Yurgens wrote in their program article entitled "Toward a Union of Europe." And further: "Disappointed in its expectations that our country would choose the road of subjugated liberal-democratic development trodden by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the EU is unable to formulate a single and constructive long-term policy in relation to Russia. In fact, Brussels has not yet decided on the type of relationship with Russia it should choose."[16]

The Russian political class is being offered a new intellectual paradigm, which combines "European choice" with Great Power status and equal unification of sovereignties. In other words, an attempt is being made to achieve a synthesis of two traditional opposites of Russian political thought: pro-Western liberal and anti-Western conservative-etatist. This reflects the objective processes now underway in the world, in particular, disappearance of the "West of the Cold War period."

This is intended to "softly" adapt Russian consciousness to the reality in which Russia will gradually lose its capacity to determine, on its own, the global balance of power: to preserve it Russia will need an influential partner. Europe needs this as well: so far it is making its first steps toward a complete realization of the real challenges of the 21st century.

Russia failed to integrate into the single European expanse either on the basis of shared values or technical criteria as had been expected late in the last century. This happened because the two subjects are geopolitically incompatible; each of them, in its own way, claims an independent and leading role. They might change their ideas about integration when they grasp the significance of current geopolitical realties, which so far offer brilliant prospects to neither.

16 http://www.rg.ru/2008/11/06/russia-europe.html.

13. Constructing a Different Europe: The Peculiarities of the German-Russian Partnership

Hans-Joachim Spanger and Andrei Zagorsky

The German-Russian relationship of the past twenty years displays two outstanding features: It is not only particularly close but at the same time fraught with exceptional contradictions, the most obvious being that nobody could have expected such a rapprochement. There are so many features which – as opposed to, say, in the relationship between France and the UK – point in quite the opposite direction. Take, for instance, their history: hardly any other country suffered as much from the German war of annihilation as the Soviet Union, while the subsequent Cold War not only came as a "great relief" (Peter Bender) to Germany, allowing it to forgive and forget, but also turned its two halves into the two most heavily armed Cold-War frontline states of one nation.

But there is also the present. According to conventional wisdom, present-day Germany and present-day Russia represent the two opposite extremes on the continuum of modernity. Whereas the Russian state, in Robert Cooper's terms, is firmly rooted in "modernity", Germany is allegedly among the most advanced post-modern states in the EU and the "most developed example of a post-modern system."[1] The former, according to this reasoning, is characterized by the "principles of empire and the supremacy of national interest," clinging to state sovereignty and the balance of power as – in Vladimir Putin's words – "the greatest achievement of humanity."[2] The latter, however, is said to rely on mutuality in surveillance, openness, and vulnerability as well as on transparency and interdependence.

Hardly any other pair of states sits together so uneasily. Nevertheless, Germany does not revert to Cooper's prescribed "double standards" but rather embraces Russia. And Russia, conversely, is far from writing Germany off as an irrelevant island of the blessed, but rather has chosen it as its prime collaborator on the continent. Moreover, this mutual official allegiance has also trickled down to the public attitudes on both sides. According to a German-Russian survey, conducted in 2008 by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach and the Levada Center, mutual sympa-

1 Robert Cooper, "The Post-modern State," *The Guardian*, 7 April 2002.

2 The full quote: "The balance of power is the main achievement of these past decades and indeed of the whole history of humanity. It is one of the most important conditions for maintaining global stability and security." Vladimir V. Putin, Interview with Arab Satellite Channel Al-Jazeera, 10 February 2007, in www.kremlin.ru (9/4/2008).

thies between Germans and Russians can hardly be exceeded. Asked which country should be "cooperated with as closely as possible," 51 percent of Russians chose Germany (ahead of Belarus 50 percent, China 47 percent and France 45 percent; the US received just 14 percent, surpassing only Saudi Arabia 11 percent and Georgia 5 percent). At the same time, 45 percent of Germans picked Russia, fifth behind only France (69 percent), the US (56 percent), the UK (53 percent) and Austria (52 percent), but well ahead of Poland (30 percent), the Czech Republic (24 percent) or China (30 percent). When asked which countries are considered "hostile", only 2 percent of Russians indicated Germany, but 65 percent named the US, 50 percent the Ukraine and another 5 percent Belarus. On the part of Germans, 5 percent named Russia, yet 13 percent chose Turkey, 10 percent Poland and 8 percent China.[3]

These findings, however, are far from unequivocal. Looking at the political class in Germany, the picture changes considerably. In a survey of 240 leading representatives from politics, business, think tanks, the media and the administration – conducted by dimap (das Institut für Markt- und Politikforschung) and the German Society for Foreign Policy between December 2008 and January 2009 – Russia does not receive impressive marks.[4] In the field of energy supplies, for instance, only 8 percent of respondents consider Russia a "reliable partner" whereas 60 percent conclude that Russia "first and foremost pursues its own interests" and 31 percent consider it to some degree as an "adversary". In the field of arms control the respective figures are even worse: 3 percent; 38 percent; and 56 percent. With regard to the UN Security Council, only 39 percent register a "constructive role" for Russia whereas 56 percent disagree. Yet, contrary to frequent calls in the US, 95 percent of respondents would refuse to expel Russia from the G8.

This picture is puzzling in that it has been the governments – and moreover the heads of government – that from the time of Helmut Kohl and Mikhail Gorbachev onwards displayed the greatest proximity and understanding, whereas at least in Germany the public(ized) opinion showed quite a measure of distrust and seemed much more in tune with the data described above. This is a recurrent phenomenon but not a continuous one, since every change of government in Germany has to a greater or lesser extent been accompanied by an initial cooling of relations. And although the new German coalition government, established in October 2009, may at first glance appear as the exception to the rule, it is noteworthy that the new foreign minister and chairperson of the new coalition party, Guido Westerwelle, needed quite some time before making his inaugural visit to Moscow.

3 "Unbekannte Freunde," *Rheinischer Merkur*, 27 November 2008, 7–9.
4 www.aussenpolitikstudie.de (11/5/2009).

When Helmut Kohl took office in 1983 his mission was to show the Soviet Union his teeth, as demonstrated by his stationing Pershing II and Cruise Missiles in Germany and by his equating Gorbachev and Goebbels, when Glasnost and Perestroika started to melt long-cherished enemy images in 1986. Rather unexpectedly, in light of the frosty climate of the reinvigorated Cold War of the 1980s, this cold attitude not only warmed considerably but culminated in the notorious "sauna friendship" between Kohl and Yeltsin, which came to characterize German-Russian relations by the time the Chancellor left office in 1998.

Moscow's acquiescence to German unification certainly played a role, but there was more to it, since a similar pattern occurred when Gerhard Schröder took office in 1998. His mission statement was "getting out of the sauna"[5] which indicated that the new German government ranked Russia fairly low on its list of foreign policy priorities and disapproved of the previous leaders' *tête-à-tête*. Yet by the time Schröder left office in 2005, priorities and rhetoric had been turned upside down, Putin declared an "impeccable *[lupenreiner]* democrat" and Russia transformed into the preferred strategic partner for pursuing Germany's national interests: "Today Germans and Russians are so closely aligned as never before. We are united by a strategic partnership for a peaceful, prosperous Europe and a stable world order."[6]

No wonder that the Grand Coalition government showed a much less enthusiastic approach as its starting point and was again eager to put an end to the much-criticized German-Russian "*Schmusekurs*" (cozy relationship) – in spite of the fact that the SPD was able to hold on to power. Nonetheless, these intentions also proved transitional and even the frosty fallout of the Caucasian War of August 2008 did not engender a confrontational turnaround.

