

---

# THE GERMAN INTERESTS TOWARDS LITHUANIA: A DILEMMA OF THE *ZWISCHENRAUM*

Matthias Röntzsch\*

## *Abstract*

With the fall of the Berlin wall the two German states became unified, furthermore numerous other states were newly found, or as in the case of the Lithuanian re-established. Lithuania became apparent again as an own international political entity, consequently Bonn/Berlin had to create a new foreign policy to this situation. After intensive support and dialogue in the 1990s it seems that, in the new millennium, the bilateral relations between Berlin and Vilnius had “fallen asleep”. Through investigate the interests and fears of the foreign policy of Germany towards Lithuania, the present article also looks at the German-Russian relations, and in this context at the development of the Lithuanian-Russian-German relations, to examine reasons for the current situations and to make prospects for a future development.

## **Introduction**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 a collective elation overdrew the European continent when ten countries from central-, northeast-, and southeast Europe joined the EU. Already, before the majority of these states joined NATO. Not even two decades prior, the continent and the rest of the world was captured in an ideological confrontation between two blocks. The fundamental changes which took place in Europe made the countries apparent again between Russia<sup>1</sup> and Germany as own international political entities, while they had no voice for nearly 60 years, and Bonn/Berlin had to find answers to this new geopolitical situation. Furthermore, the challenge had a dual character: not only the global security environment had changed, also Germany itself transformed. With the unification, Germany gained more political and economic weight, as the most populous nation with the highest gross domestic product on the continent.

---

\* Matthias Röntzsch is a student at Leipzig University. This article is based on the MA thesis of the author with the title: “Germany’s geopolitical strategy for the East Baltic Sea Region: Lithuanian Case study”. Email: m.raentzsch@gmx.de.

<sup>1</sup> To simplify matters the following study speaks of Russia instead of officially expressing Russian Federation.

The self-understanding of the new central power in the post-Cold war Europe is reflected in its foreign policy, in particular in its foreign policy towards the *Zwischenraum*, the region between Germany and Russia. Being a space which suffered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century like no other region in Europe, it was the scene for the bloodiest wars, genocide, annexation, and suppression - but also a place of hope, revolution, and rebirth. Over centuries this area was characterised as a conflict zone between different cultures and interests. Swedish, Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and German, respectively Prussian interests clashed constantly in this region. Nevertheless, it was mainly not due to different cultures which led to constant conflicts in this area, moreover the geopolitical factors made Lithuania and the East Baltic Sea Region to a hard fought area, a constant which still remains.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the Russian policy towards the Baltic countries was often referred to as the “litmus test” of its new democratic policy direction.<sup>3</sup> But the Baltic States are not only a “litmus test” for Russia, they are also a test for the German foreign policy, towards a problematic geopolitical zone in its own backyard. Furthermore, it is also an indicator whether the united Germany has found an adequate role on the international policy stage, which refers to its interests and responsibility as a European central power and economic heavyweight.

This article wants to develop the thesis that, till now, Germany has not developed a conclusive foreign policy concept towards Lithuania and the East Baltic Sea Region. This lack of a clear political strategy, so the assumption, makes the geopolitical situation of this area even more precarious. Furthermore it would be also a sign that the united Germany has not found an adequate policy role yet, which refers to its interests and responsibility in the new Europe.

Consequently this article will first try to examine German interests, with a focus on the East Baltic Sea Region and Central and Eastern Europe. In a second step the German-Lithuanian are evaluated, moreover a view on the development of the German-Russian relation is paid. This helps to approach the

---

<sup>2</sup>The region is important as sea, land and air transit route between West and East, and North and South. Especially for Russia as it is the only possible land link which connects the Kaliningrad exclave with the Russian heartland. Lithuania must be seen “as the most problematic case” of the Baltic States. It is the “weakest part” in the chain of defence, mainly because of the long border with Byelorussia and the transit – especially the military one - to Kaliningrad oblast. And also because of simple historical constants - for centuries the Baltic nations were provinces of the Czarist Empire and later the USSR – traditional assumptions, thinking and beliefs normally do not change overnight.

<sup>3</sup>Bildt, C. “The Baltic Litmus Test”, *Foreign Affairs*, No. 73, 5 (September-October 1994), p. 72.

question: What weight should Lithuania have in the future German foreign policy and how will the German-Russian, and in this context, the Lithuanian-Russian-German relations develop?

