

A New Security Policy for Eastern Europe?

An Analytical Report

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NATO and the Different Perspectives in
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Future
of
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The Background: Eastern Europe in Europe

The future of Europeans is not decided in the rather petty disputes over regulations that so often keep Brussels occupied. It is decided—and there are good reasons to believe this—in the Eastern part of the continent, in the vast region commonly called Eastern Europe. The European Union can receive significant impetus from here, it can find affirmation for its *raison d'être* from here, but it can also fail here, if the values of liberal democracy are not adopted, are not lived in perpetuity in this region.

In the first decade after the end of the Cold War, it was the liberal model to which the states in Eastern Europe turned. They strived after "Europe" in the European Union, in the West, as their "natural homeland"; they wanted to become "normal states", with their bourgeoisie and their prosperity based on economic success. They have come close to this goal up to a point, but at the same time, the ideal has gradually become weaker. The obligation to adopt European norms and institutions is increasingly being perceived by many Eastern Europeans more as a pressure; the ensuing and still growing scepticism about or even the rejection of Project Europe today is supporting a new generation of political leaders in their notions of a national identity directed against "Brussels".

To counter the dangers of illiberalism and, in particular, to prevent Eastern Europe from slipping into authoritarianism, the Regional Office of Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom for East and Southeast Europe, based in Sofia, created a new format in 2015: the "Future of Freedom" Annual Consultation for East and Southeast Europe. Representatives from the Foundation's partner organisations, as well as from think tanks, NGOs, and political parties from the region and beyond, discuss relevant topics at these meetings, and in particular the tasks facing the liberals in each country. The overarching goal is prevention: the causes and effects of illiberal trends are to be analysed and, building on this, strategies for the defence of freedom and open society are to be developed. The consultations are held in those countries and places which have a specific relationship to the chosen topic. The first consultation took place in Istanbul in 2015; the discussion focused on how to combat the growing threat to free societies from authoritarianism. The next consultation in this format was held in 2016 in Bucharest; it was about giving Europe back its strength in the face of the incipient fragility of the European Dream.

In 2017, the focus of the consultations was on the security of Eastern Europe—and for good reasons—because there is a war being waged in that region. Kharkiv in Eastern Ukraine was selected as the venue, thereby choosing a country where the topic of security currently plays a special role. The consultations were—in line with the format—comprehensive and, as is often the case with events organised by the "Foundation for Freedom", with a hybrid structure. They combined elements of different forms of organisation—seminar, conference, expert meeting, panel discussion, discussion forum, policy consultation, field trip. With this orientation, the overarching objective—collaborative learning—was met. This objective was also served by the interactive components (world café, speed dating) used alongside; they enabled the participants to recognise interrelationships; in addition, they ensured maximum communication and active involvement. In this way, informal discussions were also encouraged on the sidelines of the program, in which the participants could discuss in depth, in a smaller group, the issues that were only touched upon in the various forums of the consultation or were intentionally reserved for confidential exchanges.

With the meeting at Kharkiv, the Foundation also wanted to include those directly involved in the matter, namely the security of Ukraine, which was also what the meeting was all about. Accordingly, high-ranking representatives of the Ukrainian security establishment took part in the meeting; apart

from this, in keeping with the theme of security, the participants went on a field trip: to Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, two key places located not far from the front line in the war that the Kremlin is waging in Ukraine, against Ukraine. The consultations in Kharkiv were attended by representatives from 15 Eastern European countries, all of them were directly or indirectly dealing with the security policy as military or as politicians, as civil servants or as members of NGOs or even as former Defence Ministers. There were also representatives from Germany and the ALDE—the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in the European Parliament, which was represented in Kharkiv by a Danish politician.

All of them had come to discuss a key issue: the security of Eastern Europe and thus the security of Europe as a whole. Where is it threatened, in which field do the dangers lie? How can they be countered? And to which concept of security should one give preference—a narrow understanding that is limited to military, that is, defence policy, or a broad one that also includes economic, social and political dangers? How seriously should the worries of the Eastern Europeans, particularly of those who bear the responsibility in their countries, be taken? It became clear at the meeting in Kharkiv, people there *are* worried, and they are convinced that they have a good reason to be. How best to take account of their worries and how to counter the underlying dangers—these were questions discussed at the Kharkiv consultations.

