

THE LAST DECADE OF GERMANY'S RUSSIA POLICY: CHANGE THROUGH THE PRISM OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND SPEECHES (2005-2016)¹

David Sarkisyan

Introduction

The “neglected phenomenon” (Holsti, 2016) of change and restructuring in foreign policy has greatly increased in relevance against the background of recent years’ swift redirections in policy courses of a number of countries.

One of the most significant changes has occurred in Germany’s Russia policy. The relationship has collapsed from the strategic partnership level to the application of economic sanctions. Though the sanctions policy towards Russia holds for several consecutive years, cooperation between Moscow and Berlin continues on a number of issues, including the economic ones. Thus it’s difficult to fit the reality in the narratives of purely confrontational or cooperative discourses.

Therefore, in this paper we will trace the levels of change in Germany’s foreign policy towards Russia during the chancellorship of Angela Merkel. We will also focus on the crises of 2008 and 2014 and try to explain why they had radically different effects on German foreign policy towards Russia.

To answer these questions, we apply Hermann’s conceptual scheme (1990), as well as comparative case study analysis of the two crises for each decision stage identified in the scheme.

In this context, the official domestic and bilateral political documents serve as a litmus paper, which identifies the prevailing tendencies of the bilateral relationship. Therefore we will supplement the theoretical analysis with empirical evidence from the textual data.

The main themes of Germany’s official political discourse towards Russia and their dynamics throughout the chancellorship of Angela Merkel, since November 2005 until April 2016, will be analyzed.

The methodology of the empirical part of the research involves traditional document analysis and quantitative content analysis. Among the studied textual sources are:

- The election manifestos of the five largest German parties: Christian Democratic Union/Christian Socialist Union (CDU/CSU), Social-democratic party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands - SPD), Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Greens and the Left, as well as the three coalitional agreements from 2005, 2009 and 2013².

¹ The paper was presented at the 75th Annual Midwest Political Science Association Conference, Chicago 2017, Panel Session: Text as Data in Foreign Policy: Op Code and Content Analysis

² *CDU, CSU and SPD*, Working together for Germany with Courage and Compassion: Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD, Berlin, 2005, from http://bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2004_2007/2006/01/_Anlagen/coalition-agreement951220.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1 , Oct. 10, 2016.

CDU, CSU and FDP, Growth, Education, Unity: Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and FDP, Berlin, 2009, from https://www.fdp.de/files/565/2009-203_en_Koalitionsvertrag_2009.pdf , Oct. 10, 2016.

CDU, CSU und SPD, Deutschlands Zukunft gestalten: Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD, Berlin, 2013, from: <https://www.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/dokumente/koalitionsvertrag.pdf> , Oct. 10, 2016.

- 564 documents related to the Russo-German relations of 2005 November-2016 April period (archived in the electronic repository³ of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation).
- 193 speeches of Merkel⁴, delivered since the annexation of Crimea throughout the period of 2014 March – 2016 April were used to determine the micro-dynamics of the foreign policy change caused by the Ukrainian crisis.

The paper will proceed as follows. In the first part we are going to present the conceptual framework of foreign policy change developed by Hermann. Afterwards it will be applied to Germany's Russia policy under Merkel in 2005-2016. The levels of foreign policy changes will be determined and the time span will be classified into sub periods divided by them. In the following parts the outlined foreign policy change levels will be tested against the textual data from the key domestic and bilateral policy documents of the examined period. Next, we will examine the different effects of geopolitical crises of 2008 and 2014 on Germany's foreign policy change levels applying Hermann's scheme of 7 phases in the decision process of a major foreign policy change. Finally, we will illustrate the micro-dynamics of framing the new image of Russia, according to the new problem/goal change in the German foreign policy, using the results of the content analysis.

The concluding part will sum up the discussion and outline the contributions to the literature.

