

POLICY PAPER

# STRAINED BY WAR?

TENSIONS, EXPECTATIONS  
AND WAYS TO  
STRENGTHEN GERMAN-  
UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

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About the publisher:

Kyiv Dialogue is a non-partisan and independent platform for deepening and consolidating the dialogue between Ukraine and Germany. Kyiv Dialogue connects opinion leaders from politics, media, and civil society in both countries.

Kyiv Dialogue started as bilateral conference format in 2005. Since 2014, Kyiv Dialogue supports civil society initiatives in the Ukrainian regions to strengthen local democratic structures. Today, Kyiv Dialogue focuses on the social integration of internally displaced persons, and the reconstruction process in Ukraine.

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*Supported with funds from the Federal Foreign Office.*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The public discourse and perception of Ukrainian-German relations is very much focused on the actual or perceived shortcomings of Germany's support. Despite public demands and criticism voiced by the Ukrainian side, the relations are much better than their reputation or perception. Several Ukrainian and German government officials, politicians and experts noted that despite the sharp criticism of the Ukrainian Ambassador and the diplomatic scandals like the disinvitation of Germany's Federal President, support for Ukraine remained unfaltering. Nevertheless, the many frustrations of the Ukrainian side with Germany but also other Western partners were tangible and irritation occurred due to the slow decision-making process regarding the supply of heavier weapons in spring.

Germany has been the largest European contributor to Ukraine since 2014 and has become one of the largest military and civil donors and partners of Ukraine since the start of the war. Yet, it still struggles to accept the role of a leading military power providing Ukraine with the weaponry not just to withstand the Russian aggression but also to defeat the Russian forces in Ukraine. Towards autumn, the public and political debate shifted towards the question of whether or not Germany is willing to provide Ukraine with tanks or infantry fighting vehicles. The longer the debate continues, the longer the German side hesitates, the bigger the negative repercussions for the bilateral relationship will be.

The authors have also established that the German government has been struggling to find the right tone or narrative to justify to its public at home why continuous robust support for Ukraine is necessary. Until today, strategic communication remains the main weakness of German support for Ukraine.

Even though Germany is now among the largest providers of military, financial aid or humanitarian aid to Ukraine, it struggles to communicate this fact adequately.



That strengthens the position of many critics who view Germany's aid as "too little, too late".

Overall, this paper finds that relations between the two states and their governments are better than their reputation and the aid provided to Ukraine is more substantial than many believe.

Based on the analysis of the current state of the bilateral relations, the paper identified ways to strengthen the cooperation. Each of the ways includes some broad and some specific recommendations that could stimulate further reflection and consideration for policy debate or further in-depth policy papers with more specific policy recommendation. The recommendations can be grouped in the following way:

- I. creating a new narrative about Ukraine's victory;**
- II. changing Ukrainian and German communication;**
- III. rethinking the instruments of German support;**
- IV. embracing Ukraine's EU accession;**
- V. taking the lead on Ukraine's recovery;**
- VI. keeping Ukraine on the mental map of Germany.**

Germany is in a unique position to help Ukraine win this war and take up a leading role in the Ukrainian recovery. We believe that it should also become a lead advocate for Ukraine's fast European integration and EU-accession. The substantial military aid provided offers a new facet of the relations, which should be embraced and developed. Germany, in particular, should invest into finding the right narrative about why Western and German aid in particular are important for the European peace order. Furthermore, Ukraine and Germany should adapt their strategic communication and not only focus on the shortcomings of their relations. For Ukraine a balance of criticism, public pressure and diplomacy seems more effective. At the same time, efforts will have to be undertaken to keep Ukraine on the mental map of the Germans and ensure that the war is not the only thing that Ukraine is associated with.



## Authors

**Mattia Nelles** is a Ukraine expert and co-founder of the German-Ukrainian Bureau that provides analytical and communication services focused on enhancing relations between Germany and Ukraine. Until October 2022, he worked as a communication advisor for the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and for projects in eastern Ukraine. For the past seven years, Mattia has focused on Ukraine both professionally and academically, analyzing its reform processes, domestic and foreign policy, and politics.

Until late 2020, he was the Program Director for Ukraine at the Center for Liberal Modernity (LibMod), a Berlin-based think-tank. There he managed the “Ukraine verstehen” platform and a consulting project with the Ukrainian parliament. Mattia holds a Master’s degree in political science with a focus on Eastern Europe and Ukraine from the Free University of Berlin.



**Inna Nelles** (maiden name Borzylo) is a Ukrainian activist, expert in advocacy and strategic communication, and cofounder of the German-Ukrainian Bureau. Between 2014 and 2020, Inna served as the CEO of Center of United Actions – a think-tank and advocacy NGO in Ukraine. Following the Revolution of Dignity, Inna headed CHESNO Civil Movement, the leading watchdog initiative towards elected authorities and political stakeholders in Ukraine. From 2016 to 2018, she used to be a member of the Council of the Reanimation Package of Reforms coalition – the biggest civil society advocacy platform and the driving force behind numerous reforms.

Inna graduated from Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts and holds a Master's degree in Public Relations. She worked as a journalist and TV presenter on Hromadske.TV and a Ukrainian public broadcaster. In 2020, she co-founded the Public Interest Journalism Lab, an interdisciplinary coalition of journalists and sociologists that tackles polarization in Ukrainian society through the instruments of constructive journalism.

# Outline

1. Introduction
2. German-Ukrainian Relations Before the Full-Scale Russian Invasion
3. Relations Since the Russian Invasion
4. How to Strengthen German-Ukrainian Relations?

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2014, after the events of the “Revolution of Dignity” in Ukraine, Russia’s illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and the war it unleashed in eastern Ukraine, relations between Germany and Ukraine reached a strategically new level. Since then, Germany and Chancellor Merkel personally have been leading European efforts to stop the war and to impose sanctions on Russia. It was then that Germany became Ukraine’s most important European partner and donor supporting its reforms.

Despite notable financial, economic, and political efforts since 2014, the bilateral relations also produced a number of misconceptions and disappointments. Some of the main issues that cast a shadow of discontent on this partnership were the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, the architecture of the Minsk Agreements, and certain difficulties with the implementation of reforms in Ukraine.

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, Ukraine has looked to Germany for decisive leadership and significant military assistance. Although hesitantly, the German government has provided military, political, humanitarian, and economic assistance to Ukraine, taken in nearly 1 million Ukrainian refugees, and embraced Ukraine’s EU

candidacy status. Nevertheless, Ukrainian disappointment with Germany’s initial hesitancy to provide heavy military assistance and the actual pace at which the deliveries proceeded is a topic of heated debate both in Ukrainian and German media. At the same time, Germany feels that its assistance is not adequately appreciated.

But is this mismatch of expectations and perceptions a new phenomenon? What has gone wrong and what are the principal (mis)conceptions that the two sides had before and after the full-blown Russian invasion started in February 2022? Do the parties really perceive a certain tension in their relations as it is presented the media? And most importantly – how to use current historical moment to strengthen partnership between Ukraine and Germany?

To answer these questions, the authors conducted more than a dozen in-depth interviews with selected decision-makers and experts from Kyiv and Berlin in August and September, asking how these actors perceived Germany’s support and the relations between the two countries before and after February 2022. The interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity, which facilitated an open expression of positions, opinions, and expectations. The document contains some quotes

from individual interviews with an indication of which side they were voiced by. In addition, the authors also considered statements made by Ukrainian and German top officials from open sources, as well as available sociological data, and analytical studies.

This policy study focuses on the recent period in the history of German-Ukrainian relations from the outset of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidency to the outbreak of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine and to the present moment, seven months later.

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**The primary goal of the paper is to draw recommendations and point out the areas for enhanced German-Ukrainian cooperation during the ongoing war and for the medium term in the post-conflict reconstruction period.**



## 2. GERMAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS BEFORE THE FULL-SCALE RUSSIAN INVASION

As Karl Schlögel wrote in his 2014 book *Entscheidung in Kiew*, in the past years and up until EuroMaidan, Ukraine used to be a terra incognita on the mental map of most Germans. Usually it was perceived in the context of Russia or as a bridge to Russia.

Only after the democratic uprising known as the "Revolution of Dignity" in 2013/14 as well as the police violence that followed in Kyiv, the annexation of Crimea and the war Russia unleashed in Eastern Ukraine, did the German-Ukrainian relations reach an unprecedented intensity. Active cooperation ensued at several levels, encompassing politics, institutions, economy culture and civil society.

Between 2014 and 2021, Germany became Ukraine's largest donor in terms of non-military support, and provided Ukraine with EUR 1.83 billion. It also mustered the largest share of the EUR 17 billion in grants and loans the EU and European financial institutions allocated to Ukraine. Germany's contribution includes development assistance worth app. EUR 1 billion, EUR 500

million credit guarantees and EUR 186 million in humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup>

At the level of national leadership, good personal relations between Chancellor Angela Merkel and the fifth President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko were established. At the time, the primary expectations of the Ukrainian side towards Germany had to do with the containment of the Russian aggression and conflict resolution in Donbas. In 2014, the German government headed by Merkel was instrumental in masterminding and implementing sanctions against Russia. Merkel invested significant time and political capital trying to first stop the war in Eastern Ukraine and then resolve it diplomatically through the Minsk Agreements and the Normandy Format. One Ukrainian informant interviewed for the paper noted that Merkel's role is still not fully appreciated in Ukraine today. "Without Merkel everything could have been much worse", the interviewee said and added that the Ukrainian army was weakened by the battle of Ilovaik, where Russian regular soldiers openly intervened on the battlefield for the first time. From

the outset of Russia's war against Ukraine in early 2014 and until February 2022, about 14.000 people were killed in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

The two Minsk Agreements achieved thanks to Germany and France negotiating with Ukraine and Russia in 2014 and 2015 only succeeded in freezing the conflict into a stalemate along a line of contact more than 700 kilometers-long. The architecture of the agreements and their different interpretations by each party blocked the resolution of the conflict. "In hindsight, we have to admit that Russia used the agreements to fool us. It is very frustrating to admit", one German interviewee said.