Security: The danger from outside

As it became clear at the meeting, the farther in the East their countries lie, the greater the worries of the Eastern Europeans are. For this reason, at the Kharkiv consultations, the focus was on the power which had not been factored in since its decline in the early 1990s because the country had believed it was on its way towards a market economy and democracy and therefore to a good neighbourhood: Russia. From quite early on—this was pointed out by the participants from Ukraine as well as from the Baltic States, who had never trusted the Russian reforms—there had been signs that Russia was once again beginning expansion through power politics: in 2005, President Putin had termed the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century"; the President's address at Munich in the year 2007 precluded the departure of the Kremlin from the liberal model; and with the war against Georgia in 2008 Russia showed that it had set out on the path of revisionism. Those who still had doubts about this found themselves disproved in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and started a war against Ukraine, in Ukraine. All this, according to the participants at the consultations, was all the more worrying as the Kremlin claimed to be standing up for ethnic Russians, even though they were well beyond the borders of Russia, and that too by deploying armed forces.

Russian revisionism fits seamlessly into the fundamentally changed attitude of the Kremlin towards the West, which the participants of the Kharkiv meeting also saw: the West is again portrayed in Moscow as an opponent, as the enemy of Russia, which is denying the country its rightful place as superpower in world politics. Russia is—this impression has been purposefully conveyed by Vladimir Putin to the Russian society—a fortress threatened by the West and especially the USA. The President has put Russia into a state of mental siege. In keeping fully with the Russian-Soviet tradition, military power has again been assigned a pivotal role. These changed fundamentals of the Russian statehood necessitate an aggressive foreign policy: the Kremlin needs the fiction of external threats and the constant presence of war and violence in the language of politics and in the media, because only in this way can its own power be secured. It follows that Moscow's own interest in de-escalation is also limited, just like its willingness to enter arms control agreements with the West tends to zero: because the Kremlin does not want to allow its military power to be fenced in, but on the contrary, wishes to use it for its politics of intimidation.

The renewed expansion of the Kremlin through power politics, a conviction held almost unanimously by the participants, is not limited to the post-Soviet region realm in the narrower sense, that is, the former member states of the Soviet Union. Rather, as is meanwhile becoming more and more apparent, it also includes the states of Eastern Europe. It is time, so one hears in Moscow, to return to Eastern Europe and in particular to the Balkans. Especially in the Western Balkans, as one could hear

on the sidelines of the Kharkiv consultations, Moscow is seeking to fuel the resurgence of ethnic nationalism charged with religious extremism and to install a neo-Pan-Slavism draped in Orthodox Christianity.

Apparently, the Kremlin generally intends to revive the traditional Russian influence in Eastern Europe, wherever possible. To this end, economic power—especially having oil and gas at its disposal—is intended to be converted into political power, with the aim of anchoring Russia as a key factor in the politics of Eastern European countries, creating dependencies, and pushing back the EU, which has countered the ethno-nationalist destructive forces, virtually by itself till now. The Kremlin is all out to hold Europe captive in its disunity, in its constant conflicts. In this way, Moscow intends to realise its ultimate plan: eliminate Europe as an important political actor so that it cannot seriously counter what the Kremlin is doing today in Ukraine and will do tomorrow, perhaps, in other places, which it considers a Russian zone of influence.

The Kremlin meanwhile underpins its approach, the way all participants saw it, with a strong military component: the Russian armed forces have in large part been extensively modernised—a process that is still going on. Rapidly deployable, highly mobile brigades are stationed primarily in the Western part of the country, that is, in the neighbourhood of Eastern Europe; added to this is the Kaliningrad region, which is virtually brimming with weapon systems of all kinds, including nuclear-capable medium-range missiles. From here—as was pointed out in detail in the discussions on the sidelines—the Kremlin can, in the event of a war, disrupt or even prevent the entry of NATO troops on a large scale ("area denial"). This re-militarisation, together with the accompanying annual manoeuvres of the Russian armed forces aimed at Eastern Europe, thus build a potential, which the Kremlin can use for its own purposes. The Kremlin does not need to use this potential at all in concrete terms: Moscow regards its military as an instrument of intimidation and coercion, with which the opponent's—ultimately the European states'—fear of a serious conflict with Russia can be used to deter them from responding to a military advance by the Kremlin.

The same applies to the new kind of warfare—some participants however thought it was an old one, because the Kremlin had always engaged in it—the so-called hybrid war, which was discussed in detail at the consultation. The Kremlin has perfected its ability to wage war by any means other than military, and is increasingly using appropriate methods. Lately, they involve instruments of psychological warfare, with the help of which the Kremlin wants to win in its confrontation with the West without firing a single shot, which the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu, who was repeatedly quoted by several participants, called the supreme art of war. Here, Eastern Europe is the focus of the information war, which forms the core of the hybrid war, with the "Baltic sector" having special significance for the Kremlin. Through cyberattacks, smear campaigns and other forms of influence, the Kremlin seeks to shape the political consciousness in Eastern Europe in a way that suits it.

