35 years after the 1989 anti-communist revolutions

Markus Merkel. The coherence of a conscience[1]

Markus Meckel, a pastor and politician born in the German Democratic Republic, had visited Romania several times under communism. He returned after the fall of the regime, and in December 2024, he was invited to commemorative events in Timișoara to mark the 35th anniversary of the outbreak of the Romanian Revolution. He and his acquaintances had a special resonance for him when he took part in the gathering on December 15 at the Cetate Reformed Church. Markus Meckel had visited László Tökes here in the summer of 1989, had discussions with him about the horrors of the Ceausescu era, and had received some protest texts from Tökes which he took across the border to Hungary.

At the time, Markus Meckel was an active opponent of the communist regime in his own country. He was building links between resistance groups in the GDR, establishing contacts with dissidents in Poland and the Czech Republic - as I mentioned, also with László Tökes - and he wanted to change the world that had robbed people of their freedom and dignity. These two cornerstones of his aspirations would permeate his later writings and actions. He became one of the key players in the democratization process during the Peaceful Revolution that led to the fall of the communist regime in the GDR.

The New Human Rights Review *marks the historic changes of 35 years ago with a selection of Markus Meckel's writings. In this documentary we have collected texts that speak of his way of looking at and acting in 1989, which is also reflected in a resolution adopted by the Bundestag in 2024. This was conceived and promoted by Meckel in order to "do justice" to the understanding of the German unification process.The new perspective taken on by the German supreme body recognizes the East Germans, for the first time, as the subjects of the Peaceful Revolution and the German unification process. The value of this splendid achievement will only be appreciated in the years and decades to come.*

We have added two articles that summarize Markus Meckel's attitude to the Putin regime's cruel war against Ukraine. The texts link the 1989 anti-communist uprising in the name of freedom with the Ukrainians' struggle for freedom today. They put two of Markus Meckel's inspirational energies - the call of freedom and concern for the people - in moving dialog. There are few authors that I have seen demonstrate so powerfully, so authentically, the principle espoused by the New Human Rights Review*: "not only is it possible to reconcile the principle of human dignity and the principle of human freedom, but dignity and freedom reinforce each other".*

The way Markus Meckel lived, wrote and acted under communism and the way he lives, writes and acts today in the face of the Putin regime's delusions of cruelty are perfectly consistent. In both we find the same single ethos. We recognize the ethos of a conscience whose supreme aspiration was and is to save The Human Being.

Gabriel Andreescu

[1] English version edited by Cristina Andreescu.

Short biography

Markus Meckel, pastor and politician, was born in the GDR in 1952 and grew up in East Berlin. His father, Ernst-Eugen Meckel (1911-1977), was a Protestant pastor and responsible for ecumenical relations for the Protestant churches in the GDR. His son was able to get to know the communist states of Central and South-Eastern Europe and the (minority) churches by following in his father's footsteps. In 1971, he travelled to Romania for the first time and visited both Hungarian Christian congregations and those of the Transylvanian Saxons with his father. According to his own testimony, this made a deep impression on him, so that he travelled to Romania again several times in the 1970s and 1980s and maintained contacts. In the summer of 1989, he visited the reformed pastor Tökes László in Timișoara, showed solidarity with him and smuggled some of his subversive materials into Hungary.

After the 10th grade, Markus Meckel was expelled from state school and was unable to complete his A-levels. He completed his education at a church school and studied theology and philosophy at church colleges in Naumburg and Berlin, which were independent of the state. In 1978, he completed his studies with a thesis on Friedrich Nietzsche's 'Thus Spake Zarathustra'.

From 1980 to 1988, he was vicar and pastor of a village church in Mecklenburg. From 1988 to 1990, he founded and ran an ecumenical meeting and educational centre near Magdeburg. At the end of the 1970s, Meckel began illegal political work and in the 1980s was particularly committed to networking the various oppositional political groups that emerged in the GDR in those years. Together with his friend Martin Gutzeit, he initiated the (re-)founding of the Social Democratic Party in the GDR underground in 1989 and was one of the key players in the self-democratisation of the GDR during the Peaceful Revolution. In 1989/90, he took part in the Central Round Table, became a member of parliament following the free elections in March 1990 and was Foreign Minister in the coalition government. In this role, he took part in the negotiations on German reunification.

With the all-German elections in December 1990, he became a member of the German Bundestag. Here he campaigned for the integration of Europe`s new democracies into NATO and the EU and initiated important institutions for coming to terms with communist history: the Bundestag`s Enquete Commissions from 1992 to 1998 and the establishment of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of Communist Past in 1998, of which he is still Chairman of the Council today.

Markus Meckel was a member of the German Bundestag and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly until 2009. From 2013 to 2016, he was President of the German War Graves Commission. He is still active in various organisations on a voluntary basis. In 2020, he published his memoirs about life in the GDR until German reunification in 1990: Markus *Meckel Zu wandeln die Zeiten*, Leipzig 2020[2].

[2] Speeches and published articles can be consulted at www.markusmeckel.eu.

Epoch change in Europe 1989/90 - 35 years of Peaceful Revolution and German Unity

Markus Meckel: On 8 November 2024, the German Bundestag adopted a resolution on the 35th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and German Unity in 1989/90. Compared to previous resolutions, there are a number of statements that deserve special attention.

+ This resolution was passed at a time when the free Europe of the European Union is under pressure in various ways, both from outside and from within. With its war of aggression against Ukraine, Putin's Russia has been trying for years to prevent it from moving towards an open and liberal society as a part of the European Union and to destabilize the EU itself and undermine its values. Cyberattacks and the waging of an imperialist war are intended to undermine the international order based on international law. At the same time, the victory of freedom and democracy throughout Europe is also being threatened from within by forces that want to undermine the foundations of democracy through nationalist and ethnic ideas and undermine its institutions. This is where the resolution insists on stabilizing Germany and the EU through a defensive democracy.

+ The Peaceful Revolution and German reunification in 1989/90 are placed more strongly than before in the context of the contemporaneous European upheavals. The CSCE process, the steadfastness of NATO, but especially the reform policy of Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, who abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine and thus made it possible for the allies to embark independently on the path to democratization, are emphasized.

+ The Peaceful Revolution in the GDR in 1989 is understood as part of a Central European revolution, whose democratic awakenings each had a long prehistory but reinforced each other. A special role is attributed to Solidarnosc, but the movements for national independence in the Baltic states are also explicitly mentioned. The end of the Cold War has a lot to do with Gorbachev's reforms, with the determination not to send tanks into the allied states again, but to face the global challenges together. The victory of freedom and democracy in Central Europe and the new democracies is not seen as a victory for the West, but as a victory for freedom, justice and democracy, the European values to which social forces in these states felt committed and for which they campaigned - dissidents and committed groups and individuals. In some cases, this also included movements within communist parties, such as in Hungary or the Baltic states.

+ It is noted that the GDR citizens were the driving force behind the process of German unification through the Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Wall as part of the revolution. The freedom fought for in the GDR opened the door to German unity. The self-democratization of the GDR until the free elections in March 1990 was the prerequisite for unity. Finally, two democratic German states negotiated German unity with each other (and in the context of the so-called '2+4' talks with the Allies of the Second World War) and created the contractual basis for it. By resolution of the freely elected Volkskammer (the parliament of the GDR)[1], unity was realized on this basis as accession to the scope of the Basic Law (the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany). In contrast to the way it usually appears in many commemorative speeches, it is thus clearly emphasized that the East Germans were SUBJECT and not OBJECT not only in the Peaceful Revolution, but also in the process of German unity, and that they took this path freely and self-determinedly.

+ The resolution emphasizes the importance of coming to terms with the past and regards it as a central dimension of democratization after a past under dictatorship. It describes the central institutions that have been created in Germany for this purpose (for access to the files of the State Security, for the rehabilitation and compensation of victims, for public debate) and identifies deficits.

German Bundestag / 20/13628 / 20th electoral term

Application of the SPD[3], Alliance 90/The Greens and FDP[4] parliamentary groups

The epochal change in Europe 1989/1990 - 35 years of peaceful revolution and German reunification

The Bundestag wishes to pass a resolution:

I. The German Bundestag:

This year, Germany celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Basic Law and thus the democratic new beginning after Germany's war of extermination and the industrial mass murder of the Shoah. This was initially only possible in West Germany; Germany and Europe were separated for decades. The Basic Law drew its lessons from the totalitarian dictatorship of National Socialism and, in the first 20 articles in particular, named the democratic and liberal principles for the Federal Republic of Germany - in sharp contrast to the socialist dictatorship in East Germany. At the same time, the pursuit of unity became a constitutional mandate. Thanks to the Peaceful Revolution, what had long seemed unthinkable became possible 35 years ago - Germany was free and united. Europe grew together. In 1989, the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR and the subsequent German reunification in 1990 marked a major upheaval and departure not only for Germany, but for the whole of Europe and beyond. The Peaceful Revolution in the GDR is part of a Central European revolution that began in Poland and Hungary and then continued in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Even before this, a movement encompassing the whole of society had emerged in the Baltic states, striving for the independence of their countries. In each of these countries, these upheavals had their own long history and specific development, and yet their dynamics in 1989 must be viewed in context.

Decades before the revolutions and upheavals of 1989/1990, there were already significant freedom movements in Eastern and Central Europe, including the popular uprising on 17 June 1953 in the GDR, the Hungarian popular uprising in October 1956, the Prague Spring in August 1968 and the founding of the free trade union Solidarność in Poland in 1980, whose trade union leaders were imprisoned the following year, but which were always suppressed and crushed by the regimes.

A central common dimension was the will for a peaceful transition from communist dictatorship to democracy and self-determination. The "Round Table", which was first established in Poland and set an example, became a symbol of this. Under pressure from the masses, the communist regimes in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and the GDR were finally prepared to negotiate the path to free elections with the new democratic forces. What was important beforehand was the development in the Soviet Union itself, where Mikhail

[3] Social Democratic Party of Germany (editor's note).
[4] The Free Democratic Party (editor's note).

Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika cautious democratization process had begun. At the same time, together with the USA, far-reaching disarmament steps had become possible. The German government under Dr. Helmut Kohl gave the Hungarian government considerable support in ursuing its course of opening up and allowing GDR refugees to enter the West. The mass exodus of GDR citizens via Hungary, but also via Poland, where Tadeusz Mazowiecki was the first non-Communist prime minister, and via the occupied embassy in Prague, increasingly destabilized the increasingly ailing SED[5] regime. Hans-Dietrich Genscher's announcement in the Prague embassy that those who had fled there would be allowed to leave for the Federal Republic of Germany became a symbol.

The victory of freedom and democracy in 1989 in the countries of East Central and South Eastern Europe changed the whole of Europe. With free elections in 1989/1990, democratic states emerged in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the GDR. The two German states - the now democratic GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany - conducted negotiations on German unity with each other and with the Allies of the Second World War in order to achieve full sovereignty for a united Germany. This was completed on October 3, 1990. In the Soviet Union, there had already been a ferment in 1988/1989, particularly in the Baltic states and in the Caucasus; the societies, new and in some cases even the leading regional communist parties wanted self-determination, independence and democracy in the various republics. In the end, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the former 15 Soviet republics came about in 1991 the active involvement of Russian President Boris Yeltsin. In November 1990, the member states of the CSCE had already committed themselves to human rights and international law in the "Charter of Paris" and pledged to settle conflicts peacefully. East and West joined hands.

Of course, the upheavals of 1989 in Eastern Europe had various causes, the combined effect of which led to the fall of the communist regimes and thus to the end of the Cold War. These included the increasingly de- solated economic and financial situation of the Soviet Union and its allies, NATO's consistent security policy and the CSCE process with its principles, in which the peaceful coexistence of European states within secure borders was recognized, economic cooperation was promoted and a continuous dialogue on humanitarian issues was conducted.

Above all, however, these upheavals are due to the increasing number of people from all social classes who expressed their growing dissatisfaction with the lack of freedom, the lack of co-determination and the disastrous economic and ecological situation, sometimes secretly but also increasingly publicly. Many of them formed opposition initiatives and movements, which became the starting point for mass movements that used the crisis situation of the communist regimes to assert freedom and democracy. The fact that the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev rolled out tanks in Lithuania and the Caucasus, but not outside its territory, in order to crush the democratization process in the allied states was of central importance. Mikhail Gorbachev also proclaimed freedom of choice for the Soviet Union's allies, thereby abolishing the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine in his speech to the UN General Assembly in December 1988.

[5] We keep here the acronym SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands): Socialist Unity Party of Germany (editor's note).

East Germany as the engine of the German unification process

This process developed differently in each of the countries concerned. It often had a long history and its own dynamics. In many of these countries, this history of upheaval is described differently by the various political forces - there are often different assessments of the specific events to this day. The Peaceful Revolution in the GDR, the period between spring 1989 and the first free elections on March 18, 1990, in which the citizens of the GDR wrested power from the SED regime, did not come about by chance. It had a long history. The history of the revolution as an act of democratic emancipation of people as citizens cannot be told without emphasizing its roots in the environmental and peace movement. In this movement in the GDR, opposition groups opposed the militarization of society, the destruction of the environment and the decay of cities, despite persecution by the state. In the spring of 1989, the now well-connected opposition in the GDR was able to prove that elections had been falsified for the first time. The risk taken by individuals for their freedom, their lives and their health is just as much a part of history as the courage of many who protested against the massive electoral fraud in the spring of 1989, who took part in prayers for peace, who left the country via the green borders or the embassies, who demonstrated peacefully on the streets by the hundreds of thousands in Plauen, Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin in the autumn of 1989 or who, by storming the Stasi headquarters in January 1990, once again empowered themselves with their own files and thus the interpretation of their own lives. The work of civil rights , who were active in local opposition groups in the - many of them in the church - and increasingly networked, deserves special mention.

In 1989, various democratic initiatives and parties were founded, such as the New Forum, the SDP, Democracy Now, the Peace and Human Rights Initiative and Democratic Awakening. Their significant commitment to civil rights and freedom in the GDR, which accompanied by repression, as well as their work in coming to terms with the SED dictatorship, which often continues to the present day, deserve special recognition. It is of central importance that the people themselves in the GDR overcame the dictatorship in the Peaceful Revolution and democratized independently. The actions of the new democratic initiatives and parties, the large-scale demonstrations and round tables paved the way for non-violent democratic elections.

Even in a united Germany, we have not yet found a common narrative for these events and happenings that are so important for our country. The Peaceful Revolution is often seen only as the prehistory of German unity, which was then created largely thanks to the decisive actions of Federal Chancellor Dr. Hel- mut Kohl. In this narrative, the active contribution of the East Germans is in danger of being overlooked, as they are only seen as the object of the events. Today's commemorative culture often portrays the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989 as if this surprising event had not only put German unity on the political agenda, but had already put it on the safe path.

In the weeks and months after the Wall came down, the overwhelming will of the vast majority of GDR citizens for German unity became increasingly clear. The public debate was increasingly dominated by how this path to unity should be shaped. In view of the great differences between the societies in East and West, it was necessary to negotiate the concrete conditions of unification. However, there was still no legitimized GDR government that have negotiated for the East Germans. First a free election was needed in the GDR, which then took place on March 18, 1990, after the conditions for this had been negotiated at the Central Round Table and the formation of a democratic government. In this respect, the creation of a democracy

was a central prerequisite for unity. The path to German unity led via the self-democratization of the East Germans and a truly democratic GDR. Only this could then finally legitimize the necessary negotiations for German unity.

The freely elected People's Chamber and the democratic GDR government faced enormous tasks. They had to prepare the negotiations on German unity and conduct them in the interests of their citizens. At the same time, however, the communist-influenced conditions in the state, economy and society of the GDR had to be restructured and democratized. The Central Round Table and the many regional Round Tables had made a cautious start - for example by removing the State Security from power. However, this process now had to be driven forward very fundamentally and conceptually in such a way that it was also compatible with the structures in the Federal Republic of Germany. This included, , establishing the separation of powers and creating the structures of the rule of law as well as preparing for the re-establishment of the federal states. The first initiatives to come to terms with the past were taken at the Round Table and then in the Volkskammer. Here it decided, against some resistance in the West, to make the files of the State Security accessible to the victims and the media.

The SED state had never acknowledged the guilt and responsibility of the Germans under National Socialism. It was only at the very beginning of its work on April 12, 1990 that the democratically elected People's Chamber of the GDR acknowledged the co-responsibility of the Germans in the GDR for the humiliation, expulsion and murder of Jewish people in an internationally respected declaration (printed matter 4). It the permanent inviolability and recognition of the Polish western border. The admission of Jews from the Soviet Union had already been demanded at the Central Round Table. After the free elections, the government implemented this against some resistance and thus began the immigration of more than 200,000 Jews from the Soviet Union and its successor states to Germany. In 1991, after reunification, the immigration regulations created for this purpose by the democratic GDR government were continued by the legal regulation for so-called quota refugees.

The story of a negotiated unity, in which the East Germans are also the subject and actors of this process, is still largely untold today. It is more important than ever to describe the process of German unification as a process of self-determination for the East Germans and as a negotiation process, and to take it seriously. With the exception of the Two Plus Four Treaty, these negotiations have not even really been researched and presented to this day. There is still a wide field of activity for historical research here. Only a closer examination of these negotiations in view of the dynamics of the developments will a more differentiated assessment of the process of unification, its achievements and also its mistakes. This is the only way to overcome the sweeping assessments that are still widespread today.

As early as the establishment of the Central Round Table in December 1989, the GDR opposition advocated the drafting of a new constitution, and a commission of the Round Table began working on it. However, the People's Chamber, which was freely elected in March 1990, decided by a large majority to concentrate on the negotiations on German unity and not to take up the draft constitution for a separate GDR constitution, which had been drawn up by the beginning of April 1990. There was a broad consensus that, following the negotiations and the corresponding treaties, unification should be legally implemented as an accession under Article 23 of the Basic Law. However, many felt very disappointed that the then Federal Government was not prepared to engage in a joint constitutional process on the basis of the Basic Law and

then give all Germans in East and West the opportunity to vote on this new constitution. In this way, the East Germans would not just have been newcomers, but equal participants in this voting process.

However, it should be noted and it is of great for the self-image of the former GDR citizens to understand that the Peaceful Revolution and German unity were not a fate that befell them, but that they themselves were the subject and the cause. were actors in this process, which was so important for a united Germany and Europe.

The establishment of German unity in 1990 - 45 years after we Germans brought so much death and horror to the whole of Europe, recognized by the former Allies of the Second World War and by our European neighbors and partners - became the hour of happiness for Germans in the 20th century. The East Germans played a central role in this. The fact that this is perceived more strongly than before and is also reflected in public remembrance is of great importance for the self-confidence of East Germans.

Coming to terms with the past

After the end of the Cold War and the communist dictatorship, the new democracies were faced with the great challenge of coming to terms with these dictatorships, their history and their after-effects with the necessary state and social transformation. This included, in particular, paying tribute to the victims and the question of how to deal with those responsible for the crimes and injustices of the past.

The People's Chamber began to turn its attention to these tasks as early as 1990, during the period of the democratic GDR after the free elections: It opening up the files of the repressive system and the State Security. With the appointment of a Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security, the Rehabilitation Acts and the establishment of two commissions of inquiry by the German Bundestag, the united Germany took up this challenge with considerable effort. In accordance with the recommendations of the second Enquete Commission, the German Bundestag created the "Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship" and developed a memorial site concept through which memorials and historical sites of both dictatorships, National Socialism and Communism, are now supported throughout Germany. Both the "Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung"[6], and the ”Bundesbeauftragte”[7] have become active in cooperation and networking with other institutions in Europe that are dedicated to similar tasks in other countries. This international work is important and must be further expanded - after all, it is only in the overall view that the character of the communist system becomes recognizable.

