

**Trouw Opinion: Security 5.1.2022**

## **The EU must get moving, the tension around Ukraine is worrying'.**

Shortly before his death, former ambassador Edy Korthals Altes wrote an impassioned plea, addressed to the EU, to guard peace on Europe's eastern border.

*Edy Korthals Altes 5 January 2022, 12:55*

The increasing tension around the Ukraine between Russia and the West is worrying. In case of an armed conflict Europe risks to be the victim of it. It is therefore very important to find a solution to this conflict. In my opinion, this can only be done if it is placed in a broader framework: that of European security. A rethink of the European security structure is urgently needed. The Helsinki Accords of 1975 and the Charter of Paris of 1990 offer points of departure.

Both the EU and Russia have a strong interest in a peaceful settlement leading ultimately to a project of European cooperation. What is the EU's interest? Firstly, the security of the countries on the EU's eastern border. In addition, preventing a Russian invasion of Ukraine and strengthening the geopolitical position. It is also in Europe's interest to expand trade opportunities, including access to scarce raw materials.

And what is the interest for Russia? First of all, the elimination of threats on the western border, especially relevant because of the long, vulnerable eastern border with an increasingly assertive China. In addition, it strengthens its geopolitical position. In Russia's favour is the disappearance of economic sanctions, which could mean a possible alleviation of its worrying internal economic situation.

### **Green men**

Given these interests on both sides, how do we achieve cooperation? By reducing pressure from NATO, the most powerful military alliance in the world. This is on the express condition that Russia fully respects the sovereignty of all EU states. So no green men or cyber attacks or other destabilising actions. The slightest breach will immediately bring NATO back to full strength on Russia's western border.

It must also be excluded that Ukraine becomes a member of NATO or cooperates with it. Russia should fully respect the sovereignty of Ukraine, thus refraining from military invasion and destabilising actions. The argument that Ukraine, as a sovereign state, has the right to decide for itself with whom to ally, completely ignores the key question of whether this is in the interests of the EU or NATO, given the negative impact this would have on relations with Russia.

Cooperation also requires the strengthening of economic relations and confidence-building measures, such as the withdrawal of military forces behind a border to be determined.

### **Russian bear**

This cooperation can only come about if each other's vital interests are taken into account. That means respect for the sovereignty of the countries bordering Russia, as well as the sensitivity of the underbelly of the wounded Russian bear. We would do well to remind ourselves of the commitments made by America to Gorbachev at the time. Also of the clear warning of the former Secretary General of NATO Manfred Wörner: "No expansion of NATO to Russia's western border".

As a direct stakeholder, the EU must take the initiative, including in NATO, i.e. in close cooperation with the US. It is now the case that the US and Russia decide about us and without us about our future. The EU must get moving!

*Edy Korthals Altes (1924-2021) spent 35 years in diplomatic service, including as ambassador to Poland and Spain. He gave up his position out of deep dissatisfaction with the defence policy, especially the nuclear armament, and the hostile treatment of Eastern Europe. He subsequently devoted himself to (inter)national peace initiatives and organisations, including the Council of Churches in the Netherlands and the Coalition of World Religions for Peace. He died last Christmas Day.*