

# **RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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The Russian Federation (formerly the RSFSR, or one of the fifteen republics of the USSR) covers almost twice the area of the United States of America, or 17,075,200 square kilometers (6,591,100 square miles). The country reaches from Moscow in the west over the Urals and the vast Siberian plains to the Sea of Okhotsk in the east. The country is bounded by Norway and Finland in the northwest; by Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine in the west; by Georgia and Azerbaijan in the southwest; and by Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China along the southern land border. The Kaliningrad Region is a Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea bordered by Lithuania and Poland. The Russia Federation was established in 1991 when the USSR disintegrated and the former RSFSR became an independent nation. A declaration of state sovereignty was adopted on June 12, 1991 (now a national holiday), and official independence from the U.S.S.R. was established on August 24, 1991. The term *Russia* has been applied loosely to the Russian Empire until 1917, to the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) from 1917 to 1991, to the Russian Federation since 1991, or even (incorrectly) to mean the whole of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The term has also been used to designate the area inhabited by the Russian people as distinguished from other Eastern Slavs and from non-Slavic peoples. Moscow – the ninth largest city in

**the world and largest Russian city and capital – was founded in 1147. The city’s focal point is Red Square, bound on one side by the Kremlin and its thick red fortress wall containing 20 towers. Here tsars were crowned; in fact, Ivan the Terrible's throne is situated near the entrance. The second largest city, St Petersburg, is situated northwest of Moscow and was known as a cultural center with elegant palaces. The city is spread over 42 islands in the delta of the River Neva. The terrain of the Russian Federation consists of broad plains with low hills west of Urals; vast coniferous forest and tundra in Siberia; and uplands and mountains along southern border regions. Although the largest country in the world in terms of area, the Russian Federation is unfavorably located in relation to major sea lanes of the world. Despite its size, much of the country lacks proper soils and climates (either too cold or too dry) for agriculture.**

**The Soviet economy and society had stagnated in the 1970s and 1980s until General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-91) introduced “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (restructuring) in an attempt to modernize Communism. However, his initiatives inadvertently released uncontrollable forces. A coup was launched by hardliners in Gorbachev’s administration in an attempt to prevent the signing of a more liberal union treaty that would grant the separate republics more political independence. This coup attempt failed, as junior military leaders and the presidents of the republics, most notably Boris Yeltsin of the RSFSR, led popular resistance to the attempted coup. De facto power passed to Yeltsin and the presidents of the other republics; consequently, the Russian Federation became independent of the USSR. Since 1991, Russia has struggled in its efforts to build a**

democratic political system and market economy to replace the strict social, political, and economic controls of the Communist period. The country adopted a constitution (December 12, 1993) and established a bicameral Federal Assembly (*Federalnoye Sobraniye*). The current chief of state is President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, elected on May 7, 2000 with 52.9% of votes, as opposed to 29.2% for the Communist representative Gennady Zyuganov and 5.8% for the democratic centrist Grigory Yavlinsky.

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