
**German-Russian Relations:
Change of Paradigm versus
'Business as Usual'**

Hannes Adomeit

February 2015

Study Committee for Franco-German Relations



Ifri is a research center and a forum for debate on major international political and economic issues. Headed by Thierry de Montbrial since its founding in 1979, Ifri is a non-governmental and a non-profit organization. As an independent think tank, Ifri sets its own research agenda, publishing its findings regularly for a global audience.

With offices in Paris and Brussels, Ifri stands out as one of the rare French think tanks to have positioned itself at the very heart of European debate. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Ifri brings together political and economic decision-makers, researchers and internationally renowned experts to animate its debates and research activities.

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's alone and do not reflect the official views of their institutions.

This issue of « Notes du Cerfa » is published in the framework of the « Dialogue d'avenir franco-allemand » (Franco-German Future Dialogue), a cooperative project between the Study Committee for Franco-German Relations (Cerfa) of the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), the German Council on Foreign Relations (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik – DGAP) and the

Robert Bosch Stiftung

Cerfa's research activities, editorial and publication secretariat are supported by the *Centre d'analyse, de prévision et de stratégie* of the ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Développement international and by the *Frankreich-Referat* of the Auswärtiges Amt.



Editor : Hans Stark

ISBN : 978-2-36567-352-5

© All rights reserved – Ifri – 2015

Ifri
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
Email : ifri@ifri.org

Ifri-Bruxelles
Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21
1000 – Bruxelles – BELGIQUE
Tél. : +32 (0)2 238 51 10
Fax : +32 (0)2 238 51 15
Email : bruxelles@ifri.org

Site Internet : ifri.org

Author

Until 2013, Hannes Adomeit was Professor at the Natolin (Warsaw) campus of the College of Europe, teaching courses on the EU and Russia. He was until December 2007 Senior Research Associate at the Research Institute for International Politics and Security (SWP) in Berlin. Prior to that he was Professor for International Politics and Director of the Program on Russia and East-Central Europe at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston and Fellow at the Harvard Russian Research Center.

Professor Adomeit holds university degrees from the Freie Universität Berlin (Diplom) and Columbia University, New York (Certificate in Russian Studies, M.A., and Ph.D. “with distinction”). He has worked with the EU’s Conflict Prevention Network (CPN) on EU-Russia relations.

Abstract

In 2014, Germany's relations with Russia markedly deteriorated. The decline was precipitous but it did not occur suddenly. It began some time before Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the Kremlin's support for separatism and thinly concealed military intervention in eastern Ukraine. In the period from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 through Gerhard Schröder's chancellorship (1998–2005), Germany was Russia's privileged partner in Europe. In that sense, Berlin had a 'special relationship' with Moscow, officially labelled 'strategic partnership'. Such patterns of the past raise the question whether the current crisis in German-Russian relations is merely a temporary phenomenon, a downturn that will again be replaced almost literally by 'business as usual', or if the present deterioration of relations is to be regarded as a change of paradigm that encompasses all dimensions of policy and is likely to persist for the foreseeable future?

This *Note du Cerfa* attempts to answer this question. In doing so, it will first focus on changes of perception and paradigm on six different levels, that are decisive for the formulation of Germany's policy vis-à-vis Russia. These include: (1) the effects of Putin's new domestic and foreign course; (2) the position of the German Green party on the government's Russia policy; (3) shifts in SPD perceptions of Russia; (4) the consensus of the CDU/CSU-SPD coalition government vis-à-vis Russia; (5) the importance of Russia for German industry and commerce and Germany's dependency on Russian gas; (6) the public opinion vis-à-vis Russia.

Second, the analysis will look at the conclusions drawn by the German government for the conduct of policy. In this regard it is noteworthy that the policies of the current German government vis-à-vis Russia have, from the very beginning of the coalition's formation on 17 December 2013, been remarkably firm and consistent. This is quite contrary to previous crises when, as after the Georgian war in August 2008, Berlin quickly returned to 'business as usual' in its relations with Moscow. To some extent, the central role that Germany has played in the management of relations with Russia in the crisis over Ukraine can be said to give substance to statements made by

President Joachim Gauck, Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen at the 50th Munich Security Conference in 2014 that Germany should be more active and should assume greater responsibility in international affairs. There are, however, limits to the deviation from previous patterns of policy, which concern in particular the security and defence dimensions of the crisis.

Consequently, if one posits partnership and cooperation, as well as the 'Russia first' approach, to have been the constituent elements of the German paradigm for the relationship, then the paradigm has changed. The new paradigm is that of the management of conflict.

Table of content

INTRODUCTION	5
CHANGES OF PERCEPTION	9
The effects of Putin’s new course	9
Green Party support	11
Shifts in SPD perceptions	12
The government consensus	14
The role of German industry and commerce	15
Public opinion and the influence of the ‘Russland- Versteher’	19
GOVERNMENT POLICY: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY.....	23
Policy changes	23
Unchanged policies.....	27
CONCLUSION.....	31

Introduction

In 2014, Germany's relations with Russia markedly deteriorated. The decline was precipitous but it did not occur suddenly. It began some time before Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the Kremlin's support for separatism and thinly concealed military intervention in eastern Ukraine. This development is of enormous significance for the political and security architecture in Europe and beyond. In the period from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 through Gerhard Schröder's chancellorship (1998–2005), Germany was Russia's privileged partner in Europe. In that sense, Berlin had *Sonderbeziehungen*; that is, a 'special relationship' with Moscow, officially labeled 'strategic partnership'.¹ That state of affairs did not change significantly during Angela Merkel's first term in office as chancellor in the 'grand coalition' government of the conservatives (CDU/CSU) and the social democrats (SPD) in 2005–2009. Then vice-chancellor and foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier returned to the SPD's conceptual approach to relations with the Soviet Union of *Wandel durch Annäherung* or 'change through rapprochement',² simply reformulating it as *Annäherung durch Verflechtung* or

¹ The website of the German Foreign Ministry, accessed on January 10, 2015, in its latest revision of March 3, 2014, still leads the visitor from *Außenpolitik* (foreign policy) via *Regionale Schwerpunkte* (regional foci) to *Russland* and from there to *Strategische Partnerschaft mit Russland*; see: <www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/Russland/Russland_node.html>. For criticism of this characterization see: Hannes Adomeit, « La politique russe de l'Allemagne: la fin de la lune de miel? », *Note du Cerfa*, n° 26, September 2005, <www.ifri.org/?page=detail-contribution&id=5436&id_provenance=97> and *id.* « German-Russian Relations: Balance Sheet since 2000 and Perspectives until 2025 », for the French Ministry of Defense and the Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri), Paris, 2012, <www.defense.gouv.fr/das/reflexion-strategique/etudes-prospectives-et-strategiques/consultation>. The present *Note du Cerfa* builds on these two studies.

² The concept of 'change through rapprochement' was originally developed by Egon Bahr, « Wandel durch Annäherung », *Deutschland Archiv*, n° 8 (1973), pp. 862-65. The article is based on his speech of July 15, 1963 at the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing. Ostpolitik as conducted by Willy Brandt as German chancellor (1969–1974) constituted a deliberate application of Bahr's conceptualization.

'rapprochement through interweaving' or 'interlocking'.³ Changes in Germany's approach also failed to take place after Russia's military intervention in Georgia and its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in August 2008. Berlin not only rather quickly returned to 'business as usual' but attempted to provide the 'strategic partnership' with substance in the form of a 'partnership for modernization'.⁴

Such patterns of the past raise the question whether the current crisis in German-Russian relations is merely a temporary phenomenon, a downturn that will again be replaced almost literally by 'business as usual', i.e., that the sanctions regime will be terminated and economic relations will return to the forefront of the relationship. Or, to pose the alternative question, is the present deterioration of relations to be regarded as a change of paradigm that encompasses all dimensions of policy and is likely to persist for the foreseeable future?

The attempt to answer these questions has four parts. The first features several *propositions* or theses. The second deals with changes in *perception*. The third looks at the conclusions drawn by the German government for the conduct of *policy*. In the final part, some thought will be given to how the relationship will most likely develop in the short to medium term.