Relations with Russia were not a big theme in the September 2009 election campaign in Germany, in spite of the fact that the issue of a possible takeover of Opel by a consortium led by Russia's Sberbank arose at precisely this time. Similarly, Germany's Russia policy does not figure prominently in the new coalition agreement with the Free Democratic Party (FDP). Nevertheless, despite the balanced text of an agreement that carefully avoided any "Russia first" language,[7] during his first

5 *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 November 1998, 2; *Handelsblatt*, 17 November 1998, 3.
6 Gerhard Schröder in "Eine neue Qualität der deutsch-russischen Beziehungen," *Handelsblatt*, 8 September 2005, 9, and also in his contribution to *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 9 May 2005. And he added: "In light of the horrors of the past this development appears to me as an outstanding miracle in European history."
7 In contrast to the 2005 coalition agreement, it did not include any special section on the German Russia policy but, rather, dealt with the relevant issues in the context of multilateral policies, first and foremost within the European Union and NATO. The 2009 agreement also explicitly avoided any "modernization partnership" or even "strategic partnership" language. See: "Wachstum. Bildung. Zusammenhalt. Der Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und FDP," *17. Legislaturperiode*, 26 October 2009, 118–119.

trip to Moscow the new German Foreign Minister and the leader of the FDP explicitly praised the close "strategic partnership" with the Russian Federation.

This recurrent pattern needs explanation, which is primarily to be found within Germany but displays interactive elements as well. In order to elaborate on both these aspects we will focus on the evolution of German-Russian relations since 2000. The starting point, however, will be theoretical approaches meant to frame and provide different perspectives and alternative explanations on the subject as, in this case, exemplified by Germany.

German Russia policy in light of theoretical concepts

Although foreign policy is conducted in interaction with its addressee, it is only to a lesser extent defined by it. In concrete terms, political conclusions which are drawn from an analysis of developments in Russia, and vice versa, become plausible only against the backdrop of the "interests and values" upon which – according to the basic programme statements of both the Grand Coalition (2005–2009) and the new coalition formed by the CDU, CSU and the FDP in October 2009 – German foreign policy is based.[8] It is these two factors that steer perceptions and evaluations, although it is highly controversial as to which combination and in which way each exerts its influence. Thus the three established theoretical approaches – (Neo-) Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism – offer quite different answers, which is unsurprising in light of the limited heuristic value of those macro-theories for the analysis of such a complex phenomenon as bilateral relations among states, economies and societies.

For *(Neo-)Realism* Gerhard Schröder's tenure reflected in its purest form the maturation of Germany but, as the attitude of his successor indicates, by no means a continuous evolution. Namely, his Russia policy served best to pursue his "German path" of "self-confidently" looking after Germany's "interests".[9] This emphasis is seen as the natural outcome of the changes in the international system after the Cold War, and of Germany's growing power stemming from the re-emergence of multipolarity and the replacement of rigid bipolarity with "normal anarchy". In these conditions unified Germany could again act as a European great power, in concert with the other great powers.[10]

8 *Koalitionsvertrag CDU, CSU, SPD* of 11 November 2005, 125; *Der Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und FDP* of 26 October 2009, 118.

9 See on this notion, among others, Schröder's interview in *Die Zeit*, 15 August 2002.

10 A scholarly example is Gregor Schöllgen, for whom the Germans under the red-green coalition "found themselves" as the recreated "center" of Europe. It is against this backdrop only natural that Germany, in the controversy on Iraq, assumed a "leading role as counterweight to the US". He only complains that this was "unplanned". Gregor Schöllgen, *Der Auftritt. Deutschlands Rückkehr auf die Weltbühne* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2004), 11, 130, 133. In a similar vein, see William Smyser, according to whom, in an equally realist mode, close cooperation with Putin's Russia could help Germany "to sustainably increase in every respect its influence in Europe" and "to become once more a central locus in Europe". William R. Smyser, "Putin spielt die deutsche Karte," *Internationale Politik* 5 (2000): 20.

However, Schröder's starting point was quite different. Such factors as Kosovo, which brought about Germany's first military action since 1945; the Treaty of Nice as a precondition of the EU's further extension; and not least 9/11: all these left Germany's system of foreign policy coordinates firmly anchored in Western structures – and relegated its policy on Russia to the multilateral sidelines. Thus, Schröder stated in April 2001:

> "German foreign policy is European foreign policy. This is particularly true for the Eastern policy, which has always been of utmost importance for Germany. The focal point of European as well as German Eastern policy is Russia." And subsequently: "This does not mean that we want to hide behind 'Europe'. But it expresses the responsibility to rule out any 'special path' in relation to Russia. The federal government conceives the German-Russian relationship first and foremost in European categories. This is the background and the point of reference when we say that we want to establish a new normalcy between the two nations: without illusions, without sentimentalities; open-minded, with confidence and engaged, but without neglecting our considerable mutual own interests."[11]

By 2003, this was entirely out of date. The reference to "one's own interests" had come to emphasize proximity to Russia, not demarcation. "Europe" was no longer the starting point but rather the end point of Germany's Russia policy, since the EU was called upon to follow the Berlin example and conclude a strategic partnership with Russia – a path essentially maintained up until the present.[12] And "sentimentali-

11 Gerhard Schröder, "Partner Russland. Gegen Stereotype, für Partnerschaft und Offenheit – eine Positionsbestimmung," *Die Zeit*, 5 April 2001, 10–1. At that time it also applied to the German interests to which Schröder professed to refer frequently: "We Germans determine our interests no longer within the national but in the multilateral context, primarily in the framework of the European Union". "Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder zum 10. Jahrestag des deutsch-russischen Vertrages," 10 November 2000, in www.bundesregierung.de.

12 "I am really convinced that the expanded European Union is well advised to arrive at a strategic partnership with Russia. I want to contribute to this, because I am deeply convinced that not least on the backdrop of European history such a partnership is necessary." Interview with Gerhard Schröder in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 September 2004, 3. As to the latter, see, for instance, Chancellor Angela Merkel's speech before the European Parliament on 28 March 2007 where she stated: "Alongside the transatlantic partnership, the strategic partnership with Russia is absolutely crucial to us," www.bundesregierung.de (9/8/2009).

ties" were obviously also at play, even a "sentimental turn to Russia", which, as Henry Kissinger sarcastically advised, should not be confused with a "grand strategy".[13]

Yet since the central political position corresponds with a central geographical location on the European continent, there exists a particular vulnerability which, from a realist perspective, might encourage a particular responsibility between East and West. This qualifies the unilateral expectations and refers Germany back to the traditional multilateral pattern in order to avoid evoking mistrust and running the risk of isolation.[14] Such an approach is indeed much more in line with the current Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who displays a more multilaterally nuanced concept of national interests. The consequences for the Russia policy, conducted more pragmatically and less enthusiastically, were outlined thus by Wolfgang Schäuble:

> "We will conduct a successful Russia policy – the same is true for our policy towards the Ukraine and Belarus – only by engaging Poland. It is simply not possible in conflict with Poland and by creating new mistrust and new suspicions, justified or not. That's the mistake. And since this mistake is being committed, the Russian policy is not thought through and not balanced. This can and this must be changed."[15]

His solution: "put relations with Russia on the basis of the Weimar triangle", since only in this way does a common European policy become possible.[16]

However, Realism does not provide compelling answers to those alternative options. It conceives a state as a black box which, irrespective of domestic trajectories, pursues policies determined by its position in the international system. The decisive objective – to guarantee security in generally insecure conditions – can be achieved through two instruments of power politics: through autonomy from other states and by exerting influence on these. From this follow conflicting policy prescriptions. Rules and institutions guarantee influence but at the expense of autonomy. Conversely, the autonomous increase of security creates a security dilemma. *Balancing* versus *bandwagoning* are, depending on the polarity in the international system, two further contradictory options. These, too, played a role in Germany's relation to Russia, when Iraq posed the alternative of either aligning with Russia and confronting the US or remaining in the shadow of the great ally.

Thus far, the clarity provided by Realism has proved limited. In addition, *liberal theoretical concepts* claim that its analytical categories are inadequate in conditions of interdependence. In liberal thinking, the decisive criterion is not the power of the state in the international system but, rather, the individual preferences and power of the actors within the state: states pursue – irrespective of their relative power position – policies which serve the interests of dominant groups in society, politics or the bureaucracy. Individual utility matters, although quite often it is difficult to attribute specific foreign policy moves to specific domestic pressures.

