

In view of the war in Ukraine and  
around Ukraine

## **Initiative Part II**

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

**Initiative Part II – Further Reflections on Containing and Overcoming the Ukraine  
War**

July 31, 2023

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## Initiative Part II – Further Reflections on “Containing and Overcoming the Ukraine War”

### Entanglements

The entanglements in and around Ukraine - a Gordian knot, as it were! In Greek mythology it is considered unsolvable. According to tradition, Alexander, later called the Great, succeeded in untying it with his sword. He cut through the knot and thus heralded his triumphal march in Asia. This is the common tradition, which is based on Plutarch.

But, there is a second, a different tradition<sup>1</sup> in which Alexander unties the Gordian knot through the "liveliness of his spirit", insofar as he recognizes the function of the drawbar nail<sup>2</sup> in resisting all traditional attempts to untie the knot and pulls out the nail.

Both traditions teach: In order to solve a problem of the magnitude of the Gordian knot, old paths must be left behind and new ones taken. But new paths lie first and foremost in ideas, and these mostly lie in the renaissance of ideas - **not** in their restoration - here in the renaissance of ideas to contain and overcome the Ukraine war. The strategies currently favored, however, seem to be following a path of the sword rather carelessly, which can only be qualified as predominantly restorative.

### The idea

“**One system, many countries!**”<sup>3</sup> The system: a comprehensive security architecture in which countries, states, etc., as autonomous territories, lose only **one** feature of sovereignty, the ability of waging wars - both offensive and defensive wars. On the other hand, this loss allows the autonomous territories to "have it their way" (nach ihrer Fasson selig zu warden) within the security architecture. A journey of a thousand miles, admittedly, a journey of constant "drilling of hard boards with passion **and** a sense of proportion" (Max Weber).<sup>4</sup> Unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive rather they are mutually dependent, constitutive for the *One system* as well as for the autonomous territories.

With regard to the functionality of the security architecture, however, difficulties are emerging that could reach the extent of a Gordian knot: in the necessity of an executive to which the monopoly on the use of force would have to be transferred, in the sense of a police force, for example. And - at a minimum - in a "unifying ethos, a kind of public spirit" **analogous** to Wolfgang Böckenförde's dictum: "Thought of in terms of the state, the liberal order needs a unifying ethos, a kind of public spirit among those who live in this state".<sup>5</sup> - a sense of community, which "cannot be guaranteed by means of legal coercion and authoritative commandment". At least not if the state "on a secularized level (does not) want to fall back into the claim to totality from which it emerged in the confessional civil wars."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the degrees of freedom of the *One system*, like those

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- 1) This tradition goes back to Lucius Flavius Arrianus, a Roman historian and politician. Arrianus is considered the most reliable historian of Alexander with regard to the history of events.
  - 2) The "Gordian knot" originally refers to the artfully knotted ropes on the chariot of the Phrygian king Gordios, which inseparably connected the drawbar and the yoke.
  - 3) In a reversal and loose reference to China's "one country, two systems", more precisely to Deng Xiaoping's original intention, in which the Special Administrative Regions were granted a high degree of autonomy with regard to domestic affairs up to and including customs and monetary policy.
  - 4) In German: ... des ständigen „Bohrens von harten Brettern mit Leidenschaft und Augenmaß zugleich“ (Max Weber).
  - 5) Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde in: Frankfurter Rundschau, November 2, 2010.
  - 6) Böckenförde is usually quoted as saying: "The liberal, secularized state lives on preconditions that it cannot guarantee itself", (in: State, Society, Freedom. Studies on constitutional theory and constitutional law. Frankfurt a. M. 1976, p. 60), more rarely, however, with the continuation: "As a liberal state, it can only exist, on the one hand, if the freedom it grants its citizens regulates itself from within, from the moral substance of the individual and the homogeneity of society. On the other hand, it cannot regulate these internal forces ... seek to guarantee these inner regulatory forces by means of legal coercion and authoritative command without ... on the on a secularized level into that claim to totality from which it led out of the confessional civil wars."

of the autonomous territories, cannot and must not be limitless for the sake of their functionality: With regard to Europe and illustrated by Böckenförde: with regard to the common sense "we are then indeed with sources such as Christianity, Enlightenment and Humanism. But not automatically with every religion."<sup>7</sup>

The dilemma - or, to remain in the metaphor - the knot could perhaps be solved in the insight, limitation is not only or solely *restriction*, but also and essentially *enabling* - an realization that finds its convincing symbol in Kant's dove, "which with a light beat of its wings divides the air, senses its resistance and thinks that if this resistance disappeared, then flying would be all the easier".

