

Lessons from the Black Sea Forum

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A Guest Interview with Annegret Kramp Karrenbauer, Chair of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

This interview was conducted by Neele Henry Seifert with Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer during the Third Black Sea Security Forum, held in Odesa, Ukraine, from 28–31 May 2026.

1. What is the most important message you are taking away from this year's Black Sea Security Forum?

The Forum was very insightful and addressed a wide range of security-related issues. One of my main takeaways is the clear recognition that, while Ukraine has achieved significant successes in countering Russian aggression, the struggle is far from over. Russia continues to target civilians, and Ukraine still requires our unwavering solidarity, including sustained support from Washington. Should such support diminish, it becomes all the more essential for Europe to step up its assistance.

Another key message I take from this visit is the decisive role of political will. Regardless of the challenges we face, if there is political will, we can achieve our goals.

2. Which developments in the Black Sea region currently concern you the most – and which developments give you hope?

A large share of Ukraine's grain exports is transported through the Black Sea, not only to European countries but also to regions in the Middle East and Africa. This underscores that Ukraine's independence, freedom, and security are not solely European concerns, but matters of global importance.

What gives me hope is the remarkable creativity and determination Ukraine has demonstrated over the past years. Despite limited resources, it has managed to deter the Russian Black Sea Fleet and keep maritime routes open. Ukraine has shown that innovation and resilience can make a real difference. We can also see today the broader importance of secure and open sea lanes, especially in light of recent developments around the Strait of Hormuz.

• What would you say to young Ukrainians who continue to believe in their country's European future despite the ongoing war?

I would tell young Ukrainians that your belief in your country's European future is already helping to shape that future. Europe is not defined solely by institutions or membership processes – it is first and foremost a community of shared values: freedom, democracy, responsibility, and solidarity. Every day, Ukrainians are defending these values under the most difficult conditions.

What impressed me most during my visit was the determination and resilience of Ukrainian people. Despite the war, they continue to live, study, work, and plan for the future. This gives me confidence that Ukraine's place lies within the European family.

My hope for young Ukrainians is that the war will end as soon as possible and that a just and lasting peace will be achieved. Until then, I encourage you to keep believing in your country, investing in your education and your communities, and remaining engaged citizens.

4. Why is the Konrad Adenauer Foundation so deeply engaged in Ukraine?

The Foundation is a committed partner to Ukraine, with staff working on the ground in Kyiv. This presence is crucial, as it allows us to implement our mission and promote our core values effectively.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung supports Ukraine's democratic development and contributes to strengthening key institutions such as parliament and political parties. We know that Ukrainians see themselves as part of Europe, and they demonstrated this clearly during the protests on the Maidan. That is why we must do everything we can to help Ukraine

become a full member of the European community. We support reforms in Ukraine and work to advance the European integration process that is essential for the country's future. And of course we do work on security issues that are important for Ukraine and Europe as well.

5. You have served as Germany's Minister of Defence and today chair the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. How has your perspective on security policy evolved over time?

I have come to appreciate even more clearly that security is not limited to military strength alone. It is above all about resilience – the ability of states and societies to withstand crises and adapt quickly. This includes strong institutions, economic stability, and social cohesion. Russia's war against Ukraine clearly shows that resilience is a decisive factor in modern defence. Those who are resilient can endure even under extreme pressure.

At the same time, one lesson has remained constant: freedom and peace cannot be taken for granted. They must be actively protected and strengthened through sustained commitment, both nationally and in co-operation with partners.

6. Many young Europeans are growing up in a time marked by war, geopolitical tensions, and uncertainty. What message would you like to give to the younger generation about remaining optimistic about the future, and why should they consider engaging in foreign, security, and defence policy already at a young age?

To young Europeans, I would say: while this is undoubtedly a time of uncertainty, it is also a time in which your engagement truly matters. Every generation faces its own challenges, and yours has the opportunity to shape the future of Europe in decisive ways.

Optimism does not mean ignoring difficulties, it means having the confidence that we can overcome them together. I would encourage young people to stay informed, to think critically, and to get involved, whether through education, public service, civil society, or political engagement. The future of Europe will be shaped by those who choose to take part in it.

About the Interviewed: Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer is the former German Federal Minister of Defence, former Chair of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and current Chair of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS). The Konrad Adenauer Foundation is one of Germany's leading political foundations, promoting democracy, the rule of law, European integration, and international cooperation through projects in more than 100 countries worldwide.