Instead of diversifying its energy supplies, Germany only deepened its dependence on the exports of Russian gas. In 2015, despite all the warnings of the Ukrainian side and its allies in the U.S., Central and Eastern Europe, Germany went ahead with the construction of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline from Russia and in cooperation with Russia. Since then, the second pipeline directly linking Russia and Germany has been a major "irritant" in German-Ukrainian relations. When asked about the relations prior to the Russian invasion nearly all interviewees bring up Nord Stream 2.

One of the Ukrainian interviewees noted that "before Russian full-scale invasion, Nord Stream 2 was a huge factor - we spent a lot of time fighting it publicly and privately. But we were not able to stop [the project]. We believe the pipeline played a major role in

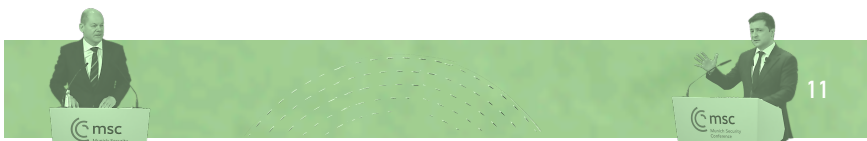
letting this invasion happen. They were warned that it threatens our security. We were not taken seriously. Our concerns have not been heard in Berlin." A German interviewee stressed that "Nord Stream 2 is a remarkable policy failure. I find it very frustrating that until today Angela Merkel refuses to acknowledge that mistakes have been made. The idea prevalent in 2015 that somehow you could anesthetize the Russians by further developing this business relationship was just extraordinarily naive. The short-sighted attempt to improve relations with Russia damaged Ukraine and Ukrainian interest in the process."

<sup>1</sup> Bundesregierung (Februar 2022): Deutschland unterstützt die Ukraine in großem Umfang,

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/unterstuetzung-ukraine-2003926>

<sup>2</sup> International Crisis Group (January 2022): Conflict in Ukraine's Donbas: A Visual Explainer,

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/conflict-ukraines-donbas-visual-explainer>





## NEW PRESIDENT — NEW APPROACHES

Since his arrival to power, the new President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy has shifted both the emphasis in cooperation with Germany and the style of communication. Researchers note that under President Poroshenko, "diplomacy of symbols" was important, while Zelenskyy's approach has become more pragmatic, and the focus has shifted from seeking allies to seeking investors..<sup>3</sup>

Zelenskyy was a successful media entrepreneur, representative of a younger generation, and a person without experience in Ukrainian politics. Even though for Chancellor Merkel he was a less familiar partner than Petro Poroshenko, official Berlin and Angela Merkel welcomed the incoming Ukrainian president with openness and interest. "Berlin was less critical towards Zelenskyy than much of the political establishment and many of the experts in Ukraine," one German interviewee said. The Ukrainians interviewed for this paper characterized the relations between Kyiv and Berlin from April 2019 to the fall of 2021 as "pragmatic working relations". One German interviewee remarked that the political coordination continued very closely on all levels, despite some media coverage to the contrary.

Zelenskyy was elected on a wave of promises to achieve peace with Russia and resolve the military conflict. Indeed, Zelenskyy made great efforts to demonstrate Ukraine's readiness to negotiate in

the Normandy format and to implement the Minsk Agreements. Germany welcomed and assisted in these efforts including the steps Ukraine undertook unilaterally in order to make the lives of those crossing the contact line in the east easier.

After the Normandy summit in December 2019, a ceasefire was established in the Donbas in July 2020. Although the Russian forces in the Donbas violated it in the first hours of the agreement, the sheer intensity and scale of shelling and casualties among civilians and the Ukrainian military decreased significantly during the relatively quiet period. "Zelenskyy's ceasefire", as Ukrainian media labeled it, was not perfect, but it turned out to be the longest and quietest during the war.<sup>4</sup> The ceasefire ended in March 2021. Its end coincided with a deadlock in the Normandy Format when it became clear that Russia's interpretation of the agreement and its insistence on direct talks between Kyiv and its puppet regimes in Donetsk and Luhansk became unacceptable for Ukraine. Early in 2021, the Ukrainian government went after Viktor Medvechuk, the leading voice for Russian interests in Ukraine, shutting down his television channels and freezing his assets, and eventually charging him with high treason in May 2021.<sup>5</sup> Russia simultaneously began its first troop buildup in Crimea, Belarus, and Russia under the guise of military exercises. With this Russia signaled its desire to escalate the conflict as its tools of influence were under legal threat within Ukraine.

However, this did not prevent Germany and the United States from unblocking the construction of Nord Stream 2 in June 2021. The agreement brokered by Angela Merkel and Joe Biden implied that Germany would take measures in case Kremlin attempted to use energy as a weapon against Ukraine or in case Russia launched an aggressive attack against Ukraine. One Ukrainian interviewee said that “the Nord Stream 2 agreement was made to restore transatlantic unity but it created immediate strategic vulnerability for Ukraine.” Another Ukrainian interviewee critically remarked that “the German-American agreement on Nord Stream signed in spring 2021 was struck behind our backs and it was perceived by many in Ukraine as a slap in the face.”

<sup>3</sup> Alyona Getmanchuk, Sergiy Solodkyy, Susan Stewart, Ljudmyla Melnyk (June 2020): Priorities and Expectations from Germany and Ukraine, New Europe Center & Institut für Europäische Politik,

[http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/German-Ukrainian\\_eng\\_FINAL\\_15\\_06.pdf](http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/German-Ukrainian_eng_FINAL_15_06.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group (January 2022): Conflict in Ukraine's Donbas: A Visual Explainer,

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/conflict-ukraines-donbas-visual-explainer>

<sup>5</sup> Simon Shuster (February 2022): Inside the Power Struggle Breaking up Russia and Ukraine,

<https://time.com/6144109/russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-viktor-medvedchuk/>

## THE RUNUP OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION

In September 2021, German citizens elected a new parliament, and on December 8, the Social Democrat Olaf Scholz was voted into the office. President Zelenskyy used the change in German leadership as a chance to reset the bilateral relations against the backdrop of a growing military threat from Russia.

As Russia proceeded to amass its military power in the border regions, Ukraine wanted its Western allies to provide the necessary military assistance and to impose preventive sanctions against Russia, by clearly signaling that a full-scale invasion would cause a serious rupture in Russia's relationship with the West. However, even throughout the winter of 2021/22, while working on a potential sanctions package against Russia, Germany remained publicly skeptical about the latter's intentions to launch a full-scale aggression against Ukraine. At the time, when tensions on the Ukrainian-Russian border were already very high, the U.S. successfully used its diplomacy and intelligence findings to warn Kyiv and the Western public of the looming Russian invasion. Meanwhile Germany was still focusing on diplomacy and stuck to its long-held policy not to provide Ukraine with any military aid. After significant pressure, Germany agreed to provide 5,000 helmets, which were delivered to the country only after the full-scale Russian invasion began. The public discourse in Germany and



Ukraine ridiculed the fact that Germany “only” gave the helmets but one German interviewee stated that it was the Ukrainian side that limited its official requests to vests and helmets.

During the days and weeks leading up to the invasion, the prevailing mood of government members in Kyiv was a mix of disbelief and frustration. On the one hand, despite warnings of the international partners and Ukraine’s military intelligence, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy did not seem to believe that an all-out invasion was imminent.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the administration was increasingly frustrated with the slow military aid and unwillingness to adopt ‘preventive’ sanctions to show Russia in no vague terms how serious the consequences of its invasion would be.

On February 14-15, the German side undertook some last minute diplomatic efforts and resorted to shuttle diplomacy to prevent the Russian invasion. Over the next two days, Chancellor Scholz first visited Kyiv and then Moscow. At the meeting with Putin, Scholz tried to revive the Normandy talks and sought to address Moscow’s alleged fears about Ukraine’s accession to NATO.

Only days later, Putin delivered a rambling speech echoing toxic falsehoods and conspiracy theories, claiming, among other things, that Ukraine is not a real state but a colony and puppet regime of the West. He then proceeded to recognize the Russian-backed proxy statelets in Donetsk and Luhansk<sup>7</sup>. Germany and the West swiftly adopted

sanctions, including a moratorium on Nord Stream 2. However, it was too late for ‘preventive’ sanctions against Russia, as the decision to invade Ukraine had already been made.

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Roman Kravets and Roman Romaniuk (September 2022): “The three longest days of February. The beginning of the great war which no one thought would come”, Ukrainska Pravda <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/articles/2022/09/5/7366059/> or Shane Harris, Karen DeYoung, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Ashley Parker and Liz Sly (August 2022): “As Russia prepared to invade Ukraine, U.S. struggled to convince Zelensky, allies of threat”, Washington Post:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war/>

<sup>7</sup> Official website of President of Russia, Address by the President of the Russian Federation (February 2022),

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

### 3. RELATIONS SINCE THE RUSSIAN INVASION

#### UKRAINE'S DARKEST HOUR

In the early hours of 24 February, Russia launched its full-scale invasion into Ukraine with the maximalist war aim to remove the democratically elected president and the government, and subjugate the whole country. As columns of Russian tanks and vehicles rolled towards Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Kherson from Belarus, Russia, and Crimea, the shock set in. Would Ukraine with Zelenskyy at the helm be able to resist the Russian onslaught, or would it fall in 72 hours, as the western intelligence services had predicted?

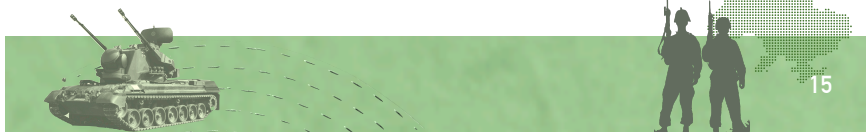
Very early into the war, Zelenskyy became a charismatic wartime leader by demonstratively staying in Kyiv and allegedly refusing a US evacuation offer by saying he needed “ammunition, not a ride”.

This communication style and charisma are alien to the majority of German politicians. However, three days after the start of the invasion, on February 27, Scholz himself delivered a landmark *Zeitenwende* address announcing the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, a remarkable policy turnaround. The Chancellor also outlined the unprecedented sanctions that the West had imposed on Russia and stressed

Germany's resolute commitment to the defense of NATO members along the Eastern front. Several interviewees from Ukraine and Germany praised the speech. One German interviewee said that “the impressive speech indicated that part of the German establishment understood that things had fundamentally changed with the full-scale Russian invasion. But translating this recognition into policy is proving to be much harder.”

