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**POLISH AND GERMAN PRESS REPORTS
ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTERS
OF BOTH COUNTRIES IN RESOLVING THE CONFLICT
IN UKRAINE (FEBRUARY–JUNE 2014)**

ABSTRACT: Polish-German relations in the first half of 2014 were dominated by the Ukraine crisis. This study is an attempt to answer the question of how Polish and German press assessed the cooperation of both countries in resolving the conflict in Ukraine; to what extent the most widely read magazines associated themselves with the decisions of their politicians and the feelings of their own societies and how much understanding they showed for the arguments of their EU partner. The analysis focuses on the unprecedented mission of the Weimar Triangle foreign ministers to Ukraine in February 2014, which led to an agreement between the Ukrainian opposition and President Viktor Yanukovich. A turning point was the visit paid by Radoslaw Sikorski and Frank-Walter Steinmeier to St. Petersburg in June 2014. The next meetings agreed on by EU partners were held without inviting the Polish partner. In view of the speed of events in the selected time interval, the articles subjected to analysis were taken from the most widely read online editions of national daily newspapers in Poland and Germany.

KEYWORDS: Polish-German relations, Polish and German press, Weimar Triangle, crisis in Ukraine, Ukrainian-Russian conflict

Polish-German relations in the first half of 2014 were dominated by the crisis in Ukraine. Ukraine's rejection of the association agreement with the European Union (November 2013), the most serious anti-government grass-roots protests since 2004, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and finally, the Ukrainian-Russian conflict proved to be the beginning of a sea change on the European continent. At the end of 2013, elections to the Bundestag took place in Germany, from which emerged a new coalition government, composed of the two largest parties

– the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union). The main leaders of this Grand Coalition declared their willingness to boost and standardize the European Neighbourhood Policy, in which the association agreement would continue to play a central role. Declarations by the leading politicians suggested a tightening of Polish-German cooperation within the Union. In the coalition agreement signed in December 2013, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats assured Poland of their intention to cooperate closely on European and Atlantic integration and stressed not only that Poland, alongside France, was of priority importance for German foreign policy, but also pointed to their immediate eastern neighbour as an entity that would have a decisive influence on the shape of EU policy towards Russia. In his inaugural speech delivered on December 17th 2013, Germany's new Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier criticized Russia for exerting pressure on Ukraine and questioned the European Union's policy towards Russia, which ignored Ukraine's strong dependence on Russia (Fix, Gawrich, 2014: 2). Such declarations met the expectations of Poland, whose ambition was to act as Eastern European advocate and which conducted an active Eastern policy within the EU. Gaining the support of Germany was perceived as key to the success of the Community's initiatives (Patecka-Frauenfelder, 2014: 110–132).

The beginning of 2014 provided hopes for the optimistic scenario of a common eastern policy among EU partners. An example of cooperation at the highest level was the mission of foreign ministers from the Weimar Triangle to Kiev and the negotiations that concluded with an agreement between the Ukrainian authorities and the Euromaidan democratic forces in February 2014 (Łada, 2014). Another joint initiative of the Polish and German foreign ministers in June 2014, using the term the Kaliningrad Triangle invented that same year, proved ineffective in building an agreement with Russia. From the German point of view, the Normandy format, agreed upon in June 2014 as an interim solution among representatives of EU states and heads of governments, proved to be more 'pragmatic' (Buras, 2014–2015, pp. 15–17). The following article will attempt to answer the question of how the Polish and German press assessed the cooperation between foreign ministers in resolving the conflict in Ukraine. While the most widely read magazines associated themselves with the decisions of their politicians and the feelings of their own societies and showed understanding for the arguments of their EU partner, in the article analysis was limited to such events as Poland's and Germany's participation in the

negotiations between the opposition and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych and the June visit of Radoslaw Sikorski and Frank-Walter Steinmeier to St. Petersburg and an attempt has been made to analyze the profiles of ministers in the press of the other country. The article does not include the contribution of Donald Tusk's broad diplomatic offensive during this period, (in late January and early February the Polish Prime Minister in the course of a few days met with the heads of the European Commission and the European Parliament, the French President, the German Chancellor, the Prime Ministers of the UK, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary in order to establish a common EU position on the Ukraine crisis) and Angela Merkel (telephone diplomacy, and numerous talks, primarily with the Russian President). No analysis was made of the comparisons in the Polish and German press in connection with the attitude of the German chancellor and the German foreign minister to the crisis in Ukraine.

