



OST/WSCHÓD

FINAL REPORT

Between the Past and Future
Poland and Germany in Eastern Europe

February 2022



Ost-Wschód. Between the past and future. Poland and Germany in Eastern Europe

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This report was researched and written by Adam Balcer, Program Director of the Jan Nowak Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław, and Tim Bohse, Project Coordinator at Deutsch-Russischer Austausch e.V. (DRA).

This study has been published within the framework of the project “DE-PL Roundtable on the East”. The project is co-financed by the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation, as well as the Warsaw office of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

Contact



The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław
ul Zamkowa 2, 55-330 Wojnowice, POLAND

www.kew.org.pl / office@kew.org.pl

1. Introduction

The situation in the Eastern Neighbourhood has changed dramatically in recent years. While Russia's role in the economic, political and social life of most countries in the region has decisively decreased, the influence of the EU, China and Turkey has increased considerably. Russia under Putin's leadership has transformed itself into a revanchist power. This authoritarian backslide has resulted in a powerful dictatorship, in which the political leadership generates "legitimacy" through permanent internal repression and external aggression. In effect, Russia's eagerness to use hard power in order to prevent the loss of its influence and promote Eurasian integration is a direct response to the decrease in its soft power. Perhaps the most striking example of this trend is the concentration of the Russian military along Ukrainian borders and the imminent threat in the winter of 2022 of a Russian land invasion. Threats of a renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine are followed by ultimatums issued by the Russian leadership directed to the US and NATO demanding unilateral security guarantees, the meaning of which amounts to a dissolution of the European security order. At the same time, repressions against the Russian society is intensifying in Moscow, culminating recently

in the banning of the leading Russian human rights organization Memorial.

Considering the various challenges and opportunities emerging in Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine), German-Polish cooperation is needed more than ever. Poland and Germany are key EU stakeholders in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Moreover, their influence has increased substantially in the region in recent years. Consequently, the nature of bilateral relations will determine the future of Eastern Europe to a considerable degree. Closer cooperation between the two states certainly will have a positive impact on the region. On the other hand, bilateral tensions will remain one of the key factors potentially hindering cooperation between them regarding Eastern Europe. Due to this, disputes between Germany and Poland could indirectly impede the stabilisation of the region. The internal political changes now taking place in Poland are perceived by Germany, many other EU member states, EU institutions and key NATO partners (including the US, Canada and Norway) as the dismantling of the rule of law. This disagreement constitutes one of the key factors negatively influencing cooperation between Warsaw and Berlin. This issue also weakens the country's credibility as a

promoter of the rule of law in Eastern Europe and its position within the EU.

A new German government constitutes both a challenge and a window of opportunity for the Polish ruling elite. On the one hand, the new administration has placed the rule of law at the centre of its coalition agreement. On the other hand, the new German government in the same document announced that it will take Poland's security concerns more seriously. As a result, Berlin will be "committed to maintaining a credible deterrent" to the Kremlin and "will take into account different threat perceptions and focus on a common and coherent EU policy towards Russia". Indeed, Germany and Poland share certain common interests in Eastern Europe, such as support for the Belarusian opposition and the deployment of their armed forces in the Baltic states. However, they also diverge strongly on some crucial issues. This is exemplified by their attitudes towards Russia and its role in Eastern Europe. Despite a recent increase in agreement between the Polish and German positions, attitude towards Moscow remains the most important challenge to potential bilateral cooperation regarding the region. For instance, both sides hold opposing views of the new Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The support by the majority of German political forces for the project has considerably weakened Germany's influence

in the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood.¹ However, it should be noted that the differences between Poland and Germany concerning Russia and Eastern Europe are deeply rooted in history (and its narratives and interpretations), culture and social perceptions. Indeed, the Polish and German policies towards Eastern Europe are to a large degree shaped by these factors. Today, this issue needs to be discussed much more than before.

In our policy paper, therefore, we will start by describing the impact of culture and history on the social perceptions of Eastern Europe in both countries. Then, we will discuss the Polish and German contributions to the security of the Baltic states. Following this, we will describe Poland and Germany's policies towards Belarus and Belarusian society. Finally, we will explain why Nord Stream 2 is such a serious source of tensions for Poland and Germany.

¹In an opinion poll conducted at the beginning of January 2022 60 per cent of Germans supported the launch of NS2 while a majority of the Green voters (55%) were against it :
ARD-DeutschlandTREND Januar 2022
https://www.infratest-dimap.de/fileadmin/user_upload/DT2201_Report.pdf

2. German and Polish perceptions of Eastern Europe: A complex legacy of history and cultural heritage

Various cultural and historical factors have played a key role in shaping Poland and Germany's Eastern policies. These issues have also influenced their bilateral relations and social perceptions of the East. This reality often causes differences between both governments and societies regarding their positions on certain important issues. The role of these factors are still insufficiently researched and recognised by scholars and experts.