In this perspective, it was not surprising that participants took the view that Russia was already waging a war: against Ukraine—this was undisputed—and against the West in itself, in a hybrid form—some participants were more reserved about this. In any case, according to a prominent voice from Estonia, one thing is clear: in Eastern Europe, we are standing at the front line of democracy. And, like a participant from Ukraine stated in no uncertain terms and unchallenged: We are now in the middle of "Cold War II". Accordingly, Moscow cannot in any way be treated like a partner as before, but must be considered—as he worded it even more guardedly—a "rival". Russia is thus again perceived as a danger in Eastern Europe—especially by the forces from which the participants at the Kharkiv consultations originated: the liberal democrats.

Security: Dangers from within

The participants from the countries that have been and continue to be overrun by Russia through war and with military power, especially Ukraine, but even Georgia, saw security policy rather as a defence method, as an instrument to protect themselves from their violent neighbour. They put forward a rather narrow definition of security in this respect, while the vast majority of participants favoured a broad

definition of security, which included economic, social and political dangers.

The adherents of the broad definition of security emphasised that security had not only a military but also a civilian component. This follows from the mere fact that the dangers which Eastern Europeans are facing in their countries are not only military in nature, but also stem from the socio-political, social-economic sphere. If there are mistakes or even serious deficiencies here, the security of the state is immediately jeopardised. Corruption was mentioned by many sides as an example: it can become a bigger danger than the military threat from outside. The same applies to economic policy: if it disregards significant sections of the population, it could become a serious danger. As emphasised by the representatives of the European Liberals: it is not only the physical integrity of the country and people, which we defend. We want to protect and we must protect a society which is built on liberal values. Self-determination, human and civil rights, Rule of Law—these and other principles, which make up a liberal democracy must be defended; because they are the foundation of our security.

It was not difficult to recognise a criticism of the governments of individual Eastern European states, primarily Poland and Hungary, in these statements of the European liberals. In Hungary, as is well known, the Prime Minister is of the opinion that a state that consciously ignores liberal values and fundamental convictions could nonetheless be a democracy: an "illiberal democracy". This view was not shared in Kharkiv: the one who does not want to guarantee the democratic superstructure, that is, the institutions that protect the rights of citizens and their freedom—independence of the judiciary, the separation of powers in general, the freedom of expression and assembly, free and fair elections—is not a democrat. And "illiberal democracy"—that is a contradiction in itself. It mainly means one thing: a danger for the people in the country and therefore a threat to the security of the state and society; also because such a regime paves the way for the Kremlin, also and especially from the security policy point of view.

Thus, the participants gained an understanding which had apparently not been clear to all until then: the security of a country and its governing system cannot be jeopardised only by an external enemy. Rather, the danger can come from within the country itself. And not only that: the security of Eastern Europe can also be undermined in Western Europe, if one does not clearly commit to its defence or actually undermines it as a result. It was this kind of danger from within that was addressed at the Kharkiv consultations from the Eastern European side.

Why is Western and in particular, German politics emphasising with constant repetition that the "conflict" in Ukraine cannot be solved militarily? If this were indeed the case, then—as a voice from Ukraine said—one might as well save on the maintenance of armed forces. In any case, the Russian side shows that it considers a military solution definitely possible; it has demonstrated this in Syria; in Ukraine, only countervailing military power is preventing it from attempting the same even here. Moreover, the constant refusal of a large part of German politics to use a clear language and to call things by their names is undermining the security policy standing of Eastern Europeans. What is happening in Eastern Ukraine is not just a "conflict" or a "civil war"—as in the language constantly used in the West—but a *war*, which Russia is waging and allowing to be waged in Donbass. And hardly any Western politician has dared—this was a bitter statement by a Ukrainian participant—to call the current Russian aggression, like the one in 2008 against Georgia, exactly as it is: aggression. And instead of condemning it, the West regularly called for maintaining peace, not allowing provocation, and seeking a diplomatic solution. And there were always voices from Germany, now and then even from the liberal camp, which found excuses for the unacceptable behaviour of the Kremlin and called for understanding.

Another danger, which the participants from Eastern Europe, especially those from the countries in the immediate neighbourhood of Russia, saw was in the wrong assessment of the politics of the Kremlin, which was attributed to the Western countries, mainly Germany, France and Italy. The focus of the criticism was on NordStream2. With this project, the Kremlin wants to further increase the already high dependence of Europeans on energy sources from Russia in order to create an instrument for political influence and for a politics of threat, even extortion. In this perspective, how can one agree to the

construction of NordStream2? This was the criticism, mainly from Ukraine, but also from Poland and the Baltic States, which revealed, to put it mildly, a deep incomprehension of the German attitude. NordStream2 is not, as the leading German politicians would have us believe, a purely economic undertaking; rather, it is highly political in nature.