With the transfer of the tasks of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records to the Federal Archives, the new institution of a Federal Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship was created at the Bundestag, which gives a voice to the responsibility for the victims with great commitment and brings their interests into the political discussion. In line with their demands, the reversal of the burden of proof in the recognition of damage to health, as has long been the practice for victims of National Socialism, should be decided on the occasion of the upcoming 35th anniversary.

[6] The Federal Foundation for the Reassessment of the SED Dictatorship (editor's note).
[7] Federal Commissioner.

In addition, the central projects adopted by the Bundestag - the Memorial to the Victims of Communist Tyranny in Germany and the construction of the Freedom and Unity Monument - are to be driven forward. The second Enquete Commission of the German Bundestag had already recommended in 1998 that an independent institution should commemorate the opposition and resistance in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR. In recent years, the establishment of a "Forum Opposition and Resistance 1945-1990" has been prepared. Opposition and resistance in the Soviet Occupation Zone began immediately after the war and ended with the victorious Peaceful Revolution in the GDR. They are part of the history of German freedom over the last few centuries.

This forum should a permanent exhibition, the possibility for temporary exhibitions, a library, an archive and resources for research and educational work. It should be closely networked with the various institutions, often under private law, that are dedicated to this subject area. This forum should publicly funded in Berlin. Funding for this forum should begin with the 2025 federal budget.

The planned Future Center for German Unity and European Transformation in Halle (Saale) is intended to make the often complex developments and changes in East Germany since 1989 more visible as a fundamental and future-oriented experience for the whole of Germany in a broad discourse, especially for younger generations. The focus is also on comparable changes in other countries with a communist past and the development of a close dialog with Central and Eastern European countries in particular. The Future Center will create a permanent space for discourse between East and West and between the generations, drawing conclusions for the future of a united Germany and Europe from the experiences of the transformation years.

Democracy - foundation and challenge

The opposition in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s and the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR were primarily aimed at democratizing the GDR. It was only when fall of the Wall and the upheavals of 1989 in Central Europe opened up realistic prospects for German unity that it became the central goal of the Peaceful Revolution and of Germans in East and West. Even before that, in the 1980s, important representatives of Solidarność in Poland had named German unity as an important condition for their own path towards the West. In Poland and Hungary, the democratization of their own country was an early

”Back to Europe” was demanded. On the one hand, ”Europe” became a symbol for freedom and democracy, for the liberal values of the UN Charter and human rights, but on the other hand, people sought to join the "European Communities" as institutions in which these values were secured. The victory of freedom and democracy in 1989/1990, the overcoming of communism, was thus very quickly linked with the striving for German unity in the GDR, with the striving for integration into the European Communities.

At the same time, the desire for self-determination and democracy also had a national dimension in many cases. This was particularly true for the multi-ethnic states of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, but also for the allied states of the Soviet Union, for which national sovereignty played a special role. The peaceful separation of Czechoslovakia and the emergence of the independent states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia also belong in this context.

Nationalism and xenophobia grew early on in the democratizing countries. In the Soviet Union, the pressure on Jews grew so that thousands and thousands eventually emigrated. After the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR, many Jews in the Soviet Union wanted to emigrate to the GDR as well. The Central Round Table decided in February 1990 to be open to this desire. On April 12, 1990, the democratic, freely elected People's Chamber decided to create opportunities for this and the GDR government implemented this, so that by the time of unification on October 3, 1990, almost 3,000 Jews had immigrated to Germany. Although the German government at the time was initially critical of this decision, as it did not consider the Federal Republic of Germany to be a country of immigration, it continued to facilitate this immigration from the Soviet Union - and later its successor states - and created the "contingent refugee" regulation in 1991. More than 200,000 Jews eventually came to Germany.

The decision of the democratic GDR had beneficial consequences for a united Germany. Without it, there would not be the rich and diverse Jewish life in Germany today that we are happy about. Xenophobia and xenophobia also existed in the GDR. Even during the large-scale peaceful demonstrations in the autumn of 1989, contract workers, for example, were able to from Mozambique such experiences. At the beginning of the 1990s, during the baseball years, xenophobic outbursts and right-wing violence in Rostock, Hoyerswerda and elsewhere caused public shock. Right-wing structures also quickly developed in East Germany, with the masterminds often coming from the West. As in other post-communist states, not only in Central Europe, right-wing populist and nationalist social forces emerged in the GDR that questioned the fundamental values of the European Union and the Basic Law.

Nevertheless, this populist questioning of fundamental liberal values is not just a post-communist phenomenon. Developments in France, the Netherlands, Italy and not least in the USA make it clear that democracy is under pressure today in a way that would not have been thought possible 35 years ago. In recent years in particular, it has become increasingly clear that the democracy won by the people of Central Europe and the GDR through their desire for freedom, which subsequently allowed Europe to grow together, must be secured and defended – both within Germany and the European Union and against enemies from outside, especially Russia. Strategic cooperation between the EU and NATO is of the utmost importance here.

Creating a resilient democracy is a shared challenge in Germany and Europe. To be successful here, we need strong social cohesion and the certainty that our values will remain viable in the future, as well as the common will to defend them.

II. The German Bundestag

• confirms, renews and reaffirms its statements on the commemoration of the Peaceful Revolution on its 30th anniversary (Bundestag printed paper 19/10613),

• recognizes the important work of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship,

• honors the work of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic Joachim Gauck, Marianne Birthler and Roland Jahn and the staff of the Stasi Records Archive,

• recognizes the work of the State Commissioners for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Thuringia and Berlin as well as the State Commissioner for the Reappraisal of the Consequences of the Communist Dictatorship in Brandenburg,

• honors the work of the Federal Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship at the German Bundestag, Evelyn Zupke,

• acknowledges in particular the work and recommendations made by the SED Victims' Commissioner in the context of the SED Injustice Rectification Acts and will pay particular attention to them in the parliamentary debate,

• recognizes the work of the memorials and places of learning for coming to terms with the communist dictatorship in Germany,

• acknowledges the many years of advocacy and persistent work of the Union of Victims' Associations of Communist Tyranny and its member associations on behalf of the victims, as well as the numerous other volunteers in civil society organizations.

III. The German Bundestag calls on the Federal Government, within the framework of the budget funds available, to

• to strengthen the culture of remembrance in relation to the history of the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR between 1945 and 1990, in particular with a focus on the common German history of democracy,

• to establish the planned "Forum Opposition and Resistance 1949-1990" and integrate it into the federal memorial concept,

• to continue to actively support the work and construction of the Future Center for German Unity and European Transformation and to further develop it on the basis of existing preliminary plans,

• to further advance the transformation of the Stasi Records Archive into the Federal Archives, in particular to provide the external locations of the Federal Archives with financial and structural resources,

• to further finance and strengthen research into the GDR and SED injustice.

Berlin, November 5, 2024

Dr. Rolf Mützenich and parliamentary group; Katharina Dröge, Britta Haßelmann and parliamentary group; Christian Dürr and parliamentary group

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Markus Meckel

Laudation for the award of the Gotha Prize “Der Friedenstein” to the “Swords to Plowshares” in the GDR" movement

Presented to Harald Bretschneider and Friedrich Schorlemmer[8]

Gotha, April 14, 2024

Salutation!

Today, in this difficult year, it may seem surprising to commemorate the independent peace movement that emerged in the GDR in the early 1980s under the motto ”Swords to Ploughshares” and to honor it with an award.

Or not? After all, the question of how to achieve peace and security is right at the top of our agenda today. But we must be careful not to come to short conclusions. But more on this later.

I am grateful for this award and would like to thank the Gotha Cultural Foundation for it - and congratulate the protagonists Harald Bretschneider and Friedrich Schorlemmer!

One thing is certain: what happened back then, in 1980 and in the years that followed, and is now being remembered with honor, not only took courage, but was also a powerful new approach in the specific situation at the time, which changed the reality in our country. Long lines can be drawn from these events to the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 and the opening of the gateway to German unity in 1990. The motto, the call to forge ”swords into ploughshares” has a lot to do with the candles of the Peaceful Revolution. And these were part of a non-violent Central European revolution that was directly linked to the end of the Cold War.

It was a very special experience of starting out and making a new beginning, which this award commemorates today. Of course, it is always difficult to say where something started - because each has its own history.

The churches in Germany and also in the GDR were very sensitive and strongly committed to the issue of war and peace after the Second World War. ”Never again war!” was the general lesson from the horrors of war, only for some initially in the awareness of the guilt of their own people. In the West, for example, the dispute over rearmament and the issue of nuclear weapons ran high. In the East, after the introduction of compulsory military service in 1962, the churches succeeded in 1964 in making the GDR the only country in the communist East to allow unarmed military service with the ”construction soldiers”; Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, as admired examples of non-violent struggle for freedom, independence and human rights, were very popular in church youth work. In 1964, Martin-Luther King even came to East Berlin and preached in St. Mary`s Church and then, due to large crowds, also in St. Sophia`s Church. The issue of military service played an important role over the decades. It was discussed whether military service could be recognized as peace service, incidentally in both East and West. Quite a few saw refusal as a clearer sign of peace. It is no coincidence that the two protagonists Harald Bretschneider and Friedrich Schorlemmer refused military service in the 1960s, as I did myself in 1970.

[8] Information on the ”Der FRIEDENSTEIN 2024” award can be found here: https://www.kulturstiftung-gotha.de/news/1/973636/nachrichten/preis-der-friedenstein-2024-geht-an-schwerter-zu-pflugscharen.html (editor's note).

Let us briefly consider the situation around 1980: With the emergence of ”Solidarnosc” in Poland in 1980, a new player came into play that gave us great hope in the GDR. Where had this ever happened under communism - such a powerful and independent social actor with its own agenda? In 1980, the Polish independent trade union Solidarnisc became a new factor in the Cold War system and also in Germany`s Ostpolitik - one that frightened the SED leadership in particular. Honecker advocated the invasion of the Eastern Bloc and thus a violent end to this awakening. At the same time, he attempted a course of foreign policy dialog, from which the GDR also benefited economically. At the same time, domestic political pressure was increased, the militarization of society increased considerably and military training was introduced in schools in 1978.

