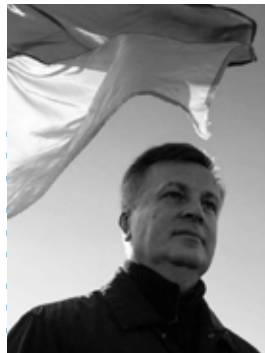


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future



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IHOR HURAK

"Policy of appeasement" as one of the factors of Russia's aggression against Ukraine

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Shortly after the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Western officials, diplomats, and experts have voiced concerns that V. Putin may soon order an attack on an EU/NATO country. As the incumbent Russian president has crossed a number of "red lines" over the past twenty years, such a development is quite possible. In the context of the threats outlined above, the article focuses on the steps the West has taken to heighten the Kremlin's geopolitical ambitions and indirectly contribute to what is happening in Ukraine.

For a long time, politicians and diplomats of the leading Western countries did not understand or pretended not to understand the threatening trends in Russia's development. Back in 2004, having analysed Russian internal changes under Putin's rule, Z. Brzezinski called him the "Moscow Mussolini". Putin's words that the collapse of the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the XX century (2005) made political scientists and experts suspect him of seeking to restore the Soviet Union¹. In February 2007, the Russian president delivered the infamous "Munich speech", which is considered a turning point in Russia's foreign policy. The above-mentioned steps of the official Kremlin did not receive a proper reaction from the West.

Western leaders also failed to respond adequately to Russia's illegal actions against Georgia in August 2008. Leaders of the leading EU countries blocked the granting of MAP to Ukraine and Georgia in April 2008, yet during the EU-Russia summit in November 2008 they have expressed their support for the Russian Federation, including plans to build new foundations for European security together with Moscow. In July 2009, Presidents B. Obama and D. Medvedev officially launched a policy of "reset", and in September 2009 the US President announced that the United States was abandoning plans to build radars and missile interceptors bases in Poland and the Czech Republic. In November 2009, the European Union and the Russian Federation launched the Partnership for Modernization initiative. In October 2010, the leaders of Germany, Russia and France discussed the creation of a united area of cooperation in the field of economy and security. Such steps of the West gave the Kremlin leadership confidence and they were one of the reasons why Putin ordered to invade and occupy Crimea in February 2014.

For several months after the Russian blitzkrieg in Crimea, the West continued to pursue the "policy of appeasement". The situation changed after the plane on an MH-17 flight was shot. Then Russia faced sectoral sanctions, it was excluded from the G8, the EU refused to hold summits with Russia and suspended negotiations on a new agreement, the Russian delegation was denied access to the PACE. In democracy, such restrictions would become a severe blow to its leadership and force it to renounce illegal actions. However, Putin's authoritarian regime, strengthened by petrodollars and systematic

propaganda, has coped with them. However, it is important to state that the restrictions were not aimed at Russia's leadership directly, the government managed to evade many sanctions, while sanctions on the Kremlin's important energy bloc had little effect².

The limited sanctions policy has proved ineffective, and the West has been willing to restart the dialogue with Moscow instead of stepping up in response to further Russian violations and misconduct. This was the pattern created mainly by the idea of the President of France to build a new security and defense architecture" (2018) together with Russia", the return of the Russian delegation to full participation in PACE (2019), the US President's proposal to return Russia to the G7 (2019). Russia saw such initiatives as manifestations of the West's weakness, and in February 2022, Putin ordered a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. In response to this move, leading Western powers have imposed an unprecedented list of sanctions against Russia. Economic experts agree that sanctions pressure could lead to Russia's default in the near future. Combined with the negative effects of the military campaign in Ukraine, this could potentially lead to the disappearance of Russia as it is now from the modern world map.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the "policy of appeasement" that the leading Western capitals have long demonstrated toward Russia has not been a key factor in Russia's aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, such a misguided approach certainly played a negative role. Now there is a need for right conclusions. The current events around Ukraine marked the beginning of the formation of a new world order. In this context, it is fundamentally important to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine that renounced nuclear weapons back in 1994 and became the object of aggression later. To form a sustainable "coordinate system" on the European continent, the United States and the EU must change their approach to addressing issues in Eastern Europe. Along with financial, humanitarian and military assistance, Ukraine should receive at least the EU candidate status. Ukrainians also deserve a MAP. On the other hand, given Russia's barbaric treatment of Ukraine, the question of Russia's role in the UN Security Council must be raised. It should be borne in mind that the current UN Charter lists the USSR, not Russia, among the five permanent members of this body. ■

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¹ It is worth noting that a number of Putin's allegations and actions indicate that he prefers the Russian Empire with its unitary system over the formally federal USSR.

² The EU has not imposed restrictions on Gazprom, which since Putin's presidency has been and remains the financial base and instrument of influence for his team.