

**The Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Foundation with the
Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Societies of
Germany, Austria and Switzerland**
Working Group Common European Home

Memorandum

In the crises of our time

The problems of international terrorism and fundamentalism, the dramatic wave of refugees, the financial crisis of this century, the globally unequal distribution of wealth and the damage caused to our natural resources not only remain unsolved but they are intensifying on a local, regional and global level. The opportunity for an “order of peace and security from Vancouver to Vladivostok” as set out in the “Charter of Paris for a New Europe” seems largely to have been missed. Not only are wars being waged as ever before, but war has also returned to Europe, chiefly driven by the conflict between Russia and its neighbouring states and the tensions with the Western democracies. Ukraine is currently giving this conflict its geographical name and its most visible expression.

In view of the crises of our time, the signatories bring to mind 1967, when the Harmel Report laid the foundation for the two-pronged strategy of the North Atlantic Alliance. Security and détente are two sides of the same coin. The common goal was “a lasting and just order of peace in Europe”. They bring to mind 1989, that memorable year in which five states in eastern Europe took the path to freedom, with the conscious acquiescence of the Soviet government. They were Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It was only in Romania, where the path could only be achieved against the bloody resistance of its ruler. And they remember the speech by President George Bush senior on 31st May of the same year in Mainz: “The Soviets ought to know that our objective does not consist of undermining their legitimate security interests.”

President Mikhail S. Gorbachev attempted the necessary and historically unique task of simultaneously changing the political and the economic system. He did not save the continental imperium, nor a reformed Soviet system. But when the Soviet Union came to an end, he succeeded in doing something with no parallel in history. Together with leading western politicians he kept the potential for conflict between west and east, between the fragmenting Soviet Union and the USA, on the path to détente so that the Cold War did not become a hot war.

However, it is with deep sorrow that the signatories also bring to mind the nuclear weapons and weapon systems of this world, approx. 90% of which are owned by Russia and the United States. And the degree of their political conflict is currently not diminishing, but increasing. Although, no further atomic weapons have been deployed in military conflicts since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we do not see any compelling reason that it will also always remain so.

War and the prevention of war

At all times during humanity’s advanced civilisation, man has fought against the barbarism of war, albeit with varying degrees of success. The modern age is pursuing two goals: the humanisation of war and the prevention of wars.

The humanisation of war includes for example banning certain weapons, the Red Cross and the development of international law. Yet the combatant parties frequently ride roughshod over existing standards of international law, if they expect to achieve their desired outcome thereby. The distinction between combatants and non-combatants seems largely to have been abolished in the wars of this and the previous century. That applies especially to the asymmetrical wars on Europe’s periphery, which, for religious and ethnic motives i.a., destroy the foundations of life for people, have triggered the greatest flow of refugees since the end of the Second World War and involve the deliberate destruction of historic, cultural monuments in their terrorist-like warfare.

However, the humanisation of war does not lead to the prevention of war, any more than a technically secured nuclear second-strike capacity does. A technology under constant development cannot offer

any guarantee against technical failure, the escalation of regional conflicts, proliferation of nuclear weapons and technologies, nor ultimately against error and human madness. Ultimately, the prevention of war cannot be secured technically at all, but only politically.

Since time immemorial, treaties have served to prevent war. The danger of the present situation consists above all in the fact that both major powers no longer perceive themselves as stabilising leading powers of interlocking, though opposing systems or even ideologies but still mutually-respected strategic interests, but above all as representatives of national interests. As a consequence and with regard to Ukraine, the “division of labour” between the United States and Europe with financial and military support on the one hand, and diplomatic mediation and sanctions on the other does not rule out the possibility of the war in Ukraine becoming a war around Ukraine. None of the structural reasons which led to the First World War appears to have been really overcome.

In addition, there is the factor of the characterising difference in the historic experience of both countries, both of which resulted from the settlement of what is an almost infinite space in western European terms.

Insulated by two oceans, North America was conquered and settled without any equal opponents over the course of three centuries by Europeans who were looking for their freedom or wanted to escape from their economic privation. The expanse of the land and the freedom of the market make the USA the greatest economic power on earth, while Europe’s self-destruction in the previous century made it a hegemonic power.

Russia, on the other hand, finds itself in a historically and geographically opposite position. On a level that by nature is almost immeasurable, the country, which is bordered in the west by superior civilisation, in the east by nomads on fast horses, its interior feudal and absolutist with no opportunity to experience civil-democratic freedom, has only been able to assert itself by means of military strength since its foundation over 1,000 years ago.

