The Fall of Communism: Crash Course European History #47

Crash Course: European History
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===== (00:00) to (02:00) =====

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===== Introduction (0:07) =====

Hello and welcome to Crash Course European History and welcome to my house. I'm filming this in the midst of a global disease pandemic. A stark reminder that we are living in the middle of history and subject to its forces.

In fact, Stan, roll the tape of me from the past back in 2014: "As for the potential dangers of the 21st century there are environmental disasters, the rise of a super bug that wipes out millions upon millions of people, possible global conflict, or a rise in instability."

I'll tell you, me from the past, I could write a book about what you didn't know in 2014, but you got that one right.

So we began this series by talking about how profoundly the black death reshaped European political, social, and economic life. The world today is vastly different from the world of 500 years ago and the human population is vastly different.

But history continues to be, what one writer calls, "The Relentless Unforeseen." And microbes, or I guess in this case viruses, continue to shape human history in very, very deep ways. And that's why I'm at home, but we can still take this opportunity to learn some history together.

===== Crash Course Main Theme (1:15) =====

===== Crash Course Main Theme (end) (1:23) =====

But where were we in history? Oh, right, the downfall of Communism in Eastern Europe, which seemed to promise a brighter future in which Eastern Europe would become as healthy and as prosperous as Western Europe. But we have to remember that in Communist countries many large assets, from intellectual property to farms to factories were legally property of the people.

Take for example the wildly popular video game, Tetris. It wasn't owned by its creator, Alexy Pajitnov, but by the Soviet state, which had employed him while he designed Tetris.

So how would all these assets be divided now that the states were collapsing?
(?)
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=====Introducción=====
Hola y bienvenido a Historia Europea de Crash Course, y bienvenido a mi casa!

Estoy filmando esto en medio de una pandemia mundial de enfermedades, un claro recordatorio que estamos viviendo en medio de la historia y sujetos a sus fuerzas.
De hecho Stan, rueda la cinta de mi yo del pasado de vuelta al 2014: "los potenciales peligros del siglo 21, hay desastres ambientales, el surgimiento de un super insecto que arrase con millones y millones de personas, un posible conflicto global y un incremento de la inestabilidad"

Te dire algo mi yo del pasado, podria escribir un libro acerca de lo que no sabias en 2014. Pero, acertaste en esa.

Así que comenzare esta serie hablando de cuan profunda la peste negra reformó la vida europea política, económica y social. El mundo ahora es vastamente diferente del mundo hace 500 años Y la población humana es vastamente diferente. Pero la historia sigue siendo lo que un escritor llamó "El implacable Imprevisto", y los microbios, o en este caso virus, continúan moldeando la historia humana en muy profundas maneras. (?)

===== (02:00) to (04:00) =====

Well, terribly, as it turned out.

Pajitnov would eventually get the rights to Tetris back, but most of these assets were taken into private control in a huge kleptocratic event that unfolded in these countries. Factory managers, former officials, and people with influence and money swept in and took control of farms, and factories, and much else.

And they paid pennies on the dollar, or I guess, in this case kopecks on the ruble. And in the midst of this, social services like healthcare and sanitation collapsed because the governments supporting them had collapsed. Many people, primarily women, were thrown out of work. Alcoholism surged.

One woman reported that after the fall of the Soviet Union, men "today walk around with fear in their eyes. Nothing but fear. They're downsizing the army, the factories are at a standstill.... They sit on the curb waiting for something to happen." Men's life expectancy fell from an already low 62 years in the 1980s to as low as 57 and a half years in the 1990s.

In Romania, inflation was over 135% in this period. In Ukraine, it was over 800%. War heroes hocked their medals and petty theft thrived and many of those who could left Eastern Europe.

Worst of all, Yugoslavia became a battleground of ethnicities in the 1990s as the Serbian government, under

===== Slobodan Milosevic (3:26) =====

Slobodan Milosevic, used both regular and freelance troops to expand Serb power and territory. Most horrific was the ethnic cleansing of rival groups including the massacre of boys and men in Bosnia and the rape of women there to create so-called Serb babies. A 1995 Croatian Massacre of Serbs who had helped seize land from Croatia was answered with the infamous Srebrenica Slaughter in which Serbian armed forces murdered more than 8,000 Muslim boys and men.

