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# Germany's Policy towards Russia in the Context of the Key Post-Cold War International Security Challenges

## Introduction

German-Russian relations have a long-standing tradition. Over the last couple of centuries, both nations have interacted socially, economically, culturally, and politically. There are examples of numerous cooperative experiences between them, but the two world wars of the first half of the twentieth century largely dominated the mutual image of the other side as a mortal enemy. To this day, the Great Patriotic War has been a major element shaping Russia's historical identity. In turn, during the Cold War, the attitude of the USSR towards the two German states was determined by an inter-bloc confrontation. Allied-vassal relations with East Germany contrasted with the confrontational nature of relations with West Germany, albeit to some extent mitigated by tendencies towards normalisation, which were expressed in the USSR-West Germany treaties of 1955 and 1970.

The political changes that occurred in Europe and the world at the end of the Cold War particularly affected the USSR and the then German states. The German Democratic Republic was incorporated by the Federal Republic of Germany, which thus witnessed a significant increase in its territorial and demographic potential and strengthened its position in the European Communities, and the emerging European Union. A different fate befell Russia, which, as the successor of the Soviet Union, experienced a significant reduction in territorial and demographic resources and lost its superpower status. However, it still remained the largest country in the world in terms of territory, and its population, economic and military potential – factors that

secure its place among the leading powers. The united Germany and Russia had to rearrange their relations on completely new principles, different from the realities of the East-West conflict. A potentially propitious ground for future relations was created by the favourable stance of Moscow – represented by Mikhail Gorbachev – towards the reunification of Germany in 1990. Shortly after the end of this process, but still more than a year before the ultimate collapse of the USSR, both countries concluded a treaty on good-neighbourliness, partnership and cooperation.<sup>1</sup> A positive harbinger were also the excellent personal relations between Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Boris Yeltsin after the collapse of the USSR.

The goal of this paper is to discuss the position of Germany towards Russia against the backdrop of selected international security problems after the end of the Cold War. The primary focus has been placed on such issues as the enlargement of NATO in 1999, the Kosovo conflict, the 2003 Gulf War, the Russo-Georgian conflict, and the conflict in Ukraine. The author has used the findings of his research to date on Germany's policy towards Russia.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the drafting of the paper, an analysis of the literature on the topic in question was used, while the institutional and legal analysis turned out to be a valuable tool too, helpful in the study of the documents cited.

## The issue of NATO enlargement

One of the most serious problems on the international security agenda in the 1990s was the expansion of NATO geared towards the inclusion of a group of former USSR states. However, this issue only began to take shape in the middle of the decade. Before this took place, the top priority for the German government was the withdrawal of Soviet/Russian troops from the eastern federal states. The determination to achieve this goal was hardly surprising, because the situation in the USSR in the last months of the state's existence, and in Russia immediately after the collapse of the superpower, was far from stable: the state's political foundations were forged in the circumstances of the constant conflict that was taking place between President Boris Yeltsin and the Supreme Council. In the event of any major disturbance in Russia, the presence of its troops in Germany could pose a threat to their national sovereignty. They had about 340 thousand soldiers, and in addition to that, a little over 200 thousand civilian workers and their families. The resilient German diplomacy shortly after the reunification of the state, which took place on 3 October 1990, led to the conclusion of two agreements with the Soviet Union on this matter. The first one – i.e. the agreement on some transitional measures (commonly referred to as the financial arrangement) was concluded on 9 October 1990. It provided that the German part would allocate approx. DM 12 billion for expenses related to temporary stay, the

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<sup>1</sup> Vertrag über gute Nachbarschaft, Partnerschaft und Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der UdSSR, *Bulletin. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung*, No. 133, 15.11.1990, pp. 1379–1382.

<sup>2</sup> See: M.M. Kosman, *Polityka RFN wobec ZSRR/Rosji w latach 1989–2009*, Bydgoszcz 2013; idem, *Konflikt rosyjsko-ukraiński o Krym (2014–2019). Wybrane aspekty z uwzględnieniem stanowiska Niemiec*, Bydgoszcz 2020.

process of withdrawing troops and support for soldiers to adapt to life in their homeland, including the construction of housing for them.<sup>3</sup> The actual agreement on the withdrawal of troops was concluded on 12 October 1990. It specified the status of Soviet troops in Germany, as well as the pace and details of their withdrawal.<sup>4</sup> It was possible to bring this process to an end by 1994. Indeed, on 31 August, the last train with soldiers on board departed for Russia, and on 9 September, the last plane departed from Germany.<sup>5</sup>

As for the NATO enlargement process, it is clear to see that it was Germany that became the main promoter of the expansion of the alliance to include Poland, although, admittedly, this support sounded with varying intensity at various stages of the process. As a rule, German political forces understood Polish security interests and aspirations to join the alliance, resulting from its traumatic historical experiences. At the same time, NATO enlargement was also in the interest of Germany, which would lose its status as the alliance's eastern flank. Enlargement was also interpreted as increasing the sphere of stability around Germany and, more broadly, across Europe. By promoting this process, however, Germany wanted to avoid any disturbances that could arise in a situation of excessive pace of it. The too rapid expansion of NATO could provoke some violent reactions in Russia and strengthen nationalist and communist circles, thus weakening the position of President Boris Yeltsin, who was regarded in the West as a friendly and predictable politician. The Russian side used the argument that during the German unification process, Mikhail Gorbachev, agreeing to Germany's presence in NATO, was to receive an oral assurance from US Secretary of State James Baker in February 1990 that there would be no further enlargement of the alliance in the future.<sup>6</sup>

