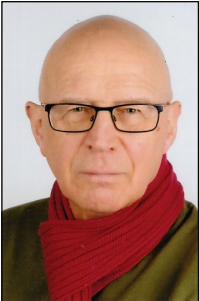


About the war in Ukraine

by Stefan Hofer,* Switzerland



Stefan Hofer.
(Photo ma)

The war in Ukraine, like any war, is terrible and should be ended as soon as possible. However, one cannot assess this war and its political responsibility without first knowing and taking into account its origins. (Written in late December 2022)

How did this war come about?

Until 1991, Ukraine belonged to the Soviet Union as a Soviet republic. Only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union did the Soviet Republic of Ukraine become an independent state. There was never a Ukrainian state before the Russian Revolution of 1917. A large part of today's Ukraine belonged to Tsarist Russia, the areas in the west to the Habsburg Danube Monarchy. In the eastern and southern districts and in the Crimea, which was only assigned to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic after the Second World War, the majority of people lived and still live today with Russian as their mother tongue.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the anti-Russia NATO has expanded further and further east to Russia's border, although in 1990 *Gorbachev* was assured that NATO would not expand further east after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Germany and former socialist states in Eastern Europe. After Poland, the former Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria had been incorporated into NATO, only Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia were missing to complete NATO's encirclement of Russia's western territories.

Since Russia under *Putin* was not willing to be a subordinate ally in the US-dominated Western system of states, the US-led West is trying to os-

tracise Russia as an undemocratic authoritarian power. This includes intimidation and threats through military encirclement. In these efforts, Ukraine, whose eastern districts come within a few 100 kilometres of the Russian capital Moscow, has a crucial role. Thus, all the stops had to be pulled out to put Ukraine on a pro-Western anti-Russian course.

After Ukraine's elected President *Yanukovych* refused to sign an Association Agreement put forward by the EU because it would have meant turning away from Russia and adopting the EU's anti-Russia policies, President-elect *Yanukovych* has been overthrown in a Western-organised, orchestrated and financed coup known as the *Maidan* and a pro-Western anti-Russia group has been brought to power.

These events resulted in Crimea, inhabited almost exclusively by Russians, to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation by referendum. After the *Maidan* coup, the Russian language, spoken as a mother tongue by the majority of the population of the eastern and southern districts of the Ukrainian state, was banned as a regional language and Russian schools were also banned. As part of a militantly anti-Russian policy, laws were enacted with the aim of driving the Russian language, the mother tongue of over 50% of the population of Ukraine, out of Ukraine.

In the Donbass districts with a majority Russian population, Kiev appointed anti-Russian governors.

The result of all this was that in the Lugansk and Donetsk districts the majority Russian population revolted and the People's Republics of Lugansk and Donetsk, independent of Kiev, were proclaimed and founded.

As a result, the Ukrainian army tried militarily to restore the Kyiv headquarters' control over the breakaway areas in the Donbass. Fighting took place with deaths and injuries on both sides. With the mediation of the OSCE, efforts were then made to settle the conflict with the Donbass, also taking into account and safeguarding the legitimate interests of the largely Russian population of this region.

* *Stefan Hofer*, born in 1948, is a Swiss citizen residing in Basel. He worked as a lawyer in Basel for 40 years. He has been retired for some years now.

These efforts led to the so-called Minsk Agreements, which were signed by the OSCE, Ukraine and Russia, as well as the representatives of the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics, and to which France (President *Hollande*) and Germany (Chancellor *Merkel*), in addition to Russia, agreed in a separate Minsk Declaration.¹

The content of these Minsk Agreements was the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of heavy weapons, as well as the creation of an autonomy statute for the Lugansk and Donetsk districts to be embodied in the Ukrainian constitution, enabling these districts to elect their own authorities within the framework of the Ukrainian state and to independently regulate and organise the coexistence of the people in these districts, including the Russian language and culture.

However, the *Minsk 2* agreement has not been implemented by the Ukrainian side. The shelling of the Donbass has continued, using the fascist Azov Brigades. By the time the Russian attack began in February 2022, more than 14,000 citizens of the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics, mostly civilians, had been killed by the illegal attacks in violation of the Minsk Agreement.

The constitutional reform, under which the autonomy statute agreed for the Donbass should have been realised, has not taken place. France and Germany, which were involved in the negotiation of the Minsk Agreement, expressly agreed to this agreement with the Minsk Declaration and committed themselves to support its implementation, have never urged Kiev to comply with the Minsk Agreement and to make the agreed constitutional changes, and certainly have not exerted any pressure in this direction.

Recently, the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel freely admitted in an interview that Ukraine and the Western signatory states only signed the Minsk Agreement in order to buy time to arm the Ukrainian army. In addition, the Ukrainian constitution has set accession to NATO as a political goal.

