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The Ukraine crisis, which is, de facto, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, has been discussed widely in the media and in public debate both in Poland and in Germany. The German media, whether right or left wing, has run subpages devoted to the situation in Ukraine.¹ The conflict is also in the media spotlight in Poland. It is given comprehensive coverage on various websites, including those hosted by major Polish newspapers and weekly magazines, as well in TV news programmes. A special webpage devoted to the crisis in Ukraine has been launched by the state-owned Polskie Radio.² Obviously, the level of interest in the Russia-Ukraine conflict varies, especially in Germany, but to a certain extent also in Poland – this results from the level of intensity of the crisis on the one hand, and the importance of other topics on the other (for example, the Grexit, Islamic State, immigrants from the South). However, it has been an essential element of public debate for over a year.

In Poland, Ukraine has been discussed widely over a number of years, and has been one of the most important topics in the context of foreign policy. In Germany, the situation has been different. There have been periods of increased interest in Ukraine, particularly with respect to the Orange Revolution and Yulia Tymoshenko's incarceration, but it is only since the Maidan movement in the autumn of 2013 and, especially, since the annexation of Crimea and the Russian intervention in Donbass in the spring of 2014, that Ukraine has become a constant feature of German public debate.

Labelling the events taking place beyond the EU's eastern border is problematic. Should they be defined as 'the crisis in Ukraine' or 'the Ukrainian crisis', or should they rather be described as 'the Russia-Ukraine conflict' or 'Russian aggression against Ukraine'? These terms could be used interchangeably, though in Germany 'the crisis in Ukraine' / 'the Ukrainian crisis' is the prevalent form they take. In Poland, both expressions are also widely used, with the term 'Russia-Ukraine conflict' appearing more frequently than in Germany.

1. Great diversity of opinions

Both Germany and Poland are surprisingly divided on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Diversity of opinion is a normal thing in a democracy, but the extent here suggests that there is a significant level of polarisation between the elites and wider society in matters related to Russian aggression against Ukraine, both in Germany and, to a lesser extent, in Poland.

In Germany, significantly different opinions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, ranging from strong condemnation, to understanding, or even support for the actions taken by Russia against Ukraine, are held both by political elites and opinion formers. Condemnation is the prevalent attitude among the CDU (Christian Democrats) and the Green Party. The SPD (Social Democrats) shows more understanding of Putin's policy but, at the same time, objects to his actions. Die Linke (The Left), as well as the far right, support Russia's actions, more or less openly. Differences, sometimes quite significant, can be observed not only between political parties, but also within their own structures, as the internal Green Party dispute concerning the supply of arms to Ukraine has shown. The idea has been vigorously rejected by party leader Cem Özdemir, while Marieluise Beck, a member of the Bundestag, would like to see it discussed more fully.³

The extent to which Poland's opinion is divided on the subject of the conflict, though not as significant as in Germany, is nonetheless surprising, especially when taking into account the stereotypical understanding of Poland's attitude to Russia and its traditional support for Ukraine. On the one hand, both major parties PO (Civic Platform) and PIS (Law and Justice) express their support for Ukraine and their opposition to Russian aggression. On the other hand, there is some, albeit marginal, support for Putin and his actions (notably from Janusz Korwin-Mikke), as well as opposition to the reaction of the West, especially the sanctions imposed on Russia. Other opinions are somewhere in between, for instance those expressed by PSL (Polish Peasants' Party) and SLD (Left Democratic Alliance).

