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GERMANY'S RELATIONS WITH THE BALTIC STATES SINCE REUNIFICATION

Andreas M. Klein / Gesine Herrmann

There is no doubting the fact that relations between Germany and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are both good and close. Germany's new minister for foreign affairs, Guido Westerwelle, also leaves no room for doubt as to the particular quality of the relations. Shortly after taking office in the fall of 2009 he met his opposite numbers from the Baltic states in Brussels for consultations which subsequently continued in July 2010 in Tallinn in the traditional 3 + 1 format. This most recent meeting of the four foreign ministers further underlines the close relations enjoyed by Germany with all three of the Baltic states as a block and with each of them individually – as does the visit of minister of state Cornelia Pieper to the Baltic region at the beginning of the year, the particular focus of which was to hold talks on the expansion of cooperation in the cultural sphere with Germany's partners in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In September, Chancellor Angela Merkel will visit Lithuania and Latvia. The trip first had to be postponed due to the unscheduled election for the office of Federal president. The Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaite and the Latvian Prime Ministers Valdis Dombrovskis will inform her about the saving and reform efforts of both countries particularly affected by the economic and financial crisis.

Dialog with the Baltic neighbors has also been taking place both in the European Union institutions in Brussels and in Berlin, the latter being the venue of visits for political discussions by both Latvian president Valdis Zatlers in January 2008 and his Lithuanian counterpart Valdis Dombrovskis at the end of April 2009. More recently, in March 2010, the foreign affairs committee of the Estonian Parliament was

in Berlin for talks with the equivalent body of the German Parliament and representatives of the German government. Not only this, but the individual German states, along with twinning arrangements between towns and districts in Germany and the Baltic states, also have their contribution to make to the deepening of bilateral relations.

This special mutual interest can be explained by more than 800 years of shared history, during which the Baltic was a region of missionary activity and settlement on the part of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, by economic ties created at the time of the Hanseatic league, and by Germany's central position between the two power blocs that until 1990 divided the world up into Soviet and American spheres of influence. However, one particularly „fateful day“ in relations between Germany and the Baltic states was August 23 1939, when German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Russian opposite number Vyacheslav Molotov signed the secret additional protocol to the Treaty of Non-Aggression between the German Reich and the Soviet Union – what became known as the Hitler-Stalin Pact - thus signaling the temporary end of independence for the three Baltic states. All this serves to explain the nature of Germany's present-day special connection with the three Baltic republics and her responsibility toward them. However, German foreign policy towards her Baltic neighbors has in the last twenty years oscillated between being the “advocate of the Balts” on the one hand and – on those occasions when Baltic interests have threatened to frustrate German national aims and, in particular, to undermine relations between Germany and Russia – a position of *advocatus diaboli* on the other.

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THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT AND THE BALTIC STATES' DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE

From 1988 until the official resumption of diplomatic relations on August 28 1991 the Baltic policy of the Bonn government was largely driven by an assumption that the question of independence for the Baltic states was closely connected with the issue of German reunification.

The intense efforts to reform the Soviet Union, which came

to be known as *glasnost* and *perestroika*, spearheaded by the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, also led to the reawakening of national consciousness in the three Baltic Soviet republics. The activities of popular fronts in the form of Estonia's *Rahvarinne* and the *Tautas Fronte* of Latvia and the Lithuanian Reform Movement (*Sajūdis*) in pursuit of ultimate autonomy reached a first climax on the fiftieth anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, when a human chain in excess of 370 miles in length and consisting of more than one million people formed to connect the three capitals, Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. Even though this civic protest, which came to be known as the Baltic Way, did not initially bear fruit, it nonetheless served along with historic events in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia to set in train developments paving the way for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the two German states.

