
Germany's Policy on Russia: End of the Honeymoon?



Hannes Adomeit

September 2005

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Research Programme Russia/NIS
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Institut Français des Relations Internationales
27 rue de la Procession – 75740 Paris cedex 15 – France
tél. : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

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Hannes Adomeit has been a Senior Research Fellow at the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP) in Berlin since 1997, specializing in Russian issues. Before that, he was a Professor of International Politics and Director of the research program for Russia and Central and Eastern Europe at the *Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy*, and a Fellow of the *Russian Research Center* at Harvard University.

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Abstract

The developments in Putin's Russia away from democracy and the constitutional state have also placed Germany's policy on Russia under scrutiny. In the run-up to the election to the Bundestag on September 18th, representatives of the opposition parties CDU/CSU and FDP have thus made it clear that they no longer approve of the policy Chancellor Schröder has adopted with regard to Russia. The new EU member states in Eastern and Central Europe are accusing Germany of pursuing a *Sonderweg* compared with the rest of the EU and attempting to build a special relationship with Russia. This article addresses the question of whether this criticism is justified, and what is behind the "strategic partnership" that Chancellor Schröder and President Putin have attested to time and again.

The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the UK Ministry of Defence.

Introduction

In the run-up to the election of the German Bundestag, and in anticipation of a possible change of government, opposition parties announced that they would be taking a tougher stance on Russia. According to Friedbert Pflüger, foreign policy spokesman for the CDU/CSU and a potential member of a Merkel cabinet, Russia will continue to be an important partner for Germany, with whom they must be able to "work well together in the areas of oil, energy and throughout the economy". But if human rights are blatantly disregarded, Germany cannot remain silent. Gerhard Schröder's motto, that friends should be able to speak plainly to one another, must not only apply to relations with the United States.¹

The potential coalition partner, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), has also taken a tougher stance. As the Council of Europe Rapporteur for monitoring and analyzing the trial against Russian billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger said Schröder's description of the Russian President as a "flawless democrat" was a "fatal mistake". Together with the former FDP leader, Otto Graf Lambsdorff, the former German justice minister also called for consequences for Russia's application to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). EU approval of this candidacy must thus be "reconsidered".²

Germany's policy on Russia has been a topic of debate in the Bundestag since 13 November, 2003, when representatives of the opposition demanded that the Federal Government take a more critical view of activities in Russia. In addition, in the Bundestag debates of November 24, and of December 1 and 3, there were calls for the Chancellor to speak plainly about Putin with regard to the presidential elections in Ukraine.

It is not only the lack of public criticism that has put Germany's Russia policy under the spotlight. Germany is being reproached for pursuing a different path on these issues that is not in line with the EU policy on Russia. It is important to consider the following questions: to what extent is this criticism justified? Do Schröder and Putin really share a special relationship of mutual trust and, if so, for what reason? Which Russia is the German policy aimed at?

Translated from the Russian by Jennifer Northup.

¹ K. Pries, "The Union Announces a Tougher Stance on Russia", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2 June 2005, p. 6.

² *Ibidem*.

How does Germany's policy on Russia fit into the EU's partnership policy for Russia? And, finally: what courses of action are open to Germany?³

³ This argument is based on: H. Adomeit, K. Bastian and R. Götz, *Germany's Russia Policy under Pressure*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, SWP-Aktuell, No. 56, December 2004.

Schröder's "Soft Policy"

German-Russian relations have been and continue to be shaped unmistakably by the relationship of mutual trust between the top politicians in the two countries. This was the case, in the 1980s and 1990s, of the relationships between Brandt and Gorbachev, Kohl and Gorbachev, as well as between Kohl and Yeltsin. The then social-democratic opposition used similar arguments to attack Kohl's "sauna diplomacy" as today's conservative and liberal opposition use with regard to Schröder's "soft policy" towards the Russian head of state. However, while the personal relationship between the statesmen of the two countries in the 1980s and 1990s was still influenced by both the end of the East-West conflict and the resolution of the German question, by the time Putin came into office it seemed high time for less emotional and more businesslike dealings. Yet we have observed that precisely the opposite has happened.