Poland's geographical location determined the role of Germany as the gateway to the alliance, as well as to the European Union. Russia's strategy, in turn, boiled down to attempts to block or at least delay the process of NATO enlargement to the east, and to establish closer institutional ties with the alliance. The latter goal was also followed by German diplomacy, which, on the one hand, promoted NATO's eastern enlargement, and on the other, tried to involve Russia in cooperation with the pact in order to alleviate Russian fears arising from NATO's approach to its borders. Hence, one can express a view on Germany's double strategy in the enlargement process. In May 1994, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel even formulated the thesis about Germany's special responsibility in its relations with Russia.<sup>7</sup> Under the conditions of the time, it was obvious that the main candidates for NATO were the countries of the

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<sup>3</sup> Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Regierung der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken über einige über leitende Maßnahmen, *Bulletin. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung*, No. 123, 17.10.1990, pp. 1281–1283.

<sup>4</sup> Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken über die Bedingungen des befristeten Aufenthalts und der Modalitäten der planmäßigen Abzugs der sowjetischen Truppen aus dem Gebiet der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Bulletin. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung*, No. 123, 17.10.1990, pp. 1284–1300.

<sup>5</sup> S. Satjukow, *Besatzer. „Die Russen“ in Deutschland 1945–1994*, Göttingen 2008, pp. 11–17.

<sup>6</sup> K. Schroeder, *Die veränderte Republik. Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung*, München 2006, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> Archiv der Gegenwart, 14.05.1994, p. 38963.

Visegrad Group. For this reason, German diplomacy in the mid-1990s cooled down the desires voiced by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to join the organisation. This position was clearly expressed by Volker Rühle, the German Minister of Defence, during his visit to these three countries in August 1995.<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned above, an important element of Germany's strategy was to alleviate Russia's reservations towards the NATO enlargement by drawing it into international cooperation and seeking some form of its institutional ties with NATO. Moscow's role in the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina was appreciated by Chancellor Helmut Kohl after the conclusion of the treaty ending the conflict in December 1995.<sup>9</sup> It should be remembered, however, that the election calendar in Russia influenced the German strategy at that time, as presidential elections were held there in mid-1996. The cautious approach taken by German diplomacy in its statements regarding NATO enlargement was aimed at not weakening the election chances of Boris Yeltsin, who was friends with Helmut Kohl. Only after his re-election on 3 July 1996, could the debate on this matter be accelerated. Helmut Kohl, during his visit to Moscow on 7 September 1996, announced talks with NATO candidates for the next year, emphasising his understanding of Russia's interests.<sup>10</sup> Before they took place, in May 1997 the institutionalisation of relations took place between the two parties, postulated earlier by Germany, by signing the NATO-Russia Act. They were based on the consultations provided for in the document within the newly created NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council<sup>11</sup> (since 2002, the NATO-Russia Council). In December 1997, protocols on the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to NATO were signed, which opened the way to the ratification procedures. The ratification debate in the Bundestag took place on 26 March 1998. The eastern enlargement of NATO was approved by the overwhelming majority of the votes of CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD and parts of the Greens. The PDS, part of the Greens and two SPD MPs voted against. A large part of the Greens, four SPD MPs and one Christian Democrat abstained.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the result of the vote testified to the fundamental consensus of the German political elite on NATO enlargement, which was formally completed on 12 March 1999. It is worth emphasizing that the new SPD-Greens coalition, formed after the elections in autumn 1998, took an extremely important and difficult decision to take part in the air strikes against Yugoslavia against which Russia was intensely protesting. Of the major political parties, only the PDS protested against the air raids.

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<sup>8</sup> Archiv der Gegenwart, 11.09.1995, p. 40340.

<sup>9</sup> Erklärung der Bundesregierung. Deutsche Beteiligung an den militärischen Maßnahmen zur Absicherung des Friedensvertrages für Bosnien-Herzegowina, *Bulletin. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung*, No. 103, 11.12.1995, p. 1010.

<sup>10</sup> Archiv der Gegenwart, 7.09.1996, p. 41375.

<sup>11</sup> Grundakte über gegenseitige Beziehungen, Zusammenarbeit und Sicherheit zwischen Nordatlantikvertrags-Organisation und der Russischen Föderation, *Bulletin. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung*, No. 43, 3.06.1997.

<sup>12</sup> Plenarprotokoll 13/224, Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographischer Bericht, 224. Sitzung, Bonn, Donnerstag, den 26. März 1998, pp. 20461–20463.

## Key challenges of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the war in the Persian Gulf, and the Russian-Georgian conflict

The first decade of the new millennium brought a series of new challenges to international security that activated both Germany and Russia. Two of them will be discussed in this section, i.e. the Persian Gulf War of 2003, and the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008. In the case of the former, Germany and Russia adopted a common position, while the latter gave rise to divergent views.

