

The Disruption of Eastern Policy

The Disruption of Eastern Policy

Looking East from
Warsaw and Berlin

Joanna Andrychowicz-Skrzeba and Max Brändle (Eds.)



Bibliographical information of the German National Library

The German National Library catalogues
this publication in the German National Bibliography.

Detailed bibliographic information can be found
on the internet at: <http://dnb.dnb.de>

ISBN 978-3-8012-0664-2

Copyright © 2023 by

Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH

Dreizehnmorgenweg 24

D-53175 Bonn, Germany

Cover design: Jens Vogelsang, Aachen

Typesetting: Rohtext, Bonn

Printing and processing: Bookpress, Olsztyn

All rights reserved

Printed in Poland 2023

Find us on the internet: www.dietz-verlag.de

Content

Preface:

Looking East from Warsaw and Berlin

Joanna Andrychowicz-Skrzeba 7

Polish Eastern policy from 1989 to 2022

Ireneusz Bil 10

Social Democratic Eastern policy: looking back and forward

Karsten D. Voigt 27

Polish-Russian relations until 2014

Agnieszka Bryc 38

A look back at German policy towards the Soviet Union: from Willy Brandt to German unity

Bernd Rother 51

From huge ambitions to shattered dreams: the late 1980s to 2014

Kai-Olaf Lang 56

The Polish *Zeitenwende* in its relations with Russia: from 2014 to 2022

Iwona Reichardt 67

German Eastern policy from 2014 to 2022: the end of *Ostpolitik* as we knew it

Sabine Fischer and Reinhard Krumm 77

Prospects for a new European Eastern policy: a Polish view

Aleksander Kwaśniewski 88

Colder times in Europe

Nils Schmid 99

Preface:

looking East from Warsaw and Berlin

by **Joanna Andrychowicz-Skrzeba**, PhD, Senior Policy Officer at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Poland

On 24 February 2022, the lives of millions of people in Europe changed. The Ukrainians above all faced hitherto unknown challenges. Poland has stood firmly behind Ukraine since the first minutes of the attack and has shown its leadership in Europe for supporting Ukraine. It has supplied arms, offered its territory as a transit hub for Western military equipment, and put strong pressure on Western countries to increase arms supplies and tighten sanctions on Russia. These actions were motivated not only by a sense of shared responsibility for the fate of the Ukrainians, but also by a tangible sense of fear for what could happen to Poland. According to survey results published in the daily *Rzeczpospolita* on 27 February 2022, 65 per cent of Poles were reckoning with the prospect of a direct breach of Poland's borders. The overwhelming conviction was that Poland was safe as long as Ukraine could resist the Russian invaders. In turn, Ukraine will continue to defend itself as long as it is supported by the West.

Poland initially criticised the extent of Western support, particularly from Germany, whose actions at the beginning were not understood in Poland. But on 27 February, Chancellor Olaf Scholz presented in the Bundestag the new position of the German government, announcing far-reaching changes in German foreign, energy and defence policy, a 180-degree shift. Poles welcomed this *Zeitenwende*, but they could not see any signs of implementation. Furthermore, its significance was hardly understood. As a result, Germany's image in Poland has deteriorated, with Poles criticising, among other

things, the slow supply of arms to Ukraine, the reluctance to supply heavy military equipment and the unsuccessful replacement of Polish tanks sent to Ukraine, the so-called *Ringtausch*.

The core of German Eastern policy for decades was Willy Brandt's 'change through rapprochement', which focused on the GDR and aimed at German reunification. This approach, which ended with unification, was modified with an assumption that ties must be upheld with Russia, no matter how difficult, due to the security reality in Europe. In contrast, Russia has never been seen as a trustworthy partner in Poland, even if, for example, the Civic Platform government tried to achieve a reset in Polish-Russian relations. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 prompted the new Law and Justice government to recognise Russia as a threat to the security of the country and the region, and led Poland to urgently seek independence from Russia, particularly in the energy sector. The construction of the Nord Stream pipelines has been a bone of contention in Polish-German relations from the very beginning of the project. Mutual relations were also strained by Polish beliefs that its concerns and warnings about Russia were not taken seriously.

Polish mistrust of German-Russian co-operation has its origins in history. Today, in the face of the war in Ukraine, many Poles think that Germany fully misjudged Russia. But the war against Ukraine has led to critical self-reflection within Germany about its Eastern policy. The highest-ranking German politicians—including President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Chancellor Olaf Scholz and SPD Chairman Lars Klingbeil—admitted to mistakes in energy and defence policy, as well as not sufficiently listening to the warnings from Central and Eastern Europe about Russia's imperialist inclinations. They have promised to undo those mistakes.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has disrupted European Eastern policy. At the same time, different perspectives on that policy have clashed. This is particularly visible in the German and Polish cases. In order to build a new European Eastern policy, we have to understand differing perspectives and clear up misconceptions and misunder-

standings. For this purpose, the Warsaw office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has issued this publication. Its aim is to contribute to the understanding of the perspectives and experiences of both sides and to enable lessons from the past to be drawn so that when a new Eastern European policy is developed it could be based on these lessons, various approaches and respect for different views.