Ultimately, as it became clear in the course of the meeting, many Eastern Europeans, especially those from the post-Soviet realm, see themselves as jeopardised by the politics of important Western European countries, especially that of Germany, which they feel is a unilateral orientation towards Russia. Certainly, Germany bears a historical responsibility to Russia. Not only to Russia, but also and especially to Belarus and Ukraine as the first victims of the attack by the Wehrmacht, who had to suffer even more than the Russian heartland in the Second World War. This is apparently largely unknown in the German society as well as to the parties there; the government is doing nothing to rectify this. As a matter of fact—as a German participant noted—the Russian elites spurn every thought that Russia itself bears a historical responsibility towards the Eastern Europeans.

Security: The danger from the Net

What had previously been familiar only to experts became apparent to all at the consultations: new and hitherto unimaginable dangers to our security are coming our way. It is cyberspace that holds this potential. What the experts from Eastern Europe presented at the consultations in Eastern Ukraine on the possibilities of paralysing Eastern European countries and the West as a whole through attacks in the cybersphere defied the imagination of most participants. In the European societies, especially in Western Europe, everything is accessible via the Net: the financial system, utilities, that is, power and water works, hospitals, traffic monitoring and control, airports and railway stations, last but not the least, government and administration at all levels, just to name a few examples. And all these targets, as experts say, could be attacked in cyberspace. If this should happen, then the consequences would be terrible: The attacked country can be rendered inoperative.

The attacked party—in this case the state—can never find out with certainty from whom the attack originated: the problem of attribution has not been solved till today; whether it can be solved at all remained unanswered at the consultations. This gives the Kremlin—according to the realistic assessment of the Russian participant at the Kharkiv consultation—always the opportunity to attack in cyberspace, but at the same time to deny such an attack ("plausible deniability"). This, incidentally, was a phenomenon—as participants from Kyiv pointed out—which was also noticeable in Moscow's war against Ukraine: Both, during the occupation of Crimea and during the military expansion in Eastern Ukraine, the Kremlin acted and at the same time denied its actions.

Due to the asymmetry of connectivity, the West is particularly vulnerable: It is highly computerised, so it cannot disconnect from the network, while other countries could turn off the Internet without affecting their ability to function. These states would therefore have good attack options in cyberspace, but because of their robustness, they are hardly exposed to Western responses. Completely scary were the intimations of the experts that there could be an escalation in the cybersphere, which could lead to a conventional war. Or, even more serious was their intimation that launcher systems for strategic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads could be attacked via the Net—with catastrophic consequences.

Ukraine, Bulgaria and Estonia offer a first impression of the possibilities opened up by the cybersphere. In Estonia, there had already been attacks on government bodies as well as banks and media on the Internet in 2007; all signs suggested that they emanated from Russian originators. During the annexation of Crimea, according to the voices from Ukraine, the Kremlin attacked military bases as well as information and government systems of the country. Later, their election system, government websites, telephones and the accounts of MPs had been hacked. The peak had been reached at the end of 2015, when Ukrainian power plants were shut down via cyberspace, resulting in a temporary electricity outage. Lastly, in Bulgaria, there were attacks on the local elections in 2015 which could be attributed to Russia.

Is all this war? If one wants to influence the will of the other side through attacks in cyberspace, said a Bulgarian expert, then it is indeed war—a statement which is of significant importance in view of Article 5 of the NATO Statute and led to the demand: We must no longer tolerate any inappropriate activity in cyberspace! In any case, active cyber defence is needed also and especially in Eastern Europe. In the defence against attacks, *time* is a pivotal factor: cyberattacks take place so fast that one cannot wait for a long decision-making process for a response. Hence, provisions must be made and automated responses need to be enabled. But this raises the counter-question: in view of the impossibility of a clear attribution of attacks, can such a facility hold out against the demands of the rule of law? After all, it's about war and peace! One must start much earlier and design new systems with an eye on cybersecurity from the outset. All of this requires an extensive use of human and material resources and an appropriate action plan, if the efforts are not to remain stuck at the draft stage, as has been the case till now.

There was little said about Russia in all of these scenarios, but it was clear to all participants who was being referred to as the "other side" in cyberwarfare. They also shared the conviction that Russia is meanwhile assuming a much more aggressive cyber posture than before, based on the readiness imputed to the Kremlin by experts, to destroy Europe's critical infrastructure systems right from the beginning, in the event of a war, with the aim of taking away from the enemy, that is, the Europeans, the ability to fight.

Security, but from where?

