

Awarding
Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2025
Sunday, October 19, 2025

The spoken word applies.

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Lord Mayor of the City Frankfurt am Main

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Karl Schlögel

Mike Josef

Lord Mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main

Greeting

On 13 May 2024, Frankfurt sealed a city partnership with Lviv in Ukraine. In September 2024, we visited our twin town with a delegation drawn from the Frankfurt civic community. For a time, Lviv had been spared from Russian attacks, but only two weeks before our visit, it suddenly came under direct fire again. The images I carry from our visit and the conversations we had there remain vivid in my mind. At first glance, it looked as if everyday life was still possible in Lviv. At second glance, however, war was omnipresent: the destroyed homes, the people who'd perished in the attacks, families mourning their fallen sons, children forced to grow up without parents, the constant wail of sirens.

These days, being happy is often an art in itself. When I got back from Lviv and played football with my son in the courtyard, I felt privileged not to have to anticipate the sound of sirens – knowing full well what that means when one lives in Ukraine. In that moment, I felt a sense of profound happiness!

I also remember what moved me so deeply while I was there: a deep conviction that the people of Lviv have the right to live in peace and freedom and the realisation that the people of Ukraine as a whole continue to defend this right each and every day!

Our friendship with Ukraine is not merely a sign of our support – it is an act of solidarity. Karl Schlögel's work makes this fact clear. When we ask ourselves what we can do to help, he provides us with a straightforward answer: take a closer look. »This kind of work begins by looking around, gaining an impression and becoming aware of the seriousness of the situation in Europe, but also of the despair and strength of a country holding its ground.«

Democracy is based on the fundamental values of freedom and humanity. Above all else, it is based on

the freedom to take control of one's own destiny. The rights associated with this freedom, including the freedom of expression and freedom to trade goods and services, embody a human achievement. In the 19th century, people throughout Europe waged fierce battles to achieve these rights. In 1848, the first democratically elected parliament in German history convened here in the Church of St. Paul. That parliament failed, but the values it represented at the time went on to form the basis for all subsequent democratic constitutions. The European Union as we know it today is based on these values. During the Orange Revolution, Ukraine sought to implement the values of democracy in accordance with its historical ties.

As I mentioned above, one of the things I appreciate about Karl Schlögel, this year's recipient of the Peace Prize, is his curiosity, his desire to look behind the Iron Curtain. I also appreciate his eye for people's everyday lives. Most historians prefer to examine the distant past, usually with the goal of shedding light on events, assessing them and placing them in a larger historical context, all from the safe vantage point of someone born generations later. You, Professor Schlögel, take a different approach. You confront the present; you engage with the lives of your contemporaries; you visit the places where upheavals and, all too often, catastrophes occur. You narrate history by drawing from cities as if they were primary sources, because you have recognised that certain locations in cities are »points of maximum concentration of historical events and experiences«, much like the place we are gathered in today, Frankfurt's Church of St. Paul.

You speak with people in power. But you also speak with people who are forced to live with the everyday reality of war. You are always willing to revise and

correct your previous opinions, and also to adapt to new circumstances. Today's society is in dire need of more individuals with these qualities as they are becoming quite a rarity! You take personal responsibility for painting a realistic historical picture; one that conveys our contemporary situation as comprehensibly as possible. In this sense, you are an excellent representative of our historical heritage.

You have just published your latest book, *Auf der Sandbank der Zeit: Der Historiker als Chronist der Gegenwart* (On the sandbank of time: The historian as chronicler of the present day). In it, you write the following with regard to Russia's exploits in Ukraine in 2014: »I, for one, was not prepared for this moment, for this surprise attack, and I subsequently did what many people do when they're mentally thrown off track: I started to look around again, to engage with the situation, to personally examine the facts so I could form my own opinion«.

You travelled to locations in Ukraine, you made your way to the battlefields, to Kyiv, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Mariupol, Odesa and other sites where, in your own words, »one could observe with the naked eye the subversion and intervention, the formation of the future front lines of a massive war«.

At the time, you spoke of a form of »Ukraine ignorance«. Even in 2022, many people still had difficulty locating the vast country on a map. Only gradually did Western Europeans start to become aware of its historical and cultural significance – thanks in no small part to your contributions. For this, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and congratulate you on being awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade!

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group

Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

For a few weeks now, I've had a slightly faded green book on my bookshelf, A5 with a dust jacket, its typography somewhat outdated. On the U1, it says: »A city will reveal only what the interested eye is able to uncover. This is no different in Moscow than elsewhere, but in equal measure more exciting and insightful.«

In 1984, when Karl Schlögel invited the world to discover the city of Moscow by way of his book *Moskau lesen* (tr. *Reading Moscow*), the city was the centre of a global empire, the intersection of two cultures, a once forward-looking project already fossilised and past its expiry date. Roughly around that same time my urban planning professor urged me to learn to read cities, to decipher them by roaming their streets; he literally said I should »learn to read them«, just as one might learn to read a text by first recognising letters and words.

