

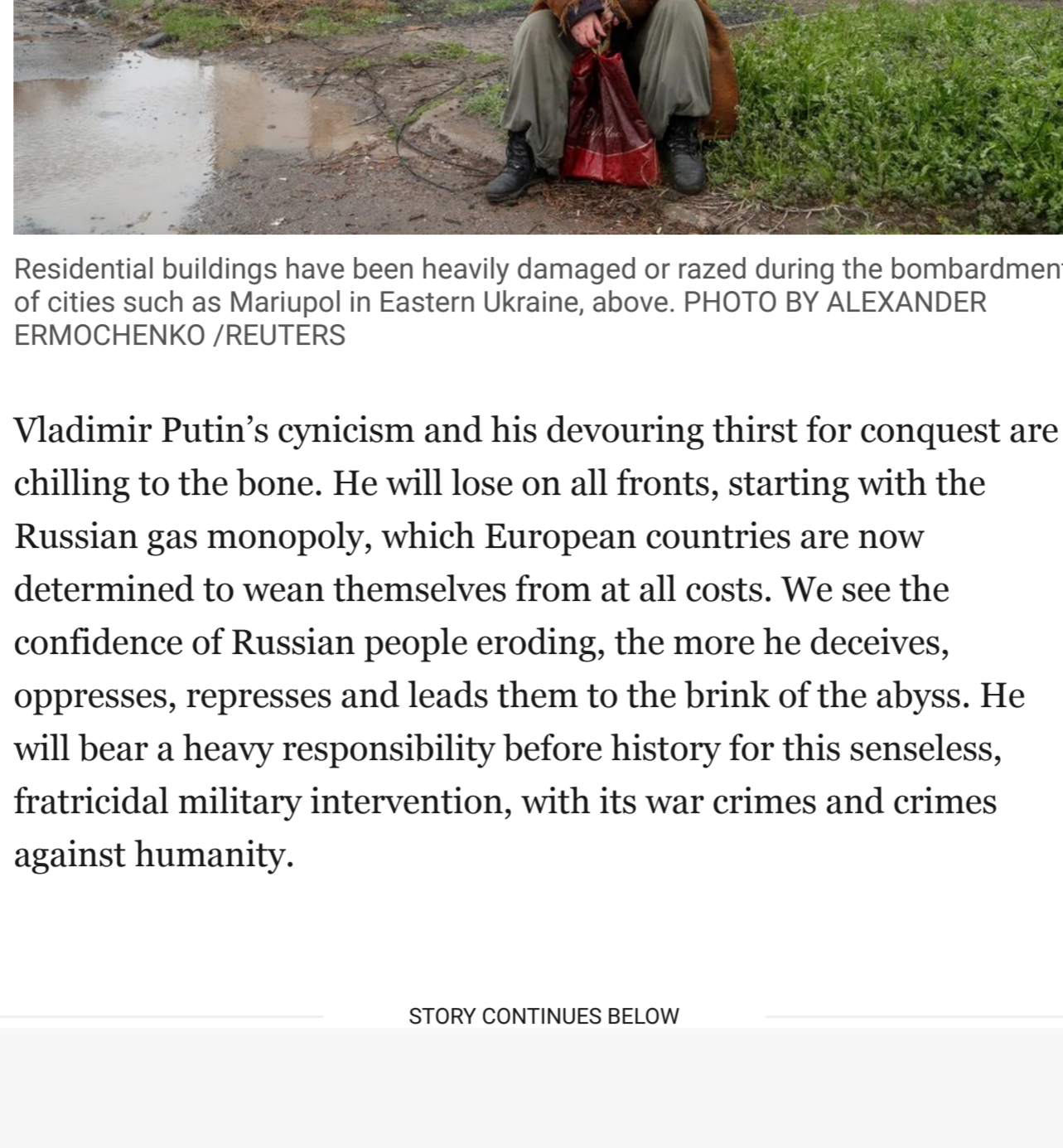
This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

Opinion / Columnists

Michaëlle Jean: The world shudders at Putin's crimes – but Ukraine has not surrendered

Russia's leader will bear a heavy responsibility before history for his senseless, fratricidal military intervention, with its war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Michaëlle Jean
Apr 14, 2022 • 1 hour ago • 4 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)

