



Lesson 113

The Battle Over Ukraine

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In this lesson we are going to be looking at the invasion of Ukraine. Specifically, we're going to be looking at the events that led up to the invasion, beginning all the way at the Time of the End.

Ukraine and the USSR

Voting for independence

Ukraine became independent from the USSR (Soviet Union) in 1991. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell which marked the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukraine had been part of the USSR and under its control since 1922, but with its death approaching, Ukraine began to discuss independence. On March 17, 1991, the Soviet Union asked all the republics it controlled if they wanted to try and preserve the USSR or become independent. However, instead of wanting to become independent, the majority of Ukrainians actually voted to stay in the USSR. Soon after this, Ukraine started to change and become more in favor of independence. It's speculated why this shift took place, but we can see two reasons. One was the overall continued collapse of the USSR, and the other was a failed coup. In August of 1991, soviet extremists tried to take over the USSR and stop it from losing control, but the coup failed. Just days after the coup, on August 24, 1991 Ukraine passed the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine. With 321 votes in its favor and only two opposing votes (plus six abstentions), Ukraine's parliament declared the country's independence from the USSR. That day the parliament also called for a national referendum on support for independence. On December 1, 1991, the referendum was held in which 84% of the Ukrainian electorate participated. Over 90% of Ukrainians voted in favor of independence; this vote basically crippled any chance of the USSR staying together, as Ukraine was its second most powerful republic (second to Russia). During the process of gaining independence and in the time after, Ukraine went on to establish its own military, navy, national currency, and government.

A new Constitution

Shortly after Ukraine gained independence it created and ratified a new Constitution. From independence until then, Ukraine had used the Constitution they had when they were under the Soviet Union (although it had been amended a few times). In 1996, this new Constitution was written by the Supreme Council of Ukraine (Ukraine's highest legislative body). The Constitution gave a lot more power to the president. For almost 24 hours, between June 27th and June 28th the new Constitution was debated. It was finally adopted with a 315 to 135 margin; the news wasn't spread officially until mid-July but the Constitution still went into effect that same day. Ukraine was the last country that had gotten independence from the Soviet Union to make a new Constitution, and every year on June 28th they celebrate the ratification of that Constitution.

Independent Ukraine

Yanukovych elected

Viktor Fedorovych Yanukovych was elected as the fourth president of Ukraine in 2010. During his campaign, he ran on policies such as getting closer to the United States and joining the European Union. He held this view for a portion of his time in office. In a speech on September 4, 2013, Yanukovych told the crowd that they should forget about ever having closer ties with Russia, again stating that siding with the European Union and the United States was a better choice for Ukraine. “Less than three months later Yanukovich spurned the EU [and] embraced Russian President Vladimir Putin.” “Why Ukraine spurned the EU and embraced Russia.” *Reuters*. On November 21, 2013, only days before Ukraine and the European Union were supposed to sign a deal, Yanukovych withdrew from the meetings and announced that he was going to go into partnership with Russia. “Public and private arm-twisting by Putin, including threats to Ukraine’s economy and Yanukovich’s political future, played a significant part,” *Reuters*. Many of the Ukrainians did not like that he ultimately sides with Russia unlike he promised during his campaign.

Revolution in Ukraine

In 2014, the Ukrainian Revolution took place. The Revolution has different names, such as the Maidan Revolution or Revolution of Dignity, but they all refer to the fight between the pro-Russian government and the opposition. We previously saw how Yanukovych was elected to become the president of Ukraine. He was also a corrupt oligarch who favored Russia. In November of 2013, Yanukovych refused to sign a deal with the European Union that Ukraine’s parliament had already supported and finalized, instead, he favored deals with Russia. Ukrainians were already upset with the influence of oligarchs such as Yanukovych - their abuse of power and corruption. This refusal by Yanukovych sparked riots called the Euromaidan protests. Anti-protests formed in response and soon the riots turned into a revolution. The Ukrainian revolution took place from February 18-23rd. During the revolution protesters clashed with police in Kyiv with about 130 civilian deaths plus 18 police deaths. Protesters also took control of government buildings throughout the country. On February 21, 2014, Yanukovych and the opposition in parliament made an agreement to form a new temporary (interim) government and to hold early elections. However, the next day police withdrew from Kyiv and it was flooded by protestors. Threatened by the rioters, Yanukovych fled the area, and parliament also successfully voted to remove him from office. Yanukovych called on Russia, who supported him and considered his removal a coup. Although Ukrainians had won the revolution and removed Yanukovych from power, Russia didn’t recognize their new government, and would make its move soon.