This is why, in the past several weeks, a new book has appeared on Karl Schlögel's bookshelf as well: a guide to reading cities by way of their figure-ground diagrams. Here, the former architect meets the historian: the architect traces the built environment, while the historian weaves in everyday experience. »We read time through space«, the historian would later write. A city's history becomes recognisable even in its figure-ground diagram.

Born into a family of farmers in 1948, the second of six children in a small community in the rural Bavarian region of Unterallgäu, he grew up without an innate ability to read cities, or to understand the East. He learned High German from the refugees who'd fled Breslau and Moravia and come to stay in Hawangen, some on his parents' farm. Their style and allure captivated him, their elegance and uniqueness fascinated him. To this day, he is still in contact with a refugee family's nanny, a gifted cook.

He was drawn to the unfamiliar perhaps more than to his own village and its traditions. At the monastic school he attended, a teacher who'd returned from being a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union offered Russian as a foreign language. He also organised excursions to Moscow. And so the young Karl Schlögel travelled to that city, where he experienced the Prague Spring firsthand.

He became an observer early on, studying Eastern European history and learning Russian. He joined the student left, but never really warmed to the structure of political work. Perhaps his place was on the sidelines. A lifelong search for the Russian *Intelligentsia* began. Karl Schlögel forged contacts, made friends; he married Sonja Margolina, a Russian author and publicist, and became a commuter between worlds. In other respects, too, he remained on the sidelines: He completed his doctorate, but then chose to write successful non-fiction books, conveying his knowledge to a wider readership, rather than pursue his Habilitation and a traditional academic career.

It was not until 1990, with the call to a professorship in Constance, that Karl Schlögel reinvented himself. The generation of professors shaped by the war were leaving their posts; he had to familiarise himself with the entire history of Eastern Europe and was also often plagued by stage fright before his lectures. In 1995, at Viadrina University in Frankfurt an der Oder, he finally stepped onto the playing field. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, students were eager to set off for Eastern Europe, and Karl Schlögel went along with them. On weekends, he travelled to Berlin to see his wife; weekdays were devoted to fostering the growth of the university. It soon became a brand bearing much in common with Karl Schlögel himself: curiosity and

a thirst for knowledge, a detective-like spirit, a deep and inexhaustible interest.

And so, time and again, he set off: to see what makes a region tick, to gain a foothold. He studied history beyond the archives as well; he needed the stories, the smells and tastes, the land and its people, the way of thinking.

For Schlögel, address books were sources just as valuable as historical treatises, footprints just as important as footnotes. As such, for generations of people who'd spent their lives knowing nothing of the East, or who'd chosen to ignore it, he shined a light on a centre of Europe that lies much farther east than many had ever imagined. His understanding of the world in the East made him a sought-after advisor to politicians, in equal parts wise and soft-spoken.

The Russian Occupation of Crimea in 2014 diverted his attention: to Ukraine, that ›borderland‹, whose borders have constantly shifted since the Middle Ages. He became an eyewitness to the seizure of government buildings in Donetsk, a city that reminded him of Bochum or Dortmund. He, the conscientious objector, the child of peace, witnessed systematic, staged violence. »Why aren't they fighting back?«, he asked himself, and then it dawned on him: Ukraine simply didn't have an army.

Even after the Russians launched their war of aggression, he continued travelling to Ukraine, where he reflected on how people can tend to a park when, right next door, homes lie in ruins. He noticed the punctuality of the trains and people's tidy clothing, even as the city he was roaming through was under a state of emergency. He observed the manner in which people maintained their dignity and sovereignty in extreme situations. He described everything precisely. Routines and everyday life played an important role. Nothing was insignificant. And he

found words for all of these things – words worthy of becoming a literary genre in their own right.

When the subject of language comes up, our conversation turns quiet and sad. We talk of the future. »You cannot orchestrate this huge country from a single point« and »Things will turn out differently than the main player believes«. And yet, a sense of speechlessness is already palpable.

Karl Schlögel, who knows Russia like no other, and for whom Russia became a place he called home, can no longer travel there without risking arrest.

Much like Boualem Sansal, who's been imprisoned in Algeria for eleven months now for a statement he made about the historical border between Algeria and Morocco.

How does one speak in times of war? How does one find a language in such a time? These are the questions that preoccupy him, and silence is one of them as well. This is another thing that's possible with Karl Schlögel: silence.

The observer on the sidelines – this is how he sees himself again now – the observer who first must look closely and analyse before he can express anything in language ...

The following evening, a friend asks me what Karl Schlögel, the recipient of the 2025 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, is like, and I venture to summarise our intense hours of conversation: Karl Schlögel is a flâneur, he wanders through cities and landscapes. He is an archaeologist who layers space and time. And, through him, every shard he lifts up becomes a sparkling kaleidoscope of history ...

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group

Katja Petrowskaja

»A citizen raises his voice«

Laudation

In early March 2022, on the eleventh day of the war, after a series of major demonstrations, there was a rally on Bebelplatz in Berlin. People exchanged handshakes and embraced silently. In those early days, we still thought we might be able to band together and stop the war. I saw a man wrapped in a Ukrainian flag standing directly at the barrier in front of the stage, at some distance from the crowd, his gaze fixed on the speakers. As I approached, I recognised Karl Schlögel. He stood there alone, leaning on the barrier, listening attentively to the speakers – and crying.

