

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title and subtitle.

The Gaze of the Other

Germany's Eastern Policy from the Standpoint of its Partners

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- After initial concerns about a resurgent Germany in the wake of reunification, over time expectations grew that the country should assert itself in foreign policy in accordance with its economic and political weight.
- In the Ukraine crisis it became evident that Germany increasingly accepts this new role. At the same time, however, it is clear from how Germany's partners view its Eastern Policy that the expectations of stronger German engagement are accompanied by other considerations.
- The sheer diversity of expectations, interests and concerns – especially in relation to Russia and the annexation of Crimea – hinder the development of a common EU policy. Although Germany's stance towards Russia is regarded by many as cautious, it is accepted that Berlin should play a coordinating role in EU Eastern Policy.
- The desire that Germany should play a stronger role is thus not to be understood as a call for leadership or even dominance. The hope is rather that Germany will facilitate coordination and integration among its partners within the EU.



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A European Eastern Policy for Germany – Coordination Not Dominance

Peer Teschendorf

»Germany is a little too big and economically too strong for us merely to stand on the sidelines of world politics and make comments.« With these words Frank-Walter Steinmeier kicked off his second stint as Germany's foreign minister and also made it clear that the mounting criticisms of Germany's foreign policy reticence were being taken seriously. Reunification had initially given rise to – historically based – concerns about a resurgent Germany. Its foreign policy restraint, partly in response to such concerns and partly due to a certain self-consciousness, over time led to increasing criticisms, however. Europe's strongest economy had to pull its weight in international efforts in response to crises, conflicts and also wars.

In 2011 the then foreign minister of Poland, Radosław Sikorski, got to the nub of the changed expectations about Germany in a speech in Berlin: »I fear German power less than I'm beginning to fear German inactivity.« However, he clarified this by saying that while Germany must take the lead in reform it must not dominate. This qualification also describes the balancing act that goes hand in hand with Germany's new role.

But Germany has been slow to accept this new role. Numerous surveys have shown that most Germans are not keen on further foreign policy involvement. Germany's past resonates in this reluctance, but also a certain shying away from the sheer complexity of world events or the worry that Germany will have to foot the bill. However, German foreign policy has been changing: with the first participations in military operations in the disintegrating Yugoslavia and later, on a larger scale, in Kosovo and Afghanistan Germany began to abandon its security policy reserve. This was accompanied by a more active role – including in the EU – which was especially evident within the framework of the financial crisis, although this, too, drew criticism.

Foreign Policy During Difficult Times

In particular during the financial crisis Germany's assumed leadership role within the EU demonstrated how

difficult foreign policy action has become. The main framework for foreign policy action in the EU is increasingly fraught with challenges and has become more and more complex with successive enlargements. The crises of recent years have heightened these conflicts appreciably and growing nationalist tendencies pose a fundamental challenge to the consensus on international cooperation. At the same time, the challenges in the EU's environment are mounting. The EU still has to deal with the refugee flows arising from the Arab revolutions and the war in Syria. With the Ukraine crisis even war and border changes wrought with violence returned to Europe so that now even the continent's security order, established in Helsinki forty years ago, has been called into question.

If the EU wishes to exert influence in this regard it has to speak with one voice. As a result, foreign policy in a Europe of (still) 28 countries has become a highly complex undertaking. The biggest difficulty lies – notwithstanding all the joint bodies, summits and resolutions – in understanding the interests, concerns and fears of all the EU states and taking due account of them, not to mention getting the message across effectively when this proves impossible. The EU's principal strength is not the weight of certain large states, but its ability to unite a plethora of medium-sized and smaller states behind an idea. Every nation called upon to take the lead on one or another political issue has to master this complex interplay of a negotiated foreign policy, show empathy even with the smallest states in the EU and to some extent put its own interests on the backburner.

The Ukraine Crisis – A Test Case for German Foreign Policy

Germany assumed this leadership role in particular within the framework of the Ukraine crisis. The conflict with Russia concerning the annexation of Crimea, as well as its interference in eastern Ukraine posed particular problems for German foreign policy. Regarding itself as

a civilian power Germany favours multilateral cooperation, the importance of international treaties and organisations and conflict resolution primarily by peaceful means. Russia has come to challenge such notions and is trying with the annexation of Crimea to establish a different model, one diametrically opposed to the one espoused by Germany. At the same time, Germany has a special relationship with Russia, which has developed not only due to the experience of the Second World War but over a long history of exchange and of diplomatic negotiations. The policy of the Federal Republic of Germany in relation to the Soviet Union and the states of central and eastern Europe was a constant and a priority of West German foreign policy, quite apart from the country's integration in the West and in the European Union. The division of Germany, which made the GDR and the Federal Republic into frontline states in the Cold War, not to mention Germany's geopolitical location in the centre of Europe, provided the frame of reference for all this until 1989.

Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* («eastern policy»), which in recognition of Germany's historical responsibility sought reconciliation with its eastern neighbours, can be regarded against this background as an attempt, by means of the CSCE and later the OSCE, to establish a framework for peace and security in Europe. Only with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Warsaw Pact did the reunified Germany finally slough off the last limitations on its sovereignty from the post-war era and become a global actor, not only economically but also politically. But even in the changed geopolitical circumstances Russia, as well as central and eastern Europe, remained a priority of German foreign policy and foreign trade policy. Thus Germany had a particular commitment to the eastern enlargement of the EU and NATO. And it was a logical extension of this policy to make every effort to find a solution when the conflict in Ukraine escalated. This included both an intensive application of EU sanctions policy and the negotiations under the aegis of the Normandy Format, which were continuing despite the difficult situation and eventually led to Minsk I and Minsk II. It also became clear in the course of these efforts that German foreign policy is guided first and foremost by the view that challenges are to be tackled only in tandem with EU partners.

Whether the other partners see things the same way, however, is the object of the present publication. The

short country analyses examine how Germany's role is seen from the different national perspectives, what their expectations of Germany are and how far Germany's partners see their interests as being taken into account. States particularly affected by the current crisis, namely Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states, were examined. Furthermore, other EU partners that have taken different positions with regard to Russia – namely Romania, Italy, France, Sweden and Finland – were considered. In the case of Georgia, we attempt to round out the overall picture by presenting a partner which, while aligned with the EU, also has a difficult relationship with Russia. Looking west, we look beyond the borders of the EU to America. And with Russia, finally, we look at the perspective of the current »adversary«.

However, it is not our aim to try to evaluate German Eastern Policy with a view to determining whether it is right or wrong. Rather the underlying assumption is that Germany can take up a coordinating role in the EU's negotiated foreign policy only if it acknowledges the interests, perceptions and wishes of its partners. These are touched upon in the short contributions; how well the partners understand policy-making in Germany is also examined. Is Germany perceived as having only one face or one position? Is it recognised outside the country that foreign policy in Germany has to be negotiated and that opposing positions have to be reconciled?

Coordination, Not Dominance

Despite the different – due to historical experiences or current political constellations – perspectives in the countries under consideration here certain comparable trends can nevertheless be discerned. It is clear above all that Germany's enhanced importance in the current conflict with Russia is accepted and generally regarded as positive. Germany's economic and political strength is considered to be an advantage in this context. Furthermore, this acceptance is to be found not only among the Baltic states or Ukraine, which are exposed to a direct threat and thus welcome any kind of support, but also in Poland, which has itself been actively involved in conflict control. Even in France German efforts are accepted in terms of EU solidarity with regard to Russia.

Needless to say, such support is accompanied by a wide range of expectations, among which German diploma-

cy has to strike a balance. Positions diverge in particular concerning how hard a line should be taken with Russia, ranging from the notion of a new containment policy towards it (for example, Romania) to a desire to maintain dialogue and not to escalate the conflict further (for example, Finland).

Germany has an integrative role to play here. Although some states regard Germany's willingness to negotiate as a weakness they are nevertheless ready to defer to a unified EU position, although only if their own position is also heard and taken seriously and existing experiences are heeded.

Besides the fundamental assent with regard to Germany's role concerns persist in relation to possible German dominance. In Poland historical memories are never far from the surface and there are fears of a rapprochement between Berlin and Moscow, to the detriment of the states in between. History is also a key factor in Ukraine, especially when the German debate is suspected of reducing the Second World War to the battle between Germany and Russia, thereby neglecting the other states of the Soviet Union and their sacrifices. Here too the worry is that insufficient notice will be taken of them.

Fears are also continually surfacing that Germany will favour the interests of its own economy at the expense of the interests of Europe as a whole and in particular those of the smaller states. The »Nord Stream« project is symbolic in this context; it finds little favour either among the states directly affected, such as Ukraine, the Baltic states or Sweden, or among states not directly affected, such as the United States. The fact that even non-European actors discern major problems here is significant and indicates that there is more at stake with regard to this project than its economic pros and cons. Worries are evident that Europe's strongest economy might favour its own interests too much or become too close to Russia.

It should also be borne in mind that although Germany now features more prominently in foreign policy debates in these countries they are often unaware of the different positions within Germany. This is based either on a view of politics as a top-down process, which views the government at the top and underestimates the other actors in the political negotiation process, or on a defective understanding of the bases of German Eastern Policy.

A whole range of things are associated with Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. To some it represents Social Democratic weakness with regard to Russia, while others fear that Germany could switch its orientation from west to east.

Naturally, neither the United States nor Russia are particularly worried about Germany's leadership role. While Washington, despite a sometimes deviating strategy with regard to Russia, can reach an accommodation with German efforts and even see benefits in them – for example, in the dialogue channel under the Normandy Format – Russia takes a different view. Although it concedes Germany's importance as the largest state in the EU it regards the United States as the primary negotiating partner on the key issues of power and influence in eastern Europe. The upshot of Russia's focus on its main adversary and its self-conception as a great power is a public discourse that at times denies Germany its independence. Diplomatic ties with Germany are nevertheless maintained.

Germany's Role as Integration Centre of European Foreign Policy

Due to the crises in and around the EU, on one hand, and Germany's relative stability, on the other, expectations concerning the latter's role remain high. Both the general public and politicians will just have to get used to this. At the same time, this demand for German leadership should not be misinterpreted. What precisely is expected of Germany became clear within the framework of the Ukraine crisis. The European partners hope primarily that it will prove possible to achieve consensus within the EU and thus to demonstrate cohesion with regard to Russia. It is thus not a question of implementing a German Eastern Policy underwritten by the power of the largest EU economy, but rather of finding a common position and asserting it. Whenever it appears that Germany is negotiating only in its own interest or looks like going beyond the common goals critical voices are quick to respond.

Outside the EU, too, in particular in Russia, the dominant view is often that it is enough to negotiate with Germany because it sets the agenda in the EU. A wise foreign policy must always emphasise that Germany cannot act alone and nor does it want to. The success of EU foreign policy will increasingly depend on its ability to give all



stakeholders a voice. In order to achieve this much has to be invested in exchanges among the partners in order to achieve an understanding of their respective experiences, but also interests. At the same time, it must also be possible to get behind the common position, even if the outcomes for one's own state are not always positive.

The ongoing discussion about a German Eastern Policy in recent months may thus have been going in the wrong direction. Germany alone will be able to achieve little in Eastern Europe. As part of the EU and an integration centre for European foreign policy, however, the prospect is more favourable.

Fears of a German–Russian Alliance at Poland’s Expense – The Polish View of Germany’s Eastern Policy

Roland Feicht

In Poland, Germany’s Eastern Policy is viewed and discussed chiefly with an eye to the current state of German–Russian relations. From the Polish standpoint Russia is the region’s major destabilising factor; against this background the change of course in German Eastern Policy following Russia’s annexation of the Crimea was viewed positively. The fact that Germany – at least for the time being – renounced *détente* with Russia was broadly welcomed.

Polish Eastern Policy

In the wake of 1989 Poland’s Eastern Policy was largely based on the so-called Giedroyc Doctrine, which, among other things, postulated support for the independence efforts of countries such as Ukraine and Belarus. The existence of independent and democratic states in eastern Europe and simultaneous efforts to continue dialogue with Russia are the pillars of Polish Eastern Policy. The support of Polish politicians – including then president Aleksander Kwaśniewski – for the so-called »Orange Revolution« in Ukraine in 2004 or even the participation of President Lech Kaczyński in a demonstration in Tbilisi during the Georgia–Russia conflict in 2008 were consistent with Polish Eastern Policy since the fall of communism.

The best known example of the Giedroyc Doctrine in action at EU level is the Eastern Partnership launched in 2009. Euromaidan in Ukraine, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014 marked a turning point in Poland’s perception of Russian policy. They fear a possible further destabilisation of the situation in the eastern part of Europe. In response, Polish rhetoric was stepped up in relation to Russia; similarly, the issue of NATO security guarantees and political solidarity with Poland within the EU became key concerns. Despite the political transformation in 2015 this fundamental orientation of Polish Eastern Policy has not altered and embraces all parties. The importance of an international commitment and support

for independence and a pro-European orientation on the part of eastern European countries remain important under the current government.

It is generally believed in Poland that Germany’s traditional Social Democratic Eastern Policy established by Willy Brandt – *Ostpolitik* – is aimed at dialogue, inclusion and the avoidance of anything that Russia might perceive to be a provocation or as heightening tensions. Poland takes the opposite approach to Russia. To Poland it makes more sense to respond to Russia’s policy course with adequate resources, while at the same time being ready to engage in political dialogue to the extent that Russia exhibits the relevant willingness. By contrast, hopes in Germany that Russia might soften its position in response to unilateral concessions on the part of the European Union and in particular Germany are considered to be naïve.

A Critical Look at the Normandy Format

In recent years Germany’s commitment has been discussed primarily with regard to four major topical areas: (i) German efforts to bring an end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict; (ii) the related German attitude to maintaining the EU sanctions imposed on Russia; (iii) allied activities within the framework of NATO (especially the strengthening of the eastern flank); and (iv) German–Russian negotiations on the building of the Baltic Sea pipeline »Nord Stream II«.

Ukraine’s so-called »Revolution of Dignity«, in which Ukrainians’ pro-European stance manifested itself, was vindication for Polish diplomacy that the course it has been pursuing is the right one. It also allowed Poland to emphasise the role that the country would like to play in EU Eastern Policy. In commentaries on the agreement between the opposition and President Janukowycz it was pointed out that consensus had been reached through the mediation of the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland. Nevertheless the fact

that further negotiations within the framework of the Minsk peace talks and the Normandy Format were conducted without Polish representatives was not taken to be malicious attempt on the part of western states – including Germany – to limit Poland's influence on EU Eastern Policy. This is even more remarkable given that in 2015 President Andrzej Duda proposed an alternative dialogue format involving a larger group of states, which was rejected by the other partners, including Ukraine. The focal point of commentaries on German involvement in attempts to resolve the Ukraine–Russia conflict was Chancellor Angela Merkel, who in Poland is generally perceived as the key architect of German Eastern Policy in the wake of the Crimean annexation, which is perceived positively, broadly speaking.

