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ARE WE WITNESSING THE TWILIGHT OF THE STRATEGIC GERMAN-RUSSIAN PARTNERSHIP UNDER ANGELA MERKEL?¹

CONTINUATION AND NEW ASPECTS

The Soviet Union consenting to the reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the former GDR paved the way for German-Russian cooperation in many fields. After the collapse of the USSR, Germans were interested in the political and economic transformation of Russia, which was supposed to enhance stability in Eastern Europe. During the administration of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, this cooperation reached new heights, as symbolized by the decision in September 2005 to build the controversial Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline.

The early elections held in Germany on September 18, 2005, brought Schröder's seven years of government to an end. For the second time in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, a 'grand coalition' government was formed by the CD/CSU and SPD, and Angela Merkel was appointed Chancellor. Most certainly, the Kremlin had found the former Chancellor a much more convenient partner than the new German leader. Although Merkel admired Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy, and had won a number of national Russian language competitions at school, her experiences in Eastern Germany had made her allergic to human rights abuses and suppression of the opposition. Earlier, she had repeatedly criticized the 'managed democracy' practiced by President Putin and argued that the interests of Central and Eastern European states should be taken into consideration more when dealing with Russia. In her opinion, the strategic German-Russian partnership could not advance unless it was founded on shared democratic values. The coalition agreement signed by the CDU, CSU and SPD on November 11, 2005 featured a clause stating that "European integration and Atlantic partnership are the pillars of German foreign policy and lay the foundations for our relations with Russia." Another part of the agreement extensively discussed the reasons for Germany and its European partners to pursue a strategic partnership with Russia. It stressed that Germany had a particular interest in the stability and modernization of Russia, supporting democratic transformations there and developing business relations, in particular in the energy sector. Germany viewed Russia as a significant partner in resolving global problems and combating international terrorism (*Gemeinsam für Deutschland*, 2005).

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The German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier from the SPD, who had headed the Chancellor's office in the former coalition, embodied 'continuation,' as he was unanimously considered to be an advocate of the Russia-friendly attitude of his former boss. Angela Merkel as the Chancellor would mean that the Moscow-Berlin relations, formerly described in terms of 'male friendship' (*Männerfreundschaft*) between Schröder and Putin, would be 'impersonalized.' From the beginning, the CDU/CSU-SPD coalition government indicated that there would be a connection between economic collaboration with Russia and its respect for shared democratic values and the rule of law. In practice, however, under the pressure from influential business circles, priority was given to trade. Germany hoped that Russian markets would rapidly open to German products, German enterprises would enjoy a good atmosphere for their operations in Russia, and Germany would be guaranteed stable and dependable supplies of energy resources (Götz, 2006: 23).

Putin's presidency was drawing to an end in 2008, and he anointed a relatively young technocrat (43 years old) free of ideological obstinacy, Dmitry Medvedev, as his successor. Part of the German political elite, mainly in SPD circles, began to treat his election run as a true chance for modernization, democratization and liberalization in Russia. It was somewhat naively expected that when Vladimir Putin handed his authority over to the new President, Medvedev would become Germany's main partner in foreign and security policy (Kornelius, 2015: 205).

After the presidential elections in Russia on March 2, 2008, followed directly by Merkel's visit to Russia (March 8) and Steinmeier's to Yekaterinburg (May 13), Germany offered extensive aid to Russia in modernizing its economy, transforming and improving its state administration and enhancing the rule of law (the Partnership for Modernization – PfM – program) (Rahr, 2008: 46–56). Additionally, Germany managed to expand this program into the entire European Union in 2009, thereby involving EU resources in the implementation of projects that Germany found most beneficial.

The first serious tensions between Moscow and Berlin arose in August 2008, after the Russo-Georgian war broke out. From its very beginning, Berlin demanded that both parties stand down and return to their original positions. After a meeting with President Medvedev in Sochi (August 15), Merkel demanded that Moscow respect the territorial integrity of Georgia, but from September, Germany sought calmer relations with Russia. Germany blocked Georgia's attempt to join NATO and opted to renew the temporarily frozen strategic partnership in a meeting between the EU and Russia on November 14, 2008. Nevertheless, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war demonstrated that the Russians could not be relied on, because, in matters of importance to Russia, they simply ignored German suggestions and reservations (Koszel, 2011: 8).

