

# GERMANY IS RUSSIA'S NATURAL ALLY

In *LookingGlass* No. 1/2008 we examined the relationship between Germany and Russia from the German perspective. Now we take a look at it from the Russian perspective. Germany and Continental Europe are considered as the natural partners and allies of Russia. For the Russian elite, the true enemy is the Anglo-Saxon world.

By **Fyodor Lukyanov**, editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*.

After Vladimir Lenin (who died in 1924), Vladimir Putin was the first top leader of Russia who spoke a foreign language. It was German, which the then KGB officer mastered perfectly during the years of service in East Germany.

It so happened that Gerhard Schröder did not speak fluent English. So Putin was the only leader of a great power with whom the German

Chancellor could speak absolutely freely and confidently, face to face, without fear of being misunderstood.

The personal factor in politics should not be exaggerated, yet it should not be downplayed, either. The relationship between Putin and Schröder went beyond the traditional contacts between the leaders of major states, especially those that are

not allies. As a matter of fact, Gerhard Schröder's career after he left the post of Chancellor has confirmed the uniqueness of the situation – he was the first Western politician of such a high rank to receive a well-paid job in a Russian state-owned company.

Of course, the language factor would not have played such a role, if there had not been such a profound mutual gravitation between Russia and Germany. It was not destroyed even by the fact that the two countries were on opposite sides of the frontline in both world wars, nor during the Cold War by the fact that the divided Germany itself had become a field of confrontation. How deep are the roots of these “special relations”?

Perhaps they began in the years of Peter the Great who viewed Europe, above all Germany and Holland, as a model for Russian modernisation. Or, in the second half of the 18th century when a German princess ascended the Russian throne as Tsarina Catherine the Second (later called the Great) since at the time, there was actually no Russian blood left in the veins of Russian tsars. By ethnicity, all her successors were German, and dynastic marriages were arranged mostly with German princesses.

The second half of the 19th century saw the development and prosperity of Russian capitalism. German businesses, which always tended to expand eastwards, also sought to actively tap the rich potential of the Russian market.

After the First World War, Bolshevik Russia and the defeated Germany were two European outcasts, and this factor once again caused them to seek rapprochement. The “romance” between the

two totalitarian regimes, which peaked during yet another division of Poland in 1939, lasted until June 22, 1941, when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. Incidentally, the Soviet Union kept supplying trainloads of grain and equipment to Germany until the day of attack, even though many Soviet people had long believed that war with Germany was inevitable.

During the Cold War, East Germany served as the most convincing evidence of the untenability of the Communist system. First, because it was a pure experiment: one nation, two systems. Communist East Germany completely lost out to Capitalist West Germany.

Second, because the failure in East Germany could not be ascribed to lassitude or inability to work – the qualities that for example many believed the Russians to have. The German mentality implies complete devotion to whatever one does; therefore Communism in East Germany was perhaps built with more dedication than in any other Soviet satellite.

In turn, West Germany – even at the height of the Cold War – began to become a leading economic partner of Moscow in Europe. *Ostpolitik* by Chancellor Willy Brandt laid the foundations for the reconfiguration of almost the entire European geo-economics not of the Cold War, but rather of the post-Cold War period. Starting in the early 1970s, the two countries – and the whole of Europe – were linked by inseparable ties in the shape of gas pipelines. Actually, it was in those years that the paradigm of the modern Eastern policy of Europe and the European policy of Russia was born. One can speak at great length about the need to diversify supplies and

purchases, but neither Russia as supplier nor the European Union as customer have real alternatives in their energy cooperation.

Today's passions over energy security and the politicisation of this issue are not unique in recent history. So far, the economy has always overcome political prejudice. One can recall that the foundations of the in-depth energy cooperation were laid in the late 1960s-early 1970s, even though the political atmosphere in Europe following the suppression of the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops left much to be desired, to put it mildly.

The next stage began in the early 1980s – an era of bitter confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher convinced the Reagan administration that broader gas cooperation with Moscow would do no harm to the security interests of the West. The US agreed despite Reagan's deep, in fact religious belief, as his former aide Richard Pipes recalled, that the Soviet Union was an "evil empire".