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When, on March 11 1990, Lithuania became the first of the three Baltic states to declare her immediate and complete secession from the Soviet Union, the West German government initially refused to be drawn into stating an official position – much to the dismay of the first provisional head of state of the independent republic of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis. “Until that point we had not seen any evidence that we could have much in the way of expectations of German policy.” (*Der Spiegel*, February 4, 1991)

For the sake of German unity Bonn was keen to stress that “the Lithuanian conflict should not become a stumbling block for Mikhail Gorbachev and his reform policies” (Kohl, Diekmann, Reuth, 1996, 363) and that any further destabilization of the USSR was to be avoided. Federal chancellor Helmut Kohl thus appealed for a policy of small steps. He was of the opinion that the Lithuanians needed to be told that their policy of „all or nothing“ was putting their chances of independence at risk. Not only this, but he was also convinced that, with wisdom, patience and psychological skill, they would be able to achieve their objective within five years¹. What mattered in the meantime was to

1 | Helmut Kohl, Kai Diekmann, Ralf Georg Reuth, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, (Ullstein, 1996), 363-6.

prevent hard liners or the military from mounting a coup in Moscow and to forestall any use of force within member states of the Warsaw Pact. Open support from the West for the sovereignty of the Soviet republics was therefore not yet in the interest of the West German government. So it was that the Kohl administration initially treated the movement towards independence of the Baltic states as an internal affair of the Soviet Union.

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Chancellor Kohl was concerned that developments in the Baltic could have a negative impact on the two-plus-four discussions scheduled for that May. For this reason he was keen to separate the German question from that of the Baltic states. After the June 29 decision to provisionally suspend the declaration of independence defused the situation in Lithuania, negotiations on the solution of the German question made swift progress, culminating with the reunification of Germany on October 3.

The Baltic states were forced to wait until 1991 for the complete restoration and recognition of their independence. After bloody clashes in January 1991 between the independence movement of Lithuania and Latvia and OMON, the special Soviet police unit, in Vilnius and Riga, the German chancellor contacted Soviet president Gorbachev with the demand that he should "put an end to all use of force and to return to the path of dialog and accommodation". (*Bundesdrucksache* 12/66, January 28 1991, 1) A few weeks later, as a sign of solidarity, the German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher received his provisional opposite numbers from Estonia and Latvia, Lennart Meri and Janis Jurkāns, in Bonn. With this action the German government gave the Baltic states a signal of the support they had for so long been hoping for, even if this still did not amount to a formal recognition of their sovereignty.

After the incidents in Riga and Vilnius German involvement in, and cooperation with, the Baltic states increased noticeably. In February the parliamentary Social Democrats (SPD) submitted a petition for the opening of a Baltic information bureau in Germany; April saw the opening in Tallinn of the *Deutsches Kulturinstitut* (German Cultural Institute), and in June MP Wolfgang von Stetten (CDU)

founded the *Deutsch-Baltische Parlamentariergruppe* (Group of German-Baltic Parliamentarians).

A turning point in German policy towards the Baltic was marked by the attempted coup in Moscow in the summer of 1991. The OMON assaults and the Moscow coup had served to demonstrate the weakness of the Kremlin on the one hand and the determination of the independence movements in the three Baltic states on the other. It was at this point that any remaining illusions as to whether peaceful means would be enough to keep Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Soviet Union were dispelled; military force would be needed to secure their compliance. However, the use of force was in the interest neither of the Soviets nor of the West, as it would in the context of the prevailing situation have confirmed the Kremlin's loss of political influence and further aggravated regional instability. In addition, the events leading up to that point pointed almost inescapably to the conclusion that the collapse of the USSR was inevitable.

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A few days after the Moscow coup, on August 28 1991, Germany was one of the first western states to formalize its relations with the Baltic republics. The talk was not, however, of a new beginning but of a continuation of diplomatic relations. The declaration that accompanied the signing of the documents on the resumption of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Baltic states itself emphasized the German government's openness to the possibility at some later date of association negotiations between the European Community (EC) and the new Baltic democracies.²

On his visits of September 11 and 12 Hans-Dietrich Genscher became the first high-ranking western politician to visit Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius, thereby signaling Bonn's support for the three republics. He instituted a parliamentary evaluation commission with the task of identifying and spelling out the future elements of Germany's Baltic policy. The then state secretary Berndt von Staden, himself

2 | Cf. Bulletin of the press and information office of the Federal German government № 90 (August 30, 1991)

a Baltic German from Estonia, took the helm and proposed that Germany become an “advocate for the Balts” in western and international institutions.

GERMAN BALTIC POLICY – FROM SUPPORTIVE TO DISTANT

The Federal Chancellery continued to behave coolly towards the young Baltic republics, notwithstanding the resumption of diplomatic relations and the wide range of diverse bilateral cultural, economic and security cooperative initiatives that were just getting under way. German-Baltic relations were then, as now, overshadowed by Russo-German relations. The German foreign policy response was in the first instance to do nothing that would place German reunification in jeopardy: this applied in particular to any policy toward the Baltic states that might not meet with approval in the Kremlin. However, even after the reunification of the two German states, the Federal German government was careful to ensure that contacts with the Baltic states did not cause relations with Moscow to suffer.

