

FROM THE EDITOR

THE GERMAN GLACIER

It has been almost a year since Russia's resumed aggression against Ukraine. Hundreds of speeches have been delivered and thousands of texts discussing the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war for the world and for our future have been published. The greatest number of excellent speeches was given by the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, who has become a symbol of the fight for freedom and independence, of resistance against colonialism and imperial aggression. He has become the contemporary 'golden standard' for a democratic leader, whose role in society is to devise political responses to attempts at imposing on the world an archaic, anti-democratic, imperial worldview, based on the superiority of power over the law, over the right to freedom and self-determination, and even over international humanitarian law that regulates the conduct of war.

Willingly or not, other leaders of the free world had to relate and adjust to the standard set by Zelensky and his appeals to face this global challenge. The Ukrainian President earned universal respect, which enabled him to appeal directly to all democratic societies. This is how a feedback loop came into being. Supporting Zelensky's political stance, democratic societies began to expect their own leaders to pursue policies in line with his¹.]

In other words, the President of Ukraine gained influence to shape the policies of the democratic world, including those pursued by the greatest powers, both towards his country and towards

¹ C.E. de Vries, I. Hoffmann, Under Pressure: the War in Ukraine and European Public Opinion. Study, Opinions, Moods and Preferences of European Citizens—Eupinions, October 5, 2022, <https://eupinions.eu>.

Russia. This was the reason why the Joe Biden administration sought to invite Zelensky to come to Washington DC in December 2022 and to address the US Congress just before a vote on another spending package enabling the continuation of US military support for Ukraine.

To the Biden administration, which was hoping to win the American taxpayers' support for the US policies regarding Ukraine and Russia, Zelensky's power of persuasion was a highly valuable asset. Although this was a very realistic calculation, it is frequently disregarded by numerous so-called realists.

The failure of the political campaign to deter Russia (this is what these initiatives actually involved), spearheaded in the late 2021 and early 2022 by the United States and backed by its European allies, combined with the resumption of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the latter's successful resistance, sparked major political turmoil in Europe.

Sweden and Finland have made the sharpest political turn when they decided to abandon their traditional policy of not joining any defence alliance. The countries of NATO's eastern flank sped up the modernization of their armed forces. The German government announced its intention to abandon its failed *Ostpolitik* (which included efforts to influence Russia through cooperation), to help Ukraine to repel Russian aggression, and to radically increase Germany's defence spending. Sadly, these declarations never materialized.

In his article published in summer 2022 on the *Foreign Affairs* website, Wolfgang Ischinger wrote: "Unfortunately, Germany has lost some of the trust it build up in Europe over the last three decades because of its intransigence on Nord Stream 2—its long planned, and now suspended, pipeline project with Russia—and its dangerous dependence on Russian energy.. And European misgivings has been compounded by Berlin's less than enthusiastic position on weapons deliveries to Ukraine. When Scholz presented some important proposals to the EU in July, including on how to reform the EU's foreign policy decision-making process, it came

as no surprise that some eastern member countries were less than lukewarm. They questioned the arrogance of such initiatives by a country that has followed, far more often than it has led, on Ukraine, and that had for so long, in their view, stubbornly refused to listen to its partners about Russia and energy”²

Ischinger’s comments on the fiasco of the German policy towards Ukraine, and even more towards Russia, should be viewed as excessively lenient.

Germany turned out to be a giant glacier; even sudden geopolitical climate change does not immediately affect either its size or the pace of its movement. What is melting at the greatest speed is Germany’s credibility in the international arena.

Almost all German allies to the east of its borders expected that Russia’s resumed aggression against Ukraine would lead to the collapse of Germany’s former *Ostpolitik* and the emergence, at last, of a *Neue Ostpolitik*. The collapse in question has exposed the failure of the assumptions of the policy Germany had pursued towards the East much longer than in the last three decades, but particularly since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. The hope was born that Germany would finally move on to pursue a policy towards Russia that would reflect both Berlin’s aspiration to moral leadership in Europe and the world, and its economic potential. The longer the much awaited changes were out of sight, the more impatient Germany’s eastern allies grew.

Over the last twelve months, all meetings (there were very many of them) with representatives of the Central and Northern European states, politicians, diplomats, experts and journalists were dominated by a sense of frustration with the German foreign policy since 2014. It seems worthwhile to discuss some of the arguments that were raised during the meetings which I attended.

