



The War in Ukraine – a Catastrophe for the People in Ukraine and for Peace in Europe

What began as social and political protests two and a half years ago has since developed into an armed confrontation between Ukrainian troops with Western backing on the one hand and separatist forces with Russian support on the other. Estimates of combatant and civilian casualties lie somewhere between 6,000 and 50,000. Findings of WHO and UNHCR suggest that it is predominantly women, children and the elderly who are bearing the brunt of war – a phenomenon frequently observed in contemporary wars.

The Ukrainian health system, already under pressure before the outbreak of violence, and suffering from limited resources and lack of health personnel, is struggling to provide health services to the local population, while at the same time treating the injured and the estimated 1.1 million internally displaced people.

The situation is especially catastrophic in Eastern Ukraine. In the regions controlled by separatists, the population is cut off from government social services that cannot be adequately replaced by local authorities. UNHCR estimates that about 675,000 people have already fled the country. Of these, about 540,000 have sought refuge in Russia and 80,000 in Belarus.^{1,2}

What is most urgently needed now is neutral international involvement (for example humanitarian aid from ICRC or the United Nations) and an immediate cessation of fighting. Support for any diplomatic efforts to achieve cease-fires is essential. Cease-fires are a prerequisite for a political process as well as a non-violent and fair reconciliation of the legitimate interests of all sides and can serve as a foundation for proper peace negotiations. We know from past wars that cease-fires frequently cannot be completely immediately implemented. However, this should not be used to discredit negotiations.

1 <http://unhcr.org.ua/en/2011-08-26-06-58-56/news-archive/1471-unhcr-delivers-aid-in-luhansk-as-conditions-in-eastern-ukraine-continue-to-worsen>

2 <http://www.unhcr.org/54d49d549>

Internationalisation of the conflict and the danger of nuclear escalation

The German affiliate of IPPNW is extremely concerned about the international dimension of the war in Ukraine and the confrontation between Russia and NATO, two nuclear powers. Instead of practising strict deescalation, both sides are currently issuing military threats and are contributing to further escalation of the war – through belligerent propaganda; through military manoeuvres in the Black Sea, the Baltic states and the Arctic Ocean, some of which even involve nuclear-capable forces; through the delivery of arms to both sides of the conflict; and through military advice and training. On top of all this is the controversial separation of Crimea from Ukraine and its integration into the Russian Federation – a move held by many to be illegitimate under international law.

Meanwhile, NATO is fuelling the conflict by deploying US troops in Eastern Europe, holding provocative parades right next to the Russian border, planning six new military bases in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria as well as missile defense posts in Romania and Poland and creating a Rapid Response Force for Eastern Europe, in which Germany will play a substantial role.^{3,4}

This mutual show of force is especially threatening due to the very real danger of a deliberate or accidental nuclear escalation. The declaration by Vladimir Putin that he would have been ready to put the Russian nuclear arsenal alert during the Crimean takeover and that he informed his “Western colleagues” about this, shows how dangerous the situation has become.⁵ Until today, Russia and the US have a total of about 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert. They can be launched in a matter of minutes and could cause a global catastrophe.⁶

In January 2015, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists found the current state of world affairs to be so threatening that they moved the Doomsday Clock forward from five to three minutes before midnight – the closest the clock has been to midnight since 1984, when relations between the US and the USSR had reached a low point. IPPNW's declaration from that time still holds true today: There is no meaningful medical response to the use of nuclear weapons.

The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons were the topic of an international conference in Vienna in December of 2014 and were poignantly described by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.⁷ The use of nuclear weapons by the US or Russia would threaten the very survival of mankind.

Moreover, the danger exists of a severe accident taking place in one of Ukraine's 15 nuclear power plants due to the continuing armed conflict – a threat which is often underestimated. The Zaporizhia Power Plant – with six nuclear reactors – is located a mere 250 km from the besieged city of Donetsk. A military strike on a single nuclear facility would have severe consequences for the environment and the population.

3 Declaration of the NATO summit 2012, point 59: "Missile defense can complement the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence; it cannot substitute for them. This capability is purely defensive."

4 http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ground-Based_Midcourse_Defense

5 Interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the documentary "The Path to the Motherland" from March 15th, 2015. http://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/59195

6 <http://www.ippnw.org/nuclear-famine.html>

7 <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nuclear-weapons-ending-threat-humanity>

A new arms race

The Ukraine crisis is affecting international disarmament efforts as well as the basic pillars of the European security structure, such as: the NATO Russian Founding Act, which contains a clause that prohibits stationing nuclear weapons in new NATO member states; the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), to whose joint consultative group Russia recently suspended its participation; and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), which prohibits the production, testing and deployment of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.

