

# Open letter: Refusing to support Ukraine is grotesque

Monday 2 May 2022, by [ZELLER Christian](#) (Date first published: 28 April 2022).

**In an open letter, 18 intellectuals pleaded against arms deliveries to Ukraine. Here a Ukraine activist answers and disagrees.**

[An open letter from left-wing intellectuals calling for a halt to arms deliveries to Ukraine has sparked controversy.](#) Here Christian Zeller answers . He is committed to Ukrainian civil society.

On April 22, the Berliner Zeitung published an open letter to Chancellor Olaf Scholz on its website. 18 personalities from science, politics and culture - including Daniela Dahn, Jürgen Grässlin, Mohssen Massarrat, Norman Paech and Konstantin Wecker - call for the arms deliveries to Ukraine to be stopped.

At a moment when the NATO country Turkey is terrorizing the Kurdish population in Iraq and Syria on a large scale with airstrikes and heavy artillery, the undersigned are not demanding that arms deliveries to Turkey be stopped. The undersigned also do not criticize Germany's extensive arms exports to the dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, which is massacring the population in neighboring Yemen.

Rather, the callers are protesting against the arms deliveries to Ukraine, which has been surprisingly successful in opposing the Russian invasion and occupation troops for the past two months. The callers do not declare solidarity with the Kurdish population and their liberation movement or with the forgotten people in Yemen, but recommend that the people in Ukraine surrender to Russian superiority and accept a military occupation dictatorship. This call reveals the mistakes of essential parts of the German peace movement.

## **Supplying arms does not in any way mean being a country at war**

The starting point is the warning "of an uncontrollable expansion of the war with unforeseeable consequences for the entire world." Yes, there is a risk of the war escalating. But it is the Putin regime that has escalated the war and even hinted at the use of nuclear weapons. The appeal reads: "By supplying weapons, Germany and other NATO countries have de facto become a war party." That is wrong. If this statement were correct, individual NATO countries would have already made themselves a war party in many wars and the USSR and China would have been belligerent countries in Vietnam against the USA. We would have long since been in a world war-like situation. We all know that's not the case.

Supplying arms does not in any way mean being a country at war. Putin knows this, too, because his regime itself supplies many weapons to warring parties without waging war itself. Those in charge at NATO know that too. There is no indication that they are currently seeking war against Russia. The open letter writes that arms deliveries would prolong the war and bloodshed. This is an assertion that cannot be proven from historical experience. Did US arms sales to the Soviet Union prolong WWII?

## **German arms exports to Ukraine have so far been relatively small**

The undersigned write that the war will be waged on the backs of the Ukrainian population. Yes that's right. But the call deliberately conceals a crucial fact.

The Russian military machine failed to occupy Ukraine and install a puppet government in the first phase of the war. Why? The Ukrainian resistance is much stronger than Putin expected. It also massively exceeds the expectations of the NATO and EU governments. At the beginning of the war, for example, the British government recommended that the Ukrainian President Zelenskyi leave the country and give up. Most Western governments assumed that Ukraine would be defeated quickly. On this they agreed with Putin. Luckily they were wrong, because otherwise there would be no more Ukrainian civil society.

Ukraine received US\$4 billion in military aid from 2014-22. But a large part of it only flowed after the beginning of the war. From 2014 to 2021, direct military aid was US\$2.4 billion. German arms exports to Ukraine have so far been relatively small, German arms exports to Russia have been much larger since 2014 - despite the embargo - and even until recently.

## **The central failure of the peace movement**

Crucial to the current situation is Ukraine's resistance. And according to all reports and experience reports, also from trade unions and civil society organizations in Ukraine, this resistance has broad social support. So far, Ukraine has only been able to hold its own against Russian superiority on the basis of this social will to resist. Trade unions, neighborhood structures and voluntary territorial defense units in the communities guaranteed that civil society could survive.

Only on the basis of this successful resistance did the NATO countries even have to face the challenge of supplying arms to the defenders. The appeal fails to mention this crucial point. This is the central failure of the peace movement. It pays no attention to social action in Ukraine and renounces its solidarity with Ukrainian civil society. The narrow geopolitical glasses that only allow a view of the great powers and their governments hide such social dynamics.

## **The undersigned rightly warn against the escalation of the war**

The appeal says war crimes are on the rise. Right. But why are the undersigned keeping silent about who commits the vast majority of these war crimes? This is the Russian army. After all, there are no Ukrainian troops on Russian territory. Even in the outcry against war crimes, the appeal is deliberately unclear and ultimately one-sided.

The undersigned rightly warn of the spread of the war and an uncontrollable escalation to the point of a major war with nuclear weapons. This danger should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, this warning remains striking. What international order do we live in when a major imperial power can only force entire societies into submission by threatening to use nuclear weapons? If that catches on, we've opened the door to barbarism. Instead of giving in to the threats, the social movements have to think much more about how societies can counteract such threats through practical international solidarity, including sabotage of military infrastructure.

## **The signatories simply recommend Ukraine's surrender**

The undersigned believe that the Ukrainian army is "far inferior to the Russian one". You have "hardly a chance to win this war". This assessment is arrogant, ahistorical and domineering. The Ukrainian resistance has already shown in the first phase of the war that an army superior in numbers and in terms of weapons can be beaten back.

Many defensive wars and rebel armies have proved this before her. In addition, a military balance of power is also a political one. The longer the Ukrainian resistance endures, the more exhausted the Russian war machine is and the more likely cracks are to appear in the Putin regime.