Following 2014, despite Russia’s return to military aggression as a political instrument, its annexation of Crimea, occupation of

² W. Ischinger, *Germany’s Ukraine Problem: Europe’s Largest Country Needs Time to Adjust to a Dangerous New World*, Foreign Affairs, August 10, 2022, www.foreignaffairs.com.

the Donbas region, violation of all international legal obligations that formed the foundations of Europe's security architecture, Berlin changed next to nothing in its attitude towards Moscow.

It continued to convince everyone that intensified cooperation with Russia and readiness to meet its demands were the best way to guarantee peace in Europe. Not only did Germany fail to abandon its Russian gas imports it received through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, but also it increased its dependence on Moscow, when it decided to construct Nord Stream 2. This latter pipeline was intended to enable Russia to use energy blackmail against Ukraine.

At the same time, major German banks maintained Russia's confidence in them, as they laundered billions of euros siphoned off from the Russian financial system by Russian secret services and 'businessmen' linked to the Kremlin³, while German diplomats advocated limiting the presence of NATO forces on NATO's eastern flank, as part of confidence building measures. At that time, when a decisive response and a boost to the credibility of the deterrence policy were urgently needed, Berlin decided to approach Russia with new proposals to engage in dialogue. However, the cost of these proposals was not to be borne by Germany but by Germany's allies on the eastern flank, and it was their security that was to be compromised.⁴

The implementation of this dangerous policy was largely influenced by the German *Ostpolitik* tradition. Germany could have abandoned it following the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2014, but missed the opportunity and thus created the conditions for further acts of Russian aggression. East of Berlin—that is, among Germany's allies to the East—this is considered Germany's greatest political mistake in the last three decades.

³ L. Harding, *Deutsche Bank Faces Action over \$20bn Russian Money-laundering Scheme*, *The Guardian*, April 17, 2019, www.theguardian.com; E. Caesar, *Deutsche Bank's \$10-Billion Scandal: How a Scheme to Help Russians Secretly Funnel Money Offshore Unravalled*, *The New Yorker*, August 22, 2016, www.newyorker.com; P. Kowsmann, *Deutsche Bank Faces Threat of Fines Over Money-Laundering Controls*, November 5, 2022,

⁴ *The German Initiative for Arms Control: Time for Dialogue with Russia*, *Analyses*, the Centre for Eastern Studies (Poland), September 9, 2016,

What contributed to this mistake? Why did Germany waste the opportunity to adjust its policy (which was synonymous with European policy) to suit the new circumstances, when Russia resorted to war blackmail? This question has been answered in a number of ways. Some of my interviewees pointed to the German tradition and the German political elite's false assumption that a policy that worked in the past would always work, no matter the circumstances.

In the final decades of the Cold War, the aim of the German *Ostpolitik* was to create political conditions in Germany's relations with Russia, so as to foster the prospect of a reunification of the two German states in the near future.

In Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Germany's partition were interpreted as proof of the efficacy of the policy of shaping political changes in Europe by boosting political and economic interdependence between democratic Germany and non-democratic Soviet Russia. Since the policy paid off so handsomely, as it helped to put an end to the Cold War and to reunite Germany, it was natural for Berlin to continue to invest politically in its relations with Russia. Since then, this has become an element of Germany's nationwide political consensus.

However, the problem was that the very same factor which had led to the reunification of Germany, i.e. the collapse of the Communist system as an effective method for accumulating capital, which in turn undermined the Soviet Union's appeal and power, also triggered the emancipation of the Soviet-dominated nations of Central and Eastern Europe. What triggered the disintegration of the Soviet empire were pro-democratic movements in the Soviet republics which, for a variety of reasons, focused on their pro-independence aspirations and wanted to reduce their political dependence on the colonial centre of power in Moscow and ultimately to free themselves from it.

