

THE WAR IN UKRAINE — CAUSES AND EFFECTS

* The war in Ukraine shocks people in Europe. This is mainly because we were convinced that our continent has become a region of peace; conflicts would only be solved peacefully. But at the same time, this makes us aware that both Ukraine and Russia are part of Europe. Whatever happens now, it is also a question of thinking about how we want to shape relations with Moscow in the future: through confrontation or on the basis of cooperation.

* The war in Ukraine is a terrible catastrophe for the country's population. Thousands of people are being killed; millions are fleeing; cities are being destroyed on a scale that could hardly be imagined. The Ukrainian president remarkably manages to get a lot of sympathy in video messages to the outside world, but his countrymen continue to suffer and die.

* The war is also a severe test for Russia. According to reports from Western intelligence services, 15 000 mostly young Russian soldiers were already killed in the first four weeks of fighting. Allegedly, the war objectives set by Moscow could not be achieved by far as easily as assumed. In any case, we will only see later how this war will affect Russia's further internal development.

* For Europe, the Ukraine war brings difficulties that can hardly be foreseen yet: the expected higher energy prices may drastically reduce the prosperity we have achieved; the competitiveness of our economy will be affected. The sanctions imposed on Russia affect the whole of Europe to a considerable extent. A deep wedge has been successfully driven between Russia and the rest of Europe.

* The USA is the biggest winner of the conflict so far. Goals pursued for years have been achieved: Europe has been re-militarised; NATO's Article 5 of "all for one" has become the Article F-35. All now buy weapons from one, namely the US, including F 35 fighter jets. The European economy is to be cut off from Russian energy supplies.

* The future international order will depend on how far Russia and China stand together or not in the Ukraine war. Instead of facing common challenges in the world together, there is a danger that antagonisms will take centre stage in a new Cold War.

1. The new international order was established against Russia.

The USA clearly won the Cold War, which ended around 1990. The Soviet Union lost it so dramatically that the state even dissolved. Washington considered the new situation a "unipolar moment", i.e. a unique chance to shape the new order exclusively according to its own interests. In this sense, the eastward expansion of NATO had already begun in the 1990s, which Moscow understood from the beginning as an aggressive act. Instead of integrating Russia into the new security architecture, it was built up against Russia from the very beginning.

This strategy was underpinned by intellectuals like Francis Fukuyama, who published the article "The End of History" in 1989. The author argued that after the collapse of communism, democracy and the market economy would finally prevail everywhere.

The end of history has not come, but the USA is acting as if it should have. Where regimes and governments continued to exist that did not correspond to American ideas, attempts were made to bring about change with "democracy-building" or "regime-change". In the process, there was always talk of implementing "Western" or "universal values", when it was simply a matter of American interests.

In this sense, an "alliance of democracies" was proclaimed in order to mobilise as many states as possible against Russia and China. The aim is to maintain the dominant power claim of the USA in a world that is increasingly becoming multipolar, i.e. in which several centres of power are emerging. This is no secret; American President Joe Biden repeatedly claims this role of "leader" for his country. In a new world, too, the "Pax americana" is to be the defining essential element.

It can be said that American policy in Europe has been quite successful since the end of the Cold War. After all, the sphere of influence of the USA has been extended over 150 million km², on which 150 million people live. After all, while the Cold War had a defensive character, which was also expressed in the defensive stance of NATO, the USA went on the offensive after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Whereas in the Cold War the aim was to contain the enemy, in the "new international order" adversaries were to be brought to their knees through "regime change" and "roll-back". Victoria Nuland expressed this attitude very clearly years ago when she stated that the USA had spent so many billions of dollars in Ukraine that it now also had the right to help shape policy there.

2. The diabolisation of Vladimir Putin.

In order to achieve its goals, the USA not only uses its military strength, the dollar is used in this struggle just as much as American law, for which a global claim to validity is made. There is the war of the secret services and human rights are used so extensively as a weapon that some already speak of "human rights imperialism".

Very soon after his election as President of Russia, the diabolisation of Vladimir Putin also began. The clear aim here was to motivate and mobilise Western public opinion in the fight against Russia. This attitude was already evident in a cover story of the "Economist" in November 2003, in which Putin was described as "Vlad the impalor", i.e. as Dracula. Specifically, the then still largely new Russian president was accused of having eliminated the powerful oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, of vigorously supporting his friends in elections; of not being a "flawless democrat". That is certainly true. However, one must also know that in its thousand-year history, Russia has never had a separation of powers in the sense of Montesquieu and is unlikely to have one in the foreseeable future.

