

# 1

## GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

### FIND OUT

How has geography influenced Russia and the other republics that once were a part of the Soviet Union?

Why has Russia had difficulty developing its many resources?

How has ethnic diversity affected the republics of the former Soviet Union?

**Vocabulary** permafrost

“**T**he whole of the country was a vast green wilderness. Never a plow had passed over its measureless waves of wild grass. . . . The whole of the surface of the earth was like a gold and green sea, on which millions of flowers of different colors were sprinkled. ”

With these words, the Russian writer Nicholas Gogol described the huge, open plain, often called the steppe, that stretches across parts of Ukraine and Russia. The steppe is one of many geographic regions that influenced the development of Russia.

### Russia Reemerges

For most of this century, the world's largest country was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union. It sprawled 6,000 miles (9,700 km) across Europe and Asia, from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. In area, it was more than twice the size of the United States. The Soviet Union included 15 republics ruled by a central government in Moscow, the nation's capital.

In 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist after the republics, one by one, declared independence. You will read about the breakup

of the Soviet Union in Chapter 34. The chart on page 709 shows the size, population, and climate of the nations that emerged out of the Soviet Union.

Russia was by far the largest republic in the Soviet Union. It had half the country's population and about three fourths of its territory. Today, Russia, or the Russian Federation as it is known officially, remains the largest and most powerful nation in the region. If you rode the Trans-Siberian Railroad across Russia, you would cross 11 time zones.

Although the other republics operate in the shadow of Russia, they are seeking to carve out their own independent course. From tiny Estonia on the Baltic Sea to Kazakhstan in central Asia, each has its own government and pursues its own policies.

## Landforms

The major landform of Russia and neighboring republics is the huge plain that stretches from the middle of Europe into Central Asia. In Europe, it is part of the North

### MAP STUDY

The Russian Federation includes lands in both Europe and Asia. To the south and west lie other independent republics that once were part of the Soviet Union.

- 1. Region** (a) What landform dominates much of this region? (b) Name three major mountain ranges.
- 2. Interaction** (a) List the main rivers and bodies of water in the region. (b) How do you think they have helped the development of the economy?
- 3. Forecasting** Which former Soviet republics would probably be most influential in a regional organization? Why?



### Nations of the Former Soviet Union

	Area in thousands of square miles	Area in thousands of square kilometers	Population in millions	Climate
Russia	6,590	17,080	148	Continental, subpolar, polar
Ukraine	230	600	52	Continental
Uzbekistan	170	450	22	Semiarid, desert
Kazakhstan	1,050	2,720	17	Semiarid, desert, highlands
Belarus	80	205	10	Continental
Azerbaijan	30	80	7	Semiarid, highlands
Georgia	30	80	6	Semiarid, highlands, savanna
Tajikistan	60	140	6	Semiarid, highlands
Kyrgyzstan	80	205	5	Semiarid, highlands
Moldova	10	30	4	Continental
Turkmenistan	190	490	4	Semiarid, desert
Armenia	10	30	4	Semiarid, highlands
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,530</b>	<b>22,110</b>	<b>285</b>	
<b>Baltic states</b>				
Lithuania	30	70	4	Continental
Latvia	30	60	3	Continental
Estonia	20	50	2	Continental
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>8,610</b>	<b>22,290</b>	<b>294</b>	

Sources: *Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1994 Book of the Year; Britannica Atlas, 1989.*

**Chart Skills** Today, 15 independent nations occupy the land of the former Soviet Union. Locate the former Soviet republics on the map on page 708. ► Using the information on the map and on the chart, identify the four nations with the largest population. What is the relative location of each?

European Plain. In Asia, it is called the West Siberian Plain.

In places, low hills break the seemingly endless plain. The low-lying Ural Mountains mark the division between Europe and Asia. The Urals do not form a real barrier, however. Throughout history, migrating peoples and invaders from Europe and Asia came into

contact on the plain. Invaders caused great suffering among those in their paths. They also brought knowledge and ideas that deeply influenced the lands they crossed.