A Conceptual Scheme of Foreign Policy Change

Hermann identifies “four graduated levels” of major foreign policy change: *adjustment changes, program changes, problem/goal changes and international orientation changes*. While the initial level merely implies quantitative variation in effort, the second level requires a qualitative change in methods serving a given foreign political goal. Problem/goal change deals with the replacement/forfeiting of a problem or a goal itself. Finally, the ultimate level of international orientation change signifies a total reorientation in world affairs.

Hermann also introduces the taxonomy of four change agents: *leader, bureaucratic advocacy, domestic restructuring and external shock*. Leader-driven change is conditional on the “conviction, power and energy” of the head of executive to force the government to alter the course. The second agent implies some governmental group advocating for a change in foreign policy. In case of domestic restructuring, a societal segment, whose support the regime crucially relies on, acts as the driver of change. Finally, “dramatic international events”, the external shocks, can also act as a trigger of change.

The impact of each of these change agents does not have to take place in isolation; rather there may be an interaction between the four with one activating the other.

Finally, Hermann identifies 7 phases of a major foreign policy change that a decision process proceeds through. We will discuss these phases as applied to Germany's Russia policy later in this paper.

Change and Continuity in Germany's Russia Policy under Merkel

We argue that Germany's Russia policy under Angela Merkel can be divided into four main periods.

³ Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, Внешняя политика. Двусторонние отношения. Федеративная Республика Германия. From <http://www.mid.ru/maps/de/?currentpage=main-country> , Accessed: Oct. 10, 2016

⁴ Die Bundesregierung, Reden, from https://www.bundesregierung.de/SiteGlobals/Forms/Webs/Breg/Suche/DE/Nachrichten/Redensuche2_formular.html?nn=391814&doctype.HASH=08c66c768cd5cb24e3d&path.HASH=e8e874fa01e22e8f2512&searchtype=news&path=%2Fbpainternet%2Fcontent%2Fde%2Frede*+%2Fbpainternet%2Fcontentarchiv%2Fde%2Farchiv17%2Frede*&doctype=speech&searchtype.HASH=ec0d611f8a232224ded3 , Accessed: Oct. 10, 2016

1. 2005-2008,
2. 2008-2012,
3. 2012-2014,
4. 2014-2016

The first phase, which started with Merkel taking the post of the chancellor in the end of 2005 and lasted approximately until the August war of 2008, has been mostly characterized by continuity of the Schroeder's era policies. There were several minor corrections to the overall course. E.g. Merkel was more prone to criticize Russia on the lack of progress in democratization and on the situation with the human rights than her predecessor. The rhetoric of the strategic partnership has also been toned down in comparison with the Schroeder's period (more on that in the next chapter). However, all these amendments were carried out at the *adjustment level* with no major policy change. The economic cooperation was on the steady rise and political collaboration continued. The main agent behind the adjustment changes was the *leader* herself. Unlike Schroeder, who had a personal friendship with Putin, Merkel introduced a more business-like, pragmatic atmosphere in the German-Russian relations. Other factors were the *domestic restructuring and bureaucratic advocacy* which took the form of social-democrats (SPD) losing their ground to Christian Democratic Union/Christian Socialist Union (CDU/CSU) as the result of the elections in 2005. CDU/CSU was generally more critical of Russia than the SPD, which is reflected in its last three pre-election manifestos and key speeches of the politicians.

In 2008-2012, until the return of Vladimir Putin to presidency, the German-Russian relations underwent much more significant changes. Applying Hermann's taxonomy, the observed alteration of policy is argued to be at the level of *program change*. Namely, the new instrument of Partnership for Modernization was introduced; stronger emphasis was placed on enhancing liberal contacts and other means of engagement. However, the initial *goal*, which the policy addressed, i.e. enhancing cooperation with Russia and making it cooperate in return, remained unchanged. There were two *external shocks* in this period: the Georgian War and the transition of presidency to Medvedev. The latter *shock* was a positive one, and resulted in a more active engagement approach (*program change*) on the German side, while Medvedev was considered to be a more liberal and Western-oriented leader than Putin. In its turn, the Georgian War did not spark a negative change in Germany's Russia policy.

