

## Germany's security policy and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

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The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has not brought about a change in Germany's stance within NATO on policy towards Russia and with regard to its Eastern allies. In fact it has even reinforced the defensive nature of Germany's security policy vis-à-vis Moscow. Representatives of the German government are already openly ruling out the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO; this despite the fact that the topic is not currently being discussed. The current character of the EU's neighbourhood policy has also been called into question - following Moscow, some characterise it as a policy that forces the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries to make a geopolitical choice between the EU and Russia. As a consequence, Germany might be bringing the signing of association agreements with the EaP's states into question – at least in their present form. Adopting Russian arguments, politicians and society in Germany are decidedly against a permanent and considerable presence of NATO forces in member states close to Russia, for example, Poland. The additional military activity that have been announced by Germany and described as strengthening the security of NATO's eastern flank will rather be part of NATO's routine actions in the region. Enhancing substantially activity of NATO in the region may, in Germany's opinion, contribute to an escalation of tensions between the West and Russia.

### Germany's approach to Ukraine: Eastern Europe from the German perspective

Germany's policy on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is shaped by two factors. The first is Germany's advantageous geographical location in the centre of Europe - the enlargement of NATO to encompass Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia has sufficiently secured the borders and direct interests of Germany's broadly defined security. The second factor is the character of relations between Germany and Russia and the fact that Berlin recognises that Moscow treats the states of Eastern Europe as a sphere of influence. Germany believes that NATO's and EU's policy towards these countries should not be implemented in the face of Russia's opposition. So far consecutive German governments have unofficially been opposed to NATO and EU membership for Ukraine and other Eastern European countries. This did not, however, mean that Germany was ready to accept Russia's exclusive dominance in these countries in the economic area. It was in Germany's interest that these countries should be at least partially in the orbit of the EU so that EU norms and legislation as well as NATO standards would have an impact on fighting corruption and enhancing the rule of law and stability. For these reasons Germany endorsed the signing of association agreements with Ukraine and other Eastern Partnership countries.

At present the representatives of the German government are not limiting themselves to ruling out Ukraine joining NATO now and in the future unofficially but are also making this plain in the public eye. This was the statement of the German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 1 April, though he emphasised the possibility of closer co-operation between Ukraine and NATO. This position (albeit presented as not agreed upon within the German government) is contrary to the official “open door” policy adopted at the NATO summit in Bucharest and recently also confirmed for Ukraine by the NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. As far as closer co-operation between Ukraine and the EU is concerned, Germany has now reached the conclusion that the Eastern Partnership program should be modified in such a way that economic integration with the EU would not rule out the development of ties between the EaP countries and Moscow. This calls into question the signing of association agreements in their present form with the EaP states. Germany will not, however, give up its own presence in Ukraine – the Federal Foreign Office is working on a plan of support for the new Ukrainian government, including in the fields of the economy, finance and the judicial system.

### **Germany's approach to Russia: no to NATO's deterrence policy**

Representatives of the German elite have up to now been convinced that Russia is unable to pose a military threat to any of the NATO member states in the short, mid- and long term. Russia was perceived as a weak state and the modernisation of the Russian Armed Forces, their training activity and offensive exercises in the region were treated by Germany as the “twitches” of a state which had not resigned itself to losing the position of a superpower both in its relations with the US and Europe. Germany also shared the view that the theses about NATO encircling and threatening Russia, put forward by a section of the Russian elite, should not be corroborated by NATO's substantial military activity in border member states (including Poland and the Baltic states) since these could count as “deterrent” measures. Furthermore, German security policy is influenced by historical factors: the memory of the defeat on the eastern front, Russian occupation, the Cold War and the division of Germany into two states on the front, and finally the recognition of the policy of détente and co-operation with the USSR as the most conducive to bringing the Cold War to an end and reunifying Germany. As a consequence Germans have a deeply rooted conviction that the only good strategy in security sphere towards Russia is the policy of dialogue and co-operation and not the policy of deterrence. For this reason Germany's participation in NATO Steadfast Jazz exercises, held in autumn 2013 in Poland and the Baltic states, was marginal.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict so far has not brought about a change in the way Germany views Russia and the security of NATO's eastern flank. On the contrary, it has tended to confirm Berlin's stance described above. Although the statement of the German defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen, on the need to enhance NATO's presence in Eastern member states has resonated in the media, it was swiftly criticised not only by the opposition but also within the government as escalating tensions with Russia. It quickly turned out that Germany's enhancement of the presence of NATO in the region will pertain mainly to actions which are part of routine NATO operations in the region. Germany has declared it will provide six Eurofighter combat aircraft to NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission. It also

announced its readiness to allocate one ship of the German Navy (probably Elbe-class replenishment ship) for two months as a command ship and a flagship to the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group One (SNMCMG1) which operates on the seas of Northern Europe, including the Baltic Sea. Since December 2013 the SNMCMG1 has been deactivated due to the lack of the declared input from NATO member states. In discussions about a permanent and substantial presence of NATO forces in Poland the German foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, remains firmly opposed to this proposal as he claims this would be not in line with the agreements signed between NATO and Russia. Steinmeier is thus adopting the Russian rhetoric about the political documents signed between NATO and Russia in 1997 and 2002 (which Russia is in fact violating) and recognises them as binding for NATO member states. This position held by the German government is reflected in the results of opinion polls. According to a survey conducted by ARD-DeutschlandTrend at the beginning of April this year, 53% of those surveyed are against NATO enhancing the military security of its Eastern member states (with 40% in favour), whereas 61% are opposed to Germany's participation in such activities (with 35% in favour). Furthermore, as many as 49% of the respondents opt for the role of Germany as an "intermediary" between the West and Russia in the present crisis, with 45% supporting a strong anchoring of Germany in NATO.

### **The prospects and implications of the German position**

The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict will not contribute to a change in Germany's security policy and the shape of the German Armed Forces. It is equally unlikely that Germany will increase its military expenditure. Berlin will be unwilling to expand tasks linked to collective defence in its military planning. It will probably refer to the principle of developing a wide spectrum of capabilities to perform different types of tasks (*Breite vor Tiefe*) which is a guideline for the present reform of the Bundeswehr. Furthermore, despite the current events, Germany's security policy will have an increasingly "global", not "regional" character. This is linked to the pursuit of the country's global economic interests.

Within NATO, Germany will, on the one hand, want to prove that it is a reliable ally. Most likely, though, it will perform primarily symbolic gestures towards its Eastern allies (rumours have appeared in the media about possible proposals from the German Ministry of Defence to hold military exercises with the participation of Germany, Poland and the Baltic states). On the other hand, Germany will strongly oppose a permanent deployment of larger NATO forces in Poland and the Baltic states and any activities going far beyond the current norm. In Germany's opinion, they may contribute to an escalation of tensions between the West and Russia. In discussions over the implications of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict for NATO strategy, Germany will probably emphasise the need to enhance dialogue with Russia and develop the dimension of "cooperative security" and not necessarily "collective defence" within NATO.

Germany is therefore a difficult partner within NATO for those allies whose territory is close to Russia. On the one hand, Germany is the ally with the largest military potential in Northern and Central Europe and it is in the interest of smaller partners to tighten bilateral military co-operation with the Bundeswehr. On the other hand, the German policy of "dialogue above all" and the opposition to a policy of deterrence requires reflection on the strategy of developing such a military co-operation with Germany which may limit the independence of the military

actions of smaller partners, including in the context of defence procurement projects in the region.