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**Will Putin End EU’s End of History?**

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EuroPoint: EU’s approach towards Russia has not been effective in deterring Putin’s aggression. The complex power structure with the democratic and transparent supranational decision making system in Europe is showing its limits against a secretive autocracy. The biggest question is no longer finding an approach that would stop Putin, as much as it’s an existential one for the effectiveness of EU foreign policy.

The dreamers of the European peace project still envision the “end of history” as articulated by Fukuyama in 1989 as a liberal democracy that transcends national sovereignty and traditional power politics. Elected governments, individual rights, protection of the rights of minorities, market rules, competition, strong rule of law, healthy state institutions, and an economic system in which capital and labor circulate with modest state oversight ensure that democracy rested on a broad, empowered middle class.

These principles allowed the European Union to successfully function as an isle of peace and stability for the past half century. In 2012, the EU won the Nobel Peace Price for over having contributed over six decades “to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe.”

Yet in the global context, EU’s post WWII decades of stability were more an exception than the rule. Those decades happened under the powerful military defense supplied by the United States. This is about to change, as the American military is shifting its focus, and began pulling troops from 15 EU bases in Germany, Italy, and the UK in an attempt to reduce spending by over $1 trillion over the next decade.

The EU is challenged today to a hybrid war by Russia’s president Vladimir Putin. It is not happening only in Ukraine, motivated by that country’s desire to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. Russian military jets (some carrying nuclear missiles) are intercepted almost daily over the Baltic countries, Eastern Europe as far South as Bulgaria, and Western Europe as far as France or the British Isles. Putin is using “old-school” methods for goals that have little or no economic or geostrategic rationale in the contemporary context, goals that only stir admiration of kleptomaniacs and disempowered nationalists.

So far, the EU has answered with appeasement, aside from a few economic sanctions. Will the EU be able to continue the peace decades in the absence of the military backing from the United States?

The nature of EU’s defense policy is reactive, occurring mostly in crises contexts. The responsibility to conduct foreign policy shifts frequently from foreign ministers to prime ministers, to the High Representative, and back to national leaders. Elected officials in member states conduct EU foreign policy through the prism of domestic politics and accountability to the taxpayers. As a result, the EU lacks a strategic direction and strength.

By contrast, Vladimir Putin’s power does not rest on an empowered electorate whose taxes support the government, but rather on petrodollars. The former spy rose from a mediocre KGB career due to his talent for creating legends.

Putin built his current propaganda on repulsion of the Western ideas of tolerance of sexual minorities and portrays himself as defender of Christian morality, in an epic East versus West battle. He justifies military aggression by claiming to protect Russian speakers anywhere around the globe. He blames the deteriorating standard of living of the majority of Russians on Kiev, Washington, and the West. His strategy is effective, as his approval rating in Russia is higher than 80%.
This power dynamic was illustrated in the negotiations for the second ceasefire protocol between Ukraine and Russia’s proxy rebels. Angela Merkel and François Hollande arrived in Minsk on February 11 with a peace proposal portrayed as a last resort to avoid “total war.” They had just returned from Washington DC, where Chancellor Merkel had convinced President Obama not to arm Ukraine out of fears that it would escalate the conflict.

Putin negotiated in Minsk from a position of power. First, the Americans were not present at the negotiations. Second, he had the tactical advantage of heavy weaponry positioned in the field. Even as the talks were ongoing, 50 Russian tanks, 40 missile systems, and 40 armored vehicles crossed into Ukraine through the Izvaryne border crossing.

“Putin laughs last,” wrote Spiegel, commenting on how he managed to exploit the powerlessness of the European negotiators. Putin emerged smiling after 16 hours of negotiations and even joked with the journalists. Hollande and Merkel were gloomy and cautious in their statements, and talked about “a glimmer of hope” and “very, very much work still to do.” The ceasefire did not hold. But that’s just a detail, it’s not the first red line Putin has crossed or will cross.