

Press release: The German-Ukrainian Historians' Commission on the Russian War of Aggression against Ukraine

This morning, Russian President Putin declared war on Ukraine. Russia's attack is inflicting incalculable suffering on Ukraine. The war is a catastrophe for Ukrainians and at the same time an attack on the fundamental values of Europe and the United Nations.

Putin's war of aggression is part of a strategy to establish a Russian-dominated imperial order in Eurasia. The fundamental values such as respect for territorial integrity and the renunciation of violence, to which Russia has committed itself internationally, are thus being trampled under foot.

The instrumentalization of history plays a prominent role in Putin's war rhetoric that accompanies the attack. It is outrageous and turns history on its head that Putin invokes a goal like "denazification" in his war. Regarding the historical myths used by Putin, the German-Ukrainian Commission of Historians once again states:

Ukraine is a European nation. Many European nations share an intertwined history of common rule with their neighbours, dating back to the Middle Ages and the early modern period. An example of this is the history of Germany and France, which goes back to the Frankish Empire, or the history of Germany and Austria. Due to the historical Russian-Ukrainian ties, Putin today questions Ukraine's nation-statehood and thus resumes the tradition of anti-Ukrainian policy of the late Tsarist Empire. This is a throwback to the imperial age. The underlying way of thinking is extremely dangerous for the hard-won peace in Europe after 1945 and must be a thing of the past in 2022.

Nation states are sovereign and have the right to freely choose alliances. The fact that Ukraine is now independent and sovereign goes back to a decision by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in 1991 to dissolve the Soviet Union together. There are no treaties restricting the choice of alliance between Ukraine and other East-Central and Eastern European states. The claim that Russia has been given a binding assurance by NATO or individual Western states that Eastern European countries will be excluded from joining NATO is a myth.

The foundations of a responsible, forward-looking policy were formulated in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and in the Charter of Paris in 1990, which were also signed by Moscow. European policy must not fall behind these principles. The European states, together with the United States, must resolutely counter Russian aggression against Ukraine. There must be no "business as usual" as after the continuing Russian occupation of Transnistria/Moldova (1991) and South Ossetia/Georgia (2008).

Putin's historical argumentation is amateurish and does not stand up to scientific criticism. However one judges them, in no case should the past be used to justify a policy of military aggression today. In view of the threat to Ukraine, we call on the German and Ukrainian governments to take active steps to strengthen Ukraine's security. After Russia has violated the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, it is necessary to take measures towards Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

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