

Never again against Russia!

by Michael Felten, Cologne



Michael Felten
(Picture ma)

A personal standpoint of German-Russian relations, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union – inspired by a visit to Saint

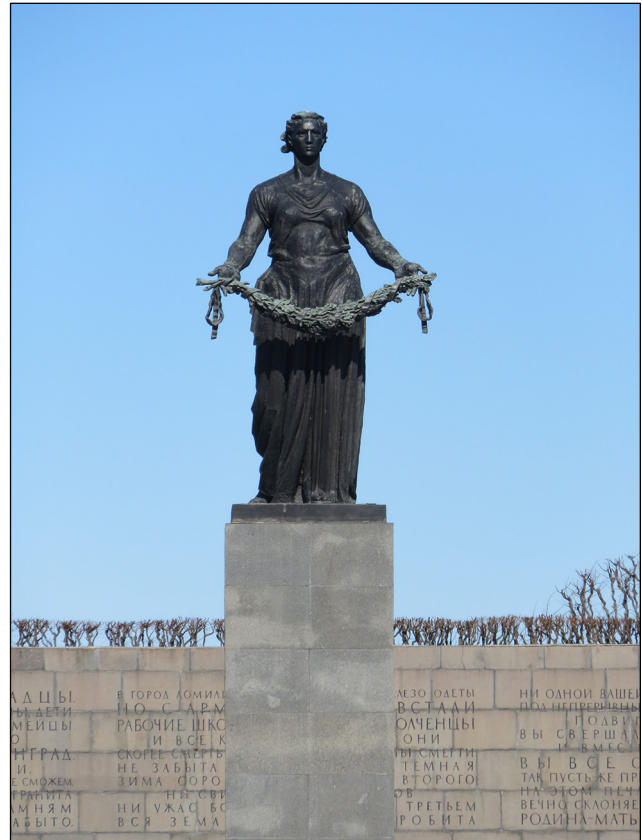
Petersburg. In view of the current anti-Russian warmongering of media and politics, it is above all the numerous peace initiatives of citizens that can save an understanding between the peoples.

With a group of friends we went to St Petersburg, the second largest city in Russia, for 10 days. Because of its many waterways, the city is also called the “Venice of the North”, and it is popular with tourists because of its art treasures, the magnificent underground railway, its city atmosphere. We’ve seen it all, but now, in an outer district, I’m standing in a vast park, in front of the huge female statue “Mother Homeland” spreading its arms – and actually fighting tears.

I’m not entirely ignorant of history, but I simply didn’t realise until now what terrible havoc the German Wehrmacht wreaked in this area during the Second World War.

One of *Hitler’s* delusional ideas had been to colonise the European part of Russia as a supply area for the Aryan race. He saw Russians as “subhuman beings” whom he did not want to simply defeat but rather exterminate. Hence the plan not to conquer Leningrad (and actually Moscow as well) at all, but to simply starve the people to death through a total blockade. So here alone – during 900 days, including three bitterly cold winters – over a million civilians had to miserably lose their lives. If you thought about each individual for just one minute, it would take you two years. As a visitor from Cologne, I can hardly believe how friendly people are to us here today.

In the meantime, even Western historians say: the blockade of Leningrad was one of the most blatant war crimes committed by the German Wehrmacht. But it was only one part of the horror that Germany unleashed on the East 80 years ago. Hitler’s entire war of aggression against the



“Mother Motherland” at the Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery in St. Petersburg. About half a million siege victims of the German Wehrmacht are resting here. (Picture gk)

Soviet Union cost the lives of at least 24 million Soviet citizens; these people bled the most for our liberation from the Nazi era. So for us Germans, it should actually not only mean: never again Auschwitz! but also: never again against Russia!

For a good decade, however, a new Russian danger has been conjured up – because the Russian bear did not want to bow to Western claims to leadership? Head of state *Putin* had already annexed the Crimea, and now surely the Baltic states must fear for their existence. Yet it was NATO that expanded far to the east in violation of the agreements and installed weapons systems on Moscow’s doorstep that could disable Russia’s missile defence. But the neo-aggressive unison of the leading media does not really allow voices of weighing up to be heard. The quasi-dictator must be shown the red card early on – and also be prepared to take military action. A kind of pre-mobilisation to instil fright.

