

Interview – National News Corporation (Croatia)

- 1) How would you describe security the situation in Europe after the latest developments in Ukraine?

The situation has never been as dangerous as it is in these days. Political instability is increasing. Putin's decision to attack Ukraine, and the Russian warfare from the very beginning is the result of a series of miscalculations and misperceptions, but we have no indication that Putin will give up soon or search a political solution. Instead, we have to assume that he will make further miscalculations and strategic mistakes, acting from a position of increasing weakness.

- 2) Are you surprised about the speed in which Ukrainian forces are taking back occupied territories?

The success of the Ukrainian armed forces is the result of incredible bravery, excellent military leadership and deserves appreciation. Political and military leadership go hand in hand. Tremendous progress has been made in reforming military training and improving defense capabilities. All these factors – combined with the weakness of the Russian armed forces and the incredible strategic mistakes of Russian leadership – led to this development.

- 3) Do you see this as the beginning of the end of the war in Ukraine or it is just one stage in a long and exhausting war that lies ahead?

I'm afraid that a long war and the uncertain perspective of a frozen conflict are more likely, as there are at the current stage no signs for peace negotiations on either side.

- 4) You worked in the German Ministry of Defence, how would you asses the current situation in German defense forces and what impact did the Russian invasion have on German defense forces?

Political leadership and public opinion in Germany – as well as in other countries - have been mistaken in their judgement about Russia as a military threat. We have now learned the hard way that we have underestimated Putin. We still struggle with the implementation of a more strategic approach to security. This approach should bring together diplomacy and military strategy in a whole of government approach. Germany has to find a new balance between these two essential parts of strategy, accept the new reality, strengthen and reorient the armed forces in order to be able to contribute to conventional deterrence and assume larger international responsibilities.

- 5) At the start of the war the German response was often criticized by some other countries, do you think they were right and has chancellor Scholz made some mistakes?

Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered a great speech in the German Bundestag four days after Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Germany left behind fundamental positions in defense policy and promised to bring more to the table when it comes to defense and security. However, words must be followed by deeds. There is an ongoing struggle of the current center-left three-party-coalition government to implement what has been identified as the way ahead and to bring forward strategic changes.

- 6) If he made some mistakes, did he learn from them and are the policies of German government now more coherent?

C. f. answer to question 5

- 7) How is Germany getting prepared for the winter? What moves did the government make to help German people regarding the price of gas and electricity?

Since the outbreak of war, Germany's policy has been to constantly reduce its dependence on Russia for gas by diversifying its gas suppliers. To this end, partnerships are being formed with other countries. Currently, the German gas storage facilities are well filled. In addition, due to rising prices, there is an appeal to the self-responsibility of citizens to save gas and electricity. The German state is providing support by offering relief packages for various target groups.

- 8) Are the sanctions against Russia working or is the price that the EU is paying for them too high?

We can be really satisfied that the sanctions worked. Unity is our strength. Russia will remain for the foreseeable future, a difficult neighbor for the foreseeable future, and a potential threat. Certainly there will be an economic price for our firm response. The alternative would be a political and moral catastrophe.

- 9) We can see in the last couple of weeks that the Russian army is in retreat, would you say that further defeats in Ukraine can bring Putin's power in question and would that be more dangerous since no one knows what to expect in that scenario?

Absolutely. Putin can't win and he will continue to lose credibility and authority. We simply do not know how he will react, and we do well to take his threats seriously and be prepared for the unexpected.

- 10) What are the main security threats to the EU countries from this wounded Russia and Putin regime? Is it a nuclear threat or hybrid or some other?

We can not rule out the nuclear threat as we do not know what is in Putin's mind and how Putin will react when he will have to deal with even more pressure from within and from outside. Conventional forces can shape deterrence through their presence in the area. They can increase the uncertainties and the costs of a potential aggressor. We can achieve deterrence through the threat of retaliation.

- 11) What can Europe learn from this unfortunate situation that can be used in future so that situations like this one do not happen again, especially regarding the energy and gas dependency?

We Europeans have to further transform to the needs of the growing economic security and political challenges from China to Russia, avoid dependence on energy from uncertain providers, overcome the split in central policy fields and develop a common vision on defense.

- 12) Did this crisis bring closer USA and Europe after several years of cold relations that started with Obama's NSA tapping of European allies?

The alliance between Europe and the United States will only matter if we achieve to overcome the disunity in central policy areas. The transatlantic community needs a strong continent, a Europe capable of defending its own interests and fighting its own battles. This is the real incentive for us Europeans if we want the transatlantic alliance to remain bedrock of the Western model of democratic values.

- 13) Can you tell us what you talked about at the Zagreb Security Forum and what do you expect from this Forum in general?

I tried to respond to three questions: Where do we stand? What does the war mean for Europe's future in a post-American world? And: How can we reformulate the strategic implications of these

changes for our security. The forum is a unique opportunity to discuss new ideas and answers to new realities. Therefore, it provides an opportunity to promote intercultural exchange and to bridge the analytical gap between the identification of regional security threats and their impact on the international order.