In March, Zelenskyy embarked on a series of speeches addressing different world parliaments. On 17 March, the Ukrainian President addressed the Bundestag, the fourth parliament in his “virtual” tour. In his speech, Zelenskyy appealed to the German historical consciousness and stated: “I appeal to you on behalf of everyone who has heard politicians say: ‘Never again.’ And who saw that these words are worthless. Because again in Europe they are trying to destroy the whole nation. Destroy everything we live by and live for”.<sup>8</sup> Zelenskyy invoked the Berlin Wall and argued that there “

was a new wall in the middle of Europe between freedom and a lack thereof. And this wall is getting taller with every bomb that falls on Ukraine.” He closed his speech with a direct appeal to Olaf Scholz “to tear down this wall. Give Germany



the leadership you deserve. And what your descendants will be proud of.”

The speech highlighted the high expectations and specific disappointments that Ukraine had harbored towards Germany. The fact that the plenary after Zelenskyy’s rousing speech immediately returned to its parliamentary business sparked sharp criticism. Indeed, the expectations and disappointment were the highest after the shock of the first days and weeks subsided and the urge and demand for supply of heavy weapons grew louder. At the same time, Germany, like France, opted for a policy of secrecy and refused to publish any data about its systems of weapons and the amounts it provided, ostensibly to guarantee security of the deliveries. The lack of transparency was interpreted by the Ukrainian and German public, media and certain experts as a way to hide the true scope of support. On March 11 polls for the first time showed that despite the fear of a bigger war, 67 percent of Germans supported weapon deliveries to Ukraine, a notion that in late February was rejected by 74% of those polled.<sup>9</sup>

At that time, Germany discussed the limitations of its military assistance to Ukraine and one Ukrainian interviewee noted: “In spring, we listened to all the arguments from the German side. At one point, we heard training would take too long; our guys could not use or maintain German equipment. To us, this did not feel like a sincere debate and more like excuses”. The fact that

German weapons would be used to kill Russian soldiers again was used as an argument to oppose arms supply. This infuriated the Ukrainians. One Ukrainian interviewee noted: “For us as one of the main victims of Nazi terror during World War II it was extremely painful to hear some people invoke German historical responsibility as a reason not to give us weapons”. A German interviewee cautioned not to overestimate the perceived tensions and said that despite public criticism Germany acted in lockstep with its allies to quickly provide Ukraine with weapons it could immediately use.

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<sup>7</sup> Official website of President Zelenskyy, Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the Bundestag (February 2022):

<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-u-bundesta-73621>

<sup>8</sup> See Forschungsgruppe Wahlen Politbarometer (März 2022):

[https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer\\_2022/Maerz\\_2022/](https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer_2022/Maerz_2022/)

<sup>9</sup> See Forschungsgruppe Wahlen Politbarometer (März 2022):

[https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer\\_2022/Maerz\\_2022/](https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer_2022/Maerz_2022/)

## THE BRAWL ESCALATES

In its most dire moment, President Zelenskyy did not shy away from the tactic of naming and shaming and the use of public pressure as a tool for rallying support for Ukraine. The symbol of that approach in Germany was the Ukrainian ambassador Andrii Melnyk, who even prior to the invasion tended to pick fights with some political figures over the recognition of the Holodomor and the German-Ukrainian historical commission, among other things. In the run-up to Russia's invasion, Melnyk openly demanded more assistance from Germany and did not shirk from criticizing Germany's lack of support.

After the invasion, the Ukrainian ambassador continued his efforts with a lot of zeal. Disregarding diplomatic protocol, Melnyk became the central actor in the public discourse rallying support for Ukraine, often in confrontational or provocative ways. Several interviewees from both Germany and Ukraine praised his "loudspeaker diplomacy" in shaping the agenda but one interviewee from Ukraine noted that "the unorthodox approach of the ambassador was initially useful but did over time become a liability". A German interviewee noted that the ambassador was central to shaping the focus of the media and public debate exclusively on what Germany did not deliver or did not do and added that this was by no means reflective of the constructive interaction the German government had with the Ukrainian side.

At the time, many observers missed that the ambassador's colorful and at times sharp criticism was, for a time, in lockstep with the demands of President Zelenskyy, who criticized ex-Chancellor Merkel for her "failed Russia policy" in one of his evening addresses in early April.

## THE "DISINVITATION DRAMA"

After the Ukrainian army pushed the Russian forces out of Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy Oblasts, the world was shocked to learn about the extent of Russian atrocities in Bucha, Irpin, Borodyanka, etc. On his very first visit outside of Kyiv to Bucha, President Zelenskyy was asked about his criticism of Merkel and he doubled down on his reproach saying that for years Western leaders like Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel had been making decisions about Ukraine together with Russia without listening to Ukraine – all to keep Russia quiet.

At that time, the Ukrainian-German relations reached a yet another low point with the last minute disinvitation of President Steinmeier in mid-April, right before Steinmeier was scheduled to depart to Kyiv from Poland. The trip was organized by the Polish President Andrzej Duda. Together with their Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian counterparts, the presidents wanted to send "a strong signal of joint European solidarity with Ukraine". The German government and several of its MPs and ministers sharply



criticized the disinvitation as a diplomatic affront. In early May, the two Presidents talked for the first time and Steinmeier reportedly said the disinvitation was a “historic affront”, unique to a head of state in peacetime.<sup>10</sup>

For weeks, the debate in Germany focused on the perceived insult to the head of state and how the Chancellor could not visit Ukraine until the dispute was resolved. Several Ukrainians interviewed for the paper described it as an “unfortunate misunderstanding”, one added that “it caused a diplomatic shitstorm that was in no one’s interest but Russia’s”. One Ukrainian interviewee added that it did not, however, affect Germany’s military or financial support. Two German government officials interviewed confirmed that and cautioned that even if the “diplomatic crisis” caused a big political discussion it did not by any means influence Germany’s support.

After the incident, Olaf Scholz refused to visit Kyiv “just for a photo opportunity”. That marked a failure in the communicative dimension of his foreign policy. The German Chancellor did not appreciate the importance of symbolic visits and symbolic politics, while the Ukrainian side sought substantial support from its allies accompanied by strong symbolic gestures. In fact, President Zelenskyy understood that the communicative dimension of his foreign policy is of crucial importance. His daily addresses to the nation and the numerous virtual addresses and visits to heads and states, governments and VIPs were

hugely important for him as they enabled Zelenskyy to shape the global narrative and garner international solidarity and support.

It took weeks until the first German representatives visited Kyiv. In early May, the opposition leader Friedrich Merz came to the Ukrainian capital. On May 8, the speaker of the Bundestag Bärbel Bas visited Kyiv on the occasion of the commemoration ceremony marking the anniversary of the end of WWII. On May 10, the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock became the first German cabinet member to visit Kyiv since the start of the full-scale invasion. Until his eventual visit in June, Scholz refused to comment when he would visit Ukraine.

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<sup>9</sup> Spiegel (Juli 2022): Telefonat von Frank-Walter Steinmeier und Wolodymyr Selenskyj: Wie unwirsch der Bundespräsident reagierte,

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/telefonat-von-steinmeier-und-selenskyj-a-00de121e-f18b-4cae-a4ea-6f690402e10f>



## THE “HEAVY WEAPONS” DEBATE

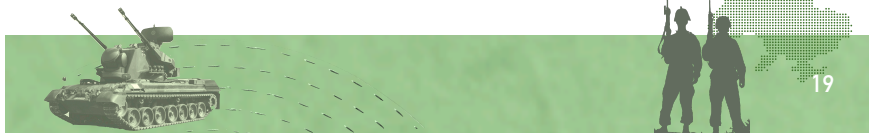
April and May saw Ukraine asking its partners for more substantial military aid in the form of “heavy weaponry”, as it was preparing for Russia to redeploy its forces and efforts in Donbas. In April, Scholz and many of his party colleagues refused to embrace the delivery of German heavy weapons, and warned repeatedly of the risks of a nuclear escalation.<sup>11</sup>

At that time, the German opposition in Bundestag exerted big pressure on the government. Knowing that parts of the ruling coalition would support the idea, the CDU/CSU threatened to file its own resolution. To avoid such a political showdown and potential humiliation of the government, on April 27 the Bundestag adopted a resolution tabled by the ruling three party coalition, which among other aspects called on the government to expand arms deliveries “immediately and perceptibly in quantity and quality” and to deliver “heavy weapons.” Polls showed that at the time the majority (56 percent) of Germans thought it was right for Germany to supply Ukraine with heavy weapons such as tanks and 39 percent opposed the idea. A month earlier 63 percent of polled Germans opposed the delivery.<sup>12</sup>

When asked about the perception of German military aid, several Ukrainians interviewed for this paper said that initially expectations towards Germany were very high. One Ukrainian interviewee said: “We expected leadership from Germany but did

not see it. It seems that the German government is not able or willing to lead on the EU level to support Ukraine, specifically, militarily.” Another Ukrainian interviewee said: “For us it is difficult to understand why Germany is so slow in providing weapons if it is among the biggest producers in the world and therefore in a unique situation to provide us with arms.” In his June interview with the weekly newspaper *Die ZEIT*, President Zelenskyy claimed: “Every head of state of our partner states and, of course, the German Chancellor knows exactly what Ukraine needs. But the supplies from Germany are still lower than they could have been.”<sup>13</sup>

Ukraine’s frustration with Germany and several others states that were hesitant to quickly supply heavy weapons was visible. Ukrainians were also frustrated with what they perceived as hesitancy to support quicker sanctions against Russian hydrocarbon imports to the EU. The fifth package of sanctions adopted by the EU in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on April 8 did not include oil or gas but only an import ban of Russian coal and other solid fossil fuels. Sanctions regarding oil were only adopted in June as part of the sixth sanctions package. “While fighting the war, Ukraine lacked the ability to see how difficult it was to get the consensus within the EU for the sanctions”, one German interviewee said and added, “Germany invested significant resources to make the sanctions as robust and sharp as possible.” Another German interviewee emphasized that German and





Ukrainian interests were and are not always identical. Stopping the import of Russian oil and gas, he said, would have been harmful to the economy and phasing them out needed time.