## 1. What are the German Interests? An Approach

From the official side German interest are defined. Initially in the *Weißbuch zur Sicherheitspolitik*<sup>4</sup> from 1994, later supplemented by other papers like the *Verteidigungs-politische Richtlinien für den Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministers der Verteidigung*<sup>5</sup> from the year 2003. The actual German security policy can be found in the *Weißbuch*<sup>6</sup> 2006. From which the following definition can be extracted: “German security policy is guided by the values enshrined in the Basic Law and by the goal of safeguarding the interests of our country, in particular:

- preserving justice and freedom, democracy, security and prosperity for the citizens of our country and protecting them from dangers;
- ensuring the sovereignty and integrity of German territory;
- preventing regional crisis and conflicts that may affect Germany’s security, wherever possible, and helping to control crisis;
- confronting global challenges, above all the threat posed by international terrorism and the proliferation of WMD;
- helping to uphold human rights and strengthen the international order on the basis of international law;
- promoting free and unhindered world trade as a basis for our prosperity thereby helping to overcome the divide between poor and rich regions of the world.”

To reach these goals “German security policy takes account of general long-term conditions as well as changing interests. The constants include Germany’s

---

<sup>4</sup> Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. *Weißbuch 1994: Weißbuch zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zur Lage der Bundeswehr*. Bonn: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Bundesministerium der Verteidigung: *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien für den Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministers der Verteidigung* (Berlin: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Federal Ministry of Defence. *White Paper 2006: on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr*, Berlin: Federal Ministry of Defence, 2006.

geographical location at the heart of Europe and the experience gained from German and European history, our worldwide integration as a trading and industrialised nation, and international obligations arising particularly from our membership of the United Nations, the European Union and NATO". The partnership towards the USA is described as "central" for the German foreign and security policy. Another "overriding goal" is to strengthen the European stability and integration and also to "develop and deepen a lasting and durable security partnership with Russia". And overall the German foreign and security policy has a multilateral character. "Globalisation, Terrorism, Proliferation and Military build-up, Regional Conflicts, Illegal Arms Trade, Energy Security, Migration, Epidemics and Pandemics" are defined as the main global challenges, opportunities, risks and dangers.<sup>7</sup> All together, the list is quite abstract, gives no order of precedence and no practical suggestions which could disturb somebody. The formulations are noble and good, but also spongy and noncommittal. The foreign and security policy of a country, and the interests and values on which this policy is based, need precision and clarity.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that in this sensible field not all facts are made official in writing.

The *Weißbuch* 2006 leaves nearly all critical, and for the practice relevant questions unanswered. All norms and rules are right but they give no proposals for the hotspots of our times. Also priorities are not selected clearly. It seems to be necessary to set the official papers aside for the moment - to rethink, at least partly and a bit more feasible, the German national interests. Not all interests have the same weight, it is necessary to define a hierarchy, beginning from vital, to outstanding, and important up to preferable interests. The vital interest of every state is self-preservation, to save the material and ideational existence of the nation state. This means to secure the integrity of its own territory, wealth of its own people and goods which are necessary for the self-determination, for example, securing energy sources or free trade routes, against external threats.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.; pp. 17-22.

<sup>8</sup> Mey, H. H. "Der Interessenbegriff in der Politikberatung für nationale Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik", in Theiler, O. (ed.) *Deutsche Interessen in der sicherheitspolitischen Kommunikation* (Tagungsband zum 7. Strausberger Symposium vom 28. bis 30. Juni 2000), Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, p. 148.

<sup>9</sup> Theiler, O. "Annäherung an die Definition nationaler Interessen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland", in Theiler, O. (ed.) *Deutsche Interessen in der sicherheitspolitischen Kommunikation* (Tagungsband zum 7. Strausberger Symposium vom 28. bis 30. Juni 2000), Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001, p. 166.

That nearly no state can defend all its interests alone and that states therefore need to cooperate seems to be a natural fact of our times.

But what is the main danger for Germany and what is therefore its vital interest? Terrorism, proliferation of WMD, military build-up, regional conflicts, illegal arms trade, epidemics and pandemics are for sure serious threats, globally and for Germany. But they are not very concrete and specific, no main political actor in the world is addressed, which makes it very easy to talk often and loud about these topics. No one will be offended, no controversial discussion is to fear. After thousands of repetitions, the people became “used” to these mainly abstract threats, no need to discuss further. These dangers also do not reflect to the geographical location specifically or the long European and German history. Australia, Japan, France, Russia or the USA also agree without provisos that these points are challenges and threats for their countries. Engagement against terrorism, the non proliferation of WMD, the active commitment to avoid regional conflicts and sanctions against illegal arms trade are with no doubt outstanding and important interests for Germany. But the focus of the German foreign and security policy should lie where the risks are closest, in Central and Eastern Europe, directly at its own “front door”.<sup>10</sup> The vital German interest is to avert a new threat power or instability in the East. Therefore is it indispensable to involve Russia - as the superior player in this region - in the European Security architecture. It is essential for Germany to promote Russia’s way towards a stable system and legal certainty.<sup>11</sup> Only in a dialogue it is possible to develop partnership with Russia. Of course it is impossible to see the vital interest detached from its surroundings. Germany should look vigilant when nationalist and populist become leaders in Eastern European countries and when it seems that old tensions break up and new conflicts rose.<sup>12</sup> Only a stable and integrated Europe is a guarantee for German security and prosperity. Interwoven global security architecture can reach this target best. Therefore is it

---

<sup>10</sup> Mey, (note 8); pp. 148-149.