Meanwhile, buoyed by the success of its policy, Germany continued its political investment in its relations with the Soviet Union. According to the recently declassified German diplomatic

papers, Chancellor Helmut Kohl believed that the collapse of the Soviet Union was “contrary to Germany’s best interest”. He viewed this development as an unprecedented opportunity to tighten the Berlin-Moscow relationship. “Perhaps now we will be able to repair what went wrong earlier in this century”. After the Second World War, which had caused the death of millions of people and had resulted in the partition of Germany, Kohl hoped to “open a new chapter in relations with Moscow” and to compensate Russia for the Nazi invasion of June 1941.⁵

A politician from the Central European region pointed out to me that this was precisely the same argument that the German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier used thirty years later in an interview for a German newspaper, in which he attempted to justify the German-Russian collaboration on the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline: “For us, Germans, it has an entirely different dimension: we look at the highly tumultuous German-Russian history. It included spells of fruitful cooperation, but also many more periods of terrible bloodshed. The 22nd of June [2021] will mark the eightieth anniversary of the German invasion of the USSR. Over twenty million Soviet citizens were casualties in this war. This does not justify any wrongdoing in Russian politics today, but we cannot lose sight of the bigger picture. Yes, we do have a difficult relationship, but apart from the present time there is a past and there is a future”⁶.

A *Financial Times* columnist commented on the German President’s argument as follows: “The trouble with Steinmeier’s defence on Nord Stream 2 as repayment of a moral debt to Russia is that the president made no mention of other countries laid waste between 1939 and 1945 at Nazi hands. Russia became the legal successor state to the Soviet Union in the UN Security Council after the end of communism in 1991. But Russians are not the sole

⁵ K. Wiegrefe, *Newly Released Documents Shed Fresh Light on NATO’s Eastward Expansion*, *Spiegel International*, May 3, 2022,

⁶ *Bundespräsident Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Interview mit der Tageszeitung Rheinische Post*, February 6, 2021, www.bundespraesident.de.

successor nation of moral debts, as Ukraine’s ambassador to Berlin was quick to point out.[...]. Germany’s Nord Stream 2 partnership with Russia arouses apprehension in parts of central and eastern Europe where historical memories last for centuries. Poland was wiped off from Europe’s map for 123 years because of three partitions between 1772 and 1795 organised chiefly by Prussia and Russia. The nazi-soviet pact of 1939 was the prelude to another two-pronged attack on Poland. [...]. Steinmeier went on to say that—for us Germans, there is another dimension.”⁷.

This seems right on point. The German elite’s prioritization of their country’s moral debt to Russia over that owed to Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, on whose territories Germany actually carried out its colonial extermination policy during the Second World War, and over the security interest of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, who lost their independence for half a century, mainly due to Germany’s actions, harked back to the tradition of imperial, non-democratic Germany. In this respect, it undermined Germany’s claim of having accounted for its colonial and imperial past.

Thirty years ago, Germany’s Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher argued that NATO accession of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, which had freed themselves from their dependence on the USSR, “was not in the best interest” of Germany. Although these countries were entitled to apply for NATO membership, the aim of Germany’s policy should be to prevent them from “claiming this right”⁸.

Germany preferred to support the crumbling empire, and then to minimize Russia’s losses, rather than recognize the opportunity to create a democratic, anti-imperial alliance with the Central and Eastern European states freeing themselves from Russian colonialism.

⁷ T. Barber, *Germany’s Bridges to Russia Split Open Europe*, *Financial Times*, February 15, 2021, www.ft.com.

⁸ K. Wiegrefe, *Newly Released Documents Shed Fresh Light on NATO’s Eastward Expansion*, *Spiegel International*, May 3, 2022,

In later years, this approach was more nuanced. When the Clinton administration expressed its support for NATO enlargement, Germany became America's most active ally in facilitating this process. It also supported the Clinton administration's idea of "meeting Russia's concerns halfway" by signing a declaration precluding the deployment of "substantive" NATO troops on the territory of the Central and Eastern European states that were about to join the alliance.

The NATO-Russia Founding Act was based on the assumption that as long as Russia maintained a peaceful political stance and respected international law, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours, there would be no need to deploy either NATO military forces or its nuclear potential on the eastern flank. However, Russia repeatedly broke the agreement based on this assumption.⁹ Once again, Berlin missed the opportunity to draw political conclusions from this fact and to demand that NATO withdraw from the obligations enshrined in the NATO-Russia declaration of 1997. Obviously, such a stance suited Russian interests perfectly and was contrary to the interests of Germany's allies on NATO's eastern flank.

