

Oleksandr Tytarchuk, Kyiv

POLICY BRIEF

“A fresh look” from Ukraine at German Foreign Policy Priorities

In this particular article, additional attempts have been made to briefly analyze the priorities of modern German foreign policy from the standpoint of Ukraine as a country representing the most recently troubled Eastern Partnership area.

The recent international efforts aimed at stopping escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Eastern Ukraine served as a source of revitalizing discussion at all levels about new Germany's role in European security architecture. As one of the most relevant examples that could be mentioned is the public debate on “a fresh look” at German foreign policy initiated by the Federal Foreign Ministry in February last year. Representatives from the German public, along with scientists and foreign policy experts, both domestic and foreign, apart from the Eastern Partnership ones, were broadly invited to participate in the above-mentioned discussion. The final report under very eloquent title “Crisis, Order, Europe” was published as an outcome of this discussion in early March this year, where the priorities of future foreign policy of the country were actually defined and generally outlined.¹ In this particular article, additional attempts have been made to briefly analyze these priorities from the standpoint of Ukraine as a country representing the most recently troubled Eastern Partnership area being (intentionally or not?) forgotten in that report.

In order to understand main principles of the modern Germany's foreign policy, first of all, we need to pay attention to those issues featuring Berlin internal policy, tactical provisions of which were laid down as a basis for current foreign policy strategy that is repeat-

edly emphasized by German officials. The inner components of German foreign policy, according to Minister F.-W. Steinmeier, include the public understanding and broad support for all governmental actions as well as mutual ability to “explain, listen and learn” (Ibid.). Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate particularly from that point of view the above initiative on having “a fresh look” at foreign policy, which could be regarded as a kind of public awareness raising campaign. The current Eurozone crisis and the Russia-Ukraine conflict violated routine balance of order used to be comfortable for the majority of Germans, the further successful maintenance of which will require new strategic approaches.

Given the nature of the above report, it is more like a program statement of the ruling Grand Coalition. This document contains a number of very interesting basic statements focused on the broad public. Nevertheless, all the basic policy guidelines of Governing Coalition of the German Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, which primarily based on the idea of a comfortable European security architecture that includes also Russia, are clearly visible behind the official backstage.

Existing geo-economic approach is dominant in Berlin foreign policy strategy, where diplomacy is considered to be the main tool for maintaining economic interests. This approach worked pretty well previously in the context of globalization, but given recent developments in Ukraine, a number of questions about its future performance has been raised, while no substantial policy changes have occurred yet. In this regard, economic sanctions against Russia, with which Germany has very close econom-

¹ On Germany's Foreign Policy Priorities and Responsibilities, by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, at: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_1D907E043801ADf0210EE273C1EA-DA61/EN/AAmt/Review2014/Uebersicht_node.htm.

ic ties, are posing now significant problems for Berlin. All this helps to understand more clearly the position of Berlin on introduction tougher sanctions against Russia, and attempts to gain practical support from Brussels in helping Kyiv with implementation of the Minsk II Agreement, namely the assistance in re-establishing social benefits payment in occupied eastern territories of the country. This is the particular example in tracking Berlin attempts to promote partially its own economic interests at joint purposes with European partners. It also could be proven by the recent decision of the European Council to provide macro-financial assistance to Ukraine for 1.8 billion euros, although this sum of money could hardly meet current requirements of the Ukrainian government.² As for public opinion, only 3% of Ukrainians support the proposal to restore under existing conditions the budget funding of the part of Ukrainian eastern territories actually occupied by Russia.³

Another important aspect is the fact that relationship with major non-European partners, such as the U.S. and Russia, largely determines Germany's attitude towards Ukraine.

The results of this year's Munich Security Conference revealed the presence of strategic differences between the U.S. and Germany in defining possible ways for overcoming the European security crisis.⁴ The question of what a power will bear responsibility for maintaining European security on the backdrop of any strategic vision for future prospects of its strengthening remains unanswered. The real differences between the U.S. and Europe on the issue of Ukraine are not as serious as it might seem at first glance. In previous cases, when security situation was seriously aggravated, practical efforts of the U.S. and European countries led by Germany were synchronized together in trying to save the basic principles of Ukrainian statehood as such.