"Kill the lot" the commander of the Serb forces ordered. Military units also sought to attack the cultural heritage of their enemies, damaging cities rich in medieval history, such as Dubrovnik, and destroying libraries and museums.

===== (04:00) to (06:00) =====

In 1993, Croats, having taken over a part of Bosnia, blew up the Mostar Bridge, built in 1566, which was seen as a symbol of the Ottoman heritage of ethnic pluralism.

In the West, these conflicts were often portrayed as resulting from ancient rivalries or as the product of a backward people, but to others it seemed one example among many in recent history of

politicians using ethnic rivalries to gain power for themselves.

I mean it's not like Milosevic invented the negative integration strategy of dehumanizing a them to create a stronger sense of us. Serb militias in the Yugoslav army would go on to slaughter Albanians in Kosovo between 1997 and 1999 before NATO forces finally pushed the militias back. And Milosevic was eventually apprehended by the world court even as in 2003 his henchmen assassinated a new reform-minded prime minister.

Still, amid all this kleptocracy and economic suffering and ethnic cleansing, new democratic institutions did begin to emerge as did private enterprise, especially in Poland. And gradually as Eastern European governments stabilized, they presented themselves as potential, new members of the European Union and also of the aforementioned military alliance, NATO,

===== NATO (5:25) =====

which I guess I should have said the full name of: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NATO expanded dramatically after the fall of Communism. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, former members of NATO's rival, the Warsaw Pact, became NATO members. And additional Eastern European countries joined for a total of 28 nations.

===== European Union (5:43) =====

The European Union was official born with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, but in some ways it had begun in 1957 as the Common Market and then expanded. Scandanavian countries joined the consortium as did Spain and Britain.

For Britain, joining the European Community in 1973, was necessary to pull itself out of economic doldrums as Common Market countries had outstripped the U.K. in economic growth.

===== (06:00) to (08:00) =====

The U.K. came to enjoy around $6 billion a year of aid that went into infrastructure and other development.

Under the Maastricht Treaty, E.U. citizens held a common passport and voted for representatives to a European parliament. And restrictions among nations in the spheres of business activity, policing of borders, and transportation policies were reduced, eventually leading to the end of passport controls at borders between Common Market countries.

Austria, Finland, and Sweden join the E.U. in 1995. And in doing so, they adopted the common policies that governed everything from the number of American soap operas aired on television, to pollution controls on automobiles, to standardized health warnings on cigarette packages.

===== Euro (6:49) =====

In 1999, a common currency, the European Currency Unit, or Euro, came into being, although Britain, Sweden, and Denmak did not adopt it.

Wait, hold on Stan. I just want to make sure I have this correct. Economists had a once-in-a-millennium opportunity to name a currency, and they named it, "The European Currency Unit." I mean, come on!

By the way, Stan isn't here. I think you should know that. I'm alone. I miss you, Stan!

At any rate, those that did adopted the Euro were mostly enthusiastic about it, like one Italian student said using the Euro provided, "a sense of belonging to a European Union and I think it's beautiful that there's this big European country." And a French nuclear scientist remarked, "People with the same money don't go to war with each other." Which is a nice sentiment, although, did he learn about the French Revolution? But also, with the adoption of a common currency, the E.U. central bank gained more control over economic policy.

Critics saw the European Union as promoting neo-liberal business policies and emphasizing corporate profits over the well-being of workers while defenders felt the E. U. did a good job of monitoring social well-being.

===== (08:00) to (10:00) =====

But one thing that was widely agreed upon is that at the time the E.U. seemed like a model for international cooperation. Like Greece urged the admission of its traditional enemy, Turkey, in 2002 and 2003, despite a former French president's propaganda that Muslim countries lacked the Christian values of E.U. members. The Greek prime minister countered that "Turkey has been a great European power since the sixteenth century."