Since Germany's international position does not rest on traditional power resources but on interdependence – economically, as a singularly successful trading state, and institutionally, as a member of all important international organisations – there exists a strong argument in favour of cooperative continuity from a liberal perspective. This can easily justify a strategic partnership with Russia since this does not necessarily entail a departure from established principles but may also be perceived as a legitimate and necessary instrument for making use of economic opportunities in global competition. Suspicions among Germany's European neighbours can thus easily be countered; less so, the criticism of domestic advocacy groups which, for instance, point to the democratic deficits in Russia or Moscow's conduct in Chechnya. However, the fact that these voices were vocal but not influential in recent years points to the domestic balance of power but not to the specifics of Germany's national interests.

Whereas the two rational theories are based, in a sense, on cost-benefit calculations, dealing with "power" in the first and "plenty" in the second case, the *constructivist perspective* (Thomas Risse) builds upon less tangible factors such as norms, ideas, roles and values as crucial criteria for foreign policy behaviour. Allegedly objective conditions such as the international balance of power or the development of international markets are relevant only to the extent of their perception by the actors. Such perceptions can be fairly different and, for instance, display the alternative of a "Hobbes culture" or a "Kant culture" (Alexander Wendt) from which, according to the relevant logic of appropriateness, fairly different foreign policy patterns may emerge.

The concept of "civilian power" in line with the "Kant culture" is a popular example of a constructivist approach for explaining German foreign policy. It combines the international dimension in terms of the expectations of others towards German conduct and the national self-concept of the German elite. Multilateralism

13 Henry Kissinger, "Will Germany's Coalition Work?," *Washington Post*, 22 November 2005.

14 A typical example from academia is Helga Haftendorn, *Deutsche Außenpolitik zwischen Selbstbeschränkung und Selbstbehauptung 1945–2000* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001), 444–45. Similarly Christian Hacke, who identifies a "revolutionary change" in red-green foreign policy and its efforts at creating a "counterbalance," at the "expense of sound political interest alignments and moral principles." Christian Hacke, "Der Autokrat Putin wird umgarnt, der Demokrat Bush angeprangert. Von Interessenausgleich keine Spur mehr. Wie Berlin die Kunst der Diplomatie abhanden kam," *Rheinischer Merkur*, 28 July 2005.

15 As stated in the parliamentary debate on the budget of the Foreign Office on 8 September 2004 (Plenarprotokoll 15/122).

16 As stated in the parliamentary debate on the budget of the Foreign Office on 8 September 2004 (Plenarprotokoll 15/122).

and civil conflict resolution are seen as the long-trained hallmarks of the Bonn Republic, with the red-green Russia policy therefore an alleged aberration of the Berlin Republic.[17] Yet the German participation in the wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan on the one hand and its refusal in the case of the Iraq war, on the other, demonstrated that the multilateral principle of loyalty to the allies and the principle of civilian crisis management can be in conflict to such an extent that the concept of "civilian power" reaches its limits.[18] Similarly, the logic of appropriateness reaches its limits when addressed to countries with exclusive claims. An example is the "special German responsibility" in light of World War II, which acts as a major justification for present day Germany's civilian nature. In his last years as Chancellor it became a major rhetorical driving force of Gerhard Schröder's Russia policy:

> "No other people paid such a high price in the criminal war unleashed by Nazi Germany. More than 20 million Russians [sic] lost their lives in World War II. We Germans should never forget it. Therefore the German people have a special responsibility to support Russia on its way to modernisation and to help Russia become an integral part of European and democratic institutions."[19]

However, Poland has exactly the same claim. And it is hardly surprising that Schröder in his first inaugural speech in 1998 aimed his historical reference exclusively to Poland to justify – as today in the case of Russia – the "offer of an ever closer partnership and the intensification of cooperation."[20]

The theoretical concepts not only arrive at opposite and contradictory findings, the realist and constructivist approaches moreover neglect one dimension which is crucial for state relations: interaction. Foreign conduct, in their view, is either determined by one's position in the international system or by an established consensus on norms – which are both by and large constant. This creates problems in the case of a country as volatile as Russia, which has frequently defied pessimistic as well as

17 See Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns W. Maull (eds.), *Germany as a Civilian Power? The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). Thus the harsh judgement that the red-green federal government had done Germany "serious harm". Hanns W. Maull, "Editorial: Deutschland auf Abwegen?," in Hanns Maull, Sebastian Harnisch and Constantin Grund (eds.), *Deutschland im Abseits? Rot-grüne Außenpolitik 1998–2003* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003), 7.

18 See on this Hanns W. Maull, "Auf leisen Sohlen aus der Außenpolitik?," *Internationale Politik* 58/9 (2003): 19–30, here 26–27. In light of this one wonders how the harsh judgement can be justified that the German refusal to participate in the Iraq war (considered unilateral and fundamentalist) amounted to "an unequivocal departure from the role model of a civilian power", as stated by Maull, Harnisch and Grund (eds.), op. cit., 16.

19 See the joint interview with Vladimir Putin in *Bild Zeitung*, 7 May 2005, in: www.kremlin.ru.

20 Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 14/3.

optimistic prognoses in such a dramatic way. Under realist assumptions this encourages worst-case scenarios and under constructivist it creates cognitive dissonances, which could result in German-Russian alienation and not the desired partnership. In contrast, liberal approaches focus on interaction in the international and the domestic sphere as they concentrate on particularistic opportunities and equally particularistic risks measured at individual cost-benefit calculations.

In addition, relations between countries as big and diverse as Germany and Russia are conducted on various levels – security, economy and society – and thus touch upon several dimensions of foreign policy, of which, next to political and economic interests, democratic values and the historical record are most pertinent. The latter, however, are of different importance in the theoretical concepts mentioned above. In Realism democratic values are irrelevant, in Constructivism they are crucial and in Liberalism they are subject to domestic debate. Thus, the tension between interests and values as a recurrent feature in the West's Russia policy can hardly be grasped appropriately under realist and constructivist assumptions, another argument in favour of the theoretical instruments of Liberalism.

Basic German perceptions and interests with regard to Russia

The basic attitude towards German-Russian relations can be summarized as follows: for reasons of its territorial size, its population and its historical role, Russia is considered a European great power endowed with a still impressive military potential and with vital natural resources offering virtually unlimited market potential. At the same time it is considered a country which undoubtedly belongs in the European continent in geographic, historical and cultural terms, yet much less so in terms of (West-)European political criteria. And its historical role has proved ultimately as ambivalent as Germany's own.

In terms of security policy, Russia therefore operates in a kind of gray zone, being neither adversary nor ally. Even without its posing an obvious threat, precaution *(Risikovorsorge)* has been the order of the day since the end of the Cold War. This has not yet been replaced by security cooperation against the common terrorist threat, which has remained rather circumscribed. In economic terms, Russia's resource endowment and market potential is considered indispensable to such a degree that precautionary moves against one-sided dependencies increasingly gain currency. Whereas German economic interests as well as the interests of German business call for cooperation, and its security interests at least urge cooperation, Germany's democratic values prove a stumbling block, since Russia's consolidation as a state and its rise as an economic power have corresponded to its descent as a democracy. This provokes irritation in politics and society and has the potential to

negatively influence the definition and pursuit of German interests. There is certainly not a human rights and democracy industry of US proportions in Germany, but stereotypes and mistrust are much more profound, run much deeper and last much longer than since World War II and the Cold War.[21] This frequently creates problems for the justification of a policy of purely interest-based cooperation – although this has been a constant rhetorical feature.