Propositions

Current German policy towards Russia, understood as that of the government, that is, the ruling 'grand coalition' between the CDU, its sister party and Bavarian wing CSU, and the SPD, has changed significantly, if not fundamentally. The change is likely to last for the foreseeable future, making a quick return to 'business as usual' highly unlikely. To that extent, the answer to the above question is that the change has relatively more of a tidal quality and is more a change of paradigm rather than a temporary deviation from previous patterns of perception and policy. There are a number of reasons for this.

³ Frank-Walter Steinmeier, « Verflechtung und Integration. Eine neue Ostpolitik der EU », *Internationale Politik*, Vol. 62, n° 3, March 2007, pp. 6-11.

⁴ « Für eine deutsch-russische Modernisierungspartnerschaft », Rede des Außenministers Frank-Walter Steinmeier am Institut für internationale Beziehungen der Ural-Universität in Jekaterinburg, *Auswärtiges-amt.de*, 13.05.2008, <www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2008/080513-BM-Russland.html>.

- First and foremost, *Russian domestic and foreign policies*, which had already been on a more authoritarian, anti-democratic course in the last year of the ‘tandem’ of then president Dmitry Medvedev and prime minister Vladimir Putin, have changed radically since the return of the latter to the presidency for a third term.
- Second, support for a corresponding change in German government policy has consistently been extended by the *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (hereafter the Green Party or the Greens). The support has its roots in the comprehensive transformation of its foreign policy stance, notably under the leadership of Joschka Fischer as vice-chancellor and foreign minister (1998–2005) in the Schröder government.
- Third, within the SPD, *more sober assessments* of the party’s *Ostpolitik* and conceptual approaches towards Russia now prevail. The idea that building a broad network of contacts and exchanges (*Verflechtung*) as well as trade and economic exchanges would give rise to a middle class that, in turn, would promote democratic change, have not entirely been abandoned. However, the party today harbors few illusions about current realities and trends of Russian domestic and foreign policy.⁵
- Fourth, there are *no important differences in perception* between the two main coalition partners in government. Concerning policies to be conducted on that basis, there are still differences between a more ‘hard line’ stance adopted by Chancellor Merkel (that prevails) and a more ‘Russia-friendly’, compromise-prone orientation of Foreign Minister Steinmeier.

⁵ To clarify terms, on its own website, *Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft* is translated as ‘Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations’ and described as an ‘organization of the leading associations representing German business [with] membership open to companies with interests in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, South-East Europe, the Caucasian Republics and Central Asia’. As the description of its geographical scope indicates, the organization’s focus goes far beyond ‘Eastern Europe’; <www.ost-ausschuss.de/a-common-initiative-economic-associations-and-enterprises>. *Ostpolitik* covers German policy to the countries east of the Oder River, notably the countries of the former Warsaw Pact and the former Soviet Union.

However, such differences have not significantly affected the actual conduct of policy.⁶

- Fifth, perceptions of *German dependency* on Russian gas, the importance of Russia for German industry and commerce as well as the dominant role of the *Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft* (hereafter *Ost-Ausschuss*) for German policy-making are *exaggerated*. German industry, by and large, has acknowledged the primacy of politics over economics.
- Sixth, the notion that German public opinion is invariably 'pro-Russian', disposed to appeasement policies and categorically against sanctions, is incorrect. *Public opinion is more differentiated and more critical of Russia* than is widely assumed.

⁶ One of the first signs of Steinmeier's change in perception was evident as early as December 17, 2013 when, in his inaugural speech at the German Foreign Office, he stated that 'it is outrageous (*empörend*) how Russia's policy has used Ukraine's economic plight to prevent [it from signing] the EU association agreement'. 'Rede von Außenminister Frank-Walter Steinmeier bei der Amtsübergabe im Auswärtigen Amt', *Auswärtiges-amt*, December 17, 2013, <www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2013/131217-BM_Antrittsrede.html>.

Changes of Perception

The effects of Putin's new course

A major manifestation of dissatisfaction with the development of Russian domestic politics and its consequences for Germany's policy became apparent on November 9, 2012. On that day, the parliament discussed three motions, one tabled by the ruling conservatives and liberals, a second by the social democrats and a third by the Greens. Whereas the SPD motion was somewhat more restrained in tone and that of the Green Party more critical, all the motions expressed concern over increasing authoritarianism and the repression of civil society in Russia, listing politically motivated court decisions, imprisonment of government critics, limitation of the freedom of the media, criminalization of peaceful protests, and many other negative features of the political system as it had developed under Putin. The CDU/CSU-FDP motion, which was carried unanimously, with the SPD and Die Linke (leftists), abstaining, culminated in the statement that the German parliament 'notes with grave concern that ever since President Vladimir Putin has reassumed office, legislative and legal measures have been taken in Russia which in their entirety are aimed at widening control of active citizens, criminalizing critical engagement and pursuing a confrontational line against government critics'.⁷

Based on that diagnosis, the resolution contained a total of 17 proposals as to what the government should do in its upcoming negotiations with Moscow. Their gist was that it should take the Kremlin to task for the direction it has chosen in domestic politics; that it should abandon the technocratic, administrative 'top-down' management of politics, the economy and society; and that it should embark on a genuine partnership with Germany along the lines of the

⁷ « Durch Zusammenarbeit Zivilgesellschaft und Rechtsstaatlichkeit in Russland stärken », German Bundestag, 17th electoral term, motion tabled by the CDU/CSU and the FDP parliamentary groups, November 6, 2012, <<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/113/1711327.pdf>>.

German understanding of modernization. It should stress to Moscow the point that modernization should not be limited to economic and technological matters (this is what the Russian government, in effect, wanted) but include 'the promotion of democracy, human rights, a law-based state, a civil society, active engagement by the citizenry and the rise of a broad middle class'.

In fact, the resolution correctly noted a major policy change that had begun to take place somewhat earlier, with the launching of Putin's Eurasian Union project on October 3, 2011 and the massive popular demonstrations in protest against the manipulation and falsification of the December 4, 2011 Duma elections. In the domestic realm, this policy change included a radical turn away from cooperation with the liberal, democratic, urban and open-minded segments of Russian society to the mobilization of conservative, orthodox and national-patriotic social forces and economic interests for maintaining the status quo. In policies towards the Near Abroad, the policy change became manifest in the more determined opposition to any 'color revolutions' that might occur, reassertion of Russian influence and control on post-Soviet space, and the use of both 'soft' and 'hard' power to that end. Lastly, its foreign policy shifted from cooperation with American and European partners on the modernization of the Russian economy to reliance on internal resources (above all Russia's natural resources – oil and gas), and the use of its the military-industrial complex as a 'motor' or 'locomotive' of economic development.⁸

The policy change of autumn 2011 and spring 2012 provides an important explanation for the Kremlin's approach to Ukraine, including its annexation of Crimea and its intervention in the eastern parts of the country. It is not the perception of external threats, including NATO enlargement to the east that prompted the comprehensive shift, but rather considerations of how the 'Putin system' could maintain power effectively in conditions of waning legitimacy.

⁸ The use of the defence industry as a 'motor' or 'locomotive' of economic development has been advocated, albeit intermittently, by Putin ever since his ascent to power in 2000; for the reassertion of that theme at the time of the policy change in autumn 2011 and spring 2012, see, for instance: « Быть сильными: гарантии национальной безопасности для России, *Российская газета* » ("To be strong: the guarantee of Russia's national security"), *Rg.ru*, February 20, 2012, <www.rg.ru/2012/02/20/putin-armiya.html>.

This problematic development has duly been noted by a research institute close to SPD viewpoints. Its authors conclude:

“Contrary to a widespread view, especially held in Germany, that interprets Russia’s behavior primarily in response to years of rejection of the country by the West, we regard [Russia’s turn away from the West] as a symptom of a deep political change having endogenous causes. [...] The key question therefore concerns less an interactive dynamics between Moscow, Brussels and Washington but rather the objectives of the Russian leadership.”⁹

The comprehensive policy change in Moscow also serves to explain the resilience of the German government’s reaction – including that of its social democratic component. It likewise explains the steadfast support of the Greens for the government’s Russia policy.