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States became the addressee of numerous expressions of solidarity expressed *inter alia* by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and President Vladimir Putin.<sup>13</sup> The speech given by President Putin to the Bundestag on 25 September 2001, which was approved by all major German political circles, was an opportunity to condemn terrorism and demonstrate the commonality of views.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the president used the opportunity to place the intervention in Chechnya in the broad front of the war against terrorism, which usually clashed with the Western perception of the conflict. However, while the American intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001 was generally recognised as an admissible and justified act of self-defence, the plans to attack Iraq and their implementation in 2003 were strongly condemned by Germany, Russia and France. They were the foundation of the rapprochement of the three countries. Regarding Germany, apart from the peculiar post-war culture of pacifism, the campaign before the elections to the Bundestag in autumn 2002 undoubtedly played an important role, the driving force of which in the case of the SPD and the Greens was the sharp criticism of Washington's war plans. Resolution 1441 of the United Nations Security Council of 8 November 2002, calling on Iraq to cooperate with the international community in verifying allegations of possession of weapons of mass destruction and announcing "serious consequences" if refused,<sup>15</sup> actually only camouflaged the divergence between the US and its critics (in Germany, Russia and France), which later gave rise to distinct interpretative differences. Russia, Germany and France, unlike the United States, argued that the resolution did not authorize the use of force against Iraq. On 10 February 2003, the already mentioned three made a declaration in Paris demanding the strengthening of the inspection instrument, calling on Baghdad to cooperate.<sup>16</sup> A similar document appeared on 15 March 2003.<sup>17</sup> However, this did not prevent the American attack, which increased tensions on both sides of the Atlantic. The joint front of the trio against the Iraq war brought together its leaders (Chancellor

<sup>13</sup> M. Thumann, 'Putin tritt dem Westen bei', *Die Zeit*, No. 42, 11.10.2001.

<sup>14</sup> Archiv der Gegenwart, 27.09.2001, p. 45287.

<sup>15</sup> Resolution 1441 (2002) adopted by the Security Council at its 4644<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 8 November 2002, <https://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/1441.pdf> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>16</sup> H. Monath, 'Dreierkoalition gegen den Irak-Krieg', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 11.02.2003, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/dreierkoalition-gegen-den-irak-krieg/388754.html> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>17</sup> Archiv der Gegenwart, 20.03.2003, p. 46193.

Gerhard Schröder, President Vladimir Putin, and President Jacques Chirac), who met at tripartite summits several times in the following years (April 2003, September 2003, August 2004, March 2005). Interestingly, the factor that strengthened the German-Russian relations in this period were the strong positive feelings that could be seen between Schröder and Putin. It was only after the German elections in 2005 and the assumption of the chancellor's chair by Angela Merkel at the head of the grand Christian Democratic-Social Democratic coalition that American-German relations were slowly returning to their former tracks, while the chancellor herself had less understanding than her predecessor for the shortcomings of Russian democracy.

The second half of the decade brought another security challenge on the continent. It consisted of a series of events, including the disputes over the independence of Kosovo, the debate on Georgia and Ukraine's membership in NATO, and the Georgia-Russia conflict in 2008.

The future status of Kosovo after the 1999 conflict was one of the major political issues on the Old Continent. Both Germany and Russia, as well as the US, the UK, France and Italy, were participants in the contact group working to stabilize the Balkans.<sup>18</sup> The so-called Plan of Ahtisaari, named after the former president of Finland, envisaged, among other things, the independence of Kosovo under international supervision. Also, the efforts of the US, Russia and the EU, working until December 2007 (German diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger led the talks on behalf of them) did not bring any effects.<sup>19</sup> As a result, on 17 February 2008 Kosovo saw the declaration of its independence with the approval of Germany and the majority of Western countries and Russia's opposition.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Germany and Russia took different positions on Kosovo, as in 1999.

A few weeks later, from 2 to 4 April 2008, a NATO Summit was held in Bucharest. One of its most important items on the agenda was the issue of expanding the alliance to include Georgia and Ukraine, i.e. the countries that had previously been a part of the USSR. However, while Russia's protests in the event of the enlargement to include the Baltic states or Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were not excessively sharp, the accession of the two countries mentioned above to the Alliance was unacceptable to Moscow. This was due not only to prestige reasons, but also to the geostrategic situation in the Black Sea basin, which, if both countries – especially Ukraine – were admitted to NATO, would radically change to Russia's disadvantage. This issue was also of interest to German political circles. The grand coalition representatives, both Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, believed mostly that one should be careful in promoting enlargement, bearing in mind how sensitive such a scenario is for Russia.<sup>21</sup> Chancellor Angela Merkel and Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who were present at the Summit in Bucharest, rejected the

<sup>18</sup> N. Mappes-Niediek, 'Poker ums Kosovo', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, No. 3, 2007, p. 279.

<sup>19</sup> 'Deutscher Diplomat sucht Lösung für Kosovo', *Die Welt*, 9.08.2007, <https://www.welt.de/politik/article1092518/Deutscher-Diplomat-sucht-Loesung-fuer-Kosovo.html> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>20</sup> D. Reljić, 'Russlands Stimme ertönt in Serbien', *Russland-Analysen*, No. 163, 2.05.2008, pp. 2–5, <https://www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen163.pdf> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>21</sup> 'Wieviel Osten verträgt die NATO', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 3.04.2008.

possibility of granting Georgia and Ukraine a Membership Action Plan, fearing an escalation of tensions in relations with Moscow.<sup>22</sup> France took a similar position. Ultimately, in point 23 of the Summit Declaration, a rather vague provision was adopted that both countries could become NATO members in the future.<sup>23</sup> As regards the enlargement of the alliance, Germany has therefore clearly demonstrated its understanding of Russia's position, taking into account its reservations and sensitivity to its perception of security.

