

A Copernican turn for peace
In the face of the Ukraine war

Initiative Part IV

The Working Group
Common House Europe
C. F. v. Weizsäcker-Society
Knowledge and Responsibility e.V.

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Basis: Basic reflections of the Weizsäcker Societies with the minutes and writings of the Working Group GHE - Common House Europe – on the Ukraine war, especially the

- Initiative-document Part I of February 12, 2023
- Initiative-document Part II of July 31, 2023
- Initiative-document Part III of October 06, 2023

The point of view arises from Immanuel Kant's three central questions as transformed by C. F. v. Weizsäcker: *"What should we know? What must we do? What can we hope for?"*

An answer in a first approximation: *We should know what we have to do to bring the war to an end in such a way that this end does not lead to further wars. Instead, we should secure a reliable and humane future for the life and social concepts of the peoples in their diverse and individual facets. Then we can hope to be able to bear the power and responsibility that our modern culture of will and intellect has placed in our hands with its scientific and technological revolution.*

Objective and task: a pan-European security architecture that contains the war in the perspective the security interests of Ukraine **and** Russia, overcomes it in a peace of reconciliation and finally, within the framework of international law, cancels it in a comprehensive "peace and security architecture and security architecture from Vancouver to Vladivostok."¹ **Part III of the working group's initiative paper** formulates three guidelines for negotiation, universally valid guidelines - guidelines of reason in a "world drifting towards chaos".²

In order to finally get on the path to a reliably humane future and in view of the threat of escalation "to the extreme" (v. Clausewitz), we should try in the field of power politics *not to merely or defensively take note of each other's legitimate security interests, but to recognize and accept them as our own - in other words, with a truly **Copernican turn**.*

As an example and with regard to Ukraine, Russia and the rapid and complicated changes of our time, this would mean:

- mutual renunciation of maximum demands in terms of war aims and territorial claims³, sanctions and reparations⁴, but instead, for example, to take care of each other's stability as well as the relations between the societies, states and zones of influence in which Russia and Ukraine, among others, are embedded.
- a cooperation that prioritises common interests over divisive ones, solves the crises of our time or at least makes a significant contribution⁵ to them, and finally seeks and finds guarantees of security through close economic and cultural ties, even outside of military assistance obligations.
- Arms control! Which, in the knowledge of *si vis pacem para bellum* – "If you want peace, you must be prepared for war" – follows on from the concept of **real** disarmament:⁶ that armed forces should and must be structured for defence, but not for attack, from Helsinki 2, from the idea of a **comprehensive** security architecture.⁷

"Because the crucial question is," said Bishop Michael Bünker at the National Defence Academy, Vienna, referring to what Mr Weizsäcker calls his alarm signal, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki: "Until August 1945, the end of the world was conceivable. The Apocalypse of John describes it marvellously. Since that day it has been realisable. **That is the difference** that Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker worked on. And which we still have to work on, which evokes our responsibility and our faith, our hope, our optimism, our ability to cooperate, our humanity."⁸

While it could once be said, *fiat iustitia, pereat mundus* – let justice be done and let the world perish over it – *today we can hope* that with the increasing proliferation, density and complexity of modern weapons systems, *nuclear weapons systems in particular*, the "saving" factor will also grow: the **unconditional will to apply common sense**.⁹ In a loose reference to Friedrich W. Nietzsche, "untimely considerations" are perhaps "the timely ones" after all.