Green Party support

To foreign observers, the position of the German Greens on the government’s Russia policy may seem surprising. After all, that party has a long tradition of anti-establishment sentiment in domestic politics and a preference for ‘soft’, peaceful – non-military and non-violent – approaches to foreign affairs. The latter has included the rejection of ‘hard’ measures such as the use of economic sanctions. However, at the same time, the party has always been conscious of the close link between domestic and foreign policy, and been an adherent of the theories of ‘democratic peace’; that is, the notion that democratic nations tend to be more peaceful than authoritarian systems or dictatorships in international affairs. From such perspectives, the severe criticism of Russia and the plea for a tough reaction to Putin’s turnaround are merely a consistent application of that theory. Indeed, in the discussion of the above-mentioned Bundestag resolution, it was the Greens, above all, who did not mince words. One of the main points they made was that, since common values with Putin’s Russia were lacking, it was nonsense to call Russia a ‘strategic partner’. Concerning the ‘modernization partnership’, they contended that, ‘in its current condition, the Kremlin

⁹ Italics mine; Matthias Dembinski, Hans-Joachim Schmidt and Hans-Joachim Spanger, *Einhegung: Die Ukraine, Russland und die europäische Sicherheitsordnung*, Hessische Stiftung für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung (HSFK), Report n° 3, 2014, <<http://hsfk.de/fileadmin/downloads/report0314.pdf>>.

cannot be a reliable partner. The addressee of our efforts for the modernization of Russia must be civil society.¹⁰ The party is also resonant with *Realpolitik*. Joschka Fischer, foreign minister and vice-chancellor in the SPD-Green coalition government in 1998–2005, has interpreted international affairs after Russia's annexation of the Crimea in just such terms:

“Before our eyes takes place the overthrow of the post-Soviet state system in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Great power politics and thinking in zones of influence and power politics plays of the 19th century threaten to replace the principles of self-determination of peoples, the inviolability of borders, the rule of law and democracy. This revolution will have a profound impact on Europe and European-Russian relations. It will decide by which rules the states and peoples on the European continent will live in the future: those of the 19th or the 21st century? Those who think that they can adjust to this development, as the Putin-Versteher [Putin apologists] in the West [are prone to do], will not contribute to peace but to the escalation of the crisis [because] gentleness is interpreted in Moscow as encouragement.”¹¹

Shifts in SPD perceptions

One of the reasons for the grand coalition's consensus and consistency, as well as for the likelihood of their prolonged duration, is a change in SPD perceptions. As in the past, internal debates have taken place about *Ostpolitik*. Questions are being raised as to whether *Wandel durch Annäherung*, as conceptualized by Egon Bahr and applied by Willy Brandt, played a major role in the collapse of the Soviet Union and whether change in Russian domestic and foreign policy can be achieved through an expansion of commerce (*Wandel durch Handel*). Evidently, the rapid expansion of German-Russian

¹⁰ Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 17/199, Stenografischer Bericht, 199. Sitzung, Berlin, October 19, 2012, <<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btp/17/17199.pdf>>.

¹¹ Joschka Fischer, « Europa, bleibe hart! Wer jetzt Wladimir Putin nachgibt, dient nicht dem Frieden. Er ermutigt Russlands Präsident, den nächsten Schritt zu tun », *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 29, 2014, p. 2. This author literally translated 'Sanftheit' as 'gentleness' but, given the context, 'appeasement' would have been just as appropriate. – In German, the word *verstehen* has two meanings. One is literal, signifying that one 'understands' something. The other is that of 'having understanding for'. It is in the latter sense that the term *Russland-Versteher* or *Putin-Versteher* is used, conveying the notion that the person in question invariably finds excuses and rationalizations for Russian arguments and actions.

trade ties did nothing to advance democracy and persuade Putin to desist from conducting revisionist policies abroad. External critics have pointed that out *in extenso*.¹² Steinmeier, however, has reconfirmed the validity of *Ostpolitik* as conducted by Willy Brandt, saying that he felt 'highly committed to its legacy'; that 'its significance cannot be overestimated'; that, whereas history 'does not repeat itself, we can try to learn from it', and that also, in the current conditions, 'a firm rooting in the West and openness vis-à-vis Russia belong together'.¹³

Nevertheless, illusions have been shed. More realistic assessments now prevail. An example of this is Steinmeier's speech in Yekaterinburg on December 9, 2014. 'As we see it', he explained to students at the city's university, 'Russia today defines its foreign policy interests essentially by distancing itself (*Abgrenzung*) from Europe. In any case, it seems to us that the EU at present is regarded in Moscow less as a partner than as a geopolitical rival. Conversely, in Europe there is concern that Russia is aiming at a global political role that is founded less and less on partnership than on military power'.¹⁴

¹² Concerning the alleged failure of past and present *Ostpolitik* of the SPD see, for instance, Jan C. Behrends, « Mythos Ostpolitik? "Wandel durch Annäherung" ist schon im Kalten Krieg ausgeblieben. Nun ist der Ansatz erneut gescheitert », *ipg-journal.de*, December 8, 2014, <www.ipg-journal.de/kommentar/artikel/mythos-ostpolitik-698/>, and Hans Kundnani, « The Ostpolitik Illusion. Despite what Berlin Proclaims, Last Century's Strategies Are no Longer Relevant », *Dgap.org*, October 17, 2013, <<https://ip-journal.dgap.org/en/ip-journal/topics/ostpolitik-illusion>>. A competent criticism of the *Handel-durch-Wandel* thesis is Fabian Burkhardt, « Neopatrimonialisierung statt Modernisierung. Deutsche Russlandpolitik plus russischer Oktat », *Osteuropa*, Vol. 63, n° 8, 2013, pp. 95-106.

¹³ Interview with Frank-Walter Steinmeier, « Entspannung kommt nicht von selbst », *Der Spiegel*, *Bundesregierung.de*, December 22, 14, <www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Interview/2014/12/2014-12-22-steinmeier-spiegel.html>. For the view that the principles of *Ostpolitik* as conceptualized and applied by Egon Bahr and Willy Brandt are still applicable today, see also: Felix Hett, « Nicht in den Dreck! Sozialdemokratische Ostpolitik hatte immerhin ein Ziel, eine Strategie und langen Atem: Daraus sollte man lernen », December 12, 2014, <www.ipg-journal.de/kommentar/artikel/nicht-in-den-dreck-709/>. Hett is a senior researcher at the political foundation of the SPD, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

¹⁴ Rede von Außenminister Frank-Walter Steinmeier an der Ural Federal University, Jekaterinburg: « Deutsche und Russen – Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft », *Auswärtiges-amt.de*, December 9, 2014, <www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2014/141209-BM_Jekaterinburg.html>.

The government consensus

Some exceptions notwithstanding, the CDU/CSU-SPD coalition government and the Greens share a common assessment of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. There is general recognition that the Kremlin under Putin is untrustworthy and unpredictable.¹⁵

- *Domestic factors* are the determining features for the conduct of the Kremlin's foreign policy, notably in the 'common European neighborhood'.
- There are still, in the 'Putin system', advocates of cooperation with the West, but for the foreseeable future Putin relies on the *representatives of the power ministries and agencies*, including first and foremost the secret services (the *siloviki* in Russian terminology), the 'military-industrial complex' and other 'strategic sectors' of the economy.
- The German-Russian and EU-Russian 'strategic partnership' is far from an accurate description of an existing state of affairs. It is merely a (distant) *vision*.¹⁶
- The defining feature of the relationship between NATO and the EU, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, in the common European neighborhood is not partnership but *competition and conflict*.
- Competition and conflict, in turn, are an integral part of the Kremlin's thinking in terms of '*spheres of influence*'.¹⁷

¹⁵ The *New York Times* reported that Chancellor Merkel told President Obama 'by telephone on Sunday [2 March] that after speaking with Mr. Putin she was not sure he was in touch with reality, people briefed on the call said'. Peter Baker, 'Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Rein in Russia', *Nytimes.com*, March 2, 2014, <www.nytimes.com/2014/03/03/world/europe/pressure-rising-as-obama-works-to-rein-in-russia.html?_r=0>. It is doubtful, however, that this is Merkel's genuine view. Rather, it appears that she realizes that Putin has a *different* 'reality', i.e. that he has different interests and objectives.

¹⁶ However, on the website of the German Foreign Ministry, the inappropriate terminology still needs to be revised; see above, fn. 1.