Perhaps it would have been better not to begin my speech with such an intimate scene. But when I was asked to deliver the laudation for today's ceremony, this memory flashed in front of my eyes. It is the reason why I didn't hesitate when asked to deliver a speech in praise of the historian and citizen Karl Schlögel. For many years, I've observed this year's prize winner with respect and admiration. I come from Kyiv, studied in Tartu and Moscow, and thus grew up in a country, or rather, several countries, that Karl Schlögel has examined over the years. His sorrow resonates very deeply with me, as does the urgency of his commitment.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine marked the end of an era of rapprochement between East and West, the end of an era of reconciliation, of an arduous search for mutual understanding and communication. This war – which continues to present an intellectual challenge even three-and-a-half years after it began – tore apart the space that had been pieced back together over the decades since the end of the Second World War, or so it seemed. Very few people contributed to this rapprochement by way of their writing as much as Karl Schlögel.

For the past forty years, the historian Karl Schlögel has strived to look beyond national borders, to break down entrenched prejudices and to counter ignorance, both through travel and meticulous archival research. Above all, however, he has sought direct encounters with people: historians, truck drivers, engineers, provincial museum employees, exiles, dissidents, human rights activists, workers and salespeople – each an eyewitness to their own lives. Their stories are woven into his explorations of the European landscape. Karl Schlögel uncovers the interconnected human destinies buried under layers of ideologies. Even before 1989, he broadened horizons toward the East and championed a common Europe. He embraced the foreign, the other, and searched for his own identity in this foreignness.

I would like to refer to this as a »peaceful campaign«, because the paths of his research and longing indeed overlap with the military campaigns waged by his father's generation. Karl Schlögel was born shortly after the war, and he has spoken several times about the good fortune of his generation – a sheltered generation granted the privilege of thinking about war, violence and weapons without actually being exposed to war and violence.

Karl Schlögel's early life story is remarkable: he was raised on a farm in the Allgäu region, attended boarding school, learned four languages, and then Russian as well. Among his teachers were German prisoners of war who had returned from the Soviet Union, where they had survived their imprisonment thanks only to the warmth of the local people. As a teenager, he travelled from deepest Bavaria to Prague, where the city overwhelmed him. In 1966, his school class took a six-week trip to the Soviet Union, and in 1968, he experienced the Prague Spring

firsthand. These extraordinary experiences shaped his subsequent life path. It is perhaps a story of teachers and learning, of Karl Schlögel's openness to experience new things, his ability to observe and absorb the world with every pore. Decades later, in his book *Planet der Nomaden (Planet of nomads)*, in which he describes migration as a defining marker of modernity, he pays tribute to the refugees from Silesia and East Prussia, the displaced persons and the homeless, whom he encountered in the 1960s.

From out of the oppression and cruelty of the war waged by his father's generation, there emerged a quite miraculous longing, a curiosity and – yes, I dare use the word – love: love for the people who lived there, in Prague, in Warsaw and further east. Love for the people and for the spaces in which these people's lives unfold.

From the very beginning, Karl Schlögel approached his work with a view to everyday life; his first book, *Moskau lesen (Reading Moscow)*, published in 1984, was the result of academic research combined with the act of strolling through the streets, all in search of a genre that would enable him to tell the story of the space he was in. He wrote about telephone directories, cemeteries, the metro, the cinema and the concert hall; he examined everyday questions and biographies; he pored over city maps and studied large buildings. In *Moskau 1937. Terror und Traum (Moscow 1937)*, he radicalised his approach by conjuring this particular year, feeling it himself, and rendering the terrible climax of the Stalinist dictatorship comprehensible to others.

Karl Schlögel has always been committed to not losing sight of the human dimension. It seems to me that the inner force driving his research is a relentless search for a voice that creates impact; it is a citizen's search for a stance, a stance that is inherent in the themes, genres and structures of all of his books. Perhaps this stance is the reason why his writing deviates from traditional forms of historical scholarship. Karl Schlögel originally decided against pursuing an academic career, and it was only in 1990 that he was appointed to the

University of Constance. Five years after that, he moved to the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). In his books, he developed a dual readability: on the one hand, as an analytical method for interpreting a city or a space, and on the other, as a principle of his writing. His interlocutor is always the person doing the reading: the citizen. This is evidence of his belief in enlightenment through writing, his belief in conversation and the idea that we can actually learn from each other. It is this belief that sometimes seems overly optimistic today.

Karl Schlögel has dedicated his life to researching Central and Eastern Europe. His book *Die Mitte liegt ostwärts. Europa im Übergang (The centre lies eastward. Europe in transition)*, contains essays written between 1989 and 2001, that is, between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Twin Towers. In these books, Karl Schlögel shows Europe coming into its own with the end of the division between East and West. He replaced the construct of »Europe« with descriptions of a lived space in transition. He brought Vilnius and Kraków, Kaliningrad and Gdansk – cities that had been forgotten in the West for decades – back onto the mental map of Europe.

