

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Border Crossings

12-6-18

History Between Ukraine and Russia

The countries of Russia and Ukraine have been closely affiliated for hundreds of years. Ukraine was a part of the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th century. Ukraine was also a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in the 20th century. Their relationship had always been fairly mutually beneficial until the USSR disbanded in the 1990s and the countries began to go separate ways. Ukraine was trying to westernize and become more like countries in the European Union. Their efforts never had much success due to the fact a lot of the Ukrainians were still very pro-Russia along with the Ukrainian government's inexperience and frequent Russian influenced corruption. Close to 30% of the population in Ukraine speaks Russian, (Ukrainian Census, 2001) some Eastern Ukrainian regions even speak primarily Russian. Russia and Ukraine's multi-century, semi peaceful coalition turned into a violent and deadly conflict in the year 2014.

Start of Ukrainian Riots

Towards the end of 2013, Ukraine and Russia had their sights set on different goals. Russia was preparing for the winter Olympics to take place in Sochi, Russia in February of 2014. Ukraine was on the brink of accepting a financial loan from the European Union (EU) for \$838 Million USD. The EU demanded major legislation reform in Ukraine in exchange for the loan. (Kramer A. E., 2013) However after initially announcing interest in the EU's deal, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich changed his mind drastically. Instead of accepting the EU's offer, Yanukovich accepted an offer from Russia for \$15 billion USD and cheaper gas prices. (Gumuchian, L. S., & Magnay, D, 2014) Many Ukrainian citizens were outraged by the decision and began to peacefully protest in November 2013. After the Ukrainian government attempted to

legislatively suppress the protests in January of 2014, protesters grew even more frustrated. After months of conflict and peaceful protest with no progress, the protest turned violent on February 18th, 2014. Over the next three days, 99 people including protesters and police officers, were killed in the riots. (Dassanayake, D, 2014) This led to the legislative body in Ukraine voting to remove the current President, and hold an election for a temporary president in the near future. President Yanukovich fled to Russia after the riots, and has not returned to Ukraine since.

The Distraction

In the midst of the violent protests in the neighboring country, Russia was hosting the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Prior to the Olympics, President Vladimir Putin's approval rating had been steadily decreasing for the past 5 years, reaching an all time low of 54% in 2013. (Ray, J, 2014) There was massive pressure and expectations for Russia to perform well in the Olympics. A documentary called *Icarus* exposed a Russian state sponsored steroid program that was mandated for all of Russia's olympic athletes. The Russians used their home field advantage and secret KGB-like tactics to manipulate the olympic drug testing procedure. Russia collected a clean sample of urine from all athletes, then started them on a rigorous steroid regimen for several months before the Olympics. Any time a Russian athlete was drug test by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), a Russia government official would sneak into the IOC lab and switch out the steroid contaminated urine, with the prior collected, clean urine. (Fogel, 2017) This was a brilliantly orchestrated scandal, and it paid off big time, Russia won the most medals of any country in the 2014 Olympics. At the same time Russia was dominating in the Olympics, the riots broke out in Ukraine. Putin saw the Olympic success as an opportunity to make a polarizing decision, ordering military force to invade Ukraine.

Annexation of Ukraine's Crimea

On March 1st, 2014 Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, requested that Russian president Vladimir Putin authorize military action in a southeastern peninsula of Ukraine, Crimea. President Putin approved the plan, and began to send unmarked soldiers to Crimea. (Sullivan, T., & Isachenkov, V., 2014) About six weeks later, the Ukrainian government recognized that Crimea now temporarily belonged to Russia, that's right, Russia stole an entire 10,000 square mile peninsula away from Ukraine. This annexation was a key escalation in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Guerilla warfare broke out all over Eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian military and nationalists, vs pro-Russia rebels. (Grytsenko, O, 2014) Russia began sending weapons, money, and troops to support the Russian rebels fueling an extremely dangerous civil war. For the past four years there has been constant warfare plaguing Eastern Ukraine. The death toll currently sits at over 10,000 people, around 1/3rd Ukrainian soldiers, 1/3rd Russian rebels and soldiers, and 1/3rd Ukrainian civilians. (Alexe, D., 2018) Prior to 2014, Ukraine was facing an economic recession, along with political corruption which led to millions of Ukrainian civilians migrating out of their home country. The warfare that broke out in 2014 until now has increased Ukrainian migration even more, making it one of the most emigrated countries on earth, with over 1 million Ukrainians leaving their home country every year. (UNIAN, 2018, September 04)