A Cooling in Germany's Stance towards Russia

The marked cooling of Germany's stance towards Russia after the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine was noted favourably in Poland. The fact that Germany supported the imposition and later maintenance of sanctions against Russia is seen in Poland – across the political spectrum – as the right and proper response to Vladimir Putin's aggression in Ukraine. Because it is feared in Poland that Russia will continue its aggressive policy in order to further destabilise the region all attempts by German politicians to lift or alleviate sanctions meet with scepticism or outright rejection.

Testimony to this is provided by, among other things, press comments on Frank-Walter Steinmeier's candidacy for German President. His alleged conciliatory attitude in relations with Russia were mentioned, which from a Polish standpoint are the result of naivety and ignorance of Russian reality. This view is currently being projected onto SPD candidate for Chancellor Martin Schulz. Angela Merkel, by contrast is generally regarded by the media and by most politicians as the one who prevented a softening of German policy along an all-too Russia-friendly path. This is discernible among other things in the slight shift of emphasis in the rhetoric of government politicians. After the British Brexit vote the PiS government, which up until then had regarded the United Kingdom as Poland's main partner in the EU, turned to other European partners, including Germany. An example of the change in rhetoric with regard to German–Polish relations is Jarosław Kaczyński's interview in *Bild*, in which

he characterised an Angela Merkel victory in the 2017 Bundestag elections as the best outcome for Poland.

Germany's NATO Obligations in Lithuania

Against the background of the Russia–Ukraine conflict the NATO member states intensified their efforts to step up the alliance's presence in the region. Of key significance for Poland was the decision taken at NATO's Warsaw summit in July 2016 to strengthen the eastern flank of the alliance. Although Poland regards the United States rather than Germany as its key security policy ally Germany's attitude with regard to cooperation in this area is closely monitored and commented on in detail. Particularly welcome is the fact that Germany, in accordance with the Warsaw summit resolutions, is taking charge of a battle regiment in Lithuania. This is taken to be a sign that Germany is ready to take responsibility for security in eastern Europe and to fulfil its NATO obligations.

The Dispute Concerning »Nord Stream II«

One undoubted bone of contention in German–Polish relations is the German–Russian pipeline project »Nord Stream II« to build a second line through the Baltic Sea. In Polish eyes, this initiative contradicts the rest of German policy with regard to Russia and the region and serves to indicate the priority given in German foreign policy to economic interests over European solidarity. Given the consequences of building the pipeline in particular for Poland – downgrading the Jamal pipeline, which runs over Polish territory – and Ukraine (loss of status as a transit state) German support for »Nord Stream II« is generally viewed negatively, as was the case when the first line was built.

The Weight of History

In order to understand the particular features of German–Polish relations and the Polish standpoint on Germany's Eastern Policy one has to appreciate the significance of history for Polish perceptions of international politics. Especially in relation to the most contentious point in German–Polish relations – the Nord Stream project mentioned above – Polish politicians, especially conservatives, constantly draw historical comparisons. During the building of the first pipeline and in the plan-



ning phase of the second the media and politicians constantly drew parallels with the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the reign of Catherine the Great. It is clear from the overall thrust of such comparisons what the main concern of Polish politicians is in relation to Germany's Eastern Policy, namely that an agreement could be reached between Russia and Germany that pays no attention to Poland's interests and leads ultimately to a limitation or even the loss of Polish sovereignty.

In Poland, Germany is regarded as a partner that, given its political and economic potential, is in a position to counteract Russian aggression. At the same time, however, there is a fear that Germany could exploit its dominance in Europe and soften its stance with regard to Russia, for example, at the expense of Ukraine's territorial integrity. In Poland's view such a scenario would represent a fundamental threat to the stability of the whole region.

German Foreign Policy in Relation to Eastern Europe – How It Looks from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

Tobias Mörschel

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – Historical Localisation and Foreign Policy Maxims

The three states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are often referred to in German usage using the collective singular »*Baltikum*« or simply »the Baltic«, as if they comprised not merely a geographically but also a politically homogenous territory in north-eastern Europe. For the sake of convenience this neglects the fact that these are three independent states, each with its own history and (political) culture, not to mention substantial differences with regard to state structures and institutions, party systems and internal, economic and social policy challenges.

Notwithstanding all the differences, which we shall not enter into more deeply here, when it comes to their fundamental foreign policy orientation one key category links the three states together: their relationships and dealings with Russia. The foreign policy of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is closely guided by security interests, in particular with regard to Russia. In equal measure, perceptions of Germany's foreign policy in relation to eastern Europe are decisively determined by this. These patterns of perception and action can be explained against the background of the three states' recent history.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are comparatively young states, founded after the First World War in 1918. However, they were able to maintain their independence for only 20 years or so, being assigned in the wake of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact to the Soviet sphere of influence. Shortly after that, the Soviet Union invaded. In these circumstances, in 1941 the advancing German troops were initially regarded as liberators. The error soon became apparent. In 1944/45 Soviet troops recaptured the territory and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania once more became part of the USSR. They were able to recover their national independence in 1990 by means of the so-called »singing revolution«. The years between 1944 and 1990 are regarded as a period of occupation.

Numerous Russian-speaking people came to the Baltic states – voluntarily or under compulsion – during these decades, which brought about a substantial change in the composition of the population. In particular in Estonia and Latvia there are large Russian-speaking minorities to this day (Estonia: 25 per cent; Latvia: around 30 per cent), a high proportion of whom are so-called »non-citizens« (Estonia: 6.5 per cent; Latvia: 12 per cent of the total population). This means that they do not possess a state guarantee and are not entitled to vote. What's more, Latvia in particular has generally failed to integrate this population group into the political community, for example, by means of an active minority policy. The Russian-speaking population in Lithuania, by contrast, is much smaller, at only 5.6 per cent; in fact, the largest linguistic minority there are the Poles, at 6.6 per cent.

Seeking, establishing and securing national identity and territorial integrity, which time and again have been undermined and violated by major powers, thus comprise a central policy concern of all three states. In this context, naturally enough, Russia is regarded as the major challenge. Relations with Russia at the political level range from standoffish to reserved. At the latest since the occupation of the Crimea and eastern Ukraine in violation of international law a sense of threat from Russia has loomed over both the political realm and large parts of the population. This insecurity is heightened by the large Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia; the relentless Russian propaganda in the (social) media also plays a part in fostering this perception.

All three states have been members of the EU and NATO since 2004. They are the only former Soviet republics to have become NATO members thus far. Estonia and Latvia are also the only NATO states with a long common land border with Russia (leaving aside the 80 kilometre Norwegian–Russian border north of the 74th parallel). Lithuania, like Poland, borders the Russian exclave of Königsberg, which has been extensively militarised. This highlights the Baltic states' special security-policy situ-

ation, namely, their direct exposure to any Russian aggression. Consequently, NATO is considered across the political spectrum and by the bulk of the population as the main security guarantee and is held in high regard.

The EU also enjoys high approval ratings in all three states. There are no significant Eurosceptic parties. Indeed, no populist parties of any kind have yet been able to establish a foothold in the respective party systems. This distinguishes the Baltic states from other new EU member states in central and eastern Europe, a fact that ought to receive more recognition and due appreciation by the EU and Germany. Moreover, in the course of the refugee crisis since 2015 the Baltic states – in contrast to the Visegrád countries – have not resisted the European allocation quotas. However, debates and practical efforts with regard to reception and integration in the three states have differed widely. Furthermore, Germany's alleged »opening of the borders« was strongly criticised by large parts of the population and also in the political realm, especially in Latvia.

Against this background we can summarise a number of core foreign policy elements pertaining to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania:

- Russia is regarded as a threat.
- No weakness may be shown with regard to Russia.
- Foreign policy is determined by security policy interests and considerations. The basic principle is »safety first«. They are totally reliant on NATO.
- Border security is regarded as central. The migration movements since 2015 have thus given rise to major worries and uncertainties concerning how well the EU's borders are protected.
- Supplementary security policy options, such as the European defence and security policy, have met with strong resistance. The fear is that NATO might be weakened and that expensive and rather inefficient dual structures would be created.
- Membership of the EU and of the monetary union strengthen ties to the West and Western integration and help to minimise dependence on Russia (also in economic and energy policy terms).

Germany's Role in the Baltic States

Despite its recent history and the large-scale crimes perpetrated in the Second World War Germany enjoys a high reputation in the Baltic states. Relations with all three countries are very good. In many respects, Germany served as a model in state reconstruction after independence. There is close economic interdependence with Germany, which is one of the Baltic states' main trade partners. The Federal Republic is a strategic partner and a close friend. Germany, which the Baltic states regard as the most dependable and influential defender of the European project, is perceived and accepted as the key leading power in Europe. However, this also means that expectations of Germany are high and that a special responsibility is attributed to it.

While up until recently German foreign policy provoked little interest in the Baltic states – the same applies, for example, to the German stance on the Greek bailout – this has changed substantially since the occupation of the Crimea and the refugee movements since 2015. Germany's actions in the latter instance were perceived by broad swathes of the Baltic population – and especially in Latvia also in the political sphere – as self-centred and irresponsible. Because national security in the broadest sense has absolute priority the opening up of the borders on humanitarian grounds was misunderstood as a sign of weakness. The subsequent efforts of German foreign policy to encourage the countries of central and eastern Europe to show solidarity with the refugees thus encountered serious misgivings.

Among the broader public German foreign policy is discussed primarily in terms of military cooperation and security guarantees for the region. Germany's NATO commitments in the context of the Warsaw resolutions were thus received very positively. In early 2017 Germany posted troops to Lithuania and took the lead in establishing the NATO battalion. This military presence in Lithuania is strongly welcomed and regarded as an important contribution to the security of the country and the region, even though these measures have a largely symbolic character and Russia remains the military superpower in the region. The hope in Lithuania is that in future Germany will develop closer ties and make an even stronger commitment, perhaps leading to more cooperation between the states. Furthermore, Germany

is already militarily active in the region, in the context of the air policing missions and in NATO's Tallinn Cyber Defence Centre.

German–Russian Relations in the Eyes of the Baltic States

As already indicated, Russia is regarded as a security-policy threat and Germany has been ascribed a special roll in ensuring security in the region. Nevertheless, there is an impression that good (economic) relations with Russia are more important to Germany than Baltic security interests. That also applies in the area of energy security. For example, German insistence on Nord Stream I and II has led not only to major irritation in the Baltic states, but has also raised the question of whether Germany is likely to pursue its economic interests without regard to the concerns of the littoral states. In the Baltic states the construction of Nord Stream II has been sharply criticised and Germany has been accused of lacking integrity in this regard.

The situations in the Crimea and in eastern Ukraine are of particular concern in the Baltic states. The latter insist on full compliance with the Minsk Agreement; sanctions against Russia should be lifted only when it has been fully implemented. Any loosening of sanctions is rejected outright because Russia would interpret it as a sign of weakness. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are thus looking with an eagle eye at how Germany – and other alliance partners – position themselves with regard to the sanctions, which in their view could have been even tougher and more comprehensive. German Chancellor Merkel is regarded as the person able to bring together the various voices within the EU with regard to Russia and pursue a strict course. By contrast, voices within the SPD calling for more dialogue and less by way of demonstrations of military strength have met with a frostier reception. This applies particularly to the utterances of former foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who warned against sabre-rattling in the region. On the other hand, positive note has been taken of Steinmeier's stronger criticism of Trump in contrast to that of Chancellor Merkel.

The Baltic states take a dim view of any possible relaxation of the sanctions imposed on Russia, even though they themselves are suffering economically from them

and from counter-sanctions. For example, the visit to Moscow by former German minister for economic affairs Sigmar Gabriel in 2016 and his call for rapprochement between the two states faced a critical reception in the media. This led to fears that the SPD might prioritise German (economic) interests over the Baltic states' security interests. There is a perception that the SPD's line on Russia is less resolute than that of Chancellor Merkel.

Recommendations for Action

- The term »Baltikum« should be dropped in favour of consistent use of »the Baltic states«. The difference is by no means merely semantic.
- The Baltic states' geopolitical situation and security interests must be taken seriously. Although German awareness of this has risen in recent years further dialogue is necessary.
- The Baltic states regard unyielding maintenance of the sanctions against Russia until the full implementation of the Minsk Agreement as a litmus test for the credibility and consistency of European foreign policy.
- More transparency is needed in Russian–German relations. Germany should keep its partners more closely informed about its motives, concerns, decisions and relationship with Russia. This applies in particular to economic-policy concerns – Nord Stream II is a good example.
- Germany should involve itself more deeply in Eastern Neighbourhood Policy. The Baltic states regard this as extremely important in the context of their own security interests.
- With regard to the construction and strengthening of a European security architecture a great deal has to be done to win over the Baltic states. Germany has a key role to play here. But there is also an opportunity here to signal clearly to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that in future the EU will no longer pass over smaller states but engage them on an equal footing. The importance of this should not be underrated, also for the future of the EU.

German Foreign Policy in Relation to Eastern Europe – How It Looks from Ukraine

Matthes Buhbe and Maria Koval

Germany is regarded as the EU's leading power. It is a promoter of Ukraine's path to the European Union and an engine of the Minsk Process, which is aimed at settling the conflict in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, Germany is also considered to be too friendly towards Russia given the annexation of the Crimea and Russia's role in the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. This is a widespread belief among the general public.

Germany is regarded less as an actor with its own Eastern Policy and rather as a guiding influence on the European Union. Considering Germany as an actor with its own interests, Berlin's Eastern Policy is, in Kiev's view, rooted in Russia's critical economic and security policy importance for Germany.

Although little difference is perceived between Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Social Democratic foreign minister, there are differences between the CDU and the SPD. The SPD, which is still strongly associated with Gerhard Schröder, is considered to be too well-disposed towards Russia.

The continuation of Merkel's chancellorship with a CDU-Greens coalition would thus be the desired outcome of the upcoming election and offer a glimmer of hope given recent possible shifts in forces – postponed for the time being – in the Netherlands (Wilders) and France (Le Pen).

Praise for Angela Merkel by no means signifies agreement with German Eastern Policy, however. Since its rejection of Russia in the so-called »revolution of dignity« Ukraine has seen itself drawn into an undeclared war. The government in Kiev would welcome a resolute anti-Russia policy, which it is unable to sustain on its own.

At best, Ukraine could live with a German Eastern Policy that took a credible stance on pan-European security and, at the same time, refused to sacrifice European values or confer its blessing on territorial compromises at Ukraine's expense.

Shifts in Perception in Ukraine

When Georgia's and Ukraine's prospective NATO membership was kicked into the long grass at the Bucharest summit in 2008 only then president Viktor Yushchenko was disappointed. The overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian population opposed membership. The events subsequent to the fall of Yushchenko's successor Viktor Yanukovich in winter 2013/2014, however, provoked a change of view. In the meantime, approval of possible NATO membership has grown substantially. The polarisation between the »pro-Western« western Ukraine and the »pro-Russian« eastern Ukraine has diminished significantly.