It is a fact that there have been no disarmament talks between Russia and the US since 2010. Instead, both NATO and Russia are investing billions into the modernisation of their nuclear arsenals, including the US B-61 nuclear bombs deployed at the German airbase in Büchel, which are supposed to be dropped by German pilots in the case of nuclear war. The decision by the German Bundestag to obtain the removal of these weapons from German soil is no longer being pursued – according to Foreign Minister Steinmeier this is because of the crisis in Ukraine.

Indeed it is due to the current crisis that deescalation is needed now more than ever. Not despite it, but because of the renewed confrontation between NATO and Russia, nuclear disarmament in Europe is more pressing than ever before. Instead, NATO member states have announced at their 2014 summit in Wales substantial increases in their military expenditure for the coming years.⁸ And Russia is also spending record sums on modernising its military. In light of the Ukraine crisis, any military buildup must be understood as threat of escalation.

Meanwhile, Russian media are reporting a new generation of sea-launched cruise missiles with a range of 1,500 km. Because these missiles would be deployed on naval vessels, they would not fall under the provisions of the INF Treaty. According to Russian sources, this development is a response to the NATO threat. Regardless of whether these reports are in fact true or not, these developments show that we seem to be entering a new round of the arms race, with a completely new quality.⁹

Causes of the conflict and the necessity for non-violent conflict resolution

It is important to end the violence in Ukraine and return to internationally-accepted forms of non-violent conflict resolution – not just for the sake of the people in Ukraine, but in the interests of global peaceful cooperation.

The violent confrontations in Eastern Ukraine have several, multi-dimensional causes. Besides the historical fault lines between diverse nationalities in Ukraine and the rise of nationalist movements, fundamental socio-economic tensions already existed since the beginning of the 1990's due to the privatisation of former state property, as well as rivalries between different

⁸ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112985.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁹ In March of 2015, Russia announced military investments of up to 300 billion until 2020; ten Iskender missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads, are stationed around Kaliningrad; test-battalions near the Ukrainian border; more NATO maneuvers than at any other time since the Cold War; 18 instead of 2 fighter jets over the Baltic Sea; parade of US heavy weapons in the Estonian-Russian border town of Narva; US plans for 2016: new weapon shipments to Latvia, Poland and Romania for 4,000 soldiers; weapon delivery to Ukraine from Lithuania and Canada; a promise of military aid of around 120 million US Dollar

groups of oligarchs who each claimed influence on the media and politics. On top of this, internal conflicts have been deliberately fuelled over many years by regional and international actors outside of the country.

The final spark that lit the current geopolitical conflict was the decision by Ukraine's former president not to sign the Ukraine–EU Association Agreement at the end of 2013. The attempt to bind Ukraine's economy exclusively to the EU ignored the interests of the Ukrainian population. However, the EU denied that Yanukovich's refusal to sign the agreement was rational in terms of domestic policy and blamed it entirely on Russian interference. The desire of the people on Maidan Square to escape their desolate economic situation through a leap to the West was fuelled by promises of prosperity, which the EU could at that point not even uphold for some of its Southern members. In addition, the EU and the US were deeply involved in the protests in Kiev from the very beginning. After the escalation of violence and the chaotic regime change in February 2014, the delegates of the Ukrainian parliament ratified the Ukraine–EU Association Agreement and President Poroshenko signed it into force – all of this just one month before elections were brought forward. The country's neutrality, enshrined in the constitution of 1996, was abandoned by parliament in December 2014 in order to make way for NATO membership.¹⁰

In this complex situation, the levels and lines of conflict should not be simplified. The parties to this conflict are sometimes composed of very diverse groups. Differing approaches to the conflict by the EU and the US attest to divergent interests, as do the conflicting politics of Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and President Poroshenko. The Russian administration seems to be less and less capable of asserting military and political influence on the militias in Eastern Ukraine and Western Ukrainian militias are partly engaged in operations without orders from the government in Kiev. While a large part of the Russian population apparently backs its government's policy on Ukraine, there are also, just as in the West, divergent views and interests.

The European House requires cooperation

The German affiliate of IPPNW welcomes attempts by the German government to promote diplomatic initiatives aimed at ending the armed conflict. In contrast, we reject sanctions and advocate their suspension, as they do not contribute to a peaceful solution of the conflict but only intensify the confrontation. We see the Minsk Agreement, to which the German government contributed, as a chance to end the bloodshed and bring about a peaceful solution to the Ukraine conflict.

