

# Back to Gorbachev or the “new thinking” and the “common European home”

by Leo Ensel\*



Leo Ensel.  
(Picture ma)

*Even if Donald Trump should stop the war in Ukraine, under the given conditions we can at best expect a new Cold War for the next few decades. There will only be real peace in Europe when all the actors involved return to a European security order based on the principles of the “Charter of Paris”. Above all, this requires a fundamental change in thinking. The maxims were formulated long ago, and it is time to rediscover them.*

The signs in the Ukraine war are currently pointing to stormy weather, and we now find ourselves in the bizarre situation of being able to do nothing but pray that *Donald Trump* actually keeps his promise to end the war as quickly as possible – and that *Vladimir Putin* keeps his nerve until then and does not allow himself to be provoked into taking measures that could trigger an unforeseeable chain reaction! But even after the fighting has ended, Europe will by no means find itself in peaceful circumstances. The “deal” between Trump and Putin will most likely result in a partition of Ukraine, meaning, a “frozen conflict”, or in other words, a new Cold War. A Cold War 2.0 that will exhaust the resources of all sides and could drag on endlessly if it does not tip over into a hot war sooner or later.

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If peaceful conditions are to prevail in Europe again that are truly worthy of the name, a huge effort will be required: all actors – all of them! – will have to pull together to achieve nothing less than a 180-degree change of direction. A fundamental prerequisite for this would be a *change in thinking*. For all of them. The good news is that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The max-

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Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev meet in Reykjavik on 10 December 1986. First steps towards de-escalation and détente. This would be possible today too!  
(Picture wikipedia)

ims have long been formulated; they just need to be rediscovered and finally implemented. In short, it is about a renaissance of “new thinking”!

To do that, we must look at the basic conditions of the nuclear situation in which our lives – and with it also the war in Ukraine – unfolds since 6 August 1945.

## Hiroshima as a world condition

“The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything – except our way of thinking, and so we are heading for an unprecedented catastrophe. A new way of thinking is needed if humanity is to survive.”

These words were written by none other than *Albert Einstein* on 24 May 1946. It would take several years before prominent intellectuals began to heed Einstein’s call and rigorously consider and precisely define the consequences of the invention of the atomic bomb for humanity and for the planet. One of the first was the philosopher *Günther Anders*, who in the 1950s used classical formulations to describe the unheard-of circumstance of a possible *man-made apocalypse*:

“Hiroshima as a world condition. On 6 August 1945, Hiroshima Day, a new era began. The era in which we can turn any place, any moment, no, our entire Earth, into a Hiroshima. Since that day, we have become omnipotent in a negative way. But since we can be annihilated at any moment,

this also means that since that day we have become totally powerless. No matter how long it lasts, or whether it will last forever, this age will be the last: for its defining characteristic, the possibility of our self-extinction, can never end – unless by means of the end itself.”

### **What can affect everyone, is a concern for all of us**

Since the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, nothing less than the survival of humanity itself has been at stake. It was through this epochal event that humanity was first constituted as *such* – albeit in modo negativo. Günther Anders:

“The bomb has achieved one thing: it is now a struggle of humankind. Something religions and philosophies, empires and revolutions have not achieved: it has succeeded to truly make us one humankind. What can affect everyone, is a concern for all of us. The collapsing roof becomes our roof. As morituri [condemned to death] we are now we. For the first time truly.”

The consequence: since radioactive clouds do not respect military alliances, power blocs and national borders, and since today’s genetic mutations affect all future generations, and since the annihilation of humanity today would destroy all unborn generations, there are only “neighbours” left: in space and in time. For the first time in the history of humankind, there is indeed a human interest that transcends all classes, religious and other differences: *the survival of the species*.

The maxim of the “new thinking” is to make this insight the decisive linchpin and to draw the necessary conclusions for political action.

### **Mikhail Gorbachev and the “new thinking”**

There has been only one leader of a nuclear power so far who was at the height of his time. He implemented the “new thinking” not only theoretically but also furthered it in a similarly dangerous situation as today into “new action”; the “new thinking” with its fundamental moments – priority of general human interests as a prerequisite for finding peaceful ways for all other interests, combating the dangers threatening humanity (weapons of mass destruction, ecological catastrophe) and renunciation of violence: *Mikhail Gorbachev!*

Based on the fact that “for the first time in its history, humanity has become mortal and the character of modern weapons leaves no state any hope of defending itself by military means



*The three European statesmen Willy Brandt, Olof Palme and Bruno Kreisky in 1975. Their goal: to establish ‘common security’ in Europe and the world. That would be possible today too! (Picture pa)*

alone, even if it is the strongest of all,” Gorbachev came to a conclusion that was similar to *Willy Brandt’s* and *Olof Palme’s* concept of “common security” right down to the wording:

“Under today’s conditions, security, especially for the major nuclear powers, can only be mutual and – in a global context – comprehensive. The policy of strength has fundamentally outlived its usefulness.” For him, this resulted in the *primacy of politics*, in other words: negotiations, renouncing the method of the “zero-sum game” (my gain is your loss) and the courage to transform a vision of humanity into a concrete goal of political action: “The only right way is to eliminate nuclear weapons, to reduce and limit armaments in general.”