At the end of the 1970s, the Soviet Union had modernized its medium-range nuclear weapons with the SS20 and invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. There were heated discussions in the West about “retrofitting” medium-range nuclear weapons.

The Cold War threatened to heat up

With this new round of the arms race, the warning time threatened to decrease dramatically, making human action to avert a “war by mistake” almost impossible. In the event of war, there would be little left in the center of Europe, i.e. Germany. And that caused fear - in both West and East Germany. The question of peace became existential.

This was particularly noticeable among young people in the GDR. It was hotly debated, especially in the churches in the GDR. There were no other semi-public places in the GDR where this would have been possible. Even after the Wall was built in 1961, the churches in East and West remained closely connected, including institutionally. The sense of togetherness was still strong through shared faith, common history and tradition as well as diverse personal connections. It was a bond that both sides regarded as existential. Every regional church, indeed every parish in the GDR had a partner church or partner parish in West Germany - and many of these were really alive... Through visits and personal encounters, a bond and knowledge of each other was maintained, where otherwise it tended to diminish in society on both sides.

On September 1, 1979, the 40th anniversary of the invasion of Poland and thus the beginning of the Second World War, the EKD[9] and the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR published a joint declaration on peace for the first time. Youth workers from the churches in East and West then drew up texts for a “prayer service for peace” in 1980.

This is where Harald Bretschneider comes in, at the time the state youth pastor in Saxony. He brought an idea discussed with friends and confidants into these talks: he suggested setting up a “Peace Decade” - 10 days of prayers, services and other church activities for peace, concluding with the Day of Prayer and Repentance. This day in particular, on which the Church calls for repentance from our circumstances characterized by guilt and disruption, was especially suitable for calling for a change of direction from the aberrations of a security policy that only further endangers the world. The motto of this Decade of Peace should be: “Creating peace without weapons - swords into plowshares”. A prophetic word of the Bible was thus placed at the center (Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3).

[9] Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (editor's note).

However, the wealth of ideas went even further and became very practical: in his search for a symbol, Harald came across the sculpture by the Soviet artist Yevgeny Vuchetich, which he had created for the World Exhibition in Brussels in 1958. In 1959, Khrushchev donated a replica of this sculpture to the United Nations - where it still stands today. The idea was to reproduce this sculpture on a bookmark and he made the first design himself. The Dresden graphic designer Ingeborg Geißler created a print template from this. This was then printed on fleece, because no permission was required for textile prints in the GDR.

The material for the Decade of Peace, which has since been celebrated by the German churches in East and West, was printed and distributed by the thousands in the GDR - along with 100,000 bookmarks. Some young people sewed the symbol onto their clothes - and wore it on the streets and in public. During the next peace decade in 1981, the symbol was then printed in the same size as a patch and became very popular and widespread.

Initially, the state authorities found it difficult to deal with this symbol - it had even been published on stamps in the Soviet Union and Hungary. It was also printed in the 6th grade school history book in the GDR. But with this initiative, it was now used to turn against state peace policy and to call for a change - against the arms race and the deployment of new missiles, against the militarization of society, against thinking in terms of friend or foe. The focus was on non-violence and dialog, the need to take into account the security interests of the other side and to strive for ”common security”, a security that does not arm against each other, but creates common legal and security structures through negotiations and agreements. The international Palme Commission (named after its chairman Olof Palme, the Swedish Prime Minister) met with the participation of experts from East and West and in 1982 proposed concrete disarmament steps to the UN under the title of common security, which were immediately taken up by the churches and the peace movement.

The ”Swords to Plowshares” patch was in line with such an alternative security policy as well as with the attitude to life and the basic attitude of many young people and generally alert people in East and West who did not want to resign themselves to the system of mutual threats.

As the patch became increasingly well-known and popular with young people, the state authorities became increasingly nervous and in November 1981 the wearing of this symbol was banned. However, many young people refused to be banned from wearing the patch - resulting in a veritable hunt for them. Police officers or teachers cut the patches out of clothing, confiscated the symbols or even confiscated the entire item of clothing. Many of those who did not remove the patches despite being asked to do so were expelled from school or university, denied their desired A-levels or other education - the repression took many forms. The Federation of Protestant Churches protested against these attacks on young people and acknowledged the symbol as an expression of the church`s witness to peace. In September 1982, the federal synod of the Protestant churches decided: ”the hold on to the symbol swords into plowshares” as a sign of the Decade of Peace. But we will refrain from printing further patches ”for the sake of peace.” Well, that didn`t convince us at the time, but it was typical of the era. At the same time, however, young people under pressure could rely on the support of the church. I remember Bishop Gottfried Forck in Berlin, who continued to wear the symbol on his briefcase.

The symbol and the independent will for peace of the churches and young people became known far beyond the GDR through the action initiated by Friedrich Schorlemmer during the

church congress in Wittenberg in September 1983. Friedrich Schorlemmer, today generally known as a gifted speaker and publicist, a controversial public intellectual for over three decades even after 1990 and honored many times, was a lecturer at the preacher`s seminary in Wittenberg at the time and was involved in a variety of ways in the church`s ”peace work. Seven church congresses were held in the GDR that year under the motto ”Daring to trust” each of them prepared independently. Friedrich was involved in the preparations in Wittenberg and came up with the idea of publicly forging a sword in the courtyard of the Luther House as a symbolic act. The practicing blacksmith Stefan Nau was also a member of the peace circle “Peace 83”, who bravely agreed to take on this reforging as an action despite the high risk involved. And so it happened - ARD broadcast the whole thing and thus carried the message to the general public, in the West, internationally and also back to the GDR - because most GDR citizens watched West German television at the time[10].

The SED saw this as a declaration of war. The term ”hostile-negative pacifist” became an enemy term to characterize enemies of the state or to classify them as such. Beyond the security policy dimension, the peace issue became the focus of opposition activities. From the beginning of the 1980s, the “peace groups” that emerged in many places began to network, make contact with each other, enter into discourse and seek cooperation. In the Western media in particular, and then also in the East itself, there was increasing talk of an ”independent peace movement, swords to plowshares”, which became a breeding ground for the opposition.

You often read that the opposition in the GDR came together under the umbrella of the church. I always find this formulation a little strange, as it sounds as if there was an opposition in the GDR that then came together in the church for practical reasons.

However, what has been said so far makes it clear that this was by no means the case. On the contrary! The Protestant churches in the GDR were - not only, but especially on the issue of peace and increasingly also on other socio-political challenges - an independent and open space for discourse that did not exist anywhere else in the country. The initiative for the debates and actions mostly came from committed Christians in the churches - at all levels, by the way, from the bishop, parish or youth pastor, from the deacon or study leader through to ordinary committed young people or other parishioners. They often had different positions among themselves, but discussed them in an open dialog and at the same time opened themselves up to society. In this way, the churches became a place of attraction for other free and critical spirits in the country.

In 1988/89, there was then an attempt by all Christian churches in the GDR – inspired by ecumenism, i.e. globally organized church organizations - to arrive at common demands and positions in the face of the global challenges of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (i.e. the environmental and climate issue). Our award winners were also involved in this (so-called conciliar) process with great commitment. In a central text of this ”Ecumenical Assembly” in 1989, a call was made - in the spirit of the message ”Swords into Plowshares” - to always give preference to non-violent conflict solutions (option for non-violence). Many of those who founded new, democratic movements and parties in the autumn of 1989 had previously taken

[10] ARD is a joint organization of regional public service broadcasters founded in 1950 in West Germany. In 1974, the ARD office in East Berlin was established, which has made ARD television the most important source of information for the citizens of the GDR (editor's note).

part in this Ecumenical Assembly and some of the programmatic demands of these new initiatives had already been formulated there.

For the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR 35 years ago, candles became its symbol - and here there is a direct connection with the motto “swords to plowshares” at the beginning of the 1980s in the clear decision towards non-violence. What happened in the GDR in 1989, however, was closely connected to what happened in neighboring Poland and Hungary and then in Czechoslovakia - the Peaceful Revolution was basically part of a Central European revolution. In the CSSR, for example, people spoke of the “Velvet Revolution”. These countries took advantage of the space for change that Gorbachev had opened up when he made it clear that tanks would not be rolling out of Moscow again (see his speech to the UN in December 1988).

With the ”Round Table” at the beginning of 1989, Poland was to a certain extent already shaping the model of change. This negotiation-based strategy of change, which was largely shaped by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Bronislaw Geremek, was also clearly based on non-violence.

The fact that the victory of freedom and democracy in Central Europe was possible without violence still fills us with great joy and gratitude in retrospect. And the collapse of the Soviet Union was ultimately also largely without any great bloodshed (although we must not forget the military conflicts in Lithuania, Georgia and over Nagorno-Karabakh!)

In the ”Charter of Paris” in November 1990, the path to democratic and peaceful development seemed to be mapped out for the whole of Europe. We know that things turned out differently. First in Iraq, then in the Balkans - and worldwide. The question of whether and in what way Germany should also participate militarily in the containment of international conflicts was the subject of heated debate in a united Germany. The positions did not run along the old border between East and West.

There were also considerable differences of opinion between the protagonists of the ”Swords to Ploughshares” movement, which led to the break-up of some of the communities that had existed in the joint non-violent struggle for democracy and the free exercise of responsibility in the 1980s. The “responsibility to protect” brought into play by the UN, i.e. the international community`s responsibility to protect, was and still is judged very differently today.

There have also been increasing differences over Germany`s policy on Russia in the last two decades. This is particularly the case now - after the brutal Russian war against Ukraine, which has now lasted two years, and the so-called “turning point” in Germany.

I am now one of those who are convinced that we must help the invaded Ukraine to defend itself with all the means at our disposal, including long-range missiles, aircraft and everything it takes to end Russian air sovereignty. We must prevent the entire country from being bombed and the economic infrastructure from being rendered inoperable.

