

# ATHENA

## FOREIGN POLICY SPEECH

### MSc Course

### "The EU and the Post-Soviet Space"

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**STAPPER**

**AS**

**CATHERINE "THE  
GREAT" II OF RUSSIA**

Reigning Empress of  
Russia, 1762-1792



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## Context

Catherine the Great, also Catherine the second, was the longest reigning empress of the Russian Empire. Her reign lasted for 34 years, from 1762 until she died in 1796. Catherine was known to be eccentric and had a fierce opinion often not shying away from discussing and arguing with her counsellors about state affairs. We are in the here and now. Putin's rule is overthrown by Catherine the Great, because she feels that Putin made a huge mess of the war in Ukraine and of Russia. She came back from the dead to take matters into her own hands. She gives this speech to the Council of Ministers and the important people that are left behind now that Putin is gone. The audience is stunned that Catherine the Great walks into the meeting instead of Putin, whom they had expected.

## Speech

Dear Excellencies,

I gather you are all very confused as to why I am standing here instead of mister Putin. Just a mere moment ago I committed a coup against mister Putin, just like I did with my own husband Peter the Third all those years ago<sup>1</sup>. Why did I commit a coup you ask? As I feel the legitimacy of my precious Russia is under threat, so I acted. I could no longer watch, how mister Putin is putting my, I mean our, wonderful country to shame on the international stage. That is why I - Catherine the second, by the Grace of God, Empress and Autocrat of all the Russians, the lady of the manor and Sovereign of many others – raised from the ashes: to clean up mister Putin's mess and to put Russia back where it belongs, on the top of the hegemonic hierarchy.

Let me tell you, dear excellencies, that I think that mister Putin acted out of a noble aspiration, a noble motive, to expand the Russian power and to wage war in order to return "historic Russian lands", just like he said<sup>2</sup>. Historic Russian lands that I, Catherine the second, conquered to begin with. Mister Putin also wants to revive "Novorossiya", a term I invented, a term that is dear to my heart<sup>3</sup>. It is nice to see that I have won such a distinguished place in history, since mister Putin has been seriously influenced by me in his ambitions to reconquer Ukraine. Because, I agree, Ukraine is part of Russia. With the partition of Poland in 1795, I specifically made a deal with Prussia and Austria that only territories populated by peoples close in language, customs and religion would be added to the Russian Empire<sup>4</sup>. We were all once part of the mighty Kievan Rus'<sup>5</sup>.

I will not let that be taken away from me just because a I do know how to wage war, as I should hope you have all learned about the glorious history of our beloved Russia. My reign is marked by military victories and the expansion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine the Great seized the throne from her husband Peter the Third via a military coup with support from the Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>2</sup> Russian President Putin used historical justifications for the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the annexation of the Crimea in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine the Great requested her imperial possessions in Ukraine to be called 'Novorossiya'. This is in line with other imperial powers calling their newly colonized areas 'new', such as New England and New France.

<sup>4</sup> Three successive partitions of Poland during Catherine's reign – in 1772, 1793 and 1795 – brought much of modern Ukraine under Russian Rule. The former Polish territories were divided between Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

<sup>5</sup> Kievan Rus' is a medieval state which was centred around the contemporary Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. Catherine considered the Kievan Rus' as Russia's cultural ancestor. This corresponds to President Putin, who sees this medieval state as the common point of origin for both the Russians and the Ukrainians. He uses the Kievan Rus' as a justification for his invasion of Ukraine because it shows that the Ukrainians are Russian.

Russian Empire. It was I who delivered one of the largest series of territorial gains in Russian history. In the first war against the Ottoman Empire, my Russian armies were victorious. That victory brought us the Yedisan, huge fertile lands along the Dnjepr River and access to the all-important Black Sea<sup>6</sup>. The second war against the Ottoman Empire provided me with the Crimea in 1783 and I achieved immortal and eternal glory such that no other sovereign in Russia has ever had<sup>7</sup>. These territories were part of the Russian Empire until 1917, and now mister Putin is not even able to get them back where they belong.

I will get them back. They do not call me 'the Great' for nothing. Under my rule Russia grew and will grow incredibly strong again. Mister Putin has lost Cherson, a city that is to the utmost importance to me. I will do everything in my power to recapture this city first, so that I can faithfully bury once again the bones of my statesman Potemkin, my general, my favourite, my Grigory...<sup>8</sup>

I expect you, dear excellencies, to support me in this crucial conquest. Those who support me will be lavishly rewarded, just like I was used to back in the day<sup>9</sup>. Those who will not support me may expect the same fate that awaits mister Putin and that my former husband endured...<sup>10</sup>

Together let us claim again what is ours, let us make Russia the Russian Empire again, let us regain our almighty imperial power!

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<sup>6</sup> Officially the Sixth Russo-Turkish War, but the first war against the Ottoman Empire during Catherine's reign, ended with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774 whereby the Russian empire gained a lot of new territories in modern Ukraine. Permanent Russian presence on the Black Sea was crucial for Catherine, as it enabled Russia to establish a Black Sea fleet. Access to the Black Sea is to the same importance to President Putin, with the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Without much resistance from the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire took the Crimean Peninsula in less than a month in 1783.

<sup>8</sup> With the withdrawal of Russian forces out of Cherson (Russian spelling since Catherine the Great was the Russian tsarina) on 9 November 2022, Russian officials removed the bones of Russian commander Grigory Potemkin who was buried in the St. Catherine's Cathedral in the city. Prince Grigory Potemkin was commander-in-chief of the Russian armed forces and grand admiral of the Black Sea during Catherine's reign. He is seen as the love of Catherine's life and was one of the most important people at her court. Potemkin played a critical role in the annexation of the Crimea in 1783. Potemkin is regarded as a source of national Russian pride. Putin also referred to Potemkin's legacy as legitimation for the annexation of the Crimea in 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine realised that maintaining the support of nobles around her was important to her success, and therefore generously rewarded the people who were on her side. She gave them titles, estates, jewels, paintings, and with new pieces of land serfs were included.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine's husband Peter the Third died a few days after his abdication. The official cause of his death was a severe stroke, however, much mystery surrounds his death, and some say his assassination was commissioned by Catherine.