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Germans and Russians

German images of Russia

An exhibition mounted in Berlin in 2008, titled, “Our Russians, Our Germans: Images of the Other 1800–2000” explored German and Russian stereotypes of each other. It revealed long-standing German and Russian clichés about the other nation and concluded that this has been a volatile love-hate relationship on both sides. From the German perspective, war has occupied a central place in these images, as has a view of Russia as a reactionary and authoritarian society, which is often placed in stark contrast to idealized German views of themselves. During the time of Bismarck, Germans viewed Russians as Asiatics who had little to do with European culture, although some intellectuals such as Thomas Mann were taken with “the Russian soul.” After World War II, West Germans viewed the USSR as a direct military and ideological threat while East Germans were presented with an image of the Russians as liberators and as a model for the new society.

Gorbachev and his reforms were supported by most East Germans, who wanted a liberalization of the moribund Honecker system. Both East and West Germans praised Gorbachev’s role in the reunification of the country.¹ Another exhibition held in 2013 played out similar themes. “Russen & Deutsche” held in Berlin’s Neues Museum attracted over hundred thousand visitors after a run the previous summer in Moscow.

Historical context

As these exhibitions demonstrate, Germans have been dealing with the Russians for a long time. As a description of the 2012 exhibition notes:

The theme is established from the beginning by an intricately carved woodcut, dating to 1360 or 1370, that shows Russian hunters armed with axes, bows

and arrows, and sticks. Once they have caught their prey, they select the finest furs and hides. The Russians then approach German traders who stand, arms folded, waiting to bargain. It is clear who has the upper hand. The elegant dress and demeanor of the Germans contrast with the simple clothes of the peasant hunters. The allure of things German—money, business savvy, confidence and culture—marks the entire exhibition.²

As one German journalist observed in 1989, “The Russians have always played a special role in the fantasies of the Germans and the Germans in the fantasies of the Russians; that is the history of almost a thousand years which has carried over from two gruesome wars.”³ The historical memories of the two nations is a complex one, with a mixture of both horrible memories of war combined with German gratitude to Gorbachev for allowing the peaceful unification of their country. “Rome or Moscow?,” this was the choice posed by Alfons Paquet, a German writer in 1920 reacting to the Bolshevik revolution. Russia was part of the never ending debate over German identity. Should Germany be a western country (Rome) or an eastern one (Moscow), a debate which comprised what Gerd Koenen has labeled the German “Russia Complex,” “a long running shift between angst and admiration, a phobic defense and empathetic contribution which characterized both sides.”⁴

Germany from unification in 1871 until the Bolshevik revolution was of greater importance to Russia than the other way around, providing modernization to a poor Czarist Russia in return for raw materials to feed the dynamic German industrial machine. As Angela Stent points out, “Germany became Russia’s most important partner and remained so irrespective of the vagaries of diplomacy.”⁵ During the Weimar Republic and up to the German invasion of Russia in 1941, Germany and the USSR collaborated against the Versailles Treaty powers that had excluded them, most famously by signing the Rapallo Treaty of 1922, which “symbolized for the Western powers the ultimate act of perfidy—the Soviet state . . . making a separate deal with Germany, persuading Germany to reject its western and eastern neighbors and collaborate with Russia to the detriment of European security.”⁶

At the same time there was also “The Red Menace” that was linked by the Nazis to “The Russian Menace” and a virulent anti-Communism. The linkage between the Soviet Union and an Asiatic threat to the West survived World War II and was revived during the 1980s German historian’s debate in which revisionist historians relativized the crimes of Hitler with those of Stalin and causally linked Communism with Fascism.⁷ There was also “a constant fear of

being overrun” by Russia based on its demographic growth, “With no natural frontiers, and therefore no physical barriers in the central landmass, the threat they posed seemed very real.”⁸

This fear was most immediate during the Cold War and German division with over four hundred thousand Soviet troops stationed in East Germany. The division of Germany left West Germany both threatened by and dependent upon the USSR. The key to the German question, meaning the national division, lay ultimately in Moscow. So while a key member of NATO, the Federal Republic was also a leader in developing relationships with the East as a way of ameliorating and then overcoming the division of both Europe and Germany. As Stent points out, “In this asymmetrical relationship, the USSR had more to offer the two German states than either had to offer the Soviet Union.”⁹

It was the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies, which finally allowed German unification in a peaceful manner, and the Russian image benefitted greatly. Gorbachev rather than Reagan or even Helmut Kohl, was given the most credit for this historic change, a change that altered the balance in the relationship back to Germany and reopened a period similar to that of Peter the Great or Catherine in which Russia looked to Germany as the key partner in the modernization of a backward country.

All this history has left a number of legacies and images in the German consciousness. There is the legacy of geography, of a proximity that does not allow Russia to be ignored: Russia as the big neighbor. There is also the legacy of economic complementarity of a resource-rich and technology-poor Russia complementing the resource-poor, technology-rich Germany. There is a legacy both of cooperation and destruction, which is continuing to generate fear in its neighbors. Clearly the legacy of cooperation has been the dominant one since German unification in 1990.

