



Germany's Eastern Challenge and the Russia–Ukraine Crisis: A New Ostpolitik in the Making?

Patricia Daehnhardt & Vladimír Handl

To cite this article: Patricia Daehnhardt & Vladimír Handl (2018) Germany's Eastern Challenge and the Russia–Ukraine Crisis: A New Ostpolitik in the Making?, *German Politics*, 27:4, 445-459, DOI: [10.1080/09644008.2018.1448385](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1448385)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1448385>



Published online: 05 Oct 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 598



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Germany's Eastern Challenge and the Russia–Ukraine Crisis: A New Ostpolitik in the Making?

PATRICIA DAEHNHARDT  and VLADIMÍR HANDL 

Since the Russia–Ukraine crisis in 2014, Germany's foreign policy has been subject to international pressures to engage more actively in restoring the peace and security order in Europe. Particularly in its eastern policy, Berlin has had to redefine its traditional foreign policy, towards what could be termed a 'hybrid Ostpolitik'. The introduction sets the context of German–Russian relations before 2014, and discusses the elements of continuity and change regarding Germany's role in Europe and transatlantic relations thereafter. It then presents an overview of the contributions to the special issue which are grouped around three themes: the question of the nature of German power and leadership; the effects of the Ukraine crisis on the Euro-Atlantic order and its impact on German foreign policy; and Germany's changing bilateral relations with the United States and its eastern neighbours in the wake of the Ukraine crisis.

The Russia–Ukraine crisis in 2014 has profoundly changed conditions under which Germany designs and conducts its Russia policy and could potentially change the German role in international affairs and in Europe in particular. Substantial change in German policy came as a surprise not only for the Russian leadership but also for many German allies: Berlin's reaction to Russian action in the east of Ukraine represented a deviation from a long-term tradition of co-operative, inclusive and trusting relations with Russia. The question remains how deep and sustainable is this change. Four years on, the Ukraine–Russia crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea tends to be seen as a game-changer for German foreign policy in that both have contributed to a reframing of the contours of Germany's Russia policy and its foreign policy in the Euro-Atlantic order – taken here to be the geographical area between North America, Europe, Turkey and Russia. As the title of this Special Issue suggests, as Berlin looks to its east, it is undergoing a process of redefinition of its Ostpolitik. This redefinition entails a mix of policy instruments and tools resulting in what could be termed a 'hybrid Ostpolitik' if a coherent and sustained new policy line is the result: Germany continues to engage with Russia, keeping all channels of communication open and

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

working for co-operative political solutions to the crisis with its allies, with Ukraine and with Russia; at the same time, Germany has begun to increase resilience, deterrence and defence options against Russia, through a mix of civilian as well as military means and measures vis-à-vis Russia, a country that Germany no longer perceives as a strategic partner. Importantly, a 'hybrid Ostpolitik' would presuppose that Germany combines more purposefully bilateral and multilateral levels of engagement with Russia, seeking to develop a coherent European Ostpolitik.¹

Could such a change of attitude to Russian action vis-à-vis Ukraine constitute a breaking point in Germany's Russia policy and in its foreign policy more generally? Or should we expect German policy to return to its normality of a low-key, inclusive policy and 'leading from behind' rather than accepting new responsibilities, as demanded by President Gauck and others, at the Munich Security Conference, in early 2014, shortly before the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine crisis, adopting a new, and more proactive, policy style?

In recent years, simultaneous crises have put German foreign policy under considerable pressure. Whether faced with the eurozone crisis, the unsettled Ukraine–Russia conflict, the ongoing war in Syria or the refugee crisis, Berlin has been continually exposed to mounting expectations from neighbouring countries and partners to adopt a more assertive role and a leadership position in its foreign policy. Germany continues to adapt to a changing international environment but has done so reluctantly, particularly in its foreign and security policy. Against the expectations of many and the fears of some, Germany has tried to respond affirmatively in a differentiated manner to all of these crises.² But to do so has not come easily and it has meant that many of the traditional foreign policy parameters valid in German foreign policy have begun to change or were challenged quite significantly. Whereas, for example, the crisis over military intervention in Libya, in March 2011, highlighted Germany's reluctance to get militarily involved by abstaining from the vote in the UN Security Council on North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s military operation, Russian actions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea triggered a change of heart in Berlin's foreign policy elite and a more assertive political role ensued.³

While there is little doubt that Germany's status (power ranking) in Europe and in the wider Euro-Atlantic order has changed considerably in recent years, it is less clear how this has impacted on German foreign policy. What does change mean – the end of continuity of Germany's institutionally embedded multilateralism, a mere adaptation to external circumstances or a leadership position in tackling solutions for major international problems? And what does a changed foreign policy imply for Germany's role in international politics and, in consequence, for its partners? Has this change affected Germany's Russia policy, and if so, in what way?

Some authors identify transformations in Berlin's foreign policy interests and identity, to become a more effective security provider commensurate with the economic and political power and link it to a new leadership role.⁴ This has been reinforced by claims that, following the election of Donald Trump as US president, and his unwillingness for the US to retain its global leadership role, Germany could step in as the 'new leader of the Free World'.⁵ Others argue that despite the changed external environment, Berlin has reaffirmed its traditional foreign policy role and foreign policy principles, such as 'never again' war, with resort to military instruments seen as the *ultima ratio* or

'never alone' based on continued institutional multilateralism.⁶ As Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier put it in 2016, despite the multiple conflicts around the globe that have

forc[ed] Germany to reinterpret the principles that have guided its foreign policy for over half a century ... Germany [remains] a reflective power: even as it adapts, a belief in the importance of restraint, deliberation, and peaceful negotiation will continue to guide its interactions with the rest of the world.⁷

While Germany's foreign policy identity remains on strong normative foundations, such as its preference for institutional multilateralism and respect for international law, the drastic pace of the changing environment of the wider Euro-Atlantic order is exerting additional pressure on German foreign policy. Thus it should come as no surprise that Germany was unusually assertive in criticising Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula; what was less anticipated was the ensuing change in its stance vis-à-vis Moscow and the implications this produced on Germany's current Russia policy. Could this mean that we are witnessing fundamental change in Germany policy with medium- to long-term consequences, including the development of a new and substantial German and European Ostpolitik? Alternatively, should we expect 'Ukraine fatigue' to take the upper hand, making Germany weary of sacrificing its relationship with Russia and the economic advantages this entails?⁸ Or instead of a new Ostpolitik, should we expect merely a combination of conflict management and pragmatic co-operation?

