After Ostpolitik: A New Russia and Eastern Europe Policy Based on Lessons from the Past

Meister, Stefan; Jilge, Wilfried

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After Ostpolitik

A New Russia and Eastern Europe Policy Based on Lessons from the Past

Dr. Stefan Meister
Head of the Center for Order and Governance in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia

Wilfried Jilge
Associate Fellow, Center for Order and Governance in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia

The large-scale Russian war of aggression against Ukraine that began in February 2022 demonstrates both the failure of Germany's cooperative Ostpolitik of the last 30 years and the need for energy policy disentanglement. Russia has become the greatest security risk in Europe. To safeguard national and European security, Germany's ruling coalition must learn lessons from the past, initiate a radical new beginning in Germany's policy on Russia and Eastern Europe, and assume a leadership role in Europe.

– **The cooperative German Ostpolitik of change through rapprochement and economic interdependence has failed. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has become an adversary of Germany and the EU. Deterrence and defense capabilities must once again become basic elements of German foreign and security policy.**

– **The goals of German policy must be Ukraine's victory, the strengthening of its defense capability, and its reconstruction and integration into the EU. These developments will probably support societal change in Russia.**

– **Germany should take a leading role in European policy toward Russia and Eastern Europe, coordinating closely with partner countries – especially in Central Eastern Europe. It should work to abolish dependencies and maintain sanctions.**

– **When developing a new Russia strategy, those parts of the Russian elites, wider society, and diaspora that are against the war should also be listened to and integrated.**

Content

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russia's war against Ukraine marks the end of Germany's cooperative Eastern policy based on interdependence following the end of the Cold War. The failure of a policy of change through rapprochement and of social and energy policy interdependence as a peace model was preceded by losing sight of realities in German foreign and security policy. The economic and energy policy cooperation with Russia – and the attempts to achieve concessions in the conflict over the common neighborhood with the EU through quiet diplomacy and offers to the Kremlin – have not been effective. Russian President Vladimir Putin's policies of maintaining power through a system of loyalty and corruption, internal repression, and external distraction from domestic failings through military aggression are set against the conflicting German interests of the rule of law, strengthening multilateralism, and peaceful coexistence. Trust in German-Russian relations was massively shaken by the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that was followed by a war in eastern Ukraine and Putin's definition of Germany and the EU as adversaries. Despite all this, the German government under Chancellor Angela Merkel further increased energy dependence on Russia. The regime in Moscow was not deterred from further aggression by the restrained reactions to their actions. The energy and economic policies of the 16 years of the Christian Democratic Merkel era largely followed the tradition of those of the previous government under Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

It was only in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, that German policy went through a fundamental paradigm shift that was described by Chancellor Olaf Scholz as a *Zeitenwende*. The German government stopped Nord Stream 2 and began disentangling its energy relationship with Russia. In addition, it approved arms deliveries to Ukraine; decided on a special fund of 100 billion euros for the German armed forces, the Bundeswehr; and, within the framework of the EU, introduced massive sanctions against Russia. For the first time, post-Cold War Berlin recognized that Russia's aggression poses a security threat to Germany and that Ukraine's defeat would endanger German security.

The securitization of all relations with Russia has thus reached a new level and will shape bilateral relations for the coming years. At the same time, Germany and the EU need a short-, medium-, and long-term approach to dealing with Russia. Because complete isolation would further strengthen the security hardliners in Russia and hinder political and social change, it cannot be in the interest of Germany and the EU in the long run. On the contrary, the long-term goal must be that Russia respects fundamental rules and principles of international law. Further, Russia should consider the legitimate security needs of its neighbors and EU member states and refrain from a direct or hybrid hegemonic policy in its geopolitical spheres of influence.

A new German policy toward Eastern Europe and Russia must build on a review of the basic assumptions of the past and redefine Germany's understanding of its role in Europe and the world. The changed conditions have consequences for German and European policy toward Russia and Eastern Europe. It is not a question of throwing all previous approaches overboard but of subjecting them to a reality check. In the following, we argue that Germany, after an active and progressive phase in its Ostpolitik in the 1990s, has increasingly lost touch with changes in Russia and Eastern Europe. Due to the dominance of economic interests and denial of geopolitical conflicts of interest, traditional Ostpolitik became predominantly oriented toward economic and energy policy cooperation – but with a regime that has less and less interest in cooperation and integration. Based on the new reality, Germany must redefine its role in Europe regarding Russia and the non-Russian Eastern neighborhood and take a leading role in enlargement policy, deterring the current Russian regime, and supporting long-term change in Russia.

Through looking at the basic assumptions of Germany's Ostpolitik over the past 30 years, this study argues for a fundamentally new German policy toward Russia and Eastern Europe based on lessons from past mistakes. Starting with the aggressive actions of the current Russian regime that culminated in the large-scale and ongoing war against Ukraine, the Eastern policy of the past decades will be put to the test and reappraised. In the first chapter, we take a critical look at German Ostpolitik after the end of the Cold War and identify the successes and weaknesses of this phase. Then, in the second chapter, we analyze six central principles of German Ostpolitik after 1990 and subject them to a reality check. In the third chapter, we look at Germany's understanding of its role against the backdrop of changing global circumstances, and, in the fourth chapter, we draw conclusions by formulating nine recommendations for policy action. We argue that only a reappraisal of Germany's Ostpolitik of the last 30 years will enable a new beginning in the German government's Eastern Europe and Russia policy.

Ostpolitik After the End of the Cold War

Relations with the Soviet Union and eastern neighbors were important to the process of overcoming the division of Germany. Consequently, Ostpolitik played a central role in West Germany's foreign and security policy as of the late 1960s. In this context, the "change through rapprochement" propagated by Chancellor Willy Brandt and his foreign policy advisor Egon Bahr was only possible in combination with a policy of robust military deterrence toward the Eastern Bloc.[1] The Soviet Union, as a status quo power, needed recognition to secure its sphere of influence and survive systemic competition. West Germany's Ostpolitik met this interest by recognizing the country's eastern borders and reaching an understanding with the German Democratic Republic (GDR) while creating economic incentives through the natural gas pipeline business.[2]

The West's Hope for Change in Russia

With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, it made sense from the German point of view to support Russia in its transformation to a market economy and democracy through a cooperative approach. In this context, the expansion of economic relations and growing energy policy interdependence served to transform and stabilize Russia and to integrate it more strongly into existing structures in Europe. At the same time, German companies tapped into a large market, and cheap Russian pipeline gas played an increasingly important role in the German economy.[3] The pursuit of this political line after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe was based on the widespread assumption – not only in Germany but also in the United States and other Western countries – that Russia would develop into a democracy. This hope even included the prospect of Russian membership in NATO. As late as 1993, former US Secretary of State James Baker promoted such a perspective in an article because, in his view, it would promote democratic change in Russia and thus prevent a return to authoritarianism.[4] This expectation, however, was already disappointed during the 1990s. The reemergence of hegemonic national-patriotic discourse in Russia reinforced the aspirations of the Central East European and Baltic states to become members of NATO as quickly as possible. In this respect, it can be argued that the United States and its Western partners did not make sufficient efforts in the early 1990s to integrate Russia more strongly into European institutions and create a new European security system with Russia and without NATO. But, contrary to the claims of those in power in the Kremlin, this was not done with the intention of holding Russia down or humiliating it. Instead, it was based on the assumption that Russia would become a democracy and that the systemic conflict had come to an end. The subsequent alienation was significantly influenced by the overestimation of the triumph of democracies worldwide, a false assumption about developments in Russia, and the underestimation of the continuing imperial legacies in Russia and perception of humiliation there.[5]

Germany's Role in the Recognition and Integration of the Former Eastern Bloc States

In parallel, the Federal Republic of Germany played a central role in both the recognition of the newly independent states that resulted from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the eastern expansion of the EU and NATO in East-Central Europe. The stabilization and integration of the states of the Eastern

1 Egon Bahr, "'Wandel durch Annäherung'. Rede in der Evangelischen Akademie Tutzing [Tutzinger Rede], 15. Juli 1963," *1000 Schlüsseldokumente zur deutschen Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*: https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_de&dokument=0091_bah&object=translation&st=&l=de (accessed April 9, 2023).

2 Andreas Metz, "50 Jahre Röhren gegen Gas," *Ost-Ausschuss – Osteuropa Verein der Deutschen Wirtschaft* e.V. – Jahrbuch 2020, June 17, 2020: https://www.ost-ausschuss.de/sites/default/files/pm_pdf/Special%2050%20Jahre%20R%C3%B6hren%20gegen%20Gas.pdf (accessed April 9, 2023).

