



Russia

Dealing with an awkward partner

NIELS ANNEN
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- The restraint and level-headed way in which the West reacted to the violation of international law by Russia in its annexation of Crimea and its behaviour in Eastern Ukraine was and still is right. From the outset the West showed a clear determination not to resort to military means but to respond only with political, diplomatic and economic measures.
- The Western unity displayed in this confrontation is very valuable. Proposals such as the venture to supply arms to the Ukrainian army throw this painstakingly achieved unity into question and are not therefore a constructive way of resolving the conflict.
- Regardless of all the highly charged rhetoric of recent months, we are no longer in the Cold War, despite the fact that some old reflexes may linger on. The world has radically changed. New actors have appeared on the international stage. There are new dangers posed by non-state terrorist groups which bind Russia, Europe and the USA together.
- We need to re-establish the political dialogue between the West and Russia. In 1967 the then Belgian foreign minister, Pierre Harmel, postulated the creation of a permanent and just peaceful order for the whole of Europe as a »strategic wisdom«. The upholding of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the resumption of direct talks between Washington and Moscow are therefore to be welcomed.
- The Ukraine crisis has placed the OSCE and the security order in Europe as a whole under tremendous pressure. What began so promisingly 25 years ago with the Charter of Paris has given way to deep disillusionment. Under its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016, Germany therefore intends to place the OSCE at the centre of its efforts to seek a renewed dialogue and rebuild lasting trust and security in Europe.



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1. Reacting with resolve and levelheadedness to Russia's violation of international law

When the first »little green men« appeared on the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea at the end of February 2014, international observers rubbed their eyes in disbelief. Was it really possible that 25 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain international treaties and international law were being trampled so blatantly underfoot? Was it really possible that Russia, with the aid of its own, only half-heartedly camouflaged soldiers, was ripping out a territory for itself from the Ukrainian state? And how was it possible to incorporate it almost overnight in its own federation of states, all under the euphemistic slogan of the »reunification« of Crimea with Russia? Before anybody in the West had realised what was going on there, matters had already taken their course. Russia had pulled off a surprise coup and presented the world with a *fait accompli*.

Nevertheless, the restraint and level-headed way in which the West reacted to this breach of international law was right. From the outset it showed a clear determination not to resort to military means but to respond only with political, diplomatic and economic measures. A military reaction could have led to an escalation with unforeseeable consequences.

We must accept, however, that the path we have embarked on will not bring any quick solutions. Anybody who thought that Russia would be so affected by the political and economic sanctions that it would immediately revise its policy on Ukraine will have had their hopes dashed. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the resolve and unity shown by the West probably took the Russian leadership by surprise and may well have deterred it from any further escalation.

In spring 2014 President Putin talked about a »Novorossiya«, a zombie state in the east of Ukraine as a real option for Russian policy. There is no more talk of that today. Russia is probably now aware what price – both economic and political – it would have to pay if the situation in Eastern Ukraine were to escalate further and a part of Eastern Ukraine declare its independence.

2. Western unity as a condition for effective action

Germany has taken lead responsibility in the Ukraine crisis. The condition for this was the establishment of a unity within the EU and across the Atlantic. In Germany there was a very broad consensus from the beginning of the crisis in this respect. The Federal Government has so far been successful in helping to maintain this consensus within the EU and with our friends across the Atlantic. Whatever the differences, the past eighteen months have shown once more how important the transatlantic partnership, based on a common foundation of values and interests, really is. Equally, however, it is important to make it clear that this partnership is not directed against Russia but rather includes the offer of cooperation on equal terms.

From the very beginning of the crisis Germany has taken into account in its policymaking that by virtue of their historical experiences, the still relatively new members of the EU and NATO, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and also Poland, are still deeply unsettled by Russia's actions and have voiced an increased need for security. This is all the more noteworthy considering that the German public show little understanding for the sometimes aggressive anti-Russian rhetoric in these countries. Other countries in the south of Europe feel themselves less threatened by Russia's aggressive behaviour because it does not affect them directly. Initially, therefore, it was crucial to balance out these different interests and to arrive at a common and resolute response. Reassurance and the offer of dialogue are two sides of the same coin. Proposals, such as the venture to supply arms to the Ukrainian army, throw this painstakingly achieved unity into question and are not therefore a constructive way of resolving the conflict.

This was illustrated by the EU sanctions mechanism which was never an end in itself and always left open the option to return to constructive relations. Our message is clear: only the implementation of the Minsk Agreement offers a realistic prospect of loosening the sanctions. All steps have at the same time been closely coordinated with the USA so that here, too, the same message goes out with respect to key questions.

Ultimately, only this continuing unity will impress Putin and possibly influence his actions. The criticism of the

Federal Government's policy voiced by the Congressional Delegation at the Munich Security Conference was therefore not only completely inappropriate and defamatory; it also drew the attention of the public to a transatlantic dispute which has damaged our credibility. It is vital that we do all we can to avoid driving a wedge between Washington and Brussels over how to proceed in the Ukraine/Russia conflict. If this were to happen, there would probably be only one winner: Russia.

3. »Strategic wisdom« as a principle for dealing with a dysfunctional Russia

Russia's behaviour towards its neighbours and its tough talking conceal the fact that it was not in good shape even before the crisis. Russia lacks much of what it takes to make a successful state ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Its government is increasingly authoritarian and, despite buoyant revenues, it has failed over the past 15 years to modernise and diversify its economy. Russia spurned an offer of a modernisation partnership extended by Foreign Minister Steinmeier back in 2007. The country therefore offers few attractive prospects to young, well-educated people to encourage them to stay. Young people in particular are continuing to leave the country in droves for the USA and Europe. Yet Russia urgently needs them.