Today Russia is not regarded as either a military or a demographic threat. Both its population and that of Germany are shrinking at a rapid and escalating pace and the Russian military threat has been displaced from the heart of Germany to a geographic remove of over a thousand kilometers. The German military no longer considers the Russian military a threat to the German homeland and has restructured its forces away from this old threat to new ones posed in the post-Cold War world. However, among German security services, Russian gangs, and transnational crime remain a serious concern as does the Russian intelligence service. Proximity remains both a problem and an opportunity.

Both Russia and Germany are in demographic decline. In 1937 there were 80 million people living in Germany, and probably around 162 million in the USSR. The projected figures for 2030 are 70 million in Germany and 131 million in Russia. Prior to World War II, close to two million Germans lived in what was the territory of the former Soviet Union. With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR, many of these people emigrated to Germany to the point that there are now over 2.4 million immigrants from the former USSR living in Germany.¹⁰ Of this number about 225,000 are Jews who emigrated from the former Soviet Union between 1989 and 2011, ranking Germany third only to Israel and the United States in terms of the size of its Jewish population. It is not clear what impact these immigrants have on the Russian image in Germany, but it is doubtful that it is a positive one given that they voted with their feet to leave once they could. Germans, who are world-class travelers, do not pick Russia as a tourist destination. While Germany is the number one sender of tourists to Russia with 375,285 German tourists traveling to Russia in 2012 out of a total of over 671,676 total German visitors, Russia is not among the top 15 German tourist destinations. Most who do visit the country go to St Petersburg or to Moscow. On the other hand, there has been an almost three-fold increase in the number of Russian tourists visiting Germany since 2007 to 713,000 out of a total of 1,385,365 visiting Germany in 2012.¹¹

Contemporary German public opinion on Russia

German views today of that complex and ever-changing country change, but a few constants seem to remain.¹² Germans have highly ambivalent views about the Russian character and history. They view Russia today as a reemerging, potentially great power. They admire Russian culture, and many aspects of Russian history. They feel emotionally and, to some extent, culturally closer to Russians than they do to Americans. They also see Russia's untapped resources and vast market as a great opportunity for German industry and the German economy. They also believe that Russians are weak on organizational skills, tend to be highly emotional, undisciplined and in need of German leadership in technology. The image of Catherine the Great and the role of Germans in modernizing Russia has not really changed much in the twenty-first century.

While Russia to Germans is big it is also unruly and unreliable. Only about one quarter of Germans say they like Russians. When asked what

they associate with Russia and Russians, vodka, alcoholism, corruption, and criminality were frequently cited along with the poor state of Russian democracy and of the Russian state. A survey conducted in 2013 found that Germans accept Russians as colleagues at work, as neighbors but only minorities would accept them as friends, bosses, or as a son or daughter-in-law.¹³ Few Germans regard Russia as a democracy, a dependable partner, or as a favorable place to invest. Germans are also divided on whether Russia is a European country. They still have a concern for Russia's power based not only on its size, but also on the memory of the destruction that Russia rained on Germany in World War II.

Memories depend upon where in Germany you go. Former West Germans and East Germans have very different experiences and memories with Russians over the past 50 years. East Germans lived with over 400,000 Soviet military forces in their small country for 50 years and were fed a constant diet of propaganda by the East German authorities exalting them to "learn how to win from the Soviet people." Russian was the required foreign language and Angela Merkel was so good at it that she won a Sputnik prize as a teenager. Dissidents were arrested and deported to West Germany for hard currency and almost all of those who remained, in the assessment of a West German paper, "had a good experience" with the Russians.¹⁴ They supported Glasnost and Perestroika and credited Gorbachev for German unification. They were continually fed anti-American propaganda and after unification became neutralists rather than supporters of NATO. Today those differences are muted and few differences can be found on east-west grounds regarding Russia, the United States, and NATO. However a Pew survey conducted in September 2013 found that while German views of Russia were negative, only 50 percent of eastern Germans had unfavorable opinion compared to 63 percent of western Germans.¹⁵ A entire generation of eastern Germans has grown up since unification and have no historical memory of the former German Democratic Republic or of Gorbachev. Both eastern and western Germans are as ambivalent about US influence on their country as about Russian influence.¹⁶ There was not much divergence on key demographic or political variables among Germans regarding views of Russia.¹⁷

German views of Russia today have to reconcile two dimensions of the strategic culture, the dimension of a trading state and that of a country that emphasizes human rights, democracy, and global norms. The German public remains skeptical and critical about the Russian state and the nature of the Russian political system but remain realist in its expectations.

On the realist side, Germans believe that Russia is a world power and that Germany has to work with it no matter the nature of its politics. Allensbach Institute polls in 2008 revealed that 62 percent of Germans regarded Russia as a world power and 45 percent believed that Russia is a land which Germany should work with as closely as possible. By 2013, in a Bertelsmann survey, the public was split over whether the German–Russian relationship was good or bad and over whether Germany should cooperate with Russia and find compromises or whether it should strongly defend its own interests in the relationship. The desire for cooperation with Russia has dropped during the Putin years and the demand for Germany to stand up to Russia has increased.