In view of the dynamics of the situation in the selected time period, a qualitative analysis has been conducted of articles selected from the most widely read online editions of national dailies in Poland and Germany. Research material was provided by *Gazeta Wyborcza* (hereafter referred to as *GW*), *Rzeczpospolita* (hereafter referred to as *Rz*), *Dziennik. Gazeta Prawna* (hereafter referred to as *DzGP*), and *Nasz Dziennik* (hereafter referred to as *NDz*). In the case of the German press, the articles included were by journalists associated with such dailies as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (hereafter referred to as *FAZ*), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (hereafter referred to as *SZ*), *Die Welt*¹ and texts from the most popular German magazine *Der Spiegel*. In the latter's case, abandoning the rule of selecting daily newspapers is justified by the very high readership of this weekly, both at home and abroad. *FAZ* presents conservative-liberal views, *SZ* – liberal views, while *Die Welt* is a Springer owned daily intended for conservative readers. *Der Spiegel* is addressed to liberal-left readers. The above selection allows for a fuller picture

¹ The dailies referred to have for years enjoyed enduring popularity among German readers and are recognized as an important influential voice in Germany. Interest in these examples of the printed press translates into a high number of visits to web pages of these newspapers. Compare H. Pürer, J. Raabe, *Presse in Deutschland*, Konstanz 2007, p. 445; and the latest press readership survey on Internet portals, conducted by i.a. <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/13032/umfrage/anzahl-der-nutzer-von-online-tageszeitungen-in-deutschland/> (access: 07.03.2014).

of the opinions built in Germany. Taking into account the press for supporters of the left-wing party 'Die Linke' would require a significantly more thorough study. The dailies referred to have for years enjoyed enduring popularity among German readers and are recognized as an important influential voice in Germany. Interest in these examples of the printed press translates into a high number of visits to web pages of these newspapers (Pürer, Raabe 2007: p. 445).

German media reacted lively to the events in Ukraine, showing much sympathy for the Euromaidan movement. Ukraine – widely regarded as a 'blank spot' in the consciousness of German society – became an important subject and one eagerly sought by German-speaking readers. Germany's increased interest in the affairs of Eastern Europe was welcomed in Poland with hopes for EU forum implementation of Poland's scenario for building the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours. This was because up till that time, issues concerning the Union's Eastern neighbours had been viewed in German political and social discourse seen through the prism of relations with the Russian Federation, according to the principle of 'Russland zuerst' (Russia first). In the German public's consciousness, ever since the arrest of the Pussy Riot group, the increasing discrimination against sexual minorities and the Kremlin's crackdown on German non-governmental organizations active on Russian Federation soil, the attitude to Moscow had undergone a relative cooling. Poland hopefully reported this change in attitude to Russian President Vladimir Putin, still being cherished by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder as a squeaky clean democrat. The Polish press closely followed the elections and the formation of a new government in Germany. The rise of the Grand Coalition (CDU/CSU and SPD) was accurately predicted. In the Polish press much space was given to speculation about Germany's future foreign minister. It was assumed that in the event of an agreement between the two largest parties in Germany, this would be Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who had already fulfilled the function of head of diplomacy in the years 2005–2009 in Angela Merkel's first government, was a trusted colleague of Gerhard Schröder and the author of the 'Partnership for Modernisation' project with Russia (Guział, 2002, pp. 42–47)². For most Polish newspapers, the assumed selection of Germany's

² Andrzej Guział outlined the basic principles of German policy towards Russia following the change of government in 2005. The Christian Democrat and Social-Democrat German government established in 2005 treated Russia as a strategic partner in all dimensions.