Invasion of Crimea

Crimea is an autonomous republic within Ukraine, but as we all know, in 2014 it was invaded by Russia. A short time after Yanukovych fled to Russia an interim government was set up in Ukraine, which put out a warrant for his arrest citing all the people that had died in the protests. But in Crimea, like the rest of Ukraine, there was still a lot of unrest. On February 26, 2014 the parliament of Crimea met to decide if they would stay with Ukraine or not - but nothing was voted on that day. Then early on February 27th armed men, without any identifying markers, took over the government buildings of Crimea. A few hours later Sergei Aksyonov went to the parliament building and took over, he was the head of the pro-Russian Unity party and he also commanded a militia. A secret vote was also conducted that day; 50 members were needed in order for the vote to be valid, but no one knows if 50 members were even there: only people Aksyonov invited were allowed in and no one from the press was there either. There were two votes and both were unanimous, but the armed guards had stayed, so that might not have been true either. Fifty-three people voted to replace the pro-Ukrainian Anatoly Mogilyov, with the pro-Russian inexperienced politician Sergei Aksyonov as prime minister of Crimea. In the second vote 61 people agreed to call a referendum on whether or not Crimea should stay with Ukraine or go to Russia. On March 6th the parliament voted to join Russia, and on March 16th (amidst pressure and allegations of fraud) 97% of people in Crimea voted for the same thing. By March 21st, Putin had signed a law making Crimea a part of Russia. But most of the rest of the world does not accept this. People know that the unidentifiable soldiers were Russian soldiers, although Putin dismisses this. Also, at this same time an identical take over happened in eastern Ukraine. Both of these regions are still under Russian influence.

Poroshenko elected

Petro Oleksiyovych Poroshenko served as the president of Ukraine from 2014 to 2019. His campaign was based on transparency (which the country hadn't seen a lot of) and getting rid of corruption. He succeeded a little regarding the latter. When he was elected, the country was in turmoil. There were protests and Russia had just annexed Crimea. Many Ukrainians didn't like the annexation of Crimea, so during the election, much of parliament was replaced with pro-Western politicians. In December of the same year Ukraine changed from being a nonaligned country to wanting to join NATO. Quoting Poroshenko, "Like so many of my countrymen, I believed that for Ukraine to become a modern and successful country, it needed to expand its ties with the West and end widespread corruption and abuses of power," "Petro Poroshenko: Ukraine needs the U.S. to respond to Russia" *The Washington Post*. Unlike Yanukovych, Poroshenko did not run a campaign on forming ties with the West then change his mind. However, he did not remain long in power because the Panama Papers (millions of leaked financial documents) uncovered that instead of selling his businesses like he said he was when he became president, he moved his assets to an offshore company. Because he ran his campaign on eliminating corruption, the Ukrainian people were very upset with his hypocrisy, and did not elect him for a second term.