The »European choice« goes hand in hand with high expectations that the West will make an intensive contribution to Ukraine's economic development and security-policy consolidation. Weapons were hoped for from previous US president Barack Obama and from Merkel's Europe stricter sanctions against Russia. The election of Donald Trump as US president, however, sent shockwaves through Ukraine. Trump is considered perfectly capable of blithely giving away Ukrainian territories in the course of dealings between the great powers in the hope of striking a better deal. Kiev believes that such a lack of principle is unimaginable in a »German Eastern Policy« and thus that the alleged friendliness towards Russia – especially on the part of Germany's Social Democrats – would be the lesser evil in comparison with President Trump's feared caprice.

Ukrainian Views on German Eastern Policy

The Ukrainian public is not very familiar with the history of German post-war politics, still less with Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Egon Bahr's »change through rapprochement«, the policy of small steps and the acceptance of both German states in the United Nations received almost no attention. There was no independent Ukraine at that time. Informed comment on the non-Russian

territories of the Soviet Union is conspicuous by its absence from the utterances of German politicians on the Hitler–Stalin years, the racist war of annihilation and the post-war order imposed by the Soviet Union. The apparent conflation of Stalin’s Great Patriotic War in Germany with Russia’s war yields blank spots.

Two names are associated with German policy since Ukrainian independence in 1991: Angela Merkel and Gerhard Schröder. Chancellor Schröder’s utterances on the significance of strategic partnership with Russia and his commitment to pipelines, which weaken Ukraine’s position as a transit country for Russian gas, procured him the image of a unilateral representative of German economic interests. In Ukraine today he ranks as one of Russia’s major advocates in Germany. Sigmar Gabriel’s positive statements as minister of economic affairs on extending the Baltic pipelines and the damage being done by Western sanctions against Russia in the German economy have only served to confirm the tendency among informed Ukrainian opinion to see SPD foreign policy on eastern Europe through this prism.

At the same time, it’s conceded that Russia is a great power and that thus the German government will necessarily want to maintain normal relations with it. Ukraine is therefore sympathetic towards the German Chancellor and foreign minister. Keeping the sanctions against Russia in place forever would also – and this is said not only in oligarchic business circles – raise fears of severing economic relations with their big neighbour. Indeed, they have already had a negative effect. Russia would at most be a supplier of raw materials, which would be a major and permanent hindrance for Ukraine’s economy and would be difficult to maintain for Europe as a whole.

The Ukrainian political class is thus thankful for the position taken by Angela Merkel and former foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, which they regard as stable, tenacious and consistent. Above all Germany ranks as the initiator of the Minsk Format and the driving force behind the associated diplomatic efforts to find a way out of the crisis. The visit made by Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his French colleague Jean-Marc Ayrault to the ceasefire line at Kramatorsk in autumn 2016 and the ensuing mediation efforts in the Normandy Format are attributed first and foremost to Germany’s initiative. It is also acknowledged that Germany, despite the considerable opposition of other EU member states, has ensured that

European sanctions against Russia have been prolonged. The fact that even Germany’s leading industrial associations have gone along with the government’s position is much appreciated in informed circles in Ukraine.

Perception of German Eastern Policy within the Framework of the Minsk Process

Notwithstanding the above comments on the »eternal neighbour Russia« there is only a marginal awareness in Ukraine that Germany’s Eastern Policy is oriented towards economic integration, convergence and the establishment of a plethora of political, social and cultural relations with the whole post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav area. For Ukraine, first and foremost, Germany’s Eastern Policy is tantamount to the Minsk Process. The point of departure for both government and opposition is the assessment that military weakness forced the Ukrainian government to sign the Minsk protocols. Accordingly, they provided a stopgap for the purpose of de-escalating the conflict and survival in the temporarily occupied areas. For strong critics of the negotiations, Germany, France and the Ukrainian government are blind in respect of the elephant in the room Russia.

In the meantime, three small parties have quit the government in protest against its »soft stance« towards the Russian aggressor. In the remaining government parties only a small majority of the »Petro Poroshenko Block« backs the agreement. The government is trying to avoid votes directly related to the Minsk Process. It fears being toppled if it allows the separatist areas rights of autonomy and elections without first eliminating the separatists.

Under these circumstances Germany’s Eastern Policy is viewed solely in terms of how it faces off against the Russian aggressor and how stable and sustainable this position may be. The reigning impression is that Chancellor Merkel has the measure of Vladimir Putin’s intentions, in contrast to SPD foreign policy. They take a cautious view of the previous and the current SPD foreign minister because the former was a radical proponent of the Minsk Agreement, while the latter is against isolating Russia and in favour of establishing conditions that would make it possible to lift the sanctions. In Kiev’s view, Martin Schulz comes to Berlin from Brussels with a good reputation because he advocated prolonging the sanctions there.

However, Kiev's political class is thoroughly aware that the level of German solidarity with Ukraine has entirely different dimensions than before 2014. Germany as the EU's most influential member, is a partner and ally for Ukraine. A positive view is taken of the fact that Berlin has refrained from making it a priority diplomatic task to reconcile Ukraine and Russia. As the Ukrainians see it, German decision-makers do not underestimate the threat level due to Russia.

Challenges for Eastern Policy

If there was an SPD Chancellor tomorrow, without any other changes in the world, three critical questions would come to the fore for Kiev:

- (i) Will Germany adhere to the Minsk Process?
- (ii) Will Germany continue to advocate sanctions against Russia?
- (iii) Will Germany make an active effort to implement the EU association agreement with Ukraine?

The more sceptical the new Chancellor is concerning Moscow's intentions with regard to implementing the Minsk Protocols, the more unconditionally they advocate sanctions and the less they doubt Kiev's desire to fully implement the reforms associated with the EU association agreement the more friends this Chancellor is likely to win in the present government in Kiev.

President Poroshenko's lip service to the Minsk Process has a lot to do with keeping the European partners on side. Public opinion regards the negotiations as a dead-end which will at best keep the Russian threat in place, while what the Free World should be doing is to insist on restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. In Kiev only a few opposition politicians – overwhelmingly from eastern Ukrainian electoral districts, are of the opinion that Russia's appetite has been satisfied with the annexation of Crimea. In Kiev Russia today is regarded as a revisionist power. Berlin should therefore categorically reject any appeasement policy and take a tougher approach to Moscow, if anything stepping up the sanctions. Finally, according to the government, more understanding of the realities of Ukrainian domestic politics is

desirable, notwithstanding the resulting shortcomings in implementing reform laws and combatting corruption. The fact that Western governments' allegations of corruption against the ruling political elite are much more severe than those levelled against the fallen Yankovich regime – for Ukrainians the epitome of cronyism – is not fair, however.

The new German government's position on the first question ought to be that at present there is no alternative negotiation format to which Russia would agree. Terminating it would make sense only if Russia could be compelled by other means to de-escalate and withdraw. Under the Obama administration it was repeatedly proposed to bring the United States to the table. Kiev's nightmare, however, would be negotiations in which everyone other than Trump and Putin were mere onlookers.

The new German government, secondly, must not allow itself to be talked into the notion of »appeasement policy«. The talk of a new Munich Agreement in which Crimea and »Novorossiya« would be ceded to Russia over the head of the Ukrainian government must be clearly dismissed as absurd. On the other hand it would be misguided to take a tougher line against Moscow unilaterally. Self-evidently, words must be followed by deeds if one wants to retain credibility. Germany as the EU's driving force in this regard would risk widening the gap between hawks and doves. A number of EU states would not go along with a unilateral confrontation.

Thirdly, supporting its neighbours in their economic and social policy transformation processes lies at the very heart of Germany's foreign policy in relation to eastern Europe. Berlin well knows that the economic and political elites, who overlap in Ukraine to a considerable extent, have barely changed since the late 1990s. President Poroshenko's predecessors, as he has, presented their policies, which were accompanied by massive corruption, as reform measures, albeit with a few blemishes. Germany, as a friend of the »European choice«, which has pronounced a new Ukraine under veteran politician Poroshenko, must be a critical sponsor and make sure that there is no backsliding in Kiev.

German Foreign Policy in Relation to Eastern Europe – How It Looks from Romania

Stephan Meuser

Romanian foreign policy suffers from a pronounced Russia complex. From this perspective all Romania's assessments and appraisals of the policies of third countries – for example, Germany – have to be seen in light of Russia and eastern Europe. This complex is the product – as so often in central and eastern Europe – of recent history. Although Romania was liberated from Ottoman suzerainty as an independent nation-state only with the active assistance of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century the country regards itself as having been for centuries the plaything of the three great powers – Russia, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire – lying as it does at the geographical intersection of their spheres of influence. As a result, to this very day there is a marked mistrust concerning the policies of the major European states, whose consequences – at least in Bucharest's view – have generally had to be borne by the smaller countries.

On the other hand, in the country's educational institutions Romania's self-image is traditionally characterised by a sense – in contrast to Poland, however, largely imaginary – of victimisation. Accordingly, Romania, despite the war of aggression conducted de facto on the side of Nazi Germany, suffered territorial, material and population losses, both because of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, which shortly led to the loss of Moldavia/»Bessarabia«, and after 1944/45 at Moscow's instigation. On top of that, a cultural mentality and historical romanticisation pervade the Romanian general public, the media and the political realm based on the notion that they constitute an Romance-speaking island surrounded by a largely hostile Slav/Magyar environment.

The regional framework of Romanian foreign policy is thus nourished largely by the experiential time horizon of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The country was largely untouched by the era of detente during the Cold War, by contrast, because under Ceausescu it was isolated even within the Eastern Block. Although Romania – after the Soviet Union itself – was the first Warsaw Pact country

with which the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations, in 1967, the increasingly national-communist course pursued by the Romanian leadership meant that these relations never deepened or led to anything in particular, with the exception of the delicate issue of the »buying out« of Romanian citizens who were ethnic Germans, which commenced in 1967 and picked up pace after then German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt visited Bucharest in 1978.

In other words, until 1989/90 Romania played no particular role in Germany's traditionally Moscow-fixated Eastern Policy. The fact that up to the present day a whole generation of political decision-makers in Romania have been influenced by the country's peculiarly nationalistic brand of communism can at least partly explain the continuing isolated and embattled mentality, as well as the tendency toward national navel-gazing characteristic of the foreign policy elite of this country of 20 million people.

Romanian Foreign Policy since 1990 – The Very Long March to the West

After 1990 the Russian neighbour suddenly lost importance in Romanian elites' foreign policy thinking. It was only with the Kosovo crisis in 1999 that this began to change a little. In the wake of the transition bilateral relations were plagued by differing opinions on the legacy of the past, as well as relations with the Republic of Moldova. Characteristically, until 2003 Romania was the only former Warsaw Pact country that had yet to sign a new political treaty with the former global power. The fact that such a rapprochement finally took place on the initiative of the social democratic president Ion Iliescu is in keeping with the Romanian left's generally more pragmatic foreign policy stance with regard to Russia.

However, Romania governments of all political stripes, at the latest since the mid-1990s have pursued a clear Western tack, aimed at NATO and EU accession, which

were achieved in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Having said that, Romania, like Bulgaria, is still subject to a so-called cooperation and verification mechanism within the EU. Considerable appreciation for German support – and not only on the left of the political spectrum – emerged from the difficult final phase of the accession negotiations, associated with Gerhard Schröder and Günter Verheugen. In sharp contrast to this was the rather reluctant attitude of French policy with regard to the eastern enlargement of the EU. In contrast to Germany, historical ally and cultural kindred France lost considerable ground in Romanian eyes after 1990.

By contrast, the United States could be considered the absolute lodestar of Romanian foreign and security policy. As a non-European power it is not contaminated by the historical reservations mentioned above and its global military strength means that for Romanian policy it counts as the only real guarantor of independence in relation to a resurgent Russia (or any other European power). The United States is the only country worldwide with which Romania regularly conducts formal foreign policy consultations, based on a »Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for the Twenty-First Century«,¹ initially concluded in 1997 and renewed on 13 September 2001, two days after the attacks on the World Trade Center, by US President George W. Bush and Traian Băsescu.

At the same time an agreement was concluded on the stationing of the US missile defence system, which was finally deployed in spring 2016. In all discussions within the NATO alliance – whether it be on the Iraq war or the issue of NATO's further eastern enlargement at the 2008 Bucharest summit – Romania is therefore on Washington's side. By contrast, Romania takes a dim view of EU efforts to build up its own security-policy capacities.

Perceptions and Positions after Years of Crisis with Russia

From Romania's standpoint the origins of the current crisis in relations between Russia and the West are not to be sought in »Euromaidan« and the Ukraine conflict, but as early as the war in Georgia in August 2008. Not only

the then president of Romania and self-professed admirer of the USA Băsescu, but practically the entire foreign policy elite in Romania consider the country as a kind of »front-line state« in the first line of defence, paying particular attention to all security policy developments around the Black Sea.

Against this background, the Russian annexation of the Crimea – in violation of international law – in March 2014 thus represented a nightmarish *déjà vu* of Russian expansion in the region. This also explains Romanian reactions to Germany's foreign policy initiatives since then. The Romania government and general public regard anything that tends towards Russia's containment as particularly positive. In particular Germany's leading role in EU cooperation on sanctions and its involvement in the deployment of NATO »spearhead« troops and their advance stationing in the Baltic countries are much appreciated and positively commented upon by all political forces and the interested general public.

However, this is contrasted with the traditional friendliness towards Russia imputed to German foreign policy, as indicated, for example, by the building of a second »Nord Stream« pipeline. Furthermore, both the Normandy Format, aimed at managing the conflict in eastern Ukraine and its results so far can hardly be considered a success. The fact that even a poorly functioning Minsk Process is better than no political process at all is not given its due. Precisely the policy elements on which a German foreign policy shaped by Social Democrats might pride itself are either ignored or at least not valued in Bucharest. The fact that there has been a possibly deliberate division of labour between German involvement and the Obama administration going on in the background since the first half of 2014 is overlooked.

Strikingly, the different policy levels of the EU, NATO and national foreign and security policy are basically merged in Bucharest. This also reflects the legacy of the traditional fixation on and exclusive experience with nationally defined policy, mentioned above. Even 25 years after the political changes large parts of the political realm, the bureaucracy and experts appear to be finding it difficult to free their thinking from geopolitical models dating from the previous century and, despite membership of both Western alliances, to master the game of multi-level politics. Paradoxically, this situation exactly

1. The only other informal foreign policy consultation with another state is the annual bilateral roundtable conducted by the FES.

resembles those in many states in the region, including Russia, which is much criticised for it. If one takes this background into consideration there is no logical difference between Germany's role within the EU and any kind of German Eastern Policy of its own – precisely because the conceptual difference is not even discerned.

This failure to get on board the multilateral world of political relations is accompanied by an extremely simplified notion of national policy-making, in accordance with which decision-making processes take place top-down. Transposed to the case of Germany this means that although it is appreciated in Bucharest that there is a foreign minister in Berlin with a different party political orientation to the German Chancellor, in case of doubt – so it is assumed – Angela's Merkel's position takes priority. This is also the case within the EU, where the foreign ministers are barely visible at the various crisis summits. By contrast, the complexity of decision-making within the framework of the mutual to-ing and fro-ing characteristic of a coalition of two large political parties of similar weight is largely terra incognita, not least because it is beyond their range of experience.