It is not, however, the demonstrative cordiality with which the German Chancellor has treated the Russian President in their 29 formal and informal meetings as of June 2005 that has provoked criticism, concern, and suspicion in Germany among the general public and the political parties. The focus of criticism is the incongruity between developments in Russia's domestic policy and Russian policy towards the post-Soviet area on the one hand, and the combination of indifference and praise Schröder displays toward Putin on the other. The primary concern is the actual or apparent priority that the Chancellor is granting his "strategic" partner, Russia, in the supposed Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis (which, since the change of government in Spain, now also includes Madrid), and the fact that he allegedly wants to build a European counterweight to America, with the help of France. The primary cause for suspicion is speculation that the Chancellor is keeping quiet on negative developments in Russia due to Germany's "dependence" on Russian oil and gas,⁴ and appears placatory due to Russia's size, resources, and missiles.⁵

The German Chancellor appears unperturbed by criticisms of his policy.

- He has never wavered from the stance he took on the *Khodorkovsky affair* in July 2004 in Moscow, where he claimed not to understand what "all the fuss" was about. He sees "no evidence that the methods used

⁴ See R. Götz, *Silence for Gas?*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, SWP-Aktuell, No. 43, September 2004.

⁵ According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* Russia correspondent, D. Brössler, "Why be Nice to Putin?", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19 December 2004.

were inconsistent with the state's legitimate rule of law" and can understand "that a state needs taxes".⁶

- In terms of the Russian policy on *Chechnya*, the Chancellor has always advocated a "political solution". However, after the three-way summit held with Putin and Chirac in Sochi at the end of August 2003, the Chancellor did not voice any misgivings on the course of events during the presidential elections in the defecting republic, even in the face of criticism voiced by international organizations and experts that the elections were a farce. He said he "could not find any perceptible fault in the way in which the elections were held".⁷
- As far as developments in domestic policy in Russia are concerned, Schröder was asked on a TV talk show in November 2004 whether Putin was a "flawless democrat", to which the Chancellor replied that he was "convinced that he is". Schröder said he was "also convinced that [Putin] wants to turn this country into a proper democracy, and that is what he will do".⁸

The leaders' wives are also party to this cozy relationship, a fact which the Schröders have emphasized by adopting a three-year old girl from a Russian orphanage. When searching for a justification of the special personal relationship between the German and Russian leaders, the simple fact that Schröder can speak to Putin in his mother tongue— unlike any other European head of government— cannot be overlooked. One can look for further justifications in the personalities of the two men and in their résumés—both had family members who fell victim to the Second World War and therefore both now feel obliged to work on reconciliation between Germans and Russians, and overcome their problematic history. As lawyers, both understand their country's economic interests: the German Chancellor is known for his willingness not to ruin economic opportunity with inflexible foreign policies, and therefore accommodates Putin's "realpolitik" and "pragmatism".

Quite apart from the personal relationship between Schröder and Putin, the German government is now faced with the fundamental question of how far it really wants to emphasize its bilateral links in dealings with Russia. This in turn leads to the question of whether relations between Germany and Russia are not characterized by special circumstances, which in turn creates a special intensity in their mutual relations.

⁶ "Schröder in Moscow: Yukos? No Problem!", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 July 2004.

⁷ Homepage of the Federal Government's Press and Information Office <www.bundesregierung.de/artikel-,413.706424/Enge-europaeisch-russische-Zus.htm>.

⁸ Interview with Max Beckmann on the ARD programme of the same name, 23 November 2004 <www.bundeskanzler.de/Interviews-.7716.749656/Toleranz-heisst-nicht-Gleichgultigkeit.htm>.

The Basic Structure and State of German-Russian Relations

After the end of the East-West confrontation, the fall of the Berlin wall, and 60 years after the end of the Second World War, German-Russian relations are, as far as is possible, unencumbered by the burden of the past, at least for the political elites in both countries. There are neither unresolved questions of territory between Germany and Russia (not even over Königsberg/Kaliningrad), nor ethnic/religious tensions, which have poisoned relations between other states. Problems such as the unresolved issue of looted artworks or the rehabilitation of German minorities living in Russia do not appear to put any great strain on German-Russian relations.

In economic spheres, Germany is Russia's top partner in three domains: Germany is Russia's largest trading partner, its most important foreign investor (including portfolio investments), and its largest international creditor. German support for building up a market economy in Russia is acknowledged, and not rebuked as American attempts to exert influence on Russian economic reforms have been. Russia views German investments and commercial partnerships positively. Germany is particularly involved in issues of environmental cooperation, including the destruction of chemical weapons and, together with the United States, the disposal of nuclear waste from the submarines of Russia's North Sea Fleet.

