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THE NEW WEST

**Liberal proposals for a strategic paradigm shift
after 24 February**

ANALYSIS

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1. Starting point

1.1. Challenges in an altered world order

Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has profoundly changed the global political situation. Fundamentally new conditions for political decision-making have emerged all over the world. Hope for a peaceful Europe has been shaken. The value-based Western model – which combines open societies, free markets, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights – has experienced multiple crises since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. None, however, compares to today's challenge to this "Western model of democracy".

The countries that consider themselves part of the liberal world order bear a collective responsibility. They must cooperate to tackle the global challenges and thereby increase trust in the Western model. This requires intensive cooperation not only between transatlantic partners but also with democracies in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to traditional partners (e.g. Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand), democratic states such as India and Indonesia are playing an increasing role – despite many discrepancies and divergent interests. First and foremost, it is thus necessary to emphasize common strengths and develop political strategies to increase stability and prosperity. In this way, it will be possible to confront the actors who threaten the Western model today.

1.2. The challengers: China and Russia

In particular, there are currently two states that are aggressively challenging Western values. The People's Republic of China has become an economic, technological and military world power while evolving into an authoritarian system with totalitarian characteristics. The communist one-party state is making a great effort to gain influence throughout the world and to assert itself as a counter-model to the West. At the same time – and in stark contrast to the systemic confrontation between the West and the Soviet Union – China is very well integrated into the global economy. China's economic ascent, on which the system's legitimacy rests, is based on precisely this integration into the global value chains.

However, the Chinese model is not a successful model for dealing with the current crises, as is evident from its responses to the coronavirus pandemic and climate change. More and more, state capitalism is turning into party capitalism, which increasingly controls and represses the lives of all Chinese people. That the People's Republic of China is not governed by the rule of law let alone a democracy, is reflected among other things in the destruction of Hong Kong's institutions and liberties as well as its imperialist attitude towards its neighbours. Geopolitical ambitions increasingly determine the actions of the Chinese leadership and are pursued with an ever-growing use of resources and increasing aggressiveness. Universal human rights are methodically

violated by government institutions. The oppression and "re-education" of the Uyghur people through coercion and violence is a horrific example.

Since the invasion of Georgia in 2008, at the latest, Russia under Vladimir Putin has abandoned the model of peaceful coexistence within a rule-based world order. The oppression of the opposition and the independent media goes hand in hand with massive propaganda efforts to discredit the Western model and justify Russian policy. Contempt for international law is one of the main constants of Putin's politics. Open and hidden influence over EU policy and certain politicians, for example, Marine Le Pen and Viktor Orbán, is part of the repertoire of the Russian president and his entourage.

1.3. The liberal model is at risk

Human rights violations, such as the brutal oppression of members of minority groups, are common in many countries. Criticism is regularly dismissed as meddling in domestic affairs. At the same time, democratic states often have varying positions about how to react to serious human rights violations. The call for sanctions is opposed to their own economic and political interests in many cases.

In addition, democracies that are governed by the rule of law are also subject to developments that diminish the appeal of the liberal model. The polarized political landscape reduces the ability of many societies to find common solutions for major problems. Short-sighted debates, mostly carried out on social media, do not do justice to the complexity of many political developments. Decreasing trust in political and civic institutions is another result.

However, it would be wrong to see the many different positions and interests expressed on various levels of the political and social discourse as negative and dangerous in themselves. Diversity and plurality are important foundations of democracy. The strength of the democratic system depends on them. Only through an open competition of ideas and a fair balancing of different interests is it possible for societies to grow in a stable and innovative way thereby offering individuals the space to shape their lives according to their own expectations. A strong civil society as the catalyst and driver of these socio-political negotiation processes is the foundation for the liberal model's success.

At the same time, it has been observed over the past decades that alliances are appreciated less and less – both in the policy areas of trade and security. In Germany in particular, the latter has barely existed, at least in its military dimension.

1.4. The value of partnerships

In times of concentrated crisis, Germany and other European countries must break away from the illusion that they can permanently outsource the responsibility for their external security to the USA. Within the transatlantic partnership, steps must be taken toward a distinct European defence capability.