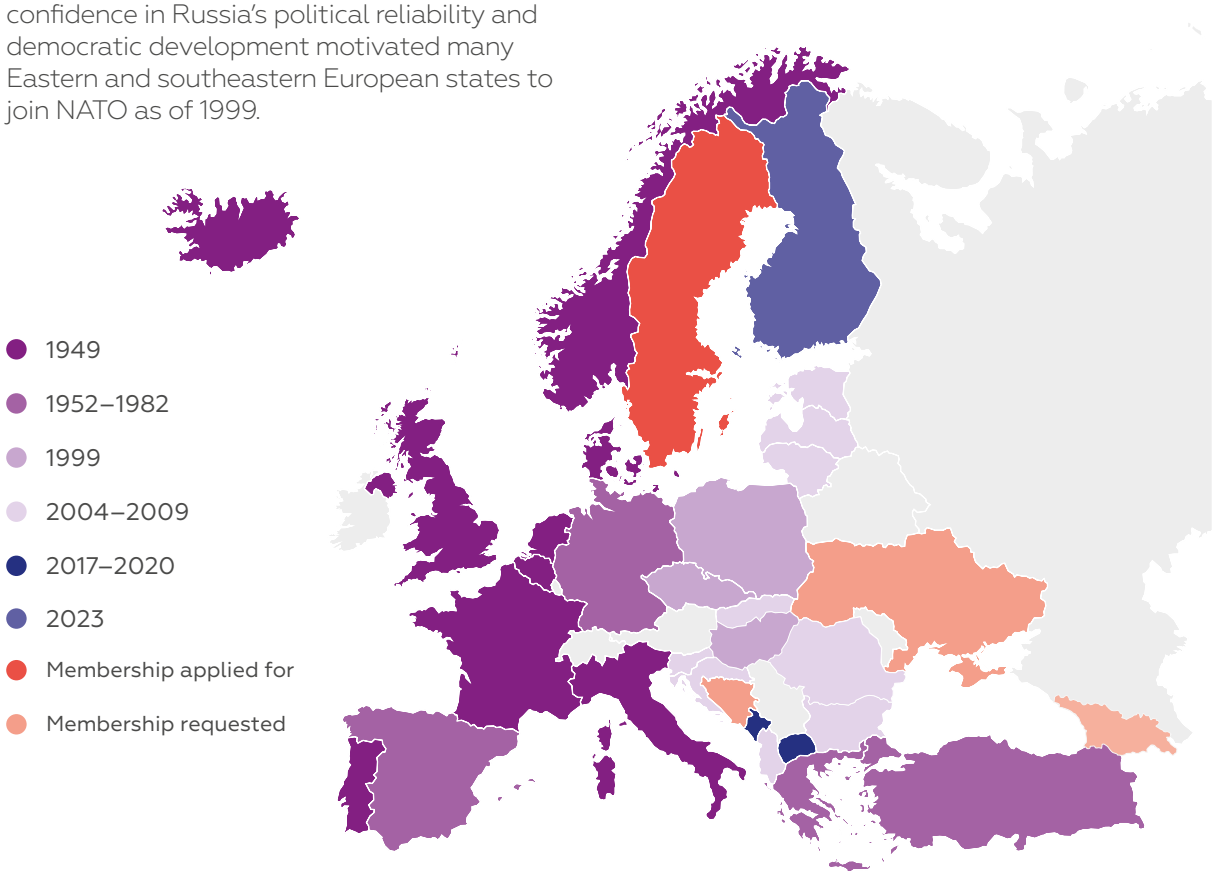
3 Statista, "Vergleich der aus Russland importierten Gasmenge mit den gesamten deutschen Gasimporten von 2011 bis 2020," March 2020: https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1302674/umfrage/russischer-anteil-am-deutschen-gasimport/ (accessed April 9, 2023).

4 James Baker, "Expanding to the East: A New NATO: Alliance: Full membership may be the most sought-after 'good' now enticing eastern and Central European states – particularly Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1993: https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-12-05-op-64339-story.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

5 TASS, Russian News Agency, "Putin says West seeking to weaken and destroy Russia," September 21, 2022: https://tass.com/politics/1511161 (accessed April 9, 2023).

Eastern Enlargement of NATO

The need for more autonomy and a lack of confidence in Russia's political reliability and democratic development motivated many Eastern and southeastern European states to join NATO as of 1999.



Source: Statista

Bloc into the EU was a central interest of Germany.[6] It assumed a leading position in Europe on this and profited. In economic terms, the Central East European states became important markets and, above all, integrated parts of the German value chain that, along with cheap Russian raw materials, were important for maintaining Germany as an industrial location. For their part, the countries of East Central Europe also benefited economically from this development. Further, Germany gained significant security advantages as it was no longer a frontline state in Europe due to NATO's eastward expansion.

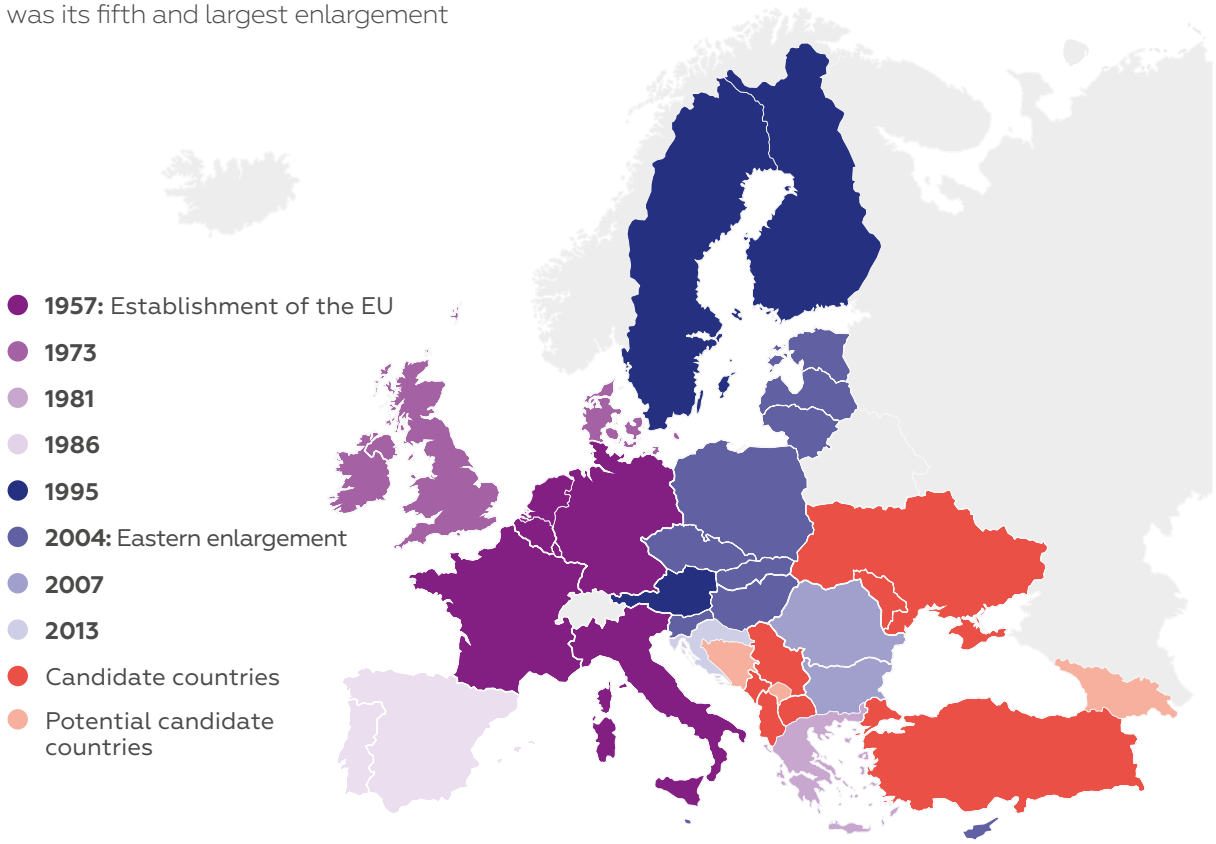
Germany also assumed a leading and mediating role in the growing crises in Eastern Europe, such as in the run-up to the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. In 2014, after the Euromaidan – the so-called Revolution of Dignity – and Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Germany worked with France in the framework of the Normandy format. At the same time, German policy was careful not to provoke Russia and made compromises at the expense of other states. For example, Germany was a key player, alongside France, in preventing the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine and Georgia, thus indirectly accepting Russian spheres of influence.[7] Even if, at the end of the 2000s, NATO membership, at least for Ukraine, was still highly controversial domestically and socio-politically, it was a mistake not to advocate for it. At the latest, Germany should have done so after the Russo-Georgian War when both states received comprehensive support from Germany, the European members of NATO, and the EU to improve their security as compensation for the denial of MAP.

6 Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, "Vor 15 Jahren: EU-Osterweiterung," April 30, 2019: https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/290350/vor-15-jahren-eu-osterweiterung/ (accessed April 9, 2023).

7 Steven Erlanger and Steven Meyers, "NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine," *New York Times*, April 3, 2008: https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

European Union

The EU's eastern enlargement on May 1, 2004, was its fifth and largest enlargement



Source: European Union

Such a change of policy, however, would have required realizing just how precarious the security situation already was for both states after 2008.

Mediation and Prevention: Germany's Ambivalent Russia and Ukraine Policy

During these developments, a growing ambivalence in German policy became apparent. On the one hand, the government in Berlin played a central role in negotiating the two Minsk agreements that followed the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass and in stabilizing Ukraine. In February 2015, through massive diplomatic intervention, Germany – together with France – probably prevented Russian forces from further pushing back the Ukrainian army, and from occupying additional territories. This at least put the brakes on Russian aggression and provided Ukraine with important breathing room that gave it time to build up its own defenses. In parallel, Germany developed into an important partner for Ukraine – not only as a mediator, but also as a supporter of the country in its legitimate goal of regaining full sovereignty over the territories occupied in the Donbass. Through financial support and assistance in an advisory capacity, Germany has reinforced the stabilization of the country, resulting in positive effects for the external resilience of the Ukrainian state to this day. The reform of local self-government, which was widely supported by Germany, has noticeably strengthened local civil society and communal patriotism that, in turn, can hardly be overestimated for the ability of Ukraine – in particular, its south and east – to defend itself and survive Russia's war of aggression. Since 2014, Germany has also been a key player in the enforcement and extension of EU sanctions against Russia, which can be assessed as a real paradigm shift in German policy.