It is difficult to put the frustration of the Ukrainian side into perspective but numerous Ukrainian interviewees confirmed that it was real but not limited to Germany. While the Ukrainian society and state were operating in an existential crisis mode, in the perception of many Ukrainians, Germany and other Western states still followed the incrementalist-bureaucratic logic. Thus, the public position and publicly visible support for Ukraine understandably became the only prism through which western politicians where evaluated in Ukraine. This explains the immense popularity of the UK, an active provider of such support. Boris Johnson, kindly nicknamed “Johnsenyuk”, who has visited Kyiv three times in the course of the war, was perceived as one of the biggest supporters and friends of Ukraine. Another reason for Ukraine’ frustrations were the high and partly unrealistic expectations that Ukraine initially harbored. Little did the Ukrainian side know about the poor shape of the German army and the German bureaucratic and political constraints, with its population fearing a military escalation with Russia.

According to one Ukrainian interviewee, “Ukraine was asking, demanding at times begging for weapons from all its allies” and said that the frustration over the

speed and amount of provided aid, especially in the first months of the war, was tangible with all major partners, even the U.S. The perception and seriousness of the tensions were exacerbated by Germany’s caution to provide heavy weapons and the way Ukrainians demanded them. The neglect of symbolic politics from the German side amidst the row over the Steinmeier disinvitation and the continuous criticism of the Ukrainian ambassador added to the perception that the relations reached a low point.

<sup>10</sup> Spiegel (Juli 2022): Telefonat von Frank-Walter Steinmeier und Wolodymyr Selenskyj: Wie unwirsch der Bundespräsident reagierte,

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/telefonat-von-steinmeier-und-selenskyj-a-00de121e-f18b-4cae-a4ea-6f690402e10f>

<sup>11</sup> See for example Spiegel (April 2022): Olaf Scholz über Ukraine-Krieg im SPIEGEL-Interview: »Es darf keinen Atomkrieg geben«

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/olaf-scholz-und-der-ukraine-krieg-interview-es-darf-keinen-atomkrieg-geben-a-ae2acfbf-8125-4bf5-a273-fbcd0bd8791c>

<sup>12</sup> Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Politbarometer (29th April, 2022),

[https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer\\_2022/April\\_II\\_2022/](https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer_2022/April_II_2022/)

<sup>13</sup> ZEIT Interview mit Präsident Volodymyr Selenskyj (June 2022),

<https://www.zeit.de/2022/25/wolodymyr-selenskyj-ukraine-krieg-europa/komplettansicht>

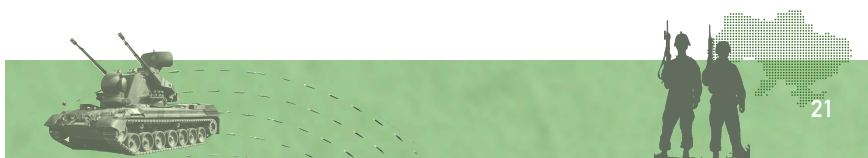
## THE SURGE OF AID

In late April and May, as the battle for Donbas intensified, Ukraine began to run out of Soviet artillery ammunition and it suffered between 200 and 300 daily casualties. It was then that the first Western systems started arriving. In April, the US hosted the first Ukraine Defense Consultative Group Rammstein Conference in Germany to discuss weapon deliveries from over 40 countries and coordinate further support for Ukraine. Shortly before, Germany announced the delivery of the Gepard anti-aircraft gun and later a joint German-Dutch initiative to deliver 12 Panzerhaubitze 2000. In late April, the first U.S.-provided artillery M777 systems arrived followed by German-Dutch howitzers on May 12. In mid-June, Germany joined a U.S. and British initiative and became one of the only three states to supply Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS),<sup>14</sup> which helped Ukraine immensely to attack Russian command and communications facilities, ammunition depots and logistics hubs. Germany provided three Mars 2 rocket artillery systems, which, according to the Ukrainian Defense Minister, arrived in early August.

The announcements of the German weapon deliveries were welcomed in Ukraine but public criticism, especially in Germany, continued unabated. The fact that the Scholz-led government continued its policy of secrecy about the extent of weapon deliveries strengthened the sense among his critics that it was

dragging its feet and was not doing enough. Opinion polls conducted in Ukraine also recorded a certain level of disappointment among Ukrainians and changes in the understanding of who were and are partner states for Ukraine. In February 2021, before the full-scale invasion, polls found that Ukrainians mentioned the following top three allies: USA (38%), Poland (35%) and Germany (28%). In May 2022, Poland (65%) and the United States (63%) managed to maintain and strengthen their positions, joined by the United Kingdom, which 66 percent of the respondents considered a friend of Ukraine. At the same time, the perception of Germany as an ally had significantly decreased, and only 14% of the respondents viewed Germany as a top ally.<sup>15</sup>

In his speech in the Bundestag on June 1 Chancellor Scholz for the first time presented a long list of what types of military aid Germany had provided and in addition announced the delivery of a modern Iris-T air-defense system.<sup>16</sup> Since June, the German government has been publishing and regularly updating a detailed overview<sup>17</sup> of its military assistance. It has become clear that, despite all the criticism, Germany is indeed one of the largest suppliers of military assistance to Ukraine in both volume and value. Against this background, polls conducted in Ukraine in June recorded an improvement in the attitudes towards Chancellor Scholz: while in April, only 30 percent<sup>18</sup> of Ukrainians viewed him positively,



in June this proportion rose to 41 percent.<sup>19</sup>

According to the latest (August) data from the Kiel Institute,<sup>20</sup> Germany is the fourth largest military contributor in terms of weapons and equipment provided and financial aid offered with military purposes, after the US, the UK and Poland. A Ukrainian interviewee said that “since this summer Germany’s military aid to Ukraine is much better and more helpful than it gets credit for. But oftentimes the systems arrive after what we perceive as unnecessary delays.” A German interviewee stressed that “statistics is not very meaningful” in this respect and that there are many questions regarding the methodology and how states assess the monetary value of their military support. Germany, he said, appraises the goods it provides by their current value and many other states use purchasing prices, inflating the value of the military aid provided to Ukraine.

At the same time, Germany worked actively to convince Central and Eastern European members of the EU to send its modernized Soviet tanks and infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine in return for German equipment. Over the past months, Germany initiated various “Ringtausch” with Greece, Slovakia, Czech Republic and most recently with Slovenia. Oryxspioenkop, or Oryx, a Dutch open-source intelligence defense analysis website, noted in September that “while the ‘Ringtausch’ programme has received its fair share of criticism, it should be mentioned that

Germany is currently the only European nation that is actively pushing other countries to give their Soviet-era weapons systems to Ukraine by offering replacement systems.”<sup>21</sup> One German interviewee said that while the swap deals were slower than expected it resulted in over 100 modernized Soviet tanks and infantry fighting vehicles that were or will be delivered to Ukraine.

While weapons are flowing, there still is a certain level of distrust in Berlin regarding President Zelenskyy and his intentions. In May, the weekly journal *Der Spiegel* reported that “sources close to the government say there is concern that Ukraine could become overconfident if it experiences a string of battlefield victories and rolls into Russian territory – which would mean that German tanks would once again be inside Russia.”<sup>22</sup> *Die Zeit* in September reported a similar concern that weapons might end up on the black market.<sup>23</sup>

According to some German and Ukrainian interviewees, German unease in providing weapons is reflected in the fact that despite offering substantial military aid, the Chancellor still refuses to see Ukrainian victory as a goal. When asked about the goals of the war, Scholz often said that Russia must not win. “Unlike many Western allies, Scholz shies away from setting Ukrainian victory as a goal because for him and many people around him Russian defeat is just unimaginable”, one German interviewee said.

Until today, it is not clear whether the Chancellor really refuses to

define Ukraine's victory as a goal because that might require more aid and supplies – or whether he does not believe that Ukrainian victory is feasible. In mid-June almost two-thirds (64 percent) of polled Germans did not believe that Ukraine would win the war with the help of Western weapons. Only 26 percent believed that Ukraine would win.<sup>24</sup> Until early-September, the numbers had not changed much. At the same time, various Ukrainian polls from those conducted in the early phases of the war<sup>25</sup> to the more recent ones showed confidence in Ukrainian victory with more than 90% believing that Ukraine would prevail in this war<sup>26</sup>.

Just four days into the war, on February 28, Zelenskyy first articulated Ukraine's aspiration to join the European Union. Days later, on March 1, he signed the symbolic application to join the EU. For many in Germany it was a surprise despite the fact that Zelenskyy had actively gathered support for an eventual application since he was voted into office in 2019, a move many in the Merkel and then Scholz government viewed with skepticism. Days before Scholz visited Kyiv the first time since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Zelenskyy gave an interview to ZDF, Germany's public broadcaster, and said: "I think there is a certain skepticism in the attitudes of German leadership towards Ukraine. I don't think this skepticism has to do with Chancellor Scholz, I don't think it is new. But I think this skepticism is expressed especially when it comes to Ukraine's future

membership in the EU and NATO, this skepticism was unfortunately also felt before Chancellor Scholz took his office. This attitude was palpable and I am confident that it will change."<sup>27</sup>

On 17 June, Scholz, the Prime Minister of Italy and the Presidents of France and Romania visited Kyiv. In their joint press conference, Scholz announced that Germany would support Ukraine's candidacy status. Initially, Germany was perceived as being hesitant to grant Ukraine candidacy status.

A German interviewee refuted that perception and noted that the government had actively debated this question and ultimately made the decision to fully embrace Ukraine's candidacy. The perceived hesitation is part of a normal three party coalition process. Ukraine received EU candidate status on June 23.

