

## **Austria's Position**

War: Russia vs. Ukraine

### **I. Introduction:**

The Russo-Ukrainian War is an ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, including pro-Russian rebel troops. It began in February 2014, following the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, and initially centred on the international recognition of Crimea and the Donbas as part of Ukraine. Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, escalating the Russo-Ukrainian War, which had started in 2014. With more than 6.4 million Ukrainians fleeing the nation and a third of the population displaced, the invasion has triggered Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II. Separatist artillery fire killed two Ukrainian soldiers on February 19, while another five were injured. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin decided on the continuation of the Allied Resolve 2022 military exercises on February 20, 2022.

Austria has long been a preferred location for Soviet (now Russian) commercial, banking, and espionage activities, according to the study Gazprom's European Web. According to Austrian police sources, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) had its largest European post in Vienna in the 2000s. In fact, Austria, like the European Union and a large portion of the international community, supports Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within internationally recognized boundaries. Despite continued diplomatic attempts, tensions between Russia and Ukraine remain high, as Russia continues to post thousands of troops on Ukraine's border. Austria has demonstrated a commitment to finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis and insists on doing so.

The recent negotiations at NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and bilaterally have therefore encouraged Austria. Although Austria feels that communication is vital, it also believes that conversations cannot be conducted with "tanks and missiles," alluding to Russia's military build-up along the border, joint drills with Belarus, cyber-attacks on Ukraine, and threats to station soldiers in Cuba or Venezuela.

Austria believes that as a neutral country and the home of the OSCE, it can help facilitate a diplomatic settlement. While dialogue is Austria's objective, the government has acknowledged that certain of Russia's demands are "unfulfillable," such as a formal declaration that Ukraine would not be permitted to join NATO.

Other topics, such as more conventional arms control, limitations on the stationing of short- and medium-range missiles, increased openness in military drills, and military hotlines, according to Austria, might serve as bargaining points.

Austria has also maintained that because it lacks a force that Putin may perceive as a threat, the European Union should drive for a diplomatic settlement and play a more active role in discussions. Austria sees this as a historic chance for the EU to mediate a solution to the problem.

The opposition parties disagreed on certain matters, such as whether Austria should stay neutral and if Austria is getting too close to NATO and neglecting Russia's concerns, despite overwhelming agreement among Austrian political parties that the objective should be a diplomatic settlement.

## II. Key Issue- Areas:

Ukraine's sovereignty is non-negotiable, according to the Austrian government, which also warned that "further aggression would have significant economic and political implications for Russia."

The Nord Stream II natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany is one such outcome being evaluated. Austria has said that a pipeline closure should not be used as a preventative measure. The Austrian government, on the other hand, suggested that if Russia invades Ukraine, the pipeline should be shut off.

During negotiations in Moscow, Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to cease the invasion of Ukraine and brought up the topic of "severe war crimes" committed by the Russian military. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, Nehammer was the first European leader to meet Putin.

All those guilty for war crimes in the Ukrainian city of Bucha and elsewhere, Nehammer warned Putin, will be "brought to account." According to his statement, he also emphasized the importance of opening humanitarian corridors so that residents besieged in cities under bombardment may get essential commodities like food and water. The Austrian leader described his journey to Moscow as his "responsibility" to exhaust all options for stopping the unrest in Ukraine, barely two days after meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv.

Austria, a member of the European Union, backed the bloc's sanctions on Russia, though it has so far rejected shutting off Russian gas supply. The country is not a NATO member and is militarily neutral. Because Europe is reliant on Russian gas, Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg (VP) has previously declared that he opposes EU sanctions on Russian gas. Furthermore, Schallenberg has already stated that the Russian-owned – and contentious – Nord Stream 2 pipeline should be exempt from any potential penalties because it is still under construction.

According to Elisabeth Christen, Senior Economist at the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (Wifo), Austria imports 80 percent of its gas from Russia, and the EU as a whole is significantly reliant on Russian gas. This places Austria in a precarious situation that extends beyond its neutrality promise. However, according to Christen, Russia's economy is heavily reliant on cash generated by gas exports, thus while Austria – and Europe – rely on Russia to satisfy their energy needs, it is a "mutual reliance." Apart from gas supplies, Austria's economy is not inextricably linked to Russia, with just 1.5 percent of imports and 1.5 percent of exports passing between the two nations.

### III. The proposed solution:

The Austrian government has put together a second package of extensive help. The Foreign Disaster Fund (AKF) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will deliver an additional 15 million euros in humanitarian help to the Ukrainian people. The most essential thing right now is to assist people on the ground in a timely, effective, and uncomplicated manner. “We will provide an extra 15 million euros from the AKF during the next Council of Ministers on Wednesday, in addition to the package we put up last week, because timely relief is twice as vital”, said Federal Chancellor Karl Nehammer.

Austria is firm in its support for Ukraine, which is presently facing unparalleled military assault. Wherever we can assist Ukraine, we will do so wholeheartedly. Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg emphasized that the goal of this massive aid package is to help alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Ukrainian people and to offer emergency supplies without red tape.

The Austrian funding will be used to provide food and water to the sponsored humanitarian organizations, as well as emergency shelter and basic medical treatment. Medical treatment for the injured is projected to see a significant rise in demand.

A good perspective of the Austrian-Swiss model is possible. Both Austria and Switzerland have flourished, with neither facing substantial external threats. Even though both Sweden and Finland are neutral, they collaborate with NATO.