Foreign Ministry heads was initially a major cause for concern. Polish journalists did not share the opinion expressed in the pages of *DzGP* that one should not overestimate the role of Steinmeier who, according to that article's author, was not an overly influential figure in his party, and since the outbreak of the crisis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had lost its former position (Woś, 2013). In analyzes regarding the new composition of the German government, emphasis was laid on fears of German diplomacy returning to a pro-Russian strategy resulting from Steinmeier's Russian sympathies. Articles published in Polish national dailies, especially in *Rz* and *GW* highlighted in the greatest detail the process of Steinmeier's change in image. While at the turn of September and October *Rz* reprimanded the future candidate for the position of head of German diplomacy for too conciliatory an attitude towards the Russian Federation³, and *GW*, sharing those fears, confirmed that Moscow always worked well with the German Social Democrats (Radziwiłowicz, 2013) then together with the progress in the formulation of a new government in Germany, opinions concerning Steinmeier became more complementary. In late October, Piotr Jendroszczyk of *Rz* wrote that the election of a Social Democrat would be good for Poland, because of his close ties with Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski (Jendroszczyk, *Berlin szuka pomysłu na UE*, 2013), and after Steinmeier's official nomination as head of German diplomacy, he assured readers that *Steinmeier is a politician who will not conduct a policy towards Russia over the heads of the Poles* (Jendroszczyk, *Trzecia kadencja podobna do poprzednich*, 2013). Bartosz Wieliński of *GW* echoed that despite Steinmeier's earlier commitment to the development of relations with Russia, his return *does not mean another era of blind love in Russian-German relations*. According to *GW*, a disappointed Berlin today does not trust Putin an inch and Russian-German relations are icy (Wieliński, *Berlin nie wierzy Putinowi*, 2014). Polish publicists referred to the words of the government's plenipotentiary for German affairs Władysław Bartoszewski, who explained in an interview with *Rz* that Steinmeier had learned a lot and in Merkel's office would conduct a balanced

³ In early October, RP quoted the *Die Zeit* weekly, in which the author drew attention to Steinmeier's pro-Russian attitude and his foreign policy conducted in 2005-2009 under Angela Merkel's first government. Steinmeier believed that the era of confrontation was over, and offered Russia help in its reforms. Osk, 'Die Zeit: Nowy MSZ może być zbyt przyjazny dla Rosji', 02.10.2014, based on: www.rp.pl, 02.10.2013, P. Jendroszczyk, 'Trudne negocjacje koalicyjne w Berlinie blokują UE', 03.10.2013., based on: www.rp.pl.

policy towards Russia (Wielński, *Berlin nie wierzy Putinowi*, 2014). *Rz* and *GW* emphasized the growing importance of Poland, which was hoping to appear as an expert in matters of policy towards the EU's eastern neighbours. Steinmeier's statement, made just after being sworn in, that he was going to Poland because, of all those in the EU, the Poles know Ukrainian specifics best was welcomed with a considerable degree of satisfaction, because it greatly contrasted with the opinions of Germans from previous years, when it was thought that the Poles were driven by anti-Russian phobias and therefore their opinions were worthless (Jendroszczyk, *Trudne negocjacje koalicyjne w Berlinie blokują UE*, 2013). *GW* and *Rz* wrote about a breakthrough in Polish-German relations (Wielński, *Berlin Warszawa – wspólna sprawa*, 2013; Czech, 20013).

Warsaw's enthusiasm did not escape the attention of the German press. Konrad Schuller, since 2004 the *FAZ* correspondent for Poland and Ukraine, noted that the key word for rebuilding Steinmeier's image was the word 'outrageous'. This was apparently how Steinmeier viewed the way the Kremlin exploited Ukraine's weakness, in order to prevent the signing of an association agreement with the EU (Schuller, 19.12.2013). *Just a small rebuke of Moscow* – continued the German correspondent – *was enough to rehabilitate the German foreign minister in Warsaw* (Schuller, 19.12.2013). In the same article the columnist pointed to a different model of thinking, which in his assessment differs from the new image of the head of German diplomacy forced by the media. An article entitled 'Gospodin Steinmeier' appeared in mid-December in the *Do Rzeczy* weekly. Its authors had no illusions concerning the intentions of the new minister of foreign affairs, considered him *a totally extraordinary Russophile, and a faithful comrade ready to support Russia even in spite of and to the detriment of Western interests*. They suggested that his return was a clear signal to the world and above all Putin, in which direction German foreign policy would lean in the coming years (Magierowski, Florek-Mostowska, 2014). The image of Steinmeier presented by the *Do Rzeczy* weekly reflected the feelings Polish right-wing conservative circles, whose initially hushed opinions emerged with strong accents in April 2014.

