History of Russia and Ukraine

For Prelims: Geographic Location of Russia and Ukraine, Kyivan Rus' (Rus' land), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

For Mains: Russia-Ukraine conflict, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests.

Why in News?

Recently, Russia recognised [two independent republics out of Ukraine](#) **(Donetsk and Luhansk - Donbass region),** signaling the **inevitable war** that followed.

- In the declaration of war, the Russian President **described Ukraine with no history or identity**, and was entirely and fully created by the **former Soviet Union (USSR).**
- Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of **cultural, linguistic and familial link.**

What is the Early History of Ukraine?

- A millennium ago, what is **Ukraine today lay at the heart of the Kyivan Rus' (Rus' land).**
- Kyivan Rus was a federation of the **East Slavic, Baltic, and Finnic peoples of eastern and northern Europe,** with its **capital in Kyiv.**
    - Modern **Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus** all trace their cultural ancestry to the Kyivan Rus'.
- The Kyivan Rus' reached its **greatest size and power in the 10th and 11th centuries.**
- In the mid-13th century, the Kyivan Rus', weakened by the **decline of trade as the Byzantine Empire collapsed,** fell apart under the onslaught of the **Mongol Golden Horde**, who sacked Kyiv in 1240.
    - The Byzantine Empire, also called Byzantium, was the eastern half of the Roman Empire, based at Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) that continued on after the western half of the empire collapsed.
    - The Golden Horde was the group of settled Mongols who ruled over Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and the Caucasus from the 1240s until 1502.
- In the early 15th century, large parts of the former Kyivan Rus' were incorporated into the multi-ethnic **Grand Duchy of Lithuania.**
- By the **Union of Lublin, Poland, in 1569**, the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania came together to form the **Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,** which was among Europe's biggest countries at the time.
- The beginnings of the **modern Ukrainian national identity** can be traced back to about a century after this event.

What are other Salient Features of Ukraine?

- **Geography:** Ukraine is in the **east of Europe,** and is **bound by Russia to its northeast,** east, and southeast, and the Black Sea in the south. In the southwest, west, and north, Ukraine shares borders, in the anticlockwise direction, with **Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Belarus.**

- It is the **largest country in Europe after Russia** itself, with an area of 6,03,550 sq km, or **about 6% of the continent.**

- **Demography:** In July 2021, Ukraine's population was **estimated at 43.7 million.** Of this, **77.8% was of Ukrainian ethnicity and 17.3% was Russian**, and Ukrainian and Russian speakers made up **67.5% and 29.6% of the population respectively.**
- **Economy:** Ukraine is the **poorest country in Europe in terms of gross domestic product and gross national income per capita**. It has deposits of iron ore and coal, and exports corn, sunflower oil, iron and iron products, and wheat.
- **Relations With India**: India is Ukraine's **largest export destination in the Asia Pacific region.**
  - The country's **major export to India** is sunflower oil, followed by inorganic chemicals, iron and steel, plastics, and chemicals.
  - Ukraine's **major import from India is pharmaceutical products.**

When Did Ukraine Incorporate into Russia?

- In the 18th century, **Empress Catherine the Great (1762-96) of Russia** absorbed the entire ethnic Ukrainian territory into the Russian Empire.
- The **Tsarist policy of Russification** led to the **suppression of ethnic identities** and languages, including that of the Ukrainians.
- Within the Russian Empire though, many **Ukrainians rose to positions of prosperity and importance,** and significant numbers migrated to settle in other parts of Russia.
- More than 3.5 million Ukrainians fought in **World War I on the side of the Russian Empire,** but a smaller number fought against the Tsar's army with the Austro-Hungarians.
- **Ukraine Becoming part of USSR**: The **World War I** led to the **end of both the Tsarist and Ottoman empires.**
  - As a mainly **communist-led Ukrainian national movement emerged, several small Ukrainian states** sprang up.
  - Months after the **Bolsheviks took power in the October Revolution of 1917,** an independent Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed, but a **civil war continued** between various claimants to power, including Ukrainian factions, anarchists, Tsarists, and Poland.
  - In 1922, **Ukraine became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).**
    - The Soviet Union had its roots in the October Revolution of 1917, when the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, overthrew the Russian Provisional Government that had replaced Tsar Nicholas II.

What was the Ottoman Empire?

- An empire created by Turkish tribes in Anatolia (Asia Minor) that grew to be one of the most

powerful states in the world during the 15th and 16th centuries.

- The Ottoman period spanned more than 600 years and **came to an end only in 1922, when it was replaced by the Turkish Republic** and various successor states in southeastern Europe and the Middle East.
- At its height the empire encompassed most of southeastern Europe to the gates of Vienna, including present-day Hungary, the Balkan region, Greece, and parts of Ukraine, portions of the Middle East now occupied by Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Egypt, North Africa as far west as Algeria, and large parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

What was the Status of Ukraine After the Collapse of USSR?

- **In 1991, the USSR was dissolved.**
- The Demands for independence had been growing in Ukraine for a couple of years previously, and in 1990, over 300,000 Ukrainians created **a human chain in support of freedom.**
    - This was followed by the **Granite Revolution when students** sought to prevent the signing of a new agreement with the USSR.
- On 24th August, 1991, after the failure of the coup to remove **President Mikhail Gorbachev** and restore the communists to power, the parliament of **Ukraine adopted the country's Act of Independence.**
    - Subsequently, **Leonid Kravchuk**, head of the parliament, **was elected Ukraine's first President.**
- In December 1991, the leaders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine formally dissolved the Soviet Union and formed the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).**
- However, **Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada**, never ratified the accession, so Ukraine was legally never a member of the CIS.

What is the Recent History of Russia-Ukraine Conflict?

- In 2014, **Russia had annexed Crimea from Ukraine following** a hastily called referendum, a move that **sparked fighting between Russia-backed separatists and government forces in eastern Ukraine.**
- Recently, Ukraine has urged the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** to speed up his **country's membership in the alliance.**
- Russia declared **such a move a "red line",** and worried about the consequences of the US-led military alliances expanding right up to its doorstep.
- This has led to the present war between Russia and Ukraine.

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