On 15 January 1986, the political sensation was complete: the then General Secretary of the CPSU read out a declaration that pointed the way to a nuclear-free world by the year 2000 in specific and realisable sub-initiatives.

### **The end of the (first) Cold War**

And it was not just a matter of fine concepts: New thinking and new action were mutually dependent. Because this policy was pursued with great vigour and consistency by Gorbachev, and because it was no longer thought in quantitative but in *qualitative* categories, for the first time real successes were achieved in the field of disarmament. The joint declaration with *Ronald Reagan* that a nuclear war could never be won by one side, must therefore never be started, and that neither side should strive for military supremacy. It was followed by scrapping an entire type of weapons, the most dangerous of all: all land-based nuclear short- and medium-range mis-

siles, the reduction of strategic nuclear missiles and the destruction of a total of 80 per cent of all nuclear warheads worldwide.

And in the “Charter of Paris”, adopted in November 1990 by all European states – including the Soviet Union, the United States and Canada – which officially marked the end of the Cold War, Mikhail Gorbachev’s vision of the “Common European Home” also seemed to be taking shape. Its epochal maxim was:

“Security is indivisible, and the security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all the others.”

This seemed to open the way for an era of peace and cooperation between Europe and the rest of the Soviet area.

### For a “new thinking 2.0”

Today, more than three decades later, we, instead, find ourselves in a situation that experts say is more dangerous than the Cuban missile crisis ...

If there is to be any prospect of a remedy, the first consequence would be to take note of the dramatic danger in which Europe currently finds itself, without any illusions. A return to the principles of new thinking, an update in view of the current geopolitical situation, in short: a “new thinking 2.0”, is more necessary than ever!

Therefore, once again, and for the hundredth time:

A nuclear war knows no winners, but only losers. Either we abolish the atomic bomb, or the atomic bomb abolishes us! Those who want peace must – in reversal of the classical Latin proverb – prepare for peace. All of us – in the West, in Ukraine and in Russia – are doomed to de-escalation if we do not want to slide (and possibly very soon) into a third, perhaps final world war. Not least, the European Union must abandon its suicidal confrontation as soon as possible and finally pursue the primacy of diplomacy.

### Back to the “common European home”

If we really want peace on our continent again, we need nothing less than a *complete reset of the European security structure*, a new policy of détente, a “Helsinki Process 2.0” and a return to the principles of the “Charter of Paris”. And this process would not least begin in the heads.

In concrete terms, this would mean for the people in Europe (politicians *and* representatives of civil society) – be it in the EU, in Ukraine (West and Donbass), or in Russia: We should,

against the overwhelmingly dominant militaristic logic on both sides, see the current completely deadlocked situation as a challenge to finally set our sights on the “Common European home” again, as an overarching solution, despite, or rather, *because* of the current extremely dangerous situation!

More precisely:

We now have to think and act radically “countercyclically”. And we must do so as if Gorbachev’s “common European home” – from Lisbon to Vladivostok – already existed: We should not only feel responsible for our respective countries, but we should also all feel equally responsible for this “common home” of ours!

And for this, a “Copernican revolution in the mind” is needed. It is important to recognise and internalise:

What affects a country, what affects a region within our large pan-European area, affects us all! Every destruction of a part simultaneously destroys our “common home”.

In this sense, there can only be “victors” in the current war in and around Ukraine, if not only the fighting – that is to say, the destruction, the mutual killing and dying – is ended as quickly as possible, but all parties agree on the principles of the “Charter of Paris” again after a ceasefire and (hopefully soon) a peace agreement.

In short, we need to return to a concept that is once again committed to the principle of a “common security”.

Anyone who scornfully dismisses this as unrealistic, naive or idealistic should also face up to the alternative without any illusions:

This is not about idealistic enthusiasm, but simply about the survival interests of all actors! Because if the policy of acute escalation is further intensified and no resistance is set against it, then there is a threat of a huge war in Europe, in the worst case a thermo-nuclear world war, in a word: globocide!

We cannot afford resignation or inertia. Einstein’s admonition still applies:

“Mere praise of peace is easy, but ineffective. What we need is active participation in the fight against war and everything that leads to war.”

In this sense, then.

Source: <https://globalbridge.ch/raus-aus-der-eskalationsspirale-ii-back-to-gorbatschow-oder-das-neue-denken-und-die-rekonstruktion-des-gemeinsamen-europaischen-hauses/>

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)