The image of the Russian polity has been negative for a while. Only 2 percent of Germans in 2008 regarded Russia as a firm democracy, 11 percent as a dependable partner, and 21 percent as a favorable place to invest.¹⁸ The Transatlantic Trends surveys have found a substantial minority of Germans would limit cooperation with Russia in international organizations. It needs to be noted that such skepticism seems to be mutual. While Russians in general have a more favorable view of Germans, in 2008 only 30 percent thought that Germany was a firm democracy, 24 percent saw it as a dependable partner, and 24 percent as a favorable place to invest.

The Transatlantic Trends surveys have also found that Germans were worried about Russian behavior toward its neighbors, its role in providing weapons to the Middle East and its role in the Balkans, with a majority supporting security assistance to the Ukraine and Georgia (prior to the Russian actions in August 2008). Germans were concerned about Russia's role as an energy provider even before the Russian–Ukrainian energy dispute of late 2008 and early 2009, although this concern was not shared among German leaders. The German public has worried that Russia would use its energy resources as a lever, but still they see the need for energy cooperation. This reflects the realist or trading state side of the German strategic culture and provides a check on the democratic or human rights emphasis.¹⁹

Germans may be realists on Russia's international role, but they are exceptionally skeptical and critical of Russia's domestic politics. Germans are among the most concerned of all European publics about the weakening of democracy in Russia.²⁰ A Pew 2012 survey found that 64 percent of Germans had a unfavorable view of Russia, levels higher than those in Poland, the Czech Republic, and most other European states and the

United States.²¹ In the 2013 edition of *Transatlantic Trends* only 21 percent of Germans polled had a favorable image of Russia compared to a robust 74 percent who had an unfavorable image. The EU 11 country average was 29 percent favorable and 62 percent unfavorable.²² The Pew Research registered a marked deterioration in the German public's opinion after Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin. However, the Allensbach Institute found that Germans were highly skeptical already at the beginning of Dmitri Medvedev's presidency. According to the German institute's poll, in 2008 only a quarter of Germans liked the Russians while 35 percent did not and 40 percent were undecided.

There had been a "Medvedev Effect" in German views of Russia when Medvedev assumed the Russian President's office. The Russian image has softened somewhat due to the face the young Russian projects to the outside world as compared to the macho and threatening Putin. The so-called "reset" of United States–Russian relations under the Obama administration also softened the Russian image both in Germany and the United States. The 2010 and 2011 *Transatlantic Trends* surveys found an improvement in the German image of Russia but kept German opinion within the European norm.²³ Similarly, a BBC 2010 poll concluded that, "Although views on Russia's influence are still predominantly negative worldwide, these have softened in the past year, after having worsened between 2008 and 2009. In the 27-country average for that survey, 37 percent held negative views and 30 percent hold positive views. Seventeen countries give Russia's influence a negative rating, seven give it a positive rating, and three are divided. Negative attitudes also moderated notably in the United States, Germany, and France, though these countries held still predominantly negative views of Russia."²⁴ The return of Putin to the Presidency in 2012 following the clearly rigged parliamentary elections put the Russian image into a new tailspin.²⁵

As the Table 2.1 illustrates, a range of public opinion surveys come to the surprising result that Americans, and in some cases even Poles, have a less negative image of Russia than do Germans.

Pew surveys have found that in June 2007, 35 percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of Russia compared to 62 percent of Germans. By 2012 the difference had narrowed but Germans were still more negative than Americans by between 15 and 24 percent. This continued to be the case in 2013 with the German public holding a more negative view of Russia than Americans and all European publics surveyed except Sweden. A Chicago

Table 2.1 Transatlantic trends 2012/2013 German, American and European views of Russia

Views on Russia	Favorable		Unfavorable		Comment
	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	
... in	32		63		- Unfavorable rose from 62 to 74 in a year - Sweden (76) is the only country with higher share of unfavorable - 70% is favorable about the US - 71% of Russians are favorable about Germany - only country the Germans like less are Iran (87%) and Greece (75% unfavorable), Israel also comes close (60%)
Germany	2	31	50	12	
2012	2	19	58	16	
2013					
... EU	36 (2102) 29 (2013)		55 (2012) 62 (2013)		Less negative than German opinion but also declining
	4 (2012)	32 (2012)	41 (2012)	14 (2012)	
	3 (2013)	26 (2013)	43 (2013)	19 (2013)	
... US	42 (2012) 28 (2013)		48 (2012) 59 (2013)		- More favorable than the Germans but also declining over previous year
	6 (2012)	36 (2012)	29 (2012)	19 (2012)	
	3 (2013)	25 (2013)	39 (2013)	20 (2013)	