In the first quarter of 2014 the media in Germany also built a positive image of Polish-German relations. The country on the Vistula River grew to become an expert in all matters Ukrainian. The German press, in analyzes of the largest country in the Eastern Partnership quoted statements by Polish politicians, the main headlines of its dailies, and conducted *FAZ*-interviews with Bronisław

Komorowski (28.11.2013) and leading an EU mission in Ukraine Aleksander Kwasniewski (*Spiegel*-Interview By Jan Puhl and Christian Nee, 09.12.2014). Attention was drawn to Steinmeier's new view of Eastern Europe (Sattar, *Ein neuer Blick nach Osten*, 2014), and to the fact that Polish-German relations are good as they have never been before, which is proved i.a. by friendship between the German and Polish foreign ministers (Sturm, *Steinmeier lehnt eine Vermittlerrolle ab*, 2013).

Declarations of closer cooperation were soon to show their practical side. The EU's diplomatic mission to Kiev and the agreement concluded on February 21st 2014 used the formula of trilateral cooperation within the Weimar Triangle (Lang, /2014–2015).

The activities of the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland led to a compromise being struck. The press in Poland and Germany described the dramatic developments in Ukraine (the increasing number of people killed, snipers shooting at protesters, heavy street fighting, and the atmosphere of civil war) (dpa, 21.02.2014). The trip made by the ministers was seen as an act of last resort (Puhl, 26.05.2014) aimed at stopping the spiral of violence (Ehrenstein, Lehnartz, Kellermann, 22.02.2014) and ending the bloodshed. The press both in Poland and Germany also treated the purpose of the visit as a symbolic message that the EU speaks with one voice. Defects in the Kiev agreement were perceived (Maidan dissatisfaction, and lack of acceptance of the agreement by extremist forces acting among the demonstrators) (Parafianowicz, Potocki, 15.03.2014), but both stressed that the most important goal had been achieved. The determination and effort made by the EU Ministers in Ukraine was duly noted, but they rated the contribution of each of the ministers differently. The foreign policy commentator for *FAZ* declared that the mission by the heads of German diplomacy was the most important challenge that the Weimar Triangle had ever had to face. In his opinion, the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland did not hesitate to throw all their authority on the scales to save Ukraine from an almost certain civil war (Frankenberger, 22.02.2014). *Die Welt* clearly pointed to Steinmeier as the initiator of the diplomatic mission, who saw in the achievement of the mission a way to stimulate the Weimar Triangle. The conservative daily admitted that although Poland had always actively worked for an EU rapprochement, Sikorski had in recent days spoken very sparingly, while Steinmeier demanded sanctions against Ukraine (Ehrenstein, Lehnartz, Kellermann, 22.02.2014). *Der Spiegel* too attributed to Steinmeier the central

