Statement by the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK) on the Russian attack on Ukraine

February 25, 2022

The Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University condemns Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine, an attack based on brazen lies. The war is another stage in the effort of President Putin and his close circle of former and current intelligence officers, associates and friends to secure the authoritarian and kleptocratic system they have established against internal or external challenges. Internally, this includes the criminalization of any kind of criticism. Externally, NATO's eastward expansion and the false argument of a "breach of promises" are used as a pretext to restore Russia's imperial possessions lost between 1990 and 1992 by the use of military force. The "threat" perceived by the Kremlin is not primarily a military one, but rather of a political, economic, and social nature. It consists in the "danger" of developments towards the establishment of democratic, law-based systems, with a market economy and an active civil society that could spill over into Russia and its neighboring countries. Accordingly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only an attack on a country where millions of Russian speakers live under the conditions of freedom and democracy but also an attack on the principles enshrined in the 1990 Paris Charter.

The consequence of the Russian policy of power and aggression is the destruction of the European Peace Order – a danger that ISPK has repeatedly pointed out but that has consistently been ignored in German political circles. ISPK has also warned of the concrete danger of a Russian war against Ukraine and the Baltic states.

This invasion could perhaps have been avoided if the governments of Germany and France had not over the past 15 years entertained the illusion that Russia was interested in partnership with the West. Since Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, it has been clear that Russia has no interest in such a relationship. At the latest after the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of eastern parts of Ukraine by Russia in the spring of 2014, it should have become apparent to Berlin and Paris that Russia was seeking confrontation with the West, while consistently expanding its military power in order to use force and the threat of its use to change the European status quo in its favor.

Despite clear warning signs, the German government failed to take the emerging dangers to Ukraine (but also the Baltic States) seriously and refrained from taking the necessary steps to build up and strengthen NATO to deter Russia from military adventures. In this context, it also ignored the fact that Russia has deployed nuclear-capable medium-range missiles against Germany for several years – as ISPK has also pointed out. The federal government has further refused Ukraine's requests to purchase weapons it urgently needs for its defense. In doing so,
it significantly influenced the Kremlin’s risk calculus in a way that made the invasion more likely.

Instead, the federal government has pursued a policy of appeasement towards Russia that obviously brought no benefits, but it has nevertheless continued to pursue the ineffective policy. At the same time, it failed to respond appropriately to threats posed by Russia against our critical infrastructures and security of supplies. Instead of reducing Germany's dependence on Russian natural gas supplies, the federal government has increased this dependence with Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2, and it ignored warnings from allied countries that pointed out early on that both pipelines would put Ukraine in a difficult security situation. In addition, it has not used the opportunities offered by the international LNG market for European countries to become less dependent on Russia. Thus, to date not a single liquefied natural gas terminal can be found in Germany.

We note with approval that the federal government is finally beginning to change course. It is decisive now to deter further Russian aggression. First and foremost, this means that the federal government must finally meet its commitments made in 2014 to strengthen the Bundeswehr, and not delay this process through various kinds of concerns, e.g. about fueling an arms race. ISPK has also pointed out this necessity. Further, it is imperative that swift and vigorous steps be taken to reduce Germany’s dependence on Russian natural gas supplies and other critical commodities in general.

About ISPK

The Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK) is dedicated to the analysis of security policy challenges. In doing so, the ISPK has set itself the task of contributing to the security policy discourse in Germany with policy-oriented research. Against this background, the goal of the ISPK's scientific work is to provide an interdisciplinary and practice-oriented range of research.

The basic research focus of the ISPK is on strategic issues in international relations in general and in German foreign and security policy in particular. In addition, specialized research departments deal with selected topics that are among the most important challenges of international security policy today.

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