII (d. 1718) – defeated by Peter the Great of Russia – Battle of Poltava (1709)

HOLLAND

- Regional identities very strong
- Religious divisions
- Stagnation of industries
- London replacing Amsterdam as European economic center
- Exhaustion and damage after prolonged conflicts with England and France
- Dutch East India Co. pushed out of India
- Weak leaders after the death of William III
- Stadholdership still elective and cumbersome and powers limited by the jealousy of the mercantile elite
- British outstrip in naval technology and trade competition

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

- Central institutions, including the emperorship crippled
- Habsburgs increasingly focus on their Austrian territories
- War of the Austrian Succession (1740)
- Divided into over 300 mini-states, with big states such as Prussia trying to expand territories at the expense of others
- Economy and population devastated by 30 Years War
- Divided religiously and culturally

OTTOMAN EMPIRE

- Complicated and inefficient system of succession
- Too fragmented and far flung
- Deep conservatism strangled innovation
- Bordered aggressive Russia and Austria
- Over-reached selves in attempted conquests of central Europe (at gates of Vienna 1529 and 1683)

AUSTRIA

- Affairs of HRE divert attention from essential issues
- Female heir of Charles VI (d. 1740) leads to sacrifices made in the **Pragmatic Sanction**
- Ottoman Sultan conquers southern territories and reaches Vienna 1683
- Frederick the Great seizes the rich province of Silesia in 1740
- Hungary regained 1687, but the nobles remained restive under Habsburg rule
- Habsburgs continue to hold their empire together, and gain territory from Poland and in Italy and the Balkans
- Habsburgs do well in the War of Spanish Succession (1701)
- Most of the population Roman Catholic
- Protestant nobles removed and land used to reward nobles to the Habsburgs
- Strong lines of internal communication
- Some innovation and growth in the economy

FRANCE

- Weak leadership in last years of Louis XIV and under his successors. Corruption and vice at Court
- Mississippi Bubble hurts economy and undermines central banking structure (1720). Hard to organize credit
- Costs of wars high; leads to huge public debt
- Indecisiveness in deciding about who was their most serious enemy – leads France to compete on sea and land against multiple enemies – divided resources and led to losses
- Clumsy censorship weakens respect for government without stifling criticism
- Nobility want power, are given it by the Regent Orleans (d. 1723), but largely ineffective

- Large resources and many effective government officials, but antiquated, cumbersome, unproductive tax system; inefficient budgetary and accounting apparatus
- Innovative society with a large and influential intelligentsia
- Valuable colonial empire
- Strongest army in Europe
- Paris the grandest city in Europe – huge popularity of French language and culture

BRITAIN

- More tightly held together after Union with Scotland 1707
- Parliamentary system and a largely free press allowed public opinion to play a significant role in shaping policy
- Absence of a standing army and the Bill of Rights forced monarchs and Parliament to rule rationally and help build commercial prosperity
- Economy and central banking system weathers South Sea Bubble crisis (1720)
- London became the money market of Europe
- Navy gained supremacy at sea around the world
- Empire expanded and prospered
- Aristocrats governed responsibly and effectively
- Flexible economy and politicians – gifted leadership: William III, Marlborough, Walpole, the Pitts, etc.
- **Robert Walpole** (d. 1745) first “prime minister” (1721-42)
- Social and political system open to men rising by merit

PRUSSIA

- Exceptional leadership from several members of the Hohenzollern dynasty
 - a) the “Great” Elector Frederick William (d. 1688)
 - b) King Frederick I (d. 1713)
 - c) King Frederick William I (d. 1740)
 - d) King Frederick II the “Great” (d. 1786)
- Added territory that contained resources, urban populations, and commercial and manufacturing activity in the Rhineland and Silesia
- Exceptionally strong army disproportionate to the size of the state
- Strong royal bureaucracy organized to support the army
- Rulers enjoyed large income aside from taxes
- Society tolerant in religion and welcomed French Huguenots
- High literacy rate
- Strong cooperation between **junker** landowners and monarchs
- Becomes a major European state under Frederick II

RUSSIA

- No influence of the Renaissance or Roman Catholic Church
- Time of Troubles (1604-13), a period of chaos followed by the establishment of the Romanov dynasty
- Vast size, resources, and population
- Peasants effectively enserfed during 17th century (1649)
- Vigorous leadership from Peter the Great, Elizabeth, and Catherine the Great (some intervals of weak leadership) – Peter's system of succession faulty
- Frequent peasant uprisings weaken state
- Strong absolutist government developed Peter the Great's (r. 1682-1725) achievements
 - a) took Baltic territories from Sweden, pushed south to Black Sea
 - b) built St.Petersburg – access to the West
 - c) Westernization of manners, customs, society
 - d) built strong modern army and navy
 - e) imposed strict control over nobility (boyars)
 - f) destroyed opposition – Old Believers/ streltzy
 - g) gained tight control over the Church
 - h) built economy
- Became a major European state