Beneath this risky high policy, however, there are movements and forces that could give hope. For example, there are numerous German-Russian friendship societies – associations of younger and older citizens who are taken with Russian culture, who appreciate the cordiality of the Russian people, who visit the huge empire in the East again and again. Russia is obviously not only attractive “from above” (according to a recent German TV ZDF documentary), one meets great cordiality from people of all walks of life there and presents are given liberally.

Last but not least, there is probably also the conviction that cross-border contacts are perhaps the only thing that ordinary people can do to counter the risky play with fire of the military-industrial complex.

Incidentally, one comes across such associations particularly often in East Germany – decreed in GDR (German Democratic Republic) times, but now carried on in times of freedom. Although the Russians in Saxony or Brandenburg initially appeared as a rigorous occupying force, over time friendships developed, families were started, people went to the Soviet Union to study or for a holiday. Today, there is a great variety of twinning arrangements throughout Germany (e.g. Cologne – Volgograd or Düsseldorf – Moscow), there is the “Friends of the Peoples of Russia” (in Berlin), a “Bonn – Kaliningrad Youth Parliament” meets in Bonn. The *German War Graves Commission* is active in Russia, a circle of friends from *Druzhba-global* undertakes annual peace trips, and the writer *Wolfgang*

To the speech of the German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 21 June 2021

gk. In his article, *Michael Felten* impressively describes how moving and enriching it is to let yourself be touched by the fate of people and to experience the reconciliatory attitude of the people in Russia in direct encounters.

In his remarkable speech on the 80th remembrance of the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, German President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier* recalls the wartime crimes of the Nazi regime. There is nothing to add to his call for reconciliation with Russia and the other peoples of the former Soviet Union. What remains, is to work towards ensuring that in future peace and no war emanates from Germany and Europe.

It is well worth reading the full speech at:
https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2021/06/210618-D-Russ-Museum-Englisch.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

Only a few extracts can be cited here:

- “No one had to mourn more victims in this war than the peoples of the then Soviet Union. And yet these millions are not as deeply etched in our collective memory as their suffering and our responsibility demand. This war was a crime – a monstrous, criminal war of aggression and annihilation. Those who go to its theatres today, who encounter people who bore the brunt of it, will be reminded of 22 June 1941 – irrespective of whether there is a day of remembrance or a memorial or not.”
- “Traces of this war are to be found among the elderly who experienced it as children, and in the younger generation, in their grandchildren and

great-grandchildren. You can find them from the coast of the White Sea in the north to Crimea in the south, from the dunes of the Baltic in the west to Volgograd in the east. They are scars of war, scars of destruction, scars of loss. What remained were mass graves, brothers’ graves, as people say in Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian.” [...] “But are we Germans doing that? Are we looking in that direction at all, towards the east of our continent about which we know far too little?” [...]

- “We should remember – not in order to burden present and future generations with a guilt that is not theirs but for our own sake. We should remember in order to understand what impact this past has on the present. Only those who learn to understand the traces of the past in the present will be equipped to help shape the future which avoids wars, rejects tyranny and makes possible peaceful co-existence in freedom.” [...]
- “What I say to you today is: on this day when we are remembering the millions upon millions who lost their lives, let us also recall how precious reconciliation is when it has grown over the graves of the fallen. This gift of reconciliation gives rise to a great responsibility for Germany. We want, and indeed must, do everything to protect international law and territorial integrity on this continent and to strive for peace with and among the successor states to the former Soviet Union.” [...]
- “I bow in sorrow before the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian victims – before all victims of the former Soviet Union. Let us work for a different, for a better future. That is a task for us all.”

Büscher walked on his own from Berlin to Moscow.

Out of self-interest alone, we Germans should do everything possible to prevent new images of East-West enmity from becoming entrenched. If the USA and its allies were to provoke Russia to the extreme, Germany would become a nuclear battleground.

International understanding, however, could use some new blood. Young people who do not get bogged down in questions of identity, but who want to devote their time to tangible problems. A humane look at the East does not

primarily mean visiting memorial sites, but rather searching for and finding interesting, exciting and appealing things.

The writer Bert Brecht was of the opinion that 100 committed people could start a revolution. Could 1000 committed people prevent the next war against Russia – or at least make it more difficult? At least, in autumn one could not vote for any party that wants to “arm Ukraine” and “increase the pressure on Moscow”.

Source: <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=73580>
from 22 June 2021

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)