



ATLANTIC MEMO #28

The Reset: How Germany Can Set a New Tone for Western-Russian Engagement

Relations between Moscow and the West suffer from a lack of trust. Berlin can play a key role in overcoming this by “resetting” foreign policy discourse and facilitating greater civil society engagement as well as economic and security cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Current relations between Russia and the West are marked by a lack of trust on the one hand and narrowly-focused cooperation on some issues on the other. Obsolete language and thinking along the lines of the Cold War have dominated Russian-Western relations for far too long and diverted attention away from successful cooperative efforts against threats of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, resource shortages, poverty and natural disasters. They will remain common challenges in an increasingly multipolar 21st century world. Only in working together will the West and Russia be able to tackle them.

One field where increased collaboration should prove beneficial to both sides is the area of civil society exchange and education. A continued deterioration of human rights in Russia will only move it farther away from Europe and deprive the country of the social and economic benefits of open discourse and innovative collaboration. The EU and Germany in particular, should therefore work to strengthen Russian civil society and open up new fora of dialogue between the Russian and German peoples, as well as greater European populace.

Closer cooperation with Russia has also been among the top priorities of the NATO Summit 2010 in Lisbon, which marked the widening of cooperation spheres and stressed willingness for changing mutual perceptions. This should prove relatively easy where Russian and Western interests are largely congruent, as in the questions of international terrorism, narco-trafficking, cyber attacks and conflict resolution in crucial hotspots. For example, both sides fear the destabilizing effects of Afghanistan as a failed state, which might spread to the Central Asian countries, and an arms race in the Middle East rekindled by Iran attaining nuclear power status.

The economic sphere equally offers vast potential for mutually beneficial cooperation. Although the level of economic interdependence is remarkable, a more stable economic integration is highly desirable as the recent gas conflicts have shown. Endemic corruption and the volatile judicial system in Russia have led to a significant decline in foreign direct investment. Furthermore, Russia's WTO accession has been continuously blocked. In short, there has been an overlap of political and economic concerns, with oftentimes devastating consequences.

However, despite these strong incentives for cooperation, the process of greater reconciliation between Russia and the transatlantic community requires painful compromise and should not be regarded a sure success. A comprehensive strategy should therefore include all available instruments to foster positive development and to contain negative outcomes. The following policy recommendations give decision-makers flexibility while pointing firmly towards closer cooperation between the West and Russia.

Germany is especially well-positioned to lead such efforts because of its close economic ties to Russia, its historic foreign policy maxim of *Wandel durch Annäherung* (change through rapprochement) and its traditional connection to the "East", resulting from its position at the very center of Europe. However, for too long now Berlin has been following a policy aimed at primarily strengthening its own economic position with little regard for the interests of its European neighbors. What the German government now needs to do is to reset its priorities and revive its vision of a united Europe and spearhead a common EU approach to Moscow.

Atlantische Initiative e.V.

Wilhelmstraße 67
10117 Berlin
Germany

Tel: +49.30.206 337 88
Fax: +49.30.206 337 90

Atlantic Memo Contributors

Marcel Lewicki
University of Munich

Benjamin Hanke
University of Leipzig

Guli Babadjanova
Phillips University, Marburg

Matthias Conrad
Free University of Berlin

Alexandra Vasileva
Free University of Berlin

Philipp Große
University of Bonn

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. "Reset" Foreign Policy Discourse

1.1 The EU and Russia need to "reset" their relationship in a similar manner as Washington and Moscow have done. Given inner-EU cleavages with regard to Moscow, it is crucial to develop an approach that unifies EU member states in order to successfully reconcile clashing foreign policy discourses between Russia and the West. Historically rooted hostilities between Eastern European capitals and Moscow have caused severe conflicts within Europe and with Russia. In order to tackle this deeply rooted mistrust, an approach is needed that acknowledges the common past while pointing out ways to a common future. Thus, the establishment of joint committees of Russian and Eastern European historians should be encouraged to assess this common history together. Germany could provide assistance by drawing on its similar initiatives with Paris and Warsaw to lay the discursive foundation for a shared future in Europe.