By focusing on continuity and change in German foreign policy, this special issue aims to cover a triple ground, articulating key issues of power, institutional structures and bilateral relations. One first set of questions is how the nature of German power – its dynamic, characteristic features, domestic and foreign context – has been affected by the Russia–Ukrainian conflict. A second set of questions deals with the implications of change in German foreign policy for the institutional structures Germany is part of, such as the European Union and NATO and how this impacts on the contours of the post-cold war Euro-Atlantic order. Finally, the other half of the articles focuses on the specificities of Germany's bilateral relations in the wake of the Ukraine crisis.

CONTINUITY AND OPTIMISM BEFORE 2014

Several factors worked as agents of continuity of Germany's Russia policy.⁹ In the realm of security policy, for two and a half decades Germany's Russia policy was shaped by three assumptions: first, that European peace and security could not be guaranteed without Russia and even less so against it; second, that post-Soviet Russia posed no external threat for European and transatlantic relations; and third, that Russia represented a strategic reservoir needed for Europe in order to ascertain a prominent role in the globalised world. These security considerations had always been central to the German–Russia bilateral relationship and its underlying historical, political, economic and energy security aspects. Moreover, before 2014, Germany did not feel threatened by Russia in military terms: the 'peace dividend' of the end of the cold war, increased substantially by EU and NATO enlargements, made any hypothetical military move of Russia against central Europe improbable and increased substantially the warning-time period.¹⁰ For a brief period, between 1991 and 1996, German–Russian relations

developed in a positive context, when the Russian leadership, under President Boris Yelstin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev embarked on setting the country on a 'westernisation' course. Russia seemed to adjust to a reformist and democratic transition, and the Russians felt German support in their programme of political and economic reform.¹¹ From Russia's perspective, one of the objectives of its foreign policy after 1991 was to find an ally in the western community, which could serve as an interlocutor for Russian interests in Europe and in its relationship with the United States. Germans, for their part, believed Russia should be brought into the community of democratic nations as Germany had been after World War II. From the German perspective, it became necessary to find a *modus vivendi* with its great eastern neighbour, a new form of coexistence that neither harassed Russia, nor at the same time required Germany to loosen its institutional EU and NATO commitments or destabilised Germany's evolving relations with eastern European countries.¹² Germany's attitude to eastern Europe, too, was much influenced by its Russia-first policy. After the collapse of the Soviet hegemony over the eastern bloc in 1989, Germany actively supported the ambition of central and eastern European countries to become NATO and European Union members. Shortly after unification Germany was one of the first NATO countries to advocate NATO membership for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.¹³ At the same time, Moscow's security concerns were taken into account, with NATO and Russia establishing the NATO–Russia Founding Act in 1997, shortly before NATO enlarged to the three eastern European countries in 1999. But whereas Berlin supported the countries of the former Soviet-led Warsaw Pact in joining the transatlantic security alliance, it opposed as potential NATO candidates the newly independent Soviet Republics, vis-à-vis which Moscow exerted influence and saw as its 'near abroad'. This helps explain why at the NATO Bucharest summit, in April 2008, considering the negative implications that potential Ukraine and Georgia NATO membership could have on the West's relationship with Russia, Germany opposed US President George W. Bush's objective of full NATO membership for these two states.¹⁴ This confirms that, in security terms, when it came to Ukraine and Georgia, Germany implemented a 'Russia-first policy' until 2014.

Secondly, until 2014, continuity persisted in the realm of economic policy. German–Russian relations were relevant but not overall significant in comparison with Germany's other trading partners: Russia's role in the German economy has been limited (in 2013, its share in German exports being comparable with that of the Czech Republic) – Russia was not important enough to be able to exert substantial pressure on the German economy or policy.¹⁵ Overall German exports were affected by the sanctions the EU and the United States imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea and the shooting down of Malaysia Airline MH17 over Ukraine. The trade volume between the two countries decreased significantly between 2014 and 2016.¹⁶ Regarding the share of oil and natural gas that Germany imports from Russia, it continues to be the biggest energy-providing country for Germany. Here the decrease has not been as significant as the overall trade with Russia.¹⁷ While abroad, growing German dependence on Russian energy exports was viewed critically, in Germany, the issue was often perceived as a two-way street and manifestation of interdependence.¹⁸ On the political side, Germans feared Russia's failed transition into a modern state due to structural weakness, which could threaten its domestic stability, predictability and rationality and could lead to internal or international conflicts.