The question put to the participants of the Kharkiv consultation—"A new security policy for Eastern Europe?"—elicited an almost unanimous answer: there cannot and should not be a security policy geared solely to Eastern Europe, just as there cannot be different security for Western and Eastern Europe. Security for Eastern Europe is thus conceivable only within an all-European framework. Therefore, one cannot call for any "new" security policy *per definitionem* for the Region, as no "old" security policy has existed till date for Eastern Europe. But then wherein lies the security for Eastern Europe, where do the Eastern Europeans assure themselves? This was what the Kharkiv consultations were all about, and this was what the question put to the participants ultimately aimed at. Just like membership in NATO is primarily the basis for the security for most Western European countries, the same is true for the eight Eastern European states that have joined the Alliance since 2004. In this respect there was consensus, but there were critical questions as to whether NATO is taking into consideration the specificities and needs of Eastern Europe adequately. Can the Alliance currently deter the Kremlin at all? Polish representatives had more than just doubts here. Their doubts were less about Donald Trump's statements, which questioned the alliance guaranty of Article 5, and more about the defence efforts of the Western European partners, which were regarded as inadequate.

The focus of the criticism was on Germany. Understanding for this came precisely from the German participants: actually, the constant reduction in defence budgets under the aegis of the peace dividends, since 1990, resulted in a unilateral disarmament in Western Europe and especially in Germany, with the result that presently, the country can no longer perform its duties—defending the country and the Alliance—to the extent necessary. Thus, Poland is currently undertaking the task of conventional deterrence almost on its own; it cannot remain this way. Germany must regain its defence capability; and this must also be the criterion for the fundamentally correct decision to increase defence budgets again, and not the rather abstract criterion of two percent of GDP.

Shortcomings of NATO in the field of strategy were seen primarily by the voices from Poland, but also those from Ukraine. The decision-making processes are much too lengthy, with potentially catastrophic consequences in case of an emergency. In general, the participants often had the impression that NATO currently does not have a clear strategy, not to mention the absence of political leaders, which the Ukrainians lamented about. This was how voices from Poland were also understood, who called for a "grand strategy" for the Eastern flank of NATO: it is where the Alliance is

facing wide-ranging challenges. If it fails there, then it will be the end of the Alliance. And in order to prevent this from happening, the Alliance's desired "grand strategy" must be backed up with military and political commitments so that it is credible, can fulfil its tasks and project stability to its neighbours. The deployment of four battalions in the Baltic States and to Poland is a step in the right direction. This is, according to the voices from Estonia and Lithuania, more than just symbolic politics. From now on, it is made clear that every Russian action immediately involves other NATO members.

What was lastly addressed and demanded here was a new NATO strategy for dealing with the changed threats. It has indeed been a long time, 7 years to be precise, since NATO last adopted a strategic document ("Strategic Concept"). And even this document has left a lot open. A lot has changed since then, in fact, almost everything: the European peace order created after the end of the East-West conflict no longer exists. In its place, war has returned to Europe. As a result, Europeans are gradually realising that armed forces are to be maintained not so much for interventions in other parts of the world—notwithstanding the importance of this task, but primarily for the defence of the country and the Alliance. How they should be used specifically in the case of defence, what should be built upon—deterrence or capability of waging war—all this still needs to be worked out.

It was noteworthy that, as the participants of the consultations reported, NATO has met with a much more positive response in Eastern Europe than is the case in Western Europe, where the forces on the Left side of the political spectrum—and not only there—often have a fractured relationship with NATO and the Alliance has a rather negative connotation in the political public opinion. The same is true with regard to the European Union: while little is known in Western Europe about its importance in terms of security policy, it was heard from the representatives of the Baltic states that the EU was also making a significant contribution to the security policy in Eastern Europe. The EU contributes to deterrence by following a clear policy of sanctions. These means of political defence—because that is what it is all about—have their effect, even without having to threaten with it. Looking at this effect, a suggestion that the EU should clearly spell out the sanctions that it would impose, if the Kremlin escalates further, was met with interest as well as approval.

But where do the Eastern European countries that are not members of the Alliance get their security from? This question raised yet another and perhaps currently the most important security policy problem. It relates less to Armenia and Azerbaijan, not even the non-aligned states in the Western Balkans, to which—as everyone at the Kharkiv consultations also agreed—a lot more attention will need to be paid in the future than ever, especially with regard to the security of all Europe. Rather, the question was aimed primarily at Ukraine and Georgia, both of which—though with little hope—are looking to the Alliance; and Moldova, which is not officially seeking membership in NATO, but is also calling for assurance, especially with regard to the still festering wound, Transnistria: How can the security be provided to these states? The political scientists were in demand here, and they readily opened their toolbox at the meeting: Membership in NATO and/or the EU; integration agreements with the EU preparing for full membership; non-alignment in the direction of neutrality ("Finlandisation") as part of a "grand bargain" between the West and the Kremlin; with regard to Ukraine, the granting of a specific ally status by the USA, within the framework of the "Major Non-NATO Ally" program; lastly, membership for the three problem states in an Eastern European security coalition with other states of the region between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea ("Intermarium")—these were the proposed solutions.

