

IS THE EUROPEAN UNION BREAKING UP BECAUSE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE?

1. The word of the hour is "unity".

After the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops on 24 February 2022, the West demonstrated great political and military unity. There was a transatlantic closing of ranks with the USA. What Russian President Vladimir Putin called a "special military operation" was portrayed by the West as an attack on "elementary civilisational values" that must be opposed with all our might. Again and again, one could also read and hear that Putin had succeeded, probably against his intention, in uniting the West.

American President Joe Biden set the goal of his policy when he declared that it was about defeating Russia and bringing about a "regime change" in Moscow. The President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, invoked European unity in her speech on the state of the European Union. And in the same vein, Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg strongly condemned the Russian invasion at the United Nations as an "assault against the rules-based international order". Leading media demanded that the war be seen "as a wake-up call for the EU's own foreign and security policy".(1) Aid measures on an unprecedented scale were agreed by the US, the EU and the UK for Ukraine.

The political consensus was followed by military unity. NATO, which a short time before had been described by French President Macron as "seemingly dead", experienced a new flowering. While the French president had repeatedly called for a separate European army, the new role of NATO reaffirmed the full military dominance of the USA in Europe. In this spirit, it was decided in January 2023 that the EU and NATO would further strengthen their cooperation. The partnership between the two organisations "shall be taken to the next level". The already excellent cooperation is to be deepened and extended to new areas because "Europe's security is under threat" (2). The fact that NATO, which was a defensive alliance throughout the Cold War, has become an offensive alliance that has pushed its missiles right up to Russia's border obviously did not play a role.

Today, the battle cry among NATO members is "fight together for democracy in Ukraine". Yet "democracy" was not always the organisation's first priority. Portugal was a founding member back in 1949, when it was ruled by dictator Antonio Salazar. Then the USA supported the military coup in Greece. They wanted to prevent a left-wing government hostile to NATO from coming to power. And Turkey was also a NATO member under various military governments. During the Cold War, the focus was on the fight against communism.

Many Western media welcomed the fact that the war in Ukraine had strengthened the transatlantic alliance. Yet the USA, after its victory in the Cold War and its ambition to exercise sole dominance in all parts of the world, has contributed significantly to the destabilisation of the international order. The failures in Iraq and the debacle in Afghanistan, the failed interventions in Libya and Syria, are now to be made up for by a victory in Ukraine. Pointing out that Europe cannot look after its security interests autonomously, the European governments submitted unconditionally to the American claim to leadership. The "alliance of democracies" founded for this purpose is at the same time an alliance against the rest of the

world. The question is whether this new transatlantic unity does not limit the European Union's ability to act to such an extent that it is now forced into a vassal role vis-à-vis the USA.

2. The "turn of the times" is a somersault backwards

The European Union's policy towards Ukraine has been described as a "turning point", i.e. a decisive change in European security policy. And it is. However, it represents a salto-backwards. In the process, essential elements of those policies that have hitherto formed the legitimacy of European integration have been abandoned, indeed turned into their opposite.

The project of European unification was first and foremost a peace project; now the EU is escalating the war in Ukraine. From the beginning, European integration meant prosperity, more quality of life for the citizens of the Union. Now it means "making sacrifices to topple Putin" and for that a reduction in the quality of life must be accepted. A separate European foreign and security policy was supposed to give the EU some autonomous room for manoeuvre. Now complete subordination to the USA has been restored.

2.1. For 1000 years, foreign policy was power politics.

It was about strengthening the power of the sovereign, of one's own country. Those who conquered other countries and expanded their sphere of influence were considered "great" in history.

There have also always been peace projects. Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote as early as 1515: "There should once be an agreement among rulers as to what each should rule.... And borders once fixed should not be moved by any treaties" (3). Charles-Irenée Castel de Saint-Pierre proposed a European Confederation in 1713, so that all future disputes would be settled by arbitration without war. And Immanuel Kant, in his work "On Perpetual Peace", described a federal confederation of states that would secure world peace: according to this, no state debt may be incurred in order to rearm; no state shall interfere violently in the constitution and government of another state; and no state shall allow itself to engage in such hostilities in a war as to make future peace impossible.

These and other peace projects remained theory until a "revolution in European diplomacy" occurred after the Second World War. With the founding of the Council of Europe, confrontation was replaced by cooperation in our continent's inter-state relations; the quest for power by the quest for greater prosperity; welfare by warfare.