During Gerhard Schröder's tenure four basic arguments were put forward in fairly clear terms, through which his Russia policy became a cornerstone of Germany's national interests. They are still valid, although the emphasis has somewhat shifted and the policy has been less trumpeted. First and foremost there has been the economic motive. And, indeed, since Russia's economic resurgence, economic interests have been the major stimulus and driving force, ideally complementing Schröder as "chief merchant" of the resource- and energy-dependent German trading state and Putin as the engine of Russian economic growth and modernization.[22]

Although German trade with Russia still lags far behind that with its major trade partners, the growth rate between 2003 and 2008 has been hard to match. Thus in 2008 Russia ranked among the top ten of German trade partners, having become number 8 in German imports and number 12 in the country's exports.[23] Through its dynamism it had become, by the time of the world economic crisis, one of Germany's most promising – and for the politically well-connected energy business the most important – partners. In only two years, from 2006 to 2008, German imports from Russia grew from €30 to €36 billion, or from 4.1 to 4.4 percent of total German imports. At the same time, German exports to Russia grew from €23 to €32 billion, raising the share from 2.6 to 3.3 percent of total German exports.[24]

In spite of the fact that the global financial and economic crisis has led to a major slump in bilateral dealings, economic relations with Russia – and the politically charged energy relations in particular – are the central yardstick for the country's national interests, just as conceived by former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.[25] It is no accident that the original demands for improved conditions for German investment gradually faded and made no public reappearance in the government led by Angela Merkel – in spite of much less visible progress in Russia to this effect. Only a few years into Putin's tenure, according to Schröder, so much had changed that "the confidence of foreign investors was fundamentally renewed and restored." Moreover: "There is not the slightest reason to enter into a debate that this confidence – for whatever reasons – could be upset." Stated in July 2004, this amounted to an unequivocal siding with Putin and his drive to smash Yukos, which would be scarcely imaginable today.[26]

Secondly, Chancellor Schröder never tired of emphasizing that Germany and Russia were in accord on all important international issues (non-proliferation, terrorism, climate change, Middle East, United Nations) and that for this reason were "strategic partners".[27] As international fortunes shifted and the "strategic" nature of this partnership fell victim to the increasingly frosty climate between Russia and the West, the term "modernization partnership" became the temporary new catchword. Launched in spring 2008 by the German Foreign Ministry, it was intended as a welcome to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, once Steinmeier's counterpart as chief of staff in the Kremlin, and an encouragement of his reform agenda.[28] The explicit "confidence", however, "that the time for a substantial building up and deepening of the European-Russian, and in particular the German-Russian, relationship, has finally come" was gone only a few months later in the wake of the Caucasian war – and with it the "great opportunity" which "under no circumstances" should be gambled away.[29] The "Modernization Partnership" thus could look back on only a

21 See on these historical roots Dieter Groh, *Russland und das Selbstverständnis Europas. Ein Beitrag zur europäischen Geistesgeschichte* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1961).

22 Gunter Hofmann, "Die Unzertrennlichen," *Die Zeit*, 16 December 2004, 2; see also Markus Ziener, "Putin bei Schröder: Gruppenbild mit Dame," *Handelsblatt*, 8 September 2005, 7. In this regard Merkel and Medvedev are much less a fit, although the emphasis on economic opportunities is still prevalent.

23 Statistisches Bundesamt. *Außenhandel. Rangfolge der Handelspartner im Außenhandel der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2008* (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009), 2.

24 Statistisches Bundesamt: http://ims.destatis.de/aussenhandel/Default.aspx.

25 As he explained on the occasion of the signing of the Nord Stream pipeline treaty: "I have to pursue German interests, in particular as concerns the security of the energy supply of the German economy." www.bundesregierung.de.

26 "Die Integration Russlands in die Weltwirtschaft," Speech of Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder before students and graduates of the Financial Academy on 8 July 2004 in Moscow, in www.moskau.diplo.de.

27 The Strategic Partnership has turned out to be a political program of much symbolism and little operational content. It is "strategic" insofar as it is aimed at relations of a long-lasting and stable nature without getting "caught by short term reactions to single events", as the two foreign ministers Klaus Kinkel und Andrei Kozyrev once wrote. Klaus Kinkel and Andrej V. Kozyrev, "Russlands Größe wird nicht von der Zahl seiner Soldaten bestimmt," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 February 1994.

28 "Für eine deutsch-russische Modernisierungspartnerschaft," speech of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Institute for International Relations of the Urals University in Yekaterinburg, 13 May 2008, in: www.auswaertiges-amt.de (26/5/2008). Similarly his speech on 4 March 2008 at the Willy Brandt Foundation, in ibid., (1/8/2008). Back in November 2007 he still professed to refer to the strategic nature of the partnership: "I remain convinced that turning our backs on Russia cannot be the right course. Especially in rough weather or when the going gets tough. And I remain convinced that the 'strategic partnership' is of key importance also for Europe's security – even if some people are now not so quick to use this word as they once were." Welcome address at the Grand Launch of the European Council on Foreign Relations Berlin, 9 November 2007, in www.auswaertiges-amt.de (9/8/2009).

29 "Globale Herausforderungen gemeinsam gestalten – Perspektiven der deutsch-russischen Modernisierungspartnerschaft," speech of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on the occasion of the meeting of the bilateral Steering Committee of the Petersburg Dialogue on

brief career. Russia as an "indispensable partner" for the "political shaping of the world of tomorrow", however, lived on.[30] And in the case of Chancellor Merkel the "strategic partnership" even made a surprise reappearance in July 2009 when she charmed President Medvedev in Munich: "Russia and the Federal Republic of Germany are linked by a strategic partnership and our negotiations have been held in a spirit of friendly relations. Where we have differences of opinion, we can talk about them and deal with them. But we have a great many common interests."[31]

The importance of a basic agreement on pressing international problems became clear in 2002 when Germany, for mostly domestic reasons, opposed the war against Iraq. Having thus parted from its allies, Germany sought external support, which after some hesitation Moscow and Paris eventually granted. Russia thus became a truly "indispensable partner", not only sparing Germany from isolation but also helping it to realize its drive towards a truly national foreign policy.

Thirdly, there was the special German historical responsibility, mentioned above. And the final postulate concerns "stability" in Russia. On the one hand, this referred to Chechnya and Russia's southern arc of crisis in the Caucasus, Iran and Afghanistan, which ensured "that nobody in Germany would have an interest in instability in Russia".[32] On the other hand, Schröder considered the newly found stability exclusively to Putin's credit, which served to qualify his authoritarian leanings. In this way Schröder sought to counter the democracy-related criticism of his domestic opposition. But he also parted from the premises of the "international stabilization process", which "builds upon economic reform and in particular on democracy" and

3 July 2008 in Passau. In line with prevailing circumstances and the frosty climate which ensued, his language became somewhat cautious, as Steinmeier reiterated on the occasion of the annual ambassador's gathering in Berlin in early August 2008: "Because we need Russia's constructive contribution in the region as the co-builder of a pan-European order of security and peace and as a participant in tackling global challenges. [...] Conflict resolution and reconstruction in the Caucasus, a forward-looking security and stability partnership with the region and an open dialogue with Russia – this is the European course and thus the very opposite of the route some people are so hasty to advocate for our time, thereby falling back into the patterns of the Cold War." In www.auswaertiges-amt.de, 9 August 2009.

30 See, for instance, Frank-Walter Steinmeier in a speech at the Russian Academy of Sciences during his visit to Moscow on 10 June 2009: "Russia is an indispensable partner for Germany and the EU on these issues [security, stability, climate change, energy security, restructuring the financial markets]." And his speech at the Department of International Relations of the Urals State University in Yekaterinburg on 13 May 2008, in www.auswaertiges-amt.de 9 August 2009.

31 And she continued: "I think that in general we are on the right track with regard to the intensification of our cooperation, so as to make relations between the Federal Republic of Germany, the largest economy in the European Union, and our neighbour Russia, what they should be." Joint Press Conference following Russian-German Intergovernmental Consultations, 16 July 2009, in www.kremlin.ru 9 August 2009.

32 Interview with Gerhard Schröder in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 September 2004, 3.

was originally favoured by his government as well.[33] At the beginning of Putin's tenure Schröder still stuck to the democracy clauses in EU partnership agreements and cautioned: "The community in values is the primary condition for Europe to further grow together."[34] A few years later this was seen as realized – at least in bilateral relations: "Thus we have put on track a future-oriented partnership which is based on the adherence to common interests and values."[35]

This testifies to a rather awkward interpretation of the democratic conditions in Russia, which Schröder offered on other occasions as well: for instance, when he commented on the referendum on a new constitution in Chechnya in spring 2003 ("good promise") or on the presidential elections in Chechnya in fall 2004 ("As far as I can see there was no serious obstruction of the elections"). Equally accommodating was his judgement of the Yukos affair in mid-2004 ("I do not understand the excitement: there is no indication that this did not happen according to the rule of law") and not least of Putin himself, whose characterization as an "impeccable democrat" served as the Chancellor's statement of the year 2004.

