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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF GERMANY IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Abstract:

It is necessary to specify that as a result of the (unification?) of Germany in 1990, its eastern frontier directly bordered with a number of former communist states. Since the beginning of the 90 years of cooperation with these states one of Germany's main tasks became rendering aid to them in carrying out reforms. Germany, being one of leaders of the EU was interested in involvement of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the European market and in receiving benefits from this cooperation, besides; in the political sphere it was important to create a common and stable Europe. One can add that stability and safety in Europe was connected with EU expansion to the East. This article also analyzes how in recent years Germany has been influencing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; demonstrating that Germany cooperated with countries of Eastern Europe not only within the European Union, but also in a bilateral format since for Germany, entry of the countries of the Central and Eastern European countries into the EU into EU was communicated with the realization of a complex of social, economic and political interests with the Visegrád group.

Keywords:

Germany, former communist states, the Central and Eastern Europe, economic and political interests, Visegrád group

Introduction

Considering the political and economic interests of Germany in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, it is necessary to specify that as a result of the association of Germany in 1990, its eastern frontier now had a

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direct border with a number of former communist states². Since the beginning of the 90th years of cooperation with these states one of Germany's main tasks became and rendering aid to them in carrying out reforms became for Germany one of the main tasks. Germany, being one of leaders of the EU was interested in involvement of the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe in the European market and in receiving benefits from this cooperation, besides; in the political sphere it was important to create a common and stable Europe. It is necessary to add that stability and safety in Europe was connected with EU expansion to the East³.

The policy of Germany towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the socialist system. Visegrád group

A number of the Russian experts who are engaged in German politics, among them Anna Serbina from Tomsk University, argue that after the collapse of the socialist system Germany has been influencing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe⁴. A. Serbina specifies, and it is possible to agree with her, that as the transformation process of countries within Eastern Europe was rather difficult and long, in order for it to successfully come to the end, East European states needed further support and investments from Germany. Germany has cooperated with Eastern European countries not only within the European Union, but also in a bilateral format. The 1990s were characterized by activation of the political, social and economic relations between Germany and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, alongside preparation for occurrence of these countries to the European Union⁵.

The entry of these countries into EU took place between 2004 and 2007. As a result of their entry into the European Union the period of split of Europe formally ended. However expansion to the East has big risks and threats for EU development as a whole. The gap in social and economic and political development between Western and Eastern Europe remains obvious. Understanding it, leaders of the European Union, being guided by economic and political interests, assumed all weight of this expansion. The special role was played here by Germany, which as the main donor of the budget of EU

² W. Dergaczew, *Jewropejskaja integracija* [in:] *Regionowiedzenie*, ed. W. A. Dergaczew, L. B. Wardomskij, Juniti-Dana 2007, <<http://dergachev.ru/publicist/eurounion.html>> (25.07.2019).

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ A. Serbina, *Politika Germanii v otnoshenii stran Centralnoj i Wostocznoj Evropy w svjazi s rasszirenijem JES: 1990-2007*, Tomsk 2011, <<https://www.dissercat.com/content/politika-germanii-v-otnoshenii-stran-tsentralnoi-i-vostochnoi-evropy-v-svyazi-s-rasshireniem#ixzz2oznXtTiW>> (31.07.2019).

⁵ *Ibidem*.

made every effort that countries of Eastern Europe as soon as possible adapted to conditions of united Europe⁶.

Germany and these countries are connected by a number of factors – shared history, geographical proximity, and a complex of bilateral interests. Besides these factors, since 2004 Germany had been interacting already within the European Union. In fact, the closest relations Germany has, is with the countries of the Visegrád group. This regional integration group was created in 1991 in Visegrád (Hungary) by three countries – Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. After disintegration of Czechoslovakia the group began to work in a four state format⁷.

It should be noted that the relationships between Germany and the countries of the Visegrád group it is possible to allocate two periods. The first period, from 1990 to 1998, then between Helmut Kohl's government and the governments of the East European four, the factors of cooperation created by a shared aspiration of achievement for the common purpose — entry of countries of Eastern Europe into the European Union. The second period, from 1998 till the end of 2000, was defined by an increase of disagreements between Gerhard Schröder's government and the Eastern European governments as the emphasis was focused on the development of transatlantic cooperation, and membership in EU already took place⁸.

Also, it is very important to note that for Germany, entry of Central and Eastern European countries into the EU was communicated with the realization of complex social, economic and political interests. First, it's civilization interests; Germany considers the Eastern European states as an important part of 'European civilization' Therefore entry of the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union is perceived as the final reunion of Europe.

Secondly, it is economic; the interests connected with the aspiration to develop trade, and investment meant cooperation with countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Since the 90s Germany has been the main trade and investment partner of East European states. After entry of these states into the EU the volume of economic cooperation between the countries continues to grow. As a whole, the conclusion was drawn that EU expansion to the East significantly affected a condition of economic cooperation between Germany and some Central and Eastern European countries. First of all changes were observed as qualitative, instead of quantitatively as cooperation was already at a stage of the associated partnership with about 80% of possible potential of growth of cooperation were used. Accession of the East European countries to conditions of the common domestic market of the EU brought these relations to a completely other level. Among the Central and Eastern European countries

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

certainly, the countries of the Visegrád group are leaders in trade volume with Germany and the main recipients of German investments. Such cooperation is mutually advantageous: for Germany the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe are a traditional sales market for German goods⁹.