On September 27, 2009, the Christian Democrats won the elections to Bundestag. A good result for the liberals and a poor one for the Social Democrats enabled the return of the CDU/CSU-FDP administration that had been tried and tested in 1982–1998. Angela Merkel retained her position, but that of Minister of Foreign Affairs was given to the leader of the liberals, Guido Westerwelle. It was conspicuous in the coalition agreement that German politicians no longer described Russia as a "strategic partner" but only as an "important partner in facing up to regional and global challenges" (*Wachstum*, 2009).

According to Stefan Meister, an expert on Russia and analyst at the research institute of the Foundation of Science and Politics in Berlin, two political camps could easily be distinguished in Germany at the time, representing different attitudes to Russia. In one group, the tone was set by MPs of the CDU and the Green Party, as well as those closest to Chancellor Merkel. They attached great importance to Russia's respecting democratic values and held high hopes for Medvedev's presidency. The other circle, encompassing deputies from the SPD, the Die Linke party and a group of MPs from the SDU and SCU, believed that it was essential to maintain a strategic partnership with Russia despite its democratic deficit, and continue the efforts to modernize Russia (Meister, 2013).

Having formed a new government with the liberals, Merkel conspicuously limited her contacts with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and gave priority to meetings and consultations with President Medvedev. At an informal meeting with Russia's President at the Meseberg Castle, Brandenburg (June 4–6, 2010), the Germans promised to get more involved in relaxing the visa regime for Russians. Germany's EU partners were surprised after a joint German-Russian memorandum was issued, which proposed establishing an EU-Russian Political and Security Committee, bringing together the foreign affairs ministers of EU member states and of Russia (Sergey Lavrov), as well as the High Representative of the EU for Common Foreign and Security Policy (Catherine Ashton). The Committee was designed to develop the principles of a civilian and military "conflict management mechanism" in Europe (*Deutsch-Russischer Gipfel*, 2010).

Germany's insistence on rapprochement with Russia within the PfM format, which was well received across Europe, was beyond doubt directly linked to the culmination of the eurozone crisis. The economic collapse of the eurozone might have endangered German exports to other EU member states, thereby generating irreparable losses to the German economy. Germany intended to compensate for that by increasing the flow of German goods to Russia. This was obvious during Merkel's visit to Yekaterinburg in July 2010, when contracts worth millions of euros were signed, especially by Siemens (*Wielkie inwestycje*, 2010).

German politicians were hoping for 2011 to mark a breakthrough in the development of strategic partnerships in different fields, including first and foremost the economy and security, between Germany and the EU on the one hand and Russia on the other. On February 9, 2011, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov signed a contract with a German manufacturer Rheinmetall to build a modern military training center in Mulino, near Nizhny Novgorod. German Rheinmetall was the first foreign enterprise allowed to build any kind of military infrastructure on the territory of the Russian Federation. Over a year later, the Nord Stream pipeline was solemnly inaugurated in the presence of 500 guests (Sykulski, 2011: 4; *Nord-Stream-Pipeline*, 2011).

At a successful summit of Russia and the EU, held on December 15, 2011, in Brussels, Russia's accession to the WTO was accepted and an agreement on visa-free movement was signed. Russia was to become a full member of the WTO upon completion of all accession-related procedures, which took place in the summer of 2012 (*UE-Rosja*, 2011).

In spite of pleas and appeals from the European Parliament and outstanding EU politicians, a Presidential election was held in Russia in March 2012, and, as planned, Vladimir Putin was elected President of the Russian Federation in the first round (with 63.7% of votes). Democratic rules being pushed to the limits and the opposition being ignored and suppressed aroused concerns in Brussels, although this outcome had been predicted in all EU states. Role switching between Vladimir Putin and Dimitri Medvedev in 2008 had been a purely technical maneuver intended to enable Putin to resume power in 2012, but a considerable part of the German elite had taken this change seriously. Medvedev had aroused high hopes for a democratic transformation in Russia and for Russian-German relations to become closer. When Putin admitted at a press conference that everything had been set up in advance, Merkel felt cheated, as she had been excessively positive about the new President (Kornelius, 2013: 205). However, this did not alter the general assumptions of German policy towards Russia. The authoritarian ruling methods in Russia were criticized, but at the same time the policy of ‘strategic partnership’ was continued, protecting German economic interests in Russia. Germany chose to ignore the matter of electoral fraud in Russia, and both parties avoided the topic of Russia’s internal situation during the inaugural visit of President Putin to Berlin on June 1, 2012, concentrating on rapidly developing economic collaboration instead (Sattar, 2012).