role in appeasing the conflict. Discussing the events in Kiev, the German magazine's columnist wrote about a trio of EU Ministers, who *mustered round* the head of German diplomacy, *urging* even their colleague Radoslaw Sikorski to interrupt his holiday in Innsbruck (Gebauer, *Der Marathon-Diplomat*, 2014). *SZ* agreed with the German press, which praised Steinmeier's diplomacy but stressed that an equally important role in the mediation process in Kiev was played by Radoslaw Sikorski, who contrary to relations in that Steinmeier allegedly had to convince him to cut short his vacation, was the first to decide to mediate in the talks (Brössler, *Reise ins ukrainische Chaos*, 2014, by the same author, *Albtraum Spaltung*, 2014). *SZ* wrote about Sikorski as *the most active of the active* also in the context of internal political disputes in Poland and the criticisms aimed at the foreign minister by the 'national-Catholic opposition', which attacked Sikorski for urging the Ukrainian opposition to accept the conditions of the compromise under threat of an increase in the number of victims and martial law (Brill, *Anteilnahme in Blau-Gelb*, 2014). According to *DzGP* publicists, Sikorski's words only aroused controversy in Poland, while the Western press considered them an expression of determination. In their opinion, Sikorski was well prepared, and the mission was successful (Parafianowicz, Potocki, 2014). The media which rebutted the charges against the head of Polish diplomacy included *Rz*. That broadsheet's columnist stressed that, regardless of one's attitude towards Sikorski, it should be admitted that he did a good job (pap, 21.02.2014) and helped negotiate an agreement (Słojewska, 2014). For *Rz* and *GW* there wasn't a shadow of doubt about the Polish foreign minister's dominant contribution. Wieliński of *GW* explained that EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton had asked Sikorski to organize a mission to Kiev. Contrary to suggestions concerning a different composition for this mission, Sikorski decided to *mount* a Weimar Triangle mission – with the foreign ministers of Germany and France (Wieliński, *Jak Sikorski negocjował w Kijowie*, 2014). Jan Haszczyński of *Rz* saw in the events in Kiev signs of a revival of Polish diplomacy, whose actions filled him with pride (Haszczyński, *Wielkie symbole Ukrainy*, 2014). *GW* and *Rz* cited the opinions of politicians and experts highly estimating the achievements of European, including Polish diplomacy, indicating that the Polish partner had to be counted with in matters concerning Ukraine. That which *GW* recognized as Poland's asset in the international arena, i.e. the cooperation of the Weimar Triangle ministers within the framework of EU diplomacy (Bielecki, Grochal, 2014), for *NDz*

journalists became an opportunity to demonstrate Polish policy's over-dependence on Community strategy, including the traditional Russian-German intimacy. On the pages of *NDz*, journalist stressed German diplomacy's care in maintaining close contact with Russia, for instance in the form of telephoning Putin with information about the intentions of the Weimar Triangle's foreign ministers (IK, PAP, 2014).

Analysing the period from February to May 2014 in order to evaluate the activities of the Polish Minister in resolving the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, much good will towards him can be seen in German media⁴. Focusing on the efforts of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, *Der Spiegel* dedicated an article to the Polish chief of diplomacy in its May issue with the telling title 'Mr. Perfekt aus Warschau' ['Mr. Perfect from Warsaw'], noting that Sikorski, known for his hard-line policy towards Russia, is – since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis at the latest – playing a new role in foreign policy, and Ukraine has become his greatest mission. The article's author Jan Puhl showed that Sikorski, earlier than others, warned that the future of Europe would be decided in Ukraine. At the same time he criticized Germany, which, like many others failed to listen to his opinion, preoccupied with maintaining good relations with Moscow. It turned out that Sikorski was right, and now hopes that NATO and the EU will not continue to treat Russia as they have so far – with such timidity and uncertainty (Puhl, 2014). Marko Martin of *Die Welt* wrote about the great Europeans from Warsaw: Donald Tusk and the polyglot Radek Sikorski (Marko, 2014). Highly rated were Sikorski's chances of being awarded the post of the EU's Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy after Catherine Ashton leaves office (Brössler, Brill, 2014).

⁴ In Germany, Radoslaw Sikorski was given good press, thanks probably in large part to Radoslaw Sikorski's Berlin speech to the German Society for Foreign Policy (November 28, 2011). Przemyslaw Zurawski vel Grajewski notes, however, that this speech delivered during the negotiations on the fiscal pact, although overestimated as to its pro German character (Polish Radio: '*Minister paid tribute to Berlin*', *Wiadomości*²⁴ '*Sikorski paid his own special tribute to Berlin*'), was a clear manifestation of Polish support for German leadership in the EU and so too was it taken, not only in Poland but also in the German media. Grajewski also drew attention to the fact that Sikorski, referring to the state budgets and federal budget in the US, called for a communitization of Euro zone debts, which is at odds with the German government's position and the attitude of German public opinion. P. Zurawski vel Grajewski, 'Polska wobec przywództwa Niemiec w Unii Europejskiej', *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2014, s. 125.

Good press for the head of Polish diplomacy and such declarations of support do not coincide with the actual decisions that were of crucial importance for the Polish government and society: sanctions against Russia or NATO's strengthening on the eastern flanks of the Union. The unbending attitude of the Russian Federation proved the value of the Polish-German partnership. Response to the Crimean crisis (March 2014) revealed differences in perception, and as a result, in the positions of EU partners.