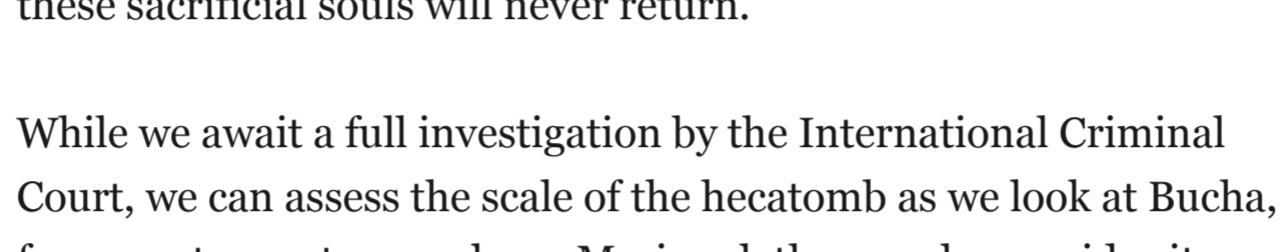


Residential buildings have been heavily damaged or razed during the bombardment of cities such as Mariupol in Eastern Ukraine, above. PHOTO BY ALEXANDER ERMOCHENKO / REUTERS

Vladimir Putin's cynicism and his devouring thirst for conquest are chilling to the bone. He will lose on all fronts, starting with the Russian gas monopoly, which European countries are now determined to wean themselves from at all costs. We see the confidence of Russian people eroding, the more he deceives, oppresses, represses and leads them to the brink of the abyss. He will bear a heavy responsibility before history for this senseless, fratricidal military intervention, with its war crimes and crimes against humanity.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

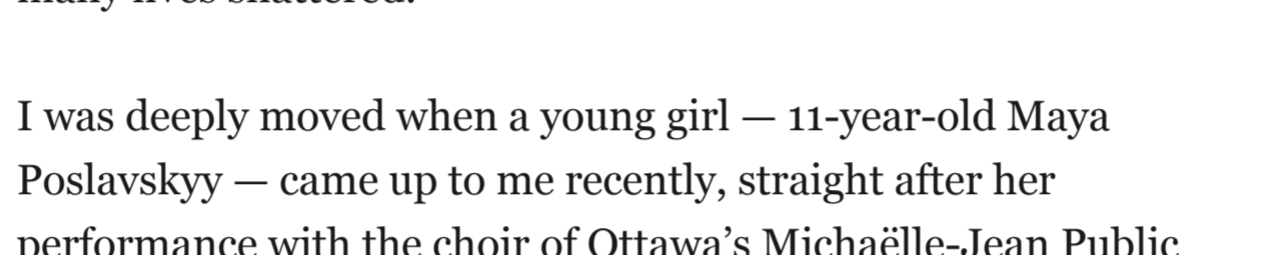


The man who ordered the invasion of Ukraine will be cursed for his cruelty, starting with the families of young soldiers, conscripts taken from the poorest regions of Russia, who were led to believe they were going to liberate and "denazify" Ukraine. Thousands of these sacrificial souls will never return.

While we await a full investigation by the International Criminal Court, we can assess the scale of the hecatomb as we look at Bucha, for a most recent example, or Mariupol, the popular seaside city which, until last year, welcomed with open arms a large number of Russian tourists. How many more martyred towns and cities will there be, their buildings gutted, their unique architectural jewels razed to the ground?

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

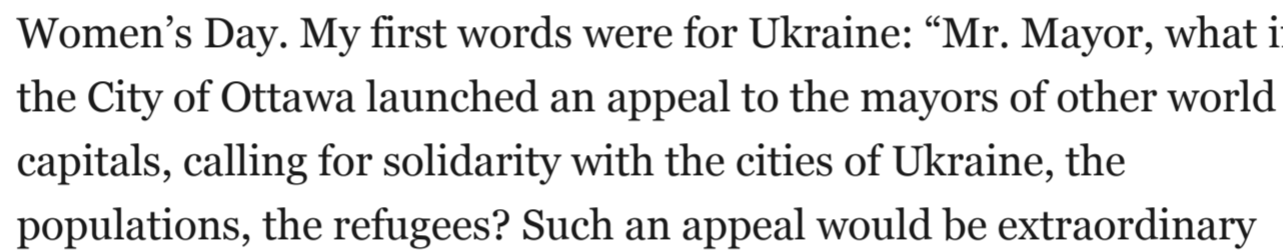


Without water, without food, without electricity, this is the coldest, most terrifying and most desperate springtime one can imagine for hundreds of thousands of people still trapped in the war zones, with nowhere to hide from deadly fire. More than 10 million Ukrainians, mostly women, children and vulnerable elderly people, have had to flee. The endless columns of refugees at the borders expose just as many lives shattered.

I was deeply moved when a young girl – 11-year-old Maya Poslavskyy – came up to me recently, straight after her performance with the choir of Ottawa's Michaëlle-Jean Public Elementary School, pointing at the Ukrainian and Canadian flag pin on my jacket, a reminder of my state visit to Ukraine as Governor General of Canada. In an instant, she threw herself into my arms and said, "I am from Ukraine, my grandparents escaped, they have arrived in Romania and should be joining us in Canada soon. It's terrible! We are so scared!"

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.