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The relations between Germany and the Baltic states on the one hand and Germany and Russia on the other were subjected to their first serious test during negotiations on the withdrawal of Russian troops, who, even after the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, were still stationed across the territory of the former Soviet Union. As far as the Baltic states were concerned the presence of foreign forces represented a potential danger to the integrity and security of the three republics. Whereas Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were seeking swift integration into the western alliance, Moscow saw Russia as the natural heir to Soviet power and considered the Baltic, as the “near abroad”, to be part of its sphere of influence. Contradictory foreign policy objectives and diverging historical perspectives on the part of the negotiation partners led to delaying tactics and the imposition of new conditions by the Kremlin when it came to the required withdrawal of Russian forces.

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The Baltic states had neither the financial means nor the political power to assert their own national security interests. They were unable to compel Russia to withdraw her troops and, as a result, ended up courting the support of the western governments. Bonn also lent its support to the three states, committing itself internationally to the cause of the swift withdrawal of Russian forces; at the same time, however, it called on the Baltic states to work with, rather than against, Russia on security issues³. In order to gain Moscow's agreement to a swift withdrawal, Germany and the western states persuaded the three republics to make compromises, one of which was to allow Russia to continue for a limited time to use military facilities in Latvia and Estonia. Bonn also called on both countries to examine whether the legal provisions governing naturalization for the Russian-speaking minorities were in line with the demands of the CSCE and, where necessary, to amend them. As a result of international pressure on both sides, the last Russian troops left Estonian and Latvian territory on the August 31 1994 deadline, exactly one year after the withdrawal of the former occupying power's military units from Lithuania. On the question of troop withdrawal, the German government supported the demands of the Baltic states as these were in line with Germany's own security interests. From Bonn's point of view the withdrawal of Russian forces from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was, along with regional cooperation forums like the Council of the Baltic Sea States, an important step towards the defusing of tensions in the region.

Since gaining recognition of their independence the Baltic states had been striving for integration into the political, economic and security structures of the (western) European community. The Baltic states thereby saw integration into the transatlantic security alliance as much more important than membership of the EC, which was in their eyes primarily defined by economic objectives. Having regained their independence in the wake of their experience of half a century of occupation by the USSR the Baltic states considered neutral status to be as out of the question as security cooperation with Russia. As far as they

3 | Cf. Udo Bergdoll, "Bonn will Anwalt der Balten sein", in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 10, 1993

were concerned the mutual security and support obligations incumbent on the NATO partners presented their only guarantee of long-term freedom and sovereignty.⁴

No sooner had diplomatic relations been re-established in August 1991 than Genscher gave his Baltic colleagues an assurance that Germany would throw her weight behind the cause of EC association status for the republics. The German government accordingly gave its approval to the admission of the three states to the PHARE program on January 1 1992 and the conclusion of cooperation treaties with the community a few months later. However, the German government's position on the proposed expansion of NATO to the borders of Russia was distinctly cooler, even though both defense minister Volker Rühle and, somewhat later, foreign minister Klaus Kinkel participated actively in the expansion discussions, even playing a part in their initiation.

The German Foreign Office hoped in particular that closer political consultation and economic cooperation in the Baltic region would satisfy the security needs of the Baltic republics. Foreign minister Genscher was convinced that security in the Baltic would only be brought about by an institutionalized form of cooperation involving both the Baltic states and Russia. In the fall of 1991 Genscher and his Danish opposite number Uffe Ellemann-Jensen therefore initiated a conference involving all those states whose territory bordered on the Baltic Sea.

The result of the Danish-German initiative was the foundation on March 6, 1992 of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, made up, alongside Germany and Denmark, of Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Sweden, as well as Iceland and Norway.

The idea was for the council to build up trust using political dialog at foreign minister level in the Baltic region, where Russia's geopolitical clout and historical role had always led to her predominance in setting the security agenda.

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4 | Cf. Gerd Föhrenbach, *Die Sicherheitskonzepte der baltischen Staaten*, Waldbröl 1999.