In 2012-2014, since the beginning of Putin's third term as the president, the general trends laid in the previous period had not been reversed until the Ukrainian crisis. Though Putin's return and the accompanying consolidation of authoritarianism in Russia were negatively received in Berlin, the Partnership for Modernization was not cancelled. This was partly due to the *degree of institutionalization* factor (the extent of government's commitment to a policy) mentioned by Goldmann (1988, p. 44). Some researchers (Forsberg, 2016) see the roots of current alteration of Germany's Russian course in 2012; however, no major policy change occurred in 2012-2014 period, rather a number of adjustments, with positive rhetoric in the official speeches and documents being toned down once again. Finally, the most profound shift in Germany's Russia policy, argued to be at the level of *problem/goal change*, occurred in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis. The Russian aggression in Ukraine constituted a totally new *problem* for German foreign policy. Economic sanctions, as well as a series of political measures, like cancelling the EU-Russia annual summits, were adopted at the *program change* level to address the solution of the new *problem/goal*. Siddi argues (2016) that no "major reconsideration of German foreign policy" towards Russia has occurred, because the engagement approach and Ostpolitik have not been abandoned altogether. However, despite the abovementioned *program changes*, which already constitute a *major foreign policy change* in Hermann's interpretation of the term, a containment dimension was added to the overall Russia policy. The new *goal* of containing Russia has been mixed with engaging it in a conengagement approach propagated by Ischinger (2015). The primary reason for this change was, of course, the *external shock* of the annexation of Crimea and the support for the separatists in the East of Ukraine. At the same time, this *external shock* (unlike the Georgian war) caused

a significant *domestic restructuring* both among the political parties (Adomeit, 2015) and the general public (Stokes, 2015) which in its turn affected the *leader* (chancellor). Summing up this brief historical excursus, we can notice that there were two *major changes* (in Hermann's understanding of the term) in Merkel's foreign policy towards Russia in 2008 and in 2014, and both of them were connected with *external shocks*. However, the effects of these shocks on foreign policy were radically different. In the following parts of the paper we will provide evidence from textual data for the abovementioned arguments that German foreign policy towards Russia underwent adjustment changes in 2005-2008, program change in 2008-2012, more adjustment changes in 2012-2014 and a major goal/problem change in 2014-2016.

Germany's Russia Policy in the Three Coalition Agreements: a Comparative Analysis

We will start with the comparative analysis of the three coalition agreements of 2005, 2009 and 2013. In the 2005 agreement there is only one paragraph devoted to Russia. It starts with a sentence on Germany's intention to work towards a strategic partnership with Russia together with the European partners. The term "strategic partnership", which was a heritage of Schroeder's era, has been subsequently eliminated from the two following agreements. Germany has also expressed its interest in Russia's modernization process through increased political, economic and societal cooperation. "A Russia which prospers and which – guided by the values to which Europe is committed and taking into consideration its traditions – successfully completes its transformation into a stable democracy" has been proclaimed as the aim of this modernization⁵. The agreement of 2009 points out the German willingness to assist Russia in reducing shortcomings in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy⁶. The mentioning of the shortcoming in the abovementioned aspects of Russian domestic politics was initiated during Merkel's chancellorship and it did not occur during Schroeder. In 2005 CDU/CSU, FDP and the Greens⁷ mentioned the problems in the spheres of democratic development and human rights in Russia in their election programs. However, these points were not included in the coalition agreement probably because of SPD's opposition which has never touched upon these issues in its election manifestos in 2005-2013. Parallel to the strengthening of CDU/CSU's positions these points were included in the subsequent coalition agreements. These were expressions of the abovementioned adjustment changes of 2005-2008 period in Germany's Russia policy, while no major measures like sanctions for human rights violations were adopted by Berlin.