**Plateaus and mountains.** South and west of the plain are plateaus and mountains. The Caucasus Mountains lie between the Black and Caspian seas in the republics of Georgia,

Armenia, and Azerbaijan (az uhr bī JAHN) and separate Russia from Turkey and Iran. Farther east, the towering Pamir Mountains separate several Central Asian republics from Afghanistan and China. The Pamirs and other mountains block moisture from the Pacific and have created the deserts in these republics.

**Seas, lakes, and rivers.** Large inland seas and lakes provide nearby peoples with water, transportation routes, and food. The Caspian Sea is the world's largest inland sea. To the east, the Aral Sea is shrinking because the rivers that feed it have been diverted to irrigate farmland. In Siberia, Lake Baikal holds more water than the Great Lakes of North America combined.

Rivers were important to the development of Russia. In Europe, the first Russian state emerged at Kiev on the Dnieper (NEE puh-r) River. Farther east, the Don and the mighty Volga rivers were busy highways of trade. In Asian Russia, the great rivers of Siberia, such as the Ob, Yenisei, and Lena, became important sources of hydroelectric power.

### **Climate, Vegetation, and Resources**

Most of the republics of the former Soviet Union lie above 49° N latitude—the same line that marks the border between the United States and Canada. Because they are located so far north, the republics have a cold continental climate. Winters are long and bitterly cold, while summers are short and hot.

Because most of the republics are located inland, they do not benefit from ocean winds that carry moisture and moderate the extremes of heat and cold. Only the republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in the Caucasus region have mild climates.

Harsh winters hurt the economy. They limit the growing season for crops, increase demands for energy, and create transportation problems. In Siberia, **permafrost**, a layer of soil below the surface that remains permanently frozen, makes building homes and factories both expensive and difficult.

Climate and location have influenced Russia's relations with other nations. Because its

northern ports freeze during the winter, Russia has sought warm-water ports to the south—especially seaports on the Black Sea that have access to the Mediterranean. Over the centuries, this has led to several wars with neighboring states.

On some occasions, cold winters have helped Russia. In 1812, "General Winter" destroyed the armies of the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte after he invaded Russia. During World War II, "General Winter" helped out once more when German troops tried to overrun the Soviet Union.

**Vegetation zones.** Six vegetation zones stretch across the former Soviet Union. In the Arctic north is the frozen tundra, which supports only mosses and lichens. South of the tundra is the taiga, a huge belt of evergreen forests that is larger in size than all 48 states of the continental United States. Still farther south, the taiga merges into another forest zone with broad-leaved trees such as maples, birches, and elms.

