


The creation of the Soviet buffer zone

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_creation_of_the_soviet_buffer_zone-en-e7ebc157-bd93-4984-b6e6-2f630bed6b81.html

Last updated: 07/07/2016



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Territorially enlarged, the USSR came out of the war with an aura of prestige from having fought Hitler's Germany. Although in 1945 the Communist world was limited to the Soviet Union, it rapidly spread to Central and Eastern Europe, forming a protective buffer zone for the USSR. Communist propaganda was greatly helped by the presence of the Soviet army in the countries that it had liberated in Central and Eastern Europe.

The leaders of non-Communist parties were progressively removed: they were either discredited, intimidated or subjected to show trials leading to their imprisonment or even execution. Three years was enough for the USSR to establish people's democracies ruled by Communist parties. Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia were more or less brutally forced into the Soviet embrace. Nevertheless, the refusal in 1948 of the Yugoslav Communists to follow the line decreed by the Cominform showed that the USSR had some difficulty keeping control of all its satellite countries.