The problem for Ukraine is that the West in general and Germany in particular has already made a preliminary decision not to wage war against Russia in order to protect Ukraine. The existing Western security guarantees do not fully apply to Ukraine, and Ukraine itself de facto is regarded as not to be a part of the European security architecture based on NATO potential, and is unlikely

to become one in the near future but for the aggressive policy of the Kremlin. This rather pragmatic situation is quite tragic for Ukrainians who have fallen and continue to fall in the fight against Russia-backed separatists so that defending European democratic values that may no longer exist in the West in such idealistic form perceived by the majority of Ukrainian civil society. Thus, more than half of Ukraine's population (51.4%) believe that the strategic goal of Ukraine should be to join the European Union.⁵ According to the latest nationwide poll, 40% of Ukrainians would raise their voices in favor of Ukraine's membership in NATO.⁶ This survey also showed that 62% of Ukrainians consider so-called separatist self-proclaimed entities "DNR" and "LNR" as a kind of terrorist organizations. Only 11% of Ukrainians support the refusal of Ukraine to join NATO as well as official declaring of neutrality status in the Constitution, and only 6% of the responders speak against the further course of rapprochement with the EU.⁷

The Russia-Ukraine crisis has certainly accelerated the process of negotiations on strengthening the European security system. The need to build up own capabilities for protecting European values has found its logical reflection in the support declared by the ruling German coalition to the proposal for the EU army creation tabled by the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Under the present circumstances, Berlin considers this idea as a strategic long-term political task to be implemented in close cooperation established between the Bundeswehr and the armed forces of other European countries.⁸ The issue of the EU army creation is to be a subject for discussion during the upcoming EU Summit in June this year. Although the practical side of this idea raises many questions, canalizing it in a purely politicized bargaining.

Against this background, we need not to overestimate the role of Germany in contributing to Ukraine's request concerning the deployment of international peacekeeping mission under the auspices of the UN or the EU to support conflict settlement in the Donbas. The recent joint German-Russian initiative to increase significantly the number of international observers in the OSCE Spe-

2 Yatsenyuk asks in Berlin more financial support from the EU (in Ukrainian), at: <http://dt.ua/POLITICS/yacenyuk-v-berlini-prosiv-sche-bilshe-finansovoyi-dopomogi-yes-168566.html>.

3 The results of the opinion poll conducted by GfK Ukraine on 2-15 February 2015 (in Ukrainian), at: <http://tyzhden.ua/News/131911>.

4 Munich Security Report, 2015, at: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/discussion/munich-security-report/>.

5 Socio-political situation in Ukraine, March 2015, (in Ukrainian), at: <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=511&page=1>.

6 Survey of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (in Ukrainian), at: <http://tyzhden.ua/News/132802>.

7 The results of the opinion poll conducted by GfK Ukraine on 2-15 February 2015 (in Ukrainian), at: <http://tyzhden.ua/News/131911>.

8 Regierungspressekonferenz vom 9. März, 2015, Europaarmee (in German), at: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2015/03/2015-03-09-regpk.html>.

cial Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (up to 1000 persons) could also prove the above perception. Moreover, all participating States unanimously supported this initiative within the OSCE to be chaired by Berlin in 2016.

Along with international organizations, there are also other international negotiation formats actively used by Germany to support the resolution of current crisis with clear preferences given to the Normandy format established in July 2014. German politicians do not mention the previous Geneva and Weimar formats of talks as promising ones hereby confirming current Berlin reliance on its own crisis management strategy without using mediation services of the U.S. and quite radical Poland being the main Washington ally among new generation of the EU Member States.

German situational political culture is now the dominant one and aims to sustain existing German society well-being on stable and secure level. Such a culture formally allows Germany to be quite strong state in the existing environment, while suppressing any innovation and preventing the formation of long-term strategy for the future. The last German-French peace initiative on establishing ceasefire in eastern Ukraine could simply prove this fact. This initiative was not intended to maintain the overall credibility of the EU, support democracy in Ukraine, or stop aggressive Putin behavior. Its main goal is to establish a kind of situational peace. The Russian side has succeeded in using this situational thinking of Berlin for exerting further pressure and dictating its own rules of the game.

The so-called “situational factor” could also help to understand the increasing personal role of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the modern German foreign policy who used not to pay due attention to this area. Her present determination and dedication to the foreign policy issues may be considered as the result of a kind of circumstances, which led to the dangerous escalation of the Russia-Ukraine confrontation directly threatening Berlin interests so that she has just been left with no choice but to use the entire arsenal of her personal merit and leading the negotiations process. However, Angela Merkel leading role in lobbying Ukrainian interests within the framework of current confrontation seems to be rather ambiguously estimated by Ukrainian expert’s community. The president of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė was recognized as the best lobbyist of Ukraine in the world, followed by the former Foreign Minister of Sweden Carl Bildt, according to expert’s poll conducted earlier this year. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel was no doubt among the top ten selected leaders together with well-known American politicians, while taking only

the sixth position.⁹ If this survey was conducted later on, after the February round of the Minsk negotiations, perhaps, Chancellor Merkel could move to higher rating, but hardly in the first place because of the above-mentioned situational thinking.