A specific and positive perception of the German Social Democrats as Eastern-Policy actors thus arises rather on the basis of the experiences ten years ago with SPD politicians within the framework of the dual EU and NATO accession, as well as in contrast to the party political loyalty of the CDU Chancellor in relation to her Hungarian colleague in the EPP, Viktor Orbán. If one turns the question in the direction of relations with Russia it has to be assumed that the involvement of German politicians in Romania that has been going on for years or even decades is almost unknown.

After what has been accomplished so far it is scarcely surprising that the main expectation in Bucharest concerning German policy does not lie in hopes of expanding dialogue with Russia, but rather in taking on Romania's position, according to which Russia is a threat to Europe that demands a hard line: in brief, a return to the time

before the Harmel Report of 1967,² characterised purely by containment. However, this is not accompanied by a separate Romanian Eastern Policy with carefully developed proposals that deviate from the German position, but first and foremost amounts to the abovementioned default setup, with its historical roots, as well as a security-policy rapprochement with Poland that has recently been observed. On top of this, Romanian foreign policy is characterised by a certain worm's eye view of Eastern Europe as a whole, which evaluates all Russia's actions in terms of the Moldova/Transnistria conflict. Even though there may be unificatory inclinations in the minority the loss of greater Romania between the two world wars is still considered a national trauma; and Bucharest sees itself as a natural ally and defender of the Republic of Moldova. As a result, the antagonistic role of Transnistria's backer and of the new Moldovan president in Moscow is almost preordained.

Despite this rather pessimistic-sounding basic state of affairs German foreign policy can hope, in the slipstream of two changes, for a more active engagement on Romania's part in future. On one hand, the election victory of Romania's Social Democrats, who are traditionally more Moscow-friendly or at least not Cold Warriors, is likely to contribute to more understanding for the German position. On the other hand, with the dual election of Russia-friendly presidents in Chişinău (capital of Republic of Moldova) and Tiraspol (capital of Transnistria) a window of opportunity seems to have opened up for trust-building measures or even a process of rapprochement under the umbrella of the OSCE »5+2« negotiations, to which neither Romania nor Russia can be entirely averse. This frozen conflict is for Moscow also the »least interesting«, so that it may hope for Western concessions elsewhere if it budges here. Some have even speculated that the election of a self-described »deal maker« as US president may provide the necessary world political impetus.

2. The report by the Belgian foreign minister Pierre Harmel for the first time encouraged the view that NATO should not rely only on deterrence, but that security should be understood as a combination of deterrence and detente.

Georgia's Turns Its Eyes Towards Germany

Felix Hett and Julia Bläsius

Germany has traditionally enjoyed a good reputation in Georgia and is regarded as a key partner. Nevertheless the perception of German policy here is relatively superficial. International politics is an elite topic, if it's discussed at all. Experts and decision-makers regard Germany not only as the central power in the EU, but also as a potentially important factor in Georgian–Russian relations. German policy towards Russia in the tradition of »*Ostpolitik*« is characterised as fairly moderate and cooperative, although the Ukraine crisis has skewed this picture somewhat. Basically, little distinction is made between the positions of different parties, even between the German Chancellor and foreign minister. Hopes are high, however, that Germany might be an important partner even with regard to Moscow.

Superficial Perceptions

German and European foreign policy are not really an issue among the Georgian general public and in the media. Only events and decisions that directly affect things in Georgia – such as the long discussed abolition of visas for the EU or various NATO summits – lead to short-lived commentary on European and even German positions. The lack of reporting is accompanied by a general lack of interest among the Georgian population in European politics. In an FES survey of young people conducted recently only a quarter of respondents aged 14 to 29 expressed an interest in EU politics. The values are even lower for other international topics.

Traditionally Close German–Georgian Relations

Policy assessments are influenced by a traditionally positive perception of Germany in Georgia. Both the first democratic republic in 1918 and Georgia's independence in 1991 were first recognised by Germany. Culturally, Germany has been a real presence since the immigration of the first German settlers 200 years ago. During the Soviet period some of their descendants – so-called »German aunties« – even spread the German language

in the kindergartens. The strong German engagement in this South Caucasus republic also contributes to the popularity of German culture. In 2017 a German–Georgian friendship year begins, culminating in 2018 in Georgia's guest appearance at the Frankfurt book fair. In development cooperation Germany is the largest bilateral donor, after the United States.

Germany is, moreover, the decisive force in Europe. This, too, makes bilateral relations so important for Georgia, whose uppermost foreign policy priority is Euro-Atlantic integration. Although there is a general awareness that continued rapprochement with the EU and NATO could lead to a further deterioration of relations with Russia, approval of this resolutely »Western policy« remains high. In the abovementioned FES youth study 74 per cent of the younger generation favoured EU accession and 68 per cent joining NATO. This is more or less representative of the population as a whole, as recent surveys confirm.

Germany's Veto of Georgian Accession to NATO

Against this background we can understand Georgia's irritation at Germany's role in its efforts to join NATO. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Germany, together with France – surprisingly for Georgia – prevented a concrete roadmap for Georgian accession to NATO and put it off for the foreseeable future. This decision was received very negatively in Georgia and explained in terms of Germany's historically indulgent stance towards Russia. The indignation about Berlin's alleged capitulation in the face of Russia's policy of aggression came out primarily in social networks. Experts and decision-makers recognised, however, that in the same year Germany – before the outbreak of the five-day war – had supported a solution for the Abkhazia question, with then foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier touting the implementation of a three-stage plan to all participants in July 2008. Germany's active role in the negotiation and implementation of a ceasefire in August 2008 was also welcomed in Georgia.

Germany's Role in the Ukraine Conflict

During the 2014 Ukraine crisis all Georgian hopes rested on Germany. Although people might have wished for tougher action on the part of the EU and the United States with regard to Russia's annexation of Crimea, Angela Merkel has been seen as the driving force behind sanctions against Russia. She is regarded as the only political leader in Europe who has taken a clear stance towards Russia and has the stature to stand up to Vladimir Putin. In Georgia people believed that the German political elite had finally »woken up« and come to realise that Russia can no longer be given the benefit of the doubt. There is a similar assessment of Germany's role in the negotiations on the Minsk Agreement; although it did not bring an end to the conflict, it did stem the bloodshed.

Russia as a Factor in Domestic and Foreign Policy

However, Russia's increasing interference in other countries' domestic affairs is viewed with concern in Georgia. Many are convinced of Russian involvement in the escalation of the refugee issue in Germany. According to one popular theory, Russia's intervention in Syria is partly a deliberate attempt to boost the flow of refugees and in this way to weaken Merkel's domestic-policy position. In general, the long arm of Moscow is suspected behind many things, both at home and abroad, including the postponement of visa liberalisation with the Schengen Area, for which Georgia has satisfied all the EU's conditions since December 2015.

Reporting in the German media in summer 2016 on the alleged nefarious activities of Georgian criminal gangs was viewed with considerable dismay in Georgia. German efforts to put the brakes on the passage of visa liberalisation through the European Council and to attach a suspension clause were met with incomprehension. The notion that in this instance, too – like in Bucharest in 2008 – Germany was taking Russia into account was expressed only occasionally. Civil society experts, however, have reproached their political elites with underestimating German influence on this issue and concentrating their efforts too much on Brussels.

Hardly Any Differentiation

On all these questions Germany is regarded as an actor; for the general public – which takes a very personalised view of politics – this is embodied primarily by Angela Merkel. Divergent party political positions scarcely play a role even in expert circles. It is not generally known that the current Chancellor and the foreign minister do not belong to the same party. Only a small elite circle saw differences in the positions of Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, even fewer express reservations with regard to the SPD based on its supposed friendliness towards Russia. Even Steinmeier is considered Georgia's friend. He was given a great deal of credit for his active role in 2008 and his symbolic visits to Georgia in 2014 and 2015 after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis. Furthermore, Germany is regarded as a strong actor in the disputes with Russia. The dialogue-oriented component is thus seen rather as an opportunity, also for Georgia. It is recognised that little can be achieved without Germany either in the partnership with the European Union or in the dispute with Russia.

Outlook

Despite the, from Georgia's standpoint, diverging tendencies in German policy with regard to Georgia Germany remains a key partner for Georgian foreign policy, especially with regard to its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. This is also the lens through which German policy is ultimately seen. Everything that promotes Euro-Atlantic integration is regarded as positive, everything else as negative. While for Georgia Germany's role is regarded as ambivalent Germany's reputation remains intact in light of tradition and its prominent position in Europe. Also as a consequence of »Brexit« diplomatic efforts are concentrated increasingly on Berlin and less and less on Brussels. At the same time, Georgia hopes to obtain German support in relations with Russia: no one wants to fall victim to a realpolitik-oriented approach to Russia in Berlin. These fears have been exacerbated by Donald Trump's ascension to power in the United States. If the kind of isolationist rhetoric he came out with during the election campaign were realised, without Germany and the crisis-fraught EU Georgia would lack allies in its efforts to assert itself against its northern neighbour.

German Foreign Policy in Relation to Eastern Europe – How It Looks from the Russian Federation

Mirko Hempel and Jens Hildebrandt

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union into 14 nation-states and the multinational state the Russian Federation in the years 1989 to 1991 the country has been looking for its role and function in the international system. As sole legal successor of the Soviet Union the Russian Federation is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as well as one of the remaining nuclear weapons states on the territory of the former Soviet Union. It derives its claim to be one of the four or five world powers, with their own civilising aura within a multipolar international system, not least from these power resources.

In contrast to the period of Soviet domination, however, the Russian Federation has no long-term strategic foreign policy guidelines, even though elite foreign policy discourse since the end of Dmitri Medvedev's period in office has been increasingly radicalised and, at the latest since the annexation of Crimea and the Russian war of intervention in eastern Ukraine, it has broadly departed from the commonly agreed values and norms of European security policy. A Great Power discourse oriented towards geopolitical spheres of influence has become established around the presidential administration, which also dominates media reporting. This majority discourse sees Russia as not only embodying a specific civilisational power pole within the international system, but also derives from this world-view an entitlement – as a political, economic and military integration centre – to possess an exclusive influence in post-Soviet space.

Germany: Only Limited Capacity to Act

From the Russian perspective Germany does not constitute a power pole of its own in the international system, but, in accordance with the power political paradigm, constitutes rather a US »vassal state«. This role was performed in particular by Chancellor Merkel during the Obama administration, according to the Russians. Germany's policy is also viewed under the reservation that it has only a limited capacity to act and collective security in Europe is interpreted as an expression of US domi-

nation. The key issue for Russian experts concerns the extent to which Germany can run a viable foreign policy at all, in terms of which three developments in particular are interesting from a Russian perspective:

- (i) Germany and the United States: As Russia sees it, it is high time the Federal Republic of Germany emancipated itself from US hegemony – if need be with Russia's direct or indirect »support«. Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has expressed this in a round about manner, but at the Munich Security Conference got right to the point. At present Germany is the bulwark of US security policy in Europe. The guarantor for this is Chancellor Merkel, whose re-election, the Russians think, would reinforce anti-Russian sentiment for the foreseeable future. The clear commitment made to NATO by the US Vice President and Germany's role as NATO linchpin in Europe provides further confirmation for Russia that this »instrument of the Cold War« (Lavrov) hinders Russian efforts to develop »up-to-date« new alliances that include Russia and are capable of meeting the challenges of the present.
- (ii) Germany and the EU: From a Russian standpoint the collapse of the European Union is only a matter of time: »Brexit«; a possible change of government in France, accompanied by a »Frexit« vote instigated by the Front National; looming state bankruptcy in Greece; the banking crisis in Italy; and – above all – the refugee and migration crisis. In Russian eyes, the latter is leading to further alienation among the member states and ultimately to the EU's collapse in its current form. What would then remain would be a small core Europe around economic giant Germany, with which Russia could then negotiate from a position of strength on matters of interest and economic issues, without pesky discussions about values.
- (iii) Germany and Russia: Russia assumes that in the foreseeable future, Germany, due to the migration and refugee crisis and the emerging security-policy failure that it has occasioned, will remain a regional

economic power, but will be politically debilitated in an EU whose signs of erosion will become increasingly evident. The great hopes of a change of government in Berlin are often »irrationally« associated with Germany's automatic, at least gradual turning away from the United States, whose current president is regarded as yet another cause of alienation from the EU and Germany. At the same time, it will turn towards Russia as a potential partner located in Europe and possessing military might, which is also able to serve as a counterpoise against an overheating neoliberal discourse and also an effective ally in the fight against Islamist terror.

In contrast to this dominant majority discourse there is also a liberal minority discourse in Russia that regards Germany in light of its position of power within the European Union and its economic might as a ray of hope for a return of a common European security policy within the framework of the OSCE, including Russia. At the same time, however, there is also a right-wing extremist minority discourse that at best regards Germany as a pawn in the imperial power discourse with the great adversary the United States and bilateral Eurasian allies.

Official Foreign Policy – Russia as »New Centre of Gravity« and »Leader of a Post-Western World«

The official government foreign policy discourse interprets – based on the power perspective already presented – Russia's role in the UN as a nuclear power and as hegemonic power in the post-Soviet space. It postulates the notion of a special »civilisatory« mission as adversary and counterpart of the United States in international relations, on an equal footing. In Europe, in Russia's view, Germany plays the key role; nevertheless Europe remains dependent on the United States in terms of power politics. They take a critical view of Germany's role in maintaining sanctions and the implementation of the Minsk Agreement. In Russia little distinction is drawn between a specifically »German« *Ostpolitik* and German instigation of the EU's course.

Ability to Set Guidelines in Foreign Policy

Nevertheless, a distinction is drawn in Russia between the Chancellor and the foreign minister with regard to

foreign policy. It is acknowledged, however, that neither Chancellor Merkel nor foreign minister Gabriel would ever call into question the Euro-Atlantic alliance – NATO or the EU – and always sing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to alliance policy. However, Angela Merkel, as the key power-political actor in Europe, negotiates on an equal footing with President Putin and within the framework of the Normandy Group. Frank-Walter Steinmeier – this is also assumed with regard to Sigmar Gabriel – is considered to enjoy a certain diplomatic leeway when it comes to issues of conflict escalation or de-escalation, especially in German–Russian cooperation.

Independent German Initiatives in the Minsk Process?

With regard to the clash of values between Russia and the EU Russia's hope and expectation is that Germany is ready to offer territorial recognition of the status quo in Ukraine and to cease to link the annexation of the Crimea with the war in eastern Ukraine. With this objective in mind the idea is that the Minsk agreement would be revised and long-term recognition of the territorial status quo accepted, although this cannot be taken for granted, as foreign minister Gabriel recently made clear once again. Nevertheless, the Russian side is trying everything to avoid Germany's allying with Ukraine and isolating Russia in Europe.

Social Democrats Useful for Tactical Reasons

The Social Democrats' Eastern Policy responsibilities are highlighted for tactical reasons and in official talks, thereby reducing Bahr's and Brandt's *Ostpolitik* at best to a negotiating position with regard to Russia. Today, détente as a condition of social transformation policy and collective security policy scarcely plays a role in the discussion. This is particularly evident in Russia's calling into question of the CSCE process, the Paris Charter and the strategic games aimed at a return to the »Yalta order«.

