Motion

tabled by Members of the Bundestag Marieluise Beck, Annalena Baerbock, Dr Franziska Brantner, Agnieszka Brugger, Uwe Kekeritz, Tom Koenigs, Dr Tobias Lindner, Omid Nouripour, Cem Özdemir, Claudia Roth, Manuel Sarrazin, Dr Frithjof Schmidt, Jürgen Trittin, Doris Wagner, Kai Gehring and the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group

Germany's Historical Responsibility towards Ukraine

The Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

I.   The German Bundestag notes:

The Euromaidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in the eastern regions have moved Ukraine to the forefront of public attention in Western Europe, including Germany, over the past three years and more. The Association Agreement with the European Union has strengthened Ukraine's links with the EU and Germany. Political, economic and cultural relations between Germany and Ukraine are closer than ever before.

However, Ukraine's reorientation towards Europe has cost many people their lives. At the Maidan in Kyiv, dozens died while demonstrating for closer links with the European Union and its community of values. The positive signals sent by Ukraine's political trajectory after the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych are backed by an increasingly strong and diverse civil society, whose courage and engagement can set an example for Europe as a whole.

The German Bundestag welcomes the growing awareness, in Germany, of Ukraine as a democratic sovereign state which is part of Europe and which aspires to be part of the Western community of values. Germany has a key role to play in supporting Ukraine's young democracy movement, not least on account of its historical responsibility towards Ukraine.

In the history of the 20th century, almost no other country in Europe experienced such tragedy and suffering as Ukraine. The territory of present-day Ukraine was one of the main theatres in the Russian Civil War and then Stalin's reign of terror and the famine – the *Holodomor* – which claimed millions of lives. From the time of the October Revolution in 1917 to the crushing of the Western Ukrainian partisan movement in the 1950s, some 15 to 20 million Ukrainians lost their lives to war and terror. The trauma of having been the backdrop to some of Hitler's and Stalin's most appalling crimes against humanity has continued to substantially define Ukraine's collective historical consciousness to this day. It is important, therefore, to have an awareness of the complex history of Ukraine, a country which

was a helpless pawn in the hands of two totalitarian systems for much of the 20th century.

Like Poland, the Baltic countries and Moldova, Ukraine was a victim of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, which was signed in August 1939 and marked the start of the Second World War. Areas of Poland, such as East Galicia, now western Ukraine, were occupied not only by the Wehrmacht but also, in parallel, by the Soviet Union.

The criminal war waged by National Socialist Germany against the Soviet Union differed from the other wars fought in Europe in modern times, and was different again from the war against the Western European countries and Western allies, not only in its objectives but also in its extreme brutality. It was waged not only against the soldiers of the Red Army but also, and quite deliberately, against the population of the territories under occupation. The intention was to annihilate Poland, the Soviet Union and with it Ukraine as states in their own right, to extinguish their societies and to enslave or murder their people. This included the systematic mass murder of the Jews, which was an integral part of the planning of war.

The genocide of the Soviet Jews began with the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Wehrmacht on 22 June 1941. Before the month was out, the shooting of Jewish men by SS mobile killing squads – the *Einsatzgruppen* – had begun. From July onwards, the mass shootings targeted women and children as well, and by August, entire Jewish communities were being wiped out. By the time the Wannsee Conference took place in January 1942, almost one million Polish and Soviet Jews had been murdered – close to the number of Jews later killed in Auschwitz. When the systematic murder of Western European Jews began in late 1942, the Holocaust was, to a large extent, already complete. Two thirds of Jews killed during the war were already dead by the end of 1942. The majority of Jews murdered during the war – more than four million – came from the occupied regions of the Soviet Union and Poland, including more than one million from Ukraine.

Many of the mass shootings were carried out on the territory of present-day Ukraine during the occupation from 1941 to 1944. Soon after the Wehrmacht's invasion of Soviet Ukraine in late August 1941, around 23,600 Jews were murdered near the western Ukrainian city of Kamenets-Podolsk. This was the largest massacre to date, and marked a historic turning point, away from the policy of selective murder towards the systematic and complete annihilation of Eastern Europe's Jews. A few days later, after the capture of Kyiv, the Nazis perpetrated one of the largest mass murders of the Second World War, massacring 33,771 Jews in 36 hours in the nearby ravine of Babi Yar. Children were thrown onto the pile of bodies and buried alive in order to save on ammunition. In all, more than 100,000 people were murdered at Babi Yar, including 50,000 Jews; Soviet prisoners of war, communists and members of the Ukrainian independence movement were also among the victims. Today, however, memories of the whereabouts of most of the mass graves in Ukraine have faded, and a systematic appraisal of history is only gradually commencing. The presence of Germany's Federal President at the annual commemoration of the massacre of Babi Yar for the first time is a very welcome sign of German-Ukrainian-Jewish reconciliation.

