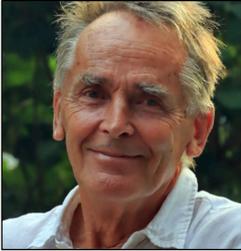


A groundbreaking German peace proposal for Ukraine that could save us all from an all-out war

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*Michael von der Schulenburg.
(Photo ma)*

At the end of August this year, four highly respected German personalities¹ presented a peace proposal² for ending the war in Ukraine through a ceasefire and subsequent peace negotiations. It is arguably the most comprehensive and groundbreaking peace proposal

made by any government, international organization or, as in this case, any private party since the war began 18 months ago.

This peace proposal comes at an extremely critical time in the Ukraine war. With a possible failure of the Ukrainian counteroffensive and the resulting weakening of the Ukrainian armed forces, NATO could be faced with the decision in the next few months, perhaps even in the next few weeks, to either further escalate the war against Russia or to go down the path of negotiations. A decision to continue the war, however, carries the enormous risk that it could increasingly develop into a direct NATO-Russia confrontation. This would not only result in further suffering of the Ukrainian population, but it would also bring the world one step closer to nuclear war. It is only to be hoped that reason will prevail, and NATO, Ukraine and Russia will opt for a ceasefire with immediate peace negotiations. The detailed German peace proposal has now shown the way to this end. It is therefore of utmost urgency to draw the attention of political decision-makers around the world to this peace proposal and to win public support for it.

The African Union, China, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia have made peace proposals and a peace proposal was earlier developed at the invitation of the Vatican. In addition, Turkey and Israel have undertaken laudable peace initiatives. However, the European Union, that should be most concerned about peace in Europe and that itself is deeply involved in this war, has not yet made any proposal on how to end this war through a political solution. Moreover, except for a proposal for peace negotiations by former Italian Prime Minister Draghi a year ago, none of the EU member states has undertaken any form of peace initiative of its own either. Sadly, this is also true for the German government.

At a time, the Ukraine war presents Europe with a supreme peril, the European Union seems to have lapsed into political rigidity. Neither does it have an obvious strategy of its own for what it wants to achieve with its military support for dragging on the Ukraine war, nor has it developed any ideas of what a peaceful Europe might look like after this war. As if this old continent had learned nothing from the terrible experiences of the two World Wars, which, like the Ukrainian war now, were fought mainly on European soil, it still clings to increasingly unrealistic maximum demands and the shocking idea that these can be achieved on the battlefield. That in the process Ukraine is being bled dry in the truest sense of the word is apparently being accepted. EU policy also seems to be deaf to the political, social and economic consequences the continuation of the war will have for the people of Europe and around the world, and the enormous dangers that would emanate for humankind from its continuous escalation.

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Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Sierra Leone, as well as shorter assignments in Syria, Somalia, the Balkans, the Sahel and Central Asia. In 2017, he published the book "On Building Peace – Rescuing the Nation-State and Saving the United Nations" and published many articles on UN reforms, intra-state armed conflicts, Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine. (www.michael-von-der-schulenburg.com)

Against this background, it becomes clear why such a detailed German peace proposal is of such great importance right now. It breaks with the fatal belief that military victories could bring peace and, in contrast, outlines ways to achieve a peaceful solution to this war through political negotiations. In the present prevailing highly belligerent atmosphere in European politics, media and think tanks, this requires considerable personal courage on the part of the initiators to stand up for peace.

Their peace proposal is also based on the Western view that Russia has started an illegal war of aggression and that thus Ukraine has every right to defend itself militarily and to accept foreign military support to do so. However, they go a decisive step further by emphasizing that this *"does not absolve the government in Kiev and its supporting states ... from politically promoting the achievement of a just and lasting peace"*. Now that this war has entered a highly destructive stage, in that there can be no more victors, their call on all warring parties and their supporting states that it is time to seek a political solution for peace has become even more urgent.

Thus, the initiators not only call for an immediate ceasefire along the existing frontlines, but also demand the simultaneous start of peace negotiations to prevent a 'freezing' of this ceasefire line and thus of the entire conflict. To avoid any delays through political rankling, they propose that these peace negotiations go straight to the core controversial issues of the conflict: a neutral Ukraine, security guarantees for Ukraine, the future status of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions as well as Crimea. For each of these controversial issues, they outline possible solutions that are based on the outcomes of the Russian-Ukrainian peace talks in March 2022 and on Ukraine's negotiating position at the Istanbul peace summit on March 29, 2022.

