Beat: News

Living in Eastern Europe During a Time of Conflict

Putin Flexing His Muscles

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USPA NEWS - In July of 2021, I moved to Hungary. I bought a home in a quiet, little village in the north, not far from Slovakia. My reasons for doing this were to retire somewhere peaceful, away from the drama and BS that had surrounded my life in the United States. My maternal grandfather was born here, so the choice of Hungary also had that basis. For years, Europe always felt like the place I needed to be. I had even spent time in Germany eight years ago, learning of my paternal family heritage. For some reason, I am more comfortable on this side of the globe. I feel like I belong here.

I knew Hungary was once a communist state. That changed after the Berlin Wall fell and Russia lost ground, its borders getting pushed back, while the world map was redrawn and eastern European countries regained their independence and freedom. It was that freedom that made me feel comfortable in my decision to make the permanent move to Europe. Little did I know that Vladimir Putin was planning to push Russia's border westward again.

Mr. Putin, the president of Russia, is a former KGB (the state security police of the former Soviet Union) officer and is also an author of several books. For the last several months, Mr. Putin had made his disapproval known as to Ukraine becoming a member of NATO. NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was signed April 4th, 1949, as an intergovernmental military alliance. As stated on NATO's website – "NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means. Political – NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defence and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict. Military – NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations." There are currently 30 members of NATO. Listed by the year they joined – 1949 – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, The United Kingdom and The United States. 1952 – Greece and Turkey. 1955 – Germany. 1982 – Spain. 1999 – Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. 2004 – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. 2009 – Albania and Croatia. 2017 – Montenegro. 2020 – North Macedonia. Currently, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine are recognized as aspiring members (NATO, 2022). President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has requested immediate acceptance to NATO and also wants to join the European Union, but due to questions of "official corruption, shortcomings in its defense establishment, and its lack of control over its international borders", there will continue to be delays in those decisions (Burns, R., 2022, February 4).

During the night, through what I see as bullying tactics, Russia has signed paperwork recognizing independence of two regions in eastern Ukraine – Donetsk and Luhansk (NBC News, 2022, February 21). It had to be be easier for Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnick, leaders of those areas, to side with Russia, than to risk harm of their citizens. In their presence, Mr. Putin has vowed to act as a "peacekeeper" in their regions. He has since ordered troops into eastern Ukraine. This has allowed him to enter the country, without looking as he has invaded. Donetsk and Luhansk have been controlled by Russian-backed separatists since 2014, when Russia took Crimea and parts of Donbas, which were parts of Ukraine. This had to be the plan of Mr. Putin all these years. He just took what he could easily get.

In this age of immediate news, due to social media and news networks, nothing happens without the world knowing. Even if something happens in secret, the secret does not last for long. Everything that Mr. Putin orders and the Russian military does, the world will know about. Some have talked about World War III or a war in Europe. I truly do not think that is possible. Not to say that some may try, but there are too many individuals who are appreciative of their freedom and will not allow a full on invasion of their countries, without a fight. They would fight along NATO forces to keep enemies at bay. The use of nuclear weapons? It may have a simple end result of eliminating an enemy, but to the country that uses them, they would also be doing themselves harm. Use of such weapons would damage the planet, the place they would still reside.

Sanctions are now an issue that will have an affect on all eastern and western countries. Imposing sanctions on Russia will cause them to impose their own. As someone living in eastern Europe, this will affect the cost and availability of everything we take for granted. For example, I heat my home with natural gas. Of Hungary's natural gas consumption, they produce 15%. The other 85% comes from Russia (GENI, 2003). The cost to heat my home has already increased, but what if pipelines are shut down? I do have the

option of electricity. There is nuclear power here, but also coal fired power plants. Hungary also consumes more coal and oil than it produces. You see the point I am making. We are not the only country that relies on Russia for natural resources.

Time will tell what will come of this, as it always does, no matter what issues arise in our lives. I imagine I will have more to say on the subject.

Thank you for your time in reading my article. These are merely my thoughts and insights based on the facts You can follow me on Instagram @wendywesthoven or on Twitter @wendy_westhoven. I appreciate comments and welcome corrections, should my research be wrong.

Wendy is a former columnist, writing for the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio. She also holds a Bachelors Degree in Business Management and enjoys embroidery and working with stained glass. She resides in Hungary.

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