

# **ATHENA**

# **FOREIGN POLICY SPEECH**

**MSc Course**

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

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**AS**

**Milan Kundera**

Czech-born French Writer



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## **Introduction: Background and Context**

Milan Kundera was a Czech-born French writer known for his novels exploring themes of identity, love, and politics. Notable works include “The Unbearable Lightness of Being” and “The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.” His writing blends philosophy and humour, reflecting the impact of totalitarian regimes on individuals. He passed away at the age of 94 in July of this year. In his 1984 essay, “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” Milan Kundera talks about the history and politics of the region in relation to the East and West. Despite being politically aligned with the East after World War II, Kundera argues that Central Europe historically belonged to the West. This separation, viewed as an attack on European civilization, represents the loss of a once-important cultural center. Kundera also compares Western values with Russian imperialism, stating that communism fulfilled Russia's imperial dreams but clashed with the cherished Western ideals in Central Europe. The essay has sparked discussions about Central European identity and European values.

This foreign policy speech takes place in the setting of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2023, December 10th in Stockholm, Sweden. Kundera comes back reincarnated to receive the 2023 Nobel Prize in Literature. He is using this acceptance speech to call attention to how Ukraine is being abandoned by the West. The speech is inspired by the essay mentioned previously.

## **Foreign Policy Speech**

*Your Majesties, Esteemed Nobel Prize laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen*

In this moment of esteemed recognition, I find myself compelled to delve beyond the accolade bestowed upon my literary endeavours. It beckons me to scrutinize not only the inked expressions that garnered this distinction but also to cast my gaze upon matters that beg our collective contemplation.

Today I revisit the themes in my essay, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," a reflection that unveils the intricate, often neglected subtleties entwined with the challenges faced by nations ensnared in the convulsions of geopolitical strife. The tragedy I speak of is not a narrative solely imposed by external forces; rather, it is a manifestation of the moral and cultural erosion unfolding within the very sinews of Europe's heart. I now find these themes materializing in the current state of affairs, particularly concerning Ukraine. Ukraine is being abandoned by the West.

In 1984, I unveiled the tragic tapestry of cultural and political erasure in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary—left to the clutches of Soviet imperialism. Europe eager for prosperity, abandoned responsibility. This Europe, bathing in its self-proclaimed enlightenment, turned a blind eye to the cultural and historical ligaments that had long been the pulse of the continent. The very principles upon which Europe stood tall—unity, heritage, and commitment to justice and freedom, are now languishing in the wake. All for the sake of comfort.

Today, I draw parallels between past Central European tragedy and Ukraine's current plight. Ukraine, a nation striving for its place in the sun, is facing a crisis that demands our collective attention. The echoes of history reverberate as, once again, the Western bastions, in their quest for stability and economic flourishing, exhibit a hesitancy to align themselves with Ukraine in the face of aggression from Russia. The tragedy does not merely lie in the geopolitical maneuvers but in the forsaking of a nation grappling for its identity and sovereignty.

The hesitancy from both the United States and the European Union to persist in aiding Ukraine transcends mere geopolitical calculations; it embodies a moral lapse. Ukraine's tragedy is not an isolated affair but a mirror reflecting the professed values of our global community. It becomes a litmus test for our vows to justice, freedom, and the self-determination of nations.

The West's past dismissal of Central Europe was a betrayal of the very principles meant to unite nations. Today, I discern a parallel betrayal as Ukraine finds itself abandoned to confront existential threats against its sovereignty and freedom.

As we bear witness to this unfolding tragedy, let us not be oblivious to the repercussions of such actions rippling beyond national borders. The corrosion of cultural and historical bonds strikes at Europe's core. The values Europe boasts of must not be mere ostentation; they should be deeply rooted in an authentic commitment to the welfare of all nations, particularly those grappling with existential challenges. It is imperative that we, as a global community, rise above narrow interests to extend a hand of support to Ukraine. The

principles we espouse cannot be mere rhetoric; they must manifest in tangible actions that speak to the better angels of our nature.

In accepting this laurel, I urge the world to acknowledge the intricate interdependence of our shared humanity. The tragedy playing out in Ukraine is not an isolated vignette, rather it is a mirror reflecting the choices we collectively weave. Let us glean wisdom from the chapters of days of old, recognizing that the obliteration of cultures and histories within Europe cast shadows that stretch far and wide across the continent. May this moment serve as a catalyst for metamorphosis, compelling us to uphold the principles that define our collective essence and to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity with those yearning for aid. Thank you.