In the Baltic states in particular, Germany's new *Realpolitik*, initiated by Kohl and Genscher, was not welcome at all. In practice, what it entailed was not just a lack of support for the decolonization of Eastern Europe, it also turned a blind eye to Soviet crimes. Several days following the Soviet secret service's attack on the Vilnius TV tower on January 13, 1991, which resulted in the death of fourteen Lithuanian pro-independence activists, Kohl and Gorbachev spoke on the phone. They "exchanged 'hearty greetings.' Gorbachev complained that it was impossible to move forward 'without certain severe measures,' which sounded as though he was

⁹ A.M. Dyrer, A. Kacprzyk, W. Lorenz, M. Terlikowski, *How Russian Violations of the 1997 Founding Act Influence NATO–Russia Relations*, PISM Policy Paper, no. 6 (166), July 2018, www.pism.pl; A.M. Dyrer, W. Lorenz, A. Kacprzyk, *Konsekwencje rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę dla porozumienia NATO-Rosja (NRFA) z 1997 r.* [Consequences of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine for the NATO-Russia Agreement (NRFA) of 1997], PISM Strategic Files, no. 6 (114), June 2022, www.pism.pl.

referring to Vilnius. Kohl's response: 'In politics, everyone must also be open to detours. The important thing is that you don't lose sight of the goal.' Gorbachev concluded by saying that he 'very much valued' the chancellor's position. The word Lithuania wasn't uttered even a single time, according to the minutes".¹⁰

It was, sadly, this tradition that Germany's continued collaboration with Russia built on, despite Russia's aggressive behaviour towards Georgia, its invasion of Ukraine, its intervention in Syria, and its attempts at poisoning Russian opposition members and dissidents, including on the territory of NATO member states, and even in the city of Berlin.

That is how the new version of German *Ostpolitik* took shape: one which, on the one hand, upheld the tradition of Germany's leading role in building political bridges between Russia and the democratic West, and on the other, stood in the way of Europe, the European Union and, more generally, the free world adapting to Russia's growing aggressiveness. It became a characteristic feature of German politics to use the term *Ostpolitik* as a synonym for the policy towards Russia alone, and to prioritize Russia's interests over not only those of the Eastern European neighbours of the European Union, but also those of Germany's formal allies in Central and Eastern Europe directly bordering on Russia.¹¹

Obviously, there were exceptions, which to this day are cited to corroborate the view that an alternative German policy towards Russia was indeed possible. One of these exceptions was the EU-Russia summit held in Samara in 2007, during which Chancellor Angela Merkel, who at that time was the President-in-Office of the European Council, forced Putin to lift the embargo on the export of Polish meat to Russia, and thus blocked Russian attempts at creating divisions within the EU.

¹⁰ K. Wiegrefe, *Newly Released Documents Shed Fresh Light on NATO's Eastward Expansion*, *Spiegel International*, May 3, 2022,

¹¹ I wrote about this phenomenon eighteen years ago: S. Dębski, *Polsko-niemiecki tandem w sprawie polityki UE wobec państw Europy Wschodniej* [The Polish-German Tandem on EU Policy Toward Eastern European Countries], *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, 2004, no. 6 (22), pp. 5–15.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Germany did not block the eastward enlargement of NATO and the European Union. However, it should be remembered that both of these processes were beneficial to all parties involved, with Germany undoubtedly being among the greatest beneficiaries. Germany's trade exchange with the new Central European EU member states quickly surpassed the total value of its trade with Russia.

It may seem that such an obvious fact should influence the perception of political priorities by members of the German political elite, who, after all, cherished the tradition of *Realpolitik*. After all, business comes first, sentiment second. But no. Because of its pro-Russian sentiment, "the need to settle moral/historical debts", and, above all, the temptation to gain economic advantage in the EU resulting from access to cheaper Russian fuels, Germany ignored its allies' warnings that the increasingly aggressive Russia may want to use this economic interdependence as an instrument of energy blackmail, and even as an instrument to bolster its aggressive behaviour. Instead, it continued to come up with new political initiatives such as the Partnership for Modernization, which was announced shortly after the Russian aggression against Georgia, or "selective engagement" in relations with Russia following the annexation of Crimea.

As a result, a new model of German-Russian relations evolved, based on Germany drawing economic benefits from this cooperation in exchange for its 'understanding' for Russian political demands. German diplomats frequently fiercely defended this model, with no regard for Germany's fundamental loyalty to its political allies, and sometimes even to the community-based nature of European institutions.

The situation became truly bizarre following the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Not only did the German government stop pretending that it was not involved in the construction of Russian gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea and that the construction was, as had been maintained, a business venture in the strictest sense, but also it began to ardently

promote it using political means. It tried to present it as a “European project”, i.e. one that served the interests of all EU member states. This was a particularly blatant instance of abuse of truth.

