

Countdown to fall of USSR

Thirty years ago the Soviet Union came to an end, but the chain of events leading up to the collapse was set in motion six years earlier by the sweeping reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev

■ **1985:** New Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) leader **Mikhail Gorbachev** (left) calls for **perestroika** (economic restructuring) and **glasnost** (political openness)

■ **1988:** Stirrings of independence in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia

■ **1989:** **Boris Yeltsin** elected to parliament set up under Gorbachev's reforms. Soviet-imposed communist regimes in central and eastern Europe are toppled – **Berlin Wall falls on November 9**

■ **1990-91:** Gorbachev calls for multi-party politics – but pro-independence demonstrations in Azerbaijan and Lithuania are violently suppressed

■ **Jun 1991:** Yeltsin elected president of Russian Federation

■ **Aug 19, 1991:** Gorbachev overthrown in coup by Communist hardliners while at his **dacha** in Crimea. Plotters aim to prevent signing of new treaty giving republics greater freedom

■ **Aug 21:** Coup collapses amid massive demonstrations, spearheaded by Yeltsin

■ **Aug 22:** Gorbachev freed from house arrest – returns to Moscow but is humiliated in Russian parliament by Yeltsin, who orders that Soviet Communist Party end its activities on Russian soil

■ **Aug 23:** Gorbachev resigns as General Secretary of CPSU

■ **Sep 6:** Independence of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia recognised

■ **Dec 8:** Leaders of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine meet to disband Soviet Union and form **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)***

■ **Dec 25:** Gorbachev steps down as Soviet president – **USSR officially ceases to exist**

- ★ **Mar 11, 1990:** Lithuania (1)
- ★ **Apr 9, 1991:** Georgia (2)
- ★ **Aug 20-22:** Estonia (3), Latvia (4)
- ★ **Aug 24-31:** Ukraine (5), Belarus (6), Moldova (7), Azerbaijan (8), Kyrgyzstan (9), Uzbekistan (10)
- ★ **Sep:** Tajikistan (11), Armenia (12)
- ★ **Oct:** Turkmenistan (13)
- ★ **Dec:** Kazakhstan (14)

*Three Baltic states do not join CIS:

■ Turkmenistan only associate member until 2005

■ Georgia pursues European-style democracy but suffers civil war

■ Ukraine never ratifies charter and declares its independence. In Dec 2021, up to 100,000 Russian troops are at its border. President **Vladimir Putin** insists they pose no threat