Third, the tradition of German–Russian historical linkages, the memory of World War II and the issue of German guilt, the ethos of Ostpolitik and gratitude for the Russian consent to German unification shaped Germany's perception and attitude towards Russia.¹⁹ A constructive relation towards Russia was thus seen as the last logical step that should finish the process of European unification.²⁰ During the early 2000s, Russia's economic weight grew and 'the Putin factor' played a role in the closer relations between the two countries. The SPD–Green coalition government led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder shared President Vladimir Putin's frustration with the policies of US President Bush concerning the war in Iraq in 2003, when strong opposition from France, Germany and Russia brought Germany and Russia closer together, as with the missile defence system Bush wanted to implement in Poland and the Czech Republic.²¹ In addition, the personalisation of relations played a role: following German unification, the Kohl–Yeltsin and even more the Schröder–Putin *Männerfreundschaft* added a strong personal dimension to the normative and material factors of the German–Russian partnership.²²

Merkel's chancellorship, between 2005 and 2014, was more demanding but still within the tradition of Ostpolitik: Russia was to be supported in its transformation and modernisation efforts, yet the effort was now more critically assessed. Even when Vladimir Putin hardened his rhetoric at the Munich Security Conference, in January 2007, suggesting that the West had not kept its word regarding containment with EU and NATO enlargements towards the East, and after the sobering experience of the Georgian–Russian five-day war in August 2008, Germany upheld the dialogue with Moscow, with Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier arguing for a new Ostpolitik and proposing a comprehensive project of 'Partnership for Modernisation' – a continued attempt of 'westernisation' of Russia and thus an export of norms, institutions and procedures of the western community.²³ Germany also tried to persuade Russia to return to the agreement on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.²⁴ This continued engagement with Russia was widely perceived as a German 'Russia-first policy', and Germany's answer to the growing challenges of Russia's relations with Europe and the United States.

In the German perception, Russia represented a strategic actor and, potentially, a strategic partner. The precondition, however, was a shared concept of modernisation and respect for the principles of international order. German policy towards Russia was thus based on a strategy similar to that of Germany's relations with the Central and Eastern Europe countries: normalisation of relations, modernisation and democratisation by way of Europeanisation, de facto westernisation, engagement in bilateral as well as multilateral contexts. German debate about pragmatic and normative approaches to Russia proved that the strategy of Europeanisation was contested by pragmatists who rejected normatively based approaches to Russia (and China) and its internal development.²⁵

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS 2014: DEALING WITH RUSSIAN REVISIONISM

Germany's attempts to integrate Russia into a post-cold war security structure, not only into the Partnership for Peace programme, the NATO–Russia Council, civil society initiatives and bilateral institutionalised arrangements, however, were not seen by

Moscow as empowering Russia to become an equal member in the Euro-Atlantic security structure. Vladimir Putin's goal of transforming Russia internationally into a revisionist power and internally into an authoritarian regime confirmed that Moscow openly questioned the Euro-Atlantic post-cold war order, which Germany had helped to construct.

This trend in Russian policy coincided with the German debate on increasing responsibility and international security. At the Munich Security Conference, in January 2014, President Gauck called upon Germany to 'take more resolute steps to uphold and help shape the order based on the European Union, NATO and the United Nations'; Germany should co-operate with others, provide more security but 'never support purely military solutions, and explore all diplomatic options'.²⁶ The external as well as self-imposed demand on German foreign policy review was that Germany had to shape the 'international process of settlement, mediation and prevention' more actively than so far, as stated by Foreign Minister Steinmeier.²⁷

The Russian annexation of Crimea and its 'hybrid war' in eastern Ukraine changed nearly every aspect of this order: it compromised the principles of territorial integrity, the inviolability of frontiers, non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes, and development of good neighbourly relations; in other words, Russia violated the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Paris Charter of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and the Russian-Ukrainian treaties of 1990 and 1997. Ideologically, Russia under Putin also made a cultural turn, rejecting the western liberal culture and declaring a return to what has been described as conservative national orthodox values. In so doing, Moscow destroyed the capital of mutual trust which Germany had painstakingly been developing for decades.

The crisis in Ukraine changed the German mainstream thinking about Russia and its own role in the prospective response to Russia's revisionist actions.²⁸ Germany has not given up on Russia; for the first time, however, a majority of the German *class politique* and the German public perceive Russia (its hybrid warfare – a flexible combination of conventional, irregular, cyber and information warfare) as a threat to the international security order, and the stability of Europe as well as of Germany.²⁹ Alternative approaches, which perceive Russia as just reacting to NATO's expansion to the East,³⁰ and/or return to a 'romantic glorification of alleged cultural commonality',³¹ remained a relevant but still a minority phenomenon in the German debate. Germany engaged in mediation efforts in co-operation with the Weimar Triangle partners France and Poland, later being the driving force of the Normandy format and the Minsk agreements. No less importantly, Germany took a leading role in implementing EU and US sanctions against Russia, it actively supported a measured military response and reassurance of Poland and the Baltic member states, and increased to a limited level its own defence effort: while the specific sum has remained a matter of dispute in politics, also during the coalition talks after the 2017 general elections, the need to increase defence and a deterrence capability has been acknowledged by all mainstream parties.³² So far, Germany has accepted the challenge of a leadership role and (mainly on the sanctions regime) set an example which has swayed other European countries.³³ This amounted to a hybrid Russia policy, combining traditional military and new civilian instruments, such as cyber and information measures, designed to contain Russia.³⁴

At the same time, communication with the Russian leadership and dialogue with Russian society as well as pragmatic co-operation (outside of the sanctions regime) continue, including the construction of the NordStream II pipeline project which transports Russian gas through the Baltic Sea to Europe, with its main destination hub located in Germany. Apart from energy supplies, the role of Russia in Germany's economy decreased as a result of the sanctions and Russia now ranks 16th out of the destinations for German exports (with Poland 8th, Czech Republic 12th and Hungary 14th, for example) and ranks 13th with regard to German imports (with Poland 6th, Czech Republic 8th and Hungary 14th, for example).³⁵ In case these changes in Germany's policies and attitudes represent a permanent shift, they will have inevitable repercussions for Berlin's relations with its partners – both large and small. This special issue thus looks into the question of how German policy in the Russia–Ukraine crisis is to be assessed and interpreted and how it affects relations with several relevant actors in Europe's east, such as Ukraine, Russia and Poland, and the United States, and ultimately how it has affected German foreign policy itself.

OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The articles in this volume cover key dimensions from differentiated perspectives, each addressing a specific aspect of German foreign policy. The articles are grouped around three themes: the first theme deals with the question of the nature of German power and leadership. To what extent can it be argued that the Ukraine crisis catapulted Germany into a new leadership position, thereby changing its power status and its understanding of how that power should best be exercised? The second theme examines the effects of the Ukraine crisis on the Euro-Atlantic order and how this has impacted on German foreign policy. Given Russia's interest in revising the established international order, through a violation of international law, as occurred with the annexation of Crimea, pressure was now on Germany to effectively answer, in practice, the numerous calls for leadership and no longer evade international responsibility for actively shaping the contours of the international order. The last theme revolves around Germany's changing bilateral relations with the United States and some of its eastern neighbours/partners in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. How have German–American relations evolved since President George H.W. Bush first spoke of a 'partnership in leadership', in May 1989, up to President Barack Obama's so-called 'leading from behind' foreign policy approach? Has Germany become a centre-stage actor in the transatlantic relation with Russia? How has the Ukraine crisis influenced German–Polish relations? How has Ukraine itself perceived Germany's mediating efforts in handling the crisis?

THE NATURE OF GERMAN POWER AND LEADERSHIP

Hanns W. Maull argues that there is nothing unusual about German power but that German power is 'normal' in its own specific way. He discusses alternative notions of power attributed to Germany in the current literature on international relations – the 'reflective', 'shaping' and 'geo-economic power' – and dismisses the thesis that Germany has no strategy, arguing that strategy should not be narrowed down to strategic autonomy in action. He perceives Germany in principle as a 'civilian power 2.0':

Germany has not engaged in a unilateral *Machtpolitik*, political considerations play a primary role, Germany has moderately increased its defence spending and has proved readiness to uphold the international order. At the same time German power (and Germany as a power) has become fragile and its impact unpredictable. Maull perceives Germany as an ‘autistic power’ (a notion which he sees more generally as a key feature of the post-cold war world). As such, German foreign policy has been increasingly overtaken by domestic concerns and influences, not ready to spend on foreign policy resources adequate to the new international challenges. German foreign policy could under such circumstance atrophy and its civilian power practice would be open to revision whenever required by specific domestic constellation and interests.

Nicholas Wright explores Germany’s response to the Ukraine crisis and argues that the crisis offers a useful lens through which to examine claims around how German foreign policy has changed in the years since unification, and particularly whether its commitment to multilateralism, for so long the foundation of its post-war foreign policy, has weakened. He suggests that by looking at how Germany engages with the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy – particularly in the context of the Ukraine crisis – one finds not only a strengthened commitment to multilateralism, notably at the EU level, but that this has been the basis for how Germany has then used other multilateral institutions such as the OSCE, as well as more ad hoc multilateral settings, such as the ‘Normandy Format’. In short, multilateralism based on the EU remains fundamental to how Germany pursues its foreign policy aims. Wright concludes that the Ukraine crisis also underscores the importance and centrality of Germany to EU (and European) foreign and security policy-making. Having for so long exhibited a ‘leadership avoidance reflex’, it is now becoming a foreign policy leader – as indispensable to this as it is to economic policy-making.

THE EURO-ATLANTIC ORDER AND GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

Liana Fix explores the notion of ‘Germanification’ of European policy towards Russia in the Ukraine crisis. Germany’s power and influence within the EU has not been limited to the application of classical neo-realist instruments of power (for instance sanctions, i.e. ‘compulsory’ power) or to constructivist instruments of power. Instead, by combining and applying different ‘shades’ of power in a mix of instruments, Germany has become the central axis of policy-making between the EU and Russia during the Ukraine conflict, decisively shaping discourse and content of EU policy towards Russia. The character of the EU response mirrors the character of German foreign policy during the conflict. In sum, Germany’s approach represents a much more complex and nuanced ‘Machtpolitik’ which represents different conceptual types of power. Fix concludes that German leadership and power exertion within the European Union during the Ukraine conflict was closely linked to the notion of ‘responsibility’, an implicit normative dimension of the concept of power: responsibility to assume leadership in a situation of vacuum by stressing the importance of international law and European unity, and guided by expectations of responsible leadership from other actors.³⁶

Patricia Daehnhardt examines how the growing disorder in the Euro-Atlantic area and the potential erosion of the liberal international order by revisionist powers has

increased the pressure on Berlin to become a more effective foreign and security policy actor, in particular since the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Germany's main difficulty is continuing to be what it would most like to remain as: a status quo power, with a commensurately low-profile foreign and security policy. She makes the argument that Germany faces the paradox of wanting to preserve the status quo of the European order, of which it has been the greatest beneficiary since unification, while realising that to continue thriving in this order, it needs to change its approach and assert its position as Europe's new ordering power. It can resort to three forms of leadership: unilateral leadership, a revitalised co-leadership with France or a collaborative strategic leadership through intensified coalition-building. Daehnhardt concludes that Germany's foreign and security policy is undergoing a more substantial change than ever before since the end of the cold war, and that a collaborative strategic leadership would best enable it to align strategies across the increasingly complex institutional structures of the Euro-Atlantic order.

BILATERAL RELATIONS: UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, EASTERN EUROPE AND UKRAINE

Stephen Szabo looks into the US-German relationship at the end of the Obama presidency and assesses the level of closeness and differences in the Russia-Ukraine crisis as well as in a broader agenda. Describing Obama as a 'liberal realist', he argues that Obama criticised the free-riding of American power and expected Europe to take the lead in responding to Russian action vis-à-vis Ukraine. When Angela Merkel took the leadership role, this solidified the Obama-Merkel relationship and the US-German co-ordination efforts regarding the conflict manifested as a bilateral 'partnership in leadership'. While Germany is perceived as a rising geo-economic power, German and American defence policies were nonetheless moving closer to a division of labour under the pressure of Russian aggression: Germany became America's most important partner in Europe when dealing with Russia. Given the divergence on economic issues, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the eurozone, 'digital and intelligence divide', the partnership remained, however, limited in its scope. Szabo therefore concludes his analysis with the question whether the relations have deeper structural foundations that could survive the change in the White House.