<sup>14</sup> BMVg (Juni 2022): Ukraine-Kontaktgruppe: Gemeinsames Statement,

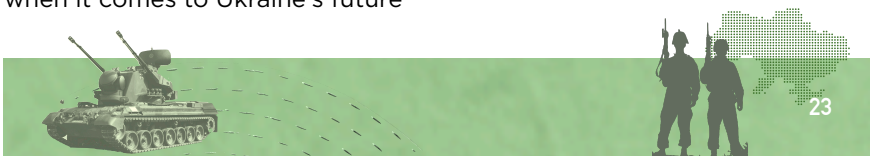
<https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/ukraine-kontaktgruppe-gemeinsames-statement-5449178>

<sup>15</sup> Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, How the War Changed the Way Ukrainians Think About Friends, Enemies, and the Country's Strategic Goals (May 2022):

<https://dif.org.ua/article/yak-viyna-vplivae-na-dumku-ukraintsiv-pro-druziv-vorogiv-ta-strategichni-tsili-derzhavi>

<sup>16</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (Juni 2022): Kanzler Scholz zur Ukraine: Wir helfen in umfangreicher Art und Weise,

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<sup>17</sup> Bundesregierung (September 2022): Militärische Unterstützungsleistungen für die Ukraine,

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/krieg-in-der-ukraine/lieferungen-ukraine-2054514>

<sup>18</sup> Rating Sociological Group, The Ninth National Poll: Assessment of International Partnership (April 2022):

[https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/devyaty\\_obschenacionalnyy\\_opros\\_ocenki\\_mezhdunarodnogo\\_partnerstva\\_26\\_aprelya\\_2022.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/devyaty_obschenacionalnyy_opros_ocenki_mezhdunarodnogo_partnerstva_26_aprelya_2022.html)

<sup>19</sup> Rating Sociological Group, Thirteenth National Survey: Foreign policy orientations (June 2022):

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<sup>20</sup> Kiel Institute (August 2022): The Ukraine Support Tracker, Working Paper,

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<sup>21</sup> Oryx (September 2022): Flawed But Commendable: Germany's Ringtausch Programme,

<https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/09/flawed-but-commendable-germanys.html>

<sup>22</sup> Spiegel (Mai 2022): Olaf Scholz and Ukraine: Why Has Germany Been So Slow to Deliver Weapons?

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/olaf-scholz-and-ukraine-why-has-germany-been-so-slow-to-deliver-weapons-a-7cc8397b-2448-49e6-afa5-00311c8fedce>

<sup>23</sup> Peter Dausend (September 2022): Waffenlieferungen an die Ukraine: Liefert die Regierung jetzt Kampfpanzer?

<https://www.zeit.de/2022/38/ukraine-waffenlieferungen-panzer-debatte-bundesregierung>

<sup>24</sup> Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (Juni 2022): Politbarometer Juni 2022,

[https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer\\_2022/Juni\\_2022/](https://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Archiv/Politbarometer_2022/Juni_2022/)

<sup>25</sup> Rating Sociological Group, The Seventh National Poll: Ukraine during the war (March 2022),

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<sup>26</sup> Democratic Initiatives Foundation (August 2022): Independence Day of Ukraine: What Unites Ukrainians and How We See Victory in the Sixth Month of War,

<https://dif.org.ua/en/article/independence-day-of-ukraine-what-unites-ukrainians-and-how-we-see-victory-in-the-sixth-month-of-war>

<sup>27</sup> Zdf Heutejournal Interview (June 2022), Präsident Selenskyj im ZDF:

<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/ukraine-praesident-selenskyj-interview-zdf-heute-journal-100.html>



## TALK OF RECONSTRUCTION

The rhetoric of the German Chancellor changed after his visit to Kyiv. Scholz began to emphasize the need to start planning for Ukrainian reconstruction. On June 22, in his last government declaration before the summer break, Scholz declared that a Marshall-Plan for the reconstruction of Ukraine was needed. He also announced an international conference of experts to be convened in October as part of Germany's G7 presidency to coordinate long-term assistance for Ukraine. Scholz went on to say that Germany "will continue to provide Ukraine with massive support: financial, economic, humanitarian, political and, not least, with the arms supply. And we will continue to do so for as long as Ukraine needs our support."<sup>28</sup> This sentiment is also reflected in the G7 Statement on Ukraine issued on June 27.

For Scholz and his entire government the talk about Ukrainian post-war reconstruction and the German role in it is a welcome shift away from the more difficult conversation on weapons supply and the longer term planning in the war of attrition. The talk about and planning of recovery offers Germany an opportunity to positively shape the agenda and utilize its resources and experience to assume a leading role in the recovery process.

The Ukrainian side also realized that it has to pursue a dual

approach. On the one hand, the primary objective is to continue to rally international support for the country's war efforts to liberate all the occupied territories. On the other hand, Zelenskyy and his government understandably want to use the moment to lock in support for the eventual recovery. That is why already in late April, the President created the National Recovery Council as an advisory body under the President of Ukraine, whose task is to develop the post-war recovery and development plan for Ukraine. The plan consisting of hundreds of pages was presented at the Ukrainian Recovery Conference held in Lugano on July 4-5<sup>29</sup>, where dozens of states pledged their support for the herculean task of reconstruction that according to the Ukrainian government will cost USD 750 billion.

<sup>28</sup> Deutscher Bundestag (Juni 2022), Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz will „Marshall-Plan“ für Wiederaufbau der Ukraine,

<https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw25-de-regierungserklaerung-897774>

<sup>29</sup> Ukrainian Recovery Conference (Juli 2022), Ukraine's Recovery Plan,

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## RETURN OF THE WEAPONS DEBATE

As the summer ended, Ukraine launched its offensive in the south and a surprise attack on Russian-occupied territories in the Kharkiv region, liberating about 6.000 square kilometers of land. While the gains have stunned both the Russians and many observers, it shows that Ukraine did use the Western provided military aid and used it to liberate more territory than the Russians have captured since April. *The Economist* reported, citing Ukrainian sources, that the German Gepard anti-air systems played an important role in the offensive.<sup>30</sup> Olaf Scholz also emphasized the fact that German weapons helped make the success of the Ukrainian army possible.<sup>31</sup>

In a landmark speech at Prague University in late August, Scholz acknowledged the need for long-term support for Ukraine. He said that the war might last longer and more effective long-term coordination and division of labor regarding military support were needed. According to Scholz, Germany would be willing to take the lead in providing artillery and air-defense.<sup>32</sup> Shortly before that, on the occasion of Ukraine's Crimea Platform, Scholz announced another military package for Ukraine worth EUR 500 million. Among other aspects, the package includes three additional IRIS-T air defense systems. Most of the weapons will be delivered only in 2023 and the package marks the beginning of a "sustainable modernization of the Ukrainian armed forces", a

government spokesperson explained.<sup>33</sup>

What is interesting, however, is what is missing from the package. For months, Ukraine has been asking to purchase infantry fighting vehicles from the stocks of Germany's weapons producers, and more recently it also specifically asked for modern German main battle tanks. Ukrainian and German interview partners for this paper also stated that there is no strict military logic behind the question why Germany does provide some of the world's best artillery and short range rocket artillery systems that wreak havoc among the Russian supply lines and positions but refuses to send its main battle tanks (like the Leopard II) or infantry fighting vehicles (like the Marder). The arguments are strictly political and so far the government has shied away from providing both. Since September, the debate and Ukrainian demand for German arms has intensified, affecting Ukrainian-German relations. Experts from the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) laid out the first plan of what a German-led European initiative for providing Ukraine with Leopard II tanks could look like.<sup>34</sup> When the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock visited Kyiv for the fourth time this year, her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba publicly raised the issue of Ukrainian need for tank deliveries at the press conference. However, the German Minister declined to say whether the government would fulfill Ukraine's request for battle tanks. Shortly after, Kuleba took to Twitter to accuse



Germany of ignoring Kyiv's pleas for Leopard tanks and Marder infantry fighting vehicles, saying that Berlin offered only "abstract fears and excuses" for not providing such military hardware", and asking "what Berlin is afraid of that Kyiv is not?"<sup>35</sup>

On her return from Kyiv, Germany's Foreign Minister gave an interview in which she spoke out in favor of delivering tanks<sup>36</sup> before walking her support back saying that Germany could only deliver tanks together with international partners. In mid-September, in an interview from Kyiv, Ursula von der Leyen weighed in the debate and said: "If they say they need battle tanks, then we should take that seriously and deliver them."<sup>37</sup> In the middle of the heated debate, Germany's Defense Minister announced that Germany will send 50 "Dingo" armored vehicles to Ukraine, marking another U-turn in the German government's stance on military support for Kyiv, just days after claiming that such a move was impossible.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Ukraine pushes strongly for the deliveries of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles. Speaking with the *FAZ* on 16 September, Kuleba stated: "Now we are asking for Leopard tanks or Marder tanks, and Germany is supplying the Dingo-type armored vehicles. That is also helpful, and we are grateful for that. But that's not what we need most in combat. What is the sticking point? Where is the problem? Why can't we get what we need and what Germany has? I have the impression that there is a kind of wall of arms in Berlin. I

think the time is ripe for the Chancellor to tear this wall down."<sup>39</sup>

In an interview with *BILD* on September 21, President Zelenskyy also weighed into the tank debate and said: "For us today, tanks mean protecting our people. We will win this war even without your tanks, but I want you to understand that we are fighting for our common values and I want this to be our common victory". He appealed directly to Germany not to justify the refusal of deliveries with references to the policies pursued by the US or other countries: "They are independent of other states. Germany is the strongest economy in Europe, so it can also lead by example."<sup>40</sup>

The whole debate about German military support is highly sensitive and controversial within Germany. A substantial majority of the population fears escalation and being drawn into a direct conflict with Russia. Chancellor Scholz knows this and acts cautiously, very much in lockstep with the U.S. administration, who is also cautious about giving Ukraine more advanced and longer range weapon systems, like the ATACMS missiles.<sup>41</sup> Providing tanks by Germany alone is viewed by Scholz as a potential risk and many left-leaning, pacifist party members who have long been rallying against the militarization of Germany not only view it as a potential for escalation but also find it unbearable to imagine German tanks on the Ukrainian battlefield being used against the Russians. This segment of Scholz electorate still clings to the naive





belief that an accommodation with Russia can be found that would bring back the cheap energy prices.