Such a rosy picture, however, was clearly confined to Schröder personally, although Merkel was careful to fall in line with the Christian Democratic opposition of the time that expressed quite some concern about this allegedly misguided course. Its criticism essentially aimed to resurrect the traditional civilian power which, in their view, had fallen victim to an amoral and unilateral realism. The more apparent the democratic deficits became in Putin's Russia and the longer the German government remained silent, the more the opposition called for "clear words". And it recalled the principle, once cherished by Schröder himself, that Germany's Eastern policy should be "a policy in Europe, for Europe and from Europe."[36] In concrete terms this entailed a refusal of any "Russia first" or German-Russian-French "axis"[37] and more regard for the "smaller partners".

33 As stated by Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer on 10 November 1998 in the parliamentary debate on the program of the first red-green coalition (Plenarprotokoll 14/3).

34 Gerhard Schröder, "Partner Russland. Gegen Stereotype, für Partnerschaft und Offenheit – eine Positionsbestimmung," *Die Zeit* 15, 5 April 2001, 10–11.

35 Gerhard Schröder, "Eine neue Qualität der deutsch-russischen Beziehungen," *Handelsblatt*, 8 September 2005, 9. Similarly, see his contribution to *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 9 May 2005.

36 As stated by Schröder in his speech at the German Society for Foreign Policy in Berlin on 2 September 1999, in *Internationale Politik* 54/10 (1999): 67.

37 This referred to the, according to French terminology, "axis" Paris–Berlin–Moscow which entailed regular trilateral consultations. Encouraged by Chirac on 11 April 2003 in St. Petersburg on the sidelines of the German-Russian Petersburg Dialogue, the heads of state and government took up again an initiative which was launched in March 1998 by Chirac, Yeltsin and Kohl similar to the German–French–Polish "Weimar Triangle". The original initiative, however, was confined to a single meeting in Moscow. From 2003 onwards a series of meetings began: in Sochi at the end of August 2004, in Paris mid-March 2005 (including the Spanish Prime Minis-

Yet much of this rhetoric was primarily directed at the domestic audience. Apparently it was the different roles in the democratic competition rather than any controversy over different approaches with regard to Russia which inspired the Christian Democrats' opposition in the first place.[38] Thus in 2005 the opposition parties made clear that the Russia policy should not be unduly drawn into the election campaign. There ought to be "much continuity in the German-Russian relationship" under a new government and Angela Merkel was said to conduct an equally "good and close, trustful relationship with the Putin administration and with Putin himself," since Russia was "a great country with great energy resources", moreover a "booming country" and indispensable for peace and security in Europe.[39] Angela Merkel's explicit adherence to a "strategic partnership" on 8 September in a brief meeting with Putin on the occasion of the signing of the treaty on the Nord Stream pipeline and right before the general election complemented this overall picture – and set the tone for her own tenure.[40]

Compared to the bumpy start of the red-green coalition, the Grand Coalition indeed displayed much more continuity, not only because of the insistence of the SPD. Certainly, the two coalition partners had different emphases right from the start. For one, Angela Merkel obviously feels much more comfortable with Medvedev than with Putin. And pragmatic caution has become the rule of the game on the part of the Chancellor's office, which therefore reacted with some restraint when the Planning Staff of the Foreign Ministry in 2007 launched a strategy paper calling for a "rapprochement through interlocking". Occasionally, controversies flared up over the lingering democracy problem and how to address it. Thus at the end of 2007 Foreign Minister Steinmeier reiterated that "a truly good human rights policy does not need to indulge in the self-adulation of Germany as a moral great power but something quite different: resolution, a long breath and clarity."[41] He thereby challenged Merkel's occasional inclination to publicly reconfirm her adherence to universal human rights standards, as evidenced on the occasion of the EU-Russia summit in Samara or when she decided to receive the Dalai Lama in her office in 2007.[42]

Nevertheless the only irritant of some weight in German-Russian relations has been the domestic evolution in Russia, which displays a still growing divergence. Whereas during Putin's presidency there was an obvious convergence between German and Russian economic and also political interests, the gap in democratic values kept growing. The crisis potential became apparent in conjunction with the "orange revolution" in Ukraine, which generated such a dynamic on its own that even Schröder could hardly escape, although he expressed deep concern about the entailing risks for stability in Europe and with regard to geostrategic implications.

The substance of Germany's Russia policy, however, did not change, which might indicate that the "soft" objectives of democracy promotion are invariably less relevant than "hard" interests. And when the Chancellor on short notice decided to pay a courtesy visit to the newly elected Russian president on Women's Day 2008, she even gave the relationship unusual symbolic credentials. The same applies to the refusal to admit the Ukraine and Georgia to NATO's Membership Action Plan at the alliance's summit in spring 2008. Former Foreign Minister Steinmeier even went one step further when he called for a joint ballistic missile defence, as common threats require a common defense.[43]

It is premature to judge the further evolution of the German policy since the government's change in October 2009. The first actions by the new government indicate, however, that the major lines justifying a close "strategic partnership" with Russia remain intact. During his first visit to Moscow as Foreign Minister, Guido

ter Zapatero) and at the beginning of July 2005 on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of Kaliningrad, for the time being the last and final meeting in this format.

38 Occasionally, this has been admitted quite frankly. See, for instance, Friedbert Pflüger, who sided with the governing coalition: "You are right. There has to be a division of labour between a parliament which makes itself heard loud and clear and the government using quiet diplomacy. But quiet diplomacy must not become an alibi for non-action." As stated in the parliamentary debate on Chechnya on 3 December 2004 (Plenarprotokoll 15/146).

39 As stated by Friedbert Pflüger in an interview with DLR Kultur on 8 September 2005, in www.friedbert-pflueger.de.

40 See "Schröder and Putin Cementing Relationship", in *International Herald Tribune*, 8 September 2005, 3; *The Moscow Times*, 9 September 2005, 1. She did so in Russian, as carefully noted on the Kremlin website, www.kremlin.ru.

41 This aims at a pan-European peace for which Russia, as an "indispensable strategic partner", is as much needed by the West as the West is for Russia as its "natural partner in modernization". The precondition and aim are "mutual interlocking" and "[t]his recognition does not require the certification of the quality of the Russian system of governance". Speech of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 4 March 2008 at the Willy Brandt Foundation, in www.auswaertiges-amt.de (1/8/2008). This, however, does not necessarily imply that Steinmeier kept entirely silent, yet his criticism remained muted and circumscribed. See, for instance, his remarks on 9 July 2008 in Munich: "I'm aware of Russia's shortcomings. But I believe that it will help no one if we persist in our role of observer on the sidelines. Our attitude will have an impact on the scope for modernization and reform in Russia!" (www.auswaertiges-amt.de) or on 27 May 2008 before the NATO Parliamentary Assembly: "Despite all the critical distance which I too maintain in view of certain developments in Russia, one thing we [NATO] must not forget: we need Russia – to preserve peace and stability in the transatlantic-Eurasian area, to resolve conflicts worldwide, and to help meet the global challenges." (www.auswaertiges-amt.de; 9 August 2009).

42 Her balancing act is best expressed in the following statement which she made on 14 May 2007 at the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of the National Parliaments of the European Union and the European Parliament: "Russia is a neighboring region of Europe, a supplier of energy to Europe. And for all of our open discussions on the issue of human rights and civil liberties, it is important to have a good strategic partnership with Russia." In: www.bundesregierung.de (9 August 2009).

43 "Im Gespräch: Außenminister Steinmeier," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 November 2008, 5.

Westerwelle kept explaining the relevance of a "strategic partnership" with Russia by its economic importance and by the need to continuously ensure Russia's cooperation in solving international security problems, in the Middle East, Iran and Afghanistan. At the same time, Westerwelle decided not to spend much time on democracy issues in his first conversations in Moscow.