Jennifer A. Yoder examines how, for historical and geopolitical reasons, the German-Polish relationship cannot be separated from the German-Russian one: whereas Germany sought to cultivate a special relationship with Russia, Poland saw a need to Europeanise relations with Russia. This produced different reactions vis-à-vis Russia following the annexation of Ukraine and differing German and Polish publics' and media interpretations regarding Russia's intentions in Ukraine. While Chancellor Merkel led the diplomatic effort over Ukraine and was instrumental in building support for sanctions (and their renewal) against Russia, she has not gone as far as her Polish partners would wish by offering Ukraine military aid or the promise of EU membership. One way to re-energise the German-Polish partnership is through a more active German role in strengthening the EU's foreign and security policies. Yoder concludes that for Germany, the Ukraine crisis illustrated how its Ostpolitik toward Russia may come into conflict with its foreign policy towards Poland and other eastern European allies. However, Germany's support for sanctions against Russia and, more recently, its support for NATO's 'double strategy' of

deterrence and diplomacy on its eastern border suggest that it is slowly coming to terms with the ‘new normal’ in Russian–European relations and, importantly, with the obligations of leadership.

Andrei Zagorski shows that the Russian perception of German policy in the context of the Russia–Ukraine crisis has not been shaped by referring to the civilian power or to geo-economic power principles. The *realpolitik* and primarily its geopolitical strand are closest to the mainstream of Russian political thinking of the political class and the professional community. Implicitly, Russian thinking follows the logic of the concept of full and genuine sovereignty, which views as sovereign actors only such states that do not depend on or share their decisions with other states/institutions. The German rejection of the Russian action in Crimea and Ukraine surprised and disappointed the Russian political and professional class. At the same time, the USA is seen as the culprit; according to this view the US provoked the Ukrainian crisis in order to prevent an emancipation of Germany and of the EU from their hegemony. From the Russian point of view, the Russian–German strategic partnership has not ended even during the Russia–Ukraine crisis: Russia expects its further development as soon as Germany establishes itself as a ‘sovereign nation’.

Finally, Alyona Getmanchuk and Sergiy Solodkyy analyse the Ukrainian perception of the German role in dealing with the Russia–Ukraine crisis. The authors show that while Ukrainian political representatives perceived Germany mostly positively as a crisis management actor, the public and the media have been more critical and suspicious. German economic interests, the tradition of *Ostpolitik* and strong ties with Russia as well as a low level of interest in Ukraine are among the main factors which caused such scepticism. At the same time, with the decisive action of Germany during the adoption and extension of the sanctions, trust in Germany has grown. While theoretical issues are not very relevant in the Ukrainian discourse about Germany, two main approaches to the German role can be detected: the liberal approach which perceives German policy as primarily norm-based and following mostly the policy line of a civilian power. Secondly, the realist school approach perceives Germany as acting mainly in accordance with its economic interest (or a ‘*Schröderisation*’ of German policy).

While the topics dealt with in this Special Issue range over the Ukraine crisis, transformations in Germany’s foreign policy more generally, change in Germany’s bilateral relations, and Germany’s impact on changes of the western order, all articles address the dynamics of change and/or continuity in foreign policy and they all take as a starting point that the Ukraine crisis and hybrid war has had an indisputable impact on the subjects these articles touch upon. Taken together, these individual articles all highlight how none of the involved countries under scrutiny here were left unaffected by Russia’s Ukraine policy, least of all Germany.

What are the takeaways of the Special Issue? The individual contributions present a multifaceted picture of Germany as a conflict manager in the context of the Russia–Ukraine crisis. The authors agree that, four years into the conflict, we have so far witnessed an active Germany, which – having departed from the traditional Russia-first policy – has influenced the dynamic of the conflict considerably, with the aim to reinstate the European security order. The Ukraine crisis itself may play just a minor role in some of the articles of this special issue. But one of the lessons that emerged and that most authors would agree on is that the crisis in Kiev, the ongoing fighting

in eastern Ukraine and ultimately Russia's annexation of Crimea combined represent a catalyst for change in Germany's policy vis-à-vis Russia, if not foreign policy change more generally. Change was underway in any case, as the Munich Security Conference speeches, in 2014, suggest; but the Ukraine crisis functioned as an impetus for this change to set in more swiftly and to catapult Germany to a leadership position it might otherwise not have taken on so early.

From the German perspective, after March 2014 the new context produced a new foreign policy approach towards Russia, a new 'hybrid Ostpolitik' in the making. Both main parties of the grand coalition have maintained a somewhat coherent and equally strong position critical of Russia, and quite unexpectedly so, taking on most of the German industry. The new grand coalition, in 2018, led by Angela Merkel, Berlin is likely to continue pursuing a strategy of sanctions, dialogue and deterrence and defence, which allows it to keep most options open. But this is not equal to suggesting that the relationship will return to normal and that there is no new Ostpolitik at all: something more fundamental seems to have changed in Germany's relationship vis-à-vis Moscow, and this seems embedded in the EU's and NATO's more general distrust of Russia's policies and its desire to revise the western international order. Thus Germany's new Ostpolitik – at least in its Russian dimension – and its growing engagement in preserving that order, contested by Russia, has stopped being a merely bilateral affair and become one of the defining elements of the present (dis)order in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Whether this means a sustainable change on the level of German polity, politics and policy is far less clear, though. There are even indications that German foreign policy has become increasingly fragile, given the financial and domestic constraints. Similarly, we see diverging interpretations of the policy performance of Germany and its multilateral context ranging from Europeanisation of German foreign policy to Germanification of European foreign policy. Also, the perspectives of individual countries regarding German policy on the Russia–Ukraine crisis as analysed by our contributors differ substantially, reflecting the shifts in German policy itself (for example the American and Polish attitudes) or ones' own wishes and preferences (Russian projections regarding Germany's role). One lesson learned therefore is that while there is a broad consensus as regards the acknowledgement of a new type of German activism in international politics due to the geographically nearby crisis, the interpretation of the nature of change in German foreign policy has not been less differentiated than before the Russia–Ukraine crisis. While this is not a new phenomenon, the international context faces a looming 'synchronised collapse' of the international order where the choices of German and European policy aimed at maintaining the order have become narrower.³⁷ If sustained, backed up by resources and domestic political consensus, German policy in the Russia–Ukraine conflict may represent a step in this direction, whatever label we may use as a descriptor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All the authors and the editors would like to dedicate this Special Issue to the memory of Anne Marie Le Gloannec, a renowned expert on German foreign policy who, having agreed to contribute an article, sadly passed away much too early. She will be missed as a brilliant academic and dear colleague.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