<sup>11</sup> Bahr, E. *Deutsche Interessen. Streitschrift zu Macht, Sicherheit und Außenpolitik*, München: Karl Blessing Verlag, 1998, pp. 79-81.

<sup>12</sup> Krzeminski, A. “Tiefe Risse in der Demokratie. Der Populismus als Faktor der ostmitteleuropäischen Politik“, *Internationale Politik*, May 2006, pp. 23-29.

requisite to establish a workable European Security and Defence Policy and also to strengthen the relations with the USA and NATO.

It is an outstanding German interest to obtain the welfare of the country. In a globalised world this goal is best achieved in a capable EU together with friends and allies. To guarantee prosperity and security at home it is important to limit, or better to stop regional conflicts. It is also important to avoid the proliferation of WMD and illegal arm transfer. World trade needs free markets and save transit routes, hence Germany should defend terrorism, organised crime, corruption and piracy. It is also a preferable German interest that freedom, democracy and human rights may grow worldwide. But with the exception of Europe, Germany should only use “soft power” to support these goals. Main instruments are the long-term and purposeful use of development aid as well as cultural and educational policy. In case of doubt interests is preferable to moral.

Even after this extensive dialogue this approach is not half complete. A lot of delicate questions and practical relevant issues are not even addressed. The EU is at a crossroad. Many targets are reached but a further deepening in this constellation seems to be impossible. Some states were not willing to join the euro zone in the past and they will also not give more responsibility to the European Security and Defence Policy in the future. When it is a vital interest, Germany needs to push a common European security policy foreword. A lot of other EU states also want a further deepening. But how will it deal when a few countries actively block and break from the inside? A strong EU-Russian partnership is desired from nearly all sides, to strengthen the energy security to stabilize Europe and to avoid a Russian concentration on Asia.<sup>13</sup> But what will the EU and Germany do if some states bloc agreements and cooperations, because of national animosity against Russia? And what is the German strategy when Russia uses rude political pressures and undiplomatic methods to widen its influence?<sup>14</sup> It is to ask how the growing tensions in the *Zwischenraum* influence the German foreign policy and the bilateral relations between Berlin and Moscow?

---

<sup>13</sup> Rahr, A. “Geopolitischer Infantilismus. Europas Unsicherheit im Umgang mit Russland nimmt zu“, *Internationale Politik*, July 2006, pp. 14-20.

<sup>14</sup> Adomeit, H. “Rückkehr auf die Weltbühne. Moskaus Ambitionen sind größer als sein politisches Gewicht“, *Internationale Politik*, July 2006, pp. 6-13.

## 2. Unshakeable German principle - “Russia first”

From 1988 onwards Bonn gave direct assistance to the Soviet Union. The reform process of Gorbachev provided hope in the Kohl government that political concessions are possible. Therefore the capitalist West Germany wanted to present itself as a vital economic partner for Moscow, contrary to the German Democratic Republic which represented a large net loss for the Soviets. Bonn’s successful *Ostpolitik* and the over decades acquired trust, as well as the economic strength, earmarked the field for reunification.

From the beginning till the end of the 1990s Russia was derailed by various crises. In August 1991 the *coup d’état* against Gorbachev, in October 1993 the struggle at the parliament building when more than 150 people died, the success of the ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy at the Duma elections, the first Chechen War from 1994 onwards, the tricky re-election of president Yeltsin in 1996, the rouble crisis of 1998 combined with hyperinflation, and the de facto bankruptcy of the state were just some of the major events. The problems were obvious and not only hazardous for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the German territory<sup>15</sup>, more over they were dangerous for the stability of Europe. German politicians felt the need to help Russia, within the realms of possibility, with financial aid, economical assistance, consultancy, advocacy and other kinds of support. Between 1990 and 1994 Germany gave over 2 billion euro to multilateral programmes, technical and humanitarian aid.<sup>16</sup> From the years 1993 till 2001 Russia received in the frame of the EU program Transform 200 million euro, which was mainly used for assistance and consultations in restructuring companies, for establishing a system of taxation, for building up administrative structures and to help the environmental protection. Russia’s