From the perspective of Germany's manufacturing industry, Russia offers a sales market with a high potential for growth, and therefore contributes to the preservation of jobs in Germany. Reciprocally, Russia is an important supplier of energy sources to Germany, in particular of crude oil and natural gas. Approximately 30% of Germany's imported crude oil comes from Russia, which represents just under 20% of Russian crude oil exports. Roughly 40% of German natural gas imports originates from Russia, which represents 25% of Russian natural gas exports. However, Germany is, as a result, not entirely at the mercy of Russia, neither for natural gas or crude oil, since suppliers from Norway to Algeria to Iran are already, or at least soon will be, in a competitive market position and could compensate for any shortfall in Russian supply. Consequently, Germany can guarantee its security in terms of energy sources by diversifying its sources of supply, and need not fulfill all its energy needs from a single supplier country. There is, therefore, no reason for Germany's policy on Russia to be shaped entirely by energy policies.

On a political level, the links between Germany and Russia have a breadth and closeness that no other EU country has achieved. In addition to regular governmental consultations, both countries are involved in forums for discussion such as the Petersburg Dialogue or the German-Russian Forum. Russia is the principle target of German foreign cultural policy. Currently, 525 university partnerships take part in the German-Russian scientific exchange program. Partnerships have also been formed at the level of states, towns and communities. Among others, the Eastern Committee of the German Economy, and the Strategic Working Group coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labor are active in the field of economic cooperation, as well as representatives of German and Russian industry within the framework of round-table discussions. The German presence in Russia goes far beyond mere representations of companies, and encompasses a multitude of organizations and foundations.

Contrary to what many foreign and security policy-makers in Moscow, the United States or most of the EU may think, Germany is not a geo-strategic rival of Russia in the CIS or anywhere else for that matter. Conversely, Russia is an indispensable partner for Germany on the international stage: the two countries are increasingly working together on counter-terrorism; Russia has facilitated German deployment to Afghanistan by granting the Federal Armed Forces permission to travel through Russian airspace and territory; Russia has, moreover, also supported German ambitions to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Germany helped found both the EU joint strategy on Russia and the European concept of the "Common Spaces". Germany was the first EU member to simplify the visa process for travel to Germany, which has been in force since January 2004.

Russia hopes that Germany will be more understanding of its needs than the "Brussels bureaucrats". For this reason, Russian foreign policy gives preference to bilateral relations with countries such as Germany over the EU as a whole. For its part, Germany could use its cordial relationship with Russia to improve understanding of the EU in Russia and thus act as a motor for their rapprochement, which the EU seeks, in the framework of a "privileged partnership". The fact that Russia and the EU, as well as Russia and Germany, have different understandings of the objective and substance that such a rapprochement process implies, however, precludes this wish. The issue is the meaning of "values" within the concept of a "strategic partnership", and also the relationship between values and interests.

Rhetoric and Reality of the Partnership

Russia and Germany both call themselves “strategic partners”. In view of the frequency with which this term is used in international relations, this alone should not mean a great deal. Russia’s real partner in terms of military and security policy is and will remain the United States. Germany, by contrast, is first and foremost an economic partner, from which Russia primarily expects aid with economic, but not social, modernization. Moreover, Russian foreign policy views the strategic partnership with Germany, and the EU, as a means of expanding Russia’s international clout, not only in regards to the United States but East Asia as well. Within this geopolitical construct, however, Russia does not expect any influence to be exerted on its internal affairs.

As Moscow’s efforts in Brussels during the drafting of the “Road Map” for implementing the “Common Spaces” have shown, Russia interprets strategic partnership above all as economic and technical cooperation.⁹ However, with this cooperation, not all that glitters is gold. Germany is indeed Russia’s most important trading partner. But Russia ranks only 14th amongst all Germany’s international trading partners for imports, and 15th for exports. Russia is not even in a leading position in terms of German trade to the East: she takes third place after the Czech Republic and Poland, barely ahead of Hungary.