In the German Bundestag election year 2017 it is likely that Russia will do everything it can to prevent Angela Merkel returning to power. The realistic scenario is that Russia will interfere in the election by means of direct and indirect support, whether it be funding, the press

or exerting influence over Germans of Russian origin. Although the effects of such exertions of influence may appear small, they can sow the seeds of uncertainty in the population and help to intensify the discussion of Russia's role in the election campaign.

Value- and Interest-Driven Policies as a »Bone of Contention« in German–Russian Politics

On the Russian side criticisms are always heard whenever Germany differentiates systematically between domestic and foreign policy actions in the Russian Federation. This applies in particular when, in accordance with the sanctity of contracts, the common European agreements – the CSCE Final Act of 1975, the Charter of Paris 1990, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 and the NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997 – are invoked as a common normative framework, as in the case of Crimean annexation. Consensus is reached with Germany only when it confines its role with regard to Russia to bilateral interest-oriented policies – for example, on the economy – and shows itself open to negotiation in the Minsk Process.

Russian Strategies Regarding Eastern Europe

If by »Eastern Europe« one understands the states arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union and which are not yet part of the Euro-Atlantic integration area, then the Russian Federation lays claim to special influence over the states of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in the west, as well as the south Caucasus, with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, as the so-called »near abroad«. The Russian Federation has created political, economic and security-policy institutions – CIS, Eurasian Economic Union, CSTO – in order to impose an institutional structure on this Euro-Asiatic area of integration. The integrative effect of these institutions has been weak so far, however, and the Russian Federation has even shown a willingness to counter tendencies towards disintegration emerging in Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine with military force.

If one takes »Eastern Europe« in a wider sense to include the states of central and eastern Europe, which once belonged to the Warsaw Pact and are today members of the European and North Atlantic alliance structures, Rus-

sia takes a wide variety of approaches to individual central European states on the basis of ethnic, economic, political and security-policy considerations. A key characteristic of Russian policy with regard to these states is, on one hand, its attempts, within the framework of a bilateral negotiating policy – as in the case of, for example, Hungary – to achieve successful cooperation at the expense of the European Community; on the other hand, on its borders with the small central and eastern European states – especially the Baltic states – Russia flaunts its military might and flouts these countries' historically well grounded fears of domination, in particular by Russia.

Prospects of German–Russian Cooperation

Russian foreign policy creates special challenges for Social Democratic foreign policy. Basically, the current conflict of policy goals between a fundamental willingness to engage in dialogue and explicit assertion of values remains in place, because there can be no peace without freedom (Willy Brandt).

A long-term strategy oriented towards accommodation, dialogue and the institutionalisation of values and interests requires a European dimension that takes in Russia as an actor on an equal footing. In particular, international integration, economic exchange and intercommunal cooperation offer a broad palette of cooperation options even during periods of diplomatic conflict.

One should be under no illusions concerning how Russia regards its foreign policy in recent years. The costly demonstrations of its capacity to act in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, as well as the successful media projection of great power status are of short-term value at best; over the long term, however, this policy only deepens Russia's modernisation deficit. Nevertheless, Russia views the past five years as successful.

Only a crisis of the current unilateral modus operandi of the Russian Federation will enable new opportunities for cooperation in terms of collective security arrangements in Europe. Every softening of international legal standards and collective security arrangements is perceived by the Russian side as weakness, insofar as a re-evaluation of the status quo does not promise new cooperative gains. The consolidation of the Euro-Atlantic value



community is a necessary condition for strengthening negotiating positions and as a basis of German–Russian cooperation and negotiations. Within this framework, however, German foreign policy must focus on dialogue and cooperation, not re-armament and demonstrations of military power.

Bilateral action does not create sustainable cooperation options or more collective security, but new areas of conflict in Europe and in the Atlantic alliance. Nevertheless, Russia's offers and initiatives that revolve around the discussion of new, more up-to-date alliances and

dialogue platforms should be taken seriously and above all taken up. Neither the EU, NATO nor, consequently, Germany can afford continued lamentable ignorance of Russian initiatives and offers of meaningful cooperation, such as Putin's speech before the Bundestag in 2001.

German foreign policy should focus on this: be tough and draw red lines in the area of international legal standards and collective security arrangements, but at the same time drive forward debate with Russia on innovative and trust-based formats for future cooperation on the widest possible variety of global challenges.

Germany's Eastern Policy from the Perspective of Brussels

Uwe Optenhögel and Marco Schwarz

The »Eastern Partnership« (EaP) launched at the European Council's Prague summit in May 2009 exerts a decisive influence over the EU's foreign policy with regard to the countries in its eastern neighbourhood. It is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and is based on enhanced cooperation and partnership with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Both political association with the EU and economic integration are to the fore here. The EU's objective is to support the countries of the Eastern Partnership in their reform processes; to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and good governance; and to promote economic development and contacts between people. EU membership is not on the agenda. The Eastern Partnership was launched by a Polish–Swedish initiative that Germany welcomed and supported. In the course of this the German government contributed decisively to the establishment of the ENP's eastern dimension and has always regarded itself as an important partner for the neighbouring countries. For geographical, historical, political and economic reasons Germany has a key role in cooperation with the countries of the EaP and Russia.

Brussels's Perspectives

If one looks at Germany's Eastern Policy from the standpoint of Brussels a number of perspectives need to be considered. Although the EU institutions usually do not speak with one voice, but often have different emphases, fundamental differences of opinion in foreign policy in particular are rare. The guidelines of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are formulated by the European Council of heads of state and government, in respect of which the Council of Foreign Ministers is responsible for implementation of European foreign policy. The specific implementation of European foreign policy is carried out by the European External Action Service (EAS), headed by the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Formally, the European Parliament has only a restricted role within the framework of the CFSP.

Economic Power, Central Power ...

A key role in the shaping of European foreign policy has been conferred on Germany not only with regard to the eastern neighbours. Across the EU, all eyes are on the policy positions taken by the new European »central power«. Against the background of the global financial and economic crisis Germany's economic and political heft has grown further since the end of 2008. Many observers believe that Germany already has a hegemonic role in the European Union. In the area of foreign policy in particular the crisis in Ukraine, which broke out in early 2014, has contributed to a further increase in importance and a leading role for Germany. The departure of the United Kingdom from the EU will serve only to boost this influence over foreign policy issues and in the ENP.

While initially Germany's (foreign) policy leadership role in the EU was reluctant and hesitant, Berlin now appears eager to make more use of the country's responsibility and heft and to give the CFSP impetus. In the past some European partners had called vigorously for the assumption of such a role, because they were more worried about Germany's passivity than any leadership role it might play. As early as 2011 in Berlin the then Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski called for a stronger engagement on Germany's part: »Today I fear German power less than German inaction«.¹

Over time expectations concerning German foreign policy have also been heightened. In general, Germany's new leadership role has been acknowledged and largely welcomed, both among the EU member states and by the EU institutions. The (personal) continuity of German foreign policy under Chancellor Angela Merkel and (now former) foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier since 2005 has undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of trust in Germany's Eastern Policy. This has experienced no serious alterations, even when the FDP headed the Foreign Ministry between 2009 and 2013.

1. Speech by Radosław Sikorski, 28.11.2011; <https://dgap.org/de/node/20029>.

In the European Council, Germany's foreign policy positions with regard to the ENP are generally followed. Many EU member states take their bearings from the German government's views when it comes to decision-making or at least wait to hear the German position before they decide for themselves. As the case arises some countries also »hide« behind Germany's decisions and keep their own views to themselves.

To date, Germany has often been able to assert its positions and ideas in the ENP. For example, key German proposals are to be found in the review of the EU guidelines on the Eastern Neighbourhood. The new pragmatic, flexible and nuanced approach to dealing with the countries of the immediate neighbourhood, published in November 2015, has been welcomed in Berlin.² Stabilisation now stands at the heart of the ENP, alongside support in coping with crises and conflicts. In the EU's »Global Strategy«, published in June 2016, strengthening the resilience of state and society in the neighbouring countries is also mentioned, alongside a stable European neighbourhood.

For the 16 partner countries there is to be a more suitable format for cooperation by means of jointly formulated focal points. The new ENP does not provide for closer convergence with the EU in the sense of a potential accession option; this is in keeping with the German government's expressed position. Before the Eastern Partnership summit in Riga in May 2015 Chancellor Merkel reaffirmed her rejection of this.

Berlin also takes a dim view of speeding up visa liberalisation and, among other things, played a role in holding up the lifting of the visa requirement for Georgians and Ukrainians. In June 2016 Germany, together with France and other partners, for the first time demanded a suspension mechanism in the event of an increase in illegal activities by the citizens of the countries in question, which has been criticised as a tactical manoeuvre by some observers, especially because Tbilisi and Kiev have already met all visa requirements.³

2. Cf. Liana Fix/Anna-Lena Kirch (2016): Germany and the Eastern Partnership after the Ukraine Crisis, Study Committee for Franco-German Relations (Cerfa); <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/enotes/ger-many-and-eastern-partnership-after-ukraine-crisis>.

3. Cf. Maciej Falkowski/Rafał Sadowski (2016): EU-Georgia: delay in the visa liberalisation process, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW); <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-06-15/eu-georgia-de-lay-vi-sa-liberalisation-process>.

... and Mediator

Besides its increasing role as shaper of European foreign policy Berlin is also regarded as a mediator between the EU member states and their differing positions. This is particularly evident with regard to the sanction policy against Russia in response to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine since spring 2014. While the Baltic states and Poland advocate stepping up the measures imposed on the Russian economy and Hungary and Italy favour a lifting of sanctions, to date the German government has steadfastly backed the existing punitive measures, until the Minsk agreement is implemented. Germany rejects any intensification, however, as well as any attempt to link them to Russia's proceedings in Syria. No alleviation of the sanctions appears on the cards at present.

Brussels welcomed the establishment of the Normandy Format, which was able to continue and expand on the work of the contact group in mediating talks between Kiev and the Russia-backed separatists in the east of Ukraine. While the United States and EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini were represented in the first contact group, since June 2014 negotiations have been conducted by Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia in the so-called »quartet«. Although the EAD and thus some EU member states would broadly favour more of a say, Germany's and France's positive mediating role has been praised.

The revival of the OSCE and the deployment of an observer mission in eastern Ukraine is also attributed to Berlin. The German OSCE chairmanship in 2016 was attended by considerable hope for a resolution of the conflict in the EU, although in the end this was disappointed. There were criticisms in Brussels that Germany itself had perhaps aroused too high expectations and had foundered on its own aspirations. Nevertheless, its mediating role in the Ukraine conflict is currently regarded as indispensable, in particular because the Chancellor is considered to be the only head of government able to negotiate with the Russian president on an equal footing.

Special Relationship

Germany benefits from its basically good relations with Russia, which facilitate political talks and negotiations

at the highest level. It is important for the EU that this keeps discussion channels open and makes exchange with Moscow an option. Merkel and Steinmeier (Gabriel) continue to have a direct line to Putin and Lavrov, which is denied to other European politicians and representatives of EU institutions.

Behind the scenes, however, the German government's assumed closeness to the Putin administration is also criticised. Politicians and observers in Brussels take the view that the special partnership between Germany and Russia should not lead to concessions with regard to Moscow or bestow influence on the Kremlin in EU negotiations with EaP countries. In some circles there is a worry that Germany might reach agreement with Russia to the detriment of central and eastern European countries, especially because the future of US sanctions against Moscow remains unclear.

Differences in Outlook

In Brussels it has also been noted that views differ within the German government concerning possible ways of resolving the crisis in Ukraine and on cooperation with Russia. While former foreign minister Steinmeier and his successor, former SPD leader Sigmar Gabriel proposed a gradual winding down of sanctions in May 2016 the Chancellor has been more guarded. The dominant view among European foreign policy actors and analysts in Brussels is that the sanctions should be kept in place until there is visible progress in implementation of the Minsk Agreement.

With regard to Russia it would have to be shown that the EU is in a position to speak with one voice even on disputed and controversial issues and not to let itself be divided by Putin.⁴ The SPD is generally considered to be closer to the Kremlin administration and President Putin than its coalition partner. Brussels no longer accepts that there remains any dividend of Brandt's and Bahr's *Ostpolitik*, although it is occasionally still brought up among Social Democrats. It belongs to the past.

4. Cf. among others, Hrant Kostanyan/Stefan Meister (2016): Ukraine, Russia and the EU – Breaking the deadlock in the Minsk process, CEPS Working Document; <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/ukraine-russia-and-eu-breaking-deadlock-minsk-process>, as well as Paul Ivan (2015): The Ukraine crisis and the demise of the European security order, EPC Policy Brief; http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=3&pub_id=6153.

Under Pressure: Gas from Russia

Germany has been publically criticised for the planned extension of the »Nord Stream II« gas pipeline. Both the European Commission and the European Parliament have found fault with the initiative launched by various energy companies, including BASF/Wintershall. EU Commission vice president Maroš Šefčovič is concerned about security of supply and diversification on the continent and energy commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete has warned about increasing dependency on Russia. Representatives of Brussels think tanks have characterised the undertaking as a political victory for Moscow. The EU cannot permit countries to go it alone in this way because, among other things, »Nord Stream II« is likely to undermine common energy security.⁵ The whole project is regarded as unprofitable and impractical. A better approach should be taken to cooperation with Russia on energy issues and the European energy market should be established on a new footing.⁶ MEPs, too, have also expressed serious concerns about the planned pipeline. It has neither economic nor environmental policy benefits and is motivated primarily by geostrategic considerations.

Even though little distinction is made in Brussels between the positions of the CDU and the SPD and the German government as such has been the target of criticism, particular censure in relation to energy policy issues as they relate to Russia has been directed against the role of former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and thus also the SPD. In the EU's view Nord Stream II is a kind of blot on Germany's otherwise relatively clean foreign and eastern policy record.

Summary and Recommendations

Since the economic and financial crisis in the euro area Germany's political clout has increased in the European Union. Its foreign policy role in eastern Europe has been boosted in particular by the war in Ukraine and the German government's mediation between Moscow and Kiev. It should be assumed that Germany will play a

5. Cf. Annika Hedberg (2015): Nord Stream II – Testing EU unity and credibility, EPC Commentary; http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=4&pub_id=6628.

6. Cf. Alan Riley (2015): Nord Stream 2: A Legal and Policy Analysis, CEPS Special Report; <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/nord-stream-2-legal-and-policy-analysis>.



leadership role in shaping European foreign and eastern policy also in the future. The United Kingdom's departure from the EU will give a further boost to this process. It is acknowledged that a successful EU eastern policy is possible only if Germany is strongly committed.

Generally speaking, its European partners and the EU institutions place considerable trust in Berlin, even though Germany today – unlike in the past – formulates its own interests more assertively. In Brussels the view is that Germany is increasingly aware of its (foreign policy) responsibility and is also making use of its leadership role. There are high expectations of Germany, although it is not clear whether they can be met in all cases.