1 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/thema/ukraine>, <http://www.fr-online.de/politik/1472596,1472596.html>, <https://www.taz.de/Schwerpunkt-Krise-in-der-Ukraine/!t5008150/>, <http://www.zeit.de/index>, (Interestingly enough, 'Ukraine-Konflikt' is one of the three major topics in the Politik section, along with 'IS-Terror' and 'Vorratsdatenspeicherung')

2 <http://www.polskieradio.pl/Ukraina/Tag4692>

3 <http://www.taz.de/!5020753/>, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ukraine-krieg-osteuropa-expertin-der-gruenen-kritisiert-prinzipielles-nein-zu-waffenlieferungen-1.2341468>. Both opinions were expressed in February 2015



Anti-government protests in Kiev, 26.02.2014, Sasha Maksymenko, CC BY licence

The Poles are split on specific questions, such as the supply of lethal weapons to Ukraine. The majority of Polish people do not rule this out, and, indeed, the then-President Bronisław Komorowski stated: 'Poland is ready to sell weapons to Ukraine. I have never heard of any embargo on arms sales to Ukraine. If Ukraine is interested, then of course Poland is absolutely open to holding talks on arms sales.'⁴ Others, however, for instance SLD leader Leszek Miller, strongly oppose this position.

Due to the wide diversity of opinions and evaluations, both in Germany and in Poland, the only way to present the discourse in these two countries is to talk about tendencies. As a result, this text is a collection of hypotheses, and not certainties.

2. Different roles in attempting to solve the Russia-Ukraine conflict

This issue is essential and is reflected in the discourse in both countries. It therefore deserves closer analysis.

The German government is the main negotiator with Russia within the EU, and even among all Western nations (the EU, USA and others, such as Canada and Norway). Since the conflict started in the spring of 2014, Merkel and Putin have frequently met and held talks over the phone. The Normandy Format – Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia – has evolved to be the key platform concerning the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Germany has taken on this leading role without enthusiasm. Its annoyance over the actions taken by Russia is growing, and this is particularly demonstrated by Merkel/CDU. Its coalition partner, the SPD, is also growing impatient, with minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier voicing heavy criticism of minister Lavrov during the Munich Security Conference in February 2015.⁵ A sense of powerlessness and helplessness has developed. Opinions on the Minsk agreement on the Ukraine crisis of February 12th, 2015 are somewhat reserved. The Germans are surprised that they have become 'hawks' in EU-Russia relations. Compared to that of many other EU nations, Germany's attitude towards Russia is certainly more hawkish than dovish. So far, Germany has sought a compromise with Russia – a compromise 'at any cost', as Polish society often sees it.

4 The remark from Komorowski was made during President Petro Poroshenko's visit to Poland on December 17th, 2014, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1324758,Prezydent-Polska-gotowa-na-sprzedaz-Ukrainie-broni>

5 "Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier criticised Russia for its latest remarks on the Ukraine conflict. 'More willingness to compromise on the part of Russia is necessary. It's also Moscow's task to define the common interests of Russia and the West,' Steinmeier said at the Munich Security Conference. 'As yet, we have seen little – too little – of this, and the speech given by Mr Lavrov yesterday made no contribution either,' he said earlier today at the end of the Security Conference in Munich. He stressed that Moscow must be aware that 'Russia can only have a positive future if it works with, rather than against, Europe.'" <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-02/steinmeier-lawrow-ukraine>

Although Poland has defended and supported Ukraine for years in the EU and NATO, it is not a member of the key talks aimed at resolving the crisis. Many Poles believe Warsaw has been sidelined in the negotiations it was once part of. The opposition, particularly PIS and SLD, have accused the PO-PSL government and former President Komorowski of not being able to take proper action on the international scene.⁶ Hence, PIS has announced that it will seek to change Poland's position and engage Warsaw in negotiations on the settlement of the conflict.⁷ The majority of Polish politicians and experts do not want to come to terms with the fact that Poland was once one of the most important negotiators, under the Weimar Format, along with France and Germany, at the end of 2013 and, particularly, at the beginning of 2014 – at the time of the internal conflict between President Viktor Yanukovich and the Maidan (the opposition) – and then lost its role as the crisis evolved from an internal one into a war between Russia and Ukraine.

3. Multidimensionality of the Russia-Ukraine conflict

At least three dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict can be identified, and these correspond to the three layers of the conflict discourse in Germany and Poland: a) violation of international law by Russia; b) armed conflict in Donbas; c) the future of Ukraine.