Since I was a student in Germanic studies in the Gorbachev era and visited West Germany at the time, I can testify to the admiration which Russians could enjoy there. And nobody was as active in sending humanitarian help to the rapidly decaying Soviet Union as the Germans, who inherently knew what it means to witness the collapse of a whole nation and set of ruling ideas. Today's Russians are very unwilling to remember that period summed up by Vladimir Putin as "the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century". The Germans' sincere wish to ease the eco-

nomie suffering of Soviet people is seen now as "thirty pieces of silver" paid for a "perfidious" decision to allow a "smooth" re-unification of Germany. Many people in Russia believe that the unification of Germany the way it happened was the result of naivety or even treason on the part of Mikhail Gorbachev. It is widely believed that Moscow gained nothing for that huge geopolitical concession.

The friendship between Boris Yeltsin and Helmut Kohl was a vivid symbol of the diplomacy typical of the 1990s – "meetings without ties" which were intended to demonstrate that even after its defeat in the Cold War Russia remained an important and respected player in world and European politics. The real role of Moscow at that time was very modest, but "friend Helmut" eagerly gave "friend Boris" the illusion of belonging to a very narrow circle of world leaders.

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Even such a cursory review of the political history shows the commonality between the two countries, which has stood the test of time. One of the reasons for that may be Russian political philosophy. The Russian elite have a world outlook based on the principles of Realpolitik. The ideas about invariable geopolitical interests of great powers as the driving force of international development were somewhat pushed into the background in the 20th century. Last century was the time of the triumph of ideologies – first the Communist ideology, and then – in the last decade – the liberal

one. The Communist ideology looked for patterns of world politics in the idea of class struggle, while the liberal ideology declared "the end of history" and the coming of a new era of universal cooperation on the principles of free trade and politics.

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Subsequent developments refuted both Communist and liberal dogmatism. In the first decade of the 21st century, it has begun to seem that "good old" geopolitics in the spirit of Karl Haushofer which Russians actually never ceased to believe in has returned and that the rivalry between states continues. Russia, now seriously disappointed with the results of the democratic transformations, is experiencing a renaissance of thinking in the spirit of the 19th century.

The established view that the Anglo-Saxon world (or, in modern terms, the Atlantic world) is the true enemy of Russia has existed since the 19th century and, apparently, stems from the fierce geopolitical rivalry that the Russian and British empires pursued in Central Asia and the Middle East. Another explanation is that the ideology of liberalism, which had its roots in Britain, has always been viewed in Russia as attempts to undermine the foundations of the conservative consciousness and world order.

Russia has never been in direct military con-

frontation with Britain (the Crimean War of 1854–56 was an exception due to a special combination of circumstances in Europe). Moreover, in both world wars, Russia and Britain fought on the same side against Germany. Yet, it is Germany that is viewed by Russia as the base of Continental Europe and as its natural partner and ally. In Russia's view, Continental Europe, united by common interests and opposed to seafaring Britain and the United States, is a guarantee of the security and influence of Russia and the whole of Eurasia. Of course, this is a very simplified description, but it can serve as the pivot of Russia's world outlook. For example, some Russian conservative writers hold that the cataclysms of the 20th century occurred because Britain and France involved Russia in the war against Germany, which ran counter to Russian interests.

One can easily find a reflection of these theoretical discussions in modern politics, too. The year 2003 nearly became a year of serious division in European politics. The division of Europe into those who supported the US action in Iraq and those who opposed it demonstrated that the former trans-Atlantic monolith no longer existed. But even more important was the new position of Russia. For the first time in more than 80 years, it was not against the West but on the side of one part of the West, the so-called Old Europe, against its other, US-oriented part.