---

<sup>15</sup> The withdrawal was “top priority” for Germany and essential to become a sovereign state. In 1989 the Western Group of Soviet Forces included 337.800 military personnel, 44.700 civilian and 164.700 family members. What meant that nearly 550.000 people associated to the Russian army lived in the German Democratic Republic, including 4.100 tanks, 7.900 armoured vehicle, 3.500 artillery, 600 combat aircrafts, 800.000 tons of ammunition and a lot of other equipment. An orderly, controlled and regular resettling of people and material was an essential element for the German security policy. See: Wallander, C. A. *Mortal friends, best enemies: German-Russian cooperation after the Cold War*, Ithaca, NY et al.: Cornell University Press, 1999; p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Götz, R. “Deutschland und Russland - „strategische Partner“?”, *APuZ*, March 13, 2006, p. 19.

overall debts abroad were in 1993 around 40 billion dollars. Germany was with 50 percent the most important creditor.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless the bilateral relations in the economic, political and security field were highly dynamic and prosperous. In 2004 there were more than 4.000 German companies active in Russia.<sup>18</sup> German banks gave credits between 1991 and 2002 in a volume of 11 billion dollars to the Russian market. German banks are also providing financial consultants for acquisitions, foreign investments and initial public offerings.<sup>19</sup> It was the *Deutsche Bank* who developed a consolidation strategy with *Gazprom* for the Russian energy industry.<sup>20</sup> The total turnover in trade amounted nearly 39 billion euro in 2005. With 21,6 billion euro stands Russia on place number ten of the German imports, and with 17,2 billion euro on rank 14 of exports.<sup>21</sup> Vice versa Germany is Russia's most important partner in foreign trade. The emphasis of Russian exports to Germany is connected to gas, oil and other raw materials. Germany is Russia's main customer for energy products, and Russia is Germany's biggest energy supplier. The connections in the energy sector are broad and interwoven. The chief executive officer of *E.ON Ruhrgas* is the only foreigner who is member of the supervisory board of *Gazprom*.<sup>22</sup> The German energy industry, which plays no important role in the oil sector, tries to become a global player in the electricity and gas market. Therefore German companies will also participate, as minor partner, in investments in Siberia. In this frame *E.ON Ruhrgas* and *BASF* - together with *Gazprom* - are participating in the development and delivery at the gasfield Yushno Russkoje. In 2006 *E.ON Ruhrgas* extended its contracts with *Gazprom* until 2035.<sup>23</sup> Another result in this cooperation is the North Eu-

<sup>17</sup> Bierling, S. G. *Wirtschaftshilfe für Moskau: Motive und Strategien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der USA 1990 – 1996*, Paderborn et al.: Schöningh, 1998, p. 246.

<sup>18</sup> Meier, C. *Deutsch-Russische Wirtschaftsbeziehungen unter Putin: Praxis, Probleme, Perspektiven*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik: Berlin, 2004, pp. 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> Richter, R.; Schäfer, K. "Geld für Öl: Deutsche Banken und Russlands Ölförderung", *Osteuropa* No. 57, (1) January 2007; pp. 22-27.

<sup>20</sup> Gvosdev, N. K. "Weder Partner noch Gegner. Auch die USA suchen nach dem richtigen Umgang mit Russland" *Internationale Politik*, July 2006, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt. *Statistisches Jahrbuch 2006 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, für das Ausland*. Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006, p. 471.

<sup>22</sup> Follath, E.; Schepp, M. "Der Konzern des Zaren", *Der Spiegel*, March 5, 2007, pp. 123-130.

<sup>23</sup> Bergmann, B. "Verlässlicher Versorger. Energiepartnerschaft mit Moskau: Warum wir Russland auch weiterhin vertrauen" *Internationale Politik*, March 2007, p. 67.

ropean Gas Pipeline. The pipeline under the Baltic Sea should directly connect Germany with the Russian main system. *Gazprom* has a share of 51 percent in the joint enterprise, the other 49 percent are split between *E.ON Ruhrgas* and the *BASF*. The project should be constructed until 2010.<sup>24</sup>

The growing economical merge is embedded in close governmental cooperation. Also relations on personal level were always very good. Kohl and Gorbachev, later Kohl and Yeltsin as well as Schröder and Putin developed an intimate friendship. At the German-Russian meeting in June 2000 both sides declared to renew the relations and to develop a strategic partnership. In his speech at the German parliament also president Putin spoke about real partnership and deepening the relations between both nations. He also mentioned the friendship between Europe and Russia, and that Germany has a special function to bring Russia closer to Europe, and Europe nearer to Russia.<sup>25</sup>

It seems that with chancellor Merkel the times of male bonding in the German-Russian relations are over, but still the relations can be described as close and trustworthy. Tone and form have changed, but the questions of energy security, strategic partnership, and economical cooperation again dominate the political agenda.