1.2. Germany should convince fellow EU members and the US of the benefits of a change in rhetoric. Russia and the West are ready to regard each other as partners, not as belligerent adversaries. This has to be reflected in the language. Also, the West has to clearly signal that it wants to treat Russia as an equal partner, instead of the "teacher-pupil" rhetoric, which still partly prevails today. In its discourse towards Russia, Germany and the West should not question the legitimacy of the current Russian leaders. Moscow, in turn, has to abstain from populist rhetoric targeted against the West for domestic purposes. Respectful interaction beyond the sometimes blunt criticism of today is much more likely to foster mutual trust and to improve the Western-Russian relations.

2. Support Civil Society and Promote Democracy

2.1 Cultural and educational exchange programs are the best way to achieve protracted cooperation, to convey democratic values and good governance practices and thus support and promote the nascent civil society in Russia. This should include an institutionalized exchange program between Russian and German students (modeled on those already in place between Germany and France and Poland), an increased number of scholarships for incoming Russian students and increased cultural cooperation between twin cities. Initiatives such as "culture days", youth concerts and sports events could broaden the base of understanding between people of different backgrounds.

2.2 To this end, the overdue relaxation of visa rules is paramount. Moreover, research pacts between German and Russian universities and an increased dialogue between small and medium business owners in both countries - for instance through already existing business associations - can facilitate a transfer of innovative technologies and new ideas. Emphasis should be on tangible benefits for citizens and consumers, not political show effects.

2.3 Germany should promote the advantages of an open society by engaging both the elected leaders of the Russian people and civil society actors outside of the incumbent administration. While respect for sovereignty should be the leading principle in Russian-European relations, a deeper understanding of each other will facilitate mutually beneficial relations. Thus, non-governmental institutions like the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung should be supported in their operations in Russia, strengthening Russian civil society through advocacy and projects like seminars for Russian journalists and financial support for local grassroots organizations. These efforts have been very effective in other post-Soviet countries and the former Soviet satellite states that are now part of the European Union.

2.4. The German government should appropriate funding for the *Deutsche Welle* to expand Russian-language broadcasts to provide outside perspectives for Russian audiences and to neutrally inform the Russians about events in Western Europe and the rest of the world.

3. Increase Security Cooperation and Integration

3.1 Due to budget restrictions and demographic decline, EU member states' armies will need closer integration to provide all necessary capabilities in the future. This is a chance for addressing Eastern Europe's demands for protection while at the same time providing opportunities for even closer cooperation with Russia on matters such as

airspace control, combating drug trafficking and responding to natural disasters. In this respect, NATO's new approach to missile defense could serve as a model for other areas of cooperation.

Germany's government should heed calls for a conference involving all members of NATO, Russia and the states from Eastern Europe to discuss the Medvedev proposal of comprehensive European security architecture, and evaluate the possibilities for further cooperation. While the original proposition must not be easily dismissed, European leaders are right to view it critically in light of it undermining the transatlantic alliance and altogether ignoring the area of human rights. Considering the oftentimes negative correlation between a dire human rights record and the stability of a state, it becomes clear that they also would need to be given adequate consideration at such a conference.

Moscow needs to understand that a reconceptualized European security system requires not only the approval, but also the help of Washington. Comprehensive European security architecture, when finally agreed on, could be based on a modernized OSCE and include aspects of a military pact such as NATO. It would have to overcome the current OSCE's ineffective decision-making procedures. By replacing the consensus principle by an EU-inspired "qualified majority vote", the OSCE could regain political significance. Besides alleviating concerns of those states that, based on historic experience, still feel threatened by Russia, it could become the ultimate guarantee for a lasting peace not only in all of Europe, but beyond.

3.2 In the case of Georgia, for example, a general agreement on European security would facilitate engaging the Georgian and Russian governments in a common dialogue that also includes members of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian de facto authorities. A Security Council-mandated and UN-led neutral Transitional Authority in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, modeled on those in Cambodia, East Timor and Kosovo, could be a way out of the deadlock.

