

## **Report from Working Group 4: Critical assessment of peace proposals (10 June)**

Reiner Braun (Opening presentation) and Emily Molinari (moderator) of the International Peace Bureau

### **SUMMARY**

In his opening presentation, Reiner Braun gave a brief overview over the many proposals for peace in Ukraine issued by political leaders from different parts of the world over the past years, spoke about main criteria for any serious peace proposals and explained about the call for action to civil society included in the new peace proposal drafted in the Vatican on the same dates as the Vienna Conference (9-11 June). The discussion following Reiner's presentation showed a solid common understanding of NATO expansion as the geopolitical context of the war as well as a broad consensus on the desired content of peace proposals (immediate ceasefire and negotiations) and revealed some best practice for civil society actions for peace mainly from Italy but also from Czech Republic and Germany.

The around fifty participants in this working group represented various civil society organisations from many different countries. Participants were active in local, regional or national peace initiatives from countries such as Austria, Germany, Ireland, Czech Republic, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Hungary, the Netherlands, Israel, France, Kosovo, Armenia and the US. The many civil society organisations represented included WILPF, Codepink, attac, the Munich-American Peace Committee, Bike for Peace Norway, Way to Peace Armenia, the Czech Peace and Justice Network, the Hungarian Committee for Peace, to name a just a few initiative names mentioned during the debate.

### **Critical assessment of peace proposals: European governments are not helpful**

Reiner's overview over existing peace proposals and their failure revealed a divide between a worldwide desire for peace in Ukraine and a surprising lack of such a desire for peace among European leaders. Of the various peace proposals that were brought forward in recent years, many came from outside Europe, e.g. China or Brazil, and the two most promising peace proposals were obstructed by European politicians. The Minsk II agreement was not implemented because leading EU member countries did not push for it to be implemented. As Reiner related, former German chancellor Angela Merkel recently admitted in a German newspaper that the goal of Minsk II was to "win time for Ukraine", so to postpone an open war between Ukraine and Russia while upgrading Ukraine's military endowment, rather than prevent the war. The promising Istanbul Peace Proposal was obstructed by, among others, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Powerful European governments have little interest in ending the war in Ukraine, no matter how much their citizens might desire peace. This is the reality we face.

During the discussion, various workshop participants emphasized the geopolitical context of NATO expansion towards the East and the nature of the Ukraine war as a proxy war between the US and the Russian Federation. Many participants argued that the US government held "the key to peace" because European leaders' obstruction of any serious peace proposals was not in any genuine European interest but a display of a one-sided and unwise commitment of EU leaders to US-American interests (or more precisely, the interests of the US-American military-industrial complex). Others argued that the key to empowering peace proposals lay with Europe's civil society, which should in each country push their governments to endorse the European interest in peace rather than the transatlantic interest in engaging the Russian Federation in long warfare. Some participants saw a rising threat of military escalation also in other regions of the world, for which some blamed the US (NATO) while others saw also a destabilizing interference by the Russian Federation in some places.

## **Content of peace proposals: Stop the killing – start negotiations**

Reiner Braun emphasized in his presentation that any serious peace proposal must include a call for an immediate ceasefire and for negotiations. Reiner reiterated that the demand for a ceasefire does not mean accepting existing front lines in the war zone as final borders between Ukrainian and Russian territory. Final borders are to be decided between the two countries at war, not by European, American or other governments, and should take into account the interests of the people living in the region currently being devastated by a brutal war, rather than the geopolitical interests of the US and the Russian Federation as competing super powers. Reiner argued that the UN Security Council had lost credibility as an institution for global stability, seeing that both the US and the Russian Federation are carrying out destabilizing armed interventions in other countries.

Workshop participants agreed that the demand for an immediate ceasefire and for negotiations should be key points in any serious peace proposal. Other aspects that participants found important to be included in peace proposals were respect for international law (UN Charta), a no-first-use agreement on nuclear arms to prevent the apocalyptic scenario of a nuclear war in Europe, taking into account the legitimate security demands of the Russian Federation in view of NATO-expansion and the end of all economic sanctions because of their harm to working people and European economies. Various participants found it helpful if peace talks returned to the content of the Minsk II and Istanbul agreements. Some participants argued that the United Nations should play a greater role in peace negotiations but agreed that the members of the UN Security Councils had discredited themselves as guarantors of peace. Some suggested reforms to create a public peace assembly within the UN structure.

## **From peace proposals to peace protest: organizing public pressure for a ceasefire**

Reiner Braun saw a new quality in the Vatican peace proposal which was being drafted at the time in Rome by Jeffrey Sachs, 40 Nobel laureates and others, on the same days as the Vienna Conference (9-11 June). Reiner emphasized that the Vatican peace proposal was the first to include a call for civil society to take action and put pressure on governments to work towards a serious peace agreement for Ukraine. Reiner congratulated the Italian peace movement representatives present for organising two large demonstrations for peace in Italy, with one hundred thousand protestors each. Reiner suggested to bring forward our demand for peace as an issue of free speech and to also make peace an election issue. Many activists face slandering campaigns for their public actions for peace and we see efforts by the mass media and political parties to silence the peace movement by undemocratic means, also in Vienna. Democracy is a guarantor for peace, because free speech is an essential tool against war mongers.

During the discussions, participants from Italy emphasized that focusing on the common desire for a ceasefire and for negotiations was essential for broad civil society mobilisation. The question of Russian and American responsibility for the escalating war in Ukraine should not be on the forefront of mobilization. The protest should rather call on the responsibility of national political leaders. The success of Italy's public mobilization for peace stems from their focus on the way forward (cease fire and negotiations) and from addressing the Italian government (to undertake diplomatic efforts) rather than placing blame or demands on foreign superpowers. Also in Czech Republic, protestors focused on demanding efforts for peace from the Czech government and on bringing together different oppositional forces against domestic policies rather than addressing foreign powers. Also in Germany, the two largest rallies for peace so far were rallies against German involvement in the war. They protested against Germany hosting the NATO conference in Munich (18 Feb 2023, 20 k participants, organised by the network "Macht Frieden!") and against German arms export to Ukraine (25 Feb 2023, 50 k participants, organised by the network "Aufstand für den Frieden" with Member of Parliament Sahra Wagenknecht).

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