The signers of the call simply recommend that Ukraine surrender. The signatories therefore assume that under the conditions of a military occupation dictatorship and mass deportation of potential opposition figures, a lively civil society could develop, which could eventually persuade the Russian troops to withdraw peacefully. This idea seems downright grotesque. It does not take seriously the war goals openly formulated by the Putin regime itself. Since 2014, Putin has stated openly and clearly on several occasions that he denies Ukraine's right to exist as a state and as a Ukrainian nation.

### **Offers to Moscow and to Putin**

The signatories regret the retreat from violence that violates international law. However, that is the "only realistic and humane alternative to a long, grueling war." That is why the first and most important step is "a stop to all arms deliveries to Ukraine, combined with an immediate ceasefire to be negotiated." The signatories specifically recommend "ending military resistance against promises of negotiations on a ceasefire and a political solution.

The offers to Moscow already discussed by President Zelenskyy - possible neutrality, agreement on the recognition of Crimea and referendums on the future status of the Donbass republics - offer a real opportunity to do so. "Ultimately, the signatories want the"rapid withdrawal of the Russian Forces and the Restoration of the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine".

### **Putin regime could be on the way to a new fascism**

As is well known, ceasefires are concluded on the basis of a concrete balance of power. Putin has once again made it unmistakably clear that he sees no room for negotiations. What should Ukraine do if Putin is pursuing bigger goals? In the logic of the undersigned, Ukraine would then have to give up and submit to the fate of a partition of the country.

The undersigned are concerned about the "legitimate security interests of Russia and its neighboring countries". In doing so, some of the signatories seamlessly follow earlier statements in which they demanded that Russia's legitimate security interests be respected. So far, however, they have paid no attention to the security interests of the Ukrainian population.

Why does NATO membership enjoy popular support in numerous countries in Eastern Europe? Probably because many people had their painful experiences with the Russian military apparatus and because they have a historical memory. Since when have the security interests of dictatorships been a priority for democrats? Marxist and socialist authors from Russia even fear that the Putin regime has embarked on the path to a new fascism.

### **The NATO countries are responsible for the escalation of the crisis**

According to the open letter, the most vulnerable cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odessa are to be declared "undefended cities". That could prevent their devastation. In concrete terms, this means that the Russian troops are allowed to march in and set up their military dictatorship. Potential opponents can be filtered out, put in camps or deported. This is already happening, even in cities that have not defended themselves.

The fundamental problem with this call is not that it opposes arms sales to Ukraine. What is reprehensible, however, is that the signatories do not concede to the Ukrainian people their own

subjectivity, their own ability to act and ultimately also not the right to resist. Their position amounts to tolerating Russian imperialism. Some of the signatories remain true to the line they expressed before the war. In doing so, they actively oppose the emancipatory and left-wing forces in Ukraine, Russia and other countries in Eastern Europe.

The NATO and EU countries bear responsibility for the escalation of the crisis. But parts of the peace movement simply adopt the Russian argument in this regard. After all, the relevant eastward expansion of NATO took place by 2004. Nor was it on the agenda for Ukraine to join NATO in the short term. So far, the EU has not even made a reasonable offer to join Ukraine. The problem is more fundamental.

### **Solidarity with parts of the German economy**

After the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships following the fall of the Wall, the capitalist countries were unwilling to integrate the countries of Eastern Europe, and especially Russia, into the capitalist system on an equal footing. On the contrary, they exacerbated uneven development within and between countries and social inequality between classes. In Russia they promoted the emergence of an economy based primarily on the extraction of raw materials.

Putin's rise to power after the chaotic 1990s also accommodated capital, which needed an efficient and, if necessary, crackdown on social unrest. The rise of the Putin regime was definitely in the interests of the "West", not least of which was the German economy. It was easier to enter into long-term business under orderly, albeit authoritarian, conditions.

These economic ties between German and Russian capital, which have stabilized over time, are also one of the reasons why a number of German corporations and the government were extremely reluctant and initially reluctant to accept the sanctions policy against Russia promoted by other countries.

After all, as long as you don't know who's winning the war, you don't want to spoil the chance of resuming lucrative business activities in Russia. This also partly explains why the German government is acting cautiously and cautiously on the issue of arms deliveries. In this respect, those parts of the peace movement that stand up hard against the Ukrainian resistance are even closing ranks with parts of the German economy, which would like to continue to maintain the friendly ties with their Russian partners profitably.

### **Right to resist**

A solidary anti-war movement would not hamper Ukrainian resistance to the occupying Russian army, but would side with the unions and neighborhood committees in Ukraine and the hard-pressed anti-war movement in Russia. Solidarity with resistance from below against the external and internal forces of domination; this must become the orientation of a lively anti-war movement.

An anti-war movement based on solidarity must, of course, uncompromisingly oppose the armament of the NATO states, and even the very existence of NATO must be called into question. The anti-war movement and the climate movement must come together and find common ground. The procurement of Russian natural gas and oil is to be discontinued without replacing them with other sources of supply.

This move away from fossil fuels is also necessary in terms of climate policy. The anti-war movement must work - not least to protect the climate - to ensure that all countries and especially the NATO countries cut their armaments spending by 10 percent a year and finally dismantle the armaments industry and convert it into socially useful production. However, neither the peace nor the climate

movement should ever deny a population the right to resist an imperialist invading army.

---

**Christian Zeller** is involved in a European solidarity network for Ukrainian civil society. He is a member of the editorial board of Emancipation magazine and recently organized two internationally acclaimed online events with representatives of left-wing organizations in Russia and Ukraine.

[Click here](#) to subscribe to *ESSF* newsletters in English and/or French.