### The path

There can be no security without America, a saying that derives its substance from America's self-imposed mission to give the world a new order.<sup>8</sup> But also no security without China, which, according to its self-image, is returning to its rightful place in world history.

However, it is still true that there is no security without Russia. And certainly not against Russia! In view of a possible instability of Russia - which shares approx. 90% of the world's nuclear weapon systems with the US - not to a lesser extent, but to a greater extent. If the integrity of the country is in danger of being lost, military doctrine allows for escalation "to the extreme" (Clausewitz), i.e. the use of nuclear weapon systems. Will China be able to accept a disintegrating Russia with which it shares a border of over 4,000 km? Can Europe have an interest in a disintegrating or disintegrated Russia, if only for reasons of the proliferation of nuclear weapon systems that can probably no longer be halted? Not to mention the political price of the "blood toll" on Ukraine?

In the Europe of more recent times, the policy that set an example, which originated the Charter of Paris with its opportunity for a "peace and security order from Vancouver to Vladivostok" and led to the reunification of Germany.<sup>9</sup> - However, a stronger, even more revolutionary pattern is the struggle to end the European catastrophe of the Thirty Years' War, a pattern engraved with a **paradigm shift** in political thought and action.<sup>10</sup>

The European catastrophe, or the "German trauma", began in 1618 with a comparatively harmless incident in Prague and was brought to an end in 1648 in the Peace of Westphalia in the form of the "Westphalian System" - in negotiations in Münster and Osnabrück, in Westphalia, the historical landscape that gave the negotiation result its name. The paradigm shift is based, in the words of Henry Kissinger, on the "ingenuity" of the Westphalian system in directing "its provisions to **procedural matters** rather than to "substantive issues". Thus, each state recognized as a "subject of international law" could "preserve its own culture, politics, religion and internal structures" and was, according to the idea at least, protected by the system against external interference. This system, which the "seminal event" of the Peace of Westphalia spread as "a new concept of international order throughout the world", is itself coming to an end today.

Thus, the concept has to be adapted to new realities again and again<sup>11</sup> - without losing the ingenuity of the Westphalian system, nor the compass of **universally valid** values.<sup>12</sup> In the words

7) Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde in: Frankfurter Rundschau, November 2, 2010.

8) Documented on every 1-dollar note as "The Great Seal": "novus ordo seclorum", translated by Hannah Arendt as: "We give the world a new order."

9) Not least because the West and the politicians and diplomats involved took the "legitimate security interests" of the then Soviet Union seriously and said so, as President George Bush Sr. did, for example, in his speech in Mainz on May 31, 1989: "And so, **let the Soviets know** that our goal is not to undermine their legitimate security interests. Our goal is to convince them, step-by-step, that their definition of security is obsolete, that their deepest fears are unfounded." - Subsequent generations of politicians obviously only pretended to take the legitimate security interests, now of Russia, seriously, at least if one is to believe the interview of Chancellor Ms Merkel in DIE ZEIT of December 8, 2022 in the crucial passage: "And the Minsk Agreement in 2014 was an attempt to give Ukraine time. It also used this time to become stronger, as can be seen today."