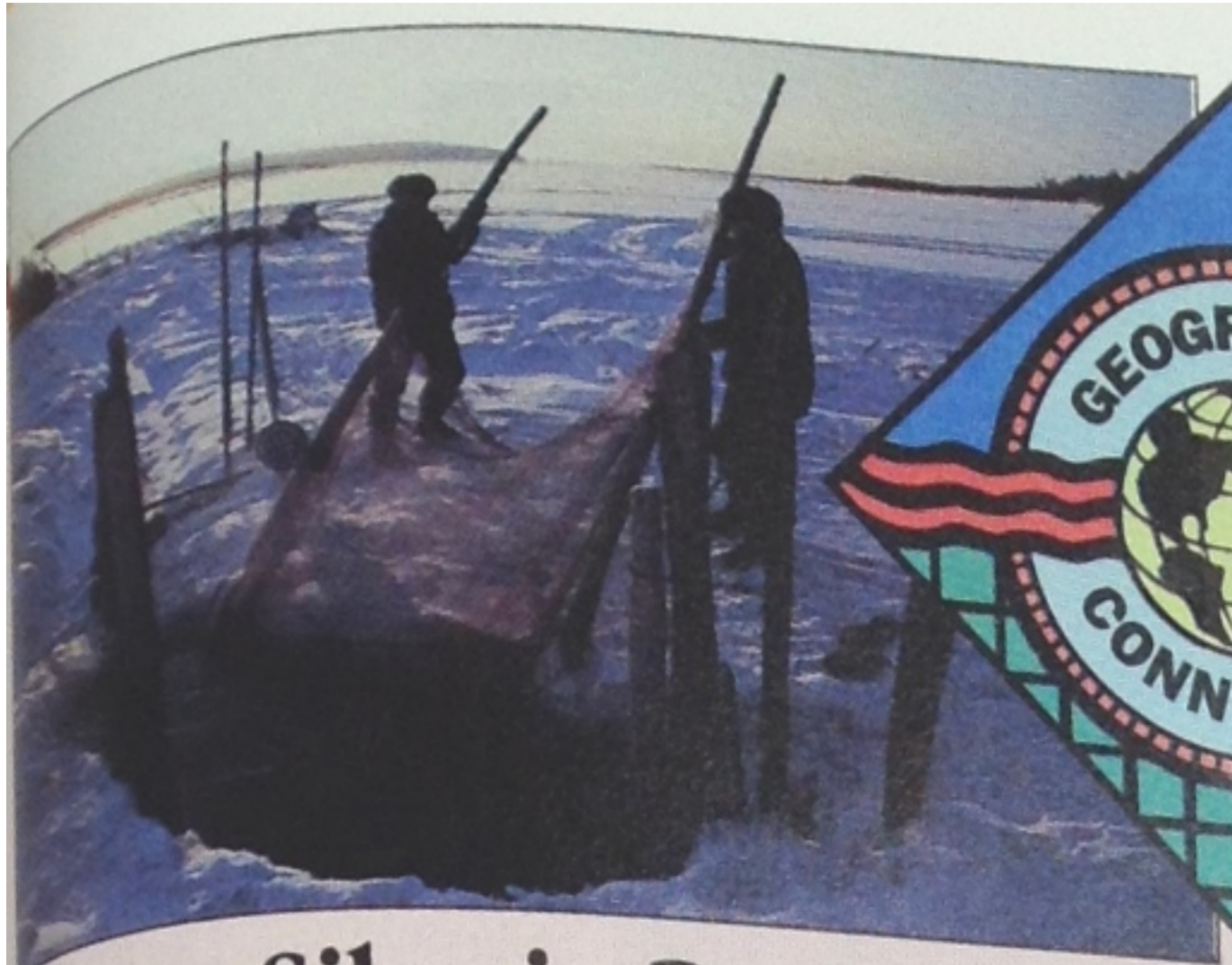
The fourth zone is the steppe, which stretches from Ukraine to Kazakhstan. With its rich black soil, the fertile steppe is the region's "breadbasket." There, farmers raise wheat, rye, barley, and potatoes. Although the steppe is similar to the American prairies, it receives less rainfall and often requires irrigation.

South and east of the steppe is the desert region of Central Asia. A sixth zone, in the mild, moist Caucasus region, supports subtropical crops such as tea, fruit, and nuts.

**Resources.** The republics of the former Soviet Union have a great variety of natural resources, although Russia has the greatest share. Russia has huge forests; fertile soil; enormous deposits of oil, coal, iron ore, and natural gas; and valuable minerals such as gold, platinum, and chromium.

Unfortunately, these resources are generally hard to exploit. Many mineral deposits lie in remote parts of Siberia. The best soil for farming is in regions that get only light rainfall, or even in the desert of Central Asia.

Until this century, Russia remained a relatively poor country despite its great potential. Using modern technology, the Soviet Union



## Can Siberia Be Saved?

Galya Pavlikova climbs into a green van and sets out from the northern Siberian town of Norilsk, driving across the tundra. Stopping near a park, she holds a metal tube outside the van window and then checks the dials on a machine. "The air quality is acceptable," Pavlikova announces.