The wealth of discrediting against Putin could fill libraries. He was just not as docile to American wishes as his predecessor Boris Yeltsin. President Biden was not the first to call him a "killer". Bill O'Reilly already used this expression in an interview with Donald Trump on Fox News. The foreign policy establishment in Washington keeps calling him a "gangster". And since the annexation of Crimea, which belonged to Russia for centuries, to Russia and the accusation that Putin interfered in the 2016 presidential election, the atmosphere has totally deepened.

Accusations against Russia are repeatedly personified as accusations against "Putin". In discussions about disarmament treaties, "Putin fibs"; and if a Russian athlete shows a positive doping test, then "Putin has doped", as if athletes from other countries did not also take banned substances. This diabolisation strategy was chosen quite deliberately: it is not only about putting the Russian president in a bad light, the main goal was and is to achieve the willingness to fight against Russia in order to achieve a "regime change".

3. The Re-Militarisation of Europe.

A revolution took place in the relations between European states after the Second World War, which originated in the Council of Europe and initially involved the countries of Western Europe. As a result of this revolution, inter-state relations in Europe have changed more in the last two generations than in the centuries before. If foreign policy was traditionally power politics, it now served to promote the welfare of citizens.

This change was not only in line with the principles of official foreign policy, this new objective was also expected by the citizens. When people from Austria to Finland and from Portugal to Denmark were asked whether international cooperation should create jobs, protect the environment and realise human rights, they received unanimous approval. A mentality of waging wars against neighbours in order to increase the power of one's own country had been overcome. Since the founding of the Council of Europe, common values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law also became the foundations of inter-state relations. Confrontation was replaced by cooperation; "warfare" by "welfare". The reliance on power was replaced by a system of law to which the members of the Council of Europe subscribed. This revolution established a new, special position for Europe in the world: Europe became a continent of peace, of human rights; Europe became a leader in essential areas such as social policy, environmental protection, or in development aid. "National security was supplemented to a decisive extent by human security.

in the USA, this rethinking has never taken place. The United States has never recognised the abandonment of armed force as the basis of foreign policy. For them, the principle "Foreign Policy without the backing of the Military is like a base-ball game without a base-ball bat" has always applied. When Germany, France and Russia refused to support the US war against Iraq in 2003, major tensions arose in transatlantic relations. The Americans did not want to accept that the Europeans had renounced a "logic of war". Even those Americans who realised that the invasion of Iraq was a mistake resented Europeans not supporting it.

The USA found allies in its tough stance against Russia, which found expression in NATO's eastward expansion, in the formerly communist states of Eastern Europe. There, national traditions allowed for a minimal autonomy during the years of communism. After its demise, nationalism was able to develop freely. Moreover, in countries like Poland, there was traditionally strong resentment against Russia. In Estonia, Poland and other countries, some believed that they belonged to the West only if they behaved as aggressively as possible towards Moscow. Exponents of American foreign policy supported this attitude under the slogan "your fight against Russia is our fight".

Years ago, during lectures in the USA on the topic of "Europe-Russia-USA and the crisis in Ukraine", the suggestion was made that Ukraine should strive for a status of neutrality, in line with the Austrian model, but this suggestion was not met with any response. Instead, the focus was on military strength; the solution was seen in equipping Ukraine with "tactical nuclear weapons". Instead of the Europeans trying to transfer their peace model, which had worked well for two generations, to America, the USA succeeded in imposing a new phase of armament in Europe. NATO's decision that 2% of GDP must be spent on armaments became a basic principle of transatlantic relations. Now, when even Germany decided to increase arms spending to 2% of GDP (from 1.5% in 2021) and to set up a €100 billion fund for the Bundeswehr, the praise in the Anglo-Saxon media was tremendous. This is especially because a large part of the additional military spending will be used to buy new weapons and fighter planes in the USA.

Even President Dwight Eisenhower noted at the time that the "military-industrial complex" exerts too much influence on American politics. Recent years have shown that this influence has even grown with the help of the media.