The relations between Russia and the European Union cooled considerably in August 2012 due to developments that aggravated public opinion in the West. In October 2012, the Russian parliament adopted a new definition of treason and espionage in the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. It stipulated that it is a crime against Russia to “provide financial, material or technical assistance or advice to a foreign state, international or foreign organization, or their representatives, in activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation,” which would be punishable by imprisonment for ten to twenty years. This was generally interpreted as a threat addressed at activists in anti-Putin opposition movements and anti-Kremlin NGOs. The sentence passed against the members of the punk band Pussy Riot, who were sent to a labor camp for insulting the Russian President in a performance in an Orthodox church, resonated widely (Ludwig, 2012; *Pussy-Riot*, 2012).

The 14th German-Russian intergovernmental consultations on November 16, 2012, in Moscow, were held in the context of these recent developments, and Chancellor Angela Merkel firmly reproached Putin for violating human rights and adopting the law on treason. She reminded him that it was an integral part of the PfM to build an open civil society, instead of persecuting activists. She could not forget that Putin had ignored her plea to release the imprisoned Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was not pardoned by the President until December 20, 2013. Vladimir Putin, in turn, emphasized the issue of problems with visas. Nevertheless, the Chancellor’s entourage of eight ministers and a large business delegation conveyed the message that priority would be given to matters of energy and industrial collaboration. It was not by coincidence that the consultations were scheduled immediately after the opening of the Nord Stream pipeline, pumping gas from Russia to German customers. The most significant information the world received was that Siemens had signed several important agreements, including a contract for EUR 2.5 billion for the supply of 675 railway engines to Russia (Wieliński, 2012).

In spite of both governments' optimism about the future of the strategic partnership, a certain confusion was evident among the political elite of Germany in the fall of 2012. The consensus about Russian integration into Europe and democratization in Russia being essential for security of the Old Continent was shaken. Germany ran out of ideas regarding how to handle an increasingly authoritarian Russia. Until then, all parties represented in Bundestag had respected the unwritten agreement that relations with Russia played an exceptional role in both Germany's and the EU's eastern policies. An expert on Russian-German relations, Jochen Franzke from the University of Potsdam, noted that Germany had to make a choice between whether to apply the 'Westphalian solution' from 1648 or acknowledge that there was a direct link between economic collaboration and international security on the one hand and respect for democratic laws and civil freedoms on the other, thereby choosing a specific model of collaboration with Russia (Franzke, 2013: 40).

UKRAINIAN WATERSHED

On September 22, 2013, Germans went to the polls aware of the fact that the election results were a foregone conclusion, since Merkel's popularity had peaked. Yet due to a poor result for the liberals, who did not enter Bundestag, the Christian Democrats were forced to renew the old coalition with the Social Democrats. This meant right from the start that certain concessions to Russia would be made. The coalition agreement, dated November 27, contained an exceptionally extensive offer to Russia, as indicated by the title of the agreement: "Open dialogue and broader cooperation with Russia" (*Offener Dialog und breitere Zusammenarbeit mit Russland*). Firstly, further support for and development of the PfM concept was announced, clearly as a gesture to the SPD and Minister Steinmeier, whose brainchild this idea was. The PfM was to be extended to other areas in order to achieve "social, political and economic progress." The agreement emphasized that a "modernized and democratic Russia with a strong economy is in the German and European interest" since Russia is the EU's most important partner. Germany declared that it would assist Russia in the development of civil society and collaboration under the Petersburg Dialogue. Moscow was urged to respect democratic standards to which it was obliged by international agreements. A revision of the visa regime for students, entrepreneurs, scholars and artists was promised. On a broader scale, a new PCA was to be drafted, collaboration in the Baltic Sea region was to be developed and cooperation within the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy was to be enhanced. Dialogue between Russia, Germany and Poland was to play a key role in these essential matters (*Deutschlands Zukunft gestalten*, 2013: 118).