As a result of Rurhgas AG’s share of Gazprom, Germany is the largest total investor in Russia, with the accumulated portfolio of German investments making up 15.6% of total foreign investments in Russia. However, if only direct investment, which has a major effect on economic performance, is taken into account, Germany falls to fourth place behind the Netherlands, Cyprus (!) and the United States, with a total of US\$ 3.8 billion invested. In view of Russia’s geographical size, her population and her resources, and compared with the level of investment in other parts of the world (in China, for example), these investments remain relatively meager.

There is a prevailing suspicion that the German government is, for political reasons, making concessions to Russia that are not economically justifiable, or that it is giving Russia precedence over other countries. One example of this is the remission of most of the 6.4 billion Euro debt: at the summit in Weimar in April 2002, Chancellor Schröder agreed to a ruling allowing Russia to pay only 500 million Euros of this debt.

⁹ Fundamental to the economic aspects, see C. Meier, *German-Russian Economic Relations under Putin*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, SWP Study, November 2004, p. 42.

A second example is the issuing of bonds connected with Russia's outstanding debts and early debt redemption. In June 2005, the German Federal Court of Auditors concluded that, in view of low refinancing costs, the sale of outstanding Russian debt is not economically justifiable as an alternative to borrowing. As a result of this transaction, the German government is faced with additional costs of approximately 1.2 billion Euros. As far as early debt redemption is concerned—at the German-Russian summit meeting in Hamburg and Gottorp in December 2004, Putin called this a “big Christmas present”—the German government has lost out, since the rate of interest originally agreed was much higher than the current refinancing rate. Repayments would only be economically advantageous if an extra 13 percent had been agreed to offset this difference.¹⁰

A third example is the German government's support for a natural gas pipeline from Russia to Germany along the Baltic seabed. Implementing this project would free Russia, not to mention Finland, from paying transit costs. On the other hand, this project would be very expensive—currently estimated at around 5 billion Euros. The German side would also have to take into account the request made to the European Commission in April 2005 by the prime ministers of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia to support a pipeline running from North-West Russia through their three countries to Germany (dubbed the “Amber” project).

In addition to the economic factors, Germany has, on many occasions, declared itself ready to enter into a strategic partnership with Russia on the basis of shared values. In accordance with the recommendations of the European Council, these values are democracy, the rule of law, a free-market system with fair competition, and respect for human rights. In other words: the partnership with Russia should be based on broad fundamental European values, and it is expected that Russia will implement these basic values as well. From a European point of view, this requirement goes without saying: these European values are considered an indispensable and appropriate basis for the creation of a modern state together with a modern economy.

There are two ways out of this dilemma: either both sides reduce their demands to a more realistic level, or they abide by the shared values and undertake further endeavors to put these into practice. Both strategies have their pros and cons. Within the framework of the first approach, some observers of EU-Russia relations are demanding that discussions on values and debates on strategy not be forced, since they see these two issues as missing the point. Instead, those involved should concentrate on achieving their aims and striving for agreements on questions of detail. Examples of this approach are the concessions made to Russia by the EU in Luxembourg in April 2004 in return for Moscow's agreement to expand the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to include the ten new EU accession countries, and also the trade-off of agreements that took place in Moscow at the EU-Russia

¹⁰ “Government Wasted More than 1.2 billion Euros, Federal Court of Auditors Calls Actions with Russian Demands Uneconomic”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 June 2005, p. 5.

summit in May of the same year, in which the EU agreed to support Russia's bid to become member of the WTO, in return for Russia's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

However, both the EU and Germany have committed themselves to a strategic partnership with Russia that is intended to stand for more than merely pragmatic cooperation in limited areas. More precisely, this should include a common agenda with long-term projects as well as the intention to intensify bilateral relations and implement shared values. The German side can hardly shy away from this model of strategic partnership without calling into question the entirety of the EU's policy toward Russia.

Stability Versus Democracy?

During the Yeltsin era, transformation to democracy and a free-market economy with fair competition was high on the Western agenda and, at least in the early stages of “new Russia”, also on Moscow’s list of priorities. These days, this has been superseded by the concept of “stability”. But is this positioning really in the West’s and Russia’s best interests? Is a Russian-style “authoritarian stabilization”—that is, the “Putin system”—really stable? In Russia, at any rate, democracy and stability are often seen as mutually exclusive. Yet in European terms, stability is presumed to be legitimized by a democratic process. The close link between a modern state and a developed, democratic society is not sufficiently understood in Russia. People fear the disarray inherent to a free society and public meddling in conflicts, particularly in regards to criticisms of the government and President by powers independent of the state.