FUNDING

This Special issue is an output of the project ‘Germany’s Eastern Challenge and the Russia–Ukraine crisis: A New Ostpolitik in the Making?’ of the Institute of International Relations Prague and it was supported from the institutional funding provided by the Government of the Czech Republic.

ORCID

Patricia Daehnhardt  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0267-4394>

Vladimir Handl  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4179-2513>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patricia Daehnhardt is Assistant Professor of International Relations at Lusíada University and a Researcher at the IPRI-NOVA – Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. She has published on German foreign and security policy and is the author (with Maria Raquel Freire) of the book *Russian Foreign Policy in the Euro-Atlantic Area: Dynamics of Cooperation and Competition* (Coimbra University Press, 2014), and more recently of the articles ‘Euro-Atlantic Security after Trump: Relations between the European Union/CSDP and NATO’, (National Defence Institute, 2017), and ‘The Foreign Policies of Germany and Great Britain after Brexit’ (National Defence Institute, 2017), all in Portuguese. Her latest publication is ‘Tectonic Shifts in the Party Landscape? Mapping Germany’s Party System Changes’, in Marco Lisi (ed.), *Party System Change, the Crisis and the State of Democracy in Europe* (Routledge, forthcoming).

Vladimír Handl is Assistant Professor in the Department for German and Austrian Studies of the Institute of international Studies at the Faculty of Social Studies, Charles University Prague and associate of the Institute of International Relations, Prague. He has published on German relations with the Central-East European countries (for example Vladimír Handl and William Paterson, ‘The Continuing Relevance of Germany’s Engine for Central Europe and the EU’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46/3 (2013), pp.327–337) and on attitudes to Russia (most recently Jakub Eberle and Handl Vladimír, ‘Völkerrecht statt Einflusszonen! Der “Plurale Frieden” fällt in altes Denken zurück’, *Osteuropa* 67/3–4 (2017), pp.121–127, available from <https://www.zeitschrift-osteuropa.de/hefte/2017/3-4/voelkerrecht-statt-einflusszonen/>).

NOTES

1. Regarding the notion of a hybrid policy, we are inspired by Christian Mölling and Claudia Major, *A Hybrid Security Policy for Europe* (Berlin: SWP Comments, April 2015).

2. The 'Review 2014' process, initiated by the Auswärtige Amt, in 2014, was a response led by then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to engage German and foreign think tanks and civil society in the tasks of advancing ideas on how German foreign policy could be redefined. 'Review 2014. Außenpolitik weiter denken', available from <http://www.aussenpolitik-weiter-denken.de/de/themen.html> (accessed 26 Nov. 2016).
3. On Germany's role in the Libya intervention, see Alistair Miskimmon, 'German Foreign Policy and the Libya Crisis', *German Politics* 21/4 (2012), pp.392–410.
4. See, for example, Pawel Swieboda, 'Weg von der Verteidigung des Status Quo!', 11 June 2014, Review 2014, available from <http://www.aussenpolitik-weiter-denken.de/de/aussensicht/show/article/weg-von-der-verteidigung-des-status-quo.html> (accessed 26 Nov. 2016); Jan Techau, 'The Servant Leader', *Berlin Policy Journal*, 6 July 2016, available from <http://berlinpolicyjournal.com/one-star-down/> (accessed 14 July 2016).
5. Timothy Garton Ash, 'Populists are Out to Divide Us. They must be Stopped', *The Guardian*, 11 Nov. 2016, available from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/11/populists-us> (accessed 3 Dec. 2016).
6. See, for example, Hanns Maull, 'Deutschlands außenpolitische Kontinuität ist richtig', 2 July 2014, Review 2014, available from <http://www.aussenpolitik-weiter-denken.de/de/aussensicht/article/die-aussenpolitische-kontinuitaet-ist-richtig-muss-aber-angepasst-werden.html> (accessed 26 Feb. 2016). See also Hanns Maull, *Germany's Uncertain Power. Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Simon Bulmer and William E. Paterson, 'Germany as the EU's Reluctant Hegemon? Of Economic Strength and Political Constraints', *Journal of European Public Policy* 20/10 (2013), pp.1387–405; Simon Bulmer and William E. Paterson, 'Germany's Role in the Handling of the European Monetary and Refugee Crisis', in *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration*, Nov. 2016, pp.1–10, available from http://iep-berlin.de/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/10/Simon-Bulmer-and-William-Paterson_-_Germanys-role-in-the-handling-of-the-European-monetary-and-refugee-crisis.pdf (accessed 18 March 2016); Constanze Stelzenmüller, 'Die Selbstgefesselte Republik', *Internationale Politik*, Jan./Feb. 2010, pp.76–81.
7. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, 'Germany's New Global Role. Berlin Steps Up', *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2016, pp.106–7.
8. Hannes Adomeit, 'Germany's Russia Policy: From Sanctions to Nord Stream 2?', *Transatlantic Academy* 2015–2016 Paper Series No.3, March 2016, available from <http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Adomeit-web.pdf> (accessed 26 May 2017).
9. Hans-Joachim Spanger and Andrei Zagorsky, 'Constructing a Different Europe: The Peculiarities of the German–Russian Partnership', in R. Krumm, S. Medvedev and H.-H. Schröder (eds), *Constructing Identities in Europe. German and Russian Perspectives* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012), pp.221–46.
10. On the German policy on EU enlargement, see Barbara Lippert, 'Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die Erweiterung der Europäischen Union', in K. Böttger and M. Jopp (eds), *Handbuch zur deutschen Europapolitik* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016), pp.393–406; and Martin Jeřábek, *Deutschland und die Osterweiterung der Europäischen Union* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2011). On German NATO enlargement policy and relations with Russia, see Marco Overhaus, *Die deutsche NATO-Politik. Vom Ende des Kalten Krieges bis zu dem Kampf gegen den Terrorismus* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008). Russia was perceived as a member of the Euro-Atlantic community: see, for example, a consequent argument for Russian NATO membership by Volker Rühle, Klaus Naumann, Frank Elbe and Ulrich Weisser, 'Die Tür öffnen. Für Russlands Beitritt zur Nato', *Der Spiegel* 10/2010, 8 March 2010, available from <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/a-682256.html> (accessed 26 May 2016).
11. By 1992 Germany was the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Russia. See Celeste Wallander, *Mortal Friends, Best Enemies: German–Russian Cooperation after the Cold War* (New York: Cornell University, 1999), p.41.
12. Patricia Daehnhardt, 'Germany and Russia: A Changing *sui generis* Relationship', in *Russian Foreign Policy in the Euro-Atlantic Area: Cooperation and Competition Dynamics* (Coimbra: Coimbra University Press, 2014), pp.141–75 (in Portuguese).
13. Volker Rühle, then defence minister, advocated as early as March 1993, at a conference at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic should become NATO members. See Volker Rühle, 'Shaping Euro-Atlantic Policies: A Grand Strategy for a New Era', *Survival* 35/2 (1993), pp.129–37.
14. Mark Webber, James Sperling and Martin A. Smith, *NATO's Post-Cold War Trajectory: Decline Or Regeneration* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.144–5.
15. Russia ranked 11th in the German trading turnover in 2013; Poland and the Czech Republic ranked 10th and 12th respectively. See *Außenhandel. Rangfolge der Handelspartner im Außenhandel der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2013* (Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden, 2014), p.2.