3.1. Annexation of Crimea – violation of international law by Russia

The annexation of Crimea was construed in Germany as a violation of the fundamental principles that European security and international relations had been based upon. Angela Merkel referred to this very clearly in a speech held for the Lowy Institute in Sydney on November 17th, 2014: 'Nevertheless, we've seen that even in Europe there are still forces which refuse to accept the concept of mutual respect or the settlement of conflicts using democratic and rule-of-law means, (these are forces) which believe in the supposed law of the strong and have a disregard for the strength of the law. That's exactly what happened when Russia flouted international law and annexed Crimea at the start of the year. Russia is violating the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Ukraine. It regards one of its neighbours, Ukraine, as part of its sphere of influence. After the horrors of two world wars and the end of the Cold War, this calls the entire European peaceful order into question.'⁸ Merkel reiterated her position in a speech held during the Munich Security Conference in February 2015: '...for over a year now, the crisis in Ukraine has demonstrated that respect for the principles of Europe's peaceful order can by no means be taken for granted. Russia's actions – first in Crimea and then in eastern Ukraine – have gone against these principles of our coexistence. Ukraine is seeing both its territorial integrity and sovereignty disregarded. International law is being violated. After the terrible war in the Balkans in the 1990s, we are once again being forced to experience what it's like when peace and stability in Europe are called into question and the use of force becomes a bitter reality. Russia's actions conflict with the commitments it has made, for instance in the OSCE Final Act or – above all – in the Budapest Memorandum, in which the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Russia pledged to protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine, in return for which the country would renounce its nuclear armament.'⁹

Merkel's view is shared by almost all the members of the political elite in Germany, with the exception of the Left. The fact that the business community, albeit reluctantly, consented to put politics above the economy and impose economic sanctions against Russia attests to how shocked Germany was at Putin's violation of these rules. It must be noted, however, that German companies initially tried to go back to business as usual. It also seems that German society finds the annexation of part of Ukraine's territory unacceptable. This is the main reason for Germany's condemnation of Russia and its support for the sanctions policy. In a survey, 44 percent of Germans said they



Angela Merkel at the Munich Security Conference, 7.02.2015, Kleinschmidt, CC-BY licence

6 <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/negocjacje-o-przyszlosci-ukrainy-bez-udzialu-polski,513230.html>

7 Cf. for instance, the statement by Krzysztof Szczerski, a close ally of President Andrzej Duda, for Rzeczpospolita, June 14th, 2015, http://www4.rp.pl/Szczerski_rozmowa

8 <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2014-Lowy-Lecture>

9 Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel on the occasion of the 51st Munich Security Conference

favour maintaining sanctions and 23 percent would like to tighten them, which makes 67 percent in total; only 23 percent of those polled believed the sanctions should be softened.¹⁰ However, Germans oppose helping Ukraine if this would result in a deterioration of Moscow-Berlin relations, with 51 percent of those polled against and only 35 percent in favour of providing support.¹¹ One might suggest that German society is against Putin violating the European status quo, though this does not necessarily mean that it is in favour of providing assistance and support for Ukraine.

In Poland, the fact the Putin has broken the rules seems to be less important than in Germany, even though, obviously, it has been highlighted repeatedly by Polish politicians and experts. One possible explanation is that, unlike the Germans, the political elite and wider society in Poland are not attached to the solutions produced during the Cold War period, as Poland did not participate in their creation. Back then, Poland was not a partner but a mere object of the process. For Germany, which significantly contributed to the development of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, this document is fundamental for European security.

3.2. Armed conflict in Donbass

The Poles have a strong sense of threat and fear of Russia's military intervention, not only in Ukraine, but also in other European states, including Poland. In Germany, this sense of fear is significantly less pronounced.¹² Both Germany and Poland would like the solution to the conflict to be diplomatic rather than military. In Germany, this has been apparent since the spring of 2014 and the onset of the war in eastern Ukraine; in Poland – since the defeat of the Ukrainian army in late August 2014 (at the Battle of Ilovaisk), when it became clear that the Russian authorities would not let pro-Russian rebels lose. The government provided them with arms as well as the support of so-called 'volunteers' and regular Russian military units.