Views on Russia playing a leading role in world affairs	Desirable		Undesirable		Comment
	Very desirable	Somewhat desirable	Somewhat undesirable	Very undesirable	
... in Germany	33 (2012)		63 (2012)		The German image of Russia playing a leading world role tracks closely with the Russian favorability image
	27 (2013)		69 (2013)		
	3 (2012)	30 (2012)	45 (2012)	17 (2012)	
	3 (2013)	24 (2013)	49 (2013)	20 (2013)	
... EU	25 (2012)		67 (2012)		- Spain (81), Poland (74), are the only two countries with a more negative view than Germany
	26 (2013)		65 (2013)		
	4 (2012)	21 (2012)	39 (2012)	28 (2012)	
	4 (2013)	22 (2013)	37 (2013)	28 (2013)	
... US	45 (2012)		43 (2012)		- More Americans think its desirable than Germans!
	40 (2013)		46 (2013)		
	17 (2012)	28 (2012)	24 (2012)	19 (2012)	
	12 (2013)	18 (2013)	25 (2013)	21 (2013)	

Council on Global Affairs survey in 2008 found that Americans, like Germans, support talking with leaders of countries and hostile or unfriendly nations, with up to two-thirds of those surveyed supporting talks with North Korea, Cuba, and Iran.²⁶ This and other surveys indicate a resurgence of a realist approach to Russia and the world following the debacle of the Iraq war and the growing strains on the American economy. Even prior to the election of Barack Obama as president, polls were showing a growing American public fatigue and disenchantment with the Bush administration's approach and legacy in foreign policy, including skepticism about the ability of the United States to export democracy.²⁷

The results of repeated surveys are closely related to developments in the highest levels of politics in Russia. Moreover, the majority of those asked on either side of the Atlantic do not seem believe that elections represent the Russian people's will. These suggest that the public opinion polls about a given nation's perception of Russia and Russians is heavily influenced by its public's views about President Putin. So if there is a policy gap between the United States and Germany, it is to be found at the elite level rather than with the general

public in both nations and this negative attitude allowed Chancellor Merkel to take a tougher line against Putin.

The Russian image in the German media

The picture of contemporary Russia projected by the German media begins with skepticism and moves on to pronounced negative images. Covers (Figure 2.1) from the leading German weekly news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, are illustrative of the changing image of Putin's Russia.

The emphasis on Putin's role in the KGB, the Gazprom state, and his aggressive nationalism provide a sharp contrast to the idolization of Mikhail Gorbachev and the Gorbymania, which characterized German views of the leader who allowed Germany to be peacefully unified. Boris Yeltsin tended to fit the German's image of Russians as friendly alcoholics. Putin's continuing ties with former East German secret service agents has left the impression of a Russian–Stasi network operating within Germany promoting Russian interests.

These connections, which will be detailed later in this volume, have been picked up by the German media and reinforced Putin's image as a ruthless and clever operator who is only too willing to use energy as a tool of foreign policy. The German media have portrayed Putin as a “new Andropov.” The Russian image hit low points during the murder of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006, the war in Georgia in 2008 and the gas crisis with Ukraine in early 2009. Even during the rebound under the Medvedev presidency, the media continued to portray Putin as the real power in Russia.

Despite its own negative view, the German public believes that the image of Russia portrayed by its media is not objective and is rather negative. In a poll taken at the end of 2007, 36 percent believed the German media reported on Russia in an objective manner while 49 percent thought it did not and 44 percent thought the media portrayed Russia in a negative way compared to only 10 percent who thought it was portrayed in a positive light. However 44 percent thought the media conveyed a neutral image.²⁸ This view is shared by Germany's Russia watchers who view German media coverage of Russia as negative and critical, although documentaries and travel coverage are more positive. They lament the decline in the number of German journalists in Russia and the impact of budget cuts on their coverage.²⁹

Russians and pro-Russian Germans have actively tried to influence media coverage of Russia. The Berlin exhibitions on Germany and Russia were

Figure 2.1 The covers from upper left to lower right read *Who Is Putin: Russia's New Alliance between KGB and capital*; *Russia's Energy: Return to World Power*; *The Gazprom State: Putin's Energy Empire*; *The Dangerous Neighbor: Vladimir Putin and the Powerlessness of the West*; Covers used with the permission of Der Spiegel.

sponsored by German energy concerns with extensive dealings with Russia, Wintershall and later E.ON. WINGAS Chairman Dr Rainer Seele explained the rationale:

It is quite natural that Germany not only maintains good business relations with Russia, but also cultivates a political exchange. At WINGAS, with our German-Russian background, we consider it our social and political responsibility to encourage people to think about stereotypes and deep-seated ideas . . . It is our wish that our commitment to the exhibition and the studies will trigger a debate on stereotypes and prejudices between Germans and Russians and provide a forum for these discussions. The ultimate goal is to promote understanding and openness towards each other.³⁰

