

Hopes and fears

The fact that Europe's great powers were tied together in alliances is not enough to explain why there was a war. We need to go deeper to find out why different nations were rivals and enemies. This map and the fact files on the great powers will help.



France

Number of soldiers: 1.25 million

Number of battleships: 28

Money spent on arms in 1913-14: £37 million

Background information: France had lost a war against Germany in 1871. She was angry about this and wanted revenge. She also wanted to get back the land she had lost to Germany (Alsace-Lorraine). She was scared that Germany could beat her in another war if she did not have strong friends to help her. She was determined to keep her large empire, e.g. lands in Africa and Asia.

Britain

Number of soldiers: 711,000

Number of battleships: 64

Money spent on arms in 1913-14: £50 million

Background information: Britain had been the first nation to have an industrial revolution. This had made her very rich. She also had a massive empire spread across the world in places such as India, Africa, Australia and Canada. She needed to be sure that her powerful navy could control all sea routes, especially in the English Channel. She hoped that the other nations in Europe would keep each other quiet so that none of them could grow powerful enough to challenge her.

Germany

Number of soldiers: 2.2 million

Number of battleships: 40

Money spent on arms in 1913-14: £60 million

Background information: Germany had only existed as a nation since 1871. In that year she proved that she had the strongest army in Europe when she beat France in a war and took rich areas of land from her. She was determined to catch up with Britain's wealth and power so she built many factories. From 1900 she also built many battleships. Kaiser Wilhelm, the emperor of Germany from 1888, wanted to have a world-wide empire. He also feared that Germany was being encircled by an enemy alliance.

Russia

Number of soldiers: 1.2 million

Number of battleships: 16

Money spent on arms in 1913-14: £67 million

Background information: Russia had a large empire in Asia but she wanted to have more influence over south-east Europe. This would give her access to essential supplies via the Mediterranean Sea. Austria-Hungary was a great force in south-east Europe and so was Germany. Russia had been going through hard times since 1900 and the Tsar (emperor) was unpopular. The Russian people had much in common with the Serbs and the Tsar believed his country would like him more if he supported the Serbs against Austria-Hungary.

Austria-Hungary

Number of soldiers: 810,000

Number of battleships: 16

Money spent on arms in 1913-14: £22 million

Background information: Austria-Hungary ruled over many different races, such as the Serbs, who wanted their own independent nations. The Austrians wanted to stop nationalism breaking up their large empire in central Europe. They were also scared that Russia might gain great influence in south-east Europe.