In the security and military field Germany is already active since the early 1990s. The Kohl government was a leading voice for the establishment of a centre to employ Russian nuclear scientist, to prevent them selling their knowledge to Third World countries.<sup>26</sup> A military cooperation agreement between Germany and Russia was signed by defence minister Rühle and Grachev on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1993.<sup>27</sup> The German-Russian joint venture *MiG Aircraft Product Support GmbH* was founded in 1993, to provide the maintenance of MiG aircrafts, which are also deployed in the German air force. Furthermore regular cooperation exists at: annual programmes, consultant activities, education of

<sup>24</sup> Timmermann, H. "Die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen im europäischen Kontext", *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, No 01/2007, p. 112.

<sup>25</sup> Putin, W. "Rede des Präsidenten der Russischen Föderation Wladimir Putin im Bundestag", September 25, 2001 <[http://www.documentarchiv.de/brd/2001/rede\\_putin\\_bundestag.html](http://www.documentarchiv.de/brd/2001/rede_putin_bundestag.html)> (last accessed 21.10.2007).

<sup>26</sup> Stent, A. *Russia and Germany reborn: Unification, the Soviet collapse and the new Europe*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 174.

<sup>27</sup> Spohr Readman, K. *Germany and the Baltic problem after the Cold War*, London; New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 130.

German officer in Russia, an armament agreement, and exercises in the Partnership for Peace frame.<sup>28</sup> Since 2003 the German military can transport its supply for the soldiers in Afghanistan by land through Russia. Germany is the first NATO country which can use Russian territory for these kinds of transit. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2006 the first German military reconnaissance satellite was brought to space, with the help of a Russian rocket. Four more satellites should follow.<sup>29</sup>

Germany assists in different projects concerning disarmament of biological and chemical weapons, and nuclear security. Germany provided nearly 55 million euro between 2003 and 2004 for the safe disposal of the nuclear submarines in northern Russia. The project in Syda Bay will continue most probably until 2010. Berlin is contributing all together 300 million euro. Already since 1993 Germany supported different activities in the destructions of chemical weapons in the former Soviet Union, including chemical weapons destruction plants in Kambarka and Gorny. The engagement in this field should continue until 2011, Germany will provide up to 300 million euro. To help Russia with modernising the physical protection of nuclear material, Germany provides 170 million euro for different projects in Moscow and Ozersk until 2009.<sup>30</sup>

With the exception of the works of art, which was stolen after the Second World War and never returned to Germany, there are no problems in the bilateral relations.<sup>31</sup> Not even in terms of minorities or in the Kaliningrad questions. Also not financially – by August 2006 Russia paid all its debts back. Germany and Russia are highly interwoven by various contracts, agreements, and joint ventures. The political elite is in regular exchange, and also the cultural and social relations are very vivacious. A rapid growing commerce between both nations completes the positive picture.

---

<sup>28</sup> Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. *Friedenssicherung durch Vertrauensbildung. Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Streitkräften*, Bonn: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Weissner, U. "Wir brauchen Russland! Für die gemeinsame Sicherheit nicht nur in Europa, sondern weltweit ist die enge strategische Kooperation der EU mit Russland unverzichtbar", *Internationale Politik*, March 2007, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit. *Die globale G8-Partnerschaft: deutsch-russische Zusammenarbeit = Global'noe partnerstvo gruppy vos'mi*. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, 2005, pp. 14-21, 34-47, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Götz (note 16); p. 15.

But is the vital German interest with this policy really fulfilled? The main intention was to avoid a new threat power or instability in the East, realized through involvement of Russia, as close as possible, in the European Security architecture, to promote Russia's way towards a stable system and legal certainty. But how stable is Russia if the opposition is suppressed and the media controlled? How stable is the region eastward from Germany, when Russia has trade conflicts with Poland, Moldova and Georgia. Gas disputes with Byelorussia and Ukraine, and permanent conflicts with the Baltic States on Russian minorities, transit questions, and different interpretations of history which lead to growing subliminal tensions? Furthermore it seems that a deeper integration of Russia in the European security architecture is at a dead-end road.