All hopes associated with the expansion of the Partnership for Modernization program died following the conflict in Ukraine, the Arab revolutions in North Africa and the aggravated conflict in the Middle East. Germany and the rest of the European Union focused on supporting democratic transformations in this region, containing the civil war in Syria and preventing the uncontrolled flow of migrants to Europe. All of this was accompanied by the need to rapidly resolve the financial crisis in the eurozone.

After the bloody riots in Kiev at the turn of 2013/2014, triggered by President Victor Yanukovich refusing to sign an association agreement with the EU, the German media took the side of the demonstrators, but German politicians called for common sense and compromise. In order to prevent the escalation of the violent conflict and achieve a compromise between the government and the opposition, Steinmeier resolved to seek an amicable solution in Ukraine together with the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, and his French counterpart, Laurent Fabius. This mission of the Weimar Three was successful. An agreement between the government and the opposition was forged on February 21. The bloodshed ended, Yanukovich fled to Russia and the formation of a new government began (Lehnartz, Kellermann, 2014).

Russia's occupation of Crimea in March 2014 came as an enormous surprise to Germany, but Merkel held her nerve. She responded in a highly restrained manner to Putin's speech of March 18 on Russia's annexation of Crimea and limited herself to a statement that Russia had broken international law, but the EU simultaneously imposed sanctions and continued the dialogue with Russia. Yet Steinmeier felt defeated, given his ambitious plans to provide new incentives for collaboration with Russia in his second term as the head of *Auswärtiges Amt* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and did his best to calm the situation. He travelled around the Baltic States and Hungary, met Russian Minister Sergey Lavrov, and thereby put Germany at the spearhead of the group of states committed to resolving the conflict in Ukraine (Książniakiewicz, 2015).

It is beyond doubt that unleashing the war in eastern Ukraine (Donbas) and the shooting down of a Malaysian civil airliner in July 2014 generated public sympathy in Germany for Ukraine and triggered demands to tighten commercial sanctions against Russia. Concerned with the attack, Chancellor Merkel pleaded for an immediate, impartial investigation and a ceasefire (*Bundeskanzlerin Merkel zum Absturz*, 2014).

In June 2014, Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine established a Normandy Format, under which Germany and France jointly worked towards a ceasefire. After a G-20 meeting held in Brisbane (Australia) on November 15–16, 2014, and four-hour talks with Putin, Merkel ultimately became disillusioned with the intentions of the Russians. After innumerable phone conversations and many hours of talks with the Russian President about the Ukrainian conflict, she could see that Putin would readily make promises and never keep his word. The German Chancellor gave a speech which left no illusions about Germany and the EU's intentions regarding accepting the illegitimate occupation of Crimea, and stated that, should the conflict in eastern Ukraine escalate and the country be further destabilized by Russia, sanctions would become more severe. She also presented the EU's strategy towards Ukraine, which was to receive political and economic support, and declared further pursuit of a diplomatic resolution of the conflict with Russia (Salzen, 2014).

The EU member states eagerly gave the task of seeking a diplomatic solution to Germany, as no other country, except France, felt like embarking on this difficult mission with slim chances of success. Germany was reluctant to assume the role of the main arbitrator in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and found it difficult to approve the sanctions policy towards Russia. Angela Merkel's new task was more of a burden than a source of pride. A renowned journalist from Berlin, Christoph von Marschall,

observed that “the room for maneuver is small, the risk is high and the prospect of success uncertain. The current crisis in relations with Russia has been the biggest challenge for Angela Merkel since she took the Chancellor’s Office” (Marschall, 2015).

Thanks to the persistent and conciliatory attitude of the German leader, the so-called second Minsk agreement was signed on February 12, 2015; its key points provided for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the frontline. The negotiations demanded significant effort from the Chancellor. During a 16-hour negotiating marathon in Minsk, she threatened to break off the talks if the separatists boycotted the agreed arrangements. There was no question that the second Minsk agreement was her personal success, which she paid for with physical and mental exhaustion. She managed to maintain the shaky unity of the EU in retaining the sanctions against Russia and stopped the noisy propaganda offensive of those who “understood Russia” (*Ruslandversteher*) in her own country (Książniakiewicz, 2015).