At the same time, despite a growing threat to NATO’s eastern flank and the Russia-Ukraine war being waged in the vicinity of NATO’s borders, Berlin initially opposed the idea that NATO should adapt to the new strategic reality by deploying battalion-size battle groups in the Baltic states in order to increase NATO’s defence potential and the credibility of its deterrence policy.

Germany’s then defence minister Ursula von der Leyen publicly countered the idea of building NATO military bases in the countries of the eastern flank as part of the process of NATO’s political adaptation to the new strategic circumstances resulting from the Russian aggression against Ukraine.¹² Subsequently, Berlin claimed that NATO drafting defence plans for the eastern flank is premature and tried to block it, and later it was even opposed to the organization of NATO drills on the eastern flank, arguing that this equated to sabre-rattling and provoking Russia.¹³

The Eastern European region will never forget that Berlin had torpedoed the plans to send weapons to Ukraine, both following the Russian invasion and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and just before the resumed aggression of February 2022. To justify its stance, Berlin cited the need “to avoid provoking Russia”. However, there is no doubt that this policy benefited Moscow much more than it benefited Tallinn, Riga, Warsaw and Kyiv.

This is just the sketchiest outline of Germany’s policy towards Russia in the last three decades, as seen by the political elite of Northern and Central Europe, as well as that of Ukraine. Indeed, it is just the tip of the iceberg. It is beyond the scope of this text to mention other German initiatives stemming from the prioritization of its relations with aggressive Russia, which posed a genuine threat

¹² A. Rettman, *US and Germany Say No to Poland on NATO base*, *EUobserver*, June 16, 2016, <https://euobserver.com>.

¹³ *German Foreign Minister Condemns NATO’s ‘Loud Sabre-rattling and Warmongering’ against Russia*, *National Post*, June 19, 2016, <https://nationalpost.com>.

to Europe, over collaboration with its allies and over efforts to arm Ukraine, the victim of Russian aggression. However, this outline is indispensable for the reader to understand the context surrounding the reception, on the eastern flank of the EU and NATO, of the speech delivered by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on February 27, 2022, i.e. immediately after Russia's resumed aggression against Ukraine.

The speech was a truly history-making event that raised hopes that Germany finally saw things clearly and now at last, under pressure of dramatic developments, will cease to defend Russian interests in Europe and begin to co-create a genuine community of values and interests with Ukraine and its allies on the eastern flank of NATO and the European Union. The German Chancellor's speech is worth quoting at length:

The twenty-fourth of February 2022 marks a watershed in the history of our continent. With the attack on Ukraine, the Russian President Putin has started a war of aggression in cold blood. For one reason alone: the freedom of the Ukrainian people calls his own oppressive regime into question. ... It is a violation of international law. There is nothing and nobody that can justify it. ... The appalling injustice, the pain of the Ukrainian people—they affect us all very deeply. ... the world afterwards will no longer be the same ... The issue at the heart of this is whether power is allowed to prevail over the law. Whether we permit Putin to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century and the age of the great powers. Or whether we have it in us to keep warmongers like Putin in check. ...

Moscow—which is, after all, a permanent member of the Security Council—was able to prevent itself from being censured. What a disgrace! President Putin always talks about indivisible security. But what he really seeks now is to divide the continent into the familiar old spheres of influence through armed force. This has consequences for security in Europe. Yes, in the long term security in Europe cannot be achieved in opposition to Russia. But for the foreseeable future, Putin is jeopardising this security. That is why I say very clearly that we accept the challenge that now faces us—with clear-headed resolve. ... we must

support Ukraine in this desperate situation. ... we must ... divert Putin from the path of war. ... [we must prevent] Putin's war from spilling over into other countries in Europe.¹⁴

A year has passed. Germany has not only understood the need for change in its policy towards the East, but also has become aware of the demand for such change. German society and a large portion of its political class began pressuring Chancellor Scholz to deliver on his political declarations. In June 2022, 70 per cent of polled Germans thought that Germany should aid Ukraine in fending off the Russian aggression.¹⁵ Still, despite such a strong call for support for Ukraine on the part of German citizens, over the last year the German state has become an anti-thesis of democratic leadership in the face of the challenge that Russian imperialism defiantly presented to the world.