4. What is this war about?

On 24 February 2022, massive Russian military formations - there is talk of 190,000 soldiers - entered Ukraine; in the east towards the second largest city Kharkiv; from Crimea towards Kherson; and in the north to encircle the capital Kyiv. The reason given by the Russian side was that the expansion of NATO, combined with the massive armament of Ukraine in recent years, had become a security risk for their own country. It would also be a matter of putting an end once and for all to the fighting in the Donbass, which has been going on for eight years and has been described as genocide because of the high number of victims. In 2015, an agreement was negotiated in Minsk between the then French President, the German Chancellor, the Ukrainian President and Vladimir Putin with the aim of establishing peace in the Donbass. An immediate ceasefire was agreed, and heavy artillery was to be withdrawn from the front. The "people's republics" of Luhansk and Donetsk were to receive a pronounced autonomy. But the Ukrainian government never kept to these agreements. On the contrary, the parliament in Kyiv even passed a law banning the Russian-speaking population from using their mother tongue.

To justify the invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin also presented in a lengthy discourse on history that Ukraine was not a real state anyway and actually belonged to Russia.

Westerners strongly condemn the war in Ukraine and usually explain it by saying that the Russian president is either a criminal or mentally ill. Western international lawyers stress that the war is illegal under international law and that the justification of self-defence is not valid. In the United Nations General Assembly, the invasion was condemned by a large majority of states; however, those that abstained represented almost half the world's population with China and India. The International Court of Justice has ordered a cessation of hostilities.

In fact, it can be said that we live in a divided world today. About one tenth of the 200 states on our planet regularly use their military to support their own foreign policy. Now Hillary Clinton, as US Secretary of State, has already stated that "the time for spheres of influence is over". This statement from the mouth of the representative of a country that maintains 800 military bases around the world is somewhat peculiar, but it obviously testifies to the will of the USA not to recognise spheres of influence of other countries. In any case, the American policy of evaluating NATO up to Russia's borders; the decades-long humiliation of this country combined with the constant diabolisation of its president have contributed significantly to the catastrophe we now find ourselves in.

Even if this American policy is officially justified by the need to enforce "democracy" and "freedom" worldwide, one must assume that other countries disagree and also have their own interests. This also raises the question of whether democracy in a society is not better enabled by trade and economic development than by military confrontation. In any case, it has been seen that where Western military power has been used in the sense of "democracy-building", in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, these operations have in no way brought the hoped-for success. Above all, where Western interests were at stake, no objections were raised under international law. This "double standard" has been exposed not only in debates at the United Nations, but also in published opinion in Asia and Africa.

As different as the US and Russia are, there are great similarities in the justification and presentation of their own wars. For example, the official reasons for going to war have been proven wrong time and

again: there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; no bombing of demonstrators in Libya; and no submarine attack on an American ship in the Gulf of Tonking. Euphemistic language is also chosen for the wars themselves. For example, the USA called its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq "stability missions"; for official Russia, the war in Ukraine is a "special mission". In war reporting, it is repeatedly said that "precision weapons" are being used, even though the many dead among the civilian population and the millions of refugees show a different picture.

However. Looking at the images of destruction coming out of Ukraine, one can only wish that more had been done to prevent this catastrophe. But to achieve that, one has to consider wars in their various forms; also an economic war and sanctions set as a precursor to a military confrontation.

5. What is the purpose of the sanctions?

Sanctions can be very harsh. In the 1990s, the UN published a study that 500,000 children died in Iraq as a result of American sanctions. Asked about this, the then US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, said "freedom just has a price". The French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said in connection with the sanctions now imposed on Russia: "We will deliver an all-out economic and financial war to Russia. The rouble exchange rate will fall drastically; Russia's currency reserves will melt like snow in the sun. We are causing the collapse of the Russian economy". The West has also frozen \$1000 billion in Russian assets. "Let Russia suffer", the French minister demanded. Will Vladimir Putin suffer or rather the Russian people? Ultimately, behind the sanctions is the typically American idea that the people are responsible for their government and should therefore also strive to bring about a "regime change" if necessary. This was also the very clear statement in President Joe Biden's speech in Warsaw at the end of March, which he also addressed to the Russian people.

But what good does it do the poor people of Ukraine if Russia suffers? The American Secretary of State Anthony Blinken gave a different answer regarding the sanctions imposed on Russia: the very threat of sanctions is meant to stop President Putin from invading Ukraine. But this goal was obviously not achieved.