Ukrainians are starting to flee

Before all of the chaos unfolding with the Ukrainian revolution, the Crimean annexation, and the Sochi Olympics, Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval rating stood at 54%. By 2015, President Putin's approval rating was at an all time high, with 87% of Russians approving

of the job Putin was doing. (Jivanda T., 2014) Despite all of the cheating, manipulation, thievery, and violence that Putin had orchestrated, the Russian people's love for President grew extensively. As a result of these actions, millions of Ukrainian citizens left the country over the following years. It is estimated that over the past 15 years, 6.3 million Ukrainians have left the country permanently. The country that took in the most Ukrainian immigrants was Poland. The average wage of a worker in Poland is about 4 times as high as the average in Ukraine. A lot of Ukrainian citizens work internationally for a temporary amount of time, and then return home with the money they earned. 16% of the working age people in Ukraine, which is about 4 million people, work outside of the country. (UNIAN, 2018, April 23) Poland employed 1.7 million Ukrainians in 2016. From 2010-2014, Poland averaged giving 40,000 work visas to immigrants to receive permission to lawfully work in Poland, with around 20% of workers being from Ukraine. By 2017 that number of workers had rose about 600% to 235,600 work visas, with 82% of migrants being Ukrainian. (Lindsey, F., 2018) Polish Minister Beata Kempa estimated there are currently over 2 million Ukrainian born people living in Poland. (UAWIRE, 2018)

Ukrainian Refugees New Home

Luckily the culture in Poland and Ukraine are very similar, resulting in migrants having an easier time transitioning to their new home. Polish and Ukrainian languages are also very similar, and Poland is offering free classes and tutors to help the Ukrainian immigrants transition to their new life in Poland. (English, 2018) Polish businesses have been very accepting of Ukrainian migrant workers, with 21% of all Polish businesses employing Ukrainians. (UNIAN, 2018, August 25) However, the public perception of Ukrainian immigrants amongst Polish citizens is not good at all. The Centre for Public Opinion Research conducted a poll recently

asking Poles about their opinions towards Ukrainians. A mere 24% of Poles expressed a positive opinion, while 40% of Poles expressed a strong dislike for Ukrainians. (UNIAN, 2018, March 13) I'm sure it must be very difficult for relatively small country like Poland, whose population is 38 million, to be accepting millions of immigrants in the short span of a few years. There seems to be a bit of conflict around labeling the people leaving the Ukraine as immigrants, or refugees. Poland is being quite naive but not recognizing the fact that Ukrainians are being driven out of their home due to Ukraine being one of the most active war torn areas on Earth. Hopefully Poles can begin to be more understanding and accepting of the refugees leaving Ukraine in the near future.

Ukraine's Future

After the disbandment of the USSR, Ukraine was never comfortable being a sovereign nation. Due to the close proximity of Russia, their previous relationships that stemmed back hundreds of years, and the similarity of their languages, Russia and Ukraine remained very tightly knit together, despite the official separation of the two countries. Vladimir Putin has always been aware of the similarities between the two countries, and he has used and neglected Ukraine for over a decade. Ukraine has never been capable of distancing themselves from Russia for several reasons. First, a large majority of the Ukrainian population has close ties to Russia as well, resulting in a lot of support and loyalty to Russia and Putin. Secondly, Putin uses his power, and manipulation skills to control the decisions of Ukrainian presidents and legislators. Any time Ukraine gets close to westernizing or reforming the country from its old ways, Russia finds a way to halt their progress. To this day, there is still heavy military conflict and fighting going on in Eastern Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainian citizens are being forced to move out of their

homes due to the political corruption and military violence that is occurring. Luckily other European countries have been accepting millions of Ukrainian refugees, seeking a new home after being force out of Ukraine. I believe that it will take massive efforts from Western countries and entities such as the United States and the European Union to save Ukraine. However, with the European Union already being unsuccessful in their efforts, and the current President of the United States pledging his allegiance to Russia, I have little hope for my home country of Ukraine to improve any time in the near future. For now, I appreciate European countries such as Poland for accepting Ukrainian refugees, and hope all Ukrainians who are in danger, find a safe way out of the country.