Although Germany is extending financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine and is gradually increasing its role in arms provisions, it is difficult not to get the impression that, as far as the latter is concerned, it procrastinates for as long as possible and ensures that the aid is as minimal as possible. Also, over the last twelve months, the German defence industry has not been significantly modernized, and insignificant progress has been made in adjusting it to the circumstances of war being waged on the European continent. To sum up, the pace of the promised *Zeitenwende* is as slow as glacier movement.

The question arises, then, what kind of change is expected of Germany?

Firstly, one that would follow the political direction set by Chancellor Scholz in his speech of February 27, 2022. Secondly, the 'turn' needs to occur quickly, otherwise it would not be viewed as a political turn at all, but rather as a swift loss of the allies' trust.

¹⁴ Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin, www.bundesregierung.de.

¹⁵ 70% of Germans Back Ukraine despite High Energy Prices, Survey Shows, Reuters, July 15, 2022, www.reuters.com.

Scholz's speech was definitely among the best speeches on the Russian aggression delivered by the leaders of the free world. It identified the problem, announced a policy shift and listed ways to act: to aid Ukraine in fending off the aggression, to support the allies so as to prevent the conflict from spilling over, to adjust Germany's defence and security policy to the new geo-strategic reality, and to increase defence spending.

However, it turned out that the speech was empty rhetoric. Or perhaps it was a social engineering trick intended to deflect attention from the necessity of holding Germany accountable for its policy towards Russia and Ukraine in the last three decades?

Meanwhile, the democratic world expects Germany to be held accountable. The German diplomatic service continues to employ individuals who cleared the way, often in a brutal, arrogant, bulldozer-like fashion, for the construction of new lines of the Nord Stream pipeline. In doing so, they harnessed the European External Action Service (which had been conceived as a diplomatic agency of the EU as a whole) to serve this purpose. So, now the same officials who vehemently countered the inter-NATO critique of Germany's wilful deafness to the increasingly frequent warning signs that Russia may pose threat to peace, today are expected to lead the policy of deterrence against Russian aggression—this doubt is frequently raised in off-the-record interviews by politicians and diplomats from the countries of NATO's eastern flank. Still active are German officials who, just a few years ago, ardently advocated against granting Ukraine the right to apply for EU and NATO membership, and held Ukrainians and their European aspirations hostage to Germany's policy towards Russia.

A policy that has been proven wrong should not only be abandoned, but also condemned.

Germany should be the leader in arming Ukraine. It should launch a program for procuring arms for Ukraine all over the world, if its own supplies prove insufficient. It should aim for Ukraine to absolve it of its political sins, including by showing active support for Ukraine's accession to the European Union and NATO.

Meanwhile, the German public debate on foreign policy still includes far too many elements of Germany's traditional attitude to Russia and Ukraine. It continues to propagate ideas that are in line with Russian propaganda, and today, when Russian aggression has become fact, many participants in the German political discourse should in fact be viewed as supporters of the Russian war campaign. So much so that sometimes it seemed that Berlin perceives Ukraine's successful fight against the Russian aggression as greater political trouble than Russia's invasion itself.¹⁶

Germany's limited participation (limited in proportion to its enormous potential) in providing military aid to Ukraine creates a glaring asymmetry between the involvement of the United States in helping Ukraine to fend off the Russian aggression and Europe's role in it.

Three decades after the end of the Cold War, European states are still unable to defend peace in Europe, not only because of their own incapability, but also because of the absence of political will—for which Germany is mainly to blame. This state of affairs is already causing political tension in transatlantic relations, which may become more pronounced in the future and may possibly lead to a more limited involvement of the United States in peacekeeping in Europe. Since the end of the Second World War, pushing the US out of Europe has been the main goal of Soviet and Russian policy towards Europe. This is one of the reasons why Berlin's insufficient involvement in arming Ukraine *de facto* is an instrument of Russia's strategy.

The *Zeitenwende* is essential today if Germany is to regain credibility in the eyes of its allies. Should Berlin fail to fold the umbrella protecting Russian interests in Europe, every German initiative will be received with caution, and the presence of German soldiers on NATO's eastern flank will be viewed as a risk rather than an asset.

¹⁶ Erich Vad: *Was sind die Kriegsziele?* [What are the goals of this war?], interview by A. Ross, *Emma*, January 12, 2023, www.emma.de.