This dismantling of the power balance and the establishment of the Putinist “vertical power” has indeed reached a critical level.

- The political system is being altered bit by bit: a new law on political parties has made it considerably harder to found a new party. From 2007, the threshold for representation in the Duma will be raised to 7% of all votes. Direct mandates for election to the Duma have been abolished.
- Governors are no longer elected by the public but by the Regional Parliaments, upon the President’s recommendation. This means that the Kremlin, in effect, appoints the governors.
- Former secret-service agents and representatives of other powerful ministries and offices are unmistakably filtering into the policy-determining presidential administration and also to governmental machinery and management boards of important state-run and semi-state-run corporations.
- Despite the fact that Putin originally called for the state to keep out of economic matters, re-nationalization is becoming more and more apparent: in the energy sector, the state-run company Rosneft has taken over Yuganskneftegas, a core part of Yukos, and the state’s share of Gazprom has increased to over 50 percent. Encroaching state control is also clear in military-industrial areas.

- The freedom of the media has been further restricted since national television broadcast was handed over to state direction, or at least subjected to state control, after the terrorist attack in Moscow's "Dubrovka" theatre; according to the report by "Reporters Without Borders", Russia is currently ranked 147th for freedom of the press on a list of 167 countries investigated.
- Scientists addressing military issues and journalists uncovering sensitive stories run the risk of being sentenced to lengthy imprisonment (Grigori Pasko, Alexander Nikitin, Igor Sutjagin, Valentin Moisejev, Valentin Danilov).
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are hampered and intimidated by governmental control measures and taxation. The right of assembly has been restricted by law. In keeping with Soviet tradition, Putin accuses NGOs of carrying out subversive activities for foreign financiers.
- There has not been a single attempt to carry out military reform to integrate the army into a democratic and constitutional society, shaping it to the needs of society. "Alternative conscription" is now being controlled so restrictively, in keeping with the beliefs of the General Staff, that practically nobody signs up for it.

Taken individually, these measures and failures are far from decisive, yet together they point to a significant change in the political system. However, Russia's current leaders still do not understand how a modern state can be dependent on a society in which stability is not guaranteed by supervision from above, but rather by "checks and balances", any more than they understood the idea 15 years ago that competition and free prices do not cause chaos, but facilitate an efficient economy. Conversely, they overestimate how effective "vertical power" can be, and are ignoring lessons learned from the downfall of the Soviet system. One of these is that, in a centralized bureaucratic system, nobody wants to take on any responsibility, which results in decisions being put off and mistakes being covered up; corruption prevails throughout the administrative organization, and by intimidating the media, the political leadership robs itself of the only effective means of counteracting corruption and abuses of power.

In Russia, people do not understand the fact that the West cannot and does not have any interest in weakening Russia. Even the global superpower, the United States, which thinks, like Russia, in geo-strategic terms, needs Russia to be strong—not only to counterbalance China by contributing to a traditional understanding of balance of powers (because China is increasingly threatening to develop into a second global power), but also to be an active partner in the battle against new challenges and threats. Nor is the EU interested in a weak Russia, which could spread instability to its periphery. Therefore, the image of a Western world hostile to Russia and only interested in its natural resources – which is circulating in Moscow's halls of power – is a misconception that could and should be dispelled by means of public

clarification. Other issues that require public discussion between Germany and Russia are Chechnya and Russia's relations with her western CIS neighbors.

Chechnya – also a German and European Problem?

In keeping with the opinion long-held by the Kremlin, Chechnya is part of Russia's internal affairs. The Kremlin insists that Chechnya gaining its independence would result in a domino effect, whereby other "Islamic" Russian republics of the North Caucasus, as well as Bashkortostan and Tatarstan would also break away. There is no solution for the problem other than "Chechenisation"—that is, the gradual transfer of power to governors chosen by Moscow and introduced via rigged elections. Some people, including Putin himself, reproach Western critics for wanting to grant Chechnya its independence, and thereby cause the collapse of the Russian Federation. In reality, the conflict in Chechnya has long been an international problem, since it has implications for the whole of the Caucasus region and could lead to the destabilization not only of Russia, but of other states in the region, Georgia in particular.

