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Alex Petriashvili

**Nine Months of Russia's Full-Scale Aggression in Ukraine:
Results, Challenges, and Prospects for NATO and the European Union**

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NATO

The special services of individual NATO member states already knew in the autumn of 2021 that Russia was preparing for full-scale aggression in Ukraine. In addition to the scale of armament movement, manpower concentrations, and photographic evidence obtained from satellites, it is clear that confirmed information of Russia's intentions came through intelligence channels (intelligence information, intercepts of telephone conversations, electronic intelligence sources, etc.). President of the United States of America Joe Biden sent the head of the Central Intelligence Agency, former US Ambassador to Moscow William Burns to Moscow, to personally deliver a letter from him, and a message to Putin: We know what you are up to and advise you to refrain. After that visit, as Bill Burns testifies, he told the president: My concern grew even further.¹

The US administration also warned the leadership of Ukraine. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba recalled that months before the start of the full-scale aggression, when he and President Zelensky's Chief of Staff, Andrei Yermak, arrived in Washington, they were told at a very high level: "Start digging trenches. You will have to fend off a massive Russian attack."²

However, before February 24, 2022, when Putin announced the decision to launch his "special military operation" in Ukraine, there was one important date - December 17, 2021. On this day, Russia publicly submitted its terms to the United States of America, in the form of two draft agreements. The content of these conditions and the unusual form of the handover to the other side indicated in themselves that, in fact, the Putin regime did not intend to enter into any negotiations.

What were the main demands?

- To revoke the decision of the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit on the accession of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO and the commitment that these countries would never join the alliance;
- The withdrawal of nuclear weapons and NATO military forces from the territories of NATO member countries after the end of Cold War in accordance with the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation;
- That the parties would not deploy medium-range missiles in areas from which the threat of attack would be tangible;

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/16/ukraine-road-to-war-takeaways/?fbclid=IwAR2PwwBCAwFIMsesBg4gMvDqphxZ-guIM3evUILJAHzEtoaoaIU-MUSCGB4>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/16/ukraine-road-to-war-takeaways/?fbclid=IwAR2PwwBCAwFIMsesBg4gMvDqphxZ-guIM3evUILJAHzEtoaoaIU-MUSCGB4>

- That, without an agreement from Russia, NATO would not send ships, planes, manpower or military equipment near Russia to participate in military exercises.

Evidently, everyone understood that these conditions would not be fulfilled. However, the US still tried to initiate a negotiation process regarding the signing of an agreement on strategic armaments. European leaders went even further: France and the leaders of Germany one after the other visited Putin in Moscow and publicly promised that there was no decision on the accession of Ukraine and Georgia, nor were they planning to allow the mentioned states to join the treaty in the near or distant future. It was the bitter truth, but it was the whole truth, all the more so since, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, there were no prospects of ending the war, and there was no readiness among NATO members to make a decision on the accession of Georgia, occupied since 2008, or Ukraine in their conditions of being in a state of military conflict with Russia.

As for the withdrawal of NATO troops from Poland, the Baltics and the Balkans, firstly, it was a very minor force (1,000-1,600 soldiers in Poland and the Baltic and Black Sea NATO member states could not really be considered a serious threat to the mythological second army of the world at that time) and second - they were deployed in 2014, that is, after Russia invaded Ukraine. Before that, NATO clearly fulfilled the agreement with Russia that it would not deploy any significant amount of military force or any kind of strategic armament in the territory of the new members.³

In fact, it was not at all a question of the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO and the presence of troops on NATO territory. From 2010 to 2013, Ukraine had a practically neutral status "thanks" to pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, who removed NATO membership from the country's priorities, and then had the Rada adopt the law on non-aligned status, leaving only integration into the European Union as an objective. We will come back to the matter of the European Union in more detail a little later, but everyone knows very well that the negotiations on the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Trade Agreement were not even close to Ukraine joining the European Union; they were merely a step to the emergence of a European perspective for Ukraine. Putin simply did not want to admit that, at least theoretically, such transformations could take place in Ukraine, as a result of which, if not completely erased, the level of corruption would significantly decrease and, on the contrary, the level of democratic development of the country would increase. It was

³https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/one-more-time-its-not-about-nato/?fbclid=IwAR3N1ddfTDMaXBUVa8k4-RR2yyq7Gy_sFJBKavgFhYvAZSMLAol3yomsqRs.

