

THE WAR IN UKRAINE-WOULD AN AUSTRIAN SOLUTION BE POSSIBLE?

1. What is it about?

There has been a war in eastern Ukraine since 2014. 14 000 people have already died; several 10 000, including many civilians, have been injured. What is it about? In December 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine, until then a Soviet Socialist Republic, became independent. In a speech in the Ukrainian capital Kiev, the then US President Bush (father) warned against a "self-murdering nationalism" and spoke out against Ukrainian independence from the Soviet Union. Literally, the American president said: "Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far off tyranny with local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicide of nationalism based on ethnic hatred". President Bush also refused to meet leaders of the Ukrainian independence movement.

Washington, however, very soon changed its strategy. Especially after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the ideas underlying the Cold War, namely containment, deterrence and multilateralism, were thrown overboard. The USA chose an offensive approach in the "war on terror" and endeavoured to establish an America-friendly system through "regime change" wherever it saw an opportunity. This new attitude also had a decisive effect on Russia: while during the Cold War they were satisfied with the demarcation of the respective spheres of influence, now they wanted to push back Russian influence and even establish a new social order in Russia itself.

2. A divided country with a difficult new beginning.

Ukraine was a divided country for centuries, one could almost say torn between East and West. Already a centre of the "Kievan Rus" around the year 1000, large Ukrainian territories were ruled by the Polish crown after the Mongol invasion. The expression of this double orientation towards East and West was the "Church Union of Brest" (1596): a Greek-Catholic Church was created, which retained the Eastern rite but was subordinated to the Pope in Rome.

When the Cossacks no longer wanted to endure Polish rule, they submitted to the Russian Tsar in 1654 with the "Oath of Allegiance of Pereyaslav". It was on the 300th anniversary of this event that Nikita Khrushchev, then Central Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "gave" Crimea to Ukraine in 1954. But the satisfaction with the new Russian rule apparently did not last long either. At the Battle of Poltava in 1709, the Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa supported the Swedish King Charles XII against Peter the Great. During the partitions of Poland in the 18th century, large parts of Ukraine became part of the Tsarist Empire, while Galicia and Bukovina became part of Austria.

In the second half of the 19th century, there was a "national awakening" in Ukraine, which is represented by names such as that of the poet Taras Shevchenko or the historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky. It is fair to say that cultural events were more pronounced in the west of the country, with Lviv as its centre, than in the east, which was strongly influenced by Russia. During the Soviet era, Ukraine repeatedly had to pay a high blood toll: during the expropriation of agriculture in the 1930s; in the Second World War; and even in the Afghanistan War, 3,000 young Ukrainians were killed.

Independence from the Soviet Union, achieved in 1991, was initially an economic and social disaster. Traditional industries such as steel collapsed; inflation and budget deficits reached record levels. The political institutions were no better off: The government and parliament were in constant conflict; the central bank acted arbitrarily; the government was authoritarian; and the judicial system was in disarray. In various circles in the USA, a gold-rush atmosphere was spreading as far as Ukraine was concerned: highly remunerated posts were being filled in the economy; a lot of money was being paid for "consultancy contracts"; US-lobbyists were booming. No wonder there was a series of lawsuits in the USA in connection with Ukraine, and even the first impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump were based on a phone call with the Ukrainian president.

3. „American Exceptionalism" in practice.

As much as individual Americans pursued different interests in Ukraine, together the US elites believe that their country is a chosen nation, destined to lead the world. All governments in Washington strive for global domination. Between "America first" and "America is back" there may be differences in style, not in

purpose. And: for them, wars are an integral part of foreign policy according to the motto: "Foreign policy without the backing of the military is like a baseball game without a baseball bat".

Bill Clinton had already committed himself to an expansion of the Alliance at a NATO summit in Prague in 1994. When even Boris Yeltsin's reaction was that this would lead to a "cold peace", the first phase of NATO's eastward enlargement was postponed until after his difficult re-election in 1996. But at the Madrid Summit in 1997, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were invited to join NATO. Even if appeasing gestures were made towards Moscow, for example with the signing of a "NATO-Russia Founding Act" (1997) or with the establishment of a "NATO-Russia Council" (2002), Washington's goal remained to completely encircle Russia and, if possible, to achieve a "regime change" in Moscow.

For this, a fully compliant Ukraine was needed. With strong financial and organisational support from the West, the 2004 "Orange Revolution" brought a pro-Western president, Viktor Yushchenko, to power. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, US President George W. Bush (son) made a massive push to bring Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance. The US initiative was supported by the Czech government as well as by Poland and the Baltic countries; France and Germany were massively opposed but the US did not let up and continued to demand the admission of Ukraine to NATO.

But even then there were voices of warning that it was wrong to try to force Ukraine into the Western camp and NATO. In a deeply divided society, consensus would be necessary above all; and the "roll-back strategy" towards Russia was therefore wrong because Moscow must perceive this as aggression. The great expert on international relations, George Kennan, predicted as early as 1998 that NATO enlargement would lead to a crisis; and that those responsible for this enlargement would then say: "That's how the Russians are". At that time, there was no mention of Putin.

In 2013, Ukraine was to be fully integrated into the Western sphere of influence through an association agreement with the European Union. The French daily "Le Monde" wrote in September 2008, when a similar agreement was being sought: "Much is at stake; will Crimea have to pay for it? "On the part of the West,

it was argued that Ukraine must have the right to join the Western value system. In fact, however, Ukraine would have had not only the right but also the duty to do so long ago. A member of the Council of Europe since 1995, the country has signed numerous conventions obliging it to implement democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to stand up against corruption and for the protection of minorities. So it is not about values, but about power, which can also be used against Russia as needed.