With no doubt, the bilateral relations between Germany and Russia are excellent, but the space between both nations is full of tensions. Invigorated with all "petro-money" Russia again thinks in great power categories, and try to regain its influence in the zone which it sees at its sphere of influence, especially in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Germany, but also others, even assured Moscow in this behaviour. Like chancellor Schröder, when he called Putin a "flawless democrat". But also the French president Chirac gave Putin a sort of "whitewash" for his policy, when he decorated him with the French Legion of Honour. Maybe German politicians can not do much to influence the domestic situation in Russia, but they can at least avoid signals which strengthen Moscow's behaviour.

There are no serious problems between Moscow and Berlin visible. But this fact is not natural one, it is mainly based on the indiscriminating German behaviour towards Russia's domestic situation and on the low German policy profile in the regions which Russia claims at its sphere of interests. This fact is eminently pronounced for the East Baltic Sea Region, "a special German Nordic or Baltic Sea Region policy still does not exist".<sup>32</sup> By maintaining low profile Germany avoided successfully any confrontation with Russia, or the blame it would search "hegemony in the East". Another question is, if this policy of low

---

<sup>32</sup> Krohn, A. "Germany's Security Policy in the Baltic Sea Region", in Knudsen, O. F. (ed.) *Stability and security in the Baltic Sea region: Russian, Nordic and European aspects*. London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1999, p. 113.

profile is adequate to support Germany's interests in Lithuania and other countries of this region, and which effect it has on this states.

### **3. The German-Lithuanian (non) relations**

The official reaction to Sajūdis and the Lithuanian struggle for independence was reluctant and passive, as in nearly all western countries. Germany was afraid to provoke harsh reactions from the Soviet side or to weaken Gorbachev and his way of reforms. Just four days after Boris Yeltsin recognised the Baltic Republics as independent states the treaty of the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Germany and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was signed.<sup>33</sup> Since that time the relations in the fields of politics, economics and culture made a considerable progress.

In the economical field Germany and the Baltic States intensified contacts. For technical cooperation Germany allocated nearly 17 million euro to Lithuania between 1992-1993.<sup>34</sup> In the frame of the Transform and the PHARE programme Germany gave assistance in the area of consultancy and expertise. Also in the military field Germany assisted. The main instruments were annual programmes, consultant activities, military educational endowment, language training and cooperation in the Partnership for Peace frame.<sup>35</sup> Already since 1992 Germany provided support with armoured cars, machine-guns, light planes, first aid material, air defence systems and ships. Important in this field is also the opportunity for Baltic officers to study at the centres of military training in Germany.<sup>36</sup>

Already from the early beginning Germany wanted to bring Lithuania and the other two Baltic nations closer to the European structures. It was in the

<sup>33</sup> Föhrenbach, G. *Die Westbindung der baltischen Staaten: Zur Integration Estlands, Lettlands und Litauens in die bi- und multilateralen europäischen und transatlantischen Sicherheitsstrukturen während der 1990er Jahre*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> Leutrum, N. G. "Das Verhältnis der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur baltischen Region", Meissner, B.; Loeber, D. A.; in Hasselblatt, C. (eds.) *Die Außenpolitik der baltischen Staaten und die internationalen Beziehungen im Ostseeraum*. Hamburg: Bibliotheca Baltica, 1994, pp. 361.

<sup>35</sup> Föhrenbach (note 33); pp. 124-127.

<sup>36</sup> Geralavičius, V. "What is Germany for Lithuania?", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* No. 8, 2001, p. 108.

national interest to avoid instability in a region so close to its own neighbourhood. The German foreign minister Kinkel made clear in a speech in 1994, that an expansion of the Euro-Atlantic stability structures eastwards is of primary interest, that the door for new members had to be opened, also for the Baltic States.<sup>37</sup> Germany pronounced itself even as an advocate for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.<sup>38</sup> And in the fields of economical support or the active lead to EU membership, advocacy was visible. Especially in the light of “soft” security Germany did a lot to stabilize the region. Also in the field of diplomacy the activity was quite high. From 1996 on the foreign ministers of Estonia, Germany, Latvia and Lithuania agreed to meet on an annual base.

Could the Baltic States put trust in German assistance for an EU enlargement, was it in the case of NATO membership different and more complex. Chancellor Kohl wanted to do nothing which could offend or even destabilize Russia, he was against any kind of NATO enlargement to the East of Germany. Here a plain “Russia first” politic can be seen, which was and still is a definite constant in the German relations with Lithuania. Also the government of chancellor Schröder, which came into power in 1998, followed more or less this “rule”. Hesitating, looking at the others, avoiding a policy of the first step. Especially in the case of NATO enlargement, the government was hiding behind paragraphs and the accounting management. Not to make decision and not to offend someone, somewhere.<sup>39</sup> All in all was the German government was not able or not willing to use its good relations to Moscow to uncock the complicated affairs between the Baltic Republics and Russia.