This revolution never took place in the USA, where the principle "foreign policy without the backing of the military is like a baseball game without a baseball bat" still applied. It is true that the USA supported reconciliation between the Germans and the French at the beginning of the Cold War, because both countries were needed in the fight against communism. But after the eastward enlargement of the EU, US Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld divided the EU into an "old" and "new" Europe, with the former communist countries, first and foremost Poland and the Baltic states, to spearhead the fight against Russia.

It was argued that these countries willingly supported an aggressive approach against Russia. NATO was pushed 1500 km to Russia's borders after Easter. The USA unilaterally cancelled disarmament treaties such as the ABM Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence Systems. In Ukraine, a coup against a democratically elected president was supported in 2014 and the country was massively rearmed. By 2021, Ukraine's military spending was

already 4% of GDP, and America was supplying \$2.5 billion worth of weapons. NATO manoeuvres were regularly held on Russia's borders.

Following the intensification of fighting in February 2022, a race has begun, often under pressure from the media, to see which EU country will take the lead in supplying arms to Ukraine. A peace union has become a war alliance. The escalation that has taken place is easy to understand: at first it was always said that "defensive weapons" would be delivered, but very quickly "armoured vehicles" became heavy battle tanks. At the same time, the government in Kiev kept making new demands. After the promise that battle tanks would be delivered, President Zelenskyy is now demanding combat aircraft.

In any case, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock could rightly say: "We are at war with Russia". For the arms companies, all this not only means big business, they have also acquired a new image as "crisis helpers". In Ukraine, the European Union became part of a war of position: it supplies the necessary weapons, trains Ukrainian soldiers for this purpose and transmits information from its own intelligence services.

Although this is a war being waged between two European states, the EU has not attempted to initiate serious peace talks or to reach a ceasefire. Instead of trying to continue the European peace project in the spirit of "European values", it has gone down the American path of militarising foreign policy. A serious blow to a cornerstone of the legitimacy of European integration.

2.2. Economic sanctions instead of prosperity.

For decades, European integration has contributed significantly to the fact that the standard of living of citizens in the member states has risen decisively. Open borders had promoted competition, the Social Charter adopted by the Council of Europe was the basis for the market economy to comply with social framework conditions. In any case, prosperity became part of the legitimacy of the European Union.

Now, in recent decades, economic sanctions have become the US's weapon of choice. Already in 2010, one third of all humanity lived under sanctions imposed by Washington. The United States is convinced that, as the strongest economic power in the world, it can win any economic war. Moreover, sanctions affect America much less than Europe because the country is not as integrated into the global economy.

Even before the fighting in Ukraine intensified in February 2022, "crippling sanctions" were imposed on Russia, sanctions the likes of which the world has never seen. The Russian economy was to be brought to a standstill even before the outbreak of war. Economic cooperation between Germany and Russia had long been a thorn in the Americans' side. There were repeated demands that the Nord Stream2 pipeline, which was supposed to carry Russian gas to Europe, not be put into operation. This pipeline, of which President Biden said, "we will take it out", was then blown up; and there are many voices who say that this would have happened even without war.

It is not entirely understandable why the EU leaders have enthusiastically adopted the American sanctions policy against Russia. Did they not consider the effects on Europe, or did they consider them too little? Because these effects are enormous. In September 2022, the

Economist wrote under the title "Morgenthau's revenge" that the sanctions could lead to the industrialisation of Germany, which could affect the whole of Europe.

The article referred to the book "Germany is our Problem", written by the then US Secretary of the Treasury in 1945, in which he demanded that Germany be turned into an agricultural country without industry (5). The sanctions now imposed, according to the article, will cut off Germany from cheap Russian natural gas, which was the basis for making the German economy highly competitive. In fact, after the sanctions, energy prices for the economy and for consumers have risen dramatically, inflation has been fuelled, businesses large and small have had to close. The competitiveness of the economy and, consequently, the prosperity of citizens in Central Europe were dramatically affected. Contrary to Henry Morgenthau's ideas at the time, today German industrial production still accounts for 27% of GDP, compared to 17% each in France and Britain. The question now is, for how much longer?

According to a calculation by the "Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft" (Institute of the German Economy), the war in Ukraine will cost the Germans € 175 billion this year alone, and from 2020 to the end of 2023 the German economy will lose € 595 billion (6).

