

# Putinism has gone global

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**This February marks two years from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and Putin's rhetoric has not waned but rather gone global in might.**

[When Andrey Piontkovsky coined "Putinism"](#), a term identifying the final stage of bandit assault on Russia and the consolidation of power on the ground of hatred and information brainwashing, he did not foresee how Putin's violence could move beyond its well-structured power dynamics in Russia and enter a new stage worldwide.

If there were predicted disastrous conflicts to flare up after 2022, Putinism became the flash point for making a global nightmare come true. The disquieting symmetry inherent to the unprecedented constellation of territorial disputes that erupted in 2023 has proven that Putinism did not only spread wide on the grounds of political mimicry by authoritarian leaders. It also boosted competing nationalisms and allowed autocrats to move beyond a simple act of imitation at home.

At present, it is not only Ukraine at stake, but also Armenia's, Kosovo's, and Bosnia's statehood along with the local and international agency of Palestinians and Kurds in the Middle East, as well as Guyana's Amerindian communities in South America, and Taiwan's democratic movement.

**Across the Balkans, a decade-long crisis of local political elites coupled with the intertwined burden of migration, depopulation and local economies at their lowest rates.**

A war could perhaps shake the standoff, similar to what Putin's genocidal rhetoric against Ukrainians gave rise to Russia's imperial aspirations. It could bring the international spotlight back on the region and give voice to those who have so far tried to have a say on the danger posed by "little Putins". Just as it happens to Ukraine, whose fate interests the international players only from February 2022 onwards, so it could happen to Bosnia and Kosovo. While the former has never restored its dysfunctional institutions due to Serb separatism haunting the country, Kosovo's concerns over Serbia's spoiling role remain unheard.

If before 2022 Western politicians whitewashed Putin's crimes across bordering countries, now ubiquitous histories of nationalism boost Putinism within the region. Milorad Dodik's and Aleksandar Vucic's close ties with Moscow continue to permit Serb nationalists to parade the suburbs of Sarajevo. Other Bosnian cities continue to commemorate the start of the Bosnian genocide, or to militarise north Kosovo to [impede any solid agreement with Pristina](#). Ironically, convicted war criminals, EU far-right politicians, and members of Russian nationalist groups cry out for securing a region that they themselves are trying to destabilize.

**Brussels's illusion that 'little Putins' would comply with the same EU accession process rather than continuing to count their chickens, has left those performing a near-perfect obedience to the West in a fragile limbo.**

Be it Albania, Kosovo or North Macedonia: pressuring smaller and weaker negotiating parties to secure "any agreement" rather than having no agreement at all, resonates with the growing voice calling for Ukraine's compromise over Russia's now-occupied regions. Those few positive exceptions

- from Albert Kurti's attempts to finalize a long-standing peace for Kosovo by including Serb communities, and the growing pro-democracy platforms in Serbia and North Macedonia, are forced to abide by Vucic and his headmen in Bosnia.

**Similarly, a growing opinion in Europe is about expecting Ukrainians to abide by Russia's outlaw occupation and halt the fighting with the latter rather than procrastinating a full-fledged access to the Western hemisphere.**

In retrospect, the rationale behind such a logic lies in Brussel's political unwillingness to break up its secure and well-nurtured ties with "strategic partners", which, ironically, strengthen ties with Moscow, Ankara and Beijing amid the current geopolitical turmoil.

In the South Caucasus, the European Union's bet on the strategic partnership with Azerbaijan was seen through foggy, rose-coloured glasses. When in summertime 2022 the European Commission signed a cooperation agreement for increasing natural gas import, Azerbaijan had already received Moscow's green lights to take over the contested region of Karabakh and build arteries between Turkey and Central Asia. The precedent "Second Karabakh War" in 2020 had already brought the Kremlin back on track, indeed. Since then, the region again became for the Kremlin the new geopolitical orbit to pivot in.

Now that Azerbaijan has fully cleared out Karabakh of its Armenian population, President Ilham Aliyev continues to exacerbate the thorny question of how to execute a solid peace with Armenia by employing ubiquitous histories of Azeri belonging and heritage over Armenia. Just as territorial claims are de facto part of Putinism, so Aliyev mulls over Armenia's territorial integrity to reverse what Karabakh Armenians did to Azeris in the 1990s. In addition, any form of criticism coming from the EU's "mutual partners" is dismissed and sent back. Azerbaijan's selective anti-Western rhetoric targets France and the US at large. As the latter is approaching Armenia through new military cooperation and the former remaining the historical ally of Armenians in the region, the unequivocal link between Aliyev and Putin is irrefutable. What Putin says about the "corrupted West" supporting Ukraine's "neonazi regime" is what Aliyev says about 'the West' supporting "Armenian fascism". Such a rhetorical affinity follows suit the successful results related to the economic cooperation achieved by the two countries in 2023, while the European Union continues to pay out its Azeri partners and keep silent about their ties with Russia.

**The opening of a "second front" over Gaza has brought Azerbaijan to juggle between Turkey and Israel at the same time. While instrumentally supporting Palestine, Turkey continues to occupy northern Syria and strike northern Iraq.**

Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the different opposition groups in Syria, led mostly by Kurds, which came together in 2015 against the Islamic State in the Middle East, remain under fire. In Israel, the two-day hearing at the International Court of Justice on South Africa's allegation against Israeli is genocide in Gaza, has not change Netanyahu's mind. "None can stop us" - as the saying goes in Israel and Russia over Gaza and Ukraine, respectively. Just as Putin's refusal to comply with UN organs to withdraw his troops from Ukraine, so Netanyahu remarks that his army would ignore any potential decision of international organs over the fight in Gaza. Nor does the Israeli PM seem prone to recognise any form of statehood to Palestinians and call for a reformed Palestinian Authority to take over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Exploiting the events of October 7, Israeli settlers dream of having their new houses along the seaside in Gaza, while Hamas's rhetoric, [an organization that Netanyahu himself propped up to counter al-Fatah's political role](#), is winning hearts worldwide. In this respect, Putinism has gone south, especially in Africa and Latin America, forcing Netanyahu to bring Israel into a geopolitical

isolation in a post-war scenario. In fact, the Global South does not only seem distant from the West's position over the Russian-Ukrainian war, but also from Israel's decision to sweep Hamas out of the Palestinian territories.

**Andrey Piontkovsky was wrong to see one of the pillars of Putinism in isolation from the outside world.**

Putinism's rhetoric and genocidal methods of doing politics are much alive globally and being currently applied locally. If in the Balkans and Middle East local tabloids continue to call for blood and nationalists run high, contested borderlands have also entered the political agenda of regions where ideas of augmented nations have historically barely served to keep nationalism much alive. Among others, Venezuela has recently stepped up its aggressive position toward western Guyana, a bordering region rich in natural resources. In Africa, Russia, Turkey and Iran are asserting an increasingly active stance after most Western countries left a power vacuum, replacing an old form of colonization with a new one.

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