On the other hand, the German government stuck to the Minsk agreements even when it became increasingly clear that the Russian side would not implement them. Germany and France had no levers at their dis-

posal to influence Russia. Moreover, both countries were unable or unwilling to consider using further instruments, including tightening sanctions or withdrawing from the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. This remained true when Russia again committed serious violations of international law, such as the construction of the Crimean Bridge and the military attack on Ukrainian navy boats that initiated Russia's blockade policy against Ukraine in the Sea of Azov. Thus, the pressure to act was mostly one-sided and on Ukraine, which made concessions to Moscow and offers to save the agreement.[8] Even more seriously, Germany weakened its own policy of strengthening Ukraine against Russia by supporting Nord Stream 2 against massive opposition from the United States, EU partners such as the Baltic states and Poland, and especially Ukraine. If the pipeline had gone ahead, Ukraine's negotiating position vis-à-vis Russia would have deteriorated further.[9] In response to Russia's increasingly aggressive actions toward Germany and the EU (disinformation and hacker attacks against EU member states[10]) as well as domestic opposition figures (the "Tiergarten murder"[11] and treatment of opposition politician Alexei Navalny[12]), Berlin tended to adopt an appeasement policy to prevent relations from getting worse. Even when it became clear that the Russian side had no interest in dialogue and cooperation, the cooperation paradigm was maintained.

Paradigm Shift in Germany's Russia Policy

During Gerhard Schröder's chancellorship (1998 to 2005), there had already been a paradigm shift in German policy toward Russia that placed economic interests in the foreground. The support for Nord Stream 2 and Germany's growing energy dependence on Russia during Angela Merkel's term (2005 to 2021) – despite Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 – gave Moscow the impression that Germany was opportunistic and solely guided by economic interests. Yet the German government did not pursue a foreign economic policy in its national interest but a "foreign corporate policy" in favor of German business. Provisions for the country were even scaled down while policy focused on promoting large companies that were given access to shares in gas production. A similar policy was and is still pursued toward China.

The "partnership for modernization" with Russia that was announced in 2008 by Germany's then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, a Social Democrat, during a lecture at Urals State University in Yekaterinburg was supposed to promote social and political change in Russia through economic modernization and technology transfer.[13] In as early as the first half of the 2000s, however, the bilateral narrowing and concentration of Germany's Eastern European policy on Russia caused decision-makers in Berlin to overlook Russia's intensification of its destructive policy of malign influence in its "near abroad." This was carried out in the wake of the so-called color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine to destabilize states striving toward Europe, thus keeping them in Russia's own sphere of influence.

After the global financial crisis of 2008 to 2009 triggered a crisis of legitimacy for Putin's system and Dmitry Medvedev was elected as interim president (2008 to 2012), the political elites in Germany seemed to have gotten some of the change in Russian politics that they had hoped for. But the seriousness of Russia's attempt to open up and cooperate more closely with the EU was already called into question by the Russo-Georgian War; it then quickly ended with Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. Thereafter, in the regime's interest to keep control, its conflict with the West – above all the United States – gained central importance. Germany and the EU were also increasingly seen as opponents by Russia's leaders. While oil and gas could still be sold to them, the Russian regime increasingly sought to weaken their internal cohesion through disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and cooperation with right-wing parties.[14]

8 Roman Goncharenko, "Steinmeier-Formel – Sprengkraft für die Ukraine," Deutsche Welle, October 2, 2019: https://www.dw.com/de/steinmeier-formel-sprengkraft-f%C3%BCr-die-ukraine/a-50679595 (accessed April 9, 2023).

9 Stefan Meister, "Nord Stream 2: The Dead-End of Germany's Ostpolitik," DGAP External Publications, February 20, 2019: https://dgap.org/de/node/32195 (accessed April 9, 2023).

10 Florian Flade and Georg Mascolo, "Bärenjagd," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 5, 2020: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/hack-bundestag-angriff-russland-1.4891668 (accessed April 9, 2023).

11 Silvia Stöber, "Tiergartenmord-Prozess: Anklage fordert lebenslange Haft," *tagesschau.de*, December 7, 2021: https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/tiergartenmord-prozess-plaedoyers-bga-101.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

12 Christoph Seidler, "Was passierte am Flughafen Tomsk?", *Spiegel*, August 25, 2020: https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/alexej-nawalnys-vergiftung-was-passierte-am-flughafen-tomsk-a-fbad75d4-dbc1-4d6c-bced-55c2cd25e7a1 (accessed April 9, 2023).

13 See the speech "Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the Department of International Relations of the Urals State University in Yekaterinburg," Federal Foreign Office, May 13, 2008: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/080513-bm-russland/232842 (accessed 9. April 2023).

14 Stefan Meister, "Isolation and Propaganda: The Roots and Instruments of Russia's Disinformation Campaign," DGAP, Transatlantic Academy Paper Series No. 6, April 2016: https://dgap.org/system/files/article_pdfs/meister_isolationpropoganda_apr16_web_1.pdf (accessed April 9, 2023).

Reality Checking Six Key Principles of German Ostpolitik After 1990

In this section, we present six central principles on which, in our view, German Ostpolitik after 1990 was based. We subject them to a retrospective "reality check," examining the extent to which they were understandable given the political realities at the time or whether they were already based on false assumptions and thus problematic even then. Furthermore, we will discuss why Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine caught the German government largely unprepared and whether or why signs of this aggression were overlooked.

1 | "Russia first"

Background: Historically, Russia has always been the most important interlocutor for the relevant power-political issues in the EU's Eastern neighborhood. As one of the leading global powers during the Cold War, the Soviet Union made decisions on behalf of all the states in the Eastern Bloc. These states had no sovereignty over their foreign, security, and domestic policies. It was only with approval from Moscow, for example, that West Germany could develop relations with East Germany (GDR) and other Eastern Bloc states. The Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr reflected the recognition of this reality. However, this approach, developed primarily by Germany's Social Democrats, led to misjudgments as early as the 1980s when, for example, the German government failed to support the *Solidarnosc* movement in Poland, thus underestimating processes of social change there and in other Warsaw Pact states such as Czechoslovakia. Indeed, Bahr accused *Solidarnosc* of endangering the balance of the blocs as a guarantee of peace by destabilizing Poland[15] – a historical view that led to skepticism of Germany's Russia policy that increased, above all, under Gerhard Schröder. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought forth new independent states that wanted to go their own way without Russia and had had historically negative experiences with both Russia and Germany. When Germany defined its Eastern European policy by focusing on Moscow's interests, it alienated these countries from German policy – especially the more they emancipated themselves from Russia. In contrast to fostering the integration of the Central East European countries, the German government increasingly acted as a brake on the integration of the post-Soviet states into the EU and NATO to avoid provoking Moscow. This was done, however, without making alternative offers and without recognizing that such "Russia first" policy indirectly implied the notion of limited sovereignty for these states.

Reality check: Thirty years after the end of the Soviet Union, independent, sovereign states had consolidated. They were pursuing their own national interests by developing away from Russia, leading to more and more conflicts with that country. The German government played a mediating role in conflicts as of 2014 – in Ukraine and elsewhere. But for a long time, Germany supported Ukraine's neutrality more than its independence or even integration into transatlantic institutions. The fact that Germany and France prevented a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008 to prepare the accession of Ukraine and Georgia is now seen as an important reason why the Russian attack on Ukraine could not be prevented.[16] This consideration signaled to the Kremlin that Russian spheres of influence would be recognized and that there was no need to fear comprehensive sanctions for possible Russian aggression against neighboring countries. The problem was that Russia saw this concession as weakness.

15 Thomas Urban, *Verstellter Blick: Die Deutsche Ostpolitik* (Berlin, 2022), pp. 20–22.

16 "France and Germany Thwart Bush's Plans," *Spiegel International*, April 3, 2008: https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-expansion-defeat-france-and-germany-thwart-bush-s-plans-a-545078.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

Putin's Russia is a revisionist power. Its rulers want to have "traditional" spheres of influence recognized and be able to shift borders if necessary. This is mainly a matter of revising the territorial losses caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russia's leadership wants to have a veto on all security policy issues in Europe and to massively limit the influence of the United States and NATO on the European continent.[17] But to accept this would not only contradict international law and the sovereignty of states guaranteed by it, but also the collective security interests of Germany and Europe.

Conclusion: Germany has developed its foreign policy toward Eastern Europe focusing too much on Russian interests. It has not included the security interests of the other post-Soviet states adequately or on an equal footing.

2 | "Change through rapprochement"

Background: The Ostpolitik during the Cold War was geared toward achieving concessions in the rapprochement with East Germany through economic cooperation with the Soviet Union and reducing immediate military escalation. The new Ostpolitik after 1990 focused on political change in Russia through economic cooperation and energy interdependence. The aim was to support democratization through the technological and economic modernization of Russia.[18] Economic development in the country was aimed at promoting a middle class that would articulate a growing interest in political participation – i.e., democratization – and the rule of law.

Reality check: Even if Russian elites still had some interest in the democratization of the country and its integration into Europe in the early 1990s, this had changed by the end of that decade or latest by the year by 2000 when Vladimir Putin was elected president. In its first years in office, his government promoted integration into the world economy and technological modernization as prices for oil and gas rose. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the power elite, the goal was always control and stability not political change. With the increasingly authoritarian leadership style of the regime and growing dominance of security elites in Russia's politics and economy, Putin sought less dependence on global financial markets, banking systems, and Western technologies, especially in his third term. The focus shifted to Russia's sovereignty. Due to his interest in enriching himself and maintaining power, Putin's system excluded political competition and systematically limited the participation of alternative politicians.