Germany also imports certain types of goods which measured by price to quality ratio are in demand in the German market¹⁰. The large German companies are considered by Eastern European countries as favorable, stable partners; therefore, despite the narrowness of the Eastern European markets, they have the niche there. Along with this, with the EU expansion of border cooperation with Germany's east lands became more active though, certainly, leadership in trade and economic cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is kept by the western lands of Germany¹¹.

However, realization of social and economic interests with EU expansion to the East had to satisfy certain political interests of Germany. Germany counted that the East European countries, having entered into EU, will support Germany at adoption of any decisions.

Relations of Germany with these countries in the 21st century

At the beginning of the 21st century alongside unifying moments there were also destructive factors in bilateral relations. These problems are connected with the common past and different views of the future of European integration. Especially difficult relations for Germany have been with Poland and the Czech Republic. These countries, now in the European Union try to pursue active foreign policy and to realize, first of all, their independent national interests. This was especially demonstrated at discussion of the Constitution of the EU and the following constitutional crisis. The document, according to the Czech Republic and Poland, limited the rights of small countries within the EU and therefore wasn't accepted¹². At the same time the anti-German hysteria began. Poland again started accusing Germany of World War II events. Germany lifted a subject of the expelled Germans, their property, and negotiations on creation in Berlin 'The center expelled' were begun.

It is possible to indicate four areas where Poland and Germany have different interests. The first one is monetary policy. As an euro area member Germany is interested in rescuing the common currency. Poland, in turn, is interested in keeping the euro area open to other EU Member States. The second one is energy policy; Germany is a front runner in the promotion of renewable

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Germany imports and opportunities for export to Germany*, <<https://www.alliance-experts.com/en/knowledge/countries/europe/best-tips-on-germany-export/>> (02.08.2019).

¹¹ R. Moghadam, *Europe's Road to Integration*, "Finance & Development" March 2014, vol. 51, No. 1, <<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2014/03/moghadam.htm>> (06.08.2019).

¹² A. Serbina, *op. cit.*

energy sources, and German energy policy is closely connected to environmental policy. Poland, on the other hand, is much more concerned about the security of supply along with the economic dimensions of energy supply. This is the reason for its support for an energy system based on domestic coal reserves. The third one is security policy; The Polish preference for NATO and the permanent presence of NATO troops in Poland does not enjoy German support. The fourth difference is the countries' perceptions of the conflict in the east of Ukraine. In the beginning of the conflict the idea of sanctions did not enjoy much support in Germany, while for Poland, Ukrainian sovereignty plays a crucial role¹³. Later in 2015 one additional issue was added. The readiness of Germany, declared by the German chancellor, to take in refugees accelerated a wave of immigration, which by far exceeded the expectations of the German government. The migration crisis has dominated European policy in 2015 as the German government tries to impose quotas on the other EU Member States, which are not kindly accepted by Poland and the other Visegrád Group members¹⁴.

As for the Czech Republic, despite a long history of interaction, wide opportunities for expansion and the consolidation of cooperation, the eviction issue of the Sudeten Germans who expressed the requirement of Germany to cancel the 1945 decrees of president Edward Benesh still isn't resolved. All this very badly reflects not only the atmosphere of the bilateral relations, but also brings negative elements into European Union development.

Slovakia and Hungary on the other hand have no such acute contradictions with Germany as in the case with Poland and the Czech Republic appeared more constructive partners for Berlin among the Visegrád group¹⁵. Many analysts note that this circumstance is caused by the fact that these countries are very dependent on the cooperation and grants arriving from the European Union with Germany as the main donor. For example, in 2015, Slovakia and Germany set a record for trade turnover. Germany exported products worth € 12 billion to Slovakia and imported almost € 13.7 billion from Slovakia. German products account for 15% of the structure of Slovak imports¹⁶.

Conclusion

Concluding, speaking of the political and economic interests of Germany in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it should be noted, that as a

¹³ M. A. Cichocki, O. Osica, *Neue deutsch-polnische Agenda. Wie können aus unterschiedlichen Grundlagen gemeinsamer Interessen werden?*, "Dialog. Deutsch-Polnisches Magazin", No. 111 (2015), pp. 51-53.

¹⁴ D. Kałan, *Migration Crisis Unites Visegrad Group*, "PISM Bulletin" 2015.

¹⁵ *Merkel' poblagodarila Vengriyu za vklad v ob'yedineniye Germanii*, <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6771901>> (15.09.2019).

¹⁶ V. Gulevich, *Slovakiya vybirayet franko-germanskiy soyuz*, "Mieżdunarodnaja Žizn", 18.08.2017, <<https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/18151>> (20.09.2019).

result of Central and Eastern European countries accession to the European Union, Germany firstly and finally solved, only the economic interests, while political domination of Germany in these countries continues.

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