The public opinion survey conducted at the time by the polling group Forsa, was paid for by Wintershall as well. The 2012–13 exhibition, which focused on energy ties, evoked the following comment from *Die Welt*: “This exhibition is being sponsored by the energy company E.ON, which is a reminder of which energies really tie Russia and Germany together.”³¹ The depiction of the German–Russia relationship was very selective and excluded mentions of the partition of Poland, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or the suppression of the 1953 uprising of East Germans. As the *Tagesspiegel* observed, “This is an appalling gap. Both sides must face the truth that in the past they were never closer to each other than during this moment of the most awful policy of violence.”³²

The views of German business tend to be more upbeat about Russia than those of the general public or the think tanks and media. German business groups are more prominent and present in Russia than NGOs and with over six thousand German firms present in Russia, their concerns center around the safety and reliability of their investments. The rule of law and enforcement of contracts seem to be their main concern. Bribery and corruption are a continual problem. A survey conducted of their members by the Ost-Ausschuss business lobby conducted in January 2013 found that German business remained upbeat over prospects in the Russian market. Half of those surveyed had experienced an improvement in the business climate in Russia, and 83 percent expected more positive developments in 2013 and believed that the climate in Russia was better than in the EU. Almost two-thirds planned on increasing their investments leading to a total of 800 million euro in new investments. Eighty percent wanted an end to the visa requirement between the EU and Russia and the majority expected the Russian government to do something to address the deficiencies in the Russian work force. Energy, raw materials, and automobiles were the branches with the

highest expectations. Bureaucracy, corruption, and customs regulations were the areas seen to be in greatest need of reform in the view of those surveyed. Only 14 percent saw any negative effects of the third Putin presidency.³³

Germans and Russian democracy

The German approach to the problem of Russia's democratic deficit has been to apply its tried and time-tested approach of change through engagement. The term "modernization partnership" characterizes this approach and was formally announced by Frank Walter Steinmeier when he was Foreign Minister in the first Grand Coalition government with Angela Merkel. It was reaffirmed by his successor, Foreign Minister Westerwelle, in a speech commemorating the landmark speech of Egon Bahr at Tützing, which began the Ostpolitik. Westerwelle reaffirmed the Bahr approach in the age of globalization, arguing that close economic networks can contribute to overcoming remaining lines of division with "change through trade" (*"Wandel durch Handel"*).³⁴

This approach is compatible with the promotion of German economic interests while offering a rationale to those concerned about human rights. As with the Ostpolitik, the modernization partnership is based on the concept of modernization through interdependence. It assumes that Russia cannot be changed through pressure from the outside but only through continual and nonthreatening interaction and interdependence, which will lead to change from within. This is the mantra of German business leaders who claim that through their presence they are gradually introducing the rule of law and the beginnings of a *Rechtsstaat*. It is the approach reinforced by Westerwelle in 2013:

German foreign policy is value bound and led by interests. Very often these are often two sides of the same coin. . . . When we represent German economic interests abroad responsibility driven German concerns can act as examples of microcosms of western values. They bring affluence and set standards in rising countries. In this way the introduction of a self conscious middle class, the rule of law and political participation is promoted.³⁵

This approach is based in part on Germany's path to democracy, which began in the Wilhelminian period as a state based on the rule of law that was evolving into a parliamentary democracy when World War I broke out. The Weimar experience also influences German views of Russia today. The German historical consciousness recalls the experience of a new democracy burdened with the

weight of economic bad times and imposed by outside powers. There is a substantial part of German elite opinion, which believes that Russia is almost genetically an authoritarian society and which tends to look to the strong leader for guidance. Alexander Rahr, perhaps Germany's most influential Russia watcher, has characterized Russian political culture as one in which the rule of law is a foreign concept. Russians, he contends, have no positive association with democracy and are deeply convinced that their politicians are corrupt and accept this. Russians suffer from a "Weimar Complex," in which democracy translates into corruption and anarchy.³⁶ Germans think that they know Russians better than any other Europeans and much better than Americans, who are regarded as well-meaning but naïve in their approach to Russia. Democracy cannot be imposed from without but only slowly and gradually through working with those in power.³⁷ This experience both shaped and was reinforced by the EU enlargement approach to spreading democracy. Germany was a major advocate of the enlargement of both the EU and NATO to east central Europe and saw this as a noncoercive way of expanding democratic norms.

These impressions seem to be widely shared at the elite level. A survey of German Russia watchers taken in the fall of 2009 found the majority, while believing Russia is more open than at any time in the last three to four hundred years, did not believe that Russia is a democracy in the Western sense but is rather something between an authoritarian system, a defective democracy with authoritarian characteristics, a guided democracy, or a sham democracy.³⁸ They rated the political system as stable and believed that a rapid democratization would threaten stability and even result in a social explosion. However even in 2009, Germany's Russia specialists worried about the growing division between society and state, fostered by rampant corruption, growing income inequalities, a lack of rule of law, and an economy too reliant on energy and other raw material exports. Russia was in need of a thorough modernization but the obstacles in the bureaucracy and the political elite may be too great. The chances for democratization were not assessed as good because democracy was associated with disorder and decline.³⁹ The protest movements that emerged in Russia in 2011 have challenged this view but has not fundamentally altered it.