The German side showed less leniency towards the Russian military action against Georgia a few months later, from 7 to 10 August 2008. It was a response to the Georgian shelling and occupation of Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, a rebellious Georgian province supported by Moscow. According to Tbilisi, Georgia's actions were a reaction to the Ossetian attacks on Georgian villages. Georgia was the most favoured by Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, while the other countries initially took a more neutral stance. On behalf of the EU, mediation was undertaken by France, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at the time, represented by President Nicolas Sarkozy, who, together with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, agreed on the terms of the truce on 12 August 2008. They were also included in the conclusions following the meeting of the EU Council on 13 August 2008.<sup>24</sup> It should also be emphasised that, apart from President Sarkozy, the German side also actively supported efforts to end the conflict, involving the experienced diplomat Hans-Dieter Lucas.<sup>25</sup> Foreign Minister Steinmeier sought a truce by conducting active telephone diplomacy with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and the heads of diplomacy of Russia and Georgia.<sup>26</sup> Chancellor Merkel also called for an end to hostilities, demanding that Georgia's territorial integrity be respected. At the same time, a significant part of German politicians warned against overly harsh reactions towards Russia after the end of the fighting.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, a conviction prevailed that Russia's reaction was definitely exaggerated and disproportionate to the actions of Georgian troops, as was clearly stated by Chancellor Merkel during her meeting with President Medvedev on 15 August 2008 in Sochi.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 'Merkel sperrt sich gegen rasche Nato-Osterweiterung', *Die Welt*, 3.04.2008, [https://www.welt.de/welt\\_print/article1865497/Merkel-sperrt-sich-gegen-rasche-Nato-Osterweiterung.html](https://www.welt.de/welt_print/article1865497/Merkel-sperrt-sich-gegen-rasche-Nato-Osterweiterung.html) [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>23</sup> Bucharest Summit Declaration, 3.04.2008, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm) [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>24</sup> Council conclusions on the situation in Georgia (13/08/2008), [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/102315.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/gena/102315.pdf) [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>25</sup> 'Bundesregierung bemüht sich um Waffenstillstand in Georgien – Steinmeier entsendet Emis-sär', 10.08.2008, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/080810-bm-telefonate-geo/225344> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>26</sup> 'Bundesminister Steinmeier ruft Parteien in Südossetien auf, aus Spirale gegenseitiger Dro-hungen und Gewalt auszubrechen', 8.08.2008, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/080808-suedossetien-bm/225858> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>27</sup> 'Deutsche warnen vor neuer Isolation Russlands', *Die Welt*, 23.08.2008.

<sup>28</sup> 'Merkel redet Medwedew ins Gewissen', *Der Spiegel*, 15.08.2008, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/georgien-krise-merkel-redet-medwedew-ins-gewissen-a-572360.html> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

To sum up, it can be noted that Berlin, on the one hand, assessed President Saakashvili's decision to take offensive actions against South Ossetia as hasty, and, on the other hand, the Russian response was disproportionate. Russia seemed to have achieved its goal by strengthening its influence in the Caucasus and practically postponing the prospect of Georgia's membership in NATO *ad Kalendas Graecas*. However, the anti-Georgian operation called into question the image of Russia as a predictable country and partner in solving international security problems in Germany, although it was only the Ukrainian conflict that fully shattered this image.

## The conflict in Ukraine: a challenge to European security

Undoubtedly, Russia was the central point of reference in Germany's policy towards the post-Soviet space. It can also be noted that the German interest in Ukraine was somewhat more distant from Berlin's eastern policy. It was only the Orange Revolution, which took place at the end of 2004, that drew more attention of the German political elite to Ukraine. The social protests that broke out in this country after the rigged presidential elections made a strong impression on the West. Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer were heavily involved in resolving the crisis. The Chancellor conducted an active "telephone diplomacy" with President Putin, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs – as Heinz Timmermann wrote – encouraged the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to actively undertake diplomatic efforts and support Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who was mediating in Kiev.<sup>29</sup> The repetition of the second round and the election of pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko were welcomed in Germany.

Ukraine came back to the centre of European politics almost a decade later. At the end of 2013, the fate of the association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, which was to be signed at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius on 29 November 2013, was being resolved. However, the Russian side increased pressure on Ukraine to discourage its rapprochement with the EU. From mid-2013, there were customs restrictions or suspension of imports of certain Ukrainian products, coupled with clear signals that these measures would be intensified in the event of further rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU. Moscow combined this with an incentive tactic, offering Ukraine loans of around EUR 11 billion and a temporary reduction in gas prices, which was impressive compared to EU proposals of around EUR 600 million to partially cover the budget deficit.<sup>30</sup> The sum of pressure and incentives directed at President Viktor Yanukovich resulted in the decision not to sign an association agreement with the EU, which was announced by the Ukrainian authorities before the Vilnius summit. A wave of protests swept across Ukraine, and on 18–20 February 2014, several dozen people died during the fighting in the streets of Kiev. Only the mediation of the ministers of foreign affairs of Poland, Germany and France, i.e.

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<sup>29</sup> H. Timmermann, 'Die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen im europäischen Kontext', *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, No. 1, 2007, p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> K. Böttger, 'Auf dem sicherheitspolitischen Auge blind: die EU-Außenpolitik angesichts der Ukraine-Krise: Zustand und Entwicklungsoptionen', *Integration*, No. 2, 2014, p. 99.