The sentence on the expansion of economic ties and creation of "long-term, reliable energy partnerships without one-sided dependencies" has practically been pasted into the 2009 agreement from the coalition agreement of 2005. This implies continuity in the economic policy regardless of the junior coalition partner (SPD or FDP). Another constant of Germany's Russia policy is embedded in the repetition of the thesis on the importance of cooperating with Russia when it comes to the solution of a number of regional and global problems.

An interesting point of 2005 agreement was the offer to support Russia in creating better conditions for a political solution to the Chechen conflict. The concern regarding the acceptable political solution of this

⁵ *CDU, CSU and SPD*, Working together for Germany with Courage and Compassion: Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD, Berlin, 2005, from http://bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2004_2007/2006/01/_Anlagen/coalition-agreement951220.pdf?_blob=publicationFile&v=1, Oct. 10, 2016.

⁶ *CDU, CSU and FDP*, Growth, Education, Unity: Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and FDP, Berlin, 2009, from https://www.fdp.de/files/565/2009-203_en_Koalitionsvertrag_2009.pdf, Oct. 10, 2016, p.171

⁷ *CDU, CSU*, Deutschlands Chancen Nutzen: Wachstum, Arbeit, Sicherheit. Regierungsprogramm 2005-2009, Berlin, 2005, S. 37

FDP, Arbeit hat Vorfahrt: Deutschlandprogramm 2005, Berlin, 2005, S. 49

Die Grünen. Wahlprogramm 2005. Berlin, 2005, S. 51

conflict was expressed in the pre-election manifestos of FDP and the Green party⁸. Subsequently, this thesis lost urgency and was excluded from the next agreements.

The point on the common neighbors of Russia and Germany deserves a special mention. The 2005 agreement contained the following phrase: "We want to shape our relations with Russia in a way that includes our common neighbors in a spirit of friendship and trust". It was borrowed from the election program of CDU/CSU⁹. In 2009, however, a more firm and assertive formulation was used: "We **will** take into consideration the legitimate interests of our neighbors in our bilateral relations with Russia." The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and the exclusion of SPD (the main advocate of Russian actions during the war¹⁰) from the coalition of 2009 had an influence on the German attitude towards *Zwischeneuropa* (the geopolitical space between Russia and the EU), which was resembled in a more alert phrase. This was indeed indicative of a program change directed at more active engagement of Russia to prevent further acts against the interests of common neighbors.

The 2009 election manifesto of SPD contained a critique of American plans on installation of anti-missile shield in Europe. It also supported the construction of a common security zone from Vancouver to Vladivostok that would encompass NATO members and Russia. This was practically a reiteration of Medvedev's proposal. Russia itself was characterized as a responsible partner. All these points were not included in the coalition agreement of the new, more "atlanticist" government, which did not include SPD.

The last coalition agreement of 2013 has some remarkable differences from the two preceding ones. With the return of SPD to the coalition and parallel to Russia's growing role in the world politics, as well as due to the "Partnership for Modernization" between EU and Russia, the volume of text devoted to Russia has greatly increased. It was entitled "Open dialogue and broader cooperation with Russia". Russia is described as "the largest and most important neighbor of the European Union". A willingness to expand the modernization partnership is expressed together with the mention of different attitudes to a modernization partnership, hinting at insufficient attention to political modernization (democratization) from the Russian elite. This implies that the core program of "Partnership for Modernization" remained intact but some adjustment changes were made in Germany's perceptions of Russia's intentions. The term "strategic partnership" used in the election program of SPD was probably blocked by CDU/CSU and there was only a mention of "modernization partnership" in the coalition agreement.

CDU/CSU's critique of Russia's domestic politics filters into the coalition agreement in a milder form, compared to the 2009 agreement. "Russia is called upon to adhere to the democratic standards of a state under the rule of law", however shortcomings were not mentioned, which was probably the result of FDP's exclusion from the coalition. Critique of human rights situation in Russia occupied one third of the text volume devoted to Russia in the election manifesto of FDP. Again this is indicative of only adjustment changes in period of 2012-2014.