Poland and Germany have a different understanding of what should be done, especially insofar as the supply of arms to Ukraine is concerned. The Germans rule out the possibility of reinforcing Ukrainian troops, particularly with lethal weapons, which they think would fuel the conflict. Poland does not exclude the sale of arms, although many say this is not the right thing to do. In Poland, those who are in favour of supplying arms claim that unless Ukraine is supported with certain types of weapons, it will not be able to stop Russian aggression and will lose more territory. Hence, providing Ukraine with weapons is necessary to defend it from Russia.

3.3. The future of Ukraine

What seems to be at the heart of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the fact that Kyiv and Moscow are split on Ukraine's future and its place in Europe. Russia has violated the European status quo and launched military actions in Donbas because it refuses to consent to a democratic Ukraine seeking integration with the West, something the authorities in Kyiv have pursued with varying degrees of success. As Ukraine and Russia's opposing positions are not likely to change, it is difficult to see how the two parties to the conflict will be able to find a compromise in the foreseeable future.

There are still major differences in how Poland and Germany perceive Ukraine's future, as well as over its membership of the EU and NATO. Poland is in favour of Ukraine joining the EU (there is no such unanimity in Poland with respect to NATO membership). In Germany, however, the majority of society and the political elite refuse to entertain the prospect of giving Ukraine EU membership, and, furthermore, the Germans are totally opposed to Ukraine joining NATO. Many Poles believe that the Germans who oppose Ukraine becoming a member of the EU in fact support the Russian position, which, under no circumstances accepts Ukraine's integration with the West.

The reasons for which Poland is in favour of Ukraine joining the EU (and NATO) are pretty much the same as those for which Germany supported the European integration of the Central and Eastern European countries, and particularly Poland, back in the 1990s. Both Poland and Germany want to have a democratic and predictable neighbour in the east. For Poland, there is one more factor that matters: it is afraid of the rebirth of an imperialist Russia – something which, many believe, could be prevented if Ukraine were to become anchored in the West.

¹⁰ Jacek Kucharczyk, Agnieszka Łada, Łukasz Wenerski, *Razem czy osobno? Polacy, Niemcy i Rosjanie o kryzysie rosyjsko-ukraińskim*, ISP Warszawa 2015, p. 25 (The research was conducted in February 2015)

¹¹ *Razem czy osobno? Polacy, Niemcy i Rosjanie o kryzysie rosyjsko-ukraińskim...*, p. 30

¹² In Poland, 76 percent of people consider Russia a military threat to their country, while only 41 percent of Germans think Russia poses a military threat to Germany, *Razem czy osobno? Polacy, Niemcy i Rosjanie o kryzysie rosyjsko-ukraińskim...*, p. 14



Revolutionaries at the Independence Square in Kiev, 9.12.2013, Sasha Maksymenko, licencja CC BY

4. The character of the new authorities in Ukraine – Russia's accusations of fascism

In addition to the three issues already mentioned, one more issue is relevant to the perception of Ukraine and its conflict with Russia: the 'fascist' government in Kyiv, as Russian propaganda has labelled it since Yanukovych fled Kyiv in February 2014.

In Germany, this issue was given much attention, particularly in the first few months of 2014. There was a concern that the far right was becoming increasingly powerful. It was mostly the Left that emphasised this concern, but politicians from other parties – from both the ruling coalition and from the opposition – were also apprehensive. However, in the aftermath of the Ukrainian presidential elections (of May 2014) and parliamentary election (of October 2014), when the far right gained little support, the situation was reassessed and the issue became less relevant.

