



Speech by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, at the Munich Security Conference

Saturday, 19 February 2022

Dear Heads of State and Government, dear colleagues,

dear guests from Germany and abroad,

dear Ambassador Ischinger, dear Ambassador Heusgen,

ladies and gentlemen,

Before I share with you some reflections on the state of the world and how we can manage the turning geopolitical tide, which the MSC has this year placed on its agenda, I would first like to mention another turning tide – not out there in the world, but here at the Bayerischer Hof.

For fourteen years, Wolfgang Ischinger, you have been not just the host and head of the Munich Security Conference but its driving force, a pioneer and a source of inspiration and motivation. Our conference today and tomorrow will be your last in this role. And so I would like to thank you for what you have done for international relations and in particular the transatlantic friendship over the past years. Thank you very much, Ambassador!

I would also like to take this opportunity to give a warm welcome to your successor. If there is anyone who can follow in such mighty footsteps, then it is you, Christoph Heusgen, with your comprehensive international experience. I am delighted that we will remain in close contact with one another after you take up your new role. And I wish you all the best!

Ladies and gentlemen, the Munich Security Conference has quite the sense of timing, as we well know. And yet I would be pleased if we could meet in slightly less turbulent times.

Europe once again faces the threat of war. And the risk has by no means been averted.

As it dominates public debate, even global challenges such as the pandemic and the fight against climate change are fading into the background. And yet they urgently require a response.

It is in this same spirit, Mr Ischinger, that I understood your words yesterday when you called on democratic societies to unlearn their helplessness.

I want to begin, not least given the critical security situation, by making one thing clear. Of course there is the chorus of voices alternately proclaiming the demise of liberal democracies or of “the West” or the international order that it has shaped. And indeed, I do not want to deny that free, democratic societies have competition. But we can say with confidence that this model has held firm against its competition.

The reasons for that have not changed today. Democracies are more adaptable and resilient in the long term, because freedom of opinion and diversity of opinion, free elections, the recognition of political opposition, the protection of minorities ensure equitable societies. States in which the rule of law prevails generate trust and stability, and countries are stronger when they respect human dignity instead of trampling on it.

There is nothing divisive about confidently asserting this – because a life in freedom, justice and dignity is, precisely, not an exclusively “Western” aspiration, but a deeply human, universal one.

This concept of universal values is also at the root of the international order that emerged from the cataclysms of the twentieth century. It has ensured equilibrium and growing prosperity, and not just in North America and Europe, but precisely in those parts of the world that now, in light of their increasing economic and political significance, want to have a greater say and a greater hand in shaping the future – and, indeed, must do so. We should welcome this drive to join in shaping events. It is a mark of success, because strong, independent partners do not weaken our position; in fact, they offer the possibility of solving problems that even the biggest and strongest cannot handle alone.

Nevertheless, this international order is entirely dependent on a willingness to cooperate – even when discussion with the other party is challenging – with clear convictions, pragmatism, a healthy self-confidence and yes, certainly, an awareness of one’s own strength. It is sustained by one core promise: that everyone, even the strong, will play by the rules.

That brings me to what we have seen in the east of our continent in recent months. To put it plainly, there is nothing that justifies the deployment of well over 100,000 Russian soldiers surrounding Ukraine. Russia is holding up the issue of Ukraine’s potential accession to NATO as a *casus belli*. That is a paradox, because there is no decision pending on the issue whatsoever.

We Europeans and the transatlantic community have warned Russia that military aggression against Ukraine would be a severe error. We want this not to happen!

Russia has now disclosed its response to the proposals made by the US, and I say that, yes, we are ready to negotiate. In doing so, we will of course make a clear distinction between untenable demands and legitimate security interests.

We must have the confidence to differentiate between the two, given everything that is at stake.

The fundamental principles enshrined by the OSCE are non-negotiable for us. Russia has agreed to them, and they include the right to freely choose one's alliances.

At the same time, there are questions of security that are important for both sides – first and foremost transparency around weapons systems and exercises, risk mitigation mechanisms and new approaches to arms control.

At my meeting with President Putin on Tuesday, I made it clear that any further violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine will have a high price for Russia – in political, economic and geostrategic terms. At the same time I emphasised that diplomacy will not fail because of us.

As much diplomacy as possible, without being naive – that is what we strive for. And we are utilising all channels of communication to this end: the NATO-Russia Council, which has met again for the first time in years; the OSCE, where conflict prevention can be discussed with all Europeans, Russians and Americans – Poland as the current Chair has made suggestions in this regard. There is the bilateral channel between Russia and the US. And we are utilising the Normandy format. It remains crucial for the resolution of the conflict.

During my visits to Kyiv and Moscow, I emphasised that the Minsk agreements must be implemented. I am very grateful above all to President Zelensky for his commitment to now make progress with the necessary laws and to discuss these in the Trilateral Contact Group.

Of course, I am not under any illusions. We cannot expect to see progress overnight. However, we can only stop this crisis in its tracks if we negotiate. What is at stake, after all, is nothing less than peace in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of this must be accompanied by a repositioning of Europe and the transatlantic alliance in a changed world. The strategy processes within the European Union and NATO therefore hold a special significance.

I would like to mention four more fundamental considerations here today.

Firstly, we will develop a broader understanding of security. The MSC has always been a pioneer in this respect, Mr Ischinger; it has come to address the risks arising from climate change, global health crises or the abuse of cyberspace and new technologies as a matter of course.

But for this broad understanding to emerge, it is essential for the EU and NATO to complement and reinforce one another, to prepare themselves to face new risks. Ultimately, a cyberattack remains a cyberattack – regardless of whether it is directed from Saint Petersburg, Tehran or Pyongyang.