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- 1) Even a journey of 1,000 miles begins with the first steps – which ultimately lead to a continuous, never-ending task of small, large and great statecraft in secret (Henry Kissinger). Certainly, Russia has attacked. But *all* those involved are *responsible* – to a greater or lesser extent and in varying degrees. The silence about this context “roars”, as Dirk Kurbjuweit says about the war in the Middle East, “like a jackhammer.” (In DER SPIEGEL No. 48 / 25.11.2023) In this context, the interview “The Cold War ended through negotiations” with *Jack F. Matlock*, former US ambassador in Moscow and Reagan advisor (<https://www.cicero.de/aussenpolitik/russlandukraine-us-aussenpolitik-jack-f-matlock>) is worth reading and noting. Colonel (ret.) *Wolfgang Richter*, one of the experts on the subject: “The frequent public assertion that Moscow was fundamentally not prepared (for substantial negotiations) does not correspond to many years of experience in arms control and the state of negotiations shortly after the start of the war.” (In: *Götz Neuneck, ed., Europe and the Ukraine War*, Mitteldeutscher Verlag 2024, p. 125)
- 2) *Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker* in: *Möglichkeiten und Probleme auf dem Weg zu einer vernünftigen Weltfriedensordnung*, Carl Hanser Verlag 1982, p. 8. The “unchanged structure of power politics” analysed by v. Weizsäcker, meanwhile, has “condemned” the great powers to the discovery that even in years of “cooperative bipolarity” and détente “to be opposing candidates for hegemony The moment in which this discovery would world politics again, I (v. Weizsäcker) already in the sixties considered it the most dangerous moment of the coming decades; today it has materialised.”
That “today” was 1982. In the meantime, war has returned to Europe, with the war over Ukraine and Russia’s geostrategic position for the second time since the Second World War.
- 3) Possibly by making borders meaningless in a pan-European security architecture. As far as the Donbass is concerned, the **first step** would be to strengthen the borders here, **temporarily**, in the form of an autonomous UN territory, for example. This opened up the possibility of maintaining the strategic balance between Russia and the USA and guaranteeing Ukraine what Henry Kissinger once called “consolidated neutrality”. In the Istanbul Agreement, Ukraine was prepared to refrain from seeking NATO membership in exchange for guaranteed independence. Today, however, after the failure of the negotiations (“The West did not want a quick peace”, see *Günter Verheugen and Petra Erler* in: *Der Lange Weg zum Krieg*, Heyne Verlag, Munich 2024, p. 30), it is “unlikely that Moscow would be prepared to return to an unchanged Istanbul compromise.” (*Wolfgang Richter*, (op. cit., p. 126)
- 4) Sanctions rarely deliver what they promise, except for “boomerang effects” in the course of an escalating economic war. And history teaches us that reparations - humiliations - produce what, according to Clausewitz and the wisdom of life, should be avoided at all costs: subsequent wars! A mutual renunciation of sanctions and reparations, on the other hand, brings with it the possibility of preventing the burdens of war from becoming toxic by means of fair burden-sharing through closer economic and cultural ties.
- 5) There are enough crises: in the energy and world food crisis, for example, in climate change, in terrorism, in migration - socialized with globally effective areas of tension such as those of the Middle East, Taiwan, Kashmir, the USA and China, of “war and peace”, of “poverty and wealth, man and nature, democracy and world politics” (*C. F. v. Weizsäcker*). Weizsäcker’s “world domestic policy”, in China’s global order concept of the “community of destiny of all people”, in the concept of “empire”, for example, and, last but not least, in *Mikhail Gorbachev’s* “New Thinking” and the new - multipolar - world order that he outlined in his groundbreaking speech to the 43rd UN General Assembly in New York on December 7, 1988. “A document of strategic foresight”, according to *Günter Verheugen and Petra Erler*: ‘Unity in diversity’ was to be created, ‘a new order of state relations’, but ‘not on the basis of ‘Western’ values, but of universal values and mutual respect.’ (p. 253 f) If we follow *Verheugen and Erler*, Vladimir V. Putin, still as a young president, took up Gorbachev’s strategic foresight with the words “to create a multipolar, if you will, non-monopolized system of international relations. A system that reflects the entire diversity of the world and enables diversity and a balance of interests.” (S. 260) However, geopolitical practice has also developed differently in Europe through the use of military means to change borders - at least so far.
- 6) For example, it follows on from concepts such as those published in *Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (ed.): Die Zukunft des Friedens in Europa*, Hanser Verlag 1990, in the documentation of the CSCE process and the Charter of Paris; it follows on from *Egon Bahr’s* maxim of “change through rapprochement” and the treaties that have been achieved, such as the ABM Treaty, the INF and Open Skies Treaties, for example. (existentially important treaties for Europe, terminated by the USA), STC, cultural and partnership agreements, etc..
- 7) *Peter Graf von Kielmansegg* looks at Immanuel Kant’s political legacy “On Perpetual Peace” in the sense of a “fictitious contract”. Kant drafts “a world constitution to be agreed by treaty”, with the “claim of philosophy to show the way to politics” and develops this fundamental thesis: “*The states remain sovereign, bound only by the duty to renounce war* (if one disregards the third definitive article.”) The third article deals with rights and duties between the states and their populations. See “Drei Regeln für den Frieden”, *DIE ZEIT* 53/2004; more detailed in *Birgit Recki (ed.): Kant lebt*, Paderborn 2006.
Neither Kant’s “world constitution”, nor a “unity in diversity” or “one system, many countries” (see Initiative-document Part II) would eliminate the conflicts and rivalries from the world. But their ideas could (if they found their time), in the spirit of the message of *Lessing’s* Ring Parable – to strive “for the bet”, “with gentleness, with cordial compatibility, with benevolence” (Nathan, third act, seventh appearance) – point out and pave the way for jointly applied reason, **including the mutual trust** that is essential for a Copernican turnaround in the field of traditional power politics (see Initiative-documents Part I and Part II). However, we have obviously not yet learnt this trust well (see Vladimir V. Putin’s speech to the German Bundestag in 2001), and have apparently already forgotten how to build it.
- 8) *Michael Bünker*, retired Bishop of the Evangelical Church A. B. Austria, including former General Secretary of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, on 11 January 2024 as part of the panel discussion “Common House Europe” at the National Defence Academy (LVAk) Vienna.
- 9) Although it has been and continues to be ridiculed as a “bad utopia”, it has proven its effectiveness time and again in historical circumstances: in recent times, for example, with the reconciliation between Germany and France, the understanding with Israel and Poland, the Cuba crisis, the transformation of the USSR without a “Great War” and the reunification of Germany). Common reason bears the potential for the necessary further development of international law, with regard to the scientific and technological revolutions of the modern age, for example, its undivided binding force.