3.3 Europe and Russia should cooperate to bring lasting stability to Central Asian countries as well, especially Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. A firm Russian commitment to logistical support for ISAF through its bases in Central Asia would render NATO bases like the German air base in Termez on the Uzbek-Afghan border superfluous and engage Russia in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Officially supporting a Russian peace-keeping operation in Kyrgyzstan could be seen as a vote of confidence on the part of NATO towards Russia's ability to solve conflicts.

3.4 Germany should encourage the Baltic States to better protect the minority rights of Russians. As long as distrust and discrimination prevail, Western demands for human rights protection in Russia sound hollow and give Russia a lever to interfere with the Baltic States' sovereign affairs. If integration and civic loyalty - not cultural assimilation - is demanded from Russian citizens in the Baltics there is a real chance for improving the political climate and alleviating security concerns between the Baltic States and Russia.

4. Promote Economic Integration

4.1 Emphasizing above all the modernization of the energy sector, Moscow's revised "Energy Strategy until 2030" offers a unique window of opportunity: Russia envisages massive FDI to make better use of its resources and to diversify in the long-term toward renewable energy sources. Climate-change induced risks for the Russian energy sector are likely to further propel Moscow in that direction. This coincides with the EU's attempts to reduce CO² emissions and develop markets for its green technologies industry. However, foreign investment will only flow into high-tech industries and services if the Russian state is perceived as a reliable guarantor of property rights and personal liberties. Western governments should therefore put emphasis on fair procedure and accountability of public servants as a matter of Russia's own interest.

4.2 Moreover, Russia's goal of WTO membership will serve a good basis for increased emphasis on trade and economic reforms. Within the framework of WTO talks, consultation and technical assistance should be offered to the Russian government. As an intermediate goal, the creation of a free-trade zone with the EU including Belarus, Ukraine and Russia as well as the South Caucasus states within a decade would be desirable.

4.3 Drawing on the experience with the European Coal and Steel Community, a similar European energy community should be developed that equally reflects the interests of

consumer and producer countries. A revised Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) should serve as a vantage point in this endeavor. Given the levels of interdependence, diversification efforts by either Russia or the EU are unlikely to have serious detrimental results on the relationship. Developing alternative supply routes, like the Nabucco, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, South Stream or Russo-Chinese pipelines, innovative delivery systems like LNG terminals, or new energy sources such as the expansion of solar power capabilities through the Desertec program are thus unlikely to prevent a mutually beneficial energy community in a greater Europe.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that for cooperation to intensify and generate sustained impact, both the West and Russia will have to move from positions they have long grown accustomed to. Furthermore, the EU and NATO need to find a common voice. Also, Russia needs to decide on its future course: To what degree does it want to become a close partner to the West? Or does Russia seek an alternative option of loose cooperation on specific policies only? A true change in relations will and cannot be achieved by one side alone. Germany in its unique role as the most significant Russian economic partner and important member of the European Union and NATO holds the key to unlocking the door between them. However, this requires Berlin to recognize the historic chance and act upon it in a truly European manner. The policy recommendations presented in this article will, where of a general nature, point the direction which diplomatic initiatives will have to take and, where precise, lay out the first steps for action.

Atlantic-community.org's Policy Workshop Competition 2010, sponsored by the U.S. Mission to Germany, challenged students with an engaging question on transatlantic relations: "What can Germany do to improve Russian-Western relations?"

Marcel Lewicki is a student of Political Science and Law at the University of Munich.

Benjamin Hanke is a student of International Relations at the University of Leipzig.

Guli Babadjanova is an MA student of Peace and Conflict Studies at Phillips University, Marburg.

Matthias Conrad is a student of Environmental Engineering at the Free University of Berlin.

Alexandra Vasileva is a Master's student of Political Science at the Free University of Berlin.

Philipp Große studies Law at the University of Bonn.