Putin's worst nightmare - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia - democracies with market economies on the borders of his corrupt, criminal and autocratic empire.

As for NATO enlargement, before discussing the issue of Finland and Sweden joining NATO, it would be good to remember that NATO first signed an agreement with Russia in May 1997, and in July of the same year it invited Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to start accession negotiations.⁴

In 2002, the second wave of expansion was announced at the NATO-Russia Summit. Putin did not protest, but spoke about deepening cooperation with NATO in Rome with NATO leaders. Russia perceived the accession of the Balkan countries to NATO as relatively painful due to its historical attitude towards the region. It even tried a coup in Montenegro, but to no avail. The Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikoloz Patrushev, who was personally believed to be the head of this coup operation, made serious efforts to free Russian special service employees from prison and cover up the story in general⁵.

Russia's calm reaction to the application of Finland and Sweden to join NATO was particularly significant. Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine had begun a few months prior to the governments of Finland and Sweden filing out formal applications to join NATO. Russia has a 1350-kilometer border with Finland. However, we well remember the rhetoric of the Russian government and its talking heads that they would no longer allow a hostile alliance to approach Russia's borders. Yet the Russian authorities had a rather calm reaction to this news⁶. Their message was: Sweden and Finland have been cooperating with NATO as de facto members for a long time, and this would merely be the end of formal procedures⁷.

The attitudes of the societies of Finland and Sweden towards joining NATO are also interesting. As recently as 2021, according to polls in Sweden, only 30% of the public supported the country joining the North Atlantic Alliance⁸. According to the surveys of September 2022, this indicator reached 83%⁹, and in Finland it was 76%¹⁰. Before these two

⁴ https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/one-more-time-its-not-about-nato/?fbclid=IwAR3N1ddfTDMaXBUVa8k4-RR2yyq7Gy_sFJBKavgFhYvAZSMLAol3yomsqRs

⁵ https://ecfr.eu/publication/do_the_western_balkans_face_a_coming_russian_storm/

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-calls-finland-sweden-joining-nato-mistake-with-far-reaching-consequences-2022-05-16/>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-lavrov-says-finland-sweden-joining-nato-makes-no-big-difference-2022-05-17/>

⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-lavrov-says-finland-sweden-joining-nato-makes-no-big-difference-2022-05-17/>

⁹ <https://globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/major-shift-swedish-public-supports-nato-membership?fbclid=IwAR2PwwBCAwFIMsesBg4gMvDqphxZ-guIM3evUILJAHzEtoaoaIU-MUSCGB4>

¹⁰ https://yle.fi/a/3-12437506?fbclid=IwAR3mxNVtQyqwLJE-dbPKPQApPQJ1vbxVpyY1GaEwGJ-Uvsn_DzB2HLEFbSM

countries officially join NATO, only the parliaments of two member states - Turkey and Hungary – have been holding out on ratifying the agreement.

On November 24, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced during a visit to Slovakia that the Hungarian Parliament would ratify the NATO agreement in the first session of 2023¹¹. But it is a relatively more complex situation in the case of Turkey, which has a number of demands for Finland and Sweden: That they recognize the Kurdish organizations operating in their territory as terrorist groups, deny them asylum, and cut off funding and political support. The same applies to the activities of the " FETÖ" organization, whose leader Fethullah Gulen has been recognized as the number one terrorist in Turkey. Unlike in Stockholm, negotiations with Helsinki are progressing more smoothly, although the chances of a final agreement have increased even more since the right-wing government came to power in Sweden. In general, this issue is being discussed as a domestic and separate foreign-political matter of the President of Turkey. Next year, Erdogan will have very difficult elections, and therefore he will try to use this circumstance to further his own interests. From the foreign policy aspect, it is important for Erdogan to renew the topic of the purchase of American F-16 aircraft. It is unlikely that significant progress or a breakthrough will be achieved in this regard, however, in connection with the activities of the above-mentioned organizations in Sweden and Finland, there is an expectation that the Turkish president will aim to gain as much as possible.

In any case, this issue is not really a top priority for Russia. The more vital fact is that Russia received everything opposite to what it demanded from NATO and the United States of America on December 17, 2021.