Pavlikova's job is to take pollution readings at 13 locations around Norilsk. Valuable metal ores were discovered there in the 1920s, and the government built factories to process them. Today, the smelting plant still pours chemical wastes into nearby rivers and its chimneys rain sulfuric acid on the tundra. On windless days, the air in Norilsk smells very much like rotten eggs. Breathing scorches the lungs.

Norilsk's environmental problems are not unique in Siberia. Sprawling across 4 million square miles (10 million sq km), Siberia is one of the world's richest storehouses of mineral wealth, including gas, oil, coal, precious metals, and metals that are of strategic importance to the military. The Soviet Union built factories and sent workers to Siberia to exploit these rich resources. But while development boosted the Soviet economy and helped meet the country's vast energy needs, it devastated the Siberian land.

Many Siberian cities rank among Russia's 70 most polluted urban centers. In some areas, lung cancer levels soared and respiratory infections among children occurred at an alarming rate. Heavy vehicles destroyed the fragile plant life of the tundra, and oil spills threatened to pollute lakes and rivers. One official complained, "They are poisoning us."

By the late 1980s, the people of Siberia had begun to protest. Residents of smoke-stack cities rallied to demand clean air. They called on the government to close down the worst sources of pollution. They opposed attempts to build new industries. The government made efforts to clean up the pollution, but progress was slow.

Today, the Russian Federation still faces the challenge of Siberia. Russia's new leaders must find a way to exploit Siberia's natural resources without destroying its environment.

1. What environmental problems does Siberia face?
2. **Making Decisions** What steps might the Russian government take to reduce pollution in Siberia? Explain the possible cost of such steps.



exploited its natural resources more fully. However, the rush to modernize has damaged the environment. For example, paper mills built to exploit Siberia's forests have polluted Lake Baikal.

## Peoples

Before its collapse, the Soviet Union was a truly multinational nation; with people of more than 100 nationalities. Most had their own languages, cultures, and traditions. In



#### Ukrainian Dancers

The peoples of Eastern Europe have preserved their distinctive cultures. Ukrainians like those shown here are proud of their culture, including traditional music and folk dances. **Culture** How does a society benefit from cultural diversity? How can it be harmed?

fact, the demands of national groups for independence helped cause the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The nationalities that live in the republics include Slavic peoples such as Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians. Armenians, Georgians, and Azeri live in the Caucasus. Kazakhs, Kyrgyzis, Mongols, Turkmen, and Uzbeks are among those who live in the Central Asian republics.

People in the republics follow a variety of religions. Christians include members of the Russian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic churches. Thousands of Jews live in Russia and other republics. In addition, many people in the Central Asian republics are Muslims.

Today, each of the republics has a dominant ethnic group, but diversity still remains. In the Russian Federation, for example, about 80 percent of the people are Russians. The other 20 percent belong to a variety of ethnic groups.

Tangled tensions among ethnic and religious groups have led to conflict. Battles have erupted in Moldova, Tajikistan, Georgia, and other republics.

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

- 1. Locate:** (a) Russia, (b) North European Plain, (c) West Siberian Plain, (d) Ural Mountains, (e) Caspian Sea, (f) Dnieper River.
- 2. Identify:** (a) tundra, (b) taiga, (c) steppe.
- 3. Define:** permafrost.
- (a) What is the major landform of the former Soviet Union? (b) How have landforms affected Russia in the past?
- (a) How has climate affected the Russian economy? (b) Why did Russia seek access to ports on the Black Sea? (c) How has climate helped Russia in the past?
- (a) What are Russia's chief resources? (b) What problems does it face in exploiting these resources?
- 7. Synthesizing Information** List two geographic reasons why Russia is likely to dominate relations with neighboring countries that were once part of the Soviet Union.
- 8. Writing Across Cultures** Write a paragraph comparing the climate of your region with the dominant climate of Russia. (See the map on page 778.)