Germany, among the largest EU member states, possesses exceptional cultural and historical relations with Eastern Europe. Considerable positive changes regarding Berlin's approach to the region have been taking place in recent years. However, a lack of self-awareness regarding the impact of Germany's imperial legacy represents a significant challenge for the state's Eastern policy. It is also clear that Germany's regional outlook has traditionally focused mainly on Russia throughout history. Meanwhile, the historical tradition of common statehood (most of the time under Polish rule) and enormous cultural and social mixing with the nations of Eastern Europe (with positive and negative elements) make Poland to a large degree part of the region. This reality is also partly responsible for the country's centuries-old confrontation

with Russia. Today, this complicated historical legacy allows Poland to engage intensively with the Eastern European nations. However, it should be noted that this legacy also sometimes hampers its relations with the region. Moreover, these issues only encourage Polish fears concerning Russia's neo-imperial policy in Eastern Europe.

Germany

Given its geographical location, Germany has developed close and comprehensive relations with Eastern Europe since the Middle Ages. The 18th and 19th centuries especially saw millions of Germans migrate to Eastern Europe or become subjects of Tsarist Russia due to its westward expansion. The Germans contributed greatly to the development of Eastern Europe (cities, architecture, art, economy, etc.) and played a key social, economic and political role in the history of Imperial Russia. In recent decades, Germany has become home to a huge group of people originating from the former Soviet Union. This historical experience makes Germany a unique case among "Western European" EU member states. Nevertheless, public debates on Eastern Europe in Germany rarely address the fact that the German perspective on the region (going back to the 18th century

(Prussia) and earlier) was imperial in character (soft and hard versions – *Mitteleuropa*, Lebensraum) and based on Russocentrism. Insufficient empathy for the fate and interests of states located between Russia and the EU in German public debates is reflected in this traditional imperial line of thought.

Certainly, Germans are emphatic about the enormous crimes, including genocide, committed by Nazi Germany against the population of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. However, the victims are often identified in German public debate solely with Russia. Meanwhile, Belarus and Ukraine are not discussed to the same extent. This is despite the fact that the Belarusian and Ukrainian civilian populations suffered particularly under German occupation. The terrible legacy of the Second World War contributed to a widespread and deeply entrenched pacifism and resentment towards traditional geopolitical thinking in Germany. Nevertheless, this legacy has not constrained Germany's ability to respond to Russia's aggressive policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Certainly, Germany's readiness to deploy their armed forces abroad (for instance, the Baltic states) has increased in recent decades. At the same time, however, Russia has become much more eager to exert military force or at least threaten to use it.

The dissolution of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) and integration of the eastern German states into the democratic system of the Federal Republic in 1990 moved the new united Germany much closer to the East. Despite this, the enlargement of the EU and NATO to the East (Central Europe) conversely led to Germany's deeper integration with the West. Various economic and demographic factors meant that the new united Germany's society remained focused on the western part of the country and the western part of the continent. The reunification of Germany was embedded into the wider process of European integration through the enlargement of the EU and NATO. In the eastern German federal states, trade with EU countries and the US is today much more developed than economic cooperation with Russia or any other post-Soviet countries. Nevertheless, the far stronger sympathies towards the Putin regime still exist in the eastern federal states. They are a result of the local authoritarian heritage.

Reunification in 1990 generated hopes in both parts of united Germany for an "end of history" in Europe. The belief that the division of Europe could be completely overcome and that a united Europe could be founded on a close partnership with Russia was widespread. Consequently, a certain revival of the country's traditional

Russocentric perception of the East occurred during this time. For many years, the country's discussions surrounding a new order in Europe failed to take into account the fundamental geopolitical "earthquake" that had just occurred in Eastern Europe. This was namely the emergence of large independent states (Ukraine and Belarus) located between Russia and the enlarged EU.

After reunification, interest in Eastern Europe decreased substantially in Germany. With the end of the Cold War, political support for research and expertise on the region went into decline. For example, courses concerning Slavic studies were reduced to "minor subjects" at universities. Important social, cultural, economic, and political changes in Eastern Europe were also not taken into account to a sufficient degree in the country. In the case of Russia, the reversal of the country's democratic transformation and the establishment of authoritarian rule were not properly researched in Germany. This lack of comprehensive and in-depth research is also true in the case of the similarities and differences between historical and contemporary authoritarianism in Russia, as well as weaknesses and strengths of the country's democratic political traditions.