Basic Russian perceptions and interests with regard to Germany

In Russian foreign policy doctrine, the concept of a "strategic partnership" with Germany is referred to predominantly in the context of developments in Europe. In a few cases, it also appears relevant in a wider context. This is particularly true when greater convergence of the policies of the two countries is noted. The commitment to the primacy of the international legal order, including the unique responsibility of the United Nations as an indispensable part of that order, or to strengthening and further enhancing the effectiveness of existing arms control regimes as an indispensable part of cooperative security serve as good examples for such convergence.[44] Germany is seen as an important partner for Russia within formal and informal multilateral institutions, such as the G8, the recently established G20, or the informal "5+1" group dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue since 2002.

Developing and maintaining a close bilateral partnership with the "leading European nations" is traditionally regarded as a key element of Russian policy, regardless of the fact that these countries are an integral part of the European Union and the North-Atlantic Alliance and bound by collective decisions.[45] In classic realist fashion, such partnerships are conceptualized in Moscow as instrumental for pursuing Russian national interests.[46] However, they are not necessarily seen as an alternative to the evolving Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, which is officially welcomed in Moscow. Rather, they are regarded as an important

44 This convergence is not free of controversy, however. Germany, for instance, has been critical of the Russian suspension of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (effective since December 2007) and considers the recognition of the independence of the Georgian breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the 2008 war illegal. Moscow, in its turn, did not expect Germany or France to agree to bypass the UN Security Council in 1999 when NATO decided to launch airstrikes against Serbia. Nor did it accept the 2008 decision to recognize the independence of Kosovo without the consent of Belgrade. These are only few examples of the discord between the two partners in their understanding of the international legal order.

45 *The Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation of 27 March 2007* (in Russian), Chapter 2 (Geographic Directions of Foreign Policy), Section 2 (Europe), point 1. Available at: www.mid.ru (5 May 2007).

46 *The Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation*, adopted on 12 July 2008 (in Russian), Chapter IV (Regional Priorities), Section on Europe, Paragraph 7. Available at: www.kremlin.ru (18 July 2008).

tool for informally influencing the formation of a common policy within those multilateral organizations of which Germany is a part but the Russian Federation is not. Thus, the individual "strategic partnerships" with Germany and/or other major European nations are perceived in Moscow not as running counter to but rather as being *complementary* to the development of a "strategic partnership" with the European Union as a multilateral institution.

Germany is by every measure regarded and respected in Russia as one of the leading European nations worth maintaining a special "strategic partnership" with. In 2008, 35 percent of those polled in Russia by the Levada Center identified Germany as an important actor in global politics while 43 percent of the respondents in Russia even tended to regard Germany as a great power.[47] Nevertheless, Berlin is not perceived as an exclusive or in any sense a privileged partner. The official Russian doctrines do not single out Berlin but refer to Germany as one among other important European nations. In addition to Germany, the short list includes France, Spain and Italy.[48] It is occasionally extended to include even Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway "and some other" European countries.[49]

Yet in 2007, more than a year after the inauguration of the grand coalition government in Germany and despite the open skepticism of Chancellor Merkel, Moscow continued to emphasize the continuous importance not only of individual partnerships with individual European nations but particularly the triangular political dialogue with Germany and France which was launched in the late 1990s by Boris Yeltsin, Helmut Kohl and Jacques Chirac and reinvigorated by Putin, Schröder and Chirac in the wake of the Iraq war until this practice was terminated by Merkel.[50]

It is no less important, however, that not every "major" European country is automatically co-opted into the group of "strategic partners" for Russia. The absence of Great Britain on the list appears (regrettably, from Moscow's perspective[51]) to be the most striking example of a major European nation with which Russia has not (yet) developed an intimate relationship.

Moscow has remained selective in other cases, too. When Chancellor Merkel was no longer available for the trilateral meetings with the Presidents of Russia and France, at the beginning of her first term in office, she suggested putting into place a

47 *Yearbook Public Opinion – 2008* (in Russian), (Moscow: Levada-Centre, 2008), 157.

48 *The Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation of 27 March 2007*, Chapter 2, Section 2, point 6.

49 *The Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation*, Chapter IV, Section on Europe, Paragraph 7.

50 *The Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation of 27 March 2007*, Chapter 2, Section 2, point 6.

51 *The Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation*, Chapter IV, Section on Europe, Paragraph 7.

variant of the "Weimar triangle" which originally brought together France and Germany with Poland and now proposed to include Germany and Poland together with Russia. Moscow was not at all enthusiastic to embark on this path. Nor did Moscow regard it as an appropriate substitute for trilateral cooperation with France. After all, as with Great Britain, Poland is perceived in Moscow as one of the most difficult European partners to work with. Almost all Polish governments since the 1990s were considered to belong to the hard core pro-American lobby in Europe and found themselves high on the list of the allegedly "Russia-hostile" nations.[52] This is an important reason why Moscow sought to limit the "Weimar" conferences to the diplomatic, rather than political, level and reduced them to meetings of the planning staffs of the three Foreign Offices.

These two examples highlight Moscow's underlying understanding of the concept of the term "strategic partner". As defined by the 2007 Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation, it refers to the "European countries which regard the role of Russia in Eurasia as an important factor of stability."[53] In other words, in order to qualify for the status of "strategic partners" countries should respect (though not necessarily like) or at least not contest Russian hegemony, particularly in the former Soviet Union, which is defined as the area of Moscow's "privileged interests", in the words of President Dmitry Medvedev.[54] Nor are they supposed to display a strong "pro-American bias" in their foreign and security policy.

"Strategic partners" are thus expected to be "Russia-friendly" (but not necessarily like-minded) countries, while those considered Russia-hostile don't qualify for this status. It is not surprising that the above shortlist of Moscow's "strategic partners" in Europe almost entirely coincides with the dominant public view of which European nations are considered "friends" of Russia and which are not. Germany leads this list with 17 percent of the respondents identifying it as a friendly nation or even close ally versus only 3 percent seeing it as a hostile nation. It is followed by France (9/1), Italy and Finland (5/1). Poland is widely perceived as a hostile nation (2/10). There seem to be important exemptions from this general rule, however. Great Britain, which has not made it on the list of Russia's "strategic partners", is not perceived as a hostile nation (3/0) by the Russian public, whereas the US, which finds itself

52 In May 2009, according to a Levada-Centre public opinion poll, Poland was within the top ten nations worldwide considered as Russia-hostile, following Georgia, the US, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. See: "Friends and Enemies of Russia" (in Russian), http://www.levada.ru/press/2009061001.html (27 December 2009).

53 *The Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation of 27 March 2007*, Chapter 2, Section 2, point 6.

54 See the script of the televised interview of President Dmitry Medvedev on 31 August 2008, in: www.kremlin.ru (7 November 2008).

among the leaders of the allegedly Russia-hostile nations (2/45), still remains for Moscow a desired "strategic partner".

To sum up, the remarkably stable perception of Germany as an important "strategic partner" of the Russian Federation, first and foremost as far as European affairs are concerned, is neither exceptional, nor is it taken for granted. It gives Moscow the value it considers worth working for. However, it is only identified as a "strategic partner" as long as it is considered to behave as a "Russia-friendly" country. The most miraculous finding against this background is that the "strategic partnership" with Germany has properly worked over the past twenty years despite the occasional ups and downs in bilateral affairs and, most importantly, despite the continuous deterioration of Russia's relations with the West in general. It is therefore an important question: Which features of German policies justify, from Moscow's perspective, the privilege of enjoying the benefit of being regarded and treated as a "strategic partner"? And which developments may eventually work against this?

Three main arguments support the dominant Russian perception of Germany as a "strategic partner". These include solid economic cooperation and interdependence; the responsiveness of Berlin towards concerns raised by Moscow plus the openness to cooperative solutions of emerging issues; and the implicit (although very vague) promise that Germany may, at some point, engage with Russia in developing a more pluralistic multipolar world order, setting stronger limits to the unilateralist hegemonic policy of the US, particularly as it evolved under President George W. Bush over the last decade.