At present, all these possibilities, as the participants also saw, hardly have a future. Thus, as one of the best authorities on this matter analysed, things will probably remain in the "grey zone", in which the mentioned states were currently in: between NATO/EU and Russia, in a "geopolitical hole" without being able to count on any reliable security. What remains should be improvised and enable Kyiv and Tbilisi and perhaps also Chisinau, using all forces, to withstand the pressure from the Kremlin. In this way, with parallel and mutually reinforcing measures, the geopolitical grey zone of Eastern Europe can be made less grey.

Security through Success? The case of Ukraine

The future of Ukraine—that was ultimately *the* topic of the Kharkiv consultation. And this future is uncertain. Ukraine wants to stay on the path it has once taken towards Europe and take further steps in this direction. Above all else, Ukraine wants to do one thing: reinforce its independence, strengthen the economy and society, open up prospects of a better life for its people. All this stands in the way of Russia, or rather one should say, the Kremlin. A successful, extensively reforming Ukraine is seen as a threat in Moscow: because it would always remind people in Russia that a "Slavic brotherland" can also be governed differently than through authoritarian pressure and violence. Moreover, the Russian elites are largely incapable of imagining Ukraine as an independent state, let alone recognising it as such. Thus, they are also incapable of being good neighbours; for the Kremlin, Ukraine is not a neighbour, but part of the Russian world.

The Kremlin, as was heard at the consultations, has dropped its plans to bring Ukraine back, wholly or partially, by force, and thereby pushing revisionism to the extreme. Militarily, the Kremlin is perfectly capable of doing so, but it is not in a position to keep the country permanently, quite apart from the fact that in the event of a large-scale aggression, relations with the West would reach their end for a long time. Hence, after the annexation of the Crimea, the Kremlin has resorted to overrunning the two Eastern districts of Donetsk and Luhansk in order to keep its stranglehold on Ukraine, and loosen or tighten it at will. The aim is to prevent the country from consolidating itself as a sovereign functioning state and from moving towards the EU or even NATO. The Kremlin's calculations, as critical voices from Russia itself describe it, are to let the country and its society wear themselves out in their resistance and gradually make them ready for a return to the Russian orbit.

Even though participants at the consultations agreed with this assessment, they were clearly reluctant to join in the radical criticism of the Minsk Agreement (Minsk II) by the Ukrainian representative. The criticism was that this agreement has been written at the Kremlin and foisted on Ukraine as well as the West, that is, France and Germany. Russia had not entered into any kind of commitments. However, the obligations imposed on Kyiv by Minsk II were unreasonable and otherwise also impossible to fulfil. The West, nevertheless, saw the Kremlin as the guarantor of peace, instead of treating it for what it is, namely, the aggressor. In fact, this is the crucial shortcoming of the Minsk Agreement: Russia portrays itself as a neutral power, but in reality, it is behind the war, in fact waging it itself—without any interest in peace. And all of this, according to the participants from Kyiv, is being asked of a Ukraine that has distinguished itself for a long time in the world arena as a contributor to international security, for example, through its continuous participation in peacekeeping operations and, above all, through renunciation of its nuclear weapons in 1994, and wanted nothing other than to go in peace on their own way.

The reaction of the Kharkiv meeting to this unequivocal position was rather reserved. All were indeed aware of the fact that the Ukrainian participants, with their disappointment and their bitterness, were in the right. But what could they propose to the Ukrainians? Questioning Minsk II, which—the Ukrainians were right in this also—hardly anyone knew in detail, would have entailed proposal of a solution to the crisis—and nobody had such a solution. In this perspective, they confined themselves to making quite seriously intentioned, but hardly politically meaningful remarks such as security is indivisible; as a result Europe can neither be free nor prosper unless Ukraine regains control of its territory and, above all, its border with Russia.

Against this backdrop, the advice from the European Liberals as well the Estonian side, to strengthen the civilian component of security, however right it may be, appeared problematic: the Ukrainian government must certainly act against the corruption that is becoming rampant again, much the same way, the society must be strengthened to become immune to hybrid attacks, and the social issues must at least be addressed in order not to allow the longing for Soviet conditions to become overpowering. But how does one do all this, when the big neighbour is overrunning the country, through war, a hybrid and a real war; when the neighbour is doing all it can to destabilise the state and society and not allow peace? And if the Western partners of Ukraine do not want to deliver weapons

so that it can defend itself, nor do they make any serious and extensive attempts to support the country economically and socially, in the way it would be necessary for it to really make headway? These were the counter questions of the Ukrainian representatives. Their repeatedly stated belief was that the EU as well as the West as a whole had neither a clear strategy with regard to Ukraine and the war imposed on it, nor a convincing political leadership.