While the enlargement of the EU and NATO to the East dramatically changed the balance of power on the continent, the German public's acknowledgement of these

enormous changes was not exactly clear. Today, Germany find itself involved in tensions with the Russian Federation on a scale unprecedented in its most recent history. This issue has been caused by events such as the Baltic states' membership of the EU and NATO, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the suppression of mass pro-democracy protests in Belarus. This reality is not reflected in the public agenda and foreign policy discussions at the proper level. On the other hand, substantial positive changes have been observed since 2014 in Germany regarding perceptions and knowledge of Eastern Europe. The annexation of Crimea and Russia's aggression in Eastern Ukraine proved to be a real game-changer. These events had a dramatic impact on perceptions of Russia in Germany. A "small revolution" in German-Ukrainian relations has been taking place since Euromaidan, creating far more bilateral contacts in every field. The Ukrainian and Belarusian diasporas in Germany are playing an increasingly active role in society. A new think tank, the Centre for East European and International Studies - ZOIS, has helped to reverse the trend of general disinterest in the region. There has also recently been a considerable improvement in the quality and quantity of media reporting on the region.² This

² Many German speaking journalists who have covered the situation in the war zone in eastern Ukraine in 2014, for instance Alice Bota, Golineh Atai, Sabine

phenomenon is related particularly to coverage of the war in Ukraine and protests in Belarus. Moreover, the Kremlin's role in various political murders, the chemical attack on Navalny and cyber-attacks against the Bundestag has increased the German public's awareness of the country's direct ties with the region and Russia's challenges to German security.

Germans were deeply divided regarding their attitude towards Russia before 2011 and particularly during the mass pro-democracy protests in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. For instance, opinion polls conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2010 revealed that half of all Germans had a positive view of Russia. At the same time, 45 per cent had a negative perception of the country. Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 resulted in a radical decline of sympathies for Russia. This outlook has improved slightly since then but today around 65 per cent of Germans express an unfavourable opinion of Russia. This is in comparison to the 30 per cent who still view Moscow in a positive manner.³ Currently, the attitude of Germans towards Russia is very similar to the position of Poles. Opinion polls on Germans' attitudes to Eastern European nations (Belarusians and

Ukrainians) are almost non-existent. This shows that German society still lacks a wider interest in the affairs of the region.

Poland

Poland has a special and very complicated historical relationship with Eastern Europe and Russia. These links have often been influenced by Warsaw's difficult historical relations with Germany. Most of Eastern Europe was under Polish indirect or direct rule for several centuries until the end of the 18th century. Following this, local Poles played a significant role in the history of these territories until the middle of the 20th century. For more than a century, most Poles lived under Tsarist Russian rule, contributing greatly to the development of the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia proper. Today, a large section of the Polish population can trace their origins back to Eastern Europe. Substantial Polish national minorities still live in Ukraine and Belarus and many inhabitants of these countries are familiar with Polish culture and language. Poland's common history with the Eastern European nations has fostered a strong interethnic understanding based on cultural and linguistic similarities. Despite this, differing interpretations of certain historical events remain a source of serious tension for Poles and Ukrainians. Many Poles perceive their own role in the history of Eastern Europe in an almost exclusively positive manner. Consequently, some in the

Adler and Jutta Sommerbauer, continue to publish articles and books on related issues.

³ Topline questionnaire Pew Research Center Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, February 7, 2020.

https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Views-of-Russia-Topline-for-Release_UPDATED.pdf

country do not want to recognise their own “sins” (crimes, discrimination, economic exploitation, etc.) committed against the Eastern neighbours. On the other hand, Poles tend to stress their own suffering at the hands of nations such as the Ukrainians. Moreover, historical religious differences between Poles (mostly Roman Catholics) and their Eastern neighbours (mostly Eastern Christians, while earlier also Jews and Muslims) are often understood in civilizational terms in Poland. This trend contributes today to the orientalisation⁴ of the country’s Eastern neighbours in certain sectors of Polish society. This phenomenon originates in the popular vision of Poland as a country historically located on the eastern borderlands of Western civilization. This trend is strengthened by the current Polish government’s approach to identity and memory. This outlook stresses that Roman Catholicism is the foundation of Polish national identity and that the Poles have only been heroes, victims and promoters of civilization in the East. Finally, this view presents certain regions in Eastern countries as almost exclusively Polish from the historical point of view.

⁴ Orientalisation can be defined as an essentialist understanding of “Eastern” cultures that is based on negative stereotypes and generalisations. It is synonymous with an oversimplified and static vision of the “Other”. Moreover, the strong political and social polarisation of Polish society and ongoing democratic backslide in the country have only encouraged internal orientalisation (orientalising of political “enemies”).