The latter expectation should not be confused with the recurrent debate in Russia on the possibility of Germany's return to some sort of a *Sonderweg* (special path) policy. Those in Russia who believe that a "Rapallo" option – which stands for close German-Russian cooperation as developed in the 1920s outside of the established European order – is a viable policy option for both Berlin and Moscow represent a negligible minority. Mainstream thinking would rather expect Germany, together or in parallel with other "strategic partners" of Russia, to lead the European Union towards becoming a more coherent and emancipated actor in world politics, increasingly distancing itself from the US and, at the same time, building upon a stronger "strategic partnership" with the Russian Federation.

The appreciation of both economic and political benefits from commercial and financial cooperation with Germany is firmly rooted in Russia from Soviet times, when it became increasingly relevant for partial technical modernization of the aging Soviet economy and instrumental in expanding some room to maneuver in the confrontation with the US. It further grew in the 1990s, when Germany became the biggest donor to the Russian Federation, providing about one-third of the financial resources borrowed by Moscow from abroad.

The economic interdependence which has grown over the past two decades between Russia and Europe, particularly Germany, remains a solid – and the single most important – foundation for the maintenance of an *entente cordiale* between Moscow and Berlin. This is true despite the gradual reduction of Europe's share in Russian foreign trade due to the rapid expansion of imports from China (and Japan). Economic cooperation with and investment from Europe are major avenues for the integration of Russia into the global economy, with Germany remaining its single most important partner. Although its role as the destination of Russian exports has slightly declined over the past few years,[55] the share of German products on the Russian market remains uncontested by any other European nation. The closest competitor in terms of export volumes and the pace of expansion is China, although Chinese products compete with those from Germany only to a very limited extent because of the different structure of Russia's trade with each country.[56]

Even the asymmetric structure of trade between the Russian Federation and Germany is often perceived as supporting, rather than diminishing, the potential for closer partnership, both economic and political. Russian exports to Europe are dominated by energy resources, of which Germany remains the most important recipient. German dependence on gas supplies from Russia in particular, although increasingly controversial over the past several years, seems to guarantee Moscow not only the cash flow but also a great deal of responsiveness and cooperativeness from Berlin on a large variety of issues beyond the energy partnership.

The Russian economy, on the other hand, relies heavily on investment, know-how transfer and imported capital from Europe and from Germany. This is what apparently provided the basis for the political concept of a "modernization partnership" put forward by the previous German government, which pointed to mutual, though asymmetric, economic dependence. However, Moscow seems to have learned to benefit politically from this asymmetry. Business partnerships with German companies in developing Russian natural resources as well as in modernizing whole sectors of the Russian economy (and particularly its obsolete infrastructure) have helped to preserve the role of the "Eastern Committee of the German Economy" as an influential pressure group for a closer partnership with Russia, out of fear that cooler political relations may jeopardize Germany's position in the heavily bureaucratized Russian market.

Here again, however, it is important to note that Moscow avoids granting Germany and German business the status of an explicitly privileged economic partner and seeks to diversify cooperation with "national champions" from a variety of European countries. The key business partners of the Russian state are not only Wintershall (BASF), EON-Ruhrgas, Siemens, Volkswagen and Daimler but to no lesser extent GdF-Suez, ENI, Enel, Renault, or even the Finnish Fortum and the Austrian ÖMV.

Beginning with the 1990s, all German governments proved responsive to the political or security concerns expressed by the Russian government. Moreover, they often advocated Moscow's interests within "Western" institutions while promoting the integration of the Russian Federation into, or its affiliation with, Euro-Atlantic and global political and economic frameworks, both formal and informal. Thus, in the 1990s, under Boris Yeltsin, Moscow relied, *inter alia*, on German support while seeking membership in the WTO, OECD, or G7, and while exploring appropriate policy options for institutionalizing its partnership with the European Union and NATO.

In the 1990s and during the current decade, Bonn and Berlin were among the addressees of Russian complaints against NATO's eastward expansion. However, in the mid-1990s, the very fact that the German government was one of the initiators of the first wave of NATO enlargement into East Central Europe did not significantly affect the Russo-German partnership. More recently, Berlin became, along with France, a major opponent of the accelerated integration of Georgia and Ukraine into the Alliance. Similarly, Berlin is considered in Moscow a crucial partner in preventing a shift in EU-Russia policy in favor of the much more critical views of a number of the new member states such as Poland or Lithuania.

German diplomacy played a crucial role in helping to overcome the crisis in Russian-Western relations that broke out over the Kosovo war in 1999, and also assisted the return to normality after the Russian war in Georgia in 2008. Over the past decade, on many occasions and, particularly, on the most controversial issues such as arms control, confidence-building, or European missile defence, Moscow often found a much more open ear in Berlin than in Washington. Practical cooperation on the Middle East, the transit to Afghanistan or the Iranian nuclear dossier, though not always uncontroversial, helped to further expand common ground on international security issues. Moscow honored this convergence by explicitly supporting Germany's candidacy for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, thereby alienating Italy, another close partner of Russia.

55 In 2007, it was the third destination of Russian exports after the Netherlands and Italy (in 2005 the second), claiming 7.5 percent of total Russian exports (8.2 percent in 2005). See the data of the Russian State statistical Committee for the respective years at www.gks.ru.

56 In 2007, Germany provided 13.3 percent of total Russian imports (13.5 percent in 2005). Italy, the second biggest source of Russian imports from within the EU, contributed only 4.3 percent (4.5 percent in 2005) while China was obviously on the rise with 12.2 percent of the total Russian imports in 2007 (7.4 percent in 2005). See the data of the Russian State statistical Committee for the respective years at www.gks.ru.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious political convergence, the underlying assumptions of the policies of the Russian Federation and of Germany remain distinct and have apparently even diverged over the past few years. Moscow, for instance, seeks to prevent further changes in its immediate neighborhood, particularly through NATO enlargement, in the firm belief that those changes would come at the expense of Russian security. In contrast with both the policy of the previous US administration and the harsh rhetoric from Moscow, Berlin seeks to leave all options open by postponing the most controversial decisions, on the one hand, while seeking to engage Moscow in discussions of what it believes to be legitimate Russian security concerns, on the other.

These different approaches put a limit on further political convergence between Russian and German policies, particularly on the European security agenda. It therefore remains an open question whether political cooperation will feed the "strategic partnership" between the two countries, or will stagnate or even fall victim to growing divergence with regard to criticism of the "Russia first" policy of the previous German governments, both within the country itself and within the European Union and NATO.

Against this background, it is no surprise that Russian mainstream thinking never went so far as to expect Germany to abandon its Western alliance and partner with Russia in shaping a distinct world order. During most of the 1990s, the Russian political elite itself sought rather to identify the appropriate ways of becoming an equal member of the world order, which was so economically and politically dominated by the West, and not least by the US. Only from the late 1990s onwards and particularly during the current decade, did it begin rediscovering the concept of a multipolar world order.

Beginning with the former Foreign and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1996, Russia developed a vision of a world order in which the hegemony of the US is limited and absorbed by a concert of old and new great powers, with Russia among them. Such a group of powers would be established on the basis of a negotiated balance of national interests among the leading and "responsible" nations rather than on political convergence.[57] Few in Moscow, however, expected any major impetus for the formation of a new multipolar world order to come from Europe or particularly from Germany. It was chiefly China, as well as a few other "rising powers", that were expected to generate the profound transformation of the world order which, at a later stage, could be embraced and followed by the European Union as well.

57 "Free of any ideological rhetoric," i.e., values, as President Dmitry Medvedev remarked. See his public statement in Berlin on 5 June 2008 in www.kremlin.ru (6 November 2008).

This general aim inspired the temptation to seize the opportunity that arose in 2002 with the rift between Germany and the US over the war on Iraq. The Kremlin was divided on the issue of whether to cooperate with the US or to block its efforts at getting a UN mandate for the war. In early 2003 Moscow even chose to refrain from using its veto in the Security Council. But the moment France started moving in the opposite direction, the proponents of a hard-line policy in Moscow overruled the previous decision by arguing that a trilateral coalition of Russia, France and Germany against the war would be more promising in terms of transforming the world order than support for a US-led intervention in Iraq.