In 2013 agreement a paragraph on visa liberalization was added, which was a consensual point present in the manifestos of CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP and the Greens. For the first time, Germany's willingness to advocate for greater coherence in EU's policy towards Russia is mentioned. This became the harbinger of Germany playing the role of EU leader during the Ukrainian crisis. At the same time the need for a new partnership agreement between EU and Russia is noted. A great importance is attached to deepening the trilateral dialogue between Germany, Russia and Poland. Regarding the thesis on mutual neighbors, the intensity of "alert" approach is slightly toned down with the phrase "we **will** take into consideration..." replaced with "we intend to take account of the justified interests of our common neighbors". The term

⁸ *FDP*, Arbeit hat Vorfahrt: Deutschlandprogramm 2005, Berlin, 2005, S. 49

Die Grünen. Wahlprogramm 2005. Berlin, 2005, S. 51

⁹ *CDU, CSU*, Deutschlands Chancen Nutzen: Wachstum, Arbeit, Sicherheit. Regierungsprogramm 2005-2009, Berlin, 2005, S. 37

¹⁰ *Sarkisyan D.*, Diplomacy-Power Ratio in European-Russia Relations, "Global Studies Journal" 8/3, 2015.

“legitimate” has also been substituted with a less binding word “justified”. This lies in the realm of adjustment changes with no major qualitative change.

The last but not the least, the concluding paragraph on Russia contains the following statement: “Security in and for Europe can only be achieved **with** Russia and **not against** it”. This point, which is closest to the SPD’s position, was borrowed word-by-word from FDP’s election manifesto and repeated by Merkel in her speech from 2015¹¹. I.e. there was an inter-party consensus on this issue. It is interesting to trace the radical shift in the rhetoric in the “White Paper” of the Bundeswehr, published in June 2016. It is unequivocally stated that: “Without a fundamental change in policy, Russia will constitute a challenge to the security of our continent in the foreseeable future”. Such diametrical shift is obviously placed in the problem/goal change spectrum.

The Fluctuations of “Strategic Partnership”

Another indicator of the general level of Germany-Russia relations and Germany’s Russia policy, in particular, is the fluctuation of the frequency of using the term “strategic partnership” in the official high-level bilateral documents, statements and speeches.

In 2005, chancellor Schroeder remarked that the Russians and the Germans have never been so unified and they were unified by the strategic partnership. In this chapter we will trace the dynamics of the frequency which this term was used with in the bilateral Russo-German official documents throughout the chancellorship of A. Merkel.

First of all, it is noteworthy that the discourse on strategic partnership has significantly declined in 2005-2008, when the chancellor of Germany was Angela Merkel and the president of Russia was Vladimir Putin. This was a result of negative adjustments in Germany’s foreign policy towards Russia in the mentioned sub period. After 2008, in 2009-2011, the period of Medvedev’s presidency, the usage frequency of “strategic partnership” rises again. This coincides with the progressive developments in the Russo-German relations. Namely, Partnership for Modernization between Germany and Russia started in 2008, which turned into the Partnership for Modernization between EU and Russia in 2010 (the abovementioned program change). In 2012, when Putin was reelected as the president of Russia, intensity of the strategic partnership discourse has once again declined to the level of 2007-2008 which is indicative of the negative adjustment changes mentioned above.

Table 1. “Strategic partnership”: frequency table

Year	Frequency
2005	8 ¹²
2006	27
2007	8
2008	6
2009	16
2010	15
2011	12
2012	8
2013	7
2014	2
2015	1
2016	0

¹¹Merkel, A.. *Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich der 51. Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz*. 2015. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/02/2015-02-07-merkel-sicherheitskonferenz.html> , Accessed: March 13, 2016

¹² Data for 2005 involves November 22-December 31 period, i.e. after Merkel assumed chancellorship. If we average the 8 repetitions per this 40 days for the whole year, we will get 72 repetitions.