Good communications and consultations with European partner countries are regarded as particularly impor-

tant and decisive for trust building. Although Germany should take the lead where appropriate, it should also ensure that other EU member states are brought on board, depending on the issue and the situation. Worries about Germany's going it alone, especially in eastern Europe, are tangible. German foreign policy should be aware of this and try to foster trust through transparency.

Even though formally the European Parliament has few rights on foreign policy issues an increasing number of MEPs and academic observers want closer involvement in foreign and security policy decision-making. That also includes better coordination with national parliaments. It is argued that intergovernmental cooperation alone is not enough to confer legitimacy on foreign policy actions and for communicating with the EU citizenry.

Germany's Eastern Policy from the Perspective of the United States

Michael Kimmage

Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009 gave German–US relations a new lease on life. Obama was well disposed towards Germany, which had not joined George W. Bush's »coalition of the willing,« and he regretted the estrangement from Berlin. Obama also noted that German scepticism about the Iraq War had brought Germany and France closer to Russia. When Dmitri Medvedev became Russian president, US–Russian relations demanded re-consideration. From Washington's standpoint, reexamining the relationships with Russia and Germany were complementary aims.

When Vladimir Putin resumed the Russian presidency, however, relations cooled substantially. After Putin granted Edward Snowden asylum in Russia, a downward spiral in the US – Russian relationship began tensions also arose in German–US relations, as Germans reacted angrily to Snowden's revelations about NSA activities in Germany.

In general Germany and the U.S. approach Russia from different angles. For the U.S., Russia is not crucial economically; and political Washington tends to emphasize Russia's democratic deficits and its aggressive conduct in Eastern Europe. Germany, by contrast, has a significant trading relationship with Russia, it has a degree of dependence on Russian energy exports, and Berlin has not accented democratization, in its relationship to Russia, to the same degree that Washington has.

These differences rest on diverging understandings of the Cold War. American politicians tend to ascribe the end of the Cold War to the West's willingness to confront Moscow, German politicians are inclined to attribute the end of the Cold War primarily to the West's willingness to engage the Soviet Union diplomatically.

The Ukraine Crisis

These differences came to the fore during the Ukraine crisis. After the annexation of the Crimea and the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, Berlin and

Washington did not have identical assessments of the problem. President Obama and Chancellor Merkel condemned Russia's actions as illegitimate and insisted that they would not accept the annexation of Crimea. They regarded Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty as a direct threat not only to the security of Ukraine but also to European security in general. From February to July 2014, however, the United States and Germany followed separate strategies with regard to Russia.

The United States wanted to punish Russia immediately for breaking the rules. Russian aggression threatened both NATO and the liberal world order: it had to be actively opposed. In Congress, the Obama government faced an array of Republicans who were awaiting the opportunity to take on Putin's Russia. Agreement was swiftly reached on sanctions and many Republicans advocated – together with some Democrats – the provision of lethal weapons to Ukraine.

President Obama imposed this line of argument up to a point, imposing comprehensive economic sanctions that were intended to punish Russia for its annexation of the Crimea and its invasion of the Donbass. These sanctions also implied the imposition of harsher measures, if the Russian military were to advance further into Ukraine; they had deterrent value.

Germany proceeded more cautiously. Chancellor Merkel was reluctant to impose sanctions, noting the danger of militarising the conflict. While Obama had to contend with Senator McCain and other hawkish Republicans, Chancellor Merkel was under pressure of another kind. The SPD and the Greens wanted to exhaust diplomatic options before adopting a more coercive approach.

Towards a Common Sanctions Policy

After the shoot-down of flight MH17, U.S. and German policy on Russia converged. Imposed only a few days before flight MH17 was brought down, American sanctions might and have remained an isolated action. The

MH17 incident prompted Germany to take the lead on EU sanctions against Russia. U.S. sanctions were now complemented by EU sanctions, symbolising transatlantic solidarity. The 28 EU member states and the United States had common worries about European security. They had spoken out jointly against Russia's actions and in support of Ukraine.

Furthermore, the combined sanctions of the United States and the EU increased the likelihood that shared strategic goals would be achieved. For the West, this was the point of the Minsk agreements, which obliged Russia to withdraw from Ukraine and to which U.S./EU sanctions were tied. For the Obama administration, German leadership was pivotal. Germany, not the United States, sat at the table in Minsk. Chancellor Merkel and foreign Minister Steinmeier were strong advocates of transatlantic unity, as was the Obama administration. The dark days of disunity over the Iraq War were a thing of the past. In dealings with Russia, Germany was Washington's indispensable European partner.

From summer 2015 to the last days of the Obama administration, Germany and the United States pursued a common policy on Russia. In retrospect, this was not a foregone conclusion. It reflected good working relations between the two governments and the common indignation against Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. Public perception of the Ukraine crisis, in Germany and the U.S., allowed for a complimentary German – American policy approach.

Qualified Cooperation

Party political considerations in Germany also played a role in this story. U.S. sanctions against Russia had only minimal effects on the American economy, with the exception of a few Oil Companies. Unlike many European countries, including Germany, the United States is not dependent on Russian energy: here party politics did not limit President Obama's policy choices. Chancellor Merkel, by contrast, had to take economic factors into account when developing her policy on Russia. German companies urged the CDU to be pragmatic about sanctions. Washington worried about keeping all the EU member states within the sanctions regime. Over time, it became clear that Germany was an excellent partner in maintaining transatlantic unity on sanctions.

The one acute bone of contention between President Obama and Chancellor Merkel was the gas pipeline »Nord Stream II«. The Obama administration struggled to understand Germany in general and Chancellor Merkel in particular. Angela Merkel was not openly for or against construction. Occasionally, she expressed herself ambiguously on the topic, although she appeared to support the idea behind the scenes. In the case of her coalition partner, the SPD, the links between its former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Russian energy companies implied more explicit support for »Nord Stream II«.

A second area of distance between Germany and the United States can be traced to foreign minister Steinmeier. Now and then he would speculate about the economic and security policy arrangements that had been in place before 2014. Because the Ukraine crisis began with President Yanukovich's refusal, at Moscow's urging, to sign the association agreement with the EU, Steinmeier was open to exploring alternative diplomatic paths and possibly to reviving the from-Lisbon-to-Vladivostok rhetoric of former, happier days in Russia–EU relations. On visits to Moscow, foreign minister Steinmeier brought up this option, with the aim of transcending zero-sum thinking on Ukraine's economic and security position in Europe.

This raised modest concern in Washington that such efforts could divert attention from Russian aggression, which was seen as the fundamental cause of the Ukraine crisis. This never happened. As for the Middle East, when Secretary of State John Kerry talked with Russia about diplomatic steps in Syria in 2016 he did so with foreign minister Steinmeier's full support. Kerry and Steinmeier agreed that there could be no exchange of »progress« in Syria for the lifting of sanctions related to the Ukraine crisis.

Finally, the United States and Germany also differed stylistically in their diplomatic stance towards Russia. At the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, US-Russian relations were already at a low ebb. A confrontational policy towards Russia is second nature to the American foreign-policy elite. Tensions with Russia are the norm in America foreign policy and to that extent a policy of isolating Russia diplomatically fell on fertile ground. Diplomatic isolation was felt to be the proper response to Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Berlin looked at its relationship to Moscow through a different lens. In Germany, there is a historic responsibility to act as a source of stability, a vehicle of integration and a guarantor of peace in Europe. This responsibility did not require agreement with Moscow, but it did favour dialogue. German politicians – including Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) – have made the journey to Moscow much more often than their American counterparts. Washington did not object to a diplomatic link between Moscow and Berlin, which was reinforced by the Normandy format – the diplomatic quartet of Ukraine – Russia – Germany – France – set up to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

European Issues

The Ukraine crisis was front page news from 2014 to 2016, but it was hardly the only problem area in central and eastern Europe at the time.

In a period of economic trauma and upheaval the Obama administration disagreed with German austerity policy toward Europe. Washington sought greater economic stimulus from Germany for Europe, somewhat along the lines of America's own stimulus package after the economic crises of 2008. On this point Berlin and Washington politely disagreed.

From 2014 to 2016, both Hungary and Poland veered away from liberal democracy. This was not a trend the Obama administration could reverse, though Washington communicated its displeasure to Warsaw and Budapest, calling on the EU to take a stricter line with Poland and Hungary. In Berlin and in Washington, enthusiasm for the Eastern Partnership Programme waned, because of the geopolitical conflict with Russia and because of the entire region's struggles with democracy and rule of law.

In Eastern Europe, Washington comfortably assumed that Germany would exercise a positive influence and be an emphatic voice in Brussels for the democratic order in Europe. Germany is also Europe's most important model of a flourishing democracy.

Although the U.S. chose to accept very few migrants from Syria and the greater Middle East, the Obama administration admired Germany's generous welcome to almost a million migrants. This symbolized, for Washing-

ton, a new era of German leadership. If Washington and Berlin reacted to Erdoğan's attempts to establish authoritarian rule with disappointment, pragmatic negotiations with Turkey on the refugee crisis made perfect sense.

In sum, where Europe was concerned the Obama administration saw Germany as part of the solution, not as part of the problem. Germany was the ideal partner.

The Trump Era

From 2014 to 2016 a new pro-Russian populism percolated in some quarters in Germany and the United States, although it did not shape government policy towards Russia.

The election of Donald Trump opens up the prospect of a radically different phase, in which Germany faces two major challenges. President Trump is an erratic communicator, an impulsive decision – making, and to a degree unprecedented in the history of American foreign policy the Trump administration speaks in multiple and conflicting voices on almost all of the key issues it faces. The Russia and the Europe policy of the newly installed administration has so far been a nebula of ideas and strategies. The resignation of security advisor Michael Flynn and the entanglements of Attorney General Jeff Sessions – a severe crisis for the new administration – both have a Russian background. Trump's rhetorical gestures toward cutting deals with Russia introduce real volatility into the West's relations with Russia. So far, the Trump administration has not presented any policy ideas on Ukraine.

The second challenge for Germany consists of defending the values that have determined US–German relations for decades. President Trump has promised a foreign policy of »America first«, an emphasis on national economic interests and a preference for bilateral over multilateral relations. If he actually pursues these goals the U.S. – German relationship can only erode, it will lack the foundation of democratic principle and human rights upon which it was built. This would force Germany to take a more independent or more exclusively European course.

These dual challenges give rise to two recommendations. On the one hand, the German government should try to develop contacts with those actors in the new



Trump administration who do uphold the »traditional« political ideals – the Atlantic wing of the government, as it were. The president will naturally be at the centre of things, but secretaries and assistant secretaries of state could also form power centres on key issues and play an important role, for example, in policy on Ukraine. It would surely be easier to work with them than with the current US head of government. The appointment of Kurt Volker as special envoy for Ukraine and the nomination (without confirmation yet) of Wes Mitchell as Assistant Secretary for Europe are both good signs for Germany.

Secondly, the German government should establish a long term policy toward the United States, whose political situation is grievously unstable at the moment. At the same time, Berlin should not shy away from expressing its opposition to the unacceptable aspects of President Trump's vision for Europe: his hostility to the EU, his indifference towards the democratic deficits in Hungary and Russia, and his preference for bilateral business relations above the value-based relations with postwar Germany embodied in countless multilateral institutions.

After the upcoming September election in Germany, Berlin should invest time and energy in Transatlantic Ukraine diplomacy. Washington may be too tied up in scandal to take the initiative, and in President Macron Berlin has an impressive partner who is already eager to assist in the revival of »Minsk,« the diplomatic agreements fashioned in 2014 and 2015 to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

In 2016 the United States and the EU found themselves at a diplomatic impasse in relation to Russia. If anything, the situation now is worse. Congress is unilaterally expanding the American sanctions regime, the relationship between President Trump and Chancellor Merkel is frosty, and the Trump administration has generated a Russia related scandal that, with each passing week, is further impeding its ability to govern. Never has German diplomatic leadership been more in demand. Germany should help to steer the United States away from heedless confrontation with Russia and away from an impulsive desire to cut deals. The maintenance of a Russia policy that can contain Russian adventurism, while keeping open the prospect of creative diplomacy, is in the long term interest of both the United States and Germany.

France and German Eastern Policy

Stefan Dehnert

Historically, France has been a constant critic of Germany's eastern policy. Underlying this was the view that too close relations with Russia and too great a shift in policy towards the East harboured the danger of Germany veering away from the West. It was in this sense that Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* encountered reservations, as did the special relationship between Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin. However, the position of equidistance adopted by Chancellor Angela Merkel, which combines awareness of the Russian counterpart with empathy for the interests of the central and eastern European partner states has led to a softening of views on German eastern policy. The role of (former) foreign minister Steinmeier in the Normandy Format and in getting the Minsk Agreement under way has also been highly appreciated.

The Significance of Central and Eastern Europe for France

Traditionally, the focus of French foreign policy has been on the Mediterranean and Africa. Simply for geographical reasons central and eastern Europe does not play such a prominent role as it does for Germany. This has also been evident in the recent past, in particular within the framework of eastern enlargement of the EU, which Germany drove forward enthusiastically and with urgency, while France, for various reasons, was rather more sceptical. On one hand, it was concerned that enlargement might hamper the functionality of the EU and on the other, that it would entail a shift in geographical focus, moving Germany to the centre of the enlarged EU.

Furthermore, these states' strong foreign policy orientation towards the United States also caused a certain estrangement between central and eastern Europe and France. Poland is a case in point. The revival of the so-called Weimar Triangle foundered in particular on France's diffidence. References to the long history of good relations cannot hide the disaffection that has arisen between the two countries. Perhaps the nadir of

French–Polish relations since the fall of the Iron Curtain was the press conference given by French President Jacques Chirac on 17 March 2003, at which he criticised the support of Poland and other central and eastern European countries for the US administration's stance on Iraq by saying that they had missed *»une bonne occasion de se taire«*. While this means little more than that they had lost a good opportunity to remain silent, parts of the US and UK press – characteristically – delivered the more provocative message that the countries of central and eastern Europe had missed a good opportunity to shut up. More recently, the decision by the current Polish government to cancel their order for 50 Caracal helicopters with Airbus and instead to award it to US manufacturer Sikorsky infuriated the French political class. This decision is also regarded as expressing a lack of European community spirit, not to mention torpedoing efforts towards a common European defence policy.

Nicolas Sarkozy's installation in the Elysée Palace ushered in, for a while, an ambitious period for foreign policy, also in relation to central and eastern Europe. At the G8 summit in Heiligendamm in June 2007 the newly elected French President met Vladimir Putin for the first time in a personal discussion. The international public has not forgotten the ensuing press conference, at which the journalists present speculated that Mr Sarkozy must have been drunk. *Der Spiegel*, for example, reported: *»It happened after the tête-à-tête with Putin: Sarkozy, slightly out of breath, stepped on the podium in the press room, where, against the backdrop of the official G8 logo, a lectern had been erected especially for him. ›Ladies and gentlemen‹, the Frenchman excused himself with a rather impish smile, ›excuse me for being late, but it's because of the long conversation I was having with President Putin‹. Then Sarkozy, still out of breath, called for questions, gazed somewhat unsteadily around the conference room and only seemed to compose himself when he put in the translation earphone.«¹*

1. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/sarkozys-bizzarrer-auftritt-be-schwipst-von-seinen-eigenen-saetzen-a-488518.html>.