16. During this time, German exports to Russia decreased from €35,802 billion in 2013 to €21,583 billion in 2016: in 2014 exports fell by 18.4 per cent, in 2015 by 25.9 per cent and in 2016 by 0.3 per cent from the previous year, respectively. In the same period, imports from Russia decreased from €41,234 billion in 2013 to €26,446 billion in 2016: in 2014 imports fell by 7.1 per cent, in 2015 by 21.5 per cent, in 2016 by 12.1 per cent, from the previous years, respectively (Statistisches Jahrbuch Deutschland und Internationales 2017, Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis), Oct. 2017, p.423, available from https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/StatistischesJahrbuch/StatistischesJahrbuch2017.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (accessed 19 Dec. 2017)).
17. Whereas in 2011 Germany imported 35,328 tons of crude oil, the number fell to 30,026 in 2014 (33.6 per cent) but increased to 32,577 in 2015 (35.7 per cent), and 36,048 in 2016 (Deutsche Rohölimporte nach ausgewählten Exportländern in den Jahren 2011 bis 2016, Statista, available from <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/2473/umfrage/rohoolimport-hauptlieferanten-von-deutschland/> (accessed 19 Dec. 2017)).
18. See, for example, Roland Götz, 'Pipeline Popanz. Irrtümer der europäischen Energiedebatte', *Osteuropa* 59/1 (2009), pp.3–18. Contrast with a critical assessment of the impact of the growing German dependence in Tom Dyson, 'Energy Security and Germany's Response to Russian Revisionism: The Dangers of Civilian Power', *German Politics* 25/4 (2016), pp.500–518.
19. On the role of historical memory on Germany's foreign policy development, see Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1997).
20. For a reflection on the historical, moral and emotional focus on Russia, see Irina Scherbakova and Karl Schlögel, *Der Russlandreflex. Einsichten in eine Beziehungskrise* (Hamburg: Edition Körber Stiftung, 2015); Bruno Schoch, 'Russische Märchenstunde. Die Schuld des Westens und Putins Kampf gegen den Faschismus', in K. Raabe and M. Sapper (eds), *Testfall Ukraine. Europa und seine Werte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), pp.233–46.
21. Constanze Stelzenmüller, 'Germany's Russia Question', *Foreign Affairs* 88/2 (2009), pp.89–100.
22. On the problematic aspects of the personalised relations, see Katrin Bastian and Roland Götz, *Deutsch-russische Beziehungen im Europäischen Kontext. Zwischen Interessenallianz und strategischer Partnerschaft* (SWP, Berlin, Diskussionspapier FG 5, 2005/03, May 2005).
23. Gernot Erler and Peter W. Schulze (eds), *Die Europäisierung Russlands. Moskau zwischen Modernisierungspartnerschaft und Großmachtrolle* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2012); Gernot Erler, *Mission Weltfrieden. Deutschlands neue Rolle in Weltpolitik* (Freiburg etc.: Herder Vrlg., 2009), pp.133–82.
24. For an analysis of the crisis and proposals to integrate Russia, see Matthias Dembinski, Hans-Joachim Schmidt, Bruno Schoch and Hans-Joachim Spanger, *Nach dem Kaukasus-Krieg: Einbindung statt Eindämmung Russlands* (HSFK, Frankfurt a.M., HSKF Report 2008, No.6).
25. For the first see, for example, the declaration of the German–Russian Forum (institution backed by German–Russian business), 'Russlandpolitik: Weniger klagen, mehr verhandeln', Deutsch/Russisches Forum, *Pressemitteilung* 04/2013 or Eberhard Sandschneider, 'Raus aus der Moralecke. Die deutsche Außenpolitik sollte der Welt nicht ihre Werte diktieren', *Die Zeit*, 20 Feb. 2013, available from <http://www.zeit.de/2013/10/Aussenpolitik-Diskussion-Moral/komplettansicht?print> (accessed 19 May 2016). For the latter position see Jörg Lau, 'Das bisschen Unterdrückung. Genscher, Mißfelder und der regierungsnahen Thinktank DGAP – Deutschlands Außenpolitiker arrangieren sich mit Diktatoren und Halbdemokraten', *Die Zeit*, 21 Feb. 2013, available from <http://www.zeit.de/2013/09/Aussenpolitik-Werte-Diktatoren/komplettansicht> (accessed 19 May 2016); Wolfgang Eichwede, 'Einmischung tut not! Wider den Selbstbetrug der Putin-Freunde', *Osteuropa* 63/4 (2013), pp.91–100; or *New Power, New Responsibility. Elements of German Foreign and Security Policy for a Changing World* (Berlin and Washington, DC: SWP and GMF, 2013).
26. Joachim Gauck, 'Germany's Role in the World: Reflections on Responsibility, Norms and Alliances'. Speech at the opening of the Munich Security Conference, 31 Jan. 2014, Munich, available from https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2014/01/140131-Muenchner-Sicherheitskonferenz-Englisch.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (accessed 22 April 2016).
27. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, *Review. Krise. Ordnung. Europa* (Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt, 2014), p.9, available from <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/269656/d26e1e50cd5ac847b4b9eb4a757e438/review2014-abschlussbericht-data.pdf> (accessed 5 Feb. 2016).
28. Even German peace research pleaded for a change of policy vis-à-vis Russia and for 'congement', a combination of containment and engagement of Russia. See Matthias Dembinski, Hans-Joachim Schmidt and Hans-Joachim Spanger, *Einhegung: Die Ukraine, Russland und die europäische Sicherheitsordnung* (HSFK, Frankfurt/M, HSKF-Report No.3/2014). The later development of the thesis arrived at a rather controversial proposal of a 'plural peace', see M. Dembinski and H-J Spanger, 'Pluraler Frieden. Leitideen für eine neue Russlandpolitik', *Osteuropa* 67/3–4 (2017), pp.87–96.