German strategic approach to Ukraine is primarily associated with attempts to prevent by all means dramatic military defeat of Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia, and save the country from total economic collapse. The total disbelief in gaining the win over Russia in Ukraine generally dominates in Germany, both at the state and society levels. According to German experts, any quick and easy solution to the Russia-Ukraine crisis could not exist, and finding such a solution would take time. The majority of Ukrainian population (70%) also believe that the crisis in eastern Ukraine could only be settled by peaceful means, whereas 21% of population support the necessity to intensify the hostilities. Overall, one-third of Ukrainians believe that the government should make all kind of concessions to stop the war, and 62.8% of Ukrainians are confident that there is a good point to regain control over the Donbas. The most popular concession mentioned by responders was to provide on temporal basis a special status for occupied territories in eastern Ukraine with the possibility for Kyiv to execute a partial control over there.¹⁰

The current policy resulted in the creation of large and uncontrolled EU neighborhood area is considered to be the greatest danger for the EU in general and Germany in particular. In this context, the Germans do not see strategic dilemmas that they face with, and do not make sufficient contributions to ensure their own safety, while calling for the maintenance of international peace and order not having the capacity for their practical protection and restoration. As a partial confirmation of these findings may serve the absence in above-mentioned report on the priorities of German foreign policy of any reference to the role and place of partnerships with neighboring countries and EU neighborhood policy as a whole.¹¹

9 Grybauskaitė and Bildt are recognized as the best lobbyists of Ukraine in the world (in Ukrainian), at: <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/files/8/9/8925505-lobbist-top10-2014.pdf>.

10 The results of the opinion poll conducted by GfK Ukraine on 2-15 February 2015 (in Ukrainian), at: <http://tyzhden.ua/News/131911>.

11 On Germany’s Foreign Policy Priorities and Responsibilities, by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, at: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_1D907E043801ADf0210EE273C1EADA61/EN/AAmt/Review2014/Uebersicht_node.htm.

The Eastern Partnership issues are clearly connected with the process of the establishing dialogue with Russia. Against this backdrop, the calls for establishing mutually beneficial cooperation with Moscow begin increasingly to sound from Berlin who would try to combine this cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries' rapprochement while taking into account Russia efforts to work more closely with these countries as well.¹² The action strategy towards Russia should vary from the strategy for addressing Eurozone crisis currently proved by Berlin, that is to be comprehensive, politically sound and grounded on strong positions. Unfortunately, the current practice suggests the opposite, and therefore it is hardly to expect major changes in that regard during the upcoming EU Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in

Riga on May 21-22, where, among other things, an uncertain perspective for long awaited visa-free regime between Ukraine and the EU will be once again outlined.

Despite the ratification by the German parliament of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, which is considered in Berlin as a new level of interaction between Ukraine and the EU, leading German politicians continue to focus on the implementation of the dual strategy in relations with Russia that based on previous and rather erroneous assumptions. All these facts would not contribute to finding lasting solution for the Russia-Ukraine crisis diverting all the course of actions in latent plane. If the EU under German leading role does not really establish partnerships that operate on an equal footing, the proposed strategy will further foster double standards. Under those conditions, the emergence of new crises, including in the uncontrolled Eastern Partnership area, according to recent Berlin predictions, is only a matter of time.

¹² Munich Security Conference, Monthly Mind, January 2015: "A Task of Generations", at: <https://www.securityconference.de/en/discussion/monthly-mind/single-view/article/monthly-mind-january-2015-a-task-of-generations/>.

About the author:

Oleksandr TYTARCHUK, since April 2012 – Associate Research Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute at the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine (FPRI); Master's degree in military management and international relations; PhD degree in pol-mil science (2008). Since November 2013 – FPRI representative to the OSCE Network of Academic Institutions and Think Tanks. Author of more than 40 scientific articles and co-author of 10 applied scientific researches on European security related issues.

East European Security Research Initiative (EESRI) is an informal discussion, analytical and information-sharing international platform aimed at uniting efforts of those experts and scientists from various countries, who are interested in finding effective ways for strengthening security in the Eastern Europe as the most vulnerable region of the common European security system.

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