Instead the current Russian leadership is seeking, by a return to orthodoxy and a display of national pride, to refocus on so-called traditional »Russian values«. This is seemingly an attempt to make people identify with the political system in order to conceal the deficits in the country's economic, political and social development, but which ultimately stems from a deep insecurity. The remaining critical part of the population, overwhelmingly from the middle classes, is increasingly kept in check by laws and regulations. The creativity the country urgently needs for its further development is thus stifled at birth.

In contrast to the time of the Soviet Union, the current political system in Russia is no longer based on a uniform ideology and a closed world view. Rather it is a colourful blend of borrowings from all parts of Russian history. Above everything else comes patriotism, expressed first and foremost, however, in loyalty to the current leadership with President Putin at the helm.

This makes the country more unpredictable than during the Cold War when we were dealing with a more or less comprehensible strategy. Today it is far more difficult to predict what course the Russian Government will take, its actions now based more on short-term tactical calculations than on a long-term strategy.

Regardless of all the highly charged rhetoric of recent months, we are no longer in the Cold War, despite the fact that some old reflexes may linger on. The world has radically changed. New actors have emerged on the international stage. There are new dangers, for example, from non-state terrorist groups.

At the same time there is still something which binds Russia and Europe together: a dangerous neighbourhood, whether in Yemen, Libya, Iraq or Syria. None of these major dangerous conflicts can be resolved unless the USA, Russia, Europe and parts of the Muslim neighbourhood work together. These are facts that it is important for us to keep bringing to mind.

The modernisation of Russia's strategic weapons arsenal announced by President Putin a few weeks ago certainly does little to promote stability and detente in Europe. It does not, however, represent a paradigm shift and is probably directed primarily internally as a show of strength. It is important for us in our responses, therefore, to carefully weigh up what is the necessary course of action and what could possibly lead to a subsequent escalation which we might struggle to control. We should bear in mind that the USA, too, has announced a modernisation programme for nuclear warheads. It is in our own interest to ensure our reactions are nuanced and take a strategic world view rather than looking for a short-term media impact. We should not make any rash statements which could jeopardise what has been so carefully and painstakingly built up in recent decades in the European peace order.

In 1967 the then Belgian foreign minister Pierre Harmel postulated the creation of a lasting and just peaceful order for the whole of Europe as a »strategic wisdom« and proposed a strategy which combined deterrence and détente – in other words: security as the sum of defence and détente. This helped lay the foundations for a policy of détente which ultimately led to the end of the East-West conflict and the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Today once again we need political dialogue between the West and Russia, a view reinforced by NATO at its last summit in Wales in September 2014. We therefore also welcome the fact that the USA and Russia are once again talking directly to each other. Whether telephone calls between President Putin and President Obama or direct meetings between foreign ministers Lavrov and Kerry: every contact offers an opportunity to work together to seek new ways out of the crisis and break the vicious circle of hardened positions and confrontation.

4. The renaissance of the OSCE: an opportunity for de-escalation

Germany will use its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016 to probe how far we can halt any further deepening of the rifts in Europe and start rebuilding bridges. The Ukraine crisis has placed the OSCE and the security order in Europe as a whole under enormous pressure. The normative basis of the organisation has been eroded and in parts obviously broken. What started so promisingly with the Charter of Paris 25 years ago has given way to deep disillusionment.

Particularly in such a precarious political situation, however, it is essential for us to do all we can to protect and strengthen the OSCE as a political instrument and platform for dialogue whose influence also extends across the Atlantic. Germany therefore wants to use its chairmanship of the organisation to seek renewed dialogue, trust and security on a lasting basis.

It is also clear, however, that unless the conflict in Ukraine can be resolved on the basis of the Minsk package of measures, it will be almost impossible to reach a new common understanding regarding the European security order. So if we seek dialogue, we must understand that this will entail a serious and contentious process of grappling with opposing ideas, interests and perceptions.

Crisis management forms an important part of the work of the OSCE. With its Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, as well as in other crisis regions, the organisation shows daily that it has important skills in this area. We should ensure the OSCE has the necessary finances and personnel to further bolster these crucial capabilities – and the institutions of the OSCE as a whole.

Germany will also during its chairmanship press ahead with the many different areas covered by all three dimensions of the OSCE. We want to focus in particular on issues which we believe can foster trust and build bridges.

There are central elements for this in the first dimension, the politico-military dimension, such as in the Vienna Document on confidence- and security-building measures and possibly also in the area of conventional arms control. There is an urgent need for us to make renewed efforts to reduce the risk of military conflicts through more transparency and confidence building.

Further areas which we should prioritise are those which relate to common threats faced by all OSCE states including international terrorism, radicalisation leading to terrorism, the international drugs trade and cyber dangers.

Europe can only be safe if human rights and basic freedoms are also upheld. Rather than asking for new commitments, we want to work initially to ensure that existing commitments are implemented more effectively. In times of propaganda and hybrid warfare there needs to be a special focus on freedom of expression, the freedom and independence of the media and the safety of journalists.

The Helsinki Final Act, adopted 40 years ago, advocated the promotion of better contacts and understanding between civil societies. Now, at a time when our counterparts in many countries are under enormous pressure, contact between civil societies is hugely important and may offer the key to overcoming years of confrontations.



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