In my opinion, there are no non-violent ways to prevent the destruction of Ukraine and the international order based on international law. Unfortunately, non-violence is not the panacea for all conflicts. The peace we seek must not be the silence of weapons based on submission. In the biblical message, peace is also linked to justice - in other words, to enabling people to live their lives in dignity and in recognition of their human rights.

However, this does not mean that non-violence is passé today. In my opinion, there are still many areas for non-violent action today. Just imagine if Palestinians did not react to Israel`s highly problematic policies with terror and murder like Hamas, but with mass non-violent protest like Mahatma Gandhi...

The Peaceful Revolution is not a model that could simply be applied elsewhere. However, the priority of non-violent means remains for all political action - and there is still a lot to be done strategically and conceptually. I cannot elaborate on this here. With regard to the war in Ukraine, I would like to emphasize that I am convinced that the use of military force to protect against life-destroying attacks and to enforce the law is not only justified, but also necessary. I even believe that Germany and Europe can and should do more here, and above all more conceptually and more quickly.

At the same time, we must not stop at military efforts. Our solidarity needs a far more comprehensive approach and much more prevention of future threats. However, these are topics that no longer belong in this eulogy.

The central point here is this: Back in 1980, when the "Swords to Plowshares" movement emerged, then in 1989/91 and finally today, the goal of a "just peace" developed at that time, a peace based on justice and preserving life in its dignity, applies. Just as the Psalm says (85:11): "That justice and peace may kiss each other". And that brings us back to this wonderful emblem at the entrance to the castle, which depicts this kiss of peace with the words: "Peace renews, discord consumes."

Ladies and gentlemen, the prize awarded today honors a non-violent movement in the GDR that achieved a great deal and in which young people in particular took on a great deal of risk and suffering in order to stand up for their convictions and for a future worth living. Our heartfelt thanks go to Harald Bretschneider and Friedrich Schorlemmer, who played a major role in this movement and its success!

Thank you very much!

Translated by Dr. Tul'si Bhambry

—

Markus Meckel

Turning point. From old thinking to new politics[11]

The challenges facing us, not only in Germany and Europe, are immense. And we all know that we cannot master them alone, but only as the EU and NATO, that is the West in its entrety.

February 24th 2022 will remain unforgetable for all of us. “We woke up in a different world”, is how Germany’s foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, put it. Indeed, who could have imagined that we would have to experience this? A war of aggression, conquest and annihilaTon in the 21st century against a peaceful neighbour in the middle of Europe, against a country that I have visited many times. Despite all my reservatons about Vladimir Putin, I would not have thought it possible.

Bombs, rockets, death, destruction, murder and multiple crimes against the civilian population – images that we know from wars in the distant past, or from complex conflicts in faraway places. This situation, however, is simple to analyse and evaluate: an autocratic president in Russia who is afraid of democracy and freedom in his own country, because that would sweep him away, and anywhere in his vicinity, because that could also set a precedent in Russia. A president with a vision of rebuilding the former Russian empire, which had lived on in the Soviet Union and disintegrated together with it. To this end Putin has torn up everything that he himself had signed up to, everything that evolved in the wake of the horrors of the world wars in the 20th century as the basis of international coexistence. By invading his neighbour,Putin is destroying these foundations and attacking not only Ukraine, but international law, which will be difficult to re-establish but is of fundamental importance for our future.

Unlearnt lessons I grew up in a dictatorship where law was regarded “as an instrument of the ruling class”. Law was subordinate to power, and thus at the mercy of arbitrary rulers. The fact that together with democracy and freedom the rule of law was once again established, to which power is also subordinate, was the main achievement of the revolutions and upheavals of 1989.

This was precisely the aim of the “return to Europe” proclaimed in the countries of Central Europe. Gorbachev commited to international law and human rights in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on December 7th 1988, and in the 1990 negotations, when his counterpart spoke of western values, he objected that they were universal values that are not inherently western. It was already clear at that time that it would be a difficult process to artticulate and implement a culture of the rule of law at all levels. It quickly became apparent that many did not fully understand the concept, and had to learn it painstakingly. This is still the case in many countries, not least in Hungary and Poland.

Yet for many years the biggest challenge in this regard has been Russia, which annexed Crimea in 2014 and has since been waging a covert war in eastern Ukraine, claiming tens of thousands of lives. And since February 24th 2022 we see Russia’s war to destroy Ukraine as a nation with its tanks, missiles and bombers, as well as horrific crimes against the civilian

[11] This text is based on a lecture given at the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing on November 12th, 2022. The text was first published in English at: https://neweasterneurope.eu/2023/03/15/turning-point-from-old-thinking-to-new-politics/ (editor's note).

population. Even the most pessimistic among us could not have imagined such a brutal war of conquest, or indeed of annihilation, in the immediate vicinity of the European Union.

Shortly after the invasion, the German Chancellor spoke in the Bundestag of a “turning point” (*Zeitenwende* in German) in a special parliamentary session. Within an incredibly short space of time, the government announced the outline of a new policy in response that doubtlessly startled the majority of listeners (even those in the coalition itself). The government broke with various longstanding tenets of Germany's foreign and security policy. Russia was clearly named and shamed as the aggressor, and Germany took the side of Ukraine without reservation. 100 billion euros was announced for the chronically underfunded Bundeswehr, as well as a future increase in the defence budget to at least two per cent of GDP, a decision that previously seemed unthinkable. Germany was now prepared to supply Ukraine with weapons in order to defend itself, breaking with the post-war consensus that it would not supply weapons to war zones.

Of course, new hurdles have repeatedly appeared, together with the inexplicable discussion about the supply of heavy weapons, but it should be agreed that as much as possible should be provided as quickly as possible so that the Ukrainians can defend themselves. At least that is my position. Indeed, if Russia were not a nuclear power, we would have to assist Ukraine – as in the Balkans with Slobodan Milošević – to help protect it from worse. Following the outbreak of war, the new Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which had been so hard fought for a short time before, finally became passé. Germany commited itself to harsh sanctions, which were then agreed by the EU with astonishing unity. Since then they have been tightened several times.

Hundreds of thousands and then millions of Ukrainians fled the war, death and destruction, and were willingly taken in by their western and southern neighbours – especially in Poland, but in Germany too. A wave of solidarity swept across Europe, one that continues to this day. Again, we seem to be living in a new era. There has been no dispute in Germany about this welcome, but rather an atempt to share the burden and show solidarity with open arms.

Outside Germany, especially in the south, people could not believe what they were seeing, remembering Horst Seehofer's dispute with the former Chancellor about restricting the flow of refugees in 2015.

Epochal break

Meanwhile, the war has been going on for almost one year. Contrary to what many had feared, Ukraine has managed with the help of weapons from the West to stop the conquest and the advance of the Russian army, and some territory has even been regained. Monstrous atrocities and war crimes against the Ukrainian civilian population have come to light. The destruction is immense, with infrastructure deliberately destroyed by Russia in order to impede or even to prevent supplies from reaching the population.

No one knows how long this terrible war will last, in which not only the Ukrainian army, but the enTre population is resisting conquest and annihilation. At the same time, the consequences of the war are evident not only in Europe, but throughout the world. The missing wheat supplies from Ukraine and Russia have exacerbated famine globally. Over the last 20 years, we Germans – but also other countries – have made ourselves increasingly dependent on Russian energy supplies, which today means we are in a real predicament and great uncertainty.

We ask ourselves anxiously how we will get through the winter, and at the same time how long we can convince our own people that solidarity with Ukraine is necessary, even if it demands sacrifices from us. I do not think we should be under any illusions: Putin is also destroying the infrastructure in Ukraine in order to make living conditions for the population so difficult that they will flee the country. He wants to precipitate a new refugee crisis, using them as a weapon to bring us in the EU to our very limits and to try and undermine the acceptance of aid to Ukraine among our own populatin

In his speech to the naTon on October 28th 2022 the German president spoke of an "epochal break" that the Russian war against Ukraine signifies, not only for that country itself, but for us all. However, such an epochal break not only calls for a change of course in a new situation, but also requires an analysis of its prehistory in order to draw appropriate conclusions for future policy. Sometimes it takes tie to understand the significance of new developments.

Sometimes it takes courage and determination to face facts and not close our eyes. Critical self-questioning is called for – but it must not become mere navel-gazing at a time when decisive action is necessary.

The title for these remarks refers to old thinking and new politics. Yet, this in itself also requires "new thinking". This formulation reminds me of Gorbachev, who also spoke about a new way discussion of the mistakes of the past with regard to Russia policy. I would therefore like to turn more towards questions of the future.

This is our war

It is often said that this war is an attack on the internaonal order based on values and recognised law, whose emergence was necessitated by the horrors of two world wars. Even during the Cold War, it was a difficult challenge to preserve the UN Charter and the principles on which it is based. The dilemma is obvious: we must try to preserve this international legal order as the basis of global coexistence, despite the attacks coming from so many sides – for it is not only Russia! China and Turkey also have completely different interests from ours and are trying to enforce the law of the strongest in their own regions. In this respect, solidarity with Ukraine is key, and at the same Tme we are talking about the defence of this legal order. It is therefore also our war!

However, Russia is a nuclear power, and we cannot simply enter this war directly on the side of Ukraine, as we did in 1999, when Milošević expelled the Kosovars and genocide was imminent. But how to protect oneself from ultimately becoming susceptible to blackmail? Much will depend on whether the democratic states of the UN are united in their action. The German government is rightly trying to use the chairmanship of the G7 for this purpose and to seek dialogue with the democracies of other continents within the framework of the G20 in order to achieve the greatest possible global unity. However, this must not be a flash in the pan, but have a plan behind it, as well as credibility and staying power. Unfortunately, both our credibility and staying power often leave much to be desired. We need concrete plans to be developed and coordinated beforehand within the framework of the EU, more than has been the case so far. The German-French relationship continues to play a central role here, although it is unfortunately not sufficiently in focus at present.

