



You can't let the bully win in Ukraine – or you're next!

Agnes Zumthor / 04.05.2022

I was seven years old when I woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of firing shells and Soviet tanks rolling through the streets of Vilnius, Lithuania. My father wasn't home that night because he was standing with the masses of unarmed people protecting the national Parliament building. It was 1991 and Lithuania wanted out of the Soviet Union, the Empire of Evil that annexed the Baltics after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1940. The Soviets were reluctant to let us leave and sent tanks to make staying more convincing. My dad came back alive, but many died under tanks safeguarding the TV tower of Vilnius and others were injured.

I'll never forget that anxiety I felt as a child wondering if I'll ever see my dad again. In comparison to the bloodshed and slaughter in Ukraine, Lithuania was lucky. We knew our aim was to get rid of the Russian yoke and acceded to the EU and NATO. Ukraine's path to self-determination took longer, but they've made Europe and the world listen and heed: there is no such thing as a Russian sphere of influence. The Baltics, Georgia and Ukraine don't want to go back. Nations have a right to decide their own destiny and choose their alliances.

The war in Ukraine has laid bare that the emperor has no clothes. The deception of Russian propaganda that refuses to call its actions war, the lies of abused ethnic populations that need to be saved and protected by the Russian army, the sheer violence and animalistic savagery of its armed forces, and the inability of ordinary Russians to unite and finally bring regime change – it's all there for the world to see. It's a narrative post-Soviet countries know oh so well. Spoiler alert: it doesn't end well. Europe usually needs something from Russia, be it cannon fodder to defeat Hitler in WWII or gas to power its industry, and smaller countries are sold down the river. We can't let this happen to Ukraine.

Let's not allow Europe to be convinced it can avoid getting its hands dirty if it just talks to Russia. Just one more phone call from Macron, another visit from a head of state to sit opposite Putin at the end of a long table. Futile dialogue is not the answer, turn off the gas valves. Gas and oil finance the coffers of Putin and his cronies. As long as the cash keeps flowing, nothing will change.

Europe needs to realize that it shouldn't stop financing Russia because it cares about Ukraine, but because it's a sitting duck.

What Russia wants, Russia gets just by

threatening to cut the gas supply to European homes and factories. European politicians are scrambling to save face in front of their electorate, while they trip over themselves trying to explain how Russia managed to pull the wool over their eyes for so long. How long will an entire continent let itself be bullied? Is cheaper gas worth bending low before Russia?

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Energy independence can be achieved. Lithuania has its own natural liquified gas (LNG) terminal, aptly named “Independence,” and has long realized that Russian gas has little to do with energy policy and everything with political dominance. If a small country like mine can have an LNG terminal, what’s stopping other EU countries? Everybody talks about going green these days, but since when is gas a renewable power source?

Russia is huffing and puffing with anger at the idea of Sweden and Finland joining NATO. Making veiled threats of nuclear winter or perhaps just a really cold one when Putin finally turns off the gas to blackmail the EU. You can’t let the bully win in Ukraine – or you’re next!

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