In the 16th century, Poland found itself in conflict with Russia over control of Eastern Europe. After many wars, this competition ended in a Russian victory. This resulted in Poland’s transformation into a Russian protectorate in the 18th century. The country would then totally lose its independence. Apart from the interwar period (1918-1939), Poland remained in the Russian sphere of influence until the end of the Cold War. In Polish historical memory, Russian rule is perceived – sometimes with exaggeration – in a decisively negative light. This situation also favours the promotion of certain negative prejudices regarding Russians. What is most crucial, however, is that these historical experiences have made Poland very sensitive to Russia’s neo-imperial policy today.

Polish attitudes towards the East also possess an important German dimension. The self-perception of Poland as a country with a very difficult geopolitical position located “between Germany and Russia” is still greatly popular in Polish society. In fact, this belief indirectly and unconsciously undermines the Polish-German relationship and the possibility of cooperation. This is because it suggests that there is no serious difference between Russia and Germany and that Berlin has not changed considerably since the Second World War.⁵ Poland’s

⁵ This self-image of Poland greatly simplifies Polish history. It is mostly founded on the memory of Prussian and Russian cooperation in the 18th century,

belief that it is trapped “between Germany and Russia” has encouraged serious objections regarding Russian-German cooperation or consultations “above Polish heads”. This self-image has also been easily manipulated in Poland. For instance, the idea that Germany is almost as much of a threat (“the Fourth Reich”) to Polish independence as Russia is promoted by the current Polish government.

Polish society’s attitude towards Eastern European countries and nations has been shaped by many historical and cultural legacies. In opinion polls, Poles have continuously expressed a negative opinion of Russia and Russians in surveys after 1989.⁶ Persistent memories of Russian domination in Eastern Europe and Poland appear to play a key role in these beliefs. Nevertheless, Polish attitudes still deteriorated decisively after Putin’s aggressive policies in 2014. Many Poles declare antipathy towards Russians but their attitude towards several nations (Arabs, Roma, etc.) is much worse. Certain groups, such as Jews, are viewed in a similar manner to Russians.

which led to the partition of Poland. This outlook once again became popular in 1939 when Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany established an alliance (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). Overall, the self-image explicitly undermines the subjectivity of Eastern European countries located between Poland and Russia.

⁶ For instance, see: CBOS, Stosunek do innych narodów, Marzec 2021, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_030_21.PDF

Poles feel considerably closer to Ukrainians than Russians. However, the population still holds decisively better opinions of Belarusians and especially their southern Czech and Slovak neighbours. This phenomenon can be explained by a particularly popular interpretation of history in Poland that places emphasis on Polish suffering at the hands of Ukrainians.⁷ In the long term, Poles’ relations with Belarusians and Ukrainians might be negatively affected by popular nostalgia concerning former Polish territories that were lost after the Second World War (the Kresy – Eastern Borderlands). Indeed, a Pew Research Centre survey from 2019 found that almost half of Poles believed that “there are parts of neighbouring countries that really belong to us”. In comparison, only 30 per cent of Germans supported this outlook regarding their own country. An earlier opinion poll revealed that almost 60 per cent of Poles regretted the fact that the Eastern Borderlands are no longer a part of Poland.

Recommendations:

- a) Polish and German public and private institutions (e.g., universities, foundations and think tanks) should support joint research projects that

⁷ Ukrainians display considerably better attitudes towards Poles than vice versa. However, their reluctance to recognise that Poles decisively more often fell victim of violence at the hands of Ukrainians during the Second World War than other way around, represents one of important factors hampering Polish-Ukrainian historical dialogue.

will offer an in-depth examination of the similarities and differences between Polish and German perceptions of Eastern Europe. These studies should cover a wide range of research activities, including comprehensive opinion polls. In the case of Germany, these should focus especially on Ukraine and Belarus.

- b) Projects that offer an innovative approach to the past and deconstruct myths and stereotypes should be particularly promoted. These projects should also engage the wider public through modern and attractive activities used in order to popularise history (documentary movies, videoblogs, podcasts, album websites, etc.). Their results should be disseminated widely among the public in both countries.
- c) The development of projects that show the complicated historical links (coexistence, syncretism but also confrontation) between Poland, Germany and Eastern Europe should be especially co-funded by Polish and German sponsors. Researchers from Eastern European countries should be involved to a large degree in these projects.
- d) The traditions of Polish and German political thinking concerning Eastern Europe that place the region in a wider European context should become one of the key topics of bilateral research (for instance, “*Kultura*”).