In 2014-2016, because of the Ukrainian crisis and the resulting goal/problem change in Germany's Russia policy, the strategic partnership discourse decays even further. In 2014, Russia's minister of foreign affairs, Sergey Lavrov, used the term only once on February 14, i.e. before the annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the crisis in the East of Ukraine. The term was used one more time on June 9, before the adoption of sectorial economic sanctions, in a commentary by the Department of Information and Press on the occasion of trilateral meeting between the minister of foreign affairs of Russia, Germany and Poland.

Throughout the year of 2015 Lavrov used the term strategic partnership only once, and in 2016 (up to May) the term was not used at all in any of the bilateral documents and speeches related to the Germany-Russia relations. In 2014-2016 the term was not used by the German side at all.

Problem/Goal Change as Reflected in the Russian Themes of Merkel's Speeches

The speeches of the chancellor, the tonality and the scope of the Russia-related themes are another important indicator of Germany's Russia policy.

To illustrate the problem/goal change in Germany's foreign policy towards Russia, we shall proceed with the content analysis of the thematic composition of Merkel's speeches delivered in 2014-2016. Out of 193 speeches of the chancellor that span through the March 2014 to April 2016, the topic of Russia was spoken about in 54 of them (approximately 28%).

Logically enough since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis the largest portion in the Russian themes was occupied by those of "annexation of Crimea", "breaches of the principles of international law" and the application of "sanction". They occur in 15.6%, 14.5% and 13% of all speeches correspondingly.

An intermediate theme between the confrontational and cooperative discourses was the narrative of "the importance of dialogue/negotiations with Russia", which was present in 10.9% of the speeches.

The theme of "cooperation/partnership/good relations with Russia" was subdued against the background of the Ukrainian crisis but still present in 4.7% of the speeches. It is worth mentioning that in none of the 193 speeches Merkel used the term "strategic partnership". At most she talked about partnership, cooperation and the willingness to have good relations with Russia.

Among the other themes are "development of good relations with Russia and the EU by the neighbors following the model "both...and" not "either...or"" (3.6%), "cooperation with Russia on Iran and Syria" (2.6%), the abovementioned possibility to achieve European security "with Russia and not against it" (1.6%).

In 1.6% of her speeches Merkel touched upon the issue of lowering the dependency on Russian energy carriers. Though Germany has decreased the proportion of Russian gas in the overall energy consumption, the low intensity of this theme even in times of the Ukrainian crisis is explained by the long duration of this process.

Micro-dynamics of Problem/Goal Change - Narratives and Reality

In this chapter, tracing the thematic micro-dynamics of Merkel's speeches and the variables of their political and economic background, we will show that the new image of Russia has been framed in Germany's foreign policy towards Russia. This new perception provides evidence for the argument of the foreign policy change at the problem/goal level.

Applying crosstabulation method an associative link has been discovered between the variables of theme of "decreasing energy dependence from Russia" and the price of oil. Each month in the period 2014 March – 2016 April was treated as an observation. The abovementioned narrative was coded as a binary variable with the value of "1" if the topic was raised during a month and "0" otherwise. Average monthly oil prices were classified into the categories of 1 (\$1-\$30), 2 (\$31-\$60), 3 (\$61-\$90) and 4 (more than \$90).

It was established that the issue of decreasing the dependency from Russian energy imports was raised during the high oil prices, more than \$90 per barrel.

Table 2. Decreasing energy dependence from Russia and Brent oil price

Count		OilGroup				Total
		1	2	3	4	
Energy	0	24	5	11	11	51
Dep	1	0	0	0	3	3
Total		24	5	11	14	54

Sig. 0.028

Another peculiarity of Merkel's Russian discourse was the connection between the sanctions narrative and the conflict intensity in the East of Ukraine. The aggregated monthly data on the casualties of the Ukrainian army and paramilitary troops published by the Information-Analytical Center of the National Security and Defense Service of Ukraine¹³ were used as a proxy variable for the intensity of conflict. Concerning the authenticity of the data, we would like to note that the author does not exclude the possibility of the figures being diminished by the Ukrainian party to the conflict. However, we are not that much interested in the precise absolute values but in the dynamics of the casualty rate or change in its relative values. Suppose that the Ukrainian authorities report daily casualty figures twice lower than the actual ones. In this case the model is still able to trace the change in the intensity of the conflict, while we assume that on average the figures for all days in the observed time span would be decreased proportionally.

