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Other Topics

“Defending What Matters to Us”

60 Years of International Work by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Foreign Policy Challenges Facing Us Today

An Interview with Dr. Johann Wadephul, Member of the Bundestag

As vice-chair of the Christian Democratic CDU/CSU parliamentary group and a foreign policy expert, Johann Wadephul is clearly the ideal person to talk to about the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's international work – a fact further underscored by his schedule: arriving at his office, we find him coming out of a meeting with a delegation of Latin American politicians who have travelled to Europe at the invitation of our institution. Of course, besides the question of what the foundation's international work can achieve, the interview also addresses the foreign policy challenges arising from the invasion of Ukraine.

International Reports (IR): Dr. Wadephul, for many years you have been one of the Christian Democrats' foremost foreign policy experts, and you spend much of your time traveling around the world. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has been working on the international stage for even longer – 60 years. Can you remember when your paths first crossed?

Johann Wadephul: That was in my first parliamentary term as member of the Bundestag, from 2009 to 2013, namely in the Western Balkans. I was already closely involved with the region at that time. We had set up the Western Balkans Working Group in the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, which I have the honour of chairing today. On one visit to the region, we participated in a conference that was also attended by Heads of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's offices in the countries involved, and they briefed us parliamentarians. And it is no different today – all the international work of our parliamentary group, not just in the Western Balkans of course, but in every conceivable region, is hard to imagine without the support of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's staff.

IR: Is there a particular trip or discussion that is stuck in your mind?

Wadephul: Yes, I particularly remember a trip to Serbia and Kosovo. I think that was also during my first term as an MP. The foundation organised a tour of the region by car, which gave me a completely different access to and a different feeling for the countries. On most trips abroad it's a case of fly in, have talks, fly out. But when you get the chance to spend a little more time in a country you find that – despite all the major conferences you've attended around the globe – this has an even greater impact.

*IR: Over the decades, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's international work has been shaped by major global political constellations and seismic shifts such as the East-West conflict and then the fall of the Iron Curtain. Today, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put the word *Zeitenwende* on everyone's lips. Do you think that, in future, people will actually say 2022 marked such a turning point?*

Wadephul: *Zeitenwende* is the right word insofar as we now *understand* that something has changed. But this change started earlier. Putin didn't suddenly become who he is on 24 February. Russia has been trying to disrupt or even destroy what is important to us – the rules-based world order – and establish its own sphere of influence for longer than just this year. But it was this shock event that really brought it to our attention, and now we have to derive immediate political consequences. In this respect, however, we are still at the very beginning.

IR: In 1956, Konrad Adenauer said: "In today's world, force is still more respected than law." Do we simply have to accept that this still applies in 2022?

Wadephul: For us, the two things always have to go hand in hand: force must be based on the law. That's why we're saying that Ukraine, for example, has a legitimate right to defend itself under international law – and we have the right to support it in doing so. But the opposite also applies: we have to learn that, in some cases, we have to defend the law with force – that is, military force.

IR: What tasks does this situation entail for Germany?

Wadephul: For Germany, a key task may indeed be the learning process that I have just described. Because if there is one country that needs to relearn this enlightened approach to the use of military force, it is Germany. We're doing so, even though it's a slow and painful process. Contrary to what the German government is portraying, Ukraine is not the first instance of having supplied weapons to a conflict zone. We did so in 2014 when we armed the Kurdish Peshmerga for their fight against the so-called IS, albeit on a smaller scale, of course. But yet we are still trying to resist the realisation that Germany, as in many other respects, will once again have to step into a leadership role. We must assume this leadership role if we are to defend what matters to us.

IR: So why are we resisting this?

Wadephul: Of course, it's linked to the fact that learning the lessons of 20th century German history – quite rightly – occupies a broad space in our education and social discourse. It is understandable that such a society does not want to push into the leadership role or even to exercise state power, including internationally. But we have to reconcile both. We shouldn't simply jettison the conscious way we deal with our own past and the restraint this engenders, but we also have to see that appeasing an aggressor is more likely to lead to an expansion of the conflict. This is a lesson that can and must be learned from 1938; even for us as Germans. But there is still a lack of will to do this.

IR: *Who can help with this?*

I remind you of the famous words of Poland's former Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski when he said he feared German power less than German inaction. But we also need actors at home to accompany and drive forward this discourse and learning process. This is where the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung can certainly play a positive role.

Wadephul: International actors can help us with this. For example,

IR: *This brings us back to the work of our foundation. These kinds of party-affiliated political foundations scarcely exist outside Germany. Therefore, in international work, the question arises in particular about the relationship between political foundations and traditional diplomacy. How do you view this relationship?*

Wadephul: On the one hand, of course, traditional diplomacy remains at the heart of our foreign policy, including the parliament's. Yet, the international work of political foundations has become an almost indispensable



"Force must be based on the law": Johann Wadephul during the interview in his office in the Bundestag.
Source: © Fabian Wagener, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

complement to this. We could even say that, with their international activities, party-affiliated foundations have specific advantages over state diplomacy. The Country Directors of these foundations can often provide a more unvarnished picture of the situation in their particular country. I have also always found it highly beneficial to talk to representatives of other foundations. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, however, naturally has a distinct advantage because it is uniquely placed to address the special issues and interests that are especially relevant to Christian Democratic foreign policy. This is another reason why we as members of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group rarely undertake a trip abroad without involving the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in the preparations. I simply can't imagine not working together.