This peace proposal originating from Germany complements the peace proposals already being made by countries or regional organizations from outside Europe. Like those, it assumes that Russian security interests as outlined in Russia's letter to NATO and the U.S. of December 17, 2021, must be considered. But in contrast to the views prevailing in the EU, the initiators of the German peace proposal share the assessment of non-Western countries that Rus-

sian President Putin is very much willing to negotiate peace. This does not yet mean that the negotiating positions have converged. As in all other peace negotiations, also in the case of the Ukrainian war, one will have to painstakingly negotiate over conflicting interests of the warring parties and their supporting states. This will, no doubt, be extremely difficult because there is no trust between the warring parties – peace negotiations take place between war enemies and not between friends. Nevertheless, the path now charted by Germany's peace proposal for a negotiated peace represents a major advantage over any further attempt to achieve a militarily enforced solution.

Therefore, it should be in the self-interest of the EU and its member states to embrace this peace proposal wholeheartedly. For it will be the EU that loses in this war. Not only would the EU find itself at the frontline should this war escalate into a direct NATO-Russian confrontation, but it will also be left with all other adverse aspects of the fall-out of the war. This will not only include the present costs of the war but more importantly, the long-term costs of having to support a destroyed, impoverished, and depopulating Ukraine. While the U.S. has the option to withdraw back across the Atlantic, the EU, however, will continue to face many of the world's crisis regions in its immediate neighborhood. It will also be the EU's economy that will suffer most not only from its homemade sanctions but also from an increase in the cost of raw materials, from the loss of sales markets and the disruption of direct trade routes to the growth regions of Asia. And if one correctly reads the signs of the BRICS+ summit, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and now also the G-20 summit, one may conclude that it is not Russia that is internationally isolated, but rather that it is the EU that loses international influence over its Ukraine policies, its failure to have prevented the Ukraine war and now its unwillingness to end it. It is the EU that now desperately needs peace, and the German peace proposal should be accepted as a one-time chance that would allow it to switch its policies towards achieving this peace while moving away from supporting a continued war.

The German peace proposal relies heavily on a decisive role for the United Nations in its implementation. According to the proposal, the framework for a comprehensive cease-fire is to be de-

cided in the UN Security Council while the monitoring of the demilitarization of the now Russian-occupied territories and the military separation of forces along the cease-fire line is to be guaranteed by UN peacekeepers. Subsequent peace negotiations should take place under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, or a High Commissioner appointed by him. Since the United Nations, the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary-General have played rather disappointing roles in this conflict, these proposals will certainly be questioned by many observers.

And yet these proposals in particular could be of far-reaching significance for global peace. It would lead to the rehabilitation of this world organization that is so indispensable and central to the maintenance of world peace. It would mean that within the confines of the UN, the various peace proposals and peace initiatives of the member states could come together, not as competing but as mutually reinforcing forces for peace. Such a strengthening of the United Nations and the associated affirmation of the universality of the UN Charter would certainly be welcomed by the vast majority of member states. The German peace proposal could make a decisive contribution to this end.

The United Nations and the UN Charter once came into being in response to Germany's awful war crimes and atrocities it committed during World War II. Germany should hence feel a spe-

cial responsibility to upholding the UN-Charter's obligation for all member states to seek peaceful solutions of conflicts and the prevention of wars. This groundbreaking peace proposal now presented by four eminent German personalities is a step towards Germany fulfilling its special responsibility. If the EU, and indeed the international community want to end the war in Ukraine peacefully and preserve global peace, there will be no alternatives to this peace proposal!

¹ Peter Brandt, son of the former German Chancellor Willy Brandt, initiator of the Ostpolitik, formerly history professor and strong voice of the German peace movement, German trade Unions and the Social Democratic Party.

Hajo Funke, formerly professor on antisemitism/ rightwing populism and international conflicts at the Otto-Suhr-Institute, Germany's leading political university think tank.

Harald Kujat, highest ranking German General (rtd.), served as German Chief of Defense (Generalinspekteur der Bundeswehr) from 2000 to 2002 and from 2002 to 2005 as Chairman NATO-Military Committee, Chairman NATO-Russia Council and NATO-Ukraine Commission of Chiefs of General Staff.

Horst Teltschik, formerly chief foreign affairs adviser to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl during the end of the Cold War and the negotiations with the four powers leading up to the reunification of Germany in 1991.

² https://zeitgeschehen-im-fokus.ch/en/newspaper-ausgabe-en/article-translated-in-english.html#article_1565