Others who took part in the mass killings alongside the SS, the specially trained police units and the Wehrmacht included local police forces and nationalist partisans. As in almost all the territories under occupation, Ukraine had its share of collaborators. During the first few weeks of occupation, they included the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), led by Stepan Bandera. This was a militant nationalist organisation in East Galicia, whose aim was to liberate their country and create an independent Ukraine, free of Stalin's Soviet Union. This quickly proved to be a vain hope – the Nazis had no interest in an independent Ukraine.

The OUN was crushed and Bandera was arrested and imprisoned in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Remnants of the OUN continued to engage in the partisans' struggle against the Nazis until the end of the war and then fought the returning Red Army once the war was over. Bandera himself went into exile and was assassinated by the KGB in 1959. His murder has led to his becoming something of an iconic figure in Ukraine's independence mythology to this day. In Soviet and – and now in Russian – propaganda, however, he was portrayed as the embodiment of an alleged Ukrainian "fascism".

The uniquely terrible war of annihilation in Eastern Europe was also a racial war in which not only the Jews were targets. In National Socialist racial ideology, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians were regarded as Slavic "sub-humans" (*Untermenschen*), destined either for slavery or for annihilation. In order to be able to proceed with "unprecedented, unmerciful, and unrelenting harshness" against the Soviet Union, Hitler decreed the partial suspension of the international law of war and waived the protection guaranteed to civilians.

As Europe's "breadbasket", Ukraine played a central role in the National Socialists' expansion plans and was therefore subjected to extreme and ruthless plundering and exploitation. In the German strategy for the war of annihilation, the deaths of millions of Slavs from famine were factored into the equation and were regarded as necessary to secure reliable food supplies and new living space (*Lebensraum*) for the German people. Under the General Plan East (*Generalplan Ost* – GPO) for the colonisation of Central and Eastern Europe, Ukraine was earmarked for German settlement, so the Ukrainian population was deliberately starved, expelled and murdered. This explains why, out of 6.8 million Ukrainian war dead, the number of civilians – 5.2 million – is so high.

The whole of Soviet Ukraine was occupied by the Germans. In 1941, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg, decreed that all inhabitants of these territories be compelled to provide labour for the occupying forces. Of the 2.8 million Soviet forced labourers – most of them women – who were deported to Germany, more than half came from Ukraine. In these mass deportations, entire communities across all age groups were transported to the German Reich; many of their farms and villages were burned to the ground.

Unlike the forced labourers from Western countries, who were subject to judicial supervision, the Eastern Europeans, known as *Ostarbeiter*, were exposed to the Gestapo's much harsher and more punitive regime and were forced to work under inhumane conditions. On their return to the Soviet Union, many of these forced labourers who had been deported to Germany were treated as "collaborators" and sent to the gulag. Stigmatised and denied any recognition as victims for decades, their fate were a taboo subject in the Soviet Union. Up until 2007, Germany made compensation payments to 856,402 former forced labourers from the Soviet Union, including 465,672 from Ukraine.

Whereas the required minimum standards of human dignity were generally upheld in the treatment of POWs from Western allied countries, Soviet POWs were deliberately denied their rights to humane treatment under the Geneva Convention. Death and annihilation in the POW camps, where conditions were comparable to those in the concentration camps, were accepted by the National Socialist regime with no qualms. Out of more than five million Soviet POWs – the precise number of Ukrainians cannot be determined – around 3.3 million died in captivity.

II. The German Bundestag declares:

Ukraine – alongside Belarus, Poland, the Baltic countries and Russia – was a main battleground in the Second World War unleashed by the Nazis and was the backdrop to the ensuing mass murder of the civilian population. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the invasion of the Soviet Union and German war crimes in Ukraine.

Germany recognises its historical responsibility towards Ukraine. This includes not only the investigation of German atrocities committed in Ukraine and against its people, but also active support for today's independent Ukraine and its society in their quest for democracy, the rule of law and economic development. The economic, political and military destabilisation of Ukraine with the aim of halting or, indeed, preventing this process therefore requires a resolute response.

III. The German Bundestag calls on the Federal Government

to continue to advocate at the bilateral level and within the international institutions for active support to be provided for Ukraine and to foster dialogues of remembrance as well as commemoration and remembrance of the past in a responsible fashion by means of educational work and cultural projects.

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Katrin Göring-Eckardt, Dr Anton Hofreiter and the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group