



**Russia's Aggression Against  
Ukraine: A Baltic Call for Solidarity  
and Action to African Civil Society**



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This publication is part of the project Eurodad network capacity building funded by EC. The publication and its contents are the sole responsibility of the project coordinator Lithuanian NGDO Platform and author AfriKo do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



## Problematic narratives in social media

From February to March 2022, AfriKo collected and analysed more than 100 messages ranging from African experts to civil society opinions on various media platforms. Our aim was to identify the most popular narratives circulating in public discourse in the early phases of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and share our reflection from the Baltic perspective.

With the below-showcased narratives, we do not have any ambition to cover the full spectrum of different positions circulating within the African public sphere. Instead, we have picked the top 3 most popular yet problematic narratives and aim to provide a balanced response informed by our historical and political experience.

### “Russia never colonised Africa”

#### Emblematic quotations:

- “Whereas Western European nations participated in the enslavement and colonization of African people, Russia did not. For that reason, Russia was never one of the colonial powers that Africa had to fight.” (A social media influencer from West Africa)
- “Russia has been a good friend to Africa. Russia never colonised Africa. Russia never murdered a single African head of state. The Russians never imposed their languages on us. But Russia support our struggle for independence. It's to return the favour.” (A civil activist from Southern Africa, Twitter)
- “Africa was never supported by America for its independence. It was Russia who gave us money and guns to fight for independence.” (A social media influencer from the African diaspora, Twitter)

#### Our comment:

The perception of Russia (a successor of the Soviet Union) as a non-colonial power contradicts the realities of nations that lived directly under Soviet rule. From the 1940s until the 1990s, the Baltics were occupied by the Soviet Union, and this period was marked by massacres, mass deportations, property confiscation, and armed and unarmed liberation movements. Meanwhile, Ukraine, under Soviet occupation, experienced a massive famine (known as [Holodomor](#)) caused by Soviet policies that killed [close to 4 million Ukrainians](#). Russia's predecessor, the Soviet Union, could be identified with liberation and anti-colonization in Africa

during the Cold War. Yet, modern Russia is a revivalist colonial power. Its neo-colonial ambitions in the region are embodied not only in the current invasion of Ukraine but its continuous and deliberate efforts to reconstitute its 'empire': Moldo-Russian war (1990-1992); 1st and 2nd Chechnya wars (1994-1996; 1999-2009) Russo-Georgian War (2008); annexation of Crimea and occupation of swathes of Eastern Ukraine (2014).

## “USA/NATO/West is behind this”

### Emblematic quotations:

- “Its wanting African support against Russia is actually sickening. Instead Africa must be helping Russia. Time for Africa to unite against imperial domination and western racism and hypocrisy.” (A social media influencer from West Africa, Twitter)
- “The United States has always wanted to capture Russia by encircling it militarily via NATO and destabilising it internally via ,NGOs'. US via toppling Ukraine's govt. in 2014 made it a clear & present danger.” (A tech leader from West Africa, Twitter)
- “USA is using Ukraine as a proxy to fight Russia”. (A social media influencer from Southern Africa, Twitter)

### Our comment:

African countries have been rightfully claiming agency in the international arena, wanting to stop other countries from treating them as a playground between great powers. However, calls to overlook Ukraine's own right to choose its political path are quite loud on African social media.

Though NATO and the EU are perceived with mistrust by African partners, Ukraine striving for Euroatlantic integration should primarily be associated with security guarantees vis-a-vis Russia's neo-colonialistic ambitions. The Baltics know that joining the EU and NATO requires deliberate and continuous efforts to overcome scepticism from our Western allies, yet efforts to seek EU and NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine have already included bloodshed. After a few months, when the prospects of NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia were further postponed at the 2008 Bucharest summit, Russia attacked Georgia. In 2014, Ukraine's government change was led not by external forces but driven by Ukraine's people's right to self-determination and the will to seek integration within the EU and NATO. These struggles continue up to this day and are led by the people in the region, who have chosen to defend a desired political path, not by any obscure external force.

## “What about...”

### Emblematic quotations:

- “The same way Russia wants to dominate Ukraine, is the same way France wants to continue dominating Francophone Africa.” (A tech leader from Western Africa, Twitter)
- ““Moscow makes moves to replace France for navy training in [#Ethiopia](#)” amid the ongoing [#TigrayGenocide](#) One wonders if those rushing to curb Russia’s fatal moves in Ukraine will recognize the same actions in Africa & contain it in time.” (An international relations expert and activist from the Horn of Africa, Twitter)
- “,The United States (US) is hoping for a ,strong African response” to Russian (RU) aggression in Ukraine (UA).” @JoeBiden, No need for Hope. Who gave NATO permission to remove Libya’s Gadafi? Africa is suffered enough. Unilateral sanctions against UN members like Eritrea (ER) is illegal.” (A policy centre based in the Horn of Africa, Twitter)

### Our comment:

In the Baltics, we must admit that we have not seriously taken into account security concerns beyond our close neighbourhood. Yet, the previous passivity and lack of engagement are not a solid argument to leave Ukraine deprived of solidarity and support when fundamental international rules have been brutally and clearly violated. The global implications of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine prove the necessity not only to steer the dialogue with our African partners on topics like global security architecture, food security, and global supply chains but also better understand salient issues and concerns of our African partners.

However, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine poses a paramount challenge for the whole international system. The disinformation and official rhetoric of the Kremlin has shown a clear genocidal intention to threaten the very existence of an independent Ukrainian state and its nation. At the same time, [Russia’s disdain towards international law and attempts of regulating the conflict via diplomatic measures and interim agreements](#) proves that it acts as a rogue power threatening the achievements of multilateralism, among them the influence and voice that Baltic and African states have built up on the international arena since (re) gaining independence. We believe it should be defended through a concerted transcontinental effort.

## Why do the Baltics matter?

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, shocked its close neighbours and the whole world. Continuing Russian aggression raises concerns about such topics as a rules-based international order, interrupted global food chains, and Russia's disinformation.

The Baltic historical experience of being under Russia's control for a few centuries and in-depth expertise in regional security enables us to share more contextual knowledge with our African partners. At the same time, the absence of previous engagements gives a chance to invite and steer a genuine dialogue on Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

## Call for action

- An African-led discussion with Ukrainians should explore the multiplicity of implications and significance of Russia's aggression against Ukraine through civil society dialogues.
- Debunking the stereotypes about Africa as a receiver not a giver of aid, African civil society organisations could initiate pan-African support initiatives for Ukraine depending on areas of their expertise. For inspiration, the Baltics have various non-governmental fundraising initiatives (e.g., [Blue/Yellow](#), [1K Fund](#)) to support Ukraine, which would be willing to work together with African counterparts.
- Mistreatment of fleeing Africans from Ukraine in the early days of invasion raised legitimate concerns about racism and discrimination; thus, African civil society organisations can play a meaningful and active role in partnering with Ukraine's counterparts to promote cultural diversity and equal rights within the international community's efforts to rebuild Ukraine.

## What is AfriKo?

[AfriKo](#) is a Baltic CSO connecting and reflecting partnerships between the Baltics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and Africa since 2015. Therefore we want to contribute to steering an informed conversation on Russia's aggression against Ukraine with our African counterparts, especially from civil society, media, and academia, and propose suggestions for joint actions.

We are not neutral about Russia's complete responsibility for the aggression against Ukraine (and its global consequences). However, we seek to establish a platform for direct experience exchange with our African partners without ignoring their particular historical experience of colonization, its long-term repercussions, and concerns regarding the current international order.