Renaissance

Only military strength gives Russia that sense of security which its history imposes on. In the phase of détente and under the shield of a guaranteed nuclear second-strike capability, Russia nevertheless consents in the disarmament negotiations to convert its conventional forces in terms of their quantity and quality according to the principle that forces must only have a defensive and not an aggressive capability. However, the truce that has existed between the two great powers for over 60 years does not protect us from the use of nuclear weapons, nor from a third world war.

“We are standing at a crossroads in the relationship between America and Russia,” Gorbachev warns urgently in a recent interview. Gorbachev says the “trust that we have built up so laboriously” is at stake, as is the assurance that we do not really and earnestly need to reckon with an incalculable nuclear risk as a result of deterrence.

Today, the balance of terror as a result of the secured nuclear second-strike capability may still be, or perhaps once more, the strongest argument for securing peace. But this balance is highly unstable. And the Cuban crisis teaches us that *one* failure is enough. That forces us to tread new paths. But new paths mostly lie in a renaissance, in this case in a renaissance of negotiations, treaties, mutual predictability and mutual trust. The alternative is neither rationally nor morally tenable – it simply cannot be permitted.

The conferences since Helsinki 1973, the bilateral treaties for reducing and controlling nuclear weapons and weapons systems, the treaty on the reduction of conventional forces in Europe, the two-plus-four negotiations on the reunification of Germany and finally the Charter of Paris document the unconditional will on both sides at those times to come to a “balance of differing interests” (Clausewitz), without the “involvement” of military means, in terms of an “order of peace and security from Vancouver to Vladivostok”.

Today, this will seem to have almost expired on both sides, and probably cannot be readily revived. Yet it is possible to detect a trace of this will, for example in the New Start Treaty of 2010 between Russia and the United States that continues the Start 1 treaty of 1991 and at times introduces a new dynamic into the relations between the two states. Its trace can be recorded once more in the renewed negotiations on limiting missile defence systems, and last but not least also in the shared interests such as preventing the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, weapons systems and technologies or containing trouble spots such as the Middle East and where possible jointly restoring peace there.

Europe

“No security without Russia” has now become a standard expression. Remembering the tension of the diversity and unity of European history, the aberrations, errors and mistakes, but also the glories of its civilisation, Europe, as an advocate of “commonly applied reason” (Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker) faces the challenge and the struggle of achieving the great goal set out in the Paris Charter, a comprehensive order of peace and security with the “Common European Home” so to speak as its solid core.

On this path the signatories see two albeit insufficient, but also essential interlocking steps:

- Firstly, the insight that every major power has its Cuba. That means the defined and mutually respected recognition of strategic interests so that the war in Ukraine does not slip into a war around Ukraine.
- Secondly, the de-ideologicalisation of conflicts. That applies in regard to Syria as much as to Ukraine, for which Henry Kissinger proposed a “consolidated neutrality” in terms of a stabilising, yet progressive development within the Common European Home.
- Thirdly, negotiations that give priority to common rather than dividing interests and lead to as close as possible integration that, if broken, will entail consequences that none of those involved would wish.

C. F. v. Weizsäcker noted emphatically in dealing with the crises and upheavals in our time, “A complex society undergoing rapid change like our own cannot survive, let alone find the best paths without insight. But we are not given insight without first making a supreme endeavour in the search for truth,” even though, as a sought for and not dictated truth, it can always be “only a partially found truth”.

No security without Russia, but equally “No security without America”. So what should Europe do? As the advocate of jointly applied reason, Europe should bring the American and the Russian presidents to a table with the objective of finding a political solution to the conflict in Syria and in Ukraine through the balancing of differing interests. Yet Europe should not place its fate solely in the hands of the two great powers, but in its own best interests make every effort to contribute to overcoming the antagonism between east and west, the spiral of threat and counter-threat, and of misjudgement and overreaction. In this way, with a robust response to the crisis surrounding Ukraine and Syria, Europe could at the same time retain the opportunity of responding to the further challenges of our time, also in jointly applied reason, for example with regard to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or the barbaric terror on its periphery.

Thus, this memorandum should be understood as an appeal to politicians, governments and heads of state. In the crises of our time, in terms of jointly sought for truth and jointly applied reason, time is pressing upon us to pave the way and move towards an order of security and peace from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

Frank Elbe
Ambassador (ret.)

Harald Kujat
General (ret.)

Dr Bruno Redeker, Director
C.F. v. Weizsäcker Foundation
C.F. v. Weizsäcker Societies

Prof. Dr Horst M. Teltschik
Former deputy director of the
German Federal Chancellery