In Poland, the reverse is the case. Initially, Russia's accusations that the new authorities in Ukraine were fascist were considered to be Russian propaganda. However, over time, the Ukrainian authorities, and particularly President Poroshenko and the parliament, came in for criticism for 'glorifying' the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and other Ukrainian extreme nationalist groups from the first half of the 20th century. Such voices were heard not only in the Eastern Borderlands (Kresy)-oriented circles, but also among PIS, PSL and SLD members.¹³ The most radical opinion was represented by Paweł Kukiz, who unexpectedly gained 21% votes in the first round of the presidential elections in May this year. Poland did not welcome the adoption of decommunisation laws by the Ukrainian parliament (April 2015), which contained provisions that allegedly glorify the UPA. This was probably one of the decisive reasons for the cancelling of the meeting of President-elect Andrzej Duda and President Poroshenko in Warsaw in May 2015. In Poland, the question as to whether Ukraine deserves integration with the West if it 'glorifies' its authoritarian, fascist tradition appears relevant.

5. Methods of stopping Russia

There is a consensus in Poland and Germany that two 'tools' can be identified which may help stop Russia's actions against Ukraine and the violation of international law. The first is economic sanctions, a solution both Germany and Poland favour. As has been said before, sanctions are supported by a vast majority of the population, particularly in Poland. It should be stressed, however, that in Germany the Left disapproves of sanctions.¹⁴

¹³ <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1403927,Szef-SLD-na-Ukrainie-coraz-silniejszy-nacjonalizm>

¹⁴ 'Wir stehen an der Seite der Vernunft und die sagt auch hier... Nein zu Sanktionen,' Party Congress in Berlin, May 10th, 2014, <http://www.die-linke.de/partei/organe/parteitage/berliner-parteitag-2014/beschluesse/auch-fuer-den-ukraine-konflikt-gilt/>

The other 'tool', which involves helping Ukraine implement reforms and change the state fundamentally, is seen by the Poles and Germans to be equally, or even more important, than the sanctions policy. Poland is, however, still very reluctant to provide Ukraine with financial support. Some say that there are enough issues to be taken care of internally, for instance subsidies for farmers, and that therefore the Polish authorities should not give Ukraine funding. They argue that aid should be limited to providing Ukraine with support with regard to the shape of the reforms that need to be implemented.

Germany fails to acknowledge the fact that Putin and his allies are not interested in resolving the conflict they have provoked at least until Ukraine is forced to federalise, something which would in fact paralyse its foreign policy and stop its integration with the West. The actions carried out by the Russian authorities (the shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines flight, the shooting in Mariupol, the use of heavy weapons in the battle of Marinka) take the wind out of the sails of those who suggest EU policy towards Russia should be relaxed.



Normandy format talks in Minsk: Alexander Lukashenko, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande, and Petro Poroshenko, 11.02.2015, Kremlin.ru, CC BY licence

6. A change in strategic thinking with respect to the East?

It appears that the Russia-Ukraine conflict impacts the way both the Germans and Poles think about Eastern policy. These changes are sometimes hard to notice and it is still not clear whether they are of a lasting nature.

6.1. Germany – the end of Ostpolitik?

Russia's actions towards Ukraine have seriously challenged the German Ostpolitik developed in the 1960s in line with the European status quo negotiated with the USSR and observed by Moscow during the Cold War period (military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was the last such instance in Europe). Many Germans are surprised that the USSR was more predictable than today's Russia and therefore wonder what should be done about the approach towards Russia taken so far. The concept of 'Wandel durch Handel', put forward by chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in an attempt to update the old Ostpolitik slogan 'Wandel durch Annäherung', turned out to be illusory, at least in the face of the ruling elite in Russia. It comes as a surprise to the political elite and the wider population in Germany that Russian propaganda treats Berlin as an opponent rather than as a partner.

On the one hand, those who would like to continue the existing strategy towards Russia still have a strong voice in the public debate in Germany. On the other hand, opinion formers call for the realistic assessment of, and approach to, today's Russia.