Radosław Sikorski, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Laurent Fabius on 21 February 2014, brought an end to the bloodshed.

The dynamic logic of those events then led to the resignation and flight of Yanukovich to Russia, the annexation of Crimea by Russia on 18 March 2014, and the start of separatist actions in eastern Ukraine and the establishment of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic there. As a result, as of 17 March 2014,<sup>31</sup> sanctions were imposed on Russia by the EU, including diplomatic and economic measures, and a freezing of assets and the possibility of certain people traveling to the EU. The shooting down of a Malaysian airliner over eastern Ukraine on 17 July 2014 by separatists added fuel to the fire in Russia's relations with the West. At the same time, however, diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict were implemented. They were conducted within the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group covering Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE – and their first clear effect was the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement in eastern Ukraine on 5 September 2014<sup>32</sup> in Minsk, and the Normandy format covering Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France.

The Normandy format came into being at the meeting of the leaders of these countries during the celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. The most noteworthy result of its activities was the conclusion of the Minsk agreement on 12 February 2015, providing *inter alia* the suspension of military operations, withdrawal of heavy weapons, creation of a buffer zone between the parties to the conflict, allowing OSCE observers to act, exchange of prisoners of war, access to humanitarian aid, restoration of Ukrainian authorities' control over the border with Russia, constitutional reforms taking into account the special status of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, etc.<sup>33</sup> Successive occasional meetings did not bring such spectacular effects, but they allowed for the maintenance of a constant dialogue. Both sides – the Ukrainian and the separatists – accused each other of breaking the agreement in the following years. Although so far it has not been possible to fully implement it and end the conflict, it should be appreciated that it has stabilized and it has not spread more widely. Following Bogdan Koszel, the main role in the development of the Minsk agreement was played by Chancellor Angela Merkel, who held talks in Kiev, Moscow, Munich, Washington and Ottawa within a few days before its conclusion.<sup>34</sup>

The diplomatic activities were accompanied by the application of the instrument of the above mentioned sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia. They were an expression of sharp disapproval of Moscow's actions, which was also expressed

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<sup>31</sup> Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP of 17 March 2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32014D0145&from=PL> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>32</sup> Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group, Minsk, 05/09/2014, <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news-feeds/foreign-offices-news/27596-protocolon-the-results-of-consultations-of-the-trilateral-contact-group-minsk-05092014> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>33</sup> Full text of the Minsk agreement, *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>34</sup> B. Koszel, *Rola Niemiec w procesach decyzyjnych Unii Europejskiej w XXI wieku*, Poznań 2019, p. 341.

by the German government. Angela Merkel has repeatedly accused Russia and the pro-Russian authorities of Crimea of violating international law, supporting sanctions and the suspension of talks on a new partnership and cooperation agreement with Russia. The Social Democrats were somewhat less inclined to criticize Moscow, for example, the government plenipotentiary for cooperation with Russia, Gernot Eler, was somewhat sceptical about the effectiveness of the sanctions in an interview for *Deutschlandfunk*.<sup>35</sup> In particular, the economic circles, represented by Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft, criticised the sanctions mechanism as affecting the interests of German enterprises dependent on trade relations with Russia. Ost-Ausschuss representatives have repeatedly emphasized the losses that the German economy suffered as a result of the sanctions.<sup>36</sup> Also, representatives of the eastern federal states, to a greater extent affected by the consequences of the sanctions, criticized their application to Russia, regardless of party affiliation. An example of such an attitude was the position formulated by the prime ministers of the eastern federal states in January 2018. They assessed the EU sanctions as ineffective, emphasizing their negative impact on enterprises in eastern Germany.<sup>37</sup>

The major German political parties also formulated positions on Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, although it should be noted that there were voices deviating from the mainstream in individual parties. The CDU was critical of Russia's conduct, which was confirmed in many statements by Angela Merkel and other party representatives, as well as in program documents. One of them was the resolution of the party's special committee on foreign policy, security, development and human rights of 16 November 2016. It criticised Russia's use of a policy of force, also in the form of a hybrid war in Ukraine, without direct military involvement. It was stressed that the European Union and its member states should make efforts to exert a positive influence on Russia while opposing its aggressive policy.<sup>38</sup> Sometimes, the CSU representatives expressed a bit more conciliatory tone. Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer met with President Putin in mid-March and then in June 2017. At that time, he assured of his efforts to abandon the sanctions policy by implementing the Minsk agreements. This conciliation was not surprising, given that both politicians agreed on Bavarian investments in Russia.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> 'Ukraine-Konflikt – "Das Thema Sanktionen wird wieder auf die Tagesordnung kommen"', *Deutschlandfunk*, 29.8.2014, [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ukraine-konflikt-das-thema-sanktionen-wird-wieder-auf-die.694.de.html?dram:article\\_id=295940](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ukraine-konflikt-das-thema-sanktionen-wird-wieder-auf-die.694.de.html?dram:article_id=295940) [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. Statement des Ost-Ausschuss Vorsitzenden Eckhard Cordes zu den Wirtschaftssanktionen Russlands, 7.08.2014, <https://www.ost-ausschuss.de/de/statement-des-ost-ausschuss-vorsitzenden-eckhard-cordes-zu-den-wirtschaftssanktionen-russlands> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>37</sup> 'Abbau von Russland-Sanktionen gefordert', *Die Welt*, 30.01.2018, <https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article172990746/Ostdeutsche-Regierungschefs-Abbau-von-Russland-Sanktionen-gefordert.html> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>38</sup> Umgang mit Russland – Zehn Handlungsempfehlungen. Beschluss des CDU-Bundesfachausschusses Außen-, Sicherheits-, Entwicklungs- und Menschenrechtspolitik unter der Leitung von Roderich Kiesewetter MdB sowie des CDU-Bundesfachausschusses Europapolitik unter der Leitung von Elmar Brok MdEP vom 16. November 2015, p. 2, *CDU.de*, <https://www.cdu.de/system/tdf/media/dokumente/151116-eu-russland-beziehungen.pdf?file=1> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>39</sup> 'Seehofer trifft Putin. Milliardenauftrag für bayerisches Unternehmen', *CSU.de*, 2.06.2017, <https://www.csu.de/aktuell/meldungen/juni-2017/seehofer-trifft-putin/> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