The results of the poll carried out by the Allensbach Institute of Public Opinion Research, commissioned by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* daily and published in March 2015, indicated a considerable rise in Germany’s mistrust towards Russia. It was particularly conspicuous that the image of the Russian President in Germany had been seriously tarnished. Only 8% of Germans had a positive opinion of the Russian President, compared to 66% with a negative opinion of him (in 2001, as many as 43% of Germans had had a positive opinion of Putin) (*Das Ansehen*, 2015).

Since Russia failed to observe the Minsk agreements, Germany was adamant about the continuation of EU sanctions against Moscow. In spite of Russia’s retaliation, the EU banned the export of foodstuffs to Russia and the sanctions were extended on a regular basis. The most recent decision was issued by the European Council on March 12, 2018, renewing the sanctions for another six months until September 15, 2018. They continue to include 150 individuals and 38 businesses (*UE przedłuża do 15 września 2018 r.*).

THE TWO-TRACK APPROACH AND CONTINUING DIVISIONS

The conflict in Ukraine and repressions against the anti-Kremlin opposition, embodied by the murder of one of the opposition leaders, Boris Nemtsov, in February 2015, began to determine the eastern policy of Germany. There was no more talk of Germany’s individual policy towards Russia, only about following the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy. The administration of Angela Merkel extended greater support to Ukraine than before and became one of the prominent advocates of an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU, which came into force in early January 2016. Germany’s attitude to security policy also changed. Germany understood that its ‘culture of restraint’ and reduction of the military potential of the Bundeswehr had led it down a blind alley, and Germany had become an unreliable partner to its NATO allies. Therefore, at the NATO summit held in Newport (September 4–5, 2014), Germany obliged itself to increase its military outlay from the 1.2% of GDP being spent at the time to the 2% encouraged by NATO. Although with difficulty, Germany also resolved to support NATO’s eastern flank. During the Warsaw NATO summit of July 8–9, 2016,

Germany backed all formerly agreed military decisions. Germans agreed to take command of a multinational battalion (made up of French, Dutch and Belgian troops) deployed in Lithuania, thereby stressing their credibility as an ally. Germany had no reservations concerning the deployment of a US heavy armored brigade in NATO's eastern flank countries and strengthening US air power in Germany. Germans also intended to assist President Poroshenko in modernizing the Ukrainian armed forces and continuing the policy of 'open doors' to NATO for Ukraine and Georgia, while making no commitments about covering either of them by the Membership Plan. On the other hand, backed by France and Italy, Germany officially declared that it was for the continuation of constructive dialogue with Russia and the reactivation of meetings held by ambassadors under the NATO-Russia Council. Germany believed that Russia's support was indispensable to end the civil war in Syria, solve problems associated with the Iranian nuclear program and combat Islamic terrorism (*Nato-Gipfel in Warschau*, 2016; Szubart, 2016).

Chancellor Merkel's pursuing a more determined policy towards the Kremlin was restrained by the standpoint of the SPD's coalition partner, the CSU, as well as by business circles and the Die Linke and Alternative for Germany parties, who openly supported the Kremlin. After the annexation of Crimea, the Social-Democratic architects of German eastern policy in the 1970s became the foremost advocates of the Kremlin, namely the late Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and his advisor, political scientist Egon Bahr. They were joined by ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and EU ex-Commissioner for Enlargement and ex-Prime Minister of Brandenburg, Mathias Platzeck. Public opinion was also shaped by the statements of Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Economy and Energy, Sigmar Gabriel of the SPD. In summer 2016, he openly suggested that the sanctions be lifted in return for Moscow's collaboration in Syria. The ex-Prime Minister of Bavaria, Edmund Stoiber, and the current Federal Minister of Internal Affairs, Horst Seehofer, are believed to admire Putin. Before the second Minsk agreement was signed in December 2014, the *Die Zeit* weekly published a dramatic manifesto, entitled "War in Europe Again," where it called for the dialogue with Moscow to continue because removing Russia from Europe would be "unreasonable and detrimental to peace." The manifesto was signed by German political, academic and artistic elites, including ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, President Roman Herzog, famous film director Wim Wenders and popular actress Hanna Schygulla and her colleagues Mario Adorf and Karl Maria Brandauer (*Wieder Krieg*, 2014).