But still in the fields of economical support, assistance for police, border protection, democratisation or the active lead to EU membership, advocacy was evident. Especially in the field of “soft” security Germany did a lot to stabilize the region. Therefore the first Lithuanian Prime Minister, Kazimiera Prunskienė, described Germany as one of the most important partners for Lithuania, espe-

<sup>37</sup> Kinkel, K. “Rede von Bundesminister Dr. Kinkel in der Graf-Stauffenberg Kaserne in Sigmaringen am 29. April 1994”, in Auswärtiges Amt (ed.) *Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Dokumente von 1949 bis 1994*, Köln: Verl. Wiss. und Politik: 1995, p. 1055.

<sup>38</sup> Ischinger, W. “The Future of the Baltic States: A German Perspective”, in Arnswald, S.; Wenig, M. (eds.) *German and American Policies towards the Baltic States: The Perspectives of EU and NATO enlargement*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000, pp. 99-100.

<sup>39</sup> Rühle, V. “Zweite NATO-Erweiterung. Die Führungsstärke der Europäer ist gefragt”, *Internationale Politik* June 2001, p. 21.

cially in the aspects of “foreign trade, cultural ties and direct bilateral support, including technological, research and academic, as well as humanitarian assistance - the first partner among the Western countries”.<sup>40</sup>

Even if there were ups and downs it seems that with the Euro-Atlantic integration the major problems were solved. But one who assumed that the bilateral relations between Berlin and Vilnius would flourish is deluded. After the EU and NATO enlargement the relations can be characterized as distanced, with a growing gap. There is no sense of deeper natural understanding and cooperation left. The bilateral relations can at best be characterised as usual relations between normal EU and NATO partners. Denmark or Sweden nowadays have closer security relationships with Lithuania than Germany. This fact is also seen simply by counting how often each state is mentioned in the Lithuanian White Paper 2006. And those pure numbers are quite impressive. The USA is mentioned 15 times, followed by Ukraine with 13, Denmark and Russia with 7, Poland and Byelorussia with 5, Latvia and Moldova with 4, Sweden with 3, and Estonia, Germany and Georgia with 2 references.<sup>41</sup> Surely, pure numbers give no qualitative assertion, but they are an indicator for political significance.

Whereby the low profile of the bilateral relations is not attributed to Lithuanian fear of a too strong German influence in the region, it is simply the German political unwillingness to engage more. It seems that Germany neglects Lithuania, as well as all the rest of the area to its East. Germany's continues also after EU and NATO enlargement with its “Russia first” policy. The states which lie between both nations are politically often ignored by Berlin politically. With the consequence that Germany is not able to deploy its potential in this region, and step by step it loses even the theoretical possibility to gain influence within this area, a fact which is still pushed by its own foreign policy.

Especially the very close German-Russian relations under chancellor Schröder must be seen as highly problematic for Lithuania, whereby the problem is not that Germany, like a lot of other countries, has friendly relations with Russia. Problematic for Vilnius is that some deals ignore the vital interests of Lithuania, and other EU members. This refers mainly to the construction of the North Eu-

<sup>40</sup> Prunskienė, K. “Lithuanian-German political relations”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* No.8, 2001, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Paulauskas, K. (ed.) *White paper of Lithuanian defence policy*, Vilnius: Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2006.

ropean Gas Pipeline in the Baltic Sea. When the project is completed Lithuania will not only lose transit money, it will also depend directly on Russian gas. The deal raises enormous fears in Lithuania, which is not completely understood by western officials, and not reflected in the scientific literature. From this the question to ask is, if it is normal that a former German chancellor becomes a “de facto” employee of the Russian state? However, in the end this project will enable Russia to separate EU countries, and on that basis to manipulate, to put more pressure on Lithuania and Eastern Europe. Because Russia will have direct pipelines to Germany, to Western Europe and Moscow, it can deal differently with Western European and Eastern European countries simultaneously. The pipeline can be used as a potential tool for an increasingly authoritarian regime, for energy blockades, and for energy power politics.

The hope that the EU would give a kind of economic security to Lithuania was disappointed. But the pipeline deal can also be described as a sort of “eye-opener”, that Lithuania cannot rely, on the will of bigger European players, that for its vital interests to be represented. For that reason Vilnius must most probably intensify an active bloc building in the European Union.

If such an active bloc, in the East of Germany, is in the interest of Berlin’s foreign and security policy must be doubted. Still Germany has the potential to get more active in this European hotspot, to integrate also the interests of small countries like Lithuania. That the relations of chancellor Merkel towards Putin are not so close, like with Schröder, is maybe a sign for a policy change to combine different interests in the EU.

