

III. *Zeitenwende* for Germany's Security Policy

Chapter 13: Implications of the Russian War of Aggression against Ukraine for German Foreign and Security Policy

Tobias Lindner¹

Abstract

February 24, 2022, represents a deeper cut in German foreign and security policy than anything we have experienced in the last thirty years. The following chapter attempts to classify how the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine will affect German security policy, Germany's relations with Russia, and our relationship with Ukraine.

Keywords

Zeitenwende, German foreign and security policy, Russia policy, Ukraine policy

1 What Does Zeitenwende Mean in Terms of Security Policy?

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is a watershed moment for security and peace in Europe. Russia has thus brutally forced Ukraine into a struggle in which nothing less than Ukraine's survival as an independent nation is at stake. This is having an impact on Germany's foreign and security policy; the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has coined the term *Zeitenwende* for it, which is now used internationally. In the immediate response to the Russian war of aggression, this means that Germany and its allies will support Ukraine resolutely and sustainably in its self-defense.

Zeitenwende, however, goes much further and extends beyond the context of the current war: we will have to redefine our understanding of

1 This chapter is a political contribution from the German Foreign Office, written by Minister of State Dr. Tobias Lindner.

security and translate it into new policies. Today, security must be defined more broadly than ever before. At its core, it includes protection against war and violence. But security also includes protecting our freedom and our democracy. As an open and globally networked society, we in Germany are increasingly the target of attacks on our values, for example through hybrid threats such as disinformation campaigns. Last but not least, security must be thought of in terms of preserving our natural resources, because the effects of the climate crisis on our security are already clearly noticeable.

Our security policy must systematically adapt to the breadth and novelty of the challenges. The term “security” no longer concerns only foreign, security, and development policy. The effects of the war of aggression on Ukraine and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, have shown that health policy, economic policy, and energy policy must be essential fields of our action. Supply chains in industry, for example, can become the Achilles heel of our economy and thus gain security policy significance. The attacks on the gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea, just like some cyberattacks before them, show the vulnerability of our infrastructure to assaults from outside. Separating internal and external security appears increasingly difficult. That is why we need an integrated approach in the future that analyzes threats in a coherent way and brings together instruments from many policy areas more effectively.

Such a new approach is necessary to address the challenges to our security. Russia’s neo-imperial policy aims to upend the European security order and directly threatens Germany’s security and that of its allies. The climate crisis is without doubt the greatest long-term challenge for future security policy. It is hitting poor regions of the world the hardest, fueling violent conflicts and driving people from their homes. The effects are also being felt in this country, where extreme weather events are causing increasing damage.

However, the solution of global problems is made more challenging by the increasing multipolarity and growing rivalry of international systems. Moscow and Beijing are increasingly aggressive in advocating their ideas of order, which rely on the logic of spheres of influence and contradict our ideal of a strong rules-based order established with the United Nations Charter.

In the spirit of an integrated approach, the German government has published a National Security Strategy in June 2023. In terms of defense policy, the Bundeswehr should thus focus even more consistently on its core task of defending Germany and its alliances and ensure reliable funding for its

personnel and equipment. The special fund for the Bundeswehr and the procurement reforms are key steps in this direction. Germany will continue to be called upon to get involved in managing conflicts in its neighborhood, because the war against Ukraine shows how much we depend on stability in our region. In our civilian and military crisis engagement, it is particularly important that we dovetail our instruments even better in order to live up to our claim to act preventively.

Security policy after the *Zeitenwende* must aim to align our international engagement more closely with the reality of international system competition and to expand partnerships with those states that are committed to preserving the rules-based international order. In particular, we want to strengthen our international climate partnerships.

The National Security Strategy has outlined how we in Germany will increase our social and economic resilience. We can only protect ourselves externally if we are also strong and able to defend ourselves internally. This includes reducing the one-sided dependencies of our economy and diversifying our supply of strategic goods. Disaster prevention and crisis management must be strengthened and adapted following our experience with the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather events – this requires even closer coordination between the federal and state governments. Our cyber architecture must also be able to cope with increasing attacks.

Those crafting security policy after the *Zeitenwende* must analyze and deal with these aspects. The German government is taking on this task, but for success it needs all relevant actors in government, business, and civil society.

