The European recovery program (Marshall Plan)


George Marshall

The European recovery plan, also known as the Marshall Plan after the US Secretary of State who proposed it, covered a range of economic strategies and reforms which aimed to provide aid to Western Europe after the devastation of World War II. It also helped the United States to become the leading country of the Western world and to prevent the spread of communism.

Historical background

During WW2, millions of European citizens had been killed or badly injured, and many cities in Great Britain, Italy, Germany and France had been devastated. Transport infrastructures had also been damaged, and banks and other financial institutions were in ruins. Entire regions were risking famine since the bombing and fighting had not allowed people to grow crops. The only world power that had not been structurally affected by the conflict and whose economy was in good health was the United States.

George Marshall

George Marshall was appointed Secretary of State by President Truman in January 1947. Just like many other American politicians, he feared that poverty and hunger would strengthen the appeal of communist parties and intensify the influence of the Soviet Union, which had already occupied most of Eastern and Central Europe and which was ruled by Stalin.



The enactment of the Recovery Plan

In 1947 Marshall presented his plan to help not only the broken economies of the countries who had been allies during the war, but also those of the enemy nations, such as Germany and Italy. Marshall even invited the Soviets to participate, but they refused because they thought it was a plan to dominate Europe economically. As a consequence, most of the Eastern countries under the Soviet influence did not take part in the programme, which eventually included seventeen countries. The Marshall Plan was signed by President Truman on April 3rd, 1948.

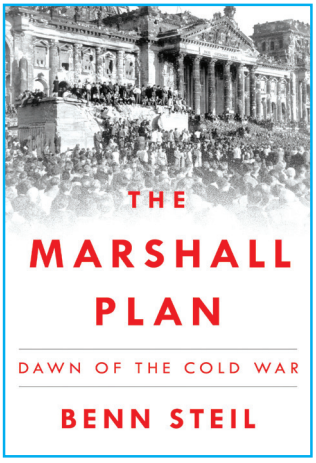
What the plan implied

The US Congress allocated funds amounting to $13 billion (about $316 billion today) to finance the plan over a three-year period. This money aimed to:

- meet the immediate need for food, medicine and housing;
- restart Europe's productive capacity by rebuilding factories, railroads, bridges, etc.;
- re-establish European financial systems;
- restore political stability.

Criticism of the Marshall Plan

Even though no one can deny the overall success of the Marshall Plan in helping many countries recover from disastrous conditions, some critics claim it largely contributed to the Cold War: according to them, the real intention of the US was to destabilise Soviet authority in Eastern Europe and establish a capitalistic ideal in opposition to the communist one.



appeal: *attrattiva*
to claim: *sostenere*
enactment: *varo*
famine: *carestia*
injured: *ferito*

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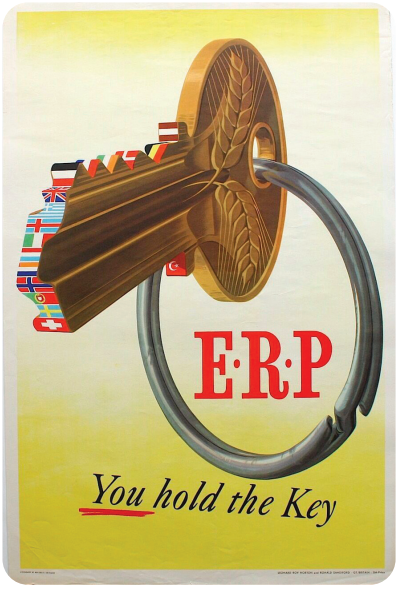
1 Decide if the statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

	T	F
1. President Truman chose George Marshall as vice-president.	☐	☐
2. During the war, agricultural production had practically stopped and this led to food shortages.	☐	☐
3. The US economy had been affected by the war as much as the European countries' economies.	☐	☐
4. President Truman authorised the plan presented by Marshall.	☐	☐
5. One of the goals of the Marshall Plan was to help Europe rebuild its infrastructure.	☐	☐
6. George Marshall did not want to invite the USSR to participate in the plan.	☐	☐
7. 15 countries received aid from the Marshall Plan.	☐	☐
8. Everybody supported the Marshall Plan.	☐	☐

2 GROUP WORK Here are the most common types of foreign aid provided to countries in danger. Rank them from the most to the least important giving reasons for your choices. Compare your choices with the rest of the class.

- ☐ Humanitarian aid (such as food, clothing, medicine)
- ☐ Cash grants
- ☐ Loans
- ☐ Civilian advisors (providing know-how and assistance in building the economy and democracy)
- ☐ Military bases and troops
- ☐ Weapons and military equipment



3 What kind of aid did Italy receive as a recipient country of the Marshall Plan? Look for information on the Internet and share your findings with your class.

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