It is to be assumed that following Russia's war against Ukraine, thought will have to be given to a reform of the UN, a product of the Second World War, given the new global realities. The composition of the permanent members of the Security Council and their veto rights is no longer appropriate in today's world. But I realise that this will be hard to change. Despite the organisation's many shortcomings, the United States always stood by the United Nations and its rulebook throughout the second half of the 20th century. But given the domestic political situation there, the conditions for establishing and maintaining an international order based on law and common rules are becoming increasingly difficult.

Developing globalisation in a spirit of shared responsibility

Whether it's vaccines against the pandemic, rare raw materials or energy, we all live in this world and are far more interdependent than we often realise. Given Russia's war against Ukraine and its deliberate use of dependencies as a weapon, it is becoming increasingly clear that care must be taken to avoid unilateral dependence in the future, especially where we are talking about states that do not share our values – those that are authoritarian or dictatorial. In the past, it has all too oŌen been the case that in the area of economic and trade relations, the criterion of human rights has been viewed as morally honourable but naïve in terms of realpolitik. So I can only welcome the fact that the German foreign minister is saying we must develop a new concept for its relations with China, in which the various aspects of our interests and values are balanced out. In recent weeks, it has also become part of the public debate: diversificaTon is the order of the day, and this will be a long and complicated restructuring process. Supply chains must be re-examined and specific criteria put in place.

Going ahead at national level makes sense in some areas, but ultimately we will have to try to reach an agreement on a common plan (not only with regard to China policy) within the EU. For in the end, coping with the consequences of this war and the challenges posed by climate and energy are directly linked.

A stress test for peace ethics

The European churches, which still fully supported the respective national policies of their governments during the First World War and blessed weapons, became a force for peace in the second half of the 20th century. At the founding of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, they stated: "War is contrary to the will of God!" Peace ethics therefore played a central role in the German churches, in both East and West.

As a 17-year-old in East Germany I completely refused military service, even in the army construction unit. This was an affront to the state. The question of peace has accompanied me all my life. In the discussion about rearmament at the beginning of the 1980s, the opposition strengthened in the GDR. During the Cold War, with the nuclear powers in hostile confrontation, I was a pacifist, or at least a "nuclear pacifist". Later, in the 1990s, I supported the Bundeswehr deployments because I was convinced they were necessary to maintain a law-based international order, and that we as Germans must not the burden of military operations to others alone. This was a much-disputed issue in the churches. The peace memorandum of 2007 then created a consensus that was in my opinion acceptable, but in the end was not really sustainable. The use of military force was consented to as a last possible resort. The statements of the Synod of the German Protestant Church in 2019 then moved back towards a more absolute pacifism.

Against the background of Russia's war of aggression, the debate has flared up again, with German arms deliveries to Ukraine being questioned a negotiated solution called for. This was a central topic at the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany, and the inner turmoil that is somehow present in each of us became clear. Who doesn't want peace as soon as possible? It's surely first and foremost the invaded Ukrainians themselves who do, experiencing as they are death and destruction on a daily basis. But what kind of peace? After the discovery of the terrible crimes against Ukrainian civilians in Bucha – and since then in many other places – the surrender of Ukrainian territories with their population to those occupying troops cannot be the peace we recommend.

And what about negotiations: these presuppose trust that the other party will adhere to the negotiated result. Should we persuade Ukraine that they can still trust Putin, who has so far broken all treaties? Or, when it comes to third-party guarantees for the outcome of negotiations, are we prepared to give such guarantees? But that would mean we are prepared to enter the conflict ourselves if such agreements are broken – indeed, to become a party to the war for what has been agreed. Who should be giving such guarantees? Who, if not us, the West? And in the West – do we want the Americans to shoulder this responsibility alone, yet again?

And then, of course, the following must apply: negotiations must not be conducted over the heads of those affected – "Nothing about us without us!" We realise how complex this is – and that the call for peace and negotiations in itself has very concrete consequences.

The importance of history for the conflicts in Eastern Europe

For both Germany and Russia, history plays a central role in foreign policy. For Germany, this applies not only to Israel, but also to its eastern neighbours and to the whole of Eastern Europe. In the past, however, the responsibility that lies with us as Germans because of the crimes committed during the Nazi era was usually focused on Russia in the East. This went so far that it served as an argument for Nord Stream 2. The fact that this responsibility affects all our eastern neighbours – Poland, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states, and together with them all the countries of the former Soviet Union, with Ukraine and Belarus the largest among them – largely fell by the wayside. So far, this has only been recognised in the case of Poland.

Thus the existence of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact is completely blocked out by Russia, as it was previously by the Soviet Union – but also here in Germany. This alliance between the two great dictators of the 20th century – Hitler and Stalin - is basically absent from our public consciousness, our memory and remembrance. I would say this is because in Germany we want to clearly distinguish between the various chapters of our difficult 20th-century history. On the one hand there are the incomparable German Nazi crimes, and on the other the communist crimes – and one should not compare them, let alone consider them together, to preclude the danger of relativising their uniqueness.

But in the period from 1939 to 1941 they did belong together, and even took place in accord with each other. Even the Soviet murder of the more than 20,000 Polish officers in Katyń and elsewhere would not have taken place without this pact – and Germany also therefore bears joint responsibility for it. Not everything that took place in this period can be neatly separated, but on the contrary is part of a deep-seated interrelation that we largely ignore to this day.

This has been and will be experienced by the affected peoples themselves, not least by our Polish neighbours. The German remembrance culture, however, insists on difference – and only addresses German crimes in isolation. In the past, this has led to a de facto cooperation with Russia, which wants to consign the Stalinist and other communist crimes to oblivion and makes the victory against Hitler's Germany the unifying seal of the people.

Almost every family was affected by German crimes (in Belarus, for example, more than a quarter of the population died). Unfortunately, the Soviet population was similarly affected by the Stalinist crimes, both before and after the Second World War. These cannot be played off against one other. Forgetting or at least neglecting these connections, Germany regarded Putin's history politics with a certain understanding for a long time. It was quite shocking to me that the great man of the SPD and former chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who with age had become something of an icon of German foreign and European policy across party lines, denied Ukraine independence as a nation shortly before his death. Here we are witness to a profound ignorance of the history of Eastern Europe and its problems, not only in Germany but also, I believe, throughout Western Europe. Even after 1990, for a long time they were not considered important – the dismantling of scientific research on Eastern Europe in recent decades is frightening proof of this!

I myself was saved from such misperceptions through my close contact with Poland (not because of my background as a GDR citizen). I still well remember a conversation with Bronisław Geremek in 1992, when he explained to me why the recognition of Ukraine's independence was so important for Poland and the whole of Europe. In my opinion, an important step would be for Germany to take the initiative for a large-scale “European Historical InsTtute for the Study of 20th Century History” with a focus on Eastern Europe. It should be financed to a great extent at the European level and, together with a network of national partners, research and present the connections and interdependencies and in this way help to overcome the frequently all too national narratives and perspectives.

Now to Russia itself. In a speech shortly before the war began, Putin was explicit in his historical justification of the war against Ukraine. Following an old Russian nationalist narrative, he denied the existence of the Ukrainian nation and Ukraine’s right to exist as a sovereign state. He transferred the image of the “fascist” enemy, which originated in the struggle against Nazi Germany and is so deeply rooted in Russia, to Ukraine, as well as that of “America and NATO” from the Cold War. He is only capable of imagining that the people of Ukraine would turn to the West when spurred on and seduced by America and the West – but in fact they simply want to live self-determined, free lives in a democratic community, and for this they see greater opportunities if they move towards the EU.

For Putin, however, an aim like this in his neighbourhood means a threat to his power – because this desire for freedom could also spread to Russian society. Putin, who spent five years in Dresden as a KGB officer, witnessed the Peaceful Revolution there in 1989. In January 1990, he and the entire office fled the city in its wake, having first destroyed all secret documents. I am convinced that for Putin, this revoluTon and the subsequent flight were traumatising events that still affect him today. And here the circle closes as far as understanding his poliTcs is concerned – domestically the construction of authoritarian and ultimately dictatorial structures, and externally the hope of rekindling old imperial dreams of power. Unfortunately, for too long German politicians could not or did not want to join the dots.

More influence for foreign and security policy

In 1990, Hans-Dietrich Genscher told me that during the negotiations on German unification a united Germany would not require additional staff in the foreign ministry, as everything needed to represent Germany on the world stage was already in place. This turned out to be a major error. The needs grew, not only because of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, but also as a result of the growing importance of Germany within Europe. Nevertheless, in the following years, not only the Bundeswehr, but also the foreign ministry was hit with increasing financial cuts. Although I have not checked the current figures, I am sure I can safely assume that even today the German foreign ministry can only dream of the human resources with which those in France or the United Kingdom are equipped.

I believe that it is of major importance to bring about a shift not only in terms of the defence budget, but also of the foreign ministry's toolset. After all, foreign and security policy is not just military hardware. It is not enough if we were to meet NATO's two per cent target. We also have much to do in these fields conceptually and administratively. It was in 1990 that Horst Ehmke told me about the most recent reform of the foreign service with shining eyes.

The current "traffic light" coalition is now working on a national security strategy, under the lead of the foreign ministry. This was already planned before the war, but it has since become even more urgent. I understand that the aim here is to develop a policy of "integrated security", which therefore does not only focus on the military dimension, and which is not just a theoreTcal plan, but includes the structures necessary for it to take shape. For too many years, we have been talking about a comprehensive approach to security in which the civilian and military dimensions of security are brought together, with the further addition of cybersecurity. However, we are sTll a long way from a set-up that gives this approach coherence and ensures that it works, if only for our own decision-making and the groundwork that precedes it. In addiTon, there is the need for coherent communicaTon with the EU and NATO.

I was very glad when Lars Klingbeil recently said that Germany must be willing to assume a leading role in foreign policy, which by the way the former Polish foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski, demanded of us 15 years ago. I do not see the ability to do that yet. But it is good that there is now a willingness to rise to the challenge. Leadership, though, must go beyond declarations and have life breathed into it – through intelligent and inclusive moderation, with original ideas and adequate resources.