¹⁷ Thus, in her speech at the Lowy Institute for International Policy in Sydney after the G-20 summit in Brisbane, Chancellor Merkel warned that 'spheres-of-influence thinking that tramples on international law should not be allowed to gain pre-eminence'. « Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel am Lowy Institut für Internationale Politik am 17. November 2014 », *Bundesregierung.de*, November, 17 2014,

- Russia is not aiming at the solution of ‘frozen conflicts’ but at using them in order to prevent the countries affected from pursuing the ‘European option’. To that extent, one of Russia’s objectives in supporting separatism in eastern Ukraine may very well be the creation of yet another such conflict.
- The ‘Russia first’ approach needed to be revised. Ukraine and the other countries of the EU’s Eastern Partnership should also be put on the ‘mental map’ and be supported more strongly politically and economically, even against Russian objections.
- Russia under Putin, in contrast to the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko, is not a country oriented towards maintenance of the status quo but a *revisionist power*. Appeasement would be the wrong answer to that challenge.¹⁸

The role of German industry and commerce

There are widespread assumptions about the fact that Germany is dependent on Russian gas; that it has vital economic and financial interests in Russia; that hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake; that German industry and commerce, as represented by the *Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft*, are the dominant actors in Berlin’s Russia policy, and that, for all of these reasons, business wants the economic sanctions to be rescinded.

<www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2014/11/2014-11-17-merkel-lowy-institut.html>.

¹⁸ Without necessarily explicitly equating Putin with Hitler, the ‘lesson of Munich’ 1938 appears to be one of the points of reference. Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, however, *explicitly* compared Russia’s annexation of the Crimea with Hitler’s takeover of the Sudeten area in 1938: ‘We know all this from history. Hitler applied such methods, in the Sudeten area, and much more.’ Schäuble in discussion with high-school students on March 31, 2014: « Schäuble vergleicht Putin mit Hitler », *Zeit.de*, March 31, 2014, <www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-03/hitler-putin-schaeuble-ukraine-krim>. The need to put a stop to a revisionist power unless ever more demands are put forward was expressed by Chancellor Merkel in her speech in Sydney as follows: At issue in the current crisis were not simply unacceptable demands by Russia on Ukraine, she suggested, but demands ‘concerning Moldova and Georgia. If things go on like this, one can ask: Should we ask about Serbia? Should we ask about the western Balkans? Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel’ [fn. 17].

Indeed, even before Russia's formal annexation of Crimea, the *Ost-Ausschuss* argued that economic sanctions are ill-advised and counterproductive. Politics should not interfere with business. More than 6,000 German firms were represented in Russia and approximately 350,000 jobs were at stake.¹⁹ Other critics of the sanctions have argued that the government was meekly yielding to pressure from the United States whose trade and economic interests in Russia were far less important than those of Germany. More recently, as the combination of economic sanctions, the drastic fall in the oil price, massive capital flight and the depreciation of the rouble have threatened to push the Russian economy into recession, government critics have warned of the country's possible 'collapse' and its 'destabilization', with dire foreign-policy consequences.²⁰

The view of German business advocating the primacy of economics over politics and solidly opposing sanctions is erroneous. There are significant differences as to how the issue of sanctions is treated by representatives of the *Ost-Ausschuss*, the *Bund der Deutschen Industrie* (BDI) and the *Osteuropaverein der Deutschen Wirtschaft*.²¹ Thus, the BDI's chief executive officer, Markus Kerber, has stated unequivocally: 'German entrepreneurs are doing what they can in order to convince Russia that it can safeguard its legitimate security and economic interests in a sustainable fashion only at the negotiating table. [...] *We adhere to the principle of the primacy of politics.*'²² Similarly, Markus Felsner, chairman of the

¹⁹ For such a line of argument see, for instance, Eckhard Cordes, Chairman of the *Ost-Ausschuss*, in an interview with the German newspaper *Handelsblatt*, « Wirtschaftliche Folgen im Krim-Konflikt bereits spürbar », *T-online.de*, January 1, 2014, <www.t-online.de/wirtschaft/id_68605402/wirtschaftliche-folgen-im-krim-konflikt-schon-spuerbar.html>.

²⁰ Matthias Platzeck, former prime minister of the Land Brandenburg and current chairman of the *Deutsch-Russische Forum*, formulated these concerns as follows: One should not forget that Russia was the 'second largest nuclear power in the world' and that if the country became 'politically unstable [...] and 'economic sanctions were to lead to social unrest and the collapse of the government, it would be completely uncertain who would then get their hands on the nuclear weapons'. Matthias Platzeck: « Auch der Westen hat nicht alles richtig gemacht », *Handelsblatt*, October 24, 2014, pp. 6-7.

²¹ *Bund der Deutschen Industrie* (BDI), transl. as German Federation of Industry. The *Osteuropaverein der Deutschen Wirtschaft* can be translated (loosely) as Association of German Industry and Commerce for Eastern Europe. Like the *Ost-Ausschuss*, it represents German industry and commerce not just in 'Eastern Europe' (see fn. 5 above) but, according to its website, in 'the 29 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, South-east Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia'. It claims to have more members than the *Ost-Ausschuss*; see: <www.osteuropaverein.org/ueber-uns/unser-auftrag/>.

²² Italics mine; « "Gesprächskanäle müssen offen bleiben": Der BDI-Hauptgeschäftsführer Markus Kerber setzt im Umgang mit Russland

Osteuropaverein, representing about 300 enterprises with business interests in Russia and Eurasia, is on record as stating: 'Of course, there are complaints. Nevertheless, *most of the enterprises support the sanctions*. Our entrepreneurs do not need closeness to the Kremlin but a predictable legal framework for investments, and on that score Russia already some time ago went in the wrong direction.'²³

One of the reasons why, despite grumbling and complaining, there is general support for government policy on sanctions may be that Russia's share in total German exports is marginal. Russia is not even among the top ten destinations for German exports. In 2013, it only occupied 11th place and in 2014 is likely to fall to 13th place.²⁴ The contraction of trade, furthermore, is not entirely due to sanctions but also to the general slowdown of the Russian economy that began before the conflict over Ukraine. Thus, German exports to Russia in 2013 fell by 5.2 per cent to about 36 billion Euros as compared to the previous year. Under the impact of sanctions and the decline of the rouble, trade shrank even further. The *Ost-Ausschuss* estimates that the decline in the volume of exports amounted to 20 per cent as compared to the preceding year. The losses of business in Russia

auf Deeskalation », *Handelsblatt*, May 20, 2014, p. 16. In the same vein, Ulrich Grillo, president of the BDI, said as early as March 14, 2014 that he 'fully' supports the chancellor in the Ukraine crisis. 'Sanctions would certainly impact these relationships' with Russia, he said. 'But international law, for me, stands above all. « Russia Sanctions Could Put Germany Inc. on the Front Lines of Trade War », *Businessweek.com*, March 18, 2014, <www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-03-18/russia-sanctions-could-put-germany-inc-dot-on-the-front-lines-of-a-trade-war>.

²³ Italics mine; « Für die Wirtschaft ist Polen wichtiger als Russland », *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, October 26, 2014, p. 6.

²⁴ In 2013, the list of recipients of German exports was topped by France, with goods worth 100 billion Euros (9.1% of total German exports) followed by the United States (8.2%), the United Kingdom (8.2%), the Netherlands (6.4%), China (6.1%), Austria (5.1%), Italy (4.8%), Switzerland (4.3%), Poland (3.8%) and Belgium (3.9%). Russia received only 35.8 billion Euros (3.2%) of German exports and thus took 11th place in the list. Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, Data for 2013, *Destatis.de*, October 29, 2014, <www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/NationalEconomyEnvironment/ForeignTrade/TradingPartners/Tables/OrderRankGermanyTradingPartners.pdf?__blob=publicationFile>. – According to the listing of German exports *per capita*, the state of affairs is even worse: whereas the Czech Republic imported German goods in the amount of 2,916 Euros per person and Poland 1,135 Euros per person, each Russian on average received German products worth only 241 Euros. Source: Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft, data for 2011, <www.ost-ausschuss.de/rekordergebnis-f-r-exporte-nach-osteuropa>. Estimates for the year 2014 according to Statistisches Bundesamt, Press release, *Destatis.de*, November 18, 2014, <www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2014/11/PD14_407_p001pdf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile>.

amounted to seven billion Euros and were putting at risk about 50,000 to 60,000 jobs.²⁵

As the record of economic sanctions against Russia thus far shows, German exporters have indeed suffered from restrictions but appear to be able to cope. Some have been able to compensate for possible losses. Affected primarily, however, is the machine-building industry, a sector that is dominated by medium-size (*mittelständische*) enterprises. In October 2014, the organization representing that sector estimated that, by the end of the year, exports of the industry to Russia could decline by 35 per cent.²⁶

Russian gas export interruptions, however, would be a more severe problem than trade losses. German imports of Russian gas in 2013 amounted to 39 per cent of total imports, with Norway and the Netherlands covering 29 per cent and 26 per cent respectively.²⁷ No short-term substitution to any meaningful extent is possible. However, given Russia's extreme dependency on fuel exports for its economy, a gas cut-off would be an almost suicidal step for the Kremlin to take. The German government is perfectly aware of this. The argument, therefore, that Germany's Russia policy is constrained by the country's dependency on Russian gas is unconvincing.