In this context, it should also be pointed out that the German conflict researcher *Leo Ensel* has correctly pointed out the following facts:

«Completely unknown, finally, is the fact that on 24 March 2021 - exactly eleven months before the Russian invasion - Ukrainian President *Volodymyr Zelensky* signed Decree No. 117, which put into effect the "Strategy for De-Occu-

pation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol" of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of 11 March. The decree provided for the preparation of measures to end "the temporary occupation" of Crimea and the Donbass. The Ukrainian government was instructed to develop a corresponding "action plan". On 30 August 2021, the USA and Ukraine then signed a treaty on military cooperation and on 10 November 2021 a treaty on "strategic partnership". This stated, among other things, literally: "The United States intends to support Ukraine's efforts to counter Russia's armed aggression, including through the maintenance of sanctions and the application of other relevant measures until the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders." Russia could take this to mean that Kiev, with US support, wanted to militarily retake the annexed and pro-Russia Crimea with its strategically important military port of Sevastopol, as well as the Russian-backed Donbass.»

Developments since the signing of the Minsk agreements have led Russia to feel compelled, for its own security and for the security and rights of the majority Russian population in the Donbass, to make the following ultimate demands of the government in Kiev:

- Ukraine's renunciation of NATO membership;
- no bases of NATO or other foreign armies on the territory of Ukraine;
- no stationing of NATO weapons on the territory of Ukraine;
- denazification of Ukraine (disarmament of the fascist Azov Brigades);
- safeguarding the rights of the Russian population in the Donbass through immediate full implementation of the agreements in the Minsk Agreement.

The Kiev government rejected these justified demands with the support of the USA, the EU and NATO. If these justified demands had been accepted, the war would not have come about.

Opinions are divided on whether it was legitimate to enforce these demands with military force, which brings death and devastation and creates suffering and hatred. Opinions are also divided as to whether this violated international law without justification. In this context, it should be noted that the *International Court of Justice* (ICJ), with reference to the secession of Kosovo from Serbia with massive use of military force (bombing of Serbian cities), came to the conclusion in a legal opinion that the right of self-de-

termination of the people of Kosovo was to be given higher weight than the territorial integrity and respect for Serbia's borders.

The war currently raging in Ukraine can and must be seen and judged in the light of the global confrontation between the US-dominated West and the forces striving for a new multipolar world order, which explains the massive intervention of the USA, NATO and the EU (arms deliveries, training and instruction of members of the Ukrainian army, deployment of mercenaries and battlefield reconnaissance).

In this conflict, the West is trying, partly successfully, partly unsuccessfully, to bring about regime changes in numerous states (Serbia, Iraq, Syria, Libya, etc.), also by military force, without regard for international law, in defence of the US-dominated world order. No one has imposed sanctions on the USA and the NATO states involved because of this.

The war in Ukraine can and must be ended through negotiations. In March 2022, negotiations were held in Istanbul that resulted in an agreement ready to be signed, after which British Prime Minister *Boris Johnson*, in consultation with President Biden, travelled to Kiev in haste to prevent the signing of the agreement that would have ended the war.

The position taken by the Zelensky government since then, that an end to the war can only be negotiated when the last Russian soldier will have been driven out of the territory of Ukraine (including Crimea) or will have been withdrawn, is not acceptable to Russia after the experience with the Minsk Agreements and is also not realistic in view of the military balance of power.

Further arms deliveries to the Ukrainian army will not succeed in driving the Russian army out of the areas it currently controls. Further arms deliveries combined with a refusal to enter into negotiations to end the war will only lead to a

prolongation of the war, more dead and wounded, more devastation and more burdens on the people of Western Europe and the US who will have to pay for these weapons.

A peace to be achieved through negotiations could be imagined something like this:

1. An immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line by both sides.
2. The Ukrainian constitution will include the perpetual neutrality of Ukraine, the prohibition of joining NATO and the stationing of foreign armies and weapons systems in Ukraine.
3. Ukraine, the USA and the EU recognise that Crimea belongs to the Russian Federation.
4. The districts of Lugansk, Donetsk, Zaporozhye and Kherson will hold a vote under international supervision on whether these districts wish to join the Russian Federation or remain with Ukraine, with all persons who were resident in these districts before the war being entitled to vote. A qualified majority of at least 55% may be required for accession to the Russian Federation. Ukraine and Russia undertake to recognise the result of these votes.
5. Ukraine and Russia mutually recognise the state borders resulting from these votes and mutually renounce the use of force.
6. Ukraine and Russia declare the intention of the two states to live on good terms with each other.

The sanctions against Russia imposed by the EU and adopted by Switzerland in violation of neutrality, which harm our population at least as much as they harm the population of Russia, should be lifted. These sanctions are damaging our country's economy and do nothing to bring the war to an end as soon as possible.

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2h0jx0>