In the last few years, the importance of global organizations and multilateral cooperation has significantly declined, not least because of Donald Trump's presidency. More and more, many countries are prioritizing bilateral deals over long-term, sustainable multilateral solutions.

However, the developments outlined above need to be understood in the context of global problems that have to be resolved both globally and locally at the same time. Climate change and world trade demand global cooperation – including with states that disregard democratic principles and the rule of law.

1.5. Liberal answers: a foundation of values and principles

These developments call for new political answers. In the debate about the shape of the future, liberal voices must be heard loudly. The liberal Western model and its optimistic core message must go on the offensive again:

- Only a liberal order ensures that freedom, prosperity, safety and the individual pursuit of happiness are possible for all human beings - free from oppression, paternalism as well as fear, and in free alliances with partners of their choice.
- Democracies, governed by the rule of law, have the power to find innovative, effective and lasting solutions to the current challenges.
- The appeal of Western democracy is unbroken for many people around the world. If they are looking for a free, prosperous life, they still aim for the USA or Europe, and not Russia or China.

To inject new life into liberal values, it is necessary to work towards achieving several basic political goals:

- International law must form the basis of coexistence between states. Democratic states must champion the rule of law throughout the world. The primacy of the law lies at the core of liberal convictions.
- For the benefit of all, progress must be made in shaping the world trade order to maximise free and fair trade.
- The unifying factor, the value of alliances, must be emphasized. Alliances in different areas and with different partners must be consolidated and developed further.
- Decisive action is important in imposing sanctions for violations of human rights or international law.
- Increasing resilience and strategic sovereignty is an indispensable prerequisite for working effectively for freedom, prosperity, and stability throughout the world.
- In areas such as climate change, it is necessary to cooperate with states that do not share democratic values and violate human rights. Any cooperation, however, needs to be based on clearly defined interests and reliable agreements.

Based on the values, principles and political goals outlined above, the following section defines selected fields of action in which liberal politics and the FNF can make particularly important contributions.

Germany and Europe will have to change in order to tackle all these challenges. Liberals view these changes as an opportunity for renewal – an opportunity that they want to seize.

2. Action fields

2.1. Security, democracy and prosperity: leveraging old and new alliances

Reliable alliances, above all NATO and the EU, can and must be cultivated and reinvigorated to accomplish these bold, necessary steps. But the New West reaches as far as the Indo-Pacific region: South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand are natural partners.

Together this alliance can and must answer questions. How can liberal democracies be protected against old and new threats? How do they want to create and maintain prosperity today and tomorrow, and how do they want to pass it on to future generations? How do they maintain freedom and exercise justice for everybody in our societies?

In addition to a new and different *Ostpolitik* for dealing with Russia and China, a realistic policy for the Western alliance is needed that wins back lost trust with our allies and affirms Germany's position in Europe and within the alliance. Discussion on this issue offers the chance for a multifaceted public dialogue to which the FNF will contribute with its network, its innovating ability and its campaigning skills.

In addition to these classic foreign policy alliances, other topical alliances must be formed to be able to tackle global challenges such as climate policy or protection against pandemics. For this purpose, the entire toolkit of hard and soft power is required. In the process, we cannot entirely dismiss cooperation with states that do not conform to our way of life to varying degrees.

2.2. Human rights, the rule of law and international law: Secure/protect law and freedom

Human rights, the rule of law and international law are the key elements of the liberal self-conception and determine the content of the FNF's work. All substantive positions must be measured against these. In the global conflict over values and political orders, universal human rights are an indispensable foundation of liberal democracies and, at the same time, they are a clear distinguishing feature from authoritarian and totalitarian forms of rule.

Liberal democracies must stand up for human rights with credibility and resilience. This includes unconditional and global support for people whose rights are restricted, as well as for those who defend them. Protecting and exercising the rights of minorities are also key liberal policies.

Global partnerships and a consistent commitment to defenders of human rights are necessary. Liberal policy-making must not only look at governments but also needs to collaborate with civil society and even individual persons. In doing so,

the balance between state and non-state actors is particularly important. Activating citizen networks or working with exemplary individuals achieves much and provides valuable momentum. For lasting stability and prosperity in a region, however, it is also necessary to reform government institutions. Successful democratic societies depend on the cooperation between the two sides: government structures that are open and adaptable to democratic impulses from the centre of society; and citizens who can confidently and consistently count on support from and access to government institutions.