Despite political pressure from his party's left, Scholz's and Germany's position is less entrenched than it seems, and Scholz has signaled his readiness to reevaluate it in consultation with other partners supporting Ukraine. In September, Nico Lange in the *Internationale Politik* summarized the sentiment echoed by many interviewees for this paper: "It is a wise principle to always act in concert with partners. However, for a country like Germany, which is rightly expected to take a leadership role because of its location, size, and economic strength, acting 'together with partners' should not mean being the last to do a little of what everyone else has already done."<sup>42</sup>

The longer the debate goes on without a joint decision by Germany and its partners, the more the question of tanks has the potential to have a negative influence on the bilateral relationships. In late September in an interview with the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung* (NOZ) Chancellor Scholz was annoyed by the demand for battle tanks. He said that partners such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Romania and Greece are supplying Ukraine with tanks produced in Eastern Europe. This equipment is immediately operational, he said, because logistics, ammunition, spare parts and the necessary know-how are available. "In return, we are gradually replenishing our partners' stocks with Western

equipment," Scholz explained. He was therefore surprised "that some critics act as if we only supply helmets."<sup>43</sup>

One Ukrainian interviewee for this paper said that despite significant German aid "the scale of the war is enormous. That is why we constantly have to ask for more weapons. But every time, we are banging our heads against the wall trying to get a new level of military support from Germany. That is so painful every time. In the end, we get what we request, but it comes with such an enormous delay, which could have been avoided, which costs lives, and this causes distraction and unnecessary friction."

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<sup>30</sup> The Economist (September 2022): Ukraine seizes the initiative in the east,

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<sup>33</sup> NTV (August 2022): IRIS-T, Panzer, Raketenwerfer: Scholz verspricht Kiew großes Waffenpaket,

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<sup>34</sup> Gustav Gressel, Rafael Loss & Jana Puglierin (September 2022): The Leopard plan: How European tanks can help Ukraine

take back its territory – European Council on Foreign Relations,

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<sup>35</sup> Dmytro Kuleba (September 2022), Twitter,

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<sup>36</sup> FAZ (September 2022): Annalena Baerbock im Interview zu Kampfpanzern für die Ukraine

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<sup>38</sup> Hans von der Burchard (September 2022), Germany to send 50 armored vehicles to Ukraine after pressure to step up support, Politico,

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<sup>39</sup> 16.09. Kuleba Interview FAZ Dmytro Kuleba: Wir brauchen Panzer dringender als Dingos,

<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/dmytro-kuleba-wir-brauchen-panzer-dringender-als-dingos-18322125.html>

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<https://www.bild.de/video/clip/video/exklusiv-interview-das-sagt-selenskyj-zur-putin-drohung-81393946.bild.html>

<sup>41</sup> The New York Times (September 2022): Ukraine Wants More Powerful Weapons. Biden Is Not So Sure,

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<sup>42</sup> Nico Lange (September 2022): Bringing About Peace with German Weapons,

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<sup>43</sup> Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung (September 2022): „Wer zusätzlich Hilfe braucht, wird sie bekommen“, NOZ,

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/interview-scholz-noz-2130514>



## PERCEPTION OR COMMUNICATION PROBLEM?

If one only looks at the public discourse, which is very much focused on the shortcomings of the German support, one inevitably comes to the conclusion that the relations must be in a state of crisis. But they are not. The German and Ukrainian public discourse and many of the public statements by Ukrainian officials, especially by the former Ukrainian ambassador Andrii Melnyk, focused on Ukraine's demands for more military support and the real or perceived shortcomings of Germany's military support. Given Ukraine's precarious military situation in spring and summer, it is more than understandable that Ukraine was frustrated with the Western aid.

As a victim of Russia's genocidal war of aggression it has every right to be frustrated with Western aid, which it perceives as being not adequate enough to enable it to win the war. Western partners, on the other hand, have their own set of interests to consider, as one German interviewee noted. There is no doubt that Ukraine's victory is in the interests of the West, but in the process Germany and the U.S. have to consider escalatory risks, the damaging effect of sanctions on their own economies etc. Ukraine, a country locked in an existential struggle for survival, cannot afford the luxury of considering nuances. Germany's hesitation can also be interpreted as grasping at straws, hoping to

have some influence on Russia on the bilateral diplomatic level or in the post-war solution.

Interestingly, several experts interviewed for this paper stated that the relationship between the leaders, governments and societies is much better than the media coverage or the discussions about more weapon deliveries indicate. One German interviewee noted that due to Germany's decades-long failed Russian policy, including the construction of Nord Stream 1 and 2, the Ukrainian expectations towards Germany are understandably higher than towards France, Italy, Poland or the UK. However, he added that much of the criticism was focused on what Germany was not doing for Ukraine instead of highlighting the strong support it has provided since 2014 and the significant increase in the scale of this aid after the Russian full-scale invasion. On the one hand, it is fair to conclude that there is a real perception problem. The perception of Germany as overly cautious, hesitant and slow in providing much needed military aid is rooted in the publicly visible disputes about the disinvitation of Steinmeier and the weapon debate, especially in the first months of the war. The perception stems from the understandable frustration of the Ukrainians about the reckless Russian and energy policy Germany used to pursue and on which it has yet to fully reflect.

However, the perception created partly unrealistic expectations as to how promptly Germany would be willing to offer support to Ukraine and how much of it it

would provide. The U-turn that German policies have taken in this respect is often underappreciated. Germany went from being Russia's main partner and advocate in Europe to the largest supporter of Ukraine within the EU in its war against Russia, overturning deeply entrenched dogmas not to provide weapons to war zones. For Ukrainians engaged in an existential struggle for survival it is difficult to accept the slow decision-making process within the three-party coalition about certain weapon deliveries and the bureaucratic inability to organize the aid more effectively. Overall, one has to admit that when compared to the support provided by other countries, like France, Italy or the UK, Germany's aid has always been sizable from day one of the war. One German interviewee said that the public discourse is completely different from the discussion Germany has with its allies and Ukraine, who pragmatically compare delivered supplies, in terms of financial, humanitarian or military support and jointly debate how it can be maintained and increased.

One German interviewee acknowledged that in his view the government had a "serious communication issue" and added that this has to do with how Germany conducts diplomacy in a much more traditional way. It has yet to catch up to the public diplomacy and PR of its American or British peers. One example that illustrates this communication issue is the fact that Germany is one of the largest financial contributors in non-military aid in absolute terms but hardly anyone takes notice of that.

In May, at the meeting of G7 finance ministers in Germany, the USA pledged USD 7.5 billion and Germany USD 1 billion in grants not loans. The other G7 members including France and Italy together pledged a mere USD 700 million in loans.<sup>44</sup> According to the Kiel Institute Support Tracker, the bulk of financial assistance between January 24 and August 3 to Ukraine came from the EU's institutions (€12.32 billion), the US (€11.06 billion), the UK (€2.1 billion), Canada (€1.82 billion), and Germany (€1.15 billion). When asked about the perception of the German support for Ukraine, one German interviewee said that the quantitative comparison of support is problematic because Germany's sum is separated from the EU's contribution, of which it also bears a "large share".

Germany does not brag about its support and that is sympathetic, but it also fails to properly communicate the immense efforts it undertakes and has already undertaken. The substantial humanitarian contributions are not properly communicated and neither is the fact that nearly one million displaced Ukrainians are currently hosted by Germany, a move that met no social opposition, debate, political backlash or the bureaucratic problems that Germany faced after taking in about 1 million Syrian refugees in 2015. Until today, Germans not only continue to host the one million Ukrainians but increasingly voice support for such measures. The share of those who want to continue to support Ukraine even if that results in higher living or heating costs for



Germans is rising: between July and late September it grew from 70 to 74 percent.<sup>45</sup> That is a remarkable change compared to 2014, when Germany was split about whether to adopt sanctions against Russia following its annexation of Crimea and the war it waged in Donbas.

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<sup>44</sup> Süddeutsche Zeitung (August 2022): EU ringt um Finanzhilfen für die Ukraine,

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/eu-ukraine-finanzhilfen-1.5634060>

<sup>45</sup> ZDF-Politbarometer (September 2022): Hohe Preise: Für die Mehrheit großes Problem,

<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/politbarometer-inflation-wiedervereinigung-100.html?slide=1664472477503>

## 4. HOW TO STRENGTHEN GERMAN- UKRAINIAN RELATIONS?

The German-Ukrainian relations in times of war are better than their reputation is. Germany has invested significant amounts into Ukraine's civilian and military capacity to prevail in this war and stands ready to take a leadership role in the country's recovery. But beyond more financial or military support, how can the relationship be improved and in what ways? The following sections reflect an aggregation of the thoughts of our interviewees and includes some observations and recommendations of the authors. Some of the ideas are practical and could be implemented quickly, others require more consideration. This is why this section hopes to encourage further debate.

### CREATING NEW NARRATIVE ABOUT UKRAINE'S VICTORY

One of the shortcomings of Chancellor Scholz and even President Biden is the lack of a coherent narrative, and, as some critics argue, of a coherent strategy, about the importance of Ukrainian victory in the war. The German Chancellor and the U.S. President<sup>46</sup> maintain that they will support Ukraine "as long as it is

necessary", but necessary for what? It is time to take the next step in strategic communication and move on from "Russia must not win" to "do everything possible for the earliest possible victory of Ukraine". Moreover, German audience in particular needs to hear why Ukrainian victory is in Germany's interests and why Russia's potential victory will have the most dramatic consequences in Ukraine and beyond. The talk about not allowing the right of the might to prevail is good but it has to be expanded and incorporated into a coherent narrative about why ending the war on Ukraine's terms is critically important for the European peace order and why it has global repercussions.

Several German and Ukrainian experts interviewed for this paper explain the German hesitancy to define such a narrative or strategy with the long historical tradition of Ostpolitik and the country's sentimental proximity to Russia, which used to be perceived as one of the strategic partners and the main victim of World War II. Russian defeat in Ukraine was and to some extent



still is hard to imagine. However, the autumn successes of the Ukrainian counter-offensive in eastern and southern Ukraine are quickly debunking this myth. As one interviewee noted, "The Germans are having an awakening, but it will take some time before they finally believe in the possibility of Ukrainian victory".

Several interviewees from both the Ukrainian and German side noted that one of the greatest successes in the current relations between the two countries is the impressive level of solidarity with Ukraine coming from ordinary Germans. These public sentiments need to be nurtured to maintain them over the medium term. A coherent narrative and strategy will help citizens to comprehend the situation of Ukrainians and maintain some of the support. Atonement for and proper commemoration of the Nazi war crimes in eastern Europe and Ukraine will have to play an important role, too.