Let's consider the results of the first nine months of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine for NATO, and what challenges the alliance is now facing:

1. A few months before the start of the war, the chaotic withdrawal of the alliance from Afghanistan happened, casting a significant shadow on the announcement made by US President Biden about the unity of NATO and his historic address: "America is back". Before the withdrawal from Afghanistan, there was a NATO summit, a reversal of Trump's earlier decision to withdraw American troops from Germany, and an effort to fix the rift within the alliance that had emerged during the previous administration. However, the messy exit from Afghanistan, to say the least, again raised questions about whether America has really returned and whether tensions between NATO members had really been removed. There is also an opinion that the not-so-orderly exit from

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-pm-says-hungary-promised-ratify-nato-membership-finland-sweden-2022-11-24/>

Afghanistan was also one of the important factors in Putin's decision, that is, 'NATO is weakened and now is a good time to conquer Ukraine and to significantly damage the prestige of NATO itself, as well as to deepen the gap within the alliance even further.' Unexpectedly for the Kremlin, as well as for many of the Alliance's supporters and opponents, NATO has demonstrated remarkable unity, unanimity and organized action. Of course, the role of the US president is important, but justice demands that the historic contribution of the now former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and with him the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, be recognized, as should the fact that NATO is indeed now more united than it has probably been since September 11th 2001.

There is a certain danger that in the event of the war being prolonged, we will see trends of "fatigue" with Ukraine, growing dissatisfaction with inflation and high energy prices, and an increase of those who want to normalize relations with Russia, within the individual NATO member states, but, in the end, I hope that the alliance's unified position will not be affected.

2. NATO expanded - we talked about Sweden and Finland above, but we also note here that valuable and economically and militarily strong new members will join the alliance soon.
3. The defense and security of NATO's European member states have been further strengthened. The US launched the legendary 101st Airborne Division in Europe for the first time since World War II. In addition, tens of thousands of American soldiers protect the security of European NATO member states today, and American strategic nuclear bombers ensure the nuclear peace of the alliance. The use of nuclear weapons is still considered one of the most significant challenges, and although the US administration strongly believes that the likelihood of this being needed is still very low¹², the Alliance's messages to Russia are very rigid and direct.
4. In the new NATO security concept, Russia is considered the main threat. The Parliamentary Assembly of NATO unanimously denounced Russia as a sponsor of terrorism. There is still a long way to go until the governments recognize Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, but one thing is clear: The country, which is considered the main threat and until now was considered the world's number two army, in this war has lost more than 100 thousand soldiers (killed, wounded, or captured), about 300 airplanes, the same number of helicopters, several thousand tanks, armored vehicles and heavy equipment, and anti-aircraft and anti-missile complexes, while the flagship

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/28/politics/us-putin-nuclear-weapon-not-probable/index.html>

ship of the Black Sea Fleet "Moscow" and 11 warships were destroyed¹³. Most importantly, all this happened without NATO itself firing a single bullet. The Secretary General of NATO is very clear in all his speeches - NATO should not allow Russia to win, and everything should be done to help Ukraine¹⁴.

5. NATO has received a real security shield in the form of Ukraine - the most combat-capable armed forces in Europe and the largest country in Europe that can deal with Russian aggression and become a member of its alliance.
6. It is true that the issue of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO has not yet matured, but after the victory of Ukraine over Russia, I am sure that the solution of this issue will be only a matter of time. Recently, the argument in favor of this expansion has been strengthened that Russia cannot/does not attack countries that are/becoming NATO members. Therefore, it is better for Georgia, Ukraine and even Moldova to be inside the alliance, so that there will be no desire from Russia to attack them in future.
7. NATO members have begun to work actively to ensure their own security in the direction of allocating significant funds. We remember well the tough conversations between Donald Trump and Angela Merkel about meeting the 2% cap on NATO's defense budget on time. And now Olaf Scholz is talking about allocating 100 billion Euros so that Germany will have the most powerful army in Europe in the near future¹⁵. However, it should be noted here that the military aid provided to Ukraine and Russia's war in Ukraine in general actually exposed a problem that has existed for years - the defense capability and armament of the majority of the alliance members weakened significantly after the end of the Cold War, and requires serious funds and efforts to improve.
8. Ultimately, after the end of this war, NATO will still be the only successful military-political alliance and the real guarantor of security, and will be much more strengthened from a military and military-political point of view. Hopefully, this will happen without a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia, but Ukraine's (and Georgia's, of course) sacrifices in ensuring Euro-Atlantic security will be duly appreciated, and Ukraine will also play a decisive role within NATO in the new security architecture.