This coalition turned out to be a brief interlude rather than a sustainable political reality. However, it obviously nurtured the belief in Moscow that an important impetus towards a more pluralistic world order could be generated not only by the rising Asian nations (and Russia) but also by Europe. This expectation began to weaken gradually in the aftermath of the Iraq war and particularly after the change in the German government from Schröder to Merkel, who put much more emphasis on revitalizing the transatlantic alliance. But it never entirely disappeared, resurfacing during the global financial and economic crisis which erupted in 2008. The Russian political elite perceived the crisis as another chance to weaken the US (and more generally the Western) domination of the economic world order, even to overhaul it completely, by transforming the decision-making procedures into more representative ones with the inclusion of relevant non-Western nations such as China or India. Moscow not only welcomed the idea of establishing the Group of 20 to address the consequences of the global crisis, but also sought to institutionalize the G20 as an informal instrument of global economic and financial governance instead of the G8.[58] Seizing the opportunity of an open-ended debate unbounded by any block discipline, it sought to engage every relevant member of the G20, including Germany, in considering ways and means to liberate the global economic and financial order from the dominance of the US and the US Dollar.

While economic interdependence and limited political convergence proved helpful in consolidating the German-Russian "strategic partnership" over the last twenty years and rendering it remarkably sustainable despite ongoing changes in government, the criticism of the increasingly authoritarian rule in Russia expressed by German civil society and echoed by the German government since the mid-2000s

58 Although part of the G8, Russia never became an institutional part of the financial and economic G7. This made it easier for Moscow to opt for transferring more powers to the G20 without fearing that its opportunities for influencing relevant decisions would diminish. On the contrary, through the G20 Moscow would gain access to decision-making on global economic and financial issues which it never had through the G8 mechanisms.

soon became the most important irritant in the bilateral as well as in the multilateral format of the German-Russian dialogue.

In general, the desire of Western nations, including the European Union, to keep on their agenda the issues of the promotion of democracy and the rule of law in relations with Russia – as well as with regards to global governance – met with increasing skepticism in the Kremlin, notably during Putin's presidency. Any export of democracy is rejected by Moscow as an impermissible and unacceptable interference into the internal affairs of a sovereign state, and is dismissed as an overdue legacy of the Cold War, thereby deferring the formation of a clique of "responsible" world powers.

There is, therefore, an obvious gap between the official ambition of German policy and Russia's vanishing understanding for it. The official rationale of German and/or European "Ostpolitik" justifies the policy of engaging Russia (or the "strategic partnership") by seeking to anchor, in the longer run, European values and to promote further transformation of the Russian Federation along the values of a pluralistic democracy and the rule of law. Contrary to this, over the past decade Moscow continuously and explicitly sought to insulate itself from any conditionality as pursued by either the European Union or by the US. Its vision of the European and of the world order does not provide for the development of a community of values, particularly if this implies a community of states based on Western political values. Moscow calls rather for the complete abandonment of democratic proselytizing and for the furtherance of "strategic partnerships" based on pure interest, again its clear realist vocation.

Consecutive German governments and that of Chancellor Schröder in particular have put the democracy issue on the backburner and have rejected any conditionality between progress in Russia's democratic transition and their dealings with Moscow. Thus the greater sensitivity currently expressed by Chancellor Merkel to those issues has certainly irritated, if not damaged, her relationship with the former Russian President Vladimir Putin. The transfer of power from Putin to Medvedev helped to narrow the emerging gap. However, the obvious conflict over the importance of values as the basis of an enduring and open partnership remains in place and may have a detrimental impact on the German-Russian "strategic partnership" when and if the economic benefits from cooperation seem to diminish and/or political convergence reaches its limits.

Conclusion

German-Russian relations throughout the past ten years have been, from the German perspective, characterized by a pattern which combined a more or less close and

enthusiastic *entente cordiale* at the government level and a still fairly reluctant attitude among the broader public. In the latter sphere, Russia has just one articulate lobby: the German business community, whose influence in government circles is much greater than in the public at large. Nevertheless, their representatives have on occasion clearly expressed their – rather accommodating – views. Right from the beginning of Putin's presidency they not only distanced themselves from too harsh a criticism of Russian conduct in Chechnya but even expressed concern about the "occasional finger-pointing behavior of German politicians."[59] Their view of Putin has therefore been quite in tune with former Chancellor Schröder, regarding Putin's "success story" as "impressive" and his chosen successor Medvedev a "lucky chance" for Europe. Accordingly, Germany is called upon to accompany Russian along its path of "continuous and gradual, not hectic, reforms" through a "cooperative dialogue" which "gives Russia the feeling and the security to be accepted. Patience is hereby of utmost importance."[60]

Nevertheless, German-Russian relations lack a stable societal basis and a stable institutional frame. The demonstrated accord at the helm thus seems simultaneously rather artificial, as it appears as the *conditio sine qua non* of any substantial rapprochement. On the part of Russia, this dilemma derives not least from the fact that its *raison d'état* requires great latitude in foreign affairs, as well as many geostrategic options combined with quite some measure of domestic complexity. On the German side, this contrasts in virtually every respect with the tried and tested pattern of a "civilian power". These conditions time and again reawaken fairly traditional anti-Russia phobia and provide a comfortable avenue for attacking the official cooperative stance.

Against this background, it is not surprising that changes in government initially reflect these societal discourses quite strongly and usually encourage a more assertive stance. In this way the constructivist explanations find an empirical backing, although only in the early stages of new governments – and in the case of the grand coalition even less so. Certainly Russia represents a stark contrast to a civilian power, but at the same time it is a valuable if not indispensable partner for Germany's political and even more so economic interests. Under realist and liberal assumptions, rapprochement is not mandatory but definitely plausible.

As with previous governments, the grand coalition also demonstrated continuity by reiterating German identity as a multilaterally embedded civilian power through appropriate symbols in public statements and official visits. And here Russia is only

59 Cf. "Ost-Ausschuss hofft auf guten Willen Moskaus," *Handelsblatt*, 3 April 2000, 11; *Handelsblatt*, 14 June 2000, 12.

60 Klaus Mangold, "Glücksfall Medwedjew," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 2008, 12.

of secondary importance. Certainly Foreign Minister Steinmeier, when assuming office in 2005, confirmed that Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer "had re-measured the scope of German foreign policy with courage and a sense of proportion", thereby increasing Germany's global reputation.[61] This, however, was not meant to justify an unconditional continuation of Schröder's particular approach, which sometimes gave the impression that Moscow might serve as a springboard for shedding the annoying traditions of the Bonn republic. Russia and German-Russian traditions are only to a very limited degree suitable testing grounds, whether for German unilateralism or for efforts at hedging bilateral relations by employing EU instruments. This has been reiterated even more clearly by the current CDU/FDP coalition government in Berlin.

The steadily increasing gap between the political orders on both sides is potentially the most divisive issue in the German-Russian relationship. Yet the situation is highly contradictory, which entails an opposite reading of the empirical evidence. On the one hand, Putin's authoritarianism has proved a beneficial, if not a necessary condition for the German-Russian alliance of interests. On the other hand, it challenges the democratic credibility of German politics and might threaten the alliance of interests in the longer run, as according to conventional wisdom peace and economic modernisation rest on democratic polities. The threshold is hard to identify in light of these ambiguities. Yet during the orange revolution it came into sight, and the after-effects are still being felt.

There is also an obvious gap between the respective visions of Europe and the global order underlying Russian and German policies towards one another. As long as there is the prospect for an eventual convergence of both the domestic political (and economic) order and the visions of the future global order and its "effective multilateralism", this gap appears not to prevent Russia and Germany from pursuing the rhetoric and the policy of a "strategic partnership". The German definition of "European Ostpolitik" appeals precisely to the hope of anchoring common values in Russian and European policies by engaging Russia instead of isolating it.

61 As stated by Frank-Walter Steinmeier in his welcome speech in the Foreign Office on 23 November 2005, in www.auswaertiges-amt.de.

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