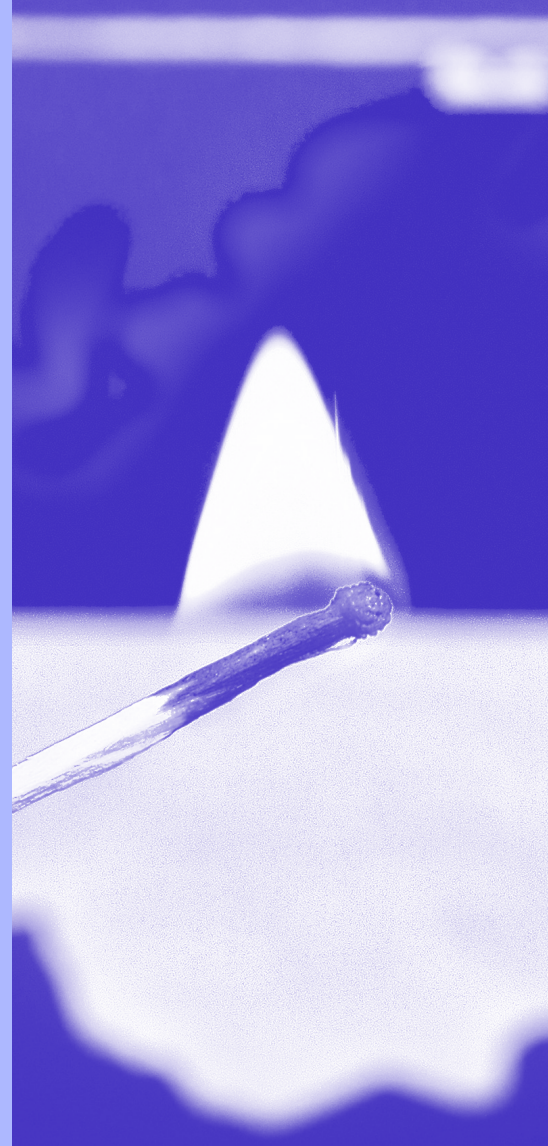




Revolt's ripple effect: what comes after the Prigozhin's 24-hour rebellion?



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Introduction

Following the Wagner Group's rebellion against the Kremlin on 23-24 June 2023, Friends of Europe hosted an event to delve into its causes and consequences, and examine the motivations, alliances and betrayals that fuelled this unprecedented act of insurrection, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Consequences and perceptions of the rebellion

In Russia

Participants identified three centres of power seen in Russia during the rebellion: Putin and the Kremlin; Prigozhin and the Wagner Group; and Ramzan Kadyrov, who remains behind the scenes but demonstrated his independence through media and speeches, calling for severe punishment for Prigozhin and the Wagner 'traitors'.

First and foremost, the rebellion of the Wagner Group and its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, against the Kremlin weakened Putin's power. Russia's military invasion of Ukraine had already demonstrated the weakness of its army, and the mutiny verified that the Russian state has lost its monopoly of violence and thus its monopoly on power. The rebellion marks a point of no-return for the Kremlin when it comes to the recovery of its monopoly of power and leadership.

The revolt revealed that the system of power in Russia does not work. On its way to Moscow, the Wagner Group was not met by Russian troops, which were assumed to be on the battlefield, but it also did not encounter the police, which are supposed to protect Russia's internal territories.

Russian elites have received a clear signal, similar to that of the coup in August 1991: nothing is guaranteed – not security, not power and not even survival. The Russian elite will now need to seriously consider their survival and safety, as noted by **Valerii Pekar**, Co-Founder of The New Country and Member of Friends of Europe's Working Group on the Post-War Future of Russia.

Notably, the population showed indifference to Wagner and did not go to streets to defend the constitutional president, signalling that there is a great unsatisfied demand for justice in Russia. It was not by chance that Prigozhin called his rebellion the 'March of Justice' and positioned himself as a counter-elite politician that wants justice.

In Belarus

Although he has claimed to be the mediator between Putin and Prigozhin, “Aleksandr Lukashenko’s role remains unclear, even if pro-Lukashenko propaganda is now trying to present him as a negotiator-in-chief and wise leader,” argued Belarusian journalist **Hanna Liubakova**.

The consequences of welcoming Wagner in Belarus are multiple, the event heard. Lukashenko is trying to use Wagner soldiers as instructors for the Belarusian soldiers. Neighbouring countries, especially Poland and Ukraine, have expressed concern, as the risk of an offensive from Belarus into northern Ukraine increases. In addition to the Russian soldiers already in Belarus, Wagner’s presence is one more tool that can prevent the Belarusian people from protesting and potentially organising an internal coup to overthrow Lukashenko.

In Central Asia and the Caucasus

Several events have contributed to the decline of Putin’s and Russia’s influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia, commented **Leia Alieva**, Affiliate of Russian and East European Studies at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA) and Member of Friends of Europe’s Working Group on the Post-War Future of Russia. Putin has struggled to prove himself as a successful moderator of the patronage system that currently rules the Russian economy. It is not enough to simply distribute resources according to informal loyalty; the capacity to keep these groups and their interests at bay, promoted, weakened or in competition with one another is needed too. It was mentioned that this type of patronage has various ways of control through compromise, pressure on families and access to resources. As Putin allowed Wagner to increase its power in this regard, the group developed its own interests, which were sometimes different from those of the Kremlin.

Possible futures of the Wagner Group

The combination of the Kremlin’s and Wagner’s interests poses several risks, including the potential nationalisation of the Wagner Group by the Russian state.

Spectacular external actions led by the Kremlin, such as military operations abroad to help other governments with Russian military or mercenaries, like Wagner mercenaries in the Sahel region, may serve as a distraction from the state’s domestic weakness or as an attempt to bolster the domestic situation.

This could also lead to a heightened search for resources and levers of power outside of Russia, especially in Africa and Central Asia, as well as an attempt to use external players to serve their domestic and foreign interests.



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