

Germany and Russia in Europe - Review of their Relationship and Impact on Europe – in the Past, Today and may be Tomorrow

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1. Rivalry and Cooperation within the “Concert of European Powers”

Looking back to the European history since the French Revolution it is probably fair so say that the continent experienced the bid of Napoleon, Stalin and Hitler for dominance, for hegemony over Europe and beyond. In the case of Stalin and Hitler their ambitions coincided or overlapped. These two persons seemed to be intertwined. They surpassed in their goals and ambitions very much the imperial rivalry among the six European Powers that constituted the “Concert of European Powers” after the Napoleonic period: Austria, France, Germany (Prussia until 1871), Great Britain, Italy and Russia. It needs to be added that Germany and Italy established themselves as participants in this system only in the course of the 19th century. Due to their war time alliance against Napoleon the three imperial powers Russia, Prussia and Austria considered themselves as the “Holy Alliance” - with Prussia playing the role of a junior partner of Russia until late in the nineteenth century when united Germany rose to the industrial power house No 1 in Europe if not beyond. These three monarchies also opposed the waves of democratic movements and national uprising for instance in Poland during partition (1863) and in Hungary in 1848.

2. World War I – by accident – and the consequences?

The colonial rivalries of European Powers in Africa and Asia led to understandings between these powers with regard to Africa (1885 Congo-Conference in Berlin) and between Russia and Great Britain in Asia (Afghanistan; Tibet, Mongolia), which affected their positioning on matters related to the European continent. France and Great Britain settled their rivalries in Africa and gradually moved towards the “Entente Cordiale” to establish a kind of balance in relationship to Imperial Germany. The closeness between St. Petersburg and Berlin faded away and opened opportunities of rapprochement between St. Petersburg and Paris. This must have been felt as a major setback in Berlin, because of the decade-old German desire to keep France isolated in Europe and be oriented towards overseas engagements.

May be, WW I happened as a kind of accident – but it meant that the balance of power in Europe collapsed that had prevailed between 1814 and 1914. The “Concert of European Powers” had evolved after the Napoleonic wars.

For fear of a Russian-French Alliance Germany placed a bid for German dominance into the international arena at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. It was renewed after the catastrophe of WW I, the imposed peace treaty and the rise to power of the nationalist and racist Hitler movement– in rivalry on the national and the international stage with the Moscow based drive for world revolution of the Lenin and Stalin led communist movement. (Fritz Fischer: “Deutschlands Griff nach der Weltmacht”; Datchitchew “Russlands Griff nach

der Weltmacht”).

Undoubtedly, under the impact of the enormous human and material sacrifices of the war, the imperial systems in Russia, Germany and Austria collapsed. Dependant or divided nations such as Poles; Czechs and Slovaks as well as the Baltic nations and temporarily Belarusians and Georgians as well as Ukrainians claimed their national independence after WW I. However, all of them fell victim to the onslaught of ideologies and nationalism dominating the decisions in Moscow and Berlin in the twenties and thirties. Once the power centres fell into the hands of radicals, the human and technological resources were doomed to be used as tools in the bid for supremacy. This transpires as the red thread of history in the twentieth century.

We may argue whether the two major tragedies, catastrophes could have been avoided. May be, however, we have to ask the question and find answers, better one answer: Who picked up the reins after the collapse? What were the new perceptions in view of the disasters produced by the drive for racial and nationalist supremacy on the one hand and for supremacy based on socialist ideology matched with historical pre-determination on the other hand?

In the case of WWI the answer was to be found in the final days of WWI and the peace initiative of Woodrow Wilson pleading for national self-determination of nations and open diplomacy for the conduct of international affairs, meaning to say through the establishment of the “League of Nations” (Geneva). The US Senate refused however to ratify the peace settlements and the Charter for the League of Nations thus withdrawing the weight of the USA from Europe, where their weight had decided the war. Revanchism dictated the peace in 1919 – in my judgement. The Soviet Union was rejected by the international community of nations as a dangerous and aggressive power. Germany was marginalized and sought to bring about the revision of the Versailles Peace Treaty. Although opponents in ideological terms Germany and the Soviet Union started cooperating with each other in economic and military affairs.

In the second instance – WWII - however, the United States could not withdraw when their weapons and those of the Soviet Union had decided the war. In the race for the future of Europe the collective system was challenged by the freedom bell of Philadelphia brought to Europe and supported by the innovative forces of market economies. On September 6, 1946 US Secretary of State James Byrnes declared in Stuttgart: The USA is ready to help rebuilding Europe provided Germany is included for the sake of the success of the whole program and in order to avoid isolating Germany another time – with disastrous consequences. With the Marshall Plan the foundations were laid for the reconstruction in Europe shortly afterwards. Almost at the same time (1946), Winston Churchill pleaded in his Zurich speech for a United Europe- without Great Britain.

Facing the bid for dominance by the Soviet Union the Transatlantic-European alliance was forged – across the divide of winner and loser of the military battles. This was the decisive difference between the perceptions and realities in 1919 and in 1945/1946. The United States brought into being as well the United Nations Organisation.