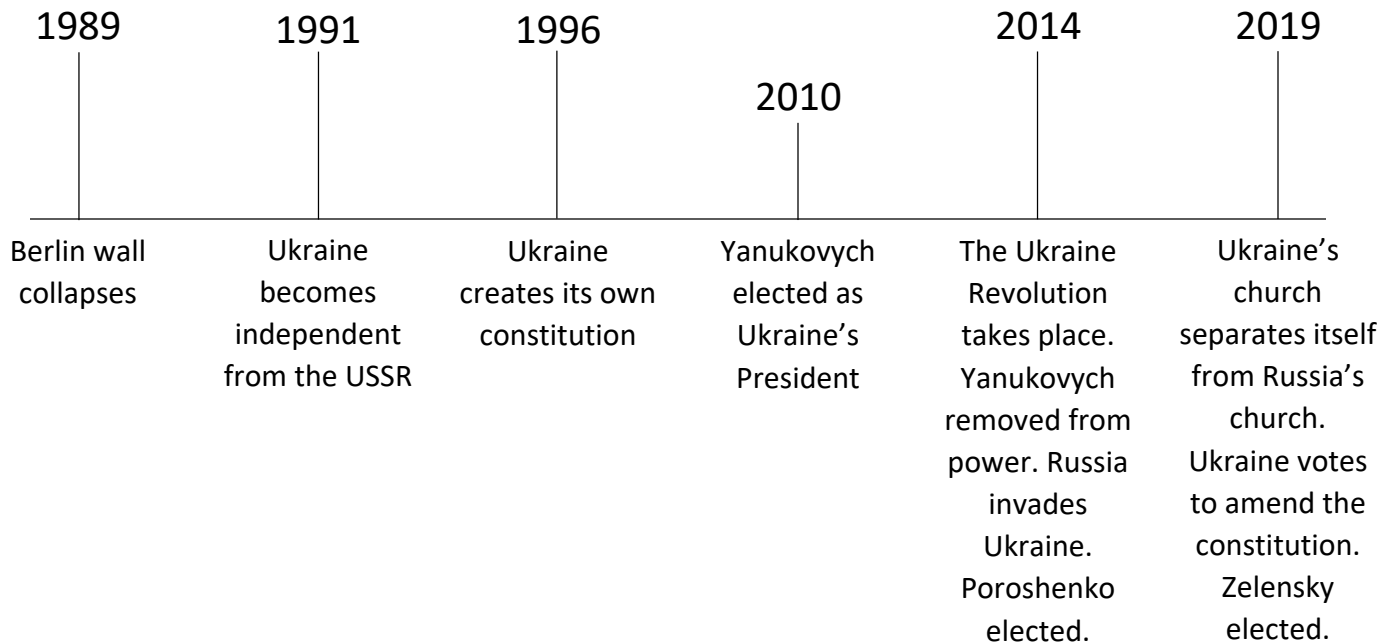
The church and the Constitution

In 2019, Ukraine's President Poroshenko made major shifts away from Russia. For centuries the Russian Orthodox church had authority over the Ukraine Orthodox church, but tensions began to rise when Ukraine became independent in 1991. Tensions increased in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. In January of 2019, Poroshenko traveled to Istanbul in Turkey to meet with the head of the global Orthodox church. He acquired a signed document officially granting Ukraine's Orthodox church independence from Russia's. We know Putin uses the church as a political tool for his own ends, and by the church becoming independent, Ukraine zapped another method of control out of his hands. The second major shift Ukraine made was amending the constitution. In February of 2019, Ukraine's parliament successfully voted to approve Poroshenko's bill to amend the Ukrainian constitution. The amendment included Ukraine's objectives to eventually join the European Union and NATO; Poroshenko called the legislation "momentous" and a "historic day." Russia is part of neither the European Union nor NATO, and therefore we know this amendment angered Putin, as he was losing grip of Ukraine which he considers is one of his spheres of influence.

Zelensky elected

Petro Poroshenko, the incumbent president of Ukraine was having a lot of problems, and the elections of 2019 did not look good for him. About four months before they took place, on December 31, 2018, on TV, Volodymyr Zelensky declared that he would run for president. Volodymyr Zelensky was trained in law, but he worked in the film business; he was an actor and comedian. He campaigned over social media and YouTube - nevertheless the people liked him. The first round of voting took place on March 31, 2019 and Zelensky won more than 30% of the votes (which was the most). On April 19th he debated Poroshenko, who had gotten second place, this was the first and only time they debated. Then on April 21, 2019 he won 73% of the vote making him the winner of the presidential election. On May 20th, he was sworn in as the 6th president of Ukraine. He didn't really have a platform, but he talked a lot about stopping corruption and getting people to trust politicians again. Zelensky is Jewish and so was the prime minister at the time - making Ukraine the only country outside of Israel to have both of those positions filled with someone who is a Jew. Zelensky's political party "Servant of the People" was made right before the elections, so he called a parliamentary election in July to try to get some seats for his party in the parliament. Servant of the People won an absolute majority of the seats - the first time that has happened since Ukraine was in the USSR. Zelensky has faced a lot of things as president. At the beginning of his presidency there was Trump, who tried to get him to come under his influence, and do what he wanted. In July, Trump asked Zelensky to investigate Hunter Biden in order for him to send aid to the country. There was also the COVID-19 pandemic, and the work that Zelensky has done to keep his promise of getting rid of corruption. In the next lesson, we will look at another problem Zelensky is facing and see how it is partly the consequence of Zelensky trying to clean up corruption in Ukraine.

In summary:



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