3. The Eastern flank in practice: Security of the Baltic states

Russian hybrid threats against the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), including cyber-attacks, disinformation, airspace violations and border incidents (involving Belarus in 2021), have been occurring on an unprecedented scale since 2014. Such events could even escalate into military aggression in the future should tensions between Russia and the West increase substantially. No region within the EU or NATO faces such serious threats to its security as the Baltic states. Moreover, NATO's ability to defend the Baltic states against a possible Russian military invasion remains limited. Nevertheless, the Baltic states dramatically increased their military expenditures after 2014. Today, they belong to a small group of NATO member states that allocate more than two per cent of their GDP to defence.

The Baltic states coordinate their foreign policies very closely with each other given the high level of overlap regarding their national interests. They all belong to NATO and the Eurozone and perceive Russia as the most serious threat to their own security. Consequently, the Baltic Assembly, which was established more than 30 years ago by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, has become the most internally coherent regional organisation in Europe. Moreover, the Baltic

states have strong economic ties (foreign trade, foreign direct investment and tourism). In effect, the level of economic integration present in the Baltic states is decisively larger than the Visegrad Group. The Baltic states have adopted complementary policies regarding the Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia. Despite their small size, the Baltic states also possess substantial assets in Eastern Europe, particularly with regards to Belarus and Ukraine. For example, the Baltic states make up around 3.5 per cent of Belarus's foreign trade. This figure is almost two times larger than the combined share of Italy and France. Meanwhile, Baltic direct investment in Belarus is larger than the combined stocks of German and Polish direct investment. The Baltic states play a key role in policies related to the Eastern Neighbourhood. This is exemplified by Vilnius's role as one of the main centres of the Belarusian opposition following the 2020 protests.

The question of security in the Baltic states is not limited to hard power but also involves economic stability. The three countries' geographical locations and developed economic ties with Russia make them especially vulnerable to possible economic pressure from Moscow. As far as the economy of the region is concerned, the

Baltic states cooperate particularly closely with Scandinavia, Germany and Poland. Germany and Poland are key trade partners and investors in Lithuania, the largest economy in the region.

Germany

Germany plays a key role within the framework of the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP), a NATO forward-deployed defence and deterrence military force (almost 5000 soldiers) located in northern Poland and the Baltic states. This operation was endorsed during the organisation's Warsaw Summit in 2016 in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine. This presence was put in place in order to protect and reassure the security of NATO's Eastern flank (Poland and the Baltic States) against Russia. It is composed of four multinational battalion battle groups divided between various countries. German soldiers constitute the third largest contingent in the EFP (12 per cent of all military servicemen) after the UK and US. Germany also leads one of the battle groups in Lithuania. Considering Germany's previous reluctance to increase its military presence on the Eastern flank, its engagement with the EFP constitutes a considerable positive development regarding Berlin's security policy. However, German society has expressed a low level of solidarity with EU and NATO partners in the East regarding the Russian threat. According to opinion

polls conducted between 2015 and 2019, Germans' support for the use of military force to defend NATO allies (Poland and the Baltic States) in the event of a Russian attack remained low. The majority of Germans declared that Germany should not use military force (55 to 60 per cent).

Poland

Poland has been working closely with the Baltic states, especially Lithuania, in the security sphere for decades. This is due to their very similar threat perceptions. After the Russian aggression in the Crimea and Donbas, Poland quickly established a joint Lithuanian–Polish–Ukrainian multinational brigade. The brigade became fully operational in 2016 and other countries are free to join the unit. In 2020, Vilnius, Warsaw and Kyiv built on this successful cooperation and launched the new Lublin Triangle regional format, which is focused especially on security. Poland provided the EFP with one tank company deployed in Latvia and the number of Polish soldiers present in the country now exceeds 170 servicemen. Cooperation between Poland and the Baltic States in the security field increased even further in 2021 as a result of the migrant and refugee crisis on the Belarusian border with Lithuania and Latvia. This crisis was provoked by Lukashenka and backed by Moscow. Polish society has expressed high levels of solidarity with the Baltic states facing the Russian threat. In

most surveys conducted in recent years, an absolute or at least relative majority of Poles supported the deployment of Polish armed forces in the event that Russia attacks the Baltic states. Nevertheless, a substantial minority is still not supportive of this idea.

