

# Russia's Attack on the European Security Order: Germany Must Act

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*Open Letter by 73 German Experts on Eastern Europe and International Security to the Government and Political Parties Represented in the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany.*

*(The piece is first published in German by "Zeit Online")*

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Massive, threatening troop concentrations on Ukraine's eastern and southern borders, intense anti-Western propaganda attacks that do not shy away from lies, as well as patently unacceptable demands on NATO and its member states: In recent weeks, Russia is fundamentally questioning the security order that has been in place in Europe since the end of the Cold War. In its international self-portrayal, Russia presents itself as a threatened state that urgently needs "security guarantees" from the West. The Kremlin is deliberately shifting the meaning of the concept of security assurances. The need for such guarantees has been discussed since the negotiation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968 regarding the protection of non-nuclear-weapons-states and not of nuclear-weapons-states.

There are now more atomic warheads stored in Russia than in NATO's three nuclear-weapons-states – the United States, Great Britain, and France – combined. Moscow maintains a wide range of delivery systems for its thousands of nuclear weapons, from intercontinental ballistic missiles to long-range bombers to nuclear submarines. It has one of the three most powerful conventional armies in the world, as well as veto power in the UN Security Council. The Russian Federation is thus one of the militarily most secure states in the world.

The Kremlin uses regular and irregular troops, as well as Russia's nuclear threat potential, to wage various wars and permanently occupy territories of former Soviet republics. Not only in Eastern but also in Western Europe as well as on other continents, the Kremlin unabashedly demonstrates a claim to special rights to enforce its interests on the territory of sovereign states. Circumventing international rules, treaties and organizations, Moscow hunts its enemies around the world. The Kremlin tries to undermine electoral processes, the rule of law and social cohesion in other countries with propaganda campaigns, fake news, and hacker attacks, among other things. The latter is done partly in secret, but with the obvious goal of obstructing or discrediting democratic decision-making in pluralistic states. In particular, the political and territorial integrity of democratizing post-Soviet transition states is to be undermined.

As Europe's largest economic power, Germany has been watching these activities critically but largely inactively for three decades now.

In Moldova, Moscow's imperial revanche began as early as 1992, immediately after the collapse of the USSR, with an armed intervention by the 14th Russian Army. Its remnants are still officially in Transnistria today, despite repeated demands by democratically elected Moldovan governments to withdraw and corresponding promises by the Kremlin. Neither to this nor to the following numerous revanchist adventures of Russia in the post-Soviet space and beyond, the Federal Republic reacted adequately.

Moreover, Berlin's foreign and foreign economic policy has contributed to the political and economic weakening of Eastern European non-nuclear-weapons-states and to the geo-economic strengthening of an increasingly expansive atomic superpower. In 2008, Germany's role was central in preventing Georgia and Ukraine from joining NATO. In 2019, on the other hand, the German government pursued the readmission of the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, even though Moscow had not and has not fulfilled any of the conditions for this highly symbolic act.

For the already fragile Ukrainian-Russian relations, the commissioning of the first Nord Stream gas pipeline in 2011-2012, entirely superfluous in energy-economic terms, was a disaster. In retrospect, it appears to have paved the way for Russia's invasion of Ukraine two years later. Much of the existing gas transport capacity between Siberia and the EU was not used in 2021. Nevertheless, the Federal Republic is now preparing to completely eliminate Ukraine's remaining economic leverage over Russia with the opening of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

The EU's economic sanctions against Moscow since 2014 have been mild and not a sufficient response to the Kremlin's increasingly aggressive course. Against the backdrop of continued German-Russian special relations, German developmental, cultural and educational cooperation with Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova creates the impression of being a mere sale of indulgences in Eastern politics. It does not diminish the significance of serious missteps in German policy toward Russia, such as the invitation to Putin to speak the Bundestag in 2001 or the Modernization Partnership from 2008 onward. These and similar German decisions suggested that Moscow has special rights in the post-Soviet space against the backdrop of then and now unwanted Russian troops in Moldova and Georgia.

Putin's attack on Ukraine in 2014 seems an almost logical consequence in light of the preceding twenty years of German political passivity vis-à-vis Russian neo-imperialism. The popular German formula of *Annäherung durch Verflechtung* ("rapprochement through interdependence" or "approximation through entanglement") for Berlin's cooperative approach towards Moscow has acquired a tragicomic meaning. There has been a geographic convergence of Russia's sphere of influence with the Eastern borders of the EU.

The Kremlin now also questions the political sovereignty of countries like Sweden and Finland. It is calling for a ban on possible future NATO membership not only for post-Soviet but also Scandinavian countries. The Kremlin is scaring the whole of Europe with "military-technical" reactions should NATO not - according to Putin - "immediately" respond to Russia's far-reaching demands to revise the European security order. Russia is threatening military escalation if it does not receive "security guarantees" - that is, permission for the Kremlin to suspend international law in Europe.

Against the backdrop of such distortions, Germany should finally abandon its special Eastern political path.

The current policy is not only perceived as peculiar in Central Eastern Europe.

The crimes of Nazi Germany on the territory of today's Russia in 1941-1944 are not suitable to justify contemporary German restraint in reacting to the revanchism and international legal nihilism of the Kremlin. This is especially so when - as in the case of Ukraine - the matter is a Russian invasion of the territory, recognized under international law, of another victim nation of former German expansionism. The continued demonstrative Russian violation of UN, OSCE and Council of Europe fundamental principles, also officially accepted by Moscow, in Eastern and now also Northern Europe must not be tolerated.

The Federal Republic's Russia policy must be fundamentally corrected. Further merely verbal or symbolic reactions by Berlin to Russian revisionist adventures will, as in the past, only tempt the Kremlin to further escapades. Germany has a special responsibility as a key country of the EU, NATO and Western community as a whole.

In the interest of international security, European integration and common norms, Berlin must finally close the gap between its public rhetoric and real practice in Eastern Europe. This should be expressed in a series of parallel and concrete measures of a political, legal, diplomatic, civil-societal, technical, and economic nature. Germany is a major trade, research, and investment partner of both Russia and the EU Eastern Partnership states, as well as a leading power of the European Union. It has more, indeed in certain areas far more opportunities to get something done than most other Western countries. This is true both in terms of containing and sanctioning Russia and with regard to supporting states dismembered and harassed by Moscow. Berlin must follow up its good words with more and more effective actions than it has done so far.

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