¹³ <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3748573-putins-thanksgiving-day-charade/?fbclid=IwAR0fuSmTyTks5hLrzXBB2f0pqxFm6lPRSbWdhB-DSeebIMR0Yr7fenZNuHs>

¹⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_209356.htm

¹⁵ <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-commits-100-billion-to-defense-spending/a-60933724>

The European Union

As is clear from Boris Johnson's interview, some European Union leaders either could not imagine that Russia would invade Ukraine, or assumed that the war would end very quickly with the complete defeat of Ukraine, that is, with the fall of Kiev and the overthrow of the democratic government¹⁶. This was probably most difficult for Ukrainian officials and diplomats to hear shortly before the war and in the first days of the war, but to the credit of the German, French and Italian leaders, they quickly grasped the situation, and when they became convinced that Ukraine was not going to surrender Kiev, or surrender in general, they took the only right and principled position. The change of government in Italy was likely viewed with hope in Moscow and in pro-Russian circles, but the new Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni made it clear from the first that Italy's position would be principled, unwavering in its support for Ukraine, and in full agreement with the European positions of NATO and the European Union.

As in NATO, most issues in the EU are resolved by consensus. The European Union is an even more complex bureaucratic and politically sensitive union. Obviously, the role and voice of its leading economies are important, and the United States also has its weight in relations with the European Union, and its opinion is paid regard to, but in the end, the adoption of the sanctions packages has shown us most clearly that even the smallest and most economically powerful countries pursue their own interests, and all big decisions are made taking into account the demands/interests of its individual members.

Before the war, diplomats from both NATO and EU member states did not allow even in private conversations that the EU could take such measures against Russia as we saw in the following months. At the time, their positions were strengthened by the experience of 2014, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine was followed by laughable sanctions from today's point of view.

It was clear that the European Union could not limit itself to traditional “concerning” statements and declarations, but it must be said objectively that many did not expect them to go so far. The freezing of Russian state assets, sanctions on the property and bank accounts of Russian oligarchs, withdrawal of European companies from the Russian market, practically paralyzing cooperation with the Russian financial sector, complicating procedures for Russian citizens to enter the Schengen Zone, and a total ban of entrance in certain countries, and finally, in the oil and gas sector, without exaggeration, the EU's making of revolutionary decisions was perhaps another major analytical failure in Putin's calculations. Europe's dependence on natural gas and oil products was so great that Putin

¹⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/22/europe/boris-johnson-ukraine-invasion-europe-comments-intl/index.html>

could not even imagine (nor could the majority of Europeans) that nine months after the start of full-scale aggression, the EU's consumption of Russian gas would drop from 40% to 7.5%¹⁷. The statements of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen¹⁸, the Chancellor of Germany¹⁹ clearly show that the pace of filling the gas reserves turned out to be incredibly high, and instead of years, it took only months.

Now that the embargo on Russian oil has been accepted, the European Union is working, with the support of individual EU member states (Greece, Malta, Cyprus), to prevent Russia from creating a fleet of invisible tankers and bypassing sanctions to continue to receive revenues from the sale of gas and oil products, which it would doubtless spend on the war. According to October data, instead of the daily 1.2 million barrels of oil, Europe bought just 95 thousand barrels of oil from Russia. It even got to the point that the EU member states discussed the upper limit of the price of Russian oil before the embargo came into force. Poland and the Baltic countries demanded a much lower (\$30) limit, while most others were leaning toward the \$60 mark. In the end, the market and the situation adjusted in such a way that Russian oil was brought to the level of \$50-52 at the end of November.

With natural gas, the embargo process is much more complex, although with Germany writing off the \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 project and not paying attention to the Nord Stream 1 explosion disrupting gas supplies, I am confident that within the next year, most EU countries will be switching to alternative gas supplies. It is true that the price of liquefied natural gas is not low, and in the European Union they complain that the American product is expensive, and in this whole process America sees the most benefits, but the process has already started and is irreversible. Russia has tried to blackmail Europe, but along with the search for alternative ways and the principled position of the European Union, the weather also turned its back on the Putin regime, and unexpectedly warm autumn and winter forecasts significantly reduced the price of its main weapon - natural gas.