There is certainly room for debate and deliberation, e.g. when it comes to the tension between the principle of sovereignty and the universal responsibility to protect human rights. In essence, liberals must put their trust into treaties and law, and not just power projection through military or economic force. It must be part of the *Zeitenwende* to place a greater emphasis on the law once again.

There is, moreover, much to be done in democratic societies as well: It is important to increase awareness of the value of the rule of law and to resolutely oppose all attempts to discredit democratic principles and the rule of law.

2.3. Resilience and strategic sovereignty: Increasing the capacity to act

Russia's attack on sovereign Ukraine has fractured the European and global security architecture. NATO and the EU reacted at once and in concert. But beyond the immediate reaction, particularly financial and military support to Ukraine, further radical changes must follow: a further reduction of dependence on raw materials from Russia, a massive readjustment of the military capabilities of NATO and the EU; and a renewed focus on Europe's "soft powers" to combine military strength with a clear signal for democracy and human rights. Ultimately, it is about adjusting to a new political and economic world order without relinquishing the claim to shape it. Moreover, it is necessary to reappraise the communicative environment in which concepts such as propaganda, social media and culture are newly understood and appropriated.

In dealing with the COVID crisis, topics such as the restructuring of supply chains, the development of strategic reserves and the reduction of dependency on key technologies have already been discussed. Resilience and strategic sovereignty for Europe are the guiding principles for the current political discussion. Only if we address the risks and challenges of the future alone with more of our own resources can we become (more) resilient. The COVID crisis was the trigger for the multi-billion euro recovery plan "NextGenerationEU". This may be the blueprint for mobilizing resources for the Europe-wide expansion of defence.

Another central question remains: To what extent can Europe, or more precisely the EU, act effectively on its own? To what extent can it build up enough strength of its own in the foreseeable future? Europe must be embedded in the transatlantic and the wider Western alliance; in this, Germany must play an anchoring role. Without the USA, Japan, the United Kingdom, and other Western partners, the EU will not be able to significantly influence the new world order either militarily, politically or economically.

In addition, it should not aspire to do so anyway, because power dynamics have shifted from how they were during the Cold War. Hence, resilience and strategic sovereignty are no miracle cures, but important reference points in a world of increasing systemic conflict, which encompasses politics, the economy, and civil society.

A priority for European governments should be a new common EU policy which should be based on the capacity to act rather than on naiveté – but always in concert with all partners of the New West. Because sovereignty also means deciding when the preservation of autonomy depends on joining forces with partners.

In this context, it is necessary to have a debate about rules in the EU: unanimity, enlargement rules and joint capacity to act must be redefined. If we want to provide a credible and workable path to EU membership for Ukraine, Moldova, the Western Balkans and Georgia, we need new integration models and accession rules. Vital steps towards further European unification must not be allowed to dissolve in decades-long negotiations. Political courage and institutional creativity are required.

It has also become obvious that the supply of raw materials, but also the integration into complex supply chains, entails the risk of dependencies that endanger sovereignty, prosperity and democracy – these risks must be made transparent and evaluated, and political action must be taken accordingly.

2.4. Future of the global economy: Globalization of the willing

In the future, companies from Europe, the USA, and other market economies will continue to have to interact with actors from economic systems in which the government has a high level of control.

Currently, political and business actors alike are pursuing different strategies, including decoupling, reshoring and ‘friend shoring’. All three strategies reflect a new assessment of risk. In this context, for instance, it has become necessary to address crises in the global food supply chain. One such crisis is unfolding today, driven by the attack on Ukraine, which has affected its ability to act as a major supplier.

Nevertheless, globalization, the worldwide division of labour and global competition remain the largest drivers of prosperity. That is why liberals embrace global institutions and treaties. These have become less important in the past few years.

To reverse this trend, the big players – primarily the USA and the EU – must come to an understanding in key areas, e.g. in the field of data privacy and intellectual property. It is necessary to find compromises quickly through pragmatism and a focus on results.