In the statements of SPD politicians, one could often notice conciliatory tones about the readiness to cooperate with Russia, nevertheless the annexation of Crimea was assessed as a breach of international law, for example in the opinion expressed by Frank-Walter Steinmeier.<sup>40</sup> The essence of the SPD's position could be found in one of the 2017 programming documents, which read:

Unser Verhältnis zu Russland ist durch das Vorgehen der russischen Regierung in der Ostukraine und den Bruch des Völkerrechts durch die Annexion der Krim belastet. Fundamentale Prinzipien der europäischen Friedens- und Sicherheitsordnung sind verletzt. Wir sind jedoch davon überzeugt, dass Frieden und Sicherheit in Europa nur mit, nicht ohne oder gar gegen Russland möglich sind. Dafür bedarf es der De-eskalation, der Rückkehr zum politischen Dialog und der differenzierten Anwendung von Sanktionsmechanismen. Der politische Prozess für die Ostukraine, der den Ausbruch eines offenen Krieges erfolgreich verhindern konnte, ist ins Stocken geraten. Wir halten den noch an ihm fest. Substanzielle Fortschritte bei der Umsetzung des Minsker Abkommens erfordern eine schrittweise Aufhebung der Sanktionen gegen Russland nach sich ziehen.<sup>41</sup>

The FDP took a fairly coherent position. Russia's policy was strongly condemned in a resolution published at the end of January 2018. In it, the FDP expressed the view that:

Russland hat durch die völkerrechtswidrige Annexion der Krim und das militärische Eingreifen in der Ostukraine die seitdem 2. Weltkrieg geltende Weltfriedensordnung gravierend verletzt. Grenzen mit militärischen Mitteln zu verändern, ist ein Tabubruch, der nicht hingenommen werden darf.<sup>42</sup>

The document advocated the maintenance of the sanctions and even their tightening in the event of a further escalation of military operations in eastern Ukraine. The Greens also openly criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine, assessing the annexation of Crimea as a disturbance to the European security architecture. They advocated maintaining the sanctions until the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.<sup>43</sup>

The Left took a clearly pro-Russian position. The views of this party were reflected in the application it submitted to the Bundestag at the end of November 2017. In it, it argued that the sanctions imposed on Russia did not resolve

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<sup>40</sup> 'Mehr Sicherheit für alle in Europa – Für einen Neustart der Rüstungskontrolle', *Auswärtiges Amt – News*, 26.08.2016, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/160826-bm-faz/282910> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>41</sup> *Zeit für mehr Gerechtigkeit. Unser Regierungsprogramm für Deutschland*, p. 107, *SPD.de*, [https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Bundesparteitag\\_2017/Es\\_ist\\_Zeit\\_fuer\\_mehr\\_Gerechtigkeit-Unser\\_Regierungsprogramm.pdf](https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Bundesparteitag_2017/Es_ist_Zeit_fuer_mehr_Gerechtigkeit-Unser_Regierungsprogramm.pdf) [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>42</sup> Beschluss des Bundesvorstands der FDP, Berlin, 29. Januar 2018. *Recht wahren, Werte verteidigen, Dialog führen – zehn Vorschläge für die Zusammenarbeit mit Russland*, p. 1, *FDP.de*, <https://www.fdp.de/sites/default/files/uploads/2018/01/30/2018-01-29-buvo-rechte-wahren-werte-verteidigen-dialog-fuehren-zehn-vorschlaege-fuer-die.pdf> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>43</sup> 'Wir stehen ein für Frieden und Menschenrechte', *Die Grünen*, <https://www.gruene.de/themen/gruene-themen-von-a-bis-z/wir-stehen-ein-fuer-frieden-und-menschenrechte.html> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

the conflict and even aggravated it. The document advocated a departure from the narrative blaming Russia for the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine<sup>44</sup>. A pro-Russian position was also taken by the AfD, which entered the Bundestag after the 2017 elections. The party's program reads that:

Das Verhältnis zu Russland ist für Deutschland, Europa und die Nato von maßgeblicher Bedeutung, denn Sicherheit in und für Europa kann ohne Russlands Einbindung nicht gelingen. Wir setzen uns daher dafür ein, Konflikte in Europa friedlich zu regeln und dabei die jeweiligen Interessen zu berücksichtigen.<sup>45</sup>