Yet there is no lack of cautionary voices. Olivier Blanchard, former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), points out that governments have succeeded in supporting consumer purchasing power with huge subsidies. At the same time, however, he stresses that it will not be possible in the long run to finance the war in Ukraine with debt. At the moment, the permanent diabolisation of Putin is still contributing to people's willingness to make sacrifices. Nevertheless, the question arises as to how the loss of prosperity affects an institution whose legitimacy also consists in improving the quality of life of its citizens.

2.3. Vassal role vis-à-vis the USA

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was supposed to be a further legitimisation for the European Union, as it could allow Europe a certain autonomy in the international picture of the young. The CFSP was adopted with the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. At that time, governments agreed to better represent common interests through intergovernmental cooperation. Peace and security were to be strengthened and conflicts prevented in accordance with the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. While there were repeated disagreements under President Donald Trump, transatlantic solidarity has been invoked again since Joe Biden took office.

In the process, the new US administration also very soon showed that American interests are paramount for it as well. The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in summer 2021 took place without the European allies being informed in time. And the "Inflation Reduction Act" passed in autumn 2022, officially a law to reduce inflation, subsidises the American car industry in an extremely protectionist way. No mention of European companies and exports being treated in America in the same way as American companies and exports in the EU.

Now the US has dramatically exacerbated the security situation in Europe through its years of pushing for Ukraine to join NATO. Washington and London have spoken out against Ukrainian neutrality. Ukrainian-Russian peace talks in March 2022 have been torpedoed. Yet the EU leadership unconditionally supports American war aims in Ukraine. Although this is a war being fought on European soil between two European states, nothing has been done by the EU to

find a diplomatic solution. On the contrary, it unconditionally follows the military strategy laid down by Washington.

At the same time, the USA itself is considering the costs of a long war in Ukraine, what pays off for the USA and what does not. The RAND Corporation, a think tank with the aim of advising the US armed forces, has stated in a study that it is very much necessary to examine whether a war that lasts until 2025 is still in the national interests of the USA. The conclusion: the USA can also profit from combat operations that drag on for years, if only because this increases the military expenditure of the Europeans and at the same time keeps their economy cut off from that of Russia. At the same time, however, one has to consider the cost to America: a prolonged conflict could draw NATO even more into the war and brings with it the risk of nuclear war. Above all, it devours those resources that are then lacking in the confrontation with China. Therefore, the study recommends not escalating the war any further and ultimately suggests negotiations (7).

The question is therefore whether the Europeans will formulate their interests just as clearly or continue to submit unconditionally to the USA, as has been the case in other conflicts.

3. Where does the path lead?

3.1. The war aims become increasingly clear

While official Western propaganda says that the war in Ukraine is about "our values", about freedom and democracy, the actual aims of the war are becoming increasingly clear: it is about power politics in the region, which very much has global implications.

Russia does not want enemy missiles on its borders that can reach Moscow in a few minutes. Russia wants compliance with the pledges made at the time by Secretary of State James Baker at the Malta Summit when he declared: "Even if we continue to have a military presence in Germany, there will be no expansion of NATO eastwards, not one inch" (8) In fact, NATO has been pushed 1500 km eastwards to the Russian border. And Ukraine has been rearmed in recent years as if it were already a NATO member.

No wonder President Putin demanded security guarantees and a security zone for his country as late as December 2021. Accordingly, the number of NATO forces should be limited and American nuclear weapons should be withdrawn. If one compares these proposals with the Monroe Doctrine, according to which no foreign power may interfere at all in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere, the Russian ideas look rather modest. And however one looks at Ukrainian history, Ukraine has been a part of Russia longer than Texas has been a constituent state of the United States. How the US reacts when a foreign power arms on its borders was seen during the missile crisis in Cuba.

In fact, the US has brutally exploited Russia's weakness in recent decades: in 1999, Serbia, an ally of Russia, was bombed. Through various "colour revolutions", pro-Russian governments were overthrown and replaced by a US-friendly one. And in 2014, there was the coup in Kiev, which replaced a democratically elected pro-Russian president with a pro-Western one. None of this has helped to improve East-West relations. With the further armament of Ukraine, a "red line" was crossed for Moscow.

The American war aims have also become clear: Ukraine must remain an American protectorate; Russia must be destroyed or at least severely weakened; the rest of Europe must

unconditionally recognise American domination politically, economically and militarily. The elites in the USA see this quite clearly. But these realpolitik goals are paraphrased as fighting "for the liberal, law-based order" in the world, that is, for good and against evil.

