

Beyond the Brink: Understanding Europe's New War

Article by Green European Journal

March 2, 2022

The Russian invasion of Ukraine provoked shock and outrage across the world. European leaders have been united in their condemnation of this brazen act of aggression, imposing an unprecedented package of sanctions. Between mass displacement of civilians, sharp shifts in energy policy, and military realignment, the effects will be felt in Europe for many years.

How did we get to this point? How can we make sense of the violence taking place at the borders of Europe?

A closer look at Vladimir Putin's rule and the rhetoric underpinning his politics indicates that perhaps this move should not have taken us by surprise. All the more so given the well-documented crackdowns on Russian civil society, media, and opposition, and the spread of disinformation within Russia and beyond.

But the answers do not only lie in Russia and Ukraine. An examination of global dynamics of economic and political power sheds light on the transformations that have taken place in recent years. The current international order must be looked at anew in light of the threat posed by Putin's Russia. The recalibration of global governance and institutions to preserve peace is now an even more pressing question.

Europe also needs to look inwards. To the impact of its policies on geopolitical matters, such as military intervention and energy. As far-right and far-left politicians now distance themselves from any equivocation about Putin – how have their past actions helped legitimise the Russian leadership?

Meanwhile, belligerent leaders in the Balkans continue to stir up ethnic tensions to further their power ambitions. The Ukraine crisis is a stark reminder of where such reckless policies can lead.

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The world woke up on Thursday 24 February to the news of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is the most flagrant act of aggression seen in Europe since World War II and a clear violation of international law. Solidarity with the Ukrainian people in the face of foreign invasion must guide the response.

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Published March 2, 2022

Article in English

Published in the *Green European Journal*

Downloaded from <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/beyond-the-brink-understanding-europes-new-war/>

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