I think we agree, however, that taking new threats like these into account is something different than laying claim to a globally active NATO.

Indeed, the developments of recent months in particular show us how vital it remains to concentrate on the issue of collective defence in the North Atlantic area. We need to muster the capabilities required for this. And yes, that includes Germany too. Aeroplanes that fly, ships that can set out to sea, soldiers who are optimally equipped for their dangerous tasks – these are things that a country of our size, one that bears a very special responsibility within Europe, must be able to afford.

We owe this to our allies in NATO, too. My message to them is that Germany stands by the guarantee of Article 5 – unconditionally. And we are also showing practical solidarity – at the moment, for example, with a greater Bundeswehr presence in the Baltic and with NATO Air Policing in the alliance's south-east.

This brings me to the second point. The repositioning of our alliances is not taking place in a vacuum; there is an interplay with other players and their ambitions. The starting point for this is a clearheaded analysis of the world around us. Almost eight billion people currently live on our planet, and this number is rising. Just a fraction of the total – 450 million and 330 million, respectively – live in the European Union or the US.

We can see similar trends when we look at our shares in the global economy in recent decades. The slices of the pie are shrinking. For me, this means that the world of the twenty-first century will be neither unipolar nor bipolar. It will have various centres of power. And this development is not in itself a bad thing, because prosperity increases as a result, or, to stay with the metaphor, because the pie as a whole becomes bigger.

Over one billion fewer people live in extreme poverty today than 30 years ago, and this achievement is an achievement of the entire international community, one that we must fight for particularly now amid the pandemic. The emergence of a middle class in countries such as China, Indonesia and India also benefits workers here.

In Asia in particular, it is in any case not a “rise” that we should speak of, but, if anything, a “revival”. Being a major power, from the perspective of Beijing or Delhi, is not a historical anomaly but rather a return to the status quo ante. There is nothing wrong with that. Quite the opposite.

What is problematic is when this growth in significance is translated into a demand for allegiance and zones of influence, when universal rules that someone previously upheld are swept aside overnight. No country should be the backyard of another country. The aspirations to power of China in particular must be seen in a nuanced light, and our stance on them will be just as nuanced – we will seek cooperation where this is in our mutual interest, in the fight against climate change and poverty or, as challenging as it might be, on the issue of arms control; we will strengthen our own capabilities; and we will give a firm

response where the preservation of the multilateral order is threatened or human rights are trampled underfoot.

But in all three areas, the same holds true: the more closely Europe and North America coordinate, the more successful we will be.

That brings me to my third remark. We need clarity on the level of the European Union's ambition when it comes to its own security and beyond – the key word here is European sovereignty.

I have just described the shifts in geopolitical power that we are facing. With regard to the US, it is clear that it will remain a centre of gravity even in a multipolar world. There can be no doubt about that. My talks in Washington last week strengthened this conviction.

But for Europe, things look different. We Europeans can only preserve our ability to act effectively, to make autonomous decisions, if we pool our will and our capabilities within the European Union.

And, incidentally, when I talk of the European Union, I also have the countries of the Western Balkans in mind. It is not enough to cite the prospect of enlargement for this region as a strategic goal. We must actively advance it. I am pleased that many colleagues from the region are here today, because this task is a shared one.

The European Union is our framework for action, our opportunity. Remaining a “power among powers”, that is what we mean when we talk of “European sovereignty”. On the path to achieving this, we need three things. Firstly, the will to act as a “power among powers”; secondly, joint strategic goals; and thirdly, the capabilities to meet these goals. We are working on all of these factors.

They also make clear the level of ambition that the EU's new Strategic Compass must reach. It includes European efforts to fight terrorism, ranging from civilian stabilisation to equipment to military training. It includes fresh momentum for more effective arms control which creates transparency and confidence, here in Europe. Talks with Russia, should they take place, can mark a beginning. Finally, it also includes active European diplomacy, such as we are practising in our dealings with Iran, for example.

On the subject of Iran: We have come far in the negotiations in Vienna over the last ten months. All of the elements for a conclusion to the negotiations are on the table. But if Iran continues to enrich fuel while simultaneously suspending IAEA monitoring, that is unacceptable. For us, a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable, not least because the security of Israel is non-negotiable. And so we have repeatedly indicated that the point will soon be reached where we will have to decide whether a return to the JCPOA is still reasonable.

We have an opportunity now to reach an agreement that makes it possible for sanctions to be lifted. At the same time, if we do not succeed in this very soon, the negotiations risk failing. Iran's leadership now has a choice. Now is the moment of truth.

I believe that the nuclear talks led by the EU are a good example of what Europe can achieve together with its partners.

That brings me to my fourth and final point, something that I hope for and request of you: Let us stick together! As friends and allies.

Sticking together, for our friends and partners, also means accepting the European Union as a single entity, recognising it as an international player and supporting further EU integration. We have quite enough to do with our opponents trying to divide us.

And so I am deeply grateful to you, Kamala Harris, to our many friends in the US Congress and the US Administration, for upholding the promise day after day that President Biden made here in Munich last year: “to support the goal of a Europe whole and free and at peace.” This whole, free, peaceful – and, I will add, sovereign – European Union is not targeted against anyone. It is certainly not a risk to transatlantic cooperation. On the contrary!

Ultimately, only an effective and capable Europe will remain an attractive partner for the United States: as a strong European pillar in the transatlantic alliance, as a loud and clear voice for democracy, freedom and justice, and as America’s closest friend and partner.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to your questions and our discussion.

Thank you very much for listening!

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ Федерального канцлера Олафа Шольца на Мюнхенской конференции по безопасности Суббота, 19 февраля 2022