As in the case of trade, a similar limited exposure can be observed with regard to foreign direct investment. FDI inflows to Russia are most important, in order of importance, from Cyprus, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, China, the UK and only then from Germany. The cumulative volume of German FDI in Russia for the year 2014 was estimated to be in the range of 20 billion Euros – not exactly an impressive figure even in comparison with the, compared to Russia, relatively small East-Central European states.²⁸ Similarly, Germany's net transfer of capital funds to Russia in 2013 was negative, amounting to 113.47 Euros. In comparison, the German net

²⁵ « Starker Rückgang von Exporten nach Russland », *Handelsblatt.com*, January 8, 2015, <www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/westliche-sanktionen-starker-rueckgang-von-exporten-nach-russland/11203800.html>.

²⁶ « Ukraine-Konflikt: Deutsche Exporte nach Russland brechen ein », *Tagesspiegel.de*, October 19, 2014, <www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/ukraine-konflikt-deutsche-exporte-nach-russland-brechen-ein/10905612.html>.

²⁷ Bundesamt für Wirtschaft und Ausfuhrkontrolle, *Entwicklung der Erdgaseinfuhr in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1998-2013*, Bafa.de, April 1, 2014, <www.bafa.de/bafa/de/energie/erdgas/ausgewaehlte_statistiken/egashist.pdf>.

²⁸ « Russische Föderation », *Ost-ausschuss.de*, 2014, <www.ost-ausschuss.de/russische-f-deration>.

transfer to the Czech Republic in the same year was valued at 3.2 billion Euros and to Poland at 2.1 billion Euros.²⁹

Public opinion and the influence of the ‘Russland-Versteher’

The political parties (or parts thereof), forces and individuals who are generally in support of and express ‘understanding’ for Russia and its policies are extremely diverse. These voices hold the EU and NATO in part, or for the most part, responsible for the conflict and reject sanctions against Russia as misguided or ‘counterproductive’. Their part of the spectrum of German public opinion ranges from the far right to the far left.³⁰ It includes former German chancellors and ministers of three political parties previously or currently represented in government as well as so-called *Wutbürger*, citizens who are fed up with and ‘furious’ (*wütend*) about everything.³¹ The basis of their opposition is correspondingly diverse. For some, the apparently ‘pro-Russian’ attitudes have less to do with Russia but are simply an extension of anti-American reflexes. Finally and equally predictably, the opposition to the government’s Russia policies ranges from mild criticism to fundamental rejection.³²

²⁹ German Trade and Invest, data for the Czech Republic: <www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/MKT/2008/06/mkt20080612193401_159030.pdf>; and for Poland: <www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/MKT/2008/06/mkt20080612193403_159160.pdf>. The figure for Poland is for the year 2012.

³⁰ To exemplify the diversity, attendees of the conference under the title ‘Making Peace with Russia’ held on November 22, 2014 included Egon Bahr, the major architect of *Ostpolitik* under Willy Brandt; Vladimir Yakunin, head of the state railways and a close associate of President Putin and one of the few people in the latter’s circle not forbidden by Western sanctions from travelling to the West; several members of the anti-European *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party; and two high-ranking officials of the right-wing – some say neo-Nazi – *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD). See Peter Dausend and Michael Thumann, « Was würde Willy Brandt tun? », *Die Zeit*, November 27, 2014, p. 3.

³¹ Examples are former president Roman Herzog (CDU); chancellors Helmut Kohl (CDU), Helmut Schmidt and Gerhard Schröder (SPD); government ministers Volker Rühe (CDU), Egon Bahr (SPD) and Hans-Dietrich Genscher (FDP); the first and last non-communist GDR prime minister Lothar de Maizière (CDU); Kohl’s foreign policy advisor Horst Teltschik, and former Land prime minister Matthias Platzeck (SPD).

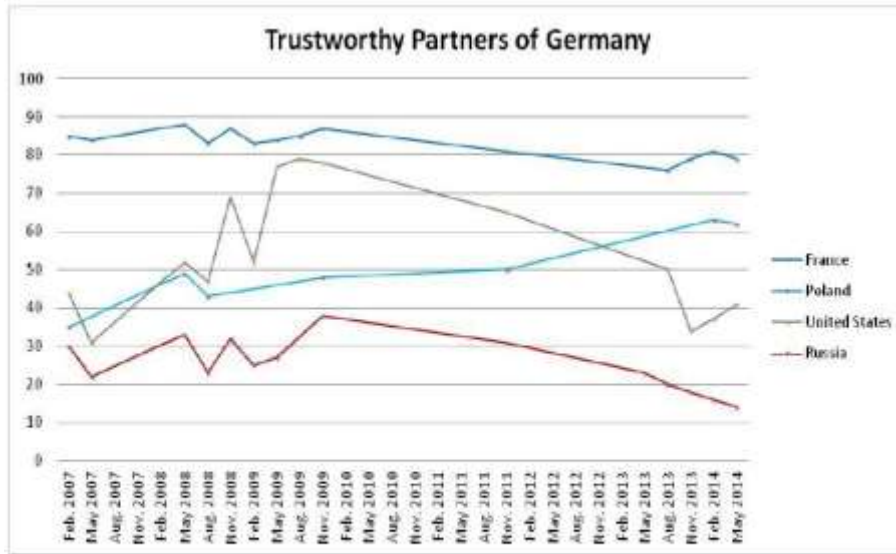
³² A prime example of ostensibly constructive criticism of the government’s Russia policy and handling of the crisis in and over Ukraine is the Appeal (*Aufruf*) by 60 representatives from the realms of politics, the economy, the arts and the media under the suggestive title of « Again War in Europe? Not in Our Name! » (*Wieder Krieg in Europa? Nicht in unserem Namen*), *Zeit.de*, December 5, 2014, <www.zeit.de/politik/2014-12/aufruf-russland-dialog>.

Whatever the exact nature of these complexities, two important observations can be made. First, the opposition does not represent the mainstream of public opinion. Second, its views are at variance with the analyses by the overwhelming majority of German academic specialists on Russia at research institutes and universities; the Moscow-based correspondents of the major German newspapers and television channels; the German political foundations working in Russia; *Osteuropa*, the one and only specialist journal on Russian, Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European and Caucasian affairs; and the Russia desk at the Foreign Ministry.³³

Concerning public opinion, as the graph below shows, the image of Russia has sharply deteriorated over time. In November 2009, that is, at a time when Medvedev occupied the presidency and promoted the idea of 'modernization' in cooperation with the West, close to 40 per cent of the respondents considered Russia to be 'trustworthy'. Consistently, without any interruption of the trend, up to May 2014 Russia's trustworthiness in the eyes of German public opinion decreased to 14 per cent. Equally significant in the context of trends in German public opinion, whereas the image of Russia practically collapsed that of Poland rose from 38 per cent in February 2007 to 62 per cent in May 2014.³⁴

³³ Based on confidential information available to this author, a distinction needs to be made between the more 'hard line' views of the Russia experts in the Foreign Ministry and the more conciliatory, compromise-prone and 'business as usual' approach of the foreign minister himself. For a scathing (well deserved) criticism of self-appointed 'experts' on Russia and Eastern Europe, see Anna Veronika Wendland, « "Experten" in der Ukraine-Krise: Eine Polemik », *Osteuropa*, Vol. 64, n° 9-10, 2014, pp. 95-116.

