

# Putin, Russia, and the moral imperative of the West

*This weekend has seen protests across Russia in support of Alexei Navalny. Tomila Lankina argues that with citizens taking to the streets, western leaders and businesses should reflect on their own relationship with the country.*

Imagine a world stripped of the basic elements of human decency, honesty, and honour, a world where the primordial instinct of greed, accumulation, avarice, and lust for endless power trumps any countervailing moral compasses or institutions that humanity have thought of to constrain and channel the base instincts of the primitive man.

[Navalny's video of Putin's palace](#), watched over seventy million times, has given us a glimpse of that world – a world where vulgarity and naked gluttony of gargantuan proportions are only matched by the vast apparatus erected to defend and shelter Russia's kleptocracy against the citizen.

Western leaders have been complicit throughout in the perpetuation of the feast. They have become enablers – turning a blind eye to the visible and the not so well concealed “hidden” in plain sight edifices of theft that the Russian rich have erected, purchased, and laundered across Europe. Political leaders and the business class have been complicit by not robustly going after this corruptly acquired wealth and strangling the hydra personalised by Putin.

Over and over, Russian citizens have called upon European leaders to act and target where it hurts the most – the villas, the vineyards, the chateaux, and the insatiable greed and thirst for the formal trappings of education in elite private schools, Oxbridge, and the Ivy League. The properties especially should have been long frozen out and the feasts that they host squandering the proceeds of theft from the Russian people should have been stopped – by simply sanctioning the Putin clique out of access and ownership.

Yet, the West has remained effectively silent – concealing the inaction behind bland, banal, and rehearsed political statements that have done nothing to target what really perpetrates and enables Putin's power – the thirst of his clan for the superficial trappings of a civilised man, which only the West can seemingly give to him, his mistresses, and their children.

It is of course easy to pretend that the West is effectively immune to the baseness of greed and power revealed in Putin's Palace, paid for at the expense of Russians. Yet, recent events in America have given us a glimpse of another such instance of a base instinct unchecked by decency, respect for institutions and the law, running amok.

Western democracies are also not immune to the reach of such power in other ways – for every Novichok poisoning attempt that goes unpunished even when perpetrated on western soil, there will be others. And the insatiable thirst for prime real estate of Russia's Tzars may mean that the lovely sea-spot that is Crimea might not be one acquisition too many, and there may be others. As Navalny says so poignantly in his video, it is but a false hope that the treadmill of greed will one day be satiated and will stop. It won't.

Just as many citizens in Russia, on this weekend of mass protest, are pausing to think about what they can do to support Navalny and his cause, so too should western leaders and businesses reflect on what they can do and where they have fallen short. For far too often they have compromised their own integrity, for the simple material gain of selling yet another London property to an oligarch or acquiring a retirement sinecure on a Russian energy company board of directors, all while blandly prevaricating in political and media statements. It is never too late to redeem oneself. This is your and our chance.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [kremlin.ru \(CC BY 4.0\)](#)*

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