German journalists stressed that the Poles are watching the revolutionary upheaval in Ukraine like few other nations in Europe (Brill, *Anteilnahme in Blau-Gelb*, 2014). It was stressed that independence of the country on the Dnepr was treated by the Polish elite as a central point of geopolitics that guarantee protection against Russia (Schuller, 2013). According to German journalists, along with the Crimean crisis, traumatic memories returned to those living on the Vistula (Brill, *Traumatische Erinnerungen, höchste Nervosität*, 2014). They recalled that in Central and Eastern Europe, there is no greater trauma than an agreement concluded over the heads of smaller neighbours (Brill, *Rückkehr der Angst*, 2014), especially in Poland, at whose request a NATO summit was called in accordance with Article 4 (Busse, 2014). The German press quoted Sikorski, who at a meeting of EU foreign ministers compared Russia to an insatiable predator (Wittrock, 2014; Brill, 2014).

Activities in the international arena aiming to increase the participation of NATO (Wittrock, 2014) were contrasted by the German press with Steinmeier's *poised* attitude (Weiland, 2014). *FAZ* in the title of an article concerning the agreements between the foreign ministers of the Weimar Triangle on a common position towards NATO, stressed that Steinmeier ruled out Ukraine's entry to NATO. *Der Spiegel*, pointing out that Steinmeier's statement was full of uncertainty, accepted with relief a resounding 'no' for Ukraine's entry to the NATO pact (Weiland, 2014). *Die Welt* decided that Sikorski's statement concerning the stationing of military bases in Poland was made by the Polish minister *half in jest* (Jungholt, 2014). Although as a joke, except that an April fool's one, Sikorski was to make it in the context of information about the withdrawal of Russian troops, which filled Steinmeier with optimism. How vain proved the information in the title of a *SZ* article 'NATO disputes information about the withdrawal of Russian troops', where the German journalist explained Berlin's caution in terms of fear of further escalation and pointed to the German Social Democratic party, which in his opinion extremely sceptically approached the idea of increasing the military

presence in the eastern flank of the alliance (Roßmann, 2014). Discussions on differences in the approach to the Ukrainian crisis among the German coalition partners were also to be found in the Polish press. For Rafał Woś writing in the columns of *DzGP*, declarations by German diplomats concerning NATO were proof of the victory of the Steinmeier concept, which envisages a very high level of understanding for Russia and its vital interests in the countries of the former Soviet Union (Woś, Powrót Steinmeiera, 2014). Referring to Steinmeier's statement taking into account Russia wishes concerning the substance of the NATO declaration made during the 1997 summit in Madrid, Piotr Semka on the pages of *Rz* asked if Germany and Russia were still rivals or secret allies. In an article published in April 2014 entitled 'Alians czarnych orłów', the columnist pointed to the left side of the political spectrum hindering tougher action against Russia. In a polemic between journalists, Wiesław Wawrzyniak's wrote retorting the above opinion and as a counter-argument cited the harsh words directed by Steinmeier to those gathered at a conference of industrialists, namely that *there can be no double-tracking – a policy criticizing Putin and an economy doing business as usual, as if nothing had happened* (Wawrzyniak, 2014). *GW* defended Steinmeier, stressing that the foreign minister is faced with voices of opposition in his own party, which come from older generation Social Democrats who understand Russia (Wieliński, *Po co Sikorski i Steinmeier ryzykują podróż do Rosji?*, 2014). A decidedly negative assessment of Steinmeier's attitude was expressed by the rp.pl blogger Anna Kozicka-Kończakowska under the revealing title 'Kiniarz Steinmeier dla upupionych'. In her analysis, she cited the *extremely vulgar veto by the Germans (...) against US troops helping the Poles*, calling Steinmeier's position anti-EU and anti-NATO (Kozicka-Kończakowska, 2014). Frank-Walter Steinmeier is the most popular politician in Russia, wrote Anna Zechenter on the pages of *NDz*. This politician *so understanding of Putin* – continued the journalist – embodies everything that is valued in the Kremlin, especially the continuation of a friendly policy toward Russia focused on doing business without a word of criticism of the Russian authority. According to the author of the text, the citizens of Germany have been frightened by Russia, and have forgotten the images from Maidan and their own indignation at Putin. They are afraid of losing their jobs and a slowdown in their economic growth (Zechenter, 2014). Citing surveys of public opinion in Germany, according to which Germany refuses to strengthen NATO's presence, *Rz* wrote that the head of the German Foreign Ministry, questioning the stationing of