³⁴ Poll conducted by Infratest in August 2014, *Infratest-dipmap.de*, August 2014, <www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/ard-deutschlandtrend/2014/august/>. The poll conducted by Infratest in the following month showed that 82 per cent of the respondents considered the actions taken by Russia in Ukraine to be 'threatening', 61 per cent were of the opinion that the EU should confront Russia more vigorously (a change of -1 per cent as compared to the August poll); <www.infratest-dimap.de/uploads/media/dt1409_bericht.pdf>.



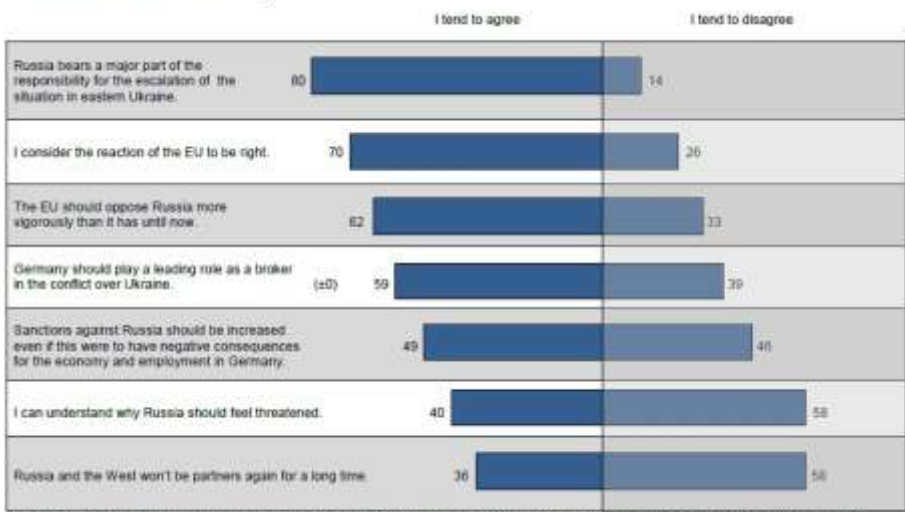
Question: I will now name several countries. Please tell me whether the country concerned can be considered a partner for Germany which one can or cannot trust.

Source: Infratest, ARD DeutschlandTREND: May 2014, <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend2238.pdf>.

The notion that German public opinion is firmly rooted in ‘pro-Russian’ sentiment is contradicted by other polls. Thus, the sizeable majority of Germans put the blame for the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine primarily on Russia (80 per cent), considered the reaction by the EU to be appropriate (70 per cent) and thought that the EU should respond more vigorously to Russia (62 per cent); almost half of the respondents were of the opinion that the economic sanctions should be tightened even if this were to have negative consequences for the economy and employment in Germany, and 58 per cent were unable to understand why Russia should feel threatened.³⁵

³⁵ Poll conducted by Infratest in May 2014 for the German TV channel *Das Erste*, DeutschlandTREND, <www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend2238.pdf>. Figures are in per cent. The percentage remainder to 100% is a composite of ‘do not trust’, ‘do not know’ or no response.

Conflict over Ukraine: Role of Germany and the EU



Question: The relations between the EU and Russia have deteriorated as a result of the conflict in Ukraine and especially the destruction of the civilian aircraft of Malaysia Airlines over eastern Ukraine. In the past week, the EU sanctions were sharpened – and for the first time, also economic sanctions were decided. I will now state several opinions about this. Please tell me whether you tend to agree or disagree.
 Source: Infratest, AND DeutschlandTREND, May 2014. <http://www.tagesschau.de/Inland/Deutschlandtrend2238.pdf>

Government Policy: Change and Continuity

Policy changes

The policies of the current German government vis-à-vis Russia have, from the very beginning of the coalition's formation on December 17, 2013, been remarkably firm and consistent. This is quite contrary to previous crises when, as after the Georgian war in August 2008, Berlin quickly returned to 'business as usual' in its relations with Moscow.

Firmness and consistency have been evident especially with regard to economic sanctions. Assumptions that Berlin would be averse to the adoption of sanctions and, if at all, grudgingly yield to pressure from Washington have turned out to be incorrect. Equally erroneous, as noted above, has been the notion that German business would exert extreme pressure on the government to desist from the establishment of sanctions. The constraints that have existed have arisen much more in the relationship with Germany's partners in the EU who had to be persuaded to adopt and maintain a common position on Russia.³⁶

Concerning economic sanctions, Chancellor Merkel has stated the position of the German government clearly and unambiguously. They should be lifted only 'after the entirety of the Minsk agreement [of September 5, 2014] has been implemented'.³⁷ She thereby rejected the idea of a gradual lifting of sanctions in exchange for the implementation of parts of the Minsk accord, with its 12 provisions for

³⁶ Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov got it right when he said on 10 April 2014 at a business conference in Berlin that Germany had been the main driving force behind sanctions; as quoted by Andreas Rinke, « Wie Putin Berlin verlor », *Internationale Politik*, May/June 2014, pp. 33-45.

³⁷ Statement made after the visit by Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk in Berlin on January 8, 2015, « Merkel bremst bei Aufhebung der Russland-Sanktionen », *Handelsblatt.com*, January 8, 2015, <www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/krise-in-der-ukraine-merkel-bremst-bei-aufhebung-der-russland-sanktionen/11203474.html>.

the de-escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Agreement on a demarcation line between the separatists and the Ukrainian armed forces or on the supervision of the Russian-Ukrainian border should not be considered in isolation, she said.³⁸ Furthermore, she drew a distinction between the (more severe) economic sanctions adopted in July 2014 in response to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, on the one hand, and, on the other, the visa restrictions and asset freezing of March of the same year in reaction to the Russian annexation of Crimea. Merkel did not see any possibility that the latter sanctions would or should be lifted by March 2015, when it had to be decided whether or not to renew them after one year's duration.

The German government's Russia policy and crisis management have been conducted in close cooperation with Poland. During the Schröder era (1998–2005), government officials in the Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry considered Polish (and the Baltic states') insistence on a tougher line toward Russia as almost a nuisance. This changed under the Merkel governments, even before the crisis over Ukraine. By all accounts, her relations with Prime Minister Donald Tusk were excellent, as were Steinmeier's with Radosław Sikorski. A major example of cooperation was provided by the format of the foreign ministers of the Weimar Triangle (Steinmeier, Sikorski and Laurent Fabius of France) in February 2014 together with the representatives of the Yanukovich regime and the Maidan movement, which led to the agreement of February 21, 2014 on the cessation of violence, constitutional reform and early presidential elections in Ukraine.

Subsequent German and French moves appeared to exclude Poland – an impression based on talks that have been held in the so-called 'Normandy format', bringing together German, French, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators.³⁹ However, if Poland were to be invited,

³⁸ Some EU governments as well as some SPD leaders, possibly including Steinmeier, have advocated such a gradualist approach. For instance, Gernot Erler (SPD), the German government's special representative for Russia (*Russland-Beauftragter*), stated in an interview with Reuters: 'If tangible progress were to be made in the implementation of the twelve provisions [of the Minsk agreement], then the time will have come to think about a loosening of the sanctions.' *Ibid.*

³⁹ The format originated in a meeting of the presidents of the four countries in Normandy in commemoration of the June 6, 1944 allied landing. Other meetings took place at the summit level in Milan on the occasion of the Asia-Europe summit (ASEM) on October 17, 2014; at the level of political directors on January 5, 2015 and of foreign ministers' level on January 12, 2015 in Berlin. Concern about the exclusion of Poland has been expressed, for instance, by Piotr Buras, « Has Germany Sidelined Poland in Ukraine Crisis Negotiations? », European Council of

Putin in all likelihood would reject the idea of being faced with yet another leader from an EU and a NATO country plus Ukraine at the negotiating table. Given the German government's tough position and close bilateral coordination, the concern about the 'exclusion' of Poland appears to be misplaced.⁴⁰ The relations of Merkel and Steinmeier promise to be as close with Ewa Kopacz and Grzegorz Schetyna as with their predecessors in the offices of prime and foreign minister.