The modernization and opening of Russian society were not in the interest of a regime that could have lost control as a result. The mass demonstrations against Putin's return to the presidency in various major Russian cities in 2011 and 2012 fueled exactly these fears, which ultimately led to the expansion of repression against the opposition, civil society, and independent media after his reelection.[19] Nevertheless, it also should be noted that the economic and social exchange that was promoted by Germany, among others, supported the modernization of a (mostly urban) part of Russian society. However, their influence was insufficient to bring about major changes – or, rather, active civil society was increasingly excluded from political participation through repressive measures.

The fact that those in power in Berlin stuck to their Russia policy despite these repressions and the resulting restriction of civil society exchange between the two countries can be explained either by naivety or wrong priorities. Consequently, the formula "change through rapprochement" was increasingly replaced by "change through trade." The argument that expanding economic and energy relations would also bring about social change in Russia in the long term was convenient for German business to counter the growing criticism of trade with an increasingly authoritarian Russia. Thus, companies and their lobby organizations gained more and more influence on Germany's Russia policy, and economic interests dominated over security concerns and human rights considerations. Regardless, historical observation has shown that it is questionable whether economic cooperation and political change are necessarily

17 Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, "Agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," December 17, 2021: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en and "Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees," December 17, 2021: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en (both accessed April 9, 2023).

18 Compare to Frank-Walter Steinmeier's speech cited in note 13.

19 Grigorij Ochotin, "Agentenjagd," *Osteuropa*, 1–2/2015, pp. 83–94: https://zeitschrift-osteuropa.de/site/assets/files/3646/oe150108.pdf (accessed April 9, 2023).

linked. Even in the case of China, whose aggressive approach both internally and externally has currently triggered discussions about parallels with Russia, this formula did not lead to democratization. Despite economic modernization, the Communist Party of China has not relinquished any power; on the contrary, it has further expanded its control apparatus. Regarding Russia, the transfer of norms toward the West – including European countries – has not met expectations because Russian elites were able to launder their money in European and US financial and banking systems and then invest in real estate and companies.[20] At the same time, (former) German and other European politicians were paid to promote Russian economic and political interests in their home countries.[21]

Conclusion: For a long time, the assumption prevailed in Germany that economic cooperation would promote political and social change in Russia. Instead, economic cooperation has strengthened the regime in Moscow. It had only limited impact in social terms and caused a "transfer of norms" in the other direction (informality and corruption).

3 | "Interdependence and interweaving as a guarantee for peace"

Background: From the point of view of leading Social Democrats in Germany at the time, it was the growing interdependence and entanglement with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc that contributed significantly to peaceful change after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.[22] However, according to the academic literature, the Soviet Union lost the arms race and the economic competition, which led to a "victory" for the West.[23] The fact that, after 1990, the German government focused on economic and energy policy interdependence – and social interdependence – initially proved to be sensible and stabilizing. From the beginning, the focus was on win-win categories and the positive effect of mutual dependence. Completely hidden in this conceptualization, however, was the fact that Russian politics thinks in win-lose categories. While Russia's leadership remained very interested in Western technology until the beginning of Putin's third term, this changed as of 2014. With the sanctions imposed by the West after the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, Russian policy became more strongly oriented toward technological sovereignty and self-sufficiency. At least officially, China was proclaimed to be Russia's most important technological partner. Interdependence was seen as a vulnerability that had to be reduced. Furthermore, social interdependence was defined as the exertion of influence from the outside, which was to be made successively more difficult through "foreign agent" legislation.[24]

Reality check: While it is true that the central premises of German foreign policy toward Russia, including the interdependence approach, were not fundamentally wrong, several points speak against them. First, there was no real reciprocity. Second, economic interdependence and quiet diplomacy proved insufficient to counteract alienation and increasing aggression from Russia. Instead, a strategic interdependence policy would have been needed – not as an exclusive bilateral policy but in the context of European energy policy. Further, it would have considered the legitimate interests of Germany's Eastern European partners regarding their security of supply. Instead of becoming a pioneer of pan-European gas storage provision, Germany wanted to use Nord Stream 2 to become the key "gas hub." It thus violated another premise of its foreign policy: that Germany never acts on issues important to the EU without consulting its partners. Moreover, a sensible interconnection should have meant strengthening Ukraine as a transit country for gas and not weakening it – which was what happened with Nord Stream 2. If the controversial pipeline had been commis-

20 Transparency International UK, "Bottle Laundromat: How Fake Trades and British Shell Companies Helped Move $820 Million of Hot Money Out of Russia," July 7, 2022: https://www.transparency.org.uk/bottle-laundromat-UK-russia-money-laundering-shell-companies-blog (accessed April 9, 2023).

21 Andrew S. Weiss, "With Friends Like These: The Kremlin's Far-Right and Populist Connections in Italy and Austria," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 27, 2020: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Weiss-Austria_and_Italy-FINAL.pdf (accessed April 9, 2023).

22 Lars Haferkamp, "Putins Ukraine Krieg: War Brandts Ostpolitik ein deutscher Irrweg?", *Vorwärts*, October 25, 2022: https://www.vorwaerts.de/artikel/putins-ukraine-krieg-war-brandts-ostpolitik-deutscher-irrweg (accessed April 9, 2023).

23 Andrei Shleifer and Robert V. Vishny, "Reversing the Soviet Economic Collapse," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity 22 (2), pp. 341–367: https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/shleifer/files/reversing_soviet_econ_collapse.pdf (accessed April 9, 2023).

24 With the so-called agent laws, Russian lawmakers introduced a new category of non-commercial, non-governmental organizations that engage in political activities or are funded from abroad. These had to label themselves as alleged "foreign agents." Organizations that received such a label were stigmatized and later even liquidated. See: Benjamin Reeve, "Die 'Agentengesetze,' ihre Evolution und Konsequenzen," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, June 11, 2018: https://www.bpb.de/themen/europa/russland/270715/die-agentengesetze-ihre-evolution-und-konsequenzen/ (accessed April 9, 2023).

sioned, Russia's potential to blackmail Ukraine would have grown considerably. As a result, Ukraine would have become superfluous as an important partner country for the transit and storage of gas to Europe. In this respect, the Nord Stream 1 pipeline was already a mistake because the extensive Ukrainian pipeline system had sufficient transit capacities, which fundamentally calls into question the need for the two gas pipelines.

Finally, with its "Russia first" energy policy, the German government torpedoed its own goal of successfully supporting reform in Ukraine, through which the promotion of good governance was to bring about stability and resilience in the EU's Eastern neighborhood.

Nevertheless, political decision-makers in Berlin allowed a growing energy dependence on Russia that included an increase in gas volumes and the sale of gas storage facilities to Gazprom, a corporation partly owned by the Russian state. In view of Germany's strategic infrastructure and energy security, this can only be described as negligent.[25] Russia's leadership was counting on Germany continuing to represent Russian interests in the EU in exchange for cheap gas. And, even though Angela Merkel supported the sanctions against Russia after 2014, Russia continued to identify Germany as a weak point in the EU and further expanded its influence on Germany's politics and economy.

Germany's dependence on raw materials from Russia, above all gas, grew steadily until the outbreak of the war against Ukraine in February 2022. Most recently, imported gas from Russia accounted for 55 percent of all gas imports to Germany.[26] Putin was thus able to use energy as a weapon and systematically build up a network of supporters in Germany: the German interdependence model became the Kremlin's successful instrument of influence.[27] Russia's leadership securitized almost all areas of its domestic, foreign, and economic policy, as well as its energy and climate policy. The Kremlin's gas and pipeline policy must also be understood against the background of these geopolitical interests. Nord Stream 2 was less an economic project than an instrument to exert influence on German and European politics and bypass Ukraine as a transit country. This calculation should also be seen in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine because the pipeline was key to cutting off Ukraine as a transit country to Europe.[28]

The systematic restriction of civil society exchange impacted another central pillar of German policy toward Russia and the East that is based on interdependencies. Putin's system used remaining bilateral platforms such as the German-Russian Forum to exert influence on Germany's politics, economy, and society. To cite another example, the Petersburg Dialogue, which is a format primarily organized by the Russian state, increasingly served to cultivate contacts with stakeholders in Germany who were sympathetic to the Kremlin and to influence German politics.

Conclusion: Economic and social interdependencies can, in principle, create trust and prevent conflicts. However, such interdependence was used by Vladimir Putin to exert influence and exploit vulnerability. Despite energy policy interdependence with Russia, trust could not be built and the war against Ukraine could not be prevented. On the contrary, this policy has led to dependencies that have become painful for Germany.

4 | "Security in Europe is only possible with – not against – Russia"

Background: Russia is central to the European security architecture and cannot be ignored. Therefore, since the 1970s, a major concern of German foreign policy has been to integrate the Soviet Union – and later, Russia – into systems of collective security such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and its successor, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). One

25 Daniel Wetzel, "Gasspeicher-Verkauf an Gazprom ist 'unbedenklich,'" *Die Welt*, March 26, 2014: https://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/wirtschaft/article126196980/Gasspeicher-Verkauf-an-Gazprom-ist-unbedenklich.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

26 Statista, "Share of national gas imports in Germany in 2020, by country": https://www.statista.com/statistics/1331539/natural-gas-import-share-by-country-germany/#:~:text=Natural%20gas%20imports%20to%20Germany,Norway%2C%20followed%20by%20the%20Netherlands (accessed April 9, 2023).