In fact, Russia has made great efforts in recent years to become economically self-sufficient. For example, 97% of trade between Russia and China was still conducted in dollars in 2014; today it is only 33%. It is therefore not clear to what extent sanctions against the Russian financial system, the high-tech sector or the oligarchs will affect military clout.

One thing is certain: Russia is one of the largest producers of oil and natural gas, but also of raw materials such as nickel, aluminium and palladium. Together with Ukraine, Russia is one of the most important grain exporters in the world.

Now, for years, people in the USA have been demanding that Germany greatly reduce its energy imports from Russia. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline in particular was a thorn in the side of many. Although energy imports from Russia had been functioning for decades, and contracts had been honoured even in the hottest phase of the Cold War, these imports have repeatedly been described as a "security risk". For years, American politicians, especially from those constituencies where fracked gas is extracted, have demanded that it be sold on the German market, even though it is much more expensive than previous energy sources. This gives the impression that the Ukraine war is being used as an excuse to finally enforce long-standing American business interests.

Russia is the eleventh largest economy in the world. If it now collapses or is totally cut off from the world economy, this must have huge repercussions, especially in the areas of energy and raw

materials. In 2008, the collapse of Lehman Brothers Bank played a crucial role in exacerbating the global economic crisis. Could the collapse of the Russian economy have a similar impact?

Already now, it is emphasised from various sides that we, too, have to make sacrifices for "our values", which are being defended in Ukraine. The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had extremely poor poll ratings before the war, has banned the largest opposition parties in his country; critical television stations have been closed down; and Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Are these "our values"? The war in Ukraine is not about democratic values, but about power politics and economic interests.

The USA has now succeeded in ensuring that Nord Stream 2, which cost \$11 billion to build, will not be put into operation. In addition, Europe has been cut off from a market that previously supplied 40% of its natural gas.

6. A new dimension of the information war.

If propaganda is the attempt to manipulate political opinions and public perceptions, then Volodymyr Zelenskyy has set new standards with his video conferences, which have been broadcast to various parliaments around the world. He embodies the weaker one who has been attacked and who fights for the rights, indeed for the survival of his country. The images of the cities destroyed by the Russian army, of the streams of refugees and of the Ukrainians' brave resistance, broadcast around the clock, lend his appearance credibility and persuasiveness. The T-shirt he wears fits the production so well that the New York Times ran a big story about it on the fashion page.

Zelenskyy always skilfully adapted the text of his remarks to the political discussion in the individual countries: before the American Congress he mentioned Pearl Harbor and the attacks against the World Trade Center; in London he spoke of Winston Churchill, the saviour of democracy; in Berlin of the fall of the Berlin Wall and in Paris he compared the heroic battle for Verdun with the situation in Mariupol. It was always about the common freedom that had to be defended.

The Ukrainian president is not sparing with criticism. In front of the French parliament, he demanded that the car manufacturer Renault, the DIY chain Leroy Merlin and a supermarket chain cease their activities in Russia. These companies must no longer be "sponsors of the Russian war machine". As France is currently in a presidential election campaign, these suggestions were immediately taken up by some candidates. In particular, the oil company Total Energies came under powerful criticism, which is continuing in court cases.

In any case, Zelenskyy has already made history with his appearances. In some parliaments, it was the first time that the president of a country at war was able to address the MPs directly. They are not the only ones who are always impressed by the speech of the pugnacious president and show it in "standing ovations". The people in the individual countries are deeply moved, which is expressed in numerous donations.

These events are framed in the overall portrayal of the war in the major Western media: the brave struggle of the Ukrainians is presented as a fight for democracy, freedom and humanism against the "murderous madness" of an autocrat. But as impressive as these performances are, more weapons for Ukraine and even tougher sanctions against Russia will probably lead to an even longer war and even more victims for the people of Ukraine.

In this context, the question may also be asked whether the personal attacks of the American president, who alternately calls Putin a "killer", a "war criminal" or a "butcher", are meaningful. These

insults may go down well with his own voters, but do they contribute to resolving the conflict? After all, in the end there will probably have to be negotiations leading to peace. The harder the fronts are, the more difficult that will be.

In the face of the "propaganda tsunami" steered by the West, Moscow has in no way succeeded in presenting its own approach accordingly. If we could hardly imagine warlike confrontations in Europe any more, the bombing of cities cannot be justified in any way.