Also, numerous statements by politicians from this party confirmed the consistent pro-Russian attitude and opposition to the sanctions.<sup>46</sup>

To sum up, it is clear to see that among the largest German parties there was a major consensus on the conflict in Ukraine – greater or lesser support for the imposition of sanctions against Russia and pressure on the implementation of the Minsk agreements. On the other hand, the Left and the AfD voiced an opposite opinion, and the politicians of the eastern federal states, which suffered the most economically as a result of the sanctions, were generally in favour of lifting them. Berlin's strategy towards the Ukrainian-Russian conflict was aptly described by Erhard Cziomer, who argued that it was based on three key elements: readiness to dialogue with Russia to end the conflict, readiness to maintain sanctions, and economic and financial support for Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusions

The issues related to European security discussed above could only be presented briefly. Each could be the subject of a separate study, as they clearly do not exhaust the catalogue of issues in German-Russian relations. They can also be joined by the international repercussions of the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline – an economic project with strong political implications. The Eastern Partnership projects and the German idea of the Partnership for Modernisation also had significant consequences. Interesting threads are also related to the relationship between the leaders, or the disputes between *Russland-Versteher* and the critics of Russia. Nevertheless, this paper focuses on security problems understood in the traditional

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<sup>44</sup> Entspannung mit Russland – Keine Verlängerung der Sanktionen gegen Russland, Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 19/95, 19. Wahlperiode, 22.11.2017, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/000/1900095.pdf> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>45</sup> *Programm für Deutschland. Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, p. 60, AfD.de, <https://www.afd.de/grundsatzprogramm/> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>46</sup> See e.g.: 'Jörg Meuthen: Dialog und Kooperation mit Russland statt Konfrontation und sinnlose Sanktionen', AfD.de, <https://www.afd.de/joerg-meuthen-dialog-und-kooperation-mit-russland-statt-konfrontation-und-sinnlose-sanktionen/>; 'Wirtschaftssanktionen gegen Russland beenden', 28.05.2018, AfD Kompakt, <https://afdkompakt.de/2018/05/28/wirtschaftssanktionen-gegen-russland-beenden/> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>47</sup> E. Cziomer, *Wyzwania nowej roli międzynarodowej Niemiec w dobie globalizacji, kryzysów gospodarczych i finansowo-politycznych po 2007 roku*, Kraków 2018, p. 195.

context, related to the use of force. It is worth mentioning that in recent years, the fate of the treaty on the elimination of intermediate-range missiles (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty – INF), negotiated and signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev on 8 December 1987, at the end of the Cold War, has also become a subject of keen interest of Germany. The agreement, which eliminated US and Soviet nuclear missiles with a range of 500–5500 km from Europe, has become one of the key steps to improve the security of the continent. Meanwhile, since 2014, the United States has been accusing Russia of breaching the treaty by producing and testing missiles exceeding the allowable range.<sup>48</sup> President Donald Trump's announcements that he would withdraw from the treaty at the beginning of 2019 (a six-month notice period since then) mobilized German diplomacy to act to persuade Russia and the US to revise their positions. However, the talks between Minister Heiko Maas and the representatives of Moscow and Washington in January 2019 brought no results. It seems that the objective difficulty indicated by the Kremlin resulted, inter alia, from out of China's reluctance to join potential disarmament treaty solutions<sup>49</sup>. The failure of Berlin's efforts to save this particularly important for European security agreement has shown the limited possibilities of German diplomacy in the collision of the interests of the nuclear powers. It should be emphasized that Germany was inclined to recognize Russia's guilt for the termination of the treaty.

Another example that illustrates the perception of current international problems by Moscow and Berlin was provided by Angela Merkel's visit to Russia on 11 January 2020. From the statements of both leaders at the press conference crowning the meeting, it could be concluded that for both sides one of the key goals was still the completion of the construction of the second gas pipeline Nord Stream, despite the reservations formulated by Washington and some Central and Eastern European countries. In line with the previous German arguments, Angela Merkel once again emphasized the economic nature of this investment. President Putin confirmed his readiness to transit gas through Ukraine for the next five years, which was recently insisted on by the German side. The mutual interest of both countries was also manifested in trade relations: President Vladimir Putin paid special attention to the volume of trade, amounting to almost USD 44 billion in the first ten months of 2019 (which placed Germany in the second place, following China, among Russia's trading partners), and to mutual investments (USD 20 billion of German investments in Russia and USD 9 billion of Russian investments in Germany). Russia and Germany were in favour of maintaining the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, which was terminated by the United States. At the same time, both leaders skilfully masked in their statements

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<sup>48</sup> J. Durkalec, 'Russia's Violation of the INF Treaty: Consequences for NATO', *PISM Bulletin*, No. 107 (702), 13.08.2014, [https://pism.pl/publications/Russia\\_s\\_Violation\\_of\\_the\\_INF\\_Treaty\\_Consequences\\_for\\_NATO](https://pism.pl/publications/Russia_s_Violation_of_the_INF_Treaty_Consequences_for_NATO) [accessed: 20.12.2020].