This struggle is seen in a broad historical context. This is also the case with Robert Kagan in his new book "The Ghost at the Feast: America and the Collapse of World Order, 1900-1941", in which he states that the "liberal order" that brought the world open political systems and a market economy was created by the power of the USA and is to be maintained by this power (9). The war in Ukraine is also seen in this context. America's task is not only to defend its own country, but also "the values of the free world" wherever they are endangered. It goes without saying that the defence of "values" is simultaneously about tangible political, economic and military interests. But for domestic reasons, in order to win the citizens over to the given policy, the shapers of American foreign policy must put values in the foreground.

Thus, Western propaganda says that the Ukraine war is about the sovereignty of the country, about democracy, indeed about saving the "free world". If the Ukrainians, as we read and hear every day, did not fight for us, Putin's army would march all the way to Lisbon.

But what sovereignty is at stake in Ukraine? We know from Victoria Nuland, now US Deputy Secretary of State, that Washington determines who gets to rule in Kiev. And without American support, the war would end in a day. As far as democracy is concerned, not only is the large Russian minority massively repressed in Ukraine, but all other national and religious minorities are also banned from using their own language and cultivating their own culture.

This war is not about values, but about Ukraine remaining in the power-political sphere of the USA. The war in Ukraine thus has a very decisive global dimension: can the USA continue to determine the balance of power in the world alone in the future or will there be a shift towards a multipolar world.

That is why Washington has contributed decisively to the escalation of the fighting, to the fact that today one can already speak of an American-Russian war. This is also because the modern weapons systems supplied by the USA are, in any case, fully integrated into American information technology. For example, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea fleet, the Moskva, could only be sunk with the help of information from the American secret services. Because of this interconnectedness, Russian soldiers using their own mobile phones are regularly blown up; as is a group of Russian generals who have been identified on the basis of US intelligence.

The question is whether the United States is prepared to escalate the war to the point where it leads to World War III, as Kiev wants? This is not a theoretical question. Proponents of war on the Ukrainian side keep emphasising that "we have been in World War III for a long time". Democratic countries must finally understand this and act accordingly (10). But these realities do not at all correspond to the narrative that is officially presented as justification for the West's support of the war. The legitimacy of Western policy in the Ukraine war is thus decisively called into question.

3.2. Journalism as ideology

Some time ago, the two French journalists Philippe Cohen and Elisabeth Levy analysed the development of their profession (11). They came to the conclusion that journalism has become an ideology, and as such has replaced communism. Now it is journalism that determines what may be thought and how. Information has become indoctrination. Journalists, according to the

authors, have become preachers who always stand on the side of good and fight against evil. Dissenting opinions are no longer allowed. A profession has become a mission.

Whereas Philippe Cohen and Elisabeth Levy drew their observations from the Balkan wars, where the shards embodied evil and the Croats and Bosnians embodied good, today the same pattern can be applied to the war in Ukraine: according to them, Putin is waging a war of aggression "that was in no way provoked", although the new order in Europe has been built up against Russia for decades. Governments that hesitate with arms deliveries and do not want to participate in the escalation of the war are accused of "damaging their country's reputation". On the other hand, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy is described as "probably the most popular head of state in the world", although millions of his citizens are fleeing the country, which is not exactly a vote of confidence.

The extent to which the trend outlined in "Notre métier a mal tourné" has intensified and intensified is shown by Leonard Downie and Andrew Heyward of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. In their study "Beyond Objectivity", they argue that journalistic objectivity is a thing of the past and that leading journalists now share this opinion. Objectivity can lead to a false balance, which is to be rejected when one side embodies good while the other embodies evil. Today, it has to be about truth, commitment to environmental protection, equality for the disadvantaged and minorities. This requires more diversity in the selection of journalists, combined with more consistency in the statements made. Diversity among the actors, but not diversity of opinion.

In contrast to this, Karl Jaspers wrote in his book "Lebensfragen der deutschen Politik": "Objective information should communicate one's own evaluative view and, in addition, report the evaluations of others, which are themselves intellectual facts" (12). That the question of whether journalism should be objective is a fundamental question of democracy far beyond the media sector is shown by a Gallup survey on "trust in institutions" in the USA. According to the survey, only 11% of Americans now trust what they read in their newspapers, 53% have no trust at all. In 2002, 35% said they trusted their newspapers. This shows that the question of whether or not reporting should be based on "objectivity" is also very much a question of the legitimacy of an essential institution of our democracy. The loss of this legitimacy could very well affect the institution being reported on, i.e. the European Union.