I held and rocked her gently, trying to alleviate her anxiety. A sigh of relief released some tension in her body.

This happened at Ottawa city hall, where Mayor Jim Watson presented me with the key to the city on March 8, International Women's Day. My first words were for Ukraine: "Mr. Mayor, what if the City of Ottawa launched an appeal to the mayors of other world capitals, calling for solidarity with the cities of Ukraine, the populations, the refugees? Such an appeal would be extraordinary coming from the Canadian capital, where so many people like me, who have had to flee horror, repression, insecurity, conflict, now live." Mayor Watson welcomed the idea and launched the appeal, starting with the capitals of the G7 countries and Ukraine's neighbours.

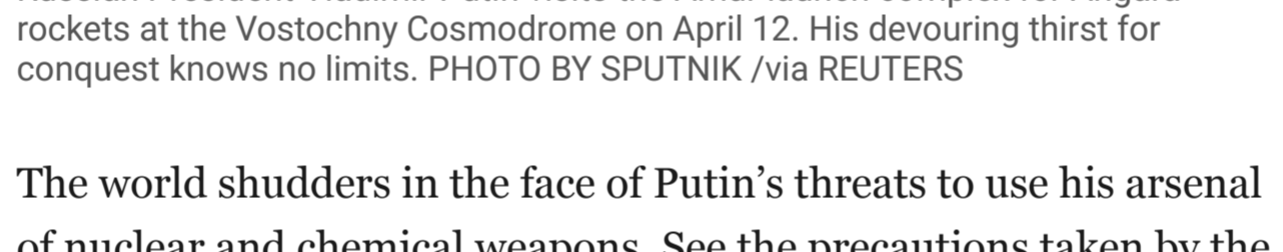
STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.



I am very touched. I think of Maya and her grandparents, who have now made it to Ottawa exhausted, trying to recover from the ordeal and the anguish for all those they left behind.

The whole region of Central and Eastern Europe is wondering: after Ukraine, which country will be attacked next?

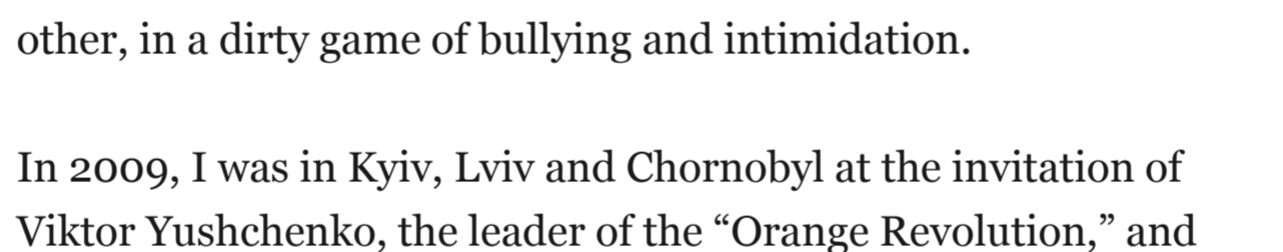


Russian President Vladimir Putin visits the Amur launch complex for Angara rockets at the Vostochny Cosmodrome on April 12. His devouring thirst for conquest knows no limits. PHOTO BY SPUTNIK / VIA REUTERS

The world shudders in the face of Putin's threats to use his arsenal of nuclear and chemical weapons. See the precautions taken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which refused to grant President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's request for a no-fly zone over Ukraine to protect his population from Russian bombs and missiles. See the European Union (EU), which did not take up the president's plea to activate Ukraine's application for membership. The fear, of course, is that Putin will retaliate and drag Europe into all-out war.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

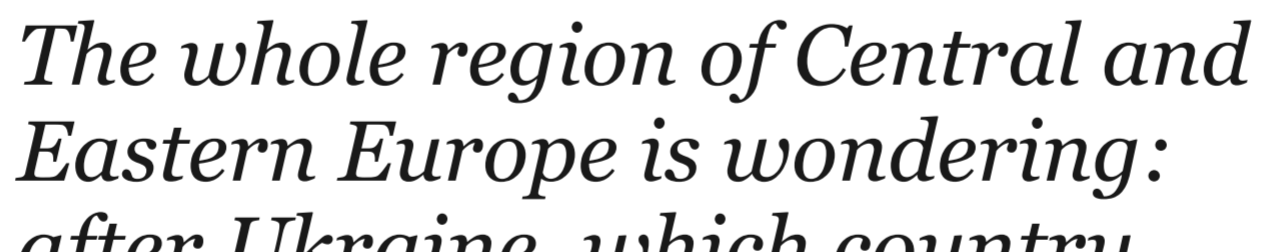


Will the heavy economic sanctions, including against oligarchs, the decision of international companies to withdraw from Russia and the suspension of visas be enough to make Vladimir Putin back down? For the moment, he is playing everyone off against each other, in a dirty game of bullying and intimidation.

