

## Topic 7.3: National Unifications

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The **Crimean War** (1853-1856) ended the era of Metternich's Concert of Europe. France and Britain joined forces with the Ottoman Empire to stop Russia from expanding into Ottoman territory. When the Concert of Europe collapsed, nationalists in Italy and Germany had a chance to finally unify their countries after the failed "revolutions" of 1848. The **Second Industrial Revolution** introduced new military technologies, which some European powers adopted more swiftly than others.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The unifications of Germany and Italy shattered the balance of power in Europe. The newly-unified German Empire built the most modern military force in Europe and became Europe's greatest industrial producer by the time of World War I.

### KEY TERMS

#### **Realpolitik**

Otto von Bismarck, though personally conservative, rejected ideological approaches to politics, opting for political flexibility and the politics of power. He continually built shifting coalitions to support his program for industrializing and unifying Germany under Prussian dominance.

#### **The Balkans**

The Balkan Peninsula, located in Southwestern Europe, became a source of political instability as the Ottoman Empire weakened and nationalist movements gained steam there.

#### **Alliance System**

Following the national unifications, Bismarck devised a system of alliances between the Great Powers, hoping to guarantee peace. Eventually, these alliances would lead to World War I as a result of tensions in the Balkans.

### COMPARISON

*German Unification and Italian Unification were **similar** because...*

Italy and Germany had each failed to unify during the Revolutions of 1848. Both nations were unified by a process that involved clever diplomacy and military force. In both cases, the people shared a common language.

*German Unification and Italian Unification were **different** because...*

Most Italians shared a common religion, while Germans were divided between Catholicism and Protestantism. Germany unified as a federal state, while Italy became a unitary state.

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*"The position of Prussia in Germany will not be determined by its liberalism but by its power... Not through speeches and majority decisions will the great questions of the day be decided... but by iron and blood." -- Otto von Bismarck*

### THE UNIFICATIONS OF ITALY AND GERMANY

The failure of the Frankfurt Parliament to unify Germany on the basis of liberal nationalism during the Revolutions of 1848 called for a different approach to unifying Germany. **Otto von Bismarck**, a gifted political operator who came from the Prussian Junker nobility, aimed to create a unified German state under Prussian dominance through "blood and iron." Bismarck used Prussia's superior industrial strength combined with modern military innovations, such as railroads and telegraphs, to defeat Austria in the **Seven Weeks' War** and France in the **Franco-Prussian War**. After defeating France, the victorious Germans gathered at Versailles and proclaimed the newly-unified German Empire.



*Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany (1871-1890)*

Within Germany, Bismarck employed the strategy of **Realpolitik**, which focused on pragmatic approaches to political power rather than appealing to pure political ideology. Bismarck came from a conservative political background, but flexibly employed nationalism, liberalism, and even socialism to his advantage. He cooperated with liberals to promote rapid industrialization and secularism, and he devised the first welfare state in Europe in an attempt to limit the political influence of socialists.

Italy followed a similar process of national unification in the late-nineteenth century, led politically by the **Count of Cavour** and militarily by **Giuseppe Garibaldi**. As with Germany, Italian Unification led to the creation of a large nation-state based on shared language and cultural identity. Although Italians were overwhelmingly Catholic, the pope (unsuccessfully) opposed Italian Unification, which was completed with the capture of Rome.

### BISMARCK'S ALLIANCE SYSTEM

Having decisively defeated France, Germany had become the most powerful nation in Continental Europe; however, Bismarck saw that the German Empire was vulnerable to being attacked on two fronts by France and Russia. A unified and industrialized Germany made the Metternich's Concert System--which depended on a balance of power between the Great Powers--obsolete, so Bismarck devised an alliance system to keep Germany out of a two-front war. In 1879, Germany and Austria-Hungary entered into the **Dual Alliance**, promising to assist each other if either party were to be attacked by Russia, and to remain neutral if either was attacked by another power (such as France).

While Bismarck's alliance system succeeded in keeping peace while Bismarck held the reins of government in Germany, the Kaiser's sudden dismissal of Bismarck in 1890 placed European diplomacy in less-capable hands. France and Russia soon entered into a strategic alliance, expanding the alliance system and setting the stage for World War I.

The wave of ethnic nationalism that led to the unification of Germany and Italy would have the opposite effect in Austria-Hungary, a multi-ethnic empire in which ten different languages were spoken. Nationalist movements in the **Balkans** challenged the imperial rule of both Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in the region. Tensions between Serbian nationalists and Austria-Hungary would lead to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the immediate cause of World War I.