Another aspect of the German government's firm attitude toward Russia is its energy policy. 'There will be a reconsideration (*neue Betrachtung*) of the entire energy policy,' Chancellor Merkel stated apodictically shortly after Russia's annexation of the Crimea.⁴¹ Although Germany's dependency on Russian oil and gas in comparison to that of other EU member countries was by no means the most pronounced, she said, it was nevertheless necessary to reduce overall EU dependence on Russia. She acknowledged that the 'necessary infrastructure that we need [for the achievement of that goal] has not yet been built'. However, a new 'long-term orientation' should be set in motion. As for the short and medium term, the German government and former EU energy commissioner Günther Oettinger have consistently supported the EU's Third Energy Package, which provides for the 'unbundling' of transportation and production of gas to lead to full marketization of the industry. That position has led to the frustration of Gazprom's ambitious and expensive plans, after having successfully built Nord Stream with four pipelines across the Baltic Sea, to build South Stream across the Black Sea via the Balkans to Austria.⁴²

Foreign Relations (ECFR), *ECFR.eu*, August 27, 2014, <www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_has_germany_sideline_poland_in_ukraine_crisis_negotiations301>.

⁴⁰ According to German Foreign Ministry officials, the meeting in Normandy between Putin, Poroshenko, Merkel and Hollande occurred *ad hoc*. At the commemoration, Poland was not represented by Prime Minister Donald Tusk but only by the then speaker of the Polish parliament, Ewa Kopacz. Apart from the likelihood that Russia would not have agreed to face three EU and NATO countries plus Ukraine, it is possible that the UK and other EU and NATO members might have asked that they, too, should be represented.

⁴¹ « Wegen Krim-Krise: Merkel will weniger Energie-Abhängigkeit von Russland », *T-online.de*, March 27, 2014, <www.t-online.de/wirtschaft/energie/id_68716082/wegen-krim-krise-merkel-will-weniger-energie-abhaengigkeit-von-russland.html>.

⁴² At the beginning of November 2014, Putin and Gazprom CEO Aleksey Miller stated that, because of Bulgaria's adherence to the principle of the separation of production and transportation of gas, the South Stream project would be stopped. Miller apodictically stated: « The project is finished. That was it. » (Das war's: Putin stoppt South Stream), *Euractiv.de*, December 2, 2014, <www.euractiv.de/sections/eu-aussenpolitik/das-wars-putin-stoppt-southstream-

The management of relations with Russia in the crisis over Ukraine follows a dual track: firmness of position and talks.⁴³ Talks between German and Russian high-level officials have not only failed to dry up but have taken place with greater frequency than ever before. Thus, between Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the G-20 meeting in Brisbane in November, Chancellor Merkel held about 40 telephone conversations with Putin. *Tête-à-tête* talks took place in Normandy, Milan and in Brisbane – a meeting that lasted for a full four hours and continued thereafter in the presence of EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Steinmeier and Lavrov also met numerous times. The German foreign minister travelled to Moscow in February and in November, meeting with Putin on the latter occasion.

The German government's engagement is important for a number of reasons. First, as a country previously considered by the Kremlin and the Russian public to be favorably disposed toward Russia, Germany's firm stance may serve to impress upon Putin the general Western position more effectively than if it were adopted by a country such as Poland that Moscow has for the most part regarded as being 'unfriendly'. Second, it serves to underline the fact that the crisis is of supreme *European* concern, thereby helping to invalidate Russian allegations that the United States is pulling all the strings. Third, it takes the wind out of the sails of the *Putin-Versteher* by demonstrating that the German government is doing everything to achieve a political solution of the crisis.

To some extent, the important if not to say central role that Germany has played in the management of relations with Russia in the crisis over Ukraine can be said to give substance to statements made by President Joachim Gauck, Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen at the 50th Munich Security Conference in 2014 that Germany should be more active and should assume greater responsibility in international affairs.⁴⁴ There are, however, limits to

310483?utm_source=EurActiv.de+Newsletter&utm_campaign=45ccbedf4d-newsletter_t%C3%A4gliche_news_aus_europa&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d18370266e-45ccbedf4d-56858477>.

⁴³ The term 'dialogue' is deliberately avoided here since, judging from all available evidence, the bilateral exchanges thus far have consisted mainly of monologues.

⁴⁴ See the speeches by President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen at the 50th Munich Security Conference, January 31, – February 2, 2014, <www.securityconference.de/en/activities/munich-security-conference/msc-2014/reden/>.

the deviation from previous patterns of policy. These concern in particular the security and defense dimensions of the crisis.

Unchanged policies

In June 2014, President Gauck expounded on the theme introduced at the Munich security conference and dealt with an issue left out at that occasion: the use of force. It was wrong, he said, 'to exclude *a priori* the use of the military instrument as the means of last resort'. He acknowledged that, in previous years, 'restraint by the Germans was justifiable'. But Germany had shed the arrogance of power characteristic of its behavior in past centuries and today stood reliably for democracy and human rights, and in that struggle 'it is sometimes necessary to take up arms. [...] Just like [in domestic affairs], where we have police, not only judges and teachers, [in international affairs], too, we need forces that are able to stop crime or despots who murderously act against other people.'⁴⁵

It was abundantly evident, however, that he was in no way relating this statement of principle to the crisis over Ukraine but to NATO 'out of area' conflicts such as in Mali or the Central African Republic, where, indeed, the German Bundeswehr was already involved. Furthermore, in September 2014, in one of the best examples of deviation from previous patterns of policy, the German parliament consented to arms deliveries to the Kurds in their struggle against ISIS – a clear departure from the traditional principle of the prohibition of weapons deliveries to combatants in 'crisis areas' (*keine Waffenlieferungen in Krisengebiete*). In Europe, however, and in the conflict with Russia over Ukraine, the previous principles have continued to apply. These are: '*European security is impossible to achieve without Russia, let alone against Russia*' and '*There can be no military solution, the crisis must be solved politically*'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ « Interview mit dem "Deutschlandfunk" », *Bundespraesident.de*, June 14, 2014, <www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Interviews/2014/140614-Deutschlandfunk-Interview.html>.

⁴⁶ The first axiom, however, has consistently neglected the fact that improvements in European security could not be achieved *with* Russia and that, for almost half a century, security in Europe was, indeed, safeguarded through NATO *against* the Soviet Union. As for the second axiom, in July and August 2014 it *did* appear that a military solution could be possible. Ukraine's armed forces in alliance with armed militias succeeded in pushing back the separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas, raising the prospect that they would be defeated. This was not to be, however,

The application of these two principles has clearly been spelled out by Chancellor Merkel. 'The approach that the EU and its partners are taking', according to her, is as follows: 'First: We support Ukraine politically and also economically. Second: We will make every effort, in talks with Russia, to arrive at a diplomatic solution of the conflict. Third: We apply economic sanctions against Russia as far and for as long they are necessary.'⁴⁷ There is no reference to any military response of any kind. The idea that a country that is under attack, be it massively or with limited forces and arms supplies, should be assisted, with weapons deliveries at the very least, is not raised publicly by the government.

Indeed, the Chancellor has also repeatedly stated the German position that the conflict over Ukraine 'cannot be solved by military means'. She has rejected ideas such as that NATO should have responded favorably to Ukraine's plea for membership in the Western alliance; German defense expenditures should be increased, and conscription should be reinstated. Discussions about strengthening NATO's defense capabilities had to be separated from efforts to solve the crisis, including, and above all, those undertaken by the OSCE, she is on record as saying. She also allocated NATO's air policing mission to the realm of burden-sharing within the alliance rather than endowing it with a deterrent purpose.⁴⁸ Volker Kauder, the head of the parliamentary group for Merkel's conservative Christian Democrats, agreed. 'The current situation with the Crimean crisis has absolutely zero influence on the Bundeswehr's defense projects,' he asserted.⁴⁹

The German government also opposed ideas for the stationing of NATO forces in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including the Polish request for the deployment of two heavy brigades of armored infantry with about 5,000 troops each. It was only willing to support measures of a symbolic significance rather than improvements in operational capabilities to cope with a potential Russian threat. Such measures included the decisions taken at the Wales Summit in September 2014 for the creation of a 4,000-strong

because at this point Russia significantly increased its military assistance, both in terms of weapons and personnel, and thereby reversed the fortunes of war.

⁴⁷ See Merkel's speech at the Lowy Institute in Sydney [fn. 17].

