Cold War
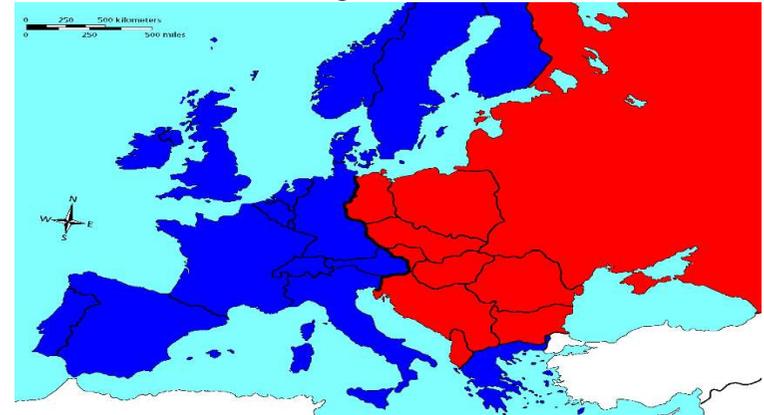
The USSR and the USA held conflicting ideologies. The USSR sphere of influence (usually called Eastern Europe during the Cold War) had state controlled economic policies and political policies that emphasised equality. These policies clashed with the free-market economic policies and emphasis on personal freedom that the USA promoted in its sphere of influence in Western Europe. After World War Two, the USSR and the USA found themselves with shared military authority in a defeated Germany. They struggled to co-operate. Mutual suspicion grew into a state of tension which became known as the Cold War. The Cold War lasted from 1947-1989 and was marked by intense competition between the USA and the USSR. They raced to have the most nuclear weapons, they were rivals in the space race, and they were always happy to support opposite sides in conflicts. Although the two superpowers never directly fought each other, their rivalry fuelled local and regional conflicts around the world.

Post-war Western Europe

Just a few years after 1945, Europe was divided into East and West, the frontline of a new Cold War. The continent that had been the most powerful in the world for so long, now found itself subject to the will of external forces: the USA and USSR (although, of course, part of the USSR was thought of as being in Europe.) War-torn and struggling to recover, the people of Europe emerged into a new post-war world with the so-called 'Iron Curtain' dividing their continent.

Map of Europe as described by Churchill in 1946 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Curtain

Fear of Germany

For many of the people of Europe Germany was a country that was still to be feared and mistrusted. Many Europeans thought German militarism had been a key cause of war in 1914. In this narrative, attempts to control Germany had failed in the 1920s and 30s, leading directly to another and even larger war. In 1945 the governments of both France and the USSR were convinced that Germany should be crushed completely to avoid the country ever threatening the peace of Europe again. This was not the policy of the US and British governments in 1945, but there was nevertheless deep distrust of Germany and Germans. Many European people had direct experience of suffering and death at the hands of Germans. This fear and mistrust made it hard for many European people, and for some of their leaders, to contemplate a strong and rearmed Germany. It also made it hard to adapt to the Cold War reality of West Germany as an ally and the USSR and Eastern Europe as a new enemy.

Economic situation

Europe's countries were in economic difficulties in 1945 and this continued for several years after the war ended. Destruction of people, infrastructure, occupation and massive spending on war had left Europe weak and exhausted. For example, Britain almost went bankrupt in 1947. In the light of this the rapid economic growth of western Europe from the 1950s is quite remarkable. The causes of this economic growth, which continued until the early 1970s, are much debated. Factors that are often cited are: the high productivity of Europe's people, the Marshall Plan gift of aid to Europe from the USA, the economic policies pursued by European governments, the promotion of free trade, international financial and economic agreements and new product and technologies.

Korean War	New superpowers
After World War Two, Korea was left divided and occupied, rather like Germany. The USSR influenced the North and the USA influenced the South so that when they withdrew from Korea in 1949, the two governments they left behind were communist in the North and democratic capitalist in the South. The USSR had trained a large army in North Korea before they withdrew in 1949. The South had a smaller, less well-trained force, and in January 1950 the US Secretary of State appeared to leave South Korea out of US Defence commitments. In June 1950 the North Koreans invaded South Korea. The US immediately sent troops and these were soon followed by United Nations troops from 14 nations (mostly the US, UK, Canada and Australia). The North Koreans were pushed back in September and October 1950, and for a while it looked as though Korea would be united under US influence. However, communist China wanted a buffer zone between itself and US influenced territory. Its troops invaded. Negotiations for a truce began in July 1951, but it was not until July 1953 (after the death of Stalin and the election of Eisenhower as US President) that a ceasefire line was agreed at the 38th parallel. In Europe there were fears of a communist invasion over the border of divided Germany. These fears were stoked by comments from the East German leader, Walter Ulbricht. The German economy took a boost from the provision of war materials to the UN fighting forces. The British government had to cut back the new British National Health Service in order to pay for its troops.	The countries of Europe emerged from World War Two exhausted. For example, Britain, undefeated but almost bankrupt, immediately began the dismantling of a world-wide Empire she could no longer afford. France, re-establishing its independence and democracy after years of occupation and collaboration, was also a shadow of the former imperial power it had been. Germany lay in ruins and under military occupation by the four wartime allies: USSR, Britain, USA and France. Real power to define world affairs passed firmly to the USA and the USSR. These two 'superpowers', as they became known, were to dominate international relations until 1991. The western European countries found that they could not defend themselves without the assistance of the USA.

Student material - Context cards: *In preparation for the activity, these cards can be given to students to read and to think about the connections between them. They can also be made available for students to refer to throughout the activity. They should help students to think about the options available to their characters as the activity progresses.*