**In search for a future Russian Strategy**

Western policy towards Russia is divided. EU and NATO countries are maneuvering between two different approaches. One group of countries – United Kingdom, Sweden, Poland, Baltic States, Netherlands - believe that until Vladimir Putin remains in power in the Kremlin, the West must contain Russia. The U.S. seem to share such an approach. Another group of countries inside EU and NATO, led by Germany and France, argue against a new division of Europe and reject a new Cold War scenario. Their approach is to bind Russia through economic and security ties with Europe. In their view, Europe cannot be stable and prosperous without an engagement with Russia.

Elder statesman in Germany, like Helmut Schmidt, Hans-Dietrich Genscher and the late Egon Bahr, issued calls for a new German Ostpolitik versus Russia. They reminded Europeans of Germany’s productive role of Russia´s advocate in the West since the 1990s. Germans, by dealing for decades with Russian economic and security interests, understand Moscow’s attitudes in rejecting NATO and EU expansion better. But in the present Ukrainian crisis, Germany obstained from playing the instruments of Ostpolitik. In contrary, Germany stood up for sanctions against Russia, although its economy suffered most under the destruction of bilateral trade relations. For Germany it was more important to prevent a split in the Transatlantic camp over Russia. Berlin chose the role of a mediator between hardline and soft approaches. Chancellor Angela Merkel blasted Russia’s policy in Ukraine as aggression, but, at the same time, invited Putin to discuss the idea of a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

The traditional German „Ostpolitik“ made sense during the Cold War, when West Germany needed a special relation with the Soviet Union because it sought to keep the option open for reunification with the GDR. Former German politicians understood that a reunification could only proceed by peaceful means. There was no alternative to detente and dialogue. But nowadays, German politicians understand that the negative Russia-mood inside the Western camp prevents a new German-led Ostpolitik. In the previous two decades, Germany had started several initiatives to engage Russia – supporting Russian membership in the G7 (2003), proposing peace-plans for Abkhazia and South Osetia (2008), building the Nord Stream pipeline (2011), developing a Central Asian initiative (2007) and inventing the so-called Meseberg process (2009). All these initiatives were ignored by other Wesren states. Germany, itself, was reluctant to support the British-Polish-Czech EU Eastern Partnership strategy (2009), which was directed against Russia. From today’s perspective, a huge chance of engaging Russia through the Nordic dimension EU strategy (proposed by the Nordic states, but not supported by the EU as a whole) has been lost in the 1990s.

Present Western strategies towards Russia lack pragmatism. They seem to build on the notion that sooner or later (after Putin) Russia returns on the path to democracy and then a strategic partership with Moscow can be resumed. The West has no „plan B“. Together with the Nordic states, who seem to voice stronger interest than the rest of Europe to return to a pragmatic cooperation with Russia, Germany could initiatiate the following steps to re-engage Russia in a positive pro-Europe dialogue:

1. The German OSCE chairmanship in 2016 should start a rethinking process of the present security institutions in Europe. European security will continue to base on two pillars – NATO and EU. But both institutions need cooperative agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).
2. The collapse of the international oil prize has postphoned energy production acitivties in the Arctic. However, the Nordic states, Russia and Germany could join forces in developing the so-called North-Eastern transit route along Russian northern cost to Asia. The transit route is designed as an alternative to trade through the Indian Ocean.
3. Building on their long-year experience on the Russian market, Nordic states and Germany seem well-equipped to cooperate with the growing middle-range business in Russia.
4. The danger of international terrorism, particularly from islamic extremists, remains a permanent threat for Europe and Russia. Joining forces in combatting terrorism could be beneficial for all sides. Such a cooperation between secret services helps to rebuild trust. If Iran is not a threat tot he West any more, why does Europe need U.S. missile defense?
5. The Nordic states are the historical protectors of the Baltic States, they are culturally close to each other. The Nordic countries could take upon themselves the difficult but nonetheless vital task to push the elites of Russia and the Baltic states towards reconciliation.

Immediate action on the EU diplomatic front is required. The other option is a return tot he Cold War, which nobody wants. The EU can always reject Russian proposals for revamping the existing European security order. But in the first place, the EU should at least try to understand the Russian real intentions, security fears and challenges.