

Frank-Walter Steinmeier:

More security for everyone in Europe: A call for a re-launch of arms control

Unexpectedly for many, Europe's security has come under threat again. Today, concern for Europe's security must be at the top of our political agenda.

Even before the Ukraine conflict, there were signs that a bloc confrontation we thought long overcome was in the offing once again. However, the new confrontation is no longer defined by the antagonism between Communism and Capitalism, but by a dispute over social and political order – a dispute about freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights – and by a struggle for geopolitical spheres of influence.

Russia's annexation of Crimea violated international law and called basic principles of the European security architecture into question. At the same time, the nature of conflicts has changed dramatically. Hybrid warfare and non-state actors are playing an ever greater role. New technologies – offensive cyber capabilities, armed drones, robots, electronic, laser and stand-off weapons – carry new dangers. New combat scenarios – smaller units, higher fighting power, faster deployment – are not covered by the existing regimes of control and transparency. The danger of a new arms race looms large.

Ever since the Harmel Report back in 1967, the West has followed a dual strategy vis-à-vis Russia: deterrence and détente. NATO renewed its commitment to this dual strategy at the Warsaw Summit. We adopted the necessary measures to provide military reassurance, and at the same time reaffirmed our political responsibility for cooperative security in Europe.

However, there is a difficulty inherent in the dual approach: Deterrence is real and visible to everyone. Yet, détente must also be real and visible! If only one side is, the balance is lost, misperceptions arise, and little remains to counteract the risk of escalation.

My suggestion is: Let's put forward a concrete goal – the re-launch of arms control in Europe as a tried and tested means of risk-reduction, transparency and confidence-building.

Agreement on arms control is not a result of existing trust– it is a precursor necessary to build trust where it is lost. In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear confrontation. Soon after the crisis – when the US-Soviet relationship was at an all-time low – both superpowers decided that it was time to work across the divide, by small and concrete steps. This principle was also at the heart of Willy Brandt's *Neue Ostpolitik* in the 1960s and 70s.

Today, we are not reliving the Cold War; today's threats and challenges are different. New and deep rifts have opened up between Russia and the West, and I fear we will not be able to close them in the near future, no matter how hard we try. Nobody should be under any illusions about the challenges we face in this endeavour – especially today, in a world of manifold crises, in eastern Ukraine, in Syria and Libya, at a time when we are not immune from renewed escalation or further setbacks. Only one thing is certain: If we don't try, peace in Europe and beyond will be fragile. So we should heed the lesson of détente: However deep the rifts, we must try to build bridges.

Today, the existing regimes of arms control and disarmament are crumbling. The CFE Treaty, which led to the disarmament of tens of thousands of tanks and heavy weapons in Europe in the years after 1990, is no longer being implemented by Russia. The Vienna Document's transparency and confidence-building mechanisms have grown increasingly ineffective, and Russia opposes the necessary steps for its modernisation. The Open Skies Treaty is being limited in its application. The Budapest Memorandum – as security guarantee for Ukraine – has been made obsolete by the annexation of Crimea. The trust that was carefully accumulated through decades of hard work has been squandered.

At the same time, Russia has repeatedly called for a new debate on conventional arms control in Europe. It's high time to take Russia at its word!

We need a re-launch of arms control which takes the new realities into account yet which is grounded in a principle that – despite all our differences with Russia – continues to hold true: We must not frame security in Europe on a permanently adversarial basis. Security is not a zero-sum game. Increased security for one must not be perceived as reduced security by the other. All the more we need to look for means and fields of cooperative security.

A re-launch of conventional arms control must, in my view, cover five areas. We need agreements that

1. define regional ceilings, minimum distances and transparency measures (especially in militarily sensitive regions such as the Baltic),
2. take into account new military capabilities and strategies (smaller, mobile units rather than traditional, large armies; accordingly taking resources such as transport capabilities into consideration),
3. integrate new weapons systems (e.g. drones),
4. permit effective verification that is rapidly deployable, flexible and independent in times of crisis (e.g. carried out by the OSCE),
5. can be applied in areas whose territorial status is disputed.

On these complex issues, we want to launch a structured dialogue with all partners who share responsibility for the security of our continent. One important forum for such a dialogue is the OSCE, which Germany is chairing this year.

Can such an undertaking be successful – in times when world order is eroding, and relations with Russia are strained? I admit, it's not certain. But it would be irresponsible not to try. It is true that Russia has violated basic principles of peace. It is true that these principles – territorial integrity, free choice of alliance, recognition of international law – are non-negotiable for us. But we must likewise be united in our interest to avoid spiralling escalation. In the West as in Russia, we feel that our world has become more dangerous. Islamist terrorism, bitter conflicts in the Middle East, failing states, and the refugee crisis bring risks for us all. Security policy capabilities on both sides are stretched to the limit. Nobody wins and everyone loses if we exhaust ourselves in a new arms race.

By re-launching arms control we can make a tangible offer of cooperation to all those who want to shoulder responsibility for Europe's security. It is time to try the impossible...