NATO forces in Poland, reflects the social mood in Germany (p.jen, 2014). *GW* argued that Steinmeier is not interested in a *dirty peace* that would satisfy German business circles and a large section of society. Confirmation that the German foreign minister does not want to come to an agreement behind the backs of his allies was to be a visit of the Polish and German foreign ministers with their Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. According to *GW*, the ministers, aware of the risk and the impossibility of convincing the Russians to accept the EU position, wanted to show that the EU speaks with one voice (Wieliński, *Po co Sikorski i Steinmeier ryzykują podróż do Rosji?*, 2014). Wieliński believed that the Kaliningrad Triangle is a good formula for negotiations. On behalf of the EU, the most important representatives of old and new Europe travelled to enter into talks with Russia. It was explained that this was first and foremost in order to maintain communications and present what position the EU represents (Wieliński, *Rozbrajanie ukraińskiego kryzysu*, 2014). An *Rz* publicist argued convincingly that the initiative of both ministers is part of a much broader EU and US diplomatic campaign aimed at arriving at an agreement with Putin that will give the new president of Ukraine time to stabilize the country (Wieliński, *Rozbrajanie ukraińskiego kryzysu*, 2014). Filip Memches claimed that such thinking is more naive than realistic (Memches, 2014). According to *Rz*, it was the Russians who pushed for this meeting, who via Russian TV channels subordinate to the Government reported the visit of the Polish and German foreign ministers on the Neva in a tone of triumph (Bielecki, 2014). Also in the reporting by *NDz*, it was the Russians who reminded everyone of the scheduled meeting of the Trinity, and when it did come to a meeting, designated a business class hotel located in a side street as the venue for the proceedings. According to *NDz* columnists, the meeting between Sikorski and Steinmeier before the visit with Lavrov was short and ineffective. Indeed they failed to convince Lavrov, and the Polish foreign minister spoke about the *differences in sensitivity* between Germany and Poland (Falkowski, 2014). The purpose behind the meeting was defended by the German daily *Die Welt*, which recognized it as proof of Berlin's interest in close cooperation with Warsaw (Sturm, *Steinmeiers Diplomatie ohne Prunk und Protz*, 2014). According to that Springer-owned daily's publicist, thanks to the latest signals of a relaxation of tension, the meeting planned during the Munich Security Conference was not cancelled, but took place only after the first attempts to establish contact between Poroshenko and Putin, while the talks with Lavrov alone lasted three hours, which was considered

evidence that Russia was also interested in the meeting (Sturm, *Steinmeiers Diplomatie ohne Prunk und Protz*, 2014). As initiator of the meeting *FAZ* pointed to Sikorski, who sought a meeting with Lavrov, in order to show how much Warsaw was interested in avoiding a long-running conflict in Ukraine. The German press quoted the Polish minister who defended the idea of his visit by stressing that diplomacy *does not mean simply talking with those with whom we agree* (Sattar, *Das Lachen des Herrn Lawrow*, 2014). *SZ* interpreted Sikorski's desire to go as an attempt to get over his image as a politician hostile to Russia. In that newspaper's view, the minister made the decision despite the criticism and controversy in Poland. *SZ* has repeatedly drawn attention to the domestic political disputes and controversies that Sikorski's decisions and statements have elicited in Poland. Among other things, Sikorski's statement exhorting Ukraine to continue the dialogue with Russia (Brössler, Brill, 2014). Lavrov's laughter when Sikorski asked whether the situation in the Crimea would not be repeated was – according to *FAZ* (Sattar, *Das Lachen des Herrn Lawrow*, 2014) and *Der Spiegel* – to once again disappoint the head of German diplomacy, who prior to the visit thought he noticed signs of tensions easing (Gebauer, *Entspannung-sübung im Ambassador*, 2014). *SZ* was not surprised by the result of the talks, which showed how risky the trip to St. Petersburg was. But was surprised that in view of the situation, Steinmeier saw *a light at the end of the tunnel*. In the context of Steinmeier's *optimism* expressed in his unchanging attitude towards Russia, German journalist Klaus Bachmann on the pages of *GW* summed up the German government's policy towards the Ukrainian crisis: *According to the grotesque logic of the German government and a large section of the media, Russia can do what it wants – can take Germans prisoner or release them, occupy Crimea or not, set fire to further Ukrainian towns or temporarily order a withdrawal of the separatists – and that is the only reason to 'make further diplomatic efforts' (the formula used by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier), and until they bring results, lay aside sanctions until a later date* (Bachmann, 2014).

