

WAR IN THE HEART OF EUROPE – IS THERE STILL A PERSPECTIVE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY?

War in the heart to Europe. Until recently we thought this unimaginable.

Yesterday at the meeting of the Council of churches in the Netherlands this stood prominently on the agenda. The council adopted a statement in which it condemned the Russian invasion in Ukraine, expresses concern, calls for prayers for the victims and urges churches worldwide – but particularly in Russia – to speak out against this war.

Based on the Charter of the United Nations, Article 2 (4) it is forbidden to threaten with or use force ‘against the territorial integrity or political independence ‘of another member state of the UN.

Meanwhile a clear majority of the General Assembly adopted a resolution which condemns the invasion as counter to the Charter of the UN and the withdrawal of Russian troops is demanded. A strong international signal.

Moreover the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva adopted a resolution to start an investigation into possible crimes against humanity and human rights in this war. The International Criminal Court at the Hague also decide to start an investigation.

In addition there is striking unanimity in the international community announcing a heavy packet of economic sanctions.

Whether all this will result in a withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and ending the war is – on a short term – unfortunately not very probable.

In this respect the fact that the EU instead of taking diplomatic initiatives and applying its soft power – which was its strong point so far – is even financing the delivery of weapons, as well as the fact that some NATO member states – Germany up front – are raising their defense budgets sharply it is not very helpful either.

Above all though we need to recognize that this attack by Russia on Ukraine is also a consequence of more than 30 years of inadequate policies of the NATO- Alliance.

In 1991 during negotiations between the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Russia a promise was made that – after the reunification of Germany – NATO would not be extended beyond the river Oder and that Poland and other central and eastern European countries would not join the western alliance. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Genscher, even suggested that NATO and the former Warsaw Pact would be merged into one common European security organization. With the Russia of Gorbatshev then that did belong to the possibilities.

However, instead of seizing the end of the ‘Cold War’ with both hands by developing a Different European security architecture NATO was extended to the east – in spite of the promise not to do so. That this still is no excuse for the attack on Ukraine is clear. However, what is also clear is that Russia felt threatened. And if Russia does not feel secure – as it turns out- we are not secure either. In this context it would also be advisable that the EU continues to develop itself as the – original – peace project it was, rather than militarize itself.

We urgently need a European security architecture of ‘mutually assured security’ instead of a unilateral security guarantee for/by one power block over against another.

Based on the above we need:

- The UN to urge for *an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, withdrawal of the Russian troops and a return to the negotiation table* in accordance with the resolution of the General Assembly. The UN to initiate talks between the US, Canada, Ukraine and Russia to recognize the national borders and territorial integrity of all member states of the UN involved in this conflict. The OSCE should be involved in these negotiations and the agreements of Minsk should be taken into consideration.
- To develop and implement a '*Marshallplan*' for the rebuilding of Ukraine under the auspices of the EU
- To start talks within NATO about *a moratorium on further extension* of the Alliance, which would take the fact that Russia feels threatened seriously. In the course of this NATO could still opt for the 'Scandinavization' of central – and eastern Europe: no NATO troops or US nuclear arms in central – and eastern Europe and no Russian troops or nuclear arms either. Working towards *mutual disarmament and mutually assured security*.

Note: this is not 'Finlandization', but rather the Norwegian model: because Norway is one of the few NATO member states with a border with Norway it has consistently refused to station NATO troops or nuclear arms on its territory not to provoke Russia.

- Modernizing the NATO-Russia Council in such a way that this yet results in a *different and Europe-wide security architecture* (including Russia) in close cooperation with the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU. A common security policy base on the Final Act of Helsinki.

Note: this means that we are still seizing the 'missed opportunity' to build a European security architecture based on mutually assured security.

These measures would not just be aimed at de-escalating this armed conflict in particular, but ultimately the de-militarization of Europe as a whole.

- To urge Russia in line with the above trust building measurements to *withdraw its troops from parts of other UN member states*: Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine.
- To decide on the basis of the above developments on *radical changes in the national budgets from military to civilian purposes* by all member states of the UN and to intensify *international cooperation* to face **the** challenges of our century – climate change and the energy transition – collectively.

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