When Putin visited Hamburg and Gottorp in December 2004, on the one hand he brushed off demonstrators (in German) calling for an end to the war in Chechnya: "There has been no more war in Chechnya for three years. It is over. You can go home. Merry Christmas". On the other hand he appeared "quite willing" to speak to German representatives "at length" about possible solutions to the Chechnya problem. The proposals offered by Germany were being "analyzed in great detail", he said, adding: "we would like to accept them wholly and completely".¹¹

It was not clear to observers, however, which proposals could have been discussed here, unless it was mere pondering of a stability pact for the Caucasus, which has, since the tragedy in Beslan, been reinstated as an issue in German politics—in particular by Gernot Erler, the coordinator of German policy on Russia. He has, however, put three conditions on this, which Moscow has not yet fulfilled. The first condition is that a truthful, unembellished account must be given of the situation in Chechnya. The second is an end to the use of force by Russian troops and special forces made up of police and secret

¹¹ On 20th December 2004 in Hamburg, Federal Chancellery website <www.bundestkanzler.de/Neues-vom-Kanzler-.7698.762839/Wladimir-Putin-ist-offen-fuer-Vorschlaege-der-Eu...htm>.

service members, against civilians. The third is reconstruction measures that would offer the population real socio-economic prospects.¹²

Two integral parts of the move towards Europeanization of the Chechnya conflict that Putin hinted at in Hamburg are the discussion group made up of high-ranking German and Russian officials, which plans to meet twice-yearly to discuss issues of human rights, and the roundtable organized by the Council of Europe. The first such roundtable took place at the end of March 2005 in Strasbourg, and was attended by 31 representatives from Russian, Chechen and Western interest groups. Two features of the meeting were noteworthy: first, that it took place at all, in view of the recent killing of the former Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov, and second, as the German correspondent in Russia—Rudolf Bindig—noted, that throughout the meeting, only one person uttered the opinion otherwise voiced frequently by Russia, namely that the situation in Chechnya was brought about by international terrorism.¹³

Intermediaries from European countries, including Germany, will be able to play an important role in granting limited autonomy to Chechnya, and in internationalizing the conflict gradually on the basis of the criteria set out by Erler. However, Moscow has still not given its essential consent for a “Road Map” of this kind. Nevertheless, it would not be the correct approach for Western and German politicians to remove the Chechen problem from their agendas entirely, and simply put it on the backburner. A separate question is whether Europe even has any desire to get actively involved in the Caucasus, and whether Germany wants to play a leading role there. At least the Beslan tragedy gave an impetus to deliberations in Berlin and Brussels on the need for developing a cooperative stability policy (to include Russia) for the North Caucasus and thus also for Chechnya.¹⁴

¹² “That is a real novelty”, interview with Uwe Halbach, expert on Russia and the Caucasus from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 22 December 2004, p. 2.

¹³ “Chechnya Round Tables to be Continued”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 23 March 2005, p. 4.

¹⁴ The motion “Stabilization Policy in the Caucasus and the Future of Chechnya”, proposed in the German Bundestag by the governing party in February 2005 and adopted by the Committee for Human Rights in March of the same year, contained preparations for this.

Germany, the New Members and the EU's "New Neighbors"

A regional space has emerged within Europe, between Russia and Germany, in which cooperation and competition overlap. There, visions of a "wider Europe" and a "wider Russia" are at odds. This area encompasses not only the EU's official "new neighbors"—which, since the meeting of foreign ministers in Luxembourg in June 2004, now includes the South Caucasus, as well as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova—but also new Eastern and Central European members, primarily Poland and the Baltic states.

Russian policy in this area remains problematic. Russian thinking is characterized by concepts such as spheres of influence and zero sum games (one side's profit is the other side's loss). This manifests itself in various ways: as pressure on the Baltic countries by politicizing, among other things, the question of ethnic minority groups; in the absence of any effort to persuade Lukashenko to make space for democratic and constitutional relations in Belarus; in the blatant intervention of autumn and winter last year in favor of the conservative faction in power in Ukraine—to the point of trying to validate the rigged elections there (Putin twice congratulating the "election winner", Yanukovich, is a case in point); in insisting on the presence of Russian troops in Moldova and supporting the regime in Transnistria; and finally in its support of a separatist South Ossetia in Georgia, and the *de facto* incorporation of separatist Abkhazia, even after Moscow declared its willingness to close the two remaining Russian bases there.