The June 2014 meeting in St. Petersburg was the last action performed in close diplomatic cooperation between the Polish and German foreign ministers. The next meetings within the framework of EU foreign policy took place without inviting the participation of the Polish partner. *GW* columnists interpreted Sikorski's absence at the Berlin meeting of the heads of foreign ministries from Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine (August 2014) as pushing Brussels and Poland out of the negotiations (Bielecki, Wroński, 2014),

thus weakening Europe (Wieliński, *Berlińskie rozmowy o ukraińskim pokoju. Dlaczego bez nas?*, 2014). *DzGP* wrote that the talks held in mid-August in Berlin were the first major success for Russia: it managed to marginalize the Weimar Triangle (26.08.2014). *Rz* feared that Berlin's broad diplomatic offensive to end the Russian-Ukrainian war intended to confirm Germany's dominant role in the central and eastern European region, to push the US out and maintain a strategic partnership with Russia (Rak, 2014). For the conservative *NDz* daily this is further evidence of the incapacity of the Polish government and a pathetic failure on the part of Polish diplomacy.

German press openly admitted that the Ukraine crisis had not only divided Polish-German partners but the entire West. The focal point in the differing positions was the approach to Russia. The press beyond the Oder pointed to the disparity between politics and the media on the one hand and German society on the other, which shows a lot of understanding for Russia (expressed i.a. in the pro-Russian tweets looking very much like propaganda controlled from Moscow). It pointed out that those media opposed to this way of thinking was accused of bias (Staib, 2014). The German public's attitude is confirmed by the results of public opinion surveys conducted in Germany, in which can be seen a clear drop in sympathy towards Russia and a sense of threat from Putin's policies. However, Russia remains a country highly valued by German citizens. The attitude of the Germans to the conflict may be explained by a fear of war and a conviction that, despite the declarations of politicians⁵ there is no need to increase Germany's responsibilities on the international stage⁶.

The end of 2013 brought disappointment to EU eastern policy, but also hope for a new quality built on Polish-German cooperation. The press in Poland and Germany responded positively to the strengthening of bilateral cooperation declarations, recognizing the potential in cooperation between their foreign ministers. The Sikorski-Steinmeier duo was written up as a spectacular, albeit short-lived success. The hopes of continuing close cooperation in the Weimar or Kaliningrad Triangle format in order to resolve the conflict in Ukraine were in the end not fulfilled. The Polish press accused Steinmeier of – taking advantage of the passivity of his

⁵ Compare Munich Security Conference (January 2014), in which representatives of the new government and the German president Joachim Gauck called for Germany's greater responsibility on the international stage.

⁶ Public opinion polls conducted by deutschlandtrend.de and the German demoscope centre Allensbacher Institut were taken into account.

Christian Democratic partner – becoming a driving force for a conciliatory policy towards Russia. Along with harsh criticism, there appeared attempts to justify the actions of the German Minister by the need to be guided by party loyalty, the feelings of society or the interests of the German economy. The German press duly reported the activities of the head of Polish diplomacy, personifying a hard line against Russia, but also perceived a policy aiming for an agreement with Russia even at the expense of criticism from his fellow countrymen. The press in both Poland and Germany pointed to a diversity of the causes for the difficulties in shaping EU policy towards its Eastern neighbour.

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