Perhaps one day someone will produce a dictionary of the connections depicted in Karl Schlögel's work, where it's all about concepts of movement in space: lines, arteries, paths, bridges, traffic corridors, markets, traces, links, ports, textures, thresholds, transitions, capillaries, streams and fabrics. »The only way to understand Europe is by reading its paths«, he writes in *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit (We read time in space)*, »the old military roads, the railway lines, the postal networks, the air corridors.«

Direct observation and personal experience quickly became an ethical principle in Karl Schlögel's work: a research ethic, as it were. The very foundation of this work is his openness to experience: it is all about never passing judgement without careful observation, whether of a person or a place. It is a process based on the capacity to marvel at things and the ability to perceive the history of a place and its

present-day existence. A key principle of Karl Schlögel's work is to capture and depict the simultaneity of then and now in the form of a complex, palimpsest-like web. As a historian, this approach makes it possible for him to examine our present day without fear. And there's a history to this courageous approach.

The shock that followed Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 prompted Schlögel to immediately make his way to Ukraine. He experienced these events as a shock on a fundamental level, not only as an expert in the field, but also as a contemporary and a citizen. His book *Entscheidung in Kiew. Ukrainische Lektionen (Ukraine: A Nation on the Borderland)* emerged from this challenge. The West had taken its eyes off Ukraine – as an expert in Slavic Studies, this realisation was a personal matter for Schlögel, as was the shock he felt at people's inability to grasp that Putin, after the wars against Chechnya and Georgia, was not going to stop. *Entscheidung in Kiew* is a collection of urban portraits, a multifaceted history of locations that had previously experienced occupation and destruction at the hands of the Germans. During the Second World War, Ukraine was completely occupied by the Wehrmacht; in Germany's culture of remembrance, this fact was often overlooked – sometimes intentionally – in the ritualised confession of German guilt towards Russia. Schlögel describes Kyiv as a »metropolis« and Lviv as a »capital city of the European countryside«. He also explores the once closed missile-manufacturing city of Dnipropetrovsk. In Donetsk, he noted the first consequences of the war as early as 2015.

»The attack on Ukraine is not just an attack on Ukraine«, he wrote at the time, now more than 10 years ago. »What is at stake there is Europe, the West, whatever we want to call it; it's a way of life that Putin and his ilk perceive as a threat. War has returned to Europe.«

When it was published in 2015, *Entscheidung in Kiew* was celebrated by my Ukrainian friends. A woman I know who was born in Kharkiv bought

several copies and gave them to her German friends, thinking she would never again have to explain the city of Kharkiv to her friends from that moment on. Indeed, Karl Schlögel had captured Kharkiv's unique constructivism, its avant-garde cinema, its vibrant literary scene, the university, the Institute of Physics and its special role in scientific achievement. Today, Kharkiv, home to over a million people, is a city under daily attack.

I would have preferred not to talk about the war today, but rather about the musicality of Karl Schlögel's works, their composition. Indeed, his great books are structured like symphonies, with a magnetic, ever-forward-moving intonation. I would have preferred to talk about the origins of his prose, which is so beautifully written. Alas, war devours space and time.

Karl Schlögel was often asked why the shock of 2014 didn't help prevent Putin's full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022. »We didn't push hard enough«, was his reply.

I will never forget the episode of the German talk show hosted by Anne Will and broadcast in spring 2022, where Karl Schlögel, in his capacity as an expert in Slavic Studies and historian, apologised to the German people for not having foreseen the war. We waited in vain for such an apology from politicians, security experts and anyone else who promised us eternal peace via their policy of »Wandel durch Handel« (Change through trade) and who continued to negotiate with the war criminal even after 2014.

In May 2022, Karl Schlögel gave a speech at a conference organised by the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (German Academy of Language and Literature) on the subject of urbicide, the murder of cities. The conference was held in Dresden, of all places. When cities are destroyed, what is the recourse for a historian dedicated to celebrating cities as repositories of human experiences and endeavours? »If I were a poet, I would give a eulogy today«, he began his speech. »But I am not a poet. I have no language for it. I only have a way of

describing what I know to be true.« In those days, Mariupol was in the process of being destroyed by Russian troops. We saw images of the destruction in real time online; ruins under which thousands of people had been buried. »Mariupol was not some anonymous industrial city in the middle of nowhere; it was a European city by the sea«, Karl Schlögel said at the time in Dresden. »A city that worked, lived, dreamed. And we watched it disappear.«

Today, Ukraine is heading into its fourth winter of Russia's war of aggression. Many towns and villages have been razed to the ground, the capital city is under constant attack, and millions of people are affected by blackouts and continue to live in peril. The longer the war lasts, the more surreal it becomes. Karl Schlögel continues his efforts to find words to combat the disbelief and numbness; he calls attention to the suffering and resoluteness of Ukrainian society, which experiences the war every day and continues to fight for its survival.