The account given by French journalist Nicolas Henin is based on the assumption that President Sarkozy's loss of composure must have been owing to the meeting with Putin. In fact, Putin was said to have threatened Sarkozy at the one-on-one meeting, after the latter had expressed criticisms on a series of sensitive points, including Russia's proceedings in Chechnya, the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, human rights and the rights of homosexuals.

Verbatim Putin is supposed to have said: *«Ou bien tu continues sur ce ton et je t'écrase. Ou alors tu arrêtes de parler comme ça [...] et je peux faire de toi le roi de l'Europe»* («Either you keep talking to me like this and I crush you, or you stop there and I'll make you the King of Europe»). This humiliation may have contributed to the fact that a more ambitious approach was adopted towards Russia, while awareness of Russia's intentions with regard to its neighbouring states was higher than ever before.

The Georgian war broke out during the French Council presidency in August 2008, giving President Sarkozy and his foreign minister Bernard Kouchner sufficient reason to launch an initiative to resolve the conflict. As late as the NATO summit in Bucharest on 2–4 April 2008 France had adhered to the German position not to offer Ukraine and Georgia the option of NATO accession. Now, however, the time seemed to have come for French diplomacy to shine: five days after the Russian intervention a ceasefire was agreed and formalised in a treaty.

The French government celebrated the initiative's rapid success, but in the left-wing media Sarkozy and Kouchner were criticised for their failure to condemn Russia's actions. President Sarkozy had even expressed a certain understanding of Moscow's behaviour, saying that «it is perfectly normal that Russia would like to defend its interests, both in the case of the Russians in Russia and Russian speakers outside the country.» This assessment appears somewhat more critical today: not only because any further advance by Russian troops on the Georgian capital at that time seemed strategically pointless and thus highly unlikely, but also because – more gravely – the agreement omitted any mention of the principle of the inviolability of borders, thereby violating the EU's foreign policy principles. It was thus deemed to have helped legitimise and cement the outcome of the in-

tervention, the occupation of part of Georgia.² The fact that the EU has never formally acknowledged this border alteration changes nothing. It was later bandied about that the different language versions of the treaty had caused the poor outcome and it was felt that the Russians had pulled a fast one.

France's attitude towards the EU's new member states in central and eastern Europe was also evident in economic policy. Only in Romania was there more substantial investment. In the other countries investment activity remained modest and Germany was given a clear field. In many commentaries these days these countries are characterised as Germany's *»hinterland«*, referring to the relocation of industrial production there.

A Glance at Germany's Recent Eastern Policy

After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc France's foreign policy ambitions in central and eastern Europe focused on Russia. No clear strategy was discernible with regard to the region as a whole, as well as individual states. It was left to Germany to pursue a more ambitious foreign policy, whose commitment can be traced back to a generally more ambitious foreign policy since the fall of the Berlin Wall and to its geographical situation. Berlin's ambitious policy with regard to its central and eastern European neighbourhood is generally welcomed, however.³

Meanwhile France reserves the right to launch its own initiatives if crisis situations emerge or to become active when Russia is part of the equation. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council France cannot merely abandon the field in favour of the other actors. Although France does not have a vested interest in the countries of this region it nevertheless wants to run up its foreign policy flag in order to be perceived as a player.

After the only modest success of France's initiative to resolve the Georgian crisis the impression emerged that crisis policy for the region will henceforth be made in closer agreement with Germany. There is a growing re-

2. Cf. Silvia Serrano, researcher at the Centre d'études des mondes russe, caucasien et centre européen (CEREC); <http://information.tv5monde.com/info/guerre-de-2008-en-georgie-le-cadeau-de-la-france-la-rus-sie-4434>.

3. Cf. <http://www.iris-france.org/42926-la-nouvelle-diplomatie-alle-mande-de-la-chute-du-mur-au-nouveau-depart/>.

alisation that against Russia only a common European approach or at least a German–French tandem makes sense and is likely to achieve any success. This applies in particular to policy on Ukraine.

Foreign policy on central and eastern Europe under President Francois Hollande and his foreign minister Laurent Fabius, as well as the Germanophile Jean-Marc Ayrault (previously the prime minister) was even more clearly an effort to join forces with Germany. This is not least a consequence of the EU's gathering crisis, but also of Russia's ever more aggressive stance with regard to Europe. A division of the main EU actors, besides the United Kingdom, is not on the cards in such a critical political state of affairs. This is immediately evident in the Normandy Format, in which France was prime mover, as well as the ensuing joint efforts to ease the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In the course of all this France has become aware that the diplomatic success of the Minsk Agreement would not have been possible without Germany's involvement.⁴

The French government decided to take this course even though the French public's long-standing obsession with a supposed national decline is growing, in the context of which Germany is always held up as a standard of comparison. Common foreign policy action can thus be interpreted as an attempt to bind Germany more closely into a joint international responsibility and thus to underline its role and obligation to the EU as a whole. France is well aware that the balance of power between it and Germany now clearly favours the latter, due to its economic might. Those occupying the Elysée Palace are thus even keener on persuading the Berlin

Chancellery to come up with a feasible way out of the ongoing European crisis, including for the southern EU member states.

In the (expert) public perception there are slight differences in policy approaches to Russia between the SPD-led foreign ministry and the Chancellor's Office. A more flexible stance is attributed to the former, while the latter is perceived as unyielding in relation to President Putin. Both sides display a continuing desire to maintain dialogue with Moscow, however. It is also considered that some Social Democrats favour an end to EU sanctions against Russia and to that end would even be prepared to accept recognition of the Crimean annexation.⁵

In France, ironically, (former) conservative presidential candidate Francois Fillon represents a similar position. During his term as prime minister under President Sarkozy he developed a kind of »male bond« with Putin and has repeatedly called of late for an end to the sanctions against Russia within the framework of a more *realpolitik*-oriented approach. On top of that he has urged that ISIS should be combated not only together with Moscow, but also with the Syrian government. This could have given rise to serious inconsistencies with the German position if Fillon had been elected president of France on 7 May. As improbable as this scenario may seem given the various scandals that have beset the conservative candidate, his installation in the Elysée Palace would clearly have brought about a change in French policy with regard to Moscow, even the danger that the common European line would have been abandoned, thereby depriving the EU of the only means of exerting pressure available to it, economic sanctions.

4. Cf. <http://www.iris-france.org/57230-quel-bilan-tirer-de-la-politique-etrangere-francaise/>.

5. Cf. <http://www.slate.fr/story/95123/russie-allemande>.

Germany's Eastern Policy – An Italian Perspective

Riccardo Alcaro

In recent decades Italy's foreign policy priorities have largely chimed with those of Germany. Both countries have regarded European integration and transatlantic relations as strategically important in maintaining security and prosperity at home and, at the same time, in standing up for international rules. Like Germany, Italy has also expended much energy on cultivating relations with Russia, which it considers an important dialogue partner in ensuring long-term Europe's stability and energy supply. Like their German colleagues, Italian politicians assume that these three dimensions, by their very nature, are tightly connected. Because European integration and transatlantic relations have been mutually conducive, the Euro-Atlantic framework has provided a platform on which to encounter Russia from a position of strength.

More recently, a number of factors have blurred this picture somewhat. While Italy, like several other European countries, has struggled to cope with the effects of the economic crisis and has experienced an increasingly divisive politics, Germany has maintained its financial and political stability. At a time in which US President Donald Trump appears to be flirting with distancing himself from Europe, France is still dealing with its economic difficulties and the United Kingdom appears to be departing from the European Union, Germany's geopolitical significance is increasing. The Germans are now expected to take the lead not only in policy areas in which its influence has always been strong, such as the governance of the euro area, but also on issues such as migration and security. German foreign policy has thus come under more intense international scrutiny.

The Italian debate on Germany's policy on Russia and central and eastern Europe has to be considered against this changed background. To be sure, speaking of a debate is presuming too much. In Italy the central issue is not German policy as such but rather the question of how EU and NATO membership affects Italian relations with Russia. Because Berlin exerts great influence in the EU, however, the positions of the Italian government,

Italian politicians, business people and analysts with regard to Russia and central and eastern Europe enable us to draw at least implicit conclusions about their attitudes to German policies. To the extent that this still underdeveloped and often turbulent debate permits us to make a judgement, Germany's policy on central and eastern Europe is likely to trigger even greater controversies in Italy in the future.

Italy, Germany's Policy on Central and Eastern Europe and the Ukraine Crisis

Until fairly recently Italy looked at Germany as a natural partner when it came to shaping relations between the West and Russia. The Italians shared Germany's view that Russia should be engaged, including by progressively associating it to Euro-Atlantic frameworks, to guarantee Europe's long-term security and to better manage threats such as nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

Naturally, there were also areas in which Italy and Germany were in competition. Energy infrastructure is one example. After the Russian state energy giant Gazprom and a group of overwhelmingly German companies agreed on the development of the offshore pipeline »Nord Stream« in the Baltic Sea, the Italians hastily concluded a similar agreement in the Black Sea – »South Stream« – in order to secure their position as energy hub for Southern Europe. Both projects were extremely controversial because they ran counter to the EU objective of reducing energy dependence on Russia.

Like Germany, Italy resisted US pressure to pave the way for NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, working towards cooperation with Russia after the Georgian war in 2008. While Germany sought some sort of balance, however, by investing money and political capital in the central and eastern European countries, Italy had no particular ambitions in this regard. Although the Italians did not reject the Eastern Partnership – which the EU launched in 2009 in order to intensify trade and political dialogue with six former Soviet republics – they did urge

caution.¹ The outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, occasioned by demonstrations calling for closer relations with the EU, to some extent confirmed Italian concerns that the EU had been too hasty.

When Russia annexed Crimea, Italy joined in the general condemnation of the first appropriation of territory by force in Europe since 1945. There was also a willingness to retract cooperation with Russia. At the same time de-escalation was favoured and there was explicit agreement with German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, according to whom not sanctions, but diplomacy should determine the West's response to the crisis.² The prospect of de-escalation receded, however, because Russia continued to stoke unrest in south-eastern Ukraine and the seed for a potential contrast between Germany and Italy was planted.

It was some time before a breach was discernible, however. The lingering perception that Italy and Germany shared the same concerns was ostensibly the reason why Rome welcomed the setting up of the Franco–German-led »Normandy format« to broker peace between Ukraine and Russia. Italian support was nonetheless marred by misgivings about the French and Germans being in charge for the rest of the EU. Observers even spoke of a German ambition to fill the geopolitical vacuum in Ukraine.³ Although this interpretation was not shared by all experts, it did represent the first systematic attempt to delve into geopolitical implications for Italy of the Ukraine crisis, which somehow inflated its potential for persuasion. Although this assessment was intended as an objective and neutral analysis, it fostered the suspicion among some representatives in the government and in the business community that Germany might be pursuing some sort of hegemony.

In Italian eyes, up to 2014 German eastern policy was compatible – apart from infrastructure development – with the Italian interest in constructive relations be-

tween the EU and Russia. Since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, however, cracks have begun to appear. Even though Italy still largely follows the German line, the gap between German eastern policy and what the Italians consider to be in their own interest has widened.

Germany's Eastern Policy and Italy's Objections

With the West–Russia confrontation showing no signs of abating, Italians have started to reconsider the merits of the German-led EU approach to the Ukraine crisis, and by extension Germany's *Ostpolitik* in general.

Agreement on the EU's sanctions is fading rapidly. As early as April 2015 the Italian Trade Agency recorded a substantial fall in exports to Russia, especially in the agricultural sector.⁴ This was followed in due course by reports of thousands of job losses and a decline in export revenues to the tune of several billion euros.⁵ These estimates were speculative (and perhaps exaggerated), but the downward trend could not be disputed.

So far, Italian grievances about the EU–Russia trade row have not turned into widespread resentment against Germany, the driving force behind the EU sanction policy. After all, Germany has incurred severe costs too. Italians do blame Germany, however, for applying what they perceive as a double standard. The case in point is the plan to double the capacity of Nord Stream by building a second offshore pipeline, »Nord Stream II«.

From Rome's perspective this is foul play on Germany's part. On the one hand, the Germans call for solidarity and a hardline stance against Russia on Ukraine on the part of the EU. On the other hand, they are ignoring their own calls for restrictions on cooperation with Moscow by giving a project the green light that runs counter to the EU objective of reducing dependency on Russian gas, deprives Poland and other countries of their revenues from transit fees and weakens Western efforts to bolster the faltering Ukrainian government.

1. For an overview of German and Italian relations with Russia before the Ukraine crisis, see Susan Stewart (2013): »Germany« and Riccardo Alcaro, »Italy«, in: M. David/J. Gower/H. Haukkala (eds): National perspectives on Russia. European foreign policy in the making?, London: Routledge.

2. Ulrich Speck (2014): Germany plays Good Cop, Bad Cop on Ukraine, Carnegie Europe, 25 June 2014; <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/06/25/germany-plays-good-cop-bad-cop-on-ukraine-pub-56011>.

3. Germano Dottori (2014): »Anche Berlino ha perso Kiev« (Berlin has also lost Kiev), in: Limes, April 2014; Brendan Simms/Liam Fitzgerald (2014): »Berlino, Mosca, Pechino: tre sindromi da accerchiamento« (Berlin, Moscow, Beijing: three syndromes of encirclement), in: Limes, August 2014.

4. Maurizio Forte (2015): Interscambio, esportazioni settore agroalimentare, attività promozionali a supporto di EXPO Milano 2015, ICE Agency Moscow, Italian-Russian Chamber of Commerce, 29 April 2015; http://www.ccir.it/ccir/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Presentazione-ICE_it.pdf.

5. Russia-UE: il costo delle sanzioni (Russia–EU: the cost of the sanctions), Exportiamo, 16 September 2015; <http://www.exportiamo.it/area-tematiche/12157/russia-ue-il-cos-to-delle-sanzioni/>.

Italy also dislikes the »Nord Stream II« project because Russia has now pulled out of the »South Stream« project. According to President Putin this decision was taken because of the strict EU competition rules, but it strains credulity that the collapse of South Stream had nothing to do with the Ukraine crisis and the associated sanctions.

The Italian government is struggling to take effective action in accordance with its concerns. Former prime minister Matteo Renzi (2014–2016) bewailed the hypocrisy of »Nord Stream II«,⁶ but strove in vain to obtain a declaration from the European Commission that the pipeline is incompatible with EU regulations on natural gas distribution in the European Union.⁷

Once, Renzi even threatened not to extend the sanctions, thereby sending the signal that Italy does not want to jeopardise cooperation with Russia on account of what is happening in Ukraine.⁸ Although in the end Renzi consented to the extension, as planned, the Italian line was clear: it agreed to sanctions only in support of implementation of the Franco-German-brokered Minsk II Agreement between Russia and Ukraine, nothing more. True to his words, Renzi in October 2016 refused to impose new sanctions on Russia in response to allegations that it had bombed civilians arbitrarily during the battle for Aleppo. Italy managed to get the motion that Germany, together with France and the United Kingdom, had got onto the EU agenda, stricken from it again.⁹

Renzi's public criticisms of the sanctions and of »Nord Stream II« were undoubtedly owing to political opportunism.¹⁰ However, there were also matters of substance

beyond election campaign considerations, which cast a negative light on Germany's Russia policy even after Renzi had left office.

