

"In Konstanz, between 1,500 and 2,000 protesters gathered at Münsterplatz on Saturday evening [February 26, 2022], according to police estimates." – SWR [German regional radio], 2/27/2022

Cf. also <<https://www.suedkurier.de/region/kreis-konstanz/konstanz/konstanz-will-keinen-krieg;art372448,11059178>>

Speech, Wolfgang Seibel (wolfgang.seibel@uni-konstanz.de), February 26, 2022

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the student organizations that prepared this rally. Our gathering is an expression of lively protest and a solidarity that literally comes from the bottom of our hearts. Significantly and fortunately, young people from a broad spectrum of political orientations have called for the rally. Despite all the gloom of the horror that Russia's war has brought upon the people of Ukraine, this is a sign of encouragement.

Much has been said and written in recent days about the mistakes of Germany's foreign policy orientation and its practical foreign and security policy. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight an aspect that concerns not only the political elites and the shapers of so-called geopolitics, but all of us. This with reference to the role of small and medium-sized states in the middle of Europe between this economically so powerful German Federal Republic and Russia, which is so immovably powerful simply because of its territorial expansion and possession of nuclear weapons. Cross your heart: Until a few days ago, who of us actually had a concept of and an interest in the nations of Central and Eastern Europe? Let's be honest: When it came to Eastern Europe, we were almost always focused on Russia. Before 1989, when Moscow really was the center of power in Eastern Europe, this even had a certain logic, a cynical logic, to be precise. It always remained an expression of a hegemonic mentality in the literal sense of the word. Even in the very last days and weeks, when the history of NATO's eastward enlargement was being discussed in this country, one could get the impression that some weighted the power projections of Vladimir Putin and the clique of yea-sayers around him higher than the right of self-determination of the nations in Central and Eastern Europe. And this despite the experiences of the Chechen war at the end of the 1990s, the Georgian war with the establishment of puppet regimes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, and precisely with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, through which Russia again changed borders in Europe using armed force for the first time since World War II.

My generation was spared the experience of WW II started by Germany in 1939 with the invasion of Poland; we grew up in the so-called Cold War. And quite a few of us, myself included, afforded ourselves the luxury of naïveté and indifference. We were naïve because we assumed that the order of the highly armed bloc confrontation established after 1945 was stable. We were indifferent - not all of us, but too many - to the people who had to live in the dictatorships of Central and Eastern Europe. Those who pointed out the permanent serious human rights violations in the area of rule of the then Soviet Union had to take into account to be labeled a Cold Warrior.

This world view, which many of us afforded ourselves at the time, was not only morally dubious, it was above all unrealistic. Which could have been recognized long before 1989 by what

was called a "people's uprising" in the language of the time: 1953 in the GDR, 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in what was then Czechoslovakia. The imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981 also belongs in this series.

Authoritarian regimes and dictatorships are inherently unstable. Which is precisely why they repeatedly lapse into a spiral of violence, both internally and externally. In 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev renounced this spiral of violence. His Generals and their henchmen - including those in the GDR - had already prepared for the "Chinese Solution," that is, the violent suppression of the democracy movements in Central and Eastern Europe along the lines of the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989. In Putin's Russia, Gorbachev paid a price for his wisdom that is known from Roman imperial times as *Damnatio Memoriae*: The erasure from national memory.

The logic and the absolute ruthlessness of Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine demonstrate that the relapse into dictatorship and thus into the suppression of any independence of civil society sooner or later not only shatters the cohesion of society but may also lead to the destruction of an international peace order. The suppression of the democracy movement in Belarus with Russia's help was, as we now realize, only a prelude. But where was our solidarity with the people of Belarus? Today we see that our inaction has also contributed to the fact that today Ukraine is also being attacked from the North, from Belarus, where Lukashenko was able to hold on to power through Putin's intervention after a rigged presidential election.

The consequences for Ukraine, one must fear, will exceed our worst expectations. There can be no doubt that Putin wants to install a puppet government in Kiev. There can also be no doubt that this will be accompanied by absolutely ruthless violence against any resistance or even signs of protest. But naïveté and indifference are now definitely no longer an option. Rallies like this one are unfolding with great force these days, but they can only be the beginning. What matters is sustained support for the people of Ukraine. With all peaceful means at our disposal. With our networks, with our friendships with Ukrainians, but, I would like to emphasize, also with those Russians who live among us and who are overwhelmingly ashamed of the crimes that the dictator in the Kremlin is committing in abuse of the good name of the Russian nation.

Our university, where I have been teaching for 32 years, has always been a place of international exchange and friendship with Ukrainian as well as Russian scientists since the beginning of its still young existence. We strongly support the appeal published the day before yesterday by more than 50 Russian colleagues in protest against the invasion of Ukraine dictated by Putin. I would like to conclude by quoting the following from this appeal <translated through deepl-freeware>:

“We, Russian scientists and scientific journalists, strongly protest the military actions initiated by our country's armed forces in Ukraine. This fatal step leads to enormous loss of life and undermines the foundations of the established system of international security. The responsibility for unleashing a new war in Europe lies entirely with Russia. There is no reasonable justification for this war. Attempts to use the situation in Donbas as a pretext for deploying a military operation are not credible. It is clear that Ukraine does not pose a threat to the security of our country. A war against it is unfair and frankly pointless. Ukraine was and remains a country close to us. Many of us have relatives, friends and colleagues in Ukraine. Our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers fought together against Nazism. The unleashing of the war for the geopolitical

ambitions of the Russian leadership, driven by dubious historiosophic fantasies, is a cynical betrayal of their memory. We respect the Ukrainian statehood, which is based on really working democratic institutions. We are sympathetic to the European choice of our neighbors. We are convinced that all problems in relations between our countries can be resolved peacefully. By unleashing war, Russia has condemned itself to international isolation and to the position of a pariah country. This means that we scientists will no longer be able to do our work properly: scientific research is inconceivable without full cooperation with colleagues from other countries. The isolation of Russia from the world means a further cultural and technological degradation of our country with a complete lack of positive prospects. War with Ukraine is a step to nowhere. We are bitterly aware that our country, which made a decisive contribution to the victory over Nazism, has now become the instigator of a new war on the European continent. We demand an immediate halt to all military actions against Ukraine. We demand respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state. We demand peace for our countries. Let us engage in science, not war!”

For this moment, I don't want to add anything to that.