A strong pro-Russian lobby in Germany is most often associated with business associations, in particular with the German-Russian Chamber of Commerce and the Eastern Department of the German Economy, headed by Echarde Cordes, who emphasized the vital interests of German industry exporting to Russia. Recently, however, economic cooperation between Germany and Russia has dwindled. German exports to Russia amounted to a mere EUR 21.5 billion in 2016, compared to almost double that in 2012 (over EUR 38 billion). The machine and automotive industries noted a considerable drop. The number of German companies operating in the Russian market fell to 5,583 in 2015 (a decrease of 7%). According to data from the Federal Statistical Bureau, Russia was the 13th top trade partner of Germany in terms of turnover, due to exports of its natural resources. At present, the volume of trade is considerably lower

than in 2012 (EUR 48 billion and 80 billion respectively), less than half of the Polish-German trade turnover (EUR 101 billion in 2016) (Godlewski, 2017).

Collaboration in the energy sector is an exception to this rule. The resumption of good economic relations was symbolized by the signing of an agreement to build the second line of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in September 2015. Critics warn that Germany's reliance on Russia's supplies of gas is going to rise to 60%, but the Merkel administration continues to view it as a purely commercial venture. After Donald Trump took office, and the US imposed sanctions on Russia in July 2017, the pipeline project has been called into question (Kireev, 2017).

In 2016, the issue of the certain helplessness of the German elite towards Russia was well understood by a renowned German monthly, *WeltTrends – das außenpolitische Journal*, which began a forum (*Berlin und Moskau – wie weiter*) to discuss German-Russian relations in the future. Experts who took part in it indicated that Russia's fulfillment of the Minsk agreements was essential for Berlin and Moscow to come to an agreement and improve relations. The issue of European security and re-designing its structure to incorporate Russia should determine the steps taken by Germany and the European Union, pushing the problems with democracy and human rights in Russia aside (WeltTrends, 2016). In another expert study, the above-mentioned Stefan Meister writes that, as well as sanctions, Russia should also be presented a positive agenda, with the economy playing the role of the leading channel of communication. Also, Russian society should feature more in German interests. The visa regime should be relaxed and fees abandoned, the exchange of young people, journalists and people associated with culture should expand, and NGOs should be supported. On the other hand, German society should be shown how the Kremlin bends facts to fit its interpretations, and resorts to exaggerations and lies (Meister, 2015).

Electoral manifestos of the main political parties running for the Bundestag in September 2017 made no reference whatsoever to the Russian-German strategic partnership or the prospects of close collaboration. The Christian-Democratic parties noted that Russian aggression had infringed upon the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The European Union committed itself to help Ukraine because of its shared responsibility for peace and freedom. Russia was urged to observe the Minsk agreements (*Für ein Deutschland*, 2017). The SPD spoke in a similar, but more nuanced vein. According to them, the German attitude towards Russia was determined by Russian activities in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, which was a breach of international law. This infringed upon the foundations of European peace and security. Still, the SPD was convinced that European peace and security were feasible "only with Russia and neither without nor against Russia." Progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements could lead to the sanctions against the Russian Federation gradually being lifted (*Zeit für mehr Gerechtigkeit*, 2017).

The above assumptions formulated in the CDU's manifesto were in stark contrast to those stipulated by the pro-Russian Die Linke party, which primarily focused on security matters. Die Linke argued that strengthening NATO's eastern flank on the Russian border would pose a threat to peace. Instead of the rearmament, confrontation and sanctions against Russia pursued by the then government, it was recommended that a policy of peace and détente should be implemented. Accepting Geor-

gia, Macedonia or Ukraine as NATO members would aggravate tensions in relations with Moscow. According to Die Linke, many German citizens are concerned with the deteriorating relations between Germany, the EU and Russia. The policy of confrontation was prevailing, which Die Linke deemed to be “disastrous.” European security is feasible only with Russia, and not against it (*Sozial. Gerecht. Frieden*, 2017).