IR: The foundation often focuses on structural work, including abroad. Therefore, the results of its work are often not immediately tangible. But are there certain successes that you associate with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung?

Wadephul: It's true that the results of this type of foundation work often only become apparent in the longer term, but nevertheless, it has had many successful projects. Let me come back to the region we talked about at the



"We mustn't overlook the signs of hope": The democracy movement in Belarus (as pictured) and the clear choice of the Ukrainian people for the West show that freedom continues to be a highly important value for many in Eastern Europe. [Source: © Vasily Fedosenko, Reuters.](#)

beginning of this interview. For many years, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has been successfully engaged in bringing the Western Balkan states closer to the European Union, as well as preserving the corresponding spirit in the societies and an understanding of what the European Union means to us. And I can say that the same applies to other parts of the world as well. For example, when it comes to maintaining dialogue with our party-political partners in Latin America, where the foundation's work began in the 1960s, or organising security policy talks with our partners from the Asian region – none of these contacts and discussion formats would exist without the foundation. And all these meetings initiate and advance political developments.

IR: One objective that lies at the heart of our foundation's work, at home and abroad, is promoting democracy. A look at the relevant indices on the state of democracy worldwide reveals that many countries have experienced a negative trend over recent years. Do you share this impression?

Wadepful: I'm less pessimistic in this respect. If we look at the development of humankind over the millennia, there has probably barely been a time when democracy has been in better shape overall. Yes, of course there are setbacks. But it will always be the case that certain people and groups in society oppose democracy, and unfortunately some of them will be successful. In the past, we have perhaps made the mistake of taking it for granted that the movement towards greater freedom and democracy in the world would happen more or less of its own accord. But a look at the history of our own Western democracies shows that the development has rarely been linear.

IR: So, it is still necessary to promote democracy?

Wadepful: Definitely. And, despite all the negative examples, we mustn't overlook the signs of hope. Look at the democracy movement in Belarus – it's very much alive! Or look at Ukraine. Despite the terrible war, we have one thing to cling onto: ten years ago, we still worried that the majority of the country might voluntarily decide in favour of closer ties with Russia, which in effect would have meant an anti-democratic development. That's off the table today.

IR: The focus of international cooperation, also for the Christian Democratic Union, is cooperation with sister parties in the EPP, the European People's Party. What impression do you have of the state of this party family?

Wadepful: A mixed impression. There are undoubtedly problems in the traditional core countries of Western Europe. It's naturally a cause of concern when the westernmost capital with a government led by an EPP party is Zagreb. The *Républicains* in France have been struggling for years, and with the Tories in the United Kingdom, we have lost an important partner from the EPP. Of course, first and foremost the parties have to deal with their problems at home, but I would also like to take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of regular dialogue among these sister parties. Here, too, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung can make an important contribution. In recent years, the foundation has become increasingly

involved in other regions of the world, and for good reason. Right now, it would be important and wise to breathe new life into the dialogue with our core partners in Europe – in countries such as France, the UK, Poland, and Italy.

IR: Let's once again take a look towards the East and at the conflict with Russia. Many observers believe that this conflict will only be resolved structurally through political and social change within Russia itself. But at the moment it is extremely difficult to exert any external influence on Russian society. Do you think this will even be possible in the near future?

Wadephul: At least, I really hope so. Despite being in favour of a consistent political and military response to Russia's aggression – more consistent than the German government's response so far – I also firmly believe that in the long term, in a post-Putin era, we will have to reopen our communication channels and restore relations, though of course under certain conditions. That's why I disagree with those who want to permanently cut our ties with Russia. Russia is a European country, and it cannot be in our interest to permanently cut ourselves off from it. Although we agree on other current issues of foreign policy, this is where we diverge from the Greens. I think this point is important, if only because Russia's future options should not solely depend on China. Russia will once again need to have political and economic alternatives, and Europe should be one of them.

IR: More generally, do you fear that the pendulum in Germany will swing to the other extreme, towards autarky, now that we have established that "change through trade" is not so simple – in other words that globalisation will be reversed?

Wadephul: I think that would be neither possible nor desirable. But it's clear that we need a degree of adjustment and must avoid certain economic sectors becoming unilaterally dependent on single countries.

IR: On China, for example?

Wadephul: Of course, also on China. But at the same time, we have to remain realistic. Europe will not be able to manufacture chips on the scale that we see in East Asia today, at least not in the short-to-medium term.

IR: So, diversification, not decoupling...

Wadephul: Exactly. After all, our goal is not protectionism, but rather the opposite: global free trade.

The interview was conducted by Sören Soika and Fabian Wagener – translated from German.