The West’s economy must remain innovative and growth-oriented. The reordering of the global strategic situation with its economic repercussions began long before the current attack on Ukraine. The rise of China, climate change, the consequences of 9/11, the debt and refugee crisis in Europe and the COVID pandemic have recently rearranged spheres of influence and redistributed resources – a process still ongoing. Europe is being strategically challenged more than ever. Lately, because of the war in Ukraine at the heart of Europe, public opinion has begun to take notice. Current items on the agenda now include topics such as the restructuring of supply chains, the development of strategic reserves, cutting back the dependency on key technologies, the implementation of a sensible immigration policy as well as addressing completely new topics such as cryptocurrencies and near-Earth space security.

Europe’s economy and its economic policy must become more resilient. This means removing obstacles in the single market, for example in the banking union and the capital markets union. However, Europe, and Germany in particular, will only be able to maintain their economic strength through openness in terms of markets and partners. We need a roadmap for further trade agreements now. That is why it is encouraging that there has been decisive movement regarding CETA and that the EU has successfully concluded free trade negotiations with New Zealand. These are important signals to central transatlantic and Pacific partners, who share our values. Improvements in the trade agreements with Latin America, e.g. with MERCOSUR, are also important. Now, more than ever, is it time for a new attempt at a strategic free trade agreement with the USA: pragmatism, focus, and a mutual willingness to adjust should replace a compartmentalised exchange over standards. In the Pacific especially, other like-minded countries should be integrated into economic and military alliances.

Politically and operationally, we are facing the question of to what extent G7, G20 and other similar formats can set the boundaries for discussions with system rivals that may also be highly confrontational.

2.5. The open society and public debate: Combat disinformation confidently

It is often claimed that one of the strengths of authoritarian systems is their ability to control the actions of their subjects more effectively. According to this reading, systems such as the People’s Republic of China are said to have superior problem-solving capabilities in comparison to Western democracies.

This is incorrect for three reasons: First, there is no justification for significantly restricting individuals’ right to shape their

lives according to their values and to express their opinions publicly. Second, it is precisely the diversity of ideas, the open debate about shaping the future and not least the initiative of many different people that lead to sustainable solutions for current problems. Third, an authoritarian state such as China must also fulfil its binding international obligations.

Furthermore, Russia's war against Ukraine is demonstrating the material and intellectual devastation caused by oppression and lack of freedom in Russia, and the power of freedom in Ukraine.

Open societies are the foundation of coexistence in freedom and autonomy – and a central goal of liberal policy. In the global debate about political values and institutions it must become clear once again that the diversity of life plans, individual ideals and requirements is the major advantage of Western societies.

At the same time, there are ever stronger attempts to manipulate the public debate and the thinking of many people through targeted disinformation, particularly on social media. These attempts are driven by countries such as Russia and China but do not come from government agents alone. The foundations of democratic institutions must not be discredited by this. The work of the FNF in analysing such activities repeatedly demonstrates its great value.

An example of this is the FNF's work on the Digital Services Act (DSA) of the EU, which among other things regulates the responsibility of platforms in dealing with disinformation and is often described as the "constitution for the digital age". The DSA is not reinventing everything. The old rule that platforms are only liable for content if they are aware of its existence and harmfulness and do nothing (notice and takedown) is still a sound guideline for today. However, other legislative initiatives, for example on chat control, must not undermine the fundamental rights focus of the DSA. The FNF has taken a clear position on these issues in the form of studies and publications.

It is important to consider carefully which defensive instruments are legitimate from a liberal perspective and where censorship or surveillance begins. Here, too, the balance between hard and soft power is crucial. Informing about disinformation mechanisms and disseminating transparent information are indispensable parts of strengthening civil society. Nevertheless, the proportionate regulation of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda is also part of a measured approach within the framework of the rule of law.

