**THE NEW COLD WAR WITH RUSSIA**

**- contribution by Horst Teubert, German foreign policy analyst and editor of** [**www.german-foreign-policy.com**](http://www.german-foreign-policy.com) **, at the 27th Desmond Greaves Weekend School in Dublin on Saturday 12 September 2015. The full title of the session was: “EU Foreign and Security policy: Ireland and the new Cold War with Russia”.**

First of all, I would like to make a remark regarding my own, German, perspective on what is now being called “the new Cold War with Russia”. We are in Ireland, most of you are Irish citizens, and if it comes to foreign policy you will beprimarily interested, I assume, in the foreign policy of your own country rather than in that of another one. My main focus has always been the foreign policy of Germany, the country where I have lived for most of my life. But there is a reason why I believe that the current foreign policy of Germany might interest you as well. Ireland is a member of the EU. Officially the EU is an alliance of 28 equal members. As usual, however, there are some members who are more equal than others, and actually there is one member that is definitely the “most equal” of all – and that is Germany. Germany is the dominating economic power of the EU, and it is the dominating political power too. So it has a dominating influence on EU foreign policy as well.

The German Establishment is fully aware of Germany’s position of dominance in the EU. To show what this means I would like to quote some sentences from a leading article that appeared on Monday last on the front page of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* probably the most influential German newspaper. The article refers to Germany as "the central power of the European Union". It continues: *"In the Euro crisis and the Greek crisis the German Government was and is the key actor. In the Ukraine crisis it plays a decisive role... Berlin's increasing political relevance which could be seen in the debt crisis was often greeted by criticisms and the allegation that Germany aspires to hegemony in Europe and imposes its ideas of fiscal order on the weaker states. By contrast, its behaviour towards the refugees is being met with amazed admiration. Whether imperious or compassionate - Europe and the world experience a Republic which is much more powerful than the Germany which celebrated its reunification 25 years ago."* So you see: the German Establishment is fully aware of its position of dominance in the EU.

The new Cold War with Russia is gradually warming up. You have probably heard of NATO's new "Very High Readiness Joint Task Force", the so called *"Spearhead Force"* of up to 5000 troops which can be relocated to military bases in Eastern Europe within just two days. There will be six NATO military bases more or less near the Russian border. A base in Lithuania was inaugurated at the start of September. There will be bases in Estonia and Latvia which border on Russia, and there will be bases also in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. At the end of September a large-scale NATO exercise called *"Trident Juncture"* will start which is supposed to train the "Spearhead Force". The German army, the Bundeswehr, will play a leading role in this and coordinate the manoeuvre from its headquarters in the German city of Ulm. As the Headquarters commander German Lieutenant-General Richard Rossmanith says, the exercise is not "only" about Russia but has "a 360 degree orientation". This means that Russia is implied, even if only one amongst other possible theatres of war. Rossmanith told the public regarding this exercise: *"NATO is the strongest military alliance in the world. ... everybody should consider carefully about how they deal with us."* *"Trident Juncture"* is NATO's biggest and most ambitious military exercise in over a decade.

What is it exactly about, this new Cold War? And what does it have to do with Ukraine, as we all know that it originated from the situation there? The matter is quite complex. To understand it properly it makes sense, in my opinion, to look at how the conflict in and over Ukraine developed and what were the motives that drove its main participants. This makes sense because these motives are important today. I would like to make three points.

**My first point:** **Germany and the EU's expansion to the East.** You will remember the eastward enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007. When that enlargement occurred we were told by the EU that it was all about prosperity, happiness and peace, and indeed the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. From a strategic point of view, however, things look somewhat different. The collapse of the socialist states of Eastern Europe in 1990 not only facilitated the enlargement of Germany and gave it the potential to become the dominating force in the EU, it also opened up again the markets of Eastern Europe which had been a major destination for German exports from the 19th century onward. Within a decade Germany again became the dominating economic and, as a consequence, the dominating political power in Eastern Europe. Eastward enlargement of the EU meant that all newly-acceding EU members had to adopt the economic norms of the EU. This made it much easier for German companies to profit from their business in Eastern Europe. Additionally, keep in mind the EU Common Security and Defence Policy and the plans for an EU Army. The EU members in Eastern Europe take part in the military operations of the EU. This is quite useful for the powers dominating the EU or, let us say, for the one dominant country.

Expansion has no natural limits, and so the eastward expansion of the EU did not stop after 2007. Some German companies, for example, realised that you can pay workers in Ukraine even lower wages than in Poland or Slovakia. So they started building their factories, let us say, not in Warsaw but in Lviv. Some EU member states, the driving force being Germany, developed plans to connect Ukraine and five more eastern countries like Belarus and Georgia closer to the EU. This was the next step towards the east, and it was supposed to end in the formal EU association of Ukraine and other eastern states. In some respects the legal status of association is quite similar to EU membership: It means that the associated states have to adopt the basic economic norms of the EU and they have to take part in the EU's security and military policy, although as non-members they cannot decide independently on all of this. Anyway, what is important is that the plans for the EU association of Ukraine meant that Ukraine would have to separate itself to a significant extent from Russia because it would become closely liked to a potentially rival economic and even military bloc. Given the importance of Ukraine for Russia, this was a major provocation.