10) See Henry Kissinger: Weltordnung, Bertelsmann, Munich 2014; cf. Herfried Münkler: The Thirty Years' War, Rowohlt, Berlin 2018

11) To new realities such as those of modern technology, the return of the constant struggle for territorial zones of influence, to finally risk the existence of humanity in the mission of universally felt values, or yet the existence of our civilization. With the adaptation to new realities, the question of the relationships between power, the means of power and ethics must also be posed anew, or posed again: "What will be if we continue to increase our technical power as we have done in the course of the last two centuries, but our previous morality, like its erosion, remains unchanged?" ("Ethics of Modernity", Basic Reflections of the CFvW Societies.)

of Kissinger a never-ending task of "statesmanship"<sup>13</sup>. On the way to the *One system*, this statesmanship could and would lead via regional orders, via orders of strong or potentially strong regions such as Europe, Asia and America, but would not dictate their "shape" to the respective autonomous regions. Instead, it would also keep the maxim of the *One system* in view for regional orders, flexible in the individual steps, but nevertheless unwavering: no more possibility of warfare, both in terms of offensive and defensive war.<sup>14</sup>

## Negotiations

As the tendency to Europeanize the Ukraine war has increased, it has become more and more accepted: "This war must not be frozen. ... It is not enough to prevent Ukraine from losing. It must be helped to win."<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, NATO, like the German Chancellor, is leaving it up to Ukraine - at least avowedly - with the goal and duration of the war when, where, with whom and under what conditions negotiations should be conducted.

But it is worth taking a look at history, and not only at the First World War,<sup>16</sup> but especially at the consequences of *carte blanche* and blank cheque at its beginning, and, at its end, to place the burden of "guilt and atonement" **on only one** of the participants, the obvious aggressor.<sup>17</sup> This is how negotiations were conducted in Münster and Osnabrück for at least four years **during** the Thirty Years' War.<sup>18</sup> "At least" as Münkler writes, because there was no official opening of the peace congress. "One slipped into the negotiations, as it were." In retrospect, this shows "the **political acumen** of the diplomats assembled in Westphalia, who 'at some point' simply began to negotiate," and in this way and thus set in motion a process "that then developed its own momentum".

Kissinger outlines this process and its dynamics by saying that some "two hundred delegates ... overcame (the) obstacles because they were united by the devastating experience of the Thirty Years' War and the determination to prevent a repetition of such a catastrophe".<sup>19</sup> However, Münkler is convinced, that the "breakthrough to peace would not have been possible with the means of congressional diplomacy alone". In the end, "only renewed warfare could bring about peace", the realization that "even for the powers that were successful in the theatres of war, France and Sweden, the continuation of the war meant such heavy burdens that it was also advisable for them to accept the compromises **that were on the table (!)**".

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- 12) General values such as truthfulness and reliability in contrast to universally felt values (such as those that have developed in the historical context of Europe with regard to democracy and human rights). The general validity is given in the same way to everyone who - analogous to the laws of mathematics - is capable of understanding it, but independently of everything subjective such as place and time of birth, wishes, inclinations and experiences.
- 13) Henry Kissinger: *Statesmanship*, Bertelsmann, Munich 2022
- 14) According to Kissinger, the development of organizational concepts for individual regions such as Europe can only take place "from within". In doing so, Kissinger does not explicitly support the dictum, but nevertheless in substance Böckenförde's calculation is that the functionality of a political entity, however constituted, is "**regulated by the moral substance of the individual and the homogeneity of society**", which cannot be prescribed.
- This functionality then enables relationships "between the regional orders" - with regard to the remaining "in-between states" and ideally in the line of the message Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's ring parable in "Nathan the Wise" - with the opportunity that is still virulent today to lift the humiliation caused by the Europeanization of the earth in a colonial style, for example as far as China is concerned, or which, when thought in the direction of Islam, turned conquerors into conquerors.
- In the parable of the ring, the judge gives the sons peace in the dispute over the real ring; they can compete to "show off the power of the stone in his ring", since according to hearsay the right ring is the one that has "miraculous power" to make people "pleasing to God and people" "with gentleness, with warm tolerability, with good deeds."
- 15) Mathieu von Rohr: Putin's final target. Editorial in DER SPIEGEL No. 24, June 10, 2023, p. 6: "The good thing is that Germany and its Western partners have now understood...".
- 16) See also Gerhard Althoff, Eva Krems, Christel Meier-Staubach, Hans-Ulrich Thamer [eds.]: *Peace. Theories, images, strategies from antiquity to the present*, Dresden 2019.
- 17) See Christopher Clark for example: *The Sleepwalkers*. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Munich 2014 and Herfried Münkler: *The Great War*. Rowohlt, Berlin 2013.
- 18) Cities that are almost 60 km apart. Not a small distance in the 17th century.
- 19) "None of whom went down in the annals of history as an outstanding figure," as Kissinger notes (*World Order*, p. 424). Nevertheless, with Münkler Maximilian Graf von Trautmannsdorf can be identified as the "actual designer of the Peace of Westphalia".