Recommendations:

a) Given Belarus's ongoing military integration with Russia, the crisis on the Lithuanian and Latvian borders with Belarus, and Russia's continued pressure on Ukraine, the military strength of the EFP should be increased substantially. Germany and Poland should heavily promote this idea and commit more soldiers themselves. In the best-case scenario, Poland and Germany could establish a Polish-German military unit that may serve as a rapid reaction force in the region. Poland and Germany may also consider deploying their armed forces in more than one Baltic state, following the examples of the UK and Czechia.

b) Plans for military cooperation with the Baltic states must include possible worse-case scenarios concerning a military escalation between Russia and the West. Germany and Poland should considerably strengthen both their bilateral defence cooperation and their links with the Baltic states concerning the northern part of the Eastern flank. This could involve new and frequent military drills, regular meetings of HQs and projects dedicated to cyber

security. This cooperation should involve other EU and NATO member states, especially the US, the UK and the Scandinavian countries, which are the main stakeholders in the Baltic Sea region.

c) Officials, experts and military staff from the Baltic states should play a more prominent role in EU and NATO risk assessments concerning the Eastern flank. Poland and Germany should engage with these figures more in national, European and transatlantic debates on the West's relations with Russia and the Eastern Neighbourhood policy. Germany and Poland should learn from the best practices of the Baltic states in fields where they have achieved significant success. This includes energy, cyber security, and the fight against hybrid threats and disinformation.

d) Polish and German public institutions and civil society groups should launch information campaigns that will raise the social awareness of their citizens regarding their obligations of solidarity with the Baltic states as members of NATO.

e) Poland and Germany should considerably improve their economic cooperation with the region, especially with Latvia (direct investments) and Estonia (trade and direct investment). They should also launch some joint Polish-German economic projects focused on the Baltic states.

f) Warsaw and Berlin should support multilateral cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, particularly with regards to the development of energy and transport infrastructure between the Baltic states and Central Europe. A special fund dedicated to this goal could be established by Poland and Germany and it should also be open to other countries.

g) Generally, Poland and Germany should perceive the Baltic states not only as security recipients but also as important allies regarding the Eastern Neighbourhood. Both states should therefore develop ties with the Baltic Assembly concerning the European Neighbourhood.

4. Belarus: Security versus democratisation

Belarus is today the most repressive regime in Europe. After coming to power in 1994, Lukashenka established an authoritarian regime that was bolstered by a planned economy and controlled media. He quickly gained the support of Russia, which became a dominating stakeholder in the Belarusian economy (almost half of all trade and most direct investment). Nevertheless, Lukashenka's seesaw policy between Russia and the EU allowed him for a long time to maintain a certain level of autonomy. His rule was maintained by repression and the exploitation of a weak civil society still unsure about the true nature of the country's national identity. The authoritarian president was also able to guarantee social and economic stability, and this was subsidised by Russia. The growing ambitions of Belarusian society and Lukashenka's mishandling of the pandemic eventually led to a broad protest movement that appeared in the run-up to the presidential elections in August 2020. This movement differed fundamentally to all previous political protests in the country, as it was much larger and had real potential regarding social integration. Indeed, the mass democratic protests that appeared in response to Lukashenka's supposed victory in the "stolen" presidential elections soon began to take on the characteristics of a

social awakening and nation-building process. Using the full force of the state security forces and his central command of crucial institutions such as state enterprises, Lukashenka was able to suppress the protests with Russia's backing. However, it is clear that he has most likely lost his legitimacy in the country forever. Belarus has paid for Lukashenka's actions and is now increasingly becoming a Russian protectorate. Today, this trend represents a key challenge to the security of Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Germany

Germany contributed somewhat to the national and democratic awakening of Belarusian society through cooperation with the country's third sector. Germany was one of the main donors of official development assistance (ODA) before the 2020 protests. German ODA accounted for eight per cent of all of the development aid received by Belarusians between 2018 and 2019. This placed Germany third on the list of donors after the EU institutions and Poland. Nevertheless, the fact that Poland has provided more than 2.5 times the aid to Belarus than Germany shows that the country could have allocated more ODA. Moreover, the community of Belarusian students enrolled at German universities is

rather small. Whilst more than 1600 Belarusians study in Germany, around 10,000 study in Poland. The protests in 2020 have led to unprecedented public attention and sympathy for Belarusian society in Germany. The Belarusian diaspora, which became visible in Germany during the political mobilisation of 2020 and 2021, has institutionalised its work and is set to continue its social and political engagement. Numerous publications on Belarus and more developed reporting on the country will likely continue to encourage public and political interest in Germany. However, the German reaction to the 2020 protests was not satisfactory. For instance, the number of Belarusians who received German humanitarian visas remained limited during this time.

Should Belarus eventually democratise and undertake economic and social reforms, Germany will definitely play a key role in this process. Even today, Germany is the most important trade partner of Belarus among the EU member states, as its share of Belarus's entire trade volume is approaching five per cent. The country occupies fourth place on the list of Belarus's trade partners. Meanwhile, German FDI stocks in Belarus exceed three per cent of all FDI. In effect, Germany occupies fourth place among EU investors after Cyprus, the Netherlands and Austria. Despite this, it should be noted that some German

companies investing in Belarus are registered in Cyprus and the Netherlands. Therefore, Germany's actual share of the FDI stocks in Belarus is substantially larger.