The monthly casualties' variable was divided into four categories: 1-100 (casualties), 101-200, 201-300 and more than 300.

The sanctions discourse turned out to be most intensive during the medium intensity of the conflict: 101-200 casualties per month. It makes sense since negotiations are prioritized during the low intensity of the conflict, while diplomatic solution may seem more likely, while excessive threats of sanctions may be counterproductive. On the other hand, with the casualty rate higher than 200 soldiers per month, i.e. under the conditions of a full scale war, when deterrence has already failed, threatening sanctions and hoping for success becomes useless.

Table 3. Sanctions theme and casualty rate

Crosstab

Count		Casualties grouped				Total
		1	2	3	4	
Sanctions	0	14	4	3	1	22
	1	6	13	5	0	24
Total		20	17	8	1	46

Sig. 0.024

The next variable of interest is the narrative of cooperation, partnership and/or good relations with Russia. We will examine its connection with the indicators of Russia's economic development and Brent

¹³ Информационно-аналитический центр Национальной безопасности Украины, Новости, from <http://mediarnbo.org/?lang=ru>

Accessed: Oct. 10, 2016

oil price. A statistically significant link has been established between lower GDP growth in Russia and the cooperative discourse. Russia's quarterly GDP growth in 2014-2015 ranged from -1.31% to 0.49%. The data for quarterly GDP growth come from the Federal Service of State Statistics of the Russian Federation. 78% of Merkel's statements on cooperation were made during Russia's negative GDP growth of -0.74% and lower.

Table 4. Cooperative discourse and Russia's GDP growth

		RusGDP						Total	
		-1.31	-1.16	-.74	-.64	-.57	.14		.49
Cooperation, partnership, good relations with Russia	0	0	9	9	4	5	1	9	37
	1	3	2	2	0	2	0	0	9
Total		3	11	11	4	7	1	9	46

Sig. 0.013

Table 5. Cooperative discourse and Brent oil price

		Oil Price				Total
		1	2	3	4	
Cooperation, partnership, good relations with Russia	0	20	2	9	14	45
	1	4	3	2	0	9
Total		24	5	11	14	54

Sig. 0.023

At the same time, while the Russian GDP is highly correlated with the oil price, a statistically significant link has been established between the abovementioned cooperative narrative and Brent oil price. Parallel to the decline in oil price the frequency of such statements rose.

Thus, scrutinizing the interplay between the background variables and content analysis variables we can see that a new image of Russia was framed. Russia can be expected to be cooperated with when it's weak, it should be a concern when it's strong and it should be deterred during the medium intensity of the conflict to prevent further escalation. This is in line with the thesis outlined in the "White Paper" that Russia constitutes a challenge for the European security.

Two External Shocks and Their Impact at Different Phases of Decision Process

In this chapter I will apply Hermann's conceptual framework of decision making stages in foreign policy change to explain why the geopolitical crises of 2008 and 2014 had different effects on the German policy towards Russia.

Phase 1 and 2: Initial Policy Expectations and External Actor Responses and Other Environmental Stimuli

Hermann argues that in case policy expectations fail to fulfill, policymakers either change their expectations or blame the failure on some external conditions (Hermann, 1990, p. 15).

Those external conditions, the geopolitical context in which the crises unfolded, were different in 2008 and 2014. Prior to the Russo-Georgian war NATO completed its fifth enlargement in 2004, the membership of Ukraine and Georgia was discussed at the Bucharest summit in 2008, and on top of that the installation of anti-missile shield in Europe has added fuel to the controversy between Russia and NATO.