3. The European Union – Replacement for the Concert or Rivalry of European Powers

In 1957 the European Community of the six founding countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – pledged to offer membership to free nations in Europe capable of meeting the requirements for democratic systems, market economies and the independence of the judiciary system. The rivalry for predominance as experienced in the 19th and 20th century was replaced by a contractual framework for the development of nations

on the continent – and it worked. In 1990 with the end of the cold war the hour of truth came for the European Union as a concept and as a reality: the unification of Germany and the accession to the EU of nations from Central and Southern Europe - liberated from Soviet domination - changed the political landscape of Europe once gain. We continue to be preoccupied with this dimension – and I mention also the still incomplete concept of Eastern Partnership offered to six successor states of the Soviet Union for whom Russia has projected a bid of Association under Moscow's leadership.

4. Russia and the New Europe

I have to revert to the Soviet Union and its bid for supremacy before, during and after World War II: According to the script of predetermined history of mankind the socialist system would prevail in the end as a result of the collapse of the capitalist system due to its internal contradictions.

Stalin supported the outbreak of WWII hoping for a costly war between Britain, France on the one side and Germany on the other in order to prevail at the end as a third force - I mean the Soviet Union - and harvesting in the end the war ridden European countries. He partly succeeded, but had no chance to win the hearts and minds of the nations suppressed by him – and he had an unexpected opponent – the North Atlantic Alliance – led by the United States - and the emerging European Union.

In the end – in the seventies - Communist China and the Soviet Union realized that the capitalist system would not collapse as a result of their internal contradictions and wars of rivalry. This meant, the Communist countries could not expect to be the heirs to the collapsing capitalist system. Therefore they concluded that they themselves had to engage in economic if not political reforms. This is it, what Moscow and Beijing undertook in the eighties and nineties in order to achieve competitive and productive economies and they are still working on it.

At the end of the cold war, Moscow obtained the security guarantees it needed in return for its withdrawal from Central Europe. The Treaty on Conventional Forces (CSE, November 1990) allowed the substantial reduction of conventional forces – in addition to the US-Soviet Agreements on the reduction of nuclear weapons and delivery means.

However, for internal reasons the Soviet Union collapsed and brought about a host of independent states around Russia and a highly dissatisfied and angry Russia. Also Yugoslavia - artificially created on the Balkan after WWI in order to cope with Serbian nationalism – collapsed.

5. Self confident Russia?

The New Russia abandoned the Charter of Paris, signed in November 1990 that committed all states of the CSCE including the Soviet Union to transform themselves into pluralistic democracies, market economies and states with respect for individual human rights and independent courts. Thus, the anticipated Common European House on the basis of shared political values could not be put into place so far as Moscow's participation is concerned. In the absence of agreement between the EU and Russia about these fundamentals, the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation (PCA) remained an empty shell, so did other projects such as the four common areas of cooperation or the energy charter. Thus relations are reduced to the economic dimension and to ad-hoc-crisis management of international crises. Russia seeks free access to the European Union market, but wants to control the

engagement of international companies in Russia under strategic considerations and it claims zones of interest at its borders (CIS countries) which is incompatible with OSCE-rules and international law. No one in the European Union can give a helping hand in this regard.

Traditionally, Russia looks to Germany as the major industrial partner from Europe - with Sweden, Greece and Italy as important partners in a second group of countries with whom to interlink more closely. Already during the Cold War Western Germany was a major trading partner and Soviet Ministers knew quite well German industrial capabilities. Germany bought a lot of oil and gas from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but had always at hand the Netherlands and Norway as substitute suppliers in case of emergency. Germany delivered seamless steel pipes for the oil and gas pipeline system of the Soviet Union.

In some instances new members of the European Union feel bypassed by German and sometimes German-French decisions regarding Russia, for instance regarding the North Stream gas pipeline.

They had to insist as well in the NATO context on proper defence planning for countries from Central and East Europe bordering Russia. It is done now and confirmed by the newly adopted NATO strategy.

There is concern about German unfounded optimism regarding the development of democratic state institutions and practices in Russia while the reality does not meet these expectations. It is also argued that Germany has to be responsive to Russian pressure because of its alleged dependence on Russian gas and oil deliveries

In my judgement such concerns are not justified – with a few exceptions. Indeed South Stream, which is still nothing but a concept – and North Stream should have been put on a broader basis. All littoral states of the Baltic Sea should have been invited to take part in the project. Also the establishment of integrated supply lines for gas and oil within the EU constitutes an important insurance against the damaging repercussions of interruption of Russian deliveries.

On the other hand, concerns about a new Rapallo type bilateralism of Germany with Russia are not justified. Berlin is concerned about self isolation of Russia or a policy of exclusion of Russia on the part of the European Union.

Therefore a large network of German official and civil society based institutions does exist in Russia and vice versa in order to broaden and to deepen cooperation and mutual reliance and confidence.

Germany cannot ignore the dark sides of the picture presented by today's Russia, let it be criminality, corruption, or lack of open society participation in public affairs.

On the other hand, Germany and other countries consider it important if not imperative not to isolate Russia and not to contribute towards a Russia that seeks to self isolate itself or to reduce the freedom of media and social work to be made more difficult (registration).

In Conclusion:

1. It is not yet clear in which way Russia will be associated with the European Union.

2. It is not clear yet, in what way the New Russia will develop towards a pluralistic democracy with an independent judiciary branch of government.
3. It is not clear yet, in what way Russia's industry will achieve its overdue technological modernization.
4. Without committing ourselves to a policy of illusions and ill advised concessions it is considered indispensable in Berlin - rightfully so - that dialogue has to continue with the government set up and independently thereof with civil society in all its dimensions. It would be good to have the European Union to adopt at large such a policy.

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