Obviously, it should be remembered that the picture presented above is an oversimplification of sorts. The announcement of a political turn in Chancellor Scholz's speech was an element of his domestic policy. It was targeted at the German public. At present, Germany is seeing a heated public and political debate on its policy towards Russia and towards Ukraine which is fighting against the Russian aggression. a heated debate is also ongoing within the German political parties making up the ruling coalition. Issues such as the rift within the SPD and Chancellor Scholz's political weakness are worthy of a separate article. However, from an outsider's point of view, these issues are not even of secondary importance.

Now, when Ukraine is fighting to defend its citizens and other Europeans, trying to stop Russian imperialism which poses a threat to Europe as a whole, is not a good time to get all excited about the level of public debate. What is needed is a comprehensive European strategy for victory over Russian imperialism, in which the key parts should be played by: a) Ukraine, as it is providing soldiers; b) the United States, as it is offering the resources that Europe lacks; c) the European Union, as it is fostering change in the European industry policy and coordinating the process of weakening Russia's defence potential by imposing economic and trade sanctions on Moscow, d) Germany, as a major state initiating the decision-making processes both in Europe and in transatlantic relations, and e) Poland and the countries of NATO's eastern flank, because they are most experienced in successfully resisting Russian imperialism. a synergy of these potentials will be a guarantee of success in the confrontation with Russia's imperialist ambitions.

The free and democratic world is very much interested in Germany changing its policy, since the current policy's ineffectiveness, sluggishness and faultiness work to the advantage of the policies pursued by this world's authoritarian rivals. As such, the current policy weakens the potential to close ranks on the defence of the international order based on international law, and therefore becomes a threat to peace in Europe and to prosperity of all Europeans.

It is a fact that in Europe nothing (or almost nothing) is possible without the participation of Germany. So, when Washington gets impatient because it is the United States that primarily shoulders the duty of defending peace in Europe, whenever this peace is under threat, it is, to a large degree, due to deficits in Germany's policy. How can these deficits be rectified?

Firstly, *size matters*. What I mean is the use to which Germany puts its size and potential. Unfortunately, very often it translates into sheer force: the German side of the argument must be declared right because of Germany's status as the EU's biggest and richest member state. This belief is often accompanied by a mercantile outlook, also in international politics: since Germany is a big and rich country, and its input is proportionately bigger than anyone else's, it should be allowed to demand a corresponding voting power in the debate on the strategy of the European 'company'. Add to this the traditionally brutal German transaction style which, in certain situations, is simply an embarrassment. In an interview, President Zelensky hinted that even when Kyiv was being bombed, Berlin was staunchly demanding political concessions in return for its aid for Ukraine.¹⁷ A remnant of this approach can also be found in Germany's attempt at making its support for Ukraine's accession to the European Union contingent on such a reform of the EU's decision-making system that would empower Berlin to push through its own policies and interests.

This approach is particularly evident in Germany's policy within the European Union, e.g. in its demands for acknowledging its leadership of the EU and for a reform of the decision-making system regarding foreign affairs and security decisions, which would involve the introduction of a qualified majority voting system. This system, obviously, favours the biggest EU member states and makes it easier to override coalitions made up of small and medium-sized countries. The very fact that Poland and Ukraine combined, with

¹⁷ *The President of Ukraine on Polish TV: Poland Embraced Us*, TVP Info channel, January 12, 2023, www.tvp.info.

their 80 million inhabitants, would have the same voting power as Germany with its 80 million inhabitants, is considered in Germany as disadvantageous. It is really difficult to understand why.¹⁸

At the same time, it is worth noting that Germany is opposed to the introduction of a qualified majority voting system in NATO. This speaks volumes. The problem with approaching international affairs as if they were a joint-stock company is that it violates the democratic rule of sovereign equality of states. This is always destructive to the common good and in the past has been known to cause alliances to dissolve.

The diagnosis spelling a shift of the world order towards multipolarity and systemic rivalry is joined in Germany by growing fears about long-term maintenance of the foundations of the country's wealth. However, the German rhetoric emphasising the need for EU member states to join forces in the face of new international challenges is often juxtaposed with German attempts to prioritize its own interests. Examples of this attitude include the energy policy model and the protective measures to counteract energy price increases, to which Germany's eurozone partners responded with reluctance and viewed them as violation of equal competition in the single market, intended to put the German industry in a privileged position.

Germany is such a big country that its unilateral actions within the EU as a political bloc can hardly be absorbed, as would be possible in the case of smaller member states.