All the unresolved issues became even more urgent in the course of the field trip, to which the consultation proceeded in full attendance, farther into Eastern Ukraine, to Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, located at the front line of the war, which the Kremlin has forced on Ukraine. Here one could experience what being close to war means: Representatives of the military and civilian administration of the region explained their mission to ensure the lives of people and supplies to them in extraordinary circumstances; from the head of an NGO, the participants learned what is being done for the many internally displaced persons; and an investigative journalist, who had himself fled Donetsk, reported how he tries, for a Ukrainian television station, to give a voice to the people in the "grey zone" on both sides of the "line of contact", i.e. the front line.

Unusual was also the meeting with soldiers and officers of an airborne brigade, which apparently had originally been a volunteer unit and then had been transferred to the regular armed forces. The conversations with the soldiers were just as impressive as they were oppressive: these were not fascists or blinded nationalists, as Russian propaganda would have one believe again and again, but simple Ukrainians who want to defend their homeland. And they are ready to commit their lives and health to it. What this can mean, the group experienced on the last stop of their field trip near Sloviansk, where a building complex had been brought under artillery fire by the so-called separatists and been heavily damaged in 2014. The buildings are still standing, destroyed and empty, with no signs of reconstruction.

What had already become apparent during the discussions in Kharkiv finally became clear after this field trip: In its efforts to weaken Ukraine and to bring it back, the Kremlin has achieved exactly the opposite. Russia has lost Ukraine, some say forever. In the conflict with Russia, the Ukrainians have become a nation. They want to assert themselves. The Kremlin wants to prevent this. It is absurd: A success of Ukraine would be a blessing for the country. But it would be perceived as a curse by the Kremlin. Conversely, a failure of Ukraine would be considered a gain in Moscow. One should be careful with this word: but the blindness of the powers that be in Russia to the true needs of Russia must indeed be called a tragedy.

Security of Eastern Europe: What has to be done?

What can liberals do for the security of Eastern Europe and thus for the security of Europe as a whole? How can, how should liberal parties, NGOs and think tanks, whether in the region or beyond, align themselves with regard to this question? Before any action can be taken, a demand must first be fulfilled, like the FDP has meanwhile included in its political objectives: Think New. This demand is comprehensive and worded—rightly so—to claim universal validity; it can, and it must also be raised, especially with regard to Eastern Europe, and is directed primarily at Western Europeans, last but not the least, at the German Liberals.

What does that mean? It means, *first* and foremost: Western Europeans must engage with Eastern Europe. And that means: They must be ready to overcome their ignorance and first *get to know* Eastern Europe. They need to know what the Eastern Europeans stand for, what constitutes the societies of their countries, how they see themselves, how they locate themselves, what are they striving towards. They need to bear in mind that the independence of many of the states of Eastern Europe has a more recent or even most recent date. While the states in Western and Central Europe originate "from the depths of the times" (de Gaulle), the Eastern European states have emerged, in many cases, from the disintegration of realms, which existed until very recently. Today, these countries have—and this is what Western Europeans must internalise—*one thing* in common: they have to fight—for their independence, their identity and their social and economic future viability. But

they also have to fight against the lack of understanding and the narrow-mindedness of Western Europeans. Ultimately, it is the profound ignorance of the history and the present status of the Eastern European states, as can be seen in Western Europe, which threatens the security of Eastern Europe and therefore that of Europe as a whole. Thinking new means, first and foremost, including Eastern Europe in the political consciousness of the liberal forces of Western Europe and giving it the place it needs and deserves.

Secondly, and equally important: Western Europeans must get off the high horse of those who—confident of their canon of values—think with a paternalistic attitude that they know what the Eastern Europeans need to do and what not to do, although they often do not possess the necessary expertise and, above all, the education, with regard to Eastern Europe. It should always be borne in mind, what is obvious in itself, but is all too often forgotten: the people of Eastern Europe have been socialised differently than the Western Europeans over the last thousand years, with impact on the current situation, which can hardly be overestimated: even values such as tolerance and solidarity may be understood differently in Eastern Europe than in the West. In this perspective, it is imperative to put oneself in the mental state and historical conditioning of the people in Eastern Europe, because only then can one understand their actions and reactions.