A letter from 'those who understand Russia', and also a response to it authored by experts on Eastern Europe, both published in *Die Zeit* in December 2014, constitute an important and symbolic

manifestation of this conflict. The two open letters present a totally different vision of Russia and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The first letter, drafted by 'those who understand Russia', was the initiative of an older generation of politicians of all stripes who favour the continuation of Ostpolitik regardless of the actions taken by Russia against Ukraine.¹⁵ It was signed by over 60 prominent figures, such as former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (SPD) and former President Roman Herzog (CDU).¹⁶ A sharp response to the first letter called for a realistic policy towards Russia and was signed by over 100 German experts on Eastern Europe, including politicians and former politicians such as Markus Meckel (SPD) and Rebecca Harms (the Green Party). According to the signatories, 'German Ostpolitik should be based on experience, facts and analysis rather than on pathos, blindness to history and generalisations.'¹⁷

Germany's position can be described as ambiguous, as in fact there is no clear concept of an Eastern policy. The majority agree that European security needs to be built together with, not against, Russia. Nevertheless, there is no good solution regarding a way forward if Russia refuses to cooperate according to the principles which Germany (the EU / the West) see as non-negotiable. There is a growing recognition that it will not be possible to hold dialogue with Putin on the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As the 'Minsk II' agreement of February 2015 failed, it appears that a long-lasting and more or less bitter conflict is the most likely scenario.

6.2. Poland – closer to the European mainstream?

Poland, including its most Ukraine-friendly part, is unwilling to be perceived as 'a hawk' among EU states on the issue of Russia. In addition, as has already been mentioned, the Polish political elite is divided on how to handle Russia. Even PO is quite conservative, with Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz stating on September 19th, 2014 that Poland should lower its guard when it comes to the crisis in Ukraine and take action only together with other EU nations: 'Poland must behave like a sensible Polish woman. Our security, our country, our home and our children must come first, which does not mean, however, that we should adopt a different position than the EU. Quite the contrary: Even though I believe that we should not strive to be an active participant in the conflict, we should provide support – along with other states – if our big European family decides it wants to help,' she said.¹⁸ The



Meeting of the Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz with Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, 19.01.2015, The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, CC-BY-NC-ND licence

15 The letter was initiated by former National Security Advisor to Chancellor Horst Teltschik (CDU), former Secretary of State for Defence Walther Stützel (SPD) and former Vice-President of the Bundestag Antje Vollmer (the Green Party)

16 <http://www.zeit.de/politik/2014-12/aufruf-russland-dialog>

17 <http://www.zeit.de/politik/2014-12/aufruf-friedenssicherung-statt-expansionsbelohnung>

18 http://www.tokfm.pl/Tokfm/1,103087,16671488,Co_dalej_z_Ukraina_Kopacz_Wie_pan_jestem_kobie-ta_.html

economic perspective and unwillingness to damage economic relations with Russia is a new factor to the public debate regarding the view towards the conflict. Some people say that one should not provoke Putin too much, referring to Germany as a positive example of such an approach. It is a view shared by SLD, at least in 2014. In the case of PSL, this approach results from the need to defend the interests of its constituents – farmers and fruit growers who have been affected by food-import counter-sanctions imposed by Russia on the EU, as well as on several states from outside the EU.

The Polish debate on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Polish reaction to the crisis increasingly resemble the discourse in many other EU states. One possible explanation is that Poland has become rooted in the EU and NATO.