27 Compare: Margarita M. Balmaceda, *Russian Energy Chains: The Remaking of Technopolitics from Siberia to Ukraine to the European Union* (Washington, DC, 2021); Konrad Schuller, "Die Schröder-Putin-Connection," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 6, 2022: https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/schroeder-putin-das-gas-russlands-deutsches-netzwerk-17780264.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

28 Stefan Meister, "Nord Stream 2" (see note 9).

thing is clear: Russia is currently one of the world's largest nuclear powers, and it has enormous military potential. Because war against Russia could lead to the annihilation of Europe or a global catastrophe, Russia was integrated into various confidence-building and security policy treaties and institutions.

Reality check: The increasing disregard or abuse of organizations such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe by Russia's leadership has led to a weakening of multilateral institutions.[29] Russia is subverting security and confidence-building in Europe – not only by no longer recognizing systems of collective security, but also by actively undermining them. The attempt by German governments to keep Russia in these institutions through compromise has therefore weakened their credibility and role in Europe.[30] Yes, it is true that there is no security in Europe without a cooperative Russia. However, at present, security in Europe is not possible with Russia and only against it. War, hybrid forms of harmful influence, and military means have become central instruments of Russian foreign and security policy. Russia's proposals for a new security architecture in Europe – with its own zones of influence and a withdrawal of NATO – contradict German interests and are intended to weaken the West.

Furthermore, Germany has not lived up to its own claims of promoting a liberal rule-based order and respect for international law that it traditionally emphasizes. On the one hand, as became obvious after 2014 at the latest, international law cannot be upheld against revisionist powers solely through diplomacy. Despite an increasingly aggressive Russia in various parts of the world – one that deliberately promoted and used the destabilization of the EU's immediate neighborhoods – the German government did not draw any security policy consequences at the time. It did not fully use the means at its disposal, such as assertive diplomacy or its economic and sanctioning power (including the termination of Nord Stream 2), to stop an increasingly aggressive Russia. The fact that Germany was instrumental in a sanctions policy toward Russia after 2014 can be seen as something of a turnaround. However, this policy sent contradictory signals. On the one hand, it was Angela Merkel who repeatedly held the EU together in extending sanctions packages; on the other, it was under her government that Nord Stream 2 was completed. The course for this was set in February 2015 – only a few months after Russia's aggression in the Donbass in the Battle of Debaltseve. This led to the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements," which again worsened Ukraine's position. Overall, the German government also made sure that the economic costs of the post-2014 sanctions were kept low on both sides.

In summary, not only the German government, but also the EU and NATO, remained too passive toward Russia's policy of dominance in the Black Sea Region – even after the annexation of Crimea. There was hardly any adequate reaction to hybrid patterns of action from Moscow that permanently undermined international maritime law and security there, or to massive breaches of international law or treaties such as unprecedented sea area closures. The same applies to the massive Russian armament of Crimea, including its deployment of sea-based medium-range missiles on the ships of the Black Sea Fleet starting in 2014 that can be equipped with nuclear war heads. This heavily armed fleet threatens not only Ukraine but also Europe. Consequently, even before 2022, Ukraine had slid into an almost hopeless strategic position relative to Russia on its southern borders. Along with strategic missteps in energy policy, the neglect of the increasing tensions and threats emanating from Russia in the Black Sea is a serious omission of German and European policy.[31]

Conclusion: For decades, the assumption in Germany was that security in Europe was only possible with Russia. However, those in power in Russia had no interest in collective security. In contrast, their policy was aimed at gaining recognition for areas of influence. Thus, the policy of keeping Russia in systems of collective security pursued by Germany tended to lead to less security in Europe. Russia's leadership systematically weakened institutions of collective security and increasingly shifted the military balance in its common neighborhood with the EU.

29 See Cornelius Friesendorf, "Fünf Wege, wie die Friedensinstitution OSZE zu retten ist," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 17, 2022, p. 5.

30 Jana Puglierin, "Meinung: OSZE dient Kreml als Feigenblatt," DGAP External Publications, February 22, 2017: https://dgap.org/de/forschung/publikationen/meinung-osze-dient-kreml-als-feigenblatt (accessed April 9, 2023).

31 Compare to numerous examples in the study *Antagonisms in the EU's neighbourhood #3: Geopolitical Ambitions in the Black Sea and Caspian Region* by the Bertelsmann Stiftung's "Key States" Initiative (*Projektinitiative „Schlüsselstaaten"*), especially the section by Wilfried Jilge titled "Russia's influence in the greater Black and Caspian Sea region," August 20, 2020, pp. 11–26: https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/default-7b774a0527-1 (accessed April 9, 2023).

5 | "Economics before geopolitics and security policy"

Background: Germany's refusal to take a leadership role in security policy in a changing geopolitical environment has so far negated trends toward globalization and interconnections and weakened its position as an internationally important actor. By defining energy projects such as Nord Stream 2 in purely economic terms for too long and ignoring implications related to power and geopolitics, political leaders in Germany have allowed Russia's leadership to use energy projects to divide the EU and strain transatlantic relations. The power apparatus in Moscow identified Germany as an important weak point in Europe and invested massive resources to influence public and political opinion in the country.[32] This approach was less effective in terms of its impact on elections to the German Bundestag than in maintaining a Russia-friendly attitude among German elites and society – despite growing Russian aggression.[33]

Reality check: From the perspective of Russia's leadership, actions related to energy and economic policy always have geopolitical implications. German policy actions must also be considered in a geopolitical context with security implications. This is not to say that Germany's appeasement and economic policy toward Russia caused the current war. However, due to the weak reactions of various German governments to Russian provocations and aggression – as well as their increase of energy policy dependencies – they bear at least some responsibility for Vladimir Putin's conclusion that he could start this war without serious consequences. The lessons learned in the Kremlin from German and European reactions to previous Russian actions led to the assumption that possible sanctions in response to a quick and short war against Ukraine would be rather weak and hesitant. The impression that, among German and European elites, economic and energy interests dominate a values-oriented foreign policy encouraged rather than prevented Russian aggression. Finally, Germany's lack of security policy weight has weakened its negotiating options vis-à-vis Moscow. Consequently, Putin now addresses security policy issues only to the leadership of the United States, weakening the EU in relation to Moscow.

Germany's cooperative policy toward Russia, which was based on quiet diplomacy and economic interdependence, was accompanied by an underestimation of geopolitics. This underestimation was combined with a tendency not to take the Kremlin's imperial language seriously enough and to neglect the geopolitical messages and threats usually sent in the guise of history and identity politics. The Kremlin's goals in Ukraine – specifically, how they are applied to southern and southeastern Ukraine – are a radicalized form of the guiding ideas that make up the concept of the *Russki Mir*, i.e., the "Russian World," and the Neo-Russian ideology that is largely compatible with it. The imagined community of the "Russian World" was an "authoritarian claim of identity"[34] that seamlessly merged with the thesis that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people"[35] – something Putin had been propagating for several years. In his essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin further escalated his thesis and de facto denied Ukrainians the right to have a state or be a nation.[36] It is significant that there was no clearly audible reaction from Germany and its Western partners to this historical-political declaration of war.

At the same time, partly because they overlooked these concepts, Germany and its Western partners failed to recognize the associated actions and plans of the power apparatus in the Kremlin, including their explosive power. This applies, for example, to the compatriot policy linked to aforementioned ideology of the "Russian World."[37] In recent years, the rulers in Moscow used this policy to empower them-

32 *EUvsDisinfo*, "Vilifying Germany, Wooing Germany," March 9, 2021: https://euvsdisinfo.eu/vilifying-germany-wooing-germany2/ (accessed April 9, 2023).

33 Stefan Meister, "Germany: Interdependence as Vulnerability" in *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses*, Atlantic Council, November 15, 2016: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/kremlin-trojan-horses/#germany (accessed April 9, 2023).

34 See Wilfried Jilge's definition in an interview with Sven Christian Schulz, "Gehört halb Osteuropa zu Russland? Wie Putins Sowjet-Trauma Kriege entfacht," Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland, August 8, 2022: https://www.rnd.de/politik/russland-wie-wladimir-putins-sowjet-trauma-kriege-entfacht-4E4V26OTN5GVLB2RTAKMLGXBD4.html; see Wilfried Jilge's analysis of the Russian World ideology in an interview with Frank Patalong, "Geschichte ersetzt für Putin das Völkerrecht," *SPIEGEL Geschichte*, March 22, 2022: https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/wladimir-putins-weltgeschichte-ersetzt-fuer-putin-das-voelkerrecht-a-a736ad11-8d7b-45f1-a3c1-a8b3855ddac8 (both accessed April 9, 2023).

35 Wilfried Jilge, "These von 'einem Volk,'" DGAP External Publications, April 25, 2018: https://dgap.org/de/forschung/publikationen/these-von-einem-volk (accessed April 9, 2023).

36 The Kremlin, "Статья Владимира Путина 'Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев'" ["Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians'"], July 12, 2021: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181 (accessed April 9, 2023).

37 This ideology states that everyone who thinks and feels Russian and belongs to the Russian cultural area is Russian and has the right to be protected by the Russian state. This explicitly applies to people who live outside Russia's borders.

selves – and supposedly protect their Russian-speaking compatriots in the neighboring states of Russia's "near abroad." This was especially true of Ukraine, which are deliberately defined in a broad and nebulous manner.[38]

Additionally, Germany's insufficient ability or willingness – like that of other Western countries – to read the geopolitical signals sent by Moscow promoted a lack of precision in its analysis of the Kremlin's goals toward Ukraine. The occupation of the Donbass was not and has never been the decisive goal of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Rather, its aggression in the Donbass in 2014 was always only a prelude and pretext for Moscow's actual goal – namely, to build a land bridge between Russia and annexed Crimea with historical-political reference to the ideology of a "New Russia" and the geopolitical claim to the territories of the northern Black Sea Region associated with it. At the same time, Russia sought to create the preconditions for cutting Ukraine off from its ports or maritime trade routes by further occupying the south. The Ukrainian state would thus be rendered dysfunctional.[39] Insufficient geopolitical analysis, including in German politics, led to two erroneous conclusions. The first was that, when trying to resolve these conflicts, the primary focus should be on the Donbass. The second was that the problems associated with the cause of the conflict, namely the annexation of Crimea, could be solved later and so were postponed.