29. Simon Bulmer and William E. Paterson, 'Germany and the Crisis: Asset or Liability?', in D. Dinan, N. Nugent and W.E. Paterson (eds), *The European Union in Crisis* (London: Palgrave, 2017), pp.220–24.
30. 'Wieder Krieg in Europa? Nicht in unserem Namen!' (8 Dec. 2014), a petition of 60 prominent German personalities – academics, journalists, artists and former politicians, available from <http://www.zeit.de/politik/2014-12/aufruf-russland-dialog> (accessed 7 Feb. 2016); the petition was signed by 32,888 German citizens by its closing date on 4 Feb. 2015, available from <https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/appell-wieder-krieg-in-europa-nicht-in-unserem-namen> (accessed 5 Feb. 2016).
31. Jörg Himmelreich, 'Etwas Besseres als Europa. Deutsch-russische Seelenverwandschaft', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 31 Dec. 2014, available from <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/etwas-besseres-als-europa-1.18452897> (accessed 22 April 2016).
32. For the changing role of Germany see, for example, Stefan Meister, *Reframing of Germany's Russia Policy – an Opportunity for the EU* (London and Berlin: ECFR, ECFR Policy Brief April 2014), Wolfgang Seibel, 'Arduous Learning or New Uncertainties? The Emergence of German Diplomacy in Ukrainian Crisis', *Global Policy* 6/Issue Supplement S1 (2015), pp.1–17; Hannes Adomeit, *German–Russian Relations. Change of Paradigm vs. 'Business as Usual 2015'* (Paris and Brussels: IFRI, Note du Cefra 120, Feb. 2015); Liana Fix, 'Leadership in the Ukrainian Crisis: A German Moment', in Niklas Helwig (ed.), *Europe's New Political Engine. Germany's Role in the EU's Foreign and Security Policy* (Helsinki: FIIA Report 44), pp.111–32. Some analysts perceived the German approach as too soft on Russia, see Hans Kundnani, 'Leaving the West Behind. Germany Looks East', *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2015, available from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/leaving-west-behind> (accessed 5 Feb. 2016). Germany's criticism of Russia's actions was met with surprise and disbelief in Moscow; an analysis by the Russian Institute of Europe subsequently focused exclusively on pragmatic areas of co-operation (economy, research, culture etc.), avoiding the issue of Ukraine and security policy, see *ГЕРМАНИЯ. 2015. Часть II.* (Институт Европы Российской академии наук. Доклады Института Европы No.328, 2015), pp.65–82.
33. As Giles et al. suggest, 'Germany's evidence-based stance – initially giving Russia the benefit of the doubt, then acting firmly – may have helped pull other European countries, most notably Norway and the UK, along in its wake, even to the detriment of their own economies'. See Keir Giles, Philip Hanson, Roderic Lyne, James Nixey, James Sherr and Andrew Wood, *The Russian Challenge* (London: Chatham House Report, June 2015), p.36.
34. On the concept of hybrid policy, see Mölling and Major, *A Hybrid Security Policy for Europe*.
35. Außenhandel. Rangfolge der Handelspartner im Außenhandel der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 2016 (Statistisches Bundesamt, Destatis, 24 Oct. 2017), p.2, available from https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesamtwirtschaftUmwelt/Aussenhandel/Tabellen/RangfolgeHandelspartner.pdf?__blob=publicationFile (accessed 5 Nov. 2017).
36. Tuomas Forsberg, 'The EU as a Normative Power (Once Again). A Conceptual Clarification of an Ideal Type', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49/6 (2011), pp.1183–204.
37. Hanns W. Maull (ed.), *Auflösung oder Ablösung? Die internationale Ordnung im Umbruch* (Berlin: SWP Studie, Dec. 2017).