Of course, no-one is under the illusion that all this is going smoothly for EU citizens. The withdrawal of European companies from the Russian market, as well as the decrease in the number of Russian tourists in European countries, high prices, record inflation and, of course, the financial support provided to Ukraine, have significantly affected their incomes. However, so far it can be said that none of this has affected the mood of the

¹⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/eu-has-reduced-share-of-russian-gas-imports-to-75-eu-commission-chief/2707526#:~:text=The%20European%20Union%20has%20reduced,in%20the%20country's%20capital%20Tallinn.>

¹⁸ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-29/europe-nears-gas-storage-target-early-despite-russian-supply-cut>

¹⁹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/germany-s-gas-storage-facilities-are-at-full-capacity-chancellor-scholz/2746121>

Europeans regarding the continuation of aid for the Ukrainians, and, according to research, the majority of citizens of EU countries support the continuation of said aid²⁰. This does not mean that the threat of a prolonged war will not negatively affect these supportive figures, but, so far, European societies deserve nothing but praise and gratitude. Those who are familiar with the complexity, egocentrism and Euroscepticism of many an ordinary European will surely join me in this expression of gratitude.

Again, the role of the new German coalition government and its leader Olaf Scholz in all of this cannot be ignored. If the position of individual countries - Poland, the Baltics and Central Europe was easy to guess, the German Chancellor's historic speech in the Bundestag was a big surprise for many. In a recent interview, former Chancellor Angela Merkel admitted that it was time for new approaches and a new leader.²¹ Obviously, we cannot and will not assign responsibility for everything to Angela Merkel, who formed a policy of relations with Russia based on the interests of German businesses. Today, one can hear the assessments of high-ranking politicians, historians and experts that Germany's policy towards Russia was wrong. As an expression of this, a photo from the site of the explosion of the Nord Stream-1 pipeline earned the title: "German policy toward Russia in one photo"!

Along with Germany, a significant share of the responsibility belongs to France, which continues to try to save Russia's face, to put Vladimir Putin at the negotiating table, and to somehow achieve a ceasefire. Yes, in any form, and not by forcing Russia's capitulation.

The function of "white crow" in the European Union clearly belongs to the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán. In fact, his policy towards Putin has not even changed. It is true that his country joined the vast majority of sanctions, but in the most pressing issues, such as the purchase of natural gas and oil, Hungary managed to persuade the European Union to consider its own position.

The European Union also contributed to the military reconstruction of Ukraine. In addition to providing a supply of weapons to Ukraine in the first weeks, the European Union decided to create a special mission that would help the Ukrainian armed forces in preparing its units to fight against Russia. Obviously, the idea of creating a European army, which is being tirelessly lobbied by French President Macron, came up here again, but, in my humble opinion, this idea has no prospect of realization.

²⁰ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2022/public-opinion-on-the-war-in-ukraine/en-public-opinion-on-the-war-in-ukraine-20221006.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63751688>

However, another idea belonging to the French president has achieved more success. The European political community met on the 6th of October in Prague and created a new platform for dialogue, where it was explicitly stated that it is neither an alternative nor a supplement to the European Union: It will simply be another, broader platform where European countries will be able to discuss and agree on important issues²².

The European Parliament also adopted a historic resolution²³ that took another step to recognize Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and to establish an international court to punish the perpetrators and decisions makers of crimes committed in Ukraine.

The resistance of Ukraine played a historic role and created an equally historic opportunity for the expansion of the European Union to the east, specifically in the direction of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

Many important statements were made in this regard, but the most important was the European Union's decision to grant membership candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, and European perspective to Georgia²⁴. Anyone familiar with the history of EU enlargement will agree that such decisions would not have been considered if not for Ukraine's heroic struggle against Russian aggression. Even a short time before Russia's full-scale aggression began, no-one in the EU member states and structures was discussing such a possibility. Of course, this does not mean that Ukraine will automatically be welcomed into the European Union after the victory, just as there are no guarantees for Moldova and Georgia, but no-one can deny the fact that it was as a result of the successful struggle of the Ukrainians and the Georgians that this unique opportunity arose, an opportunity that should not missed out on!

²² https://www.freiheit.org/european-union/franco-german-perspectives-european-political-community?fbclid=IwAR3N1ddfTDMaXBUVa8k4-RR2yyq7Gy_sFJBKavgFhYvAZSMLAol3yomsqRs

²³ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221118IPR55707/european-parliament-declares-russia-to-be-a-state-sponsor-of-terrorism>

²⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/european-council-conclusions-on-ukraine-the-membership-applications-of-ukraine-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia-western-balkans-and-external-relations-23-june-2022/>