In this way, the key role of Ukraine for the entirety of European security was also overlooked. On Ukraine's Black Sea coast and in the Azov region, the Kremlin's goals toward Ukraine and the West overlap. Since 2014, the massive weakening of Ukraine through the creeping or open occupation of its sovereign waters in the Azov and northwestern Black Sea, as well as the aggression toward its southeastern territories (Donbass), form the main building block in a larger imperial design – the strengthening of Russia's hegemonic position on its southern flank in the Caspian and Black Seas.[40] In parallel, it forms the basis of Russia's power projection toward the EU and NATO, not only in the Black Sea, but also in the Western Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. All this has led to massive tensions in the Black Sea Region whose shores or catchment area include five of the six states of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP).[41] Partly because the explosive nature of these events in the neighborhood was not recognized, Germany and its partners in the European Union failed to strengthen security policy toward the states associated with the EU: Ukraine and Moldova and, in a better time, Georgia. NATO would also have needed a stronger security presence in the Black Sea – for example, based on and supported by an alliance of states that neighbor NATO under their national flags – to react appropriately to Russian policy.

Conclusion: Germany assumed that it could act only on economic and energy policy while ignoring the geopolitical consequences of its own actions. However, this is not possible when dealing with an actor that thinks and acts primarily in terms of geopolitics and security policy because that causes actions to be interpreted in a different context. At the same time, Russia's leadership tried to prevent Ukraine from drifting toward transatlantic structures. Ignoring this geopolitical competition was largely what caused German and European elites to not want or be able to see that Russia's war against Ukraine was coming.

6 | "Historical responsibility prohibits criticism of Russia"

Background: While Germany's guilt for the millions of deaths in the Soviet Union during the Second World War is a historical fact, the German culture of remembrance in politics and society was – and still is – incomplete regarding the consequences of that war for the non-Russian states in East-Central and Eastern Europe. Germany's perception of those states continues to be shaped by old patterns of thinking. The Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 23, 1939, for example, resulted in the partition of East Central Europe. Thus, it was the culmination of a way of thinking in terms of spheres of influence that degraded the states of "Inter-Europe" (*Zwischeneuropa*)

38 Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (New Haven, 2016); Regarding concrete application before and during annexation, see: Wilfried Jilge, "Es geht nicht um die Krim, sondern um die Ukraine – Anmerkungen zur Politik Russlands gegenüber der Ukraine," *Arbeitspapiere zur Internationalen Politik und Außenpolitik* 1/2014, pp. 1–15.

39 Compare to Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Antagonismen," pp. 12–13, 19–21 (see note 31).

40 Stefan Meister, "Strategic sovereignty in the EU's Southeastern neighborhood: The Black Sea as part of a larger geopolitical region," Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Tbilisi, January 28, 2021: https://ge.boell.org/en/2021/01/28/strategic-sovereignty-eus-southeastern-neighborhood-black-sea-part-larger-geopolitical (accessed April 9, 2023).

41 Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Antagonismen," pp. 13–14 (see note 31).

to a space with second-class borders.[42] The Pact is still considered a traumatic event today – not only in the Baltic states and Poland, but also in Ukraine. For Ukrainians, this view is linked to the fear that Germany and Russia might again reach an agreement over their heads and to their detriment, which was confirmed from the Ukrainian perspective by the Russian-German pipeline policy. Today, parts of Germany's political and economic elites still think in an incomplete way that reflects the repression of such historical events and the continuity of an approach to "Inter-Europe." This may also help explain why the security interests of the successor states of the USSR, situated between Russia on the one hand and the EU and NATO on the other, have not been taken seriously enough. This is even more astonishing because, in the 1990s, both the then German government and large parts of the opposition pushed for eastward enlargement of the EU precisely because of the realization that states like Poland should never again become a plaything of Germany and Russia.

Reality check: The widespread suppression of the fact that the Soviet Union consisted of different peoples who, like the Russians, had to make great sacrifices is problematic. German guilt and responsibility must be felt toward the post-Soviet successor states such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, and not just toward Russia. Ukraine, which was completely occupied by Germany and became the main site of the Holocaust, suffered massive human losses and destruction. Germany must not be lenient toward Russian policy because of a guilt complex that goes hand in hand with a historical fixation on Russia as the former leading power in the region ("Russia first") – especially since this has been skillfully used again and again by the Kremlin's disinformation policy for its own purposes. Against this backdrop, neither can Russia's military actions toward its neighboring states be tolerated, nor can Ukraine's right to self-defense and military support be denied.

On the contrary, the legacy of Germany's guilt in the Second World War is not only paraphrased with the axiom "War in Europe: never again," but also "Auschwitz: never again." This places a special responsibility on Germany for Ukraine, against which Russia is waging a brutal war of aggression aimed at eradicating Ukrainian identity. Not acting or only acting hesitantly here and justifying this with phrasing related to Germany's commitment to peace in Europe and responsibility toward Russia does not do justice to Germany's own responsibility.[43] As Russia's leadership wants to destroy Ukraine as a state and society and transform its own country into a totalitarian state, Germany has a special (historical) responsibility to resolutely oppose these developments and take on a leadership role in Europe. "Fascism in Europe: never again" also means acting against the fascist and totalitarian tendencies in current Russian politics.[44]

Conclusion: For decades, Germany has focused its undisputed guilt for millions of Soviet victims in the Second World War primarily on Russia while largely ignoring other post-Soviet states with high numbers of victims such as Ukraine and Belarus. A differentiated understanding is needed – namely, that different peoples within the Soviet Union suffered from that German war of aggression and that the injustice of that time cannot be compensated by any German leniency toward the current Russian injustice against Ukraine.

42 Erwin Oberländer and Rolf Ahmann, "Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939: das Ende Ostmitteleuropas?", in *Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939: das Ende Ostmitteleuropas?* ed. Erwin Oberländer and Rolf Ahmann (Frankfurt, 1989).

43 *Zeit Online*, "Wieder Krieg in Europa? Nicht in unserem Namen!", December 5, 2014: https://www.zeit.de/politik/2014-12/aufruf-russland-dialog (accessed April 9, 2023)

44 Timothy Snyder, "We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist," *New York Times*, May 19, 2022: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html (accessed April 9, 2023).

Reality Check: The Six Basic Principles of German Ostpolitik After 1990

1	**„RUSSIA FIRST"**	Until very recently, Germany has conducted its relations with the post-Soviet states almost exclusively with regard to Russian interests, thus indirectly giving Russia a veto on relations with these states and recognizing their limited sovereignty.
2	**"CHANGE THROUGH RAPPROCHEMENT"**	German policy-makers long believed that economic cooperation would promote political and social change in Russia. However, close trade relations have strengthened the regime and had only a limited social impact.
3	**"INTERDEPENDENCE AND INTERWEAVING AS A GUARANTEE FOR PEACE"**	Economic and social interdependencies can create trust and prevent conflicts. But precisely these were perceived by Vladimir Putin as influence peddling and vulnerability. This policy has led to dependencies that Germany is feeling painfully, and it could not prevent Russia's war against Ukraine.
4	**"SECURITY IN EUROPE IS ONLY POSSIBLE WITH – NOT AGAINST – RUSSIA"**	For decades, the assumption in Germany was that security in Europe was only possible with Russia. But Russia's leadership had no interest in collective security and aimed its policy at gaining recognition for Russian spheres of influence.
5	**"ECONOMICS BEFORE GEOPOLITICS AND SECURITY POLICY"**	Germany has focused on economic and energy policy with regard to Russia, ignoring its geopolitical consequences. But ignoring geopolitical competition can be fatal with an actor that acts with geopolitics and security in mind, as the 2022 invasion of Ukraine shows.
6	**"HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY PROHIBITS CRITICISM OF RUSSIA"**	Germany directed its undisputed guilt for the millions of Soviet victims during the Second World War primarily to Russia while often neglecting the high numbers of victims in other post-Soviet states such as Ukraine and Belarus. This resulted in false restraint in criticizing Russia.

Source: Authors' own summary

Rethinking Germany's Position and Role in Europe

Since the end of the Cold War, Germany's role as a power in Europe has been characterized, above all, by restraint and its concentration on economic interests. During the Cold War, this position was understandable because Germany was a frontline state with the Communist Bloc. However, after reunification – and especially as of the 2000s with the rise of the Federal Republic as the central economic power in Europe – it became less and less justifiable. German reticence in security policy and its concentration on playing a purely mediating role has repeatedly weakened the EU. Although the German government took the lead in the financial crisis of 2008 to 2009, it did so with national interests in mind, rather than communal ones. For example, Greece and Portugal hardly acted in the pan-European interest by forcing the sale of their strategic infrastructure to China.[45] While Germany's government must define and defend the country's national interests, it must also coordinate them with European partners. If this does not happen, the formulation in the EU's foundational treaty "never to act against Europe's interests" becomes an empty phrase. Germany should also take a leading role in dealing with Russia and Ukraine and coordinate this with the Central East European states. The EU is not an institution that acts on its own in situations of foreign and security policy crisis. It is the member states that make the EU capable of acting. Insufficient leadership – as we saw in the first months after the start of Russia's large-scale war under Chancellor Olaf Scholz – was at best compensated by the leadership of the United States. This continues to be the case. Without US leadership, Ukraine would have no chance of surviving and winning this war. What is also clear: currently, no other EU country can fill the gap left by the lack of German leadership.