Besides that, the shorter the time period between the start of a policy implementation and the object's action, the more likely are the policymakers to perceive it as a cause and effect relationship. In 2008 Russian aggression may have been interpreted in Berlin as a protective response to the immediate geopolitical prelude, while German leadership was not happy either with Bush's plans of integrating Ukraine and Georgia in NATO at a stepped-up pace. In 2014 there were no such immediate geopolitical developments that may have been interpreted as a cause for Russia's defense reaction¹⁴.

Phase 3: Recognition of Discrepant Information

External shocks arguably have more chances to be recognized provided they employ large amounts of resources, remain intact for longer time periods and are strengthened by other events of a kind. The Ukrainian crisis has lasted for years unlike the brief Georgian war, as well as became much more resource-consuming for Russia. Furthermore, recidivism of aggression has also contributed to a shift in German policymakers' perception of Kremlin's intentions.

Phase 4: Postulation of a Connection between Problem and Policy

Shorter time frame separating the policy implementation and failure to reach the goal contributes to better perception of policy's insolvency. On the eve of the August war in 2008 there was a lack of effort on the side of Germany and EU to engage Russia politically. A whole range of abovementioned instruments and programs was developed after the crisis. In sharp contrast, the Ukrainian crisis broke out at the peak of Germany's engagement approach to Russia, which testified for its preventive inefficiency.

Phase 5: Development of Alternatives

At this stage sensitivity to contextual information is important for proposing alternatives to the existing course. Besides the broader geopolitical mosaic, transition of presidency in Russia was also part of the context. Medvedev, as a more cooperative Russian president (Spechler, 2010), may have contributed to portraying the "defender" type of Kremlin strategy (using Treisman's (2016) taxonomy) that should be tackled with engagement and not containment. However, in 2014, after the return of hardliner Putin to presidency, a more "imperialist" (Treisman, 2016) image of Russia (that should be countered with containment) was projected.

Phase 6: Building an Authoritative Consensus for New Options

Norms and ideology shared by policymakers are crucial at this stage for reaching a consensus. The two crises may have also looked differently from the point of view of democratic norms, deeply entrenched in the post-WWII Germany's foreign political identity. Tbilisi heavily relied on military force (including its usage against civilians (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, 2009)) ignoring the prospects for peaceful regulation and nations' right for self-determination. Of course, it does not justify the Russian actions that went as far as bombing and invading Georgian cities located far from South Ossetia, but it ameliorated the negative perception of Russian response in the eyes of German foreign policy establishment. This was reflected in Steinmeier's (2008) and Merkel's (Deutsche Welle staff, 2008)

¹⁴ Libyan crisis and outbreak of war in Syria both occurred well in advance, in 2011.

remarks. Annexing Crimea, however, by taking advantage of political instability in Ukraine and supplying armaments to non-peaceful separatists looked like an outright aggression.

Phase 7: Implementation of New Measures

Finally, specific formulation of expectations for the new policy, as well as follow-up and review work is important for the successful realisation of the new course. In the Ukrainian case the goals of sanctions were specifically outlined, and permanent monitoring of the situation has been established with subsequent prolongations of sanctions because of lack of progress on Minsk agreements or Crimean issue.

Conclusion

German foreign policy towards Russia during the chancellorship of Merkel has mostly been endogenously continuous. This is in line with both theoretical and empirical literature on foreign political stability of parliamentary democracies and studies on post-Cold War Germany's foreign policy. Some aspects of Germany's Russia policy and their change have been reflected in the coalition agreements of the last three German governments, bilateral high-level documents and statements, as well as chancellor's speeches.

Accounting for foreign policy change and its levels we can identify 4 main sub-periods in the last decade of Germany's Russia policy: 2005-2008 – adjustment changes, 2008-2012 – program change, 2012-2014 – adjustment changes and 2014-2016 goal/problem change. Thus there were two major foreign policy changes.

The *external shocks*, though with varying effects, were the main causes of change in the observed period. The two crises had significant dissimilarities that translated into different reactions by German policymakers almost at all stages of foreign policy decision process.

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