Reflection on the failures of the late Ostpolitik, its narrow focus on Russia and its shortsighted energy policy is vital. Germany needs to reflect how parts of its political, business and cultural elites as well as parts of the population were unable to duly recognize the rise of Russian neo-imperialism and chauvinism and there should be investigations into how Russia tried to use its lobbyists and, possibly, strategic corruption as a tool to nurture ties with Germany. Secondly, Germany should have an honest debate about the failures of its Russia policy. The most recent German suggestion

to ban EU citizens from holding high management or supervisory board positions in Russian state-owned enterprises as part of the newest sanctions package is a welcome first step to address the problem.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, we should realize that right now, Germany has very limited tools to influence Russia but under current conditions Ukraine's victory is one of such tools. A Ukrainian victory over the medium or long-term can trigger democratization of Russia, Belarus and other countries in the region. One German interviewee noted: "If you want to positively influence Russia and pull this country in a different direction, you have to do it through Ukraine. You have to make Ukraine a success because Ukrainians will eventually succeed in developing a different way of running their country, a more mature society. They will radiate influence towards Russia. But what we can't allow is Russia to pull Ukraine down and that is really what this war has been about from the outset. Russia and its model are failing and it wants to drag Ukraine down with it."

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<sup>46</sup> The New York Times (May 2022) Opinion | President Biden: What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/31/opinion/biden-ukraine-strategy.html>

<sup>47</sup> Björn Finke (September 2022): Dürfen Europäer bald nicht mehr in Russland abkassieren?,

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/sanktionen-schroeder-eu-russland-l-1.5663244?reduced=true>

## CHANGING UKRAINIAN AND GERMAN COMMUNICATION

Changing the style of communication on both sides is also extremely important. Many of the misunderstandings and tensions described in this paper were caused by communication failures. Many interviewees point out that at the working level German-Ukrainian relations look much healthier than their public appearance filtered through the prism of the media.

This is not to say that Ukraine should refrain from publicly articulating its needs or demands. But it is important for Ukraine to change the tone of communication and ask for support in a more constructive way, not forgetting to fairly acknowledge in public communication all the numerous kinds of assistance that Germany is currently providing. The appointment of the new Ambassador of Ukraine to Germany is a good opportunity to reset the official communication and restore the balance between communicating the urgent needs both bilaterally, diplomatically and publicly.

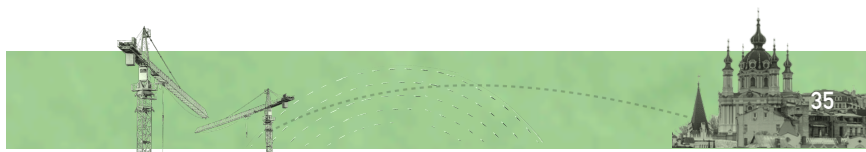
At the same time, Germany should also reconsider its approach to communication. The irritation of Ukrainians is exacerbated by the lack of a logical explanation why Germany cannot supply tanks and infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine, while it is already supplying state-of-

the-art howitzers or rocket artillery, both of which wreak havoc on the Russian army. Transparency, consistency and justification of decisions are crucial.

In addition, the German government should communicate more clearly to its domestic public that rising energy prices are the result of Russia (not Ukraine) launching a war of aggression in Europe, and therefore dependence on Russian energy is a threat to German national security. It should explain that the government's policy in this regard would not revert to the previous state if and when Russia's war against Ukraine ends. This will eventually help to work with the attitudes and expectations of the Germans themselves as domestic opposition in the context of rising costs might pressure the government to reduce or condition support to Ukraine, dictate peace or force ceasefire.

## RETHINKING GERMAN MILITARY SUPPORT

Russia's sham referendums, the annexations of four Ukrainian Oblasts, and its mobilization have shown its willingness to stick to its maximalist war aims and to double down on its war efforts. Russian leadership seems to believe that mobilization will sufficiently prolong the war while Russia deploys tools of economic warfare, political destabilization, escalation threats, and influence





campaigns in the West in order to manipulate Ukraine's allies into forcing Ukraine to negotiate. That should prompt the West to urgently step up its support and adapt its policy of support for Ukraine. Taboos about providing certain weapon systems, like the longer-range ammunition for the HIMARS, that the Ukrainian commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi recently defined as the number one request from the U.S., should be revised.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Germany has to prepare for the possibility that this war of attrition might last longer than it was envisaged before.

Besides being a cause of disagreement, the German-Ukrainian military relationship also bears potential for growth and strengthening in the long term. The peaceful resolution of the war in Donbas based on the Minsk Agreements and the Normandy and Minsk Formats was a cornerstone of German involvement in Ukraine. During the ongoing military hostilities, Germany's military and other support can become a lever on the diplomatic level. Only if Germany keeps up and even increases its military support, Ukraine is likely to accept it as the main negotiation partner in future settlements with Russia.

Relations with foreign militaries have not been an integral part of German foreign policy for historical reasons. To a certain extent, that will have to change as Ukraine's Armed Forces will need Western support in the long term. It is also in Germany's interest to actively participate in modernizing the Armed Forces of

Ukraine so as to first and foremost win this war and then be able to start a recovery process and withstand potential Russian aggression in the future. That is why Germany should invest in the conventional Ukrainian military in the short, medium, and long term. It will not only enable Germany to learn from Ukraine's battlefield successes and the largest conventional war in decades, but also gain political influence on how the civilian-military relations and the recovery of the Ukrainian defense sector are shaped. The clear goal of the modernization should be the increase of interoperability with NATO forces. Becoming a major provider of arms to Ukraine's defense also means billions of contracts for Germany's defense industry.

Scholz's announcement that Germany is ready to take a lead on artillery and anti-air systems is a good sign, but Germany should listen to Ukrainian demands and pragmatically, in cooperation with its allies, evaluate what is feasible. For now, Ukraine has identified the German tanks and infantry fighting vehicles as its key priority. As ECFR experts argued, the Leopard 2 tanks are the only mass-produced European tanks used by 13 European states. In practical terms, this makes them the best choice for Ukraine. The longer Germany hesitates, the bigger the political fallout and potential damage for the bilateral relations will be, and the later the tanks and IFVs will join Ukraine's arsenal.

Even if the military is still a rather alien tool in Germany's foreign policy, Germany has to use the

potential of its own sizable arms industry to support Ukraine. The most important thing here is to have an honest and pragmatic debate about Ukraine's needs and the available stocks of the German Bundeswehr and the industry.

The EU and Germany have set up funding schemes to allow Ukraine to buy weapons directly from the producers. The schemes are proving to be successful and have been used to buy ammunition and weapon systems, like the 18 RCN-155 modern artillery systems that Ukraine purchased directly from the German producer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW). The funding schemes should be expanded to allow Ukraine to buy more Iris-T air defense systems and use the money for the purchase of the 100 PzH-200.

Finally, on September 30, following, Russia's annexation of the four of Ukraine's territories, Ukraine announced that it would apply for NATO membership. Even if this seems unthinkable today, Germany should not be dismissive about it. Together with its NATO allies, Germany should lead a serious discussion about post-war security guarantees.

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<sup>48</sup> UKRINFORM, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi & Mykhailo Zbrodskyi (September 2022): Prospects for running a military campaign in 2023,

<https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3566404-prospects-for-running-a-military-campaign-in-2023-ukraines-perspective.html>

## EMBRACING UKRAINE'S EU ACCESSION

Germany officially supports granting Ukraine the EU candidate status and Scholz and other German government officials endorsed the aspiration of Ukraine and Moldova to join. German leadership should now go one step further and become the key political advocate for Ukraine's accession. Ukraine's real desire to join offers a tool to positively and strategically influence Ukraine's development. In numerous interviews with Ukrainians, the authors heard that the political will to join the EU is very real. One interviewee described it as a "now or never moment." The support of the population to join the EU is currently at its historical high with around 90 percent of Ukrainians welcoming the idea. Now it is up to the Ukrainian government to show that its ambitions are real and to provide far reaching institutional changes, reforms, and laws necessary to advance quickly. It will certainly require a lot of effort to accomplish all that while the war continues.

If Germany invests its political leadership, financial means and technical expertise in full seriousness into Ukraine's ambition to join the EU, Ukraine will be able to approximate EU legislation and regulation quicker and fulfill the criteria to join sooner. Such a proactive role would lend Germany even more credibility and influence, which it can further use to ensure accountability, checks and balances, institutional capacity, rule of law, anti-corruption, etc.



The review of Ukraine's implementation of the EU recommendations issued after the candidacy status offers a litmus test. If the criteria are indeed fulfilled Germany should take the lead on convincing other European states to open the accession negotiations. Germany can go ahead with high-level political support by creating a new Berlin track, similar to the Berlin Process for the Balkans, to commit to open accession talks, and develop ideas on integration steps that can be realized before Ukraine eventually joins the Union. All of it will certainly bring tangible benefits to Ukraine in the process. The German-Ukrainian government consultations, initiated years ago by president Kravchuk, should be revived to bring back regular government exchange with a focus on the EU accession and recovery.

Recently German and Ukrainian Foreign Ministries discussed the idea of setting up specific formats on how the two ministries can best accompany the process of Ukraine's accession to the EU. Both Bundestag and the Verkhovna Rada should also follow in these tracks and create formats that go beyond the friendship groups so as to institutionalize regular working groups on the EU approximation that will enable their MPs to support and monitor Ukraine's EU accession.

The temporary lifting of quotas that were granted during wartime under the DCFTA is about to expire at the end of 2022. There is evidence of real pushbacks by some branches of the European

industry that fear competition and have already voiced criticism. Germany should help Ukraine to get the best possible deal. At the same time, Germany should advocate for the development of clear plans on how Ukraine can gradually get full access to the Four Freedoms and the European single market. As experts such as Gerald Knaus have discussed<sup>49</sup>, each of the Four Freedoms requires the adoption and implementation of various legal and technical steps but they could be put into specific road maps for Ukraine. Ukrainian and German interviewees for this paper noted that having such specific carrots, akin to the Visa Liberalization Action Plan, could channel the political will and lead to tangible benefits of EU integration, while the longer and highly technical process of EU accession is also supported and continues in parallel. Eventually, Ukraine could take part in sessions of the EU institutions without voting rights.