Germany often uses the EU when it is in its own interests. If the German government does not want to act itself in certain crisis situations, it often hides behind the EU. Also, mistakes it has made in the "national interest" were repeatedly blamed on the EU as an institution. For example, during talks with Vladimir Putin in 2015, Germany's then Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Sigmar Gabriel, a Social Democrat, promised to bring the Nord Stream 2 pipeline under German legislation so that external actors – such as the EU – would not have legal access to block it.[46] The aim was to bypass the EU and get the pipeline approved without further delay. After Russia began its large-scale war of aggression, Gabriel justified that position and the sale of gas storage facilities to Gazprom by citing the EU's liberalization policy, which would have left him no other option.[47] Here, the responsibility that a national politician has was shifted to the EU in an attempt to push through projects against pan-European interests.

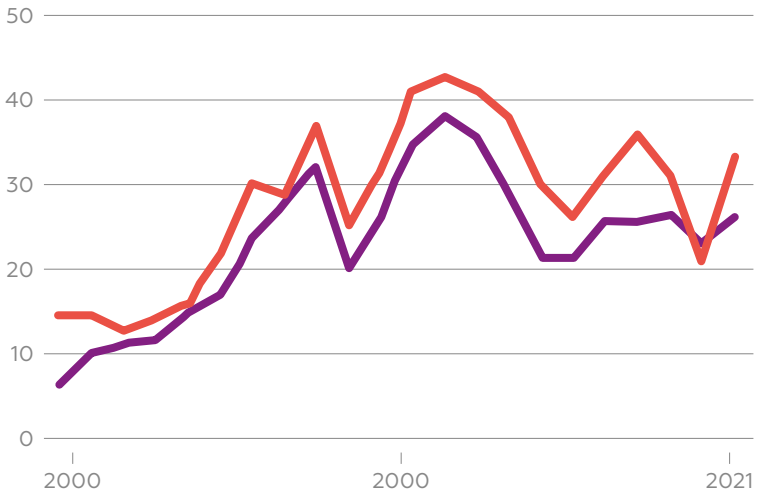
The German government played a mediating role within the framework of the Normandy format and the Minsk negotiations. For this, it was important to maintain a certain neutrality. However, when it became clear that the agreements could not be implemented as planned, sticking to these deadlocked formats was no longer sufficient. To respond appropriately to a crisis, a government must be able to adapt its role and the formats at hand to changing realities. Adhering to existing formats out of a lack of alternatives is not only insufficient but can also discredit one's own actions or legitimize the policies of hostile actors. It helps a country like Russia to weaken institutions and formats, for example, by reinterpreting agreements. Russia's leadership prefers to create new formats that it can dominate and whose rules it can dictate – such as the Astana format on Syria and the trilateral platform with Armenia and Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War in 2020 –

45 Renee Maltezou, "Update 1 – Greece seeks role as China's gateway to Europe," Reuters, June 20, 2014: https://www.reuters.com/article/greece-china-assets-idINL6N0P14DW20140620 (accessed April 9, 2023).

46 The Kremlin, "Meeting with Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Economic Affairs and Energy of Germany Sigmar Gabriel," October 28, 2015: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50582 (accessed April 9, 2023).

47 Atlantik-Brücke, "'Nord Stream 2 war ein Fehler. Und auf die Osteuropäer haben wir schlicht nicht gehört': Ein Interview mit dem Vorsitzenden der Atlantik-Brücke, Sigmar Gabriel": https://www.atlantik-bruecke.org/nord-stream-2-war-ein-fehler-und-auf-die-osteuropaeer-haben-wir-schlicht-nicht-gehoert/ (accessed April 9, 2023).

Cooperation with Consequences: Germany's Trade with Russia
Volume of Foreign Trade Between Germany and Russia (in Billions of Euros)



TOP IMPORT GOODS 2021:

Crude oil/natural gas: **19.4 bn euros**
Metals: **4.5 bn euros**

TOP EXPORT GOODS 2021:

Machinery: **5.8 bn euros**
Motor vehicles and parts: **4.4 bn euros**

RUSSIA'S SHARE OF GERMAN FOREIGN TRADE IN 2021: 2.3%

Source: Statista

while it simultaneously bypasses international multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and OSCE. Thus, the Normandy format corresponded with the Russian interest in exclusivity. Interest waned, however, when Russia realized that the real purpose of this format that includes Germany and France was to redress the imbalance of power between Russia and Ukraine and thus enable Ukraine to discuss fundamental political issues with Russia on equal footing. It is even more important to define the principles upon which one's own foreign policy actions are based and to uphold them. These principles should not be flexible but should be underpinned by the strengthening of multilateral institutions and adherence to agreements.

Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, marked the end of the European security order agreed after the Cold War, making it necessary to design a new security architecture for Germany and Europe. Only three days after the war began, Chancellor Olaf Scholz proclaimed a "turning point" – *Zeitenwende* – in German policy, thus acknowledging both this new reality and the failure of previous federal governments to prepare Germany for potential security threats.[48] With the announcement of a special fund of 100 billion euros for the modernization of Germany's armed forces, the Bundeswehr, the federal government has, for the first time, recognized Russia as a threat to German security. Furthermore, this undertaking must be seen as recognition two facts: Europe cannot permanently rely on the United States and Germany must do more and pay more for its own security. So far, however, there is no comprehensive strategy for responding to the new challenges that have only become more visible with Russia's continuing aggression. Putin's Russia is a threat not only to European security, but also to a global order built on international institutions and law.

The rise of China as a global power on the one hand, and the domestic political crisis of the United States – combined with its concentration on the Asia-Pacific region and withdrawal from regions such as the Middle East – on the other, provide opportunities for action for other actors like Russia. The hasty withdrawal of the United States and its allies from Afghanistan has shown the limits of Western power and revealed fractures and weaknesses in the Western alliance. This also motivated the Kremlin to attack Ukraine. Russia and China are challenging a

48 The German Federal Government, "Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz am 27. Februar 2022": https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/regierungserklaerung-von-bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-am-27-februar-2022-2008356 (accessed April 9, 2023).

global order and multilateral institutions dominated by the United States and want to set their own norms. In a multipolar world, the model favored by Russia, great powers and transactional negotiation systems are dominant. This does not mean the end of multilateralism, but the weakening of open markets, the strengthening of national sovereignty in economics and security, and ad hoc negotiation formats. Germany owes its economic and prosperity model to globalization in a multilateral framework and the peace order in Europe that has been guaranteed by the United States in recent decades. This order is actively undermined by Russia. Its war against Ukraine further weakens the German economic model, which is based not only on open markets and functioning global supply chains, but also on cheap Russian pipeline gas and other accessible raw materials. A new model is not yet in sight, and the short- and medium-term adjustment costs – including the partial deindustrialization of energy-intensive sectors – will be immense for Germany and Europe.

To guarantee security and prosperity, there is a need for more European sovereignty and European leadership in crises in the EU's neighborhood and beyond. This requires a toolbox of instruments that provides the ability to react to wars and crises and reduces vulnerabilities and dependencies. Clinging to old role models and assumptions only delays adaptation to these new realities and continuously increases costs. If Germany had already drawn the right conclusions from Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and gradually reduced its energy dependence on Russia, instead of increasing it, today's costs and the Kremlin's blackmail potential would be much reduced.

This means equipping Ukraine with weapons in such a way that the price of future attacks by Russia becomes too costly. The German government is already providing a great deal of financial support and stabilization as well as military upgrades; this was underlined by the delivery of the Iris-T missile defense system and Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, among other things. Nevertheless, it could advocate for more generous aid within the European framework to secure the ability of the Ukrainian state to function in the war in the longer term. If Germany were to play a more proactive, strategic, and forward-looking role in providing military aid, this would enable Ukraine to liberate more territories. In light of the conversion of the Ukrainian armed forces to Western weapons and ammunition, which will become necessary in the medium term, debates on the delivery of Western infantry fighting vehicles and battle tanks are rather among the smaller questions; these should be answered in Ukraine's favor anyway. Too much hesitation in this area is likely to encourage further Russian aggression and thereby increase costs.[49] Only a Russian defeat in Ukraine can lead to political and social change in Russia. Western states, above all Germany, have it in their power to equip Ukraine financially and militarily in such a way that it can win this war and survive as a state with its own identity. Such a Western policy must be combined with a functioning nuclear deterrent and clear communication to the Russian regime of the political and economic costs it would face if it used tactical nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

49 Kiel Institute for the World Economy, "Ukraine Support Tracker: A Database of Military, Financial, and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine": https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/ (accessed April 9, 2023).

Outlook and Recommendations for Action

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has shaken the basic assumptions of German foreign and security policy. It was not until February 24, 2022, that German economic and political elites accepted that a new era had begun – although a fundamental change in Russian policy toward Germany and the EU, visible to all, has been in place since latest 2012 and although the Kremlin has been waging a (hybrid) war, not only against Ukraine, but also against the West, since 2014.[50] The *Zeitenwende* announced by Olaf Scholz, with all its implications, is thus an adjustment of German policy to existing realities that has taken place in retrospect. However, this also needs conceptual and strategic underpinning, which has been lacking so far. Redefining Germany's interests and its own understanding of its role in Europe is a central task for the current German government. It must adapt these to the new realities, take international principles into account, restore international law, and strengthen multilateral institutions and partnerships. In this context, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock has rightly based her foreign policy on the principle that values and interests are "not a contradiction, but two sides of the same coin." This premise could now be spelled out in concrete terms using the example of a strategy to be formulated for the EU's Eastern neighborhood and the Wider Black Sea Region, for example. At the same time, political and social change in Russia must be supported in the long term, which implies high costs for all involved.