In recent decades, the German political class has led the population to believe that security issues would no longer be of great importance to them; or, no better, that others would take them on. A number of wake-up calls, such as that at the 2017 Security Conference, ultimately went unheeded. However, a government that wants to and has to address these issues – as the current one does after the shocking experience of this war – needs popular support. Here we are all challenged, not least the churches and their academies. For to this day, the wind blows violently against anyone in Germany who is facing up to the challenges of our security.

On this point we are still at the very beginning.

Western unity – and reconstitution

Following February 24th 2022, not only Putin but probably also many of us were surprised at how quickly and clearly the West reacted to the attack on Ukraine. The EU, which had previously been so divided, proved itself capable of joint action at unusual speed – and also of good coordination with the United States, Canada and Britain. That was a hopeful sign, even if cracks are now reappearing, and that's only thinking of Hungary's special role. Another cause for concern is the apparent lack of coordination between Germany and France, but that seems to me to have been recognised.

The challenges facing us, not only in Germany and Europe, are immense. And we all know that we cannot master them alone, but only as the EU and NATO, that is the West in its entirety. Much will depend on the intensity of communication between the various parties involved – not just the big states. Indeed, the small ones must also be taken seriously, a case in point being that we should now be learning from the strength of judgment of the Baltic States. The debate must be transparent and include a clear explanation of policies to the public, including difficult questions and dilemmas. In recent months, I have often had particular admiration for Robert Habeck – not because he did everything right, but because he shares his thinking and the considerations that have led to difficult decisions. Such openness engages people and helps them to understand and to show solidarity and loyalty, even if they don't think every decision is right – but at least it becomes clear that "up there", as people say, it is not just machines that make politics, or hired villains as the conspiracy theorists believe, but that these are usually people who mean it seriously and do their best. This is of immense importance for democracy.

For the unity of the West or indeed an integrated security policy in NATO, it is important that we know and can trust each other. Neither happens automatically, and remains a task for everyone involved. This has a simple human dimension – but also an institutional one. People look each other in the eye, interact – and see that they can or cannot work together. Especially in the later case, institutional cooperation plays a central role. And this is a delicate balancing act. It must be clear beforehand where there are well-rehearsed mechanisms that can be relied upon in an acute situation, or whether there are open questions that need to be decided politically.

NATO repositions itself

When Putin gave his famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, in which he accused the West of having broken all its promises, I was the first German politician to have the chance to react briefly to him. I countered that NATO's eastward enlargement was not an aggressive project of the Americans or the West (this wasn't the aim at all), but the wish of the new democracies like Poland and the Czech Republic, of Presidents Havel and Wałęsa, who felt abandoned by the West. I countered that Russia could feel absolutely safe if all its western neighbours belonged to NATO. His problem lay elsewhere, I said.

It was not until 1993, after Madeleine Albright had travelled through the countries of Central Europe and was convinced particularly by these two presidents, that NATO began to adjust to enlargement. As late as 1997, with the creation of the NATO-Russia Council, Russia accepted the expansion of NATO to include these new democracies and sought new structures for security cooperation. That ended with Putin. At any rate, under Putin's rule Russia did not

seek its security in cooperation and reliable common structures, but, as in the 19th century, in buffer zones, in spheres of influence of the “near abroad”, as they have long been called in Russian security strategy, thereby denying neighbouring countries the sovereignty to which they are entitled under international law (and indeed in line with the OSCE principles). But this meant and still means that Putin measures security according to imperial standards, the principle that might is right.

Over the last two decades, this was ultimately conceded to him by those in power in Germany – and that is the problem. By Gerhard Schröder in any case, but also by subsequent governments. When, after the annexation of Crimea and during Russia's covert war in Eastern Ukraine, the concern of the eastern NATO members grew and NATO at least began to station a symbolic number of troops in the east, this was still called “sabre-rattling” in Germany.

Although German policy is different today, this has not been forgotten by our eastern neighbours. Most importantly, with this war, Putin has had to realise that he has miscalculated. All attempts to divide and weaken the West have ultimately failed to bear fruit. NATO is repositioning itself as the security anchor of the West. Even countries that previously defined themselves as neutral are now seeking their common security within the Alliance. Finland and Sweden will become part of NATO. This is an important signal. Both countries will also be important when it comes to ensuring that European countries have a greater weight within NATO in the future – and will also have to provide more resources. Whether this is possible with two per cent of GDP remains to be seen.

Europe will have to take much greater responsibility for its own security. The United States will shift its focus more to Asia, but if it follows a rational policy, it will remain the central security partner within NATO. But who knows what will happen after the next elections in the US. The very thought of this must make us grateful that Joe Biden, an experienced foreign policy expert and a reliable and strong partner, is in the White House now in this time of crisis, during this war. At the same time, it must make us apprehensive that our security depends to such a large extent on uncertain election results in the United States.

Ukraine recently applied for NATO membership. Here I share the position of most NATO countries that the most important thing at present is that we provide Ukraine with all possible help and military support to defend itself, but do not become a party to the war ourselves.

At the same time, however, it is important to make clear to Russia that there is a clear red linewith regard to other countries in the region. I am thinking in particular of Moldova. In my opinion, we should not only support Moldova for its help to the many Ukrainian refugees, which is fortunately already happening, but also be prepared to provide security guarantees for the country. How this should be structured in concrete terms would have to be clarified with Moldova itself, which is constitutionally neutral.

After this war, further NATO memberships will have to be considered as part of a new security strategy. The structural relationship between the EU and NATO must also be deepened. Turkey has blocked that from happening for a long time, but this must be overcome. For the foreseeable future, security in Europe will have to be conceived as security from Russia. Which Russia we will have to deal with in the future remains open today. It is to be hoped that it will

one day become a state that is a reliable member of the international community – and can thus once again become a partner on security issues.

The EU finally takes up the challenge

In my opinion, the German public has not sufficiently perceived the fundamental change in policy that the EU has made after the launch of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. The willingness to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova (and Georgia, as soon as it is ready) is truly a long-awaited breakthrough and policy change that previously seemed almost unthinkable. The German government deserves high praise for helping to achieve this, and for the fact that it is now also strongly committed to the integration of the Western Balkan countries. Hopefully, this policy will finally gain momentum! Of course, there can be no quick accession to the EU, because it is a community based on law – and this law and its institutions must first be set in motion. This also means an end to oligarchic rule – and that is a great challenge, not least for Ukraine.

However, I would like to make a structural proposal on the way to membership. I already did it in the 90s, when it had no chance – but I still think it is useful and helpful. By this I'm talking of observer status in the European Parliament for the countries in the process of joining the EU. Such observers – who would belong both to the parties making up the government and the opposition – would get to know the political culture in the EP and take this discourse back to their own countries. I am convinced that this would have a profound effect, and would contribute to greater realism and a more nuanced understanding. A transfer of knowledge in both directions. We need this increase in knowledge that began during these months of war, and we must give it institutional permanence. These observers should also be elected in their own countries – thus resulting in a European election campaign in these states. Imagine the political signal: a European election campaign in Ukraine.

Perhaps we have learnt in recent months that the European East is of existential importance for us. We must get to know it better – far better than before – in all its complex history, and to take it seriously. This will require a great deal of effort.

The huge challenge of reconstruction aid for Ukraine is very acute. A major joint effort is needed here, but it cannot mean returning to the status quo ante. Reconstruction will have to be combined with modernisation, taking into account for example the climate issue, renewable energy supply, modern transport infrastructure, but also the administration. This is a field in which Germans and Poles could cooperate excellently.

Foreign policy and civil society

I am one of those who considered the Ostpolitik and détente policies of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr to be beneficial for us in East Germany. I am convinced that it made a significant contribution to finally ending the Cold War. One error of judgment by the protagonists of this policy, however, must be remarked on: they did not expect that in the Eastern Bloc, in these dictatorships, a political entity would emerge from within society that would gain such potency. When Polish Solidarity came into being in 1980 (and later also the opposition groups in other countries), its importance was completely misjudged and it was regarded rather as a problematic development that endangered Ostpolitik. The establishment of the Social Democratic Party in

East Germany was thus regarded by Egon Bahr as a threat to his policy. As Gert Weisskirchen told me, Willy Brandt once commented on Bahr's prioritisation of stability with the remark “my little Metternich,” and thus hit the nail on the head. Willy Brandt himself admiTed to Bronisław Geremek at a conference in Paris shortly before his death that this emphasis on stability and the miscalculation of the importance of society's demands for human rights was an error of judgment.

This error of judgment remained a part of the SPD foreign policy for a long time. Egon Bahr in particular stuck to this line throughout his life – and his influence on SPD foreign policy was enormous. In 2013, he said at a school in Heidelberg: “International politics is never about democracy and human rights. It is about interests and states. Keep that in mind, no matter what you are told in history class.”

On the other hand, one of the lessons of 1989 in my view is that democracy cannot be exported (this was another misjudgment that had been made previously), but that it is a key challenge to show solidarity with and support the tender plants of democratic civil society in authoritarian and dictatorial countries. The democrats in these places need international solidarity and support to facilitate their practical activities, while at the same time international public opinion contributes at least a little to their protection.

It is striking that countries with a communist past have learnt this lesson and are advocating it in the EU. But Germany and the EU as a whole are still quite weak and underdeveloped in this field. Here we can truly learn from the US. Ten years ago, the “European Endowment for Democracy” was created as a means of reaching this goal during the Polish EU Presidency, in order to provide civil society with flexible and rapid support in the form of small amounts of funding. This European foundation is doing remarkable work. Unfortunately, neither the EU itself nor the member states are providing enough recognition or funding in order to do justice to this enormous task, which is staring us in the face in many countries. More should be done in this area as a matter of urgency – we need to use all the means at our disposal.

This is particularly true of civil society in Russia and Belarus. At the moment, little is possible in either country. But we can support the democratic exile. It would be a great accomplishment if Germany were to become a country of democratic exile. For Belarus, this is happening now in Poland and Lithuania. Germany could do the same for Russian exiles. This would include fast and flexible visas, institutional and financial support through an infrastructure that allows these people to be active on the international arena from Germany, on behalf of the cause for which they had already campaigned at home – a democratic Russia.