We live in a time of general uncertainty and disunity. It is a time marked by the growing tendency to think in terms of opposites. In this time, Karl Schlögel has become a pillar of support for me and many others, the epitome of steadfastness beyond any ideological traps.

This includes his most recent major work: *American Matrix*. Schlögel did not allow the war to take away

his freedom to write about the US, for he has explored and engaged with this realm as well. The book, which was published in 2023, is yet another example of resilience: we cannot allow war to break us; we must continue to go about our work. This is no easy undertaking for someone whose heart is quite literally gripped by this tragedy.

Karl Schlögel, on that day at Bebelplatz, you gave a speech titled *Für eure und unsere Freiheit* (*For your freedom and ours*). Your public expression of despair was enormously helpful back then, as was your ability to pick yourself up and carry on, in spite of everything. You helped us understand that we are not alone. Thank you for raising your voice, time and again.

It is a great honour for me to be speaking here today. I am merely one voice in a chorus of people from here and elsewhere for whom Karl Schlögel's voice carries great meaning.

Allow me to extend my warmest congratulations to you on receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. I wish you much strength for everything you love and everything that moves you!

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group

Certificate

The German Publishers and Booksellers Association
has chosen to award the 2025 Peace Prize
of the German Book Trade to

Karl Schlögel

In his distinguished body of work, German historian and essayist Karl Schlögel combines empirical historiography with personal experience. As a scholar and flâneur, an archaeologist of modernity and a seismograph of social change, he explored the cities and landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe long before the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Through his writing, Schlögel placed the cities of Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv and Kharkiv on the mental map of his readers. He also repeatedly characterised Saint Petersburg and Moscow as European cities. His unique narrative style combines observation, insight and feeling, a blend that allows him to effectively challenge existing prejudices while also awakening our curiosity.

After Russia's annexation of Crimea, Schlögel sharpened his focus on Ukraine, inviting us to join him in reflecting on Germany's own blind spots regarding the region. His was one of the first voices to warn of Vladimir Putin's aggressive expansionist policies and authoritarian-nationalist claims to power. Today, Schlögel continues to affirm Ukraine's place in Europe, calling for its defence as essential to our shared future. His enduring message is both clear and urgent: Without a free Ukraine, there can be no peace in Europe.

German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Chairwoman

Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

Frankfurt am Main, Church of St. Paul, October 19, 2025

Karl Schlögel

»Learning from Ukraine. Lessons of Resistance«

Acceptance speech

I would like to thank the German Publishers and Booksellers Association for this prestigious award, Frau Schmidt-Friderichs for her extraordinarily moving words, the members of the jury, my publisher, my longstanding editor and the translators who ensured that our books came to fruition and reached their readers. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Katja Petrowskaja, who is more able than I to speak about what has been my lifelong pre-occupation. Thank you!

Of particular importance to me is the opportunity this award gives me to speak at this historically significant site, not only in the 75th calendar year since the establishment of the Peace Prize, but at a time when, in light of the new world disorder, we are becoming most painfully aware of the limits of our own powers of judgement. The most monstrous thing is underway: before our very eyes, Ukrainian cities are being bombarded day after day, night after night, by Russian missiles, while Europe seems unable or unwilling to protect them. We were shocked to witness the murderous pogrom perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the transformation of Gaza into a battlefield claiming thousands upon thousands of civilian casualties. The world has hardly taken note of the apocalyptic scenarios of civil war in Sudan.

But where, if not here in Frankfurt's Church of St. Paul, is the appropriate place to speak of ways to end wars and to take Walter Benjamin's words seriously: »But if you want peace, talk about war,« a spin on the older version: »Si vis pacem, para bellum.« A look back at the history of the Peace Prize – as a visit to its website readily avails – might render an initial impression that everything has already been said on the subject of war and peace. The speeches read like a chronicle of post-war Germany's intellectual challenges: in the early years, everything remained overshadowed by the Second World War, which had just come to an end, and the catastrophe that Germany

had wrought upon the world; the site of the award ceremony had itself just re-emerged from the rubble. Looking back, it becomes clear that the subsequent decades were by no means a time of idyllic, peaceful coexistence, but rather of Cold War, a time of balanced equilibrium, and the ever-looming spectre of nuclear self-destruction. The fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War did not spell the end of history in Europe, but rather ushered in a period marked by the cessation of systemic antagonism and the obviation of the reasons for major military conflict between the two superpowers; all the while, astute observers saw in the Yugoslav Wars an early indication of the end of the post-war period, which terminated with the Russian occupation of Crimea in spring 2014 and – more definitively – with the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, opening the door to a new pre-war era.

Researching the origins of wars and the complicated paths to peace – silencing the weapons, ending the killing, disempowering the aggressor, perhaps reaching a peace treaty that can then lead to reconciliation – offers infinitely rich and illustrative source material for what diplomacy can and cannot do, but it does not provide applicable recipes for ever more, as history does not repeat itself. And then it becomes clear that, despite all our knowledge, despite all the experience of previous generations, we must start again from scratch, and that our profound haplessness renders us incapable to describe what is going on before our eyes. The terms we use to describe the new circumstances are inadequate. We are at a loss for words to accurately convey what is happening. This is more than just a lack of concepts or writing skills; it is the loss of the horizon of experience that has formed us till now, a reality where everything we have accumulated over the course of a lifetime seems in question, devalued, even in ruins.