Notwithstanding the fact that it has no legally binding mandate, the Council of Baltic Sea States⁵ was, and remains, an important regional body. In the 1990s it provided a new opportunity – and one that the tense state of Russo-Baltic relations demanded – for communication and cooperation on level terms between the states bordering on the Baltic Sea. Bonn supported the cooperation between the northern and eastern European states in the pursuit of its own best interests in the Baltic region. The multilateral framework of

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the CBSS was intended to promote dialog – above all between the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the one hand and Russia on the other – and, within the context of this forum, to clear up points of dispute in the process of transformation. The CBSS also covers a whole raft of initiatives in the fields of democracy assistance, economic development, technology and knowledge transfer, environmental protection, energy security, and transport and communication, all of which are intended to form the basis of sustainable growth and stability in the region.

The CBSS and the rapprochement between the three Baltic states and the Council of Europe, the EC and NATO acted together to lay bare the previously hidden dualism that existed at that time between the German foreign ministry and the Federal Chancellery. The foreign minister was always far more interested in the Baltic states than the Federal chancellor. They had different priorities: The minister applied himself to the cause of the three states, whereas the chancellor's focus was on relations with Moscow. This distribution of roles applied in 1991 and 1992 to Kohl and Genscher, just as it did to Kohl and Kinkel from 1992-1998. Far from pursuing a strategy of division of labor the politicians represented different views on the question of the integration into Europe of the Baltic states. Thus it was that the foreign ministry was convinced that the Baltic republics, like the other CEECS countries, had a rightful place in an expanded Europe and consequently lent its support to their efforts to gain full membership of European institutions and organizations as soon as possible. In contrast, the Chancellery's view of EC/EU membership for the Baltic states ranged from indifference

to outright skepticism, a position which put a brake on all associated endeavors. In the same manner, the Federal Chancellery initially rejected the expansion of NATO to the western border of Russia: this was a renewed objection, the intention of which was first and foremost to avoid snubbing its partner in the Kremlin, so important for the process of reunification. In the face of the Kremlin's criticism of NATO's expansion plans, Bonn made a plea for a "middle way between full membership and informal cooperation in the form of the Cooperation Council" (Feldmayer, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 2, 1993). For the Baltic states on the other hand, membership of the military alliance was at the end of the day the highest priority, promising as it did important security guarantees to counter any possible aggression from Russia.

Negotiations on eastward EC and NATO expansion continued to make only slow progress even after Klaus Kinkel took over the reins in the Foreign Office. With the difficulties in the transformation process in the former Soviet states in mind, Germany responded coolly in the spring of 1993 to the proposal from the Danish presidency of the Council of the European Communities that free trade agreements be swiftly concluded with the Baltic states. At this time, Bonn considered the desire of the Baltic states to begin association negotiations in the near future to be unrealistic. The German government thereby sent out the signal that it did not yet consider the three states ready for accession – as such discussions were generally followed by the conclusion of Europe agreements and the associated prospect of full EC membership.

To sign association agreements with all three Baltic states within six months was the intention of the German EU Council Presidency.

The German government only relinquished its reluctance when Germany assumed the presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union in July 1994. A declared aim of the presidency was to create closer ties between the Union and the CEECS countries and to sign association agreements with all three Baltic states. Accordingly, German foreign minister Kinkel set out the position of the Federal government in a March 1994 byline article:

*"Germany emphatically supports moves to bring the Baltic states via association status into full membership of the European Union. It is our desire to help these states quickly and with all the means at our disposal to take up their rightful place in Europe. As proponent and advocate for the Baltic states we shall commit ourselves to the conclusion this year of a Europe agreement with these states. The European Union would remain incomplete if all three Baltic states were not one day to become members."*⁶

During the German presidency Bonn made repeated appeals to the European heads of state and government to give their consent to the swift commencement of discussions on association with the Baltic states. The European Council finally decided unanimously at the EU's Essen summit of December 9 and 10 1994 to commence negotiations with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia on the subject of Europe agreements. In this way the German government had decisively accelerated the integration into Europe of the Baltic states. The swift signing of the agreements with all three Baltic states was a success for German foreign policy and promoted the three young democracies' understanding of themselves as part of the western canon of values. The resolutions, clearly designed to be heard in Moscow, underscored the sovereignty of the three states and their orientation toward Europe.