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Russia’s jostling in the international arena and its quite open pursuit of greater influence in global politics has forced Germany to review its eastern policy. The terms “strategic partnership” and “Partnership for Modernization” have disappeared from the vocabulary of politicians in the Chancellery and the *Auswärtiges Amt*. With the exception of the energy sector, economic collaboration has lost pace and the leading recipient of Germany’s enormous industrial output is now China. Germany was especially offended by Putin’s administration blatantly ignoring the advice and pleas of Chancellor Merkel, in particular regarding the conflict in Ukraine. Some scholars believe that Germany has been partly responsible for the developments in Russia since 2005. Enchanted by the vision of strategic partnership, Germany made little of the Russian threat to European security and exaggerated its own influence on Russian policy (Franzke, 2016: 108).

Berlin is aware that Russia is pumping increasing amounts of money into armaments and keeps trying to interfere with elections, most famously in the 2016 US presidential election and possibly even in the 2017 German elections. Therefore, it will be impossible to marginalize Russia and a new formula for mutual relations must be found. It is, however, difficult to come up with new ideas. It is striking that, whereas at the beginning of this century Germany went ahead with its own plans towards Russia (the Nord Stream, Partnership for Modernization, ignoring Ukraine), paying no attention to the opinions of the other EU member states, it is now trying to ‘Europeanize’ German policy towards the Russian Federation. Renowned German experts Barbara Lippert and Kai-Olaf Lang forecast that the process will be reminiscent of “cooperative confrontation” (*kooperative Konfrontation*), where Germany – alongside its EU partners – will pursue joint and loyal selective collaboration with Russia on the one hand, and contain the neo-imperial ambitions of the Kremlin alongside NATO on the other (Lang, Lippert, 2015).

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ABSTRACT

The author of this paper analyzes the policy of strategic partnership between Germany and Russia, especially in the field of the economy, which originated after the reunification of Germany in 1990. He stresses that it was the government of Angela Merkel after 2005 that began to emphasize the authoritarian rule of President Vladimir Putin and human rights breaches in Russia. Nevertheless, economic cooperation continued under the pressure from business circles. The author's main hypothesis is that it was only Russia's aggression towards Ukraine that undermined German-Russian collaboration, which is no longer given priority. Germany is the foremost advocate of the EU's maintaining its sanctions against Russia. Angela Merkel's third and fourth governments have tried to 'Europeanize' Germany's policy towards the Russian Federation to a greater extent. Both Germany and the EU need Russia as a strategic partner to resolve problems in the Middle East and combat international terrorism. Russia is also a significant supplier of strategic resources to Germany and the EU. This paper employs the descriptive research method, the method of source analysis and decision-making analysis.

Keywords: Germany, Russia, strategic partnership, European Union

**ZMIERZCH STRATEGICZNEGO PARTNERSTWA NIEMIEC I ROSJI
POD RZĄDAMI ANGELI MERKEL?****STRESZCZENIE**

Autor w artykule analizuje politykę strategicznego partnerstwa Niemiec z Rosją, szczególnie w obszarze gospodarki zapoczątkowaną zjednoczeniem Niemiec w 1990 r. Podkreśla, że dopiero rząd A. Merkel po 2005 r. w większym stopniu zaczął zwracać uwagę na rządy autorytarne prezydenta W. Putina i łamanie praw człowieka w Rosji. Jednocześnie pod naciskiem kół gospodarczych kooperacja gospodarcza była kontynuowana. Autor stawia hipotezę główną, że dopiero agresja Rosji na Ukrainę zachwiała podstawami współpracy niemiecko-rosyjskiej i nie jest ona obecnie traktowana jako priorytetowa. Niemcy są głównymi zwolennikami utrzymania unijnych sankcji wobec Rosji. Tzw. trzeci i czwarty rząd A. Merkel obecnie w większym niż dotąd stopniu próbuje „europeizować” swoją politykę wobec Federacji Rosyjskiej. Niemcom i UE Rosja jest nadal potrzebna jako strategiczny partner w rozwiązywaniu problemów Bliskiego Wschodu i walki z międzynarodowym terroryzmem. Liczy się jako ważny dostawca surowców strategicznych dla Niemiec i UE. W artykule zastosowano deskryptywną metodę badawczą, metodę analizy źródeł i metodę decyzyjną.

Słowa kluczowe: Niemcy, Rosja, strategiczne partnerstwo, Unia Europejska