In 2009, I was in Kyiv, Lviv and Chornobyl at the invitation of Viktor Yushchenko, the leader of the "Orange Revolution," and president of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010, whom we later officially received in Ottawa. He avowedly came to express his gratitude to Canada, the first western country to recognize the independence of Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, and to greet the one million Canadians of Ukrainian origin.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.



But Yushchenko was clearly more concerned with the campaign he was already leading for Ukraine's membership in NATO.

Time is running out," he said, "Ukraine needs NATO's shield and deterrent against the plans of Vladimir Putin, who dreams of reinstating a new empire, a new USSR that will bear Russia as its name. He is obsessed with this plan."

“*The whole region of Central and Eastern Europe is wondering: after Ukraine, which country will be attacked next?*”

He had obtained the support of the Harper government and Washington, whose promises remained unfulfilled, however, in the face of fierce opposition from the Kremlin, which supported Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian candidate. Yanukovich was elected Ukraine's president in 2010.

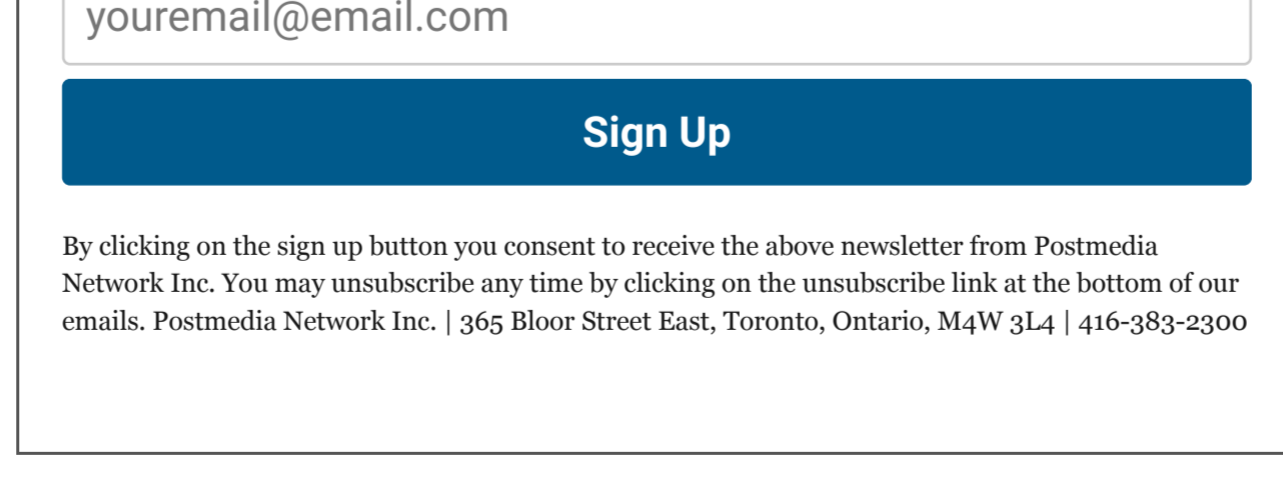
In 2013, Yanukovich announced his refusal to sign the association agreement of Ukraine with the European Union, in favour of an agreement with Russia. We remember the result: waves of protests, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians outraged by this decision, especially young people, students, artists, full of dreams and hopes, eager to open up to the world, holding up their "revolution of dignity," until the deadly confrontation of February 2014, in Maidan Square, Kyiv, when government forces were ordered to fire live ammunition, leaving more than 80 dead. Deposed by Parliament, Yanukovich took refuge in Russia as one returns to the fold. There are now rumours that Putin is thinking of putting him back in charge of Ukraine.

The Ukrainians, however, have not surrendered. I doubt they ever will.

Michaëlle Jean served as the 27th Governor General of Canada, and is former Secretary General of La Francophonie.



Latest National Stories



Ottawa Citizen Headline News
Sign up to receive daily headline news from Ottawa Citizen, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.

Email Address
youremail@email.com
[Sign Up](#)

By clicking on the sign up button you consent to receive the above newsletter from Postmedia Network Inc. You may unsubscribe any time by clicking on the unsubscribe link at the bottom of our emails. Postmedia Network Inc. | 365 Bloor Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 3L4 | 416-983-2300

THIS WEEK IN FLYERS

COMMENTS

Postmedia is committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion and encourage all readers to share their views on our articles. Comments may take up to an hour for moderation before appearing on the site. We ask you to keep your comments relevant and respectful. We have enabled email notifications—you will now receive an email if you receive a reply to your comment, there is an update to a comment thread you follow or if a user you follow comments. Visit our [Community Guidelines](#) for more information and details on how to adjust your [email](#) settings.