<sup>49</sup> 'Heikle Themen bei Besuch von Heiko Maas in Moskau', *Zeit Online*, 18.01.2019, [https://www.zeit.de/news/2019-01/18/heikle-themen-bei-besuch-von-heiko-maas-in-moskau-190118-99-615308?utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F](https://www.zeit.de/news/2019-01/18/heikle-themen-bei-besuch-von-heiko-maas-in-moskau-190118-99-615308?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F) [accessed: 20.12.2020].; B. Wessel, 'Die Europäer und der INF-Vertrag – ratlos', *Deutsche Welle*, 1.02.2019, <https://www.dw.com/de/die-europ%C3%A4er-und-der-inf-vertrag-ratlos/a-47324149> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

the differences regarding the conflict in eastern Ukraine and Syria, reaffirming their commitment to their peaceful resolution.<sup>50</sup>

In conclusion, it should be highlighted that from the German perspective, Russia is an extremely important actor in the construction of international security. This is due to its territorial, demographic, economic and military potential. German political circles share the view that without Russia it is impossible to solve the key problems of international security. After the end of the Cold War, in various statements and documents, German-Russian relations were even described with the term “strategic partnership.” A more reserved attitude towards Russia could be discerned during Angela Merkel’s chancellorship. In fact, she did not hesitate to openly criticise the shortcomings of Russian democracy and respect for human rights. The war with Georgia, followed by the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, shook the image of Russia in Germany, which from then on began to be treated as an actor causing international security problems, rather than as a partner in solving them. Having said this, its potential and opportunities to both fuel and mitigate conflicts – in Europe and around it (Ukraine, Syria, Libya) – do not leave an alternative to dialogue.

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem Präsidenten von Russland, Wladimir Putin in Moskau’, *Die Bundesregierung – Aktuelles*, 11.01.2020, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenzen/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-dem-praesidenten-von-russland-wladimir-putin-1711802> [accessed: 20.12.2020].

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*Polityka Niemiec wobec Rosji w kontekście najważniejszych  
wyzwań dla bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego po zakończeniu  
zimnej wojny*  
*Streszczenie*

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie stanowiska Niemiec wobec Rosji w obliczu kluczowych kwestii związanych z bezpieczeństwem międzynarodowym, które pojawiły się po zakończeniu zimnej wojny – w szczególności w obliczu poszerzenia NATO w 1999 r., konfliktu w Kosowie, wojny w Zatoce Perskiej w 2003 r., konfliktu między Rosją i Gruzją, a także konfliktu na Ukrainie. Wszystkie te kwestie miały znaczący wpływ na środowisko bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego i wywoływały ogromne emocje, uwidaczniając przy tym liczne różnice w zakresie stanowisk poszczególnych aktorów sceny stosunków międzynarodowych. W tym kontekście autor próbuje również scharakteryzować znaczenie Federacji Rosyjskiej dla niemieckiej polityki zagranicznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** polityka zagraniczna Niemiec, Rosja, rozszerzenie NATO, Krym, konflikt na Ukrainie, konflikt rosyjsko-gruziński

*Germany's Policy towards Russia in the Context of the Key  
Post-Cold War International Security Challenges*  
*Abstract*

The paper looks at Germany's position towards Russia in the face of major international security problems after the end of the Cold War: the 1999 NATO enlargement, the conflict over Kosovo, the 2003 Persian Gulf War, the conflict between Russia and Georgia, and the conflict in Ukraine. All these issues had a significant impact on the international security environment, and they aroused great emotions, highlighting several differences in the positions taken by individual actors in international relations. In the paper, an attempt has also been made to pinpoint the importance of the Russian Federation in Germany's foreign policy.

**Key words:** German foreign policy, Russia, NATO enlargement, Crimea, conflict in Ukraine, Russian-Georgian conflict

*Deutschlands Politik gegenüber Russland im Kontext der  
wichtigsten Herausforderungen der internationalen Sicherheit  
nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges*  
*Zusammenfassung*

Der Artikel beschreibt die Position Deutschlands gegenüber Russland angesichts der großen internationalen Sicherheitsprobleme nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges: die Erweiterung der NATO im Jahr 1999, den Kosovo-Konflikt, den Golfkrieg 2003, den Konflikt zwischen Russland und Georgien und den Konflikt in der Ukraine. Alle obengenannten Themen hatten erhebliche Auswirkungen auf das Sicherheitsumfeld, erregten große Emotionen und unterschiedliche Positionen einzelner Akteure in den internationalen Beziehungen. Der Autor versucht in diesem Zusammenhang auch, die Bedeutung der Russischen Föderation für die deutsche Außenpolitik zu charakterisieren.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Deutsche Außenpolitik, Russland, NATO-Erweiterung, Krim, Konflikt in der Ukraine, russisch-georgischer Konflikt

*Политика Германии в отношении России в контексте  
важнейших проблем международной безопасности после  
окончания холодной войны*

*Резюме*

В статье представлена позиция Германии в отношении России перед лицом ключевых проблем, связанных с международной безопасностью, которые возникли после окончания холодной войны – в частности, в условиях расширения НАТО в 1999 г., конфликта в Косово, войны в Персидском заливе в 2003 г., конфликта между Россией и Грузией, а также конфликта в Украине. Все эти вопросы оказали существенное влияние на международную среду безопасности и вызвали огромное волнение, при этом демонстрируя многочисленные различия в позициях разных игроков на международной арене. В этом контексте автор также рассматривает значение Российской Федерации для внешней политики Германии.

**Ключевые слова:** внешняя политика Германии, Россия, расширение НАТО, Крым, конфликт в Украине, российско-грузинский конфликт