Poland

Apart from Germany, Poland is the most important EU stakeholder regarding the future of Belarus. Taking into consideration the authoritarian slide of Belarus and the democratic and national awakening of Belarusian society, Poland's comprehensive engagement with the country's population is particularly relevant. Between 2018 and 2019 Poland allocated almost 75 million US dollars of ODA to Belarus, especially the country's democratic opposition and civil society. More than twenty per cent of all of the ODA received by Belarus and Belarusians originated from Poland. During this period, Poland occupied second place after the EU institutions among donors of ODA assigned to Belarus. After the mass protests in August 2020, Poland became the most important safe haven for Belarusian political refugees. Poland has provided Belarusian asylum seekers with almost 10,000 humanitarian visas. This is the largest number in the EU. Even before last year, Poland was the most popular destination for Belarusian students enrolled abroad outside of Russia. Their number in Poland has greatly increased in recent years and soon Poland may surpass Russia as the country hosting the largest number of Belarusian

students in the world. The number of Belarusians working in Poland has also risen considerably in recent years. However, there is still a lot untapped potential, as only 60,000 Belarusians are currently working legally in the country. Before 2020, Belarusians often visited Poland as tourists. At the same time, Poles made up the largest group of EU citizens visiting Belarus before the pandemic. Despite very bad bilateral political relations, Poland remains together with Germany the most important trade partner of Belarus among the EU member states (around a four per cent share, almost the same as in the case of Germany).

Belarus also gained a particularly important place in Polish foreign policy after 2020 due to Moscow's growing control over the country. The ongoing integration of Belarus with Russia in the military sphere means that Poland may soon face a dramatic deterioration in its security situation. Indeed, Poland will soon be faced with Russian forces both in Kaliningrad and along the 420-kilometre border with Belarus. In effect, a huge part of Poland will find itself “besieged” from two directions. The current migration and refugee crisis artificially stirred up by Minsk, with Moscow's tacit support, only further confirms Polish fears. This crisis should be understood as a Belarusian counterstrike against sanctions imposed by the EU on Minsk in response to Lukashenka's brutal crackdown against mass

protests in 2020. The situation shows that Poland's fundamental desires for security and democratisation in relation to Belarus are strongly intertwined, unfortunately, within a vicious circle. Without the democratisation of Belarus, Russia will cement its military control over the country. Simultaneously, Belarus's increasing integration with Russia in the security field will only make the liberalisation of the Belarusian regime even more unlikely. Moreover, the support of the Polish government for the democratic opposition is in stark contrast to its own internal politics. Many EU institutions and member states view these developments in Poland as a democratic backslide. If Poland – a key EU player regarding the Belarusian opposition – continues with its current domestic policies, it will only damage its attempts to build coalitions for Belarus within the EU and NATO (also involving Germany). Overall, it will make Poland less attractive for Belarusian civil society.

Recommendations:

a) Poland and Germany together should promote within the EU the strategy of a “Long March” concerning Belarus. This should be based on certain fundamental pillars, such as a detailed list of sanctions that will be imposed automatically in response to the actions of the Belarusian regime; an open-door policy towards political refugees, labour immigrants and

students from Belarus; a transparent and principle-based position regarding political prisoners; and a common and permanent campaign for their release. Poland and Germany should also establish a common programme of comprehensive support for the Belarusian democratic opposition and for high-quality research on developments in Belarus.

b) Given the military integration of Belarus and Russia, Poland and Germany should promote the preparation of a special strategy on Belarus within NATO and the EU. This will outline responses to any deterioration of the security situation. It should place an emphasis particularly on the fast deployment of NATO and EU forces in response to any future Belarusian provocations.

c) Poland needs to conduct a serious public discussion on the possible negative consequences of its internal developments on policy towards Belarus. Such debate should focus on the credibility of Polish support for the democratisation of its neighbour and Polish coalition building capacities in the EU and NATO. Certainly, the current political polarization in Poland makes such a public debate between the opposition and the government highly difficult. However, the opposition, civil societies, think tanks and media may try to place the issue on the agenda.