7. Germany and Poland – similarities and differences

- * Taking the view of the EU as a whole, Germany and Poland are in the same team, which has not been necessarily the case so far when it comes to their policies towards Russia. Neither Poland, nor, obviously, Germany wants to be perceived as hawkish, but they are also far from being dovish. The prevailing approach towards Russia is based on realism. As a result, the stereotypes of the Germans as a pro-Russian force (according to the Poles) and the Poles as anti-Russian 'hawks' (according to the Germans) are (partially) being challenged. In Poland, however, those who accuse Germany of being pro-Russian still have a strong voice. This view can be seen as partially justified, taking into account, for instance, the letter of the sixty, but it appears to be the voice of a generation that is no longer in active politics.
- * Nonetheless, it should be stressed that Germany and Poland's views on Russia, similar as they may be, are attributable to different reasons. Germany objects to Russia violating the rules, and fears that the European security architecture is at threat. Poland is primarily afraid of Russian aggression, including military action which could go beyond Ukraine. This is why Germany and Poland are divided on supplying weapons to Ukraine and, particularly, on stationing NATO bases on its (NATO's) eastern flank, including on Polish territory. The new President Andrzej Duda is pushing NATO to permanently deploy troops in Poland. Germany's reluctance to set up NATO bases stems from the fact that many German politicians believe such bases would infringe the principles of the European security architecture and violate the agreements between NATO and Russia. This dispute is one of the most fundamental issues in Polish-German relations and might plunge NATO into severe crisis.¹⁹
- * It is worth stressing that in the context of the conflict in Ukraine and the most significant deterioration of relations with Russia since the end of the Cold War, the economic dimension plays an important role not only for Germany, but also for Poland. Unexpectedly, the perception in both countries has become similar, with Germany putting politics above economics, which has not always been the case when it comes to relations with Russia, and with Poland raising the economic aspect in the discussion on relations with Russia in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It seems that the countries 'meet halfway', as they both put politics above the economy, but believe the latter is also important. However, there are still major discrepancies between them. In Germany, the economic factor mostly affects big business, while in Poland it is particularly crucial for one profession – food producers (particularly fruit growers exporting large amounts of apples and other fruit to Russia) who have been bruised by Russian tit-for-tat sanctions.
- * Both countries are concerned about the growth of far-right movements in Ukraine, albeit for totally different reasons. Germany was previously concerned about the rise of the extreme right, but the election debacles of far-right candidates dispelled most of these fears. In Poland, the concern is primarily about the accusations levelled at the ruling authorities and Ukrainian parliament concerning the 'glorification' of Ukrainian far-right organisations from the first half of the 20th century, particularly the UPA. Germany concentrates on a threat that relates to the present, while in Poland special attention is paid to the past – Ukraine's history. In Germany, the question of Ukraine turning toward fascism plays a minor role in the perception of the country in mid-2015. In Poland, this issue is becoming increasingly pressing, tarnishing the image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in a variety of environments, both on the right and on the left.

- * Poland and Germany may surprisingly, to a certain extent, come closer to each other as far as their views on the future of Ukraine are concerned (so far, they have been fundamentally different). In Germany, though, the idea of Ukraine joining the EU and, particularly, NATO still receives a muted response. The events of the last two years have not changed the fact that Ukraine is perceived in Germany as a bit of 'a stranger'. In Poland, those who say that Ukraine should become part of the West still have a strong voice. However, the accusations that the Ukrainian ruling elite has not come to terms with the far-right ideology of the 20th century may result in the belief that Ukraine is not ready for integration with the West. Both countries are subconsciously afraid of a rise in immigration triggered by the war in the east of Ukraine – this results in, among others responses, the unwillingness of both societies – German and Polish - to waive visas for Ukrainians.

- * Despite a similar perception of Ukraine and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Germany and in Poland, there are still major discrepancies between the two concerning the assessment of Ukraine's importance. In Germany, the subject of Ukraine is raised predominantly in the context of the EU/ NATO-Russia conflict over the European security architecture. In Poland, Ukraine is given more recognition. The Poles believe the existence of Ukraine as an independent and democratic state is a fundamental factor ensuring national security of Poland.



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- Historical Breakthrough. The Rulers and the Ruled in Today's Russia. Grzegorz Gromadzki, Łukasz Wenerski (cooperation), Institute of Public Affairs, 2012
- A dangerous game. The authorities and society in Russia in 2014. Grzegorz Gromadzki, Institute of Public Affairs, 2014

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