I could not imagine that Russia would regress into times that in many respects resembled the practices of Stalinism, which I had dedicated years of my life to researching; I could not imagine an America, which I had come to know as a student, harbouring fears of an authoritarian regime taking hold one day soon. It is completely alien to me that something could begin to slip in the Federal Republic of Germany; and even more remote was the idea that war, which for me was something I knew only from television and documentaries, could become something real in our immediate vicinity. But this is what has happened. And it seems that it is now our turn, if I may speak in the collective singular: our generation, which is accustomed to, and even spoiled by, times of relative peace, must think everything through again from the beginning – a kind of stocktaking and examination by a generation that has been enormously lucky and is now finding it incredibly difficult to bid farewell to its preconceptions and to adjust to the war in Europe, with all that it entails.

How liberating it felt to work your way out of the confines of the divided Cold War world and cross over the demarcation line drawn between East and West or under the Iron Curtain. For me, a person with no family ties to Eastern Europe but whose father had been active in the war as of 1 September 1939, most of the time on the Eastern Front and in Ukraine, this was the case very early on. I learned as a young boy that beyond the division of Europe into East and West, into socialism and capitalism, there was another, a third schism that was not commensurate with the first two: the lost centre of Europe. This was the beginning of a voyage of discovery into a region that did not interest post-war West Germans at the time, or only insofar as an opportunity to observe the enemy. As always, biographical coincidence played a decisive role: Russian lessons at a Bavarian boarding school, the atmosphere availed by the thawing of tensions and the relative peaceful coexistence of the 1960s – Yevgeny Yevtushenko's *Poem Babi Yar* and Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*, but above all the lasting impressions of early trips to Prague and the former Soviet Union. These trips helped me realise that understanding Central and Eastern Europe was not just a matter of reading, of academic training, but also involved the people, landscapes and

theatres of history that I was to discover in my studies, long before Milan Kundera's famous 1983 essay *Un Occident kidnappé ou La tragédie de l'Europe centrale*: the atmosphere of the Prague Spring, the encounter and friendship with dissidents and emigrants, and the idea that the opposition movements in the East and West would need to find each other across the Wall, perhaps even requiring a bridging of the divide between intellectuals and workers. The mental map of Europe had already shifted before the fall of the mighty barrier. Dissident circles in Budapest, Warsaw, Berlin and the kitchens of Moscow discussed what would soon culminate in revolutions in Eastern Europe. It was an exciting time of cross-border conspiracy, new reading material and the discovery of connections that created a new cultural realm beyond the dichotomy of a divided world. A vastly diverse linguistic, cultural and historical space – a former casualty of war, genocide and expulsion – once again saw the light of day. People had been banished to the dead zone between the empires of Hitler and Stalin, moving about in a world of dual experience where, as they learned, there was no escape, no possibility of flight. It was a place of utter helplessness.

The exploration of this space and the visualisation of its history were soon followed by the transformation of the political map, which, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, did not stop at the borders of the last multi-ethnic empire. However, there was still a long way to go to achieve complete independence and freedom for Ukraine. It took the Maidan Revolution and a war to finally shake Ukraine loose from the limitations of a narrow west-centred perception. It ceased to be »terra incognita«, a blank spot on the map. It became present to us via our screens, through reporting; the refugees who came to us, a large and beautiful country, a Europe in miniature, connected to the world by thousands upon thousands of threads: the thousand-year-old Kyiv, Kharkiv, a metropolis of European modernity, Odessa, whose grand staircase descending to the harbour offers a look back on the entire 20th century, Lviv, Leopold, Lvów, Lvov, more than just a »Little Vienna«, a cultural headwater for the entire continent. Ukraine as a prism of all European experiences in the »century of extremes«: The venue of

revolutions, civil war, world wars, the Holodomor and the Holocaust, and finally the stage for independence and freedom after decades of struggle.

But then came Russia's occupation of Crimea. Over ten years ago, having returned from Kharkiv, Donetsk, Mariupol and Odessa, I wrote: »We do not know how the battle for Ukraine will end; whether it will stand its ground against Russian aggression or it will fall to its knees; whether the Europeans, the West, will defend or abandon it; whether the European Union will hold together or fall apart. Only this much is certain: Ukraine will never disappear from the map in our minds.«