## **Conclusions**

In 2004 Lithuania was finally able to overcome all difficulties and became member of NATO and EU. Since that time, it seemed that Germany “stopped” its bilateral affairs with Lithuania. The relations are distanced, no special attention is paid. Lithuania is treated like Ireland or Portugal, countries where ordinary diplomatic ties are enough. Does this mean: “No attention, no problem”?

This article examined, why no attention is indeed a problem. Simply stated, Lithuania and the East Baltic Sea Region are hotspots on the European continent. They are not, like Ireland or Portugal, steady places. The assumed fact

that NATO and EU enlargement would eliminate the insecurities in the space between Germany and Russia was a deception. There is a big distance between aspiration and reality in the *Zwischenraum*. In fact different zones of security remained. This situation is not indifferent for Germany's security, as vital interests are located in this area. The aversion of a new threat power or instability to its East should be the essential interests of German foreign and security policy. The disregard of the hotspot East Baltic Sea Region neglects a vital security zone in its own backyard. Old tensions are not eliminated and new forces rose, additionally the region got more heterogeneous and complex.

The tensed situation between Lithuania and Russia gets even more problematic with the foreign policy of some western states, especially Germany. To nearly all critical Russian actions of the last two decades - from Moldova over Chechnya to the Baltic States - the German governments stayed calm. Kohl and Yeltsin, Putin and Schröder showed a demonstrative friendship, and praised each other wherever possible. The German policy of the last 20 years is critical observed in Lithuania, no critic towards Russia is interpreted as tacit approval, which legitimises and amplifies Russia's power politics. Lithuania sees the preliminary culmination point of this policy in the gas pipeline project under the Baltic Sea. Estimation prevails that Germany is just interested in good business relations, and does not care much for European unity. With the consequence that it loses even the rest of possible influence in this area, a gap which others will fill. But the major problem is that conflicts in this region can not be settled with this kind of policy and the rifts become deeper. Germany amplifies Russia's great power ambitions via this policy and undermines own interests.

By keeping a low profile to its East, Germany avoided successfully any confrontation with Russia, without looking at the consequences for the region which lies in between. But growing tensions in the *Zwischenraum* will in the long run directly influence Germany's vital interests. By simply ignoring the problems between Lithuania and Russia, but also with other states in the region, they will not become less. It is more probable that the tension will continue, maybe even grow, or shift to different institutions like NATO and EU. A first indication of this development is the veto on new Partnership and Cooperation agreement between Russia and the EU. Another example is the blocked initiative to sign an EU-Russia energy charter. The idea to integrate Russia closer to the European security architecture also becomes more unlikely, mainly due to the domestic situation

in Russia itself, but also because of resistance from Central and East European Countries. A bit more balancing between the positions could alleviate the strains. An intensification of the bilateral German-Lithuanian relations would serve this purpose, as for the future Berlin should pay more attention to symbolical gestures and practical politics. In the political field Germany could send a military attaché to Vilnius, like Denmark and the USA.<sup>42</sup> Additionally to the annual meetings between the German foreign minister and its three Baltic counterparts, high political und diplomatic contacts between both nations could be intensified.<sup>43</sup> Compared with states like Denmark, Sweden, or the USA, the German profile in the economical sector and in the field of security policy is still quite low. Organisations like the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Baltic Council, or the Northern Dimension program of the EU are useful forms of multilateral regional cooperation, but they were inapplicable to eliminate regional anxieties.

In the last fifteen years Germany espoused Russia with a double-digit billion euro sum. No doubt the money was needed to stabilize Russia in catchiest political times. But just a couple of years later Russia is debtless and has currency reserves of more than 350 billion dollars.<sup>44</sup> Germany on the opposite has debts of more than 1.400 billion euro.<sup>45</sup> These facts allow raising the question if Germany follows a long-term concept which refers to its interest and responsibility in the new established Europe? As Germany has no strategically means like France or England it must especially rethink its economic and security policy, globally and towards Lithuania and the East Baltic Sea Region in particular.

---

<sup>42</sup> At the moment the German military attaché in Latvia is also responsible for Lithuania.

<sup>43</sup> In the last years Lithuania enjoyed no priority on diplomatic level, seen also in the fact that for the most German ambassadors it was their last job in Vilnius before they abdicated to enjoy their pension.

<sup>44</sup> Stocker, F. "Staatsgeld beherrscht die Finanzmärkte", *Die Welt*, June 27, 2007, p.9.

<sup>45</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt (note 21); p. 591.