2 What Does *Zeitenwende* Mean for Our Russia Policy?

With his decision to launch a war of aggression against Ukraine that violates international law and cannot be justified by anything, Vladimir Putin has deliberately burned all bridges between Russia and the European Union (EU) and between Russia and Germany. Our response has been clear and unequivocal: we have jointly imposed comprehensive, targeted sanctions in the EU, we have expelled, in coordination with our partners, numerous employees of Russian diplomatic missions who acted against our interests and endangered our internal security, and we have broken off or suspended virtually all cooperation in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. There cannot, and will not, be a return to the kind of cooperation we

have maintained over the past several, often difficult, years. Rather, we must prepare for a long confrontation with a Russia that is pursuing an anti-Western agenda.

This choice was made by Putin. We agree with our partners – in the EU, the G7, and far beyond – that we want to counter a neo-imperial Russia, which seems ready for almost any escalation, with a policy of clear principles. Our unity is our particular strength in this. Together, we have managed to win a strong number of supporters in the UN General Assembly for a resolution condemning the illegal annexations of Ukrainian territories in September 30, 2022. The fact that, in addition to Russia itself, only Syria, Belarus, North Korea, and Nicaragua voted against it shows how isolated Russia is on the world stage. The adopted resolution is also an important document because it clearly expresses the international community's legal conviction on the illegal annexations and thus also permanently defines the starting point for a peaceful solution under international law.

We had campaigned intensively for the resolution worldwide in the run-up, emphasizing that nothing less than the UN Charter with its most fundamental principles is at stake. We want to continue to address undecided states. We will continue to engage in dialogue around the world, making clear that all states have an interest in defending the UN Charter, which is being persistently and gravely violated by Russia. And we will have to continue to work together to find solutions to the global consequences of this war and to counter Russian disinformation.

The following applies to our Russia policy: we must also strategically adjust to a revisionist and confrontational Russia. Firstly, we must permanently oppose the Russian war of aggression and support Ukraine for as long as it is necessary. It must be made very clear: anyone who breaks rules on such a massive scale must feel their global isolation, and there must be no “*business as usual*” for them in any international forum. We will maintain sanctions pressure on Russia so that it becomes clear that aggressive revisionism and rule-breaking have consequences. Our sanctions against Russia are having an impact. They are curtailing not only Moscow's economic capabilities, but above all its military capabilities. For example, Russia is finding it increasingly difficult to obtain technology products. The impact of the sanctions will continue to grow as time goes by. Russia's economic base will be weakened for years to come – by a lack of international financing, technologies, *know-how*, and links to international markets.

Secondly, we are increasing our resilience to external attacks. We are investing in modern technology and equipment, better integrating our

European defense industries and strengthening the European pillar of NATO. We are also making our society more resilient to hybrid attacks at all levels. President Putin is targeting our social peace. To counter this, we need closely cooperating intelligence services and a powerful cyber defense – both in Germany and in coordination with our allies.

Russia is deliberately using energy as a geopolitical weapon. By limiting its supplies of natural gas, Moscow obviously pursuing a dual intention. Firstly, it wants to prevent sufficient filling of EU storage capacities and create deficiencies and high prices. Secondly, Russia is trying to divide the EU with a view to sanctions. Therefore, we are working to move away from Russian gas and fossil energy as a whole as quickly as possible. It is important that we have been able to significantly reduce our import dependency on Russian gas from 55 percent in 2021 and continue to do so. The goal is a joint European phase-out of Russian energy imports. For this, EU-wide crisis management and solidarity mechanisms are indispensable. We are in the process of signing bilateral solidarity agreements for severe gas shortage situations with our neighbors – we have already made a start with Denmark and Austria.

The EU level also plays an important role here. For example, we support the EU Commission's *REPowerEU* package to reduce gas consumption, which is also intended to ensure that climate protection targets are met and to address the effects of high prices. Every euro spent on solar parks, wind turbines, and green hydrogen electrolyzers is an investment not only in our national security but also in global security.

Thirdly, we need to invest more specifically in our partnerships with third countries. We should listen more closely to better understand their concerns and needs. To do this, we also need to think more strategically about our neighborhood policy in the east. It is good that Ukraine and Moldova have become EU accession candidates. We must also give the people in the Western Balkans a credible European perspective without raising false expectations. But Russia is also trying to expand its influence outside Europe. With its months-long blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports, Russia accepted that the food crisis in many countries would worsen, with consequences also for political stability and extremism. Even after the conclusion of the Istanbul Agreement in July 2022, Russia continues to spread false reports about alleged Western sanctions against food and repeatedly questions the extension of the agreement. Together with our partners in the EU and G7, we are working to expose Russia's disinformation even more clearly and audibly, while continuing our extensive engagement on food security,

including in African countries. Unlike Russia, we offer reliable partnerships and fair investments.