The US plan to set up a missile defense system in Europe, as well as the steady eastward expansion of NATO and EU have both contributed significantly to a justified Russian suspicion of the intentions of the Western alliance. Added to this is the Russian perception of a military imbalance, as NATO and the US possess superior conventional military capabilities and, due to their “prompt global strike” capability, decidedly more options for intervention than Russia.

Peace and security in Europe are only possible in cooperation with Russia, not in opposition to it. All European states, including Russia, have a legitimate need for security. We should return to the concept proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev and former Minister for Special Affairs of

¹⁰ A military partnership treaty was already signed with NATO in 1997.
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm?selectedLocale=en

Germany, Egon Bahr, that we all should live in a common "European House" and that we require a common security architecture.

NATO has to make it absolutely clear towards Russia that it does not intend to corner or encircle it and it has to take back previous steps into this direction. We reject the eastward expansion of NATO as well as its interventions and troop deployments in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East, as they are not compatible with policies geared towards peaceful cooperation. Although the path of dialogue will surely not be an easy one, in the end it is the only one that can lead to real peace. There can be no military solution to the confrontation between NATO and Russia or to the conflict in Ukraine.

What IPPNW Germany is doing

It is a central goal of IPPNW to raise awareness about nuclear weapon policies and the current threats to existing arms control treaties, and to mobilise a broad public movement against the subsequent dangers. To this end, we are participating in protests at the German nuclear weapons base in Büchel, actively taking part in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), supporting a ban on all weapons of mass destruction and encouraging all diplomatic efforts to deescalate the new East-West confrontation.

In order to be able to issue a realistic assessment of the situation, German IPPNW has analysed background information, the different levels and root causes of the conflict. As a German peace organisation, our main focus lies in pointing out the possibilities of the West to contribute to deescalation. IPPNW Germany therefore directs its demands primarily at the German government and its allies, but of course also addresses all other parties of the conflict. With international action like the social media campaign "We refuse to be enemies", we try to create a visible signal and to give a voice to the peace-loving majority.

Demands of German IPPNW:

- We demand from all sides an immediate end to the fighting and implore all external actors to stop supplying the conflict parties with weapons and military advice, cease military maneuvers, renounce any implicit or explicit threat of using nuclear weapons and abstain from any further build-up of arms.
- We demand the adherence to the Minsk cease-fires and demand guarantees that these are continuously verified. Setbacks in their implementation must not be used to undermine further negotiations.
- We demand that people who have opposed the war through political activism, obstruction of recruitment, draft dodging and desertion be officially recognized as political refugees and granted unbureaucratic asylum.
- Immediate humanitarian aid must be provided in sufficient measure by the International Red Cross and UNHCR and must be permitted by all parties to the conflict in order to mitigate the catastrophic situation, especially in Eastern Ukraine.
- We demand an end to the sanctions, which have led to an entrenchment on the political level and have been a burden to the general population, both in Russia and in the EU.

- Priority should be given to securing existing pillars of the European security structure, especially the NATO Russian Founding Act, the CFE and the INF treaties.
- There is an urgent need to restore the interrupted channels of communication and security mechanisms between Russia and NATO, which were able to prevent misunderstandings between the two sides during the Cold War. In light of the continuing nuclear danger, their existence could be vital for billions of people.
- In the long term, we demand a resolution of conflicts through the consideration and fair reconciliation of the legitimate interests of all parties. Military alliances such as NATO cannot be expected to promote such non-violent and fair reconciliations of interests, but obstruct them. For this reason we demand their dissolution.
- We demand a comprehensive news coverage that does not only present one side of the story. This demand is not only addressed to the German media, but to the media of all sides. Different positions and perspectives must be heard and taken seriously and must not be discredited.
- Ukrainian society must have the liberty to enter fair economic relations with any state it chooses. These relations should serve the prosperity of the entire population, not just certain groups, classes or regions. In our opinion, a political and military neutrality of Ukraine would be the most suitable solution to the current confrontation.
- Civil society must be permitted to develop freely and without outside interference and should be able to start independent local projects in order to promote and secure peace, e.g. projects that support deserters, aid reconciliation efforts or deal with the radicalization of society through fanatic nationalism and armed struggle.
- We ask everyone to participate in regional and international campaigns such as the social media campaign “We refuse to be enemies”.

We ask everyone who wants to contribute to peace to join the demonstrations around the Day of Liberation May 8th-10th and the 70th anniversary of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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