

The History of Latvia
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mlp_udoTgiQ
transcript: <https://dontveter.com/latvia.pdf>

"The United States cannot afford to be the policemen of the world anymore" - Donald Trump

"And he uses the NATO alliance almost as a transactional business alliance.

To think that the Baltics could pay up that kind of money for protection is simply, you know, never ~~was in the cause:~~" [was in the cards.]

Ever since the war in Ukraine, the Baltic states have been in the geopolitical spotlight.

Because whenever you hear a discussion about Trump's commitment to NATO, it's also about the question whether the United States would defend the sovereignty of those countries.

Today, we wanna focus on Latvia, a country with a history that's significant, because it's been ~~playball of~~ [a part of] bigger European conflicts in the past.

This is, the history of Latvia.

In the early middle ages, there were four different Baltic tribes that inhabited the area of today's Latvia.

Which ~~by then~~ [in those times] was ruled by many different principalities.

In the 12th century, German missionaries settled along the Daugava river in order to convert the mostly pagan believing people to Christianity.

The Germans also founded the city of Riga, which is about 10 miles ~~distance~~ from the river's mouth.

Because of its location, the city quickly became an important trading place and was the third biggest city along the Baltic sea.

In 1282, it joined the Hanseatic League, a trading confederation that dominated commercial activity in northern Europe for over 3 centuries.

Between the 16th and early 18th century, Russia, Sweden and Poland-Lithuania all fought for control over the eastern Baltic.

Russia eventually gained control over Riga and in 1768, the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became part of the Russian Empire, which grew further west.

The authorities heavily Russified Latvia.

They completely banned the Latvian language from schools and joining the Russian orthodox church became mandatory.

During the first world war, parts of Latvia were captured by Germany and the territory was largely destroyed by war.

And at the end of the war, for the first time, many people saw a real chance for a Latvian state to be founded, especially since both Russia and Germany were busy figuring out their own future.

With the creation of the socialist republic in Russia and the founding of the Weimar Republic in Germany, a national awakening began that ultimately led to the proclamation of Latvia's Independence.

And in 1920, a freely elected assembly drafted a constitution for the new country.

During that period, a contest was held to design a monument for Latvia's independence.

A statue of the Russian ruler Peter the Great in one of Riga's central roads, close to the old town, was torn down - and replaced by the newly built Freedom Monument, unveiled in 1935.

On the top of it, [there is] a woman holding three stars that stand for the [three] historic regions of Latvia.

At the beginning of the second world war, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union made a pact in which they re-ordered Eastern Europe into German and Russian spheres of influence.

As a result of that, Latvia was taken over by the Soviet Union and the local population was suppressed.

Many who were against it, were either jailed, deported or in some cases even killed.

But Nazi Germany broke the pact and on the 22 [22nd of] June 1941, German troops attacked Soviet forces and took control over the entire land.

During that time, some ethnic Latvians joined the German army in the fight against the Soviet Union.

Those were in the Latvian Legion and fought alongside German-Nazi troops.

This leads to some controversy, to this day, since on the 16th [of] March every year - some people in Latvia gather to remember these Latvian legionnaires.

They see them as fighters against illegal Soviet-occupation, but at the same time, these were Nazi troops and the commemoration is honoring them.

The Nazis killed about 66 thousand Latvian Jews as well as tens of thousands of Jews from other countries that were brought to Latvia.

Later in 1943, the Nazis built the concentration camp, Kaiserwald, near Riga, where more than 10,000 people were imprisoned and had to do forced labor.

After the second world war, the land was annexed by the Soviet Union again, and the period of

Stalin's ruling was the toughest for many Latvian families.

Nationalists and potential troublemakers for the Soviet regime, were often imprisoned without a trial - or sent to the brutal Soviet gulag camps where many died.

In March 1949, about 40,000 Latvians were deported to Siberia without a right to ever return to their homes.

Latvia was Russified, and between 1945 and 1955 more than half a million Russians moved to Latvia, dramatically reducing the percentage of native Latvians living there.

Remarkably, the freedom monument in the center of Riga survived all of this, and even the Soviets did not touch it.

But they tried to alter the meaning of it.

The three stars were now said to represent the three Baltic states: Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania - and they are held by mother Russia.

Despite that official reinterpretation, it still remained a symbol for independence among most of the population.

In the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev began opening and reforming the Soviet Union, and a new national awakening in Latvia began.

By the summer of 1987, thousands of people protested against the occupation at the freedom monument.

And the chants for freedom became louder, leading up to the ~~23~~ [23rd of] August 1989 and one of the biggest political demonstrations in history.

About 2 million people from all the Baltic states formed a 420 miles long human chain that connected all across the three countries.

The visually stunning protest was noticed all across the world and within just 7 months Lithuania gained its independence.

Latvia followed and became a fully sovereign state in August 1991.

~~Since~~ [After] independence, Latvia ~~has been~~ [started] working towards joining NATO as well as the European Union.

And in 2004, both of these goals were achieved.

Because of its turbulent history, today's Latvia combines many differences in it.

The capital Riga has many Protestant churches and buildings from the time of German settlement.

But there also are Russian Orthodox churches all across [the country], as well as typical Soviet Stalinism buildings, like the Latvian Academy of Arts (Mistake: Academy of Science)

Today, about 61% of the population is Latvian, whereas 26% are Russian.

In fact, the second largest town, Daugavpils, has a Russian population of 53%.

This leads to some tension, since when Latvia became independent, many Russians were not granted citizenship because lawmakers feared that this would make the country unstable.

And to this day, there are 247,000 people of which almost all are Russians from the former Soviet Union.

They can however, become Latvian citizens if they speak the Latvian language and live in the country for a long enough time.

Since the relationship between the European Union and Russia becomes more and more tense, Latvia also is in a conflict.

Russia is Latvia's second biggest trading partner and Latvia has a large Russian population.

But since the war in Ukraine, many Latvians see Russia as a security threat and old fears ~~reappear~~ have reappeared.

After all, Latvia [has] only had 26 years ~~since~~ of independence, and while there are a ~~bunch~~ [lot] of challenges, there are also a lot of opportunities.

With the country changing rapidly, it will be interesting to see how it will develop in the future.

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