In spite of all the support lent to the cause before and during the Germany presidency of the Council of Ministers, the German government nonetheless continued to hold back from proposing a clear timetable for the accession of the Baltic states to the EU. With an eye on Russian interests the German chancellor initially appealed for the unconditional admission of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary only into the EU and NATO. The accession of the remaining CEECS states to even one of the two organizations was initially postponed to some unspecified point in the future.

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6 | Klaus Kinkel, „Die Zukunft des Baltikums liegt in Europa“, in: *Die Welt*, March 5, 1994.

The German government's position on the expansion prospects for the countries of central and eastern Europe was set out by defense minister Rühle on a November 1996 lecture trip to London: "The most important message to the countries that are not yet in the process of becoming members is the political signal: We are in an open political process; we are not saying 'no', but 'not yet'" (Rühle, quoted in *Bulletin* № 94 of the press and information office of the Federal German government, November 22 1996) Even at this time it appeared probable that the Baltic states would be among the „not yet“ accession candidates. The Baltic states were disappointed with Bonn's evasiveness and unwillingness – contrary to their hopes – to support their call for admission in the first round of expansion.⁷

Shortly after the July 1997 decision on restricted NATO expansion the EU Commission set out its position on the readiness for accession of the ten candidates. It recommended commencing discussions with Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus. In order to prevent Latvian and Lithuanian disappointment at the setback from derailing those reform processes that had already been set in motion and compromising those yet to be embarked upon, the German foreign minister met his three Baltic opposite numbers in Riga in October 1997. He encourages the two southern Baltic republics to follow the Estonian example by carrying on with their reform programs in line with the Copenhagen criteria.

In essence, the SPD/Green Party coalition of 1998 to 2005 under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder continued the committedly uncommitted Baltic policy of the predecessor government. The CEESC states were afraid, above all initially, that Bonn would be less interested than it had been in the past in the expansion of the Union. In the run-up to the December 1998 EU summit in Vienna chancellor Schröder emphasized that no date for expansion had been set and the existence of further open questions meant that it would be irresponsible to make any firm commitments on the matter. Nor could foreign minister Joschka Fischer's payment of lip service to Germany's

7 | Jasper von Altenbockum, "Die baltischen Staaten sind von Bonn enttäuscht", in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 19, 1996.

continuing role of "advocate within the EU for the central and eastern Europeans" (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 27, 1998) disguise the fact that not one of the members of the red-green cabinet was especially interested in making commitments to the Baltic. During this period Berlin gave emphatic support neither to the continuation of negotiations with Estonia nor to the Latvian and Lithuanian catch-up process. Nonetheless, Latvia and Lithuania were successfully able to implement the *Acquis communautaire* in the second round and, having already been admitted to NATO, to accede to the EU on May 1 2004 along with Estonia and five other central and eastern European countries plus Malta and Cyprus.

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One cause of sourness in German-Baltic relations has been the "Northstream" natural gas project, worth billions of dollars and managed by a Russo-German consortium; the plan is to connect Wyborg in Russia with the energy hub of Lubmin, close to Greifswald in Germany, and the pipeline is intended from 2012 to transport up to 2 trillion cubic feet of gas per annum to the EU. During the preparation phase of the project, intended to form part of the European energy network, the three Baltic states complained of being, if not completely ignored by the German and Russian governments, both of which were vying for the project, then at the very least of not being kept sufficiently informed of the plans. In the face of the lack of diplomacy demonstrated by the Federal Chancellery and the Kremlin in the affair and public displays of manly friendship⁸ between Gerhard Schröder and Russian president Vladimir Putin, Baltic politicians lined up in public discussion forums to draw parallels with the Hitler-Stalin pact, by means of which Berlin and Moscow had jointly decided on the future of the Baltic republics as part of the Soviet sphere of influence. Although the comparison is completely without foundation it nonetheless provides evidence of the deep insecurity and low self-confidence felt by the Baltic states in the wake of fifty years of occupation. That there should be a degree of skepticism toward a former occupying power that has described the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the

8 | Cf. Michael Thumann, „Anatomie einer Männerfreundschaft“, in: *Die Zeit*, September 9, 2004, http://zeit.de/2004/38/Putin_2fSchr_9ader (accessed August 5, 2010).

“greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century” (*Russland Analysen*, № 63, April 29 2005, 13) and toward its political partner, who has characterized the originator of this statement as “a democrat through and through” (*Beckmann*, ARD, November 22, 2004), is understandable. Last but not least, the war with Georgia in the summer of 2008 stirred up strong emotions in the Baltic states on the basis of comparable experience of Soviet expansionary policies in the twentieth century.⁹

CONCLUSION

Relations between Germany and her Baltic neighbors have in the last twenty years essentially been driven both by efforts on the part of the governments of the day to maintain good relations with Russia and by the historical and political ties binding Germany to the Baltic.

Until 1990 the primary aim of German foreign policy was to attain the reunification of the two German states in a context of peace and freedom whilst maintaining existing European and transatlantic partnerships. The election of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and subsequent reformist policies were seen by the West German government under the leadership of Helmut Kohl as a possibly unique window of opportunity for the reunification of the two German states. However, the peaceful reunification of Germany was at this time unthinkable without the goodwill and consent of Moscow and would have been untenable without appropriate security guarantees to the Kremlin. Any cooling of the German position toward the desires of the Baltic states, such as their demands for independence and NATO membership, occurred for the sake of Germany’s own interests.

The peaceful reunification of Germany was unthinkable without the goodwill of Moscow. Any cooling of the German position toward the desires of the Baltic states occurred for the sake of Germany’s own interests.

Germany was always an active proponent of Baltic interests as long as such behavior was not seen to jeopardize her own national interests. No German government could afford to ignore the Kremlin’s position on the Baltic if it

9 | For an evaluation of Russian foreign policy objectives under Putin cf. Erich G. Fritz, “Gute Worte – Falsche Taten”, in: *Die Politische Meinung* № 440, July 2006, 53-56.

did not want to risk losing the goodwill of the leadership in Moscow, thereby putting its avowed aims on the line. The fractious relations between Moscow and the Baltic states in respect, for instance, of troop withdrawals and the Russian-speaking minorities served to further complicate matters. It was these conditions that led successive German governments to adopt a policy on the Baltic that repeatedly exposed Germany to the accusation of being overly accommodating to Moscow.

The second significant factor influencing the policy of German Federal governments was the checkered nature of German-Baltic history. The influence of the Teutonic Knights and the German Balts since the 13th century, now generally viewed as positive, on the one hand, and the negative impact of the August 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact on the other laid the foundations for Germany's connection with, and responsibility toward, the three republics. It was above all during the first years of transformation that the Federal German government made frequent reference to these historical determinants. The obligations resulting from them were, and remain, important drivers of German policy toward the Baltic.

Neither the accession of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the European Union nor their admission to NATO would have happened as fast as they did if it had not been for the assistance of German foreign policy.

Whether Germany has always lived up to her self-styled role as "advocate for the Balts" has been a matter of debate in many quarters.¹⁰ Overall it can be said that all German governments, from Helmut Kohl and Gerhard Schröder through to Angela Merkel, have sought active involvement with the Baltic states, both in international organizations and through the medium of bilateral agreements, even though the intensity of this involvement has been variable. Neither the accession of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the European Union nor their admission to NATO would have happened as fast as they did if it had not been for the assistance of German foreign policy. Both the Federal

Chancellery and the foreign ministry continue to this day to offer their support and act as brokers at the European level to promote questions of internal and external security

10 | Helge Danckert, "Anwalt der Balten" oder Anwalt in eigener Sache?: Die deutsche Baltikumpolitik 1991 – 2004, Berlin 2008.

for the Baltic states. That this also sets the basic tone of foreign policy affairs has become clear since discussions took place in 2005 on the rerouting of the Baltic pipeline.

Whenever it has come to the crunch – for instance, during the violent clashes in Vilnius and Riga at the start of 1991 or the hot phase of the August 2008 Georgian conflict that coincided with a visit of chancellor Angela Merkel to Tallinn – the Federal German government has always stood four-square behind its Baltic friends and partners. Whilst the Balts would prefer a less ambivalent – and more favorable – position on their aspirations in times of peace as well as conflict, Germany expects a quid pro quo in the form of greater equanimity toward their Russian neighbor, especially in the context of the irreversible establishment of the Baltic states within the European Union and the transatlantic security alliance.

Whilst the Balts would prefer a more favorable – position on their aspirations Germany expects a quid pro quo in the form of greater equanimity toward their Russian neighbor.