I would like to emphasize that the main driving force behind the EU eastward expansion was Germany. France was much more interested in a Union for the Mediterranean, its historical sphere of influence being to the south of the EU. Germany sabotaged this French project in order to focus the activities of the EU as much as possible on Eastern Europe. The fact that Germany was the driving force behind the whole process of EU eastward expansion means that it acted aggressively against the strategic interests of Russia. One might object that Germany aims at cooperating closely with Russia in the economic sphere, especially in exploiting Russian gas. Even political cooperation with Russia might be beneficial for Germany in order to counterbalance the influence of the United States. Both perspectives are valid, but looking back into history such tension between different objectives is nothing new. Germany cooperated with Russia in the early years of the German Empire until its strength brought about a powerful eastward expansion which led it into a collision with Russia that resulted in the First World War. Germany cooperated with the Soviet Union in the 1920s to gain new strength against the West. Under the Nazi-Soviet Pact the Nazis did business with the Soviets right up to the days before their assault on the Soviet Union in June 1941. The pattern is quite simple: cooperate as long as possible to gain strength, and when strength results in too vigorous an eastward expansion and eastward expansion leads to conflict with Russia, then try to defeat Russia.

**My second point: the United States, NATO eastward enlargement and transatlantic rivalry.** As we all know, not only the EU but also NATO has expanded into Eastern Europe following 1990. Why? One can find an answer to this question if one reads, for example, the book *"The Grand Chessboard"* by Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski was National Security Advisor to US President Jimmy Carter. He was the guy who thought up the brilliant plan to support the mujahideen in Afghanistan in order to weaken the Soviet Union - and by doing that he brought into our lives a certain Osama bin Ladin. In "*The Grand Chessboard"* Brzezinski wrote that, to remain the dominating world power, the United States must prevent the rise of a united "Eurasia". "Eurasia" in the final analysis means a close alliance of the EU and Russia. How can that be prevented? NATO is an excellent means to this end because it binds large parts of Europe to the United States. When Brzezinski wrote *"The Grand Chessboard"* in 1997 NATO was preparing its eastward expansion. It meant that ever larger parts of Europe would be tightly bound to the United States.

Following the two EU enlargements of 1995 and 2004, the United States went further and demanded the NATO accession of Ukraine. Why? George Friedman, founder of the US think-tank Stratfor, explained this in February this year in a presentation at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. He said: *"The primordial interest of the United States ... has been the relationship between Germany and Russia because united they are the only force that could threaten us . . . German technology and German capital, Russian natural resources, Russian manpower, are the only combination that has for centuries scared the hell of the United States . . . The solution for the United States . . . The solution for the United States is a cordon sanitaire, a belt of states, from the Black Sea to the Baltic.”* To close the gap between Poland and the Black Sea, Ukraine had to join NATO. Interestingly, German Chancellor Angela Merkel vetoed the commencement of NATO accession talks with Ukraine which the USA administration wanted to have approved at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. For Germany, Ukraine was to be part of the EU's sphere of influence, not of NATO's and Washington’s.

**My third point: Russia.** On the one hand, Russia has always been interested in a close cooperation with Germany. If Russia wants to expand its economic activities and its influence in a westward direction, it has to cooperate with Europe, and if one wants to cooperate with Europe it certainly makes sense to have good relations with Europe's strongest power, which is Germany. On the other hand, Ukraine is of crucial importance for Russia. As George Friedman put it, if it comes to Ukraine, *"the question on the table for the Russians is: Will they retain a buffer zone*" [against the EU and NATO] *that is at least neutral or will the West penetrate so far into Ukraine that they are 70 miles away from Stalingrad and 300 miles away from Moscow?"* In the light of these consideratuions of course, Russia had to be decidedly opposed to a NATO and EU accession of Ukraine, even if it led to a conflict with Germany, an important Russian partner in the West.

Put these three points together, and you will understand why civil protests against an oligarchic regime in a remote capital in Eastern Europe could turn into one of the main theatres of global conflict in a short space of time. It was not the Ukrainian population as a whole that went on to the streets at the Maidan protests, as the Western media has suggested. It was mainly the Ukrainian middle classes who were strongly in favour of close cooperation with the West. Of course they were supported by the United States and the EU, and of course the US as well as Germany and the EU had done their homework and built solid contacts with various middle-class organisations in Ukraine. They even prepared them well for these political activities, hoping that they would be active in favour of the West. One of the worst things they had done however was to help build up an alliance between the Ukrainian middle classes and nationalists and fascists in Western Ukraine with the aim of strengthening their potential for political protests. That is why the Maidan demonstrations quickly became a nationalist, and in part a fascist, movement. The United States, but also Germany and the EU, contributed crucially to this.