There are two main schools of thought in Germany on dealing with this Russian dilemma: one that believes that more networking with Russia will lead to its Westernization and another that believes that it is an authoritarian country, which cannot be integrated or embedded in Western structures.⁴⁰ Added to this is a broad discussion on what modernization means. Most Germans still believe that Russia will only be modern when it modernizes its society and political system

and they differentiate between Putin's technological definition of modernization and Medvedev's, which includes both political and social modernization. As one Christian Democratic parliamentarian put it, "modernization requires democracy and the security of the law."⁴¹

There is, however, a debate within Germany on the impact of passivity on Germany's view of itself. A lead on a leading German television news program following the Petersburg Dialogue meeting of 2010 declared, "A Lot of Business and a Little Human Rights." Gernot Erler, a leading Social Democrat parliamentarian and close advisor on Russia policy in the Steinmeier Foreign Office, and thus one of the architects of "modernization through interdependence," agreed that "Human rights, the development of society in Russia and what Germany can contribute to it have been pushed into the background in recent years."⁴²

The Greens have been outspokenly critical of the human rights situation in Russia and Germany's economic accommodation to the realities of Putin's Russia as has the Federal Commissioner for Human Rights, Markus Löning, an Free Democrat parliamentarian. The parliamentary coordinator for German-Russian relations, Andreas Schockenhoff, has also been critical of political and human rights abuses in Russia as has the leading Christian Democrat Russia critic, Eckart von Klaeden. Yet the view remains in both major parties that continued engagement with Russia is the only option. There is a consensus that Putin's system still has broad public support, perhaps more than the regime in Beijing, and that the opposition is weak and divided.

German political foundations and NGOs remain active in Russia but have been limited by the sanctions imposed on NGO activities by Russian legislation. The Green's foundation, The Heinrich Böll Stiftung, issued a statement strongly critical of the state of Russian democracy following the 2011 Petersburg Dialogue meeting and has undertaken numerous efforts to work with Russian civil society. The FDP affiliated Naumann Stiftung has also been critical, stating that Russian rhetoric on democratization, including that of Medvedev, is "only rhetoric."⁴³ A new law that went into effect in November 2012 required organizations operating in Russia and receiving funds from abroad to register as "foreign agents." It not only revived a term used by Stalin, but a law that has had tangible adverse effects on international NGOs. The U.S. Agency for International Development was expelled from Russia weeks before the law even came into effect, the police have conducted "tax raids" in the offices of several other organizations and some of them are or have faced charges for their failure to register as "foreign agents" in front of the court.⁴⁴ The crackdown on foreign NGOs not only affected globally well-known international organizations,

such as the Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, but also German political foundations. In March 2013, prosecutors launched investigations at the offices of both the CDU-affiliated Konrad Adenauer Foundation and SPD-affiliated Friedrich Ebert Foundation.⁴⁵

A major problem facing German civil rights advocates is the disjointed nature of Russian civil society. In the estimate of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung:

“In Russia there are both engaged citizens and NGOs. However, in a Russia-specific expression: engaged and organized civil society are not linked to each other, but are growing apart. The amendment of the NGO law of 2006 has further increased the latently hostile attitude of the state apparatus towards the NGOs. In Russia, unlike in West European countries, there are no state or tax incentives for engagement in organizations that serve the common good.”⁴⁶

The director of the Ebert office in Moscow summed up the situation following the Khodorkovsky trial as: “legal nihilism.”

The official German government reactions to the human rights and democracy deficits in Russia has tended toward the Realpolitik and Russia is fundamentally authoritarian approaches until late 2012. A close look at the statements on Russia coming out of the Foreign Office and the Chancellor’s Office show that while human rights issues were mentioned, the tone remained noncommittal. State Secretary Werner Hoyer of the Foreign Office warned in 2009 against “anti Russian hysteria while on the other side, saying to our Russian friends what goes and what doesn’t.” He went on to argue that Russia is “more a European country than one thinks,” and should consider itself a part of Europe and embed itself in European structures. In other statements Hoyer argued for avoiding “charges from the Cold War period,” and Foreign Minister Westerwelle referred to the “strategic partnership” with Russia and that human rights “are always a theme” in his visits to Russia. These statements contrasted with those of the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Foreign Office, Markus Löning, who was more direct and outspoken referring to the Khodorkovsky verdict as “a farce,” which “raises considerable doubts on the legal justice system,” and promising to support human rights activists in the future. This contrasted with Westerwelle’s reaction which spoke of “a setback on the way toward the modernization of the country.” These statements also stood in contrast to those made regarding Belarus, where much more direct and harsh language was used.⁴⁷

The same patterns held for statements by the chancellor who spoke of “having built a completely new partnership with Russia . . . in spite of all the human rights questions,” or of her “disappointment” over the Khodorkovsky verdict. In

her remarks before the Ost-Ausschuss in October 2010, she referred to Russia as “our great partner in the region,” and went on,