One might have thought that Germany would take seriously the concerns of the new EU members in respect to Russian neo-imperial tendencies, that it would have helped reinforce the sovereignty of the new states and prevent any cleavage from developing within EU policy with regard to Russia. It has paid lip service to such a policy, but has never implemented it seriously. Similarly, Germany has only half-heartedly supported NATO membership for the Baltic countries. By contrast, Schröder came out strongly in favor of a gas pipeline built along the Baltic seabed in bilateral talks with Putin at Hanover in April 2005. Schröder's unreserved consent to take part, along with Putin, in the celebration of Königsberg's 750th anniversary, ignoring the fact that the Presidents of Kaliningrad's neighboring states Poland and

Lithuania were *not* invited, is also indicative of the German government's insensitivity to issues relating to Eastern and Central Europe.¹⁵

And while Poland and Lithuania have been emphatically in favor of free and fair elections in Ukraine, along with a non-violent change of power since the beginning, German policy has been more quiet. This is due to the fact that the "Orange Revolution" brought about an unpleasant situation for Berlin, and certainly put Schröder and Putin's "personal friendship" to the test. The "soft policy" seemed bound to fail. However, when there was nothing left for Putin to do but recognize the will of the Ukrainian voters and focus on damage control instead, word came from the Chancellor's entourage that the opposite was true, namely, that "soft policy" had been a success. This was because the "change" in Russian policy on the Ukraine question could be attributed to telephone conversations between the Chancellor and Putin.

Nevertheless, Germany's position on Ukraine, like the majority of EU-15 governments, has remained cool. Indeed, the German government is in favor of beginning negotiations on EU accession for Turkey, but has discouraged Ukraine to make any official attempts to join.

¹⁵ As a reaction to this, among other reasons, the Lithuanian embassy in Berlin issued a statement in which it also quoted a Lithuanian political scientist saying that the "ostentatious non-observance" of Lithuania and Poland emphasises the Kremlin's attempts to get Berlin on Moscow's side and form a "new, historically-charged Moscow-Berlin axis". It claimed that Germany did not comprehend how Russia was using this to try and manipulate recent history. "Sharp Lithuanian Criticism for German Foreign Policy", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 June 2005, p. 6.

Where Now in German-Russian Relations?

German-Russian relations are characterized, as shown above, by a special depth and intensity. This relationship should, and will, be strengthened further. However, critics of the German policy claim that the partnership between the two countries is only limited.

Chancellor Schröder's vision of a strategic partnership encompasses, as clarified in the Bundestag debate on December 1, 2004, the preservation of peace in Europe, economic cooperation—including in the field of energy—and the sponsoring of meetings between "civil societies" within the framework of the "Petersburg Dialogue". However, this is not enough for a strategic partnership on EU terms, that is, long-term bonds formed between partners who fully agree on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and a free-market economy.

If, in the context of a "strategic" partnership with Russia, the preservation of peace in Europe relies on military-strategic aspects without the participation of the United States and NATO, this will in the foreseeable future over-stretch both German and European policy too far. An all-too-close security cooperation between Germany and Russia or Europe and Russia would run the risk of developing military "counterweights" and thus undermine the alliance with the United States. As far as the preservation of peace is concerned, this would not only be unhelpful, it could actually be rather damaging.

Limiting partnership to strategic economic cooperation is also not an option—and not just because the state would use a politicized and therefore unsuitable instrument to meddle in company affairs. Moreover, simple economic cooperation that does not include other aspects would not be understood by either German or European society (apart from business circles).

The "civil society dialogue" in its current form, as meetings between leaders of both countries, appears to be a step in the right direction, even if it has little effect on public debate in Russia. A comprehensive strategic partnership between Germany and Russia should, in accordance with EU visions, be primarily dedicated to ensuring that Russia and the other CIS states fully embrace democracy and the market economy, while ensuring that human

rights and civil freedoms are maintained. In view of the current trends in Russia's development, this task is by no means an easy one, but to neglect it would serve neither German nor Russian interests. The spectrum of possible reactions to this stretches from embarrassed silence to vociferous hostility. It is, however, possible and desirable to adopt a more balanced approach between these two extremes, as American politicians and diplomats have done. That is, to express well-reasoned and clearly-formulated criticism in public, while simultaneously avoiding unnecessary controversy.