Through the E. U., traditional adversaries could benefit through negotiated settlements and through reductions in defense spending as happened between France and Germany.

===== The European Union - Drawbacks (8:34) =====

Alright, let's go to the Thought Bubble. For some, there were of course also big drawbacks to European Union membership. For example, in 2002, the E.U. responded to a decline in the fish population by imposing a 40% cut in fishing which preserved a lot of fisheries but hurt a lot of communities.

A Spanish fisherman, from Vigo near the Porteguese border, pointed to technocrats lack of concern for ordinary people's livelihoods saying, "The bureaucrats in Brussels have signed my death warrant and that of all the other people you see here in this port. The worst thing is that these gentlemen in their suits have never been on a boat and know nothing about the ocean." Rodrigo Duron (?) had paid $2 million for his boat and he had a crew of 17 people with families to support.

Moreover, each fisherman's livelihood produced jobs for some 5 other people. Workers were needed to can and freeze fish, to keep up the ports, to build ships, and so on. So there were inevitably trade-offs to E.U. regulation and they could produce harm like in this case. Unless you're fish, of course.

Finding the balance between the needs of individuals, like Rodrigo Duron, and the needs of the larger community to maintain longer term fish stocks and preserve biodiversity, for instance, is one role of government.

And whether that's best done up close or at great distance has been a subject of much debate in the E. U. and beyond. Thanks, Thought Bubble.

Eastern Europeans also had mixed reactions to the E. U. with many of them feeling like poor cousins.

===== (10:00) to (12:00) =====

Like on the eve of joining the E.U., the standard of living in Poland was 39% that of E.U. members. And even that statistic hides the big differences between the relative prosperity in cities and the profound poverty in the countryside.

And not everybody was enthusiastic about joining like one farmer in the Czech Republic testified, "It's bad...the European Union is already imposing various quotas and regulations on us." And for one retiree in Eastern Europe, the rising price of beer said it all: "If I wanted to join anything in the West," he said, "I would have defected."

Others asked why now that they were free to be independent would they want to join another huge organization that would erase their national and ethnic identities as Communism had tried to do.

Still, from some points of view, things definitely did get better: even in the least prosperous former Communist states, ownership of freezers, and computers, and cell phones rose. Car sales increased 10 to 12 percent a year, but again, this spending was far lower in the countryside, where close to half of people could not afford basic necessities.

A further sign of both prosperity and regional differences, the new shopping malls that sprang up were mostly around capital cities, but these new customers, some 100 million of them initially were a huge opportunity for mega-stores like IKEA or Electroworld.

"When Electroworld opened in Budapest, it provoked a riot. Two hundred thousand people crowded to get in the doors," one report claimed. Critics called the transformation Consumania. Others saw the phenomenon differently.

One eastern European business person called it "a social act, indicating that one had joined consumer society." So Europe was integrating and consumerizing in the early 21st century, but it was also fracturing amid waves of ethnic feeling.

===== Splitting of countries (11:54) =====

Despite 2 centuries aimed at building Slavic nationalism in 1993, Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

===== (12:00) to (13:25) =====

Yugoslavia also came apart into several states including: Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, all claiming ethnic or religious distinctiveness. The Soviet Union, itself, broke up into some dozen states.

And this drive for autonomy was pervasive. In 1998, the United Kingdom gave Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland independent parliamentary control of education, health, roads, tourism, and other services.

And even as globalism began to rise, a phenomenon we'll discuss in detail next time, hyper localism rose in response to it. Should a local fisheries quotas be decided by international organizations that try to consider the largest possible picture? And our response is to say global pandemics: best organized at the local, national, or international level?(?) Those questions are of course especially relevant in an age where humans must confront so many shared, global, species-wide problems. Thanks for watching. I'll see you next time.

===== Closing (13:01) =====

Crash Course is usually filmed in the Jaden Smith Studios in Indianapolis, but is currently filmed in my basement. Thanks so much to all of our patrons at Patreon.com/crashcourse for making this possible. We got lots of other crash courses for you to watch. Thanks again for being here and as they say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.