

# Let's talk about peace – but how?

## Considerations for the German debate on the war against Ukraine

**We are German organisations for civil conflict transformation and peace work that have also been active in Ukraine or involved in the Ukrainian-Russian dialogue for many years now. We stand in solidarity with our partners from Ukraine, who are resisting the attack by the Russian Federation. Our solidarity also goes to all people in Russia and Belarus, who are taking a stand against the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine.**

We are united in our concern that

- solidarity and the willingness to help the people in Ukraine are dwindling;
- mutual respect for different perspectives is being lost in the highly polarised German debate on the war and the commitment to peace is increasingly being discredited;
- the focus on military solutions means that alternative approaches are receiving too little attention, civil society is being accorded scant attention, and the scope for diplomacy is not being pursued sufficiently.

A wide variety of positions and perspectives on the war are represented in German society, whereby the supply of weapons and negotiations are often presented as options that are diametrically opposed. In our opinion, such narrow views are not helpful as they neglect fundamental possibilities that could help to mitigate violence and its consequences, end the war and bring long-term prospects for peace.

**With this declaration, we wish to share considerations for a constructive and respectful culture of debate about solidarity during the war and approaches to achieving peace.**

- I. **It all begins with empathy.** An empathetic attitude must be adopted in the discussion on war and peace. The fighting continues and people are dying every single day. It is now of utmost importance for Ukrainians that we recognise their suffering and that they are heard and supported.

Russians, who oppose the logic of war, also deserve our solidarity. We oppose a blanket boycott of Russian culture and people in Germany. We also acknowledge Russian and Belarussian civil society that is taking a democratic, human rights-based approach as key stakeholders in all de-escalation and peace efforts.

Large sections of Ukrainian civil society are critical of or oppose Ukrainian-Russian dialogues in the current situation. We respect this attitude. At the same time, the channels for communication, dialogue or cooperation that exist or are desired by all involved parties can also help to mitigate the consequences of war and aid in the development of prospects for the future.

- II. **Speak with Ukrainians rather than about them.** When we in Germany talk about the war or formulate demands, we should seek a meaningful dialogue with people from Ukraine. They are the ones, who must face the war, hence their voices must be heard when we discuss how to end it. There can be no lasting peace without involving the people of the country

currently affected by this Russian war of aggression.

- III. Draw the focus to civil society more.** Civil society is an indispensable stakeholder, both now during the war and for a peaceful future. The strong cohesion within Ukrainian society is impressive and decisive to the people of Ukraine having been able to resist the Russian war of aggression for more than one year now. The spirit of solidarity and voluntarism should be preserved at all costs. Which is why Ukrainian civil society must remain the focus of our support.

The active participation of civil society groups is also crucial to any future negotiations and the peace process. This also applies for the international commitment to the reconstruction of Ukraine: Ukrainian civil society must be substantially involved here, too.

- IV. Include unheard perspectives in the debate on the war.** Our perception of the war is inevitably one-sided and incomplete. The logic of war has long dominated the public discourse in Germany. The focus is on military approaches, violence and exclusionary dichotomies of good and evil, friend and foe. We believe it is important to draw the attention during the debate to the people who are not visible and barely heard. The Ukrainian men, who have fled or refused to enlist, for example. The Ukrainians, who have fled to the Russian Federation to escape the fighting or have been abducted and taken there. And the people living under Russian occupation. There have been hardly any reports from these areas; their perspectives on the war are barely heard.
- V. Russia started this war and can also end it.** We say this unequivocally: Russia started this war in 2014. The decision to attack Ukraine as a whole in February 2022 was made solely by the government of the Russian Federation. Hence it is also able to end this war by ceasing all attacks and withdrawing its troops from the entire territory within Ukraine's internationally recognised borders.
- VI. It is the task of diplomacy to explore ways out of the spiral of escalation and to end the war.** Negotiations have already taken place on selected humanitarian issues, such as prisoner exchanges, safe zones for nuclear power plants, and grain exports. The German federal government should support such negotiation formats. Even if peace negotiations are not yet taking place, it is the task of diplomacy to prepare for these as best possible and to coordinate them with partners.  
In the long term, questions of a security and peace architecture within Europe in the future that goes beyond the current war in Ukraine also needs to be negotiated.
- VII. Take the danger of expansion of the war and nuclear escalation seriously.** It must be possible to discuss this risk in the public discourse; it must not be used to further polarise the debate – by accusing people of acting without solidarity or believing the Russian propaganda, for example. There are no morally pristine answers to the question of how much this risk of escalation should determine the West's actions. Rather, ethical dilemmas play a role, too, and should also be addressed.
- VIII. Continue to critically question the new direction in German security policy.** Since the Chancellor's speech on 27 February 2022 about a "historical turning point" ("Zeitwende"), there has been a rapid change of course in German foreign and security policy. The focus has now shifted to armament and deterrence. We fear that diplomacy and non-military approaches to peace receive too little support and application, both in Ukraine and in other conflicts. As peace organisations, we shall continue to critically question the actions of the German government and its allies.

## **SIGNATORIES**

**Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation e. V.**

[www.cssp-mediation.org](http://www.cssp-mediation.org)

**Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst e. V. (forumZFD)**

[www.forumZFD.de](http://www.forumZFD.de)

**inmedio peace consult ggmbh**

[www.inmedio.de](http://www.inmedio.de)

**KURVE Wustrow – Bildungs- und Begegnungsstätte für gewaltfreie Aktion e. V.**

[www.kurviewustrow.org](http://www.kurviewustrow.org)

**OWEN – Mobile Akademie für Geschlechterdemokratie und Friedensförderung e. V.**

[www.owen-berlin.de](http://www.owen-berlin.de)