Putin's Russia is determined to erase an independent and free Ukraine from the map of Europe. Putin has openly declared so and day after day has been proving that he means it. No words can rival the images of destruction. There is no atrocity his troops have not committed. Nothing and no one has been spared as a target for drones and missiles: market squares, residential neighbourhoods, museums, hospitals, harbours, railway stations. Cities that were on the rise – new airports, transport routes, hotels – are being flattened by bombs. Cities have become zones where drones hunt people. The direct hit of a missile is followed by a direct hit on the rescue team. The industrial giants of socialist reconstruction are being reduced to rubble, as are churches, monasteries and sanatoriums. What was once the Ukrainian equivalent of Germany's productive Ruhr area no longer exists. If the country cannot be conquered, it must at least be destroyed, made unliveable. A new term is circulating: urbicide. Abandoned towns of the 21st century, detonated dams and bridges, flooded landscapes, fields of black earth scorched and contaminated for generations, ethnic cleansing and the abduction of tens of thousands of children. The occupied territories are little more than a massive camp under the control of warlords and criminals. The disaster that Putin's Russia has wrought upon Ukraine goes by many names: imperialism, revisionism, mafia state, fascism, ruscism. Its crimes are documented and stored in real time in an infinite number of images, and the names of the perpetrators – whether at the front, in torture chambers, in propaganda or at command centres – will no doubt one day be identified.

It is astonishing how long it has taken Germany to realise the true nature of Putin's Russia. No matter the issue – historical path dependence, cultural affinity, nostalgia and sentimentality, economic interests, even corruption – recent German-Russian relations are ripe for historical clarification and a reappraisal from which no one emerges clean. There have been many »Russlandverstehers«, that is, individuals who empathise with Russia's viewpoint, but too few who actually understood anything about Russia itself. If they had been clear-eyed, they would have explained what was in store for us and that the categories employed to make sense of Putin's empire were in large part the product of wishful thinking and credulity, instead of ultimately having to admit that we were no match for this figure of evil – or whatever term will emerge for this tyrant. How much easier and more convenient it was to blame NATO or the collective West. Indeed, the search for a deeper meaning to Putin's policies continues on to this day. Among the explanations offered: humiliation of the former superpower, fear of encirclement, need for security, struggle for recognition. And there exists a corresponding misconception that misunderstandings can be rectified and deals negotiated through bilateral argumentative discourse. However, the idea that Putin would adhere to arguments or even rules of procedure has been refuted from the outset. He has simply knocked over the table at which negotiations and talks were due to take place according to certain rules and declared with bravura that breaking the rules was part of the system, long before the term »disruption« became more widely used. He was and is a master at escalation dominance, the well-calculated escalation of conflicts, including his calculated breach of the nuclear taboo. Fear is his most important weapon, and his true talent lies in his exploitation of fear. To this day, he considers himself the undisputed master of the proceedings.

But not everything has gone according to his plan – the blitzkrieg in Ukraine, capturing the capital, the victory parade down Khreshchatyk in Kyiv, the encirclement of Kharkiv. Things turned out differently. Despite hundreds of thousands of killed and wounded at the front, he is barely making progress – so he targets Ukraine's defenceless civilian population. His slogan is simple: we will finish you off

wherever you are; you have no hope but to surrender. Diplomacy is just a tool to buy time, which he believes works in his favour. Those in his circle of advisors say it openly: We will break the backs of you Europeans.

Am I guilty of Russophobia? One tactic in the repertoire of intimidatory rhetoric is to defame criticism of Putin's regime as slander against Russia. As someone who has been admiring Russian culture since his youth and has spent a lifetime working to promote it, this simply cannot apply to me. It pains me when friends and colleagues are imperilled and driven into exile. Putin's instrumentalisation of the prestige of Russian culture plays a major role in the implementation of his imperial ambitions – the soft power of ›Rússkiy mir‹, the Russian world that knows no borders. Another key element of the rhetoric of intimidation and moral blackmail is the defamation of the Ukrainian leadership as Nazis and the placing of Germans under the suspicion of being Nazis. The Bundeswehr is stigmatised as the successor to the Wehrmacht, while the Russian war against Ukraine is misrepresented as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War against fascism. All crimes of which Russia is guilty are summarily blamed on the Ukrainians – from the downing of flight MH17 to the murders on the streets of Bucha.

As absurd as this propaganda seems, it is not without effect, especially in Germany, which continues to suffer from war remorse and is accordingly vulnerable to such allusions to Nazism. In comparison, the propaganda from Soviet times seems outdated and rather harmless. It no longer focuses on the contrast between black and white, on the distinction between truth and lies; it now targets the dissolution of the distinction between truth and falsehood itself. It functions according to the motto: everything is equally true, everything is equally false, hence the erasure of the basis of all judgement. It is aimed at the domestic public, at creating images of the enemy and fears of encirclement; but it is also intended for public consumption beyond the Russian sphere. Everything is fair game when it comes to undermining the credibility and self-assurance of Western societies. It is not difficult to pinpoint where open societies are most vulnerable and easiest to wound – and where the forces linger that can be utilised to this

end. The capacity for self-criticism and self-doubt, this greatest achievement of open societies, is used to undermine stability and self-confidence. Russia then praises itself as the standard-bearer for a unique and in every respect superior civilisation. Europe and the West, or what was understood to be the West, are derided as weak and decadent – their time has passed. This voice is not without echo in a situation where reading Spengler's *Decline of the West* is once again in fashion. Taken together, everything is having an effect. The war that Russia has brought back to Europe is being waged not only by military means, but also as a war over hearts and minds, using moods, fears, resentments, nostalgia – and the tempting offer of a return to business as usual.