⁴⁸ « Russland wendet sich wieder altem Denken zu », *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 16, 2014, p. 3.

⁴⁹ « Ukraine Crisis Exposes Gaps Between Berlin and NATO », *Spiegel.de*, April 7, 2014, <www.spiegel.de/international/germany/ukraine-crisis-exposes-gaps-between-berlin-and-nato-a-962978.html>.

Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) capable of deploying within 48 hours; the enhancement of hosting capabilities in CEE countries; an increase in NATO's air and sea surveillance, and greater frequency of allied training exercises.

There are two rationales for Berlin's opposition to military-related measures in response to the crisis over Ukraine, one 'objective' or international, the other 'subjective' or domestic. As for the first rationale, it is difficult to refute the argument made not just by the German government that the deployment of NATO combat forces to CEE countries, let alone Ukraine, would be a step that Kremlin hardliners would use as 'proof' of their perennial contention of the alleged dangers of NATO's eastern enlargement. Such a step could also convey the patently false notion that NATO countries are ready to answer the question of *mourir pour Kiev* in the affirmative. Concerning the domestic rationale, German public opinion is overwhelmingly against any military moves. It is still firmly wedded to the paradigm of Germany as a 'civilian power'. The use of force for the achievement of political objectives, which may be considered a normal feature of foreign policy in the US, Britain and France, is (still) a completely alien and unacceptable concept in Germany. In fact, even moderate and sensible arguments for the participation of the Bundeswehr in peacekeeping operations face an uphill battle in parliament, let alone among the public at large.⁵⁰

One of the possible, perhaps even logical, consequences of the German government's view – that, on the one hand, Russia is a revisionist power and is not averse to using military means to achieve far-reaching objectives and, on the other hand, that the conflict cannot be solved militarily – could theoretically be that Russia's power should be weakened and that sanctions are one of the means to that end. The German government, however, has not put forward

⁵⁰ The opposition to the use of force under any circumstance has moralistic and emotional dimensions. Notably on the left, such measures as weapons deliveries to the Kurds and President Gauck's plea for German participation in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian intervention call forth shrill warnings against a 'militarization of German foreign policy' and personal attacks against the president as a 'disgusting warmonger' (*widerlicher Kriegshetzer*). Thus, for instance, explicitly, the former GDR civil rights advocate and winner of the German book trade's peace prize (*Friedenspreisträger des Deutschen Buchhandels*), the Reverend Friedrich Schorlemmer, in June 2014, « Friedrich Schorlemmer: Gauck sollte schweigen – Bürgerrechtler kritisiert Bundespräsidenten wegen Plädoyer für Auslandseinsätze », *Neues-deutschland.de*, June 27, 2014, <www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/937316.schorlemmer-gauck-sollte-schweigen.html>, and Norbert Müller, member of parliament of the Land Brandenburg, in November 2014, Markus Decker, « Wie Hund und Katz », *Berliner Zeitung*, November 4, 2014, p. 5.

and is not pursuing such a course of action. The purpose of sanctions is expressly limited to conflict resolution in Ukraine.

Conclusion

In some quarters of the foreign-policy community in Berlin, the current crisis in German-Russian relations is felt to be like a nightmare and that, when one awakens, there will be relief because everything will turn out to have been but a bad dream. The ‘nightmare’, however, is reality. The ‘strategic partnership’ has proven never to have existed; the ‘modernization partnership’ did not get off the ground; the – in the positive sense – political ‘special relationship’ has come to an end; trade, after a tremendous expansion, is shrinking; the German government has taken the lead in confronting Russia over Ukraine and in other parts of the ‘common European neighborhood’ and is determined to maintain economic sanctions until the fulfillment of the September 2014 Kiev agreement, and the image of Russia and its leadership in German public opinion is at an all-time low since the collapse of the Soviet Union. All this is unlikely to be a mere temporary phenomenon.⁵¹ If, therefore, one posits partnership and cooperation, as well as the ‘Russia first’ approach, to have been the constituent elements of the German paradigm for the relationship, then the paradigm has changed. The new paradigm is that of the management of conflict.

What is the likelihood that there will be a return to more cooperative relations, and what are the conditions on which such a return depends? The answer to these questions crucially hinges on developments in Russia. Medvedev’s ‘modernization’ drive has been replaced, after Putin’s return to the presidency, by anti-democratic and anti-liberal national-patriotic mobilization. In foreign policy, partnership and cooperation with the European Union has given way to the attempt to forge a Eurasian Union. This turn, however, was not prompted by exogenous elements, such as emerging threats from

⁵¹ As early as May 2014 Merkel pointed out that the crisis in and over Ukraine was unlikely to be resolved soon and that, therefore, patience and persistence (*‘langer Atem’*) were necessary ‘so that the pre-eminence of law would be asserted rather than the principle of might makes right’ (*‘die Stärke des Rechts, nicht das Recht des Stärkeren’*), <www.derwesten.de/politik/merkel-nur-diplomatie-kann-ukraine-krise-loesen-aimp-id9341881.html>.

NATO or hostile EU policies, but by endogenous factors, first and foremost by the concern of the Kremlin leaders that their power base might be eroded by democratization and liberalization, and by 'color revolutions' in the European neighborhood spilling over to Russia.

The policy of internal repression and external revisionism was perhaps sustainable in conditions of Western acquiescence, normal international economic relations and high oil prices. They are not sustainable, however, in a context of economic sanctions, low oil prices, massive capital flight and devaluation of the rouble. Putin, in essence, has returned Russia to the late Brezhnev era of bureaucratic immobilism and inertia, economic stagnation and decline, excessive expenditures for the military, internal security and the military-industrial complex – in short, to an overextension created by unsustainable costs for the empire.⁵² The likelihood that Putin will now rapidly change course and return to the 'modernization' agenda is close to zero. Equally unlikely, as the opponents of sanctions in Germany argue, is the 'destabilization' and ultimately 'collapse' of Russia. More likely is the realization of the Russian leadership that the anti-Western orientation domestically and internationally will lead nowhere, that there is no alternative to cooperation with the West and that a gradual accommodation and adaptation to that reality is necessary.

⁵² It is important to note in this context, however, that the disintegration of the political structures preceded economic disintegration; see Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 1998. China, in the view of Russian critics of *perestroika*, did it right, maintaining the political structures while liberalizing the economy.

Notes du Cerfa

Published monthly since 2003, this collection is dedicated to analyzing the political, economic and social evolution of contemporary Germany: foreign affairs, domestic policy, economic and financial policy and social issues. The « Notes du Cerfa » are concise, scientific and policy-oriented research publications. Like the « Visions franco-allemandes », the « Notes du Cerfa » are available on Cerfa's website (free download).

Previous publications

Pascal Kauffmann, Henrik Uterwedde, « *Quel **policy mix** de sortie de crise pour la zone euro ? Vers de nouvelles convergences franco-allemandes* », *Vision franco-allemande*, n° 25, janvier 2015

Tobias Koepf, « *L'Allemagne à la recherche d'une stratégie de politique africaine* », *Note du Cerfa*, n° 119, janvier 2015.

Michel Drain, « *L'engagement de la Bundeswehr en Afghanistan : quels enseignements pour la politique de défense allemande ?* », *Note du Cerfa*, n° 118, décembre 2014.

Hans Brodersen, « *Vers le grand large ? Le commerce extérieur allemand entre l'UE et les BRICS* », *Note du Cerfa*, n° 117, novembre 2014.

Pierre Zapp, « *Un nouvel « Agenda » pour l'Allemagne ? Comprendre les défis économiques et sociaux* », *Note du Cerfa*, n° 116, septembre 2014.

The Cerfa

The Study Committee on French-German Relations (Cerfa) was founded by an intergovernmental treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic in 1954. It has analyzed relations between the two countries for over 60 years. The Cerfa engages in a wide range of activities. It promotes the French-German debate and policy-oriented research through conferences and seminars that bring together experts, policy-makers, decision-makers and civil society representatives of both countries.

Since 1991 Hans Stark is Secretary General of the Cerfa and editor of the research note series « Notes du Cerfa » and « Visions franco-allemandes ». Nele Wissmann is Research Fellow and in charge of the « Franco-German Future Dialogue ». Lea Metke is Project Manager at the Cerfa.