By supporting the alliance of the middle classes and Western Ukrainian nationalists, Germany, the EU nd the USA supported, even if unintentionally, the partition of Ukraine. The reason is simple: The majority of the people in Eastern and Southern Ukraine not only have a close relationship with Russia, they also remember that their forefathers were oppressed and murdered by West Ukrainian fascists during the Second World War when those Ukrainian elements cooperated with the Nazis. Many people in Eastern and Southern Ukraine were quite mistrustful of the Maidan protests, and when the Maidan-backed government came to power in February 2014 with the strong support of the EU and the United States, they reacted against it. Some even spoke in favour of separating altogether from Ukraine since nationalists and fascists had gained such strong influence on the government in Kiev. These are the root causes of the split-off of Donetsk and Lugansk as well as the secession of Crimea. It is no coincidence that today sundry fascist Ukrainian battalions on the one side and pro-Russian militias on the other side are entrenched against one another around Donetsk and Lugansk.

The secession of Crimea was very important, and it has much to do with the new Cold War. Russia obviously could not for mere strategic reasons simply tolerate pro-Western nationalists taking over in Kiev. An overwhelming majority of Crimea's population wanted that peninsula to become part of Russia. Russia supported them and finally took over Crimea. By this means it saved its Black Sea Fleet and the strategic port of Sevastopol which is regarded by military experts as indispensable to the Russian navy. But there may have been amore influential factor: For the first time since 1990 Russia openly resisted the expansion of the West. Before that, up to 2014, only the West could claim the power to split up foreign states such as Serbia/Kosovo, if necessary against international law. Now Russia did the same. The West saw this as a kind of a rebellion against Western domination, and as a result the EU and, even more obviously the United States, launched an open confrontation with Russia which resulted in the imposition of EU ecnomic sanctions on Russia and counter- sancitions by Russia against the EU.

A more fundamental reason why the West deemed it necessary to confront Russia is that in recent years Russia has been strengthening its position on a global scale. Here are some examples. Do you remember who was able to act as a mediator between the West and Syria in 2013 and to get the agreement of the Syrian Government to destroy its chemical weapons? It was Russia that did that. The Obama administration was not amused to have to deal with a stronger Russia at eye-level. Russia has intensified its cooperation with China, but also with other countries in Asia - India and Vietnam, for example. There are the "BRICS", an alliance of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which is gaining influence worldwide and has just opened the "New Development Bank", an international bank that operates as a kind of an alternative to the Western-dominated World Bank. Russia works together with countries like Venezuela in Latin America, which opposes US hegemony, and it is more and more active in the Middle East. A good example is the current debate on whether Russian activities in Syria amount to military intervention on behalf of the Syrian Government. The London-based think-tank Chatham House stated already in the spring of 2013 that Russia was trying to assert its strength internationally and aimed at pressing the West to stop illegal wars like those in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya. If Russia really intervenes militarily in Syria, it will be to prevent the West from toppling another government - that of Bashar al Assad.

So these are the origins, the main elements and the various front lines in the” new Cold War”. One might add that from a German perspective - the perspective that is decisive for the EU - Germany is trying to combine aggressive acts such as the NATO manoeuvre "Trident Juncture" with a degree of novel economic cooperation. For example last week the German gas company Wintershall, a subsidiary of the chemical giant BASF, announced a new joint venture with Russia’s Gazprom to exploit a huge Siberian gas field. Adding to that, they announced that they will build a new pipeline parallel to "Nord Stream". "Nord Stream 2" will channel even more Russian gas to the EU. The EU will have to accept this. But this is not the end of “the new Cold War”. Remember the original Cold War: While confronting the Soviet Union, German companies built pipelines to obtain huge amounts of Russian gas. This clearly helped to strengthen the Federal Republic of Germany. In the end the Soviet Union broke down, whereas Germany ended up having more power than ever. The German Establishment would not mind achieving such a result again.

Interestingly, large parts of the German population do not really like the idea of a new Cold War. But as it is not the population but the elites who run the country, this does not lead to a change in policy but only to strong propaganda by the Establishment aimed at bringing the people into line with the Government. Although this propaganda does not seem to be too successful so far, there is up to now no strong opposition on Germany’s streets against the new Cold War. That could change. In Ukraine Germany tries to enforce the Minsk Agreement to prevent things getting completely out of hand right next to the borders of the EU. The Minsk Agreement, by the way, resulted from negotiations not involving the United States, and therefore it was an assertion of German rather than US leadership with regard to the Ukraine conflict. It is not clear whether Germany will succeed in imposing the Minsk Agreement. The rival sides in the new Cold War have the motives that I have mentioned. The next hot-spot may well be Syria, if Russia intensifies its support for the Syrian Government. But one thing is clear: This conflict is very dangerous, the more so as both sides have large numbers of nuclear weapons at their disposal. Strong popular opposition to these developments is more than ever needed therefore in every EU country including Ireland.