

A Sea Change in Europe Over Ukraine

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by Robert B. Adolph

There has been an enormous sea change within the European Union (EU) sparked by Vladimir Putin's unwarranted invasion of Ukraine. There is a massive wave of support for the embattled Ukrainians. Suddenly, it is in vogue to speak of freedom from state oppression. Suddenly, it is in vogue to speak of tyranny. Suddenly, it is in vogue to speak of what we stand for in the West. Putin's unprovoked assault on Ukraine is rightly taken as an attack on liberal democracy. Although perhaps more symbolic than actual, diplomats in Strasbourg are considering accelerating the timetable for Ukrainian accession into the EU: something that was unthinkable only a short time ago. The European politicians are sounding more combative, more supportive of those under siege, and more engaged with their fellow democracies with every passing day. President Biden's State of the Union address rang a similar bell. Did Putin misjudge Europe's and America's response to his naked aggression?

Of course, none of this happened in a vacuum. The Biden Administration has been quietly building consensus behind the scenes. He anticipated Russian actions and helped prepare Europe accordingly. Putin has unintentionally reinjected long-dead clarity into the conduct of international affairs on the continent. It is clear who the aggressor is, and it is clear who is in the right—all of Europe agrees for the first time in decades. We have not seen this kind of unanimity since the Cold War.

A pugacious Ukrainian President spoke before the European Parliament via video from the front lines. His speech

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met with thunderous applause, not because of his eloquence but because of his courage in refusing to accept President Biden's offer of safety and remaining to fight with his army. Now, that is leadership!

The economic implications are startling. The Nord Stream 2 gas-line project is—literally—dead in the water. The European democracies will not soon again depend on Russia for gas or oil. Major Western petroleum companies are extracting themselves from their commitments to former Russian partners, as are multiple other major business interests. Sanctions and threats of confiscation of luxury yachts and mansions are beginning to hammer the Russian oligarchs. The common people of Russia suffer too and worse. Crippling economic and financial sanctions will no doubt push Russia into recession. Much worse is waiting in the wings.

But there is more. Russia's multiple brutal stabs into Ukraine are revitalizing the NATO military alliance as nothing else ever has. EU nations are openly discussing increasing military budgets, as they search for additional alternatives to punish Putin for his outrageous violation of international law and norms of conduct. EU nations have promised to supply the Ukrainian Army with more

weapons and ammunition. Popular opinion in Europe, the United States, and around the globe is squarely in the Ukrainian camp. Even China, one of Russia's usually dependable supporters in the UN Security Council, seems to be foot-dragging on all related matters.

The pressing question is this: can Europe, the United States, and the world halt this invasion without engaging in more than mere sanctions and indirect military support to the Ukrainian people? The unstated hope in the West is that the Russians themselves will take appropriate corrective action by convincing the autocrat to either cease his war of choice or, failing that, by removing him from office by force of arms. These scenarios would certainly be convenient, but how likely are they to come to fruition? A big worry is the dictator's veiled threat to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons. Can he really be that crazy? There are no easy or simple answers here. The Western nations must be prudent. But the powerful united front that has developed between the EU and United States is both necessary and heartening. Sanctions are crashing the Russian economy. Will the sea change be enough to dissuade Putin?