References:

- About number and composition population of UKRAINE by All-Ukrainian population census'2001 data. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>
- Alexe, D. (2018, June 12). Normandy Format foreign ministers discuss Ukraine conflict. Retrieved from <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/normandy-group-foreign-ministers-discuss-ukraine-conflict/>
- Dassanayake, D. (2014, February 21). Ukraine protests: Top medic claims at least 70 protestors killed in Kiev clashes. Retrieved from <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/460875/Ukraine-protests-Death-toll-rises-as-police-and-protestors-clash-after-truce-collapses>
- English, F. (2018, January 08). Retrieved December 06, 2018, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_km9tEnJYc
- Grytsenko, O. (2014, April 12). Armed pro-Russian insurgents in Luhansk say they are ready for police raid. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20140412131249/http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/armed-pro-russian-insurgents-in-luhansk-say-they-are-ready-for-police-raid-343167.html>
- Gumuchian, L. S., & Magnay, D. (2014, January 23). Putin, Yanukovych promise closer economic ties amid Ukraine protests. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/17/world/europe/ukraine-protests/>
- Fogel, B. (Director). (2017). *Icarus*[Motion picture on Netflix]. United States: Alex Productions.
- Jivanda, T. (2014, March 14). Vladimir Putin's approval rating hits three year high as Russians back. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-hits-three-year-high-as-russians-back-putin-over-ukraine-9192170.html>
- Kramer, A. E. (2013, December 15). EU suspends trade deal talks with Ukraine - The Boston Globe. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2013/12/15/suspends-trade-deal-talks-with-ukraine/gZOIK9J1kFp2wMKw0IbIVI/story.html>

- Lindsey, F. (2018, September 19). Ukrainian Immigrants Give The Polish Government An Out On Refugees. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2018/09/19/ukrainian-immigrants-give-the-polish-government-an-out-on-refugees/#4bbaba3b4bb1>
- Nardelli, A., Rankin, J., & Arnett, G. (2015, July 23). Vladimir Putin's approval rating at record levels. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2015/jul/23/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-at-record-levels>
- Ray, J. (2014, February 13). Putin's Popularity Waned at Home Before Olympics. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/167408/putin-popularity-waned-home-olympics.aspx>
- Romanyshyn, Y. (2018, July 9). Ukrainians in Poland attracted by average wage 4 times higher. Retrieved from <https://www.kyivpost.com/business/ukrainians-in-poland-attracted-by-average-wage-4-times-higher.html>
- Sullivan, T., & Isachenkov, V. (2014, March 01). Russian troops take over Ukraine's Crimea region. Retrieved from <https://news.yahoo.com/russian-troops-over-ukraines-crimea-region-200052097.html>
- UAWIRE. (2018, February 27). Polish Minister: There may be more than 2 million Ukrainian migrants in Poland. Retrieved from <https://uawire.org/poland-minister-there-may-be-more-than-2-million-ukrainian-migrants-in-poland>
- UNIAN. (2018, September 04). Over 1 mln Ukrainians leave country annually - Klimkin. Retrieved from <https://www.unian.info/society/10247838-over-1-mln-ukrainians-leave-country-annually-klimkin.html>
- UNIAN. (2018, August 25). One in five Polish companies employs Ukrainian workers: Study. Retrieved from <https://www.unian.info/world/10236768-one-in-five-polish-companies-employs-ukrainian-workers-study.html>
- UNIAN. (2018, March 13). Poles' attitude to Ukrainians worst in last decade – poll. Retrieved from <https://www.unian.info/society/10040087-poles-attitude-to-ukrainians-worst-in-last-decade-poll.html>

UNIAN. (2018, April 23). Almost 4 mln Ukrainians labor migrants - study. Retrieved from <https://www.unian.info/society/10091948-almost-4-mln-ukrainians-labor-migrants-study.html>