2.6. Defence and security: effectively adapting military capabilities to risks and threats

The war in Ukraine necessitates breaking through certain political walls and demands thinking in terms of the bigger strategic context. This applies to both Germany and the EU and NATO. Moscow still has a strong interest in entrenching its hegemonic influence in Belarus, Moldova, the Balkans and

the Caucasus region – always by means of blackmail and manipulation, and occasionally through military force. In Putin's view, the West, and particularly NATO's protective umbrella, constitute a fundamental threat to Russian imperialist interests in Europe.

In Germany, the Federal government's 100 billion euro programme is a decent start. However, words must be followed by deeds that enable the German army to meet current and future challenges. These 100 billion euros cannot be the last word and additional resources will be needed. If NATO refocuses again on alliance defence in Europe, Germany will be facing infrastructure investments in the billions due to its geographic location at the centre of Europe and its role as a logistics hub of the alliance.

It makes sense for NATO and the EU to align institutionally their military planning and arms procurement projects to increase sustainably their military capabilities because bureaucratic processes carried out in parallel are dysfunctional. That is why the division of labour between both organizations should be rethought. In this context, the following could be beneficial: The EU starts the development of a "Marshall Plan" for Ukraine and those neighbouring countries that are most affected by refugees. NATO adopts a rollback strategy concerning Russia, which is designed for the long term.

Europe and the West will need this "Rollback Russia" strategy to counter Moscow's instruments of power and reduce its political radius of action. In terms of military power, NATO must emphasize its deterrent and defence readiness with the stationing of military units on its external borders with Russia. Economically, long-term sanctions must be set up and the consequences for the global economy must be calculated rationally. The political decision-making processes for further sanctions against Russia must involve ordinary citizens and the business community, and they need to be explained and communicated with clarity and transparency. In this way, the West and its partners around the world will find the strength to thwart Putin's strategic calculation on all levels and to prevent him from occupying or destroying sovereign states.

In order to succeed, it is also necessary to reduce dependencies on raw materials from Russia and other authoritarian regimes such as China. The latter especially is a formidable and difficult undertaking. The notion that we could be back to normal by summer 2023, however, is undoubtedly an illusion. The war in Ukraine is also a *Zeitenwende* economically, especially in terms of energy policy.

Moreover, the West should continue to cooperate on an international level with countries that have no interest in an unpredictable and aggressive Russia being able to have free rein on a global level. These include particularly our Asia-Pacific partners such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. Wherever possible, Russia should be isolated internationally, for example by cancelling invitations to G20 meetings.

Finally, Germany and all of democratic Europe must also improve their guard in terms of domestic policy and strengthen

their resilience against Russia. This involves the development of civil protection procedures, as well as defence capabilities against cyberattacks and other attempts to manipulate social discourses. A high standard of democratic debate must be maintained and reclaimed repeatedly in our societies, and in addition, a genuine, mature conversation about our values and their defence is needed. Both political leadership and participation from citizens are of essential importance.

2.7. A new dawn for innovation and progress: actively shaping the world of tomorrow

As liberals, we trust in the personal responsibility, creativity, and rationality of free people. The free exchange of ideas is the basis for human progress in all its forms and expressions. The history of humankind has convincingly demonstrated how innovations contribute to the continuous growth of human knowledge and prosperity.

In the last decades, globalization and digitalization have achieved new, hitherto unimagined possibilities for more and more people – almost everywhere around the world. Poverty has declined in massive, historically unprecedented ways. The standard of living of many people has increased considerably – not only in terms of income but also in terms of access to education or the provision of healthcare.

To put it another way: Globalization is not an urban innovation game for trendy citizens of the world. Globalization is by far the most successful programme in history for combatting poverty and hunger. That is why liberals speak so passionately about well-regulated policies for a global division of labour. Moreover, for this reason, they envision a polity in which conflicts are settled through legal means and respectful political dialogue; a polity in which opportunities are created through progress and innovation, and to which all people have access.

At the same time, it is necessary to put down any rose-tinted glasses and identify challenges and threats with utmost clarity. The consequences of the current war, including the concomitant dislocation of resources, are only one dimension. Current world affairs are characterised by an unprecedented degree of simultaneity, in which climate change, privacy threats and the need to defend the right to self-determination all vie for attention. It is of vital importance to create a political framework that leaves as much room as possible for innovation, while at the same time addressing the aforementioned dangers.