5. Energy security after Nord Stream 2

In July 2021, Germany and the US issued a joint statement on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which runs under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany and bypasses Eastern Europe. In light of this statement, it is likely that the pipeline will soon be operational. The pipeline will facilitate Russia's attempts to maintain and potentially even increase its already significant share of the EU gas market. According to many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the launch of Nord Stream 2 will strengthen Russia's ability to use blackmail against them. The project is therefore perceived negatively by Poland's main political forces. It has also played a key role in the deterioration of Polish-German relations. It seems that the full application of the EU's energy regulations to the pipeline is the only serious instrument left that can counterbalance Russia. Indeed, the way that Germany will apply these regulations will be of crucial importance. Nord Stream 2 is particularly dangerous for the energy security and economy of Ukraine. After the signing of the US-German deal, the continuation of Russian gas transit through Ukraine now simply depends on Moscow's goodwill. It is estimated that Ukraine would lose around 1.5 billion US dollars should Russia decide to completely suspend gas transit through Ukrainian territory. Moreover, if the transit

from Russia to the EU stops, the virtual reverse flows from the EU to Ukraine will be prevented. The lack of transit options will also increase the price of the gas that Ukraine imports from Russia. Finally, it may make it harder or even totally impossible for EU companies to use the huge underground storage facilities in that country.

Germany

Nord Stream 2 is a project constructed on the basis of close cooperation between Russia and Germany and was implemented in spite of Russia's aggressive policy in Eastern Europe. It is endorsed by the majority of Germany's political elites. The Greens is the only German party which firmly stands against the project. The project also enjoys huge societal support in Germany. Despite this, the pipeline is not needed for various economic and environmental reasons according to leading German experts. The German government's climate targets call for a phase-out of fossil fuels, including natural gas, by 2050. Existing transfer capacities are sufficient to ensure supply stability in the coming years. The pipeline will thus only lead to sharply rising gas prices and slow down the expansion of renewable energies. Nord Stream 2 is a symbol of "elite capture", as well as strategic Russian meddling in

Germany. Lobby efforts were coordinated by former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the chairman of Nord Stream's supervisory board. Matthias Warnig, a former officer in East Germany's security service, was also involved in promoting the project. So far, proposals in Germany to address the criticism and opposition coming from Central and Eastern Europe are focused on promoting Ukraine's integration into the European energy market and its involvement in the European energy transition. These ideas are still insufficient to address the numerous problems caused by the pipeline.

Poland

Poland was highly critical of Nord Stream 2 from the very beginning. A wide consensus on the issue emerged among the country's main political forces. This situation represents a rare case within a deeply polarised Polish political scene. Furthermore, the great majority of Poles view Nord Stream 2 in a highly negative light. Poland is convinced that the project could strengthen Russia's economic and political influence in Germany and that it will be used as an energy weapon against Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine. Warsaw hoped that the US would force Germany to withdraw from the project by using sanctions. However, the aforementioned US-German deal on the pipeline has shown that Washington will not impose any new sanctions. Poland shares its

serious objections with many countries of the region. For instance, the foreign ministers of Poland and Ukraine issued a joint statement concerning the agreement. The ministers declared that the failure of Berlin and Washington to block the project will only threaten the security of Europe and particularly its Eastern part. Polish politicians and experts criticised the US-German deal by arguing that it does not contain any legally binding obligations (for instance, sanctions) in the event of aggressive Russian actions against Ukraine. Moreover, Poland is highly disappointed that neither the US nor Germany has guaranteed the maintenance of Russian gas transit through Ukraine. Poland also expects Germany and the US to greatly increase the budget of a Green Fund for Ukraine, which is supposed to support the transformation of the country's energy sector. The project's initial funding target was set at a modest one billion US dollars. According to the Polish government, the EU (especially Germany) and the US should also invest considerably in Ukraine's gas infrastructure. Warsaw also strongly believes that it is important to apply EU laws to Nord Stream 2. This is particularly true regarding issues such as the certification of the independence of the route operator, the assurance of third-party access to the pipeline and transparent transmission tariffs.

Recommendations:

a) Germany should strictly implement all applicable EU regulations regarding Nord Stream 2. At the same time, Berlin should prepare and launch a long-term strategy aimed at reducing its energy dependence on Russia.

b) Poland and other states critical of the pipeline should highlight within the EU the negative security implications of the project in the context of Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy in the region.

c) Poland and Germany should jointly promote Ukraine's involvement in EU energy corridors and the planning of the EU's strategy regarding energy security.

d) Poland, Germany and Ukraine should all sign a legally binding agreement that will guarantee broad Polish and German investments in Ukraine's gas infrastructure. It should strengthen the country's integration with the EU (interconnectors, reverses, storages, etc.) and encourage renewable energies and energy efficiency. Moreover, the agreement should oblige Germany to impose sanctions on Russia should Moscow make any military and/or energy threats against Kyiv. One of these key sanctions should involve the suspension of Nord Stream 2.