We invited ten well-known experts from Poland and Germany to co-operate on this book. These experts analyse German and Polish policies towards Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation, beginning with the last decades of the twentieth century. Some of them, like former President of the Republic of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and Karsten D. Voigt, former member of the German Bundestag, made great contributions in the shaping of those policies. Our Polish and German authors addressed the same topics but from very different national perspectives. They concentrated on German and Polish Eastern policies from Willy Brandt and his *Ostpolitik* in Germany and Polish democratic transformation in 1989 until the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, German and Polish policies towards the Russian Federation until the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the period from 2014 until the outbreak of war in 2022. Former President Kwaśniewski and Nils Schmid, the Spokesman on Foreign Affairs of the SPD Parliamentary Group in Bundestag, conclude by presenting ideas and predictions for the future of European Eastern policy.

We would like to thank all the authors of our publication for their willingness to take part in this project. Their expertise has formed the basis of this book. We very much hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of each other's perspectives in the past and, through this, in the future so that Europe can be free, secure and stable after the unprovoked Russian aggression in Ukraine. The only way to achieve this is through understanding, agreement and co-operation. Europe must not emerge from this war divided, but united by a common interest in defending its own values and security and fostering stability, democracy and prosperity.

Polish Eastern policy from 1989 to 2022

by **Ireneusz Bil**, PhD, President of the Board of the Aleksander Kwaśniewski 'Amicus Europae' Foundation

In his article, Ireneusz Bil outlines Polish policy towards the Eastern European countries from 1989, the year of the democratic transformation in Poland, until the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022. He outlines the shift in Polish Eastern Policy throughout the years—from Poland as an advocate for East European interests to the loss of this role and its previous position. Bil also touches on the evolution of Polish attitudes toward Russia, shifting from the hope that Russia could be a pragmatic partner to the eventual political and economic decoupling of Polish-Russian relations.

Contemporary Polish foreign policy, including its Eastern dimension, dates to the beginning of the Polish democratic transformation in 1989 when on-going geopolitical changes in the neighbourhood necessitated a reformulation of political and diplomatic relations with all neighbours. Concurrently in the west, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the declaration of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's famous 10 Points marked the beginning of German reunification and altered the situation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Due to security challenges and legal questions arising from German reunification (the border issue in particular), normalising relations with Germany became an absolute priority for the Polish government and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Political agreement on the Polish-German border, achieved within the so-called '2 + 4 talks' and the subsequent bilateral treaties that followed, were a fundamental act of strengthening Polish sovereignty and subjectivity in Europe. Without the confirmation of Poland's

western border and the resulting stability it would have been difficult for the new Polish authorities to effectively confront the challenge of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991.

The following years witnessed a 180-degree shift in Polish foreign and security policy. The Warsaw Pact—once a mighty opponent of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—deteriorated along with the Soviet Union, only to be fully dissolved in July 1991. Soviet troops remained stationed on Polish territory until 28 October 1992 and until 9 September 1994 in the former East Germany. Poland, along with other CEE states, decided to apply for membership in NATO, a decision which was met initially with surprise and even disbelief among former adversaries in the West.

However, establishing relations with the four new eastern states—Russia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine—remained a challenge for the new Polish government. Shifting borders and political transformations are often the breeding ground for uncertainty and instability, as exemplified by the conflicts in the Balkans. Similar unhealed historical wounds persisted in the Polish neighbourhood, with its long track record of territorial rivalry, military conflicts, mutual claims and grievances. Particularly painful was the centuries-long Polish-Ukrainian history, with periods of Polish colonialism and economic exploitation, bloody Ukrainian uprisings, and finally, during and after WWII, the Wołyń ethnic cleansing¹ and the forced resettlement of Ukrainians during the action *Wisła*. The People's Republic of Poland's practice of prohibiting any reflection on ethnic issues did not facilitate the dialogue process. Ethnic nationalism or historical soul-searching and reconciliation were simply a taboo matter in the Eastern bloc.

1 The massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Poland were carried out in German-occupied Poland by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) with the partial support of the local Ukrainian population against the Polish minority in Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, and parts of Polesia and Lublin region from 1943 to 1945. The peak of the massacres took place in July and August 1943. Most of the victims were women and children.