- **1.** The "Russia first" conviction that has long prevailed in Germany should be replaced by integration and cooperation with states and societies in the EU's Eastern neighborhood that strive for democracy, the rule of law, and a market economy. While the Eastern Partnership (EaP) has focused on transformation without integration, this new policy should aim for reform and transformation with the goal of integration into the EU. The expansion of the European democratic and legal space into the Eastern neighborhood is in the German and European interest. Taking Russian sensitivities into account at the expense of the common neighborhood with the EU contradicts this. The aim should be political change in Russia itself, promoted by successful democratization and reforms in other post-Soviet states. Due to its size, location, history, and dynamic civil society, Ukraine has a key role to play in this systemic conflict with Russia. Therefore, German policy should focus on a "Ukraine first" policy in the medium term – not only to ensure its survival as a state, but also to promote its reform and EU integration policy as a central goal of German foreign policy in the European interest.

- **2.** As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU's neighborhood and enlargement policy needs an update. The EU needs a strategy to strengthen its neighborhood in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and the Black Sea. Germany should play an important role in this by working to strengthen the connectivity and security of trade routes and promote the resilience of partners, especially in the wider Black Sea Region, at a time when Russia has massive military commitments in Ukraine and limited resources for other regions and conflicts. This includes promoting connectivity between the Black and Caspian Seas and with Central Asia, with a view to supplying the EU with oil and gas. Initiatives must be promoted that do not allow important but currently difficult partners in the region, such as Georgia, to drift away from Europe toward a "third way" or into a Russian sphere of influence. To this end, the EU and Germany must become more active in these countries in promoting processes of reform of the rule of law, freedom of the media, and electoral law with more consistent conditionality. In doing so, the affiliation of countries like Georgia and Armenia to Europe should always be emphasized. Due to its geographical location, the integration of the Republic of Moldova is a priority task in the context of the integration of Ukraine.

50 The beginning of the anti-Western orientation of Russian foreign policy can arguably be traced back to before Vladimir Putin's appearance at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. The tragedy of the Beslan hostage crisis and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine played a special role in the consolidation of anti-Western policy in 2004.

- **3.** The idea of "change through rapprochement" should apply more to general Russian society than to the ruling elites. Since it is currently barely possible to enter into cooperation with Russian civil society, the German government should support Russian opponents of the regime who have had to leave their country for political reasons and are trying to gain a foothold in Europe. They should be supported in developing a Russian vision for a peaceful Russia in Europe and thus contribute to coming to terms with and overcoming their country's imperial and colonial past. For example, platforms in science, education, media, and for think tanks could be established with them to develop concepts for a new, democratic Russia in Europe and to make a positive impact on the information space in the Russian language. This would be a policy of sustainable change. In contrast, a restrictive visa policy, which is repeatedly called for, tends to work against reforms in Russia. Nevertheless, a blanket admission of Russian conscientious objectors should not take place.

- **4.** Peace and stability in Europe are not possible with Putin's Russia, but only against it. Only NATO membership guarantees security for its member states. The capacity for military deterrence against Russia is an important security guarantee for Germany within NATO. A functioning deterrence is a key signal from the West to the Russian elites: if they understand that aggression beyond the war against Ukraine will meet with resolute resistance from NATO and that the massive military effort in Ukraine will lead to a weakening of Russian military capabilities, this could also lead to the containment of the current war. Of particular importance here is a credible nuclear deterrence – currently the most effective guarantee against Vladimir Putin's threats of a tactical nuclear strike.

- **5.** Germany needs a cultural change away from a bureaucratic to a strategic foreign and security policy. The German government needs concepts in its security policy to realize the potential of the *Zeitenwende*. However, these concepts must be underpinned with instruments. Within the framework of NATO, Berlin should come up with proposals to strengthen Germany's own security vis-à-vis Russia; this is especially important as Germany has a key role to play in the security challenges facing the Alliance simply because of its geographical location at the center of Europe. For example, NATO must respond to the current threat by reacting adequately to the build-up of conventional and nuclear-tipped short- and medium-range missiles that Russia has been undertaking for several years. In this context, Germany should work to ensure that NATO pays the same attention to the Black Sea Region as it does to the Baltic Sea Region and Northern Europe, since the Russian annexation and militarization of the Crimean Peninsula poses a threat to Europe similar to the armament of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

- **6.** More than two percent of gross domestic product should be permanently spent on modernizing the Bundeswehr and increasing its ability to act within NATO structures in Europe. NATO's northern enlargement and the modernization of weapons systems in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine create the possibility that Germany could make massive security investments in partnership with other countries. Germany could thus become a central component of a European security system with neighboring NATO partners in the Baltic and North Sea Regions, as well as in Central Europe; this would also have implications for the Black Sea Region. The Special Fund associated with the *Zeitenwende* will make Germany the third most important European security actor after Great Britain and France. Using these funds for a pan-European security upgrade is a strategic task that would also help to satisfy the demand for more burden sharing with the United States.

- **7.** The complete isolation of Russia is not expedient in the long term. Rather, controlled economic and technological integration is in the German and European interest. Should Russia become completely dependent on Chinese technology and disconnect itself from the global banking and financial system because of Western sanctions, the possibilities for Europe and the United States related to influence and information will dwindle. As the example of the sanctioning of Iran shows, a complete isolation of an authoritarian state does not necessarily lead to a change in policy.[51] On the contrary, it strengthens the more isolationist security elites and weakens the liberal parts of the elites and wider society. Nevertheless, depen-

51 Stefan Meister and David Jalilvand, "Sanktionen gegen Russland: Fünf Lehren aus dem Fall Iran," DGAP Policy Brief, June 8, 2022: https://dgap.org/de/forschung/publikationen/sanktionen-gegen-russland (accessed April 9, 2023).

dencies on Russia must be reduced and those in power in Moscow must be deprived of the possibility of using energy as a weapon against European states and their eastern neighbors. Thus, the integration of energy networks between EU member states and eastern neighboring states interested in integration serves to strengthen energy security in Europe. Gas and oil supplies are an important means of influence for corrupt elites, as the example of Hungary shows. Pan-European rules are needed to minimize these possibilities. Interweaving the energy policy of the EU with Ukraine and other states in the eastern neighborhood within the framework of the Green Deal is an important project in terms of economics, integration, and security.

- **8.** NATO should adopt a modified dual approach – i.e., it should combine the necessary strengthening of its military capabilities with the willingness to again accept offers of cooperation in mutual security interests (confidence- and security-building measures, transparency, disarmament and arms control) to reduce tension with Russia and the post-Soviet region. Despite the massive antagonism with Russia, no attempts to talk to Russia's leadership about confidence-building measures should be neglected. The top priority at present must be to end the war against Ukraine. Russia must withdraw from the occupied territories and respect fundamental principles of international law such as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbors.

  Germany should define itself more strongly as a geopolitical and security actor and at the same time strengthen multilateral institutions based on international law by increasing available resources. Linked to this, it must be willing – within a European framework – to organize more peace operations in the EU's neighborhood and beyond. Further, it should strengthen institutions for the prosecution of war crimes and those working to stop international corruption (with a focus on specialized teams within the offices of public prosecutors) by improving its provision of personnel and funding. A values-based foreign policy does not exclude pragmatic partnerships with undemocratic states. However, this must not lead to compromises and appeasement that undermine international law and thus the rules-based order – as shown by past relations with Russia. Securing the European legal and democratic space internally and expanding it externally requires a proactive and strategic German and EU foreign and security policy, along with an expanded set of instruments that includes peace-building measures.

The integration of Russia into systems of collective security in the long term and the agreement of confidence-building measures must remain the goal. However, if the current Russian regime has contradictory ideas of European and global security, uses violence as a means of asserting interests, and thinks in terms of spheres of influence, there can be no cooperative security. This makes it important to strengthen existing institutions and prevent Russia from dominating conflicts and regions in Europe and its neighborhood. In addition to strengthening NATO's role in Eastern Europe, the EU should therefore also have stronger security components (tackling disinformation and corruption, strengthening societal resilience and security institutions). There are no security guarantees outside NATO. Even more important is the willingness of countries in the EU and NATO to supply weapons for self-defense and deterrence to partner countries like Ukraine. A radical rethinking of security in Europe is needed. In the process, Putin's Russia should be denied any influence and both the military and civilian resilience of partner countries that are not part of NATO should be systematically strengthened.

The central lesson of the last 30 years of Germany's Ostpolitik is that Germany can no longer afford to pursue a policy of appeasement toward Russia in the interests of its own security. It takes political responsibility to bring about fundamental change in Germany's policy toward Russia and Eastern Europe. It is also the responsibility of German politicians to explain this change to their own society and to underpin and sustain it strategically – despite criticism. Moreover, German leadership in Europe is needed to make the EU's neighborhood and enlargement policy a relevant instrument in a new geopolitical and security environment, and to find appropriate responses to Russia's aggression. Despite some positive changes in German policy, this leadership is not yet sufficiently evident, which weakens Europe's ability to address global challenges.

DGAP

Advancing foreign policy. Since 1955.

Rauchstraße 17/18
10787 Berlin
Tel. +49 30 25 42 31 -0
info@dgap.org
www.dgap.org
@dgapev

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