I believe our relations with Russia have radically changed over the past twenty years. I will very clear say that I have the strong conviction that Russia is not just a strategic partner on paper, but that Germany and the entire European Union have an immense interest to bind Russia more strongly to Europe . . . I believe the modernization strategy that President Medvedev is pushing with the government and Prime Minister Putin, is the key to success.⁴⁸

In contrast in referring a few months earlier to the murder of the human rights activist Natalia Estemirova, Merkel noted, “It is important that more is done to clarify what happened.” In the same statement she referred to the round six thousand German firms active in Russia and the potential for economic cooperation.⁴⁹ At a press conference with President Medvedev on July 15, 2010 she stated, “We naturally discussed the murder of Natalia Estemirova. I understand that the investigation is on- going and that we can’t disturb it, and that it will be carried out in a reasonable manner.” There was a pattern in the statements by the Chancellor and her press spokesman to simply react in a noncommittal way to obvious incidents picked up by the media but to generally downplay them and stress areas of cooperation with Russia. This remained the case in the face of growing public protests in Russia in December 2011 against electoral fraud in the December parliamentary elections. While US secretary of state, Hilary Clinton was quite clear in calling the elections “neither free nor fair,” at a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, German Foreign Secretary Westerwelle said “we have taken note of the reports by OSCE election monitors in Russia with concern.”⁵⁰

The tone of Merkel and Westerwelle sharpened significantly as the vestiges of Russian democracy were eliminated by Putin in 2013. Westerwelle in his June 2013 speech on Ostpolitik and globalization referred to the German relationship to Russia in more balanced terms than were the case prior to 2012.

Our cooperation with Russia is broad and diverse. Trade has reached record levels, while cultural and academic exchange is more intensive and closer than ever before. On a political level, Russia and Germany, Russia and the EU, are working together in a strategic partnership. We’re bound by numerous common interests and we’re cooperating closely in many spheres, from the G8, Afghanistan and the efforts to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa to the E3+3 talks on Iran. However, there are also differences and many observers currently believe that what divides us is growing at a faster pace than what we have in common. We’re

concerned about the treatment of political opponents and civil society, about selective criminal prosecution and about the discrimination against homosexual people. We aren't ignoring these concerns and differences. For we have a common frame of reference, jointly agreed standards on democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human dignity. Russia and Germany are both members of the OSCE, we're both members of the Council of Europe. A policy of confrontation toward Russia would achieve nothing. We have to speak frankly but with respect with one another. What we need is strategic patience and political creativity.⁵¹

Yet the pull of both economic interests and the German political culture have prevented any major changes in policy, as opposed to rhetoric. This tug of war between interests and values continues. While Westerwelle contended that there is no such distinction and that interests are closely related to values, others argue that Germany should push its values in order to promote its interests. As one keen observer of the German political scene, Constanze Steltzenmueller put it,

Germany will have to understand that this new approach is not just about interests and strategy but also about solidarity, namely, defending the rights of countries that seek safety, prosperity, and democratic values and freedoms: the aspirations Obama spoke of in Berlin last summer and that the United States once protected in West Germany. To the extent that Russia acts to deny these essential rights, Germany and all of Europe must comprehend that they are being confronted with an authoritarian challenge to liberal Western democracy. For reasons of moral self-preservation as much as solidarity, balancing is then no longer an option. That, in the end, is the answer to the new German question.⁵²

The Moscow correspondent for the liberal weekly, *Die Zeit*, while exploring all the violations of the democratic constitution of Russia, concluded:

Establishing human rights in Russia will take longer than many in the West hope. Doubts about the universality of Western values will still dominate the discussions in which "Russia's own way" is evoked. The unease with "values imperialism" is often mixed with political practicality as Putin's system of "autocracy light" reacts with hostility to any sort of organized opposition. Democracy has to be "directed" in accordance with the ideas of the political elite. It must not be out on the streets, but should be like a play in the powerless Parliament. However, the real decisions in the Kremlin are hardly transparent. This could change if the emerging middle class would call for political participation and basic rights. So far there has been little evidence of this.⁵³

The challenge of this new authoritarianism, what Johannes Vosswinkel calls authoritarian light, is part of a larger challenge to the Western liberal order. It

can be seen in the “Beijing consensus,” “Asian values,” and closer to Europe not only in Russia but also in Hungary. Simply put, can authoritarian systems that deliver economic growth and stability, and allow their subjects (they cannot be called citizens) to travel freely pose a viable alternative the liberal model? Ivan Krastev has raised this problem in a compelling way.

First, Russia is a light version of authoritarianism in that, as Krastev rightly points out, “most Russians today are freer than in any other period of their history. They can travel, they can freely surf the Web . . . and they can do business if they pay their ‘corruption tax.’”⁵⁴ Second, it is not an ideological regime but rather one which “presents itself as a variant of, not as an alternative to, Western democracy.” Finally it is, unlike China, not a success but rather a dysfunctional and uninspiring place, characterized by Krastev as “zombie authoritarianism.”