On top of that, in our part of the world, the term "Putin-understanding" is already a dirty word. So people who try to understand Moscow's policy rationally are met with mistrust, even rejection. In any dispute, it would be very important to at least know the behaviour of the other side, regardless of whether one agrees with it or not. From Metternich to Kissinger, those diplomats have excelled who could adjust their moves to the opponent because they knew him. It is also essential to know the nature of a conflict, i.e. both sides, in order to find solutions and gauge implications for the future.

7. The shaping forces of tomorrow.

For the foreseeable future, the United States will remain the strongest country in the world, despite global political and economic changes. A characteristic of American foreign policy is "American Exceptionalism", i.e. the belief that America is the chosen nation. This belief was already deeply rooted in the thinking of the founding fathers and is rooted in Puritan, Calvinist thinking. This conviction of the special role of one's own country is not just a theoretical concept, it is quite decisive in shaping US foreign policy. As early as 1656, Oliver Cromwell declared the fight against the "axis of evil" to be a decisive task for England. In doing so, he stated the following: the fight for English interests and the will of God are congruent.

The "Alliance of Democracies" that has now been formed can certainly be seen in this tradition, aimed at helping "the good" to break through in a world of autocrats. However, one must also reckon with the fact that this will usher in the era of a new Cold War.

What does this mean for international relations, for the economy and for living conditions in the individual countries? The Cold War with the Soviet Union was a political and ideological struggle against communism, with proxy wars taking place in the peripheral zones. Economically, the two blocs were strictly separated and an "iron curtain" made any communication very difficult. The West oriented its economy towards a market economy, the communist countries cultivated a kind of barter economy within the framework of COMECON. At that time, Austria supplied about 12% of its exports to the Eastern Bloc and was thus the lone front-runner among the Western European countries. The USA, Great Britain, Canada, France, Italy and Japan accounted for 40 % of global exports in 1960, the Soviet Union's share was 4 %.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, globalisation created a worldwide trading system that also included Russia; China became a member of the WTO as early as 2001. Foreign direct investment reached new heights, the first McDonald's branch opened in Moscow in 1990 and Russian oil flowed to the West in huge quantities. Some people perhaps believed that with the adoption of the Western economic system, the Western political system would also prevail in these countries. Obviously, they did not consider that a millennial political culture follows its own laws.

In 2021, China shipped \$576 billion worth of goods to the US; before the Ukraine war, millions of Russians worked for foreign multinationals. 30% of world production is now produced by "autocratic states". A new Cold War would therefore have much greater economic repercussions than the previous

one. One question now is how Russia's total isolation will affect the economy, especially that of Europe. The other question is how far Moscow will succeed in undermining Western sanctions with the help of China. One can assume that Beijing is interested in showing that Western sanctions are not a magic bullet. On the other hand, Beijing will try not to become a victim of additional American sanctions. After all, Huawei's chief financial officer was arrested not long ago at Washington's instigation because the company was accused of having flouted American sanctions against Iran.

It will also be decisive how much the USA mixes its struggle for values and interests. Traditionally, a country's foreign policy was interest-based. Foreign policy was geared towards its own security; more power was often equated with more security. The USA's current emphasis on enforcing democracy and human rights worldwide has added a new dimension to international relations. Accordingly, the use of military force is justified wherever one is convinced that one is fighting for noble values. For Washington, it will be a question of weighing the extent to which democracy and human rights are to be enforced even if this endangers peace and security. As noble as "regime change" may seem to one side, the other side may be anxious to defend itself against it, possibly even through war.

If the supply of energy and raw materials, fertilisers and grain from Russia is cut off, this will have serious economic consequences. If, in addition, attempts are made to bring autocratically ruled countries to their knees, this has a very decisive effect on the political organisation of international relations, above all on the maintenance of peace.

The war in Ukraine is a terrible example of how not to manage a crisis in the 21st century. No matter how much the American president berates his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, no matter how massively the Russian population is punished by the sanctions imposed, and no matter how much all Europeans suffer, the long-suffering people in Ukraine are not helped by this. After the Second World War, Western Europe succeeded in overcoming hereditary enmities in order to build a common future. People have renounced a "logic of war" in order to jointly promote their own welfare. It would be important to convince those who believe that the future lies in higher arms spending and that problems can be solved with wars of the correctness of this model today.

(*) **Dr. Wendelin Ettmayer**; former Member of the National Council; Ambassador; Author;
www.wendelinettmayer.at