Translated by Adam Carr

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Markus Meckel,

Solidarität mit der Ukraine[12]

For the past two and a half years, we have been waking up every morning to hear about bombings, missiles and drones in Ukraine, and the number of lives they claimed the previous night. We hear original reports and see images of horror.

Ukrainians have been fighting and dying in defence of their country for ten years now. In 2022 President Putin openly said that he wanted Ukraine wiped off the map. Civilians are dying every day and vital Ukrainian infrastructure is being destroyed.

For 10 years, terror and coercion, murder and rape have prevailed in the territories occupied by Russia. More than 20,000 children have been abducted and forcibly adopted, robbing them of their identity in order to turn them into Russian patriots. Bucha has come to stand for civilian suffering under Russian occupation.

Two and a half years ago, it became apparent to the citizens of Germany and the EU – although warnings had been issued much earlier – that our ideas and concepts of peace and security are no longer valid. We had been shaped by Willy Brandt's words: "Peace is not everything, but without peace everything is nothing." In the context of the mutual nuclear threat of the Cold War this was true. The détente became a necessity, and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which culminated in the Helsinki Accords, helped end the Cold War. Then it was over, and freedom and democracy prevailed in East-Central and South-East Europe.

The year 1989 profoundly changed the whole of Europe, not just the East. Germany's Peaceful Revolution 35 years ago opened the floodgates for the country's reunification. Within a few years, we, the citizens of East Germany and the other new democracies, were awarded the opportunity to live together in freedom, self-determination and democracy within the EU and NATO.

At the Ecumenical Assembly for Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation in 1988/89, the churches of the GDR spoke out in favour of a "just peace". This term would shape Christian peace ethics.

The end of the Cold War brought a tremendous sense of hope for peace and security. In the autumn of 1990, East and West joined hands in the "Paris Charter" and a commitment to human rights and international law as the basis of international relations.

The idea of a peace dividend emerged, promising to re-allocate financial resources to other global challenges. Sadly, our hopes for an era of peace after the Cold War were thwarted. The shock came as early as 1991 with the wars in the Balkans. Some of us remember the question that suddenly arose: what can we do and what should we do to stop Serbian President Milošević from imposing war and expulsion – or "ethnic cleansing" as it was called – on the former brother states in Yugoslavia, especially Kosovo? I recall many conversations and debates across society, within the political parties and in our churches. What was the ethical thing to do in such a situation? We wrestled with this question, and the imperative that emerged was the

[12] Ethische Herausforderungen Grunewaldkirche Berlin, 24.2.2024.

need protect people. We had to define this imperative as an international one. The United Nations spoke of the "responsibility to protect".

In Germany, the question was whether the Bundeswehr should take part in military operations to stop Milošević and prevent him from committing further crimes. Even in the early 1990s, I was in favour of Germany‘s participation. I believed that we must not shirk from this responsibility.

The last two and a half years have confronted us with Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbouring country, Ukraine. In view of this all-out war against a whole big country and its civilian population, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke of a historic turning point – a Zeitenwende.

This unique situation, which echoes Germany’s invasion of Poland 85 years ago, requires us to re-examine all our guidelines of the last few decades. In Germany, one such guiding principle was not to export weapons to crisis regions. But what if the victim of a war of aggression – Ukraine in this case – cannot defend itself without weapons? Can we justify to ourselves that this country, unable to defend itself, is subjugated, deprived of its autonomy and independence?

That inhumane crimes are committed against its people? Can we simply stand by and watch? According to the law in Germany and in many other countries, a person can be held liable for failing to come to the rescue of another person. Don’t we become guilty in a similar manner when we fail to render assistance to a nation in need?

We stand up for peace today as we did then, and as Christians we pray for it. But let’s be clear what kind of peace we have in mind! Peace is more than just guns falling silent. We’re more and more attuned to the fact that laying down arms at the wrong time can bode ill for times to come, rather than opening a promising future.

This is why the peace we seek is not a pax Romana. That’s what the ancient Romans called a conquered – or pacified – territory. That kind of peace deprives the country’s inhabitants of their freedom to lead a self-determined life.

That kind of peace is not shalom, or the peace that the Bible and Jesus speak of. Shalom presumes that political conditions reflect and do justice to the human being as God’s creature and likeness, with all the inherent dignity.

”And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever” (Isaiah 32:17). To act in the name of peace is not the same thing as to adhere to rigid principles such as non-violence. In complex situations, it must be beneficial to people in very concrete terms. Not even the non-violent revolution of 1989, our great experience of hopefulness, provides a pattern that can simply be transposed.

Sometimes we’re faced with the choice between a rock and a hard place, and it’s understandable that we struggle. Knowing full well that war and military force always cause innocent people to suffer, we may have to conclude that it is necessary to use military means to enforce the law and protect people. Following intense discussions, the peace memorandum published by the Protestant Church in Germany in 2007 also agreed to this principle.

Still, non-violence continues to be a priority if it allows us to achieve these goals. But are they achievable today? Of course, we all wish it were easier, and people come to different conclusions even while following the Gospel. Different views exist, in our society and in our churches, on the issue of arms deliveries and the usefulness of negotiations in the current conflict. We must bear with these discrepancies, with each other, and stay united – humbly aware that we cannot avoid incurring guilt. Because one thing is clear: refusing to get involved, by supplying weapons for instance, does not mean that we are blameless also guilt. At the same time, it's key that we stay united in our struggle to find the right path, in prayer for peace and in hopefulness. And we must act! And make decisions! We, the Protestant Church in Germany, have fostered dialogue and connections with the Russian Orthodox Church for decades. But what happens when its Patriarch Kirill supports the war of aggression and literally declares it a "holy war"? Yes, fortunately other positions exist in Russia and in the Russian Orthodox Church.

But they are few and far between, and they have a hard time being heard. How should we, the other Christian denominations, deal with this? Where is dialogue still an option, and where is it bound to fail? Shouldn't we side with the victims and help them confront the aggressor with all the means at our disposal?

The German Lutheran theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an active opponent of Nazism, urged the churches of his time to recognise that our Christian duty is not only to help the victim, but to actively throw a spanner in the works of evil. We ought to come to Ukraine's defence ourselves. Unlike Serbia in the 1990s, however, Russia is a nuclear state, so this kind of active participation is not an option. What follows, in my opinion, is that we must at least provide Ukraine with everything it needs to defend itself, including long-range weapons such as the Taurus, as well as aircraft and defence weapons that help the Ukrainians wrestle back air superiority over their territory. What is more, we must become aware of this war's impact beyond Ukraine: Russia not only wants to subjugate its neighbour, but also to destroy the world order based on international law. Just look at the map to see what may happen if Russia were to win and annex Ukraine. It's not hard to work out who the aggressor's next victims would be. In my view, all that we're not prepared to do today is already taking a toll in human lives, and omorrow it's not only the financial cost that will rise but also the scale of human suffering – in Ukraine and, most likely, beyond. Finally, Ukraine needs more than just military aid! We must also look beyond the military dimension. Peace involves so much more! Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees need support, and I am moved to see how our society and Christian communities have stepped up. At the same time, I think it's a political mistake to refuse the same opportunities to Russians and Belarusians who flee these dictatorships as democrats or conscientious objectors. Ukraine also needs reliable long-term aid for reconstruction, stability and security, which can only be achieved through integration into the EU and NATO. This hould be stated clearly even today, and we ought to start with the preparations right now! The public coffers will not be able to bear the entire financial burden; private investment, meanwhile, depends on guaranteed security. The citizens of Ukraine need a partnership of equals as well as the recognition of their right to live in dignity and be part of our family.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An ethic of peace cannot provide straightforward recipes to follow. Dietrich Bonhoeffer struggled intensely to find the right path before concluding that necessary actions must be taken in the given circumstances. In the 1930s he had developed strong pacifist tendencies rooted in

the Sermon on the Mount. He was determined to refuse military service, knowing full well that under Hitler this was punishable by death. Eventually, however, he chose yet another path. His political resistance extended to supporting an attempt on Hitler's life. He was aware of the guilt that an assassination would incur. Still, he considered the plan to be not only justifiable, but necessary.

The murderer, Bonhoeffer argued, must be prevented from committing further murders. The church sharply criticised his stance, as well as Bonhoeffer himself, and rejected his involvement in the German resistance movement. Today we tend to have a different perspective. There's no ultimate certainty in what we believe to be the right thing. As a Christian, however, I say we have hopefulness and our plea for God's mercy. During a Holocaust commemoration at the German Parliament, Marcel Reif, the son of a survivor, said that his father rarely spoke of his concentration camp experience. What he passed on to his son was the message "be a human being!" This means to have empathy for our fellow human beings! It means to take responsibility, to be attentive to our fellow human beings and to stand by them. It means to offer protection and support wherever we can, to work towards peaceful coexistence and to seek reconciliation and a promising future. I've almost come to the end of my speech, but I'd like to take up the keyword of reconciliation to touch on a theme from the Ukrainian women's letters, namely their hatred of Russia and the Russians. As a German, I must acknowledge that the vast majority of my people supported the war and the crimes perpetrated during the National Socialist era. The political resistance movement was tiny, because it was extremely dangerous to get involved – as it usually is in a warring dictatorship. Only few individuals in the West recognised these small pockets resistance. One of them was George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, a friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

That said, the German people experienced a great deal of reconciliation in the decades that followed. To acknowledge our own collective guilt was central, because reconciliation requires truthfulness. It took a long time. But the same will apply to Russia in the future. Russia remains our neighbour, and our hope is to find reconciliation with a democratic Russia. This will, no doubt, be a long and arduous journey.

Today, however, our task is to guarantee security in the face of the threat from Russia in order to bring about peace. This is why we stand unwaveringly by the side of Ukraine, the victim of Russian aggression and crimes!

Translated by Dr. Tul'si Bhambry