Such a demand is constantly raised in Western Europe with regard to the people of Russia—and rightly so. In contrast, such demands are generally not made at all in the West of the old continent with regard to the Eastern Europeans; and even if such demands are made, they are often rejected, though Eastern Europeans are no less entitled to this than in the case of Russia. The people in Eastern Europe have their specific experiences. They should be respected, also and especially when the Eastern Europeans want to convey these experiences to their fellow-Europeans in the West. This respect is often lacking. As it became clear at the consultations, the Eastern Europeans find it painful, even offensive, when their constant warnings about the developments in Russia are dismissed in Western Europe, and especially in Brussels, as historically conditioned hypersensitivities and, therefore, as something to be brushed off as insignificant. These and other harmful developments can be avoided only if a dialogue is held with the Eastern Europeans, one that is worthy of being called a dialogue. And this equally means: if one listens to them—as equal partners. And this also means overcoming the differences, which naturally occur in such a dialogue, with the willingness to compromise.

Think new: This means, *thirdly*, countering the tendency to classify Eastern Europe only from a geopolitical point of view: as a buffer state, which should protect Western Europe from Russia. Such a view is fatal: because it excludes and does not do justice to Eastern Europe. The idea of a two-speed Europe would have the same effect, if implemented. With these and similar concepts, there is a growing danger that the East-West divide in the European Union, which has been noticeable for some time now, will deepen further. There is a threat of Europe being split into two classes. The refugee crisis can act as an accelerating element here: It fuels the fears of Eastern European societies and at the same time contributes to strong feelings against Eastern Europe in Western European societies.

Fourthly, state and society in Eastern and Western Europe—and this is where the New Thinking begins to turn into action—have to do their homework. This was the tenor of all statements made at the Kharkiv consultations, no matter where the participants came from. This demand is only seemingly banal. Ultimately, it includes everything that really needs to be done. First of all, it involves the containment of military threat and is aimed primarily at NATO: It needs a substantial collaborative effort by all its members in all areas, including cybersecurity, in order to regain defence capability where it has been lost. Only in this way can the inner strength for resistance be boosted, which has meanwhile become fragile. In so doing, liberals should vigorously pursue the idea of a European army that they have been advocating for a long time, all the more so, because the French president is already supporting concrete ideas in this regard. Furthermore, the EU is called upon to increase its engagement in Eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans and in Ukraine also, and especially with regard to the significance of the region from the security policy point of view.

Lastly, the liberals in Western and Eastern Europe—and this too is a part of their homework—should put into action concrete projects that will make it clear to the Eastern Europeans that the common Europe will also bring them tangible benefits. The imagination knows no bounds here. Where, for instance—just to indicate the direction—is the project for vocational education and training for the younger generation from Eastern European societies, who are suffering from lack of work? Where is the placement agency for skilled workers from Eastern Europe to the EU countries, where they are needed? These and other no less necessary projects are, on the one hand, appropriate for benefiting the people; on the other hand, they help shape the political consciousness of the Eastern Europeans in a way that can only serve the common European cause and thus the security of Eastern Europe.

Above all, it is about implementing the important takeaway of the Kharkiv consultation, its Lesson, so to speak: Security ultimately lies in the legitimation of the state and society, in their sustainability. This in turn is based on the success of the state, good governance and proper administration. Accordingly, the political agenda for the liberal forces in Eastern Europe is: fulfil the demands of the constitution, implement a state under the rule of law as well as a socially responsible state, lead the daily battle against the enemies of open society. Ultimately, these are the "troubles of the plains", which need to be understood and passed.

Fifthly, the liberals in both Eastern and Western Europe have to be accountable for who is confronting them on their eastern border in the person of Russia, what the Putin system is all about, what kind of goals it pursues. Only on this condition can Europeans—be they part of the elite or just citizens—recognise at all that the Kremlin is already engaged in a hybrid war against Europe and the West, which is understood as an enemy; only in this way can this attack be countered. In this context, emphatic words were directed at the participants of the consultations by the representatives of the countries that had the deepest experiences with their current neighbour, Russia: Ukraine, Estonia, Georgia. Anyone who wants to contemplate the security of Eastern Europe must first get a clear idea of Russia and its elites. And if Europe finds itself faced with the necessity to put up resistance, having the will to do so would be more important than having the weapons. One of the leading politicians of Estonia quoted Pericles: "The secret of happiness is freedom, but the secret of freedom is courage."

The quintessence of the Kharkiv consultations lies in the reminder that several participants of the meeting made: A precept of meaningful security policy is that one's own values must not only be carried on the lips; they must also be lived, always implemented in concrete terms, both internally and in relation to the outside world. This reminder, also addressed to the German liberals, is all the more appropriate because Germany, as a power at the centre of Europe, bears a special responsibility for the future of the European Union: The Germans must keep Western and Eastern Europe together and counteract the recent, significant increase in centrifugal forces. The German liberals are therefore called upon to do their utmost to advocate that Germany and the European Union invest in the stability of Eastern Europe and thus in the security of Europe.

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