

PRESS RELEASE

First Westphalian Peace Conference in Münster

Federal Minister of Defense Boris Pistorius gives opening speech

Düsseldorf/Münster, August 16, 2023 - The Wirtschaftliche Gesellschaft für Westfalen und Lippe e. V. (WWL) is hosting an international peace conference in Münster for the first time on September 15, 2023. The Chairman of the WWL Board of Directors, Dr. Reinhard Zinkann, together with the head of the conference, Armin Laschet, Member of the Bundestag and former Minister President of North Rhine-Westphalia, presented the concept and program today at the state press conference in Düsseldorf. Federal Minister of Defense Boris Pistorius will open the Peace Congress and Vitali Klitschko, Mayor of Kiev, will give the closing speech.

375 years after the Peace of Westphalia, international politicians, entrepreneurs and political scientists are discussing the global consequences of Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine in Münster's historic town hall. The conference looks beyond the borders of Europe and discusses the conflicts in the Middle East and the Gulf region as well as the flashpoints in Africa and the resulting consequences for the world and Europe in particular.

"In this tense and challenging situation, Westphalian and Lippe entrepreneurs, with their close connection to the historic peace treaty of 1648, felt they had to do something," says Dr. Zinkann. "Our family-run companies are not unaffected when people are suddenly drawn into armed conflicts. We are also very concerned that political conflicts have a direct impact on the global economy."

For decades, politicians and business have traditionally met at the beginning of the year in Davos and a little later at the Munich Security Conference, according to Dr. Zinkann. "The time between these annual conferences seemed too long to us; we need to talk to each other more often and more intensively." And so the idea of the Westphalian Peace Conference was born. Dr. Zinkann: "We want to talk about possible peace solutions in the Ukraine war, about security issues in our European countries and about what role the economy can play in peace processes."

Conference chair Armin Laschet says: "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine calls into question the rule-based coexistence of peoples and reveals profound conflicts between globally competing conceptions of the system. The representatives of a liberal community of states based on internationally agreed rules are called upon to once again promote our model, which is based on the integrity of state borders and the peaceful settlement of conflicts of interest.

The foundations for modern international law were laid in Münster in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia. It is therefore exactly right that the WWL is now convening the Westphalian Peace Conference. Business and politics should work together to find ways to achieve peaceful coexistence, in Europe and globally."

Because while the horror of war has flared up again in the middle of Europe, there are signs of hope in other parts of the world. A fundamental change is taking place in the Middle East, with the four Arab states of Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan signing the Abraham Accords together with Israel. This marks the end of a decades-long period of hostility and separation and opens a new chapter of economic, political and cultural cooperation and regional integration. In a region that has been marked by armed conflict for years, there is now a historic opportunity for peace and the normalization of relations between former adversaries.

After the opening speech by Federal Minister of Defense Pistorius, Peer Steinbrück, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt Foundation, Ronald Pofalla, the last Chairman of the Petersburg Dialogue, Wolfgang Ischinger, former Ambassador to Washington and London and long-time head of the Munich Security Conference, will discuss Europe's role on the world stage. Christian Kullmann, CEO of the global corporation Evonik AG, Employers' President Arndt Kirchhoff and NRW Economics Minister Mona Neubaur will discuss what role the economy can play in the global peace process.

Luigi di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf Region, Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, and security expert Professor Neumann from King's College London will then discuss the opportunities for rapprochement between Israel and its Arab neighbors, before the Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hendrik Wüst, and Vitali Klitschko, Mayor of Kiev, conclude the conference with their statements.

Since 1998, the Wirtschaftliche Gesellschaft für Westfalen und Lippe e. V. has awarded the International Prize of Peace Westphalia every two years to personalities who have made a special contribution to peace in the world. Previous winners include outstanding statesmen and stateswomen such as Vaclav Havel, Giscard d'Estaing, Helmut Schmidt, Helmut Kohl and Carla del Ponte. French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been working with great commitment to mediate between the warring parties since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, will receive the Peace of Westphalia Prize this year, which will be presented in Münster in the first half of 2024.

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