This is why the *Zeitenwende* should lead to a democratization of German foreign policy, understood as a pledge to respect the democratic nature of international relations as well as the interests

¹⁸ “With qualified majority voting, a Council decision must be approved by 55 per cent of the member states representing at least 65 per cent of the EU population. Ukraine would get about 9 per cent of the votes, which is about the same as Poland's voting weight today. At the same time, the voting shares of other member states would decrease—that of Germany, for example, from 18.6 to about 16.9 per cent. Together, Poland and Ukraine would then have about the same voting weight as Germany”. N. von Ondarza, *Ukraine's Possible EU Accession and Its Consequences*, SWP (German Institute for Foreign Affairs), June 22, 2022, www.swp-berlin.org.

of smaller allies and partners. The free world needs a Germany that is able to self-limit and to take into account the common good of the democratic union. Europe needs a Germany that fulfils its potential not in order to lead, no matter if it is welcome as a leader or not, but also to enable Europe to act. Germany should be a facilitator of European consensus rather than a leader.

Secondly, *style matters*. In order to be a consensus facilitator in Europe, Germany must be able to democratize the way it conducts its own foreign affairs, to make it more transparent to both its foreign partners and the domestic public opinion. Employing lies to achieve political goals is inadmissible. This is not the place to cite examples, but Germany's involvement in the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline and its attempts to shield it using political means yield dozens of them.

Thirdly, *timing matters*. No one will succeed as a consensus facilitator if they are a straggler in the decision-making process, i.e. if other parties need to pressurize them to do what others have long considered as an obvious and necessary thing to do.

Fourthly, *history matters*. Germany's past still obliges it to have a heightened sense of responsibility in foreign affairs. However, a significant portion of the German political class continues to cherish old beliefs and judgments which the Russian aggression against Ukraine has proven to be wrong.

In order to ensure security in Europe, it is vital that Germany makes an increased and decisive effort to step up its defence capability. However, this should be accompanied by Berlin's increased readiness to engage in dialogue with those countries which are more exposed to the Russian threat, and by its greater sensibility to their security interests. The history of the twentieth century has taught Germany an important lesson, namely, that it is impossible to find a compromise between freedom and enslavement, between sovereign existence and an imperial drive for domination. Imperialism does not seek dialogue to reach a compromise, because it is organically incapable of it; it intends to break the spirit of its opponents and to subjugate them. Germany should adopt the

perspective of the Eastern European nations and integrate their experience into its own policy; otherwise, because of its imperial past, it will be suspected of pursuing imperial tendencies and being ready to communicate with authoritarian powers behind its allies' backs. With such a Germany, Europe will not be able to regain its political dynamism.

Fifthly, *restraint matters*. One cannot facilitate consensus if one caters to one's own interests only. Perhaps a country smaller than Germany could be excused, if it operated in this manner, because its limited potential would not impact the balance of common interests. What Europe needs, then, is both Germany's potential and the ability to harness it to facilitate European consensus. However, this potential should also be put to another use: to allow countries that are smaller and less powerful than Germany to pursue their interests, sometimes even at the cost of Germany's own short-term or immediate interests. Bigger countries are more powerful, to be sure, but this does not mean that they always have to employ their entire potential.

Sixthly, *honesty matters*. a country facilitating consensus must be able to correct its own mistakes, which means that it must be able to admit to having made a mistake. This is not synonymous with admitting one's weakness; on the contrary, it builds authority which is indispensable in creating the common good. It earns the partners' trust.

Political declarations and slogans stressing the role of the leader as mediator will not suffice. The surest way to regaining full trust leads through a return to an earlier understanding of Germany's role in the EU as a state which is open to demands voiced by smaller partners and is pursuing its own interests with the constant awareness of the risk of becoming a dominant actor. Instead of pushing for qualified majority voting, it is acting as a broker for the common good. This is what can make Germany stronger and ensure that the EU is sufficiently effective to maintain, at least partly, the achievements of the liberal international order.

What if Germany fails to rise to the expectations of the coalition of the free world countries, as regards learning from the fiasco of its *Ostpolitik* and introducing self-imposed limits in the name of the common good of the democratic community? Then, due to its inertia and moving as slowly as a glacier, it will gravitate towards hegemony. And Europe has always been unhappy with German aspirations to hegemony. Let us hope, then, that this trend can be stopped in time.

translated by Agnieszka Pokojaska