

Ukraine: Germany is under increasing criticism

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In recent days, there has been a crisis in relations between Ukraine and Germany, caused by a series of actions by Berlin that impeded the transfer of weapons to the Ukrainian army in the face of a potential attack from Russia, as well as by the publicly expressed opinions of some German military officers and politicians which caused widespread outrage in Ukraine. For example, the commander of the German fleet, Vice-Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach stated that Crimea would never return to Ukraine and expressed his understanding for President Vladimir Putin's policy, and the Minister-President of Bavaria and CSU leader Markus Söder questioned the purpose of Western sanctions against Russia and ruled out Ukraine's membership in NATO in the foreseeable future. In response, the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that these opinions encourage Putin to attack Ukraine and contradict the support thus far provided by Germany. On 22 January, the German ambassador in Kyiv was summoned to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In turn, on 24 January, the Committee for Ukraine's Integration with the EU and the Committee on Foreign Policy and Interparliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine addressed Bundestag deputies with a letter calling for Germany to revise its policy towards Ukraine, as "it is in line with Russian propaganda" and "is undermining the good relations between [Ukraine and Germany]." Criticism of Germany has also become an important topic in the Ukrainian media. For example, the influential pro-Western portal European Pravda accused Berlin of supporting Russia's aggressive actions.

Commentary

- The Ukrainian elites and public became even more disillusioned with the stance taken by Germany when it was revealed that Germany was blocking arms supplies to Ukraine as part of NATO's NSPA agency and because Berlin did not agree to Estonia's delivery of self-propelled howitzers originating from German army supplies. This disillusionment was deepened further still by the information that British transport planes carrying military aid for Ukraine had bypassed German airspace, and the statements from German politicians and military officers were the final straw. Until that time, the government in Kyiv had been attempting to avoid openly criticising Berlin. Recent political and media reactions indicate that Germany's credibility as a genuine supporter of Ukraine has been significantly undermined.
- The disappointment in Kyiv is all the greater since German decisions and statements contrast with the increasingly bold declarations by Ukraine's Western partners regarding the supply of weapons in the context of potential Russian aggression. Germany's actions are destroying the hopes of Ukrainian decision-makers for a change in Germany's

attitude towards Russia. Such hopes arose when the Green Party, viewed as anti-Russian, joined the new government. These hopes were not entirely groundless: last May, Robert Habeck, one of the leaders of the Green Party, who is now serving as vice-chancellor of Germany, spoke in favour of supplying weapons to Ukraine and of full support in the war against the Russian aggressor (for which he was criticised by almost his entire party, including the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Annalena Baerbock).

- Kyiv's indignation should be seen as the culmination of dissatisfaction with a series of German moves towards Ukraine and its attitude towards Russia. It stems from the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, as well as an insignificant and vague aid package for Ukraine envisaged in the German-American agreement signed by the Chancellor Angela Merkel government in July 2021 regarding the de facto US consent to the construction of the pipeline. One important factor that deepened Ukraine's disappointment with Berlin's attitude was the lack of its involvement in the work of the Crimean Platform, initiated by Kyiv in order to activate international efforts to de-occupy Crimea. This was proven by the fact that Germany sent low-ranking delegates to the initiative's summit in August last year. Chancellor Merkel, who had visited Kyiv two days earlier, did not attend the summit. In 2021, negative reactions in Ukraine were also caused by the statement of the German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who argued that the construction of Nord Stream 2 was a form compensation for Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. This sparked irritation among Ukrainian leaders, who pointed out that he did not treat the millions of victims of the Nazi occupation of Ukrainian lands with equal sympathy.
- It seems that only Germany's role in the European Union and NATO and Berlin's participation in the negotiation process regarding the settlement of the conflict in Donbas has so far prevented Kyiv from expressing more severe criticism of the German government's actions (such criticism is expressed on a regular basis, for example, in the statements of the Ukrainian ambassador to Germany). For this reason, the editorial published by the influential European Pravda news website (which is an uncompromising voice of the criticism against Germany which is widely expressed in Ukrainian traditional and social media by journalists, experts and some politicians) can be viewed as the actual opinion of the Ukrainian political and intellectual elite. The authors stated that Berlin's policy is perceived as "complicity in Russian aggression" against Ukraine, and its continuation will mean "a disaster in Ukrainian-German relations." The statements from the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and expert circles are also a form of pressure on Germany, aimed at increasing support for Ukraine in the face of the threat of an armed conflict with Russia.