3.3. What can we learn from the First World War?

The war of position in eastern Ukraine is repeatedly compared to the war of position in the First World War: enormous sacrifices with few territorial gains. In addition, however, there are a number of other parallels between the "Great War" and the war in Ukraine: those groups in the German Empire that rejected any negotiated peace and pushed for a "victorious peace" contributed decisively to the disaster of their country. The Habsburgs, the Hohenzollerns and the Romanovs only lost the legitimacy to rule their countries because of the war. And one thing became clear: the effects of war are unpredictable.

If there were peace offensives during the First World War, they were regularly prevented by those who pushed for a "victorious peace". Just like Siegfried in the German heroic saga, the German army would defeat all enemies and dictate peace. This is very reminiscent of the statements of the Ukrainian president and his supporters in the West that "there is no alternative to victory on the battlefield". And those who say their help until final victory, in any case, support the destruction of Ukraine today and perhaps its dismemberment tomorrow.

For the German Reich, any negotiated peace would probably have been better than the disaster that occurred in 1918. Will this also apply to the future of Ukraine?

The First World War put an end to the dynasties that had existed for centuries in Austria-Hungary, the German Empire and Russia. Alan Sked of the London School of Economics argues that before 1914 these countries had a good economic and social development and that it was the war that broke out in 1914 that led to the fall of these dynasties ((13).

As far as Austria-Hungary is concerned, Sked emphasises that under the Habsburgs a constitutional state existed, essential elements of a welfare state were introduced and that economic development, compared to other countries, could show positive results. And those who advocated reforms wanted to do so within the framework of the given political structures and institutions. One could cite writings by Karl Renner and Otto Bauer's treatise on the nationality question as examples of this.

In the German Empire, the economic upswing was particularly pronounced and the foundations of a welfare state laid by Bismarck were exemplary. From 1870-1913, German economic production increased eightfold (compared to a tripling in France). In 1913, Germany produced more steel than Great Britain; in areas such as chemistry, electrical appliances or precision mechanics, top performances were achieved. Alan Sked cites all these examples to show that the two monarchies in Central Europe were not doomed before 1914, i.e. before the war, but that it was the world war that deprived the ruling houses of their legitimacy.

This is also true for the Tsarist Empire. In 1914, 327 foreign companies had established themselves in Russia. Foreign investment contributed significantly to the expansion of the Russian economy. These investments were obviously an expression of the confidence that people abroad had about a positive development in the Tsarist Empire. The British ambassador in St. Petersburg also expressed himself in this sense, writing in April 1914: "Russia will soon be so powerful that we should try everything to preserve her friendship".

That is not to say that there were not also major political and social problems in the three monarchies. Rather, the argument is that it would have been possible to overcome them and that it was only the World War that led to the fall of the dynasties because they had lost their legitimacy. For, as the First World War in particular shows, a war has consequences that are not foreseen. This also applies to the war in Ukraine. If leading exponents of the European Union now strive for a fight to the final victory, whatever that means, this may well have consequences that no one is considering at the moment. In particular, this may also entail a loss of legitimacy for the European Union. In this way, European integration runs the risk of losing the foundations on which it has been built so far.

Notes:

- (1) Iryna Solomenko; The Long War; in International Politics May/June 2022
- (2) Press release of the EU Representation seen on 10 January 2023
- (3) Idee Europa; Entwürfe zum Ewigen Frieden; Accompanying material for the exhibition of the German Historical Museum; Berlin 2003
- (4) Economist from 4 December 2021
- (5) Economist from 17 September 2022
- (6) Institute of the German Economy; 23 January 2023
- (7) New York Times; 6 February 2023
- (8) Economist from 8 January 2022
- (9) Robert Kagan; The Ghost at the Feast: America and the Collapse of World Order 1900 - 1941;
- (10) The Russians know Putin is finished; in Die Welt of 10 January 2023
- (11) Philippe Cohen & Elisabeth Lévy; Notre métier a mal tourné ; Paris 2008
- (12) Karl Jaspers; Lebensfragen der deutschen Politik; Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, Munich 1963
- (13) Alan Sked; The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918; London 2003

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