Subsequent developments showed that Paris, Berlin and Moscow were right to strongly oppose that war. At the same time, the leaders of each of the countries that formed the core of the coalition against the Iraq campaign were guided by personal considerations. For Jacques Chirac, it was

another opportunity to affirm the independence of France and its claims to European leadership. For Gerhard Schröder, it was a way to win additional votes at elections, whose outcome was not obvious. For Vladimir Putin, it was to all appearances a chance to gain an entirely new position for Russia in Europe.

The presidency of Vladimir Putin cannot be described as successful in view of his initial plans and the results he achieved in foreign policy. Putin's initial aim was not at all to turn Russia into a latent threat, as it began to be viewed by the end of his presidency, but to make a "big deal" with Europe on the basis of asset swapping – that is, access to Russian energy resources in exchange for Russia's access to European markets and technologies. He spoke about that, in more or less explicit terms, almost throughout his presidency – from the famous speech in the German Bundestag (he delivered it in German, which made an indelible impression on the audience) to the no less famous speech in another German city, Munich. Considering the interests of German businesses, Germany was assigned a special role in this strategy.

This approach had two culmination points. One was in 2005 when Putin and Schröder signed an agreement on the construction of a North European gas pipeline. The other was in 2007 when Putin, speaking to Chancellor Angela Merkel, proposed that Germany be the main distributor of Russian gas in Europe.

However, these efforts have not produced the desired results. Unlike the late 1960s or the early 1980s, now there have emerged transit nations between Germany and Russia, which are not

ready to remain passive observers of large-scale projects launched by great powers. The words by Radek Sikorski, the then Minister of National Defence of Poland, that the North European gas pipeline is a reincarnation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, represented a landmark statement that outlined the limits of the individual geopolitical capabilities of Russia and Germany. And the generous proposal outlined to Angela Merkel already had no chance of being implemented – such a manifest establishment of "special relations" would not be met with understanding by any of Berlin's allies, and Germany knew that very well.

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Russian-German relations today are an excellent illustration of the state in which Europe finds itself. On the one hand, the European Union does not have a unified political identity and will hardly have it in the future. On the other hand, large countries, however influential they may be, are bound by commitments to their allies and cannot pursue the independent policies that they would consider the most advantageous to themselves.

This is why Moscow's policy of pragmatic integration, with reliance on key partners – Germany, France and Italy, failed to produce the desired result. Russia did not think of any other model for rapprochement, while as of the second half of the 1990s, Moscow was no longer interested in integration according to EU recipes, that is, integration based on gradual adoption of EU norms and principles.

Germany will continue to maintain a special position toward Russia anyway, as German businesses are keenly interested in broader contacts with this country. However, the polarization of attitudes toward Moscow in the European Union is increasing, so now it is pointless to speak of any geopolitical constructs that involve Russia.

The political reputation of Gerhard Schröder after he concluded the contract with Gazprom was delivered a heavy blow – as well as his ability to efficaciously perform the functions of a North European gas pipeline lobbyist. Nevertheless, Schröder's efforts to achieve rapprochement with Russia – no matter what motivated them – were a bold move from a historical point of view.

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There are many arguments to support the possibility that in the 21st century the centre of global influence will shift from the Euro-Atlantic space to other parts of the world, most likely to the Asia-Pacific region. Neither Russia, nor the "Old World" have any chance, taken separately, to play a central role in future world politics. However, the pooling of their potentials can essentially increase the capabilities of both parties.

To date, neither Russia, nor Europe are ready for serious discussions on their common future. Attempts to speed up rapprochement – like those made by the EU in the 1990s or by Russia in the

2000s – fail. "Special relations" with individual European countries, patterned after "holy alliances", are impossible – as is Russia's incorporation into some supranational union.

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Germany will play an important role in building new relations with Russia when Europe (the whole of Europe, not just the European Union) becomes aware of the need for a further merger of the Russian and European potentials. After the Second World War, Germany, along with France, was one of the authors of the most fantastic political project in history – the gradual unification of former arch-enemies in a close alliance. Turning Europe into a truly safe and stable place requires plans for its further integration that would be comparable in intellectual boldness to the project of the late 1940s. And then "special relations" would really be established between Russia and the whole of Europe, not just Germany.