A Still Underdeveloped, But Already Polarised Debate

There has been no policy change in Italy under Renzi's successor, Paolo Gentiloni. Angelino Alfano, leader of the small moderate coalition party and new foreign minister, has committed himself to implementing the Minsk II Agreement and thus also to the sanctions that are supposed to achieve it. Nevertheless, he has stressed that Italy regards dialogue with Russia, not sanctions, as the right way and does not agree to the automatic prolongation of sanctions.¹¹ Given the growing economic problems, however, it is doubtful whether the Italian government's strategy of stridently complaining about a policy that it itself supports can be sustainable for long.

The political opponents of Renzi and Gentiloni's centre-left Democratic Party (PD) have seized upon the widespread discontent. They reproach the government with regularly kowtowing to Italy's most powerful allies, the United States and Germany. As a result, the biggest Eurosceptic parties have put rejection of sanctions against Russia centre-stage on the political agenda.

Although the sanctions are the principal bone of contention the debate goes even further. For example, another important pillar of Germany's central and eastern European policy – NATO's role in central and eastern Europe – has also come in for criticism. Although the debate is less intense in this instance, it is also more polarised than in the case of sanctions. At the same time, this debate indicates something new in Italian foreign policy since the Second World War that is worth examining.

Across broad swathes of the political spectrum in Italy – especially in the case of the Five Stars Movement (M5S), but also among forces on the left and right – the idea has gained ground that Italy's membership in the EU

6. »Italy's Renzi joins opposition to Nord Stream 2 pipeline deal«, in: *Financial Times*, 15 December 2015; <https://www.ft.com/content/ceb-d679c-a281-11e5-8d70-42b68cfae6e4>.

7. Marco Tacconi (2016): »The Italian Ally in the V4 Gas Security Battle«, in: *Visegrad Insights*, 15 July 2016; <http://visegradinsight.eu/the-italian-ally-in-the-v4-gas-security-battle/>.

8. »PM Renzi plans to tell EU Council that renewal of Russia sanctions should not be automatic«, in: *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 16 December 2015; <http://www.italy24.ilsole24ore.com/art/government-policies/2015-12-15/north-stream-130902.php?uud=AC6hkptB>.

9. »Italy's Renzi forces retreat from new sanctions on Russia«, in: *Financial Times*, 21 October 2016; <https://www.ft.com/content/1cd7f-7dc-9730-11e6-a80e-bcd69f323a8b>.

10. »Italy »preparing to cause trouble« for EU as relations with Germany sour«, in: *Independent*, 16 January 2016; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italy-preparing-to-cause-trouble-for-eu-as-relations-with-germany-sour-a6818341.html>.

11. »Il ministro Angelino Alfano: »Fronte comune contro il terrore bisogna coinvolgere anche Mosca« (A common front against terror requires the inclusion of Moscow, too), in: *Corriere della Sera*, 20 December 2016; http://www.corriere.it/politica/16_dicembre_20/fronte-comune-contro-terrore-1f95b7c8-c644-11e6-81c3-386103f9089b.shtml.

and NATO hamper relations with Russia. M5S and other parties are thus not particularly willing or even not willing at all to accommodate the demands of central and eastern European NATO member states for stronger security guarantees.

The general perception that Italy is the loser in trade disputes between the EU and Russia, the inability of the coalition government under PD leadership to convey the EU's stance in a positive manner, and the increasingly Russia-friendly attitude of strong political forces, such as M5S and the Lega Nord, all indicate growing potential for differences of opinion between Italy and Germany.

Conclusions

The Italian view of Germany's policy on central and eastern Europe is to be derived not so much from sporadic assessments of German foreign policy, as from the debate on what is at stake for Italy in the current confrontation with Russia. At the risk of simplifying too much it is, however, possible to distinguish two viewpoints.

Italy's large Eurosceptic coalition is characterised by its stance on »sovereignty«, although it goes further than that.¹² Those adhering to this position demand the resumption of cooperation with Russia in order to safeguard Italy's trade, energy and security interests. In keeping with this they also question the strategic value

of EU and NATO membership. The regional freedom of action of the former Soviet republics – often portrayed as passive onlookers in a geopolitical conflict between the West and Russia – is often overlooked.

The proponents of »sovereignty« do not value the EU as a multilateral system that confers benefits on all member states, but increasingly regard it as an instrument in the hands of the most powerful European states, especially Germany, which use it to exercise influence over the weaker and poorer – or badly run – member states. Even though German policy on central and eastern Europe is rarely discussed, we might assume that the dominant view in these circumstances is that the Germans pursue only their own interests, so that Italy would be better off giving more thought to its own nationally defined priorities.

The other standpoint is represented by the PD and other moderate and centre-right parties. They emphasise that EU and NATO membership bring Italy invaluable strategic benefits, contributing to the country's economic prosperity and security and boosting its foreign policy influence. These forces recognise that Italy should protect its economic and energy interests by espousing moderation and pursuing dialogue with Russia. However, they also take the view that Italy has a strong interest in supporting a European order based on compliance with one's international obligations, dependability of state action and renunciation of violence in the resolution of international conflicts. These forces approach German foreign policy with more understanding, but only to the extent that it contributes to the defence and promotion of the EU as a rule-oriented order. If that loses relevance – for example, due to growing criticism of the sanctions or »Nord Stream II« – Germany's eastern policy will encounter significantly more opposition in Italy.

12. If elections were held now around 30 per cent of the electorate would vote for M5S and around 14 per cent for Lega Nord; Sondaggi elettorali Lorient: scissione PD, M5S e centro-destra non ne approfittano (Lorient electoral polls: PD split, M5S and the centre-right are not taking advantage of it), Termometro politico; http://www.termometropolitico.it/1248548_sondaggi-elettorali-lorien-intenzioni-di-voto-scissione-pd-m5s-centro-destra-affluenza.html.

Perceptions of German Eastern Policy in Finland and Sweden

Christian Krell

Finland and Sweden are similar in many respects. Both countries are part of Scandinavia and members of the EU; both have rejected NATO membership. They both look back on a past as non-aligned, neutral states. In both countries there is a sensitive and thoughtful debate on Russia's foreign and security policy, as well as on Germany's stance towards Russia. At the same time the differences in these debates are striking: while in Sweden it's the done thing to keep Russia at a clear distance, the debate in Finland is more balanced.

Sweden

Even though Sweden, in contrast to, for example, Finland or the Baltic States, has no direct border with Russia the country is increasingly engaged with a possible threat from the East. As a Baltic coastal state it is in geographic proximity to Russia and has a relatively direct link over the sea, which encourages debate on relations with Russia.

Although Sweden joined the EU in 1995, it has not yet become a member of NATO. The possibility of accession has been raised repeatedly – it is being discussed at the moment – but the current red-green minority government has clearly ruled it out for the time being. A lot of effort is made to build up security policy cooperation both within the European Union and with NATO, but Sweden is hindered in this regard by continuing adherence to its historically rooted military non-alignment and neutrality policy, which even today constitute the core of its foreign and security policy, while at the same time suppressing the desire for stronger cooperation with allies such as NATO.

Fear of Russia: Submarines off Stockholm

Foreign and security policy debates in Sweden are currently more intense than they have been for a long time. One senior staff member of the Swedish ministry of de-

fence describes the current focus as follows: »I've been working in the Ministry of Defence for 25 years. Public interest in my work has never been so high.«

In the press foreign and security policy is discussed primarily against the background of a perceived threat from Russia. The defence capabilities of Sweden and of individual regions, such as the capital city Stockholm or the adjacent island of Gotland, in the event of a possible Russian assault are as much a topic as Russian provocations, such as violations of Swedish airspace by Russian fighter jets.

One indication of the seriousness with which Sweden takes this threat is the stationing of troops on the holiday island of Gotland from mid-2017. The alleged sighting of a Russian submarine in Swedish waters in 2014 is likely to have stoked these worries further. Regardless of how real these threats are the very perception of a threat is already affecting Swedish-Russian relations, as illustrated by the following headline from Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*: »Russian ambassador: Swedish-Russian relations worse than during the submarine hunt in the 1980s«. Germany's policy on Russia is also perceived and monitored against this background.

German Eastern Policy:

Correct But Please Don't Make It Any Friendlier

Germany is perceived as the central actor in European policy on Russia. As a headline in one of the leading newspapers put it, Germany is the »most powerful country« (*»mäftigaste land«*) in the EU and the key figure both in the formulation of a European stance with regard to Russia and in dealings between Europe and Russia.

Note has been taken of the different positions of the German foreign ministry and the Chancellor's Office. The majority of political actors tend to lean towards the Chancellor's Office in this regard, although in practical terms no discernible conclusions have been drawn from this.

Generally speaking there is a wish to keep open lines of communication while maintaining clear demarcations and unambiguous positions with regard to Russian policy. From Sweden's perspective it is imperative to maintain sanctions, although talks should not be ruled out completely. For example, in February 2017 Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström met her Russian counterpart in Moscow for the first time for over two years.

In Sweden's view, it is both desirable and necessary to strengthen the EU's security-policy capacities, especially given Russian aggression in relation to Ukraine and the security-policy uncertainty in the wake of the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump.

Special Topic: »Nord Stream«

Another important aspect of Swedish views on Russia and Germany is the Baltic Sea pipeline planned by Gazprom, EON, Wintershall and Nederlandse Gasunie. »Nord Stream II« is intended to bring gas from Russia to Germany. This project's predecessor came in for a lot of criticism around ten years ago and it has given rise to various arguments in the Swedish debate.

On one hand, Ukraine and other states would have to incur high financial losses if gas were no longer transported via their territory, forfeiting transit fees. On the other hand, the question also arises of whether the project runs counter to the EU's strategic objectives with regard to energy policy. After all, the EU aims to become independent of Russian gas and »Nord Stream II« would increase the Russian share in the European gas market even further.

For Sweden there are also security policy dimensions. It fears that if Russia was allowed into Swedish harbours it might use them for military operations. There are important Swedish air and naval bases nearby Karlshamn harbour, which is intended to play a major role with regard to »Nord Stream II«. Karlis Neretnieks, former President of the Swedish National Defence College, has pointed to the possibility that Russia could use container ships as cover for missile systems and thus smuggle them into the country.

The Swedish coastal town Karlshamn has just given Gazprom permission to use its harbour for its work.

Despite the attached security conditions this decision has caused a stir in Sweden. The Swedish government, together with Denmark, has written a letter to the European Commission asking it to review the pipeline plans. It cannot forbid its municipalities from taking such decisions, but the project, Gazprom and Germany's role will continue to be subject to close and critical scrutiny

Finland

1,269 km Russian-Finnish Border

The figure of 1,269 kilometres not only describes the length of the border that divides Finland and Russia, but is also a decisive geopolitical magnitude in the debate on Finnish foreign and security policy. Finland finds itself – and not just geographically – in an intermediary position between the east and the west of Europe. Based on its efforts to maintain neutrality after the Second World War Finland today, as a neighbour of Russia, an EU member and a Scandinavian state, has been allotted an important mediatory role.

Although Finland is not a member of NATO the country's basic position can no longer be described as neutral in the face of growing integration in the EU. Finland's involvement in the abovementioned circles – Scandinavia, the EU and proximity to Russia – means that it continues to have a close interest in viable relations both with Russia and with the EU and NATO.

Russia the Top Issue

»Russia is always headline news in Finland«, as a former Finnish diplomat describes Russia's relevance in the public debate. Explicit attention is paid to German policy towards Russia in this context. Germany is considered to be the decisive European power in relations with Russia, as a result of which particular attention is paid to Germany's eastern policy in the press.

Overall, foreign and security policy questions are currently at high tide. Due to the impact of the Ukraine crisis, Brexit, Trump's election and increasing Russian aggression Finland's own defence capabilities, for example, are the subject of intense discussion. As a result, more

funding has been allocated for defence spending, there is a new law on military service and a law on reconnaissance is planned.

German Eastern Policy: Correct But Please Don't Make It Less Friendly

Germany is regarded as the driving force for European policy on Russia. From a Finnish perspective Germany's leadership role has developed especially in the recent past, for example, during the Ukraine crisis. Overall Germany is perceived to be assertive in foreign policy issues, which is generally welcomed in the public debate. German foreign policy is described as mediatory, consensus-oriented and diplomatically engaged. The concept of »civil power« is associated with Germany. One example of this self-conception is that Germany seeks European solutions rather than national ones. This aspiration towards cooperation meets with considerable approval in Finland, but it is made clear just as frequently that the interests of the more eastern states, such as Poland and Finland must also be taken into consideration, even if they are sometimes formulated differently from those of Germany.

German policy during the Ukraine crisis is also interpreted within this framework. However, there is a different assessment in this instance. Basically, the political elites and the majority of public commentators describe Finland's position as being very close to Germany's stance. At the same time, there are concerns about taking too harsh a position in relation to Russia. It is often argued that lines of communication must be maintained even under difficult circumstances. Specifically, there is, for example, support for the Minsk Agreement. Although it is sometimes regarded as problematic, it is also considered the best available negotiation outcome. Overall, despite all the worries and concerns with regard to Russian policy a premium is put on dialogue with Russia. In mid-January, for example, President Sauli Niinistö announced in an interview that he will meet his Russian colleague Vladimir Putin at least twice in 2017: he will travel to Moscow, while a visit to Finland by President Putin is envisaged for the summer.

Finland thus appears to put a premium both on talks with Russia and on international cooperation and defence policy cooperation within the EU. Niinistö explicitly welcomed the willingness of other European states to engage with Russia bilaterally.

In relation to German eastern policy, as already mentioned, there are differences between the positions of the German chancellor Angela Merkel and former German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The former foreign minister's attitude was considered to be more ready to talk, more conciliatory and more cooperative and thus in keeping with Finland's interest in ascribing the talks high priority. Merkel's position and some voices in the CDU, which are calling for a tougher stance with regard to Russia, is viewed critically, however. The perception of Social Democrat policy as more reserved concerning NATO's role also tends to meet with more approval.

The sanctions against Russia are occasionally mentioned in the public debate. Overall, Finnish exports to Russia are relatively low, given the country's spatial proximity, at only 5 per cent of Finnish exports. However, in particular a number of supporters of the centre party of prime minister Juha Sipilä take a critical view of the sanctions. Centre party supporters from the agricultural sector regard the sanctions as a threat to their livelihood, but this sentiment is not representative.

In its own self-perception Finland certainly finds itself reflected in Germany's policy on Russia, but at the same time considers itself an experienced actor in dealing with Russia. It expects its expertise in this regard to be used in the formulation of German and European policy on Russia.

Summary

Both Finland and Sweden ascribe Germany a decisive role in European dealings with Russia and line up alongside the German stance. At the same time, considerable differences are discernible. While Finland backs the more cooperation-oriented positions in German eastern policy Sweden is interested in holding Russia at arm's length.



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