In November 2013, the Ukrainian government declared its intention to "suspend" preparations for the signing of the Association Agreement. Demonstrations took place on the Maidan in Kiev, which led to a "regime change" and the establishment of a pro-Western government in February 2014. As many experts had predicted, Crimea then returned to Russian sovereignty and fighting broke out in the east of the country.

4. Propaganda wars.

The determination of the USA to finally incorporate Ukraine into its own sphere of power was very clearly expressed in the well-known telephone conversation that Victoria Nuland, then Assistant Secretary of State, had with the US Ambassador in Kiev in 2014, which can best be translated as: "We are proceeding without regard for Europe". In the same phone call, Ms Nuland stated that the US has spent \$5,000 million in recent years to tie Ukraine to the US and to break Russian influence.

The propaganda wars are waged with corresponding intensity. America is always "protecting" and "defending"; Russia is always "aggressive" and "malicious". America is always "informing" and "inclusive"; Russia is always "disinforming" and "disruptive". Since America always needs an enemy, Russian President Vladimir Putin has been hyped up into a monster from which Ukraine, if not all humanity, must be saved. The leading Western media's choice of words against him cannot be harsh enough: he is a "being without a soul"; at least an "autocrat"; if not a "murderer" altogether.

Those who only ask whether the other side does not also have arguments that should be heard are discredited as "Putin- understand him". This is not about persons, but about interests. Even against Boris Yeltsin, "The Economist" already

stated in November 1999 that he must recognise the Western rules of the game, otherwise he would "isolate himself".

As far as Crimea is concerned, Emperor Joseph II recognised Russia's sovereignty over the peninsula to Tsar Catherine as early as 1783. Now Russia is accused that the newly declared Russian sovereignty over the peninsula after a referendum "represents the first violent shift of a border in Europe". Yet since the end of the Cold War, the USA has expanded its sphere of influence in Europe by 1 million km² between Albania and Estonia. And in the age of globalisation, spheres of influence count more than borders.

Accompanying the mainstream media coverage is a myriad of seminars and conferences which, like George Soros in his essay "Wake up Europe", point out that Europe faces an "existential threat" from Russia. The logical conclusion at many of these events is that defence budgets in Europe must be increased. Should tanks roll against Muscovites again?

So Ukraine is in an extremely difficult situation: torn apart internally and under strong pressure from outside. Is there a solution?

5. The example of Austria.

Can a state in such a difficult situation as Ukraine today solve existential problems? Yes, as the Austrian example shows. Our country was often portrayed as a "failed state" in the interwar period. Violent ideological domestic tensions led to a civil war; foreign policy pressure to the loss of independence. After the Second World War, however, the Second Republic became a success story.

What had changed? After the Second World War, the two major political camps in Austria found a basic socio-political consensus and, in terms of foreign policy, with the commitment to military neutrality, a mode that made it possible to regain full sovereignty.

The new beginning in 1945 was characterised by a willingness to compromise: the first provisional state government, chaired by State Chancellor Karl Renner, consisted of no fewer than 46 members. Every party was to be represented everywhere. The willingness to compromise covered all areas. The foreign ministry, for example, was headed by ÖVP man Karl Gruber. In order to involve the other camp as well, three socialists, Ernst Lemberger, Walter Wodak and

Bruno Kreisky were assigned as "social attachés" to the embassies in Paris, London and Stockholm. That the "capable young Kreisky" then came to the presidential chancellery on the recommendation of Foreign Minister Gruber is part of the history of the Second Republic.

The foundations of the state were built together: the ÖVP achieved an absolute majority in the 1945 National Council elections, but a grand coalition was formed with the SPÖ. The economic system was basically oriented towards a market economy, but large-scale industry was nationalised. In the years after the war, the social system was substantially expanded, from unemployment benefits to workers' leave; from the Works Council Act to housing reconstruction. Ferdinand Graf (ÖVP) and Interior Minister Oskar Helmer (SPÖ) jointly laid the foundations for the new federal army by establishing the B- Gendarmerie. This cooperation made it possible to solve the existential problems of the post-war period and to set the course for the future.

Above all, the two governing parties also agreed that a military neutrality of Austria should be the basis of foreign policy. This meant independence from large military and political blocs. It was the neutrality of the state, but not of the citizen, i.e. no ideological and economic neutrality. The obligations arising for Austria from neutrality were clearly circumscribed: they meant compliance with the norms of the law of neutrality according to the Hague Agreement of 1907 in the event of war and the avoidance of all ties that could prevent this compliance. Austria became part of the West in socio-political terms; with reasonable relations with Russia.

With the State Treaty of 1955, the withdrawal of the Allied troops was achieved. And one thing above all: Austria was the only country in Central Europe where there was no unrest after the Second World War; whereas the uprisings in the GDR (1953); in Hungary (1956); in Czechoslovakia (1968) and in Poland certainly also had the potential to endanger international peace.

Since the conclusion of the State Treaty and the declaration of our country's "perpetual neutrality", the world has changed--and not. The dividing line between the American and Russian spheres of influence has shifted eastwards. What has remained is the endeavour of the great powers to think in terms of power politics. The Austrian example shows one thing: a country that is united in domestic

politics and pursues a sensible course in foreign policy does not necessarily have to be a pawn of the great powers.

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