The German response to this challenge is likely to be muted because the “German idea of freedom” has also put a great emphasis on what political scientists call positive freedom rather than the American emphasis on “negative freedom.” Germans have emphasized, at least since the beginning of Bismarck’s welfare state, the positive role of the state in providing economic security and social equality. The American model, in contrast, emphasized the freedom of the individual and the negative freedom associated with limiting the role of the state. German Liberalism in the European sense has been weak while a social democratic approach modified by Christian Democracy after World War II has resulted in a consensus around the social market economy.⁵⁵ In addition, as Ralf Dahrendorf taught, Germans have always had a preference for an apolitical, neutral state run by bureaucratic or technocratic “experts.”⁵⁶ German political history in the twentieth century reinforced these tendencies. Finally the risk-averse nature of German culture has placed a high priority on predictability and reliability. It is no accident that Germans are the world’s best engineers. All of this means that in assessing the state of Russian democracy, Germans are likely to be more sympathetic to a stable and calculable system that may be short on democratic liberties to one that is unstable and unpredictable. Throw in a jaundiced view of the Russian character with its emotionalism and violence and you have a tendency to prefer a soft authoritarian Russia, with a version of a market economy, to an open but wild and unpredictable one. The legacy of the George W. Bush Administration in its efforts at democracy promotion and the failure of American efforts to reform Russia or to impose democracy in Iraq have left most Germans even more skeptical about pushing democracy in authoritarian countries, especially those with which they do a lot of business.

Germany of course has changed a great deal since Dahrendorf wrote his classic study. Three generations have grown up since the 1960s and at least one new generation in the former East Germany has been socialized in a democratic republic. As noted, the Greens in particular, have been in favor both of a more open and participatory Germany and therefore have desired a Russia on similar lines. However the Europeanization of Europe and especially of Germany have also reinforced a bureaucratic approach to governing. The famous “democratic deficit” of the European Union has not fostered a democratic revolution in Europe against the French style technocracy of Brussels. Thus Germans can live with a “guided democracy” in Russia just as they can successfully live with Communist China and with technocratic European authorities imposing conditions on national governments like in Italy and Greece. The disillusionment with Europe, which is emerging in Germany as one consequence of the European debt crisis, has also weakened German confidence in the European model and confidence in the “Anglo-American” liberal model, which was never terribly strong to begin with has all but vanished.

The idea of democracy promotion in the American sense is also not really in the German lexicon. There is no German exceptionalism along the lines of American Wilsonianism and no sense of being “a city on the hill.” The long, complicated and extensive history of the German–Russian relationship creates a different context for the approach of German foundations. Of the six German political foundations operating in Russia, only the Heinrich Boell Foundation, which is close to the Green party, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, which is close to the FDP, focuses on human rights and working with NGOs. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which is close to the SPD, tends to concentrate more on social democratic concerns such as social policy and security issues and works with state related players on the grounds that “the state in Russia decides, like it or not.”⁵⁷ Again the legacy of the Brandt *Ostpolitik* is pervasive here. The German foundation approach differs from those of American NGOs such as Freedom House, or the Republican and Democratic Institutes in that the Germans don’t want to convince Russians to be Germans while there is a sense that the US groups are trying to Americanize Russians. “We see the Russians as partners with whom we must work and take a long term approach which features continuous dialogues and bringing younger Russians to Germany.”⁵⁸

In the German case, therefore, it is not so much that economics trumps democracy as that the German version of democracy is open to living with light versions of authoritarian systems, particularly if they remain as open as Krastev contends. Particularly if these systems allow some form of market economy

and reward foreign investment there will be little incentive for democratic crusades, especially from geo-economic or trading states that are not in military competition. To quote Krastev,

The new authoritarian regimes' lack of any ideology also partly explains why the democratic world is reluctant to confront them. They do not seek to export their political models, and hence they are not threatening. The new authoritarian regimes do not want to transform the world or to impose their system on other countries. So the axis of conflict is no longer the free world versus the world of authoritarianism - it is more the free world versus the world of free riding.⁵⁹

This is the source of tension between the United States and Germany as the American economic stake in Russia is minimal while a geopolitical competition continues. While the theory of democratic peace originated with a German thinker, Immanuel Kant, and has wide acceptance among German international relations theorists and with Guido Westerwelle, who stated in his Tutzinger comments that, "peace is best guaranteed between democracies," there is no alternative concern that Russia poses a realist threat to German security. Russia is more of a problem to be managed than a threat to be confronted. While a public perception of Russia as a great power continues in Germany, it remains seen as a defensive and insecure power rather than an expansionist one.

The real challenge facing German policy is that the Ostpolitik paradigm is no longer seen to be promoting democracy in Russia. Handel is not producing Wandel. German business remains content to deal with an authoritarian state so long as it offers a stable and reliable investment environment. The public is more negative but still has a realist view about the need to live with a big Russia and remains skeptical that it can be changed from the outside. Yet the gap between values and interests is widening and the easy optimism expressed by Westerwelle that the two are compatible is becoming less sustainable in the face of the Putin state.