It is difficult to adjust to our new situation, the regrouping of global forces and alliances. It is like saying goodbye to a world that has begun to disintegrate. Gone is the certainty of being able to rely on the America we have known since Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* and from its great literature – it is a country that I remember since my first visit as a land of free speech and freedom from fear. This America no longer applies. Europe is now confronted not only with the phenomenon of Putinism, but also with a US president who is overturning all notions of the silent functioning of checks and balances and of alliances, and who is forcing us to rethink all the coordinates we once thought secure. Europe is now alone and fully on its own in a situation where everything is in flux.

Confronted with this situation, I began rereading the old texts in which the most clear-eyed minds of the 1930s tried making sense of the forces that loomed in Central Europe. Once again, I revisited the analyses and works written in exile, whether in Paris, New York or Weimar on the Pacific: Ernst Fraenkel's *The Dual State*, Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and later, with Stalinism already in mind, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. But however prescient and accurate these analyses were, we must now, at this turning point in history, set out on our own journey to capture the novelty and danger of today's situation in our own words. Heeding the lessons of Ukraine in this pursuit is helpful, indeed indispensable.

No one is more interested in peace than the Ukrainians. They know that an aggressor with limitless determination cannot be stopped with words. They are realists who can afford no illusions. Their refusal to be victims drives them to fight back. They are prepared for anything. They fight for their children, for their families, for their state – they are prepared even to die for their country. What amounts to television footage for others is firsthand experience for them. Ukraine's defence at the front would be nothing without the army of volunteers behind it. They have survived the winters and braved the nightly terror of drones and missiles for weeks, even months on end. The IT experts of yesterday are the drone pilots of today. The festive dress women don for the theatre or a concert betrays an attitude that holds firm even in a state of emergency – the club is where young people draw strength to continue the resistance. They are heroes in a post-heroic world, without making a fuss about it. They keep their transport system running, and with it their country remains whole. The howl of sirens is background noise for their everyday lives, not just a fire drill. They have learnt how drone strikes differ from ballistic missile attacks. They are helping us prepare for the time after this historical turning point. They are teaching us that national defence has nothing to do with militarism. Soldiers, and above all women soldiers, are respected because everyone knows that they are performing their duty and doing that for which they are prepared. The citizens of Ukraine are teaching us that what is happening is not the ›Ukraine conflict‹, but war. They are helping us understand whom we are dealing with: a regime that hates Europe and that seeks to destroy Ukraine as an independent state. They are showing us that accommodating the aggressor only increases its appetite for more, and that appeasement does not lead to peace – it paves the way to war. Because they are on the front line, they know more than we in our still-safe confines of the hinterland. Because they are at the mercy of a superior enemy, they must be faster and more intelligent than their foe. Ukrainians, who are generally suspected of nationalism, are showing us that patriotism has not become obsolete in the 21st century. They are ahead of us in terms of military technology, as they were forced to fight at a time

when we could still allow ourselves to ponder questions of eternal peace. They took it on themselves to develop weapons that were withheld from them out of hesitation or fear. They are the mirror into which we peer, reminding us what Europe once stood for and why it is still worth defending. They are calling out to us: do not be afraid – not because they are not afraid, but because they have overcome their fear. Ukraine's writers do their utmost to express what those farther away lack the words for. They have taken the Ukrainian language out into the world and performed a literary miracle. Their poets speak with deadly seriousness, while some have even paid for it with their lives. Their president is a man who expects the truth from his compatriots, no matter how bitter he knows it may be. They are well versed in the behavioural tenets of resistance and are teaching the Europeans what to expect if they continue to fail to prepare for the worst-case scenario. They have learnt from experience that when threat levels are high, decisions are made overnight, while in quieter times they are put off until the day after tomorrow, if even then. Stoic aplomb is a luxury they can only afford once the war is over. To endure, to persevere, despite unspeakable exhaustion – this is the revolution of dignity in permanence. They are the ones to whom we owe our peace, while they pay a price both incalculable and unfathomable.

It is first and foremost to them and to all people of good will that we owe our gratitude. And it is to them that the greeting from these grounds should usher forth – from the Church of St. Paul in Frankfurt, a hot spot of the German Movement for Unity and Freedom, and a ground zero of Europe's Springtime of Nations. It is a greeting to the defenders of a free Ukraine, to the men and women who continue their work despite everything, who take their children to school despite swarms of drones, to the inhabitants of Kyiv who hole up in metro stations, to the engine drivers who navigate their trains on time from Ivano-Frankivsk to Kharkiv.

As unlikely as it may sound, we Europeans would do well to learn from Ukraine: this would mean learning how to be fearless and brave, and perhaps even learning how to triumph.

Translated to English by the Hagedorn Group

Ikebana sculpture

Dr. phil. Horst Nising and Uwe Jacob, senior professors at the Ikenobo-Ikebana-Academy in Kyoto/Japan, have designed and created an ikebana sculpture in honor of the Peace Prize winner Karl Schlögel.

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