

Putin again whitewashes the Stalinist era

Vladimir Putin launches a fresh attack against Poland's role in the Second World War, but some in the West may be receptive to his message.

President Vladimir Putin's recent article reinterpreting the Second World War has the Russian president presenting himself as a pro-Soviet historian, writes Andrzej Nowak, a professor of Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

In his article on the Second World War published in *The National Interest*, Putin accused European politicians, and Poland in particular, of wanting to "sweep the 1938 Munich Conference under the rug."

Professor Nowak explained that the reason for Putin resorting to lies is twofold: He seems to want to sign his name under Stalinist policies due to his own Soviet patriotism combined with the need to fulfill a strong desire to serve as historian in praise Stalinist Russia — a time in history when the country was perhaps at its zenith in terms of power.

Novak believes that Putin wants to participate in a political game which entails that "only the strong have a monopoly on truth", and Russia is meant to be part of this group.

In his article, Putin also claims that Poland should have chosen to side with Stalin, which would have entailed losing half of its territory, but would have avoided the Second World War or helped achieve a swift Soviet victory.

The professor warned that although Putin's claims seem absurd, there is fertile ground for them among certain political spheres within the U.S. and Germany. He pointed out that the publishing of Putin's article coincided with news that U.S. troops would be transferred from Germany to Poland and Polish President Andrzej Duda's visit to Washington.

Professor Andrzej Nowak:

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Professor Nowak believes that due to Poland's growing geopolitical position, Putin is returning to the narrative in which Germany is meant to be the leader of European affairs.

"This is a signal to Berlin. Putin is suggesting that Germany's dominant position in Europe can only be maintained through a partnership with Russia and the exclusion of Poland," Nowak said.

The professor pointed to a new element of the Kremlin's historic narrative in Putin's article – the Russian president's role as a historian.

"In his broad article, which is an interpretation of the entire Second World War, Putin reveals himself as a historian. This is a kind of signature beneath the extrapolated gigantic lie concerning the Stalinist era," he said, adding that this was unprecedented as even Stalin had not pretended to be a historian.

Nowak stressed that Putin suggested in his article that the Katyń forest massacre was the work of Hitler's collaborators, the Poles, because they are considered collaborators in the eyes of a large part of public opinion.

Nowak stated that according to the Kremlin narrative, Poles were also responsible for Katyń, in an absurd claim that seems to apply they had murdered themselves.

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