

Statement of the German Commission for Justice and Peace

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT PRESENTS A EUROPEAN CHALLENGE

The annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation, followed by the war in Eastern Ukraine, marks a deep turning point in the development of the peace and security order in Europe (EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe). It is therefore not only, but also a serious challenge for the common foreign and security policy of the European Union. In this context, the main emphasis is on the validity of international law and its fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states as well as the principles of the political order in the state, especially freedom and the rule of law. This is a serious challenge, because the violation of international law is not trivial. The European project of a co-existence based on rights, freedom and solidarity is under considerable pressure - both from within and outside.

Avoiding simplification, defending Ukraine's integrity, supporting democracy and the rule of law

The complex nature of the Russian-Ukraine conflict exemplifies the peace and security policy requirements European and German politics have to face. However, this complexity is rarely adequately reflected in the political debate. Individual aspects are often singled out and over-emphasized and associated with one-sided accusations. One side blames NATO alone the other side makes Russia or the Russian Government solely responsible. Such constrictions hinder an adequate understanding of the conflict and its dynamics. It is important to make people aware of the different historical influences and largely unprocessed experiences from the period of block confrontation, which play a role which is hard to overestimate in European perceptions of the Russian-Ukraine conflict, and to bring them into discussion. In addition, the cultural and religious dimensions of the conflict are all too often underestimated, especially in the West.

This misjudgement strengthens the illusion of being able to adopt an equidistant attitude towards the conflicting parties, thanks to which one is not involved in the conflict itself. This political temptation to deceptively avoid conflict must be countered. We therefore clearly em-

phasise the need for a policy of solidarity with the Ukrainian people, insofar as it advocates Ukraine's integrity - including the control of the Russian-Ukrainian border by Ukraine - and its peaceful transition to a democratic and liberal state governed by the rule of law. Emergency humanitarian aid measures are urgently needed to alleviate the effects of refugee flows in the country. European policy for Ukraine also includes the requirement not to allow discrimination against the part of the population with Russian origin. The European Union is also called upon to strongly support the fight against widespread corruption, not least because it jeopardises both the economic and constitutional development of Ukraine. A European Community that fails to take sides with those who are fighting for the European idea gives itself up and loses its credibility. A joint action against the "shrinking space" for civil society actors in Russia and parts of Ukraine is therefore advisable. In its efforts to curb violence in Eastern Ukraine and to initiate a political solution, the OSCE whose activities should be backed up by a blue-helmet mission is of increased importance.

Strengthen the European dialogue, build trust, and promote encounters

In the decades of the Cold War, churches have persistently tried to make use of gaps in the Iron Curtain and to build bridges between West and East. Their experiences and abilities, their initiative and patience are in demand again in the changed constellation of the present time. Although the Russian-Ukraine conflict seems to be frozen at the moment and the war in Eastern Ukraine is barely attracting public attention, it would be a mistake to consider the danger to be overcome. This requires a long-term commitment at many levels, the main objective of which must be to renew the lastingly destroyed trust between Russia and the West without denying the existing differences. Trust-building is indispensable and it takes a lot of patience. A short- or medium-term solution to the Russian-Ukraine conflict is not to be expected.

For the German Commission for Justice and Peace the following points are of particular importance:

- a) We strongly urge to intensify exchanges within the EU on the multifaceted dimensions of the conflict and the differences in its interpretation. In addition to shared interests and values, its ability to act is essentially based on a common understanding of the specific nature of the challenges. The plurality that characterises Europe demands a consciously practised multiperspectivity that cannot simply be dissolved from a superordinate point of view, but only in a consensus that takes account of different experi-

ences. However, this does not in any way mean to renounce one's own point of view and to give up the understanding that an agreement on fundamental principles and rules of coexistence is necessary. With a view to creating robust bases for dialogue, to curb the information war and to deal with intra-European authoritarianism, it is necessary to safeguard the contemporary historical facts concerning the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

- b) We consider it questionable in principle to delegate the EU's debate on the Russian-Ukraine conflict mainly to a number of member states, as has largely been the case so far. The EU's policy needs a broad support by society and must be backed by the main European institutions, in particular the European Commission and, on behalf of European societies, the European Parliament. The consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict affect the EU as a whole. In this conflict not only Ukraine's future path is being negotiated, but also the future of the European project.
- c) The Commission for Justice and Peace as a church actor is convinced that persistent encounters and exchanges have considerable potential for long-term understanding and reconciliation. These must be used systematically and patiently. The more fragile political relations become, the more strong and crisis-proof ties are needed. The common faith and the various connections and relationships of trust between the churches have a lot to contribute here. The reliable strengthening and the development of church and civil society networks must be promoted with a view to overcoming the Russian-Ukraine conflict.

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