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<sup>49</sup> See for European Stability Initiative (Juli 2022): Offer the four freedoms to the Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova,

<https://esiweb.org/proposals/offer-four-freedoms-balkans-ukraine-and-moldova?cat=40>

or Piotr Buras (June 2022): Partnership for Enlargement: A new way to integrate Ukraine and the EU's eastern neighbourhood, European Council on Foreign Relations,

<https://ecfr.eu/publication/partnership-for-enlargement-a-new-way-to-integrate-ukraine-and-the-eus-eastern-neighbourhood/>

## TAKING THE LEAD ON UKRAINE'S RECOVERY

With its vast experience in technical assistance and financial resources Germany could become a leading player in Ukraine's recovery. In late October 2022, together with the EU, Germany is hosting a technical recovery conference, which should be used to discuss models for recovery and Germany's specific contributions. It is important to avoid the siloization of Germany's recovery efforts. The government should first define its strategic priorities in Ukraine's recovery and then synchronize accordingly the various technical assistance programs.

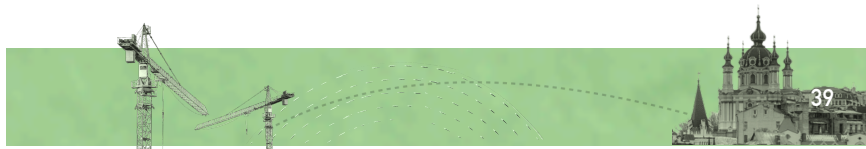
The reconstruction of Ukraine is closely linked to its desire to join the EU. If Germany is active in both fields, it mutually reinforces both. One very practical instrument could be the introduction of a high-ranking German Special Envoy for European Integration and Reconstruction of Ukraine, who could coordinate the interagency process linked to both helping Ukraine to join the EU faster and regularly coordinate the many actors on the German side involved in the recovery process.

The war has shown the importance of local actors and how they contribute to Ukraine's astonishing resilience. It is clear that any German reconstruction efforts should emphasize the critical role of local agency. German recovery should have strong components focusing on the role of cities, mayors, city

councils, local businesses, civil society and the citizens. Germany is a big supporter of the decentralization reforms in Ukraine. It now has to champion the role of inclusive participation of local actors in the recovery and ensure that the decentralization efforts continue.

In the short term, the priority for Ukraine's recovery should be to rebuild (through the provision of money and equipment) and protect critical infrastructure (such as water plants, power plants, heating plants) and help procure enough gas and coal to help millions of Ukrainians survive this winter. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the deliberate strategy of Russian aggressors to destroy critical infrastructure, which forces us to look for hybrid solutions, such as modular heating systems.

For Germany, one of the foci should be on helping Ukraine rebuild its destroyed social infrastructure in accordance with Ukraine's Fast Recovery Plan. According to KSE experts, as of September 5, housing is the key sphere that requires urgent restoration efforts with \$75.3 billion in potential costs, followed by infrastructure with \$51.1 billion<sup>50</sup>. This assistance can be provided both in the form of financial resources and equipment, materials (from concrete to glass). In addition, Germany already has experience in providing a small number of modular settlements to accommodate internally displaced people in Ukraine. Such projects will have to be significantly scaled up.



According to the experts of the Anticorruption Action Centre, in order to mitigate corruption risks and ensure integrity of reconstruction efforts recovery funds should not be placed into the Ukrainian budget. Acting as legal representatives of the Ukrainian people, and in cooperation with the representatives of the local authorities, Ukrainian authorities should define and prioritize the list of objects for reconstruction and rebuilding. However, the Ukrainian authorities should not have exclusive rights to select contractors for these projects. This process should be depoliticized and transparent, with the representatives of donors having a crucial say. Such approach proved to be effective in combating corruption and ensuring legal reforms geared towards the rule of law and should serve as the basis for the reconstruction efforts, too. Among other means, an establishment of a separate fund, which will act as the procurement agency, can be one of the ways of achieving this. However, such efforts should ensure that local businesses are included in the reconstruction process and not all projects go to international bidders.

One key component in German planning should be the question of how German funds can support local implementers, such as local and regional civil society, but also local aid organizations. Germany's humanitarian efforts should not be exclusively focused on providing money to big international humanitarian

organizations. New instruments have to be found to support the effective efforts launched by local Ukrainian initiatives since February this year. One such example is "Dobrobat" that unites thousands of Ukrainians involved in the reconstruction of housing destroyed by the Russians. At the community level, one such instrument could be the provision of specialized equipment, tools and materials for joint use by volunteers and community members.

Several interviewees noted the big potential in strengthening bilateral energy partnership. Germany should take a lead on the Green Recovery, an area where the two countries have started to initiate projects. Germany's efforts could focus on the reconstruction and expansion of renewable energy production and help attract the necessary investments to produce and export green hydrogen.

Lastly, before a comprehensive reconstruction plan is adopted, it would be very useful to have a systematic review of the German technical development assistance to Ukraine since 2014 and up to the present moment. This would help to critically reflect on what has been achieved by various projects implemented by organizations such as the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) or the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). Such reviews imply a systematic analysis by the Ukrainian side and reflect how political partners, project partners and

the local population perceive the achievements or its shortcomings. The fact that despite substantial technical development assistance, Germany is still not perceived as the leading donor, raises the question of whether the strategic communication of the German efforts is adequate and systematic enough.

<sup>48</sup> Kyiv School of Economics (September 2022). Due to the last estimates, damage caused to Ukraine's infrastructure during the war is \$114.5 bln,

<https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/due-to-the-last-estimates-damage-caused-to-ukraine-s-infrastructure-during-the-war-is-114-5-blm/>

## KEEPING UKRAINE ON THE MENTAL MAP OF GERMANY

Because of the war, many people in different parts of the world have learned about Ukraine. But what exactly do they discover about Ukraine and what do they associate the country with?

Ukraine is not only about the war, revolutions, or the Chernobyl disaster. Unfortunately, without a proper context, the tragic pages of Ukrainian history often form a false impression of the country that rightfully belongs to the great European family and is currently defending the values of freedom, democracy and human dignity on its battlefields.

It is especially important to put Ukraine on the mental map of different countries as a coherent

narrative of a distinct, separate nation, a functioning democracy that defends its freedom and independence. This is particularly crucial in Germany, where for many years Ukraine has been perceived through the prism of Russia, and where Russian narratives, propaganda and disinformation about Ukraine have penetrated the media and public discourse.

The decoupling of Ukraine from Russia (and from the Soviet Union) in the minds of Germans is an important task, but it is difficult to move forward without accomplishing it. One Ukrainian interviewee noted that "[w]e tried to convince Germans and the German government to look at Ukraine through the prism of Ukrainian-German relations, not through the prism of German-Russian relations. It was the most difficult task. We want to be seen for our own merits, not as part of Russian politics. We are now at a point where some optics has changed. Achieving this is very important. Our relations will heal when Germany sees us as a partner separate from Russia."

It is important to debunk myths and check narratives about Ukraine on different levels – from the media to school textbooks – as misinformation about Ukraine, whether intentionally or not, shapes misperceptions. Ukrainians should also focus their efforts on explaining the context – why and what is happening in the country today – by strengthening cultural ties between Ukrainian and German intellectuals, using various instruments of cultural diplomacy such as open lectures,



thematic discussions, media columns, presentations.

Today, as the bulk of Ukraine's public funds is directed to the frontline and social payments, the country's cultural institutions such as Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, the Ukrainian Institute, the Institute of Ukrainian Books, run the risk of being left without funding for their activities. Large donors, such as Germany, should support Ukraine's cultural diplomacy and add new foci to communication about Ukraine. The war is not only about Russian war crimes, but also about inspiring stories of resistance – from the volunteer movement to the cultural front. Ukrainian academics, philosophers, poets, artists and designers have something important to share with the world.

The potential of the Ukrainian diaspora in Germany, which is joined by almost one million refugees, is also underutilized. The task of Ukrainians abroad is not only to draw attention to the war and advocate for aid, but also to present Ukrainian culture, traditions, modernity and history – debunking the myths and telling the world who they are. Germany is already investing a lot of effort and money in integrating the recent arrivals into the German society. With the mobilization in Russia, it will be even more important for Germany to provide an encompassing security approach towards all the Ukrainians here, given the expected influx of Russian draft dodgers. One German interviewee raised the question of whether the classic German integration

approaches have to be revised and adapted given that many of the refugees do want to return once it is safe enough to do so. Many schoolchildren for instance now attend two schools: the German one in the morning and the Ukrainian one online after classes.

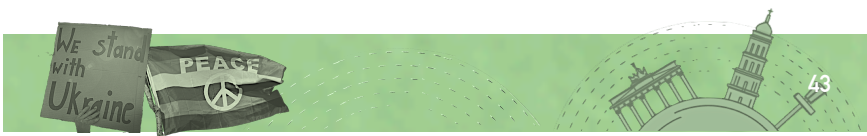
It is extremely important today to look at the future of Ukrainian-German relations and invest in building bridges between the younger generations of both countries. Joint leadership programs, training and volunteer camps, internships in political parties, government bodies and cultural institutions – a large arsenal of tools can be used to ensure that those who will design public policies in Ukraine and Germany in 20 years will be free from illusions and myths, understand each other and work on the basis of common values.



## ABSTRACT

This policy study focuses on the bilateral relations between Germany and Ukraine from the outset of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidency to the outbreak of full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine all the way to the present moment, seven months later. Based on more than a dozen interviews with decision-makers and experts, a review of previous research, and media reporting, the study finds that the relations are actually better than their public perception. For a variety of reasons, the public discourse of the relations is very much focused on the perceived shortcomings of Germany's support for Ukraine, at times ignoring the substantial military, economic, financial, and humanitarian support that Germany provides.

Nevertheless, the frustration that Ukraine feels with Germany but also with its other Western partners was tangible, caused by the slow decision-making process regarding the provision of heavier weapons in the early phase of the war. Germany's hesitancy in complying with the most recent Ukrainian request for main battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles is likely to put bilateral tensions in the spotlight again. The paper identifies six areas of enhanced cooperation between the two countries during the ongoing war and in the medium term in the post-war reconstruction period.







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