In the first half of the eleventh century, military conflict and political changes altered the ethnonationalistic makeup of the population in the central parts of Central Europe in an unprecedented manner that would not be repeated until the twentieth century. A coalition of pastoralist ("nomadic") Finno-Ugric and Turkic ethnic groups expanded to the Danubian Basin. Under this military and demographic pressure, Greater Moravia waned and ceased to exist at the turn of the eleventh century. The invaders established their own polity in its stead, which became known as Hungary. The western half of Greater Moravia, organized as the polities of Bohemia and Moravia became part of the Frankish Kingdom, in 962 overhauled into a Holy Roman Empire. The center of Hungary and its eastern borderlands became increasingly Finno-Ugric from the ethnonationalistic point of view. Turkic-speakers assimilated with the Finno-Ugric majority of the invaders and disappeared. However, during the 1237 Mongol invasion of Central Europe, Turkic-speaking Cumans (Polo-vtsians, Kipchaks) sought refuge in Hungary. Afterward they settled in this kingdom and received territorial autonomy, which they retained until 1876, for centuries after they stopped speaking Turkic. These autonomous territories were known as Cumania Major (Nagykunság) and Cumania Minor (Kiskunság).

The mainly Turkicophone Khazar Khaganate that controlled lands between the Black and Caspian Seas declined in the course of disastrous wars against Rus’ and the (East) Roman Empire (Romania), before collapsing in the 960s. The short-lived alliance of Rus’ with the Turkic-speaking Pecheneg pastoralists, which gave Kyiv access to the Black Sea littoral, was over by the early eleventh century. Simultaneously, in 1018 Romania defeated Bulgaria and re-incorporated its territory south of the Danube. As a result, Bulgaria’s former northern half beyond the Danube was open to penetration by Turkicophone pastoralists. Most probably, around that time (East) Romance-speaking Vlachs, distressed by wars and collapsing states, migrated north of the Danube seeking secluded pastures in the Carpathians. This hypothesis explains the late medieval appearance of Romance-speakers, who then established Walachia and Moldavia in the fourteenth century. In 1866 these two Danubian Principalities gave rise to the Romanian nation-state. However, this hypothesis is at odds with the Romanian national master narrative, which claims a continuous presence of Romance-speakers in this area since the Romans conquered Dacia in the early second century, despite the fact that Rome had evacuated this province already in 271. There are no historical records confirming any Romanceophone presence in Dacia between the late third and thirteenth centuries. However, such presence during this period of one thousand years is reasonably attested south of the Danube.

The short-lived expansion of Rus’ to the Black Sea left the state in control of the exclave of the former Khazar fortress of Tmutorokan’ and its vicinity, both at Crimea’s easternmost end and in the Kerch Peninsula. This explains the persistent Slavic presence in the area. Another political change that altered a dialect continuum took place in the mid-twelfth century in the Mediterranean when Sicily was conquered by the Caliphate and turned into an emirate. This added an Arabic-speaking element to the island’s Greek- and (West) Romance-speaking Christian population. In the north, the founding of the Slavic polities east of Denmark on the southern Baltic littoral replaced the earlier Norse presence there. What is more, the eastward expansion of the Holy Roman Empire was stopped by the founding of Poland in the second half of the tenth century, though the country adopted this name only in the early eleventh century.

The region of Central Europe from the east was bordered by the Holy Roman Empire and from the south by Romania. Both these superpowers were Christian and whenever they had the opportunity they conquered any non-Christian polity. This normative principle could not escape the attention of the rulers of Hungary, Poland, or Rus’. In order to prop up their states with a widely accepted legitimizing ideology, these rulers and their courts adopted Christianity as their official religion, namely, in 966 in Poland, 988 in Rus’, and 1000–1001 in Hungary. Poland and Hungary received Christianity from the Holy Roman Empire, complete with the Latin language- and alphabet-based literacy. Rus’ adopted Christianity from Romania, but this event was not followed by the usual cultural package of Greek language- and alphabet-based literacy. Unlike Bulgaria’s autocephalous Church, the Rus’ counterpart remained under the ecclesiastical control of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Constantinople. However, Rus’ was located too far to the north for Romania to be able to extend effective control over it. Hence, the compromise was struck that the Rus’ Church would fall back on the Cyrillic-based Slavonic literacy as initiated in Greater Moravia and codified in Bulgaria. The cost of not following this normative pattern of Christian statehood was amply illustrated by the fate of the obstinately non-Christian Obodrite state that was crushed and destroyed.
by the Holy Roman Empire in the course of the 1147 Wendish (that is, “Slavic”) Crusade along the Baltic littoral.

The founding of Hungary translated into a stable Finno-Ugric dialect continuum in the middle of Central Europe. With time it “touched” the Germanic dialect continuum in the west, that is, in the Holy Roman Empire. In the east, Finno-Ugricphone Hungarians brushed shoulders with Turkic-speaking pastoralists, first, Cumans, and later Pechenegs and Polovtsians. The semi-permanent—or better, fleeting—presence of these pastoralists effectively extended the Turkic dialect continuum (Central Asian in its origin) into Central Europe. Meanwhile, Romance-speaking pastoralists settled in the previously uninhabited southern and eastern Carpathians, firmly founding an East Romance dialect continuum in the Danubian Basin. These changes in the ethnolinguistic make-up of the population in the middle of Central Europe gradually bisected the original Slavic dialect continuum into a North Slavic dialect continuum and a South Slavic dialect continuum.