Fourth, however, we also want to provide greater support for Russian civil society. We want to promote channels through which people in Russia can obtain objective information. We support the Russian diaspora in creating networks, and promote independent NGOs. We grant targeted scholarships and work permits and support Russian-speaking journalists in reporting freely on Russia. The issuing of visas is an important tool in this regard. We do not want any semblance of normality and carefree tourism in times of a brutal war of aggression; that is why we in the EU have suspended the visa facilitation agreement with Russia. But we are also taking care to ensure that Russians who are critical of the government and politically persecuted persons continue to have the opportunity to travel to Germany, and that Russians fleeing military service can apply for visas in neighboring countries with as little red tape as possible.

3 What Does *Zeitenwende* Mean for Our Ukraine Policy?

Germany supports Ukraine politically, financially, with humanitarian aid, and also by supplying weapons. We have been doing this since the start of the Russian war of aggression on February 24, 2022, and will continue to do so – until Ukraine has won this war. The last few weeks have shown how essential our arms deliveries in particular – especially the delivery of heavy weapons – are for Ukrainian defense and the recapture of the areas of Ukraine occupied by Russian troops. We want to continue these arms deliveries. In this respect, it is important that the EU has made more than 3 billion euros available for military support to Ukraine until November 2022 through the *European Peace Facility*.² The air strikes by Russian forces on Ukrainian cities and civilian infrastructure have also made it depressingly clear once again how important it is to strengthen Ukraine's air defense capabilities. In early October 2022, Germany already handed over the first of a total of four planned IRIS-T air defense systems to Ukraine. The state-of-the-art IRIS-T systems will hopefully make it even easier to protect Ukrainian cities and civilians from barbaric Russian air attacks in the future.

2 As of 18.11.2022: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/ip_22_6699.

The EU foreign ministers also agreed on a training mission for Ukraine's armed forces. As part of this mission, a total of 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers are to be trained in Germany and other EU member states. This mission is intended to make an important contribution to coordinating and supplementing the support measures already underway and to gearing new measures even more specifically to Ukrainian needs. Germany is aiming to make a substantial contribution and is also providing one of two headquarters.

Since the start of the Russian war of aggression, Germany has provided around 460 million euros³ for humanitarian aid in Ukraine and its neighboring countries. This makes us the second-largest donor after the United States. The funds provided so far have been used to care for refugees and internally displaced persons, provide medical and psychosocial assistance, distribute food packages, and build water and sanitation facilities, among other things. In addition, we assisted Ukrainian households with heating and fuel to withstand the winter 2022–2023. The energy sector in Ukraine has been badly affected by targeted Russian destruction. There is therefore an urgent need for spare parts and also direct energy supplies. With the approach of a new heating season 2023–2024, the availability of coal and gas reserves becomes particularly critical.

We have also expanded Germany's involvement in humanitarian mine and ordnance clearance. Without humanitarian demining, the reconstruction of Ukraine after the end of the war will not be possible. Demining is also an indispensable prerequisite for stabilization, the return of refugees, and the use of arable land.

At the invitation of the German G7 Presidency and the EU Commission, an international conference held in Berlin on October 25, 2022, discussed the reconstruction of Ukraine. The conference was attended by renowned experts, international organizations, think tanks, academics and representatives of civil society, and the private sector. The reconstruction of Ukraine will entail an international effort, which already requires effective coordination among international partners, especially in the G7 and EU circles. The conference made an important contribution in this regard and provided expert recommendations for further action. Reconstruction offers the opportunity to be inter-linked with modernization of the state and economy, ecological transformation and reforms that are also important for the EU accession process.

3 As of 18.11.2022.

On the recommendation of the EU Commission, the European Council granted Ukraine candidate status in June 2022, thus underlining that Ukraine is part of the European family. This step is of high value to the people of Ukraine and it reflects their emotional connection to Europe. What is now needed is a strong commitment to the implementation of reform steps as outlined by the European Council and the EU Commission. Germany will continue to actively support Ukraine on its path to integration with the European institutions.

4 Conclusion

The Russian president is waging war against Ukraine because Kyiv has turned to Europe and embraced the values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Thus, developments in Ukraine in recent years became an increasing threat to the preservation of Putin's authoritarian system. However, the Kremlin has not only conventionally attacked Ukraine with its war of aggression, but also threatened the entire European security order. It is not only Ukraine's freedom that is at stake, but the values of all of Europe. Ukraine is currently fighting for these values. Hereby it needs our full support – Ukraine can count on that.