## Reason? Reason!

The Ukraine war - and not only this war - seems to confirm the Roman "*si vis pacem para bellum*": "who wants peace must be prepared for war". This will probably remain true as long as the concept of order of the One system has not been realized - **only that the wars should and must no longer be waged under the condition of modern technology!** Precisely because modern technology "can transform war into a total catastrophe".

"Who takes the sword shall perish by the sword"<sup>20</sup>. If we follow v. Weizsäcker, the consequence with regard to this biblical admonition is "**fundamentally different**" today than in **all** earlier times. After all, an escalation "to the extreme" (Clausewitz) may no longer be solely about the life and survival of the individual, or of individual groups such as families or tribes, or even solely about the life and survival of entire peoples and cultures. Rather, the very existence of humanity is at stake today.<sup>21</sup> Kissinger, referring to the horrors of the Thirty Years' War: "In our time, which is threatened by an even more ominous future, we must do what is necessary **before** we are overwhelmed by events." And that "*at a time when a possible outcome is not yet foreseeable.*"

Therefore, what can we do, what must we do? Return to "commonly applied reason", which starts with "just start negotiating" - **now!** Somehow, somewhere, **but just not about anything**. Rather about containing the war over / for Ukraine in the perspective of Ukraine's **and** Russia's security interests, finally overcoming it within the framework of international law in a reconciliatory peace, which - in a comprehensive pan-European security architecture - would also resolve the question of "guilt and atonement".

There are plenty of **reasons**<sup>22</sup> to do so: the energy and world food crisis, climate change, terrorism, migration - in global areas of tension such as "war and peace", "poverty and wealth, man and nature, democracy and world politics" (v. Weizsäcker). "The *archē kinēseos*, the first cause of movement," as Hans Jonas writes, "still lies in people and ultimately in concrete individuals," ultimately in the "liveliness of their spirit" (Sidereus Nuncius<sup>23</sup>). Also when it comes to unraveling the entanglements of the war in and around Ukraine. Thankfully, a Gordian knot is only inextricable in the Greek mythology.

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20) Luther Bible 2017; 1 Mo 9,6.

21) John F. Kennedy in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis in **1962**: "Above all, nuclear powers, while defending their own vital interests, must avert the kind of confrontation that would force an adversary to choose between a humiliating withdrawal or nuclear war. Such a course in the atomic age would only be proof of the bankruptcy of our politics – or of a collective death wish for the world."

Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker: "In the past, not always the peoples, but humanity did survive the largest wars that were technically possible at the time. War was a terrible but possible institution. It is still possible today, but it is not permanently survivable for them (humanity); it is necessary to overcome it as an institution." ... "The reason lies in modern technology, which can turn war into a total catastrophe."

Mikhail S. Gorbachev: "The world in which we live today is at a turning point. This affects all areas of life. What they have in common is that the scientific and technological revolution has spread to all parts of the world" ... "The emergence of nuclear weapons has the fundamental character of this Changes tragically underlined. ... The problem of survival and self-preservation of humanity has arisen on a grand scale."

22) There are also approaches to this, in CF v Weizsäcker's "world domestic policy", in China's global order concept of the "community of fate of all people", in the concept of "empire", for example.

23) Galileo Galilei: Sidereus Nuncius. News of new stars; stw 337 (Suhrkamp Paperback Science); Salviati p. 210: "I cannot admire enough the spiritual height of those ... who, through the liveliness of their spirit, did violence to their own senses, to such an extent that they were able to place what reason commanded above the most obvious contrary sensory impressions."